

# Loneliness, Nature, and Technology

## Questions of Embodiment in Haushofer's *Die Wand* and von Steinaecker's *Die Verteidigung des Paradieses*

Benjamin Schaper

In Marlen Haushofer's *Die Wand* (1963) and Thomas von Steinaecker's *Die Verteidigung des Paradieses* (2016), nature and technology are each presented as destructive and soothing forces on the protagonists' lonely bodies, which bring both happiness and decay, pleasure and pain. Haushofer's novel is widely recognized as a seminal opus for its depiction of the (feminine) individual's isolation in a relentlessly patriarchal postwar Austrian society and, after its rediscovery during the nuclear protests in the 1980s, an important impetus for ecocriticism. Among several prominent literary responses such as Thomas Glavinic's *Die Arbeit der Nacht* (2006) or Heinz Helle's *Eigentlich müssten wir tanzen* (2015), Bavarian author Thomas von Steinaecker's postapocalyptic novel, which was long-listed for the German Book Award, is a particularly productive point of comparison. The novel engages in a creative dialogue with *Die Wand* and explores the tensions that ensue from the depiction of a world in which nature and the human body are increasingly subjected to technological influences. Accordingly, it offers a decisive intervention in discourses around social bonds and embodiment, whereby the Cartesian dichotomy between the mind and the body is questioned. On the one hand, the body represents—as Margaret Littler argues in regard to *Die Wand*—"the irreducible site of suffering, and retains the memory of suffering even when the conscious mind has 'processed' and disposed of it" (218). On the other hand, the body also emerges in a more positive Nietzschean sense as the bearer and

producer of knowledge and as the site for future configurations of human nature. In both instances, I will argue that the protagonist's engagement with nature and technology challenges the mind's epistemological hegemony. In this context, the protagonists' loneliness intensifies the focus on embodied experience and knowledge by relentlessly exposing them to the destructive and overpowering forces of nature and technology.

The novels' antithetical depiction of nature and technology draws on, and then imaginatively reworks, seminal debates on the tension between natural forces and cultural processes, the lonely individual and society, as notably explored in Sigmund Freud's *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930) and Friedrich Nietzsche's notion of *homo natura* from Aphorism 230 of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (1886). Whereas Freud rejects a solitary way of life in favor of collaboration, aiming to control nature through cultural and technological achievements, Nietzsche precisely postulates for the reintegration of the human into nature, where the individual, stripped of culture, can lead a more authentic life. Analyzing *Die Wand* on the basis of these theories and then comparing it with *Die Verteidigung des Paradieses* demonstrates how the cluster of loneliness, nature, technology, and embodiment gains societal significance in the early twenty-first century when loneliness is understood as "embodied" (Bound Alberti)—with both psychological and physiological effects—and becomes an acute societal issue. At a time when artificial intelligences destabilizes the distinction between human and machine, technology increasingly merges with our natural human bodies, and the preservation of nature is more at stake than ever. Particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which physical isolation has been actively sought, technology functions as crucial mediator for the maintenance of social bonds and provides the tools for protecting our vulnerable bodies, and nature once again becomes a protective, soothing refuge from the perils

awaiting in human society. Rereading *Die Wand* and comparing the novel with von Steinaecker's *Verteidigung des Paradieses* through the lens of Freud and Nietzsche, first, opens up a new and more nuanced understanding of Haushofer's seminal twentieth-century novel by revisiting it through her twenty-first-century successor. Second, the comparative reading reveals developments in the intellectual discourses around loneliness, nature, technology, and embodiment, whereby the lonely bodies of the protagonists become not only the focal points for the conflicting forces of nature and technology but also sites for the generation of knowledge. Finally, tracing these developments can help us to provide insights into how to build resilience against loneliness in a highly technologized age and to understand our own contemporary condition, caught between a vanishing nature and an ever-developing technological world.

## Culture vs. Nature: The Lonely Individual's Struggle in Haushofer, Freud, and Nietzsche

In *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, Freud states that in their struggle to overcome the hardship of life and to find happiness, humans are striving toward strong experiences of pleasure (“Lustgefühle”) and toward the absence of pain and displeasure (“Unlust”; 20). While pleasure and happiness, according to Freud, can only be experienced episodically, which Haushofer's protagonist affirms regarding the happy but temporary and eventually forever lost summer on the *Alm*, humans' capacity for unhappiness is far less limited and emerges from three sides: from our own body, destined for decay that is sending pain and fear as warning signs; from the outside world's overpowering destructive forces; and finally from the potentially most severe source for suffering—our relationships with other human beings (21, 32). To avoid *Unlust*, Freud identifies various methods for which loneliness, nature, and technology are crucial:

Gewollte Vereinsamung, Fernhaltung von den anderen ist der nächstliegende Schutz gegen das

Leid, das einem aus menschlichen Beziehungen erwachsen kann. Man versteht: das Glück, das man auf diesem Weg erreichen kann, ist das der Ruhe. Gegen die gefürchtete Außenwelt kann man sich nicht anders als durch irgendeine Art der Abwendung verteidigen, wenn man diese Aufgabe für sich allein lösen will. Es gibt freilich einen anderen und besseren Weg, indem man als ein Mitglied der menschlichen Gemeinschaft mit Hilfe der von der Wissenschaft geleiteten Technik zum Angriff auf die Natur übergeht und sie menschlichem Willen unterwirft. Man arbeitet dann mit Allen am Glück Aller. (22)

Both the self-chosen isolation from society and the collaborative approach to master the challenges posed by nature with the support of science and technology can lead to happiness—in the first case individually and in the second case potentially both individually and collectively. It is clear that Freud privileges collaborative efforts in science and technology as the more effective approach to avoid *Unlust*, which is further emphasized by his remarks on the lonely hermit, whose rejection of societal renewal he deems as unproductive and pathologizes as insanity (27). Similarly, Freud expresses astonishment at the assumption that we would be happier if we abandoned culture (“Kultur”), which he defines as protection against the origins of suffering, and returned to more natural “primitive Verhältnisse” (33).<sup>1</sup>

Both these assumptions conflict with Friedrich Nietzsche’s notion of *homo natura* (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 143–45). Embracing the lonely recluse of the hermit and a lifestyle attuned to nature, Nietzsche rejects the cultural advancements that Freud would later turn to in order to avoid *Unlust*:

Aber wir Einsiedler und Murmelthiere, wir haben uns längst in aller Heimlichkeit eines Einsiedler-Gewissens überredet, dass auch dieser würdige Wort-Prunk zu dem alten Lügen-Putz,-Plunder und-Goldstaub der unbewussten menschlichen Eitelkeit gehört, und dass auch unter solcher schmeichlerischen Farbe und Übermalung der schreckliche Grundtext *homo natura* wieder heraus erkannt werden muss. Den Menschen nämlich zurückübersetzen in die Natur; über die vielen eitlen und schwärmerischen Deutungen und Nebensinne Herr werden, welche bisher über jenen ewigen Grundtext *homo natura* gekritzelt und gemalt wurden; machen, dass der Mensch fürderhin wieder vor dem Menschen steht, wie er heute schon, hart geworden in der Zucht der Wissenschaft, vor der anderen Natur steht [ . . . ]. (144–45)

