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“The friendship of our distant relations”: Feminism and Animal Families in Marlen Haushofer’s *Die Wand* (1963)

Anna Richards

Abstract

This article considers Marlen Haushofer’s novel *Die Wand* (1963) in the contexts of animal (eco)feminism from the 1970s onward and the animal essays of philosopher Cora Diamond. It argues that Haushofer’s novel, in which the female narrator survives behind an invisible wall with a family of animals, anticipates feminist theories of intersection between the oppression of women and of non-human animals and illustrates a feminist ethics of care. The novel attends to animal characters as individuals with agency and, setting up a stylistic and thematic tension between the everyday and the extraordinary, it exposes the reader to difficult ideas about animal death and human destructiveness. Despite the novel’s challenge to the conventional way of seeing animals, the narrator ultimately upholds the idea of an unbridgeable barrier between human beings and other species, but she reverses the traditional hierarchy: she values non-human animals more highly than human beings.

Austria in the 1950s and 1960s was not an easy place to be a woman or a non-human animal. Women were largely relegated to the roles of wife and mother, with their supposedly natural capacity for caring and nurturing seen as the cornerstone for postwar peace and normality (Vansant 24). There were many legal restrictions on women’s freedom, such as a husband’s right to prevent his wife from working outside the home (26). The women’s liberation

movement did not begin in Austria until the 1970s (Neyer 92). As far as animals' well-being was concerned, two negative developments are evident during the 1950s and 1960s. Agriculture was rapidly becoming more mechanized and the proportion of smaller farms decreased (Mathis 231-32), yet there was little legislation to protect animals from cruel factory-farming conditions. At the same time, the Austrian animal-rights movement, which began in 1846 when the first animal welfare organization was formed ("Wiener Tierschutzverein") and became particularly active around 1900, with campaigns for vegetarianism and against vivisection, was experiencing something of a lull.[1] It was not until the 1980s that modern animal rights activism started in earnest in Austria, when campaigns against factory farming, animal experimentation and the fur trade raised public consciousness and led to legal reform.[2]

Appearing in 1963, before this increase in public awareness of animal abuse, Marlen Haushofer's novel *Die Wand* (*The Wall,* 1991) is extraordinary in its portrayal of animals as valuable individuals in their own right, rather than simply as creatures existing for human benefit. The novel offers the first-person account of a woman who wakes up one morning in a hunting lodge in the Austrian Alps to find that, nearby, an invisible wall has descended and the people and animals on the other side are dead. Apparently the only human survivor, the narrator develops close, mutually dependent relationships with a dog, a cat, a cow, and their offspring. While blaming humanity, and in particular men, for creating a loveless, technologically oriented society responsible for its own demise, the narrator attributes largely positive qualities to these animals and loves them like a family. As Dagmar Lorenz points out, the wall allows Haushofer's female protagonist to gain autonomy ("Marlen" 186). It also allows animals more freedom, for example by sparing the bullock Stier from the slaughterhouse (Haushofer, *Die Wand* 136).[4] I argue here that Haushofer anticipates feminist,

ecofeminist, and pro-animal writings of the 1970s and beyond, particularly the idea of a feminist ethics of care, with her critique of patriarchy and its oppression of women, her sympathy for and re-evaluation of the status of non-human animals, and her linking of these two areas of concern. Before turning to *Die Wand* in detail, I want to outline some important developments in pro-animal feminist thought, including discussions about the role of literature in animal advocacy, to provide a retrospective framework for my reading of Haushofer's ground-breaking novel.

Feminism and Animal Advocacy

Women have been centrally involved in animal advocacy from the European and North American animal welfare organizations of the nineteenth century to the modern animal liberation movement, and they have often made explicit links between feminism and animal rights.[5] Simone de Beauvoir, whose *The Second Sex* (1953; first published in French in 1949), was an important influence on Haushofer's writing (Lorenz, "Marlen" 176), associated hunting, fishing, and warfare with a male drive to dominate the natural world (de Beauvoir 95, 105). By the early 1960s, when Haushofer was writing *Die Wand*, there was growing protest against the effects of man-made technology and farming methods on the environment and on animals in writings that typically originated in the United States or in the United Kingdom but were sometimes translated into German. In *Silent Spring* (1962), published in German in 1963 as *Der stumme Frühling* and often considered the foundational text of the environmental movement, Rachel Carson exposed the wide-ranging deleterious consequences of pesticide use and other practices that illustrated man's "arrogant" attempts to "control nature" (Carson, "Silent Spring" 258). Although she does not discuss the relationship between gender and the abuse of animals directly, she does refer to perpetrators as men in

this book, as well in a letter written in 1953 in which she criticizes men who hunt animals (Carson, letter?? 327-28). Another critique of the treatment of animals, in this case farm animals, was written by Ruth Harrison in 1964. *Animal Machines*, a powerful, but not explicitly feminist, attack on factory farming, was translated into German as *Tiermaschinen* in 1965. It inspired farm-animal welfare reform in Europe and, according to ethologist Marian Stamp Dawkins, brought a change in the way people thought about animals "around the world" (1-2).

In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, feminists developed these critiques of male "progress" and associated animal abuse into a comprehensive theory of intersectional patriarchal oppression, arguing that for centuries men had been identified with science, rationalism, and culture, while women had been aligned with the opposite, "lesser" values—with emotion, the body, and the natural world—in a binary system. Ecofeminism in particular exposed the connections among sexism, colonialism, racism, speciesism, and environmental abuse, and demonstrated that the construction of normative masculinity in Western society is dependent on separation from and domination over women—over the maternal and the feminine—and over others associated with them, including non-human animals (Donovan 367-69). For Andrée Collard in *Rape of the Wild* (1988), man's first hunting expeditions were patriarchy's founding moment because they legitimized male brutality and led to a gendered division of labor (38). Collard recognizes that some indigenous hunting cultures, such as those of Native Americans, have a different, more respectful attitude toward nature and animals (7). In Western patriarchal societies, however, man hunts not because he loves nature but because he loves "how he feels *in* it as he stalks his prey" (5). In these societies, which she describes as "death-oriented" (1), hunting is "the *modus operandi* […] on all levels of life" (34). Indeed, so accustomed are we to predation, Collard writes, "that it horrifies only

when it threatens to kill us all, as in the case of nuclear weapons" (46).[6] In *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), Carol J. Adams addresses the long-standing association between meat and masculinity from another angle. As animals are abused, slaughtered, and consumed, she argues, so women in patriarchal societies are abused, objectified, or consumed in sexual terms, for example in pornography. Another point of connection is the control and abuse of women's and animals' reproductive capacities.

