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Friends or Foes – Representations of the Relationship between Man and Nature in Three Different Media Types: Literature, Live Action Film and Animated Film

Abstract: The concept of nature and its relationship to man is crucial in ecocriticism, and has been much debated during the whole existence of the field. In an overview of the short history of ecocriticism, Lawrence Buell (2011) shows how the view on nature has developed since the beginning of ecocriticism in the early 1990s. During this period, nature has been seen as both friend and foe to man, it has been considered as a place for retreat for the individual but also the subject of human reshaping. It has evolved from the wilderness of thinly populated remote areas that have to be preserved to urban and industrial landscapes which have to be adapted to man. It has been seen as a counterpart of man, but also as an integral part of man. In extreme views, it has even been suggested that nature as a concept is irrelevant. Timothy Morton argues for instance that the term “nature” is so polyvalent and baggage-ridden a term that it should be banished from the lexicon.

In this paper, I will analyze three different views on the relationship between man and nature in three different media types. All the cases are dramatic representations of this complicated relationship. The first cases, representing the media type of literature, are also the earliest ones, and consist of two works by

Swiss author Charles Ferdinand Ramuz: his novel *La grande peur dans la montagne* (*Terror on the Mountain*) from 1927 and his short story “Scène dans la forêt” from 1945. In these examples, nature appears as a God who punishes man for his attempts to tame it. The second example is much more recent, and comes from the media type of live action film. It is the Icelandic film *Woman at War*, directed by Benedikt Erlingsson in 2018, a film in which nature and man also have a conflictual relationship, but nature is not the vindictive God who punishes man. On the contrary, nature appears at beautiful, but fragile, and in need for help. Finally, the animated film *Wall-E*, by Andrew Stanton in 2008, shows nature as humanity’s last chance. Without nature, man goes inevitably towards extinction. At the same time, through a formal device, nature appears as indestructible despite its fragility.

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Formal devices, in particular concerning narration, will be at the center of my interest, so narratology will be the main analytical tool. Besides narratology, the field of intermediality will inform my analytical approach, not only because the three examples come from three different media types, but since narration itself will be addressed as an intermedial feature.

Keywords: Intermediality, Ecocriticism, Intermedial Ecocriticism, *Woman at War*, Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, *Wall-E*.

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine ecocritical aspects in three different media types: literature (two works, a novel and a short story, by Swiss author Charles Ferdinand Ramuz), feature film (the Icelandic film *Woman at War*) and animated film (*Wall-E*). The basis on which these media types are differentiated is Lars Elleström's model of intermedial relations, updated in an article from 2020, in which media types are defined as "clusters of media products" (2020: 54). Thus, the distinction between the three media types above are made at the level of what Elleström calls "basic media modality modes", that is features that have to do with the "most salient material, spatiotemporal, sensorial and semiotic properties" (2020: 54). From the point of view of the basic modes, it is more relevant to distinguish between feature film and animated film, which involve totally different material creative processes, than between a novel and a short story, as in Ramuz's case, where the difference is at a higher level, called qualified media by Elleström, in which the social and the cultural context play the main role.

The theoretical basis of the paper is what Jørgen Bruhn (2020) calls "intermedial ecocriticism", and defines as an intermedial approach to ecocritical questions as these appear in different media products. In more precise words, intermedial ecocriticism is "a method to analyse and interpret specific media products, or, on well defined methodological grounds, to compare more than one media product across media borders" (Bruhn 2020: 126). The requirement is that the media product "should be a part of the ecomedia" (Bruhn 2020: 126), or environmental narratives, defined by Alexa Weik von Mossner as "any type of narrative, in any media that foregrounds ecological issues and human-nature relationships, often but not always with the openly stated intention of bringing about social change" (2017: 3).

In Bruhn's definition, intermediality is seen as a comparative approach, in which media related aspects are the main point of interest. It should however be stressed here that intermediality *per se* is not a comparative study of different media products, since it can be a characteristic of one single media product. Bruhn is right, though, to insist on comparing different media products across media borders, since it is mainly by means of comparing that media specificity can be ascertained even for one single media product. Thus, one possible intermedial approach could be to study the media specificity of a certain feature, by

comparing its use in different media types. This is the approach used in this essay, in which narration is the central feature studied in all the media products. Therefore, narratology will be the main theoretical and methodological tool in the analyses below, whose goal thus is to highlight how narrative features from different media can be used when approaching ecocritical questions.

