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Transforming the Humane: Human/Animal Relationships in Marlen Haushofer's *Die Wand* and
Franz Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*

An Honors Paper for the Department of German

By Joosep R. Võrno

Bowdoin College, 2022

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Introduction

What do a novel featuring a giant transparent wall and the tale of a man transforming into an insect have in common? Answering this question with respect to Marlen Haushofer's *Die Wand* (1963) and Franz Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* (1915) certainly seems like a daunting task. These texts differ considerably in their time of publication, setting, and an array of other characteristics. At the same time, the most important element that these two texts share that is the hallmark of great fiction: they accomplish the defamiliarization of familiar circumstances. At once, these texts make the strange familiar and the familiar strange – but how do Haushofer and Kafka accomplish this? In asking so, another parallel becomes evident: both texts open with the introduction of a puzzling event that the two works are also named after (Gregor Samsa's transformation into a monstrous kind of vermin or Haushofer's protagonist discovering herself stuck behind a mystical transparent wall). Both characters accept this puzzling occurrence within their understanding of reality and discover their position to be reconfigured within social and natural hierarchies, particularly in terms of the position of "otherness." Consequently, borders and power dynamics of gender, class, and even age and lineage become disrupted, through which these texts accomplish social critique. The most important border which is disrupted in both texts, however, is the border between human and animal: Gregor finds himself transformed into an actual bug, and Haushofer's protagonist finds her only companions in *Die Wand* to be animals, which, in turn, propels her into a different kind of human/animal transformation. By examining the border between human/nonhuman in both texts, specifically in what it reveals about care, I show how the two texts imagine a new reality in which the position, perception, and power of "the other" has changed.

A key difference between the human/animal transformation in the two texts is in the fact that Gregor's transformation is a physical one while he retains the thoughts of a human. Haushofer's protagonist, on the other hand, experiences a more gradual, psychological transformation over the course of the novel that results in her leaving behind her former life and its humanness. Alongside this, there are two other key dimensions within which the human/animal transformations in *Die Wand* and *Die Verwandlung* are opposites of each other. These are outlined in figure 1, below:

Franz Kafka, <i>Die Verwandlung</i> (1915)	Marlen Haushofer, <i>Die Wand</i> (1963)
Abrupt, physical transformation with psychological consequences	Gradual, psychological transformation with physical consequences
Perception of social hierarchies clarifies as a result of increased proximity to his family	Perception of social hierarchies clarifies as a result of distance/removal from her family
Transformation from integrated individual to individual at odds with oneself	Transformation from individual at odds with oneself, to integrated individual

Figure 1: Key differences between the human/nonhuman transformations in the texts.

The second principal difference lies in the fact that Gregor's perception changes as a result of being able to observe and confront social issues up close, while Haushofer's protagonist becomes aware of them through distance. The entrapment behind the wall and the perceived death of the rest of humanity results in her being removed from the social structures that previously governed her life and fusing herself with nature, which make her aware of the inequalities, particularly in terms of gender, that she has been subject to. Conversely, while Kafka's Gregor Samsa becomes isolated in his own home and an insect-like body, he is brought closer to his family, which allows him to observe and expose the social hierarchies that as a travelling salesman, he was instrumental to preserving. The third key difference of the human/animal transformations in *Die Wand* and *Die Verwandlung* has to do with otherness, but in this case, the question of where,

when, and in what ways, the protagonists themselves are seen as “the other”. In the opening of the novel, Marlen Haushofer presents her protagonist as someone whose human and nonhuman sides are at odds: her body is not acclimated to living in such a direct relationship with nature, but she also recognizes that the human qualities in her are necessary for the survival of the domesticated animals in her care. Over the course of the novel, this conflict between the human and animal within herself, moves toward resolution when, following a traumatic experience, she begins viewing herself less as an individual and more as a part of nature. In contrast, Gregor Samsa initially pictures himself as a part of human society, and in a position that his new body prevents him from fully acting out. As a consequence, Gregor is ultimately denied the roles he has usually played as part of his job and his familial structures, resulting in him questioning his position along the human/nonhuman dichotomy.

At its core, the transformation from human to nonhuman in both *Die Wand* and *Die Verwandlung* is a disruption. It is a disruption of concepts of “human” and “nature” which in turn force the question of human nature and humaneness. By asking, “what does it mean to be humane,” the first part of this project will focus on how the transformation reconfigures the characters’ relationship with, and position within networks of care, kindness, and tolerance. Importantly, humaneness is not presented as a condition or consequence of being human in the text. Rather, humans are presented often as uncaring, especially toward the nonhuman. The protagonists, transformed into animals, exemplify a high level of care to both the humans and nonhumans around them. The opposition between human and nonhuman is explored further in section two through moments in the texts that are informed by the disruption of what it means to be human. Art and music, rationality, and sexual and reproductive potential are some of the topics in both texts that bring this topic to the fore. In the third section I bring focus back to

aspects of individuality and belonging, especially in how the characters' economic, gendered, and familial roles and their negotiation (and renegotiation) illuminate a contrast between individuality and the sense of being a part of a greater whole, this whole being human society and the natural world. This interpretive strategy, as I will discuss in section four, is inspired by magic realism. Drawing on both contemporary literary scholarship and the ideas of Franz Roh, a German art historian who first coined the term, I discuss magic realism as literature that disrupts. It is literature that imagines new realities in which familiar objects are presented in an unfamiliar way. This allows for a renewed perspective through which social structures and the position of "the other" are reconfigured. I will demonstrate how the human/animal transformation in these texts, seen in the interpretive context of magic realism, unite these texts in their endeavor to topple social structures that are disguised as accepted realities.

Traditional Interpretations of Die Wand

Die Wand is often identified as a novel set in the depths of the Cold War, and/or as a text of second-wave feminism.¹ The first of these is made most apparent by the protagonist's assumption that the giant invisible wall and the strange effects on those outside of it is a kind of weapon of mass destruction. In fact, she commends the poison she assumes responsible for the petrification of the humans and livestock for the ability to leave plants unharmed. Through this, she critiques the resource-oriented nature of war. The protagonist also describes the weapon as "die humanste Teufelei" because it did not appear to have caused pain.² The protagonist's initial

¹ Anna Richards, "The Friendship of Our Distant Relations": Feminism and Animal Families in Marlen Haushofer's *Die Wand* (1963)," *Feminist German Studies* 36, no. 2 (2020): 84-85.

² Marlen Haushofer, *Die Wand: Roman*. (1963. 23rd Reprint by Berlin: Ullstein, 2017), 41.

hope of being rescued lies in the assumption that what is taking place is an experiment she expects will come to an end. This hope is abandoned quickly, but anti-war sentiment echoes throughout the text in the trauma and resilience cultivated by the protagonist, who reflects on living through the Second World War. Although the hunting lodge is stocked with a variety of supplies, food shortage becomes an inevitability. Describing her cravings for plentiful food, especially while waiting for her first potato yield, the narrator reveals: “Ich kannte ihn schon aus der Kriegszeit, aber ich hatte vergessen, wie schrecklich es ist, von einem unzufriedenen Körper abhängig zu sein.”³ In the fall, during a thunderstorm that takes the life of one of the kittens which the protagonist nurtured and formed a connection with, memories of war visit the protagonist once more: the rumbling of thunder invokes memories of spending nights in cellars to avoid bombing raids.⁴

Beyond specific memories of war, cruelty, and unkindness, in particular towards women and animals, is portrayed as a masculine trait in *Die Wand*. Haushofer couples this with the notion that it is men who occupy positions of power, making decisions over others' life and death. The narrator imagines, for example, that those who put the wall in place had been men. She also mentions having been a victim of violence at the hands of a man but remains unspecific. On the other hand, describing her relationship with the dog Luchs, she imagines herself as his master (*Herr*). Being unkind to nature, however, is not an exclusively masculine trait; this is exemplified by the fact that Luise is much more fond of hunting than her husband and the protagonist. The protagonist expresses guilt in killing (in her case – for food), whereas hunting had been a favored pastime for her sister even though she was a worse shot. The feminist tone of

³ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 55.

⁴ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 92.

the novel becomes most evident in the way that the appearance of the wall allows for a reconfiguration of power hierarchies. Put simply: being by herself, she does not have a man telling her what to do. The protagonist humorously expresses this by suggesting that if there even were another person trapped with her behind the wall, she would like it to be an elderly lady.⁵ In fact, some traditional readings of *Die Wand* involve the imagination of the protagonist's new existence as a kind of matriarchal utopia, a new society based on the reproduction of maternal animals, but also one that is bound to fail at the appearance of the man in the end of the novel.⁶ The protagonist also proposes that she would have not wanted to live alongside a weaker partner because she would kill them with her care, leading her to question whether it is only animals who can tolerate herself. While the protagonist is relieved from the fact that, being alone, she is no longer the subject of a masculine power-hierarchy, her desire not to be the "stronger" of a partnership leads to demonstrate that she wishes not to participate in these hierarchies at all, even if her way of exercising power would differ (as an act of care/overbearingness). This, however, prompts the question: how would this relationship of care ultimately differ from the ones the protagonist forms with the animals around her? After all, the animals could be considered "weaker" in the context of the text, evident from the cow needing to be milked and catered to. The most evident difference between the relationship she imagines with the humans, and the relationship she has with the animals appears in the reciprocity of the latter. It is a possibility, therefore, that the novel presents the human-human network of care as unidirectional, whereas

⁵ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 66.