Animal ecofeminists challenged the masculine bias of the animal rights philosophy developed in the 1970s and 1980s by Peter Singer, Tom Regan, and others. In *Animal Liberation* (1975), Singer argues from a utilitarian position that, because non-human animals are capable of feeling pleasure and pain, their interests should be respected, and that the boundary drawn between animals and human beings is arbitrary. In *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983), Regan insists that, although animals do not share human rationality, they have rights because they are what he terms *subjects-of-a-life*. For Josephine Donovan, Singer's utilitarianism, which involves ranking the extent of suffering of different sentient creatures, "remains locked in a rationalist, calculative mode of moral reasoning" that in fact reinforces the gap between human and non-human animals (358). Similarly hierarchical, Regan's natural rights theory privileges a particular kind of creature with "a subjective consciousness […] and/or […] the kind of complex awareness found in adult mammals" (Donovan 355). Rather than asserting an abstract concept of rights, which relies on autonomy, equality, and justice, or adopting the "masculinist," holistic ecological view that nature as a whole is the locus of value rather than its individual parts (Kheel, "License" 97), pro-animal feminists such as Donovan promote an ethics of care that privileges attachment, compassion, and responsibility. According to this moral system, which Carol Gilligan first discussed in her book *In a Different Voice* (1982) and which other feminist thinkers developed further in the

1980s and 1990s, ethical decisions are an embodied response, an "interplay between emotion and cognitive skills" (Curtin 278), growing out of particular relationships with others and involving an understanding of context and narrative rather than being dependent on universal rules. Pro-animal feminists argue that the others owed a duty of care include non-human animals, with whom human beings share a certain relatedness and the physical experience of living in the world. Following in the tradition of Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil's ethics of moral attention to others, they argue that we should pay careful heed to individual animals and to our instinctive response to animal suffering and death (Gruen 290; Kheel, "Vegetarianism" 335). As Donovan writes:

> Out of a women's relational culture of caring and attentive love […] emerges the basis for a feminist ethic for the treatment of animals. We should not kill, eat, torture, and exploit animals because they do not want to be so treated, and we know that. If we listen, we can hear them. (375)

For Collard, maternity is at the heart of a care ethics approach to animals. She traces the link between women and nature to ancient goddess-worshipping civilizations that believed in a "concept of universal kinship" (3) among all creatures because they were all born of Mother Earth: "Creatures as diverse to us as the pig, the dolphin and the human child were perceived as uterine animals: animals born of the same mother, nourished at the same source, subject to the same laws" (9). Women continue to have a special relationship with nature and non-human animals because of their reproductive systems, which allow them "to share the experience of bringing forth and nourishing life with the rest of the living world" (106). Collard insists, however, that women do not actually need to bear a child to experience this particular connection with living beings (106). Indeed, in ecofeminism maternity

typically functions not prescriptively, but metaphorically, describing a protective, caring approach.

By around 2000, ecofeminism had waned in popularity (Gaard). It was dismissed by many as too broad-ranging and as falsely equating different causes, or, as Erica Cudworth writes, for "a tendency […] to conflation—the use of an all-encompassing theory of gender relations to explain intersected oppressions" (26). The pro-animal aspect of ecofeminism came under particular attack. According to Greta Gaard, many ecofeminists saw gender roles, and some saw species, as socially constructed (31-36). Comments such as Collard's on motherhood, however, exposed ecofeminism to the charge of homogenizing women and, as Beth A. Dixon puts it, of "essentializing women as emotional and bodily and closer to nature than men" (193). In *Woman the Hunter* (1997), Mary Zeiss Stange argues that to oppose hunting on feminist grounds is to reinforce old stereotypes of women as peace-loving and passive, which amounts to "a flight from self-knowledge, as well as from responsibility" (185). "Woman the Hunter," Zeiss Stange asserts, "is a necessarily disruptive figure" (2), who has a profound understanding of nature "as a process of life and death" (84). According to Adams and Donovan, some feminists insisted that regarding the welfare of animals as a feminist concern took attention away from women's needs (3). Kathryn Paxton George objected that vegetarianism was not healthy for women and that it placed another "moral burden" on them, despite the fact that they bore an unequal share of caring responsibilities already (408).[7] Criticisms came from within ecofeminism, as well, with some ecofeminists arguing that it was ethnocentric to expect all ethnic groups, regardless of their culture, to forgo animal products (Sturgeon 154-55). While feminists of different orientations rejected the association of feminism with animal rights (as essentializing, stereotyping, ethnocentric, a distraction or a burden), some pro-animal thinkers have also rejected, or at least qualified, it.

They point out that animals have much less scope for resistance than women (Hastedt 208), and that comparing women in the sex industry with farm animals minimizes the suffering of the latter, who, unlike women, are bred and killed by the millions (Heubach 266).

Despite opposition to linking the animal and feminist causes, the modern field of critical animal studies bears a debt to and shows a continued overlap with feminism and ecofeminism (Gaard). As it is for ecofeminists, a focus on the intersectionality of oppression is one of the central principles of the Institute for Critical Animal Studies ("ICAS's Core Belief"). Influenced by Derrida, postmodern and posthuman animal studies also interrogates the boundary between the human and the animal that has long informed the Western philosophical tradition, an undertaking that, for feminists, has a gendered inflection. Since women have historically occupied the category of human only tenuously, twenty-first-century feminists argue, the human subject to be decentered in the posthuman project is male. Rosi Braidotti writes: "Becoming animal […] speaks to my feminist self, partly because my sex, historically speaking, never made it into full humanity, so my allegiance to that category is at best negotiable and never to be taken for granted" (531), something that can also be said of other groups of people marginalized under patriarchy. Feminists argue that *woman* and *animal*, like other terms denoting underprivileged groups, are diffuse, homogenized constructions, imbued with qualities the dominant male subject seeks to control, disavow, and separate from the male or the human (Mütherich 9, 21; see also Hastedt 205-6). For Susan Fraiman, as for Donovan, this process is at work when writers on animals reject "feminizing associations" by asserting their neutrality and objectivity rather than attesting to affection for animals (Fraiman 100). In a recent volume published by the German Human-Animal Studies research group Chimaira, Sabine Hastedt adds her voice to the deconstructive-feminist critique of the binary concepts man/woman and human/animal. With reference to Judith

Butler, she argues that animals are not passive, unchangeable entities, but actors in the realm of culture, capable of development, and able to perform in their relationships with human beings in ways that challenge stereotypes.