From this perspective, besides from being an intermedial study, this paper can be seen as an example of econarratology, a project developed by Erin James (2015), whose goal is to bring together ecocriticism's referential focus and narratology's textual interest. As Markku Lehtimäki eloquently put it: "When practicing econarratology, we are supposed to do close textual analysis of voices and structures but also enrich this analysis with a contextual and referential interpretation, which is informed by our knowledge of the natural world" (2019: 91). As such the paper is an attempt to supersede what theorists have seen as an irreducible antagonism between narratology, with its focus on language, forms and structure, and ecocriticism, with its interest in political and cultural literary theory (cf Lehtimäki 2019: 87). The works studied below are especially well suited for such an attempt, not only because they are examples of ecomedia, and as such representing different views on the relationship between nature and man, but also because they are challenging from a narratological point of view.

2. Nature, Man and Intermediality

The concept of nature and its relationship to man is crucial in ecocriticism. This is, for instance, how Cheryll Glotfelty's defined ecocriticism already in 1996, in the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*: "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (1996: xviii). Interestingly enough, this remains one of the most cited definitions of ecocriticism since then, despite its fixation to literature as the epitome of man (see Buell 2011: 88). What should be noted is that the term "nature" is not mentioned in this definition. One reason might be the term's earlier use in literature, from as early as pastoral poetry in Antiquity, which would not really suit the ecocritical agenda. Another reason could be the term's vagueness, especially the problematic aspect that man is actually a part of nature. By using the term "physical environment" instead, the problem is avoided, but not resolved, since it is not actually stated where the boundary line between man and his or her physical environment is to be drawn. Finally, a reason might be to highlight the difference compared to the first wave of ecocritical theorists, for whom the relation between man and nature was conflictual. Indeed, as it appears in Lawrence Buell's short history of ecocriticism from 2011, the first wave of ecocriticism had a romantic view of nature as the counterpart of man, the place which was before man and was not affected by man. They thus idealized nature and contrasted it to everything that was created by man. For them,

“environmentalism equals nature protection in thinly populated remote areas” (Buell 2011: 94). The views of the second wave of ecocriticism show how differently the concept of nature can be understood. Indeed, they claim that “throughout human history nature itself has been subject to human reshaping, and that especially since the industrial revolution, metropolitan landscape and the built environment generally must be considered as at least equally fruitful ground for ecocritical work” (Buell 2011: 93). Thus, nature is not only, as was the case in the first wave, the country or the wilderness in thinly populated remote areas, but also urban and industrial landscapes which have to be adapted to man.

In both the first and the second wave of ecocriticism, however, nature, in its main meaning as physical environment, is seen as separated from man, something that has been criticized by theorists who see man as an integral part of nature. The fiercest critics, such as Timothy Morton in his 2007 work *Ecology without Nature*, argued that the term “nature” itself should be banished from the lexicon because it is so polyvalent and baggage-ridden (see Buell 2011: 96). However, such views have been, rightfully I argue, criticized, for instance by British ecocritic Greg Garrard (2010), for, as he says, throwing the baby-out-the-with-bathwater. Because even if man is an integral part of nature and is not to be seen as separate from it, our survival depends on saving the environment we live in, which I think requires its abstraction from the integral relation with man. Therefore, nature in this paper is mainly seen in its meaning as man’s physical environment, and as such separated from man, without pretending that this definition is comprehensive, and without pretending that man and nature are completely separate entities at all levels.

The polemics around the concept of nature in ecocriticism should not, I argue, be overestimated, as it is done for instance by Nirmaldasan Selvamony when he concludes that “ecocritics are not agreed on what constitutes the basic” (2007: XIX). Its replacement with “physical environment” is admittedly helpful in many cases, but not a necessity. The earlier use of the term in literature is not a burden either. On the contrary, ecocritics could even use this opportunity and apply the newly coined theory to earlier works, both in order to see them in a new light and to learn from them. The term’s vagueness and its complex relation is not something negative either, and can actually be used as aesthetic assets in some cases. This is what I am trying to show in this paper.

