The Call of the Wild: Hunting and ecology in the stories of Otto Alscher and Horst Stern

Axel Goodbody

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1. Hunting as a cultural phenomenon, and as a moral and environmental problem

Hunting is a prime subject for exploring our relationship with the wild, and shifting conceptions of the nature/culture divide, for the hunter is a liminal figure, with one foot in the camp of humanity, pursuing his prey, but with the other paradoxically situated in the world of the animal, who he knows more intimately than other men, and with whom he is linked by empathy and identification. Matt Cartmill writes of the hunter as a fundamentally ambiguous figure, "who can be seen either as a fight against wildness or as a half-animal participant in it" (1996: 31).[1] Historically, nature-lovers have more often than not been hunters, who have regarded themselves of friends of the animal kinds, and by extension friends of the wild, non-human realm that the animals inhabit, while hounding and shooting individual animals. Hunting is the traditional vehicle of our closest encounter with the wild animal, a site of immersion in nature and rediscovery of what is felt to be our true human nature.

The hunt has played a significant part in many cultures, and served varying social functions throughout the course of history. Its significance as a source of food in primitive societies is, however, often exaggerated. While it is true that, from what we know of Palaeolithic man, the earliest European hunter-gatherer peoples (Neanderthal Man) lived on a diet in which large wild animals played a major part, by the later Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods our more immediate ancestors (Cro-Magnon Man) were more gatherers than hunters, and big game was of limited importance in comparison with the smaller animals hunted and eaten in everyday life. Hunting was now as much

a matter of skill, strategy, communication and adaptability as of sheer strength and the living out of individuals' aggressive instincts.

A second myth about hunting is that it has always served as a natural vehicle for genetically programmed, aggressive and destructive human instincts. From the nineteen-twenties on, a school of anthropologists led by Raymond Dart claimed that the origins of humankind lay in a shift from the food-gathering practices of forest dwellers to hunting in the open savannah. Their argument that it was walking upright and using weapons which distinguished *homo sapiens* from the apes was taken up by the journalist Robert Ardrey in the nineteen-sixties. Humans were, he wrote, a "killer ape" species. Central propositions of the 'hunting hypothesis' which Ardrey popularised were that hunting and its selection pressures had made men and women out of our ape-like ancestors, instilled a taste for violence in them, estranged them from the animal kingdom, and excluded them from the order of nature (see Cartmill 1996: 14). The picture of humans as mentally unbalanced predators threatening an otherwise harmonious natural realm has been disseminated in countless works of popular science, novels and poems, not to mention films such as Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Though the view that hunting and shooting today are remnants of aggressive behaviour rooted in evolutionary psychology, and hence reflect innate human qualities, still finds supporters (see Kühnle 1994 and 1997), it has long since been challenged by experts (see Chapters 1, 2 and 10 in Cartmill 1996 and Chapter 8, 'Anthropology', in Fromm 1977). In the hunter-gatherer peoples of Europe, hunting appears to have acted as a periodic supplement filling gaps in protein supply, at times of year when other food was not available (see Cartmill 1996: 17). Archaeological finds have in any case revealed that hunting accounted for only a tiny percentage of the meat eaten in the earliest urban centres of the agrarian societies which began to emerge in the Mediterranean area around 10 000 BC (see Spehr 1994: 59f.). By this time, the primary function of hunting was to protect crops and livestock, and to ensure the safety of human settlements from predatory animals. The link between hunting and aggression is in any case questionable: in today's primitive societies, for instance, animals are commonly asked for forgiveness when being killed.

Among the aspects of hunting which have been of long-term cultural significance are its association with male identity and with social elites. Throughout most of Western history, hunting has been a stereotypically male activity. Today, many men like to go hunting because it gets them away from their families, and into the (almost) exclusively male company of old friends: it fulfils a need for male bonding. Many men believe that hunting affirms their identity as men and, as Cartmill notes, feel that taking a boy hunting cements his bonds to other males and helps make a man out of him (p. 233). Some hunters think their sport affirms their virility as well as their masculine identity. However, hunting was not, it seems, originally an exclusively male domain. Lesser game was frequently hunted by women, who were responsible for the everyday provision of food, though hunting larger animals, which involved going further afield and could last over days or weeks, was probably the business of men. The ancient historian J.J. Bachofen interpreted Greek myths of male Olympian sky-Gods slaying chthonian female monsters as reflecting the eclipsing of a peaceful, egalitarian and environmentally sensitive matriarchy by a warlike, hierarchical and polytheistic patriarchal society at the end of the Minoan and the beginning of the Mycenaean culture. Bachofen's views are now considered speculative and unreliable. However, Greek mythology does seem to contain evidence of the eclipsing of a female mythology of nature and hunting (represented by earth Goddesses, Artemis the huntress, and the Amazons) by male equivalents (Zeus, Perseus, Hercules, Achilles).

"The motives of hunters are vague and visceral", Cartmill notes (p. 228). The stereotype of the violent, psychopathic male who simply takes pleasure in inflicting pain and death is, however, no more plausible for most persons involved than the suggestion that hunters in today's industrialised countries are pursuing an economic rationale. Different people hunt for different reasons. In certain societies and at certain times, hunting has been a marker of the ruling class, and social climbers have joined the chase to gain status. Hunting was already an attribute of royalty and a marker of social privilege in ancient Greece (and to a lesser extent also in Rome), and this aspect became central in the Middle Ages. From the time of Charlemagne, hunting rights were separated from land ownership and made a royal

prerogative, which was then divided up and awarded by territorial rulers to nobles and other loyal subjects. Deer and boar hunting served to bond the nobility with the monarch, and provided a training ground for military activities. Although hunting lesser game continued to be open to ordinary people, the period witnessed the emergence of new practices of hunting aiming no longer at a quick and certain kill, either for the procurement of food or for protection, but rather at hunting as a display of cultural sophistication and status in the feudal social hierarchy. Many of the elaborate conventions which now emerged in Germany under the term *Waidwerk* (the art of hunting) were imported from France, where the noble art of hunting, which now focused on falconry and the mounted pursuit of stags, in which no missile weapons were used, and the quarry essentially run to death (the “Parforce” hunt), served as a model of and training ground for chivalry. Conversely, however, hunting can be a seasonal ritual of working-class solidarity, or an event bringing together people of different social classes. (Landry writes that William Cobbett, one of the most outspoken radical writers in early nineteenth century Britain, championed hunting and other rural sports as recreations that encouraged social and cultural interaction between elite and non-elite – 2001: 44.)

In the early modern period, two different relationships with the natural environment existed side by side, together with traditional (often ecologically beneficial) limitations on its use. They both deprived nature of subjectivity and moral value. On the one hand, the development towards increasingly rational economic exploitation of natural resources sought to render agricultural production more efficient. This was paralleled by the refinement of methods of hunting as a ‘harvesting’ of game, and the extermination of predators such as bear, wolf and lynx in most parts of Europe. On the other hand, elaborate hunting parties at Renaissance and Baroque courts involved the slaughter of vast numbers of animals. Such cruel and wasteful practices were grounded in a conception of nature as negative other which corresponded to the medieval view of nature’s inferiority and sinfulness, leaving the way open for the unimpeded exercise of domination and representation of power. (The same values and arguments enabled the *Naturvölker*, or primitive peoples encountered by the first colonists, to be ruthlessly robbed, murdered and

enslaved, and patriarchal control over women's alternative knowledge and use of plants, animals and the human body to be tightened in the witch hunts.)

Christian tradition, which underlies most Western attitudes, in fact embraces two conflicting strands of thought about how animals should be treated. Both of these are founded on Bible passages. The first, 'dominionist' strand, which was formulated in the fourth century by Saint Augustine and restated by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, and remains influential today, emphasises humanity's separateness from the rest of creation, and our legitimate right to make almost any use of animals for our own interests. In *Genesis* 1, 28, God blesses the newly created man and woman, and says to them: "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all the living creatures that move on earth" (*New Jerusalem Bible*). In *Genesis* 9, 1-4, Noah and his sons are even incited to be "*the terror and the dread* of all the animals on land and all the birds of heaven, of everything that moves on land and all the fish of the sea" (my emphasis). Every living thing is ours to eat.[2]

A second, contradictory strand of Christian thought holds that human exploitation of nature (and predation in general) entered history with the Fall, and will disappear when God comes again to reign on earth. It is inspired by the ideal state of non-predation, in which all God's creatures coexist in peaceful vegetarianism, envisaged in the prophecy of Isaiah: "The wolf will live with the lamb, the panther lie down with the kid, calf, lion and fat-stock beast together, with a little boy to lead them" (*Isaiah* 22, 6-9). This counter-current in Western thought, which is present in the teaching of Saint Francis and the writings of Albert Schweitzer, has come to the fore in the second half of the twentieth century. Challenging humanity's exploitation of the animal world, it conceives of our relationship with animals as somewhere between stewardship and brotherhood. Many of the arguments around hunting today draw ultimately on one or other of these approaches.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed a major shift in attitudes towards nature and animals which began to alter the status and cultural significance of hunting. With the separation from nature of the growing number of people living in urban environments and working in industry, the professions and administrative jobs, the rural landscape acquired new value

as a sphere of semi-autonomy for the individual, affording freedom for self-realisation, aesthetic pleasure and metaphysical experience. The first *Naturdenkmäler*, or "natural monuments" (the term was coined by Alexander von Humboldt in 1819), the precursors of national parks and conservation areas, were designated and protected from a sense of the need to preserve pockets of wilderness (and the wild animals living in them) capable of injecting, albeit temporarily, 'romantic' feelings into the visitor as an antidote to the 'artificial' life of civilisation (Spehr 1994: 130). This development was accompanied by a new understanding of our relationship with animals, one more emotional than rational, based on imaginative identification on the one hand, and recognition of their difference and autonomy on the other.

The behavioural and evolutionary links between humans and animals were now stressed rather than their previously alleged lack of reason, will and soul. Rousseau pleaded in the preface to his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1754) for the participation of animals in natural law, on the basis of their sentience, and wrote of human duties towards them (see Dinzelbacher 2000: 347). Herder described animals as the "older brothers" of man in *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-91). He continued to subscribe to the notion that man was "the highest form of being attainable by an Earth-organisation", and, through reason, "the first freedman of creation", but noted the actual superiority of certain animals over human beings in terms of instincts and skills in his *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1772) (see ibid. 352, 356, 369 and 371). Since the Renaissance, Humanists such as Michel de Montaigne (1533-92) had repeatedly opposed cruelty to animals. Thomas More reviled hunting in his *Utopia* (1516), and argued that killing animals was a matter for butchers. George Turbervile's *Noble Art of Venerie or Hunting* (1576) introduced a series of original poems into the material drawn from French sources, in which hart, hare, fox and otter plead for mercy, speak of their suffering, and demand humility of the hunter, who should not gloat at his conquest, but seek pardon of his prey (see Landry 2001: 35-42). The more sweeping change in public attitudes which began in the second half of the eighteenth century is signalled clearly in Matthias Claudius's short but moving *Schreiben eines parforcegejagten Hirschen an den Fürsten, der ihn parforcegejagt hatte* (1775). Writing in the pages of his

widely read journal, the *Wandsbecker Bote*, the popular poet and essayist Claudius gave satirical expression to the suffering of an innocent, peaceful, herbivorous animal, for the satisfaction of sadistic human pleasure:

Durchlauchtiger Fürst,
Gnädigster Fürst und Herr!
Ich habe heute die Gnade gehabt, von Ew. Hochfürstlichen Durchlaucht parforcegejagt zu werden; bitte aber untertänigst, mich künftig damit zu verschonen. Ew. Hochfürstl. Durchl. sollten nur *einmal* parforcegejagt sein, so würden Sie meine Bitte nicht unbillig finden. Ich liege hier und mag meinen Kopf nicht aufheben, und das Blut läuft mir aus Maul und Nüstern. Wie können Ihr Durchlaucht es doch übers Herz bringen, ein armes unschuldiges Tier, das sich von Gras und Kräutern nährt, zu Tode zu jagen? Lassen Sie mich lieber totschießen, so bin ich kurz und gut davon. (Claudius 1980: 156f.)

