THE ECOLOGICAL VOICE IN RECENT GERMAN-SWISS PROSE

Andrew Adams Liston

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The University of St Andrews, September 2004

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to investigate the ecological theme in German-Swiss prose of the last thirty years. The role of nature has understandably always been significant in Swiss literature. In a nation that has eked out its living, in such an impressive and violent landscape, there is of necessity a highly developed awareness of the environment. Furthermore, the close relationship between mankind and the environment is inherently ambiguous, with each acting alternately as curse and blessing to the other. The bond between people and geography is made all the more vital in the Alps, where existence is under the constant threat of avalanches and landslides. In light of this heightened environmental sensibility, it is unsurprising that, with the growing profile of ecological debate in general, Swiss writers should demonstrate an acute cognisance of the significance of ecological problems.

The notion of an ecological voice takes the discussion further. The question is posed whether these works merely represent a reflection of societal concern for the environment, or whether literary responses may constitute solutions. This investigation therefore contributes both to literary criticism on Swiss writing and to the understanding of the role of conceptualisation in finding solutions to ecological problems.

To explore and analyse these ideas, this thesis considers a representatively broad spectrum of differing responses to ecological crisis. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list of recent Swiss 'Öko-Literatur', but instead to be an investigation of the variety of narrative strategies employed in this period of growing ecological awareness.

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1. Introduction

We are in the midst of a seismic shift in thinking about the nature of ourselves and the world we live in. It is no hyperbole to describe the magnitude of the shift as an intellectual revolution.¹

Before embarking on an investigation of an ecological literary voice, it is necessary to have a firm understanding of ecology itself. The roots of the word are from the Greek terms 'οικος', meaning 'home' and 'λογος', meaning 'word' or 'discourse'. It is defined as the branch of biology that studies the relationship between organisms and their environment.² This started to become an important field of study in the wake of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. His theory radically reshaped the way we see mankind's position in relation to nature, causing a revolution of thought, not just in biology. It refuted the biblical notion of creation, relegating man from a position of dominance over and separateness from nature (God's promise to Noah, Genesis 9 vv. 1-3), to merely being part of nature. In Darwin's theory of natural selection there remains nevertheless the sense that mankind is the ultimate product of the gradual process of evolution, giving our species a natural right to dominance, even if we are no longer separate from nature. From being the cherry on the cake we became just another raisin in it, albeit a big one. Being part of nature meant that a knowledge of that nature, and our relationship to it, became a central intellectual concern, thus elevating the position of ecology.

This thesis investigates recent ecological literature. The term 'recent' refers roughly to the last 30 years, with the earliest date of publication, among the works handled, being 1976. The starting point in the seventies is not a random choice. In the last 30 years, the study of ecology and ecological questions have become matters of central importance. They can win

¹ Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin, *The Sixth Extinction. Patterns of Life and the Future of Humankind*, (New York: Doubleday, 1995), p. 223

politicians votes and help to sell newspapers. Paradoxically, even motor cars can be sold under environmental slogans now.³ What has caused this change in the profile of ecology? Clive Church asserts that ecological concern is a luxury of economically stable and rich states, which is at first sight a persuasive argument, since real poverty does not allow the luxury of cares other than how to obtain food, water and shelter. Indeed, the countries that demonstrate ecological awareness are predominantly Western and are among the wealthiest countries in the world.⁴ However, this correlation is in fact simplistic. Church ignores the fact that the United States of America, the world's richest nation, is by far the world's largest pollutant and is significantly less committed to environmental issues than less wealthy states. George W. Bush's recent decision not to sign the Kyoto agreement is the most startling example of American governmental ignorance and arrogance regarding the environment. The notion that ecological issues come second to the economy is further undermined by the fact that the seventies, which saw the awakening of an ecological conscience, were economically very unstable. Even Switzerland's economy was in a downward spiral at this time and there was more industrial action in Switzerland than at any time before or since.⁵ Ecology did not become a central issue in the seventies because of economic stability. Instead, the intensified focus on our relationship to our environment appears to be due to a number of developments in ecological research at this time.

Ecologists began to reassess Darwin's theory of natural selection (sometimes called 'background evolution'). It has now become clear that major evolutionary change occurs in bursts. Modifying the notion of gradual evolution, Stephen Jay Gould speaks of "punctuated equilibrium." We can identify the origins of this theory in the work of a French eighteenth century scientist. Georges Cuvier, the scientist responsible for the terminology we use for the various geological ages, came up with a theory that became known as "catastrophism."

² *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, ed. F. Sturges Allan, (London, 1920)

³ "Kia - the car that cares [for the environment]." Australian television advertisement.

⁴ Clive Church, personal communication in the Swiss Embassy in London, January 2002.

Cuvier's research with fossils proved that species died in mass extinctions. The extinctions create gaps in the ecosystem, which new species then fill. In this way, they provoke bursts of evolution. He suggested that there have been perhaps 30 of these extinctions, caused by catastrophes such as the Noachim flood. The biblical overtone that this comparison lent his research led to the rejection of Cuvier's theory altogether once evolutionary biology had undermined the authority of the Bible.⁶ However, in 1980 Luis Alvarez, of the University of California, Berkeley, published his theory that the huge extinction at the end of the Cretaceous period was caused by a large asteroid colliding with the Earth. This brought catastrophism, albeit in an altered form, back into the main forum of biological debate.

In 1979 Norman Myers, an Oxford University ecologist, published *The Sinking Ark*. His research draws attention to the fact that nearly 50% of the world's species live in the world's forests. Forest only covers 7% of the world's surface, however. Myers predicted that if the rate of deforestation remains as high as it was in 1979, by the year 2100 we will have lost half of the Earth's species.⁷

The significance of these figures can only be appreciated in light of the holistic attitude prevalent in current ecology. In the same year as Myers' controversial and alarming research appeared, James Lovelock published *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*.⁸ His hypothesis is that the Earth, its atmosphere and all life in it, are parts of a superorganism, which he calls 'Gaia'. The term is taken from Greek mythology, Gaia being the ancient Greeks' goddess of the Earth. The work attracted a cult following, including notable figures such as Vaclav Havel. Ecologists were initially sceptical, seeing a lack of scientific evidence as a weakness in his work. However, opinion has since changed and Gaia, under different titles, is now a respected theory among scientists as well. Ecologists have realised that biodiversity is fundamental to life. That is to say that if we lose some species we do not

⁵ See: Jonathan Steinberg, *Why Switzerland?*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 2

⁶ See: Leakey, pp 41-44

⁷ See: Norman Myers, *The Sinking Ark*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 111

simply lose those species themselves, but, because of the interdependence of species, their extinction has a knock-on effect for surviving species. For example, the extinction of the dodo also precipitated the extinction of a species of tree, which relied on the dodo to distribute its seeds.⁹ More dramatically, due to the interdependence of animals and plants, the extinction of a plant can devastate an ecosystem.¹⁰ It is similar to removing stones from a wall: remove one and a few more will fall. Indeed, scientists refer to 'keystone' species, whose loss can cause crisis in their surrounding environment.¹¹ To continue the simile, if many stones are removed the dilapidation of the wall will be disproportionately much greater, with the result that there will be not much of a structure left at all. The same effect is perceptible in the five major extinctions that we know about. Accelerating rates of species-loss caused the total collapse of ecosystems and an upheaval in species hierarchy.¹² The present rate of species-loss is 400 times the normal background rate and is comparable to that of a mass-extinction such as the one at the end of the Cretaceous period, which sealed the fate of the dinosaurs.¹³ An increasing number of scientists therefore consider that mankind is on the brink of a catastrophe.

Having seen how complex the environment is, as well as how critical it is to maintain the biodiversity of life, it is perturbing to discover more ways in which the critical balance may be tipped in a catastrophic direction. Because of the way it alters habitats, climate change can be another important factor provoking mass-extinction. Changing sea-levels, for example, have been linked to most massive extinctions.¹⁴ In the past, global cooling drove ecosystems out of temperate zones towards the equator, concentrating life in that area of the globe,

⁸ See: James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989)

⁹ See: Norman Myers, (ed.), *Gaia. Der Öko-Atlas unserer Erde*, (Frankfurt am Main, 1985; originally published in London, 1984), p. 155

¹⁰ See: Myers, *Gaia*, p. 154

¹¹ See: Leakey, p. 216

¹² See: Leakey, p. 46

¹³ See: Myers, *Gaia*, p. 154

¹⁴ See: Leakey, p. 50

creating havoc in ecosystems and setting off a snowball effect of extinction.¹⁵ Global warming threatens to upset the balance in a similarly dramatic fashion. The balance is also disturbed if a species becomes excessively dominant because this species will encroach on other species' habitats, thereby forcing species into extinction. Presently, we are in a predicament where all these possible causes of catastrophe are becoming increasingly real. The root cause behind all of them appears to be *homo sapiens*. We appear to be the first species to be the equivalent to a geological force. Our exceptional success as a species will result in the world's population reaching a figure of between 8 and 10 billion by the year 2050.¹⁶ If the population grows at this rate and the proportion of the net primary productivity, which we consume, grows accordingly, we will eventually reach a point where primary productivity must fall as space becomes scarce and the effects of a shrunken biodiversity will kick in. As the Stanford biologists Anne and Paul Ehrlich put it: "People will try to take over all of it [net primary productivity] and lose more of it in the process."¹⁷ Climate change increases the pressure on biodiversity. With the amount of carbon dioxide that modern westernised society produces, there is no doubt that we contribute to global warming. Add to this the impact of deforestation on biodiversity and we will soon be in an eco-crisis of our own making that will threaten the existence of humankind. Little wonder then, that in the wake of such discoveries, ecological concerns became central questions facing all of us and were no longer the private domain of a small group of scientists.

We face a crisis-one of our own making-and if we fail to negotiate it with vision, we will lay a curse of unimaginable magnitude on future generations.¹⁸

¹⁵ See: Leakey, p. 51

¹⁶ See: Edward O. Wilson, *The Future of Life*, (London: Little, Brown, 2002), p. 31, and Martin Rees, *Our Final Century*, (London: William Heinemann, 2003)

¹⁷ Anne and Paul Ehrlich, 'The Value of Diversity', in *Ambio*, Vol. 21, 1992. P. 225

¹⁸ Leakey, p. 224

1.1 Literature and ecology

What does literature have to do with ecology? The scientific arguments, which have foregrounded the study of ecology, give part of the answer to this question. In the last thirty years, ecology has become a major issue concerning the future of human life on Earth. Günter Grass has drawn attention to the influence of scientific research, saying, in reference to *The Limits to Growth* reports of the Club of Rome, "Diese Berichte sind unsere nüchterne Offenbarung," and are "die Apokalypse als Ergebnis eines Geschäftsberichtes."¹⁹ Grass's use of dramatic Biblical terms emphasises the existence of cross-over points between imaginative literature and natural science. To some extent, literature reflects societal concerns. We tell stories partly to understand and assess our experiences, or as Jonathan Bate puts it "to humanize the big problems",²⁰ and one of these problems is the threat of ecological disaster. The high level of interest that this threat provokes is evident in the large quantity of contemporary artistic responses. Pandering to the human penchant for the dramatic, Hollywood has produced films featuring ecological catastrophe.²¹ The most recent of a huge body of these, *The Day after Tomorrow* by the German director Roland Emmerich, is a typically swashbuckling Hollywood production, swamped with special effects, which culminates in heroic triumph tinged with an element of self-sacrifice. Despite the ecologically problematic element of closure implicit in the narrative formula of derring-do resulting in victory, the film contains a telling recurrent motif of humans on the edge of some kind of abyss and also highlights the positive role education and learning could play in averting ecological catastrophe. In the German film industry, Werner Herzog, albeit controversially,

¹⁹ Günter Grass, 'Die Vernichtung der Menschheit hat begonnen' in *Werkausgabe in zehn Bänden*, ed. by Volker Neuhaus, in vol. 9 ed. by Daniela Hermes, (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1987), p. 830

²⁰ Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, (London: Picador, 2000), p. 25

²¹ For example: *The Medicine Man*, *Waterworld*, *Deep Impact*, *Armageddon*, *Twister*, and most recently *The Day after Tomorrow*.

has directed several films with ecological themes.²² 'Green' concerns are also to be found in contemporary art. A piece of installation art in a recent Tate Gallery competition consisted of lights in a room simply being turned on and off. The concept draws attention to this simple act that costs the world so much energy. Perhaps the most prominent recent artist to deal with environmental issues has been Joseph Beuys, who saw art as fundamental to ecology and famously planted 7000 oaks as a sculpture at the seventh *Documenta* in Kassel.²³ Ecological themes have become increasingly visible in literature too, with the most significant recent examples in German being works by Max Frisch, Günter Grass, Christa Wolf, Monika Maron and Carl Amery.²⁴ Ecocriticism is now a respected academic discipline, particularly in the United States of America, where there are chairs in the subject, as well as an Association for the Study of Literature and Ecology (ASLE). ASLE also has a branch in Great Britain and a similar organisation has recently been founded in Germany.²⁵

1.1.1 Alienation from the Natural Environment

Societal concern for the environment certainly goes some way towards explaining the growth of cultural expression for the subject. However, it does not go the whole way to explaining the links between culture and the environment. After all, nature fascinated artists long before the world was threatened by ecological disaster. The first cultural expressions of mankind's relationship to the natural world date from pre-historic times. Stone-age cave paintings contain landscape representations.²⁶ These depictions were presumably provoked by a deep-seated fascination with nature. The recurrence of prey motifs, such as bison, suggests some

²² See, for example: Tom Cheesman, 'Apocalypse Nein Danke: The Fall of Werner Herzog', in *Green Thought in German Culture*, ed. by Colin Riordan, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997)

²³ See Frank Finlay, 'Joseph Beuys's Eco-aesthetics' in *Green Thought in German Culture*, pp 245-258. Begun in 1982 the project was completed by Beuys' son in 1987, a year after the artist's death.

²⁴ See, for example: Max Frisch, *Homo faber*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), Günter Grass, *Die Rättin*, (Munich: dtv, 1998) Christa Wolf, *Kassandra. Vier Vorlesungen. Eine Erzählung*, (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1983) Carl Amery, *Der Untergang der Stadt Passau*, (Waldkirchen: Südost Verlag, 2004), Monika Maron, *Flugassche*, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1986)

²⁵ The European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and the Environment was founded in Münster 12.3.2004

psychological need to deal with this particular form of interaction with nature. Capturing wild animals in an image possibly allowed a process of distancing to occur and conceivably assists a process of polarization between hunter and hunted, between mankind and nature. The fascination with nature is a central and enduring aspect of human culture and can be seen to grow proportionately with our increasing alienation from nature through modernisation and urbanisation. The oldest surviving recorded narrative, the Sumerian epic *Gilgamesh*, already has the tension between urban man and wild man at its core, and the hero must prove his merit by hewing down a forest. The pastoral tradition begins with the eulogies for a "Golden Age" by ancient Greek poets. Horace, who lived mainly in Rome and was the darling of a number of rich urban patrons, idealised the country life from afar. Similarly, Rousseau's idealisation of the simple life can only be fully understood in relation to his urban experiences in Paris and Geneva. Indeed, Doris Kadish goes so far as to say "... it can be argued that alienation is the very bedrock of landscape's existence [in literature]."²⁷ This can be perceived in the growth of interest in the natural environment in the nineteenth-century, which coincided with the rapid industrialisation of the Western world. William Wordsworth immortalises the pattern of rural life in the Lake District in a reaction to the intrusions of modernisation, such as the railway. In *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau, regarded by many as the founding father of environmentalism, draws attention to mankind's growing alienation from his natural surroundings and calls for a better identification with nature: "Think of our life in nature, daily to be shown matter, daily to come in contact with it, - rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the *solid* earth! the *actual* world! the *common* sense! Contact! Contact!"²⁸ Thoreau could have been speaking for the mountaineers who began to swarm over any incline from Lochaber to the Alps, from the end of the 18th century onwards.²⁹ It seems no coincidence

²⁶ See: Leakey, p. 142

²⁷ Doris Kadish, *The Literature of Images*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), p. 6

²⁸ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986; first published: USA: Ticknor and Fields, 1854), p. 55

²⁹ See: Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, (London: Fontana, 1996), p. 482

that this pastime began in Britain, the first industrialised country. Malcolm Pender suggests that the British mountaineers who “discovered” the Alps “die Umweltverschmutzung fliehen wollten, die sie und ihre Zeitgenossen in England mit der Errichtung der ersten modernen Fabriken angerichtet hatten.”³⁰ As modern, industrialised, urban life developed in the 20th century, so did this sense of alienation. Alienation is a psychological and subjective experience and, as such, is a subject that is dealt with effectively in the arts.

The split between nature and humankind, of which the sense of alienation is a symptom, is a deep-seated cultural phenomenon that seems either to have caused or give expression to a complex psychology. The examples of this cultural phenomenon number among the central narratives of the Western civilised world. Not least among these is the Bible. According to the book of Genesis, Adam is awarded God-given dominion over plants and animals. (Genesis, i. 28) Further examples of this kind of configuration are to be found throughout the Bible. Where the natural world challenges this dominion, with diseases or wild, predatory animals, for instance, the text gives explanations that this is because of the Fall. (Genesis, iii. 18) The influences of such anthropocentrism in such a crucial text should not be underestimated. Adam’s position at the centre of Creation has had repercussions in a vast array of different fields from law to agriculture. The Creator’s purpose and design were (and still are) sought in the most improbable places. According to George Cheyne, an eighteenth century commentator, God fashioned horse excrement to have a pleasant odour because he knew that humans would spend a lot of time with them.³¹ If man had dominion over animals, great efforts had to be made to hide links between animals and humans, and so maintain a safe distance. Keith Thomas notes that, in the early modern period, lavatorial practice remained taboo, for fear that it might demonstrate animal urges.³² To a large extent

³⁰ Malcolm Pender, ‘Die bedrohte Umwelt im deutschschweizer Roman der 80er Jahre’, in *Studien zur Germanistik*, ed. by Zoltan Szendi, (Pecs, Hungary: Janus-Pannonius University, 1993), p. 122

³¹ See: George Cheyne, *Philosophical Principles of Religion*, (2nd edition: London, 1715), i., p. 359

³² See: Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World. Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 38

taboos persist regarding such topics. Furthermore, the desire to maintain an appropriate gap between mankind and animals meant that attention was drawn to seemingly peculiar facets of *Homo sapiens*. Two of the most salient were technology and religion. We can therefore see that, in addition to causing much environmental damage, the ubiquitous and eternal pursuit of technology not only often functions to distance us physically from nature but also possesses a philosophical dimension that contributes to alienation.

The Enlightenment seized upon religion as a stick with which to beat the dichotomy between humans and the natural world into both. René Descartes perfected the discourse on the differences between humans and animals. Animals were unfeeling and had no soul; men had souls and also religion. Our spiritual life elevated us above the brute state, he claimed. Animals were automata and if they howled this was not from a sensation of pain but simply because of a reflex similar to when a bell is rung.³³ This argument not only strengthens the position of religion, which, as we have seen, suggests a similar hierarchical system, but sanctions all kinds of exploitative behaviour with regard to the environment. Descartes' emphasis on the division between subject and object is another major contribution that his philosophy has made to Western attitudes towards nature. This precludes an understanding of the self as defined by the surrounding environment, such as Martin Heidegger was later to teach. Günter Grass identifies the fundamental flaw of Enlightenment thought as the coupling of rationality and technicality.³⁴ This leads to the rational exploitation of nature, which in turn, some argue, eventually results in horrific consequences, such as the Holocaust.³⁵

³³ See: Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 545

³⁴ See: Günter Grass, *Gespräche mit Günter Grass*, vol. 10 of *Werkausgabe in zehn Bänden*, ed. by Volker Neuhaus, (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1987), p. 348

³⁵ See Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1995; first published: New York, 1944).

1.1.2 Biophilia

Why should our alienation from nature find such widespread aesthetic recognition and expression? With all the damage we inflict on the natural world, we might be tempted to draw the conclusion that humans are born with a hatred of nature. Why then do we immortalise nature in the products of our imagination? Some, like Urs Richle, a contemporary Swiss novelist, suggest that nature is eulogised simply out of ignorant sentimentality: we no longer have an intimate, first-hand knowledge of nature and so it is a source of mystery and fascination.³⁶ The natural world may indeed present an apt locus for sentimentality but this sentimentality is not necessarily born out of ignorance. We recognise natural objects as classes rather than objects with individuality. We do not know a primrose, for example, as an individual. We perceive one primrose to be just the same as the one we saw as children. In this way aspects of the natural environment function as measuring sticks for us over time and are therefore often easy targets for nostalgia. It is partly for this reason that Susanne Kichler highlights the role of landscape in literature: "landscape becomes the most generally accessible and widely shared aide-mémoire of a culture's knowledge and understanding of its past and future."³⁷ This aspect of constancy offered by nature is thrown into sharp relief by the increasingly rapid rate of urban change, further enhancing, by contrast, the appeal of a natural environment. Fred E. Knecht, a contemporary Swiss graphic artist, plays precisely on this point in his apocalyptic futuristic scenarios. Taking significant features of the cultural landscape, he achieves a shock effect by radically altering parts of them, creating a juxtaposing effect by showing us a familiar cultural constant in a mutated form. For example, in modernising one of Switzerland's cultural cornerstone paintings, Rudolf Koller's *Gotthard Post*, he gives gas masks to the draught horses and turns the rough track they are travelling on into a four-lane motorway. His image embodies the way in which culture may be linked to

³⁶ See, for example: Urs Richle, *Das Loch in der Decke der Stube*, (Munich: Piper, 1997).

³⁷ Susanne Kichler, 'Landscape as Memory: The Mapping of Process and its Representation in a Melanesian Society' in *Landscape. Politics and Perspectives*, ed. by Barbara Bender, (Oxford: Berg, 1993), p. 85

ecology. Ecological damage is transforming a homeland and thus rendering the national cultural heritage obsolete. The success of Knecht's shock tactics points to the fact that modern urban ways of life have not evolved at the human rate, a point that is often forgotten by the critics of green utopia. Urban experience is unprecedented and to seek security in something that appears to hold more permanence, or even just an image of that habitat, can be reassuring. Furthermore, people do not generally experience a sense of loss without having lost something; it is unlikely for someone to yearn for something that they have not known. Consequently, it seems fair to consider the poetic yearning for our lost Eden to be due at least partly to a feeling of genuine discontent with modernity. Abraham Cowley captures the essence of the effect of industrialised urbanisation in exacerbating the sense of loss with regard to nature:

Who, that has reason, and his smell,
Would not among roses and jasmine dwell,
Rather than all his spirits choke
With exhalations of dirt and smoke?³⁸

Edward O. Wilson believes that our affinity for nature is nothing new and that its roots lie deeper in the workings of the human mind. Wilson has called it "biophilia." In a text bearing his neologism as its title, the Harvard entomologist convincingly explains his theory that the human brain is programmed for a more direct experience of the natural environment than modern Westernised modes of existence permit. When the species *homo sapiens* evolved, it was in an ecosystem that bears very little resemblance to a modern city. *Homo sapiens* emerged on the plains of Africa some 150 000 years ago. For roughly 99.5 % of that time the species survived as so-called "hunter-gatherers", that is to say wandering the plains in search of food either by happenstance or hunting. This hunter-gatherer experience has left

its mark on our psyche. Wilson suggests that we have a natural inclination to be able to see a long way. This allows us to spot both danger and prey from afar. Similarly, trees offer sanctuary from the elements as well as from predators, hence our arborophilia. Furthermore, large expanses of water generally hold no natural threats and so lakes or the coast are features we like to see in our immediate environment.³⁹ We can identify these elements as recurrent features of cultural and literary biophilia. Trees, for example, have played a central role in German culture since Tacitus' *Germania*, which allotted the barbarians "timbered virtue" because of their rural and sylvan habitation and noted arboreal religious practices as well as creation myths stemming from plants.⁴⁰ The idea of biophilia is also supported in the field of psychoanalysis. C.G. Jung sees the universality of nature myths as an indication of the importance of nature in the subconscious.⁴¹ 'Biophilia' goes some way to explaining the presence of ponds and parks in urban environments. The persistence of green spaces in our cities, in an age when almost everything is put to practical and economic use, suggests an innate human need for a contact with nature.

1.1.3 Changing Perceptions of Nature

The fact that we say "nature" at all and treat it as an 'Other' indicates a large degree of perceptive alienation. At the very least, the split is linguistically present and may well be deeply embedded in our psyche too. This fundamental tension is perceptible in the origins of the contemporary ecological movement in the late 1960s. One of its prime objectives has been to effectuate a reconciliation with nature.⁴² A reconciliation assumes a state of separation. This approach therefore places the ecological movement firmly in the rationalising tradition of the Enlightenment because it creates a dualistic split. In an attempt to move away from

³⁸ Abraham Cowley, 'The Garden' in *Several Discourses*, ed. by Christopher Minchin, (London, 1904), p. 65

³⁹ See: Edward O. Wilson, *Biophilia*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 110

⁴⁰ Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, p. 84

⁴¹ See: Schama *Landscape and Memory*, p. 15

⁴² See: Ingolfur Blühdorn, 'Ecological Thought and Critical Theory', in *Green Thought in German Culture*, p. 94

such a view, Gernot Böhme demands a revision of concepts and calls for an abolition of the notion of nature altogether.⁴³ He is not alone in this. Addressing the split between nature and mankind, Klaus Meyer-Abich, an eco-philosopher, suggests a biocentric attitude, which is concisely summed up in his call for a change of terminology from "Umwelt" to "Mitwelt."⁴⁴

Literature can play a role in this conceptual transformation. In *The Song of the Earth*, Jonathan Bate suggests that literature can do for the mind what parks do for the body. The comparison of literature to urban parks emphasises the fact that literature, like the green spaces in towns, is evidence of an alienation from nature. From a purely practical perspective, in order to obtain the paper needed to write on, you have to exploit nature by cutting down trees. The emergence of writing can also be traced to the critical moment when the hunter-gatherers bent themselves to a pastoral way of life: the oldest surviving writing is the record of grain trading. The gulf between modernised civilised humans and the bushmen of the Kalahari embodies the transformation caused by this trick of the traders. The written word is also a key mechanism that allows mankind to emancipate itself from nature. Telling stories puts us in an historical context because stories usually have a timescale that goes beyond the immediate present. Furthermore, it allows us to accumulate wisdom over generations, permitting learning to modify natural instinct and adding to our alienation from nature. We are no longer simply reliant on our animal instincts but have the notion of our past by which to define ourselves.⁴⁵ What is more, books are an utterly human phenomenon and culture has been a way in which humans have sought to define themselves as superior to the animal world.⁴⁶ Literature, it has been argued, cannot truly achieve any sort of reconciliation between humans and nature since nature has no access to the world of literature and no means of expression. As a result, many see the transposability into literary structures of radical

⁴³ See: Gernot Böhme, *Natürlich Natur. ÜberNatur im Zeitalter ihrer technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), p. 22

⁴⁴ See: Klaus Michael Meyer-Abich, *Praktische Naturphilosophie. Erinnerung an einen vergessenen Traum*, (Munich: Beck, 1997)

⁴⁵ Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, p. 26

ecological philosophies, such as the ideas of Meyer-Abich, as impossible and contradictory. However, this criticism relies on the critical Cartesian dichotomy. For if man *is* part of the natural world, what invalidates his expression of sympathy with his “Mitwelt”, even if it remains inaccessible to other creatures? This argument is similar to the lessons of Zhuang Zi, the Taoist teacher. Walking by a river with a companion, he sees some fish jumping and remarks on how happy they are. His companion asks him how he can know if they are happy since he is not a fish himself. Zhuang Zi turns his friend’s subject/object logic back on his friend and suggests that since his friend is not Zhuang Zi he cannot know if Zhuang Zi does or does not know what the fish feel. Zhuang Zi highlights the importance of irrational emotion in an identification with the natural world.⁴⁷

1.1.4 Martin Heidegger

The anarchic animal state desired by extreme ecologists may be utopian - we are probably too far removed from that state ever to return to it. However, in order to avert an ecological disaster, we may well need their radical mind-set.⁴⁸ Literature could be a useful vehicle for achieving this. The following chapters constitute an investigation of a number of works of literature that promote a rethinking of mankind’s place in the environment. Many of the discussions draw on a reading of the work of Martin Heidegger. Turning to the work of Heidegger, we find the words “dichterisch wohnet der Mensch” cited repeatedly.⁴⁹ With this quotation, which Heidegger attributes erroneously to Friedrich Hölderlin, the philosopher returns to the roots of the term ecology (see section 1.1) with the sense of home implied in dwelling and the sense of word in poetics. Modern modes of existence can be reduced,

⁴⁶ Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, p. 42

⁴⁷ Beat Sitter Liver, in conversation with the author, Zurich, 06.05.03

⁴⁸ See: Bate, p. 64

⁴⁹ Martin Heidegger, “...dichterisch wohnet der Mensch...” in “Vorträge und Aufsätze” in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 7, (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), pp 191-208

according to Heidegger, to “nur das Innehaben einer Unterkunft.”⁵⁰ He claims, however, that “wohnen” (often translated as ‘to dwell’), can contain elements of poetry: “Vielleicht trägt sogar das eine das andere, so nämlich, dass dieses, das Wohnen, in jenem, dem Dichterischen, beruht.”⁵¹ Heidegger emphasises this idea because he sees poetry as the way in which people express their subjective and personal connection to a place. As it is often highly subjective and personal, lyric poetry may also be fundamentally bound up with what defines a person’s being. Being and dwelling lose their separateness in Heidegger’s thought. He draws the links between being, dwelling and building by showing their shared etymology: ‘bauen’ comes from the old German ‘buan’ meaning ‘to live’ or ‘to dwell’, and the forms ‘bin’ and ‘bist’, meaning ‘am’ and ‘are’, are also derived from the same root. “Die Art, wie du bist und ich bin, die Weise, nach der wir Menschen auf der Erde *sind*, ist das Buan, das Wohnen.”⁵² In this way he highlights that formerly the sense of where one lived and the sense of one’s existence were closely related. Today, the idea of living without working is obsolete – life is therefore defined by work. Since we tend to work at a different location from where we ‘live’, life as a whole is no longer defined by place.

Rejecting the Western tradition of philosophy because of what he considers to be its simplistic ontological assumptions, Heidegger suggests that: the question over the meaning of being has not yet been properly posed or properly answered.⁵³ He criticises previous philosophers for their perception of human beings as spectators. René Descartes, David Hume and Immanuel Kant all ground their modes of thought on analogies that refer to the human perspective as that of an onlooker.⁵⁴ Heidegger wants to draw attention to the influence on self of the human role as actor or participant. He draws attention to the fact that humans are mortal. If they are outwith the parameters of their physical environment, as the spectator

⁵⁰ Heidegger, “...dichterisch wohnet der Mensch...”, p. 193

⁵¹ Heidegger, “...dichterisch wohnet der Mensch...”, p. 192

⁵² Martin Heidegger, “Bauen, Wohnen, Denken”, in “Vorträge und Aufsätze”, in Gesamtausgabe, vol. 7, (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), p.149

⁵³ See: Stephen Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 8

model of previous thinkers suggests, they must be capable of a form of divine transcendence.⁵⁵ In his essay "Bauen, Wohnen, Denken", Heidegger moves away from the limiting understanding of self that sees the persons existing in isolation from their surroundings. He suggests that beings that are usually considered as separate entities are in fact mutually interdependent.⁵⁶ According to his view, we cannot see the world, say, as simply a container for humans, who, as a substance within that container, remain unaffected and unchanged by the container. Following the logic of such an understanding of self, it would be possible for the substance to exist unchanged in a different container, the container having no effect on the substance.⁵⁷ The simple act of breathing demonstrates that we interact with our surrounding environment and demonstrates the flawed nature of this mode of perception. Heidegger's line of thinking thus reassesses the Cartesian divide between *res existensa* and *res cogitans* and therefore adds further strength to the attack on the Enlightenment outlined above.

Returning to Henry David Thoreau, we can identify Heidegger's notion of poetic dwelling: "if men constructed their dwellings with their own hands, and provided food for themselves and families simply and honestly enough, the poetic faculty would be universally developed." In suggesting that personality may be expressed through habitat, Thoreau pre-emptly Heidegger's belief in the importance of place in defining self.

In his essay, "Die Frage nach der Technik", Heidegger discusses his understanding of technology as a physical entity constituting a means that allows one to achieve an end. In the process of achieving that end technology brings about a revelation of the material used in the technological device as well as of the person manipulating the technology: "Technik ist eine Weise des Entbergens. Die Technik west in dem Bereich, wo Entbergen und

⁵⁴ Mulhall, *Heidegger*, p. 39

⁵⁵ See: Mulhall, *Heidegger*, pp 39-40

⁵⁶ See: Heidegger, "Bauen, Wohnen, Denken", pp 147-164

⁵⁷ The container metaphor is the author's own example to illustrate Heidegger's idea.

Unverborgenheit, wo ἀλήθεια, wo Wahrheit geschieht.”⁵⁸ He also expresses his fears about modern, technologically advanced modes of existence and the effects of mass-production. Heidegger’s argument centres on a differentiation between older and more modern forms of technology. Using the examples of a windmill and a hydroelectric power station. They both appear simply to be ways of harnessing energy. Heidegger finds a problem with the latter, however, in that the water turbine harnesses energy as such. In this way, it divorces the natural force temporally from the use that will be made of it. The windmill, on the other hand, is not capable of making this temporal dislocation and therefore reveals the power of the wind. The “Entbergen” is transformed into a “Herausforderung” and, by way of this challenge or demand, technology reduces both the persons using it and the object to which it is applied to a “Bestand” or stock.⁵⁹

In addition to this, with faceless production lines, the items manufactured lose the essence of their maker’s being. The replacement of the hand-crafted potter’s mug with a Styrofoam cup amounts to a loss for both the producer and also the user because being is no longer invested in the item. Thoreau’s advice, roughly a century before Heidegger’s analysis, implies a similar evaluation of the worth of a personal contact with that which surrounds one. The implications of this for the ecological discourse are clear.

We have already seen that our most fundamental narratives deal with the relationship between mankind and the natural environment. This suggests a profound connection between culture and nature. This connection is a key element of German culture. From Tacitus’ descriptions of the Germanic barbarian tribes onwards, nature has played a central role in literary culture. It can even be said partly to define German culture, which, thanks to *Germania* and other texts, to some extent posits Germanic people as the children of nature.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Martin Heidegger, “Die Frage nach der Technik” in “Vorträge und Aufsätze” in Gesamtausgabe, vol. 7, (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), pp 14-15

⁵⁹ See: Heidegger, “Die Frage nach der Technik”, pp 7- 36

1.1.5 The Swiss and their Environment

For the Swiss, the environment - the countryside, the mountains, the glaciers, the lakes - plays an enormous role in the collective consciousness. Any visitor to Switzerland will be struck immediately by the rugged terrain. It is difficult to ignore the towering shapes of the Alps all around. Ask anyone to generalise about Switzerland and they are likely to mention high mountains, snow, forests, cow-bells, and Alpine chalets. One critic calls it "das Reiseland *per se*, Gegenstand idyllischer Träume."⁶¹ Going beyond such superficial responses, it is easy to see how Swiss life has been, and remains, closely involved with the environment. Rural life in steep-sided valleys has always been at the mercy of avalanches and landslides, making the vital relationship between peasant and soil all the more crucial. The strong presence of the natural world in the country's culture is therefore to be expected. From *Die Alpen*, by the father of Swiss literature, Albrecht von Haller and Salomon Gessner's mountain *Idyllen*, through *S'isch äben e Mönsch uf Aerde, Simeliberg!*, the Swiss Romeo and Juliet ballad where the harsh natural environment fills the destructive role of Shakespeare's warring families, to Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz's landslide novel, *Derborrence*, and Ferdinand Hodler's landscape paintings, the Helvetic cultural horizon is dominated by the natural environment. It seems unlikely that in any other country an overview of the nation's literature would be called *Lesen statt klettern*, as Hugo Loetscher's recent study is.⁶²

Whether Adolf Hitler was discouraged from attacking Switzerland because he knew that every treacherous mountain valley was bristling with heavily armed Swiss, or because he saw no benefit in conquering the mountainous country, which, as a neutral state, maintained fragile connecting routes between Germany and Italy as well as important arms factories, the landscape seems to have played a role in the successful and peaceful defence of Switzerland.

⁶⁰ Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, p. 76

⁶¹ Malcolm Pender, 'Franz Hohler und die Zerstörung der Idylle', in *La Suisse – une Idylle? Die Schweiz eine Idylle?*, ed. by Peter Schnyder and Philippe Wellnitz, (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2002), p. 291

⁶² See: Hugo Loetscher, *Lesen statt klettern*, (Zurich: Diogenes, 2003)

Friedrich Dürrenmatt describes war-time Switzerland in *Stoffen*: "es war nicht auszumachen, ob sie ein Gefängnis war, eine belagerte Festung oder eine Produktionsstätte für Hitler."⁶³ Today, the traditional impenetrability of the Alps functions in reverse, with Switzerland becoming increasingly economically dependent on the invasion of tourists. Dürrenmatt also sums up this phenomenon succinctly: "Seit die Natur entdeckt worden war und sich jeder Trottel in der Bergeinsamkeit erhaben fühlen durfte, wurde auch die Fremdenindustrie möglich".⁶⁴ The image of an idyllic, isolated, rural life, which attracts the tourists, is jeopardised not only by the tourists themselves, as they swarm through geranium-bedecked villages in ever increasing numbers, but also by Switzerland's position as a trans-Alpine through-route. This, of course, generates important revenue, but with the increasing volume of traffic, it also puts an enormous strain on the natural environment.⁶⁵

The increasing awareness of the pressure that modern human life puts on the environment, coupled with the local awareness of this threat, has precipitated a deeper commitment to the natural environment in Switzerland. This is evident not only in the extensive recycling programmes, which means Switzerland is the first country to have rubbish criminals, as well as in the Swiss constitution, which is the first to contain an article concerning the value of all creatures,⁶⁶ but it can also be identified in the eco-friendly statement of the Gruppe Olten, one of Switzerland's foremost literary groups. E.Y. Meyer demonstrates quite clearly a concern for the natural environment already in the title of his essay: *Plädoyer – Für die Erhaltung der Vielfalt der Natur beziehungsweise für deren Verteidigung gegen die ihr drohende Vernichtung durch die Einfalt des Menschen*.⁶⁷ In *Empörung durch Landschaften*, Adolf Muschg calls for an appeal, which must be

⁶³ Friedrich Dürrenmatt quoted by Heinz Ludwig Arnold in the introduction to *Meine Schweiz*, (Zurich: Diogenes, 1998), p. 16

⁶⁴ Dürrenmatt, *Meine Schweiz*, p. 7

⁶⁵ See: Jürgen Barkhoff, 'Green Thought in Modern Swiss Literature', in *Green Thought in German Culture*, p. 224

⁶⁶ The article in question entered the Swiss constitution on 17.5.1992. For a full discussion see A. Bondolfi, W. Lesch, D. Pezzoli-Olgati (ed.s), *Würde der Kreatur. Essays zu einem kontroversen Thema*, (Zurich: Pano, 1997)

⁶⁷ E.Y. Meyer, *Plädoyer – Für die Erhaltung der Vielfalt der Natur beziehungsweise deren Verteidigung gegen*

“kompromisslos, vom Beton nicht mehr einzuschüchtern, Protest auf Teufel komm raus”⁶⁸ against the loss of the natural world, the destruction of which is, according to Muschg, a symptom of civilisation. The author draws on the above-mentioned emotional identification often prompted by the natural landscape. He is drawn into reflection on the natural world by the viewing of a Schinkel landscape painting and is perturbed to realise that what was once a natural landscape has now become an artificial one. He compares Zollikon wood in his childhood to how it appears 50 years later and is shocked by the result. A critical element of this change is the transformation of perception. What was once a wood is now an “Erholungsgebiet”.⁶⁹ Nature no longer exists in its own right but must meet performance-related criteria. Muschg and Meyer, two of Switzerland’s literary grand old men, demonstrate with their impassioned pleas, that environmental concern has become an important theme in recent Swiss writing. This kind of commitment fits smoothly into the vogue for *littérature engagée* that characterised Swiss writing in the 1960s and 1970s⁷⁰ and yet it simultaneously represents a new point of departure within that framework.

However, given that the natural environment plays such a pivotal role in Swiss life, it is not surprising that it constitutes a prominent feature in Swiss literature, over and above ‘green’ issues. Indeed, if writers deal with societal problems, then a society built both physically and psychologically around the mountains, will necessarily produce literature that is deeply concerned with this natural environment. This concern is perceptible in the thematic bias towards the relationship between man and nature, which is so evident in recent Swiss writing. These works cannot, however, be classed simply as “Öko-Literatur”⁷¹, because they

die ihr drohende Vernichtung durch die Einfalt des Menschen, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982)

⁶⁸ Adolf Muschg, *Empörung durch Landschaften. Vernünftige Drohreden*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), p. 18

⁶⁹ Muschg, *Empörung durch Landschaften*, p. 17

⁷⁰ See: Pia Reinacher, *Je Suisse. Zur Aktuellen Lage der Schweizer Literatur*, (Nagel and Kimche in Carl Hanser Verlag: Munich and Vienna, 2003), p. 14

⁷¹ R. Wiegmann, ‘Graue Gegenwart - Aufgehellte Zukunft. Literarische Texte im Umfeld der Grünen’, in *Öko-Kunst. Zur Ästhetik der Grünen*, ed.s Jost Hermand and Hubert Müller, (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1989), pp 125-48

are not merely preoccupied with the defence of the environment. Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the champions of ecological literature, defines ecocriticism thus:

ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of language and literature.⁷²

Although this flies in the face of postmodernist literary theory, which places literature as if in a vacuum and treats a given work as an isolated entity, this kind of attitude appears to be particularly apposite in relation to Swiss literature in general. Even a work which shows no interest in environmental issues, such as Peter Weber's *Der Wettermacher* (1996), for example, still remains embedded in an identifiable localised rural environment. Though the novel is primarily a linguistically playful work, it is set in Toggenburg, and the rural backwater remains at its heart.⁷³ Equally telling are some attempts made to move away from the traditional rural image, because often the image stays defiantly present, even if only as a point of departure. Franz Böni's novel *Die Alpen* (1983) alludes, in its title, to Albrecht von Haller's hymn to the traditional mountain existence, but is in fact a depiction of contemporary Swiss life, which has little interaction with the mountains at all.⁷⁴ The image of a rural idyll reappears in his short stories, where characters with a stereotypical illusion about mountain life-styles seek a kind of pastoral relief at high altitude. Although Böni explodes such stereotypes with harsh depictions of the mountain way of life, it is indicative of the significance of such myths that a writer should set about destroying them.⁷⁵ With the natural environment so deeply ingrained into the general consciousness it is reasonable to expect that

⁷² Cheryll Glotfelty, *Introduction. Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis*, in Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (ed.s), *The Ecocriticism Reader*, (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996), p. xvi

⁷³ See: Reinacher, *Je Suisse*, p. 10

⁷⁴ See: Franz Böni, *Die Alpen*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983)

⁷⁵ See: Franz Böni, *Ein Wanderer im Alpenregen*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979)

within Swiss literature the ecological texts themselves will often demonstrate a sophisticated narrative approach to mankind's relationship to nature.

1.1.6 Ecocriticism

In recent years, the reception of ecological narratives has changed with the development of ecocriticism, which has helped to draw attention to the place of ecology in literature.

It [ecocriticism] seeks to redress the marginalisation of the natural environment in critical trends since the seventies, without losing sight of either the psychological complexities, the linguistic innovation or the ideological bias identified in literary texts by psychoanalytic criticism, poststructuralism and new historicism.⁷⁶

The term 'ecological' has been defined firstly as describing simply that which is in some way related to ecology, that is the study of the relationship between plants, animals or peoples and the environment. It has also been defined, however, as using methods that are *beneficial* to the natural environment.⁷⁷ Ecocriticism, as defined by Lawrence Buell, also puts the emphasis on a "spirit of commitment to environmental praxis".⁷⁸ 'Eco'-anything seems therefore to be a vague way of referring to something that shows some concern with the natural environment. This latitude in definition is useful for this study of recent Swiss ecological writing, since the texts investigated here offer very different ways of approaching ecology. They range from Walther Kauer's vehement denunciation of 'progress' in *Spätholz*, through the apathetic indifference of Max Frisch's narrator in *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*, to the subjective irrationality of Gertrud Leutenegger.

⁷⁶ Axel Goodbody, 'From Raabe to Amery: German Literature in Ecocritical Perspective', in *From Classical Shades to Vickers Victorious: Shifting Perspectives in British German Studies*, ed. Steve Giles and Peter Graves, (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 1999), pp 77-78

⁷⁷ *The Chambers Dictionary*, (Edinburgh: Chambers Harrap, 1993).

⁷⁸ Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination. Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), p. 430

As Glotfelty points out in the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, if writers had not taken up the cause then ecological problems, which naturally implicate everyone and not just scientists, would be much less likely to have been numbered among the "hot topics" of our time.⁷⁹ The practical aspect of publicising problems is not the only reason why the imaginative medium of fiction can be usefully implemented for ecological purposes. In order to give an answer to the grave ecological questions posed to humankind, Edward O. Wilson reckons: "We will be right to listen carefully to the heart, then act with rational intention and all the tools we can gather and bring to bear."⁸⁰ This quotation illustrates how scientists, such as Wilson, recognise the importance of emotional responses and imaginative expression as crucial factors involved in our assessment of how to proceed *vis à vis* the natural environment. The real problem for the doomsday prophets is that the ecological apocalypse they predict is essentially unknowable. Their predictions remain forecasts into the distant future and involve too many variables. As such, they contain a high degree of uncertainty, and so key issues tend to become lost in a morass of inconclusive debate. Here we come up against problems of terminology. The word apocalypse has already been mentioned twice. The term is firstly problematic in that it implies the ability to foretell the future, since it refers to God's revelation to St. John in the last book of the bible.⁸¹ The omnipotent power invested in the term is at odds with the essential ignorance mankind possesses about the future. The second problem with the use of this word is that the biblical overtones invest the possible ecological catastrophe with the sense that the catastrophe is a form of retribution for sins committed against nature. This overtone animates nature in an anthropomorphic way, which could undermine any attempt to reassess man's relationship to nature, which many writers and thinkers consider necessary, as we shall see. Despite the tensions at the heart of the use of this

⁷⁹ Glotfelty, *Introduction*, in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, p. xvi

⁸⁰ Wilson, *The Future of Life*, (London: Little, Brown, 2002), p. 111

⁸¹ New Testament, Revelations

word in this context, it is widely employed with a hazy range of meanings. It can be understood as a general way to invest a natural disaster with a degree of human causality.

Evidence for the contentious nature of the debates over potential ecological disasters can be seen in the growth in popularity and influence of alternative scientific theories, such as James Lovelock's Gaia theory. Gaia is Lovelock's shorthand for the idea that the earth is a self-regulating entity akin to a single organism.⁸² Although most serious scientific ecologists question his work, Lovelock's holisitic theory represents a different perspective and diminishes the place of mankind. As the subtitle suggests - "A new look at life on Earth" - the book brings to our attention the possibility that our faith in science could be naïve and that there could be another way of approaching our attempts to understand the world around us. This new approach constitutes the impact of his work, for the theory, as Lovelock admits, "is scientifically untestable."⁸³ This is not meant as an avowal of imperfection, rather it is intended as a pointer to our possible incapacity ever to fathom life fully. Illustrating the value of such a novel approach, one of the central tenets of Gaia - the interconnectedness of life and the vital interplay of species - has since become an accepted part of biological thought. Indeed, William Rueckert calls it the "First Law of Ecology."⁸⁴ Although *Gaia* is hardly a work of narrative fiction, it nevertheless is not classed as a conventional scientific text and so highlights firstly the value of airing unconventional opinions and secondly that science cannot provide all the answers. Literature, unlike science, offers an alternative discourse, a realm for discussion and imaginative speculation on this unknown future.

Despite the important role that literature might play in raising the profile of ecological issues, there has been a relative dearth of scholarly interest in the topic, within the field of German literary criticism. Jost Hermand, one of the leading Germanists researching ecological literature, notes in his *Geschichte der Germanistik* that there are few Germanists

⁸² See: James Lovelock, *Gaia. A new look at life on Earth*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989)

⁸³ Lovelock, *Gaia*, p. ix

⁸⁴ William Rueckert, 'Literature and Ecology', in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, p. 108

engaged in studying this area.⁸⁵ Axel Goodbody, president of the newly formed European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and the Environment, confirms Hermand's observation in the volume *Literatur und Ökologie*, saying that while other topics such as GDR literature or women's literature regularly receive treatment in chapters dedicated solely to them, ecological writing is not usually allotted its own corner in general studies of German literature.⁸⁶ There are exceptions to the rule, and the establishment of the above-mentioned organisation suggests that this hitherto neglected area may receive some attention, but in general it still remains largely under-researched. This is particularly true in the case of German-Swiss literature studies, where the emphases in literary research remain on the discussion of literature as a forum for social change,⁸⁷ the Swissness of Swiss literature,⁸⁸ and the notion of Switzerland as a prison.⁸⁹ The contributions of Malcolm Pender and Jürgen Barkhoff counter this trend in Great Britain and Ireland. Barkhoff's essay 'Green Thought in Modern Swiss literature', in Colin Riordan's collection *Green Thought in German Culture*, highlights the major works with ecological themes and formed a point of departure for this thesis.⁹⁰ Pender has recently published an article that explicitly investigates the role of ecological themes in works by Franz Hohler.⁹¹ He has also published a more general article on Swiss literature from the 1980s that is concerned with the threatened natural environment.⁹² This thesis is conceived as a further contribution to this field of German-Swiss studies by analysing what can be seen as a significant trend in recent Swiss literature.

⁸⁵ See: Jost Hermand, *Geschichte der Germanistik*, (Hamburg: Reinbek, 1994), p. 240

⁸⁶ See: Axel Goodbody, *Literatur und Ökologie*, his introduction to *Literatur und Ökologie*, ed. by A. Goodbody, *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik*, vol. 43, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), p. 12

⁸⁷ See: Reinacher, *Je Suisse*, p. 7

⁸⁸ This is demonstrated by the large number of essays on the topic as well as by the many conferences and public discussions, such as *Nationale Literaturen heute - ein Fantom? Die Imagination und Tradition des Schweizerischen als Problem*, which took place at the Schauspielhaus in Zurich, June 2003.

⁸⁹ See, for example: Paul Nizon, *Diskurs in der Enge. Aufsätze zur Schweizer Literatur*, (Zurich: Arche, 1973)

⁹⁰ See: Barkhoff, 'Green Thought in Modern Swiss Literature' in *Green Thought in German Culture*, pp 223-241

⁹¹ See: Pender, 'Franz Hohler und die Zerstörung der Idylle'

⁹² See: Pender, 'Die bedrohte Umwelt im deutschschweizer Roman der 80er Jahre'

1.2 The Ecological Voice

This voyage of discovery into the notion of literary voice begins in Prestwick airport. A large placard of the region's most famous son, Robert Burns, greets those arriving in the Ayrshire airport. It bears the inscription "Prestwick International Airport salutes Robert Burns/ Poet of Humanity/ Voice of People Everywhere." Understood literally, this would appear to suggest that Burns functions as a medium for a horde of mutes. However, 'voice' here does not refer to the physical control of the tongue, the epiglottis and the larynx but instead works as a metaphor and points to Burns' capacities as a teller of other people's tales. 'Voice of People Everywhere' suggests the poet's ability to capture the feelings of a large body of people and to pronounce something on their behalf. The sense of community evident in this claim, which is broadened by the fact that it is placed in an international airport, hints at the popular appeal of Burns. This idea is strengthened by a quotation from Burns' famous egalitarian poem *For a' that and a' that*, which runs under the image of the poet: "It's coming yet, for a' that/ That man to man the world o'er/ Shall brothers be, for a' that." These lines demonstrate Burns' own belief in his ability to understand mankind as a whole, if not also his ability to express something on its behalf. Returning to the words of the placard, the sense of gratitude for a service rendered, which is suggested by the notion of saluting, points towards the idea that this body of people would not have had a means of expression had it not been for the efforts of Scotland's poet. 'Voice' in this context therefore refers to giving expression to an underprivileged community, which typically cannot or does not achieve articulation.