⁶ "After civilization's downfall, the woman tries to live in balance with nature and takes care of the remaining animals. Accordingly, the novel is often read as a post-human utopia or even a matriarchal form of society based on the reproduction of animals." Sabine Frost points to Konstanze Fliedl's *Die Melancholische Insel* (1986) as one example of scholarship that deals with this perspective." Sabine Frost, "Looking Behind Walls: Literary and Filmic Imaginations of Nature, Humanity, and the Anthropocene in *Die Wand*," in *Readings in the Anthropocene: The Environmental Humanities, German Studies, and Beyond*, ed. Sabine Wilke and Japhet Johnstone (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 62-88.

the nonhuman network of care into which the protagonist is inserted lacks a hierarchy of power due to its reciprocity.⁷

The protagonist's progression toward more autonomy in *Die Wand* closely mirrors how non-human animals are portrayed in the text, rendering the feminist and ecocritical perspectives of the novel as parts of one greater whole. The protagonist values the animals she cohabits the hunting lodge with, not merely as a resource (the tracking capabilities of Luchs as a hunting dog, or milk from the cow Bella), but as individual beings. The culminating tragedy of the text that propels the protagonist to shoot the deranged axe-man without hesitation also demonstrates a capability of valuing the animals' lives above human ones.⁸ The portrayal of how Haushofer's protagonist cares for – and is cared by – the animals in her company, is seen as an example of feminist ethics of care that is ahead of its time.⁹ At the same time, a sense of human exceptionalism is perceptible in the protagonist, albeit in a nuanced way. After taking the cow under her care, she writes:

So ein Tier will gefüttert und gemolken werden und verlangt einen seßhaften Herrn. Ich war der Besitzer und der Gefangene einer Kuh. Aber selbst wenn ich die Kuh gar nicht gewollt hätte, wäre es mir unmöglich gewesen, sie zurückzulassen. Sie war auf mich angewiesen.¹⁰

Describing herself both as a prisoner and as a master of the cow reveals a key dilemma for the protagonist: it is because she is human that she is able to take care of the cow, but it is also her

⁷ Margaret Littler, "The Posthuman and Marlen Haushofer's *Die Wand* on Page and Screen," in *Marlen Haushofer: Texte und Kontexte*, ed. Andrea Capovilla (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2022), 41.

⁸ Richards, "The Friendship of Our Distant Relations," 95.

⁹ Richards, "The Friendship of Our Distant Relations," 84.

¹⁰ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 33.

human ability to show compassion that ultimately leaves her no choice in doing so. While the protagonist's habitus of caring for the cow does not change over the course of the novel, her rationale around it does, in particular, presenting a realization of herself as integrated within nature, and thus no longer finding contradiction in her desire to care for the cow and the other animals around her.

Gregor Samsa: The Strange Familiar

In a striking contrast to the gradual, psychological transformation from human to nonhuman in *Die Wand*, Franz Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* presents the transformation as an abrupt, mysterious opening premise of the work: "Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheueren Ungeziefer verwandelt."¹¹ In terms of scholarly discourse on Kafka's text, Engel and Aurochs say it best when they suggest that the only consensus appears to be the multitude of possible interpretive approaches.¹² This is primarily due to the elusive nature of characterizing the nature of Gregor's transformation, and what it would mean for him, to "find himself as a vermin" (*sich als Ungeziefer finden*). For example, an interpretive strategy first proposed by Günther Anders postulates that Gregor Samsa's transformation can be seen, instead of a literal human-bug transformation, as a literalization of a metaphor. This idea is revisited and refined by Stanley Corngold who emphasizes the shapelessness of the metaphor into which Gregor Samsa has transformed.¹³ The principal reason for why Corngold's approach does not conflict with the

¹¹ Franz Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*. (1915), 2.

¹² Manfred Engel and Bernd Aurochs, *Kafka-Handbuch: Leben–Werk–Wirkung* (Springer-Verlag, 2010), 169.

¹³ Stanley Corngold, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Vermin: Metaphor and Chiasm in Kafka's The Metamorphosis," *Literary Research (Montreal)* 21, no. 41–42 (2004): 57-58.

human/animal transformation I propose lies in the fact that the “Ungeziefer” he morphs into, is seen as a creature that is in opposition with the condition of the human apparent from the urban bourgeois family setting of the text. According to Corngold:

“[T]he concept of a vermin is not of a natural thing; it has no predictable visual identity; it is not literally a thing: “vermin” is a shifting social construction. Beetles in turn-of-the-century Prague, Jews in the Third Reich, mountain lions in Colorado, wild boars in contemporary Berlin – all have the distinction of being defined as vermin.”¹⁴

Corngold also points to the etymology of the words *ungeheuer* and *Ungeziefer*, which suggest Gregor to have become a creature both “unfit for the household” and impure (unfit for sacrifice). This radical shifting in the role of Gregor within his family ultimately make him a stranger in his own home, which in turn allows for a renewed perspective through which Gregor perceives his own family. Gregor himself, too, is perceived differently by the humans around him, however, Gregor’s family members appear somewhat blinded to this. After all, the relationship that Gregor has with his father, which is much more difficult than those with his sister or mother, does not necessarily have to do with Gregor’s loss of humanness. The theme of a complicated, possibly even inhumane relationship between father and son does appear as a theme in several other of Franz Kafka’s stories and has much more to do with the author’s own life experience and not a transformation into something unlikable.¹⁵ Even the reverse could be true: the father’s aggressiveness and repulsion towards Gregor may have partially served as the cause of his transformation.

¹⁴ Corngold, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at Vermin,” 57-58.

¹⁵ Carolin Duttlinger, ed., *Franz Kafka in Context*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 12. In this volume, Franz Kafka’s relationship with his father is examined and identified as a theme in several of his stories, including *Das Urteil* (1913), *Die Verwandlung* (1912), and others.

Invisible Borders

One of the concepts that unites *Die Wand* and *Die Verwandlung* beyond the exploration of a human/animal divide is the idea of isolation. Haushofer's protagonist's entrapment behind the transparent wall could be seen as a parallel to the way in which Gregor is – at times, forced, but at other times, compelled – to remain in his room. He can exit, if he wants, and does so several times, although his father ultimately forces him back in each time. These moments when Gregor emerges reveal the way in which Gregor's role within familiar structures, and his perception of these structures, changes. Even without escaping, however, Gregor's enclosure in his room ultimately does not isolate him from his family in the way that Haushofer's protagonist is forever separated from the people she cared about. By no longer assuming the lifestyle of a travelling salesman, the new Gregor can spend more time in the company of his family, at least by looking and listening through the doorway. Like Haushofer's protagonist observing the fate of the humans left outside of her protective prison, Gregor Samsa gazes through the doorway, finding a new way to be informed of, and have a sense of participation in the goings-on of the Samsa-family. Gregor even exclaims to witnessing some of these aspects of family life for the first time, having only heard about his family's habits, such as the father reading the newspaper aloud, through letter correspondence with his sister. Looking through a window, in a similar manner to Haushofer's protagonist looking through the transparent wall, is a common theme in several of Franz Kafka's texts, although in this instance Gregor is observing through a doorway. This process is at once a process of remembering and looking ahead, as Gregor observes the adjustments his family is forced to make, but also takes note of things reminding him of his past

(such as a portrait of his former self in a military uniform).¹⁶ The transparent wall, and Gregor's doorway therefore serve less as a physical separator of themselves, but more so as a lens that shifts these characters' perception of a life that has rendered them "the other."

Metamorphoses of the Mind

While Gregor Samsa discovering himself an insect in the opening of the text has become the text's most famous feature and a central focus of scholarly investigation, it is the end of *Die Wand* which seems to be adorned with particular interest. Much of Haushofer's narrative imagines what a coexistence between a human and her animals might look like, but this is disrupted by a culminating tragedy in which a deranged axe-man appears from the woods, murdering the protagonist's cow and dog. Without hesitation, the protagonist shoots the man. While an argument can be made that the protagonist may have acted out of self-defense, it is the protagonist's subsequent mourning of Luchs's death which is foreshadowed throughout the novel that would indicate the protagonist's actions stemming from something else: from her relationship with Luchs having shifted to the point where she values the life of an animal above a human one. Rather than seeing this as "character-development" of Haushofer's protagonist or even Luchs, contemporary scholarly discourse on *Die Wand* identifies this concluding point in the text as a marker of a gradual, psychological transformation in the protagonist that occurs on the border of the animal/human distinction and results in the "dissolution of a unified self."¹⁷ In "The Posthuman and Marlen Haushofer's *Die Wand* on Page and Screen," Margaret Littler

¹⁶ Duttlinger, *Franz Kafka in Context*, 123.

¹⁷ Littler, "The Posthuman and Marlen Haushofer's *Die Wand* on Page and Screen," 45.

identifies, like this project, an apparent change in the protagonist, through which she sees herself no longer as human, but rather as a non-individualistic part of a natural system.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is considered one of the key texts that has shaped the human-animal transformation in literature. One of the principal differences between the transformation taking place in *Die Wand* and other texts that feature a metamorphosis is the lack of a physical change into animal, many of the changes within the protagonist are those discussed by Gymnich and Costa in their investigation of human-animal metamorphoses in contemporary literature. By tracing the influence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in contemporary literary instances of the human-animal transformation, Gymnich and Costa identify how, alongside the physical change (which does not occur in this way in *Die Wand*), narratives of human-animal transformations examine a psychological change within the narrator which is "bringing about novel or alien ways of perceiving the world."¹⁸ Furthermore, texts featuring a human-animal metamorphosis examine communication, particularly in how the human/animal divide brings about a kind of impenetrable language barrier, and the idea that different animals (and the transformations into these animals) represent different qualities a human could embody. Even without transforming into an animal herself, the differences in the protagonist's relationships with animals and what they represent nonetheless makes this a characteristic feature of *Die Wand*. Ultimately, Gymnich and Costa argue, however, that the human-animal metamorphosis serves as a tool to examine human-animal relations: "Involving what is presumably the most intimate connection between human beings and animals imaginable, the depiction of a human-animal transformation is

¹⁸ Gymnich & Costa, Pp. 6 Marion Gymnich and Alexandre Segao Costa, "Of Humans, Pigs, Fish and Apes: The Literary Motif of Human-Animal Metamorphosis and Its Multiple Functions in Contemporary Fiction," *L'Esprit Créateur* 46, no. 2 (2006): 68.

virtually bound to challenge culturally dominant assumptions about animals as the ‘other’ of humankind.”¹⁹

Chapter 1: What does it Mean to be Humane?