Spanning the period from the late 1970s to the 2000s, the animal essays of ethics philosopher Cora Diamond touch on many of the themes discussed above. Diamond's discussion of the role of literature in advocating for animals makes her work particularly illuminating for an analysis of Haushofer's *Die Wand*. Diamond only briefly addresses the intersection between sexism and animal abuse. In the 1978 essay "Eating Meat and Eating People," she accepts that there are links between speciesism and sexism, and that "What might be called the dark side of human solidarity has analogies with the dark side of sexual solidarity" (478-79), but she argues that these analogies are weaker than some have suggested. Diamond takes issue with Singer's argument that we should not eat animals for the same reasons we do not eat people. In her view, we do not refrain from eating people primarily because we recognize them as beings with quantifiable interests, in the way that Singer asks us to do for animals, but rather because there is something specific, and special, about our relationship to other human beings. Although, like animal corpses, human corpses have no awareness and therefore no interests, we treat them with respect and do not eat them.

Diamond does advocate for a more sympathetic treatment of animals, however, with arguments that in many ways are in keeping with a feminist ethics of care. The way to promote vegetarianism, she writes in the 2001 essay "Injustice and Animals," is not to encourage people to see animals as the same, but to acknowledge that even though they are different from us—"strange and other" as she puts it (140)—they are still "'with' us" in the world (139). She believes in the importance of an embodied, emotional response to the suffering of animals, whom she describes in her 1978 essay as "fellows in mortality, in life on

this earth" and "in a certain boat" with us ("Eating" 474). Rather than calculating their interests and rights in an abstract way, we should exercise "a kind of loving attention" ("Injustice" 131-32), which would lead us to recognize their vulnerability, to feel distress at their pain, and to respond with pity or to "relent" in our treatment of them ("Eating" 478). As shown above, Donovan believes that if we listen, we can hear animals. Diamond would agree, but with the qualification that when we hear a moral appeal from an animal or see in its eyes a request for mercy, we are projecting a human response on to it, "hearing it speak—as it were—the language of our fellow human beings." Rather than rejecting our special human status, we need to draw on it to enable us to make moral judgments, since without our human frame of reference, we have "no footing left from which to tell us what we ought to do" ("Eating" 478).

In another essay, "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy" (2003), Diamond addresses the limitations of philosophy, which "deflects" our exposure to the reality of animals' suffering by means of rational, moral arguments (59). Literature can go further: calling on the imagination, it can at moments expose us to the horror and beauty of animals' lives, to our shared bodily vulnerability, and to the pain we cause them. These ideas typically resist our modes of thinking and are "capable of panicking us" (74). Diamond discusses how the protagonist of J. M. Coetzee's lecture-novel *The Lives of Animals* (1999), Elizabeth Costello, experiences her awareness of the suffering that human beings inflict on animals, and the fact that most people carry on as if oblivious to it, as an isolating and almost unbearable wound. In Haushofer's *Die Wand*, I argue, the protagonist is similarly exposed to realities of death and human destruction that her mind struggles to comprehend. To use Diamond's words, "the livingness and death of animals" are portrayed as "presences that may unseat our reason" (74) in Haushofer's novel.

Feminism and Animal Families in Haushofer's *Die Wand*

Haushofer was not, as far as we know, involved in any pro-animal organization. Nor was she a vegetarian, although her biographer Daniela Strigl writes that she did not enjoy cooking meals for her family, meals which would presumably have included meat. Like the protagonist of her novel *Die Mansarde* (1969; *The Loft*, 2011), she may have preferred to eat bread and butter if left to her own devices (Strigl, *Marlen* 190). She was afraid of dogs, and despite a childhood spent in the Alpine countryside, where her father was a forester, preferred living in the city (249). She was, however, highly sensitive to animal suffering. She refused to go fishing with her husband because of her concern for the fish (273), and she was deeply upset by the slaughter of pigs and cows in the butcher's yard outside her flat in Steyr (240-41). She was particularly fond of cats (290), referring to one of her pet cats as a third child (222), and even took cat food with her to feed stray ones when she went on holiday to Rome (288).

Non-human animals appear in some form in many of Haushofer's novels and stories. In the autobiographical *Himmel, der nirgendwo endet* (1966; *Nowhere Ending Sky*, 2013), the child protagonist Meta adores the family dog, is horrified when her father beats him, and is afraid that he could do the same to her (96-7, 104). Meta's distress at the killing of pigs and deer destroys her faith in a benevolent God (137-38). In *The Loft*, the narrator's quest in life is to draw a bird that does not look like it is alone in the world (18). Two of Haushofer's children's books, *Müssen Tiere draußen bleiben?* (1967, Do animals have to stay outside?) and *Wohin mit dem Dackel?* (1968, Where to put the dachshund?), tell of children's fondness for dogs, while a third, *Bartls Abenteuer* (1964, Bartl's adventure), is narrated from a cat's

perspective. It is in *Die Wand*, however, that Haushofer's attention to the point of view of non-human animals is at its most radical.