The idea that a work of literature with a single author can stand for the sentiments of a group can also be found in the notion of "bardic voice." Just as the poetry of Robert Burns can be considered as the expression of a wider general public, the voice of the bard can be understood to represent a nation. It is therefore possible that the voice of a text can belong to beings that are not in any direct way related to the authorship of the text. As we shall see with other forms of voice, the bardic version is reliant on some form of external pressure. As

Donald Wesling and Tadeusz Ślawek note, the bardic voice comes to the fore when there is a need for national unity, such as in times of invasion or in times of imperial expansion.⁹³

General Bernard Montgomery said that history was the victor's second triumph over the defeated. His words indicate an association between power and the ability to tell one's tale. Finding a literary voice can therefore become a process of emancipation of the underprivileged and is often a task laden with political and social significance. Feminist critics have picked up on this association between power and discourse. Susan Sniader Lanser claims that "few words are as resonant to contemporary feminists as 'voice'"⁹⁴ and Luce Irigaray explains why, saying that to find a voice is to find a way, thus encouraging the search for a female voice in order to find female power.⁹⁵ A brief look at titles of books by feminist critics demonstrates the prevalent fashion for resurrecting a "lost" feminist voice or searching for a "different" perspective from that of the traditional authority of the white Christian male.⁹⁶ This understanding of voice is not restricted to feminists. Other communities, which have been, in terms of literature, previously inarticulate, such as ethnic minorities, colonised peoples or homosexuals, have also emphasised the significance of finding a voice.⁹⁷ With the demise of metanarratives in the postmodern age there has been a prolific diversification of voices, undermining faith in central and accepted values.⁹⁸

One of the reasons why such weight is attached to literary expression is that the forum of literature has often offered the possibility for a discussion of topics, which have otherwise

⁹³ See: Donald Wesling and Tadeusz Ślawek, *Literary Voice. The Calling of Jonah*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 6

⁹⁴ Susan Sniader Lanser, *Fictions of Authority. Women Writers and Narrative Voice*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p.3

⁹⁵ See: Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 209

⁹⁶ Some examples of such feminist texts are: Moira Burgess, *The Other Voice: Scottish Women's Writing from 1808*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1987); Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); *Gender and Literary Voice*, ed. by Janet Todd, (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980)

⁹⁷ Some examples are: *1492-1992: The Voice of the Victims*, ed. by Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo, (London: SCM Press, 1990); William Harlan Hale, *Horace Greeley: Voice of the People*, (New York: Harper, 1950)

⁹⁸ For a fuller discussion of the effect of postmodernism see: Paul Michael Lützeler, 'The Postmodern German Novel' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern German Novel*, ed. by Graham Bartram, (Cambridge:

been denied an arena for public debate. This opportunity afforded by literature has been exploited not only by feminist writers, such as Elfriede Jelinek, for example,⁹⁹ but also by politically engaged writers deprived of a political stage, such as the Scottish nationalist poet Hugh MacDiarmid¹⁰⁰ and writers in the German Democratic Republic, like Christa Wolf. Reflecting again on the relationship between power and voice, we can see that literature is not only the voice of power but can also be an empowering voice.¹⁰¹

Considering the attitude of mankind to nature, as explored in the preceding sections, the natural environment can be considered as another body that has suffered, like the other oppressed communities mentioned above, under the hegemony of the white Christian male perspective.¹⁰² Similar to these silenced and victimised communities, the natural environment has been largely literarily as well as literally inarticulate. Lacking human language, the natural environment can only find its way into literature via the prism of a human author. Burns, who, as we have seen, is considered capable of expression on the part of others, indicates his own faith in his alleged capacity, in a poem where he gives the natural environment a voice. In *Verses on the Destruction of the Woods near Drumlanrig* the lyrical 'I' encounters "the genius of the stream." This anthropomorphic figure, which equates to the spirit of the natural environment, is endowed with the power of speech and exchanges verses with Burns' protagonist, discussing the demise of the woods on the banks of the Nith. The polarity between mankind and the natural environment, which is set up by the dialogue, culminates with the "sprite" bemoaning "Man! cruel man!", who is to blame for the destruction of the

Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp 266-279

⁹⁹ See: Allyson Fiddler, 'Subjectivity and women's writing in the 1970s and early 1980s', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern German Novel*, p. 263

¹⁰⁰ See: Scott Lyall, *The Politics of Place in the Work of Hugh MacDiarmid*, unpublished doctoral thesis, (University of St. Andrews, 2004), p. 5. Lyall discusses the case of MacDiarmid who saw his poetry as more influential as political propaganda than his political propaganda itself.

¹⁰¹ See: Dell Hymes, *Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality. Towards an Understanding of Voice*, (London, U.K. and Bristol, U.S.A.: Taylor Francis, 1996)

¹⁰² See: section 1.2, 'Literature and Ecology'.

trees.¹⁰³ By the simplest means of personifying nature, Burns gives the natural environment a voice, expressing a sentiment that he considers germane to it in the given situation.

Part of what goes into defining a particular voice is the choice of subject matter. The act of poetic choice, as an element in the creation of a text, is in itself an endorsement of the content. Literature can be defined through this choice and the process of selection and omission will leave its mark on a work. Mikhail Bakhtin makes this point: "Reality that is unrefracted and, as it were, raw is not able to enter into the content of literature."¹⁰⁴ The fact that there are different genres, such as detective stories or thrillers, is proof of the existence of norms and conventions related to the subject matter of a work. Leslie Fiedler highlights this in regard to feminist texts:

Wherever fiction turns from outdoors to indoors, from field to boudoir, from flight to love, from action to analysis, from reason to sensibility the female persona becomes, even for male authors, an inevitable mouthpiece.¹⁰⁵

For Fiedler, the choice of subject matter is a crucial element for establishing literary voice, which outweighs even the author's perspective.

As we have seen in the previous section, ecological literature has been defined as works which deal with mankind's relationship to nature. Burns' lament for the lost trees on the banks of the Nith fits squarely into this category and meets Fiedler's subject matter requirements for voice. Burns' technique however remains essentially anthropocentric. The sentiment that supposedly belongs to the natural environment in Burns' poem is probably much more akin to the poet's shock at finding a well-loved place altered, than anything in fact

¹⁰³ J. Logie Robertson (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Robert Burns*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), pp 255-257. There are other instances of ecological concern in Burns' work. See, for example, *The Humble Petition of Bruar Water to the Noble Duke of Athole*, in Robertson, pp 131-133

¹⁰⁴ P.N. Medvedev and M.M. Bakhtin, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship. A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. by Albert J. Wehrle, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978; first published in Russian: St. Petersburg, 1928), p. 17

¹⁰⁵ Leslie Fiedler, foreword to Caesar R. Blake, *Dorothy Richardson*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press,

felt by the environment, whose feelings are notoriously difficult to establish. The personification of the river strengthens this suspicion because the aspects bewailed by the sprite, such as the lost shade and beauty of the trees, are precisely the things that humans appreciate.¹⁰⁶ The problem posed by anthropocentrism for ecological literature has long been recognised. Wilhelm von Humboldt goes so far as to say that all cultural forms of nature are fundamentally anthropocentric.

[Die Natur] wird in einen Gedanken umgeschaffen, dadurch erhält sie zweierlei: sie wird der menschlichen Natur ähnlicher gemacht, da menschliche Kräfte sie in ihrer Vorstellung zusammenfassen, und sie erhält eigne, einschränkende Grenzen und wechselseitige Bestimmung ihrer Teile von der Phantasie, weil aus dem unermeßlichen All der Natur ein Stück herausgerissen und in ein selbständiges Ganze verwandelt ist.¹⁰⁷

Attempts to find an aesthetic for the natural world have often resulted in simplistic human allegories, such as Henry Williamson's *Tarka the Otter* (1927) or Richard Adams *Watership Down* (1974), where the animal subjects think in human terms. Although this narrative strategy perhaps facilitates empathy for human readers, it tends to preclude any reassessment of human attitudes and constructs out of nature an opposing pole to mankind. Although such texts can achieve an aim in that they may draw attention to ecological concerns, they offer neither alternative modes of thought nor new approaches to the natural environment. Sniader Lanser has identified this as a problem for authors trying to subvert existing hegemonies. In adopting rhetorical norms, which may enable an easier reception of their work, such writers' attempts to undermine authority may in fact strengthen the position of that authority by acquiescing to its methods. "Writers and narrators may need to strike a delicate balance in

1960), x

¹⁰⁶ Wilson, *Biophilia*, p. 111

¹⁰⁷ Wilhelm von Humboldt quoted in Peter von Matt, *Öffentliche Verehrung der Luftgeister. Reden zur Literatur*, (Munich and Vienna: Carl Hanser, 2003), p. 18

accommodating and subverting dominant rhetorical practices.”¹⁰⁸ This realisation problematises the simple content definition of an ecological voice and draws attention to the importance of narrative technique, which cannot be ignored for a full understanding of a text.

At this juncture, we must turn to narratology for another understanding of the term voice. In contrast to the sociological view discussed above, voice is defined by poetologists as a group of characteristics displayed by a narrator in terms of tone or style.¹⁰⁹ This understanding of voice concentrates on the way in which a narrator addresses the reader, rather than on a narrator’s perception of events. Gerard Genette argues that “in the most unobtrusive narrative, someone is speaking to me, telling me a story, is inviting me to listen as he tells it.”¹¹⁰ Although Genette uses the masculine third person singular pronoun for the teller because the French language does not allow him an impersonal third person, it is perhaps more accurate in English to use the impersonal pronoun ‘it’ since narrators have the capacity to move from perspective to perspective in a wholly supra-human way. ‘It’ avoids the confusion generated by the suggestion of a person created by the pronouns ‘he’ and ‘she.’ Nevertheless, Genette’s point remains valid in that for us, as readers, to accept a story, we need to sense an organising force behind any given narrative, an unifying ‘voice’ that speaks to us, even if this ‘voice’ includes many different perspectives. This need, which is probably archaic and derived from oral story-telling, is still considered conventional.

The different literary understandings of voice discussed here have generally been treated as separate avenues of study. The sociological conception is generalising, mimetic, political and positivist, while the narratologists explore technical, semiotic and particular aspects of a given work. The sociologists investigate the narrator’s perception of events, the narratologists, the narrator’s style and tone. On the surface, this division appears a justified

¹⁰⁸ Lanser, *Fictions of Authority*, p. 5

¹⁰⁹ See: Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)

¹¹⁰ Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 101

categorisation. However, if there is a discernible unity of voice suggested by a group of characteristics (Genette's teller behind the tale), can there not also be an anthropomorphic perception pertaining to that unity? Joyce Carol Oates urges against such a connection being made: "For a practising writer, artist of any kind, "sociology", "politics", and even "biology" are subordinate to matters of personal vision."¹¹¹ Oates ignores, though, that personal vision is heavily influenced by sociology, politics, and biology. If we assume that personal vision is affected by the social context, then the division between narratological and sociological conceptions of voice would appear to be an over-simplified and deceptive dichotomy. This is because it seeks to discount the possibility of interplay between the two kinds of voice, suggesting, if the argument is extrapolated, that both might exist in isolation. Without a narratological investigation of voice, the sociological reading becomes essentialist and reduces literature to the product of a given social and ideological environment, a mere reflection and not an entity in itself. At the same time, reductive formalist poetics can disconnect literature from human history, treating it as if it were an isolated phenomenon in a vacuum. A combination of the two voices is relatively uncommon in literary scholarship, with the significant exceptions of Bakhtin, for socialist poetics, and Sniader Lanser and Dale M. Bauer for feminist criticism. Taking Bakhtin's notion of "sociological poetics" as a lead, such a synthesis offers a fruitful line of enquiry. Bakhtin is insistent in his linking of social reality to literature, saying: "The literary structure, like every ideological structure, refracts the generating socio-economic reality, and does so in its own way." At the same time, he criticises those who do not recognise the "ideological independence and originality" of a work, which lies in its "artistic structure." Formalists do not escape criticism. He lambasts their faith in the extra-social existence of literary structure calling their system "a magnificent *reductio ad absurdum* of principled non-sociological poetics." Bakhtin seems to understand literature as a kind of cultural seismograph: without systematically and analytically explaining

¹¹¹ Joyce Carol Oates, 'Is there a female voice? Joyce Carol Oates replies:', in *Gender and Literary Voice*, ed. by

anything, it can sense and display new ideas, which are nevertheless fundamentally linked to reality. Thus he considers that literature can be the birthplace of ideology.¹¹²

Ecocritics are notoriously shy of using any kind of theoretical framework to deal with texts and it is therefore unsurprising that this kind of approach has rarely been taken in this area. However, if writers do engage in the type of subversion of rhetorical norms that Sniader Lanser refers to, any worthwhile investigation of ecological literature will require research into narrative structures. Introducing an ecocritical volume of essays, Richard Kerridge gives a succinct example of such an approach, which illustrates its value. He demonstrates how dominant narrative forms do not cope well with ecological problems, giving the example of a newspaper report in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster. The reporter highlights the difficulty of properly representing the crisis but then quickly offers a solution to the representational conundrum by using a Second World War motif: disaster, followed by heroism results in victory. The victory gives the narrative a satisfying sense of closure. The trouble is that ecological crisis does not fit easily into such a norm since outcomes seem gloomy and more importantly are uncertain. As Kerridge puts it "The real, material ecological crisis, then, is also a cultural crisis, a crisis of representation."¹¹³ Carl Amery, the Bavarian author and environmentalist, also senses this crisis. "Wir alle, wir Künstler und Literaten, nehmen notgedrungen an einer Lotterie teil, deren Ausgang wir nicht kennen." He attacks the kind of attitude perceptible in simple texts with anthropomorphic figures from the natural world and calls instead for a change in perception. "Naturschutz" for Amery is an invalid mode of conduct because of the element of control inherent in "Schutz." As a human-centred activity, it has focussed on areas of the natural environment that most appeal to humans: aesthetically beautiful flowers or landscapes. This is the kind of sentiment that lies at the heart of Burns' Nith poem. Amery illustrates that such criteria are not based on ecological value. He sees a

Janet Todd, (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980), pp 10-11

¹¹² See: Bakhtin, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, pp 16-37

¹¹³ Richard Kerridge, 'Introduction', in Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells (ed.s), *Writing the Environment*:

“Neu-Orientierung unseres Denkens und Fühlens” as necessary and regards a new aesthetic, which puts humans and nature on the same level, as a way of achieving this re-orientation.¹¹⁴

This thesis investigates the work of five authors, who endeavour to move away from conventional attitudes towards the natural environment and thus, to varying degrees, exemplify Amery's notion of re-orientation. In their different ways, they all seek to reassess the prevalent faith in the dominant Western, technocratic, capitalist and exploitative approach to nature and its narrative modes. They try to give a voice to the underprivileged community of the natural world.

Ecocriticism and Literature, (London and New York: Zed, 1998), p. 4

¹¹⁴ Carl Amery, ‘Gedanken über Natur, Naturschutz und Kunst’ in *Bileams Esel. Konservative Aufsätze*, (Munich: List, 1991), pp 250-271

2. Capitalism, Fascism and Subsistence Farming: Walther Kauer's *Spätholz*

Walther Kauer has been compared to Ernest Hemingway for the concise and sparse immediacy of his prose and for the tense, confrontational situations, laden with a sense of fated climax, which the Bern author favours.¹¹⁵ Anecdotal evidence suggests that Kauer, like Hemingway, found raw material for his prose in his colourful personal experiences. Moving to the rural canton of the Grisons in the 1970s, the author became a radical activist. He became involved in protest movements against atomic energy as well as the flooding of valleys resulting from the construction of dams for storage electricity. As a pragmatist, he saw no problem in employing all possible means to achieve these ecological goals, which he considered vital. He adopted a stance of trying to reconcile differing political factions that shared common fears over the technical exploitation of the natural world. Coupled with his notorious quick temper, this position brought him on occasion into violent arguments with other campaigners, who were unwilling to accept such a Machiavellian attitude.¹¹⁶ Written during Kauer's sojourn in the mountains, *Spätholz* (1976) has a belligerent mountain farmer as the central protagonist, who displays, in defence of his cause, a violent passion akin to the author's own fervour. Kauer's character, Rocco Canonica, is a septuagenarian Ticinese, who is preparing to assassinate his German neighbour in a symbolic act of revenge for the profit-driven destruction of an eco-centric way of life.

The 2002 edition of the novel has an unusually geographically precise exergue: "*Roman aus dem Tessin.*"¹¹⁷ A classifying exergue usually only defines a work's form and therefore the topographical information on the cover of the recent edition seems out of place. The content has been allowed to spill over into the formal categorisation of the novel.

¹¹⁵ See: Bruno Schmid, 'Wiedergelesen: Der alte Mann und der Baum' in *Aargauer Zeitung*, 26.01.02

¹¹⁶ Bernard Schlup in conversation with the author, Bern, 07.07.2003. Schlup was the editor of the left-wing, Chur-based journal *Viva*, to which Kauer contributed during his time in the Grisons.

¹¹⁷ Walther Kauer, *Spätholz*, (Basel: Lenos, 2002; first published: Zurich and Cologne: Benziger, 1976). The first editions of the work are more standardly referred to simply as 'Roman'. Further references to the Lenos edition

However, rather than being an editorial error, this exergal oddity indicates firstly the links between form and content, which are central to the novel, and secondly, it suggests the importance of the surrounding environment in giving the work its form. The title and the epigraph hint at the significance of the environment in the work too. The epigraph informs us in a bland scientific tone that the title refers to the second period of a tree's yearly growth. Superficially, it would appear that neither title nor epigraph have much connection with the content of the tale, which deals with the disintegration of the traditional subsistence way of life in a Ticino valley, seen through the prism of the life-story of the protagonist. While epigraphs are typically used to provide an illuminating quotation from another author, Kauer opts instead for a slightly bewildering snippet of sylvan natural history. The reasons for the unusual perspective and challenge to conventions suggested by the title, epigraph and exergue are given fuller explanation in the course of the novel and the connections between the form, the content and the natural environment become clearer. Rocco Canonica has seen the traditional way of life in the rural community transformed by technical modernisation. A close-knit agricultural community, within which Rocco's father eked out a modest subsistence as a farmer, gives way to the forces of globalising capitalism, and a way of life is destroyed. This transgenerational tale is brought to an abrupt end by the effects of the hydro-electric dam built above the village. The dam both metaphorically and literally wrecks the traditional mode of existence. At first, it changes the emphasis from brutal subsistence to bare-faced profit-seeking. Ultimately it collapses, and the resultant landslide wipes the village off the hillside.

The narrative structure of Kauer's novel is the complex basis of his ecological voice. The 'Erzählzeit', or notional present, lasts approximately 24 hours. The first chapter begins with Rocco at his kitchen table polishing his rifle in preparation for shooting his German neighbour, Herr Korten. Korten has won the legal right to fell a tree, which Rocco refers to as his "Lebensbaum". Korten wishes to dispose of the tree because it spoils his view of the lake

and Rocco wishes to defend it because he considers his life to be bound up with the tree's existence. This level of the narrative, the 'Erzählzeit', relates the minimal action that takes place in the night and the consequences of the felling of the tree on the following day. The 'erzählte Zeit' constitutes the contents of Rocco's memory and therefore stretches back generations. However, this is not related chronologically. The brief synopsis of the first chapter given above demonstrates how the narrator supplies the reader from the outset with a summary of the main issues in the novel, which will be more fully developed in the course of the work, via disparate chunks of Rocco's memory. These oblige the reader to piece together the story like a jigsaw puzzle. The opening also loads the text with tension since we are prepared for a dramatic denouement. Similar to Heinrich Böll's *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum*, we begin the novel with full knowledge of the identity of the characters involved, without the sort of mystery associated with a detective story. Instead, as with Böll's text, the interest of the text lies in how the protagonist comes to his gruesome intention.

At the start of each of the seven chapters the narrative returns to the notional present and thus to Rocco's murderous plan. Each time we return to this primary level, Rocco's memory is then stimulated by something else in the room and we are presented with another series of recollections, focalised by the protagonist. Within the chapters there are also moments when Rocco returns to the present, so that we are constantly weaving back and forth between present and past. Kauer's rejection of an Aristotelian linear narrative structure raises several questions. Why does he choose this strategy? What purpose does the intertwining of the various narrative levels serve? Why should the eve of the felling of a tree be attributed such narrative significance?

The constant returning to the 'Erzählzeit' and Rocco's crisis centralises the tree. It creates a sense that the narrative wanders back and forth around the farmer's "Lebensbaum", just as the farmer himself has done all his life. It is as if we explore the various branches of his

life in the 'erzählte Zeit' but must always return to the trunk of the tree, the 'Erzählzeit.' The connections between man and tree go beyond superficial conjecture. The opening lines introduce the reader to a tense narrative present:

Um sieben Uhr würden sie kommen. Sie kommen immer am frühen Morgen, wenn sie etwas Ungutes vorhaben. Im Morgengrauen werden Verurteilte abgeholt. Rocco wußte nicht wo er das gehört oder gelesen hatte. (7)

From just these words it is not at first clear who or what has been condemned. Furthermore the syntactic proximity of Rocco and the reference to the executions suggests that Rocco is perhaps heading for trouble. The tension in the narratorial present, created by the uncertainty over exactly what will happen at dawn, who 'they' are and how Rocco is implicated, is maintained over the next ten pages, while temporal digressions introduce us to the protagonist's life. Only after these first ten pages do we learn who the unnamed 'they' are and that they are in fact coming to fell a tree. We will see, however, that it is not merely to create a tense opening that the threat is linked to Rocco in the reader's imagination. The links between the tree and the farmer have greater significance and, although we discover that the tree is the "Verurteilte", the mystery of the first passage is only solved at the end of the narrative with the disastrous landslide that deprives Rocco of his chance of shooting his neighbour. This dramatic climax also unites the fates of both tree and protagonist, thus justifying the confusion created at the beginning.

Further parallels are drawn in the novel between the fate of the tree and that of Rocco. Having worked very hard to build up their farm to support their modest needs, the Canonica family is ravaged by fire. The farm is destroyed and Rocco's parents lose their lives. Both Rocco and the tree survive. The separate tales of how they survive are told

consecutively and the arising pronominal confusion links the tree and the man on a linguistic level:

Rocco sah in die Krone des Nußbaums. Er hatte das Feuer dieser Nacht überstanden. Zwar hatte er alle Blätter verloren, und während der ersten beiden Jahre nach der Brandnacht hatten nur zwei oder drei Zweige ausgeschlagen. (167)

The 'er' in the second sentence could be Rocco or the tree. Even in the third sentence it is not entirely clear if the leaves are metaphors for Rocco's parents and so it is only in the final clause that it becomes certain that the tree is the subject. This confusion emphasises the similarity of their fates.

It is not until the final chapter, when the tree has been felled, that we discover exactly why Rocco refers to the tree as his "Lebensbaum" (227). In this way the tree lends circularity to the novel: it begins with the threat to the tree and ends with it being cut down and an explanation of what it means. Rocco's father planted the tree when Rocco was born, putting the placenta under the roots of the tree to nourish it. In this way the tree's life is bound up with Rocco's, and tradition insists that if the tree dies then the man will die too. This tradition may seem antiquated, superstitious and unscientific, but at the same time it represents a way of showing respect for nature by symbolising how the farmer's life is closely related to his surrounding environment. Leslie Van Gelder has argued persuasively for a comprehension of person as place. She bases her argument on the fact that we all begin our lives as part of another place, namely our mother's womb. After birth, we appear to lose this physical connection with place when the umbilicus is cut. However, as Van Gelder puts it:

Our lungs become a new umbilical cord. Just as that physical conduit once served as a passage of relationship with our mothers, breathing offers us a passage of relationship with all living

beings in the world. We take breath into our bodies and exhale a changed version back again. In this way we continually connect [...] to the physical body of our world.¹¹⁸

The burying of the placenta, a practice common among primitive peoples, acknowledges this on-going interrelationship.

The close relationship between Rocco and the tree is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that once the tree is felled it is like a diary for Rocco: "Er, der nie daran gedacht hätte ein Tagebuch zu führen - hier lag sein Tagebuch aufgeschlagen vor ihm." (217) We can see how the various years of his life unfolded. As a subsistence farmer, his life is directly and essentially linked to the natural environment and the weather, and so the dead tree is a fairly accurate summary of his life, with the 'Frühholz' ring showing how good the harvest was and the 'Spätholz' ring showing the quality of the vine harvest. The old farmer's ability to read these rings is another indication of his familiarity with the natural world around him. Rocco looks at the core and considers the year of his birth, 1900, which some saw as the sign of the approaching apocalypse and others as a new beginning (218). He can look at two black rings and remember the tragic fire. But once the tree is felled his diary is ominously finished. The landslide occurs in the night following the felling of the tree. It brings the novel to a close, and thus the work finishes as it starts, with the "Lebensbaum". The reasons for the enigmatic title and epigraph finally become clearer. They emphasise the parallels between tree and narrative that are suggested by the comparison made in the text between tree and diary. The novel fulfils a similar role to the tree since it too tells Rocco's story.

Simon Meacher perceptively points out that the felling of the tree has a further implication. Deforestation is partly to blame for the disaster. Traditionally, the villagers looked after a "Schutzwald" above the village. This was there to hold the steep sides of the mountain together and so prevent a landslide. When the dam was constructed, the wood was

¹¹⁸ Leslie Van Gelder, 'The Philosophy of Place. The Power of Story', unpublished paper delivered at the

cut down and concrete walls were erected instead. These prove to be insufficient and the mountain gives way. By syntagmatic implication, the felling of the symbolically significant “Lebensbaum” is linked to the landslide, which is in part due to deforestation. Kauer thus links a spiritual ignorance of the natural world to an ignorance of how to safely co-exist with the natural world.¹¹⁹ Disastrously, the villagers have gone from regarding the natural environment as a “Mitwelt” to seeing it as an “Umwelt”, to borrow Klaus Meyer-Abich’s differentiation. They no longer regard themselves as part of their natural world and neglect to maintain an active relationship with it. Instead, they consider themselves apart from it and able to banish it (represented here by the mountain) behind concrete walls.¹²⁰

The two different perspectives regarding the turn of the century, which Rocco mentions in passing as he stares at the growth rings of his tree, sum up the central tension in the novel. This tension is between the old traditional way of life and the new, capitalist and technically modernised mode. This dichotomy is explicitly discussed by the characters in the novel. It first comes to our attention in an argument between a tinker and Rocco. The tinker, the old Giancarlo, tells Rocco that the world marches on. Rocco asks if they have any need to march on with the rest of the world (32). The argument is repeated when Rocco’s son Giancarlo criticises Rocco’s obdurate adherence to tradition.

Wenn du dir [...] nur ein einziges Mal anhören würdest, was in der Welt vor sich geht, und mir zugestehen, dass ich etwas Neues versuchen könnte. (59)

His mother answers him asking why we should seek more than we can achieve through our own hard work (59). That both the son and the old tinker are called ‘Giancarlo’ emphasises the similarity of the two characters’ points of view. Significantly though, they represent different generations either side of Rocco and Teresa’s generation. This suggests that the

Beyond Anthropocentrism conference, University of Exeter, July 2002, p. 3

¹¹⁹ See: Simon Meacher, unpublished masters dissertation, University of Exeter, 1998, pp 18-19

urge towards technical progress is not something new but instead has always existed, hinting at a deep-rooted psychological facet of humankind. It also means that the opposing pole of practical reason, of Thoreau-like contentedness with a bare minimum,¹²¹ is not merely conservative or old-fashioned simply for the sake of being so, but is a constant alternative that often loses out to the seduction of novelty. In Piero Bianconi's *Der Stammbaum* (1971), another novel set in the Ticino canton dealing with the dramatic effects of a dam and with a tree as a central motif, the construction is the product of some higher power, something beyond the protagonist's comprehension, an unavoidable destiny. The work suggests that the lust for technology has a peculiar primal force.¹²² The opposing pole to this modernising compulsion, the argument of self-constraint, takes on further significance in the wake of the reports of the Club of Rome, *The Limits to Growth*.¹²³ Before these important investigations into the world's resources and population growth, Thoreau's argument that one should be happy with the necessary minimum required to survive may have seemed to some like arbitrary asceticism. After them, his arguments take on a prophetic aura. Published in 1976, in the wake of the Meadows' text, Kauer's novel voices the concerns at the heart of *The Limits to Growth*, namely that a mode of existence that continues to exploit the natural environment will result in disaster.

The first chapter introduces us to Rocco and his simple, hard-working, subsistence way of life, and how the village has changed during his lifetime. When he went to school there were 50 children in the class. Now there are not even 50 permanent residents in the whole village. At one time the village survived solely from farming. Now there are only two old farmers left. The changes in the village are attributed in part to the regime change. The respected old mayor and major landowner, Leponti, hands over to his son. However, it

¹²⁰ See: Klaus Meyer-Abich, *Aufstand für die Natur: von der Umwelt zur Mitwelt*, (Munich: Hanser, 1990)

¹²¹ See: Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, pp 54-55

¹²² See: Piero Bianconi, *Der Stammbaum: Chronik einer Tessiner Familie*, trans. by Hannelise Hinderberger, (Zurich/Stuttgart: Werner Classen, 1971; first published in Italian: 1969)

¹²³ See: Donella and Dennis Meadows, Jorgen Randers, William Behrens, *The Limits to Growth. A Report for*

becomes clear "... dass der Junge nicht aus demselben Holz geschnitten war wie der Alte."

(17) The wood metaphor draws links between humans and trees, just as the opaque introduction linked Rocco and the tree. By extension, the metaphor also suggests a subtle link between the fate of Leponti and that of the tree. The young Leponti begins the changes that will ruin the village. He gives up farming, opens a hotel and starts selling off tracts of land for holiday homes. Superficially, this does not appear to constitute any flagrant crime. Nevertheless, the memory of this shift in the balance of power is so bitter that it wrenches Rocco from his reminiscences. Rocco is jolted back into the present because the new mayor is also partly responsible for the felling of Rocco's tree. The narrator exploits the narrative structure to the full here, using the 'Erzählzeit', with its attendant tension examined earlier to give emphasis to certain points of the 'Erzählte Zeit.' The memory is thus linked to the extreme notional present situation, where Rocco is preparing to shoot someone.

The generational transformation of the village has repercussions in Rocco's own family. Following his desire for financial profit, Leponti allows the construction of a large storage-electricity dam, which requires a large labour force. Rocco's sons, Giancarlo and Ernesto, are employed, although their mother, Teresa, senses that the dam will bring bad luck. Like an old soothsayer, she is right. The first sign of trouble appears when Giancarlo decides that he and Ernesto are going to sleep up at the dam instead of coming home every night. They spend too long on the journey to and from work. Furthermore, the extra farmwork once they are home is a further exertion. Despite the family arguments and Teresa's tears, the boys have their way, with Rocco's consent. So the boys are gradually removed from the farming community. Consequently, the situation in the mountain community deteriorates. Giancarlo has sexual intercourse with a farmer's daughter who has become a prostitute for the dam-workers. The couple involved may not consider this to be entirely a bad thing, but the relationship represents a breach of traditional morality,

especially since she becomes pregnant. The girl's father demands that Girancarlo marry his daughter but neither the girl nor Giancarlo want this and so the marriage does not take place, causing scandal in the village. The shift from the village community to the dam is the key change here. Even Rocco has to admit that the circumstances at the dam are not conducive to moral behaviour, with so many young men living together without the other usual constituent parts of a community. Without any families there, it is no surprise that a moral code that is centred on family life will be disregarded. When Rocco visits the dam the measures that are taken by the priest in order to combat masturbation and prostitution, strike him as childish and ineffective. Morals are defined by the community and where there is no real community to speak of, there is no moral code either. Kauer thus makes an interesting point about the importance of environment - here the focus is on the social environment - in defining self, as far as the morals pertaining to that self are concerned.

As a result of the scandal, Rocco has a physically violent argument with his son. The arguments demonstrate how Giancarlo no longer respects the traditional patriarchal hierarchy: "Ich bin nicht dein Knecht bloß weil ich dein Sohn bin." (61) Giancarlo and the girl leave the village. Fearing his father's temper, Ernesto also leaves. Rocco also blames the strife for his wife's untimely death. The dam is therefore responsible indirectly for a major social upheaval that tears apart the village. With the case of the forsaken "Schutzwald" as well as this incident of lapsed morality we can identify the loss of community as a theme in the novel. Kauer, a convinced socialist, returns frequently to this theme throughout his oeuvre attributing a whole raft of social ills to the diminution in value of the common good.¹²⁴ It is important to notice that the arguments against the changes that lead to the boys' exile are not clearly formulated: Teresa *senses* that the new sleeping arrangements will end in problems but she cannot articulate precisely why. In an enlightened world governed by rational thought, such an argument stands little chance of convincing anyone of the dangers

¹²⁴ See: Christoph Bircher, *Der Erzähler Walther Kauer. Eine Gratwanderung in einer gastlosen Welt*, (Zurich:

of building a dam. Essentially, the dam represents an alternative way of life that has little in common with the traditional mode of existence. The clashing prerogatives of subsistence and profit are incompatible and result in the demise of the former.

Kauer gives the dam syntactical prominence at the start of the novel (21) primarily in order to draw attention to it, as it is the major catalyst bringing about the metamorphosis of the village. It is the most prominent example of how the changes brought in by the young Leponti wreak havoc with the established patterns of life. The rest of the novel is devoted to examining how the village changes in the wake of the construction of the dam. From Rocco's perspective, it is quite clear that the changes are for the worse but others in the community profit from them so there is never a united call of dissent. Kauer also gives the dam structural priority in order to set up a polarity with the other central symbol in the novel, the "Lebensbaum", which is given similar structural prominence. This structure creates a boomerang effect: the novel begins and ends with the dam and the tree.

By the time we reach the final calamity, the community has already been slowly dismembered. The fate of the prostitute widens the scope of the destruction of the rural community from the narrow focus of the Canonica family. This is made clearer by further examples. Severino, the goat-herd, becomes Korten's butler and the loss of freedom to roam the hills is accompanied by a much longer working day. The fate of the carpenter Paolo is more poignant. He expects the holiday residents to fill their new houses with furniture, and so in anticipation of good business and a lot of work he sells his own pastures. However, the new inhabitants prefer to bring their own furniture so Paolo finds himself unemployed. With nothing to do he resorts to alcohol and domestic violence. Once again, the old way of life, where Paolo was the only carpenter, is invalidated by the new way of life, which simply has no need of Paolo. This is a further example of how the technological age takes society beyond a close unit and results in immorality and violence. This is a recurrent theme in

Kauer's work. In his earlier novel *Schachteltraum* (1974)¹²⁵ the main character is also a farmer who cannot cope with technical modernisation.

The opening chapter also deals with Rocco's military service. He was part of the force that guarded Switzerland during the war. In the Swiss popular imagination Switzerland's famous "Igelstellung" struck such fear into Adolf Hitler that he decided against an invasion.¹²⁶ On one level, the mention of Rocco's military service serves to explain why he has a rifle in his cupboard. On a deeper level, it serves the purpose of drawing attention once again to the way in which priorities have changed with the times. Rocco's captain says in his speech at their falling-out parade that the duty of protecting the country could now be left to the younger generation. However, instead of defending their country against invaders, the next generation welcomes them. The young Leponti sells former farmhouses as holiday homes to rich foreigners. The fact that the foreigner in Rocco's sights is a German reinforces the suggestion that the invasion that did not take place in the 1940s is now happening. Rocco draws the connections clearly for us:

Hatte man ihm nicht im Zeughaus gesagt, damals, vor fünfzig Jahren, mit diesem Gewehr, das ihm nun anvertraut werde, habe er die Freiheit zu verteidigen. Nun gut – er würde sie verteidigen, die Freiheit. (88)

Although the invasion is less dramatic in the seventies than it would have been in the Second World War, the result remains the same – the village is destroyed. In this way, the narrative sets up an interesting parallel between capitalism and fascism. The comparison is made possible by the retrospective perspective of the narration. This also permits the reader to see

¹²⁵ Walther Kauer, *Schachteltraum*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen, 1974)

¹²⁶ The Swiss are less quick to remember that peace was in fact bargained for with the production of various weapons for the Axis forces and with the guarantee of open supply lines between Italy and Germany. The Swiss held the Nazis in check by threatening to destroy the vital supply lines if their neutrality was infringed.

that Rocco maintains his principles over the years and remains a stable bastion in the face of modernising change.

When the narrative switches back to the notional present, Rocco is usually sitting in his kitchen cleaning his rifle to the tick-tock of the clock. This injects tension into the narrative on the primary level of the plot. The clock is a simple tension-builder, reminding us that time is running out. It sounds a note of apocalyptic predetermination. The rifle reminds us that Rocco intends to shoot Korten and so appeals to our innate sense of the dramatic.¹²⁷ The drama is intensified since the old nut tree is Rocco's "Lebensbaum" and Korten may therefore be capable of taking Rocco's life too. Linked to the early morning setting there is the sense of a duel. There is also a secondary tension here. Korten, the Deutschmark-brandishing tourist, represents the destruction of a way of life. We learn about this way of life in the secondary level of the narrative, in the 'erzählte Zeit.' Therefore there is a tension between the present and the past. We are constantly reminded of this tension by the interlacing narrative technique. This technique also further foregrounds the connections identified earlier between fascism and capitalism since it juxtaposes tales of Rocco's active service with his conflict with the German. The links between fascism and capitalism have been investigated thoroughly by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in their seminal *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1944). Ingolfur Blüdnor has called the text one of "the most influential philosophical and sociological writings of the twentieth century" and has proposed that it could "play the role of midwife as ecological thought enters a radically new phase of its evolution."¹²⁸ Their work posits the Holocaust as the ultimate product of the Enlightenment, seeing the exploitative use of Jews during the Second World War as the logical culmination of the dialectic between subject and object, between man and nature expounded by René Descartes. Outlining what would be the legacy of the Enlightenment, Francis Bacon suggests that our ability to control nature is due to three essential elements:

¹²⁷ See: Leakey, p. 43

the cannon, the printing press and the compass.¹²⁹ The rifle may be seen as the modern equivalent of Bacon's cannon. As we have seen, it maintains both a narrato-spatially and thematically prominent role in the novel. In an earlier version, the ending of the novel is strikingly different, with the rifle playing a decisive part: Rocco shoots Korten and is sent to prison.¹³⁰ In the final version, Kauer rejected this ending in favour of one that suits his protagonist's character better. The avoidance of what might be considered poetic justice and the choice of an impartial catastrophic closure has attracted criticism. According to Gert Ueding, by his choice of conclusion in the final version "verletzt Kauer die Logik seiner Geschichte und weicht der in ihr beschlossen liegenden Konsequenz aus."¹³¹ However, by ignoring Ueding's "Logik", Kauer progresses thematically as well as formally beyond anthropocentrism moving the focus of the narrative away from a human conflict, diminishing the human actions to a side-show in the broader narrative of the surrounding natural environment. Rocco postpones his intention to shoot Korten, preferring first to help his cows. They are in need of water because there is a problem with the water supply so Rocco resolves to climb the mountain to fix the pipes:

Du kannst warten, dachte Rocco. Korten kann warten – wir haben beide viel Zeit. Und er verschloß das Gewehr im Schrank. Meine Kühe können nicht warten. Sie brauchen Wasser. [...] und [er] war nur noch gespannte Aufmerksamkeit für seine nächstliegende Aufgabe. *Das andere* hatte er vorläufig vergessen. Einfach aus seinem Bewußtsein verdrängt. (172-173)

The rifle is shut away and the subsistence farmer's instinct in Rocco takes control. The vague and italicised "*Das andere*" indicates that our eco-hero has a split in the way he thinks. This is evident earlier in the text, when Rocco starts making plans for the future of his farm while

¹²⁸ Blühdorn, 'Ecological Thought and Critical Theory', in *Green Thought in German Culture*, pp 89-90

¹²⁹ See: Francis Bacon, *In Praise of Knowledge. Miscellaneous Texts Upon Human Philosophy*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. by Basil Montagu, (London, 1825), p. 254,

¹³⁰ See: Bircher, *Der Erzähler Walther Kauer*, pp 165-167

¹³¹ Gert Ueding, 'Der Berg war gekommen', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20.05.1976

he is milking, only to realise that he has forgotten that, with his sons having left, there is no future for the farm. On the one hand, we have the option of instrumental reason, represented by the rifle and his calculated and premeditated decision to murder Korten, whilst, on the other hand, we have the option of practical reason, represented by his desire to satisfy his cows' need for water. Horkheimer and Adorno differentiate between these two types of reason. "Practical reason" seeks to satisfy basic human needs seen here in Rocco's compassion for his beasts. "Instrumental reason" is how they describe the urge for the technical control of nature.¹³² The possibility of a perversion of instrumental reason to violent purposes is one of the key criticisms levelled at the Enlightenment in their attempt to understand how an enlightened culture can evolve into a fascist state. Since Rocco's rifle represents instrumental reason and is in his cupboard because of the Second World War, we can see that Kauer's text echoes *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, reminding us of the dangers of instrumental reason and linking the Enlightenment to fascism and capitalism. The dichotomy between the two types of reason is also illuminating if we return to the central debate over modernisation. Rocco argues with his first son, Giancarlo, about the use of new techniques in farming. Rocco cannot see any point in using them when they have always managed without them. Father and son represent differing poles of human reason. Rocco seeks to satisfy basic human needs and thus represents "practical reason", while Giancarlo yearns to implement technological innovations and thus represents instrumental reason.

The move away from more conventional poetic logic represented by the ending is one way in which Kauer attempts to transcend anthropocentrism. In replacing the predictable ending with one where the mountain is alive and comes down to the village, Kauer avoids the emphasis on human justice, which the original ending would have foregrounded. The denouement has the effect of silencing the human voice in the text and puts the focus on the impartial arbitrariness of the natural environment. Although Rocco understands his

¹³² Paul Connerton (ed.), *Introduction to Critical Sociology*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp 27-28

environment well, his comprehension ultimately cannot save him and he is destroyed along with the village. In wiping out the human voice in the text the narrator deprives the reader of the possibility of a conclusion within the notional reality of the fictional framework that we have encountered in the text up until this point.

Instead of a conclusion within the narrative framework, the novel finishes with an authorial epilogue. It has the sobering effect of bridging the gap between the fictional level and the authorial level, giving the illusion that the story is true. Even though the Terzone is an invented valley, elements of the tale are factual. Numerous storage dams were built in the Ticino in the seventies and the mountain, Monte Lema, can be found just above Lugano. These details coupled with the effect of the epilogue encourage the reader simply to see the connections between fiction and reality. This crossing-of-the-boundaries allows the novel to take on wider implications and functions like the moral of a fable in that it draws the reader's attention to the transferability of a message.

The novel reaches its climax with the words "Der Berg war gekommen." (254) The pluperfect tense indicates a collusion between man and mountain, since a few pages previously Rocco addresses the mountain directly in his thoughts: "Komm doch herunter, komm endlich herunter." (250) The fact that the mountain "comes", seemingly answering Rocco's beseeching call, gives the text an animistic aspect because it renders the mountain active and also apparently capable of communicating with the farmer. Animism can also be seen in Teresa's interpretation of the uprooting of Rocco's sapling in the night after it is planted. She believes that a huge hound belonging to a giant within the mountain is responsible. She thus accords life to the mountain by way of the anthropomorphic metaphor of the resident giant and links the fate of the tree spuriously to the mountain. Couched as these examples are in the perceptions of the Canonica family, they do not offend the modern reader's rational sensibilities, and, more importantly, show that the Canonicas regard humans as on a level with the surrounding natural world. Whether the mountain really responds to the

demands of the farmer is not the central issue; the crux of the matter is the eco-egalitarian attitude that he displays and the faith in the supernatural shown by his mother. Here again we can find an echo of Horkheimer and Adorno, who considered the triumph of reason over superstitious beliefs as a keystone in the construction of the man/nature dichotomy. The rejection of animism forms a significant part of this victory: "Die Entzauberung der Welt ist die Ausrottung des Animismus."¹³³

Rocco's call to the mountain is reminiscent of the demand for apocalypse in the Book of Revelation: "I am so weary of sighing, O Lord, make that the night cometh." This places the text in a pre-modern tradition of apocalypse, and thus makes an appeal to a pre-rational mode of thought, which represents a further rejection of the Enlightenment. Despite borrowing this tone from the Bible, the text makes an important modification of the original. Rather than calling on an anthropomorphic God, Rocco incites the mountain to do the apocalyptic job. This revision of one of the western world's meta-narratives replaces a man-like figure with the natural environment, thereby putting a safe distance between the text and the Bible with all its negative ecological implications.¹³⁴ The rejection of the Bible is also discernible in the attitudes of the main character, who does not hide his lack of respect for religious authority.

There are other aspects of the content of the novel that support the notion of an ecological voice. Korten has a purely aesthetic reason for chopping down the tree. Nature for him has become simply a picturesque backdrop for his retirement. The emphasis is certainly on the sense of an element of shaping by human hand, which is contained in the term "picturesque". The important thing for Korten is the view of the lake. Wolfgang Herles has identified this kind of attitude towards nature, which sees the natural world merely as an arena for human actants to play out their stories, as one that is typical of German literature in

¹³³ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, p. 11

¹³⁴ See: above section 1.2

the 1970s.¹³⁵ Kauer's juxtaposition of an alternative perspective with such an attitude therefore throws a prevalent mode of thought into question. Rocco's relationship to the environment differs from Korten's in that, as a subsistence farmer, he depends essentially on the surrounding environment. The old farmer might be able to understand the German's interest in seeing the lake if his neighbour demonstrated an understanding of the use of such a view. However, the tourist obviously cannot read the natural signs of a storm brewing, which for Rocco are legible in the lake, because he chooses to water his lawn prior to a downpour. Although this seems a minor point, and no harm comes to the lawn from the double drenching, it is indicative of Korten's alienation from the environment. This proves to be a critical factor towards the end, when only Rocco can read the signs of the mountain's instability and nobody will listen. Importantly, the inhabitants' alienation from nature also implicates Rocco, the inference being that without a coherent communal effort, all are doomed, including those who predict disaster. Rocco's good relationship with his immediate environment is evident in his decision to fix his water pipes instead of shooting Korten. His animals are more important. Towards the end of the novel, as the ground trembles, they take fright, needing Rocco to calm them: "die Kühe beruhigten sich durch seine Anwesenheit." (155) The cat is similarly comforted by his presence supporting the sense of a relationship between the man and the natural world. This sense of a relationship is most obvious when Rocco is returning from the bar at the end of the novel and the trees address him: "Leg dich hin, alter Narr, flüsterten ihm die Bäume zu." (251) The possibility of communication between trees and a human supports the central motif of the "Lebensbaum". In the light of Rocco's relationship with the natural world, the felling of his tree is not therefore merely a sentimental symbol for the death of the farmer but is an example of a modern aestheticised view of nature (with all the implications of a dichotomous subject/object relationship

¹³⁵ See: Wolfgang Herles, *Der Beziehungswandel zwischen Mensch und Natur im Spiegel der deutschen Literatur seit 1945*, (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1982)

between viewer and viewed contained in the term “view”) triumphing over a way of life that is fundamentally part of the natural world.

Kauer’s prose draws the reader in close to the main character, precluding distance between reader and text. Not only do we gain detailed knowledge of Rocco’s life, and are thus predisposed to sympathise with him, but we also share his perspective because the majority of the narrative is focalized by him. This perspective, which, as we have seen, demonstrates an understanding of the environment, encourages the reader to feel the same sense of unease about the changes leading up to the disaster. Thus the narrative pushes the reader towards adopting Rocco’s ecological voice.

The fact that the main part of the ‘*erzählte Zeit*’ is related without the protagonist leaving the kitchen also suggests a Heideggerian sense of being. His memories are a fundamental part of what shapes him as a person and these memories are firmly bound up with his immediate environment. We have already seen how the rifle and the tree function as starting points for flights of reminiscence. The narrative is flecked with further instances of his memory being provoked by things around him. A dent in the wall makes him think of the argument with his son when the dent was made. Similarly the sight of his water pipes sets his mind off on a train of thought about how they came to build the pipes in the first place. Even when the protagonist leaves the kitchen in the notional present of the text, we are not then confined to this narratorial level. The surrounding fields and woods also stimulate his memory. For example, seeing the fallen leaves on the floor of the forest, Rocco recalls when they collected them to feed their first cow (183). Similarly, the sight of an adder provokes the narration of the story of the Ghirengelli family, since the snake was on their family’s crest. The narrative is Rocco’s life story and the fact that it is structured around these Proustian memories draws attention to how his life is defined by the things which surround him, that is to say his environment. Keith Basso highlights the mutual dependency of place, person and story as follows:

Places possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musings on who one might become. And that is not all. Place-based thoughts about the self lead commonly to thoughts of other things – other places, other people, other times, whole networks of associations that ramify unaccountably within the expanding spheres of awareness that they themselves engender. The experience of sensing places, then, is thus both thoroughly reciprocal and incorrigibly dynamic. As places animate the ideas and the feelings of persons who attend to them these same ideas and feelings animate the places on which attention has been bestowed, and the movements of this process – inward toward facets of the self, outward toward aspects of the external world, alternately both together – cannot be known in advance. When places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination, and where the latter may lead is anybody's guess.¹³⁶

From the landscape of the mind, with the help of the roving imagination, emanate stories. The environment influences our stories and we affect the environment by involving it in our stories. Van Gelder emphasises that the relationship between story and place is often dependent on a connection over a period of time to a place. Through our changing relationship over time with a place we may discover ourselves and thus construct the narratives of our lives. Our changed perspectives of a childhood place revisited as an adult are a good example of the importance of place in the building of self-knowledge through story.¹³⁷ We may perceive therefore in *Spätholz* that the narrator's choice of a retrospective branching narrative structure, which is superficially analogous to the shape of a tree, allows emphasis to be placed on an existential interconnectedness between things, environment and self, in a way that a conventional linear narrative does not. The text and the farmer's environment are therefore mutually dependent. The topospecificity helps to explain why the

¹³⁶ Keith Basso, *Wisdom sits in Places*, (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), p.

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¹³⁷ See: Van Gelder, *The Philosophy of Place. The Power of Story*, p. 6

editor chose the unusual exergue. Equally, the title and the epigraph, while seeming to ignore humans altogether, are actually appropriate for the tale of a man who lives as part of his environment, understands the terms himself and sees how they are linked to his life.¹³⁸ We may realise that our confusion at the outset hints at our own alienation from the natural environment.

The subtly interwoven narrative strands of Walther Kauer's novel, *Spätholz*, bring together the disparate elements of capitalism, fascism and subsistence farming. The past is set against the present and the divergent philosophies of life come into conflict. The Enlightenment's faith in the ability of technical reason to control nature is undermined. The catastrophe proves the protagonist right. However, his understanding of nature is no guarantee of his survival. In this way, Kauer's novel paints a sombre picture of the fate of mankind, where the actions of those that do not understand the natural environment cause a disaster that implicates not only the guilty party but everybody else as well.

Christoph Bircher identifies a core tension at the heart of Kauer's work. He sees a contradiction in Kauer's desire to be bought and read by a society that he lambastes in his work.¹³⁹ In *Spätholz*, this contradiction is thrown into sharper relief by the tensions exposed between practical and instrumental reason. There is also a tension in the parallels we have identified between the novel and the tree. The novel is the portrait of a figure who represents a way of life that has no need of novels or books in general. It is only thanks to the Enlightenment and the subsequent industrialisation that the majority of people in developed countries can sit down comfortably in an electrically lit home to read a novel. Kauer

¹³⁸ Christoph Bircher identifies links between all of Kauer's titles and the forms of his narratives. Bircher, *Der Erzähler Walther Kauer*, p. 145

¹³⁹ Bircher, *Der Erzähler Walther Kauer*, p. 229

paradoxically makes his attack on the Enlightenment through a medium afforded and celebrated precisely by the Enlightenment.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ This flaw has also been identified in Horkheimer and Adorno's arguments by Ingolfur Blühdorn in 'Ecological Thought and Critical Theory', p. 95

3. Max Frisch's *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*: Ecological Eschatology

3.0.1 Max Frisch and Ecology

Before commencing the investigation of *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*, it is worth placing it in the context of Max Frisch's oeuvre. Frisch is one of the most successful authors of post-war German literature. He owes his fame and popularity largely to the success of the three novels *Stiller*, *Homo faber* and *Mein Name sei Gantenbein*, which Marcel Reich-Ranicki counts among the enduring works of the twentieth century.¹⁴¹ Volker Hage, author of the Rowohlt monograph *Max Frisch*, classes the period between his two *Tagebücher*, when Frisch wrote these three novels, as encompassing the writer's major work.¹⁴² In the secondary literature on Frisch, there is a wealth of material investigating the three novels, with the general emphasis being placed on the author's concern with existentialist questions of self and identity. It seems clear, therefore, that Frisch's fame and popularity derive largely from his interest in these subjects.

