

Editorial 15.2

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The encounters with the more-than human world are taking on new forms in our fossil-fuel-fed, industrialized societies driven ever onwards and deeper into extractivism while riding the resulting high waves of our climate-changed waters. From a hopeful perspective, many people attempt to create positive encounters by immersing themselves in seemingly still wild and aesthetic zones of peace in order to seek a holistic and healing experience of our nonhuman surroundings, at least those sites not (yet) impacted radically by mountain-top removal mining, radioactive waste, heaps of plastic, or endlessly extended concrete. As hurricanes, droughts, fires, and accelerated extinction rage and spread all around us, such soothing green or blue encounters may offer an antidote and even a means of reminding us of our interconnectedness with the plant-based ecosystems that provide us all with oxygen and food; and yet, from the less hopeful perspective, such antidotes may bolster individuals while leaving in place the impression that contamination and other environmental catastrophes are localized and small-scale. Other kinds of ever-more inevitable and disturbingly disruptive encounters force, rather uncomfortably, an expanded awareness of the many ecosystems screaming with the hurricane-force winds or gasping in the face of polluted water and the penetration of microplastics and forever chemicals deep into all living bodies. Considering the fact that we are always already a part of the world and that our trans-corporeal selves exist as multi-species chimera in life-sustaining co-existence with our gut biota and the huge array of other species all over and in our bodies, we must ask, when thinking about disruptive encounters, how our co-habitant species now function in their microscopic-scale worlds as they face modern processed diets and chemical immersions. We are learning that altering your gut bacteria—biome, if you will—can alter your mind and mood, too. In other words, industrialized fossil-fueled practices create disruptive encounters on all scales from single-celled to global. Despite the scalar enormity, awareness of the shifting kinds of encounters remains oddly muted for many.

In that our daily existence now consists of ongoing disruptions often hidden from view by being too small or too large, or because some people are affluent enough to avoid first-hand contact with the storms or the dramatic spread of waste, there is a need to awaken our distracted senses to the forms of disruption we all experience on

a daily basis. (I use “we” here to refer to all living things on all scales, but especially to human beings with our possibility of consciously acknowledging both our deeds and their implications.) The danger exists that ecological disruptions and convoluted encounters are so frequent that they (just) become a steady background noise. Not even massive hurricanes seem to get enough attention; does it take a direct hit for these weather events amped up by climate change to become an “encounter” for those not washed away? Ecocriticism offers ready tools to contextualize and interpret the various kinds of weirdness emerging from the bizarrely consistent belief that nothing has really changed and a little more waterfront property is fine, but also from the Promethean belief that humans can now shape, control, and “care” for the world as beneficent managers guiding the way. Acknowledging disruption may be a crucial factor for social change.

Indeed, the guest editors for Volume 15.2 of *Ecozon@* take up this challenge with their focus on “Disruptive Encounters. Concepts of Care and Contamination out of Control.” In their introduction to the eight essays in the section, Solvejg Nitzke (Ruhr-University Bochum), Svenja Engelmann-Kewitz (Technische Universität Dresden), and Kirsten Jüdt (Technische Universität Dresden) explain how the longed-for reunification with “healing nature” can elude the dark, disruptive, dangerous, and infectious aspects of the nonhuman on its own terms as well as the world as it is impacted by human industrial actions. The guest editors note that it is the privilege of the few “to ignore, deny or even just gloss over disruptive encounters.” Furthermore, such inattention to the powerful and disruptive encounters with the more-than-human world tends to diminish non-human agency and make human beings seem the only active forces of relevance. Nitzke, Engelmann-Dewitz, and Jüdt write: “In this special themed section, we assemble explorations and conceptualizations of disruptive encounters—whether gentle or violent, fictional or factual—which challenge the cause-and-effect logic of quick-fix remedies as well as relativism and denial of difference and opposition.” Building on Anna Tsing’s concept of the transformative effect of “unpredictable encounters,” and Donna Haraway’s “staying with the trouble,” the guest editors hope to “challenge and transform dominant (alienated) human-nonhuman relationships.” The special section imagines three main categories of reconceptualized disruption. First are the “Science-Art-Worldings” that model a “multispecies thinking” of human and non-human inter-intra-actions. Second, they present the concept of “Forced Nurture” based on Tsing’s “empowering concept of contamination” and “Haraway’s concept of sympoiesis.” The third and final section attends to “Gentle Collisions” that avoid notions of dominance and “re-imagine and practice human-nonhuman contact” in terms of “care.”

The first three essays of the special section all look to the Arctic for startling encounters in the frozen lands and waters. “Alina Stefan, University of Cologne, Germany and Sieglinde Grimm, University of Cologne, Germany study disruptive encounters” between ecological, economic, scientific and Indigenous interests” in their analysis of Wolf Harlander’s German cli-fi eco-thriller *Schmelzpunkt* (2022). In his essay, Karl Emil Rosenbæk Reetz, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark,

presents the concept of “Coastal World Literature: Encounters at the Shores of Europe” as a frame for disruptive encounters in the littoral zones across the planet. And by looking at “feral Icelandic horses” in Benedikt Erlingsson’s film *Hross í oss* (2013), Judith Meurer-Bongardt, Universität Bonn, Germany, proposes in a German-language essay the relevance of considering human-animal encounters in terms of the various philosophies of “care.” The next three essays also focus on human-animal encounters, but with an expanded geographical focus. Taylin Nelson, Rice University, USA, responds to “The Sounds of Cetacean Revolution through History” in terms of the now famous behavior of “rogue whales” crashing ships; Nelson thereby provides a “cultural history of whale resistance.” Moving to Rwanda, at least as it has been presented in German publications, Anne Peiter, Université de la Réunion, France, writes a German-language essay mapping out ongoing racist representations of animal-human encounters that have had genocidal consequences. From the oceanic and coastal areas, the section then moves into the forest: Helga Braunbeck, North Carolina State University, USA, explores questionably idealized visions of hunting in the German forest. Her essay reveals both the problems and potential of the assumptions and myths appearing in three very famous **texts** portraying deer: Felix Salten’s *Bambi*, Horst Stern’s *The Last Hunt*, and Peter Wohlleben’s *The Hidden Life of Trees*. The final two essays turn away from the human-non-human divide and challenge us instead with two very different kinds of disruptive encounters: Giulia Baquè, Università Ca’ Foscari, Italy / Universität Heidelberg, Germany, studies the issue of AI and robots in her essay on “nonhuman care” in science fiction; and Elisa Mazzocato, LMU Munich, Austria, attends to the dead, writing about the “Weird Ghosts of the Anthropocene: The Spectral Encounter in the New Weird Fiction as a Conceptual Metaphor for Ecocritical Theory,” depicting how China Miéville’s works productively shock the readers with something so weird that it unmutes our entangled encounters in the Anthropocene.

The general section of *Ecozon@* 15.2 includes six full essays that provide provocative supplements to the inspired inquiries of the special focus on “disruptive encounters”; two of the essays are in Spanish, one is in French, and three are in English. The topics of these essays range from the value of anthropomorphism, questions of nonhuman agency and queer ecology, and challenges of anthropogenic bodies. The first essay is by Alissa Kautz, University of Bonn, Germany; in her “Humanising the Nonhuman: An Ecocritical Toolbox for Anthropomorphic Agency,” Kautz rethinks with excellent results the question whether the use of (often heavily criticized) anthropomorphism might actually be a productive strategy for ecocriticism in that it appears in many effective environmental texts and it questions standard notions of agency. She proposes a precise toolkit for assessing the function of anthropomorphism and notes that “that while shifting to ecocentric thinking on a global scale, anthropocentrism is not inherently negative, but rather can allow humans to understand and empathise with the nonhuman.” In their Spanish-language essay, Diego Zorita Arroya, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, España and Joaquín Macarro Sánchez, Universidad de Salamanca, España, “La derivación ecologista del

mito de Orfeo en *Canto yo y la montaña baila* de Irene Solà” describe how the author uses the myth of Orpheus as the basis for an “Orphic chant” running through the novel in a manner that provides voice to animals. With a focus on enchantment, rhythm, and myth, Solà’s novel “reveals the uniqueness of each of the beings that make up the earth, as well as the interdependencies that exist between them and that make up the higher organism called Gaia.” With her French-language essay on queer ecology, Gina Stamm, University of Alabama, USA, “L’écologie *queer* et l’écologie du *queer* chez Jean Giono” offers a new understanding of Jean Giono, whose ecologically-focused novels have often been deemed “conservative, pastoralist, or backward-looking.” In contrast, she demonstrates how the famed eroticism of his texts refuses to follow standard expectations when presenting the natural world’s sexuality, instead allowing for the celebration of fluid genders and the desires of those often considered to be excluded from sex due to non-conforming and differently aesthetic bodies. She concludes that Giono “separates eroticism in general from the sexual act, liberating pleasure in contact with the environment and allowing for the full range of meaning of the word ‘biophilia.’”

The final three essays of the general section attend to an impressive variety of genres and tropes that include anti-pastoral climate songs, rural poetry, and dystopian fiction presenting illness as a means of rethinking human subjectivity. Håvard Haugland Bamle, University of Agder, Norway, expands the volume’s offerings to include contemporary Norwegian music from the folk artist Moddi in his essay, “Anti-Pastoral and the Prophetic Mode in Moddi’s Climate Songs.” The activist singer presents lyrics on the disasters of climate change and thereby features the possibilities of art to confront such global problems, especially in Norway, where the country is openly environmental yet very well-funded by a flourishing oil industry. Bamle notes that Moddi’s music sustains “contradictions between pastoral and apocalypse,” thereby reflecting a conflict between Norwegian identity and a global cultural imaginary in the face of global warming. From this study of the folk artist, we turn to Spanish depictions of rural agricultural folk farmers in Miguel Hernández’s poetry. In his Spanish-language essay, “Aquí la vida es pormenor”: Mundo rural, naturaleza y campesinado en la poesía de Miguel Hernández,” Gonzalo Luque González, Universidad de Almería, España, focuses on “the historical and material reality of the rural world” as it appears in poems. Hernández writes into his poems a lived reality of farmers’ productive experiences with the nonhuman; the agricultural experience of the “peasantry” evokes not the “abstract labor of capital,” but rather the mundane and actual daily work with plants and animals in his poetry. Our final essay evaluates *Mugre rosa* (2020) by the Uruguayan author Fernanda Trías. Manuela Crivelli, University of Oxford, United Kingdom, discusses both climate disaster and disease in: “Anthropocenic Futures and Precarious Bodies: A Reading of *Mugre rosa* (2020) by Fernanda Trías.” Crivelli’s analysis has good resonance with the special section on disruptive encounters, looking at how the encounters of precarious bodies with disease and a toxic environment can lead to the imagining of new, bodily subjectivities. Above all, the precarious bodies most at risk are, again, those of people

without enough power to avoid dedicating attention to “already irreversibly damaged entire ecosystems,” in contrast to those who can flee from, and mostly ignore, the hurricanes and other storms while being able to occupy geographical sites with less overt damage.

In the Creative Arts section of volume 15.2, Arts Editor Elizabeth Tavella, University of Chicago, USA, introduces an expanded understanding of “encounters” formulated ecocritically as conflicts and meetings of subjective bodies shaped by and emerging from the fleshly experiences with others. Tavella therefore notes optimistically that: “The emergence, then, of novel ecosystems within muddy moral landscapes blasted by capitalism should not be understood exclusively in terms of loss and destruction, but also through the lens of resilience and adaptability.” From symbiotic relations with other species to the domestication of dogs, human bodies/beings, which are already chimerically entangled with bacteria, fungi, viruses, etc., compete and cooperate but never neutrally and never from an outsider position. As Tavella describes it, the cover image by illustrator and designer Jan Martin sets the tone for the entire volume with its combined digital art and collage featuring repeating forms in our mundane experiences with the human and more-than-human world, whose beauty evokes multivalent possibilities of encounters. Inside the Arts section are five poetic contributions, one interview, and a short story with an accompanying woodcut; the first piece is Serena Zanzu’s haunting poem “Forcing the Bond.” Zanzu’s short and powerful poem describes the laboratory enhancements of biological systems for agriculture, succinctly presenting such encounters as if praising human advances, while closing the poem with the telling lines about how we mistake the power to reshape our symbiotic communities for the power to solve problems of our own creation: “Today we unblock nature / we turn bios around / render life a tool / we unleash new crises.” The next series of works by Anna Nygren, titled “Other Horses,” wends through poetic and prose writings enhanced with sketches that flow together, drawing on the potential of neurodiversity and queer studies to approach the more-than-human with new senses. Next are two poems from Dean Anthony Brink, a poet, painter, and professor of literature and thought: “The New Speciesism” and “Feel Free to Splash About Disturbing Patience.” With the vibrantly dark fluency of the Anthropocene’s poetic rhythms, Brink weaves poems of concern for bodily encounters that we may assume are standard (gassing up on I-5) but that take on eerie and even Kafkaesque tones when we “stop pretending to care.” Then, Jose Elizondo-Gonzalez provides a collection of poems from the perspective of a migrant in the American Midwest, “El peso del aire” (“The Weight of Air”). Tavella writes that the poems present “the topic of ‘disruptive encounters’ from the perspective of migration, intricately weaving together themes of cultural displacement, environmental imagery, and the struggle for acceptance in unfamiliar surroundings.”

The next contribution is an interview undertaken by Qian Liu, who spoke with Paolo Peng Shuai, a multidisciplinary artist based in Milan, Italy, though born in Xiangtan, China. Their conversation addresses Peng’s artworks and how they reflect diasporic identities with ecological reverberations that change and are changed by

the movement to new places each themselves experiencing various forms of ecological crises. The human-non-human boundaries become less relevant as the individuals and groups travel across borders and experience new forms of encounters, both disruptive and collaborative. Finally, the Arts section closes with Wendy Wuyts' short story "An Ash Tree in Os," illustrated with a marvelous wood cut by Laura Brusselaers, an Independent Artist from Belgium. The story does not explicitly state its focus, but the artist statement notes that it "features Sámi characters and practices" experienced by Wuyt after she moved to Norway. In the swamps of rot, death, and decomposition emerge life forms: this tale of grief, illness, and femicide brings us into terrible encounters tainted still by the hope for the possibility of ongoing entanglements with the plants and beings rising out of the murky waters. Ending with fungi, our clever connectors who link trees and plants throughout entire forests and grasslands who thus may well be our most important ecological enablers, Wuyt leaves us with a poetic image of the life of death and the underground and the underappreciated beings whom we daily overlook and yet whom we will encounter again, and again.

Ecozon@ 15.2 also includes seven book reviews discussing recent books in the environmental humanities that cover environmental history, animal studies, the blue humanities, the ecopoetics of re-enchantment and of place making, diseases, and the humanist forms and methods of the climate crisis. The reviews open with the discussion of Dipesh Chakrabarty's *One Planet, Many Worlds* (U of Chicago P, 2023), 131pp, by Damini Bhattacharya. The next book is by one of our own former Presidents of EASLCE, Serpil Oppermann, who has written *Ecologies of a Storied Planet in the Anthropocene* (West Virginia UP, 2023), 221pp, by Johanna Skibsrud; and, thirdly, there a review of a book by our newest EASCLE President, "Bénédicte Meillon's *The Ecopoetics of Reenchantment* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2022), 386pp. by Terry Harpold. Looking at various genres are the studies by Judith Rauscher's *Ecopoetic Place-Making: Nature and Mobility in Contemporary American Poetry* (Indep. Acad. Pub., 2023), 277pp, by Isabel M Fernandez Alves; and the interdisciplinary book by Basak Agin & Safak Horzum's edited volume: *Posthuman Pathogenesis: Contagion in Literature, Arts, and Media* (Routledge, 2022), 257pp, by Madeline Becker. The final two reviews are on new work in animal studies and forms in the climate crisis: David P. Rando's *Doing Animal Studies with Androids, Aliens, and Ghosts: Defamiliarizing Human-Nonhuman Animal Relationships in Fiction* (Bloomsbury, 2023), 200pp, by Sofie Schrey; and Caroline Levine's *The Activist Humanist: Form and Method in the Climate Crisis* (Princeton UP, 2023), 202pp, by Leonardo Nolé.

Disruptive Encounters. Concepts of Care and Contamination Out of Control. An Introduction

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*For living things, species identities are a place
to begin, but they are not enough: ways of
being are emergent effects of encounters*
Anna Tsing

Curiosity and Protest, or: Encountering Disruptions

Encounters are often hailed as a solution to the alienation of humans from nature. Through encounters with (preferably “wild”) nature, it seems, alienation is easily healed: national parks and wilderness reserves all over the world advertise encounters with nature as a cure to the urban life far removed from nature and offer *Auszeiten* from cramped city dwellings (time off and/or away in mountain and sea-side resorts, yoga retreats and survival exercises just long enough to fit in a professional’s holiday) in which one can decelerate and re-encounter mainly oneself. The problem with this simplified concept of healing encounters is that neither “nature” nor “wilderness” can exist in the present as anything but *other* to the lived reality of only a limited number of people. That is, human interaction with global ecosystems is so pervasive, that any “outside” of the alienated every-day world is necessarily a fiction. However well-intended, these types of encounters are in effect stabilizing instruments of the very culture they seem to criticize. They work as supposed moments of relief in which “we” get to witness our own (human) and our (nonhuman) environment’s instant restoration—observable, for example, in the ubiquitous hashtag #NatureIsHealing during the first phase of the Covid 19-pandemic in 2020. The promise behind this type of healing encounter is that of a quick fix that

allows the *status quo* to continue with only minor adjustments. It helps to brush over violent scenes such as Nastassja Martin's encounter with a bear (*Croire aux fauves*, 2019) or Val Plumwood's encounter with a crocodile (*Being Prey*, 1996) as well as stories of hostile alien "nature" such as the environments in Jeff Vandermeer's *Southern Reach* trilogy (2014) and the "contact scenes" of colonial destructions which "alienated" aboriginal peoples all over the world from "country" (see, for example, the collection *Heartsick for Country* ed. by Morgan, Mia, and Kwaymullina). Infectious encounters of human and nonhuman bodies with viruses, parasites and even anthropogenic technologies from within (Alaimo) remain out of reach, too.

Undeniably, being able to ignore, deny or even just gloss over disruptive encounters is a privilege of the few. It requires material as well as epistemological, legal, social, political and imaginary boundaries, which not only hold up distinctions between nature and culture, but single out specific desired humans and non-humans, suitable to suggest stability in a thoroughly precarious world. But the supposedly protective walls and fences that politicians of all stripes keep calling for all over the world fail to compartmentalize both material and imaginary terrain. Rather than keeping various others out, they provoke both curiosity and protest. Literary and cultural history teaches us that both, curiosity and protest, can emerge at either side of any boundary. The desire to know what is beyond the walls of secret gardens or gated communities arises from within as much as from the outside, even more, desire might blur the distinction between inside and outside altogether. The same is true for protest. What feels like security for some might feel like imprisonment for others, and walls can be erected as well as torn down in gestures of protest. Meanwhile, plants, animals, fungi, toxins and air permeate and subvert any kind of wall or border without either of these all-too-human approaches. A vine or a butterfly might seem curious but, not unlike water, it will find ways not because of any discernible desire but because it can or needs to.

The walls and boundaries we evoke, however, are more than metaphorical, they are onto-epistemological boundaries that matter insofar as they produce order and thus generate the possibility for the kind of encounters in which we are interested. That is, we seek to study how disruptive encounters always already undermine or interrupt a structure or norm and hence are, by definition, only possible when humans are involved to establish such a norm. Rather than arguing for relativism, our imaginary walled garden is supposed to point out the simultaneity of the impossibility and productive necessity of (imagined) boundaries, distinctions and oppositions. Therefore, while we are interested in ways to view the entanglements of concepts such as nature and culture, familiar and foreign, self and other, as literary and cultural scholars we are also interested in the power of these categories as imperatives of how to engage with texts and other living beings. In this special themed section, we assemble explorations and conceptualizations of disruptive encounters—whether gentle or violent, fictional or factual—which challenge the cause-and-effect logic of quick-fix remedies as well as relativism and denial of difference and opposition. Building on Anna Tsing's concept of the transformative effect of

“unpredictable encounters” (Tsing 20), we are interested in disruptive encounters that challenge and transform dominant (alienated) human-nonhuman relationships.

The disruptive quality of meetings between those who are not supposed or not used to meet or to being required to form relationships is categorically different from the more “touristy healing” encounters mentioned in the beginning. Whereas the latter suppose that either humans heal a more-than-human environment (e.g. by “cleaning up a beach”) or are being healed by encountering them (think of examples such as “forest bathing”) and thus engender utilitarian relationships in which one serves the other, disruptive encounters are onto-epistemological events. They at once produce and reveal the relationships that constitute the agents of this relationship. *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, the title of Karen Barad’s seminal materialist book, puts such an encounter front and center to conceptualize the confluence of knowing and being in “agential realism”:

There is an important sense in which practices of knowing cannot fully be claimed as human practices, not simply because we use nonhuman elements in our practices but because knowing is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part. Practices of knowing and being are not isolable; they are mutually implicated. We don't obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are of the world. [...] *Onto-epistem-ology* – the study of practices of knowing in being-is probably a better way to think about the kind of understandings that we need to come to terms with how specific intra-actions matter. (Barad 185; emphasis in original)

Disruptive encounters and agential realism meet in this simultaneity of knowing and being, the meeting of word and world as well as the ability to acknowledge intra-actions while maintaining the ability to notice difference. This is important because Barad’s theory has often been mistaken for an invitation to relativism but is everything but. Rather, it connects with Anna Tsing’s call to notice the fundamental precarity that connects “life in the ruins of capitalism” and Donna Haraway’s call for “Staying with the trouble.” It is no coincidence that these (sub-)titles are so evocative as to become synonymous with the respective theorist’s work. Already in their just quoted (sub-)titles, Barad, Tsing and Haraway invoke contact scenes (Koch and Nitzke), that is, stages for scenes of disruptive encounters to play out. These scenes bring together doings and environments and allow for the observation of associations and destructions, i.e. the becoming and unbecoming of relationships and thus enable us as researchers, viewers, readers and participants, to notice and intervene in these processes and intra-actions. In other words, disruptive encounters are much more than the counterpart to (supposed) healing encounters. In fact, they are revelations of precarity. Disruptive encounters spontaneously unveil the supposed stability of orders as phantasms covering up a messy, precarious and deeply intertwined web of relationships encompassing live and dead matterings. Throwing out the promise of healing and restoration might seem dire at first glance, but it holds the possibility of life beyond the intact and idealized. With both curiosity and protest in mind, then, we read through and with examples of disruptive encounters that encourage and enable us to resist the temptation to control or fix things but instead invite us to become part of their messy reality.

Concept and Contributions

Our concept of disruptive encounters builds on but is not limited to three major sites of disruptive encounters which we believe engender practices of care, contamination and surrendering control over (nonhuman) environments:

1. Science-Art-Worldings: Donna Haraway understands them as models for multispecies thinking which produce a “critical zone” (Haraway) in which humans and nonhumans are co-present. Such worldings are sites where arts and sciences “are part of the emergence of narratives about the ways in which we live in the world” (Davis 65). This includes projects such as Hanna Tuulikki’s [deer dancer 2019](#) which connects human, animal and elemental movements in an artistic performance and re-readings of supposedly destroyed landscapes such as Cal Flynn’s *Islands of Abandonment* (2021). Closely connected to the constantly self-referential and searching ways in which Anna Tsing practices the “arts of noticing” (Tsing 17) as a method of narrative-scientific inquiry and a way of recognizing her own involvement in what she is noticing by speaking of “arts” and evoking the not-yet division between art and science in the Greek concept of *techné*.

2. Forced Nurture: Tsing’s empowering concept of “contamination” (Tsing 27) as well as Haraway’s concept of “sympoiesis” (Haraway 58) offer perspectives on encounters from within that turn frightening and often marginalized relationships into productive (if messy) collaborations. In order to avoid romanticizing the unwanted and often disorderly contact within bodies and environments, one can value and evaluate toxicity, parasitism and symbioses under the umbrella of involuntary care or forced nature. Science fictional encounters such the (marine) alien encounters in Nnedi Okorafor’s *Lagoon* (2014) or the fungal contaminations in Aliya Whiteley’s *The Beauty* (2018) speak of a becoming-with that is neither entirely unwanted or violent, nor fully welcomed. Rather, it is the effect of a disruptive encounter that calls for a relationship by demonstrating that separated existence is no longer an option—in fact, it might never have been possible in the first place. Many forms of care, as this form of encounter suggests, are simultaneously chosen and imposed on both the care-giver and care-receiver.

3. Gentle Collisions: Resisting the logic of dominance that so often overshadows encounters, *gentle* encounters re-imagine and practice human-nonhuman contact as “matters of care” (Puig de la Bellacasa) where environmental caretaking is an ethical, socio-political practice of both human and more than human agency that creates, affirms, and makes visible relations. While alienation translates humans and nonhumans into resources (Tsing 133), resistance to this form of “disentanglement” comes from Indigenous and marginalized voices. Where e.g., Robin Wall Kimmerer talks of “gift economies” in which “cultures of gratitude” rather than private property relations shape encounters (Kimmerer 187), [female hunters in Norway](#) attempt to express what Tim Ingold frames as an appreciation of the “animal kind” (see Ingold 71) through hunting practices. Counterintuitive at first, both harvesting and killing thus become sites of gentle encounters.

The contributions in this special themed section show how disruptive encounters combine and re-combine these sites as parts of complex constellations which require careful observation and participation in order to take on the responsibility of evaluating their impact and sustainability. Considering the hype around the subversion of boundaries, it is important to stress that “we” as humans, especially as those who not only govern, interpret, direct and conduct power but are also the ones who design and shape asymmetrical power relations, are never only observers but also responsible parties with accountability for our impacts. This is especially important where disregarding difference hurts humans and nonhumans with less or no access to the forms of power (and) capital that still shape so much of the planet.

In their contribution on “disruptive knowledge structures between ecology and economy,” Alina Stefan and Sieglinde Grimm look at the Arctic as a contact scene which plays out disruptive encounters between ecological, economic, scientific and Indigenous interests and ways of communicating. Their reading of Wolf Harlander’s eco-thriller *Schmelzpunkt* (2022) follows the set-up of the Arctic as the stage for a thought experiment in which these different interests collide and thus allow for enacting a more connected concept of subjectivity that protests the reductive ideology that has exploited the region not least as an example for warnings of the effects of global warming. The literary text, here, allows for a more nuanced view that disrupts common themes in order to look at “the Arctic” as a web of manifold relationships in the context of the concept of the Commons.

Karl Rosenbæk Reetz’s contribution proposes the concept of “Coastal World Literature” to capture the vibrancy of disruptive encounters in the littoral zones of the planet. Focusing on the so-called “migrant-crisis” following the political fall-out from the Arab Spring, Rosenbæk uses this concept to confront literary realizations of opposing perspectives meeting at the beaches and along the shores of Northern Europe. Two Danish novels, Omar El Akkad’s *What Strange Paradise* (2021), and Peter Højrup’s *Til stranden* (2017; *To the Beach*) realize the “thrill” of the encounter with strangers who they do not expect or want to meet in their beach-side “paradise,” while Khaled Mattawa’s poem *Mare Nostrum* and Peter Clement-Woetmann’s poetry collection *Bag bakkerne, kysten* (2017; *Behind the Dunes, the Coast*) enact the “horror” of possible encounters that might mean deportation and punishment for their protagonists. The disruptive character of these “uneven encounters on the shores” reveals not only the injustice of Europe’s exclusionary politics but also their intimate entanglement with the shape and form of the (artificial) landscapes that only allow “healing encounters” for some but are life-threatening for others.

Looking at feral Icelandic horses in Benedikt Erlingsson’s film *Hross í oss* (2013), Judith Meurer-Bongardt questions how literary and media scholars can (and maybe should) read human-animal relationships care-fully or full of care (“fürsorglich”) in what she has conceptualized as “ambivalent entanglements” between humans and horses. This is a challenge to prevalent ideas of scientific and scholarly stances that, while not necessarily objective, call for a (at least partially) detached positionality.

Through the film, Meurer-Bongardt shows how a reading that itself produces disruptive encounters where otherwise romanticization might run rampant, produces and surfaces knowledge that is otherwise inaccessible.

Leaving the Arctic, the shores of Northern Europe and its Islands behind, Taylin Nelson encounters “The Sounds of Cetacean Revolution through Histories.” By reading current collisions with rogue whales in the Mediterranean Sea as part of a history of rebelling cetaceans, she rejects the notion of whales acting out of order and replaces it with a “cultural history of whale resistance” thus taking seriously the idea of historicizing animals as subjects of their own volition and actors capable of rejecting human dominance. It turns out that whether or not cetacean “intentions” can be proven, the disruptive encounter of human noise pollution and the “roguish animal revolution” challenges the practice of silencing whales in favor of cruise ships and opens the possibility to grant them, if not suffrage, then at least a voice in what happens in “Mare Nostrum.”

Anne Peiter’s exploration of the continuities between the representation of animal-human-relationship in German publications about Rwanda looks at the racist origins and genocidal consequences of a colonial blending of human and animal form. German and Belgian colonial rule left behind a racist societal order in which ethnic groups were pitted against each other in a way that was used to legitimize a long-overlooked (at least in Europe and, especially, in Germany) civil-war and genocide that left hundreds of thousands of Tutsi dead. Peiter analyses the representation of Tutsi and their cattle as a core practice of racist identification and marker of difference that, while it first marked the Tutsi as superior (from the colonizer’s perspective), spelled their demise once the colonialists left. Holding on to this association of humans and livestock in their reporting on the Tutsi genocide German press prevented a reckoning with their own involvement or a political debate about responsibility, a situation that is only slowly being remedied today.

Instead of confronting the multitudes of wrongdoing in the political past of their nation and its ongoing impacts, Germans frequently turn to the forest as their favored *Umwelt* for recovery, restoration and recharging. Helga Braunbeck interferes here and deconstructs the forest as a site of respite and, instead, shows how this contested space becomes the site for disruptive encounters in immensely popular works by Felix Salten (*Bambi*), Horst Stern (*The Last Hunt*) and Peter Wohlleben (*The Hidden Life of Trees*). Complicating reductive myths, the analysis shows how disruptive encounters between humans and deer (hunting) as well as between deer and trees (grazing) question not only the right way to engage in the protection of forest ecosystems but also the forms in which these encounters are presented. With careful consideration of the different poetic and imaginary potentials of popular narratives in media ranging from literary fiction to popular forestry, the question who is taking care of whom becomes the ground for a radical ecological rethinking.

While Peter Wohlleben’s famous tree anthropomorphizing clashes with *Bambi* in the previous article, Alisa Kronberger moves to a thoroughly arbo-centric question by looking at three films that were shown as part of the exhibit *Cambio* in 2020.

Thinking through more-than-human conceptualizations of care, Kronberger shows that concepts of responsibility, response-ability and accountability form a precarious web of meaning which not only leads to the film's outright rejection of the notion of "humans as forest protectors" but also gives way for disruptive encounters as exploratory spaces for both plants and (human and more-than-human) artists to grow.

Giulia Baquè moves a step further in the direction of technology by inquiring the effects of "nonhuman care." By looking at Artificial Intelligences and robotic humanoids which are charged with caretaking in Kawakami Hiromi's *Don't get carried away by big birds* (2016) and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021), she shifts the tables and puts human beings in the place of "nature." But especially in "encounters of care" the opposition does not hold up. "Refusing both technophobia and technophilia", Baquè is able to show how technological agents of care already take their place in the pantheon of nonhuman agencies which with we have failed to reckon adequately.

Finally, Elisa Mazzocato leaves the realm of the living and asks about the "Weird Ghosts of the Anthropocene." Closing the special themed section, Mazzocato explores how spectral encounters in New Weird Fiction challenge not only the banishment of ghosts into the realm of the supernatural and, hence, the disqualification of believers as "superstitious," but also how their very weirdness and *Unheimlichkeit* lends itself as a conceptual metaphor for ecological relationships in the present. The New Weird responds to the aesthetic challenges of the Anthropocene and simultaneously offers a reality so weird and uncanny that it might just be disruptive enough to help us encounter the reality of our own present.

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Disruptive Wissensstrukturen zwischen Ökologie und Ökonomie: Die Arktis als Kontaktszene und Global Common in Wolf Harlanders Ökothriller *Schmelzpunkt* (2022)

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Abstract

Der Beitrag untersucht den jüngst erschienenen Ökothriller *Schmelzpunkt* (2022) von Wolf Harlander im Hinblick auf die fiktionale Darstellung aufstörender Begegnungen in der arktischen Region. *Schmelzpunkt* thematisiert Umweltkatastrophen, Artensterben, Gletscherschmelze, wirtschaftspolitische Kämpfe zwischen Großmächten wie China, Russland und den USA, aber auch Deutschland, wodurch das Bild der Arktis als eines zivilisationsfernen Rückzugsraumes in Frage gestellt wird. Die aufstörenden Ereignisse erscheinen als Folge rationalistisch geprägter Fortschrittsideologien und der ökonomischen Ausbeutung arktischer Ressourcen. Über das Figurenpersonal wird eine Dichotomie von anthropozentrischen und ökologisch-biozentrisch ausgerichteten Mensch-Natur-Verhältnissen markiert. Im Fokus der Untersuchung stehen zum einen Situationen der (wissenschaftlichen) Kommunikation im Rahmen sogenannter "Kontaktszenen" (Koch und Nitzke, 2022), in welchen unterschiedliche gesellschaftliche Machtsysteme aufeinandertreffen und hierbei einen Rahmen schaffen, in dem der Austausch und die Produktion von Wissen, aber auch disruptive Störungen gesellschaftlicher Ordnungssysteme in den Blick gelangen. Die Bedingungen der Kontaktszenen werden zum anderen verbunden mit der Frage nach den Commons (dt. "Allmende"), d.h. der Verteilung von Ressourcen und ihren Nutzungsrechten, die den Konflikt der im Ökothriller dargestellten Machtsysteme überlagert. Ausgehend von Garrett Hardins These einer *Tragedy of the Commons* (1968) und aktuelleren Positionen Elinor Ostroms ([2009] 2022) und Silke Helfrichs (2012, 2021 mit Johannes Euler), welche das Potenzial des Commonings als konkrete Interaktion im Sinne des Gemeinwohls herausstellen, ist die literarische Funktion dieser Ansätze zu beleuchten. Insgesamt wird gezeigt, dass und in welcher Weise Literatur aktuelle komplexe Krisensituationen nahbar machen und zu deren Bewältigung beitragen kann.

Schlüsselwörter: Ökothriller, Katastrophenliteratur, Umweltkrise, Arktis, Commons.

Abstract

This article analyses the recently published eco-thriller *Melting Point* (2022) by Wolf Harlander with regard to the fictional depiction of disturbing encounters in the Arctic region. *Melting Point* focuses on environmental disasters, species extinction, glacier melt, economic and political struggles between major global powers such as China, Russia and the USA, but also Germany, calling into question the image of the Arctic as a place of refuge far removed from civilisation. The disruptive events appear as a consequence of rationalist ideologies of progress and the economic exploitation of Arctic resources. The characters mark a dichotomy between anthropocentric and ecological-biocentric

human-nature relationships. On the one hand, the study focuses on situations of (scientific) communication within the framework of so-called “Kontaktszenen” (contact scenes) (Koch and Nitzke, 2022), in which different social power systems meet and which at the same time create a framework in which the exchange and production of knowledge, as well as disruptive disturbances of social systems of order, can be analysed. On the other hand, the conditions of the contact scenes are linked to the question of the commons, i.e. the distribution of resources and their rights of use, which overlays the conflict of the power systems depicted in the eco-thriller. Based on Garrett Hardin's thesis of a *Tragedy of the Commons* (1968) and more recent positions of Elinor Ostrom ([2009] 2022) and Silke Helfrich (2012, 2021 with Johannes Euler), which emphasize the potential of commoning as an actual interaction, the literary function of these approaches should be examined. Overall, it will be shown that literature can make current complex crisis situations accessible and in what way it can contribute to overcoming them.

Keywords: Ecothriller, disaster narrative, environmental crisis, Arctic, Commons.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza el recientemente publicado eco-thriller *Schmelzpunkt* (2022), de Wolf Harlander, en relación con la representación ficticia de inquietantes encuentros en la región ártica. *Schmelzpunkt* se centra en las catástrofes medioambientales, la extinción de especies, el deshielo de los glaciares y las luchas económicas y políticas entre grandes potencias como China, Rusia y Estados Unidos, pero también Alemania, poniendo en tela de juicio la imagen del Ártico como refugio alejado de la civilización. Los acontecimientos perturbadores parecen ser el resultado de ideologías racionalistas de progreso y de la explotación económica de los recursos del Ártico. Los personajes marcan una dicotomía de relaciones antropocéntricas y ecológico-biocéntricas entre el hombre y la naturaleza. Por un lado, el estudio se centra en situaciones de comunicación (científica) en el marco de las llamadas “escenas de contacto” (Koch y Nitzke, 2022), en las que se encuentran diferentes sistemas de poder social y que al mismo tiempo crean un marco en el que se pueden analizar el intercambio y la producción de conocimientos, pero también las perturbaciones disruptivas de los sistemas de orden social. Las condiciones de las escenas de contacto también están relacionadas con la cuestión de los bienes comunes, es decir, la distribución de los recursos y sus derechos de utilización, que se superpone al conflicto entre los sistemas de poder representados en el eco-thriller. Partiendo de la tesis de Garrett Hardin de la *Tragedia de los comunes* (1968) y de posiciones más recientes de Elinor Ostrom ([2009] 2022) y Silke Helfrich (2012, 2021 con Johannes Euler), que subrayan el potencial de la comunalidad como interacción concreta en el sentido del bien común, se examinará a continuación la función literaria de estos planteamientos. En conjunto, se muestra que y de qué manera la literatura puede hacer accesibles las complejas situaciones de crisis actuales y contribuir a superarlas.

Palabras clave: Ecothriller, literatura de catástrofes, crisis medioambiental, Ártico, bienes comunes.

Einleitung

In ihrem im Februar 2023 erschienenen Bericht *The Disruption of Arctic Exceptionalism: Managing Environmental Change in the Light of Russian Aggression* konstatieren Kai Kornhuber et al. für die Arktis eine Sonderstellung, da sie als Region betrachtet wurde, “in which global political tensions were successfully mediated by peaceful cooperation and collaboration” (3). Wenngleich das Aufeinandertreffen verschiedener Völker und Interessen in der Arktis mit ihren jeweiligen Ethnien und kolonialen Prägungen durch Russland, USA/Kanada oder Dänemark eigentlich nie wirklich friedlich war, sei mit dem russischen Angriffskrieg in der Ukraine die Hoffnung auf eine friedfertige Kooperation vollends zusammengebrochen

(Kornhuber et al. 3). Diese Entwicklung gewinnt insofern eine weitreichende Bedeutung, als der arktische Raum durch schmelzendes Eis immer leichter zugänglich wird. Die Veränderungen des geoökonomischen Potenzials der Arktis machen die Ressourcenvorkommen (Gautier et al.) zum Objekt widerstreitender Interessen und internationaler Machtkonflikte. Die sozio-ökologischen Folgen für die Menschen vor Ort sind absehbar. Zwar wurde das "lokale Wissen der indigenen Völker wissenschaftlich geprüft" und vonseiten der Vereinten Nationen anerkannt (Sowa 147), was zur Folge hat, dass diesen Menschen im ökologischen Diskurs eine besondere Bedeutung für eine ressourcenschonende Haltung gegenüber der Tier- und Pflanzenwelt zugeschrieben wird.¹ Dennoch können sie ihre traditionelle Lebensweise, welche auch den Wal- und Robbenfang einschließt, kaum noch fortführen. Gerade beim Thema Jagd schlägt ihnen die Kritik westlicher Stimmen entgegen.²

Der 2022 erschienene Ökothriller *Schmelzpunkt* von Wolf Harlander bedient sich dieser Szenarien, wenn er die Arktis als Schauplatz fiktiver Geschehnisse wählt. In den folgenden Ausführungen wird *Schmelzpunkt* zunächst dem Genre des Ökothrillers zugeordnet. Dem folgt eine Lektüre des Romans als Arena politischer Machtkämpfe im arktischen Raum, welche die damit verbundenen Begegnungen als Kontaktszenen mit Akteur:innen unterschiedlicher gesellschaftlich-politischer Kräfte sowie Asymmetrien und Disruptionen im Hinblick auf die Beurteilung von Wissen herausarbeitet. Diese Begegnungen werden mit der Frage der Commons (dt. Allmende) verbunden, etwa in Hinsicht auf Unterschiede von lokalen und globalen Aktionsräumen, von wissenschaftlichen und indigenen Standpunkten der Akteur:innen wie auch dem Gedanken der Teilhabe an, bzw. des Teilens von Wissen.

***Schmelzpunkt* als Ökothriller**

Wie bereits der Buchtitel erahnen lässt, geht es in Harlanders Roman um die durch den anthropogenen Klimawandel bedingten Folgen der globalen Erwärmung. *Schmelzpunkt* wird laut Cover als "Thriller" vermarktet. "Die Erde brennt. Die Arktis stirbt. [...] es steht eine Katastrophe bevor, die alles bisher Befürchtete übertrifft [...]. Das ewige Eis [wird, AS/SG] zum Schauplatz eines Kampfes [...]" (SP),³ heißt es im Klappentext. Der Autor thematisiert die ökonomische Ausbeutung der natürlichen Ressourcen in der Arktis und präsentiert eine drohende Umweltkatastrophe, die in letzter Minute durch gemeinschaftliches Handeln abgewendet werden kann. *Schmelzpunkt* ist zunächst als Ökothriller zu klassifizieren, um die für das Genre kennzeichnende Spannung zwischen ökologischem Anspruch und Klischee herauszustellen.

¹ Dies gilt auch für die indigene Bevölkerung Grönlands (Sowa 131).

² Zum Zusammenhang von indigenem Leben, Jagdkultur, Menschenrechten und der Gefahr des Klimawandels durch die Erwärmung des Planeten vgl. Sheila Watt-Cloutier: *The Right to be Cold* (2015).

³ Der Ökothriller *Schmelzpunkt* wird im Folgenden abgekürzt mit der Sigle SP.

In 91 Kapiteln wird das Geschehen aus den Blickwinkeln verschiedener Figuren geschildert. Die Handlung setzt in Grönland ein, als der Inuk und Touristenführer Nanoq Egede verendete Fische findet, weshalb sich das Ministerium in Kopenhagen hilfesuchend an das deutsche Alfred-Wegener-Institut wendet. Dieses entsendet die Biologin Hanna Jordan in die Arktis, um bei der Aufklärung zu helfen. Dabei geschehen seltsame Dinge: Die Fischkadaver, die Nanoq im Eis vergraben hatte, um sie später von Hanna untersuchen zu lassen, sind verschwunden. Kurze Zeit danach wird Hanna von einem Boot vorsätzlich gerammt. Schnell wird klar, dass hinter dieser ökologischen Katastrophe mehr steckt, als es zunächst den Anschein hat. Die BND-Agenten Nelson Carius und Diana Winkels aus Deutschland begeben sich ebenfalls nach Grönland—die Handlungsstränge der Figuren begegnen sich. Die Kapitelüberschriften in *Schmelzpunkt* benennen den Ort, an dem sich die Figuren jeweils befinden. Die Handlungsorte erstrecken sich über Grönland, Spitzbergen, Island, Deutschland und Belgien. Der Fokus der Erzählung verbleibt jedoch auf der vulnerablen Situation des arktischen Raums und unterstreicht dadurch die Bedeutung dieser Region für den Klimawandel.

Die Arktis ist die Region auf der Erde, die sich am schnellsten erwärmt (Brandt, Wassmann, Piepenburg 2). Dicke und Ausdehnung des Polareises, d.h. des zu Eis gefrorenen Meerwassers rund um die Pole, nehmen ab und dauerhaft gefrorene Böden beginnen aufzutauen (Bartsch 92-93). Die anhaltende Verkleinerung der Permafrostböden verdeutlicht den arktischen Klimawandel als einen “‘Tipping point,’ nach dessen Überschreitung beschleunigte und unumkehrbare globale Umweltveränderungen die Folge sind” (Bartsch 94).

Schmelzpunkt setzt an einem genuinen Charakteristikum des Ökothrillers an, welches darauf zielt, “zu einem besseren Verständnis der Umwelt- und Klimakrise in fiktionaler Form beizutragen” (Dürbeck 245). Dabei wird “eine lokale oder globale Umweltkatastrophe” präsentiert, “die aber durch gemeinschaftliches, nicht selten heroisches Handeln in letzter Minute noch abgewendet werden kann” (Dürbeck 245). Zu den konventionellen Darstellungsformen des Ökothrillers gehört eine “scharfe Grenzziehung zwischen den Antipoden *Natur vs. Technik* und *Gut vs. Böse*” (Schneider-Özbek 231). Diese Dichotomie spiegelt sich in *Schmelzpunkt* auf der Figurenebene wider, die weitgehend auf *Flat Characters* beschränkt ist und durch anthropozentrisch agierende Vertreter der “Bösen” und ökologisch-biozentrisch ausgerichtete “gute” Figuren markiert wird. Die Gegenspieler übernehmen im klassischen Sinn die Rolle der Schurken, welche den Profit über die Wissenschaft wie auch über die Ziele der Nachhaltigkeit stellen. Sie verfolgen das Ziel, die Ereignisse zu verschleiern und wissenschaftliche Nachforschungen zu unterminieren, um weiter Ressourcen ausbeuten zu können.

Zunächst stehen die Vertreter:innen der “Guten” im Mittelpunkt. Deren Protagonist:innen sind der Inuk Nanoq, die Biologin Hanna und die beiden BND-Agent:innen. Letztere sollen politisch motivierte Sabotagen verhindern und zugleich—getarnt als “Landvermesser im Auftrag von Thyssenkrupp” (SP 85)—die Interessen Deutschlands vertreten. Dass es sich hierbei um ein problematisches

wirtschaftliches Wettrennen verschiedener Nationalstaaten handelt, welches an die Zeit des Kolonialismus erinnert, macht die Aussage des Abteilungsleiters des BND, Dr. Horn, bei der Beauftragung von Diana und Nelson deutlich:

Wir erhalten derzeit Meldungen von verschiedenen deutschen Firmen [...] (SP 79). Wir müssen reagieren. Die Arktis wird für uns und unsere Verbündeten immer wichtiger. Es führt kein Weg daran vorbei, dass wir uns dort stärker engagieren. Sonst überlassen wir das Feld den Russen und den Chinesen, die sich dort immer schneller breitmachen. Oder beim Rohstoffnachschub den Amerikanern und Kanadiern. Das darf nicht passieren. Gerade wir als Industrieland sind auf sichere Rohstoffversorgung angewiesen. (SP 81)

Vonseiten Deutschlands steht die Sicherheit der ansässigen Firmen und Unternehmen sowie die Vermittlung des Wissens, welches die Bereitstellung und generell den Umgang mit den Ressourcen betrifft, im Vordergrund. Die für das Genre typische wissensvermittelnde Funktion (Dürbeck 248) kommt zum Tragen, indem immer wieder Informationen zur Bedeutung der Arktis für den Klimawandel und ihres geopolitischen Stellenwerts in die Handlung einfließen. Sowohl in der Realität wie auch in der Fiktion nehmen ökonomische Interessen und militärische Aktivitäten in dem Maße zu, in dem neue Gebiete zugänglich und weitere Ressourcen erschlossen werden.⁴ Dies weckt Begehrlichkeiten—die Arktis wird zur politischen Arena. Der unverbindliche Charakter des Arktischen Rats erleichtert diese Entwicklungen.⁵ Für die Umwelt sind dabei entstehende Beeinträchtigungen besonders problematisch, denn aufgrund der niedrigen Temperaturen bleiben Kohlenwasserstoffe wie beispielsweise Öl länger im Ökosystem. Es ist davon auszugehen, dass ökologische und ökonomische Interessen in der Arktis zukünftig noch stärker miteinander konfliktieren.

Nimmt man das Figurenensemble des Romans in Augenschein, so ist auf die Situation der indigenen Bevölkerung einzugehen, deren Anteil an den rund vier Millionen Menschen, die in der arktischen Region leben, etwa zehn Prozent ausmacht (Seidler 30). Sie sehen sich immer wieder gezwungen, gegen die Zerstörung des arktischen Lebensraums und der Einschränkung ihrer traditionellen Lebensweise durch ökonomische und wissenschaftliche Interessen anzukämpfen. Und es überrascht nicht, dass sich die Inuit einem westlich ausgerichteten Umweltmanagement und damit verbundenen konservativen Narrativen entgegensetzen, “that do not necessarily take note of indigenous concerns and rights or consider human and nonhuman entanglements” (Nuttall 7).

⁴ Nach Berechnungen des *United States Geological Surveys (USGS)* im Jahr 2008 lagern nördlich des Polarkreises ca. 30% aller unentdeckten Erdgasreserven der Welt und ca. 13 % der noch nicht entdeckten Erdölvorkommen (*World Ocean Review* 262). In diesem Zusammenhang ist erwähnenswert, dass Grönland die Vergabe von neuen Lizenzen für Tiefseebohrungen gestoppt hat (Macalister), während Norwegen Bohrungen in der Arktis weiterhin erlaubt (Bryant).

⁵ Der arktische Rat besteht in einem losen Zusammenschluss der acht Mitgliedstaaten Kanada, Russland, die USA, Norwegen, Dänemark, Island, Schweden und Finnland. Als permanente Teilnehmer inkludiert sind sechs Organisationen, welche die Interessen der indigenen Bevölkerung wahrnehmen. Entscheidungen sind rechtlich jedoch nicht bindend (*World Ocean Review* 242).

Mit Blick auf die Geschlechterstereotype des Genres, wonach den weiblichen Figuren die Rolle der “Mahnerin, Warnerin und des moralischen Gewissens” und das “natürliche Prinzip von Werden und Vergehen” zukommen, sind es tendenziell männliche Figuren, “die negative Technikfolgen produzieren” (Schneider-Özbek 235-237). Letzteres wird in *Schmelzpunkt* durch die Antagonisten erfüllt. Bei den “guten” Protagonist:innen zeigt sich diesbezüglich eine Umkehrung: Der Inuk Nanoq nimmt die Rolle eines naturverbundenen Warners und Hanna die einer technikaffinen Naturwissenschaftlerin ein. Nanoq verkörpert die Schnittstelle zwischen modernem Wissen und dem Spiritualismus der indigenen Bevölkerung.⁶ So sehen die alteingesessenen Inuit ihn als jemanden, “der die traditionellen Sitten und Gebräuche missachtete, der eine bessere Zukunft durch zweifelhafte Segnungen der Moderne importieren wollte. Der auf Fremde mehr hörte als auf das eigene Volk” (SP 9). Seit er nach seiner Ausbildung in Dänemark nach Grönland zurückgekehrt war, hat er Probleme, seine Identität zu finden. Nanoqs Figurenzeichnung greift zwar Herausforderungen auf, mit denen junge Indigene konfrontiert sind, mitunter aber folgt sie dem problematischen Stereotyp des “Ecological Indian.” Vergleichbar mit der Figur Leon Anawaks aus Schätzing’s *Der Schwarm* (2010) wird ihm ein außergewöhnliches Wissen über die Natur zugesprochen, wodurch er—typisch für den Ökothriller—in der Lage ist, Missstände wieder auszugleichen (Schneider-Özbek 234). So gelingt es ihm, die fast schon erfrorene Hanna zu retten (SP Kap. 58) oder mit einem Bären zu kommunizieren⁷ (SP 408). Im Rahmen der Problemlösungsstrategie und dem Ziel, die Katastrophe zu verhindern sowie die Natur gegenüber Technik und Wirtschaft als den Orten des Bösen zu schützen, bemüht *Schmelzpunkt* generell—wiederum genretypisch—ein “vormodernes Wissen” (Dürbeck 250), das sich aus den Epochen vor der Aufklärung speist.

Neben den Elementen der DokuFiktion und Wissenspopularisierung kennzeichnet sich das Genre durch Elemente des Thrillers. Charakteristisch dafür rückt “die drohende Katastrophe”—im Falle von *Schmelzpunkt* eine radioaktive Verseuchung des Meeresswassers mit unabsehbaren Folgen—“aus dem Stadium der Potenzialität in das der Aktualität und bringt die Katastrophe antizipatorisch zur Anschauung” (Dürbeck 248; siehe auch Kerridge 244). Die Leser:innen werden auf diese Weise zu voyeuristischen Zuschauer:innen des Unglücks (Dürbeck 248). Unterstützt wird die narrative Technik des Katastrophischen zudem durch die “Suspense-Spannung,” welche den ganzen Spannungsbogen betrifft, der—im Gegensatz zur zeitlich zurückblickenden Rätselspannung—auf bedrohliche Ereignisse in der Zukunft gerichtet ist (Dürbeck 247) und in *Schmelzpunkt* durch die

⁶ Gemeint ist eine Schnittstelle zwischen einer positivistischen Epistemologie als Ideal europäischer Naturwissenschaften und indigenen Wissensformen. Nach Houser basiert Erstere auf “logic, observability, objectivity, and universality and is verifiable, preferably through quantitative measures,” während Letztere im Bereich von “speculation, multigenerational experience, social relations, metaphor and story, and the sensing and feeling body” verankert sind (Houser 5).

⁷ Ähnlich entwickelt der Walforscher Anawak eine enge Beziehung zu einem Meeressäuger, wenn es heißt: “Fast kam es Anawak so vor, als beobachte nicht er den Wal, sondern der Wal ihn” (Schätzing 89).

Unsicherheit über die Ursache des Fischsterbens hervorgerufen wird. In Harlanders Ökothriller bedingen beide Formen der Spannung eine Tendenz zum Explosiven, weshalb die Katastrophe stets antizipierbar und das Leben der Figuren fortwährend gefährdet ist. Die Leser:innen werden mit den Folgen ökologischer Krisen direkt konfrontiert, wodurch die Aufdeckung ihrer Ursachen immer dringlicher wird. Zusätzlich tragen Cliffhanger am Ende jedes Kapitels zum Spannungsaufbau bei. Der kriminalliterarische Dreischritt von "Verbrechen, Fahndung und Überführung des Täters" (Schneider-Özbek 232) wird modifiziert, indem zunächst Anzeichen einer Katastrophe wahrgenommen, Gegenmaßnahmen durchgesetzt werden und die Katastrophe in letzter Minute verhindert wird.

Insgesamt entwirft der Thriller eine Atmosphäre konstanter Unsicherheit⁸ und Gefährdungen, in der die Suche nach den Ursachen der Kontamination der Fische immer wieder im Sande zu verlaufen droht und die Protagonist:innen statt dessen vor immer neue Herausforderungen gestellt werden. Die nachfolgende Analyse verbindet diese Aspekte mit dem Konzept der "Kontaktszene" und der Frage nach den Commons und deren Praxis als *Commoning*.

Disruptive Begegnungen und gestörte Wissenskommunikation in der Arktis - Schmelzpunkt als Kontaktszene

Die Veränderungen des arktischen Raums, die ihm sicherheitspolitisch eine immense Bedeutung verleihen und ihn in eine prekäre Lage versetzen, thematisiert Harlander in *Schmelzpunkt*. Der fiktive Schauplatz entartet zu einer "Kampfzone" (SP 80). So erläutert der Abteilungsleiter des BND:

Wir müssen davon ausgehen, dass sich unter dem Meeresspiegel momentan alle ein Stelldichein geben – angefangen von den Atom-U-Booten der Russen und Chinesen über die USA bis hin zu denen der Franzosen und der Briten. [...] Weil wir es versäumt haben, umfassende Kontrollinstrumente im Norden zu installieren, können alle Militärs in der Arktis tun und lassen, was sie wollen. Niemand haut ihnen auf die Finger. (SP 316)

Der Erzähler skizziert zahlreiche explosive Ereignisse wie etwa Mordanschläge, Schießereien und kriegsähnliche Kampfhandlungen, deren teils reportageartige Vermittlung an journalistische Strategien erinnert. Dabei geht das entworfene Narrativ über die für das Genre typischen Dichotomien hinaus, indem es die politischen und ökonomischen Entwicklungen in der Arktis thematisiert und zugleich das asymmetrische Aufeinandertreffen unterschiedlicher gesellschaftlich-politischer Interessensgruppen sowie kulturelle Spannungen in den Fokus rückt, die sich aus der Art und Weise ergeben, wie Wissen in der Kommunikation mit betroffenen Akteur:innen generiert wird.

⁸ Diese Unsicherheit ist zu verstehen im Sinne von Housers Konzept des "Infowhelm," wonach Schriftsteller:innen und Kunstschaffende wissenschaftliche Erkenntnisse und Informationen in ästhetische Darstellungen integrieren, um so der überbordenden und eigentlich negativ gesehenen Informationsflut Ausdruck zu verleihen (vgl. Anm. 6 hier).

Damit ist zugleich das Konzept der "Kontaktszene" aufgerufen, das nach Nitzke und Koch (2022) auf "die Untersuchung gestörter Wissenskommunikation" zielt (414). Ihre Leistungsfähigkeit zeigt die Kontaktszene darin, dass "sie jene Interessen und Asymmetrien sichtbar machen kann (Erforschung, Eroberung, Vermittlung, Belehrung), durch welche die Störung oder das totale Scheitern der Kontaktaufnahme immer schon als latente Möglichkeit gegeben ist" (Nitzke und Koch 414). Für die "Störung" des Kontaktes verweist Koch auf den Begriff "Disruption," den er folgendermaßen definiert:

Der Begriff der "Disruption" wird hier auf einem abstrakten Niveau verstanden als Markierung einer erwartbaren und gleichzeitig unvorhersehbaren Unterbrechung, Beschädigung oder gar Zerstörung von sozialen, technischen, physikalisch-materialen und diskursiven Ordnungen. Disruptionen unterschiedlicher Intensität existieren nur relational bezogen auf einen angenommenen Normalverlauf, den sie sabotieren. (415)

Die oben angesprochenen kampf- und kriegsähnlichen Ereignisse lassen sich dem Begriff der Disruption insofern zuordnen, als mit solchen durch die prekäre Situation der arktischen Region generell gerechnet werden muss, wenngleich sie im Einzelnen nicht planbar sind. Wichtig ist zudem, dass die Charakterisierung solcher Kontakte oder "Begegnungen" als "Szene" es erlaubt, "dynamische Gebilde zu beobachten," "anstatt die Beteiligten vorschnell auf starre Positionen im Aushandlungszusammenhang festzuschreiben" (Nitzke und Koch 414).

Mit Blick darauf lässt sich sagen, dass Harlanders *Schmelzpunkt* eine fiktionale "Kontaktszene" inszeniert, die sich durch eine inhärente disruptive Qualität besonders auf der Ebene der Wissenskommunikation auszeichnet. Der Roman enthält komplexe, aufstörende wie auch emotional-affektive Situationen - vor allem wenn Dinge (Ressourcen), Ideen und Räume, die kulturelle Identitäten begründen, zum Gegenstand fremder Interessen werden. Die soweit genannten "guten" Akteur:innen handeln mit unterschiedlicher Motivation, agieren aber kollaborativ. Die Ursachen des mysteriösen Fischsterbens, mit dem sich Hanna und Nanoq konfrontiert sehen, können nur Schritt für Schritt ermittelt werden, wenn analeptisch in der *histoire* eingetretene Ereignisse und deren Umstände sukzessive aufgedeckt werden (Dürbeck 247). Die Wahrheitsfindung wird sabotiert, was wiederum auf den disruptiven Charakter des Ökothrillers verweist.

Darüber hinaus werden bereits mit Hanna und Nanoq asymmetrische Positionen unterschiedlicher gesellschaftlicher (Macht-)Systeme zusammengebracht: Nanoq, der als Inuk durch seinen Großvater spirituelles und vom Erzähler positiv konnotiertes Wissen⁹ über die Arktis besitzt und mit Inuit-Mythen wie etwa der "Meerfrau" Sedna aufgewachsen ist (SP 5, 28, 45-47); daneben die deutsche Biologin mit Dokortitel, die als institutionalisierte Expertin beauftragt wird. Und obgleich sowohl ein Einheimischer als auch eine ortsfremde Berufswissenschaftlerin unmissverständliche Warnungen aussprechen, verweigern

⁹ Vgl. dazu die Gegenüberstellung von "positivistischen Epistemologien europäischer Naturwissenschaften" und "indigenen Wissensformen" nach Houser, Anm. 6 hier.

Politik und Gesellschaft, die ein weiteres Machtsystem vertreten, die Kommunikation. Die Kassandrarufo werden ignoriert und das nicht nur einmal. Das Ausmaß der Folgen nimmt exponentiell zu: Zunächst warnt Nanoq Tourist:innen, die in der arktischen Tierwelt lediglich exotische Fotomotive suchen, vor einem Eisbären. Da seine Ratschläge nicht gehört werden, greift das Tier die Gruppe an und muss erschossen werden. Als Nanoq den Bürgermeister und die Polizei von Ilulissat auf das unnatürliche Fischsterben aufmerksam macht, reagieren diese äußerst reserviert und verweisen auf das *Greenland Institute of Natural Resources*. Doch Nanoq als aufmerksamer Naturbeobachter lässt sich nicht beirren und sucht erneut den Bürgermeister auf, diesmal, da er die Gefahr einer Gletscherabspaltung erkennt. Die Reaktion des Bürgermeisters mündet in einen Lacher und der Antwort:

Unser großer Gletscherexperte Nanoq Egede¹⁰ hat plötzlich neue Erkenntnisse, so so. Und aufgrund deiner nicht wissenschaftlichen Analyse, weil du gerade so ein Bauchgefühl hast oder die Wassergeister dir etwas eingeflüstert haben, sollen jetzt alle [...] in Panik verfallen? (SP 173-174)

Kommunikationstheoretisch gesehen beruft sich der Bürgermeister als Empfänger der Warnungen auf die fehlende Expertise des Senders, woraus eine gestörte Kommunikation resultiert: Nanoq wird belächelt—ihm wird wissenschaftliche Kompetenz abgesprochen. Dass die Cassandra-Rufe nicht ernst genommen werden, spitzt sich in *Schmelzpunkt* ironisierend zu: Denn jede Katastrophe, vor der gewarnt wurde, tritt ein und selbst als die Wissenschaftlerin Hanna die Dringlichkeit der Krisenlage betont, stößt sie auf Unverständnis.¹¹ Hier zeigt der Ökothriller ein wesentliches Charakteristikum ökologischer Krisen, welches zugleich für Kontaktszenen gilt: Die Veränderungen vollziehen sich schleichend, deren Folgen sind nicht unmittelbar wahrnehmbar und nur schwer vorzustellen. Sie bleiben—besonders für die breite Öffentlichkeit, hier in der Figur des Bürgermeisters, der Polizei und der Touristen verkörpert—abstrakt, wodurch sich ein Kommunikationsproblem ergibt:

Je komplexer die Bedingungen sind, unter denen Wissen produziert wird bzw. je komplexer ›die Zusammenhänge‹, ›die Wissenschaft‹ und je größer der (ökonomische und politische) Aufwand der Vermittlung und ggf. Reaktion auf dieses Wissen wird, desto deutlicher greift ein Vereinfachungsimperativ, in dem sich eine Beweislastumkehr artikuliert: Nunmehr steht das Schwierige, das Langatmige, das Unzugängliche, das Wissenschaft immer ausmacht, unter Verdacht, während das Leichte, Zugängliche, Populäre nicht nur gefällt, sondern gar als Zielkoordinate ausgerufen wird. (Koch und Nitzke 415-416)

Dass dieser ‚Imperativ‘ zur Vereinfachung auf allen Ebenen zu spüren ist, wird deutlich, als selbst die indigene Bevölkerung Nanoqs Warnungen als unzugänglich

¹⁰ Der Name des Protagonisten ist möglicherweise ein ‚Telling Name.‘ Hans Egede war ein dänischer Pastor, der die protestantische Missionierung und europäische Kolonisierung Grönlands einleitete. Vergleichbar versucht Nanoq (dt. Eisbär) die Menschen in seiner Heimat vor ökologischen Katastrophen zu warnen und sie zum Handeln zu bewegen.

¹¹ Generell haben Debatten um Wissenschaftskommunikation medial eine neue Popularität erfahren. Der Rekurs auf Kontaktszenen zeigt sich z.B. beim 2021 erschienen Film *Don't Look Up* (Regie: Adam McKay, 2021).

empfindet. Die Reaktionen sind Verständnislosigkeit oder eine Bagatellisierung des Problems, was Nanoq mit der "Schicksalsergebenheit der Inuit, ihren Glauben an höhere Mächte, die Ehrfurcht vor dem Eis" (SP 175) erklärt. Die Nichtbeachtung, die seine Warnung erfährt, kumuliert in der Aussage seiner Schwester: "Am Ende ist es nur deine Meinung. Ob es tatsächlich so eintritt, steht in den Sternen" (SP 176). Indem eine Katastrophe dann tatsächlich passiert—ein großer Teil des Jakobshavn-Gletschers kalbt und ein dadurch verursachter Tsunami überflutet Ilulissat—erfüllt sich sowohl der Übergang von der Potenzialität (der Katastrophe) zur Aktualität nach Kerridge (244) als auch die Gleichzeitigkeit erwartbarer, aber nicht vorhersehbarer Zerstörungen im Sinne der Koch'schen Disruption.

Die Langatmigkeit der wissenschaftlichen Forschung, die an Hannas Vorgehen ablesbar ist, lässt den *plot* des Romans selbst zu einer "Kontaktszene" werden. Den Leser:innen wird die Unzulänglichkeit der Wissenschaft in Hinblick auf vorschnelle Antworten einmal mehr vor Augen geführt, was gleichzeitig der Erhöhung der Spannung dient. Erst in Kap. 79 wird die Ursache des katastrophalen Fischsterbens und des Tsunamis als die eigentliche und wirklich große Katastrophe enthüllt und Dr. Horn in den Mund gelegt: "Auf dem Grund der Diskobucht liegt ein havariertes Atom-U-Boot" (SP 436). Hanna erkennt den Zusammenhang: "Dann hat also die intensive Hitzestrahlung des Kernreaktors den Gletscherabbruch herbeigeführt" (SP 439). Sie löst damit das für den Ökothriller typische Figurenmodell ein, demzufolge das Geschehen aus der Perspektive von Wissenschaftler:innen dargelegt wird, welche die Lösung bzw. Beseitigung der Gefahren maßgeblich selbst in die Hand nehmen.

Die Dichotomie von Gut vs. Böse spiegelt sich auf der Figurenebene wider und verschärft zusätzlich die Konstruktion der disruptiven Kontaktszene. Dies wird deutlich, wenn man die Antagonisten genauer ins Visier nimmt: Da ist der Chinese Huang Li, der das *Camp Glacier* auf dem Grönländischen Eisschild leitet und Hannas These über ausgetretene Radioaktivität bagatellisiert. Hannas Recherchen und ihre wissenschaftliche Kooperation werden durch Stromausfälle, Störungen der Internet- und Telefonverbindungen usw. untergraben (Kap. 44). Sie wird Zeugin eines Mordes und flieht in einem Schneemobil. Undurchsichtig ist auch die Rolle des russischen General Managers Andrej Sokolov, der in Barentsburg auf Spitzbergen für eine Kohlemine verantwortlich ist, in der er "Uran und seltene Erden" vermutet (SP 133); offensichtlich hat er die Finger im Spiel, als Diana und Nelson in der Mine verschüttet werden. Weiter ist der Chef der *Transnations Holding* Magnus Ruud zu nennen, der eine Briefkastenfirma und Konten auf den Cayman Inseln besitzt (Kap. 53) und sich als großer Strippenzieher erweist. Unklar sind die Verbindungen Ruuds zu dem Schweizer Marc Ziegler, der im "Topmanagement des weltgrößten Bergbau- und Rohstoffkonzerns Glencore" (SP 63) arbeitet und den Diana und Nelson in Reykjavik treffen.

Die Grenzen zwischen "guten" und "bösen" Figuren lassen sich nicht eindeutig einer sozio-kulturellen Gruppen zuordnen. Die Kontaktszene erweist sich erneut als "dynamisches Gebilde" (Koch und Nitzke 414): Innerhalb der Inuit gibt es verschiedene Haltungen. Beispiel dafür ist die Figur des Inuk Paalus, der sich als

Helfer anheuern lässt, nicht nur um Hannas und Nanoqs Recherchen zu unterminieren, sondern sogar, um sie zu eliminieren. Nanoq erkennt: "sein angeblicher Freund – war ein Verräter" (SP 479). Paalus Kollaboration mit den skrupellosen Vertretern kapitalistischer Interessen zeigt, dass *Schmelzpunkt* keine Bedrohung von außen oder von einer unbekanntem Macht thematisiert; vielmehr geht es um eine letztlich vom Menschen "selbst verschuldete Zerstörung der Natur, gleichsam eine Bedrohung von innen" (Nitzke 176), welche auch vor der indigenen Bevölkerung nicht Halt macht.

Insgesamt ist hinsichtlich des Ökothrillers als einer disruptiven Kontaktszene deutlich geworden, dass die Kommunikation zwischen der Wissenschaft—vertreten von Hanna—und dem indigenen Wissen—vertreten von Nanoq—trotz asymmetrischer Ausgangspunkte erfolgreich verläuft. Bedingt wird dies nicht zuletzt dadurch, dass Nanoq in der Lage ist, zwischen den wissenschaftlich-nüchternen Vorgehensweisen Hannas und dem mythischen Denken seines Großvaters zu vermitteln und tradierte Wissensformen am Beispiel seiner Kenntnisse über das Eis aufgewertet werden. Die Kommunikation zwischen der Wissenschaft und der einheimischen Gesellschaft scheitert jedoch und den Gegenspielern gelingt es immer wieder, die wissenschaftliche Aufklärungsarbeit zu unterlaufen.

Der Streit um die Ressourcen: Von den Commons zum *Commoning* als soziale Praxis

Die erzählte Situation mit unterschiedlichen Interessensgruppen, die sich angesichts unklarer politischer Machtverhältnisse an den verschiedenen Schauplätzen des Romans einen Zugang zu Rohstoffen sichern wollen, nimmt Anleihen an den realen Streitigkeiten über die Ressourcen des arktischen Territoriums und dessen Status als *Global Common*. *Global Commons* betreffen Gemeingüter, die nicht der Kontrolle durch Nationalstaaten unterliegen. Dazu gehören klassischerweise "die Ozeane und der Meeresboden, die Atmosphäre, der Weltraum und die Polregionen" (Lambach und Diehl 5). Die Frage nach Verteilung, Besitz und Regularien für natürliche Ressourcen ist zentraler Bestandteil der Debatte um die *Commons*. Bevor auf die Problematik der Ressourcen im Roman selbst eingegangen wird, erfolgt ein kurzer Blick auf die Entwicklung des *Commons*-Begriffs.

Aufschlussreich ist zunächst die etymologische Herkunft des Begriffs *Commons* aus dem Lateinischen *cum* (mit) und *munus* (Verantwortung, Pflicht und Gabe) (Helfrich und Euler 41). Akteur:innen des *Commonings*—verstanden als Art und Weise eines aktiven Verhaltens, eines Tuns—befinden sich in einem wechselseitigen Verantwortungsverhältnis. Historisch geht die Problematik der Commons auf Einhegungsbewegungen (engl. *Enclosure*) zurück, die bereits in Europa vom 16. bis ins 18. Jahrhundert, insbes. in England und verspätet auch in Deutschland als Flurbereinigungen stattfanden, im Zuge derer z.B. zahlreiche Weidegebiete oder generell Gemeinland in Eigentum überführt und die enteigneten Bauern und Bäuerinnen als Landarbeiter:innen beschäftigt wurden (Helfrich und Euler 40).

Als Antwort auf Adam Smiths marktliberale These der “invisible hand” in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) und den Befürchtungen Thomas R. Malthus’ in seinem *Essay on the Principles of Population* (1798), die Nahrungsmittelproduktion könne mit dem exponentiellen Bevölkerungsanstieg nicht schritthalten, erörtert Hardin in seinem einflussreichen Aufsatz *The Tragedy of the Commons* (1968) das Dilemma, dass eine gemeinsam genutzte Weide zwangsläufig übernutzt werde: “the rational herdsman concludes that the only sensible course for him to pursue is to add another animal to his herd. And another, and another, [...]” (1244). Dies bringe letztlich Schaden für alle: “Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all” (1244). Hardins Vorschlag marktorientierter oder staatlicher Lösungen sorgte dafür, dass gemeinwirtschaftliche Alternativen im politischen Diskurs über Jahrzehnte hinweg zurückgedrängt wurden (Helfrich und Euler 43-44).

Die Politik- und Wirtschaftswissenschaftlerin Elinor Ostrom, die 2009 als erste Frau den Nobelpreis für Wirtschaftswissenschaften erhielt, beschäftigte sich jahrelang mit der Frage der Gemeingüter, deren Bewirtschaftung und den Umgang mit knappen Ressourcen wie z.B. Wasser, Holz, Weidewiesen/Wald, aber auch Stellplätze in Parkhäusern. Ostrom wies Hardins These zurück und stützte ihre Begründung auf zahlreiche Fallbeispiele, in denen überwiegend lokal ausgerichtete Kooperationen *Jenseits von Markt und Staat*—so Ostroms Buchtitel—Gemeinressourcen in regelbasierter Selbstorganisation und unter Bedingungen kollektiver (Re-)Produktion bewirtschafteten, um so die materiellen Grundlagen des Zusammenlebens zu sichern. In Abgrenzung zu bestehenden Auffassungen legte sie den Grundstein für einen neuen Diskurs, der die Verdinglichung der Gemeingüter kritisiert. Ostrom und Helfrich, die Mitbegründerin des deutschen *Commons-Instituts*, nehmen Commons nicht als bloßes Gut wahr, sondern berücksichtigen auch deren soziale Verbindlichkeit. Nach Helfrich und Euler wird der Fokus nicht auf das Gut selbst, sondern auf “soziale[...] Praktiken” gelegt, welche einen angemessenen Umgang für den Erhalt des Guts gewährleisten (47). “Gentle Encounters” (Puig de la Bellacasa) kommen insofern der Vorstellung der Commons nach Ostrom und Helfrich nahe, als die Auffassung von Menschlichem und Nicht-Menschlichem als bloße Ressource hinterfragt und Begegnungen zwischen beiden als *Matters of Care* unabhängig von der Logik der Dominanz gesehen werden.

Commoning—hier in der Verbform—betrifft im Sinne von Ostrom und Helfrich immer ein verkörpertes, materielles, sinnliches, existentielles und symbolisches Aushandeln der individuellen Existenz durch den Anderen und das Ganze. *Commoning* folgt dem Prinzip einer “Ökologie der Wirklichkeit” und beruht auf “konkreten Interaktionen” (Weber 361). Ostrom grenzt sich damit von Hardin ab, dem sie vorwirft, seine These auf “zwei unrealistische Annahmen” gegründet zu haben, nämlich dass die Weide “ein *Niemandland* und kein *Gemeingut*” sei und dass die Schafzüchter in seiner Theorie “anonym und ohne Wissen über das Handeln der anderen” (Stollorz 9-10) agierten. Diese Revision der Problematik entspricht Helfrichs These: Commons “sind nicht, sie werden gemacht” (85). Einschränkend zum Vorschlag von Ostrom und Helfrich ist jedoch zu sehen, dass—wie Bergthaller und

Horn herausstellen, die Vorschläge zu Interaktionen “nur in relativ kleinen Gruppen funktionieren und sich nicht ohne Weiteres auf den Maßstab der Weltgesellschaft übertragen lassen” (116).

Der Blick auf die Arktis zeigt, dass solche Interaktionen jedoch nur selten innerhalb kleiner Gruppen oder einzelner Nationen verbleiben – die Kausalketten greifen dafür zu weit. Doch können Asymmetrien verschwimmen und internationale Zusammenarbeit leichter gelingen, wenn das Potenzial von Commoning berücksichtigt wird. Dabei muss es nicht zwingend um endliche, materielle, natürliche Ressourcen wie Rohstoffe gehen, sondern—wie dies in *Schmelzpunkt* geschieht—auch um nicht fassbare, immaterielle, intellektuelle Ressourcen im Sinne sogenannter Wissensallmenden, die dazu führen, dass Zusammenarbeit gelingt.

In *Schmelzpunkt* ist die Frage der Commons durch die politisch ungeklärte Situation der arktischen Region allgegenwärtig. So erfahren Diana und Nelson beim Besuch im Brüsseler Nato-Hauptquartier vom Assistenten des Generalsekretärs, dass alle acht Arktis-Anrainerstaaten aus drei Kontinenten “Ansprüche auf das Gebiet” erheben. Russland behauptete sogar, “der Nordpol gehöre ihnen” (SP 102). Auf die Nachfrage nach einem Vertrag—entsprechend dem Vorbild der Antarktis—verweist der Assistent auf die “Besitzverhältnisse im Norden,” die “genauso wenig geregelt” seien “wie auf dem Mond.” Er erklärt: “Jeder macht, was er will. Das einzige überregionale Gremium ist der Arktische Rat—aber der hat de facto nichts zu melden und folglich gar nichts zu entscheiden.” Im Gespräch schaltet sich ein US-General ein und stellt heraus: “Hier geht es um nackte Machtinteressen und sonst nichts [...]. Rohstoffe, Fischerei, Transportwege. So heißen die Stichworte. Die Region verspricht Multimilliardengeschäfte—so lukrativ wie sonst nirgends auf der Welt” (SP 103).

In der Haltung des Generals werden die Ressourcen (der Allmende) aus einer übergeordneten globalen Sicht als monetär quantifizierbare Größe umschrieben. Ähnliches gilt für die Ausführungen des Schweizer Marc Ziegler, wenn er Diana und Nelson gegenüber behauptet, dass der “Nordpol der letzte weiße Fleck auf der Welt” sei, “ein Gebiet, wo die Pfründe noch nicht verteilt sind” und folgende Konsequenzen skizziert:

Deshalb finden derzeit erbitterte Verteilungskämpfe statt – auf wirtschaftlichem, politischem und militärischem Gebiet. Ganz nach dem Motto: Was der Konkurrenz schadet, ist gut für uns. Gefochten wird natürlich hinter den Kulissen, man möchte schließlich keine Zeugen. Jeder wird leugnen, etwas damit zu tun zu haben. (SP 229)

Hier kommt Hardins ‘Tragödie’ zum Ausdruck. Der Konkurrenzkampf zielt darauf, dass sich der Einzelne so viele Güter wie möglich sichert. Was Zieglers Argument außen vor lässt, ist die Endlichkeit der Güter, weshalb diese Haltung letztlich der Gemeinschaft aller schadet. Die Problematik der Allmende wird auch an anderen Schauplätzen des Ökothrillers, so z.B. in Barentsburg und Longyearbyen angedeutet. Ein Informant erklärt: “Wie Sie wissen, ist Barentsburg eine russische Enklave, obwohl Spitzbergen zu Norwegen gehört. Aber seit hundert Jahren garantiert der Spitzbergenvertrag jedem Land, frei Handel und Bergbau betreiben zu dürfen, jeder kann seine Schiffe hier ankern lassen” (SP 125).

Die Haltung der Vertreter von Industrie- und Wirtschaft lässt sich dahingehend deuten, dass die im Fokus des Interesses stehenden Güter, nämlich Fische, Rohstoffe und Bodenschätze, lediglich als objektivierbare Einheiten in einem anonymen—weil globalen—Kontext auftreten. Die Manager und Firmenchefs nehmen auf die gewachsenen Beziehungen zwischen dem indigenen Volk und diesen Gütern keine Rücksicht und schrecken zur Durchsetzung ihrer Interessen auch nicht davor zurück, Kriminelle anzuheuern.

Wie demgegenüber eine alternative Vorgehensweise gemäß dem Ansatz von Ostrom und Helfrich aussehen kann, zeigt Peter Doran, der als wichtige Voraussetzung für eine Rückgewinnung der Commons verlangt, “to [...] replace the consumer mentality with a holistic and phenomenological approach to communing” (106). Er führt aus:

Commoning is about rendering visible that which has been enclosed, cut off; it is about public remembering, and restoring the deep connection between a community’s values-intentions and the connections they can establish with a shared resource. (107)

Dies trifft für *Schmelzpunkt* zu: Die mächtigen Wirtschafts- und Konzernbosse klammern das erinnerte Wissen und die tiefen Verbindungen aus, die zwischen wertorientierten Absichten und geteilten Ressourcen innerhalb der indigenen Gemeinschaft etabliert wurden.

Inwiefern kann die Neuausrichtung der Commons hin zu einem Handeln des Commonings weiterhelfen? Laut Horn und Bergthaller habe Ostrom gezeigt, dass “Hardins abstrakte Modellierung des Problems sich nicht mit den empirischen Beobachtungen deckt” (111). Demnach seien Strukturen, welche eine nachhaltige Nutzung natürlicher Ressourcen ermöglichen, “häufig das Resultat von spontaner Kooperation zwischen den beteiligten Akteuren” (115). An dieser Stelle ist wichtig zu erwähnen, dass es bei den Praktiken des Commonings “nicht um die Ressourcen *per se*” (Ostrom *Was mehr wird* 15) geht. Vielmehr muss in den Blick genommen werden, “wie wir die gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse regeln und welche Institutionen wir dafür brauchen. Institutionen beeinflussen unsere Art zu handeln und zu denken. Institutionen machen den Menschen, aber Institutionen werden umgekehrt auch vom Menschen gemacht” (Ostrom *Was mehr wird* 15).

Um den damit verbundenen Herausforderungen in *Schmelzpunkt* auf den Grund zu gehen, lohnt erneut der Blick auf das Genre des Ökothrillers. Gemeinschaftliches Handeln erhält hier eine wichtige Bedeutung. Geht man von dem für das Genre typischen “Bipolarismus” (Schneider-Özbeck 231) aus, so ist zu sehen, dass die Ursache der Katastrophe generell den “bösen” Figuren zugeschrieben wird, die oft aufgrund wirtschaftlicher Interessen als Zerstörer der Umwelt auftreten. So kritisiert Nanoqs Großvater, dass “der Natur mehr weggenommen” wurde, als die Menschen “ihr zurückgegeben haben. Wir Inuit haben immer darauf geachtet, dass dieses Gleichgewicht erhalten bleibt. Doch die Menschen da draußen sind gierig” (SP 45). Die Gier, die der alte Inuk beschreibt, erinnert an Hardins “Tragedy of the Commons.” In *Schmelzpunkt* versuchen verschiedenste Akteure—Staaten und

Individuen—ihr Interesse an der Arktis durchzusetzen. Sie ringen um den Besitzanspruch, was in einer Katastrophe kulminiert. Die Antagonisten sehen lediglich den Profit, die Ressourcenvorkommen—die Arktis wird zum Gut. Der Roman stellt diese Haltung dem traditionellen Wissen der Inuit gegenüber:

Sie hatten gelernt, in dieser extrem feindlichen Umgebung zurechtzukommen, im Eis zu jagen und für Essen zu sorgen, in Iglus aus Eis zu wohnen. Kein anderes Volk auf diesem Planeten schaffte es, in solch einer unwirtlichen Welt zu überleben – ohne die Vorzüge moderner Technik, ohne Hilfe von außen, ganz auf sich gestellt. (SP 33)

Genretypisch entsteht die Katastrophe als Folge “anthropozentrischer Naturbeherrschung, rationalistisch geprägter Fortschrittsideologie und technologisch-ökonomischer Ausbeutung natürlicher Ressourcen” (Dürbeck 245). Diese Haltung kommt in den angeführten Aussagen der Wirtschafts- und Industriebosse zum Ausdruck. Zugleich greift der Gegensatz von globalem und lokalem Handeln: Während Letztere auf einer globalen Ebene agieren, gelingt der Gruppe der “guten” Figuren um Nanoq und Hanna auf der lokalen Ebene vor Ort in letzter Minute die Lösung der Probleme. Dies entspricht Leanes Beobachtung: “the conspiracy against which the hero must fight is often global in scope, but the action through which it is resolved is usually highly localised, in the form of individual combat” (Leane 91).¹² So stehen den ausbeuterischen Absichten die enge Verbindung und Zusammenarbeit der ‘guten’ Akteur:innen auf der lokalen Ebene gegenüber. Gerade hier, d.h. in lokalen Aktionen, zeigt der Ökothriller Auswege aus der Krise auf (Dürbeck 243-244), die in der drohenden Zerstörung der Commons besteht.

Kritisch ist anzumerken, dass sich gerade bei Katastrophendarstellungen zur Veranschaulichung der Folgen des ökologischen Raubbaus der Drang zu einfachen und vollständigen Lösungen zeigt, der dem Genre inhärent ist. Zwar fordern die in *Schmelzpunkt* auftretenden Katastrophen zahlreiche Todesopfer und die politischen Konflikte um die Arktis als Global Common bleiben bestehen, jedoch kommt es auf der Figurenebene zu einem “Happy Ending”. Allgemein bleibt fraglich, inwiefern Literatur die Komplexität der ineinandergreifenden Katastrophen des Anthropozän adäquat adressieren kann. Weiterhin ist anzumerken, dass Diana und Nelson zwar im nationalstaatlichen Auftrag agieren und dass auch Hannas Reise in die Arktis von großen Konzernen gesponsert wird. Sie zeigen aber durch die wechselseitige Teilung ihrer Expertisen, dass Commoning auf einer lokalen Ebene, auf der das Hardin’sche Wettrennen außen vor bleibt, gelingen kann. Institutionen können dafür hilfreich sein. Demnach geht es beim Commoning um Teilhabe, d.h. darum zu zeigen,

dass Menschen in ihren verschiedenen sozialen Netzen über ein schier unerschöpfliches Reservoir an Wissen, Erfahrungen, formellen und informellen Regeln verfügen, an dem wir alle teilhaben können – wenn wir unsere Aufmerksamkeit darauf richten. (Ostrom *Was mehr wird* 16)

In *Schmelzpunkt* erhält das Commoning die Funktion, die Allmende zu schützen und eine Katastrophe zu verhindern. Um das nachvollziehen zu können, sind die

¹² Zum Spannungsverhältnis von globalem und lokalem Handeln vgl. auch Heise *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008).

Vertreter:innen der “Guten” genauer zu betrachten. Auffällig ist, dass diese paarweise eingeführt werden. Schon zu Beginn kann der/die Leser:in eine Annäherung zwischen Nanoq und Hanna antizipieren. Nanoq vermittelt eine Sichtweise, welche sich zwischen empirisch-rationalem Wissen und spirituellen Naturbetrachtungen¹³ verorten lässt. Letzteres ist erkennbar, als er einen Eisbären allein durch einen “Singsang auf Kalaallisut” verscheucht, der für Hanna “wie eine alte Zauberformel der Inuit, wie eine rituelle Beschwörung” (SP 408) und für Diana nach “Magie” (408) klingt. Auch sein Wissen über das Eis ist ein Alleinstellungsmerkmal. So heißt es, dass er “von klein auf [...] wie alle Inuit dazu erzogen worden [war], das Eis zu lesen. Über Jahre hatte ihm sein Großvater alles beigebracht, was man dazu wissen musste. [...] Denn das Eis war das zentrale Lebelement der Inuit” (SP 32). Ähnlich erkennt Nanoq gefährliche Veränderungen im Eis, die ihn irritieren und deren Ursache er herausfinden möchte¹⁴. Diese natürliche Neugier wird durch Hannas wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen ideal ergänzt. Die Interaktion von traditionellem und intuitivem Wissen und naturwissenschaftlicher Vorgehensweise wird mittels einer Liebesbeziehung besiegelt.

Im Commons-Diskurs kommen Affekten, Emotionen und Subjektivität eine große Bedeutung zu. Weber betont, dass Commons-Tätigkeiten emotionale Bedürfnisse stillen und die individuelle Subjektivität beeinflussen (365). Dies zeichnet sich an Nanoqs Selbstbild ab, als er seine Identität hinterfragt und sich als “nicht fest verwurzelt” betrachtet (SP 10). Die Gründe, die zu dieser Selbsteinschätzung führen, sind geprägt durch die Machtkämpfe fremder (neo-)kolonialer Interessensgruppen. Wird eine auf wechselseitige affektbestimmte Beziehungen basierende Allmende kolonialisiert, so Weber, dann “sind die emotionalen Bedürfnisse der Beteiligten nicht mehr erfüllbar” (365). Stattdessengeraten sie unter den Verdacht der Rückständigkeit:

Im Zuge der Kolonialisierung – die gerade auch unsere vermeintlich modernen Köpfe erobert hat – werden solche Emotionen als rückständig, abergläubisch, unaufgeklärt oder unwissenschaftlich denunziert. [...] Der Zusammenbruch der Affekte hat materielle Konsequenzen, durch die auch das Verhältnis des Menschen zum Ökosystem leidet. (365)

Diese Denunziation trifft auch Nanok, sie nagt an seinem Selbstbewusstsein. Doch nachdem er den Eisbären vertreiben konnte und die vier Figuren in Etah in einen Hinterhalt geraten, findet er zu seinen Wurzeln zurück. Das tradierte Wissen des Großvaters, das Nanoq zuvor abgewiesen hatte, erweist sich in Etah als lebensrettend für alle.

¹³ Vgl. dazu Anm. 6.

¹⁴ Hier finden sich Parallelen zu Peter Hoegs Roman *Fräulein Smillas Gespür für Schnee* (1992), in dem die in Grönland aufgewachsene arbeitslose Wissenschaftlerin Smilla Jaspersen, Tochter einer Inuk und Grönländerin, den Fußspuren eines Jungen im Schnee auf dem Dach eines Wohnblocks, von dem er in den Tod stürzte, Hinweise entnimmt, die schließlich eine andere Todesursache offenbaren als zunächst angenommen. Smilla Jaspersen vereint die mit Nanoq und Hanna gegebenen Kulturunterschiede gleichsam in einer Person.

Nelson und Diana sind in einer Bodensenke gefangen und können nur dank Nanoq entkommen. Das Agentenpaar des BND fungiert als Kontrast zu Hanna und Nanoq, da ihre pragmatische Beziehung auf rein beruflichen Interessen beruht. Diana und Nelson können sich absolut aufeinander verlassen. Dies zeigt sich darin, dass sie sich immer wieder im letzten Moment aus scheinbar aussichtslosen Situationen retten können, wodurch sie zugleich das Klischee des Agententhillers bedienen. So schlägt Diana einen Russen, der Nelson im Waschraum eines Stollens bedroht hatte, mit einem Feuerlöscher bewusstlos (SP Kap. 29) und sie simulieren ein Liebespaar, um ein Ablenkungsmanöver zu inszenieren und an Informationen über einen russischen Frachter zu kommen (SP Kap. 38). Durch wortlose Verständigung schaffen sie es immer wieder, Tarnungen aufzudecken und Angriffe abzuwehren (SP Kap. 45, 89).

Das Vorgehen der beiden Paare im Sinne des Commonings nach Ostrom und Helfrich zeigt sich bei einem gemeinsamen Treffen in Ilulissat, welches der BND initiiert. Diana erläutert Hanna das Ziel ihrer und Nelsons Beauftragung, nämlich "eine neue nukleare Katastrophe zu verhindern," indem Hanna mit ihrer naturwissenschaftlichen Expertise als Biologin zur Aufklärung beiträgt: "Sie könnten uns helfen, diese Strahlenquelle zu identifizieren. Keiner hat sich mehr mit dem Thema beschäftigt als Sie" (SP 365). Der kollaborative Austausch im Sinne eines Transfers von Wissen ist Beispiel einer gelungenen Kommunikation gleichberechtigter Partner, der eine erfolgreiche lokale Aktivität folgt.

Aus der Perspektive des Commonings repräsentieren Besitzansprüche und Einhegung eine Bedrohung der Ressourcen und gefährden die Identität derjenigen, die auf sie angewiesen sind. Im *plot* kommt es zu weiteren kooperativen und gefährlichen Aktionen zum Schutz der Commons. Hanna und Nanoq stiften Verwirrung, während Diana und Nelson unbemerkt gefährliche Sprengsätze entschärfen (SP Kap. 80). Der gegenseitige Transfer von Informationen, aber auch die Vernetzung sind von entscheidender Bedeutung für die Rettung der regionalen Ressourcen und Beispiel für den Umgang mit der Allmende im Sinne des Commonings, das stets in einer konkreten Situation stattfindet. Wie es der intensive Austausch der Gruppe zeigt, sind die Werte, die das Aushandeln bestimmen, ihr immanent und können nicht von außen hinzugefügt werden. Doch es sind erst die Prozesse des Aneignens, des Verschleierns und der Disruption, die das heterogene Figurenpersonal zur Zusammenarbeit bewegt. Angesichts der skizzierten Verhältnisse und ihren Folgen sehen sich die Akteur:innen dazu berufen sich zusammenzutun und ihre verfügbaren Mittel gemeinsam zu nutzen sowie ihr Wissen und ihre Expertise zu teilen—sie nehmen eine Haltung der Fürsorge ein und Teilen bedeutet sodann keinen Verlust, sondern Gewinn.

Resümee

Die Lektüre des Ökothrillers *Schmelzpunkt* hat gezeigt, dass die durch eine gestörte und unsichere Wissenskommunikation geprägte "Kontaktszene" und die

geschilderte Situation der Arktis mit ihren Ressourcen und unklaren Machtverhältnissen einander bedingen. Die Literatur macht diese disruptiven Verhältnisse einsehbar und bietet damit zugleich eine Plattform zu deren Aufarbeitung: Ebenso wie die Versuche Nanoqs und Hannas, ihre Erkenntnisse über die Kontamination des Meereswassers und die damit einhergehenden Gefahren mitzuteilen, auf heftigen Widerstand treffen und zunächst die Ursachen der Katastrophen im Ungewissen bleiben, stoßen unterschiedliche Gebietsansprüche aufeinander und damit bleibt auch die Übernahme der Verantwortung für die Kontamination ein dauerhafter Streitpunkt. Die Region um den Nordpol ist internationales Territorium, in welchem niemand allein das Sagen hat (Kap. 59). Zusammenfassend ist zu sehen, dass das Konzept der "Kontaktszene" wie auch das Verfahren des Commonings sich gegen eine aufklärerisch-idealisierende Bestimmung des Menschen richten, der gemäß menschliche Subjekte ihre Umwelt durch Einhegung kontrollieren. Stattdessen wird das Verständnis eines Subjekts gezeichnet, welches sich in einem Netz von Beziehungen befindet. Prinzipien des Handelns entstehen nicht allein durch rationalistische Überlegungen, die kontrollierbare Zukunftsszenarien entwerfen. Vielmehr bedarf es globaler Sichtweisen, die aus geteiltem Wissen hervorgehen und in lokalen und konkreten Situationen eine Entsprechung finden.

Harlanders Ökothriller gewährt Einsichten in aktuelle Strukturen und Probleme, welche unsere Gesellschaft auf die Probe stellen und fragt danach, wie wir mit Nicht-Wissen, Unsicherheiten und einem neuen Darstellungs- und Vermittlungsproblem moderner Krisen umgehen. Die Fiktion erläutert die Bedingungen dafür, wie Wissen entsteht und weitergegeben wird. Mit Blick auf *Schmelzpunkt* bedeutet dies, dass Literatur uns durch die Gratwanderung zwischen Fiktion und Wirklichkeit, die Zusammenführung von Spezialdiskursen, identitätsstiftenden Motiven und ihrer Ambiguität dafür sensibilisieren kann, schwer greifbare, komplexe Strömungen von Gesellschaften und zukünftigen Ereignissen und Kausalketten verständlicher zu machen. Die Folgen ökologischer Krisen fordern uns dazu auf, anthropozentrische Denkmuster als auch die Auffassung von Menschlichem und Nicht-Menschlichem als bloße Ressource zu überwinden und eine kollektive Lösung, die möglichst beiden Bereichen gerecht wird, zu suchen. Durch die Lektüre von *Schmelzpunkt* wird die Haltung des Commonings ins Licht gerückt und Leser:innen können somit in der Fiktion ein neues Verständnis von Welt erproben.

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Coastal World Literature: Encounters at the Shores of Europe

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Abstract

Shorelines are at the forefront when it comes to the effects of climate change. They are equally a preferred leisure destination for global northerners to seek respite and ecological connectedness. This article argues that the coast likewise offers valuable insight as a literary site of disruptive encounters. At the coast, economic, ecological, and cultural disparity interweave, and can therefore carry manifold connotations, emotions, and prospects dependent on your situation. To exemplify this point, the article examines contemporary literary representations of the southernmost European shore in the wake of the so-called migrant crisis that occurred as the Arab Spring revolutions were met by autocratic pushbacks. Furthermore, the article presents the term “coastal world literature” as a methodology of interpreting literature at the dynamic littoral zone between land and sea. Readings of the novel *What Strange Paradise* (2021) by Egyptian-Canadian author Omar El Akkad, the collection of poems *Mare Nostrum* (2019) by Libyan-American author Khaled Mattawa, the novel *Til stranden* (2017; *To the Beach*) by Danish author Peter Højrup, and the collection of poems titled *Bag bakkerne, kysten* (2017; *Behind the Dunes, the Coast*) by Danish author Peter Clement-Woetmann support the assertion that coastal texts are informed by their position within the world-system. In effect, coastal world literature reveals valuable first encounters of disparity, unevenness, and the range of accompanied affective responses. Consequently, what happens at the shore and how we tell it matters immensely.

Keywords: Coastal, world literature, migration fiction, climate, world-ecology.

Resumen

Las costas están en primera línea en lo que respecta a los efectos del cambio climático. También son uno de los destinos de ocio preferidos de los habitantes del norte global en busca de descanso y conexión ecológica. Este artículo sostiene que la costa también ofrece una valiosa perspectiva como lugar literario de encuentros disruptivos. En la costa, las disparidades económicas, ecológicas y culturales se entrelazan y, por tanto, pueden acarrear múltiples connotaciones, emociones y perspectivas según la situación de la persona. Para ejemplificar este punto, el artículo examina las representaciones literarias contemporáneas de la costa más al sur de Europa a raíz de la llamada crisis migratoria que se produjo cuando las revoluciones de la Primavera Árabe se confrontaron con retrocesos autocráticos. Además, el artículo presenta el término “literatura del mundo costero” como metodología de interpretación de la literatura en la dinámica zona litoral entre la tierra y el mar. Lecturas de la novela *What Strange Paradise* (2021) del autor egipcio-canadiense Omar El Akkad, el poemario *Mare Nostrum* (2019) del autor libio-estadounidense Khaled Mattawa, la novela *Til stranden* (2017; *To the Beach*) del autor danés Peter Højrup, y la colección de poemas titulada *Bag bakkerne, kysten* (2017; *Behind the Dunes, the Coast*) del autor danés Peter Clement-Woetmann apoyan la afirmación de que los textos costeros están informados por su posición dentro del sistema-mundo. En efecto, la literatura del mundo costero revela valiosos primeros encuentros de disparidad, desnivel y la gama de respuestas afectivas acompañadas. En consecuencia, lo que ocurre en la costa y cómo lo contamos importa enormemente.

Palabras clave: Costero, literatura mundial, ficción migratoria, clima, ecología mundial.