Nietzsche criticizes a perceived human exceptionalism, which is mostly based on cultural and scientific achievements. For Vanessa Lemm, Nietzsche’s emphasis on a “return to nature stands

in tension with established conventions and obligations to commit to institutionalized moral, political, religious or patriarchic values” (44) and, by extension, with technological process instigated by science. The rejection of all these cultural constructs, according to Lemm, also leads to the reestablishment of the body as a bearer and producer of knowledge. She argues that for Nietzsche, “affirming *homo natura* means embracing the condition of embodiment as pertaining to life rather than hiding the body behind illusions of a higher, moral origin” (44, emphasis in original). The body, in a reversal of the Cartesian dichotomy, is thus privileged over the mind, and this focus on “a form of lived and embodied knowledge [. . .] keeps us honest and hence open to the continuous task of having to reinvent our nature” (Lemm 34). Thus, the reintegration of humans into nature by breaking out of societal conventions and cultural processes and the reclamation of the body as source of knowledge should not be seen as a step back in human progress but rather as an impulse for continuous future development:

The return to nature reveals that human nature is multiple, plural and in becoming continuously immersed in alteration and self-alteration and hence never self-same and identical to itself. Through the retranslation of the human being back into nature, Nietzsche’s free spirits discover that human nature does not lie behind us as something that pertains to some remote form of (animal or plant) life, but something that lies ahead of us in the future. (Lemm 43)

In *Die Wand*, the body is portrayed twofold. More in line with Freud’s positioning of the body in the context of decay, pain, and fear, Littler rightly states that the body in the novel functions as irreducible site of suffering (218), which becomes clear from the pain the protagonist endures when laboring in order to provide for herself and her animals, breaking her body and, at times, bringing on thoughts of suicide as a means to escape her prison (Haushofer 267, 317, 339–40). However, the body also functions as a site of knowledge that goes beyond suffering and trauma. Ingo Cornils states that the protagonist is “left not simply to survive on her own, but also to develop the resilience to cope with her loneliness” (215); my analysis will demonstrate that, just

as the protagonist repeatedly states explicitly that education, reason, and the mind hardly have any importance in her struggle to survive in nature, it is indeed the knowledge of the body that helps her cope with her situation (see Haushofer 105–6, 110–11).

This particularly applies to the daily work she is required to do. When teaching herself how to prepare firewood for the winter, she says that after a few days “begriff ich endlich, das heißt, meine Hände, Arme und Schultern begriffen, und plötzlich war es, als hätte ich mein Leben lang nur Holz gesägt” (105–6). It also applies to her sense of safety—“Sicherheit bedeutet für mich soviel wie sehen und berühren können” (250)—and her ability to make sense of the wall. Reason fails the protagonist in her attempt to understand the invisible wall during her first encounter with it: “Ich [. . .] versuchte zu überlegen. Es gelang mir nicht” (17; also 34). Her own and Luchs’s bodies, however, have already generated the knowledge and carry indisputable signs of its existence: “da war Luchs mit seinem blutenden Maul, und da war die Beule auf meiner Stirn, die anfang zu schmerzen” (18; see also 19, 23–24, 78). Hence, it is entirely consistent that she then tries to make the wall visible by placing physical markers along its course, gauging it through her trail and simultaneously calming her doubting mind (24, 37). In both cases, we witness a process of *habitualization*, a notion developed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, who refer to Helmut Plessner’s concept of “exzentrische Positionalität,” which contradicts Descartes’s dualism between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* by arguing that—in contrast to animals—humans can occupy a position external to their core, allowing them to reflect on themselves without leaving their bodies (see Plessner 288–92). Similar to Pierre Bourdieu, who, equally inspired by Plessner’s focus on the body, highlights the significance of physical actions for the creation of a *Habitus* (99–127), Berger and Luckmann demonstrate how physical human actions become a model that can be reproduced through repetition without a conscious effort,

thus enriching human knowledge and emphasizing the importance of physical knowledge that has been inscribed in the body. As Silke Steets further highlights in her study on the sociology of architecture (2015), physical forms of knowledge generation are also highly dependent on space, which in *Die Wand* is not only represented by the isolation caused by the eponymous wall but also by the spatial separation between the valley and the *Alm*.

Similar to these theories, Haushofer's novel reverses Cartesian tradition in that it privileges physical knowledge over the knowledge of the mind, both in generating knowledge and forgetting. The body is decisive in understanding that the protagonist's previous life has come to an end and that she will have to endure isolation and loneliness: "Erst wenn das Wissen um eine Sache sich langsam im ganzen Körper ausbreitet, weiß man wirklich" (81). In terms of forgetting, it is true that while the protagonist's body remembers trauma, it tends to forget moments of happiness such as the summer on the *Alm*: "Ich spüre nicht mehr, wie schön es war, ich weiß es nur noch. Das ist ein schrecklicher Unterschied" (285). This is further reminiscent of Hermann Schmitz's notion of "leibliche Betroffenheit," which focuses on sensuality from a phenomenological perspective (see Schmitz, *Der unerschöpfliche Gegenstand and Was ist Neue Phänomenologie?*). "Leibliche Betroffenheit" and subjective experience, for Schmitz, operate as the main sensory mechanics for the generation of human knowledge. In *Die Wand*, the protagonist's physical knowledge helps her to survive on a daily basis, but its tendency to remember trauma rather than happiness increases her experience of pain and suffering and leads to a deterioration of her mental health. In this respect, loneliness in *Die Wand*, from a phenomenological perspective, can be described as an affective physical experience that through routine and *habitualization* becomes embodied knowledge.

The body in *Die Wand* is equally important for the process of renewal that Lemm

recognizes in Nietzsche's notion of *homo natura*. The protagonist lives through several stages of personal renewal, from the person before the arrival of the wall to the person right after as well as the person that has experienced the loss of her animals (57–58). A first recognizable stage of this personal renewal is that the loss of inter-human relationships and the exposure to raw nature abolish the binary opposition between genders so that her body—again functioning as a source of habitualized knowledge—adapts by developing a hybrid gender identity that allows her to move between identities depending on the demands of her daily chores—for example, she becomes a young man for physically demanding tasks (108–9). Generally, however, the protagonist's process of renewal has just begun, and she is still not able to grasp where this will lead her: “Schön langsam fing ich an, mich aus meiner Vergangenheit zu lösen und in eine neue Ordnung hineinzuwachsen” (335; see also 247–48, 176–79).