In the eighteen-forties and fifties, Arthur Schopenhauer systematically developed an ethic based on sympathy with all forms of life, which invested animals with intrinsic value as active subjects and moral entities. The breakthrough of the theory of evolution with Darwin's work drew new attention to the continuum between animals and humans. Though it was interpreted by many as confirming humans' superiority over other life forms, it prompted interest in previously neglected 'animal' aspects of humanity such as the unconscious. In a famous passage from the opening of *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben* (1874), Nietzsche contrasted animals' blissful security in their instincts, their innocent freedom from self-questioning and moral scruples, with the discontent arising from man's memory and the burden of awareness of history. Animals are:

kurz angebunden mit ihrer Lust und Unlust, nämlich an den Pflock des Augenblickes und deshalb weder schwermüthig noch überdrüssig. Dies zu sehen geht dem Menschen hart ein, weil er seines Menschenthums sich vor dem Thiere brüstet und doch nach seinem Glücke eifersüchtig hinblickt – denn das will er allein, gleich dem Thiere weder überdrüssig noch unter Schmerzen leben, und will es doch vergebens, weil er es nicht will wie das Thier. (Nietzsche 1980, I: 248)

The human instincts, which had been denigrated in the early modern period as lower, animal aspects of humanity, acquired a quasi-heroic significance in the context of Nietzsche's cultural criticism. Though he does not write that return to carefree childhood or immersion in the spiritual world of the animal, who he supposed to be free of awareness of death, hold out the promise of lasting redemption from individuation or escape from the alienation of modern

civilisation, he expresses envy of animals as creatures enjoying a supposedly spontaneous, uncomplicated relationship with the natural world, in an originary form of being based on immediacy of instinct. This core element of the vitalist philosophy which exercised such influence at the turn of the twentieth century was to lead to a politically disastrous subordination of reason, ethics and the cognitive to instinct and existential self-interest in Nazi ideology (see Dinzelbacher 2000: 527-9).

By the end of the nineteenth century, societies to prevent cruelty to domestic animals and to protect endangered species had been founded all over Europe. Paradoxically, however, hunting also flourished. It now served, alongside nature conservation and tourism, as a means of compensating for the emotional deficits of industrial society. Hunting satisfied a growing need for contact with a 'wild' sphere of unregimented existence, combining the encounter with 'unspoiled' wilderness and the wild animal with a supposedly 'authentic' way of life. Hunting and conservation exemplified two sides of the same coin of experiencing nature corresponding to Erich Fromm's distinction between 'Haben' and 'Sein', i.e. between passive possession/consumption of material things, aggression and greed on the one hand, and an active, productive relationship with nature based on love and shared experience on the other (see Bode and Emmert 2000: 47f.). As indicated above, the relationship between hunting and love of nature is curiously complex: not only early scientific naturalists, but also poets and other writers celebrating nature were commonly hunters. Conservationists such as John James Audubon and Johann Matthäus Bechstein, politicians who promoted conservation like Franklin D. Roosevelt, and even the originator of the Land Ethic, Aldo Leopold, were keen hunters and advocates of hunting.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the emotions projected onto animals were highly contradictory: on the one hand they reflected indifference and a hostility rooted in pride in modernity and confidence in the superiority of human civilisation, on the other a sense of kinship, fed by discontent with modernity. The widespread practice of mounting and displaying antlers like military trophies, as fetish objects conveying a reassuring sense of control and power, has been interpreted as suggesting that hunting responded to collective insecurities about (gender and class) identity in the face of female

emancipation and of the threat of revolution. The extended ritual of killing the quarry, involving observing a moment of silence, placing a twig in the animal's mouth, and compulsory blooding of the shirtsleeves while field dressing and dividing up the carcass, turned the act into a miniature drama in which the hunter cathartically triumphed over his fears. Personal and collective insecurities had already been present in Romantic representations of the hunter as precarious and endangered, a position symbolised by Actaeon, the hunter who became the hunted, torn to bits by his hounds in punishment by Diana for having spied on her naked in her bath (see Rigby 2004: 225f.).

The motif of the hunter's ambivalence about taking the life of an animal, which is present in many accounts of hunting, is no mere accretion of modern civilisation, but reflects, according to Cartmill and Landry, a fundamental ambivalence in hunting discourse throughout the centuries, which they see as characterised by its shifting identifications between the humans and animals. This aspect of hunting is reflected in the story of Saint Hubert. According to legend, Hubert, a French nobleman who lived in the early eighth century and became Bishop of Liège, became obsessed with hunting after the tragic death of his young wife. A vision of a shining cross in the antlers of a deer he was pursuing led him to devote his life to evangelisation. The shared suffering and death of the crucified Christ and the hunted stag are underlined by the similarity of the deer's antlers with the crown of thorns. (In one version of the tale, the event takes place on Good Friday and Hubert's wife tries in vain to dissuade him from going out hunting.) The hunter's remorse over his bloody actions at the sight of his reproachful victim is transformed through a projection of powerful unconscious wishes into divine forgiveness and redemption through the animal's vicarious suffering.[3]

A transitional phase between the eighteen-nineties and the nineteen-thirties saw a gradual decline in the significance of hunting as a marker of the social elite (though big game hunting in the colonies provided a substitute), and growing pressures on game. Royal hunts continued, however, and indeed reached new heights under the German Kaisers. After 1871, shooting parties on their estates in East Prussia (Rominten) and Brandenburg (Schorfheide) met the greatly increased representational needs of the newly founded German Empire. Wilhelm II, who was famous for his lavish shooting parties, is

reported to have shot 75 000 animals personally, over a period of 30 years – seven a day on average (Bode and Emmert 2000: 128). These hunting activities reflect the vain, impulsive and domineering personality of a man who exacerbated international political tensions in the run up to the First World War, and have been interpreted as a form of compensation for feelings of inferiority stemming from physical disability (his left arm was shorter than his right). However, Wilhelm II's personal obsession coincided with the practice of hunting as a form of representation of power by German rulers going back to the court of the Emperor Maximilian I in the early seventeenth century.

Meanwhile, the sophistication of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century weaponry, the opening up of hunting to ever larger sections of the population, and the gradual exposure of previously remote parts of the country to hunters as a result of increased mobility all took their toll on game. This pressure, which was felt in all the developed countries, led to a phase of more comprehensive legislation concerning the management of wildlife in the nineteen-thirties and forties. German hunters have tended to speak with pride of the exemplary hunting law passed in 1934, banning the unnecessary suffering of animals, regulating which and how many could be shot, and making hunters legally responsible, for the first time in any country, for the care of game and the maintenance of stock. However, the *Reichsjagdgesetz*, like the Nature Conservation Act (*Reichsnaturschutzgesetz*) which succeeded it, illustrate the combination of ruthless control, exploitation and modern development (involving the draining of wetlands and the large-scale improvement of agricultural land, and the building of dams and motorways) with idealisation of nature, the soil and the German landscape, which characterised Nazi ideology. Hitler, who was a dog-lover and a vegetarian, was, like most of the German population, uninterested in hunting. Indeed, his personal distaste (despite his romantic heroisation of existential struggle, critique of the degeneracy of modern civilisation, and fixation on racial health) is recorded in a conversation with Albert Speer in his mountain retreat on the Obersalzberg:

"Wie kann ein Mensch sich nur für so etwas begeistern. Tiere zu töten, wenn es sein muß, ist ein Geschäft des Metzgers. Aber dafür noch viel Geld ausgeben… Ich verstehe ja, daß es Berufsjäger geben muß, um das kranke Wild abzuschießen. Wenn wenigstens noch eine Gefahr damit verbunden

wäre, wie in den Zeiten, als man mit dem Speer gegen das Wild anging. Aber heute, wo jeder mit einem dicken Bauch aus der Entfernung sicher das Tier abschießen kann… Jagd und Pferderennen sind letzte Überreste einer abgestorbenen, feudalen Welt." (Speer 1969: 110f.)

The "fat belly" is a reference to the second in command in the Third Reich, Hermann Göring, who was a keen hunter and adopted the title *Reichsjägermeister*. Historically, there have been many links between the control and exploitation of animals and of fellow humans. However, the less than innocent political dimension to hunting has nowhere been more evident than in the Third Reich, when totalitarian control went hand in hand with a problematic understanding of nature as a sphere of purity and authenticity. Göring, who took over the imperial estates in 1936, notoriously exemplified the link between hunting and the exclusion and extermination of beings not considered organic or 'natural'. Hunting was in practice restricted to a tiny elite in the Third Reich, but the number of animals killed and the quality of the trophies rose dramatically, not least due to scientific perfectioning of the practices of breeding, over-stocking and winter feeding which had begun under the Kaisers.

In the postwar decades the traditions of intensive care for game and the representational hunt were resumed in West Germany, and, a decade and a half later, in the GDR. Up to the nineteen-seventies, West (and East) German heads of state, senior politicians and top civil servants were members of the shooting fraternity, alongside members of the nobility, bankers and the captains of industry. Shooting continued to be a privilege of the relatively wealthy, but its growing role in corporate hospitality shifted it in practice further and further away from the intimate knowledge of and interaction with the wild animal which it traditionally involved.

Tensions between the interests of hunters and conservationists also came increasingly to the fore. Native fauna were largely ignored by German conservationists, and popular concern over the loss of species concentrated on charismatic foreign megafauna. The attention of the members of the environmental movement was meanwhile directed towards the issues of pollution, nuclear power and global warming, and later also to forest dieback and the hole in the ozone layer. However, the animal-loving environmental

journalist Horst Stern took up the cause of foresters, whose complaints about the damage to State forests resulting from overstocking with deer had been ignored by the authorities thanks to a powerful hunting lobby: Stern brought the issue to the attention of the public in a TV documentary on Red Deer, which was provocatively broadcast on Christmas Eve, 1971. “It was a devastating blow to German forest romanticism, Bambi-type sentimentality and, last but not least, the smooth talking of the hunting fraternity”, noted Ernst Johann in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (see Fischer 1997: 115). Stern repeated and developed his arguments in an open letter to the President, Walter Scheel (Stern 1975), which led to the end of State hunts as diversions for visiting Heads of State and diplomats, and forced the German Hunting Association to acknowledge the need for reform. Hunters no longer possess the political clout they once had, and there is, as in the UK, a vociferous German anti-hunting lobby.[4]

Wilhelm Bode and Elisabeth Emmert have described the nineteen-seventies and eighties as a turning point for hunting (p. 12), a time of sweeping change, when the need for a new democratic and ecological legitimation of the practice became apparent. It was now recognised that hunting must be integrated with conservation and forestry, and undergo a transition “from noble hobby to ecological craft”. They write of the necessity for a reduction of the stocks of game to a level which will prevent irreparable damage to Germany’s mixed forests,[5] a switch from trophy hunting to planned culling of the weaker animals, including does and fawns, and a reduction of winter feeding and medical intervention, which effectively turn deer and boar into domestic animals. German hunters see themselves today as “applied conservationists”, benefiting the environment by preserving otherwise endangered species through the protection of their habitats.[6] However, as long as hunting focuses on the preservation of the currently favoured species at the expense of others, its real environmental benefit and contribution to biodiversity is limited. So long as the current population of deer is maintained by feeding, hunters cannot either claim to be performing an ecologically valuable task by standing in for extinct natural predators such as wolf, lynx and bear.[7]

For some hunters at least, a part of the attraction of their sport lies in an erotically charged, aggressive pleasure taken in killing animals. (This troubling motivation is discussed by Cartmill, pp. 238-40.) Here hunting is associated with a violent and irrational aspect of the human psyche: certain men (fortunately relatively few) practise a Dionysian form of hunting which makes them feel “wild and wicked and crazy”. Tradition sanctions here what would otherwise be regarded as a pathological inclination akin to rape. However, there are many more supporters of hunting who seek to justify it in terms of its ‘naturalness’. Hunting today is, they claim, a disalienating activity. The hunter gains a knowledge of and develops a respect for his prey which is missing in ordinary life relations with animals as a result of the industrialisation of modern food production, and its invisibility to the consumer. By giving expression to the ‘animal’ or ‘predator’ within us, tracking, stalking and shooting are also an ‘original’ way of being human, in which normally suppressed instincts are reunited with reason.