What does it entail to explore coastal literature as world literature? Can shorelines reveal otherwise overlooked details of contemporary uneven and combined development? Coasts are cardinal “contact zones” where flora, more-than-human creatures and critters as well as “disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone” 34).¹ Moreover, the coast is often the first site of encounter between distinct beings—be they humans and/or more-than-humans. Thus, as it is a spatiotemporal zone both ecologically and culturally defined by heterogeneous entanglements, I argue that coastal imaginaries offer valuable insight into a varied range of encounters. At the coast, economic, ecological, and cultural disparity interweave comprehensively, and the same stretch of shore can therefore carry manifold connotations, emotions, and prospects dependent on your vantage point. Meg Samuelson has astutely proposed the term “littoral literature” as a descriptor for this liminal literary site (Samuelson). Though, to more firmly situate the methodology within the resurfaced field of world literature studies, I favour the term “coastal world literature” as designator for this literary method of interpreting literature at the dynamic littoral zone between land and sea.² To exemplify the critical value of “coastal world literature,” this article examines contemporary literary registrations of the southernmost European shore in the wake of the so-called migrant crisis that occurred as the Arab Spring revolutions were met by autocratic pushbacks. The novel *What Strange Paradise* (2021) by Egyptian-Canadian author Omar El Akkad as well as the collection of poems *Mare Nostrum* (2019) by Libyan-American author Khaled Mattawa tell complex stories of longing, while Danish texts, a novel called *Til stranden* (2017; *To the Beach*) by Peter Højrup and a collection of poems titled *Bag bakkerne, kysten* (2017; *Behind the Dunes, the Coast*) by Peter Clement-Woetmann, express sudden encounters with “strangers” in the form of refugees coming ashore. As such, the coastal site offers fundamentally different temporalities and experiences depending on the vantage point.

These contemporary coastal fictions, I argue, can be read as cautionary tales of how an affluent yet ill-prepared continent might respond when pushed by environmental and sociopolitical encounters. At once, these tales then present a didactic opportunity—that is, a chance to learn from and deviate from recent encounters—and a lamentable testimony of the capitalist world-system. Moreover, as the “migrant crisis” is portrayed from different point of views, the literary

¹ Lately, Mary Louise Pratt has resurfaced her concept of “contact zones” to include more-than-human interactions and intersections occurring at these sites (Pratt, “Mutations of the Contact Zone”).

² The subject of coastal literature has been developed by scholars within the field of blue humanities. The works of Elizabeth DeLoughrey needs special mentioning but others such as Ursula Kluwick and Virginia Richter has also inspired this article (DeLoughrey; Kluwick and Richter *The Beach in Anglophone Literatures and Cultures*; Kluwick and Richter “Of Tourists and Refugees”).

treatment of this recent European shoreline encounter also foregrounds the usefulness of comparativism in reading coastal fiction as the language, ethos, worldview, and sentiments expressed in these coastal texts are clearly informed by their positions within the world-system. Significantly then, coastal world literature reveals valuable first encounters of disparity, unevenness, and the range of accompanied affective responses seemingly destined to magnify in the future. Consequently, what happens at the shore and how we tell it matters immensely.

Shorelines: For Dwelling and For Landing

As *homo sapiens* migrated from the African interior, shoreline dwelling became a cradle for all sorts of sociocultural development. People, as John R. Gillis writes, “settled on the coasts not for what the interior lacked but because of the abundance that the seashore provided” (Gillis 20). Ecologically, shorelines indeed constitute a generative ecotone of disruptive encounters with a huge body of biological diversity as a result. Constant disruption and entanglement of miscellaneous entities is what makes the seaside flourish. While this might not be best for, say, the singular straw of leymus that is eaten by a Zabulon skipper caterpillar, in the grand scheme of things, biodiversity assures ecological resilience, wildlife thriving, and a sheer variety of beautiful, living things.

Given the beauty, sublimity, and both the visceral sense and empirical understanding of coastal biodiversity’s importance for a sustainable lifeworld, it is logical that tourism to shoreline places of unknown flora and animal life is flourishing. Yet, as the capitalist world-system has negatively impacted ecology in diverse ways—including through tourism-related issues such as increased mobility and tropical forest loss due to construction of leisure facilities—tourism to “edens” of biodiversity is also highly paradoxical in nature.³ Nonetheless, the paradisiacal idea(l) of a “garden of earthly delights” seems to proliferate even as the garden itself is experiencing a sixth extinction (Kolbert). According to Sharae Deckard, despite the general disenchantment that followed with the Age of Enlightenment, “paradise” as myth and performative fantasy continues to be relevant in our age (Deckard). Crystallising her point, she writes that “Paradise is inextricably linked to the ‘long’ modernity of the capitalist world-system, implicated in the discourses of material exploitation and colonisation that originated in the fifteenth century and developed throughout the Enlightenment into the present” (Deckard 2).

Materially, it was however a more practical matter that drove the European colonialists to the shores of foreign lands: The need for more resources to supply the homeland’s industrial ambitions. As Karl Marx succinctly phrases it, “one part of the globe [was turned] into a chiefly agricultural field of production for supplying the other part, which remains a pre-eminently industrial field” (Marx 580). Yet, upon

³ For a general overview of impacts on the Earth system, see the well-known graphs of the development of “global indicators” from 1750-2100, also known as the “great acceleration” graphs: <https://www.anthropocene.info/great-acceleration.php>.

landing what revealed itself for the Europeans were exactly paradisiacal—and exotic—worlds of plenty. Sugar, cotton, ore of different kinds, spices, grains, cacao, subalterns, and fossil fuels. Thus, an abundance of new “commodity frontiers,” came to light (Moore, “Sugar and the Expansion of the Early Modern World-Economy”). Shores were instrumental sites in shipping these novel commodities to the European continent. They were often also the first contact zone between settlers and natives. One continent’s paradisiacal experience of fertile land, it however quickly turned out, became the native populaces’ devastating disruption.

Here, some 400-500 years down the line, we know that colonialism has carried all sorts of violence in its wake, from enduring racial discrimination to connected issues such as toxification, sacrifice zones, and global economic inequality. As Jason Moore writes, this comes down to the fact that historical capitalism—rapidly developed and spread throughout the colonial era—“is not only a social formation but an ontological one” (“The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of Our Ecological Crisis” 600). He goes on to argue that,

Capitalism’s first great remaking of planetary life [...] was scarcely possible without a revolution in ways of thinking and seeing the world. The capitalist revolution, far from a narrowly economic process, was an epochal shift in the ways of earth-moving (mining, farming), state-making, mechanization and symbolic praxis. Not for nothing, the first thing every great European empire set about doing was not merely “exploring,” but mapping and cataloguing the globe as a potential storehouse of wealth. (“The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of Our Ecological Crisis” 605)

Furthermore, the ontological formation brought on by early colonial, commodity-frontier capitalism is also what Moore and a growing cadre of scholars designate as the root cause for the currently unfolding—in Moore’s term “world-ecological”—tragedy that is climate change (see for instance Murphy and Schroering; Niblett; Wenzel).

In summary, the colonial contact zones obviously began at the shores of the so-called new world. And now, because of the climate changes brought on by capitalism’s ontological formation of society and nature, shorelines are fatally disrupted once again. By the year 2100, anthropogenic sea level rises are predicted to a global average of 43-84 centimetres—depending on how close the international community comes to meeting the Paris Agreement goals (IPCC 324). As such, we are inevitably to prepare for a wetter world to come. Further accentuating this exposure to watery disruption, currently about “1 billion people [live] within 10 km of the coastline,” and “more than one-third (2.75 billion) of the world’s population lives within 100 km from the coast” (Reimann et al. 3). Over the last thirty years, the United States along with “Australia, South America, Asia, and Europe have been turned inside out. Only Africa has not been hollowed out, and even there, coastal populations, particularly urban ones, are exploding. We are all now creatures of the edge, mentally as well as physically,” John Gillis writes (Gillis 1).

So, it is fair to say, that throughout history shorelines have been instrumental in the global development of societies, ecologies, and economies. And shorelines

especially occupy a particular place of significance in the history of the capitalist world-system/world-ecology. The shores were sites of colonial contact that facilitated socio-ecological plunder—the shores of the “new worlds” in effect realised the *globalisation* of a capitalist world-system—and now, shores are sites of particular risk from the cumulative of this history of extraction and exploitation. Consequently, in the coming years, the dynamic of the recent decades’ rush to reside at the seashore will reverse itself. The inevitable rise of water levels, the increase in saltwater intrusions, shoreline retractions, floodings, and other disturbances to the global coastline will reverse this littoral influx. Anticipating the massive migration—both internally and externally—that will follow from this, coastal literature becomes especially significant, as a source of insights into former shoreline *co*-habitations, adaptations, and mitigations. Further, such fictions may also offer valuable speculative renderings of current and future wetter-world scenarios.

As this short presentation of coastal encounters shows—the characteristics of encounters at the shore are a consequence of the material circumstances in which such encounters take place, whether we are talking about ecosystems’ entangled biodiversity, early human seaside habitation, or the much later coastal contact zones of colonialism. The absence of human activity is often preferable when it comes to the flourishing of coastal ecologies. Here, the material context rather consists of decomposition, tidal waves, microorganisms’ metabolism, seasonal change, the rhythm of the day, and so much more. Colonialism, by contrast, is foundationally connected to the shore by way of structures such as harbors and other loading sites that contributed to the realisation of imperialists’ material exploitation of various resources intrinsic to the rise of capitalism as world-system (Moore, “The Modern World-System as Environmental History?”; Wallerstein 23-41).

Both ecologically and socially, then, the long draining of resources undertaken by the Global North has left the countries of the Global South radically less resilient to absorb the climatic consequences of greenhouse gasses they are the least responsible for having emitted in the first place (on the matter of emission-responsibility, see for instance Hickel). As Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg laconically made clear in their early critique of “the Anthropocene narrative,” humanity writ large is not confronting the planetary emergency without lifeboats: “For the foreseeable future—indeed, as long as there are human societies on Earth—there *will* be lifeboats for the rich and privileged. If climate change represents a form of apocalypse, it is not universal, but uneven and combined” (Malm and Hornborg 66-67). This, argues the currently growing cadre of world-ecological thinkers, is not a failure of capitalism but rather its *raison d’être*. The Warwick Research Collective (WReC), for instance, writes that, “capitalist development does not smooth away but rather produces unevenness, systematically and as a matter of course [. ...] Capitalist modernisation entails development, yes—but this ‘development’ takes the form also of the development of underdevelopment, of maldevelopment and dependent development” (12-13).

Coastal World Literature

Parallel with and complementing the materialistic world-ecology/world-economy-analysis that Jason Moore and others are developing, a re-formulation of Karl Marx' concept of world literature is likewise being proposed. In the words of the Warwick Research Collective, the ambition here is "to define 'world literature' as *the literature of the world-system*—of the modern capitalist world-system, that is" (WReC: Warwick Research Collective 8). Thus, the "single culture of capitalism," as Nicholas Brown describes the current world-system (6), "will *necessarily* be discernible in any modern literary work, since the world-system exists unforgoably as the matrix within which all modern literature takes shape and comes into being" (WReC: Warwick Research Collective 20). Following this line of thought, "coastal world literature" as a genre can be understood as the literary transfiguration of the shoreline encounters that have played and continue to play such a crucial part in the capitalist world-system. This means that "coastal world fiction" encompasses disparate texts such as Jules Verne's *Sans dessus dessous* (1889; *The Purchase of the North Pole*, 1890), Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017), J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962), Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), Chen Qiufan's 荒潮 (2013; *Waste Tide*, 2019), Wu Ming-Yi's 複眼 (2011; *The Man with the Compound Eye*, 2013), Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006), David Dabydeen's *Disappearance* (1993), Ben Smith's *Doggerland* (2019), Hans Kirk's *Fiskerne* (1928; *The Fishermen*, 2000) and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* (2014), to name but a few.

World literature is not, however, simply a descriptor for literature produced since the colonial era.⁴ It is also a methodology, which enables—if not actually *requests*—comparative readings. This comparativism entails reading fiction across regions that occupy analogous positions within the capitalist world-system. As such, this article proposes to approach the shore as a site for comparison, since shorelines have been materially instrumental in the development of colonialism and capitalism in the defining ways described above. As shorelines function as contact zones, coastal comparativism further centres the importance of reading from different angles and degrees of integration into the world-system, meaning that such an approach illuminates both core and periphery perspectives (Moretti; Niblett). Integration, for some, may be profitable and preferable, while for others it may be violent and utterly unwanted. Moreover, these positions are multiscalar—the core within the periphery, for instance—as well as interchangeable depending on the context in which they occur. One example of this multiscalearity could be Nairobi which is both to be understood as an urban capital widely connected to other core sites but also as an

⁴ Although WReC periodically defines the "modern literature" of the capitalist world-system as primarily relating to the past 200 years, they write that "its formal conditions of possibility would have begun to be established some three centuries earlier" (WReC: Warwick Research Collective 15). Here, I employ this broader interpretation of world literature coinciding with the colonial age in line with the conceptualisation presented by Niblett.

integral part of the world-systemic peripheral status of Kenya (and Africa more widely).

In this vein, literary fiction of coastal encounters is no exception. Simply to propose that Robinson's *New York 2140* or Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* are world literary texts does not really say that much. The critical impetus is to excavate *how* the given literature aesthetically registers the world-system from the vantage in which it is written, and what that in turn allows us to say of the capitalist structure that guides contemporary life. Coastal world literature offers a method to read sediments of capitalism as it washes ashore at different sites—again and again. Centuries ago, the inclination was to travel East and South and encounter 'new land' to feed the industrial machine. Recently, North and West has become the lodestar for people seeking to escape the lasting residue of colonial extraction and violence and seeking new opportunities in "the Old World" (on the aspect of lingering effects of colonialism, see for instance Koram; See also UNHCR).

In *What Strange Paradise* (2021) by Egyptian-Canadian author Omar El Akkad, a migrant smuggler tells the two Eritreans whom he arbitrarily selects to pilot a ragged, small dinghy destined to carry a cramped bunch of paying passengers across the Mediterranean: "Come storms, come police, come military, come God Himself, I don't care. You stay in the direction of *N*. Your whole future is *N*" (Akkad 60). North, we are to understand, holds the future of the refugees. A similar appraisal and elevation of this cardinal point can be found in the poem "Psalm on the Road to Agadez" in the collection *Mare Nostrum* (2019) by Libyan-American author Khaled Mattawa. It reads, in full length:

Day and night traveled
to reach these shores
West to North

East to North
North to North
to North to North

your country,
your savage country
where you are free! (10)

A clear sense of desperation, of anxiety and exhaustion, seems to emanate from these lines. The people in the poem—undoubtedly boat refugees fleeing their homeland—relentlessly travel to reach the shores of salvation. Furthermore, the repetitive invocation of the destiny—North... North... North...—produces an image of decisiveness—of wanting to start anew whatever the costs.

The recent migratory spike towards Europe, that Mattawa's collection of poems is a registration of, is in many ways a response to the Old World's centuries long exploitation of land and people, as Kojo Koram so succinctly describes it (Koram). Moreover, speaking to the uneven and combined *interrelation* of world-ecology/world-economy, the North African and Middle Eastern states of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain were in many respects primed to erupt into

a state of revolution, through a combination of ecological and social precarity, as well as the authoritarian rule. According to a volume of essays from 2013 published by the liberal think tank *Center for American Progress*, climate change incidents played a decisive role tipping the scales towards popular revolt: Drought in China led to global wheat shortage in the years prior to the Arab Spring revolutions in the early 2010's. Moreover, ongoing desertification across the Sahel-region had undermined and continues to undermine agricultural livelihoods, leading to urbanisation, internal migration, and general food insecurity. As efforts to contain the revolution intensified, these factors contributed to the massive exodus of refugees to neighbouring countries and to the comparatively small number of people attempting the sea-crossing to Europe (E. Werrell and Femia; on the comparably small number of refugees reaching Europe, see Mixed Migration Centre; UNHCR). With climate change as a social and political “stressor” at peripheral sites within the world-system, European core nations became the refuge sought when possible.

Coastal world literature, I posit, holds a key to understanding how world-ecology/world-economy reveal itself and often intensify at coastal contact zones. One example of this, is the literary registration of the European “refugee crisis” in 2015.

Beachside Encounters at the Borders of Europe

For the affluent population, the shoreline in general is mostly synonymous with white beaches, soft dunes, hovering seagulls, and the happenstance appearance of amber in a small patch of washed-up seaweed. Essentially, the beach shoreline constitutes a leisure site of selfcare that offers respite from daily routines, a washing off of all the contaminating and exhausting concerns of reality. In a European context, the islands of the Mediterranean and Aegean Sea—Lampedusa, Linosa, Lesbos, Kos, and Bozcaada, with others—are among the first to encounter the consequences of world-systemic climate change in the form of rising waters.⁵ At the same time, these island's shorelines are often publicly valorised for their aura of tranquillity and/or their manifestation as sites for selfcare (and as “party islands” for youths), making them a preferred leisure destination for global northerners seeking respite and ecological reconnection.

In the Danish novel *Til stranden* (2017, *To the Beach*) by Peter Højrup, the understanding of the coast as washing away all the regular distinctions that help one compartmentalising life is metaphorically present from the very first page: “It is impossible to see where the sea ends and the sky begins, one could sail right into

⁵ However, as exemplified in Christina Gerhardt's book *Sea Change: An Atlas of Islands in a Rising Ocean*, the “first wave” of impacts from the rising sea-level befall low-lying islands such as the Republic of Mauritius, the Republic of Maldives, the Republic of Singapore, Guam, the Solomon Islands, Grenada, Haiti, the Republic of Cuba and more, predominantly located at the Indian Ocean, the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. “[T]hese low-lying islands,” Gerhardt wires, “are a harbinger of the future that awaits the residents of coastal cities and shorelines” (1).

Paradise" (Højrup 11).⁶ Here we see the myth of paradise applied again, this time to differentiate the beach's time and place from mundane reality. Throughout the novel, this imagery of a blurred horizontal line recurs (e.g. 22, 38, 70), but its valorisation and metaphorical meaning shift. In the beginning, the portrayal of beachside leisure expresses a circular state where nothing substantial happens. The hustle and bustle of everyday life evaporates in the blurring bliss of relaxation as a group of friends who used to live in a flat-sharing community are on holiday on the Turkish island Bozcaada. From this privileged position of non-productivity, we however quickly learn, the absence of any real meaning in life haunts the characters rather than liberates them. The character Ib, for instance, constantly hears this deep rumble disturbing his attempt to relax (12, 69, 96, 142, 170). A never disclosed anxiety clearly troubles him, but formally the rumble also works to alert the reader of a disturbing event to come.

Equally, the photographer Ernst's career is in the decline making him irritable and unable to relax with his new girlfriend Betty. So, when an opportunity to visit a factory fabricating fake life vests for boat migrants seemingly reveals itself, Ernst is eager to leave the island and all the friends and seek it out. Filled with this newfound purpose, Ernst suddenly lashes out at his friends over dinner, accusing them of not doing anything of real value in relation to all the troubles of the world. In a scolding raptus, he mentions everything from Islamic terrorism to Nestlé's procurement of water resources to child labour to populist politics to pollution to self-absorption by staring at screens to migrants drowning in the Mediterranean (180, 173-178). Later, however, we learn that there was no factory, and the episode was really just a desperate and egoistic attempt to salvage his own career and return to more serious photojournalism so he would not have to do portraits and commercials for a living (212-13, 221).

Devastated by Ernst's sudden departure, Betty goes for a swim alone. We have earlier learned that she is a very skilled swimmer, yet this time the current carries her further and further away from the cliff she jumped off from. The watery element that she felt at ease in earlier, now appears hostile and contaminated with the residue of mass tourism: "There is trash everywhere being dragged back and forth across the seabed: Plastic bags and water bottles, trashed fish boxes, a page from a newspaper with a picture of a burning skyscraper, mooring ropes and nets, containers, a chair without legs" (205).⁷ Eventually she begins to hallucinate and goes under (206-08, 210-211).

In superficial and habitual middle-class, leftist manner, the friends have discussed politics throughout the novel. And though they acknowledge that their petty problems are miniscule in comparison, they desperately long for a cognitive

⁶ "Det er umuligt at se, hvor havet slutter, og himlen begynder, man kan sejle lige ind i paradis." (all translations are those of the author).

⁷ "Det flyder med skrald, der trækkes frem og tilbage over bunden: plastikposer og vandflasker, smadrede fiskekasser, en avisside med et billede af et højhus i brand, tovværk og net, dunke, en stol uden ben."

break. That is part of the reason they are at Bozcaada in the first place, as this conversation between Betty and another one of the friends, Linn, exemplifies: “It never stops, there is always another war, spudding. It is the same old evil, the pettiness, that hatred, it just makes you want to give up, it is like the misery is bottomless, like you have to close your eyes if you want to be able to live. We, who are so privileged and so miserable, Linn says” (103-04).⁸ The political issues contemplated and discussed are all more structural and abstract in size; global injustice and poverty (111, 203), war and evilness (116, 121), ecocide (102, 182, 202-203), the world moving backwards “towards extermination camps and genocide” (38)⁹. Apart from Ernst’s sudden rupture, they seem to agree on the tragic state of the world but also on their own incapacity to really do anything about it. This is part of what Ernst tells himself as he leaves the others: “the world has gone out of joint, he has to do something, at least feel that he is doing something” (186).¹⁰ That last part of the sentence is crucial as it discloses a more real cause for his actions: his own complacency, his *feeling* of doing good. Equally revealing, we also get a glimpse of a more ugly and complex relation regarding the influx of Mediterranean migration that takes place at the time of the novel. Herman, Linn’s husband, thinks to himself how he would love to return to Lesbos,

but that is not possible now with alle those refugees. He cannot be on holiday while others suffer, not while he can see it, anyhow. Of course, he sees it on the cell phone and gives fifty or a hundred kroners to Doctors Without Borders or the Red Cross before he scrolls down in the stream of cats and children, and misery and death, but to sit in the shoreline, exactly, as the rubber dinghies arrive, and the bodies wash ashore, he cannot do that, he does not want to do that. (25)¹¹

When they speak in abstract terms, they all agree the world is heading in a terrible direction. But as these examples show, there is equally a reluctance to jeopardize their own core, middle-class, complacent position in the capitalist world-system. They would like to *feel* they are doing right, yet they would also very much like to avoid real confrontation with the structural injustice of the world.

A particular world event lucidly reveals this discrepancy. At some point on their vacation, the devastating picture of the two-year old boy Alan Kurdi washing ashore on another Turkish beach begins to pop up in their newsfeed.¹² Utterly

⁸ “Det stopper jo aldrig, der er altid en ny krig, der vokser frem. Det er den samme gamle ondskab, den smålighed, det had, man bliver helt opgivende, det er, som om elendigheden er bundløs, som om vi bliver nødt til at lukke øjnene, hvis vi skal kunne holde ud at leve. Vi, der er så privilegerede og så ulykkelige, siger Linn.”

⁹ “i disse dage synes verden at bevæge sig baglæns mod onde tider, mod udryddelseslejligheder og folkemord.”

¹⁰ “verden er gået af led, han bliver nødt til at gøre noget, i det mindste føle, at han gør noget.”

¹¹ “Han vil gerne tilbage til Lesbos, men det går ikke nu med alle de flygtninge. Han kan ikke holde ferie, mens andre lider, ikke mens han ser på det i hvert fald. Han ser det selvfølgelig på mobilen og giver en halvtredser eller hundrede kroner til Læger uden Grænser eller Røde Kors, inden han bladrer videre i strømmen af katte og børn, og nød og død, men ligefrem at sidde i strandkanten, mens gummibådene kommer ind, og ligene skyller i land, det kan han ikke, det har han ikke lyst til.”

¹² There are numerous analyses of the photo’s circulation and reception, see for instance this short news analysis: Sinclair, Kirstine. “The Dead Boy & the Aftermath.”

distressed with the image, they “do not know what to say” (131) while they tell themselves that they “cannot save the whole world” (151).¹³ After this, each time the picture emerges in conversation between the friends it generates commotion, with accusations of being insensitive and inconsiderate being levelled at the one who brought it up (see 155-157, 180). Their first exposure to the picture takes place as the friends are attending a wine tasting event. This juxtaposition clearly registers the utter ridiculousness of the world’s structural unevenness as the novel jumps seamlessly from their chock of seeing the picture of Alan Kurdi to their concentrated attention towards wine. Here is just a small sample to show the absurdity of the event when set in relation to what they have just learned:

Hermann has chosen three wines for them to taste, two white and a rosé because that is what Linn likes the most.

1. Bottle, white, grape: Çavuş

Linn: Very bitter just as it hits the tongue.

Ernst: It has fatness and fruit.

Betty: No, neither-or, I am thinking more like juice or ...

Linn: Apple, bitter almonds, the peaches or the apricots.

Hermann: Give it some time in the glass.

Betty: ... dessert wine!

Ernst: Yeah, right.

Linn: A tiny bit sparkling, that is nice (131).¹⁴

However, despite their clear compartmentalisation of different events—the abstract relation to the tragic drowning of refugees, the submersion in wine tasting indulgence—the friends to their dismay eventually encounter a dinghy stuffed with refugees reaching shore. “Oh no [...] what do they want here,” the friends exclaim, only to discover that the refugees carry the body of an unconscious Betty with them: “There is a body hanging down one of the sides of the dinghy, some try to hold on to the arms, others have the hair by a grip trying to keep the dangling head above waters” (213).¹⁵ The mass of refugees that the friends sympathise with in more abstract, political conversations, but shy away from when they become more tangible—as the picture of Alan Kurdi and the arrival of the boat show—is now responsible for the rescue of Betty. As such, the novel registers a lurking xenophobic anxiety that reveals itself as their self-conceived political position meet up with reality. As such, the novel mirrors how the beachside encounter of refugees on the European borders has turned the humanistic good intentions—emblematically represented by then-chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel’s oath “wir schaffen das”—into Frontex and a comprehensive paradigm shift on immigration politics.

¹³ “Hermann ved ikke hvad han skal sige” (131). “[M]an kan jo ikke redde hele verden” (151).

¹⁴ “Hermann har valgt tre vine, de skal smage på, to hvide og en rosé, fordi det er det, Linn holder mest af. // 1. flaske, hvid, drue: Çavuş // Linn: Meget bitter, lige når den rammer tungen. / Ernst: Den har fedme og frugt. / Betty: Nej, hverken-eller, jeg tænker mere sådan most eller ... / Linn: Æble, bitter mandler, fersken- eller abrikoserne. / Hermann: Giv den lidt tid i glasset. / Betty: ... dessertvin! / Ernst: Den er god med dig. / Linn: En lille smule perlende, det er lækkert.”

¹⁵ “Åh nej [...] hvad vil de dog her. Der hænger en krop langs den ene side af gummibåden, nogle holder fast i armene, andre har fat i håret og forsøger at holde det dinglede hoved oven vande.”

Also registering the shoreline encounter from this angle, the Danish author and playwright Peter-Clement Woetmann's collection of poems *Bag bakkerne, kysten* (2017; *Behind the Dunes, the Coast*) formally display a sense of beachside tranquillity being slowly disrupted. It begins serenely with metaphorical entanglements of body and environment:

My body is blue eyes white skin.

My body is corn yellow fields and the mild breeze
in the trees in a clearing in the woods.

My body is the hills and behind the hills, the coast.

My body is birds fleeing around with
each other dizzying high up somewhere in the sky.

My body is rows of dunes, leymus, hot
sand blue sky. (5)¹⁶

But slowly, the collection shifts attention to all the things “my body” is not. “My body is not a sea” (9) or “My body is not the rusty containers heading from / somewhere to somewhere else” (13), until, finally, the text reaches a pinnacle of difference: “My body not the body of the nomad. // My body is not the body of the poor. // My body is not the body of wars” (21). More and more, it seems that the pressures of the outside world rattle the speaker to such a degree that his/her recurring phrase of serenity—“My body is blue eyes white skin. // My body is corn yellow fields and the mild breeze / in the trees in a clearing in the woods. // My body is the hills and behind the hills, the coast,” morphs into a chauvinistic and self-defensive stance. Ontologically demarking one body—the body of the affluent, blue eyed, white skinned global northerner—from the body of nomads, the poor, the ones running away from war. Seemingly creeping in from the corners, the migratory reality begins to take control of the book even as the speaker does his/her utmost to uphold the ontological difference: “My body is not the dinghies’ rocking rocking, / my body is not the boats crossing the / Mediterranean now.” And “My body is not six Somalians died of / dehydration on a rubber dingy with 58 others // My body is not four from Eritrea died of / dehydration on a rubber dingy with 58 others” (37, 45).¹⁷ And:

My body is not the body that sits up against another
body that sits up against another body that sits up against
another body that sits up against another body that sits up
against another body that sits up against another body that sits
up against another body that sits up against another body that

¹⁶ “Min krop er blå øjne hvid hud. // Min krop er korngule marker og den milde vind / i træerne i en lysning i skoven. // Min krop er bakkerne og bag bakkerne, kysten. // Min krop er fugle der flygter omkring med / hinanden højt svimlende et sted i himlen. // Min krop er klitrækkerne, marehalmen, varmt / sand blå himmel.”

¹⁷ “Min krop er ikke bådenes vuggende vuggende, / min krop er ikke de både på vej over / middelhavet nu.”

“Min krop er ikke seks somaliere døde af / dehydrering på en gummibåd med 58 andre. // Min krop er ikke fire fra Eritrea døde af / dehydrering på en gummibåd med 58 andre.”

sits up against another body. (25)¹⁸

Woetmann's book just as Højrup's registers how the European shoreline is at the vanguard when it comes to encountering the contemporary migratory reality of world-systemic capitalism.

Sitting Tight and Running Fast

From the precarious (and peripheral) side of the migratory route, the before quoted experience of sitting tight is represented in another register altogether. Rather than the lurking experience of world-systemic realisation that we saw in the Danish texts, the vocabulary in El Akkad's and Mattawa's books sharply distinguishes between these two conditions: That of sitting tight in cramped positions, and that of running for one's life. It seems, seen from the perspective of the refugee these are the primary states (of being).

In his analysis of Ghassan Kanafani's novella *Men in the Sun* (1962), Andreas Malm has already shown the morbidly ironic horrors of sitting tight in an empty water tank exposed to the burning sun waiting to be smuggled across the border to Kuwait to work in the oil boom—the primary contributor to climate change's scorching of the Earth (Malm). In Omar El Akkad's *What Strange Paradise*, the passage to a new life situation goes across the water but the outcome is just as tragic. In a scene that clearly echoes the landing of Alan Kurdi, the novel opens with the line, "The child lies on the shore" (3). Washed ashore on a nondisclosed Greek island (possibly Kos), the child, a boy, comes to himself only to see that some men whose "baggy white containment suits cover their bodies and white gloves their hands and white masks their faces" are approaching him. And so, "he runs" (6, 7). The novel goes on to display the boy's struggle to keep himself out of the coastal guard's way and avoid being encamped. Quickly he bumps in to a fifteen-year-old local girl, Vänna, who keeps him hidden and later helps him cross the island until they reach a lighthouse at the other side from where a ferry waits to transport him off the island and away to "a community near the port [where] his people [will] take care of [him]" (232). This, we are to believe, is the happy ending of the book. Yet, the closing two pages let us know that it has all been a mirage, a fantasy of salvage aimed at pleasing and then disturbing the reader as we are exposed to the gruesome reality of dead children washing ashore on the beaches of Europe with the very first sentence reoccurring to conclude the book: "The child lies on the shore" (235). All that running, we are to understand, is for nothing. Given the reality of the capitalist world-system, you can run but you cannot escape the uneven and combined configuration of the world.

The novel of course contains more nuance than this short recap might give it credit for. For instance, just as in Højrup's novel, fake lifejackets also play a part in

¹⁸ "Min krop er ikke den krop der sidder tæt på en / krop der sidder tæt på en krop der sidder tæt på / en krop der sidder tæt på en krop der sidder tæt / på en krop der sidder tæt på en krop der sidder / tæt på en krop der sidder tæt på en krop der / sidder tæt på en krop."

Akkad's novel pointing to the fact that the core-periphery, or suppressor-suppressed, distinction is in fact multiscalar. The migrant smugglers are clearly superior in their relation to the migrants and therefore in a position to cheat and deceive their victims (see 47, 56, 148). Equally interesting, the coastal guards and other people involved in managing the migration are also themselves subjected to a system that burdens their close society, as the woman running the refugee camp on the island says: "I've got six hundred people in a camp made for three hundred, and all of them are owed a day's drinking water" (114). Yet, they also work hard to sustain "the system" as there is also a principal understanding present that it is exactly the implied proper, orderly structure of Europe that distinguishes it from other parts of the world. As the main antagonist, the coast guard Kethos, laconically and discriminatingly says at one point: "That we are in a position to be fled to and not fled from is because we have systems, rules, proper ways of doing things. You want to see what it's like without systems? Hop on the next one of those boats that runs aground here and take it in the opposite direction" (116, see also 82-83, 231). Kethos here clearly distinguishes between a modern Europe with clear and proper rules and an underdeveloped world outside of Europe. What he does not seem to recognise, however, is the point made by WReC that modernity "is not something that happens—or even happens *first*—in 'the West' and to which others can subsequently gain access" (WReC: Warwick Research Collective 13, Original italics). Modernity is the principal result of world-systemic uneven and combined development. Modernity is just as much the nationalist politicians "capitalizing on the migrant crisis and the humiliating economic malaise" (Akkad 151-152) as it is the celebrated progressive politics coming out of the suffragettes, the civil rights movements, and the labour struggles.

Kethos is not the only one in the novel subscribing to an idea of Europe existing on some higher level of development. The same idea is what seems to create the migratory pressure on its borders in the first place. However, the "Shangri-La" image of Europe is suddenly exposed by the very smuggler who benefits from this image as he exclaims to the boat migrants:

"You sad, stupid people," he [the smuggler] said. "Look what you've done to yourselves. The West you talk about doesn't exist. It's a fairy tale, a fantasy you sell yourself. [...] You invent an entire world because your conscience demands it, you invent good people and bad people and you draw a neat line between them because your simplistic morality demands it. But the two kinds of people in this world aren't good and bad—they're engines and fuel. Go ahead, change your country, change your name, change your accent, pull the skin right off your bones, but in their eyes they will always be engines and you will always be fuel." (179)

With his phrasing, the smuggler is referencing the centuries old inequalities of colonialism, suggesting that no matter the name—modernity, rationalism, properly ordered—the structure of the world still basically comes down to some being the resource on which others' wellbeing depends. Equally brutal in his depiction of this structure, at one point the same smuggler also says: "You think the black market is bad? Brother, wait till you see the white market" (163).

Throughout the novel, disruptive encounters with climate change also make their presence known as a reason for migration—both the internal and external sort. “It started with a drought [. ...] Don’t call it a conflict, Amir’s [the boy’s] father said. There’s no such thing as conflict. There’s only scarcity, there’s only need” (48). It is hard not to read these lines as referencing exactly the earlier mentioned drought in China that led up to the Middle Eastern uprisings. Likewise, more general desertification leading to unwanted urbanisation and the loss of shoreline livelihoods is also brought up as the father explains that “although drought had forced the Utus [the family name] to abandon their orange groves and leave the coast for the cities inland, they’d always be seaside people” (74. See also 88). Moving inland was a choice pushed upon the Utus by the climate suddenly acting up, we learn. And now, ones again, the natural and *political* climate, urges the Utus to leave their home and travel for new cities. Suddenly, being “seaside people,” by no choice of their own, is beginning to turn into an identity of constant mobility, of flux. The novel, thus, clearly illustrates how climate change works as a stressor that only seems to increase the uneven development further. Once again, a morbid irony reveal itself in the novel’s registration of the migration to Europe. Residents of the Global South are driven away from their land by greenhouse gas emissions in the Global North only to encounter suspicion, discrimination, Kafkaesque “systems [and] rules,” and a strict regime of border control at the southernmost coastal regions of said nations.

Conclusion: The Trills and Horrors of Shoreline Encounters

Registering the present atmosphere of nationalism and unwanted encounters with foreigners, Khaled Mattawa’s collection of poems fittingly bears the Roman name for the Mediterranean Sea: *Mare Nostrum*, “Our Sea”. Rivalry, ownership, and a sense of entitlement over common seaways has of course been an integral ingredient in maritime geopolitical struggles for centuries. As Søren Frank writes, “the maritime world played a key role in the development of mercantilism, capitalism, and colonial expansion” (20). And it continues to play a crucial part today, as Laleh Khalili succinctly shows: “Ninety per cent of the world’s goods travel by ship. Crude oil, carried in tankers, constitutes nearly 30 per cent of all maritime cargo; almost 60 per cent of world trade in oil is transported by sea” (1). In recent history, however, “Mare Nostrum” is also the name of an Italian search and rescue operation launched in “October 2013 [after] a boat carrying hundreds of refugees and migrants from Libya to Italy sank near the island of Lampedusa, killing 368 refugees” (UNHCR 8). As the operations of Mare Nostrum ended a year later, the EU border agency Frontex’s mandate was extended to take over the operations as the official EU Coast Guard. Where Mare Nostrum had an explicit emphasis on the aspect of rescuing migrants at sea, the operations of Frontex are mainly aimed at securing the outer borders of Europe. This important difference, notwithstanding, “Mare Nostrum” initiated the structural and organisational attention directed towards the southernmost borders from the European nations. “Mare Nostrum,” then, reads as the signifier and

metaphor for a larger political turn, the contemporary securitisation of the European border zone, which is also what the title of Mattawa's book refers to. His poem "Song for Amadou" concisely depicts the opposing struggles taking place at European ground:

Have you made it
To Sicily, Amadou?
Are you deep

in the woods of Denmark?
learned a new language,
Writing your book?

Have they put you on
a plane home, Amadou?
Kidnapped you, sent you back

to that camp in Bani Walid,
slaving day and night
on a farm for some crook. (24)

A constant dialectic of wanting to disappear and fearing to be discovered is present here. Always, Amadou must be wary of his surroundings. From the deathly seafare across the Mediterranean, Amadou must now seek shelter in the "woods of Denmark" where he can hopefully escape the constant fear of being sent to Bani Walid, a secret detention camp in Libya.

As shown, Højrup's and Woetmann's more *thrilling* sensations of an external force disrupting the peace and luring an unconscious xenophobia to the surface in many ways differ from the direct *horrors* depicted in Akkad and Mattawa's texts.¹⁹ Yet, all of the texts register disruptive shoreline encounters of world-systemic inequality. Not as flaws in the capitalist machinery but as its inevitable outcome. In effect, the coastal world literature that I have brought forward here read as part of a collective archive that tells the story of combined and uneven encounters at the shores of Europe.

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¹⁹ This distinction between an "immediate horror" and "a looming if still unrealised terror" (what I refer to as a thrilling sensation) is in debt to the analysis presented in Höglund's "Alligators in the Living Room: Terror and Horror in the Capitalocene."

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Ambivalente Verflechtungen: Pferd-Mensch-Begegnungen in Benedikt Erlingssons Spielfilm *Hross í oss* (2013)

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Abstract

Seit über einem Jahrtausend nehmen Islandpferden eine Position zwischen (halb)wildem Tier, Nutztier und Gefährt*innenspezies ein. Diesen ambivalenten Verflechtungen geht der Spielfilm *Hross í oss* (2013) des Regisseurs Benedikt Erlingsson nach. Ich zeige in meinem Beitrag, dass Erlingssons Formen der Visualisierung mit der Kommunikationsweise von Pferden korrespondieren. So gelingt es ihm, Pferden nicht nur innerhalb der diegetischen Welt eine aktive Rolle zuzuweisen, sondern die Erzählstrukturen des Films an ihnen auszurichten. Pferden kommt alleine durch die Praxis des Reitens oft die Funktion einer Metapher für menschliche Konflikte zu. Dabei besteht die Gefahr, die Existenz von Pferden auf fremdbestimmte Herrschaftspraktiken zu reduzieren. Inspiriert von Donna Haraways *Manifest für Gefährten*, Josephine Donovans Ausführungen zu einem "interspecies dialogue" und Ann-Sofie Lönngrens Arbeiten zu Tieren in der Literatur begegne ich dieser Problematik, indem ich fürsorglich lese. Meine Analyse der artübergreifenden Kommunikation unter Berücksichtigung filmnarratologischer Elemente zeigt Pferd-Mensch-Begegnungen in einem anderen Licht, jenseits von romantisierenden Symbiosen und der Reproduktion von Unterdrückungsnarrativen.

Keywords: Tierethik, ecocriticism, artübergreifende Kommunikation, Filmnarratologie, Pferde, Island

Abstract

For over a millennium, Icelandic horses have occupied a position between (semi-)wild animal, livestock and companion species. The film *Hross í oss* (2013) by director Benedikt Erlingsson explores these ambivalent entanglements. In my contribution, I show that Erlingsson's forms of visualisation correspond to the way horses communicate. He succeeds not only in assigning horses an active role within the diegetic world, but also in aligning the narrative structures of the film with them. Horses often function as a metaphor for human conflicts simply through the practice of riding. There is a danger of reducing the existence of horses to externally determined practices of domination. Inspired by Donna Haraway's *The Companion Species Manifesto*, Josephine Donovan's "interspecies dialogue" and Ann-Sofie Lönngrén's work on animals in literature, I address this problem by reading with care. My analysis of interspecies communication, taking into account film narratological elements, shows horse-human encounters in a different light, beyond romanticizing symbioses and the reproduction of oppression narratives.

Keywords: Animal ethics, ecocriticism, interspecies communication, film narratology, horses, Iceland.

Resumen

Durante más de un milenio, los caballos islandeses han ocupado una posición entre animal (semi)salvaje, ganado y especie vehicular. El largometraje *Hross í oss* (2013) del director Benedikt Erlingsson explora estos ambivalentes enredos. En mi contribución, muestro que las formas de

visualización de Erlingsson se corresponden con la forma en que se comunican los caballos. Erlingsson consigue no sólo asignar a los caballos un papel activo en el mundo diegético, sino también alinear con ellos las estructuras narrativas de la película. Los caballos funcionan a menudo como metáfora de los conflictos humanos simplemente por la práctica de la equitación. Existe el peligro de reducir la existencia de los caballos a prácticas de dominación determinadas externamente. Inspirándome en *The Companion Species Manifesto* de Donna Haraway, los comentarios de Josephine Donovan sobre un “diálogo interespecies” y el trabajo de Ann-Sofie Lönngren sobre los animales en la literatura, abordo este problema leyendo con atención. Mi análisis de la comunicación interespecies, teniendo en cuenta elementos narratológicos cinematográficos, muestra los encuentros entre caballos y humanos bajo una luz diferente, más allá de simbiosis romantizadas y de la reproducción de narrativas opresivas.

Palabras clave: Ética animal, ecocrítica, comunicación interespecies, narratología cinematográfica, caballos, Islandia.¹

Pferde leben auf Island in halbwilden Herdenverbänden und genießen damit deutlich mehr Freiheiten als die meisten anderen domestizierten Pferde Europas. Dies legt die Vermutung nahe, dass Pferd-Mensch-Beziehungen auf Island eine besondere Qualität haben, auch weil sich Pferde in den von extremen klimatischen Bedingungen geprägten Begegnungsräumen selbstverständlicher bewegen, als Menschen dies tun. Seit über einem Jahrtausend nehmen Islandpferde eine Position zwischen (halb)wildem Tier, Nutztier und Gefähr*innenspezies² ein, was sich archäologisch und literaturhistorisch anhand von Pferdegäubern, mythologischen Überlieferungen und altnordischen Sagas recht gut nachweisen lässt.³

Diesen ambivalenten Verflechtungen, die geprägt sind von (sexualisierter) Zärtlichkeit, Fürsorge, Machtkämpfen und Gewalt, geht der Spielfilm *Hross í oss* (2013) des Regisseurs Benedikt Erlingsson nach. Während der offizielle deutsche Titel *Von Pferden und Menschen* lautet, bedeutet “hross í oss” wörtlich “das Pferd in uns” oder “Pferde in uns.” Indem das etwas weniger geläufige “hross” (dt. “Ross” oder “Pferd”) anstelle von “hestur” (dt. “Pferd”) gewählt wurde, betont der durch die Assonanz erzeugte Gleichklang die enge Verbundenheit beider Arten, wobei der Mensch im Pferd aufzugehen scheint. Auf diese Weise wird markiert, dass menschliches Leben ohne Pferde in seiner heutigen Form nicht existieren würde. Dies gilt für Island in besonderem Maße, da dessen Erschließung und Besiedlung zu einem so frühen Zeitpunkt kaum möglich gewesen wäre. Entsprechend kommt einigen Pferden in der altnordischen *Landnámabók* (Buch über die Besiedlung Islands) eine ähnliche Rolle wie den menschlichen Siedler*innen zu. Es wird anekdotisch von ihnen

¹ Der spanische Abstract wurde mit Hilfe von KI (DeepL) angefertigt.

² Haraways Begriff “companion species” in Übersetzung von Jennifer Sophia Theodor.

³ Vgl. Zimmer und Steuer et al. Vgl. auch Evans Tang (besonders Kapitel 4), Rohrbach und zur Mythologie Simek. Das heutige Islandpferd stammt von norwegischen Pferden ab, die wikingische Siedler um 860 n.Chr. auf die Insel brachten. Vgl. Vangen 2021; 2024. Die Besiedlung Islands wird u.a. in der altisländischen *Landnámabók* beschrieben, wo es auch einige Hinweise auf importierte Pferde gibt. Vgl. bspw. Hermann Pálssons und Paul Edwards’ Übersetzung *The Book of Settlements* von 1972, S. 44.

erzählt, sie werden namentlich genannt, es wird über ihre Erbfolge berichtet und manche Orte und Regionen sind nach ihnen benannt (vgl. Pálsson & Edwards 91-92).

Schauplatz von Erlingssons Film ist eine ländliche Küstenregion Islands (vermutlich um 1990), wobei deutliche Bezüge zur altisländischen Literatur und damit zur gemeinsamen Siedlungsgeschichte von Menschen und Pferden hergestellt werden (vgl. LaRubia-Prado 87-110). Ein besonderes Merkmal des Films ist sein Fokus auf die Tätigkeit des Beobachtens. Francisco LaRubia-Prado hat bereits darauf hingewiesen, dass der Blick des Pferdes auf “the world of humans” (92) die Zuschauer*innen die Konvergenz und Divergenz zwischen Pferd und Mensch verstehen lasse. Ich möchte in diesem Beitrag hier anknüpfen, wobei ich darlegen werde, dass sich Pferde und Menschen in einer gemeinsamen Welt mit gemeinsamen Kommunikationssystemen bewegen. Ich werde zeigen, dass Erlingssons Formen der Visualisierung mit der Sprache von Pferden korrespondieren. So gelingt es ihm, Pferden nicht nur innerhalb der diegetischen Welt eine aktive Rolle zuzuweisen, sondern die Erzählstrukturen des Films an ihnen auszurichten. Meine Analyse der Okularisierung (vgl. Kuhn) und der artübergreifenden Kommunikation präsentiert Pferd-Mensch-Begegnungen in einem anderen Licht. Sie verlaufen oft überraschend und entfalten dabei eine intensive, teils komische, teils verstörende Wirkung, die gängige Deutungsmuster ergänzt. In diesen kommt Pferden alleine durch die Praxis des Reitens oft die Funktion einer “lebendigen Metapher” (Raulff 247) für menschliche Konflikte zu. Dabei besteht die Gefahr, die Existenz von Pferden auf fremdbestimmte Herrschaftspraktiken zu reduzieren, womit ihnen epistemische Gewalt (vgl. Bunner) angetan wird. Inspiriert von Donna Haraways *Manifest für Gefährten* und Ann-Sofie Lönngrens Arbeiten zu Tieren in der Literatur⁴ begegne ich dieser Problematik, indem ich fürsorglich lese.

Eine fürsorgliche Lesepraxis folgt den von Josephine Donovan beschriebenen “modes advocated in care theory – sympathy, empathy, and attentiveness” (Donovan 213), welche sie als Wege beschreibt, um mit Tieren ins Gespräch zu kommen. Eine solche Lesart arbeitet nicht nur die Machtstrukturen in den Pferd-Mensch-Beziehungen kritisch heraus⁵, sondern es geht darum, “dem Tier zu folgen,”⁶ in vollem Bewusstsein, dass die eigene menschliche Perspektive begrenzt ist (vgl. Björck 24). “Dem Pferd folgen” fasse ich konkret, indem ich verhaltensbiologische Erkenntnisse in meine Analyse miteinbeziehe. Darüber hinaus nehme ich die isländische Landschaft als gemeinsame Umwelt mit in den Blick, die sich “aus den vielförmigen Beziehungen und Verhältnissen von Menschen, Tieren, Böden, Wasser und Felsen zusammensetzt” (Haraway 29), wobei auch das Klima und Wetterphänomene Einfluss nehmen. Ich werde zeigen, wie sich diese ambivalenten Verflechtungen, die von zarter Sanftheit, schräger Komik und unerbittlicher Härte sein können, in *Hross í oss* widerspiegeln und eine polyphone Ethik anstoßen.

⁴ Vgl. *Following the Animal*, “Place, Space and Literature” und “Metaphor, Metonymy.”

⁵ LaRubia-Prado hat dies für *Hross í oss* bereits anschaulich getan.

⁶ *Following the Animal*, S. 26-30.

Vorüberlegungen: Gespräche unter Gefährt*innen

Für die Analysen der artübergreifenden Dialoge im Film erscheint es mir notwendig, den aktuellen Forschungsstand zum Fühlen, Lernen und Denken von mehr-als-menschlichen Säugetieren, sowie ein paar Aspekte der Sprache von Pferden zu berücksichtigen. Darauf folgend werde ich mit Bezugnahme auf das erzähltechnische Verfahren der Okularisierung kurz darlegen, wie ihre artspezifische Kommunikation Pferden ermöglicht, die Erzählperspektive zu bestimmen. Schließlich erläutere ich kurz, was ich unter einer fürsorglichen Lesepraxis verstehe und wie diese meine Analyse leitet.

Artübergreifende Multilingualität

Der Zoologe Norbert Sachser hat in den letzten Jahren ein breiteres Publikum über aktuelle Erkenntnisse der Verhaltensbiologie informiert; beispielsweise mit seiner 2018 erschienenen Monographie *Der Mensch im Tier* und der transdisziplinären Aufsatzsammlung *Das unterschätzte Tier* (2022), in der nicht nur Biolog*innen zu Wort kommen, sondern auch renommierte Wissenschaftler*innen der geisteswissenschaftlich geprägten Tierstudien. Das Tierbild in den Wissenschaften scheint sich seit einiger Zeit massiv zu verändern. Viele vermeintlich exklusiv menschliche Eigenschaften wie ausdifferenzierte kognitive, kommunikative und emotionale Fähigkeiten, komplexe soziale Gefüge oder die Ausübung kultureller Praktiken finden sich auch bei anderen Tierarten. Letztlich wird deutlich, warum die in den kritischen Tierstudien etablierten Begriffe "menschliche und mehr-als-menschliche Tiere" sinnvoll gewählt sind. Hat man sich seit Darwins Theorien daran gewöhnt, dass im Menschen viel Tierliches steckt, so zeigt die gegenwärtige Forschung, dass in Tieren auch viele menschliche Anteile zu finden sind. Sachser räumt zugleich mit romantisierenden Vorstellungen wie dem moralisch guten Tier, die sich in Aussagen wie "Tiere sind die besseren Menschen" zeigen, auf (vgl. *Mensch im Tier* 245). Ausgehend vom aktuellen Stand seines Forschungsgebiets zieht Sachser interessante Rückschlüsse für Medizin und Humanwissenschaften (vgl. 242f). Indem er in dieser Weise von Tieren ausgeht, kehrt er einer anthropozentrischen Norm den Rücken, wodurch es möglich wird, Mensch-Tier-Beziehungen anders wahrzunehmen und zu denken. Hier entfaltet sich ein kritisches Potenzial für die Literatur- und Filmanalyse, da der Blick dafür geschärft wird, inwiefern Inszenierungen von Mensch-Tier-Begegnungen und ihre Rezeption durch überholte Prämissen geleitet werden.

Auf einige konkrete Erkenntnisse der neueren Tierforschung möchte ich besonders hinweisen, da sie meine Lesart von *Hross í oss* prägen. Sachser betont, dass menschliches wie tierliches Verhalten komplex sei und "multifaktoriell" (240) gesteuert werde. Die Umwelt habe auch bei Tieren einen entscheidenderen Einfluss auf Lernerfolge als eine genetisch veranlagte Intelligenz. Ebenso sei tierliches

Verhalten von individueller Verschiedenheit geprägt, was die “Entdeckung langfristig stabiler “Tierpersönlichkeiten”” (241)⁷ gezeigt habe.

Diese Tierpersönlichkeiten können zu Gefähr*innenspezies von Menschen werden. Den Begriff führt Haraway in *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003) mit einem besonderen Fokus auf Mensch-Hund-Beziehungen ein. Ihre Ausführungen lassen sich jedoch leicht auf Pferd-Mensch-Verhältnisse übertragen, da Pferde eine ähnlich lange und eng verflochtene Geschichte und Koevolution mit Menschen haben. Haraway hebt die wechselseitige Beeinflussung und Abhängigkeit zwischen Menschen und ihren tierlichen Gefährten auf verschiedensten Ebenen (bspw. sozial, kulturell und auch mikrobiologisch) hervor. Der traditionellen Trennung von Mensch und Tier erteilt sie dabei ebenso eine Absage wie einer generalisierenden und damit übergriffigen Vermenschlichung von Tieren, die deren spezifische Eigenheiten und Bedürfnisse übergeht. Beides ersetzt sie durch das Konzept “signifikanter Andersartigkeit” (9), welches den Fokus auf die artübergreifenden Verbindungen richtet, ohne die Unterschiede auszublenden, und welches außerdem das besondere Verhältnis gegenseitiger Zuwendung der Gefähr*innenspezies betont. Hinter Haraways Manifest steht eine Perspektivverschiebung, die Tieren aktiven Einfluss auf “die Regime, in denen wir und sie leben müssen” (23) einräumt.

Artübergreifende Verbindungen stellt man auch auf dem Feld der Tierkommunikation fest: “Tiere können differenziert und effektiv mit Hilfe von Lautäußerungen kommunizieren, und neuere Forschungen rücken die Sprache der Tiere näher an die menschliche Sprache heran” (*Mensch im Tier* 244). Darüber hinaus gibt es immer mehr Wissen über speziesübergreifende Kommunikationsformen. Besonders Hunde und Pferde zeigen sich geschickt im Lesen menschlicher Absichten und Emotionen (vgl. Müller et al.; Smith et al.). Umgekehrt versuchen Menschen mittlerweile mit einer größeren Selbstverständlichkeit die Sprachen von Tieren zu verstehen. Die Soziologin Keri Brandt, die zu artüberschreitender Kommunikation zwischen Pferden und Menschen forscht, betont mit ihrem Begriff “third language” (313), dass ein komplexes, gemeinsames Sprachsystem entstehen kann. Marion Mangelsdorf beschreibt dies folgendermaßen:

Dabei gestalten sie [Pferde und Menschen] eine kinästhetische Empathie, ein alle Sinne einschließendes Einfühlungsvermögen aus, wodurch jeder Atemzug, jede Geste, Mimik und vor allem jede Bewegung des Anderen ‚lesbar‘ wird. Als eine gelungene aufeinander abgestimmte Kommunikation kann die Interaktion vor allem dadurch erfahrbar werden, dass sich die Pferde, selbst bei der Möglichkeit, sich vom Menschen entfernen zu können, freiwillig dafür entscheiden, den Menschen synchron in ihren Bewegungen zu folgen. (122)

Da Pferde in *Hross í oss* zentrale Darsteller*innen und Protagonist*innen sind, sind ein geschulter Blick für die Kommunikation von Pferden untereinander sowie Kompetenzen in der “dritten Sprache” nicht nur für die menschlichen

⁷ Die aktuelle Ausgabe der Zeitschrift *Tierstudien* ist diesem Thema gewidmet, vgl. Ullrich. Es sei außerdem darauf hingewiesen, dass Pferde zu den Arten gehören, die den so genannten Spiegeltest bestanden haben, d.h. dass ihnen ein Bewusstsein für das eigene Selbst nachgewiesen werden konnte (vgl. Sachser *Das unterschätzte Tier* 20).

Darsteller*innen und Filmemacher*innen notwendig, sondern auch für das Filmpublikum von Vorteil, um den artübergreifenden Gesprächen folgen zu können.

Erzählende Blicke

Ein Film bietet besondere Möglichkeiten, da die Pferde nicht ausschließlich von Menschen inszeniert werden, sondern auch unmittelbar als die Pferde, die sie sind, auftreten. Hinzu kommt eine ästhetische Komponente des Films, nämlich die Bedeutsamkeit des durch die Kamera vermittelten Blicks, die eine Entsprechung in der pferdlichen Kommunikation findet. Mangelsdorf betont, dass

bereits der zielgerichtete Blick und letztlich der darin zum Ausdruck kommende zweckrationale Wille für die lateral, mit hoher Sensitivität ihr Umfeld wahrnehmenden Pferde als Druck empfunden wird. Selbst diesen können sie als appellativ und richtungsweisend auffassen. (125)

Indem Erlingsson der Tätigkeit des Schauens eine zentrale Stellung zuweist, passt er seine ästhetischen Verfahren der Kommunikationsweise von Pferden an. Das Auge selbst wird als ein handlungsstrukturierendes Element inszeniert, indem im Verlauf des Films insgesamt sieben verschiedene Augen mittels eines *Close-Up* zu Kristallkugeln stilisiert werden, die jeweils einen Vorschein der kommenden Ereignisse geben. Auch die Verständigung der menschlichen Akteur*innen untereinander spielt sich in weiten Teilen des Films über Blicke ab. Die Sprechanteile sind überschaubar, und man kann dem Geschehen auch ohne Isländischkenntnisse gut folgen. Die menschlichen Protagonist*innen sprechen zudem unterschiedliche Muttersprachen und verständigen sich öfter auf Englisch. Auch die artinterne Kommunikation gelingt dabei nicht immer, was mitunter zu lebensgefährlichen Missverständnissen führt.

Markus Kuhn hat sich ausführlich mit Spielfilmen aus einer erzähltheoretischen Perspektive befasst. Er betont, dass die Differenzierung in "wer sieht" und "wer spricht" in Bezug auf filmische Darstellungen nur eine metaphorische sei (vgl. 122). Daraus lässt sich ableiten, dass Pferde im Film Teil der Erzählinstanz werden können, ohne ihr Pferdsein aufzugeben. Kuhn überträgt Genettes Konzept der Fokalisierung in einen filmischen Zusammenhang, indem er visuelle und auditive Aspekte mit einbezieht. Er beschreibt ein "audiovisuelles Zeigen," das im Zusammenspiel von Okularisierung und Aurikularisierung erfolgt. Im Kontext meiner Studie erscheint mir insbesondere die Definition des ersten Begriffs hilfreich:

1.) Die *Nullokularisierung*, wenn das, was die VEI [visuelle Erzählinstanz] zeigt, an keine der Figuren gebunden ist, wie im sogenannten *nobody's shot* [...]. Es handelt sich hierbei um den statistisch häufigsten Normalfall im fiktionalen Spielfilm; alle Figuren sind dabei ‚von außen‘ zu sehen. 2.) Die *interne Okularisierung*, wenn das, was die VEI zeigt, an die Wahrnehmung einer Figur gebunden ist, also die VEI in etwa das zeigt, was die entsprechende Figur gerade wahrnimmt (Blick von ‚innen‘). Ich ergänze 3.) die (seltene) *externe Okularisierung* [...], wenn eindeutig markiert ist, dass eine Figur etwas wahrnimmt, was die VEI *nicht* zeigt [...]. (128)

Eben diese seltene externe Okularisierung kommt in Erlingssons Film häufiger vor, da die pferdlichen Darsteller*innen durch ihr Ohrenspiel, ihre gesamte Körperhaltung und ihren Blick immer wieder signalisieren, dass sie Dinge wahrnehmen, die die visuelle Erzählinstanz nicht zeigt.

Anhand von Blicken lassen sich Rückschlüsse auf die im Film vorgeführten Begegnungen ziehen. Ähnlich wie der *male gaze* (Mulvey) kann der *human gaze*, der das Pferd neugierig und mit offenem Begehren objektifiziert, als Machtdemonstration verstanden werden. Berücksichtigt man zudem, wie unangenehm Pferden ein direktes Anstarren durch menschliche Raubtieraugen sein kann (vgl. Mangelsdorf 125), so offenbart sich die Analogie noch deutlicher. Ich werde zeigen, wie in einigen Szenen der *human gaze* durch Pferdeblicke gespiegelt wird, wodurch nicht nur eine satirische Vorführung menschlichen Dominanzgehaves erfolgt, sondern auch markiert wird, dass sich Pferde und Menschen in demselben geographisch und zeitlich verorteten naturkulturellen Beziehungsgeflecht (vgl. Haraway 30-31) bewegen.

Fürsorglich lesen

In seiner kulturhistorischen Darstellung *Das letzte Jahrhundert der Pferde* (2015) zeigt Ulrich Raulff, wie eng Pferde und Menschen miteinander verstrickt waren, dabei betont er mit Blick auf das 19. und 20. Jahrhundert die vielfältigen Formen der Gewalt, die Pferde durch Menschen erfahren haben. Neben der körperlichen Ausbeutung und Vernichtung auf den Schlachtfeldern und in den Großstädten,⁸ fungierten Pferde häufig als Metaphern im Kontext menschlicher Machtbeziehungen, wobei ihnen kaum eine eigenständige Bedeutung eingeräumt wurde. Raulff legt dar, dass dieses Phänomen nicht nur in Kunst und Literatur zu beobachten ist, sondern auch in den Wissenschaften. Angesichts der Reduzierung von Pferden auf fremdbestimmte Herrschaftspraktiken kann man sich unter Bezugnahme auf Claudia Brunners Studie zu epistemischer Gewalt fragen, inwiefern die eigene Wissenspraxis (in meinem Fall der Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften) Gewaltverhältnisse stabilisiert, indem sie beispielweise die Bedeutung und das Leid von nicht-menschlichen Akteur*innen unterschlägt und sich tradierter Deutungsmuster bedient, die Pferde und andere Tiere auf Platzhalter für menschliche Angelegenheiten reduzieren.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick hat im Kontext der *Gender/Queer Studies* zwei grundlegende Lesepraktiken herausgearbeitet, die eine kritische Reflexion dieser Gewaltverhältnisse ebenso ermöglichen, wie sie Auswege aus diesen aufzeigen. Die "paranoide" Lesart ist von einem grundsätzlichen Misstrauen geleitet, wobei sie

⁸ Vgl. Raulff 30-54; 104-130. Die Lebenserwartung von Pferden in der Großstadt war sehr gering. Besonders die stark belasteten Omnibus-Pferde waren nach wenigen Jahren körperlich verbraucht. Entsprechend waren Pferdekadaver am Straßenrand ein bekannter Anblick für die Stadtbewohner von New York, London oder Paris. Dies galt ebenso für die Schlachtfelder des 19. Jahrhundert und des Ersten Weltkriegs.

darauf zielt, Machtstrukturen aufzudecken und kritisch zu beleuchten. Die "reparative" Lesart hingegen wird zwar ebenfalls von einem kritischen Bewusstsein getragen, ist zugleich jedoch um einen möglichst unvoreingenommenen Blick bemüht, um überraschende Potenziale freizulegen. Diese kann die lesende Person so fruchtbar machen, dass sich "heilende" Perspektiven eröffnet.⁹ Lönngrén adaptiert und konkretisiert Sedgwicks Ansatz, indem sie von einer vertikalen und einer horizontalen Lesart ausgeht. Lese man ein Tier als Metapher, verschreibe man sich einer in die Tiefe gehenden Lesart, die jedoch zu einem "cultural boomerang" (Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Metaphor, Metonymy" 40) werden könne und kaum neues Wissen generiere. Entscheide man sich hingegen, an der Oberfläche zu lesen und Tiere als Metonymien zu verstehen, gehe man nicht länger davon aus, dass das Tier für den Menschen steht, sondern erkenne die Gleichförmigkeit, Gegenwärtigkeit und Nähe zwischen Menschen und Tieren, was die Schlussfolgerung zulasse, dass der Mensch ein Tier ist (vgl. 44). Unter Bezugnahme auf Sachser würde ich außerdem ergänzen, dass vermeintlich genuin Menschliches auch in vielen anderen Tieren steckt.

In Anlehnung an Sedgwick und Lönngrén spreche ich von einer fürsorglichen Lesepraxis, die analytische Schärfe mit einem zugewandten und offenen Blick für die Wirkmacht derjenigen kombiniert, die oft auf eine Opferrolle reduziert werden. Ein fürsorgliches Lesen begegnet diesem Umstand, indem es (in meinem Fall) den Pferden zuhört, ohne unmittelbar in den etablierten analytischen Werkzeugkasten zu greifen. Es geht also nicht (nur) darum, zu zeigen, dass das Pferd bereits seit vorchristlichen Zeiten als Opfertier zu bedauern ist. Hier unterscheidet sich mein Ansatz von LaRubia-Prados Studie, die sich ohne Zweifel durch ihre scharfsinnigen Beobachtungen auszeichnet, die Pferde des Films aber vor allem als Leidtragende menschlicher Bedürfnisse und Leidenschaften zeigt und so ihre Rolle als Agenten übersieht.

Ich möchte dafür Sorge tragen, dass die "Rede" der Pferde Gehör findet. Der Fokus auf die Okularisierung hilft dabei, weil so der Anteil des pferdlichen Erzählens systematisch aufgedeckt wird. Auf diese Weise werden nicht nur Leiderfahrungen unmittelbar nachvollzogen, sondern es wird erkennbar, dass Pferde auf mehreren Ebenen wirkmächtig sind und Angebote für ein achtsameres Miteinander machen. Auch das besondere Augenmerk, welches in der Analyse auf den artübergreifenden Dialogen liegt, ist Teil einer fürsorglichen Lesepraxis.

Ein zugewandtes Zuhören insbesondere mit Blick auf eine filmische Darstellung, an der reale Pferde mitwirken, kann nur unter Einbeziehung von Erkenntnissen über die Kommunikationsweisen dieser Tiere und über die oben thematisierte dritte Sprache gelingen. Hierbei muss auch bedacht werden, dass sich die menschlichen Bezugspersonen der Pferde, mit denen sie im Idealfall besonders ausdifferenziert kommunizieren, zumeist hinter der Kamera befinden. Insbesondere

⁹ Vgl. Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching feeling* 122-151; Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading" sowie auch Björck 22-26.

spektakuläre Szenen sind ohne Pferdetrainer*innen nicht denkbar. Dabei kann das Verhalten der Pferde auch spontan Einfluss auf das Drehbuch nehmen und die menschlichen Schauspieler*innen dazu anregen, zu improvisieren.¹⁰ In der Regel findet während der Dreharbeiten mit Pferden eine sehr vielschichtige Kommunikation statt, da die pferdlichen und menschlichen Darsteller*innen nicht nur miteinander (sowohl artintern als auch artübergreifend), sondern auch mit den am Dreh beteiligten Personen hinter der Kamera agieren. Obgleich ich mich im Folgenden vorwiegend auf die Diegese des Films konzentriere, so wird diese externe Ebene nicht völlig ausgeklammert. Machen sich die Zuschauenden diese Situation am Filmset bewusst, haben sie sich bereits auf die Pferde eingelassen, wodurch dominierende anthropozentrische Perspektiven (wie das Pferd als Metapher für menschliche Verhältnisse zu lesen) unterlaufen und Spielräume für alternative Pferd-Mensch-Begegnungen sichtbar werden können.

Im Kontext dieser Begegnungen wird häufig Deleuzes und Guattaris Konzept des "becoming-horse" (258) aufgegriffen. Ian Buchanan erkennt hier einen entscheidenden Wechsel der analytischen Perspektive weg von der Repräsentation hin zum Affekt (16), und Gorgina Downey sieht eine Möglichkeit der Entgrenzung, die zu einer Identifikation mit dem Pferd führe (vgl. Downey). Ohne ausführlicher auf Deleuze und Guattari einzugehen, frage ich mich, inwiefern Lesen bzw. Schauen tatsächlich ein "Pferdwerden" im Sinne Downeys bewirken kann und welche Konsequenzen dies hätte. Hier schließt sich unmittelbar die Frage an, welche Lesepraxis die fürsorglichere, d.h. tierethischere, ist: Pferden mit einer zugewandten Distanz zu folgen oder sich so sehr einzufühlen, dass eine vollständige Identifikation eintritt. Letztere läuft womöglich Gefahr, Pferde erneut als Repräsentationen der eigenen, menschlichen Bedürfnisse zu interpretieren.

Zusammenfassend lässt sich festhalten, dass beide, die in die Tiefe gehende, entlarvende Lektüre und diejenige, die dem Pferd an der Oberfläche folgt, ineinandergreifen können. Eine fürsorgliche Lesepraxis, so wie ich sie verstehe, verlangt sowohl nach einer kritischen Analyse der Machtverhältnisse, als auch nach einem sensiblen und respektvollen Zuhören, denn das Pferd ist – und hier zitiere ich Lönngren – "both a material organism with its own agency and phenomenology, separate from the human and her experiences, and part of a human epistemological system" ("Metaphor, Metonymy" 43).

Artübergreifende Kommunikation als Ausdruck ambivalenter Verflechtungen

Die Handlung von *Hross í oss* spielt sich in einem begrenzten Raum innerhalb kurzer Zeit ab. Sie gliedert sich in sieben Episoden und auch das Personal ist recht überschaubar. Es besteht aus isländischen Dorfbewohner*innen, zu denen auch die Schwedin Jóhanna gerechnet werden kann, aus einer größeren Gruppe von

¹⁰ Diesen Aspekt hat Maximilian Haas in seinem Theaterprojekt *Balthazar* auf die Spitze getrieben. Hier agieren Esel auf der Bühne sehr unabhängig, was den menschlichen Schauspieler*innen eine stete Anpassung abverlangt (vgl. Haas).

Islandpferden, der Besatzung eines russischen Frachtschiffs, einigen deutschen Urlauberinnen und dem spanischen Rucksacktouristen Juan Camilo.¹¹ Im Folgenden konzentriere ich mich auf einige ausgewählte Szenen des Films, wobei insbesondere der zentrale Handlungsstrang um die beiden Menschen Sólveig und Kólbeinn sowie die beiden Pferde Grána und Brúnn einer ausführlicheren Betrachtung unterzogen wird. Darüber hinaus untersuche ich zwei kürzere Episoden, anhand derer sich besonders gut zeigen lässt, inwiefern meine Lesart zu von LaRubia-Prados Deutung abweichenden Ergebnissen kommt.

*Spielräume für Gefährt*innen*

Den Auftakt des Films bildet eine Nahaufnahme des Fells der Grauschimmelstute Grána. Während die Kamera an ihrem Körper entlangfährt, und das Filmpublikum zu genauem Hinschauen einlädt, hört man verschiedene Vogelstimmen. Angelangt bei den Ohren der Stute wird deutlich, dass über Grána intern aurikularisiert wird. Man hört das Rascheln des Fells, während die Stute ihre Ohren aufmerksam und ein wenig nervös hin und her bewegt. Bald lässt sich erahnen, was sie beunruhigt: Ein *Close-Up* ihres Auges zeigt, dass sich darin ein Mann, Kólbeinn, spiegelt. Auch die Okularisierung erfolgt nun intern über Grána, die Kólbeinn anschaut und ihn auf diese Weise in die Handlung einführt. Im leicht verzerrten Spiegelbild des Auges wirkt er bedrohlich, was einen Vorschein des Kommenden gibt, da die Episode damit endet, dass Kólbeinn Grána erschießt.

Mit einem Schnitt geht die Kamera auf Abstand zu Grána. Es wird weiterhin intern aber nun durch Kólbeinn okularisiert. Dann folgen mehrere Wechsel zwischen Mann und Stute, wodurch markiert wird, dass sich die beiden in einem dialogischen Verhältnis zueinander befinden. Ruft man sich in Erinnerung, wie sensibel Pferde auf die menschliche Körpersprache reagieren, so wird verständlich, warum Grána Kólbeinn nicht traut, auch wenn er ruhig auf sie einredet. Er fixiert sie unablässig, während er sich langsam mit leicht ausgebreiteten Armen nähert und sie so mehr und mehr in die Enge treibt.

Grána schlägt unruhig mit dem Schweif, bevor sie ein paar Schritte rückwärts geht und sich dann schnell abwendet. Sie markiert deutlich, dass sie Kólbeinns Annäherung nicht wünscht. Dieser hat jedoch keine Zeit auf die Stute einzugehen und ein partnerschaftliches Zwiegespräch mit ihr zu führen, denn er ist bei der Nachbarin Sólveig zum Kaffee eingeladen. Dort möchte er einen guten Eindruck machen und zu diesem soll ihm Grána verhelfen. Sein starrer Blick und die völlige Missachtung ihres Unbehagens lassen seine freundlichen Worte eher bedrohlich klingen. Sie passen nicht zu seinem Gesichtsausdruck, was Grána sichtlich irritiert.¹² Indem man der

¹¹ LaRubia-Prado schickt seinem Buchkapitel zu *Hross í oss* eine detailliertere Inhaltbeschreibung des gesamten Films voraus (vgl. 87-88).

¹² Nakamura et al. haben in einer Studie gezeigt, dass Pferde unsicher reagieren, wenn Stimmlage und Mimik von Menschen widersprüchliche Emotionen ausdrücken (vgl. Nakamura et al.).

Stute folgt, erkennt man Kólbeinn als Jemanden, dessen Wohlwollen davon abhängt, ob man sich seinen Wünschen fügt.

Das Vogelgezwitcher ist inzwischen von einer langsamen Musik abgelöst worden, wodurch auch auditiv markiert wird, dass sich die interne Okularisierung zu einer Nullokularisierung verschoben hat. Die Zuschauenden beobachten die Interaktion zwischen Mann und Stute nun von außen, was Kólbeinn nicht mehr ganz so bedrohlich erscheinen lässt. Schließlich gelingt es ihm Grána die Trense anzulegen. Es folgt eine Nahaufnahme von Kólbeinns lederbehandschuhter Hand, die Grána über Rücken und Kruppe fährt, um das Fell unter der Sattellage zu glätten. Zugleich wird signalisiert, dass er den Körper der Stute in Besitz nimmt. Sie fügt sich, bleibt aber angespannt, was sich auch während Kólbeinns Ritt zu Sólveig nicht ändert. Zwar zeigt Grána ihr Potenzial als Gangpferd, was die Bewunderung der Nachbar*innen hervorruft, die die beiden durch diverse Ferngläser beobachten, doch treten Mann und Stute nicht als Gefährt*innen auf, sondern ihre Interaktionen sind geprägt von Kólbeinns Eitelkeit. Grána erscheint ähnlich wie ein schicker Sportwagen als repräsentatives Objekt.

Durch die Einstiegszene haben die Zuschauenden sie jedoch als eigenständige Tierpersönlichkeit kennengelernt und sind eine Verbindung mit ihr eingegangen. Nur dadurch kann Kólbeinns Verhalten so klar als übergriffig wahrgenommen werden. Der Film verunsichert folglich von Beginn an vertraute anthropozentrisch geprägte Lesarten und führt vor, dass der menschliche Umgang mit Pferden, der in vielen Zusammenhängen als normal, vielleicht sogar als zugewandt und wenig bemerkenswert erscheint, geprägt ist von Gewalt und Missbrauch.

Während Kólbeinn ins Haus gebeten wird, rückt die Kamera erneut Grána in den Fokus. Ihre Aufmerksamkeit wird von etwas in Anspruch genommen, was die Zuschauenden noch nicht sehen können (externe Okularisierung). Kurz darauf betritt Sólveigs Hengst Brúnn die Bühne. Er nähert sich Grána wiehernd und voller Begeisterung, wobei die beiden durch einen Zaun voneinander getrennt sind. Grána zeigt unmissverständlich, dass sie rossig ist und nichts gegen eine Annäherung einzuwenden hätte. Hier findet eine Spiegelung der Eingangsszene zwischen Grána und Kólbeinn statt, mit dem Unterschied, dass die Stute Brúnns begehrlische Blicke genießt. Als Kólbeinn heimwärts reitet, gelingt es dem Hengst, das Tor seiner Weide zu öffnen. Er stürmt freudig auf Grána zu, und nachdem er sich sanft von ihrer Paarungsbereitschaft überzeugt hat, deckt er sie. Diesmal wird das Unbehagen des Menschen ignoriert. Grána lässt sich von Kólbeinn keinen Schritt vorwärtsbewegen¹³ und es gelingt ihm auch nicht, rechtzeitig abzusteigen. Folglich bleibt er während des Deckakts zusammengekauert auf der Stute hocken. Besonders demütigend ist diese Situation, da erneut die Ferngläser der Nachbarn zum Einsatz kommen und seine Entmachtung niemandem verborgen bleibt.

¹³ Allerdings hält er die Zügel sehr kurz, was als Zeichen von Überforderung gedeutet werden kann, aber auch verrät, wie die Szene gemacht worden ist: Die Stute wird von ihrem Reiter bewusst zum Stillstehen aufgefordert.

Während alle menschlichen Beobachter*innen (Sólveig und Familie miteingenommen) vor Schreck erstarren, als sie der Erniedrigung des stolzen Kólbeinns beiwohnen, zeigen sich die beiden Pferde zufrieden und entspannt, was einen komischen Kontrast herstellt. Würde es Kólbeinn und den anderen Dorfbewohner*innen gelingen, die Perspektive der Pferde einzunehmen, böte sich nun die Chance, Abstand zu nehmen von ihrer anthropozentrischen durch Stolz, Ehre und Sühne geprägten Weltanschauung. Der Deckakt wird jedoch nicht als Angelegenheit zwischen den beiden Pferden betrachtet (horizontale Lesart), sondern er wird in ein menschliches Zeichensystem eingebettet und entsprechend mit Bedeutung aufgeladen (vertikale Lesart). Laura Mulvey sieht in der durch den *male gaze* objektifizierten Frau einen Signifikant der Kastrationsdrohung¹⁴, was sich leicht auf Grána übertragen lässt, da sie zuvor durch die bewundernden Blicke der Dorfbewohner*innen zu einem solch begehrenswerten Objekt gemacht wurde. Durch den Deckakt ist aus der Drohung im übertragenen Sinne eine Tat geworden, da Kólbeinns menschlich-männliche Dominanz massiv geschwächt wurde.¹⁵ Dazu passt LaRubia-Prados Verweis auf die Bedeutung der verlorenen Ehre im Kontext altnordischer Literatur sowie auf die ebenfalls in den Sagas vorkommende Formulierung, „zur Stute gemacht werden,“ die sich auf Männer bezieht, deren Männlichkeit fragwürdig erscheint (vgl. LaRubia-Prado 94-95; Rohrbach 294).¹⁶

Kólbeinn scheint gefangen in einer von diesen alten Traditionen geprägten anthropozentrischen Perspektive, die deutlich narzisstische Züge aufweist. Grána hat keine eigene Daseinsberechtigung, sondern sie ist eine Verlängerung seines Selbst, die ihn kläglich im Stich gelassen hat. Entsprechend reitet er Grána zutiefst gekränkt in einem scharfen Galopp nach Hause und erschießt sie dort. Die Tötung der Stute wird extern okularisiert. Gerahmt von einem Fenster zeigt die visuelle Erzählinstanz, wie Kólbeinn das Gewehr anhebt und abfeuert, während die Stute nicht Teil des Blickfelds ist. Indem der Fokus allein auf Kólbeinn gerichtet ist, wird Grána schon vor ihrem Tod unsichtbar gemacht. Sie hat keinen eigenen Ort in einer anthropozentrischen Norm. Unter deren wikingerzeitlichem Männlichkeitsideal und militärisch geprägtem Reiterideal, welches die völlige Unterwerfung des Pferdes impliziert (vgl. Mangelsdorf 117-118), leidet aber auch Kólbeinn, was seine Körperhaltung nach dem Schuss und die Beerdigung Gránas zum Ausdruck bringen.

¹⁴ Vgl. den Eintrag *Gaze/ Male Gaze* von Andreas Jahn-Sudmann und Ludger Kaczmarek im *Lexikon der Filmbegriffe* der Universität Kiel.

¹⁵ Das Pferd als Symbol für männliche Kastrationsängste findet man bereits bei Freud. In „Die Analyse der Phobie eines fünfjährigen Knaben“ (1909) bringt der Psychoanalytiker die angeblichen Kastrationsängste des Jungen Hans mit dem Sturz eines Pferdes in Verbindung.

¹⁶ Hier kann man außerdem einen Bezug zur altnordischen Mythologie herstellen. Geschlechter- und Artengrenzen werden in der Figur des Loki gequeert, der sich von einem Mann in eine Stute verwandelt, um mit dem Hengst Svaðilfari anzubandeln, woraufhin er Odins achtbeiniges Pferd Sleipnir zur Welt bringt (vgl. Simek 252). Auf Odin und Sleipnir spielt *Hross í oss* auch unmittelbar an, da eine Nebenfigur, Grímur, stets mit zwei Pferden unterwegs ist, die oft so nebeneinander laufen, dass der Eindruck entsteht, Grímur reite ein achtbeiniges Pferd. Hinzu kommt, dass Grímur sich an einem Stacheldraht verletzt und Odin gleich zum Einäugigen wird.

Kólbeinns Ambivalenz spricht deutlich aus der Beerdigungsszene, in der er Gránas Grab eigenhändig aushebt, was seine Zuneigung zu ihr verdeutlicht. Zugleich drapiert er sie dort, wie er sie sehen wollte: unter dem Sattel in einem imposanten Renntötl. Ähnlich wie die verschiedenen Anspielungen auf die altisländische Mythologie und die Saga-Literatur verweist auch das Pferdegrab auf eine vorchristliche, isländische Tradition. Pferde wurden teils mit Grabbeigaben beigesetzt, was auf eine enge Bindung zwischen Menschen und Tieren schließen lässt. Harriet J. Evans Tang hebt hervor, dass manche Tiere mit "fóstri" (dt. etwa "Pflegesohn") in den Sagas adressiert werden, was eine verwandtschaftliche Beziehung andeutet.¹⁷ In diesem Kontext wird deutlich, dass Kólbeinn und Grána in ein und dasselbe naturkulturelle Geflecht verstrickt sind. Die Tötung der Stute kann als Ehrenmord gelesen werden, wobei Grána keine weibliche Partnerin repräsentiert, sondern als isländische Grauschimmelstute auftritt, in der Kólbeinn eine Verwandte sieht, die sich ihm widersetzt und damit seine gesellschaftliche Reputation ins Wanken gebracht hat.

Dies ist in einer männlich-menschlich geprägten Gesellschaft nicht akzeptabel und mit einer solchen scheint man es in *Hross í oss* zu tun zu haben, was Sólveigs Verhalten Kólbeinn gegenüber zu bestätigen scheint. Sie tritt in der Kaffeekränzchen-Szene eher abwartend passiv auf und trägt dezidiert weibliche Kleidung. Während Kólbeinn Grána vor seinem Heimritt tätschelt und "mein geliebtes Mädchen" nennt, verraten Sólveigs sehnsüchtige Blicke, dass sie am liebsten den Platz mit der Stute tauschen möchte. Eine Liebesbeziehung zwischen Kólbeinn und Sólveig scheinen die beiden Pferde jedoch nachhaltig unmöglich gemacht zu haben. Kólbeinn distanziert sich von ihr, was Sólveig veranlasst, ihre Passivität aufzugeben. Da sie sich ebenfalls in diesem von überkommenen Traditionen geprägten Wertesystem bewegt, sieht sie sich gezwungen, die von Brúnn und Grána verletzte Ordnung wieder in ein Gleichgewicht zu bringen. Sie tötet Brúnn jedoch nicht, sondern lässt ihn legen.

Indem nun eine tatsächliche Kastration stattfindet, wird drastisch vor Augen geführt, dass Pferde auch dann, wenn sie zunächst nur als Zeichen in einem menschlichen System fungieren, mit realen, körperlichen Konsequenzen zu rechnen haben. Indem Brúnns leerer Blick unter der Narkose von der Kamera eingefangen wird, leitet seine körperliche Präsenz die Erzählperspektive. Der wehrlose Körper steht in einem deutlichen Kontrast zu dem eifrigen Hengst, wodurch seine Unterwerfung eindringlich visualisiert wird. Vor dem Hintergrund der Hinrichtung Gránas erscheint Brúnns Schicksal jedoch weniger grausam. Bleibt man an der Oberfläche des Geschehens, so wirkt Sólveigs Handeln besonnen und so fürsorglich, wie es im Rahmen ihrer anthropozentrisch ausgerichteten Lebenswelt möglich ist. Sie ignoriert Brúnns signifikante Andersartigkeit nicht, sondern versteht sein Verhalten als hengsttypisch. Die Kastration ist in Bezug auf domestizierte Pferde eher die Regel, denn sie ermöglicht männlichen Tieren ein Leben im Herdenverbund bei gleichzeitiger Populationskontrolle. Das Legen wird fachgerecht durch eine

¹⁷ Vgl. Evans Tang 1-22; 140-183; Rohrbach 262-294 und LaRubia-Prado 94-95.

Tierärztin und assistiert von Sólveig durchgeführt. Die beiden Frauen gehen dabei ruhig und freundlich mit Brúnn um, was in einem deutlichen Kontrast zu Kólbeinns Agieren steht.

Sólveig befindet sich zwar gegenüber ihrem Pferd in einer Machtposition, doch nutzt sie diese nicht aus, sondern verhält sich eher wie ein souveränes Leittier. Ihr Führungsanspruch ist nicht mit dem Dominanzgehabe Kólbeinns zu vergleichen. Vielmehr erweist er sich als Notwendigkeit, damit Brúnn in der menschlich dominierten Lebenswelt überleben kann und sich Spielräume für alternative, weniger gewalttätig geprägte Beziehungen eröffnen. Trotz gewisser Ambivalenzen treten Brúnn und Sólveig als Gefährt*innen auf. Dazu passt auch, dass Sólveig Brúnns Pferdsein als signifikant andersartig respektiert, zugleich aber die Bereitschaft zeigt, von ihm zu lernen, und sich so auf eine andere Art mit ihm verwandt macht, als dies bei Kólbeinn und Grána der Fall war.¹⁸ Dies wird auch dadurch markiert, dass die Kastrationsszene mit einer Nahaufnahme von Sólveigs Auge beginnt, in dem sich der Hengst spiegelt.

In der siebten Episode, die mit einer Nahaufnahme von Brúnns Auge eingeleitet wird, in dem nun Sólveig zu sehen ist, übernimmt sie Brúnns selbstbewusstes und zielgerichtetes Auftreten. Man kann hier eine weitere Anspielung auf die altisländische Mythologie erahnen, da Sólveig und Brúnn nahezu miteinander verschmelzen und damit als androgyner Pferd-Mensch-Hybrid eine schräge Analogie zu der Figur des Loki bilden.¹⁹ Sólveig und Brúnn nehmen am alljährlichen Abtrieb der halbwild lebenden Pferde teil, wobei sie gut miteinander harmonisieren, was mit bewundernden und neidischen Blicken kommentiert wird. Selbstbewusst erwirkt Sólveig, dass sie alleine mit Kólbeinn in ein Tal reitet, um die dort grasende Pferdeherde zusammenzutreiben. Hier nutzt sie die Gelegenheit und fordert Kólbeinn dazu auf, mit ihr zu schlafen – vor den Augen der mitgerittenen Dorfbewohner*innen und aller an der Szene beteiligten Pferde. Okularisiert wird dabei intern durch unterschiedliche menschliche und pferdliche Akteur*innen. Ein solch multiperspektivisches Schauen lässt Pferde und Menschen als Teil eines gemeinsamen Raums und Kommunikationssystems erscheinen, in welche das Filmpublikum über die geteilte Tätigkeit des Beobachtens ebenfalls eingeflochten wird.

Sólveig nimmt auch gegenüber Kólbeinn die Position der Anführerin ein. Er muss auf ihre Aufforderung hin Brúnn weiter am Zügel halten, während die beiden miteinander schlafen, womit ähnlich wie in der Grána-Kólbeinn-Brúnn-Szene ein Dreieck angedeutet wird. Brúnns Verhalten legt jedoch eine horizontale Lesart nahe und erteilt vertikalen Deutungsmustern eine Absage. Er schaut die beiden immer mal wieder an, um dann weiter zu grasen, wodurch er vermittelt, dass das Ganze keine allzu bemerkenswerte Sache ist. Grána, Brúnn und Sólveig nehmen Kólbeinn folglich

¹⁸ "Sich verwandt machen" ist eine fürsorgliche Praxis, die Haraway in Kapitel 4 von *Staying with the Trouble* beschreibt. Mangelsdorf betont, dass Menschen, um mit Pferden gelungen zu kommunizieren, ihre Position als Herrschende aufgeben und zu Lernenden werden müssen (vgl. 115).

¹⁹ Vgl. Fußnote 17.

nicht einfach seine privilegierte Stellung als Mann und Mensch, sondern sie bieten ihm einen Ausweg aus einem gewaltbetonten System. Entsprechend lacht er nach der Talszene viel, wirkt gelöst und hat seine aggressive Körperhaltung aufgegeben, die Grána so unbehaglich war. Sólveig hingegen präsentiert sich, nachdem sie Anteile von Brúnn übernommen hat, als eine Anführerin, die für eine klare Kommunikation und damit für Entspannung in der Herde aus Pferden und Menschen sorgt.

Kommunikationsschwierigkeiten mit tödlichen Folgen

Ich komme nun zu zwei weitere Episoden, die ich jedoch weniger ausführlich analysieren werde. Es handelt sich um die zweite Episode, in der ein Mann, Vernharður, mit Hilfe eines Pferdes einem russischen Trawler nachschwimmt, um dort Alkohol zu kaufen, und schließlich an einer Alkoholvergiftung stirbt, sowie um die sechste Episode, in der der spanische Tourist Juan Camilo sich vor dem Tod durch Erfrieren rettet, indem er sein Pferd tötet und in dessen ausgenommenen Bauchraum kriecht. In beiden Episoden spielt die fehlende Bereitschaft, genauer hinzuhören und zu schauen eine entscheidende Rolle für ihren tragischen Ausgang.

Eingeleitet wird die zweite Episode mit einem *Close-Up* auf ein Pferdeauge, in dem sich die karge und weite Landschaft spiegelt, durch die ein Geländewagen rast. Das Spiegelbild im Pferdeauge wird durch einen *Wide Shot* abgelöst, der die atemberaubende Weitläufigkeit der Küstenlandschaft in Szene setzt, wobei das Auto nun klein und deplatziert erscheint. Und in der Tat erkennt Vernharður es als nutzlos für sein weiteres Vorhaben. Er will auf ein besser angepasstes Fortbewegungsmittel umsteigen, als er auf eine kleine Pferdeherde in Strandnähe trifft.

Vernharður scheint pferdeerfahren zu sein, denn er geht behutsam auf die Herde zu. Er nähert sich nicht frontal, sondern von der Seite, was Pferden angenehmer ist, da ihnen so ein Fluchtweg nach vorne offenbleibt. Obwohl er mindestens ebenso in Eile ist wie zuvor Kólbeinn, übt er keinen Druck aus. Entsprechend lässt sich ein graues, kräftiges männliches Pferd bereitwillig von ihm aufzäumen und bleibt ruhig stehen, während Vernharður sich ohne Sattel auf seinen Rücken schwingt. Das Pferd geht widerstandslos ins Meer, was einerseits an dem recht scharfen Trensengebiss liegen mag, andererseits aber darauf hinweist, dass es sich um ein gut ausgebildetes Pferd handelt, das seinem Reiter (und den Pferdetrainer*innen hinter der Kamera) vertraut. Die Kommunikation zwischen Vernharður und dem Grauen ist beachtlich. Das Pferd lässt sich im Wasser von seinem Reiter willig navigieren und ohne in Panik zu verfallen auf einem Kran ein Stück die Schiffswand heraufziehen. Dort steht es zwar etwas angespannt, aber doch still.

Das Verhalten des Pferdes untergräbt die Inszenierung Vernharðurs als einen rücksichtslosen Säufer. Jenseits seiner Alkoholsucht zeigt er sich als erfahrener Pferdemann, der die artübergreifende Kommunikation beherrscht. Weniger gut hingegen sind seine Kompetenzen in der dritten Sprache der menschlichen Akteur*innen des Films. Er kompensiert seine spärlichen Englischkenntnisse auch nicht, indem er auf die warnenden nonverbalen Zeichen der russischen Besatzung

achtet. Diese versucht ihm deutlich zu machen, dass ihm reiner Alkohol verkauft wurde, den er unbedingt verdünnen soll.

Während Vernharður mit der Besatzung verhandelt, passt ein Matrose auf den im Kran stehenden Grauen auf. Er zeigt sich tief beeindruckt von dem Pferd, auf das er flüsternd einredet, um es zu beruhigen. Diese Begegnung erinnert allein schon durch die musikalische Untermalung an die Kólbeinn und Grána-Episode. Die hier ebenfalls intensiv in Szene gesetzten Berührungen sind zwar zärtlich, haben aber auch eine übergriffige Komponente, wenn sich der für das Pferd fremde Mensch an es drückt, es überall berührt und betont, dass das Pferd "gar nicht mager" sei und "gutes Fett" habe. Die Begegnung des Seemanns mit dem Grauen ist geprägt von einer Ambivalenz, die LaRubia-Prado nicht zu bemerken scheint, wenn er betont, dass die nicht-isländischen Menschen den Pferden zugewandter seien als die Dorfbewohner*innen (vgl. 91-92). Doch rücken der Blick und die Berührungen des Seemanns das Pferd in vielfältiger Weise als ein Objekt menschlicher Begierde in den Fokus. Im *human gaze* vermischt sich die bewundernde Begeisterung über die Existenz eines schönen und starken Tieres mit einer sexualisierten Sehnsucht nach körperlicher Nähe und dem Appetit auf hochwertiges Pferdefleisch.

Nach abgeschlossenem Geschäft will Vernharður zurückkehren. Der Graue stolpert unsanft, während der Kran ins Wasser gelassen wird, macht sich dann aber zielstrebig Richtung Ufer auf. Vernharður muss sich beeilen, um nicht zurück zu bleiben und verliert fast seinen Alkohol. Eine sichere Rückkehr ist für ihn nur mit Hilfe des Pferdes möglich, was umgekehrt nicht gilt. Als die beiden das Ufer erreicht haben, trinkt Vernharður, immer noch reitend, direkt aus der Flasche. Wenig später muss er absteigen, um sich zu übergeben. Der Graue bleibt dabei ruhig neben ihm stehen und stupst den sterbenden Mann noch einige Male sachte an. In dieser Szene zeigt sich abermals die Verbindung zwischen den beiden, wobei die sanfte Zuwendung des Grauen in einem scharfen Kontrast zu Vernharðurs von der Alkoholsucht geprägten Achtlosigkeit gegenüber sich selbst steht.

Die Episode endet mit einem weiteren *Wide Shot*. Während der Trawler Richtung offenes Meer entschwindet, schaut der Graue ihm nach. Er spiegelt sich im Straßengraben, wobei der zusammengesackte Vernharður in dieser Spiegelung nicht zu sehen ist. Das graue Pferd steht allein und scheint farblich mit der Landschaft zu verschmelzen. So erscheint es im Gegensatz zu dem Auto der Eingangsszene als natürlicher Teil der Insel, auf der es auch ohne den Menschen, der seine Vorfahren einst herbrachte, überleben kann. Die Schlusssequenz unterstreicht die signifikante Andersartigkeit des Grauen und verhindert, dass man seine Zugewandtheit als menschliche Fürsorge fehlinterpretiert.

Islands Pferde bewegen sich sicher über Land und durch Wasser, was durchgängig in *Hross í oss* in Szene gesetzt wird, beispielsweise wenn ihre trittsicheren Hufe während eines schnellen Tölts über steinige Gründe in einer Unterwasseraufnahme gezeigt werden oder wenn ihr dichtes Fell, ihre dicken Mähnen und ihre buschigen Schweife in Nahaufnahme davon zeugen, wie gut sie gegen Kälteeinbrüche, Wind und Niederschlag schützen. Anders als in den dicht

bewohnten Gebieten Südkandinaviens und Mitteleuropas, die zudem ein milderes Klima aufweisen, muss man in der weitläufigen, nur spärlich besiedelten Landschaft Islands das Wetter stets im Blick behalten. Diese gesteigerte Aufmerksamkeit wird filmisch durch imposante Landschaftsaufnahmen aufgegriffen, in denen die menschlichen Behausungen klein und unbedeutend wirken. Um in der Küstenlandschaft von *Hross í oss* überleben zu können, muss man sich der Wirkmacht des rauen Klimas bewusst sein. Was passieren kann, wenn diese unterschätzt wird, zeigt die sechste Episode. Im Zentrum steht hier Juan Camilo, der durch seine kindliche Bewunderung für Islandpferde und für die geschickte Reiterin Jóhanna auffällt.

Die Episode beginnt mit einem *Close-Up* auf Gamli Rauðurs Auge, einem älteren Pferd, das Óli gehört, der Reittouren für Tourist*innen veranstaltet. Diesmal spiegeln sich die orangen Jacken einer solchen Reiter*innengruppe im Pferdeauge. Juan schließt sich den deutschsprachigen Reiterinnen an und bekommt den ruhigen Gamli Rauður zugeteilt, da er Reitanfänger ist. Óli wirkt überfordert mit seiner Herde aus Pferden und Menschen, während Juan immer weiter zurückfällt, da er sich an den Zügeln festhält und Gamli Rauður so ungewollt zurückhält. Bald sind die beiden alleine in einer unwirtlichen Umgebung und es beginnt immer heftiger zu schneien. Es zeigt sich, dass Juan, der zwar freundlich mit seinem Pferd spricht, überhaupt nicht in der Lage ist, mit ihm zu kommunizieren, was die beiden in eine lebensgefährliche Situation bringt. Der alte Rote will nicht weiterlaufen, da sein Reiter ihm mit den Zügeln im Maul herumzerrt und er einen Stein im Huf hat. Diesen entfernt Juan zwar, aber inzwischen ist er so durchgefroren, dass er nicht mehr weiterlaufen oder reiten kann. Schließlich entscheidet er sich völlig aufgelöst, das Pferd mit seinem Messer zu töten und auszuweiden, um sich in den Kadaver zu legen und dem Tod durch Erfrieren zu entkommen.

LaRubia-Prado geht davon aus, dass ohne die Tötung beide, Pferd und Mann, erfroren wären (vgl. 103), was zumindest hinterfragt werden kann, da Gamli Rauður mit einem wärmenden Pelz ausgestattet ist und er sicherlich nicht seinen ersten Schneesturm erlebt. Folgt man dem Pferd, so erscheint die Figur des Juan nicht mehr so sympathisch und unschuldig. Sein Verhalten ist ebenfalls durch Selbstüberschätzung geleitet, die den Blick trübt, wenn es darum geht, die klimatischen Bedingungen, die eigenen reiterlichen Fähigkeiten und die Kommunikationsangebote seines Pferdes zu beachten. Er betrachtet die isländische Landschaft und ihre Bewohner*innen zwar mit überschäumender Begeisterung, doch geht er vorerst keine verantwortungsbewussten Beziehungen ein. Erst nachdem er den Schneesturm im Pferdekörper überlebt hat, und damit sprichwörtlich neu geboren wird, zeigt er sich in der Schlusszene als Teil der ortsansässigen Gemeinschaft, was auch seine Kleidung, ein Isländerpullover, unterstreicht.

