The Austrian Imaginary of Wilderness:
Landscape, History and Identity in Contemporary Austrian Literature

Dissertation

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By

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Abstract

Contemporary Austrian authors, such as Christoph Ransmayr, Elfriede Jelinek, Raoul Schrott, and Robert Menasse, have incorporated wilderness as a physical place, as a space for transformative experiences, and as a figurative device into their work to provide insight into the process of nation building in Austria. At the same time, it provides a vehicle to explore the inability of the Austrian nation to come to terms with the past and face the challenges of a postmodern life. Many Austrian writers have reinvented, revised, and reaffirmed current conceptions of wilderness in order to critique varying aspects of social, cultural, and political life in Austria. I explore the way in which literary texts shape and are shaped by cultural understandings of wilderness. My dissertation will not only shed light on the importance of these texts in endorsing, perpetuating, and shaping cultural understandings of wilderness, but it also will analyze their role in critiquing and dismantling the predominant commonplace notions of it. While some of the works deal directly with the physical wilderness within Austrian borders, others employ it as an imagined entity that affects all aspects of Austrian life.
Dedication

To my family, without whose support this would not have been possible. I am so glad to be a part of us.
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Chapter 1: Introduction: Literary Wilderness

The conflict between technological progress and the preservation of nature is considered the key debate of the twenty-first century by William Cronon, one of the premier scholars of environmental studies in the United States.\(^1\) He argues that the modern understanding of nature is based on historical and cultural concepts that are called into play within social debates concerning nature preservation and conservation. Wilderness, both as an idea and a physical reality, holds a special position in the debate of nature preservation because of its shifting meaning throughout the history of human interaction with their surroundings. Despite the recent focus on the role of interaction with nature in modern Western culture, environmental thinking is not merely a twentieth century invention. Current questions about our influence on nature, and the opposite, are not novel; they have identifiable roots in Greek notions of Cosmology, paganism, Middle Age thinking of “the great chain of being,” Christian respect for the whole of creation, and natural philosophy. Despite this long tradition, a concentrated environmental movement was evident in neither the United States nor Europe until the 1960s. Scientific studies, like “The Limits to Growth,”\(^2\) spurred on discussions about the role of humans in

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the environment in cultural and philosophical thought in significantly new ways. As a result of increased preservation and conservation, among other environmentally conscious efforts, and the emergence of the fields of environmental history and cultural geography, the idea of wilderness and our interaction with it have become a renewed focus of scholarly attention in the last thirty years.

The idea of wilderness, while being part of a longer tradition of human interaction with nature, differs from other conceptions of nature. Its most enduring definition is that it is a form of nature untainted by civilization. Unlike the broader term “nature,” which can be an integral part of modern civilization in the form of parks, gardens, or even a tree-lined street, wilderness is defined by its separation and distinction from spaces intended for human habitation. People have conceived of it in a variety of ways, including as a physical space, an aesthetic realm, and an abstract reality, in the forms of myth, image, and figurative language. Recently, however, the definition has become solidified politically because of the Wilderness Act (1964) in the United States: “A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” The International Union for the Conservation of Nature’s categorization system has also identified the specific properties necessary for an area to be designated “wilderness.”

Despite the stabilization of its political definition in the United States and Europe and the influence of this definition on preservation efforts in other countries, a number of

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commonplace notions, existing since ancient times, are still at work within the modern concept.

My goal is to trace historical conceptions of wilderness as a physical and conceptual space in the Western context, as it affords certain aesthetic and transformative experiences as both a physical place and imaginary space. I identify within historical sources the standardized or commonplace notions of wilderness in order to understand instances of the motif in modern Austrian literature. I argue that older understandings of wilderness are still vital, despite a drastic reevaluation of specific natural areas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I further argue that the loss of real, physical wild spaces has led to a schizoid development for modern humanity. On the one hand, domestication and cultivation, which has led to its loss, has prompted many people to travel farther and farther away from urban environments in order to experience pristine landscapes. At the same time, however, the history of containment and domestication has afforded the illusion that one can still experience wilderness without leaving the comforts of civilization or national borders. The loss or containment of physical wilderness, then, has led to the marketing of small doses of the “wild” within capitalist society as a standard aspect of life. The desire to experience some type of emotional response to nature can be fulfilled without danger and the potential loss of life. A third development of this containment is the continued use of its non-literal significance because of the qualities that have been traditionally associated with it.

Much like the United States, Austria is a country with legal protection of natural areas, but preservation efforts in Austria differ from those in the United States. Preserved and conserved lands were first made national parks in the 1980s in Austria. They are
mostly provincial and private, not federal as in the United States. Despite this, the Austrian agencies concerned with managing forests and national parks display a similar understanding as that expressed in the Wilderness Act: humans are only visitors or are absent altogether. According to the National Parks Austria website, six of the seven national parks in Austria are International Union for the Conservation of Nature Category II designated wilderness areas. In answering the question “What is a National Park?” the website states:

Nationalparks sind grundsätzlich für die Öffentlichkeit zugänglich - die Erholung beruht vor allem darauf, unberührt Natur vorzufinden und zu erleben. Zu den weiteren Zielen und Aufgaben, die im Nationalpark verfolgt werden, zählen wissenschaftliche Forschung, Bildung, Schutz der Wildnis sowie jener der natürlichen Schönheit und der heimischen Kulturgüter.\(^5\)

The founding of national parks in Austria attests to the increased political and social focus on environmental issues. Particularly in Western nations, commonplace notions of wilderness are not only apparent in ecological and environmental writing, but rather this discourse continually informs cultural production, including literature, film, advertising, and nature conservation efforts. The employment of wilderness in literature, either as a setting, motif, or character, reflects and often problematizes the greater trends in the social and cultural movements of the day concerning nature. As the British literary critic Raymond Williams famously noted, “. . . the idea of nature contains, though often unnoticed, an extraordinary amount of human history.”\(^6\)

Scientific understanding of ecology significantly shifted philosophical and cultural thinking about nature in the twentieth century. Despite the major advances in the


modern era that have heavily influenced the way in which we think about nature, other forms of knowledge, including fairy tales, literary works, media images, myth, and religion have equally contributed to current ideas of wilderness. For example, the themes of paradise and apocalypse continue to have resonance in literature and other forms of cultural production.7

Wilderness was once a place people feared and attempted to conquer, but it shifted into a place for leisure and action; this transformation of commonplace notions about it reflects the malleable nature of concepts historically. More recently the call of the “return to the wild” in the second half of the twentieth century, as a countermovement to the overly organized, controlled, and systematic aspects of contemporary society, has created new opportunities for people to find leisure opportunities. The perceived need for these experiences is prompted by the marketing techniques behind ecotourism, greater attempts to preserve natural areas, and the development of new challenges, such as extreme sports. The stark transformation of wilderness areas’ value, along with the resilience of earlier definitions of it remain an integral part of wilderness discourse and have contributed to the need to reassess the power of previous and current conceptions of it.

Greg Garrard claims that the current conception of wilderness, as defined by the Wilderness Act, is a relatively new construction that only gained cultural prominence at the end of the nineteenth century. He notes, “It is a construction mobilised to protect

particular habitats and species, and is seen as a place for reinvigoration of those tired of the moral and material pollution of the city.”

He also notes, “Wilderness has an almost sacramental value: it holds out the promise of a renewed, authentic relation of humanity and the earth, a post-Christian covenant, found in a space of purity, founded in an attitude of reverence and humility.”

Despite the longer tradition of human interaction with wilderness, like that discussed by Max Oelschlaeger in *The Idea of Wilderness* (1993) and traditions like the Epic of Gilgamesh, the understanding to which Garrard refers is especially relevant in the United States where constructions of nature, in particular wilderness, have been an integral part of nation and culture building. The concept of Manifest Destiny in the colonial expansion westward, the preservation and conservation efforts that resulted in the National Park System, and the American notion of “stewardship of the land” have all contributed to modern conceptions of wilderness both in the United States and abroad.

Austria is also a country in which relationships to nature have had an important impact on the construction of nation and national identity. The notion of the Sublime, in connection with the Alps and the importance given to Germanic forests particularly in the eighteenth century, has contributed to the positive valuation of the Austrian landscape. In addition, Austria has relied heavily on tourism for the rebuilding of its national identity and economy following World War II. Austria differs from the United States, however, in that it is a country where remote, yet usable, areas are actually quite rare, which causes

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9 Garrard 59.
10 This epic was first discovered by Hormuzd Rassam in 1853. It was translated into English in the early 1870s and into German around the turn of the twentieth century. Its significance will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.
many Austrians to search for physical manifestations of the “wild” outside of their national borders. Abstract wilderness is also evident in Austrian cultural products in the form of symbols, myth, and figurative language.

Several authors in the fields of environmental history and cultural studies have traced the development of modern ideas of nature and their impact on national identity in order to re-conceptualize the wilderness idea. Key texts that appeared in the 1980s and 1990s, such as Anna Bramwell’s *Ecology in the 20th Century* (1989), Max Oelschlaeger’s *The Idea of Wilderness*, Keith Thomas’s *Man and the Natural World* (1996), and William Cronon’s *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking Man’s Place in Nature* (1996), have detailed shifts and developments in ideas about wilderness; they also trace the social and cultural changes that have affected how we consider our place in the world.

Literature participates in the reassessment of the our role in the world in multiple ways; wilderness serves as a vehicle for authors to highlight the civilization-versus-nature conflict, to criticize current political, social, and cultural institutions, and to stimulate a rethinking of modern interaction with wilderness. Representations of wilderness have appeared in scientific, travel, ecological, marketing, and literary texts for centuries. Yet many, including Garrard, argue that the modern environmental movement first gained significant widespread momentum with the poetic parable *Silent Spring* (1962) by Rachel Carson.\(^\text{12}\) While this view may be debatable, it is important to note that modern environmentalism has relied heavily on traditional literary genres such as the pastoral, apocalyptic novel, and other “pre-existing ways of imagining the place of humans in

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nature that may be traced back to such sources as Genesis and Revelation13 for its political and cultural implications. Wilderness within literature is particularly interesting because it can serve as evidence of historically evolving notions of the perceived proper social and cultural interaction with nature. Literature can also participate in reconsidering and dismantling the dominant definitions of nature and question the ruling ideologies surrounding environmental thought.

The modern Austrian literary works included in this study are important representations of wilderness because they draw attention to the literary tropes and commonplace notions that have existed about it since ancient times. Often, these literary texts show distrust of conventional understandings of wilderness, thus challenging them. At the same time, however, modern Austrian literature is highly informed and influenced by historical conceptions of wilderness, and therefore participates in the creation of new commonplace notions and stereotypes. This literature often carries older ideas to their extreme ends, as in Elfriede Jelinek’s work Oh Wildnis, Oh Schutz vor ihr (1984). She highlights the faulty notions of wilderness, the inherent weaknesses of these understandings, and the influence of “nature” on culture and politics. Some works, however, like Christoph Ransmayr’s Der fliegende Berg (2008), perpetuate figurative qualities of wilderness without reflection or criticism. He perpetuates dangerous stereotypes. These works also share a common theme: wilderness has been used and viewed primarily as a commodity in the late capitalist era.

Late twentieth century inquiry into the relationship between civilization and wilderness, in the scholarly fields of environmental history, environmental philosophy,
and cultural geography, has understood these terms as highly contested cultural constructions. Ecocriticism, also called environmental criticism, is a literary field that acknowledges the problematic quality of nature concepts and also views cultural constructions of nature as departure points from which to approach the study of ecology and literature in new ways. Ecocritics attempt to reevaluate, in light of environmental peril, the tradition of the conflict between nature and civilization in Western thought. Not all scholars in this field pursue the same goals. At its broadest, ecocriticism can be considered the study of the relationship between the human and the non-human throughout cultural history, with both the term “human” and “non-human” becoming the subject of “critical analysis.”

Ecocriticism as a theoretical approach is growing in Germanic studies, but because of the particular historical and cultural differences in the literary traditions of particular languages, nations, regions, or peoples, not all ecocritical theory can be blanketed under other traditions. Due to the field’s relative newness, it lacks strong theoretical foundations outside of the Anglo-American context. The way in which people have described, viewed, and understood wilderness cannot be separated from the cultural context and historical mindset from which the understanding comes, thus calling for an assessment of a country’s specific historical and philosophical engagement with it.

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15 The field of German ecocriticism is quickly growing, and since the time I started this project, many more philosophical and foundational texts have become available.
Wilderness has had a fundamental impact on the formation of Western civilization because it has been a vital component of cultural narratives and myths that have dominated Western thought. At the same time, however, philosophical inquiries into the value of wilderness have had a direct impact on the current global environmental movement. Current studies of nature, particularly in the fields of environmental history and cultural geography, have attempted to show that literary conceptions of wilderness are not based solely on real conditions, but rather are informed by philosophy, culture, religion, and language. These studies do not deny nature as a physical reality that functions as a real referent that changes and thus informs conceptions of it. They view nature as a concept that acts as a screen upon which individuals and societies project their own values. Lawrence Buell identifies conceptions of environment as a result of “a myth of mutual constructionism: of physical environment (both natural and human-built) shaping in some measure the cultures that in some measure continually refashion it.”\footnote{Lawrence Buell, \textit{Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond} (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2001) 6.}

Wilderness has held a special place in the philosophical history of man and nature because it has been considered the nature “out there,” free from human interaction and mysterious because of its lack of human inhabitants. This is one of the ways philosophers and authors define wilderness in order to distinguish it from the broader notions of nature and environment.\footnote{See the travel literature of Bruce Chatwin, \textit{In Patagonia} (1977), and Paul Theroux, \textit{The Great Railway Bazaar} (1975), both of which are considered classics in the genre. The former work displays a misanthrope looking for the last place on earth untouched by human civilization only to become extremely disappointed and disillusioned once reaching Patagonia. See also W. G. Sebald, \textit{Nach der Natur: Ein Elementargedicht} (1988) and \textit{Die Ringe des Saturn: Eine englische Wallfahrt} (1995).}
Cronon identifies an inherent pitfall in many of the current definitions and understandings of nature that negatively impacts the effectiveness of the “save the environment” movement. Cronon’s essay “The Trouble with Wilderness, or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” (1995) faults conceptualizing wilderness as a place separate and opposite to modern civilization for the current problems in environmental advocacy. Because wilderness, in all of its definitions, has been conceptualized as a space outside of and separate from culture, there has been little understanding of it as a cultural concept. In order to truly overcome the polarity created in part by modern environmental philosophy, Cronon argues that philosophical inquiries into the concept itself are a good first step to understanding the complicated situation of environmentalism and the history of ideas about wilderness.

Despite the opportunities ecocriticism has created for a reassessment and repriviledging of the power relations at work within our interaction with nature, particularly the supposed civilization/nature dichotomy that many ecocritics employ to justify new forms of thinking about the our role in the universe, one must guard against relying too heavily on universal truth claims or ‘meta-narratives’ that social movements often employ. In order to avoid grand generalizations, scholars must continue to situate their studies both historically and culturally. Thomas Kirchhoff and Ludwig Trepl cite the importance of this: “Jede bestimmte Art und Weise, wie Natur aufgefasst wird, ist ein kulturgeschichtliches Phänomen; ihre Existenz und ihr objektiver Charakter verdanken sich, unter anderem, intersubjektiven kulturgeschichtlichen Ideen oder Idealen, die auf

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die Natur an sich projiziert worden sind.”

For many of the conceptions of wilderness evident in Austrian literature in the past thirty years, considering environmental problems in analytical, as well as cultural and historical, terms has become increasingly necessary. An ecocritical reading of a text is particularly effective in analyzing wilderness in literature because it recognizes that “nature” is not a static referent that has a true essential quality, as the meaning and use of the word would seem; rather, “nature” is a construction that works as a lens through which we view the world around us.

The purpose of this study is to determine how wilderness has informed and been employed in contemporary Austrian literature. It is not my intention to completely flesh out its longer history in Western civilization: rather, I identify specific commonplace notions prevalent in this history that have affected the literature produced by Austrians in the past thirty years. I hope to discover the Austrian “imaginary of wilderness” and to trace how conceptions of the “wild” have been a powerful tool in critiquing Austrian politics, culture, and postmodern existence. Contemporary Austrian authors have incorporated Wildnis into their work, despite the relatively small amounts of it in Austria. I show that these authors rely not only on physical spaces as setting and as theme, but that their employment of wilderness is also dependent upon a longer tradition of commonplace notions about it. Garrard notes the validity of this method:

Breaking these monolithic concepts down into key structuring metaphors, or tropes, enables attention to be paid to the thematic, historical and geographical particularities of environmental discourse, and reveals that any environmental

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tropo is susceptible to appropriation and deployment in the service of a variety of potentially conflicting interests.\textsuperscript{20}

To argue that Austrian ideas about wilderness are particularly “Austrian” or that they have specific ramifications for national culture is difficult. If one follows Benedict Anderson’s conception of nation or considers national identity part of an “imagined political community,” then Austrian national culture can no longer be considered by fixed terms spatially and temporally, but rather must be considered as a mental construct.\textsuperscript{21} As such, Austrian views on wilderness become cultural artifacts. Socio-linguist Ruth Wodak considers national identity “a complex of similar conceptions and perceptual schemata, of similar emotional dispositions and attitudes, and of similar behavioural conventions, which bearers of this ‘national identity’ share collectively and which they have internalised through socialisation (education, politics, the media, sports, or everyday practices.)”\textsuperscript{22} Conceptions of wilderness, then, can be considered an important aspect of national culture. Austrians themselves consider nature to be an expression of national culture alongside the other more commonly considered products of culture. As a commodity, wilderness has been the foundation of the tourism and sport industries, key economic “exports.” As many critics have noted, the natural environment of Austria is a point of pride in which the nation, politics, and culture are celebrated, whether the celebration is through images of mountains, through sport competitions, or even as a body-culture connected to both these things. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{20} Garrard 14.
Even with the importance of a collective “imaginary of wilderness” within national identity, literary representations can be extremely personal. Individual experiences in all forms of nature often highlight the failure of language to accurately communicate those experiences. Despite this inability, there are aspects common to people’s perception and representation of wilderness that underscore the dominant discourse about peoples’ relation to nature in individual historical eras. I will show that the rhetoric contemporary Austrian authors employ is unique because they present many of the historical conceptions through a type of pastiche, where commonplace notions and tropes are appropriated, reencoded, and perpetuated. They are highlighted, questioned, fractured, broken, and confirmed in an attempt to mark wilderness as a highly contested concept. These works also show a self-reflexivity that is common in postmodern literature; they often acknowledge their use of tropes and the problematic elements therein. Theoretical frameworks providing a typology of interaction with nature exist, and these frameworks are helpful but are also limiting in their interaction with texts.  

Although the framework I employ may not be definitive, it will allow me to analyze literary wilderness in an enabling way.

For each of the works I analyze, wilderness is not merely an essentially-based referent with which their characters physically interact (although this is often an element of it), but rather a cultural construction that carries with it varying personal, cultural, religious, and social ideas. A real, physical environment exists outside of these works and changes to it are reflected in varying degrees in the literature, particularly in the way the

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characters and readers think about it. The way spaces are understood and the tropes used in attempts to articulate and represent physical reality show a reciprocal relationship. The works included in this study are extremely diverse in their style, choice of topic, and political or artistic agenda, yet they all include wilderness as a prominent theme. They are representative of the ability of authors to incorporate wilderness in literature with diverse goals. I will consider the specific effect of wilderness within each work alongside the main themes that lie at the core of the author’s oeuvre.

The ideas of wilderness that have been called upon in contemporary Austrian literature will be outlined below. Although this does not represent a complete list and does not specify a context for each trope or commonplace notion, I hope that this typology can determine which traditional conceptions are evident in contemporary Austrian literature and how they are effectively adapted and employed in a critique of modern Austria. I will explore wilderness as it moves from a physical place to a space for transformative experiences and finally to a representation of “imaginary” wilderness through image, symbol, metaphor and other figurative devices.

Physical wilderness has historically been portrayed in literature as a place to be avoided because of the danger it poses to humans. It is a place in need of cultivation, a living space for peoples traditionally considered uncivilized or for those who have broken the social contract in some way. Within Chapter 2, I draw on what contemporary philosophical and historical scholarship determines are the major cultural constructions of physical wilderness in order to identify the most prevalent commonplace notions about it, both historically and contemporarily. I then analyze Jelinek’s Oh Wildnis, Oh Schutz vor ihr (1984), Menasse’s Schubumkehr (1997), and Ransmayr’s Morbus Kitahara (1995)
and *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis* (1984). I argue that wilderness’s containment through a long history of domestication has resulted in differing reactions. Jelinek claims the nature preservation in the form of National Parks is part of a capitalist system in which those who own or manage land give the masses an illusion of freedom, while all the while the elite profit privately. For both Jelinek and Menasse, images of wilderness and pristine landscapes have been part of the Second Republic’s attempt to cover-up Austria’s complicity in National Socialism and the Holocaust. Beyond this, though, the images of nature in Austria that are presented to both Austrians and the world are simulated and do not reflect actual wilderness. They claim that theories of “natural” nature have been called upon to justify exclusionary and discriminatory practices. Ransmayr’s characters respond to the history of containment differently; because of the lack of “real” wild nature in Austria, they travel to the farthest reaches of the world in order to seek out authentic relationships. His works also draw attention to the illusion of cultivation and domestication, and he points toward other models of understanding human interaction with the world, like geological time. All of the authors demonstrate that a return to nineteenth century ideas of *Heimat* and idyllic relationships with nature are dangerous and displace with them the history that has been enacted upon Austrian soil.

Within the Western tradition, the notion that physical wilderness is the antithesis to the city and civilization and should be either cultivated or kept separate through preservation has developed historically alongside a fascination with wild and free spaces. In Chapter 3, I outline the historical developments that contributed to the desire for experiencing wilderness first-hand that peaked during Romanticism. The negative
elements associated with being in wilderness could also be positive. I demonstrate the foundations for the shifts in evaluating wilderness through ancient texts. I also analyze key developments in literary history that have contributed to the reevaluation that occurred. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the solely positive aspects of wilderness dominate representations of it, turning it into a place people sought out to improve their condition and have transformative experiences. It also became a place where people could test the limits of their capacities. I show that with this fascination came the idea that wilderness could provide opportunities for leisure. Tourism grew with a growing desire to have transformative experiences in nature. I also show the reciprocal relationship between tourism and the way we conceptualize nature. I again turn to Jelinek’s *Oh Wildnis, Oh Schutz vor ihr* to show her distrust of the idea that aesthetic experiences are possible through literature and that art can accurately represent nature. I then analyze her play *In den Alpen* (2002) to further the argument that nature is implicated in Austria’s refashioning of itself after World War II and that sports and tourism have played important roles for not only individual and national identity but also economic rebuilding. I include a reading of Stifter’s *Der Waldsteig* (1845) to demonstrate many of the nineteenth century conceptions of wilderness and the protagonist’s ability to have positive, transformative experiences there. Stifter belongs to the literary tradition within which the contemporary authors position their own works. My reading of *Schubumkehr* relates to its treatment of tourism and the erasure of history concomitant in that enterprise. I turn to Ransmayr’s *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis* in order to demonstrate a counter-example of the commonplace notions of experiences in wilderness in nineteenth century texts, such as those exemplified in Stifter’s work. The
explorers in Ransmayr’s text find it extremely difficult to have any type of sublime experience because the wilderness they encounter has not yet been cultivated or contained. Their transformation comes in the form of being disillusioned with their mission of discovering new lands and their scientific goals. Finally, I include a discussion of Daniel Kehlmann’s *Die Vermessung der Welt* (2005) in order to position his and Ransmayr’s work in a recent literary tendency to investigate nineteenth century explorer scientists and to reevaluate, in light of the postmodern paradigm, the role science and technology play in our relationship to nature.

In Chapter 4, I argue that in addition to a physical space and a place for transformation, wilderness has continually been employed for its figurative meaning. I show that it serves as a projection screen where personal and social ideology and philosophy have been played out. I claim the defining feature of this use is wilderness’s status as the “other” to civilization, which can be in the form of a symbol of true human nature, woman, a positive counter-model to modern progress, and an aesthetic model for art. I begin the chapter with an analysis of figurative language and then give examples of both the positive and negative values people have placed on abstract wilderness historically. I connect this to wilderness as other, showing that the values associated with wilderness as “other” are often transferred to other “others” through a process of collective memory. I use both ancient and modern cultural artifacts as examples to demonstrate this. I begin my close reading with Ransmayr’s *Der fliegende Berg* (2006). I claim the two protagonists are representations of two varying interactions with the “other” that are the result of two very different Weltanschauungen. The landscape they encounter becomes a screen upon which they project their goals and wishes. I also show,
however, how Der fliegende Berg, along with Morbus Kitahara, employs “wild woman” stereotypes, reinforcing both the negative and positive qualities attributed to both women and nature as “other.” I then analyze Jelinek’s Gier: Ein Unterhaltungsroman (2000) to demonstrate the use of wilderness as a symbolic landscape. Within the text, the narrator condemns the efforts of the Austrian nation to conceal its National Socialist history, but the landscape is complicit in revealing what is hidden, resisting the domination placed upon it. Within Menasse’s Schubumkehr, wilderness also resists the domination placed upon it. Menasse also relies on a feminizing of wilderness, as his female protagonist is closely associated with nature. I end my discussion with Ransmayr’s Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis. Unlike Jelinek, who points to the inherent dangers in revaluing nature, Ransmayr embraces the qualities of freedom and breaking of norms associated with wilderness. The structure of the novel reflects these qualities.

Within literary scholarship, various methods have been used when considering the role of nature in literature. Historically, it has been studied as a motif, as an author-specific experience, and as a psychological and philosophical phenomenon. Even with the tradition of approaching landscape and nature in literature from these various directions, little scholarly engagement is seen in German studies with the concept of wilderness exclusively. Unlike English language literature, a comprehensive study of wilderness in German for German-language literature is yet to be undertaken: studies in German speaking countries tend to focus on the English-speaking context or originate in the field of landscape ecology. Despite the fact that wilderness has not been a specific topic of study in German literary scholarship, depictions of it and human interactions in
wild areas continue to be an important theme in literary works in the German speaking realm.

Fewer works in German studies approach the role of forests and the Alps in contemporary contexts than do those in English or for English literature. Studies that focus on forests as a motif in literature tends to concentrate on Minnesang poetry or Romanticism, and yet they are themes that have been used continually throughout the modern era. For example, the essays in Charles Watkins’ edited volume tend to focus primarily on the British context, and the essays which do study German speaking areas limit their topics to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Literature and art concerning the “discovery” of the Alps and personal and philosophical conceptions of the sublime tend to dominate the research, and little attention has been paid exclusively to the role the Alps, tourism, or mountain sports play in contemporary Austrian literary works. With the emergence of ecocriticism, however, new book chapters and journal articles concerning the writings of Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, Ernst Moritz Arndt, and National

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Socialist conceptions of nature and preservation as connected to *Blut und Boden* ideologies have emerged.\(^2^8\)

Key texts for identifying commonplace notions of wilderness are *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1965) by Roderick Nash, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (1993) by Max Oelschlaeger, and *Landscape and Memory (Der Traum von der Wildnis: Natur als Imagination)* (1995) by Simon Schama. Nash’s monograph traces changes in the concept of wilderness in the United States to show its transformation from colonial times, as nature needing cultivation, to modern times, as a nature with intrinsic value outside of that provided by human intervention. The work depicts the major periods of change in American thinking about nature through analyzing the nature writing of Transcendentalist authors Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, the founder of the preservation movement John Muir, and twentieth century writers like Aldo Leopold. Nash also details and analyzes the major environmental milestones in the history of the United States, including landscape painting, the founding of the National Park System, and the emergence of the modern environmental movement. Nash argues that the reevaluation of wilderness in the nineteenth century resulted in its preservation. He claims this was a purely American phenomenon at the time, and one of the great contributions to world thought. This has resulted in changing attitudes internationally. Partially because of Nash’s work, many have come to consider wilderness preservation an American value and export.

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Oelschlaeger’s work has been equally important. He begins with the question of how and why nature is again coming to be considered “the source of human existence, rather than a mere re-source to fuel the economy.” In assessing current ideas about nature and the basis of environmental consciousness, (or non-environmental, as the case may be), Oelschlaeger broadly outlines the idea of wilderness. By tracing the philosophical history of conceptions about it, Oelschlaeger hopes to promote an “evolution of consciousness” in order to stave off massive extinctions and global environmental peril. He begins with the Paleolithic and Neolithic ages, moves into the Classical period of Rome, jumps to the Modern period, then focuses more concretely on Romantic writers Emerson, Thoreau, preservationist Muir, twentieth century environmentalist poets Gary Snyder and Robinson Jeffers, the philosophy of Deep Ecology, and postmodern conceptions of nature.

Although not typically considered one of the foundational philosophical texts on nature, the art historian Simon Schama has offered a study of our interaction with nature that includes a multitude of sources both American and European. Schama’s work is important in that he diverges from what he calls the attempt “to restore a distinction between landscape and manscape” in much of the environmental history written for both the American and British contexts. In *Landscape and Memory*, Schama takes a historical view and argues that nature and our images of it cannot be separated from one another. Nature and landscape are comprised of layers built from myth and social imaginings as well as geological, ecological, and landscape formations. Schama also

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29 Oelschlaeger 1.
30 Oelschlaeger 2.
contends that the Western insistence on the pristine nature of wilderness is derived from actual and cultural circumstances, yet this fact is to be celebrated and not lamented:

“Even the landscapes that we suppose to be most free of our culture may turn out, on closer inspection, to be its product.”

It is the argument of *Landscape and Memory*, Schama continues, that

this is a cause not for guilt and sorrow but celebration . . . The brilliant meadow-floor [at Yosemite] which suggested to its first eulogists a pristine Eden was in fact the result of regular fire-clearances by its Ahwahneechee Indian occupants. So while we acknowledge (as we must) that the impact of humanity on the earth's ecology has not been an unmixed blessing, neither has the long relationship between nature and culture been an unrelieved and predetermined calamity. At the very least, it seems right to acknowledge that it is our shaping perception that makes the difference between raw matter and landscape.

Schama emphasizes that nature has no intention of providing us anything and that only through representation and occupation of nature is one able to give meaning to natural systems of the world.

Environmental history has succeeded in making nature and topography active historical agents. Within the discipline, studies underscore the importance of recognizing the tendency to exclude nature from accounts of important historical factors that influence the human condition. While most twentieth century environmental histories differ in their accounts of when the nature/human dichotomy was solidified, it is helpful to look at the general assessments of these histories. They outline important developments in the relationship between humanity and wilderness that continue to influence our views of nature today. Schama notes that the myths of native cultures we are often told (by scholars such as Oelschlaeger, Nash, Cronon, and Donald Worster)

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32 Schama 9.
33 Schama 9-10.
are missing from modern wilderness ideas are actually an integral part of Western culture and always have been.\textsuperscript{34} For the purpose of this study, it will be helpful to catalog these ideas to the extent they are utilized in Modern Austrian literature.

As noted above, the American concept of wilderness has received much scholarly attention in the past 150 years, and despite a strong tradition of representations of wild spaces in Germanic history and philosophical thought, little scholarly attention has been paid to the Austrian conception of wilderness. German scholars’ reticence in approaching this topic is not exclusively a phenomenon in literary studies. Matthias Stremlow states, “Die Germanistik ist mit ihrer Abstinenz, die Mensch-Wildnis-Beziehung zu erforschen, nicht allein.”\textsuperscript{35} He notes that not only in social studies, but in the humanities in general, the “forest” has only recently again become a topic of study.\textsuperscript{36} Axel Goodbody also asks why German Studies has been reserved in embracing the study of ecology and literature. In his introduction to Literatur und Ökologie (1998), he notes that this disinterest stems from the fact that Germany lacks a literary tradition comparable to the nature-writing genre in the American and British tradition. He also notes that the skepticism afforded to “Ökoliteratur” by German scholars is a result of the “Übertreibungen und apokalyptischen Untergangsszenarien der achtziger Jahre.” In addition, he notes that ecological literature has been considered the “letzte Manifestation einer nicht mehr gefragten ‘Gesinnungsästhetik.’”\textsuperscript{37} Within the German tradition, there is also a danger in revaluing nature writing that has traditionally been tied to ideals of Heimat, nostalgia, and

\textsuperscript{34} Schama 13.
\textsuperscript{35} Matthias Stremlow and Christian Sidler, Schreibzüge durch die Wildnis: Wildnisvorstellungen in Literatur und Printmedien der Schweiz (Bern: Haupt, 2002) 35.
\textsuperscript{36} See Albrecht Lehmann, Von Menschen und Bäumen: Die Deutschen und ihr Wald (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1999).
been appropriated within National Socialism for dangerous nationalistic goals. Albrecht Lehmann and Klaus Schriewer note that as a topic of serious scholarly study, German forests, like the *Heimat* problem, were untouchable in the years following World War II.

Yet like many current ecocritics argue,

Wenn eine besondere Liebe der Deutschen . . . zu ihren Wäldern bei jeder Gelegenheit in der Tagespresse als fraglos gegeben unterstellt wird, die Klagen der Bevölkerung über ein ‘Waldsterben’ im Mediendiskurs aus untergründig in deutschen Köpfen wirkenden Baum- und Waldmythen, Märchen und romantischen Gedichten hergeleitet werden, ist es geboten, den gegenwärtigen Zustand und die Wirkweise alter und neuer Waldmythen und Waldideologien zu kennen.³⁸

Ecocriticism can reevaluate previously taboo literary works and the environmentally conscious mindsets they maintain without necessarily praising the potentially dangerous ideological and national elements therein. Contemporary literary works themselves, like those in this study, have aided in the reevaluation of nature concepts.

Klaus Zeyringer sees a great shift in Austrian literature in the 1980s.³⁹ Because the works discussed in this study have been written no earlier than 1984, his historical overview *Innerlichkeit und Öffentlichkeit: Österreichische Literatur der achtziger Jahre* (1992) is helpful in positioning each author’s work in a longer literary tradition. He labels 1986 a turning point in Austrian literature, which had before that time “. . . been rooted in a physical and social topography which told of the suppressing of the fascist past and the covert continuation of totalitarian structures.”⁴⁰ Austrian literature subsequently moved toward new themes, such as examining the shifting political landscape of the 1980s,

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conservatism of new appointments in the Catholic Church, tightening of restrictions on immigration, and concerns about the incorporation of Eastern nations into the European Union. Although Zeyringer notes that Austrian authors had engaged the questions of Austria’s involvement in National Socialism and had attempted to expose the “founding myth” of the Second Republic, it was not until a series of scandals in the 1970s and 1980s involving politicians with National Socialist pasts that full attention was paid to Austria’s failure to go through a process of Vergangenheitsbewältigung in the same way Germany had. The Waldheim Affair of 1988 ended Austria’s “age of innocence” and deflated the “Austria as Hitler’s first victim” myth. This caused artists in large numbers to criticize state-propagated conservative ideology that denied the presence of historical continuities from the pre-1945 period. These conservative trends sparked critical responses, particularly in the form of essays, against the consensus government and “Habsburg myth” that dominated postwar discourse. Some of the more renowned works in this category include Die Leiche im Keller (1988), a collection of essays by over fifty artists directed at President Kurt Waldheim, Peter Turrini’s Mein Österreich: Reden, Polemiken, Aufsätze (1988), and Robert Menasse’s Die sozialpartnerschaftliche Ästhetik (1990) and Das Land ohne Eigenschaften (1992).

As the cultural and political atmosphere in Austria changed in the 1980s, the literature produced during this time and after also shifted to meet the goals of critically assessing

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42 Vilo Dor, ed. Die Leiche im Keller (Vienna: Picus, 1988).
43 Peter Turrini, Mein Österreich: Reden, Polemiken, Aufsätze (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1988).
the modern situation. Post-war novels tended to revert to older forms of aesthetics, like the *avant garde* and a focus on pre-war modernist forms of art employed by members of the *Wiener Gruppe*, or returned to an even earlier tradition that focused on the collapse of the Habsburg Empire.\(^{45}\) This is not to say that post-war novels did not confront or expose Austria’s political and economic cover-up of National Socialism, but the New Subjectivity of the seventies and eighties shifted focus to the personal and everyday problematic socially, culturally, and sexually. The 1980s produced a very different social and political landscape than the one authors had previously confronted, which is reflected in the literary responses to these changes at the time.

The 1980s also saw a re-envisioning of the father-son polemic, of the mother-daughter conflict novel, and of the transmission of norms through a male-dominated language. Elfriede Jelinek’s *Die Liebhaberinnen* (1975), along with *Die Klavierspielerin* (1983), *Lust* (1989), and *Die Kinder der Toten* (1995) explore these themes in strikingly new ways. Critical responses characterize Jelinek’s work as broadly exposing oppressive forms of domination, particularly those of a class and sexual nature that are implemented through language and veiled by the ruling ideologies of capitalism.\(^{46}\) Many works survey Jelinek’s specific role in criticizing and deconstructing the ruling ideologies of the Second Republic. Critics claim that she pushes the boundaries of language and content in order to provoke readers and audiences into an awareness of social and political


complicity in oppressive forms of thought and action. In addition, the topics of female sexuality, pornography, and feminism dominate these works. Jelinek’s novel Oh Wildnis, Oh Schutz vor ihr emerges in the secondary research, if at all, in terms of Jelinek’s deconstruction of the concepts of Heimat, patriarchy, and class distinction. It is also considered by many critics to be written against the “Naturfrömmigkeit” movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s. In terms of Jelinek’s representation of nature, J. Nie’s dissertation “Naturbegriff in der österreichischen Gegenwartsliteratur” takes up the question of environmentalism in Austria in the 1980s, particularly after the building of the nuclear power plant in Zwentendorf. In addition to these themes, much of Jelinek’s later work, along with the criticism thereof, focuses on the “near extinction of European Jewry under National Socialism.”


Questioning what is true, reconceptualizing the past from multiple perspectives, and challenging the systems of power and knowledge behind reality and history as they are presented as part of the Second Republic’s publicity campaign are dominant themes in much Austrian literature in the past thirty years. In addition to his numerous collections of essays, Robert Menasse’s fiction has been integral in understanding the process of coming to terms with the past in Austria, on both a national and personal level. His first published novels were part of the *Trilogie der Entgeisterung*, which includes the titles *Sinnliche Gewißheit* (1988), *Selige Zeiten, brüchige Welt* (1991), and *Schubumkehr* (2001). Menasse reverses Hegel’s concept of the development of human consciousness, exploring the changing notions of *Heimat* connected to the process of coming to terms with the past that many second and third generation Austrians experienced after the Second World War. What differentiates Menasse’s writing from other literary explorations of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is that his works predominantly feature protagonists who, like Menasse himself, have returned to Austria after spending a long time abroad. His works also deal with questions of identity and his protagonist’s Jewish heritage, particularly *Die Vertreibung aus der Hölle* (2001). His novels are dominated

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by postmodern narrative techniques, and this aspect of his work often becomes a topic of literary criticism. The novel *Schubumkehr*, like Jelinek’s novel *Gier* and play *In den Alpen*, criticizes the artificial nature of tourism and presents artificial landscapes that are created for tourist enjoyment but become the cause of ecological demise and loss of human life through murder or accident. Zeyringer also identifies 1986 as a turning point because Austria’s two best-known authors, Peter Handke and Thomas Bernhard, published their most successful novels at that time. Handke’s *Die Wiederholung* and Bernhard’s *Auslöschung* both point to a demise of façades and worlds falling apart. These myth-breaking novels developed alongside what Zeyringer calls Austrian “Mythosträchtigkeit” of the 1980s, in which Austrian literature integrated myth into works either to deconstruct myth’s totalizing and universal applicability or to infuse it with new meaning. Zeyringer notes that the tendency to appropriate myth changed in the 1990s, with classicized forms of myth being exchanged for dystopia and destruction.

This tendency characterizes much of Ransmayr’s writing. Instead of integrating myth in his writing to order and stabilize a chaotic world, myth becomes fractured and fragmented, with stability being provided only by the writing of the text itself. Although *Die Letzte Welt* (1988) is Ransmayr’s best-known and critically acclaimed novel, his first

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58 See Anna Catherine Souchuk, The Problem with Gemütlichkeit: (De)constructing Artificial Places in the Novels of Josef Haslinger, Robert Menasse, and Elfriede Jelinek, Diss. Yale University, 2008.
60 Zeyringer, *Innerlichkeit und Öffentlichkeit*, 250.
novel, *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis* (1984), acted as a prototype for his later use of myth. Ransmayr’s use of myth has been widely discussed; Zeyringer dedicates a book chapter to the topic in *Innerlichkeit und Öffentlichkeit*, and a number of articles and book chapters have explored Ransmayr’s postmodern myth building. Along with the use of myth, Ransmayr’s work seems to be, like his protagonist of *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis* (1984), obsessed with the creation of reality and with intertwining fact and fiction with the present and the past. Many critics have read his work through the lens of postmodernism, and numerous monographs, dissertations, book chapters, and journal articles have approached this topic. Ransmayr’s novel *Morbus Kitahara* reconceptualizes space and time by rewriting post-World War II history. He creates a fictional Europe not rebuilt through the Marshall Plan (officially the European Recovery Program), but rather intensely de-industrialized by the Morgenthau Plan (more

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formally known as the Treasury Plan for the Treatment of Germany). This literary “alternative history” has caught the attention of scholars interested in pursuing the effects of memory and history in the cultural realm.\(^6\) It has also sparked discussions of the role of memorializing in the postmodern context.\(^6\) More recently, much attention has been given to Ransmayr’s novels in terms of what James Martin calls a “crisis of cultural knowledge,” a “phenomenon within recent German-language postmodern literature, in which authors combine dystopic themes, such as the return of myth, apocalypse and destruction.”\(^6\) Axel Goodbody argues that Ransmayr’s works differ from his 1980s counterparts because they present “bleak scenarios of the demise of humanity at the hand of nature.”\(^6\) While Ransmayr’s work has been noted for its “Aesthetics of Humility”\(^6\) and his shorter literary pieces, including \textit{Strahlender Untergang: Ein Entwässerungprojekt oder die Entdeckung des Wesentlichen} (1982) and \textit{Geständnisse}


eines Touristen: Ein Verhör (2004) include visions of the world without people, Ransmayr’s works create a much more nuanced and complicated scenario of the relationship between humans and their natural environment than characterized by Goodbody. In addition to the themes mentioned above, Ransmayr’s works engage with the cultural knowledge of “others,” in which the travel motif, geography, the gaze, and the concept of the Sublime all play an important role.  

Zeyringer notes that the negative criticism much German speaking literature of the 1980s has received is due to its solipsism that focuses on purely Austrian issues. He sees a shift in the early 1990s towards a focus on the travel motif: “Journeys into other worlds represent one way out of the ‘closed circuit’ in which critics and the objects of their criticism are more dependent on one another than is often apparent.” A focus on multiple realities in this ‘post-solipsistic’ literature is a driving factor, and despite the conservative swing of Austrian politics at the time, authors are unwilling to lose the subversive nature of art, substituting it for other systems that have traditionally provided meaning to life in the world, like religion, morality, and ethics.

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69 Zeyringer, “Österreichische Literatur seit 1986.”

70 Zeyringer, “Österreichische Literatur seit 1986.”
Raoul Schrott employs the journey motif in his literature, alongside his attempts to understand nature “as something wholly other than and indifferent to human life.”

His first novel, *Finis terrae: Ein Nachlass* (1995), takes the journal motif to the very ends of the world. It combines four travelogues in order to create a postmodernist narrative somewhere between fact and fiction. *Die fünfte Welt: Ein Logbuch* (2007) also narrates a journey “zum letzten weißen Flecken dieser Welt.” Unlike the travel narratives mentioned above, Schrott’s novel is an autobiographical record of a trip with a scientific expedition to a desert spanning the countries Chad, Sudan and Libya. Schrott’s attempt to understand the natural world in his poetry, by reaching beyond the scope of science, has also caught the attention of many critics. Ransmayr’s most recent novel, *Der fliegende Berg*, is also a fictional travel narrative whose protagonists wish to reach the last white spot on the map of the world. Following the trend of the 1990s that Zeyringer finds particularly significant, neither of these works include Austrian characters nor take Austria as its setting.

The importance of national parks to American culture and the supposed value of wilderness areas for themselves and for the visiting public have had an impact on conservation and preservation worldwide.

John Muir himself worked in Yosemite at a house that soon evolved into a hotel and resort as more and more visitors came to see the

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73 See Wolfgang Müller-Funk, “Räume in Bewegung: Narrative und Chronotopik in Christoph Ransmayrs Roman *Der fliegende Berg*,” *Kakanien Revisited* (Web: 5 May 2010).
“wonders of nature.” These travelers were prompted to travel West because of the influence of Romantic art, notions of the Sublime, and curiosity as more stories and tales of the incredible nature reached cities. American conceptions of the value of wilderness, though typically praised, have also come under great criticism for their restrictive qualities. Cronon, in his article “The Trouble with Wilderness,” calls the American concept of wilderness a “cult” that teaches us “to be dismissive or even contemptuous of such humble places and experiences.” He notes that “wilderness tends to privilege some parts of nature at the expense of others.” Although the American park system has influenced the modern Austrian imaginary of wilderness, a longer tradition of interaction with nature, evident in Austrian literature and culture, has left a powerful legacy, informing current notions of it. As I will show in the following chapters, travel to remote areas by urbanites, including pilgrimages to the Alps, trips to Austrian spas, and travel during Sommerfrische have been an integral part of Austrian culture since the nineteenth century. Even if the primary reason for the creation of national parks has theoretically been the preservation of untouched areas, lodges and the national parks as tourist destinations have been a founding element of American culture for at least a century. A distinction between Austrian and North American wilderness areas is important here, though. Unlike in the United States, where much of the land used to create national parks was either uninhabited or taken from native peoples in order to establish government owned and managed parks, much of the land used to establish national parks and protected areas in Austria were and still are privately owned and managed through

76 William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” 86.
contracts with landowners, thus creating economic opportunities through tourism for otherwise non-usable land.\textsuperscript{77} In addition, the proximity of some Austrian National Parks to urban centers results in their inclusion in a more cultured landscape. For example, the National Park Hohe Tauern is within a short distance from Vienna. Because of the private land ownership, the park is still regularly used for farming and grazing, practices that do not normally happen within designated wilderness areas. Despite these differences, the Wilderness Act and the US Park System have had enormous influence on conversation and preservation efforts in Austria, even if the realities of the national parks are quite different.

