

Letras Hispanas

Volume 13, 2017

SPECIAL SECTION: Ecocrítica ibérica contemporánea y nuevos materialismos

TITLE: “The Return to Earth” in the Anthropocene: (E)colonization in Marlen Haushofer and Jesús Carrasco

EDITOR: Heike Scharm

E-MAIL: heikescharm@usf.edu

AFFILIATION: University of South Florida; Department of World Languages; 4202 East Fowler Avenue; Tampa, FL 33620

ABSTRACT: This essay offers a transnational reading of *Die Wand* (Marlen Haushofer, Austria, 1963) and *La tierra que pisamos* (Jesús Carrasco, Spain, 2016) with the objective of getting insight to the evolution of ecofiction over the past fifty years. The focus of this study will be the attempt to show a consistent line of criticism of what anthropologists and geologists are calling the era of the *Anthropocene*, a concept and term that promotes a trans- and post-national conception of space, the problematizing of a planet divided by manmade borders, a renewed focus on an otherness beyond the human species, as well as the possibility of revisiting postcolonial critiques of power structures affecting all ecosystems beyond human cultures. Both authors draw attention to the transcorporeality of Worldnature and the need to deconstruct Western dualist thinking by dismantling binary oppositions, such as gender (masculine versus feminine) and species (animal versus plants). While both novels reveal the ills of a modernity built upon the utopia of infinite progress by revealing the dystopia it produces, we can also observe how ecofiction written today denounces much more directly the horrors of environmental destruction and of human and non-human exploitation, and how its focus has shifted from the need for individual liberation and reintegration into Worldnature towards a broader, community-based ecological way of thought.

KEYWORDS: Ecological Thought, Anthropocene, Transnational Ecofiction, Transcorporeality, Eco-pastoral Utopia

RESUMEN: Este ensayo propone una lectura transnacional de las novelas *Die Wand* (Marlen Haushofer, Austria, 1963) y *La tierra que pisamos* (Jesús Carrasco, España, 2016). El objetivo radica en arrojar luz sobre la evolución de la ecoficción durante los últimos 50 años. Se pretende mostrar una progresión consistente en cuanto a la crítica de lo que antropólogos y geólogos consideran la era del antropoceno. Como respuesta a los males de una modernidad desenfrenada, ambas obras promueven una concepción trans y posnacional del espacio, rechazan una visión planetaria que divide el mundo según fronteras artificiales, expanden el concepto de otredad más allá de la especie humana, y exhiben un renovado interés en críticas poscoloniales, específicamente en cómo actitudes y prácticas imperialistas siguen afectando a todos los ecosistemas. Tanto Haushofer como Carrasco llaman la atención sobre la trans-corporalidad del mundo y la necesidad de deconstruir un pensamiento occidental edificado sobre una visión dualista. Además, se observa un cambio de enfoque, del enfoque en la liberación individual (de los confines establecidos por la cultura) y reintegración (en un mundo natural), hacia un pensamiento ecológico más expansivo, incluyente y comunal.

PALABRAS CLAVE: pensamiento ecológico, antropoceno, ecoficción transnacional, transcorporealidad, utopía eco-pastoral

BIOGRAPHY: Heike Scharm is Associate Professor of Spanish and Transatlantic Literature and Culture at the University of South Florida. She is the author of *El tiempo y el ser en Javier Marías. El ciclo de Oxford a la luz de Bergson y Heidegger* (Rodopi 2013) and edited a volume on *Postnational Perspectives of Hispanic Literature* (University Press of Florida 2017). Her ongoing research focuses on ecofiction and film, ecological thought, and comparative approaches (Europe and the Americas).

“The Return to Earth” in the Anthropocene: (E)colonization in Marlen Haushofer and Jesús Carrasco

Heike Scharm, University of South Florida

This essay offers an ecocritical reading of two novels, *Die Wand* (1963), by the Austrian writer Marlen Haushofer, and the second novel by the Spanish writer Jesús Carrasco, *La tierra que pisamos* (2016). By establishing connections between both works, we can recognize important similarities and analogies, all of which allow us to get insight into the evolution of ecofiction over the past fifty years. The focus of this study will be the attempt to show a consistent line of criticism of what anthropologists and geologists are calling the era of the *Anthropocene*,¹ a concept and term that promotes a trans- and/or post-national conception of space, the problematizing of a planet divided by manmade borders, a renewed focus on the encounter with an *Other* that encompasses an otherness beyond the human species, as well as the possibility of revisiting postcolonial critiques of power structures affecting all ecosystems beyond human cultures. In terms of its utility for contemporary literary criticism, the Anthropocene solicits similar responses from across the sciences and the humanities, mostly and primarily the call for an adjustment in scientific, political, economic, and military approaches (Scranton 19), based on the recognition that ecosystems (including, species, cultures, and nations) do not exist in isolation, but exert a profound effect on one another. This view, which some critics refer to as the interconnectivity or transcorporeality² of our planet (Iovino 55), has also begun to play an important role in contemporary

fiction across the world. This new genre of ecofiction (whether intended or not by its authors) bears witness to the emergence of an ecological consciousness that responds to the Anthropocene with a critical urgency.