Care and acts of care play an important role in both *Die Wand* and *Die Verwandlung* because it is acts of care which mark the transformation within Gregor Samsa and Haushofer’s protagonist. In *Die Wand*, the reciprocal acts of care between the protagonist and her companion animals, with the ultimate culmination of her avenging the death of the dog Luchs and burying him in a human fashion, exemplify how the protagonist eventually values the life of the dog above that of another human, the axe-wielding man. Over the course of the novel, the protagonist does not necessarily become more kind, given that many of her perceptions of kindness follow her from her former life, such as the fact that she does not enjoy hunting; she does so out of necessity and with remorse. What the protagonist undergoes over the course of the narrative is a reconfiguration of her relationship with humaneness, leading to her adoption of a nature-oriented ethics of care.²⁰ In a similar manner, Gregor Samsa is never presented as an unkind man, in fact, his job is more so discussed as a sacrifice: something he does in order to provide for his family. His occupation as a travelling salesman prevented him from spending enough time at home, and in his new condition, Gregor becomes aware of many of the challenges that the family faces on a more interpersonal level. *Die Verwandlung* is divided into three parts, in each of which Gregor emerges from his room. Each of these instances of emergence can be interpreted as an act of care. In contrast, the way in which Gregor’s family members do – and in certain instances, do not

¹⁹ Gymnich & Costa, “Of Humans, Pigs, Fish and Apes,” 69.

²⁰ Richards, “Feminism and Animal Families,” 78.

– reciprocate care towards Gregor also serves as a driving force towards Gregor’s eventual demise. Given the liminality of the protagonists’ human/nonhuman status in both texts, these characters at the time of their final acts of care, are worth discussing in context of the term *humane nonhuman*, in particular because of how (human) social hierarchies of power in either text appear to lack humaneness.

Networks of Care in Die Wand

To discuss the nature of care relationships in Marlen Haushofer’s novel, it is worth beginning with the end, with the death of the protagonist’s canine companion at the hands of a strange man, whom the protagonist subsequently shoots. These events transpire after the protagonist has spent nearly two years living in the hunting lodge alone, save for the animals in her company, a period during which the protagonist’s life begins to resemble an idyllic codependence with nature, contested by the dwindling of critical resources such as matches. Believing that she was the only person within the walls, the protagonist is unprepared for the man’s appearance, who suddenly murders the bull, and is thereafter approached by the dog Luchs. The latter storms toward the man, and although Luchs stops the offence because the protagonist calls the dog back, the man nonetheless murders the dog. Following this, the protagonist shoots the man. She does not give much thought to who the man may have been, and drags his body off a cliff, although she gives Luchs a proper burial. The protagonist’s shooting of the man without comment or hesitation or remorse marks the protagonist’s final act of care, in which she holds the dog’s life above a human one. It is the connection the protagonist forms with the animals by participating in their reciprocal network of care which allows her to do so. Furthermore, the behavior of the man exemplifies the way in which the notion of humaneness

becomes detached from the quality of being human in Haushofer's novel. As Anna Richards discusses in *Feminism and Animal Families* (2020), the protagonist's killing of the axe man serves as a reversal of the traditional human-animal hierarchy, in support of the ecofeminist perspectives of the 1970s and onwards, the idea that true care and humaneness toward the nonhuman other occurs through rejection of human exceptionalism. While Richards argues that it is only through the death of the protagonist herself that human exceptionalism can be eradicated, this paper supports the notion that the protagonist does undergo a transformation into the nonhuman that appears to overcome a kind of threshold, where she no longer views animals as "the other. Coupled with her transformation is the adoption of this new ethics of care.²¹ By observing acts of care toward nonhumans in the remainder of *Die Wand*, this transformation can be seen as a process that occurs gradually over the protagonist's two years behind the wall.

At regular intervals in *Die Wand*, the protagonist also discusses networks of care in her former life – networks that have since become dismantled. The protagonist discusses how, in fulfilling her role in the family, caring for her children when they were young, she experienced a feeling of entrapment. After her children had grown up, she experienced freedom. Yet, it was a freedom she did not take advantage of, because it was a freedom without happiness. Reflecting on the period after no longer being able to care for her children, the narrator writes: "Später war ich nie mehr glücklich gewesen. Alles Veränderte sich auf eine trostlose Weise, und ich hörte auf, wirklich zu leben."²² The protagonist notably discusses this after completing a difficult and time-consuming task: delivering a great amount of hay to the hunting lodge for the cow, Bella. The protagonist reports experiencing a kind of satisfaction she had not felt in a long time but felt

²¹ Richards, "Feminism and Animal Families," 85.

²² Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 203.

this way as a result of this strenuous act of care. Given this, when the narrator discusses her feeling as if she were the prisoner of her cow, or of the circumstances in general, the language of entrapment may not carry its expected negative connotation and is what propels her to take care of the animals in her company. This is consistent with the idea that the protagonist ultimately does not attempt to escape outside of the wall: even though (because she did not see their deaths), she believes her daughters to still be alive.²³ The compulsion to take the cow under her care during the first few days of her new life behind the wall may therefore have been to restore her role of a caretaker, which is also consistent with the fact that she begins to refer to herself and the animals in her care as a family. However, the border between human and animal in this part of the narrative is still quite clearly defined. This is most evident for Bella, who is arguably the least sufficient of the animals the protagonist befriends. Upon their first meeting, the cow moans out of misery from not having been milked.²⁴ On their way back to the hunting lodge, the protagonist leads the cow, placing herself between the cow and the invisible wall. As the narrative progresses, these kind of acts of care can be seen reciprocated by the animals as well: when Luchs and the protagonist visit a gorge, it is the dog, instead, who expresses care and concern and leads the protagonist's movements.²⁵

By taking a closer look at naming practices of Haushofer's protagonist in the novel, the protagonist's relationships of care with her animals become more nuanced. Despite feeling more love towards Bella and the cat, the protagonist has still not given the cat a name, although she has named nearly all the other animals in her companionship. Luchs is the only animal whose

²³ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 288.

²⁴ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 30.

²⁵ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 96.

name the protagonist knows from before, and because of this, the dog is somewhat of an exception to the purpose the protagonist has in the animals' names. Nonetheless, Luchs's name is poignant, because it emphasizes once again the way in which the nature around the hunting lodge has been appropriated for the benefit of humans: actual lynxes in the area are extinct and have been replaced by hunting dogs, many of whom share that exact name. In the case of the animals that the protagonist names herself, however, her rationale at first glance seem quite simple, exemplified by the name of the cow, Bella: it was short and sounded nice.²⁶ At the same time, it is worth noting that Bella is a name that would fit either for a human or for a cow. The protagonist also lists "Dirndl, Gretl oder vielleicht Graue" as other possible cow names that she did not choose. In contrast, the kittens which join the company later in the narrative are no longer named after humans, but rather, after natural things which correspond to the animals' appearances (Tiger, Perle). From this, one might note that while her initial naming practices originated from a desire to form a kind of human-like companionship with the animals, this is eventually reversed.

A curious exception to this naming practice, however, is the mother-cat. The old cat has no name. The protagonist suggests that this is because the old cat would no longer get used to a new name. It should also be quite clear by this point, however, that the protagonist herself has chosen to remain nameless in her report, her rationale being the following: "Ich hatte ihn schon fast vergessen, und dabei soll es auch bleiben. Niemand nennt mich mit diesem Namen, also gibt es ihn nicht mehr."²⁷ Over the course of the narrative, the cat gives birth to several kittens, and loses them, which mirrors the way in which the protagonist discusses her own life as a mother,

²⁶ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 38.

²⁷ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 44-45.

even if not dead, she considers her daughters lost to herself ever since they grew up. Due to this it may be possible that the protagonist's decision not to name the mother-cat stems from the fact that she, to a higher degree than the other animals, identifies with the cat and the cat's role in the world: as a mother. This is also confirmed by a dream which the narrator experiences, in which she imagines giving birth to these animals. A third animal that is not named is the young bull that Bella gives birth to who is simply referred to as "der Stier". Conversely, the bull remains nameless because the protagonist has not connected with the bull to the degree that she has with the other animals, and in a way, also sees his value only in his reproductive capacity.

Care and Tolerance in Die Verwandlung

While Gregor is presented as an empathetic individual already in the beginning of the narrative, Gregor's relationship with care changes as he becomes more aware of the injustices experienced by his family. Part I of *Die Verwandlung*, which follows Gregor's first day as a "monstrous vermin," accounts Gregor emerging from the room in order to prevent his manager from leaving, in order for Gregor's position in the sales firm to remain secure. This instance of Gregor expressing care still stems from his desire to support his family financially, given that he still believes he can recover and return to work as normal. As such, this act of care can be interpreted as a continuation of Gregor's former relationship with his family: a desire to, despite a lack of fondness to the job, to serve as the breadwinner of the household. This act of care is also an act of solidarity as Gregor hopes to be able to utilize the professional connection with the manager, the fact that Gregor has been an exemplary employee until then, in hopes that the manager will not report Gregor to the chairman who has not made a personal connection with his employees. Unfortunately, Gregor is unable to catch up to the manager and realizes that his

speech is no longer comprehensible to him, nor his family. His father, beating him with a newspaper, forces Gregor to return to his room, despite Gregor's attempts at communicating that he would have done so willingly. Thereafter, Gregor's room becomes shut and for the most part, he remains in his room, quietly listening in on his family or observing when the door has been left askew.