The dominating notions of appropriate interaction with wilderness have changed drastically from the late nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century in European thought, and some specific events and cultural conditions give Austria particularity in the literary representations that responded to these changes. Whereas writing can be a highly individual expression, those expressions are grounded in a social, cultural, and literary tradition. Schama notes that “not all cultures embrace nature and landscape myths with equal ardor, and those that do, go through periods of greater or lesser enthusiasm.”\textsuperscript{78} This is not to claim that no generalizations about attitudes toward our relationship with the natural world can be made, but rather it is to acknowledge the differences in attitudes across time and space. The literary tradition of Austria, particularly canonical works and authors, can illuminate the dominant and foundational notions about wilderness. These canonical works are useful to see what effect their

\textsuperscript{77} Andrew Terry, Karin Ullrich, and Uwe Riecken, \textit{The Green Belt of Europe: From Vision to Reality} (Cambridge: International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, 2006) 18 and 106.\textsuperscript{78} Schama 15.
authors’ views have had on the literature written later. Novels by Adalbert Stifter and Joseph Roth are two examples of the types of wilderness representations that appear in Austrian literature. These authors, I argue, have had an influence on the contemporary Austrian literature discussed in this study in a way that is more significant than the literature that appeared in Austria after 1930 but before the post-war period.

As mentioned above, tourism is an aspect of the Austrian tradition of writing that distinguishes it from other literary traditions. According to the *Urlaub in Österreich: Der offizielle Reiseführer* website, ten percent of the gross domestic product of Austria is directly related to tourism. This site also notes that although the Alps are the most easily identifiable feature of the Austrian landscape, about fifty percent of the country is forested. In addition, the site claims that, “Like most European countries, Austria looks back on a very eventful history. Yet there are some elements of the Austrian character that haven’t changed much over the centuries: the partiality for indulgence, beauty, and cultivation has always been a driving force in the country’s past and present.” Whether or not Austrians really have a better appreciation of nature than peoples of other cultures, the very fact that Austrian tourism marketing promotes the idea that they do reveals the cultural significance of a perceived close relationship to nature for Austria. “Nature” is listed as an “activity” on the Official Guide to Austria website, indicating a shift from an older conception of it as a mysterious and scary place to a more modern construction where nature is a place for leisure, sport, and solitude.

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In the late nineteenth century, tourism became an important economic factor for Austria’s success as a small nation. Austria had before that time been an integral part of pilgrimage routes and provided a spa culture both for its own and Germany’s wealthy citizens. But, a rising middle class, alongside industrial and infrastructural growth in the mid-nineteenth century, allowed a greater number of people the ability to travel in a particular mimicry of upper class wealth.\(^8\)

In addition, the closing of certain mines and the construction of new railways allowed for roads and inns, previously catering to traveling workers and traders, to be used for tourists of all classes. Despite these considerations, arguably the biggest factor in the foundation of a strong tourism industry, which spurred on the development of much of the above-mentioned infrastructure in Austria, is the notion of the Sublime.

A great change occurred in the European attitude toward mountains, and the Alps in particular, in the mid-eighteenth century. Albrecht von Haller’s poem “Die Alpen” (1732) and Rousseau’s Julie, or the New Heloise (1761) and Confessions (1782) were instrumental in positively changing notions of mountains: these authors celebrated them in their literature for mountains’ ability to renew the soul with their high vantage points. The wildness of mountains, according to Haller and Rousseau, could provide a freedom that was no longer threatening or scary, but refreshing and revitalizing.

Immanuel Kant’s notion of the Sublime, outlined in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790), also contributed to certain areas of wilderness being valued more highly than others. Kant values nature as a source of beauty and as important for the project of art. The Sublime is a necessary experience, Kant claims, because of the fear that one feels while experiencing a great and large aspect of nature: the individual employs the powers of understanding and imagination, which ultimately engenders the ability to survive in everyday life. Current natural philosophy has attempted to reassess why national parks tend to be in areas of mountains, grand vistas, and forests, and not in the less appreciated aspects of natural landscape, like marshes and plains. The philosophical value placed on the sublime in Europe in the nineteenth century, and transferred to the American context, resulted in viewing nature being considered a religious experience. This has contributed to the current selection of areas to be preserved.81

Because the Alps provided an ideal location for experiencing the Sublime, the nineteenth century saw an increased number of wealthy intellectuals traveling there as a part of their *Bildung*. As the notion of the Sublime evolved in the nineteenth century, interaction with wilderness became viewed as an experience that provided refuge from the demands and constraints of society. For many Romantics, the transcendental quality of nature assured one of his own mental and physical abilities, and this is precisely the time period when mountaineering and alpine tourism became popular as a leisure-time activity. As an outgrowth of romantic philosophy and scientific pursuit, the popularity of mountain climbing in Austria has left a lasting tradition on views of wilderness,

81 See John Rodman, “What is living and what is dead in the Political Philosophy of T.H. Green?” *The Western Political Quarterly* 26 (1973): 583-4. He holds that the idea of National Parks primarily serves anthropocentric needs and is a reflection of aesthetic, cultural, and religious motivations.
beginning with the writings and experiences of Friedrich Simony, a friend and literary
inspiration to Stifter. This tradition continues today in the writings of Reinhold Messner,
considered the greatest mountain climber of all time.\textsuperscript{82} Whereas climbing mountains in
Austria once represented the feat of man over primordial nature, it has now become a
mere training ground for climbers tackling greater and higher peaks all over the world.\textsuperscript{83}
The absence of largely untainted wilderness areas in Austria, (because of private land
ownership of these areas), notions of sublimity that influenced groups like the \textit{Deutsche
Alpenverein}, the creation of winter sports areas, and tourism have all left Austrian
wilderness a largely elusive concept. It has, in response to its disappearance, become
fictionalized and marginalized, leading many Austrians to travel outside of Austria for
interaction with more “authentic” forms of nature.

The geographical and environmental features of Austria, which were perfectly
suited to experiencing the nineteenth century notion of the Sublime, were put on display
for the world to see through the Austrian tourism board in the late nineteenth and early
twentieth centuries at various world expos, contributing to Austria’s image as a nation
defined by its landscape. The Alps and alpine valleys became standard images of Austria
starting in the nineteenth century, and these images continue to have resonance in media,
literature, and art today.\textsuperscript{84} Even for those people who have never traveled to alpine areas,
a host of primarily idyllic images, thanks to paintings of the Alps by Romantic artists

has over 60 publications concerning mountains and mountain climbing.
\textsuperscript{83} Hermann Hesse’s \textit{Peter Camenzind} (1904) is an interesting Neoromantic treatment of mountain
wilderness aiding a young man’s education and maturity. The term “Hausberg” designates the closest
mountain to a town or village, and is often a popular excursion destination or the training mountain for
climbing at a young age, as Peter does in the text.
\textsuperscript{84} Steward 115.
such as Northern German Caspar David Friedrich and also because of popular culture images like those found in Charlie Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator* (1940), *The Sound of Music* (1965), and ski resort advertisements, have become firmly planted in the minds of many when imagining Austria.\(^8\) The use of these images in the formation of a national consciousness in the Second Republic is highly problematic to many Austrian authors, thus coming under intense criticism in the 1970s and 1980s. These images, along with textual representations, have created a collective memory of Austrian wilderness.

Along with representations of the Alps, there is a tradition in Austrian literature of representing the eastern regions of the empire as less civilized and less prepared to foster wilderness into a *Kulturlandschaft*. Much of this literature reads like colonial narratives, in which an urban, civilized, and educated person leaves the comforts of the city, typically Vienna, in order to experience something exotic. In doing so, the character recognizes the inferiority of the people and nature he meets. Stifter’s *Brigitta* (1844) and Roth’s *Radetzkymarsch* (1932) are two example of this. The crux of this view deals with cultivation, in which people and nature must be taught how to yield their best products. The ideas of balance and cultivation came to dominate Stifter’s discourse and are characteristic of the long history of themes of domestication in nineteenth century social and cultural thought. Both texts set characters from urban backgrounds in non-urban areas to highlight specific differences between the development of self possible in the Viennese center and the rural fringe. The frontier serves *Brigitta*’s protagonists as place to cultivate the landscape in order to become balanced. *Radetzkymarsch* positions this

\(^{8}\) The influence of Caspar David Friedrich’s depictions of the Alps and other landscapes will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.
dynamic between urban and fringe differently - the edges of the empire the protagonist’s son encounters have already been civilized, but have regressed. The frontier the protagonist once experienced as a young man, and which helped form his identity, is no longer present for the son. The specifically Austrian cultural and literary tradition I have outlined above suggests that although American conceptions of wilderness have been influential internationally, particularly in the last fifty years, the Austrian imaginary of wilderness stems from a longer and a more specifically Austrian context.

Wilderness, or wild nature, is primarily defined by its separation from and opposition to civilized areas. Along with the physical reality, cultural and emotional connotations contribute to commonplace notions of wilderness. A short history of the definition of Wilderness/Wildnis will help determine the historical precedent for these ideas. There is in both German-language and Anglo-American literature a strong historical tradition that considers mountains and forests as prototypical wilderness, primarily because this is the type of landscape most prevalent in these geographical regions. This relationship is also due to the etymological roots of the terms Wald and wild in both German and English; this connection does not completely exclude other definitions of nature separate from civilization, such as desert, wasteland, or any uncultivated land. As an indication of the strong cultural associations between wilderness and forested and/or mountainous areas, linguists, etymologists, and other

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86 This short history will include both the German and English terms for three reasons: one, this dissertation is in English, so it may be important to distinguish any differences between “Wildnis” and “wilderness.” Two, eighteenth century conceptions of the sublime greatly influenced American conceptions of “wilderness.” Twentieth century conceptions of “wilderness” were then, I believe, exported back to Europe and have continued to have influence of conceptions of Wildnis currently. Three, much of the scholarly works and theory about the idea of wilderness have been written in English.

87 “Wald” can also refer to “Weide” because of the history of using tree foliage as fodder for domesticated animals. See F. W. M. Vera, Grazing Ecology and Forest History (Boston: Little, Brown, 2000).
scholars have attempted to identify this relationship linguistically. Kurt Mantel gives a short etymological history of the term in *Wald und Forst in der Geschichte: Ein Lehr- und Handbuch*, concluding that *Wald* and *wild* have the same etymological roots. He claims that the Old High German word *Wald*, including *Walth*, *Walpus*, or *Walthus*, also meant *Wildberg* and *Wildnis*. The use of these words designated “der Kultur nicht unterworfenes Land.” 88 Stremlow and Sidler also give a brief history of the definition of *Wildnis* in *Schreibzüge durch die Wildnis: Wildnisvorstellungen in Literatur und Printmedien der Schweiz.* 89 They note the term *Wildnis* did not appear in lexicons until the nineteenth century but rather consistently appeared under the *Wald* heading. 90 For example, in Zedler’s *Großes vollständiges Universal-Lexikon aller Wissenschaften und Künste* (1731-1754), the headings of *Wald* and *Wueste* include mention of *Wildnis*, but no stand-alone definition of the term exists. The lexicon entries for both *Wald* and *Wueste* demonstrate the physicality of these concepts, but the definition also includes conceptions of wilderness as having a wild character about it, indicating that the term refers to more than just a physical space:

*Wald, ist ein offener, weit umfangener, mit Ober-Holtz bewachsener Boden, daraus die Nutzung an Wild, Holtz, Mastung, und anderen mehr zu geniessen ist. Alle Gehöltze der wilden Bäume werden, wo derselben eine grosse Menge gewachsen, und sich über gantze Länder weit und breit erstrecken, nicht unbillig Wildnissen geheissen, weil es in selbigen vermuthlich rauch und wild genug seyn, auch ein wildes Ansehen haben mag.* 91

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89 Although I borrow some of the work already done by Stremlow and Sidler, I go beyond their analysis to include other primary sources.
90 Stremlow and Sidler 23.
According to this definition, a wilderness area was simply a large tract of forest, most notably characterized by the wild elements therein.

In the prologue to the third edition of *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Nash also illustrates the importance of the connection between wilderness and forest for contemporary conceptions of wilderness. He claims the English etymological root of wilderness can be linked to the Old English *weald* or *woeld*, meaning forest, or more broadly, “the place of wild beasts.” He further emphasizes the connection between the terms “forest” and “wilderness” in the Germanic languages, which was spoken in the heavily forested parts of Europe, by noting that a single word term for “wilderness” does not exist in Romance languages.\(^92\) Yet throughout the history of forestry and land cultivation, *Wald* and *Wildnis* and “forest” and “wilderness” have come to have differing connotations, despite their linked heritage.

The term *Wildnis* is referenced in both the entries for *Wald* and *Wild* in Kluge’s *Etymological Dictionary of the German Language*. The entry doubts an etymological connection between *Wald* and *wild*, noting that “*wild* seems to be used only of living beings . . . the connection with *Wald* is improbable, though a more certain origin has not yet been found.”\(^93\) Kluge does acknowledge a connection between the forest and the qualities often associated with wilderness. He notes that the French “savage” is a derivative of the Latin “*silva,*” or forest, leading to the assumption that the German follows the same derivation.\(^94\) Despite the conflicting scholarship as to whether or not the terms *Wald* and *Wildnis* are related etymologically, many authors, in both defining the

\(^92\) Roderick Nash 2.
\(^94\) Kluge 395.
term *Wildnis* for scholarly works and in the application of the term in literary works, conceptualize forest and wilderness as having a relationship historically. This is significant in itself because commonplace notions of wilderness have incorporated an understanding of it as primarily forested areas. The use of wilderness as a cultural construct and the forested physical reality of many areas have perpetuated these connections.

Johann Christoph Adelung was the first scholar to include the term in a reference work under its own heading. His definition in *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart* (1793-1801) shows not only the influence of Judeo-Christian uses of the term but also the continued association of wilderness with forests. *Die Wildnis* is “eine wilde, ungebauete und unbewohnte Gegend, besonders eine solche waldige Gegend.” These meanings seem to be quite in opposition to the concept of a forest, a place that is teeming with ecological production and life. And yet, these meanings underscore a very important aspect. Early conceptions of wilderness understood it as the physical and metaphorical antipode to civilization, and therefore the forces at work within that place were not only in need of control and domination by human progress but were also considered evil until such cultivation occurred. The *Wald* and the concept of wilderness are described in the Middle Ages and early modern period in a variety of texts as an uncanny place that is totally separated from the civilization, ruled by the irrational,

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95 The *Deutsches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* by Köbler and Gerhard of 1995 does see an etymological connection and traces the term *Wildnis* (under the heading of *Wald*) to the Germanic *Walþu* or *Walþuz*, *Wald*, 458.


97 This idea will be discussed in further detail below.
but also as the space of marvelous things. *Vinster, dunkele, wild, ungevüege*, and *unglehiure* are some of the words used to describe the *Wald* in medieval poetry, particularly Minnesang.\(^98\) The etymological connection of the terms *Wald* and *Wildnis*, along with the cultural and literary use of the *Wald* as a prototypical *Wildnis* has bound the terms in a way that has not been completely separated either in their definitions today or in the currency they hold literally and figuratively in rhetorical and literary texts, media, and social usage. The terms *Wald* and *Wildnis* and the historical and etymological connections that exist between them are still quite apparent and powerful in conceptions of both of the terms.

While tracing the commonplace notions that have informed current conceptions of wilderness, one must consider an even older idea, the German concept of “*Urwald*.”\(^99\) Physically, these forests were the result of changing temperatures at the end of the Ice Age, producing primarily three types of forests in the Germanic area: the deciduous forest, pine wood forest, and the coniferous forest, which is the main type of forest found in Austria.\(^100\) Texts, such as Tacitus’ first century *Germania*, have contributed to a long tradition that characterizes forest wilderness as more than just biophysical reality. In Ancient times, the forests of the Germanic area were characterized as “*urwaldähnlich*” with the “*ur*” presumably pointing to a time before culture.\(^101\) Descriptions of the Germanic forests by Romans are primarily negative: the forest is the place of darkness,

\(^{98}\) Walden 100.
\(^{99}\) The idea of the German “*Urwald,*” or primordial Teutonic Forest, is significant in the formation of ideologies about who the German people are, and is connected to a series of historical and cultural events that have been defining moments for notions of German identity, most notably when “*Germanness*” was being threatened from outside. Schama brilliantly discusses this history. See “Der Holzweg: The Track through the Woods,” 75-134.
\(^{100}\) Lehmann and Schriewer 9-10.
\(^{101}\) Mantel 48.
coldness, rawness, and wildness. The land Tacitus describes is considered Wald but also “wild” with “tangled forests and dismal swamps” where “fruit trees do not flourish” and “cattle are unusually stunted.”\textsuperscript{102} In English, words like “wildlife” refer to non-domesticated animals, but the term primarily encompasses animals that live in forested or mountainous areas. The German term “Wild” is described by Zedler as “insgemein alles jagdbare Vieh, welches in den Wäldern sich aufhält,” but he also lists examples of “Wild” which wouldn’t necessarily be hunted, like small birds.\textsuperscript{103} For Tacitus, the wildlife he described in Germania are the Germanics themselves, and his text creates a strict dichotomy between the civilized peoples of Rome and the barbarianism of the forested Germania. Tacitus’s text was not only recouped and reinterpreted by those wishing to celebrate the connections between Germans and the woods in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but the text sheds light onto the conflation often made between wilderness and its wild inhabitants, be they human, plant, or animal. In addition to the close presumed proximity of the words wild and Wald etymologically, those things that are today considered “wild” have a historical connection to the Wald in social and cultural imaginaries.

For the German speaking areas of Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, Wildnis seems to be closely tied to forests and mountains, despite conflicting accounts of the term’s etymological roots.\textsuperscript{104} Alongside this relationship, however, the definition of wilderness, in both English and German, has included spaces that are increasingly not

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\textsuperscript{102} Cornelius Tacitus, The Agricola and Germania, trans. R.B. Townshend (London: Methuen & Co., 1894) 57.\
\textsuperscript{103} Zedler 682.\
present in Europe. Words like *Finsternis* (darkness, obscurity), *Öde* (waste, barren land), *Wüste* (desert), *Einöde* (desert, solitude), *Ödland* (wasteland and uncultivated area), *Moor*, and *Steppe* are partially synonymous with *Wildnis*. What is curious about these connotations is that many refer to ecological regions that do not exist in German speaking regions at all, or exist only on the fringes. Nash notes that these connotations became synonyms for the term “wilderness” during translations of the Bible into German. The use of terms like “desert,” from the Latin meaning “deserted or abandoned place,” and “wasteland,” in reference to American landscape, show that the Judeo-Christian figures and metaphors that American settlers brought with them from Europe were even more important when conceptualizing wilderness than the natural actuality of the landscape.\(^{105}\)

This can also be said of German speaking countries— although the only deserts that exist in middle Europe are those in the high Alps, the concept of wilderness as a barren, deserted and treeless area is quite common. Partial synonyms of *Wildnis*, like *Abgeschiedenheit*, *Abgelegenheit*, *Unfruchtbarkeit*, and *Unzugänglichkeit* suggest a place in need of cultivation, lack of production, and separation, in which people can quickly become disordered, confused, and “wild.” They also suggest the strong connotations that *Wildnis* has and the potential of images of it to carry figurative, and not just literal, meaning.

The definition of wilderness has been transformed through connotations and associations. In addition, the physical referent upon which commonplace notions are based is constantly changing, which results in changing perceptions and definitions of it. Despite this, older definitions, based on a historical physical reality, continue to inform

\(^{105}\) Nash 39.
current conceptions of all the forms of wilderness and form a layering of meaning: older connotations are still available meanings for use in cultural production. As this brief history has shown, it is important to make distinctions between terms, because the word “wilderness” may not designate the same physical landscape for a modern industrial society that biblical authors intended. For my purposes, I propose the following distinctions in order to help delineate this history of meanings: “wilderness” will be used in a larger sense to mean any areas that are suitable as isolated places, are distinguished from areas of excessive human presence and control, or have been viewed as such. A physical space can be referred to as “wilderness” not because of its particular physical features, but rather because of our emotional and psychological response to it. The term will not specify particular ecosystems but rather all types of isolating or disorienting physical or imaginative spaces, like deserts, heaths, caves, tundra, and the like. This could also include urban spaces, as many authors and others have used the term to describe the isolation and disorientation of the individual in modern urban environments. Wilderness, though, can be used figuratively to designate non-physical meanings as well. “Wilderness areas” will be used to designate actual places, whether they are a geographical location or the setting of a text. “Wild nature” will be used to distinguish the particular life forms that exist within these spaces, should they be plant or animal.
Chapter 2: Across the Border

“Over time, our only chance at safety will depend on not turning the mountains into Disneyland.” —Reinhold Messner—

Austria is a nation that has defined itself through nature. The image of a country of mountain sports, idyllic alpine villages, and a people who are close to their natural surroundings has been part of its national projection of identity since the beginning of the second Republic. Literary critics of Thomas Bernhard, Felix Mitterer, Robert Menasse, and Elfriede Jelinek have characterized their work as intentionally exposing an intricate and intentional plot by Austrian leaders and media to cover up the country’s complicity in National Socialism. Such critics claim that these authors’ images of the Austrian landscape and its presentation through media and marketing to the world brings to light the inability of Austrians to acknowledge their history through a process of Vergangenheitsbewältigung. While these literary investigations have provided insightful and important commentary on social and political issues within the Second Republic, the role of nature for the Austrian nation and its literary tradition is much more complicated within many of these works of fiction than would appear based solely on these critics’ readings. Despite the “artificiality” of nature that many of these authors identify, nature, and wilderness in particular, continue to play an important role in Austrian literature. I

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argue in this chapter that the history of wilderness in the Austrian context is one of cultivation and containment through civilization. As wilderness areas diminish, contemporary Austrian authors explore the ways in which we have reacted to the inability to experience truly wild nature because of its absence. Ransmayr’s novel Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis, for example, features protagonists who attempt to reconnect with the natural world by traveling to the furthest reaches of the globe. Jelinek’s novel Oh Wildnis, Oh Schutz vor ihr employs wilderness as both a physical place and idea. There is evidence, then, that a notion of wilderness, despite the relatively small amounts of undomesticated and uncontained areas in Austria, is still a vital idea with some amount of common referentiality for writers.

In an effort to identify some of the most prominent commonplace notions of physical wilderness in Western philosophical, historical, and literary texts, I have located within contemporary philosophical and environmental historical studies trends in thinking that reveal standardized and common ideas. The historical development of certain attitudes toward nature and wilderness outlined in these texts, or recouped through historical or philosophical inquiry, often contradict one another, thus revealing the various definitions that were once popular in art and literature. Notions of what constitutes wilderness has had a lasting effect on contemporary literary texts. Some authors in the field of environmental history have ideological goals that could cloud an assessment of these historical notions of nature. Environmental philosophers and historians rely on historical evidence, philosophical thought, and cultural and artistic

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107 For the distinction between the terms “wilderness,” “wilderness area,” and “wild nature,” please see the Introduction.
products to develop theories regarding human interaction with wilderness in order to assess culturally-specific conceptions of it, as described above. These inquiries have the ultimate goal of either understanding our current relationships with nature, analyzing the effects of human change on the environment, or formulating possible solutions for the lasting and arguably catastrophic effects on nature from modern technology. I, however, am solely interested in identifying the commonplace notions of physical wilderness evident in these works.

There are great ecological differences in types of wilderness: deserts, forests, mountains, and steppes are just a few examples. There have also been major shifts in the environmental features of areas that individual groups consider wilderness. Primarily though, attitudes toward wilderness and how it is theorized, conceived of, and defined as a place gives us more insight into the relationship between humans and the environment historically than the ecological and geological particulars of areas themselves. For this reason, one can use the term “wilderness” or speak of an area and despite the physical differences common ideas and notions can still be associated with it. Within this scholarship, I have identified the most prevalent and influential commonplace notions of physical wilderness: although these classifications are neither comprehensive nor mutually exclusive, they do provide a framework that is intended as a heuristic tool with which to assess the use of physical wilderness as a setting and theme in modern Austrian literature.

This short overview of the way physical wilderness is represented in modern environmental history texts shows that the main defining feature is its opposition to the city, the ultimate image of civilization. As has been noted in the introduction, wilderness
is treated here as a cultural concept that has shifted and changed historically as philosophical, religious, and scientific knowledge and views of the world have developed. This can also be said of other terms used in this study. Because of the slippery nature of these terms, I offer working definitions for clarity. For example, the meanings of “culture” and “civilization” have often been contested within a variety of texts historically. I follow anthropologist Edward B. Tylor’s definition from *Primitive Culture* (1871): culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” But because culture itself is a socially constructed concept, it can also be understood as a reflection of what a society values most. “Civilization” is also a term that is not easy to define because attempts at doing so often reflect a certain ideology and world-view. In my discussion, I designate civilization to be the particular physical infrastructure that supports a technological society. Although these uses are not definitive, they will support my distinction between wilderness and the city and patterns of existence in nature versus those in culture.

Nash claims that wilderness “was instinctively understood as to be something alien to man—an insecure and uncomfortable environment against which civilization had waged an unceasing struggle.” City walls were built not just to protect people from the enemies outside of them, but also from the dangers of the “wild,” such as non-domesticated plants, animals, and humans whom the dwellers within city walls considered barbaric and uncivilized. The “unknown” outside the borders of civilization

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109 Nash 8.
caused physical wilderness to be conceived of as a dangerous and mysterious place, full of fierce animals. It also served as a habitat or refuge for “uncivilized” people, such as hermits and criminals. A sharp distinction grew between types of plants and animals; useful species were brought into the city walls, and those that were not were kept outside and designated “wild” whether there was a real threat from them or not. In addition to wilderness being dangerous, or perhaps because of it, it needed to be tamed, cultivated, or destroyed as part of a Christian vision of human responsibility on earth, an attitude that is still quite prevalent in our interaction with nature. The importance of cultivation and domestication for civilization’s development reached its full expression in Europe in the Middle Ages and will be discussed below.

As wild places diminished because of efforts to tame them, lamentations about their loss grew in philosophical, theological, and literary texts. This developed into an idea that physical wilderness needed to be conserved and preserved. I argue that as a result of this history of domestication, small quantities of contained wilderness remain, thus eliminating many of the dangerous realities of interacting with it. Commonplace notions reveal that Western societies no longer conceive of wilderness areas as places to be avoided because of their inherent harm to humans. The idea has been transformed: it is now a source of challenge and inspiration in physical, mental, and spiritual ways. Nevertheless, the dangerous and mythical qualities have not been eliminated from cultural imagination and continue to be represented in non-literal ways. In Chapter 4, I examine the use of wilderness as a figurative device as an image of “otherness.” In this first of three chapters, I examine the history of wilderness’s containment and the response of modern Austrian authors to this development.
Max Oelschlaeger, in his philosophical history *The Idea of Wilderness*, first traces the historical development of wilderness conceptions from prehistoric times into what he proposes as a postmodern wilderness philosophy and then uses this history to critique common contemporary conceptions of how “primitive” peoples interacted with nature. Oelschlaeger reconstructs the Paleolithic period to show a turning away from the concept of “Magna Mater,” or an organic model of the universe, to that model’s demise with the advent of the scientific revolution, the Hegelian notion of teleological progress, and other modernist notions like ecofeminism and resourcism. His history is problematic because of the blanket assumptions he makes about varying groups of peoples and diverse ecosystems. If conceptions of nature are social constructions related to a physical reality, then perhaps varying physical realities resulted in varying conceptions of wilderness, even as early as the Paleolithic period. Oelschlaeger’s position is representative of one side of environmental ethics, what Martin Drenthen calls “relativistic constructivism” and “moralistic value realism,” the former of which holds that conceptions of nature are contingent social constructions that make claims about reality. Despite this weakness in Oelschlaeger’s work, my study is indebted to his theories. He considers current conceptions of wilderness to have originated, and then developed, not as a linear progression; rather he believes that the evolution of conceptions form “a non-linear . . . mosaic.” Although physical wilderness containment has meant a change in its actual qualities, representations of the wild in literature continue to rely on many of the

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110 Oelschlaeger 2.
112 Oelschlaeger 7.
commonplace notions about it that have had varying levels of significance during different historical periods.

Oelschlaeger hopes that by viewing human relationships with wilderness as a cyclical development, we might be able to recognize and re-establish our similarities with a Paleolithic past in which people were part of, rather than dominant over, nature.

Throughout various times in history and by different cultures, physical wilderness during pre-agricultural times has been conceived of as a dark and mysterious place that people avoided. Oelschlaeger questions this history, which he describes as the “long-entrenched civilized-primitive dichotomy, a bifurcation grounded in an assumption that the human story lies in our triumph over a hostile nature.” In attempting to reclaim this history, Oelschlaeger discredits current notions of prehistoric peoples’ relationship to wilderness, such as the notion that “humans wanted desperately to escape from the wilderness and dreamed of civilization.” He believes this negative representation of early humans’ attitudes is grounded in a much more recent history.

As opposed to the popular image of a primitive man fighting for life in the wilderness, Oelschlaeger contends that interaction with nature during the Paleolithic period was harmonious. Pre-historic humans, he believes, likely had no concept of culture and therefore recognized no distinction between themselves and nature. He notes, “The idea of wilderness with connotations of wasteland, badlands, or hinterlands was not conceivable” during the Paleolithic period. In addition, Oelschlaeger argues that the image of wilderness as a dark and mysterious place that harbored fantastical creatures,
fierce animals, and outsiders was actually only popularized during the Early Middle Ages as a result of Christian monasteries. He states that early peoples had no fear of wilderness because “irrespective of place, nature was home.”116 While this may be an overly romanticized view of pre-historic peoples, Oelschlaeger’s insights into the development of this negative view, including the contribution of Christianity to this view in the Middle Ages, is valuable if not complete.

Many monasteries were in remote, wild places, and monks saw it as their duty to do God’s work by ridding the areas of the sacred groves of paganism. Oelschlaeger states: “By taming the wilderness the holy brothers fulfilled God’s plan, simultaneously exercising human dominion over nature and exterminating paganism.”117 We must once again guard against sweeping generalizations and narrow arguments. Susan Bratton notes that conceptions of wilderness have served Christianity in a variety of functions, and no single reading of the “value” of it during any particular time period is possible. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. Despite the limitations of the work, Oelschlaeger’s descriptions show that current conceptions and historical reconstructions of the past are more reliant on commonplace social norms than individual encounters and ideas. Both humans being one with nature and the bifurcation between wilderness and civilization are common ideas that are continually called upon in literature.

Despite environmental historians’ disagreements about the relationship early humans had with nature, the legacy left from the transition from the Paleolithic mindset into the Mesolithic one cannot be denied. Agriculture enabled hunter-gatherers to

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116 Oelschlaeger 12.
117 Oelschlaeger 72.
become stationary, cities began to grow, and a dualistic relationship formed between the people who were inside the city walls and the nature that was outside. This resulted in the commonplace notion of wilderness as the opposite of the city.

Hans Jonas’ work *The Imperative of Responsibility* (1985) explores the role of the city in our treatment of nature. More generally, he posits an “imperative of responsibility” for technologically-based Western society in which traditional ethics, where nature was considered outside of the realms of human responsibility, are no longer valid. The original “promise” of science, he claims, has become an agent of disaster, pushed ever forward by economic progress.\(^{118}\) Jonas, drawing on the categorical imperative of Kant, calls for a new ethical imperative: “Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life.”\(^{119}\) As one of the first philosophers to address the perceived dangers of technological development, his work raised an ethical consciousness of the perils of environmental destruction in the late twentieth century and is still considered one of the most authoritative philosophical works concerning the question of bioethics.\(^{120}\)

Jonas’s discussion of the distinctions made in the Ancient period between inside and outside city walls is helpful for understanding the shift from people feeling at home in nature, as Oelschlaeger contends, to a sharp distinction between city and wilderness that, according to Jonas, has led to environmental disaster. He states:

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\(^{119}\) Jonas 11. Kant’s original reads: “Handle so, daß die Maxime deines Willens jederzeit zugleich als Prinzip einer allgemeinen Gesetzgebung gelten könne.”

Man’s life was played out between the abiding and the changing: the abiding was Nature, the changing his own works. The greatest of these works was the city, and on it he could confer some measure of abiding by the laws he made for it and undertook to honor. But no long-range certainty pertained to this contrived continuity . . . Still, this citadel of his own making, clearly set off from the rest of things and entrusted to him, was the whole and sole domain of man’s responsible action. Nature was not an object of human responsibility—she taking care of herself and, with some coaxing and worrying, also of man: not ethics, only cleverness applied to her.  

Jonas enlists limited historical evidence to make his philosophical argument, and although his arguments rely too much on a perceived dichotomy and ignore the reality of transitional spaces of Ancient times, such as agricultural areas, cultivated forests, and plains, the view that nature was a self-regulating and self-generating system upon which humans could and should enact change through careful manipulation is another commonplace notion. This is particularly true of wilderness because of its strict separation from civilized areas. Clarence Glacken claims, “The idea that there is a unity and a harmony in nature is probably the most important idea, in its effect on geographical thought, that we have received from the Greeks, even if among them there was no unanimity regarding the nature of this unity and harmony.” The idea that nature is a unified, whole, and self-contained system continues to hold cultural currency. It is often used in justification for transgression against the preservation and conservation of wilderness even in the twenty-first century and is particularly vital in discussions concerning global climate change.

Glacken’s *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* (1967) is also helpful in understanding the development of the idea that wilderness is defined in its opposition to the city. His

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121 Jonas 3-4.
text is one of the earliest attempts in scholarly writing to examine how past societies and cultures, from ancient times to the end of the eighteenth century, have understood the relationship between us and nature. Glacken’s work is a key contribution to environmental history, as the first to outline on such a grand scale three ideas that have dominated nature discourse: “the idea of a designed earth; the idea of environmental influence; and the idea of man as a geographic agent.”

The main thrust of Glacken’s study, if it can be summed up in just a few words, is that these three questions, despite their varying levels of influence throughout history, have endured and have contributed to current notions of nature, even in modern ecological theories. Glacken shows that while in the ancient world the idea of man as geographical agent was quite weak, it gathered momentum throughout the Middle Ages, reached a peak in the eighteenth century, and has remained strong through modern times. And although strong in both ancient times and in the modern era, the idea of environmental influence was weakest when Judeo-Christian thought dominated the Western world. The idea of a designed earth has continually been prominent. Glacken concedes that “[t]he single most important generalization to be made about the attitudes toward nature held by the peoples of the classical world is that these varied greatly throughout the long span of ancient history.”

Glacken is, however, able to trace some general trends and maintains that the attitudes developed during the Hellenistic period differed greatly from those before. This time period is most important for understanding ideas of nature throughout post-Hellenistic

\[123\] Glacken vii.
\[124\] Glacken 13.
This shift demonstrates a new interest in nature for the improvement of practical and utilitarian goals, resulting in a more realistic portrayal of nature in literature. This is not to say, however, that the Paleolithic notions and “veneration of Mother Earth” disappeared completely; indeed, they continued to be present in myths and rites of agriculture and fertility, which therefore engendered more factual notions of farming, herding, and mining.

Glacken’s discussion of the Hellenistic period is particularly relevant for understanding the roots of wilderness’s dichotomous relationship to the city and the enduring power of commonplace notions from Ancient times to the modern age. He claims that the advent of agriculture and the broadening of city life in the Hellenistic period resulted in substantial reasons for believing that the roots of modern attitudes toward nature are to be found in the Hellenistic age rather than in earlier periods . . . No earlier period in the history of Western civilization revealed such strong, self-consciously expressed contrasts between the urban and rural as did the Hellenistic, probably a result of unique conditions of urban life of the age not only in city building but in the increased size of cities.

This heightened awareness of the contrasts between city and country resulted in a great number of literary texts that celebrated either one or the other. A tradition of expressing bewonderment of human works was prominent, like Sophocles’s notion that limitless nature sustains development through culture. Sophocles’s praise for man’s mastery of nature through developed, civilized skills is exemplified in his “Ode to Man” in the first stasimon of the tragedy Antigone. The idea that domination of nature is a signal of

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125 Glacken 13.
126 Glacken 30.
127 Glacken 61.
128 Glacken 25.
civilization progressing out of wilderness has persisted into the twenty-first century and has formed much of the basis of the logic behind modern capitalism. The teleological view of progress, in which man has a certain extent of free will over nature, is countered only through death, becoming man’s ultimate connection and union with nature.

Alongside the literary praise of man and his works, Glacken notes that new literary representations of a higher quality of life outside the city were particularly prominent, creating a literary tradition in which “[t]he city is a place of excess, of gluttony and drunkenness, debauching the young into premature ill health. In contrast is the life of the country, which is presumed to be closer to ways which are most natural to man because they were gifts originally given by mankind by the gods.”\textsuperscript{129} One could argue that instances of extolling the virtues of non-civilized areas and decrying the excesses of the city, like Tacitus’ \textit{Germania}, existed prior to the Hellenistic period. Generally, though, the strong urban tradition that demonstrates an “affection for the city as a superior creation of man” dominated cultural and social evaluations of wilderness.\textsuperscript{130}

The antagonistic and dualistic relationship between wilderness and humans that Oelschlaeger claims occurred with the advent of agriculture and the end of hunter-gatherer societies and that Jonas believes occurred with the growth of cities was solidified in philosophy, helping spur the advent of modern science through the Cartesian model. Vittorio Hösle discusses this development in \textit{Philosophie der ökologischen Krise} (1991). He argues that the school of scholasticism promoted by Thomas Aquinas advanced the first notion of an individual relationship with God. René Descartes’

\textsuperscript{129} Glacken 32.
\textsuperscript{130} Glacken 33.
placement of the individual as the “absolute” solidified what was earlier merely an emphasis on the individual and new subjectivity. Descartes’ separation of the mind from the body caused other individuals, nature, and God to lose potency. Nature became the “other” to the individual in Cartesian philosophy, thus allowing the mechanistic notion of nature to gain legitimacy. Hösle states:


Even before Descartes, though, environmental historians point to the medieval outlook on nature, which revolved around the responsibility of humankind to bring wild nature into a state of cultivation, as contributing heavily to the tradition in which wilderness is defined against civilization.

Glacken summarizes this view in *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*: “If a dominant idea existed [in the Middle Ages], it was that man, blessed with the faculty of work, assisted God and himself in the improvement of an earthly home even if the earth were, in Christian Theology, only a sojourners’ way station.”

Wilderness was defined not only as a place outside of civilization, but it was also commonly conceived of as needing cultivation. This notion was particularly important during the early modern period when drastic environmental changes, like the clearing of forests, were increasingly necessary to support the growth of populations, expansion of cities, and the need for timber to fuel new technologies and wage wars. Christian theology justified man’s domination of

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132 Glacken 175.
nature, as Oelschlaeger states: “Knowledge [about the natural world] revealed God’s presence and divine wisdom in creating the splendors of the universe and served as an instrument of human dominion over nature so that his will might be realized.”

Alongside the theological position of our dominion over the earth, the theories of nature’s unity and self-generative qualities that had existed since ancient times persisted and necessitated working the land and demanded ongoing cultivation in order to keep wilderness contained. This mindset has been integral to the logic of growth of modern capitalism; natural resources must be a potentially endless resource in order to support the cultural value that growth is inherently good, that any problem can be solved through unchecked expansion.

Glacken, in his description of the writing of St. Bernard, notes that “the landscape is changed from a wilderness and given meaning because human beings impose an order upon it; when men change nature they can make it more useful—perhaps, even, more charming and more beautiful.” Wilderness changed from a space separate from urban spaces and other man-controlled landscapes into a highly valued potential economic commodity. As this commodity became less available, the qualities attributed to it began to detach themselves from actual physical conditions, and aesthetic and religious value developed alongside economic ones. Even though people recognized that actual wilderness might not be in fact as limitless and self-regenerating as previously thought, an imaginary realm of wilderness could be.

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133 Oelschlaeger 70.
135 Glacken 213.
I have argued above that wilderness has been defined in its opposition to the city, with relatively little departure from that dichotomy in the ancient period and the Middle Ages. Some scholars claim that the rapid technological and scientific advances, explosion of urban areas, and growing secularization in the Western world in the early modern period contributed to significant changes in attitudes toward nature. For example, Keith Thomas’s *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (1983) outlines the major changes affecting anthropocentric philosophies in Middle Ages Europe. He claims that the human position of assumed supremacy over nature changed drastically during the early modern period. Thomas outlines some of the diverging attitudes toward the overarching norm of physical wilderness considered a place to be tamed, dominated, and cultivated. Thomas agrees with Oelschlaeger and Glacken that the main and most powerful idea concerning the human position in the universe for centuries was our “dominion” over the earth, even if there was disagreement about the exact meaning of the word. This worldview was ultimately changed in response to, but also as a result of, the accelerated cultural and social changes in this period. His work focuses specifically on England, but many of the cultural, political, and philosophical changes Thomas outlines can be traced in German speaking countries as well.

Thomas identifies advances in astronomy (like Galileo’s views of the universe), geology (like the writings of Alexander von Humboldt), and botany (particularly the Linnaean movement to collect and identify the world’s species), and economic changes (like industrialization and the growth of cities) as developments that challenged the idea
of human uniqueness\textsuperscript{136} and the responsibility to control their environment. Thomas’s research shows that changing popular attitudes toward nature in both theological and non-theological texts underpinned the greater philosophical and scientific transformations in knowledge of the natural world and our position within it. While Oelschlaeger claims that ascendancy over nature reached its most dangerous form in the early modern period, he gives only a scant account of voices that contested the prevailing philosophies concerning the environment. Thomas notes, in contrast to Oelschlaeger, that the growing tendency in the early modern period to attribute intelligence, reason, emotions and other human qualities to animals worked to undermine the long-held notion of humans’ complete distinctiveness from them\textsuperscript{137} because of their supposed mechanistic qualities as proposed by Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, and in some interpretations, Descartes.\textsuperscript{138} In fact, without these underlying changes occurring in popular attitudes first, Thomas believes revolutionary works like Charles Darwin’s \textit{The Descent of Man} (1871) would never have gained widespread acceptance and those ideas might not have become the basis of much scientific study of the world today.\textsuperscript{139}

By some accounts, the early modern period shifted away from the long-held notion of “dominion” over the earth and returned to an earlier model of people being part of, and not superior to, wild nature. Other accounts, however, see a development of even

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\textsuperscript{136} “Uniqueness” refers to the view that humans were not part of the animal kingdom, not just another distinct species of nature, but rather a being which existed somewhere between God and nature.
\textsuperscript{139} Thomas 133.
\end{flushleft}
stronger attempts to maintain human uniqueness precisely because of new theories claiming our oneness with nature. These attempts will be outlined in Chapter 3.

Alongside shifting attitudes in the early modern period, wild areas and animal populations diminished, thus generating novel ideas of conservation and preservation. As the Industrial Revolution spread quickly through Europe, lamentations regarding the loss of wilderness developed alongside it. A growing concern for what Jonas calls the “alienation from nature by the thoroughly artificial world of the big city” formed in many Western cultures as a result of the growing demands of technological progress in the early modern period. The physical regeneration and self-regulating mechanic system thought to be the essence of nature as presented in the eighteenth century by philosophers like Bacon, Hobbes, and Descartes were supplemented with different theories of environment proposed by scientists and geologists like Darwin and Humboldt and works like George Marsh’s *Man and Nature: or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action* (1863). New ideas about the changes species undergo replaced older conceptions of the environment as a machine within a stable system: the environment was constantly evolving through a process of selection. And yet, commonplace notions like the endless bounty of wilderness or the self-regulation of nature are still prevalent in contemporary conceptions of them as part of political, social, and popular rhetoric.

Along with the growing demand for natural resources, increased travel to mountainous and forested areas to escape the unhealthy city contributed to increasing efforts to preserve wilderness areas during the early nineteenth century in England and the middle and later nineteenth century in North America and in German speaking 140 Jonas 154.
Preservation was also considered more imperative because of the refocusing at the turn of the nineteenth century of our place within nature, as opposed to above it, and because of the new scientific focus on the process of evolution and the new science of ecology, alongside varying notions of the Sublime. The belief that elevated spaces and grand vistas were necessary for judging experiences and objects as sublime contributed to preserving only certain types of nature, primarily mountains and forests. As buildings became taller (like mountains) and cities became denser (like forests), the experience of viewing large open spaces and horizontal distance could only be accomplished by raising one’s elevation or traveling out of urban areas. Some major European cities had a tradition of common land, but the cutting of sod and the enclosure movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century eliminated much of the common green space or transformed it into city parks. Both the Sublime and the sanctity of wild nature, which became important topics in Europe in the nineteenth century, determined the areas that were valued and therefore conserved and preserved either through private land ownership or as state or national parks. The world’s first national park, Yellowstone, was created in 1872, but it was not until the 1970s that a non-mountainous or forested area, the Florida swamps, was designated as a national park.