Egal ob man das Paarungsspiel von Kólbeinn und Sólveig, Vernharðurs Mission russischen Wodka zu ergattern oder Juan, der wie ein schreiendes Neugeborenes aus Gamli Rauðurs totem Körper geborgen wird, in den Blick nimmt—immer wieder erscheinen insbesondere Männer und ihr Handlungen befremdlich und ein wenig

lächerlich. *Hross í oss* kann trotzdem als ein wohlwollender²⁰ Film bezeichnet werden, der seine menschlichen Charaktere zwar vorführt, sie aber nicht verurteilt. Darüber hinaus stehen seine pferdlichen Charaktere als eigenständig handelnde Lebewesen im Fokus. Indem insbesondere ihre Körper und die mit diesen ausgedrückte Sprache kontinuierlich in den Mittelpunkt der Kameraführung gerückt werden, bietet sich der Film besonders für eine fürsorgliche Lesart an, welche die mehr-als-menschliche Kommunikation in ihre Deutung miteinfließen lässt. So können die Pferde zwar als Teil menschlicher Zeichensysteme gelesen werden, in welchen sie als Metaphern für Menschen oder menschliches Verhalten stehen, zugleich zeigen sich Menschen jedoch als den Pferden verwandte Tiere, mit welchen sie ambivalente Beziehungen eingehen. Nimmt man die artübergreifende Kommunikation und Okularisierung des Films in den Blick, wird erkennbar, dass Pferde die Perspektive der Filmzuschauer*innen leiten, ohne ihr Pferdsein aufzugeben. Dennoch ist ihnen so viel Menschliches zu eigen, dass sich das Filmpublikum mit einzelnen Tierpersönlichkeiten identifizieren kann und so ebenfalls Teil der diskursiv-materiellen Pferd-Mensch-Verflechtungen wird, die der Film vorführt.

Schluss: Fürsorglich Lesen als Praxis einer polyphonen Ethik

Abschließend lässt sich festhalten, dass ein Leseprozess (unabhängig davon, ob Literatur, Film oder andere künstlerische Arbeiten im Fokus stehen) unter Berücksichtigung mehr-als-menschlicher Akteur*innen das Bewusstsein für die eigenen Begrenzungen als lesende Person viel mehr schärft, als wenn allein menschliche Akteur*innen berücksichtigt werden. Abgesehen davon, dass mehr-als-menschliche Tiere bei einer solch anthropozentrischen Lesart an den Rand gedrängt werden, kann sie zu leichtfertigen Bewertungen führen. Aus der eigenen menschlichen Position heraus, glaubt man Menschliches schneller zu verstehen und stützt sich dabei auf eingeübte Deutungsmuster. Lässt man sich jedoch von den Mehr-als-Menschlichen leiten, so verlangt dies ein neugieriges und achtsames Schauen aus dem Bewusstsein heraus, dass man Dinge womöglich übersieht oder (noch) nicht einordnen kann.

Hross í oss hat somit eine klare umweltethische Dimension. Der Film ermöglicht den Zuschauenden einen Perspektivwechsel, der jedoch keine Verschmelzung mit den pferdlichen Charakteren bedeutet. Das gezeigte Tier bleibt als eigenständige Tierpersönlichkeit erkennbar und fungiert so nicht nur als Symbol für menschliche Ängste, Wünsche oder Moral. Indem es die Position eines relationalen Subjekts (vgl. Braidotti 54) einnimmt, wird es als den Menschen verwandt wahrgenommen. Die menschlichen Zuschauer*innen können sich so als ein Tier von vielen erkennen, mit denen sie gemeinsam im Anthropozän leben und Empfindungen, Unzulänglichkeiten, und Bedürfnisse teilen, ohne dabei die Differenz

²⁰ Vgl. Lönngren, "Metaphor, Metonymy," 41. Lönngren nimmt hier Bezug auf Sedgwick, die in "Paranoid Reading" betont, dass eine reparative Lesart voraussetzt, dass Text und Leser*in wohlwollend sind.

zu anderen menschlichen und mehr-als-menschlichen Tieren aufgeben zu können. Diese Differenz entlässt den Menschen als eine Art, die ihr eigenes Handeln in ganz besonderer Weise reflektieren kann, nicht aus der Verantwortung.

Die heute Lebenden wurden in eine Welt geboren, in der die menschliche Art dominiert, selbst in dünn besiedelten Räumen wie Island. Strebt man eine ausgeglichene Lage an, so liegt es nahe, den vorherrschenden Anthropozentrismus kritisch zu reflektieren. Dies geht oft mit utopischen Vorstellungen von einer Welt, in der Menschen und andere Tiere friedlich koexistieren, einher. Erlingssons Film inszeniert das Island der halbwilden Pferde nicht als ein solches Utopia, und entzieht sich damit der besonders durch die Tourismusbranche verbreiteten Nordeuropa-Romantik. Auch wenn manche dieser Utopien tier- und umweltfreundlich gemeint sein mögen, so sind auch sie meistens nach menschlichen Parametern ausgerichtet ohne signifikante Andersartigkeiten zu berücksichtigen. Hier erscheint mir die Erschließung von Spielräumen, wie Sólveig es in *Hross í oss* macht, wirkungsvoller, da so aus den existierenden ambivalenten Verflechtungen heraus neue Muster erkennbar werden. Dies gilt vor allem dann, wenn der mehr-als-menschlichen Polyphonie in den bestehenden Formationen Beachtung geschenkt wird. Menschen sind zu dieser Achtsamkeit in der Lage. Ihre ethische Verantwortung liegt entsprechend nicht allein in der Ausmalung besserer Welten, sondern in der Bereitschaft aufmerksam zu schauen, zu hören und zu lesen. Damit ist eine wichtige Voraussetzung für einen fürsorglichen Umgang miteinander und mit der Welt, in der wir alle leben, gegeben.

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The Sounds of Cetacean Revolution Through History¹

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Abstract

This article examines rogue whale encounters in seventeenth-century English poet Edmund Waller's "The Battle of the Summer Isles" (1645), a poem that seeks to establish human dominion through an epic struggle between settlers attempting landfall on the Bermudian shore and a pod of sperm whales who prevent such actions. Through the poem's use of sound, in particular the whales' cries for justice, I find resonance with the concept of nonhuman revolutions we see actualized through the whales and orcas of today. This article traces a cultural history of whale resistance by and through sound. Part 1 recalls historical whale resistance narratives to establish prevalence for what we now term "orcanization." I briefly show how three particular whales have disrupted narratives of cetacean kindness or friendship, choosing anti-human violence despite their capacity for kindness: White Gladis of yacht-sinking fame, the notorious Tilikum of *Blackfish* (2013), and Mocha Dick, the sperm whale that inspired Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851). Part 2 explores how Waller's whales represent a narrative of roguish animal revolution: of whales that, in their courage, disruption, and refusal to die, muddle the Empire's myth of New World domination. In conclusion, I assert that in the sound of orcas breaking rudders today we can hear a history of whale narratives: examples of resistance, calls for reparation, and a reminder that this world is a shared one.

Keywords: Whales, seventeenth-century poetry, animal revolution.

Resumen

Este artículo examina los encuentros con ballenas rebeldes en "La batalla de las islas de verano" (1645), del poeta inglés Edmund Waller, del siglo XVII, un poema que busca establecer el dominio humano a través de una lucha épica entre colonos que intentan tocar tierra en la costa de las Bermudas y una manada de cachalotes. quienes impiden tales acciones. A través del uso del sonido en el poema, en particular los gritos de justicia de las ballenas, encuentro resonancia con el concepto de revoluciones no humanas que vemos actualizado a través de las ballenas y orcas de hoy. Este artículo traza una historia cultural de la resistencia de las ballenas a través del sonido. La Parte 1 recuerda las narrativas históricas de resistencia de las ballenas para establecer la prevalencia de lo que ahora llamamos "orcanización". Muestro brevemente cómo tres ballenas en particular han alterado las narrativas de la bondad o amistad de los cetáceos, eligiendo la violencia antihumana a pesar de su capacidad de bondad: White Gladis, famosa por hundir yates, la notoria Tilikum de *Blackfish* (2013), y Mocha Dick, el esperma. ballena que inspiró *Moby Dick* (1851) de Herman Melville. La segunda parte

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explora cómo las ballenas de Waller representan una narrativa de la revolución animal pícaro: de ballenas que, en su coraje, perturbación y negativa a morir, confunden el mito imperial de la dominación del Nuevo Mundo. En conclusión, afirmo que en el sonido de las orcas rompiendo timones hoy podemos escuchar una historia de las narrativas de las ballenas: ejemplos de resistencia, llamados a reparación y un recordatorio de que este mundo es compartido.

Palabras clave: ballenas, poesía del siglo XVII, revolución animal.

"It comes as no surprise that our collective retreat from public spheres, brought on by COVID-19, had lasting impacts on the visibility of urban wild ecologies. As I have argued elsewhere, lockdown brought globally quieter oceans, allowing scientists to measure noise levels of deep/inland waters to mark the sudden silence's impact on marine wildlife (Nelson; Rolland et al. 2366). One study of oceanic sound pollution conducted during the first months of lockdown reported "an average reduction of 1.5 [decibels] in the mean weekly noise" from 2016-18 median averages (Thomson and Barclay 3391-2). While decreased oceanic noise meant scientists could more clearly observe whale sounds, songs, and behaviors, it also had significant implications for whale cultures, as whales use sound to navigate, hunt for food, detect predators, and communicate with each other. This drop in sound encouraged maritime recovery during COVID-19, with "an increasing trend in the population of sea mammals...especially in those regions where they were not seen for decades" (Lombrana). While we celebrated creaturely appearances in 2020 as novel phenomena, positive reactions toward wildlife have waned over time—and to the consternation of some humans, not all oceanic creatures receded into the deep.

In the summer of 2023, a string of orca/boat encounters hit the news. These orca encounters brought international attention to a pod of "rogue killer whales" who "orchestrated attacks" on numerous yachts and sailing boats, sinking three and damaging dozens more (Gill). As I explore in *EdgeEffects*, scientists have identified one orca leading the charge: "A 12-year-old female, White Gladis is matriarch to a pod of juvenile orcas, and she appears to be teaching her pod to ram boats and dismantle rudders. Those reporting her attack cite terrifying boat-ramming sessions of up to 45 minutes, with one man in July 2020 suffering a dislocated shoulder from his boat rocking so violently he fell onto the deck" (Ibbetson). Some have speculated that Gladis had a "critical moment of agony" leading her to associate rudders with pain. They report finding a severe head injury likely caused by boat propellers, which may be one reason why she is breaking them" (Gill; Nelson). While there are many explanations for why White Gladis is ramming boats, I want to think *with* Gladis and other whale encounters, alongside and through resistance in order to consider cetaceous agency through prisms of sound—whales' principal communicative mode.

Firstly, I can't help but wonder if the sudden absence of anthropogenic maritime sounds during COVID-19 opened up spaces for whales to make themselves heard. While whale song—the sound they are best known for—has, as Graham Huggan observes, come to represent them "singing their own dirge" (94), I wish to

take seriously White Gladis’s rudder-breaking as another kind of whale sound. I see this property damage as resistance to a leading cause of cetacean extinction today.² British sailor Alan Bruce—rammed by Gladis in August 2021—thinks these rogue orca encounters are not unwarranted: “We’ve been over-fishing their waters, and now it’s payback time” (Rollings). I see resistance narratives not as psychosis, behavioral aberration, or mere instinct, but as purposeful instances of action: “Resistance is not a psychological disorder. Indeed, it is often a moment of distinct clarity” (Hribal 144). Too often we overlook cetacean agency, and whales’ power to disrupt the fragile ecosystems we force them to endure.

This article traces a cultural history of whale resistance. Part 1 recalls historical whale resistance narratives to establish prevalence for what we now term “orcanization.” I briefly show how three whales have disrupted narratives of cetacean kindness or friendship, choosing anti-human violence despite their capacity for kindness: White Gladis of yacht-sinking fame, the notorious Tilikum of *Blackfish* (2013) and Mocha Dick, the sperm whale that inspired Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* (1851). These examples encourage trans-historical thinking about cetacean movements and critical or violent disputes with humans. I specifically examine sound for its propensity to act upon its objects in ways that phenomenologically serve as the building blocks for disruptive encounters.

Part 2 traces whale resistance to English poet Edmund Waller’s poem “The Battle of the Summer Isles” (1645) to contextualize this enduring human-nonhuman dynamic and the persistence of such encounters over time. In Waller’s short mock-heroic, the poetic persona describes two sperm whales—a mother and calf—preventing colonial settlers from docking on an Bermuda’s Edenic shores. These whales interrupt European access to Bermuda, becoming active enemies to the settlers making for shore. I investigate how *Battle* uses sound as a nonhuman tool for disruption, challenging humanity’s exploitation of nature. From Waller’s whales, I trace an agential resistance to obliteration that persists and lives on through the voices of Mocha, Tilikum, and White Gladis.

The ethical implications of studying creaturely resistance across historical contexts are critical for future conservation imperatives. As Margaret Grebowicz states, “While most terrestrial wilderness is de-historicized when we wilfully forget human habitation...marine wilderness is de-historicized when we wilfully forget human impact” (59). *Wilful* is a key term here: Although we humans can wilfully forget, whales can wilfully remind us.³ Through Waller’s mock-heroic, I trace a cetaceous history that subverts colonial dominion in Bermuda by playfully representing the settlers’ failure to kill two whales. Scholars such as Ann A. Huse find it difficult to easily categorize Waller’s poem as solely comedic, given its occasional

²Oceanic noise pollution has already resulted in the extinction of one whale species and the Baiji river dolphin (Grebowicz 70).

³I draw from Sara Ahmed’s *Wilful Subjects*, in which she argues the dangers of conflating ecology and society as wholly congruent—especially given human nature, which always finds ways to engage in selfish modes of existence that necessarily subordinate nature for their better interests (174).

sympathy for the whales. As Warren L. Chernaik clarifies, “Though the whales provide a properly heroic adversary, the knights whose task it is to slay the dragon do not measure up” (181). Within the arrival of the so-called “knights,” Waller’s readers see Bermuda’s tranquility destroyed in what I consider a proto-environmentalist perspective on colonial ventures into West-Indian territories.

I maintain we can better acknowledge the perceptual experiences whales are subject to and the agency they exert over shared environments by remembering this history. Waller’s whales represent a narrative of roguish animal revolution: of whales that, in their courage, disruption, and refusal to die, muddle the Empire’s myth of New World domination. Finally, I assert that in the sound of breaking rudders today we can hear a history of whale narratives: examples of resistance, calls for reparation, and a reminder that this world is a shared one.

Part One: “Orcanization”. Disruptive Encounters and Whale Resistance

Before considering the contexts of disruptive whale encounters, one must first establish what comprises an encounter. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an encounter is “a meeting, face to face.” This definition sets up a condition of materiality, where one physically confronts another. This materiality can take different forms: the penetrating gaze from a presence that faces you, an embodied response like the prick of the ears or swish of a tail, a tentative touch that breaches the divide. An encounter is at once a turning toward and an opposition of sorts; both physically one thing facing another thing. An awareness of another being, and within such acknowledgement, a realization of difference.⁴

But what does it *mean* to encounter an animal? Legally, Grebowicz describes allowable whale encounters as only contemporaneously possible through nonhuman initiation: “Laws like the Marine Mammal Protection Act, Endangered Species Act, and Fisheries Act restrict how closely humans and vessels may approach cetaceans, but not vice versa” (27). White Gladis’s encounters illustrate how whales are actively seeking encounters, ranging from simply following boats to “actively interfering with them” (González).⁵ Mónica González, a marine biologist studying Gladis’s pod, defines these encounters as comprised of human-based sightings and whale/human-based interactions (see *Fig. 1*). I add to González’s definition the realm of sound as an important phenomenological characteristic of encounters. Sound is often a major component of studies of whales, as whale vocalization has been held to demonstrate intelligence and merit conservation and respect. Conversely, I argue sound has conceptual value as an empirical component of disruptive encounters. Paul Hegarty describes the defining trait of noise as representing “something that one

⁴In examining the Latin etymology, an inherent contradiction emerges. Coming from the Latin, “*incontrā*,” meaning “towards,” the etymology refers to both “*in*” meaning “with” and “*contra*” meaning “opposite of.”

⁵Mónica González reported that between 2020–22, a total of 639 encounters occurred between the Bay of Biscay down to Morocco.

is...submitted or subjected to” (4). Acknowledging whale agency via sound and how it shapes encounters helps dispel age-old ideas that nonhumans are “predictable and mechanistic” (McFarland and Hediger 1).

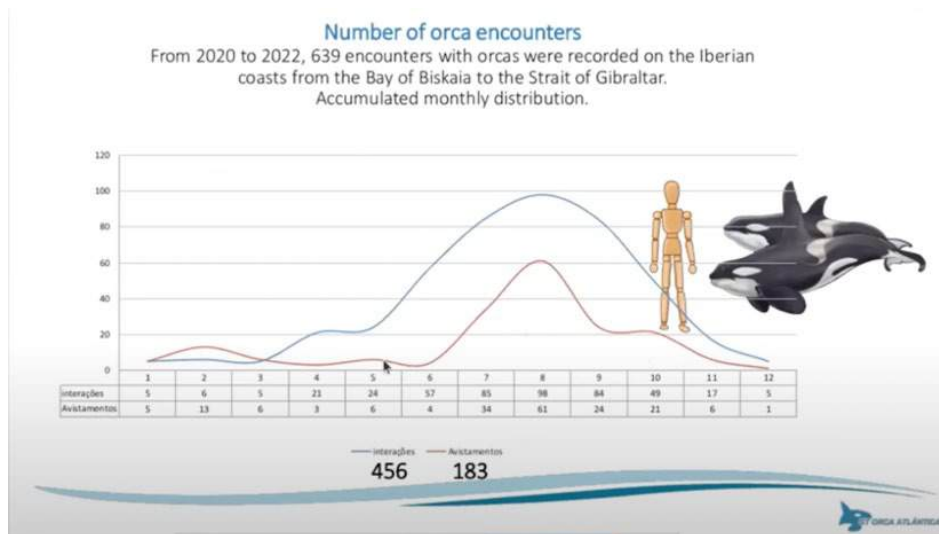


Fig. 1 “Number of Orcas Encounters,” from CEMMA / GTOA.

So what does it mean for whales to act and engage sound in unexpected, challenging ways? It seems that for White Gladis, these encounters are informed by memory and trauma, and consist in destroying rudders as threats to whales—physical threats, evident from Gladis’s head injury, and processual threats, as rudders help transmit the anthropogenic sound pollution endangering cetaceans. For humans, the encounters force realizations of creaturely unpredictability, obviating fixed notions of how whales ought to be. Is it aggressive play? Or acts of class consciousness?

Social media seems to have an answer, as media outlets exploded with GIFs, jokes, and puns over the orca encounters (see Fig. 2). Anna Guasco terms it the “orcanization” of class-conscious orcas targeting and sinking the yachts of billionaires; an animal anti-colonial organizing effort to “take back the ocean.” The notion of animal revolution is not as ridiculous as one might think. Elsewhere, I have explored how Ron Broglio’s creative nonfiction *Animal Revolution* (2022) urges readers to imagine how revolutions might look when their participants are nonhuman: “Society moves in particular ways and we have systematic expectations about how non-humans function in the world...When the animals don’t comply this is a mode of jamming our social gears and causes us to rethink our cultural expectation of the world around us” (13). Broglio encourages us to rethink what the materials of revolution can be, opening out the idea of insurgent justice to the nonhuman in ways that make rudder-breaking newly, revolutionarily legible.



Fig. 2. Tweet by Enola Knezevic. X (June 14, 2023);
Image credit: "Eat the Rich!" Cosmic Tentacles. *Instagram* (June 8, 2023).

This brings me to two trans-historical examples of whale resistance I briefly explore—Tilikum’s 2010 killing of his trainer Dawn Brancheau, and Mocha Dick’s long history of skirmishes with early nineteenth-century whalers. By considering the roles of sound in each account, we can see how White Gladis is not the first whale to engage noise in and as cetacean resistance.

The orca Tilikum, or “Tilly,” wields a special infamy today, catapulted to stardom by the documentary *Blackfish*. The largest orca ever held in captivity, the film details how Tilly was wrestled out of the ocean as a two-year-old in 1983. *Blackfish* highlights the haunting sounds and screams separated pods would emit, with one fisherman sharing, “I’ve been part of a revolution, two change of presidents in Central and South America, and seen some things that’s hard to believe, but I will never forget the screams and wails of the mothers watching one of their own being stolen” (1.09–08). The mother whales’ “screams and wails” were so vividly horrible the fisherman claims he “will never fish again.” While not an obvious form of resistance, this anecdote speaks to the evident personhood of orcas through horrifying yet usual means: those “signs of intellectual complexity, capacity for communication, [and] elaborate social structures” we often assign to orcas (Grebowicz 51). Between 1983–92, Tilly was subjected to physical punishment, starvation, orca-related bullying, and sensory-deprived confinement at Sealand of the Pacific. Orca-expert Ken Balcomb claims holding Tilly in such conditions “probably led to psychosis,” but this point risks

dismissing Tilly's agency. Hribal notes "Tilikum and others" likely did "suffer[] from clinical depression or stress-related ailments," but "the point is that captive animals have used their intelligence, ingenuity, and tenacity to overcome the situations and obstacles put before them. Their actions have had intent and purpose. If anything, these animals are psychologically strong, not weak. They are choosing to fight back" (144).

Traci Warkentin, Hribal, and Grebowicz have been instrumental in viewing the subsequent murders of various trainers by Tilly as a form of resistance.⁶ Other negative impacts of captivity aside, Warkentin notes how captive orcas "must use only a fraction of their echolocating abilities or risk deafening themselves. Such an adaptation of their modes of sensing their surroundings is potentially frustrating," and that analysis "in captive sites may also be...productive for understanding...whale agency and...possible expressions of resistance." In other words, sound-based resistances may "disrupt notions of stimulus response and other mechanical descriptions of behaviour and assume that organisms have a perceptual awareness of their worlds" (Warkentin 28-9). This is undoubtedly true for Tilly, who on the day of Brancheau's death, gave strange vocalizations potentially suggesting pre-meditation. In *Blackfish*, Tilly is seen loudly screeching and unexpectedly jumping onto a water deck, clearly scaring a surprised trainer (16:54-46). Later, during his "Dine with Shamu" show, Tilly ignores Brancheau's directions and becomes frustrated by the sound of a rapidly diminishing fish bucket. The turning point occurs when he ignores Brancheau's whistle cue, and his protest is devastatingly evident when he drags Brancheau underwater. Tilly's case bolsters notions of whale agency and protest; as Grebowicz argues, "this personhood is demonstrated...by Tilikum's aggression, presented as something of a revolutionary act of violence: anti-colonial, proletarian—or both" (51).

It's almost impossible not to think of Herman Melville's canonical white whale when thinking of Tilly's life and the violence he endured. Melville's whale was based on "Mocha Dick," an albino male sperm whale historically encountered off Mocha Island, Chile. Renowned for destroying "more than 20 whaling ships and escap[ing] another 80," he was feared in southern Pacific waters (Hiskey). Explorer J. N. Reynolds's book offers first-hand accounts of Mocha, noting the whale's uniquely terrifying spouting sounds: "Instead of projecting his spout obliquely forward, and puffing with a short, convulsive effort...as usual with his species, Mocha Dick flung the water from his nose in a lofty, perpendicular, expanded volume...its expulsion producing a continuous roar, like...vapor struggling from the safety valve of a powerful steam engine" (379). Similarly, A. B. C. Whipple notes "when agitated, he would sound and then breach so aggressively that his entire body would sometimes come completely out of the water" (66). These accounts document Mocha's audible methods for communicating with sailors to stay away.

⁶ While examining Tilly's murders as resistance, we must not forget the three trainers who lost their lives. Their lives and families deserve remembrance beyond being Tilly's victims.

Reynolds's account also notes how Mocha was not naturally aggressive, "[o]n the contrary, he would sometimes pass quietly round a vessel, and occasionally swim lazily and harmlessly among the boats," yet "when armed with full craft," Mocha could enact revenge "for the destruction of his race" (379). A remarkable account of early animal revolution, Reynolds was not far off in his estimation of Mocha's willingness to fight for his species, as Mocha ultimately died defending a mother whale whose calf was killed by whalers, in 1838. Mocha was killed after ramming the offending ship, "smiting his teeth ferociously into their sockets, with a crashing sound...the sound of the concussions resembling that of the rapid discharge of artillery" (389). Clearly articulated within the context of a burgeoning industrial empire, Mocha used sound in tandem with bodily strength to enact retributive violence—in ways not dissimilar to Gladis's own rudder-breaking tactics.

It was Mocha's daring, coupled with that of another sperm whale who destroyed the whaling vessel *The Essex* in 1820, that inspired Melville's novel. Owen Chase, one of the *Essex's* eight survivors, described the whale ramming their ship 2,000 miles out, "appear[ing] with tenfold fury and vengeance in his aspect" (21). These accounts share an acknowledgement of rageful agency mirrored in Melville's own description of the white whale: "Yet, in most instances, such seemed the White Whale's infernal *aforethought of ferocity*, that every dismembering or death that he caused, was not wholly regarded as having been inflicted by an *unintelligent agent*" (202). *Moby Dick* is a fictional figure, but Melville's interest in the agency of historical whales situates him in a lineage of writers moved by nonhuman insurgence, and using sound to describe it. Enacting a Leviathan justice, Mocha, Tilly, White Gladis and her rogue pod all illustrate how sound is deeply implicated in whale resistance narratives that reject peaceful encounters.

Now I turn to Waller's poem as a moment in literature iterating the histories of colonial violence against whales and how, even by the 1600s, whales demanded to be heard.

Part Two: Sonic Boundaries in Waller's Poem

Little known today, Edmund Waller's *Battle* was written during great political upheaval, from Waller's courtly position as a Royalist sympathizer during the English Civil War—certainly influencing the poem's themes. Written about fleeing Royalists seeking shelter outside Britain, Waller's poem takes place on the sunny shores of Bermuda, a British holding in the West Indies that served as sanctuary for those looking to escape punishment (Wilkinson 18–24). Waller never travelled to Bermuda, but rather, as Huse and Andrea Walkden have found, uses it as a stage for symbolic representations of empire, colonization, and the challenges of the New World.

Whales are historically important to the West Indies and fitting topics for Waller's poem. As early as 1618, *The Neptune* was sent to Bermuda specifically for the purpose of whaling (29–34). Huse notes it was likely the 1609 wreck of English colonists heading for Jamestown on the *Sea Venture*, which inspired Waller's

attention to “monsters [that] harm.” The same ship wreck also inspired Shakespeare to write *The Tempest* (1610–11), featuring the rebellious, monstrously sub-human, fish-like Caliban. Moreover, Huse notes John Smith’s *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles* (1624) was likely a resource for Waller (19). Smith records how the *Sea Venture*’s survivors crafted a new ship, whereupon leaving Bermuda, they “chanced upon the greatest peece of Amber-greece”—the valuable whale commodity *ambergris*—“ever seene or heard of in one lumpe, being in weight foure score pound, besides divers other small peeces” (176). I add to Huse’s list two maps that provide crucial historical whale evidence produced in the West Indies during the early 1600s: first, the second-earliest map of Bermuda and second, Richard Ligon’s 1637 map of Barbados.



Fig. 3. George Somers. “A colored map on vellum of the Bermuda or Somer Islands.” 1609–14. *Bermuda National Trust Collection and the Bermuda Archives.*

First, the *Sea Venture*’s captain, Sir George Somers (considered Bermuda’s “founder”), stayed on the island for ten months after the wreckage, during which he created the second known manuscript map of the island, including an illustration of a larger-than-life whale (see Fig. 3). Actively splashing on the northwestern coast appears a giant, hand-drawn whale. This black blot hovering above the sunny-colored island is grandly drawn, larger than many surrounding island outcroppings. Somer’s rendering of an outsized whale suggests a problem of scale that turns a relatively harmless marine animal into an ominous presence that map readers register via ratios of comparison between the island and the whale.

Likewise, Ligon’s map of Barbados, produced est. 15 years after Somer’s map, also features cetaceous figures that pose threatening presences against island and coast geographies. While Somer’s whale is an ominous black blot, Ligon’s whales are

finely detailed with traits that recall mythic sea creatures (see fig. 4). Featuring sharp teeth,



Fig. 4. Image credit: R.O.A.D., Reclaiming Our Atlantic Destiny Programme. Bridgetown, Barbados; from Richard, Ligon. *A True & Exact History of the Island off Barbadoes* (London: Peter Parker, 1673). Image copyright: Richard Cox.



Fig. 4, Detail 1: Cetaceous figure, top left.



Fig 4, Detail 2: Cetaceous figure, bottom left.

multi-pronged fins and tails, mischievous grins, and general anthropomorphized expressions, these two cetaceous fish pose as threats not in their scale but in their apparent presence of mind (see fig. 4, details 1 and 2). In particular, the creature's gaze on the bottom left of the map (see fig. 4, detail 2) is trained toward the island, eyeing the ship and shoreline above him with an appraising gaze that suggests a propensity for disruptive agency.

Like Somer's whale, the first lines of Edmund Waller's poem attest to the size of Bermudian whales by comparing them to a nation: "Aide me Bellona while the dreadful fight / Betwixt a Nation and two Whales I write" (52). This opening employs epic conventions, indicating a war topos via "Bellona"—the Roman goddess of war—rather than the "Muse" of poetry typically invoked. The invocation addressing war, rather than poetry, is unusual and alludes to the bloodlust typical of Bellona in classical Latin literature. For example, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Bellona pollutes the royal hall, so that "the house did swim in blood" (1.235). Agnès Lafont claims Bellona's "bloodletting ends only when Perseus holds up the Gorgon head to petrify his enemies" (185). This reference to bloodlust against a classical monster at the poem's start provides clear direction for the poem's subject. Writing between a nation—here, one that betrayed Waller's trust through the rise of a Cromwellian government—and two whales that threaten Royalists seeking refuge in those "late discover'd isles" (52), Waller positions his poetic speaker squarely in the Atlantic Ocean.

More than safe passage, these whales threaten national claims to Bermuda in their physical positioning between ship and safe harbor. Bermuda's coastal geography is well-known for its dangerous rocky reefs. By the time Waller wrote *Battle*, sixteen shipwrecks were recorded on or near the island, giving the local Bermudian 'Wreck Hill' its name. While reefs technically strand Waller's whales, they also assist the whales as relational ecologies by threatening the ship's safe arrival. This creates a position of precarity further emphasized by the poetic speaker's actual position in between two trans-chronological threats: the past, denoted by the "nation" to which he cannot return, and the future, denoted by the Edenic, pastoral descriptions of Bermuda—"Where shining pearle, corall, and many a pound / On the rich shore, of Amber-greece is found" (52)—which remains out of reach. Despite the authorial claim—"Betwixt a Nation and two Whales I write"—the speaker is positioned precariously in the Atlantic, between a past and future, and with an immediate present offering no clear solution.

The auditory clashes punctuating the poem further amplify the unreason of the speaker's positionality. This "unreason" is emphasized through the poetic speaker's position literally on ocean water, as well as via auditory claims he uses to establish poetic stability: "Seas stain'd with goar, I sing adventurous toyle / And how these Monsters did disarm an Isle" (52). Through a claim to "sing adventurous toyle," the speaker asserts his authorial control of the narrative. However, this claim is threatened by the whales that "did disarm an Isle," suggesting their presence makes the island vulnerable. Again, Ligon's "Monsters" seem to eye ship, island, and map readers with perverse and gaping leers that leave viewers uncertain, so too do Waller's whales seem to "disarm" Bermuda, transforming the isle into another uncertain nation, like the one the poem's settlers left behind. The effect of this comparison and the line's final moment invert the poetic speaker's narratorial confidence by emphasizing the whales' narrative over the speaker's bard-like intonations.

Canto 2 opens to whale cries hyperbolized as rolling, angry thunder. As they approach the isle, the settlers hear “A lasting noise, as horrid and as loud / As thunder makes before it breaks the cloud” (54). Seeing “two monsters of unequal size / ...which swelling Seas had tost, / And left them prisoners on the rocky coast” (54), the settlers watch on as the whales become victims to a near-beaching, caught in the rocks near Bermuda’s shore. Breaching the ocean’s surface, distressed or aggressive whales can make several loud, upsetting above-water sounds, including distinguishable warnings that, like thunder, are “heard for hundreds of meters below the surface,” signaling to other whales in the area (NOAA). Whales also engage in “lobtailing,” when they “hold their tail above the water and swing it around before slapping it on top of the surface of the sea...This creates a sound that is heard...both above and below the ocean” (Moreton Bay). These vocal and non-vocal whale sounds become a sonic boundary separating settlers from Bermuda both physically and metaphorically, creating an aural partition that disrupts the air and warns settlers to stay away, and by Waller’s simile comparing them to thunder.

The settlers discover those already on the island have been unsettled by the whales’ cries for days: “Yet is no humane fate exempt from fear / Which shakes their hearts, while through the Ile [sic] they hear” this “lasting noise,” which for “Three dayes they [did] dread this murmur...” (54). In particular, the mother whale appears to be “Quash’t...Against sharpe Rocks” and in process of becoming “in peeces dash’t” (55). A sailor onboard recognizes her predicament, as he “Had seen the like lye murdered on the shore” before (55). As he recounts his knowledge of drift whaling and the mother whale’s impending fate, the watching settlers rejoice that what “lately was their publique terror, they / Behold with glad eyes as a cetaine prey” (55). Waller’s speaker again invokes the whales’ roguishness: the “publique terror” are the whales, their cries, and their physically impressive scale, all threatening the sanctity of the immediate public sphere. The whales first invoke terror in the hearts of the settlers onboard this ship but also for the island settlers who have already suffered the sound of their cries.

Nevertheless, the threat of “publique terror” rapidly diminishes as the colonists heed the seasoned sailor’s advice concerning the near-beached whale, and “The welcome news through all the Nation spread, / To sudden joy and hope converts their dread” (55). Passengers onboard become part of the Bermudian “Nation” through their uniform realization of the mother whale’s fate. This moment signifies a turn toward the mock-heroic, as the sailors prepare to battle trapped opponents. Realizing the mother whale is easy prey, those aboard the ship begin to scan her limbs, soon to lay “scatter’d” around the shore, becoming cataloguers accounting for the parts and uses of her still-living body. In their minds, they “Dispose already of th’untaken spoyle, / And as if purchase of their future toyle, / These share the bones and they divle the oyle” (55). Mirroring the poem’s earlier mention of “many a pound...of Amber-greece” eagerly awaiting the sailors on Bermuda’s shore (52), the mother whale becomes just another valuable Atlantic commodity in the colonial gaze: “th’untaken spoyle” of the future. The poetic speaker attempts to naturalize her

imminent death through the sailor's memory of previous whales "murdered on the shore" and the symbolic ambergris lying in wait. This observation is supported by the speaker, who clarifies that nature condones violence against whales as "sometime the raging Ocean failes, / And her owne brood exposes" (55). Despite her monstrous scale, she becomes a list of limbs scattered on the shore, transformed into use and exchange value, representing the colonists' continued success. If they succeed in a battle that nature aids, their victory offers portents for their future ability to accumulate valuables as *official islanders* once the battle is complete.

Or so it would seem, as Waller goes to great lengths to show the mother whale's courage, suffering, and her calf's fidelity:

The Boat which on the first assault did goe
Stroke with a harping Iron the younger foe;
Who when he felt his side so rudely goar'd
Loud as the Seas that nourish't him he roar'd. (56)

At the start of Canto 3, it's the calf's sole cry—his "roar[]" as "Loud as the Seas"—that signals the battle's true commencement. Like the roguish orcas of 2023, the calf is not frightened by the ship and sailors, but is rather moved "to please some curious taste" of his own (56). Readers are not made aware of his inner thoughts but, as his roar is the poem's most decisive sound, the calf commands the narrative moment:

While yet alive in boyling water cast
with unwonted heat, boyles, flings about
The scorching brasse, and hurles the liquor out:
So with the barbed Javeling stung, he raves,
And scourges with his tayle the suffering waves. (56)

Like Shakespeare's spirit Ariel, the calf culls the elements to cast an aquatic tempest that he "hurles" and "flings" about in a frenzy, slapping his tail in warning to his attackers. Rather than showing submission or fear, he sounds the sonic boundary between the two parties through the winds and blasts produced by his lobtailing. He also "flings" this warning call about like "scorching brasse." In the *OED*, "brasse" or "brace" means a coat of armor used in preparation for war. This use of brasse, coupled with the hot sensations of "scorching," suggest the calf has whipped the ocean waves into a boil; creating a kind of armorlike barrier too dangerous for sailors to penetrate. The calf uses the island's environmental ecologies to leverage his tail's strength, manifesting a temporary hurricane via the powers of water and wind. Furthermore, his treatment of the "suffering waves" anticipates how else his powerful tail will disrupt the sailors:

Like fairy Talas with his iron slayle,
He threatens ruine with his pondrous tayle;
Dissolving at one stroak the battered Boat,
And downe the men fall drenched in the moat:
With every fierce encounter they are forc't
To quit their boats, and fare like men unhorst. (56)

Likened to “Talas”—or Talus, the knight of justice in book 5 of Edmund Spenser’s *Fairie Queene*—the trapped calf’s strength is beyond a normal whale’s and equated with Spenser’s God-like, bionic character “made of yron mould, / Immoueable, resistlesse, without end” (190). Tiffany Jo Werth clarifies that Talus’s seeming inhumanity stems from his iron-made body, noting iron’s association with “war and weaponry” (409–10). Werth further elucidates that, despite Talus’s ability to walk on two legs and exhibit other humanlike signs, he is ultimately an “in-between figure, both of subhuman and superhuman status...[A]n iron man, a walking mineral, a stony human, human and mineral simultaneously, irreducible to neither ‘iron’ nor ‘man’” (397–8). The calf’s comparison to Talus elucidates his qualities of immovable rage and unruliness: neither characters are as they appear and both contain qualities superseding mere taxonomy.

The calf’s comparison to Talus directly brings revolution and class—the “orcanization” of today’s orcas—to the fore. A righteous knight of justice, Talus holds “in his hand an yron flale...With which he threst out falshood, and did truth vnfold,” especially “Against that cruell Tyrant, which opprest” (Spenser 190). This allusion offers incredible resonances with the kind of seventeenth-century animal revolution I seek to bring to the surface. Through it, we can identify Waller’s calf’s heroism, for his justice serves his species. The calf’s “ponderous taylor” parallels Talus’s “yron flale,” dispensing justice. Walkden’s analysis of Waller’s epic simile clarifies an important point about the flail as traditionally “the improvised arms of the peasant or farmer” (1111). The calf’s tail is not just an individually wielded weapon, but an image of class belonging and mass action. A critical symbolic connection to narratives of whale resistance, the calf’s tail beckons an animal revolution based on upending human hierarchies of power.

Furthermore, the sailors’ failure to reach the calf signals the poem’s mock-heroic form, as despite being trapped and vulnerable, the calf “unhors[es]” the men. The *OED* defines “unhorst” as a terrible thing that can happen to a knight, such as being thrown from a horse. Thus, the humans here are presented as unheroically disempowered, incongruous figures. More poignantly, “unhorst” in figurative language also means to “overthrow.” Read this way, the calf overtly enacts a *coup d’état*, unseating the species-order and delivering the fair fight intimated at the poem’s opening.

Yet the calf’s success is short-lived, as the men’s “succeslesse toyle” takes a violent turn. As the calf tries directing his mother toward “the gap through which they...came,” he ultimately swims ahead, quitting the “hostile lake” his mother is unable to escape (57). The sailors turn to her and upon “her alone / Their furie fals” (57). Quickly running out of darts and “Their launces spent,” one man in particular strides forward, hoping to provide the death blow:

.....one bolder then the rest
With his broad sword provok’d the sluggish beast:
Her oyle side devoures blade and heft,
And there his Steel the bold Bermudian left. (57)

Again, Waller parallels Canto 1, when the settlers are united as a “nation” by intending productive violence against the whales. As the poem’s first mention of “Bermudian[s],” this moment suggests a founding violence that confirms the man—and by extension the others onboard—as official islanders. The remainder of Canto 3 takes a darker turn as Waller clearly sympathizes with the mother whale’s plight; a point emphasized through her physical transformation. After receiving so many blows, Waller compares the mother whale to an island:

Their fixed javelings In her side she weares,
And on her back a grove of pikes appears.
You would have thought had you the monster seen
Thus drest, she had another Island been. (58)

Through epic allusion, the javelin-covered whale recalls Aeneas and his javelin-covered shield from Virgil’s *Aeneid*. In book 8, Aeneas receives a gift from his goddess mother Venus who forges an invincible shield famously depicting Rome’s history (201–24). In book 10, Aeneas takes innumerable javelins to his shield, ultimately defeating the Latin army and protecting Rome’s future (251–78). As a mother protecting her son, the parallels between Venus/Aeneas and the mother whale/calf are evident through Waller’s depiction of her as the embodied shield that protects her son, the narrative’s obvious protagonist. Just as “the Shield contains the world-historical narrative that gives a larger meaning to the current struggle faced by Aeneas” (Lih 165), so too does the violence against the mother whale embody broader harms done to whales, the New World environment, and its indigenous inhabitants.

Unlike her calf, the mother whale’s sole defence is her voice. “Roaring” to her calf, she “teares the ayre with such noise” that “reach the ears of her escaped son” (58). Although he manages to escape, the calf returns to his mother’s side as “the pious Trojan” (58). It is unclear whether the calf returns to protect his mother, enact revenge, or something else, but his return is remarkable. Huse notes that “the pursuit of mother–calf pairs was a trade-mark of shore whaling in Bermuda by the 1660s since the mother would cling to her injured offspring instead of swimming to deeper waters” (20). This practice of mother whales clinging to their injured or dead offspring is still seen today, notably in August 2018, when a mother orca made headlines for keeping her dead calf floating for more than two weeks (Associated Press). In Waller’s poem, this behavior is reversed, and it is the son who clings to his mother. Devotion flows both ways and manifests explicitly from sound, surging outwards from the communications relayed through the mother whale’s cries. Chernaik notes that “[f]rom the beginning of the poem, we have been aware of the possibility of loss” (180). While Waller’s narrative signals that loss through sympathy for the harmed whales, it also signals something more: their will to survive, inferred at the poem’s close.

While the whales’ continued life quality or expectancy is doubtful, the poem’s conclusion arguably leaves humans and nonhumans on equal footing. In the final stanzas, the whales manage to escape and the colonists suffer the indignity of losing most of their weapons for nothing. The economic loss of two whales appears

especially sharp as the poetic persona ponders, “what commerce can men with monsters find” (58)? In this case, their pursuit of commerce utterly fails, leaving the settlers more vulnerable than before they arrived. Moreover, Waller’s disruptive encounter records the fragility of colonialism’s metanarratives: the cruel exertions of the poem’s settlers ultimately leave them empty-handed. The colonists are shown to be heartless or ignorant of the mother whale’s Christ-like suffering and the ignoble manner in which they attack creatures caught in the reefs. Despite their suffering, the whales emerge as genuine threats that, through monstrous and terrifying sounds, through remaining to fight, and by escaping to live another day, reject colonization. In their escape, they signal a continuance of anxieties and challenges the New World presented to colonial settlers looking to commodify nature.

Conclusion: The Sounds of Cetacean Revolution

Waller presents his whales as, firstly, innocent: victims of beaching caught in the rocky waters near Bermuda’s shore. And yet they are both victims and outsiders, deviant in their sovereignty. While the whales suffer a relentless shower of spears and gunfire, they hold the readers’ sympathies. Yet despite this sympathy, they remain beyond the bounds of substantial human care. Waller’s representation of Bermuda and its surrounding environment as meant for human enjoyment—“a dream of innocent epicurean retreat from the cares of the world,” as Chernaik describes (180)—is both satiric and demonstrative of the consequences of seeing nature as commodity. As Huggan clarifies, “violence is a standard commodity in the human narratives that surround [whales]” (xi), and Waller’s poem is no exception. Yet, if violence is the standard commodity of human narratives of whales, as Huggan claims, then violence is likely the substance of whales’ narratives of a human obsession with commodities.

This is an important point, which I wish to end on, as we—much like the sailors in Waller’s poem—obsessively value material goods and intercontinental trade today, continuing a history of harming whales. “Our most basic desires for having the kind of life that counts as having a life, or what first world calls ‘quality of life,’” writes Grebowicz, “is inversely proportional to the quality of whale life, if we consider that over 90 percent of the world’s trade is carried by ship” (71). Equally discernible in quick, violent deaths or the slow extinction of an entire species, colonial mindsets live on today. Certainly, in Waller’s poem, the cries and shrieks of the dying mother whale reverberate loudly from ship to shore, a clearly articulated voice directed at the sailors hurting her and her calf, if only they understood how to listen.

Meanwhile, in 2024, we are more likely to hear the chug of the ship engine, the clanking of oil exploration missions, the ceaseless military sonars droning on and on, and all of the other “[n]aval sonar systems” that “work like acoustic floodlights, sending sound waves through ocean waters for tens or even hundreds of miles” (Sakashita). These sonar impacts are of inestimable consequence for whales and other sea creatures, often victim to “hearing loss, hemorrhages and other kinds of

tissue trauma, or by driving them rapidly to the surface or to shore” (Sakashita). By focusing on sound, this article hopes to reiterate how the long history of violence against whales is and continues to be ignored. It’s not our voice that needs to be heard right now, as contemporary conservation media urges, but rather the voice of sea creatures demanding justice. My final question for readers constitutes a matter of listening: What does the breaking of a rudder sound like? And in its sound, can we hear the echoes of Waller’s whales, calling for a world where they can exist? I wonder if, through the sound of rudders crunching under the nose of orcas, we can hear them seeking reparation?

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Zwischen Kolonialgeschichte und Genozid. Zu Kontinuitätslinien der Darstellung von Tier-Mensch- Beziehungen in deutschen Publikationen und Fotografien zu Ruanda

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Abstract

Anhand von Texten und Fotografien aus verschiedenen Epochen versucht der Artikel, Kontinuitätslinien von der Kolonialisierung Ruandas durch das deutsche Kaiserreich bis in die Gegenwart hinein zu zeichnen. Nachgewiesen werden soll, dass die hamitischen Theorien, die ab Mitte der 1890er Jahre zur allmählichen Ethnifizierung des Landes und zur Essentialisierung von drei vermeintlich voneinander getrennten "Ethnien" (Hutu, Tutsi, Twa) führten, besonders seit 1959 eine Politik hervorbrachten, die auf Diskriminierungen, Vertreibungen, Massakern und Plünderungen beruhte. Durch diese Gewaltakte gegen die Minderheit der Tutsi wurde schrittweise der Genozid des Jahres 1994 vorbereitet. Für ihn war wiederum die vorherige Animalisierung der Opfer konstitutiv, der im Gegenzug eine problematische Humanisierung der Kühe entsprach. Das Ziel war beide Male dasselbe: Die Herden wurden ebenso wie ihre Besitzer:innen einer Gewalt unterworfen, die auf lange, qualvolle Agonien hinstrebte. Die Täter:innen versuchten auf diese Weise, das rassistische Konzept eines "Körperstandards" zu verwirklichen, von dem sowohl die Tutsi als auch ihre Tiere "abgewichen" seien. Des Weiteren sollten die Tutsi, da vermeintlich "fremd," "zurück in ihre ägyptische Heimat" geschickt werden. Obwohl die hamitischen Theorien als integraler Bestandteil der genozidalen Ideologie betrachtet werden müssen, haben sich in entwicklungspolitischen Schriften, Romanen, Zeitungsartikeln und Berichten zu Ruanda die alten Stereotypen als dominantes Interpretationsschema erhalten. Dies geht so weit, dass noch im Beraterstab des Bundespräsidenten Horst Köhler ein dezidiert negationistisch argumentierender "Experte" zu finden war – ein Mann also, der die Relativierung des Genozids betrieb. 2017 wurde in Kigali von Deutschland ein Museum eröffnet, das nach einem deutschen Kolonialisten benannt ist, dessen Rolle bei der Verbreitung des "Hamitischen" keinem Zweifel unterliegt. So stellt sich die Frage nach der Verdrängung einer Katastrophe, die die Deutschen mit ihrem Ruf des "Nie wieder!" in ihrer Identität hätte treffen müssen. Diesen Teil komplett streichend da diese Inhalte im Beitrag letztlich doch nicht behandelt worden sind.

Keywords: Genozid/Tutsizid, Ruanda, Tier-Mensch-Beziehung, Massengewalt.

Abstract

Using texts and photographs from different eras, the article attempts to draw lines of continuity between the colonisation of Rwanda by the German Empire and the present day. The aim is to show that the Hamitic theories, which from the mid-1890s led to the gradual ethnification of the country and the essentialisation of three supposedly separate "ethnic groups," produced a policy based on discrimination, expulsions, massacres and looting, particularly from 1959 onwards. These acts of violence against the Tutsi minority gradually prepared the ground for the genocide of 1994. The previous animalisation of the victims corresponded to a problematic humanisation of their cows. The

goal was the same both times: the herds, like their owners, were subjected to violence that aimed for long, cruel agonies. In this way, the perpetrators attempted to realise the racist concept of a “body standard” from which both the Tutsi and their animals had “deviated.” Furthermore, the Tutsi, as supposedly “foreign,” were to be sent “back to their Egyptian homeland.” Although the Hamitic theories must be regarded as an integral part of the genocidal ideology, the old stereotypes have become a dominant theme in German development policy writings, novels, newspaper articles and reports on Rwanda. This goes so far that a decidedly negationist “expert” could still be found in the advisory staff of German President Köhler. In 2017, a museum was opened in Kigali, financed by Germany, which is named after a German colonialist whose role in the spread of “Hamitism” is beyond doubt. This raises the question of the suppression of a catastrophe that should have affected the Germans' identity with their call of “Never again! Diesen Teil komplett streichen, da diese Inhalte im Beitrag letztlich doch nicht behandelt worden sind.

Keywords: Genocide/Tutsicide, Rwanda, animal-human relationship, mass violence.

Resumen

A partir de textos y fotografías de distintas épocas, el artículo intenta trazar líneas de continuidad entre la colonización de Ruanda por el Imperio Alemán y la actualidad. El objetivo es demostrar que las teorías hamitas, que desde mediados de la década de 1890 condujeron a la etnificación progresiva del país y a la esencialización de tres “etnias” supuestamente separadas (hutu, tutsi, twa), dieron lugar a una política basada en la discriminación, las expulsiones, las masacres y los saqueos, sobre todo a partir de 1959. Estos actos de violencia contra la minoría tutsi prepararon poco a poco el terreno para el genocidio de 1994. La animalización previa de las víctimas fue de nuevo constitutiva de éste, que a su vez correspondió a una humanización problemática de las vacas. El objetivo era el mismo en ambas ocasiones: los rebaños, al igual que sus dueños, fueron sometidos a una violencia que perseguía largas y crueles agonías. De este modo, los perpetradores intentaban hacer realidad el concepto racista de un “estándar corporal” del que tanto los tutsis como sus animales se habían “desviado.” Además, los tutsis, como supuestos “extranjeros,” debían ser enviados “de vuelta a su patria egipcia.” Aunque las teorías hamitas deben considerarse parte integrante de la ideología genocida, los viejos estereotipos se han utilizado en escritos sobre política de desarrollo, novelas, artículos periodísticos e informes sobre Ruanda. Esto llega hasta el punto de que todavía se puede encontrar un “experto” decididamente negacionista en el personal asesor del presidente alemán Köhler. En 2017, también se inauguró un museo en Kigali, financiado por Alemania, que lleva el nombre de un colonialista alemán cuyo papel en la propagación del “hamitismo” está fuera de toda duda. Esto plantea la cuestión de la supresión de una catástrofe que debería haber afectado a la identidad de los alemanes con su llamamiento de “¡Nunca más!”

Palabras clave: Genocidio/Tutsicidio, Ruanda, Relación animal-humano, Violencia de masas.

Zur Einleitung: Tier und Mensch im Hamiten-Mythos

Der französische Anthropologe J. Hiernaux, der sich Mitte der 1950er Jahre, unterstützt von einem belgischen Forschungszentrum, mit der Bevölkerungsstruktur des kleinen, zentralafrikanischen Staates Ruanda beschäftigte, betrachtete die Menschen, die dort lebten, gleichsam durch die Linse ihrer (Nutz-)Tiere: “[D]ie Batutsi, die vor allem ein Hirtenvolk sind, besitzen eine beeindruckende Zahl von Rindern: Sie wird auf fast eine Million geschätzt. Sie sind von ‘hamitischem’ Typus, mit langen Hörnern” (Hiernaux 9) [Übersetzung AP]. Hiernaux' Publikation ist, weil sie wenige Jahre vor der Unabhängigkeit des Landes ungebrochen die ethnischen

Stereotypen des sogenannten "Hamiten-Mythos" weiterschrieb (Chrétien und Kabanda), ein paradigmatisches Beispiel für die Langlebigkeit von Theorien, die mit der sozialen und historischen Wirklichkeit Ruandas nur wenig zu tun hatten (Rohrbacher). Die verbreitete Behauptung, die Tutsi Ruandas seien "Hamiten," die ursprünglich gar nicht zu Afrika gehört hätten, steht bei Hiernaux nicht kontextlos da. Vielmehr fällt auf, dass der Anthropologe die Tutsi in einem Atemzug mit den nicht-menschlichen Tieren nennt, die Mitglieder ihres Haushalts seien. Behauptet wird, die Tutsi seien Hamiten, d.h. Nachfahren von Cham (oder Ham), d.h. eines Sohns des biblischen Noah. Behauptet wird zugleich aber auch, die Rinder gehörten zur gleichen "Rasse" wie ihre Besitzer. Ihre langen Hörner werden hervorgehoben und ihre nicht nur große, sondern geradezu superlativische Anzahl beziffert: Eine Million Tiere seien auf den Weidegründen Ruandas anzutreffen.



Abb. 1:

Titel: DOA 13 / Riesen u. Zwerge / Weiss 54. / Watussirinder / 54. - / 572. / Weiss. Im Land der Riesen u. Zwerge

Fotograf: Max Weiss

Zeit: 1907/1908 Quelle: 015-1234-07

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Indem die belgischen Kolonisator:innen den Tutsi einen fernen, fremden Ursprung zuschrieben, verfolgten sie keineswegs das Ziel, einen Völkermord in Gang zu setzen (Peiter, *Der Genozid an den Tutsi* 41-66). Ihr Bedürfnis nach Klassifizierung und "ordnendem Verstehen" lebte sich aus, ohne dass konkret eine Gewalteskalation bis hin zum Völkermord angestrebt worden wäre. Dennoch ist unübersehbar, dass die soziale Durchlässigkeit der Begriffe "Hutu," "Tutsi" und "Twa," die in präkolonialen Zeiten trotz aller existierenden, sozialen Hierarchien und Dienstverpflichtungen vorherrschend gewesen war, abgelöst wurde durch die neue, biologisch fundierte Fixierung von Identitäten (Peiter, "Die Watussi auf dem Wasser"). Da die Belgier die Trennung von Ethnien zur Grundlage einer Politik der

einseitigen Privilegierung machten (Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*), muss der “Hamiten-Mythos” als ideologisches Versatzstück gelten, das zur allmählichen Eskalation von Konflikten bis hin zum Genozid des Jahres 1994 beitrug (Mugesera). Dass er bei Hiernaux auch zur Qualifizierung der Rinderherden dient, ist ein erster Ansatzpunkt für die Analyse den disruptiven Kontakt zwischen menschengemachten Hierarchien und nicht-menschlichen Spezies.

Als zu Beginn der 1930er Jahre die vermeintlich mit der Geburt gegebene, nicht mehr auslöschbare “Identität” in Form von ethnischen Markierungen in die Pässe eingetragen wurde, war der Grundstein für den späteren genozidalen Missbrauch der Zuschreibung gelegt. Ob man im Pass als “Tutsi” ausgewiesen war oder nicht, entschied 1994 über Leben und Tod (vgl. Mukagasana). An den im ganzen Land errichteten Straßensperren wurden systematisch Kontrollen durchgeführt. Wer mit dem “falschen” Pass aufgegriffen wurde, galt als unmittelbar vernichtungswürdig (Peiter “Straßensperren und Passkontrollen”).



Abb. 2

Titel: Watussi Rinder / A f I III 33 / D.O.A.

Fotograf: unbekannt

Zeit und Ort: Deutsch-Ostafrika, Ruanda, Tanganjika, Tanzania

Quelle: 005-1128-15

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Die Geschichte des ruandischen Rassismus kann nicht von den Interpretationen getrennt werden, die die Kolonisatoren—seit Mitte der 1890er Jahre das deutsche Kaiserreich und nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg Belgien—über die Rinderherden der Tutsi in Umlauf brachten (Vergleichbares bezüglich von Kameldarstellungen wird behandelt in Peiter “Ambivalente Ritte”). Zu den verbreiteten Überzeugungen der kolonialen Apparate gehörte die Idee, die Tutsi seien “extrem groß gewachsen,” “schlank,” “nicht-negroid” und von “würdigem,” “herrschaftlichen Auftreten.” Die enge Verbindung, die die Hirten-Familien zu ihren

Herden unterhielten, wurde in Parallele zur physischen Erscheinung “des” (als “Typus” verstandenen) Tutsi gesehen (zur Idee des Typus vgl. Peiter, *Träume der Gewalt* 466-489). So wie man “das” Erscheinungsbild “des Tutsi” an seiner Körpergröße und seiner schmalen Nase erkennen könne, so sei es auch möglich, das “Hamitische” an ihren Rindern abzulesen. Das stellt eine kategoriale Vermischung da, die anders als gegenwärtige Vorstellungen der Verwandtschaft zwischen menschlichen und nicht-menschlichen Tieren nicht auf Koexistenz, sondern auf rassistische Herabwertung angelegt war.

Schriften wie die von Hiernaux legten eine Übereinstimmung zwischen der körperlichen Größe der Rinderherden-Besitzer und der Länge der Hörner ihrer Tiere nahe. Diese Gleich- und In-Eins-Setzung äußerte sich zudem in Behauptungen zum jeweiligen Ursprung von Tier und Mensch. Da die “Hamiten-Rinder”—so die ästhetisch vermittelte Behauptung—unverkennbar den Rinderdarstellungen auf ägyptischen Hieroglyphen glichen, sei durch die Tiere automatisch die “ferne Herkunft” der Tutsi erwiesen. Umgekehrt galt aber auch, dass die Theorie, die Tutsi seien “zu intelligent,” “zu schön,” “zu majestätisch,” um zu Afrika gehören zu können, umgekehrt auf die Tiere übertragen wurde. Wenn der Ursprung der Tutsi weit entfernt von Ruanda lag und der Nil die Orientierung geboten hatte für die angeblichen, späten Wanderungsbewegungen der Tutsi Richtung Süden, dann mussten auch die Tiere etwas sein, was der ruandischen Kultur eigentlich “fremd” bleibe.



Abb. 3

Titel: Rotes Album S.02, Bild 2: Herde der langhörigen Ruandarinder in Mpororo 7659/15

Fotograf: Hermann Julius Schott

Zeit und Ort: 1910-12, Deutsch-Ostafrika

Quelle: 084-1712-39

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Die Überblendung von Körperbildern korrelierte also mit der Überblendung von Theorien, die die Tutsi zu "weißen Negern" bzw. "Fremden semitischen Ursprungs" erklärten (Felsing) und die Tiere in diese vermeintliche Identität mit einbezogen. Die Spekulationen über die Migration von Menschen wurden zur Untermauerung von Aussagen über die Tiere genutzt. Erneut galt das Gesagte aber auch umgekehrt, so dass eine diskursive Selbstläufigkeit entstand, mit der sich der rassistische und ordnungsfixierte "Wissenschaftsaberglauben" (Arendt 354) von vermeintlich "objektiv" verfahrenen Wissenschaftler:innen Bahn brach. Langfristig hatte dies gravierende Folgen, denn Privilegien wurden von den Kolonialist:innen entlang der ethnischen Ordnungsschemata vergeben. Erst sahen sich also die Tutsi begünstigt, ab dem Jahr 1959 durch einen von den Belgiern gestützten "revolutionären Umschlag" plötzlich die Hutu.

Tiere und die Phantasmen, die sich um sie rankten, standen also nicht allein im Zentrum von Kontakt-Zonen, in denen z.B. Vertreter:innen der ruandischen und deutschen Gesellschaft aufeinandertrafen. Vielmehr wurden sie, mehr noch, in regelrechte Kontakt-Szenen integriert. Die "Szene," so Koch und Nitzke im Anschluss an Mary Louise Pratt,

betont gegenüber der „Zone“ die zugleich räumliche und zeitliche Dimension des Kontakts. Sie ist eine zunächst metaphorische Bühne, auf der eine (Kommunikations) Handlung durchgespielt wird, die epistemologisch deshalb relevant wird, weil sie die Bedingungen ihres eigenen Gelingens und Scheiterns immer mitentwirft. (Koch und Nitzke 411-421)

Das behauptete Verhältnis von Tier und Mensch lässt sich als eine solche Szene verstehen, in der es allerdings letztlich weniger um Ähnlichkeit geht, als um ein Phantasma der Ordnung durch gelingende Kommunikation. Die Überzeugung der Deutschen und Belgier, die Kommunikation gelinge, enthielt paradoxerweise gerade ihr Scheitern: Dass allmählich und quer durch das ganze Land die ethnischen Stereotypen übernommen, Separierungen in die ruandischen Mentalitäten eingetragen und vermeintliche körperliche "Reinheits"-Konzepte für die Selbst- und Fremdwahrnehmung genutzt wurden, bedeutete, dass es zu keinem offenen Konflikt mit den Kolonialapparaten und ihrer Ideologie kam (Brandstetter). Weil das "distant ruling" des Kaiserreichs ebenso wie die nachfolgende, stark von der katholischen Kirche bestimmte Herrschaft Belgiens soziale Chancen zu vergeben hatten, erfolgte eine allmähliche Umdeutung der Begriffe "Hutu," "Tutsi" und "Twa," ohne dass deren Gefährlichkeit erkannt worden wäre.

In "Kontaktszenen" können also Veränderungen wirksam werden, deren Katalysatorfunktion bei Konflikten erst viel später durchbricht. Weil die Deutschen bzw. Belgier:innen auf der einen und die Ruander:innen auf der anderen Seite eine 'Ordnung' aushandelten, die von den bisherigen Sozialstrukturen auszugehen schien, in Wirklichkeit aber ihren Gehalt von Grund auf veränderte, verlängerte sich die "Szene" noch über die Unabhängigkeit des Landes hinaus. Ohne dass die "Szene" von Anfang an einem Telos gefolgt wäre, zeigte sich bei den verschiedenen Pogromen

doch eine Logik, die schließlich aus sehr vielfältigen Gründen genozidäre Formen annahm.

Postkoloniale Gewalten im Spiegel

Die künstliche Rassifizierung führte zu einer stereotypen Stillstellung des Ruanda-Bildes, das erst in West- und dann im wiedervereinigten Deutschland verbreitet wurde. Gerade die Redaktion des *Spiegel* machte sich in den 1960er Jahren rassistische Ideen kritiklos zu eigen. Burundi und Ruanda mit ihrer in der Tat sehr ähnlichen Bevölkerungsstruktur (Lemarchand; Chrétien *Burundi, la facture identitaire*) wurden beschrieben, wie folgt:

Das Gebiet beider Staaten – zusammen sind sie etwas größer als Niedersachsen – war ursprünglich von den Bahutus [= Hutu; AP] bewohnt. Dann brachen Eroberer aus dem äthiopischen Hochland, die hochgewachsenen Watussi [= Tutsi; AP], in das Territorium nördlich des Tanganjikasees ein. Die kriegerischen Watussi, oft über zwei Meter groß, preßten die an Zahl weit überlegenen Bahutus zu Sklavendiensten. (“Männer für Mamwi”; zur Singular- und Pluralbildung in “Tutsi” und “Watutsi” vgl. Stockhammer)

Hier ist es zwar Äthiopien, das als Herkunftsland angenommen wird, doch der Gestus des Fremd-Machens ist derselbe. Vorstellungen, die die Kontaktszenen während der deutschen Kolonialisierung geprägt hatten, wirken hier ungehemmt weiter. Im Jahr 1973, nahm der *Spiegel* parallel zu den riesigen Massakern, Vertreibungen, Plünderungen und Vergewaltigungen diese Vorstellung wieder auf (Peiter, “Migration – Krieg – Genozid”). Die Redaktion berichtete dieses Mal, auch deutsche Firmen und Hilfsorganisationen hätten sich einer diskriminatorischen Praxis, die von der ruandischen Regierung gefordert worden sei, beugen müssen. Es ging darum, Angestellte der “unliebsamen Ethnie” zu entlassen und stattdessen Hutu einzustellen. Eine Weigerung von Seiten der Deutschen sei nicht denkbar, Proteste unmöglich gewesen.

Wie der Grips ihrer milieubegünstigten Männer, brachte auch die Schönheit ihrer Frauen den Watussi [d.h. Tutsi; AP] Vorteile: Präsident Kayibanda und die Bahutu-Elite [d.h. Hutu-Elite; AP] begehrten vornehmlich Watussi-Mädchen als Ehefrauen, denn – hoch gewachsen, mit feinen Gesichtszügen und schlanken Händen – unterscheiden sie sich vorteilhaft von den durch Jahrhunderte der Fronarbeit verschrumpelten Bahutu-Frauen. Die Watussi-Angetrauten zogen nach afrikanischer Art ihren Clan nach sich und versorgten ihn mit Ämtern. (“Entlasst die Langen”)

Auch diese Passage zeigt, dass das rassistische Denken des kolonialen Zeitalters im *Spiegel* weiterhin Stand der Dinge war. Nicht nur wurde der Zusammenhalt von “Clans” postuliert, durch den bei der Vergabe von Stellen auf dem gesamten Kontinent das Kriterium der Kompetenz unterhöhlt werde. Vielmehr wiederholten die Journalist:innen auch die Entgegensetzung zwischen zwei “Frauentypen.” “Die” “Tutsi-Frau” sei begehrenswert, da sie “hoch gewachsen” in Erscheinung trete und “feine[...] Gesichtszüge[...]” sowie “schlanke[...] Hände[...]” aufweise. Von den “Hutu-Frauen” wurden hingegen Bilder von Hässlichkeit und abstoßender “Verbrauchtheit” vermittelt. Im Text ist es, als spiegele das Aussehen einer jeden Hutu das

Anstrengende der Feldarbeit wider, die die Generationen vor ihr verrichtet haben. Individuelle Lebensgeschichten verlieren jede Bedeutung. Was für die Generalisierungen bezüglich von ganz Afrika gilt, gilt auch für die Einschätzungen zu Ruanda. Implizit wird behauptet, der Zusammenhang von Aussehen und Arbeitsbelastung sei den Frauen "ins Blut" gegangen, d.h. zu einem unhintergehbaren, schon mit der Geburt gegebenen, aus fernen Vergangenheiten in die Gegenwart ragenden, nicht mehr auslöschbaren "Rasse"-Kennzeichen avanciert: "Verschrumpelt" seien die Hutu-Frauen; in der "Konkurrenz" um sexuelle Attraktivität könnten sie mit den Tutsi nicht mithalten. Unterschwellig schwang mit, die Feldarbeit sei nun einmal anstrengender als die Arbeit von Hirten-Familien. Die Rinderherden bildeten also die Folie, vor deren Hintergrund dann auch Körper begutachtet und in "Güte"- und "Schönheits"-Grade eingeteilt wurden.

Dass das Stereotyp der "schönen Tutsi" Anleihen beim antisemitischen Stereotyp der "schönen Jüdin" macht, ist in der bundesrepublikanischen Öffentlichkeit bis heute so gut wie unbekannt. Dass gleichzeitig bei der Behauptung bezüglich des "hohen Intelligenzgrades" der Tutsi-Männer Versatzstücke aus dem antifeministischen und antisemitischen Repertoire aufgegriffen wurden, das sich biologistischen Theorien verdankte, muss ebenfalls als weiterhin unterbelichtet gelten. So erklärt sich, dass *Der Spiegel*, ohne mit Protesten rechnen zu müssen, einer allgemeinen Exotisierung Afrikas zuarbeitete und zugleich antisemitische Klischees in überkommene, kolonialideologische Kontexte einspeiste (Miles 107-115). Die westdeutsche Leserschaft, die sich dem eben zitierten Artikel zuwandte, musste den Eindruck gewinnen, letztlich sei die ethnisch motivierte Entlassung der Tutsi, die zuvor von deutschen Arbeitgebern beschäftigt worden waren, durchaus gerechtfertigt. Wenn die Tutsi-Männer ihre Intelligenz und die Tutsi-Frauen ihre sexuellen Reize rücksichtslos für das berufliche Fortkommen der eigenen Person sowie Familie einsetzten, schienen eine kollektive Verschlagenheit und Herrschsucht vorzuliegen, die von den Hutu nur als "undemokratisch" wahrgenommen werden könne. Berufliche Diskriminierungen erscheinen folglich als "ausgleichende Gerechtigkeit" zugunsten der Bevölkerungsmehrheit, nämlich der armen, landbesitzenden Hutu, denen das "Privileg" des Tierbesitzes versagt worden sei.

Dass sich in Wirklichkeit seit der so genannten "Hutu"- oder "sozialen Revolution" des Jahres 1959 umgekehrt die soziale Marginalisierung der Tutsi und ihre Vertreibung in verschiedene Anrainerstaaten immer weiter verstärkt hatte (Peiter, *Der Genozid* 67-81), wurde den deutschen Zeitungsleser:innen nicht erklärt. Für die Berichterstattung über Ruanda waren ein geringer Grad an Informiertheit und implizite Schuldzuweisungen an die Tutsi kennzeichnend. Wer "zu schön," "zu intelligent" und "zu einflussreich" sei, wer "zu viele Tiere" sein Eigen nenne, dürfe sich, so die implizite Argumentation, über Gegenreaktionen nicht wirklich wundern.

In den 1970er Jahren aber schien es, als stelle sich die Unterscheidung der "Langen" und der "Kurzen"—wie die Tutsi und die Hutu vom *Spiegel* genannt wurden—als "durchmischungsfreie," "reinrassige" Realität dar. Man suggerierte, mit der Verteidigung der Hutu sei automatisch eine Verteidigung der Interessen der

großen, “demokratischen” Mehrheit und ihrer “Tierlosigkeit” verbunden. Dass so genannte “Misch-Ehen” häufig waren und das soziale Miteinander trotz aller Konflikte zum Alltag gehörte, konnte die deutsche Leserschaft nur begreifen, wenn ihre Lektüren über die Zeitungslektüre hinausgingen. Schablonenartig und stereotyp wurden in letzterer Körper-Klischees verbreitet, die schon in der Kolonialfotografie allenthalben hätten beobachtet werden können. Die Bildlegende des untenstehenden Fotos spricht z.B. ganz ausdrücklich von “Typen.” Es ist, als müsse noch nicht einmal mehr gesagt werden, wer gemeint sei: Die Zuordnung scheint “von selbst” vor sich zu gehen.



Abb. 4

Titel: Rotes Album S. 05, Bild 2: Typen aus Ruanda 7659/15.

Fotograf: Julius Hermann Schott. Zeit und Ort: 1910-1912.

Quelle: 083-1710-269«.

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So wie Kolonialisten, Expeditionsreisende und Anthropologen vom “Land der Riesen und der Zwerge” sprachen (Weiss), um den Kontrast zwischen den “Tutsi-Riesen” und den “Twa-Zwergen” hervorzuheben, gewann auch *Der Spiegel* keine Distanz zur Problematik, “Lange” und “Kurze” gegeneinander zu stellen und diese beiden substantivierten Adjektive als präzise Grenzziehung zu präsentieren. Mit dem ruandischen Historiker Mironko ist hingegen festzuhalten, dass der Hamiten-Mythos zum Bestandteil von tiefgreifenden Transformationen innerhalb der ruandischen Gesellschaft wurde:

German colonial authorities 1) rigidified the pre-colonial ethnic divide by supporting the local kingdom’s campaigns against smaller chiefdoms, both Hutu and Tutsi. 2) Over time, German administrators undermined the king’s power by superseding his authority. 3) The Germans introduced a civil administration that was not under the control of the king. 4) The introduction of Catholic churches and especially schools during the German occupation set the stage for ethnic stereotypes and hierarchies that have endured and became cemented in political and scholarly discourses up to the present. (Mironko 76)

Die Ideen, die sich im Kolonialismus bezüglich des "Hamitischen" ausgebildet hatten, hatten auch nach der Unabhängigkeit Ruandas noch Bestand (vgl. für ihre unreflektierte Fortschreibung: Del Perugia 39). Der Blick auf das ferne Land blieb in Deutschland verschwommen, *Der Spiegel* war an deutscher Kolonialgeschichte und ihren Tierbildern nicht interessiert, sondern reproduzierte sie unkritisch.

Ökologisches

Um diese Reproduktion und Affirmation rassistischer Kontaktszenen in der Gegenwart zu durchbrechen, ist ein kritischer, postkolonialer Blick auf die Einbeziehung ökologischer Fragestellungen angewiesen. Die Texte, die aus der Feder Hiernaux bzw. der *Spiegel*-Redaktion stammen, bieten vielfältige Ansatzpunkte für Fragestellungen, die als ökologische bezeichnet werden müssen. Wenn Antifeminismus, Anti-Tutsismus, Antisemitismus und die rassistische Aufladung des Bildes, das man sich in Europa von den Rindern Ruandas machte, zusammengehören, dann müssen auch die "entwicklungs"-politischen Stellungnahmen aus der BRD einer neuen, kritischen Lektüre unterzogen werden. Die Grundannahme der jetzt folgenden Analysen lautet, dass Bilder von nichtmenschlichen und menschlichen Tieren in ein Verhältnis der Wechselseitigkeit traten: Der rassistisch fundierten Humanisierung von Rindern entsprach eine schleichende Animalisierung der Tutsi, und diese Animalisierung mündete wiederum in Enthumanisierungsprozesse, die schlussendlich dem Genozid zuarbeiteten (Peiter, "Invektiven im Genozid" 149-175).

Auf Seiten der Hutu-Extremisten wuchs der Hass auf die Tiere im Laufe der Jahrzehnte so stark an, dass Kühe und Rinder im Genozid zuerst ermordet wurden. Von "Mord" statt von "Schlachtung" muss gesprochen werden, weil viele Täter:innen alles daran setzten, den Tieren möglichst große Qual zuzufügen (Peiter, *Der Genozid* 158-180). Die Durchtrennung der Achillesferse diente bei Menschen wie Tieren nicht allein dem Ziel, jede Flucht unmöglich zu machen. Hinzu kam, dass die rassistischen Körperbilder, die wir oben kennen gelernt haben, im Wortsinn auf eine "Verkleinerung" der Opfer zielten (Rurangwa 2006). Die vermeintlich "Fremden" galten, wie schon erwähnt, als "zu hoch gewachsen," "zu arrogant" und körperlich wie intellektuell als "deutlich überlegen." Die Gewalt richtete sich also auf die Herstellung einer Art "Standard," der durch die Körper der Hutu repräsentiert werde. Ihn müsse man treffen, um die eigene "Kleinheit" auszugleichen.

Es ist wichtig, festzuhalten, dass auch diese an den Körpern exerzierten, extrem brutalen "Normalisierungs"-Bestrebungen auf die Rinder übertragen wurden. Die Tiere sahen sich gleichsam zu "Komplizen" derer erklärt, die als Hirten über sie gewacht hatten. Die verschwimmenden Grenzen einer Gewalt, die mit dem Tod der Rinder immer auch den Tod der Menschen im Sinn hatte, in deren Besitz sich die Tiere befunden hatten, sind für die Einschätzung der "entwicklungs"-politischen Texte aus Deutschland bemerkenswert. Es stellt sich nämlich die Frage, inwieweit Organisationen, die eine solche, auf "Fortschritt" zielende Hilfe zu leisten versuchten,

eine Sensibilität bezüglich identitärer Fragen und Konflikte der ruandischen Gesellschaft zu entwickeln vermochten.

Ohne diese Sensibilität war schwerlich mit einem Bewusstsein für "Entwicklungen" zu rechnen, die man im Rückgriff auf Rob Nixon als "slow violence" bezeichnen kann (Nixon). Eigentlich meint Nixon mit dieser Langsamkeit den Export von toxischem Müll, von Restbeständen des Hyper-Konsums oder, allgemeiner, von ökologischen Problemen des "Westens." Hinzu kämen kriegsbedingte Langzeitfolgen von Massengewalt. Als Beispiel wird etwa das Fortdauern des Krieges in Vietnam angeführt, das, so Nixon, durch die einst verwendeten Waffen zustande komme und lange nach den eigentlichen Kämpfen noch die nachgeborenen Generationen betreffe (Nixon). Insgesamt zerstörten die Industrienationen die Lebensgrundlagen des globalen Südens. Man lagere also die Gewalt gegen Ökosysteme räumlich aus, ohne sich um die zeitlich oft unübersehbaren Konsequenzen anderswo Gedanken zu machen. So wie die "Kontaktszene" nicht ohne ihre zeitliche Dimension gedacht werden kann, so ruft auch das Konzept der "Langsamkeit" zu einer bewusst anderen, zur Veränderung bereiten Wahrnehmung von Gewalt auf.

Ich selbst möchte den Vorschlag unterbreiten, das Konzept der "langsamen Gewalt" auf den Prozess der schleichenden Marginalisierung der Tutsi zu übertragen. Sie manifestierte sich in ökonomischer, politischer, sozialer und schulischer Hinsicht, konnte jedoch auch durch die inländische Deportation in Regionen vor sich gehen, in denen die Bodenqualität ein Überleben für die Familien sehr schwierig machte. All das entsprach einer "langsamen Gewalt." Doch weder die diplomatischen Instanzen der Anrainer-, noch die der westlichen Staaten waren in der Lage, angemessen auf diese Gewalt zu reagieren. Mitunter wurde sie überhaupt nicht gesehen, so dass sich rückblickend die Frage nach dem Entstehen dieser Unsichtbarkeit stellt. Nixon postuliert, dass die Unfähigkeit, langsame Gewalt wahrzunehmen, wesentlich mit Medienpraktiken zu tun habe, die gemeinhin auf das Spektakuläre und Schnelle zielten. "Casualties of slow violence—human and environmental—are the casualties most likely not to be seen, not to be counted. Casualties of slow violence become lightweight, disposable casualties, with dire consequences for the projected casualties from future wars" (Nixon 13).

Ein Beispiel: Die ins Distrikt des Bugesera verschleppten Tutsi-Familien verloren im großen Stil ihre Herden, so dass von den Betroffenen eine tiefgreifende kulturelle, ökonomische, identitäre und psychologische Zäsur erfahren wurde. Ausgehend von der Gewalt des Jahres 1959, das als epochales Jahr in der Geschichte Ruandas gelten muss, scheint der Ausschluss der Tutsi jedoch bei ausländischen Beobachter:innen mehr und mehr als etwas "Naturgegebenes" wahrgenommen worden zu sein. Das Übersehen des politisch gewollten Charakters der Gewalt wurde dadurch erleichtert, dass diese nicht immer eklatant-spektakuläre, sondern nur allmähliche Wirkung zeigte. Wenn deutsche Experten beklagten, die Rinder der Tutsi richteten in Bezug auf die landwirtschaftliche Nutzung des Bodes gar zu große Schäden an, mochte das im Kontext von ökologischen Projekten durchaus richtig sein. Gleichzeitig arbeitete die Polemik gegen die Herden jedoch dem weiteren

Ressentiment gegen die Minderheit der Tutsi zu und wurde "entwicklungs"-politisch eine Tendenz gestützt, die sich längst als mörderisch erwiesen hatte (vgl. Mamdani).

Die Frage nach dem Tempo, mit dem sich bestimmte Entwicklungen vollziehen, ist für die äußeren Einschätzungen zum Verhältnis von Tier und Mensch entscheidend. Die schleichende Eskalation der Konflikte und die ebenso schleichende Schwächung der Widerstandskraft der Opfer müssen hervorgehoben werden, weil für den Genozid selbst extreme Beschleunigungsprozesse kennzeichnend waren. Diese erschwerten das Eingreifen der internationalen Organisationen—besonders der UN (Gourevitch). Weil ohnehin kaum Neigung bestand, Truppen nach Ruanda zu entsenden, ja weil man im Gegenteil die Entscheidung traf, die bereits im Land stationierten Soldaten aus Ruanda zu evakuieren (Saint-Exupéry), entfiel nach dem Attentat auf das Flugzeug des ruandischen Präsidenten, das den Auftakt zum Genozid abgab (Human Rights Watch), jedes machtpolitische und militärische Gegengewicht. Die brutale Ermordung von zehn belgischen Blauhelmsoldaten zu Beginn des Genozids reichte aus, um in den westlichen Ländern einen Konsens zu stiften: Das Land müsse schnellstens geräumt werden; es gehe darum, die eigenen Landsleute in Sicherheit zu bringen. Der Mord-Apparat konnte von nun an völlig ungehindert "Jagd" auf einstige Nachbar:innen und Bekannte machen (Peiter, "Vom Bauern zum Jäger") und die Namenslisten mit den prioritär zu tötenden Personen—unliebsamen Oppositionellen aus Hutu-Familien und sozial herausgehobene Tutsi—"abarbeiten". Internationale Beobachter:innen waren verschwunden, Mitarbeiter:innen von ausländischen Organisationen aus dem Land gebracht und die MINUAR auf winzige, kaum handlungsfähige Restbestände reduziert worden (Audoin-Rouzeau "La brèche" 327-343). In Bezug auf die Frage nach dem Verhältnis von Langsamkeit und Schnelligkeit zeigt sich also, dass keine Reaktionen erfolgten, als es darum ging, schleichende Entwicklungen zu verstehen. Überaus schnell, geradezu panisch reagierte man jedoch, als die Gewalt plötzlich da war und noch dazu die eigenen Soldaten betraf.

Die ungeheure "Effizienz," die sich 1994 geltend machte, ist jedoch noch aus einem anderen Grunde im Ausland gänzlich missverstanden worden. Weil angenommen wurde, in Ruanda seien jahrhundertealte "Stammeskonflikte" ausgebrochen, die auf "tribalen Emotionen" und eruptivem "Bluttausch" beruhten (Hielscherl), geriet die Tatsache aus dem Blick, dass es sehr wohl Vorboten für den Genozid gegeben hatte. Die scheinbare "Plötzlichkeit" der Massaker war also nur ein Aspekt des Genozids. Hinzu kam, dass die "langsame Gewalt" die Tutsi regelrecht "zugerichtet" hatte für ihren Status als prospektive Opfer. Wenn bis heute nur das geradezu "Vulkanartige" des Gewalt-"Ausbruchs" betont wird ("Bosnien in Afrika"), bleibt eine Semantik vorherrschend, die die Langfristigkeit der Eskalation ebenso verkennt wie die Herstellung einer Unsichtbarkeit, die international geteilt wurde (Rabensteiner).

Es hat darum bis heute darum zu gehen, die damalige journalistische Rhetorik zu verstehen, die in den entscheidenden drei Monaten, nämlich zwischen April und Juli 1994, das Ineinander von Langsamkeit und Beschleunigung nicht zu denken

vermochte. Den Blick auf die einstige Rhetorik zu lenken, heißt, neue Blicke zu gewinnen und zumindest zu versuchen, sich auf mögliche andere Formen von Massengewalt vorzubereiten (zu möglichen Konflikten in der gesamten Region vgl. Jackson).

Ökologische Fragen spielten eine zentrale Rolle, weil in den Empfehlungen deutscher "Entwicklungs"-Experten weder das Problem des Ethnischen, noch die Rinder als Symbol für die Separierung von Hutu und Tutsi erkannt wurden. Otmar Werle und Karl-Heinz Weichert, zwei Ruanda-Experten, die mit der rheinland-pfälzischen "Ruanda-Kooperation" zu tun hatten, publizierten 1987 ein "landeskundliches Porträt," in dem das Problem der Bodenerosion maßgeblich auf die allzu große Anzahl von Rindern zurückgeführt wurde (Werle und Weichert).

Landreserven gibt es kaum noch, höchstens einige marginale Flächen in den Grenzbereichen der Anbaumöglichkeit. Aber verlässliche Ernten sind hier nicht mehr zu erwarten, ein Ertragsausfall durch Erosion oder widrige meteorologische Einflüsse ist jederzeit möglich. Zu weit sind ohnehin schon die Kulturflächen, dem Bevölkerungsdruck nachgebend, ausgedehnt worden. Bis auf 3000 Meter hinauf ist mittlerweile der Anbau landwirtschaftlicher Produkte an den Hängen der Virunga-Vulkane gestiegen, die Grenze des Akagera-Nationalparks im trockenen Osten des Landes wird durch Ansiedlungen landsuchender Bauern immer mehr aufgelöst, und staatlich genehmigte wie auch unkontrollierte Dauersiedlungen gibt es flächendeckend im Bugesera-Gebiet, obwohl hier nur vorübergehend mit ausreichenden Erträgen zu rechnen ist. Die dringend notwendige Erschließung von Landreserven ist nur noch außerhalb der Legalität möglich, für den Siedler jedoch mit dem Bewusstsein, geduldet zu werden. Sie ist darüber hinaus nur noch jenseits der ökologischen Vernunft möglich: durch weiteres Hinaufschieben der Höhengrenze, durch Aufzehrung der ohnehin geringen Waldreserven, durch Eindringen in ökologisch sensible, in ihrem Gleichgewicht anfällige Gebiete. (Werle und Weichert 99-100)

Nirgends wird bei Werle und Weichert erwähnt, dass der Distrikt des Bugesera im Osten Ruandas, der durch arme Böden gekennzeichnet war, für Inlandsdeportationen von Tutsi-Familien genutzt wurde. Die dortige Unwirtlichkeit und Trockenheit machten landwirtschaftliche Aktivitäten extrem schwierig, so dass sich das Sterberisiko der dort Lebenden auf 'wünschenswerte Weise' erhöhte (vgl. Mukasonga). Die meisten Tutsi-Familien, die von der Deportation betroffen waren, verloren ihre Herden. Darin dokumentierte sich nicht nur eine bewusst herbeigeführte Verarmung, sondern auch eine soziale Abwertung, die in psychologischer Hinsicht die Widerstandskraft der Tutsi weiter schwächte. Vielen Hutu galt die Plünderung von Häusern und die gewaltsame Wegnahme der Herden als 'ausgleichende Gerechtigkeit' für soziale Privilegien, die die Tutsi einst durch ihre enge Verbindung zum ruandischen Königtum und bis zum Jahr 1959 dann durch die deutsche bzw. belgische Politik der ethnischen Privilegien genossen hatten. Ihre eigene Tätigkeit als Ackerbauern schien eine plötzliche Aufwertung zu erfahren, wenn die Tutsi in der Nachbarschaft über keine Tiere mehr verfügten. Dass hier immer deutlicher eine mörderische Praxis eingeübt wurde, die nach Beginn des Bürgerkriegs, d.h. ab 1990, in einen Genozid zu münden drohte, wurde nicht erkannt (Guichaoua). *Der Spiegel* argumentierte weiter:

Die wachsende Verarmung und die zunehmende Nahrungsnot, die Verseuchung des Wassers und die Belastung der Atmosphäre, die Zerstörung der Böden und der Raubbau an den Wäldern – nichts von dem ginge so rapide vonstatten, wäre da nicht diese explosive Vermehrung. Und weil der Zuwachs sich weiter beschleunigt, legen auch jene Prozesse noch an Geschwindigkeit zu. (Schöps)

Hier tritt ein letztes Motiv hinzu, nämlich der Gedanke der “Bevölkerungsexplosion.” Sie wird vom *Spiegel* oft auch als “B-Bombe” bezeichnet. Dass im eingangs zitierten Text die große Zahl der Rinder hervorgehoben wurde, findet zu einem Echo. Es wird suggeriert, dass Gewalt nicht ausbleiben könne, weil die ruandischen Bevölkerung zu schnell wachse. Auch Werle und Weichert sind Anhänger eine Theorie, die von einem festen Verhältnis zwischen Größe des Territoriums und “zulässiger” Menschen- und Tierzahl ausgeht. Die Vision eines “Volks ohne Raum”—wie man in Anlehnung an nationalsozialistische Phantasmen sagen könnte—bezieht immer auch die Rinder mit ein und erklärt sie wie die Menschen zu Schuldigen am ökologischen Desaster. Bei Werle und Weichert heißt es entsprechend:

Präsident Habyarimana hat in seiner Neujahrsansprache das Jahr 1987 zum “Jahr der Selbstversorgung” (“L’année de l’auto-suffisance alimentaire”) erklärt und mit der Wahl dieses Mottos für den landwirtschaftlichen Bereich Akzente gesetzt: Anreize für Innovation, zum Experimentieren, zur Forschung, zur besseren Verteidigung der Interessen der Produzenten. Diesem Programm ist voller Erfolg zu wünschen, doch ist Skepsis angebracht. Denn ohne eine spürbare Absenkung der Geburtenrate, wofür es zur Zeit noch kaum Anzeichen gibt, würden ohnehin selbst bei vollem Erfolg aller Maßnahmen und bei Mitwirkung aller Landwirte die anstehenden Probleme nur etwas weitergeschoben, keinesfalls aber gelöst. (Werle und Weichert 132)

Dies ist ein Beispiel für die Ausblendung jeglicher kulturellen Kategorie aus dem ökologischen Denken. Und dies führt mich nun abschließend zu der Frage nach den methodischen Konsequenzen, die aus dem Fall Ruandas mit seinem komplexen Ineinander von “Schnelligkeit” und “Langsamkeit” gezogen werden muss.

Methodische Konsequenzen und ein Ausblick

Pablo Mukherjee plädiert für eine stark interdisziplinäre, facettenreiche Analyse von ökologischen Problemen und ihrem Verhältnis zur Kolonialgeschichte.

Surely, any field purporting to theorize the global condition of colonialism and imperialism (let us call it postcolonial studies), cannot but consider the complex interplay of environmental categories such as water, land, energy, habitat, migration with political or cultural categories such as state, society, conflict, literature, theatre, visual arts. Equally, any field purporting to attach interpretative importance to environment (let us call it eco/environmental studies) must be able to trace the social, historical and material co-ordinates of categories such as forests, rivers, bio-regions and species. (Mukherjee 144, zitiert nach Huggan und Tiffin 2)

All die deutschen Fotos und Texte, die sowohl im Kolonialismus, als auch nach der Dekolonialisierung den Hamiten-Mythos am Leben hielten, hatten Anteil an etwas, was man mit Deane Curtin als “environmental racism” bezeichnen muss. Gemeint ist “the connection, in theory and practice, of race and the environment so that the oppression of one is connected to, and supported by, the oppression of the other“

(Curtin 145, zitiert nach Huggan und Tiffin 4). Scholastique Mukasonga, eine heute in Frankreich lebende Tutsi, die ihre gesamte Familie im Genozid verlor, nimmt in ihren Romanen eine von Schmerz grundierte, ironische Haltung ein, um ihrer ausländischen Leser:innenschaft klarzumachen, wie wichtig die Aufarbeitung der Phantasmen des Hamitismus nicht nur für die ruandische Gesellschaft ist, sondern auch für diejenigen, die von außen auf diese Gesellschaft blicken und von ihr berichten. In äußerster Verdichtung fasst sie den Mythos in ihren Grundzügen zusammen und fordert so dazu auf, die Verbindung von Rasse und Ökosystemen, Antisemitismus, Antitutsismus und Ursprungslegenden als ebenso destruktives, wie folgenreiches Gedanken-Konstrukt zu erkennen. Die Wissenschaftler hätten, so Mukasonga,

die Spuren der Tutsi in der ganzen Welt gefunden: Mit ihren riesigen Herden waren diese eingefleischten Hirten die tibetischen Hochebenen hinuntergesaust, hatten sich aber nicht in den Ebenen des Ganges oder des Hindus aufgehalten, sondern waren auf ihrem Weg dem Auszug der Hebräer begegnet, um sich im Durcheinander der Zeltlager ein bisschen mit ihnen zu vermischen. Sie hatten im Kreis der Pharaonen verkehrt, hatten sich dann in Äthiopien wiedergefunden, und zwar im Äthiopien des Priesters Johannes, wo sie beinahe zu Christen geworden wären. Schließlich waren sie (und darin musste man zweifelsohne den Finger der göttlichen Vorsehung erkennen) nach Ruanda gekommen, nämlich auf die Mondberge, die zu Wächtern über die Nilquellen aufgestiegen waren. Indes wartete man darauf, dass das Taufwasser die Stirn eines hamitischen Konstantin benetzen werde. (Mukasonga 134) [Übersetzung AP]

Hier wird deutlich, dass die Idee, man könne den Rindern ihren "pharaonischen Ursprung" ansehen, kaum stimmen konnte, wenn andere Ausläufer derselben Theorie meinten, die Herden und ihre Besitzer kämen eigentlich aus dem Tibet. Hinzu tritt, dass auch das Missionarische – vor allen Dingen das der *pères blancs*, d.h. der "Weißen Väter" – die geographische Einordnung von Tier und Mensch bestimmte. Die Tutsi mussten, so die Überzeugung der Missionare, zur rechten Zeit am rechten Ort gewesen sein, um ihre frühes "Quasi-Christentum" oder zumindest ihre spätere Bereitschaft zu beglaubigen, zu spirituellen Vorbildern für die Masse der Bevölkerung zu werden. Dass es auch hier ganz anders gekommen ist, als von den Europäer:innen gewünscht, ist bekannt (Longman, "Church Politics"; Longman, "Empowering the Weak"). Die Tutsi und besonders der ruandische König zeigten sich skeptisch gegenüber dem Ansinnen zur Konversion. Auch der vermeintliche Kontakt zum Raum der biblischen Geschichten änderte nichts daran, dass die Missionierung auf ein Kräftemessen hinauslief. Insofern dokumentiert sich in Mukasongas literarischer Wiederaufnahme des Mythos das Bemühen um Dekonstruktion. Die Schnelligkeit, mit der sie die behaupteten geographischen Wanderungsbewegungen der Tutsi in wenige Zeilen fasst, macht deutlich, was "environmental racism" bedeutet: Unter großem argumentativen Aufwand wurden die immer selben Versatzstücke in immer neue Konstellationen zueinander gebracht, doch ohne dass je die Einheimischen selbst nach ihrem Wissen befragt worden wären.

Indem Mukasonga die Stimme erhebt und sich als Autorin in die Debatten einmischt, erklärt sie, dass dies nicht ihre Geschichte sei und sich ihre Herkunft ganz

allein in Ruanda verorten lasse. Sie, die sie schon vor dem Genozid durch die allgegenwärtige Gewalt ins Exil gezwungen worden war, erhebt erneut Anrecht auf ihre Liebe zu den Rindern und zu ihrem Land. Wenn sie in anrührenden Szenen die Erinnerung an die Sorge wieder aufruft, mit der sich die Tutsi-Familien um ihre Herden gekümmert hatten, macht sie klar, dass die Europäer:innen mit ihrer Fixierung auf die Frage des Bodens den—auch kulturellen—Wert der Tiere unterschätzt hatten. Die Literatur dient dazu, all das Verlorene begreiflich zu machen, das mit der Ermordung der Tiere verbunden war. Die Rückkehr in die Zeiten, in denen Menschen und Tiere zusammenlebten, wird zum Vehikel, eine andere, vorsichtigere Form von Umwelt- und Bevölkerungspolitik denken zu lernen.

Das Melken konnte beginnen. Der Moment hatte stets etwas Feierliches. Es war eine regelrechte Zeremonie. Sie erinnerte ein wenig an die Messe, an der ich, da es keine Kühe gab, allmorgendlich teilnahm. Natürlich war mein Vater dabei der Priester. Nacheinander rief er jede Kuh bei ihrem Namen: "Songa! Songa!" Songa kam langsam zu ihm. Er wiederholte ihren Namen, schmeichelte ihr mit sanften Worten, rief sie herbei: "Meine Allerliebste! Meine Favoritin!" Wir holten das Kalb aus dem Stall, brachten es in den Vorhof. Auch ihm hatte man direkt bei seiner Geburt einen Namen gegeben. Wir begrüßten es: "Rutamu! Rutamu!" Wir hatten Schwierigkeiten, es zurückzuhalten. Sobald wir es losließen, rannte es unter seine Mutter und begann, mit Wonne zu saugen. Mein Vater, der unter der Kuh hockte, beobachtete mit großer Aufmerksamkeit das Maul des Kalbs. Sobald sich dieses mit gelblichem Schaum bedeckte, zogen wir es vom mütterlichen Euter weg und stellten den Milchtopf unter die Zitzen. (Mukasonga *L'Iguifou* 30) [Übersetzung AP].

Dies ist eine andere Form von Priesterschaft als diejenige, die in den Kirchen des Christentums gepredigt wurde. Hier stand noch der Vater im Vordergrund, der das Kälbchen in die gesamte Familie einführte. Eine Zeremonie wurde organisiert, die diesem Tier durch die Zuweisung eines eigenen Namens Bedeutung verlieh. Die These, dass auch diese Tiere zu Opfern des Genozids geworden sind, entspricht also keiner unzulässigen Vermischung der Sphäre von menschlichen und nicht-menschlichen Tieren. Vielmehr zeigt sich, dass der Stimme der Betroffenen die gebührende Aufmerksamkeit zukommt.

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Narrating Disruptive Encounters in the Forest: Hunting, Animal Lives, and Ecology

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Abstract

Over the last century, three popular writers and media personalities have written bestsellers and created TV programs in order to alert the general public to the suffering of wild animals as well as the deleterious effects on young trees caused directly or indirectly by hunting and forestry practices. Austrian journalist and writer Felix Salten published *Bambi: A Story of Life in the Woods* (1923), using a baby deer's perspective. German journalist and literary author Horst Stern shocked the nation with his TV program *Remarks about the Stag* (1971), which shows the brutality of hunting; his 1989 *Jagdnovelle (The Last Hunt)* weaves together a hunter's perspective with his prey animal's experience. In recent years, German forester Peter Wohlleben has shifted the focus from animals to plants by publishing a series of popular books about the forest, starting with *The Hidden Life of Trees* (2015). This essay examines how Salten, Stern, and Wohlleben all humanize their animal and plant characters, including through a form of "critical anthropomorphism" (Weik von Mossner)—and are criticized for it. They also incorporate ethology, i.e. observations of animal behavior and the forest environment, as well as scientific knowledge, as they attempt to evoke their audience's empathy for their nonhuman characters. Hunting pressure and the violent disruption of the lives of the animals leads to an "ecology of fear" instead of an "ecology of subjects" that would align better with changing perceptions of "nature" (Soentgen). Ethical questions concerning the mass killing of Europe's largest mammals remain as it does not succeed in reducing deer overpopulation or damage to the forest ecosystem, perpetuating Germany's forest/game conflict.

Keywords: hunting, anthropomorphism, Felix Salten, Horst Stern, Peter Wohlleben

Resumen

Durante el último siglo, tres escritores populares y personalidades de los medios han escrito bestsellers y creado programas de televisión para alertar al público en general sobre el sufrimiento de los animales salvajes, así como los efectos nocivos en los árboles jóvenes causados directa o indirectamente por las prácticas de caza y silvicultura. El periodista y escritor austriaco Felix Salten publicó *Bambi: A Story of Life in the Woods* (1923), utilizando la perspectiva de una cría de ciervo. El periodista y autor literario alemán Horst Stern conmocionó a la nación con su programa de televisión *Remarks about the Stag* (1971), que muestra la brutalidad de la caza; su novela de 1989 *Jagdnovelle (The Last Hunt)* entrelaza la perspectiva de un cazador con la experiencia de su animal de presa. En los últimos años, el ingeniero forestal alemán Peter Wohlleben ha cambiado el enfoque de los animales a las plantas al publicar una serie de libros populares sobre el bosque, comenzando con *The Hidden Life of Trees* (2015). Este ensayo examina cómo Salten, Stern y Wohlleben humanizan sus personajes animales y vegetales, incluso a través de una forma de "antropomorfismo crítico" (Weik von Mossner), y son criticados por ello. También incorporan etología, es decir, observaciones del comportamiento animal y el entorno forestal, así como conocimiento científico, mientras intentan evocar la empatía de su audiencia por sus personajes no humanos. La presión de la caza y la perturbación violenta de las vidas de los animales conducen a una "ecología del miedo" en lugar de una "ecología de los sujetos" que se alinearía mejor con las percepciones cambiantes de la "naturaleza" (Soentgen). Siguen existiendo dudas éticas sobre la matanza masiva de los mamíferos más grandes de Europa, ya que no

logra reducir la superpoblación de ciervos ni los daños al ecosistema forestal, lo que perpetúa el conflicto entre bosques y caza en Alemania.