To return to Freud, it becomes clear that the reintegration of humans into nature runs directly against his definition of culture as “die ganze Summe der Leistungen und Einrichtungen [. . .], in denen sich unser Leben von dem unserer tierischen Ahnen entfernt, und die zwei Zwecken dienen: dem Schutz des Menschen gegen die Natur und der Regelung der Beziehungen der Menschen untereinander” (36). Rather than as a chance for future progress, he sees nature as a potential threat. While Freud acknowledges that nature can never be controlled completely (32), particularly since humans are already an integral part of nature due to their own mortal organisms, technology and science emerge as decisive tools to combat nature, both within our bodies and beyond. Freud attests that science and its technical applications have enabled humans to control nature to such an extent as never before (34) but concedes that neither technological process, which had only brought “billiges Vergnügen” and indeed also created new problems (35), nor the transition from a weak animal-like being to a godlike creator enabled humans to be



truly happy (38–39). If one accepts the assumption of the protagonist in *Die Wand* that the wall is indeed a technological invention, then technology has not only been unable to prevent the end of civilization; it created it. Consequently, technology can neither solve the problem created by technology nor allow the protagonist a “billiges Vergnügen” when her hope for a brief moment of joy through hearing music from the car radio is as stymied as her attempts to find out whether there is life outside the wall (30). Eventually, all technological achievements that, according to the protagonist, were once subject of idolatry fail to fulfill their task to control nature and conversely are claimed by it, as signified by Hugo’s Mercedes being taken over by plants and being used as a nesting site for birds (298–99).

In Freud, the destructive force of technology becomes particularly virulent with regard to broader cultural processes, in which individual happiness is at odds with the happiness of society as a whole: Culture thus initiates the transition from the power of the individual to the power of society (43–44), forcing the individual to trade “ein Stück Glücksmöglichkeit [für] ein Stück Sicherheit” (65). This tension between individual happiness and the wish to connect with other people is fueled by humans’ inherent *Aggressionstrieb* and *Destruktionstrieb* as descendants of the death drive and their fantasy of omnipotence, particularly when the individual’s narcissistic wish for the “Befriedigung seiner Lebensbedürfnisse und die Herrschaft über die Natur” cannot be fulfilled (72; also 61–62). Eventually, this leaves Thanatos and Eros as fierce opponents through the quest for individual happiness and human connection as well as the processes of individual and cultural development (95; see also 72–73, 94). It becomes clear from the very end of Freud’s critique of civilization that this conflict gains a new threatening dimension in the age of technology:

Die Schicksalsfrage der Menschenart scheint mir zu sein, ob und in welchem Maße es ihrer Kulturentwicklung gelingen wird, der Störung des Zusammenlebens durch den menschlichen

Aggressions- und Selbstvernichtungstrieb Herr zu werden. In diesem Bezug verdient vielleicht gerade die gegenwärtige Zeit ein besonderes Interesse. Die Menschen haben es jetzt in der Beherrschung der Naturkräfte soweit gebracht, daß sie es mit deren Hilfe leicht haben, einander bis auf den letzten Mann auszurotten. Sie wissen das, daher ein gut Stück ihrer gegenwärtigen Unruhe, ihres Unglücks, ihrer Angststimmung. Und nun ist zu erwarten, daß die andere der beiden "himmlischen Mächte", der ewige Eros, eine Anstrengung machen wird, um sich im Kampf mit seinem ebenso unsterblichen Gegner zu behaupten. Aber wer kann Erfolg und Ausgang voraussehen? (100)

In *Die Wand*, Haushofer offers three potential explanations for the origin of the wall. First, the Freudian readings of several critics (among others Brüns, *Außenstehend, Ungelenk, Kopfüber Weiblich* and "Die Funktion Autor und die Funktion Mutter"; Caviola; Lorenz; and Markotic) establish the wall's appearance as an expression of the protagonist's psyche and isolation and accordingly discuss the wall and the protagonist's condition in the context of mental illness. Second, strikingly the wall appears in the night from April 30 to May 1 (Haushofer 11), the famous *Walpurgisnacht* in German folklore during which the witches assemble on the Blocksberg, which can be seen as an allusion to the genre of magical realism (the link between *Die Wand* and magical realism can also be found in Schmidt, "Frauenphantasien über Frauen und Natur" 173–74; Schmidt argues that Haushofer converts the metaphor of the wall, which highlights the protagonist's mental and social alienation, into a magical realism as the protagonist accepts its existence as truth) and which might in turn invite critical intertextual comparisons with other famous literary *Walpurgisnächte* by, for instance, Johann Wolfgang Goethe or Karl Kraus. The third explanation, which forms the central line of analysis in this article, is a technologically induced catastrophe (this was explored in less detail by, for example, Kublitz-Kramer; Littler; Schmidt, "Frauenphantasien über Frauen und Natur"; and Strigl), which evokes both the historical background of postwar geopolitical conflicts and the Freudian tension between the *Aggressionstrieb* and the *Destruktionstrieb*.

From early on in the novel, the nuclear threat of the Cold War is present (11), and indeed

the explanation that the wall is a technologically developed weapon is the one the protagonist deems most likely: “Ich nahm an, sie wäre eine neue Waffe, die geheimzuhalten einer der Großmächte gelungen war” (53). Whereas technology in *Die Wand* fails to provide *Lust* and to tame nature in order to guarantee the safety of human beings, it does establish the novel’s postapocalyptic setting. The re-translation of the protagonist into nature that is beyond the reach of humans’ destructive force is the basis for the protagonist’s joy on the *Alm*, which also contrasts the harsher natural surroundings further down in the valley: “Die Menschen hatten ihre eigenen Spiele gespielt, und sie waren fast immer übel ausgegangen. [. . .] Es war besser, von den Menschen wegzudenken. Das große Sonne-, Mond- und Sterne-Spiel schien gelungen zu sein, es war auch nicht von Menschen erfunden worden” (281). In general, *Die Wand* establishes the human pursuit of destruction and death as victorious over its opponent, Eros, with the wall being the final manifestation of its victory. The protagonist makes the “triebhaft[e] [. . .] Wißbegier” (99) of the scientists that created the wall, their desire to control nature—particularly decay and death—with technology, coupled with humans’ capacity for reason as a means of resisting the course of nature (320) responsible for the victory of destruction and death over love, the loss of the only “Hoffnung auf ein besseres Leben,” and the “unendliches Heer von Toten” (320). However, this is not so much due to the overwhelming power of the *Aggressionstrieb* and the *Destruktionstrieb* but rather due to humans’ inability to love. The protagonist reflects on the struggle between love and destruction when new kittens are born and concludes that despite the pain that the inevitable loss of the kittens will cause her, she nevertheless will continue to attach herself to the animals: “Wären alle Menschen von meiner Art gewesen, hätte es nie eine Wand gegeben [. . .]. Aber ich verstehe, warum die anderen immer in der Übermacht waren. Lieben und für ein anderes Wesen sorgen ist ein sehr mühsames Geschäft und viel schwerer, als zu töten

und zu zerstören” (216). The exception to this is the protagonist, whose *Trieb* for love has supposedly been “eingepflanzt” (99, 268), bestowing her with the capacity for empathy, care, and love that hints at the possibility of a lonely renewing life, re-translated into nature, once all other human beings and their cultural efforts are gone.