While at first glance, Gregor's entrapment in his room may appear as an isolation from his family, it appears that his work as a travelling salesman kept him away from his family to an even greater degree. From the crack in his door, Gregor can observe the daily habits of his family and realize: "Was für ein stilles Leben die Familie doch führte."²⁸ While in the role of provider for the family, Gregor appears to have been almost completely unaware of the kind of life led by his family members back home, a life which he, while being locked in his room still, is able to participate in to a further degree than when he was working in his job, also finding out about many of the adjustments the family would make as a result of Gregor's new condition. Possibly, as a result of his newfound connectedness to the members of his family, Gregor begins to demonstrate a great level of empathy toward his family members. In one instance, for example, he expresses frustration with the fact that he is not able to thank his sister for all that she does for him. His way of showing his gratitude and understanding comes through him doing his best not to startle his sister when she comes into the room: he tucks himself away under the bed and remains there whenever his sister is present. Despite Gregor having no ill intent, him being hidden away serves to alleviate these suspicions, which he perceives to be confirmed by the relieved looks of his sister.

²⁸ Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*, 40.

When Gregor's sister and mother are removing furniture from Gregor's room, it is the first time that he is able to see his mother following the transformation. Again, out of consideration Gregor hides himself under a sheet, at least until he springs out to defend the picture of the woman in furs, which the reader is first introduced to in the opening of the text. It is a picture, ripped out of a magazine, of a woman dressed in a fur muff. Unfortunately, Gregor's reaction causes his mother to see him on the wall and faints as a result. His sister rushes the mother out of the room, but Gregor follows, out of concern for his mother. In a way, this incident echoes Part I, in which Gregor leaves his room in order to call back the manager and reason with him. In either case, his emergence from his room stems from a position of empathy, although his intentions are misinterpreted by the family. "Gregor ist ausgebrochen," proclaims his sister after Gregor leaves the room. As a result, Gregor's father bombards him with apples, even attempting to fatally injure him – he is stopped at the last minute by Gregor's mother.²⁹ Gregor's inability to speak causes him to be misunderstood, despite his intentions to be kind. What differs from Gregor's first emergence out of the room is that in this instance, his care is motivated by a desire to provide emotional, rather than financial support. Despite imprisonment in his room, Gregor's presence closer to the family has caused him to experience a connection to the family in a new way, showing Gregor that support is not only possible through financial means. His attempt, however, ultimately proves unsuccessful.

If Gregor Samsa is to be considered nonhuman, at least to some extent, following his transformation, then acts of care across the human/animal boundary have a similarly high importance in illuminating the contrast between the human and the humane in *Die Verwandlung*. They soften what strikes us as Gregor's new, monstrous, and clumsy shape, for his confinement

²⁹ Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*, 74.

bestows heightened perceptive abilities on Samsa: he sees things previously hidden or ignored. Throughout the narrative, Gregor exhibits care towards members of his family, however, what is reciprocated by the family ought better to be described as tolerance. Once again, it is worthwhile to begin with the end, with Gregor's final act of care. In the final part of Kafka's *Erzählung*, Gregor perishes. His body has gradually grown weaker, partially as a result of starvation and the injuries he has sustained from physical encounters with his father, including the apple lodged in his back which has begun to rot. In his final moments, Gregor reflects:

An seine Familie dachte er mit Rührung und Liebe zurück. Seine Meinung darüber, daß er verschwinden müsse, war womöglich noch entschiedener, als die seiner Schwester. [...] Dann sank sein Kopf ohne seinen Willen gänzlich nieder, und aus seinen Nüstern strömte sein letzter Atem schwach hervor.³⁰

What is evident from Gregor's final moments is that his death comes peacefully, the act of disappearance being a kind of sacrifice he had already made for his family in his former life, disappearing into his work. As such, Gregor's perishing can be interpreted as the ultimate disappearance, the final act of care toward his family whom he has seen struggle because of his challenging condition. This might be contested with the notion that Gregor dies "ohne seinen Willen," which might at first glance suggest that Gregor dies unwillingly. Yet, his death occurs not *against* his will but *without*: he dies willingly but without active effort; he allows his death to happen naturally in this moment. In the following day, the housekeeper removes Gregor's body from his room, which also marks his death as an act of care toward his family, given that acts of care in the text are coupled with Gregor emerging from his room.

³⁰ Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*, 102.

As shown by the fact that Gregor connects his act of ultimate disappearance to the sacrifice of disappearing from his family to work, it is not Gregor's relationship with care that changes in *Die Wand*, but rather, the way in which his family interprets and misinterprets his acts of care. Prior to his metamorphosis, Gregor Samsa was a travelling salesman, and although his occupation is first mentioned almost as an aside, much of the first part of *Die Verwandlung* has to do with his role as the source of financial security for his family. When Gregor first attempts to get out of bed in his new body, he experiences a sudden pain which he attributes to the difficulty of his work, the mobile nature of which comes with many challenges, including an "immer wechselnder, nie andauernder, nie herzlich werdender menschlicher Verkehr."³¹ The reason Gregor works at this job, despite finding it unpleasant, is because of debt owed by his parents, and Gregor imagines it would take a few more years before he is able to quit. Gregor's contribution to his family is not necessarily recognized or appreciated, as evidenced by, for example, the fact that following Gregor's demise, the family intends to move to a new apartment that is "besser gelegen" and "überhaupt praktischer," as the one found by Gregor.³² Even though Gregor may have undergone a transformation into something physically nonhuman, one might suggest that as a result of his role more as a source of financial security and less as a family member has already rendered Gregor nonhuman. In fact, by remaining in his home for the remainder of the family, the connection becomes more human as Gregor is able to at least attempt interpersonal connection with his family members. Unfortunately for Gregor, he is unable to communicate this for the most part. Due to the familial connection, however, his family members do tolerate him and allow him to remain in his room, even attempting to cater to

³¹ Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*, 4.

³² Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*, 110.

his basic needs. These acts, however, appear as acts of tolerance rather than care. This, once again accomplishes a criticism of the lack of care and humaneness directed by humans toward Gregor, who is perceived as a nonhuman other.

To reiterate: as the care which Gregor expresses toward his family is not reciprocated much beyond the provision of rudimentary necessities, the family merely tolerates him. This tolerance, however, does stand in contrast with the people with whom Gregor comes in contact and that are not part of his family. Towards them, the family continues to accept him as their son. Following Gregor's demise, the housekeeper is the one to inform Grete and the parents of Gregor's passing. She exclaims: "Sehen Sie nur mal an, es ist krepieret; da liegt es ganz und gar krepieret!"³³ Notably, the way in which the housekeeper addresses Gregor as an "es" and describes his death as "krepieren" (an unpleasant, miserable kind of death) stands in stark contrast with how Gregor is still referred to by his name or the masculine pronoun by his family. In fact, the family is taken aback by the tactlessness of the housekeeper's words and actions, which included removing and throwing away Gregor's body. As a consequence, the father exclaims that the woman will be let go the following day.³⁴ Considering how the father has treated Gregor until then, including violently harming him on several occasions, the decision to fire the housekeeper for her brash actions towards Gregor illuminate the fact that Gregor's family members tolerated him out of consideration that he was a family member. It is through the familial connection that Gregor's family, while recognizing his transformation, do not see him purely as an "other." This prompts the question: how does Gregor see himself? Does he see

³³ Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*, 104.

³⁴ Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*, 110.

himself as a human and if so, what does it mean to be human in the first place? In the upcoming chapter these questions will be explored in both *Die Wand* and *Die Verwandlung*.

Chapter 2: What does it Mean to be Human?

Complementing the way in which Gregor Samsa and Haushofer's protagonist themselves discuss their changing relationship to humanness, the human/nonhuman transformation also reconfigures these character's relationship to a variety of characteristics and qualities that are associated with being human. As the boundary of the human and the animal is explored in the two texts, new perspectives on sexual desire, property, the ability to appreciate the aesthetics of art, the social notions of gender are presented. This defamiliarization sets into question social conventions and hierarchies that previously governed the characters' lives. For instance, it is when the protagonist herself takes note of the transformation that she realizes she is no longer governed by conventions of gender, even noting herself to have become genderless. Furthermore, in *Die Wand*, the renewed perspective allows her to bond with the animals accompanying her to a more equal extent, one not governed by human exceptionalism.

Die Wand: Nature as Almost Human

Something that reveals that the protagonist in *Die Wand* undergoes a transformation which is more gradual is the way in which she longs for human connection in her early days behind the wall. While the narrator does not explicitly talk about missing being around other humans, a yearning for a social connection at this stage is perceptible through the way in which she attributes human characteristics to the animals and nonliving natural features around her. For instance, she

describes Luchs as emitting a “Seufzer, der fast menschlich klang,”³⁵ in addition to comparing the sound of a nearby river to a quiet conversation between two humans.³⁶ On one hand, these comparisons might indicate that the protagonist recognizes human qualities in the natural characters and objects around her, and that it is not a transformation within the protagonist, but Luchs’s move across the nonhuman boundary that becomes the groundwork for their strong relationship. Yet, a reading more consistent with the idea of the transformation within the protagonist would suggest that it is more so the fact that Luchs is likened to a human because this would make her perceived reader of the report able to comprehend the connection she was making. In other words, Luchs is not expressing human-like qualities, but rather, the protagonist is reinterpreting her connection to Luchs akin to a connection between two humans. This view is supported by the fact that as the narrative progresses, comparisons such as these become more infrequent and ultimately cease.