Strikingly though, in a televised discussion amongst a number of the writer's colleagues shortly after his death, the majority named *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* as the work that they most admired, and Peter von Matt claimed that Frisch himself considered the work to be his best. Searching for reasons why this narrative should be less well known and why, in comparison with his other works, critics have largely neglected it, von Matt points to the change of thematic focus.¹⁴³ Published after the contentious and autobiographical *Montauk*, it lacked the personal element and the narrative innovation of its predecessor, with the familiar themes of identity and self-definition giving way and the writer's attention shifting to ecology and eschatology. It is therefore deeply ironic in *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* when the narrator comments that novels dealing with personal issues are not

¹⁴¹ See: Marcel Reich-Ranicki, *Max Frisch*, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1994), p. 11

¹⁴² See: Volker Hage, *Max Frisch*, (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2004), p. 54

¹⁴³ See: Thomas Gloor, (ed.), 'Literatur-Club Extra: Max Frisch', *D.R.S.*, 26.04.1991

appropriate for the contemporary time period; Frisch's wide readership expected precisely such a text.¹⁴⁴

Although this reaction may appear to suggest that Frisch's interest in ecological issues was new, his environmental awareness in fact constitutes a considerable strand running through his work, which is already present at an early stage. His play *Die Chinesische Mauer* (1947) clearly demonstrates that Frisch was conscious of the dangerous power that humans have over the natural environment and their own destiny, thanks to technology. The threat of atomic warfare means that:

Zum ersten Mal in der Geschichte der Menschheit [...] stehen wir vor der Wahl, ob es die Menschheit geben soll oder nicht. Die Sintflut ist herstellbar. Technisch kein Problem.¹⁴⁵

The threat posed by overdeveloped technology is also present in the *Tagebuch 1946-1949* (1951), where Frisch suggests that the choice facing humankind is no longer between war and peace but between "Frieden und Untergang."¹⁴⁶ The subject of *Der Harlekin*, a sketch for a film included towards the end of the journal, is murder, facilitated by technology.¹⁴⁷

The terms 'Sintflut' and 'Untergang' give Frisch's work an eschatological tone, with a biblical overtone. The sense of an ultimate end to human existence is perceptible in the author's description of Frankfurt a year after the end of the Second World War too. The fact that Frankfurt is in ruins prompts the narrator to imagine a world without humans:

ein menschenloses Gedeihen, ein Schweigen aus Disteln und Moos, eine geschichtslose Erde, dazu das Zwitschern der Vögel, Frühling, Sommer und Herbst, Atem der Jahre, die niemand mehr zählt¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Max Frisch, *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*, (Frankfurt am Main, 1981), p. 6

¹⁴⁵ Max Frisch, *Die Chinesische Mauer*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1964), p. 100

¹⁴⁶ Max Frisch, *Tagebuch 1946-1949*, (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1988), p. 182

¹⁴⁷ See: Frisch, *Tagebuch 1946-1949*, pp 309-354

¹⁴⁸ Frisch, *Tagebuch 1946-1949*, p. 31

The appealing image of a blossoming nature without humans is intensified by the singing birds and suggests that the narrator, having seen the war-torn city, regards such an eschatological prospect as positive. The “Schweigen” and the lack of stories prefigures somewhat *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* and points to the futility of language and stories in the face of an unfeeling natural world.

Returning to the theme of technology, we can see how it functions as a destructive force in *Homo faber* (1957), where technology functions as an opposing pole to the natural world. Described by Bill Niven as a “green *Bildungsroman*”, the work relates the tale of Walter Faber. An engineer with a blind faith in technology, Faber “rides roughshod over his own life, ignoring physical, sensual, emotional and spiritual needs.”¹⁴⁹ His obsessive faith in technology is illustrated by his desire to shave in the desert with an electric razor although there is no electricity and his desperate cleaning of a car in the jungle, where vehicular transport is rendered impossible by the mud. Such incidents of failing technology force him to realise that he cannot overcome life and death by way of technology. A journey into the jungle, which stinks of “blühender Verwesung”¹⁵⁰, encourages him to accept the natural cycle of life, and he emerges from it comparing himself to a newly born child. His voyage becomes one of sensual and emotional experience, as he falls in love. Thus technology can be seen to preclude experience because it prevents contact with the natural world. It may also prevent an acceptance of mortality, which in turn hinders participation in the natural cycle of life.

3.0.2 *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*

Like Walther Kauer’s *Spätholz*, Max Frisch’s story *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* has an elderly male protagonist and a landslide as the central event. The piece also demonstrates an

¹⁴⁹ Bill Niven, ‘The Green *Bildungsroman*’, in *Green Thought in German Culture*, ed. by Riordan, p. 201

ecological voice, albeit in a different tone. It is the tale of Herr Geiser, a 74-year-old who has retired from his native German-speaking Basel to live in a mountain village in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland. The text, with Herr Geiser as principal focalizer,¹⁵¹ can be unravelled into two main thematic strands. Firstly, it relates how the village is cut off from the rest of the valley by a landslide caused by unusually heavy rains. Secondly, the tale shows the gradual dilapidation of Herr Geiser's mental capacities as he nears the end of his life and teeters on the brink of a stroke. So already, on a superficial thematic level, we can perceive that, in this text that Frisch originally provisionally entitled "Klima",¹⁵² the natural environment and Herr Geiser's fate run parallel. While the mountainside subsides, Herr Geiser's body collapses. It becomes apparent in the course of the text that this connection between man and the natural environment is not merely superficial or coincidental but instead is indicative of the main concerns of the story.

The narrative is set against a background of fear and foreboding. This background is partly generated by the isolation of the village and the worry that supplies might run out. Herr Geiser returns repeatedly to the subject of the post-bus not being able to make it up the hill.¹⁵³ He also makes lists of the supplies left in the house, commenting on his store as it diminishes. It is therefore made clear to the reader that life in the mountain village is threatened by the natural environment because the villagers no longer rely on the immediate environment, but instead depend on the man-made road as a life-line, bringing in supplies. The repeated references to the post-bus can therefore be understood to function as signals of Herr Geiser's fear, since they remind us that the village is isolated. The sense of isolation is given extra weight because the narrative ends with a reflection on how the natural environment in the

¹⁵⁰ Frisch, *Homo faber*, p. 51

¹⁵¹ Frisch, *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*, p. 11: "Zeitweise fällt der elektrische Strom aus, was man in diesem Tal gewohnt ist; kaum hat man eine Kerze gefunden, endlich auch Streichhölzer, so ist der Strom wieder da, Licht im Haus..." The deictics that I have emphasised here demonstrate that the story is told from the point of view of the inhabitant. All further references to this edition will be given in brackets following quotations in the text.

¹⁵² See: Franz P. Haberl, 'Death and Transcendence in Max Frisch's 'Triptych' and 'Man in the Holocene'', in *World Literature Today, A Literary Quarterly of the University of Oklahoma*, Vol. 60, (Oklahoma, 1986), p. 583

valley is harshly opposed to human habitation.¹⁵⁴ The threat posed by the natural environment filters through to Herr Geiser's choice of reading material, which includes the memoirs of Robert Scott. Significantly for Frisch's text, Scott's final memoirs famously were penned on the brink of death, at the hands of the natural environment. Again, the narrator employs repetition in order to draw attention to the reference to this sombre work (17, 29). There is also a more direct, existential fear in the tale, generated by the ageing Herr Geiser's frailty and impending death. The prospect of a looming eco-apocalypse, suggested by the repeated mention of rising sea levels, further augments the pervasive sense of doom (30, 67, 68). The notion of rising sea levels provokes thoughts of The Flood and indeed one of Herr Geiser's cuttings refers directly to it (25-26). This biblical citation is followed by a comment focalised by Herr Geiser dismissing the possibility of such an event. Nevertheless, when he visits the public bar he makes inquiries as to whether anyone else has thought of the possibility of "Sintflut", which suggests that his earlier dismissal was an attempt to banish a fear, akin to whistling in the dark (44). The notion of 'Sintflut' along with the references to rising sea-levels transform the text from a personal story about an old man into a parable of far wider implications.

The idea that the sense of apocalypse in the narrative originates with Herr Geiser's state of mind is evident in the links made between low-key and personal disasters and the more general notion of the apocalypse. In the same passage where Herr Geiser nervously inquires in the bar about the possibility of a flood, the young men of the village blithely play table-football: "Die Erosion die draußen stattfindet, bekümmert sie überhaupt nicht." (44) Perspective is a decisive factor for imagining the apocalypse.¹⁵⁵ There are many instances in the text of Herr Geiser's mental state being susceptible to this kind of fear. For example, the

¹⁵³ There are thirteen separate references to the post-bus in the text.

¹⁵⁴ See: Michael Butler, 'Max Frisch's *Man in the Holocene*: An Interpretation', in *World Literature Today*, vol. 60, p. 576

¹⁵⁵ For a fuller discussion of this notion see Axel Goodbody, 'Catastrophism in Post-War German Literature' in *Green Thought in German Culture*, ed. by Colin Riordan (Cardiff, 1997), pp 159-180

track the cat leaves in the wet grass scares him because he presumes that it is a crack in the ground (46).

Unremittingly, his fears about the crack in the ground perforate the text over a number of pages. This is characteristic of the narrative structure, which is closely linked to Herr Geiser's psychology. From the beginning, we are confronted with this narrative structure. The phrase: "Irgendwo klöppelt es auf Blech" (9) appears as a paragraph on the first page, separated from the previous and subsequent paragraphs by a gap of two blank lines. This mention of the rain is repeated in the same form on the following page. A comparison between the text and the way that rain falls is tempting. At the very least, Frisch's textual organisation challenges the norm and the seemingly arbitrary nature of his structure has more in common with the chaos of the natural world than a more conventionally organised text would have. The drops of text suggest a mind in a natural state of dilapidation in old age and Frisch links the thought process of his protagonist to the falling of the rain by presenting his thoughts in exactly the same fashion as the descriptions of the weather. For example, the idea introduced on page 11: "Schlimm ist nicht das Unwetter -", is only resolved on page 13: "Schlimm wäre der Verlust des Gedächtnisses -". The link is strengthened because the idea – the loss of memory – is being used in comparison to bad weather in order to define what would be "schlimm." They indicate a faltering sense of coherence in Herr Geiser's mind and establish early on a link between the natural world and the way the human mind works.

This mental dilapidation is also suggested by the inclusion within the text of excerpts from other sources. Disappointed that he cannot remember certain facts, Herr Geiser is obliged to use an encyclopaedia. Unable to gain any satisfaction from looking things up and underlining them, because he forgets them again quickly, he decides firstly to write things down and pin them to the wall, and then simply to cut out the relevant sections from the books. These excerpts from encyclopaedias, histories and the Bible are interleaved into the fictional text, presenting the reader with an impression of the walls of Herr Geiser's home.

Like the drops of text mentioned earlier, these cuttings are presented in a haphazard manner, without introduction or coherent explanation. Towards the moment of Herr Geiser's stroke and the end of the text, the narrative becomes increasingly incoherent, with a profusion of these excerpts and almost a total absence of the fictional tale, emphasising his deterioration (113-119).

The relationship between Herr Geiser's personal story and the various cuttings that punctuate his reflections is worth investigation. Once Herr Geiser decides simply to cut out the relevant passages from the books, rather than write them out by hand, these bald facts lose the last trace of any personal or human mark. Firstly, they have little to do with Herr Geiser's personal story, the main thematic interest of the tale, except to reflect where his thoughts have wandered to and what he is pinning to the walls. Secondly, they represent the bigger picture into which he (and by extension, the rest of mankind) will be subsumed. Their interest goes beyond the human, generational time-scale and lies in the ecological time-scale. The tension between the two time-scales is introduced by the title. With the impersonal reference to mankind as a whole, it is hardly appropriate to the private tale of an old man. It draws attention to the fact that man has not been on the planet for ever and implies that we should not assume a right to existence. This implication is strengthened by the relationship between title and tale, which links the whole of mankind to the fate of the lone protagonist. If this relationship can be understood as a sense unit, then the conclusion of the tale assumes grave implications, highlighting through the demise of Herr Geiser that mankind does not possess any right to eternal existence. The tension between the broader picture and Herr Geiser is at its most fraught when the pieces of paper start to take over his life and he poignantly removes the portrait of his wife in order to create more space for the pieces of paper. The pieces of paper also challenge his authorship, standing independently within the fictional narrative told from his perspective.

This narrative technique tests the reader's memory. We have to remember what was going on a few pages previously in order to understand what is happening now. Accustomed as readers are to trying to decipher texts, to uncovering a latent meaning, we try to reorganise the disparate elements in this text into a coherent whole. The reader's attention is drawn to this narrative technique, and its implications, by the title, which is in fact a mistake. One of the cuttings tells us that man first appeared in the Pleistocene, (28) but Geiser later asserts that it was the Holocene (103). The mistake is made more than seventy pages after the cutting from the encyclopaedia is incorporated in the text, and the reader can easily miss it, indeed most critics miss this point. In this way, the reader's experience reflects the faltering memory of Herr Geiser. Frisch peppers the text with little mistakes like this and demands a painstaking effort from the reader to discover them. Readers of Frisch's other prose works, such as *Mein Name sei Gantenbein* and *Montauk*, will be familiar with the author's habit of using forms which challenge the reader, and *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* is no exception. By testing our memories like this, Frisch can again widen the scope of his work to include his readership too; just as Herr Geiser's memory undermines his attempts to set himself apart from natural history by mastering a body of knowledge, our memories likewise undermine our efforts to understand, and thereby have some sense of control over what we read.

The mistake in the title has a second implication. It draws our attention to the arbitrary nature of a linguistic name for a pre-human age. Why Pleistocene and not Holocene? Herr Geiser's remark "Die Natur kennt keine Katastrophen" (103) also suggests that the relationship between words and things is not concrete, something emphasised by the German-speaking protagonist's ignorance of Italian (38, 39). Nature does not provide value qualifications for natural phenomena such as landslides – they just occur, regardless of human reactions and their effects on human life. The fact that a statement like this is not a banality, and actually surprises us, also highlights how our perception of the world is so reliant on language. This mode of perception, however, is not reciprocated. Rather than giving us

authority, it would appear that language merely serves to alienate us from nature, making us an aberration in the natural world. This discrepancy between language and nature is evident when the rain pours down and Herr Geiser has little to do, so one random Sunday in his account becomes nothing more than a diary of the falling rain. In a more conventional narrative, ellipsis would be used to glide over this inconsequential passage. It amounts to a diary of life without humans and may well strike the reader as absurd and boring.¹⁵⁶ This is illuminating because it demonstrates not only how we normally require a human element in a story, but also that without humans there is no plot, no overarching meaning, and no teleological aim. All these things can therefore be considered unnatural, linguistic and human constructs. The same idea is put forward more explicitly towards the end of the tale when Herr Geiser comes to the realisation that “Die Natur braucht keine Namen. [...] Die Gesteine brauchen sein Gedächtnis nicht.” (139) This echoes Goethe, whose poem *Das Göttliche* suggests a similarly impervious nature.

Denn unführend

Ist die Natur:

Es leuchtet Sonne

Über Börs und Gute,

Und dem Verbrecher

Glänzen, wie dem Besten,

Der Mond und die Sterne.¹⁵⁷

Herr Geiser's use of cuttings also indicates that he is losing his faith in his own ability to master knowledge through language and must resort to someone else's efforts. His rejection of language culminates with his refusal to communicate with his neighbours, beyond

¹⁵⁶ Wolf Koepke writes of the tale that it “is not very exciting in itself”, in ‘Retreat into Prehistory’, *World Literature Today*, vol. 60, p. 587

¹⁵⁷ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Das Göttliche*, in *Goethe's Poems*, ed. by Charles Harris, (Boston, New York,

throwing a teacup out of the window at them (127).

The realisation that nature pays no heed to language, and that language is a relatively recent invention, points to a major theme of the tale, namely, that humans are only a small part of a bigger picture. With the constant references to the millions of years that Earth has existed, it is hard to miss the point that mankind is little more than a scratch on the surface of time. In this way, the text moves towards John Muir's perspective: "Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation?"¹⁵⁸ The brevity of mankind's ecological longevity is also ironised subtly by the salamanders that keep appearing in Herr Geiser's bath. In terms of species longevity, amphibians are some of the most successful animals, predating even reptiles. Although Herr Geiser's considerations of natural history do not actually include a comparison of the evolutionary success of humans and salamanders, the adjacency of his ruminations on mankind's place in the history of the Earth and the appearance of the salamanders, combined with the suggestion that Herr Geiser resembles an amphibian, (124) begs for the connection to be made by the reader. A similar comparison is made when sketches of the skeletons of a dinosaur and a human are placed adjacently in the text (118).¹⁵⁹

As we have seen, the text is built around the natural dilapidation of Herr Geiser's mind, which, as a narrative strategy, already challenges the conventions of a coherent narrative. Through the mistakes, repetitions and arbitrary structure, it also challenges the authority of a narrative to provide a full and complete picture of any experience, and undermines the ability of language to comprehend, and in a sense, to master the natural world. By constructing his narrative from fragments of other narratives that have been pulled apart and rendered incoherent, Frisch makes this point on a grander scale. Within the fictional world of Herr Geiser, cutting out the various excerpts leaves the original books in pieces,

Chicago: D.C. Heath, 1899), p. 56

¹⁵⁸ John Muir quoted by Sueellen Campbell in 'The land and language of desire' in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, p. 129

rendering them useless and unintelligible (114). Furthermore, the cuttings that he pins to his wall represent a core of human knowledge. The bibliography at the end of the work lists the authorities that have been undermined, including the Bible, the Brockhaus encyclopaedia, the Duden dictionary, as well as several natural history books. The first cutting is the opening lines of the creation myth from the Bible, which forms the starting point for the Christian religion and must therefore be regarded as fundamental to the whole of the Western philosophical tradition. It appears therefore that Frisch has decided to open with an attack on the foundations in his demolition of this tradition. The demolition begins with the simple illuminating question of an old man at the end of his life. Herr Geiser asks if God will exist, once there are no longer any human brains that cannot conceive of a Creation without a Creator (17). The terms "Schöpfung" and "Schöpfer" suggest an anthropomorphic deity. Isolated as he is, Herr Geiser naturally hears no reply and thus, by way of the lack of answer, the answer is given. So, the sense of purpose, permanence and harmony given to the world by the Bible is shown to be a fiction and the notion that the Earth is comparable to a human achievement is rejected.

If an aim of Frisch's narrative is to demonstrate the futility of knowledge, one might be tempted to argue that it is a self-defeating text because, if it is successful, his insight could be understood as knowledge itself. To combat the authority of the text, Frisch includes an authorial narrator. Although the majority of the text is presented from a third person narrative perspective focalised by Herr Geiser, there are brief comments in brackets, which appear to come from an extra-diegetic authorial narrator. We can assume this because, in one of these bracketed sections, the alternative narrative voice demonstrates authorial preoccupations by discussing the value of the novel form (16). This authorial perspective draws attention to the fictionality of the work as well as the fallibility of the various narrative perspectives. When Herr Geiser says that it is Wednesday, the authorial narrator suggests it could be Thursday

¹⁵⁹ The sketch is reproduced on the cover of several editions of the tale.

(17). With the interjection following the list of different types of thunder, we can see why an author might choose "Donnerstag" instead of "Mittwoch". The interjection draws attention to the importance of arbitrary paradigmatic connections for the author's construction of a text. The flippancy of this interjection ironises the seriousness of Herr Geiser and serves thus to further isolate the protagonist, who seems to have become the victim of some form of collusion between the narrator and the reader. It also suggests that the authoring of a text is similar to playing a game. Thus the inclusion of the extra-diegetic level points toward the value of the whole text: it is simply a pastime. The other comments from the authorial perspective are validations or embellishments of Herr Geiser's claims, suggesting a superior and authoritative point of view, which primarily suggests that Herr Geiser's narrative is not completely trustworthy. The embellishments demonstrate knowledge of the environment, which in turn suggests that the authorial narrator shares a similar perspective to that of the protagonist. The fact that the title of the tale, that salient error identified earlier, must be attributed to the authorial narrator undermines the assumed authority of this position and points to links between narrating and narrated persons as well. This suspicion gives a note of self-irony to the tale and therefore contributes to a degree of playfulness in the tone.

The futility of the body of knowledge is evident because man, represented by Herr Geiser, evidently cannot keep it all in his head and therefore cannot master it. Since the text is mostly focalised by Herr Geiser almost everything within it can be perceived as his opinion. His desire to understand the world around him is expressed by his pinning the pieces of paper to the wall. Internalising the knowledge represented in the cuttings, however, remains beyond his capabilities, as is clearly demonstrated by the inconsistencies between the cuttings and the narrative focalised by him. Lending this failure serious implications, one excerpt from the encyclopaedia actually identifies the ability to set oneself apart from the rest of the natural world as a fundamentally human trait that in part relies on a body of knowledge (71). However, the pieces of paper serve to illustrate where Herr Geiser has made mistakes. Frisch

experiments with montage in his second published diary, *Tagebuch 1966-1971*, and uses the technique in all of his subsequent fiction.¹⁶⁰ Visually striking for the reader, the cuttings deprive the protagonist of complete control over the text and therefore undermine his authority. Although it has been claimed that knowledge is a means of establishing some sort of distance from nature, Geiser's failed attempt demonstrates how little control man in fact has over this knowledge and therefore over his natural environment. Here again we can identify parallels between text and environment. In trying to find a body of knowledge the focalizer loses control of the text while this body of knowledge demonstrates where he has gone wrong and thus how he will not in the end be able to separate himself from the natural world.

Significantly, there are no more cuttings in the text after his stroke, until the very end of the tale, when the themes of the work are concisely summed up in a few impersonal cuttings. Turning his back on the body of knowledge, Herr Geiser does nothing when the majority of the excerpts are blown onto the floor by a gust of wind. The fate of the cuttings demonstrates neatly how the natural environment literally defeats this knowledge. Herr Geiser's rejection of the excerpts suggests an acceptance of the ephemeral nature of mankind and, by extension, himself. An alternative function of knowledge, which points to the notion of futility, is identifiable earlier in the text. "Wissen beruhigt" (20) Herr Geiser says to explain his desire for information.¹⁶¹ This comment ties knowledge to an emotional need, rather than to rational purpose, since, in response to the threat posed by the natural environment, the protagonist seeks out any random, inappropriate piece of knowledge, here, the golden section. The comment is reminiscent of Kurt Vonnegut's short poem explaining mankind's craving for wisdom:

Tiger got to hunt,

¹⁶⁰ See: Hage, *Max Frisch*, p. 119

Bird got to fly,
 Man got to sit and wonder 'Why, Why, Why?'
 Tiger got to sleep,
 Bird got to land,
 Man got to tell himself he understand.¹⁶²

Even before his renunciation of knowledge, Herr Geiser seems to be moving towards a similar understanding of the thirst for knowledge as innate curiosity, a natural trait, rather than a way to overcome nature.

Herr Geiser's acceptance of the futility of knowledge and his ephemeral nature marks the turning point in the tale. It comes to him when he tries to make his escape from the village by walking over the pass. The journey is arduous enough for a young man and is therefore a taxing adventure for an old man. He nevertheless eventually makes it over the pass. With Frisch's pedal note of failing technology in the background,¹⁶³ the reader is primed for a denouement. Almost at the village on the other side, Herr Geiser hears the church bells, turns around and climbs back over the pass. This apparent capitulation is provoked by the realisation that there is no escape from the contingencies of nature, even if he escapes the trapped village. He is still an old man nearing the end of his life whether he be in Basel or Ticino: "Was soll Herr Geiser in Basel?" (105) He sees the futility of learning, knowledge and progress, although having made this discovery he does not verbalise it. Typical for an ageing man, he cannot remember from one moment to the next what he was doing, thus losing any sense of future or past, (76) another defining human trait explained in one of the preceding excerpts. Ultimately, he regresses to savage habits, throwing the salamander on the fire and roasting his cat (125).

¹⁶¹ The sentiment is repeated later on p.37 when Herr Geiser explains why he misses his television.

¹⁶² Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 115

¹⁶³ Among the technological items that fail Herr Geiser are his binoculars (14), his television (30), his cooker (30), his boiler (31), his scissors (80), and his reading glasses. (84)

The most coherent story told within the text stands out, like the Matterhorn itself, because of its isolation. It is the tale of Herr Geiser getting stuck on the Matterhorn with his brother. This tale is evidently a favourite of his because he has bored his grandchildren often enough with it. The fact that this exciting climbing story is actually boring points to its inconsequentiality. It is trotted out randomly for the grandchildren, just as it pops up arbitrarily in the tale. Because it does not fit into any larger whole, it is as sad and lonely as old people's disjointed reminiscences often are. It seems like the kind of central narrative that a Frisch character would once have constructed his identity around.¹⁶⁴ However, left in isolation, the tale points to a rather different, empty and gratuitous story for the sake of story, or "Gier nach Geschichten,"¹⁶⁵ to quote Frisch. Once again, language proves to be a hollow promise, little more than a way of passing the time. This sense is supported by the repetitive and erroneous nature of the protagonist's other narratives. Small details alter between various versions of a story. For example, Geiser's description of the valley, which is very repetitive, as well as repeated, tells the reader variously that the last snows melt in May (57) or July and August (63). These discrepancies are another way in which Frisch undermines the authority of the narrative since the tale does not communicate any objective facts. He thus diminishes the value of story-telling, and it comes as no surprise that Frisch's fictional output slowed dramatically after this publication.

The Matterhorn tale is given emphasis not only by its isolation but also by its location at the end of the narrative, following his escape attempt. The pointlessness of climbing mountains, which is reinforced by the isolation of the narrative, is reminiscent of Ludwig Hohl's *Bergfahrt* (1976).¹⁶⁶ Published while Frisch reworked *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*, the text can be summarised by the question, which the protagonist dwells upon as he

¹⁶⁴ See: Butler, 'Max Frisch's *Man in the Holocene*: An Interpretation', p. 578

¹⁶⁵ Max Frisch, *Gesammelte Werke in zeitlicher Folge*, ed. by Hans Mayer, Vol. IV, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976), p. 262

¹⁶⁶ See: Ludwig Hohl, *Bergfahrt*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975)

climbs: "Warum steigt ihr auf die Berge? Um dem Gefängnis zu entinnen."¹⁶⁷ The principal irony of this comment is that the climber exchanges one prison, presumably that of human society, for another one, that of the natural world, from which he will not escape. While Hohl's climber tries to escape a mental gaol, Frisch's septuagenarian reckons with an escape from physical isolation, only to realise, once outside the boundaries of his physical isolation, that in reality his prison is mental and that, as for Hohl's protagonist, there is no escape possible.

The pointlessness of the climb and its narration fit with a general tone of futility present in the text. "Müßig" dots the narrative, as do comments focalized by Herr Geiser on the uselessness of various implements (74, 75). A dense opening paragraph signposts the major themes of the tale, including futility:

Es müßte möglich sein, eine Pagode zu türmen aus Knäckebrötchen, nichts zu denken und keinen Donner zu hören, keinen Regen, kein Plätschern aus der Traufe kein Gurgeln ums Haus. Vielleicht wird es nie eine Pagode, aber die Nacht vergeht. (9)

Building a pagoda from crisp-bread amounts to a pointless exercise to pass the time, and thus introduces the theme of futility. Herr Geiser's desire to forget the sound of the weather outside indicates the threat posed by the natural environment and his fear of it, which is identifiable throughout the story. The sense of threat is intensified by the fact that the time that Herr Geiser wishes will pass is the night, which suggests that his fears have prevented him from sleeping. The acceptance that the pagoda might never be built, that his efforts may come to nothing, hints, by way of the syntagmatic association set up by the first sentence, that his intention to forget the weather is also hopeless. 'Pagoda' is the Russian term for weather and the constructions are intended to give protection from the elements. Here, however, the vain attempts to build a crisp-bread pagoda offer Herr Geiser no psychological protection

¹⁶⁷ Hohl, *Bergfahrt*, p. 87

from the threat of the weather. Importantly, Herr Geiser only considers the construction of a pagoda; he remains inactive. As we have seen, the tale lacks action. Wolf Koepke notes that, with the ageing protagonist threatened more by the passing of time than by anything else, it is precisely the passing of time that builds the central action of the tale.¹⁶⁸ Herr Geiser's stroke is a symptom of old age and so the central event of the tale relates to ageing and therefore the passage of time. This theme, which is closely linked to the theme of futility, is built into the syntax of the opening paragraph. The only non-hypothetical verb is "vergeht". In this way, from the very beginning, emphasis is put on the fact that the passing of time is the one existential phenomenon of which we can be certain.¹⁶⁹

The parallels between the vain attempts to build a pagoda and the construction of the useless "Zettelwand" (53) are illuminated by an investigation of the house motif, that common Swiss literary trait.¹⁷⁰ The danger posed by the subsiding hillside causes Herr Geiser to fear for his house. Given the context of German-Swiss literature, where the house has come to stand as a symbol for society in general or a "national structure which protects and demarcates",¹⁷¹ then we can assume that the threat to his house has wider implications. This can be seen to be the case since, if the natural environment threatens Herr Geiser's house, then it threatens his wall of knowledge too. "The vast intellectual and cultural edifice mankind has constructed as his "permanent" habitat" is thus questioned and the links between buildings and human endeavour in general are made more explicit.¹⁷²

Apart from the Matterhorn anecdote, there are two other main coherent narratives in the text, forming a triptych on the themes of isolation and the impermanence of mankind. At

¹⁶⁸ See: Koepke, 'Retreat into Prehistory', p. 588

¹⁶⁹ For a full discussion of the central importance of the pagoda, see Gertrud Bauer Pickar, ' "Es wird nie eine Pagode": Max Frisch's *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*', *Seminar*, 19 (1983), pp 33-56

¹⁷⁰ See: Martin Kraft, *Schweizerhaus. Das Haus-Motiv im Deutschschweizer Roman des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Bern and Frankfurt am Main: Herbert Lang, 1971), pp 8-9

¹⁷¹ Malcolm Pender, ' "Du musst das Haus abtragen": The Motif of the House in Recent German-Swiss Fiction', in *The Modern Language Review*, July 1993, Vol. 88, Nr. 3, p. 687

¹⁷² Michael Butler, 'Max Frisch and Friedrich Dürrenmatt', in *Rejection and Imancipation: Writing in German-Speaking Switzerland 1945-1991*, ed. by Michael Butler and Malcolm Pender, (New York and Oxford: Berg, 1991), pp 41-56

the heart of the text, Herr Geiser retells the tale of his trip to Iceland. The absence of human life on the island is emphasised by the repetition of the fact that there are no farmsteads to be seen and the aforementioned barrenness of the environment. The sense of an ante-anthropoc world is also suggested by the numerous references to the ice age, the various geological ages and a world without humans (68-71). Immediately prior to the Iceland discourse and again at the very end of the text, we are presented with a description of the valley. The adjacency of the two narratives gives impulse to draw a comparison between the description of the Ticino and the Arctic island. Such a comparison rewards the effort, since the emphasis in the discussion of the Onsernone valley remains on a large and geological time-scale: "Die Aussicht herrlich, nicht anders *als vor Jahrtausenden*." (64); "...ein grünes Tal, waldig *wie zur Steinzeit*." (67)¹⁷³ These comments suggest an immutable natural world, which is disinterested in human concerns. This sense is emphasised by the repetition of the claim that it is not a dead valley (60, 142), which suggests one might be tempted to think the contrary. The fact that the government must undertake measures to keep the valley alive strengthens this impression (143). The valley's human history further supports the suggestion that the valley is really a realm of nature. Without evidence of ancient habitation and with the old subsistence way of life no longer being practised, the likelihood of the area remaining inhabited by humans is slim.

These three stories reiterate the notion of links between the text, Herr Geiser's mind and the natural environment. The Onsernone, Iceland, and the Matterhorn are all environments that the protagonist has experienced. Each of these locations is barren and isolated, and the human presence is slight. The Iceland story emphasises an experience of a pre-human age, while the Onsernone description has mankind barely eking out an existence. The Matterhorn tale depicts the protagonist and his brother literally clinging on to a natural

¹⁷³ My emphasis.

environment, where the sense of isolation is so great that the protagonist imagines it would be impossible to resist suicide if he had to spend the night on the mountain (135).

We have seen that Frisch challenges the authority of human knowledge and highlights its futility. He also challenges the authority of language. He constructs a pastiche from various secondary sources and an incoherent narrative focalised by the sole protagonist. With no sense of an Aristotelian plot, the only narrative motor seems to be the passing of time – time that will run out for Herr Geiser, as it will one day for the rest of humanity. We can therefore identify an ecological voice in *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* since the narrative strategies employed by the author prompt a reassessment of nature's hierarchy. Importantly though, Frisch's work does not focus on topical green concerns. He even disregards the threat of nuclear war, mocking the American paranoia that results in radar stations tracking Russian driftwood (70). Unlike the other authors handled in this thesis, Frisch's narrative does not call for the imbalance between man and nature to be put right, he rather belittles it. Frisch's bleak perspective is not so concerned with the rape of nature, as with the realisation that all mankind's efforts are futile, that the search for understanding and knowledge is worthless, and that we are merely a tiny blip in the history of the natural environment on Earth. So we can see that the 'ecological voice' serves the purpose of displacing human life a little away from the centre of these works and representing it as something peripheral, at the mercy of greater forces.

4. Gertrud Leutenegger's Metanoic Narratives

Gertrud Leutenegger was born in 1948 into a strict Catholic family in Schwyz, in Switzerland. After studying at the Zurich *Schauspielakademie*, and a spell as an assistant director in the *Schauspielhaus* in Hamburg and also at the *Schauspielhaus* in Zurich, she took the decision to dedicate her time to writing. Having published poems in Zurich newspapers as a student, she moved to "eine ausgedehntere Form"¹⁷⁴ with the novel *Vorabend* (1975). Despite the generic classification, the work retains many poetic features and ignores many of the formal conventions and traditions associated with the novel. This proves to be a defining trait of Leutenegger's work. "Ich möchte gegen den Strich schreiben,"¹⁷⁵ she comments, and certainly her work challenges conventions in both form as well as content. *Vorabend* deals ostensibly with a demonstration and might therefore be expected to be a politically-committed text such as was common in the 1970s. According to the narrator however, the novel has "...kein Thema."¹⁷⁶ Leutenegger's refusal to follow trends is perceptible in her other works too: *Nineve* (1977) reconsiders and "politisiert"¹⁷⁷ the biblical story of collective salvation through the actions of a chosen individual; *Lebewohl, Gute Reise* (1980) reassesses the Gilgamesh epic, centralising the point of view of the temple whore with the intention of revising more recent homosexual versions of the myth;¹⁷⁸ in *Gouverneur* (1981) the writer moves beyond realistic and chronological narration;¹⁷⁹ her short prose pieces in the volume *Das verlorene Monument* (1985) are in part reactions to intended governmental action and are therefore also written against the grain; *Kontinent* (1985) demolishes the notion of the Swiss village idyll as a phenomenon existing in isolation.

¹⁷⁴ Gertrud Leutenegger, personal communication with the author, Zurich, 10.07.2003

¹⁷⁵ Leutenegger, personal communication, Zurich, 10.07.2003

¹⁷⁶ Gertrud Leutenegger, *Vorabend*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), p. 16

¹⁷⁷ Gertrud Leutenegger, *Nineve*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), p. 170

¹⁷⁸ Leutenegger expressed this intention in conversation with the author, Zurich, 10.07.2003

¹⁷⁹ See: Henriette Herwig, 'Gertrud Leutenegger. Zwischen Tradition und Individuation', in *Grenzfall Literatur*, (ed.s) J. Bättig and S. Leimgruber, (Freiburg, Switzerland, 1993), p. 564

"Ich sehe die Welt ein bisschen anders,"¹⁸⁰ Leutenegger explains, in order to justify these revisions. To express her unconventional perspective she also employs unconventional literary devices. In his investigation of the role of the arts in the environmental movement, Axel Goodbody points to the importance of language in shaping opinion. This is where writers can be instrumental, he argues. "Because of their focus on the medium, creative writers tend to be at the forefront of awareness of the shortcomings of received language."¹⁸¹ Leutenegger appears to fall into this category, challenging received norms and, in this sense, she is a metanoic writer. The biblical term "metanoia" refers to a moment of radical change. Importantly, it contains the sense of a transformation. In the Old Testament, metanoia refers to the complete dedication of a person to Yahweh.¹⁸² In the New Testament, metanoia occurs on the road to Damascus: Saul has a blinding vision of Christ and becomes Paul, who then continues his journey with a changed perspective.¹⁸³ The Swiss eco-philosopher Beat Sitter-Liver refers to an ecological metanoia. Central to his notion is the sense in the Damascene Enlightenment that a change of perspective is undertaken and that with this new outlook the protagonist proceeds. Carl Amery, the Bavarian eco-writer *par excellence*, also takes up this notion suggesting that our world is in ecological peril if we continue to live "ohne die grundsätzliche Umwälzungen, ohne *Metanoia*." He calls for "einen Weg in die Zukunft, der zugleich ein Weg der Erhellung der Vergangenheit ist."¹⁸⁴ With the idea of metanoia, Amery and Sitter-Liver distance themselves from conservative environmentalism with its negative reputation for simplistic and reductive nostalgia and they move towards the philosophy of Arne Naess and the deep ecologists. Rather than constituting a complete revolution, metanoia implies a paramorphosis, to borrow a term from chemistry, or a change but not a wholesale change.

¹⁸⁰ Leutenegger, personal communication, Zurich, 10.07.2003

¹⁸¹ Axel Goodbody, 'Anxieties, Visions, Realities: Environmentalism in Germany' in *The Culture of German Environmentalism. Anxieties, Visions, Realities*, (New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2002), p. 40

¹⁸² See: Old Testament, 1st Kings (18, 37)

¹⁸³ See: New Testament, Acts (9, 1-20)

Understanding existence as defined through environment, the deep ecologists argue the importance of the senses in our knowledge of ourselves. Since the senses rely on the surrounding environment, the deep ecologists thus contradict the prevalent notion in capitalist societies of the self as a self-contained individual. Drawing attention once again to her unconventional outlook, we can identify a reliance in Leutenegger's work on sensual impressions.

Haben Sie je einen Aufsatz über die Fragwürdigkeit menschlicher Rechtsetzungen, menschlicher Strafverfahren, menschlicher Liebesformen gelesen und wurden verunsichert bis in die verlöschenden Bewusstseinskreise Ihres Schlafes hinein. Ich habe solche Beweisführungen immer mit seltsamer Stumpfheit registriert. Aber eine Strassenbiegung, ein beiseite geschobener Stuhl, ein verschlossenes Achselzucken konnten sich plötzlich mit Signalen aufladen, eine Spirale aufsteigender Blasen auslösen, die eine ganze Lebensform durchbrechen, zum Zerfließen bringen. Ihre kämpferische Bedeutung. Eine kleine Röte. Wie belanglos sie begann¹⁸⁵

Rejecting clear arguments as a way of convincing an audience of one's point, Leutenegger presents her readers with uninterpreted impressions, about which the reader must make his/her own decisions. She shows "... eine Skepsis gegenüber allem Diskursivem und ein Vertrauen in die Phänomene selbst."¹⁸⁶ As readers, we are left alone with the turn in the road or the chair, which has been pushed to one side. Bringing to mind Stendhal's theories about the importance of the freedom of the reader's interpretation, Leutenegger consciously avoids clarity. This is perceptible in her reluctance to give interviews because an interview "...wird oft zu einem solchen Verrat am Text."¹⁸⁷ Instead, she believes her texts should speak for

¹⁸⁴ Amery, *Bileams Esel*, pp 48-49

¹⁸⁵ Leutenegger, *Vorabend*, p. 68

¹⁸⁶ Henriette Herwig, 'Zwischen Tradition und Individuation' p. 571

¹⁸⁷ Leutenegger, correspondence with the author, 06.05.2003

themselves and should not be reduced to one definitive interpretation.¹⁸⁸ Subjectivity is encouraged while the existence of an objective reality is questioned.

Her first novel, *Vorabend*, is an account of the narrator's impressions as she walks through Zurich, following the route of a demonstration, which will take place on the following day. The anticipation of the demonstration not only gives the novel its title but also lends the text a tension of an unfulfilled future. This is balanced by the avenues of memory we are taken down as the narrator wanders around Zurich's streets. In a Proustian way, she allows herself to be inspired by moments of involuntary memory and thus the notional present, already loaded with the anticipation of the demonstration, is given the third temporal dimension of the past. In this way, the narrator demonstrates the Heideggerian sense of "dwelling" discussed in the introduction. The streets are not only paving stones and concrete, but have a further spiritual level, "das Unsichtbare in der Landschaft."¹⁸⁹ In her collection *Das verlorene Monument*, Leutenegger openly laments the demise of this dimension and it remains an important concern of all her work. In *Vorabend*, Leutenegger lays down the fundamental framework of her peculiar style. Her other works build from these foundations, indeed, continuing the architectural metaphor, her work has been compared to houses in a town: they are constituent parts of a greater whole. "Scheinbar zufällig aneinander gereiht, bedingen sich die Häuser gegenseitig; zur Stadt verwirklichen sie sich erst in Relation zueinander."¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, puzzling allusions in one work are often only resolved in another: the unclear references to the quince-yellow stripes of a zebra crossing in *Vorabend* are clarified in *Gouverneur*.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ Leutenegger, personal communication, Zurich, 10.07.2003

¹⁸⁹ Leutenegger, personal communication, Zurich, 10.07.2003

¹⁹⁰ C. Neidhart, 'Träume vom Einssein mit der Welt. Ein Porträt der Schriftstellerin Gertrud Leutenegger', in *Die Zeit*, 29.03.1985

¹⁹¹ Rike Felka, *Das geschriebene Bild. Über Gertrud Leutenegger*, (Vienna, 1996), p. 30

The relationship with Fabrizio, described in her second novel *Nineve*, is also at the heart of her novella *Meduse*.¹⁹² The novella deserves mention within this framework because of the central dichotomy between a traditional way of life and technological progress. The opposing poles are represented by Fabrizio's aunt, Giuditta, and his uncle respectively. Interestingly, here the two poles are inseparable, with brother and sister being reliant on each other. They are the last two permanent inhabitants of Rovina, a fictional Ticino mountain village. As with Walther Kauer's *Spätholz* (1976), the decline of a way of life involves a battle between conservation and technological progress. The fact that these two are, as in Kauer's narrative, represented by family members emphasises the proximity of the two divergent modes of existence as solutions to the demise of the mountain community. The conservationist approach is epitomised by Giuditta's attempts to maintain the "nevera". The nevera is a kind of simple refrigerator. It is a stone structure which the Ticinese used to build above the villages in the shade of the woods and which they packed with snow so that they had a cold place to store milk and cheese in the summer. The futility of this conservationist approach is suggested by the link that is made between the death of a child and the nevera. The narrator and her lover, Fabrizio, decide to spend a romantic night together in the nevera. It results in Fabrizio getting cold and their discovery or vision of a dead or dying child.¹⁹³ The tone of decay and decline is further heightened by the fact that the night in the nevera is the couple's last night spent together. The suggested infertility of the situation is augmented by the relationship of the last two inhabitants of Rovina. Not only are they siblings, but they are both unmarried. Although they are inseparable in that they both are content to live with only each other as company in the village, they cannot bring themselves to share a house. Instead, Fabrizio's uncle sleeps with his machines, linking the element of infertility to faith in technology. His faith in technology is however undermined by his inability to repair anything

¹⁹² See: Gertrud Leutenegger, *Meduse*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988). The text, like much of Leutenegger's work, has no generic classification.

for the village's summer inhabitants. Giuditta's situation is no more fruitful. Behind locked doors, she forlornly guards the paraphernalia of married life. The intensity of the sibling relationship is manifest in their almost simultaneous deaths. When her brother dies suddenly, Giuditta very quickly develops an enormous uterine tumor, which spells a painful end for the maiden aunt.

Both *Vorabend* and *Meduse* demonstrate Leutenegger's desire to write along new lines, "gegen den Strich." Her first novel is an unusual take on the demonstrations that were common in Zurich in the 1970s. It constitutes a new perspective by presenting the social injustices in relation to their immediate environment, rather than through abstract theoretical discussion. *Meduse* is also atypical in that the reader is simply presented with the phenomena of the dilapidation of rural life; the narrator sides with neither the conservationists nor the technocrats. Both works also demonstrate that she is committed to social issues. Her refusal to use standard techniques to express this commitment can be seen as a general rejection of traditions and traditional forms, which she perceives as being negatively loaded. This represents the bedrock on which her prose is built, as we will see in *Das verlorene Monument*, *Lebewohl gute Reise*, and *Kontinent*.

¹⁹³ The uncertainty in the narrative has resulted in critics summarising the episode with at least three different versions.

4.1 *Das verlorene Monument: Concrete Apocalypse*

Gertrud Leutenegger's work has been published for nearly thirty years by Suhrkamp. As we saw in the introduction, this period has seen a raising of the profile of ecological issues. In Switzerland, with female emancipation only arriving in 1971,¹⁹⁴ feminism is also very much a contemporary issue. Environmentalism and feminism constitute salient thematic focuses of Leutenegger's work. The three works that are most concerned with ecological questions are *Das verlorene Monument*, *Lebewohl*, *Gute Reise* and *Kontinent*. Of the three, *Das verlorene Monument* is the most accessible and is a good starting point, from which to investigate Leutenegger's work. It is a collection of short prose pieces, which appeared as newspaper articles over a period of seven years. The first story, *Der Tod kommt in die Welt*, was published in 1977 in the *Tages Anzeiger* and the last, *Reise durch die Miniatur*, was published in the same Zurich newspaper in 1984. Despite the fact that each story was therefore originally intended to stand as a work in its own right and not necessarily a part of a whole, the stories demonstrate a commonality of purpose and share thematic and stylistic features, which lend the collection a sense of coherence. This coherence is probably due to the freedom Leutenegger enjoyed to express her untempered opinion on the subjects which concerned her, thanks to her favourable relations with Christoph Kuhn, the literary editor of the *Tages Anzeiger*.¹⁹⁵

4.1.1 *Der Tod kommt in die Welt*

The first piece in the collection is the most obviously environmentally committed, with both form and content united in a cry of protest at the damage done to nature. It is set in the author's home town of Schwyz. The narrator returns there after a long absence and is shocked at the changes that she sees have taken place. Her major concern is the

¹⁹⁴ See: Christoph Dejung, *Schweizer Geschichte seit 1945*, (Frauenfeld, 1984), p. 16

transformation of the natural environment into an artificial concrete one. She discusses the effect that this has on her, citing one of Grimm's fairy tales to illustrate that the damage done to the environment upsets her so much that it nearly drives her insane. This reaction turns her into an outsider. She also discusses the various reasons why these changes have taken place. Consumerism and capitalism bear the brunt of the blame. However, the narrator also interestingly sees an element of random, irrational aggression in the destruction of the environment. She deals too with the fundamental contact with the natural environment that she had as a child and for which she now yearns. Like her outrage, this is supported intertextually by a literary quotation. Goethe visited Schwyz in 1775 and found it an idyll of natural beauty. The narrator shares a similar memory of the place but this memory, like Goethe, now belongs to the past. At first glance then, the piece appears to be a personal reaction to localised environmental damage. We will see that in fact the personal and localised are suggestively linked in subtle ways to a bigger picture. Furthermore, her reaction to the changes is not left simply on a physical level. As the title indicates, the spiritual issues of transcendence and of death are also raised.

In a dense, compact and opaque opening paragraph, Leutenegger introduces the main themes of the story, some of which will also prove to be central to her work as a whole. The first sentence cryptically introduces a sense of doom: "Ich werde nicht mehr lange leben." Following this, the narrator laments the loss of a direct sensual experience of nature: she can no longer touch the earth, she no longer knows the smell of the grass after the rain or the sensation of walking barefoot along the riverbank and the mountains, which used to look like golden elephants, now appear maimed. The idea of maiming has a resonance since the loss of the senses of sight, smell and touch constitute a mutilation of the human experience. The syntagmatic suggestion of the first sentence is that this mutilation is what will kill her. The cause of the death of experience is concrete: "Alles was ich anfasse, ist aus Beton." Tellingly,

¹⁹⁵ Leutenegger, personal communication with the author, Zurich, 10.07.03

after the two examples of touching the natural world, concrete thwarts precisely the sense of touch. Concrete will also stop the natural cycle of life after her death, since she says she will not be allowed a coffin that crumbles around her into the earth, and that instead she will be walled in by concrete.¹⁹⁶

Looking again at the experience that she has known and whose loss she now laments, we can identify it as a childhood memory, since children tend to seek out wild places partly out of a sense of adventure and partly in order to claim them as their own.¹⁹⁷ Following a stream barefoot to where it flows into the lake sounds like a child's adventure and the memory of "Sumpfgras" suggests wild, untamed nature. In this way, concrete destroys the experience of nature at the beginning of life. This experience is so fundamental to children that in urban landscapes they will seek out or create replacement wildernesses to conquer.¹⁹⁸ Remembering the denial of the cycle of life after death, we can perceive a total denial of life, from beginning to end, which Leutenegger weaves into her text in one dense opening paragraph. We can begin to make out the kind of death she is referring to in the title.

The alert reader will notice that the description of the narrator's lost sensual experience of nature is limited to three senses. Hearing and taste are still available to her. However, we see that these remain intact only to be offended by further damage done to the environment. The loss of farmland and the consequent loss of foodstuffs imply a restriction to what we might taste. More directly, the narrator's aural capacities are only mentioned in relating a negative childhood experience. Swimming in the lake as a child, she is called to the shore by the warning siren, which sounds when the road builders are blasting the rock. The juxtaposition of two contrasting relationships with nature could hardly be starker: the children enjoy "die ausgelassensten Wasserspiele", while the roadbuilders attack the stone with dynamite (14).

¹⁹⁶ Gertrud Leutenegger, *Der Tod kommt in die Welt*, in *Das verlorene Monument*, (Frankfurt am Main, 1985), p. 7. Further page references to this work will appear in brackets in the text.

¹⁹⁷ See: Wilson, *The Future of Life*, p. 138

This denial of sensual contact with nature is once again linked to mutilation, this time more directly, confirming the suggestion made in the opening lines. The postman's foot is torn off by a stone that is sent down by the blasting. Indeed, mutilation can be perceived as a recurrent theme in the text. The mountains are maimed like elephants, the Earth bleeds, we torture the Earth, and we bleed, smashing our faces against the concrete with which we have replaced farmland, leaving us with nothing to eat (15). Firstly, the mention of mutilation calls to mind the violence humans do to wild animals. The comparison of the mountains with elephants is particularly telling, given the dire reality of elephant poaching at the end of the seventies, which littered the African plains with rotting carcasses of elephants, killed only for their tusks.¹⁹⁹ Elephant poaching is a key paradigmatic example of human exploitation of the natural environment for economic profit. Secondly, we too are literally as well as metaphorically mutilated in the piece. The use of the first-person plural form emphasises that what we do to nature (the elephants or the landscape around Schwyz), we do to ourselves: "Wir sind unsere eigenen Mörder geworden." (11) Echoing the thoughts of Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, the narrator sees the exploitation of nature as the beginning of the exploitation of humans: "Die Naturmissachtung ist nur der Anfang der Missachtung der menschlichen Seele, der Anfang körperlicher Folterungen, der Anfang endgültig verwüstender Kriege." Horkheimer and Adorno linked the Holocaust to capitalism in a similar way, saying that capitalism must ultimately reduce everything, including humans, to economic units of worth.²⁰⁰ The parallels between war and the exploitation of the environment are also present elsewhere in the text. We have already identified the central theme of mutilation, which itself suggests conflict. The narrator compares the effect of the building site to the effect of war. The reason for building everywhere, and thereby harming the environment, is capitalism or "hemmungslose Profitgier" (8). The narrator quotes the

¹⁹⁸ See: Wilson, *The Future of Life*, p. 138

¹⁹⁹ See: Iain and Oria Douglas-Hamilton, *Among the Elephants*, (London: Viking, 1975), p. 24

²⁰⁰ See: Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, p. 212

Schwyz executive, who openly agrees that the building of a motorway café will damage the environment but insist that the economic benefits are more important. Unrelenting, the narrator draws the links between the demands for luxury and industrialisation on the one hand, and on the other, the consequential drop in agricultural productivity, which will leave us with nothing to eat. Perhaps the most telling example of the damage done to the environment by capitalist greed is the exploitation of the name of the mountains behind Schwyz in the name of a shopping centre. The mountains are called “die Mythen”, and so a foreigner asks if the shopping centre sells myths. The narrator remarks: “Es klingt wie ein schlechter Witz und ist erschreckende Wahrheit. Wir verkaufen den Mythos unserer Freiheit zum billigsten Preis.”⁽¹⁵⁾ The narrator therefore sees the mountains as representing freedom. They stand metonymically for the natural environment and since they are used now only as a marketing device, they are symptomatic of both the loss of freedom to experience nature through the senses as well as the contemporary fashion for attempting to derive economic profit from anything.

The notion that damage we do to the environment is damage done to ourselves is supported in the piece by a perceptible Heideggerian sense of belonging, or “being-in-the-world.” Heidegger sees the notion that man considers himself in isolation as the fundamental flaw in Western thought; he on the contrary asserts that man’s being is defined partly by the things around him.²⁰¹ This idea is perceptible in the ‘death’ the title refers to. It is not a literal, physical death but death in the sense that the fundamental existential contact with the environment is denied. The notion that humans belong to a natural environment is further supported by animistic descriptions of the natural world: the Earth is alive, lakes breathe, mountains are not only like elephants but are also awake in the night, and the world bleeds (10-11). This indicates the holistic attitude that pervades Leutenegger’s work. Humans are not separate from nature but are part of it, need it and rely on it. At the end of the tale, the narrator

²⁰¹ See: M. King, *Heidegger’s Philosophy*, (New York, 1964)

calls for the espousal of a way of life, which will "...dem Kreatürlichen seine Rechte zurückgeben...". In this demand, the narrator emphasises that humans are animals and have animal needs. The rights of "dem Kreatürlichen" are the kind of direct sensual experiences of nature that the narrator remembers in the opening lines. The sense that these experiences are rights reiterates the Heideggerian notion that man is fundamentally linked to his surroundings.