## Embodied Loneliness in *Die Wand*

An examination of both traditional notions of and recent research on loneliness reveals how a focus on the body is crucial for an analysis of loneliness in the context of technology and nature—and, indeed, beyond. In the second half of the eighteenth century, secularization in the course of the Enlightenment also influenced notions of loneliness. Katrin Wittler shows in her study on loneliness in the eighteenth century how loneliness was uncoupled from its religious origins whereby one-ness with god is sought, for example, by the secluded hermit. Nevertheless, Wittler demonstrates how loneliness is still generally described, e.g. in the works of physician/philosopher Johann Georg Zimmermann, as “Lage der Seele,” with all its corporal conditions and consequences (209). Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering Zimmermann’s double perspective as physician and philosopher, loneliness, as also argued by Fay Bound Alberti in her *Biography of Loneliness* (2019), crucially included physicality until the eighteenth century, an aspect that according to Bound Alberti is mostly ignored nowadays. While I would argue that solely understanding loneliness as a mental ailment is changing, not least since John Cacioppo’s and Patrick William’s seminal works proved physical effects of loneliness for the first time in the early twenty-first century, I adopt Bound Alberti’s notion of “embodied loneliness” (14), which she uses to describe a return to the pre-Cartesian era in which the mind and the body were not separated and emotions were regarded holistically (xi, 14–16) and to emphasize the importance of the “bodily and material cultures of loneliness” (14).

Similar to how the body can function as a memory device for suffering and as a bearer of knowledge, it can also carry information on loneliness, which from the eighteenth century onwards was split into a positive and negative side. On the one hand, Wittler argues that loneliness in the late eighteenth century was understood as “leib-seelisches Bedürfnis”—temporary periods of loneliness that could coincide with a retreat into nature, could foster health as well as expand, invigorate, sharpen, and strengthen the mind and the heart (208). On the other hand, loneliness increasingly appeared in a pathological context when it came into the proximity of melancholy and ran the danger of becoming a permanent condition (Wittler 210). Wittler recognizes a temporal, spatial, and emotional shift in understandings of loneliness in the late 1700s, which increasingly pathologized the permanent natural recluse as going against the Enlightenment’s assumption that humans depend upon, and should be a benefit for, society. At the same time, however, it also served to separate loneliness from its spatial component and establishes it as a psychological condition that can also be experienced in the company of others (194–96).<sup>2</sup> This paradox later intensified in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution and the transcendental loneliness or homelessness as expressed in Friedrich Nietzsche’s dictum “Gott ist tot” in Aphorism 125 of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882) as well as in Georg Lukács’s *Theorie des Romans* (1916).<sup>3</sup> Paired with rapid technological developments and urbanization, these developments created a form of Social Darwinism that corroded social bonds and led to a fragmented society, which left the modern individual in psychological isolation and alienation. In Haushofer’s *Die Wand*, both the temporal/spatial and the emotional sides of transcendental loneliness are present: The protagonist, at least until the moment in which she shoots the intruder, has no choice but to endure the permanence of the emotional and spatial loneliness of the valley in which she is trapped. Nevertheless, there are also hints that she also felt quite lonely

in her life before the appearance of the wall, for example during the superficial conversations with her friends (94) or when she describes how she had become increasingly estranged from her daughters (271). Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the early psychological studies on loneliness by Frieda Fromm-Reichmann (1959) and Melanie Klein (1963) were published around the same time as *Die Wand*, the latter's essay "On the Sense of Loneliness" even in the same year.

In the novel, the pathological side of loneliness, just as in the late eighteenth century, also has to be read in the context of creative productivity. Wittler argues that the creative potential of the new secularized loneliness of the period, other than hermits' or monks' loneliness, which is legitimized by the church, has to be explained (205). She continues that the loneliness of writing represents a state of freedom from the burden of the world as writing and reading guarantee the possibility of a sociable behavior without the need for social interaction; the author then gains happiness from bringing ideas created in loneliness to a broad audience and hence contributing to the Enlightenment project (201). Thus, when alone, writing, according to Aleida and Jan Assmann becomes the "Medium einer Ersatzkommunikation," which replaces more natural and easier communication with people (14). The protagonist's *Bericht*, written in the loneliness of nature after the death of Luchs and Stier (369–70), does indeed function as an *Ersatzkommunikation*, but her circumstances as well as motivation for writing and her imagined audience differ quite strikingly from the concept of loneliness and nature as sources of inspiration around 1800. The protagonist's loneliness is an enforced and permanent state, and the *Bericht* emphasizes the dangerous, brutal, and death-bringing side of nature that counteracted the creative refuge of mother nature in Romantic literature.<sup>4</sup> Tellingly, the one summer on the *Alm* when she is experiencing the soothing solitude of nature, even if tainted by the constant fear of danger arising from her potentially being too careless, is the only time when she does not

continue her notes (236–37). Rather, it is the trauma of loss, the pathological side of loneliness, and the challenging seasonal conditions that initiate her writing process:

Ich schreibe nicht aus Freude am Schreiben; es hat sich eben so für mich ergeben, daß ich schreiben muß, wenn ich nicht den Verstand verlieren will. Es ist ja keiner da, der für mich denken und sorgen könnte. Ich bin ganz allein, und ich muß versuchen, die langen dunklen Wintermonate zu überstehen. Ich rechne nicht damit, daß diese Aufzeichnungen jemals gefunden werden. Im Augenblick weiß ich nicht einmal, ob ich es wünsche. Vielleicht werde ich es wissen, wenn ich den Bericht zu Ende geschrieben habe.

Ich habe diese Aufgabe auf mich genommen, weil sie mich davor bewahren soll, in die Dämmerung zu starren und mich zu fürchten. Denn ich fürchte mich. (7–8)

Writing the report hence foremost fulfills the therapeutic purpose of maintaining the protagonist's mental sanity in isolation and alleviating fear and anxiety. In contrast to the Enlightenment purpose of producing a text in loneliness in order to bring it back to an audience and foster the Enlightenment project, *Die Wand's* protagonist initially writes her report without entering a fictional dialogue with an imagined audience, not only being lonely in the writing process but also preventing the connection with a future readership (see also Caviola). While the report still does not have a didactic purpose, at a later point in the narrative the protagonist abandons her earlier stance on writing solely for herself:

Seit einigen Tagen ist mir klargeworden, daß ich immer noch hoffe, ein Mensch werde diesen Bericht lesen. Ich weiß nicht, warum ich es wünsche, es macht doch keinen Unterschied. Aber mein Herz klopft rascher, wenn ich mir vorstelle, daß Menschengenossen auf diesen Zeilen ruhen und Menschenhände die Blätter wenden werden. Viel eher aber werden die Mäuse den Bericht fressen. [. . .] Es ist ein merkwürdiges Gefühl, für Mäuse zu schreiben. Manchmal muß ich mir einfach vorstellen, ich schreibe für Menschen, es fällt mir dann ein wenig leichter. (111–12)

With loneliness understood as embodied, the physicality of description here is striking. The protagonist writes by hand, imagines the paper being touched by hands (the function of hands in the novel merits a study of its own), and the eyes of the reader *rest* on the paper. Moreover, thinking about her report eventually finding a human audience causes a strong physical reaction of the protagonist's heart. Writing for a human audience on the one hand helps her to tackle her

mental block caused by trauma and pathological loneliness. At the same time, establishing the paper on which the report is written as a mediator of touch also tries to treat the protagonist's physical loneliness by imagining that the paper will eventually be passed on. The protagonist creates an imaginary *Du* so that writing the report instigates a fictional dialogue with an imagined reader as proxy for physical and mental human connection in order to alleviate her writing process, her trauma, and her loneliness.