3. Nature as Avenging God: Charles Ferdinand Ramuz

The first examples that I will analyze are the oldest too, and represent the media type of written narrative literature. I will look closely at some extracts from two works by French speaking Swiss author Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, who lived between 1878 and 1947. Neither of the examples could be simply classified as an ecocritical work, especially because

of the time period when they were published (1927 and 1945), but it is exactly therein their strength lies. Indeed, it is an advantage, as it has been proved by numerous ecocritical of literary works by for example Henry David Thoreau, to analyze older texts through the lens of ecocriticism, especially in order to highlight that, in the field of aesthetic media, ecocritical questions were present long before the theory itself made its official appearance as late as in the 1990. It is also interesting to see how such older texts fit in the different waves of ecocriticism. Besides, narration is a key element in these works, not because they are from the media type of written narrative literature (representing thus narration in its most traditional form), but because they challenge certain narratological concepts by using unexpected and complex narrative techniques. The choice of starting with these works is motivated by the importance of the narrative elements in them, but also by the strategy to establish my narratological approach, which is mainly based on Gérard Genette's narratology in literature. This is also the reason why the analyses of these works will receive more space in this paper.

I will start with Ramuz's novel *La grande peur dans la montagne*, published in 1927 and translated into English as *Terror in the Mountain* in 1967. The novel is about a group of people who decide to take their cattle to a mountain pasture, La Sassenaise, despite a curse that hangs over the place. The novel's ecocritical aspect lies in the way it presents the conflictual relation between man and nature. Indeed, nature, in form of the mountain, takes its revenge on the men who took their cattle there, showing that nature does not accept intruders. It is exactly this view of nature that is interesting in the context of this paper, that is nature as a remote place outside man's influence, which is the romantic view of nature as the counterpart of man that Buell considers typical of the first wave of ecocriticism. This conclusion can be drawn after studying the narration of the novel, because actually at the content level, it is not at all clear that this is what happens. The novel is, on the contrary, often seen as an example of the fantastic according to its renowned definition by Tzvetan Todorov in *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970): the hesitation between a supernatural and a natural explanation. Indeed, in the novel, it is alluded that there could be a supernatural power that causes the men's deaths, not the cattle which run over them in a fit of the foot-and-mouth disease, which is the reasonable explanation.

I argue that the relationship between man and nature is the main theme of the novel, and I illustrate my point with the following closer look at an extract. It is telling the story of a girl, Victorine, who defies the interdiction to climb up the mountain in order to visit her boyfriend, Joseph, who had been put in quarantine because of the foot-and-mouth disease. On her way up, the girl falls into the river and dies. The question is who is narrating this extract:

[...] ce qu'elle a fait, traversant la rue ouvertement, sans hâte. [...] là non plus elle n'a pas été vue. [...] Elle eut de la chance, elle ne rencontra personne. Elle fit le tour du village ; nulle part, elle n'avait été vue, ni même dans l'espace de prés

à découvert. [...] Elle a vu venir à elle l'escarpement de la pente tombant vers la rivière sous une couche de nuit plus noire, qui était la lisière de la forêt ; elle y arrivait déjà : on n'avait pas appelé, rien ne bougeait ; – au moment où elle allait être forcée de quitter la berge, qui devenait rocheuse et trop abrupte, elle est entrée sous les pins. Là, on pense qu'elle a dû se reposer un moment... « On a trouvé une place, disent-ils, où des plantes de forêt couchées montraient qu'on s'était assis. [...] Elle a dû tomber une première fois ; son panier a roulé dans des buissons où on l'a retrouvé. Oh ! on a pu tout lire, disent-ils, toute son histoire, comme si elle l'avait écrite exprès pour nous. [...] Oh ! on a tout pu lire, comme si on avait été avec elle [...] Oh ! disent-ils, on a tout pu lire ; c'était écrit comme dans un livre phrase après phrase, et jusqu'à la dernière. (*La grande* 111-112)

[...] and this she did, crossing the street in full view, without hurrying. [...] [S] he hadn't been seen there either. [...] She was lucky, she met no one. She went the whole length of the village without being seen, not even in the meadow. [...] She saw the steep drop of the mountains toward the river, where the outskirts of the forest formed a darker belt of light; nobody had called, nothing stirred. This was the moment when having been forced to leave the bank, now too abrupt and rocky, she stepped under the pines. It's there, they think, she must have stopped a while to rest... "We found a place," they say, "where the undergrowth showed that someone had sat there. [...] She must have had her first fall. We found her basket rolled into the bushes. Oh, you could read everything," they say, "read her whole story, as if it had been written on purpose for us". [...] "Oh yes, you could read it all as though you'd been with her" [...] "Oh yes," they say, "you could read it all. It was written sentence by sentence as in a book, up to the very last one." (*Terror* 88-91)