Leutenegger uses the microcosm of Schywz in dealing with the threat that modern capitalist society poses to the environment and in turn to itself. However, the implications within the text go beyond the parameters of the *innerschweizer* town. For example, there is a distinct sense of apocalypse in the story, widening its scope from personal to universal. Directly mentioned in the narrative is the narrator's memory of her childhood obsession with the idea of a flood. With the lakes out of bounds because swimming in them had become dangerous, she wished every night that the waters would rise and flood the dilapidated town of Seewen. Her apocalyptic desire encompasses the notion that the town deserves this punishment, since God sent the Flood to wash away the sins of the world. Emphasising that it is an apocalypse of our own making, the flood that comes is concrete, instead of water, but it nevertheless destroys the narrator's childhood world. The notion of a lost world is echoed when the narrator comments after the Goethe quotation: "Beschreibungen aus einer versunkenen Welt"(16) drawing a parallel with Atlantis. Furthermore, we can identify the four horsemen of the apocalypse: Death, Hunger, Plague and War. On a thematic level, we have already seen that death plays a significant role in the story, not just in the title, and we are further warned that extensive building on farmland will leave us with nothing to eat. The apocalyptic tone can also be detected if we look closely at the tropes. The comparison between the spread of concrete and war is striking. The cause for the spread, capitalist greed, is repeatedly described in pathological terms. The narrator mentions the "Konsumsucht" and "Renommiersucht" of our "kranke Zivilisation", as well as calling the symptoms of the disease, that is to say the concrete, "ein Krebsgeschwür." The presence of the four horsemen

serves not only as a grim portent of doom but also draws the links between the ecological protest and medieval catastrophism. As we saw in the introduction, contemporary environmentalism borrows heavily from catastrophism, even if the religious causes are no longer accredited. Environmentalism and catastrophism are similar in that they both attempt to predict a future, and these predictions tend to be bleak. Mankind has always used past experiences to look into the future. The problem now is that the future appears to hold unprecedented disasters. Our field of experience cannot help us. As Steve Raplan points out, this puts us in a similar position to people in the Middles Ages:

Perhaps writers and artists will be able to provide the required images. In medieval times, artists were highly successful at providing images of a never-to-be-experienced future. That dire future was called 'Hell'. Perhaps an analogously vivid term will be created for our potential future.²⁰²

A common reaction to this modern version of catastrophism is to ridicule it. "The 1960s and '1970s have witnessed a major cultural crisis. An increasing number of people reject the world we have created: nostalgic for a world we have lost, they delude themselves with idyllic and romantic visions of the past."²⁰³ The narrator's lament for her "idyllic" past is met with similar ridicule and she feels herself to be an outsider. To illustrate this, she cites Grimm's *Märchen*, "Der Frieder und das Caterlieschen." One of Grimm's less well known stories, it is the tale of a girl who has an unusual animistic perspective and also takes a literal understanding of metaphorical language.²⁰⁴ In Leutenegger's work we are only presented with part of the story. Catherlieschen climbs a mountain and sees the damage a road has done to nature. To protect the ground from the wheels she smears butter into the tracks. In doing so, she also drops her cheese and so is left without any supplies. She cares little for property

²⁰² Steve Raplan, 'Cognitive Maps in Perception and Thought', in *Image and Environment: Cognitive Mapping and Spatial Behaviour*, eds R. M. Davis, and D. Stea, (Chicago, 1973), p. 76

²⁰³ Derek Birdsall, and Carlo M. Cippola, *The Technology of Man*, (Penshurst Press, England, 1980), p. 261

²⁰⁴ See: Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, *Märchen der Brüder Grimm*, (Zurich, 1974; first complete works edition

however, so it does not trouble her greatly. This chimes with the anti-capitalist tone of Leutenegger's narrative. Catherlieschen's care for nature is also expressed in her direct communication with the earth, the air, and the maize, again echoing the narrator's direct contact with nature. This, combined with her indifference to economic matters, makes her appear strange to her own husband, who eventually throws her out. No longer able to recognise herself, she cuts her clothes in half, which makes the rest of the villagers consider her mad (11-12). The act of cutting up her clothes echoes the mutilation of the senses examined earlier. So, we can see that the *Märchen* supports the main themes of Leutenegger's text. Furthermore, the use of the *Märchen* genre supports the notion that ecological protest narratives are warnings, since *Märchen* were employed to warn children of future dangers. It reflects the catastrophist tendencies that environmentalism has inherited. The resonance between the *Märchen* and the main narrative also suggests that the main narrative is a kind of modern *Märchen*. Like the elephants and the horsemen of the apocalypse, this elevates the narrative from the level of a localised cry of protest, to that of a literary text with a wider, symbolical significance.

The Goethe quotations equally set the short story in a larger context. The quotations also form a stark juxtaposition to the only other outsider's impression of Schwyz, which they follow directly in the narrative. Where Goethe sees an idyll of natural beauty, the contemporary foreigner reacts incredulously to the notion of a "Mythen-Center". The narrator hints at further links between the two perspectives with the comparison of Goethe's observations to descriptions of an Atlantis. Both observations thus play with ideas of myth, and the one is lost in the other. Goethe's idyll has sunk under the concrete of the commercialism that sells the myth.

Finally, the polyvalent notion of death in the piece deserves attention. We have already seen that it is a recurrent theme. Furthermore, it appears to be an unconventional

understanding of death. This is clear from the title. The formulation, “death comes into the world”, suggests that death is not already there. This is bewildering at first, since death in the conventional sense is clearly already present in the world. Through the syntagmatic implication examined earlier, we can infer that the death referred to by the narrator is in fact a death of experience. Very quickly the notion of death then shifts on to the biological process of decay, which is thwarted by the changes in the natural environment. This seems to constitute a contradiction: at one and the same time we can identify both death as caused by the changes (the death of experience) as well as death (the natural biological process) as being denied by them. What is the solution to this apparent conundrum? The final mention of death comes at the end of the tale and the term shifts in meaning again. Here it is linked to material wealth:

Wie befreit fühlte ich mich, wenn die Schweiz eine gewisse Komfortarmut zurückgewänne, wenn sie endlich wieder das Lebenswerte dem Profitgierigen vorzöge. Wir könnten noch einmal dem Tod entrinnen.(16-17)

In rejecting economic greed, we can regain the things that make life worthwhile; in this sense the death we can escape is the death of experience. This sense of death also echoes the central Christian tenet that material wealth does not transcend the grave. If we dedicate ourselves entirely to the headlong pursuit of material wealth, death has complete finality, which in turn brings us back to the denial of the cycle of life. The narrator therefore seems to suggest that if we forsake the “Profitgier” we have a chance of transcendence. The polyvalency of the notion of death ties the themes of the short story together. Environmental damage is linked to death in the death of direct sensual contact with the natural environment; at the same time environmental damage taken to an extreme prevents the cycle of life after death; the general apocalyptic tone of the story also derives in part from the inclusion of the notion of death and

also from the prominence given to death by the title and the conclusion of the tale; the futility of material wealth in the face of death constitutes part of the general rejection of capitalism.

Es geht zuletzt nicht um einen vordergründigen Heimatschutz, es geht um etwas viel Elementares.

Es geht um unsere eigene Substanz. Um unsere Lebenswurzeln, die ausgerissen werden. (9)

4.1.2 *Das verlorene Monument*

The piece that gives the collection its title is a reaction to the plans for the rebuilding of Lucerne railway station, which was destroyed by a fire. Not overtly concerned with conventional notions of ecology, *Das verlorene Monument* nevertheless deals with what we value in our extended environment. In this case, the narrator draws attention to the spiritual value of “grosszügige Architektur”²⁰⁵ and complains about the plans which were being made to build an entirely utilitarian station, which would make the most of possible economic gains. We can see therefore that, as in the first piece, unbridled capitalism remains a thematic focus here.

In *Das verlorene Monument*, as in her other work, the prose represents a subjective reality, which is a multiperspectival collage of dream, memory and physical reality. These elements converge on one single narrative plane. The piece opens with the relation of a dream. The length of the first sentence and the confusion of various strands in the prose render the identification of the narrative perspective problematic. Appearing in the *Tages Anzeiger* shortly after the fire itself and opening with the words “Nein, nicht in der lichterloh flammenden und in sich zusammenberstenden Decke...” the piece appears to begin with an account of the disaster itself. In fact, it begins with the narrator’s father telling the narrator about a recurrent nightmare, which he used to have as a child. The dream involves him on a swing that is fixed somewhere high in the sky. He relates it standing in Lucerne station while his wife stares into the open space above her, into the famous glass dome. The dream adds an apocalyptic tone to the disaster, which the reader knows will take place. The dream’s impact

is augmented by the narrator repeating it three times in the piece. She thus draws attention to this example of a subconscious premonition. This done, she then gives the reader one of her own, writing in the past tense about the dome that at the time of publishing had not yet been rebuilt. Similar to *Der Tod kommt in die Welt*, her experience is diminished by the new building. She conveys this by way of a long list of things that are no longer possible:

an den Entstellungen ohne ich den Verlust, keine leeren glasüberdachten Passagen mehr lassen
Versprechungen aufleben, keine Kuppel bildet das Forum einer zu träumenden Freiheit, so ist
Reisen kein Aufbruch mehr, kein Abenteuer und schon gar keine Flucht (51)

Once again we can identify how important the senses are for the narrator. The loss is something which she senses, rather than something which she can clearly rationalise. "Entstellungen" further hints at the idea of mutilation, which was identified in the first piece. Additionally, she laments the loss of the psychological aspect of travelling that is implicit in the capitalist rationalisation of the station. Any sense of adventure or escape is stifled by the architecture of the new station; travel becomes simply a matter of getting from A to B. Peter von Matt summarises the essence of the change:

Der Untergang des altmodischen Bauwerks steht zeichenhaft für alles, was seit den sechziger Jahren in der Schweiz unter dem Zeichen Fortschritt und Weltoffenheit und dynamisch-technischer Entwicklung geschehen ist.²⁰⁶

The really significant element in the loss of the dome is that the planned replacement dome leaves no room for the myth, leaving the travellers, who pass through the station, robbed of an opportunity to indulge their imaginations. This naturally has implications for literature and it

²⁰⁵ Leutenegger, personal communication, Zurich, 10.07.03

²⁰⁶ Peter von Matt, 'Kritischer Patriotismus. Die Auseinandersetzung der Schweizer Schriftsteller mit der guten und mit der bösen Schweiz' in *Der Zwiespalt der Wortmächtigen. Essays zur Literatur*, (Zurich: Benziger,

is here that we can identify one of the key reasons for the cryptic nature of her work. Leutenegger departs from the trend of critical patriotism and criticises the “aufklärerisch-rationale Sprache” used by its proponents, for being spiritually reductive. Although she sees patriotism as problematic, she admires the myth and irrational element of it, its “Zwielicht.”²⁰⁷

The importance of the old station as an example of what Leutenegger calls the invisible element in environment is made obvious by the suggested connections²⁰⁸ between the station and various characters’ subconscious. The father’s dream draws together the psychological elements of memory (that of his childhood), experience (his visits to the station) and imagination (the idea of a swing fixed to the sky.) This wealth of psychological experience is not highly valued by a materialistic society, which cannot count dreams or weigh memories. The value of the dome may not be measurable in economic terms but it nevertheless has direct beneficial effects, which are highlighted in the text. For example, the face of the narrator’s mother loses all traces of strain as she stares into the open space. For the narrator herself the station has a quasi-religious aspect: the pictures of the various destinations painted on the walls are “die Altarbilder der Reise”(42) adding a sense of pilgrimage or spiritual experience to travel. She assimilates these into her mental picture of her home environment, comparing the picture of the Matterhorn to an over-sized version of the Mythen (42). Tying the different narrative strands of the text together the piece culminates with a cry of anguish from the narrator. An escape from the all-embracing arms of capitalism is no longer possible: “life is shopping” (51). The use of English in the text makes this clear, implying the homogenisation of culture that accompanies globalisation. She imagines herself now on a swing in the “verschwundene Leere” of the station and laments the loss of the possibility of seeing the flaming red petticoat, an allusion to the memory of her mother

1991), p. 25

²⁰⁷ Quoted by von Matt in ‘Kritischer Patriotismus’, pp 23-25

²⁰⁸ Elizabeth Boa identifies these partial connections as a characteristic of Leutenegger’s prose. See: Boa, Elizabeth, ‘Gertrud Leutenegger: A Feminist Synthesis’, in *Rejection and Emancipation: Writing in German-speaking Switzerland 1945-1991*, ed. by Michael Butler and Malcolm Pender, (New York and Oxford: Berg,

standing under the glass dome. In the final sentence she broadens the perspective, suggesting that what has happened in Lucerne is simply symptomatic of the general trend toward diminishing psychological freedom in both town and country.

A characteristically Leuteneggerian piece, *Das verlorene Monument* concentrates on our relationship to our environment. Rejecting any desire to employ rational arguments, Leutenegger finds her own language and own narrative forms, creating her ecological voice, a language of the home. In the wake of the article and other opposition to the plans, Lucerne station was in fact given a new dome.

4.1.3 *Die dankbaren Toten von Chippis*

The fifth piece in the volume deals with another part of Switzerland that is suffering ecological damage for the sake of short-term economic gain. Chippis is a small village in the Valais region in the Alps of southern Switzerland. The tale, which is a portrait of the village in one long paragraph, begins with a reception at the aluminium works, which have poisoned the local environment. The owners, who are drawing the economic profit out of the region, are toasting the local politician in celebration of the end of the "Fluorkrieg." From the reception room's windows we can see the changed environment of Chippis. This leads the narrator on to discuss the effects of the aluminium works on the village's human and animal inhabitants, which are no cause for celebration. Moving paradigmatically from point to point, the narrator finally returns to the aluminium works where the dead of Chippis are laid to rest.

The short story begins with a simile for lack of communication between parties. The description of the reception flanks the description of the statues in front of the building. These figures sit as if they are engaged in a "weit entfernten Zwiegespräch" and they look as if they were meant to look at each other but their gazes also appear to be unable to reach each other (69). This typical Leuteneggerian narratorial interpretation sets the tone for the remainder of

the tale. The lack of communication is also evident in the behaviour of the villagers: they do not complain about the terrible poisoning of their environment because the aluminium company pays them "Schweigegelder." With the aluminium company being responsible for the silent statues in front of the building, the villagers' behaviour not only reflects the statues in their silence but also in the fact that the aluminium company controls them. In the description of the scene in the local bar, the "Café de l'Industrie", the only communication seems to be between a man and a beer bottle, which he is holding to his ear, as if the bottle were a radio (72). Finally, at the end of the tale, we come to the graves at the aluminium works. They are for the workers who have come down from the Val d'Anniviers to work in the aluminium works and who never returned. The narrator suggests: "Es ist als ob diese zwei Orte, der Friedhof und das einmal verlassene Tal, einander antworten würden, aber sie sprechen eine unversöhnliche Sprache." (76) Nobody takes the dead back to their valley and their contact with their home is broken: they will not see the wild, natural environment of their valley, nor the shifting light (77). The tradition of standing the coffin on its end during the wake gives the dead the opportunity to "greet" the mourners. This dialogue is also broken by the aluminium works, which thus continues to dominate the workers even after death.

Why this silence? Why the "Schweigegelder"? The absence of communication brings us to the heart of the "Fluorkrieg" and the changes caused by the aluminium works. The "Fluorkrieg" is about the waste from the works, which changes the chemical balance of the soil, making it impossible to grow the traditional apricots.²⁰⁹ In order that the farmers do not complain, the aluminium company buys the land from the farmers and then rents it back to them at reasonable rates, extracting a contractual commitment from them not to claim damages. Mafia-like, the company pays any remaining independent farmers for their silence on the matter. The company then suggests to the farmers that they replace their apricots either with a robust species of apple or bananas. Bananas are obviously not indigenous to

²⁰⁹ The Valais apricots are well-known to the Swiss reader, above all as an example of the government's

Switzerland and importantly the apples are an "in ausländischen Industriegebieten erprobte Golden Delicious-Sorte." (70) This therefore constitutes a diminution of biodiversity, which we saw in the introduction will lead to ecological catastrophe, if not halted soon. The wider significance of the loss of the apricots is suggested by the narrator: "Manchmal wird das Seltene, Untergehende zur warnendsten Figur." (70) This narratorial interpretation preempts Edward O. Wilson, who likens the world-wide dying-off of amphibians to miners' canary lamps.²¹⁰ For the inhabitants of the Valais the disappearance of the apricots is as significant of the local environmental damage as Wilson's frogs are for world-wide environmental damage. The frog crisis happens to be particularly serious in Switzerland and in spring warning signs appear urging motorists to try to avoid squashing the frogs. The ecological tone continues with an anti-capitalist tirade reminiscent of Chief Seattle's message to George Washington.²¹¹ The farmers receive financial compensation from the aluminium works. The narrator asks: "Aber wie kann man Erde mit Geld ersetzen? Wie kann man die Luft kaufen?" (70-71) For the narrator, our relationship to our natural environment cannot be transferred into economic worth, and she sees no correlation between the two.

Her next question takes us onto the theme of the poor quality of life of the Valais people: "Wie kann man Krankheit zum Lebenszustand erklären?" (71) The locals live a futile life of permanent illness. The scene in the bar is dispiriting. The villagers watch a football match on the television, an unproductive activity in itself that is made all the more extreme by the scoreline always remaining nil nil. There is the man, mentioned earlier, who is listening to his beer bottle. The rest of the town is empty, dark and silent apart from the sound and light of televisions coming out of the houses. Any complaints about diseased livestock are brushed aside by experts who inadvertently let slip that the aluminium company has given them orders that decisions over any damage discovered are to be made in favour of the aluminium

protectionist policy concerning traditional methods of farming.

²¹⁰ See: Wilson, *The Future of Life*, p. 56

²¹¹ Chief Seattle's famous, although unsubstantiated, message to the president:

company. Like a good mafia then, the aluminium company controls the decision-makers as well as the people. The inhabitants suffer from wrist-pains and gastric problems but these symptoms are passed off by the experts as mere simulation. Partly as a result of these problems, but also because this artificial landscape is just as foreign to the Valais people as it is for the Italian immigrants, everyone shares the dream of leaving Chippis (75).

“Jede menschliche Ordnung, die etwas wegnimmt, wofür sie kein gleichwertiges Gut bietet, bringt den Tod.”(71) The narrator indicates here that the poor standard of life in Chippis is equivalent to a sort of death. We can therefore again identify the polyvalency of meaning that we encountered in the first piece in the collection. This is already evident from the title of the text, “Die dankbaren Toten von Chippis”. How can the dead be grateful? To be grateful one has to be alive. The solution to this puzzle is given at the end of the piece. There is a tradition that says that the dead will “gratefully” come to the aid of those that honour their last resting place. Remembering this tradition whilst considering the graves at the aluminium works, the narrator feels herself to be obliged to ask who thinks of the living people of Chippis? In posing this question she implies that there is a parallel between the living and the dead in Chippis; she puts the living in the same category as the dead. The parallel links back into the earlier implication that the standard of life is in some way comparable to death. It further reinforces the fact that the aluminium works exerts control over both the living and the dead in the village. The workers are never freed from the grip of the works and instead they remain in a state of limbo, where their lives are dulled by the effect of the works and their deaths do not bring a return to their homes. As in the first short story, we can identify the idea that the damage done to the environment constitutes in various different ways a sort of death.

To conclude, the more opaque and cryptic aspects of Leutenegger’s texts lend a depth and interdependence to the readily identifiable themes of environmentalism and anti-capitalism. Through paradigmatic digressions and syntagmatic inferences, the author subtly

encourages the reader to identify the correspondence between the various divergent parts of the narratives and the superficial contradictions. In restricted narrative space, Leutenegger achieves, through her dense and poetic prose, a sense of what we are losing, in both physical and spiritual terms, through profit-driven damage to the environment. Her, in places, apocalyptic tone gives force and a universal validity to her work. The subjective experiences of returning to a changed home or visiting a village in the Valais are lifted from the level of a simple report into narratives of much wider significance through the poetic and fantastical in Leutenegger's prose.

4.2 *Lebewohl, Gute Reise*

Gertrud Leutenegger's dramatic poem published in 1980 is a reworking and contemporization of the Sumerian *Gilgamesh* epic, which predates Homer by some 1500 years.²¹² The 4500-year gap between the original and the revision is bridged immediately by the unexpected title and the list of characters. "Lebewohl, Gute Reise" is the first line of a Comedian Harmonists' song from the 1920s. This reference therefore places the dramatic poem squarely in the twentieth-century. The list of characters contains the names "Gilgamesch" and "Enkidu", which clearly signal the mythological content of the work. This connection between the modern world and the ancient mythological world is one of the central tensions of the work from which many of the key themes grow. The clash of epochs evident in the title is also indicative of the wealth of allusions and symbols that enrich the text. Leutenegger's work not only alludes to these ancient mythological figures and to a popular musical act from the early twentieth century, but also to the Bible, the Third Reich, the Cold War, the *commedia dell'arte*, the Alps and contemporary ecological problems. This "brodelnde Mischmasch"²¹³, which plays around one of the oldest surviving pieces of text, is anchored to the central theme of mankind's alienation from the natural environment. The environment itself plays an important role in the work and stands in opposition to Gilgamesch's urge to civilise, which functions as the fundamental driving force behind the action of the dramatic poem. As with her other work, Leutenegger does not allow these themes to remain peripheral but instead binds them closely to the more general and larger issues of self-realisation, life and death.

In order to gauge properly Leutenegger's revisions of the Sumerian epic, it is useful to outline briefly the original. Indeed, without knowledge of the original story, the Swiss modernisation poses comprehension problems for the reader. Gilgamesh was a tyrannical Babylonian king who ruled the city of Uruk. A man of superhuman strength, he had never

²¹² See: N.K. Sandars (trans.), 'Introduction' in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p.7

faced a significant rival. This changed with the arrival of Enkidu. According to the myth, the people of Uruk pray for the gods to send an opponent to face Gilgamesh. Answering their prayers the gods send a wild man, Enkidu. A trapper encounters him and becomes infuriated by the wild man's actions, which thwart him in his attempts to catch animals. The trapper employs a temple whore to seduce Enkidu, reasoning that this will estrange him from the wild animals. Rejected by the animals and having lost some of his strength, Enkidu is lured to the city by the whore. There he meets Gilgamesh and the pair wrestle. Although Gilgamesh wins, the encounter is closely fought and the opponents become close friends. They travel to southern Iran, slay Humbaba the Terrible (a demon), destroy a cedar forest, and become famous for their bravery. When the heroes return to Uruk, Ishtar, the goddess protecting Uruk, proclaims her love for Gilgamesh. He rejects her and subsequently Ishtar sends the Bull of Heaven to destroy the town. The heroes however kill the bull, further angering Ishtar. Enkidu rips off one of the bull's limbs and threatens Ishtar with it, saying they will kill her next. Afterwards, the Gods decide to punish Enkidu for his part in the killing of Humbaba by giving him a fatal illness. Following the subsequent the death of his friend, Gilgamesh is distraught and seeks out the guru Utnapishtim, who tells him that the secret of eternal life is to be found in an aquatic plant. The plant is unfortunately stolen from Gilgamesh by a serpent, and so he returns, unhappy, to Uruk, where he dies. Gilgamesh is unquestionably the hero of the story and although he shows human fallibility, he is generally viewed as a positive figure for his strength of character and bravery.²¹⁴

The epic of Gilgamesh is a myth. This is evident from the supernatural elements and from the presumed fictionalisation implicit in the fact that this earliest surviving example of writing purports to recount the tale of events which took place 700 years previously. Myth has been defined as a way in which a society locates its social practices or gives some answer to

²¹³ Albert von Schirnding, 'Von Nineve nach Uruk' in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Munich, 11/12.10.1980

²¹⁴ See: Sandars, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

the question of human origins.²¹⁵ With so many elements of the Gilgamesh tale identifiable in other fundamentally formative and subsequent narratives, such as the Odyssey and the Bible, we can count the ancient epic among the essential stories of Western culture. If myth has the power of ratifying social custom then it comes as no surprise that, for the kind of reforming mind that Gertrud Leutenegger possesses, an examination of such a powerful social phenomenon should be appealing.

Superficially, Leutenegger's dramatic poem shares much with the source. Firstly, the form mirrors to some extent the original. The Sumerians had no clearly defined literary categories or generic distinctions for their literature: there existed no difference between prose and poetry, nor between hymns, epics and myths. Non-fiction was not separate from fiction, and present time could be mixed together with history.²¹⁶ Leutenegger's choice of the form of the dramatic poem blurs the distinction between modern genres of poem and play. Illustrating just how much of a grey area this is, one pedantic commentator suggests that in fact *Lebewohl, Gute Reise* is a "poetisches Drama."²¹⁷ The fact that the work has seldom been performed means that most of the audience is made up of readers, and in this perhaps contingent sense the typical experience of *Lebewohl, Gute Reise* is similar to that of reading a novel. In short any attempt to place the work in any one literary category is likely to be unproductive. Secondly, there are common elements in the *histoire* of both the original and Leutenegger's version: Gilgames(c)h and Enkidu are main characters; the former seems to represent the civilised man while the latter is the wild man of the woods and mountains; Enkidu is seduced by a temple whore; Gilgames(c)h and Enkidu fight each other, become friends, and later slay a bull; Enkidu dies of a fatal illness; a forest is destroyed; Gilgames(c)h seeks out Utnapis(c)htim and the secret of everlasting life.

²¹⁵ See: Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, p. 163

²¹⁶ See: Raoul Schrott, *Die Erfindung der Poesie*, (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbush Verlag, 1999), pp 31-32

²¹⁷ von Schirnding, 'Von Nineve nach Uruk'

The shared basic form and rudiments of the *histoire* show that the same myth lies at the heart of the two versions. However, as mentioned above, the fact that the title of the modern version is not “Gilgamesch” already points to the reinvention of the myth and the diminished significance that the figure of Gilgamesch has in Leutenegger’s version. This investigation of Leutenegger’s first dramatic poem seeks to identify and assess the author’s revisions of the text while placing the work within the wider context of the ecological strand in her oeuvre.

The thrust behind the original epic is the self-realisation achieved by the main character. In this respect, Leutenegger remains true to the original. However, the Swiss author significantly alters the manner in which Gilgamesch comes to his self-knowledge. In the Sumerian version, Gilgamesch’s wanderings and mighty deeds are the illuminating factors on his journey of self-realisation. In the manner of a epic hero, he undertakes a long and arduous voyage, punctuated by brave exploits before finally crossing the sea to Utnapishtim and discovering the secret of life. This seems to be the reward for old age and a full life, and is the prelude to death. Losing this secret, which, as a mortal, he must, he then dies. Leutenegger’s character is very different but is perhaps more picaresque in that his exploits are random. This said, he is more tragic than comic. The hero’s mighty deeds are portrayed in a much darker light, giving Gilgamesch the aspect of a violent megalomaniac. In the second scene it is suggested that he has little compassion: he has somehow injured the temple whore (who seems to be bleeding throughout the work) and has then thrown her out in the night. Rather than being a king admired for his brave acts, Gilgamesch proves to be a crafty and underhand politician and is himself responsible for sending the temple whore out into the wilds in order to lure of Enkidu to the city. He does this so that he might have an “Ersatzkönig”,²¹⁸ someone to partner him in power, onto whom he can deflect the blame for all the problems that his disastrous and tyrannical reign has caused. These problems and contentious decisions are

²¹⁸ Gertrud Leutenegger, *Lebewohl, Gute Reise*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), p. 22. Further references

are listed in scene six: he plans to turn the ziggurat into a 'Kriegslabor'; the land around the canal has been left to turn into a wasteland; his network of roads has destroyed the fields of barley; fruit moulds on the few remaining quince trees; a desperate farmer has sawn his own head off; and Gilgamesch plans to build a watch tower taller than the ziggurat to survey the town wall (29-30). The conflict with Inanna is one of the clearest examples of how the Sumerian hero has become an anti-hero in Leutenegger's version. Gilgamesch and Enkidu capture the goddess, just as they do in the original, but in the 1980 version the feat is less than glorious. Inanna is asleep when they attack and Enkidu suggests that she is perhaps in fact already dead. The two warriors hardly constitute a finely honed team. Enkidu has realised that Gilgamesch is only using him as a target for public criticism and he is tired of their bloody travels. They bicker, shout and curse each other (71-73). The inseparable couple of the ancient epic have become a pair that are brought together by expediency and are actually incompatible. Their friendship proves to be hollow and Gilgamesch is seen to be exploiting even his closest ally. As Christa Wolf does in *Kassandra*,²¹⁹ Leutenegger deconstructs a heroic male myth here by replacing the dominant, but positively depicted male hero of the Sumerian tale with a destructive, violent, misogynist tyrant. Leutenegger's figure is brought no personal enlightenment by his travels, which are represented as sporadic sprees of arbitrary violence, or as the temple whore (who continually highlights Gilgamesch's transgressions) puts it "eine lange nutzlose Reise" (78).

Gilgamesch's solitary megalomaniacal struggle is an attempt to dominate and control the world around him in an effort to remain superior to life itself. This can be seen in scene 4 in his desire to rationalise and shape the world: "dieses flammende zuckende alte Gebilde Erde, ich will es noch einmal bändigen." (20-21) The sought after control indicated by "bändigen" is emphasised by the word "Gebilde", which suggests that the earth is something

to the work will be given in brackets after citations in the text.

²¹⁹ See: Christa Wolf, *Kassandra*, (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1983). Wolf revises the Trojan war, giving a similarly anti-heroic slant to the myth.

akin to a human creation. Taking the metaphor of crafting one step further, Gilgamesch wants in his ideal kingdom:

unempfindlich, kühl, diszipliniert und berechnet, ein Volk von Statuen! jedes meiner Worte soll historisch werden und ich selbst unangreifbar wie der Nimbus meiner Person, the most wanted man! (21)

The notion of statues invests this image of a rationalised world with Nietzschean overtones of Apollonian control. The sense of shaping is also present in the idea that his words should become "historisch." This brings us back to the power of the speaker, which we examined in the introduction, implicating the telling of stories in the protagonist's megalomania, as well as pointing towards a Hegelian understanding of history. This search for power over both his textual and real surrounding environments points to a comprehension of self that is based on the Cartesian split between subject and object. Gilgamesch considers everything around him as an Other and treats it consequently as such. He does not see himself as part of that Other.

This speech is the first time in the work that we hear from Gilgamesch and it therefore plays a crucial role in defining his character. In the scene, we also learn that his escapist sentiments are provoked by his relationship with the temple whore. His first words in the work are about how she has had an emotional effect on him. He says this as he drives into "eine weite leere Ebene" in his large mirror-windowed car (20). The mirror effect is designed to reflect the outside world and Gilgamesch's choice of a desert-like destination further adds to the sense of an attempt to flee contact. The emphatic characteristics of his first speech, signalled by the multitude of exclamation marks and verbal ejections, indicate the protagonist's excited, if not desperate state of mind. His exposition of his desire for an unemotional people follows on directly from a renunciation of love, in what is paradoxically an extremely emotional outburst. If it is not already clear what Gilgamesch is experiencing,

then the Grosse Königin spells it out to him: "Du hast Angst vor dem Tod." She links this morbid fear to the whore's love, suggesting that Gilgamesch has been frightened by the power of her love. The use of the song "Lebewohl, Gute Reise" in this critical scene is interesting. The Grosse Königin plays it on her cassette player for the sake of the whore and in so doing angers Gilgamesch. It is particularly poignant following Gilgamesch's speech since he has just announced that he wishes to "take his leave" of love,²²⁰ and the song, associated as it is with farewells, has now been attributed with links to his former lover. The song is a recurrent motif in the work and loaded as it is after this scene, it serves as a constant reminder of Gilgamesch's motives and the central theme of self-realisation.

The fear of love can be understood as a fear to engage with the world. Love is an example of how things beyond the traditional limits of the self can change the self. When one is in love, the emotional state of the self is changed. This change is dependent on another person and the relationship to that person. The emotional state of the self is therefore not controlled from entirely within the self alone but is also influenced by what is around the self. An acceptance of this interaction breaks down the subject/object divide and encourages, in its place, a Heideggerian understanding of existence as defined in part by that which surrounds the self.

Gilgamesch's morbid fear becomes his primary preoccupation as he searches to avoid death by conquering life. His struggle is set against a more general dichotomy between life and death, which is a central theme of the work. The dichotomous structure of the first act highlights this theme. The scenes are divided between Uruk and the top of a very high mountain, where an "ICH" character is lying masked in her coffin. ICH seems to be in a limbo world, as she appears to be dead and is lying almost mummified in a coffin, but can communicate nonetheless with living characters. She remains serene on the mountain top while Gilgamesch down below in the city is very active: he fights, he travels to far off lands

²²⁰ The German in the original is: "Abschiede müssen geleistet werden."

and conquers demons. The polarity of the situation is emphasised by the juxtaposition of scenes, with the focus oscillating from the mountain top half-life of the ICH to Gilgamesch's vital reality down below. Once again, however, things are not as they might at first seem. By the end of the work, we can see that Gilgamesch's frenetic action strangely precludes life, while the ICH figure exists quite peacefully but in a fuller sense. Her fuller existence is due to her involvement with the surrounding natural environment, which appears to define her. She says in her opening speech:

Eben war mir, ich sei ein Teil des Berges geworden und hätte Augen aus dem Stein heraus aufgeschlagen und läge in einem Sarg von Bläue [...] ich spüre meine Füße nicht mehr, sie sind in die Bläue ausgeronnen (11)

She exclaims to her mother, who accompanies her on the plateau, "Was hast du für Augen, Mutter, die Wolken stehen darin still" (12), suggesting that she is also embedded in the natural environment.

This makes a stark contrast to Gilgamesch, whose problems derive from his desire to conquer the world around him, an attitude that precludes a realisation of the moving parameters of self, which might include elements of the surrounding environment. The tyrant possesses a destructive urge to civilise, which is clearly perceptible in the taming of Enkidu. As in the original myth, Gilgamesch and Enkidu are represented initially as polar opposites: the urban civilised type and the wild man of the woods. In Leutenegger's version, this is exaggerated with Enkidu first appearing in the work as an ape (30). Once the whore has seduced Enkidu and brought him to Uruk, Gilgamesch vaunts the civilisation of Enkidu returning to the metaphor of art noted earlier. He praises his "Marmormuskeln", suggests shaving him of his wild hair and encourages him to avoid emotions and instead assume a "Statuenblick" (42). The details of marble muscles and a statue's gaze suggest the work of a sculptor and once again bring to mind ideas of Apollonian shaping.

Having run with the beasts, Enkidu is now prepared to slay them for the sake of it. Together with Gilgamesch he rips the holy wedding bull to pieces. The implications of this bloody act are pronounced by the whore: "dich selbst hast du umgebracht, dich selbst hast du verstümmelt". Because he has an emotional link to the animals, he hurts himself when he mutilates the bull. Gilgamesch tries to reply that this kind of act is perfectly natural and he sees little difference between war and love-making. The whore responds to this saying: "Aber du kannst nicht das Leben überwinden und am Leben bleiben!" (51) This idea is reminiscent of Leutenegger's work *Der Tod kommt in die Welt*. In the short prose piece, which was examined in the previous section, Leutenegger expounds her understanding of the interdependence of life and death. "Ich werde nicht mehr lange leben" the narrator says in that piece, referring not to literal organic death but to the death of experience through the preclusion of sensual contact with the surrounding environment. In *Lebewohl, Gute Reise*, the whore tells Gilgamesch that he must engage in life and admit the links he has to the things around him. Prefiguring Gilgamesch's own acceptance of the truth of the whore's words, Enkidu recognises it, as he is dying of lung cancer, civilisation's malady *par excellence*. Linking his mortality to self-knowledge, he says: "Siehst du das frische hellrote Blut aus mir rinnen, endlich fühle ich mich wieder." (89) Gilgamesch asks whether he has not already seen enough blood, to which he replies that the blood of others, spilled by him and Gilgamesch, only made him lose himself. Just as the whore suggested earlier, his brutality has the negative effect of diminishing his experience of life.

ICH has assumed the physical position of Utnapishtim in the myth. The wise man with the secret of life is supposed to have survived the Flood because his boat washed up on a very high mountain, which remained above the water level. Like Utnapishtim, the coffin-ridden ICH seems to hold the secret to life. The work comes to a conclusion with Gilgamesch on the peak and the ICH shouting "Gilgamesch lebt!" (112). With his journey to Utnapishtim to discover an elixir of life ending in failure, it appears that Gilgamesch is

reconciled to the idea of death, as is demonstrated by his visit to his relative on the peak, who seems to live in a sort of limbo, surrounded by the paraphernalia of death. This final journey therefore implies an acceptance of death on the part of the protagonist and it is only by way of this acceptance that he can really live. Rather than seeking out some great truth of life by making a great journey, it is suggested that life's true meaning is to be found by acknowledging mortality. That Gilgamesch travels to a figure simply called "ICH", and that additionally this figure cryptically should appear to be related to him, adds to the idea of the main character coming to recognise an "I" or to an understanding of self.

Gilgamesch's alienation from his natural environment manifests itself in an range of ecological problems stemming from his mismanagement of his state. There is a plague of ants, which suggests that the natural environment is unbalanced and out of control (35). The attempts made to control it result in some of the population going mad. The incident thus functions as an example of how attempts to control nature have a negative effect on humans. There are other more indirect and less clearly explained examples too, such as the doves, which are firstly an uncanny colour, red, and secondly are represented as dying off throughout the work. Random violence towards nature can be identified in a typically bizarre and unexplained Leuteneggerian anecdote where two men destroy a brood of magpies (66). Gilgamesch demonstrates a similar destructive urge when he hacks agaves to pieces (100). Perhaps most seriously, the problematic over-use of the roads over the Alpine passes is alluded to. Throughout the piece, "das Gebirge" recurs as a hallowed alternative to the seedy city. The association between the Alps and the after-life, which is set up by the "hohe Ebene" scene, is intensified by Enkidu's vision of the mountains as he lies on his death-bed. Laden with these heavenly connotations, the effect of Gilgamesch's roads take on greater significance. "Das ganze Gebirge trauerte über die Schändungen Gilgameschs" bemoans the whore, reiterating the sense of the hills as sacred. The third elder paints a nightmarish nocturnal picture of the Alpine passes, over-loaded with traffic, denuded of traditional

habitation and lit by the ghostly light of headlamps. His description concludes with the horrific detail of a run-over child (68). The Alps are no longer a habitat, they are merely a transit route. The implications of the devastation of the mountains are clarified towards the end of the dramatic poem, when the whore explains that what Gilgamesch does to the environment he does to her:

das Gebirge ist eine Verlängerung meiner Person, jene versengte Bergspitze am
Horizont ist meine Brust und der vergiftete Pässe mein Auge und in jedem Schritt
verbrannter Erde verbrennst du mich. (80)

Similar to the ICH figure and unlike Gilgamesch, the whore has a sense of being that includes the environment. Brutally and symbolically, she throttles the last surviving dove, so that Gilgamesch does not get his hands on it. In so doing, she destroys a symbol of peace and demonstrates her desperation and loss of hope (81).

Leutenegger undermines the differentiation between humans and animals to support her rejection of the value of civilisation as a process of self-realisation. We have already seen that Enkidu actually first appears in the work as an ape (30). The other figures in the work also have simian counterparts. There is a troop of apes and monkeys that is quite clearly an alternative to the human group in the work. The baboon appears to be the equivalent of the Große Königin and the three howling monkeys play the role of the three elders. In scene nine one of the elders comically expresses his need to urinate just as did one of the monkeys in scene six. As we saw in the introduction, the physical need to urinate and to defecate is a subject that is often avoided because it makes connections between the animal and the human. Leutenegger however does not shy away from the topic and indeed invests some detail in the subject. The similarities are accentuated by the fact that there is only one set of actors; the elders must play the role of the howling monkeys and Enkidu plays the

“Nachtaffe”. Gilgamesch’s well-ordered utopia of statues proves to be mere fantasy once we have seen the all too similar ape society, which the apes call more accurately a “heilige Anarchie” (29). The allusions to Darwinian evolution are teased out by the apes’ discussion of the humans’ recent classification of the animal world. Here Leutenegger incorporates one of the key issues at the heart of human alienation from nature. The act of giving names and classifying things is a way of establishing a distance from those things. Just saying “nature” designates it as an Other and sets up a polarisation. This is especially valid where a hierarchy is involved, as is the case here. The apes are horrified and find the humans’ classifications ridiculous (26). Their outrage, the actors doubling up and Enkidu’s transformation all contribute to the dismantling of the divide between civilisation and the natural world and draw attention to our links to our biological ancestors.

As well as being of considerable thematic significance in the work, the inclusion of Darwinian theory represents a key feature of Leutenegger’s style. By adding it, Leutenegger puts an element into the myth that was not available to the original story-teller. This is not only a strong validation of the value of her attempt to revise the myth but also draws attention to what is at stake if myths are left unchallenged. If myths remain unaltered, there lies a risk that critical ideas, which have may have become central because of those myths, become anachronistic and fossilized. Innovative theories, such as background evolutionary theory, would be denied a place in the societal forming inherent in myth.

Leutenegger’s challenge to the myth therefore refuses to allow the epic to remain in a distant age and a distant land. The use of the song, which recurs throughout the work, gives Gilgamesch’s tyranny a modern resonance. Three of the six Comedian Harmonists were Jewish and as a result the group was forced to disband in 1934. The fact that they used this song to take their leave from the stage adds to the poignancy. There are allusions to the fate of refugees and exiles, since the apes have been driven out of Uruk and have been “herabgewürdigt...wie ein vertriebenes Volk”. The mention of a “Kriegslabor” and of a

watchtower compounds the suggestion that this is a Third Reich, Second World War setting. In the light of the examination of Kauer's *Spätholz*, the allusion to the Nazi period adds a further dimension to the rape of nature perpetrated by the protagonist, since it draws on the links established between fascism, capitalism and ecological problems. The mention of the Alps tells us that we are no longer in Persia (45). Motor cars, plastic bags, the tape machine, a life-support machine and high-voltage ant deterrents are some of the props that intimate contemporaneity. These are, however, juxtaposed with elements that firmly root us in antiquity: the ziggurat, the rituals, and dressing up in doves' feathers and agave blossom. In this way, Leutenegger's version is not restrictively set in one single epoch or location, and assumes universal validity.

The integration of other myths and stories within the framework of the Gilgamesh story has a similar effect. The appearance of the Hure disguised as Pulcinella, the Neapolitan folk story hero, jolts the audience out of the Babylonian epic and the modern setting, and throws it into the Italian *commedia dell'arte* genre and the Renaissance. The profusion of masks in the poem also supports this idea. The Renaissance saw, among other things, a revival in literature of the classics and a rebirth of the epic. This reference to the Renaissance could therefore be interpreted as a distillation of the revival of antiquated forms: the Gilgamesh epic has been reinvented with elements of the eighteenth century *commedia dell'arte* in the twentieth century, with clear references to all three epochs (ziggurat, Pulcinella, Comedian Harmonists). The effect is a calking of cultures, giving one route map to where we are today. To this pastiche Leutenegger adds her own inventions, as when Pulcinella warns that the natural world will administer dire retribution if the traditions are not obeyed (45).

Why does Leutenegger choose this pastiche of styles, of myths and legends? The jarring of modernity and myth brings to life the critical moment of Enkidu's transformation from Nachtaffe to civilised man, the moment of mankind's alienation from nature. As Albert

von Schirnding puts it "Mit Gilgamesch, dem ersten Kulturhelden, nahm das Unheil seinen Lauf."²²¹ The epic of Gilgamesh represents the beginning of mankind's perceptual removal from the environment in that it constitutes one of the oldest surviving texts. The invention of writing and recording marks the time when humans underwent the transformation from hunter-gatherers to farmers and traders, since written records facilitated trade. Moreover, history, as we saw in Frisch's *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*, is one way we like to differentiate ourselves from other creatures. The implications of Gilgamesch's desire to become historical, which he proclaims in his first scene, become more serious.

Gilgamesch's story would make fine material for a *Bildungsroman*. He is a young male hero who grows dissatisfied with his life as it is and consequently undertakes adventurous travels abroad before ultimately making a return to his home. This sort of structure would perhaps be consonant with the wishes of the vainglorious protagonist of *Lebewohl, Gute Reise*. Ironically, however, it is not the treatment he receives, as Leutenegger rewrites the patriarchal discourse of the *Bildungsroman*. The work opens with the mother of the ICH uttering the beginning of a cry of pain. The focus is not Gilgamesch, it is on the figure he has overthrown in grabbing power. Rather than telling the story of Gilgamesch as a hero, we can see that Leutenegger fashions a tale that allows the other figures in the story a chance to speak. Indeed, the ICH and the whore are involved in roughly the same number of scenes as Gilgamesch. Returning to the song, we can perceive that it unites all the victims in the piece: the mother plays it in the first scene; it is played again for the whore in the fourth scene; and Enkidu's last word to Gilgamesch is "Lebewohl" (92). Looking once more at the title, we can now see the significance of replacing "Gilgamesh" with "Lebewohl, Gute Reise." Leutenegger has replaced the tyrant with his victims – they are now the central interest in the myth. Giving a voice to these characters means also giving a voice to the natural environment since they represent that dimension of the work.

²²¹ von Schirnding, 'Von Nineve nach Uruk'

Leutengger makes a further revision to the traditional power base by removing elements of divine power from the myth. The poem makes no reference to an almighty, supernatural being. The goddess Inanna is mentioned but she seems to have no special, divine power. We have already seen that Enkidu is seduced because Gilgamesch plans it, not because the gods have commanded it, and his death is from cancer, not because of a divine dictate. Most tellingly, Pulcinella predicts an apocalypse that has nothing to do with the gods. The natural environment will take its revenge by way of landslides, avalanches and with the seasons altering (45). The removal of power from the gods and the relocation of it in the natural world represent a rejection of traditional, anthropocentric religions.

Elements of the original Gilgamesh epic can be found throughout the fundamental literature of Western Europe. The story of Utnapishtim surviving the great flood is commonly perceived to be the original, from which the story of Noah was taken. Homer is said to have based the intimate rivalry of Achilles and Patroclus on the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Gilgamesh's journey across the sea of death to the land of eternal life has a parallel in Virgil's *Aeneid*, where Aeneas visits the underworld, crossing the River Styx. There are other parallels, but already it is clear that the work has had an enormous influence. Western culture was built upon this bedrock of narrative literature. The notion of patriarchy is central to this culture. Man, Gilgamesh, the hero, is the hub around which spin the various spokes of human society. From a feminist perspective this is highly problematic. With her collage, Leutenegger thus undermines the European literary tradition. The effect of juxtaposing different literary knick-knacks from a period of more than four and a half millennia, is to jar the audience or reader's receptive sensibilities, challenge their expectations and force him/her to reconsider what are essentially the basic pillars of our culture. This is why Leutenegger uses a form that cannot readily be fitted into a standard categories. That this form resembles to some extent the Babylonian original suggests the idea that Leutenegger is offering an alternative 'original' myth. This could be seen as drawing on the original manner

of myth-transmission by oral story-telling, which relied on fallible human memory. It is an accepted part of the oral tradition that each raconteur will put his own spin on the tale, depending upon time, place and whim.²²² Leutenegger revives this personal aspect of the oral tradition in retelling the tale according to the preoccupations of a late twentieth century, female, western European writer.

The work is quintessentially Leuteneggerian: it remains cryptic in places, drawing on a body of symbols, such as quinces and mountain tops, which recur in her other works; a journey of self-realisation lies at its core; and it is packaged in an unusual format. In choosing the form of a dramatic poem, she indicates that she intends her work to be transmitted orally, harking back to this earlier tradition. Her use of the present tense, which is natural to the medium of drama, could also be interpreted as lending the text a sense of the immediacy of this tradition. Leutenegger uses myth to explode the authority that myth itself has taken on within the realm of cultural history and literature. For such an ambitious task she must have necessarily a broad focus and therefore she alludes to over 4500 years of literature. Rather than employing myth to re-inforce an idea within a story or to give a narrative a wider frame of reference, Leutenegger reinvents the original in a peculiar format, refusing to rely on existing formulae, and in so doing demands a reinvention of the social hierarchy that it has supported. At the heart of this reassessment is a new emphasis on the place of the natural environment in any social reconfiguration.

²²² See: J.F. Campbell, *Popular tales of the West Highlands*, (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1994; first published: Edinburgh, 1860-62), p. 25

4.3 *Kontinent*: ein geschildertes Tonstück

Leutenegger's fourth longer prose work, *Kontinent* (1985), is the author's most ecologically committed text. With her unmistakably complex poetic prose, she weaves a narrative that takes the reader from an unnamed Alpine village via the narrator's memories to China. Leutenegger calls the work "die epische Darstellung der Menschwerdung",²²³ an existential journey of spiritual discovery. This journey is undertaken by a first-person female narrator. The text is centred on the narrator's relationship to both her physical and social environments. Furthermore, the action of the novella takes place principally in a village where mankind's difficult relationship with the natural world lies at the heart of the inhabitants' daily existence. The narrator has been employed by the aluminium works in the village to record a piece of music for a celebration they are holding. Her task is therefore based on her sense of hearing, and the end result provides an interesting record of the village's relationship to the surrounding environment. A further strand in the narrative is the narrator's problematical assimilation. For the greater part of the narrative, the villagers remain nameless, distant and ambivalent in their reactions to the newcomer. The other main strand in the narrative is the intercalated reminiscence of a past love affair in China. These superficially divergent parts of the narrative are brought together by the shared themes of belonging, alienation and ecology.

The novella begins with the narrator being brought to the village by two locals. She moves into a house by the canal at the bottom of the village. Dominating the view from her veranda, and the surrounding countryside, is the observatory, which is conspicuously painted red. In going about her work, the narrator comes into contact with various villagers, notably the 'Verwalterin', with whom she establishes a good relationship, by the end of the novella. Her work is intended to be a collection of natural sounds from the area and so she is brought into close contact with the local environment. She sees the effect that industry has on the

landscape and in turn on the inhabitants. Since her work is commissioned by the aluminium works, she also has to visit the factory and is thus confronted with the effects it has on both the inhabitants and the environment. The novella culminates with her music being played at the village's music festival and her absence at the aluminium works' celebration. She is accepted by the villagers and moves from the canal house at the bottom of the village to the observatory at the top, which she paints blue.

The opening pages of the novella encapsulate the primary elements of alienation. The narrator arrives in a mountain village that she doesn't know. She is therefore an outsider, and, as an outsider, everything in the village seems new and foreign. Looking at the first page we can see that the narrator has a different perspective from that of the inhabitants. The narrator reports: "Der Beifahrer streift die noch schattigen Kiefernwälder, die Gerölldeltas mit keinem Blick."²²⁴ The mention of the features of the landscape indicates that although the co-driver may not be looking at them, the narrator herself has certainly noticed them. Augmenting the alienation implicit in the different perspectives, the removal men are also threatening, driving very fast over the mountain roads. The narrator's unease is demonstrated by her irrational fear that her clothes are falling out of her cupboards in the back of the van, when they are in fact packed away in boxes. So this first passage already draws attention to the main tensions in the narrative. The narrator is in the uncertain position of being an outsider, so there is a perceptible tension between her and the village. At the heart of this tension is a difference of outlook: while the majority of the villagers remain passive in response to damage done to the environment, partly because they value their livelihoods, which depend on the aluminium works and the intensive vine culture, the narrator will become sceptical about the aluminium works' activities, precisely because of the environmental damage it causes.

²²³ Beatrice von Matt, 'Gertrud Leuteneggers Roman „Kontinent“. Gespräch' in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 13/14.07.1985

²²⁴ Gertrud Leutenegger, *Kontinent*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), p. 7. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

The villagers' ambivalent relationship to their natural environment is expressed succinctly towards the beginning of the narrative. As they approach the village the co-driver reminisces about childhood games on the frozen pools beside the river. They used to light the bubbles of gas trapped in the ice, which then burnt impressively. From watching the flames they burnt off their eyebrows. Despite the negative side-effect the co-driver still tells the tale fondly and with excitement. The game amounts to an exploitation of nature for a simple pleasure, which the boys carry out without regard for personal safety. Leutenegger touches here on the complex psychology that may lie at the heart of the damage humans do to their environment: we exploit nature even when the exploitation is detrimental to ourselves. Edward O. Wilson puts it as follows: "The audaciously destructive tendencies of our species run deep and are poorly understood. They are so difficult to probe and manage, as to suggest an archaic biological origin."²²⁵ The experience is also restricted to the past, since the pools no longer freeze. The effects of global warming are therefore also implied by this anecdote.

This ambivalent and complex relationship with nature is equally perceptible in the recent change in the way of life of the villagers. The thin villager tells the narrator that they all used to be farmers. This way of life meant a rich surrounding environment, with which the villagers had to cultivate a close relationship in order to survive. The diverse range of crops and livestock, now replaced solely by the industrialised viticulture, not only constituted a wider range of biodiversity, but also brought the villagers into contact with one another: "Das Vieh hat früher alle unablässig beschäftigt, das Debattieren übers Vieh hat den Grossteil des Kontakts ausgemacht." (75) Partly explaining the elliptical way in which all the villagers seem to communicate, the thin villager asks: "Über was will man sich jetzt noch unterhalten?" The "Verwalterin" similarly complains that there is little communication now in the village: "früher war das anders, da lebte man von den vielen ausgedehnten Verwandtschaftsbesuchen, jetzt geht jeder seines Wegs." (149) The change in their work has therefore had a negative

²²⁵ Wilson, *Biophilia*, p. 118

effect in their social relationships as well as on the surrounding environment. With the reduction in communication between the villagers, there is, however, no organised opposition to the aluminium works. The villagers continue to go about their existence mute. This is even more crassly exemplified by the mutilated workers in the aluminium works. Playing her music in the aluminium works, the narrator meets a worker whose hands have been mangled at work. He tells her the tale with "...einer jähen Gier" (64), complains that the newspapers no longer report the accidents in the factory but does nothing himself to combat the problem and remains in the service of the aluminium works. His resigned suggestion that she continue playing her recordings, which symbolise the power of the aluminium works over both the human and natural environment, encapsulates a passivity, which is almost ubiquitous among the local inhabitants. This passivity has allowed the works to continue unimpeded despite wreaking havoc with the life of the village.