The notion that physical wilderness is primarily a mountainous and forested area had become ingrained in the Austrian and American imaginary, not only because those are the natural areas that are most abundant in those countries, but also because of the

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141 The concept of the Sublime will be discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 3. At this point, it suffices to note that the Sublime contributed to the types of physical wilderness preferred in European and American history.
142 See Radkau 62-85.
143 Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” 80.
prevalence of those landscapes in Romantic literature. Early advocates of preservation through federal legislation cited the dangers of exploitation by those who would use the “wonder-land” of nature for economic purposes, and yet national parks as tourist destinations, along with the necessary infrastructure, have been an integral part of them for at least a century in the United States.\footnote{The continued need for wilderness areas for physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits will be discussed in Chapter Three.} Despite Oelschlaeger’s and others’ attempts to re-envision attitudes toward nature with post-historic narratives, wilderness continues to be most commonly defined as separate from civilization. The perceived antagonistic relationship between people and wilderness has resulted in much of its erasure through cultivation and domestication. At the same time, however, virgin landscapes and untouched nature are specifically sought out for their ability to provide isolation, solitude, and other experiences not necessarily possible in civilized areas. The shifting of the concept in the United States and Europe indicates that wilderness has become valued and marked positively because it has to some extent been “contained,” either through active management or through strict demarcation that indicates those areas as an extension of a history of domestication of peoples and places. In fact, the entire National Park movement may have turned into an extension of this long history of domestication.

Wilderness as a physical space is a prevalent theme in much contemporary Austrian literature. It functions as literary setting and represents an Austrian reality. Writers establish it as a theme to ground their cultural or political critique of Austrian

\footnote{See Marlene Deahl Merrill, ed. *Yellowstone and the Great West: Journals, Letters, and Images from the 1871 Hayden Expedition* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999) 208.}
society and highlight greater societal trends in the twentieth century. Many of these spaces function purely as a backdrop upon which greater existential, political, and cultural themes are explored. For other authors, however, the physical reality of the Austrian landscape is the direct impetus for the work. I will examine the extent to which Austrian authors rely on commonplace notions of wilderness and how they react to its containment and release.

Elfriede Jelinek has a reputation as a prominent critic of her nation; particularly tourism’s role in the process of building the Second Republic of Austria following World War II.\textsuperscript{145} Her work is certainly controversial. She has received both glowing praise and condemnation, not least because of her Communist party affiliations. She received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2004, and this decision even led to the resignation of one committee member.\textsuperscript{146} Despite, or perhaps precisely because of, her status as a controversial Austrian author, Jelinek’s works that utilize wilderness are particularly relevant for this study. I claim wilderness functions in her work as a vehicle for questioning the validity of the idea of essential nature. Her work also illuminates how nature has been used as a justification for, or distraction in, covering up historical, political, and social oppression in Austria. Her work is part of a quite successful and visible aspect of Austrian cultural life, i.e., a series of stage and television plays that directly address Austria’s relationship to its mountainous and forested landscape and its relationship to the tourists who come to Austria to enjoy nature. The historically engaged \textit{Die Alpensaga} (1976/77) by Peter Turrini or sarcastic and cliché-filled works like \textit{Die

\textsuperscript{145} See Konzett, \textit{The Rhetoric of National Dissent in Thomas Bernhard, Peter Handke, and Elfriede Jelinek}. \textsuperscript{146} For complete documentation of both the positive and negative reactions to Jelinek’s award, see Pia Janke, et al, \textit{Literaturnobelpreis: Elfriede Jelinek} (Wien: Präsens, 2005).
Pieke Saga (1990/1993) by Felix Mitterer prepare the ground that not only influenced the sarcasm and shocking language that exemplify Jelinek’s work, but also created a tradition within which Jelinek’s texts, such as the novels Oh Wildnis, Oh Schutz vor ihr, Gier, and also the trilogy In den Alpen, play a significant role.

Literary criticism of Jelinek’s oeuvre tends to focus on certain themes in her work, such as feminism, socialism, and history. The role of the “wild” has received little attention, although Wildnis is a setting in many of her novels and is important thematically. Jelinek’s texts can in no way be called “nature writing”: they are much less about a mimetic description of landscape, and much more about signification, thus disclosing and revealing the power behind the rhetoric used to describe Austria’s relationship with the natural world.

Jelinek’s text Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr reveals the power structures that underlie the treatment of physical “Wildnis” and that exist in “Wildnis” discourse. She is particularly aware of the National Socialist rhetoric of the connection between German identity and physical landscape and breaks down myths she thinks have been perpetuated in order to maintain a consensus mindset in Austria for tourism. This has resulted, according to Jelinek, in the oppression of woman and working classes and in biological primitivism. The three main characters of the text interact with wilderness differently, but each relationship reveals it as a commodity that is connected to and part of the governing system of power. Erich, a character from the novel Die Liebhaberin, is a forestry worker who embodies the commoditization, cultivation, and parceling of landscape and wilderness’s transformation into agricultural and industrial products. His reactions to the environment are part of the text’s larger discourse on wilderness as commodity and the
resulting destruction inherent in the production of usable goods: “Andere stehen staunend vor Bäumen, er richtet sie durch Axtstrechelchen hin” (118). For him, the forest is nothing more than an economic commodity, but he does not recognize that his interaction with it is actually governed and controlled by those who own the land. The second character, Frau Aichholzer, is a nature poetry author who is discriminated against by publishers because of her age, gender, and her past relationship with a famous German philosopher. The third main character is the wife of a West German department store owner, who takes a party of prominent friends, politicians, and businessmen among others, to a country house for a hunting excursion. Wilderness is for them part of a socio-cultural system of convention and prestige in which natural areas are preserved primarily for recreation and leisure. By examining and relying on the multitude of commonplace notions within wilderness discourse, Jelinek exposes the power structures at work behind the “save the environment” movement, claiming that only the controllers of capital really have anything to gain by conserving natural areas. Physical wilderness in the text is a manifestation of social and political conditions in Austria.

Jelinek uncovers the power and privilege within nature discourse through loosely related characters in a small Styrian village. Using film script conventions, the text is divided into three sections, each labeled with a different literary genre and place: the first is Aussentag. Gedichte., the second Innen Tag. Keine Geschichte zu Erzählen, and the third is Aussen. Nacht. Herrliche Prosä! Wertvolle Preise! Jelinek’s parodies Naturlyrik within the first few pages of the text, setting an early sarcastic and cynical tone. The second section refers to the shocking and exaggerated nature of the narrator’s tale, and the third section mocks the traditional literary designations of a work such as this. The
place names within the text are important for the reader because the text does not have a traditional plot, nor does it follow prescriptive rules for a novel.

The plot is simple, but there is some action that ties the work together. The first section focuses on Erich. As he is walking to the house of the nature poet, Frau Aichholzer, who lives outside of the village, the narrator plays a number of language games to explore Erich’s thoughts, memories, and fantasies. Erich’s wife has left him for a more successful man and has taken his children with her. The second section of the text centers on the aging Frau Aichholzer. She lures Erich up to her home by asking him to bring her groceries. Although the philosopher with whom she had an affair is never named, the narrator gives special attention to the philosopher’s high standing in the Third Reich. Frau Aichholzer laments that she never became a successful poet in her own right and gains the respect of others only by sharing information about the philosopher. In her thirst for sexual gratification, she plans to lock Erich up in the cellar but falls victim to this plan herself. This section ends with Jelinek pointing to the artificiality of the text itself. The third section of the text finds Erich in the employment of a wealthy department store owner and wife doing odd jobs for their hunting party. The wife is quickly drawn to Erich’s “physical nature” and attempts to seduce him. He leaves the house and is shot and killed after failing to identify himself to a security guard.

Erich, Frau Aichholzer, and the manager show little character development and lack uniquely individual characteristics. Rather, they are blank forms upon which the discourse of each section can anchor itself. In a 1983 essay entitled “Ich möchte seicht sein,” Jelinek applies the term “shallow” to her texts, claiming that her characters do not

147 Heidegger, Arendt, Bachmann.
possess psychological paradigms because she avoids “realist” narrations, causing her characters to tend towards shells or models.\textsuperscript{148} With regard to Jelinek’s later works, Fatima Naqvi notes that “a living deadness awaits all humanity after the Shoah and makes impossible the traditional humanist conceptions that underpin psychological narratives.”\textsuperscript{149} Jelinek’s later works feature life and death intertwined, with the living and the dead occupying the same space and communicating, though not always relating to one another. Death is not a prominent theme in \textit{Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr}, but the characters exhibit the typical shallowness and portray a certain amount of the “lifelessness” that permeates much of her work after 1995.

The narrator and characters bring to light, question, and dismantle commonplace notions of wilderness and their implementation in maintaining a consensus social model and covering up the historical and cultural ills of Austria. The novel also prompts the reader to question a longer tradition: the antagonistic relationship between rural and urban, or wilderness and civilization. The distinction between rural and urban areas has been important since ancient times, and there is evidence of praising both urban and rural spaces in the Austrian literary tradition. The \textit{Heimatroman} was a particularly popular Austrian genre in the nineteenth century, exemplified by the work of Peter Rosegger, but also popular in the immediate post-war years in response to the growing urbanization and modernization of Austria. The \textit{Heimatroman} provided “the illusion of an unspoiled, unchanging landscape in which peasants tilled the soil and lived according to the rhythms

of nature." This genre included a series of topoi that celebrated a rural life of agriculture, community harmony, rootedness connected to a certain place, and conservative traditions. These are the very conceptions of nature that many contemporary Austrian authors attempt to dismantle. Jelinek’s text has been labeled by many critics an Anti-Idylle or Anti-Heimatroman in the tradition of Thomas Bernhard, Josef Winkler, Gerhard Roth, and Gert Jonke. Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr displays the author’s concern with the potential political power of notions of rural and urban more than with redefining or changing the nature of the terms themselves. She destroys the culturally popular image of the idyllic Austrian countryside that became widely promoted in post-war Austria.

In order to make this critique, the text relies on older commonplace notions of wilderness as a wild and scary place that enables revelations and harbors uncivilized peoples. Whereas Frau Aichholzer views nature from what one might call a romantic perspective, the forestry worker is more familiar with its wildness and harshness. Frau Aichholzer refers to Stifter’s “sanftes Gesetz” when stating, “Die Forstgesetze sind heftig, die Naturgesetze sanft” (13). Stifter’s philosophy is outlined in the forward to Bunte Steine (1853): in essence, he considers the wild, brief, and violent outbursts of nature as isolated incidents that should be considered less significant than the enduring, subtle, and “preservative” aspects of natural force. Erich, however, sees the raw power of nature and considers the significance of isolated natural incidents: “Naturregeln kennt er keine, die Natur schöpft sich ins Maß. Schreckliche Schwerkraftgesetze werfen Bäume

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auf Leute” (23). As opposed to the commonplace view that natural forces provide life
with an enduring balance and rhythm that should also be a model for human
relationships, as Stifter advocates, Jelinek points to the absurdity of such a notion, noting
that the wild incidents of nature, like a tree falling on people, are also significant: “Ist in
dieser Natur ein voll ausgebildeter Wächter vorrätig? Baum fällt trotzdem. Die Natur ist
mir gegenüber zum Gläubiger geworden, nichts an ihr deutet auf etwas hin . . . Nichts ist
Gesetz und schon gar nichts sanft” (24). Erich’s purely economic relationship with nature
takes away much of the symbolic and mythic qualities that others associate with it or that
are celebrated through nature poetry. In addition to these qualities, wilderness represents
both the biological and cultural differences between men and women and how they
interact with one another. It also reveals the thin veneer of civilization, domestication,
and socialization and will be discussed more fully in Chapter 4.

The narrator highlights negative, ugly aspects of the environment and downplays
any conventionally beautiful aspects. Jelinek parodies both nature writing of the
nineteenth century and “green” writing of the twentieth century with descriptions of the
effects of local industry on the rural landscape. In addition, the environment surrounding
the Styrian village lacks the prerequisite “features” of an ideal Austrian landscape, like a
“großer See,” thus precluding the possibility that this landscape could be portrayed as an
idyllic tourist destination. Not only are the characters shallow and lifeless, the landscape
too seems to lack the beauty and vitality needed to attract people there. The introduction
describes the “vom Regen giftig aufgeschwollene Bach” (8) and the “Zementwerk” that
does nothing but “grauen Stab blasen” (7). This description is quickly contradicted,
however, when Jelinek exposes the parody she has presented and negates any lamentation
that could be attributed by the residents to the destruction of the environment. The novel opens with a seemingly romantic story about a city that has had its environment damaged by human interaction, but then Jelinek changes this tone: “Die Natur ist schmutzig, wo man mit ihr in Berührung kommt” (9). Erich’s relationship with nature is controlled by profit potential: “Die Natur ist ihm ein Rätsel, er verdient an ihr” (8-9). Jelinek makes the point that nothing is free from harnessing and domination, and anything can be used as a commodity for capital materialism.

The narrator also uses sarcasm to lay blame upon the town itself: “Sie hat kein wirtschaftliches Talent, weil sie kein Bild von ihrer Umgebung gewinnbringend produzieren kann” (58). The area finds itself, then, in a downward spiral: because it is too industrial and lacks the prerequisite idyllic features of a tourist destination, it therefore must rely on other industries. It is precisely the power behind wilderness’s conversion into a material commodity, whether as product or space, and the consequences of this conversion for both humans and landscape that interest Jelinek. Yet like Jelinek’s other works, no solution is offered; it is merely highlighted, deconstructed, and rebuilt through discourse and language.

Without having to delineate the specific opposition between urban and rural, Jelinek is able to simply mention geographical spaces that in turn conjure up visual associations already cemented within the imagination of the Austrian reader of an idyllic and/or backward countryside or urban metropolis. As Schmidt-Bortenschlager notes, these images “garantieren die medial vorbereitete Abrufbarkeit von Vorstellungen, Bildern, die in jedem Kopf inzwischen eben schon indent sind, genauso indent, wie die
Jelinek does not need to be very descriptive. Her readership is already familiar with the connotations associated with certain place names, thus enabling her to play with these connotations to either confirm what the reader already thinks or turn the connotations around.

Jelinek satirizes the vision of a “natural” relationship between people and nature by identifying what she recognizes as the conversion of people, animals, and the landscape from “nature” to “non-nature”: “Die Natur erhält in diesen Jahr ihre Endform” (56). Jonas Torsten Krüger calls her work a thematicization of the “Deformierung von Mensch und Natur in einer mediengetränkten Welt.” According to him, Jelinek situates what is left of wilderness in a social environment that is controlled by media images and political and economic power. As Allyson Fiddler points out though, “To assert that Jelinek is doing something new and original by politicising nature, however, would be misguided, for it is simply not true that nature is treated in contemporary literature as a universal constant, untouched by the political issues of its day.”

Jelinek draws attention to and scrutinizes the idea that nature is “natural,” conceptually stable, or apolitical: “Mir geht’s um die Politisierung der angeblich unpolitischen Natur.” Much in the same way that one brand of feminism can be dangerous for women of lesser privilege because it ignores essential class divisions, Jelinek warns of broad scale “environmentalism” and conservation/preservation that can potentially be used by those in positions of power to

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154 Fiddler 111.

solidify the material realities that hierarchize society. William Cronon notes that one of the key problems in identifying things as “natural” or “unnatural” is that “treating such things as normal and inevitable in effect naturalizes them, placing them beyond our control and excusing us from having to take responsibility for them, making it easier to pretend that they have little or nothing to do with our actions.”

The Baudrillardian model of simulation is vital in understanding Jelinek’s description of what she claims is the real Austrian landscape. In the work *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), Baudrillard theorizes the lack of distinction between reality and simulation in a number of phenomena; images precede reality, particularly in urbanization and in other conditions in which people are detached from nature.

Baudrillard explains: “It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of duplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself . . .”

The narrator of *Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr* notes that while walking, all one sees is “ärmliches Moos, kümmerliche Flechte” and “nirgends das Echte vom Bildschirm” (7).

Both the moss and the lichens are small, seemingly insignificant nature images, as opposed to the grandeur of trees or mountains that dominates much nature writing and are thus set in opposition to the “reality” of Austrian landscape as presented by advertising and mass media: “Ein kleiner Kasten hat ihm erklärt, was er [Erich] von der Natur zu sehen hat und was nicht” (77). The images of Austria presented at home and abroad are of the third order according to Baudrillard’s model: the distinction between image and

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156 Fiddler 112.
159 Jean Baudrillard 167.
representation can no longer be discerned, and originality becomes a meaningless concept. Jelinek takes this further than the universal concept of simulation that Baudrillard designates as a marker of postmodernity. According to Jelinek, the particularly “Austrian” facet of simulation is dangerous because the images that have become reality have been instrumentalized by Austrian leaders to forge the Second Republic while blatantly ignoring, or covering up, the National Socialist past. Jelinek claims that the physical reality of Austria can never live up to the perfection that is presented in media images of pristine Austrian landscape. In addition, the inhabitants of this wilderness do not possess a higher moral compass than those living in cities as presented in both nineteenth century Heimatliteratur and contemporary media.

Baudrillard’s and Jelinek’s critiques are to a certain extent problematic because they presuppose a standard and uniform reception of the mass media by a certain Western population. Jelinek employs the concept of a “real” physical wilderness as a counter-model to this “Echte von Bildschirm.” Jelinek presents physical (and metaphorical) wilderness as something from which one needs protection, as stated in the work’s title, but the text offers no alternative to the idyllic nature images presented in the mass media. She picks up on this theme later in the text:

Das blank gerodete Firmament, das wir gerade im Fernsehen zum ersten Mal an diesem Tag erblicken dürfen (‘das Österreichbild, also ein Land, das einmal echt und einmal als sein Bild vorkommt’), erschlägt sie einen Augenblick fast vor Glück, als sie jetzt vors Haus tritt, um zu atmen. Herrlich! Wie viele können es gerade heute nicht sehen! Fühlen! (208)

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160 This idea is prevalent in many of her works. In Kinder der Toten, for example, Jelinek states: “Sie (die Landschaft/Natur) wird mit dem Reiseführer verglichen und muß jetzt Rechenschaft ablegen, ob sie auch an der richtigen Stelle steht und ihr auch nicht von wilden Deponien . . . geschadet worden ist” (82).
The text destroys but also then confirms notions of wilderness as a threat to humans both physically and metaphorically. It also shows a reciprocal relationship of destruction, however, tying the Austrian landscape to murder because it is the space upon which the Holocaust was enacted. The text makes this connection by breaking down traditional clichés popularized in *Heimatliteratur* of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in which the possible health benefits of rural environments were touted and also by the “green alternative” lifestyle of the twentieth century found in the “back to nature” movement. Wilderness is not only a victim of industry, compartmentalization, and tourism, therefore in need of preservation and conservation; it is also a massive threat, both in physical reality and in our imagination of it. Although Erich gains economic value from natural products, he also suffers from his encounters with it: “Blutende Naturwunden auch in meinen Handflächen . . . Dieses läufige Land vernichtet mich, ist hinter mir her . . . Furchtbarster Gemeinheiten machte dieser Wald sich schuldig, äußerlich ist er freilich beeindruckend in seiner vielbewachsenen Gesamtheit und Gangart” (12-13). Jelinek confirms a commonplace notion of wilderness, i.e. that those who work to control and cultivate it somehow know it “better” than those who don not: the narrator of the text notes that “Ein Bauer geriet vor dreißig Jahren ins Schneebrett und meidet heute noch Naturprodukte” (47). Marlies Janz notes that “An der Stelle von Adornos emphatische Begriff des Naturschönen tritt bei Jelinek das Naturhäßliche.”

The title reveals much about Jelinek’s aestheticization of political content; *Wildnis* is the only “reality” known and stands in opposition to the conventional rural scenes and landscape images presented for the purpose of luring tourism. What is much more

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dangerous, however, than the physical reality of wilderness is the figurative “Schutz” the Austrian reader needs when s/he comes to the realization that wilderness represents the dark secret of Austria’s past and present social and political ills and its uncovering.

The most prevalent criticism Jelinek makes in the text is that its conservation and use for either pleasure or profit is a highly privileged activity specifically reserved for those who hold power or wealth. The idea of wilderness, Jelinek claims, has become a bourgeois construction that “nur die Besitzenden und andere Privilegierte wie Dichter und Touristen . . . genießen und darüber in der Metasprache sprechen” (69). And while some may argue that this is not true, the history of containment, of private ownership, and the illusion of freedom that is granted to tourists and native Austrians in their interactions with nature are considered to be, by Jelinek, part of the social contract that continues the social norms and accepted domestication of a hierarchized society so emblematic of the Austrian Empire and pre-war Austria. The only characters in Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr who have the luxury of both enjoying nature and looking fondly upon it are the department store king’s hunting party, Frau Aichholzer, and Erich’s ex-wife’s new husband. This enjoyment does not seem to be just a bourgeois construction, however.

The author also shows that setting parks aside for the masses is part of the strategy in which the land owners have their own “Bergeigentum” (265), allowing them to both enjoy pristine environments and to profit from them. Jelinek’s conclusion is to some extent problematic, since many wilderness and Allmende areas are free and open to the public despite private ownership. To make this critique, she relies on eighteenth and

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162 Jelinek makes a distinction between the type of hunting which the wealthy do for leisure and the type of hunting which is done out of necessity.
nineteenth century notions, in which pristine nature is a retreat of the elite and wealthy. This idea is both historically accurate and popularized in literature and film. Jelinek’s main concern, however, is that very few ultimately profit from the use of these areas economically, and that activities engaged in by tourists, like skiing, are quite connected to the capitalist system that generates wealth for a small group of elites and not the masses who partake in the activities. In fact, setting parks aside for the masses may be part of a strategy of bourgeois containment that affords an illusion of freedom to the users of these spaces. Jelinek is not primarily concerned with the individual benefits that wilderness affords its participants.

Jelinek focuses on the private land that was used in establishing the national parks in Austria and laments that many influential people profited from their founding: “Denn wesentliche Voraussetzungen für die Gründung der Nationalparks sind die Zustimmung der betroffenen Grundeigentümer und die angemessene Entschädigung der wirtschaftlichen Nachteile. Der überwiegende Teil der Nationalparkflächen befinden sich in privatem Eigentum.”\textsuperscript{163} The creation of national parks is less about conserving and preserving ecological areas for future generations’ enjoyment, Jelinek claims, and more about protecting the investments and interests of the rich and minimize landowners’ risks as wilderness is slowly being converted to cultivated landscape: “Unter der warmen Decke der begrünten Langweile fällt denen zum Spaß die Natur ein, dort wollen sie einen Park anlegen, damit die Menschen darin im Kreis gehen sollen” (225). In the same breath, she cynically notes, politicians will talk about the protection of nature and also its parceling as an economical commodity: “Millionen unterschreiben unterdessen

\textsuperscript{163} “National Parks in Austria,” 2.
Critics have noted that Jelinek’s arguments are too programmatic and overemphasize the effect of environmental consciousness on the working class. Michael Amon, for example, notes: “Elfriede Jelinek vertritt also offensichtlich die These, daß nur die Arbeiterklasse am Umweltverschmutzung und Sauerstoffmangel verrecken kann. Die Annahme, daß der verdreckten Umwelt keiner entkommen kann, bezeichnet sie als ‘die Illusion vom Klassenfrieden.’” Jelinek’s critique, however, is not that one particular sector of society is responsible for polluting the environment, but rather that by conserving nature, wealthy landowners have more to gain than the masses. The text ends with Erich being shot by the bodyguards of the hunting party, described as “den Beherrschen der Wildnis” (282). The association of Erich, the worker, with wilderness and the wealthy department store owners, politicians, and business people as its dominators ends the work.

Menasse is also critical of the use of tourism in Austria to cover up the past, the ills of a consensus government that had ruled Austria for decades, and the latent anti-Semitism he believes still exists in Austria. His novel Schubumkehr is the last work in a trilogy in which he presents his social and political criticisms. The work is concerned with a number of long-established themes in Austrian literature, including national identity, Heimat, and the effects of history. According to Menasse, Austria’s natural environment has been co-opted to support the maintenance of the conservative cultural

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and political landscape of postwar Austria. This has allowed Austria and Austrians to successfully continue the cultural and historical image of the country as both an exemplar of European culture and as Hitler’s first victim. The novel's title, *Schubumkehr*, is a term Menasse borrows from the field of aviation. “Thrust reversal” describes the simultaneous forward and backward thrust of a jet engine that eventually leads to a breakdown.¹⁶⁵

Within the novel, this forward and backward movement represents a series of drastic changes in both the town in which the plot takes place and in the characters, resulting in a crisis of identity for both. The title also relates to Menasse’s notion of history, which deconstructs Hegel’s philosophical model of progress achieved through *Aufhebung*. Menasse employs both literally and figuratively Walter Benjamin’s famous “angel of history,” a figure from a Paul Klee painting. Benjamin rejects the chronological view of history embedded in the Western view of time, where reality is limited to the present. In his famous essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940), he describes history in terms of this Klee image. The angel “faces the past,” and rather than seeing a “chain of events,” he sees “one single catastrophe,” and while he would like to keep turned to the past, he is “propelled forward” by “progress.”¹⁶⁶ History’s development is constantly caught in a dialectic of forward and backward progress pushing toward the future. Angels appear in many of Menasse’s novels, and their placement or removal is not only typical of anti-*Heimat* literature, but they also allow his characters a certain amount of nostalgia.¹⁶⁷ Menasse utilizes the notion of forward and backward thrust in order to

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¹⁶⁵ See Renate Posthofen, “Mapping the Point of No Return: Robert Menasse’s *Schubumkehr*,” 329.
understand a number of changes happening in Austria in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including the opening of the Czechoslovakian border.

The novel is set in a small village in the Waldviertel of Bohemia, near a lake called Braunsee, along the still closed Czech-Austrian border. Renate Posthofen claims about Schubumkehr that thematically, one finds a direct, literary connection to the present-day situation in Austria. It can be detected in the similarity between certain fictional characters and well-known Austrian political notables, in the depiction of evolving and expanding hatred against foreigners as well as in the use of certain economic strategies to revive and remodel the tourist trade of Komprechts.¹⁶⁸

The protagonist is 35-year-old Roman Gilanian, a professor of literature who, after living in Brazil for many years, returns to Austria. His mother and her new husband have moved from Vienna to the small town Komprechts, which has been economically devastated after both the glass factory and quarry have closed. The town administrators are therefore left with the responsibility of devising money-making schemes in order to rebuild the local economy. As an alternative to traditional industrial production, the city attempts to refashion itself as a tourist destination. The work is characterized by postmodern qualities including fragmentation, a non-linear plot, and varied forms of narration. These “poetics of postmodernism”¹⁶⁹ lend a multiplicity to the text that structurally mirrors the uneasiness and fracturing experienced by the characters, the town of Komprechts, and the European geographical landscape.

The text operates on a number of narrative levels: first, there is an unnamed omniscient narrator, who adds information about the events and characters in

¹⁶⁸ Posthofen, “Mapping the Point of No Return: Robert Menasse’s Schubumkehr,” 327.
Komprechts. Second, commentary is provided by two unnamed viewers of videos shot by the protagonist, thus adding a visual element to the more traditional literary narrative forms. Third, the first-person narration of the protagonist Roman is supplemented through letters and conversations with his mother.

The process of domestication and containment of wilderness— taming it, but then presenting it in small doses for enjoyment— seems to be a way for people to believe they are interacting with nature authentically. The amount of “wild” they encounter is in proportion to their wants. In addition, the town administrators create a simulated nature out of the wild nature- one that appears to be authentic but one that is actually highly constructed in order to serve the perceived wishes of the tourists. In an essay about the author Gerhard Frisch, Robert Menasse characterizes Austrian literature as dealing “nicht mit Schein gegen ein Wirkliches, sondern mit der Erscheinung als dem Wirklichen selbst.” Although this notion refers to what Jamie Feijoo identifies as the “fiktive oder inszenierte Identität [des] Landes, die von einem zeitlosen Habsburger-Mythos und der Selbstdarstellung als Naturidylle unter Ausblendung der jüngeren Geschichte Österreichs geprägt sei,” the microcosm of Komprechts is representative of the macrocosm Austria.

As the town prepares to become an area that will attract “green” tourists, the administrators change the physical landscape in order to make it more appealing to the preconceived notions the tourists have of wild nature. Rather than conserving or even

preserving the naturally wild areas in Komprechts for its attempts in ecotourism, the town attempts to create a type of natural theme park, a simulated natural environment with which tourists can more easily interact and therefore obtain higher amounts of pleasure from than the “real” wilderness found in and around Komprechts. Menasse presents this interaction as not only naive and constructed, but within it one can see the simulated quality of late capitalist society as theorized by philosophers like Baudrillard that affects the tourists’ expectations of what they want to experience.

Baudrillard and Umberto Eco consider Disneyland the perfect example of the unreal. Eco states that while at Disneyland, “we not only enjoy a perfect imitation, we also enjoy the conviction that imitation has reached its apex and afterwards reality will always be inferior to it.”172 This extends to nature, as well, Eco claims. Zoos, nature parks, and the like are built on the premise of offering “real” nature, but as he explains, in many of these places, “Nature has almost been regained, and yet it is erased by artifice precisely so that it can be presented as uncontaminated nature.”173 Baudrillard takes this line of thought one step further and recognizes that Disneyland has already become reality. Originally presented as fantasy and a counter-model to real society, Disneyland is, in a postmodern world, “presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and the order of simulation.”174 As people are no longer able to recognize the difference between reality and fantasy, according to Baudrillard’s theory, the fantasy becomes real. The residents of Komprechts do not yet

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173 Eco 52.
174 Baudrillard, 172.
live in a state of hyperreality because of their rural setting and the recent demise of capitalist industry. In order to please the coveted tourists, they manage to turn the landscape into a fantastic and simulated reality.

König, the mayor of Komprechts, heads the transition from a “natural” nature in Komprechts to a simulated one; they will build “ein ganz neues Komprechts” (99). The motto of this new campaign is that “Wir haben Ihnen nichts zu bieten. Was wir haben, ist unverkäuflich. Ist unbezahlbar. Ist ein Geschenk der Natur” (123). While looking over the travel brochure written by the marketing agency he has hired, the mayor becomes upset that the brochure doesn’t feature the quarry, glass factory, and train station. He complains that nothing but pictures of the forests surrounding Komprechts are to be featured, but the marketing agent explains: “Die Unique Selling Proposition, wie wir sagen, von Komprechts ist nicht der Ort selbst, sondern das, was ihn umgibt: Der Waldgürtel und der See. Natur, Natur, Natur” (129). The mayor is unfamiliar with what the modern tourist wants. He is informed by the marketing agent: “Keine Hotelkomplexe, das ist es, was er will. Natur, Natur, Natur . . . ” (121). Most outdoor enthusiasts, and many green tourists, want to experience “pristine” nature, i.e. nature that has not been changed or disturbed by people. Even the wildest areas, which are not official wilderness areas in many countries, are supervised by resource management agencies, have been drastically changed through human interference, or are actually a result of the removal of people from those areas. For the tourists coming to Komprechts, the “authentic” places and cultures they hope to experience are anything but authentic. Many scholars in tourism studies have shown that despite what tourists think they want, in actuality, they only desire to travel to areas that are suitable for their needs and are only interested in
comfortable experiences. As the marketing agent in *Schumumkehr* explains, most tourists “wollen Natur, aber sie wollen keine Wildnis” (128).

While working with the marketing agency, the mayor is convinced that he needs to make changes to the lake, lakefront, and surrounding areas to make them more “idyllisch,” and less wild, in order to attract more tourists. As the physical landscape is altered, the area begins to resemble a type of amusement park in nature:


As soon as the landscape in Komprechts is arranged for the benefit of the tourists, and the natural elements are altered, it becomes “eigentümlich” (139) and “Unwirklich” (52). The line between simulated and “authentic” becomes blurred. The “wild” elements around Komprechts must be physically altered to adhere to the preconceived notions of “beautiful nature” the tourists possess in order for the town to be able to attract them there. For example, as the natural result of a frozen fog, “zweiundsechzig Stück totes Wild- Rehe, Hirsche, Kitze” are found in the forest that borders the town. This uncomfortable side of nature, which displays

175 Although Dean MacCannell’s view is narrow, because it ignores much of the individual differences in the tourist experience, his argument that tourists are looking for pleasing and authentic experiences has some validity to it. See Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976).
how raw and wild it can be, would be displeasing to the tourists, so the
townspeople work quickly to remove the animal cadavers (49). The
“Naturfassade” that will be developed, “wie eine Welt ohne Menschen” (121), will
allow the tourists who come to this area, disguised as a “pure,” “untouched,” and
“pristine” landscape, to recuperate, get in touch with their “original” humanity, and
remind them of the “gute, alte Zeit, als man noch Sommerfrische sagte” (122).
Menasse points to the danger inherent in a world without humans. Concomitant
with the removal of evidence of people is the removal of the history that is tied to
the landscape and nostalgic goals. In Das Land ohne Eigenschaften, Menasse notes
that emphasizing the beauty of nature always means the downplaying of the
history associated with that place. Within Schubumkehr, the replacement of the
real with the unreal and the marketing agent’s selection of which aspects of the
town to highlight contributes to the erasure of history.

As has already been discussed, one of the defining qualities of wilderness is
its opposition to the city. Menasse utilizes this social-cultural juxtaposition in the
text to criticize the new “Natur-Religion” (8) that is attracting residents of urban
centers. Roman’s mother has recently become attracted to the trendy ideologies of
the “Back-to-Nature” movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s, but with roots
in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. The over-industrialized and
materialistic nature of middle-class existence in much of Europe during the second
half of the nineteenth century spurred a great number of texts and movements that
advocated a more natural lifestyle physically and spiritually. Under the umbrella

176 Menasse, Land ohne Eigenschaften, 112.
term Lebensreform, these responses included Adolf Just’s *Kehrt zur Natur zurück! Die wahre naturgemäße Heil- und Lebensweise. Wasser, Licht, Luft, Erde, Früchte und wirkliches Christentum* (1895), literary expressions of spiritualism and natural medicine, the *Wandervogel* movement, and the counter-culture settlement on Monte Verita in Ascona, Switzerland that was visited by authors like Hermann Hesse and Franz Kafka, among others who contributed to the various natural and hippie movements of the late twentieth century.¹⁷⁷

Roman’s mother begins eating in organic restaurants, practicing yoga, and ultimately quits her job of twenty-five years to move to Komprechts with her much younger, car-mechanic boyfriend. Whereas the town hopes the changes they enact upon the landscape will attract green tourists, Roman’s mother buys a farm precisely for its wild and unchanging quality. Menasse sets the first-person narration taken from Roman’s mother’s letters to him in italics to differentiate it from that of the narrator. She tells Roman that she is a “*Heimkehrende, weil ich zurückkehre zu den Grundlagen allen menschlichen Daseins – zu einem sinnvollen und gesunden Leben in Übereinstimmung mit dem natürlichen Kreislauf der Natur*” (37). She wishes to engage in “*biodynamische Landwirtschaft und Viehzucht*” (37). Menasse satirically exposes the return to a natural bio-state as a romanticizing of the pre-historic human relationship with nature. The mother is portrayed as an idealistic “*granola*”¹⁷⁸ who naively leaves Vienna. The narrator alerts the reader that she, like the potential tourists in Komprechts, has a fairy-tale

vision of wilderness and the results of her efforts to cultivate it: “Was an diesem Haus unübersehbar unheimlig war, hatte sie sofort als romantisch, beziehungsweise dort, wo das Gemäuer unter dem Ansturm wildwuchernden Gesträuchs und Gestrüpps besonders arg in Mitleidschaft gezogen war, als verwunschen empfunden, und sie wußte, sie würde dieses Haus wachküssen” (40). Unlike the other characters in the novel, who know only life in a rural area, the mother is unable to see what is clearly not “homey,” but rather the demise of a once cultivated space. Her descriptions of the place reveal that she too has fairy-tale associations with a return to an original natural state. She finds the house “enchanted,” and like the Grimm’s tale Dornröschen, she believes she can “awaken the house with a kiss.” The narrator, however, quickly disenchant the farm with more realistic information about its condition, describing the remnants of human excrement in the dung they use on the fields. The organic fertilizer that the mother and boyfriend eventually put on the land contains “Damenbinden” and “Präservative” (117), literally spoiling the reader’s notions of organic farming.

The mother’s views are influenced more by an imaginary idea than by reality itself. Any attempt to return to a natural state unaffected by civilization is futile and can be dangerous because of the history it often ignores.

The narrator and mother explain why this particular farm is organic:

Der Hof hatte einer Frau gehört, deren Mann während des letzten Krieges, im sogenannten Rußlandfeldzug, desertiert war und dann als vermißt galt...Sie ließ immer größere Teile ihres Grundes verwildern, die sie nicht mehr bewirtschaften konnte . . .Es war ein Glücksfall, denn nach allem, was wir erfahren haben, können wir sicher sein, daß nie, zumindest nicht in
She fails, however, to acknowledge that her good luck is at the expense of the pain and suffering of the woman who previously owned the farm. In addition, she does not acknowledge that the state of the farm and the woman is a result of being “verwahrlost.” The farm transitions into “ein so verwildertes Stück Land” (41), and the woman becomes “wahnsinnig” (41). The mother shows little remorse for the horrific legacy of World War II that enables her to buy the house cheaply and to have fields that have not been fertilized through artificial means. Menasse demonstrates that returning to an earlier state of “environmental bliss” is impossible because of history’s impact on the land and the land’s reflection of history.

Despite the mother’s idealistic and naive notions of life on the land and her resource called “Das große Buch vom Leben auf dem Lande,” (40) she ultimately fails in her attempts to naturally recultivate the land, leaves the “Landwirtschaft hinter sich zurück” (117), and dejectedly returns to Vienna. A return to an idealized, idyllic state is not only impossible for the landscape itself, but it also leads to a regression of personal identity for both the mother and Roman. In fact, the farm and land seem to have a similar effect on the mother as they did on the original owner. Roman describes his mother’s fascination with a return to nature lifestyle as “Biowahnsinn” and recognizes the town of Komprechts’ inauthenticity. This attempted return to a more natural connection with the world, or those ideals typified in the nineteenth century concept of Heimat, in order to fill the void
between meaning and experience that is so often found in the modern world can be dangerous:

Vielleicht war das wirklich ein Charakteristikum für den Menschen in der modernen Zivilisation: daß man mit emphatischem Glauben aberwitzige Zusammenhänge knüpfen muß, um ein Koordinatensystem zu bilden in der Leere, die man sonst nicht ertragen würde. Und so macht man dann zum Beispiel glücklich die Yoga-Stellung Pflug, bevor man hinausgeht zum Pflügen. (84)

The simulated movement has replaced the real movement and although this connection does not actually fill any type of void, there is consolation in the idea of reenacting a perceived closer relationship to nature. Yet we are unable to actually attain this; contact with physical wilderness is provided through simulation in hyperreality. The separation between imaginary and real is an indication of the extent to which people have become accustomed to small doses of the wild. The city of Komprechts attempts to close this gap through a simulation of nature. The mother attempts the same through cultivation of wilderness and a return to the “natürlichen Kreislauf der Natur.” Both the mother’s and the town’s efforts result in the dangerous outcomes and fractures of identity that are embodied in the novel’s title.

Like Schubumkehr, Joseph Roth’s Radetzkymarsch (1932) is set during a time of immense transformation in Austrian history. Like Menasse’s novel, the changes that occur on the macro level of Austria are reflected on the micro level in fractures in the characters’ identities. Set in Vienna during the decline of Habsburg rule, the plot illustrates a deep distinction between the civilized life of the urban center Vienna and the uncivilized and backward life of underdeveloped Eastern areas of the Austro-Hungarian
Empire. Roth utilizes a commonplace notion of the city/wilderness dichotomy in which a wild landscape engenders wild behavior, but it also relies on a specifically Austrian tradition as apparent in texts like Stifter’s *Brigitte* (1844) and *Der Nachsommer* (1857). Menasse, Jelinek and Ransmayr take part in this longer tradition by examining and exposing the social and cultural values attributed to the city and its “other.” The tradition of representing rural as backwards and urban as progressive has been an effective literary trope since ancient times. Yet the specificity of representing Eastern regions of the empire as the opposite of high-cultured Vienna gives weight to the argument that a distinctly Austrian literary canon has affected contemporary writing about wilderness.

As *Radetzkymarsch*’s plot progresses, the orderliness and regimentation of a highly bureaucratized life in the Austrian Empire under the Habsburg monarchy begins to crumble. The men, and presumably women, of this new generation struggle to negotiate the advances of modern society and the rules and codes that have governed their parents’ lives.

The novel narrates three generations of the Trotta family. The protagonist is a wealthy *Bezirkshauptmann*, whose father was granted nobility for accidentally saving the young emperor from being shot. His son makes his living off this legacy, but his grandson makes a career in the military and becomes involved with drinking, gambling, and other forms of debauchery. While visiting his son who has been stationed in an

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180 As discussed earlier, this is one of the main premises of Glacken’s text *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*. The distinction between urban and rural will be discussed again in Chapter 4.

Eastern region, the _Bezirksleiter_ describes it as dirty and disorganized, inhabited by wild creatures and heathen peoples:


The agricultural people are not described as idyllically in tune with the harmony of nature as is found in much _Heimatliteratur_ of the nineteenth century. The farmers are represented as backwards and dumb, which does not rely on the literary commonplace that inhabitants of rural areas are simple and innocent, an idea used by Haller, Stifter and others. Rather this representation calls upon an older tradition of the barbarian who lived in the wilderness.\(^{182}\) The narrator informs the reader of the _Bezirksleiter_’s time in other border-lands:

Es war schon eine geraume Zeit seit dem Tage verflossen, an dem der Bezirksleiter außergewöhnlich gegessen hatte. Der Anlaß war damals das Abschiedsfeier des Statthalters, des Fürsten M., gewesen, der mit einem ehrenvollen Auftrag in die frisch okkupierten Gebiete von Bosnien und Herzegowina abgegangen war, dank seinen berühmten gewordenen Sprachkenntnissen und seiner angeblichen Kunst, ‘wilde Völker zu zähmen.’ (169)

The view that wild people need to be tamed is representative of the father’s generation.

This civilization’s decline, which generates wild behavior, is part of his son’s generation.

The Eastern region is representative of the son’s need to rebel against control and domination by his father and the domestication inherent in a society ruled by rank, codes,

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\(^{182}\) Thomas 259 and 260.
and titles. He enjoys a respite from the formalities and propriety he must adhere to in Viennese society and takes full advantage of the space where “anything” goes. The Bezirkshauptmann brings a revolver with him, presumably to protect him from what he imagines is a “wild-frontier” full of fierce animals, but what he discovers scares him even more than his expectations: “Was sollte da ein Revolver! Man sah keine Bären und keine Wölfe an der Grenze. Man sah nur den Untergang der Welt!” (174). Ultimately, this decline also leads to the family’s downfall. The Trotta family’s eventual fall from notoriety parallels the decline of the Habsburg Empire. Roth’s novel is part of a powerful tradition within Austrian literature that explores the dynamic between the urban center and the rural fringes. Yet, unlike Stifter’s characters who must often leave Vienna in order to develop fully, Roth doubts this possibility. Despite the efforts of cultivation and civilization, the regression found in the urban center mirrors that of the frontier.

Christoph Ransmayr’s novels take part in the tradition exemplified by Roth’s depiction of the regression of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Particularly, Die letzte Welt shares qualities with Roth’s novel. The edge of the Roman Empire in the text is not a place that provides the opportunity for development as in Stifter’s portrayal of the fringes, but rather the people and their attempts to civilize the space result in a constant regression and destruction from the natural elements. Ransmayr’s other novels and shorter prose pieces have similar starting points: they include a strong critique of the rationally scientific world that has created a technology-based civilization that enables people a seemingly comfortable life but isolates and distances them from essential experiences. While the setting of each novel is particular, Ransmayr prefers a main protagonist who leaves the comforts of civilization to experience a less rational world and
who eventually disappears into that world. Lynne Cook describes each of Ransmayr’s projects as “an eschatological vision that traces a series of progressively distorted and depleted repetitions of human experiences and events, culminating in the end of the individual subject with its symbolic displacement, disappearance, and a conjectured subsumption into nature in each of the worlds of his texts.”\(^{183}\) The novels also engage the real and imaginary, often intertwining the two so that they become indistinguishable.

As discussed in the Introduction, scholars note that Ransmayr’s work is part of a tendency found within environmentally oriented literature of the late 1970s and 1980s to present apocalyptic themes of human self-destruction through the overuse of technology.\(^{184}\) Some examples are the poem *Der Untergang der Titanic* (1978) by Hans Magnus Enzensberger, the novel *Die Rättin* (1986) by Günter Grass, *Störfall* (1987) by Christa Wolf, *Flugasche* (1981) by Monika Maron, and the juvenile novel *Die Wolke* (1987) by Gudrun Pausewang, to name but a few. Other scholars, however, note that his work is a departure from the more overtly environmentally-conscious works of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Axel Goodbody argues that Ransmayr’s novels *Die Letzte Welt* and *Morbus Kitahara* differ from those of his contemporaries because they present “bleak scenarios of the demise of humanity at the hand of nature….\(^{185}\) Ransmayr’s works create a much more nuanced and complicated picture of the relationship between humans and their natural environment than characterized by Goodbody. Natural destruction is often presented parallel to human destruction, and neither is solely at the hand of the other.

\(^{183}\) Cook 227.
\(^{184}\) In addition to Goodbody, see Holger Mosebach, *Endzeitvisionen im Erzählwerk Christoph Ransmayr* (München: Meidenbauer, 2003).
\(^{185}\) Goodbody, “From Egocentrism to Ecocentrism: Nature and Morality in German writing in the 1980s,” 413.
Moreover, destructiveness is not always negatively presented. The morphing, transient, and regenerative quality of it is reflected in the potential of the narrative to interweave past, present, and future; nature presents an alternative mode of existence to the philosophical, religious, and political ideologies of modernity.