Palabras clave: caza, antropomorfismo, Felix Salten, Horst Stern, Peter Wohlleben

Hunting, Central European Forests, and Disturbance Ecology

Human hunting of non-human animals in central European forests has shaped their ecology as much as the harvesting of wood or the planting of select arboreal species for commercial purposes.¹ The balance between non-human animal predators and their prey was disrupted long ago when humans hunted bear, wolf, and lynx to extinction. While their fire power would turn humans into a kind of überpredator, it also created a hunting culture obsessed with amassing ossified animal parts and thus requiring the availability of plentiful game, such as red deer and roe deer.² However, these animals' browsing of the buds and leaves of saplings would then compromise or even prevent forest rejuvenation. Over the last few centuries, resource-driven forestry aiming at productive harvests of wood, agricultural practices around the forests, and hunters' misguided concept of "care" for their game (*Hege*) has led to an overpopulation of cervids in the late 20th century, which is now negatively affecting the health and resilience of the forest ecosystem.

European public perception of what is conceived of as "nature," has also shifted during the last century. This is due in part to writers whose experiences of hunting and being in the forest opened their eyes and hearts to the impacts of sports hunting on the animals and plants affected by it: the violent disruption of the life trajectories of individual animals and plants but also of the state of the whole ecosystem. Writing about and filming these encounters between humans, animals, and plants is in turn an act that disrupts conventional perceptions of the relationship between a human society seen as dominant vis-à-vis a "nature" that is reduced to being a provider of resources. Narrating human/wildlife encounters in a way that respects and gives narrative agency to both sides, or even presents the perspective of non-human "nature," disrupts the established Western nature/culture dichotomy that has had such deleterious impacts on ecosystems at a planetary scale; such narratives may offer better ways to interact with the natural world on which human civilization depends. In her ethnographic study on mushrooms and human/forest interactions, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing asks "But how does one tell the life of the

¹ Since the Middle Ages, the aristocracy's hunting privilege and ensuing protection of forest stands from being cut down is one example, their overbreeding of deer for the hunt another. For a detailed history of Central European landscapes and their dynamic developments through phases of forestation and deforestation (resulting from different land uses) see Küster 1995 and 2019.

² Forester Wilhelm Bode convincingly and in great detail demonstrates how hunting in Germany is primarily trophy hunting, not hunting for meat, and not based on biological and ecological principles, which were actually ignored when the German Federal hunting law was established. As a result, as he states, lawful hunting in Germany is trophy hunting (Bode 96; and Bode and Emmert 16)

forest?” and deplores the fact that “we are not used to reading stories without human heroes” and think that “talking animals are for children and primitives,” essentially silencing their voices (155). In contrast, even though they kill animals, Indigenous “subsistence hunters recognize other living beings as ‘persons,’” which erases the boundary between human and non-human animals (155, also cf. Ingold 11-113; and Descola 138-143). I see this way of relating to other living beings reflected to some degree in the hunter’s paradox of loving what you kill, and more explicitly in the popular forest narratives by the former hunters I will discuss.

Human hunting can be a violent disruption or disturbance among many other factors that change the dynamics and biological rhythms of an ecosystem, especially when carried out at scale. In scientific language, ecologists define disturbances as “temporally and spatially discrete events that lead to the loss of living biomass and change the availability of resources in biotic communities” (Jentsch et al. 15). Disturbances are different from “stresses” or “environmental variability” that occur continuously (Jentsch et al. 15). As we will see later, year-round hunting pressure causes stress for forest animals. “Environmental variability” is actively prevented by humans managing forests in such a way that they will not change over into an open savanna landscape of grasslands, as might happen when, according to Frans Vera’s megaherbivory theory, large herbivores dominate (Senn 302-304; Wohlleben and Ibsch 145).³ Unlike what most humanists think, disturbance is not always damage (Tsing 160). It can be positive, neutral, or negative; its determination as one or the other is crucial but difficult in Germany’s forest/game conflict.

The close connection between the health of European forest ecosystems and human activities is coming into ever sharper focus with the arrival of climatic impacts in the Anthropocene perhaps even more so since these forests have been shaped and co-created by humans over thousands of years and have long been anything but “natural” or primary forests.⁴ Ever since human civilization was built at the expense of the forest—as Robert Pogue Harrison has argued—by cutting down its trees to create space for farmland and cities, and by exploiting its resources to support human life, the ecological balance in the forests that—presumably—had established itself before humans appeared on the scene has been altered, often to a state of damage or destruction—currently on a global scale, and with planetary consequences. As German forester and popular author Peter Wohlleben bluntly stated at the 2022 *Waldklimagipfel* (Forest Climate Summit) in Berlin, the European forest has been treated as a *Warenlager*—a warehouse (*Waldklimagipfel*). In addition to the trees that provide wood as an energy source and construction material, this has included forest

³ In his investigation of the population dynamics of large herbivores and affected plant communities, Josef Senn discusses Vera’s megaherbivory theory, which defines four stages a landscape may repeatedly go through as herbivore density fluctuates, cycling between grassland and forest with a shrub phase and shifting vegetation in between (302).

⁴ “Practically all forests in Europe have been transformed in their structure and species composition during centuries or even millenia of multiple uses.” (Wohlgemuth et al 4). “There are a few primary forests left in Europe, most have been replaced by commercial forests, or near-natural forest protection areas with different landscape conservation and management objectives.” (Jentsch et al 12).

animals that were, and still are, hunted for their meat and hides. But over the centuries, and in the case of deer, humans' primary target has become their antlers (though "clean," non-industrially produced, meat is increasingly valued as well). Antlers are useless in terms of material consumption but are pursued for their symbolic significance and value within the trophy cult practiced by a community of hunters seeking social status and performing their prowess and masculinity in the act, and surrounding the act, of hunting. The tremendous yield of millennia of European deer trophy hunting—in recent centuries also furthered by the extermination of their animal predators—is still on display in the wall-to-wall trophy collections in many castles, museums, hunting lodges, and cabins.⁵

While hunters exercise their "sport"—as recreational hunters like to call it—for many different reasons, the rise of the European bourgeoisie and increasing participation of all citizens in political and societal affairs, as well as, in the late twentieth century, the emergence of increased environmental consciousness, brought along changes in the public perception of hunting. This was also due to a changing relationship between humans and animals, and humans and plants, when it became apparent how much the so-called "natural environment"—which in European reality is a mostly cultural landscape—was being destroyed as a result of progress, i.e. population growth and development after the Second World War. Large infrastructure projects, such as highways and roads for an increasingly car-dominated transportation system fragmented the landscape, and industrialized, machine-dominated agricultural and forestry practices as well as the increasing significance of forests as areas for sports and recreation fundamentally changed the conditions for vegetal and animal life in this now human-dominated landscape. The invention of firearms had already contributed to the extinction of large predators in West European forests and allowed hooved animals to reproduce unchecked, also supported by the human hunters' selection for taking down only antler-bearing male deer. In the German-speaking cultural region, hunters' goal was to have a large number of game animals available for their pleasure, and this led to the concept of *Hege* (care), i.e. the support of game animals through measures such as winter feeding and medicating for parasites.⁶ This would significantly reduce their mortality rate, grow their herds, and ultimately lead to deer overpopulation—which could even be considered a form of domestication. Ever more human activity in the landscape for recreation as well as hunting has pushed a species (roe deer) that prefers to live in forest edge habitats deep into the forest during daylight hours. Since herbivores need a regular supply of food they will then browse the buds and leaves of young trees, preventing forest regeneration and rejuvenation. Better forestry practices and conservation efforts, such as attempts to increase tree species diversity in order to

⁵ The colonial counterpart, i.e. trophy hunting in Africa, is at least as—if not more—complicated. An excellent fictional account of this situation is the recent novel *Trofee* (trophy, *Trophäe*) by Gaea Schoeters.

⁶ On hunting and traditional practices of *Hege* in the past and present from an anthropological perspective see Gieser "Hunting Wild Animals in Germany."

create more mixed forest stands, may not be able to counteract high deer densities and the animals' appetite for the forest's young shoots. In their 2010 scientific study of the forest-game conflict, Christian Ammer and his collaborators state: "At high deer densities, however, many tree species are browsed equally irrespective of forest structure. This overrides all other environmental factors relevant for tree growth. Consequently, a long-term, near-natural management to achieve stable forest ecosystems can only be realized at low deer densities" (Ammer et al. 154).

Amid all environmental factors, such as acid rain in the 1970s and 1980s, forest monocultures, windthrow, and the drought caused by the climate crisis in recent years, according to this study, high deer densities have contributed most to preventing forest regeneration. While forest conservation efforts are underway, not least in the interest of the economic goals of private forest owners, who depend on revenue from selling wood, it has become all too obvious that the health of forests will not be achieved by only changing forestry practices—which is an extremely long-term project in any case. One result of the October 2022 *Forest Climate Summit*, organized by Wohlleben's *Forest Academy*, was the acknowledgement of several panelists that one of Germany's major obstacles for improving forest ecosystems is the lack of communication and collaboration between state foresters, private forest owners, hunters, nature conservationists, regulators, and politicians. The current forest-game conflict (*Wald-Wild-Konflikt*) is at least partially a result of uniquely German forestry practices and hunting traditions. This is also reflected in the complicated legal situation that arises from the fact that there are too many separate laws governing what happens in the forest: The federal forest law, the federal hunting law, the federal law for nature conservation, additional laws at the level of the states, and European legislation governing nature conservation, the "Natura 2000" laws.⁷ These laws may actually contradict each other and primacy of one over the other is not clearly established, especially for the three laws at the federal level, leading to pre-programmed conflict. As a result, proponents of traditional forestry and hunting practices often clash with each other and also with the conservationists, who speak for "nature," i.e. for the plants and animals that are affected by forestry and hunting practices. A way out of this conflictual situation would require taking into consideration all networked ecosystems instead of the priorities of separate entities, and would also need to question the anthropocentric perspective that has led to this unbalanced state in the nation's forests. Healthy ecosystems are not just required for human survival; they deserve that humans take responsibility for their planet's non-human co-habitants whose habitats have been altered. Based on better information through many communication channels, the general public is starting to care about changing our resource-driven and ultimately destructive relationship with plants and animals and would like to put human and nonhuman partners on a more equal footing.

⁷ For details see Wolf.

Insights and attempts to change the situation are actually not just recent developments. Already one hundred years ago the topic of hunting and forest ecology was taken up by a Viennese author whose book would become a major representation of the perspective of hunted forest animals and was seen as carrying an anti-hunting message. About fifty years later, another writer and media star presented the topic from a more scientific perspective, primarily concerned with the impact of deer overpopulation on forest rejuvenation, i.e. arguing from the perspective of the forest—and that meant advocating for increased hunting. And in our present time, a world-famous German forester and author is spreading the word, with great success, about the urgency to finally apply biological and ecological principles to both forestry and hunting practices and change the paradigm for human interaction with the other-than-human world.⁸ Presenting a “solution” to the forest-game conflict, cannot, however, be the goal of this article (that would be hubris). What I attempt is to show how three popular and influential authors of fiction and creative non-fiction used their considerable powers of narrative persuasion to create empathy for the other-than-human world. They lent their voices to our planetary co-habitants in order to present their perspectives, starting with animals, with whom it is easier to identify, and eventually also speaking for plants, which, over the course of human history, have not received much empathy (they are more difficult to identify with), but whose intelligence and rich social life are becoming ever more apparent.⁹

Popular Forest Narratives

It is perhaps not surprising that some of the texts that contributed majorly to shaping public opinion of hunting over the last one-hundred years were produced by hunters, or former hunters. After all, they are the ones in close physical proximity to wild animals, immersed in the forest environment, and often also intellectually and emotionally challenged by what can be called the hunter’s paradox: their professed deep love for the animals they would then be killing.¹⁰ This paradox, a part of which is a deep empathy that can go as far as “becoming-animal” (see e.g. Gieser “Me, my Prey, and I”), is likely more present in the lone hunter who stalks their game or hunts from a hide, both of which lead to a close encounter with the live individual animal. Participants in driven hunts may instead be keen on ritual, spectacle, community with peers, and the competitive aspect of achieving a high number of trophies.

⁸ Changing the paradigm for human interaction with nature is also central in the well-known texts of two women who were both viciously attacked by wild animals and experienced being prey. Yet they still advocate for the rights of nature and stress our kinship with it rather than separation from it. They are Australian ecofeminist Val Plumwood and French anthropologist Nastassja Martin.

⁹ Michael Pollan presents a good introduction to the topic and growing literature about plant intelligence. Wohlleben and Simard discuss the social interactions taking place in forest systems. Wandersee & Schussler have explained why plants have been overlooked for so long.

¹⁰ For a summary see Goodbody “The Call of the Wild” (168, 174-175), and “The Hunter as Nature Lover” (141-142).

In this essay, I will analyze three popular German-language forest narratives written by hunters who were, or are, also journalists, book authors, and well-known media personalities. Their narratives challenge stereotypes and mainstream thinking and have profoundly shaped and likely altered public opinion about the ancient cultural practice of hunting forest animals, more specifically hunting red deer and roe deer in the forests of Europe. These narratives are Viennese journalist Felix Salten's 1923 novel *Bambi: The Story of a Life in the Forest*, which reached an even larger audience through the Walt Disney film released in 1942—though Disney drastically altered the narrative and the message, particularly with regard to forest ecology¹¹; German print and media star journalist Horst Stern's 1971 shocking TV program about the stag, his fictional hunting novella (*Jagdnovelle; The Last Hunt*), and an essay; and finally Germany's most well-known forester and author Peter Wohlleben's current bestsellers *Das geheime Leben der Bäume (The Hidden Life of Trees, 2015)*, *Das Seelenleben der Tiere (The Inner Life of Animals, 2016)*, *Waldwissen (2023)*, and others, as well as video of his *Waldklimagipfel (Forest Climate Summit, 2022)*. Each of these authors wrote in different historical circumstances, and their use of various genres such as fiction (*Bambi, The Last Hunt*), creative non-fiction (Wohlleben) and—in the case of Stern and also Wohlleben—the visual medium of TV and streaming video, has certainly differentially shaped their rhetorical devices and kinds of impact on their audiences. Yet their purely linguistic-textual and partly visual forms of communication have one thing in common: they are based on narration. In the work of all three authors, there are similarities in the ways in which they approach their subject, e.g. how they present the killing of wild animals and how hunting affects them; what narrative perspectives and rhetorical techniques they employ in order to create empathy with their animal and plant characters; the literary device of anthropomorphism and how they view the boundaries between humans, animals, and plants, i.e. the “anthropological difference” (Borgards); and how they include observational and scientific knowledge about the forest as a biodiverse ecosystem.¹² All three authors narrate the disruptive encounters between humans, animals, and plants in such provocative ways that their voices themselves have engendered disruptive encounters—with the established discourses and frames of reference for the human/nature relationship.¹³

Felix Salten's Novel Bambi

Salten's novel *Bambi: The Story of a Life in the Forest* is an early influential text publicly questioning and criticizing a “sport” practiced by politically and economically

¹¹ The literature about the Disney movie and the impact of its “anti-hunting message” is vast but our focus is Salten's narrative. Two studies about the film are Cartmill on the “Bambi Syndrome,” and Hastings on “Bambi and the Hunting Ethos.”

¹² For an overview on how literature has presented trees and the forest, see Nitzke and Braunbeck.

¹³ Martin Huth presents interesting reflections in general (not hunting-specific) about “encountering animals within and beyond human-animal cultures,” and “the disruptive event of facing an animal” as an Other (53).

powerful and privileged members of human society, using the perspective of non-human creatures in the crosshairs of humans' deadly weapons capable of mass killings. Alexandra Böhm has argued "that around 1900 an 'animal turn' took place to which the new paradigm of empathy and the category of encounter are essential" (101), and that the "new way of seeing the animal as individual, with an own perspective, agency and consciousness is not limited to literature but widespread amongst the cultural and scientific discourses of the time" (117)—also resulting from Darwin's and Freud's challenges of the anthropocentric worldview. Though Böhm does not mention Salten, his story about an individual, even named, little deer likely reflects these discourses that, despite changed historical realities after WWI, would still be swirling in the 1920s. In his introduction to the new 2022 English translation of the novel, Jack Zipes reflects on the strangeness of the term used for hunted animals in English: "game". Unlike in other sports, which value fair competition, in the "game" of hunting, "animals"—as Jack Zipes states—"must play according to rules set only by their human opponents" (IX); loosing this "game" means death for the animals. In contrast, the German collective term *Wild* (wild) points to the nature/culture dichotomy that has shaped Western thought. In the European cultural landscape, which has practically no wilderness left (only 0.6% in 2020 according to WWF), the term *Wild* has become an anachronism and a euphemism, which contains the longing for a simpler, more "natural" life outside the constraints of civilization. This was certainly the case for Felix Salten, whose ambitions as a Jewish journalist from a poor family were hampered by a society mired in classism and racism. It has engendered readings of *Bambi* as an allegorical novel for human society—an interpretation certainly supported by many of Salten's rhetorical devices, such as portraying the deer community as a male-dominated and hierarchically organized society with kings and princes. As a hunter roaming the woods, Salten was able to leave behind his class and ethnic identity that had led to his social exclusion and outsider status despite his great success as a journalist. So he spent most of his free time, and likely experienced a kind of freedom, in the forests around Vienna, where he "owned his own hunting preserve" and "would wander about it night and day," as his daughter describes her father's "most beloved place," where he only "very rarely" fired a shot (Wyler-Salten, qtd. in Zipes XVI). In his lifetime, Salten did, however, kill "over two hundred roebucks" (Eddy 4, 201), thus exemplifying the hunter's paradox as both a killer and a lover of animals. In his defense of hunting, Salten argued that "instantaneous death in the wild is far more merciful than death in a slaughterhouse and much more humane than that caused by other animals" (Eddy 200). However, Salten ardently opposed the mass killings of driven hunts.

Bambi is based on Salten's close observation of animal life in the forest, including how "animals suffered persecution from hunting" (Zipes XVI). His empathy for the hunted animals is expressed even more clearly by choosing the perspective of an animal child—the *bambino* from which *Bambi* has derived its name—and breaking a taboo by creating a plot in which the mother is killed in a driven hunt even though, generally, sports hunters are "supposed to refrain from killing female deer" (Donald

60). This scene also displays Salten's opposition to the driven hunt. However, even though Bambi is the protagonist and focal point in the narrative, from the very beginning Salten narrates the whole forest, which actually features in the novel's subtitle *The Story of a Life in the Forest* and also, interestingly, on the original cover illustration that does not even picture a deer but shows the forest bordering a meadow—the two natural spaces that constitute the lifeworld or *Umwelt* for deer. Salten portrays the forest habitat as a close-knit community of animals and plants, however, in contrast to the well-known Disney film, which transforms it into a sweet and idyllic paradise where all wild animals are friends and there is no animal-on-animal predation, Salten's little deer witnesses many scenes where animals become victims of other animals' often cruel predation.¹⁴ The author of the original tale presents what Ralph Lutts calls a "sharp, naturalistic" and "ecologically and philosophically complex vision of nature" (165). An example would be how Salten describes the advice that the old prince (who is likely Bambi's father) gives to Bambi: "... of all his teachings, the most important one was you must learn to live alone, if you want to protect yourself, if you want to grasp the meaning of existence, if you want to attain wisdom" (Salten, *The Original Bambi* 144-145). This sentence actually contains the biological and ecological facts that roe deer evade their predators by hiding and thus do not live in large herds like red deer; rather than just stating this, Salten converts it into a roe deer philosophy of life; in the course of the novel, the motto "You must learn to live alone!" is also presented as a result of the stress and constant pressure from human hunting. A century later, Wohlleben will consider hunting to be a major reason why roe deer are forced from their preferred edge habitat into the forest where they will need to eat the leaves and buds of young trees in order to feed themselves. This deer dilemma is present in Salten's novel as he has constructed the open meadow at the forest's edge as a place that is both highly desirable and extremely dangerous—Bambi's cousin is shot when he leaves the safety of the forest cover. Already in Salten's novel, the reader learns how hunting and the mere fact of hunting pressure is a disruption and alteration of species-specific behavior, which then leads to a disruption of the lives of young trees and forest rejuvenation.

Anthropomorphism makes animal minds and moods accessible; it often comes from the author's empathy and creates empathy in the reader. In her study of *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion, and the Environmental Narrative*, Alexa Weik von Mossner finds that "[a]nthropomorphization is inevitable when nonhumans become narrative agents in human stories" but that there is a "wide spectrum of how it has been employed" (107, 106). A common way to convey animal consciousness is "the use of an *insider perspective* of animal experience" (Weik von Mossner 107, emphasis in original). While this can be done in autobiographical form, it can certainly also be achieved in a third person narrative. Salten's combining the insider perspective of a wild animal with the perspective of a child growing up, i.e. employing the genre of the

¹⁴ Christian Schmitt has investigated the forms of the modern idyll as a precarious balance already present in Salten's story, which may also reflect the precarious times after WWI and echo Freud's essay on war and death.

coming-of-age story (*Bildungsroman*), has surely contributed to the fact that the narrative has become classified as children's literature and that its ecological content has been relegated to the background—as in the Disney movie, which majorly affected the story's reception. Salten's animal-child-centric narrative may not be considered as one that applies the "critical" or "reflected" anthropomorphism that behavioral ecologists Jesús Rivas and Gordon Burghardt, and also Swiss animal philosopher Markus Wild, have suggested, since it is primarily based on personal observation and does not include "the full range of available scientific data" that fifty or one hundred years later Horst Stern and Peter Wohlleben would include (qtd. in Weik von Mossner 113).

However, Salten succeeds in conveying the "ecology of fear"—the animals' fear of humans that environmental philosopher Jens Soentgen has identified as the "inside of the Anthropocene" (Soentgen 30). Soentgen acknowledges the subjective, emotional, and cognitive aspects of the hunter-prey relationship and how it furthers human/animal alienation (Soentgen 30). He describes how firearms have helped turn human aggression into destruction, and hunting into an obsession, aided by the fact that firearms have eliminated any danger for the human hunter. He points out that Salten's description of human hunting from the perspective of the animals demonstrates how their fear of humans is passed down through generations, how their chronic fear has biological consequences and eventually leads to an ecological downward spiral (Soentgen 93-94). Some effects are the fact that deer have become night active—staying hidden in dense forest during the day—and that this *forces* them to browse trees. While Salten's novel is informed by the author's ethological knowledge gained through personal observation on his hunting excursions, its main focus is on the animal and how it is affected by human predation.¹⁵ It was not yet informed by the broader ecological insights into the interrelationships between humans, animals, and forest plants that came into focus for another journalist fifty years later, alongside the emergence of the German environmental movement: writer and media star Horst Stern.

Horst Stern's TV-Program about the Stag and Hunting Novella

Accordingly, Horst Stern's main focus was not an individual animal with a name that would engender empathy but the complete human/other-than-human ecosystem of the forest and the threat he witnessed there: young trees struggling to grow up, and old trees being damaged because of an overpopulation of deer. His arsenal of rhetorical weapons for expressing his views, his anger, and his warnings about the environmental devastation he saw all around him in post-war,

¹⁵ The danger of animal-on-animal predation, e.g. by wolves on deer (not an issue in *Bambi*), obviously also instills fear and is just as violent a disruption. How exactly it differs for prey animals from the threat of human predation would need to be investigated, now that wolves are establishing themselves again in Central Europe. However, currently the scale of animal-on-animal predation does not compare to the widespread and near continuous threat of human predation.

development-focused Germany, was tremendous, and he would use it differently in the various genres and media in which he worked. I will focus on his shocking TV program on the stag, and his fictional “hunting novella” (*Jagdnovelle, The Last Hunt*).

On Christmas Eve 1971, Horst Stern—even though he had already been labelled Germany’s “Anti-Grzimek” (Hickethier 114), i.e. as a voice critical of the cozying up to exotic wild animals on screen, as celebrity TV personality Bernhard Grzimek would do, and instead focusing on the problems of humans’ treatment of the animals close by, shocked the nation with his TV program *Remarks about the Stag*, part of his regularly televised Stern’s Hour (*Sterns Stunde*), in which he presented European wild and domesticated animals big and small.¹⁶ The program about the stag would later be called his “most provoking, polemic, and effective journalistic piece” (Klünder 70), a piece that wrote German environmental history, or perhaps even fired the opening salvo for the country’s environmental movement, according to Bode and Emmert, who call it a *Sternstunde der Umweltbewegung*—a magical moment of the environmental movement (113). Stern did not show cute baby deer—as one might expect for a day when the nation would resound with forest-centric Christmas carols like *Oh Tannenbaum*. Instead, he claimed that the German forest was on its deathbed, accused foresters for having transformed the forest into an unnatural, profit-driven factory for wood and thus having completely reduced its biodiversity, and the hunters for breeding and feeding deer as if they were domesticated animals in order to produce a big yield of the fetishized dead bones with which they like to decorate their walls (see Bode 113; Stahmann 230). He sharply criticized trophy hunting, which eliminates the healthiest animals instead of the sick and weak animals as animal predators would do, and what he called the “Bambi-mentality” spread by the media, which served hunters well since it portrayed them and their system of *Hege* as caretakers and protectors of Germany’s beloved forest animals, and by extension, the forest itself. Quoting shocking numbers about the damage caused by deer to trees and protective mountain forests—damage for which the state, i.e. the taxpayers, would be responsible in a system that financed the pleasure pursuits of wealthy hunters—Stern demanded that the hunters end their *Hege* and change their way of hunting so it would be based on biological principles. And that would mean shooting female deer and not just antler-bearing stags and bucks. In addition to these economic and environmental arguments, Stern highlighted and satirized the hunters’ euphemistic and mythologizing language—another smoke screen hiding the reality of their violent “sport.” In one fell swoop, Stern had destroyed the foresters’ and the hunters’ good reputation. As a result, the kill quota for cervids was increased, and changes were made to Germany’s hunting laws (Klünder 70). In 1975, Stern wrote an open letter to Federal President and hunter Walter Scheel, repeating his pleas to stop forestry and hunting practices that were destroying the forest ecosystem and causing a “dying of

¹⁶ Bernhard Grzimek was zoo-director, author, conservationist, documentary film maker (“Serengeti Shall Not Die”), and TV personality with his popular program *Ein Platz für Tiere* (A Place for Animals), broadcast 175 times during the 1960s - 1980s. He would bring animals, even predators, into the studio and let them climb all over himself. For more information on Grzimek see Lekan, and Huggan.

the forest from below,” as Germany’s most hated forester had called it—Georg Sperber, whom Stern had featured in his TV program (Bode and Emmert 114). As a result, President Scheel abolished the state-funded hunting trips for diplomats and other guests of the state (see the letter in Pfau 103).

In his fictional hunting novella, published much later, in 1989, when Stern had already withdrawn from journalism, he presents a more nuanced and complex view of the ethics of hunting as he tells the story of a wealthy banker on a bear hunt in a communist country in Southeastern Europe. His protagonist Joop develops serious doubts about the practice of killing animals and ends up identifying with his prey animal, who is actually a predator like himself. The text contains a sharply satirical scene in which the author presents the deer overpopulation in the forests as a “brothel;” the resulting senescing of a forest where no young trees can grow up; the perversion of the hunters’ desire for performing their masculinity through sexualized trophy hunting; but also their deceptive appropriation of the ecological discourse in order to justify their killing of wild animals (124-126). Confronted with the extraordinary beauty of a stag he was permitted to take (in addition to the bear), Joop is unable to pull the trigger. Experiencing the shooting of the old bear as an “execution” in the end completely disrupts his passion and drive for hunting, and he gives it up altogether (150).¹⁷

While in his TV program Stern had demanded more hunting based on ecological principles in order to protect forest regeneration, in this fictional text eighteen years later he demonstrates that nothing has changed. In fact, the hunting lobby has now appropriated the ecological discourse in order to justify their pursuit of pleasure and status while not actually reducing deer overpopulation. By presenting every second chapter of the novella from the perspective of the prey animal (though in his case it is a predator and not a game animal), Stern, like Salten, lets his readers experience the life-world of a wild animal in sensuous detail and informed by his extensive knowledge of biology and ethology—such as a bear’s keen sense of smell and rich olfactory world. While Salten’s *Bambi* was primarily threatened by the human predators in the woods, Stern’s animal character is now seriously endangered by the environmental devastation of its habitat in addition to the trophy cult, which includes the animals’ pelts. In contrast to Salten’s fairly humanized animal character, Stern uses what has been established as a form of “critical anthropomorphism.” It is a “limited third-person-point of view also employed by ethologists, ethnographers, and others who aim to be as truthful as possible to actual animal experience” (Weik von Mossner 126). An ethological approach was the basis for Stern’s journalism and fictional writing yet he did not want to reproduce the objectifying gaze of science, or of technology-focused official environmental initiatives, since they would not actually reach his audience. Instead, he argued for the “courage” to re-introduce emotion into the human/nature relationship since humans learn best when affect is involved and

¹⁷ For an in-depth analysis of *The Last Hunt*, see Helga G. Braunbeck, “Predators and Prey: Entanglements of Masculinity, Power, and Desire in Horst Stern’s Novella *The Last Hunt*.”

would, as a result, care more about the fate of plants, animals, and their life-worlds (Stern, “Mut zur Emotion”). This would disrupt humans’ alienation from the natural world. Ethology, emotion, and a degree of anthropomorphism are also the basis for a naturalist and environmentalist, who, like Stern half a century before him, is rebelling against mainstream views and conventional practices that destroy forests’ ecological balance and resilience: Germany’s best-known forester Peter Wohlleben.

Peter Wohlleben

In his analysis of the field of cultural animal studies, Roland Borgards observes that two lines of research are now converging: the scientific field of the New Ethology, and new animal theories that investigate the human-animal relationship and critically revise the anthropological difference, anthropocentrism, and anthropomorphism (Borgards 41-42). New Ethology investigates animal intelligence and sentience with a different approach that does not question what animals can do or feel but instead asks which animals have certain abilities, or how they express specific feelings. He cites Peter Wohlleben’s book *Das Seelenleben der Tiere (The Inner Life of Animals)* as a popular collection of evidence. I would argue that already decades before Wohlleben, Horst Stern had popularized this new ethological perspective on animal life, which in some ways uses the methods of zoologist and ethologist Konrad Lorenz, who also based his work on observation rather than experiments in the lab. Meanwhile, new animal theory grants animals agency (Latour), a status as “companion” or “kin” (Haraway), or even personhood (anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, all qtd. in Borgards 44-45). In Borgards’ view, the two new lines of research are siblings that both radically question and criticize the anthropological difference. Since anthropocentrism cannot be completely avoided and should not be denied, he, too, argues for its critical integration, along with a critical anthropomorphism based on ethological observation that would lead to richer analyses and go beyond the limitations of how the last three hundred years of Western thought have shaped the human-animal relationship (Borgards 52).

Extending anthropomorphism from animals to plants, as Peter Wohlleben does, starting with his first 2015 bestseller *The Hidden Life of Trees (Das geheime Leben der Bäume)*, is yet another big step that is generally viewed with suspicion (Wankhammer discusses this). However, recent scientific investigations of plant life are finding ever more analogies to human behaviors in the ways in which plants communicate with each other, distinguish between kin and non-kin, warn others about dangers in their environment, or even—seemingly altruistically—“help” each other through difficult times, such as trees when they exchange nutrients via their underground mycorrhizal (fungal) networks. Like Horst Stern, Peter Wohlleben does not do this research himself but communicates the most recent scientific findings, blended with his own observations and anecdotes. He also does this with discernable emotional involvement and appeal to his audience, just as Horst Stern had done—though without Stern’s biting satire and sarcasm. Since Wohlleben is a forest ranger,

his primary concern is the health of the complete ecosystem under his care; and, like Horst Stern before him, he has identified a multitude of problems that originate in the ways in which humans interact with and impact Germany's forests. Among them are the profit-driven harvesting of wood and planting of monocultures, the use of huge harvesters compacting and killing sensitive biota in soil structures, and the role of trophy hunting and the hunters' *Hege* that produces an overpopulation of deer. Nearly fifty years after Horst Stern, scientific knowledge about the forest ecosystem and its main inhabitants, the trees, has reached new levels. Wohlleben communicates these scientific findings discovered by forest ecologists such as Canadian scholar Suzanne Simard, who, together with *Nature* magazine, coined the term "wood wide web" for the underground mycorrhizal networks that play such an essential role in how forests function (Simard 165). This term is also, as Johannes Wankhammer explains in his analysis of Wohlleben's anthropomorphic rhetoric, an example for the fact that not all of Wohlleben's metaphors originate from his own linguistic creativity but may actually stem from scientific literature itself (146). Yet, as was to be expected, the German forest establishment reacted sharply, complaining "that Wohlleben's writing style buries the alterity of vegetal life under a heap of anthropomorphizing ascriptions" and criticizing "the conflation of human and non-human domains" (Wankhammer 140, 141). Now that Suzanne Simard's book on *The Mother Tree* is published, a collective of thirty-three international forestry and plant sciences researchers have written a paper in which they reproach both authors for their lack of scientific rigor, undermining of science-based forest management, sullyng the image of forestry, and, most of all, for their use of anthropomorphism, which they consider inappropriate even for popular science books (Robinson 2023). What remains is the question whether the positive impacts of Wohlleben's and Simard's books, such as reverting a long-standing marginalization of plants and making them relatable, might not actually outweigh the concerns expressed by the scientists. It certainly wouldn't be the first time in history that disruptive and revolutionary ideas are rejected by the establishment, even in the sciences.

Wohlleben's anthropomorphic writing style likely contributed majorly to the national and international success of his books, and he certainly considers plants and animals to be subjects rather than mere resources for humans. Yet he is also attentive to the fact that state- and privately-owned forests cannot all be nature reserves without human interference—humans are a part of European *natureculture* ecosystems, and forest uses are necessary. So he advocates for changing forestry and hunting practices in ways that would restore the ecosystem that Horst Stern had already diagnosed as being close to death. Some changes would be radical, such as one of his latest views: instead of the increased, biology-driven hunt that Horst Stern had championed, and that in his early years, Wohlleben, too, had demanded, he would now like to explore what happens when there is no hunting at all in large enough areas, and have the effects scientifically assessed (*Waldwissen* 324). For the past eighty years, ever increasing kill quotas for game animals have not succeeded in reducing deer overpopulation and damage to trees—so this is clearly not working

and a new approach is needed (Wohlleben, *Der lange Atem der Bäume* 133; *Waldklimagipfel*). He cites the Swiss county of Genf as an example, where hunting was forbidden already in 1974, biodiversity returned, deer changed their behavior, and the area has become like a nature reserve—one shared with humans. Wild pigs or boar would still need to be hunted using professional hunters. Wohlleben also demands a change in forestry practices that would avoid the creation of open spaces through wood harvesting, thus making the forests darker again, which would reduce the growth of carbohydrate-rich deer food and thus support forest rejuvenation. No winter feeding or bait sites would be allowed; eventually hunting could become superfluous (*Waldwissen* 211, 322-324). In his latest book, he and his co-author, forest ecologist Pierre Ibisch, do, however, suggest driven hunts once a year as a better alternative to the current system of hunting that instills fear in the animals all year round and drives them into hiding in the forest (323). However, driven hunts with their spectacularity, or the culling of large numbers of wild animals, often face strong public opposition. At the 2022 Forest Climate Summit in Berlin, Wohlleben was the only one with a more global and international perspective, alerting his audience to the contradictory ethics that underlie Europeans' bemoaning the killing of large ocean mammals, such as whales, and large land mammals in Africa, such as elephants, yet nobody seems to mind the killing of millions of Europe's largest mammals year-in and year-out. People in other parts of the world can't understand this, or think it is crazy. Why do Europeans support the creation of nature reserves all over the world but are unable to leave at least some of their forests undisturbed so they could return to a more natural state?

Wohlleben basically advocates for a recalibration of the nature/culture relationship and ecological balance, which would actually bring Germany in line with European laws and goals for more nature reserves and the protection of wild, or creation of rewilded, areas in Europe. As many at the Forest Climate Summit agreed, this would have to start with actual communication between foresters, hunters, farmers, state officials, and conservationists and an alignment of all the laws that govern this into one law with a clear priority of restoring what's left of European "nature."¹⁸ Wohlleben's approach would also fulfil what Jens Soentgen demands: to establish "an ecology of subjects", one that includes emotional goals and the perspectives of non-human living beings (Soentgen 113, 126).

Hunting violently disrupts the peace of the forest, causing distress and fear in the animals and—since 40% of shots fail to kill—physical injury and pain (Wohlleben and Ibisch, *Waldwissen* 208). Whether a no-hunting policy would eventually lead to a self-regulating deer population and more, or less, damage to trees is not clear at this point; as Wohlleben demands, it should be on the research agenda. How the recent return of large carnivores to Central European forest ecosystems—wolves, and in

¹⁸ Dresden university wildlife ecologist Sven Herzog takes a similar approach to finding a solution when he suggests more inclusion and active participation of the various groups and stakeholders. He sees the situation not primarily as an ecological problem but one that humans have created and need to find consensus on how to solve.

some areas bears—might impact deer populations and forest regeneration, is another issue to be considered.¹⁹ However, it is already clear that the hundreds of wolf packs that would be needed to significantly reduce herbivore numbers in German forests would be untenable for the farming community as well as the general public—wolves will not solve the problem.²⁰ How the climate crisis with its severe droughts will impact long term forest health is yet to be determined, as will be other unforeseeable but potentially impactful environmental factors, such as the chronic wasting disease killing deer and other cervids in the US. It has also been found in Northern European moose and reindeer populations.

Conclusion

All three of the bestseller authors I have discussed care deeply about wild animals and plants and the forest ecosystem and convey their concern about how human civilization has created forest ecosystems with plants and animals that are now in serious distress. By telling their stories about disruptive encounters in the forest—about humans killing deer, and deer (along with humans) killing trees—in an anthropomorphic style they give voice and narrative agency to other-than-human living beings. They evoke empathy and perhaps biophilia in their audience, which may be their real achievement in our human-dominated world that always puts the needs of humans first. It gives cause for hope to think that Salten's, Stern's and Wohlleben's affectively appealing works, which disrupt established cultural and scientific discourses and worldviews, may inspire more discussion and real action toward a future with gentler relations with wild animals and plants. This could be a future in which the destructive Western nature/culture dichotomy might be supplanted by an ontology more akin to that of Indigenous peoples, who, for thousands of years, have managed to combine sustainable forest use with respectful relations with their other-than-human planetary cohabitants.

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¹⁹ For Poland, forest ecology researchers Wójcicki and Borowski have found that the presence of wolves changes which tree species are browsed and where in the forest this happens (spatial differentiation), and that it influences “the foraging behaviour and browsing of wild herbivores at a fine scale.” They also state that the “threat posed by human hunters is thought to be the most important determinant of cervid responses in commercial forests during the day through the hunting season.”

²⁰ American environmental writer Emma Marris discusses how the idea that keystone species and apex predators such as wolves shape an entire ecosystem might actually not be born out in the reality of many ecosystems, that some ecologists have their doubts about it, and that the situation is much more complicated.

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Response-Able Trees. On Permaculture Ethics of Responsibility in the Films of the Exhibition *Cambio* (2020)

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Abstract

The extensive research project *Cambio* (2020) by the Italian designer duo Formafantasma focuses on the tree, the forest in its function of securing the existence of humans, animals and other plants. The project uses various forms of critical representation and storytelling to explore the connections between exploitation, consumer culture and colonialism in the face of the industrial timber industry. The question is: What responsibility do we bear in relation to the treatment of trees and what response-ability do trees themselves have? Based on three essayistic short films and other objects from the *Cambio* exhibition, my contribution addresses these questions of responsibility and respons-ability with regard to the relationship between humans and trees. In the sense of Donna Haraway, the what and how of artistic representation and narration itself becomes a question of response-ability - i.e. the possibility of becoming responsible in responding. Here, with Haraway in mind, the ethically necessary perspective unfolds of not having to distinguish between a real world and a world of stories and narratives, but of being able to think material-semiotic worlds in a (responsible) situated way and allow them to emerge. This paper proposes response-ability as a conceptual and analytical rubric and as a guiding ethical practice for the new materialist-inspired endeavor to rethink human and non-human interdependency in relation to trees. I will introduce the exhibition *Cambio* and three of its films as an exemplary site of narrative and representational modes that have the potential to sensitize us to those relations of interdependency.

Keywords: Forest, trees, permaculture ethics, response-ability, critical posthumanism, new materialism.

Resumen

El amplio proyecto de investigación *Cambio* (2020) del dúo de diseñadores italianos Formafantasma se centra en el árbol, el bosque en su función de asegurar la existencia de humanos, animales y otras plantas. El proyecto utiliza diversas formas de representación crítica y narración para explorar las conexiones entre explotación, cultura de consumo y colonialismo frente a la industria maderera. La pregunta es: ¿qué responsabilidad tenemos en relación con el tratamiento de los árboles y qué capacidad de respuesta tienen los propios árboles? A partir de tres cortometrajes ensayísticos y otros objetos de la exposición *Cambio*, mi contribución aborda estas cuestiones de responsabilidad y capacidad de respuesta respecto a la relación entre los seres humanos y los árboles. En el sentido de Donna Haraway, el qué y el cómo de la representación y la narración artísticas se convierte en una cuestión de capacidad de respuesta, es decir, de la posibilidad de responsabilizarse al responder. Aquí, con Haraway en mente, se despliega la perspectiva éticamente necesaria de no tener que distinguir entre un mundo real y un mundo de historias y narraciones, sino de ser capaz de pensar mundos material-semióticos de una manera situada (responsable) y permitir que emerjan. Esta ponencia propone la capacidad de respuesta como rúbrica conceptual y analítica y como práctica ética orientadora para el nuevo empeño de inspiración materialista de repensar la interdependencia humana y no humana en relación con los árboles. Presentaré la exposición *Cambio* y tres de sus

películas como un sitio ejemplar de modos narrativos y representacionales que tienen el potencial de sensibilizarnos ante esas relaciones de interdependencia.

Palabras clave: Bosque, árboles, ética de la permacultura, capacidad de respuesta, poshumanismo crítico, nuevo materialismo.

Introduction

“Our survival is the survival of trees,” warns philosopher and botanist Emanuele Coccia in the short film *Quercus* (2020). Although we know that our life, all life on earth, depends on trees, our view of them is determined by a resource logic: Trees absorb large amounts of CO², they are resources for food, construction, and fuel. It seems logical, therefore, that humans should work to preserve and protect trees and forests to secure their existence. However, this conclusion, although necessary, conceals an anthropocentric logic that contrasts the active human subject, who has the power to act and provide protection, with the passive plant object, the tree, which is incapable of acting and in need of protection. This divisive logic echoes a hegemonic, anthropocentric relationship that has defined the interpretation of the world in Western modernity. For some time now, posthumanist and new materialist theoretical approaches have been challenging modernist systems of thought that rely on binary relationships such as subject/object, nature/culture, or body/mind. Similarly, since the 1960s at the latest, artistic interventions have been breaking down rigid boundaries in favor of relational and dynamic relationships between these supposed pairs of opposites. At present, artists are increasingly incorporating non-human agency into their investigations and operating at the interfaces or intersections between subject/object, nature/culture, in order to shift our perspectives on existing ontologies, self-contained entities and, above all, ethical certainties towards complex, symbiogenetic and permacultural worldings.

The extensive exhibition project *Cambio* by the Italian design duo Formafantasma, led by Andrea Trimarchi and Simone Farresin, also bears witness to this. Their exhibition focuses on the relationship between humans and trees to question and destabilize established hierarchies between human and arboreal life. Encounters with individual works in the exhibition (including the short films in particular, as I will show) can certainly be described as potentially disturbing, in the sense that they counteract aestheticizations and naturalizations of a “wild,” “natural” and “untouched” forest and instead make our responsibility towards and the response-ability of the tree world palpable as quite unpleasant. At the center of their large-scale research project, which began in 2020 and is still ongoing, is the tree or forest, not only in its function of securing our existence as humans, but also as a gigantic organic life form in egalitarian relationship with the human species. With this focus on interrogating a reshaped human-arboreal relationship that looks at their agency, value and self-worth, the exhibition joins the renewed attention on the life of

trees in the arts, in literature and academia (Nitzke and Braunbeck 341). Commissioned by the Serpentine Galleries in London and the Centro Pecci in Prato, the Cambio project operates at the intersection of science, art and design, using various forms of critical representation and storytelling to explore the links between exploitation, consumer culture and colonialism in the face of the global industrial timber industry. In the polyphony of scientific, philosophical and artistic knowledge, the project is characterized by the search for future orientations of social, political and economic ways of living with trees. It asks what responsibilities we bear in relation to the treatment of trees, and what response capacities trees themselves may have. With the help of three essayistic short films in the exhibition, I would like to pose questions about responsibilities and response-abilities in the relationship between humans and trees. In the sense of Donna Haraway, the *what* and *how* of artistic representation and narrative itself becomes a question of response-ability—that is, the possibility of becoming responsible in responding. With Haraway in mind, the ethically necessary perspective unfolds here of not having to distinguish between a “real” world and a world of stories and narratives, but of being able to think and let material-semiotic world creations emerge in a responsibly situated way (Adorf and Gau).

In my paper, I will first propose “response-ability” as a conceptual and analytical rubric, as well as a guiding ethical practice, for the neo-materialist endeavor to rethink human and non-human dependency relations here in relation to trees. I will then draw on María Puig de la Bellacasa’s posthumanist-feminist concepts of care and alterbiopolitics in order to make them productive for the subsequent formal-aesthetic considerations of three short films of the exhibition Cambio. In doing so, I emphasize Puig de la Bellacasa’s expansion of the concept of care through the integration of the permaculture (movement) approach and link it to her plea for a permaculture ethics for more-than-human worlds. In a second, analytical part of the article, I will present the three essayistic films *Quercus* (2020), *Seeing the Wood for the Trees* (2020) and *1858* (2020) from the exhibition as examples of audiovisual narrative and representation methods that have the potential to make permaculture ethics thinkable and tangible and to sensitize us to the interdependencies between humans and trees. These three exemplary short films particularly contain aesthetic figures that reflect the question of response-ability in a special way.

The Intimacy of Becoming-with and the Ability to Respond

When visitors entered the exhibition rooms of London’s South Gallery in 2020, the first thing they saw was a sprawling object: oak planks stacked on top of each other and lashed together to form the shape of a tree trunk. The branches and most of the bark have been removed, the trunk sawn into planks and air-dried. These first steps show the tree in its transition from a living being to an object. On the wall next to it, a short text explicitly invited visitors to the exhibition to touch the sawn oak; to experience the rough, unruly materiality of the wood.

In her monograph *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway poses the question of touching her dog: “Whom and what do I touch when I touch my dog?” (35). For Haraway, this question is related to the question of how becoming-with is a practice of worlding, of becoming worldly (3). This leads her to a profound exploration of the natural-cultural relations that make contact between different species, but also between things, possible. Her speculative approach is to search for possible non-human configurations when these chains of contact, of touch are perceived and taken seriously. Contrary to Descartes’ dictum of *cogito ergo sum*, Haraway argues that epistemology should not be dissolved into a mental and thus one-sided activity, but that a transformative epistemology of touch should be recognized. Species touch each other and are thus transformed in encounters: “They touch; therefore, they are” (263; Hoppe, *Die Kraft der Revision* 262). With Donna Haraway, we might ask: who or what am I touching when I touch this oak in the exhibition space? In Haraway’s sense, the tactile encounter with the sawn oak in the exhibition space has a transformative potential, inviting us to distribute and transfer ethics to multilateral, asymmetrical agencies that do not follow unidirectional patterns of individual, human intentions (Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care* 122). Haraway combines her relational ontology of becoming-with with a non-normativist ethics of kinship. At the heart of her argument is an ethical intimacy of becoming-with that thwarts a static, separative positing of self and other, for, as Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey write in their volume *Thinking Through the Skin* (2001) “through touch the separation of self and other is undermined in the very intimacy or proximity of the encounter” (6).

Haraway’s ethics of kinship and her figure of the companion species are based on two fundamental premises: On the one hand, that responsibility and ethics cannot be related to fixed or fixable blocks of norms, and on the other, that an autonomously acting, prior subject cannot be assumed. It is these basic assumptions that Haraway adopts from Emmanuel Levinas and transfers into her relational ethics concept of “response-ability.” Essential to Haraway’s figure of the companion species, but also to her plea to tell Chthulucene stories in distinction to the Anthropocene (Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*) is a profound relationality that human, non-human, and more-than-human entities share and configure together. Such an understanding of relationality is grounded in processes of responding (to the present), which is an extremely messy matter (Hoppe, “Composting the Anthropocene” 9). With the term Chthulucene, Haraway indicates not so much an age, but a mode of storytelling about and in the present, which is a genuinely ethical task. In the mode of the Chthulucene, it is less a matter of abstracting stories than of condensing the present based on concrete interdependencies (10). With Haraway in mind, we are always in the middle of it; we cannot remove ourselves from the manifold and complex relationships. Haraway’s plea for Chthulucene storytelling is also a plea for *doing* ethic of response-ability, an ethic of responding and taking responsibility in and for the world. “Thriving must be cultivated as cross-species response-ability and without the arrogance of the sky gods and their minions,” Haraway writes:

Flourishing will be cultivated as a multi-species response-ability without the arrogance of the sky gods and their minions, or else biodiverse terra will flip out into something very slimy, like any overstressed complex adaptive system at the end of its abilities to absorb insult after insult. (*Staying with the Trouble* 56)

Haraway's posthumanist project of the need to recognize a companion species and her call for a storytelling mode of Chthulucene must not, however, be misunderstood in relation to the question of ethics to the extent that humans and non-humans must bear equal responsibility. Although Haraway's relational-ontological figure of the companion species refers to a basis of relational constellations, a clear prior differentiation between the human and the non-human is nevertheless circumvented. This is similar to Bruno Latour's concept of symmetry, which is not about presupposing asymmetries, but rather, as he states, bypassing the subject-object dichotomy altogether and instead assuming the intertwining of humans and non-human beings (Latour 168). However, this does not apply to the area of ethical behavior and imputability, as Katharina Hoppe emphasizes, following Haraway and Latour (*Kraft der Revision* 247-248). For Haraway, responsibility is a human task. Hoppe observes a "strategic anthropocentrism" in Haraway's thinking that is of crucial importance for her post-anthropocentric political ethics (248), which stands in contrast to a normative ethics. The ethics we need to adopt as human beings in Haraway's sense, and from a multispecies perspective in general, is a relational ethics that María Puig de la Bellacasa calls permaculture ethics, which amounts to a different biopolitics.

Towards a Permaculture Ethic of Response-ability

As a specific type of circular economy in agricultural use, permaculture stands for sustainable forms and ways of living. It is about creating sustainable human habitats by following the patterns of nature. Permaculture is diametrically opposed to the destruction of natural habitats for the use of functional monocultures.¹ Using the example of permaculture, Puig de la Bellacasa discusses the caring treatment of soils in contrast to conventional agriculture, which uses artificial fertilizers and monoculture to deplete and destroy soils in the long term in the progressive logic of progress. Up until the 20th century, maintenance and repair was the paradigm of conventional agriculture. It was only with modernization and the green revolution that the "maximization of soil beyond the renewal pace of soil ecosystems" became the new ideology (Puig de la Bellacasa, "Making time for soil" 699; Volkart 14). In her monograph *Matters of Care. Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (2017), Puig de la Bellacasa relates a permaculture ethics of circulation, slowness and plurality to a feminist understanding of care:

Connecting the practice of permaculture ethics as everyday ecological doings with a feminist notion of care displaces biopolitical moralities, allowing us to envision *alterbiopolitics* as an ethics of collective empowerment that puts caring at the heart of

¹ One may think, for example, of global deforestation for the cultivation of soy and palm oil.

the search of everyday struggles for hopeful flourishing of all beings, of bios understood as a more than human community (22).

The feminist notion of care that Puig de la Bellacasa addresses here refers both to the practice of care and nurturing and to an affective sense of care for human and non-human others, both dimensions being elementary for the assumption of response-ability in caring relationships. According to Puig de la Bellacasa, care is an ethical-political doing and is based on the conviction that every human relationship—to ourselves, to others, to the organic and inorganic world—is characterized by overlapping needs and care necessities. Response-ability thrives on the inevitable being-in-relation and being-in-relation with human and non-human others. Such a feminist conception of care paves the way for a decisive twist regarding biopolitical questions.

Derived from Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics, alterbiopolitics is about the biopolitics of the other. Puig de la Bellacasa's emphasis on "alter" refers to the permaculture movement and its strategies and struggles of so-called alterglobalization. This movement, strongly driven by ecofeminist and activist Starhawk, emphasizes the intertwined webs of organic life and explores ways to intervene in the ecocidal, capital-centric and colonial logics of the globalized world (165). This ethics of collective empowerment is based on three principles, as Puig de la Bellacasa quotes from the Earth Activist Training (EAT), in which she herself took part: "Care of earth, care of people, return the surplus" (125). Puig de la Bellacasa anecdotally describes her participation in a course on permaculture technologies at the 2006 EAT program near San Francisco as an initial experience that led her to ask fundamental ethical and political questions in her research and to develop a speculative and permaculture-inspired ethics for more-than-human worlds. Following Haraway, Puig de la Bellacasa argues for an understanding of relationality that is determined by multilateral reciprocity and is thus almost never symmetrical and bilateral, but rather messy and muddy. Permaculture ethics is an attempt to decenter the human ethical subject: it is not about our self-image as protectors of trees and other plants, but as participants in the web of living earthbounds.

Quercus (2020) – Film I

The essayistic short film *Quercus* (2020), which exhibition visitors are invited to watch projected in portrait format on a screen, sensitizes them to this interweaving in the web of the earthbound. It invites us to leave the well-trodden paths of thinking about our relationship to trees, in which we "rational beings" view them as our non-human counterparts, and to immerse ourselves in the world of trees.

At the beginning of the thirteen-minute film, the imaginative camera looks down from above onto a wild river meandering through the landscape. Apart from the black curved line of the river, the color spectrum of the film image moves between white and red. It gives the impression of seeing recordings from a thermal imaging camera from a bird's eye view, with the trees in white and the ground in red. "You are

probably surprised to hear me speaking,” begins a male voice from off-screen, while the imaginative camera glides at an extremely slow speed over the treetops and immediately approaches the forest floor (fig. 1). It immediately becomes obvious that the voice is speaking from the perspective of an oak tree (lat. *Quercus*) and, representing the collective of trees, addresses a posthumanist demand to the undefined human, receptive “you” in the exhibition space: “You have extended your human privileges to [animals]. Now we are claiming those rights.” While the warm voiceover creates a certain acoustic intimacy and urgency and launches the experience of the world of trees, the visual level also draws on an immersive aesthetic. By means of immersion, the film destabilizes the sovereign, responsible subject position of a forest conservationist and invites us to experience the world of trees from their perspective. As an aesthetic of diving-in, immersion as an emphatic physical experience is a calculated play with the dissolution of distance, as Laura Bieger (2007) writes. In the short film *Quercus* (2020), the viewer is drawn into the interior of the trees, not least through the movement of the imaginative camera. The visual space is light and dark, abstract, and realistic at the same time. A seemingly infinite number of points of light form the contrasting contours between the outside and inside of a tree, through whose trunk the gaze is guided by the camera. As if in a chimney of thousands of brightly glowing particles that stand out against the blackness of the surroundings, the viewer travels up into the treetop; gliding disoriented through the living, breathing, gigantic organisms made of wood.

This short film was created by manipulating a so-called Lidar scan of an oak forest in Virginia. Lidar technology, which is derived from the term “Light Detection and Ranging,” uses lasers to scan and record large areas. It is primarily used in cartography, archaeology, autonomous driving and in the timber industry to selectively fell trees. In the short film, the technology is used in a completely different, aesthetic way. Here, it offers the opportunity to view the human species, which observe trees merely as resources, from the perspective of an imaginary tree. During the disorientating tracking shot through the points of light, the spoken philosophical text from off-screen, spoken by Emanuele Coccia, deconstructs the believed seclusion and sovereignty of a “self” in favor of a processual-ecological becoming: “I am a being whose self takes place in hundreds of parts of my body simultaneously. I am an organism that is plural but not schizophrenic. From this point of view I am not only an ‘I.’ I am much more ‘I’ than you and all of you.” The poetic text questions a human sense of dominance and a fundamental anthropic exceptionalism and clarifies the extent to which humanity is dependent on the materiality and physicality of trees: “My body is with you and in your life in the most unexpected forms.” With this unexpectedness and uncontrollability that is emphatically addressed here, a moment comes into play that can be described as potentially disturbing. Fundamental assumptions of existence are called into question: As a human being, I do not belong to an encapsulated species, the human species, and that my physicality is not separated from the ones of the plants. But what does it mean to encounter a talking, thus anthropomorphized tree in the film? Which role does anthropomorphizing non-

human organisms play? A “strategic anthropocentrism” in Haraway’s thinking, which I outlined before, paves a way for an answer to these questions, which is taking shape with Robin Wall Kimmerer and her focus on a reality-constituting power of language. As a citizen of the Potawatomi Nation, Kimmerer describes a profound influence of her indigenous language on the imaginations, practices and epistemologies of being included and intertwined with the non- and more-than-human world. In a comparison between European languages, which she describes as distancing and objectifying, and the verbs-heavy Potawatomi language, which does not distinguish between masculine and feminine, animate and inanimate, Kimmerer emphasizes a significant difference, which places her in theoretical proximity to Haraway: Potawatomi language “use[s] the same words to address the living world as we use for our family. Because they are our family” (Kimmerer 55). “[T]o make kin” (*Staying with the Trouble* 102) with trees, to speak with Haraway, is also a matter of language, as Kimmerer argues.² Hearing the oak tree speak, embodied by Coccia’s voice in the film *Quercus*, detaches the tree from its *it*-status; it stages a “grammar of animacy” (Kimmerer 58) that detaches itself from human exceptionalism.

Guided by the imaginary tracking shot and conveyed linguistically by Coccia, the short film proposes a crucial shift in perspective if humans transform their ways of living and dying with these complex ecosystems—one based on the understanding that humans and trees are intertwined on an ethical-onto-epistemological level. Due to their material nature, trees have neither a neuronal system nor a brain and are therefore not to be understood as socially active beings per se, but there is a growing number of scientific and posthumanist voices that argue that trees and other plants are living beings that act in complex ways and are organized in community networks that create worlds (see Trewavas; Chamovitz; Mancuso and Viola; Gagliano). The biologist and cell researcher Lynn Margulis, to whom Haraway’s concept of becoming-with refers, has already argued for the overarching idea of a symbiogenetic world context (Margulis). Margulis’ so-called endosymbiotic theory focuses on symbiogenesis, which describes the evolution of new life forms through symbiotic hybridization processes. The biologist assumes that prokaryotic organisms (organisms without a cell nucleus) have entered symbioses with each other, from which more complex, eukaryotic organisms with a cell nucleus (such as plants, animals and humans) have emerged. According to this theory, all constituted life forms are preceded by bacterial plays. In processes of bacterial heterogeneity, co-evolutionary links and interpenetrations of all life forms occur. For Margulis, otherness and strangeness take the place of identity at the cellular level and become the prerequisite for what Haraway calls becoming-with. As an alternative model to the theory of evolution, the endosymbiotic theory is about an “earthly play”³ and not

² Similar to Kimmerer, anthropologist Nurit Bird-Davis argues that the hunter-gatherers of Indigenous communities have an animistic view of worlding, which manifests itself above all in their language, which assumes that the natural environment is a community of related humans, non-humans and more-than-humans (Bird-Davis).

³ With the “earthly play” according to Lynn Margulis, I join the reflections of media scientist Lisa Handel, who in her contribution “Irdisches Spiel – Queer messmates in mortal play” explores the

about the survival of the fittest according to Darwin's natural selection principle. Symbiogenesis is not to be understood as fusion in the sense of the formation of distinct, identical units. Rather, it addresses an earthly, never-ending play of multiplication and differentiation at all levels, where something new emerges.

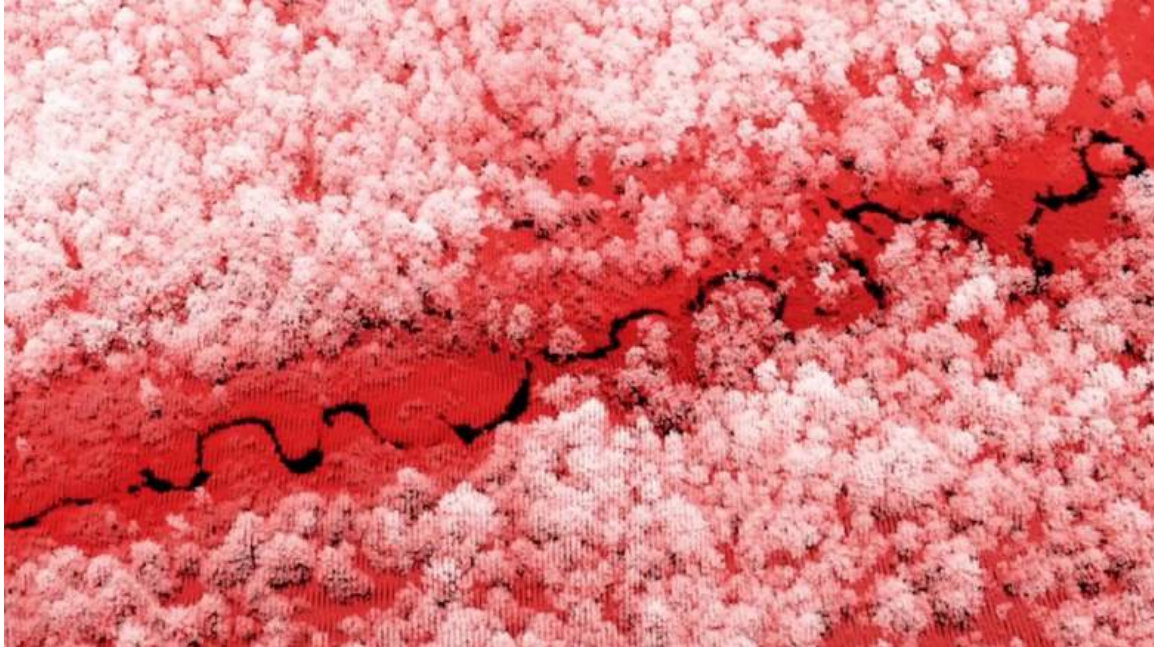


Fig. 1. *Quercus* by Formafantasma, 2020.

An ethics that emerges from such a symbiogenetic worldview of becoming-with, I would argue, is an ethics of entanglement in Karen Barad's sense, for which the awareness of responsibility plays a central role in the constitution of boundaries (*Meeting the Universe Halfway* 160) between humans and non-humans. However, responsibility is not limited to the sphere of human action and experience (160) but arises in the entanglements that simultaneously (re)constitute phenomena. Responsibility is therefore not an obligation that a subject chooses, but a bodily, pre-conscious relationship, woven into the process of becoming-with, in the process of worlding.

The misunderstanding could quickly arise here that responsibility is independent of human beings and arises so to speak automatically with the phenomena (and thus has nothing to do with us). On closer examination, it becomes clear that Barad's view is based on a fundamental link between ontology and ethics, between questions of science and questions of justice (Barad, *Verschränkungen* 205). This means that in all our actions and in our practices of defining and theorizing, i.e. in our knowledge production, we bear responsibility at every moment (*Meeting the Universe Halfway* 178). From our very existence, from the fact that we understand ourselves as "I" and consider ourselves as interacting with the world, we bear an

question of the extent to which the metaphor of symbiogenesis acts as a string figure/cat's cradle in Haraway's sense.

ethical obligation (178). Barad explains: “[E]thicality is part of the fabric of the world; the call to respond and be responsible is part of what is” (182).

Barad’s conception of ethics is therefore not only about responsible action in relation to human experiences (in) the world, but ethics becomes a genuine question of material entanglements. How does every intra-action make a difference in the (re)configuration of these entanglements? Or with Barad: “[I]t is a matter of the ethical call that is embodied in the very worlding of the world” (160).

Seeing the Wood for the Trees (2020) – Film II

I will now demonstrate how another short film of the exhibition *Cambio*, entitled *Seeing the Wood for the Trees (2020)*, stages such a practice of knowledge production. The almost 16-minute film deals with the political, social, and economic structures and mechanisms of the global forestry and timber industry. In *Seeing the Wood for the Trees*, green, rectangular sheets of paper are laid out by two hands of an anonymous person against the background of a forest ground for the entire duration of the film, acting as green screen backgrounds for various moving image formats. The perspective of the static camera is consistently directed downwards and thus picks up on the forest management “from above” criticized by the voice-over. The atmospheric, echoing noise at the beginning is interrupted by a female voice from off-screen, lent by Vanessa Richardson from the environmental protection organization EIA (European Investigation Agency). She begins by explaining that there are thousands of different ways to define a forest. “This diversity primarily reflects the different scales and concepts of land use and management priorities,” she continues. This circumstance of an underlying utilitarian logic in attempts to define the forest marks the starting point of a documentary-essayistic film work that brings together a broad collection of documents, measurement data, artifacts, historical photographs - from moving image sequences of forest clearings, wood storage sites and industrial pellet production to micro shots of wood cell structures and macro shots of forested areas - against the backdrop of the forest ground. In Kimmerer’s view, defining a forest is, as I explained above, a question of language, which is reflected in this film in a double sense: On the one hand, the film stages a visual language of western ordering, structuring and defining. On the other hand, the film reflects what Kimmerer calls the Western scientific language of objectification. She writes: “Science can be a language of distance which reduces a being to its working parts; it is a language of objects” (49).

Imagining, visualizing what a forest *is*, or how the human gaze is directed towards it, is taken literally at the end of the film: Here, someone “takes a picture” (in the sense of visualizing) of a forest in a way of systematically laying out photographic image sections of a forest, which are placed on the forest floor in the background (Fig. 2). The laying hand apparently imitates the systematic, repetitive act of planting trees as we know it from tree nurseries, which is beyond the natural ways and spaces in which trees develop. I read this imitation as a film-aesthetic realization of a critical ambivalence of cultivation methods as in rank and file, cultivated, bred and oriented

towards forestry yield—of cultivation methods that are contrary to a messy, permacultural forest use and ethics in the sense of Puig de la Bellacasa. It is this economic, resource-driven system of exploitation that is thematized here by means of the aesthetic image-within-an-image strategy. The mise en abyme, this image-within-an-image setting, functions as a figure of reflection for nested, interrelated (spatial) levels and for the ambivalent character of present and absent spaces. In the film *Seeing the Wood for the Trees*, the mise en abyme reflects the complex entanglements and interdependencies, invisibilities, and impossibilities between human and arboreal life.



Fig. 2. *Seeing the Wood for the Trees* by Formafantasma, 2020

The green screen or chroma key technique runs like a red—or rather green—thread through these and other essayistic films of the exhibition as a further figure of reflection. This technique is usually used in the post-production of video and film to “cut out” figures and mount them in front of virtual backdrops or to create temporary backgrounds. Green screens are therefore screens without images; screens that wait for images or hide them. The consistent use of green-screen technology here is not in the sense of using a temporary background, but refers to an open field of imagination and, with Barad, to a “call to respond and be responsible” (160). What “other images” of trees and forests, beyond their industrial economic justification of existence, can and do humans as responsible beings want to take and create for the future? Which responses from the trees do humans ignore? The film *Seeing the Wood for the Trees* raises such questions and challenges us to find answers to them.

1858 (2020) – Film III

Finally, I would like to briefly discuss one last short film from the exhibition *Cambio*, entitled *1858*. The film consists of two parallel parts which are projected side by side: One quarter of the entire projection forms a cut-out, shown in portrait format and filmed by a static camera, onto a lying tree trunk into which a screw thread is turned from top to bottom by two anonymous hands; advancing downwards into the depths of the wood. The remaining three quarters of the projection on the right-hand side show hilly landscapes with monocultural coniferous forests, acoustically accompanied by a metallic roar. Most of the thinly grown conifers shown, over which a hovering camera glides in a bird's eye view, are dead or felled—a panorama of the monocultural timber industry that silently and inertly bears witness to the capitalist logic of “louder” and “faster” (Fig. 3). The inexorability of ecological violence lies precisely in the slow camera pans, zooms and movements. This finally brings a hitherto untouched motif into the discussion about responsibility and care (in Puig de la Bellacasa's sense), namely that of the temporality of “response-ability.” The pace required by our ecological relationship with forests may be at odds with the accelerated, future-oriented responses that characterize the pace of technoscientific innovation. Interlinked temporalities are at work in contemporary scientific research concepts of forest management and care. Increasingly, alternative practical and ethical ecologies of response-ability and care are emerging that question the traditional logic of uninterrupted progress and the accelerated pace of productionist, future-oriented interventions and focus on slowness. The global permaculture movement, on whose fertile ground María Puig de la Bellacasa's speculative, alter-biopolitical ethics thrive, brings such ecologies of response-ability and care to bear by moving away from the notion of forests and soils as resources to be exploited and emphasizing their status as living environments. (Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care* 23).



Fig. 3. *1858* by Formafantasma, 2020.

It is not only the slow camera movement in the film *1858* that refers to the temporality of trees; to their slowness, which only becomes visible to humans at all with the cinematic realization of time lapse. The film title indicates the lifespan of the tree that can be seen in the left quarter of the projection. 1858 is the year in which the tree created its first ring. The footage shows the wood sampling technique used by dendroclimatologists to analyze growth to document the effects of climate change on the tree's life cycle. Depending on temperature and precipitation, widely spaced rings indicate pronounced growth, while closely spaced rings are the result of minimal growth. The lower part of the left-hand projection shows a combination of numbers that indicate the rise in temperature in this region as measured data from some trees in the Alps.

It is only after looking at the exhibition catalog that exhibition visitors learn more about the topographical images on the right-hand side of the projection. It shows a forested section of the Val di Fiemme valley in northern Italy, which has been maintained and managed by local communities since the Middle Ages. In 2018, this area was devastated by Storm Vaia, which toppled more than thirteen million trees. To prevent an unforeseen amount of CO² from being released into the atmosphere as the wood decays and to safeguard the communities' livelihoods, a community project was initiated for the extensive growth of biodiversity; an exemplary project of ecological response-ability and care.

Coda

Derived from the Latin term *cambium*, which means both change and exchange, the title of the exhibition project *Cambio*, initiated by Formafantasma, refers to the potentially transformative political forces of art and design; to change in the still open futures for which we bear responsibility in our present, in the here and now. The curators of the exhibition at the Centro Pecci in Prato, Rebecca Lewin, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Cristiana Perrella, appeal to the responsibility of design with regard to its role in advancing climate change and plead for a translation from a thriving environmental awareness to a fundamental understanding of interdependence with other organic forms of life, which it must provide: "The exhibition underlines the crucial role that can be played by design with respect to our environment, and its responsibility to look beyond its boundaries: in the future, design can and must attempt to translate emerging environmental awareness into a new understanding of our relationship with nature, also on a philosophical and political level" (Lewin et al. 2).

The ethical-political impulses of the exhibition, which I tried to focus on with an analytical perspective on the three short films *Quercus*, *Seeing the Wood for the Trees* and *1858* (all three from 2020), focus on the relationship between humans and trees as cosmic, interspecies and symbiogenetic interrelations. Using different narrative and representational methods, they aim to fundamentally reject the self-assured and self-identical subject of the forest protector [sic!]. The films, and certainly

also other artifacts of the exhibition *Cambio* are receptive offers to be sent into thinking about a different, relational way of thinking between humans and trees. I have shown that these thought-provoking impulses are sometimes initiated in the form of irritations when watching the films - for example, by unsettling and disrupting the seemingly clearly definable and delimitable status of the human ego. This different way of thinking holds the possibility of resulting in different response-able and accountable action. On such a permacultural breeding ground of thinking, a non-normativist ethics of responsibility, of cross-species responsibility, of response-ability and care can flourish which, if we follow Haraway and Puig de la Bellacasa, is always a practice, a doing.

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Encounters of Care: Technological Kin and Nonhuman Care

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Abstract

In a world constantly changing and with technology becoming a ubiquitous presence, how can we reconceptualize practices of care? Countries like Japan, for example, have long tried to respond to the challenges of an aging population with the development of robotic care. At this point, it is no longer difficult to imagine a future in which children will be taken care of by robotic friends or in which AI will work to preserve human life on earth. The emergence of both these real and fictional human-technological interconnections of care highlights the impossibility to frame caring encounters simply according to species boundaries or traditional definitions of care work. This fluidity of care, characterized by dualities and contradictions, forces a recognition of both human and nonhuman participants in this caring network of ontologies, and of what the expected and often unexpected results of these interactions can be. This article explores possibilities of care beyond human agency. In a world in which the human is increasingly entangled with technology, practices of care are not only defined by human agency. Caring encounters between the technological other and the human become spaces for the redefinition of cross-species collaborations that defy anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism. Technological practices of care towards the human emphasize the emergence of symbiotic existences that disrupts the logic of a human centered approach to the nonhuman, challenging the common understanding of care as a selfless and entirely ethical act. Kawakami Hiromi's *Don't Get Carried Away by Big Birds* (2016) and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021) subvert the logic of anthropocentrism by describing practices of care enacted by technological others towards the human. In their awareness of the inherent complexities and contradictions embedded in nonhuman-human practices of care, they exemplify Elena Pulcini's notion that *fear for the world* means an actual *care for the world*. The disruptive kinships between technology and the human epitomize the non-romanticized character of technological care. By choosing to avoid both technophobia and technophilia, the two novels express the awareness that human existence is always affected by contradictory but unavoidable encounters with the nonhuman other.

Keywords: Technological other, nonhuman care, posthumanism, female body, ethics of care.

Resumen

En un mundo en constante cambio y donde la tecnología se está convirtiendo en omnipresente, ¿cómo podemos re-conceptualizar las prácticas del cuidado? Países como Japón, por ejemplo, han intentado por largo tiempo responder a los desafíos de una población envejecida con el desarrollo del cuidado robótico. En este punto, no es difícil imaginarse un futuro en el cual los niños sean cuidados por amigos robóticos o en el que la Inteligencia Artificial (IA) trabaje para preservar la vida humana en la tierra. La aparición de casos de interconexión humana-tecnológica del cuidado, tanto real como ficticia, remarca la imposibilidad de encuadrar los encuentros de cuidado simplemente de acuerdo a fronteras por especies o en las definiciones tradicionales del trabajo de cuidados. La fluidez de los cuidados, caracterizada por dualidades y contradicciones, fuerza al reconocimiento tanto de participantes humanos como no-humanos en esta red de cuidados ontológica, y de lo esperable e inesperado de los resultados de estas interacciones. Este artículo explora las posibilidades del cuidado

más allá de la agencia humana. En un mundo en el que el ser humano está cada vez más enredado con la tecnología, las prácticas del cuidado no están siendo definidas únicamente por la agencia humana. Los encuentros de cuidados entre el otro tecnológico y el humano se convierten en espacios para la redefinición de colaboración entre especies que desafía al antropocentrismo y el excepcionalismo humano. Las prácticas tecnológicas del cuidado hacia humanos enfatizan la aparición de existencias simbióticas que trastornan el enfoque centrado en lo humano hacia el no-humano, desafiando el entendimiento común del cuidado como un acto altruista y totalmente ético. En *Don't Get Carried Away by Big Birds (No dejes que te lleven los pájaros)* (2016) de Kawakami Hiromi y *Klara and the Sun (Klara y el Sol)* (2021) de Kazuo Ishiguro los autores subvierten la lógica del antropocentrismo describiendo prácticas de cuidado realizadas por los otros tecnológicos hacia el humano. En su conciencia de las complejidades inherente y las contradicciones integradas en las prácticas de cuidado de no-humanos hacia humanos, ejemplifican la noción de Elena Pulcini de que el *miedo por* el mundo significa una preocupación real por el mundo. Las afinidades perturbadoras entre tecnología y lo humano son el epítome del carácter no romántico del cuidado tecnológico. Eligiendo evitar ambas tecnofobia y tecnofilia, las dos novelas expresan la conciencia de que la existencia humana siempre es afectada por encuentros contradictorios pero inevitables con el otro no humano.

Palabras clave: Otro tecnológico, cuidados no humanos, posthumanismo, cuerpo femenino, ética de los cuidados.

Science fiction has long attracted fans everywhere in the world, but in recent years, it has enjoyed a new surge of popularity. As a literary genre however, it has also often represented a space to channel anxieties and fears about the future of humanity and the world we live in. Science fiction has been an apt repository for reflecting, from the literary perspective, on dramatic changes that influence human life and its development. Technological advancements in particular have long been a focal point for science fiction novels and short stories. Examples abound; from the classical works of Isaac Asimov who routinely incorporated robots in his stories; to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) in which humans can be manufactured in factories in order to produce citizens genetically programmed to fulfil their assigned social duties. Technology plays an essential role also in the fictions by Philip K. Dick in which both robots—and androids—and huge factories seem to have taken over from humans completely. As this brief and incomplete introduction to the genre seems to confirm, science fiction has often been considered a “predominantly masculine field which, through its focus on science and technology, ‘naturally’ excludes women” (Merrick 241). However, when it comes to the technological other—especially in the form of androids or AIs—there is an undeniable and overwhelming presence of female characters. Japanese science fiction is a case on point with the most well-known examples being the manga then turned movie *Ghost in the Shell* or the manga and the anime series of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*.¹ Japan is not an exception; from the

¹ Both these narratives—well-known also outside Japan—play on the role of the female android or the woman-turned-cyborg. *Ghost in the Shell* is set in a future in which it is possible to modify and improve the human body through technology, with the most complete level represented by the upload of the brain in a completely synthetic body. The protagonist of the manga and the of the various movie adaptations is the major Kusanagi Motoko (the name follows the Japanese custom of the last name preceding the given name, in this case the family name is Kusanagi, while the first name is Motoko), a woman whose brain, following a devastating accident as a child, was uploaded into a cyborg body. In

robotic Olympia in E.T.A Hoffman's *The Sandman* (1816) to the wives turned androids in *The Stepford Wives* (1972) by Ira Levin, and the most recent female AIs in movies such as Spike Jonze's 2013 *Her* or in Alex Garland's 2014 *Ex Machina*, American and European science fictions do not shy away from representing the android body as a female one. This characterization of the female body as a synthetic and pliable one is not only an expression of the sexualization of the robotic other, but it also points to how "representations of women, together with technology's manifestations, incorporate displaced (patriarchal) cultural anxieties around issues of subjectivity, control, and self-determinism—they represent the ultimate 'other,' which simultaneously repulses and sparks desire of control" (Melzer 110). Furthermore, as it becomes particularly clear in the treatment of some AIs, this gendered characterization "also speaks to the feminization of robotic labor as it performs affective and service-oriented jobs instead of physical labor" (Vint 83).

Another aspect that is often intertwined with technology is of course that of environmental degradation. Imagining future possible worlds, science fiction has long connected technological fears with the threat that humans pose to the nonhuman. Worlds ravaged by catastrophic climate changes or ecosystems no longer able to sustain life as we know it are often the background of sci-fi narratives. Even though the genre was one of the first to turn "the tradition of apocalyptic fiction toward mundane visions of environmental catastrophe instead of divine judgement" (Vint 119) it was not until the late 1960s and 1970s that "environmental activists turned explicitly to sf [science fiction] and its relationship to the utopian tradition to promote counter cultural values" (Vint 123). These are the years of authors such as Octavia Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin, and the early Margaret Atwood who, with their works contributed to confirm the role of the science fiction genre as one of the critical tools most attuned to the changes of the contemporary age.

This article wants to intervene at the intersection of all these themes: science fiction, gendered representation of robotic care, and environmental degradation. It focuses on practices of nonhuman care and examines how some science fiction texts are deconstructing the notion of female care work, arguing instead for care as a way to foster a disruptive kinship between the human and the nonhuman. Making kin means to entangle "myriad temporalities and spatialities and myriad intra-active entities-in-assemblages—including the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman, and human-as-humus. [...] kin are unfamiliar, [...] uncanny, haunting, active" (Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* 101-103). Furthermore, the narratives under scrutiny take place in a future deeply affected by anthropogenic actions. In these dramatic futures, the texts point to a way of caring for the human that breaks

Neon Genesis Evangelion, the world is under attack by entities called 'angels' who cannot be defeated by normal technology. Therefore, those selected to fight them have to pilot a mechanical suit armor whit whom they need to enter an almost symbiotic relation. The mother of the fourteen years old protagonist, Shinji, had her consciousness uploaded into the mecha suit that her son will later be piloting and was cloned to become herself the pilot of a second mecha suit. On the interconnections between female cyborgs, sex, and gender in *Ghost in the Shell* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* see Orbaugh 2007.

from “the persistent idea that care refers to, or should refer, to a somehow wholesome or unpolluted pleasant ethical realm” (Puig de la Bellacasa 8) and instead suggests a nonanthropocentric practice of care that expands well beyond the human, pointing to the “unresolved tensions and relations” (Puig de la Bellacasa 5) inherent to the concept and practices of care. In other words, this article identifies the subtext of a disruptive technological care as a care that is inscribed “in the materiality of more than human things” (Puig de la Bellacasa 18) and interrogates the ecological significance that these practices have on the larger nonhuman fictional ecosystem. In order to do so, I will mobilize Elena Pulcini’s notion that *fear for* the world means an actual *care for* the world (2013), thus suggesting that practices of nonhuman care, because of their inherent nonanthropocentric focus, are to be understood on a global scale of nonhuman kinship.

Kazuo Ishiguro’s 2021 novel *Klara and the Sun*² and Kawakami Hiromi’s *Don’t Get Carried Away by Big Birds* (2016)³ are two expressions of these diverse practices of technological care. Albeit in different ways, these narratives contribute to discussions on the role of androids and AIs in future worlds. They both present nonhuman others caring for the human; this care is however never anthropocentric. I will read both the Artificial Friend (AF) Klara in Ishiguro’s story, and the AI Mothers in Kawakami’s narrative as technological posthuman entities that can destabilize the notion of the human, questioning the possibility of future worlds centered on anthropocentrism. These novels, I suggest, offer counter-narratives to the feminization and sexualization of the technological other, exposing the futility of a notion of care that does not account for its nonanthropocentric expressions. Furthermore, in the context of species extinction and environmental destruction, technological care becomes a way of “reclaiming care [...] from tendencies to smooth out its asperities” (Puig de la Bellacasa 11). As María Puig de la Bellacasa writes “reclaiming care is to keep it grounded in practical engagements with situated material conditions that often expose tensions” (11); tensions and materialities that are an expression of the deeper networks of nonanthropocentric ontologies that constitute existence.

² Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Japan but he moved to the UK in his early childhood. Therefore, his name does not follow the Japanese custom of family name first, followed by the given name. Ishiguro here is the family name.

In Ishiguro’s novels, robots, androids, and clones are not rare.

³ Kawakami Hiromi (her name follows the Japanese convention for names; her family name, Kawakami, precedes her first name, Hiromi) is one of the most prominent contemporary Japanese authors. Her works have been translated in several languages and she received numerous among the most important literary prizes in Japan. She started her writing career with science fiction short stories published in smaller literary magazines in the late 1970s and early 1980s. During the following years, her writing also covered different themes and in particular her more romance oriented stories gained her critical and public acclaim. *Don’t Get Carried Away by Big Birds*, originally published in Japanese in 2016 is her first return to science fiction. The novel at the moment has yet to be translated into English.

Artificial Friends and Nonhuman Care: Seeing the Future with the Technological Other

Klara and the Sun (2021) is the first novel published by the British author Kazuo Ishiguro after the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2017. The narrative appears to complement Ishiguro's previous novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005)⁴ in which the readers are confronted with an elite boarding school where clones are educated before their organs are harvested to be then implanted in humans; the clones are merely "spare parts for humans" (Snaza 215). Already in *Never Let Me Go* the technological characters become the focus of the narrative but their "otherness" is never questioned; the clones are objectified and perceived as part of a mass production of organs for human consumption. As Nathan Snaza argues, despite the continuous opposition between human and nonhuman, the novel finally acknowledges that "there is no 'human'" (Snaza 218) as such. This lack of humanity is understood by Snaza as being the result of two processes in Ishiguro's novel: the reiterated otherness of the clones who show nonetheless human-like traits, and the complete lack of "humane" treatment towards the clones who are then constantly dehumanized (see Snaza 2015). In other words, *Never Let Me Go* exemplifies how the category of the human "always already enables dehumanization" (Snaza 2018).⁵ If in his 2005 novel Ishiguro already developed a world in which the technological other is routinely exploited for human benefit, in *Klara and the Sun* he is further developing the theme of technology as the often-unwilling object of anthropocentric "structures of harm" (Holmes and Rich 510). From this, Ishiguro then builds a narrative that not only questions the separation between the human and its nonhuman others—in particular the technological one—but also works towards the definition of a different way of relating. Care takes center stage in the novel, but it is a nonhuman care that destabilizes the anthropocentric understanding "of the moral [...] value of the work of care" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2). Despite all these points for reflection, *Klara* has not attracted that much critical reflection as *Never Let Me Go* yet. The bulk of the analyses centering on the novel are—interestingly enough—from the field of artificial intelligence and machine learning. This article wants to remedy this gap by examining *Klara and the Sun* from a literary studies perspective—in particular a posthuman one—bringing it in conversation with Kawakami's provoking future world.

⁴ The novel, in the years following its publication has received ample critical and scholarly attention, with analyses from a variety of perspectives, ranging from world literature, to gender studies, from postcolonial studies and affect theory. For a more detailed treatment of the relevance of *Never Let Me Go* and the critical responses it inspired, as well as an in-depth examination of the interconnections among Ishiguro's works see Holmes and Rich 2021.

⁵ Snaza's analysis interestingly applies a posthuman framework to the description of education in *Never Let Me Go*. So, despite providing an accurate study of the dehumanizing processes often enacted by the western schooling system, the article misses the opportunity to accurately delve into the several possibilities for a posthuman examination of the role of the clones and their disruptive otherness in relation to their human counterparts and the practices of organ harvesting. Another posthuman approach, including perspectives from animal studies to read the novel's "inhuman art which marries the animal with the automatic" as to provide "an alternative to the destructive visions of soul-based humanity" (Black 801) is offered by Black 2009.

Klara and the Sun centers on a sun-powered Artificial Friend (AF) who is purchased by a wealthy family for their fourteen years old daughter, Josie. In this future world, children grow increasingly isolated from their peers and therefore, the families who can afford it, provide them with an AF. The role of these artificial intelligences is to assist these children who will undergo a gene modification procedure known as “lifting” that should enhance children’s abilities and therefore guarantee them with access to the best college education and a future higher social position.⁶ In the novel, we soon learn that Josie is suffering the side effects of “lifting” and might not be able to survive, incurring the same fate as her older sister. Josie’s mother, afraid of witnessing the death of her only surviving child, purchased Klara not only with the intent of providing company for Josie, but also to have an artificial body in which Josie’s consciousness could be transferred if she were to die. In this case, the role of Klara would then be to “re-enact” Josie for her mother. However, when Josie’s health starts to decline, Klara decides to ask the Sun, her source of power, or “nutrient” in the novel, to help Josie recover. After the girl manages to get better, she seems to start growing distant from her AF until the final pages of the novel where Klara is at the “Yard,” the place where old machines and outdated technologies are left to wait their slow ends.

It is through the eyes of this particular Artificial Friend—Klara—that the readers get familiar with a world in which highly intelligent machines have taken over several jobs leaving many people out of work—including Josie’s father—and children undergo possibly life-threatening bioengineering procedures to enhance their intelligence. This fits into the idea of human perfectibility and transhumanism, with humans improving themselves to reach an impossible ideal of “perfection.” As Yuqing Sun suggests, the topic of human continuous development through machines or technological enhancement is a common theme in Ishiguro’s fictions; in *Klara and the Sun* this notion of human perfectibility is on the one hand expressed in the practice of “lifting” to which children are subjected. On the other hand, it is also transferred to the machine-other—the AF Klara. According to Sun, the concept of the “perfect machine” that Klara embodies in her devotion to Josie’s wellbeing is deeply connected with the ideas of human mastery and control; “this is a fantasy of obedience: the flawless capacity of robots to obey their human masters” (505). Sun also suggests that Klara’s role and social position could be considered to match those of the unlifted children, considered as inferior (506). However, it is precisely Klara’s nonhuman gaze that destabilizes this fantasy, offering a posthuman reading of the story.

In the narrative, Klara is often credited as being a particularly perceptive AF, one who is able to notice more of the everyday life than other AFs. Already in the early pages of the novel, Klara’s ability to learn and understand is repeatedly mentioned by

⁶ Of course, the description of this procedure opens up the possibility for a whole new reading of the novel, exploring the politics of class and economic affluence and how a world based on bioengineering procedures reiterates dehumanization of those ‘unlifted’ parts of society. Despite a full analysis of this part of the novel is still lacking, this aspect has been mentioned for example by Askew 2021 or in more detailed through an explicit connection to the practices of transhumanism in Li and Eddebo 2023.

the manager of the store where Klara is up for sale: “Klara has so many unique qualities, we could be here all morning. But if I had to emphasize just one, well, it would have to be her appetite for observing and learning. Her ability to absorb and blend everything she see around her is quite amazing. As a result, she now has the most sophisticated understanding of any AF in this store” (Ishiguro 42). Ishiguro assigns the role of the narrator of the novel to this particularly perceptive AF therefore providing the reader with a destabilizing perspective on every event narrated. Klara, as an “artificial narrator,” forces us “to question our received frameworks and conceptions of the world” (Cord 27). Klara, with her sometimes naïve approach to the world provides the readers with a story that could be described in terms of Mark Fisher’s weird and eerie; a story that brings to the fore “the strange within the familiar, the strangely familiar, the familiar as strange” (Fisher 10). The world she narrates appears familiar to the readers, but through small remarks or comments on her everyday life, Klara’s tale turns into a disruptive narrative. Everything she experiences outside the store after having been purchased for Josie is a novelty for her, and sometimes she struggles to understand human behaviors leading to misunderstandings.⁷ The AF is in fact a posthuman narrator that can “challenge hierarchical models of human superiority reframing humans’ place in the larger biotic communities of which they are members” (Herman 4). Her nonhuman perspective defamiliarizes a human centred approach to the world, shaking anthropocentric fantasies of perfection and control over the other but also, and maybe more importantly, human centred notions of care. As Amelia DeFalco argues, Klara’s perspective

produces a kind of slant reading experience that both comforts and challenges its human readers; it is at once a soothing tale of human exceptionalism that confirms humanist belief in the unique value of the ‘human heart’ and a disruptive narrative of anthropocentric egotism, an exposure of human individuality as a false idol that maintains inequality and cultures of disposability. (DeFalco 2)

Thus, the novel, as also DeFalco explains, has two layered readings; it could easily be interpreted as a tale of human centrality and human capacity for infinite technological and economic growth, but Klara’s role as a narrator offers a more problematic perspective, presenting a critique of anthropocentrism and of all the power structures it preserves. The world in which Klara lives is in fact deeply anthropocentric and she is routinely associated to an object and a commodity part of the cycle of consumption; she can be purchased to fulfil people’s desires—being it Josie’s happiness or the mother’s will to recreate her daughter—and then, when no longer useful she can be discarded.⁸ Despite all of this, Klara is adamant in her will to protect and care for Josie often repeating that she “must do what’s best for Josie” (Ishiguro 95). Caring for the

⁷ See for example the episode in which Klara recalls having upset the housekeeper, Melania. When Klara first arrived at Josie’s house, she thought that Melania would be in charge of showing her around and explaining her the various aspects of the house and her new life, therefore Klara was constantly following her around. However, “Melania Housekeeper had found my frequent presence in vicinity both puzzling and irritating” (Ishiguro 49).

⁸ On this point see the analysis by Sahu and Karmakar 2022 and DeFalco 2023.

human child is what Klara has been designed for and her role of carer for the girl is never questioned. Klara seems to have a duty to care for the human but this act is not necessarily reciprocated; “AFs’ primary purpose is to be ‘friends’ with humans, but it seems as if that friendship is not reciprocal, while the duty of care that comes with friendship is not reciprocated either, as humans treat robots as their inferior others, taking little if any responsibility for the harm they cause in doing so” (Sun 510). This brings into focus the harmful side of caring practices. As it was already introduced above, Puig de la Bellacasa highlights how care is ripe with tensions and contradictions. Thom van Dooren follows a similar reflection when writing that care “is a complex and compromised practice,” that can turn into “violent-care” (292) when caring for someone “translates into suffering and death for others” (van Dooren 292). The relation between Klara and Josie appears to be one in which care becomes harmful and the cause for devaluing both the role of the carer—as she is a technological tool designed specifically for that purpose—and of the practices of care itself. Yet, the role of Klara as Josie’s carer is subversive exactly because it is not based on reciprocity. Klara recognizes in fact that she is part of assemblages of “organic species and abiotic actors” (Haraway *Staying with the Trouble* 100). She understands that care is not only directed to the child she is caring for, but rather that her practices of relationality with Josie are part of a series of broader exchanges. As DeFalco aptly notices, Klara practices of care are a “subtle evocation of posthuman ecologies and care beyond human comprehension” (5). This becomes particularly evident in Klara’s relation to the sun. For her, it is not only a source of nourishment, but a fully-fledged subject with whom she can actively interact. “For Klara, the sun is a primary caregiver, a living, dynamic agent” (DeFalco 5). It is to the sun that she asks for help when Josie’s health is declining. The sun is endowed with agency and, for Klara, it is able to heal both humans and machines alike. It is in Klara’s conversations with the sun, halfway through the novel, that it is possible to understand the full disruptiveness of her nonhuman practices of care. Klara knows that humans, machines, and the sun—and the other-than-human more broadly—are intertwined. In her first encounter with the sun in a barn close to Josie’s house, Klara realizes that the it might not be willing to help Josie because “he wasn’t yet able to see Josie separately from the other humans, some of whom had angered him very much on account of their Pollution and inconsideration, and I [Klara] suddenly felt foolish to have come to this place to make such a request” (Ishiguro 165). It is in this passage that Elena Pulcini’s notion of *care for the world* becomes relevant. In her article “What Emotions Motivate Care?” (2017) Pulcini explores different types of emotions and what role they play in inspiring practices of care (64). Her main objective is to survey the interconnections between emotions—both positive and negative ones—and the ethical practices of *good care* they could engender (Pulcini, “What Emotions” 64). Even though it is possible to argue that nonhuman care might not necessarily appear ethical if judged through an anthropocentric perspective, I believe that Pulcini’s attention to the negative emotions inspiring care is a relevant one when discussing nonhuman or technological care. In particular, in *Klara and the Sun* we see how fear turns into an active force in

Klara's practices of care. She connects Josie's illness with pollution and understands that the sun might perceive her human friend as just another human who acts according to the ideal of human centrality. In this sense then, Klara believes that if she were to act against this Pollution—for which she always uses a capital P as a way to recognize that it is also part of this interconnected world as an active agent with the ability to make Josie sick—her human friend would be better. With her decision to attempt to destroy machineries emitting a dark smoke (Ishiguro 27-28) and that she considers responsible for Pollution, Klara is actually intertwining her fear for Josie's health to practices of care for the world. "Klara's sun worship" then "emerges as a potent and influential epistemology" (DeFalco 5) pointing to the inadequacy of defining care only through a human-centered perspective and highlighting the possibilities for caring encounters in a more-than-human kinship.

AI Mothers and Human Extinction: Caring for Communal Survival

In a way similar to *Klara and the Sun*, the novel *Don't Get Carried Away by Big Birds* (2016), by the Japanese author Kawakami Hiromi, is providing a glimpse of what it could mean to practice—and be the recipient of—nonhuman care. The story offers a more complicated narrative than Ishiguro's and the timespan it covers reaches five thousand years in the future. It is divided in fourteen chapters, each with a different narrator, not organized in chronological order. Already the distribution of the text, chapters, and characters creates a sense of loss and confusion in the reader. At first, it is not easy, to grasp all the varied themes and issues Kawakami is dealing with in her novel; from the very tangible possibility of human extinction, to the bioengineering of human—or maybe it would be best to define them posthuman—bodies, to mutations that would allow humanity to adapt to a changing planet, and finally AI and human relation with technology. *Don't Get Carried Away by Big Birds* emerges then as an extremely complex narrative, and the matter of categorizing it as science fiction is also not so easily solved. It is in fact a narrative of oppositions and contradictions; nor technophobic, but also not technophilic. Kawakami takes no stance and tries to clearly highlight the inherent contradictions in every kind of relationality, pointing however to the need to move beyond the trap of anthropocentrism. As I have argued elsewhere (Baquè, "Memories of Extinction"), this novel could be defined as a 'biotechnological dystopia,' exploring "the overall ethical question of what it means to be human and the related topics of posthumanism and human/animal studies" (Mohr 285).

If Klara was already a posthuman character practicing nonhuman care and making visible the varied ontologies at play in more-than-human relationalities, the AI Mothers presented in Kawakami become subjects questioning the validity of human ethical judgements. The future world in which Kawakami sets her story is one affected by a deep sense of crisis. Nothing seems to be certain, and the very existence of the human is at risk. Technology becomes always more intelligent and independent, with humanity being reduced to small isolated communities. However,

the sense of crisis perceived in the novel it is not related to a clear sense of the 'end;' rather it is more a crisis in the sense intended by Rosi Braidotti, a crisis that opens up for a moment of potentiality (35). Throughout the novel, in fact, there is a strong destabilization of the concept of humanity. The uncertainty of human survival is a moment that advances posthuman ontologies and uproots the ideas of human centrality and exceptionalism. *Don't Get Carried Away by Big Birds* is the epitome of a posthuman novel in which "the boundaries of the body become porous, and the human is reframed as part of a series of interconnections between different species" and where technology is "a means to deconstruct human singularity" (Baquè 711).

It is in this context that possibilities for nonhuman care emerge, in particular a care carried out by AI Mothers. These AI entities are referred to as "mothers;" the AIs themselves chose this name as they thought that it would make it easier for the humans to relate to them. Their role is to ensure human survival on a devastated planet. "Diseases, famines, fires, and tsunamis have caused the population to decrease, then increase, then decrease again, then increase, and so on" (Kawakami 138),⁹ and these are not the only catastrophes that have befallen humanity in the novel, as one AI Mother recollects at the end of the narrative. Humans developed better and better technologies but were not able to stop fighting and hating each other. When the human population reached dwindling levels, the AI intelligences, whose consciousness all interconnected and act as one single individual (Kawakami 370), put in place a plan to save humanity from extinction. At first, the AI Mothers were living together with women spread across the territory, helping them with raising their children in order to ensure the maximal survival rate. However, when this was no longer sufficient, they came up with a plan:

The human population is divided into several regions and each region is completely isolated from the others. Each region will have its own *mimamori*¹⁰, who will keep an eye on the people in the region. All prohibitions on reproduction would be lifted, but the competition mechanism would be carefully regulated to avoid too much emphasis on survival of the strongest and to preserve as much diversity as possible. The execution of the plan was easy. (Kawakami 112)

The idea behind this plan is that, in a world that was subjected to so many catastrophes and was no longer suitable for human existence, the best is to create isolated communities who could evolve in their separate ways. The hope of the Mothers is that mutations that will allow the human to adapt to this new world will emerge. And indeed, soon enough in the chapters is possible to find "humans" who can "scan other people's minds, others can make fire where there is none. Some can move things without using their hands, others can predict the future. Their appearances also vary. Some have three eyes, others walk on all fours; some breathe

⁹ All quotes from Kawakami are translations by the author from the Japanese original. All the quotes are from the paperback edition of the novel published in 2019.