Both novels discussed in this essay offer different examples of what Émilie Hache and Bruno Latour, among others, have called a “return to earth” in the era of the Anthropocene. The metaphorical “return” not only requires a change in thought (*Weltanschauung*) concerning nature/the Other, but also requires a change in how the subject perceives itself in relation to the Other. Once the main characters adopt a transcorporeal view of the world, they rescind their position of exceptionality and begin the process of integration (the “return”) as de-centered subjects. The acceptance of transcorporeality and the subsequent integration into nature necessarily require the deconstruction of Western dualist thinking. Both Haushofer and Carrasco provide examples of how vertical and hierarchical views based on binary oppositions dissolve into a horizontal and transcorporeal understanding of the world and a de-centering of the self. Whereas Carrasco’s first novel *Intemperie* (2013) primarily focused on a traditional postcolonial critique of civilization (culture) and barbarism (nature), *Die Wand* and *La tierra* further expand the deconstruction process by addressing and dismantling all binary oppositions, including those of gender (masculine versus feminine) and species (human versus nonhuman).

Transnational Ecofiction as a Call for an Ecological Consciousness

Although *Die Wand* is Marlen Haushofer's best-known work of fiction and has been translated into eighteen languages, readers with a non-German language background are usually not familiar with her work. The first translation into Spanish, by Genoveva Dietrich (*El muro*, Siruela 1995), does not appear until more than three decades after the first Austrian edition. While Julian Pölsler's successful cinematographic adaptation (*Die Wand* 2012) did help to promote the novel, it is still relatively unknown on the mainstream international market. Jesús Carrasco, a young upcoming writer from Badajoz, is also still somewhat unknown within and beyond Spain, although his highly praised first novel *Intemperie* (2013) has sold the rights to be translated into nineteen languages and has received important literary awards. Equally, a predominantly European readership has already awarded his second novel *La tierra* (2016) several literary prizes. Nevertheless, due to the recent publication date of *La Tierra* and Haushofer's continued inconspicuous presence outside of academia, it might be useful to include at least a brief summary of each of the two novels.

Die Wand could be read almost as a prelude to Carrasco's novels, especially *La tierra*, since it reflects a similar ecological consciousness, introduces analogous themes, and even approaches them from the same narrative perspective. Both novels are written in the form of diaries by middle-aged women, both representatives of Western culture who find themselves isolated in a hostile nature setting, forced to learn to survive separated from their own civilization. In *Die Wand*, the nameless woman from the city accepts the invitation of her friends to spend the weekend at their cabin in the Austrian Alps. The first evening, the couple decides to drive down to the village to run some errands, while she stays behind. The next morning, she realizes that her friends never returned to the cabin.

As she heads towards the village to check on them, she hits an invisible wall. She soon realizes that she is completely cut off from civilization and has to learn to survive, to collect provisions, prepare for the winter, and to care for her animals: a dog, a cat, a cow, and later the bull the cow gives birth to. She moves between the cabin in the Alps and a hunting cabin higher up in the mountains, according to the seasons. While she slowly adapts to her surroundings, she begins to write, well aware that nobody will ever read her thoughts. First, she annotates events in a calendar, mostly to keep track of time and to maintain her humanity in complete isolation from other human beings. After more than a year passes, she finally encounters another survivor. However, as she approaches her cabin, she sees the man killing her animals with an axe and shoots him dead. This traumatic event propels her to start writing a diary. After two years, her last diary entry describes her final transformation and her integration into nature, or, her "return to earth."

Die Wand was published during the infancy of ecological thought, at a time of nascent but quickly growing ecological consciousness in the West, in part due to the diffusion of the iconic earth images taken by Apollo 8. The first celebration of Earth Day in 1970 marks a slow but definite shift from egocentrism to ecocentrism. Haushofer's novel's reception was quite positive, although critics had differing views when attempting to define the novel. Most read it as a Robinsonade, while others detected a radical criticism of Western civilization; some called it a utopia, others classified it as dystopian fiction, while others still understood the novel as a piece of feminist literature that criticizes patriarchal societies and celebrates women's liberation. None of these descriptions contradict or exclude one another, of course. Interestingly enough, each and all of these classifications also apply to Jesús Carrasco's novels *Intemperie* and *La tierra*.

Carrasco has been classified as a Spanish neo-ruralist writer following in the footsteps of authors such as Miguel Delibes.

However, there are marked differences. Written from a third-person perspective, his first novel narrates the coming of age of a young boy who runs away from domestic abuse in an unspecified region shaped by a hot and dry climate. The absence of names of characters or places further highlights the intentional omission of any national or cultural specificity. The boy is simply referred to as “niño,” his father as “padre,” the shepherd as the “cabrero,” and the villagers according to their position or profession. The setting of the novel, therefore, takes on the characteristics of a bioregion³ rather than the particularities of a specific identifiable Spanish rural area, as may be the case in Delibes’ novels. As the boy escapes the violence of the villagers (the representatives of civilization), he finds himself exposed to the unforgiving elements of what appears a post-apocalyptic nature setting. When he is about to die from a heatstroke, an old shepherd (the representative of the uncivilized barbarian) rescues him and teaches him how to adapt and to survive. After renouncing all knowledge he had acquired in the village, including social conventions and even verbal communication, the boy begins to incorporate himself into the affective community of the herd. The confrontation between civilization and barbarism comes to a final climax when the villagers find the shepherd, beat him unconscious, destroy his provisions, and kill most of his goats while the boy goes into hiding. After the shepherd’s death, the boy assumes the responsibility of the herd and accepts a new life subordinated to nature. His final step of transformation exemplifies de Vries’ summary of deep ecology, which he largely bases on Kay Milton: the adaptation of a radical environmental lifestyle that implies an identification with nature and a life lived in accordance with the rhythm of nature (de Vries 74-75).