The industrialised viticulture is a further example of how the way of life in the village is no longer in harmony with nature. The felling of trees in order to expand the vineyards results in landslides. One occurs prior to the notional present of the text, sweeping houses away. The tragedy of this landslide lives on in the village in the form of an old woman, who lost her home in the disaster and since then has been unable to speak coherently. The narrator identifies her by the children's socks that she wears – a cryptically poignant detail, which must remain unexplained because the old lady cannot communicate. Once again, damage to the environment hinders communication, this time by rendering someone practically dumb. Another landslide occurs during the narratorial notional present. It causes uproar in the village, especially among the women. A Cassandra figure complains that their warnings have not been heeded. Nonetheless, the reaction remains passive: "Stille ist eingetreten" and nothing is done to change the status quo (56). The industrialisation of the viticulture means that a helicopter is used to spray the vines with pesticides. This too has had disastrous consequences with misunderstandings resulting in workers being sprayed. The damaging

influence of the intensive methods used in the cultivation of the vines is summed up in a scene towards the end of the novella. The narrator helps the old lady with the children's socks to free a bat from the nets strung over the vines. The net is very tough and the narrator has difficulty breaking it. There is no knife to hand and the narrator does not know what to do. The old lady solves the situation by simply biting through the net. She then collapses into the arms of the narrator, who comforts her. The old lady and the narrator demonstrate the benevolent human impulse towards nature while the net opposes them, representing human exploitation of nature. In this short scene we can therefore identify an exposition of the schizophrenic attitude towards the natural world apparently inherent in humanity.

The tense relationship between mankind and the environment is also subtly inscribed in the language of the novella. Arriving in the village, the narrator notes the clear blue of the sky. In the next sentence she notices the broken slates lying around, a symptom of human exploitation of nature. So, an example of the beauty of nature is syntagmatically juxtaposed with an example of the effect humans have on nature. A few pages further on the sky is described as "schieferblau", which is now paradigmatically loaded, and ties up the beauty of nature with the destructive activities of the aluminium works in the space of one word. The colour blue and particularly the blue of the sky become recurrent features of the narrative. The fact that the colour blue is now negatively loaded jars with the general preconception that the blue sky is beautiful. Therefore, every time the narrative returns to the blue sky - this universally recognised example of the beauty of nature - it challenges us to reassess our assumptions about the natural world. The narrative pushes us towards looking beyond the superficially perceptible reality.

The narrator's task in the village also balances on the see-saw of the ambivalent human attitude towards nature. She is supposed to be making recordings of sounds from the surrounding environment, which will constitute a piece of 'concrete' music, a collage made from pre-existing sounds. The aluminium works have commissioned the piece for their

celebration and also intend to play the recording in the works over the tannoy. The most salient sounds, and the ones she therefore records, are, however, almost all linked in some way to the damage the aluminium works is doing. She records the sound of iron stakes being hammered into the ground, the clatter of the vine-trimming machines and the booms of avalanches set off by dynamite. The narrator comes to see her goal as creating a music, "die so bedingungslos durch alle Natur und jedes ihrer vergewaltigten Elemente hindurchgegangen ware." (38) The primary irony here is the fact that the people responsible for the damage to the environment want to celebrate the environment. In accepting the work of the narrator they perversely celebrate ecological damage. The secondary contradiction is the fact that the chosen method of celebrating the environment is to make music out of it, which itself is a way of harnessing nature and giving it a manmade form, even if the form-giving is kept to a minimum. Even the intention of providing an objective recording is compromised: "...Sie haben hervorragende Arbeit geleistet, natürlich müssen die von Ihnen aufgezeichneten Naturgeräusche erheblich verstärkt verändert werden, wir haben hier im Aluminiumwerk eine bestimmte Vorstellung von einer Jubiläumsplatte..."(133) Nature must be moulded to fit our image of it. There is a further irony in the intention of the management of the aluminium works to play the music to the workers while they work: the sounds are supposed to be from the natural environment and would therefore have been what the workers would have heard had they remained farmers. Instead of hearing nature in its original form, the workers are provided by the management with a "Stimulierungskulisse" (40) of artificial sounds to encourage them to work in an artificial environment. The management of the works seeks to improve the productivity of the workforce through the recording. In this way, another aspect of nature is exploited with the ultimate aim of increasing economic profit.

In the short prose piece, *Der Tod kommt in die Welt*, we identified an experience of nature based on the senses. In *Kontinent*, this preoccupation with a sensual contact with nature remains in the foreground. Through our senses we can learn that we are not isolated

individuals but instead our being, our experience of life, is dependent on that which surrounds us. Both the knowledge of our senses and the knowledge our senses provide are therefore essential to an ecological understanding of existence. Significantly, hearing is the central sense in the novella. The narrator's task draws our attention to this sense. By reducing the experience of the environment to sounds, the narrator cuts out the delusions of sight. It is true that the narrator *sees* evidence of environmental damage, and, as we have observed with the example of the colour blue, the visual images conjured by the narrator can be powerfully loaded. However, nature often gives an untrustworthy, superficial impression of health. For example, the sturdy apple trees are in actual fact only there because the indigenous apricots have died off. This is the consequence of the change in the chemical balance of the soil caused by waste from the aluminium works.²²⁶ We cannot always trust visual appearances. One of the villagers complains to the narrator about the naivety of visitors: "was wissen die von dem Gift in der blauen Luft?" (104) Is it for this reason that, at the beginning of the novel, the co-driver does not bother to look at the surrounding scenery? Is he aware from living here that the impressive view of the immediate environment can be deceptive? Certainly, any positive visual impressions of the natural environment quickly prove to be insignificant in comparison to the narrator's recordings, which pare down our experience of nature to the piercing tone of a warning siren.²²⁷

Recording the din of industry, the narrator's work puts the focus on the sense of hearing, however the detrimental effects of the aluminium works and the intensive viticulture are not restricted to the recordings. They can also be seen in instances in the narrative where this sense is in one way or another interfered with. The narrator and the 'Verwalterin', for example, cannot continue their conversation because of the deafening noise of a helicopter. We have already seen the example of the old woman with the children's socks: the sounds she

²²⁶ See also: Leutenegger, *Die dankbaren Toten von Chippis*, in *Das verlorene Monument*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), pp 67- 77

²²⁷ Warning sirens are a recurrent feature in Leutenegger's work. See for example: *Lebewohl Gute Reise, Der*

makes are no longer intelligible. The villagers need for their sense of hearing is diminished since, without the cows, they no longer have anything to say to each other. This theme can also be linked to the attention given in the novella to the bats. Drawing attention to the relevance of the sense of hearing, one of the villagers explains how bats rely almost entirely on this sense. The episode where a bat gets entangled in the nets over the vines is another example of how modern ways of farming are no longer in harmony with the natural world: the bat's radar system cannot prevent it becoming tangled in the net.

The sense of hearing is central for the reader too. Our impression of the scene is largely generated through aural details. We hear squeaking bats, chirping crickets, rushing streams and sounds coming from a smashed accordion in a gully. The wealth of aural detail makes the deafening effects of the aluminium works and the viticulture not only more telling within the narrative but also symbolically significant for the reader, since the narrative relies heavily on our aural imagination. Finally, they are also lent a seriousness in the connections made by the narrator between them and mutilation: the villagers have an impaired sense of hearing, which "von dem alltäglichen Lärm abgestumpft worden ist." (111) Rike Felka has summed up Leutenegger's work as a "geschriebenes Bild."²²⁸ In the case of *Kontinent*, it seems more accurate to call the novella a "geschildertes Tonstück."

Through her work, the narrator comes to a position of greater knowledge of her immediate physical and social environment. This leads to a transformation of her attitude. At the beginning of the novella, she comes to the village with the intention of fulfilling her task and serving the aluminium works. As we have seen, her arrival is bewildering for her. This sense of bewilderment pervades the text. The villagers' anonymity emphasises the narrator's position as an outsider and adds to the general uncertainty. The narrator cannot understand fully what is going on. Things are never totally explained at the time and only partially in hindsight. For example, driving through the village, the narrator sees nobody until she arrives

on the square where there is a large group of men dressed in black. This is not explained at the time and the narrator cannot understand why they are all there. It is only later, when she is talking with the 'Verwalterin', that she learns that there was a funeral that day. The villagers are partly responsible for the narrator's state of ignorance. They treat her as if she had some prior knowledge of the area and continually draw parallels between her and her mysterious and unexplained predecessor. The narrator is also surprised by her lodgings. When she arrives in the village she presumes that she will live in the observatory that she has noticed on the hill above the settlement. Instead, she is in the canal house at the bottom of the village. So there is an initial disappointment. Adding a sense of unease to her disappointment, the door to the canal house bears the word "danger". Typically, it remains unclear why the word is there at all. The view from the house is dominated by the observatory and the narrator's thoughts often return to it. Thinking about her music, the narrator comments: "Rot leuchtet das Observatorium auf dem Hügel. Unannehmbar rot."

It would appear then that both the villagers and the observatory remain distant from the narrator. However, towards the end of the novella, the villagers allow her to move into the observatory. Their crucial question to the narrator is what colour to paint the observatory. They are pleasantly surprised when the narrator chooses blue – the colour they themselves would choose. The move to the house on the hill is therefore in many ways an acceptance by the villagers of the narrator. They allow her to live in the dominating building, and more significantly they are all united on the question of the colour. By the end of the novella the narrator has therefore been assimilated into the village.

By the end of the novella, her attitude towards her employers has also changed. She no longer wants to have anything to do with the works. She continues recording sounds even after she has fulfilled her task for the aluminium works. This means that her music is no longer for the works but has become purely personal expression. This independent attitude is

²²⁸ Rike Felka, *Das geschriebene Bild. Über Gertrud Leutenegger*, (Vienna: Passagen, 1996), p. 55

summed up in the music festival towards the end of the novella. The villagers organise it to take place on the same evening as the celebration planned by the aluminium works. Although the music festival hardly constitutes direct opposition to the works, it is nevertheless the first occasion when the villagers rise out of their apathetic passivity. The narrator's music is played and enjoyed by the villagers.

The music festival implies a growing solidarity between narrator and villagers and also demonstrates the transformation of her position in the social network of the village. She has gone from the position of outsider to being part of the community over the course of the novella. But it is not only the narrator who has changed. Her otherness means the sounds she records are new and strange to her and therefore worth recording. For the villagers, on the other hand, these sounds are simply part of the accepted way things are and so they do nothing about them. Her otherness provides the mirror that allows the villagers to see themselves. This is also evident in their own narratives. Since their tales are unknown to her, the villagers have a reason for telling them to her. Significantly, they are usually monologues – they do not expect replies from the narrator. Here the act of narration itself becomes important: self-understanding for the villagers is born from the act of telling. The narratives nevertheless require a listener and they therefore further stress the importance of the sense of hearing. Merely watching the villagers and the village she learns little about the situation, and she remains an outsider. However, the telling of the stories de-alienates the narrator because she is no longer in a position of ignorance and perhaps more importantly through listening to the villagers' narratives she achieves an intimacy with them. Indeed, their narratives are as we have seen at times opaque and elliptical, giving the narrator (and the reader) little to go on. The lack of emphasis on the content of their stories stresses their value in achieving intimacy. The act of narration is at the same time a self-assessment exercise for the villagers, encouraging the villagers to stand up for themselves. Dancing to the narrator's music at the music festival, they achieve this as well as allowing the narrator to become assimilated. So,

we can see that the villagers and the narrator bring something to each other. Contact with that which is foreign facilitates a discovery of the self.

The de-alienation of the narrator encapsulated in the music festival is illuminated by the growing suspicion that she and her predecessor could in fact be the same person. This is evident from the conversations with the villagers, which rarely omit a comparison between the narrator and her predecessor.²²⁹ This is particularly striking in the case of the butcher. Remembering that her predecessor only bought dried meat, he puts dried meat to one side for her. Towards the end of the text the suggestions become more direct: the butcher asks her if her predecessor can remember the last music festival, as if she has direct access to her predecessor's mind (156). Most telling are the instances where the narrator slips into memories that could be those of the predecessor (79). She has vague and unclear memories of events in the observatory, which she naturally cannot have if she is new to the place. The suspicions are further strengthened by the knowledge of the surrounding area that she displays. She chooses the colour blue for the observatory because it will comply with the vernacular architecture. The observatory is mysteriously central in the novel. The dead are buried there, the dance takes place there, the narrator has several conversations with the 'Verwalterin' there, her view from the canal house is focused on it, and she finally moves there. With the suggestions of a connection between the narrator and her predecessor in mind, the reasons for the centrality of the observatory become apparent. It could be her former home. Her physical and psychological alienation from the building are mentioned repeatedly. The red colour is: "wie ein Schlag ins Gesicht"(9) or "unannehmbar rot"(99). But at the same time it remains strangely fascinating and the narrator returns to it literally as well as in her thoughts. Similarly, her past remains suppressed, only forcing its way into the narrative here and there through dreams or mental wanderings. The links between her past and the observatory are reinforced by the narrator, "Das Rot des Observatoriums schreckt mich wie

²²⁹ See: Yunfei Gao, *China und Europa im deutschen Roman der 80er Jahre - Das Fremde und das Eigene in*

ein verborgener Teil meiner Selbst.”(106) The implication appears to be that the observatory is her former home and therefore holds clues to the nature of the narrator’s self. Following this implication, her alienation from the village can be understood as an alienation from her former self. Her move can be understood as her ultimate acceptance of the village and her past.

Self and place are therefore closely related in *Kontinent*. As with Leutenegger’s short prose pieces, a Heideggerian sense of “being-in-the-world” lies at the heart the novella. Her journey of discovery of the self is fundamentally grounded in an experience of the natural environment. Her being is firmly rooted in the natural world around her,

Ich kann mir nicht vorstellen, eines Morgens nicht mehr zum Glucksen des Kanals zu erwachen, dem Knacken Rascheln der Kiefernrinde über dem Dorf nachzugehen, das Rebstöcke zu hören, sich vervielfachend von Abhang zu Abhang.(138)

The sounds remind us of her work and suggest that this too has been part of her search for identity. This is why she cannot stop recording even once she has fulfilled the works’ demands of her. She needs the close relationship with the environment that her work brings. Yunfei Gao sees this as the fundamental aspect of her existential journey saying, “Sie hat ein neues Ich in der Natur gefunden.”²³⁰

The interpretation of the novel as a journey of discovery of the self helps to illuminate the cryptically intercalated strands of the narrator’s past experiences in China. The narrator wanders mentally to China on fourteen occasions in the narrative. These journeys arrive unannounced in the narrative sometimes in the middle of a sentence. They are often provoked by a situation suitable to either reflection or sleep. To begin with they are difficult to decipher and have been described by Jürgen Jacobs as giving the narrative an “irritierende

der Interaktion, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997), p. 131

²³⁰ Gao, *China und Europa im deutschen Roman der 80er Jahre*, p. 122

Inkohärenz.”²³¹ However, towards the end of the narrative they become increasingly coherent and a fuller picture of her past experience emerges with the introduction of a recurrent “du” figure. The reminiscences are further clarified by the butcher who informs the narrator that her predecessor had planned a journey abroad. The importance of these past journeys, in her acceptance of herself, is perceptible in an anecdote about an old man who cannot bear to part with the ashes of his dead wife. The ashes are the physical remains of his past, and he needs his past to know who he is in the present (117). Similarly for the narrator, her past must form a dialectic with her present in order for her to come to an understanding of her self, in order for her to make “diese[r] kurze[n] und doch nach so langer Zeit erfüllte[n] Reise”(162) to the observatory.

In the characters’ lives, the past is evidently important for the present. This point leads onto the complex subject of the narrative strategies employed by the author in the text. Apart from the villagers’ tales, the text is composed in the present tense. This lends the text an immediacy for the reader. We share the narrator’s present. The text is not a closed and finished article so that we cannot read it simply as an account of the narrator’s former uncertainties in the secure knowledge that it has all taken place in the past. We do not know where the text is going because without the past tense we cannot assume an end to the tale. The future is therefore open. The narrator’s past is also narrated in the present tense and is thus woven into the narrator’s present. We therefore encounter a present that drifts with the homeless narrator. The use of the present tense has an ecological implication. The process of damage to the environment highlighted by the text remains contemporary and immediate. We are not allowed to relegate it to the past but are forced to accept that it is part of the present. The past tense would be inappropriate since the dramatic climax of ecological problems has not yet taken place – it is part of the open future.

²³¹ Jürgen Jacobs, ‘Die Sammlerin des Naturtons’, in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10.10.85

The alienation felt by the narrator is also transmitted to the reader. As it is a first-person narrative, there is no omniscient narrator supplying the information that we do not learn from the protagonist. Therefore, the lack of names, the gaps in the stories and the various mysteries are just as bewildering for the reader as for the narrator. The sense of bewilderment is compounded by the narrative wanderings, such as the narrator's memories of China. These are presumably familiar to the narrator (who nevertheless gives no comment on them) but are not made so for us. Here we can identify a parallel between the text and the village: the text is just as bewildering for us as the village is for the narrator. The links between geography and consciousness are therefore identifiable. In Leutenegger's text, the experience of each is highly subjective. We can identify further geo-conscious links in the textually omnipresent observatory. It is not only central to the plot of the novella, but remains central also in the thoughts of the narrator. It is thus everywhere in the novella, dominating the narrative in both the internal narratorial reflections as well as the external descriptions of the landscape. Earlier, we identified the theme of problematical communication between the villagers and the narrator. The experience is regenerated for the reader through the complexity of the narrative techniques. Her communication with the reader is the text itself. The tale can only slowly be understood in the light of the villagers' tales and the narrator's memories. It is only by becoming accustomed to the narrative digressions that we can begin to understand the text and draw the links between the various disparate elements. Jürgen Jacobs' disparaging description of the text as a "Brei von Gedanken und Stimmungen, von beliebigen Assoziationen."²³² may seem valid enough at the start of the text but once the reader has a sense of the whole, he/she can identify too much of a structure to call the text a "Brei", and the connections appear more than "beliebig". Again, this suggests a parallel between text and topography. We can learn to feel at home in the text, and thus understand it, just as the narrator learns to feel at home in the village. If it is complex and difficult to follow, this is

²³² Jürgen Jacobs, 'Gertrud Leutenegger', in *Kritisches Lexikon zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed.

because the narrator is not in harmony with her social, psychological and physical environment. In this way the reader shares the alienation and the uncertainty felt by the narrator, as well as the process of de-alienation and reintegration. We can therefore see that the “irritierende Inkohärenz”²³³ serves the purpose of generating a bewildering textual environment for the reader.

It is also possible to identify similarities between the work and a piece of music. The lack of narratorial comment or judgement on the subject of her narrative means that the reader is left to make up his/her mind about the sequence of events presented. The scenes follow on from one another without introduction or explanation, combining to create an impression or a feeling, rather than provoking a precise interpretation. In this way, the text demands an effort from the reader; the lazy reader may well be left with a “Brei von Gedanken.” The reader is often presented with a choice of impressions. For example, when the narrator is in the aluminium works listening to the maimed worker’s story, the worker behaves in an ambiguous way:

Auf seinem Gesicht spielt mir etwas Unerreichbares ab, auf einmal hebt er die Hände, wie zur Abwehr, oder als schmerzten ihn die Geräusche, aber sind das überhaupt noch Hände? (63-64)

The uncertainty of the narrator is immediately clear from the “Unerreichbares.” It is made more evident by the choice of two possible interpretations of the worker’s reaction, which the narrator offers us. Leutenegger resists the temptation to allow her protagonist narratorial omniscience and thus the worker’s experience remains private. This again emphasises the subjective nature of experience, recalling the words of the narrator in *Vorabend* (1975): “Ich glaube nicht an eine Wirklichkeit. Ich glaube nur an Wirklichkeiten.”²³⁴ The narrator’s exclamation of horror at seeing the worker’s hands also points to the subjectivity of

experience. While she wonders if they are hands at all, the worker most likely still regards them as his hands, since they still function for him as such (although his thoughts remain private so that we cannot be sure). In the manner of Kafka, the narrator avoids causality. Presented with such a hermeneutic challenge, the reader's reaction is consequently subjective. It is only once the reader has become accustomed to the abrupt thematic changes in the text and has seen that certain topics recur, that he/she can identify various elements in the narrative as central themes. These might be environmental damage, social alienation or self-realisation. In this respect, the work resembles a piece of music, since a musical audience is very free in its reception of a piece of music but will nevertheless share a basic interpretation. The tension between the whole of a work and the analysis of the parts lies at the heart of hermeneutics. It would therefore seem that there is nothing new here. However, in Leutenegger's work, this tension is exaggerated. Indeed, picking up on this point, Henriette Herwig goes so far as to call Gertrud Leutenegger an "Anwältin der Individuation."²³⁵

Her prose is often described as poetic.²³⁶ *Kontinent* is poetic in the sense that a significant passage of time is absent from the narrative. The tale thus remains largely descriptive, giving a partial account of life in the mountain village. The poetic aspect of Leutenegger's work is also perceptible in the suggestive nature of her narratives. Hinting at connections that nevertheless remain only partially articulated, the text shares the concentrated and condensed form of poetry.²³⁷ This "radikale Verkürzung"²³⁸ has on the one hand resulted in a meagre readership, but on the other is centrally important for the author's metanoic purposes. In *Kontinent*, the conventional syntagmatic implications are diminished. At times, the linear inference is reduced, so that the prose becomes more of a sequence of

²³³ Jacobs, 'Die Sammlerin des Naturtons'

²³⁴ Leutenegger, *Vorabend*, p. 108

²³⁵ Henriette Herwig, *Gertrud Leutenegger. Zwischen Tradition und Individuation*, p. 572

²³⁶ See, for example: Christoph Kuhn, 'Eine Wirklichkeit, die sich in Musik auflöst', in *Tagesanzeiger*, 21.9.85; von Matt, Elizabeth, 'Ungelöste Erinnerung', in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 5.9.85; Kurz, Paul Konrad, 'Aufstieg zum Innersten', in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29.3.88

²³⁷ See: Boa, 'Gertrud Leutenegger: A Feminist Synthesis', p. 202

²³⁸ Vesna Kondric Horvat, *Der eigene Utopie nachspüren*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), p. 178

impressions and associations than a story. A scene from the narrator's memories of China demonstrates this aptly:

Dann bewegt sich nur noch der unablässige Strom von Fahrrädern an uns vorbei in die Dunkelheit hinein. Du hast mir nicht mehr geantwortet. Rot steht eine kleine Pagode mitten im Häusermeer, blutig rot. In den Wohnblöcken am Horizont überall dasselbe unterschiedslose Licht. (132)

The bicycles, the pagoda, and the block housing are haphazardly united by the narrator's gaze. The passage is merely a description of the scene. It has little impact for the narrative as a whole, since the things she sees hardly play a role in the story. It reinforces the subjectivity of the narrative because it appears to be simply the record of the narrator's experience, a sequence of impressions suggestive only of a sense of unease and foreignness.

The poetic nature of Leutenegger's prose can also be interpreted as having ecological implications. Poetry represents a highly subjective expression of being and is furthermore a literary genre that is often perceived to be born out of the emotions.²³⁹ The Swiss eco-philosopher, Beat Sitter-Liver, considers a subjective understanding of our relationship to our environment as fundamental in establishing a more ecological way of life. He perceives poetry as a means of achieving this.²⁴⁰ We have already seen how central subjectivity is to both the form, content and reception of *Kontinent*. Why should this be so important for an ecological text? Interestingly, the need for a subjective expression of experience begins with the rejection of the notion of the self as a self-contained entity. Love, as we saw in the section on *Lebewohl*, *Gute Reise*, can bring about this kind of realisation.²⁴¹ This is true of all emotions, which are a very real part of the self. So, a knowledge of the self depends upon an understanding of emotions and therefore in turn an understanding of the environment. For

²³⁹ See: Emil Staiger, *Grundbegriffe der Poetik*, (Zurich, 1951; first published: 1946), p. 24

²⁴⁰ Beat Sitter-Liver, in conversation with the author, Zurich, 06.05.03

Kant, the basics of being are to be found in the answering of the questions "what am I?", "what should I do?", and "what can I hope?".²⁴² This amounts to a phenomenological, social and transcendental knowledge of the self. Erich Fromm identifies the fundamental flaw of capitalism in the negation of the social function of the self. By reducing the person to a independent unit of worth, he argues that capitalism hinders emotional maturity. Emotions are relegated to a position of secondary worth because they generate no economic capital, except perhaps for the sale of plastic hearts on 14th February. Fromm lays the blame for the increase in psychological illness in the Western civilised world at the feet of the reduction of the self to an isolated entity inherent in capitalism.²⁴³ Self-realisation also lies at the heart of Gandhi's politics. Gandhi sees it as impossible for a community to exist without the self-realisation of the individual. The one belongs to the other: in the individuality of man lies "the essential unity of man and, for that matter, all that lives".²⁴⁴ His aside, "all that lives", points in the direction of the biocentric approach taken by philosophers such as Arne Naess, who coined the term "deep ecology."²⁴⁵ Naess demonstrates, with the example of the neurosis of displaced Eskimos, that the stability of a self can be partly dependent not only on the individual's relationship to other human beings but also on his/her relationship to his/her environment.²⁴⁶ Leutenegger's subjective and poetic "epische Darstellung der Menschwerdung", which deals with alienation and de-alienation from both social and physical environments, can thus be understood as a deeply ecological text.

Further elements of deep ecology can be detected in the rejection of narrative norms in *Kontinent*. In the introduction to this chapter we saw how Leutenegger is a committed, metanoic author, assessing cultural traditions and suggesting alternative versions. *Lebewohl*,

²⁴¹ See: section 4.2

²⁴² Roger Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 1995), pp 133-160

²⁴³ See: Erich Fromm, *Die Kunst des Liebens* (Ulm/Donau, 1971; first published in English: New York, 1956)

²⁴⁴ Cited in: Arne Naess, *Gandhi and Group Conflict*, (Oslo, 1974), p. 35

²⁴⁵ Arne Naess, 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement', in *Inquiry*, Vol. 16 (1973), pp 95-100

²⁴⁶ See: Arne Naess, 'Self-realization. An Ecological Approach to Being in the World', in *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, Arne Naess and George Sessions, (eds.), (London/Boston: Shambhala, 1995), p. 231

Gute Reise is an eco-feminist revision of one of Western civilisation's fundamental narratives. *Kontinent* is perhaps less obviously a rejection or revision of traditions. Nevertheless, the work toys with various narrative norms but never allows them to take control. Leutenegger's unsettling modernist techniques, discussed earlier, prevent the work being classified simply as a Swiss village tale.²⁴⁷ Instead, as we saw with the loading of the colour blue, the text asks us to look beyond the superficial idyll of the traditional *Dorfgeschichte*. The work also displays some of the characteristics of a *Bildungsroman*. The narrator undertakes a journey, undergoes a change, moves from a position of alienation from her home to a position of acceptance in a community, and makes a positive impact on that community. However, the dialectic of home and abroad, and that of past and present self/ves are never clarified. They are clearly identifiable as present in the text but they resist interpretation. There is no perceptible underlying metanarrative and so the narrator remains the only authority in the text. It appears that the narrator returns to the village (although this is an uncertain assumption on the reader's part), just as a *Bildungsroman* protagonist might do, but her assimilation into the village community is not the result of her learning to fit in, as would be the case with a *Bildungsroman* hero, but instead stems from her efforts to realise her own subjective reality, as we have seen. The story also lacks the length and the passage of time that are characteristic features of a *Bildungsroman*. Precisely because they are aberrations from the norm, these variations draw attention to themselves, and highlight the role of subjectivity in the story. Why has the author chosen a recognisable narrative norm and then written a text that only conforms partially to that norm and in fact goes some way to undermining it? A possible answer could be that the text is intended as a correction of the traditional genre: while the traditional form proposes the society as the ultimate authority, Leutenegger, like Gandhi, suggests that self-realisation is the beginning of community.

²⁴⁷ For a fuller discussion of this notion see Malcolm Pender, 'Themes in the German-Swiss Novel of the Eighties: Beat Sterchi's *Blösch* and Gertrud Leutenegger's *Kontinent*' on *Kontinent* and the genre of the *Dorfgeschichte*, in: Arthur Williams, Stuart Parkes, Roland Smith (eds.), *Literature on the Threshold. The*

Leutenegger defies conventions too by omitting a generic exergue for *Kontinent*. This reflects that the work does not fit readily into any generic category. The term 'novella' might seem appropriate because of the piece's length and structure, which roughly correspond to those of a novella. The work however lacks the unexpected twist in the plot that is characteristic of a novella. It furthermore deals with events which occur beyond the limits of the Alpine village, the primary location of the action and has arguably therefore too wide a perspective to be labelled a novella. Because of this wider scope, *Kontinent* has also been called a novel.²⁴⁸ 'Erzählung' or 'story' is perhaps more suitable, being a less precisely defined term for a prose narrative.²⁴⁹ The author herself gives the work no generic classification at all. In so doing, she avoids establishing a set of expectations that might accompany the exergue.²⁵⁰ The lack of generic classification also allows the text to free itself from the conventional differentiation between fact and fiction, again reinforcing the notion of subjective reality, reminiscent of Christa Wolf's 'subjektive Authentizität.'²⁵¹ Omitting the exergue is another small but nevertheless significant way in which the author avoids conforming to a literary tradition that the form and the content of the work clearly undermine.

Ich musste meine eigene Musik erkennen, um die Musik der Welt zu erkennen. (142)

With this realisation towards the end of *Kontinent*, the narrator draws together the themes of belonging, alienation and ecology. In the recognition of the interrelationship of her own 'music' and that of the world we can see that the narrator has achieved a Frommian understanding of how self-expression and self-realization are necessary to a comprehension of

German Novel in the 1980s, (Oxford, 1990), pp 153-68

²⁴⁸ See: Christoph Kuhn, 'Eine Wirklichkeit die sich in Musik auflöst', in *Tages Anzeiger*, 21.09.1985

²⁴⁹ See, for example: Klara Obermüller, in *Die Weltwoche*, 12.12.1985, uses the term 'Erzählung.'

²⁵⁰ The relationship established by an exergue between text and reader was described at the Polyphony Workshop, Monte Verita, May 2003, by Arno Renken as 'contractual.' By this he means that in giving a text a generic classification an author establishes a set of expectations.

²⁵¹ Christa Wolf, *Subjektive Authentizität. Gespräch mit Hans Kaufmann, 1973*, in Wolf, Christa, *Die Dimension des Autors. Essays und Aufsätze, Reden und Gespräche 1959 – 1985*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987), pp

existence in a wider sense. The way the sentence is constructed suggests that her primary aim was "die Musik der Welt zu erkennen." With this in mind, we can see that self-realization is a step on the road to finding a home in the world and does not merely imply a restrictive form of individualisation.²⁵²

Nevertheless, the fact that there *are* two sorts of music demonstrates the existence of the dialectic between belonging and alienation, which we identified earlier, and despite the progress the narrator makes in the village, this tension remains ever present. This is evident in the final passage where we appear to return to the beginning of the work with the same removal men, who brought her to the canal house, coming to take her on the short journey to the observatory. The narrator is in a constant process of learning about herself; she is on a continuing journey from alienation to belonging.

The interface between these two themes is Leutenegger's language of dwelling, her ecology. We can see that Leutenegger's sense of ecology is close to the meaning of the original Greek terms. Indeed, she warns against a 'shallow' ecological interpretation of her work: "fassen Sie die 'ökologische Stimme' nicht zu eng; es geht um alles Kreatürliche, die Schöpfung überhaupt."²⁵³ Her work is not ecological in a conservationist sense, even if it highlights the decline of biodiversity. Rather, it embodies the "intellectual revolution" that Richard Leakey suggests is already taking place.²⁵⁴ The work amounts to a textual representation of consciousness, by joining dream, memory and notional reality all on the same narrative level. Within the space of a sentence, with no syntactical indication whatsoever, the narrative can flow from the notional reality of the Valais village into the psychological reality of the narrator's memories of China. In this way, Switzerland and China can become part of the same 'Kontinent'. The metaphor works because, as we have seen, the

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²⁵² Naess considers the conventional understanding of self-realization to be a restrictive, individualistic ego-trip. He uses the term in order to capture people's attention, because they feel safe with it. For a more comprehensive investigation of these ideas see: Naess, Arne, 'Self-Realization. An Ecological Approach to Being in the World.' in Naess and Sessions *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, (Boston and London, 1995)

narrator's journey of self-realization is not only one of recognition of an interior self but is also one of acceptance that the self is dependent on the exterior environment as well. Again, the importance of the present tense must be emphasised. The narrative itself is the self-expression that allows the narrator the knowledge of herself, which helps her to achieve self-realization. It is in the act of telling that she learns; therefore, for this to be an on-going process, for it to remain "die epische Darstellung einer Menschwerdung,"²⁵⁵ the narrative must remain in the present tense.

To draw the various strands together, the text can therefore be considered to be thoroughly ecological on the levels of language, structure, syntax, content, and also the effect it has on the reader. Rejecting traditional forms and resisting interpretation, Leutenegger's prose is iconoclastic and ground-breaking. The narrator has found a language for her home, a language that achieves a sense of what to be at home means.

²⁵³ Leutenegger, in correspondence with the author, Zurich, 6.05.2003.

²⁵⁴ See the introduction, 1. above.

²⁵⁵ My italics.

5. Beat Sterchi's *Blösch*: A Moo for Biocentrism

In *Blösch* (1983), the Bern author Beat Sterchi (1949-) gives a detailed description, in over 400 pages, of the Swiss meat industry. The action of the novel takes place on the two principal stages of a sirloin steak's journey before it reaches the shops, namely the farm and the slaughterhouse. These two scenes are however set so clearly apart as if they were binary opposites. Although life on the farm is by no means idyllic – and Sterchi goes to great lengths to avoid a clichéd representation of Swiss pastoral life – the more complete world of the rural village seems a paradise for both humans and animals in comparison with the icy hell of the slaughterhouse, where not only cows are chopped up. The two scenes are drawn together by the two main characters Ambrosio, a Spanish *Gastarbeiter*, and Blösch, the prize cow. The cow and the Spaniard are almost omnipresent, appearing in one form or another in each of the twelve chapters, be it on the pastures or in the abattoir. Being everywhere in the novel, Blösch and Ambrosio unwittingly indicate that the two dichotomous scenes in the novel are in fact parts of a whole. The work balances on the tension between the apparent dichotomy between the urban and rural settings and the subtle suggestions that the two are nevertheless part of one system. There is also a perceptible element of holism in the novel as well as erosion of the traditional antipodal demarcation between man and animal. These elements combine to give an unconventional perspective on an unconventional subject.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the novel is Sterchi's use of a variety of narrative techniques to give greater definition to the polarity between farm and slaughterhouse. This allows, on the one hand, "ein traditioneller Blick über eine immer noch überschaubare Welt"²⁵⁶ on the farm and, on the other, a multiperspectival impression of the technically

²⁵⁶ Beat Sterchi, in conversation with the author, Bern, 25.06.2003

modernised and industrialised urban scene, which Sterchi describes as “zerrissen” and “ungesund.”²⁵⁷

5.0.1 The Farm

The novel begins with the retrospective account of Ambrosio's experience as a hired milker on a farm in the Emmenthal. Narrated by a third person, omniscient narrator and mostly focalised by the main characters, this is the “traditioneller Blick” Sterchi refers to. The odd-numbered chapters are devoted to the rural setting and are accordingly narrated in this way. The six chapters set on the farm constitute a conventional realist depiction of agricultural life and have been compared in style to the work of Jeremias Gotthelf, another Emmenthaler.²⁵⁸ The reader learns how Ambrosio arrives in the fictional village of Innerwald in order to earn enough to support his family in Lá Coruña. He is required as a milker because, with the arrival of milking machines, there are no milkers to be found in the surrounding area. Already we can identify a tension in the rural scene. Knuchel, who hires Ambrosio, is the only farmer to resist the trend towards mechanisation and to continue milking by hand in the traditional manner. But to do so, he must hire foreign help and thus go against public opinion. Ambrosio is assimilated easily into farm life and proves to be a skilful milker. Although he speaks no German, he nevertheless understands what is expected of him and what needs to be done. The villagers, however, resent having foreigners in Innerwald and, after a scuffle in the bar involving both Ambrosio and Luigi, an Italian working on another farm, the idyllic rural days of the exotic immigrants are numbered. Drawing attention to the part that animals play in the narrative, Sterchi chooses Blösch as his other main character. Famous for her record milk production, Blösch is the lead cow in Knuchel's herd and the envy of the other farmers in the

²⁵⁷ Sterchi, in conversation with the author, Bern, 25.06.2003

²⁵⁸ See: Heinz Ludwig Arnold, ‘Passion einer Kuh, Passion eines Knechts’, in *Der Spiegel*, Nr. 50, (Hamburg, 1983), pp 185-187

village. The six agricultural chapters are as much a tale of Blösch's life - of her mating, calving, sickness and recovery - as of Ambrosio's experience.

The "Knuchelhof" appears to be a scene of harmony between humans and animals. All beings on the farm are united in the effort to produce more milk. The prosperity of all relies on their communal effort. Even the dog, Prinz, is depicted as straining for the general good. When the cows produce more milk than usual, the dog, which drags the milk cart to the cheese-maker, proudly pulls the extra weight up the hill into the village.²⁵⁹ Since they are all members of the same milk-producing team, with a shared goal, the conventional differentiation between mankind and animals is diminished. Knuchel's bio-egalitarian attitude towards those in his immediate environment demonstrates this. He treats humans no differently from animals. When there is a problem with Blösch, he initially swears at the cow, then at his wife and finally at himself (25). The parity in importance of herd and family is evident in the account of the birth of one of the farmer's sons. His wife and a cow gave birth simultaneously giving Knuchel the dilemma over whether to be in the byre or in the farmhouse. Emphasising their similar position in the estimation of the farmer the calf and the son have nearly the same name. They are called "Stine" and "Stini" respectively. The narrative technique also puts the animals and the children on the same level. One section ends with the cows feeding. There follows a two-line gap before the narrative continues: "In Maulecken glänzte Milch und Morgenkaffee. Es war Sonntag." (246) Without mention of the subject and in light of Knuchel's favourable treatment of his cows on Sundays, we might think that the focus is still the byre. At the very least, the narrative is comically unclear. The third sentence of the section introduces the children as the subject. However, to reinforce the ambiguity established by the syntactical lack of clarity, there is another animal simile and the children are likened to swans. A biocentric attitude is clearly perceptible as Knuchel reflects on the villagers' opposition to the Spanish milker. He asks why they should care, how they

²⁵⁹ Beat Sterchi, *Blösch*, (Zurich: Diogenes, 1983), p. 16. Further references to this edition will be given after

would know better, and wonders why they do not wait to see what the cows make of the Spaniard: "Und hatte das Vieh etwa nichts dazu zu sagen? Jetzt wollen wir doch sehen, wie die Kühe zu der Sache stehen." (32).

The use of "sagen" in this quotation personifies the cows and we can see how the language used by the narrator further supports the idea that humans and animals are on the same level. We have already seen this in the psychological personification of the dog: he is *proud* of the amount of milk and "übermütiger als üblich" (16). His name, Prinz, further personifies him. Pulling the milk into the village, he barks, "als ob er sagen wollte: Kommt her, ihr Kleinbauern, [...] kommt und seht, wieviel Milch wir heute wieder bringen." Although, the narrator remains realist in that the animals never use language directly, the narrative often borders on anthropomorphism either with an interpretation of a bark or a moo, or by focalising the narrative from an animal's perspective. At times, the narrator uses free indirect speech from Blösch's perspective. Having read how Blösch pulls rank on the other cows when it comes to the early morning trip to the water trough, we read "Status musste sein." (12) We must attribute the short sentence to the cow. The cows are also often personified. Describing the "Herdenhierarchie" (12), in itself something we might more readily associate with human society, the narrator gives Blösch the title of "die erste *Dame im Stall*" (12, my italics). The narrator readily associates a range of psychological attributes with the cows from "überdimensioniertem Stolz" (12) to "Eitelkeit" (13). The cows are in turn "gelangweilt" or plotting "Stallaufstände." (13) The personification is supported by a range of bovine neologisms: "kuhdemokratisch" (25), "Kuhvolk" (30), "gekuhänselt" (30) and "kuhgerecht" (31). Like Gertrud Leutenegger's ape society in *Lebewohl, Gute Reise*,²⁶⁰ Sterchi's cow hierarchy is a parody of human society. At the same time, it gives the animals the sort of psychological subtlety that we normally like to reserve for ourselves.

quotations in the text.

²⁶⁰ See: Leutenegger, *Lebewohl, Gute Reise*, pp 24-31

To complement the striking personification of the animals, the narrator animalises his human characters. He repeatedly draws attention to scratching and itching.²⁶¹ Without any significance for the plot, the inclusion of these actions only serves to suggest how ape-like the humans are. Scratching is an instinctive action and for that reason is sometimes scornfully regarded as animal and often seen as impolite. Sterchi's narrative emphasises that many simple human actions are instinctive and unreflected, thus stressing that humans are animals. For example, the manager in the general store does not actively put his pencil behind his ear, stick his arms out, or point with his hands. Rather, these things happen of their own accord. The personal pronoun disappears and with it goes the manager's conscious influence on his actions:

Der Bleistift verschwand hinter dem rechten Ohr. Zwei Arme streckten sich hinaus, Ärmel rutschten über Handgelenke zurück, zwei Hände zielten, zehn Finger schoben sich ineinander, umklammerten sich fleischig, massig, drückten, drückten kräftig. (46-47)

By animalising the humans, as well as personifying the animals, Sterchi ensures that there is no narratorial hierarchy separating the two. He is neither aggrandising animals nor belittling humans. The two groups, which are normally treated as separate entities, are treated as one. This is most comically obvious in the case of implied parity between Knuchel and the local bull achieved by the juxtaposition of the descriptions of their affection for the cows (14).

In his affection towards his herd, and their warm reaction to his presence in the byre, it is apparent that Knuchel's relationship with his animals goes beyond simply earning a living. Almost religiously, the farmer takes more time for milking his cows on Sundays. Before milking begins, he inspects his herd, taking his time to praise various cows for their straight backs and to sort out any wounds. "Sonntags hatte Doktor Knuchel Sprechstunde." (13) Again, we can identify an element of supraspeciesist equality in the

²⁶¹ See: Sterchi, *Blösch*, p. 182, for example.

narrative, thanks to the choice of the words "Doktor" and "Sprechstunde" rather than "Tierarzt" and "Klinik." A doctor normally operates on his own species. Furthermore, "Sprechstunde" suggests that the farmer can communicate with his cows. This is emphasised in the following paragraph: "Diesen Aufmerksamkeiten konnten die Tiere nicht gleichgültig begegnen." They stick their udders out for him and flick their tails in appreciation of his care and attention (14). Knuchel interacts with his animals and establishes an emotional bond, which echoes the philosophy of the deep ecologists discussed in an earlier chapter of this thesis.

The narrator treats Blösch and Ambrosio equally. The narrative alternates continually between them so that they are given narratospatial equality. While Chapter 3 deals with Ambrosio's discovery of the shooting practice, Chapter 5 relates the episode where Blösch mates. The narrator also deals with both characters in a syntactically similar way. Their actions are often reported in single-sentence paragraphs. For example, when the Spaniard starts milking, the farmer rushes around, worrying and fussing. We read long paragraphs focalised by Knuchel. These are punctuated by single-lined paragraphs such as "Und dann saß Ambrosio unter einer Knuchelkuh." (33) or "Ambrosio hatte gut aufgepasst." (34), or "Und dann melkte Ambrosio." (35). Blösch's actions are also often depicted simply and sparingly. This narrative parity not only emphasises their position as the protagonists but once again indicates that the standard differentiation between humans and animals is disregarded here.

By disposing of the traditional hierarchical relationship between mankind and animals, Sterchi's narrative is biocentric. Biocentrism attributes inherent value and equal moral status to all living organisms. Ignoring the vital ecological processes of death and predation, the philosophy quickly becomes embroiled in problems of practicality. It nevertheless is a tenable position in a variety of refined versions and offers an alternative to

the more familiar but potentially environmentally threatening anthropocentric standpoints.²⁶² *Blösch* is not an anthropocentric text. The tale is not primarily about humans. Instead, the novel offers a wide range of points of view, some animal, others human. Attention is drawn to this initially by the title, which underscores the central position of the cow in the novel and furthermore by the balance of the narrative between Ambrosio and Blösch.

The polyphony of Sterchi's narrative throws Knuchel's ability to communicate with his animals into greater relief. Ambrosio speaks no German, let alone Emmenthaler dialect, and accordingly any direct speech from the Spaniard is given in Spanish. Knuchel does not understand Spanish, and thus Ambrosio's language is as comprehensible or incomprehensible as the cows' mooing. He needs the context of the situation as well as body language in order to understand his new byre-mate. Again the narrative puts humans and animals on the same level, and language, which is another way we commonly like to differentiate ourselves from animals, is reduced to a rudimentary and imprecise means of communication. This is most obvious when Ambrosio is asked if he wants to work in Switzerland, to which he replies in Spanish, "Pleased to meet you" (49, my translation). Because of the context the non-hispanophone reader will probably assume the Spanish means something like "yes please", as do the Swiss characters in the text. Knuchel's experience of Ambrosio's speech is regenerated for the average German-speaking reader. For Ambrosio's thoughts, the narrator subtly employs both German and Spanish. The narrator exploits Ambrosio to give German-speaking readers both an insight into the mind of an outsider and also to achieve a distancing effect, provoking them to reconsider language in general. What the reader has to understand for the sake of the plot, they read in German. Otherwise, Ambrosio's thoughts are often in Spanish. Initially they appear just as bamboozling as a cow's moos might. The reader is often not supplied with Ambrosio's body language and therefore is not in a position to read from his actions. Instead, the narrator usually uses

²⁶² See: Clare Palmer, 'An Overview of Environmental Ethics', in *Environmental Ethics. An Anthology*, ed. by

paraphrasing or translation *in praesentia* to recreate Knuchel's approximate understanding of Ambrosio for the reader. For example, when the mayor comes to look at Ambrosio's official documents, the Spaniard does not understand him. " 'No entiendo'" are his reported words, which are then explained for us by the narrator: "Ambrosio zuckte erneut die Schultern." (90). The context of any dialogue also proves to be an important part of understanding. While Knuchel and Ambrosio are plaiting the silage,²⁶³ a woman rides past on a bicycle. Free indirect speech in Spanish focalised by the Spaniard provokes the farmer to comment on the woman's bicycling ability.

Predictably, Ambrosio has difficulties understanding Swiss-German. For example, he cannot understand what the farmer's wife says. However, he can understand what she means because her whole being complements her every action. "Und wie sie aussah, bewegte sie sich, und wie sie sich bewegte, so sprach sie auch." (20) In this way, Ambrosio is able to read from her movements what she means to say, and the narrative encourages us to understand language as a part of a whole, one of a broad range of constituent elements that make up communication.

Just as Ambrosio becomes accustomed to the farmer's wife and learns to understand her body language, we get used to Ambrosio's language. His favourite word is "caramba." Through his free use of the word when surprised or shocked we may deduce that it is an expletive. Like the snarl of a dog, we cannot interpret it accurately but we can gain a rough idea of what is meant, simply from the context and through its repeated occurrence. Because we only understand our textual environment through our familiarisation with it, the text is arguably eco-polyphonic, that is it contains a variety of languages and ways of communicating (body language, mooing, barking) in order to give a linguistic notion of what being at home means.

The inclusion of snippets of Swiss-German adds to the polyphony of the text. Expressions like “sali”, “Muni” and “Bäziwasser” indicate that we are in Switzerland, and words such as “däräwäg”, “Gushti”, or “Plägoricheib”, are unmistakably Emmenthal dialect. As with the Spanish in the novel, we acquaint ourselves with various expressions and thus begin to feel at home in the text. “Muni”, for example, occurs so often in such obvious contexts that we can soon translate it as “bull.” However, there are enough dialect expressions for the work to require a glossary. This suggests that the amount of dialect exceeds what we, as readers, can reasonably be expected to understand from the context. The inclusion of Swiss-German therefore goes beyond simply giving the novel a little local colouring. By complicating the text for the reader, Sterchi encourages reflection on the local nature of language, how language belongs to a place. Readers are made aware of their distance from the scene through their incomprehension. Innerwald is not our home. The notion of the text as eco-polyphonic is given further support here because the mixture of High German and dialect allows us on the one hand to locate the scene of the narrative solely through the language and to understand some expressions, while on the other demonstrating that we are foreigners. The polyphony is thus a complex narrative device, which complicates while it elucidates.

While Knuchel demonstrates a biocentric approach, the other farmers avidly convert their farms into solely profit-oriented production lines. This creates a tension between the trend towards complete mechanisation through technological innovation, on the one hand, and, on the other, Knuchel’s refusal to sell out entirely to the rule of capitalism. “Er leistet am längsten Widerstand,” Sterchi explains.²⁶⁴ While the other farmers use milking machines and talk about their animals as units of economic value, Knuchel regards his cows as having more than purely instrumental value. This is indicated by his vocabulary. He ridicules the neighbouring farmer saying, “So verschissen wie der Bodenbauer seine *Ware* lassen wir unsere *Kühe* nicht zur Stalltür hinaus.” (158, my italics) His use of a different word for his

²⁶⁴ Sterchi, in conversation with the author, Bern, 25.06.2003

neighbour's cows helps to differentiate the way his neighbour views and treats his herd from Knuchel's own proud attitude, which further displays how his cows represent more than just economic worth to him. This is more blatant in his argument with the other villagers in the bar. "Ich habe keine Grossvieheinheiten im Stall. Ich habe Kühe," (186) he says and, more tellingly, "Grossvieheinheiten und Melkverfahren! Hatt denn hier keiner mehr ein Gehirn im Gring!" (193). The juxtaposition of the two registers, the technical language and the dialect expression, emphasises his point. The language of the local environment is the dialect, identifiable by the word "Gring", and can therefore be understood as language of the home or ecological. The technical terms not only emphasise that the cows are treated purely as economic factors but also indicate alien interference. Words like "Melkverfahren" and "Grossvieheinheiten" do not belong to the dialect of the region and are therefore not the language of the home.

The tension between capitalism and traditional husbandry is evident throughout the novel. Near the beginning, Knuchel expresses his disgust at the idea that his cows might become simply "eine Art Ausgangspunkt für ein Netz von Röhren, Pumpen und Ventilen" (15). The opposing pole to Knuchel, a modernising farmer, suggests that it does not matter if, because of mechanical milking, an udder resembles "ein schlampiger Dudelsack, mit Strichen wie Stacheln dran", the key is how much milk the cow produces (47). Knuchel answers the capitalist clearly, explaining that his son "schaut nicht nur ins Portmonnaie. Der hat Freude am Land, am Vieh im Stall." (48) A dichotomy is thus created between capitalism, providing economic prosperity, and husbandry, which provides happiness. Ambrosio's presence in Switzerland is also centred on this dichotomy. On the very first page, we learn that he is coming to Switzerland in order to earn money but that he is emotionally bound to Lá Coruña. Ambrosio's journey to Switzerland is described in topographical detail. We read about the desert plains of northern Spain and the mountains of Switzerland. On arrival he feels an overwhelming desire to return "durch die Tunnels zurück über die Berge, nur zurück ans

Licht seines eigenen Dorfes in Coruña." (7) In this passage, we can again identify a language of dwelling in the repetition of the features of the landscape, which emphasises how the topography influences where one feels at home. The stark juxtaposition of the tunnels of Switzerland with the light of Coruña also draws attention to the role the environment plays in the alienation Ambrosio feels on arrival. He is part of Lá Coruña in that he is emotionally reliant on that particular environment, which is reduced here to the synecdoche of the light. Importantly, the narrator uses the word "Coruña" and not "Spanien", thus accentuating the localisation of Ambrosio's sense of being at home. In short, while he is financially better off in Switzerland, he is happier at home. The replacement of traditional methods of farming with modern technologically advanced methods is analogous to the Spaniard's uprooting from his home. The mayor tells Knuchel about the American use of surrogate mother cows, which horrifies Knuchel.

Knuchel kratzte sich unter dem Kinn. „Amerika. Amerika. Wenn ich das nur hören muss. Was ist denn das für ein Donnersgestürm? Sollen sie doch. Lass die doch! Wir sind hier gut gefahren. Wir hatten Glück im Stall, bevor die dort drüben überhaupt wussten, was eine Kuh ist. Und wie die dort drüben aussehen.“ (48)

The repetition of "Amerika" underscores the foreignness of the practice. As we have seen, foreignness is significantly negatively loaded in the narrative. The reference to the appearance of the cows draws attention to the appreciation of intrinsic values in the animals, as we saw earlier. Most significantly, the notion of "Glück im Stall" underpins the whole of the husbandry argument and centralises happiness, something that the capitalist faction does not even mention. Furthermore, Knuchel points out that the traditional way of farming was sufficient to their needs. The argument 'if it ain't broke don't mend it' is left unanswered by the technomaniacs. The passage also links the fad for technology with Knuchel's constant nervous scratching of his chin. The farmer scratches his chin throughout the novel and

eventually makes it bleed. The link established here loads the nervous action with a technophobic association. Knuchel's throat also tightens at the prospect of any technological innovation. Furthermore, when his wife convinces him to try the new bull with Blösch, the narrator notes how his feet become sweaty (168). Thus his instinctive, animal reactions, which recur at least twice in every agricultural chapter, remind the reader of the central tension that we have identified here.