Critics in the past typically read the non-human characters in *Die Wand* in figurative ways, as expressing something about humanity. Gerhard Knapp argues that the "near-ideal relationship" between the protagonist and Luchs the dog, who is male, shows that "the novel does not close the book forever on any future possibility of human co-existence and even (hetero)sexual love" (304), because Luchs represents a kind of "new" masculinity (303) and acts as "a substitute husband" (299). For Wolfgang Bunzel, portraying animals allows Haushofer to explore, by way of contrast, what it means to be human (104-5). Elke Brüns interprets the animals through a psychoanalytic lens, as revelatory of the narrator's psyche. More recently, however, some critics have approached the animals on their own terms. Sabine Frost compares the novel *Die Wand* with the film version, released in 2012. She argues that the protagonist achieves complete oneness with nature and animals in the film. In the novel, however, this "utopian project […] fails" (62), because "[the narrator's] care for the animals is but another kind of power relation" (69), and she only has empathy for those to whom she can attribute human qualities. Vanessa Hester observes that the narrator of *Die Wand* questions the boundary between humans and animals, which, though remaining, reveals itself to be more fluid than the narrator had supposed (209).

While scholarly attention to the animals as animals has only been forthcoming in recent years, the novel's feminist message has been widely recognized for decades.[8] In what follows I want to link these two perspectives and illustrate how, when she wrote the novel in the early 1960s, Haushofer anticipated future feminist thinking on animals. The re-evaluation of the status of non-human animals, I argue, is the result of the narrator's close, embodied

relationship with them. Her nurturing role foreshadows a care ethics approach, thereby dismantling certain stereotypes while relying on others.

Die Wand was written at the height of the Cold War, after the erection of the Berlin Wall and the invention of a neutron bomb that could destroy life while leaving property intact (Knapp 286), and Haushofer's narrator assumes that the wall that descends overnight is a weapon. The world petrified behind it, according to the narrator, was a patriarchal one, hostile, strange, and unsettling to women (*W* 64). In fact it resembled "a motorcar manufacturers' congress" (*W* 170), an image characterizing Austria in the postwar years as a capitalist, technologically oriented society dominated by groups of privileged men, of which the car, like the Mercedes left useless inside the wall until it is claimed by nature, is a symbol. The narrator is relieved that no men seem to have survived, because, being physically stronger, they would have been able to order her around (*W* 51-52). She abandons most stereotypically feminine attributes, including a concern for her appearance, and engages in hard, physical labor. Yet, as Jacqueline Vansant observes, "two human qualities remain constant before and after the wall: woman's role as protector of life and man's as destroyer" (66). Destructiveness, aggression, and domination over others are connoted male and are part of the kind of death-driven, hunting ideology that, according to Collard, is central to the workings of patriarchy, while loving and caring are shown to be female qualities. The gendered nature of this division of roles is underlined when the protagonist identifies two groups: people "like me" ("von meiner Art," *Die Wand* 121), who care for others, create life, and bring up children, and "the others", who are motivated to destroy life by jealousy of women's reproductive capacity:

> If everyone had been like me there would never have been a wall […]. But I understand why the others always had the upper hand. Loving and looking after

> another creature is a very troublesome business, and much harder than killing and destruction. It takes twenty years to bring up a child, and ten seconds to kill it. […] perhaps I've reached the point where I can understand even murderers. Their hate for everything capable of creating new life must be terrible. (*W* 124)

The novel as a whole is an illustration of the idea, expressed emphatically here, that caring is not merely an emotion, but a series of actions that are repeated over the long term and that involve hard work. Like Collard, the narrator sees the propensity to care in this way as rooted in a maternal role that extends beyond human offspring. Later in the novel she dreams of interspecies reproduction, with herself a kind of universal mother to a family of creatures, recalling Collard's vision of nature's diverse "uterine animals":

> We belong to a single great family, and if we are lonely and unhappy we gladly accept the friendship of our distant relations […]. In my dreams I bring children into the world, and they aren't only human children; there are cats among them, dogs, calves, bears and quite peculiar furry creatures. (*W* 180)

Some critics, such as Mireille Tabah, have taken issue with the way Haushofer seems to "essentialize" women by reproducing the caring role patriarchy ascribes to them (189). Brüns similarly sees Haushofer's naturalization of women's love for animals as problematic (59-60). On two occasions, the narrator describes her instinct to care for others as "eingepflanzt" (implanted), which suggests an inborn quality (*Die Wand*, 55, 151). However, not all women are portrayed as caring toward animals. The narrator's cousin Luise, described briefly at the beginning of the novel, is an enthusiastic hunter. Moreover, the narrator's care for her animal family is sometimes described in ways that reference male as well as female roles: as Franziska Frei Gerlach points out, she describes herself as their "Herr" (master) (183, footnote 137). Lorenz argues that Haushofer's fiction, following de Beauvoir, in fact reveals

gender differences to be in large part a social construct (Lorenz, “Marlen” 177-78). In emphasizing the link between women and animals with reference to childbirth, Haushofer anticipates the ecofeminists of the 1970s and beyond for whom maternal care is an empowering source of moral value, but the novel stops short of suggesting that an ethics of care can exclusively be practiced by females. After all, Luchs is the most caring of the animals, treating the narrator “like a helpless child” (*W* 191) when she is ill, for example.

The narrator has always liked animals (*W* 115), but the wall precipitates a major shift in her relationship with them. Suddenly facing a struggle for survival, she recognizes the physical vulnerability she shares with them as “fellows in mortality” (Diamond, “Eating” 474). The members of this “single great family” all suffer pain and need food, warmth, and tenderness (*W* 180). She and the cat, she writes, are made of the same stuff and “were in the same boat, drifting with all living things towards the great dark rapids” (*W* 155), a comment that recalls Diamond’s description of non-human animals as “in a certain boat with” human beings. When the deer are starving in the winter, the narrator shares her chestnuts with them, even though she needs them herself (*W* 106). It is those animals who become part of her immediate family, however, who especially cause her to reevaluate conventional concepts of the human and the animal and the barriers between them. She is mutually dependent on Luchs the dog, the cat and her kittens Tiger and Perle (Pearl), Bella the cow, and her calf Stier (Bull).[9] They share daily experiences—responses to the weather, for example (*W* 177), or, in the case of the cat and of Bella, whom she describes as a sister (*W* 180), the experience of giving birth and motherhood. She, Luchs, and the cats share meals like a family, and the mother cat shares her bed. They offer her the friendship that she argues human beings accept from animals when they are lonely, and she becomes more attached to them than she was to people, who never seemed friendly to her (*W* 115) and whom she found hard to love (*W* 96).