This savage element at the heart of hunting is explored in one of the most significant philosophical defences of hunting in modern time, the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset’s *Meditations on Hunting*, first published in 1942. Ortega describes hunting as a “deep and permanent yearning in the human condition” (Ortega 1986: 29). It involves hardship, risk, physical effort and concentration, and presupposes a scarcity of game. One of the difficulties with Ortega’s argument is that he takes the predatory animal as a model, but in practice nine out of ten chases by predators in the wild are unsuccessful – an unattractive prospect for sporting hunters. It also ignores the fact that humans differ in important ways from other animals. A second difficulty is that the commercialisation of hunting as a recreational activity has stripped it of the schooling of the intellect and the disciplining of the instincts which led Ortega to describe the code of ethics observed by hunters as comparable to those in monastic orders and the military (p. 31). The sophistication of modern weapons has necessitated the elaboration of a set of rules which seek to prevent hunting from becoming too easy. (Hare, pheasant, grouse and duck may not, for instance, be shot while sitting or swimming.) Ortega recognises the artificiality with which hunting has been turned into a ‘sport’, involving ‘fair chase’ and chivalry. As weapons become

more effective, man has “imposed more and more limitations on himself as the animal’s rival in order to leave it free to practise its wily defences, in order to avoid making the prey and the hunter excessively unequal” (p. 45).

If hunting is a sport which benefits society by bringing people closer to nature and permitting them to escape at least temporarily from their alienation from their true human nature prevalent today, it is difficult to understand why it should be necessary to kill the animal: the compensatory proximity with nature is equally possible for walkers and photographers. For Ortega, it cannot however simply be replaced by other competitive sports or the photo safari. Though the purpose of the hunt lies in the chase rather than in the kill, the death of the animal remains crucial. “Every good hunter is uneasy in the depths of his conscience when faced with the death he is about to inflict on the enchanting animal”, but without “the harsh confrontation with the animal’s fierceness, the struggle with its energetic defence, the *point of orgiastic intoxication aroused by the sight of blood, and even the hint of criminal suspicion which claws the hunter’s conscience*” (my emphasis), hunting in Ortega’s view lacks authenticity. “The spirit of the hunt disappears” (p. 95).

Ortega notes the ‘extras’ conveyed by hunting: “the immersion in the countryside, the healthfulness of the exercise, the distraction from [one’s] job, and so on and so forth” (p. 97). However, hunting is much more than these. As he rightly notes, it is a spiritual act, a religious rite – and, for him, an experience restoring us to authentic being. Because hunting relies on intense observation of the animal, and a sort of imitation, or anticipation of its moves, Ortega writes of a “mystical union with the beast” (p. 124). The ‘equal’ encounter with the wild is “a conscious and almost religious humbling of man which limits his superiority and lowers him toward the animal” (pp. 97f.). In the “subtle rite” of hunting we divest ourselves of civilisation and return to nature (pp. 123 and 116). Deprived by civilisation of our “ancestral proximity to animals, vegetables and minerals – in sum, to Nature”, we take pleasure in the “artificial return to it” (p. 111). Hunting is a “vacation from the human condition through an authentic ‘immersion in Nature’” (p. 121).

The argument that hunting gives (temporary) relief from the pain of individuation is returned to by Erich Fromm in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, but without Ortega’s mysticism. Fromm distinguishes “elite

hunting", which "satisfies the wish for power and control, including a certain amount of sadism, characteristic of power elites", from the actions of the primitive professional and the modern passionate hunter. The last of these is led by two principal motivations. The first is to return to the "natural state", become one with the animal, and be "freed from the burden of the existential split: to be part of nature *and* to transcend it by virtue of his consciousness". However, of at least equal importance is the hunter's enjoyment of his skill (1977: 185). It is worth noting that neither the experience of "oneness with nature" nor the pleasure taken in the combination of skills and "wide knowledge beyond that of handling a weapon" (ibid.) required by hunting would seem to necessitate or justify killing wild animals today, though Fromm does not comment directly on this.

Val Plumwood's recent reflections on the "relational" or "respectful" hunt go further towards accommodating the shift in thinking about nature from strong to weak anthropocentrism, and sensitivities to animal rights and gender equality. Plumwood limits her justification of hunting to forms based on need and practised in a context which involves some elements of respect and sacredness. The animal must be treated "responsibly and seriously to fulfil an important need in a way that recognises the 'more' that it is and respects both its individuality and its normal species life, in a reciprocal chain of mutual use which must ultimately include both hunter and hunted" (2000: 299ff). In other words, to conform to the principles of sacred eating in a good human life, we must gain our food in such a way as to acknowledge our kinship with those whom we make our food, and the "more than food" that every one of us is (p. 303). The "sensitive hunter" relies not only on his or her communicative skills and knowledge, but also on understanding of and rapport with the animals that are being hunted. The hunter will often be effective by adopting an 'intentional' stance, i.e. conceiving the hunted animal as another mindful, communicative, and intentional being, and combining this rapport with the imperative of hunting food needed for the survival of self and loved ones.

Neither Ortega nor Plumwood satisfies the imperative of humanely managing Germany's (or Britain's) game populations today. And we are left with the paradox that hunters are among those who care most about, know most intimately, and practise the most effective stewardship of our wild

animals, but are motivated by the desire to kill – for pleasure rather than for food. Public attitudes towards hunting seem broadly negative, but there is a vociferous minority determined to continue, and it is hard to imagine how game could be managed without some form of shooting.

The reflection in literary texts of attitudes towards animals and hunting has aroused little academic interest in Germany so far.[8] Yet literature, as a medium of non-trivial reflection on personal experience and received cultural values, can give unique insight into the complexity of our relationship with wild animals. In the following, I examine the hunting and wild animal stories of the Romanian German Otto Alscher (1880-1944) in the context of the ideological construction of nature and hunting in the early twentieth century. Alscher, a hunter who yet showed profound respect for wild animals and expressed concern at the erosion of their habitat, exemplifies the tensions in the attitude towards animals of his generation and beyond. His writing also illustrates the problematic political implications of the quest for authentic human experience, taking predatory animals as models for human behaviour, while at the same time speaking of the wild animal's essential otherness and calling for a 'partnership' with wild animals, a reconciliation of nature and culture, civilisation and the wild. The action in Horst Stern's novella, which was written half a century after Alscher's stories, takes place in the same part of the world (the forests of the Carpathian mountains). Motivated by an explicit aim to expose the hypocrisy of hunting practices in the nineteen-seventies and eighties, the domestication of the wild and the degeneration of a noble sport through political instrumentalisation and commercialisation, it illustrates the changed environmental situation and the shift in attitudes towards animals, and serves as an example of both the strengths and the weaknesses associated with the writing of direct environmental commitment.

2. Idyll and aggression in the stories of Otto Alscher

Though forests, mountains and wild animals have exercised a powerful fascination over the German cultural imagination,[9] there is little more wilderness left in modern Germany than in Britain. The densely populated central European landscape has been cleared, cultivated and shaped by its inhabitants for more than a thousand years, and the last native German

wolves were shot in the mid-nineteenth century. It is not therefore surprising that Otto Alscher, one of the few twentieth-century German authors to know and write about life and animals in the wild, should have lived on the extreme Eastern edge of the German-speaking world, in a corner of the former Austro-Hungarian empire, where the Danube traverses the Southern Carpathian mountains.

Hunting and wild animal stories occupy a marginal status in twentieth-century German literature, and Alscher's reputation today is no more than that of a minor provincial writer, remembered at best in the context of the literature of the Banat region, today divided between Romania, Serbia and Hungary, which was colonised by Germans in the early eighteenth century, and where at one time over a million German speakers lived. Yet he published four novels and six volumes of stories during his lifetime. In the years leading up to the First World War Alscher enjoyed considerable success with literary and journalistic works which drew his wider home to the attention of German readers as one remote from the major European capitals, an exotic landscape of forests, farms and small towns, inhabited by Gypsy woodcutters, Romanian peasants and Hungarian landlords. The novel *Gogan und das Tier* (1912) and the two volumes of short prose *Die Kluft: Rufe von Menschen und Tieren* (1917) and *Tier und Mensch* (1928) were published respectively by a leading German publisher based in Berlin (S. Fischer), and, in the case of the stories, by a reputable Munich firm (Albert Langen). However, his later work failed to match this success. The novel *Zwei Mörder in der Wildnis* (1934) only appeared in abridged form, serialised in a popular journal, and his last collection of stories, *Die Bärin* (1943), which contains some of his best writing, was published locally in a small print run by a friend of the author's.

Alscher, whose father ran a photographic studio in the town of Orşova, began his writing career after a brief period studying photography and graphic design in Vienna in 1900. He moved to Budapest to work as a journalist in 1911, and at the end of the First World War he supported the short-lived Hungarian Socialist Republic. After this had been crushed, he returned to the Banat, where his home had meanwhile become a part of the Kingdom of Romania. For a time Alscher continued to work as a journalist, and played an active part in the socio-political life of the German minority during the brief

period of cultural revival which ensued. However, political disillusionment, professional disappointments and the break-up of his first marriage led him to withdraw to a house in the woods he had built and lived in sporadically in the pre-war years. His efforts to live the simple life here, hunting, working a smallholding and writing, earned him the nickname of the "hermit" and "Mahatma Ghandi" of Orşova. Grinding poverty and failure to find a publisher for his novels and stories left him open to the lure of fascism in the nineteen-thirties, whose glorification of the instincts he shared. When Germany lost control of Romania in the final months of the Second World War, Alscher was interned and died in a camp.[10]

Alscher was a keen hunter in his youth, and his early stories celebrate hunting as an expression of deep-rooted human instincts. But as he got older, he seems gradually to have lost pleasure in shooting, and become more interested in observing and describing the bears, wolves, lynxes, polecats, martens, eagles and smaller creatures of the Carpathian forests. From the start, his writing reflects a fundamental ambivalence regarding the shooting of wild animals, and in the nineteen-twenties, their focus shifts away from the excitement of tracking animals down, towards respectful observation, appreciation of their grace and vitality, wonder at their autonomy and acknowledgement of their right to life. First signs of this may be found in the stories 'Der Marder' and 'Der Fremde', which he wrote during the First World War. In the former, the author sets out with his dogs and his best rifle on a winter hunting expedition. It is the first good day after a depressing spell of bad weather, and the landscape is magically transformed by snowfall. He writes of the will to power and describes the exertion of hunting in terms reminiscent of Nietzsche, as a stripping away of the layers of effete civilisation, and, like Ortega, as a regaining of our lost animality:

> Gibt es etwas Herrlicheres als den Willen zur Kraft? Den Willen zur Gewalt, zur Überwältigung, zur Grausamkeit, wenn es sein muß, wenn wir sie nur üben, weil wir sie auch zu ertragen wissen und sie eine Probe unsrer Kraft an anderen ist. […]
>
> Der Körper dampft und verlangt Nacktheit. Die Muskeln, denen alles zu eng ist, wenn sie jauchzen, wenn sie ihren Gesang singen, ihren gleichtönig wuchtigen, unbeirrt fließenden Gesang. Leben ist der Gesang des Körpers. Hartes, willensuchendes, einfaches Leben, dessen Scham das Verhüllte, Verdeckte und nicht das Nackte ist. (Alscher 1917: 20-22)

Coming on the tracks of a pair of wolves, he muses:

Ich möchte doch wieder einen Wolf sehen, wie er kommt, lang, geräuschlos, stark und grau durch den Wald gleitend, furchtlos auf den Schützen zu, der ihn mit klopfendem Herzen erwartet. Und wie sich dann alle Wildheit jäh und flammend in seinen Blicken entzündet, bevor sie hart verlöschend einem starken Leben nachgleiten, das von dannen schwindet, sich irgendeiner fernen Urkraft wieder zu einigen. (p. 24)

Alscher laments the dilution of the life force in the process of civilisation, our recourse to increasingly sophisticated weapons, and the gradual displacement of strength by cunning, of the body by intellect. And yet this is no untroubled celebration of the Dionysian, for he also writes of modern man's unease at taking animal life. He experiences feelings of shock and horror at his own actions when faced with the death throes of a hare. There is a disturbing contradiction in man's dual nature, he muses, as both a creature of instincts and a reasoning subject guided by moral principles, capable of empathising with animals (p. 22). Brushing this feeling aside, however, he proceeds to shoot a wildcat which his dogs have flushed out of a badger's den. Reinvigorated, he strides out in search of further adventure and observes at the sight of the blood dripping from the animal strung from his rucksack:

Vielleicht ist der Gang der Menschen darum so stark, so stolz, weil Blut ihren Weg bezeichnet. Weil jeder Schritt der Menschen Vernichtung ist, Vernichtung von Zeit, Raum und Unmöglichkeit. Und daß diese unsere Tritte des Verderbens doch immer wieder zu neuem Leben führen, ist dues nicht das Erhabenste unseres Seins?