Ransmayr’s novel *Morbus Kitahara* addresses the city versus wilderness conflict through the lens of Austrian involvement in National Socialism. His novel differentiates itself from other rewritings of the post World War II period, most of which start with the premise that the Allies lose the war. Ransmayr’s novel is an alternative post-war history in which Germany and Austria are not reindustrialized and modernized through the Marshall Plan, which results in the *Wirtschaftswunder* of the 1960s. Instead, Ransmayr’s history has left Germany and Austria demolished and backward. Ransmayr names the plan put in place by the Allied forces the Stellamour Plan, which alludes to the so-called Morgenthau Plan, written by Henry Morgenthau in the summer of 1944 as a solution for dealing with defeated Germany and Austria. Morgenthau’s views on how to best manage post-war Germany were laid out in his book *Germany Is Our Problem* (1945), but are best expressed in a journal entry from August 1944:

> Too many people here and in England hold to the view that the German people as a whole are not responsible for what has taken place— that only a few Nazi leaders are responsible. That unfortunately is not based on fact. The German people as a whole must have it driven home to them that the whole nation has been engaged in a lawless conspiracy against the decencies of modern civilization.\(^{186}\)

Ransmayr’s text focuses on the role of memory in post-war society. The town of Moor is the central setting for the novel. Its occupying army seems to take literally the idea that

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the German people must be educated in the atrocities of the past. The local commander forces reenactments of the violence committed within forced labor camps and he creates memorials to the victims of the Holocaust on the side of the mountain that separates Moor from other cities:

HIER LIEGEN ELFTAUSANDNEUNHUNDERTDREIUNDSIEBZIG TOTE ERSCHLAGEN VON DEN EINGEBORENEN DIESES LANDES WILLKOMMEN IN MOOR (33)

Like the historical Morgenthau Plan, the fictional Stellamour Plan calls for the complete demilitarization of Germany and Austria, the destruction and removal of all key industries, and the parceling of the country into smaller, militarily controlled zones.

The process of deindustrialization and demodernization afflicts the town of Moor and causes progress to devolve: “Unaufhaltsam glitt Moor durch die Jahre zurück” (43). Wilderness becomes an accomplice to the occupiers’ attempt to turn Moor “Zurück! Zurück mit euch! Zurück in die Steinzeit!” (41) by reappearing in an area that was once cultivated and highly valued for its natural beauty. Moor, and the lake near it, were popular tourist destinations before the war. The nature in the text does negatively affect the residents of Moor with its ever-encroaching growth and its reclaiming of space, which could be regarded as a revenge against the domination and cultivation placed upon it.

Wild nature is represented in parallel to the uncivilized behavior displayed during the war not only by the National Socialists, but also in the attempts of the liberating Allied forces to turn the occupied territories away from modernity. Ultimately, though, nature’s transition from domesticated and cultivated landscape into wilderness is not the source of civilization’s demise in the text: the three main protagonists and the residents of
Moor are ultimately dehumanized and destroyed not because they are asked to return to a more primitive form of existence through the Morgenthau Plan, but rather because of the oppressive “Rituale der Erinnerung” (44) they are forced to go through by the Allied forces. Ransmayr’s text reveals literally what Menasse shows metaphorically. The mother in Schubumkehr returns to a farm that has been fallow and is now considered “organic” because the farmer deserted in Russia during World War II and never returned. History, for Menasse, becomes a part of the landscape. Ransmayr makes this point more explicitly, for the historical record of the place and its victims is literally inscribed into the landscape.

As all the modern technology is removed, electricity is cut off, and Moor is transformed back into an agrarian community, the residents’ interaction with wilderness does not return to a rural unity with nature. In fact, the people feel even more isolated from nature than ever before as they are forced to re-enact scenes from the stone quarry labor camp nearby. As an allusion to the labor camp Mauthausen and its “stairs of death,” located near the hometown of Ransmayr and which he visited as a child, the residents of Moor are forced to carry stones up from the quarry floor upon “Die Stiege” (46). While this could be viewed as revenge on humans for their raping of the earth of its valuable resources, the exercise becomes a simulation of the real:

Aber Elliot war nicht grausam. Elliot verlangte auch diesmal nur den äußeren Schein und zwang keinen seiner Statistin, einen der echten, zentnerschweren Steinquader, die wie Denkmäler ausgestandener Todesqualen immer noch am Fuß der Treppe verstreut lagen, auf sein Traggestell zu wuchten. Elliot wollte nur, daß sich die Bilder glichen und bestand nicht auf dem unerträglichen Gewicht der Wirklichkeit. (47)
The ultimate goal of instilling a feeling of guilt and remorse into the residents of Moor backfires, and the task of remembering becomes an insufferable boredom and burden. The Stellamour Plan intends to turn the natural landscape of Moor and Austria back into a “Kartoffelacker,” yet because the allied forces are unwilling to return to a pre-modern world themselves, this isn’t successful. Much like the mother’s attempt in Schubumkehr to return the farm to a naturally cultivated area, history, and in both cases World War II, has placed too much of an imprint on the physical landscape in order to recreate a simple, agricultural community. The notion of returning Germany and Austria to undeveloped, agrarian cultures ultimately fails. Rather than narrating a society being overrun by a returning and revengeful wilderness, Ransmayr’s text shows the destruction of the area by an attempt to rewrite the history of human progress.

*Morbus Kitahara* indicates that it is impossible to return to a more “harmonious” form of life within nature in order to avoid the ills of modern civilization most notably expressed by World War II. This notion prefaces Ransmayr’s first novel *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis*. The plot grew out of a journalistic assignment on the somewhat obscure *k.u.k. Österreichisch-Ungarische Nordpolarexpedition* that departed on the *Admiral Tegetthoff* in 1872 and returned to Vienna in 1874 under the leadership of Captain Carl Weyprecht and Land Commander Julius Payer. Ransmayr explored their archival remains and in the process became extremely interested in the participants’

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individual motivations for taking part in the expedition.\textsuperscript{188} The novel Ransmayr created from the original magazine article and photos was initially published in 1984 and went relatively unnoticed. Only after the success of his second novel, \textit{Die Letzte Welt}, and a change in publishers, did \textit{Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis} become an international bestseller.

Ransmayr’s work focuses on an aspect of Austrian life, i.e. contact with pure wilderness, that has virtually disappeared within Austria’s borders and instead has been replaced with privately-owned and state-managed areas. Even in the Austrian Alps, evidence of civilization and involvement in the landscape can be seen, from the hiking path markers to the refuge huts built and maintained by the government and by the \textit{Alpenverein}. Perhaps because of the lack of true, untouched areas remaining in Austria, Ransmayr’s works, like the aspirations of the expedition members, tend to focus on nature outside of Austria encountered only by searching for the last white spots on the map.

The novel is comprised of two separate plots, presented by an unnamed narrator, that are connected to each other and are often blended with one another. One plot line tells the story of the original Arctic expedition, based on journal entries and publications by the expedition members themselves. The second plot line follows the story of the fictional Joseph Mazzini, an Austro-Italian resident of Vienna, who becomes so obsessed with the history of the nineteenth century expedition that he decides to follow in their footsteps. He eventually disappears into the Arctic wilderness. The narrator relates both

\textsuperscript{188} Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger, “Christoph Ransmayr’s \textit{Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis}: Interweaving Fact and Fiction into a Postmodern Narrative, 270.
the story of the expedition and of Mazzini but also includes his own reflections about the process of writing. Eventually, he becomes so obsessed with writing Mazzini’s tale that he resembles Mazzini more and more. The thematic level of the novel contributes to its engagement with the question of the importance of wilderness in a world where more and more nature is becoming contained. Also, the journal entries of Payer and Weyprecht and the other expedition members reveal a reliance on commonplace notions of wilderness as outlined above, including the conflict between the recognition of the destructive and scary qualities of the Arctic and a need to exert powers of reason to dominate it.

Few literary scholars have paid particular attention to the journal entries of Payer and Weyprecht, which describe their perceptions and give insight into the type of interaction they have with it. These journal entries are particularly important because they are the texts that lead Mazzini into the past and prompt his attempts to gain authentic experiences in the world. In turn, it is Mazzini’s interaction with and disappearance into the Arctic hinterland that prompt the narrator’s aesthetic journey of creating the narrative. The novel’s afterward assures the authenticity of the journal entries, but the selections by the narrator (or author) to be interwoven with Mazzini’s story and diary entries are intriguing. Payer and Weyprecht display a belief in progress and the power of science to further domination over the natural world, but they also recognize the destructive potential nature holds and have a vague fear of their precarious position within the natural world.

The text presents the Arctic as the physical antithesis to urban life; it is scary, dangerous, foreign, and nothing like popular images from eighteenth century art and literature. In terms of its destructive nature, the wilderness Mazzini and the expedition
members encounter in Austria and around the capital of Vienna pales in comparison to
what they will experience in the Arctic. Although it is not necessarily considered a
“prototypical” wilderness as I have outlined above, one of its main distinguishing
features is that the far north is inappropriate for civilization. In a journal entry, Julius
Payer describes this in detail:

Mit Pflanzenfarben also kann die Natur sich dort oben nicht schmücken; sie kann
nur durch ihre Starrheit imponiren und im Sommer durch ihr ununterbrochenes
Licht, und gleichwie es Länder gibt, die durch das Übermaß, mit welchem sie die
Natur gesegnet hat, bis zur Uncivilisirbarkeit erdrückt sind, so lag hier das andere
Extrem vor uns: gänzliche Vernachlässigung, unbewohnbare Dürfigkeit. (194)

Weyprecht, while giving a recruitment speech for the Arctic mission, describes a “ferne
Welt” (10), and the people of the crowd go away “fearing” the images the Lieutenant
described. He notes that “Das Ächzen und Kreischen der zu Eis erstarrten Dünung des
Nördlichen Polarmeers könne in dem Reisenden . . . die verborgsten Ängste nach oben
derängen . . . ” (10). The narrator, Weyprecht, and Payer present the Arctic as a place with
its own destructive rules. They are totally incongruent with those of humans. The narrator
discusses the catastrophes of past adventurers exploring this area of the world as they
search for the North-West Passage. He describes the explorers’ pursuit of knowledge,
noting that “Der arktischen Welt war es gleich” (44). The sea and ice found in this part of
the planet are “gewalttätig,” and the sea conditions in this expedition differ greatly from
the previous ones Payer had undertaken. The narrator and Payer both stress that the sea
and ice are unpredictable, which can be neither fully understood nor predicted by people.

This contradicts the basic premise of Western science: nature has a rhythm and rules that,

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189 Those who do inhabit the Arctic are portrayed by the narrator as unusual characters and outsiders who
are most comfortable outside of Western societies. Werner Herzog, for example, portrays the residents of
McMurdo Station, Antarctica, similarly in the film Encounters at the End of the World (2008).
once observed, can be predicted. The expedition members find the Arctic unpredictable: what they have already observed and know of previous experiences in Austria, and even previous expeditions in the Arctic, do not allow them to envisage what will happen in the future. The progress made in science and technology since the expedition, including the opening of the North-West Passage does not make travel in the Arctic easier. It also persists in capturing the imagination of readers and viewers today—tales of trials and tribulation in the far north are as popular as ever.\(^{190}\)

As mentioned above, wilderness as a scary and dangerous place was a popular theme throughout the Middle Ages in epic poetry and Minnesang.\(^{191}\) This commonplace notion was often expressed because of ignorance about life outside of city walls or beyond inhabited areas. Through new scientific methods and instruments, for instance the telescope and microscope in the early modern period, myth about nature was gradually replaced with scientific explanations and increased knowledge about the people, plants and animals that inhabit it. These developments will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 and 4.

Despite the long history of notions of wilderness’s value expressed through myth, these forms of knowledge do not affect the modern protagonist of Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis: “Es ist ein entlegenes, aber längst kein mythenverzaubertes Land mehr, in das Josef Mazzini aufbricht. Wohlvermessen und verwaltet liegt

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\(^{190}\) See for example Andrew C. Revkin, *The North Pole was Here: Puzzles and Perils at the top of the World* (Boston: Kingfisher, 2006) or Alec Wilkinson, *The Ice Balloon: S. A. Andree and the Heroic Age of Arctic Exploration* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012). The recent growth in number of television programs, like *Deadliest Catch*, attests to the popularity of Arctic-based adventure series. A large number of nineteenth-century travelogues are also available in recent editions, including those of Peter Warren Dease, Fridtjof Nansen, and Sir William Parry.

Spitzbergen im Eismeere, ein kaltes Floß, der letzte, steinerne Halt auf seinem Weg in eine andere Zeit” (62). Advancements in technology and a demystification of the world through science do not make a difference for Mazzini’s mission; he is unable to reach Franz Joseph Land and becomes disillusioned with his undertaking.

Like Mazzini’s inability to retrace the steps of the original expedition because of the unpredictability of the Arctic, nothing can prepare the expedition members for the futility of their efforts, despite the domination and cultivation of the physical world they pursued in their lives in Austria. The members of the expedition undertake trials in the Austria, but it is only a training ground for greater attempts at erasing “einen der letzten weißen Flecken von der Landkarte der Alten Welt” (19). The hunter and mountaineer Johann Haller, for example, senses that his fellow Tyrolean climber, whom he is trying to recruit for the trip, might be reluctant to embark on such a journey because of fear of the unknown, even though he possesses the skill and prowess to climb the Alps. He assures him in a letter that “was ich thue, das thust Du auch” (12). The physical world of the Arctic, however, “wo die Bedingungen der Wildnis drängender und spürbarer sind als die Maßstäbe der zivilisierten Welt, die tief unter dem Horizont liegt,” is indifferent to the experience the expedition members bring to it (110). Despite the efforts to cultivate and dominate nature through agriculture and cities, thus creating a shared culture in an urban experience, the expedition members are isolated once they are in wilderness, not only because of the effects the physical environment has on them mentally and physically, but also because of the social hierarchies of their Viennese culture. The narrator states: “Auch in der kleinen Gesellschaft an Bord der Tegetthoff waren die Journale der Untertanen von denen der Befehlshaber so verschieden, daß es manchmal schien, als
würde in den Kojen und Kajüten nicht an einer einzigen, sondern an der Chronik mehrerer, einander ganz fremder Expeditionen geschrieben“ (36). The narrator makes a social critique of the difference in world perspective held by the different social classes of men on board. They are ultimately unable to rely on the shared experiences afforded through culture. They lack the type of consolation normally awarded through civilization because of their extreme situation.

The convention of time also displays the varied experiences and isolation the members of the expedition exhibit while onboard. Oelschlaeger argues that the Paleolithic mind believed in synchronic time and that linear conceptions of time, coupled with the Judeo-Christian notion of a start and end point to time, have created a situation in which humankind has elevated itself out of nature. The narrator repeatedly refers to the modern concept of chronological time as the catalyst preventing shared experiences in the Arctic; time simply does not function there as it does in other parts of the world. The explorers are in an environment that is constantly presented by the narrator as inhospitable and incongruent with the rules of order and logic that enforce modern civilization: “Unter den tiefziehenden Wolken bleibt der Unterschied zwischen Tag und Nacht aus. . . “(70). For example, the sailors arrive at the port in Tromsø, yet their journal entries record differing dates of arrival. The narrator notes:

The rules of marking the passage of time seem to be incompatible with the reality of the natural environment in which they find themselves. Reality, notes the narrator, is only a concept of consciousness and one that truly is individual. The cultural conventions that are incongruent with the sailors’ actual experience in relating to their natural surroundings is interpreted by the narrator as a symptom of a greater cause; the men’s diaries reveal the greater truth that reality, like time, is a cultural construct and that, because individual perception can never be truly known, the men’s perceptions are wild, unpredictable, and the “other” to reason.

Wilderness is scary, dangerous, and confusing. The difference in light levels and also the body’s reaction to day and night in the regions from which the sailors come are totally incompatible with those in the Arctic. Modern notions of time are ineffective here and contribute to the disorientation people feel: “The sailors haben ja auch Länder gesehen, Gebirge, die durch den Himmel getrieben sind und zerflossen, Luftspiegelungen, nein, das waren keine wirklichen Länder . . .” (99). The mirages and plays of light that appear confuse the explorers and lead to disappointment, particularly for Payer. His goal of discovering new lands beyond Franz Joseph Land is never actualized, and those who experience this defeat cannot help but anthropomorphize the Arctic and attribute to it the actions and emotions associated with Classical myth and trickster tales, like cunning and revenge. Payer is more than aware of this erroneous thinking and states: “Wo auf Erden herrscht solch’ ein Chaos? Unbewußt ihrer Schrecken walten die Naturgesetze” (101). He recognizes that reason and logic cannot be applied toward or assumed of the natural world. Yet, he still defends reason against myth, like
other explorers who experience the Arctic first hand. He attempts to explain physical wilderness in human terms.

One of the more powerful commonplace notions of wilderness is the human duty to tame and cultivate it. Ransmayr’s text demonstrates the futility of this impetus; within the text, the Arctic resists any and all efforts of the sailors to leave a mark upon the landscape. They attempt to cut channels in the ice to free their ship (91), to bury the Newfoundland dog Bop (143), to hammer ice off of the ship to keep it from sinking, or even to reach Franz Joseph Land, yet everything accomplished is only temporary: “Was immer sie jetzt auch tun – sie haben es schon einmal getan. Sie wiederholen ihre Tage. Die Zeit kreist. Selbst was sie längst versunken glaubten, kehrt wieder zurück . . . und so muß hier alles, was geschieht, nur die Wiederkehr des gleichen ist, geraten sie in ihren Gesprächen immer tiefer in die Vergangenheit“ (143). The Arctic environment is indifferent to modern notions of progress and resists the domination they attempt to impose on it. As Payer and a group of sailors embark on a land mission and “discover” Franz Joseph Land, the narrator ascribes the landscape with knowledge of its domination, which is a product of Payer’s naming the places he sees: “Tosend leistet ihnen das Land Widerstand: gegen diese Stürme vermag alle Wut und Begeisterung nichts” (193). Yet the text is ambiguous—the reader is unsure whether the narrator means a literal snow storm experienced by the expedition members that they cannot fight or whether it is the storm of naming by Payer, described by the narrator as “zornig” and “fanatisch” (193).

Wilderness resists domination in other ways, including the experiences of the many animals that are part of the narration of the text. In Tromsø, the sailors buy dogs and the narrator notes that “die Hunde werden ihre Wildheit auch unter den Schlägen der
Tiroler Jäger nicht verlieren” (38). The image of the “blow,” be it of a hand or a hammer, is a trope that represents progress and hewing civilization out of raw materials, an image that is present for example in Stifter’s *Brigitta*. The blows of the sailors here in the Arctic are useless.

In addition to the journal entries of various expedition members, Mazzini’s own diary, and the first person account of the narrator, the text includes photographs from the original expedition archive, drawings of the Arctic done by Payer, and modern color photographs by Ransmayr’s friend and artist Rudi Palla. The photograph of a dog sled half buried in the snow (140) enforces the argument that the narrator makes throughout the text— the sled will soon be covered, and the trace of human interaction with wilderness will disappear. And yet, because of the transient nature of the water, ice and snow, the sled will again appear and be re-covered. The image shows that despite involvement by people in the Arctic, the natural world is not affected by them. Because the text was written in the 1980s, Ransmayr seems unaware of the impact that humanity will finally have on the Arctic in the form of global warming, most likely caused by the byproducts of technology. For the sailors of the 1870s and the character Mazzini of the 1980s, domination, cultivation, and interaction with Arctic wilderness turn out to be without merit.

The characters seem to have little effect on the Arctic and yet the Arctic has a profound effect on them. The realities of the environment in which they find themselves are felt physically and mentally. Mountaineer Haller’s weather log, which he keeps virtually every day of the journey, seems to align with his physical state. He is most unwell on windy and snowy days, but seems to improve as the snow, wind, and ice
movements die down. These journal entries stress the effect the environment has on the 
perception of the expedition members. The human body follows the rules of nature, 
particularly when not controlled or maintained by certain routines of culture. In addition, 
stress, anguish, and the possibility of going mad are threats to the human psyche here.

The narrator and the expedition members represent the Arctic as resisting the 
cultivation, domination, and separation from the city that many civilizations have 
attempted to maintain for centuries on end. In reality, however, wilderness is oblivious to 
the efforts to keep it at bay. Mazzini lives in Vienna with the widow of a stonemason, 
who daily sits and “betrachtete aus dem Fenster oft stundenlang die unverkauften 
Grabsteine ihres Gemahls, die immer noch im Hinterhof des Hauses gelagert waren. Auf 
den Steinen wuchs Moos” (16). Ransmayr explores the various levels of progress that 
societies measure for themselves and their spaces as compared with the types of 
“progress” that are found in nature. Like the moss slowly growing on the gravestones, 
people must continually fight the process of destruction and degeneration enacted by 
wilderness.

Despite the continually failed attempts to dominate, conquer, exploit, demarcate, 
know scientifically, or merely withstand the barren wilderness of the Arctic, the fields of 
ice have not lost their value in the twentieth century. Mazzini’s ship accommodates him 
as a tourist, but also carries scientists, zoologists, and even an artist who designs postage 
stamps. The travelers represent the various values people who interact with this part of 
the world place upon it today:

Die Zoologen schießen Robben und Vögel, um die über lange Nahrungsketten ins 
Blut der Polartiere gelangten Industriegifte des Südens nachzuweisen. Die 
Geologen entnehmen dem Eismeergrund unermüdlich Bodenproben und können
Many attempt to understand nature on its own terms, yet there is still domination inherent in the search for science knowledge or commodity.

The value associated with wilderness has been changed with the creation of national parks. The narrator notes that for years, hermits and recluses were as normal in polar regions as the coal miners and polar researchers of today:


The preservation of wilderness within national parks, then, has a double-sided effect. On the one hand, these areas and the wildlife within them are protected and contained; on the other, administration of these areas controls which activities can occur and who or what can live within their boundaries. For those who wish to leave civilization and seek out isolation, few opportunities still exist. Most of those who attempt an escape from civilization either disappear like the protagonist Mazzini of the text, are killed by wild animals like Timothy Treadwell in Werner Herzog’s documentary Grizzly Man (2005), or simply die of either disease, starvation, or some other cause like Christopher McCandless in John Krakauer’s non-fiction work Into the Wild (1996). Despite these well-known failures to succeed in wilderness areas, a fascination with solitude and survival still exists in modern societies as evidenced by the success of television shows like Man vs. Wild and Survivorman. This idea will be explored further in Chapter 3.
The works I have discussed by Ransmayr, Menasse, and Jelinek utilize commonplace notions of wilderness: it has been transformed from the physical and cultural opposite of civilization into a contained commodity that essentially serves our interests economically, aesthetically, and spiritually. Where wilderness was once understood as barren wasteland, certain areas have become protected and represent in popular culture a place for leisure and rejuvenation of the human spirit as in the text *Schubumkehr*. For Jelinek, containment of wilderness indicates an attempt at controlling the masses, through politics and media, by the ruling classes. True wilderness does not exist, but rather is determined through media and politicization. It also provides, however, an alternative experience to the order of civilized life as seen in *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis*. Wilderness containment has allowed individuals and societies, as William Cronon argues, to disregard the detriment and devastation done to non-wilderness natural areas, with the knowledge that at least some wild areas will be protected. This is why, for example, many Americans see no irony in driving gas-guzzling SUVs cross-country in order to spend a one- or two-week vacation in Yellowstone Park, thus becoming “nature-lovers.” Wilderness, as a physical place, has been altered by human thinking and control. Its transition into a commodity has caused a loss of connection for the modern protagonist. Within these authors’ novels, the employment of physical wilderness has enabled them to advance certain ideas about history, politics, and life in the modern world. I will show in the next two chapters how uses of wilderness conceptions as aesthetic motifs and as a figurative device add to writer’s exploration of the utility of wilderness in the conflicting dichotomy between nature and humans.
Chapter 3: A Place of Redemption

“God’s country is a double-edged sword: It is beautiful, but it can also be hell.”
— Frontier House— PBS

Developers of the Wilderness Act and proponents of modern environmentalism have suggested that experiences in wilderness have “spiritual, aesthetic, and mystical dimensions” and can provide “mental and moral restoration.” Within the modern usage of the term, a concern for the emotional and spiritual value available to people through experiences in wild places is prevalent. The notion that these areas and landscapes provide us with the opportunity for transformative experiences is often invoked within arguments for advocating the preservation of areas in both the United States and Austria. The text *Wilderness Management* (1978), published by the United States Forest Service, explicitly states: “In today’s bustling world, [wilderness] offers a place where important human values can be rediscovered and where a simpler, less complicated life exists, at least momentarily; it offers a chance to be rehumanized.” Although this text was published for the American context in the 1970s, the literature produced by the Austrian National Environment Office uses much of the same rhetoric, describing the

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Nationalparks as “Orte für Besinnung und Natuerlebnis.” In addition, the World Conservation Union notes that wilderness areas should “[o]ffer outstanding opportunities for solitude, enjoyed once the area has been reached, by simple, quiet and non-intrusive means of travel.”

As outlined in Chapter 2, environmental historians tend to conclude that negative views of wilderness as a scary and dangerous place in need of domestication and cultivation have been the predominant notions of it throughout history. A change in views shifted this discourse during the eighteenth century. Oelschlaeger, among others, claims that the concept carried a primarily negative meaning well into the nineteenth century, specifically because of the nature/human duality perceived in philosophical and scientific texts. His work attempts to recoup alternative, more positive, conceptions of our relationship to wilderness by envisioning and co-opting the Paleolithic mindset.

There is little way, without written record, to know exactly how early people envisioned their place in nature or even if they reflected upon it at all. Environmental historians have used literature and art, particularly from the Classical period, as evidence of general trends of thought. This research shows that there has been a transition of wilderness conceptions as the negative place opposed to civilization into a positive space providing opportunities for religious, and eventually secular, experiences.

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194 “National Parks In Austria” 1.
Environmental historians, literary critics, and authors themselves often point to the Romantic period as the time at which, generally, wilderness conceptions transitioned from negative to positive in both philosophy and literature. As discussed in Chapter 2, the groundwork for this transition was laid in shifting notions of nature in the early modern period. Glacken proposes that three main views dominated Western geographic thought from the Greeks until the end of the eighteenth century: the idea of a designed earth, the idea of environmental influence, and the idea of man as geographic agent. Glacken’s history stops at the end of the eighteenth century, for he claims that “the thought of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries requires a different kind of treatment . . .” Chenxi Tang’s *The Geographic Imagination of Modernity* (2008) purposefully begins where Glacken leaves off and proposes that a new model underpinned interaction with nature at the time around 1800:

In contrast to the ideas of environmental influence and human agency, which both suggest causal determination . . . the earth and human society were reconceived at the turn of the eighteenth into the nineteenth century as two complex systems of forces engaged in unceasing interaction and reciprocal determination, with each one of them acting on and reacting to the other as its environment. The outcome of this interaction at any particular juncture is then fed back into both systems so that effects simultaneously function as causes, and vice versa. At any given moment in time, the earth and the human world can be seen as equilibrating with one another and forming a dynamic unity.

Despite the newly acknowledged “unity” between humans and nature, humans still held a special or privileged position in the world because of their ability to reflect critically upon this position. The most significant philosophical and scientific change around 1800 is that geographic knowledge replaced *description* of the world with *explanation* of the

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197 Glacken vii.
198 Glacken xii-xiii.
world. Before this time, geographic inquiry had focused on topically describing objects in three ways: first, the earth as an astronomical feature; second, terrestrial objects and phenomena; and third, facts about humans. For example, Worster states in his history of ecological thought, *Nature's Economy*, that

at the very core of [the] Romantic view of nature was what later generations would come to call an ecological perspective: that is, a search for holistic or integrated perception, an emphasis on interdependence and relatedness in nature, and an intense desire to restore man to a place of intimate intercourse with the vast organism that constitutes the earth.

The turn away from climatic models toward more integrated “ecological” models was apparent in not only the geographical work by the founders of modern geology Alexander von Humboldt and Carl Ritter, but also appeared in the shift in science that was previously concerned with collecting and categorizing facts to becoming a system of experienced knowledge. This idea spread to other disciplines as well; knowledge was becoming less based on objective reason and more on experience.

Rousseau’s pedagogical revolution contributed to new models of gaining knowledge. By exchanging the memorization of facts, figures, dates and other information primarily found in books for an emphasis on experience, Rousseau’s pedagogy collapsed the Cartesian distinction between mind and body and replaced it with man and environment. Unlike Descartes’ separation of mind from body, Rousseau attributed to the human being a unity of mind and body; man was a “natural” subject. In *Émile, or On Education* (1762) Rousseau advocated educating students according to natural processes. This emphasis on direct experience, as advocated in the educational

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200 Tang 7.
201 Worster 82.
pedagogy of reformers like Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, prompted not only scientists, but also poets, out of their dwellings and into their surroundings.\footnote{See Edward J. Power, “Educational Theory in the Modern World,” \textit{Educational Philosophy: A History from the Ancient World to Modern America} (New York: Garland, 1995) 53-88.}

Nash argues that the Romantic turn away from structured and cultivated landscapes began in the cities, where the scientific and industrial revolutions were felt most prominently. This change was prompted by Enlightenment philosophy, tales of colonialism, and a desire to experience the exotic: “[Wilderness] not only offered an escape from society but also was an ideal stage for the Romantic individual to exercise the cult he frequently made of his own soul. The solitude and total freedom of the wilderness created a perfect setting for either melancholy or exultation.”\footnote{Nash 47.} Despite the increased journeys of urban dwellers into rural spaces during the early modern period and the importance of notions of the Sublime within eighteenth and nineteenth century philosophy, the notion that wilderness areas provide solitude and freedom in positive ways is a much older conception. In addition, Oelschlaeger views the Romantic notion of wilderness as a more important reflection of the philosophical currents of the age. He cites new conceptions of wilderness, like those espoused by Rousseau, as a reflection of the strict social hierarchies in which the majority of Europeans were living at the time, with deeper social and cultural implications than simply providing an opportunity for the individual to experience renewal.\footnote{Oelschlaeger 110-111.}

The Romantic period was a solidifying point in the progression from negative to positive, however the Romantic view of nature was not novel; it showed a turning away from enlightened rationalism, but it also recouped earlier conceptions of wilderness.
Evidence of a positive evaluation of nature, before the nineteenth century Romantic notion of it, exists in dictionary entries of the word “Wildnis.” Grimm’s *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (1861) defines it as “unbewohnte, unwegsame gegend; der vorstellung des waldes, des gebirges und der wüste nahestehend.” However, “die gewöhnliche, ältere vorstellung scheint fast nur die unfreundlichen züge des bildes zu bemerken, so vor allem die gefahren durch wilde thiere und andere bewohner der wildnis.” Alongside the primarily negative meaning of Wildnis “findet sich aber auch schon früh eine mildere auffassung, die es gestattet, das wort auch auf schöne und anziehende gegenden anzuwenden.” The entry states that this positive association normally is associated with “romantische wald- und gebirgsgegenden in der heimath” and “als quelle erhebenden naturgenusses.”

The dictionary entry contains evidence that positive evaluations of the “wild” arise much earlier than many environmental historians and literary scholars contend.

This chapter will outline the commonplace notions of wilderness as it transitioned in the literary imagination from a primarily negative place to be avoided into a place people sought-out because of the positive transformative experiences one could have there. I then analyze how authors employ or dismantle the idea that it is a place that can lead to purification, renewal, enlightenment, imagination, or self-abandonment. It will also show that transformative experiences, however, may be gained without directly interacting with physical reality, for example through art and literature. For this reason, I use within this discussion the term “wilderness areas” to describe places for humans to

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physically experience wilderness, whereas “wilderness landscapes” provide aesthetic experiences.

As has already been discussed in Chapter 2, negative emotional and physical experiences in wilderness areas, due to the perceived threats found there, have been a popular literary trope since antiquity. Much of the current discourse surrounding the supposed positive benefits resulting from experiences in these areas and landscapes rely on a long tradition of images in biblical, philosophical, and literary texts and art.

It has often been represented in texts as a separate world all its own to which one travels and then returns improved: because of the hardships one must withstand there, wilderness offers the epic hero transformative experiences, the ability to overcome trials, and the opportunity to reenter society as a leader. Joseph Campbell, in his foundational comparative mythology text *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), identifies this as the “monomyth.” He states: “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.”

Wilderness often serves as the space of transformation for the hero as can be seen in one of the earliest known pieces of literature, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, from the second millennium B.C.E. The text reveals positive aspects of solitude despite its inherent dangers and reveals that humans can benefit, in a unique way, from the trials associated with being alone in nature:

> They stood in awe at the foot Of the green mountain. Pleasure

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Seemed to grow from fear for Gilgamesh.  
As when one comes upon a path in woods  
Unvisited by men, one is drawn near  
The lost and undiscovered in himself;  
He was revitalized by danger.²⁰⁷

This version of the ancient text describes a place separate from and uninhabited by humans that can offer the hero improvement in both his physical and emotional state. The pleasure Gilgamesh feels from the fear of the mountain and his ability to glimpse some deep-seated quality within himself becomes an important aspect of interaction with nature in eighteenth century conceptions of the Sublime.

Spiritually transformative experiences have been an important topos in biblical texts and form much of the foundation of conceptions of wilderness areas and their purported ability to provide people with positive transformations. The Judeo-Christian tradition places paradise and wilderness at opposite ends of the good/evil spectrum; for example, the Garden of Eden is the antipode to wilderness, which the Israelites must travel through after being denied the “promised land.”²⁰⁸ In the Old Testament, God punishes with wilderness and rewards with paradise.²⁰⁹ And yet, experiences in deserted or uninhabited areas are often presented in biblical texts as opportunities for spiritual and physical tests that result in a closer relationship with God. Both Moses and Jesus benefit greatly from their solitude in the desert; they are tested by God and ultimately become closer to him because of the experiences they endure. Nash notes three distinctive legacies of this biblical tradition within common views of wilderness in modern time:

²⁰⁹ For example, *The Holy Bible, King James Version*, “Numbers 14:35 and 32:15.”
find God; and third, it became a testing ground where “chosen people were purged, humbled, and made ready for the land of promise.”

The negative aspects of biblical wilderness carry with them positive associations. As Susan Bratton points out, this ambiguity should be no surprise, because “[w]e have the tendency to expect Christianity to present one view of the environment, be it positive or negative. This is not historically realistic. Judaism and Christianity are complex social phenomena, extending over many centuries and moving through numerous urban and rural cultures.”

Kip Redick notes, “In these [biblical] stories Yahweh is revealed as a God in opposition to the gods of Egypt and Mesopotamia, and one who manifests himself in hierophanies: the burning bush and pillar of fire and smoke, for example. These stories became the symbolic origin of wilderness as a place of refuge and at the same time of trial.”

One could argue that conceptions of wilderness have maintained negative meaning because it never became the final location for people in biblical texts. Rather, it served as a space for transition, change, and growth before a group or individual’s ultimate return to “civilized” land. Those groups who sought solitude or were expunged from their societies found wilderness a refuge to cultivate a new civilization.

Whereas these experiences are community based in the Old Testament, the New Testament adds an individual element to them that not only emphasizes the relationship of a human being with God, but also the

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210 Nash 16.
requirement of solitude for personal spiritual growth. The personal element of these experiences is expressed in Christian theology through retreats, pilgrimages, and isolation from civilization by hermits, monks, and more recently lay people. Modern rhetoric justifying preservation reveals that this tradition has also impacted the ways in which people seek secular renewal in modern society.

The integration of pagan elements into Christian theology and imagery has also contributed to the tradition of viewing wilderness positively. Forests and mountains have been the two most important landscapes in Western Christianity, and although the biblical understanding of wilderness actually implies desert, biblical sojourns in the desert were reimagined as trips into mountain and forest spaces in European theology. Groves of trees have had sacred meaning to pagan religions in different cultures for centuries. Trees represent the idea of enduring strength, show the promise of spring awakening, and connect humanity to a history much older than its own. As Christianity spread throughout Europe, it co-opted these aspects of pagan belief for its own purposes, resulting in syncretistic views of wilderness. Alongside the symbols noted above, Schama argues that one finds in nature a consolation for mortality because it aligns nicely with the Christian notion of the afterlife, thus elevating within Christianity the symbolic status of trees and other vegetable matter.²¹⁴

In addition to a tradition of wilderness as a place for religious and secular transformative experiences, there is evidence of earlier positive valuations in Medieval poetry. These poems often honor wilderness as an Ideallandschaft, where outcast lovers

²¹⁴ Schama 214-239.
can meet. Already in some of these poems, a concern for the rapid disappearance of German forests and other spaces is acknowledged. Walter von der Vogelweide laments the “destruction of the forest” in his *Alterselegie* already in the thirteenth century: “die mîne gespilen waren / die sint traeye und alt. / bereitet ist das velt / verhouwen ist der Wald.” Throughout the Middle Ages, rapid deforestation and cultivation prompted a reimagining of the earlier fear of the forest into a rhetoric that praised its cultural, economic, and legal benefits.

At a time when a German national identity was being put forward, German humanists in the Middle Ages, such as scholar and poet Celtis and artist Albrecht Altdorfer, rediscovered and appropriated the representations in Tacitus’s *Germania* in an effort to exaggerate the subtle criticism of Rome that Tacitus intended, using the text to differentiate between the pureness of the German people and the decadence of the Romans. The result of much of this national heritage rhetoric was, as Larry Silver argues, that the image of German wilderness and the stereotypical barbaric German who lived there was transformed in literature from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century into domesticated woodland that provides a “noble savage” with a healthy and fulfilling life. Earlier representations of the “wild man” and his pagan rituals were used in order

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215 For example, in Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan* (thirteenth century), Tristan and Isolde find refuge in a cave in the wilderness: (line 17070) “Es hat auch seinen guten Sinn, / daß die Grotte einsam / in dieser wüsten Wildnis lag.” Eds. Rüdiger Krohn and Friedrich Ranke (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980.)
to provide a counter-example to civilized Christianity. In the imagination of many, the bestial barbarian of *Germania* had transformed into a noble man of nature who provided a positive example against the vices of the ever-more modern world.\(^{220}\) The Tacitean tropes of the “pure,” “free,” and “militarily courageous” German were repeated and intensified from the Middle Ages on in a variety of texts.\(^{221}\)

Baroque poetry also utilizes wild landscapes as an opportunity for religious transformative experiences. Andreas Gryphius’s poem “Einsamkeit” (1658) cannot be considered landscape or nature poetry in the late eighteenth century sense. Tang identifies two features of the poetic discourse of that time: “first, it is generally as much concerned with the visual operation of delimiting and ordering natural space as with describing what is actually seen; and second, it tends to interpret the order and unity constructed by the eye either physico-theologically as evidence for the perfection of God, or, in accordance with the pastoral tradition, as a manifestation of golden age of harmony.”\(^{222}\) It does, however, reveal a positive response to wild landscapes, although these objects of nature only serve as a projection screen for the poetic voice:

\[\text{In dieser Einsamkeit, der mehr denn öden wüsten,} \\
\text{Gestreckt auff wildes kraut, an die bemooste see:} \\
\text{Beschau ich jenes thal und dieser felsen höh,} \\
\text{Auff welchem eulen nur und stille vögel nisten.} \\
\text{Hir, fern von dem pallast; weit von des pöbels lüsten,} \\
\text{Betracht ich, wie der Mensch in eitelkeit vergeh’} \\
\text{Wie auff nicht festem grund all unser hoffen steh’,} \\
\text{Wie vor abend schmähn, die vor dem tag uns grüßten.} \\
\text{Die höl’, der rauhe wald, der totenkopff, der stein,}\]

\(^{220}\) This will be developed more in Chapter 4, but is important to mention here because the shift of wilderness and its negative conceptions to positive ones greatly influenced future imaginations of the wilderness as a place being aesthetically pleasing.

\(^{221}\) See Christopher B. Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book: Tacitus’s “Germania” from the Roman Empire to the Third Reich* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).

\(^{222}\) Tang 57.
Den auch die zeit auffrisst, die abgezehrten bein,
Entwerffen in dem muth unzählliche gedancken.
Der mauren alter grauß, diß ungebraute Land
Ist schön und fruchtbar mir, der eigentlich erkant,
Dass alles, ohn ein geist, den Gott selbst hält, muss wanken.

While concerned with salvation, the “ungebaute land” is not only “schön,” but also “fruchtbar” to the poetic voice. The vantage point of the poetic voice, high above the various natural features, indicates that a view of landscape can lead to meditation or transformative religious experience. This notion cannot yet be called sublime, but it hints to the idea of the Sublime as it is expressed in its many variations in the eighteenth century. The main purpose of wilderness in Gryphius’s poem is to reveal to the subject a higher religious knowledge of God’s greatness.

Another major shift in the human-nature relationship that contributed to a more positive notion of wilderness was the enlightened liberalism of the eighteenth century, as expressed by people like Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, John Locke, and Joseph Addison and their influence on garden theory. Both personal gardens and larger estate gardens, particularly in England, manifested a shift away from the rules of classical architecture. Landscape as an aesthetic discourse had already emerged in the Italian Renaissance and then shifted into an artistic genre. The landscape garden discourse developed, though, alongside landscape painting, in an effort to provide a more “natural” form of beauty as opposed to the rigidness of French gardens. Tang notes that during this time, “No theoretical tracts on landscape failed to extol the aesthetic pleasure

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that [landscape] painting was capable of giving to its viewers. In *The Moralists* (1709), for example, Shaftesbury states:

> I shall no longer resist the Passion growing in me for Things of a *natural* kind; where neither *Art* nor the *Conceit* or *Caprice* of man has spoil'd their *genuine Order*, by breaking in upon that primitive State. Even the rude *Rocks*, the mossy *Caverns*, the irregular unwrought *Grotto's* [sic] and broken *Falls* of Waters, with all the horrid Graces of the *Wilderness* it-self, as representing NATURE more, will be the more engaging, and appear with a Magnificence far beyond the formal Mockery of Princely Gardens.

Like a “wilderness” that could be featured in Renaissance painting to represent fear, evil, or even freedom from rules, these garden features could provide, from the eighteenth century onward, a sense of “freedom” and the opportunity for purely positive experiences in nature without the actual threats of the wild to which Shaftesbury refers. This view, though, is at best problematic, considering that during the same period the concept of the “picturesque” developed, i.e. that beautiful nature should resemble art and should be arranged as scenery. The irony inherent in these creations should not go unnoticed— to be able to enjoy a “natural” landscape garden takes enormous amounts of cultivation and domestication. By bringing the “wild” into the civilized space, the need to preserve authentic wilderness areas might seem unnecessary.

The ability to “hide” the cultivation and domestication of a garden in its resemblance to “real” nature is precisely what German geographer Carl Ritter admires of the English landscape. He writes in the introduction to his *Anleitung zur Verschönerung der Landgüter und Landschaften* (1839) that he was “bezaubert” by the

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225 Tang 58.
He rejects the French landscape with its parallel lines and open acknowledgement of the gardener’s work. He states:

In England sind alle Felder, Wiesen, und Äcker mit Bäumen und Gesträuchen eingefaßt, was der Landschaft einen eigenen Reiz verleiht, und den Fremdling bezaubert. Diese Pflanzungen verbinden sich mit den Wäldern, welche die Anhöhen beherrschen, indem sich theils Wieseneinbrüche bis in das schattige Dunkel des Waldes zurückziehen, oder sich Blößen bilden, die nicht allein jenen malerischen Anblick gewähren, sondern auch durch Vereinigung der Ökonomie mit der Forstcultur den höchsten Ertrag liefern. Es sind nicht etwa hohe steife Wände von Pappeln oder Acacien, die nach der Schnur gepflanzt, eine Landschaft ganz entstellen, den Boden aussaugen und zu viel Schatten machen; nein! es sind dichte Massen von Gebüschen, über die sich Boskette schlanker schöner Bäume erheben, deren leichter Ästeschwung sich in den Lüften wiegt, natürliche Anpflanzungen kaum die Menschenhand verrathend. – Ich will es versuchen, ein schwaches Bild solch einer englischen Landschaft zu entwerfen. Kaum hat man die Hauptstadt verlassen, als man sich von der üppigsten Vegetation umgeben sieht, ringsum Gärten, Wiesen, Felder, durch die sich in weiten Bogenlinien herrlich breite und fest wie in Kitt gegossene Straßen schlingen. Man wähnt auf ihnen in dem reizendsten Naturparke zu fahren, zu dem all’ die ausgedehnten Landschaften gleichsam mit einander verwebt sind.\(^2^{29}\)

Jost Hermand notes that the shift in landscape gardening from very formal and geometric planning to a more “natural” garden that resembled untouched nature, from an “anthropomorphic-aesthetic” idea to “biocentric-ecological,” took on a very different character in France where “proponents of natural rights were able to live out their ideals only within literary utopias.”\(^2^{30}\) For example, Rousseau’s novel *Julie, or the New Héloïse* (1761) was wildly popular in Europe and may have been the most read novel of the

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\(^{229}\) Ritter 1-2.

century.\textsuperscript{231} Julie, and the ethics of authenticity professed within it, greatly influenced the way in which eighteenth century Europeans considered nature, specifically landscape gardens and, most importantly for this discussion, the Alps. The nature garden concept that eventually became popular in Germany in the second half of the eighteenth century lost the political element associated with the literary French landscape as expressed in Rousseau’s novel. Rousseau describes the garden at Clarens as an attempt to keep the garden as close an approximation to “real” nature as possible. It exhibited the attempts of garden landscapers to create an authentic and idealized form of nature, an “Elysium” that would “exude the magic of pristine nature.”\textsuperscript{232} The pastoral image of Arcadia, which became highly popular in eighteenth century painting, increased the appeal of this type of landscape garden and was transferred to its design.\textsuperscript{233} Both landscape gardens and landscape painting of the period drastically eliminated the primitive and barbaric aspects formerly associated with it. Idealized wilderness was now highly celebrated, if still in artificial forms.\textsuperscript{234}

To some extent, the aesthetic importance of wilderness today has roots in landscape gardens of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the notion of an ideal Arcadia continues to affect current representations of nature. Following the presentation in landscape painting and gardens of nature in an idealized form, authors began writing positive representations of wilderness and its aesthetic importance in its most idealized form. These descriptions eliminated any ambiguity about its value. In fact, a

\textsuperscript{232} Hermand 35, 36.
\textsuperscript{234} Schama 528. See also Erwin Panofsky, Meaning in the Visual Arts (New York: Doubleday, 1955).
“wilderness,” an area that was artificially constructed to appear as real, became a standard aspect of many landscape gardens. Seventeenth century English landscape gardener Timothy Nourse describes this feature: “In a word, let this Third Region or Wilderness be Natural-Artificial; that is, let all things be dispos’d with that cunning, as to deceive us into a belief of a real Wilderness or Thicket, and yet to be furnished with all the Varieties of Nature ...”235 The garden imitations of a natural utopia were quite different from the representation of wilderness in Medieval painting. As part of man’s duty to God, the lost paradise of Adam and Eve’s fall needed to be regained through cultivation and domination of nature.