In a similar manner, human constructs of gender also become more diffuse as the narrative progresses. By the end of June, the protagonist’s physical appearance undergoes several changes which, in many ways, operate as a process of de-gendering: she grows thinner, and her shoulders become more angular, she cuts her hair short with nail clippers and begins to wear many articles of mens’ clothing she finds in the hunting lodge. In a sense, all of the changes mentioned above can easily be considered by-products of the increased amounts of manual labor and the spending of considerable time outside. At the same time, these external changes serve both as one of the causes for, and a visible marker of, the transformation taking place within the protagonist, who, as a result, begins to lose the awareness of being a woman. She reflects:

³⁵ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 26.

³⁶ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 24.

Gleichzeitig kam mir das Bewußtsein abhanden, eine Frau zu sein. Mein Körper, gescheiter als ich, hatte sich angepaßt und die Beschwerden meiner Weiblichkeit auf ein Mindestmaß eingeschränkt. Ich konnte ruhig vergessen, daß ich eine Frau war.³⁷

On one level, the passage quoted above appears to discuss the nature in which the protagonist's body becomes de-gendered. Furthermore, it could point to the fact that Haushofer's protagonist is disconnecting from the idea of being a *human* woman and an individual and begins to see herself as a part of nature – this is confirmed by the fact that the protagonist even likens herself to a sturdy tree trunk in the end of the same passage.

Something else that is revealing about what it means to be human in *Die Wand* is nutrition. In her *metabolic reading* of Haushofer's novel, Caitríona Ní Dhúill discusses Haushofer's novel in terms of a metabolic rift – the Marxist idea that as a result of the rapid expansion of industrial agriculture and food production, humans (especially in an urban setting) are becoming increasingly disconnected from the natural processes that bring food to the table. It would be hasty to suggest that the impacts of this metabolic rift are alleviated by the mere placement of the characters in the hunting lodge setting, however, because the natural landscape itself has been humanized: by eliminating essentially all predators, humans like the protagonist's sister Luise instead participate in hunting as a recreational activity, rather than to fulfill a basic human need. Ní Dhúill suggests that, by directly participating in the process of food acquirement through foraging, hunting, and some rudimentary farming, Haushofer's protagonist is becoming more connected with nature by dismantling the metabolic rift surrounding her in her former life.³⁸ Thus, having to cater to her need for food herself serves as one of the major reasons why

³⁷ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 82-83.

³⁸ Caitríona Ní Dhúill, "Fuelling Lockdown: Haushofer's *Die Wand* as a Text of the Great Acceleration," in *Marlen Haushofer: Texte und Kontexte*, ed. Andrea Capovilla (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2022), 19.

the protagonist is forced to let go of some of the characteristics which make her human. After all, much of her physical labor that lead to the changes taking place in her body as discussed above, is done in order to provide for herself, and for the animals in her care. Yet, it is recognizable particularly in the context of metabolism that at this stage, her human and nonhuman sides are at odds. For instance, the protagonist comments that despite recognizing the nutritional benefits of the nettles growing behind her heap of cow dung, she has not and does not intend to consume them. In fact, she comments that she does not necessarily understand why she feels compelled to do so.³⁹

An appreciation for art and music is also something that is used to explore the distinction of the human in *Die Wand*. As shall be seen in the section on *Die Verwandlung* that follows, it is also something that unites the two texts. Music is presented as a phenomenon that provides comfort. During her early days behind the wall, the protagonist ventures to the Mercedes parked outside of the hunting lodge and tests the car radio. She does so, partially, to ascertain the extent of the damage caused by whatever caused the wall to spring up around her. She does, however, also exclaim: “Jetzt wäre ich vor Freude über ein bißchen Musik umgefallen.”⁴⁰ This idea of music providing comfort is repeated when the protagonist expresses frustration due to the breaking of her alarm clock: even though the ability to tell time was not particularly important to her, its rhythmic ticking had provided her a sense of security. In contrast, the alarm clock and its breaking had no effect on the animals living with Haushofer’s protagonist.⁴¹ While the ticking of the alarm clock might not be the best in invoking the idea of music, is worthwhile to consider

³⁹ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 45.

⁴⁰ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 24.

⁴¹ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 259.

that it is the closest thing to music that the protagonist is able to listen to. The fact that she mentions her animals to be unmoved by it once again reinforces the idea that there are certain aspects to humans that differentiate them from other animals, one of which is the capability to appreciate art. As such, in the case of music, *Die Wand* certainly upholds the idea of there being something different about humans' response to music to that of animals. What remains unclear, however, is whether the protagonist is longing for music for the sake of itself, or whether it is a part of her desire for human connection in a more general sense.

While the appreciation of music seems to illuminate the human side of Haushofer's protagonist, a scene involving Gregor being drawn to Grete Samsa performing on her violin provides a less straightforward exploration of the relationship between music and the human condition. Per the request of the three lodgers in the Samsa apartment, Grete begins to play her violin in the living room, so that the men could listen to her. Despite the lodgers acting displeased, the narrator describes Grete's playing as beautiful. In fact, Grete's performance appears to have a strange attraction for Gregor: he is drawn out of his room and moves closer and closer to the living room. Puzzled by the effect of the music, the text even postulates: "War er ein Tier, da ihn Musik so ergriff?"⁴² Given that *Die Verwandlung* is written in the third person, it is not completely clear whether this question was something Gregor asked himself, or whether this is a question being posed directly to the reader, who is inspired/ to ponder its myriad dimensions. In this instance, a clear answer is not given as to whether him being drawn to music speaks to an animal part within himself, however, it is clear that there is something in Gregor that sets him apart from the three men who act disinterested in reference to the music. Rather than defining an appreciation for art/aesthetic beauty, this passage demonstrates how Gregor himself, alongside

⁴² Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*, 92.

the reader, is invited to tackle this question. A possible alternative question also arises: *how* could Gregor be an animal if he is so enthralled by the music? Have the three tenants, by not appreciating Grete's playing, in fact, lost a part of their humanity? This begs the question of whether or not music, as a non-verbal artistic form, is really indicative of the quality of being human.

Die Verwandlung: Is Gregor Human?

Echoing the events that transpire in *Die Wand*, the third part of Kafka's *Erzählung* also features the introduction of a man – in this case, three men. To cope with their deteriorating financial means, the Samsa family decides to rent a room in the apartment to three lodgers. Gregor's sister and mother also cook the men dinner, and during one of the dinners, which are quiet, Gregor notices eating sounds:

Sonderbar schien es Gregor, daß man aus allen mannigfachen Geräuschen des Essens immer wieder ihre kauenden Zähne heraushörte, als ob damit Gregor gezeigt werden sollte, daß man Zähne brauchte, und daß man auch mit den schönsten zahnlosen Kiefern nichts ausrichten könnte.⁴³

Gregor's realization directly points to the fact that Gregor is aware of having certain non-human qualities; after all, his new form likely lacks teeth, and he is despite this able to, without trouble, eat his food. By noticing the lodgers' chewing teeth, Gregor no longer considers himself among the indefinite pronoun "man" that he is using in order to make a general statement about humans. It is possible that, while he considers himself a member of the family, he does not see himself as a human member of the family, especially considering the types of interactions his family has

⁴³ Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*, 88.

with him are more akin to those one would have with a family pet – they do not talk to him, but they feed him, and he is present in the household. Worth considering also is what Gregor himself consumes. Like Haushofer's protagonist, his options are limited, although not because of a lack of resources but because he is unable to cater to his needs on his own and is dependent on his sister. In opposition to *Die Wand*, the desire for cleanliness and fresh food is absent for Gregor. Reflecting on the fact that Gregor's sister cleans his room, he recognizes that he has no issue with the room being unclean. Furthermore, Gregor is actually dissatisfied with the fresh food options Grete initially brings him, and it is a stale piece of cheese that Gregor himself (while still in human form) had declared inedible some time prior that he finds the most pleasure in consuming. What is evident from this is that while nutrition and the process of eating serves as a way to differentiate between the human and the nonhuman in either text, the unwillingness of Haushofer's protagonist to consume the nettles near the dung heap accentuates her human qualities, while Gregor's desire to eat the family's leftovers serves as a marker of his nonhuman side.

In *Die Verwandlung*, it is humans' sexuality and capacity to work that are used as well in order to explore the human/nonhuman boundary. A few months after Gregor's transformation, his sister and mother enter Gregor's room to remove his furniture. His sister's rationale for the removal of furniture is the fact that Gregor has grown more accustomed to his new way of moving, including crawling on walls, and the furniture gets in his way. Initially, the thought of the removal of furniture is a welcome one to Gregor, but after a while his mother questions whether this might indicate the family losing all hope in Gregor's recovery, which immediately inspires Gregor to rethink his wishes and to wonder whether the lack of human contact may have confused his judgement. This passage is indicative of the idea that the isolation from his family

Gregor experiences has catalyzed the process of transformation within him, one that sees him also find enjoyment in his new body. Additionally, Gregor seems to accept the fact that he no longer makes productive use of the furniture in his room, such as his writing desk, and that being no longer seen as fully human in the eyes of his sister, Gregor no longer has complete autonomy over his property in a way that he formerly had. His mother's reminder of a possible recovery for Gregor, however, ultimately reverses this thinking in his mind and causes him to intervene.

Hastily, Gregor springs out from under the sheet that was covering him and proceeds to defend the picture of a woman in furs, by sticking on the wall and shielding it with his entire body. Although many of the objects in the room hold sentimental value to Gregor, it is precisely the picture he chooses to protect – a picture which is introduced in the very opening of the story. The picture, cut out of a magazine and framed, depicts a woman dressed in furs, her forearm hidden inside a fur muff.⁴⁴ On one hand, considering that the woman is dressed in furs, and is therefore transgressing the human-animal boundary in her own way, Gregor may have been motivated to protect the picture as a result of a sense of solidarity felt towards another nonhuman, or at least an image of one. More likely, however, it may stem from Gregor's male heterosexual desire towards the woman in the picture. The woman's garb, in this instance, is less a transgression of the human boundary, and more simply sexualized apparel that is evocative of female genitalia. One might consider Gregor's sexual desire a kind of "animalistic" urge, but the plausible notion that Gregor jumps out to protect the picture stems from a renewed sense of being human, complicates this notion. As discussed before, Gregor's actions startle the mother, leading Gregor to escape the room to comfort her, and ultimately leading him to be injured by apples thrown at him by his father. As I will show, pain, both inflicted by Gregor's father, and

⁴⁴ The woman's appearance is a reference to *Venus in Furs* (Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, 1870), a novella that likely inspired Kafka to use the name Gregor for his protagonist.

the pain he experiences on his own as he adapts to use his new body, reveal how the instinctual process of learning from pain indicates a nonhuman quality while the capacity to inflict pain complements (in that it stands at odds with) the human quality of showing mercy.