Das Starke siegt. Wenn nicht darauf die Entwicklung von Mensch und Tier aufgebaut wäre, was wären wir heute? Aber das Recht der Kraft wird immer seine Geltung haben, auch für die Zukunft der Menschheit. Denn wehe, wenn es einmal nicht mehr so sein sollte. Wir dürfen immer nur durch Macht zur Milde gelangen, denn nur der Adel der Kraft ist der wahrhaftige. (pp. 27f.)

These commonplaces of Social Darwinism, in which Darwin's principle of the survival of the fittest (i.e. those most able to adapt to environmental change) is reformulated in a doctrine of the right of the strongest to dominate other species, and dubiously transferred to the human sphere, lead to reflection on the unlimited power of modern man over animals, and fantasies of his own prowess as a hunter:

Ich will heute meine Überlegeneheit ausnützen. Ich will sehen, ob etwas meinem Siegeswillen gewachsen ist, ob das Spiel vom Leben und Tod in meiner Hand durch etwas eine Störung erleiden kann. (pp. 28f.)

However, this moment of supreme hubris is a turning point. A marten, seemingly trapped in an isolated thicket, manages to escape his dogs and bullets to safety. He starts the homeward journey disappointed and perplexed that his shots could have missed their target. Gradually, these feelings pass, and his lasting memory is the sight of the marten's "wonderfully easy dashing", its "supple, agile gliding" across the snow, and the wonderment that prevented him from pressing the trigger until it was too late:

Es ist kein Springen, kein Laufen, es scheint den Schnee nicht zu berühren, nur um über die weiche Masse hinwegzugleiten, ohne eine Spur zu hinterlassen. Ich sehe deutlich das ganze Tier, aber ich erkenne keine Bewegung, schlank und schmal und wie aus Erz gegossen fliegt es hin. (p. 31)

We humans will never be able to emulate such suppleness and lightness, the powerful yet invisible play of muscles, whose action is of unfathomable origin. The strength of animals lies in such seeming effortlessness, which contrasts with the struggle and sweat attaching to all our achievements. Indeed, it is shame over that sweat which drives us to seek artificial aid in weapons, to feign feverishly a strength which we do not possess, but with which the animal is born. Echoing Nietzsche's *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben*, he reflects that humans have sought to outstrip animals out of sheer *jealousy*. Our admiration for them is the purest thing of which we are capable (p. 33).

In 'Der Fremde', a similar lesson is learned by a Romanian shepherd's boy, who is visiting his father in their summer grazing in the mountains. "What use are wolves?" he asks. "They're no good for anything, there's not even room for them in the forest any more – they should be exterminated!" (p. 44). He is puzzled by his father's equanimity when one of their dogs is killed by the leader of the wolf pack. The man accepts the presence of the wolves in the forest and argues for coexistence with them:

"Was soll man machen! Der Wolf leidet es eben nicht, daß wir in seinem Walde tun, als wären wir die Herren. Vordem waren die Hirten hier heroben, die Wölfe machten zuviel Schaden, auch die Adler schlugen Lämmer, nun aber sind wir doch gekommen, und wenn sie sich da zur Wehr setzen, müssen wir es ruhig dulden! […] Wald ist Wald und der Wolf gehört zum Walde." (pp. 48f.)

Towards the end of the story, the boy finds the leader of the wolf pack trapped in the shepherds' hut. Having entered to steal a new-born lamb the shepherds are looking after, the animal has been caught by the wind blowing the door shut. Alone and without a weapon, the indignant boy can do no more than shout abuse at the animal through the window. It turns to look at him:

Wie groß doch der Wolf war. Wie mächtig sein Schädel, die gedrungene Brust, der langbehaarte Rücken. Die Augen glühten, sie stachen auf ihn, und doch war es, als ruhe dieser fremde, wilde Blick nicht auf ihm, durchdringe ihn vielmehr und schaute weit hinaus. (p. 57)

Overcome with the feeling that it is impossible for anyone to capture or defeat such "immense, indomitable wildness" (p. 58), that it would merely be inherited by some other creature in the forest if this wolf should suffer harm, and with the sensation that he himself will "collapse and fade away" if he does not remove the barrier which separates him from the animal, the boy eventually throws open the door and releases the wolf. As it passes him, it is as if his existence "shakes from the steps of a great, strange life" (p. 60). If Alscher's description of the marten in 'Der Marder' recalls the symbolisation of the life force by animals in the paintings of Henri Rousseau or Franz Marc, it is the wolf which exercises a particular fascination in both stories and becomes an identification figure, standing, as in the American animal stories of Ernest Thompson Seton, for an uninhibited way of life, lonely but free of ties, and where necessary cruel and devoid of guilt.

Stories narrated from the perspective of the hunter predominate in Alscher's early work, but are later balanced by a growing number of tales and passages in the novels told from the animal's perspective. At the very heart of his mature writing is the encounter with the wild, which is crystallised in the experience of being fixed in the animal's gaze. By returning our human gaze, animals make us aware they are active subjects and not merely passive objects. They reassert an autonomy which momentarily decentres our anthropocentric world view. In an autobiographical note entitled 'Von mir über mich', written in 1934 to accompany the serialisation of his novel *Zwei Mörder in der Wildnis* in the magazine *Daheim*, Alscher describes a dramatic experience in his childhood:

Mein Leben verlief wie das vieler Kinder deutscher Auswanderer bis zu meinem dreizehnten Jahre mehr farbig als eintönig, ohne daß ich jedoch

etwas Außergewöhnliches darin gefunden hätte. Bis dann ein aus den Verhältnissen nicht gerade herausspringendes Geschehnis mein Wesen bestimmend beeinflußte. […]

An einem Oktobertage kehrte ich mit anderen Kameraden von einem Ausflug über die Berge heim. Ich ging voran, es dämmerte bereits stark. […] Da schiebt sich plötzlich ein großes, graues Tier über die Waldblöße. […] Ich sehe den starken Schädel, die breiten Wangenhaare, die spitzen, kurzen Ohren und den stämmigen Brustbau. Sogleich weiß ich: es ist ein Wolf! Doch nur mit einem ungeheuren Erstaunen starre ich ihn an. In mir ist gar keine Furcht, nur ein freudiger Schreck, der fragen möchte, nichts als fragen. […]

Mir ist, als hätte ich eine große Freundschaft werden sehen, die aber doch nur Verheißung blieb. Zweifel und Bewunderung für das freie, wilde Tier erfüllten mich und Fragen, viele Fragen, die sich der Knabe nicht beantworten konnte (*Daheim* 70, no. 15: 4).

The encounter, which corresponds to several passages in Alscher's fiction, is perhaps as much imagined as experienced. He describes himself as a child of "German émigrés": his parents were both from Silesia, and the family only moved to Orşova when he was eleven. Hence the young Otto was an outsider, who sought solace in nature (and companionship with other social outsiders). The absence of fear shows the boy has entered manhood: the incident resembles an initiation into the great community of nature. The encounter with the wolf is presented as a solitary one, and the animal holds out a "great friendship" as a tantalising possibility. Alscher is careful not to seek to go beyond this and claim such friendship existed in reality, for that would domesticate the animal and sentimentalise the experience. Its freedom and wildness at the same time serve as a model for his own non-integration in society.

Coming eye to eye with a wild animal, or hearing its call nearby, is described repeatedly in Alscher's stories a mystical moment giving meaning to life. "Es ist seltsam", he concludes the autobiographical sketch,

daß die langen Jahre des Großstadtlebens, das Wirken an einer Zeitung vor dem Kriege […], der Krieg selbst, […] dann die reichen Jahre politischer und völkischer Tätigkeit – daß dies alles mir nur wie ein Zwischenspiel erscheint zur Festigung jener Augenblicke, da ich bei föhnigem Wind unter mir im Walde des Nachwinters den rauhen Plärrschrei des Luchses hörte. […] Ja, ganz kurz sind die Augenblicke des wahren Lebensgefühles beim Menschen, und doch sind sie allein Träger eines ganzen Daseins. (ibid.)

Alscher here takes understanding of and respect for the wild animal a step further than previous German writers such as Karl May, Ludwig Ganghofer

and Hermann Löns. Löns, who is remembered as the ‘poet of the Lüneburg Heath’ and ‘father of the German wild animal story’, was one of the first Germans to write extensively about animals from their perspective. His early stories, written from the mid-eighteen-nineties on, feature real creatures rather than the allegorical figures of animal fables, and avoid crude anthropomorphisation. But they continue to present animals as individuals with personalities and conscious motives for their actions, humanising them as quaint rustic figures. His mature writing is more factual and naturalistic, combining precise personal observation with scientific knowledge. Alscher’s depiction of animals is from the start less cosily anthropomorphic than that of Löns, who was fourteen years his senior. While continuing to ascribe a degree of intentionality to the animals, he is more sensitive towards the reality of their lives and more faithful to their perceptual worlds.

The similarities between Löns and Alscher are nevertheless considerable, and worth noting: outsiders by birth in the regions to which they gave literary voice, they can be said to have constructed their identities by idealising the local landscape as wilderness, and stylising themselves as hunter-writers. For both, nature serves a dual function (see Dupke 1993: 107ff): on the one hand, it is a harmonious, often idyllic refuge from society, a source of pleasure which compensates for the alienation, disorientation and fragmentation of city life and modern industrial society, and for problems in the authors’ private lives (see especially Chapters 4 and 8 of Dupke 1993). On the other, it is a site of Darwinian struggle. The rule of the strongest is presented as a quasi-divine order, a stern but ultimately reassuring life principle. The influence of Nietzsche’s critique of civilisation is evident in both Löns’s and Alscher’s celebration of the law of nature as one contrasting with the ‘artificial’, ‘degenerate’ laws of modern society, and standing as a model for social regeneration and the future State.[11] It is no accident that, although they displayed left-wing sympathies in their youth, both authors turned to *völkisch* (i.e. racist-nationalist) conservatism, and ended up in compromising proximity with the Nazis.[12]

This dual function of nature is directly expressed in Alscher’s first novel, *Ich bin ein Flüchtling* (1909). The forest provides a haven for the two Gypsy protagonists, who have been wrongly accused of theft and attempted

murder by local farmers. Its majestic calm impresses itself on them: “Here they were at home, here, where they had spent the night hundreds of times, and often stayed months as woodcutters, always surrounded by peace, and at peace in themselves” (p. 13). Such passages on the comforting safety the virgin forest affords by day alternate with others where the giant trees tower over the two tiny figures by night, the gathering darkness in their branches suggesting the insignificance and powerlessness of human beings against nature. The forest, the mountains and the starry skies above them are visible tokens of *das Gesetz*, the law of nature. Its constant self-renewal of the species in the great cycle of birth and death, which is aloof and cruelly indifferent to the fate of individuals, is echoed in the human laws which ensure that the Gypsies remain disadvantaged outsiders (pp. 17f. and 52). In the following passage, where one of the Gypsies lies awake at night in the forest, Alscher, like Löns, alternates between ultimately contradictory faces of nature: its unfathomable, hostile power over life and death, and the comforting security of its seeming peace and harmony:

> Sein Blick war in die Nacht gerichtet, als sähe er Unfaßbares in ihr kreisen, etwas, das mit wütender Macht auf ihn eindrang und dessen er sich nicht zu erwehren vermochte.
>
> Nach ein paar Stunden Schlaf aber, als er zufällig erwachte, das Feuer ruhig blaken sah, die tiefe Stille der Urwaldnacht fühlte, stieg eine wohlige Sicherheit in ihm auf, ein wonniges Heimgefühl, so tief und sicher, daß er es nie zu verlieren glaubte. (p. 19)

Alscher’s Gypsies are a “Naturvolk” (1909: 217), exhibiting the innate guilelessness of Rousseau’s noble savage, but capable of outbursts of savage violence. Idyll and aggression were complementary aspects of international cultural criticism at the turn of the twentieth century. Present, for instance, in the wilderness writing of Rudyard Kipling and Jack London, they are exemplified as opposite poles in the pre-war German literature of nature by the monist spirituality of Waldemar Bonsels’s much-loved children’s story *Die Biene Maja* (1912), and Löns’s Blood-and-Soil historical novel *Der Wehrwolf* (1910). Löns and Alscher blend them together in their animal stories, constructing nature as an expression of the longings and hopes of their contemporaries, but also of their fears and fantasies of violence. The ‘myth’ of nature which comprises their response to the pressures of

modernisation and the scientific world view of the age embraces both harmony and a destructive tendency. The latter is evident in the problematic fascination with the survival instinct and ruthless self-assertion of predators which we noted above in Alscher's writing. In the novel *Zwei Mörder in der Wildnis*, which was written in the nineteen-thirties, it is a lynx which personifies the wild. The protagonist Hugo Frahm recognises in the animal, which appears to him at various points in the forest, a kindred spirit, and a model for his future actions:

> Wie, wenn das Erscheinen des Luchses vor ihm irgendeine Bedeutung hatte? Vielleicht die, daß zwischen ihm und diesem gewaltigsten Vertreter der Wildnis eine geheime Bindung zustandekommen würde, die sein Leben dem dieses kühnen Räubers annähern würde? Eine Tat der Gewalt hatte ihn in den Urwald geführt, hierher, wo nur die unverhüllte Kraft ihr Recht fand. Also mußte auch er ein Mensch werden, der nur durch seine Stärke sich Geltung verschaffte. Das wollte ihn der Luchs wohl lehren. (*Daheim* 70, no. 17: 7)

As Helga Korodi has pointed out, the animal effectively becomes his totem (Korodi 2003: 138). The 'Wehrwolf' in Löns's novel, a neologism combining self-defence with the attributes of the werewolf and real wolves, performs a similar function (see Dupke 1993: 165-7).

The celebration of hunting which Alscher shared with Löns as a variant of the vitalist philosophy so widespread around 1900 is curiously ambivalent: on the one hand, they represent the hunt as an innocent opportunity to enjoy nature and regain naturalness by watching, listening and putting physical strength, endurance and skill to the test. On the other, it enables them to live out latent violent tendencies. Observing animals is a source of pleasure in itself for Löns, but always leads to the destructive act. Dupke shows through close reading of selected passages how hunting is erotically charged in Löns's work: suppressed libido is transformed into aggression, and the kill is described in terms of sexual possession (Dupke 1993: 78-85 and 117ff). In some of Alscher's early stories and in places in *Zwei Mörder in der Wildnis* nature is also eroticised. However, libidinous overtones are relatively insignificant in Alscher's work as a whole.

A further difference between Alscher and the North German Löns is the relative absence of racism in his work. Coming from a multi-ethnic stopping point for river traffic on the Danube, where a sprinkling of Austrians and

Hungarians lived alongside ‘Swabian’ Germans, Romanians, Gypsies and Jews, Alscher constructs on the whole even-handed cultural images rather than discriminatory racial stereotypes. His representation of Gypsies is far from Löns’s “vermin” (“Ungeziefer”, in *Der Wehrwolf*: see Dupke 1993: 139): he idealises their way of life as one reintegrating dimensions of our being suppressed in modern civilisation, and identifies, like his urban Expressionist contemporaries, with the under-privileged and socially disadvantaged (in his case not factory workers or prostitutes, but tramps, casual workers and shepherds). His political views may have been fickle and sadly misguided – in the early years of the First World War he penned chauvinistic propaganda, and during the Second World War he wrote politically compromising articles in return for a small regular income – yet his individualism, tolerance and support for a multi-cultural society were sufficiently distinct from Nazi ideology to ensure he remained an outsider in the Third Reich.

Löns’s espousal of the conservationist cause (he supported efforts to found the first German national park in the Lüneburg Heath, opposed building in intact landscapes, spoke out against the clearing of trees and hedges by ‘improving’ estate owners, campaigned for the protection of birds and pleaded for consideration of animal suffering) led environmentalists in the nineteen-seventies and eighties to describe him as a pioneering ecologist and an early Green (Dupke 1993: 20). However, Dupke reminds us that the considerations he was motivated by were aesthetic and political rather than genuinely ecological (p. 277). The same is of course true for Alscher: his lament at the creeping destruction of the habitat of wild animals is rooted in a defensive critique of modernisation and its seeming threat to individual freedom by depriving us of the ability to lead simple, natural lives. In the story ‘Über den Menschen’, which was written during the First World War, a modern city is described from the perspective of a bear, as a suppurating wound or cancerous growth on the face of the earth:

> Der Bär umkreiste auf den Höhen oben die Stadt. Er sah das Tal durchsetzt mit eckigen Erhöhungen, die ihm wie Wucherungen waren, gleich den krankhaften Auswüchsen am Stamme alter Bäume, wie Schorf einer Wunde, die nie heilte, wie sie ineinanderliefen, sich gegenseitig zu verdrängen schienen. Und aus diesen Wucherungen heraus und hinein krochen Menschen gleich Maden am schon zerfallenen Kadaver eines Tieres.

> Die Höhen rings um die Stadt waren kahl, zerwaschen, zerfressen. Das Gehölz verkrüppelt, die Berge wie verstümmelt, gleich dem Grase, dem Boden rings um das Aas eines Tieres. (1917: 90f.)

Expressionist pathos is replaced by more sober description, however, in the later stories. In the volume *Tier und Mensch* (1928), 'Zerstörung' tells how the virgin forest of the Carpathians, which has afforded a bear "undisturbed peace" and "a safe yet limitless home", is disturbed and changed forever by hunters. The bear survives despite being wounded, but its habitat, which is described in terms reminiscent of Stifter's timeless, majestic Bohemian forests, will never be the same again:

> Einsam und unberührt war die Wildnis wie vordem, trotzdem aber klaffte ein Riß durch die Stille. Etwas in ihr war zerstört, hatte sich schreckhaft geändert, und so tief die Ruhe des Urwaldes auch war, so friedlich ihr Weben, ein Schrillen durchzitterte sie, schnitt in sie hinein, so daß sie der Bär schmerzhaft wie eine Wunde empfand. (1928: 26)

'Verfolger' is a similar narrative, but this time from the perspective of a wolf. Again, the forest has been "violated" and "made strange" by intruding hunters and hounds pursuing wolves which had taken their sheep. 'Der Furchtbare', a gripping story concerning the impact of the opening of a manganese mine in the forest on a colony of eagles, alternates between the perspective of the birds and that of an engineer who works in the mines. Alscher writes of the impact of population displacement in the First World War, population growth and industrial development on the habitat of the Carpathian bears, wolves and lynxes, from a sense of the necessity of striking a balance between the material needs and desires of humans and the value of the non-human, including wildlife.

In his late work, the gap separating humans from animals is further bridged through presenting animals as models for humanity in caring and loyalty. This is particularly true of the last volume of stories, *Die Bärin* (1943), whose subtitle, "Contemplative Stories", signals the author's relinquishment of vitalist activism. In the title story he writes of a boy who has stolen an infant bear cub from its den, and is bringing it back to show proudly to his teacher. Events lead to recognition that the mother bear is anything but a "dumb animal", and the cub's life and happiness are worthy of his respect and care. In 'Mein Freund Walter, der Uhu', subtitled "Strange Links Between man and

Animal", Alscher writes of his relationship with an eagle-owl which he had been given as an owlet, and has raised to maturity. The bird continues to visit him after its release into the wild. Close knowledge of animals can only lead us to recognise them as friends, he argues, though they will always retain their autonomy. Even predators are not enemies, but competitors, and potential partners of man:

> Bindungen bestehen zwischen Tier und Mensch, die wir noch lange nicht alle geklärt haben. Was wissen wir überhaupt von den wahren Empfindungen der Tiere, wir ahnen noch immer nicht die Grenze, wo bei ihnen Erfahrungen und Triebe in Überlegung, vielleicht sogar zusammenhängendes Denken übergehen. Eines aber ist mir gewiß: daß das starke, freie Tier, das Raubtier, dem Menschen nicht unbedingt als Feind, sondern als Partner, als Wettbewerber gegenübersteht, wenn es in ihm die gleiche Stärke und Freiheit spürt. (1943: 22)

The need to coexist with animals and respect the natural environment is also the prime message of the novel *Der Löwentöter*, which was written in the nineteen-twenties, but only published posthumously in 1972. Alscher's most thoughtful treatment of our relationship with animals and with our own animality is, however, to be found in the early novel *Gogan und das Tier* (1912), which explores the possibility of reconciliation between civilisation with the wild, reason and instinct. His most successful longer work in terms of structural cohesion and symbolic richness, this book tells the story of the illegitimate offspring of a Hungarian countess and a travelling Gypsy. Through Gogan's search for his true parents and his quest for an identity involving integration of his – at times – violent impulsiveness (described as the "unredeemed wildness" and "simplest, most violent instincts" within him – Alscher 1970: 118), Alscher undermines ethnic and social barriers. Gogan is bent on tracking down his father, in order to avenge his mother's rape and rid himself of the "curse of animality" he has inherited (p. 112). However, the novel ends with him resolving to accept what he owes to his father, and "grasp and transfigure" the "animality" within him (p. 113). When two college friends ask him to join them in a business project to exploit the forests on the estate, he thus rejects the proposed, strictly rational usage of natural resources, saying this would compromise his personal freedom:

> Wenn ich dies Gut übernehme, tu ich es nicht, um es als Forst- und Ackerland zu betrachten, sondern als ein Stück Erde, das einzig meinem Fuß gehört…

Denn ich will diese Erde nicht als ein Tier betrachten, das für mich arbeiten muß, ich will auch nicht der Untertan sein, der für diese Erde lebt und blutet. Ich will nicht besitzen, will nicht besessen sein, sondern will mich dieser Erde als Teil der Natur, als Landschaftsteil anfügen. Und möge dabei ihr Acker zu Brachland, ihr Wald zur Wildnis werden, sie wird doch jene Landschaft bleiben, mit der mein Atemzug der gleiche ist. (p. 116)

This identification with the land is closer to Erich Fromm's 'Sein' then 'Haben', or Löns's *völkisch* belonging. It becomes Gogan's aim in life to "convert the animality in us into conscious life practice" (p. 118), and avoid the pathology of an age in which human libido is suppressed. His newfound purpose finds confirmation in the trusting obedience of a pointer he has just purchased, "a large, powerful dog […] with the muzzle of a badger, but the eyes of a wolf" (p. 115). Its hunting urges are half the result of training and half inborn hunting instinct. As "the product of man, yet animal enough […] to testify to its belonging to the great unity of life with every breath" (p. 119), it stands as a model for the reconciliation of the tensions within him between longing for the freedom to follow his impulses and recognition of the necessity for reason and its disciplined application.