Writing the report is furthermore closely linked to the protagonist's relationship with her animals. As she only begins writing after Luchs's death, her report follows the tradition of (autobiographical) works on human-canine relationships in which the death of a dog provides an impetus for writing (Kuzniar 141). In *Melancholia's Dog* (2006), Alice Kuzniar establishes two functions of the posthumous narration of a dog's life: on the one hand, the writer "tries to regain the intensity of their relation through language" (143) and, on the other hand, the writing represents an attempt to anticipate and mitigate the trauma of loss, to control grief, and to instigate a process of healing (143–44). Both these aspects are taken up in *Die Wand* through the protagonist's relationship with Luchs. First, as the relationship initially aids her in coming to terms with the loss and isolation that she experiences when the wall first appears, she tries to keep it alive in her report. Second, the report also functions as a means of working through the trauma she experiences when Luchs is murdered and to mitigate her ensuing depression.

Gender expectations are crucial not only in regard to writing but also for the analysis of human-canine relationships in general. Analyzing Portuguese-British visual artist Paula Rego's "Dog Woman" series, Kuzniar emphasizes how the motif of the solitary dog-women renounce internalized normative structures and social customs (75) and represent an "inner revolt against gender constrictions" (79). Liberating women from the objectification of the male gaze, the



relationships with dogs, according to Kuzniar, instead constitute a “compassionate antidote to the shame suffered in a male-dominated world” (117). First, if we follow the protagonist’s explanation that the male *Aggressionstrieb* leads to the establishment of the wall and Luchs’s brutal death at the hands of the intruder, all violence and constrictions have their origin in hyper-masculine ferocity, such that Luchs’s compassionate support of the protagonist transcends the social taboo of the dog as “inferior replacement for human love” (8) and instead represents a desideratum for more nurturing forms of masculinity. Second, when human social norms are gradually abandoned, it is not only that the protagonist’s gender identity becomes increasingly hybrid in regard to adapting to the challenging task of surviving in the mountains. Rather, relationships with dogs, according to Kuzniar, also “cannot be restricted to the singular role of guarding, lover, companion, or child but incorporates all of those modalities and shifts among them” (109). Similar to the hybrid gender identity, then, the dynamics between the protagonist and Luchs are in flux: At times, the childlike Luchs depends on the protection of the motherly protagonist (e.g., 179–80), and at times the protagonist depends on Luchs as a supportive, protective, and equal friend (e.g., 198). Through this egalitarian codependence and beyond societal restrictions, the protagonist overcomes the potential shame associated with closeness to a pet and allows the animal to complete herself.<sup>5</sup>

Even if she accepts her animals as companions, what remains for the protagonist is the fear of becoming animal-like herself. This fear is explored when the protagonist states that she is keeping up her personal hygiene and writing her report lest she be stripped of her humanity and transformed into an animal-like being (57). According to Kuzniar, Western philosophy has a long tradition of ascribing muteness and isolation to animals and, “in its efforts to define the quintessentially human, [. . .] has sought to bolster human uniqueness and superiority by

abrogating to itself the sole command of speech” (27). While the protagonist does not privilege human over animal experiences, quite the contrary in fact, her writing is crucial as a defense mechanism against mental illness, which, in Freudian terms, can result from unprepared humans being stripped of culture and being returned to more natural “primitive Verhältnisse.” The intellectual challenge of writing her report requires both the mind and the body as a store of memory. Although the protagonist is increasingly unable to rely on culture and its artifacts, her “exzentrische Positionalität,” as manifested in the reflective writing process, upholds the importance of the mind as a means of bringing order into her experiences in an unrelenting natural environment and establishes, at least until the report is finished, a clear distinction between human and animal approaches to the world. Literature in this regard often aims to reimagine the wordlessness of the dog and to make it speak in order to satisfy the “hunger for communication and understanding” between the species and thus to alleviate the loneliness of both the dog as well as the human counterpart (Kuzniar 24). In bestowing animals with the ability to communicate with humans, literature not only aims to span the “unbridgeable distance from the pet that is otherwise so close” but also “gives rise to another reversal, whereby the conventional oppositions and strictly policed boundaries between human/animal, cultivated/ignorant, tame/feral, and self/other are called into question” (65, 112). Indeed, Haushofer’s novel generally depicts a process in which the animals are increasingly anthropomorphized and in which the protagonist increasingly leaves behind constructs such as gender to which she was bound in human society.

The protagonist establishes loneliness as catalyst for this process, which is further characterized by the tension between the fear of destruction and love for her animals that both relate to their function as companions and, in case of the cow Bella, serve as sources of nutrition.

The protagonist states that while she had only appreciated animals in the superficial way of townsfolk in her earlier life, her isolation in the mountains leads to a much deeper engagement and appreciation:

Es soll Gefangene gegeben haben, die Ratten, Spinnen und Fliegen zähmten und anfangen, sie zu lieben. [ . . . ] Die Schranken zwischen Tier und Mensch fallen sehr leicht. Wir sind von einer einzigen großen Familie, und wenn wir einsam und unglücklich sind, nehmen wir auch die Freundschaft unserer entfernten Vettern gern entgegen. Sie leiden wie ich, wenn ihnen ein Schmerz zugefügt wird, und wie ich brauchen sie Nahrung, Wärme und ein bißchen Zärtlichkeit. (315)

The enforced isolation, loneliness, and unhappiness of the protagonist tighten the bond between the protagonist and the animals and collectively, they increasingly efface the distinction between human and animal (see also Caviola 106–7; Kovács 98–99; Kublitz-Kramer 281, 291–93; Markotic 85; Littler 216; and Schmidt, “Frauenphantasien über Frauen und Natur” 174). In this way, each of the three most prominent animal figures—Bella, Luchs, and the cat—supports the protagonist in different ways. First, the protagonist’s survival depends on Bella and on her delivery of another, ideally male, calf. Luchs and the cat then help to alleviate the protagonist’s intellectual and physical loneliness, which is encapsulated in the protagonist’s statement that she would not have survived the winter without them and that she was never alone with the animals (174, 332). As a result, the importance of the animals for the protagonist’s mental health becomes inseparable from that of her writing her report.