When Haushofer's protagonist first ventures out to grasp the span of the wall around her, she returns with the realization that her feet are in pain. This is due to both the fact that at this stage, her body is unaccustomed to the landscape but also the fact that she did not wear hiking boots on her expedition.⁴⁵ In this small moment, it is through pain response that the protagonist learns to adapt to her circumstances. Similarly, Gregor Samsa experiences pain as he explores the capabilities of his new body, and pain becomes a recurring element in the text, as a reminder to Gregor that he is no longer human. Beyond experiencing pain simply stemming from his own body, however, Gregor also experiences acute pain at the hands of his father when he is forced to return to his room on repeated occasions. This demonstrates how pain serves as a vehicle for instinctual learning for the nonhuman, while it also reveals the capacity of humans to inflict pain on one another and on those beings they deem to be "the other," and lesser than themselves. In essence, Gregor forgets his condition as a nonhuman and desires to comfort his mother – as any son would. His body, however, prevents him from communicating this and he is physically punished by his father for even trying. What can be observed is two perspectives which have changed as a result of Gregor's transformation, in conflict with each other. The first of these perspectives is Gregor's perspective on care, which has shifted from providing financial security to include emotional forms of care, such as comforting an upset mother. This, however, stands in conflict with the shift of perspective that Gregor's father has of him, who perceives Gregor's act of care as an escape attempt.

⁴⁵ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 23.

Chapter 3: What does it Mean to Belong?

Bringing together how *Die Wand* and *Die Verwandlung* explore what it means to be human and what it means to be humane reveals how both Haushofer's protagonist and Gregor Samsa navigate life between the human and the nonhuman. This allows for a defamiliarization of social structures that these characters had accepted as part of their former reality. In *Die Wand*, it is the protagonist's removal from social hierarchies that allows them to become evident as something inhumane that governed her previous life, but something that can now be dismantled. In contrast, Gregor Samsa and his family neither escape nor dismantle social inequalities of the lived reality of the bourgeois family, but it is by Gregor being brought closer to these circumstances of his family and also observe from a slight distance that he is able to recognize them. Ultimately, there appears to be a moment of empowerment and liberation for Grete Samsa as she, following Gregor's demise, assumes the role of decision-maker for the family. This is quickly thwarted, however. Instead of being recognized as liberated from gendered hierarchies, Grete Samsa's parents recognize that she has grown into a "schönen und üppigen Mädchen" who should soon be married off.⁴⁶ *Die Wand* similarly does not appear to provide a satisfying conclusion in terms of reconfigured social injustices: as opposed to reaching an epoch of the posthuman, Haushofer's protagonist accepts her eventual death, and will likely perish soon thereafter, along the rest of humanity. By broadening the lens from the perception of the individual of the objects around them to the individual as they see their surroundings on a structural level, this section explores the idea that Haushofer's protagonist transitions from an individual at odds with herself (as a result of the social structures governing her life) to someone

⁴⁶ Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*, 110.

integrated within nature. Conversely, Gregor Samsa begins as a part of society, accepting the social reality of his work, but transitions into an individual at odds with himself.

Disruption of Invisible Borders

One of the first social structures that becomes dismantled in *Die Wand* is the concept of property. This is first seen in a scene where the protagonist discovers Hugo's small storage of liquor. To calm herself, the protagonist drinks a glass of whiskey, and reflects: "Es fiel mir auf, daß ich an den Whisky als an meinen Whisky dachte, ich glaubte also nicht mehr an die Rückkehr des rechtmäßigen Besitzers."⁴⁷ Although her realization shocks her, her assumption of ownership of the whiskey is not rationalized as an inheritance, but more so the fact that because of a new absence of ownership, she can think of the whiskey as hers. Of course, this might then apply to the rest of Hugo and Luise's belongings as well, and to the protagonist's benefit, Hugo had been preparing for hard times and stashed a lot of useful items. The protagonist even discusses the entire valley in terms of a property that she may lay claim to. She adds: "Der neue Besitzer, wenn es ihn gibt, hat sich noch nicht bei mir gemeldet."⁴⁸ As the passage suggests, property is a (human) social contract, seen as the protagonist assumes ownership of the valley, and not, say – Luchs. At the same time, the novel's feminist tone reminds the reader that it is men who, as a rule, possess and make decisions over property.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 21-22.

⁴⁸ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 59.

⁴⁹ In the passage quoted here, it is possible that the protagonist assumes the hypothetical owner of the valley to be male, and the dismantling of possession and property is thus important both from the standpoint of a human-animal divide, but also in terms of gender. "Der Besitzer," coupled with the accusative masculine pronoun "Ihn," in the text refers first and foremost to the owner and masculine in the grammatical sense, but the masculine form of the noun as the default proves the automatic assumption of ownership as male and/or masculine.

The concept of family does not become dismantled in *Die Wand*, despite it being presented, similarly, as a patriarchal structure. While in certain instances, the protagonist does think back to her family at a time before the wall, the familial connection in *Die Wand* is presented as something that need not be one tied by blood and can transcend across species. Once Haushofer's protagonist begins to take care of Luchs, the cow and the cats, she begins to think of herself as a head of the family: "Ich hatte ja nur noch die Tiere, und ich fing an, mich als Oberhaupt unserer merkwündigen Familie zu fühlen."⁵⁰ While the protagonist recognizes the fact that her family is an unusual one, this quotation still retains the use of the traditional structure of a family, at the head of which usually is a man. In the absence of men, however, the gendered expectation of the role of head is foregone and the protagonist is able to assume the position. This does continue to indicate, however, that it is something about her being human that allows her to exercise control over the animals. At the same time, as the protagonist progresses in her transformation from human to nonhuman it is no longer so. For instance, initially the protagonist considers herself as the master of Luchs but after losing him, feels not like she has lost a servant, follower, or a living companion of utilitarian function. Instead, she reflects that she feels like an amputee. With the loss of Luchs, the protagonist feels like she has lost a part of herself.⁵¹ As such, the novel initially accomplishes the presentation of the human/animal power hierarchy in which it is humans who make decisions over their animals – and this is connected to the way in which men make decisions over women in the public sphere but also in the household economy. Both of these social hierarchies appear to be dismantled over the course of the narrative. At the same time, it is worth considering firstly that by the time the protagonist has accomplished this

⁵⁰ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 47.

⁵¹ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 149.

oneness with Luchs, she has let go of both her identity as being a woman, and subsequently as a human. Secondly, the protagonist is only able to accomplish this in the (nearly) complete absence of other people around her who might resist the obliteration of these social structures, suggesting that even if a world free of these power hierarchies were possible, it would take something like a catastrophic event to get there.

By bringing together the idea of masculine control over nature (animals, more specifically) and patriarchal structures governing the familial structure, *Die Wand* presents these issues not as separate, but as two sides to the same coin. This perspective is supported by ecocritical feminist literature of the 1970s and beyond. In *Feminism and Animal Families* (2020), Anna Richard discusses how the unjust treatment of nonhuman animals resembled that of the subjugation of women in Austria during the 50s and 60s, a period before the emergence of both women's and animals' rights movements which sought to mitigate structures of masculine control such as cruel conditions in the livestock industry and household inequalities that rendered women unable to embark on a career outside of the household if the husband did not agree.⁵² To Richards, *Die Wand* is a revolutionary work in the way in which it depicts animals as "individuals with autonomy," thus enabling the reader to imagine the reconfiguration of a traditional human-animal hierarchy.⁵³

Over the course of *Die Wand*, the protagonist observes nature overtaking manmade objects around her. This process of nature assimilating manmade objects thereby becomes a reflection of the transformation happening with the protagonist, but in the dimension of the non-living (or in the case of plants non-conscious) other. In particular, the protagonist notices the

⁵² Richards, "Feminism and Animal Families," 77.

⁵³ Richards, "Feminism and Animal Families," 76.

following about Hugo's car parked outside of the hunting lodge: "Auch ich habe mitten im Wald so ein Ding stehen, Hugos Schwarzen Mercedes. Er war fast neu, als wir damit herkamen. Heute ist er ein grünüberwuchertes Nest für Mäuse und Vögel."⁵⁴ The protagonist reflects on the car's appearance over the various seasons, suggesting that over the course of her two years behind the wall, the car has served as a visual reminder of the way in which human constructs and human-made objects become dismantled and repurposed. The car also serves as a reminder to the protagonist of her own eventual demise, the fact that her running out of critical resources is inevitable. This also prompts her to reimagine what will become of the report that she has been writing, instead of being used as a resource for researchers whose appearance she has by now given up on, she imagines her manuscript becoming food for the mice, who would not differentiate what is written on the pages. The protagonist no longer has hope for rescue, nor does she attempt to venture outside of the wall. Instead, the latter part of the novel marks the protagonist's transformation from individual at odds with themselves to someone who is integrated with nature. She accepts her death as inevitable, and she accepts the fact that what she leaves behind will be repurposed in a fashion in which the natural elements around her see fit.