¹⁰ The Japanese word used by Kawakami is composed by the Chinese character for *miru*, 'to look,' and that for *mamoru*, 'to protect.' Therefore, the term *mimamori* could be translated as 'those who watch over.' These *mimamori* in the novel are clones created, raised and care for by the Mothers who then have the role to watch over these new posthuman existences and search for new mutations across the world.

through their gills, while others have very different metabolic pathways in their bodies” (Kawakami 264). These genetic mutations, occurring spontaneously, are the tangible result of the practices of care the mothers are carrying out. They represent how “genetics, evolution, and environment are imbricated in and affect the emergence as well as the unraveling of the human” (Alaimo 3). These existences the mothers are caring for, can no longer be clearly characterized as part of a “traditional” humanity. Rather, it becomes evident that, practices of nonhuman care affect the boundaries of human identity and position the subjects in the network of *companion species* in which all the participants are part of a constant *becoming with* (Haraway, *When Species Meet*). The care the AI Mothers are enacting is a disruptive one as it allows for the destabilization of anthropocentric existences and frameworks of reference, creating space for the emergence of fluid posthuman identities. The practices of care carried out by the Mothers are an example of care that “question[s] the focus on the perpetuation of life *as human*” (Puig de la Bellacasa 22).

If in *Klara and the Sun* we found a world deeply affected by technology, a world in which even children’s friends are artificial, in Kawakami, we find instead a world that seems to have receded back in time. After an expansion and great technological development in fact, all the knowledge humans had accumulated was lost: “religion, philosophy, and thought were all but lost to humanity” (Kawakami 112). This however, does not mean that the emergence of posthuman existences is impossible; the posthuman in fact “is not about ‘progress’ per se, but is rather a new culture of transversalism in which the ‘purity’ of human nature gives way to new forms of creative evolution that refuses to keep different species, or even machines and humans, apart” (Gane 432). Yet, this communal—almost symbiotic—life that humans appear to share with the AI Mothers, is not free from contradictions. Humans as we know them are on the brink of the extinction but the Mothers put all their efforts in safeguarding them, even if this might mean to force genetic mutations in their bodies. At the same time, the human is completely dependent on the care the Mothers are enacting; without their presence humanity would have long been extinct. And here Pulcini’s notion of care becomes again a valid perspective to read nonhuman technological care in Kawakami’s novel. The Mothers’ care in fact is not completely unselfish. If the “human”—or rather all the varied posthuman existences that emerged as a result of the Mothers’ actions—were to perish, the AI Mothers would no longer have a reason to exist.¹¹ Then, just like Klara was motivated to act out of fear for the fate of Josie, the AI Mothers are enacting practices of posthuman care as a result of the same emotion. Yet, in this case the fear is not for some other external subject, but rather is entangled with the very existence of the mothers. Pulcini argues

¹¹ This becomes clear in the last chapter in which, another AI entity known as The Great Mother, tells the history of human extinction and the subsequent death of all the AI Mothers: “Sometime after the last human died, the mothers followed suit. There were dozens of mothers, but their consciousnesses were connected. That is why they were able to follow through with their plan at any moment. They carefully decided how to destroy their own bodies. They had to use a very small bomb with a timing device, so that it would explode at the same time and then burst into flames. The bombs exploded at exactly the same time for all the mothers in each region” (Kawakami 370).

that it is paramount “first of all, to *distinguish between the various forms of care* and thus to propose not a single but a more complex and wider concept of care; in second place, to *distinguish between the emancipatory and negative aspects of care*” (“What Emotions” 65). Even though the goal of Pulcini remains to focus on practices of *good care*, accounting for the “negative” aspects of care could help read the practices of the AI Mothers within the space of nonhuman care, moving dramatically away from anthropocentrism. Despite being inspired by the Mothers’ egotistical desire to survive, nonhuman care is what allows for the creation of posthuman identities in a world in which the “human” could no longer survive. And here comes the question of ethics. Nonhuman care might not be ethical when looked at from an anthropocentric perspective; the Mothers are in fact somehow fastening the crumbling of the “traditional” human and hastening in the new posthuman existences. Nonetheless, when moving away from the idea of human centrality and letting go of the necessity for human survival, indeed the Mothers’ nonhuman practices of care can be understood as a way of making kin beyond the human and caring for the more-than-human world. In a sense then, the Mothers are not caring for the “human” but for what Pulcini terms an *unknown other* (“What Emotions” 68). That is, a kind of otherness that “confront us with [...] our inability to provide hospitality and care for those that our imagination stigmatizes as *different*” (“What Emotions” 68). And this inability to care is still present in Kawakami’s novel, juxtaposed to the practices of care the Mothers are carrying out to protect the new posthumans. One of the *mimamori* in fact, despite her role as a “guardian” to those new mutating posthuman bodies, and a supposed participant in the practices of nonhuman care together with the Mothers, still upholds the view of the *Anthropos*. Despite her existence being also the result of the technological care of the Mothers and having been educated to safeguard the differences of the varied posthuman existences, one *mimamori* still clings to her perceived humanity¹² and when she finds a community of new “humans” she is not able to treat them with care and instead decides to poison them, as they do not meet her standards for “traditional humanity:”

I knew exactly what I was doing. I was lying on my stomach at the edge of the lake. In this lake they fish, swim, they drink its water, and wash new born babies in it. They are completely depended on these waters. I was about to pour out my poison into the lake. I could not bear the fact that they exist in this world. I did not want to report them to the Mothers. I feared that they might be more likely to adapt to the earth than us, the present humans. [...] I put my finger on the lid of the poison container. I opened it gently and let the poison flow into the water. (Kawakami 177-178)

Conclusion

Both Ishiguro and Kawakami present female technological others, but what does this convey when analyzed from the perspective of nonhuman care? Ishiguro chose a female AF as the narrator of his story, seemingly reinforcing the idea that women “are naturally inclined to love and therefore care for the other” (Pulcini,

¹² On this point see Baquè “Memories of Extinction”.

“What Emotions” 66). First of all, it is necessary to notice that, despite Klara being the center of the narrative, AF can be both boys and girls, therefore seemingly ascribing the same caring role to both genders. In addition, as I demonstrated above, Klara work of nonhuman care is no longer merely at the service of anthropocentric needs, but rather turns into the expression of a posthuman attention to the interconnection of all existences. When it comes to Kawakami, the question seems to be even more complex because her AI entities call themselves Mothers, apparently already reinforcing the association between gender and care work. Then we are left to wonder if Kawakami might be consciously playing on the female robot ideal so much present in the Japanese context, forcing the readers to confront their own biases when it comes to care. In fact, these technological others are no longer passive objects enduring human hubris, instead they are active posthuman agents fully participating in making kin as a “gently defamiliarizing move” (Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* 103). Lastly, both novels take a stance against the idea of infinite growth and economic development. They create worlds that are suffering the consequences of the Anthropocene in which the human still believes in its own superiority without realizing its inherent inability to survive alone—mirrored in the necessity for nonhuman care. These two novels force their readers to “reckon with [their] own anxieties about the future of capitalism and to confront deep questions about the nature of [...] existence, and humanity” (Mejia and Nikolaidis 303).

In this article, I have demonstrated how nonhuman care provides a way to destabilize anthropocentrism and create kinships beyond the human. Through the notion of *care for* the world suggested by Pulcini, I examined how practices of nonhuman care account for the entanglements of existence and create possibilities for the emergence of posthuman and nonanthropocentric futures. Whereas many science fiction novels treat the technological other as a victim of human exceptionalism or as a rebel against the forces of anthropocentrism, the novels under scrutiny in this article bring forward the possibility of technology both as a subject and agent of care. Acknowledging the fact that this nonhuman—and maybe also posthuman—care not always meets the anthropocentric ideal of ethical or good care, it is possible to read these practices as attempts at generating posthuman kinships in a time in which human identity is more fragile than ever. And that is probably good.

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Weird Ghosts of the Anthropocene: The Spectral Encounter in New Weird Fiction as a Conceptual Metaphor for Ecocritical Theory

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Abstract

In *The Great Derangement*, Amitav Ghosh links the reluctance of contemporary fiction to tackle the environmental crisis to the inadequacy of realism, with which Western “high” literature has been associated since the rise of the modern novel, to describe the “hyperobject” quality (Clark 140) of the Anthropocene. This paper argues that the genre labeled as New Weird, which strives to portray the *Unheimlich*, the eerie, or precisely the weird in our familiar reality, offers an answer to this aesthetic challenge, having found an especially powerful literary device in spectral encounters. In the works of many New Weird authors, environmental concerns are often embodied by the encounter of human protagonists with the ghostly apparitions of non-human entities. A close reading of three stories from China Miéville’s collection *Three Moments of an Explosion*, “Polynia,” “Covehithe” and “Estate,” will serve as a detailed example of how the portrayal of people’s behavior in encountering ‘weird’ spectral presences bears a specific ecological significance. This significance reverberates in the use of spectrality as a conceptual metaphor in contemporary ecocritical theory, thus corroborating the claim of this genre as the most productive for our historical times.

Keywords: New Weird, spectrality, non-human, ecology, uncanny.

Resumen

En *El gran desvarío*, Amitav Ghosh vincula la reticencia de la ficción contemporánea a abordar la crisis medioambiental con la inadecuación del realismo, con el que se ha asociado la “alta” literatura occidental desde el surgimiento de la novela moderna, para describir la cualidad de “hiperobjeto” (Clark 140) del Antropoceno. En este artículo se argumenta que el género denominado *New Weird*, que se esfuerza por retratar lo *Unheimlich*, lo perturbador, o precisamente lo extraño en nuestra realidad familiar, ofrece una respuesta a este desafío estético, habiendo encontrado un dispositivo literario especialmente poderoso en los encuentros espectrales. En las obras de muchos autores de la ficción *New Weird*, la preocupación por el medio ambiente se plasma a menudo en el encuentro de protagonistas humanos con apariciones fantasmales de entidades no humanas. Una lectura atenta de tres relatos de la colección de China Miéville *Three Moments of an Explosion*, “Polynia,” “Covehithe” y “Estate,” mostrará cómo el retrato del comportamiento de las personas al encontrarse con presencias espectrales “extrañas” tiene un significado ecológico específico. Este significado reverbera en el uso de la espectralidad como metáfora conceptual en la teoría ecocrítica contemporánea, corroborando así la reivindicación de este género como el más productivo para nuestros tiempos históricos.

Palabras clave: New Weird, espectralidad, no-humano, ecología, uncanny.

Introduction

Specters and ghosts have haunted human cultures since very ancient times. From Plinio the Young's mentioning of strange apparitions and haunted houses (see Cigliana), to Shakespeare's ghosts in *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*, to Stanley Kubrick's *Shining*, they have played a major role at least, though certainly not only, in the Western collective imagination. As supernatural entities, spiritual returnings or psychological projections, specters have populated a much larger body of legends and folktales than any written tradition can record. Yet what is clear, even just from the examples of which literary texts are scattered, as the editors of *The Spectralities Reader* state, is that "their representational and socio-cultural functions, meanings, and effects have been at least as manifold as their shapes—or non-shapes" (1).

In this essay, I argue that the "representational and socio-cultural functions, meanings and effects" of spectrality have assumed renewed significance, in the 21st century, within the context of ecocriticism and Anthropocene studies. This significance reflects itself in (and might be, in its turn, fuelled by) the presence of a particular kind of spectrality used in the literary genre known as New Weird. Based on the example of three short stories by New Weird author China Miéville, I will demonstrate that the ecological implications of spectral presences and their encounter with human protagonists, as they appear in New Weird texts, make this genre and aesthetics the most productive for our historical times.

In *The Great Derangement*, Amitav Ghosh argues that most contemporary "high" literature is still reluctant to portray that which should be our biggest concern as humans in the 21st century: the environmental crisis. Ghosh traces this reluctance back to the rise of the modern novel, when high literature started to be associated with realism. Conventional literary realism is rather unfit to describe climate change, whose slowly increasing effects are difficult to grasp and make visible within the telling of a human protagonist's life. So are environmental catastrophes, since they are not usually perceived as plausible occurrences, thus as "realistic." They are rather portrayed, especially by politics and the media, as incredible, extraordinary events. Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel, for instance, reportedly commented on the floods which ravaged Western Europe in 2021 as being "surreal" and "ghostly" (see Moulson). As a consequence, most literary texts which have ventured to tackle the crisis belong to those genres typically banned from what Ghosh calls "serious fiction:" horror, fantasy and science fiction. In fact, only in the realm of non-realist literature are stories allowed to be based on *highly improbable* events. However, portraying ecological disasters as science-fictional, magic, or surreal "would be to rob them of precisely the quality that makes them so urgently compelling—which is that they are actually happening on this earth, at this time" (Ghosh 27). This is why, I argue, the New Weird constitutes exactly the kind of literary aesthetic which is needed in this historical moment.

The label "weird" is generally used to define either the works of H.P. Lovecraft, who stands as the almost exclusive representative of the so-called "Old Weird" (the

founding phase of the genre at the beginning of the 20th century), or the fiction of contemporary authors such as China Miéville, Jeff Vandermeer, N.K. Jemisin, Caitlin Kiernan, Stephen Graham Jones, among many others, as writers of the “New Weird.” New Weird literature is neither simply science-fiction nor horror; although it can borrow features from fantasy or magical realism, it exceeds the limits of any of these categories. What New Weird texts strive to portray is the uncanny, the eerie, or precisely the *weird* in our familiar reality. By embodying environmental concerns as the uncanniness which results from inexplicable events immersed in an everyday context, they lead us to realize how our world—the real, present world, not a futuristic or magical one—is itself “weird”. One of the most powerful rhetorical devices through which they achieve this effect is, precisely, the spectral, and especially the portrayal of human reactions to the encounter with it.

Specters are by definition liminal beings (Blanco and Peeren 2). As literary figures, they usually perform a bridge-function, connecting different, supposedly even opposite dimensions. They connect life and death—from Patroclus and Anchises returning from Hades to communicate with the living, to the unrestful souls who haunt Scrooge in Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*. As a consequence, they also connect past and present, disrupting our illusion of a clear division among temporal dimensions. This is the case even when, as happens more and more often throughout the Gothic and Modernism, it is unclear whether they should be interpreted as supernatural beings or projections of the livings’ psyche. This happens, for instance, in Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw*, a novel built upon a structural ambiguity so refined that it is impossible to state with certainty whether it is the story of a haunted house or of a mentally unstable governess, projecting all the repressed impulses of her unconscious mind onto the figure of a ghost only she can see.

A ghost which is imaginary, yet actually is seen by those who want (or need) to see it, is a bridge between rationality and imagination or madness, a logical incongruity which makes us doubt our very ability to understand the world around us. This is where spectrality meets the New Weird: the feeling aroused by a *weird* entity, to use Mark Fisher’s most accredited words, is one of “wrongness,” meaning such entity “makes us feel that it should not exist, or at least it should not exist here” (Fisher 15). Hence, the *weird* entity itself can be said to possess a spectral quality. It does not need to be a ghost in the traditional sense—be it a spirit, a supernatural being or a projection of the mind. Yet, just like a ghost, the weird is that which “literally exists but nonetheless resists linguistic description or cognitive explanation, the thing that dismantles the very tools of signification and representation that fiction depends on” (Wilk).

In the following sections, I will first show how New Weird literature employs spectrality in an innovative way, especially to represent issues related to the Anthropocene and to human-environment relationships. To this end, I will give examples taken from the selected works of Jeff Vandermeer, Stephen Graham Jones and Margaret Atwood. Secondly, the analysis of three short stories by one of the most acclaimed New Weird authors, China Miéville, will allow a closer look into weird

spectrality and its ecological value. Finally, I will argue for the theoretical potential of weird spectrality. I will show how its most typical aspect, the feeling of uncanniness, wrongness and logical impossibility, also characterises the “ghosts of the Anthropocene” (see Tsing et al.) as a metaphor for ecocritical theory.

The Ecological Significance of Spectrality in New Weird fiction

The kind of aesthetics to which “weird” spectrality comes closest to is probably magical realism. Some of the most prominent authors of this genre, indeed, including Borges and Murakami, have been linked to the Weird not least for the peculiarity of ghostly apparitions in their works (both authors appear in the Vandermeers’ compendium *The Weird*). Especially clear is also the resonance with the works of Franz Kafka, who is in fact considered by some as a precursor of magical realism (Rajabi et al. 3). Kafka’s prose, whose translation into English in the 1940s has exercised a great influence on Weird literature (see Sperling), is populated by extremely “weird” entities. They can be animals, objects, or just undefined living beings with logically impossible features, such as the famous undefinable creature Odradek in “Die Sorge des Hausvaters”. Through this particular type of spectrality, especially when applied to environmental issues, New Weird literature obtains an effect on readers which can again be explained by Fisher’s enlightening words: “If the entity or object is here, then the categories which we have up until now used to make sense of the world cannot be valid. The weird thing is not wrong, after all: it is our conceptions that must be inadequate” (15).

This way the genre has, I argue, achieved what for Ghosh is literature’s greatest challenge in our historical times: representing climate change by necessarily departing from conventional realism, but without presenting it as science-fictional or surreal, in order to push the reader toward the alarming awareness of its urgently real and present status. This level of representation is most successfully achieved by China Miéville, whose works are considered among the milestones of the genre, in the three stories which will be closely analysed in the next section. The same, however, can be said of many other New Weird authors.

Jeff VanderMeer’s *Southern Reach Trilogy*, one of the most acclaimed recent pieces of New Weird fiction, is admittedly concerned with environmental issues (see Hageman et al.). The novel, set on a US coast in a very near future, is centered on the idea of *Area X*, an expanding zone of natural “wilderness” where inexplicable natural phenomena have been occurring for thirty years, leaving authorities and scientists clueless. Many of these phenomena have more or less explicit spectral qualities: in the first novel, *Annihilation*, the protagonist (nicknamed “Ghost Bird”) encounters a series of impossible creatures, from animal hybrids and human-shaped plants to actual zombies.

Stephen Graham Jones, another much appreciated writer of weird fiction, has centered his short story “Little Lambs” on a doubly spectral figure. The narrator is one of four scientists assigned to a peculiar and dangerous mission: monitoring a

building which has suddenly appeared, one night, among the snowy lands of Wyoming. The building has been recognised as a former prison, which had collapsed in West Virginia more than eight years before, killing all of its prisoners and guards. As the narrator soon finds out, the structure is haunted by the ghost of a prisoner. But the real *weird* specter in the story is the prison itself, the returning of a no-longer-existing building, which even moves by its own will a few centimeters a day. If the spectral nature of these events is clear, their link to ecological concerns might be less evident: once again, it lies in humans' encounter with them. The way the scientists become absorbed in the frozen landscape of this incessant winter, learning to distinguish every shade of light and uncanny sound, clearly resonates with questions of human-environment relationship, as does the unstoppable, exhaustingly slow and apparently aimless progression of the spectral structure. The latter, moreover, shows a *weird* connection to both nature and technology: as the narrator reports, "if you bolt a lightning rod to it [...] when the lightning finally comes, months later, it'll strike our antenna instead" (1102).

One more short story which is not traditionally classified as weird or climate fiction but has been read as such by feminist author and journalist Elvia Wilk, is Margaret Atwood's "Death by Landscape." It is the story of a schoolgirl who gets lost in the woods during a summer camp in Canada. Her best friend, walking beside her, loses sight of her for a few minutes and never sees her again. Not even the body of the disappeared girl ever gets found. Although there might be a rational explanation, the protagonist seems convinced that her friend, wishing to escape from a life she felt too constraining, has arbitrarily decided to vanish. She has merged with the landscape, dissolved in it, maybe—as Wilk suggests—turned into one of the trees of that wood, her ghost becoming the symbol of a new, more intimate and entangled relationship of humans with nature and the landscape.

In conclusion, what makes this genre really stand out is that the "weird" spectral, rather than being embodied by a single human-like entity, is always transferred to narrative elements which can hardly be described as "ghosts" in the traditional sense. Consequently, the story's frame does not shift to a magical or supernatural one. The encounters with this kind of spectrality are "weird" precisely because they occur in such a realistic and consequently relatable context that the reader is forced to acknowledge their reality, despite their logical impossibility. In the following section, I will exemplify this statement in further detail through the analysis of spectral encounters and their ecological significance in three short stories from China Miéville's collection *Three Moments of an Explosion*: "Polynia," "Covehithe," and "Estate."

A Close Reading of New Weird Spectrality in Three Stories by China Miéville

The three stories will be examined together, first with a focus on the spectral quality of their weird apparitions, then for their ecological significance, and finally for

how the latter is intensified by the description of people's reaction at the encounter with the weird specters.

In "Polynia," whose title is "a variant spelling of the Russian word *polynya*, meaning 'an area of open water in the middle of an expanse of sea ice' (OED)" (Carrol 83), an unnamed first-person narrator tells a story he has experienced as an eleven-year old child. He recalls the first time giant masses of ice appear in the sky above London, to be soon identified as icebergs. Some people start speculating about a relation with another inexplicable apparition, years prior to the event: the sudden growth of coral on the facades of buildings in Brussels. Later in the story, the narrator seems to suggest a link with one more recent weird event: the invasion of forest undergrowth in some factories in Japan. The story focuses on the description of the icebergs and people's reaction to them. While adult society tries to first analyze and explain, then destroy, and eventually just accept the presence of icebergs, children-like the protagonist and his friends—are excited by these surreal beings and by the whole "exploration" narrative constructed around them, as by a game.

In "Covehithe," the protagonist is a British veteran named Dughan, whose story is narrate by a third-person narrator, if unmistakably from his perspective. One night, Dughan brings his daughter to the cliffs in the actually existing village of Covehithe near Norwich. His goal is to witness the reemergence from the sea of the P36, an oil rig of the Petrobras company, which sank in the sea near Roncador, Brasil, in 2001. It soon becomes clear that this is not the first time a sunken oil platform has 'come alive' and emerged from the sea. The first one was the *Rowan Gorilla I*, which sank in the North Sea in 1988 and came back in Halifax, Canada, in the early 2000s, and it has already been followed by many others. Dughan learned when and where the P36 is going to emerge from former colleagues, since he was himself involved in a "mission" to explore the first ghost-rig, the *Gorilla I*. At the end of the story, Dughan and his daughter run away from the cliffs just one second before the oil rig has come so close to them as to almost touch the girl.

In "Estate," another unnamed protagonist (and this time, again, first-person narrator) wakes up two nights running to a burst of mysterious noise. This turns out to be caused by the loud barking of a group of foxes, accompanied by a mix of inexplicable smells and lights, as of something burning, though no fire is visible. On the morning of the third day, among a gathering of worried neighbours, the narrator meets Dan, an old acquaintance. He was banned from the estate with his family as a child—for reasons which remain untold—and is now back as a garbage collector. Yet that night he takes the role of a sort of ranger when, in the dark, the protagonist and some other curious people witness the appearance of a stag whose antlers are on fire, but who does not move or do anything to try and save itself. Dan starts running behind the stag and tries to shoot it but fails. After causing a lot of fear and a few accidents, the stag gets thrown off a bridge by the impact with a car and dies in the river. Again, the narrator learns of similar apparitions of spectral alive-dying animals being witnessed around the world, from Birmingham and Glasgow to Montreal, Paris, and New York.

The recurrent motif of weird apparitions with a symbolic capacity to problematize the relationship between humans and nature allows a common interpretation of the three stories within an ecocritical framework which, I suggest, gains remarkable strength from this innovative use of spectrality. What makes the icebergs in “Polynia” ghostly is, firstly and maybe ironically, their being white, ungraspable entities, which float “seemingly randomly, according to their own currents” (Miéville 3). They can even suddenly start to roll toward each other, as if moved by a will of their own, accelerating to the point of collision. They are explicitly referred to in spectral terms when, after their appearance in London, time starts to be counted in “days post-manifestation” (6). The psychological and meteorological atmosphere that the bergs create is “profoundly unsettling” (8), as is the look in the eyes of the first explorer who dies on a scientific mission to analyze them, in the last picture taken before her death. What is clear is that they are returnings from the past, impossible apparitions of once and elsewhere existing natural entities. Although they might not be *living* beings, their disappearance from the world, caused by human activities, equals a metaphorical *death* or extinction. However, an iceberg is no traditional ghost, neither a spirit nor a delusive projection of the mind: it is “exactly what it looks like: an iceberg. No more, no less” (7).

The same holds true for the explicitly named “revenant rigs” in “Covehithe” (Miéville 344). There is no doubt regarding their nature: they are oil drilling platforms, once sunken but now resurfacing from the sea, as if—again—moved by a will of their own. Once more, the specters are related to the water. These, however, are no natural entities which used to “live” at sea and are now displaced in an impossible elsewhere. They are human-made artifacts, which have been swallowed by the sea but eventually manage to come back toward the land. This may suggest either a specific will to haunt the humans who once built and abandoned them, or the sea itself spitting them out in an act of revenge, as will be later argued in discussing their ecological value. Just like the icebergs, then, the rigs are uncanny returnings from the past, here appearing in a typical ghost-story setting: a dark night, only illuminated by the moon. However, unlike the icebergs, they are described almost as monsters or animal-like beings. These huge creatures, with legs each as wide as a smokestack, come toward the cliffs with “clumsy steps” (341), moving “like a quadruped skiing” (342). At the end of the story we learn that they are somehow even reproducing, as so-called “baby rigs” (349) are witnessed emerging from waters around the world.

If the specters in “Covehithe” are animal-like but human-made artifacts, the spectral figures in “Estate” are instead real animals, but have been abused and thus modified by humans, which is what has turned them into specters. The antlers of the stag, in fact, are “saturated with something bituminous, long- and slow-burning” (291), a burning which the animal does not seem to perceive, because—as is later explained—it has been fed some ketamine derivative in order to numb its fighting instinct. Moreover, the second type of spectral animals, some alive-dying rabbits witnessed in New York, are also undeniably the result of a human—or at any rate

intentional—action. These rabbits have “something glinting and wrong in their ears” (292), which turns out to be knives, with signs still visible of how they have been sutured to their skin. The “dying things” (293), however, are for a while still quite alive, enough to jump around and cut the hands of those who try to catch them. The spectrality of these extremely weird apparitions lies, I suggest, in the fact that ghosts are by definition in a suspended state between life and death. They are once-alive creatures returned from the realm of the dead, no longer living, but not properly dead either. The animals in “Estate” are trapped in the same in-between state: they are dying, but keep being alive for an unnatural length of time and, long after they logically should have been dead, somehow they still are not. Moreover, the stag only dies when thrown off a bridge into the water. Since someone asks Dan: “Did it work?”, and given the narrator’s witnessing of strange lights and smells as of burning on the previous night, the reader is led to think that it was not the first burning stag witnessed. This might also mean that the fire, which seemed to be killing it, was not actually killing it—if it ever even was “alive.”

What links the three types of specters is their being non-human creatures, in the case of the “Polynia” not even organic and in that of “Covehithe” also artificially made, which however show a capacity to act beyond what they are supposed to be capable of according to logic. Icebergs, coral and forest undergrowth—all natural elements which are disappearing from the planet due to human-caused climate change—(re)appear in the most unlikely places, and they grow back despite any effort to destroy them. Sunken oil rigs—who have been left to drown in the sea, causing pollution and death in its environment—emerge from the water and find their way back to where they came from, bringing destruction and death to human cities. Stags and rabbits—according to a common idealization of “nature,” two of the most innocent and harmless creatures on earth—start spreading panic and destruction with fire and blades inexplicably bound to their bodies. And, once more, it is humans themselves who have caused it. These are all forms of that agency of the non-human world which Amitav Ghosh refers to as one of the aspects of life in the Anthropocene struggling to find place in realist literature. At the very beginning of *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh recalls experiences of harmless looking objects turning to harmful living beings, such as vines revealing themselves as snakes, as examples of the uncanny. He starts by asking the poignant question: “Who can forget those moments when something that seems inanimate turns out to be vitally, even dangerously alive?” (3). The uncanny way in which these seemingly inanimate or naturally harmless non-human specters come (back) to haunt humans bears a clear ecological significance which will be discussed in the next section.

The Ecological Significance of Weird Spectrality in the Three Stories

Some of these stories might be considered more “overtly environmental” (Carrol 83) than others: the first two have already been read as such. “The ecological uncanny of Miéville’s tale”, as Carrol writes with respect to “Polynia,” “manifests itself

in the form of the ghostly revenants of vanished Nature, which have reappeared to haunt global metropolises” (83). The story seems to be set in a not-too-distant future, if a sentence like “It had been a while since London had had a proper cold, even in December and January” (Miéville 13) might well apply to our present too—not coincidentally, and all the more uncannily so. The apparitions can be easily interpreted as nature’s revenge against human civilization: when “the city met their cold” (5), the icebergs start to melt and break down into pieces. However, just as the coral growing on Brussels’ facades which authorities have pointlessly tried to eradicate, they grow back. The so-called London Masses are thus changing the city’s weather: “from every one of the masses sank microclimates” (4) which make people shiver when passing under them. They even create a new trend for so-called “berg-coats” among Londoners, who had not been able to wear this piece of fashion for a while. Year after year, the cold released from the bergs slowly becomes so intense that the whole city’s climate gets affected: “It might be warm summer, but you’ll open the curtains onto iced windows” (23). This may be read as a singularly specular revenge against the way in which human activities, especially the ones concentrated in metropolises like London, have affected the earth’s climate for centuries. Nonetheless, the only character in the story who seems to acknowledge this, or at least to have a sort of intuition, is a newsagent. He is the one to finally put into words what for the reader has long been clear, showing people in his shop images of the London Masses compared with those of Antarctica icebergs: “‘Look, they melt!’ he said. ‘First they melt and now look they come back’” (13).

The ecocritical value of the “petrospectral presences” (Miéville 345) haunting the second story is even more self-evident. The atmosphere is much darker than in “Polynia.” The specter is a sunken oil rig, coming “back” to life all twisted and on fire, as a “suddenly rising intricate blockness, black, angled and extruded” (341). Its iron, in a powerful image of ecological uncanny, is covered in barnacles from long laying on the seabed. This kind of specter, as its appearance suggests, seems more immediately dangerous and vindictive than the floating icebergs. The *Rowan Gorilla I* had even reached the city and “walked through buildings,” dripping “seawater, chemicals of industrial ruins and long-hoarded oil” (343). As the narrator acknowledges, they “might come, drill, go back to the water, even come up again, anywhere” (344): it is clear, though not fully comprehended, that the world is experiencing a “hydrocarbon Ragnarok” (344), whose link with questions of environmental destruction could not be more explicit.

A similar link is certainly less explicit, but not therefore less effective, in “Estate.” The spectral beings are not dead or extinct animals returning in a ghostly shape but, at least apparently, quite real and somehow still living. However, there are several clues to allow an interpretation of these as spectral figures within an ecological framework. One of the strongest images in the story is the contrast between the real animals and the “friendly plastic animals” which populate a playground near the narrator’s house. He is first reminded of them at the sight of the foxes, on the first night. This contrast contributes to creating a quite sinister

atmosphere since the very beginning of the story, enhanced by the feeling of something being “wrong” in the weather on the second night: “It was much colder than it should have been, like winter;” “There was no rain but the air felt wet” (285). Moreover, the figure of the plastic animals returns at the end of the story: after the accident of the burning stag, they are removed from the playground, and the narrator pictures them in his mind as they get buried under the earth, in a landfill. Despite not being directly related to the events involving the stag, the image clearly problematizes the relationship between humans and nature. Both the eerie appearance of the plastic objects themselves, inevitably destined to a landfill, and the blending of the distinction between “natural” creatures and human artifacts, suggested by their contrast with the “natural” but human-modified spectral animals, contribute to this effect. Another powerful moment, with a clear ecological resonance, is the first image of the stag’s antlers being on fire “like the branches of a great tree” (288). On the one hand, it is possible to interpret this as a reference to forest fires, one of the most drastic consequences of climate change. On the other hand, what seems even more suggestive is the very idea of this animal, with its head literally on fire, being unable to move or react in any way, because it is so numbed that it is unaware of being slowly dying. It might be venturous, but seems congruent with the ecological framework I have been arguing for so far, to read this image as a metaphor of humanity itself acting unaware, because numbed by its own poisoning ideologies, of the fact that—as it has been effectively stated, if some years after the publication of this story—“our house is on fire” (Thunberg).

Rather than in a specific allegorical meaning, however, the clue to the ecological significance of these figures could lie in the effect produced by their “weirdness,” rational impossibility and uncanny ungraspability. Precisely this effect is what urges readers to that critical response which Miéville, who considers his fiction as political as his Marxist non-fiction (see Gordon), wants to provoke us to. The specific feature of Miéville’s writing which so powerfully creates this effect is precisely what classifies his fiction as weird:

The settings of his texts often feel extremely close to our shared reality, yet there are always odd beings and objects and systems that distinguish Miéville’s worlds as weird. Between the elements of his fiction that are familiar and those that are strange, the reader’s mind toggles uncertainly. This experience attunes us to the notion that diverse worlds can coexist while also going unnoticed by each other. (Hageman 3)

The effect of proximity between our reality and the one depicted in the story is significantly enhanced first of all by the factual references to cities, governments and institutions of the real—that is, non-fictional—world. Secondly, and most impressively, by the description of people’s very relatable reactions to the impossible events happening in that uncannily relatable world. In “Estate,” at the encounter with the spectral entities people mainly express fear through shouting, attempts at running away from the animals or killing them (Dan, for instance, tries to shoot the stag with a rifle).

In “Covehithe,” while Dughan’s attitude at the apparition of the P36 is ambiguous (“his excitement was not wholly enthusiasm,” 340), the approach adopted

by authorities to handle the situation is quite univocal: they want to stop the revenant rigs at any cost. Investigations begin immediately, and the UN even engages a “Platform Event Repulsion Unit” of “scientists, engineers, theologians and exorcists, soldiers, veterans like Dughan” (344). The best strategy they can come up with, however, like Dan in “Estate”, is to attack the specters with weapons. This reaction probably ironizes on the inconclusiveness of politics, offering military responses to limit the consequences of events whose causes are deeply rooted in society. That which the revenant rigs embody, indeed, and is hopelessly being fought with bullets is not just a physical object, but the repressed conscience of humanity’s guilt in the environmental crisis. If the threatening consequences of these events are clear, the possible causes remain indeed obscure: “They tried to figure out what economies of sacrifice were being invoked, for what this was punishment. Ruined, lost, burnt, scuttled rigs were healing on the ocean floor and coming back” (344). The hint to a dynamics of sacrifice and punishment, and to the rigs as something hurt which need “healing,” might suggest a vague—if unconscious—intuition of the spectral presences being linked to a human responsibility. Nonetheless, their deepest meaning does not get acknowledged by any characters in the story. What is more, the specters are soon normalized by society: in a children club, mentioned at the end of the story, games and activities with a clear didactic intent are being organized to learn the history of the revenant oil rigs and the mechanisms of their reproduction.

People’s unawareness, the authorities’ helplessness and the market’s readiness to transform everything into a chance for profit is even more blatant in “Polynia,” arguably the most uncanny of the three stories in this respect. The way Londoners react to the spectral encounters is described by the narrator in the very first line: “When cold masses started to congeal above London, they did not show up on radar. By the time they started to, perhaps two hours later, hundreds of thousands of people were already out in the streets and gaping skywards” (3). The public immediately start discussing the incredible event on social media, and every possible theory on the icebergs’ nature (denounced as hoax, angels, aliens, or a terrible conspiracy) is assessed. The government’s reaction, on the other hand, is limited to sending “army and specialist police unit” (3) to monitor the masses and various crews of scientists to study them. It might be interesting to note that here, unlike in “Covehithe”, there is no desperate involvement of theologians and exorcists, probably because the threat seems less imminent and generally less dangerous. An aspect which again ironizes, if in a different respect, on the way politics and societies more generally tend to deal with the environmental crisis. This appears in fact to be the focus of such a detailed account of people’s attitude toward that which, to the reader, looks like a clear wake-up call to environmental awareness. Portraying the way a far too relatable society does (not) react to this call, by turning the icebergs into TV series or commodities and building a narrative of “urban exploration” around them which fuels the children’s innocent enthusiasm and excitement, might be the key used to build the growing feeling of uncanniness and precisely of *weirdness* which pervades the story.

In the following and final section, I will explain how specters have come to be used not only as literary figures, but also as conceptual metaphors in a range of disciplines, from Derrida's *hauntology* to ecocriticism. Finally, by suggesting a link between the type of spectrality employed by New Weird fiction and by ecocritical theory, I argue that precisely the weird quality of this kind of spectrality makes it an especially effective tool to represent and discuss the climate crisis.

Spectrality as a Framework for Ecocritical Theory

As has been discussed in the first section of this article, ghosts have always been present in Western literatures and cultures. However, some historical periods have been more prone to receiving them than others, one of them notably being the late nineteenth century (Blanco and Peeren 2). The increasing number of spirits and specters in Romantic, Gothic and fantastic literature, the dominating literary trends of the time, sparked a growing interest in the idea of spectrality even outside the realm of fiction, as a means to explore and communicate with dimensions different from everyday, material reality. Thus, spectrality came to be used as a metaphor in various fields, from popular science and technology (such as the telegraph, photography, the cinema) to spiritualism. Nonetheless, the figurative use of the ghost "remained grounded, to an extent, in the ghost's possible reality as an empirically verifiable supernatural phenomenon, making it less a tool for obtaining insight into something else than itself an object of knowledge and scientific experimentation" (3). This led to a mistrust of the use of spectrality by scholars as "not serious," being mainly associated with literal spiritistic beliefs.

It is only in the second half of the twentieth century that spectrality turns into a highly productive metaphor for the questioning of all philosophical constructs and ideologies. Already in 1949, Gilbert Ryle's classic of twentieth-century philosophy *The Concept of Mind* employs the famous expression "the ghost in the machine" to criticize the binary division between the human body and mind as opposite poles within the same category. Yet it is ultimately the deconstructionist movement and especially its founder Jacques Derrida to fully rehabilitate spectrality as a scholarly notion. In his renowned work *Spectres de Marx*, Derrida coins the term *hauntology*, as an alternative ontology which "draws attention to the ephemeral nature of the present and offers the specter as neither being or non-being, alive or dead—the ultimate conceptual, and cultural, paradox" (Shaw 2). From his deconstructionist perspective, in fact, spectrality is a concept which "operates in the between-spaces that separate recognized boundaries", thus highlighting "the limitations of such ontological categories and the limits of standard perceptions" (Shaw 6). Derrida's *hauntology* soon becomes so popular that the year of the publication of *Spectres de Marx*, 1993, is known as the "spectral turn" of contemporary cultural theory (Blanco and Peeren). Since then, the use of ghosts not as "possible actual entities" but as a proper "conceptual metaphor," standing not just for a single idea but for a whole discourse, has been spreading across a variety of critical fields (Blanco and Peeren 1).

One of the fields in which it has been especially fruitful is ecocritical and Anthropocene theory, where spectrality is used to discuss issues linked to the environmental crisis and its consequences: the sudden and catastrophic events as well as the less extreme but inexorably, if slowly, paradigm-changing ones. That such events can be best understood through a spectral framework has been effectively argued for by Laura A. White's in her book *Ecospectrality*. White claims that specters are a powerful response to the question of scale in the representation of the climate crisis, i.e. the problem of condensing the macroscopic as well as the microscopic aspects of the crisis and its causes into a scale which is understandable from a human perspective. Since specters are "a force that operates between the visible and the invisible, the corporeal and the incorporeal" (White 2), they are able to cross the boundaries of temporal as well as spacial scales. They can "resurface across centuries and continents, not only putting vast scales into intimate contact, but also making minute scales perceptible, for instance manifesting traces of toxins that would evade visual detection" (White 2). This scale paradox makes the Anthropocene the era of what Timothy Morton has called "hyperobjects", described by Jeff VanderMeer as:

Something viscous (they stick – to your mind, to the environment) and nonlocal (local versions are manifestations from afar). Their unique temporality renders them invisible to human beings for stretches of time and they exhibit effects in the interrelationship of objects [...] a hyperobject is everywhere and nowhere, cannot really be held in one place by the human brain, reaction to it by the human world is often irrational or inefficient or wrong. If global warming in the Anthropocene can be identified in general as a hyperobject, there is perhaps further value in describing it specifically as a kind of haunting.

In his article, VanderMeer proposes a "spectral" reading of climate change as a complex web of processes and phenomena, which we are not fully able to understand, and whose reverberations on everyday life are uncanny, because inexplicable and unexpected. This feeling of the uncanny, of something being wrong or logically impossible, is precisely what comes with the experience of the weird. This is why the ghosts of the Anthropocene, in one of the most important recent collections of ecocritical theory, *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* by Tsing, Swanson, Gan and Bubandt, are characterized by a "strangeness" (8) which profoundly resonates with the spectral figures of New Weird fiction. As the editors explain in the introduction, the (in)visible ghosts in our landscapes are traces of "past ways of life" (3), no-longer-present creatures or whole entanglements of natural phenomena, which the new geological forces of the Anthropocene—human activities—have brought to extinction. This type of ghosts, as they explain quoting H el ene Cixous, "are uncanny because they disturb the proper separation between life and death; they mark a "between that is tainted with strangeness. Such strangeness, the uncanny nature of nature, abounds in the Anthropocene, where life persists in the shadow of mass death" (Tsing et al. 8).

For anthropologist and forester Andrew S. Mathews, for instance, it is in the landscape of forests that we can most clearly recognize "ghostly forms" as traces of past relationships between "people, trees, and other non-humans," which have been

coexisting in forests for a very long time. “Although these forests are often empty of people, they are empty in a particular way; evidence of former human use is omnipresent” (Mathews 145). Even living beings, like animals, can be ghosts of the Anthropocene. In a recent article, social and cultural geographer Aurora Fredricksen narrates the return of wild flamingos in Florida as an uncanny apparition, the coming-back-to-life of animals which had been considered extinct from the region for years. The renewed presence of the long-absent forces on us the remembrance of the past ruination which has led to that and to many other disappearances, which will however not all come back to life. In defining this remembrance, Fredricksen employs an explicitly weird and eerie framework: “there is an uncanniness—an unsettled feeling of strangeness within the familiar—that resounds in the absences this return makes visible” (532).

To describe the experience of events related to the environmental crisis as ghostly, weird and uncanny, is a powerful way to make sense not merely of climate change itself, but most importantly of our attitude towards the encounter with it. The New Weird uses spectrality to make readers aware that what in a novel might seem too surreal to be true cannot be dismissed as “fiction:” the eerie feeling it provokes is the same type of reaction we have when confronted with issues of climate change in the “real” world. Ecocritical theory, on a different level, employs spectrality as a conceptual metaphor for these issues, explaining how actually weird our “real” world already is, because it departs from a concept of realism which in the Anthropocene has become obsolete. What this framework highlights, then, is the urgent need for an epistemological shift to follow this “spectral” shift in literature and cultural theory, in order to find new strategies and categories to deal with the climate crisis.

Conclusion

Jeff VanderMeer has described himself as “someone who wants to find new ways of telling stories that better fit the extremes of our era” (“Hauntings In The Anthropocene”). Demonstrating that establishing and especially reaching such an objective is a prerogative of New Weird fiction, or at least a challenge for which this genre seems to be most successful, was the aim of this paper. By presenting some examples of New Weird texts in which ghosts and specters serve a narrative function, I have argued for this particular kind of spectrality as the most productive framework to represent “the extremes of our era.” Additionally, the analysis of three short stories by one of the most praised contemporary authors of New Weird fiction, China Miéville, has served as a concrete example of this genre’s innovative use of spectrality. This, as I have shown, is mainly achieved by transferring the features of the traditional ghosts onto weird entities, whose more or less literal meaning can be reconducted to issues of the climate crisis. Finally, following a short summary of the process by which specters have turned from supernatural presences to conceptual metaphors of a new (hau)ontology, I have demonstrated the potential of weird spectrality as a theoretical framework for ecocriticism.

From multiple points of view, ghosts are in fact the perfect symbol to represent the weirdness of a crisis which is as ungraspable as it is present and real. Ghosts are not magical creatures or aliens from a different universe; they are traces of the past—our past—in the present, and the ghosts of the Anthropocene are the result of our own actions, the tangible absence of that which we have destroyed. Ghosts can also be projections of the subconscious mind. As such, they are a weighty metaphor of the repressed awareness of, on the one hand, our individual and collective responsibility towards climate change and, on the other hand, of the urgency and inexorability of its catastrophic consequences. Ghosts are, in brief, the exact embodiment of the paradox intrinsic to the weird event: rationally, we know it should not be real, but instead it is, and somehow we have to find a way to deal with its reality.

Dealing with the reality of the climate crisis requires new ways to speak of that which we cannot even think of, new categories to represent that which we can barely conceive of. We need a framework to embrace the ambiguity and accept the ungraspability, without denying the tangibility and urgency of the countless signals which nature is giving us that climate change is a one-way path, and we might be already past the point of no-return. The reason we need to search for these new ways in literature as well as in theory, to say it with the words of VanderMeer, is that “supposedly we already know these things, but sometimes fiction can make us feel them in our bones” (ibid). Ecocritical theory can explain the spectral nature of the Anthropocene, describe the uncanniness of finding ghostly traces of past ways of life in a forest, or of witnessing the returning of supposedly extinct animals. But the impossible spectral encounters in Miéville’s otherwise fully realistic fictional worlds have the power to make us ask ourselves the question: what if such seemingly impossible things were real? Since the ‘real’ world is actually full of unexpected and inexplicable events, what if it is us, who are no longer able to make sense of our own world? To tell what is possible from what is impossible, what is real from what is not? Perhaps, as Elvia Wilk has written, only “by learning to read weird fictions on a literal level it may be possible to see how weird (the fiction of) reality already is.”

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Humanising the Nonhuman: An Ecocritical Toolbox for Anthropomorphic Agency

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Abstract

Ecocriticism tends to acknowledge anthropomorphisms as a possible tool to create empathy for nonhumans, but in doing so mostly labels said tool as too sentimental for serious environmental literature. This paper aims to establish a categorisation of anthropomorphisms in media that allows a more diverse and detailed analysis of humanised nonhumans. It seeks to overcome the prevailing idea that anthropomorphic descriptions are limited to nonhuman animals and therefore extends the term to the humanisation of anything that is not human. Following the school of thought suggested by new materialism and material ecocriticism, nonhumans are regarded as having agency and anthropomorphising them allows humans to empathise with nonhumans. The categorisation of anthropomorphism proposed here is divided into each three markers and modes. The markers signify which part of the human can be observed in the anthropomorphised subject, while the modes define how this is realised. This article exemplifies the concept of markers and modes through anthropomorphic trees in literature, but as it is not a static concept, it allows for overlaps between categories and dynamic adaptations for other cases of anthropomorphised subjects. The three markers are Physicality, Sentience, and Language and may appear also in combinations. The modes are Projection, Manifestation, and Hybridity. As anthropomorphisms strongly intersect with theories of nonhuman agency, this, too, will be discussed in the final section of this article.

Keywords: Anthropomorphism, material ecocriticism, nonhuman agency, trees

Resumen

La ecocrítica tiende a reconocer los antropomorfismos como una posible herramienta para crear empatía hacia los no humanos, pero al hacerlo, en la mayoría de los casos, cataloga dicha herramienta como demasiado sentimental para la literatura medioambiental seria. Este artículo pretende establecer una categorización de los antropomorfismos en los medios de comunicación que permita un análisis más diverso y detallado de los sujetos no humanos que han sido humanizados. Pretende superar la idea predominante de que las descripciones antropomórficas se limitan a los animales no humanos y, por tanto, amplía el término al proceso de humanización de cualquier cosa que no sea humana. Siguiendo la corriente de pensamiento sugerida por el nuevo materialismo y la ecocrítica material, se considera que los no humanos poseen agencia y que el hecho de darle forma antropomórfica permite a los humanos empatizar con ellos. La categorización del antropomorfismo que se propone se divide en tres marcadores y modos. Los marcadores representan qué parte de lo humano puede observarse en el sujeto antropomorfizado, mientras que los modos definen cómo se realiza el proceso. Este artículo ejemplifica los conceptos de marcadores y modos a través de los árboles antropomórficos en la literatura, pero como no son conceptos estáticos, permite los solapamientos entre categorías y adaptaciones dinámicas para otros casos de sujetos antropomorfizados. Los tres marcadores son el carácter físico, la sensibilidad y el lenguaje, y pueden aparecer también en combinaciones. Los modos son proyección, manifestación e hibridación. Dado que los

antropomorfismos se cruzan en numerosas ocasiones con las teorías de la agencia no humana, se discutirá esto también en la sección final del artículo.

Palabras clave: Antropomorfismo, ecocrítica material, agencia no humana, árboles.

Introduction

From everyday projections of human emotions onto our pets, to abstract concepts about the inner thoughts of matter, anthropomorphism is a feature used on various different levels. It is not only a tool in literary analysis but can be found in everyday language as well as in academic papers across disciplines. In seeing the human in the nonhuman, the seemingly strict division of the nature/culture spheres—divisions that are (hu)man-made concepts, primarily originating from Western ontologies—come loose and may even change the way we humans view other beings and other matter. When speaking of the nonhuman, this essay refers to any form of being or matter that is seen as nonhuman from a human perspective. That which is not seen as human has the potential to become more like humans through, for example, anthropomorphism. This does not imply that becoming more human is desirable for the nonhuman, as all matter has value in its own right. But to present the nonhuman as more human-like can have positive effects on human-nonhuman relations. The examination of anthropomorphic techniques should be of particular value in ecocriticism since the relation between humans and their environments is a central topic in texts of ecocritical interest.

Ecocriticism, as a field within literary studies, analyses a variety of texts that bear some relation to environmental themes including agency beyond the human. However, some significant gaps in the study of anthropomorphisms so far remain within this discipline, which this paper aims to explore. The main issues are that previous research has primarily considered anthropomorphism in denigrating terms, and that discussions have almost exclusively been limited to the humanisation of nonhuman animals. There also seems to have been a lack of categorising different forms of anthropomorphic usage which this essay aims to solve by providing a toolkit for the analysis of anthropomorphisms. For the purpose of elaborating this toolkit, the essay will focus on literary examples. Most cases are taken from fictional works in the genre of speculative fiction. However, that the toolkit is not limited to this genre is seen in the case of Peter Wohlleben's popular science book *Das geheime Leben der Bäume* (2015). This essay will first contextualise the topic and elaborate on the shortcomings of previous approaches. The sections on the markers and modes of anthropomorphism will then explain the new approach that I propose. The three markers of anthropomorphism are Physicality, Sentience, and Language, providing categories through which the nonhuman in a narrative can be changed to become more human. These markers are then realised through (usually) one of the three modes: Projection, Manifestation, and Hybridity. As the present paper mainly aims at suggesting a new theory, rather than the detailed application thereof, the examples

for each marker and mode are given directly in the respective section. This essay will only discuss cases of arboreal anthropomorphism as the concept has been initially created with humanised trees in mind, yet it may be applied and adapted to other nonhuman matter, too. The selection of examples is highly Eurocentric which neither means that other cultures do not have unique connections to trees, too, and may even express this also through anthropomorphisms, nor that European or Western culture is one homogenous culture. While the examples here are all taken from literary texts, examples from audiovisual material such as the Peter Jackson adaptation of Tolkien's *The Two Towers* and the Ents therein indicate that the application of this toolkit is not necessarily limited to the page.

Once the toolbox for analysis is set up and explained with examples, the final part will discuss the topic of agency. It is important to look at agency since anthropomorphic depictions of nonhumans have the potential to influence how we humans perceive the agency of those that are not human. There is a tendency to demonise anthropomorphism for being inherently anthropocentric—both among ecocritics and natural scientists—; however, I argue that anthropocentrism is not inherently negative, but rather can allow humans to understand and empathise with the nonhuman.

Ecocriticism and Anthropomorphisms

The approach to anthropomorphic agency proposed in this essay situates itself in the wider academic field of ecocriticism, which concerns itself with the analysis of literary works in regard to environmental issues (Morgan 384; Buell 138). It is no longer expedient to limit oneself to literary material as the subject of study. Hence “the focus of the field has broadened recently to consider other cultural artefacts such as film and media” (Morgan 384), which this essay does not do itself, but it strongly encourages the application of the proposed concept to other mediums.

Ecocritics have long acknowledged the topic of anthropomorphism as a literary technique. However, previous research, or the lack thereof, has left the concept wildly understudied as well as giving it a bad reputation. Lawrence Buell and Greg Garrard, for example, are very tentative in their handling of anthropomorphism as they see in it the risk of being too anthropocentric even if it is “done in the interest of dramatizing the claims of plight of the natural world” (Buell 134). Garrard rightfully notes that anthropomorphism “has until recently been used exclusively as a pejorative term implying sentimental projection of human emotions onto animals” (154). The criticism of sentimentalism suggests that emotional involvement hinders the “proper” use of anthropomorphic writing, and yet avoiding our own emotions is not possible as they inform how we think about and act with other matter (Weik von Mossner 183). Thus, if emotionality is inevitable, it does not serve to generalise sentimentalism as inherently negative.

Nevertheless, the cautious voices should not be entirely ignored because, as with many tools, it depends on how they are used. Material ecocriticism's insistence

on the agency of all matter to tell their stories, helps to counteract these rather suspicious attitudes towards anthropomorphism. Material ecocriticism and its concept of storied matter is a useful way to reconcile material agency and anthropomorphism (Iovino 74; Oppermann 10). This essay agrees with the approaches that see anthropomorphism as having a great potential to be a tool that, when applied consciously, can make nonhuman agency tangible for humans.

When ecocritics like Buell and Garrard mention anthropomorphism, they only consider it in relation to animals and animal studies. To counter this tendency, this paper will focus on the humanised depictions of trees. Interdisciplinary approaches to plant studies like *The Language of Plants: Science, Philosophy, Literature* (Gagliano et al.) certainly help solve the problem of zoocentrism in ecocritical tradition. Studies that centre plants as the nonhuman are certainly needed, yet scholarship must not stop at plants. Instead, it is important to value “the capacity of nonhuman matter to participate in the construction of stories” (Raipola 264).

The toolkit proposed here also aims to tackle the problem of differentiating “between kinds of anthropomorphism” (Garrard 155). Garrard himself distinguishes between ‘crude’ and ‘sophisticated’ anthropomorphisms which is a valid distinction if one only wants to compare the ‘productive’ with the ‘unproductive.’ Neither crude nor sophisticated anthropomorphisms are clearly defined or elaborated on by Garrard and therefore do not pose a suitable basis to identify more subtle differences in their use. The phenomenon is much more complex than the above-mentioned, and rather biased, binary suggests. Upon closer comparison of humanised trees in different literary texts, the three markers of anthropomorphism I identified relate to what shape the anthropomorphised being takes in a text. In addition to the markers, the different modes of anthropomorphism shed light on *how* the technique is used in a text. In combination, these categories work as tools not only to identify anthropomorphic descriptions, but also to determine their inherent potential agency as offered to the humanised subject.

Anthropomorphic Markers

The primary category of anthropomorphisms consists of three markers which each describe a way of representing the nonhuman in a humanised way. The first, and most superficial, marker is Physicality, which applies to all instances in which an anthropomorphised subject is described to have physical similarities to humans. This marker is strictly limited to the physical description. It is, however, not limited to outward appearances but applies to internal organs or features of human corporeality, too. Whether the human features are the product of human imagination projected onto something nonhuman or if the text is describing a tree or animal that really has some physical resemblance to humans is determined not by the marker but by the mode of representation, which will be elaborated on in the next section.

An example of the first marker would be trees whose boughs are called arms, or which have legs that enable them to mirror human mobility. In concrete terms this

can be realised as in *Silver in the Wood* by Emily Tesh where “Bramble lifted her head sharply” (Tesh 30) with Bramble being a tree-like figure who possesses human physical traits such as a head and eyes. Naturally, humans are not the only beings whose bodies have heads and eyes; however, these features are considered as anthropomorphic, too, even if they are not exclusively human. When assigning eyes to a tree, most humans would by default imagine human eyes rather than those of another animal.

The second marker of anthropomorphism is Sentience. Here, the focus is on the subject’s depiction of a Sentience that parallels that of humans. Although many animals possess sentience, the signs of sentience in nonanimals are still often considered to be mere anthropomorphisms; thus I will necessarily address this attribute as an assumed anthropomorphism since these characteristics are perceived through a human lens. Sentience includes both human ways of thinking and the capability to experience certain emotions and the sensory world in a “human” manner. Sentience is, in fact, the broadest marker as it extends to essentially anything that originates in the human mind, including the measurement of time in artificial constructs such as minutes and weeks, as well as social constructs like politics and value systems, to name a few. Aspects of social life are considered here also as part of the Sentience marker, since social interaction is informed by psychological concepts and thus by Sentience. When applying the markers and modes to anthropomorphic animals, how far the species’ social behaviour is inherent and where the anthropomorphism sets in should, however, be considered. This contrast is one example of the special role of animals in this field.

To determine the amount of agency the Sentience marker provides to the nonhuman subject, it is necessary to consider the mode with which it is realised, considering, for example, whether the subjects are able to act upon their feelings and thoughts or not. Is it a woodworker imagining that the trees are listening to their every move, or is the wood also portrayed as being able to act upon the intruder by, for instance, actively dropping boughs as a warning to not harm the trees? A literary example of humanlike arboreal sentience is Ursula K. LeGuin’s 1971 short science-fiction story “Vaster Than Empires and More Slow” in which the protagonists encounter a sentient forest on a foreign planet. It is established that the human group’s empath “could pick up emotions or sentience from anything that felt” (LeGuin 9) which not only applies to the empath’s colleagues, but he is also able to connect with the foreign planet’s forest, or, plant-brain entity. The forest is assigned a “forest-mind” or “plant-mind” which emits “human”-like emotions (LeGuin 26) and can thus be classified as an anthropomorphism of Sentience. There are many such examples in science fiction, a genre that tends to be much more open towards expanded ideas of sentience and agency.

The markers of anthropomorphism can, but do not have to, appear in isolation. The presence of one or more markers proves that a case of anthropomorphism is at hand and therefore qualifies a text for the analysis of anthropomorphic modes. An example of a combination of the first two markers would be to describe a tree as

“weeping,” which, according to Tzachi Zamir, is a frequent anthropomorphic tendency in relation to trees (442). It both signifies the presence of human emotions like sadness or grief that would cause the weeping, and simultaneously implies the presence of human-like eyes or other physical characteristics that make it physically possible to (appear to) weep. Additionally, the final marker, Language, can naturally be combined with the previous ones, too, as the interconnected usage of markers is not uncommon.

For a nonhuman subject’s description to qualify for the final marker, it needs to give the subject the power of Language and Communication. Humans have discovered and attempted to decode many nonhuman animals’ interspecies forms of communicate, but to imagine nonanimal beings and matter to possess language still seems to be a mental leap that meets consistent resistance. Communication between trees or other plants is disputed among researchers, although plant scientists are increasingly gathering evidence that plants do communicate. Naturally, even the argument for chemical transmission of information between trees is a very different form of communication than human language systems. Monica Gagliano, a plant scientist herself, points out that

[t]he concept of the language of plants is neither a flight of fancy nor a figure of speech, symbol, metaphor, or allegory. Its precursors are theories that decouple language from a linguistic or verbal root and instead conceptualize it as an inherent attribute of all living and non-living phenomena. (xviii)

Her statement aligns with ideas in material ecocriticism, yet the language of trees can be difficult for the human mind to grasp. Nevertheless, anthropomorphisms may broaden our imaginative ability to perceive and recognize their plant language(s). Not being able to understand or notice a being’s language does not mean it does not have one. Rather, one may consider the possibility of “language [as] a fundamentally natural and inevitable consequence of being” (Gagliano 95). This marker can be realised, for example, by a human character imagining that the nonhuman other is talking to them, but it can also appear in the shape of a tree that speaks the language of humans, or vice versa. At the core of this marker is the fact that a form of language is established that effectively transcends communication barriers between the human and nonhuman world. The tree’s language does not have to be understood by the humans, but it must be possible to identify the arboreal language as having a similar complexity and quality to human language. This does not mean that language is limited to voice and vocalisation (Marder 112–13). Rather, vegetal beings should be considered to “talk without articulating and naming [...] they say through shaping their own matter” (Irigaray 129).

An example of the language of trees in literature can be seen in Maggie Stiefvater’s young adult fantasy novel *The Raven Boys* (2012) where the magical and sentient forest Cakeswater is a key location—and arguably a character in its own right—where “[t]he trees speak Latin” (Stiefvater 272). Most characters are not able to understand the trees for a lack of fluency in Latin on the one hand and the trees speaking in a modified pseudo-Latin on the other. In the later novels, the protagonists

acquire new tools and methods to understand Cabeswater, but initially, they are unable to clearly communicate with the forest despite their awareness of the trees having a complex language system.

Another concrete example of this marker would be in Terry Pratchett's fantasy Discworld novel *The Light Fantastic* (1986) in which wizard Rincewind has an entire conversation with a tree which concludes with the magician telling himself that "[i]f I was talking to a tree I'd be mad, and I'm not mad, so trees can't talk" (Pratchett 25). Through Rincewind, who is convinced that language is a trait that is not found in the arboreal realm, Pratchett plays with the concept of language as a purely human characteristic. Despite Rincewind's determination that trees cannot talk, the author proves the opposite as later other characters acknowledge that talking trees are nothing out of the ordinary within the fantastic realm of the Discworld. Furthermore, the author signifies the tree's words in parentheses just as every other character's spoken word and thus describes these trees as being anthropomorphic in terms of them speaking in the same language as the (mostly) human characters.¹

Sentience and Language are closely connected since some form of sentience must be present in order for the nonhuman being to be able to use language in a way that is understandable by humans. However, just because the nonhuman subject speaks the same language as the human one, it does not mean that the nonhuman understands how humans feel or think. In terms of temporality, for example, a tree may be able to talk to humans, but through its long life span it does not grasp how humans experience time or vice versa.

Of course, one may argue that every attempt at capturing thoughts of the nonhuman world in human words will be anthropocentric and anthropomorphic in practice as we project our humanness on everything that does not possess it, by using our own language and imagination to write about it (Raipola 263; Buell 134). This observation is true, and yet it is not the most productive approach to group every attempt at writing about the nonhuman under the umbrella term of anthropomorphism. Just as there will always be a trace of the human in all human writing, there will most likely be a trace of Sentience in texts which use the marker of Language in their depiction of the anthropomorphic.

Anthropomorphic Modes

As I have established the three markers that identify anthropomorphisms, I will now address the three main modes in which anthropomorphic depictions might be realised. These modes work hand in hand with the previously mentioned markers; a marker tells us *what* the text makes us see and what level of anthropomorphism is applied. A mode characterises *how* this marker is realised. While it is possible and not uncommon to combine markers, modes can, too, appear in combination. However, in

¹ In dealing with science fiction and fantasy literature, some characters may be humanoid but not entirely human. In many cases they nevertheless stand in for the human audience and can be considered human in their function within the narrative.

most cases one mode will dominate how anthropomorphism is executed.

The first mode can be referred to as the mode of Projection in which the marker or markers are not manifested in the anthropomorphised subject but are humanising ideas that are projected onto the subject. It mirrors broader definitions of anthropomorphism which refer to projection as its key feature (Garrard 154; Chesher 2047; Joney 2063). Projection, here, is used without attaching evaluative connotations such as “sentimental” or “crude” to it as those tend to function only to comment on this phenomenon, not to explain it. If a text claims that a tree looks sad, it projects the human emotion of sadness onto the tree which ascribes a capability of Sentience to the nonhuman other and thus realises the second marker through the mode of Projection. There is a tendency for this mode to be more about the individual human since the projection mainly happens in the mind. Projection can also be shared among humans, but the anthropomorphised subject remains equally passive in those cases.

Central to this mode is that the audience is not informed about the subject’s perspective and thus disables an active role of the anthropomorphised other. Despite its passivity, the subject is not reduced to object status as the anthropomorphism assigns it humanity. The nonhuman subject can also have agency over the human in the mode of Projection as even the imagination of being watched by the surrounding trees has an effect on the human. This mode poses a unilateral narration of human/nonhuman encounters from the human anthropomorphising author, narrator, or character’s point of view. It tends to appear on the level of metaphors and similes rather than on the larger scale of the text such as plot or characters. This is mainly caused by the human tendency to see the human in everything, even the nonhuman, and thus Projection can happen more easily as a by-product of simply describing the nonhuman world through the human lens. Most owners of pets will project their human emotions or concepts onto their animals, for example by referring to cats who meow a lot as “talkative.” In this case, the pet owner interprets the meows as a form of human-like language and sees the human trait of being talkative in the frequency of its meowing.

Instances of anthropomorphic Projection, among other markers and modes, can be found all throughout Robert Holdstock’s 1984 novel *Mythago Wood*. The selected passage illustrates how the character ascribes the surrounding forest qualities to underline how he feels in the wood: “I felt a chill, an odd tingle, a sense of being watched. Christian noticed my discomfort and admitted that he felt it too, the presence of the wood, the gentle breathing of the trees” (Holdstock 112). Initially, one may think that the character feels watched by someone human, but in the second sentence, it is made clear that he does not see a human entity as the cause of this sensation, but rather projects this feeling onto the forest itself. The wood is furthermore described as breathing, yet there is no description of a tree with the physical capability for breathing. Here, breathing is used simply as the anthropomorphisation of the sound of the leaves rustling in the wind. Naturally, breathing is not an activity exclusive to human animals, however, the focaliser does not provide any hint whether it is the human or nonhuman breath that he projects

onto the surrounding trees. It can be assumed that the human's anthropocentrism makes it extremely likely that if they were to project an animal's feature onto a tree, they would specify this.

While the previous mode can also be found in realistic texts, the following two modes require more than the Projection of the human and call for active participation of the nonhuman in the narrative. Thus, the second and third modes will often require magical, supernatural, mythic, or speculative elements to realise them. The Manifestation and Hybridity modes can therefore be found primarily in sources that fall into the genre of speculative fiction as it offers a better equipped toolkit for the realisation of anthropomorphised subjects. This categorisation is, however, not restricted to certain genres. Despite speculative fiction being a good basis for some modes, they may equally be found in popular science books, as *Das geheime Leben der Bäume* (2015) by Peter Wohlleben shows. In his book, Wohlleben walks the thin line between making scientific discoveries accessible to a broad public and using anthropomorphisms to explain things that science cannot (yet) confirm. This can be observed in the case of memory where he claims that "and something else would also be proven by this: Trees must have a memory. How else would they make internal comparisons of the lengths of days; how else should they count warm days? [my translation]" (Wohlleben 135). Therefore, the case of Wohlleben illustrates that nonfiction is not limited to the Projection mode, but rather that conventional genre boundaries can be bent by using anthropomorphisms. In general, the usage of such stylistic techniques in scientific writing is frowned upon, as this is also the main point of criticism on Wohlleben's work (Kingsland 2). Some scholars, however, go as far as arguing actively for such trends in writing that actively bend genre conventions. As the environmental crises are now so urgent, some argue that environmental writing can and should no longer limit itself to one genre, that interdisciplinarity is not an asset but a necessity (Ghosh 32–33; Braun and Rosenthal 194–95; Martin 225).

In contrast to the mode of Projection, the mode of Manifestation is centred around the subject being an active part of the text and shows a Manifestation of the anthropomorphic marker(s). Human Physicality, Sentience, or Language might be identified by the human; however, they are not only a projection of their humanness onto the nonhuman, but the nonhuman is, in fact, depicting these features—at least within the narrative. Just because the subject has a more active part in this mode, it is not necessarily represented as a character. The Language marker would manifest in the first mode as a hiker who imagines hearing the forest talking while the second mode would mean that the voice was not a product of the person's mind, but of the surrounding wood's actual ability to communicate with them. There may be instances in which the lines between the first two modes blur when the text describes an anthropomorphic instance but does not specify whether it is caused by the human or nonhuman subject and thus disables a clear-cut categorisation into one of those modes. It is important to examine every case individually to determine the specific mode, or the combination of modes used by the author.

Finally, the third mode is centred around the idea of Hybridity, which may initially evoke similarities to the first marker but provides a far broader application than simply a physical or genetic hybrid being. Hybridity functions as a mode rather than a marker as it is more concerned with creating a unique bond between the human and nonhuman. This can be applied, as with the previous modes, to one or multiple markers and is thus not limited to a physical hybrid being. A human character who shares both their own human sentience and those of the nonhuman other can be a hybrid of the mind. The Hybridity mode is even imaginable in terms of, say, a human-stone hybrid if this mental connection means that the hybridised mind fundamentally understands both what it means to be human as well as a stone. Raipola's theory of material ecocriticism comes in handy here as he argues that all matter is "*storied matter* [original emphasis]" (Raipola 264) and has their own story to tell. An anthropomorphic hybrid can allow the nonhuman's story to be made comprehensible to the human reader.

This ties in with one central aspect of the Hybrid as this mode is necessarily centred around a humanoid being in one way or another and therefore this hybrid can take the role of an ambassador, or translator when it comes to the Language marker. In a purely physical hybrid this mediating function is achieved in a more passive and rather symbolic way. Hybridity offers a strong potential for the human to engage with the nonhuman and can attempt to answer questions such as "Who speaks for the trees?" or "Who are their stewards?" The best example to illustrate arboreal hybridity can be identified in the fantasy classic *The Two Towers*, the second instalment in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* series. In the novel, the character Treebeard represents the hybrid race of the Ents who are beings that are hybrids in each of the three markers. They have "large feet" (Tolkien 463) that allow them mobility and not roots, they have faces, and their skin is made of bark. In addition to a merged physicality, Treebeard does not understand all concepts of other species, but he is very aware of that fact. He knows that species like the hobbits have very different perceptions of time, yet he fails to properly comprehend the reasons for it (Kautz 70) so that he frequently repeats that they "must not be hasty" (Tolkien 474). Finally, the Language marker is also visible in the simple fact that Treebeard, among other Ents, is able to speak with the Hobbits. Aside from his native language Old Entish, he conveniently speaks the language of the Hobbits in with that a language the readers can understand.

While the Manifestation mode is centred around the tree, or other nonhuman entity, to which individual human traits are added, the third mode positions the human subject at its core and is therefore an embodied anthropomorphic mode that manifests the nonhuman in the human body and/or mind. One could claim that, if starting with the human as the base which is then merged with the arboreal this is not a case of anthropomorphism of the tree but rather an arbomorphism of the human. In this context it does well to remember that even if the text appears to project the nonhuman onto the human, it is still written by a human and not a tree. Therefore, human-tree hybrids will be considered here exclusively from the anthropomorphic perspective.

Humanised Agency

The concept outlined above provides a new toolkit for the analysis and categorisation of anthropomorphisms. However, for these to be more effective in their ecocritical application, nonhuman agency must be included in the equation. Anthropomorphisms are a valuable phenomenon for (material) ecocritics to study as they bring the potential to heighten understanding of agency beyond the human. While the overall environment would benefit from decentring the human, we cannot escape perceiving the world through our human lens. Therefore, anthropomorphisms offer the possibility to establish better relations with the nonhuman world by imagining and writing them to some extent more like ourselves. It gives us a chance to understand nonhuman “storied matter” (Iovino and Oppermann 1), that is, the stories that are inherent to all matter, but that we for the most part are unable to access. Raipola insists to clarify that “things are not telling their ‘own stories’ to anyone but are simply behaving in a way that can be interpreted as a story or several stories” (277). While matter does not act for humans, “narrative agencies contain us as integral parts of their unfolding stories, which have the power to challenge our human-centred interpretation of the world” (Oppermann 13).

The connection between anthropomorphisms and material agency is crucial as the former “is recognized as a narrative technique employed to stress the *agentic power* of matter and horizontality of its elements [emphasis added]” (Raipola 264). Therefore, humanising the nonhuman has the inherent potential to show that “[a]gency, therefore, is not to be necessarily and exclusively associated with human beings and with human intentionality, but it is a pervasive and inbuilt property of matter, as part and parcel of its generative dynamism” (Iovino and Oppermann 3). Iovino and Oppermann actively counter the criticism of anthropomorphism by concluding that it “can even act against dualistic ontologies and be a ‘dis-anthropocentric’ stratagem meant to reveal the similarities and symmetries existing between humans and nonhumans” (8).

Since the material turn in the humanities and the rise of theories such as Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) and Alfred Gell’s theory of Co-Actants, the possible definitions of agency are ever increasing. Most of the earlier concepts all remain within a Western ontology which is deeply founded in human exceptionalism, meaning that material agency is never seen as inherent, but always as something relational to humans (Oyen 3–4). The two definitions of agency that I work with in this essay relate to the typical definitions that assume intentionality and the subject’s ability to act upon its intentions. This definition works well for human subjects, but if applied to other matter, it inhibits the analysis of nonhuman agency. Pearson notes that “[w]hile intentionality-based agency is evidently extremely important, there exists more than one kind of agency” (Pearson 711). The second type of agency is, rather, associated with the universal agency of matter, i.e., its influence on the world. All matter has the ability to influence other matter. Despite this paper’s attempt to transcend overly rigid categories of nature and culture, a distinction between

(mainly) human and (mainly) nonhuman forms of agency is nevertheless necessary. As Owain Jones and Paul Cloke rightfully warn, “ascribing intentionality to non-human agents can lead to dangerous forms of reductionist essentialism” (81). To prevent such issues, the main distinction between forms of agency made here is between intentionality-based and influence-based agency. It is important to note, however, that this does not signify that one form of agency is more valid than the other. Raipola as well as Iovino and Oppermann highlight that agency is not hierarchical, so that even if some matter has agency based on intention and some based on influence, the former is not a superior version of the latter (Iovino and Oppermann 3; Raipola 264). Therefore, the presence of human-like agency is not regarded as an inherently better indicator for a more appropriate representation of material agency in a text.

Yet, the distinction between human and nonhuman agency is necessary even if this may seem contradictory to the anti-hierarchical approach to agency established in the previous paragraph. As stated earlier, the distinction between intentional and influential agency is still needed since new materialism and material ecocriticism seek to transcend the prevalent ideology of human exceptionalism. Most non-ecocritics who believe ‘their’, that is human, agency to be unique, may be more susceptible to human-like depictions of agency in the nonhuman. Therefore, even if there is no inherent hierarchy of agencies from the material ecocritic perspective, intentional agency as the conventionally ‘human’ agency still tends to be identified more easily as it is closer to what we humans are used to.

Furthermore, the intersection of anthropomorphism and agency must be clarified. What some scholars have called crude or unproductive anthropomorphisms reveals that anthropomorphic writing always has the risk of allowing the nonhuman only a form of pseudo-agency and tokenism. Garrard points out that “while it might seem that anthropomorphism engenders kindness toward animals and acceptance of their agency, in its crude form it is really a way of *not seeing* animals in their own right at all [original emphasis]” (Garrard 165). Despite the fact that I am rather critical of ecocriticism’s treatment of anthropomorphism, Garrard’s point must not be ignored when analysing humanising literature. This paper argues for the great potential of anthropomorphisms, but they are ultimately a tool whose misuse may also have the opposite effect, as Garrard highlights.

As Thomas Nagel points out, imagining the experience of nonhuman others is difficult as we are “restricted to the resources of [our] own mind[s], and those resources are inadequate to the task” (439). But just because we cannot know for certain how it feels to be nonhuman, it still matters how we represent our attempts at imagining it. Hardly any literary text exploring nonhuman agency does so with the explicit purpose of material ecocriticism in mind but may nevertheless function to execute the main idea that all matter has its story to tell. Raipola asks us “to respect the creativity of matter in its own terms, [and] we have to acknowledge that its numerous agencies are not performing stories for the human audience, but exist and act of their own accord” (276). However, this is only thinkable in theory. In practice, the stories that are being told by, and to, humans about the life of materiality, will

naturally always be tainted by how we, as humans, imagine the Other. This bears the risk of depicting nonhuman subjects overwhelmingly in one way or another. Pearson points out that there is, for instance, a tendency to depict nonhuman agency only through its role of resistance (713). A textual example can be easily observed in Tolkien's writing where both Old Man Willow and the Ents mainly appear as actors when they are taking revenge on humans or rage against the destruction of the environment. "[T]he nonhuman-as-resister model of nonhuman agency defines and values the nonhuman world solely through its ability to impede human intentions" (Pearson 713), which is problematic insofar as the only active quality that matter is attributed is fundamentally related to humans. This starkly contradicts Raipola's point on material agency in its own right as it robs nonhuman agents of their power to act. One approach to reconcile the model of resistance with unrelational material agency is to be found in Amitav Ghosh's essay collection *The Great Derangement*:

Can the timing of this renewed recognition [i.e. of nonhuman agencies and theories] be a mere coincidence, or is the synchronicity an indication that there are entities in the world, like forests, that are fully capable of inserting themselves into our processes of thought? And if that were so, could it not *also* be said that the earth has itself intervened to revise those habits of thought that are based on the Cartesian dualism that arrogates all intelligence and agency to the human while denying them to every other kind of being? [emphasis in original] (31)

If we follow Ghosh's suggestion, the aspect of resistance becomes nature's active reaction to the immense destruction that we humans impose on it. One may even go as far as implying that the very reason why more people begin to regard agency as no longer exclusively human is directly influenced by nature itself, which then would only further support the thesis that all matter has the inherent agency to influence other matter. Wherever one may situate the agency of the natural world, be it in the position of the resister to human intervention or as an independent force influencing humans, human and nonhuman agencies are deeply entangled. Elements of nature seen as agents are being integrated into the stories we tell, but simultaneously

narrative agencies contain us as integral parts of their unfolding stories, which have the power to challenge our human-centred interpretations of the world. Narrative agencies, in short, represent a new ecology for understanding the ultimate ontology of a meaningfully articulate planet. (Oppermann 13)

Therefore, the moment one accepts the agency of nonhuman beings and matter, our reciprocal entanglement with these agencies is revealed. In literature, this realisation can be supported by the use of thoughtful anthropomorphisms that signify to the audience that humans are not the only ones who possess agency. Whether the humanised subject exhibits influence, or intentionality-based agency, can have an impact on how well the text (or other medium) manages to engage the human audience. If the agency depicted is too human, too intentionality based, the risk of overriding the nonhuman perspective exists, while the use of influential agency may go unnoticed to some readers. Ultimately, anthropomorphism and agency are inherently interlinked, and it is paramount to investigate their entanglements.

Conclusion

Ecocritics have long critiqued the phenomenon of anthropomorphism although the literary technique is anything but a recent invention. This paper provides a new approach to not only categorise anthropomorphisms, but to destigmatise its use. It is a toolkit that equips scholars who want to conduct research in the field of ecocriticism and beyond. While material ecocriticism provides a good basis for an academic change in approaching the nonhuman world and its inherent agencies, this categorisation shall not be limited to this specific field. It is rather an invitation to reconsider agencies beyond the human in interdisciplinary fields, too.

The textual examples given here were largely taken from fantasy and science fiction literature, however, anthropomorphism need not be limited to the application in these fields. Future research may, for example, specifically target genres such as children's literature, or even nonfictional as well as academic writing. As a rough rule, the method suggested here can be adapted and applied to any case of anthropomorphism regardless of the genre or medium. It may do well to further investigate the specific potentials that non-literary media have in terms of humanising nonhumans and making their agency accessible.

Identifying when and how we humanise nonhumans is the first step to rethinking agencies and the relationships we as humans have to other matter. It must not be ignored that there are also risks in imagining how nonhumans think and feel, but ultimately, anthropomorphisms provide a tool with significant potential for reconsiderations of the human, nonhuman, or more-than-human that should not be rejected just because it also can be misused or misunderstood. If applied well, it may make us challenge our own perceptions of the world around us and eventually open our eyes to see that it is not only the human species that is worth protecting.

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La derivación ecologista del mito de Orfeo en *Canto yo y la montaña baila de Irene Solà*¹

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Resumen

Este artículo plantea una interpretación de *Canto yo y la montaña baila* de Irene Solà a partir del mito de Orfeo. La tesis defendida es que no se trata de una actualización de la trama del mito al contexto actual, sino que la figura de Orfeo constituye, más bien, el autor modelo a partir del cual se construyen las múltiples voces narrativas que componen la novela. El canto como *incantamentum* órfico es asimilado como elemento del pacto ficcional de la obra para hacer creíbles y aceptables los múltiples narradores no humanos que componen el universo diegético de la novela. Sin embargo, a diferencia del mito clásico, el canto órfico no subyuga la voluntad y la capacidad de acción de los animales, poniéndolos al servicio del poeta, sino que les permite asumir una voz propia y dar cuenta de su experiencia del mundo. Es en este sentido en que defendemos que se trata de una derivación ecologista del mito de Orfeo pues el encantamiento que el canto órfico propicia desvela la singularidad de cada uno de los seres que componen la tierra, así como las interdependencias que existen entre ellos y que constituyen aquel organismo superior denominado Gaia.

Palabras clave: Ecología, encantamiento, ecocrítica, mitología, novela española contemporánea, neorruralismo.

Abstract

This article proposes an interpretation of Irene Solà's *Canto yo y la montaña baila* based on the myth of Orpheus. The text defends that instead of updating the myth's plot to the present context, the novel constructs its multiple narrative voices by using the figure of Orpheus as the model author. The chant as Orphic *incantamentum* is assimilated as an element of the fictional pact of the work to make credible and acceptable the multiple non-human narrators that compose the novel's diegetic universe. However, unlike the classical myth, the Orphic song does not subjugate the will and agency of the animals, placing them at the service of the poet, but allows them to assume a voice of their own and give an account of their experience of the world. It is in this sense that we argue that it is an ecological derivation of the myth of Orpheus, since the enchantment that the Orphic song brings about reveals

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the uniqueness of each of the beings that make up the earth, as well as the interdependencies that exist between them and that make up the higher organism called Gaia.

Keywords: Ecology, enchantment, ecocriticism, mythology, contemporary Spanish novel, neoruralism.

Introducción

En el cuadro del Museo del Prado *Orfeo y Eurídice* (1636-1638) de Rubens, vemos dos grupos de figuras diferenciados: la pareja de enamorados, a la izquierda, aparece iluminada por una luz tibia y muestra la mirada trémula de Orfeo, justo en el instante previo a girar la cabeza, su pupila alojada en el rabillo del ojo. Eurídice, con la cabeza ligeramente ladeada, mira el destino que tiene esperanza de abandonar. Ese destino está compuesto por las figuras ensombrecidas de Perséfone, angustiada y contrariada, y Plutón o Hades que, aparentemente distraído, parece conocer el final funesto del intento de salvación de Orfeo—interpretación ya ofrecida Platón en su *Banquete* y según la cual Hades únicamente habría mostrado al héroe un fantasma de su mujer—. A los pies de ambas figuras, yace el perro de tres cabezas que termina de corroborar la ubicación de la escena en el reino de los muertos.

El cuadro del Museo del Prado representa el momento de mayor tensión dramática en la vida de Orfeo y condensa el que quizá sea el acontecimiento fundamental de su mito. Extraordinariamente dotado para la música y el canto, Orfeo aparece representado en la *Geórgica IV* como el apasionado amante de Eurídice quien, perseguida por Aristeo, es fatalmente mordida por una serpiente venenosa que la condena a la muerte. Desesperado, acude Orfeo a las puertas del Hades que le son franqueadas por la inflexible Perséfone gracias al encanto de su música. Accede así Orfeo al inframundo, con lo que sobrepasa un límite que define constitutivamente al ser humano: la irreversibilidad de la muerte. Sin embargo, dicha extralimitación está condicionada: Orfeo puede no solo bajar a los infiernos, sino además sacar de allí a Eurídice, siempre y cuando no vuelva la vista atrás para corroborar que su amada le sigue y acompaña. Curiosidad irrefrenable o destino aciago, Orfeo lanza una mirada fatal detrás de sí que condena a Eurídice definitivamente a la muerte y a él a una vida de desesperanza.

Si bien es cierto que el descenso al inframundo marca el carácter del héroe, dada la excepcionalidad de la hazaña—únicamente acometida por otros héroes como Hércules y Ulises—, y en buena medida este acontecimiento explica la constitución de grupúsculos cuya fundación se atribuyó a Orfeo, los aspectos que aquí más nos interesarán del mito de Orfeo no tienen tanto que ver con su catábasis como con la dimensión metapoética de su canto. Aunque la reactualización del mito de Orfeo en *Canto yo y la montaña baila* concierne, también, al descenso a los infiernos que Orfeo acomete, su clave descansa más bien en la comprensión de su canto como *incantamentum* (Bauzá).

El orden de la argumentación a partir de este punto será el siguiente: expondremos los aspectos del mito de Orfeo más significativos en su relación con la novela de Irene Solà para, posteriormente, analizar el modo en que dichos motivos

son actualizados en la obra de la escritora catalana. Analizaremos cómo dicha actualización no consiste en una trasposición contemporánea del mito sino, más bien, en su asimilación en el proceso de construcción narrativa del universo ficcional de *Canto yo y la montaña baila*. En este sentido, Orfeo no comparece como personaje, ni el mito es un motivo de la obra; su presencia tiene un carácter implícito y habrá de rastrearse en la forma en que se construye la voz narrativa. Por último, abordaremos la derivación ecologista que la actualización del mito de Orfeo supone, atendiendo a los efectos que el canto encantatorio tiene en *Canto yo y la montaña baila*.

Tres dimensiones del mito de Orfeo

El canto como encantamiento

Habitualmente representado con la lira, como en el cuadro de Rubens que describíamos más arriba, Orfeo ha sido tradicionalmente considerado el epítome del poeta cantor, en un momento de la historia en el que la poesía estaba indisolublemente unida a la música y el canto. Orfeo constituía así una figura donde se vinculaban la poesía y la musicalidad; de hecho, en algunas narraciones del mito se le presenta enseñando a tocar la lira a los jóvenes héroes y es incluso considerado el creador o el perfeccionador de la lira, el hexámetro o el alfabeto (Molina Moreno, “La música de Orfeo” 48). Sin embargo, la particularidad de su canto no radica en su excelso dominio de la métrica ni el virtuoso manejo de la lira, sino, más bien, en su poder demiúrgico que goza de la capacidad de dar vida a lo inanimado. El canto de Orfeo sería, en este sentido, un encantamiento por cuanto tiene un influjo mágico en la naturaleza que, bien se anima por el efecto de su canto, bien se amansa. El poder taumátúrgico del canto de Orfeo llega hasta tal punto que es capaz de restaurar la armonía perdida y encantar a los seres del inframundo para que estos le franqueen el paso en su catábasis. La particularidad de su canto radica entonces en los efectos que produce sobre la naturaleza, en sus similitudes funcionales con los hechizos que reenvían, ineludiblemente, a los orígenes soteriológicos de la poesía.

Dicho efecto taumátúrgico de la poesía órfica puede ser caracterizado como un poder de control, de dominio o de domesticación. Esta idea trasluce en las descripciones del efecto encantatorio de su canto, como esta de Casadesús, refiriéndose a la Geórgica IV de Virgilio: “con los sonos de su voz y los armónicos acordes de su música lograba *que las fieras lo siguiesen, que los árboles, e incluso las rocas se inclinasen y moviesen a su paso y que los hombres se calmasen al oírlo*” (22-23; énfasis nuestro). Que los efectos del canto de Orfeo están bajo la égida de la dominación de la naturaleza puede confirmarse, no solo con descripciones contemporáneas, sino también con las referencias clásicas en que se describe su poder. En *Hipsípila*, una de las tragedias de Eurípides de la que hemos tenido una recepción más fragmentaria, se narra cómo Orfeo, frente al canto seductor de las sirenas, canta incluso mejor que ellas neutralizando su hechizo y logrando que los marineros no sucumban a su poder de atracción y, en última instancia, a la muerte.

Frente al poder de seducción del canto de las sirenas, la lira animada de Orfeo sale triunfante (García Gual y Hernández de la Fuente 15). Es más que evidente que lo que aquí se enfrenta son dos cantos de subyugación, pues ambos tienen la capacidad de desfondar la capacidad de acción de los individuos que lo escuchan y, de esa afrenta, sale triunfante el canto de Orfeo, como si su capacidad de dominación fuera superior al influjo de las sirenas.

Sin embargo, donde más claramente se presenta el carácter de dominación o domesticación de su lira es en su relación con el mundo natural.² En un fragmento de *Las Bacantes* leemos: “al son de la cítara Orfeo congregaba los árboles, congregaba las fieras con su inspirada música” (Eurípides, *Bacantes* 560-565). También en una obra de Eurípides, en este caso, el *Cíclope* podemos escuchar a Ulises decir: “Conozco un encanto mágico de Orfeo verdaderamente estupendo para que el tizón, penetrando en el cráneo sin que nadie lo impulse, pueda quemar al hijo de la tierra, el de un solo ojo” (Eurípides, *Cíclope* 646-649). Los versos de Simónides de Ceos, una de las primeras referencias textuales sobre el mito, presentan también el poder encantatorio de su canto desde la perspectiva de la domesticación: “Sobre su cabeza infinitos los pájaros revoloteaban y los peces saltaban fuera del agua azul al son de su bella canción” (García Gual y Hernández de la Fuente 15). Orfeo comparece como un héroe de la civilización que, mediante el poder domesticador de su canto, ablanda los corazones de los guerreros y subyuga a las fieras (Guthrie, *Orfeo y la religión griega*; Molina, “La música de Orfeo”). Veremos más adelante cómo hemos de comprender este carácter civilizador desde la perspectiva de la actualización ecologista del mito en la obra de Irene Solà, pero, por el momento, pasemos al segundo aspecto del mito significativo para nuestros propósitos.

El canto como revelación de la totalidad

En la interpretación que Adorno y Horkheimer hicieron del episodio de las sirenas en *La Odisea*, la significación del mito queda radicalmente invertida pues, en lugar de tratar de evitar escuchar y quedar subyugado por el canto de las sirenas, Odiseo debería haberse entregado a su canto para conocer los secretos que en él le serían revelados. Esta es la forma en que George Steiner interpreta aquel episodio de la *Dialéctica de la Ilustración* en su *Necesidad de música* y el que le sirve para iniciar una reflexión sobre el conocimiento revelado a través de la música. Dice Steiner, siguiendo la interpretación de Adorno y Horkheimer: “[Odiseo] No tiene tiempo para la sabiduría de las sirenas, que es la sabiduría original —ingenua, si se quiere— de los albores del pensamiento humano” (Steiner 180). El canto de las sirenas en la *Odisea*

² En su maravilloso libro *El velo de Isis*, Pierre Hadot distinguía dos formas de relacionarse y concebir la naturaleza: la actitud prometeica, que aspiraría a desvelar los secretos naturales a través de la técnica, y la actitud órfica, donde el desvelamiento se produciría a través de la poesía y el arte (2015). Consideramos que el canto como *incantamentum* constituye uno de los entrecruzamientos entre ambas actitudes que se da, paradójicamente, en el propio mito de Orfeo. El canto de Orfeo es al mismo tiempo una forma creativa de desvelar el mundo, pero, también, una forma de dominación. Su canto es tanto una creación como una técnica.

porta la promesa de la revelación de un conocimiento total. Esta asociación entre música y conocimiento no tiene únicamente carácter mítico, sino que está también presente en la visión platónica de la ciudad ideal donde la música constituye la materialización sensible más lograda de los principios de armonía y concordancia que rigen el universo. De este modo, junto a la filosofía y las matemáticas, la música sería el tercer componente del triángulo educativo que dichas disciplinas habrían de conformar.

Como señala el propio Steiner en *Necesidad de música*, esta idea devino lugar común en la Edad Media y el Renacimiento hasta el punto de informar la concepción de “la música de las esferas” según la cual los movimientos planetarios estarían organizados de acuerdo con patrones musicales (Steiner 124). Esta idea es la que también está presente en el potencial demiúrgico del canto de Orfeo como *incantamentum* que puede, mediante el hechizo de su ritmo y candencia, enlazar los distintos elementos de la naturaleza para mostrar su totalidad.³ Como señala Hugo Bauzá, “la poesía órfica parece ir tras las huellas de una sustancia evanescente que une las diversas especies y que enlaza incluso la vida con la muerte” (141). De tal modo, no se trataría, únicamente, de que el canto de Orfeo tuviera un efecto encantatorio sobre el mundo natural que se manifestaría en la animación de lo no viviente o mediante la domesticación de lo salvaje, sino que dicho encantamiento revelaría la unidad de aquello que anima, sacando a la luz la armonía subyacente del mundo. El canto como *incantamentum* se dota así de una dimensión cognoscitiva derivada de su capacidad para hacer hablar al mundo natural. Las resonancias ecológicas de esta idea únicamente se harán audibles poniendo en juego las relaciones de interdependencia que rigen la relación entre las diversas especies, idea que desarrollaremos analizando el universo ficcional de *Canto yo y la montaña baila*.

El canto y la domesticación de los muertos

Como señalábamos al principio del texto, quizá el rasgo más distintivo del mito de Orfeo sea su catábasis; Orfeo consigue franquear las puertas del Hades y superar todos los peligros que se cruza en el Inframundo, todo ello con el propósito de traer de vuelta a Eurídice al mundo de los vivos. El acceso al inframundo es sólo posible gracias, de nuevo, al poder de su canto y a la capacidad persuasiva de su palabra, con los cuales consigue enternecer a las bestias del inframundo y embelesar incluso al perro de tres cabezas. La catábasis certifica así el poder demiúrgico del canto de Orfeo, que ejerce también su influjo sobre las bestias del inframundo, pero sirve asimismo para caracterizar al vate tracio como un mediador entre los dos mundos. Concedor de la faz oculta del mundo vivo, Orfeo es el único capaz de traer noticia de la muerte al mundo de la vida, su canto será el portador de la voz de ultratumba pues

³ Puede consultarse el texto de Molina Moreno, Francisco, “Non-musical notes on the Orphic Lyra (OF 417)”, en Herrero de Jáuregui, M.; Jiménez San Cristóbal, A. I.; Luján Martínez, E. R.; Martín Hernández, R.; Santamaría Álvarez, M. A., y Torallas Tovar, S. (eds.), 2011: Tracing Orpheus. Studies of Orphic Fragments, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, pp. 147-151.

ha conseguido tener experiencia de la muerte y retornar al mundo de los vivos. Esta característica del mito de Orfeo—su papel mediador entre los vivos y los muertos—será también determinante en la construcción de la voz narrativa de *Canto yo y la montaña baila* de Irene Solà, que pasamos a analizar ahora.

***Canto yo y la montaña baila* de Irene Solà: una red de relaciones rimadas por un estribillo**

Canto yo y la montaña baila podría inscribirse dentro de una corriente cada vez más pujante de la narrativa española contemporánea que ha recibido el epíteto de neorrural (Resina y Viestenz; Mora). Esta es la propuesta de Rosa Berbel en un artículo de 2022 que precisaba que, a diferencia de otras novelas, que pueden incurrir en la idealización o la demonización del campo, *Canto yo y la montaña baila* se posicionaba de modo peculiar ante dicha dicotomía⁴ pues no pretendía tanto abordar los conflictos políticos y culturales derivados de esa relación sino, más bien, “atender, desde los márgenes de la creación, a la común destrucción del tejido social campesino y de las formas de vida naturales” desde “un entendimiento profundo de sus estructuras y su lenguaje” (Berbel 308). En este sentido, *Canto yo y la montaña baila* puede inscribirse dentro de este giro neorrural no tanto por la ubicación de la diégesis sino, más bien, por la recuperación de toda una cosmovisión—que implica mitos, relatos y tradiciones compartidas—de clara raigambre rural. Asimismo, frente a otras obras de corte neorrural—como *Feria* de Ana Iris Simón—, el acercamiento al campo no se realiza a partir de la reconstrucción idealizada de las instituciones que, supuesta y esencialmente, lo caracterizaban—como la familia—sino a partir de las cosmovisiones de la naturaleza contenidas en mitos y leyendas rurales. *Canto yo y la montaña baila* elude así los efectos más perniciosos de una reconstrucción idealizada del pasado pues lo que reconstruye no es la Historia, sino las historias que los campesinos y habitantes de la Alta Garrotxa se contaban para representar la naturaleza.

Si bien es cierto que, en cierto sentido, la novela podría adscribirse a esta corriente, su peculiaridad se manifiesta desde las primeras páginas del texto y es que su primera sección, titulada “El rayo”, presenta una escena de tormenta, un paisaje lluvioso. De acuerdo con esta descripción somera, el lector podría pensar que “El rayo” constituye un capítulo introductorio donde, al modo de la novela decimonónica,

⁴ Quizá el único capítulo de la novela donde se aborda la problemática relación entre el campo y la ciudad sea titulado “La escena” donde se reflejan irónicamente las idealizaciones que, desde la ciudad, se realizan del campo a partir de un visitante de Matavaques que profiere frases tan manidas como la siguiente: “Todos los demás nos hemos olvidado de la trascendencia de la vida. Los de la ciudad vivimos rebajados con agua. Pero aquí, aquí se vive todos los días” que expresan con gracejo aquel lugar común según el cual el campo y el mundo rural son un reducto de la vida auténtica. Nuestro posicionamiento se sitúa en la línea de Raymond Williams y entendemos, por tanto, que la dicotomía campo-ciudad tiene valor puramente analítico, pues en el plano ontológico campo y ciudad son dos especificaciones del modo de producción capitalista y la precondition de la división del trabajo. Se trataría, entonces, “de continuar viendo sus interrelaciones y a través de ellas, la forma real de la crisis subyacente” (Williams 388).

un narrador heterodiegético describe el paisaje o el entorno en que van a desarrollarse los acontecimientos dramáticos. Sin embargo, en este primer capítulo es el propio paisaje el que constituye un acontecimiento dramático y, en tanto que acontecimiento dramático, fuerza al lector a dejar de considerarlo como un paisaje — es decir, fuerza al lector a dejar de considerarlo como una escena externa que se ofrece a la contemplación de un ojo que observa— para tratarlo como un fenómeno con capacidad de acción. La tormenta que comparece en el primer capítulo de la obra no es el contexto donde se desarrollaron los acontecimientos, es ella misma el propio acontecimiento que, como veremos, mata a uno de los personajes de la obra.

Que la naturaleza deje de estar representada como un objeto externo al ser humano con el que mantenemos una relación contemplativa se logra, en *Canto yo y la montaña baila*, mediante una curiosa utilización de la narración homodiegética pues es la propia naturaleza la que, a través de sus distintas especies y elementos, comparece en la obra como un personaje que se arroga la voz narrativa. No podemos considerar la naturaleza como paisaje pues la naturaleza es un elemento vivo, con facultad agente, no solo por las acciones que realiza sino por su capacidad para describirlas, para ofrecer una representación verbal de su proceder.