In this constellation, we witness not only the protagonist’s increasing “**Rückübersetzung in die Natur**” but also the anthropomorphization of Luchs, who is bestowed with the ability to comprehend language and to feel empathy: “Luchs stand mir am nächsten, er war bald nicht nur mein Hund, sondern mein Freund; mein einziger Freund in einer Welt der Mühen und Einsamkeit. Er verstand alles, was ich sagte, wußte, ob ich traurig oder heiter war, und versuchte auf seine einfache Art, mich zu trösten” (67).<sup>7</sup> In a reversal of the Cartesian tradition, Kuzniar

argues that only when the human subject recognizes that it is not the only being empowered to communicate and acknowledges the dog as a separate subject able of communication that an “in-between space that marks the true site of intimacy” can be created (125, 127).<sup>8</sup> While this connection between the human protagonist and the animal Luchs is fostered by the protagonist’s loneliness, the creation of this space between the protagonist and Luchs “counters geographical displacement with the emotional security” offered by the dog (113). While Luchs’s perceived ability to communicate and to react to the protagonist’s needs alleviate the loneliness of the protagonist’s mind, touching him provides a remedy for her physical loneliness. When she is reflecting on the cat, which unlike Luchs mostly avoids physical contact with her, she states: “Das Schlimmste ist, dass ich mich ohne Luchs wirklich allein fühle” (199). In the tradition of narratives about women and dogs that are predominantly characterized by “inner seclusion and exile” (113), the in-between space of true intimacy with Luchs does not just promise “physical intimacy” and “the sense that one is recognized in one’s very being” (107) but also helps the protagonist to combat the “threat of depression” (110). Eventually, the protagonist and Luchs engage in a “lived togetherness that, although often experienced in solitude, alleviates loneliness” (110). Hence, Luchs can provide unity between a mental and a physical connection and a remedy for the protagonist’s embodied loneliness, in addition to—as the protagonist speculates later in the novel—alleviating his own fear of being left alone by the protagonist (356).

## Finding the LORD: Transcendental Loneliness in *Die Verteidigung des Paradieses*

A transcendental entity enters questions about loneliness and embodiment in the highly technologized world of Thomas von Steinaecker’s *Die Verteidigung des Paradieses*. The

reference to Haushofer's *Die Wand* in von Steinaecker's postapocalyptic novel is explicit: Heinz, the novel's juvenile protagonist and first-person narrator, at certain moments recites opening sentences from, and makes references to, literary works that are described as "Weltliteratur" (49).<sup>9</sup> Over the course of the novel, Heinz's first sentences represent a postmodern mix of popular and high culture from Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* series to Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930/1932/1943). Among these, he also quotes the first sentence of *Die Wand* (330) and thus establishes Haushofer's novel as a pre-text.

The first major similarity between the novels is that Heinz, like *Die Wand's* protagonist, writes his report by hand, recording his experiences on the *Rosenalm* and during his journey to Paris. In particular when he is stuck in the refugee camp, writing, as in *Die Wand*, acquires a therapeutic function to keep him sane when he has no one to talk to: "Vielleicht verhindert das ja auch, dass es mir genauso ergeht wie manchem anderen hier, dem die Sicherungen durchbrennen" (272). Although Heinz is surrounded by other refugees, he is still isolated as a teenager without any major attachment so that, similar to *Die Wand*, writing creates a dialogue with a fictional *Du* to save him from mental illness associated with loneliness. Indeed, it helps him and his *Gemeinschaft* to survive: "Solange ich schreibe, überleben wir" (153). Eventually he dies just after finishing his report as an old man. In contrast to Haushofer's protagonist, Heinz, however, is writing for a concrete audience and with the concrete purpose to document everything that happens to him and his *Gemeinschaft* so that "die Kultur des Homo sapiens überdauert, hier auf der Rosenalm, in unserem Resort, *durch meine Hand*" (17, emphasis in original). Whereas culture and civilization will eventually end with the death of *Die Wand's* protagonist, Heinz's writing in loneliness follows the Enlightenment ideal of being brought back to a society so that the text can instruct future readers about an ideal community in a

postapocalyptic world (34). This becomes particularly clear when the addressee of the report changes in the final third of the novel and the story is now aimed at the baby Xiwang (313) who on the *Alm* has been already declared the person who will one day inherit all the knowledge that is left in the community (112) and will become the *Du* of the fictional dialogue as a sisterly confidant (314).

Alongside the narrative context, Steinaecker's novel has several structural and thematic congruences with *Die Wand*. Its first third is set in mountains surrounded by a shield; corpses that are "erstarrt und doch unversehrt" (23) can be seen on the shield's other side; Heinz has a robot in the shape of fennec fox that resembles Luchs as a four-legged canine companion and which is his "einzigster best friend" (31); he has a special relationship with one of the cows, which resembles Bella; transmitters fail to make contact with the outside world (70, 75–76), and Heinz is traumatized when a member of Heinz's community brutally kills strangers who have entered the resort with an axe (118–35)—just as the protagonist of *Die Wand* shoots the intruder. However, even though some of these features are seemingly in congruence with *Die Wand*, closer examination reveals how they have been modified for our highly technologized age. First, the *Rosenalm* itself, the paradise that has to be defended, differs strikingly from Haushofer's setting. The term *Paradies* can also be found in *Die Wand* when the protagonist, emphasizing her love for the forest, states that it would have been paradise to raise her daughters there but then expresses her doubts: "Nein, es wäre doch nicht das Paradies gewesen. Ich glaube, es hat nie ein Paradies gegeben. Ein Paradies könnte nur außerhalb der Natur liegen, und ein derartiges Paradies kann ich mir nicht vorstellen" (102–3). In von Steinaecker's novel, paradise does indeed lie outside unrelenting nature and is presented as a version of nature that, in the Freudian sense, can be completely controlled through technology so that hardship and suffering can be

avoided. The assumption that the *Rosenalm* was a “Wildnis” (84) is immediately ridiculed, and it is striking that it is usually referred to as a *Resort* (17), since resorts do not usually contain untamed nature but rather curated gardens that are closed off from the outside world. The weather is programmed for “traumhafte Bedingungen” (24), with sun during the day and rain during the night, resources suffice precisely for the demands of the *Gemeinschaft* (24), and the shield seals off the *Rosenalm* against even the tiniest particles from the contaminated wasteland beyond (94). The inhabitants, unlike Haushofer’s protagonist, are not struggling for survival and do not have to break their bodies through the labor required to live in harsh natural conditions. Their situation only becomes dangerous when the technological system of the *Resort* malfunctions and when it is revealed that even the river that provides them with water is artificially fed from a reservoir and not from a natural source (104). In this setting, the seemingly natural idyll of the *Rosenalm* is revealed as a technological trick designed to protect its inhabitants from the dangers of the devastated and desolate postapocalyptic world outside of its protective shield. Invoking the Freudian ambition to control nature through technology, this renders a return to a natural state in the Nietzschean sense impossible.