The novel, however, does not end with the death of the protagonist, nor is there a presentation of an idyllic, codependent existence alongside the animals. In the concluding sections of the novel, the protagonist befriends a white crow: "In diesem Herbst ist eine weiße Krähe aufgetaucht. Sie fliegt immer ein Stück hinter den andern und läßt sich allein auf einem Baum nieder, den ihre Gefärten meiden. Ich kann nicht verstehen, warum die anderen Krähen sie nicht mögen."⁵⁵ The protagonist does not understand why the crow is being treated as an outsider

⁵⁴ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 222.

⁵⁵ Haushofer, *Die Wand*, 251.

by its flock, which demonstrates that nature is not presented as purely and unproblematically idyllic in the novel. There are hierarchies and forms of ostracism among animals, too. At the same time, it is the fact that the crow is an outsider that inspires the protagonist to connect with it, bringing it food on repeated occasions. This is the first non-domesticated animal with which the protagonist bonds. In contrast to the cow, this crow is able to fend for itself and does not require the protagonist to bring it under her care. As such, the bond between the crow and the protagonist is one no longer governed by the human-animal hierarchy which would be the case inevitably with domesticated animals. This bond is one of shared experience: the crow is recognized as an outcast, a way in which the protagonist herself feels, being the only human left alive.

For the reader, the protagonist's transformation is seen as a positive one, as something which ushers in a new, more caring epoch for the formerly human. At the same time, consistent with how the protagonist discusses her transformation earlier as something she wishes would not happen, she also does not view her transformation as a fully positive phenomenon in the closing of the novel. The protagonist realizes, as Sabine Frost points out: "The forest's violent intrusion into her mind is threatening, and she must acknowledge that sharing the forest's thoughts also means losing control over her own thinking and thus relinquishing her human identity." Frost continues to suggest that instead of seeing herself as part of nature, she ultimately considers herself as a kind of mediator, someone who "thinks for the forest" but transcribes this, as "the forest's human voice".⁵⁶ Ultimately, the protagonist's ability to be a mediator ceases when she runs out of paper, thus again resisting the idea of a satisfying, utopic in the protagonist's continued existence following the novel's ending. This resistance to the transformation is also

⁵⁶ Frost, "Looking Behind Walls: Literary and Filmic Imaginations of Nature, Humanity, and the Anthropocene in *Die Wand*," 68.

evident in *Die Verwandlung*, where Gregor's (human) thoughts recognize how his transformation is affecting his life, leading him to attempt to resist this. At the same time, the possibility of being a mediator is not possible for Gregor as he has already lost the ability to communicate with his family from the start.

Architectures of Injustice

Before transforming into a monstrous insect, Gregor's work was his life. He was a travelling salesman who mostly got to learn about life at home through letter correspondence. In essence, Gregor was someone who was integrated into a social structure dictated by finance. Gregor's supervisor is one of many examples of the fact that these structures are disinterested in Gregor as an individual, but rather, in his unwavering commitment to the firm. After Gregor loses his job and the family is no longer able to make ends meet, Gregor's father reassumes the working man's life, a life of struggles that were not unknown to Gregor:

Mit einer Art Eigensinn weigerte sich der Vater, auch zu Hause seine Dieneruniform abzulegen; und während der Schlafrock nutzlos am Kleiderhaken hing, schlummerte der Vater vollständig und wartete auch hier auf die Stimme des Vorgesetzten."⁵⁷

His father's complete devotion to his job is akin to that of Gregor prior to his transformation who, as a travelling salesman, hardly got to spend time at home. What these moments reveal is the dehumanizing expectations that an exceptional employee is one who never participates freely in the domestic sphere, which in turn suggests that readers revisit the question of what caused Gregor's transformation in the first place. This question is never answered, but the fact that he suspects it to be his work that caused him pain when rising from bed in the morning seems to

⁵⁷ Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*, 78.

point in precisely this direction. While the lives of Grete and the mother undergo less of a drastic change as they remain as caretakers of the household, the family is nonetheless forced to rent out a part of their apartment to the three boarders who do not only end up taking up one of the rooms – they also overtake many of the domestic privileges of the family, such as eating in the dining room (see above).

The Samsa family, however, think themselves free of fault when it comes to class-based hierarchy, as made evident by the way in which the cleaning woman in her house is fired by the father without any consideration. On one hand, the father's decision may stem from his familial affinity to Gregor: the housekeeper perceives Gregor no longer as a human at all, while Gregor's family members still do. On the other, if one is to consider how it was Gregor's loss of a job that caused the family substantial financial complications, the firing of the cleaning woman can be seen as part of a repeating cycle. After all, the father does not ponder what kind of financial trouble he may place the housekeeper in, in a similar way to how the manager fires Gregor without remorse, or how the three tenants who move into the Samsa household ultimately leave without paying for their stay. In comparison to *Die Wand*, thus, Gregor's transformation does accomplish a defamiliarization of social structures in him that brings them to light to the reader, but these social structures are not ultimately deconstructed in the way that they are in Haushofer's novel. The same is the case for gender autonomy. In Haushofer's novel, the protagonist's removal from society allows her to gain new autonomy, one that is not controlled by men in her life, something she describes as freedom. A similar thing happens to Grete Samsa following Gregor's demise. Since Gregor had been the main source of income for the family, many of the decisions around the house had been Gregor's, including the choice of apartment for

the family to live in. After Gregor dies, however, the decision of which (smaller but more practical) apartment to move to becomes a collective decision between Grete and the parents:

“Die größte augenblickliche Besserung der Lage mußte sich natürlich leicht durch einen Wohnungswechsel ergeben: sie wollten nun eine kleinere und billigere, aber besser gelegene und überhaupt praktischere Wohnung nehmen, als es die jetzige, noch von Gregor ausgesuchte war.”⁵⁸

The fact that the decision is made collectively and not by the father suggests that, because of Gregor’s death, certain power structures have been reconfigured. In fact, the parents notice this elevation of autonomy in Grete Samsa, who, in the final lines of the story, arches her lithe body toward the spring sunshine. In this moment, however, the parents notice—and note—that Grete has developed into a “schönen und üppigen Mädchen.” This comment on Grete implicitly reinforces the social structures of early 20th-century bourgeois society by hinting that Grete, like the new and more practical apartment, will play a crucial role in improving/repairing the social and economic standing of the Samsa family. She is, after all, ripe for a potentially profitable marriage.

Chapter 4: Implications of Narrative Mode

As I have demonstrated in this project, Marlen Haushofer’s *Die Wand* and Franz Kafka’s *Die Verwandlung* are texts that share a transformation of the human to the nonhuman, which is catalyzed by a mysterious event. The reader is never told what caused Gregor’s transformation or the invisible wall to spring up; rather, the reader, like the protagonists, is expected to accept this

⁵⁸ Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*, 110.

opening premise as truth within the narrative. An exploration of the characters' elusive position between the human and the nonhuman calls several other truths into question. All this is done to examine social concepts and injustices from a new, defamiliarized perspective. This is certainly one of many possible interpretive strategies for the two texts but it is one that becomes particularly apparent when these two texts are read alongside each other in the context of magic realism. In fact, I was first inspired to do so because I identified a structural similarity in the two texts which I sought out to identify as magic realist in its nature. As shall be seen by the brief overview of magic realism as a narrative mode in literature, making the claim that either of these texts is magic realist appears complicated. Yet, the fact that these two works do not comfortably fit within any one of the plethora of definitions for magic realism leads to even more evocative discoveries.

Magic Realism: The Puzzle

The term "magic realism" is commonly thought of as a Latin American phenomenon that was popularized by Gabriel García Márquez's *100 Years of Solitude* (1967). The original coinage of the term, however, can be attributed to Franz Roh, who was a German photographer and art historian during the Weimar period. In 1925, Roh wrote his most famous work, titled *Nach Expressionismus: Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei*. In this volume, Roh identifies an emergent post-expressionistic visual language that demonstrates a renewed appreciation for everyday objects as they are depicted in a realistic style and names it *Magischer Realismus*.⁵⁹ While Roh's book marks the actual starting point of magic realism as a

⁵⁹ Franz Roh, "Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois P. Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), 15-31.

term, it is important to recognize that Roh predominantly focuses on visual art and mentions literature in his book only briefly. Roh's version of magic realism also does not explicitly feature supernatural elements, like those that are characteristic of well-known Latin American magic realist literature of the 1960s and beyond. Franz Roh saw magic realism as a renewed perspective on everyday objects which captures the magic already embedded within them. What distinguishes magic realism from other narrative modes is the lack of hesitation on the part of the protagonist: the supernatural element may not be received positively or calmly, but the possibility of it actually occurring is never questioned. What is accomplished is a defamiliarization of the familiar. In the case of *Die Wand*, and *Die Verwandlung*, both texts open with a seemingly supernatural premise that, in turn, disrupts and reconfigures perspectives they have on objects and social structures from the protagonists' former lives. Without claiming the texts themselves to be magic realist, it is worth pointing out that several of the texts' shared qualities (defamiliarization, a seemingly supernatural opening premise, political commentary, destabilizing of temporal references and sequences, and an exploration of otherness) appear at the intersection of Franz Roh's magic realism and Latin American literary magic realism.