The ability to experience wild nature through gardens and art did not, however, completely eliminate the desire to experience the positive aspects of wilderness first hand. In fact, it most likely contributed to this notion along with the shift in science and pedagogy from fact-based knowledge systems to experience-based ones, as discussed above. Because images that were favored in eighteenth and nineteenth century literature were rarely representations of truly wild areas, as the domineering force of civilization had already taken hold, authors and scientists were forced to travel farther and farther from urban centers to experience nature without traces of culture. Travel to uncivilized areas had previously been attached to colonial expansion and the christianizing mission, but with a new emphasis on the unity of nature and experiential knowledge in early Romantic thought, scientist-explorers like Humboldt and Darwin justified their travels under the banner of science.

The literary techniques used to describe the forest during the Middle Ages, and the landscape garden and painting praised in the eighteenth century for their aesthetic power, were then transferred to writing about other forms of wilderness, particularly the romanticizing of mountains in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Petra Raymond notes:


Thus, a discourse of wild landscapes had already become ingrained in the cultural and social imagination before many people actually encountered Alpine landscapes firsthand. This allowed writers to transfer already established tropes about nature to new experiences in wilderness.

The idealization of a “natural” nature in the form of the landscape garden changed conceptions of wilderness from an object in constant need of cultivation in order to be considered beautiful to an object that could be aesthetically pleasing in its own right. Drovers of painters, poets, and tourists traveled to the Alps in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In addition, the notion of the Sublime added a personal element to experiences in wilderness areas as trips to the Alps became extremely popular.

Rousseau most significantly shaped the idea that mountain wilderness could provide positive transformative experiences in a newly secular way. The first part of the eighteenth century had seen the development of a natural theology that credited mountain landscapes with allowing the viewer to see God’s work first hand, as discussed above. A new “Aesthetics of the Infinite,” which transferred vastness from God, to space, and then to the physical earth in the form of mountains, was becoming a familiar rhetoric to which theologians and poets turned, even before they had a particular language to express their experiences. Marjorie Hope Nicolson explains this phenomena: “The ‘natural Sublime’ had come to England in the works of philosophers and physicotheologists and of at least one poet, before a group of critics, analyzing their experience in the presence of grand nature, began to develop a critical theory by which to explain their peculiar responses.”

Rousseau’s literary descriptions of the Alps were perhaps the first of their kind. Many cultural critics and historians point to Rousseau’s Julie as vital to mountains’ recasting from scary places that housed dragons and other mythical peoples and creatures to landscapes that provided opportunities for transcendence and the appreciation of beauty. Rousseau’s novel greatly influenced people’s views of mountains, but his descriptions celebrating wilderness landscapes were not the first of their kind. In fact, many biblical texts demonstrate that mountains were absolutely necessary for spiritual and emotional intervention from God. In addition, many travelers to the Alps in the eighteenth century

wrote representations of the mountains that reveal a positive evaluation of the landscape’s ability to inspire and challenge the human soul.\textsuperscript{238}

Even though Rousseau was not the first to suggest that mountains were beautiful or that they could provide travelers with transformative experiences, his praise of the Alps was professed in a novel and not in a travelogue, purely theological, or scientific text. Before Rousseau, another writer had professed the beauty of the mountains. Albrecht von Haller, a Swiss naturalist and poet, celebrated the Alps and its people in a poem titled \textit{Die Alpen} (1732). Alongside Barthold Heinrich Brockes’s \textit{Irisches Vergnügen in Gott} (1721-48), Haller’s poem was one of the first comprehensive landscape descriptions in German poetry. Haller’s main goal, like many of the early Enlightenment thinkers, was to bring a new language of nature to an educated readership.\textsuperscript{239} Through more control of nature in the form of scientific knowledge, and beyond recognizing its vastness, one could see beauty in it.\textsuperscript{240} Haller describes the landscape of the Alps and the life of the Alpine peoples, with moral assessments about their pure and simple pastoral life juxtaposed with the corrupt city. By leaving out any of the realities of poverty and medical ailments afflicting the Alpine peoples, more than likely due to limited nutrition and inbreeding, Haller transformed the image of the idiot mountain peasant into a simple, yet noble, lover of democracy. His idealization of the mountain people is part of a tendency in the eighteenth century to recast images of wild men in the wilderness into the “noble savage” discussed above. The mountain peasant who had once been considered dumb, inbred, and totally uncivilized was now shown to

\textsuperscript{238} See Schama, “Vertical Empires, Cerebral Chasm,” 447-513.
\textsuperscript{240} See Koschorke.
be governed not by the legacies of Rome, but by the laws of nature.\textsuperscript{241} In this sense, the poem owes a debt to the ancient tradition of Anacreontics and pastoral poetry, along with their ancient topoi, both of whose themes were primarily a simple and bucolic life. Within his personal travelogue, von Haller speaks of the mountains providing a “Widerspiel des Grauens und der Anmuth” and of a mixture of threatening and irresistible “Reiz.”\textsuperscript{242}

\begin{quote}
Durch den zerfahnen Dunst von einer dünnen Wolke
Eröffnet sich zugleich der Schauplatz einer Welt,
Ein weiter Aufenthalt von mehr als einem Volke
Zeigt alles auf einmal, was sein Bezirk enthält;
Ein sanfter Schwindel schließt die allzu schwachen Augen,
Die den zu breiten Kreis nicht durchzustrahlen taugen.

      Ein angenehm Gemisch von Bergen, Fels und Seen
Fällt nach und nach erbleicht, doch deutlich, ins Gesicht,
Die blaue Ferne schließt ein Kranz beglänzter Höhen,
Worauf ein schwarzter Wald die letzten Strahlen bricht;
Bald zeigt ein nah Gebürg die sanft erhobnen Hügel,
Wovon ein laut Geblök im Tale widerhallt;
Bald scheint ein breiter See ein Meilen-langer Spiegel,
Auf dessen glatter Flut ein zitternd Feuer wallt;
Bald aber öffnet sich ein Strich von grünen Tälern,
Die, hin und her gekrümmt, sich im Entfernen schmälern. (lines 325-340)
\end{quote}

Haller’s poem, though describing the landscape as beautiful, presents individual aspects of nature in a linear way, with one image after another. Haller privileges vision—it is the only sense that experiences the view, outside of a “sanfter Schwindel” resulting from his inability to perceive “alles auf einmal.” In this way, Haller’s poem, with its focus on

\textsuperscript{241} Schama 480.
visual perspective and color, adheres to the principles of painting and does not describe the complete physical and sensory experience. Rather, landscape dominates the poem, thus limiting perhaps the ability of the lyrical I to have a transformative experience in nature. The poem’s legacy is that for the first time, mountains serve as a *locus amoenus.*

In *Julie,* Rousseau took Haller’s legacy to a new dimension. The mountains no longer affect only the visual sensation, but the whole body, reflecting the shifting notion of the mind-body and nature-body split, as discussed above. He describes the Alps as “serene” and as a place where the protagonist can find his “interior peace” (65) because of the “purity of air” (66). The intense popularity of the novel inspired generations of artists and poets, who featured the mountains and Alpine Swiss people positively in their own works. Rousseau’s work certainly contributed to a growing tendency in the late eighteenth century to value wilderness for its beauty and ability to provide visitors with positive experiences, both physical and aesthetic, and most importantly, to experience the Sublime.

There are many theories of the Sublime, all of which draw on the ancient tradition as expressed by Longinus. In the Western tradition, Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant are most often cited as providing the vocabulary and rhetoric for what we consider discourse of the Sublime today. Nicolson points to three thinkers who, after each had taken journeys across the Alps and commented on those experiences, solidified during

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243 Tang 64.
244 Latin for “pleasant place,” a *locus amoenus* is a poetic convention in which both real and imaginary places serve as idyllic landscapes or spaces of safety or comfort.
the eighteenth century the importance of the Sublime in Western thought, thus associating the mountains with the vastness of God long before Burke published *Inquiry* in 1757.

John Dennis, Shaftesbury, and Joseph Addison each contributed to theories of the Sublime in distinctive ways. Their legacy is explained by Nicolson:

From this time forth, we shall find men following one or the other of the three critics who were responsible for the developing concept of the Sublime: some will feel the Sublime a higher Beauty; some will emphasize the vastness of size in the objects God—or man—has made; some will emphasize power shown in the most vehement and violent aspects of Nature. In time the rhetorical and natural Sublimes will become parts of a single whole. But to Dennis, Shaftesbury, and Addison, differ though they might in other respects, the ‘primary’ stimulus to the Sublime lay in vast objects in Nature—mountains and oceans, stars and cosmic space—all reflecting the glory of Deity. The ‘rhetorical’ Sublime was only secondary.\(^\text{246}\)

Addison differentiated himself from both Dennis and Shaftesbury because he saw the Sublime not as a higher form of Beauty, but as a distinctive effect opposite to beauty. Kant also makes this distinction in *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Although Kant’s theories of Beauty and the Sublime have proven to be the most influential aspects of the work in terms of experiences in nature, the text was originally written in order to bridge the gap between his first two critiques, in which the principles of pure reason and practical reason are explored. The text was vitally important to nineteenth-century expressions of interactions with nature, even if what we consider sublime today is perhaps a watered-down version of Kant’s intended critique. His text is also important because it uses the term “aesthetics” in reference to beauty and art, and not to sensual perception as it had been used before.

\(^\text{246}\) Nicolson 323.
As we decide what is beautiful and what is not, Kant distinguishes between two types of beauty: “Es gibt zweierlei Arten von Schönheit: freie Schönheit (pulchritudo vaga), oder die bloß anhängende Schönheit (pulrichtudo adherens). Die Erstere setzt keinen Begriff von dem voraus, was der Gegenstand sein soll; die zweite setzt einen solchen und die Vollkommenheit des Gegenstandes nach demselben voraus.”

The first type determines whether something is beautiful based on the perfection of its qualities, based on its use. The second type of beauty is not based on use value, but rather is a subjective judgment, or taste. Kant borrows from Shaftesbury the concept that aesthetic pleasure is the only form of pleasure that is not concerned with the existence of its object.

He sees perfection as the teleological purpose of an object: beauty, in art and in nature, does not have a purpose outside of itself. Kant’s most controversial claim is that the aesthetic judgment is universal. He states: “Schön ist das, was ohne Begriff allgemein gefällt.”

Kant, like Addison, also distinguishes the Beautiful from the Sublime. Kant differentiates himself from the theorizers of the Sublime in the eighteenth century because he claims that it is not just greater than Beauty, but rather that the Sublime is a separate experience altogether. Unlike beautiful nature, the Sublime is not a quality of a discrete object in nature, but is instead a person’s internal response to the limitlessness of nature. This response differs from the aesthetic response to nature because unlike...

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249 Kant §9.
recognizing beauty in nature, which requires only the senses, experiencing the Sublime requires the faculty of reason.

Kant distinguishes between the mathematical Sublime, the idea of infinity ("Selbst ein Vermögen, sich das Unendliche der übersinnlichen Anschauung, als gegeben, denken zu können, übertrifft allen Maßstab der Sinnlichkeit . . ."), and the dynamic-sublime, which is considered an object of fear. Objects of nature that make us feel small in comparison to their might are Sublime because they cause people to raise their consciousness above normal use:

. . . Ihr Anblick wird nur um desto anziehender, je furchtbarer er ist, wenn wir uns nur in Sicherheit befinden; und wir nennen diese Gegenstände gern erhaben, weil sie die Seelenstärke über ihr gewöhnliches Mittelmaß erhöhen, und ein Vermögen zu widerstehen von ganz anderer Art in uns entdecken lassen . . .”

Kant transforms the Sublime from the capacity to view God’s power and feel horror in the face of natural greatness to a very anthropocentric experience. The faculty to experience an overwhelming emotion triggered by nature, the ability to resist it, and the power to employ the entire mental capacity confirms the Cartesian separation of res cogitans and res extensa. What we should call the Sublime, therefore, is not the recognition of the great power of nature, the limitlessness of nature, or even Beauty in nature, but rather the human acknowledgement of freedom and independence from nature.

The theory of the Sublime has been vital to the elevation of mountain spaces from places to be avoided into places to be sought out and may have even contributed to notions of man’s ability to conquer and master Alpine spaces, first through journeys to

250 Kant §26.
251 Kant §28.
and through the Alps and later in the sports of mountain climbing and skiing, as will be discussed below. The shift that occurred during the Enlightenment and Romantic periods to a positive evaluation of mountain landscapes also occurred for conceptions of the forest, as more and more people resided in primarily urban areas. Along with a real and imagined nostalgia for natural spaces came representations of forests in literature and painting that provided the viewer or reader with thoroughly positive images of wilderness landscapes.

Within Europe, a transition took place during Romantic nationalism; at the same time that the Alps were being “discovered” as sources of transformative experiences and forests were being depicted as places for people to experience transformations physically, emotionally, and spiritually, the völkisch movement was gaining momentum in Germany. Within the discourse of Romantic nationalism, a cult developed around the notion of the German Urwald and the primacy of the German people to it.252 Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, who proclaimed in his famous Land und Leute (1854) that a Volk “could be attained only if it fused with the native landscape.”253 Riehl connected the character of the German people to the German forest. The environmental determinism that underpinned his argument was an integral aspect of his anti-Semitism and was appropriated by National Socialist ideology. Because Jews were not considered “people of the forest,” they were assumed to lack the vital qualities present in those who were. His personal conceptions of

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nature contributed to more than just philosophical, political, and historical agendas. He recognized an aesthetic and personal importance in experiences possible in wilderness:


No longer was wilderness a place to escape, avoid, or cultivate, but rather it had become a place that people actively sought in order to have positive transformative experiences, a tradition which continues in the rhetoric of wilderness preservation today.

The notion that wilderness provides its visitors with transformative experiences still carries cultural weight. The religious tradition of wilderness ideas has not completely lost its value even in the secularization of modernity. For example, Ansel Adams specifically attempted to create a spiritual experience in his work through images of uninhabited nature; he once told the National Park Service that he photographed Yosemite in a specific way in order to promote “a religious idea.” He also believed, “In the last analysis, Half Dome is just a piece of rock . . . there is some deep personal distillation of spirit and concept that moulds these earthly facts into some transcendental emotional and spiritual experience.”

Besides Adams’ notion that wilderness has no inherent meaning (outside of that provided by humans through their experiences with it),

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254 Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, *Kulturgeschichtliche Carakterköpfe* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1891) 56. I use Riehl as an example of the shifting, but also problematic, nature of valuing the idea of environmental influence, or the inseparable connection between a “people” and their “landscape.” Riehl’s philosophy was vehemently anti-Semitic, and was appropriated for National Socialist exclusionary policies and the Holocaust. The connection between landscape and a people, for instance the American notion of Manifest Destiny, also resulted in racism, exclusion, and relocation or murder of native peoples. See John Hausdoerffer, *Caitlin’s Lament: Indians, Manifest Destiny, and the ethics of Nature* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2009).

his statement embodies the idea that images of raw nature need to be presented in an aesthetically pleasing way in order for the viewer to have a positive reaction to it.

Leisure activities in wilderness areas, which provide transformative experiences, are a common theme in Austrian literature. Hunting, skiing, and mountain climbing are some of the main sources of interaction with wilderness and provide opportunities for transformative experiences. The tradition of hunting in the Austrian empire for both sustenance and for sport contributes to current commonplace notions of wilderness. Like other forms of interaction with nature, hunting has changed historically. Schama notes that “unlike some modern ecological sensibilities, the old epics of the forest were not squeamish about the kill, experiencing it as a consummation, not a desecration, of woodland nature.”

Wilderness areas are often places to which hunters travel, where they kill wild animals, and from which they return to more civilized areas. Historians have shown, however, that hunting areas have rarely been truly wild since the early modern period. Both Thomas and Schama claim that hunting areas were connected to the economic stability of the local towns, and royal hunting areas were often highly artificial in nature.

In the Austrian context, for example, the Oak-Reserve Johannser Kogel in the Wienerwald included a hunting ground as early as 1457, and soon thereafter a wall was built around it. The wall guaranteed the royal family and their guests exclusive rights to the space and was thought to protect the area from the encroachment of civilization, thus creating a wild atmosphere for hunting.

In reality, though, the wall greatly changed the flora and fauna found in the area and, because of the great increase in deer

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256 Schama 60.
and wild boar kept safe from wolves and other prey, the hunting ground became more of a game reserve than wilderness. This area evolved into the Lainzer Tierpark and became a public wildlife preserve only after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The restricted use and containment of certain natural areas for hunting and other sport also means disallowing “natives” of those areas from using the lands exclusively. In the American context, the creation of preserved and contained areas quite often involved the forced relocation of both nomadic and settled Native Americans.

Hunting also leads to a gendering of wilderness. Because of the association between hunting for sport and male aggression and domination, as Jelinek makes evident in her text *Gier*, wilderness has been considered a gendered environment, or space intended for use by men exclusively or for those who wish to display stereotypically masculine qualities. It can serve as a place where men temporarily shed the gloss of civilization to return to more primeval state and act upon their animalistic urges. This commonplace notion of the value of physical wilderness may have even led to its preservation. For example, the notorious big-game hunter Teddy Roosevelt urged the establishment of set-aside areas for men to retain, or even regain, their “manliness” by “roughing it” in the wilderness. Without these opportunities, he feared, men would become too effeminate because of the social order of civilized American culture. This is not to say that he did not also support the preservation of animals and have a strong

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love of birds. Publically, however, his rhetoric displayed a “hyper-macho image that protected him from any charge of sentimentality.”

The tradition of hunting as a display of skill and power over wild beasts, as evidence of personal wealth, and as a leisure activity informs contemporary views of athletics. Outdoor sports play an important role in providing people with secular and religious transformative experiences in wilderness areas and landscapes. Sports have even to some extent evolved out of the process of hunting and have also been seen as developing out of training for war. Sport enthusiasts engaging in hiking, surfing, skiing, and other outdoor activities often refer to quasi-spiritual experiences as an alluring aspect of their activities, as has been discussed above in terms of mountain climbing and the experience of the Sublime. Sports can assist in forging an individual’s identity by providing physical challenges and transformative experiences. Most relevant for the discussion of wilderness in contemporary Austrian literature is the role that sports have played in forging a national self-identity for Austria.

In the previous section, I have outlined the various secular and non-secular opportunities for transformative experiences in wilderness areas and the positive aesthetic opportunities provided by wilderness landscapes as a historical narrative in which negative commonplace notions transitioned into positive ones. This positive valuation reached a peak in the nineteenth century in literature and art, and commonplace ideas

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were employed by artists and writers to express positive wilderness experiences. These traditional notions have been appropriated by contemporary Austrian authors for their own political, social, and artistic goals. Below, I will discuss in detail how commonplace notions of transformative experiences in nature inform these modern works.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Jelinek’s novel *Oh Wildnis, Oh Schutz vor ihr* presents wilderness as a commodity that provides profit for a small group of individuals under the guise of an open space and protected area. Jelinek criticizes the tendency of poets to praise nature solely for its positive qualities, a tradition that she sees as stemming from the early Romantic period. The narrator, in the second section of *Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr*, titled “Innen. Tag. Keine Geschichte zu erzählen,” cynically views aesthetic experiences of wilderness represented in art. The main character of this section, the poet Frau Aichholzer, has never found literary fame on her own; now that her philosopher companion has died, her frustration at not becoming successful is even more evident. This character reveals and questions the importance of and possibility of aestheticizing nature. Frau Aichholzer wishes to aestheticize wilderness in her poetry, but the narrator stresses that establishing a semiotic relationship with nature in an original state is impossible even in art because such an original no longer exists. As the text switches from first person to third person narration, the reader is often lost as to whose voice or opinion is being expressed, and yet the narrator is able to set up a dialogue structure to ridicule the poet’s thoughts and views of nature and poetry:

The poet is blamed alongside the media and government for producing myths about Austria’s environmental reality. Frau Aichholzer is openly mocked by the narrator as the “[f]ette, alte Gedichtbäckerin, die Zucker auf den ruhig dahinfließenden Lebkuchen Natur pinselt” (99). Not only does the sugar sprinkled on nature make it that much sweeter, but by comparing baking to poetry writing, Jelinek takes all seriousness out of the project of creating art. Unlike the typical Austrian association with baking, Jelinek goes against the norm and presents it as a mechanistic task in which creativity and originality are not important, but rather is merely a matter of following a recipe and assuring the correctness of measurements. Neither the poet nor her art are aesthetically pleasing: “Unter dem stetigen Umrühren des Alters wird die Natur im Gedicht mit dem Original verglichen und sie selbst mit jüngeren Frauen” (97). The narrator compares the production of art to simply combining ingredients, and the art that is produced loses its reverence as something original.

Jelinek’s narrator is not interested in the mystification of nature in Aichholzer’s poetry, but rather she critiques poets who represent “archaische Natur” in their art, rather than the actual physical reality that exists in Austria. Yet, like the woodsman Erich, politicians, tourists, and athletes, the narrator laments that even the artist wishes to interact with nature for some type of personal profit, either monetary gain or personal gratification. She notes that the poet “möchte endlich von der Natur profitieren wie der dumme Wanderer” (96). Jelinek’s reference to Goethe’s Wanderers Nachtlied serves two purposes here; first, she gives an example of idyllic nature poetry in which nature is
reduced to its base forms, and second, she questions the notion implied in Goethe’s poem that human experiences in nature are limited to spiritual awakenings or epiphanies. The narrator countermands this idea by describing the emotional response to nature as extremely mechanistic: “Sie dreht an ihren zarten Knöpfen, und die Gefühle fließen. Die Dichterin stellt sich auf die Empfindung ein und beschreibt damit den Fels” (93). In juxtaposing the physicality of wilderness with the emotional response to it, the narrator demonstrates that Frau Aichholzer also has an ambiguous relationship to nature. She personifies nature: “Sie bildet als ihre ureigneste Aufgabe die Natur naturgetreu ab. Die Natur trägt einen gemeinsamen Anzug mit der Kunst, und so kann immer nur einer von den beiden vor Publikum auftreten“ (95). Jelinek argues that not only are realistic portrayals of nature impossible in a world that is dominated by images of reality in the media, but also that art has little chance of representing reality.\(^{263}\) The narrator identifies nature not only as threatening or overwhelming, but personifies “her” into a murderer:

> “Sie möchte nie sterben und bemüht sich, mit der Mörderin Natur gut zufuß sein und auszukommen” (93). Dying is also not natural, but rather an attack.

Both Frau Aichholzer and Erich depend on nature for their livelihood. Erich views it as a material commodity with an immediate exchange value. Aichholzer, in contrast, sees wilderness as an aesthetic commodity with a limited or nonexistent exchange value. The narrator makes evident the oversupply of nature poetry while discussing the publisher who will not publish Frau Aichholzer’s works: “Sie wird höflich gebeten, keine neuen Gedichte mehr einzusenden, solange die alten noch nicht verbraucht

\(^{263}\) Jelinek’s vision of the artist’s (in)ability to represent reality is the topic of her Nobel Prize for Literature (2004) speech “Im Abseits.”
sind” (96-97). Frau Aichholzer resents the fact that she cannot exchange natural landscapes for profit.

A large number of wilderness areas in the Alps have been converted to ski resorts and used specifically for tourism. Jelinek claims that the conversion of these physical spaces economically benefits a select few and becomes an accessory in the cover-up of Austria’s complicity in National Socialism. The narrator recognizes that wilderness areas are now sought out for recreational purposes: “Vor Furcht sieht einer die Natur nicht mehr, es geht so steil bergab, er sieht nur ihre Bezwinger in den Vorarbeiterjankern. Die junge Frau fühlt sich von der Landschaft nicht belästigt, sie hat früh klettern gelernt” (49). Jelinek’s texts support the argument that the appropriation of Austrian areas for leisure and sport has contributed to a collective amnesia. This “forgetting” is described in Oh Wildnis, Oh Schutz vor ihr as a competition itself, thus making both sport and complicity in the acts of National Socialism an important element of Austrian identity: “Es begann eine Weltmeisterschaft im Vergessen, die wir zuerst im Wintersport, und zwar mit der Note Eins gewonnen haben. Keiner wird je unsere unsterblichen Schisiege bei der Olympiade (der Toni Sailer) vergessen!” (153).

According to Matthias Konzett, Jelinek’s texts have shown that the illusion of collective identity, that figured so prominently in fascist ideology . . . has not been critically and fundamentally questioned. It has merely been displaced onto the consumer who lays claim to a distorted sense of community by obsessively substituting leisure for reflection, spectacle for history and amnesia or melancholy for mourning.264

In addition, the transformation of wilderness into resorts and leisure areas in Austria are marketed to consumers as a way to experience a new type of nature “spirituality:” “Was

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264 Konzett 115.
soll das eigentlich heißen: die Natur besiegen oder besingen? Wo sieht man heir noch Natur? Nicht einmal genügend für die Dichtkunst ist vorhanden. Wo ist hier Natur wie die Dichtung sie strengstens verzerrt sieht, aber teuer verkaufen möchte?” (121). Jelinek draws attention to a tendency in postmodernism to discount culture and what it has provided: “Dieses Finkelkind Kultur, jawohl, keiner will es, jeder glaubt, er hat es ohnedies zum Milchholen geschickt (er hat schließlich noch mehr zu gebähren!), aus jeder Familie wird es gleich wieder weggeschickt, um sich zu Fuß draußen in der Wildnis zu bewähren” (138). By inverting the common Rousseausque image of nature being threatened by culture, Jelinek shows that culture and its art is becoming more and more threatened by the principles of wilderness, for example concepts like survival of the fittest and the need to prove oneself and distinguish oneself above others. This idea finds its fullest expression, according to Jelinek, in sport.

Several Austrian authors have employed sports in their texts as an impetus to express their cultural-political critique of Austrian society. Jelinek’s In den Alpen and Ein Sportstück (1998), Franzobel’s Olympia: eine Kärntner Zauberposse samt Striptease, and Marlene Streeruwitz’s Sapporo (2002) are some examples. There may also be an increase in the use of sporting imagery in current Austrian political rhetoric. Allyson Fiddler makes the significant point that sports not only contribute to the Austrian national identity, but Austrian sporting events, particularly skiing, have provided “an excellent photo opportunity for politicians and other ‘Prominente’ to be photographed and filmed amongst the young, fit sportsmen and women and be associated with the many successes.

of the Austrian team.” In addition, sporting events provide a substitute experience for those who are either unwilling or unable to engage in sports themselves. The increase of nationally and internationally broadcast sporting events since the 1950s has not only allowed for viewers to have vicarious experiences, but has also created an economic value for sports, which can now be broadcast to millions of viewers.

Armin Thurnher describes sport as a constitutive factor in the Austrian people’s image of themselves and argues that Austrians need compatriots to represent them in conquering their landscape. The Großglockner, for example, can be seen as a kind of mythical object in the Barthesian sense. It is not simply Austria’s highest mountain but acquires a “second order” or “mythical” cultural meaning: “Österreich ist Alpenland.” Thurnher explains, “. . . Den Berg besiegen heißt, sich über den Alltag zu erheben, das Leben, ja das Land zu bezwingen.” Mountains, argues Fiddler, can be read as “indomitable high peaks and yet clearly, as the photographs prove, also as peaks that can be conquered, and the Austrian or Austrians who do so stand pars pro toto for the mountain-loving Austrian nation.”

The connection between sport, wilderness, and politics in Austria became increasingly evident in the late 1980s and 1990s with the rise of the Austrian Freedom Party and the leadership of Jörg Haider. Often photographed in sportswear, Haider openly

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267 For example, the X Games were first introduced as a commercial venture by ESPN in 1995.
268 Roland Barthes’ collection Mythologies (1957) exposes how bourgeois society assigns myths and values to cultural materials beyond their semiotic meaning, calling them “second-order signs.” The term myth is used because often the “second-order” meaning ignores or obscures realities of a cultural material.
used his hobbies of running, skiing, and mountaineering as evidence that he was a potent and fit political leader. Yet skiing is not only a photo opportunity for celebrities and politicians, it is an important economic sector and cultural symbol of Austrianness:


Although Jelinek refers directly to Haider only rarely in her works, mountain sports in Austria, which hold cultural currency and economic profitability, are for Jelinek a manifestation of the need to conquer mountain landscapes and prove a fit and healthy body.²⁷³ *Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr* addresses the cultural importance of mountain sports in Austria, and above all, she claims sports promote the privileging of healthy bodies: “Pseudo-Sportbekleidung kann man sich einkaufen. Sie bildet die Schönheit der innerlichen Vorstellung von Olympiade ab (Sport! Sport! Herrlich. Die Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika, unsere Außenstelle!” (8). Barbara Kosta argues that the Austrian national body has inclusions and exclusions: “Particularly, the bodies of athletes are considered objects of national pride and identification, and provide an idealized image of the national self.”²⁷⁴ A distinguishing feature of popular Austrian sports, like skiing,
hiking, and mountaineering is their primarily individual character, thus allowing for the fetishization of the body on both the individual and national level.

The glorification of the sound human body that conquers wilderness through cultivation and domestication has long been an integral aspect of the Judeo-Christian heritage, as discussed above. Austrian politics and politicians’ self-presentation in the media has utilized this commonplace notion to project a certain image of strength and power. Jelinek finds it particularly offensive that this connotation of masculinity and “Feschismus” still carries currency in skiing and other mountain sports. Images of Haider standing upon the Grossglockner exemplify the cult of the fit body that Jelinek so adamantly critiques. Yet even before the rise of figures like Haider, Jelinek illuminates the misplaced importance of skiing and other mountain sports in Austria. In *Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr*, Erich’s sister’s has cancer, a wild growth of cells in the body. Once her body becomes weak, her kids are no longer interested in interacting with her, and they prefer to spend time exercising their own bodies in mountain sports: “Darf ich dieses Rennen noch mitfahren, Mama. Stirbst doch sowieso” (19). Not only is the mother excluded from these activities because of her weak and ill body, but the children have already dismissed her in favor of taking part in a skiing competition. Jelinek’s texts imply that wilderness areas are enjoyed by both the economically and physically privileged; if it is true that mountain sports are an integral aspect of national cultural identity, those who are unable to engage in such activities are excluded from an important

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276 For a longer treatment of this topic, see Allyson Fiddler, “Sport and National Identity in the New Austria.”
aspect of their own cultural identity. The exclusionary practices of National Socialism have not been erased in Austria according to Jelinek’s argument, but have only been shifted to new paradigms.

Sports and violence, including masculine violence against women, are never far apart in Jelinek’s texts. In *Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr*, a rape is described: “Die Wirtstochter wird nach Mitternacht auf die Kegelbahn geworfen, war später nur ein Scherz” (64). In this scene, violence, sex, and sport are conflated into one activity. The bowling alley is where competition and sport happen, but it is also leisure activity. In the end, though, the sexual act is described as neither intimate nor violent, but rather as a joke. The connection between sport and violence is evident in Jelinek’s other works as well, including *Ein Sportstück*. The play conceives of sport as battle performed publicly, where the players lose body parts during the match. Jelinek uses hyperbole to demonstrate her discontent with a system that praises physical fitness over intellect or emotion, that encourages sexism, racism, and classicism, and that injures athletes and spectators both physically and culturally.

Jelinek’s play *In den Alpen* also displays a strong connection between sport and violence. The play is based on the mountain train tunnel accident in the city of Kaprun in 2000, when 155 skiers were killed due to a fire in the funicular. This incident is an opportunity for Jelinek to question the value of conquering wilderness landscapes as an important aspect of individual and national identity in Austria. The characters are either victims or rescuers, and while their dialogue is prompted by the events during and after the tragedy, the cultural and moral questions they raise are not limited to the specifics of the actual incident.
Jelinek blames the disaster on the train manufacturers who were able to use inexpensive products during construction because of loose safety codes concerning funiculars and ski lifts. The dramatization features victims of the accident, including a young girl, another child, a mountain climber, and an older woman, who converse with rescue workers as they remove bodies and body parts from the accident. The play concentrates on themes that are prevalent in Jelinek’s other work; interaction with wilderness through tourism and a natural Alpine landscape that conceals Austria’s National Socialist past, the traces of fascist thought still present in modern Austria, and the role of the media and the power of language in influencing society.

One of the key themes of the play is the length that ski resort owners will go in order to make a profit. Jelinek claims this is often at the expense of human life. Fiddler argues that the very “lust for destruction that the Greeks and Nietzsche claim sport prevents” is precisely what sport encourages, according to Jelinek. Sport is not a civilizing agent, as some sociologists have suggested, but is a result of training for war, and the inherent violence and disregard for loss of life in battle remains in sport for competition and for leisure. The funicular disaster in *In den Alpen* amplifies this point.

Jelinek appropriates the language of media and turns it against itself. She describes the incident with exacting words and distancing techniques with food metaphors like “Schmelzkäsekleidung.” Jelinek shows the trivialization of events in their news coverage because of their placement between “Familienserien und Talkshows,” thus asking the audience to question the validity of such sources (11). Her rhetoric in this

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text has a similar foundational premise to that in *Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr*, in which the narrator laments that the “real” has been replaced by “Das Echte von Bildschirm.” The play draws attention to the artificiality of events covered by the media and to the positive press such a disaster and its aftermath affords public figures and others “... die beinahe in die Kameras schluchzen, indem sie nicht zu wissen vorgeben, daß es Kameras sind, vor denen sie da so furchtbar weinen” (20). Even more radically, the play suggests that all forms of report are to be distrusted, including the play itself: “Trauen Sie diesem Geschriebenen nicht, man weiß ja nicht, von wo es herstammt” (16). The text exposes Austria’s concealment of the past, along with its rebuilding of itself as a nation for the personal gain of very few at the expense of the masses. In the same way that the skiers attempt to dominate the natural landscape, the national need for an image of pristine wilderness results in a type of “real” wildness, in which those involved in the business of tourism will do whatever it takes to turn an economic profit.

Discussion of the supposed benefits or ills of tourism must be viewed as part of a longer tradition in which aestheticism was a particularly important aspect of travel. As discussed above, the theory of the Sublime contributed to hordes of tourists traveling to Austria and Switzerland to experience the beauty of the Alps firsthand. Alongside this tradition, the spa culture of Austria has been the setting for many Austrian works and contributes to conceptions of wilderness. Although the spa resort was initially seen as a place of respite and healing for the upper classes, spas such as Marienbad became a Mecca of tourist activity in the late nineteenth century.²⁷⁸ Marienbad was a heavily

²⁷⁸ Marienbad is now called Mariánské Lázně.
populated spa town, and the mountains surrounding the various resorts provided wild nature for the town’s visitors to explore.

Stifter’s short story Der Waldsteig exemplifies many of the commonplace notions of the benefits of wilderness areas and landscapes in the nineteenth century. Nature functions as a vehicle in Der Waldsteig that enhances the characters’ emotions and teaches the protagonist new ways of looking at the world. In Stifter’s novella Brigitta (1844), the protagonist Stephan Murai transitions from a passionate man, unable to love in the way that is demanded of him, into a reasonable, ordered man who is then capable of “Gattenliebe.” Stifter presents an inversion of this course in Der Waldsteig. Tiburius, an emotionless young man constrained by cold reasoning, turns into a loving, passionate man. Stifter insists that self-control is vital to the personal development of a person. Yet an excess of self-control paired with no emotion can be detrimental to that development. Stifter advocates a balance in human life that should match the order found in nature; yet there is also room and necessity for disorderly and wild aspects of life, shown in romantic love as passion. Wilderness becomes a figurative device that reinforces Stifter’s dichotomy between reason and passion, and will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Tiburius is a wealthy man who grew up under terrible circumstances. His parents shower him with presents and care for his physical needs, but he is unable to understand the idea of love because they show him little emotion. As a small boy, he is so confused about his personal relationships that “er [nahm] alle Male den Stiefelknecht seines Vaters, wikelte ihn in saubere Windel ein, und trug ihn herum und herzte ihn” (148).

279 Brigitta will be treated more fully in Chapter 4.
Although he learns the rule of “Bürgertum” and cultivation, he is unable to find a suitable wife. Tiburius compensates for the void in his life, and attempts to overcome his isolation by buying material objects. Tiburius must admit that his collection and love of material things has become an illness, and “[e]ndlich mußte er sich es eingestehen, daß er krank sei.” He is intelligent, rational, and organized to a fault. If it is rationality in ritualized form that has made Tiburius sick, it should be the wildness of nature that cures him, according to the dialectic Stifter has set up in his didacticism. But Tiburius retreats to his home, and “nach einiger Zeit ging er überhaupt nicht mehr aus dem Hause . . .” (154). He travels to a spa because of his physical ailments, but he stays close to the spa grounds. He views the mountains through a telescope: “Er hatte sich auch an seinem Fensterstoke ein Fernrohr angeschraubt, und betrachtete durch selbes öfter die närrischen Berge . . .” (167). Tiburius is able to view the landscape, but he does not directly experience it. The distanced view has no effect on him, and only after he experiences the forest and mountain’s ability to confuse and mislead him does he gain a different understanding of his natural surroundings. Viewing the landscape from afar does not have the ability to transform him in the same way that experiencing the forest and mountains first-hand does.

The protagonist takes daily walks on the edge of the forest on the spa doctor’s advice, and only explores the surrounding area on a whim. As Tiburius continues into the forest, “Nun wurde er ängstlich,” (173) and he realizes he is lost: “da gehen die Leute nicht gerne herauf, weil es so wild ist, und darum wußtet ihr nicht, wo ihr seid“ (178). He

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is so nervous and agitated that he starts to run: “Tiburius fing nun, was er seit seiner
Krankheit nicht mehr gethan hatte, zu rennen an, und rannte auf dem Pfade in höchster
Eile . . .” (174). The more nervous Tiburius becomes and the more scared he feels, the
stranger the forest appears to him; the trees “strekten sich immer höher und wilder” and
“auf manchem Moossteine lag ein schrekhaft blizendes Gold” (175). To anyone familiar
with the forest or the path that Tiburius takes, the trees would not have been described as
“wild,” and the mossy stones certainly would not be “frightful.” Tiburius not only feels
lost, but the forest is unknown and unreasonable to him. Tiburius had always relied on
others to solve his problems, making this situation truly new and alarming: “Er war nie in
der Lage gewesen, sich aus solchen Sachen heraus finden zu müssen, und seine Noth war
groß” (175). It is no accident then that a “Holzknecht” leads Tiburius out of the forest, as
these characters represent opposing poles in their view of wilderness. The woodcutter
feels completely comfortable and at home in the forest, a territory that threatens Tiburius
but provides the woodcutter’s living. He cultivates and uses the woods for his own profit,
thus demystifying it, something Tiburius must still learn to do. After he does so, he is
proud of himself: “Herr Tiburius . . . lächelte sich hinein, und war recht vergnügt, daß er
in dem großen Walde gewesen sei und das Abenteuer bestanden habe” (184). Like
Gilgamesh who is “revitalized” by being on the path no one has ever traveled, Herr
Tiburius undergoes a renewal through his solitude in the forest and is transformed
through his experiences in nature.

The narrator in Der Waldsteig explicitly states that Tiburius will be changed
through his encounters with nature: “Das Alles ist er durch nichts Mehreres und nichts
Minderes geworden, als durch einen einfachen Waldsteig; denn Herr Tiburius war früher
ein sehr grosser Narr . . .” (148). Much like Jelinek, Stifter references locations in the Austrian landscape that elicit in the reader certain ideas and emotions that are assumed to be part of a shared national identity: “Mancher, der in unserm Vaterlande und in unsern Gebirgen bewandert ist, wird auch, wenn er überhaupt diese Zeilen liest, den Waldsteig sogleich erkennen, und wird sich mancher Gefühle erinnern, die ihm der Steig eingeflössst hat, wenn er auf ihm wandelte . . .” (148). The associations assumed of the reader allow Stifter to forward his didactic agenda. As Tiburius gets lost in the wilderness, the reader should empathize with his fear but should also understand that the forest can provide one with positive experiences: “Er wußte nicht, daß es allen, die Wälder besuchen, so gehe. Jedes folgende Mal sind sie klarer und verständlicher, bis sie dem Besucher endlich zu einer Schönheit und Freude werden” (183). Once the fear of the unknown is overcome, Tiburius repeatedly visits the woodcutter and falls in love with his daughter, who is praised by the narrator for her simplicity. The spa, although thought of as a place of healing, does nothing for the man. He must literally lose himself, be forced to face his own fears, and come to know a “daughter of nature” in order to understand true love. Authors such as Jelinek and Menasse attempt to undermine or question precisely the representation of these types of transformative experiences.

Menasse’s novel *Schubumkehr* can be read as a critique of romantic and idealistic notions of the benefits of direct encounters with nature. Even though the green tourists

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281 Thomas Mann’s *Zauberberg* (1924) provides a modern example of this. Hans Castorp, the central protagonist, spends several years in a Waldsanatorium in the Swiss Alps. In the sub-chapter entitled “Schnee,” Castorp gets lost in the snow and blacks out. This experience allows him some clarity, though; it is at this point that he has an epiphany and takes a position on the question of what is important in one’s existence (686). Although he returns to the Sanatorium with a clarified outlook, this is short-lived. Unlike the protagonist of *Der Waldsteig*, whose sojourn in the wilderness allows him a life-long transformation and the ability to experience the highest form of love, Castorp remains essentially unchanged. The novel ends with his entry as a soldier into World War I, presumably pointing to his death.
that the townspeople wish to attract yearn for “authentic” experiences in pristine and untouched nature, the reality is that the “wild” nature they encounter is constructed by the town to be pleasing to them, as discussed in Chapter 2. Tourism scholar Dean MacCannell theorizes that tourists pursue real and authentic experiences, but are prevented from doing so by the conventions cemented in the tourist industry like the tourists’ preferred presentation of constructed spaces and “false-backs,” areas that appear to be authentic but are actually constructed in order to appear authentic.\footnote{Dean MacCannell, \textit{The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class} (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), quoted in Erik Cohen, “The Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences,” \textit{The Sociology of Tourism: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations} (London/New York: Routledge, 1996) 91.}

The assumption that all tourists are looking for similar experiences, despite differences in class, sex, age, and ethnic backgrounds is certainly problematic, but Menasse appears aware of the dialectic between tourist and host and exposes and criticizes it in the text.

The green tourists consider their experiences in Komprechts to be authentic and despite the highly constructed quality of the environment, it will not degrade aesthetically and spiritually transformative experiences but will in fact enhance these experiences. Tourists from urban areas, in particular, are interested in having authentic experiences in wilderness areas and landscapes because of the perceived extreme distancing effects of modernity. During a conversation with the marketing agent, who will design a tourism brochure for the town, the mayor of Komprechts learns what the tourists want: “... keine Hotelneubau, nur Privatzimmer, sanfter Tourismus, Wanderwege, Erlebniswanderwege, meinenwegen Kräuterwanderwege, Lehrwanderwege, Radwanderwege” (99). Tourists leave the city for a short time, seeking aesthetic and spiritual experiences, relaxation, and moral and mental rejuvenation: “Sie wollen
Abgescheideheit, aber Sie wollen doch auch Annehmlichkeiten . . .” (128). They are also interested in having the infrastructure to which they are accustomed in their urban lives.

Both Baudrillard and Eco use the concept of “hyperreality” to describe the simulation of reality that is present in technically advanced postmodern societies, as discussed in Chapter 2. This concept is helpful in understanding the perceptions of green tourists described in Menasse’s novel. As described above, the commonplace notion of leaving civilization and traveling into the wild to experience spiritually or aesthetically transformative experiences, to re-invigorate oneself for the trials of civilization, has a long history. The tourists who come to Komprechts seek to connect wilderness and civilization in a highly artificial setting. And yet, like the classical and biblical trope of sojourns in the wilderness for mental, moral, and spiritual restoration, the stay is only a short one. Because of the established conventions of the tourist industry, the experience will not be authentic.

According to Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreality, the tourists are no longer prepared to recognize or accept authentic nature because of the daily influences of television, movies, and social and cultural images of wilderness. These images secure themselves in consciousness as reality, but no longer hold any connection to the original. Tourists find themselves in a state of hyperreality and what they understand as real or authentic has been constructed from images and signs. Like Jelinek’s argument that the image of wilderness as presented in the media and in cultural propaganda conceals reality, Menasse posits that tourists are unable to appreciate nature unless it is constructed.
The marketing agent with whom the mayor works is already keenly aware that images create the fantasy experiences tourists have come to expect. The tourists do not want true wilderness like that experienced by only the most skilled and adventurous, but rather a modified nature, a “gestrafften Busen der Natur” (128). The agent takes advantage of the hyperreal social conditions within which the tourists find themselves by using brochures full of images; he is forced to operate within this system. For example, the agent proposes to use the picture of a mushroom in the brochure: “Zu Fliegenpilzen assoziiert doch jeder Betrachter sofort verwunschene Märchenwelt, Hexen und Feen . . .” (123). The mayor rejects this suggestion because he knows that the mushroom in the picture is poisonous. He fears that people will pick it along the trails that are to be built for the tourists. The magical and fantastical quality of the image, however, is more important to the marketing agent than the deadly reality. As the tourists view these images, they imagine a magical and mystical world. These thoughts are no longer just associations but have become reality themselves. The agent describes to the mayor how such images can operate: “Und das Idyllische dieses Foto wird noch verstärkt durch den Hochsitz da im Hintergrund . . . Denn der Tourist weiß, wo ein Hochsitz ist, da kann man jederzeit mit Tieren rechnen” (129). A hunting blind is intended for observing, enjoying and identifying birds and wildlife, and it also symbolizes the domination humans pursue over other life forms. It is no coincidence, then, that “die neuen Hochsitze standen in so geringem Abstand nebeneinander, daß der Eindruck einer Wachturmreihe entstand” (141). Unlike Stifter, whose protagonist must undergo a transformative experience in the mountain forest, the tourists of Komprechts are unable to have such a transformation.
They wish for the supposed benefits of experiencing the Sublime, yet the power of media and constructed realities inhibit them from accomplishing this.