Jesús Carrasco’s second novel, *La tierra*, could be read as a continuation of the author’s ecological reflections on the role of mankind in the Anthropocene. An example of alternative history, *La tierra* offers a much more

direct criticism of global capitalism than his first novel, and also than earlier works of eco-fiction, such as *Die Wand*. The novel takes place in Spain at the beginning of the twentieth century during a fictional occupation and colonization of the Iberian peninsula by an unspecified Germanic empire. Through actual and imagined conversations between the female protagonist, landowner Eva Holman (the representative of civilization), and the indigenous Spaniard Leva (the barbarian), *La tierra* reconstructs two perspectives—the colonizer’s and the colonized—in an effort to humanize the Other by creating affective ties between them. Carrasco’s main character lives on her farm, surrounded by walls, with her abusive and bedridden ex-military husband until a stranger appears. The male intruder spends his days sitting on her grounds like an animal, digging his hands deep into the soil. He neither speaks nor asks for anything. The female narrator’s attitude towards the invader begins to change. Her initial fear and rejection slowly turn to curiosity and, finally, empathy. Through her diary, intertwined with brief verbal and mostly non-verbal exchanges between the colonizer and the colonized, she begins to reconstruct Leva’s life story in her imagination, until she becomes painfully aware of her own culture’s central role in the destruction of his village and the death of his family members.

Just like *Die Wand*, *La tierra* is an intimate first-person account, a kind of ecological Bildungsroman. Eva, Carrasco’s female narrator, bears a striking resemblance to Haushofer’s main character, even down to small details. Both replace human male companionship with that of a dog. Eva’s dog’s name is Kaiser (German for *emperor*), whereas Haushofer had initially chosen the name Maxi (short for Maximilian, the Roman emperor) before later changing it to Luchs (*lynx*). In both novels, the arrival of a male intruder initiates the writing process and also the narrators’ final profound transformation. Both women initially speak for the northern, colonizing force that documents its advances

and setbacks while attempting to dominate/cultivate the “virgin” lands it intends to “civilize.”

The Anthropocene, from the Utopia of Modernity to a Planetary Dystopia

Ecofiction, as a genre, may be understood as a reaction to the age of the Anthropocene and also as a response to “the dynamics of an imperialistically motivated globalization” (Heise 7). A product of Western modernity driven by the desire for progress and unlimited economic profit, these imperialistic attitudes towards nature presuppose a sovereign ownership over the planet’s natural resources. In the age of the Anthropocene, the ensuing praxis of (neo)capitalist colonization and exploitation not only interferes with and reshapes the planet, but also sustains the dominant Western power structures by further legitimizing man’s role as the earth’s colonizer.⁴ The process of colonization is justified by a perceived right and even duty to “maîtriser la nature” (Latour 31), and by the conviction that human intervention can civilize that which is “natural,” meaning barbaric, and modernize that which is underdeveloped. *Die Wand* and *La tierra* provide ample examples that reflect the attitude that shapes the Anthropocene, and which relies on a colonizer’s perceived superiority over nature. Therefore, the struggle against nature, and its subsequent attempts at domination, initially presents itself in both works as a utopian project of Western modernity, understood as progress and as the expansion of a high-functioning civilization, before finally revealing itself as a dystopian self-destructive reality.

In *La tierra*, the utopia of the Anthropocene is forcefully maintained through colonial myths that feed on nineteenth-century pastoral elements. The utopia of progress only exists in the imaginary of the colonizers,

even before leaving their homeland. From the first lines of the novel, the colonial myth of the virgin land, pure, lush, and fertile, reflects the age of the Anthropocene, since it is the colonizer who sees herself not as a pioneer who discovers Eden, but as the creator of a perfected nature yet to be constructed in the new colonies:

Veníamos a delinear un jardín, a plantar rosas, crisantemos y hasta orquídeas, aquí donde sólo había guijarros. A este breñal le faltaban nuestras fragancias. No había prados, ni los hay, terca tierra, pero nosotros reparamos su mala suerte, su ancestral barbarie, a base de frondosos setos, bien cortados, bien alineados, bien tupidos. (*La tierra* 89)

The novel plays upon the continuous contrasts and contradictions between the myth of the colonizers and the dystopian reality they end up creating, an obvious metaphor for the economic—rather than ecological—rationality tied to neoliberal globalization: the colonizing empire sets out to cut down forests, to exploit the earth’s resources, to slaughter the natives like animals, or to slowly starve and work them to death in labor camps before systematically burying them in mass graves, all with precise calculations to minimize investment and to maximize profit. At the same time, the empire’s officials continue to propagate the colonizers’ discourse of progress and universal well-being (occupation and oppression are called “pacification” throughout the novel), thanks to the sophisticated civilization they are bringing to the peninsula. Among them, the narrator herself lives on her isolated farm, surrounded by walls and fences, in what appears to be a harmonic relation with nature. The farm becomes a fragile micro-representation of the empire (globalization), a utopian manmade Eden, the result of the domination of nature understood as progress, and of the civilizing of the native barbaric cultures.

The arrival of the Other/barbarian at the farm further confirms the colonizer's status as the civilized, and strengthens the binary opposition between civilization and barbarism. She describes his arrival as a "sucia penetración" of her "propiedad particular," and finds his lack of speech irritating and provoking. She sees him as less than human, a stray dog covered in scars who digs for food:

Arrodillado frente al bancal, ha volteado la tierra con sus manos [...]. Tiene el mentón manchado de tierra húmeda, como si se hubiera dado un banquete con ella. Está ahí, en silencio, frente a mí, con las manos hundidas en el suelo." She contemplates him, feeds him, and asks herself "Qué sería esta gente sin nosotros. (31)

Comparing herself to this "ser anejado" confirms her own superiority as well as responsibility, a logic based on a twisted interpretation of Darwinism that serves to justify her hierarchal worldview and rationalize her own exceptionalism:

Si hemos alcanzado un lugar hegemónico en la historia ha sido porque hemos expulsado a los débiles. Una bandera tan grande como para albergar a los pueblos del mundo. Un solo Dios verdadero. Un solo rey. (55)

Being civilized, for her, means to fulfill her duty to maintain her privileged position above an inferior nature, whereas the barbarian is the one that "se deja llevar por los impulsos y la carne" (57). She sees the Other lacking in reason, his behavior as incoherent, and believes him incapable of rational speech: "alguna vez hila una frase, pero, por lo general, sólo pronuncia monosílabos" (34).