While the protagonist of *Die Wand* is merely fantasizing about one day making her way past the wall (136), *Die Verteidigung des Paradieses* discusses what happens when the invisible wall is passed through and lets its protagonists explore the postapocalyptic world outside of the mountain resort. Full of criminal gangs, mutant camps, and radiation, a radioactively contaminated wasteland is all that is left of nature after being destroyed by human activity. It is quickly associated with hell (23), which might encourage us to reconsider to what extent the wall is imprisoning Haushofer’s protagonist and to what extent it is actually protecting her from whichever catastrophe has unfolded in the outside world. With hell, the wasteland is equally

associated with religious imagery as before the *Resort*: “Die Natur befolgt das Gesetz des Gleichgewichts. Man könnte es auch so ausdrücken. Der LORD behütet uns” (111). Nature, which in this context relates to the tech version of the *Resort*, regains the soothing qualities of Mother Nature; in contrast to Haushofer’s novel, when we engage with a highly technologized world, questions of a creator, of embodiment, and of what it means to be human become prevalent again, thereby questioning the notion of transcendental loneliness.

In negotiating these questions, von Steinaecker sends his protagonist Heinz on a different trajectory than Haushofer: like *Die Wand’s* protagonist, as an “E-Klon” (von Steinaecker 363), Heinz and his human *Gemeinschaft* initially fight against becoming animal-like, to maintain their human “Würde” through maintaining personal hygiene and particularly through their effort in the “Kampf gegen das Vergessen” (25, 33). This is among others exemplified by Anne organizing her garden according to the map of the world and by the *Gemeinschaft* naming the cows after prominent historical figures from Renaissance painter Titian to President John F. Kennedy and German footballer Franz Beckenbauer (27–28). In line with Heinz’s purpose of writing being reminiscent of Enlightenment thought, the purpose of this “Kampf gegen das Vergessen” is equally to pass on human knowledge for the benefit of future generations. Before the catastrophe, humans mostly relied on technology to store knowledge, and Heinz himself is one of the most striking manifestations of this development. It is no surprise then that Heinz’s reintegration does not lead him into nature but into society—indeed, in contrast to *Die Wand’s* protagonist, his fight is not so much to stay human so much as to be recognized as human in the first place. In this context, loneliness provides the impetus not only to write his report but also for his desire to belong.

Reflecting on his relationships with the other members of the *Gemeinschaft*, Heinz comes



to the conclusion: “Ich konnte tun, was ich wollte, bis auf Cornelius war ich schon immer allen egal gewesen. Und nun sogar auch ihm. Ich hatte niemanden. Niemanden. Nur mein Toy” (218). He has been orphaned by the apocalyptic event, which results in the *Gemeinschaft* on the *Rosenalm* becoming Heinz’s proxy family. This new family, however, fails to integrate the young adolescent protagonist fully, mostly due to the age gap that is best exemplified by Heinz’s infantile attachment to his robot fennec. Sherry Turkle reveals in her sociological study *Alone Together* (2011) how, when robots were trialed as cure for loneliness in homes for the elderly, adults first had to overcome the embarrassment at being seen playing with dolls: “Once they have declared themselves not crazy, they can proceed in their relationship with a robot seal. Or with a robot baby doll” (109). While it is surely the adult prejudice against playing with robots that impedes Heinz’s integration into the group, von Steinaecker uses Heinz’s relationship with his toy—similar to how Haushofer employs the relationship of the protagonist and Luchs—to discuss bigger questions about embodiment and what it means to be human. Both the fennec and particularly the cow represent automata as described by Descartes that one is not easily able to distinguish from real animals. For not only do they realistically resemble and move like real animals but they also eat, drink, and have a digestive function. Eventually, the very inner core of the body and the lack of existential fear are the only way to distinguish a real from the robot animal when the cow shares the same fate as Stier in *Die Wand*, to be killed and cut open by an axe (150). These examples, however, merely set the stage for the great technological trick, namely Heinz himself, who as a technologically produced clone represents the greatest step away from the Cartesian tradition as he is no longer recognizable as a machine by his human interlocutors. Hence, one cannot interpret Heinz’s relationship with his toy or the cow as the childish attachment of a lonely adolescent but instead as the creation of a new, non-human

community whose solidarity, if we assume that the last *Heft* of the novel is indeed to be taken at face value, enables Heinz and the other survivors of the *Gemeinschaft* to escape the human traffickers on the *Loreley*.

As Claudia Nitschke has argued, Heinz's posthuman embodied hybrid identity that "umfasst [. . .] Menschliches und Nichtmenschliches" (245) complicates notions of embodiment. Eventually, the novel suggests that not only nature as represented by the *Resort* but also human nature are not stable categories anymore. On the one hand, just as in *Die Wand*, the body functions as site of habitualized memory, triggering positive memories when a scent reminds Heinz of life on the *Alm* (377) and storing the trauma of having committed cannibalism that leads to a strong nauseous reaction years later (398), which further highlights the distinction between the paradisiac *Alm* and hellish beyond. On the other hand, knowledge has literally been *eingepflanzt* in Heinz as three implants, which makes it ambiguous whether his mental development was "natürlich oder auf Implantat zurückzuführen" (363). This first resembles the *eingepflanzte Trieb* to care that Haushofer's protagonist cannot suppress. Just as she unconditionally cares for her animals, the literary heritage stored in Heinz, according to Nitschke, develops Heinz's "moralische Disposition, eine Sehnsucht nach couragierter, engagierter Integrität" (231). With the image of a living nature and reproductive sexuality being disbanded, the desire for a godlike creator and a transcendental connection enters the discourse on loneliness in the highly technologized world of the novel.

In this quest, it is significant that Heinz is both a clone and an orphan. In his analysis of the clone protagonists in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005), Justin Omar Johnston argues that both orphans and clones "contain an easily activated search engine to seek their 'origins' or the 'original' humans from whom they were cloned. Where these origins are

foreclosed [. . .], this engine becomes paranoid, exciting multiple clues and proliferating analogical possibilities” (54). Heinz is not able to connect properly with his community rationally or emotionally and is also not equipped with sexual desire (54, 392–93), which foreshadows his later life in the community of celibate monks in which sexuality is taboo and hence cannot function as a means for connection. Heinz first seeks to connect with his lost father, who, tellingly, is supposed to wait in space and then with the LORD. The ability to connect naturally and not electronically through his implants with the LORD, a higher transcendental authority that Heinz establishes as the ultimate creator of his life rather than the engineers in the clone labs (398), becomes the decisive feature for Heinz to be recognized as human.