Even her daughters are described in negative terms (*W* 32), while her animal family has mainly positive attributes: Luchs is loyal, brave, and cheerful; Bella is gentle, patient, and a loving mother; Stier is innocent and trusting; the cat is clever and independent; Perle is beautiful and peaceful; Tiger is affectionate and playful. They possess types of intelligence that the narrator does not, including knowledge of the forest and an instinctual understanding of the moods of human and non-human others. Von der Thüsen finds the way the narrator writes about the animals and her relationship with them sentimental and moralizing (*W* 164). In this, he echoes the masculinist dismissal of affection for animals identified by Donovan and others and ignores the political aspect of the novel's moralizing. After all, if it were put into practice, the narrator's vision of the status of animals would involve a complete restructuring of modern society. Knapp does not overstate the case when he argues that Haushofer's works constitute "ultra-radical challenges to reality as we perceive it" (285).

As time goes on, the narrator feels the boundaries between herself and her animal family begin to dissolve (*W* 180). This is particularly the case with Luchs. One summer she completely forgets "that Lynx was a dog and I was a human being. I knew it, but it had lost any distinctive meaning" (*W* 203). When he dies, she mourns him profoundly (*W* 114) and begins writing the report that is the book in an attempt to maintain her sanity in the face of grief. As discussed above, feminist critics such as Braidotti have argued that a looser hold on the boundary between the human and the animal comes more easily to women than to men, or at least privileged men, since women's position in society's hierarchy of creatures is lower. Like Braidotti's, it seems that the narrator's "allegiance" to a fixed category of the human "is at best negotiable."

Narrating Animals

What are the narrative implications of *Die Wand*'s focus on non-human characters? The novel is a genre that typically relies on dialogue, relationships, and conflicts between people, but for most of *Die Wand* the narrator is the only human being present. There is very little direct speech, a strong focus on the narrator's own experiences, described by Celia Torke as an "Ich-Fixierung" (ego-fixation, 211), and not much action. The novel is largely an account of the narrator's day-to-day work in the changing seasons, planting, growing, scything, and caring for the animals, interspersed with reflections on her situation. To some extent, however, the non-human animals can fulfil the narrative roles typically occupied by human characters because of the dynamic and individualized way they are portrayed. They have agency, or, at least, as much agency as anyone: the narrator challenges the idea that any living creature has free will, thus eroding another distinction historically drawn between human and non-human animals. They do not all adhere to the kind of vague, diffuse idea of the animal that pro-animal feminists such as Birgit Mütherich criticize, which ignores animals' heterogeneity or, as Derrida puts it, "corral[s] a large number of living beings within a single concept: 'the Animal'" (400). Nor do they embody a static, passive idea of nature such as Hastedt identifies. Instead, the narrator observes differences between animals of the same and of different species, and within individual creatures over time. When the cat gives birth to kittens, the narrator soon becomes aware of their "independent little souls" (*W* 57), observing that "not even two young cats are as alike as peas in a pod" (*W* 57). She describes Tiger's games in loving detail and in doing so attributes to him abilities commonly associated only with human beings: the ability to invent and communicate rules and to pretend. His passion, she writes, is theater, and he performs a number of different roles (*W* 147, see also 133, 158). Luchs, as well as the narrator, is called upon to join in the kitten's games. The narrator describes the dog's response to Tiger in a nuanced way that suggests a complex

interior life, a change in feelings over time, the freedom to direct his own behavior, and a desire to communicate with others:

> Lynx had long ceased to be jealous. I don't think he took Tiger seriously. He did sometimes play with him, he would devote himself to the little one's games, but he was afraid of his temper tantrums. Whenever Tiger had one of his temper tantrums and raged through the hut, Lynx looked at me with the expression of a helpless, slightly irritated and uncomprehending adult. (*W* 147)

From passages such as this one, which casts Luchs as an exasperated stepfather, it is easy to see why Haushofer has been accused of anthropomorphizing the animals (von der Thüsen 162; Frost 70-71). As animal theorists have argued, however, anthropomorphism does not have to be aligned with anthropocentrism and has the potential to expand our understanding of animals. The criticism inherent in the term may rely on a false belief that animals are more different from us than they really are (Ryan 39, 41). In describing animals in seemingly human terms, the narrator of *Die Wand* is acknowledging the ways in which they are, to use Diamond's words, "So like us, […] so astonishingly capable of being companions of ours"—the way that kittens play just as human children do, for example. At the same time, she accepts that in other respects they are "so unlike us […], so unfathomably distant" (Diamond, "Difficulty" 61). This is illustrated when she imagines which memories may enter Bella's mind, but concludes "I know so little about her" (*W* 81). Tentative in her descriptions and interpretations of the animals' motives and behavior, she repeatedly uses the verb "scheinen" (to seem) and expressions, as in the long quotation above, such as "I think" or "I don't think"; "I don't know if"; "I can imagine"; "perhaps"; "I wonder how"; "who knows"; and "as if." Of Luchs's ability to understand her speech, for instance, she writes: "Who knows, perhaps he understood more than I thought" (*W* 203). In other words, faced with the unknowability of

animals, she offers speculative possibilities, instead of giving up any attempt to understand them.[10] In fact, Haushofer's observations often appear well-founded. Before writing the novel, she studied animal behavior carefully.[11] The author Oskar Jan Tauschinski described her portrayal of animals in the novel as "genialische Offenbarung" (brilliant revelation), worthy of publication in a zoology journal (25). Recent research has supported many of her speculations, suggesting for example that dogs may understand more of human language than has previously been supposed (Prichard et al.).