When read as a utopia of progress in the process of deconstruction, the farm takes on the function of a utopic stage, to borrow from Louis Marin, where:

the other figurability appears: the negative of contemporary social, historical reality. This latter is the absent term, as such, of the figure that refers to it. The utopic figure is a discursive object, not without reference, but with an absent referent [...]. It refers to a reality that is not said within the figure, that is not taken up in discourse as its signified. If it does so, it does so marginally, as the end point of a comparison and not of a referent. (196)

The male intruder, then, serves as the "other figurability," which "allows [...] real transformation" (196). He initiates the process of the colonizer's transformation by first affirming and then questioning a series of binary oppositions: not only those of utopia and dystopia or civilization and barbarism, but also between male and female, and, finally, between nature and humanity. The voiceless victim becomes the absent referent, the personification of the dystopic reality outside the walls surrounding the farm. This reality begins to be reconstituted within the isolated farm as a discursive object, as an imaginary loss projected into the colonizer's writing and sustained through the mourning for her own dead son. The intruder, thus, becomes the personification of negation, loss, and absence.

The Ecological Turn: From Deconstruction to Mangled Matter

The relationship between postmodernism and ecocriticism has been somewhat conflicted. Whereas some criticize postmodern deconstruction for creating a distance between literature and reality, leading to "linguistic constructionism, relativism and nihilism," others recognize important affinities between postmodern thought and ecocriticism (Opperman 36). Serpil Opperman

argues that postmodernism and ecocriticism are much more connected than one might assume. Both postmodernism and ecocriticism “endorse renewed forms of imaginative interaction with the material world, and they both search for conceptual and practical tools of emancipation of anthropocentric views.” Furthermore, ecocriticism and postmodern thought “are both characterized by their mission to find ways of dissolving the hierarchical dualisms associated with Cartesian, mechanistic thought associated with modern ideas of economic progress.” Opperman underlines their common efforts

to introduce liberation tools, to deconstruct dichotomies, to promote more sustainable lifestyles and non-anthropocentric discursive and material practices to contribute to the world’s transformation. (35-36)

Laurence Coup’s discussion on different types of postmodernism could bring some clarity as well. He points out:

we should bear in mind Charlene Spretnak’s distinction between ‘deconstructive postmodernism,’ which fosters ‘a nihilistic disintegration of all values’ and ‘ecological or reconstructive postmodernism,’ which seeks opportunities for creativity and growth. The one merely plays amidst the ruins of modernity; the other works to open up possibilities for both people and planet. (7)

Among one of the main objectives of ecocriticism, particularly of reconstructive eco-postmodernism, therefore, has been the deconstruction of dualisms and binary views, which foment the idea of human exceptionalism and justify the exploitation of nature, other humans, and animals valued as resources. Carrasco’s novel offers a representative case of how colonial myths are constructed, and how the dehumanization of the Other shapes and justifies the colonial mindset; but *La tierra* also

exemplifies how this process of deconstruction ultimately leads to the colonizer’s transformation and reintegration into a broader, non-hierarchical planetary community.

Once the female protagonist realizes that the voiceless intruder (*homo alalus*) could have a story to tell, the encounter with the Other opens a discursive space, in which the duality of civilization-barbarism begins to dissolve. This event offers an interesting contrast to *Die Wand*. Whereas Haushofer’s protagonist’s writing activities stress the divide between nature and culture, and therefore require her to cease writing in order to complete her transformation, Carrasco’s main character only achieves her transformation into a decentralized subject through her writing, specifically through her writing the Other. In *La tierra*, as the encounter with the Other takes place, spoken language (the colonizer) and muteness (the Urmensch) are the defining properties of the human and the non-human. Thus, language becomes “the identifying characteristic of the human,” and by “identifying [her]self with language, the speaking [wo]man places [her] own muteness outside of [her]self, as already and not yet human” (Agamben 34-5). The written language, however, the diary through which her own voice is silenced and the intruder is given a voice, allows for the reversal of language and muteness, and thus allows for language to “function as a bridge that passes from the animal to the human” (35). In *Die Wand* the writing process emphasizes the binary opposition between nature and culture. In the end, Haushofer’s protagonist, therefore, must abandon her diary and chooses contemplation within nature and the physical proximity of wildlife over her isolated writing activities. Carrasco’s character’s diary, on the other hand, becomes what one may call an act of ecologization, as it documents the transformation of colonial discourse into ecological discourse, which implies the dissolution of the binary opposition of culture and nature through the dissolution of the binary opposition of language and muteness. As she writes

the Other, she becomes the Other by placing her own muteness outside herself, as Agamben would say. At the same time, her focus shifts from existence defined as autonomous and separated from its surroundings, towards an existence defined as coexistence. For Timothy Morton, one of the defining characteristics of ecological thought is the understanding that “existence is profoundly about coexistence,” and that we “are each others’ environment” (4). Furthermore, Morton describes the thinking of the ecological thought as a process of fomenting an “opening, questioning mode” of thinking (8).