Christoph Ransmayr is also concerned with modes of domination. His texts acknowledge the domination that western science affords its participants, as a system employed to gain knowledge of the world in a way that contrasts with other ways of knowing, like emotional and spiritual knowledge. Many environmentalists, philosophers, and historians hold that western science’s marriage to Christian theology is responsible for much of the domination and exploitation of the natural world. The cold rationalism of modern science has been blamed as the cause of much destruction of the natural world, as Lynne White, Jr. famously claimed in his controversial *Science* article “The Historic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” (1967). Ransmayr’s texts explore, on the other hand, the potential of the natural world to destroy its inhabitants. His first published work, *Strahlender Untergang: Eine Entwässerungsprojekt oder Die Entdeckung des Wesentlichen* (1982), is concerned with a new type of science that will replace traditional science, which has turned the world into “eine unübersehbare Ansammlung/ von Gegenständen der Beobachtung,/ der Definition,/ der Nachahmung,/ Beherrschung/ und Manipulation” (16). Within the text, scientists fail to notice their own destructive force in the process of gaining knowledge and the loss of individuality in modern existence. The proposed “Neue[n] Wissenschaft” will allow people to organize their own destruction in a desert terrarium. The new science proposes to give meaning to individual existence.

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283 See also Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” *Science* (13 Dec. 1968); Anne and Paul Ehrlich, eds *Population, Resources, Environment* (San Francisco: Freeman, 1972); Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle* (New York: Knopf, 1971). The weight different authors give to the factors which might be responsible for the ecological crisis, including modern science, modern technology, agriculture, and the Western mentality of unchecked progress, vary immensely.
through self-destruction: “... unter Entzug aller Ablenkung zu/ entwässern, damit es wenigstens/ im raschen Verlauf seines Untergangs/ zum ersten Mal Ich sagen kann?/ Ich, und dann nichts mehr” (36). Ultimately this project fails, however, as the project volunteers become disillusioned with “Neue Wissenschaft.” Ransmayr takes up the quest to negotiate the poles of rational and non-rational interaction with the world in the text *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis*.

The journals of the expedition leaders Payer and Weyprecht, along with the narrator’s commentary on those entries and his factual knowledge of their trip, can be categorized as “nature writing.” John Elder defines nature writing as “a form of the personal, reflective essay grounded in attentiveness to the natural world and an appreciation of science but also to the spiritual meaning and intrinsic value of nature.”

Payer and Weyprecht’s nature writing reveals their spiritual, emotional, and aesthetic interaction with nature, while adhering to a notion of science grounded within the prevailing political, social, and spiritual ideologies of their time. Although Payer is labeled by the narrator as “Entdecker” and Weyprecht as “Forscher,” both relay artistic representations of their experiences and express them in highly aestheticized ways (125). Ultimately, whatever positive evaluation they give of their interaction with nature, especially aesthetic appreciation, and what can be called their “ecological” view of nature will be clouded and deformed by political goals and the teleological notion of progress through reason and rational science. Payer and Weyprecht’s notions of science differ, and the narrator often critiques their interaction with their natural surroundings. The eventual

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disillusionment of both Payer and Weyprecht suggests that their goals of gaining new lands for the Austro-Hungarian Empire and furthering scientific knowledge interfere with their ability to have positive transformative experiences. Basing a judgment on both the expedition member’s experiences and the protagonist Mazzini’s thwarted attempts to trace their path, the narrator suggests a humbler interaction with nature.

As the twenty-six members of the “österreichische-ungarische Nordpolexpedition” leave Vienna by train, Payer reflects on his and what he assumes to be the other members’ feelings about the trip and the goal of their mission: “Ein Gefühl aber belebt Alle, das Bewußtsein, daß wir, in einem Kampf für wissenschaftliche Ziele, der Ehre unseres Vaterlandes dienen, und daß man unsern Schritten daheim mit regster Antheilnahme folgt” (32). Payer contends that he is serving the Austro-Hungarian Empire with a mission of scientific discovery, but his interactions with the natural landscape are more mythical and romantic in their representation than scientifically rationalist. As he encounters the Arctic and expresses his ideas about how to properly interact with it, he displays notions somewhere between empiricist science and secularized religion. While Payer may have thought of his journal entries and sketches as an accurate representation of his interaction with the Arctic, contemporary assessment of them reveals a view influenced by traditional conceptions and romantic aestheticism of the natural surroundings.

The land Payer hopes to discover emerges in his imagination as a utopian idyll and does not resemble the Arctic he had already seen during his earlier missions. Payer describes how he believes this land will look: “Seine Thäler dachten wir uns damals mit Weiden geschmückt und von Renthieren belebt, welch im ungestörten Genuß ihrer
Freistätte weilen, fern von allen Feinden” (33). Despite his many publications on geography, cartography, and arctic exploration, Payer’s romantic imaginings and political aims cloud a reasonable assessment. Payer, relying on aesthetic conventions from nineteenth century literature and art, imagines a paradise island amongst ice. What he encounters, however, is very different:

Unbeschreibliche Einsamkeit liegt über diesen Schneegebirgen . . . Wir hören von dem feierlichen Schweigen des Waldes, einer Wüste, selbst einer in Nacht gehüllten Stadt. Aber welch ein Schweigen liegt über einem solchen Lande und seinen kalten Gletschergebirgen, die in unerforschlichen duftigen Fernen sich verlieren, und deren Dasein ein Geheimniß zu bleiben scheint für alle Zeiten . . . (33)

Payer describes a place that defies the conventions of human language; the silence here is “indescribable.” By referencing some of the most popular themes of romantic poetry, for example silent hills, desert, and night, Payer wishes to break with the notion that artistic aesthetic evaluation is possible for this landscape. He believes a poet’s words cannot encapsulate the Arctic, and his experiences are also too powerful for the rational language of the scientist. Therefore, it “must remain a mystery for all time.” Payer attempts to understand the Arctic without artistic conventions, but ultimately fails. He relies on literary and mythical tropes of interaction with nature, thus causing disillusionment with his goals.

Payer, it turns out, fails to even politically exploit the natural world in the way he had hoped, and he eventually becomes disillusioned with the goal of conquering new territories in the polar region. This is foreshadowed by the disillusionment of the sailors who have never before been to these areas. Despite Weyprecht’s description of the polar lands as “trostlos” and “tödtend,” the “Einfältigen” are unable to imagine anything
beyond their previous conquering missions. Payer, who at times succumbs to the same romanticization of the arctic world, can still “enlighten” them: “Mit schmerzlicher Enttäuschung wurde die Lage und der Unwerth von ‘Nordpolen’ vernommen, daß es kein Land sei, kein zu eroberndes Reich, nichts als Linien, die sich in einem Punkte schneiden, und wovon nichts in der Wirklichkeit zu sehen sei!” (37). The expedition members’ ability to enjoy emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic experiences in the Arctic is hampered by their unrealistic expectations. The sailors are enmeshed in a mythical history of exploration and discovery. The exotic they imagine is that of “die Küsten Amerikas und Indiens,” and their notions of conquering new lands cannot be separated from the histories and stories they have heard or told themselves. Even though Payer anticipates the hardships of the journey, the disenchantment shown by the sailors also alludes to the “Irrtum” of the endeavor as a whole and the inability of them to reach their goal of “furthering knowledge.” Payer writes in his journal:


Payer recognizes the fault of being driven by individual ambition, but he clings to the idea that we further “our knowledge” of the world by discovering new lands. He compares it to a Sisyphian task: “Jeder Handgriff eine Sisyphusarbeit, sagt Payer. Sisyphus?, fragen sie. Dem ist ergangen wie uns, sagt Payer” (138). Like Sisyphus rolling
his boulder up the hill with the hubristic belief that he can outwit the gods, Payer believes that humans control their own progress without influence by natural laws. Payer recognizes the vanity of man’s pursuit of knowledge and feels that the struggle suffices to give meaning to his existence.

Like Payer, Weyprecht recognizes the need for emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic experiences in wilderness, but he understands their mission differently. He is primarily concerned with science and with the furthering of knowledge and seems less invested in the political goals of the Empire. The science experiments he hopes to carry out follow the tradition of the nineteenth century explorer-scientist Alexander von Humboldt, whose studies of the Americas significantly influenced the nature writing of Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Walt Whitman.285 Humboldt rejected the pure empiricism of enlightened Rationalism and German Idealism, and he also rejected the overly sentimental descriptions of the Romantics. Weyprecht also attempts to find a balance between two poles:

Um sich für die Natur zu begeistern, ist es nicht nötig, ein Stubengelehrter zu sein, der in den Staubfäden der Blume nur das Zeichen ihrer Classe, in dem Insecte das Objekt für das Mikroskop und in dem Berge den Stein erblickt-man braucht auf der andere Seite aber auch keineswegs ein sentimentaler Enthusiast zu sein, den das Glitzern der Sterne in Entzücken versetzt und der in seiner Schalen Bewunderung der Majestät des Blitzes vielleicht von den weigen Gesetzen nicht weiß, nach welchen die Natur Alles regelt. In der Erforschung der Räthsel, mit welchem sie uns umgiebt, kommt das Streben des denkenden Menschen nach Fortschritt zum vollsten Ausdrucke. (94-5)

Weyprecht not only pursues cold science, but also appreciates the Arctic for its inherent qualities and power. Weyprecht perceives nature as an independent whole and self-

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satisfying system that is unaffected by human intervention: “In tieffster lautloser Stille geht Alles vor sich, jeder Ton ist verstummt, die Natur selbst scheint den Athem anzuhalten, in regungsloser Bewunderung ihres eigenes Werkes” (93). He finds this balance between the emotional and scientific in the dynamism of the natural world:

Wer die Natur wahrhaft bewundern will, der beobachte sie in ihren Extremen. In den Tropen, in ihrer vollsten Praht und Ueppigkeit, im strozten Sonntagskleide, über dessen Betrachtung man nur allzu leicht geneigt wird, den Kern zu übersehen – an den Polen in ihrer Nacktheit, die aber umso klarer und deutlicher den großartigen innern Bau hervortreten lässt. In den Tropen verliert sich das Auge in der Massenhaftigkeit der zu bewundernden Details, hier richtet es sich in Ermangelung dessen auf da imponirende Ganze, in Ermangelung des Productes auf die producirenden Kräfte. (95)

Spinoza’s concepts of *natura naturata*, or a passive product of nature, and *natura naturans*, or the self-causing aspects of nature, are important for Weyprecht’s assessment of the goal of observing nature. He is far more interested in the “Naturkräfte selbst” than in the products of nature. He attempts to remain scientific in his descriptions of the Arctic, but he, like Payer, succumbs to the poetic impulse and relies on metaphor and literary conventions in order to relate to his surroundings: “Der Kampf ruht zwischen den streitenden Mächten der Luft. Doch nur für kurze Zeit! Wie in Wuth über den frechen Eindringling, dem er das Feld geräumt, bricht dann der eisige Schneesturm aus Norden, die Geißel des arktischen Reisenden, mit verdoppelter Gewalt herein . . .” (134).

Weyprecht relates to the atmospheric changes that are occurring around him by anthropomorphizing the air and snowstorm. In order to clearly communicate his scientific observations to the public, he ascribes to the air with human emotions like “rage” and describes the snow storm as an “intruder.” More specifically, though, Weyprecht attributes his emotions to the natural landscape. The snowstorm is not an intruder in
natural terms, but poses a threat to the expedition members: “Die Luft is so erfüllt mit
Schnee, daß der Mensch nur mit abgewandtem Gesichte zu athmen vermag . . .” (134).
Weyprechṭ’s descriptions allude to human battles, and he can only understand the human
position in this environment as one of survival. He employs both mythical and biblical
language in his scientific descriptions: “Die Verkünder des Schneesturmes sind zumeist
im Sommer die Nebensonnen, im Winter die Nebenmonde” (135). This reference is
followed by a more scientific description of this natural phenomenon, but is introduced
with allusions to myth in order to be more relatable, suggesting that the more scientific
description is not enough for the reader to fully understand the snowstorm.

Weyprecht devalues the human constructions that have divided the earth into lines
and points. For the true scientist, these constructions have no effect on the results he
wishes to find. Weyprecht recognizes the natural environment as one that has its own
system of organization that resists the logical organization certain cultures have put onto
it. Weyprecht is uncomfortable with the notion that humans are in complete control and
domination of the natural world and with the primarily nationalistic goals that have
obscured the true pursuit of science: “Solange der nationalistische Ehrgeiz einer bloßen
Entdeckungsreise und die qualvolle Eroberung von Eiswüsten die Hauptmotive der
Forschung bleiben, sei kein Platz für die Erkenntnis” (241). Upon his return to Vienna,
Weyprecht admonishes the scientific community for hiding nationalistic goals behind the
guise of “true” science, and the text makes it clear that the power structures that exist
behind scientific research have not really changed by the time Mazzini enters the Arctic:
“Die Geologen entnehmen dem Eismeergrund unermüdlich Bodenproben und können ihr
Interesse an allfälligen Erdölvorkommen nur mühsam hinter der Reinheit der
Although nineteenth century nationalism has been replaced with twentieth century capitalism, the pursuit of “knowledge” is an ideology that has been used as a pretense for other motives.

In his description of the natural world, Weyprecht also looks for a balance between demystification and mystification, something that he feels is lost in the socially organized system of Vienna. Weyprecht’s comprehension of nature and the proper human interaction with it also wishes to find a space between the perceived split between culture and nature. While giving a recruitment speech, he discusses the terrible and destructive qualities of the Arctic that the sailors will encounter. His speech, however, takes a turn:

Das trostlose Einerlei einer arktischen Reise, die tödende Langweile der endlosen Nacht, die gräßliche Kälte, das sind eben die nach allen Seiten variirten Schlagworte, mit denen die Civilisation den armen Polarreisenden zu bedauern gewöhnt ist. Aber zu bedauren ist nur jener, der sich der Erinnerung and die Genüsse, die er verlassen hat, nicht erwehren kann . . . Ein Solcher thut besser, wenn er ruhig zu Hause bleibt . . . Für Denjenigen, den das Schaffen und Treiben der Natur interessirt, ist die Kälte nich so grimmig . . . Langweile fühlt aber nur der, welcher sie in sich selbst trägt und der nicht im Stande ist, die Beschäftigung zu finden, welche den Geist davon abhält, sich brütend das eigene Elend selbst zu schaffen. (11)

Weyprecht recognizes both the danger of boredom one can feel in an overly demystified culture and also the danger a natural world distinguished by chaos and destruction has for civilized society. This topic is then taken up in the character Mazzini, who also feels the isolation and meaninglessness of his life in Vienna. And while Mazzini departs on his journey in order to find some type of authentic relationship with the world, it is only upon their return to Vienna that Payer and Weyprecht become disillusioned with their goals of discovering new lands and furthering their knowledge of the natural world through science.
Ransmayr’s characters in his other novels show a similar concern with civilization. Their motivation to travel is not only for a certain amount of glory that will be bestowed upon them by their societies, but also because of tiredness with overly organized civilization and uneasiness in their culture. Cotta, the protagonist of *Die Letzte Welt*, follows the poet Naso to the edge of civilization not only because he would receive “... die Anerkennung für die Wiederentdeckung einer großen Poesie,” (130), but also because he “diese Reise wie alles, was er in seinem Leben bisher getan hatte, aus Langeweile unternahm” (131). Ransmayr juxtaposes the pursuit of a goal within the acceptable and praiseworthy definition of one’s society and a certain boredom with the confines and expectations of one’s culture. In a description of why people were leaving Rome in hordes after the installation of the new Emperor Augustus of *Die letzte Welt*, the narrator explains that people want to escape the “Apparatur der Macht” (112). They also flee, however,

... vor der Rekrutierung oder bloß vor der Langeweile eines bis in die lächerlichsten Pflichten vorgeschriebenen Staatsbürgertums. Weitab von der Symmetrie eines geordneten Lebens suchten sie irgendwo an den verwildernden Grenzen des Imperiums nach ihrer Selbstbestimmung oder auch den Bildern einer romantischen Phantasie, vor allem aber nach einem Leben ohne Aufsicht. (124)

Weyprech recognizes the human spirit’s need for mystification outside of the highly demystified modern world, but also recognizes that civilization tends to break down within the spaces in which it is most tested. Egon Schwarz, in analyzing a number of nineteenth century scientific texts, concludes:

Wir sind hier auf das zentrale Problem der ganzen modernen Epoche gestossen, die Ahnung von der totalen Autonomie der Natur, von der immer prekärer sich gestaltenden Position des Menschen im Weltall. Bei vielen steigert sie sich zu einer nihilistischen Furcht von der Überflüssigkeit des einzelnen bzw. vor seinem Angewiesensein auf sich selbst. Im Zusammenstoß mit einer exotischen,
Weyprecht’s search for meaning in an overly civilized world through a science that combines pure rationalism and romantic imaginings illuminates to him the precarious position of humanity in the natural world.

Daniel Kehlmann’s wildly popular novel *Die Vermessung der Welt* also interweaves historical fact and fiction to question the validity of Positivism. The novel is set at an important point in German history. As Tang outlines in *The Geographic Imagination of Modernity*, European society developed a pronounced shift in its views of both space and time, replacing Classicism and Historicism with new models around 1800: “. . . the spatial reflection of society from the late eighteenth century onward had three overlapping dimensions: the asymmetrical division of the earth into Europe and the enormous space lying outside Europe, the ordering of the European soil into nation-states with well-defined territorial boundaries, and the vision of the whole world as a mosaic of spatially delimited ethnic cultures.”

By examining terrestrial space from a scientific perspective, focus is shifted from chronological time toward geological time, a teleological trajectory of history to a layering of events.

Kehlmann explores this time period through the fictional biographical accounts of two of the most influential scientists of the nineteenth century: the explorer-botanist Alexander von Humboldt and the mathematician Carl Friedrich Gauss. Both are engaged in “measuring the world,” but they do so through very different means. Kehlmann creates

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a tension between the two figures on a number of levels, particularly between Gauss’
analytical approach and Humboldt’s empirical approach to science. The narrator traces
their lives in alternating, yet parallel chapters; like Gauss’ discovery of curved space, that
parallel lines do in fact intersect, the lives of Gauss and Humboldt cross paths at a
number of points within the text. For example, during the meeting of the two in Berlin,
through newspaper articles in which Gauss is able to read of Humboldt’s adventures (57, 151), and when Humboldt hears about Gauss’ discoveries (196).

The figures contrast each other in multiple ways: Gauss is portrayed as
introverted, unkind, and so consumed by his own thoughts that he interrupts the
consummation of his marriage to write down a mathematical formula. He is also
stationary and does all of his scientific research and thinking from Göttingen, save the
trip to Berlin where he meets Humboldt. He approaches his goal of “knowing” differently
than Humboldt: “Stundenlang beobachtete Gauß beim Licht einer Öllampe dieses Pendeln
. . . Man brauchte nicht auf Berge zu klettern oder sich durch den Dschungel zu quälen.
Wer diese Nadel beobachtete, sah ins Innere der Welt” (272). The naturalist is portrayed
in opposition to Gauss: Humboldt is vain, overly-ambitious, and interested in fame
through science. Where Gauss represents cognition, Humboldt represents physicality.
The novel traces the protagonists’ view of science and their personal investment in their
work. For Gauss, new knowledge leads to more unknown: “Mann könne kaum ahnen, wo
die Weg in die gekrümmten Räume noch führen werde . . . ” (12). Humboldt sees an end
to his collection of knowledge: “Das Ende des Weges sei in Sicht, die Vermessung der
Welt fast abgeschlossen” (238).
Humboldt also compels himself to travel to foreign lands, and has an interest in the “other” spurred on by his visits to the Berlin salons with the likes of Goethe, Herder, and explorer Georg Foster: “[er] hatte mit Cook die Welt umrundet und mehr gesehen als irgendein anderer Mensch aus Deutschland….Er erzählte von Drachen und lebenden Toten, überaus höflichen Kannibalen, von Tagen, an denen das Meer so klar war, dass man meinte, über einem Abgrund zu schweben, von Stürmen, so heftig, dass man nicht zu beten wagte” (28). The narrator, though, already alludes to the eventual disillusionment of Humboldt. As a child, Humboldt was already intrigued by the “other” by hearing tales “über Aguirre den Wahnsinnigen,” who took an “Alptraumfahrt” along the Orinoko River in search of the mythical El Dorado: “Noch immer waren kaum Forscher in diese Gegend vorgedrungen, und eine verlässliche Karte gab es nicht. Aber er werde es tun, sagte der jüngere Bruder. Er werde dorthin reisen” (22). The place that Humboldt plans to travel is marked semantically as irrational. Beyond that, though, by establishing early in the novel that Humboldt plans to explore the same area that Lope de Aguirre did, the reader makes a connection between a well-established symbol of violence, cruelty, and folly in art and literature and Humboldt’s eventual undertakings.

Like the eighteenth century explorers of *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis* who unwittingly reveal an artistic and aesthetic knowledge of the Arctic despite their scientific intentions, Humboldt adheres to a German Romantic conception of art and science in which aesthetics and moral components were important aspects of environmental interpretation. He believes that the employment of imagination is necessary in scientific inquiry, much in the same way that it is necessary for the artist. Gauss and Humboldt’s work confirm postmodern conceptions of space, in that they show
a link to power and the ability to shape space in the ways they imagine, describe, and represent it. Humboldt’s description of this newly “rediscovered” colonized-space has affected perceptions of it until at least the twentieth century. Kehlmann, however, seems to lend favor to Gauss’ method of theoretical science as opposed to Humboldt’s practical science. While toiling in South America, Humboldt succumbs to all types of physical hardships because of the natural environment, such as extreme heat while near a volcano and altitude sickness while climbing what was thought to be the highest mountain in the world. His ability to physically withstand the journey is spurred by his scientific zeal. Yet Kehlmann shows this turmoil to be somewhat unnecessary, considering that he and Gauss, who does not travel at all, come to similar conclusions in the end.

Humboldt is confident in the positive outcome of his task and the search for knowledge in general. He believes “... alle Schwierigkeiten menschlichen Anfangs, wie Angst, Krieg, und Ausbeutung ...” can be solved through science: “Wissenschaft werde ein Zeitalter der Wohlfahrt herbeiführen ...” and will even solve the “Problem des Todes” (238). Humboldt’s projection certainly seems naive to the modern day reader, but it also brings into question the role science and along with it teleological modern progress play in modern society, politics, and culture. The novel is effective in bringing the modern reader to question similar issues in postmodern society.

Whereas Ransmayr achieves both a contemporary and historical perspective on attempts to experience wilderness through multiple plot lines and historical and

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contemporary characters, Kehlmann’s use of indirect speech and prolepsis, as many critics have noted, allows the contemporary reader into the minds of Humboldt and Gauss:

Kehlmann makes striking use of prolepsis to make further ironic nods to the modern-day reader’s world . . . The result of such clear references to the reader’s contemporary situation is to make the world of the fictional characters appear oddly foreign and yet humorously familiar at the same time: in identifying with the historically famous characters as they are mediated through the text, the reader can enjoy the process of vicariously consuming the lifestyles of these iconic figures, and in doing so gain a temporary distance from his or her own world.290

An increased philosophical focus on space in the late twentieth century, as evidenced by studies like Henri LeFebvre’s *The Production of Space* and Edward Soja’s *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989) prompt this reevaluation. Kehlmann’s novel is one of a number of postmodern German novels that uses the scientist-explorer as a vehicle to forward questions about the construction of space and the existence of multiple realities, such as Sten Nadolny’s *Die Entdeckung der Langsamkeit* (1983), Ransmayr’s *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis*, W.G. Sebald’s *Nach der Natur* (1988) and Schrott’s *Finis Terrae*.

In his *Wo ist Carlos Montúfar* (2005), Kehlmann reflects on both his own authorial decisions and his narrative strategies in *Die Vermessung der Welt*. In addition, he outlines both the successes and failures in Humboldt’s theories, including Humboldt’s notion of a unified nature that is governed by the rules of order, rather than by chaos. A main critique of the novel is this view. Whereas Gauss fully acknowledged the chaos that underlies the natural world, Humboldt follows the maxim of his teacher: “. . . wann

immer einen die Dinge erschreckten, sei es eine gute Idee, sie zu messen” (22). Humboldt fights his fear of chaos (50, 129) and tirelessly attempts to demonstrate a “Weltordnung” with his measuring.291

The final assessment of the two protagonists offered by the text is self-aware; it questions how they have related to the world and evaluates their intellectual achievements, thus including them in the measuring they themselves had attempted of the world. Humboldt’s disillusionment with his travels is evident: “Aber während die erst Vororte Berlins vorbeiflogen, und Humboldt sich vorstellte, wie Gauß eben jetzt durch sein Teleskop auf Himmelskörper sah, deren Bahnen er in einfache Formeln fassen konnte, hätte er auf einmal nicht mehr sagen können, wer von ihnen weit herumgekommen war und wer immer zu Hause geblieben” (293). Humboldt becomes resigned to the futility of his efforts: “Die Dinge sind, wie sie sind, und wenn wir sie erkennen, sind sie genau so, wie wenn es andere tun oder keiner” (291).

Gauss reaches a new understanding of the importance of knowledge beyond science. In his later years, he begins learning “die russische Sprache” (266) and reading the works of Pushkin. Humboldt also becomes disillusioned with the fame that he has sought alongside his scientific discoveries: “Gerede und Geschwätz, flüsterte Humboldt in Ehrenbergs Ohr, keine Wissenschaft. Er müsse Gauß unbedingt sagen, daß er besser verstehe” (290). He gains an unexpected amount of humility in his later years, and both he and Gauss move away from their mastering goal of “measuring the world” to a position of less grandeur, measuring the successes and failures of their own lives. Gauss’

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acknowledgment that the world can actually never be known and that chaos will prevail is a surprisingly postmodern conviction.\textsuperscript{292}

Both Ransmayr’s and Kehlmann’s novels seem to discredit the self-sacrifice associated with science as part of a desire to keep scientific work separate from capitalist utility.\textsuperscript{293} This is exposed in Humboldt’s admission that if the mapping of a natural canal between the Amazon and Orinoco river is successful, it could lead to “ungenannte Unternehmungen” (136). Along with Ransmayr, Kehlmann makes explicit the often unintended consequences of scientific knowledge. In addition, the protagonists in all the works come to realize the inadequacies of science— their instruments do not allow them to know the world; this can only be done through the employment of imagination. Kehlmann’s main critique in the novel follows that of Ransmayrs’ in much of his work; the world in not characterized by order, but chaos and an endless stream of change. Neither science, nor civilization, nor God, for that matter, can change this reality. Humboldt’s view that “die Natur sei ein ganzes” (117) and positivism in general are proven naive illusions. In addition, the employment of science significantly changes ones view of the world. Gauss notes while taking one of his afternoon walks in the woods:

\begin{quote}
Inzwischen verirrte er sich nicht mehr, er kannte diese Gegend besser als irgend jemand sonst, schließlich hatte er all dies auf der Karte fixiert . . . Wo nur Bäume, Moos, Steine und Graskuppen gewesen waren, spannte sich jetzt ein Netz aus Geraden, Winkeln und Zahlen. Nichts, was einmal jemand vermessen hatte, war noch oder konnte je sein wie vorher. (268)
\end{quote}

Ransmayr’s and Kehlmann’s texts are historically grounded within German contexts, but they contain a much more universal theme and criticism than those of


\textsuperscript{293} See Rebecca Herzig, \textit{Suffering for Science: Reason and Sacrifice in Modern America} (Newark, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).
Menasse and Jelinek. While both Menasse and Jelinek critique a particularly Austrian emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic experience, implying that there is a collective cultural identity with which all Austrians are familiar or from which they are excluded, Ransmayr tends to focus on the individual experiences possible or as he often claims not possible in postmodern life. Conceptions of transformative experiences in wilderness contribute to a national identity that helps maintain a status quo in Austrian cultural and political life. They also shape the way in which we experience the world and the ways in which they represent the world. Within the Austrian tradition, the notion that excursions into wilderness areas can provide people with transformative experiences has shifted. Ideas that cultivation of the landscape, scientific knowledge, or discovering the “foreign” can develop people and nations on a linear trajectory is distrusted by the modern authors discussed in this study.

Modern excursions away from civilization may function as an instance of the archetypal hero’s journey, as envisioned and described by Campbell. This journey, as both a real transformative experience and an imaginative one, carries symbolic values. As wilderness areas and landscapes become contained, people must travel farther and farther out of civilization to experience secular and spiritual transformations. Because of this, wilderness as culture’s “other” has taken on figurative, and not just literal, significance. The qualities associated with physical wilderness are transferred to other entities so that wilderness as a way of thinking or being can be experienced in other spaces. For example, by identifying the qualities that provide the opportunity for transformation of self, like solitude, trial, and creativity, one may not have to travel outside of civilization. Statements like Thoreau’s famous “in wilderness is the preservation of the world” and John
Muir’s “The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness” indicate the figurative meaning nature can carry. In my next chapter, I will outline the abstract qualities that conceptions of wilderness carry and identify their use in literature.
Chapter 4: The Abstract “Other”

“I believe the common character of the universe is not harmony, but chaos, hostility, and murder.” Werner Herzog, *Grizzly Man*

As outlined in the previous two chapters, wilderness can serve as the setting, motif, or a theme in literature and can be represented as a place in which people can experience transformation. Yet it is more than biophysical reality. As a cultural construct, it is rooted in a discourse that reaches back to pre-ancient times. Commonplace notions about it have shifted, changed, and been given special and different emphases at different points in history, but as Richard Gill argues, generally this discourse is about

. . . order and chaos, identity and otherness; it is as much a social construct as a natural event; and inherently about nation and empire, race relations, gender relations, and social order; the ideas of natural spaces has implicit within it a sense of otherness in which wilderness is quite separate from the civilized centre. Untouched nature is seen to stand outside of time and space.\(^{294}\)

One of the main defining qualities of wilderness is its “otherness” to civilization and culture. Wilderness, as has been shown in the previous two chapters, has been considered the physical antithesis to cities. This notion has its roots in ancient times and one could argue that classical civilization defined itself against uncultivated nature. Alongside areas outside of cities being labeled wilderness, a cognitive boundary also existed. Cultures

could separate that which was not “immediate” to themselves with the designation “wild.” Thomas Kirchhoff and Ludwig Trepl argue:


For example, Zedler’s description of the etymological connection between the words “Wald” and “Wild” in the \textit{Universal-Lexicon} (1731-1754) shows the figurative potential of wilderness imagery: “Denn, weil ein Wald eben nicht der Ort ist, wo eine wohlständige Sittsamkeit ihre Wohnung aufschlagen kann, so pflegt man alles, was unbändig, rau, eigensinnig, ungezogen, unfreundlich, und vor sich nach eigenem Gefallen zu leben geneigt ist, wild zu nennen.”\footnote{Zedler, \textit{Universallexikon}, 681.} According to Rolf Haubl, the term “wild” has continually been used in Western society as a designation for everything “foreign” that a society would like to separate from itself.\footnote{Rolf Haubl, “Wild-fremd? Das Wilde in uns- eine psychologische Entdeckungsreise,” \textit{Politische Ökologie} 59 (1999): 25.} Haubl notes that by naming something “wild” cultures defined themselves against qualities they perceived to be different from their own. The cognitive boundary between “wild” and “cultured” enables groups to identify certain qualities as desirable or undesirable.

Nash prefaces his book \textit{Wilderness and the American Mind} with the qualifier that wilderness “is so heavily freighted with meaning of a personal, symbolic, and changing
kind as to resist easy definition.” Other environmental historians discussed in this study also acknowledge its powerful non-literal meanings. Neil Evernden argues that the postmodern idea of wilderness is a search for meaning achieved through new stories of creation or myth. This idea, according to Evernden, recoups the motif as the realm of the marvelous and mythical and becomes a way of thinking that can result in pulling humans out of an anthropocentric understanding of themselves into a more cosmic and ecological understanding of time and progress.

Oelschlaeger envisions a postmodern idea of wilderness as a necessary counterpart to the dominant perception of ourselves as a species. He states: “... our attempts to defend the wilderness confirm our search for meaning; they represent a defense of absolute value, a defense of cosmos, that is, something beyond human measure, and not scenery.” As an argument against this type of reasoning, Schama calls into question Oelschlaeger’s claim that a possible solution to the nature/human dichotomy is to found new myths on which to base the understanding of wilderness and our relationship with it. Schama shows that the new myths Oelschlaeger and Evernden wish to found are actually already present as part of twenty-first century Western culture and have in fact been present all along, thus only needing to be rediscovered or acknowledged. Alongside environmental historians, social scientists have noted the importance of wilderness symbolism. In his book *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*, geographer Yi-fu Tuan attributes the ambiguity of conceptions of wilderness to its function as a symbol of both moral discord and divine...
virtue in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The figurative uses of wilderness are as important to its discourse, if not more so, than its literal uses. Kirchhoff and Trepl describe this non-literal development:


Within this chapter, I trace the origins and history of wilderness as the figurative “other” to civilization and how specific images of it in Western history, philosophy, art, and literature have become an integral part of “collective memory.” I contend that authors use figural meaning to associate qualities of wilderness with other entities. Specifically, I argue that its perceived quality as Western civilization’s “other” presents a host of attributes that are then applied or associated with other perceived “others” of civilization such as non-Western peoples and points of view, women, and a non-teleological views of the world. Within the associations made between wilderness and “others,” a bifurcation exists within the value certain cultures have placed on these associations. When writers and artists employ wilderness figuratively, the qualities presented within the association are valued either for their positive difference to civilization or their negative difference. I argue that with the shifting value of physical wilderness from a primarily negatively-valued place to a positively-valued place, a shift

303 Kirchhoff and Trepl 43.
304 I draw on Maurice Halbwachs’ term to refer to memory that is sustained through the production and reproduction of representational forms, in this case, images of wilderness in literature and art. See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
has also occurred in the evaluation of wilderness qualities in their figurative meanings. Despite this shift in the predominant use of non-literal wilderness, negative connotations continue to be employed in literature in figurative ways.

Figurative language is an imaginative tool used in both oral communication and written texts in order to increase the understanding of concepts. Figurative language is an embedded aspect of language that often goes unnoticed because of its continued use and established meanings, but writers also consciously employ the technique to add variety and style to their texts. It can be broadly defined as writing that moves away from literal meaning in order to achieve a certain style, emphasis, or other meaning.

Within general everyday usage, an image is a representation of a literal object, place, or sensation that produces an effect in the reader based on non-figurative description. An image can become a symbol, however, when the non-figurative meaning “turns” to figurative and the image is not just a representation based on resemblance of quality, but rather a non-literal meaning is intended with the use of the image. Meaning is then determined through association and context. In Chapter 2, I outline the representation of wilderness as a literal referent. In this chapter, I am interested in the figurative meaning that images carry within the collective iconic memory of wilderness.

Within certain disciplines including geography, environmental history, space and place studies, and even resource management, it has been quite acceptable since the 1980s to speak of “symbolic landscapes,” i.e., landscapes that carry meaning beyond their literal qualities. This notion is most often applied to “cultural landscapes” where meaning can be placed onto the landscape through monuments or other symbols such as the Statue of Liberty. But natural landscapes such as forests, swamps, deserts, and other forms of
wilderness can also carry non-literal meaning. Gary Backhaus and John Murungi explain this use of the term “symbolic:” “The mountain peak qua mountain peak, that is, its ‘straightforward’ apprehension, does not seem to be a symbolic landscape. But, if the mountain peak symbolizes for us the pinnacle of achievement or the heights of esoteric knowledge, then the mountain peak carries symbolic meaning, for it translates states of affairs in the medium of mountain peak experience into the media of action and thought, respectively.”

The mountain peak becomes symbolic because as a concept it has associated meanings that inform our imagining, experience, view, and representation of it. I use the term “symbolic” in this sense when referring to wilderness as an image that carries meanings beyond its literal representation.

The idea of a symbolic landscape is particularly important in understanding the American West, where the notion of Manifest Destiny was implemented. Wilderness in the American context is often spoken of as carrying “symbolic” meaning, in that it has come to embody certain qualities that are for some a vital aspect of the need for preservation. Within the Austrian context, as was already discussed in Chapter 3, natural forms of wilderness, like the Großglockner, are symbolic. Beyond monuments and specific features of nature, an entire landscape can also carry non-literal meaning. One can “read” a landscape for the intrinsic qualities ascribed to it, thus producing specific meaning when represented in a text or as an image, symbol, or metaphor.

In its most basic definition, metaphor is a literary figure of speech that involves a transfer of meaning and comparison between two disparate entities linked by common

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qualities suggesting a resemblance between the two, although the literal meaning may not be immediately applicable. Everyday language involves the use of dead metaphors, or connections so commonly used that the original meaning of the elements involved has dissipated. As literary critic F.L. Lucas claims, “Every expression that we employ, apart from those that are connected to the most rudimentary objects and actions, is a metaphor, though the original meaning is dulled by constant use.”306 If, in fact, language is based on metaphor, how are we to understand its use in literature? Is not all language then metaphor?

According to Geoffrey Leech’s A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry (1973), metaphors are nothing more than tropes that reveal content as differentiated from schemes, i.e. literary devices having to do with expression more than meaning. To exhibit the point that metaphors are absolutely necessary in language and function as a tool in understanding experience, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson claim that metaphors are powerful conceptual tools that allow for the expression of metaphysical realities and are an integral part of language.307

Metaphors, in this broader understanding, are more than simple comparisons between two things. As the etymological definition of metaphor demonstrates, metaphors involve a transfer of meaning, but this meaning is not always neutral or literal. As Max Black’s “interaction” theory reveals, when readers approach metaphors in texts, they come already with preconceived notions of the terms involved in the metaphor.308 He

makes a distinction between the subject and predicate of a metaphorical statement, similar to I. A. Richardson’s division between the “tenor” and “vehicle.” The “tenor” of a metaphor is the subject to which attributes contained in the “vehicle” are ascribed. Black claims that metaphors are not neutral literary constructions but, rather, are interpreted by readers with foundational understandings of the world. The secondary, not literal, meaning of the metaphor is understood then through “a system of associate commonplaces” and “connotations.” As Colin Turbayne explains, “[W]hen I say a man is a wolf . . . something besides that name is transferred from wolves to men. I do not pretend that man shares the qualities of wolves; I intend it. What these properties are I may, but need not, specify. They cannot be all the properties common to wolves, otherwise I should intend that man is actually a wolf. Thus when I say that man is a wolf . . . I intend that he shares some of the qualities of the wolf but not enough to actually be classified as an actual wolf . . .”309 These associated commonplaces are often untrue of the literal referent, but the success of metaphor is not reliant on the actual properties of the object being referred to, but rather on an agreement of the associated commonplaces within a certain social and cultural group of language users. I argue that wilderness serves as a vehicle to ascribe the qualities associated with it to a multitude of “tenors.” The preconceived notions social and cultural groups employ in their understanding of the association between wilderness as civilization’s “other” and the other “others” reflect not only the cultural and social tradition behind the terms, but also the value which has been ascribed to such terms. In addition, commonplace notions of a term often have power.

long after the literal meaning has changed. Metaphors, therefore, can be used to infuse a seemingly neutral element with the connoted meaning of the compared element. For example, by saying “The city is a wilderness,” the connoted and not literal qualities of wilderness are transferred to the city. The social and cultural conceptions of wilderness at the point at which the comparison is being made inform an understanding of the metaphor creator’s intended value judgment of the city.

If we are to follow the important claim made by Dennis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniel that landscapes can be a “. . . pictorial image, a way of representing, structuring, or symbolising surroundings,” images of wilderness in literature can be symbolic or metaphoric. An understanding of iconography may be helpful when examining wilderness as a figurative device. In the same way that iconography in art, as formulated by Erwin Panofsky, deciphers images within their cultural and historical context, I am interested in analyzing images and representations of wilderness in literature for the commonplace notions, or connotations, implicated in those images through what is now labeled “collective memory.”

Iconography, understood in the narrow sense, is a field of study that identifies the traditional symbols in a work of art, like a cross symbolizing Christianity. However, Panofsky promoted a broader understanding of the imagery in a work of art. He claims that iconography is finding the “underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion . . .” The attitude toward wilderness, either as a negative counter world to civilization or as a positive

model of “otherness” that balances the ills of civilization, displays the bifurcation of wilderness’s value. Panofsky explains this in terms of “soft” primitivism and “hard” primitivism:

There had been, from the beginning of classical speculation, two contrasting opinions about the natural state of man, each of them, of course, a "Gegen-Konstruktion" to the conditions under which it was formed. One view, termed "soft" primitivism in an illuminating book by Lovejoy and Boas, conceives of primitive life as a golden age of plenty, innocence, and happiness — in other words, as civilized life purged of its vices. The other, "hard" form of primitivism conceives of primitive life as an almost subhuman existence full of terrible hardships and devoid of all comforts — in other words, as civilized life stripped of its virtues.312

Wilderness areas and landscapes are therefore real and imagined places that serve as the symbolic “other” to Western civilization and its prescribed order. Societies that adhere to a Judeo-Christian heritage have traditionally viewed civilization as positive because it is antithetical to uncultivated and urge-driven ways of life that are considered barbaric, pagan, and ungodly. In opposition to civilization and the city, as discussed in Chapter 1, wilderness’s lack of order has been viewed as fostering and allowing immoral and unethical behavior in humans. In Jelinek’s work, for example, a lack of the “right” civilization reveals and causes animalistic behavior in its citizens, which is exhibited in violence, murder, sadomasochism, and abuse. Despite the negative view of a lack of culture, there is a freedom within the lack of order. Wilderness has also been a symbol of liberation from the confines of civilization or as an opportunity to establish a new order.

Aby Warburg’s concept of Bildgedächtnis, iconic memory, is an apt theory when considering the connotations and historical notions of wilderness that have become

solidified in collective memory. With his art installation *Mnemosyne-Atlas* (1924-1929), Warburg set out to demonstrate the continued existence of ancient ideas and images in modern European culture. Although Warburg’s thesis was specifically supported by artistic images, “the general approach to reception history as a form of (cultural) memory could be applied to every other domain of symbolic forms as well.”[^313] By turning to iconography, I will critically read images and figurative uses of wilderness in modern literature to reveal the continuation of ancient social and cultural values contained therein.

As the study of collective, and later social and cultural, memory has shown in the last century, all senses can generate memory; both texts and images can play a role in memory formation and contribute to cultural memory for both groups and individuals.[^314] Images may have a greater effectiveness in transferring meaning because they draw on automatic cognition, which “. . . relies heavily and uncritically upon culturally available schemata—knowledge structures that represent objects or events and provide default assumptions about their characteristics, relationships, and entailments under conditions of incomplete information.”[^315] I argue that the default assumptions made about wilderness and the figurative qualities it possesses are applied to other “others” of Western civilization.

Mountains and forests have come in many arenas to embody the ideal wilderness, as discussed in the Introduction, and are often used not only as symbols of purity,

grandeur, and preservation, but are often used metonymously, meaning that a single tree or mountain peak can stand for all of wilderness or even all of nature. In addition, wilderness can be employed in literature as more than a single symbol representing a specific quality; it can become metaphorical or even allegorical to represent a larger way of thinking or interaction with the world. In a close reading of Adalbert Stifter’s *Brigitta* (1844), I show that the cultivation of wilderness moves from the symbolic to the metaphorical. I then demonstrate that modern Austrian texts in this study rely on figurative meaning to represent wilderness as civilization’s non-literal “other.”

In many modern uses, this representation seems to have acquired a solely positive value, particularly in the United States. When deciding upon language for the American Wilderness Act, Howard Zahniser chose the word “untrammeled” and rejected terms like “undisturbed.” This word is important, Douglas Scott explains, because “[t]oo often, this word has been misread as untrampled, or misinterpreted as some synonymous variation of untrampled, with the erroneous connotation that it describes the . . . ecological condition of the land.” The use of “untrammeled,” demonstrates that the ideal wilderness for Zahniser is defined by more than its physical qualities as an ecosystem or type of landscape. It describes an abstract quality of how one should interact with nature and defines it as a place and space that is uncontrolled and unrestricted. 

This meaning reveals Zahniser’s notion that wilderness should also represent an “other” to the dominant logic of modern progress. David Cole notes the significance of this on a physical level:

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317 This definition has caused much debate as to how management of wilderness areas should exist in the United States. Not all National Parks, in both the United States and Austria, are designated “wilderness,” but rather adhere to the second category of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature protected areas categories.
“Wilderness landscapes are the only lands where humans refrain from saying that they know best.” 318 Zahniser himself seems to see an even more abstract meaning to this notion. He states that “... to know the wilderness is to know a profound humility, to recognize one’s littleness, to sense dependence and interdependence, indebtedness, and responsibility. Perhaps, indeed, this is the distinctive ministration of wilderness to modern man ...” 319 In both Menasse’s and Ransmayr’s novels, wilderness represents a mode of interaction with the world that privileges humility and a lack of control. In addition, as is particularly evident in Ransmayr’s novels, the arrogance of science and the belief that humans know best how to control and manipulate nature is represented as a defining aspect of modern culture. 320 Real and abstract wilderness can become a balance to this mentality. As a contrast to modern science, wilderness can symbolize that which reason is not: mystery, myth, and “other” forms of knowing.

As was mentioned in Chapter 3, the image of wilderness as a pure and idyllic sylvan area is a powerful element of collective memory. A defining aspect of wilderness areas and landscapes is that they are spaces outside the realm of human influence and lack cultivation. This quality is part of its iconography; wilderness images can be associated with backwardness and a lack of refinement, but they can also be associated with pureness and virginity. Wilderness promotes naturalness, the opposite of civilization. Naturalness can be viewed negatively (civilization is necessary for

goodness), or it can be viewed positively (civilization is corrupting to inherent human
goodness).