Despite the proximity between the human narrator and her animal family, however, the novel appears ultimately to uphold the idea of human exceptionalism. The narrator realizes that she is unable ever to become an animal: "a human being can never become just an animal; he plunges beyond, into the abyss" (*W* 35). Were she to cease such daily activities as washing her clothes, she fears she would become a depraved human being, rather than a non-human animal in harmony with nature (*W* 35). Furthermore, she remains in charge of the animals, as head of the family. Like the female animals whose reproductive capacity is, as Adams observes, exploited in agriculture, so Bella is used by the narrator for milk. Neither Bella nor her calf appears to suffer from it, but nonetheless this constitutes, as Hofman writes, an instrumentalization of the cow (203). Even more problematically, the narrator kills fish and deer for food. Her hunting, however, is very different from the feminist act of self-assertion that Zeiss Stange describes. As Collard points out, people who hunt for pleasure typically "kill the biggest and the best" (52), while predatory animals such as bears kill the weak. For the narrator of *Die Wand* as for some non-human animals, hunting is a necessity, not a means to fortify the ego. She only shoots weak bucks, hoping thereby to stop the deer from reproducing so quickly and suffering a food shortage themselves (*W* 79). Echoes, at most, remain of hunting in the form it took before the wall, such as the references to Luise's

enthusiasm for hunting, to the deceased huntsman, or to the "hunting lodge" in which she lives. Hester argues that the narrator's decision to kill to feed her family shows that she does not consider all species equal (207), but in fact this privileging of some animals is the contextual result of her relationship with and responsibility for them, particularly for those unable to look after themselves because of previous human intervention, rather than the result of any absolute moral distinction. Nevertheless, a conflict is evident that the narrator is unable to resolve between her own preservation and that of her family, on the one hand, and the interests of other individual animals, on the other. This conflict gives rise to a profound sense of unease. She retains her antipathy toward killing animals (*W* 43, 95) and describes fishing as murder (*W* 35). Far from bringing her closer to nature, it is when engaging in what she calls "the bloody business of hunting" (*W* 49), that is, when perpetuating what Collard describes as "the *modus operandi* of patriarchy," that she feels most at odds with her environment.

Despite this internal conflict about her human status and her reluctant exercise of power, for the narrator it remains from the place of the human that sympathetic judgements about animals can be made and compassion extended to them, just as it does for Diamond. The narrator realizes it is imperative that she maintain her human reason (*W* 7) in order to be able to care, not only for herself, but also for her animal family (*W* 51). From her more powerful position as human being, she is able to exercise a kind of mercy which seems similar to Diamond's concept of pity or relenting in human dealings with animals. One winter's day she sees a fox, who, she conjectures, could be the one who killed Perle. She considers but decides against shooting it, because to do so would mean to partake in the chain of "injustice" that included Perle's piscine victims as well as Perle herself (*W* 98). As a human being, she alone has the burden of making moral choices: she is "the only creature in

the forest that can really do right or wrong […]. And I alone can show mercy” (*W* 98). The human capacity for mercy involves projecting our responses onto animals or, as Diamond puts it, “imaginatively reading into animals something like an appeal to our pity” or hearing them speak our language (“Eating” 478). This tendency is illustrated by the experience of giving birth which Bella and the narrator share across species boundaries, but which the narrator relies on human language to convey. When Bella goes into labor, she comforts her: “I said the same things to her that the midwife in the clinic had said to me” (*W* 109). Bella may not know the meaning of the words, but the narrator believes that she understands the benevolent intention in them (*W* 109). To use a phrase of Diamond’s, the narrator’s ascription of human emotions to animals is not “sentimental anthropomorphizing” (“Eating” 472), but a moral decision to treat animals *as if* they shared human responses, while recognizing the limitations of her understanding.

Haushofer also recognizes the limitations of realism in literature. In order to expand conventional thinking about animals, she exceeds the realistic and allows animals to prevail in fantasy scenarios. The narrator dreams of talking animals (*W* 114-15) as well as interspecies reproduction. In an old magazine she reads a fantastical story of animal retribution in which the eel king chases and strangles a farmer who has tortured animals (*W* 99). She finds the story excellent. The science fiction, or perhaps fairy-tale, aspect of the novel as a whole—the invisible wall—allows Haushofer to construct a world of changed relations to other creatures.[12] It is striking, however, that the novel’s language, unlike its premise, is straightforward, often prosaic, and that the events narrated are largely the everyday tasks and repeated actions essential for the survival of the narrator and her family—the “troublesome business” (*W* 124) of looking after dependents that is traditionally carried out by women and dismissed under patriarchy as mundane. The narrator speculates very little

about the wall and seems almost to forget it. Some critics past and present have judged the novel “boring.”[13] Frost finds it “monotonous,” with “tedious repetitions and lack of plot” (63). For one early reviewer, the descriptions of the changing seasons were unnecessarily long.[14] Von der Thüsen diagnoses a “style problem” because Haushofer fails to invent new linguistic formulations for ideas (164).[15] Readers such as these seem to be missing a dimension of the text, appreciated by others whose reaction to it is diametrically opposed. Brüns writes of “the effect of sucking you in which is often mentioned as emanating from this text,” citing several critics and reviewers who describe themselves as entranced, compelled, or absorbed by it, including one who is at first “soothed” by the language, “until little by little a sense of unease arises in me.”[16] Even von der Thüsen concedes that the novel possesses “the radiant power of the uncanny.”[17] This mesmerizing, fascinating quality is caused by the stylistic and thematic tension between the ordinary and the extraordinary discussed above, the juxtaposition of the quiet, limited language and world of the novel on the one hand and a pervasive sense of threat on the other, described by Battiston-Zuliani as “a gulf, a structure of contrast between the quiet of the descriptive tone and the horror which is actually being described.”[18] As Strigl points out, the narrator’s routine work loses any sense of “banality” because it is a fight for survival (“Vertreibung” 135-36). That the wall is at once omnipresent—the title of and prerequisite for the story—and curiously absent clearly amounts to a kind of repression rather than forgetting, and the sense of something beyond, something terrifying to confront, remains.