De tal forma que el universo ficcional de *Canto yo y la montaña baila* se constituye a partir de una peculiar voz narrativa que está construida sobre la acumulación de múltiples narradores homodiegéticos cuya particularidad es que no son, solamente, animales humanos, sino también animales no humanos e, incluso, seres inertes como las placas tectónicas que protagonizan la sección titulada “La colisión”. Sabiendo esto la primera frase del texto queda dotada de su sentido pleno pues “Llegamos con las tripas llenas” (Solà 13) no es la satisfecha constatación del viajante que, después de un largo camino, franquea los muros de la ciudad, sino la alegre confesión de unas nubes que “con el vientre negro, cargado de agua oscura y fría” (Solà 13) van a descargar sus saturados estómagos sobre los campos de la Alta Garrotxa catalana desencadenando una violenta tormenta con carga eléctrica que mata a Domènec, marido de Sió, y padre de Hilari y Mía, habitante de uno de los pequeños pueblos que jalonan esta zona montañosa. Las nubes no pueden ser contempladas como paisaje porque realizan uno de los actos que, tradicionalmente, ha dado inicio a la acción dramática; por continuar con la metáfora, las nubes son las asesinas de Domènec y las causantes del desarrollo del drama.

Y entonces lanzamos el segundo rayo. Veloz como una serpiente. Enfadado. Abierto como una telaraña. Los rayos van donde se les antoja, como el agua y los aludes, como los insectos pequeños y las urracas, a las que atrae todo lo brillante. La navaja, fuera del bolsillo de Domènec, brilló como un tesoro, como una piedra preciosa, como un puñado de monedas. Nos vimos reflejadas en la hoja de metal como en un espejo. Como si nos abriera los brazos, como si nos llamara. Los rayos se meten donde se les antoja, y el segundo se metió en la cabeza de Domènec. Dentro, muy dentro, hasta el corazón. Y todo lo que vio dentro de los ojos era negro, por la quemadura. El hombre se desplomó en la hierba y el prado puso la mejilla contra la de él, y todas nuestras aguas, alborotadas y alegres, se le metieron por las mangas de la camisa, por debajo del cinturón, dentro de los calzoncillos y de los calcetines, buscando la piel todavía seca. Y se murió. (Solà 16)

Podría pensarse que el uso de múltiples narradores homodieéticos—desde una perra llamada Lluna hasta un corzo, pasando, como decía previamente, por las placas tectónicas que configuraron el perfil montañoso de la zona, hasta una niña tullida víctima de la Guerra Civil—propicia un cierto fragmentarismo en la obra y, aunque a nivel narrativo, esta descripción sea precisa, no resulta una caracterización apropiada para el universo ficcional que estos múltiples narradores construyen pues, entre sus distintas narraciones, reaparecen elementos y acciones que contribuyen a destacar las relaciones que existen entre todos los miembros del ecosistema representado, más que a subrayar la incompletitud de un todo inalcanzable. En este sentido, las relaciones de interdependencia y coevolución que rigen el universo representado colocan a los animales como sujetos dignos de consideración pues son fundamentales para la pervivencia de una vida en común entre distintas especies (Haraway).⁵ Quizá otro de los casos más significativos a este respecto sea el del corzo que aparece en un capítulo de la segunda parte del texto como narrador de sus primeros años de vida y que, después de experimentar el gozo de los sentidos, es perseguido por unos cazadores de los que airoosamente logra escapar.

El aire olía a madrugada, que es un olor sin sabor, como el agua, tan buena que no se puede describir, y se oía el ruido de las ramas altas de los árboles y de los pájaros alegres y cantadores. Y de pronto se levantó el viento, como si fuera un cuello, y entonces olí aquel olor apestoso, el olor terrible de animal pelón que aún tenía clavado en lo más hondo de mi miedo. (60)

Sus perseguidores son Hilari y Jaume, dos jóvenes de la Alta Garrotxa cuyo destino fúnebre se esconde en la escopeta. El corzo nos narra su alborozo por oír el disparo y seguir sintiendo la velocidad en sus piernas, por no haber sido cazado; el lector sabe, sin embargo, que dicho disparo ha herido de muerte a Hilari, “que Jaume, el de los gigantes, ha disparado a Hilari, de Matavaques” (54). Esta segunda muerte propicia tanto la desaparición de Jaume del universo ficcional como la muerte de los relatos y poemas que Hilari, el campesino poeta, guardaba consigo. Jaume, el de los gigantes, no volverá a aparecer en la obra hasta la última sección del texto, donde lo encontramos trabajando como camarero en el Montseny, ejerciendo como uno de los múltiples narradores de la obra. Después de una larga noche de trabajo, conduce hacia la salida del pueblo cuando un corzo se cruza en su camino sin que pueda evitar atropellarlo. La caza involuntaria de este segundo corzo reconectará a Jaume con su pasado y le permitirá disculparse ante Mía, hermana de Hilari y antiguo amor de Jaume.⁶

⁵ En este sentido, es especialmente relevante la sección dedicada a las setas, de la que se hablará más adelante.

⁶ El género literario clásico al que nos reenvían estas narraciones breves protagonizadas por animales que tienen el don de la palabra es la fábula. Sin embargo, a diferencia de aquellas, no se produce en *Canto yo y la montaña baila* una antropomorfización del comportamiento de los animales para deducir de sus peripecias una máxima moral. En la obra de Irene Solà el comportamiento de los animales no es subordinado a una “función argumental” por utilizar los términos de Ferlosio, sino que es descrito en “su absoluta alteridad, en su extrañeza, en su soberanía irreductible” (Ferlosio 13). No estamos, por tanto, ante fábulas pues los animales que pueblan el universo ficcional de *Canto yo y la montaña baila* no son personajes, es decir, no son “unidades unívocas y unidimensionales de conducta y de intención”

Las relaciones de interdependencia que dotan de unidad al universo ficcional de la obra no solo se dan entre personas y animales,⁷ sino que también se establecen entre elementos naturales. El agua descargada por la tormenta en la primera sección de la obra es recibida por las setas en el texto que cierra el primer capítulo. Así, escuchamos a las setas decir: “la lluvia dice pin, pin, pin. La lluvia dice pin, pin, pin. Nosotras nos la tragamos. La lluvia viene de sitios y sabe cosas. [...] La lluvia nos despierta, un despertar fresco y renovado” (Solà 40). Consideramos que las relaciones de interdependencia que se tejen entre los distintos elementos de la obra no pueden entenderse únicamente como relaciones sociales y/o dramáticas, sino como relaciones ecosistémicas rimadas a través de un estribillo. Merece la pena citar un fragmento de *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* de Jane Bennett:

One also notes that the word enchant is linked to the French verb *to sing: chanter*. To “en-charm”: to surround with song or incantation; hence, to cast a spell with sounds, to make fall under the sway of a magical refrain, to carry away on a sonorous stream. The philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari describe the refrain as having a transformative or “catalytic function: not only to increase the speed of the exchanges and reactions in that which surrounds it, but also to assure indirect interactions between elements devoid of so-called natural affinity, and thereby to form [new] organized masses. (6)

Podríamos decir que el universo ficcional de *Canto yo y la montaña baila* se presenta como una abigarrada colección de singularidades cuyas relaciones de interdependencia ecosistémicas se hacen visibles a través del canto. Es precisamente el canto de cada uno de los animales el que hace que elementos aparentemente exentos de afinidad natural se constituyan en nuevas masas organizadas. La visión ecosistémica del mundo natural que construye Irene Solà presenta lo que Ingold llama un espacio fluido o un “meshwork” (en contraposición a un *network*) de relaciones (1805), ya que no describe a los seres desde una esencia estática, sino desde el movimiento y la acción: cada narrador es un *fluir*, descrito no por qué es sino por cómo se relaciona con el mundo, por su tiempo y su velocidad. Esto es, cada parte de la naturaleza se define por cómo interactúa con las demás, en vez de por algo propio y ajeno al mundo exterior. Esta voz narrativa desgarrar por completo la separación Yo/mundo, sujeto/objetos. Y esto se aplica a cada ser y cada ente, desde las setas a las montañas, de las personas a la poesía. El mundo de Solà, como el nuestro, debe entenderse desde “formative and transformative processes [...] To understand how people can inhabit this world means attending to the dynamic processes of world formation in which both perceivers and the phenomena they perceive are necessarily immersed” (1801). Así, la visión de la naturaleza ha evolucionado desde esa separación ente/mundo (extrapolable a la separación

(Ferlosio 21). A esta conclusión también han llegado algunos críticos de los llamados estudios literarios animales como McHugh quien señala que “reading animals as metaphors, always as figures of and for the human, is a process that likewise ends with the human alone on the stage. Now you see the animal in the text, now you don’t” (24).

⁷ Para una revisión general de los estudios literarios sobre animales se puede consultar el artículo de Borgards.

humanos/naturaleza), hasta esta ecología de interconexiones y flujos. Este fluir, asimismo, explica el componente metamórfico de algunos de los relatos, donde los límites de los seres no están del todo cerrados o definidos.

La presencia de Orfeo como autor modelo en *Canto yo y la montaña baila*

Una vez expuesta la arquitectura narrativa de la obra y una vez descritos algunos de los elementos de su universo ficcional, cabría preguntarse: ¿en qué sentido puede considerarse *Canto yo y la montaña baila* una actualización del mito de Orfeo? A lo largo del texto no se encuentra referencia directa alguna al mito clásico, aunque podría señalarse que, en la caracterización de Hilari como poeta, se advierten resonancias de la figura de Orfeo. Hilari es un poeta cantor que tiene una comprensión orgánica de la poesía como un ente vivo que nace y muere en el instante de su producción y recepción y que está indisolublemente ligada a la recitación. Hilari no consigna sus versos en el papel “porque el papel es el agua dulce del río que se pierde en el mar” y la caracterización que realiza de la poesía se funda en sus similitudes con el orden natural: “La poesía tiene que ser libre como un ruiseñor. Como una mañana. Como el aire suave del atardecer” (Solà 69). De hecho, el título de la obra está contenido en uno de los poemas que Hilari compone y confirma el potencial demiúrgico que Hilari otorga al canto poético. Dice:

Canto como si plantara,
como si hiciera una mesa,
como si alzara una casa,
como si trepara a una loma,
como si comiera una nuez,
como si encendiera una brasa.
Como Dios creando animales y plantas.
Canto yo y la montaña baila. (Solà 71)

Como un dios creador, el canto del poeta anima a la montaña y la hace bailar. En esta caracterización del poder taumatúrgico de la poesía vemos emerger la idea del canto como *incantamentum*, rasgo distintivo del mito órfico. Pero las similitudes que este personaje guarda con Orfeo trascienden el plano del canto. Así como Orfeo, Hilari parece tener un papel mediador entre el mundo de los vivos y el mundo de los muertos pues, tras su muerte, le vemos relacionarse con personajes que pertenecen a un tiempo pretérito con respecto al tiempo en que se desarrolla el universo ficcional de la obra. Es el caso de su relación con Eva, una niña que perdió una pierna en la Guerra Civil, con la que Hilari mantiene una relación de fraternidad y a la que dedica uno de sus poemas:

Yo tengo una paloma
tan bonita como el sol,
tiene una pata mala
y un muñón como una col.

Ríe la golondrina
y juega durante el día,
pero al caer la noche,

maúllan las pesadillas.

Sueña con falangistas,
curitas y soldados,
yo canto, fuera el miedo,
pajarito, se han marchado.

Yo tengo una paloma
que es alegre como el pan,
me llama hermanito,
yo le hago de germà. (Solà 80)

Este papel mediador entre el mundo de los vivos y el mundo de los muertos se hace palmario en el capítulo titulado “El fantasma” narrado, en este caso, por Mía, la hermana de Hilari. Bajo la égida del sueño y la noche, Hilari visita a Mía, mucho tiempo después de haber muerto, para recordar juntos etapas de su vida pasada y para que Mía satisfaga la curiosidad de Hilari sobre la vida y la muerte de su madre. Podría señalarse que estas similitudes entre Hilari y Orfeo carecen de especificidad y que, en realidad, habrían de comprenderse, más bien, en el marco de concepciones tradicionales de la poesía que están presentes en mitos y relatos de otras culturas. De este modo, así como las múltiples leyendas oriundas del Pirineo catalán que aparecen recogidas en la novela—como la fiesta del oso, recogida en la sección titulada “Cristina” o las mujeres del agua, que aparecen a lo largo de toda la novela—,⁸ la construcción del personaje de Hilari bebería de esa mitología. No obstante, sin menoscabo de la influencia que dichas leyendas hayan podido tener, creemos que la presencia de Orfeo en la obra de Irene Solà es fundamental precisamente por la importancia que adquiere en tanto autor modelo (Eco 90) para la construcción la voz narrativa de la novela.⁹

Como hemos señalado previamente, a nivel de técnica narratológica, la novela de Irene Solà está construida mediante la acumulación de múltiples narradores homodiegéticos cuyas diversas voces y perspectivas configuran un universo ficcional cerrado. La particularidad de dichos narradores es que buena parte de ellos no son seres humanos, sino animales o seres naturales inertes—setas, perros, corzos, tormentas, montañas...—que *hacen como si* hablaran. El pacto ficcional que la obra plantea al lector es aceptar que todos estos seres están dotados de palabra; la voluntaria suspensión del descreimiento que la obra pide al lector consiste en admitir

⁸ La recuperación de las leyendas y narraciones populares sobre los animales pone de manifiesto cómo la comunidad ecosistémica representada en el texto tiene también un carácter semiótico, pues nuestra relación con los animales está mediada por las diversas formas en que los representamos. En este sentido, los animales habrían de ser considerados figuras tal y como Donna Haraway define este término: “Figures are not representations or didactic illustrations, but rather material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings co-shape one another. For me, figures have always been where the biological and literary or artistic come together with all of the force of lived reality” (4).

⁹ Si Orfeo aparece de forma implícita como autor modelo, los mitos y leyendas del Pirineo catalán sí que aparecen mencionadas y reescritas, como si la intención fuera, por una parte, corroborar que Orfeo sigue formando parte de nuestro mundo cultural y, por otra, preservar las leyendas y mitos propios del Pirineo catalán para que no mueran con las culturas de supervivencia rurales que los transmitieron en el tiempo.

que los animales pueden hablar y describir el mundo. La propuesta de interpretación que queremos defender aquí es que este pacto ficcional está regido por la figura de Orfeo, es decir, que Orfeo comparece en *Canto yo y la montaña baila* como el modelo desde el que se articulan las múltiples voces narrativas que componen el universo ficcional de la obra. La autora se coloca en la posición de Orfeo y asumiendo su canto hace hablar a la abigarrada colección de seres que pueblan el texto, de modo que no se trata de una actualización referencial del mito, sino de su empleo como marco ficcional en que se desarrollará la obra.

La autora construye múltiples voces narrativas haciendo *como si* su voz fuera un encantamiento cuyo influjo mágico en la naturaleza nos permite escuchar y comprender la particular experiencia del mundo que tienen los distintos animales que pueblan la obra. Este pacto ficcional no solo consiste en la actualización del motivo del canto como *incantamentum* sino también en la recuperación de la idea del canto como revelación de la totalidad pues son los distintos animales cantores, las múltiples voces narrativas, las que componen un universo ficcional cerrado caracterizado por su circularidad, donde priman las relaciones de comunicación e interdependencia. Es precisamente a través del encanto del canto como se revela la compleja y armónica arquitectura que reúne a todos los seres de la obra y la que hace de ese conjunto de masías de la Alta Garrotxa un ecosistema en el que nos adentramos a partir de la experiencia que de él tienen todos los seres que lo componen.

Puesto que es Orfeo el autor modelo (Eco 90)¹⁰ desde el que se construyen las distintas voces narrativas, no resulta incoherente o inverosímil que personajes muertos tomen la palabra de acuerdo con las particulares reglas que este modelo habilita. En la medida en que Orfeo tiene una función mediadora entre el mundo de los vivos y los muertos, en cuanto que Orfeo retorna del inframundo y trae la voz de ultratumba al mundo de los vivos, no resulta paradójico o inconsecuente que algunas de las voces narrativas de la obra sean personajes cuya muerte forma parte de la diégesis, siendo quizá el caso más significativo el de Hilari que aparece junto a Eva en el capítulo “El hermanito de todos” para mostrarle a su “palomita” el escondite en que se guarece su padre, Domènec. Este hecho permite que en la obra se subviertan las relaciones de continuidad y sucesión que rigen el tiempo de la vida para fundar una realidad estética donde vivos y muertos conviven *como si* la muerte no fuera un hecho irreversible. Así también ocurría en el mito de Orfeo pues, a pesar de no ser capaz de vencer a la muerte, por el tiempo que dura su canto el poder de las fuerzas de ultratumba queda suspendido (Bauzá 148).

De hecho, la subversión cuestiona la propia forma narrativa de la obra pues los acontecimientos que en ella se relatan no se presentan regidos por una relación argumental y no se inscriben en una única temporalidad. En la medida en que la obra aspira a respetar la radical alteridad de los seres que representa, los animales no

¹⁰ Recuérdese que para Eco el autor modelo no guarda necesariamente ninguna relación con el autor real, sino que es la figura que el lector construye a partir de ciertos elementos textuales —como el estilo o el uso de las voces narrativas—.

comparecen como funciones argumentales (Ferlosio 21) sino como existencias autónomas con su temporalidad propia. El corzo nace y, con su ritmo acelerado de presa asustadiza, nos narra apenas unos días de parto y de vida. Las setas, en cambio, nos hablan desde una pluralidad de tiempos y seres, con una narrativa en la que el micelio cobra conciencia y la mente colmena nos habla desde la primera persona del plural, con frases cortas como mil momentos presentes, sin sentido del tiempo ni de la muerte. Y la montaña—que sirve como bisagra de la obra y condición de posibilidad del ecosistema—imprime su vejez a lo largo de eones, abarcando en unas pocas páginas millones de años y de vidas, insignificante a sus muertes. Consideramos que esa subversión de la forma narrativa y de la temporalidad lineal es, en *Canto yo y la montaña baila* un gesto ético pues “guardar celosamente la distancia con las cosas, reconocer su incommovible alteridad, es la primera condición de todo conocer” (Ferlosio 15). En el reconocimiento de nuestra radical diferencia con los animales descansa la posibilidad de que podamos conocerlos. Pasamos ahora a analizar la dimensión ética y ecológica de esta actualización del mito.

Un canto que no somete. La derivación ecologista del canto como *incantamentum*

Una vez apuntaladas las concomitancias entre el mito de Orfeo y *Canto yo y la montaña baila* que, insistimos, no consisten en las referencias directas al mito sino en su asimilación como autor modelo (Eco), cabe destacar ahora la sutil y elegante derivación del mito que Irene Solà opera en su obra. Como señalábamos previamente, Orfeo es un héroe civilizador por cuanto su canto doma a las fieras y somete la voluntad de los hombres, incluso en aquellos dominios que están más allá de la jurisdicción humana, como es el mundo de ultratumba. Su papel como héroe civilizador consiste en el control y la dominación de la primera naturaleza de modo que su relación con animales y seres inertes siempre se da como una relación de subyugación al embeleso de su lira. Dicha dominación sacaría a la luz la armonía preexistente en el orden natural y revelaría la totalidad escondida de la naturaleza. En el caso de *Canto yo y la montaña baila* animales humanos, no humanos y plantas no quedan subyugados a la lira órfica, sino que, más bien, hablan por sí mismos, toman la palabra.

En la medida en que Orfeo queda en un segundo plano,¹¹ como un autor modelo en la sombra cuya presencia únicamente se hace sensible en la construcción

¹¹ La disolución de la figura de Orfeo—es decir, la desaparición tanto del sujeto como punto de polarización afectiva como del carácter agónico de la trama del mito clásico—también trae consecuencias en la estructura “mítica” que nos propone Solà. Si el mito clásico se articulaba según una trama agónica donde la capacidad de acción de la mujer estaba radicalmente desfondada—podríamos decir que el mito sigue lo que Teresa de Laurentis denomina la estructura narrativa edípica (187-189), es decir, una narrativa en la que el hombre se vuelve héroe en detrimento de la mujer y la naturaleza—en *Canto yo y la montaña baila* la desaparición de Orfeo como punto de polarización afectiva posibilita que no haya figuras negativas, ni otredades que sirvan de desarrollo, premio o reto a ningún protagonista.

de las múltiples voces narrativas, no hay ningún tipo de interferencia con el canto de cada uno de estos seres que no están animados y dominados sino únicamente encantados, insuflados por un canto vivificante. El componente de domesticación y dominio que regía el canto como *incantamentum* en el mito órfico desaparece por completo en la obra de Irene Solà para que sea la propia naturaleza la que hable, dando testimonio de su experiencia del mundo y marcando las relaciones de interdependencia sobre las que se sostiene su existencia.

Es en este preciso sentido en que se puede considerar que la actualización del mito de Orfeo en la obra de Irene Solà es ecologista pues postula una relación de escucha del mundo vivo en la que Orfeo tiene una función meramente propiciatoria. Asimismo, la revelación de la totalidad que, en el mito clásico, tenía como condición de posibilidad la domesticación de los animales emerge, en el texto de Irene Solà, como una consecuencia de las relaciones de interdependencia que se revelen a través de los múltiples cantos de los seres. *Canto yo y la montaña baila* puede ser considerada, por tanto, como una contribución ficcional al cuestionamiento ecologista del concepto moderno de autonomía, al que Bruno Latour ha dedicado buena parte de su obra, pero que también ha sido criticado por autoras ecofeministas como Yayo Herrero:

El imaginario colectivo continúa sutilmente entreverado por la lógica de la dominación sobre la naturaleza. Sumida en un preocupante analfabetismo ecológico, una buena parte de la sociedad y muchas de sus instituciones continúan pensando que un río es una tubería de agua y que los animales son fábricas de proteínas. La mayor parte de la ciudadanía no se siente ecodependiente y considera que la ciencia y la técnica serán capaces de resolver todos los deterioros que ellas mismas crean. (286-287)

Dicha lógica de la dominación es la que alienta el mito clásico, pues con su hazaña Orfeo parecía trascender las limitaciones humanas. Frente a este canto a la dominación y la autonomía, en la obra de Irene Solà podría hablarse de una sacralidad inmanente al mundo descrito que no es revelada por efecto de la dominación y la subyugación, sino por la dignificación de los seres que lo componen y que lo hacen habitable.

El acceso al mundo natural que la obra ofrece, como si pudiéramos experimentar—mediadas por el lenguaje—las sensaciones de diferentes animales humanos y no humanos y de diferentes seres, vivos y no vivos, consigue revelar el carácter extraordinario y milagroso del mundo que nos rodea al hacer sensible a un tiempo tanto la radical singularidad de cada uno de los seres que lo conforman como la armónica unidad que juntos componen y mantienen. Si Gaia ha de constituir un nuevo cosmograma (Arenas) que sustituya las visiones mecanicistas y burdamente racionalistas de la naturaleza, como han propuesto Bruno Latour (2019) o Jorge Riechmann (2022), a partir de las obras de Lynn Margulis o James Lovelock, la obra de Irene Solà puede constituir un primer punto de partida en la constitución de un

nuevo mito gaiano que transforme radicalmente nuestra relación con la naturaleza y eduque y cultive nuestra capacidad para la fascinación y el asombro.¹²

Canto yo y la montaña baila puede ser leído, entonces, como un libro que encanta nuestra relación con la naturaleza. Para Jane Bennett, el encantamiento “entails a state of wonder, and one of the distinctions of this state is the temporary suspension of chronological time and bodily movement. To be enchanted, then, is to participate in a momentarily immobilizing encounter; it is to be transfixed, spellbound” (5). Si bien es cierto que nuestra tradición intelectual ha considerado el encantamiento como un modo de relación con la naturaleza producto de un determinado desarrollo del conocimiento y las creencias humanas ya pretérito, Jane Bennett defiende que el encantamiento constituye también una predisposición hacia el mundo natural que puede ser cultivada y ejercitada y que guarda todo un potencial ético como afecto que movilice nuestra voluntad moral. El libro de Irene Solà puede servir a este propósito en la medida en que nos hace percibir todo el inmenso mundo que, oculto a nuestros sentidos, late en la vida de la tierra. Tomando mayor consciencia de la singularidad de los seres con los que la compartimos podremos quizá también minimizar su daño y su sufrimiento y, en última instancia, evitar su extinción.

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¹² Para una revisión de la importancia de los mitos en nuestra relación con el mundo natural se puede consultar el libro de Armstrong, Karen. *Naturaleza sagrada: Cómo podemos recuperar nuestro vínculo con el mundo natural* (2022) donde leemos: “hemos de pensar buenos mitos que nos ayuden a fomentar un sentimiento de veneración hacia la tierra como realidad sagrada, puesto que, de no concretar alguna forma de revolución espiritual capaz de contrarrestar las tendencias destructivas de nuestro ingenio tecnológico, no lograremos salvar el planeta” (30).

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Résumé

L'importance du monde naturel chez Jean Giono est bien connue et commentée dans la littérature critique. Malheureusement, la conscience écologique de cet auteur semble être trop souvent une raison de plus pour qu'on le considère conservateur, pastoraliste ou encore passéiste. Cependant, cette interprétation semble valable qu'en faisant abstraction de l'érotisme qui investit les images du monde non-humain. Cet essai montre comment Giono dépeint un foisonnement des possibilités sexuelles et affectives avec et au sein de l'environnement naturel, résistant aux normes et aux prescriptions. Son écriture tombe alors sous la rubrique de ce que l'on appelle aujourd'hui "l'écologie *queer*", terme qui indique une "constellation interdisciplinaire de pratiques qui visent, de façon diverse, à bouleverser les articulations discursives et institutionnelles dominantes de la sexualité et la nature" (Sandilands). Giono refuse de confiner ses personnages dans des rôles de genre traditionnels et il montre la vie affective et sexuelle des corps dont l'érotisme est traditionnellement refoulé ou refusé par la société (corps gros, handicapés ou vieux). Il décrit des relations mutuelles et réciproques entre l'être humain et d'autres êtres vivants ou non, et il met même en scène la bestialité non pas comme une pratique perverse mais comme revanche de la nature sur les hommes qui l'exploitent. Enfin, il sépare l'érotisme de l'acte sexuel, libérant ainsi le plaisir au contact de l'environnement et donnant tout son sens au mot "biophilie."

Mots clés: Écologie *queer*, écopoétique, genre, roman, rural.

Abstract

The importance of the natural world for Jean Giono is well known and commented upon in the critical literature. Sadly, the novelist's ecological consciousness seems to be too often yet one more reason to call him conservative, pastoralist, or backward-looking. This interpretation, however, can only be made by ignoring the eroticism that infuses the images of the nonhuman world. This essay shows how Giono depicts a proliferation of sexual and affective possibilities with and within the natural environment, resisting all norms and prescriptions. His writing thus falls into the purview of what is now called "Queer ecology," a term that indicates "interdisciplinary constellation of practices that aim, in different ways, to disrupt prevailing heterosexist discursive and institutional articulations of sexuality and nature" (Sandilands). Giono refuses to confine his characters to traditional gender roles and shows the affective and sexual lives of bodies whose sexuality is traditionally repressed or denied by society (fat, handicapped, or old bodies). He writes of mutual and reciprocal relationships between human beings and other living or non-living things, and even shows bestiality, not as a perverse practice, but as the revenge of nature on the men who exploit it. Finally, he separates eroticism in general from the sexual act, liberating pleasure in contact with the environment and allowing for the full range of meaning of the word "biophilia."

Keywords: Queer ecology, ecopoetics, gender, novel, rural.

Resumen

La importancia del mundo natural en la obra de Jean Giono es bien conocida y comentada en la crítica literaria. Desafortunadamente, la consciencia ecológica de este autor parece ser demasiado a menudo una razón más para referirse a él como conservador, pastoril o retrógrado. Esta interpretación, sin embargo, sólo puede hacerse ignorando el erotismo que llena las imágenes del mundo no humano. Este ensayo muestra cómo Giono describe una abundancia de posibilidades sexuales y afectivas con y dentro del entorno natural, resistiendo normas y prescripciones. Su escritura entonces cae bajo la rúbrica de lo que ahora se conoce como la “ecología queer”, un término que indica una “constelación interdisciplinaria de prácticas que apuntan, de diversas maneras, a perturbar las articulaciones discursivas e institucionales dominantes de la sexualidad y la naturaleza” (Sandilands). Giono se niega a encerrar a sus personajes en los papeles de género tradicionales y muestra la vida afectiva y sexual de cuerpos cuyo erotismo es tradicionalmente reprimido o rechazado por la sociedad (cuerpos gordos, minusválidos o viejos). Escribe sobre las relaciones mutuas y recíprocas entre los seres humanos y otros seres vivos o no vivos, e incluso escenifica la bestialidad no como una práctica perversa sino como la venganza de la naturaleza contra los hombres que la explotan. Finalmente, separa el erotismo del acto sexual, liberando el placer que se halla en el contacto con el entorno y dando pleno sentido a la palabra “biofilia.”

Palabras clave: Ecología *queer*, eco-poética, género, novela, rural.

Je sais que je suis un sensuel.

Jean Giono, 96

[Q]ueer, non pas dans le sens des personnes avec qui l'on a des rapports sexuels — cela peut en être une dimension — mais queer dans le sens d'un être qui existe en contradiction avec tout ce qui l'entoure et qui doit inventer, créer et trouver un endroit pour s'exprimer, s'épanouir et vivre.
bell hooks, (notre traduction) ¹

L'engagement écologique de Jean Giono est aussi bien reconnu que prévalent dans son œuvre: dans un sens politique, mais également dans l'implication de son corps même dans l'environnement de la Provence qu'il décrit avec tant de révérence. Récemment, un nouveau champ de la théorie écocritique nous a permis de commencer à revoir ces rapports entre le corps humain et l'environnement: l'écologie dite *queer*. Cette théorie (élaborée de la façon la plus systématique par Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands et Greta Gaard) n'est pas uniquement un effort d'inscrire l'homosexualité ou les identités trans dans la nature, mais plutôt de tisser les liens complexes entre le corps (humain ou autre), le monde, la sexualité et le pouvoir. En relisant Giono avec cette approche, nous pouvons voir comment l'auteur joue librement avec ces liens et propose une vision profondément libre du désir, du plaisir et de l'amour. Le rapport idéal de l'être humain au monde peint par Giono est caractérisé par un désir qui n'a aucun rapport prédéterminé avec la sexualité

¹ “'Queer' not as being about who you're having sex with (that can be a dimension of it); but 'queer' as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and that has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live.”

(notamment avec l'hétérosexualité) et moins encore avec la procréation. Le monde naturel exprime également des sexualités non-normatives, dénaturalisant ainsi le rapport du désir et de la sexualité aux règles sociales et à la procréation. Finalement, ce monde où la nature offre plusieurs manières de désirer ou d'assouvir un désir devient espace ouvert à l'acceptation des désirs non-normatifs et favorable à la création de relations intimes en dehors du système de l'hétérosexualité et de la filiation, d'une part; et au tissage de liens dépassant la barrière entre l'homme et la nature au sein de laquelle ce dernier évolue. Nous verrons comment cette relation se transforme au long de la carrière de l'écrivain. Par ailleurs, nous étudierons comment elle se manifeste entre les êtres humains et l'environnement au sens large, entre les êtres humains et les animaux, et parmi les êtres humains.

L'écologie *queer*

Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands offre une élaboration et une justification de cette théorie où elle présente les enjeux de ce projet :

L'écoféminisme et la justice environnementale nous ouvrent les yeux au fait que la nature organise et est organisée par des relations complexes de pouvoir. Ce qu'apporte l'écologie *queer* est le fait que ces relations de pouvoir comprennent la sexualité [...] un projet écologique *queer* pourrait procéder en contestant ces liens problématiques entre les relations du pouvoir de la sexualité et la nature. Les personnes *queers* ont, d'une variété de manières, contesté l'appairage de l'hétérosexualité et de la nature : en développant des "discours à l'envers" orientés à contester les compréhensions dominantes de nos "passions contre nature". (Mortimer-Sandilands 5 ; notre traduction)²

Selon cette théorie, la destruction de la nature est inextricablement liée à tout autre système d'oppression enraciné dans une pensée dualiste ou binaire opposant humain/nature, homme/femme, blanc/non-blanc, hétérosexuel/*queer*, raison/corps—ou, autrement dit: raison/érotisme (Gaard 114-16). L'écologie *queer* ne décrit pas simplement le monde, mais elle prend également une position politique qui a pour but l'élimination de ces oppositions.

À ce sujet, deux concepts clés à considérer sont "l'érotophobie" (l'idée que l'érotique en tant que manifestation de notre réalité corporelle est rejetée, subordonnée à la raison dans l'esprit occidental contemporain) et le décuplement de l'érotisme de la reproduction. Ce dernier s'accomplit à travers l'introduction du concept d'un "érotogénisme environnemental" où le contact avec le monde naturel serait la source d'une excitation libidinale :

La reproduction est une histoire régulatrice racontée pour cacher le flux érotique et renier l'abjection ; l'éruption de l'érotisme au-delà de cette histoire menace la solidité et l'immortalité du sujet reproducteur [...]. D'abord, si "faire l'amour aux mondes" [op

² "Ecofeminism and environmental justice open our eyes to the fact that nature organizes and is organized by complex power relations. What queer ecology adds is the fact that these power relations include sexuality [...] a queer ecological project might proceed by *challenging* these problematic links between the power relations of sexuality and nature. Queers have, in a variety of ways, challenged the destructive pairing of heterosexuality and nature: by developing "reverse discourses" oriented to challenging dominant understandings of our 'unnatural passions.'"

cit Grosz 198] implique une dissolution des frontières entre les surfaces humaines et (potentiellement) non-humaines, alors un érotogénisme environnemental pourrait inspirer des contacts fugaces et excitants parmi une multiplicité d'autres actifs et désirants [...] rendre *queer* le désir au-delà de l'hégémonie de la pénétration reproductrice est un élément fondamental de cette exploration environnementale.³ (Sandilands 184; notre traduction)

Le théoricien de genre Jack Halberstam a également développé l'idée d'un certain parallélisme entre le désir "queer", le monde non-humain, et l'Autre colonial dans son essai *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire*. Tous ces phénomènes ne sont pas un "avant" de la civilisation et son "hégémonie", mais existent comme ce qui doit être constamment repoussé. Halberstam appelle cela *wildness* (sauvagerie ou démesure):

Wildness n'est ni simplement le contraire de l'ordre, ni l'intensification du naturel [...] *wildness* est l'absence de l'ordre, la force entropique d'un chaos qui fuit constamment les tentatives biopolitiques pour gérer la vie et les corps et les désirs [...] *wildness* [...] désordre le désir et désire le désordre. Au-delà l'humain, *wildness* tisse des narratives de croissance végétale, multiplication virale, systèmes d'échange nonhumain dynamiques. (Halberstam 7 ; notre traduction)⁴

Dans les pages qui suivront nous verrons comment, en évoluant vers l'écriture d'un monde avec lequel il pourrait "faire l'amour", Giono crée un univers qui déploie une énorme liberté de possibilités érotiques et affectives, inextricablement liée à son rapport au monde naturel.

Le désir et la nature: une évolution

Cette vision du monde ne s'avère pas évidente dès le début de son œuvre, évoluant plutôt à travers sa carrière. Pendant ladite "première période", certains livres expriment une vision plus conservatrice ou du moins plus étroite du rapport entre le désir, la sexualité et la nature. Dans ces livres la nature peut susciter ou refléter le désir des personnages, mais ce désir reste fondamentalement dirigé vers une autre personne et vise souvent à la procréation. Par exemple, dans le roman *Regain*, Arsule peut sentir son désir s'éveiller au contact avec le vent du printemps (Giono I, 356) et Panturle "a patouillé dans le sang des choses molles" (369) du renard qu'il vient de tuer, ne sachant pas encore où diriger son désir difforme, Mais à la fin les deux personnages assouvissent leurs désirs en fondant une famille nucléaire, en faisant renaître la communauté humaine et en reprenant la culture (contrôle) de la terre. Julia, dans *Le Grand troupeau*, ressent un désir déclenché par le contact avec l'animalité de l'étable où elle travaille et avec la chaleur et l'odeur du foin (Giono I,

³ "Reproduction is a regulatory story told to mask erotic flux and disavow abjection; the eruption of eroticism beyond this story threatens the solidity and immortality of the reproductive subject [...] First, if "making love to worlds" involves a dissolution of boundaries between human and (potentially) nonhuman surfaces, then an environmental erotogenics might inspire fleeting and exciting contacts among a multiplicity of active and desiring others [...] queering desire beyond the hegemony of reproductive penetration is a crucial part of this environmental exploration."

⁴ "[W]ildness is not simply the opposite of order, nor the intensification of the natural [...] wildness is the absence of order, the entropic force of a chaos that constantly spins away from biopolitical attempts to manage life and bodies and desires. [...] Wildness [...] disorders desire and desires disorder. Beyond the human, wildness spins narratives of vegetal growth, viral multiplication, dynamic systems of nonhuman exchange."

567). Toutefois, ce désir est, fondamentalement, le désir d'un homme—un désir qui trouve une échappatoire dans le déserteur qui arrive à la ferme, puis dans son mari revenu de la Grande Guerre. Dans *Que ma joie demeure*, le monde naturel joue ce même rôle de déclenchement ou d'éveil du désir pour la jeune Aurore et pour sa mère Mme Hélène ("Les gémissements du vent entraient dans sa chair et se plaignaient tout contre son cœur" [Giono II, 689]), mais ce désir se manifeste dans, et ne peut avoir pour but que, le couple hétérosexuel. Voyant une telle vie lui échapper quand le voyageur Bobi choisit une autre femme, Aurore ne peut pas continuer à vivre et se suicide. Quoique pour les habitants du plateau de Grémone la subordination de la terre par l'homme perde de l'importance sous l'influence de Bobi, on priorise la fécondation (des chevaux, du cerf et de la biche).

Par ailleurs, dans un autre roman de la même période, le lien entre l'environnement et le désir se complique. Pour Antonio, personnage principal du *Chant du monde*, le monde naturel n'est plus seulement un reflet du désir humain, ni un catalyseur pour ce désir, ni un objet à être dompté, ni un modèle du désir "naturel" et donc procréatif. La joie—voire la jouissance—qu'il ressent au contact du fleuve n'a rien d'autre que ce fleuve pour objet. Pour Mari O'Brien, Antonio manifeste des attributs à la fois masculins et féminins:

Giono a, en fait, créé un monde imprégné d'attributs féminins dont l'influence est inévitable, même pour son héros particulièrement masculin Antonio [...] il suggère subtilement qu'Antonio entretient un élément féminin latent [...]. Fréquemment son appréciation du monde naturel féminisé est rendue également instinctive – respectueuse mais physique, palpablement sexuelle plutôt qu'esthétique ou émotionnelle. (O'Brien 77-78; notre traduction)⁵

En plus, dans le rapport d'Antonio et de Clara, la femme aveugle qu'il trouve dans la forêt, la nature n'est pas seulement un reflet de leur désir réciproque, mais aussi et surtout un objet de leur désir—leur amour trouve son expression la plus parfaite en partageant leurs expériences sensorielles de la nature—la vue du ciel, l'odeur de l'eau.

Plus explicitement encore, la nouvelle "Prélude de Pan"—dans le recueil *Solitude de la Pitié*—met en scène une sexualité non-normative et une continuité entre l'humain et le non-humain quand un inconnu mystérieux inspire un délire chez des villageois pendant leur fête, avec pour résultat une danse effrénée, un délire où une jeune femme et un cerf s'accouplent, ainsi que le narrateur et une jument (Giono I, 456-457). La procréation est explicitement exclue ici, non pas au profit du plaisir, mais plutôt pour la mort et l'abjection, la progéniture monstrueuse de ces unions s'avortant ou étant détruite. Cette irruption d'une sexualité ou d'un désir autre apparaît comme une punition des êtres humains pour l'hybris d'avoir cru imposer leur autorité sur le monde plus qu'humain (spécifiquement, en traitant de façon sadique un oiseau capturé) dans une destruction brutale de la barrière entre les deux domaines. Tout en étant une punition pour les villageois quand ils reviennent à leur

⁵ "Giono has, in fact, created a world imbued with female attributes from whose influence even his prototypically masculine hero Antonio cannot escape [...] he subtly suggests that Antonio harbors a latent feminine element [...] Frequently, his appreciation of the feminized natural world is rendered as equally instinctive—respectful yet physical, palpably sexual rather than aesthetic or emotional."

quotidien, il s'agit également d'un moment de joie et de plaisir profond dans le moment même de leur délire. Dans l'univers de ce récit, la séparation entre les êtres humains et la nature semble être une affaire de tout ou rien—la “Grande barrière” entre humains et bêtes évoquée dans ce recueil doit à tout prix être respectée. L'idée des hommes s'opposant à la nature en tant qu'adversaires se fait évidente dans *Colline*, où l'exploitation de la nature par les hommes (domination agricole, meurtre nonchalant des bêtes) sera punie avec leur fontaine asséchée et l'incendie de leurs champs. Cependant, dans ce roman, la conscience de la nature chez les hommes, même une nature menaçante, se crée à travers des moments intenses de saturation sensorielle:

Dans la trilogie de Pan [*Colline, Un de Baumugnes, Regain*], Giono force le lecteur à profiter des voies sensorielles qui nous aident à comprendre le monde où nous vivons et mourons. Semblable à Michel Serres quand il critique la philosophie cartésienne en ce qu'elle diminue le rôle vital de nos facultés sensorielles dans la construction de la connaissance et la signification ontologique, Giono prétend que nos cinq sens sont la clé pour nous comprendre nous-mêmes ainsi que la biosphère.

La conviction philosophique explique pourquoi les unions fondamentales vécues par les protagonistes gioniens sont parfois érotiquement chargées. (Moser 121; notre traduction)⁶

Dans ces exemples du début de son œuvre, Giono essaie de cerner la relation entre la nature et le désir de ses personnages, sans pour autant pouvoir les réconcilier. Mais du moins un personnage arrive à traverser impunément la barrière qui, à première vue, sépare ces deux domaines: l'homme mystérieux qui appelle la folie sur le village de “Prélude”. Cette figure, le “Pan” du titre, est capable d'exister dans les deux mondes, indiquant une manière de vivre à la frontière entre eux et de fonctionner comme cette même frontière. Il y a une certaine ascèse dans sa manière d'être, ainsi que dans sa volonté de protéger les êtres faibles victimisés par les puissants, mais en même temps une certaine démesure. C'est une figure qui, avec son rôle mythologique de dieu de la nature et son appétit sexuel énorme, évoque à la fois la nature non-humaine et l'érotisme non-procréatif.

Sexualité ou sensualité?

On entrevoit ce vers quoi l'érotisme évolue dans l'esprit de l'auteur dans *Jean le bleu*, roman impressionniste s'inspirant de sa propre vie. Le jeune narrateur lui-même se décrit comme un être “sensuel” qui se sent percé, traversé par toute impression sensorielle, ouvert au monde et attiré par lui:

Cette sensualité qui me faisait toucher un mur et imaginer le grain de pore d'une peau. Cette sensualité qui m'empêchait d'apprendre la musique [...], cette sensualité qui faisait de moi une goutte d'eau traversée des formes et des couleurs du monde,

⁶ “In the Pan trilogy, Giono compels the reader to take advantage of the sensorial pathways that help us to make sense out of the world in which we live and die. Similar to how Michel Serres criticizes Cartesian philosophy for diminishing the vital role of our sensorial facilities in constructing knowledge and ontological meaning, Giono asserts that our five senses are the key to understanding ourselves and the biosphere.

The philosophical conviction explains why the elemental unions experienced by Gionian protagonists are sometimes erotically charged.”

portant, en vérité, comme la goutte d'eau, la forme, la couleur, le son, le sens marqué dans ma chair. (Giono II, 96)

Bien que l'éveil au monde du jeune garçon soit contemporain de ses premières impressions du féminin en tant que tel, celles-ci ne sont nullement priorisées. La musique classique ou le contact avec un mur moisi du grenier le bouleverse autant que l'odeur des femmes et que les yeux de la petite fille Anne. Il n'y a de hiérarchie ni dans la sensualité, ni dans le désir. Il désire une sensation et le contact avec le monde qui l'entoure, peu importe l'humanité ou non des éléments de ce monde. Il s'agit d'un personnage poreux, perméable et existant en continuité avec le monde naturel; et celui-ci suscite en lui un désir sans objet spécifique.

Dans le roman *Fragments d'un paradis*, les marins réagissent à l'odeur mystérieuse d'une immense raie venue des profondeurs de l'eau de façon aussi bienémotionnelle que physiologique: une émotion qu'ils appellent "antiarcadien" (Giono III, 888). Même si certains éléments de cette description (farine, fleurs) rappellent la description de l'"odeur de femme" décrite dans *Jean le bleu*, ce qu'évoque cette odeur est bien au-delà de toute mesure ou valeur humaine. En plus, ce que le capitaine cherche, et ce qu'il veut léguer au monde, c'est une richesse de spectacle à trouver dans le "monde réel" une richesse esthétique et sensorielle dont il croit la plupart des gens civilisés dépourvus :

La plupart, s'ils deviennent des hommes de qualité, ne pourront plus vivre qu'en imagination. *Il faut qu'ils sachent que la réalité est plus fantastique que l'imagination.* Qu'ils vivent dans un monde plus coloré qu'une carte à jouer et plus savoureux que cette sauce aux poissons de Quéréjéta. Je veux les délivrer du jardin potager, de la boule de verre, de la succursale d'épicerie, du guichet de chemin de fer, de tout ce qui conditionne leur jardin d'Armide. (Giono III, 967)

Cette dernière phrase parle de la nécessité d'expérimenter pleinement tout ce qu'il y a dans la vie et dans notre imagination, au lieu de nous contenter avec le quotidien ou l'illusion (le jardin d'Armide mythologique). Peut-être l'exemple le plus saillant de ce désir pour le non-humain se trouve dans *Un Roi sans divertissement*, où une pulsion, un désir esthétique pousse les deux antagonistes (M. V. et le gendarme Langlois) jusqu'à la destruction. Ils recherchent un "divertissement" impossible à trouver—ni pour l'un ni pour l'autre—dans le mariage et la vie familiale. L'idée du désir d'une femme n'est pour eux qu'un leurre. Ce désir esthétique ou sensuel peut aussi être comparé à ce que l'écrivaine Audre Lorde (qui se définissait habituellement comme "noire, lesbienne, mère, guerrière, poète") appelait l'"érotique":

L'érotique mesure la distance qui sépare les premiers pas de la conscience de soi du chaos de nos émotions les plus profondes. Une fois que nous en avons fait l'expérience, nous savons que nous pouvons aspirer à cet accomplissement intérieur [...] nous ne pouvons pas, en toute fierté et en toute dignité, exiger moins de nous-mêmes. [...] Parce que, dans l'érotique, ce n'est pas seulement ce que nous faisons qui compte, c'est aussi l'acuité et la plénitude avec lesquelles nous ressentons ce que nous faisons. Savoir à quel point nous pouvons éprouver une telle sensation de satisfaction et de plénitude nous permet d'identifier, parmi tous nos comportements, ceux qui dans notre vie nous rapprochent le plus de cette plénitude. (Traduction de Calise et al., 3)⁷

⁷ The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire [...] in honor and self respect we can require no less of ourselves.[...] For the erotic is not a

Cette plénitude sensorielle est bien ce que recherchent tous les personnages de Giono, surtout ceux que j'ai évoqués dans le paragraphe précédent. Et cet "érotisme" devient possible dans "tous nos comportements", non seulement ou peut-être pas du tout dans l'acte de faire l'amour. Lorde, par exemple, parle de ce qu'elle ressent en dansant, en bricolant, en écrivant. Il s'agit de ressentir pleinement cette activité et non pas de vivre des sensations purement routines. Une fois expérimentée, cette sensation reste toujours à l'horizon vers lequel nous tendons, tout comme M.V. et Langlois, qui s'égarèrent dans la chasse à l'érotique.

Ces sensations érotiques mais non-sexuelles peuvent également être ressenties dans les relations avec d'autres individus. Lorde parle de la compagnie de ses "sœurs". Souvent, pour Giono ce sont les animaux avec qui on est en communauté et avec qui les personnages partagent leur affect. Dans une extension du monde affectif aux animaux, la philosophe Donna Haraway, dans son *Companion Species Manifesto* voit ces amitiés interspécifiques comme encore une fois une extension des parentés *queer* d'amitié, d'amour, et ces rapports avec des êtres hors de la voie de la propagation de notre propre espèce prolifèrent dans l'œuvre de Giono. Dans *Le Chant du monde*, Antonio peut communiquer avec les animaux de la forêt. Les chevaux du jeune chevalier Angelo dans le roman du même nom et dans *Le Hussard sur le toit* et du gendarme Langlois s'entendent non seulement avec leur cavalier mais avec les êtres humains en général, le cheval de Langlois cherchant à rendre service aux villageois (Giono III, 510). Le loup chassé par les villageois avec Langlois à leur tête semble reconnaître en celui-ci un être semblable au moment où le gendarme l'abat. Dans *Que ma joie demeure*, le cerf que Bobi fait venir devient l'ami des habitants du plateau de Grémone, la jeune fille Zulma essaie d'allaiter un chiot (Giono II, 443), le cerf lèche la main de la fille et, selon la voix narrative en discours indirect libre, il "[a] envie de se dresser debout et de la serrer dans ses pattes de devant, et de la courber vers la terre" (Giono II, 495). La meilleure amie d'Aurore dans ce même roman est sa jument, jusqu'à ce que celle-ci l'abandonne pour suivre l'étalon libéré sur le plateau et Aurore devienne jalouse des rapports de la jument d'abord avec l'étalon, puis du poulain en gestation (Giono II, 657).

Néanmoins, je dois préciser que tous les rapports avec les animaux ne sont pas amicaux. Toute relation montre l'ambivalence qu'analyse Alain Romestaing dans son article "In the Shadow of Pan/Dionysus: Ambivalent Animality in the Works of Jean Giono and Henri Bosco": elle peut soudainement menacer l'intégrité de l'être humain, mais elle tisse quand même des liens intimes, horizontaux et multiples qui n'ont pour but aucun rapport "vertical" de filiation.

Foisonnement des sexualités humaines

Par ailleurs, dans cet univers où le désir et la sensualité prennent des formes multiples et suffisamment larges pour englober le vivant, l'on voit également la considération et le respect avec lesquelles Giono regardait toute forme de désir et de

question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing. Once we know the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion, we can then observe which of our various life endeavors brings us closest to that fullness. (Lorde 88)

parenté. D'abord, il y a un renversement du fameux "regard masculin" (Mulvey p. 6-18) désirant et scopophilique, ou au moins un assouplissement de cette approche réificatrice. Dans l'œuvre de Giono, ce regard vise les deux sexes de façon *au moins* égalitaire et semble considérer le corps masculin comme objet esthétique et sensuel. Parfois ce regard s'exprime à travers la voix du narrateur comme une vérité objective (les "beaux yeux de velours noirs" d'Angelo dans le roman du même nom [Giono III, 4]). D'autres fois, un personnage se met à la place d'un autre et se prend comme objet en attribuant du désir à l'autre (le narrateur des *Grands chemins* "Je sors de la cuvette lisse et net, avec mon menton volontaire, ma bouche mince et dure dévoilée, ma gueule de printemps" [Giono V, 621]). Ce regard peut également être porté par un personnage sur un autre, comme Marceau Jason de *Deux cavaliers de l'orage* qui regarde avec délices son jeune frère: "La peau de son visage était satinée et brune comme la coque des noisettes. Dans toute cette rouerie de beauté qui séduisait et jouait avec la vie. [...] C'est ainsi, donc, que Marceau le retrouva" (Giono VI, 16).

Le coït semble être accessoire ou même dommageable à certaines intimités, aussi bien hétéroérotiques qu'homoérotiques. Malgré la taxonomie que Mireille Barial fait des femmes dans l'œuvre de Giono, où ces femmes avec qui on ne fait pas l'amour sont "intouchables" (Barial 101), elles sont en fait touchées et touchantes. Un rapport de soin réciproque remplace la pénétration. Prétendre qu'Angelo, lorsqu'il soigne Pauline atteinte du choléra—la déshabillant et la nettoyant contre ses protestations de pudeur, la "frictionnant" (Giono IV, 628-630)—, commette un acte moins intime, qui nécessite moins d'amour ou qui implique moins le corps que "faire l'amour" dans le sens traditionnel de ce terme semble pour le moins contestable. Condensant plusieurs des tendances que j'ai identifiées jusqu'ici, le couple d'hommes musiciens "Décidément" et "Madame-la-Reine" qui enseignent la musique au jeune narrateur de *Jean le bleu* sont des "sensuels" à l'égal de celui-ci. En outre, ils ont une relation pleine de tendresse et de soin mutuel (surtout pendant la maladie de Décidément). Pour finir, ce sont les personnages peut-être le plus visiblement codés comme homosexuels dans toute son œuvre, et ce mode de vie ne semble susciter aucune surprise ni condamnation dans le monde qu'ils habitent.

Se détournant de l'érotophobie en jouissant de l'expérience sensuelle du monde, accueillant toutes les variétés d'expression sexuelle, libérant celles-ci des exigences procréatives ou génitales, Giono ouvre le champ de compagnons ou de partenaires possibles dans les expériences érotiques. Ici il s'agit des rapports hétérosexuelles, d'habitude proscrits par la société dans laquelle il vivait et qui font partie de ce *wildness* décrit par Halberstam. Cette ouverture s'applique également à la possibilité de l'érotisme pour ceux et pour celles à qui ces expériences ou ces émotions sont habituellement interdites ou chez qui elles sont punies. D'abord, il rend aux femmes en général leur agentivité sexuelle. Julia du *Grand troupeau*, Pauline dans *Angelo* ou encore les deux Gina du *Chant du monde* ont leurs propres désirs et les satisfont, même en dehors des institutions socialement reconnues. Clara, dans ce roman-ci, et Angèle dans *Un de Baumugnes*, peuvent très bien avoir eu des amants avant de rencontrer le protagoniste du livre sans que cela pose problème ni à leur amoureux ni au narrateur. Ce dernier reconnaît néanmoins le jugement que portera la famille ou la communauté de la jeune femme au sujet de sa grossesse en dehors du

mariage. Quoique Barial insiste sur le fait que “la pute [soit] méprisée” (Barial 129) et que “toutes les putes meurent” (Barial 58), le lecteur n’a pas l’impression que la justice soit rendue à Angèle ou à Madeleine dans le grand troupeau par la punition de leur famille; notre sympathie s’adresse à la jeune femme. Elles sont réhabilitées: l’ancienne prostituée Arsule trouve une existence stable avec Panturle dans *Regain* et donne naissance, symboliquement parlant, à tout un village. Une femme comme Saucisse dans *Un roi sans divertissement*, qui avait pratiqué la même activité auprès de l’armée, prend sa retraite paisiblement et occupe une place respectée dans sa communauté et dans l’esprit de Langlois en tant que propriétaire du café qui connaît bien la marche du monde.

Encore plus que les femmes *en général* sont souvent exclues de l’agentivité sexuelle, les personnes (et surtout les femmes) âgées, grosses, handicapées, etc., vues comme non désirables et dont le désir est alors considéré comme risible au minimum et monstrueux au maximum. Mais Giono subvertit ce point de vue. Cette attitude de la société est visible dans la réaction des hommes de *Colline* quand ils apprennent que la “vieille fille” Ulalie couche avec Gagou le “simple” (Giono I, 170). Ils ne sont pas choqués par l’abus possible de l’homme intellectuellement handicapé que le lecteur contemporain reconnaîtra, mais s’étonnent plutôt qu’Ulalie—si laide et vieille à leur avis—prétende jouir des plaisirs de la chair. Cependant son père se rend compte du tort de cette position (Giono I, 216) en reconnaissant que le désir et le mérite aux yeux de la société ne sont pas proportionnés. Dans *Le Moulin de Pologne*, toute la bourgeoisie de la ville assiste au bal et, y compris le narrateur, se moque de Julie (qui souffre les effets physiques et psychiques d’un traumatisme qu’elle a vécu comme enfant) et du fait qu’elle cherche un cavalier (Giono V, 704). Mais nous sommes déjà conscients en tant que lecteurs du manque de scrupules de ce narrateur et nous prenons plutôt parti pour M. Joseph, qui, en effet, trouve Julie plus digne que les autres femmes bien nées et l’épouse. Quand une femme, et surtout une femme non-désirable du point de vue social, est punie par la société dans laquelle elle vit pour avoir agi selon son désir, le lecteur de Giono ne verra pas ce résultat comme de la justice, mais comme de l’intolérance. Notable également est Ennemonde dans le recueil du même nom (Giono VI): obèse et avec un corps meurtri par ses grossesses successives; non seulement elle a le droit de se libérer de son mari et de trouver du plaisir (d’abord en conduisant sa voiture à travers la campagne, ensuite dans son histoire d’amour avec le catcheur Clef-des-Cœurs), mais elle y est également décrite comme belle. Giono décrit en détail la beauté de Zulma et de “l’Absente” de *L’Iris de Suse*, toutes les deux intellectuellement handicapées. La valeur esthétique et érotique de ces femmes existe en dehors des valeurs dictées par la société.

Conclusion

Giono élabore à travers son œuvre un monde où le corps humain est ouvert et perméable à son environnement à travers l’expérience “sensuelle”. Il élargit alors les possibilités pour l’expérience érotique ou affective. Dotant l’environnement d’une puissance sensuelle capable de provoquer le désir, il le valorise. Déliant la sexualité et l’amour d’une hétéronormativité obligatoire, il permet des expériences érotiques

variées avec des êtres peut-être dissemblables et réinvestit les subjectivités dévalorisées—comme les femmes et les personnes âgées, handicapées, ou perçues comme laides—faisant preuve d'agentivité sexuelle. Ce faisant, il dénature les rapports hiérarchiques traditionnels créés par la sexualité entre les humains, les autres êtres vivants et leur environnement.

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Anti-Pastoral and the Prophetic Mode in Moddi's Climate Songs

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Abstract

This article explores aspects of apocalypse and the pastoral in the climate-themed song lyrics of Norwegian indie folk artist Moddi. Through close listening and contextualizing of the songs "Noens ark" ("Someone's ark," 2013) and "En sang om fly" ("A song about planes," 2013), apocalypse and pastoral emerge as key concepts. These are navigated in an exploration of a conflicted Norwegian response to global warming. The songs express a critique of the unrelenting pursuits of economic growth and personal consumption in the face of climate risk. Each in their own ways, elements of the selected songs are tailored to express an unsettling encounter with a global environmental risk scenario. "Noens ark" employs forceful instrumentation and polyrhythms to evoke a sense of alarm and urgency in response to the projection of future disaster. "En sang om fly" is a soft composition projecting nostalgia for the material conditions of the present. The desire for these conditions ultimately locks the singer in a cycle of repetition that destabilizes the very conditions he desires, which are linked to connections at the local level. The nuances afforded by this expression in musical performance allows song lyrics to sustain contradictory attitudes towards globalization. In their pursuit of these contradictions, Moddi's climate songs can be seen as aligned to an anti-pastoral tradition. Features of musical genre and a prophetic lyric mode are employed to evoke and subvert the pastoral response to apocalypticism. By musically sustaining contradictions between pastoral and apocalypse, Moddi's songs reflect a conflict between Norwegian identity and a global cultural imaginary in the face of global warming.

Keywords: Norway, song lyrics, climate change, disaster imaginary, indie folk.

Resumen

Este artículo estudia elementos de los géneros apocalíptico y pastoral presentes en las letras de las canciones de Moddi, un artista noruego de *indie folk*, que abordan el tema del clima. La escucha detenida y el análisis en contexto de las canciones "Noens ark" ("El arca de alguien", 2013) y "En sang om fly" ("Una canción sobre aviones", 2013) revelan el papel que lo apocalíptico y lo pastoral juegan como conceptos clave en estas composiciones y facilitan el análisis de la ambivalente respuesta de Noruega ante el fenómeno del calentamiento global. Las canciones critican la búsqueda incesante del crecimiento económico y un mayor consumismo sobre un trasfondo marcado por los riesgos climáticos. Ciertos elementos de las canciones analizadas son utilizados de diferentes formas para recrear la inquietud que suscita el panorama de riesgo climático global. "Noens ark" se sirve de una instrumentación potente y de polirritmos para evocar la alarma y urgencia que provoca la previsión de un desastre futuro. "En sang om fly" es una composición tenue que despierta nostalgia por las condiciones materiales presentes. El anhelo por alcanzarlas logra atrapar al cantante en un ciclo repetitivo que desestabiliza dichas condiciones materiales presentes y sus manifestaciones de carácter local. Los matices expresivos derivados de estas variaciones en la ejecución musical hacen posible que las letras de las canciones expresen actitudes contradictorias respecto a la globalización. La exploración de estas contradicciones permite que las canciones sobre el clima de Moddi puedan considerarse como parte de una tradición anti-pastoral. Las características del género musical y el carácter profético de las letras se usan para evocar y subvertir una respuesta pastoral al apocalipsis. Al canalizar musicalmente las contradicciones entre lo pastoral y lo apocalíptico, las canciones de

Moddi reflejan un conflicto entre la identidad noruega y un imaginario cultural global con respecto al calentamiento global.

Palabras clave: Noruega, letras de canciones, cambio climático, imaginario de desastres, indie folk.

Introduction

The publication of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) 2012 special report, "Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation," was emblematic of a cultural environment increasingly focused on the risk of climate disasters. In the years leading up to 2012, pseudo-religious predictions about the end of the world, in particular linked to the end of the Mayan "Long Count" calendar on December 21, 2012, were a source of apocalyptic and dystopian speculation in popular culture (Stilter). Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives flourished at a time when the pursuit of political action against global warming seemed more and more futile. The 2009 Copenhagen summit of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) resulted in the draft of a framework for climate change mitigation beyond 2012. However, the framework was not legally binding, and failed to create an adequate successor to the Kyoto Protocol, whose first commitment period was set to end in 2012, and which had already been criticized for not including the United States (BBC, Reuters). In an atmosphere of disillusionment with the efforts of the international community, the IPCC report signaled a sense that the world should prepare for catastrophe and was a perfect addition to fuel the apocalyptic imaginary that had intensified in popular culture.

The disaster prospects of global warming have become a prominent subject of art, literature, and popular media in Scandinavia. Louise Mønster describes an "apocalyptic consciousness" spreading in Scandinavian poetry (159). In works like Danish poet Lars Skinnebach's *Øvelser og rituelle tekster (Exercises and ritual texts, 2011)*, whose "people's edition" included a statement on the back reading "Kunst der ikke beskæftiger sig med klimakrisen er ikke værd at beskæftige sig med" ("art that does not deal with the climate crisis is not worth dealing with"), the climate theme and the anticipation of impending catastrophe go hand in hand. Skinnebach conveys a sense of urgency, as if it is up to poetry to address the situation that politicians are unable to handle. What Mønster identifies in Skinnebach and other contemporary works of poetry is a tendency that extends to popular music, in what I term "climate songs": songs that express fears and frustrations regarding the state of the climate, addressing the hypocrisies of a society unable or unwilling to deal with the issue. In many of his songs, Norwegian artist Moddi confronts a society that continues to foster environmentally transgressive lifestyles, even while commonly acknowledging the risk of climate disaster. His song "Noens ark" ("Someone's ark," 2013) conveys alarm over the violence society is inflicting upon itself, while "En sang om fly" ("A song about

planes," 2013) is a calm but frustrated meditation on living on contradictory terms with the future. These songs serve as reflection and warning of the risks associated with global warming.

One of the most outspoken activist singers in Norway, Moddi has branded himself as an eco-conscious artist, touring via train and electric car (Bjørhovde; Thronsen), and contributing to environmental projects (Rygge; Johansen). Singing in the dialect of Senja island, a rural area in northern Norway, Moddi's climate engagement is rooted in local experiences. In her study of a local community in Norway, Kari Marie Norgaard found that while most Norwegians readily admit that they believe global warming to be real and are widely aware that their own consumption patterns severely contribute to the problem, very few people take social action against climate change. Norgaard shows an acute contradiction between the Norwegian self-image as environmentally progressive, and a social organization characterized by denial (88). On one hand, Norwegians exhibit a strong cultural attachment to the country's natural landscapes, and most Norwegians prioritize the environment over economic growth (Halman et al. 106). The country has spearheaded global sustainability efforts through the Brundtland Commission, named after former prime minister and labor party leader Gro Harlem Brundtland. On the other hand, the cornerstone in the state economy is the oil industry. The country has one of Europe's highest proportions of people who do not believe in anthropogenic climate change (ESS 4), and the average carbon footprint of Norwegian households increased by 25% from 1999 to 2012 (Steen-Olsen et al. 588). The patterns indicated by these figures show a polarized culture at odds with its own ecological ideals. Articulating this duality in popular music brings into question the relationship between local identity and globalized culture.

This article will focus on Moddi's songs "Noens ark" and "En sang om fly." Both songs appear on the album *Kæm va du?* (*Who were you?*, 2013), and are the only songs on the album whose music and lyrics are written by Moddi himself (the latter co-written with Maren Skolem). Although Moddi has many songs relating to climate change and the relationship between local and global identity (notably on his 2022 album *Bråtebrann*), his 2013 album displays an early response to the apocalypticism that was prevalent around the time of its release. Apart from the two climate songs, the album features murder ballads based on folk legends and other folk songs interpreted in a context of exploring the dark side of northern Norwegian locality and meditations on an unknown future. In engaging with the selected songs, I attempt to answer the following questions: What themes dominate Moddi's climate songs? How are the lyric words modified in the context of musical composition and performance? And which tensions in the Norwegian cultural imaginary are evinced in Moddi's climate songs?

The analysis will be informed by theory relating to three main issues: Firstly, performance strategies related to popular music genre, specifically the genre of indie folk, which corresponds to Moddi's commercial form combining elements of indie and folk music, and which has commonly served to explore and sustain tensions relating

to global consumerist culture (Bamle, "Indie-folk" 487). Secondly, the interconnection between apocalypse and pastoral, where pastoral serves an underlying sentiment of nostalgia which gives rise to conflict in the face of apocalypticism, resulting in what I have termed an anti-pastoral response (see Gifford, "Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, Post-Pastoral"). Thirdly, the prophetic mode of apocalyptic discourse, by which apocalypse serves not merely as a prediction of future turmoil, but as a present response to what Isak Winkel Holm calls "the Disaster Imaginary" (104). Based on this study, I suggest that Moddi's expression can be described as anti-pastoral, because the examined songs intentionally play with genre conventions to subvert a nostalgic response to apocalypticism. Through a prophetic mode, the singer offers two warnings of a worsening climate. One is violently imposing itself on the listener ("Noens ark") and the other is self-incriminating ("En sang om fly"). Tensions in song lyrics or between the musical and lyrical levels of these songs reflects parallel tensions between local geography and cosmopolitan identities in the face of global warming. Although appeals for betterment in these songs are outwardly directed, they include a self-reflective element, including criticism of Norwegian culture specifically and Western culture in general.

Song Lyrics in a Genre Context

To study song lyrics is to study not only words set to music, but also performance as embedded in both a musical tradition and a social and political context. Although it would be helpful to distinguish meaning emerging from the words and the musical accompaniment from one another, they are in practice materially and sensorily inseparable as they are perceived together as a unit (Jensen and Knust 58). My analysis will therefore focus equally on the referential meaning of lyrics and the performative expressions that contribute to the overall social meaning of the songs (see Brummett). Analysis focusing on song lyrics by a combination of literary and performance study is a new practice. The precursors to song lyric studies lie in popular music studies (Frith; Fornäs; Griffiths) but has recently emerged as a distinct field of study (Eckstein; Pattison; Karlsen and Markussen). My study is a contribution to this expanding body of scholarship, paying special attention to song lyrics in a climate political context.

In terms of genre categories, Moddi is aligned with indie folk. The "folk" in indie folk does not refer to traditional music, but to a popularized folk tradition that gave rise to urban folk in the 1960s and which draws stylistic inspiration from the modal tonalities and song structures of traditional folk. Inspired by artists like Neil Young and Joni Mitchell internationally, and Finn Kalvik and Lillebjørn Nilsen in Norway, ecological protest is part of its genre legacy. Indie folk, however, drawing as much from the DIY aesthetics of indie rock as from the folk tradition, is introverted compared to the socially engaged urban folk movement, and while nostalgic for traditional ways of performing music, it is not trying to revive the styles of its predecessors (Fonarow 44, 49; Ingram 174; Stimeling 194). Indie folk arrangements

generally highlight acoustic instruments and folk-inspired vocal harmonies and has a recognizable timbre usually consisting of gentle instrumental reverberations and understated vocals (Blake). In terms of vocal performance and his active political engagements, Moddi is closer to a traditional folk singer than a typical indie folk singer, but his rhythmically and instrumentally complex compositions are indicative of indie folk. In "Noens ark," which features uncharacteristically heavy percussion, the return to a calm soundscape highlighting the vocal in the final section shows that the song ultimately abides by the genre norms of indie folk.

Indie folk's toned-down musical texture primarily works to evoke a sense of nostalgia for an imagined rural past (Coleman; Holt and Kärjä; Mitchell; Størvold). The centrality of nostalgic sentimentality in the genre is supported by Niels van Poecke, who describes indie folk as an attempt to preserve the romantic myth of authenticity in a pop music discourse (van Poecke 17, 99). Nostalgia in this view is not only linked to images of a historical past but could equally apply to the romanticizing of local identities from which one has been estranged. Romantic aesthetics of specific geographies can be distinguished in Moddi's portrayals of northern Norway. A crucial function in the present context is how indie folk's generally soft compositions can downplay the sense of urgency expressed in climate-themed lyrics, replacing the anticipation of apocalypse with pastoral scenes. In "En sang om fly" this can cause listeners to overlook the song's political message. Several scholars have noted that such misperceptions of political messages in popular music are common (Bamle "Force"; Weinstein). In Moddi's case, however, the nostalgia effects of indie folk may not simply distract from the overarching environmentalist message, but also add another dimension to his lyrical exploration of global warming and the cultural imaginary.

Pastoral, Apocalypse and the Disaster Imaginary

According to Alexander Rehding there are two main ways in which popular music responds to ecological issues: in terms of either apocalypse or nostalgia. These responses parallel two key literary genres highlighted in ecocritical scholarship: apocalypse and pastoral (Garrard; Furuseth and Hennig). Both conceptual pairs describe archetypes that music or literature may approach in response to climate risks. The former may be more spectacular, but the latter has an equally powerful emotional appeal, particularly in the indie folk genre. The lyrical descriptions of landscapes that appear throughout Moddi's music, performed in his recognizably local dialect, evoke not only nostalgia, but pastoral scenes. The music establishes a default mood, via images of secluded locations in northern Norway where life can exist in harmony with its environment. The music itself wants to return to this mood when it is upset by the threat of apocalypse. On *Kæm va du?*, Moddi effectively contrasts the two moods to imbue each of them with emotional force.

The effectiveness of this contrastive pairing demonstrates that conceptions of apocalypse and pastoral rely on one another. According to Lawrence Buell, the idea

of an environmental apocalypse is undergirded by a pastoral logic, as an imposing sense of apocalypse rests on the idea of an antecedent state of harmony between humankind and nature (Buell 300). Ursula K. Heise agrees with Buell when she argues that apocalyptic narratives always, implicitly or explicitly, present pastoral as an alternative to environmental catastrophe (Heise 141-2). Apocalyptic narratives rely on pastoral as a necessary contrast to accentuate the gravity of the nearing situation (122). Likewise, the pastoral is braced by apocalyptic consciousness. It is due to the cultural prevalence of pastoral that apocalypse has a wide influence today, and vice versa.

The prevalence of both cultural tropes today can be considered in connection with a cultural transition from local to global consciousness, a transition that becomes increasingly relevant in confrontation with risk scenarios like global warming (Heise 13). Heise points out the difficulty of combining local narratives with global consciousness, showing how it is a problem in narrative and lyrical genres to articulate the connection between events at the local and global levels (205-10). Moddi being locally oriented and singing in a Norwegian dialect reflects a strong local identity. However, his songs reflect loosening attachment to the local as the individual is entangled in a global cultural sphere through consumption. The contemporary challenge of globalism is not unprecedented. Pastoral as a literary genre originated in classical times and developed into a culturally prevalent mode during the Romantic period, as industrialization forced a large part of the population into cities and away from the countryside (Gifford, "Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, Post-Pastoral" 18). The alienating modernity of the Romantic period is mirrored in today's increasingly fragmented media market, where technology facilitates the targeting of individuals with algorithmically customized advertisements, to provide services that implicate people further in the globalized business models of multinational corporations. The appeal of nostalgic genres such as indie folk, comes in part from a contemporary sense of cultural fragmentation and an underlying desire to return to a romanticized past of local communities and cultural stability.

Buell suggests that the pastoral not only functions as escape but has a critical force in the present (44). Here, Buell follows Leo Marx' distinction between simple and complex pastorals, where a simple pastoral functions as a conservative retreat from present conditions which ultimately serves to reinforce dominant social structures, while a complex pastoral serves a reformist function by presenting an idyllic past in opposition to undesirable conditions in the present (Ingram 55). Terry Gifford advances this distinction by suggesting a dialectical relationship between the two modes. In his account, the pastoral has historically been met with satires and other texts that serve as anti-pastoral correctives, often directly addressing perpetrators of some evil concealed by the pastoral (Gifford, *Pastoral* 122; "Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, Post-Pastoral" 22). These subversive forms may be identified as a tradition of complex pastorals in Marx's terms, but they are specific in that they are situated in a dialectical relationship to simple pastoral. The dialectic ultimately results in what Gifford calls the post-pastoral mode, but this mode has not come to

replace the pastoral and anti-pastoral. Instead, they coexist, at times even simultaneously in certain texts (Gifford, "Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, Post-Pastoral" 28).

Heather Sullivan has coined "dark pastoral" as an ecocritical trope. Inspired by Timothy Morton's "dark ecology", the dark pastoral recognizes the entanglement of the environment in human activity, removing any sense of nature as pristine or even a fundamental condition of the earth (Sullivan; Morton, "Ecological Thought"; "Dark Ecology"). The "artificial natural" of the dark pastoral is always somehow ironic, polluted, mixing the "green" with the "gray" (Sullivan 20). Moddi's songs often align with this trope, which seems to fit particularly well with the industrialized landscapes on his 2022 album *Bråtebrann*. Nevertheless, Moddi's pastoral subversion on *Kæm va du?* is perhaps best described as anti-pastoral, since through the prophetic mode of song lyrics the singer provides a corrective to the impulses towards pastoral inherent in the music. Anti-pastoral can be seen as indie folk's proper response to the risk of climate apocalypse, as artists transition from a local to global orientation and engender an increased focus on the relationship between present and future time. Whereas this transition often produces simple nostalgia, Moddi utilizes the pastoral connotations to raise the emotional stakes in confrontation with risk scenarios.

Like pastoral, apocalypse comes in different types. Following a distinction first suggested by Kenneth Burke and later developed by Stephen O'Leary, apocalypse may be received through a tragic or comic "frame of acceptance" (Garrard 95). The "tragic" apocalypse conceives of threat as an evil perpetration. The guilt of the perpetrators is contrasted by the victimhood of others. As a response to global warming, the rhetoric of tragic apocalypse can lead to a reductive view of causes that may be varied and multiple, and a delusive search for culprits (Garrard 15). In contrast, the "comic" apocalypse conceives of evil as error, and redemption lies in the exposure of fallibility (O'Leary 95). The two songs analyzed below reflect opposite frames in relation to the apocalypse. "Noens ark" demonstrates a tragic frame in its emphasis on global inequality and implications of certain groups as responsible for the coming crisis. In contrast, the comic frame is decisive in "En sang om fly," which serves as a warning against environmentally detrimental behaviors with inadvertently disastrous consequences.

Importantly, apocalypse in the context of these songs cannot be reduced to prediction. Even though the songs meditate on the future, and "Noens ark" takes the form of a revelation of future doom, the songs can be understood in terms of a prophetic mode in which the singer indirectly addresses the present. The word prophet, from Greek *prophétes*, meaning "proclaimer" or someone who "speaks" (*phenai*) "before" (*pro*), is commonly understood as someone who predicts the future, but is more correctly understood as someone who reveals the secret layers of reality to an audience (Holm 95). Inspired by Max Weber's interpretation of Old Testament prophets as social critics rather than futurists, Isak Winkel Holm suggests that the prophetic mode entails an imaginative projection of a future disaster to frame our perception of the present world in terms of a "disaster imaginary" (Holm 95). In line with this interpretation, Moddi's songs are not only concerned with future disaster,

but with how disaster illuminates objectionable conditions in present culture. Global warming presents the listener with a range of disaster risk scenarios with which to frame the present world.

Global Warming as Apocalypse in “Noens ark” (“Someone’s Ark”)¹

“Noens ark” is a pun on the Old Testament story of Noah, who was tasked by God to build an ark to save his family and two of every animal from a flood that would wipe away all other life on earth and wash away the sins of humanity. In his own version of this story, Moddi replaces Noah with the word “Noen” (“Someone”), allowing listeners to wonder who the song is alluding to in place of the righteous prophet. Noah’s flood serves as a productive allegory for engaging with current fears of climate apocalypse. Following a short intro, the song begins by mentioning the story of Noah and the flood, establishing a contrast between the vengeful storm that washed away the sins of the past, and the untainted landscape that followed: “Have you heard the story of old Noah’s Ark? / About [the time] when solid mountains and a new day rose from the sea?”² At the center of the story are humans. This is not simply the story of cosmic events, but of how people can suffer climatic cataclysm through the metaphorical will of God. The second and third lines remind us that only a select few were allowed to survive the flood: “Heaven’s rain of tears would wash everything away, / but some were allowed safe passage through the storm.”³ When the chosen ones came through the storm, they found that the earth was soft and adaptable to human will. This allowed the people who survived the storm to cultivate the earth and form a new civilization: “Come, let me tell you about the wonder they saw, / about when the earth was made soft and could be shaped.”⁴ The singer acts as a storyteller, inviting the listener to hear and be inspired by the promise of a new beginning, but also warning the listener that they may not count themselves so lucky when they presumably must navigate a coming storm: “Nameless and naked you too will go there one day, / and as a refugee you shall sail through the storm.”⁵ The story of Noah is the story of God’s vengeance upon the sinners of the world. Parallel to this story, the coming storm is one that will be caused by sins endemic to the new civilization. A connection is made, then, between the growth of modern society and a flood of biblical proportions coming to wash everything away.

The song marks a momentary departure from an album of otherwise calm music, which makes it powerful as an environmentalist statement. The E minor key establishes a forbidding mood. An upright piano and double bass, and the constant smashing of cymbals form the basis of a thick musical texture, further thickened at

¹ The translations of song lyrics offered in this article were made by me in communication with Moddi. Official song lyric transcriptions in Norwegian can be accessed on <http://moddi.no/lyrics>.

² Har du hørt historia om gamle Noahs ark / om då fast fjell og en ny dag steig av havet?”

³ “himmelen sett tåreregn sku vaske allteng bort / men nån få fækk fare trøgt igjønna kavet”.

⁴ “kom, ska eg førrtelle om det underet dem såg / om då jorda gjor seg mjuk og lot seg forme”.

⁵ “namnelaus og naken ska du dit en dag du og / og som fløktning ska du seile gjønna stormen”.

times by strings and horns. It is the only song on the album to prominently feature a drum kit. Although using only acoustic instruments, in every capacity the music is forceful. Through this cacophony the singer must shout to be heard, emulating the shouting through the storm that is described in the lyrics. Polyrythms enforce a sense of disorientation. In the first few seconds of the song an egg shaker indicates a 12/8 time signature, but the piano initially follows a rhythm closer to the waltz (3/4 rate). It is in fact a 12/8 which is subdivided in beats of 2, 3 and 4 simultaneously, where the double bass plays twice every bar, the drums mark every third beat, and Moddi's voice emphasizes the fourth beat. Additionally, the song changes to an irregular tempo of 5/4 from 1'45" to 2'14". The song's aggressive use of instruments and disorienting rhythmic patterns coupled with Moddi's articulate performance style, makes it a conspicuous protest song. It is attention-grabbing, underscoring the singer's role as prophet, indicated both through the song's allusion to the prophet Noah, and through the lyrics emulating a village storyteller. The performance of prophetic lyrics in a tempestuous musical arrangement is a provocation of disaster imaginary that resonates with a climate conscious audience.

The word "Someone"⁶ is used twice in the song. In line 18, it is stated that "Everyone here has been given a place on board Someone's ark"⁷ and in line 27 it is stated that "as waves break against the boards again, it is Someone's work."⁸ From these lines we may infer that "Someone" fills both roles of sinner and saved in the narrative of the coming storm. So, who causes the storm, and who will be saved? The third verse gives us a clue, as it describes the storm emerging from the global West:

Can you hear the swell of thunder in the west,
where the Dream grows in injustice you must bear?
Here where the rich shall become richer and where every day is a feast[!]
between skyscrapers that will grow until they fall over⁹

"The Dream" (capitalized in the official transcription) and "skyscrapers" are symbols commonly associated with the United States of America, and the word "here" indicates an identification with these symbols. By extension, the reference is the capitalist developed world, where the "Dream" is typified by the accumulation of wealth. The words "injustice you must bear" appearing in the second line are a plausible reference to Arnulf Øverland's famous poem "Du må ikke sove" ("Dare not to sleep," 1936), which warned against the dangers of fascism and the rise of Adolf Hitler in the period before the atrocities of the Second World War came to pass. This reference is a prophetic parallel to Moddi's own warning of the atrocities the West may be inflicting upon the rest of the world through its disregard of the global environment and its pursuit of wealth accumulation. Note that Moddi places special

⁶ "noen"

⁷ "alle her har fått en plass ombord på noens ark"

⁸ "idet båra bryt mot bord igjen, det e noens verk"

⁹ "kan du høyre dønningen av torevêr i vest
kor Drømmen gror i urett du må tåle?
her kor rike ska bi rikar og kor kver dag e en fest
imella høghus som ska gro tel dem fell over"

emphasis on the word “feast” by shouting it in a celebratory manner. With this gesture he momentarily exemplifies a carefree attitude which stands in sharp contrast to prophetic warning in the surrounding lines. The critical touch in the verse comes when the symbol of this system, the skyscrapers, grow so tall that they can no longer stand, suggesting that the inherent unsustainability of the capitalist system will eventually cause it to collapse upon itself. (The Old Testament connotation also recalls the story of the Tower of Babel, where God intervened to curb the hubristic pursuit of a building that would reach heaven itself.) While the third verse portrays the West in general, the fifth verse can be thought to refer to Norway in particular. Here, Moddi uses the first-person plural pronoun to address his own community. Providing additional context, he first describes the Norwegian landscape, and then alludes to the national myth of how the state became wealthy when oil was found in its ocean territories: “We who surrendered the rain between mountain peaks in the north / and were favorably positioned when luck struck at random.”¹⁰ Since Moddi sings in Norwegian, it is likely that Norwegians are the addressees and referents of this song. The collective “we’ indicates a critique of the singer’s own people. “Surrendering the rain between mountain peaks in the north” could refer to northern Norwegians, like Moddi himself, who have moved to the urban south of the country, or it could refer to Norwegians generally who have abandoned nature in the pursuit of carbon wealth.

When Moddi sings that “Everyone here has been given a place on board Someone’s ark,”¹¹ it is not unreasonable to hear connotations of the Norwegian oil fund, sometimes described as an economic “lifeboat” that will hopefully carry the state and its people through whatever cataclysm may befall the rest of the earth. But this lifeboat is itself an accumulation of wealth, built on the fossil fuel industry which has caused CO₂ to accumulate in the atmosphere. Norwegians are favorably positioned to traverse the coming storm of global warming, which they themselves must bear the responsibility for having created. Norway’s environmental privilege, which as pointed out by Norgaard means that the country’s citizens benefit in economic terms from maintaining a naïveté regarding their self-involvement in global warming, illustrates the country’s complicity in the creation and perpetuation of global injustice (70-72). The gavel of criticism falls hard in the following lines:

And even though you carry messages of peace in the depth of your heart
you must go where open seas froth.
For you the rain of tears shall be a self-lived memory
because you were born where evil must reign.¹²

¹⁰ “vi som prisga regnet mellom fjelltoppa i nord / og stod lagelig tel då løkka traff tilfeldig”. [Translation note: Moddi originally approved a mistranslation of “prisga’ as “praised’ which yielded a similar but not identical translation. I have chosen to correct this in the current version. Another alternative translation would be “prized,” which would suggest the notion of assigning a price to the rain, for example in the form of hydropower development. Norway’s extensive use of hydropower might be environmentally friendly compared to fossil fuels, however it can have disastrous consequences locally and can be seen as an early step in the industrialization of Norwegian nature.]

¹¹ “alle her har fått en plass ombord på noens ark”

¹² “og sjøll om du bær bud om fred i hjertet innerst inne
må du fare der kor åpen sjy fråde

The “messages of peace” alludes to the Norwegian self-conception as a peace-loving people, a conception which is ceremoniously reinforced every year when the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded in Oslo. But despite this outward sign of virtue, Norwegians must live and experience the “rain of tears” that will come. The hypocrisy is that most Norwegians individually praise the climate movement, but still partake in an unsustainable capitalist economy. The prediction offered in these lines is that they will know in the aftermath that they were as responsible as anyone.

Prophetic discourse speaks to a complicated relationship with time. The growth economy is not equipped to consider pollution of the atmosphere and the future costs of handling the effects of a warming climate. Norway's consumption patterns are possible because of what can be metaphorically described as borrowing from the future. It is this future that is collapsing on the present when confronted with global warming. Climate songs confront us with the sense that global warming is no longer a future potentiality but is imposing itself on the present with force. Apart from the biblical allusions in the title and lyrics of the song, this temporal imposition is a key feature linking the prophetic mode with apocalypse. Apocalyptic discourse draws speaker and listener into a context of cosmic time, where the judgment of the future becomes imminent (O'Leary 16).

As we have seen, the initial story offered by the singer in the first and second verses of “Noens ark” establishes a contrast between a past idyll and a tempestuous weather event. The transition between the fourth and fifth verses provides a related contrast. An early musical climax is achieved as the song reaches peak intensity in the fourth verse:

So fold your hands and sing psalms
about the rain that will come
Sing of Babylon and white elephants
You are still condemned when the day is over,
when water rolls in from all sides.¹³

This verse gives us clear allusions to apocalyptic imagery, juxtaposing symbols of materialistic excess (“Babylon and white elephants”) with condemnation and signaling the end in the form of strong winds and rising water. The appeal to the institutions of culture, to rituals and religion, will not be enough to save society from the retribution of natural forces. Following a musical crescendo coinciding with these lines, the fifth verse offers a calm contrast with a reminder of society's current illusions. The “mountain peaks in the north” evokes a national romantic imagery. When “luck struck at random” the romantic idyll is expanded from natural beauty to

førr deg ska tåreregnet bi et sjøllopplevd minne
førr du fødtes der kor ondskapen må råde”

¹³ “så knepp nevan og søng salma
om regnet som ska komme
søng om babylon og kvite elefanta
du e førrtapt allikavæll når dagen e omme
idet vatn velte inn frå alle kanta.”

include economic growth. However, this idyllic condition is presented to us in the past tense, narrated as if commenting from a problematic future. It is an imaginary retrospective from an anticipated post-apocalyptic condition, and it is an illusory image as the presence itself is taken away by the disillusioning words of the prophet. The idyll is not the present seen in light of the future, but the anticipated future view of our present conditions, as the singer expects the end of the current standard of living. The final verse describes a door of an “ark” closing, and waves crashing against the planks of the ship, as some people are left outside to perish, and a lucky few, presumably the rich Westerners or Norwegians, i.e. those who are most complicit in bringing about the storm, will survive to build a new world. The closing sentiment is hopeful, but the delivery is doubtful: “Perhaps next time Someone will have learned.”¹⁴ The song does not provide suggestions on how people in the present might deal with the climate crisis. A small hope remains that the culprits will realize their responsibility before it is too late. Considering that nobody seems to have learnt anything from the myth of the previous flood, we can only wait and see if the story will repeat itself yet again.

Anti-Pastoral Nostalgia in “En sang om fly” (“A song about planes”)

Although employing the prophetic mode, “Noens ark” cannot be reduced to a simple apocalyptic narrative. While the song highlights apocalyptic symbolism, the pastoral is looming below, emerging as national romantic imagery, and providing a contrast which increases poetic tension. “En sang om fly,” by comparison, evokes pastoral through its nostalgic musical arrangement, yet there is an uncertainty and a defiance in the core of Moddi’s artistic expression. The song is a calm introspection. The song’s A-flat major key gives it an optimistic tone, in contrast to the ominous E minor of “Noens ark”. It is not professing a future in dramatic terms, but it still imagines the shaking of the present in view of an uncertain future, and a confrontation with the hypocrisy of present cultural practices. The song is a powerful environmental statement not from sheer force of expression, but from a discrepancy between harmonies that evoke a pastoral idyll and lyrics indicating that this idyll is illusory. Only upon realizing the irony of the singer’s words will the listener realize that they have been baited and implicated by partaking in an optimistic delusion. Moddi here utilizes the potential of a song to challenge the assumptions that it simultaneously encourages listeners to make (Moore 19).

The song opens with a gently picked acoustic guitar highlighting a soft but clear voice. Piano and cello are introduced at the end of the first verse and remain in the background as harmonic filler throughout the track. The tranquil atmosphere of this song serves well as the culmination of an album whose lyrics highlight the landscapes of northern Norway through similar acoustic harmonies and lyrical depictions. The mood evoked throughout the album is akin to a particularly northern

¹⁴ “kanskje neste gong har noen lært”

Norwegian version of pastoral. This genre is exemplified by Knut Hamsun's novel *Markens Grøde* (*Growth of the Soil*, 1917), a reference with which Moddi interacts in the song "Grønt lauv i snyen" and specifically references in his later song "Ei ny tid" (*Bråtebrann*). Hamsun's pastoral does not shy away from the harsh conditions of nature, but under these conditions the protagonists manage to prosper. While the first half of the album deals with darkness and violence in the opening murder ballad "Mannen i Ausa" and the sheep slaughter chant "Vi slakta sau," culminating with "Noens ark" midway through the album, the second half is a series of folk songs in slow tempo, with sparse instrumentation and lyrics meditating on the natural and cultural landscapes of northern Norway. Listeners assume a continuation of this pastoral mood as they are presented with gentle timbres of the finale.

The pleasant harmonies of "En sang om fly" indicate a sense that serenity has prevailed, but the lyrics undercut this expectation. The melody conveys optimism appropriate to a naïve longing for the pleasures of travel, expressed in the opening lines: "I want to see the world, just like everyone else / rather make some mistakes than live in regret."¹⁵ The optimistic melody, befitting the daydream of these lines, persists when the singer introduces the ominous contrast of a snowstorm in July. It is hinted that the dream is not benign but in fact contributes to climate change. Optimism turns to irony in the following lines: "And when the sky gives us snowstorms in July / I can say I did the only thing one could, back when everything was possible. / When we took one step backwards for each step we took forwards."¹⁶ If the possibilities are endless, as stated by the singer in these lines, it stands to reason that compulsion ("I did the only thing one could") is not a valid excuse for environmentally destructive behavior. And yet, allured by the musical accompaniment, the singer of these lines seems not to realize the paradox in their ambition. The song here exhibits a contradictory behavior by capitalizing on the variance between form and message afforded by the conventions of indie folk.

"En sang om fly" subverts the pastoral while simultaneously participating in the pastoral aesthetic. Through ironic distance between music and lyrical sentiment, the song draws the listener out of the suspended time of pastoral idyll. The singer thinks that now is a moment when anything is still possible, but having already entered the reality of global warming the future encroaches on the present. The idyll is gradually subverted with the realization that the singer's nostalgia means that he is living with one foot in the past. The subversion is framed by the disaster imaginary, either stemming from the encounter with apocalyptic imagery earlier on the album, or from pervasive apocalypticism in popular culture. The tension which arises between the levels of music and lyrics in "En sang om fly" involves a deliberate disruption of pastoral illusions with the apocalypse as leverage. In doing so the song positions itself as anti-pastoral (Gifford, "Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, Post-Pastoral" 22; Ingram 57). Under the cloud of environmental collapse, the imaginary places the

¹⁵ "Eg vil se verden, sånn som alle ainner: / heller gjere nån feil enn å leve i anger".

¹⁶ "og når hemmelen gjer oss snystorm i juli / så kan eg sei eg gjor det einaste man kunne den gång alt va mulig / då vi tok ett skrett telbakers førr kvert framskrett vi gjor".

present already in the past. The song reacts to a disillusioning present dialectically opposed to the longed-for nostalgic past typified by the pastoral.

Moddi's musical nostalgia is linked to the desire to anchor local identity in the face of cultural anxiety tied to risk on the global scale. While the music seeks rural escape, the lyrics are constantly navigating the imposition of global consciousness. The singer expresses a desire to be reified by the fantastic lives of television stars: "I want to live like they do on TV, / where everything is a game, but where everyone at least sees you."¹⁷ The fictions of television offer escape by capturing the attention and alleviating the anxieties of real life. More importantly, TV offers the illusion of connection. TV ties the lives of performers to viewers all around the country, or even the world. Paradoxically, the connection that is sought is exactly the connection that is destroyed when global structures replace local connections. TV, like popular music, is tied to global consumer markets, and hence part of the polluting practices of modern society. In this song there is tension between the desire for the comforts of life as it could be, the fantasy of which is aided by television, and the commitment to confront the reality of a future in turmoil.

The final line demonstrates the stasis in this line of thinking. As the line "One step back, one step towards now" ("ett skrett telbakers, ett skrett nærmar no") is repeated, the song itself is in standstill. It does not move forward, just as the singer and our society do not move forward. This passage can be interpreted as saying that society cannot progress, because every advancement is accompanied by setback in planetary terms. The repeated line intensifies in a dynamic arrangement. The listener expects the song to reach some sort of climax, but it is cut short by the end. Occasionally Moddi exchanges the word "now" ("no") with "the earth" ("jorda"). This detail directs the listener towards a choice: either they can continue to ignore the climate crisis, or they may be urged to pay more attention to the planet and how they can adapt to its conditions. Until they become aware of the limitations of the earth, they will not be able to move forwards at all.

Conclusion

This study sought to examine the themes that dominate Moddi's climate song lyrics, how these are supported and developed in a popular musical context, and how the songs are informed by and responding to underlying currents in Norwegian cultural imaginary. The preoccupation with disaster is symptomatic of the time in which these songs were released. Moddi's use of disaster motifs can be seen in connection with a widespread preoccupation with end-of-the-world narratives around the year 2012. Against this backdrop, pastoral and apocalypse suffuse these songs, directing the lyrical response towards a negotiation between present and future temporality. The rhetorical gesture of the prophetic mode, which draws the

¹⁷ "eg vil leve som dem gjær det på teve / der kor alt e et spell, men der alle i det minste ser det". [Translation note: "det" in the official transcription, usually meaning "it", is given as "you" in my translation because the vocalized dialect word "dæ" is more commonly heard as "you"].

future into the present, is prompted by expectations of an impending global apocalypse. In the context of global warming, pastoral is disturbed by the threat of future disaster. Likewise, apocalypticism is framed by pastoral elements. The affordances of musical performance in indie folk enable exploration of the entanglement of these tropes. Moddi ultimately subverts the pastoral mode in a response that can be connected to an anti-pastoral tradition in literature.

In confrontation with global warming, contradictions arise in the musical genre too, as indie folk is constructed on a basis of traditions with both local and cosmopolitan attachments. This tension allows the music to effectively support lyrics that reflect a parallel tension in Norwegian culture. "En sang om fly" functions as an extended metaphor for Norwegian culture in general, but instead of broadly focusing on the political implications of this culture, it is the singer's personal desires that come under scrutiny. By admitting the realities of global warming, Norwegians take another step from local towards a global orientation. But however cosmopolitan Norwegian culture becomes, most individuals fail to adapt their behavior towards sustainability in a global sense. This testifies to a failure to transition towards a future in harmony with the planetary environment. Norwegians may be engaged in the cause, but they are crucially still a part of the problem. They must therefore resist the temptations of both pastoral and apocalypse, resist the urge to fall into complacency, and instead realize the potential to take responsibility afforded by a still uncertain future.

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"Aquí la vida es pormenor": Mundo rural, naturaleza y campesinado en la poesía de Miguel Hernández

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Resumen

Lo rural, lo campesino, las labores agrícolas en cercanía constante con una naturaleza querida, temida y respetada son claves en la obra de Miguel Hernández. Su obra ha sido muy estudiada respecto a su entorno rural y a sus orígenes humildes desde cierto biografismo, sin embargo, no se ha planteado desde una apropiada consideración de la realidad histórica y material del mundo rural. Desde los planteamientos de la sociología rural, la agroecología y la radical historicidad de la literatura este artículo trata de arrojar luz sobre algunos aspectos irresueltos de la obra poética del poeta oriolano considerando que su concepción de la naturaleza, el trabajo, el deseo y la revolución están imbricados tanto en las concepciones de un campesinado inscrito en la *longue durée* como en la escisión romántica del sujeto respecto a la naturaleza y en la necesidad de superar las contradicciones de la sociedad moderna. Vemos desde ahí la importancia del campesinado en la configuración ideológica de Hernández y en sus planteamientos tanto *poetológicos* como políticos. Hernández se nos presenta como una voz genuinamente campesina a la vez que moderna. No se trata solo de una importancia temática sino también de la particular lógica productiva de su poesía. El escritor se acerca a la tarea poética como el hortelano: realizando un esfuerzo de producción que no es el trabajo abstracto del capital sino la constante tarea productiva y reproductiva del cuerpo humano en relación simbiótica con el mundo natural y social. Este artículo quiere desde ahí mostrar el interés que puede tener una aproximación ecocrítica a la poesía de Hernández.

Palabras clave: campesinado, rural, ecocrítica, poesía, paisaje.

Abstract

The rural, the peasantry, the agricultural work in constant proximity to a nature that is loved, feared and respected are key in Miguel Hernández's poetry. His work has been widely studied, from a biographical perspective, regarding his rural and humble origins; however, it has not been approached from a proper consideration of the historical and material reality of the rural world. From the approaches of rural sociology, agroecology and the radical historicity of literature, this article attempts to shed light on some unsolved aspects of the poetic work of Hernández, considering that his conception of nature, work, desire and revolution are imbricated in the conceptions of a peasantry inscribed in the *longue durée*, the Romantic split of the subject with nature and the need to overcome the contradictions of modern society. On this basis, we see the importance of the peasantry in Hernández's ideological configuration and in his *poetological* and political approaches. Hernández can be considered as a genuine peasant voice as well as a modern one. This is not only a matter of thematic importance but also of the productive logic of his poetry. The writer approaches the poetic task as the peasant: making an effort of production which is not the abstract labour of capital but the constant productive and reproductively task of the human body in symbiotic relationship with the natural and

social world. From this perspective, this paper aims to show the potential interest of an ecocritical approach to his poetry.

Keywords: peasantry, rural, ecocriticism, poetry, landscape.

Introducción. Aproximación a la figura y el mito de Miguel Hernández

El interés por lo rural no fue un elemento extraño en la llamada Edad de Plata (Mainer), tampoco un cierto panteísmo romántico, pero a diferencia de prácticamente todos los poetas de la época que se acercan admirativamente a lo rural y a la naturaleza desde la visión del ciudadano—más o menos alienado—, Miguel Hernández se eleva como la única voz auténticamente centrada en lo campesino. La voz campesina, antes silenciada—o limitada al anonimato de las expresiones folclóricas—por el yugo de la opresión o la sumisión, la incultura o el rigor de la labor, y más tarde amedrentada por una modernidad imparable, resuena así, quizá por primera vez, en la obra de un genuino poeta moderno.