Images of Arcadia illustrate the way in which wilderness has been designated
civilization’s “other.” They also reveal how representations of real geographic locations
are not necessarily tied to the actuality of place, but rather can take on imaginary and
symbolic meaning. In Renaissance painting, for example, Arcadia served as a symbol of
unspoiled and virtuous wilderness. Images and descriptions of it before that time,
however, were hardly flattering. The first representations of Arcadia began with classic
writings about the Greek region. The ancient Greek historians Pausanius and Herodotus
describe Arcadians as indigenous Greek shepherds and hunter-gatherers, who lived semi-
nomadic lives.\textsuperscript{321} This lifestyle was very different from the stationary, fortified dwellings
in which Athenians lived. As denizens of the home of Pan, god of the ‘wild’ in Greek
mythology, Arcadians were despised by urban Greeks as barbaric and backwards, people
who had to be taught to make living quarters and clothing.\textsuperscript{322} Nash describes the
representation of Arcadia in Greek myth:

Greeks who had to pass through forests or mountains dreaded an encounter with
Pan. Indeed, the word ‘panic’ originated from the blinding fear that seized
travelers upon hearing strange cries in the wilderness and assuming them to
signify Pan’s approach. Related to Pan were the tribe of satyrs— goat-men of a
demoniacal character devoted to wine, dancing, and lust. They were thought to
appear only at night and then solely in the darkest parts of the forest. According to
Hellenic folklore, satyrs ravished women and carried off children who ventured
into their wilderness lairs. Sileni and centaurs completed the Greek collection of
forest spirits.\textsuperscript{323}

\textsuperscript{321} See Pausanias, \textit{The Description of Greece, Book 8: Arcadia} and Herodotus, \textit{The Histories}, Book 1,
Chapter 57.
\textsuperscript{322} See Pausanias.
\textsuperscript{323} Nash 11.
Arcadia served as both the physical and mythical “other” to Athens and represented a place where the elements of domestication and civilization had never been established. Bestiality, violence, gluttony, and brutishness were negative elements of the imaginary Arcadia that stand in contrast to the positive vision of pureness and naturalness uncorrupted by civilization that developed later.\textsuperscript{324} Wilderness in this place was at once a realm without rules and a place in which no rules needed to exist.

Virgil’s \textit{Eclogues} is arguably the most influential collection of poems ever written, and they have become the foundation for much pastoral poetry in the European tradition. Virgil’s pastorals have been credited with ridding Arcadia of its conventional primitive qualities and firmly planting the mythical Arcadia as an icon of unspoiled wilderness in the Western imagination. Schama notes that in Virgil’s \textit{Eclogues}, “We are at the very opposite pole from the pre-selenic original Arcadia, where there were men who looked, and behaved, like beasts.”\textsuperscript{325} The real Arcadia and iconic Arcadia are at odds, and yet, as Schama notes, “Arguably, both kinds of arcadia, the idyllic as well as the wild, are landscapes of the urban imagination, though clearly answering to different needs.”\textsuperscript{326} Both forms of Arcadia, the negative as well as the positive, are part of the Western \textit{Bildgedächtnis}.

\textsuperscript{324} This imagery still exists in depictions of Satan as a Pan-like figure, as well as more positive images, such as Peter Pan, who rules Never-never Land.  
\textsuperscript{325} Schama 529. The long-held scholarly belief that Virgil invented the spiritual imaginative of Arcadia is deftly disputed by Richard Jenkyns in \textit{Virgil’s Experience: Nature and History, Times, Names, and Places} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 157. “What can be firmly said, once again, is that there is no grounds at all for supposing Virgil intended to place the herdsmen of this poem in an Arcadia either literal or metaphorical.” Despite Jenkyns arguments, the significance of the belief that Virgil first changed the imaginative of Arcadia shows that the current imagination of wilderness holds that it had both positive and negative meanings since classical times, even if in reality, as Jenkyns argues, it was not until the sixteenth century that Arcadia was firmly planted in the Western imagination as the perfect example of the idyllic because of Jacopo Sannazaro’s \textit{Arcadia}.  
\textsuperscript{326} Schama 525.
Tacitus’ *Germania* contributes to the establishment of wilderness as an image of the positive and negative qualities of Rome’s “others.” He values Germanic freedom as an alternative lifestyle to overly civilized societies such as Rome. Like stories of the Arcadian ideal, Tacitus’ *Germania* is a product of the imagination and does not necessarily reflect the actual physical reality of the Germanic peoples and lands. By comparing elements of Roman and Germanic society, the lands he describes become an iconic “other” that enable him and generations later others to construct a careful critique of Roman society. He does not admire every aspect of the Germanic life and uses terms in the text that paint a very dreary picture of the way these people lived. He compares the over civilized aspects of Roman culture to the under civilized ways of the Germanics. As Ronald H. Martin notes, “It is a challenge, not to throw away civilization and the advantages of the *Pax Romana*, but to purge Roman society of its dross.”\(^\text{327}\)

Tacitus is particularly interested in the Germanic form of government. He suggests that because Germanics do not live in cities and their houses are far apart, they are able to know a type of freedom that is nonexistent for Romans. He states that they were “[n]ot like persons acting in response to a command . . .”\(^\text{328}\) Duane Stuart Reed notes the importance of this statement: “The penchant for individual freedom of action exhibited by the Germans was bound to provoke comment on the part of a Roman, since his prejudice was all in favor of carefully ordered parliamentary procedure and punctilious cooperation.”\(^\text{329}\) By contrasting the lifestyle of the Germanics in the Roman-designated wilderness and the society of the Romans in cities, Tacitus imagined the wilderness of


\(^{329}\) Reed ff. 9.
these peoples as both positive and negative. Like so much representation of the “other,” *Germania* acted as a mirror in which Tacitus could reflect upon his own cultural traditions and qualities. Much in the way that wilderness was designated as anything outside of civilization, many cultures have defined themselves against uncivilized “others.” The image of wilderness as both a place in need of culturing and a place free from civilization’s decadence continues to operate in modern uses of it.

Caspar David Friedrich’s paintings made significant contributions to the iconography of wilderness and the values associated with it, specifically during the Romantic period. He followed the tradition of integrating powerful myths of pagan and Christian religions into artistic representation. By using the evergreen tree as both a symbol of the cross (an icon of Christianity) and the notion of resurrection, but also by using evergreen groves as an image of a sanctuary, Friedrich “provoked the anger of German critics by negating the difference between sacred art and landscape.” Friedrich was certainly a product of his time, but his work exemplifies the tendency in Romantic art to use natural images to underscore important Christian messages. What Friedrich’s art also allowed for the future, however, was the removal of specifically Christian elements, leaving behind images that incited spiritual experiences for the viewer without a direct reference to God and allowing the spiritual to be replaced with the psychological in later landscape painting.

Also influential in the formation of this iconography is the culture debate that took place in Europe in the middle to late nineteenth century, referred to in Chapter 3 as

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330 Schama 207.
Romantic Nationalism. It is here that we see for the very first time a reversal of the wilderness/civilization dichotomy, in which wilderness is not used to represent a place outside of civilization, but rather the negative qualities typically associated with it are attributed to the very specific experiences of living in an urban center during and after the Industrial Revolution. The positive qualities of wilderness are seen as a way to counter the ills of modernity.

Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl’s critique is significant for this study because the contemporary authors discussed here recognize the problematic nature of conservative culture critique, not least its appropriation by National Socialists in the twentieth century, as discussed in Chapter 3. Riehl’s work was not only extremely influential in nineteenth century discussions of modern civilization, but it also provided a language and arguments to discuss the problems of society and city life that are still employed in the twenty-first century.

Greatly influenced by the events of the 1848 revolution, Riehl envisioned a new social order originating within bourgeois society: “Riehl disparaged the French Enlightenment view that nationhood was a product of written constitutions, abstract natural rights, or the protection of private property; instead he proposed that national character emerged organically, from the topography and culture of a particular territory. Like his predecessors Herder and Arndt, Riehl proposed that each landscape, be it national, regional, or local, reflected centuries of interaction between an area’s human inhabitants and their natural environments.”

\[332\] Land und Leute exhibits the type of

rhetoric used in conservative culture critique in the mid-nineteenth century. By placing *Wildnis* and *Stadt* at opposite ends of the social spectrum, Riehl reversed the positive and negative elements in this dichotomy to inscribe the terms with new values: “Nicht bloß das Waldland, sondern auch die Sanddünen, Moore, Heiden, die Felsen, und Gletscherstriche, alle Wildniß und Wüstenei ist eine nothwendige Ergänzung zu dem cultivierten Feldland. Freuen wir uns, daß es noch so manche Wildniß in Deutschland gibt. Es gehört zur Kraftentfaltung eines Volkes, daß es die verschiedenartigsten Entwickelungen gleichzeitig umfasse.”

Riehl’s social philosophy is problematic at best, and it is no wonder that current environmental conservation rhetoric and efforts in German speaking countries must tread lightly and take into consideration the racism and social determinism that is connected to this history in exceptional ways. He draws on iconic images of Germanic Lands and the “primitive,” but “noble,” German that was reinterpreted from Tacitus in the Middle Ages by German scholars. Riehl’s designation of wilderness as a necessary element that provides “energy” to the German people is interesting in two ways. First, his designation of all types of physical wilderness, and not just mountains and forests, as vital relies on even older traditions of and shows a re-broadening of the designation of the term, perhaps due to new scientific fields such as ecology, that were beginning to develop in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Second, the idea that wilderness was needed as a balance and check to modern progress in the city is important, in that it provided the basis for the metaphor that urban development left unchecked becomes wilderness.

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The modern works discussed in this study are informed by and contribute to the collective memory and iconography of wilderness as an “other” to civilization. As one of the most prominent Austrian authors, Stifter’s employment of both literal and figurative wilderness in his fiction is vital to understanding the transition of it figuratively. Within his work, nature shifts from a subject to be understood in its own right, either as an actual place or symbol, into a marker of another subject, for example the inner workings of the subject. In this way, wilderness transfers from a symbol of specific attributes in certain characters into a metaphor for the higher laws of the universe that affect both culture and nature. Stifter differs from many of his Romantic counterparts because he attempts to represent nature as it is, and not merely in its idealized or imagined form. In his famous “Vorrede” to *Bunte Steine* (1853), Stifter discusses this philosophy:

> Das Wehen der Luft, das Rieseln des Wassers, das Wachsen der Getreide, das Wogen des Meeres, das Grünen der Erde, das Glänzen des Himmels, das Schimmern der Gestirne halte ich für groß: das prächtig einherziehende Gewitter, den Blitz, welcher Häuser spaltet, den Sturm, der die Brandung treibt, den feuerspeienden Berg, das Erdbeben, welches Länder verschüttet, halte ich nicht für größer als obige Erscheinungen, ja ich halte sie für kleiner, weil sie nur Wirkungen viel höherer Gesetze sind. Sie kommen auf einzelnen Stellen vor, und sind die Ergebnisse einseitiger Ursachen. Die Kraft, welche die Milch im Töpfchen der armen Frau empor schwellen und übergehen macht, ist es auch, die die Lava in dem feuerspeienden Berge empor treibt, und auf den Flächen der Berge hinab gleiten läßt. \(^{334}\)

Stifter focuses on not just the terrific or extraordinary aspects of nature as a driving force, but rather sees all elements of nature as a result of the constant force behind natural phenomenon. He also professes a strong connection between nature and human experience: “So wie es in der äußeren Natur ist, so ist es auch in der inneren, in der des

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By shifting the focus away from individual acts or objects of nature as symbols of human qualities to the whole system of nature, Stifter uses the forces of nature as a metaphor for human experiences, drives, and history. Just as nature needs cultivation in order for it to achieve its potential, people also need cultivation in order for them to reach a balance between instinct and their cultural code.

*Brigitta* (1844) demonstrates that both people and wilderness are in need of cultivation. In the first section of the text, the narrator travels into the Austrian “colony” in the Hungarian steppe to visit Stephen Murai. Stifter deliberately winds the reader back in time to a wild setting that is described as “fremd” and “eigentümlich” (10). The narrator’s description of the landscape, though, is not simply objective representation; rather it becomes a screen upon which the qualities of the characters, and their transitions, are projected. Along the journey, the narrator meets a woman, who appears to him very unusual: “Dieser war aber nichts anderes als ein Weib, etwa vierzig Jahre alt, welches sonderbar genug die weiten landesmäßigen Beinkleider an hatte und auch wie ein Mann zu Pferde saß” (12). Already at the outset of the story, Brigitta is marked as an “other:” not only in her status as a woman, but as a “masculine” woman. This “other” status makes Brigitta perfectly suited for her work cultivating the steppe. Even as a child, she was marked as “other” because of the lack of love she receives from her parents. In addition, she has shown non-feminine traits since a young girl, making her an outsider in society: “Als die Mädchen in das Jungfrauenalter getreten waren, stand sie wie eine fremde Pflanze unter ihnen” (50). The image of the “foreign plant” can be read in two ways: on the one hand, Brigitta could be considered an exotic “other,” alluring and

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335 Stifter, “Vorrede,” 11.
interesting precisely because of her unusualness while on the other, she could be compared to an invasive species, spoiling the viewers’ pleasure of the other young women and thus needing to be removed. She is even described as having “dunklen Farbe” (54). This status as “other,” even as a baby, causes Brigitta to develop a hardening of emotions. As she squirms out of her mother’s arms, the mother becomes bitter and Brigitta’s emotions more empty: “So ward die Wüste immer größer” (49).

Wilderness is also figuratively employed to describe the emotions of the protagonist and estranged husband of Brigitta, Stephen Murai. The narrator first meets him “[i]n Unteritalien, beinahe in eine ebenso feierlichen Öde, wie die war, durch die ich heute wandelte” (6). Unlike Brigitta, though, who is unable to show emotion, Murai has an overabundance of passion. He loves Brigitta, but because he has not yet understood how to fruitfully control his inner animalistic urges, he embraces another woman. Brigitta accuses him of infidelity and leaves for the steppe. Once there, Brigitta must build a wall to keep wolves out of her cultivated space. The wolves are symbols of Murai’s wild behavior, which Brigitta attempts to keep at bay.

The more that Brigitta cultivates the land and pushes back the wild elements on the steppe, the closer she comes to the “allerhöchste Liebe” that should be “ohne Maß und Ende:” “Sie began die Heide um sich zu sehen, und ihr Geist fing an, die Öde rings um sich zu bearbeiten” (44). Brigitta’s work on the land, coaxing fertility out of wilderness, is symbolic of the development of her own emotions. While Brigitta appears to overcome the emotional scarring from her childhood, in which she could only love with a reasonable, passionless love, Stephan Murai must undergo the greatest change in order to overcome his wildness. When he first arrives to the city in which Brigitta lives as
a child, people begin to talk about him and say “daß er etwas Wildes und Scheues an sich habe, und dass man es ihm ansehe, dass er in Walde auferzogen worden sei” (40). The immediate connection between the wildness of Murai and the fact that he was raised in the forest is important; Brigitta in her cultivation of the land attempts to control the wild elements of the forest, and by doing so, also controls the wild features of Stephan. It is not until his son is attacked by a wolf and Stephan kills it that he symbolically kills the wolf within himself and understands the importance of organic cultivation.

The text employs wilderness as a metaphor not only to enhance the representation of the protagonists’ cultivation of self, but it also associates it with the “natural” cultivation of a people, and more broadly, the progress of national history:

Dort war er [Murai] im Äußern der glatte, feine Mann gewesen – hier aber war alles anders, und oft, wenn ich ganze Tage nichts sah als das ferne, rötlich blaue Dämmern der Steppe und die tausend kleinen weißen Punkte darinnen, die Rinder des Landes, wenn zu meinen Füßen die tiefschwarze Erde war, und so viel Wildheit, so viel Üppigkeit, trotz der uralten Geschichte so viel Anfang und Ursprünglichkeit, dachte ich, wie wird er sich denn hier benehmen. Ich ging in dem Lande herum, ich lebte mich immer in seine Art und Weise und in seine Eigentümlichkeiten hinein, und es war mir, als hörte ich den Hammer schallen, womit die Zukunft dieses Volkes geschmiedet wird. (10)

For the narrator, the cultivation of the wild landscape is not simply about Brigitta and Murai learning to find an appropriate balance between emotion and reason, but rather their work on the steppe is metaphorical for the whole of Hungary.

Stifter also employs wilderness symbols and metaphors in his novel *Der Nachsommer* (1857). In this text, the protagonist Heinrich leaves his urban home in order to experience the world through scientific experiments. Although he comes in very close contact with nature, it is not until he is able to give up his pure empiricism and experience
wilderness that he comes to appreciate beauty in cultivated nature. Although Stifter’s protagonist employs a science that differs from traditional science, i.e. one that resembles the experiential science espoused by Goethe, his texts present wilderness as a thing to be understood and cultivated for both its own, but more importantly, human good. Stifter uses wilderness as a metaphor for the city in which Heinrich finds himself.

Alongside the critique of the city in Romantic Nationalism developed the city as wilderness metaphor, which “suggests that the city has become the new wilderness, evoking, on the one hand, feelings of intimidation and awe, a sense of the infinite, and the experience of absolute dependency; and on the other, danger and the wild behavioral traits of hostility, aggression, and violence.” Heinrich describes his experiences in the city:


As wilderness becomes managed and domesticated, the city is a new wilderness because many of the same experiences thought to be possible only in wild nature are now considered possible in urban areas and have taken on a positive connotation. For example, those living in urban environments often welcome its challenges, such as

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overcoming extreme solitude, finding joy in anonymity, and “struggling” to get to work, to find a parking space, or even to get ahead in a corporate position.

Whereas Stifter deems cultivation and domestication necessary to reach a certain balance of passion and reason, the late twentieth century saw a reversal of such notions in much theoretical and literary work. Greatly influenced by the field of Postcolonialism, many anthropological, philosophical, and theoretical texts have questioned, in new ways, the extent to which European cultures, as a result of their Eurocentric forms of thinking and logic of domination, can understand other cultures. A major aspect of this debate circles around the notion of reality and whether or not non-rational forms of knowledge about reality, as espoused by peoples historically labeled ‘primitive,’ can be known by rationally-centered Europeans. Hans Peter Duerr, author of *Traumzeit: über die Grenzen zwischen Wildnis und Zivilisation* (1978), views non-Western logic as an opportunity to break through the borders and limitations of Western thought. Instead of reiterating the Western notion that non-rational forms of knowledge are primitive, the work challenges this idea by suggesting that non-Western views of the world are actually more complex forms of knowledge than Western ones. All cultures, he claims, have created some type of distinction between themselves and wilderness. He states: “Wir haben davon geredet, daß die menschlichen Kulturen den Zaun zwischen sich selber und der Wildnis auf verschiedene Weise errichtet haben und daß dieser Zaun eine unterschiedliche Bedeutung angenommen hat” (151). Duerr investigates how and when this fence is

dissolved by certain peoples and how Western society could integrate some of these types of non-rational dissolutions into their own ways of thinking about reality.

Christoph Ransmayr’s texts are also concerned with non-Western forms of reality, both on a perceptual level by his characters themselves, but also on a narrative level in which Ransmayr’s works question whether or not a single reality can ever be aesthetically presented. As has been discussed in previous chapters, the works *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis* and *Die Letzte Welt* feature protagonists who are unable to firmly grasp reality. Ransmayr questions whether one is able to write a real account of anything. This doubt is embodied in the narrator of *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis* and in Naso in *Die Letzte Welt*. The border, as Duerr describes it, that becomes broken in these works provides the narrators with a type of dreamtime in which the rules of logic are not enforced, thus freeing both the narrator and author. The interaction with both a physical and metaphorical wilderness and the qualities associated with it allows both the characters and authors the ability to experience forms of reality that are “other” than modern logic.

Ransmayr’s text *Der fliegende Berg* addresses the question of if and how one can know a different culture. The protagonists, older brother Liam and younger brother Pad, reside on Horse Island, Ireland. The story Pad narrates contains many themes: a love-hate relationship between the two brothers, the question of whether or not a shared childhood can result in a shared view of the world, the role of love in “finding” oneself, and the use of technology in the modern age. I will focus on only a few of these themes, including the brothers’ goal to conquer a Tibetan mountain named Phur-Ri by the occupying Chinese and “der Fliegende Berg” by the nomadic tribe that lives near its foot certain times of the
year. I will examine how the brothers’ goal becomes a way for Ransmayr to change the “misanthropic apocalyptical tone” literary critics identify in his other works. The text explores the possibility of finding a way out of the anthropocentric domination of the modern world that preoccupies his other works, which has previously only been resolved with the death of the protagonist. The brothers’ opposing views of how one should interact with wilderness operate on a figurative level. Liam’s interactions with the world are dominating, calculating, and technological, whereas Pad finds freedom in wilderness. Ransmayr examines the extent to which one can engage positively and negatively with “otherness,” or alterity. In this use of wilderness as the figurative “other” to civilization, Ransmayr shows that the feelings of isolation so common in modern society can be countered with attempts to engage with the world in non-Western ways.

Der fliegende Berg differs from Ransmayr’s other works in significant ways, not least in its form. The protagonists of his novels disappear into wilderness, presumably to their death. This becomes a freeing experience for the characters, perhaps the only experience that provides humans an authenticity in the world. Pad escapes disappearance, perhaps at the expense of Liam, who is swept away by an avalanche during the brothers’ descent from the peak of the mountain. Ransmayr illustrates through Pad’s experience the possibility of interacting with the world authentically before death.

There are major parallels between the brothers’ experiences on Horse Island and their time in Tibet. Both places are described as a wilderness: on Horse Island “wirken gerade die Weiden / wie von einer Katastrophe heimgesucht / und trotz ihrer

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Fruchtbarkeit wüst” (34). The province Kham in Tibet is “eine unbesiedelte Wildnis ohne Wege, ohne Namen” (42). Despite the isolation both locations have geographically, Horse Island is connected to the world technologically and “lag auf der Höhe der Zeit, / und wir hielten dort über das Netz / Kontakt mit der Welt . . . ” (32), whereas Kham and “der fliegende Berg” are “trotz Hunderter im Orbit kreisender Augen / und Ohren, Kameralinsen, Signalsender, Satelliten / so stumm und geheimnisvoll / wie in einer längst begrabenen Zeit” (78-9). Technology, however, does not help Liam escape isolation—in fact, in a place where even the lighthouse is operated by a computer, Liam is unable to find meaningful relationships with other people.

The trip to Kham becomes an obsession for Liam. He “schien wie bessen von dem Gefühl, / eine Entdeckung gemacht zu haben” (39), even though there is no definitive evidence that the mountain Liam sees in a photograph he finds online is actually a “makellos weißen Fleck” (43) on the map. Unlike the explorers in Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis, who attempt to name and claim the last white spots on the map, Ransmayr leaves open the question of whether or not Liam has found an uncharted mountain. He discovers a black and white photo of the mountain taken from an airplane and decides against looking for actual evidence of the mountain. Liam is so focused on his goal of conquering the mountain that he loses touch with the physical reality around him. In his effort to conquer both physical and figurative wilderness, Liam loses the ability to find his individuality instead of achieving the transformation he is seeking. Pad, however, understands that “[v]ielleicht ist jenes Bedürfnis / tatsächlich unstillbar, / das uns selbst in enzyklopädisch gesicherten Gebieten / nach dem Unbekannten, Unbetretenen, / von Spuren und Namen noch Unversehrten suchen läßt - /
nach jenem makellos weißen Fleck, / in den wir dann ein Bild unserer Tagträume /
einschreiben können” (43). The self-reflexivity Pad shows is more than just a result of his
status as narrator. Pad is able to escape isolation through close connection with physical
and metaphorical wilderness.

Wilderness as a figurative “other” to the West is apparent in the brothers’
interaction with the region in Tibet. Liam, who becomes representative of Western ways
of thinking, is interested only in conquering, dominating, and reaching the top of the
mountain. He has a severe desire for the “Unbekannten, Unbetretenen” (43). Pad believes
that Liam’s passion for climbing (instilled in him by their Irish Republican Army father
with the idea of preparing them for a possible military action against England) is a way to
escape their father's domination: “Klettern für ihn immer auch / eine Möglichkeit war,
einen unüberwindlichen Abstand / zwischen sich und die Welt unseres Vaters zu
bringen” (262). The domination Liam feels from his father— and to which Ireland is
subjected by England— is his primary discourse with reality. Domination becomes the
principal metaphor in the rhetoric used to describe climbing mountains. Words like
“bezwingen” and “erobern” (280) are used to express Liam’s need to climb the mountain.
Pad sees this differently, however: “Genügte es nicht, einfach weiter und weiter, / immer
weiter bis ganz nach oben zu gehen?” (281). Carl Niekerk notes, “In Ransmayrs Roman
ist der fliegende Berg primär ein Bild, das zur Projektionsfläche für das Begehren der
beiden Protagonisten dient.”

340 Carl Niekerk, “Poetik der Metonymie: Alterität in Christoph Ransmayrs Der fliegende Berg,” literatur
The domination by England that their father resists is paralleled in Tibet.

Ransmayr compares the political situation in Kham and in Ireland in a number of ways. Their father, “ein Untergrundkämpfer, ein Rächer, ein Bombenleger” (177), joins the IRA out of personal motivation, when his wife leaves him for a Northern Irish “Souper”— the label of someone whose ancestors abandoned their Catholic faith during the Great Famine in order to receive a “Napf Suppe” (102). The father is replacing his anger at the mother, who “in den Norden desertiert” (102) by searching for a “wahr” or “wirklich” Ireland: “Als wahr und wirklich pries unser Vater nur, / was seinen Vorstellungen von der Welt / in allen Balangen entsprach” (53). For the father, a “real” Ireland is one free of domination. The brothers' father stresses that they learn “die gälischen, nein irischen! Namen” (132). Pad recognizes that language and naming are yet other forms of domination and that England's colonial enterprises were not only far away in non-European lands, but also within Europe: while “Sir Everest und seine Gefährten” (129) are busy claiming territories and climbing mountains, Ireland is suffering through the “katastrophalsten Hungersnot seiner Geschichte” (129). The text draws attention to the fact that the problem of colonialism is not uniquely a Western versus non-Western discussion, but rather that inner European and inner Asian colonialism are comparable. Liam, although a victim himself of colonial rule, is as a result of his Western paradigm unable or unwilling to sympathize with the Tibetans.

The brothers’ interaction with wilderness becomes representative of their dichotomous ways of knowing: Liam is rational, and Pad is emotional. Lakoff and Johnson note that one of the orientational metaphors in Western thought is that rational is up and emotional is down. As they explain, “Such metaphorical orientations are not
arbitrary. They have a basis in our physical and cultural experience.” This metaphorical orientation applies to Liam and Pad’s desired geographical locations and their ways of looking at the world. Liam, a former computer programmer, prefers to view from above, in logically organized lines and graphs. Isolated on Horse Island, on the edge of cliffs overlooking the sea, he spends hours in front of his computer screens, understanding things in binary code and interacting with the outside world through electronic pulses. He carries these forms of knowing with him, even when encountering another place and culture: “wie beim Schreiben in den Elementarsprachen / der Programmierer gab es für ihn auch in Kham / keine Frage, deren Antwort / nicht Ja oder Nein lauten konnte” (94).

As the brothers travel toward “der fliegende Berg” with a convoy of researchers and Chinese soldiers, Liam is focused only on his goal and seems disinterested in the domination that China exercises over not only the Tibetan people, but the landscape. Ransmayr makes explicit that Chinese domination is more than just cultural and political:

Und in den breiten Mäandern von Hochtälern,
in die unsere Route von Lhasa nach Chengdu
schließlich einmündete, sahen wir Lastwagenkolonnen
dahinkriechen, turmhoch beladen
mit den Stämmen riesiger Himalayazedern,
Hemlocktannen und Tränenkiefern –
den in Rohstoff für Chinas Zukunft verwandelten
Urwäldern von Kham, an deren Stelle nun nackte,
mit Millionen Baumstümpfen beschlagte Hügel
in alle Himmelsrichtungen
und bis an den Horizont davonrollten:
Kahlschläge, aus denen Wild, Vögel
und Menschen geflüchtet waren und den Insekten,
Ameisen, Borkenkäfern und ihren Artgenossen
überlassen hatten:

341 Lakoff and Johnson 17 and 14.
ein schattenlos, verwüstetes Land. (110-1)

Pad takes great interest in these scenes, which appear to him as a "real" image, as opposed to the electronic images that Liam allows to pass over his computer screen. Pad experiences the world physically and down, i.e. at sea level, whereas Liam experiences it isolated in his house high on the cliffs of Horse Island.

Like the natural history of destruction that German author W. G. Sebald’s work *Die Ringe des Saturn* shows, the text illuminates a history of destruction that is inherent in post-Enlightenment modern progress. What differs, though, is that this is not restricted to Western forms of thought, and Ransmayr is able to show that political and geographical domination, mostly attributed to European countries colonizing non-European countries, is not historically inaccurate, but is itself also an idea that results from Eurocentrism. In addition, political and geographical domination tend to rely on natural domination in which wilderness areas are leveled in order to fuel “progress.”

Pad, who is interested in the freedom from dominating forms of knowledge that wilderness affords, is affected by the physical devastation that is occurring, whereas Liam, “‘Master Kaltherz, nickte bloß abwesend . . . Liam war an einer Leerstelle, einem weißen Fleck, / nicht an Wälder interessiert‘“ (111). What appears to be more disturbing to Pad, however, is the fact that Liam is completely unmoved by the destruction of the human element in the region. Liam seems to distance himself from others in the way in which one looks at an electronic image, whereas Pad is deeply moved by seeing a group of men sentenced to death and other evidence of China's domination and occupation of Tibet:

Liam blieb ungerührt.
Liam betrachtete, was er sah, schweigend wie auf einem Bildschirm: Soldaten, Pilger, Verurteilte, ließ sich von ihrem Anblick und allem, was uns an diesem und anderen Reisetagen entgeg kam, bloß bescheinen und betrachtete den Wechsel der Bilder mit der gleichen Unbewegtheit, mit der er verfolgte, was auf Bildschirmen erschien und wieder verschwand: wachsam, auf alles gefaßt, aber ohne Wut oder Empörung. (94)

Liam ignores the destruction of both environment and humans because of his goal of conquering the mountain. The destruction is easy to ignore for Liam, which is distressing to Pad. Sebald’s essays in *On the Natural History of Destruction* (1999) address the ease with which German authors have ignored the Allied bombings of German cities during the Second World War. Sebald connects the ability to ignore barbarism during the war to the German response during the bombings themselves. He states: “You do not expect an insect colony to be transfixed with grief at the destruction of a neighboring anthill, but you do assume a certain degree of empathy in human nature, and to that extent there is indeed something alarming and absurd about continuing to drink coffee in the normal way on Hamburg balconies at the end of July 1943 . . . ” (42). *Der fliegende Berg* presents Liam’s total disregard for the social and political injustice being enacted upon Tibetans as representative of the logic inherent in Western thought, which results in disregard for one another and the failure of, as Sebald describes, “healthy human reasoning” (42). Figurative wilderness can serve as a counter-model to this.

Ransmayr’s text is successful in that it demonstrates an alternative to Eurocentric ways of thinking, providing two types of interaction with the world represented in Liam and Pad. The text, in its efforts to show the ability of Pad to learn the “other” and escape the reason and technology-directed life of his brother, fails to a certain extent because it
relied on wilderness as “other” to civilization metaphors in clichéd and stereotypical ways. Postcolonial theory has shown that efforts to represent non-European peoples, especially non-European women, from Western perspectives can be problematic.\textsuperscript{342}

Wilderness imagery has not only been represented as the “other” to Western civilization in general, but has also been invoked to represent woman as the “other” to man. This figurative other, like both the discussions of Arcadia and \textit{Germania} have shown, has been viewed in the Western world as either a positive lack of cultivation, represented in the archetypal “Mother Earth,” or as a negative lack of civilization, as in the “wild woman.” These images are not unproblematic, however, and as postmodern, postcolonial, and ecocritical theories have shown, the concept of “other” in relation to Western civilization/man has created and continued forms of domination and objectification. This is not only a physical domination but, as ecolinguists contend, a linguistic one as well. Feminizing nature through metaphors and symbols, such as those mentioned above and those noted below, is more significant than simply a way to express qualities in figurative language. As Tzeporah Berman notes:

\begin{quote}
several common idioms and metaphors used to describe Nature and the environmental crisis within environmental discourse . . . such as ‘rape of the land,’ ‘virgin forest,’ ‘Mother Earth,’ and the re-appropriation of the word ‘Gaia’ to represent the Earth reinforce patriarchal dualisms and hierarchal traditions which continue to objectify woman and Nature, and perpetuate the separation of humans from each other and the non-human world.\textsuperscript{343}
\end{quote}

The conflation of woman/nature as “other” to civilization is more than just an attribution of qualities; it reflects a dominant view of the world in Western culture that has resulted

\textsuperscript{342} See for example Homi Bhaba, \textit{“The Other Question . . . The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse,”} \textit{Screen} 24.6 (1983): 18-36.

in both the stereotypical praise of certain qualities of woman and non-western peoples with simultaneous condemnation of other perceived attributes.

Ransmayr’s texts are typically characterized as innovative, ground-breaking, postmodern, and progressive. And yet, Ransmayr too falls into the trap of employing stereotypical female characters who embody wilderness, and yet he does not do so critically. In *Morbus Kitahara*, for example, one of the main protagonists, Lily, is portrayed as a wild-woman who roams the high mountains. And “obwohl sie die meisten Jahre ihres bisherigen Lebens in der gleichen Armeseligkeit und unter dem gleichen, von Gebirgen und Hügelketten gefaßten Himmel verbracht hatte wie irgendein Bewohner des Seeufers, was und blieb Lily für Moor doch nur *die Brasilianerin. Eine Zugereiste. Eine aus der Fremde*” (110). Lily, a refugee as a child from “die Schuttwüsten der Stadt Wien,” has turned into a wild woman in this place. She is an outsider not only because of her immigrant status, but also because of her behavior once reaching Moor. Vienna is commonly used as a symbol of the highest type of civilization that can be reached by human endeavors, but because of the effects of the war, even Vienna has become a “wasteland.” Therefore, its refugees hope to reach one of the ships headed for Brazil. Lily’s family, however, does not make it to the ship and ends up in Moor.344

The commonplace notion that wilderness engenders wild behavior is important for the construction of Lily as a character. Within Moor, she learns to transverse wilderness and to travel easily between the various zones of the text: the decaying, backward, regressing Moor, the wilderness that separates it from the outside world, and

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344 Despite the revelation of her heritage, one cannot help but read Lily as an Amazonian. Her, and the protagonists Bering and Ambras’, eventual death in the Brazilian wilderness makes the connection that much more convincing. Even her name is somewhat reminiscent of “lea” from “Penthesilea.”
the modern, electrified, and occupied town of Brand. The mountains that Lily regularly crosses in order to trade goods and war memorabilia serve as a barrier for the residents of Moor, but because Lily is one with the wilderness she is able to easily occupy this third space: “Lily konnte töten. Eine Frau allein im Gebirge oder allein irgendwo in den Hotelruinen hoch über dem See, mußte sie immer wieder vor der Geilheit der Banden flüchten, mußte die Hänge hinabspringen, vor Totschlägen und Brandstiftern davonrennen in die Wildnis und oft in die Nacht und mußte sich in den Klüften des Steinernen Meeres verbergen, in irgendeinem Dickicht am Seeufer oder in Höhlen“ (125). She is called “Die Jägerin” by the narrator and “dispassionately” snipes the skin-head bands of marauders. Her ability to hunt, however, is the result of a transformation: “Aber zweimal, auch dreimal im Jahr . . . verwandelte sich Lily von einem schnellfüßigen, kaum zu erjagenden Opfer in eine ebenso schnell Jägerin . . .” (125). Her transformation is a reflection of her inability to feel pain or remorse from the killing, despite her being a victim of much violence herself. The narrator describes her hunt: “Stundenlang, manchmal tageland lief, stieg, kroch und kletterte Lily zur Jagdzeit bewaffnet durch das Steinerne Meer, las wohl da und dort eine schöne Versteinerung auf und beim Durchwaten der Bäche auch Smaragdsplitter, suchte auf diesen Wegen aber nach nichts anderem als nach ihrem Wild” (128). Lily could be described as the “wild woman” archetype in the Jungian sense. She is completely self-sufficient. Her “Behendigkeit in der Wildnis schützte sie”, she is “[vertraut] mit allen Wegen ins Gebirge” (99), she is a hunter, and she is able to tame the wild dogs owned by the protagonist Ambras: “[sie] vertraute . . . sich doch selbst den größten von Ambras Hunden lachend an, ließ zu, daß

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345 Emphasis original.
The conflation of woman and wilderness takes an even more clichéd turn in Der fliegende Berg. The clan member Nyema is representative of the Earth Mother, or Mother Goddess. Because of the death of her husband, she is labeled a “Himmelsbraut,” which allows her to, if she would like, “mit jedem Mann ihres Willens ein Kind zeugen” (185). Perhaps there is such a social construction in Tibetan culture, but the notion of a woman who can have sex with anyone she chooses without social retribution is also a long-standing male fantasy often disguised as female freedom. This image of Nyema as a stereotypical “other,” subject to male fantasy, is further enforced by Ransmayr’s description of Pad and Nyema having sex. It happens not in a tent, but rather in the moss on the edge of “ein natürliches Becken” (187) in which Pad has taken a bath. He describes his experience with her as freeing him from the disgust he finds in the human body:

wie für immer befreit von deisem Ekel
nur die Aromen von Erde, von Yakwolle,
von Schneewasser und Heu an Nyemas Schenkeln,
an ihrer Brust, auf der sie meine Hand,
meinen Mund, meine Zunge duldet,
und roch nur den Rauch und die Nachtluft
in ihrem Haar, das auf mich herabfloß,
als sie sich zu meiner Reiterin aufschwäng
und zuließ, daß ich mich an ihren Brüsten festhielt,
so fest, daß ihre Milch, die doch Tashi ernähren sollte,
auf meinen Hals, auf mein Gesicht tropfte
und mich in einen Rausch versetzte,
von dem Captain Daddy
Ransmayr’s text perpetuates the image of the erotically charged ‘native’ female, labeled by some a positive quality, and by others negative, that has been prominent in Western literature for centuries. In addition, Pad acknowledges that this encounter is the realization of a fantasy, yet there is no critical distance shown in the text because of the first person narration. Perhaps Ransmayr is attempting to show that despite Pad’s wish to disengage with his brother and the Western forms of knowledge Liam represents, it is not extensive enough to allow him to lose his inherent Western prejudices against non-Western peoples. I believe this is not the case, and rather Ransmayr participates in stereotypically using a figurative conflation of woman and wilderness. Much of the rhetoric that has allowed the oppression of the “other” human being throughout history holds true for the control and exploitation of nature, and it is no coincidence that women’s oppression is paralleled in their association with wilderness in both positive and negative ways.  

In an effort to dismantle and deconstruct some of the women-as-wilderness images that are so prevalent in literature, Jelinek’s works often include dysfunctional sexual relationships between the characters, disabusing any notions of sexual promiscuity as a form of female emancipation. Jelinek’s text *Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr* presents wilderness as much more than simply a physical reality or simulated reality within Austria’s national borders, but rather as an abstraction she wishes to deconstruct.

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346 This has been the founding notion of Ecofeminism. See Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (New York: Zed Books, 1993).
Wilderness becomes in the text a symbol for the relationships between the sexes, for example the emotional and sexual friction between Erich and his wife, Erich and the poet, the manager and the *Kaufhauskönig*, and Erich and the manager. The relationships between men and women in the text reverse and challenge the conception of nature as feminine, but also employ nature as something which can engender uncivilized, brute, and savage behavior, as displayed in the physical and sexual violence the characters enact upon each other and nature: “Ob Frau, ob Wiesenknöterich, beide gedeihen sie nach einem einzigen Prinzip, sind zum Abpflücken da, diese Blumen! (31). The text illuminates the insistence of modern society to accept violent behavior behind the defense of biological determinism.

As discussed above, Riehl’s works portray wilderness as the opposite of commercialized agriculture. As the modern city in Germany became more and more industrialized and material culture eclipsed natural culture, wilderness became an important symbol for Riehl. Schama explains this in greater detail: “[Forests were], in short, the home of community; the absolute opposite of a Germany made over into one vast overupholstered, department-store-manufactured bourgeois parlor. If, in this scheme, the rootless Jew was the purveyor of this corrupted, citified society, the forester was his antithesis— the embodiment of ethnic authenticity, rooted like his trees in the ancient earth of the Fatherland.”347 It is no coincidence, then, that Jelinek places the forester opposite the department store owner and his wife in the third section of *Oh Wildnis*: in a reversal of the tradition that Stifter and others upheld in tales like “Der Holzweg,” Jelinek complicates the idea presented by the Grimm Brothers’ Fairy Tales and within Romantic

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347 Schama 114.
literature that wilderness is a free space, in which the rules of Rome don’t apply and
instead a form of primitive and Germanic equality prevails. Rather, according to Jelinek,
wilderness not only is symbolic of true human nature, but wilderness unchecked and
uncultivated leads to the mindset that is responsible for the crimes of violence against
“others.”

Jelinek’s novel *Gier: Ein Unterhaltungsroman* (2000) addresses many of the
same issues that have dominated her work including sexual violence, images of
environmental (mis)use, rural Austria and its underlying fascism, and the use of language
in multiple ways to undermine “masculine” thought. Helen Finch claims that because
*Gier* is Jelinek’s first novel published after the entry of the far-right Freedom Party led by
Jörg Haider into Austrian government, the work has “political significance as a direct
response to an episode that, albeit briefly, was considered a major disruption to the
European consensus following the Cold War.” The narrator’s (or Jelinek’s)
monologues continually question the assumption that sexual urges and desires are
“natural” and instead intend to show that these are ruled by a social system that has
created notions of roles of gender and condemn the system that has allowed violence
against women to be a “natural” part of men’s conflict to overcome their “wild” side.
Many scholars agree that Jelinek is a socialist feminist who believes that the overthrow of
capitalism is the only way for feminism to be successful and that capitalism creates
unhealthy sexual relationships between men and women. And yet, she recognizes that

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the defeat of capitalism will not automatically lead to sexual equality or “daß, wenn sich unser kapitalistisches System geändert haben wird, sich alles, was im argen liegt zwischen Männern und Frauen, automatisch mitändern wird.”

As in so much of Jelinek’s work, social issues and problems are raised, but tangible solutions are not given.

The text describes an “idyllic” town in Styria wracked by greed. The way in which Jelinek positions greed within the specific history of the Second Republic and the allusions she makes to contemporary events make the text distinctive from traditional literary explorations of greed. More than just the desire for money, greed in the text becomes an all-encompassing way of life for the characters. The protagonist “Gendarm” Kurt Janisch displays all forms of “Gier,” including monetary greed, sexual lust and desire, and voraciousness. He is married and has a son with whom he acquires investment property. He has sex with most of the women in the small town, hoping his relationships will enable him to acquire their property. He soon becomes involved with a woman named Gerti and convinces her to marry him so that she signs over her house to him. Their sexual relationship becomes increasingly more violent and oppressive. In the meantime, he becomes involved with her daughter Gabi, whom he then murders and disposes of in a man-made alpine lake. Gerti then returns to her childhood home in Vienna and kills herself. Violence against the self and others permeates Jelinek’s work and is true of Gier as well: Janisch is not the only character that displays violent greed, as his son and daughter-in-law are also attempting to kill an old woman (Frau Eichholzer), so that her house will be turned over to them. What is most significant about this text for

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my discussion is the connection Jelinek makes between late capitalism, patriarchal violence, and ecological demise. The underlying theme of consumption is expressed in material and sexual ways that affect the domination of both woman and the environment in violent ways.

Despite the sub-title, “an entertainment novel,” the text is not entertaining in the traditional sense. It shows little progression of plot, the narrator speaks about events before they have taken place in the story, and details about a certain event are given fragmentally throughout the narrative. In addition, the crime and punishment is revealed early in the story, thus quickly ending any possibility of a traditional crime fiction arc:

“So wie die . . . noch nicht sechzehnjährigen Lehrling, leider im seichten Wasser und daher noch intakt, im See, im See. Wir kommen gewiß noch dorthin zurück. Der Gendarm würde sich nie entschuldigen, wozu wird man etwas? ” (58). The plot takes up very little space in the text and the characters, like many of those in Jelinek’s other works, are mere types that the narrator uses in order to rail against or about a variety of topics including greed, politics, sex, banking, tourism, and the writing process itself. The structural, linguistic, and narrative elements of the text are intended to do the “entertaining.” As Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger notes, Jelinek “repeatedly alters the time sequence of the narrative by using anachrony, analepsis, as well as prolepsis” as part of the process of deconstructing the plot.  

Like many of Jelinek’s other works, the text is less about the characters, their actions, and a linear progression of events, and more about the rhetoric and narrative passages that are loosely held together.

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As opposed to the archetypal “Earth Mother” or image of the “Wild Woman” who frequently appears in literature, Gier’s narrator continually compares women to dwellings, which also has a long history as a stereotypical trope because of the domesticity of woman. The two main female characters in the text, Gerti and Gabi, are not the natural “other” of civilization and of man, but women become the object of men’s ultimate desire as they want to “house” themselves in women. Both women and dwellings are things to be dominated by men, alongside the natural world.