Influenced by existentialist philosophy from the 1950s such as that of Heidegger, the novel exposes the reader to ideas about the individual’s place within a vast, meaningless universe, into which animals and people are thrown (“geworfen,” *Die Wand* 179) without being consulted (“ungefragt,” *Die Wand* 179).[19] Concepts such as these are seldom expressed

clearly in *Die Wand*, difficult as they are to define or pinpoint, but they make themselves felt when the narrator is in awe, baffled, or traumatized, when her attempts at repression fail. In one passage worth quoting at length, Haushofer discusses "reality" in terms similar to Diamond's. Unable to understand the world, animals and children can nevertheless authentically experience its beauty and its horror, while adult human beings typically avoid confronting these by means of daydreams and activities:

> Since my childhood I had forgotten that the world had once been young and untouched and very beautiful and terrible. I couldn't find my way back there, since I was no longer a child and no longer capable of experiencing things as a child but loneliness led me, in moments free of memory and consciousness, to see the great brilliance of life again. Perhaps animals spend their whole lives in a world of terror and delight. They cannot escape, and have to bear reality until they have ceased to be. Even their death is without solace and hope, a real death. Like all human beings, I too was forever in hurried flight; forever trapped in daydreams. Because I hadn't seen the deaths of my children, I imagined them as being still alive. But I saw Lynx [Luchs] being killed, I saw the brain swell from Bull's [Stier's] split skull, and I saw Pearl [Perle] dragging herself along like a boneless thing and bleeding, and again and again I felt the warm heart of the deer cooling in my hands.
>
> That was reality. (*W* 162)

Animals and children, lacking the capacity to distract themselves from reality, "perhaps" experience continually "a world of terror and delight," but the narrator's experience of this world is intermittent. During a summer spent on the *Alm* (high mountain pasture), for example, she gazes at the sky and loses herself in a sublime appreciation of nature (*W* 139).

In moments such as these, the lost world she describes seems almost prelapsarian, a sense reinforced by the biblical echoes in the long quotation above.[20] Nature, however, is far from a paradise. The narrator expresses a visceral sense of the terror of death. The threefold repetition of "I saw" and the expression "again and again" in the same sentence reinforce the involuntary, urgent way the images of animal death impress themselves upon her. Unlike for Heidegger, for whom animals' lack of awareness of their impending death makes the experience less authentic, a mere "verenden" (coming to an end),[21] for the narrator of *Die Wand* it is non-human animals, not human beings, who experience "a real death" because they cannot detach themselves from it by means of the imagination.

Haushofer uses images and symbols to hint at these difficult ideas and at the dimension beyond the everyday. As argued above, her literary exploration of an ethics of care involves recognizing and paying attention to animals as individuals, but this does not preclude her from also employing them synecdochically. The image of the beautiful, lonely fox who may have killed Perle, for example, repeatedly returns unbidden to her mind and represents, she believes, "something important" (*W* 98). Exactly what this meaning is remains just out of reach (*W* 98), but it seems associated with the interdependence, as well as the separateness, of all animals, and with the wonder and cruelty of nature, ideas that include, but exceed, the fox himself. This is true of the deer, too, to whose heart the narrator refers in the long quotation above. She finds the deer lying in the snow with its leg broken, kills it and takes it home to eat. In *Woman the Hunter*, Zeiss Stange describes killing wild animals as an education in the dependence of life on death and in the nature of existence (116). "There is an infinity of meaning," she writes, "in the beating of a heart, as well as in its stopping" (185). In *Die Wand*, the narrator's experience of stopping a heart seems to bear out Zeiss Stange's words. Killing the deer sickens her and the memory of its heart, which is still warm when she

cuts the ice-cold body open, remains with her, illustrating the almost unfathomable transition from life to death. For a long time, she lies awake in the darkness "thinking about the little heart freezing to a clump of ice in the room above me" (*W* 108). As for Zeiss Stange, then, an animal's death has existential weight for Haushofer, but the conclusion she draws from it is very different. For Zeiss Stange it is something the hunter can observe impartially. Since life and death are "natural," we should embrace killing and allow ourselves to be edified by its spectacle. Zeiss Stange argues that ecofeminists who criticize hunting as masculine are absolving women of responsibility for the darker parts of themselves and of nature, associating women "only with the noble and life-affirming aspects of nonhuman nature" (84). In fact, I would argue, Zeiss Stange absolves hunters of responsibility by casting killing as the inevitable way of the world. In *Die Wand*, the stopping of the deer's heart illustrates not only the harsh reality of life and death, but also human culpability. Its resonance is best understood in the context of other animal deaths—that of the nuthatch the narrator finds the day she discovers the wall, for example, its head caved in after flying into it, an image she can never forget "for some reason" (*W* 15). The indelibility of these memories and the narrator's inability to determine exactly what they signify point to an excess of meaning which transcends the individual. They are suggestive of the profoundly unsettling, unfathomable realities of death and of the human capacity for destruction.

This capacity finds an extreme manifestation at the end of the novel when a deranged man appears suddenly and kills Stier and Luchs by beating their skulls with an axe, before the narrator shoots him dead. Among other things her written report is an attempt to understand the man's baffling behavior (*W* 207). In the context of her love for her animal family and her disillusionment with humanity, in particular with men, the shock and incomprehension that some readers have felt at her remorseless killing of the intruder is surprising.[22] As Knapp

argues, the intruder represents old masculinity, from the time before the wall (303). As such, he is a remnant of a way of being that the narrator wants to expunge.

Conclusion

Haushofer's understanding of the relationship between the human and the animal differs, then, not only from Zeiss Stange's, but also from Diamond's. Like Diamond, the narrator recognizes a kind of human exceptionalism that informs her moral position. But while for Diamond this exceptionalism, this "significance in human life" ("Eating" 471), is valuable, Haushofer is largely pessimistic about human beings. The feminist care ethics her narrator adopts in relation to animals, which builds on the concept of maternal love and involves careful attention to individual creatures and their contexts, is contrasted with the violence that erupts powerfully near the end of the novel with the intruder's murder of the animals, but which has made itself felt in unsettling moments throughout the narrator's account and is the partially repressed premise for the novel as a whole. Although reluctant, she is complicit in it: she hunts with a weapon. Women are not immune from male violence.[23] She may attempt to make "moral" interventions on behalf of animals, but these, she suspects, in the end do no good (*W* 107, 141). As a human being, she remains an outsider (141), "the only disturbance" (119) in a forest that does not want people to return (141). For Diamond, the human custom of burying human but not non-human animals with ceremony emphasizes the difference between them. In *Die Wand*, the narrator kills a man without regret and pushes his corpse down the mountain, but she buries Luchs in one of his favorite spots and grieves deeply for him. If she has to concede, to her dismay, that the human-animal hierarchy persists, she upends it: she values non-human animals more highly than human beings. The only way she can conceive to solve the problem of human exceptionalism is her own death.[24] Even her

report, bulwark against the collapse of human reason and testament to her existence, will, she predicts, ultimately be eaten by mice (62).