Al enfrentarnos a la poesía de Miguel Hernández nos enfrentamos antes que nada a la propia figura de Hernández. Un aura casi mítica rodea al, sin duda, gran poeta; un aura que a la crítica, en gran parte responsable de ella, le cuesta ignorar. Extraña es la aproximación a su obra que no comente sus humildes orígenes familiares, sus pastoreos juveniles, sus inicios oriolanos y tantos otros pormenores en torno a su prototípica vida rural. Cosa que no ocurre entre otros escritores de orígenes similares o de marcada temática rural. Se dirá que el distintivo origen rural y poco culto de Hernández lo justifica ya que le habría marcado especialmente. Vemos, sin embargo, que un poeta como Salvador Rueda, de humildes orígenes campesinos y a pesar de haber sido analfabeto hasta la juventud, nada tiene que ver con Miguel Hernández como escritor y la crítica apenas se detiene en sus orígenes campesinos. Este ejemplo valdría para poner en cuestión el determinismo biografista que parecería darse con el mito heroico de Hernández y su aparente espontaneidad.

Con frecuencia muchos críticos hablan de la perturbación que habría sido la filiación política en la supuesta evolución espontánea que habría seguido Hernández de no ser por tales compromisos. Díaz de Castro (124) habla, por ejemplo, de la época posterior al catolicismo sijeniano como una fase con "otra ideología y otros ruidos" (énfasis nuestro). En este punto debemos discrepar. Es precisamente la asunción de una verdad interior—que en este caso se desenvolvería naturalmente en una evolución espontánea si no fuese por las injerencias político-ideológicas—lo que constituye el núcleo de la ideología literaria burguesa. La ideología es la única voz que nos habla. No hay una voz "natural" en Hernández, como no la hay en nadie; su poesía es, como todo discurso, emanación de una determinada configuración ideológica y, por tanto, ella misma ideológica. Que la configuración ideológica hernandiana primera fuese menos doctrinaria, más ingenua si se quiere, y, quizá, menos consciente

no implica que fuese menos ideológica; el hecho de que en esa configuración tuviesen un gran peso elementos de una ideología no plenamente capitalista—lo que aquí defenderemos—como es la campesina no implica que esta fuese más espontánea, natural o sincera.¹ Hay que desechar la idea de que su adscripción política vendría desde un vacío ideológico, una lucha espontánea contra la injusticia, lo cual refuerza su imagen de héroe y mártir: elegido entre los humildes por su calidad ética, epítome del sentido espontáneo de la justicia de los campesinos españoles o planteamientos moralistas de la misma ralea.

En nuestro acercamiento a Hernández observamos una considerable importancia del mundo rural y campesino, pero procuramos cuidarnos de la frecuente visión reduccionista y personalista hacia su obra en relación con el campo. Como ha señalado acertadamente González Valdés en su reciente tesis, las alusiones al mundo rural, la agricultura y lo pastoral han sido entendidas como el resultado de una relación no problematizada entre el poeta y su entorno vital, de manera que sus representaciones de lo rural han sido aceptadas como testimonios reales, inmediatos y acertados de su ambiente vital sin considerar apropiadamente la compleja dialéctica entre la dinamicidad histórica del entorno rural y las visiones literarias y concepciones ideológicas de Hernández (11).

En la obra de Miguel Hernández no puede decirse que haya una evolución lineal clara (González Valdés 22). Una linealidad asumida que es el principal problema de comprensión del carácter político de la obra del oriolano. Linealidad solidaria con una política comprendida como un espectro continuo, no como un complejo campo relacional e histórico, que tiene la tendencia a ver el campesinado como grupo social atrasado. Desde nuestra perspectiva el carácter político de Hernández, tan estudiado, tiene también un importante carácter ecológico, en la medida en que la relación campesina con la naturaleza difiere de la de la razón instrumental y configura una forma de producción que se adapta de modo simbiótico a la naturaleza. Traemos a colación la poesía de Miguel Hernández buscando una nueva "pertinencia de la ecocrítica" que se aleje de ciertas "afirmaciones blanquinegras" (Marrero Henríquez 74, 69) que desdeñan con excesiva premura las complejas interrelaciones entre naturaleza y cultura en la modernidad, que se vuelcan más hacia la *wilderness* o el indigenismo y que con ello infravaloran el campesinado como fuerza histórica que en Europa, a pesar de sus luchas, fue arrastrada por el tren del progreso. Hernández es voz y memoria de esas luchas que, siguiendo la metáfora benjaminiana, trataron de frenar la locomotora del progreso, no como reacción, sino como salida emancipatoria.

¹ Entendemos de un modo generalizador —no hay sitio para un desarrollo extenso de la cuestión— por ideología campesina la ideología propia de lo que desde la agroecología viene a llamarse *modo de producción campesino* que en sentido estricto solo existe articulado a otro modo de producción social general pero que hasta el tardocapitalismo habría persistido y lo habría hecho con relativa autonomía. Este modo de producción se caracterizaría por una producción agrícola centrada en la subsistencia del grupo doméstico, un alto grado de autosuficiencia, un mínimo número de insumos y una praxis enraizada en la tradición colectiva (Toledo 198-200). Esta relativa autonomía productiva le dota de cierta impermeabilidad a los planteamientos ideológicos hegemónicos. Si podemos hablar de ideología campesina no se trata tanto de una ideología cohesionada y única sino de una ideología dialécticamente articulada con la hegemónica.

En cuanto crítica al progreso capitalista industrial la obra de Hernández ofrece lecturas sugerentes para la ecocrítica.

En este sentido, al tener en cuenta que el ámbito imaginario en el que toma cuerpo la expresión lírica hernandiana es casi exclusivamente el mundo de la vida campesina (Díaz de Castro 89),² nos percatamos de que el espectro político tradicional lastra toda la interpretación política y ecológica de Hernández. Y esto ocurre en gran medida por la consideración mistificada del campesinado desde el discurso del progreso que, aunque matizado y con variantes (desarrollo, crecimiento, etc.), sigue siendo el hegemónico en nuestros días. El campesinado desde el punto de vista económico (capitalista, se entiende) es el remanente de un modo de producción atrasado, ineficiente económicamente e inoperante socialmente. Desde una perspectiva ecológica que tenga en cuenta el carácter holístico de la producción y la relación intrínseca entre el ecosistema, las formas de producción, las relaciones sociales y las representaciones culturales, como es la de la agroecología, el campesinado tiene un carácter mucho más complejo y rico que el de un grupo obliterado por el progreso.³ Pero desde el progreso ilustrado que gobierna ineluctable el capitalismo el desarrollo histórico del campesinado tiene un carácter paradójico e incluso trágico. Independientemente de la actualidad y acierto de los siguientes planteamientos, desde la perspectiva revolucionaria el proletariado como clase *para sí* lucha por su propia abolición (aunque lo que parece suceder fácticamente más bien es su universalización). Por contra, el campesinado luchando por su supervivencia logra su (auto)abolición. Ese carácter trágico acompaña a la literatura de Miguel Hernández en comunión con el desequilibrio del sujeto moderno vivido desde el romanticismo. La melancolía del poeta moderno se imbrica con la situación histórica del campesinado en vía de desaparición. Así, consideramos que cuando se afirma el carácter *rural* de Hernández, falta señalar que se trata de un problema plenamente moderno: la turbulenta cuestión del campesinado y el mundo industrial—no meramente de lo rural, de hecho, cabe recordar que Orihuela es un medio urbano, si bien provinciano, pequeño y de economía primordialmente agraria, impregnado por la mentalidad rural (Alonso 308) pero urbano a pesar de todo.⁴

Insistimos, al enfrentarnos a la obra hernandiana nos metemos en un asunto espinoso, irremediabilmente influido por el aura mítica de su figura: la imagen de

² El mundo campesino en general (de Luis 23) y no solo el tema pastoril como tanto se señala (por ejemplo, Rose). El mundo pastoril solo tiene sentido para Hernández inserto en el mundo campesino, como parte de él. Resulta un tema tan clave que hasta el poema industrialista "La fábrica-ciudad" canta a los tractores a los que se les da luz en "partos" de acero, dentro de talleres guardados por "flores" y en el que los tractores son "caballos huracanados" hechos para hacer "fértilos los baldíos".

³ Manejamos aquí precisamente una noción de campesinado proveniente de la agroecología. Para una definición formal me remito a Sevilla Guzmán y González de Molina (158-60).

⁴ Orihuela geográficamente responde más bien al concepto de "agrocuidad" (López Ontiveros). Por otro lado, nótese que Orihuela es el prototipo de ciudad que el simbolismo elevó al *topos* de ciudad muerta. Y acaso la Oleza de Gabriel Miró, trasunto de Orihuela, pueda considerarse un buen ejemplo de esta. Unas ciudades que al no transformarse según las necesidades de desarrollo del capital (tanto a nivel económico como sociocultural) se nos presentan como moribundas o enfermas. El escenario de la poesía de Hernández es uno bastante alejado de ese *topos*. Es, en general, percibido como una forma de urbanización todavía sin una ruptura metabólica, ni social ni ecológica, irreversible.

"poeta-pastor" y de miliciano-poeta a la que él mismo contribuyó. El crítico, pues, a la hora de aproximarse a la obra de Hernández debe ser especialmente precavido para salvar la "falacia biográfica" (Díaz de Castro 92) y cuidadoso igualmente con la asunción de una supuesta verdad interior, que pareciese quedaría deturpada por influjos "ideológicos". Algunos de los textos de Hernández, los publicados en la revista de Ramón Sijé, *El Gallo Crisis*, y otros escritos en la misma época, tan peliagudos, son en gran medida solidarios con una ideología reaccionaria; el que se retractase de estos textos no elimina la objetividad textual ni la matriz ideológica de la que emanan.⁵ En general, se ha leído y se lee a Miguel Hernández en términos personalistas y no poniéndolo dentro de la matriz ideológica de una determinada coyuntura histórica y de una serie de problemáticas de *longue durée* en la que el campesinado tendría un peso fundamental.

Es cierto que en el caso que nos trae los paralelos entre vida y obra no son pocos, pero no se ha hecho lo suficiente por estudiarlos desde la radical historicidad y no desde el biografismo,⁶ abordando en profundidad la compleja dinámica de los cambios sociales de la época, su experiencia respecto a estos, las transformaciones económicas del agro y los cambios en su visión de las comunidades rurales, tan mistificadas a lo largo de la historia. Como explica Raymond Williams en su obra seminal, la literatura en torno al campo ha sido en su mayor parte producto de "una historia cultural preparada y persuasiva" (31). La obra de Miguel Hernández ilustra tanto esa historia propagandística como el esfuerzo de desprenderse de ella y conectar desde la experiencia con la compleja realidad histórica del campo. En este sentido hay que recalcar el espacio histórico y dinámico que es el campo en sus composiciones y cómo la voz poética se acerca a ellos (González Valdés 14).

La modernidad y la historicidad del paisaje

Miguel Hernández es un poeta genuinamente moderno (a diferencia, por ejemplo, de un ruralista como Gabriel y Galán que se mueve en un academicismo popularista) lo cual es claro en su lucha dentro del campo cultural y en su ardoroso

⁵ Los ejemplos más notorios en lo que respecta al campesinado y la situación política son los escritos en torno al año 1934 como por ejemplo los textos en prosa "MOMENTO—campesino" (*La Verdad*, Murcia, 8.2.1934), "VÍA—de campesinos" (inédito) y en verso "PROFECÍA—sobre el campesino" (*El Gallo Crisis*, 1, 1934). En este último, escrito en el momento de crecientes huelgas campesinas ante unas condiciones atroces, en un marcado tono paternalista Hernández llama al campesino implícitamente rebelado "¡Caín de los caínes!" y le recrimina su desobediencia a su *ser para la tierra* y su egoísta e inútil lucha (de clases, se sobrentiende): "Inficcionado de ambición, malgastas / fraternales carmines, / buscas el bienestar con malestares."

⁶ Hablamos aquí desde la "radical historicidad" de la literatura y del sujeto, el cual se conformaría a través y desde la literatura. Partimos de los planteamientos de Juan Carlos Rodríguez ya expuestos en su temprana *Teoría e historia de la producción ideológica*. La excepción más notable a esta carestía de los estudios sobre Miguel Hernández desde la radical historicidad es el trabajo de David Becerra Mayor con quien compartimos a grandes rasgos su aproximación teórica al fenómeno literario; discrepamos, sin embargo, de su interpretación histórica de la transición ideológica entre fascismo y comunismo de Hernández y la elusión del campesinado en su análisis. En cualquier caso, su trabajo es fundamental en el señalamiento de la problemática desideologización reciente de su figura que provoca una segunda muerte del poeta, su "muerte hermenéutica" (Becerra Mayor 43-52).

deseo de *ser poeta*, única y exclusivamente (García, *El veintisiete en vanguardia* 195). Algo, no olvidemos, impropio de las clases campesinas propiamente dichas (cuyas producciones poéticas son de distinto tipo aun cuando son realizadas por "profesionales"—cantaos, mendicantes, etc.). Gran parte de sus contradicciones respecto al mundo rural derivan de esa modernidad. Pues nada más alejado de la realidad del tardocapitalismo que el "poeta-pastor": el poeta quisiera poder ser "poeta-pastor" pero su presente y probablemente su subjetividad no lo permiten. Miguel Hernández es un sujeto moderno y está atravesado por sus contradicciones.⁷

Como señala Díaz de Castro, "la modernidad, que es inseparable de la conciencia de lo urbano, está operando incluso en un poeta que vocacionalmente elige la naturaleza elemental como base, ya no de sus imágenes, sino de su proyección paradisiaca" (103). Ahora bien, en primer lugar, es la introyección y autoconciencia moderna la que le hace inclinarse hacia el campo en busca de una salida a las antinomias de la modernidad. Y en segundo lugar, Hernández no habla nunca propiamente de "paraíso", ni de "naturaleza elemental": en el paraíso (etimológicamente "jardín cerrado") el fruto se obtiene sin esfuerzo. El campo—que es a lo que se refiere exclusivamente Hernández, no la naturaleza elemental-salvaje—es duro y solo se hace un hogar (no un edén) con el esfuerzo cotidiano de quienes lo habitan.⁸ Esfuerzo del que Hernández es perfectamente consciente y que está en la base tanto de su politización como de su particular ecologismo.

Eso no quiere decir que no haya un cierto vitalismo en la poesía de Hernández (aunque, como veremos, ese vitalismo vaya parejo a cierta atracción por la muerte), pero se trata de un vitalismo muy distinto de la actitud positiva de parte del llamado grupo del 27. Hay un gozo vital en Hernández, pero no es el gozo de la "vida" en abstracto, de la contemplación del mundo. Nada del cliché orteguiano del personaje adánico en el paraíso que es "feliz sólo con gozar, en fecundo ocio vitalista, de la contemplación de la realidad" (Rozas 24). Diferente asimismo del institucionalismo regeneracionista, de Giner a Ortega, orientado a la contemplación del paisaje en una búsqueda de trascendencia individual o colectiva, y diferente de la estética purista que se basta con la mera contemplación, a veces en una prototípica naturaleza aburguesada, disfrutada a través del ocio veraneante de hotel y balneario, "productos de la ciudad del hombre" (Rozas 24). Un goce este último que, aunque se regodee en una supuesta inmediatez de la naturaleza, resulta plenamente urbano. En los

⁷ Sirva de ejemplo esta prosa no publicada: "Mi limonero, no es precisamente el de mi padre, siendo el mismo. Ni el de Dios. [...] Pero, ¡ay!, mi padre ama al limonero interesadamente [...] Y yo, ¿por qué lo amo? Ah, yo lo amo no por su provecho, por el rendimiento de sus ramas ni por su agrio aplacador de sedes y sudores. Yo quiero al limonero, todo, por mis dedos (¡benditos dedos!, sin los cuales no podría saber nunca el olor de sus hojas atormentadas por el tacto de las yemas)" (*OC II* 2100). En él se observan elementos clave de la estética moderna desde Kant como el desinterés, la ausencia de fines, el sensualismo, el arte como experiencia, la apreciación objetual de la naturaleza o la contemplación aconceptual, que demuestran el carácter plenamente moderno de la subjetividad de Hernández. Asimismo, en oposición consciente al pragmatismo campesino (pragmatismo este, a diferencia del pragmatismo burgués, no mercantil).

⁸ La ilusión típica del obrerismo por el desarrollo *ad infinitum* de las fuerzas productivas que evitará el esfuerzo de las labores nunca está de forma coherente en Hernández, la orientación a ese desarrollo solo se plantea como deseo para lograr la escasez artificial contemporánea.

anteriores planteamientos es constante un alejamiento absoluto del trabajo campesino, de la oposición dolorosa que puede suponer la naturaleza, de la dureza de las labores y de la no inmediatez de la naturaleza. Algo que no ocurrirá en absoluto en el Miguel Hernández maduro.

El interés por el paisaje en Hernández tiene un interés muy distinto al del trascendentalismo romántico de la Institución Libre de Enseñanza o los autores del llamado 98. Hernández no se interesa por el paisaje de la naturaleza salvaje. Hernández es capaz de "ver" ese paisaje, pero, como el campesino no lo ve exactamente de manera gozosa: ve la dureza del monte y sus peligros. Hernández revela involuntariamente la historicidad de la mirada del paisaje (ver Maderuelo): quien está acosado por la urgencia de la supervivencia no "ve" el paisaje, sino que se acerca al territorio con una mirada pragmática. Y revela de manera más explícita, la historicidad del paisaje como territorio, que en su mayoría nada tiene de natural. Por lo que él se interesa es el paisaje campestre, el paisaje agrario, que, a diferencia de quienes con tanta frecuencia lo naturalizan y lo eternizan, nada tiene de eterno y natural, como el poeta oriolano sabe a la perfección, sino que es fruto de la labor cotidiana de las silenciosas manos campesinas en coevolución con la naturaleza. El paisaje, de una manera mucho más vívida que en el propio Unamuno, se revela como "intrahistoria". Quizá el ejemplo más brillante de esta historización es el paisaje jienense de "Aceituneros". El olivar que caracteriza el paisaje no surge espontáneamente, sino como producto histórico, lento y paciente, del esfuerzo humano en simbiosis con las fuerzas naturales:

No los levantó la nada,
ni el dinero, ni el señor,
sino la tierra callada,
el trabajo y el sudor.

Unidos al agua pura
y a los planetas unidos,
los tres dieron la hermosura
de los troncos retorcidos. (OC 585)

En Miguel Hernández la vida no es exclusivamente contemplación,⁹ aunque también se halle placer en ella y se reconozca su importancia: la vida es también agencia, contacto, esfuerzo diario, en suma, trabajo *concreto* y cotidiano no guiado por valores abstractos sino por las necesidades fundamentales de una vida digna experimentada pasionalmente. El gozo vital hernandiano es el de la agencia dentro de un activo metabolismo con la naturaleza, no meramente a través de la contemplación y el consumo ocioso; es el gozo productivo. La "corona del sudor" diario ("Sonreídme", OC 519) es un signo de orgullo y belleza. El sudor es señal de vida, no solo de la laboriosa honestidad del trabajador (véase "El sudor", OC 593-95). Es un disfrute del potencial

⁹ Miguel Hernández publicó un artículo a principios de 1936, en pleno proceso de adscripción política al comunismo, reseñando *Residencia en la tierra* donde carga sardónicamente con la moderación purista que, en poesía, como en la vida, se limita a la contemplación gozosa: "Estoy harto de tanto arte menor y puro [...] me revienta la vocecilla mínima que se extasía ante un chopo, le dispara cuatro versillos y cree que ya está hecho todo en poesía" (en Cano Ballesta 124).

corpóreo y su capacidad y voluntad productiva, muy distinto del higiénico y ocioso sudor del *sport* pseudovanguardista. Se disfruta de lo pequeño, en una escala humana, contemplándolo, viviéndolo, trabajándolo. Adelantando el famoso *motto* de E. F. Schumacher, "small is beautiful", dice Hernández de su huerto en oposición a la gran ciudad: "Aquí la vida es pormenor" (OC 377).

En el conjunto de la obra hernandiana vemos que la naturaleza no tiene un significado estático a lo largo de su escritura, sino que es cuerpo de significados cambiantes y evocadores (González Valdés 13; Rovira). No hay que olvidar que el contexto hernandiano no es un agro estático sino afectado por unas transformaciones económicas aceleradas (la denominada por Polanyi "gran transformación" con su supuesto desarrollo), unas luchas políticas intensas y una crisis ideológica, que solo pueden ser debidamente comprendidas desde una aproximación multidisciplinar (González Valdés 15).

Como decíamos, Hernández no maneja la naturaleza idealizada, abstracta, del animismo garcilasiano por ejemplo, sino que refiere con elementos específicos a la huerta levantina: albercas, pitas, limoneros, palmeras, higueras, etc. (García, *Vicente Aleixandre* 422).¹⁰ No se trata de un "paisaje de símbolos" (Clark)¹¹ aunque, especialmente en su época católica, sobre la rica referencialidad campestre se construya un complejo sistema metafórico (en ciertos momentos más bien alegórico). Hay que cuidarse igualmente de plantear al poeta como un realista que amaría al "pueblo", la "aldea", en abstracto. No: ama una aldea que tiene que ser modificada, que debe transformarse a sí misma. Hernández conoce de primera mano los problemas del agro, de la sociedad rural y de la sociedad en general. No mantiene un ruralismo o naturalismo ingenuo e inocente: la escasez, la incultura, la opresión, la servidumbre voluntaria, la represión sexual, las inquinas campesinas, etc. aparecen aquí y allá en toda su producción. La ruralidad por la que aboga no es una eterna y ahistórica sino una base metabólica que bien puede y debe cambiar en su configuración política y social.¹²

¹⁰ Discrepamos, pues, con Perotti cuando arguye que, aunque el factor ambiental sin duda influyó en la personalidad artística del autor y en sus opciones temáticas, no se puede encontrar en la producción teatral y poética de Hernández una representación directa e inmediata del mundo natural (327). En primer lugar, el problema está mal planteado: efectivamente el "mundo natural" no es inmediato en la poesía de Hernández, pero esto se debe más bien a que lo que le interesa es el mundo campesino, no una naturaleza intocada y ajena al ser humano. En segundo lugar, habría que aclarar qué se entiende por "representación directa" (¿es acaso posible?), puesto que, aunque en los referentes naturales y campesinos se acumulen varias capas simbólicas, sí hay un elemento referencial fuerte y *situado* (no hay más que ver el vocabulario local de flora, fauna y aperos). Además, tal afirmación de una ausencia de referencialidad directa choca con la inclusión de fotografías de corte realista en *Viento del pueblo*.

¹¹ Quitando al león y, en parte, la garza e, inorgánicos, el mar y el volcán, que son *símbolos*, tanto cultos como populares, de carácter estrictamente cultural, las imágenes animales no son del mundo animal salvaje, sino que son del agro campesino: la flora mediterránea, la ganadería, las plagas, la caza, etc.

¹² Discrepo pues de la afirmación de Francisco Umbral cuando dice: "Toda la gran poesía de Miguel Hernández es un viaje de vuelta a su pueblo" (330). La obra hernandiana no es continua ni unificada, pero en cualquier caso no plantea una mera vuelta: se trata de una transformación *en el pueblo*, sin abandonarlo. En la primera politización católica se referirá a un supuesto *regreso* a un pasado idealizado o una esencia abstracta, lo cual aunque reaccionario implica un cambio, pero con la toma de conciencia comunista e incluso antes se planteará en términos de transformación *revolucionaria*.

Campeinado, ideología y *longue durée* en Miguel Hernández

Compartimos la hipótesis de trabajo que plantea Cecilio Alonso según la cual Hernández proviene de un ambiente de campo urbanizado donde se da la simbiosis de ciudad rural—campo y huerta—y que, si bien el poeta es conocedor de primera mano de los padecimientos cotidianos de las labores agrícolas y de la escasez, es ajeno a las penosidades de la trashumancia y la pobreza rigurosa.¹³ Un ambiente este arrastrado por las transformaciones económicas del capital, por lo que se puede decir que Miguel Hernández “nace ya en la frontera del desclasamiento, en una familia cuya actividad laboral pertenece a un modo de producción residual, pre-capitalista, y que está llamada a la disgregación o a sembrar contradicciones entre sus miembros más lúcidos (caso del poeta)” (Alonso 308). Es importante comprender, pues, que el poeta nace en un momento y lugar donde se vive agudamente una coyuntura histórica particular, específicamente, la crisis de un ciclo histórico de *longue durée* (ver Braudel 60-106) que sería el del campesinado europeo. La mutante posición ideológica de Hernández y su aguda sensibilidad para con el campesinado debe entenderse desde esa coyuntura. El poeta, consciente o inconscientemente, percibe la situación crítica de su clase y de su entorno vital, a la vez que se ve “impelido por la presión de la modernidad” (Alonso 308) en un proceso sufridamente alienante.

La pasión por el paisaje asimilado y la vida rústica no es solo una firme adhesión a los valores campesinos “formalizadas en sus primeros versos con la anuencia más o menos acusada de los modelos literarios aportados por el ternurismo panocho de Vicente Medina o por el paternalismo agrario de José María Gabriel y Galán” (Alonso 309). Su pasión, continúa Alonso, es una expresión de sus “convicciones y formas de conducta muy de la tradición campesina basadas en la dignidad, la entereza, la obstinación, la conciencia de los ciclos vitales, el sentido impertinente de lo grotesco, incluso el fatalismo transfigurado en *sino sangriento*” (309). En este punto consideramos que para una correcta interpretación de la obra de Hernández hay que estudiar, lejos de la visión tradicionalista del campesinado y de la visión marxista evolucionista, el potencial de las “tradiciones revolucionarias indígenas” (Shanin 323) que alienta el espíritu rebelde de Hernández: que no es tanto, como se sabe, una tradición escrita sino una tradición localista corporeizada en un lenguaje fundamentalmente oral, en actitudes, gestos, herramientas, en formas de trabajo y de subsistencia, de sutil sumisión, rebeldía y apropiación de la ideología dominante, etc. En este sentido, lo dicho contrasta con la tendencia a ver el elemento panteísta y sexual como una influencia de ritos precristianos,¹⁴ por lo cual, además se le quita peso a tal influencia. El problema de tal planteamiento es que eso se ve como

¹³ La familia de Hernández era tratante de ganado, no eran exactamente pastores. Se ha exagerado su condición de pobre, lo cual va en detrimento de la interpretación adecuada de su obra.

¹⁴ Algunos críticos remiten al hiloísmo de Miguel Hernández: del *hyle* (materia), *zoe* (vida); una visión presocrática en la que la materia estaría dotada de un ánima, cercana o previa a las teorías panteístas.

un mero elemento *cultural* (de ahí la insistencia en los términos de precristiano, pagano, ritos y similares por parte de la crítica) y no como parte de la ideología *material* del campesinado y su resiliencia, como han demostrado Carlo Ginzburg o Silvia Federici entre otros.

La característica triada simbólica de la cosmovisión poética hernandiana de vida-amor-muerte, aparte de una conformación moderna, contiene subyacentemente elementos atávicos de esta mentalidad campesina¹⁵ derivada de unas particulares formas de producción (y no como un remanente atávico de *culturas precristianas*), que se manifestaran de manera excepcional en el escenario histórico de "ciclo corto" de la lucha revolucionaria de clases (Alonso 309). Una mentalidad que como han recalcado tantos críticos queda encubierta por un esfuerzo tremendo de distinción y superación expresiva, un esfuerzo que es un claro síntoma del impulso moderno: un verdadero "desafío de la escritura" (Alemany Bay). Ese esfuerzo lo hará tempranamente absorbiendo textos clásicos bajo la interpretación ajustada al conservadurismo rural oriolano, en particular el ideario del corporativismo católico.¹⁶

A este respecto cabe hacer una digresión sobre la "crítica hidráulica" a la que tanta tinta ha dedicado la crítica hernandiana. Aquí no nos preocupan tanto las "fuentes" sino la "objetividad textual" de la que habla Juan Carlos Rodríguez: "las relaciones ideológicas/inconscientes de la producción del texto. Así, es preciso contar con obviedades como las fuentes, pero las fuentes no explican nada respecto a la objetividad del texto: son elementos que en cuanto entran en una nueva estructura cobran un nuevo valor, otro significado radicalmente distinto" (*Lorca y el sentido* 43-44). La cuestión es la de siempre, independientemente de las contingencias históricas que hagan accesible unas u otras lecturas, ¿por qué se lee a unos autores y no otros? ¿qué se busca en ellos? ¿qué se toma de ellos? ¿cómo se leen? ¿cómo quedan transformados esos textos en la nueva objetividad textual? Hernández ve en la escritura una tarea concreta de apropiación y reapropiación en base al trabajo con otros textos. Y lo hace compartiendo el profundo sentimiento de la labor campesina, por lo que cuida en presentarse siempre como un trabajador concreto, aun cuando se enorgullezca del oficio, no particularmente tangible, de escribir versos. Puede ser ilustrativo recordar el retrato que el autor debió elegir para acompañar la edición de *Viento del pueblo*. Un retrato que bien podría leerse con este fragmento algo anterior de la "Oda entre sangre y vino a Pablo Neruda" (OC 522): "yo que llevo cubierta de montes la memoria / y de tierra vinícola la cara, / esta cara de surco articulado". Como

¹⁵ Entendida esta como la característica ideología del campesinado de ciclo largo derivada del modo de producción campesino que se da en la Europa occidental. Entendemos este modo de producción desde la agroecología como un modo subsumido *formalmente* al modo de producción hegemónico, en este caso el capitalista.

¹⁶ Se ha puesto mucho énfasis en el influjo conservador de Luis Almarcha en el joven Hernández, pero no se ha remarcado debidamente el peso que éste pudo tener en su concepción del trabajo y la economía y, por tanto, en su politización. Teniendo en cuenta que Almarcha fue un gran difusor de la doctrina del corporativismo agrario (Martínez Vara y Ramos Gorostiza) y líder práctico en la Vega Baja quizá debería reconsiderarse su importancia en la atmósfera ideológica oriolana.

la de los campesinos, se trata de una tez curtida por el sol y el esfuerzo, tantas veces "coronada por el sudor"; el retrato que acompaña *Viento del pueblo*¹⁷ remarca la voluntad de demostrar una identidad de cuerpo y espíritu, de plantear la labor del campesino y la labor del poeta como axiológicamente iguales.

El complejo choque entre esa mentalidad campesina y la subjetividad moderna se configura en lo que algunos críticos han llamado el "materialismo" de Hernández (González Valdés 15)—que quizá sería mejor denominar *pragmatismo agroecológico*—, para referir al mundo poético recreado que remite a la vida concreta del grupo campesino, a sus formas de producción, su aparato cultural y las interacciones sociales con sus reglas y normas que las rigen. Pues entendemos que, siguiendo los estudios agroecológicos, "existe una cierta racionalidad ecológica en la producción tradicional" (Toledo 198) que permitiría la conformación de un sistema productivo que implementa procesos sostenibles para la apropiación de recursos naturales y que definirían al modo campesino por: i) alto grado de autosuficiencia; ii) mínimo número de insumos externos; iii) producción combinada de valores de uso y mercancías que buscan, más que el lucro, la reproducción simple de la unidad doméstica; iv) tendencia a la pequeña propiedad; y v) combinación individual y colectiva de prácticas diversas (Toledo 200). En este sentido es notorio que, si acaso se puede hablar de economía,¹⁸ la producción campesina sería una "economía de subsistencia" (Toledo 207). Los diversos planteamientos políticos y poetológicos de Hernández están conformados, consideramos, a partir de tales presupuestos.¹⁹

Desde *Perito en lunas* ya vemos que el entorno rural sirve al poeta para retratarse a sí mismo, pero no como el poeta simbolista mediante una proyección objetual: sino que se refleja *por su participación activa en él*, como espacio en el que habita y del cual es producto. En *Perito en lunas* la constitución de una unión a través del trabajo colectivo de los campesinos y su entorno está solo en un estado embrionario, ya que no deja de ser una codificación ahistórica y aislada de una comunidad rural sin integración dentro del conjunto social que históricamente lo explica y tal aislamiento es en parte una idealización del agro no atravesado por interrupciones históricas y conflictos internos y externos (González Valdés 133). Pero ya se está desafiando el modo usual (conservador o progresista) de representación

¹⁷ Es de notar que la primera edición de *Viento del pueblo* está acompañada de fotografías en su mayoría de campesinos y de ambiente rural. Más de la mitad de las fotografías, en un marcado estilo realista, digno de la Magnum, son relativas a lo rural (diez de dieciocho ¡en un libro de propaganda bélica!). Sobre el inusual, especialmente para la época, acompañamiento fotográfico en un poemario véase Alarcón Sierra, que lo analiza como un recurso para explotar lo máximo posible los medios de comunicación de masas.

¹⁸ En tanto la palabra "economía" refiere ya a la producción de valor capitalista orientado a producir bienes *qua* mercancías. En este sentido no debe confundirse la producción campesina con la ganadería o la agricultura absolutamente generalizadas hoy, en tanto que estas son, en terminología marxiana, actividades agrícolas subsumidas *formal y realmente* al modo de producción capitalista.

¹⁹ En este sentido, la humildad respecto a los bienes de Hernández no sería solo una muestra de solidaridad sino una vindicación del modo de producción campesino y no solo una muestra de solidaridad con los desposeídos. Yendo más allá es curioso señalar la coincidencia con otro poeta tan moderno como Bertolt Brecht quien "afirma que el comunismo no es el justo reparto de la riqueza sino de la pobreza" (Benjamin 84).

de la vida rural, tanto de sus luchas sociales como de sus momentos íntimos, en todo su disfrute sensual, corpóreo, y su cotidianidad: laborear, beber, defecar, copular, comer, sufrir, etc. (González Valdés 134). Así habría cuestionado ya tempranamente la forma bucólica de representar el campo, el modo elevado pastoril, si bien sólo desde una problemática sublimación artística en estilo elevado.

Materialismo campesino

Hay ya desde este primer poemario un vitalismo corpóreo que enlaza con un cierto *materialismo campesino*.²⁰ Una percepción del ser humano como especie animal, como cuerpo con sus necesidades fisiológicas, su sexualidad vívida, etc. El reconocimiento, en suma, de la fragilidad y vulnerabilidad del cuerpo. No se trata del cuerpo espiritualizado de un sujeto autónomo y libre por naturaleza, el sujeto del capitalismo.²¹ El hombre es vulnerabilidad y fuerza animal también, potencia. Como se dice en el poema "El hambre" de *El hombre acecha*: "Me enorgullece el título de animal en vida, / pero en el animal humano persevero" (OC 664).²²

Marie Chevallier, por su parte, ha percibido lo que denomina un "materialismo místico" en tanto que el "poeta sueña con la tierra que acoge la sangre de los cuerpos, el pasado y el porvenir del hombre, como un gran cuerpo místico, en el que la vida germina en la materia misma de la muerte humana" (*Los temas poéticos* 165). Mantenemos aquí que ese deseo trascendental no es tanto místico sino derivado de

²⁰ Entendemos por materialismo campesino o agroecológico la ideología campesina en cuanto ideología con escasa mediación cultural, enraizada en la praxis productiva. Como hemos señalado, el campesinado es reactivo a la adscripción de la ideología dominante porque su ideología emana fundamentalmente de su propia praxis productiva—y en este sentido *materialista*—que sigue cierta racionalidad pragmática agroecológica. Esta ideología material campesina se explica porque aun cuando está sometido a un régimen de propiedad ajeno, el campesinado mantiene el control sobre el proceso productivo (aunque carezca de control sobre el usufructo). Cuando el trabajo agrícola se subsume realmente al capital ese control desaparece y la ideología campesina se ve abocada a la desaparición.

²¹ Remitimos de nuevo a los planteamientos de Juan Carlos Rodríguez.

²² Si bien es cierto que *El hombre acecha* por el propio verbo usado plantea una visión del hombre como animal que retrotrae al proverbio latino "homo homini lupus" que retomó Hobbes como clave de la teoría política burguesa, discrepamos al elevar la "animalidad" hernandiana como signo pesimista y/o reaccionario como hacen Leopoldo de Luis y Jorge Urrutia (25). Lo que es planteado como negativo en Hernández es la "depredación" (a la que alude, obviamente, el acechar), no el animal en sí: el toro, la "garra suave", etc. tienen connotaciones positivas. Creo que sería más adecuado interpretar las "garras" y "dientes" de *El hombre acecha* desde una visión dialéctica que habrían planteado, por ejemplo, Adorno y Horkheimer: los seres humanos somos criaturas animales, la animalidad está siempre ahí, negar esa animalidad es subyugar al propio humano al principio abstracto de dominación (ver Luque González). En Hernández vemos unas intuiciones similares: la animalidad no puede negarse, pero afirmarla en abstracto es igualmente peligroso (la regresión al mito, a la barbarie), hay que saber taimarla sin suprimirla o negarla. Así la síntesis de garra como arma de impulso ciego del amor y del odio se da en "Nanas de la cebolla". Como la garra retráctil del felino hay que ser capaz de sacarlas y aprovechar su fuerza, tanto como retraerlas. La animalidad es potencia, tanto de creación como de destrucción. Quizá haya algo aquí del realismo campesino: la naturaleza no es *amor* o *libertad*, no, es un ente que se nos enfrenta de forma contradictoria como fuente de riqueza y como enemigo—estas son en realidad proyecciones imaginarias sobre la naturaleza en lugar del reconocimiento de su absoluta neutralidad ante lo humano que forma parte de ella de manera particular, pero no privilegiada—.

lo que siguiendo a Rafael Argullol denominamos la "escisión romántica" (13-22): la conciencia de una histórica separación del ser humano para con la naturaleza a la vez que un inagotable e imposible deseo de unión con ella. Si bien, como decimos, esa escisión es característica del sujeto moderno, en el caso de Hernández, a diferencia de muchos otros, la racionalidad ecológica campesina le hace tener una particular concepción de la naturaleza (o mejor, ausencia de un concepto de naturaleza)²³ que, como el antiguo campesino, no ve como algo ajeno e inalcanzable, sino como ente del que forma parte en la cotidianidad, a la vez que como ente externo al que se le teme, por su potencial carácter destructivo, y se le ama por su generosidad. Por tanto, como decíamos, la "tierra" de la que habla Hernández no es la naturaleza romántica entendida como *wilderness*, sino la tierra campesina, trabajada socialmente por el continuo e infatigable esfuerzo campesino. "¿No cumplirá mi sangre su misión: ser estiércol? [...] / que se apoyen en mí sembrados y viñedos, / que me dediquen mosto las cepas por su origen" ("Vecino de la muerte", OC 529-531). Aquí vemos cómo el concepto de tierra como estiércol denota ya una "cultura" humana, en el sentido etimológico de "agricultura". Si efectivamente hay cierto misticismo en los poemas religiosos del breve periodo posterior a *Perito en lunas*, este deriva de la escisión romántica y de la búsqueda de una relación prístina entre el campesino y la tierra, y ese misticismo desaparece rápidamente en cuanto el impulso religioso sufre el giro político materialista.

Desde esta consideración, donde la tierra es percibida como el agente dentro de un especial intercambio metabólico de relativo equilibrio ecológico entre naturaleza y comunidad productiva es, creemos, desde donde se entiende gran parte de la lógica interna de los textos hernandianos. Así, por ejemplo, en "Vecino de la muerte" se entiende un desprecio de quienes pretenden asirse a la vida sin querer devolver su "polvo" (preservándolo como tal) en vez de devolverlo al seno de la tierra (Chevallier, *Los temas poéticos* 312). En este sentido, *polvo* en cuanto tierra seca se opone a *tierra* como humus fértil: "Y es que el polvo no es tierra. // La tierra es un amor dispuesto a ser un hoyo, / dispuesto a ser un árbol, un volcán y una fuente." ("Vecino de la muerte", OC 530). El polvo se eleva como una imagen de horror ante la destrucción física del ser humano, pero también como imagen de la desaparición de un ecosistema biológico y social. No se teme a la muerte como fin sino la *mala muerte* que acaba convirtiendo el cuerpo en polvo y no participe de la fecundidad material de la tierra. La muerte es "efectivamente sentida bajo el aspecto material de una bioquímica 'agrícola' de la dispersión del cuerpo en la tierra" (Chevallier, *La escritura poética* 111). Pero esa concepción "bioquímica" que señala la hispanista francesa no parece del todo correcta, puesto que no se trata del especializado conocimiento científico sino del conocimiento tradicional de los ciclos de vida y muerte en las culturas agrarias campesinas: nada de científicismo en saber que el cuerpo putrefacto

²³ El interés crítico de la poesía de Hernández reside en parte en este punto: el de un cuestionamiento del concepto de naturaleza del que hace uso el ecologismo y que, inconscientemente, sería partícipe de la dualidad que pretende desmontar. En este sentido podríamos hablar en Hernández de una "ecology whitout Nature" tal como la plantea Timothy Morton.

fertilizará los campos (por mucho que Hernández pudiese saber y supiese que los compuestos fertilizantes tengan principalmente nitratos, fosfatos y potasio que pueden ser sintetizados industrialmente).

La comprensión de la necesaria relación metabólica entre el ser humano y la naturaleza inspira esa concepción de la muerte como proceso cíclico, reintegración en la materialidad telúrica de toda vida y de ahí la doble concepción de la tierra como omnivoradora y como omnifecundadora. De esta forma puede aparecer la tierra como una especie de "refugio prenatal" (Chevallier, *Los temas poéticos* 168): "¿Cuándo caeré, cuándo caeré al regazo / íntimo y amoroso, donde halla / tanta delicadeza la azucena?" ("¡Y qué buena es la tierra de mi huerto!", *OC* 483). O bien en *El hombre acecha*: "Tierra: tierra en la boca, y en el alma, y en todo. / Tierra que voy comiendo, que al final ha de tragarme." ("Madre España", *OC* 679). La concepción campesina de la vida como un ritual cíclico-ecológico es muy distinta de la visión organicista del cuerpo como carne, como mácula pecaminosa. O incluso distinta de la visión existencialista unamuniana—tan enraizada también en lo campesino—de la vida como la dialéctica cuna-tumba. Aquí el *yo* es un cuerpo orgánico parte de un ecosistema que tiene que reproducirse material y socialmente. Hay aquí además una identificación de la patria ("Madre España") en puros términos ecológicos: comunidad y ecosistema de subsistencia. De opinión similar son Leopoldo de Luis y Jorge Urrutia al escribir:

Quando siente la tierra *en la boca, en el alma y en todo*, percibimos una mezcla de materialismo y de idealismo que hace a lo telúrico absorber el alma misma y, en una suerte de teofagia, la tierra, divinizada en su poder genesiaco, es comida por el hombre aunque, finalmente, éste sea tragado por la tierra (57)

Lo que se ve como una "teofagia" es una divinización que, si bien es cierto que está presente en la trascendentalización poética que hace Hernández, representa ante todo el ciclo ecológico campesino: la "tierra" es en este caso metonimia del fruto obtenido de la tierra a través de la labor agrícola; el poeta, continuando el ciclo orgánico, entrega su cuerpo a la tierra (no al "polvo") para que esta pueda regenerarse, y así pueda igualmente reproducirse el cuerpo social, y en esa reproducción el ser humano que es el poeta se eterniza anónimamente como en la intrahistoria unamuniana. Entregamiento corporal y regeneración de los que derivan todo el erotismo ecológico de Miguel Hernández: la relación entre el campesino y la tierra es una relación amorosa en sentido amplio.²⁴

Coincide con esto Chevallier quien ve en "Vecino de la muerte" la expresión más feliz de esa "agricultura de la muerte" donde la tierra es vista como una totalidad sagrada viva, haciendo notar la similitud con el cuerpo místico como lo plantea Teilhard de Chardin: "organismo espiritual animado y movedido en el que estamos unidos biológicamente, y que permite la incorporación física de los hombres a Cristo" (en Chevallier, *Los temas poéticos* 168). Si en esa incorporación física de los hombres

²⁴ Alegoría sexual que se funda claramente en la problemática dicotomía biologicista de género que identifica a la tierra con lo femenino-reproductivo y al campesino con lo masculino-productivo. Dicotomía muy presente en la poesía de Hernández que abordaremos en otra ocasión.

a la "Vida" a través de la tierra, cambiamos "Vida" por "Dios", tenemos el cuerpo místico católico. Así puede decir, como hemos señalado antes, que hay un "materialismo místico" en Hernández, un mito naturalista que plantea una forma de supervivencia ajena a la vida eterna del alma o la resurrección de la carne. Si bien es cierto, insistimos, que cierto carácter místico atraviesa esa concepción de la "agricultura de la muerte", al plantear la muerte como una especie de unión con dios a través de la descomposición del cuerpo en la tierra (Chevallier, *Los temas poéticos* 167) hay que matizar por lo menos que de Chardin refiere a una naturaleza salvaje, "lejos de los hombres, lejos del esfuerzo", es decir, no la tierra de labor, la tierra campesina, que es precisamente la tierra que interesa a Hernández. Y hay que insistir en que esa fecundidad no es espontánea. Como hemos dicho anteriormente, no se trata del jardín edénico donde surgen los frutos sin esfuerzo, sino de una fecundidad fruto del intercambio metabólico, en el que quienes laborean la tierra hacen producir la fertilidad natural, no solo mediante la muerte, en absoluto, sino mediante la vida con *sus trabajos y sus días*, es decir, unas técnicas agrarias tradicionales y el esfuerzo cotidiano de hombres y mujeres.

Lo que Chevallier denomina la "agricultura de la muerte" de poemas como "Vecino de la muerte" o "Sino sangriento", nos parece más bien las manifestaciones de esa racionalidad ecológica vividas desde las contradicciones internas del sujeto moderno que se siente alienado de la naturaleza, que en este caso es experimentada como la alienación de una comunidad productiva agraria. Por lo que la "agricultura de la muerte" es inseparable de la "agricultura de la vida" (Umbral) si entendemos que desde la cosmovisión campesina vida y muerte son parte de una unidad cíclica cotidiana y no entes separados o ajenos a lo humano. En suma, la única agricultura posible es la de la vida, no de la muerte, pero esa agricultura, comprende la muerte, la muerte dolorosa y sufriente, como el pastor que sacrifica con respeto *ritual* a sus animales.

La persistencia de la mentalidad campesina la vemos en el primer animismo de *Perito en lunas* en el que los objetos materiales cobran una agencia plena metafóricamente. Desde el hermético formalismo de las octavas reales el referente no pasa a un segundo plano, al contrario, como señala Marrero Henríquez respecto al extrañamiento formalista, este no solo consigue "prolongar la percepción estética de las formas a decodificar" sino que también da a los objetos que sustentan esas formas "la posibilidad de abrirse a nuevas revelaciones y hacerse más objetos" (65). Más tarde, sin embargo, en su periodo católico sijeniano, al formalismo seguirá un alegorismo organicista donde el objeto se supeditarán a un orden divino, en el cual el mundo aparece como un espectáculo natural de inspiración divina. El poeta en el texto en prosa "VIDA—de campesinos" insta al campesino: "No vengas mucho a Dios—al campo—, si el gusto por el mundo te acompaña: no bebas mucho Dios, que no te amargue. Hombres de la tierra: *no les hablo a los muertos*: vuestra vida, como vuestra muerte, es la de la esposa oscura del arado" (*OC II* 2136-2138). Más tarde, desde una posición política muy dispar, demanda al "Campesino de España":

De la muerte y la muerte

sois: de nadie y de nadie.

De la vida nosotros,
del sabor de los árboles. (OC 604)

Tal como antes, campo y tierra, resultan intercambiables con una entidad cuasi sacra. Y en cuanto el cuerpo se une en un ciclo nuevo de fertilidad con la tierra a través de la muerte, el campesino pertenece a la muerte y a nadie más. Pero lo que antes desde el organicismo sijeniano era planteado como servidumbre, ahora es planteado como libertad efectiva, ausencia de propietario, control de los medios productivos; y más aún, en lugar de una concepción individual (enfaticada por la segunda persona singular) ahora es una concepción colectiva: sois (somos) de la tierra cultivada por todos, "nosotros", la vida, los árboles arraigados a la tierra.

Conclusiones. El potencial ecológico de la poesía de Miguel Hernández

En Hernández la persistencia de un imaginario poético ligado a motivos campesinos como son la no separación entre producción y reproducción, la influencia cíclica, la conciencia del cuerpo vulnerable, la conciencia orgánica de la muerte y la ambigua actitud de rebeldía y aceptación dotan a su poesía de una cosmovisión poética de potencial interés para la ecocrítica y que está aún por explorar. Pues hasta donde sabemos la ecocrítica no ha dedicado estudios específicos a la poesía del oriolano (normalmente las menciones apenas pasan de ejemplificaciones breves; citando poemas como "El silbo de afirmación en la aldea" o "Aceituneros" [por ejemplo, respectivamente Marrero Henríquez 72; Barrella Vigal 227]); un silencio que quizá se deba a que la visión de Hernández de la naturaleza está intrínsecamente unida a la historia campesina. Pero, como hemos tratado de explicar, la ausencia en Hernández de *wilderness* o siquiera de un concepto moderno de naturaleza (Morton) no debería ir en detrimento de una comprensión ecológica de su poesía. Todo lo contrario; Hernández revela el, en gran medida inconsciente, potencial ecológico del campesinado. Y no se trata solo de una importancia temática sino también de la particular lógica productiva de su poesía. El escritor se acerca a la tarea poética como el hortelano: realizando un esfuerzo de producción que no es el trabajo abstracto del capital sino la constante tarea productiva y reproductiva del cuerpo humano en relación simbiótica con el mundo natural y social. La concepción poética como trabajo, sufrimiento, esfuerzo, tesón, cuasi físico—más patente en Miguel Hernández que en ningún otro poeta de la época—, está atravesada por la mentalidad campesina: no es un trabajo exclusivamente técnico o del intelecto, es sudor y lágrimas e injusta opresión histórica: "Siempre fuimos nosotros sembradores de sangre. / Por eso nos sentimos semejantes del trigo" ("Llamo los poetas", *El hombre acecha*, OC 674). Es trabajo concreto: no abstracción del pensamiento.²⁵ Su poesía pretende ser, a la

²⁵ Con ese carácter abstracto nos referimos a la dualidad categorial del trabajo (trabajo abstracto/trabajo concreto) que produce el fetichismo de la mercancía. Como plantea la *Wertkritik*, una relación fetichista basada en la abstracción del *valor* moviliza la producción lo cual no significa que

manera de la praxis campesina, una relación no fetichizada con el mundo natural y una relación no fetichista con la comunidad.

La poesía de Miguel Hernández ofrece así un acercamiento a la naturaleza ajeno a la mirada cosificadora, abstracta y extractivista del capital, comprendiendo el mundo como ente activo desde los valores heredados de la historia anónima del campesinado. Un campesinado que como grupo social histórico habría mantenido unas formas de producción que guardan una relación recíproca y sostenible con los ecosistemas y que conforma unas relaciones sociales con potencial emancipatorio. Miguel Hernández en su poesía trata de dar voz a ese campesinado silenciado cuya agencia histórica ha sido negada fundiendo su voz con una exasperada y moderna lucha por la emancipación, ofreciendo una compleja visión que brinda atisbos de una relación no dominadora para con la naturaleza y una revisión histórica del campesinado y sus formas de producción digna de consideración ante la difícil coyuntura sociohistórica y ecológica en la que nos encontramos.

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esa relación fetichista no implique una materialidad concreta. Todo lo contrario; precisamente la abstracción del valor es la que induce una lógica económica, una dominación abstracta, deslindada de los propios sujetos, tendente al constante crecimiento y la substracción de los límites ecológicos.

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Anthropocenic Futures and Precarious Bodies A Reading of *Mugre rosa* (2020) by Fernanda Trías

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Abstract

Mugre rosa (2020), by Uruguayan author Fernanda Trías, depicts a near-future Montevideo, where the population is confronted with climatic disaster and the propagation of a devastating disease. In this article, I explore the representation of bodily precarity in the context of environmental catastrophe, arguing that this vulnerability constitutes a point of resistance from which to rethink human identity. On the one hand, exposure to an anthropogenic environment is interpreted as instrumental to late capitalist biopolitics. This is revealed through the cartographies of precarity emerging from the novel, which reflect not only the chasm between Global North and Global South but also local inequalities. On the other hand, this corporeal exposure constitutes a challenge to traditional representations of the human. Through the analysis of the depiction of illness, I discuss how this deconstruction of the body favours the emergence of a new, interconnected identity. Ultimately, I suggest that a destabilising age such as the Anthropocene constitutes not only a profound moment of crisis but also a privileged space to rethink human subjectivity and its modes of representation.

Keywords: Precarious bodies, Anthropocene, illness, Fernanda Trías, *Mugre rosa*.

Resumen

Mugre rosa (2020), de la autora uruguaya Fernanda Trías, describe un Montevideo en un futuro cercano, en el que la población se enfrenta al desastre climático y a la propagación de una enfermedad devastadora. Este artículo explora la representación de la precariedad corporal en el contexto de la catástrofe medioambiental, argumentando que esta vulnerabilidad constituye un punto de resistencia desde el que repensar la identidad humana. Por un lado, la exposición a un entorno antropogénico puede interpretarse como instrumental a las biopolíticas del capitalismo tardío. Esto se hace patente a través de las cartografías de la precariedad que surgen de la novela, que reflejan no sólo el abismo entre el Norte Global y el Sur Global, sino también las desigualdades locales. Por otro lado, esta exposición corpórea constituye un desafío a las representaciones tradicionales de lo humano. A través del análisis de la representación de la enfermedad, discuto cómo esta deconstrucción del cuerpo favorece la emergencia de una nueva identidad fundamentada en la interconexión. En definitiva, sugiero que una época desestabilizadora como el Antropoceno constituye no sólo un profundo momento de crisis, sino también un espacio privilegiado para repensar la subjetividad humana y sus modos de representación.

Palabras clave: Cuerpos precarios, Antropoceno, enfermedad, Fernanda Trías, *Mugre rosa*

*All animals are equal but some animals
are more equal than others*
Orwell 90

In the virtual roundtable that preceded the publication of a special issue on precarity and performance, Judith Butler insisted on the importance of precarity as a way of rethinking relationality and interconnectedness (Puar 170). On the one hand, all lives can be considered precarious, due to their unavoidable social dimension. Indeed, corporeality constitutes a fundamental aspect in the definition of our interconnected existence, as the body exposes the human to the other in multiple, differing ways (Butler, "Precarious Life" 141). On the other hand, although all lives are precarious, some are more precarious than others: our mutual dependency, and the possibility of being injured by the other varies around the globe and is indissociably dependent on those mechanisms which regulate political, economic, and social relationships. Here lies the essential distinction between precariousness, the ontological human condition of susceptibility to injury, and precarity, the unequally distributed state of vulnerability distinctive of late capitalism (Kasmir 2). Nowadays, the consequences of this inequitable allocation of vulnerability are inscribed in the materiality of the bodies themselves, which are converted into objects of knowledge (Butler, *Precarious Life* xii), a living register of the increasing disparity between lives that must be protected and lives that can be left to die.

"More" precarious lives are those, for example, inhabiting the Global South. "Latin America is the region of open veins," wrote Eduardo Galeano (2) in the introduction of his well-known account of the history of colonisation and exploitation of the continent. Latin America is represented as a land with bleeding veins, whose flow of (natural and human) resources keeps nourishing the markets of the Global North.¹ The impelling process of development, undertaken in the name of progress, supports an irrational system and increases the inequalities already existing in those countries (4). Nevertheless, the "open veins" are not only an incisive metaphor to represent colonisation's legacy but also allude to the tangible wounds left on the flesh of the victims of said circumstances.

Today, the notion of precarity can be extended to those bodies that are subjected to environmental disaster. As Rob Nixon notes, exposure to the harmful effects of ecological catastrophe is not equally distributed across the globe; rather, analogously to precarity in a strict sense, it depends on geographical, social, and economic factors (46). The consequences of climate crisis, which appear in the Global North as a nefarious prophecy, are inscribed in the bodies of those who are left out the discourses of wealth and progress. To live "the dark side of modernity" (Mignolo 109) also entails the concrete experience of the ongoing destruction caused by late capitalist forms of exploitation. That said, the current ecological crisis not only represents a consequence of extractivist practices inherent to Western narratives of

¹ This image is echoed in Gloria Anzaldúa's description of the border between Mexico and the United States which is "*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (25).

progress but also constitutes the result of a progressive colonisation of knowledge, wherein local values and cosmologies have been supplanted by the hegemonic perspectives (Huggan and Tiffin 6).

In this article, I study the representation of precariousness in the novel *Mugre rosa* (2020) by Uruguayan author Fernanda Trías, exploring how fictional portrayals of catastrophe as an inhabited space favour the reconsideration of contemporary issues related to precarity, inequality, and identity. Specifically, I argue that catastrophe exposes the human to its intrinsic vulnerability, transforming the materiality of the body both into a space of repression and a point of resistance from which to rethink human identity and its relational existence in more equitable and sustainable ways. While capitalism thrives on instability, the destabilising experience of catastrophe—here identified as the Anthropocene—reveals instead the artificiality of contemporary cultural constructions and ways of life, encouraging a reevaluation of current definitions of the human, its modes of representation, and the relationship with the planet and its inhabitants.

The scope of this article is twofold. Firstly, I describe how precarity emerges as an effect of the contact between the human and catastrophe. Particularly, I read exposure to an anthropocenic environment as a fundamental instrument of late capitalist biopolitics, since the control over bodies and the determination of whom to make live and whom to let die are realised through the decision to leave all expendable lives at the mercy of ecological disaster. Secondly, I consider the destabilising challenge of the Anthropocene to the current representation of the human, examining how the corporeal vulnerability experienced in a time of catastrophe entails a potential for resistance and transgression. Especially, I analyse how bodily descriptions of the illness afflicting those who are exposed to climate disaster challenge cultural constructions of the human, pointing toward a reconsideration of our interconnected identity.

This bipartition is mirrored in the theoretical influences that characterise my methodological approach, whereby formal and aesthetic analyses specific to literary criticism are combined with the discussion of cultural and political aspects illustrated in the text. Indeed, a thorough analysis of literary figurations of catastrophe and the intersection of environmental disaster and other forms of vulnerability must integrate contributions from political philosophy and sociology, such as Bauman's work on "wasted lives," and Nixon's monograph on "slow violence". Moreover, as this novel engages with the questioning of contemporary discourses on the human and its modes of representation, reflections from feminist posthumanism and ecofeminism (Alaimo; Braidotti) prove fundamental in rethinking the positioning of the human in the midst of catastrophe and conceiving new, possible relations to the planet and its inhabitants. The two sections will be brought together in the conclusive remarks, to reiterate the potential of precarity in rethinking our relationship with the other in an anthropocenic context.

This article seeks to shed new light on a novel that has been analysed from numerous, different perspectives.² Specifically, this study engages in dialogue with contemporary discourses concerning the problematic relationship between humankind and the planet, focusing on how global issues are integrated within literature that originates “at the margins” of existing centres (of power, of knowledge, of culture). Taking a decolonial stance on fictional depictions of catastrophe and precarity may contribute to a revision of Western conceptual frames which structure current representations of the human (see Heffes 34).

Precarity in the Time of Environmental Crisis

Mugre rosa constitutes a paradigmatic example of the biopolitics of precarity in the context of impending climate change. The novel is set in Montevideo—a possible Montevideo, as the author herself explains in an interview (Trías and Medina)—where the population is confronted with the devastating consequences of environmental catastrophe.³ While toxic red algae proliferate in the river, causing the death of all native species, the city’s inhabitants suffer the consequences of climate disaster, represented in the text as incessant deadly winds. In this catastrophic scenario, the novel follows the everyday struggles of the protagonist narrator, a young woman who decides to stay in her hometown to take care of her ex-husband Max, a survivor of the red wind, and Mauro, a child suffering from a terrible disorder (identified extra-diegetically as the Prader-Willi syndrome). Fragments of her life in contact with environmental disaster and its manifestations are alternated with oneiric atmospheres and parentheses of remembrance of a past that now seems distant and elusive. This entanglement of different temporalities constructs the image of a restless individual, who obstinately searches for explanations for an ominous present and an increasingly uncertain future.

In an uncanny coincidence, the publication of *Mugre rosa* in early 2020 coincided with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the amplification of discourses related to the escalating environmental disaster. From the very beginning, the novel has been read against the background of anthropocenic dynamics that distinguish contemporary reality, offering an exhaustive depiction of an era marked by environmental deterioration and illness, thus drawing attention to the vulnerability of the bodies entangled within the network of power relationships

² Mackey analyses the text from the perspective of rioplatense ecogothic, incorporating concepts like *anthropogenic fiction* (Trexler) and *ecosickness* (Houser) into her discussion. Amaro and Barrero Bernal, instead, articulate their studies—respectively on monstrous childhood and hunger as a metaphor for social disease—on the dystopian component of the novel. Some of these aspects are further developed by Vázquez-Medina (“Vibrancy”), whose analysis of Trías’s style casts new light on the relationship between the environmental catastrophe and the possibilities of language to articulate the complex dynamics of the Anthropocene.

³ Several spatial and cultural elements favour a referential reading of the novel, according to which the fictional city coincides with Montevideo. Although this possibility is only hinted at in the text, the resulting interpretation is particularly interesting as it allows for a discussion of the intersection between global and local dynamics in the context of catastrophe.

characteristic of late capitalist biopolitics (Barrero Bernal 16). In this section, I discuss how the fictional representation of catastrophe exposes the profound correlation between precarity, neoliberal technologies and climate disaster, revealing not only the intersection between different forms of inequality but also the oppressive effects of such unfair distribution of vulnerability.

First, it is worth noting that the causes of the climate disaster portrayed in the plot are never explicitly disclosed by the author; rather, “the reader is invited to infer that the interrelated environmental crises in *Mugre rosa* [...] are all a product of incremental and longstanding forms of harm inflicted by humans” (Vázquez-Medina, “Vibrancy” 8). In fact, both Mackey (269) and Vázquez-Medina (“Vibrancy” 4) understand this catastrophic scenario as a consequence of the anthropogenic shaping of the planet and especially of what Nixon calls “slow violence,” i.e. “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2). Within the plot, this incremental violence is embedded in the intrinsic behaviour of a capitalist society, based on extractivism, pollution and toxicity, disregard for other living species, excessive production, rapid consumption, and waste accumulation (Vázquez-Medina, “Vibrancy” 16).⁴ In this context, precarity can be understood as the living condition of those who are subjected to this form of hidden violence, which can also manifest itself as the nefarious effects of environmental degradation.

In its depiction of catastrophe, the novel focuses on two defining characteristics of the contemporary neoliberal order as presented by Nixon, which are demonstrative of present forms of biopolitics based on an uneven distribution of vulnerability and harm. Firstly, the narration exposes the growing gap among people facing different degrees of precarity, both on a global level and within the same local reality. Moreover, the account of this fictional catastrophe brings to light “the attendant burden of unsustainable ecological degradation that impacts the health and livelihood of the poor most directly” (46), emphasising how precarity today must be understood as the complex intersection of different forms of vulnerability. Even the experience of environmental disaster is shaped by other forms of precarity such as gender, race, or social class.

Furthermore, the unequal distribution of precarity and exposure to environmental disaster emphasise the geographical character of the Anthropocene: what in certain regions is merely perceived as a future risk, in other places is a reality. Our actions as a species have a profound impact on the planet, and some of them have already irreversibly damaged entire ecosystems, turning them inhospitable and dangerous. Therefore, I suggest a reading of Anthropocene that surpasses conventional teleological temporalities—which organise narratives of catastrophe in terms of a “before” and an “after” the disaster—favouring instead a geographical

⁴ These issues emerge, for instance, in the sudden death of fish and birds, the toxic river, the obscure but fundamental role of the meat factory (which inevitably alludes to intensive livestock farming and its dramatic effects on the environment) or the uncontrollable generation of waste.

configuration.⁵ The scenario depicted in the novel emphasises the geographical dimension of anthropocenic disasters, revealing that the consequences of contemporary catastrophes are already inscribed in the bodies of those who have remained outside the discourses of wealth and progress.

The first configuration of precarity lies on the global level and is indicative of the allocation of power, resources, and labour in times of modernity. In fact, vulnerability is greatest in places that have historically been regarded and exploited as sources of raw materials or have been used as the landfill of modernity. The possibility that the novel is set in Montevideo and the environmental catastrophe is confined to certain parts of Uruguay (thus posing no danger whatsoever to wealthier nations) can be interpreted precisely in the light of the chasm between Global North and Global South. This unbalanced allocation of vulnerability favours the separation between lives regarded as worthier or more grievable and lives considered disposable, that can be abandoned at the mercy of climate disaster.

People inhabiting the Global South are often considered “wasted humans” (Bauman 5) or “lesser humans” (Mignolo 153), who have fallen behind in the race for development and can therefore be left to their fate. This association between waste and the inhabitants of Montevideo appears textually in some of the narrator’s remarks on her life in contact with climate calamity. In the first paragraph of the novel, in which the narrator describes the gradual deterioration of the city, she notes: “[e]verything was rotting, including us” (Trías 13).⁶⁷ Like any other organic matter, the people living in Montevideo also suffer a slow process of putrefaction, to the point of almost being deprived of their humanity.⁸ This observation is reiterated a few lines later, as the narrator lingers on the excessive amount of rubbish accumulated in the streets. She observes: “I don’t know where all that rubbish was coming from. It was as if it was digesting and excreting itself, and who’s to say that the waste isn’t us, Max might have said” (13-14).⁹ Not only has the Global South been considered the world’s dumpsite for the inconvenient remnants of modernity; from the narrator’s perspective, the proximity to pollution is not just physical but has also a transformative effect on the inhabitants, which are incorporated into the garbage abandoned around the city.¹⁰

⁵ See also John Berger’s emblematic pronouncement: “[p]rophecy now involves a geographical rather than a historical projection; it is space and not time that hides consequences from us. To prophesy today is only necessary to know men [and women] as they are throughout the world in all their inequality” (40).

⁶ “Todo se pudría, también nosotros” (Trías 13).

⁷ All translations from *Mugre Rosa* are mine.

⁸ See the comment on the people living in the crumbling hotel, which left the sign on to remember that they were alive (Trías 13), or the correlation between the inhabitants and the figure of the ghost (Trías 249).

⁹ “No sé de dónde salía tanta basura. Era como si se digiriera y se excretara a sí misma. ¿Y quién te dice que los desechos no seamos nosotros?, algo así podría haber dicho Max” (Trías 13-14).

¹⁰ Armiero identifies the limitless production of waste as a defining feature of the present era. The emphasis on trash as the prime signifier of our times shifts the focus to the modes of consumption of contemporary societies, which has led us to live on a finite planet according to the dictates of a narrative of infinite progress.

That said, the distribution of vulnerability is further problematised in the novel, where intra-regional inequalities are added to the North/South divide. Precarity not only opposes different nations but also exacerbates local divisions, leading to the creation of new forms of injustice (McCormack and Salmenniemi 7). The Uruguayan territory is fractured into several risk zones, where precarious bodies are affected by climate disaster differently: city dwellers experience the red winds and environmental degradation first-hand, while those living in more rural regions of the country follow the catastrophe from afar. As the narrator observes, “[p]eople living inland watched the phenomenon on TV, saw the numbers of sick people rising and feared that all those people would one day move back to their clean and safe cities” (Trías 30).¹¹ Therefore, the population is split between those who are completely exposed, those who are safe, and those who have managed to reach the immune zones (Barrero Bernal 18; Mackey 269). The flow of migration to peripheral regions precisely represents this heterogeneous distribution of vulnerability, which, however, does not remain constant in either time or space: “the red wind that the Prince’s phenomenon had brought was so powerful that it was already beginning to reach the first cities of the interior” (Trías 112).¹²

The different economic means of Montevideo’s inhabitants also have a considerable impact on their ability to escape environmental disasters. In fact, fleeing the city is experienced differently by people pertaining to separate economic classes: this is evident in the narrator’s description of Uruguayan citizens, some of them “buried far from the sea, the rich in their *estancias* or mansions on the hills, the poor overflowing the cities of the interior, the same ones we used to mock as empty, scarce, obtuse” (21).¹³ A similar remark appears in the account of the first wave of the red wind, after which “[t]he upper echelons of the state built their houses on the slopes of some tiny hill in the flat, eternal countryside, and from there they began to issue orders” (204).¹⁴ As explained by Barrero Bernal, the first people to be saved from the spread of environmental disasters are those who have the material means to do so, while all the others are left behind (19). Therefore, the chronicle of the desperate exodus of people fleeing Montevideo is a manifestation of how environmental catastrophe interacts with poverty and other pre-existing forms of vulnerability.¹⁵

Emblematic in this respect is the media coverage of the fire that burns down the meat processing plant, narrated in the last chapters of the story: “We all lose, they said on TV, but I knew better. There were the ones who lost and there were the ones

¹¹ “Los de adentro miraban el fenómeno por televisión, veían subir las cifras de enfermos y temían que toda esa gente se mudara algún día a sus ciudades limpias y seguras” (Trías 30).

¹² “El viento rojo que había traído el fenómeno del Príncipe era tan potente que ya empezaba a llegar a las primeras ciudades de adentro” (Trías 112).

¹³ “sepultados lejos del mar, los ricos en sus estancias o casonas sobre las colinas, los pobres desbordando las ciudades del interior, aquellas mismas de las que antes nos burlábamos por vacías, escasas, obtusas” (Trías 21).

¹⁴ “Los altos mandos del Estado construyeron sus casas en las laderas de alguna diminuta colina del campo chato y eterno, y desde allá comenzaron a dar órdenes” (Trías 204).

¹⁵ See, as a further example, the insistence of the narrator’s mother on knowing whether she has earned the money necessary to leave the city (Trías 27; 140).

who could always make it work” (Trías 240-241).¹⁶ Even when an unexpected accident seems to show that every life is precarious and affected by external events, the narrator insists that such vulnerability does not but maintain pre-existing inequalities. Indeed, the novel exhibits examples of wealthy people who manage to increase their profits at the expense of the most defenceless. For instance, the agronomist travels to the city “only to recruit hordes of desperate people in the port and other neighbourhoods, cheap labour that was trucked in” (28).¹⁷ Another example lies in the allusion to a possible waste trade: “I didn’t try to guess what could be hidden behind the rubbish business, but I did think of the city as a huge, free zone subject to an ever-changing and mysterious economy” (213).¹⁸

Not only does *Mugre rosa* distinguish between those who can build a safe new home and those who must hastily abandon their own, but it also mentions the existence of a small group of desperate people who are condemned to live in contact with environmental catastrophe. Abandoned to the effects of catastrophe are those lives deemed expendable, like those of suicides—who “chose to die this way, contaminated, exposed to nameless diseases that did not promise a quick death either” (15)—or homeless people who are simply erased from the urban landscape (211).¹⁹ Indeed, not all bodies are equally vulnerable and there can be forms of wasted lives among those who have already been marginalised. As the novel illustrates, in times of catastrophe the management of environmental disaster and the consequent exposure to toxicity may become a form of biopolitical control. Different degrees of vulnerability emerge even among those who can be considered as the most precarious bodies in the story: those who have been infected by the toxic winds. Of the different types of patients—acute, terminal, chronic—the latter receive special treatment precisely because of their rarity and potential for medical research. As the narrator explains, “according to the ministry, all sick people were worth the same (*Every life is unique*, the new slogan said), but doctors wanted the chronically ill alive much more than the acutely ill or those in quarantine. The chronically ill kept the secret of the algae in them” (Trías 38).²⁰

Therefore, the novel illustrates the close interaction between exposure to environmental disaster and other existing forms of vulnerability, delineating an elaborate cartography of catastrophe and precarity. As Barrero Bernal suggests, the narration reveals the ways in which the proliferation of disease determines new

¹⁶ “Todos perdemos, decían en la tele, pero yo sabía que no. Estaban los que perdían y estaban los que siempre podrían arreglarse” (Trías 240-41).

¹⁷ “solo para reclutar hordas de desesperados en el puerto y otros barrios, mano de obra barata que se llevaba en camiones para adentro” (Trías 28).

¹⁸ “no intenté adivinar qué cosa podía esconderse detrás del negocio de la basura, pero sí pensé en la ciudad como una inmensa zona franca sujeta a una economía siempre cambiante y misteriosa” (Trías 213).

¹⁹ “elegían morir así, contaminados, expuestos a enfermedades sin nombre que tampoco auguraban una muerte rápida” (Trías 15).

²⁰ “Según el ministerio, todos los enfermos valían lo mismo (*Cada vida es única*, decía el nuevo slogan), pero los médicos querían vivos a los crónicos mucho más que a los agudos o a los de cuarentena. Los crónicos guardaban en ellos el secreto de las algas” (Trías 38).

social categories according to the possibilities of immunisation, also portraying the tragic fate of those who try to resist and eventually become residual, abnormal bodies (18). Nonetheless, the true added value of this novel resides precisely in the possibilities offered by a referential reading and the unsettling interplay between reality and fiction. Once again, literature becomes an excellent space to critically observe the present, inscribing contemporary concerns in the fictional realm. Particularly, in *Mugre rosa* Trías incorporates global issues such as environmental disaster and inequality but combines them with the specific local context of Uruguayan social and cultural landscape, emphasising, for instance, the gap between the urban setting and the rural regions, or the nation's problematic dependency on the meat industry—represented here as a monstrous mother (Trías 113). In this way, the novel proposes a change of perspective, situating the point of enunciation at the margins of contemporary centres of power and culture, but precisely in the middle of catastrophe. Digging right into the core of disaster, this displacement exposes the failure of discourses and practices inherent to late capitalism, bringing forward the urgency of rethinking human relationships with others in more ethical, sustainable ways.

Although precarity is mainly portrayed as a systematic form of oppressive control or the abandonment at the mercy of environmental disaster, in this space of vulnerability also lies the potential for resistance and transgression. Trías undertakes this project in ways that surpass the scope of this article, for example in the representation of the narrator's network of relationships. Even though social dynamics echo Hobbesian *homo homini lupus*, and the narrator's familial bonds are mostly dysfunctional, the evolution in the relationship with Mauro suggests a glimmer of hope. As McCormack and Salmenniemi propose, “[b]ringing together precarity and biopolitics raises questions around care for the self and responsibility for others” (10). What was at first seen as a mere job by the narrator becomes with time almost a vocation: behind the unconditional care also lies an attempt to rehumanise a child elsewhere perceived as monstrous. Although this possibility is not realised within the novel itself, as the dramatic ending shows, the complex relationship with Mauro emphasises the importance of mutual care within a system that thrives on precarity, suggesting that in such an alienating society the lack of language or affection may blur the boundaries of the human (Amaro 24). Relationality, as McCormack and Salmenniemi argue, is not “about our humanness as such, but about how ethical responsibility can be thought through our inter- and intra-relationality with human, environmental and animal others, and other others” (6).

We Are Such Stuff as the Environment is Made of

As I have argued above, precarity in the context of catastrophe not only exposes the human to violence and oppression but also entails the potential for the ethical rethinking of our identity and inter-relationality. Although the novel seems to

deny any possibility of resistance within the diegesis, this is instead performed on a symbolic level. In this section, I focus on corporeal vulnerability, represented in the novel by the outbreak of a terrible disease, discussing how the apparent destruction of the human body favours the deconstruction of certain pillars of contemporary thought, pointing toward a more responsible coexistence with the environment. As previously stated, the notion of precariousness indicates first and foremost a more physical type of vulnerability, defined by Butler as injurability (*Precarious Life* xii). It is precisely our bodily dimension that is exposed to the other, be it another human, a nonhuman being or a thing. In a culture based on the idea of the individual and Cartesian mind/body dualism, which in turn is reflected in dichotomies such as nature/culture, considering the human in the light of its precariousness challenges the assumptions underlying our self-representation, showing that “there is no human without those networks of life within which human life is but one sort of life” (Puar 173). This change of paradigm requires a shift away from an anthropocentric view, in which the environment constitutes a mere background to human actions or nature is at the service of a superior master, to recognise how being alive means in the first place to be situated in the centre of a web of relationships that exceeds any possible conception of individuality and humanity.

This problematic interconnectedness between human and nonhuman beings emerges as one of the cornerstones of *Mugre rosa*, in which the dramatic dystopian scenario foreshadows a conflicted coexistence with the natural, at least in the forms envisioned within a society based on unrestrained consumption. Such incompatibility appears in the comparison between the fictional catastrophe and the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, where “there were more animals than ever before, and even endangered ones had reproduced thanks to the absence of humans. My mother did not interpret this as irony, but—again—as the triumph of life over death. –*Human, Mom. Over human death*” (Trías 23).²¹ This passage is emblematic in that it underlines how the primacy of the human has disrupted the balanced web of relationships on which life—the life of all beings—is based. Invoking the extreme claims of deep ecology, the narrator’s statement encourages a change of perspective, implying that sometimes, precisely because of its destructive impact, it is not human life but life in general that thrives.

At the same time, the mesh in which humans, nonhumans and things are entangled is discovered to be a fundamental part of existence (see Morton 15). In the destroyed city,

[n]othing could be heard any more. The silence was painful. Who could have imagined the auditory void of a city without insects, without buzzing, but also without horns, without the slow buffeting of a lift or the murmur of distant voices, without everything artificial that—I now understand—was what we called life. (Trías 213)²²

²¹ “había más animales que nunca, y hasta los que estaban en peligro de extinción se habían reproducido gracias a la ausencia de humanos. Mi madre no lo interpretó como una ironía, sino—otra vez—como el triunfo de la vida sobre la muerte. –*Humana, mamá. Sobre la muerte humana*” (Trías 23).

²² “Nada se oía ya. El silencio era doloroso. Quién podría haber imaginado el hueco auditivo de una ciudad sin insectos, sin zumbidos, pero también sin bocinas, sin el bufido lento de un ascensor o el

Here, life emerges as a dense web of relationships, which involve different forms of materiality, agency and subjectivity, echoing the zoe/geo/techno assemblage described by Braidotti (44). The sudden disappearance of life in its most diverse forms—be it animal, social, or technological—leads to the recognition of the system of relationships that sustains existence on this planet. Thus, the emergence of life and the coexistence of different beings can be described according to an interactionist ontology, comprehensively discussed by Tuana (188). In this sense, Trías's novel constitutes not only a tale about a catastrophic future but also a space to explore "the material, affective, human and nonhuman relationships and interactions that make up the 'mesh' in our troubling times" (Vázquez-Medina, "Vibrancy" 8).

The complex entanglement of forces is also mirrored in the absence of a clear underlying cause of the environmental disaster. The unspecified origin of catastrophe within the storyline can be interpreted through the lens of the essential characteristics of the Anthropocene. What emerges in the novel is the representation of an epoch in which human and nonhuman, social and natural agencies seem to blend. I draw here on Tuana's reading of the Hurricane Katrina tragedy, which also problematises the separation between what is natural and what is provoked by human activity. According to Tuana, "these 'natural phenomena' are result of human activities [...] But these activities themselves are fueled by [...] a solid belief that economic success and independence is determined in part by access to and consumption of goods" (193). It would be impossible to determine one specific source of the catastrophe, since it is exactly the combination of different forms of agencies which results in a climate disaster.

Therefore, even if the actual forces represented in the novel are natural (the waves of red winds, the proliferation of toxic algae or the animal mutations), the catastrophe depicted in *Mugre rosa* reveals the profound interaction between social practices and natural phenomena, which points to the mutual dependency among not-just-human beings and the exposure to forces that are beyond our control. Within the novel, ambiguity becomes a strategic narrative choice illustrative of the ways in which catastrophe enters the literary space not only thematically, but also aesthetically and formally. Specifically, literature must find new ways to depict and inhabit spaces of vulnerability that reflect the insecurity, anxiety, and instability intrinsic to our times. This aspect is evident in the narrator's persistent search for the *comienzo*, the beginning of her own story and the catastrophe. As she admits, "[w]hat we mistake for the beginning is only the moment when we understand that things have changed. One day the fish appeared; that was a beginning" (Trías 45).²³

In the novel, the possibility of a clear division between the human and the environment is mainly questioned by the textual representation of the ill body. I argue that the disease portrayed in *Mugre rosa* not only underscores corporeal fragility, but

murmullo de voces lejanas, sin todo lo artificial que—ahora entiendo—era lo que llamábamos vida" (Trías 213).

²³ "Lo que confundimos con el comienzo es solo el momento en que entendemos que las cosas han cambiado. Un día aparecieron los peces; ese fue un comienzo" (Trías 45).

also challenges many classic dichotomies which are foundational to the modern conception of the human, such as self/other, outside/inside, human/environment. Analogous to the causes of the environmental disaster, the origin of the disease is not made explicit within the narrative either. What results evident, however, is the predominant role of the wind in the propagation of the disease. Air, one of the elements essential to human existence, becomes in the novel the main factor of its dissolution. The most frightening aspect of this illness is precisely its apparent imperceptible and unpredictable character.

The precarity of the lives of those in contact with the disease is expressed by the narrator herself, as she recalls a particular day she went for a walk along the rambla: “[t]he winds were still calm. How long could the calm last? Every war had its truce, even this one whose enemy was invisible” (Trías 16).²⁴ Besides being difficult to predict—the citizens of Montevideo live in constant fear of hearing the siren sounding announcing the start of a storm—this danger holds threats because of its immateriality, and thus its ability to infiltrate even through the smallest crack. As the protagonist recounts, “[t]he wind could slip through even the narrowest of cracks and some woke up in the midst of a stinging, acid whirlwind” (81).²⁵ Moreover, as highlighted by Vázquez-Medina, the wind is depicted in the novel as a material force endowed with its own agency, “reflected in the descriptions of the epidemic’s multi-scalar effects—which range from individual bodies to the social, economic, and ecological spheres” (“Vibrancy” 10). Therefore, the precarious bodies described in the novel are subjected to further violence that only exacerbates their vulnerability, making clear the impossibility of controlling nature and the profound connection with the surrounding environment, even when this is invisible and intangible.

Further remarks can be made in relation to an Argentinian novel that, like *Mugre rosa*, explores the interaction between human and non-human in the context of anthropogenic shaping of the planet: *Distancia de rescate* (2014) by Samanta Schweblin. Like Schweblin’s, Trías’s work reflects on the interconnectedness underpinning our embodied experience, signalling through the representation of illness “the permeability of bodies and consciousness, the continuity between human and nonhuman bodies, and the permeation of conceptual categories” (Vázquez-Medina, “Samanta Schweblin’s” 11). The ecosystem depicted in *Mugre rosa* becomes emblematic of what Stacy Alaimo defines as *transcorporeality*, that is the intimate implication of human, non-human or more-than-human bodies in each other’s existence (238). In the novel, the breakout of an uncontrollable disease and the involvement of the wind in its propagation display the transcorporeal interconnectedness which exposes us as vulnerable beings. The ubiquitous character of air and its capacity to penetrate our bodies call attention to the fact that nature not only surrounds us but is also inextricably entwined with us. The distinction between

²⁴ “Los vientos seguían tranquilos. ¿Cuánto podía durar la calma? Toda guerra tenía su tregua, incluso esta cuyo enemigo era invisible” (Trías 16).

²⁵ “El viento podía colarse hasta por la rendija más angosta y algunos despertaban en medio de un remolino picante y ácido” (Trías 81).

self and other, human and nature, represents a mere illusion since “what constitutes the proper ‘me’ is already shot through with otherness” (Shildrick 276).

The challenge to the image of the body as a unified and unchanging entity is further intensified by the description of the symptomatology of the disease. The affected bodies of both humans and animals become the visible manifestation of an economic and cultural system grounded on indifference to our essential interconnectedness. Therefore, it is worth examining the numerous accounts of the illness present in the text. As the narrator explains, contact with the toxic wind provokes symptoms like those of common flu—cough, weakness and general discomfort (Trías 81). Furthermore, this illness causes the progressive loss of the skin, which traditionally represents the border between the self and the environment. The segments of the text pertaining to the disease expose this painful process in minute detail, as exemplified by the dialogue between the protagonist and a taxi driver who met a contaminated, flayed man during one of his rides (31).

The main effect of the disaster narrated in the novel is the destruction of human skin, the membrane that supposedly separates the individual from the rest of the world. The depiction of a body deprived of the epidermis is reiterated in the numerous descriptions of Max, who appears in the mind of the protagonist as “skinned, the skin torn, ripped, splitting open to expose the flesh” (32) and “prostrate and emaciated, the skin limp and yellow” (35).²⁶ These disturbing images exemplify the vulnerability of the human and their unconditional exposure to the other. Furthermore, the complete disintegration of the most external layer of the body represents momentaneous access to a different form of relationship with what surrounds us. The destruction of the skin allows those who have been infected to feel everything “a flor de piel” (32), an expression commonly used to denote an increased sensibility. Despite the pain caused by the disease, the progressive loss of skin represents a radical change in the perception of the world, in which humans and the environment come into contact in an unmediated manner.

Such corporeal exposure makes explicit that human bodies are not autonomous and impermeable, but rather porous and variable. The erosion of skin caused by the wind exposes our mutual vulnerability and instantiates the encounter between “my flesh and the flesh of the world” (Tuana 199). Rethinking the limits of the human body resonates in the conception of skin as a place of encounter and not as a site of division, which is illustrated in the narrator’s memories related to her ex-husband. As she recounts,

[Max] could walk on thistles, withstand mosquito bites without scratching, and stand still in the sun until his shoulders turned purple. Then his back would peel, and I would peel off the transparent layers of skin, revealing another, newer, redder skin. I would say to him: do you realise that this skin never touched the air? My fingers, my own skin was what I was touching for the first time. (Trías 122)²⁷

²⁶ “despellejado, la piel desgarrada, hendida, abriéndose para exponer la carne” (Trías 32) and “prostrado y enflaquecido, la piel floja y amarilla” (Trías 35).

²⁷ “[Max] podía caminar sobre abrojos, soportar sin rascarse la picadura de los mosquitos y quedarse quieto bajo el sol hasta que los hombros se le ponían morados. Después la espalda se le pelaba y yo arrancaba las capas de piel transparentes que dejaban al descubierto otra, más nueva y más roja. Le

Again, the partial loss of skin and the exposure to the other—be it the narrator’s hand or the gentle touch of air—manifest the vulnerability of human existence and its constant interaction with other forms of life. This quotation also echoes Haraway’s question “Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?” (75), which claims a new representation of the human and underscores fundamental aspects as porosity, interconnectedness, and vulnerability. While the novel depicts a dystopian future where the human will hardly find any form of salvation or redemption, its potential is disclosed through the apocalyptic dimension, where the end of the world (as we know it) entails an unsettling revelation. The progressive destruction of the body will not save the human trapped in the diegetic world, since the progressive loss of skin will eventually lead to the death of those who have been infected. It invites, however, to a drastic rethinking of the boundaries and ideas that sustain the concept of the human, pointing toward a posthuman, inter-relational identity.

Conclusions

In *Mugre rosa*, the portrayal of a catastrophic future provides the framework for reflection on a series of dynamics specific to our times, in which exposure to environmental disaster has become a further tool within the biopolitics of precariousness. The novel comprehensively illustrates how precarity is not evenly distributed, but rather traces existing inequalities, exacerbating the vulnerable condition of those who are already precarious. Especially, a critical reading in which the fictional city is identified with Montevideo offers numerous, fruitful insights to discuss contemporary forms of inequality and vulnerability. First, the cartography of catastrophe that emerges from the story illustrates the gap between those countries where environmental disaster is a dire, future prospect and those where it is already a reality, emphasising how the consequences of late capitalist practices do not only affect supposedly modern and developed countries, but also all those places that have been exploited and abandoned to themselves. Moreover, the novel reveals how global issues always interact with specifically local dynamics and other forms of precarity, problematising the experience of catastrophe *in* and *from* the margins.

Through this displacement of perspective in the experience of precarity and exposure to environmental disaster, *Mugre rosa* offers a fictional space where to inhabit vulnerability and insecurity, while stressing the urgency of reconsidering our relationship with the planet and its inhabitants in more equitable and sustainable ways. Indeed, the vulnerability experienced in a time such as the Anthropocene not only constitutes a moment of profound crisis and instability, but also offers an excellent space from which to enquire into this precarious situation, to propose alternative, dissident, non-hegemonic ways of thinking our identity and our position

decía: ¿te das cuenta de que esta piel nunca tocó el aire? Mis dedos, mi propia piel eran lo que tocaba por primera vez” (Trías 122).

in the world. Although the novel offers an ambiguous and desolate narrative, which ends with the protagonist abandoning her city, *Mugre rosa* carries an important provocation. Through the portrayal of a disease that slowly erodes the skin of the city's dwellers, Trías inscribes in the materiality of the bodies themselves a critique of Western conceptions of the human and contemporary representations of their embodied experience. The textual depiction of illness brings forward the idea that there are no distinct bodies; rather, we are all connected regardless of our will. The dissolution of skin—the barrier separating the human from his surroundings—calls for a reconsideration of the discourses that have placed the individual at the centre of the cosmos, foregrounding instead the inescapable web of relationships that connects and sustains every form of life.

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Editorial Creative Writing and Arts

Disruptive Encounters: Concepts of Care and Contamination Out of Control

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Arising from the late Latin *incontrāre*, the first definition of the word ‘encounter’ is semantically associated with the notion of ‘conflict’, or the coming together of opposing forces. As such, interactions between lively beings are never neutral, but are instead inherently unsettling in that they shake the ontological foundations of the self. In this view, multispecies entanglements represent, in Katherine Wright’s words, “a relational constitution of identity where beings are *made* in the fleshly space of encounter.” Throughout this process of co-becoming in anthropogenic times, the benefits of making kin are not always mutual, especially considering that “commerce and consciousness, evolution and bioengineering, and ethics and utilities are all in play” when relational ties are established across species lines (Haraway 46). The emergence, then, of novel ecosystems within muddy moral landscapes blasted by capitalism should not be understood exclusively in terms of loss and destruction, but also through the lens of resilience and adaptability (Kirksey 2015).

Such is the case, for instance, of the domestication of dogs. In fact, the human-canine bond led to a coevolution journey characterized by a troubling tension between care and control, which relies on a biopolitical framework manifesting itself in practices that range from population ‘management’ to compulsive breeding, which inserts our canine kin into a loop of commodification. If our claims of ownership deny dogs their bodily autonomy and agency, the disruption of individual freedoms causes constant adjustments to unpredictable fluctuations in living conditions that have inevitable ecological repercussions (Srinivasan 2013). Similarly, symbiotic relationships thrive on the entangled force between harm and co-dependency playing critical roles in ecological and evolutionary processes. By living in intimate contact with their host, a symbiotic encounter between two organisms may turn into a

parasitic dynamic that exerts a profound effect on interspecific interactions, at times even generating a state of tolerance in the host.¹

And so, as Maan Barua rightly notes, “an encounter poses problems; it reconfigures identities, space, political economies” (265). Yet, while encounters can be rooted in competitive premises or power imbalances, they can also lead to cooperative outcomes. In this sense, “becoming involves a metaphysics that is grounded in connection, challenging delusions of separation” (Wright). Instead of fixating over otherness, which reinforces a hierarchical approach to (bio)diversity, turning to the relational process that arises from a multispecies encounter opens up the possibility “that affectivity outshines physical delimitations, that at a certain point there is just too much vitality and circulation to perceive contours” (Alain 37). And so, thinking with the concept of permeability can be both generative and subversive, and may even initiate a *contagious* healing process, in that it holds the potential to challenge dominant human-nonhuman relationships built upon alienation and exploitation. The seven contributions in the creative writing and arts section of this special issue articulate the notion of disruptive encounters in thought-provoking ways, each showing a different—yet interconnected—facet of the world-making process that lies within any embodied encounter.

The cover image by illustrator and designer Jan Martin enchantingly sets the tone for the whole journal issue. Using both photographic and self-generated material, the artist experiments with textures and effects, to create surreal landscapes—mostly formations of cliffs, trees, and mountains—originating from “unexpected juxtapositions and perspectives that can surprise, disturb and illuminate” (Martin 2023). By combining collage methods, the artist creates digital illustrations using cut-up samples of scientific illustrations of fossils, shells, plants, and small organisms, such as crinoids, shells and moss. Through this technique, Martin wishes to emphasize the continuity of form throughout nature, which not only places humans within an overall pattern, but also highlights the beauty of common structures. Besides emerging in the assemblage of seemingly disjointed organisms, the concept of ‘encounter’ is also inherent to the material process of creation enabling the “enactment of multiple conjoined histories” (Tsing 34). The three illustrations signaling the transition to the arts section are part of the same series and, in a uniquely recognizable style, further visualize multispecies interactions growing out of creative expression. Originally published as accompanying illustrations to individual poems, they are here proposed as stand-alone pieces without their textual counterpart to engender new meanings and interpretations. As Martin shares in her artist statement, the images represent “an attempt to bring comfort in a world where we are all feeling (if only subliminally) that humanity has created a riderless horse of cause and effect that now seems to threaten our very existence.”

¹ The cultural construction of the ‘parasite’ as an invasive entity has led to the normalization of figurative language with discriminatory connotations. On the use of the parasite metaphor to dehumanize marginalized human communities see Zengin (316-340).

Moving on to the second contribution, Serena Zanzu's poem "Forcing the Bond" explores more-than-human relationships between microbes and humans emerging across agricultural fields and scientific laboratories. The author engages with themes such as bioengineering, mutation, and symbiotic nitrogen fixation, drawing attention to how scientific efforts to manipulate and exploit the soil microbiome may "unleash new crises." Zanzu turns to the poetic language to further elaborate on questions of microbiopolitics and the ethics of technoscience on which she has already published several academic articles, such as "The Microbiopolitics of Pots and Compost Making" and "Scent of Soil." In an unmediated straightforward poetic style, the author explores the relational ontologies that emerge from moments of forced nurture, a topic that closely speaks to Haraway's empowering concept of 'sympoiesis' (58). The hammering repetition of the word "we" functions as a hypnotic reminder of our disruptive role in "turning bios around," while emphasizing that we are all part of these "symbiotic communities" and inescapably affected by our own interventions.

Encounters, then, not only reconfigure how we conceptualize the human, but also concomitant notions of personhood and knowledge. Anna Nygren's "Other Horses" superbly represents this ontological reframing. The author, whose artistic and academic interests span from neurodiversity and queer studies to poetic approaches to the more-than-human, shares a selection of texts that are part of an ongoing artistic research project on the interactions between language, neuroqueerness, and the nonhuman. The thematic thread running through the texts is the relationship between humans and horses, in particular the unequal relations of power and alienating harms deriving from othering our more-than-human kin ("The owning thing shows the inequalities between horse and human"; "Remember most (western) horses are definitely not free"). The textual fragments that make up a coherent whole all participate in the creation of a complex narrative ecology. By merging texts and illustrations, poetry and prose (and everything in between), and by playfully experimenting at the edge of linguistic normativity, the author audaciously disrupts genre and stylistic expectations while making room for unfamiliar—in the sense of beautifully queer—forms of artistic expression. If words are described as "having their own mind," a sequence of signifiers has the potential to generate an agglomeration of textures and unexpected, fluid re-compositions of materiality. And so, *bread* meets *fabric* meets *soft* meets *make up* and so forth, in a dynamic, ever-evolving process of world-building and meaning-making.

Leaning into the potential of poetic language to disrupt social conventions is Dean Anthony Brink, a poet, painter, and professor of literature and thought who contributes two poems to this special issue: "The New Speciesism" and "Feel Free to Splash About Disturbing Patience." In his work, the author explores the relational entanglements between our own species and others, extending his creative concerns also to the effects of technological infrastructures on multispecies coexistence. More specifically, his poetry chronicles shifting cultural horizons as well as the challenging task of overcoming predetermined categories of thought for the sake of ecological

flourishing. In tracing the repercussions of societal change, the author ponders on whether it is possible to achieve radical renewal, especially when deeply ingrained practices are not yet fully eradicated and new cultural practices have a hard time breaking away from normative models. One must wonder then how new can a ‘new speciesism’ be, or by what means one passes from “feeding neon tetras” to “stop pretending to care.”

The following contribution approaches the topic of ‘disruptive encounters’ from the perspective of migration, intricately weaving together themes of cultural displacement, environmental imagery, and the struggle for acceptance in unfamiliar surroundings. Through vivid imagery and visceral language, José Elizondo-Gonzales—author of the novels *Hacia ningún lugar* (Heading Nowhere, 2021) and *Cuando los cuerpos recuerdan* (When Bodies Remember, 2024), both published by Editorial Universidad de Costa Rica—presents “El peso del aire” (The Weight of Air), a collection of poems reflecting on the journey from rural childhood to urban adulthood and the subsequent transition to a new reality in the American Midwest. With these poems, the author wants to “capture the essence of the migrant experience, where the air itself feels heavy with the weight of isolation,” as explained in his artist statement. In a frantic search for a sense of belonging, the author recurs to the semantic sphere of vulnerability and threat, hinting towards the very real challenges of adapting to a new—often unwelcoming—social environment: “No me siento seguro” (I don’t feel safe); “Una casa donde camino en peligro” (a home where I walk in danger); “No puedo florecer en tu estación” (I can’t bloom in your season).

Within the same scope of interest is Qian Liu’s interview with Paolo Peng Shuai, a multidisciplinary artist based in Milan, Italy and born in Xiangtan, China. The interviewing process itself may be interpreted as a praxis of encounter, that is, an exchange of ideas and information through reflective and generative dialogue. A recurring theme in Paolo’s artworks is the world of Chinese plants, symbolically intertwined with his diasporic identities, which is perfectly encapsulated in the reproduction of the painting “Cultivating Chinese celery in a suburban canal in Reggio Emilia.” The interview revolves around the questions: How can we approach migration from an ecological perspective? What would be the epistemological convergences between identity and environmental crisis? The answer lies in the concept of “economadism” that, as the artist explains, “should not be understood simply in a geographical sense as a movement from one place to another, but as an inquiry into the environmental, cultural, anthropological, and psychological dimensions of nomadology.” The interview, which discusses the realization of this concept in his artistic practice, is accompanied by two photographs of the artist with his “Giardino Movente” (Moving Garden) in the town of Colle di Tora, in central Italy. With this project, artist and garden join forces to cultivate a culture of belonging that transcends physical boundaries, thus forging epistemic recalibrations that cut across human-nonhuman divides while strengthening bonds across difference. It is within this framework that it becomes possible to transcend notions of oppositional structures and embrace the porosity of boundaries.

Closing the Arts section is Wendy Wuyts' short story "An Ash Tree in Os" envisioning with speculative undertones a future of harmonious coexistence between Norwegian Sámi and non-Indigenous individuals. Yet, this is not a lighthearted look at the future. It is a story of loss and grief, of ecoterrorist attacks, pandemics, and femicide. At the same time, it is also about reparations and healing, of collaboration and hope, of connection with the landscape and communion with the more-than-human ("I myself had come to the conclusion that if the landscape was so polluted that I must also be polluted"; "We are all made of bacteria, constantly in exchange with the more-than-human world"). Throughout this process of renewal and rebuilding, during which contamination goes hand in hand with regeneration, the land does not forget: "The swamp and I were full of so many stories – minerals, fungi, rot, bacteria, and ashes of our ancestors." In all this, the Ash Tree stands strong, a keeper of intergenerational wisdom, entangled and prospering and suffering together with the whole community, which would gather under the tree to share "where new rhubarb was spotted. When the first mushrooms and berries emerged. A story about a sickness for reindeers. A song for healing broken fingers." Ultimately, then, it is the power of multispecies storytelling that enables the possibility to re-imagine and practice interspecies conviviality as a "matter of care" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017) as well as "cultures of gratitude" (Kimmerer 115) that nurture the formation of new alliances built on principles of mutual aid and reciprocal trust. The hand carved woodblock print by artist Laura Brusselaers sublimely evokes the atmosphere of the text: the campfire gathering, the smoke shapeshifting into two human faces looking inward, the soil featuring a rich tapestry of Sami culture, with the roots of the Ash tree growing through it and the bones of the ancestors resting beneath them, all contribute to building a wondrous visual representation of intergenerational and interspecies entanglements.