Blösch's impregnation is a telling example of this central dichotomy. The village has two bulls. "Gotthelf" is a born and bred Innerwald bull and has always been Knuchel's bull of choice. The community has however bought a new bull called "Pestalozzi", one of the largest in Switzerland. Under pressure from his wife and the mayor, the farmer ignores his instinctive preference and opts for the new, larger bull. However, Pestalozzi takes no interest in Blösch. Gotthelf must be fetched and duly performs his task admirably (169-176). Pestalozzi, whose name has connotations of reform as well as neglect of progeny, represents the spirit of modernisation. The bull is the product of careful interbreeding abroad in order to create an enormous bull. Gotthelf, on the other hand, is a pure Simmentaler bull and represents the traditional, local way of farming. His name underlines this, since Jeremias Gotthelf is famous for his conservative attitude and resistance to change. It is suggested that Pestalozzi's failure is due to his inability to acclimatise to the thinner air at altitude (244). Gotthelf's potency is a clear example of the traditional way of farming being more effective than the modern alternatives. The episode is also indicative of how the modern techniques are favoured for their outward appearance. The villagers, and, comically, the women in particular, find the massive Pestalozzi attractive and for this reason he is preferred. The sequence of events is also symptomatic. Rather than continuing with the old system until there is a problem, the fad for the modern provokes the premature introduction of the new bull where he is not needed. Eventually, towards the end of the novel, the community is obliged to sell the bull at a loss, compounding their mistake.

The episode shows too that Knuchel's omnipresent doubts about modernisation are well founded. The narrative technique links this scene, along with Knuchel's doubts, to other moments of doubt. After a long discursive paragraph about the various advantages of the new bull and his popularity, we read in a one-line paragraph that undermines the whole preceding laudatio of the new bull: "Nur der Knuchelbauer hegte Zweifel." (171) The shortness of the sentence is reminiscent of the way the narrator deals with both Blösch and Ambrosio. The juxtaposition of such short sentences with the lengthy and carefully postulated arguments gives lucidity to the simply expressed and elliptical statements. In this instance, it also reflects how Knuchel cannot articulate his fears clearly. All he can say is that the bull is not from the area. (168) The polyphony of the text already suggested that language is an imprecise tool. Here we see how Knuchel's gut reactions are more reliable than the careful arguments of the modernisers, further undermining the authority of language. This naturally has implications for the narrative itself. A similar short sentence follows the description of the shopkeeper's ability to calculate with his pencil and the authority that this red pencil then assumes among the villagers. "Nur Knuchel hielt wenig von dem roten Bleistift." (44) Proof of Knuchel being right only comes with the Gotthelf/Pestalozzi example much later in the narrative. In retrospect, the reader can draw on the narrative similarity of the occasions where Knuchel opposes the modernising trend and deduce that the farmer was also right on the previous occasion. It is significant that the reader can only be sure in retrospect of Knuchel being right. In this way, the reader has the same experience as the villagers. We too can be swept away by the excitement of technological advances because we do not yet have the proof that the technology has a negative effect.

5.0.2 The Abattoir

Although Knuchel also fears the milking machines and has hired Ambrosio to avoid introducing them, he is eventually forced by the villagers' obdurate opposition to the Spaniard

to offload his new milker and to automate his milk production. In the light of the examples of Knuchel's instinctive reactions being right, this turn of events is ominous. Ambrosio goes to the "schöne Stadt" to work in an abattoir. The brutal and mechanical scene in the slaughterhouse compounds the sense of foreboding signalled by Knuchel's hesitancy. The change of narrative technique from the rural scene highlights the change of location. After the "traditioneller Blick", the narrative becomes diffuse, multiperspectival and challenging for the reader. Both Ambrosio and Blösch remain central but the majority of the text is focalised by a slaughterhouse apprentice. The scene depicted is the last day that Ambrosio works there, seven years after his arrival on the farm. The six chapters amount to more than half the total number of pages but the notional narrative present is restricted to one day. This makes a stark contrast to the rural passages, which cover a period of some months.

The abattoir narrative begins with a waking first-person narrator, the apprentice, who relates, over three pages of short, brittle and incomplete phrases, the action of the previous day and also his journey to the slaughterhouse at the start of his day. The sections of the narrative that are told by the apprentice are usually in the present tense and amount to the notional narrative present of the slaughterhouse half of the novel. Once at the abattoir, we are thrown into a multiperspectival block of text without breaks between sentences, making it difficult for us to unravel the various strands in this knot of narrative. This equally lasts for about three pages before we move on to a third person narrator, who gives a coherent summary of the scene in the past tense, again lasting three pages. The mix of perspectives, techniques and tenses keeps us permanently uncertain. Who is narrating now? Whose dialogue are we reading? It appears to be a bamboozling puzzle that augments the sense of a "zerrissene Welt"²⁶⁵ suggested by the first-person narrator's style.

We can identify a structure of sorts, however. The narrative continually returns to the first-person narrator. These sections of the narrative always begin with the time of day and

²⁶⁵ Sterchi, in conversation with the author, Bern, 25.06.2003

once we have become accustomed to this technique, the times help to signpost the first-person perspective for us. They also signal that the narrative has some kind of plot despite the confusion generated by the varied perspectives and tenses. The reduction of the narrative motor to simply the passing of time is reminiscent of Max Frisch's *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*. In Frisch's novella, the reduction functions as an eco-narrative device by avoiding narratorial editing and thus avoiding the anthropocentrism of more traditional narration.²⁶⁶ Here, it functions similarly to show a lack of anthropomorphic influence over the narrative and also the lack of control the characters have over their day. The times draw attention to the attendance-recording clock, which becomes a powerfully loaded motif in the narrative. As the apprentice approaches the abattoir he is faced with the clock. "Und hinter der Stempeluhr nichts als Zeit, nichts als die Zeit, in der jeder Morgen ersäuft, bevor er begonnen hat." (58) The clock controls the workers' existence in the abattoir. It reduces them to parts of a machine. There is no way to argue or reason with it, so they must obey its mechanical rhythm completely. The workers unwillingly trudge past the clock. "Keiner stempelte rot, man kannte die Tücken der Zeit, man wusste für wen sie tickte." (62) The turn of phrase is reminiscent of Hemingway, one of Sterchi's favourite authors, and the reference adds an ominous tone to the act of stamping the card. In the light of the central role of the clock we can better understand what the apprentice means at the start of the slaughterhouse part of the novel. It begins, like all the passages from his perspective, with a reference to the time:

Fünf Uhr dreißig.

Der Morgen, den ich nicht besitze.

The time he spends in the slaughterhouse is not his. One of Marx's key criticisms of capitalism is precisely that the worker's life-time is turned into work-time.²⁶⁷ The fact that the

²⁶⁶ Frisch, *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*. See chapter 3 of this thesis.

²⁶⁷ See: David McLellan, *Marx*, (Glasgow: Collins, 1975) p. 54

narrative is constructed around the times regenerates an equivalent experience of the control of the clock for the reader. It also demonstrates that the pace of the narrative is unusually slow, since each time the narrative returns to the first-person perspective usually only fifteen minutes have elapsed. This reflects the experience of anyone who has worked under the authority of an attendance-recording clock, for whom time seems to pass very slowly.

The workers also lose autonomy in their work. They become, as Marx might put it, merely an appendage of a machine.²⁶⁸ The fate of the tripe-cleaner demonstrates this clearly. Rötliberger has worked at his post for over 30 years and is nearing retirement age. However, because of regulations, his immediate superior Bössiger wants to replace Rötliberger with an untrained worker and to move Rötliberger to controlling a machine in another department. He strongly resents this and disputes the decision with Bössiger. The argument bases itself around the nature of Rötliberger's work. He argues that the trainee cannot gain the necessary feeling in his hands within the allotted three days' training. "Gefühl! Gefühl!" laughs the boss and tells him that all he needs to do is to write down the relevant information for his successor. We can again identify the dichotomy between technological mechanisation and rational thought on the one hand and, on the other, a traditional sensual understanding of one's work. Bössiger attempts to convince him to try out the new post arguing that it is "rationell mechanisiert" (198). This is met with fierce opposition from Rötliberger: "ich bin Metzger." (198) His self is bound up with his work and changing his work would mean changing him. The final straw for Rötliberger is when Bössiger explains that the machine is "idiotensicher" and that the work is highly appreciated and well-paid (199). Rötliberger replies that they should then put an idiot behind their machine and asks if they really think that the "mickerigen Zahltagsumschläge" (199) can truly recompense the work done in the abattoir.

²⁶⁸ See: McLellan, *Marx*, p. 54

The idea that the workers are part of an industrialised process, which reduces them to being parts of a machine is evident in the assembly line mode of operation. The *Ich-Erzähler* calls the process “das Demontageband” (67). In interview, Sterchi mentions how the great slaughterhouses in Chicago inspired Henry Ford’s revolutionising industrial technique. He thus hints at how important the sense of industrialisation and the assembly line is to *Blösch*.²⁶⁹ A sense of the assembly line is achieved in the narrative when the work in the slaughterhouse is summarised on one page. Each separate stage of the work is reduced to a one-line paragraph. Each stage involves an employee and thus the summary of the work involves a reduction of the workers, who are diminished to being a part of the work.

Robbed of their time and any autonomy in their work, in addition to becoming merely a cog in a machine, the workers sense a repression of self. This is most clearly exemplified by the apprentice’s experience. As he approaches the abattoir he feels his throat tighten. “Lange vor dem ersten ICH ist Schluss, fertig, kein Wort rutscht mir die Kehle hoch: ich bleibe stumm.” (55) The capitals used for the “ICH” draw our attention to the word, the most basic expression of self. In the abattoir itself, he can find no way to express himself. This sense is recreated by the partial syntax. Even if he could express himself, the machines are so loud that it would be futile (125). Emphasising the significance of his inability to express himself, he asks if remaining silent could be life threatening (200). Even his attempt to masturbate in the toilets is futile. The apprentice sums up his existence by comparing himself to an Egyptian slave. This suggests that working in the abattoir involves a complete negation of personal rights (200). The negation of self is also perceptible in the narrative techniques of the slaughterhouse chapters. The use of multiperspectival streams of language blurs the identities of the various characters into a hazy unity, which diminishes their individuality. This is emphasised by the majority of the workers never being fully named until the end, when the authority in the abattoir is overthrown (422). It is furthermore evident in the description of the

²⁶⁹ Sterchi, in conversation with the author, Bern, 25.06.2003

group of workers as they enter the abattoir. "Kein Kaiser, kein König, kein Bürger, kein Bauer und kein Handelsmann, dafür aber etliche Metzger" the society is incomplete and all the workers are reduced to doing the same thing. The most distinguishing feature of each character is the type of cigarette he smokes. The different brands of cigarette punctuate the streams of language, standing out from the rest of the text thanks to the use of capitals. Brand names are given in capitals throughout the novel, drawing attention to the central role of the product in a capitalist system. With the workers being identified by their cigarettes, there is the suggestion that the product is more important than the worker. This is another accusation Marx levels at capitalism. Additionally, we can see that the slaughterhouse dominates every aspect of the workers' lives. They talk incessantly about cows, they swear about cows, their jokes revolve around cows, they dream about cows and there is even a religious tone in the act of slaughter as the apprentice remembers what he has to do as he might remember the catechism.

The personal contact to the surrounding environment, which is present on the farm, is absent from the slaughterhouse. The juxtaposition is most obvious with Ambrosio's reaction to Blösch's arrival in the abattoir. In the context of the slaughterhouse, the cow is just another object on the production line, but for Ambrosio Blösch is a person. While Ambrosio mutters the cow's name under his breath, the apprentice calls the cows "Milkmaschinen." Ambrosio's initial exclamation "I know her" (70, my translation) demonstrates his emotion. It is set against the sober tone of an extract from a biology text-book, describing scientifically what a cow is. Blösch's proud attitude is also described against the backdrop of another extract from the biology book. The book's analytical and objectifying generalisations jar with the narrator's description, which amounts to clear evidence of an individual character. Her appearance reminds Ambrosio of a different way of life and he is unable to work for the rest of the day. His realisation of the significance of his shock at seeing Blösch comes towards the end of the novel and forms a central passage for our understanding of the novel.

dieser Leib war auch Ambrosios Leib. Die Wunden Blöschs waren seine Wunden, der verlorene Fellglanz war sein Verlust, die tiefen Furchen zwischen den Rippen, die Hutgrossen Löcher um die Beckenknochen, die gruben sich auch in sein Fleisch, was der Kuh fehlte, das hatte man auch ihm genommen. (406)

Here Sterchi echoes the ideas discussed earlier about human relationships to environment. Our environment is part of us. Ambrosio takes the analysis further.

Ja, er hatte gelacht über die Passivität, über die Anspruchslosigkeit der Knuckelkühe, aber was da auf der Rampe einmal mehr vorgeführt wurde an bedingungslosem Gehorsam, an Unterwürfigkeit und ziellosem Muhen das hatte er mittlerweile zu seinem Ekel an sich selbst kennengelernt. In Blösch hatte sich Ambrosio an diesem Dienstagmorgen selbst erkannt. (406)

Here he perceives that the cows and the humans are all bound up in the same process and are equally exploited for the purposes of the abattoir, which fundamentally amount to the pursuit of capital. Ernest Gilgen, the worker who leads the final uprising, also perceives the parallels between the cows and the employees (424).

With this insight, a retrospective look at the text reveals further evidence that man and beast are on the same level and are both maltreated by the system. The most obvious example is the fact that nearly all of the workers have been physically damaged by their work, creating a parallel with the lacerated animals. For example, Buri is missing a leg, Ambrosio is missing a finger and the apprentice cuts himself. A further parallel can be seen between the way the workers are ordered around and the way the animals are led into the abattoir and are pushed around. Orders are shouted in a military manner.²⁷⁰ Sterchi remembers this as the worst aspect of his own training as a butcher.²⁷¹ In the end, when the

²⁷⁰ See for example pp 71, 75, 113, 124, 125, 145, 154, 197, 200, 204

²⁷¹ Sterchi, in conversation with the author, Bern, 25.06.2003

workers stage a revolt, the foreman is obliged to wrestle with one of the workers in an attempt to force them back to work (422). The use of brute strength is reminiscent of the way the animals are forced to the slaughter. We might suppose that the coercion of the animals to the slaughter is an inevitable part of the production of meat but by the end of the novel even this is thrown into a different light. The slaughterhouse revolt culminates with the sacrificial slaughter of a small, Swiss, flower-bedecked cow. Unlike the previous slaughters in the narrative, the cow is calm and does not strain against the workers even when her throat is cut. The workers catch her blood in a pan and pass it around to drink. The act seems to function like a communion, allowing the workers to acknowledge the cow and to demonstrate that the death of the cow is now physically incorporated in them (428-431).

Sterchi has suggested that the traditional form of the novel is no longer valid for modern life.

Die kohärente Form des Romans war eine kulturell akzeptierte Form. Früher war eine Geschichte ganz etwas anderes als heute. Die Roman-Geschichte mit Höhepunkt, Auflösung und Schluss entspricht nicht mehr unserer heutigen zerstückelten und zerrissenen Lebensform mit sieben offenen Fenstern, um in der Computersprache zu reden.²⁷²

He nevertheless chooses a conventional narrative mode for the rural part of the novel. Why might he choose this mode? We have already seen an example of a traditional rural existence on Knuchel's farm. In the light of Sterchi's comments, the generally coherent form of the narrative in this section would appear to bolster the sense that the rural scene is more complete and homogenous than the abattoir scene. Sterchi explains that the Innerwald scene is "immer noch überschaubar."²⁷³ This is literally true since the entire village can be surveyed from one standpoint. Ambrosio can begin to feel at home once he has observed the scene and

²⁷² Sterchi, in conversation with the author, Bern, 25.06.2003

²⁷³ Sterchi, in conversation with the author, Bern, 25.06.2003

knows all its constituent parts (51). The idea of the Innerwald world being "überschaubar" is also true in the sense that in the small rural community there is little privacy. Everyone knows everything about everybody. The use of a third person omniscient narrator therefore seems appropriate.

Sterchi suggests that the primary aim of the dichotomous narrative technique is to create a kind of counterpoint.²⁷⁴ The salient differences between the two parts primarily function to give an overwhelming sense of how different these two worlds are. The terrible conditions in the abattoir are made to appear even harsher in comparison with the relatively benign agricultural world.

The dichotomy also undermines the reassuring omniscient third person perspective as a valid narrative form for contemporary experience. In his first *Tagebuch*, Max Frisch asks, "Was ist eine Welt? Ein zusammenfassendes Bewusstsein. Wer aber hat es?"²⁷⁵ Sterchi's use of a collage form of different narrative techniques echoes this sentiment. The collage functions as an ecological narrative device, undermining the notion that one character or narrator can adequately summarise the whole of any given situation and also denying the reader the impression that we as humans can fully grasp our reality. We no longer have the confidence to express ourselves in a coherent manner.

The intercalation of the different parts is also significant. The whole narrative is in fact focalised from the abattoir. The novel opens with Ambrosio stamping his card for the last time and thinking back on his arrival in Switzerland (7). Thus the reader begins with the knowledge that Ambrosio will end up in a slaughterhouse. The beginning is reminiscent of Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.²⁷⁶ Márquez's character is facing a firing squad, so Sterchi's reference adds a dramatic touch, suggesting an analagous fate for Ambrosio. In this way, as we read the farm section, we are already aware that this happy

²⁷⁴ Sterchi, in conversation with the author, Bern, 25.06.2003

²⁷⁵ Frisch, *Tagebuch 1946-1949*, p. 108

²⁷⁶ See: Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. by Gregory Rabassa, (London: Penguin,

scene is not the whole story. To ensure that the reader does not forget where the narrative is going, the narrator introduces the multiperspectival scene of the abattoir before the agricultural tale is finished. The alternation between scenes, which continues throughout the novel, continually reminds us of the fate of Ambrosio and Blösch. This gives the whole narrative a sense of doom. Ambrosio is already at the end of the narrative at the beginning of it and by the second chapter we know that Blösch is dead.

While the two scenes are obviously very different, the intercalation of the two parts of the narrative brings the two together by rendering the tone of the novel predominantly gloomy. The sense of impending doom is augmented by various details in both parts of the text. Each farm chapter ends on an ominous note, which counteracts anything positive in the rural scene and ensures we leave that part of the narrative with an indistinct sense of approaching disaster. For example, at the end of the first chapter Blösch is sick (54). Chapter three ends with Ambrosio in a fight in the local bar (111). Attention is drawn to the unexplained and uncanny banging noises in the Knuchel household at the end of the fifth chapter. There are also ominous elements in the slaughterhouse sections of the narrative. Ambrosio's shock at seeing Blösch frees him from his role in the abattoir and he wanders aimlessly like a sleepwalker (112). For the majority of that section of the text Ambrosio is absent from his post in the abattoir and the uncertainty as to his whereabouts is raised repeatedly. Ernest Gilgen is likewise absent. The information that he and Ambrosio are close friends allows their absence to generate a sense of conspiracy, which is compounded by the fact that Gilgen was seen sharpening an axe the previous day (201). The sense of impending doom is also perceptible in the distortion of narrative conventions. Malcolm Pender draws attention to two aspects of the narrative, which are characteristically Swiss. Both the house motif and the returning hero are well-known helvetic literary topoi.²⁷⁷ Here they are exploited

1973). Sterchi acknowledges his debt to Marquez in conversation with the author, Bern, 25.06.2003

²⁷⁷ See: Malcolm Pender, 'Themes in the German Swiss novel of the 1980s', in *Literature on the Threshold. The German Novel in the 1980s*, ed. by A. Williams, S. Parkes, R. Smith, (Oxford: Berg, 1990), pp 154-162

by Sterchi as another way of showing how things are not quite as they may superficially appear. Ambrosio's perspective constitutes an outsider's impression of Swiss rural life and parodies the Swiss traditional narrative device of a returning hero's perspective as a way of investigating the society. The returning hero is in fact a total outsider. Ambrosio has quite literally a different perspective because he is much smaller than an average Swiss. The house, which is often employed as a symbol for Swiss society as a whole, appears to be large and strong on the outside but contains the unnerving banging sound of heads against walls.

If the dichotomy between the two parts were a simple relationship of binary opposites, the antipode to the abattoir would be some kind of idyll. The presence of the disturbing elements mentioned above undermines such an interpretation and complicates the relationship between the two parts. There are various details, which, along with the protagonists, appear in both parts of the narrative. The pencil becomes a recurrent motif. We have already examined the passage where the red pencil makes its first appearance. It becomes a symbol of rational calculation and Knuchel's natural suspicion of it sounds an alarm bell. It appears in the slaughterhouse too. When Gilgen mocks the other workers for their obedient respect for the authority of the attendance-recording clock, he ridicules their pride in wearing a pencil behind their ears (145). The military tone used in the abattoir is also present in the countryside scene with the shooting practice and Knuchel's absence for military service. Both examples are negatively loaded. The atmosphere on the farm without Knuchel is unsettled and Ambrosio is thrown into a state of shock when he discovers the rifle practice. The modernisation of work practices is controversial in both scenes: Rötliberger's craftsmanship is no longer wanted in the abattoir and milking machines are introduced to replace human skill in the byre. All the characters in the work have some form of nervous habit that suggests psychological infirmity. Knuchel scratches his chin while the apprentice feels a tightening in his throat. The narrative techniques are not quite so clearly separated as it seems at first. The long passages that approximate to a stream of consciousness are not in fact restricted to the abattoir scene. (for

example: 43, 51) Sterchi's Marxism is also perceptible in both parts of the narrative. We have already identified this aspect in the abattoir. It is also present on the farm. The key difference between the traditional methods of farming and the modernised methods is the loss of the worker's personal connection with the product with which he is involved. Rather than establishing a close working relationship with a dairy herd, as is described in detail on the Knuchelhof (e.g. 18), the farmer merely turns on a machine. This clearly echoes Marx and Engels' sentiments in the Communist Manifesto.²⁷⁸

From the subtle sense of a whole that lurks under the surface of the split narrative, Heinz Ludwig Arnold draws the conclusion that *Blösch* is not an ecological narrative. He argues this because the farm world is not idyllic.²⁷⁹ This seems to be a simplistic interpretation of the complex narrative we have examined. The wholeness of the text affords the reader a moment of clairvoyance. The situation in the abattoir is what awaits the agricultural world. In the name of capital, the farmers equip themselves with the mechanisation that will sever their personal contact to their work and their environment. The dire consequence of this is the reduction of both humans and animals to nothing more than cogs in a machine, as we have seen in the abattoir. Just as the recurrent references to the firing squad give Márquez's novel an ominous tone, the links between the two parts of Sterchi's novel make it a lament for Knuchel's biocentric way of life.

In *Blösch*, Sterchi highlights the fact that lucidly expressed rational arguments are not always to be trusted. In his work, sparsely narrated instinctive reactions by both humans and animals tend to prove more reliable. Fittingly, Sterchi's novel is not an essay. He chooses instead to express what he needs to say in a fictional account, based on intimate personal knowledge of the material.²⁸⁰ The content and form of the novel breaks down any

²⁷⁸ See: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*, (Ditzingen: Reclam, 1989)

²⁷⁹ See: Arnold, 'Passion einer Kuh, Passion eines Knechts', p. 185

²⁸⁰ Sterchi explains that "Man schreibt weil man muss." He also emphasises the influence of his up-bringing in the underground preparation rooms of his parents' butcher's shop, which gave him the necessary knowledge as well as the urge to write. Sterchi, in conversation with the author, Bern, 26.06.2003.

differentiation between animals and humans. Ambrosio's realisation that he is controlled by the same process that controls the cows, despite always having thought that he had had in some way a superior perspective, suggests that although we so confidently trust the ability of our brains to grasp adequately our experience, we in fact have as little perspective on life as the bee that continually flies into the same closed window. The polyphony of the text draws further attention to this biocentric notion by highlighting how imprecise language can be and by putting human and animal communication on the same level. To conclude, Sterchi's narratologically innovative text can legitimately be called a moo for biocentrism.

6. Franz Hohler's Eco-Parables

Den Fortgang dieser Geschichte kenne ich nicht.²⁸¹

Born in 1943 in Biel, the multi-talented Franz Hohler first caught the public eye in 1965 as a cello-wielding student with a one-man cabaret in Zurich University's cellar bar. Spurred on by his success, he dropped his studies of German and left university to pursue a career performing. His cabaret numbers continue to meet with critical acclaim in Switzerland, Austria and Germany, above all for his subtle yet pointed attacks on the status quo. "Hohler deutet nur an. Seine Anspielungen steckt er mit verschämten Augenzwinkern in verspielte, aber geistreiche Verpackung."²⁸² Ask any Swiss about Franz Hohler and they are likely to reply spontaneously "I bi de René und i säge nüt." This is a quotation from Hohler's famous television series for children, "Franz und René," one of the longest-running Swiss television programmes.²⁸³ It is René's only line in the show, which defines him through silent defiance. It has become a slogan for child rebellion against the authority of adults by a refusal to use the adult medium of reasoned arguments. Even if the words are his co-star's, they are fundamentally associated with Hohler in the public eye. The author is thus inextricably linked with an image of recalcitrant dissent. This reputation is confirmed by his career as a prose writer, which began in 1967 with a collection of short stories, ironically entitled *Das verlorene Gähnen und andere nutzlose Geschichten*. The title, with its wink in the direction of Gottfried Keller, announces Hohler's light tone. This collection was followed by another entitled *Idyllen*, in 1970. The title of the latter recalls Salomon Gessner's more famous work, which bears the same name.²⁸⁴ However, as Urs Widmer notes, "Hohlers Idyllen sind keine

²⁸¹ Franz Hohler, *Die Zeichnung*, in *Zur Mündung*, (Munich: Luchterhand, 2000), p. 37

²⁸² J. Hösterey, 'Unverhohlenes Vergnügen' in *Franz Hohler. Texte, Daten, Bilder*, ed. by Michael Bauer and Klaus Siblewski (Hamburg: Luchterhand, 1993), p. 74

²⁸³ See: Bauer and Siblewski, *Franz Hohler*, p. 42

²⁸⁴ Salomon Gessner, *Idyllen*, ed. by E. Theodor Voss, (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1973; first published: 1772)

Schäferereien”²⁸⁵ and, in fact, as Karl Krolow observes, “Mit der Idylle [...] wird ironisch und zuweilen sehr bitter Scherz getrieben.” From early in his career it was therefore evident that subversion and the questioning of norms and traditions were to form a significant part of his oeuvre.

Although Hohler defies straightforward categorisation, it is fair to say that he is commonly perceived as a satirist. From his cabaret debut, *pizzicato* (1965), to his most recent play, *Zum Glück* (2002), satire, absurdity and irony have been central to his work. In many of his tales he satirises his subject matter through hyperbole. For example, the story *Von echter Tierliebe*²⁸⁶ tells of a man whose love of animals goes beyond the ordinary. His love for his sheep becomes so extreme that he loses first his wife, then his job, and finally wants to marry his favourite sheep. Hohler’s novel, *Der neue Berg* (1989), is in part a satirical work. The author paints a scurrilous picture of Zurich society, which is at times corrupt, arrogant, ignorant and amoral. Nevertheless, the novel remains serious, foregrounding significant contemporary ecological problems. Hohler’s satirical tone might appear to detract from the gravity of the social issues handled in the novel. The author sees the use of satire differently:

Satire macht es möglich, über das, worüber wir eigentlich weinen und brüllen müßten, auch lachen zu können. Sie eröffnet die Möglichkeit, zu einem Problem einen neuen Zugang finden zu können. Satire ist daher Verführung zum Nachdenken.²⁸⁷

This perspective on the use of satire suggests that Hohler intends his work to go beyond the level of entertainment. In reply to the question of whether he is committed to an attempt to improve society, Franz Hohler claims, “Eigentlich arbeite ich an nichts anderes.”²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵ Urs Widmer, ‘Alphabetische Idyllen’ in Bauer and Siblewski, *Franz Hohler*, pp 88-89

²⁸⁶ Franz Hohler, *Von echter Liebe*, in *Das verlorene Gähnen*, (Bern, 1967)

²⁸⁷ Bauer and Siblewski, *Franz Hohler*, p. 60

²⁸⁸ Franz Hohler, ‘Autorenumfrage 1. Der Autor und sein Engagement’, in Bauer and Siblewski, *Franz Hohler*, p. 51

He expresses the hope that his work will induce his readers to take action themselves,²⁸⁹ and on closer inspection of his work we will see that there are distinctive features of his style, which require an effort and engagement from the reader.

His personal commitment to ecological issues can be seen in his attendance and central participation at several large-scale demonstrations. He performed at the Gösigen demonstration against nuclear energy, he participated in the Bern "Walddemonstration", and he was present in Val Madris to demonstrate against the damming of many Alpine valleys. In the introduction we saw that the last thirty years have seen a significant rise in the interest in ecological questions. Hohler's eco-commitment can be seen within his fictional work in the fact that ecological themes have been present in his work since the early days of environmental concern, long before ecological literature established itself in the 1980s. The positioning of this chapter, dealing with Franz Hohler, at the end of the thesis, which is constructed essentially according to the chronology of publication dates of the works discussed, demonstrates that his work still demonstrates a keen ecological focus today.

Both nuclear power and hydro-electric power are contentious ecological points of debate. Some see nuclear power as the only viable alternative to fossil fuel for our energy-greedy way of life, believing faith in a possible reduction in energy consumption to be a misguided fantasy. James Lovelock, the Gaia theorist, numbers among these.²⁹⁰ Hydro-electric power stations are another matter that provokes fierce debate. Indeed, opposition to such proposals is often perceived as an instinctive mistrust of technology. Hohler demonstrates such a mistrust of technology and science:

Die Wissenschaft nimmt für sich in Anspruch, diese reale Welt zu erklären oder die Gesetze der realen Welt herauszufinden, zu beschreiben und empirisch zu erklären. Diese Erklärungen sind

²⁸⁹ See: Michael Bauer, 'Franz Hohler. Kabarettist und Schriftsteller', in Bauer and Siblewski, *Franz Hohler*, p. 65

²⁹⁰ See: Ted Davenport, 'Environment guru tells climate change experts to go nuclear', in *The Independent*, 4.6.2004

nie vollständig. Die werden gerne als verbindlich betrachtet, aber sie sind nicht die einzigen Erklärungen, nicht die einzigen Bezugspunkte. Deshalb ist immer der Mensch selbst gefragt, was denn seine Wahrnehmung unabhängig von den wissenschaftlichen Gesetzen sagt, was seine Gefühle sagen, was seine Ahnungen sagen, was seine Empfindungen sagen, und häufig kommen da ganz andere Empfehlungen als von der Wissenschaft und von der realen Seite.²⁹¹

In the discussions of Hohler's novel, *Der neue Berg*, and his novella, *Die Steinflut*, we will see how important instinctive reactions are for the survival of Hohler's protagonists.

Commenting on *Die Steinflut*, Charles Linsmayer points to a central facet of Hohler's work. He says that the novella is "obwohl ganz im Historischen angesiedelt, von leidenschaftlichem, hinreissendem Engagement getragen."²⁹² Realism is an important part of Hohler's work and in his novella the historical element, combined with a wealth of detail, renders the tale realist. Although a volcano improbably appears in *Der neue Berg*, the novel is set in an easily recognisable, realistically portrayed Zurich. Much of his shorter work is also realist. This allows the reader to feel familiar with Hohler's fictional world. However the grotesque and surreal are also crucial in Hohler's work. Describing the genesis of his short story *Die Rückeroberung*, in which the natural world reconquers Zurich, the author relates how the idea began in his reality, with an eagle landing outside his window, and then took flight in his imagination. He emphasises how the fictional realm is suited for such an operation: "Dort beginnt der Übertritt vom Realen ins Surreale. Für mich ist das schön wenn das ein unmerklicher Schritt ist."²⁹³ The influence of Franz Kafka, an author Hohler greatly admires,²⁹⁴ is evident in the Swiss author's preference for this combination of the everyday and the fantastical. Fiction also gives scope for an expression of conjectural opinion, going beyond reasoned understanding. Equally, it allows a re-questioning of things we might like to

²⁹¹ Andrew Liston, 'Die Wirklichkeit des Traums', interview with Franz Hohler, *Denkbilder*, (Zurich, 2003), p. 1

²⁹² Charles Linsmayer, 'Weltuntergang 1881 im Glarnerland', in *Bund*, 22.10.1998, p. 7

²⁹³ Liston, pp 1-2

²⁹⁴ See: Liston, p. 3

think we understand. Hohler's surrealism often poses questions precisely about such firmly held preconceptions.

His short prose might also be described as *realistic*, that is to say, realistic in narrative style rather than content. In his Zurich *Poetikvorlesungen*, Hohler suggested that the short form suited today's world because people do not have the time to read longer texts. The effect of Hohler's stage experience is also recognisable in his shorter work, which is often short enough to incorporate into a show. Indeed, much of it has been performed either as part of a cabaret performance or in one of Hohler's many public readings. The stories are anecdotal, told as they might be by a neighbour or a friend. Dealing often with the everyday and banal, Hohler gives literary form to that which he designates "unter dem Gefrierpunkt des Erzählbaren."²⁹⁵ His keen interest in everyday life is well known: "Geschätzt wird aber stets Franz Hohlers Gespür für die kleinen Dinge und sein Interesse am Alltäglichen."²⁹⁶ He designates some of his work, such as *Wo?*,²⁹⁷ *Ein eigenartiger Tag*,²⁹⁸ and *Der Mann auf der Insel*,²⁹⁹ specifically as "Alltagsbeschreibungen."³⁰⁰ In this way he rehabilitates material that "is sometimes dismissed as gossip or anecdote, yet is the only articulate form some experiences and lives achieve."³⁰¹ Thus, similarly to feminist writers, Hohler gives a voice to the narratively underprivileged. This subtle interest has exposed him to criticism. One reviewer commented, "Die Kleinkunst ist wohl da, doch fehlen die zeit- und sozialkritischen Aspekte."³⁰² This kind of criticism has haunted his work. His interest in the "Alltag" is often regarded as superficial and as implying that he lacks the strength to tackle more serious issues. However, Hohler perceives an interconnectedness between the banal, everyday occurrences and the superficially more significant, eye-catching events. In an interview where

²⁹⁵ Franz Hohler, 'Die Kürze zwingt zum Denken', *NZZ am Sonntag*, 16.11.2003, p. 67

²⁹⁶ Klaus Siblewski, 'Vorbemerkung', in Bauer and Siblewski, *Franz Hohler*, p. 9

²⁹⁷ See: Franz Hohler, *Wo?*, (Darmstadt/Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1975)

²⁹⁸ See: Franz Hohler, *Ein eigenartiger Tag*, (Darmstadt/Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1979)

²⁹⁹ See: Franz Hohler, *Der Mann auf der Insel*, (Frankfurt am Main: Luchterhand, 1991)

³⁰⁰ Bauer and Siblewski, *Franz Hohler*, p. 62

³⁰¹ Hymes, *Ethnology, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality. Towards an Understanding of Voice*, p. 219

³⁰² Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 28.04.1970

he discusses his work in general, Hohler sums up what might define his work, saying "kleine Ursache, große Wirkung."³⁰³ *Der neue Berg*,³⁰⁴ a novel which links everyday reality to an extraordinary natural disaster, is a good example of this philosophy. Hohler's standpoint has an illuminating parallel in Stifter's "sanftes Gesetz".³⁰⁵

Die Kraft welche die Milch im Töpfchen der armen Frau emporschwellen und übergehen macht, ist es auch, die die Lava in dem feuerspeienden Berge emportreibt und auf den Flächen der Berge hinabgleiten läßt.³⁰⁶

Despite Hohler's politically more reactionary stance, he has a lot in common with the 19th century Austrian writer, Adalbert Stifter, as we will see in the investigations of the texts.

In this introduction to Hohler's work, we have seen that the writer is committed to social change, concerned about the state of the natural environment and keen to champion the cause of the underdog. How then are these convincing eco-credentials related to formal aspects of his work?

Evidence of his commitment to social change, Hohler's narratives often demand an active effort on the part of the reader. Functioning in a similar way to Bertolt Brecht's "Verfremdungseffekt" and Max Frisch's "Offen-Artistische", Hohler's "Spiel mit offenen Karten"³⁰⁷ asks the reader to acknowledge the fictionality of the work, obliging him/her to deal with it as such, and so prompts the process of hermeneutics and an engagement from the reader. This trait of his work is particularly evident in his shorter prose but is also clearly present in *Der neue Berg* and *Die Steinflut*. With ecocriticism defined by Lawrence Buell as

³⁰³ Bauer and Siblewski, *Franz Hohler*, p. 68

³⁰⁴ See: Franz Hohler, *Der neue Berg*, (Frankfurt am Main, 1989)

³⁰⁵ Adalbert Stifter, *Vorrede in Bunte Steine*, (Augsburg: Goldmann, 1991), p.9

³⁰⁶ Stifter, *Vorrede*, p. 8

³⁰⁷ Liston, 'Die Wirklichkeit des Traums', p. 1

putting the emphasis on a "spirit of commitment to environmental praxis",³⁰⁸ we can see that Hohler's provocative prose is grist to the ecocritic's mill.

As well as confronting the reader with his overt fictionalization, Hohler challenges the reader within his narratives, re-questioning standard perceptions by offering alternative perspectives alongside accepted norms. For example, in his short prose piece, *Die Befreiung*, Hohler gives a new slant to the traditional fairy-tale liberation of a princess.³⁰⁹ Simone de Beauvoir complains that the fate of the female literary figure is one of passivity. Sleeping Beauty is for her the archetypal female character.³¹⁰ In Hohler's tale, she becomes somebody who can assert her will. Rather than following the prince to freedom, as the prince and the reader expect, the princess radically voices her own opinion, and chooses instead to remain with the dragon. She questions the prince, thus presenting the reader with an investigation of the standard version. Similarly, in another short piece, *Das Blatt*, the reader is directly addressed and an opinion is ascribed to him/her. Watching an ant lug a leaf from far, when there are plenty nearer to the anthill, the narrator predicts the reader's reaction, saying: "wie sinnlos, denkst du".³¹¹ Impugning the reader's assumed opinion, the omniscient narrator attempts to give us a rare insight into formic psychology, explaining that the leaf the ant is carrying is in fact a love-letter. The narrative refutes what we take for granted by offering an alternative perspective. The fact that the suggested alternative is far-fetched and calculated to bring smiles to the faces of Hohler's audiences does not diminish the questioning of our preconceptions. Instead, it reinforces the point, drawing attention to the fact that any human interpretation will remain just that and hinting that attempts at objectivity will always be flawed. The piece does not give us the key to the ant's state of mind but rather signals the

³⁰⁸ Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 430

³⁰⁹ See: Franz Hohler, *Die Befreiung*, in *Die Karawane am Boden des Milchkrugs*, (Munich: Luchterhand, 2003), p. 39

³¹⁰ See: Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. by H.M. Parshley, (London: Pan Books, 1988), pp 215-216

³¹¹ See: Franz Hohler, *Das Blatt*, in *Die Karawane am Boden des Milchkrugs*, (Munich: Luchterhand, 2003), p. 71, first published in *Der Mann auf der Insel*, (Luchterhand, 1993), p. 45

futility of even attempting to discover it and the fallibility of transferring human perspectives onto the ant's world.

The use of the (apparently) omniscient narrator is central to Hohler's eco-poetics. If in *Das Blatt* he employs the narrative device in a way that highlights the subjectivity and fallibility of human understanding, he also uses it to transcend a limited subjective perspective. This is evident in *Der neue Berg*, where none of the many characters is certain of what is happening but the reader, afforded all their points of view by the omniscient narrator, can draw the conclusion that there is a mountain about to erupt. This can be understood as an ecological device in the sense that it simultaneously foregrounds the inadequacy of subjective perspective, as well as demonstrating that a broader, more all-encompassing outlook can promote an insightful knowledge of the natural environment and of the threats posed by it. Even in Hohler's collections of shorter prose pieces, there is a perceptible overarching narrative perspective that unites the seemingly disparate short works. In the collection *Zur Mündung*, for example, we can easily identify a simple structure with the same, or a similar narrator describing at regular intervals in the collection his impressions on walks. Reminiscent of the "Gedankenspaziergänger" Robert Walser,³¹² this/these narrators allow themselves to reflect on whatever crosses their path. This strategy is most obvious in the narratives with titles beginning with the preposition "zu": *Zur Mündung* at the beginning and *Zu Berg* in the middle of the collection. The preposition reinforces the impression of a single narrative perspective. The concluding story, *Ein Weltuntergang*, confirms this impression when the narrator climbs a mountain that the climbing narrator in *Zu Berg* claims he has always wanted to attempt. This sense of an over-arching voice reiterates the idea of a whole despite the various different perspectives being presented. Giving a broad and general perspective, tying in all actants, this voice also avoids the reductiveness of a single character's view and could be described as one way in which to achieve a 'holistic' narrative giving a complex whole that

³¹² Hohler in conversation with the author, Zurich, 28.11.02

is more than the sum of its parts.³¹³ 'Holistic' narrative is a suitable form for giving voice to the notion of Gaia, the theory expounded by James Lovelock that the earth and its atmosphere is a whole, functioning as a single entity.

In short, Hohler's prose presents, in a non-speciesist way, a range of perspectives, including those of figures that are otherwise narratively underprivileged. The author uses strategies to transcend narrative conventions and to illuminate fallible preconceptions. His approach is holistic and ecologically committed. In his own words: "Ich stelle mir dauernd eine Welt vor, die besser wäre, befriedigender, anders wäre."³¹⁴ At the same time, the influence of the author's years on the stage is unmistakable. While his narratives depart from norms, he nevertheless does not forget the reader and thus his departures from the norms are never so drastic as to hinder the reception of his work, and it is perhaps more accurate to call them modifications. On a simple level, this ensures that Hohler's work retains accessibility, something that is reflected in his success and popularity with a wide readership. For an author committed to social change, reaching a broad spectrum of the general public must be deemed an important achievement. Hohler's faith in well-known strategies, such as the omniscient narrator, has an oblique parallel with the work of Anselm Kiefer. Kiefer rejects post-modernity's narcissism and concern only for art. His paintings demonstrate an attempt to re-emerge art into narratives of time and place, and they betray a confidence in the author of what he termed a "Gesamtkunstwerk."³¹⁵ Like Kiefer's images, Hohler's superficially simplistic narratives show an almost antiquated trust in the integrity of the undisguised storyteller. As a cabaret artist, this is of course what he is. It is a position which allows his stories a closer relationship with reality than post-modernist theory generally permits. Embedded within the tradition of oral story-telling and loaded as they often are with a message, Hohler's ecologically-themed tales are best summed up as eco-parables. Asked what he models his

³¹³ Holism is defined as such in *The Chambers Dictionary*, (Edinburgh: Chambers Harrap, 1993)

³¹⁴ Michael Bauer, *Franz Hohler, Kabarettist und Schriftsteller*, an interview with Franz Hohler, in Bauer and Siblewski, p. 66

work on, Hohler replied: "Ich gehe häufig von der Parabel aus."³¹⁵ This could however be slightly misleading, since Hohler's parables are not completely conventional. Returning to the quotation from a Hohler short story that stands as the subtitle for this section, we can identify one of the most crucial elements of these "parables." Although Hohler may embrace conventional forms to a certain degree, his narrators demonstrate a reluctance to accept the authority associated with a conventional narrator. Avowals, such as "Den Fortgang dieser Geschichte kenne ich nicht", are frequent. They show that, although Hohler's narratives often seem like parables, the narrator refrains at the last moment from delivering a moral. As a form of anti-parable Rather than a wholesale rejection of the narrative structures of authority, Hohler chooses simply to modify the model slightly, knowing from practical experience the importance of the medium as a vehicle for the message. Hohler tells stories as you might hear them on the street. But within that well-known framework he openly shies away from the authority associated with it.

³¹⁵ Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, p. 126

³¹⁶ Hohler replies in 1992 for the second time to *Autorenfrage 1. Der Schriftsteller in unserer Zeit*, ed. by Peter André Bloch and Edwin Hubacher, in Bauer and Siblewski, p.51

6.1 Franz Hohler's "kurze Geschichten" and "Kurzgeschichten"

Franz Hohler has won many prizes for his short stories and prose pieces. Most recently he was awarded the *Kasseler Literatur Preis für grotesken Humor*, which indicates one of the key features of his work. More famously, Hohler was awarded a prize for his collection of short stories *Die Rückeroberung* (1982), only for the prize to be later rescinded by the cantonal government.³¹⁷ His work was considered too radically aggressive towards the authority that was awarding the prize. This non-award is evidence of another central element in Hohler's work, namely the challenge to authority and established norms.

Hohler's work also includes a novel, *Der neue Berg* (1989), and a novella, *Die Steinflut* (1998), which will be investigated later in this chapter. However, the cabaret artist, who has recently been called "der Meister der Verknappung",³¹⁸ favours shorter forms for his literary output. In the first of his Zurich *Poetikvorlesungen* (2003), the author described the reasons for and the effects of his preference for brief forms. Citing a seemingly banal two-line short story by Daniil Kharms, which ends with the authorial comment "Das ist eigentlich alles",³¹⁹ Hohler suggests that the authorial interjection is not in fact true. The medium implies that there is more to the piece than we might at first assume. "Wir sind zum Ergänzen gezwungen" he explains. As readers of a literary text, we are inclined to begin the hermeneutic process of deriving a sense. The brevity of the story leaves us with no conclusion and we must make up our own minds about where the story is going. John Gerlach points out that the short story, being short, obliges the author to distil his work to a more concentrated form. Consequently, readers must construct the *histoire* from much subtler hints than they

³¹⁷ See: Bauer in Bauer and Siblewski, p. 19

³¹⁸ Hohler, 'Die Kürze Zwingt zum Denken', in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung am Sonntag*, 16.11.2003, p. 67

³¹⁹ Daniil Kharms, *Begegnung*, in *111 einseitige Geschichten*, ed. by Franz Hohler (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1981), p. 95

would with a novel, for example.³²⁰ This in itself makes the process of understanding a short story much less finite or certain, and therefore more open to personal interpretation than more fully elaborated forms of prose. In the *Poetikvorlesungen*, after every interpretation of a short story that he gave, Franz Hohler asked rhetorically "Sage ich zu viel?" His answer was no, a short story requires an increased input from the reader and an increased sensitivity to less obvious implications.

The lack of closure imbued by such an ending is a fundamental way in which Hohler's narrative, which is otherwise conventional, gently alters the norms. As we saw with Richard Kerridge's example in the introduction (section 1.2), closure is an unsuitable narrative structure for a subject whose outcome is uncertain. It is a way, too, in which the narrator may stand back from the authority of his story. This kind of ending echoes the disclaimers of the narrators in Hohler's short prose pieces.³²¹ We will see from Hohler's longer works, *Der neue Berg* and *Die Steinflut*, that this is a recurrent feature of his style.

The form of the short story is significant in the tale *Die Rückeroberung*.³²² An impersonal first-person narrator relates how Zurich is at first invaded by eagles, then by deer, then wolves, then bears, then snakes and finally the streets become strangled by plants, turning Zurich into a kind of jungle. People flee the town and we are left wondering what the future holds for the city. As the title suggests and the plot demonstrates, the relationship between humans and the natural world is not harmonious. With the appearance of the eagles and even the deer there is a suggestion that perhaps the animals and humans might be able to coexist. However, details hint that this will not in fact be the case. Firstly, the narrator knows that it is a golden eagle because he remembers the stuffed eagle from his schooldays. Wondering where it might have come from, the narrator must rule out the zoo since the eagles there have their wings clipped so that they can "nur noch ein paar armselige Hüpfer

³²⁰ See: John Gerlach, 'The Margins of Narrative', in *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*, ed. by Lohafer and Clarby, (Baton Rouge, 1989), pp 74-84

³²¹ See previous section.

machen."³²³ The zoo here is portrayed negatively as a place where human restrictions are placed on animals. Furthermore, when a set of cast-off antlers is found, the presumption is made that they must have been left lying on the crossroads by someone who had found them in the mountains and just was not aware of their worth. Coming at the start of the short story and following on from the title, these details imply human exploitation of these animals, and so even before it becomes apparent that humans and animals are not going to coexist happily together, that there must be a winner and a loser, the reader is already primed for an imbalance.

That there is a struggle between mankind and nature is supported convincingly by Hohler's deft control of the narrative. Related by a first-person narrator the story, to begin with, appears to be a narration of personal experience: his wife is introduced into the narrative whilst observing the eagles, only to disappear from the narrated world completely. Later in the story, we are reminded again of the presence of the narrator within the fictional realm of the story, when he relates the experience of his son. Like his mother, the son is then also excluded from the story. Combined with the impersonal narration, which could easily be from a third person omniscient narrator, the appearance and subsequent omission of these figures has the effect of suppressing the human presence in the narrative. This is precisely what is happening in the fictionalised Zurich, where the animals and plants are regaining control of the city and are forcing the humans to leave. If Gerlach is right to suggest that a greater level of interpretation is required with a short story,³²⁴ the introduction and subsequent exclusion from the text of the narrator's family, and the narrator's suppressed presence take on weighty implications.

The tone set by Hohler's use of a military term as the title is further supported by the construction of the text. The tale reads like the report of a military campaign. Alternate

³²² See: Franz Hohler, *Die Rückeroberung*, in *Die Rückeroberung*, (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1982)

³²³ Hohler, *Die Rückeroberung*, p. 5

³²⁴ See: Gerlach, 'The Margins of Narrative', pp 74-84

paragraphs are used to discuss firstly what the animals do and secondly what the citizens of Zurich come up with in response. There is a pattern of attack and counter-attack. For example, the immediate response to the arrival of the deer is to raise a general alarm and try to fence them in. The sense of a struggle between mankind and the natural world recurs frequently in Hohler's work and is often strengthened by his use of military discourse.

The tension between the human world and the natural world is most commonly depicted through a juxtaposition of animals with traffic. This is initially evident in the shock created by the appearance of antlers on one of the busiest crossroads in Zurich. It causes a reaction because of the incompatibility of antlers and traffic. The tension between animals and motor vehicles is also perceptible in a number of the scenes that follow. Firstly, the police hurriedly attempt to fence in the herd of deer before the morning commuters hit the streets. Later, the herd is trapped in a multi-storey car park. Finally, we are confronted with the distressing image of the first dead deer lying beside a destroyed petrol pump with her blood mingling with the oil. As Malcolm Pender correctly observes, "Das Auto wird zum Symbol einer naturfremden Welt."³²⁵ The narrator gives further depth to the conflict between nature and phenomena associated with motorised transport when he highlights the irrationality of the uproar, caused by the death of one child at the claws of wolves. Although many people die on the roads every year, the people of Zurich have grown accustomed to the situation, and these deaths are simply accepted. In the light of this narratorial comment, it is possible to interpret the lack of comment, when the narrative deals with the plants covering the motorways, as a sign that the narrator is unsure where his sympathies lie. This notion is supported by his use of the term "Grün" for the plants, rather than a more negatively loaded "Unkraut" or neutral "Pflanzen." In the final depiction of the scene outside the narrator's window, the emphasis on the bright colours of the flowers reinforces the impression of a narratorial preference for plants over motorway.

³²⁵ Pender, 'Franz Hohler und die Zerstörung der Idylle', p. 293

Although C.E. May argues that the short story does not require a conclusion because it lacks the proliferation of disparate elements common in the novel that would require tying up, he also highlights the fact that the ending of a short story holds the punch, since it is this that the reader is left with.³²⁶ It is also from that point that the reader starts his interpretation. Hohler makes full use of this punch, smacking the narrative into the present tense two pages from the end. This has the effect of emphasising the natural open-endedness of the short story, giving immediacy and urgency to the crisis. The narrator is not relating the tale from a safe distance, instead he is at his desk in the middle of the strangled city, with a hostile environment outside. What will happen to him and his narratospatially deprived family? What will happen to Zurich?