What remains is an almost existentialist belief in the value of perseverance and the "troublesome business" of caring, a business she, like the animal ecofeminists of the 1970s and beyond, inflects as feminist and typically female. Strigl sees the narrator of *Die Wand* as a kind of female Sisyphos, with the qualification that, unlike Camus's Sisyphos, the narrator does not joyfully "affirm" human life ("Vertreibung" 125, 136) but accepts it with a kind of resignation (125). Hope is not entirely absent from the novel's conclusion, however. The narrator looks forward to the possibility that her female animal companions will give birth again. She will help care for their offspring, as she resolves to care for the single white crow in the spruce trees nearby, ostracized and left behind by its companions. The novel's concluding line, in the present tense, expresses an ongoing relationship between two individuals, woman and (female) animal, an expectation of care, and an assumption of responsibility: "She is already waiting for me."[25]

Anna Richards studied at the universities of Cambridge, Oxford, Tübingen, and Hamburg, and at the Humboldt University in Berlin. She has written and edited books and articles on German women authors from the eighteenth century to the present day, on mourning and *Empfindsamkeit*, and on animals in women's writing. She works as a Lecturer in German at Birkbeck College, University of London.

Notes

[1] Though rare, animal activism was not entirely absent in Austria in the 1960s—the Internationaler Bund der Tierversuchsgegner (International Association for the Opponents of Vivisection), for example, was founded in 1968. See "Wer wir sind."

[2] These campaigns were led by groups such as the Arbeitskreis Tierrechte der Österreichischen Vegetarier Union (Animal Rights Working Group of the Austrian Vegetarian Union), formed in 1985. In 1988 animals were distinguished from inanimate things in §285a of the Civil Code (Austria, *Allgemeines bürgerliches Gesetzbuch*); in 1989 a new law restricting animal experimentation came into force (Austria, Bundesgesetz); and in 1992 Austria ratified the European Convention for the Protection of Animals Kept for Farming Purposes (Wilkins 404). Thanks to Martin Balluch, chairperson of the Verein Gegen Tierfabriken (Society Against Factory Farming), and Erwin Lauppert, former chairperson of the Vegetarische Union Österreich (Vegetarian Union of Austria), for information about the history of the Austrian animal welfare and animal rights movements.

[4] Unless otherwise indicated, all citations are taken from *The Wall*, the English translation of Haushofer's *Die Wand*. Subsequent citations are indicated with the abbreviation *W.*

[5] See Lorenz, "Austrian Women" (70), on women's animal advocacy around 1900. See Donovan for examples of first-wave feminists who advocated for animals (359). See also Richards.

[6] See also Marti Kheel, "A License to Kill," on masculinity and hunting.

[7] See also Gruen 284.

[8] For feminist readings of *Die Wand* see e.g. Lorenz, 'Marlen Haushofer'; Vansant; Frei Gerlach; Knapp; Venske.

[9] According to Bunzel, assigning arbitrary names to animals is an exercise of human power. In *Die Wand*, many of the animals are instead named after their species or metonymically,

that is, according to their characteristics (Bunzel, 115). The cat Tiger's name could also suggest a blurring of species boundaries. In the case of Luchs (Lynx), however, the narrator suggests something different. She writes that his name, "quite unsuitable" to him, is a name long given to hunting dogs in the valley, one of whom may long ago have been responsible for killing the last lynx, a species now hunted to extinction there (*W* 31). His name is another sad reminder, then, of the human destruction of animals. The narrator herself remains nameless, since there is no human being left to use the name arbitrarily assigned to her.

[10] Ryan discusses the use of "as if" as a way of offering tentative interpretations of animals' motives in Angela Carter's short story "Lizzie's Tiger" (41-47).

[11] Haushofer consulted her brother Rudolf, who had studied forestry, for information about plants and animals and checked her facts thoroughly as she wrote the novel (Strigl, *Marlen* 249-50).

[12] For Von der Thüsen, the novel resembles the kind of fairy tale where a woman is banished to a tower or into the forest and becomes stronger as a result of her trials (166). Frei Gerlach similarly compares the narrator to the protagonists of legends who survive in the forest with the help of plants and animals (182).

[13] For example, Franz Rainer Scheck in *Science Fiction Times*, May 1969, quoted in Brandtner and Kaukoreit 58.

[14] Review by I. L. in *Die Presse* (Wien), 29/30 Aug. 1964, quoted in Brandtner and Kaukoreit 62.

[15] "Stilproblem" (Von der Thüsen 162).

[16] "[D]ie immer wieder beschriebene soghafte Wirkung, die dieser Text auslöst" (Brüns 55, note 93); "besänftigt," "bis nach und nach Unbehagen in mir aufsteigt" (Brüns 264-65). [I don't think it's necessary to put the ‚entranced' in inverted commas in the text, since I'm

giving the translation anyway, so I've deleted the translation here. HOWEVER, I am only 99% sure that the page ref 264-65 is still accurate (instead of being just 265 now) and this book is in the library. Can this wait to be checked till the final final proofs?] [I think we can just leave the page numbers as they are until you have the chance to check.] THANKS – CAN WE LEAVE THIS NOTE TO REMIND ME TO CHECK?

[17] "[D]ie Strahlkraft des Unheimlichen" (Von der Thüsen 170).

[18] "[E]ine Kluft, eine Kontrastruktur zwischen der Ruhe des beschreibenden Tones und dem tatsächlich beschriebenen Grauen“ (Battiston-Zuliani 91).

[19] On the role of existentialism in Haushofer's work see Strigl, "Vertreibung."

[20] See 1. Corinthians 13.11: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (*King James Bible*).

[21] See Heidegger, *Unterwegs* 203; *Sein und Zeit*, § 49, 247.

[22] See for example Brandtner and Kaukoreit, 70, 80, 105.

[23] On women's complicity in male sins in other works by Haushofer, see Venske and Kecht.

[24] She plans to die when there is no animal left for her to care for, perhaps by tunnelling under the wall (*W* 32-3, 124).

[25] My translation of the original "Sie wartet schon auf mich" (*Die Wand* 208).

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