The two types of magic realism, while seemingly distinct from one another, can still be linked together vis-à-vis Franz Roh: In 1927, sections from Roh's book were translated into Spanish and published in *Revisita del Occidente* by José Ortega y Gasset. The publication, based in Madrid but with considerable international influence, not only reduced the number of paintings featured in Roh's manuscript from 87 to 4, but also modified Roh's title to simply "*Realismo Magico*", and altogether removed the preface,⁶⁰ the first sentence of which reads: "I

⁶⁰ Kenneth Reeds, "Magical Realism: A Problem of Definition," *Neophilologus* 90, no. 2 (April 2006): 176-179.

attribute no special value to the title ‘magic realism.’”⁶¹ In essence, Roh chose this name because his subject matter needed a name. Roh was interested in finding a name that expressed more than just the chronological relationship implied by “Post-Expressionism”. Roh’s term occurs quite sparsely in his original text, occurring rarely if at all after its introduction, while mentions of “objectivity” and “new objects” are frequent. All this resulted in what can arguably be considered separate paths of development for *realismo magico* and *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which reunited as a result of explosive growth in international scholarly interest in the 1960s and beyond. In the latter half of the 20th Century, discourse on magic realism in German literature also expanded, connecting Roh’s original ideas with trends in literature that sought to uncover magic within the everyday. While some Latin American scholars would consider Franz Kafka a magic realist, scholars in Germany were (and are) divided on this. Ultimately, Kafka’s role as an intermediary of Franz Roh’s magic realism and the “current” of magic realism in Latin America is still recognized. To reiterate, the goal of this brief overview is not to attempt to make claims about Franz Kafka’s belonging or possible lack thereof, to these categories, but rather to outline how the core idea of defamiliarization which unites the different instances of magic realism was what inspired a reading of *Die Wand* and *Die Verwandlung* together, and how a magic realist approach is a helpful interpretive strategy to approach these texts and to set them in new, previously unexplored contexts like this one. Below, magic realism will be discussed as a narrative mode which is subversive at its core because of how it accomplishes a reconfiguration of power structures in a realistic yet unfamiliar setting or mode of being, which is helpful in contextualizing *Die Wand* in this discussion as well.

⁶¹ Franz Roh, “Magischer Realismus: Nachexpressionismus,” 15-17.

While *Die Wand* is predominantly identified among a variety of categories of science fiction, rather than magic realism, it is still important to recognize how Haushofer's novel embodies the subversive nature that has come to define the magic realism as a narrative mode that calls into question the category of the "other." According to critic Maggie Ann Bowers, the power of magic realism as a narrative mode lies in the way it subverts categorization by calling realness itself into question:

"Once the category of truth is brought into question and the category of the real broken down or overturned, the boundaries of other categories become vulnerable. The reader becomes aware that if the category of the real is not definite then all assumptions of truth are at stake."⁶²

The magic realist novel uses its supernatural elements to reconfigure traditional hierarchies of power, be they gendered, colonial or otherwise – in doing so, the reader is left with the conclusion that the dismantling of these structures is not only possible in a fantastical world, but rather, they can imagine a social reality in which it is possible. It is thus unsurprising that a narrative mode which does not place itself in any particular geographic location or era has become an effective means of attack for feminist authors like Angela Carter and Isabel Allende. In 1987, Patricia Hart even coined "magical feminism" as its own subcategory of magic realism.

This project is a reading of *Die Wand* which is consistent with several examples of the more recent scholarly perspectives on Haushofer's novel, such as the approach taken by Margaret Littler; the idea that within the protagonist is an invisible transformation through which she arrives at integration within nature. A similar transformation in the opposing order can be marked in Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*, where Gregor Samsa begins as an integrated, working

⁶² Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 68.

member of society but is stripped of this position and rendered an individual. One of the key similarities of the transformation is that in either text, the transformation is catalyzed by an opening, puzzling premise that alienates the key characters from the other human beings around them. Until this point, the question of whether Gregor Samsa's transformation into vermin happened, or whether the giant invisible wall actually showed up, has been carefully avoided. And while these questions may be the source of initial interest or curiosity for the reader, readers of either text will ultimately conclude that it is not about this initial puzzling premise; it is how the protagonists change in response to it. Gregor Samsa's condition may be unique, but the way he is treated by society is much too familiar – the same could be said about Haushofer's protagonist in *Die Wand*, who finds herself at the crux of the human/nonhuman power hierarchy. One might note that, because of this, an interpretation of the opening premises as metaphor might be appropriate. A return to Franz Roh, however, might offer a third perspective.

This project first began out of a desire to bring together *Die Wand* and *Die Verwandlung* with Franz Roh's vision of magic realism. This is admittedly an unlikely combination, but nonetheless a productive one, precisely because it is an attempt at something similar to what the texts themselves are accomplishing: a defamiliarized perspective on the social structures that govern the everyday lives of the protagonists. Franz Roh discusses miniaturization as a prevalent practice of painters of magic realism. He suggests that presenting things in a miniature “seeks to endow the viewer, who is frequently too cursory and careless in his knowledge of the world and in his idealism, with a penetrating and meticulous lucidity.”⁶³ To Franz Roh, the concept of miniature extends beyond the idea of precise, small paintings that seek to capture “smallness

⁶³ Franz Roh, “Magical Realism: Post-Expressionism,” in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. ed Louis P. Zamora & Wendy B. Faris (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1995), 27.

from within.” There is another kind of miniature, one which seeks to “locate infinity in small things” that stems from “a special way of looking at the world” and can include even giant paintings, music, and other forms of art.⁶⁴

The Miniature

In essence, Marlen Haushofer’s *Die Wand* and Franz Kafka’s *Die Verwandlung* create their own kind of miniatures. The texts’ protagonist/narrator is isolated from their surroundings and “framed” in an enclosed space, be that an invisible transparent wall or Gregor’s room. It is in these miniature frames that these characters’ changing position in relation to the humans and nonhuman animals around them is brought into the reader’s focus. The invisible wall that forms around the protagonist in *Die Wand* creates a miniature world for her, her own universe in which she is directly involved with the nutrient cycle. As the only human (or so she would believe), she also becomes her own kind of miniature – a small individual in a limited yet overwhelmingly large space around her. *Die Verwandlung*, in contrast, is a miniature already in form, but Gregor’s home also becomes a miniature of society, through which class issues that prevail beyond the level of the individual are presented.

Important to Roh’s concept of the miniature is the objects’ relationship to background and foreground, and in the texts investigated in this project, the concept of a background is equally important. In Haushofer’s novel, the invisible wall’s presence is constant, however, its transparency prevents it being approached as a background phenomenon: it is only when the protagonist is up close that she is able to interact with the wall at all, by feeling it (she even sets up stakes around the wall to help her remember its position and existence). In contrast, the

⁶⁴ Franz Roh, “Magical Realism: Post-Expressionism,” 27.

protagonist herself gradually lets go of her position as individual and as human and therefore exceptional. Her transformation into the *humane nonhuman* is thus a transformation from foreground to background. The wall, if thought of as a magic realist element in the “painting” that is Haushofer’s novel, is not first and foremost a physical barrier that prevents the protagonist from escaping, it is an ordering principle, it is something that creates structure in the life of the protagonist.

The concept of miniature is of further help in linking these texts together if considered in the sense of Kafka’s literature as minor literature. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s “Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature” (1975) is seen as one of the foundational political texts about Franz Kafka’s works. Pointing out that Kafka is an author writing in German, in Prague, in a distinct dialect of “Prague German”, Deleuze and Guattari identify Kafka as a writer whose “dialect of minor” literature stands in opposition with High German language, which as a consequence makes the nature of his work subversive, as it is a literature of a small nation that defies control of the bigger one.⁶⁵ Stanley Corngold provides nuance to the claim that Kafka is writing in a particular dialect, but nonetheless is in agreement with the idea that in its linguistic foundation, Kafka’s works are of a subversive nature:

Despite its inaccuracy, Deleuze and Guattari’s view of Kafka as an author working within the constraints of a minor literature has now located Kafka exemplarily within a certain dialect – or perhaps, pidgin – of critical theorizing. This is a political criticism empowering the literature of small nations, a literature said to be exemplary of strategies for *exploding power at the underside*.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Stanley Corngold, “Kafka and the Dialect of Minor Literature,” *College Literature* 21, no. 1 (1994): 144-145.

⁶⁶ Corngold, “Kafka and the Dialect of Minor Literature,” 145. Emphasis added.

Once again, it is worth returning to Bowers' idea that at its heart, magic realism is a literature that seeks to disrupt notions of the truth and the real in order to empower "the other," per Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka can be read in noticeably similar terms. It is actually Deleuze and Guattari's essay that has served as a link between Haushofer's *Die Wand* and Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* in one of the rare instances that these texts are brought together in critical literary scholarship. In "Materialisierte Entfremdung" (2021), Jürgen Gunia discusses the invisible wall of *Die Wand*, both as a literalized metaphor, and as part of a process Deleuze and Guattari describe in their essay on Kafka: the process of "Ausweg". Like this project, Gunia connects the appearance of the wall to Gregor's transformation as an unexplainable event, but something that persists through the narrative and thereby achieves a reconfiguration of the character's circumstances. Gunia discusses Haushofer's protagonist's longing for freedom and provides a further connection to Kafka's "Ein Bericht für eine Akademie" in which the monkey Rotpeter exclaims: „Nein, Freiheit wollte ich nicht. Nur einen Ausweg; rechts, links, wohin immer.“⁶⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, as Gunia point out, link the importance of the "Ausweg" in these texts to Marx's alienation theory, the idea that as a consequence of living in a stratified class system, one begins to lose their humanity – that they are, in essence, catapulted into a human-animal transformation.⁶⁸ Gregor Samsa cannot help but become an animal to sharpen his perception and realize his truth. The anticapitalism of these texts thus further cements them as texts that aim to defamiliarize, and thereby disrupt existing social structures from the point of view of the minor or "the other." The way Kafka and Haushofer accomplish this is by challenging the very principles of the real in the worlds they present. By disrupting what is possible in the real world,

⁶⁷ Jürgen Gunia, "Materialisierte Entfremdung. 'Schöpferisches Verfahren in Marlen Haushofers *Die Wand*,'" *Altre Modernità*, no. 25 (2021): 57-58.

Die Wand and *Die Verwandlung* set to question oppressive and harmful social structures that have come to be accepted as infallible realities. In other words: by *changing the world*, these texts force us to contemplate how the world might be changed.

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