In *La tierra*, the encounter with the Other is the defining moment when the colonizer begins to think and write ecologically, meaning, not about the Other, but opening herself up towards the Other in the aforementioned “opening, questioning mode.” Morton’s concept of the strange stranger as an Other, based on Derrida’s *arrivant*, to whom we owe hospitality and who resides “at the limit of our imagination” (17), is a fitting description of the intruder, as his initial muteness takes over as an imagined narrative voice, and as the original locus of enunciation (the centralized subject) recognizes her own muteness as displaced into the Other. As she becomes aware of their interconnectedness, the intruder’s story begins to give meaning to his utterances and to what at first appeared mere animalistic or senseless gestures (his muteness). Through her opening towards him and writing him, the Other ceases to be the barbarian and the colonial myth begins to shatter. She describes this process of sense-making like a sudden invasion of fragments of his horror (42), until she realizes:

Todo lo que hasta entonces me parecía arbitrario e inconexo en el hombre del huerto se va ordenando en mi mente [...]. No permanece tumbado, con el pecho y la cara pegados al suelo, porque sí. Hay un sentido en esta pauta que le lleva a pasar el día bajo la sombra de la encina o entre los bancos. (66)

It is through the own colonizer’s perspective that the eco-pastoral utopia slowly reveals itself as a dystopian setting, as she uses her diary to document her process of transformation, from the colonizer into a de-centered, neutral, and interconnected subject. After the narrator confirms and insists on hierarchical dualisms following the encounter with the Other, her own writing slowly proceeds to deconstruct and dissolve them. However, more than a simple reversal of colonizer and colonized, *La tierra* seeks to broaden the reader’s ecological consciousness beyond the denouncement of the ills of colonization by providing a planetary perspective of the consequences of systematic exploitation supposedly justified by an economic rationality and ideology tied to economic globalization and unregulated capitalism. Therefore, the second binary opposition the novel aims to dissolve is that of the human and non-human. Reminiscent of Agamben’s anthropological machine discussed in his essay *The Open*,⁵ the Other is dehumanized and reduced to the status of *Homo alalus*, a non-speaking man or animal (“Sprachloser Urmensch” 34), in order to justify the exploitation of the Other. The colonized are transported like animals in trucks heading towards slaughter and described as “un tumulto feroz, donde quien no

chilla, muerde” (52). When they finally arrive at the labor camp, many have died, and those who did not, arrive as “trozos de carne” (73).

However, the animalization of the Other, seen from the point of view of ecocriticism, has a different effect. Rather than simply subverting the dichotomy civilization-barbarism through the animalization of the Other, the novel proceeds to address—and ultimately dissolve—the binary opposition of the human and the non-human. As Grusin explains, the objective of the non-human turn is to undermine the idea of human exceptionalism,

expressed most often in the form of conceptual or rhetorical dualisms that separate the human from the nonhuman—variously conceived as animals, plants, organisms, climatic systems, ecosystems [...]. The non-human turn proposes, therefore, that the human has always coevolved, coexisted, or collaborated with the non-human—and that the human is characterized precisely by this indistinction from the nonhuman. (n.p.)

The detailed description of the natives who are exploited and slaughtered as cattle underscores not only the brutality of past and ongoing colonialism, but also of factory farming, and the silence of the exploited naked earth, once covered with forests filled with animals, which “speaks” through the silence of the prisoners who are forced to cut down the trees:

Juntos todos ellos, pero solos, caminan bajo el cielo gris hasta llegar a la parte del bosque que les ha sido asignada para empujarlo más y más lejos. Lo hacen retroceder hacia las laderas y, una vez allí, lo acechan y persiguen por torrenteras y escarpaduras hasta alcanzar, algún día, las rocas estériles en las que el mundo termina. (121)

La tierra proceeds to intertwine images of human and non-human suffering and destruction until all types of exploitation and destruction become one and the same image of horror. These images of universal suffering exemplify Diana Coole’s argument that “the difference between humans and animals, or even between sentient and non-sentient matter, is a question of degree more than of kind,” and that insisting in a difference in kind, rather than in degree, only serves to “justify humans’ instrumental appropriation of material resources” (n.p.).

The depiction of horror and suffering in Carrasco’s novel exemplifies Morton’s concept of “dark ecology,” since “they compel our compassionate coexistence to go beyond condescending pity” (16) and allow us to reframe ourselves as “part of the ecological project” (9). Therefore, when the colonizer begins to understand and relate to the intruder’s pain, the recognition of his horror further allows herself to open up and connect herself to him. Whereas, as Deleuze and Guattari would suggest, desire can function as a force of liaison, in the case of Carrasco’s novel, this force of liaison, or “force of linkage conveying a transformational tendency” (Massumi n.p.) is not desire but the pain both characters feel due to the loss of their children. In a sense, then, what allows her to finally create a connection with him, is less the rehumanization of the Other, but rather her own animalization (her being stripped of her cultural superiority and reduced, just like the intruder and all of exploited matter, to that of a being-that-suffers). As Brian Massumi explains,

animal becoming is most human. It is in becoming animal that the human recurs to what is nonhuman at the heart of what moves it. This makes it surpassingly human. Creative- relationally more-than-human. (n.p.)

Stacey Alaimo suggests that

thinking across bodies may catalyze the recognition that the environment, which is too often imagined as inert, empty space or as a resource for human use, is, in fact, a world of fleshy beings with their own needs, claims, and actions. (2)

The process of transformation initiated by the Other brings about the dissolution of the binary opposition between civilization and barbarism and between the human and non-human. However, before the deconstruction of dualisms can lead to the emergence of a transcorporeal view that initiates the subject's "return to earth," a final transformation into a de-centered and neutral subject is necessary. Therefore, the last binary that is dissolved in both novels is that of male-female.