The narrator employs a variety of modes and shifts narrative perspective to become the mouthpiece for the characters. She doesn’t present the inner feelings and emotions specific to the person, but rather she presents the feelings consistent with that type of person. The narration is not only omniscient, in that she follows the action of the story and presents the inner thoughts of the characters, but she herself becomes a character in the story who reports from a first-person perspective, because she too has been seduced by Janisch. The narrator also directly addresses the audience and reflects on the writing process: “. . . weil ich bereits jetzt alles über die Gestalt weiß. Das ist ja das Schöne an meinem Beruf” (98). The narrator constantly vacillates between attempting to remain reliable and admitting the unreliability of the text she has presented: “Ich fasse noch einmal zusammen, kann es aber, wie immer, nicht halten und lasse es im letzten Moment fallen boing . . .” (455). The reader infers that the action she refers to may not have actually happened. Because the characters are types, the narrator self-consciously presents what might as well have happened and signals this to the reader with the phrase, “Kann ich mir vorstellen” (329). Finch argues that Gier “offers a challenge both to the conventional, authoritative structures of the novel and . . . demonstrates a seepage of
meaning, reference and authority across her work as a whole . . .” Seepage also describes the symbolism at work in the text. The natural landscape cannot be controlled and eventually its inability to be contained allows for a resurfacing of things, revealing both the murder Janisch commits and Austrians Jews who died through the Holocaust.

In addition to being Jelinek’s first novel that directly addresses Haider and the FPÖ, Gier includes a twenty-five page description of a man-made lake, which makes the work quite worthy of critical attention. The narrator discusses the process of making the lake: a quarry was filled with water in order to not only cover up the hole in the earth, but also to provide a place for tourist enjoyment of the landscape. A green slime grows on the lake because of its artificial nature and because it is used to “cover up” human destruction of the landscape. This slime makes it unsuitable for swimming or recreation. The now artificial wilderness fails as a tourist attraction. No wildlife will live here, and the lake is continually referred to as dead. Despite all attempts to make the lake prettier, the deadness always returns. Fittingly, Janisch dumps Gabi’s body into the lake, and wilderness becomes unwittingly complicit in the crime that he has committed. This lake, which is so dead that nothing will grow in it, is symbolic of the characters in the work: they too are static types that do not evolve or grow. Jelinek employs these types in order to look at relations between men and women from every angle: “Die Menschen würden sehr böös auf mich sein, wenn sie wüßten, daß ich sie hier in Wursthüllen stecke und aufhänge, jedem Blick preisgegeben . . .” (303). The lake, though, by regurgitating Gabi’s body, resists hiding her murder and becomes symbolic for an Austria that, despite its attempt to hide its complicity in the Holocaust, continually reveals evidence thereof.

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352 Finch 153.
Consumption ultimately means death in the novel, for people as well as the environment, and Jelinek makes connections between the consumption of people in late capitalism and during the Holocaust: “Der Sinn dieser von Organismen bevölkerten Häuschen wird sein, daß das jeweilige Vorgängermodell als Sicherheit für das nachfolgende wird genommen werden können, na, ist das nicht eine gute Idee zur Belebung unserer Wirtschaft und zur Abschaffung von überzähligen Lebewesen?” (23).

The same mentality that encourages mass consumerism through reproducibility allows and relies on a certain amount of destruction: “Das Verschwinden dieses Mädchens ist gar kein Problem, denn es ist dermaßen vielfältig vorhanden. Es hat sich genauso hergerichtet wie alle anderen . . .” (166). The lake, which has been man-made for “Material für die Straße” (80) is not alive, but dead; “Selbst dieses Wasser hier ertrinkt ja in sich selbst, ohne einen einzigen Aufschrei” (81-2). But, like those who have been victims of consumerism, the lake

muß unbeschreiblich schlammig, dunkel, eisig, trostlos dort sein, sozusagen der Ort, an dem das Gewässer ohnmächtig ist, aber trotzdem unablässig, mit einem Teil seines Gedächtnisses, der von der Alpenkonvention, welche die Schadstoffe einlädt, sich hier nur ja nicht ausladen zu lassen, nicht geregelt worden ist, mit einem Teil, der auf der Lauer liegt, wahrcheinlich lauert er auf sein eigenes furchtbares Erwachen. (84-5)

In addition to the lake that is symbolic of the violence inherent in consumerism, wilderness does not allow a complete covering up of history:

Über die Aufräumungsarbeiten nach dem Murenabgang im letzten Herbst wollen wir gar nicht erst zu reden anfangen, dieses Kapitel müssen wir endlich abschließen, obwohl wir doch so dran hängen. Da haben doch sogar die Gendarmenschüler fünf Tage lang bei den Aufräumungsarbeiten mitgeholfen, von den Tonnen an Haar in der Erde, die sich bis heute keiner erklären kann, ganz zu schweigen. (26)
Hair is an object that also appears in Jelinek’s novel *Die Kinder der Toten* (1995) and is commonly viewed as a synecdoche for the bodies of victims of the Holocaust buried under Austrian soil. While Austria attempts to control and project imagery of pristine and perfect nature, thus keeping the Habsburg myth alive and the truth buried, the uncontrollable wild elements of nature resist complicity and reveal the truth.

Menasse’s novel *Schubumkehr* also uses wilderness as an image of resistance. The major characters in the work are representative of the various actions happening in the town. Mayor König, the King, symbolizes the transition of Komprechts nature from a state of wilderness to a simulated amusement park. Roman, the protagonist, symbolizes *Heimat* and the struggles one has with memory, and both Frau Nemec and Roman’s mother are symbolic of two types of interaction with wilderness.\(^{353}\)

Menasse also relies on wilderness abstractions in order to give the nature in the text some type of voice. Frau Nemec symbolizes the wilderness’s own fight against the changes that are taking place in the town and the surrounding area. Not only is Frau Nemec an outsider in her physical location in that she lives on the border of the forest that belongs to the neighboring *Grafschaft*, but also in her age and her knowledge of the wilderness surrounding Komprechts. She is also, like many of the people in Komprechts, superstitious and experiences early in the novel a natural catastrophe that reaches beyond this superstition: “Nun war während der vergangenen drei Tage etwas passiert, das sie in ihrem ganzen Leben nie erlebt hatte, das sie nicht einmal vom Hörensagen kannte, das im Erzählen hören unglaublich klingen mußte- die Augenzeugen aber entsetzte” (24).

Menasse associates Frau Nemec and the powerful or dangerous side of the landscape in

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\(^{353}\) The character of Roman’s mother has been discussed in detail in Chapter 2.
Komprechts early in the novel. Not only is Frau Nemec the one to name this natural disaster, “angefrorenen Nebel,” but she is also a witness to the fog’s “fürchterliche Wirkung” (22). Yet unlike the other witnesses who are horrified by the scene that “sah aus, als hätten unzählige Bomben eingeschlagen, ein Schlachtfeld, ein Trümmerhaufen,” Frau Nemec is closely associated with the event and objects when changes to the area, like the replanting of the forest, are made (24). She prefers that the area be left alone to re-grow without intervention and becomes a voice for allowing nature to be wild. As these changes take place in order to make the newly planned quarry museum and the surrounding area more appealing to visitors, Frau Nemec becomes more and more isolated from the world she knows. She sees the changes as inauthentic and describes the newly built lakeshore: “. . . in diesem gespenstisch stillen Seepanorama, in dieser falschen Idylle . . .” (134).

Frau Nemec lives between two different modes of interacting with wilderness, on the edge of the town, between the forest and the quarry. Her home is literally placed between the modernity of late-capitalist Komprechts and the regionalism and ruralism of the Grafschaft. As Komprechts attempts to replace the “real” wilderness with a simulated nature, as discussed in detail in Chapter 2 and 3, Frau Nemec recognizes that she is out of place in this new simulated reality: “Das war nicht die Welt, nicht die, die sie kannte und die ihr vertraut war, und sie war nicht alleine, sie war zusammen mit der ganzen Germeinde, in der sie seit jeher gelebt hatte, aus der Welt herausgehoben und in eine andere gestellt worden, in der nichts mehr real schien” (48). Frau Nemec, of all the people in Komprechts, is most heavily affected by the changes going on around her. As a symbol of resistance, her reactions against the actions enforced upon wilderness allow
nature some agency. She notes that the transformation from wilderness into a false idyll resembles death: “Aber jetzt brummten die Fliegen über dieser Szenerie wie über einem Kadaver” (134).

Frau Nemec does not protest the changes going on in Komprechts verbally but rather, uses the forces of nature to enact what she believes will solve the issue. As the mayor reveals his wish to change the environment around the lake and to use her house and the surrounding forest as a part of the proposed quarry museum, Frau Nemec decides not to allow these changes. She kills him because she believes he is responsible for the creation of a world in which she no longer fits. Frau Nemec prepares the mayor a soup from the very same mushroom that is pictured on the front of the travel brochure in order to avenge herself. She is portrayed as both a Mother Earth, who is close to nature and knows its secrets, but also a Wild Woman: “Frau Nemec kannte die Stelle genau, wo die Pilze wuchsen . . . im Volksmund bekannt unter dem Namen Racheengel” (152). The use of a wild mushroom against Komprechts’ transition into a green tourist destination ultimately shows the power behind the reality of the physical and not just the symbolic. Despite the associative meaning of the mushroom indicating a fairy-tale world from which the marketing agent hopes to profit, the actual mushroom has the ability to kill and is more powerful than even the notion of what a “Racheengel” might be able to do in human consciousness. Frau Nemec represents the revenge of wilderness against its own transformation into domesticated nature.

Herr Ölzant, an older resident of Komprechts, is also symbolic of the history tied to the landscape that is being lost with the rapid changes to the environment. He, like Frau Nemec, feels discarded with the changes the mayor makes. He continues to pull
stones out of the non-profitable and no longer-working quarry, in order to revive the tradition of the “Untergänger,” which entails “den Verlauf der [Gemeinde-] Grenzen ständig zu überprüfen” (111). He believes his purpose is to completely rebuild “die Gemarkung des Forsts” (115). Jamie Feijoo notes that “Herr Ölzant betreibt seine eigentümliche Rettung der Vergangenheit, damit diese in der fortschreitenden Transverstierung Komprechts nicht vergessen wird.”354 Both characters personify the loss of history inscribed on the landscape, particularly the quarry which was once part of a National Socialist forced labor camp. The mayor believes that, along with the wilderness and the wildlife carcasses killed by the frozen fog, both Frau Nemec and Herr Ölzant need to be removed in order to make forward progress. Much in the same way that Jelinek’s artificial lake is symbolic of a covering of history, Menasse’s characters are representative of Austria’s removal of its Nazi history in order to be appealing to tourists.

Wilderness functions in Ransmayr’s, Jelinek’s, and Menasse’s literature as the figurative “other” to Western civilization and whose destruction is symbolic of the destruction of Austria’s National Socialist history. Wilderness can also represent freedom and alternative modes of experiencing the world. Ransmayr explores this idea in a number of his works, where the concept of inventing reality predominates; myth and fantasy are related to “real” accounts and histories, and Ransmayr blends the real and unreal to make them into a unified whole. The protagonist of Ransmayr’s novel Die letzte Welt is interested in following in the footsteps of the poet Naso to find the work Metamorphosis not only for the personal glory it will afford him, but also because he is interested in the “Erfindung der Wirklichkeit” (254). The alternative history of Morbus

354 Feijoo 74.
Kitahara also invents reality by imagining a post-World War II Germany that, instead of being re-industrialized by the Marshall Plan, is left an underdeveloped and war-ravaged land through the alternative Morgenthau Plan. The narrative does not follow a simple chronology, but rather begins with the end, much like the reversal of development within the town of Moor. The three protagonists attempt to escape the deindustrialized Moor but find themselves in a parallel, if not wilder, place. Their destination is the Brazilian town of Pantano, the Portuguese word for “bog” or “marsh,” or moor. There is also the ruin of a prison camp nearby, but there is no secret in this, for the chapter is titled “Heimkehr.”

The scene in which the protagonists Bering and Ambras fall to their deaths at the end of the novel is the same scene that begins the novel, in a type of Nietzschean “Wiederkehr des Gleichen.”

Ransmayr had already experimented with the idea of inventing reality in Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis. What actually drives Mazzini beyond the invention of reality in his fantasies into the material world of the Arctic is laid out for the reader in the foreword entitled “Vor Allem,” where the narrator outlines the entire structure of the work that will follow:

Wir haben uns nicht damit begnügt, unsere Abenteuer einfach zu bestehen, sondern haben . . . so insgeheim die Illusion gefördert, daß selbst das Entlegenste und Entfernteste zugänglich sei wie ein Vergnügungsgelände, ein blinkender Luna-Park: die Illusion, daß die Welt nur durch die hastige Entwicklung unserer Fortbewegungsmittel kleiner geworden sei . . . Aber das ist ein Irrtum! Unsere Fluglinien haben uns schließlich die Reisezeiten in einem geradezu absurden Ausmaß verkürzt, nicht aber die Entfernungen, die nach wie vor ungeheuerlich sind. Vergessen wir nicht, daß eine Luftlinie eben nur eine Linie und kein Weg ist und: daß wir, physiognomisch gesehen, Fußgänger und Läufer sind (7).

Technology enables us to interact with nature in increasingly sophisticated ways. The mindset that encourages technological progress, however, remains thoroughly distanced
from the object of its pursuit. Similar to a Baudrillardian simulation of the real, technology has created the illusion that the world has become smaller and more reachable, yet Ransmayr’s narrator stresses that the route towards experience afforded by modern technology is only a line—a geometrical concept that structures the world through systematic reason and logic but which removes the traveler from direct experiences. Moreover, humans are physically intended to walk and run, actions that put them into direct contact with their surroundings, and also require a certain amount of humility when encountering nature. The narrator laments that journeying has become a tourist experience because of technology, one that is undertaken for pure pleasure and entertainment, but one that allows only a superficial experience for the traveler. He understands that true experience of the material world means getting back to the original.

The modern protagonist Mazzini first becomes acquainted with the narrator through a mutual friend, the book dealer Anna Koreth. After perusing Koreth’s antique collection, Mazzini discovers “die mehr als hundert Jahre alte Beschreibung einer Eismeeerfahrt entdeckte, die so dramatisch, so bizar und am Ende so unwahrscheinlich war wie sonst nur eine Phantasie” (19). Mazzini is fascinated with the explorers’ accounts of this expedition: within them he finds confirmation of his childhood fantasies that his mother fostered in him through descriptions of his great-grand-uncle, a member of the original North Pole expedition (14). The narrator is struck by Mazzini’s occupation with fantasy: “Er entwerfe, sagte Mazzini, gewissermaßen, die Vergangenheit neu.” Mazzini would “denke sich Geschichten aus, erfinde Handlungsabläufe und Ereignisse, ziehe sie auf und prüfe am Ende, ob es in der fernen oder jüngsten Vergangenheit jemals
wirkliche Vorläufer oder Entsprechungen für die Gestalten seiner Phantasie gegeben habe” (17).

The narrator’s own task in retelling the story of Mazzini is paralleled in Mazzini’s wish to invent reality: “aber eine phantasierte Geschichte, die tatsächlich schon einmal geschehen sei, würde sich doch durch nichts mehr von einer bloßen Nacherzählung unterscheiden; niemand würde eine solche Phantasie zu schätzen wissen und jeder glauben, hier läge ein reiner Tatsachenbericht vor” (17). The narrator alerts the reader to the contrived nature of the narrative he will present but wishes to authenticate Mazzini’s existence through the writing of his text.

The role of the narrator in telling Mazzini’s story is similar to Humboldt’s scientific approach that steered a path between cold rationalism and over-sentimentalized Romanticism. This balance affords both Humboldt and the narrator the opportunity to use not only empirical facts, but also imagination:

The philosophical study of nature rises above the requirements of mere delineation, and does not consist in the sterile accumulation of isolated facts. The active and inquiring spirit of man may therefore be occasionally permitted to escape from the present into the domain of the past, to conjecture that which cannot yet be clearly determined, and thus to revel amid the ancient and ever-recurring myths of geology.\(^{355}\)

The narrator must also “escape” the present into the past and use imagination to tie the facts together. He notes: “So ordne ich, was mir an Hinweisen zur Verfügung steht, fülle Leerstellen mit Vermutungen aus und empfinde es am Ende einer Indizienkette doch als Willkür, wenn ich sage: So war es. Mazzinis Abreise erscheint mir dann als ein Hinüberwechseln aus der Wirklichkeit in die Warscheinlichkeit“ (56). The

narrator’s task of putting Mazzini’s story together becomes reminiscent of that of the scientist-explorer, arranging facts and imagination in order to present a complete picture of reality: “Ich habe auch die anderen Hefte Mazzinis mit Namen versehen . . . Ich bin mit den Aufzeichnungen verfahren, wie jeder Entdecker mit seinem Land . . . ich habe sie getauft” (171). As opposed to adhering to a strictly historical model of narration, Ransmayr employs a mode that Tang claims is a hallmark of postmodernism: “Since historical consciousness has always been deemed the hallmark of modernity, the so-called postmodernism of the past quarter century has reclaimed geographic-spatial thinking as an antidote to the peremptory imperative of historicization.”

Wilderness in the work becomes a metaphor. The system of existence that is the controlling factor in nature is presented as an alternative mode of understanding human existence and counters the dualism of the Cartesian model and the teleological progress myth of modernity. The cyclical, transient, morphing characteristics of nature, and the networks of significance that are present in nature, become a model for the structure of the text itself. Ransmayr’s novel breaks the dualisms of nature-civilization and civilization-art and does this on three interdependent levels. First, the expedition members’ journal entries become representative of man’s perceived position over nature through progress and technology. Second, the text presents a protagonist whose feelings 

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357 Thomas Epple in his essay ‘Phantasie contra Realität- eine Untersuchung zur zentralen Thematik von Christoph Ransmayrs ‘Die Letzte Welt’, Literature für Leser H.1 (1990): 29-43, contends that art becomes the only alternative for both nature and civilization in Ransmayr’s work, yet this view ignores the natural world that is presented in his works not as pure aesthetic fantasy from the characters’ point of view, but as material reality.
of isolation within modern existence cause him to seek an authentic relationship with the natural world. And third, the narrator begins to break down the dualisms that affect both the expedition members and Mazzini through the creation of the text itself.

As the narrator discovers the story and discovers reality himself, the text that he presents carries the same characteristics of the natural world that the nineteenth-century North Pole expedition members Payer and Weyprecht and the modern protagonist Mazzini encounter. Whereas mimesis intends to show and diegesis to tell, the text does both simultaneously. The structure of the text represents nature, while the narrator represents both nature and the characters’ feelings and emotions, which are also mimetic of the natural world. The structure of the text does not have a traditional form and employs many of the characteristics of postmodernism, including a non-linear plot, temporal flexibility, pastiche, and intertextuality. These literary techniques reflect the natural world that Payer describes as “Chaos,” in which “Naturgesetze” rule (101). The social hierarchies and power structures that the expedition members bring with them to the Arctic are only enforced through the strict regimentation of life that Weyprecht attempts, and yet these too begin to break down under the pressures of the arctic reality. The narrator situates his difficulties in determining the truth amongst a longer tradition of “teilbare Wirklichkeit.” This alludes to previous expeditions of knowledge in the past in which those who “discovered” new lands were never disillusioned of their knowledge. An example is Christopher Columbus, who out of pride never admitted that he had not discovered India as he had set out to do but, rather, discovered lands previously unknown to his European contemporaries. The “Heldengestalten” the narrator portraits include “der Genuese Christoforo Colombo” who “entdeckt das Mündungsgebiet des Orinoco und
Ransmayr presents a novel that aesthetically represents the natural world as it really is: destructive, transient, and a “mystery for all time.” The novel interweaves history and fiction, reality and fantasy, and nature and culture through the art itself. The novel breaks the polar relationships that have dominated western philosophy, culture, and religion for centuries and suggests new ways of looking at human existence by privileging the presumed “other” of reason: nature, fantasy, and myth. Art, nature, and civilization, then, become an interdependent unity that can no longer be understood as polar opposites.
On an ecological level, as each organism’s existence in nature is dependent on and influenced by the relationship it has to the inorganic and organic substances around it, the narration of the work is a web of signification, in which the narrator’s relationship to Mazzini, his journals, the journals of the expedition, his own knowledge of the world and himself, and his task of narrating Mazzini’s story all influence the text that is ultimately presented by the author. After Mazzini’s disappearance, Koreth and the narrator enter his apartment to find a wine stain on the carpet that had been covered with salt. The stain then disappeared when the rug is rolled up, and this leads the narrator to remember parts of Mazzini’s journal, “Auch über diesen Fleck führt eine Erinnerung . . .” (57), in which polar bears are robbed of a tooth for research. The pools of blood quickly freeze into ice particles, but then also quickly disappear. This pool of blood in the ice then reminds the narrator of details of the original expedition: “. . . ich über diesen Rotweinfleck auf eine Eisscholle geriet (56). Not only does history repeat itself in this scene, from the expedition killing polar bears for food, to scientists collecting information for the protection of the bears, to Mazzini reading about polar bears being killed by the expedition and then spilling his wine, but it also foreshadows Mazzini’s disappearance into the ice.

The historical sources, biographies, and letters that the narrator puts together to tell Mazzini’s story is a metaphorical ocean wilderness in which the narrator is not only lost and disoriented, but where he also finds freedom and creativity. The disillusionment the members of the expedition feel after learning that they are traveling to a place that in reality does not exist and can only be represented by lines and points is reflected in the narrator’s attempt to write a history out of the journals left behind by Mazzini and the
members of the Austro-Hungarian expedition. Like Weyprecht’s concept of viewing the force of nature in its extremes, the narrator is more interested in the process of putting the story together than in the product itself. When not all of the details are there, when some of them are missing, one is able to see *natura naturans* instead of *natura naturata*. The story has no ending, the product is never finished, and creating the narrative becomes a force in itself. Like Payer and Weyprecht, who eventually realize the error of their notions of dominating forms of knowledge and the “Irrtum!” of modern attempts toward authentic experiences with the natural world, the narrator too acknowledges the Sisyphean task he has of narrating reality. The never-ending journey that Mazzini takes is metaphorical for the narrator as well. Mazzini leaves no tangible remains to “verbrennen, versenken, oder verscharren,” so he must “erst in den Geschichten, die man sich nach seinem Verschwinden über ihn zu erzählen beginnt, allmählich und endgültig aus der Welt geschafft werden” (9). In attempting to bring a close to Mazzini’s story and therefore to his life, the narrator finds himself in a never-ending task, one which he will “nichts beenden” (250). The narrator continually changes the facts of the story and the details of Mazzini’s disappearance “immer anders und neu und rücke mich in den Versionen zurecht wie ein Möbelstück” (251). Unlike the disillusionment that Payer, Weyprecht, and Mazzini feel, the process of creating art becomes a moment of freedom for the narrator: “[ich] stehe inmitten meiner papieren Meere, allein mit allen Möglichkeiten einer Geschichte, ein Chronist, dem der Trost des Endes fehlt” (252).

In a lengthy description of the phenomenon of the northern lights, Weyprecht demonstrates his attempt to find in the power of the arctic a balance between the rules of civilization and a need to mystify the world around him. Even though he tells a sailor,
who falls “zu einem Gebet auf die Knie” to ask the Madonna to help them, that “. . . sie sollten nicht auf Wunder vertrauen, sondern auf ihn” (92). Weyprecht himself relates his perception of the phenomenon to biblical battles. He begins the journal entry with a description: “. . . in dichten Büschnel schießen fortwährend Tausende Blitze von allen Seiten jenem Punkte am Himmelsgewölbe zu, nach welchem die freie Magnetnadel weist . . .” (93). Weyprecht is unable to continue with a purely scientific description of what he observes and relates this observation to previous knowledge of the world: “Es ist, als sei die Sage wahr geworden, von welcher wir in den alten Chroniken lesen, die himmlischen Heerscharen hätten eine Schlacht geschlagen und sich mit Blitz und Feuer von den Augen der Erdbewohner gekämpft” (93). Weyprecht’s description gives legitimacy to the myths of history by providing metaphors for natural occurrences but also undermines these myths because of the scientific understanding he has of the functioning of northern lights.

Weyprecht relies on symbols, myth, and metaphor to understand the natural phenomena around him even though he deplores the use of myth as a tool for political and national goals. He disapproves of Payer’s enthusiasm for the discovery of new lands and wishes to engage in science unobstructed by national pride. The narrator reports:

. . . die Erkenntnisse, die er sammle, hätten der Wissenschaft nützlich zu sein und nicht dem nationalen Ehrgeiz, der neuerdings auch den Nordpol um jeden Preis erobern wolle; selbst der Nordpol habe doch für die Wissenschaft keinen größeren Wert als jeder beliebige Punkt im hohen Norden auch; die internationale Hetzjagd nach Entdeckerruhm und nördlichen Breitenrekorden sei ihm zuwider und er kehre lieber mit gesicherten Ergebnissen . . . zurück. (96)

Throughout their trip, Weyprecht fears that the physical conditions of destruction and darkness will also have an effect on the souls of the sailors and requires therefore both
school lessons on board ship and Christian services every Sunday. Weyprecht knows that rules of civilization are going to be tested if the weather does not change, allowing the expedition’s return to mainland Europe. If this scenario should occur, he will choose death over the breakdown of the hierarchy that has ruled the expedition thus far:

“Offiziere der Admiral Tegetthoff noch an Bord gemeinsam bekannt: Wenn auch der Rückzug nur in die Hoffnungslosigkeit führen sollte . . . werde man Hand an sich legen und auch der Mannschaft den Selbstmord raten. Denn der Tod durch Erschießen sei gewiß gnädiger als . . . den viehischen Kämpfen um einen Fetzen Fleisch, dem Zusammenbruch der menschlichen Ordnung, dem Kannibalismus schließlich und Wahnsinn“ (232). The dreaded breakdown of hierarchical structured civilization does eventually come to pass: not because of their experiences and the influence of being in wilderness, but because of the growing political boredom and extreme nationalism of early twentieth-century Europe. The story of Payer and Weyprecht and the Austro-Hungarian polar expedition ends with World War I, one of Europe’s greatest slaughters of humans by humans.

With the outbreak of World War I, Julius Payer recognized the potential of a world without the ideologies of modern existence that led to oppression and domination, and because of this he makes a projection for the future in a 1915 entry of his journal:

“Staatsbankrotte, Millionen von Toten, die Zerstörung der Städte . . . und schliesslich der Untergang der Welt durch Verbrennung unseres Planeten als eines Schandflecks unseres Sonnensystems” (250). The characters are humbled in their interaction with arctic wilderness in the text, and their attempts at finding meaning in the world and authentic experiences through the ideologies of science, philosophy, nationalism, and at re-
experiencing history are thwarted. Payer notes about the arctic world: “Der Stumme erkennt jetzt, daß er doch ein Paradies entdeckt hat” (250). The meaning of individual life begins to grow in importance when it is taken out of the world; in the same way that Weyprecht is able to observe the true features of nature in the polar regions where an overabundance of life does not cloud his view, Ransmayr’s protagonists gain meaning when they are removed from the world: “Das Schicksal und Leben des einzelnen erscheint nirgendwo kostbarer als im leeren Raum.”

How can one with the knowledge that “Irgendwann wird diese Welt da sein, wie sie die längste Zeit war: eine Welt ohne uns,” live and discover “etwas wie Freude, auch Begeisterung?” The art that remains as a result of the disappearing protagonist gives meaning to his existence. Moreover, the relationship that the reader has to the text itself, with her ability to employ imagination while still humbly interacting with the world around her, brings a remystification to existence despite the knowledge of her precarious position in the world.

Payer and Weyprecht eventually recognize the insignificance of the search for progress. Mazzini, who lives in a time without such an emphatic teleology of progress, recognizes the insignificance of the individual and civilization. As all these characters come to discover the insignificance of humanity as compared to natural history, individual human life becomes like the blood/wine stain that quickly fades: it is only a fleck in the history of the world. The history of the natural world progresses but is also cyclical: “Was immer sie jetzt auch tun – sie haben es schon einmal getan. Sie

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358 Ransmayr, *Geständnisse eines Touristen*, 103.
359 Ransmayr, *Geständnisse eines Touristen*, 129.
wiederholen ihre Tage. Die Zeit kreist” (143). Ultimately, “die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis” is not just the destructive threat that wilderness poses to human existence nor the boredom of existence in bourgeois society, but the knowledge that \textit{res cogitans} does not necessarily exist over \textit{res extensa} and that a blurring of the lines between wilderness and civilization, as Duerr suggests in \textit{Traumzeit}, is necessary in order for people to authentically experience the world. Humans do not exist in a higher position than nature, but are a small, insignificant presence in natural history. Ransmayr’s text \textit{Geständnisse eines Touristen: Ein Verhör} (2004) discusses the core message of the novel \textit{Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis}:


The humility that Zahniser claims wilderness provides reflects the notion that human existence is dependent not only on its own works, but also that this existence depends on other life forms. A connection between American notions of wilderness as expressed by Zahniser and the Austrian authors Ransmayr, Jelinek, and Menasse might not be immediately apparent. Yet as Mark Harvey explains, “The horrific tragedy of the Holocaust and the brutal deaths of millions at the hands of other dictators such as Stalin
might seem unrelated to the task of guarding the wilderness. But for Zahniser, such inhumanity and unfathomable evil were the ultimate expression of an arrogance that also emerged in efforts to control nature and regulate the lives of other human beings.\textsuperscript{360} In keeping nature wild, Zahniser hoped to encourage a reverence for life, an idea that differs perhaps little from Thoreau’s dictum from the essay “Walking” that “In wildness is the preservation of the world.”

The contemporary literature analyzed in this study supports the argument that despite modern progress and the elimination of many wilderness areas, or perhaps precisely because of it, cultures should recognize the wild elements in its social imagination even if this is only as an abstraction of “real” wilderness. Wilderness abstractions are used to remystify the natural world that has become rid of these forms of knowledge through modern science and provide a reminder of the effects of non-humble interactions. Not only are wilderness symbols based on cultural and socially constructed meanings, but they also reinforce the way in which we conceive of wilderness. Wilderness abstractions allow human agents to interact with wilderness in non-physical ways. In fact, conceiving of the city or non-Western ways of thinking as wilderness allows experiences that may be similar conceptually to those of interacting with “real” wilderness. Wilderness abstractions can also, however, obstruct the very concrete goals of environmental preservation. If, in fact, the city is the new wilderness, in which one can experience both the positive and negative elements of natural wilderness, does one

\textsuperscript{360} Mark Harvey, \textit{Wilderness Forever: Howard Zahniser and the Path to the Wilderness Act} (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005) 147.
actually need the other? And to what extent is natural wilderness then necessary in modern existence?
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Wilderness’s continued designation as nature completely separate from civilization gives it a special position within debates about the human role in nature. Even though shifts in philosophy and science, particularly at the time around 1800, have reflected the notion that humans are a part of, and not distinct from, nature, wilderness continues to be a nature that is distinct from human habitats. The Wilderness Act was the first political attempt to define the space in order to preserve it. The views of wilderness expressed within it, though, have only gained prominence in the last 200 years. As a result of colonial expansion westward, and the notion of Manifest Destiny within the formation of the United States as a nation, particularly American values of wilderness developed. This definition has affected international preservation efforts, and currently the IUCN categories outline how different natural areas are identified. The definition of wilderness in the Wilderness Act, however, reflects a historical development of the idea of wilderness from Ancient times, notions that American settlers brought with them to new settlements. In this study, I have traced this transformation with the goal of identifying key commonplace notions about wilderness. I have also outlined the key historical, philosophical, and artistic events in the European context that have significantly changed the way in which people think about wilderness. This context has grounded my readings of key contemporary Austrian texts that utilize wilderness as a setting, motif, or theme.
I have shown that despite the varying cultural contexts, commonplace notions of wilderness are surprisingly similar in the Western context. There are subtle differences in the properties of wilderness areas in the United States and Austria, such as that Austrian wilderness areas tend to be private, and not public, lands. The specificity, though, of authors’ employment of wilderness relies on the historical heritage and contemporary social and cultural paradigms of the Austrian nation. The notions of wilderness that appear in these works reflect a collective national identity or more often, highlight the inadequacies of that identity. For example, the specific and deliberate use of tourism in the rebuilding of the Austrian nation after World War II has resulted in a very specific criticism of tourism in contemporary Austrian literature, particularly in the works of Elfriede Jelinek and Robert Menasse. Also, unlike in the United States, physical Austrian wilderness free from signs of human presence is actually quite elusive, causing many Austrians to seek wilderness outside of their national borders. These searches are reflected predominantly in the works of Christoph Ransmayr and Raoul Schrott.

I have argued that wilderness functions as a vehicle contemporary Austrian authors employ in order to critique the ruling ideologies of the Austrian nation. The authors’ critiques are decidedly modern, and yet wilderness within these texts reflects that commonplace notions about it are still quite relevant and potent. I have relied on the field of Ecocriticism for my study because it acknowledges that wilderness is more than physical reality. It is a cultural construction that changes over time. Nature can function in literary texts as a human construction upon which people project their own cultural ideologies and values. The literature discussed in this study demonstrates that wilderness is more than a setting in literature and can be employed as a non-literal referent. At the
same time, however, wilderness areas exist, and physical changes to them result in a continual reevaluation of our place in the world.

I have also positioned each author’s work in the longer tradition of the Austrian literary canon. Austrian writing in the past thirty years has tended to question the dominant modes of thought in culture and politics, challenged systems of power that result in domination or oppression, and reconceptualized history from multiple perspectives. Wilderness has played an important role in these contemporary trends, but I also demonstrate that contemporary writing engages with the canon in multiple ways. The Alps, the Austrian spa culture, and interaction with Eastern lands of the empire are prominent themes within Austrian literature. The contemporary writers in this study purposefully approach these topics to question or reconfigure their predecessors’ views.

Within Chapter 2, I identify the major commonplace notions of wilderness as a physical space. I pinpoint within foundational environmental history studies the views these authors reveal as formative in the construction of wilderness as a cultural concept. I show that wilderness was designated as nature outside of cities. Nature that was useful to civilization was domesticated and cultivated, which left those areas not deemed useful separate both physically and cognitively. As a distinctive space, wilderness was feared because it contained wild plants and animals that posed a physical threat to humans. In addition, it served as the habitat of “uncivilized” people who threatened Western culture both physically and cognitively. Wilderness areas also became a refuge for people who had transgressed the social code in some way. The status of wilderness as the nature “out there” and a fear of it resulted in a lack of knowledge about its character. This resulted in conjectures about its qualities and inhabitants in folklore and myth, which ascribed to
wilderness mythical and supernatural elements. The fear of the wild shifted, though, because of a long process of domestication and containment. The Christian view of “dominion” and responsibility on earth and the duty of man to tame the natural world contributed to this development. In addition, the increased need for raw materials to support growing populations and cities, along with the advent of modern technologies within the logic of economic progress, aided and justified the continual process of domestication and destruction of wilderness.

As Clarence Glacken demonstrates, the strict dichotomy between wilderness and the city has since Ancient times contributed to a view that non-urban areas could provide a counter-example to the ills of the city. Predominantly, though, my survey of environmental history texts demonstrates that the negative view of wilderness changed very little until the early modern period. During this period, new theories such as that animals possess intelligence, reason, and emotion countered the previously held view that animals were machines. The formerly unquestioned belief that humans were distinct from the natural world was now open for debate. A series of rapid advancements in science reinstated a view of humans being part of, and not dominant over, nature. Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution challenged the notion that nature was a self-contained and stable system. A new concern for the human impact on nature emerged, along with an increased knowledge of the cities’ detrimental effects on health. These views resulted in lamentations about the loss of nature and a rise in conservation and preservation efforts. The scary and uncultivated wasteland of wilderness that was once feared was being transformed into a place where people could escape the city.
In my close reading of contemporary Austrian literature, I show that despite the transformation of conceptions of wilderness from primarily negative to primarily positive, the negative commonplace notions of it are still employed in contemporary literature. I began my discussion with Elfriede Jelinek’s *Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr*. Jelinek critiques the handling of wilderness as a commodity. She sees the conservation and preservation of wilderness an important aspect of Capitalism in which those who control wilderness areas have the most to gain. She also employs commonplace notions of wilderness— that it is scary, dirty, and promotes wild behavior— to demonstrate the erasure of Austria’s negative history that is implicit in the nation’s promotion of its natural landscape as a pristine and idyllic image. By calling attention to the artificiality of images presented by the media, Jelinek’s text presents a critique of the replacement of real wilderness with artificial wilderness. The text’s parody of nature writing calls into question the danger in valuing nature without questioning the potentially dangerous rhetoric that has historically been tied to it in the German speaking tradition, particularly in Romantic Nationalism, National Socialism, and contemporary conservative politics.

I then connected my reading of Jelinek to Robert Menasse’s *Schubumkehr*. Like Jelinek’s critique that the promotion of inauthentic pristine landscapes cover-up the history enacted upon them, Menasse’s text illuminates the danger of nostalgia and the use of tourism in refashioning a national Austrian identity that blatantly ignores its complicity in National Socialism and the Holocaust. The text is a microcosm of greater Austria, showing in detail how history easily becomes erased with the promotion of tourism. Wilderness is transformed to become more pleasing to tourists, but the presentation becomes fake, thus obscuring authenticity. In addition, I show that the protagonist’s
mother’s attempt to return to an idealized unity with nature also erases the history of the place. The attempts of both the town and the mother fail. Wilderness resists its inclusion in the process of denying reality.

Christopher Ransmayr’s text *Morbus Kitahara* also examines the long-lasting perceived dichotomy between wilderness and the city and presents the attempt to return to a oneness with nature as naive and dangerous. The alternative history of post-World War II Austria, with the installation of the Morgenthau instead of the Marshall plan, results in a regression of progress. The society is unable to positively rebuild itself. Ransmayr discounts the commonplace notion of wilderness as a place that enables people to counter the ills of urban environments. His characters in *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis* seek authentic wilderness in their missions. This novel demonstrates the truly destructive and deadly potential of wilderness. The characters ultimately recognize humility in the universe and find it impossible to scientifically know the world. Ransmayr draws attention to the ultimate incompatibility of reason and logic with a true understanding of nature.

Chapter 3 explores the notion that wilderness areas and landscapes can provide people with transformative experiences. I show that although physical wilderness was once a place avoided, it has since ancient times served as a space necessary for solitude and reflection. Alongside this notion, though, developed the idea that wilderness had value for its beauty and allure. Romanticism is often labeled the time period at which major social and cultural transformations resulted in a positive evaluation of wilderness because of a new emphasis on experiential knowledge for science and on emotional transcendence. Forests and mountains, in particular, were considered ideal environments
for experiencing the Sublime. Scientific inquiry shifted from an emphasis on categorizing facts to attempting to understand the whole of nature; this shift, along with the theories of the Sublime, contributed to practical changes in people’s view of wilderness. During the Middle Ages, ancient texts were reclaimed by German scholars and revalued wilderness for its positive qualities. Whereas representations of wilderness as chaotic and ugly served into the Baroque period as a projection screen to reveal the recognition of God’s greatness, the early modern period saw an emphasis of man’s position over nature in the theory of the Sublime. Wilderness could be beautiful without human intervention, and these developments were reflected in landscape gardening where order, logic, and artificiality were replaced with attempts to create more natural landscapes. These views were also reflected in the literature of the time, as poems like Haller’s Die Alpen and Jacque Rousseau’s Julie attributed positive qualities to mountain landscapes. In addition, trials in wilderness paradigms became replaced with leisure activities as wilderness was now valued and sought-out for the positive transformative experiences it could engender. As an extension of this, sports have been valued for their ability to test the limits of human capacities without exposing one to the actual dangers of excursions in more wild areas.

Jelinek’s Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr displays a distrust of the notion that wilderness can provide transformative experiences, even in aesthetic representations. I claim that Jelinek satirizes the attempts to write a poetics of nature found in Austrian literature in the 1970s. She demonstrates with her work that nature and landscape are intricately tied to history and that attempts to aestheticize a wholeness of nature obscures the restorative aspects of that endeavor. In addition, she criticizes the praise of sport for
its supposed benefits, noting that not only do Austrian sports draw attention away from the realities of National Socialist complicity, but also that the glorification of the human body results in exclusionary practices. Her play *In den Alpen* illuminates the disregard for human life implicit in the commonplace notion that experiences in wilderness are opportunities for transformation and self-renewal. Adalbert Stifter’s short story *Der Waldsteig* served as an example of the type of reasoning against which Jelinek writes.

Menasse’s *Schubumkehr* also scrutinizes what he and Jelinek identify as a growing secular spiritualism with nature movement. Within the novel, the tourists who the town wishes to attract wish to experience nature authentically, but because the nature that has been presented to them through the media is of the hyperreal, wilderness must be altered. The tourists wish to experience the Sublime but are unwilling to interact with wilderness and lose the comforts to which they have been accustomed in their modern urban lives.

Ransmayr’s novel *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis* also questions whether transformative experiences in wilderness are actually possible. The explorers in the text are representative of a nineteenth century mindset which views struggle with nature important for the formation of both individuals and nations. Although they try to use modern science to experience some type of connection with the universe, they must ultimately rely on non-scientific forms of knowledge, such as art and myth, to comprehend their surroundings. Ransmayr illustrates their attempts to found new territories and advance knowledge through science to be particularly futile, as the protagonists become disillusioned with their attempts at authentically experiencing the world. Daniel Kehlmann’s novel *Die Vermessung der Welt* forwards a similar argument.
The plot occurs at the time around 1800, but analyzes the historical characters through the lens of postmodernism. Both Gauss and Humboldt attempt to know the universe through measuring, but they too become disillusioned, and recognize that knowledge only leads to more unknown.

Positive experiences in wilderness have become possible because wilderness has become contained to the point that it is no longer a threat. Wilderness has become a product in Austria. I claim in Chapter 4 that beyond recognizing the economic and ownership implications of wilderness, these texts demonstrate that people are attached to place and space in emotional, psychological, and symbolic ways, all of which transcend the limitations and control of commodity, both positively and negatively. As a cultural construction, wilderness can carry non-literal meaning. I argue that the idea of wilderness is based on a series of qualities that define it as Western civilization’s “other.” These qualities have then been transferred to others who display qualities different from those dominant in Western culture. The non-literal meanings of wilderness have also shifted historically. The idea of Arcadia serves as an example of this. It has been represented as idyllic, virtuous, and pure, but also as backwards, bestial, and barbaric. This, along with my discussions in Chapter 2 and 3, demonstrate how wilderness’s “otherness” has been valued both positively and negatively at various points in the Western context. Positive and negative images of wilderness are part of our Bildgedächtnis and contribute to the solidification of wilderness in individual and national collective memory. I further argue that with the positive valuation of wilderness physically, wilderness’s abstract qualities have also been praised for their otherness to the dominant modes of thought in Western culture.
Authors employ wilderness as a figurative device in multiple ways. In my reading of Stifter’s *Brigitta*, I demonstrate how wilderness transitions from a symbol of personal qualities, such as Brigitta’s emotions or Stephen Murai’s ability to love, into a metaphor for personal and national development. Stifter’s *Der Nachsommer* employs wilderness figuratively, but in this case the disorienting and confusion associated with wilderness becomes a metaphor for the individual’s experience in urban areas. His work presents cultivation and progress as important individual and national qualities.

In my reading of Ransmayr’s *Der fliegende Berg*, I show a reversal of Stifter’s model. The novel presents Ransmayr’s critique of rational forms of knowledge by presenting two possible modes of interacting with wilderness, which are represented in the brothers Liam and Pad. Liam’s attempts to dominate the mountain, but Pad becomes disillusioned with doing so. Pad undergoes a transformation because he is able to see beyond his Western forms of thought and know the “other,” both literally and figuratively. Through this knowledge, he finds a freedom unknown to him before his encounters with the “other.” Within the text, figurative wilderness serves as a counter-model to the dominating forms of Western knowledge.

*Schubumkehr* and *Der fliegende Berg* closely associate women with wilderness. His portrayals are problematic because historically, identifying both woman and wilderness as the “other” to civilization has allowed the same forms of domination and oppression to be applied to both. For example, the character Lily in Ransmayr’s *Morbus Kitahara* is portrayed as an outsider because of her wild behavior, but also because of her status as a woman. The “Mother Earth” archetype and “wild woman” image are powerful images in Western collective memory, but the male characters in these works are not
representative archetypal figures. The casting of the women characters into commonplace roles, without an indication in the text that the authors do so purposefully, perpetuates dangerous stereotypes and patriarchal dualisms in which woman is man’s “other.” The plot of Jelinek’s novel *Gier* illustrates the oppression and violence that has been committed against both woman and nature as a result of dominating consumption. Within the text, men consume both woman and the landscape. The process of containing wilderness, however, fails in the text, and the landscape resists implication in hiding the corpse of a murdered female character. The lake that regurgitates her body is symbolic of Austria’s attempts to conceal its complicity in the Holocaust.

One reason for our failure to "save the earth," argues Neil Evernden, is our disagreement about what "nature" really is—how it works, what constitutes a risk to it, and even whether we ourselves are part of it. The question of how humans fit into nature is a discussion that has dominated philosophy, religion, literature, and art since Ancient times. In addition, as my study has shown, nature is not only a concrete, physical reality, but also a product of the imagination. Despite the transformation of our attitudes toward nature, certain ideas about it, even ones that have been shown to be unwarranted, continue to work within collective memory.

I finish my discussion with a reading of Ransmayr’s *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis* and argue that the notion of wilderness as chaotic, transient, and incomprehensible provides a model of interacting with the world that counters the dominant paradigms in Western culture. The structure of the text reflects the same qualities and creates for the narrator and author creativity and freedom. This is not a cause for despair but, rather, an opportunity to step out of the modern myth of progress.
As wilderness in Austria has become less and less “wild,” people have struggled to understand how they should relate to wilderness. Within the literature discussed in this study, wilderness functions as the “other” to civilization. Many contemporary Austrian authors are keenly aware of this dilemma and explore “otherness” in a variety of ways with varying conclusions. The contemporary authors discussed in this study contest the position that experiences in wilderness areas can provide individuals caught in the isolation and solipsism of modern life the opportunity for transcendence and reunion with the universe. Figuratively, though, wilderness can provide an alternative model of existence to teleological progress and enlightened thought and perhaps provide an opportunity for ridding culture of the domination and oppression inherent in this logic. By valuing wilderness not for its physical qualities, but for its ability to remind us of our momentariness in the universe, we can perhaps overcome the dichotomy between self and other.
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