Similar to the clones in *Never Let Me Go*, which in the reader’s perception undergo a disturbing identity transformation from students to clones (cf. Johnston p. 59), Heinz’s trajectory leads him from child to commodity whereby he is instrumentalized as a “biotechnisches Wunder” for the political purpose of raising the public image of the extinct German state and culture as well as refugees from the destroyed former German regions (384). Heinz is increasingly dehumanized as a curiosity, reduced to his implant tattoos that he is asked to show on television as a public spectacle (387), which eventually—reminiscent of Georg Büchner’s eponymous protagonist in *Woyzeck* (1836/37)—leaves him as a “Zirkusbär” (392). In relation to Ishiguro’s clone protagonists, Johnston argues that when they do somehow “precariously attach themselves to the family of man, it is on the outskirts of the human, where subjects are treated as less-than-fully-human” (54) and this also happens to Heinz in Paris. A clear-cut clone identity is forced upon him by oppressive human standards and perceptions that do not allow for nonbinary identities on which one cannot easily put a label. Whereas Ishiguro’s clones are looking for the donors from whom they were replicated out of a hopeless desire to see what a fully integrated

life in society looks like, Heinz, despite at times still feeling lonely, can find acceptance in communities on the *Rosenalm* and in the monastery that have heterotopian characters in that they are connected to regular society but removed enough to be governed by different social codes that allow for Heinz's integration. More important, however, is that Heinz's struggle to overcome his transcendental loneliness eventually also frees him from the social exclusion that his hybrid identity has hitherto experienced in human society. The projected future hybridity of identity as exemplified by Heinz is brought into focus in the very last sentences of the novel: "Es war einmal ein Kind auf einer Alm, das war ein E-Klon, ein Honk, ein Junge, eine Bakterie und eine Schildkröte. Es war einmal ein Junge, der wurde ein Häftling und eine Berühmtheit. Es war einmal ein Mann, der wurde ein Mönch. Es war einmal ein Greis, der schrieb ein Buch. Es war einmal ein Mensch" (408). The novel's conclusion summarizes crucial plot points and interwoven fictional works written by Heinz throughout his journey that present a tension between human and machine, a biological and a technological identity.<sup>10</sup> Significant, however, is the very last word, as it emphasizes that the endpoint of Heinz's journey is his *Menschwerdung*. While the clones in *Never Let Me Go* fail to prove that they have souls through the creation of art, the characteristic fairy tale phrasing in the last sentences highlights the power of narration to create a hybrid narrated identity indicative of an "exzentrische Positionalität" fueled by Heinz's individual belief of being an equal being created by the LORD (398), the transcendent authority not tainted by human prejudice. Therefore, in contrast to Haushofer's lonely protagonist, Heinz represents a shift in the highly technologized age depicted in the novel: Heinz is not reintegrated into nature, nor does he abandon human identity to converge with faunistic or floral features. When the whole of nature is a technological trick and the distinction between human and machine has increasingly become permeable, the *Rückübersetzung des Menschen* is not one into

nature but into society itself. Thereby, loneliness still functions as the trigger for the process of reintegration. However, rather than accepting social isolation, the pre-Enlightenment oneness with God, or rather the LORD, instigates a new sense of community and belonging after the end of the rationality-fueled technological process.

## Rereading Haushofer's *Die Wand*

In the early twenty-first century, when questions of technological process in relation to digitalization and advanced robotics are linked with questions of conservation and social bonds, Marlen Haushofer's *Die Wand* gains prominence as a pre-text for recent Germanophone literature: von Steinaecker's novel offers new perspectives not only on questions of loneliness, nature, technology, and their influence on lonely bodies but also on Haushofer's original novel. *Die Verteidigung des Paradieses* takes its cue from one of the three possible origins of Haushofer's wall and presents technological progress paired with the human *Destruktionstrieb* as the cause for the apocalyptic scenario. The eponymous paradise lies outside of nature, when technology has rendered untamed nature a technological resort and all that is left from technologically unregulated nature has been turned into a deadly nuclear-contaminated wasteland. As in Haushofer, technology fails to provide a remedy to the protagonist's lonely existence and also prevents its protagonist from being reintegrated into a natural haven. Hence, Heinz's struggle to overcome his loneliness and to be recognized in human society leads to the reestablishment of a transcendental connection.

At a time when societies are getting increasingly wary of technology and the fear that the human desire to control nature will lead us down a dystopian path,<sup>11</sup> von Steinaecker's references to Haushofer's *Die Wand* enable us to reinterpret the novel in a more positive light—beyond the bleakness and despair of the protagonist's isolation. The protagonist's lonely body is

not only a site that carries the traumatic memories that the human *Destruktionstrieb* has inscribed in it; once freed from the oppressive structures of human society, the reintegration into nature also allows for her body to become a site for the generation of knowledge that then enables new forms of human-animal cohabitation. Reading *Die Wand*—both the novel and the invisible wall around the protagonist’s mountain range—through the lens of the shield surrounding the *Rosenalm*, it is clear that it is not so much a prison as a natural protection against the even greater technologically induced destruction and suffering that await on the other side of the wall.

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Benjamin Schaper is departmental lecturer in German at the University of Oxford. He holds an MSt in Modern Languages (Comparative Literature) and a DPhil in Medieval and Modern Languages (German) from the same institution. Formerly, he taught at the universities of Munich and Durham and was a Sylvia Naish Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Modern Languages Research, University of London. He has published widely on twentieth- and twenty-first-century Germanophone literature, film, and television, including his monograph *Poetik und Politik der Lesbarkeit in der deutschen Literatur* (Winter 2017), the special issue “The Lonely Nerd” (*Exchanges*, 2022), and the volume *Entertaining German Culture: Contemporary Transnational Television and Film* (Berghahn, 2023). His postdoc project analyzes loneliness and human-machine interaction in the age of Romanticism, modernity, and the digital age. His research further focuses transnational German film and television, the literary market, and literary networks.

## Notes

1. Freud contextualized this within Christian missionary work when missionaries encountered native tribes which, due to the absence of culture, the benevolence of nature, and their general modesty, supposedly lived “ein einfaches, bedürfnisarmes, glückliches Leben” (33) that was unattainable for the supposedly culturally more

developed visitors.

2. This also resembles Freud's assessment of the hermit as unproductive and insane that eventually leads Freud to privilege collaborative cultural processes in search of happiness.
3. Nietzsche established the dictum in Aphorism 125 of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* and later developed his argument in *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883–85).
4. On nature and its significance for (artistic) inspiration in Romantic literature, see, e.g., McKusick; Schmidt, "From Early to Late Romanticism."
5. On shame about and acceptance of animal companions, see Kuzniar 109.
7. Earlier in the novel, the protagonist further states: "Ich ging zu Luchs zurück und redete ihm gut zu. Er war ja ganz vernünftig, ich hätte viel eher Zuspruch gebraucht. Es war mir plötzlich ein großer Trost, Luchs bei mir zu haben" (20).
8. In his *Discourse de la méthode* (1637), Descartes argues that humans and animals were separated by the ability on the part of the former to speak and to correctly react to various different challenges intuitively (73).
9. For a detailed analysis of von Steinaecker's use of intertextuality, see Nitschke.
10. For a detailed analysis of the quote, see Nitschke 245.
11. "We may well wonder why a simple, if mesmerizingly told, story of a woman who finds herself not only isolated from the world but also quite likely one of the few surviving human beings on the planet has struck a nerve fifty years after it first appeared. This may have to do with the similarities between the Cold War uncertainties and our postmillennial sense of insecurity about the future that has made strange bedfellows of the back-to-nature and the survivalist or prepper movements" (Cornils 216).

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