In *La tierra*, the binary male-female, in its subsequent dissolution, becomes evident in the names of the two main characters. Eva Holman, the colonizer, and Leva, the colonized, emphasize the opposition between the feminine and the masculine. Eva, obviously, is named after the first woman created from man according to the Biblical account, whereas *hohl*, in German, signifies "empty/hollow." We could thus read her name almost as an equation of female-negation/absence-male, where the male and the female cancel each other out. The native intruder, on the other hand, is called Leva, or L-Eva. L, for logos, joined with or separated from Eva. Again, Leva represents the discursive object, the absent referent, Eva's own displaced muteness, but he also becomes the reason, the voice, the written word of Eva; his name indicates that he is as much her counterpart as he is part of her. He is the strange stranger as much as he represents Eva's own strangeness within her. In reference to Blanchot, Eugene Hill reminds:

The neutral is that uniquely suggestive mode of discourse that puts the greatest distance between itself and all questions of reference, of truth or falsity [...]. The neutral (in German, "without gender," *geschlechtslos*) evades categorization, [...] it ruptures the given world to admit the unknown, [and opens] a multiple space which could be affirmed, quite apart from all affirmation, only by a plural mode of utterance (n.p.)

Hence, by de-gendering the subject, the female narrator-protagonist is able to envision a new utopia and to dissolve the remaining binary oppositions and their attributes or values of good and bad. As the subject transforms and opens up a discursive space, Outopia, the no-place, becomes Eu-topia, a place beyond nothingness, according to Marin, where the good can be conceived, if not as a possibility then at least as a future necessity, and where contradictions may be preserved but binary oppositions dissolved.

Carrasco's degendering offers another valuable parallelism and also contrast to Haushofer's novel. While feminist readings of *The Wall* are still as widespread as they are justifiable, when we reframe the work within ecocriticism, we recognize that the question of gender itself is much more complex than a critical denouncement of patriarchal power structures or a call for women's emancipation. Rather than playing the masculine against the feminine, Haushofer's novel equally aims to deconstruct gender dualisms, and proposes a return to a more fluid conception of gender, perhaps as found in nature itself. In that sense, *Die Wand* takes on an almost prophetic tone, by raising issues and presenting viewpoints that have come to the forefront in the time period following her own. Similarly to *La tierra*, Haushofer's protagonist undergoes

a slow transformation from a colonizer to a de-centered subject willing to become part of nature, rather than to dominate it. She begins her process of transformation, her “return to earth,” by shedding her gender specificity, and by embracing herself as *geschlechtslos*, as subject without gender:

Mein Haar, das stark gewachsen war, hatte ich mit der Nagelschere kurz geschnitten [...] Mein Gesicht war mager und gebräunt und meine Schultern eckig, wie die eines halbwüchsigen Knaben [...] Die Fraulichkeit der Vierzigerjahre war von mir abgefallen, mit den Locken, dem kleinen Doppelkinn und den gerundeten Hüften. Gleichzeitig kam mir das Bewußtsein abhanden, eine Frau zu sein [...] Manchmal war ich ein Kind, das Erdbeeren suchte, dann wieder ein junger Mann, der Holz zersägte, oder, wenn ich Perle auf den mageren Knien haltend auf der Bank saß und der sinkenden Sonne nachsah, ein sehr altes, geschlechtsloses Wesen.⁶ (99-100)

Just as Eva Holman, Haushofer’s nameless narrator—now freed from her gender/cultural specificity—initiates the writing process after her encounter with a male intruder. However, in *Die Wand*, the encounter with the Other immediately leads to violence and death. Whereas Eva Holman merely considers shooting the intruder, Haushofer’s protagonist does shoot him to death the first moment she sees him. One of the main differences that explains the two women’s different reactions consists of the timing of the male arrival. Whereas Eva and Leva’s encounter takes place prior to the moment when utopia turns into dystopia, in *Die Wand*, the main character had already begun her transformation. She had managed to create her own utopia from a dystopian setting (a process in reverse of that described in *La tierra*), and accepted her place within nature. When the intruder arrives, she no longer perceives the wall as an enclosure that imprisons her, but

rather as a form of protection from her own species, which she considers at this point a hostile civilization threatening her existence. The intruder’s first act of violence consists of bludgeoning her dog and the young bull to death. His gratuitous act of violence stresses her need to protect her newfound community, and also confirms her growing aversion against her own species, of which she no longer wishes to be part. However, both encounters are central to the protagonists’ final transformation. In *La tierra*, the perceived horror suffered by the Other, once the subject is able to relate it to her own suffering, allows the protagonist to recognize herself as part of Worldnature. In *Die Wand* the Other’s gratuitous act of violence is the cause of her pain and loss. Nevertheless, both experiences initiate the writing process and the final de-centering and reintegration of the subject.

The Return to Earth

Bruno Latour, when speaking of the age of the Anthropocene, suggests that we need to radically change the way we view our place in nature. Rather than seeing ourselves as humans, as “mangeurs de terre” (Hache 19), we need to see ourselves as earthlings. Émilie Hache calls this “the return to earth,” an idea she adapts from Marion Zimmer Bradley’s story *The Climbing Wave* (1955). The short story narrates the return to earth of a group of astronauts four centuries later, after a disruption in the time-space continuum. During the four centuries of their absence, earth and its inhabitants had undergone a profound transformation. Rather than opting for a continued modernization and seeing their species as privileged and outside of nature, mankind transformed into earthlings, an integral part of Worldnature. Hache suggests that in the age of the Anthropocene, this return to earth “pourrait être une image adéquate pour notre temps, succédant à la destruction de celle du globe” (18).⁷ The image of the globe she refers to consists of the metaphor for modernity: an

earth perceived and valued as an empty planet, contemplated from an imaginary distance, open for exploitation and separated from mankind. A return to earth may then be understood, not as an act of *recolonization*, but rather as a form of *ecolonization*, where the focus is shifted from the taking possession of earth towards a perspective of a broader ecology, a joining into the transcorporeality of our world, not as humankind, but as earthlings. This idea is already reflected in the title of Carrasco's novel, *La tierra que pisamos*, which implies an "us" that considers itself not only above and separated from matter (or what Morton calls "the mesh"), but also in its right to walk over it and to exploit it.