“Ein apokalyptischer Wind weht durch solche Literatur” suggests Wolfgang Hädecke.³²⁷ Certainly, the image of a strangled Zurich emptying of its population is apocalyptic. The open-endedness adds to the sense of apocalypse because the apocalypse has literally not yet happened and the reader is not in the position simply to write off the apocalypse as a fiction since it is a possible future for both the fictional world as well as our reality. Looking more closely at the text, the sense of apocalypse is also identifiable in the tropes. For example, the cars and their drivers disappear into the herd of deer “wie ein Stein in den Fluten.”³²⁸ This not only condemns them but also hints at the sense of a flood, something that will prove to be a potent apocalyptic symbol in Hohler’s work. Significantly there is also a tone of pleasure in the narrator’s view of the strangled city, suggesting that, despite the military discourse, the dichotomy between humans and animals is not a case of binary opposites. There seems to be a latent desire for this eco-apocalypse. Axel Goodbody has

³²⁶ See: C.E. May, *The Short Story; The Reality of Artifice*, (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1995), pp 15-18

³²⁷ Wolfgang Hädecke, ‘Kreuzottern in Zürich’, *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 14.05.1983, p. 111

³²⁸ Hohler, *Die Rückeroberung*, p. 9

identified this desire as a possible reason for the recent fashion for apocalyptic writing.³²⁹ There is a tone of respect for nature throughout the short story. This is initially perceptible in the awe of the first-person narrator for the large bird of prey on the neighbouring rooftop. This again is a recurrent trait among Hohler's narrators. The neglect of the human characters considered earlier further supports the idea that the narrator is more interested in the invading deer and wolves. The final description of the city also contains an element of fascination and admiration for what is happening. This is signalled initially by the return of the focus of the narrative to the eagle and then by the long and detailed description of the changed vista from the narrator's desk. The hotel, which dominated the view, is now "wie ein gewaltiger alter Baumstrunk"³³⁰ and is covered with ivy, clematis and nasturtiums, making a beautiful collage of colours. The fact that the narrator knows in detail where to look to find the nasturtiums implies a level of contemplation that suggests that the narrator enjoys this view.

Although the narrative becomes surreal, *Die Rückeroberung* is based on a realistic depiction of Zurich. "Das Surreale ist nie so surreal, dass es von der Realität losgelöst ist," Hohler explains in interview.³³¹ It is interesting to read Hohler's short story at a time when the presence of a lynx in the Zurich area is causing a stir. The lynx is greeted in the press with a similarly complex mixture of awe and fear as the narrator of *Die Rückeroberung* demonstrates for the invading elements of nature. This common human reaction to the natural environment can be identified as a theme in Hohler's work and is particularly evident in his shorter works.

Maggiatal is a short story in the same vein.³³² The narrator uses military metaphors to describe nature winning back the Ticino valley, gradually re-conquering the forsaken and dilapidated human settlements on the steep mountain slopes. The first sentence sets the tone in a similar way to the title of *Die Rückeroberung*. "Der Wald hat den Kampf um die Abhänge

³²⁹ See: Axel Goodbody, 'Catastrophism in German Post-war Literature', in *Green Thought in German Culture*, pp 159-176

³³⁰ Hohler, *Die Rückeroberung*, p. 20

³³¹ Hohler, in conversation with the author, Zurich, 28.11.02

³³² See: Franz Hohler, *Maggiatal*, in *Zur Mündung*, (Munich: Luchterhand, 2000), pp 52-57

gewonnen.”³³³ The trees are described as “Legionen” and are undertaking a “leisen Vormarsch.”³³⁴ These details animate the wood and in so doing imply a plan or purpose, further enhancing the sense of a conflict, since a conflict requires two sides. The construction of the wood as animate is also evident in the sense that the people try to “tame” nature in the valley; you can only tame something, which has its own will.³³⁵ The people’s efforts are described as laborious. The depiction of the way the inhabitants cut, burnt and felled is repeated. This repetition gives a sense of the “Jahren und Jahren und Jahren” in which people have laboured to controlling nature.³³⁶ Their actions are repeated a third time in the text when everything that they have constructed is destroyed by the surrounding environment. The balance of the repetitions in the narrative lends strength to the natural environment since the long and arduous process of taming the land is destroyed so simply and at the first attempt, narratively at least, by the natural environment. The force of nature is additionally supported by the narrator who frames the human efforts with references to nature’s victory. The introductory one-line paragraph juxtaposes and undermines the long repetitive sections on the human toil, which follow it, and the final “Sieg über den Menschen [...], den Sieg der stillen Armee der Bäume”³³⁷ concludes the short story by framing the human effort with nature’s victories.

As with *Die Rückeroberung*, the narrative perspective is significant. In this short narrative, the narratorial presence is reduced even further. Told by a third person omniscient extradiegetic narrator, the piece contains a minimised anthropic element. This is apt for a description of a valley now devoid of humans. The tone of celebration, signalled by the “triumphierende”³³⁸ chestnut trees, coupled with the sense of a struggle, reinforces the suggestion of a desire for the victory of nature over mankind. The animism and

³³³ Hohler, *Maggiatal*, p. 52

³³⁴ Hohler, *Maggiatal*, p. 55

³³⁵ See: Hohler, *Maggiatal*, p. 53: “mit denen der Wald gezähmt wurde”

³³⁶ Hohler, *Maggiatal*, pp 52-53

³³⁷ Hohler, *Maggiatal*, pp 56-57

personification of nature further strengthen the ecological voice since they invest the natural world with capabilities that we do not usually attribute to it. This blurs the demarcation between the human and the natural world and thus diminishes the implied anthropocentrism inherent in story-telling. To sum up, *Maggiatal* goes some way to suggesting that our conventional understanding of nature is not in fact satisfactory and that the natural world is capable of more than we might think.

The cabaret number, *Der Weltuntergang*,³³⁹ is also based around the problematical relationship between mankind and nature. It too highlights how the human perspective is sometimes dangerously myopic. The ballad describes the knock-on effects of removing a keystone species. The piece combines a range of genres and registers that grotesquely juxtapose the style of a children's song and a showman's patter with an apocalyptic content. The ballad relates how the disappearance of an insect on an island in the Pacific leads to the disappearance of a species of bird that fed on the insect. This in turn leads to the disappearance of a species of fish, which fed on the bird's faeces. The process goes on in similar fashion, via a chicken-feed crisis to an accelerated greenhouse effect leading ultimately to an apocalyptic rise of the sea level: "Die Flut hat heute [sic]."³⁴⁰

The grotesquely light tone is achieved by the juxtaposition of the opening words "Der Weltuntergang" with the subsequent address to the audience "meine Damen und Herren."³⁴¹ This beginning sets the matter-of-fact tone, which lists very simply the stages of the apocalypse. Each stage follows on from the next with the words "Wenig später", giving the piece a simplicity and yet at the same time a sense of unavoidable, looming disaster in that time is running out. This is confirmed by the title, which indicates where the text is heading. The repetition of the phrase also functions to link the separate stages of the apocalypse

³³⁸ Hohler, *Maggiatal*, p. 56

³³⁹ See: Franz Hohler, *Der Weltuntergang*, in *Die Karawane am Boden des Milchkrugs*, (Munich: Luchterhand, 2003; first published in *Das Kabarettbuch*, Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1987), pp 133-140

³⁴⁰ Hohler, *Der Weltuntergang*, p. 136

³⁴¹ Hohler, *Der Weltuntergang*, p. 133

together and to remind us that the final dramatic events are linked to the first seemingly insignificant disappearance of a small insect. The light-hearted tone is maintained by the repetition of the seemingly harmless “die ziemlich kleine Insel im Pazifik”, which trivializes the origin of the problem as well as illustrating how an eco-apocalypse could begin beyond our perspective. Towards the end of the piece, the phrase is followed by “jetzt geht es immer schneller”, which refers both to the textual repetition of the phrase and also to the accelerating knock-on process leading to disaster. This adds to the sense of approaching doom and also voices the idea that both the text and the process are spinning out of control.

A further telling aspect of the text is the narrator's use of the future perfect to describe the first knock-on effect. The future perfect tense is well suited for apocalyptic writing because it is predictive while at the same time being finite: “dass der Vogel mit der eher schrillen Stimme die Gewohnheit hat oder gehabt haben wird.”³⁴² The narratorial hesitation serves to draw attention to the use of the tense. The future perfect chimes with the narrator's final words. While he imagines that scientists will invent some date in the future for the start of the apocalypse, he suggests that the end has already begun.

Da ist er equally presents the reader with a novel perspective on the natural environment and our relationship to it.³⁴³ The piece touches on the effects of global warming, alluding to the mildness of recent winters, and dealing with the surprisingly cold winter in 1999. Once again there is a suggestion of a military struggle. The narrator wonders if the winter is “kriegsgefangen an der Klimafront.”³⁴⁴ Furthermore, the narrator describes speaking to friends in mountainous settlements, which have been cut off by avalanches, as being similar to speaking to people in besieged Sarajevo during the Balkan war in the 1990s. The struggle between mankind and the winter is also evident in the construction of the text. As in *Maggiatal*, a list of human endeavours (this time in the shape of settlements, which have been

³⁴² Hohler, *Der Weltuntergang*, p. 134

³⁴³ See: Franz Hohler, *Da ist er*, in *Zur Mündung*, (Munich: Luchterhand, 2000), pp 107-110

³⁴⁴ Hohler, *Da ist er*, p. 107

established) is counterbalanced by a list of the names of avalanches that will wipe them away. Again reminiscent of the Ticino piece analysed above, the text comes down on the side of nature, with the human efforts belittled by the repetition of their vain attempts made to counteract the power of the winter.³⁴⁵

The fact that the avalanches have names hints at an animistic tone. The sense of an animate nature is also suggested by the refusal to name the subject of the piece until the second page, and even then it is not referred to directly. Instead, we read about an unspecified "er." This is first indicated by the title, *Da ist er*, from which we cannot ascertain to what or whom the "er" refers. Thus we read simply about 'his' actions and are therefore more inclined to attribute life to the subject. Had the narrator introduced the subject as "der Winter" immediately, the reader would be more likely to dismiss the animistic tone as infantile. Instead, the mystery of who or what the subject is forces the reader to analyse the animate actions of the winter and thus discover the subject of the piece. The sense of animism is generated by various clues in the introductory paragraph, which indicate that the subject is or was alive. For example, the "er" is described as "der Totgegläubte", the reference to death implying that there was once life in the subject and thus demonstrating a narratorial belief in animism. Further strengthening the sense of nature being alive, the avalanches are compared to skiers. They are just as keen to rush all the way to the bottom of the valley as the skiers are.³⁴⁶

This comparison adds an element of pleasure at the heart of the destructive force of nature. Again, as in other ecological narratives, we can identify the desire for nature to take revenge. The narrator describes how the avalanches have reached down to just above Brig. S/He describes how the avalanche peers down lecherously at the town's buildings, "die so schön knirschen würden unter ihrem Gewicht."³⁴⁷ Rather than siding with the threatened

³⁴⁵ See: Hohler, *Da ist er*, p. 109

³⁴⁶ Hohler, *Da ist er*, p. 108

³⁴⁷ Hohler, *Da ist er*, p. 109

inhabitants, the narrator gives the avalanche's perspective in an anti-anthropocentric, if still anthropomorphic, manner.

The element of narratorial longing for a natural world victory over humans is yet more tellingly obvious in the short piece *Die Karawane*. While cleaning a milk-jug, the narrator stares into it and sees a vision of nature taking revenge on mankind for the exploitation of elephants for ivory. A caravan of camels with two camelherds crossing a desert is ambushed by a troop of elephants, which gobbles up the camels leaving the camelherds helpless and alone in the desert with their booty. The piece is short yet complex. One might expect revenge to be visited directly on the ivory traders. However, their plight without their camels is not only more pitiful but also highlights the futility of their trade because the ivory is of no practical use. Their predicament also hints at the knock-on effect the trade might have. The ivory trade could spell the extinction of elephants, a keystone species. The loss of elephants could leave mankind in a desertified environment with nothing but useless pieces of tusk to show for their efforts.

The structure of the piece is significant. The events in the desert are framed by comments from the diegetic level. The events of the story are thus not left as a possible albeit improbable carnivorous elephantine reality and attention is drawn to the presence of the narrator as well as the process of fictionalisation. In this way, we are encouraged to consider the figure behind the vision and we are therefore once again confronted with the idea that apocalyptic fiction is closely linked to a narratorial desire for apocalypse.

The narrator concludes the short narrative saying "Ich wußte es war unmöglich, dass sich so etwas auf dem Boden eines Milchkrugs ereignet./ Trotzdem habe ich es gesehen."³⁴⁸ With an apparent contradiction, the narrator here accepts the impossibility of the tale while at the same time reinforcing the reality of his/her experience. Hohler deals with this tension in interview:

³⁴⁸ Franz Hohler, *Die Karawane*, in *Die Karawane am Boden des Milchkrugs*, (Munich: Luchterhand, 2003) p.

Was ist Wirklichkeit? Ist der Traum keine Wirklichkeit? Ist er nicht mehr der Realität zuzurechnen? [...] Der Traum ist etwas wie eine zweite Realität [...] In der zweiten Welt werden Geschichten angesiedelt, und es werden Geschichten erzählt. Die haben immer wieder mit der normalen Welt etwas zu tun.³⁴⁹

He thus emphasises the role of imaginative narration as a way of expressing psychological realities and also how the “two” realities should not be understood as separate. The implication therefore is that a vision in a milk-jug is a significant event that despite its surreal nature nevertheless expresses something about the real world. Hohler goes on to suggest that the understanding of our reality could be greatly improved if we were to pay more heed to such expressions. He encourages us to value our sensual understanding more and to question the simplifying calculations of rationality.

The polarity between rational calculation and sensual understanding is central to *Billiges Notizpapier*, another of Hohler’s short stories. Described by the author as a “Selbst-Persiflage”,³⁵⁰ something that again points to the erasure in Hohler’s work of the margins between reality and fiction, it is the tale of a man’s obsession with recycling paper. He reuses any piece of paper that only has something on one side. His plan appears initially to be a simple and rational way of saving both natural and economic resources. However, the obsession eventually becomes so extreme that it endangers the harmony of his family.³⁵¹ The tale reaches its climax with the man discovering that his wife has bought a new block of paper upon which to write her shopping list and has thrown away his home-made recycled block. He reprimands her with the overdramatic words “du betrügst mich.”³⁵² The first hint that the tale will revolve around a gender polarity is given in the first sentence: “Ein Mann – solche

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³⁴⁹ Hohler, in conversation with the author, Zurich, 28.11.2002

³⁵⁰ Hohler, in conversation with the author, Zurich, 22.11.2003

³⁵¹ See: Beatrice von Matt, ‘Nicht Wahr aber Wirklich’, in Bauer and Siblewski, p. 104

³⁵² Franz Hohler, *Billiges Notizpapier*, in *Die Rückeroberung*, (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1982), p.

Geschichten handeln meist von Männern.”³⁵³ The tale is therefore not centred on a female subject. Consequently, we may ask ourselves what exactly are the sorts of stories that deal with men. A gender stereotypical answer might base itself upon the idea that men are more rational and calculating, while women use their feelings more to understand. The introduction to the main character supports this idea. We learn how he is a very busy man involved in many different activities, in short “ein durch und durch brauchbarer Mann.”³⁵⁴ This description foregrounds the quality of usefulness, which becomes his obsession. We can identify this not only in his notepaper habit but also in the way he arranges his house. His place in the family’s “Wohnküche”, itself a set-up designed for practicality, enables him to easily access the new shopping list he has created for his wife. He demonstrates how his notepaper craze has become excessive in that he takes no notice of his wife, who resents this practice. The abstract notion of usefulness has become the man’s aim and takes precedence in his mind over his desire to help his wife, which was the original reason for him to collect paper.

His wife on the other hand acts not purely out of practical necessity. Her original notepad, before it was replaced, was a gift from her godchild. This added detail of information draws attention to the fact that things can have a use beyond the purely functional and suggests that the woman looks after her relationship with her godchild. This care for the social environment is totally absent in the man who even goes as far as limiting the possibilities for his daughters to express themselves creatively by replacing their drawing pad, which he considers to be unnecessarily large, with a smaller recycled paper version. The girls eventually give up drawing because of this alteration.

The removal of their drawing pad is legitimised by the man’s apparent ecological concern. Interestingly though, this justification is secondary to what the father sees as a healthy exercise of limiting oneself. In his reasoning, we can identify a more sinister element

of domestic megalomania. The craze seems to be more about gaining control over his own environment than about caring for the wider natural environment. This becomes more evident when the man realises that he has more notepaper than he can ever use and thus decides to use it when playing cards to keep the scores, although there is a perfectly good slate with chalk for the purpose, which would be more ecologically sound. In losing sight of his immediate, domestic environment he eventually also loses sight of the bigger picture and his idea of saving resources is revealed as absurd.

Der Verkäufer und der Elch is another short story that deals with a rational idea taken to the extreme and which results in an absurd situation. The tale grotesquely examines the tensions between economy and ecology. The tension between the two is already signalled by the mismatch in the title. A gifted salesman who has already proved his ability by selling, for example, bread to a baker, takes up the challenge set by a friend of selling a gas mask to a moose. This incongruous task seems to foil the salesman who is told by the moose that he has no need of a gas mask. However, the salesman has a plan. He builds a factory that pollutes the atmosphere to such an extent that the moose comes back to him looking for a gas mask. The final irony in this very short narrative is that the factory creating the pollution is also producing the gas masks.

As with *Billiges Notizpapier*, this tale illustrates how absurd a situation can become if we lose sight of the aim of a given process. Here, commercialism has gone so far that the need, which is what a salesman caters to, is artificially created by the salesman. The piece highlights the dangers of all-out capitalism, showing that if the only concern is profit, something somewhere else will be damaged. We can identify Hohler's ecological preoccupations in the fact that it is the natural environment, and in particular the moose, which suffer in this narrative.

Der Verkäufer und der Elch is a modern parable drawing attention to the absurd consequences that blinkered economic calculation can lead to. *Der Geisterfahrer* deals with a

situation where rational understanding is not enough. The short story focuses on an accident hot-spot on a motorway in the Jura. Although the stretch of road is very straight and there are no obvious reasons for accidents, they nevertheless keep occurring. Two children who survive an accident report seeing a hay-wagon being pulled by horses in front of them just before the accident. According to legend, a dead farmer used to haunt the area because a stone marking his marches had been moved. It transpires that the stone used to lie right under the place where the accidents happen. The authorities choose at first to ignore the tale because a ghost story was not enough to convince them. However, after the next accident they replace the stone and narrow the road.

The significant element in this tale is that even "im technischen Zeitalter"³⁵⁵ the supernatural and the inexplicable have a role to play. Introducing the tale, the narrator says:

Ob nun so etwas tatsächlich passiert oder ob es sich die Betroffenen nur einbilden, ist nebensächlich. Es *wirkt* jedenfalls, und wenn es nicht wahr ist, ist es doch wirklich.³⁵⁶

This idea could stand for Hohler's work in general. Whether the story is true is not important. The significance of a tale lies in what it expresses. In *Der Geisterfahrer*, the authorities do not listen to the experience expressed in the ghost story but instead treat it as invalid because it is improbable. As a result, more motorists are killed.

In *Ein Weltuntergang*, rational calculation is once again confronted by a sensual understanding. The piece is an account of Hohler's experience of the eclipse of the sun on 11th August 1999, which he watched from the Weisshorn, one of the highest peaks in Switzerland. The narrative is written in typically sparse language, which adds to the impression of its being a straightforward, factual account of the climb. This simple tone allows us to read the apocalyptic vision at the end of the text as an equally fundamental and simple part of his

³⁵⁵ Franz Hohler, *Der Geisterfahrer*, in *Die Rückeroberung*, (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1982), p. 57

³⁵⁶ Hohler, *Der Geisterfahrer*, p. 51

experience. Such a vision jars with a factual account since it moves from the real world into the realm of the hypothetical and imaginary. The vision is sparked off by the narrator's experience as the sun disappears. "Ich schreie auf vor Erstaunen, obwohl ich nur das sehe, worauf ich seit langem durch verschiedenste Artikel und Sendungen vorbereitet bin."³⁵⁷ The sight of the disappearing sun is more telling than any calculation or explanation. Like Adalbert Stifter 150 years before him,³⁵⁸ Hohler is struck with fear at the thought of the catastrophe if the sun were never to reappear. He imagines finally being stuck and frozen on the mountain, a puzzle for astronauts from faraway galaxies. This last line leads us away from the world and bleakly diminishes humankind, putting a cosmic and post-human perspective on our experience.

In an essay entitled 'Die Vernichtung der Menschen hat begonnen', Günter Grass draws attention to the fact that literature presumes a future in that writing something down entails an implicit sense of passing on wisdom. The difficulty for literature now, he says, is that the future is no longer certain and that there may be no-one on to whom to pass wisdom. "Schon wird vom Wegwerfgedicht gesprochen."³⁵⁹ Grass's words function as a good summary of the idea behind another volume of Hohler's short narratives, the *Wegwerfgeschichten*.³⁶⁰

The reassessment of a conventional anthropocentric approach to the place of humans within the universe is another of Hohler's key concerns. This is evident in his unusual treatment of the natural world in several of his works. We have already seen, with the descriptions of the awe-inspiring eagles in *Die Rückeroberung*, that Hohler's narrators display a sense of wonderment at the natural world. In *Zu Berg*, an account of Hohler's climb of the Eiger and the Mönch, we can identify elements of this unusual attitude. The ring of mountains above the Kleiner Scheidegg are animate. The climbing narrator suggests that they

³⁵⁷ Hohler, *Ein Weltuntergang*, in *Zur Mündung*, p. 120

³⁵⁸ See: Adalbert Stifter, *Sonnenfinsternis*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1972), Vol. 14, pp 103-114

³⁵⁹ Günter Grass, 'Die Vernichtung der Menschen hat begonnen', in *Werkausgabe in zehn Bänden*, ed. by Volker Neuhaus, in Vol. 9 ed. by Daniela Hermes, (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1987), p. 831

³⁶⁰ See: Franz Hohler, *Wegwerfgeschichten*, (Bern: Zytglogge, 1974)

are wondering "ob wir wirklich in ihrem Stück mitspielen wollen."³⁶¹ The sense of a natural theatre is emphasised when the narrator refers to the scene as "die Bühne des Bergtheaters"³⁶² with the Eiger as "die Kulisse."³⁶³ With mountains as actors, with implications of the slow pace of geological development, humans are reduced to extremely small and ephemeral figures on the world stage. The natural world is also portrayed as a work of art in *Das erste Programm*. This short piece towards the end of the collection *Zur Mündung* is the description of the narrator's view from a window. The first paragraph portrays a countryside scene. The apparent discrepancy between this and the title is clarified by the subsequent paragraph: "Das ist das Bühnenbild des ersten Programms."³⁶⁴ What follows is given the title of "Handlung"³⁶⁵ but is not a conventional plot: it starts raining, a swallow flies by and some thin clouds float towards the peak of a mountain. The climax, or "Entscheidendes",³⁶⁶ is a herd of cattle being driven across the narrator's field of vision. The herd's approach is announced by the ringing of the cows' bells and the cow-girls' calls "aus dem Off",³⁶⁷ another theatrical term. After they have disappeared from view the narrator's eye is cast once more over the scene after which "Die Handlung ist zu Ende."³⁶⁸ The narrator concludes the observational piece reiterating that what s/he has seen is for her/him "das erste Programm", that s/he finds it exciting and has no need of another "Programm". This short prose piece encapsulates many central aspects of Hohler's prose. Thematically, it demonstrates his continued fascination with nature for nature's sake and also with that which is normally regarded as trivial or not worth mentioning. Without the narrator's indications, *Das erste Programm* would have no beginning, middle or end. It could neither be classed as a comedy nor as a tragedy and thus defies classification. The narrator's theatrical labelling draws attention to the shaping effect of the human hand. Even if

³⁶¹ Franz Hohler, *Zu Berg*, in *Zur Mündung*, p. 86

³⁶² Hohler, *Zu Berg*, p. 86

³⁶³ Hohler, *Zu Berg*, p. 87

³⁶⁴ Franz Hohler, *Das erste Programm*, in *Zur Mündung*, p. 116

³⁶⁵ Hohler, *Das erste Programm*, p. 116

³⁶⁶ Hohler, *Das erste Programm*, p. 116

³⁶⁷ Hohler, *Das erste Programm*, p. 116

³⁶⁸ Hohler, *Das erste Programm*, p. 118

it is shown to be out of place, the shaping is nevertheless there, as if to suggest that humans require it. Hohler thus buys into an accepted form for a narrative, enabling his reader easy access to it, but within that framework he admits its limitations. The dislocation between the title and the first paragraph, which, for the sake of comprehension, requires the narrator to explain the link, demonstrates the gulf between culture and nature. What the narrator describes would never otherwise be called a drama. We can identify an ecological voice here because Hohler puts the natural world, including the human figures of the cowherds, into the centre of his prose without shaping it through interpretation or exploiting it to construct pathetic fallacy. The incongruity of the theatrical language draws attention to the fact that nature as Anselm Adams tries to photograph it is seldom recorded in literature. By dealing with a literarily neglected topic, *Das erste Programm* functions as a reassessment of literary focus and is in this way exemplary of Hohler's work.

6.2 *Der neue Berg*

Franz Hohler's first full-length novel, *Der neue Berg* (1989), depicts everyday life in a suburb of Zurich. The Swiss daily routine is interrupted by the appearance of a new mountain in a forest beside the suburb. This constitutes the central event of the novel and is its climax. In the first chapter, a character notices that cracks have appeared in the ground in the forest and there is a series of minor earth tremors. The cracks gradually widen attracting the attention of the protagonists and causing debate over what the cracks mean and whether they are connected to the earthquakes. Some of the characters sense an impending natural disaster and, heeding their instincts, decide to flee the city. The authorities are reluctant to issue a warning for fear of inciting general panic. They insist on the need for hard scientific evidence before they act. However, the geologists fail to perceive the gravity of the situation in time, a general warning is never issued and so the climactic volcanic denouement brings widespread death and destruction.

From this brief synopsis it is clear that the novel is concerned both with changes in the natural environment and with modern, urban modes of life. Superficially, it would seem logical that the two subjects have little to do with each other. However, the narrative technique is such that these concerns are not merely coincidentally linked in that they are present in the same narrative but, due to the narrative technique, they become intricately meshed. Indeed, Jürgen Barkhoff goes so far as to call the novel "explicitly 'green.'"³⁶⁹ Contemporary society is depicted as morally rotten and at the same time out of touch with the natural environment. This society's adverse impact on the environment is alluded to, as are 'greener' alternative ways of life. Furthermore, allusions are made to the Celts, whose culture allegedly showed a deep respect for the natural world. The notion of "Gaia", or an

³⁶⁹ Barkhoff, 'Green Thought in Modern Swiss Literature', in *Green Thought in German Culture*, p. 232

animate natural world, is also plainly identifiable. The work therefore clearly demonstrates the author's ecological concerns.

The novel comprises forty-eight short chapters depicting the lives of the main characters. These are the members of three families, a young member of the town council, Christoph Portner, and a divorcee, Roland Steinmann. On the whole, the chapters are restricted to presenting short episodes in the lives of the protagonists from their own perspectives. At first, there seems to be little connection between the chapters. Indeed, in a narratorial aside at the beginning of the novel, we are warned that this will be the case and that we should not let it disconcert us.³⁷⁰ Rather than following a linear syntagmatic plot, the novel's structure is based on seemingly arbitrary, paradigmatic associations between the chapters. For example, chapter 30 deals with the disorderly state (both metaphorically and literally) of the Niederer household after the housewife leaves. Following this chapter we are presented with Doris Fischli reflecting on her automatic, housewife's reaction of mopping up the drop of milk she has just spilt. There is no connection between these two chapters other than the shared theme of a housewife's way of life. The Fischli and the Niederer households are not any more connected than that; there is no Aristotelian plot to speak of that might bind these two families together. They simply exist side by side in the novel as they might do in the same suburb of Zurich, with nothing more linking them than a communal living space and way of life. This kind of association (or dissociation) prevails in the novel.

The large number of perspectives that this structure entails is reminiscent of postmodernist strategies, where the multiplicity of points of view undermines the notion of a central or definitive interpretation. Similarly, in *Der neue Berg* no one character is allowed to dominate the text. In this way, Hohler (like postmodern theory) rejects the idea that any one human interpretation could be the right one.

³⁷⁰ Hohler, *Der neue Berg*, p. 11. Further references to the novel will be given in brackets after citations in the text.

However, the various elements are not allowed to remain in complete isolation. Hohler's debt to Adalbert Stifter is perceptible in the fact that the paradigmatic association between chapters mentioned above revolves around the spilling of milk, which is reminiscent of Stifter's own example in his "sanftes Gesetz." This reinforces the suggestion of a linking process. The fact that there is little or no causal link between the chapters enhances the significance of location in weaving the narrative together. It foregrounds the fact that what links these characters is the shared living space of the suburb. Furthermore, the novel lacks a main character. The structure thus supports the notion of an ecological voice because the natural environment performs the function of the main character, interconnecting the disparate narrative strands of the characters' lives. This is most clearly seen in relation to the gradual emergence of the volcano. It becomes the principal narrative driving force in the text. For example, the first minor tremor becomes a link event. The narrator takes us on a tour of the various unconnected family units, juxtaposing their experiences and reactions to the tremor. The text, then, is given structural coherence by the natural environment. More explicitly, within the subject matter of the text, the environment can be seen to bring the characters together within the framework identified. Max Stebler and Roland Steinmann are brought together by their curiosity about the cracks in the ground. This contact with one another encourages both characters to think about changing their lives, since Max, the family man, envies Roland's freedom, while Roland, the loner, envies Max's happy domestic situation (57). Their trip into the wood to investigate the cracks in the ground brings the pair in turn into contact with Heinz Fischli, who represents yet another strand of the narrative that until this point has remained separate from the others (94). Similarly, it is the shared interest in the widening cracks that brings Roland together with Madlaina, a contact that has the potential to become a relationship. In other words, the environment is the sole agent that functions to bring the characters into contact with one another; it is the only uniting factor creating a community.

Although this environment is primarily an urban one, the woods constitute an important part of many people's lives. On Sundays the forest is full of people jogging. Roland Steinmann hints that there is a quasi-religious aspect to this activity:

Es war unglaublich wie viele Menschen am Sonntag offenbar leiden wollten und sich in Sporthöschchen oder Trainingsanzügen am äußersten Rand ihrer Möglichkeiten durch den Wald quälten. (125)

Later on in the novel, he goes to the woods very early one morning and finds it transformed into an "erweiterte Turnhalle" (311). It appears that the woods offer a natural antidote and sanctuary for the victims of modern, city life:

Lauter Verantwortungsträger, dachte Roland, die sich für die Schlacht in ihren Büros stählen, und [...es schien ihm,] als versuchten all diese Männer, Dinge loszuwerden, die sie in ihren Sitzungen und Terminen und an ihren Computern nicht brauchen konnten, und die frische Waldluft kam ihm mit einem Mal verseucht vor, auch das eine Deponie, eine für seelischen Sondermüll, mit jedem Fußtritt einer gut gefederten Joggingsohle wurde ein Alptraum in den Waldboden gestampft oder ein Ehestreit flachgedrückt oder der Vorwurf eines Kindes niedergetrampelt. Streng genommen gingen all diese Menschen schon um sechs Uhr ihren Geschäften nach, hier im Wald. (311)

The shared natural environment is therefore also a crucial support system for a dysfunctional society. This passage summarises the inter-personal problems that have been played out in full in the various social groups presented earlier in the novel. For example, Helen Stebler dreams that her husband, Max, defecates on her face, the Niederers' marriage is under threat because Manfred Niederer has been seeing a prostitute, and in the Fischli household the children complain to their parents about their mother having an affair. Roland's reflection reveals that what the joggers are trying to leave in the wood is what constitutes their personal

lives. They are trying to get rid of them because it is of no use to them in their work place. This drastic perspective illustrates the way in which these people have been reduced to a state where they seek to reduce themselves to fulfil the requirements of their jobs. They have become merely instrumental. The people Roland sees in the woods early in the morning are average Zurich citizens. By suggesting that the average citizens suffer similar fates as the characters in the novel, the narrator emphasises that the characters are themselves average citizens. In this way he suggests that the microcosm of the diegesis is a prism through which we may perceive the macrocosm of society in general. This linking of fiction to fact is supported by Hohler's realism, which sets the narrative firmly in the Swiss economic capital. Significantly, the passage cited above also ties the spiritual to the physical: the nightmare (spiritual) is trampled into the ground (physical) by the well-supported jogging shoe. The people indulging in physical exercise are using the activity in the woods to exorcise emotional and psychological problems. The common and erroneous practice of separating the spiritual and psychological from the physical "that plagues our mental image of the human person"³⁷¹, is flouted here: nightmares, marital stress and complaints are all stamped into the ground. This suggestion of monism hints at one of Hohler's key concerns, which I will return to later.

If the natural world gives some sort of coherence to the novel, it is important to note that it also leaves the text open-ended. The narrative culminates with the emergence of the volcano and the earthquakes that accompany it. The dramatic events are related in one long sentence that stretches over three pages and summarises what the rest of the novel is about (432-434). This neat summation of the content of 434 pages above all gives a syntactical sense of the power of the earthquake that so quickly and easily destroys the suburb. It also rather diminishes the human intrigues that have gone before – they are simply washed away in a sea of words. It constitutes an abrupt end to the novel, giving us no real conclusion, with the human stories within it left incomplete (with the exception of those that die in the

³⁷¹ Matt Ridley, *Genome*, (London: Virago, 1999), p. 148

earthquake). This type of ending is reminiscent of an idea expressed by Frisch in *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*: "Die Natur kennt keine Katastrophen."³⁷² The human side of the story is of no interest to nature. Adalbert Stifter also demonstrates this idea in, *Bunte Steine*, his collection of short stories. In *Bergkristall* two young children get lost in a snowy landscape on Christmas Eve and have to spend the night on the mountain. The narrator informs us of the festivities going on in the village below the children but in their shelter they cannot hear the churchbells or see the light of the Christmas candles. Nature is impervious to the festivities - they are entirely human constructions. The high mountain environment, so devoid of human life, constitutes a 'Jenseits.' The children seek a way beyond the glacier but there is no 'beyond' because they have already reached it.³⁷³ In Hohler's novel, which is principally governed by the natural environment, it is entirely appropriate that the human stories within it are not given a full conclusion.

The human interest in the novel is shown to be peripheral from the outset. It opens with a nameless character running through the woods on the outskirts of the suburb. Rather than beginning his tale in a standard fashion, by introducing his character, as in the famous norm "The Marquise went out at five o'clock",³⁷⁴ Hohler leaves the runner's identity obscure. It is only towards the end of the first chapter that he is given a name. The authorial narrator intrudes into the fictional text to tell us that for the purposes of telling a long story involving a number of different characters he will call the runner Roland Steinmann (11). In deviating ever so slightly from traditional patterns, Hohler challenges the human perspective by working towards a possible ecological perspective, such as how the woods might perceive the runner. Just as Frisch's nature would not call a landslide a "catastrophe", Hohler's forest would be unlikely to give the runner a name.

³⁷² Frisch, *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*, p. 103

³⁷³ See: Adalbert Stifter, *Bergkristall*, in *Bunte Steine*, (Augsburg: Goldmann, 1991; first published in Leipzig, 1853), pp. 139-184

³⁷⁴ Frank Kermode designates this the norm for an opening sentence in his *The Sense of an Ending*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966) p. 22

Although this moment at the beginning is the only time when there is an authorial comment from the narrator, the intrusion is nonetheless significant. It emphasises the fictionality of the text and briefly disturbs the mimetic effect of the opening pages, pulling us out of the fictional realm and presenting us with a different level in the narrative. This level, apparently at one remove from the fictional, could be said to be closer to the level of the reader - it is as if we are being told the story orally and the narrator has stopped to explain himself in mid-flow, as Hohler himself might do, during a stage performance. It therefore also functions (paradoxically) to pull us *into* the text since the extradiegetic level is included within the novel. This appears to be a key concern of Hohler's as it recurs in his other prose works. His short story *Der Kuss*, for example ends with a choice of three alternative endings for the reader to decide upon.³⁷⁵ These games with the reader are reminiscent of the subtitle to this chapter, taken from the tale *Die Zeichnung*, which is a refusal by the narrator to give any kind of conclusion to his narrative: "Den Fortgang dieser Geschichte kenne ich nicht."³⁷⁶ What effect does this have on the narrative? Hohler himself says of such narrative intervention: "Das ist ein Spiel."³⁷⁷ The notion of a game introduces a second participant into the typically solo performance of narration. Referring to his innovative mode of introduction of Roland Steinmann into *Der neue Berg*, Hohler explicitly states this as his aim: "Ich wollte sozusagen das Lesepublikum am Akt des Namengebens teilhaben lassen."³⁷⁸ Similar to Hohler's public readings where he often demands some kind of active engagement from the audience, these playful narrative devices encourage the reader to take the initiative and finish the story. The narrative authority is thus displaced from its conventional authorial locus. This allows the narrative to reach beyond the realms of fiction. At the same time it blurs the distinctions between reality and an imagined reality, thus raising the status of fiction. This in turn emphasises one of the central themes of the novel, namely that knowledge can never be

³⁷⁵ See: Franz Hohler, *Der Kuss*, in *Die Rückeroberung*, (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1982), pp 47-48

³⁷⁶ Hohler, *Die Zeichnung*, in *Zur Mündung*, p. 37

³⁷⁷ Liston, 'Die Wirklichkeit des Traums', p. 1

finite, a claim often made by science, and that imagination has a role to play in understanding. Dreams and fantasy (fiction) – the products of our imagination and emotions – are crucially important in our everyday lives (reality). An example of this in the text can be seen when Roland decides to heed the warning given to him in a dream and to flee the city. As he watches the volcano erupt over Zurich, he thanks Monika, who has warned him in the dream (431). This may strike us as odd, since we normally thank people for things they have done *consciously* for us. By giving thanks, Roland crosses the boundary between reality and fantasy. Since doing this saves his life, we are encouraged to do likewise. Hohler's novel is thus designed to be more than an entertaining fiction that is put back on the bookshelf afterwards – it is calculated to instigate action. As the author puts it, "Das fänd ich schön, wenn meine Texte belebend wirken würden und dazu anregen, dass man nachdenkt und vielleicht selbst etwas unternimmt."³⁷⁹

This idea suggests why the text is constructed partly from realistic elements and partly from fantastical ones. The tale is set in the very real environment of Zurich, which contains a real television station along with a wealth of other realistic circumstantial detail. It is not however a report: the characters and their actions are invented. The fictional element is even exaggerated towards the fantastical. With the appearance of the volcano, the text moves from realism to surrealism. Sitting on the middle of a tectonic plate on the Earth's crust, Switzerland is highly unlikely to see the birth of a volcano. At least, this is as much as science can tell us and, as we will see, our faith in science is something that Hohler seeks to undermine. In explaining the genesis of his story, Hohler mentions a vision of a new mountain he had one day emerging from the woods on the outskirts of Zurich. Even in the conception of the novel reality and fantasy merge. His view of a cloud convinced him momentarily of the

³⁷⁸ Liston, 'Die Wirklichkeit des Traums', p. 1

³⁷⁹ Bauer, 'Franz Hohler, Kabarettist und Schriftsteller. Ein Gespräch mit Michael Bauer' in Bauer and Siblewski, p. 63

existence of a new mountain.³⁸⁰ This renders the author's perspective central to the process of artistic expression, even if the work is largely impressionistic.

We have seen how Hohler plays on the border between fact and fiction in the way he constructs his text. This tension also lies at the heart of the content of the novel. Central to Hohler's dissenting cry against the status quo is the conviction that our present mode of existence is at odds with the natural environment. Over the course of the novel we are presented with an array of society's ecological sins: the devastation of the environment through roads; acid rain; problems of atomic waste; algae choking the North Sea; the over-consumption of water; the felling of Brazilian rainforest to satisfy the European demand for beef; the ozone layer hole; the eradication of wildlife from the woods. Counteracting this are the attempts of a few to live in a more ecologically friendly way: Roland Steinmann rides a bicycle; Doris Fischli uses biodegradable washing powder; Madlaina is a vegetarian.

Although Barkhoff dismisses these efforts as "feeble",³⁸¹ they nevertheless constitute the greener perspective within the novel. Furthermore, the fundamental tension of the text relies on this perspective, which is represented by a group of concerned citizens, including Roland Steinmann and Christoph Portner's protest group. The authorities, centred on the mayor, Herr Niederer, represent the other pole. The dichotomy rests on the varying interpretations of the unusual train of events sparked off by the tremor in chapter four. The worried citizens sense some danger, while the authorities fear mass hysteria and insist that without any scientific evidence there is nothing to fear. This conflict comes to a head on the eve of the earthquake after Roland has broken into the broadcasting room during the news in order to inform the general public that the cracks in the ground are now belching out smoke and that people should flee if they feel inclined to do so. By the woods the authorities clash with Portner's ecologically named "Frischer Wind" protest group. The geologists cannot provide any hard evidence about what will happen and suggest that people have no reason to

³⁸⁰ See: Liston, 'Die Wirklichkeit des Traums', p. 1

fear. To this a woman retorts that she is not willing to delegate so much to the experts that she must ask them when to feel afraid (407). Nevertheless, the authorities claim there are no grounds for panic. At the same time the protest group suggest that people should follow their instincts: "Doch, sagte Portner, der Anhaltspunkt müsse die eigene Angst sein, das Vertrauen auf die eigenen Gefühle." (417) This confrontation is about rejecting the hegemony of both science and centralised decision-making and about encouraging trust in our emotions. And it is those who trust their natural emotions and flee the city who survive the earthquake.

Benefiting from the perspectives of all the characters, the reader is constantly reminded of the cracks in the forest as each character visits them. This heightened awareness is emphasised by the structure, which has the novel alternating between events in the city and the private lives of the characters on the one hand, and the cracks in the forest on the other. Given this overall view, it is easy for the reader to anticipate the outcome; we share the sense of impending doom that is felt by some of the characters. This position of superior knowledge over the characters is augmented by the title, which hints at the emergence of the volcano. The title at the same time suggests the implausibility of events in the novel, since mountains are commonly considered ancient, as similes like "as old as the hills" suggest. A new mountain is an improbable collocation. The notion of a mountain's age encourages reflection on a non-anthropocentric time-scale, and, further, the consideration of life before and after the existence of humans. It also poses the question, albeit in a highly dramatic way, what if the environment were to change radically? Even though the events in *Der neue Berg* are improbable, less sensational but equally pernicious alterations to the environment are a real possibility. Lending authority to the tale, Hohler mentions in interview having visited a new mountain, the Central American volcano Paracutin. His anecdotal aside to the effect that the volcano is almost exactly the same age as him adds incidental definition to the parallels

³⁸¹ Barkhoff, 'Green Thought in Modern Swiss German Literature', p. 233

between the private lives of the characters in the novel and the growth of the mountain.³⁸² Furthermore, our appraisal of the situation is not coloured in the way that those of the characters are. For example, unlike the mayor, Manfred Niederer, who is frightened of the political implications of giving a false alarm, we do not need to worry about an electorate. As we will see in the section on *Die Steinflut*, Hohler often affords his readers a privileged position vis à vis events. We can see here how the omniscient narrative perspective can function in an ecological way, as Richard Kerridge has suggested. In giving a general, all-inclusive view of the subject matter, it serves to underline the idea that everything is interconnected and gives the impression of a whole, of which the protagonists are only a part.

³⁸³ In this sense, *Der neue Berg* can be read as a “holistic” narrative.

Although some of the characters demonstrate an instinctive understanding of what is going on in the immediate natural environment and manage to escape the natural disaster, Hohler creates a pervading sense that the society is out of touch with the environment. For example, the Niederer sons don't know how much to feed their dog because their mother used to feed it before she left. (266) A dog is a symbol of a former, hunter-gathering age when mankind was closer to nature and relied on dogs in a more fundamental way. In modern, urban life, a dog is a cultural fossil. In their ignorance of what to feed the dog, the boys therefore demonstrate a hyper-real alienation from nature since it is a domesticated form of nature that they cannot understand. Hyper-real nature can also be identified as lurking in the window boxes. Roland Steinmann reflects on the fact that more nitrate is used in Swiss gardens than by the farmers (92). Similarly, Rolf Schwarz's cuckolded wife only appears in the text to demonstrate her tremendous zeal in growing her own fruit and vegetables. However, this also appears to be a warped and exaggerated attempt at a subsistence existence since she produces far too much and must rely on a freezer to store it in. In addition, she is

³⁸² Hohler, in conversation with the author, Zurich, 28.11.02

³⁸³ See: Richard Kerridge, 'Ecology and Narrative', unpublished paper delivered at the *Beyond Anthropocentrism* conference, Exeter, 2002

obliged to indulge in her taste for the home-grown secretly, when her husband is away, because he does not approve. She does not know that these opportunities often occur when he is philandering. The association between vegetable cultivation and sexual adventure not only ascribes a sense of fetishism to the former and banality to the latter but it also suggests that both husband and wife are indulging in fantasies, albeit rather different ones (197). The shopping centre is another salient example of hyper-real nature. The mall is set up as if it were an outdoor street, where shops sell over-sized flowers and miniature "Zimmersprungbrunnen" (147-152). However, on his way home from the shopping mall, it is the sight of a cow having its hooves clipped that makes Roland Steinmann think he is hallucinating: the unreal (the kitsch shopping centre) has become more real than the real (the cow) (154).

Despite the alienation of society in general from nature, Hohler's eco-apocalyptic vision is not totally bleak. The children in the novel demonstrate an ecological awareness and therefore represent a note of hope. In this respect, Hohler's work is again reminiscent of Stifter's. In *Bergkristall*, the children are not perturbed by the bad weather and they do not vocalise a human evaluation of it. In their difficult situation they simply continue instinctively just as animals would do.³⁸⁴ Hohler's younger characters also show a subconscious understanding of nature. Illustrating why he has such trust in children, Hohler indicates that they pay more heed to their instinct. He gives the example of a child who takes fright in a zoo when a lion opens its mouth to roar. His parents laugh pointing out the bars protecting them. However, the instinct of the child is justified because, as Hohler stresses, this is his natural reaction.³⁸⁵ In *Der neue Berg*, Christian Stebler, a young child, draws a picture of a giant kicking the suburb as an explanation of the first tremor. Towards the beginning of the novel, he gives the picture to Steinmann, who reflects on the picture several times in the course of the tale and then uses it to warn the public at large, when he makes his informal television broadcast on the eve of the disaster. Christian's brother, Fabian, also shows a subconscious

³⁸⁴ See: Stifter, *Bergkristall*, p. 163

understanding of the events unfolding in the woods. He repeatedly suffers from the sensation that his hands are swollen and about to explode. Barkhoff has argued persuasively that this is a symptom of our alienation from nature, since one of the peculiar, anatomical features of humans is the thumb. "Our thumb enables us to use tools, to be a craftsman, a technician, a *homo faber*. The uncontrollable explosion of our technical capabilities lies at the root of the present ecological crisis."³⁸⁶ Fabian's mother takes him to see a psychiatrist, who allows Fabian to play in a sandpit. Fabian constructs a volcano. Around it, human figures fight among themselves before the mountain erupts and buries everyone in a sea of lava. The psychiatrist surveys the scene and makes the comment "tiefsitzende Ängste." (287-292) Although this is obviously his diagnosis of the boy, it is importantly not assigned directly to him, and the reader can make the link to the mountain, especially since we know that the epicentre of the earth tremors has been unusually deep. Once again this shows a parallel between a human experience and the natural world, bringing the two together. Significantly, the children express their fears about the natural environment in aesthetic ways: drawing a picture and building a sand model. This reflects Hohler's concern with the importance of imaginative processes in understanding our environment and again ties the products of the spirit to external realities, as well as supporting Hohler's own aesthetic.³⁸⁷

These intuitive expressions of ecological awareness have an animistic tone. The earthquake assumes the form of a giant³⁸⁸ in Christian's picture, giving it anthropomorphic and active qualities. Similarly, the association made between Fabian and the volcano suggests an environment that is alive and sentient (tiefsitzende Ängste). These are just two examples of how the environment is portrayed as a living being but they are typical of the work as a

³⁸⁵ Hohler, in conversation with the author, Zurich, 28.11.2002

³⁸⁶ Barkhoff, 'Green Thought in Modern Swiss Literature', p. 234

³⁸⁷ This is a recurring trait of Hohler's writing already identified in 6. above.

³⁸⁸ Giants are a common motif in Hohler's work. Hohler frequently includes in his stage performances a short story where giants smash cars with iron bars. In *Die Steinflut*, the mountain becomes a "Bergungeheuer" towards the end of the tale.

whole. There is a wealth of anthropomorphic metaphors.³⁸⁹ Furthermore, the idea that the earth is actively taking revenge, which is repeatedly suggested in the text, is vindicated in the final chapter: “nun hatte irgendeine Macht das Feuer hier an die Oberfläche gebracht, hier, mitten unter uns, hier, wo dieser Planet täglich verletzt wir” (433). Once again, the text reaches beyond the realm of fiction and implicates the reader by way of the “uns.” This is a good example of the way in which Hohler slightly tweaks what is largely a conventional narrative. The rare, extradiegetic, direct narratorial address made to the reader hardly constitutes a radical innovation but nevertheless represents the surprisingly bold way in which Hohler asserts the links between reality and fiction.

The sense of animism is reinforced by the references to the Celts. The Celts are said to have had a sacred respect for the natural environment, believing it to be an animate mother goddess. In the novel, they are linked to the emerging mountain, since the cracks in the ground are situated on the site of an ancient Celtic burial ground. Madlaina also mentions them, explaining that they based a calendar on trees. It turns out that the disaster happens during the time of the ash and, ominously, a fallen ash blocks the way into the forest on the eve of the disaster. Like the understanding demonstrated by the children, these references suggest that it is possible to remain in touch with the natural environment. The implication is that the ‘advance’ of civilisation represents regression in ecological terms since the original inhabitants of the area of Zurich were Rhaetic Celts. Hohler suggests that we are out of touch, but that there is reason for hope if we look to our ancestors and our children. Once again we can see Hohler reassessing the voices of authority and giving voice to those who are not normally attributed with the authority of language.

We have seen how Hohler’s narrative structure to some extent plays with meta-narratological norms. The rejection of authority implicit in these narrative strategies is also evident in the content of *Der neue Berg*. If the structure of the narrative refuses to allow a

³⁸⁹ See *Der neue Berg*, pp. 7, 42, 57, 61, 79, 86, 115, 169, 202, 212, 358, 376, 410.

dominant voice other than that of the natural environment to emerge, the content makes it quite clear which conventional authorities are the targets of Hohler's attack. In his *Zürcher Poetikvorlesungen*, Hohler explained that the short story *Ektisch* constitutes "eine Kurzfassung meines einzigen grossen Romans, [...] *Der neue Berg*."³⁹⁰ In this short story, the male authority of a mythical volcano-inhabiting people refuses to acknowledge the threat of apocalypse, which the female population has sensed. This results in annihilation for the Ekter. Their fate is an allegory of the dangers of ignoring our sensual understanding of the world.

The prevalence given to the Celts, as well as the animistic tone, suggest a rejection of the authority of the Christian church. Once again there are echoes of Stifter. The mountain in *Bergkristall* is also animate: "...er [der Berg] so schön und blau wie das sanfte Firmament auf sie niederschaut."³⁹¹ Furthermore, cut off in the mountains on Christmas eve, the children are given no divine help. Indeed, the narrator informs us that it is only thanks to the "Natur in ihrer Größe", which gives them inner strength, (174) that the children survive. In *Der neue Berg*, nature replaces divine forces. The sense of retribution mentioned earlier is introduced by Roland Steinmann in an interesting way: "Wenn er kommt, dann kommt er zu allen." (63) The fact that everybody is implicated is suggestive of the Day of Judgement. However the 'er' here is not God but the unidentified black giant in Christian's picture. The vague suggestion that revenge will not be meted out by God but by a different supernatural power becomes more definite when Roland sees a thunderbolt shoot out of the ground prior to the major earthquake. The climactic appearance of the new mountain also demonstrates that the supernatural power comes from below, from the earth, rather than from the heavens. The rejection of the Christian religion is not one of Hohler's primary concerns, it is presented rather as part of a traditional hierarchy that gives mankind a position of superiority. According to the Bible, God created man as lord and master of the planet. Hohler's Celtic references and

³⁹⁰ Hohler, 'Die Kürze zwingt zum Denken', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung am Sonntag*, Zurich, 16.11.2003, p. 67

³⁹¹ Stifter, *Bergkristall*, p.184

his judgement from below reject Christianity in favour of a more Gaiistic, or earth-centred approach.

In the discussion of instinct, we saw how science was shown to be in conflict with intuition. Those who respond to their natural instincts survive while those that wait for a definitive answer from the scientists receive their answer too late (427). However, the ultimate failure of science does not come as a shock at the end of the novel because it has been signalled earlier on. For example, science, in the form of conventional medicine, cannot help Manfred Niederer with his allergy to cold air. Repeated penicillin injections have no effect. This can be read as a small-scale version of the final disaster. Niederer's illness is caused by a polluted environment; he seeks answers from conventional medicine but ultimately science fails him; nature 'takes revenge', as it were, in the form of the allergy. His way of life is linked in this manner to the ecological problems in general. This is more obvious in the case of Max Stebler's hiccups. Once again conventional medicine cannot cure Max's chronic hiccups and so he decides to visit a reflexologist. Although he is sceptical and taken aback by the quack's questions about his private life, the hiccups disappear. Primarily, this represents a victory for alternative medicine over more conventional methods. When his hiccups return he revisits the witch doctor who cures him a second time but warns him that he needs to change his life if he really wants to be cured. Max does not like his job but up until this point has done nothing to change it. The implication is that his physical well-being is linked to his psychological and spiritual well-being. Similarly, society as a whole reaps the physical retribution, in the shape of earthquakes and a volcano, for its spiritual alienation from the natural environment, as demonstrated by the refusal of some to heed their natural instinct of fear. The major failure of science is explained by Dr. Bollag, the scientist in charge of investigating the cracks in the ground. As the ground ominously belches forth smoke, Bollag admits that he has overlooked the central tenet of his science, that natural history is never finished, and that although massive movements in the earth's crust only happen every ten

million years, this does not mean that it cannot happen now (426). Essentially then, the message is that the earth is 'alive' – it remains volatile and therefore not something science can know empirically. No finite definition is adequate.