Alscher emphasises the otherness and autonomy of the wild animal as a source of enrichment in our lives. Wildness, he suggests, is important to us as something we are in danger of losing ourselves. Paradoxically, this can be a justification for hunting, as in Gogan's explanation of an unannounced absence from the estate:

"Seht, mir geht es wie meinem neuen Hunde da, der soll auch manchmal ganz unvermutet verschwinden und einige Tage ausbleiben. Vielleicht um einmal frei von aller Dressur einen Fuchs zu hetzen oder seine überschüssige Kraft auszutoben, um durch die Erschöpfung um so mächtigeren Ersatz zu gewinnen … So geht es mir!" (p. 115)

The book ends with Gogan taking the dog out hunting. Alscher was of his time as a hunter, who yet appreciated nature and sought to preserve it. The same tension is observable in contemporaries such as the novelist William Faulkner, whose great hunting tale *The Bear* (written, like Alscher's last collection of stories, in the nineteen-forties), is the story of the initiation of a young man into adulthood and simultaneously a paean to the wild and a lament at its passing.

It is not surprising that Alscher's novels, which are flawed by structural weaknesses, implausible plots, clichéd characters, and intrusive religious-philosophical commentary, are forgotten today. But he was a master of shorter prose, excelling in brief, atmospheric pieces which evoke, like wildlife photographs, the encounter with the wild and the experience of nature. Typically, he conjures up the scene is a synaesthesia of closely observed elements: birdsong, the noises of animals in the forest, the parnramic backdrop of dusk and dawn in the mountains, the taste and touch and smell of things. 'Die Waldnacht' in *Die Bärin* opens with the sounds, shapes and smells of the forest at night. Dangers lurk for the unwary amongst the animals going about their business:

Langer, rinnender Grillenlaut. Er zieht die Nacht mit, immer tiefer in die kühle Finsternis hinein. Eine Bergwand mit schwarz geballten Bäumen schließt das Tal ab. Sie wacht reglos über der Nacht in dem Garten alter Obstbäume, der zu ihren Füßen hingelagert ist. Ganz ins Dunkel geduckt kauert eine Blockhütte mit leeren Fensterhöhlen, die den feuchten Geruch der Verlassenheit ausströmen.

Im finsteren Ball eines Nußbaumes faucht schläfrig eine Waldkauz. Es ist, als spräche er mit sich, müde und zwecklos. Unter ihm, bei einem Astloch, schabt eine Haselmaus an einer Nuß, doch der Kauz beachtet sie nicht.

Die Nacht ist voller kalter, stickiger Ruhe. Sie atmet den Geruch von Fallaub, Staub und faulen Äpfeln aus. Ein Igel, der sich schnuppernd unter den Bäumen hinschiebt, zerstört manchmal die Stille mit einem lauten Geraschel, dann wieder verharrt er lange und unhörbar auf einer Stelle.

In den Bäumen oben wispert und schüttert es. Bilche, Siebenschläfer, sind dort an der Arbeit, die Spätlinge eines Birnbaumes zu verzehren. Manchmal lassen sie eine angefressene Frucht fallen, die klatscht dumpf auf, raschelt kurz nach, worauf dann ein lauerndes, stummes Lauschen der Nacht folgt. (1943: 32)

The landscape is ensouled, but this is no bland, harmonious Romantic pantheism: as in Wilhelm Lehmann's poems and *Bukolische Tagebücher* (written 1927-32, published 1948), it is alive with the actions of real birds and animals. These appear as if in response to the intensity and persistence of the author's waiting and listening. The touches of anthropomorphisation invest the scene with a dynamic of expectancy. Onomatopoeic verbs and unfamiliar bird names lend freshness: Alscher enriches our lives by opening our eyes to a world we have neglected and ignored. His deftly and economically structured animal stories, which combine such vivid landscape descriptions with authentic knowledge of the animals, deserve to find readers again.

Unsurpassed in evoking the atmosphere of the forest, they remind us of the presence of the wild, and the need for wildness in our lives.[13]

"In the last two centuries, animals have gradually disappeared. Today we live without them", writes John Berger in his essay 'Why Look at Animals?' (Berger 2003: 264). Most of us know only our pets, which have been transformed into human puppets, and our only contact with wild animals is in zoos, or on television. These are "always the observed". The fact they can observe us has lost all significance: they are the "objects of our ever-extending knowledge" (p. 267). This reduction of the animal to an object is "part of the same process as that by which men have been reduced to isolated productive and consuming units" (p. 265). Historically, animals have been "subjected *and* worshipped, bred *and* sacrificed":

> Today the vestiges of this dualism remain among those who live intimately with, and depend upon, animals. A peasant becomes fond of his pig and is glad to salt away its pork. What is significant, and is so difficult for the urban stranger to understand, is that the two statements in that sentence are connected by an *and* and not by a *but*. (p. 261)

Simultaneously like and unlike us, animals lead parallel lives. They offer humans "a companionship which is different from any offered by human exchange. Different because it is a companionship offered to the loneliness of man as a species" (p. 261). "The eyes of an animal when they consider a man are attentive and wary", Berger comments. "Man becomes aware of himself returning the look" (p. 260). For Alscher, hunting was a unique possibility of experiencing the animal's gaze.

3. Cultural criticism and ecological commitment in Horst Stern's *Jagdnovelle*

Born in Stettin on the Baltic coast in 1922, Stern fought in the Second World War, was captured in North Africa, and spent two years as a Prisoner of War in Kentucky. Having learned enough English there to enable him to get a job as a legal interpreter for the US forces near Stuttgart on his release, he became a legal reporter for the daily newspaper *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, and subsequently reporter for local news. Meanwhile he developed a fascination with animals, their living environment and behaviour, and our relationship with them. Stern acquired and looked after a series of birds and small animals,

including a falcon and a pair of ravens, which he prepared for release into the wild, and began writing pieces about them for the weekend supplement of his paper.[14]

When his friend Wolfgang Bechtle became chief editor of the scientific magazine *Kosmos*, Stern was commissioned to write longer and more serious articles, including one which involved a trip to the Antarctic. His work as a journalist covered a wide range of topics, and trained him in the ability to gain a quick grasp of a subject, identify key issues and formulate arguments clearly, entertainingly and persuasively. His career took a decisive turn in 1970, when he was invited to make a series of TV programmes on animals for the Stuttgart-based Süddeutscher Rundfunk. The first, entitled *Bemerkungen zum Pferd*, caused a furore among the horse-riding community by exposing the pain and fear involved in training horses for racing and show-jumping. Some twenty-five often sharply critical and politically sensitive TV programmes about animals, the conditions they lived in and our disturbed relationship with them in modern urban society followed over the next nine years. Under the general heading ‘Sterns Stunde’, they set out to counter the dissociation of our relations with animals which has resulted from the division between those subjected to unfeeling scientific knowledge and economic use on the one hand, and others whose lives are often grotesquely deformed through their treatment as pets. Stern was no animal rights radical, and not even a vegetarian, but he saw it as his task to inform, educate and enlighten the public, and to reintegrate our estranged knowledge of and feelings about animals. This central aim is summed up in a commentary he gave when two of his programmes were broadcast again at the end of the nineteen-eighties:

> Homo carnivoris, der fleischfressende Mensch, besudelt sich ja nicht, indem er seinem natürlichen Proteinhunger folgt. Er gerät nur dann ins Zwielicht, wenn er das Kainsmal des Tiertöters rosig überschminkt, indem er das Nutztier total aus seinem Bewußtsein verdrängt und sein schlechtes Gewissen darüber oft genug in eine fanatische Afterliebe zu Hund und Katze und zum Kanarienvogel Hansi umfunktioniert. (cited in Fischer 1997: 153)

Using cameramen trained in the ‘Stuttgarter Schule’ tradition of quality television documentaries, Stern reinvented the genre of the *Tiersendung* or animal-centred programme, no longer permitting viewers to escape from everyday reality to exotic foreign landscapes, but rather critically examining

Germany's native animals and their treatment. With hard-hitting pictures and terse, often sarcastic and bitter commentaries, he presented challenging facts and arguments about battery poultry farms, pig and cattle rearing, tourism and industrial development in the Alps, and hunting. Controversial programmes alternated with more conciliatory and visually attractive ones: in a two-part film, for instance, Stern sought to combat fear of spiders by informing the public about them and presenting beautiful images.

Stern had become a household name and was a leading opinion former on animals' rights when he broadcast three in-depth programmes on the use of animals for experiments in pharmaceutical research between 1977 and 1979. His scrupulously balanced presentation of this emotive subject refused to condemn the scientists as "sadists in white coats" (see Fischer 1997: 70), and pointed out the benefits for the treatment of spastic children gained from distressing experimental operations on the brains of cats. Inevitably, Stern was attacked in the tabloid press as a traitor to the cause. As much in response to the change in the political climate in Germany from the late nineteen-seventies on, when the media were gradually opened up to commercial stations and entertainment began to replace more serious programming, as to personal disappointments, Stern withdrew, first from TV, and later from journalism, and moved to the west coast of Ireland.

Since his semi-retirement in 1984, Stern has continued to write sporadically on environmental issues, but more importantly, he has published three works of fiction. In 1986 he surprised the reading public with the historical novel *Mann aus Apulien*, a portrait of the thirteenth-century Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. Though Stern had published a poem and a short story in the immediate postwar years, and written a radio play and cabaret texts, he had soon given up literary ambitions for journalism. Many of his articles, essays and speeches, however, display literary qualities, combining pithy phrases and vivid imagery with stylistic elegance. The longer essays and travelogues include narrative passages, make use of cultural allusions and quotations, and employ irony and structuring metaphors (see Fischer 1997: 194).

Mann aus Apulien, the literary debut of a man in his mid-sixties, was thus only in appearance an abrupt change for Stern. The subject had also

occupied him for more than two decades, ever since efforts to train a falcon in the early sixties had led him to read Frederick's classic work on falconry, *De arte venandi cum avibus*. Though the more cruel practices are disregarded, the medieval emperor's careful description of his observations, written at a time when his contemporaries were content to quote Aristotle, is still of interest to falconers today. *De arte venandi cum avibus* prompted Stern to speculate what sort of man the author was. He explores the last five years of Frederick's life through interior monologue, making extensive use of dreams and fantasies, and reflecting sceptically on his youthful plans, ageing body, and the looming collapse of the empire. In all of this, the art of falconry provides a unifying pattern of metaphors (see Fischer 1997: 198-200).

The autobiographical element already present in *Mann aus Apulien* gains central importance in his other novel, *Klint* (1993), in which Stern gives free reign to his darkest thoughts about the environment and his most pessimistic visions of the future. Again, his approach is oblique, imaginative and concerned with subjective states rather than objective facts. The life and death of the protagonist Klint, a journalist whose degeneration into mental illness parallels and is fed by the progress of ecological degradation, are reconstructed by a second journalist. This narrator's attempt to separate fact from fiction in the documents at his disposal is progressively undermined. Lengthy parts of the narrative consist of Klint's feverish fantasies. Here, as in *Mann aus Apulien*, metaphors play a structuring role: Stern gives a new twist to the Classical motif of Arcadia, and sodomy provides a striking image for the perversion of our relationship with nature and animals. Ludwig Fischer comments that the novel, which was not a success with the public, nevertheless made a highly original contribution to the literature of environmental apocalypse in the nineteen-eighties: "Stern's union of literary and aesthetic quality with political and moral 'sensitivity' makes the book a major work of contemporary German literature" (see Fischer 1997: 202-5 and 257-66, also the chapter on *Klint* in Jambon 1999).