In Carrasco, the realization that the narrator's utopian farm was built upon a mass grave where Leva's own family was buried, changes the colonizers worldview and finalizes her process of integration into *la tierra*. Leva's initial physical digging into the soil announces the final scene of the novel, which superposes the uncovered mass grave under the soil of the farm and gives a new, shocking meaning to the title of the novel. This final revelation towards the end of the novel stresses the importance Morton places on what he calls "the ecological thought, a discourse based on dark ecology, which incorporates ugliness and horror, uncertainty and irony as fundamental parts of ecological thinking" (16). Eva, through her writing, takes up Leva's disconnected moans, gestures, and words, and articulates them into a coherent discourse. Writing the Other, here, is far removed from a colonizer's overwriting of the Other. Ultimately, it serves to manifest her own displaced muteness, her own unspoken words and uttered moans: "palabras sueltas, por siempre desconectadas entre sí, con esa misma narrativa inexplicable de unas estrellas que, por brillar próximas, forman una constelación" (132). Leva becomes the interlocutor and also the voice that speaks through her, for her, and with her. As she writes the Other, she constructs herself as a subject able

to experience her own mourning for her dead child and to connect to the world around her through a shared horror and suffering. In the end, she no longer is the colonizer, but becomes a part of his constellation and a part of the earth both walk on. The discursive communal text, disconnected and at the same time interconnected through a shared suffering, becomes a metaphor for the interrelated mangled matter of transcorporeality:

Los cuerpos en la tierra, los cuerpos bajo el sol. El aire que los envuelve. El dolor, que es el mismo para todos. ¿Acaso no estamos hermanados por él? [...]. El dolor que nos une. Quien ha perdido a un hijo los ha perdido a todos. (257)

In the end, Eva, Leva, her dead son, the colonizer, the colonized, humans, nature, all become one:

Ahora, apagados los alientos, irónicamente mezclados [...]. Hombres, mujeres, ancianos, niños, familiares, amigos, desconocidos, reunidos. Juntos los cuerpos en una aleación indestructible. Quizá, como dicen, en algún momento fuimos uno. No un solo cuerpo, sino un solo ser. Nosotros, los árboles, las rocas, el aire, el agua [...]. La tierra. (257)

Equally, Haushofer's narrator indicates that her "return to earth" is complete when she becomes a neutral subject, not only freed from gender but even from a species-specific identity. In the final scene of the novel, she realizes that the civilized, the colonizer, is the barbarian, whereas nature becomes "die grosse Gemeinschaft," a utopian community, hidden and protected by the wall. She describes how she is now neither man, nor woman, but rather, "einem Baum ähnlicher als einem Menschen" (99-100).⁸ She then proceeds to announce "mein neues Ich von dem ich mir nicht sicher bin, dass es nicht langsam von einem grösseren Wir aufgesogen wird" (230).⁹ *Die Wand's* final

sentence provides us with another metaphorical image of a return to earth, the integration of the de-centered subject into Worldnature: “Die Krähen haben sich erhoben und kreisen schreiend über dem Wald. Wenn sie nicht mehr zu sehen sind, werde ich auf die Lichtung gehen und die weiße Krähe füttern. Sie wartet schon auf mich” (345).¹⁰

Both Marlen Haushofer and Jesús Carrasco provide two examples of eco-fiction that narrate the process of transformation, from the colonizing Western mindset that has brought about the age of the Anthropocene into a de-gendered and de-centered subject, which initiates its return to earth in order to become an integral part of the planetary community. Both protagonists participate, as well as find hope, comfort (Haushofer), and peace (Carrasco) in what ecocritics call the transcorporeality of the world. In both novels, the process of constructing and deconstructing dualisms leads to a systems-oriented view of nature where all matter (man, animals, plants) are “mangled,” “meshed,” or interconnected. The protagonists’ “return to earth” becomes possible once they begin to relate to Worldnature no longer as colonizers, but as de-centered subjects who are part of a greater Us. Finally, both Haushofer and Carrasco suggest that today’s challenge is not to learn how to die in the Anthropocene, as Roy Scranton’s *Reflections on the End of a Civilization* suggest, but rather to learn how to live, how to coexist, not as nations or cultures or species, but simply as part of a mangled matter whose survival ultimately depends on the capacity to “return to earth.” Written almost half a century ago, Haushofer’s novel *Die Wand* can be read as the beginning of ecofiction. By comparing her novel with Carrasco’s recent work, we can see important parallelisms, such as the confrontation between nature and culture, the realization of the interconnectedness of Worldnature, the need to move away from a hierarchical view that fosters imperialistic attitudes, exploitation, and ultimately self-destruction, to an ecological thinking and a “return to

earth.” Furthermore, both novels reveal the ills of a modernity built upon the utopia of infinite industrial progress by revealing the dystopia it produces. One marked difference between both works, however, could be one of a broader perspective. Haushofer’s novel focuses primarily on the process of individual transformation and places a greater emphasis on personal emancipation and liberation, possible only in a utopian setting isolated and separated from civilization through the wall. Carrasco’s novel, on the other hand, denounces much more directly the ills of globalization and shows the horror of environmental destruction, human and non-human exploitation. Whereas Haushofer’s final utopia returns to a kind of locus amoenus in which integration into the “greater Us” is only possible following the separation from the human species and the renunciation of culture/written language, Carrasco’s utopia of a complete acceptance and integration into the transcorporeality of Worldnature only becomes possible through the act of writing. Nevertheless, both works are valuable examples of ecofiction. As ecofictional utopian representations, they foster an ecological consciousness and way of thought, and, as such, they offer what Ernst Bloch calls the principle of hope, one of the main driving forces of change.