Der neue Berg clearly demonstrates an ecological voice. It does this by relating modern, urban society to ecological problems in an intricate yet subtle narrative mesh. Ecological issues are centralised and brought into the everyday reality of average Zurich people. These are not peripheral, superfluous concerns but matters of life and death. The hegemony of science is questioned and an understanding of natural instincts is shown to be crucially important. Significantly, Hohler avoids overt didacticism: the links between the appearance of the mountain and the average way of life are not made explicit until the very end. By this point, the reader, like the survivors in the novel, has made the connections and is prepared for the climax. Hohler has chosen literary form, that is the aesthetic realm to make his argument. This particular variant of the third person narrative, in which an anthropic ordering of the plot gives way to an environmental organisation, is a way of expressing an experience of nature that goes beyond a scientific or instrumental attitude. It is a way of expressing a sense of the unknowable.

6.3 *Die Steinflut*

Franz Hohler's novella, *Die Steinflut* (1998), is a fictionalisation of the landslide in Elm of September 1881. Reading about the disaster as described by the geologist Albert Heym, Hohler discovered a footnote indicating that the only person who realised and reacted to the danger presented by the mountain was a seven-year-old girl, named Katharina Disch. The author decided to retell her tale.³⁹² The novella deals with life and death in the mountains, beginning with the birth of a sixth child in Katharina's family and ending with the natural catastrophe. For the birth, Katharina is sent to stay with her grandmother, who lives in a hamlet further up in the mountains. Although there have been warnings about a possible landslide, for various reasons nobody has left the village. After the birth of the sixth child, Katharina chooses not to return home and, as a result, avoids death in the landslide that wipes out the entire village in the valley, leaving her orphaned. The birth of the sixth child forms the background to the whole narrative. The emphasis is therefore on the renewal of life and life's cyclical nature. However, the novella ends with the deathblow dealt by the mountain, and the villagers' fragile existence, on the brink of poverty and undernourishment, is shattered. The constantly reiterated tense relationship between the natural environment and the villagers' existence is best demonstrated by the fact that they earn their living from a quarry but it is precisely the quarry that makes the mountain unstable. This imbalance is introduced subtly into the text, so that, little by little, things get out of kilter until the dramatic conclusion seems inevitable with human exploitation of nature proving disastrous.

The disaster has been looming from the very beginning. The title of the tale, "Steinflut", immediately introduces the notion of the landslide. Furthermore, the first words of the story are a prolepsis, giving us an elliptical glimpse into Katharina's future. We are told that the seven-year-

³⁹² Hohler, in conversation with the author, 28.11.2002

old girl will not leave her grandmother's house until she marries.³⁹³ This leaves us wondering why. All we have to go on is the title. The adjacency of the title and the introductory, one-line prolepsis nudges the reader towards speculative anticipations of the future. Is there a connection between the "Steinflut" and her not returning to her own home? Does it perhaps destroy her home?

These two pieces of information therefore create a sense of foreboding, which is sustained throughout the work. As Sven Siedenberg puts it: "Überall lauert Gefahr."³⁹⁴ "Steinflut" suggests the apocalyptic idea of "Sintflut", which becomes a motif of the work. Another recurrent motif is fear itself, evident in repeated incitements not to worry, as well as in the protracted discussion of the idea of "Angsthase," which will be examined below. There are also many elements that could be interpreted as spooky, such as the discussion of the shortage of coffins in the village and Katharina's father standing, like the grim reaper, with a scythe in his hand as his children leave the village to go to their grandmother's house. The foreboding tone of the work is intensified by the fact that almost every chapter concludes on a portentous note or with a suggestion of fear. The first two chapters end with Katharina's little brother, Kaspar, being frightened. On the first occasion, he is scared by the threat of having a horseshoe nailed to his foot. He has been drawn by a horse's whinny to watch a blacksmith nail on a horseshoe, and asks why horses wear shoes at all. Katharina answers incorrectly saying that this is so that they can walk (11). In reality horses wear shoes in order to work - in other words, so that mankind can exploit them. The blacksmith's joking threat is illuminated by the boy's fear. Not recognising the joke, Kaspar is terrified by the horror of nailing something onto living feet, and his naïve fear highlights the brutality of the act, which lies in the implicit exploitation, rather than in real pain, since the horse in fact feels nothing. The second chapter also ends with fear, this time ominously caused by falling rocks. As if in response to Kaspar's desire to go home there is a loud crash.

³⁹³ See: Franz Hohler, *Die Steinflut*, (Munich: Luchterhand, 1998), p. 5. Further references to the work will be given in brackets after quotations in the text.

³⁹⁴ Sven Siedenberg, 'Wenn der Berg kracht', in *Die Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 7.10.98, p. v2/4

Like an oracle, Katharina encourages her brother to continue up the path to their grandmother's, saying it was a piece of the mountain falling onto their home (20). Punctuating the story, the crashing rocks remain a constant percussive reminder of the threat hanging over the village. Again at the end of chapter ten, a loud crash awakens the grandmother from her sleep, and again it is Katharina who relates what has happened. There is a perceptible structure therefore within the chapters, which always build to an ominous climax, often transmitted through the medium of Katharina.

In this way, the form mirrors the content. The mountain is being rendered unstable by the gradual effect of the unceasing deluge of rain, coupled with the effect of the quarry, until finally it gives way with terrible consequences; in the text, the structure of the chapters is made lopsided, weighed down as they are with intimations of impending doom. These are also created by the combined effect of unsettling events in the natural world coupled with a human interpretation. This cohesion of form and content is tightest at the denouement. With the collapse of the mountain comes the breakdown of the syntactic structure. Katharina's life, as we have seen it in the carefully structured tale, and all the characters in it, pass by us in one long sentence, stretching over five pages without a single paragraph break (152-157). The concentration of the *histoire* into this short narrative space emphasises the force of the landslide, which has the power to destroy everything so quickly and easily.

The disintegration of the syntactic structure not only mirrors that of the hillside but also confounds the reader's expectations in relation to the form and in particular the ending of a novella. In terms of the discussion of the generic features of the German novella, *Die Steinflut* can be seen as largely conforming to the conventional model.³⁹⁵ It remains close to one narrative perspective, it centres on an unusual event, and the characters are subordinate to a higher power. The traditional critical turning point of the novella, however, which conventionally should precede a concluding section, comes in the shape of the landslide at the end of the tale. In this

³⁹⁵ See: Judith Leibowitz, *Narrative Purpose in the Novella*, (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), p. 15. Hohler concurs

way the novella is given no real conclusion and we are left without any sense of closure. The landslide leaves the story open-ended – Katharina's tale is simply abandoned. Since the narrator ignores narrative convention and provides no conclusion, the reader is confronted with the unusual sensation of having been abandoned by the narrator. As in Günter Grass' main ecological work, *Die Rättin*, the disappearance of the narrator functions here as an ecological narrative device.³⁹⁶ In this way, the tale ends with the mountain, as it were, having the last word, and leaving the human interest sidelined. The ending finishes the novella on an almost eschatological note even though Katharina survives the landslide and the deluge of text is still focalized from her perspective. This is because rather than following the conventions of literary form the hand of what Seymour Chatman would call "the implied author"³⁹⁷ is forced by the natural environment. This is another important way in which Hohler's text goes beyond a purely anthropocentric mode of writing.

The notion of an ecological voice is supported by the focalisation in the text. The greater part of the tale is told from the little girl's perspective. With a child as the central character and focalizer, it could be argued that *Die Steinflut* remains an anthropocentric text. Hohler's earlier novel *Der neue Berg* is anti-anthropocentric because of the absence of a central human character – the mountain takes on the central role. In *Die Steinflut* on the other hand, we have a central human character in the shape of Katharina. However the difference here is that Katharina herself is in touch with the natural world. Small details support the notion of the child being more in touch with nature than the rest of the villagers. For example, the need to urinate and to defecate is mentioned unusually frequently. Normally these are activities that are totally ignored in literature,³⁹⁸ but Hohler insistently includes these natural urges. Since children tend to show a greater interest in bodily functions than adults, Hohler can make this point quite unobtrusively by

with the criteria which Leibowitz considers "traditional", in conversation with the author, Zurich, 22.11.2003

³⁹⁶ For a thorough investigation of Grass' novel see: Johann Siemon, 'Ecological Disaster as a Narrative Precept in Günter Grass's *The Rat*', in *Green Thought in German Culture*, pp 185-189

³⁹⁷ Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, (New York, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 151

³⁹⁸ There are notable exceptions (*Woyzeck*, Georg Büchner, is one) but they remain precisely that: exceptions.

using a child as focalizer. However, attention is nonetheless drawn to the subject through the terms used. The childish dialect form “brunzeln” is used for peeing and ‘a number two’ is innovatively referred to as a “dicke Tante.” Why this emphasis? The phrase “a call of nature” (or “Ruf der Natur”) says it all: the inclusion of these details draws attention to the fact that humans are naturally constrained by bodily functions. We have already seen that the topic of bodily evacuations can be intentionally avoided in order to hide mankind’s links with the animal world.³⁹⁹ The subject demonstrates that humans remain animals in their physical requirements and therefore are part of, not separate from, the natural world.⁴⁰⁰ Not content simply to include this unconventional subject matter, Hohler emphasises the way in which the natural bodily routine shapes human life, structuring his text around these constraints: his chapters often open with the need to go to the lavatory (57,66) and close with the need for sleep.

Furthermore, in the text there is a profusion of tropes connecting humans to the natural world. These again are mediated through Katharina, as primary focalizer, but are not exclusively presented from her perspective. For example, Katharina’s hand feels for Kaspar “wie ein Kieselstein aus dem Bach, durch und durch naß und durch und durch kühl.” (26) As the two children make their way up the hill to their grandmother’s house they are presented as being literally in harmony with the natural world around them, as is made clear by the syntax of the following passage:

Es gab ein großes Geräusch, das war der Regen, der auf die Blätter des Waldes fiel, an dessen Rand sie emporstiegen, und es gab ein kleines Geräusch, das aber viel näher bei den Ohren war, das waren die Regentropfen, die auf ihre Kapuzen und Pelerinen fielen. Zum großen Geräusch gehörte auch das Rauschen des Sernf, welches das ganze Tal erfüllte, und zum kleinen Geräusch gehörte das Aufsetzen ihre Schuhe auf dem Weg, der mit Steinchen bedeckt war. (22)

³⁹⁹ See: Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, p. 38

⁴⁰⁰ Franz Hohler concurs with this interpretation in conversation with the author, Zurich, 28.11.02

Katharina's childish curiosity is often illuminating. She does not know how people become pregnant. She knows how cows become pregnant, but cannot imagine her father behaving to her mother like a bull to a cow. Her reflections on the subject leave her pondering why marriage is a prerequisite for pregnancy. (8) Her thoughts bring us back to the theme of reproduction and regeneration, introduced in the brief opening prolepsis. The theme recurs throughout the novella and balances the work, establishing a thematically opposite pole to the ubiquitous portents of death when Katharina realises that she herself will one day have children (90). Her simple child's logic asks questions of human, social constructs, that is, about what separates humans from animals. The distinction between animals and humans is also broken down in Katharina's dialogues - she uses the same language to talk to both. This is evident from the very beginning of the novella, where she takes leave of her family, including the cat, proleptically ironically asking if the cat wants to come too (6). Similar to Beat Sterchi's *Blösch*, Hohler's narrative thus displays a biocentric attitude. This can be seen elsewhere in the text too. After watching his grandmother's piglets suckling, Kaspar announces "Will essen." (92) The syntagmatic implication draws further attention to the fact that humans and animals belong in one category.

As we have seen, it is often through Katharina that the indications of impending doom are intimated. Katharina's portentous words frequently take on a prophetic tone. This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated at the end of chapter six. In reply to the adults' question about what she thinks of the terrible weather, she says she thinks the Great Flood might well come (47). Her prophetic words understandably shock the adults. Katharina's apparent sixth sense and prophetic status are not ascribed vaguely to some innate, mystical, or subconscious understanding of nature, but are given a plausible explanation. Helping out in her parents' bar she has overheard the men's conversations discussing the question of the mountain's safety. Within the framework of the bar, the narrator is able to introduce critical demographic elements to the narrative. Overpopulation is suggested by Katharina's father, who complains the child "käme im dummsten Augenblick" (8) and a neighbour, who says "noch ein Maul

zum stopfen" (80). Malnutrition is evident in the frequent mention of goitre (9, 40, 64, 155) and in the occasional need to fetch emergency supplies from Alsace (113). With these dangers lurking in the background, it is little wonder that the men are reluctant to stop working the mine, the major source of employment. As a child, Katharina is not cognisant of the economic pressures, which impair the adults' views. By extension, socio-economic forces are therefore shown to be partly to blame for the tragedy and it is only the child, who has not yet fully grown up to take her place in that society but is old enough to make her decision to stay behind, who can avoid it.

The reader shares Katharina's privileged perspective in two ways. Firstly, thanks to the hint given to the reader by the narrator in the form of the title and the opening prolepsis, we too have a sense of imminent disaster. Importantly, this sense is also not a rational perception, but rather an intuitive suspicion based on narrative tone. Since the suspicion turns out to be well-founded, the text in this way encourages us to take heed of our intuitions. Secondly, the position of the reader outwith the boundaries of the text, means that the pressures felt by the villagers do not influence us either. In this way, Hohler encourages the reader to share the 'ecological voice,' which is an exceptional one, at least in the context of this story.

It is not one shared by the majority of the adults in the tale. The narrative perspective of a child allows simple but telling questions to be asked about many adult preconceptions. For example, adult authority is revealed to be arbitrary when Kaspar is allowed to take more food whereas his older brother, Jakob, receives a clout on the ear for trying to do the same. Katharina notes "Die Erwachsenen ... schlugen gern drein, wenn ihnen nichts mehr in den Sinn kam." (41) More crucially the adults have evidently also lost a sense of understanding of their own emotions. Throughout the novella attention is drawn to the emotion of fear. The insult "Angsthase" occurs repeatedly. Again, this is illuminated by Katharina. She asks why you should be insulted for fearing being hit by stones falling off the mountain. To her, it

makes perfect sense to worry about it, and she wonders if there is a word for someone who *does* stand under falling rocks and is not scared: “Ein Muthase” perhaps (49). Of course, “Mut” and “Hase” do not fit together. This is because “Angst” is precisely the rabbit’s defining feature. The rabbit’s wariness constitutes the natural survival instinct of the species. Calling someone a “Muthase” therefore suggests they have lost touch with their natural survival instinct. Furthermore, Katharina cannot understand why everyone is so proud when they have done something dangerous (103). It appears, then, that the adults endeavour to ignore their natural reactions at the cost of their safety. Although Sven Siedenberg suggests that Katharina “wandelt sich [...] vom Angst- zum Muthasen,”⁴⁰¹ it is actually the fact that she is quite open about her fear and remains an “Angsthase”, honest towards herself, that saves her. She is asked if she was scared on the walk up to her grandmother’s house and she reflects on the way the adults try to avoid the question. She cannot understand why they do this and answers that she herself was indeed afraid (38-39). Wrestling with the insult, she asks if Noah and her grandfather deserved the title. Her grandfather guided Suvorov’s army over the Alps but deserted them when the situation became critical. Noah similarly feared destruction and so built the ark. With the justification that “Beide hatten irgendwie mehr gewusst als die andern”, Katharina decides that they were right to act as they did (88). The animals in the tale also react according to their natural instincts. Züsi, the cat, and two chickens flee the village before the landslide. Carl Amery, the German environmentalist and science-fiction writer identifies the importance of paying attention to your natural emotions as central to his definition of ‘Gaia,’ or belief that the Earth itself is an animate deity, a mother goddess. He writes of “die Verankerung einer neuen Weltsicht im tiefsten Zentrum unserer Gefühle: jener Weltsicht, die man ganz mit dem Stichwort Gaia umschreibt.”⁴⁰² Overhearing a conversation between her uncles and the forester, Katharina realises that danger is imminent. The narrative becomes at this point similar to the end of the novella. In a long

⁴⁰¹ Sven Siedenberg, ‘Wenn der Berg kracht’

sentence, Katharina reflects on all the people down in the valley, who should be warned. This formal narrative similarity means that when we read the climax of the novella we have the impression that we already know the outcome, because the content and syntax are familiar to us. In this way, we become accustomed to the textual environment and can therefore, like Katharina, be in a position to suspect the outcome. The discrepancies between Katharina's and the adults' perspectives highlight the fact that the adults have lost touch with the environment, while Katharina remains in tune with it.

Towards the end of the novella, Katharina's oracle status becomes more explicit. Up until this point, she has expressed an uncanny sense of the looming disaster, but here her words take on a note of certainty. Like the oracles of ancient Greece, who would allegedly access their subconscious through intoxication, Katharina's words appear to come from her subconscious, from a "zweite Katharina" (141). The decision not to go back down to the village is attributed to this second voice within her, which seems to be an expression of her subconscious. It also eerily foretells the landslide, (152) shocking the 'first' Katharina. Despite her shock, Katharina reflects on what she (the second Katharina within her) has said and realises that she concurs with herself. The *Wortschwall* is the continuation of these reflections and therefore begins in the conditional tense, considering what the villagers *should* be doing. During these reflections the mountain gives way and so within this long sentence the tense changes to the present. In this way the 'two' Katharinas are brought together; the first one, who is the focalizer for the greater part of the tale, and the second one, who foretells the disaster, are united in this final sentence. This union implies that Katharina has reacted to her subconscious – her fears, her intuition and her experiences – and because of this has survived. Hohler's trust in the perspective of children in general is further exemplified by Kaspar, who is also endowed with second sight, and sees an apocalyptic vision similar to Katharina's early on (34). Kaspar is however still too young to take the autonomous decision

⁴⁰² Amery, *Bileams Esel*, p.260

to stay behind. Katharina's insight and oracle-like position are reminiscent of Cassandra, the daughter of the king of Troy, who was blessed by Apollo with the gift of prophecy, but not of being believed. A figure thus synonymous with pessimistic predictions, Cassandra has become a motif of apocalyptic and ecological writing, most notably in Christa Wolf's rewriting of the myth in *Kassandra*.⁴⁰³ The use of such a focalizer therefore places Hohler's novella squarely in the burgeoning contemporary trend of eco-apocalyptic writing.⁴⁰⁴

Returning to the title we can see that it also implies that there is some greater, superhuman, force at work. Hohler might have chosen a more neutral title such as "Der Erdrutsch." "Steinflut" is a neologism, and being almost an anagram of "Sintflut", it draws attention to the idea of the Great Flood. The idea of the "Sintflut" is first introduced in the text as the children make their way to their grandmother's house. Katharina as she tells the biblical story of the Great Flood to Kaspar in order to distract him from the arduous journey they undertake to reach their grandmother's house. Ominously, this takes place in the pouring rain (28-29). As we have seen, she then prophesies the "Sintflut." Her words introduce the idea of sin, since, according to the Old Testament, God sent the rains to wash away the sins of the world. Indeed, the German term derives from the word "Sündflut" meaning "sin-flood." The change from 'Sint' to 'Stein' in the title implies, however, that here a natural force is at work, rather than an anthropomorphic deity. This change moves from an abstract human conception towards a tangible part of the natural world. Furthermore, childish logic picks holes in the biblical story: Kaspar asks about the fish – surely they had no problem surviving the flood (29). In Katharina's version of the story she adds marmots and mountain deer to the animals saved by Noah. These additions are significant. They draw attention firstly to the fact that Katharina thinks of them and wants to save them. Secondly, they highlight the fact that the original version is a generalisation – it does not allow for regional variation in fauna. It

⁴⁰³ See: Wolf, *Kassandra*

⁴⁰⁴ For a fuller discussion of this trend see Goodbody, 'Catastrophism in Post-war German Literature', in *Green Thought in German Culture*, pp 159-180

highlights the dangers of ethical globalization. The end of the tale of the Flood is told by Katharina's grandmother later in the tale (84). In this way, the parable is woven into the narrative. It is not simply told and then abandoned, becoming instead a form of intradiegetic accompaniment to the main narrative strand.

Returning to the suggestion that Christian religion, as it is practised, is out of touch, we can identify a similar implication during the church sermon. The villagers can hardly hear the words of the minister because of the noise of the falling rocks (133). It is as if the mountain and the minister are competing and indeed the villagers dispute the significance of the inaudibility of the holy man. The impotence of the church is suggested by the fact that the sermon includes a baptism, which supposedly will protect the child from the forces of evil, but will in practical terms do nothing to save the child from the landslide. The villagers would do better to forget their prayers and to pay heed to the crashing rocks. The animistic tone that is hinted at by the change in the title from "Sint" to "Stein" is further supported by instances when the mountain becomes animate. For example, the mountain is described as some kind of aggressive monster, actively eating up trees (90) and firing down blocks of stone (146). It is later explicitly called a "Bergungeheuer" (153). Rather than the anthropomorphic Lord God handing out divine retribution to the villagers, the natural environment itself is alive and wreaking its terrible revenge.

Charles Linsmayer calls the novella "Weltuntergang 1881 im Glarnerland."⁴⁰⁵ This raises the question as to how a text told uniquely from one perspective and firmly rooted in canton Glarus can take on wider-reaching implications that might concern the whole world. Despite the rejection of religion, the text nevertheless borrows from the biblical heritage with which it plays. It becomes a parable of sorts. Partly compensating for the lack of an ending, Hohler adds a brief postscript, giving some details of the real Katharina's life. He thus synthesises fact and fiction. We have already seen elsewhere in Hohler's work, in particular in

⁴⁰⁵ Charles Linsmayer, 'Weltuntergang 1881 im Glarnerland', *Bund*, 22.10.1998, p.7

Der neue Berg, that the tension between reality and artifice is fundamental to it. Hohler's postscript draws the reader away from the fictionalised world of the novella and points us towards the reality upon which the text is based. This lends the tale authority, and gives Hohler's apocalyptic tone, which runs through his entire oeuvre, an historical crutch. Thus, from a historical source, Hohler creates a convincing ecological parable, which touches on the problems of over-population, malnutrition and the ill effects of concentrating solely on economic wealth, to sound a warning for the future. Furthermore, as Linsmayer observes, Hohler is not interested in the consequences of the accident, nor indeed in the accident itself. "Ihn interessiert das Verhalten der Menschen vor der Katastrophe."⁴⁰⁶ This is an equivalent perspective to ours today; ecologists suggest that we are on the brink of a variety of ecological disasters. In 1998, with an ebbing of the popularity of green politics world-wide, the dangerously blinkered attitude of the majority of the characters in *Die Steinflut* is poignantly analogous of the general atmosphere. The tale demonstrates an ecological voice in support of this ecological content with the narrator remaining very close to the perspective of the young girl. She remains aware of her natural environment in being part of it, in a Heideggerian sense. With a human perspective thus contributing significantly to the ecological tone of the text, there is a note of hope in the novella. In stark contrast to the many examples of human error and short-sightedness, the central character shows enough understanding to survive the wrath of the natural environment and so remains Noah-like above the waves of the stone flood.

⁴⁰⁶ Linsmayer, 'Weltuntergang 1881 im Glarnerland'

7. Conclusion

The preceding chapters investigate an important dimension of German-Swiss literature over the last 30 years. One of the characteristics of this period has been the ubiquitous proliferation of environmental concern. The works discussed represent a broad spectrum of ecological literature, which spans the period and demonstrates a wide range of thematic emphases, narrative techniques and differing perspectives on ecological dilemmas. This conclusion draws together the many strands and the recurrent motifs of the various works in question and assesses them comparatively. In the introduction, problematic areas were touched upon, such as the links between fiction and reality, and between literature and ecology, and so it is necessary here to posit an answer to these conundrums too. Altogether, this constitutes an evaluation of the nature and significance of the ecological voice in recent German-Swiss prose.

7.0.1 Thematic emphases

It is a striking aspect of ecological writing that authors tend to employ outsiders as narrators or focalizers. From Herr Geiser, Max Frisch's Basler in the Ticino, through Gertrud Leutenegger's nameless narrator in *Kontinent*, to Beat Sterchi's Spanish milker, Ambrosio, this phenomenon is immediately evident from the works investigated in this thesis. It is true that outsiders are frequently used as mouthpieces in literature more generally, famous examples being found in works such as Fyodor Dostoevski's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) or Albert Camus's *The Outsider* (1942). Using an outsider allows an analysis of the society from which the character is estranged, because being alien to that society, the outsider can pick up on and question in an illuminating way that which would otherwise seem everyday and banal to an average representative of the community in focus. The figure of the returning

hero may also perform this function, since the period of time in which the character has been absent commonly causes estrangement from his/her society.

This is true of the outsiders in ecological literature too. As a child, Katharina Disch, in *Die Steinflut*, has a position outwith the learned social values and the economic concerns of the adult world. As a result, she asks simple yet provocative questions unmasking a number of flaws in the prevalent way of thinking. Walther Kauer's *Spätholz* also has an outsider at its core. Significantly however, Rocco Canonica does not begin life as one and only becomes one as the way of life that he practises becomes outmoded. He thus comes to represent that way of life and thus his position as an alienated individual serves to show how vitally the modern mode of existence differs from the old, with the dichotomy pared down to an old farmer aiming his rifle at a German tourist. As a Spanish 'Fremdarbeiter', Sterchi's Ambrosio finds the Swiss environment very foreign. His feelings of alienation are registered in his self-consciousness. Rather than being at ease in his new environment, Ambrosio repeatedly feels as if he is acting and on stage. Taking a Heideggerian line of argument, this points to the importance of environment in determining being. He cannot fully exist in a new and foreign place because his being is dependent on the things around him, which are no longer those that he knows. In this way, the position of the outsider allows a crucial ecological point to be made, since only the element of foreignness permits an exposition of the vital interplay between being and environment. In addition to this, as Malcolm Pender points out, "this figure becomes a vehicle for more direct comment on Switzerland."⁴⁰⁷ He approaches the Swiss rural world with a very different point of view from that of the inhabitants. This is manifested not least in his diminutive stature, because of which he literally physically has a different perspective from the much larger Swiss. This is conveyed in his amazement at the size of the dog, the cows and the houses. Although Heinz Ludwig Arnold does not explicitly make the point, his comparison of *Blösch* to Günter Grass's *Die Blechtrommel* pushes the reader

⁴⁰⁷ Malcolm Pender, 'Das Eigene und das Fremde: three literary manifestations', in *Images of Switzerland*.

towards a realisation of the shared dwarf-like perspective of the main characters, which allows a glimpse of the underbellies of the Emmenthal and Danzig societies respectively.⁴⁰⁸

Ambrosio's estrangement is increased by the language barrier, which puts him on a level with the cows, at least in terms of communication with the Swiss. His position as a linguistic outsider is mirrored in the predicament of Max Frisch's protagonist in *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*, as well as in that of Leutenegger's narrator in *Kontinent*, a German speaker in a French-speaking part of the Valais. A linguistic outsider is a particularly effective medium for the transmission of an ecological text for a number of reasons. Firstly, paradoxically for literary protagonists, the characters are distanced from words and culture. We can see this when Herr Geiser hesitates over his Italian spelling. This provokes reflection, and ultimately he questions the value of the correct spelling and language in general. Alienated thus from language, the importance of culture is reduced. Furthermore, the characters are forced to rely on a more direct sensual relationship with the environment, be it social or natural. Leutenegger's narrator, Herr Geiser and Ambrosio all achieve a closer understanding of their natural surroundings partly because of this linguistic handicap. Secondly, the alienation from their environments felt by these figures can be associated with an alienation from the ecology of the place, that is the place's language of home. It draws attention to the fact that language is not necessarily a way of being superior to the environment and the natural world, as is often believed, because it is often in fact fundamentally linked to that place. Ambrosio's reaction to Innerwald is exemplary: "Zum ersten Mal in seinem Leben wußte er, daß er klein, fremd und anders war."⁴⁰⁹ Herr Geiser's musings on the many different terms for thunder and Inuit words for snow illustrate this point. They are outsiders not just because the cows seem giant and the dogs are large but because they are unable to name things. In the act of naming there is an element of knowing.

Challenges from the Margins, ed. by Malcolm Pender and Joy Charnley, (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 86

⁴⁰⁸ Heinz Ludwig Arnold, 'Passion einer Kuh, Passion eines Knechts', in *Der Spiegel*, (Hamburg, 1983), pp 85-87

By using alienated characters to focalise their narratives, these Swiss authors begin to unpack the discourse of mankind's environmental alienation, which was outlined in the introduction (above, 1.1.2). With the natural world so often seen as an 'Other', standing in opposition to the civilised human world, constructing characters who are also in some way distanced from the surrounding human world is an appropriate way of giving voice to that mute Other. Leutenegger's ICH figure in *Lebewohl, Gute Reise* is a fine example of a human figure taking on the responsibility of speaking for the natural environment. As we have seen, her physical position, high on a mountain top, represents an opposing pole to the flatland urban civilisation of Uruk. Underpinning these spatial implications, she also appears to be literally part of the natural environment. Occupying this kind of analagous position, such a character may be able to generate, in human terms, an expression of the meaning of the position of otherness. Although this strategy smacks of anthropomorphism, it is at least an attempt on the part of the writer to approach and approximate what is essentially unknowable. The outsider figures have a liminal function in that they work as a bridge between the opposing poles of culture and nature. They are capable of this because they have a heightened awareness of the natural world whilst remaining human. The sense of their liminal position is intensified by the fact that, as fictional characters, they are embedded in culture, but are simultaneously the focalizers of narratives that are the expression of a real ecological consciousness. In this way, they help to deconstruct the myth of mankind's separateness from nature.

Among these outsiders, with their ecological messages, there are a number of Cassandra-like figures. Cassandra, the daughter of the Trojan king Priam, was blessed with the power of second sight but was cursed that no-one would believe her predictions. As we have seen in the discussion of *Die Steinflut* (6.3 above), Hohler exploits this mythological position effectively using Katharina to focalise his narrative. The young girl is indeed

⁴⁰⁹ Sterchi, *Blösch*, p. 8

endowed with dream-like second sight. To an extent Sterchi's farmer, Knuchel, and Kauer's protagonist, Rocco Canonica, have prophetic abilities too. Like Cassandra, they predict disaster but their warnings are not heeded. The significant difference between the ancient Greek and the modern Swiss farmers is that their inspiration is not supernatural. Rather than being the recipients of divine illumination, the Cassandra figures of recent Swiss ecological literature gain their insight through an intimate knowledge of the local area. Both Rocco and Knuchel derive their existence from this knowledge and while the links between Rocco and the natural world are taken to greater extremes, Knuchel's hesitancy to modernise coupled with his intimacy with his herd signals a similar committed and essential understanding of his natural environment. The important difference between Knuchel and Rocco is the influence of economic pressures on the two men. While Rocco's way of life is becoming obsolete, it nevertheless permits him to ignore market forces, since his own production meets his personal needs. Since his vision is unclouded by economic factors, with his economics revolving around stability rather than growth, he is not interested in seeking new ways to create wealth. Thus he has a superior perspective to the other characters in the novel. On the other hand, Knuchel is, perhaps more realistically, part of the commercial process and cannot afford to ignore the market. Although he sees the dangers, he is obliged to give in to the prevalent attitude and effectuate many changes, rendering his foresight bitterly futile.

Harold Fromm sums up the attitude that forces Knuchel's hand in a lucid examination of contemporary feelings towards ecological debate. He highlights the fact that, in the modernised Western world, we are always at one remove from "Nature".⁴¹⁰ Our contact with the natural world is diminished by concrete, television, air-conditioning, motorised transport and supermarkets. The air that we breathe sometimes seems to have little to do with the world outside, and the packaged food that we eat often bears no resemblance to the raw materials of plants and animals. Fromm suggests that, in such an environment, it is easy to become

⁴¹⁰ Harold Fromm, 'From Transcendence to Obsolescence: A Route Map', in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, pp 30-39.

complacent. When ecological problems are mentioned, it is easy to ignore them when they appear to have no direct effect on our sealed-off existence and only concern a natural world that functions as nothing more than a back-drop. As Fromm puts it:

Today, man's Faustian posturings take place against a background of arrogant, shocking, and suicidal disregard of his roots in the earth.⁴¹¹

The biological necessities of life remain exactly that and if we forget "our roots in the earth", whether in favour of a growth economy or a luxurious life-style, we are doomed. This is precisely the fate of Kauer's community in the Terzone valley and, in Sterchi's novel, the appearance of the emaciated lead cow of Knuchel's herd in the slaughterhouse is a dark sign, proving the farmer right.

Not being part of adult society, Hohler's prophetic children (see above, 6.2 *Der neue Berg* and 6.3 *Die Steinflut*) share with Rocco Canonica the privileged position of being outwith socio-economic forces. They gain a further crucial insight because they have a more open and direct access to their emotions than their adult counterparts do. The rationalised adult world demonstrates an autodestructive neglect of emotions, which is best characterised by the fatal decision of many Zurichers to pay no heed to their fear in *Der neue Berg*. The loss of an emotional contact with the natural environment lies at the heart of Leutenegger's work too. This is brought to the fore by the nature of the narrator's work in *Kontinent*, which illustrates the removal from nature identified by Fromm. In recording natural sounds, which are to be played to the factory workers, the narrator is effectively packaging the natural environment and thus not only shaping it but also introducing a technologically manufactured distance between the workers and their environment. The dangers of a preclusion of contact

Fromm capitalises the N of nature.

⁴¹¹ Fromm, 'From Transcendence to Obsolescence', p. 39

with the natural world are also the subject of Leutenegger's short prose piece, *Der Tod kommt in die Welt*.

With writers favouring emotions over reason, the distrust of the Enlightenment and of capitalism emerges as another theme. In his essay 'Die Zerstörung der Idylle hat begonnen' Jürg Weibel examines new trends in Swiss literature, saying that the 1970s saw Swiss writers beginning to deconstruct the image of their country as an idyll that had been so proudly propagated during the 40s and 50s.

Damit wird ein eindeutiges Urteil über die kapitalistische Gesellschaft gesprochen: Sie erscheint als unfähig, die gesellschaftlichen und menschlichen Probleme Einzelner wie auch ganzer Gruppen zu lösen.⁴¹²

This is an apposite comment on the works analysed here. The publication of *The Limits to Growth* in 1972 clarified for the world what unimpeded increase in consumption and growth of populations and economies would mean in ecological terms. This set the environmentalists at odds with the capitalists even though the welfare of all is normally claimed by both sides as their goal. The future of life, in the broadest sense, depends on a limiting of the exploitation of resources. Any such act of restriction would, in short, spell stagnation for many economies. In the works looked at, this dilemma is probably enunciated most clearly in *Spätholz*, in the argument between Rocco Canonica and the foreman at the dam. The former cannot see why humans should strive for more than they need while the latter argues that progress is inevitable. Concisely encapsulating the impasse between environmentalists and capitalists, the two come to no conclusion. Sterchi's *Knuchel* holds the same argument within himself. This leaves him literally scarred since the anxiety provoked by the dilemma causes him to scratch persistently at his neck. The threat posed by capitalist

⁴¹² Jürg Weibel, 'Die Zerstörung der Idylle hat begonnen. Zu neuen Tendenzen in der Schweizer Literatur', *Drehpunkt*, Nr. 39, June 1978, p. 33

exploitation of the environment is clearly linked to bodily harm in both Leutenegger's and Hohler's work too. The theme of maiming recurs in Leutenegger's work and is always a result, whether direct or indirect, of capitalism. This is clearly the case in Hohler's work, from the revengeful elephants in the desert, in his short narrative *Die Karawane*, to the mining that is partly to blame for the landslide in *Die Steinflut*, as Antje Weber points out. "Es geht am Beispiel des unsachgemäßen Schieferbaus, um Naturkatastrophen und ihren Zusammenhang mit wirtschaftlichen Interessen."⁴¹³ Hohler interestingly returns frequently to Zurich as a locus for his narratives, which becomes a symbol for capitalism. The link between capitalism and the Limmat city is clearly identifiable in the short story *Das Halstuch*:

Wie eine Krake sitzt diese Stadt am unteren See-Ende, eine Krake, deren Fangarme in die ganze Welt hinaus reichen, sie gibt und sie nimmt, und mit dem Geld, das sie nimmt, nimmt sie auch die Unruhe, die Zufriedenheit, die Ungleichheit, den Unmut der Welt zurück nach Zürich, und dann gehen Erschütterungen durch die Stadt, plötzlich liegt die Bahnhofstrasse in Scherben und niemand kann es erklären in diesem schönen und lebenslustigen und durch und durch gesunden Gemeinwesen mit den vielen Tulpenbeeten des Gartenbauamtes.

Malcolm Pender highlights the reference to Conrad Ferdinand Meyer's poem *Römische Fontäne*, pointing out that the key difference is that while the nineteenth-century fountain takes and gives water – a fundamental element of life – Hohler's twentieth-century city deals solely in money.⁴¹⁴ In the ecological texts investigated earlier, Zurich reappears in this role of a hotbed of capitalism and consequently reaps an apocalyptic harvest. The city is the sole target of the animal uprising in the short story *Die Rückeroberung*, and the narrator is unable to explain why. The reader has an inkling, and this is confirmed in the author's subsequent

⁴¹³ Antje Weber, 'Der Chronist des Alpen-Alps. Immer wieder macht der Schweizer Autor und Kabarettist Franz Hohler Katastrophen zum Thema – auch im neuesten Buch', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 12.11.98

⁴¹⁴ Pender, 'Franz Hohler und die Zerstörung der Idylle', in *La Suisse – une Idylle? Die Schweiz – eine Idylle?*, p. 293

novel, where the natural environment once again rises up only against Zurich and the connections between the erupting volcano and the consumerist society are made more clearly. We can therefore extrapolate Weibel's observation to include the ecological literature of both subsequent decades as well.

The defensive response to the greedy rape of the natural resources tends to come from the environment itself. This is perceptible throughout this eco-canon, from the animism of Hohler's natural environment, which actively fires rocks and avalanches, breathes, and spews lava, to the less direct resistance of Blösch's unsplittable carcass. If ecological disaster is to occur then some facet of the natural environment will naturally be involved, whether it be rising sea levels, a collapse in biodiversity or a negative spiral of productivity. In this respect, the notion of the natural environment as a critical actant is plausible even if these are imaginative works. There is a subtle modulation of these fictional natural reactions, however, between the different works. While the environment in the works by Kauer and Hohler contradicts conventional wisdom in that it is active, the environment offers only indirect resistance in Sterchi's novel. Frisch's text is more extreme and avoids any hint of anthropomorphism at all. The natural environment impassively surrounds Herr Geiser and exacerbates the old man's isolation. In an apparent paradox, the disasters of Hohler and Kauer contain an element of hope. This is perceptible in the attitude of Hohler's narrators who often revel in the power of nature and thereby present it positively. This perspective, coupled with the fact that nature is so often victorious, commonly draws the reader into collusion with essentially anti-anthropic sentiments. Kauer's novel also draws the reader into a feeling of justified bloodshed. By focalising the whole text almost completely from Rocco's perspective, the reader is drawn into his mind and encouraged to share his opinion. As Jürgen Barkhoff says: "Kauer creates little or no distance from his protagonist but draws the reader into his story and its value judgements."⁴¹⁵ When the old farmer is mistreated and when his warnings

⁴¹⁵ Barkhoff, 'Green Thought in Modern Swiss Literature', in *Green Thought in German Literature*, p. 231

are shown no respect, the reader is eager to see him vindicated, and thus despite Rocco's death, the landslide fulfils our desire for poetic justice. Frisch's narrative, while less dramatic, also deals with "der andauernden Allmacht der Natur über die moderne Zivilisation."⁴¹⁶ The victory of nature in *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* is that it is not one. Herr Geiser's struggle to maintain control over both his mental and physical environments eventually results in an eschatological realisation: that he will die as will mankind, and the natural world will continue existing without them.

The challenges made by the natural environment to humankind often contain an apocalyptic tone. This would appear to contradict the rejection of conventional religion, which is another feature of these works. However, rather than buying into a belief-system it appears that these writers tap into a rich vein of imagery and instead of undermining their cause, their appropriation of the apocalyptic discourse might be better considered to be a rewriting of it. Divine retribution is replaced with ecological retribution. This is evident in Leutenegger's *Lebewohl, Gute Reise*, for example, where the environment replaces the gods. This sort of allusion is significant in an increasingly secular society, where rationalisation has diminished belief in the supernatural and caused an arrogant faith in technology and human knowledge. The word "sin" has become archaic, and any check religion may have had on morals is now negligible. Thus a Zwingli-influenced society, that once concealed honey in biscuits because honey was regarded as a luxury and therefore a sinful excess, is now caused no moral compunction by the notion of greed. Since unbridled capitalism means there is a strong likelihood of ecological problems occurring, it is indeed appropriate that apocalyptic discourse, with its overtones of sins being paid for, should be used in ecological writing.

These eco-apocalypses manifest themselves most frequently as landslides. Landslides and avalanches are part of everyday reality in Switzerland. The fact that 60% of the country is uninhabitable, because it is too mountainous, indicates the great extent to which the Swiss live

⁴¹⁶ Pender, 'Franz Hofer und die Zerstörung der Idylle', p. 290

among mountains. Their existence is consequently demarcated by the Alps and their attendant dangers. With the industrial age came a huge growth in the demand for firewood to power the steam engines of the Ruhr valley. The resultant denuding of the Alpine slopes had the direct consequence of destabilising the hillsides and thereby increasing the number of landslips. *Die Steinflut* is based on one of the most dramatic disasters to occur during this period. In Kauer's novel, the neglect of the "Schutzwald" and the construction of the dam are to blame, and although it is set a century after the landslide at Elm, the human motives of exploitation remain the root cause behind the catastrophe. Gertrud Leutenegger's works include landslides too. Although they play a less significant role in her narratives, they nevertheless function as an example, among others, of the effect of human abuse of natural resources. Frisch's narrative also revolves around a landslide. This one is, however, arbitrary. The heavy rains that cause it are not connected to any human activity. This chimes with the general tone of the work, which expresses the indifference of the natural world to humans. The narrative stance reflects this relationship, or lack of one, by establishing a distance between reader and protagonist that mirrors the distance between the protagonist and the environment. Rendered little more than a narratorial game, Herr Geiser's fictionality is drawn to our attention. In this way the suspension of disbelief is destroyed and the reader's sympathy for the old man is diminished. Although the weapon in nature's arsenal that really threatens Herr Geiser (as well as mankind) is time, the landslide functions as a warning shot and is the catalyst for Herr Geiser's reflections. Thus, by being used by writers in a range of related functions, the landslide may be considered as a key recurrent ecological motif in recent Swiss literature.

The theme of landslides helps to locate the narratives in the identifiable mountainous environment of Switzerland and, in this way, points to the relationship between reality and fiction. Evidence of this relationship can also be found in the writers' own experiences. The slaughterhouse world has a correlation with Sterchi's experiences in his parents' butcher's shop. Max Frisch occupied an old farmhouse in Herr Geiser's village. Gertrud Leutenegger

has experienced linguistic exile, having lived in hillside villages in all the different language zones of Switzerland. Walther Kauer was for a time a resident of the rural and mountainous canton of the Grisons. As a hiker and climber Franz Hohler has an intimate knowledge of the Alps and his many depictions of Zurich are coloured by his experience as a resident of the city. So we can see that this group of authors deal with their own habitats in the texts examined in this thesis. As such, the texts are narratives of dwelling. Emphasising this notion, the house proves to be a theme in these works, recurring as a central hub around which the rest of the work turns.

Rocco Canonica's house is the locus of the narration and is the force driving the narrative in that Rocco's flights of memory are provoked by that which surrounds him in his home. The signs of impending doom are registered by the house, through shaking timbers and cracking walls. This ties the fate of the house to the fate of the protagonist, since Rocco is also aware of the coming disaster. In this way, their stories are united and so the narrative demonstrates a Heideggerian sense of dwelling. While the narrator draws attention to the similarity of the tree to a diary, Rocco's home plays an equally significant role in recording his life, in that it bears witness, through marks on the walls, to the great events of Rocco's life. The beams of the house are scorched black by the fire in which he lost his parents and the fight, which drove his son to leave, is written on a wall in the form of a dent. The house plays an equally important role in Leutenegger's *Kontinent*, albeit more cryptically. The canal house at the bottom of the village is associated with the narrator's initial sense of alienation and the move to the repainted observatory, seemingly her former home, represents her assimilation into the village community. Once again physical and social environments are shown to be intertwined. In Hohler's *Die Steinflut*, the home is again the primary locus of narration and the centre of the characters' lives. Katharina's attachment to her home increases the tragic element of the landslide and the importance of home for her is signalled by it being the subject of the first sentence. A threat to the home underlines the menace of the imminent

volcano in *Der neue Berg*, because a tremor that shakes his house is one of the first hints Roland Steinmann receives suggesting that all is not well. The Knuchels' house in *Blösch* also provides ominous signs. Ambrosio falls asleep to an unsettling banging sound, which makes a repeated appearance in the text. It transpires that the Knuchel children bang their heads off the wall as they fall asleep. Thus the novel is punctuated by these percussive reminders of the disturbed situation in the Knuchel home. The house is also of central significance in *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*. Herr Geiser's dwelling becomes his wisdom when he pins his entire knowledge to the walls of his home. The futility of this in the impervious face of nature is first subtly signalled by his failure to construct a pagoda from crisp-bread and is confirmed when a gust of wind blows all the notes off the walls. Once again, this psychological defeat is coupled to a physical one as Herr Geiser slowly loses his mind and his house, which is constructed on steep slopes, is menaced by the prospect of a landslide. In all the texts we can identify a focus on home that goes beyond a superficial cursory mention. Home takes on a variety of different meanings, but there is a construction of links between the physical and mental notions of home that is common to all the narratives. These works express the psychology of dwelling and are therefore deeply ecological in the true sense of the ancient Greek etymology.

The salient house motif ties these works into a perceived Swiss literary tradition.⁴¹⁷ According to Malcolm Pender: "The house has long been regarded in the Swiss ethos as the national structure which protects and demarcates."⁴¹⁸ This central position of the house is in part due to the influence of Heinrich Pestalozzi and Jeremias Gotthelf. Pestalozzi sees the home as the cell of family life that enables development of the individual. Shortly before the founding of the modern Swiss state in 1848 in a much-quoted speech made in Chur, Gotthelf expanded the relevance of the home-life to the country as a whole. Illustrating just how

⁴¹⁷ See: Martin Kraft, *Schweizerhaus. Das Haus-Motiv im Deutschschweizer Roman des 20. Jahrhunderts*, (Bern and Frankfurt am Main: Herber Lang, 1971), pp 8-9

⁴¹⁸ Pender, 'The Motif of the House in Recent German-Swiss Fiction', p. 687

influential these comments were, Pender highlights the prominence of the house motif in works by Gottfried Keller, Robert Walser, Albin Zollinger and Max Frisch. He also charts the development of the motif as literature became increasingly critical of society in the 1960s and 1970s, with works by Bichsel and Nizon beginning to deconstruct the myth.⁴¹⁹ Although the authors whose work is the subject of this thesis are not as radical as their contemporaries, Nizon and Bichsel, they nevertheless clearly draw on the rich tradition while simultaneously throwing new light onto the subject. These authors oppose the suggestion that Bichsel makes in *Eigentlich möchte Frau Blum den Milchmann kennenlernen* (1964) that literature has no correlation with reality and that it is therefore inappropriate to use a tangible and material image such as a house as a defining feature of a nation's literature.⁴²⁰ They offer instead a concept of literature as capable of expressing a part of the reality of what to be at home means. This is based on the relation of text to location and also the idea that being in the world and being at home are simultaneously psychological as well as physical phenomena that do not exist in isolation. In the works that have been investigated, the central place of the house, with its attendant Swiss implications, denotes the emphasis placed on dwelling. Furthermore, because the symbol of the house is heavily loaded in Swiss literature, the cracks in the beams and the shuddering floors have the capacity to suggest that ecological crisis threatens more than just the fictional world depicted.

7.0.2 Narrative techniques

These five authors employ contrasting narrative strategies in order to express their differing ecological perspectives. These strategies are crucial to the success of the texts and are fundamentally linked to the ecological implications of the narratives, as we have seen in the previous individual discussions of the works. Although the main investigations deal in depth

⁴¹⁹ See: Pender, 'The Motif of the House in Recent German-Swiss Fiction', pp 687-697

⁴²⁰ See: Peter Bichsel, *Eigentlich möchte Frau Blum den Milchmann kennenlernen*, (Olten und Freiburg in Breisgau: Walter, 1987), p. 7

with the significant elements of these ecological voices, it is worth drawing together and considering comparatively the major aspects of the different approaches.

The influence of the environment on the construction of the texts is evident in the work of all the writers discussed here. Kauer's construction, which is based around the old farmer's tree, helps to emphasise the interconnections between his protagonist's life, environment and story. The arbitrary and adventure-defying construction of Frisch's text embodies how the natural environment does not conceptualise like humans and the inconsequentiality of humans and human narratives in the broader perspective of geological time. The salient dichotomy in Sterchi's *Blösch* highlights the differences between the two scenes of the novel and encapsulates the psychological impact of the different environments of village and industrialised slaughterhouse on both men and beasts. In *Kontinent*, Gertrud Leutenegger sets the reader free in a dark forest of symbols, to which he/she slowly becomes accustomed, just as the narrator becomes accustomed to her unfamiliar environment. The psychological reality of environmental alienation is thus recreated for the reader. Franz Hohler's texts show the least textual similarity to the environment. His narratives are firmly grounded in his experience as a storyteller and consequently do not formally deviate dramatically from narrative norms. In the denouements of *Der neue Berg* and *Die Steinflut* we can, however, perceive an attempt to approximate in language the effect of the eruption of the volcano in the former and the impact of the landslide in the latter. There are therefore identifiable parallels between textual construction and environment.

Franz Hohler's adherence to well-known forms does not prevent his texts from bearing an ecological message. Instead, his anecdotal style means his stories make a realistic impression, in the sense that, in form, they are like the tales that people tell every day. This kind of realistic narration not only facilitates the reception of Hohler's work but also could be interpreted as indicating that there is a natural way of telling stories. Rather than proving

human aloofness from the natural world, this idea would suggest that narrative is simply a facet of our species, a function of being human, like birdsong to a bird.

The fact that literature in its modern form owes much to the Enlightenment seems to contradict the content of these texts, which often challenge the Enlightenment by drawing attention to its problematic legacy. All of the authors, however, work some form of disclaimer into their narrative strategies, illustrating the constraints and shortcomings of literature. This is evident in *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* from the playful distance between the narrative perspective and the narrated world that is created by the presence of the authorial narrator. The tale becomes a game or a pastime, analogous to Herr Geiser's crisp-bread pagoda. Furthermore the narrator's errors and uncertainties further serve to undermine the presumed authority of the narrator. Leutenegger removes the authority from her texts with her tactics, which deny hermeneutics. Her texts refute finite interpretation by presenting the reader with opaque images and by slipping from one narrative level to another. Although they hold a position, which is often similar to that of an omniscient narrator, Hohler's narrators, as we have seen, often openly draw attention to the fact that they are not. Hohler's "Spiel mit offenen Karten"⁴²¹ permits his narrators a degree of integrity by accepting fallibility and fictionality.

While Hohler may adhere to certain conventions, his parables are not totally normal because they refuse to give an answer. The alteration of norms constitutes one of the key features of the ecological voice in this representative body of recent German-Swiss literature. Sterchi's novel has been called the last *Bauernroman*, because his coupling of the two dichotomous scenes hails the end of the notion of a self-contained rural world. By this narrative technique, Sterchi is also able to highlight the dire consequences of the industrialisation of farming and of the abattoir. Leutenegger's refusal to classify her work represents a rejection of restrictive structures and expectations. *Lebewohl, Gute Reise*, a

⁴²¹ Liston, 'Die Wirklichkeit des Traums', p. 1

pastiche of styles and stories, is a paradigm for her revisionist bent. The concept of *Kontinent* as a modified *Bildungsroman* also illustrates how the author innovates with old forms. Frisch's montage technique functions as a way of reducing the authorial presence, and the contrasting information in the excerpts strengthen the attack on narrative authority.

Thus these texts provocatively undermine notions of authority, questioning the human capacity to fully comprehend our lot. This doubting standpoint enables a deconstruction of the myth of humankind's separateness from the natural world, a belief that relies on the idea that our understanding places us superior to nature. With part of the argument resting on the premiss that humans are fallible, there is an inherent contradiction within the majority of these texts in that they themselves provide solutions. They are at risk of becoming authoritative in undermining authority. A rejection of authority, however, is only part of the impact of these works. Repositioning the human voice as part of a greater chorus, this Swiss eco-canon offers alternative points of view, from the ecological awareness of Rocco Canonica to Knuchel's biocentric attitude. From Franz Hohler's "Muthasen" and Gertrud Leutenegger's metanoic quinces, we can see that this group of Swiss authors employs diverse methods in their attempts to bridge the nature/culture divide and to find an ecological voice.

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