Jadgnovelle, a shorter work which was written between the two novels, and published in 1989, is closer to normal expectations of *ökologische Warnliteratur*, or the literature of environmental commitment. It is, however, more than just a fictionalisation of the issues which Stern had addressed

eighteen years previously in his TV programme *Bemerkungen über den Rothirsch* and the open letter to Walter Scheel. In setting and theme, *Jagdnovelle* (which has been published in English under the title *The Last Hunt*) invites comparison with Alscher's stories and novels. The action takes place in the nineteen-seventies in an unspecified South-East European dictatorship which we can deduce from geographical references to be Yugoslavia. The inspiration for the story came to Stern on a visit to that country in the company of a delegation of Munich forestry officials to inspect traditional methods of forest management. As he relates in the opening pages (Stern 1991: 7f.), he came across an enormous bearskin displayed in a provincial hunting museum, with a plaque bearing the name of a German hunter who had shot it. The skin, he was told, had been retained in the country because of its exceptional size (close to the world record). Within moments, Stern has commented in an interview, the outline of the story how the bear came to be shot formed in his mind (Stern 1997: 71).

Thematically, there are parallels with Otto Alscher's stories 'Über den Menschen' and 'Die Alten' (1917: 81-96 and 2000: 67-73). The first of these, set during the First World War, told how a bear was displaced from its hitherto secluded forest habitat by the advancing military, and began to follow waves of refugees in their trek down to the sea. Though it returned to its original home, it lost the natural instinct to avoid humans, and before long fell victim to hunters. In the second story, an old man has cleared a smallholding in the forest, built a house there and planted fruit trees and maize. He is determined to catch the animal which keeps plundering his plums and beehives. When he discovers it is a bear, he is puzzled by its approach to a human settlement, at a time of year when food is in plenty, with young animals, domestic and wild, available at a safer distance. On eventually encountering it in the forest, he finds it is so old as to be forced to live from fruits and berries. Blind in one eye, it is pitifully thin. Recognising a fellow traveller in old age, he has not the heart to kill it, and leaves it in peace.

Stern's novella, which is also concerned with wildness and domestication, and focuses similarly on ageing as an experience common to both animals and humankind, describes, at greater length, the displacement of a brown bear from its Balkan habitat due to human encroachment, its

wanderings and struggle to survive. It succumbs to dependence on feeding by a gamekeeper, and eventually dies at the hand of a hunter. The bear is a counterpart to the hunter's lonely, ageing and alienated self, in a world increasingly driven by political, economic and technological imperatives. Though this bear is unusually large, experiences in its youth have made it especially shy of human contact. It refuses to accept the bait laid by hunters, and does not attack farm animals. Driven from the area in which it was born by less inhibited, hence physically stronger rivals, it has found refuge for some years in a remote Alpine valley. However, it is disturbed again by the construction of a dam and hydroelectric power station, and returns to the Balkans. Driven by hunger, it finally accepts the food left for it by a game-keeper, who guides it day by day closer to the hide from which it is eventually shot.

Stern alternates between narration from the animal's perspective and that of the hunter and gamekeeper. Of the three narrative strands, one is concerned with the West German financier Joop, who is in charge of foreign business at the headquarters of a major bank in the Rhineland. The second follows the bear's journey, and the third tells of Duschan, the Yugoslavian gamekeeper in whose territory it settles. The three narratives converge in an ending which is not without dramatic twists (e.g. pp. 87-93, where the bear encounters a charcoal burner), despite our foreknowledge of the outcome. Joop, the hunter, discovers that his fate has been unknowingly intertwined with that of the bear for years (pp. 158f.). He first hears of the animal on a visit to Yugoslavia as a representative of the World Bank, to approve funding for projects including a motorway to facilitate the development of forestry and tourism in the hunting grounds to which it has returned. When he learns where the bear has come from, he realises he is also part-responsible for its displacement from the Alps, through his earlier involvement in the approval of the above-mentioned dam (pp. 159f.). Before he has even pulled the trigger, he is then doubly complicit in the processes which have led to the bear's death.

Joop is, however, no mere stereotype of the philistine German financier, but cultivated, sensitive to verbal nuance, and intellectually curious. Capable of introspection, he is aware of the tensions between conflicting

scales of value beneath the seemingly calm surface of his life. Like many a contemporary, he alternates between pragmatic rationalism and actions which compensate for the emptiness of his life (pp. 43f.). At certain moments he is capable of side-stepping the economic rationale. For instance, he requires of the Yugoslavian authorities that environmental impact experts be present at his inspection of the terrain for the proposed development projects to be funded by the World Bank (p. 74). These conservationists become his 'Erinyen' (p. 133), i.e. the avenging spirits of his guilty conscience. His economic realism is constantly challenged by conflicting inclinations: a lust for hunting bordering on enslavement on the one hand, and a growing sense of guilt rooted in ecological awareness on the other:

> Es schüttelte ihn das inwendige Ringen zwischen einem fast als Ekel empfundenen neuen Trophäenüberdruß […] und der alten Bockgeilheit, die sich von jeher im Töten und Trauern zu läutern suchte […]. Ekel und Geilheit, beide waren in Joop, der Ekel auch eine Folge seiner langsam gewachsenen Erkenntnis, daß der neue ökologische Mantel, in dessen Schutz vor öffentlicher Unbill die Jagd sich in die Zukunft zu schleichen sucht, nur mühsam die alten Zeichen der Lust an ihrem Leib verdeckt. (p. 141)

The misgivings which Joop increasingly entertains about the moral justification of hunting are deepened by what the Yugoslavian ecologists reveal of its environmental consequences, and he undergoes a 'Pauline Conversion' (p. 132). Torn between the hunter's lust for the kill ("Bockgeilheit") and mounting dissatisfaction with the false pretensions symbolised by hunting trophies ("Trophäenüberdruß"), he finds himself physically incapable of shooting the prize stag reserved for him by the Head of State as a sweetener. Though he regrets this moment of weakness, and subsequently accepts the bear when it is offered him as a substitute, he gets no pleasure from shooting it. In the final pages of the story he renounces hunting symbolically, removing an oil painting of Diana the huntress from his office and having the prized rifles he keeps in his flat encased in "museum glass" (p. 173).

Joop is initially convinced of the possibility of reconciling hunting with nature conservation, and believes the countries of Eastern Europe may have something to teach the West here (p. 76). But he learns that the giant antlers he sees displayed are not the innocent fruits of assiduous game-keeping ("Erntefrüchte einer bewundernswert konsequenten Wildhege"), but "a

luxuriation of bone growth wholly unsuited to forest life", and "biological nonsense" (pp. 78f.). The quest for ever larger stags with finer antlers necessitates the maintenance of a vast deer population, since each stag is at the peak of a biological pyramid. The damage caused by the deer eating the new shoots and scraping the bark off young trees is such that nothing survives to replace the mature trees, and the forest is gradually becoming open grassland.

Hunting is in any case losing its real meaning: permitting the deer to multiply means that the foreign visitor paying for shooting rights no longer has to search for game. It is there, waiting tamely. The animals have been conditioned by "Kirrung" i.e. being fed in a particular place at a particular time, and can easily be picked off by hunters sitting in wait. The deer are to all extents and purposes being *farmed*. This critique comes to a head in a passage arranged in verse form (pp. 135-7). Lulled into a soporific trance by the heat of the afternoon, Joop hears the voices of the Yugoslavian ecologists merge in a powerful indictment of the overstocking of the forests. Building on the traditional association of hunting and shooting with the sexual act, the forest is described as having become a "stag brothel" ("Hirschbordell"), designed to maximise the foreign currency income from Western hunters and bolster the dictator's ego.

Otto Ascher had written of laying out food for wild animals, especially wolves, in the winter months, in the *Luderplatz* (literally 'carrion place') near his house in the woods, in order to lure them into an open space where they could be readily shot. Such hunting by way of making the wild animal compliant is inherently problematic for Stern, who sees today's shooting for sport as characterised by deception and shame (p. 141). Instead of finding, pursuing and outwitting a wild animal fighting to the death for survival, its living conditions are undermined, it is deprived of its normal source of food and then offered a substitute, through feeding, which draws it ever more closely into the sphere of our control. There is no element of struggle left in the hunt. The animal is duped and "executed" (pp. 169, 171), rendering the hunter effectively emasculated.

A second recurrent metaphor reflecting Stern's disgust with this domestication of the wild in modern society is the "piggishness" it engenders

in both the animal and the hunter.[15] Joop recalls a TV programme from the nineteen-sixties showing how grizzly bears in the US national parks had taken to eating kitchen refuse, conveniently providing motifs for camera-bearing tourists while rummaging in yoghurt pots (pp. 62f.). The author's moral indignation is a touch too evident as he describes the bear in our story, which starts out wild and shy of humans ("He lacked gluttony. He lacked *piggishness*", p. 22), finally taking the gamekeeper's bait:

> Er fraß von ihr mit einer viehischen Gier, die ihn im Innersten seines Wesens zu verderben begann. Schon ertrug er auch den für seine feine Nase um die Bäume schier wabernden Geruch von Menschen und ihrem Gerät und sogar den Lärm der noch fernen Sägen auf der Lichtung. Gurgelnd und schmatzend, das Maul vor Speichel triefend, die Augen vor Lust verdreht, wühlte er die Zähne in die allzu bequeme Beute. Sie hatten es geschafft. *Sie hatten ihn schweinish gemacht*. Er wußte es nicht, aber er war es nun geworden und würde es bleiben. Tanzbärhaft hing er am Nasenstrick ihrer Listen, wie die anderen Bären der Gegend auch, sein Fell ein Sack voll Geld. (p. 112)

The Yugoslavian bears have become "boarding pupils" of the Head of State's game keepers ("Zöglinge der Jagdfunktionäre des großen Mannes in seinem Palast in der Hauptstadt", p. 130). This undermining of the essence of the wild animal is troubling not only because it compromises humans' moral integrity, but also because of the limitation of the scope for human self-realisation which accompanies it. The citizens of Eastern Europe have been deprived by dictatorship and the command economy of freedom and the ability to make decisions about their lives, while in the West the name given by the bank employees to the pretentious desk in Joop's office, the "bay of pigs" (p. 11), suggests a corresponding degeneration into servility under capitalism.

Money and commercialisation are in fact presented as universal evils responsible for the corruption of modern society. Stern's starting point in the tale is the grotesque mismatch between the enormous "shamanic" bearskin, inspiring fear in visitors to the museum even when deprived of head and claws, and the insignificance of the hunter, whose name indicates bourgeois ordinariness. Money, he muses, can be the only conceivable link between this puny hunter and his primeval quarry. When Joop travels to New York for a World Bank meeting, the slogan he is met with by protestors, "Dollars and pounds are the rich man's hounds!" (p. 44) suggests a link between the

human injustice furthered by globalisation (Third World debt) and our exploitation of animals in hunting (p. 46). The corruption of wild animals, Joop observes elsewhere, exemplifies the material and spiritual pollution of civilisation modern (p. 63). In a drunken conversation with a fellow hunter, he extends the second law of entropy to the feelings, and to language as the medium of their expression. Our way of life is debasing everything of value, in a “meltdown of mediocrity” (p. 31).

There is a continuity here with passages examined above in Alscher’s writing expressing cultural pessimism. Stern’s pessimistic generalisations about a world in which the things of nature have begun to shed their skins like vipers (pp. 26f.), devoid of passion (p. 31), dominated by money and shallow, transient relationships, suggest he subscribes to a mindset lamenting the “end of nature”. He is, however, wise enough to recognise that we cannot escape from guilt in our relationship with animals: it is better to know the fish we eat, hence we should all become anglers, he once said to the *Zeit* journalist, Reiner Luyken in an interview (1993). Ariane Heimbach states in her essay ‘Kein sogenannter Tierfreund’ (Fischer 1997: 149-66): “For Stern, reducing the violence we do to animals is all we can realistically aim to achieve, given his fatalistic conception of the relationship between humans and animals, his view that human well-being is only attainable at the cost of animal suffering” (ibid. 162). It is perhaps truer to say that Stern alternates between a quite challenging standpoint based on rational ecological considerations and utilitarian, anthropocentric arguments against the infliction of unnecessary suffering on animals on the one hand, and more conventionally nature-loving passages implicitly embracing a holistic, biocentric standpoint on the other.