Notes

¹Paul Krutzen coins the term in 2000, but Michael Samways refers also to the *Homogenocene* in 1999. The Anthropocene, from the Greek *anthropos* (man) and *kaino* (new), defines a geological era in which mankind becomes a force that actively changes the geological characteristics of the planet. Some scientists date the beginning of the Anthropocene with the beginning of agriculture 12,000 years ago, others consider the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century significant, yet others refer to the start of the nuclear era in the 1940s, or the great acceleration of globalization in the twentieth century. While there is no consensus as to the exact beginnings of the Anthropocene, scientists and critics across the disciplines agree that the human species has become a main geological force on the planet, responsible for climate change and the radical transformation of ecosystems (Latour 31).

²According to Stacy Alaimo,

[i]magining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always inter-meshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment.'⁽²⁾

³Bioregionalists propose a new understanding and organization of place according to a region's ecological particularities, such as climate, fauna, or biodiversity, and not according to national or cultural boundaries (Heise 34). This re-semantization of place is a salient characteristic of ecocofion.

⁴My use of "human" in the remainder of this essay is an explicit simplification for the sake of argumentation, and is not meant as an act of European-dominant environmentalism, all to the contrary. All references to humankind as a species/concept are to be understood within the context of imperialistic globalization: as the driving elements within our species who permeate capitalistic power structures, a Western economic rationality, and a misguided understanding of modernity. By referring to humankind as a species that has shaped the Anthropocene, I do not wish to imply an ignorance of the internal power asymmetries characteristic of our species. For a more detailed discussion on environmental discourse, privilege, and inequality among humans, see Prádanos and Anderson.

⁵Ironically and quite fittingly, the title of Carrasco's first novel, *Intemperie*, was translated into English as *In the Open*.

⁶When my hair had grown too long, I cut it short with nail scissors [...]. My face was thin and tanned and my shoulders were square, like those of an adolescent boy [...]. I had lost my middle-aged femininity, with the small double chin and the round hips. At the same time, I lost the sense of being a woman [...]. Sometimes I was a child looking for strawberries, then I was a young man cutting wood, or, when I held Perle on my thin knees while sitting on a bench and watching the sun set, a very old being without gender (99-100).

⁷"could be an adequate image for our time, following the destruction of the globe."

⁸"Resembles more closely a tree than a human being."

⁹"My new I, of which I am not sure that it isn't slowly being absorbed by a greater Us"

¹⁰"The crows have risen and circle screeching above the forest. When I cannot see them anymore, I will go to the clearing and I will feed the white crow. She is already waiting for me."

Works Cited

- Agamben, Giorgio. *The Open: Man and Animal*. Translated by Kevin Attell, Stanford UP, 2004.
- Alaimo, Stacy. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. Indiana UP, 2010.
- Carrasco, Jesús. *Intemperie*. Seix Barral, 2013.
- . *La tierra que pisamos*. Seix Barral, 2016.
- Coole, Diana. *New Materialisms. Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Duke UP, 2010.
- Coupe, Laurence. *The Green Studies Reader*. Routledge, 2000.
- Grusin, Richard. *The Nonhuman Turn*. U of Minnesota P, 2015.
- Hache, Émilie. *De l'univers clos au monde infini*. Éditions Dehors, 2014.
- Haushofer, Marlen. *Die Wand*. DTV, 2003.
- Heise, Ursula. *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet. The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. Oxford UP, 2008.
- Hill, Eugene. "The Place of the Future: Louis Marin and his *Utopiques*." *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, July 1982, n.p.
- Latour, Bruno. "L'Anthropocène et la destruction de l'image du globe." *De l'univers clos au monde infini*. Edited by Émilie Hache, Éditions Dehors, 2014, pp. 29-56.
- Iovino, Serenella. "Material Ecocriticism: Matter, Text, and Posthuman Ethics." *Literature, Ecology, Ethics. Recent Trends in Ecocriticism*. Edited by Timo Müller and Michael Sauter, Universitätsverlag, Winter, 2012, pp. 51-68.
- Marin, Louis. *Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces*. Humanity Books, 1984.
- Massumi, Brian. "The Supernormal Animal." *The Nonhuman Turn*, edited by Richard Grusin, U of Minnesota P, 2015.
- Morton, Timothy. *The Ecological Thought*. Harvard UP, 2010.
- Opperman, Serpil. "Rethinking Ecocriticism in an Ecological Postmodern Framework: Mangled Matter, Meaning, Agency." *Literature, Ecology, Ethics. Recent Trends in Ecocriticism*, edited by Timo Müller and Michael Sauter, Universitätsverlag, Winter, 2012, pp. 35-50.
- Prádanos, Luis I. and Mark Anderson. "Transatlantic Iberian, Latin American, and Lusophone African Ecocriticism: An Introduction." *South Atlantic Ecocriticism*, special issue of *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1-21.
- Scranton, Roy. *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene. Reflections on the End of a Civilization*. City Lights Books, 2015.
- Sterneborg, Anke. "Die Wand." *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, October 2012, p. 15.
- Zimmer Bradley, Marion. *The Best of Marion Zimmer Bradley*. Daw Books, 1988.