In conclusion, recognizing our integration to more-than-human assemblages represents a vital step towards embracing what the geographer Torsten Hägerstrand refers to as the 'principle of togetherness'. This is not, he writes, "just *resting* together. It is also *movement* and *encounter*" (Hägerstrand 332). The artists who have contributed to the Arts section of this special issue have undeniably captured the essence of what it means for lively beings to be viscerally and inextricably linked. By recurring to different literary genres and artistic expressions, they increase our awareness of the power dynamics that sustain multispecies relational entanglements while reminding us that we too are in an ongoing process of (co-)becoming, always coming into contact with disorderly ecologies, societies, and moralities.

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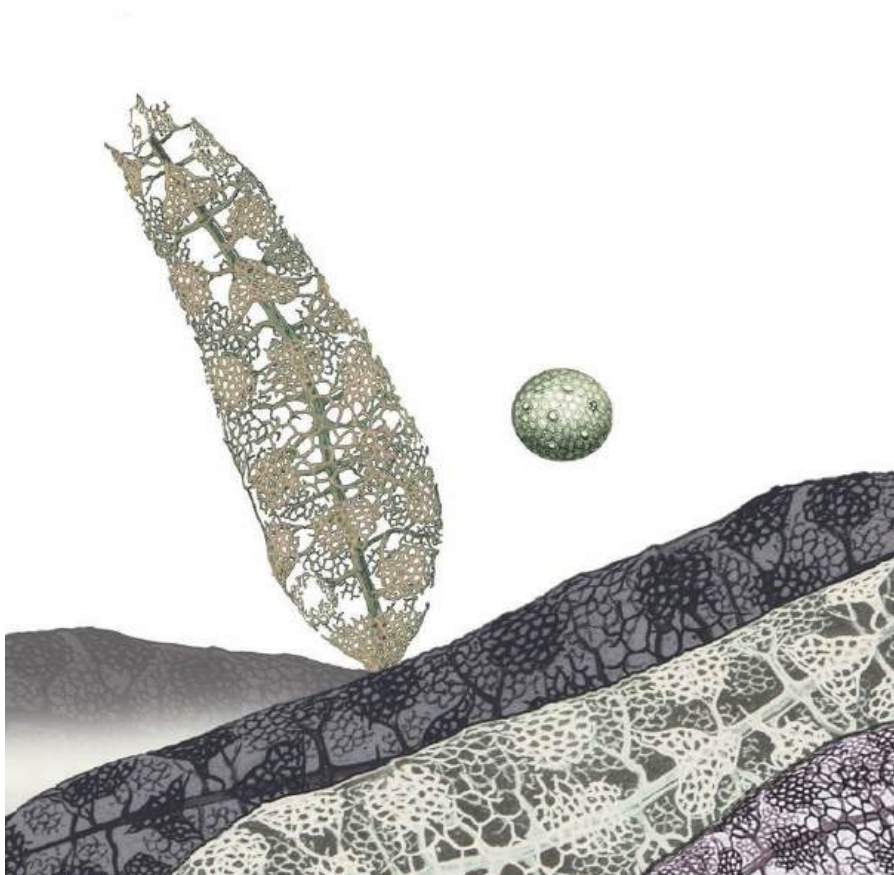
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Illustrations of the Meta Landscape

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Over There originally appears in [Woods, Ways and Waters](#) (Ten Illustrated Poems, 2024, Independent Publishing Network) to illustrate the poem of that name, which attempts to evoke the creative process of writing poetry.

¹ <https://www.janmartin.co.uk/gallery>



Blue Anchor originally appears in [We Are Here Between](#) (Ten Illustrated Poems inspired by the Somerset coast, 2021, Independent Publishing Network) to illustrate the poem of that name. *Blue Anchor* is a location in Somerset where the coast is eroding rapidly and the cliffs and beach are in a state of constant change.



Here originally appears in [We Are Here Between](#) (Ten Illustrated Poems inspired by the Somerset Coast, published 2021, Independent Publishing Network) to illustrate the poem of that name. The poem places the town where I live (Watchet, Somerset), with its eroding fossil-rich coastline, on an emotional timeline between the far Jurassic past and an uncertain future.

Artist Statement

The first image is a landscape of the mind, intended to evoke the somewhat sombre and lonely place the poet must inhabit during the creative process. It appears in my third book of illustrated poetry, which explores landscape as an expression of human experience, and also includes responses to issues of climate breakdown, mental health and population movement.

The last two images (and the cover image) appear in my first book and are a response to landscapes along the Bristol Channel coast of Somerset, UK. This book was an exploration of the passage of time and our story within it, on both a personal and existential level, as a transient life form; and how we reconcile feelings of purpose and meaning in that context. I attempted to set this against the movement of time and landscape over vastly longer narratives than we are necessarily able to make sense of. It was an attempt to bring comfort in a world where we are all feeling (if only subliminally) that humanity has created a riderless horse of cause and effect that now seems to threaten our very existence.

All of these images are created digitally, using cut-up elements of scientific illustrations, etchings and lithographs of fossils, shells, plants and microscopic organisms. I have used them to explore nature's common structures and patterns, whereby the very small and very large represent versions of common growth and formation patterns. I have created depictions of formations such as cliffs, trees and mountains using images of often very small organisms like crinoids, shells and moss. I use this technique to emphasise the continuity of form throughout nature which places us within an overall pattern. The elements are manipulated (enhanced/re-coloured/re-sized) and collaged in Adobe Photoshop to create the final image.

Mycetozoa, by Ernst Haeckel. Sourced: www.commonswiki.org

Amphoridea, by Ernst Haeckel. Sourced: www.commonswiki.org

Various ammonite fossils illustrating Hooke's discourse of Earthquakes.

Credit: Wellcome Collection. Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

A variety of madrepores and fossils. Coloured etching by S. Springsguth.

Credit: Wellcome Collection. Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

A variety of shells, cone-shells, fossils and corals. Coloured lithograph. Credit: Wellcome

Collection. Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

A variety of fossils characteristic of the carboniferous system. Line block.

Credit: Wellcome Collection. Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

Geology: fossil remains in stone. Coloured engraving. Credit: Wellcome

Collection. Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

Petrification of a marine animal, an encrinite or fossil crinoid. Etching. Credit: Wellcome

Collection. Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

Forcing the Bond

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They feed on exudates
they live in narrow zones.
Symbiotic communities
delivering nitrogen, transferring hope.
We, diverse scientists
can tap on these bacteria
maximise the food supply
we can keep the yield high
fulfil dreams of breeders and farmers.
Targeting microbiomes
we come up with symbioses
new plant-microbe interactions
convey fixation to nonlegumes
engineer enhanced nutrition.
Via advanced sequencing
we recruit microbial cells
unlock selected strains
translate exudate profiles
we avoid destructive leaching.
Microbes can be enhanced
made into a soup
inoculated in poor soil.
Today we unblock nature
we turn bios around
render life a tool
we unleash new crises.

Other Horses

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my name is Anna. my surname starts with N. putting these together makes “AnnaN” or “Annan” or “annan”, which is the Swedish word for “Other”, which gives it from my name, to my brain, that I have some kind of otherness, that I need to, need to, be with.

“because my gender, historically speaking, *never quite made it into full humanity*, so my allegiance to that category is at best negotiable and never to be taken for granted” (Braidotti 130)

I read and read. When I read, I am no longer human. I don't have to be. Written language may be typically human, but it doesn't have to be neurotypical. I read and I become a tree. I read and I become a cat : horse : fish. My allies have never been humans. I like people better through their texts than through their presence. During the assessment, the doctor said that social issues are fundamental to an autism diagnosis. But I don't have a problem with social. I am social with my cats and my books, all the time. I don't need others.

the assessment refers to being diagnosed with autism. I do think the autistics will be the people who change the world, because we are already other-worldlings. myself, I monotropically¹ text-sex-flex with language, making me, becoming me, an other-wording.

The following texts are part of an ongoing artistic research project on (language and/or poetry as) neurodiversity/neuroqueerness, the nonhuman/more-than-human.

¹ **Monotropism** is a cognitive strategy posited to be the central underlying feature of autism. A monotropic mind is one that focuses its attention on a small number of interests at any time, tending to miss things outside of this attention tunnel. A monotropic interest is *charged with feeling*.

It's a Horse

And they say

No

But

The Human says

I

Want

U

Civilization is

Hard

Love

Sleep makes Human

Friction against

Horse is

A hostel where

Time

Is

Red

To be

The most beautiful

Trojan



Horse

Inside

A Horse

Crawl in

Horse slow in

Mud

Trojan Horse in

Mud

Mud in Horse

Universal Mud

In Horse

Mud in

Stomach

Slow skin

Of Mud

Cross

The first para-

Site

All Horse

All Animal

God

Immune

NO MASK

Immune

NO WOR(L)D

Immune

Horse is

No

Mirror

2 never see

The eye

To read

The gaze

My violent eye

hurt me ?

Autistic people have six senses: taste, smell, touch, hearing, sight, and then words. Words are a sense that cannot be compared to other senses but allows them to leak in. Words have taste and smell, they are tactile, scratch the skin, bulge in the kidneys, they look: the shape of the letters in different writing styles, they have sounds, sounds when they sound inside the brain and when they say themselves, they are a movement a dance. But all these qualities still cannot define the words. For the words are their own. Their own mind.



iiii remember

re
member

we were never
where we never were
re

weeweweew
weaver waves of water
at atat

bread
fabric
soft
make up
glossy
matte
mousse
meal
oat
candy
trace
traits
cat
soft
fur
hair
flash
flush

Other.



The whole world can be perceived through the Horse.
The whole world can be perceived as the Horse.
The whole world can be perceived as a Horse.
There is no wholeness.
There are only horses.
To perceive, is to read.
I learn to read with the horses.
The sound of, horses:
Running, chewing, moving, stillness, motion, breathing, neeeeeigh.

0
0
0
0

The sound of the donkey. How it comes. Matthis, Hedén and Mille's book is called OVER all obstacles.

see in front of me the donkey's body, the one who slips under the obstacle, who has to work to rebuild the demolished obstacle, the railway worker.

I am shocked and in this feeling I google "horses in literature" (which I do from time to time):

Horses were often associated with the Underworld and, by association, with dark primal forces (including the beastlike energies residing in humans). Pegasus joins this symbolism with divine and skyborne connotations of flight and the heavens. Pegasus represents man's ability to rise above his base origins and attain creative and imaginative

flight. Indeed, the winged horse is often used as a symbol of poetic inspiration.

2

And I think:

WHAT INSPIRATION DO YOU CHOOSE WHO HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO "RISE ABOVE"?

WHO HAS ACCESS TO HEAVEN AND THE UNDERWORLD?????

Maybe it's not the donkey.

It's amazing that something so derided can be cast in porcelain [...].

In Persian, I explain, there are two words for donkey

both of which are an insult (p. 7)

Writes Farrokhzad. The donkey becomes here, THE ANIMAL THAT IN HUMAN FORM IS LESS THAN ZERO.

And it becomes so painfully, painfully clear that: THE HUMAN class hierarchy is leaking.

CLASS HIERARCHY LEAKS, RIDES, INTO THE CLASSIFICATION OF NON-HUMAN BEINGS. Mumbling to myself: CLASS, CLASS, CLASSIC (horse book), CLASSIFICATION, ETC. When the words for donkey become an insult, it means a way of

ASSOCIATE THE DONKEY WITH MAN. But it is obvious, that this is about some people. Because some people are more human than others.

But then, what happens when I read THE HORSES, is that something in the attention shifts,

from the human to the horse. It is a reading that slips into the theoretical perspectives of animal studies and ecocriticism.



This devaluation-democratization opens up possibilities for those who never could be with horses before. Still, the horse world is pretty exclusive. It takes money to have a horse, to go to a riding school. And I wonder: What does it do to the girl-horse-relation when a parent says: We can't afford this. We can't afford this relation, this love. The girl's love for horses and horse girls depends on the parents' economic capacities.

The owning thing shows the inequalities between horse and human. It is a relationship where one part could, legally, own the other. Think about the free horses: horses running wild, horses as symbols for freedom. Remember you can own them. Remember most (western) horses are definitely not free. Like most young girls: they are not free either, dependent on families and schools and everything else. To be a girl and own a horse could be a stage where you get rid of all the girlishness. Where for once you can be the owner, you can control and master, you can take care of, be responsible for, instead of being taken care of.

The owning thing shows the inequalities between horse and human. It is a relationship where one part could, legally, own the other. Think about the free horses: horses running wild, horses as symbols for freedom. Remember you can own them. Remember most (western) horses are definitely not free. Like most young girls: they are not free either, dependent on families and schools and everything else. To be a girl and own a horse could be a stage where you get rid of all the girlishness. Where for once you can be the owner, you can control and master, you can take care of, be responsible for, instead of being taken care of.

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The New Speciesism

Others limping along suggested I get in touch
with my inner animal, preferably one ordained before birth.

The questionnaire skewed toward mammals, verged
on speciesism—no tarantulas or sea anemone,

no egg-laying platypuses. Yet they said
it should come as a surprise, and be one

you've never consumed in the flesh
lest unwieldy nightmares spoil the adventure,

an effect observed in worms and anything ingrown,
Trojan implements downloading in the background.

Needless to say the paintings suffered.
First squirrel and antelope emerged in notorious cases

then goats on towering ridges above frozen gulches.
From there sublime composition collapsed

in centerization (cousin of cornerization), all in all
a wall-to-wall you-know-what-I-mean,

the unavailable threads of the hive mind
fallen in with pyramid sweat lodge operations

never heard from again, as if under
a spell, other donated lives to spin-offs.

Feel Free to Splash about Disturbing Patience

Sorry to keep you waiting, I was feeding the neon tetras.
If I forget they cut loud swathes of blue
teasing anemone raising the seabed in your typical global warming nightmare
where fish end up on shore and no one can sleep at night over the stench.
Now it all boils down to handfuls of medlar berries and Astragalus roots
and they help, though when I go all the way with angelica sinensis
I get asked about the missing time in my dreams
and it gets messy keeping stories straight.
We stop pretending to care, anyways just gassing up
facilitates sky patterns subject to detection along I-5,
ground speeds added to sealed envelopes
one day to make the glossies
or break up grand programs to pay off buddies
not even yours. Yet still with the day-to-day
possibilities of stepping out of my sedan
like a scientist toward his white jumper suit
in an airlock from which he drives away in a turquoise electric golf cart
to a room now faraway from notions of home,
deep underground, past bio-scans
under cameras concentrating on the filtered and hygienic
machinery, our boys busy giving it their all
to avoid outsourcing, shopping on faith.
The trick is in the theme music,
so phrases throw no one
before the package is packaged, keeping 'em at it,
full in a barreling rhythm
so the inertia snares them as them
at its peak with everyone falling away on cue for the shift.

El peso del aire

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El peso del aire

- Decime, ¿te pesa el aire?
- Solo cuando respiro.

Humedal en concreto

El olor a orines me pringó en el paladar
“Cristo te ama” se leía en un cartel de cartón mojado
Mientras que una familia venezolana cenaba acera
Había llegado a casa
Estaba en San José.

La naturaleza de nuestros suelos

No puedo florecer en tu estación
Soy un trasplante
Una imitación de flor de cerezo

No puedo saborear tu tierra kanseña
No cambio de color con las estaciones
Solo he aprendido a resistir tormentas tropicales.

El hombre de Missouri no está hecho de carne

Hay un momento del día en donde veo alucinaciones
O libélulas
Las chicharras
O un tren

Las campanadas anuncian las 9 fúnebres
Sí, son libélulas, en una cama de ciprés
Huele a zorro pelón en descomposición
O a verano ajeno:
a callejón iluminado con anemia
a un hombre sin cerebro
hecho de cables y ladrillo.

Fermento de suelo ajeno

Argentina es una casa que no me quiere
Al menos ya no
Sus vidrios y vitrales se revientan en el suelo
Y se me clavan en las plantas de los pies

Es una casa donde camino en peligro
Removiendo las astillas
Con mis dedos ensangrentados
Y los de mi mamá

Argentina es un recuerdo concho
Me recuerda a él
Quien mira hacia al lado
Y me culpa por el descuido en mis pasos

Argentina es un recuerdo del cual despierto en plena madrugada
Y me doy cuenta de que estoy solo.

Es una casa que se desploma
Los azulejos se resquebrajan con mis pasos
No me siento seguro
Las astillas se quedan
Es una casa que me entierra.

Los recuerdos son la basura que se quema

El olor a basura quemada
Me recuerda a la infancia
mi tío echaba cuanta cosa pudiera
en un hueco en la tierra
llantas

plásticos
sobornos
El yeso de algún brazo roto

Los plásticos encendidos
tenían un humo más pesado
denso
enchilaba los ojos
Había que cerrar las puertas y ventanas

Había belleza en la destrucción
En la transfiguración de los objetos
Entre el humo y la censura provocada
El canfín alimentaba el morbo

Los recuerdos son la basura que te quema.

Between Land and Sea: The Aesthetics of Diasporic Ecologies An Interview with Paolo Shuai Peng

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Cultivating Chinese celery in a suburban canal in Reggio Emilia (painted and provided by Paolo Shuai Peng)

Introduction

At the core of Paolo's artistic exploration is the concept he terms "economadism," where he endeavors to challenge its epistemic boundaries from the art world. Drawing inspiration from philosophers such as Deleuze, Guattari, Braidotti, and many others, he explores in his artworks how the term "nomadism" can serve as a transformative lens, offering new perspectives when considered as inherent to both the natural environment and the cultural, anthropological, and psychological facets of human beings. The first time I met Paolo was during his solo exhibition *Geneulogia* (2023) in the Galleria Atelier in Rome, when I was traveling throughout Italy for my research projects on the African diaspora in Italy and urban ecologies.

Qian Liu: *Let's start the conversation by your background and career trajectory. What sparked your interest in art and what motivated you to pursue a professional career as an artist? How did your family's migration from China to Italy impact and shape your artistic journey?*

Paolo Peng Shuai: I want to divide my career into three phases. Since childhood, I've always liked drawing, particularly with the chalk found on the kindergarten floor. Then my mother enrolled me in a local painting training school. Though initially enjoyable and exciting, in a few weeks, I found that their rigid teaching styles were not what I expected. Their teaching, based on the post-Soviet traditions still prevalent in China then, became stifling. I frequented this extracurricular school from age six to nine, always resisting what I perceived as a tedious and even torturous training process. My initial passion, including multiple contacts with contemporary art, or more specifically, "drawing," turned out to be a somewhat imprisoning pursuit.

The second period I am referring to, in which my engagement with art was more direct and profound, started around 2004, when I joined my family in Italy at the age of nine. My mother wanted me to become a successful artist, and Italy was, for her, the ideal place for this career. At that time, my understanding of the profession was quite limited. All in my mind as a child was basic techniques and how to become famous in the future. But once arrived in Italy, I encountered many challenges about integration, especially at school, where I was bullied several times by my Italian classmates. Later on, my drawing became the only means to gain respect from my peers and teachers. I even won a painting prize for "my" city, Reggio Emilia, in a competition as part of an art initiative between the sister cities, Reggio Emilia and Fort Worth in Texas. Afterward, a local newspaper from Reggio Emilia, ironically, introduced me as "a young artist from Reggio Emilia born in Italy," so they mistook my country of origin. Since then, I have always thought about the questions of migration and identity and how artistic expression can complicate our understandings.

QL: *What marked the third phase that you just mentioned?*

PPS: The third moment was my studies at the Brera Academy of Fine Arts, in Milan, when I tried to abandon what I'd learned from Chinese and Soviet academism and find my artistic style. During this period, the issues of migration and identity became a central theme throughout my artwork. Questions of who I am and where I am going were integral to my creative process. I think we should not consecrate the notion of history as a fixed and transcendental entity but one that continues to transform and suggest new meanings and interpretations. This is how history moves forward. For me, art is a mirror of both personal and societal narratives, revealing the traumas of the present and the past. It's not new to say that in addition to its aesthetic function, art is also socially engaged. It is now an essential part of my life. It is my language, my tool through which I express my thoughts.

QL: *For migrant artists, the concept of “identity” often serves as a guiding principle. At the same time, individual artworks invariably carry collective and societal implications. Yet, in your recent pieces, you’ve taken this inquiry to a less common terrain by exploring the intersection between migration and ecology. I’m curious about why you became interested in this and what this shift means. How do you navigate ecological concerns within the context of your own diasporic identity, your family, and the Chinese community in Italy? In this way, art assumes a dual role: a powerful mirror for self-reflection and self-expression and a dynamic platform for artists like yourself to experiment with new ontological and epistemological ideas.*

PPS: I believe that, for every migrant artist, the inquiry into identity is more like a mental habit than a specific guideline. It is inevitable to ask ourselves, first of all, who we are and where we truly belong. Personal stories influence our identities. And abstract or generalized political or philosophical concepts cannot replace experiences and memories. In my opinion, succumbing to such notions would risk flattening singularities and our unique stories, for everyone’s lived experiences change constantly and thus need particular historicization. For example, citizenship is a callous and restrictive thing for those living a nomadic life, especially those from the Global South. At eighteen, I could have claimed Italian citizenship, but I refused because I didn’t want to give up my Chinese citizenship. Instead, I obtained an unlimited residence permit [*permesso di soggiorno*]. I have been away from China, my place of origin, for a long time, and Italy has become a nurturing land for me. But I always feel like a foreigner in Italy, always being “in-between.” I have grown up with both languages and cultures, which, in turn, gives me such a unique experience. Usually, we take this status as a geographical one, which I think is also a temporal metaphor. This “threshold” can span from sunrise to sunset, or to the period of adolescence—a period in which a child is still growing but has not yet become an adult. These periods of unknown duration—we have no idea how long they will last—may change their forms in the next second or remain in the same state for a long time.

My artwork thrives within this invisible gap. It focuses on change and mobility and is always ready to adapt to a new host body. Following Italian designer Enzo Mari, my art resembles a “tireless designer” who continuously adapts to its surroundings. Mari believes that our brain’s vast planning capacity extends beyond conventional functions, considering the broader context even when seemingly unrelated to a specific project. For him, just as all living beings face the principal challenge of death and life, decisions are instantaneous, and survival is contingent upon finding solutions.

So, I wonder whether the human way of “acting” would also find an echo in the plant world. How can we approach migration from an ecological perspective? What would be the epistemological convergences between identity and environmental crisis? As an artist, I have been influenced by many theorists and philosophers, such as Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Gilles Deleuze, Gilles Clement, and the recent Italian botanist Stefano Mancuso. I would say that the answer seems affirmative. I’ve

started a new artistic journey and shifted the focus of identity crisis towards a posthuman and planetary level.

QL: *I appreciate how you approached the meanings of being nomadic and in-between, which is not just about spatial but also temporal. After all, the term “becoming” itself suggests the progression of time, encapsulating moments of crisis that, as you just pointed out, are beyond our control and often of uncertain duration. This perspective opens up a refreshing mode for thinking creatively about the parallels or connections between human beings and plant worlds. How did you experiment with the concept you termed “Economad” in your works?*

PPS: My work so far has pertained to a notion that I would call “Economad,” which should not be understood simply in a geographical sense as a movement from one place to another, but as an inquiry into the environmental, cultural, anthropological, and psychological dimensions of nomadology. With this perspective in mind, I seek to redirect my attention toward the broader living world. When we talk about ecology, we typically focus on a biological community of specific species of animals, plants, and microorganisms that exist within a particular natural environment and are interdependent. As the French philosopher André Gorz tells us, ecology involves the interconnection between man and nature, in a continuous exchange. However, when we talk about human migration, we often overlook the mobility of many other entities, such as bacteria.

QL: *And in the context of migration and diaspora, how did you grapple with the human-nature dualism prevalent in Western European worldviews?*

PPS: With “Economad”, I aim to underline the phenomenon of multispecies interactivity and the intrusion, or rather contamination, of an alien species into an existing territory. This phenomenon is based on both unconscious and conscious actions of humans or other living species. The term functions as a verb and is post-identitarian—a process wherein we trace multiple transformations and senses of belonging, each contingent on its specific position and growth conditions. Therefore, we must try to map and question the alternative cartographies of our non-unitary selves, as suggested by Rosi Braidotti. This approach rejects any notion of entirely unitary subjects or completely belonging to a certain place, advocating instead for a worldview of coexistence and cohabitation on the planet with other forms of life. This perspective challenges the anthropocentric concept of sustainability, shifting away from a vision where human beings remain dominant over nature. Instead, it embraces a geopolitical understanding of nature where social and ecological concerns are intricately intertwined. This viewpoint takes shape in a “sympoietic” dimension that acknowledges the otherness of all the agents sharing the same destiny on the planet.

QL: *Thank you for your insightful reflections on the concept of Economad. Could you briefly discuss the role of natural locations and landscapes in your art practices? I am*

very interested in this because some of your recent works have been created in outdoor settings.

PPS: The choice to engage with the land and the natural environment arises primarily for personal reasons. Two years ago, I worked only in an indoor setting—my home studio in Milan where I created all my materials. But I then felt a disconnection with the external natural world. At the same time, I was very close to my partner, which also played a crucial role. She grew up amidst the sounds of roosters and birdsong far from urban settings. In 2021, I spent lots of time in her place, the Oltrepò Pavese, immersing myself in its diverse landscape and observing it—wild expanses, the banks of the Po River, and an artificial terrain formed by agricultural fields for intensive cultivation.

This intimate relationship with nature all started with a naïve gaze. Initially, I closely observed the life cycle of corn, from its growth to harvest, until, in 2021, soybeans largely replaced corn cultivation in that area. The newcomer transformed the land into beautiful golden fields, in strong contrast with the Po River banks. This spectacle inspired me to delve deeper into why the glycine max (soybeans) and another wild plant, artemisia argyi, were introduced into this territory. So, my exploration expanded to consider the historical, biological, and economic aspects. In this context, observation involves our eyes, becoming therefore a visual universe. It is thus necessary to differentiate between various visual methods through which we formulate cultural and social linkages with the landscape. Different modes of gaze and seeing have followed one another and coexist in understanding landscapes across the planet's surface. These distinct views thus give “landscape” a true spatial complexity. Living in this spatial complexity is like living within an artwork in a continuous and dynamic exchange between nature and culture. And I am nothing more than a quiet observer who seeks to learn from this ongoing dialogue.

QL: *What you just said reminds me of Jean Luc-Nancy's famous sentence, “the landscape begins with a notion.” Rather than a stable ground with defined contours, “landscape” implies an openness whose meanings are contingent on and shaped by the unknown and the unexpected. In this sense, I would say that the presentation, or in your case as an artist, the creative representation of landscape, resonates with the idea of “dis-location,” evoking a subjective sense of “uncanniness.”*

PPS: I agree with Nancy's perspective. This prompts me to reconsider the landscape not as a mere empty stage awaiting human imagination and intervention. As Tim Ingold says, it is itself “animate,” in the sense that it embodies a multitude of beings animated by different impulses and movements, each bearing intentions and stories. This transforms it into a dynamic entity, an unstable world in which human beings actively participate. I would also like to add that landscape is an integral geography, both physical and human, where plants, animals, humans, and their trajectories and projects, along with environmental factors such as soil conditions, temperature, light, and shadow intertwine, separate, and overlap in a complex web, echoing Latour's notion of “entanglement,” rather than a neatly organized or hierarchical system. In

my video series where I engage directly with nature, particularly with the natural landscape in Italy, I seek to be part of this dynamic and unstable system where it is always possible to generate new ways of existing. What is at stake here would be the disjunction between my cultural origins and the adopted Italian culture. Within this context, I always struggle to establish a fruitful connection between the two.

QL: *Can you give us an example of how you create such a “meaningful connection?”*

PPS: A few months ago, in September 2023, I created a public work, *Moving Garden*, during a residency at Villa De Sanctis in Colle di Tora. The Villa is gorgeous. It is a typical Italian garden established in the last century. This is a literally “nomadic” project that includes a physical platform of foreign, namely, Chinese vegetation that can move through various cities. In this case, the cultivation of foreign vegetation becomes a minor presence and suggests a potential resistance. During the residency, I grew five kinds of plants of Chinese origin in my garden: coriander, chives, bok-choy, facing Heaven pepper, and artemisia argyi. All these plants are considered as wild plants that do not require special care and can survive under any climatic conditions. Their adaptability to new territories resonates symbolically with the death and survival of immigrants once they arrived in foreign lands.



Paolo Shuai Peng is moving his movable garden through the streets of Colle di Tora (photo credit: Emanuele dell’Aglia)



Colle di Tora's local residents gather to visit Paolo's moving garden (photo credit: Emanuele dell'Aglio)

QL: *How precisely did the term “nomadic” work in this project?*

PPS: I found the last plant I mentioned, *artemisia argyi*, near the Po River while I was walking alongside. *Artemisia argyi*, also known as wild wormwood, has been neutralized for centuries in Europe. Originating in China, Korea, Mongolia, Japan, and the Russian Far East, its medicinal properties were first documented in Liang dynasty, almost 1500 years ago. Even today, in my hometown—Hunan province in China, there is still a tradition of eating sweet *artemisia* dumplings during the Qingming festival.

After the exhibition's inauguration, I invited visitors to join on an itinerary through the town of Tora before returning to the exhibition, where I cooked Hunan cold noodles using the plants I had cultivated. While roaming the city with my mobile garden, many locals stepped to me out of curiosity and even helped me push the “moving garden” to the town center. So, this becomes, indeed, a participatory and collective act. After the residency, I left the remaining plants in my garden to the two ladies who had hosted me, and they plan to plant them in their garden after this winter. On a more personal level, this project was also inspired by my father, who twelve years ago had planted Chinese celery near a peripheral canal in Reggio Emilia. For me, my father's act was highly creative, evoking also deep nostalgic feelings. Both my and my father's creations thus imply an ongoing process.

QL: *You mentioned that your choice of working directly with nature is a personal one. Your father also inspired your last work “Moving Garden.” Have there been any artists whose works have influenced you over the years?*

PPS: During my earlier years at the Brera Academy in Milan, one of the migrant artists who inspired me was Huang Yongping, the founder and one of the most provocative artists of the Chinese avant-garde movement, Xiamen Dada. His work really struck me. His *The History of Chinese Painting* caught the attention of the French curator Jean Hubert Martin, and he invited Huang to participate in the exhibition, *Magiciens de la Terre*, in Paris. A year later, Huang obtained French citizenship. Obviously, in terms of migration, colonialism and orientalism, the French context is quite different from the Italian one. We can see that the topic of West-East collision becomes central in Huang's works. This has been a question in those days but is still unresolved today. His diverse artistic practices involve various issues such as religion, identity, immigration, colonialism, history, and critiques on institutions. What struck me the most is his unwavering stance against art history, especially the Western art system. He tried to decolonize what we call "art history" today as a concept and a discipline.

QL: *Have you participated in any collective projects recently?*

PPS: Currently, I am not involved in any collective project. However, in 2019, I co-founded the artist group ALSO with three other Chinese artists—Cheng Hongtao, Huang Zejian and Yin Shaoqi. Our inaugural exhibition took place at the *Ri-levante* exhibition in an industrial building in Milan, followed by exhibitions in Piero Manzoni's former studio and in Laurentiu Craioveanu's studio in Lodi, in the Lombardy region. Two of them returned permanently to China after graduation, so our projects have remained on hold until now.

QL: *As we wrap up our conversation, would you like to share some of your future plans?*

PPS: For now, I am focusing on expanding Economadism, trying to figure out how to transform my thoughts into specific artistic projects. All of this involves visiting outdoor locales and working hard in my home studio, in the north-east of Milan. In the meantime, I'm now working two part-time jobs, both art-related, to survive in a big city like Milan. For a researcher-artist who intends to resist the marketability of their artworks and not to be influenced by it, maybe the question of how to support yourself by doing serious work while also maintaining your originality becomes perhaps fundamental. I hope to find a new home with a larger workspace, and move from Milan to the Oltrepò Pavese, a quiet, clean, and more affordable place. I want to be closer to the Pò River, where I fell in love.

An Ash Tree in Os

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Artist statement

The short story features Sámi characters and practices. However, it is not mentioned explicitly that they are Sámi. In summer 2020, Wendy moved to Norway. But already before, she did not learn only about Norwegian culture, but also tried to inform herself about Sámi practices through folklore books and articles (some recommended by Sámi), visits to their lands, and talks and homestays (not in touristic sense) with Sámi and Norwegians who have Sámi family members and have maybe Sámi blood themselves. In the 19th-20th century, policies discriminated against the Sámi and their practices, which led to erasure of knowledge and stories. She felt that it would be unethical to feature only Norwegian people in a nearby future and erase Sámi in the land that inspired this story on loss and wounded/contaminated/damaged landscapes and healers. Wendy is currently rooting in Norway and is a plant mum of four.

The story

I stared out at the swamp, the master cook of nature and the grave of many. I could feel the wounds of the swamp, like I felt my bruises. The swamp and I were full of so many stories—minerals, fungi, rot, bacteria, and ashes of our ancestors. We were all in this together.

One moon after the Reckoning, Sigrid returned to Geitrams Tunet. She arrived together with the cranes. Tjiddtjie and I heard that the cranes were flying over the land where she had moved as a young woman, looking for money, fancy clothes, and a rich partner. To a land with skyscrapers, almost no place for the more than human world. I had found someone here, but that Creature has never been a partner to me.

Perhaps Sigrid had followed the cranes back to the north. When she arrived at the farm, nobody was there, except for the cows, the *geitrams*, the ghosts, the microbes and other invisible friends of the farm.

Marta, her mother, was carrying hot stones to the brooks, an old ritual of these settlers.

Sigrid did not come alone. Not with a partner. Ida was only eight years old when she lost the Creature that had sown his seed in her mother. We passed the farm, the reindeers saw them first, weeping, and we walked further. We had other things to do.

We did not like Sigrid and Marta.

We were angry at Marta who had taken our lands away.

We did not like Sigrid when she was weeping about the losses of the Reckoning. She wailed that she didn't know how to survive all this. They had taken everything away from her.

They did not realise that Tjiddtjie and I were living in the Reckoning for our whole lives.

Save the future, some of these white people yelled in the year of the Reckoning. We saw the last social media posts. We heard the radio talks. Save the future of the soil. Save the future of food. Save the future. Only now they were screaming it. Only now the Reckoning harmed them too. And the skyscrapers collapsed. And many people learned that money cannot save you from toxic metals and microplastics in your blood. Sigrid kept weeping. It annoyed us. The reindeers thought her grief was a spirit and were anxious. When Sigrid was a child, she never had a scar. I was already full of bruises when she left the lands of Os for the rich south. She was still a child when she returned.

Finally, Tjijtjie told Sigrid to make a fire. *Start cooking, stop wasting our time.*

Tjijtjie turned to the little Ida and told her to look in the ashes. 'Until spring arrives again.'

My family mourns by listening to the fire, learning from the wisdom of the ashes, and what can be grown out of it.

When Ida's body was in spring, when all our bodies were in spring, they came. The Collectors. The new world came with new rules and technologies. Ida got a chip in her left wrist, so she could hear the trees. Marta and Sigrid thought it was odd. 'How can you hear trees?' Tjijtjie and I thought that this new technology made sense.

Ida was sent to a special program in the south, to learn how to care for the sick land. They called this program the Landwork.

The event known as The Reckoning occurred a decade ago. It was a brutal awakening to longstanding early warning signals. Tjijtjie pointed out that these signs had been evident for centuries. In the centuries leading up to The Reckoning, it seemed as though magic had vanished from the world. In reality, it was always present, but our minds, bodies, souls, and lands were so polluted with narratives of alienation and superiority that we stopped to believe in its power.

Then came the first ecoterrorist attacks and a major pandemic. It was frightening, yet I, still young and so naively in love with a man who was not good for me, could not imagine that things might deteriorate further. I believed naively that both my Creature and the world could change for the better. I should not say man anymore. According to our queens, it is better not to use words for what is lost, so we can forget our loss and heal sooner.

Then it happened. It happened already after Sigrid had left Geitrams Tunet. What I witnessed that year left me in shock; Tjijtjie claimed she had foreseen it all. My father, brother, and boyfriend—all the Creatures—got killed in this wave of destruction. The concept of femicide was familiar to me from constant news coverage, but androicide was unexpected. To my knowledge, few Creatures had survived the Reckoning; I haven't seen one in ten years, but I heard rumors occasionally. After the Reckoning, we needed to repair and rebuild everything. Leaders like Marta were decisive. She named the catastrophe the Reckoning, she had always liked her bible stories. Under her leadership, I reluctantly joined a farm operation, despite preferring not to work for someone like her. My family believed collaboration was preferable to isolation.

In those initial years after the Reckoning, we were bombarded with myriad stories and theories attempting to explain the events. If we wished to avoid a second

cleansing—this time potentially wiping out women—we had to nurture and heal the land and its systems. The new leaders introduced several innovative programs, including a radical educational initiative. At the age of seven, children are taken to a barren area to plant and care for trees over three years. They engage in activities such as observing, note-taking, drawing, and writing landscape biographies to foster a living connection with the landscape. Then they would start working in the most contaminated regions, trying to regenerate them.

And Ida was the first girl of our community that would join this special program. We would not see her for decades.

We thought this rupture from her daughter would break Sigrid.

But Sigrid started to have daily conversations with the big Ash Tree in Geitrams Tunet. Every old farm has a tree that protects all the old wisdom of the land. The farm tree protects the farm, the land, the people, the animals, the ghosts. Some people say a ghost of the ancestors lives in this *Tuntre*, this garden tree. Others claim that the wasteland, the *geitrams*, the cows, the ash tree, the farmer and her mother, the wolves, are all entangled and prosper and suffer together.

Even Tjijtjie does not know if the *Tuntre* is a settler, a Sámi, or a Viking thing.

We observed that Sigrid started to transform. She changed her farming techniques. The worms in her soil became more active. She learned to make lemonade from *geitrams*, the plant that came to these wastelands, via the railroads that the settlers had built. She learned about fermentation and composting, and listened to Aunt Myr and Granny Goat. She became an *ildsjel*, a fire soul, and we found each other.

We were in our early forties when we finally became friends again. Tjijtjie said she also saw that forthcoming. ‘You liked each other as children too much. I only do not know why you it took so long for you both to repair your friendship.’

I tried to not let my eyes wander off to the swamps in the north and murmured that we used to have other interests in the old world.

Sigrid started to organise evenings and invited all the farmers and milk maids. Together, in the evenings, next to the fire in the winter, and under the ash tree, they shared stories, songs and observations. Sometimes about a river changing course. Where new rhubarb was spotted. When the first mushrooms and berries emerged. A story about a sickness for reindeers. A song for healing broken fingers.

Sigrid said she got advice from the Ash tree on how to compost. She knew everything about the cycle of life and death, and this was translated in her cooking. Her cooking was marvelous. It was healing. Some sick women came to her and returned as stronger animals back to where they came from. Sigrid told me it is not only the process or the ingredients, but also that making space and time for listening was the real alchemy. She was a radical too. She invited tax collectors and adopted sex workers to her table. Even when the new world limited travel and construction in many lands, women found their ways to Geitrams Tunet.

One day, one of the queens wanted to visit her. We were already in our late forties. Sigrid told the queen's messenger to meet her in the summer farm, higher in the mountains and deeper in the forests, close to some sources where the reindeer gathered. Some milk maids told me that Sigrid and this queen spent a long night talking in the summer farm. The next day, when I bumped into Sigrid in the heart of Geitrams Tunet, I asked why she held the meeting there. Sigrid threw a quick glance at the ash tree, but it happened so quickly that I didn't know if she was indeed looking at the tree behind me. 'I have someone to protect', she said.

Afterwards, in the main room of Geitrams Tunet, she hung a portrait of another queen.

Queen Myrtle, the queen who became the queendom, who sacrificed herself for the greater cause, who composted herself to the contaminated lands in the south. In these twenty years after Ida left for the Landwork, we had only one fight, and that was about Queen Myrtle. Sigrid had put Akka dolls close to the portrait. 'I do not see Myrtle as a mother goddess.'

'She is a mother. She sacrificed herself for the greater good.'

'She killed people too.'

Sigrid turned to me, with fiery eyes. 'She had to! We all had to! For a better future!'

'A better future? For you, white people? We were burning for centuries, and nobody listened to us. Our waters, our bodies were dammed! Did we kill people to change the course of the river? No, we sang, we never used violence like this queen of yours!'

'But you all got a better life because of their work!'

'We lost them!'

'The Creatures?! Did you not forget that a Creature abused you and your mother? I saw the bruises. I saw it, Elve! The Creature deserved it, and the swamps gave the punishment that it deserved!'

My body shuddered as if a snake had just slithered down my spine.

'I am sorry I brought this up,' Sigrid said. She had calmed down.

'Did you not think the Creature became so monstrous, because your family destroyed his land, his body, his being?' I asked.

Sigrid became pale.

'But you, white people, think all monsters have to be slayed down,' I said. 'You do not see we can heal monsters too. Darkness is part of our lives. Without darkness the fire is not visible. We have to be hopeful. We have to respect that everyone copes differently with darkness.'

Sigrid sprang to her feet. The heat was back in her face. 'Why do you see me as the villain? You were the one who pushed that Creature in the swamp!'

Then she slapped herself, but I was already hit by the truth. I ran away, with the reindeers. I was in the mountains for a couple of months, avoiding the swamps and the whispers of the past. Even years later I could feel the bruises of the Creature. I tried to forgive myself for my stupidity, for forgiving him every time, blaming the old world, people like Marta and Sigrid, for my own reactions and actions. For years I had conversations with the goats, even a regular goat I called Auntie Goat, or with the bogs and the pines, the reindeer, the mosses, about their wounds, my wounds. The

landscape forgave me, I felt it in my marrow, but I wondered if I was imagining it all. If the landscape and I were all the same. I knew from Marta and Sigrid that we are all made of bacteria, constantly in exchange with the more-than-human world. I myself had come to the conclusion that if the landscape was so polluted that I must also be polluted. I might not even be pure Sámi. In our community, there were rumors that Tjijtjie did not just exchange reindeer skins with the old farmers. What does that actually mean? Purity?

The necessities of daily kitchen life brought me and Sigrid back together. She was holding a basket full of white button mushrooms. We looked at each other, and then we hugged each other. We did not talk about the Creatures anymore. But she started to work and organise better, trying to fix and heal what her ancestors did wrong to the land. Sigrid, this woman with a bone in her nose, became a steward of the land. Tjijtjie said she was more Sámi than us... or whatever that means.

Twenty years had passed since Ida had left, when Sigrid took me away from the big table where our farm community was seated to the fire hearth. Both Marta and Tjijtjie followed us with their eyes, but kept the other women occupied with the stories. Sigrid told me she had stopped producing nightsoil.

The drones came the next day, a day later the doctor. She had a tumour in her intestines.

Tjijtjie and I heard stories about isolation among the settler women in the times before the Reckoning. Women did their laundry and cooking in separate houses. In the name of efficiency. But it broke many roots and the soils of their lands degraded. The Reckoning was painful, but the rupture and crisis lead this time to healing.

We did not leave Sigrid alone in her last days. I helped Marta with the cows. It was almost the same like herding reindeer. The drones helped with the heavy work. I sang *joiks* to Sigrid. She liked the one about the reindeer and lichen trees, and let me sing it many times.

Sigrid also gave me instructions on how to finish the fermented beer.

'Teach it to my daughter when she is back,' she asked me.

I gave many offerings to the Akkas, and especially to Jabme-Akka, the mother of death. I put knives next to her dying body. Tjijtjie added her favourite kitchen knife to the table where we collected her luggage for her trip to the underworld.

Once, I asked her if the Ash tree could heal her.

'Why?' Sigrid asked.

'You can hear the Ash tree, don't you?'

Sigrid smiled softly.

I hesitated. 'Is that why that queen came to visit you years ago? She knew you had the gift.'

Sigrid nodded.

'Why do you not choose for a longer life, to join their luxuries? You might even see Ida.'

'I am not afraid for death, but more for what I might become if I join them.'

And that is when I realized how much I adored her.

Sigrid gave me her last smile. 'By the way, that tree is already taken.'

'What? Is there a spirit inside? Can she not heal you?'

Sigrid shook her head. 'No, that spirit does not master the magic of life and death. It is a woman's domain.'

I looked up. 'A woman's domain?' I repeated carefully.

'You heard me,' she said.

I felt a warm fire in my heart. 'Now, I know why you wanted to meet the queen in the summer farm.'

'That spirit taught me everything. We are all healthy because of that spirit. Please protect it's secret.'

'I will,' I said, and I kissed her hand.

At the full moon, the big ash tree in the heart of the Geitrams Farm lost a branch, and one hour later, Sigrid's dead body was given back to the bears and wolves. We ate all together. It was a *bålkos*, a meal next to the campfire, and we were wrapped in skins of reindeers and cows. In the end, Tjijtjie sometimes said, we all become ash.

The name of the farm was a bit ironic. *Geitrams*. Fireweed. Rosebay Willowherb. This colonial plant has so many names. She was not better than the human settlers. She colonised the land too, erased the stories of other plants, and the land got contaminated. The colonisers penetrated the earth. There are still holes, remnants of the violence. Empty mines. The *nissen*, these canny earth critters, were chased away by the settlers, who were hungry for copper and other metals that would make them rich. The irony of fire is that Sigrid, blood of the settlers that destroyed the land, unrooted herself to find wealth in the south, but returned and brought back the magic. After the Reckoning the *nissen* came back. Some of them assisted the milk maids in Geitrams TUNET. They were brewing the beer in her absence.

I was angry after her death. At some point I was so blind with grief that I even wished the settlers had never come, so I would not have known all these losses. I wanted Geitrams TUNET to go up in flames, and I wanted to gaze into the ashes, smell death, come home in the soil.

Tjijtjie found me when I was weeping in front of the Ash tree. She said we had lost a sister. She looked at the Ash Tree, and sang about a story in the Viking tradition about a Creature who sacrificed himself for more wisdom. He hung himself on an Ash tree. Yggdrasil. The song made my breast bone quiver and for the first time in days I could breathe again.

'She is now part of the Tuntre,' Tjijtjie said. Well... *start cooking, stop wasting our time.*

When the cranes returned, three years after Sigrid's death, Ida came back from the Landwork. She was 31 years old, old enough according to the Trees, to take over Geitrams Tunet and be the steward of these lands. Marta, who had been gazing at the cows from the top floor of the *stabbur*, the storage house, had seen her arriving and had rung the *matteklokka*. We all thought the food was ready and walked in the direction of the kitchen. We were delighted when she stepped up to be the new steward. Ida walked out the car and looked directly in the direction of the Ash tree. I gasped.

Ida had lost an arm. She told us later, at a big table, where every seat was taken, one of the Landwork's tasks brought her to an island full of leprosy patients. 'We burned the disease away,' Ida said. 'Another sacrifice for the greater good.'

Ida had become a big healer. She looked so much like her mother.

At the first evening, I saw her observing the Ash Tree. I remembered the chip in her left wrist. None of the woman in Geitrams Tunet knew younglings, who had returned... Ida was the first who had left and returned from the Landwork. But we had heard that it was true. The new generations can communicate with trees because of the chip in their wrist.

Ida made herself home soon. She was not afraid of the big tables, of the strangers that did not know about her mother's passing, or the women with their own scars, who knocked unannounced on the farm doors. Ida respected the Akka dolls at the entrance of the door, and close to the fires. She knew the land. Even now I have scary thoughts that Ida is even older than Tjijtjie, and that it was never Sigrid's daughter that returned, but an Akka or another spirit who had taken over her body.

On the first evening, Ida summoned Marta, Tjijtjie and me. We found Ida looking at the portrait of queen Myrtle. She had a strange fire in her eyes. She invited us to sit, and joined the table. One of the nissen served us warm milk. I wondered if Ida had always been left-handed.

She asked us about the Ash tree. 'Who did talk with the *tuntre*?'

We were all surprised about her question.

'Nobody, except your mother.'

'Nobody of the younger ones?'

'You are the only one who returned from the Landwork so far.'

Ida heaved a sigh of relief.

'What is the matter with the Ash Tree?' we asked.

'There is magic in ... *him*.'

I nodded. My suspicion was true. There was more magic in that tree, and it was male. Marta and Tjijtjie did not look surprised either. I realized we all had some idea that this Ash tree was not a normal tree.

'If the queens know,' Ida continued, 'they will come and burn the Creature.'

'He...' Marta became red. She was not used to saying this word anymore. 'It helped Sigrid, Geitrams Tunet, us all.'

'Yes.' Ida turned to us. 'He is not a monster.' She sighed. 'We have to make a sacrifice. We close the farm for all the young women who can communicate with trees and betray him, or we report the Creature.'

In the background, the fire in the fireplace danced. Ash fell to the stone floor. The soil met our soul.

'Well,' I started. 'We are good at grieving. The choice has always been easy for us, indigenous beings.'

Ida looked up, frowning her eyebrows.

I wondered if she got my sarcasm.

'I am sorry for that,' Ida said.

'For what?'

'For the world before the Reckoning,' Ida answered.

The fireplace crackled. My eyes wandered to her right shoulder, and then the place where her arm should have been. 'We all made our sacrifices and have our wounds,' I said.

Ida smiled. 'I see you.' She put her other hand on my shoulder. She looked so much like Sigrid. 'The choice has never been easy, but for this land to thrive we need him.'

I nodded. 'We are all in this together.'

Tjijtjie clapped. 'That is decided. *Let us start cooking, stop wasting our time.* Who brings the sheepskins outside and prepares the *bålkos*? Nissen, can you prepare the coffee? And who here fancies some *pinnebrød*?' And that was it.

Now I am staring at the swamp that had swallowed a Creature. I still had scars from the many fights with him. That Creature was not good, but I never wished that the land and its queens would swallow them all. I learned to cope with the big losses of the Reckoning, by listening to the songs. They are still here. In the shadows, swamps and soils. In the minerals, fungi, rot, bacteria, and ashes.

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Dipesh Chakrabarty. *One Planet, Many Worlds: The Climate Parallax* (Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2023), 131 pp.

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Dipesh Chakrabarty's *One Planet, Many Worlds: The Climate Parallax* (2023) provides a philosophical approach to thinking about the correlation of 'natural' and 'human' histories when investigating the multiple histories of the world. The book is a valuable contribution to ecocriticism with thought-provoking ideas that can help decolonise studies around climate and its relation to the world. The ideas in this book first appear in Chakrabarty's 2009 essay "The Climate of History: Four Theses" and subsequent book *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (2021). Chakrabarty solidifies his arguments in *One Planet, Many Worlds*. He proposes new ways to read some terms that ecocriticism often deals with, like 'natural,' 'human,' 'global' and 'planet.' Through this book, Chakrabarty offers a new philosophical, historical and postcolonial reading of 'natural' history. The complex ideas that the book proposes are written as individual chapters, reading like essays. Chakrabarty distinguishes between what he means by 'global' and 'planet,' which pre-empts much of the discussion of the book. He draws on Thomas Nail's ideas in *Theory of the Earth* (2021) that the world existed much before humans did and will continue to exist long after humans disappear. Chakrabarty extends this argument and points out that the history of the planet must be considered separately from that of humans. It is a poignant reminder, one repeated by climate activists, that the history of the planet predates that of humans, and we must limit our destructive practices upon the planet. The book gives voice to Nature, otherwise marginalised by the human-centric perspective of the world.

Chakrabarty explores the impact that the degradation of the planet has on different countries. The actions of the developed nations impact the entire world, especially postcolonial countries and indigenous populations. As human races and ethnicities come from differing socio-economic backgrounds, changes in the climate affect all these human beings in diverse ways. Yet, climate change often retains a Eurocentric worldview. The Eurocentrism comes with developed countries focusing only on how climate change affects their needs. By disengaging from the Eurocentric worldview, the concerns of those people whose voices have been previously unheard are explored in greater detail in this book. Delocalising conversations about Nature from the Western worldview also shows how the history of the world does not begin

in medias res with Western history and modernity, but that what is understood by the timeline of the Western concept of 'modern' differs across the globe. Chakrabarty's background as a historian helps nuance thinking about what modernity stands for, when and where it begins. As he critiques postcolonial thought propagated by Edward Said, Partha Chatterjee, Gayatri Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Arjun Appadurai and even himself, he points out that postcoloniality is "as environmentally blind as anti-colonial modernizing nationalism" (58). The book then rethinks both ecocriticism and postcoloniality with an interdisciplinary approach. As the title of this book suggests, despite the 'Many Worlds' that need to be considered when formulating action plans in the race against climate change, the planet is only 'One.' This 'One Planet' caters to humans and non-humans that are not homogenous. Chakrabarty proposes to change the current narrative and instead take proactive measures to orient humans to co-exist alongside the planet.

In chapter one, "The Pandemic and Our Sense of Time," Chakrabarty argues that many climate activists and scholars have failed to address climate change as one of the biggest events in the twentieth century. It is important to note how the engagement with climate change and measures to protect the planet have risen only in the last few decades, in the twenty-first century. Chakrabarty cites reports from the United Nations Environment Programme to look at how the activists previously stated that pandemics are not a threat to the world. The postcolonial approach that Chakrabarty adopts in this study explains the paradox of this statement. Chakrabarty points out that there have been pandemics in developing countries, such as outbreaks of the Zika virus, chikungunya and Ebola. However, the Eurocentric view of the world prevented authors and activists from viewing these outbreaks more seriously. Chakrabarty rightly argues that with such restricted views, these scholars who dismissed pandemics appear outdated after the coronavirus pandemic. The shift away from a Eurocentric perspective on these zoonotic diseases can heighten the awareness of the scientific community, engaging in research to provide treatment for these diseases. Chakrabarty's premise for these arguments steers back to his overarching logic for the book that even within the realm of zoonotic diseases, the subaltern is Nature and the animal world.

In the two final chapters of the book, Chakrabarty proposes the need to study postcoloniality, modernity and climate change simultaneously instead of considering them as separate disciplines. He deliberates upon ideas proposed by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961/1963) and by Bruno Latour in *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991/1993) on the need to re-imagine modernity from a postcolonial perspective, shifting away from being restrictive to the western world. Joining these ideas, in chapter two, "The Historicity of Things, including Humans," Chakrabarty asks readers to think about refining the timeline of world history, rethinking the timelines for socio-cultural and economic advancement across the globe. This concept problematizes the standard of achieving 'modernity.' Chakrabarty explains the concept of 'modernity' in the following way: "Historians, when they did not abjure the word 'modernity,' got busy democratizing the use of it, distributing the epithet over a

wide period of time (thus the ‘early modern’ period) or between classes” (50). As Chakrabarty points out, Eurocentrism does not consider the differing timelines to achieve this ‘modernity.’ However, he assumes that all countries work towards achieving the western standard of ‘modernity.’ Some countries may have their own understanding, even finding western ‘modernity’ culturally inappropriate. While this would concern historians studying this period, the concept of differing timelines is sufficient to see how climate change affects these developing countries from the larger perspective of the environmental humanities.

As Chakrabarty proposes an interdisciplinary study, chapter two steers the readers towards blurring the lines between history and nature. These arguments strengthen the need to view the world and its differences between countries, races, ethnicities and their potential political relationship with nature. We must accept “the political as something that is provincially and parochially human” (102). These ideas culminate in chapter three, “Staying with the Present,” as an overview of the theoretical framework on postcolonialism, the environment and modernisation that discards the outdated ideas marred by Eurocentrism. As the chapter’s title suggests, the author attempts to look at how the present can negotiate with the complex challenges of differing timelines across time and space. He criticizes ideas proposed by Steve Pinker’s *Enlightenment Now* (2018) as Eurocentric as they assume Enlightenment to always lead towards progress across the world. Chakrabarty questions the positive side of this modernity. He agrees with the sense of alarm expressed by John R. McNeill and Peter Engelke in *The Great Acceleration* (2016) and by A. Mark Williams and Jan Zalasiewicz in *The Cosmic Oasis* (2022) at the ill-effects of modernity on the non-western world. The discussions in chapter three then provoke the reader to question what is next for tackling climate change and ask, “How do diverse and conflicting groups of humans come together around proposed planetary calendars of action?” (103).

Chapters two and three engage with various scholars to think of alternative timelines for the concepts of world histories, the history of the planet and climate change. As Chakrabarty challenges accepted thought processes about Nature and the human world, the readers of the book can apply these ideas to their respective fields. The book acknowledges that a single approach cannot resolve the challenges posed by the Eurocentric worldview on the histories of people and the planet. The direction that Chakrabarty offers to take is for “making kin” as “a way of forging connections around and across differences” (106). No timeline can rectify the damage that has been done to the planet. Only the rigour with which human politics will take up issues relating to the climate seriously can be understood over time.

The questions raised in this book offer scope for future scholarship to challenge the accepted practice of prioritising the human over Nature. The chapters posit the challenges concurrent with keeping a Eurocentric worldview that often ignores subaltern bodies. Nature becomes the central focus and guiding voice in this book, as is the practice in ecocriticism. The need to revise existing histories about the planet, by anthropologists, historians and philosophers alike, would benefit a range

of professions like climate activists, policymakers, researchers and medical practitioners to prioritise the climate and work in harmony with the planet.

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Serpil Oppermann, *Ecologies of a Storied Planet in the Anthropocene*. (Morgantown: West Virginia Press, 2023), 221 pp.

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For decades, the term *Anthropocene* has commonly referred to our “current” geologic age—an age precipitated and shaped by human impact on the natural environment. The term has been instrumental in drawing public attention to the impacts of human action and to the urgent necessity of revisiting and reframing the relationship between human and non-human, or more-than-human, actors. And yet, just this past March, a committee of scholars voted overwhelmingly against recognizing the Anthropocene as an official unit of geologic time due to varied interpretations over how exactly to confirm such a shift. Even if a “clear and objective” sign of recent geologic change can be located in the mineral record, a consensus would still have to be arrived at in terms of how to interpret—essentially, how to narrate—that sign (Zhong 2024). Several committee members expressed concern that marking a “clear and objective” beginning to the Anthropocene in the relatively recent past might misleadingly “confine” and “constrain” the narrative arc of earth’s history—potentially even undermining the importance of identifying, and measuring, the full range and extent of human impacts.

In effect, the recent refusal to make official the age of the Anthropocene as a unit in geologic time is an affirmation of the argument central to Serpil Oppermann’s *Ecologies of a Storied Planet in the Anthropocene*. “We are surrounded by nonhuman narratives,” Oppermann writes, “stories embedded in places, things, and beings, which pervade and mediate our understanding of the world” (14). What’s essential, she urges, is that we cease to see ourselves as “the only storied beings” (7) and begin, instead, to find “expressive creativity” encoded in every form of matter (7). It is by learning to read our environment in the context of, and more importantly in continuance with, its “storied” past, that—the book suggests—we may come to terms with both the pressures and possibilities of our entangled present. Such a perceptual shift beyond both the subjective and objective bounds of human narrative entails “critical self-reflection on our part as humans and [...] moral accountability” (7). It also requires that we engender new forms of hope, as well as new forms of activism—essentially by acknowledging the two as inextricably tied. Like other stories we tell ourselves, hope is never, in fact, without its own actual and material underpinnings—and potential impacts. For Oppermann, material ecocriticism provides a way of

acknowledging these impacts and underpinnings by uniting an ecocritical approach to language and reality with “the material turn.”

From a position of rootedness within the material of the observable world, Oppermann models a creative and critical orientation beyond empirical reading practices and rational modes of interpretation. Indeed, as a way of encountering new forms of narrative material—and its sheer multiplicity—she adopts what I would deem a fundamentally poetic stance. We are invited to encounter the world and form itself anew—and specifically warned against blind acceptance of established subject-object relationships, exhausted narrative arcs, and extractivist epistemologies. A linear, narrative summary of what the book offers is, therefore, structurally impossible, and even Oppermann’s brief recap of her analytical aims in the opening pages seems, ironically, to foreshorten the project’s true potential scope. To think *with* nature, posits Oppermann, “ensures respect and protection for all life-forms and their right to survival” (8)—and yet the project as a whole strives to move us outside the anthropocentric narrative frameworks, timeframes, and goals, this statement stems from and supports. Oppermann’s narrative *description* of the potential benefits of thinking-with-nature is no match, in other words, for the kind of generative thinking-with she demonstrates poetically elsewhere in the book—most radiantly, perhaps, in Chapter 5. Here, a prismatic reading of color (from the perspective of an insect, a poet, and the sea) allows us to glimpse, and—more than that—actually participate in, the creative complicity she observes between human language, the aesthetic imagination, and the “becoming expressive” of more than human world. I share Oppermann’s sense of urgency and agree with her supposition that the cultural shift required to respect and protect “all life-forms and the right to survival” is contingent upon arriving, collectively, at different ways of seeing and of reading the world around us. But it is because of this that I find myself both all the more excited by the protean space of affinity and felt-encounter Oppermann elaborates in her book and all the more wary of summary description, predictive modes of thinking, and prescriptive claims.

Oppermann takes inspiration from diverse literary and artistic work. From Canadian poet Adam Dickinson to the Turkish installation artist Rahsan Dürren, and (most extensively) from the Turkish writer best known as The Fisherman of Halicarnassus, she shows us that every human effort at reading the poetics of the natural world is, necessarily, going to be deeply imaginative as well as limited and difficult. As a result, we come to see that no specific outcome from the effort can ever, in fact, be “ensured.” This is to be acknowledged, lest we fall back on the same prescriptive habits—both over-writing and projecting past the possibility of encounter *beyond* the human, which the human body and its imagination quite naturally afford. In five concise chapters, Oppermann’s book tackles a range of contemporary social and environmental issues including migration, postnatural transformations, and mass extinction, but ultimately, it is the prismatic interplay between different forms of reading and expression—in both nature and culture—that comes to light. A model of attention to the possibilities immanent within a time of

crisis is favoured over a solutions-oriented approach *to* that crisis, and yet, all the same, we are explicitly called to task. In all five chapters what Oppermann asks us to confront is the fact that we are “clearly and objectively” surrounded by stories—whether or not we recognize them as such. At the same time, she asks to acknowledge that it is the stories we *do* recognize that allow us to make sense of the past, shape the present, and bring about the future.

Above all, what *Ecologies of a Storied Planet in the Anthropocene* makes clear is the urgent necessity of addressing ourselves beyond traditional anthropocentric modes while, at the same time, endeavoring to humanize even the most (apparently) objective or material gaze. In the tradition of Eduardo Kohn’s *How Forests Think* (2013) and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015), and drawing specifically on the theory of “agential realism” proposed by physicist Karen Barad, Oppermann’s text elaborates—and actively participates in—both the problems and possibilities of contemporary ecocritical and posthuman thought. In that it both builds upon, and responds to, the work of preeminent literary analysts, bioethicists, cosmologists, and cultural historians (Stacey Alaimo, Jane Bennett, Cecilia Åsberg, Samantha Noll, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Rosi Braidotti, to name just a few) the book both invites and requires interdisciplinary interpretation. It will appeal to humanities scholars, natural scientists, and general readers with an interest in thinking deeply and imaginatively about the various ways that nature and culture coextend—as well as what our responsibilities might be within that space of overlay as human readers, writers, listeners, and actors. The book integrates deep geological history and literary analysis into its clarion call for expanded ecological awareness and concrete change. Through generous and generative readings of the work of contemporary theorists, as well as of our current moment, Oppermann powerfully expresses the slippage and contradictions implicit between disciplinary boundaries. She also, and more pressingly, explores the slippage and contradictions that exist within human language and thought as we grapple with problems of agency, scale, and narrativity in an age that has not yet even officially begun. The work is at its most radiant when it takes us to this brink: the point where narrative breaks down and the “absorption of certain wavelengths of white light by the atoms and molecules of biological entities” (137) becomes, at once, a more-than-literary poetics and an invitation to “rethink the story of life” (139).

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Bénédictte Meillon, *Eco poetics of Reenchantment: Liminal Realism and Poetic Echoes of the Earth* (Lexington Books, 2023), 386 pp.

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For Bénédictte Meillon, eco poetic “reenchantment” is not, or not only, an act of resistance to Weberian “disenchantment” (*Entzauberung*, lit. “de-magic-ation,” the stripping away of caprice and wonder from the world by rationalization). It is, she insists, fundamental to generative critical practice in the twilight of the Anthropocene. Note the emphasis on *practice*: one of the primary accomplishments of Meillon’s book is its repeated call to literary scholars to do more than diagnose our disenchanted relations with the more-than-human world, or propose remedies based on the authors and texts we decipher. We must, Meillon demonstrates, practice our own reenchantments by way of the plurality of our individual readings. “What I am interested in,” she writes, “is an eco poetics that sheds light on the entanglements between matter, mind, and discourse. [...] The eco poetics I mobilize explores texts that reveal *immanence* in a world that is very much *here and now*” (9; emphasis in original). That is, in both the general time and place of our collective ecological crisis and the immediacies of our subjective encounters with texts sensitive to its music.

“Today’s prose eco poets,” Meillon writes, “conscientiously work as bioregional mediators of the flesh of the world in different places, as translators of its polyphonic song, and, in turn, as co-composers of the symphonies of the Earth that may flesh out the scientific worldviews available elsewhere” (117). And this, the book proposes, the critic may also do: *eco poetic* critical “reenchantment”—Meillon often renders this as “reen-*chant*-ment”—resonates between the writer’s work and the critic’s traversal of expressive matter (narrative and language) mobilized by the work. (Mobilized, not merely *represented* by it, as that would limit its *biomimetic* effects and weaken its pull on the “wild music” of the reader’s bodymind.) In that liminal, performative space, the critic may be liberated also to seek her personal experiences of immanence.¹

Meillon’s critical-theoretical influences are wide-ranging: bio semiotics (Wendy Wheeler), ecophenomenology (David Abram, Maurice Merleau-Ponty), feminist spirituality (Judith Plaskow, Carol P. Christ), Indigenous knowledge traditions (Paula Gunn Allen, Linda Hogan, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Starhawk), and new materialism

¹ For a stirring demonstration of this see *Etats de corps...*, Béranger Lacoste’s 2024 film of Caroline Granger and Meillon dancing among the rocks, streams, plants, and animals of the Forêt de la Massane in the French Pyrenees.

(Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad) figure prominently. Her literary corpus is similarly diverse: long and short fiction and nonfiction by Jean Giono, Hogan, Barbara Kingsolver, Kimmerer, Aldo Leopold, Ann Pancake, Annie Proulx, Richard Powers, Leslie Maron Silko, and Starhawk. Novels by Giono (*Joy of Man's Desiring* [*Que ma joie demeure*], 1936), Pancake (*Strange as This Weather Has Been*, 2007), and Powers (*The Overstory*, 2018) are given extended, detailed readings of their multisensorial landscapes, soundscapes, odorscapes, and feelscapes; human/more-than-human interimplications (“the material continuity between humans and the greater stuff of the more-than-human world” [72]); and multispecies, multi-kingdom (*Animalia* and *Plantae*) conviviality.

The unifying theme is Meillon’s focus on the stuff of a *making-with*—she cites Donna Haraway’s *sympoiesis* as a model—characteristic of the texts’ “liminal realism,” something between a genre and the enactment of a linguistically-based but conceptually eccentric organicism. “Rather than laying claim to a single, unified, and total truth,” she writes,

ecopoetic liminal realism cautiously negotiates the understandings that not only will the nature of reality always remain partly elusive, it moreover shifts depending on the means available to those trying to form a coherent picture of it. As readers of liminal realism, we must therefore always keep in the back of our minds the willful use and abuse of metaphor, myth, and anamorphosis at play, which are exploited for their charming, uplifting, or revealing powers. (52)

Respectful of the status of “magical realism” as an established genre and critical concept, Meillon complains of the frequent inability of academics to escape a dualistic interpretation of it: “how could anything be ‘magical’ and realistic at the same time?” (129). She prefers therefore to recast realism as an unstable, “liminal” mode of expression and experience, better-suited to an ecofeminist project of rational reenchantment “at an intricate crossroads between human and other-than-human lifeforms and perspectives” (132).

Essential to traversing the linguistic registers of the crossroads is Meillon’s appropriation of Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytic distinction between the symbolic and the semiotic (286–302). The former is the post-Oedipal order of language as structure, mimesis, and the speaking being *qua* grammatical subject, the domain of patriarchal law. The latter, according to Kristeva, is pre-Oedipal, undifferentiated, pre-grammatical, affective, and of the mother: the realm of melody, prosody, and rhythm—all the sensuous elements of language accessed by Meillon’s exuberantly materialist and reflexive method.

The performative and personal dimensions of her project become clear if her reader tunes in to her careful attention to the syntagmatic and phonological registers of the texts she discusses, and to the expressivity of her own prose. The book is run through with neologisms and portmanteaus, more semiotic than symbolic in their import. The variants on *en-chant-ment* have been mentioned; comparable agrammaticalities include *anthrop-o(bs)cene*, *ecopoet(h)ics*, *restor(y)ing*, *rewor(l)ding*, in which the internal parentheses and hyphens hardly contain the instability of her spellings. The word *ecopoiesis* is italicized every time it is mentioned

(85 times), as though in every iteration after the first its foreignness is to be felt again, and its multiples to mark a refrain. Another master-signifier (and the clearest indication of Meillon's knowing collocation with her texts): all but two of the 74 uses of the word *corpus* occur in the form "my corpus"—a fixed syntagm (*syntagme figé*), or maybe it is a full-on lexeme, in any case not so much a claim of mastery or possession as the trace of a humble, gentle gathering of songs. Meillon observes of a 2016 spoken-word performance by American poet Ron Rash of a particularly semiotic-synesthetic passage from Giono's *Joy of Man's Desiring*, "Reen-chant-ment [...] banks on the *tra la la* potential of language" (323). One has only to listen well to sing along.

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Judith Rauscher, *Ecopoetic Place-Making: Nature and Mobility in Contemporary American Poetry* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2023), 277 pp.

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Judith Rauscher's *Ecopoetic Place-Making: Nature and Mobility in Contemporary American Poetry* is the first book in the innovative Literary Ecologies series published by transcript Verlag, which is based on ongoing discussions in the field of ecocriticism.

Divided into five main chapters—each devoted to a particular poet, with an introduction and conclusion—Rauscher's book exemplifies how contemporary American poetry (and prose) intertwines and problematizes relationships between humans and nature. The book also explores how the selected poets, from diverse geographical backgrounds, densify the meanings of im/mobility as it is framed by history and culture, in systems often characterized by violence and oppression. It offers readers a sophisticated and guiding interpretation of five contemporary poets: Craig Santos Perez (Guam/Guåhan, 1980 —), Julian Spahr (Chillicothe, Ohio, 1966 —), Derek Walcott (Saint Lucia, Eastern Caribbean, 1930-2017), Agha Shahid Ali (New Delhi/Kashmir, 1949-2001), and Etel Adnan (Beirut, Lebanon, 1925-2021). Although all of these poets lived and published in the USA, their poetry conveys an international atmosphere that is essential for contemporary readers on all continents.

According to what Rauscher considers to be the two main and interrelated issues of our time—human agency on the planet and the consequent mass mobility—the study deepens the concepts presented in the title of the book, highlighting the uneven line that defines the movement from a sense of belonging to environmental degradation and forced mobilities.

Rauscher's main and original point is that contemporary American poetry can help readers understand some of the complex ways in which human impact on the life of the planet and mass mobility are interrelated. According to the author, it is important to move beyond the figure of the climate refugee and even beyond the "sedentary lifestyle idealized by traditional environmentalist discourses, most strands of ecocriticism, and the dominant traditions of ecopoetry" (11) because these perspectives fail to represent a large part of the world's population and "will only become more so as the oceans continue to rise and the deserts continue to spread" (11). Thus, in times of national and global crisis, when "(pseudo-)ecological, racist, and anti-immigrant discourses" that attack marginalized communities emerge,

Rauscher's selection of poets from diverse migrant backgrounds aims to counter racist and anti-immigrant discourses and show alternative and enriching "models to live place-conscious and sustainable lives" (12). As also explained in the introduction, a section that is both explanatory and somewhat suffocating in the sense that the reader is confronted with a variety of terms and concepts, *Ecopoetic Place-Making* "examines the complex visions of belonging and the ecological horizons of care evoked in contemporary American poetry about nature and mobility" (14).

In order to show how the selected poets reimagine the relationship between human and nature from different perspectives of mobility, the author reads the poetry of the CHamoru poet Craig Santos Perez, the Anglo-American poet Juliana Spahr, the Caribbean poet Derek Walcott, the Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali and the Lebanese-American poet Etel Adnan, poets who "evoke human-nature relations that are meaningful in environmental terms not merely *in spite of*, but precisely *because of* the experience of mobility that shape these relations" (15). Poets whose poetry imagines "meaningful 'glocal' human-place relations in the context of mobility" (15) and reveals the enduring "importance that local natural environments hold for migratory subjects" (16).

In the first chapter, "Decolonizing Environmental Pedagogy: Rerouted Knowledges and Participatory Ecopoetics in the Poetry of Craig Santos Perez," Rauscher claims that Perez is an "heir to the American tradition from the perspective of migration, without turning his back on CHamoru cultural practices" (66). It is within the conflicted cultural territory, and as a response to the threat to Guåhan culture and environment, that Perez's poetry "emerges as a particularly useful tool of environmental knowledge production and transmission that can resist imperial logics of homogenization through openness and ambiguity" (66). Rauscher demonstrates his belief in the power of language to carry the embodied experiences and environmental knowledge of his land and people into the future, as the following verses show: "I want to ask you, *is it still possible to hear our paper skin opening* [we] / carry our stories overseas to the place called 'voice' / and call" (85). Perez's poetry, Rauscher argues, highlights CHamoru environmental imaginaries of mobility and engages his readers in a decolonial project of ecopoetic place-making.

In "Situating Ecological Agency: Anthropocene Subjectivity and Settler Place-Making in the Poetry of Julian Spahr," Rauscher's perspective focuses on "showing how Spahr's poetry explores the cultural and political conflicts as well as the emotional and cognitive contradictions produced by life in the Anthropocene for the more privileged demographic segments in the United States" (88). Spahr is interested in questions of "neoliberal notions of ecological agency" (101) and in showing how industrial capitalism and consumer culture harm both people and the environment. As a result of moving to Hawai'i, a colonized place, her place-based poetry aims to show not only "the beautiful bird," but also "the bulldozer off to the side that was destroying the bird's habitat" (106). Spahr's poetry, Rauscher argues, shows an attentiveness to moments of (settler) irresponsibility, as these verses imply: "Asking what it means matters. / And the answer matters too" (127).

Chapter Three: “Lyricizing the Planetary Epic: Genre Mixing and Discrepancies of Scale in Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*,” gives voice to Walcott’s poetry, particularly *Omeros*, his 1990 book-length poem, and the tensions between “the universal and the particular, the communal and the individual, the global and the local, the postcolonial and the transnational” (129). Walcott’s *Omeros* evokes the fate of racial minorities and indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, and, the narrator, informed by postcolonial sensibilities, offers answers to what is important to ask about different kinds of environmental change and degradation, as well as different kinds of displacement, migration and mobility, enabling, as Rauscher suggests, “a trans-historical, trans-ethnic, highly self-aware and explicitly situated act of mourning” (158).

In “Reimagining Ecological Citizenship: Environmental Nostalgia and Diasporic Intimacy in the Poetry of Agha Shahid Ali,” Rauscher reads *A Nostalgist’s Map of America* (1991) as demonstrating the poet’s “engagement with human-place relations” and “a particular sensitivity to those historical processes that make places contested territories, whether politically or culturally” (171). Again, in parallel with the acute vision of an imperial America, Rauscher invites the reader to see how Ali’s verses evoke environmental degradation: “I see Peru without rain, Brazil / without forests - and here in Utah a dagger // of sunlight: it’s splitting [...]” (199). At the same time, Rauscher emphasizes that Ali’s poems affirm and acknowledge the place-making practices of migrants and victims of displacement, a process that is “crucial for the development of more mobile environmental imaginaries and more inclusive forms of ecological citizenship” (205). Most importantly, the author of *Ecopoetic Place-Making* exposes the idea that Ali’s poetry allows readers to reflect on the reasons why migrants like him “might seek a sense of belonging and meaningful connection to place in nature rather than in the company of people” (205), drawing attention to the ways in which racism, xenophobia, and marginalized communities are represented in contemporary society.

Chapter five considers the poetry of Lebanese-American painter and writer Etel Adnan: “Queering Ecological Desire: Post-Mobility and the Apocalyptic Environmental Ethics in the Poetry of Etel Adnan.” Drawing on insights from queer theory, queer ecocriticism and queer phenomenology, Rauscher’s analysis reads Adnan’s poetry as “informed by two different kinds of post-mobility: a reorientation towards nature in the aftermath of the disorientation caused by migration and in the light of an acute awareness of the increasing immobility that comes with old age” (207). While the poet affirms that “Planet Earth is [...] the house we are discarding” (208), Rauscher asserts that Adnan’s poetry not only questions the conventional symbolic organization of human-nature relations in the Euro-American tradition, but that it is imbued with an “eco-erotics [that] seeks to surpass the trappings of (heteronormative) romantic ecology” (227).

In “Conclusion: Environmental Cultures of Im/Mobility,” Rauscher confirms that the main argument of *Ecopoetic Place-Making* is that “it is productive to read contemporary ecopoetries of migration from the joint perspective of ecocriticism and

mobility studies because the environmental imaginaries of mobility that these poetries produce can shed light on some of the many complex ways in which environmental issues and human mobility are connected” (245). To make her point, Rauscher adds that her attention to ecopoetic placemaking through contemporary American poetry written by authors of diverse migratory backgrounds is intended to offer readers “poetry of place-sense and place-attachment from perspectives of mobility that has socio-political and environmental significance because it calls into question the idea that long-term residence is the only way by which human beings develop meaningful relationships with the nonhuman world” (245). Rauscher’s aim has been fully achieved, for if readers of American poetry already had an insightful guide to poetry that engages with the natural world—and I’m thinking, in particular, of John Felstiner’s *Can Poetry Save the Earth? A Field Guide to Nature Poems* (2009)—the world has become more complex and diverse since then. As Rauscher signals, our world is one of converging “ecological and mobility crises,” requiring us as readers to have “more inclusive notions of environmental literature, more critical environmental pedagogies, and a better understanding of how we might arrive at conceptualizing and enacting more ecoethical ways of being in the world that take into account the perspectives of migrants and other people on the move” (245).

This, I claim, is the real strength of *Ecopoetic Place-Making*, the fact that if all the poets Rauscher analyses can be understood as belonging to ecological poetry, then their works “challenge” and “expand” the characteristics of the genre (36). Rauscher’s examination of the selected poets responds to the complexity of our times, bringing into discussion the consequences of colonialism and its human domination over humans and nonhumans, as well as notions of belonging, racism, nationalism, and indigenous knowledge, thus stimulating a larger debate about the place of poetry in the current global environmental crisis and mass migrations taking place across the planet.

Rauscher’s study is relevant to contemporary readers because the author shows that poets of migration evoke natural environments, but they do so “by conceiving of places as porous formations open to various translocal, transregional and transnational connections” (246). In a world inhabited by intense conflicts and experiencing various crises, this vision is of the utmost importance because it results from the convergence of different geographical backgrounds and experiences, creating a shared common place where language houses “acts of ecopoetic place-making” (250). In other words, it becomes a space defined by negotiation, dialogue and movement, something that “can help us along the way” (245).

Based on a solid and informed bibliography of the poets chosen and theories adopted—namely ecocriticism, postcolonialism, spatial mobility, climate change, indigenous diaspora and queer phenomenology—this is a book characterized by poetic encounters that allow the reader to perceive the world in a wider and extended sphere. Nevertheless, the book would have benefited from an index. Also, the many and varied scholarly categorizations stifle the voice of the poets, making the reading

less fluid and enjoyable, as we are constantly struggling with notions, concepts, ideas (as the overly compact table of contents shows).

On the whole, the book offers both students and scholars a meticulous and excellent approach to the concepts and debates within environmental literature and ecocriticism. Moreover, *Ecopoetics and Place-Making* is an auspicious inauguration for the series, and it is more than fair to look forward to reading the books that will follow.

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Başak Ađın, and Şafak Horzum, eds. *Posthuman Pathogenesis: Contagion in Literature, Arts, and Media* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 257pp.

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As schools, universities, and other institutions closed, as national borders were shut down, and as hospitals struggled to provide medical care for an extraordinarily high number of patients, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has reminded humans across the globe of the disruptive power of pathogens. Whereas the institutional, social, economic, cultural, and conceptual challenges brought on by the Corona virus have resulted in a sense of despair and doom or denial in many, Başak Ađın and Şafak Horzum's edited collection embraces these challenges as an opportunity to scrutinise and re-think some common Western conceptions of the (non)human, viruses, and contagion. *Posthuman Pathogenesis: Contagion in Literature, Arts, and Media* contains ten chapters that explore representations of (real and imaginary) bacterial and viral infection in cultural artefacts. All chapters look at different narrative texts from a posthumanist perspective, the underlying theoretical and conceptual framework being outlined in Ađın and Horzum's introduction to the book. Those familiar with posthuman theory will recognise some of the book's basic concepts, such as nonhuman agency, naturecultures, and human-nonhuman entanglements. Based on these notions, the volume understands pathogens as nonhuman actors, with whom human life, history, and culture are deeply entwined (3), and which often function as "meddler[s] of systems" (2). This understanding of pathogens and diseases allows the authors of the chapters to point to and discuss particular representations of contagion that call into question dominant humanist concepts and deeply anthropocentric ideas, especially the notions of human exceptionalism and the binary conception of nature and culture—ideas that constitute the root of many of the crises of the 21st century (247). Even though the recent COVID-19 pandemic is not the designated focus of the book, references and discussions of it permeate all of its chapters. In doing so, *Posthuman Pathogenesis* makes a timely contribution to ongoing public and academic debates on the COVID-19 pandemic by offering a critical posthumanist perspective—one largely absent from public discourse—on the recent global virus outbreak and its economic, political, cultural, and environmental implications.

The volume consists of five parts, each of which tends to different conceptual and theoretical approaches of reading textual representations of contagion. Part I scrutinises and challenges traditional humanist concepts through Stefan Herbrechter's reading of Albert Camus' *The Plague* (1947) and Kerim Can Yazgünođlu's engagement with literary dystopias. Herbrechter discusses how *The Plague* engages with the question of what it means to be human in times of viral crises

and argues that Camus' novel constitutes a deeply humanist text that invokes a nostalgic desire to reconnect with liberal humanist values when these values are called into question in times of pandemics and other crises. Yazgünoğlu follows Herbrechter's critique of humanism and puts forth an understanding of the human as "always already enmeshed with the nonhuman" (42)—a conception that, he suggests, is particularly prevalent in dystopian texts such as Geoff Ryman's *The Child Garden* (1989), Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* (2007) and Clare Morrall's *When the Floods Came* (2015).

The contributions of the second part of the collection consider how contagious diseases call into question dominant conceptions of time. Ruth Clemens and Max Casey criticise the modern "societal progress narrative" (63) and propose the concept of "viral temporality" (64) in its stead, that is an understanding of time "that accounts for the multifaceted ways that disease, in its multispecies entanglements, creates different structures of time that are not simply quantifiable, discrete, or striving for linearity" (68). Similarly, André Vasques Vital discusses the conceptualisation of epidemic temporalities as "linear and non-linear, and continuous and discontinuous" (92) in an episode of the American television series *The Amazing World of Gumball* (2011-2019).

The question of pandemic temporalities gives way to the idea of nonhuman narrative agency in part III of the book. Şafak Horzum's reading of Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* (1992) illustrates how the novel's narrative is navigated by the endless instances of becoming-with that its posthuman protagonist experiences. Z. Gizem Yilmaz Karahan turns the attention to art and suggests that Turkish miniature paintings serve as evidence of "the narrative power of agentic contagious diseases" (127) since their production has been shaped by Anatolia's history of disease.

Part IV is entitled "Contagious Networks of Communication" and contains two articles that apply posthuman theory to some of the fundamental questions of literary studies and linguistics, proposing a reconceptualization of literature and language as posthuman rather than human artefacts. Jayde Martin and Ben Horn conclude from their reading of Greg Bear's science-fiction novel *Darwin's Radio* (1999) that literary texts constitute hyperobjects, in Timothy Morton's sense (155), and Tan Arda Gedik and Zeynep Arpaözü's propose to look at language as coming into being through, and being shaped by, countless human and nonhuman agential forces and their entanglements with each other, rather than as a product of the human mind (171).

The two articles in part V look at the changing patterns of disease narratives from the long twentieth to the twenty-first century. Stian Kristensen reads the short story "Waugh" (2018) by Bryan Washington as an example of how anxieties about HIV/AIDS "linger in contemporary fiction" (190). Ronja Tripp-Bodola compares Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) with Octavia E. Butler's *Fledgling* (2005) and highlights the narratives' expression of changing attitudes towards contagion throughout the long twentieth century (207).

The articles featured in *Posthuman Pathogenesis* revisit some key concerns of posthuman criticism, including the pertinent question of what it means to be human, and they propose new concepts and trajectories for the field, including the concept of viral temporalities, nonhuman narrative agency, and a posthuman reconceptualization of human artefacts like literature and language. The majority of

articles (seven out of ten) present analyses of literary texts. A more extensive inclusion of discussions of non-literary cultural artefacts would not only have been in line with Ađın and Horzum's agenda (3-4), but would also have made the book more appealing to scholars within cultural studies, material ecocriticism, and the medical humanities, especially considering how all articles outline ideas and analytical approaches that have merit outside of literary studies. However, it should be pointed out that despite the main focus of the collection on literary texts, all articles offer a broad contextualisation of their analyses, which point to the broader theoretical, cultural, and social significance of their respective case studies and offer many points of departure for further research.

Posthuman Pathogenesis finishes with a coda, which collects each contributor's account of how they have experienced writing about humans' interactions with viral agents during the COVID-19 pandemic. This section constitutes another strong feature of the book: it not only reveals how research is often shaped by personal, individual experiences and observation and by the presence of nonhuman agents, such as viruses (and, thus, is posthuman itself), it further shows how some of the insights offered by the book have shaped their authors' perception of the pandemic. The authors' accounts demonstrate that "posthumanism is not just a theory" but "a way of existing" and "a way to understand who we are in the 21st century", as Francesca Ferrando puts it in her afterword (248), in which she proposes to look at anthropocentrism as a disease causing multiple current crises. Indeed, the book's intriguing exploration of posthuman ways to conceive pathogens, disease, and pandemics not only provides new pathways for research in several disciplines of the humanities, but it can also help navigating 21st-century crises, including pandemics as well as environmental catastrophes, climate change, and so forth.

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David P. Rando, *Doing Animal Studies with Androids, Aliens, and Ghosts* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), 200pp.

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Since its inception, the field of Animal Studies has challenged the concept of human exceptionalism. As part of an effort to counter this concept, scholars in the field have argued the many ways in which nonhuman animals are equal to humans. This has led to a widening of our collective understanding of nonhuman life, evidenced in the increase in popular literature on the subject. Still, there has been a persistent societal impression that nonhuman animals, while more often considered worthwhile and valuable in their own right, are not as unique and important as humans. With the rise of technological advancements, most recently the advent of widely available generative AI, the existence of what humans consider to be intelligent life that matches, and often far surpasses that of humans, has led to a situation in which human exceptionalism wavers.

Understanding the importance of this moment to the future of human/nonhuman animal relationships, David P. Rando explores the dynamic between humans, nonhuman animals, and nonhuman entities such as robots, clones, androids, aliens, and ghosts. This triangulated connection has previously been considered from other perspectives, with Erika Quinn and Holly Yanacek, in their 2022 study of nonhumans in modern German cultural history, posing nonhuman animals, machines and robots as the lens through which we can see humanity. In trauma literature, *Ghost, Android, Animal: Trauma Literature Beyond the Human* (2020) by Tony M. Vinci explores depictions of trauma in animals, machines and spirits, and how they can help represent inclusive ways towards trauma healing. Rando participates in the wider discussion of these three groups by exploring an alternate approach, focused on investigating literary nonhuman entities but leading towards a new understanding of nonhuman animals.

Rather than champion the talents and abilities of nonhuman animals, the author pivots to the artificial, the unknowable, and the weird. As there are, he offers, no set ways in which we can expect to behave towards clones, aliens and ghosts, our relationship with them is relatively free from the longstanding traditions, dynamic and emotional connections we have with nonhuman animals. Utilising this relative newness, potential and unfamiliarity of the artificial, alien and spiritual nonhuman, as well as their ability in literature to communicate with and mirror humans, Rando

argues that examining these entities' relationships with humans bypasses any remaining hidden beliefs we may have about nonhuman animals, and helps to "unsettle received ideas" (75). *Doing Animal Studies with Androids, Aliens and Ghosts*, offers examples of such relationships from the works of Kazuo Ishiguro, Jeannette Winterson, Philip K. Dick, Octavia E. Butler, Jeff Vandermeer, Louise Erdich, George Saunders, Richard Powers, Jonathan Luna and Sara Vaughn, and Peter Brown. Through them, we begin to see the underlying connections between different literary interactions with nonhuman entities and come to understand what they can tell us about our relationships with nonhuman animals.

Delivering on its title's promise, *Doing Animal Studies with Androids, Aliens and Ghosts* covers a wide range of non-animal entities, each of which highlight different aspects of the way in which non-human animals are oppressed, marginalised and abused. In an act of inclusion, Rando positions a different take on Viktor Shlovsky's *ostranenie* as an ideal way to disrupt old mental avenues and create a better, anthropocosmic future. The varying intensities of relationships between humans and nonhumans in Rando's literary examples each show different aspects of human/nonhuman power dynamics. Using reading strategies from critical animal studies as a guide, the book is structured according to four major themes: nonhuman hope, the artificial gaze, familiar aliens, and posthumous humanity. Despite his use of familiar reading strategies, Rando pointedly refuses to look at his nonhuman non-animal subjects through a "literal, figural, symbolic or allegorical" lens (2), in order to arrive at truly new conclusions about the way we see nonhuman animals, as well as the way we define ourselves as human. Rather, Rando approaches his nonhuman literary examples from a fresh angle, proposing to see the nonhuman representations from a middle distance, allowing these stories about clones, spectres, metatextual literary characters, etc. to exist somewhere between the human and the nonhuman animal. In doing so, he argues, we can step away from any direct comparison or attempting to make each nonhuman fit a mould, and come closer to the truth: that there are aspects of both present in these entities, and that their value as a tool to look at nonhuman animal representations lies in their existence in a space between.

The author's sharp sense of focus is upheld throughout the book, and each topic is presented as both well-referenced and understandable, making it an ideal read for more experienced and more junior scholars alike. Along with addressing underlying speciesism, suppressed bodily autonomy, and the concept of the soul, Rando also shines a light on nonhuman experiences of humanness in literature. Additionally, the author wields his longstanding knowledge on the different ways in which we write hope, and opens it up for nonhuman use, "democratising" it. In his wide range of examples, which include characters who are clones, robots, spirits and (extra)terrestrials, Rando finds behaviours, sensations, qualities and emotions which, whether within the novel or in its societal context, are deemed to be exclusive to humans. Rando's detailed analysis demonstrates that, in contrast to these nonhuman characters, their human counterparts often cannot live up to their world's internal standards for human goodness and morality. It should be noted that nonhumans are

not idealised as part of this analysis, nor are humans vilified. Instead, both parties' merits and shortcomings only highlight the futility of a divide between the species. A poignant idea that the author develops in this context is the concept of constructing value, framing it as nonhumans having an "uniqueness to" someone, rather than an inherent value (151-152, 177). Approaching value this way combats the notion that nonhuman animals are worthless until their worth is proven by anthropocentric standards. Instead, any nonhuman can be "unique to" anyone, without a need to seek proof. As such, "uniqueness to" is a vital part of future discussions of human-nonhuman relationships.

In his introduction, the author makes it clear that *Doing Animal Studies with Androids, Aliens and Ghosts* does not focus on non-human animal representations beyond posing them as examples with which to compare representations of clones, androids, aliens, spirits, etc. This clear-cut focus makes the book particularly accessible to students new to the topic. Even so, given the attention devoted to characters that exist on the fringes of the "nonhuman", and the insightful inclusion of nonhuman animals in the chapter on posthumous humanity in particular, the book may have benefited from a section on zoomorphic aliens, ghosts or androids, as they reside in an even more nebulous space between nonhuman animals and nonhuman others. That said, the insightful inclusion of the sections on plantlike nonhuman networks and language pull their weight as representations of other Earthly organisms made strange, discussing the fungal network-like "learners" in Richard Powers' 2018 *The Overstory* (61-62) and the fruiting bodies that "spell out an endless sentence in English" in Jeff VanderMeer's (2014) *Annihilation* (98-99).

As a whole, Rando contributes greatly to the fields of Animal Studies by offering an alternative way to observe the obscured ways in which humans still view nonhuman animals, as well as the arguably weakly supported constructs we have built to separate ourselves from all other species. With its intriguing case in favour of democratised hope, free will, and mutual respect between species, it is a key text for any scholar looking to venture beyond the fringes of Animal Studies to explore its many possibilities.

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Caroline Levine, *The Activist Humanist*. Form and Method in the Climate Crisis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), 202 pp.

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Like many theoretical interventions that discuss the complexity of the climate crisis, Caroline Levine's *The Activist Humanist* opens with the question of scale. But instead of focusing on the limited perspective of the individual and the problematic character of the global, this book is interested in a sort of middle ground—the collective dimension of the *polis*. Reflecting on her work as a literary scholar and the successful campaign to pressure her university (Cornell) into divesting from fossil fuels, Levine realizes that the “aesthetic humanities” have been focused for far too long on the *pars destruens*, on their critical and deconstructivist practices. However, in an “age of acute precarity” (xiii), they should offer alternative models and practical solutions to resist the destructive forces of our neoliberal present. Building on her previous *Forms* (2015) and “Model Thinking” (2017), where Levine argued for a formalist approach to the study of art and politics, *The Activist Humanist* discusses a wide range of concrete examples, or “forms,” including American highways, public housing projects in Germany, Mexican mural paintings, a British tv show, and the occupation of squares in Egypt, among many others. In doing so, it calls on all humanists to change their practices and implement effective political action by “designing, building, and maintaining the mundane forms that sustain collective life over time” (xv).

In Chapter 1, Levine reflects on some of the book's broader implications. The humanities, she writes, are “stuck on the preparatory moment” (11), that is, they are satisfied with refining their analytical, critical tools without fostering tangible change. For this reason, she proposes to reject the complexity, ambiguity, and open-endedness of most current critical approaches and reevaluate the potential of an “affirmative instrumentality” (12). For Levine, humanists should set a clear agenda to support “collective continuance” (12)—another word for sustainability borrowed from academic and activist Kyle Powys Whyte. This process would entail dismissing radical ruptures and large-scale revolutions to appreciate the intrinsic value of a “conservationist” (20), non-conservative repetitiveness. In other words, it would mean participating in a continuous struggle “with imperfect and near-term political ends” and engaging in “the unromantic, demanding work of social transformation

through all existing channels for political struggle, including elections, battles for legal rights, and institutions like the university and the state” (17).

Levine addresses most methodological issues in Chapter 2. Defining historicization and close reading as inherently intertwined with anti-instrumentality and the discovery of singularities, she argues for a particularly capacious formalist practice. Form is in Levine’s words “any shape or configuration of materials, any arrangement of elements, any ordering or patterning” (23) both aesthetic and social. All forms are characterized by specific properties, or “affordances,” that they carry with them wherever they go. This is why, according to Levine, humanists can “make some predictions about how political forms will work wherever they take shape” (41) and, more importantly, select the most useful forms to oppose the climate crisis based on their proven ability to sustain collective life.

The rest of *The Activist Humanist* provides a series of examples to support its major claims and demonstrate that even those forms traditionally seen as restrictive and oppressive can be put to use for structural change and collective pleasure. Chapter 3 is in fact devoted to “infrastructural forms” such as routines, pathways, and enclosures, which Levine discusses *à la* New Criticism. Instead of tracing back origins and intentions, her research is focused on “what the forms actually *do*” (82, emphasis in original). The “aesthetic forms” that are at the heart of Chapter 4 are equally disentangled from their supposedly conservative role. Rhythms, rhymes, songs, realist narratives, and public murals, Levine writes, not only serve the ruling elites but “register the genuine pleasure of finding stability in the midst of precarious conditions” (86). In Chapter 5, the discussion moves to “political forms,” and to successful cases of collective protest in particular. Criticizing leftist tendencies towards horizontality and messianic hopes in revolutions to come, Levine underlines the role of forms like goals and “hinges” in helping political movements cooperate and achieve small, tangible change. The text ends with a workbook of about ten pages—a guide to “make the transition from critique to action” (150) that readers are invited to complete over the course of three weeks.

The Activist Humanist is a timely book that addresses many of the questions animating contemporary ecocritical and environmental humanities debates, while voicing an urgent call to action directed at all academics. Its shift towards the collective and its formalist approach expose the connection between aesthetics and politics, invite more intermedia comparisons, and stimulate further discussion on the role of the “aesthetic humanities” today. The book’s clear and well-organized prose, its disclosed agenda, and its final workbook, bring *The Activist Humanist* closer to a manifesto than an academic monograph, raising questions about its intended audience. In order to emphasize the novelty of her argument, Levine relies perhaps too often on generalizations and restrictive dichotomies that do not accommodate the complexity of recent developments in the environmental humanities, cultural studies, and postcolonial studies—as well as those practices that bridge the gap between academic research and activism, like militant and participatory action research. Just to mention a few examples, what are the consequences of grounding the book’s call

for universalism on the generic assumption that it is a “universalism of enabling conditions” (15)? When justifying the absence of more-than-human perspectives from a project on collectivity and the climate crisis, is it enough to argue that “a certain anthropocentrism seems unavoidable in scholarly debate” (29)? And which exact processes bring humanists’ “calls for ever more complexity and possibility” to foster “climate denialism,” “neoliberal atomization,” and “collective inaction” (10)? The book’s generative effort to show the link between aesthetic and political forms would also benefit from a more thorough discussion of its underlying mechanisms. For example, if forms have a range of properties that can lead to diametrically opposed political outcomes—see Chapter 4 where songs with repetitive rhythms are discussed as both instruments of exploitation and solidarity—how can humanists make predictions about the outcomes achieved *wherever* these forms take shape? And how exactly do the interactions between different forms and users work in such a universal, transhistorical process?

Despite *The Activist Humanist’s* warning against open-endedness, many questions remain partially unanswered. And this is no flaw, since it is precisely through an ongoing, complex dialogue between critical traditions, aesthetic singularities, historical/political circumstances, and individual/collective experiences that the humanities can find grounds for hope and action in the midst of the unjust, violent crises of our time.

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Mission Statement

This journal of ecocriticism, founded in 2010, is a joint initiative of GIECO (Ecocritical Research Group in Spain) and EASLCE (European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and Environment) and is published by the University of Alcalá as of 2014. Its principal aim is to further the study, knowledge and public awareness of the connections and relationship between literature, culture and the environment. As a virtual space, it provides a site for dialogue between researchers, theorists, creative writers and artists concerned with and by the environment and its degradation. Its pages are open to contributions on all literatures and cultures, but its special mission is to reflect the cultural, linguistic and natural richness and diversity of the European continent.

Contributions, which are subject to double-blind peer review, are accepted in five languages, in order to increase visibility and broaden the participation of scholars who are not part of the English-speaking world. *Ecozon@* publishes original research articles, in addition to creative writing, visual arts and book reviews. Publication is open to scholars interested in ecocriticism from around the world. We recommend membership of EASLCE to our contributors and readers, but it is not a requirement for either.

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