This ambivalence is evident in his position on hunting. He does not altogether discredit it: what Stern misses in hunters today is above all their failure to know and respect the wild animal (see p. 37). He sketches an alternative to Joop in the figure of Mari Czerky, the man’s divorced second wife. The last in line of a noble Austro-Hungarian family, and the only woman Joop has really loved, Mari is an incarnation of the goddess Diana, fearless and chaste. She gives the animals a ‘fair’ chance by not using a support when shooting, gladly bearing the bruises from the recoil of her rifle. She takes only enough cartridges for one shot at each animal, and does the animals the

honour of standing to shoot them, whereas others sit in hides: game deserves decency/standing (“Anstand”, p. 118), she observes.

Joop’s relationship with Mari during the latter part of their marriage and after their divorce is reflected in the painting of Diana hanging in his office. He identifies not only with the shadowy figure of the hunter in the background, who is offering up the hare he has caught to the goddess, but also, involuntarily, with the bleeding hare itself. His inadequacy in the face of his second wife’s social and sporting superiority is explained by the domination of his innermost being by concepts from the sphere of management and finance, such as “ablegen”, “Rendite” and “Wiedervorlage”, which render him unable to feel or think authentically (p. 124). Diana embodies, as Cartmill writes, “all the ambiguities inherent in the figure of the hunter. Though she persecutes the wild animals with her ‘arrows of anguish’, she is also their friend and protector. She killed (or connived in the death of) the great hunter Orion because he boasted in her hearing that he would kill every wild beast alive” (1996: 33**).** Her aura of holy virginity spills over into her environment, rendering the deer and the forest sacred. Stern seems to be mourning the passing of this sanctity of the wild, which he links with Ortega’s conception of hunting as a rite restoring us to authentic being.

Heimbach puts her finger on the unresolved tension running through Stern’s work when she criticises his “hunting sentimentality” (Fischer 1997: 156), and the emotion-led relationship with animals which surfaces periodically in his writing and media work, and runs counter to his general strategy of critical enlightenment (ibid. 159). Stern does not actually problematise the validity of the concept of ‘wildness’ in contemporary society any more than Alscher does, or explore the wider consequences of reconceiving nature as something inevitably shaped by man.[16] *Jagdnovelle* is a plea for ‘ecological’ hunting based on the principle of rational management of game, but the emotional force driving it is one of identification with the individual animal, which would logically find expression in a total rejection of killing animals. The narrative records this confusion of purpose, which seems characteristic of our time: at the end, Joop has the painting of Diana taken down from the wall of his office and returned to Mari. It is not clear whether he

does so in admission that he is not cut out to be a hunter, or whether the gesture is tantamount to a rejection of hunting *per se*.

These uncertainties in conception are matched by weaknesses in the execution of *Jagdnovelle*. The story sold well enough to be brought out in paperback two years after the first edition, but came in for criticism from reviewers. Klaus Modick, for instance, described it as preachy, saying Stern's weaker passages were "on the level of radio programmes for schools: adult education in narrative form" (Modick 1989). As a work of literature, it is neatly, if conventionally constructed, but marred by the author's transparent didacticism. Stern's disgust with modern hunting finds expression in a graphic anatomical description of the bullets entering the bear's body, tearing through its blood vessels, nerves and muscle tissue (pp. 168f.). The first shot, which misses its heart, passes through its body, mangling its shoulder before exiting under the first rib, and proceeding to rip open the stomach of the dead horse the bear is feeding on, "so that the green broth from the one mixed with the red blood from the other. It oozed and dripped and spurted a little in the rhythm of the animal's heartbeat" (p. 168). Too often we are told what to think: italics are used to hammer home points (pp. 22, 112, 160 and 171), and key passages are spoiled by laboriously explained metaphors and pretentious cultural allusions (for instance the passages from Trakl's poems read by Mari Czerky, pp. 121f.).

Stern avoids sentimentalising the bear, indeed, he pulls no punches in describing the uglier side of its nature, reminding us repeatedly, for instance, of its unaesthetic salivation and smell (pp. 16, 24f., 41f., 66). When it wakes from their hibernation, fear takes hold of the creatures of the forest (p. 87). It remains other, outside human values, in that it acts with casual brutality, devouring first a defenceless newborn fawn and then a cuddly baby owl (pp. 24, 69). Given the chance, it is even capable of cannibalism (p. 71). However, *Jagdnovelle* lacks the subtlety and integrity of Alscher's stories. Though the movements and actions of the bear are described on the whole from the perspective of an attentive observer, and merely paralleled with acts of human volition through similes and subjunctive constructions (p. 29), Stern occasionally slips into allowing it to think and act like a human. At one point, he writes: "The bear did not spare a thought for the fact that, by following the

meat day by day, he was getting steadily closer to the clearing." He swiftly corrects the anthropomorphic implication: "But bears probably don't think anyway" (p. 145). Towards the end of the story, he similarly comments defensively: "The bear sighs – whatever people may think who say that bears don't sigh" (pp. 166f.).

The animal stories of Alscher and Stern are far from providing definitive answers in our search for appropriate positions and ethical principles for our dealings with animals, but they illustrate and draw attention to the tensions, contradictions and shifts in public attitudes towards them, and the growing anxieties of our age concerning the legitimacy of our exploitation of the natural environment. Alscher had an intimate knowledge of nature, and there is already a conservationist thrust to the stories in which he writes of the displacement of wild animals as a result of the erosion of their habitat. He was an increasingly reluctant hunter, more interested in observing wild animals than in killing them. Emphasising their otherness and autonomy as a source of enrichment in our lives, he pleads for respect for them and asserts their brotherhood with us. Writing half a century later, Stern is committed to the prevention of cruelty to animals and to their right to live in as natural a way as possible. *Jagdnovelle* is an outcry against contemporary hunting practices, but, while pleading for ecologically sound management of wildlife, it reveals a sneaking admiration for hunting as it might be: a human immersion in the natural world, and in animal being. Before we condemn Stern's inability to resolve the conundrum of preserving the wild in a relentlessly civilised world, perhaps we should remember that it is humbug to oppose the (relatively swift, pain-free and dignified) killing of animals by responsible hunters, so long as we continue to ignore and condone the suffering of the millions of cattle, pigs, sheep, hens and ducks kept in conditions unsuited to their nature and their annual slaughter in our battery farms and abattoirs. Our schizophrenic treatment of animals, unthinkingly consuming the many and lavishly cherishing the few (the 'Bambi syndrome'), degrades us and deprives our lives of a dimension of meaning. Stern, who was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Hohenheim, Stuttgart in 1974 for his part in "gradually guiding private and public attitudes towards animals away from sentimentality towards the facts" (quoted from Fischer 1997: 151) is rightly

described by Ludwig Fischer as a significant “precursor of all those striving for a less violent, less sentimental and schizophrenic relationship between human beings and the fellow creatures on whom they ultimately rely” (Fischer 1997: 7).

[1] I am indebted in this chapter to Matt Cartmill's informative and thought-provoking book *A View to a Death in the Morning* (1996), which combines cultural history with a persuasive anthropological critique of hunting. I have also drawn on the chapter 'The Greenness of Hunting' in Donna Landry's book *The Invention of the Countryside* (2001). The essays in Werner 1999 provide more detail on the history of hunting in Germany (especially in the Palatinate), and its cultural significance. Bode and Emmert 2000, which focuses on ecological concerns, has also been a useful source. Dinzelbacher 2000 and Spehr 1994 provide further background information.

[2] There is, however, one exception: "You must not eat flesh with life, that is to say, blood, in it." In the immediately following lines, God also demands account of human *and animal* "life-blood", and goes on to establish a covenant with Noah, his descendants, and *every living creature on the ark*, that never again will He destroy all living creatures by a flood.

[3] Cartmill notes that the symbolic elevation of deer to noble and supernatural status may be in part traceable back to the ancient Celtic tradition of reverence for the stag (see Chapter 4: 'The White Stag', of Cartmill 1996). The supposedly virtuous elements of endurance and ethical responsibility in his hunting practice provided a bridge for imagining the forgiveness of the saint. The curious development of St Hubert (rather than the second-century Roman St Eustace, St Giles or St German, about all of whom similar legends existed) into the patron saint of German hunters met a need of the nobility for ideological vindication. Hunting was invested with positive cultural attributes through the link with the French legend and the aura of saintliness.

[4] See Nimtz-Köster 2001 and the webpages of the Initiative zur Abschaffung der Jagd (Initiative for the Abolition of Hunting), which has organised protest marches in Berlin for several years, at <http://www.abschaffung-der-jagd.de>.

[5] Apart from general debarking, silver fir, maple, ash and beech have suffered disproportionately from deer grazing their young shoots, leaving behind a monoculture of planted spruce susceptible to storm damage and increasing erosion.

[6] See the aims of hunting as formulated on 'Jagd-online' <http://www.jagd-online.de>, the website of the *Deutscher Jagdschutzverband* (literally, the 'German Hunting Protection Association'). The page on *Waidgerechtigkeit*, the traditional ethos of hunting subscribed to by professionals and amateurs, lists regulations and practices concerning the care for and protection of animals, which include elements of environmental protection alongside the avoidance of unnecessary suffering.

[7] The rapid increase in the deer in Europe and North America over the last forty years (there are now more roe deer, muntjac, fallow, red and sika in Britain than at any time in the past century, and about £50 million of damage is caused by road accidents annually) has made them something of a pest species, and led to increasing conflicts over land use between

hunters and recreational users of the countryside on the one hand, and farmers, foresters and gardeners on the other.

[8] See, however, Thomas Dupke's study of the hunter and writer Hermann Löns (1993), to which I refer below. Useful background information is also provided by Jost Hermand's chapter on animals in nineteenth-century German literature, 'Gehätschelt und gefressen. Das Tier in den Händen der Menschen' (1991b: 53-74).

[9] Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory* (1995) and Robert Pogue Harrison's *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation* (1992) discuss these motifs in German myths and fairy tales.

[10] For a fuller account of Alscher's life and a general introduction to his writing see Goodbody 2003.

[11] It is likely that Alscher absorbed Nietzsche's ideas indirectly, like Löns and many other contemporaries, from the popular works of Julius Langbehn and Paul de Lagarde – see Dupke 1993: 167-72.

[12] In the case of Löns, this was posthumous, for he lost his life in the First World War. In Chapter 1 of his book, Dupke discusses the role which the monument erected to Löns in the Lüneburg Heath played in Nazi ceremonies, and how the author was transformed into a patron of rearmament, self-sacrifice for the fatherland and Blood and Soil. Ideological parallels with internationally better-known contemporaries writing on nature and animals such as Knut Hamsun (*Growth of the Soil*, 1917) and Henry Williamson (*Tarka the Otter*, 1927) are discussed in Chapter 7 ('The Literary Ecologist') of Bramwell 1989.

[13] Horst Fassel edited a comprehensive anthology of Alscher's stories on behalf of the Landsmannschaft der Banater Schwaben in 1995, but the only edition currently available is the recent reprint *Die Bärin*, edited by Hela Korodi (Alscher 2000), which contains eleven of the fourteen stories in the original volume of the same name together with eight other stories of Alscher's.

[14] Further biographical details, and a very useful discussion of Stern's media work, journalism and writing, are to be found in the interviews and articles in Stern 1997 and Fischer 1997.

[15] Stern's adoption of the term "Verhausschweinung" ('turning into a a domestic pig', p. 63) from the ethologist Konrad Lorenz prompts the question whether using pigs as symbols of docility and thoughtless gluttony does not play into the hands of those who underestimate their intelligence and capacity for pleasure and suffering, and consequently see them as falling outside the sphere of our moral concern.

[16] Stern reflects on the process of domesticating wild animals, for instance p. 81, where Joop notes that the winter feeding of red deer in the Bavarian Alps was begun by the Wittelsbach dynasty centuries ago. However, he seems to fall short of not only the insights formulated in Gernot Böhme's *Natürlich Natur* (1992), but also his own aim to combine emotional attachment to animals with rational understanding and argument (a goal which Heimbach describes as critically inflected love of animals ["reflektierte Tierliebe"] and empathetic knowledge of them ["sensible Tierkunde"] – Fischer 1997: 150).