Clearly, the source of the enunciation is hard to establish, not only because of the ambiguous French pronoun "on" (which can mean both "one" and "we"), but also because the main narrative voice makes reference to certain "they" as speakers. The interesting thing is that these "they" narrators too are quoting in their turn, or rather interpreting, what somebody has transmitted to them. It is as if someone had left the signs on the banks of the river, in the undergrowth, in the bushes, like the written letters in a book. So nature is functioning as the material medium of a book, through which the information of the event is transmitted. Nature can thus be seen as both the sender and the medium here, since the words acquire a materiality, as if they had been written. Besides, this form of accumulation of traces of a human being in the undergrowth is reminding of changes in geological times recorded in rock stratigraphy. As Gibbard and Walker claim (2014), the Anthropocene, that is the period in which human beings start leaving geological traces, will appear in similar ways in rocks, as if left on purpose for someone in the future to read.

However, what is important is to see nature not as a personified narrator of a human type but as a sort of extension of the human mind in the sense given by Clark and Chamber in their 1998 article “The extended mind”. Nature would thus function as a virtual focal point or a virtual narrative space to be occupied by humans through an act of fusion, which can be compared to Rosi Braidotti’s concept of nomadic thought, which “invests all that lives, even inorganic matter, with the power of consciousness” (2011: 3). According to such an interpretation, the perceiving mind of humans would have lost its bodily connection and migrated into nature. The disembodiment thus accomplished would be, admittedly, interesting, but the perceiving mind would still be of a human origin.

In other extracts, nature appears more clearly as a distinct narrator who posits itself in contrast to the men. An extract early on in the novel, when the men climb the first time on the mountain, shows how an unclear narrative voice addresses the men by the second person pronoun, establishing thus a clear distance and distinction:

Les hommes marchaient en deux groupes : le président et Crittin plus devant. Le président avait une lanterne ; le garde de commune avait une lanterne. On a commencé à monter. [...] On a passé devant une petite réunion de fenils qui vous ont regardé venir, se taisant pour vous regarder venir, après quoi ils ont été se serrer les uns contre les autres, comme pour se dire des choses. (*La grande peur dans la montagne* 12)

The men walked in two groups, the mayor and the Crittins somewhat ahead. The mayor had a lantern; the ranger had a lantern. They began to climb. [...] They passed a little group of hay-sheds which watched you coming, and afterward huddled together as if to talk things over. (*Terror in the Mountain* 8)

What is strange here, apart from the untranslatable “on” in “on a passé”, inappropriately translated with “they passed”, is that all of a sudden the men are addressed by the second person pronoun, which seems totally illogical and inappropriate. If it weren’t that the hay-sheds actually were the narrators addressing the men, something that would not be that illogical since their capacity to talk is suggested in the extract. The hay-sheds seem to function even more clearly as narrators in the following extract, just after the one before. Here, the ambiguous pronoun “on” could actually function as “we”, a pronoun referring to the hay-sheds:

On y voyait encore un peu ici, à cause des étoiles et à cause de l’assez grande largeur du ciel. Mais voilà que bientôt les bords de la vallée se sont rapprochés, en même temps qu’on a vu s’avancer à votre rencontre une espèce de nouvelle nuit plus noire, mise dans le bas de l’autre comme pour vous empêcher de passer. (*La grande peur dans la montagne* 12-13)

You could see a little as there were stars and a rather wide expanse of sky, though soon the sides of the valley pushed closer and from the depth of the night a new, darker sort of night advanced to meet you as if to prevent your passing. (*Terror in the Mountain* 8)

Here, the focalization, that is the perspective through which the events of the story are witnessed, seems to be not only on the hay-sheds, but rather on the mountain itself, strengthening thus my point that nature is the narrator. Moreover, the mountain is presented clearly in opposition to men, since it seems to actively stop them. Thus, nature appears to be man's foe even through subtle forms of narration.

Actually, all along the novel there are cases in which the narrative voice seems to pertain to objects from the mountain, suggesting thus the possibility that nature can have a voice. I will exemplify it further with the extract below, where the stream seems to talk to the main character, Joseph, during his farewell to his fiancé, Victorine, right before climbing the mountain and leaving the village:

Le torrent s'est remis à son discours qu'il ne va plus interrompre jusqu'au matin...

Et c'était tout, avec la grosse voix de basse de l'eau et le discours qu'elle tient, étant seule à avoir la parole, toutes les nuits, toute la nuit... (*La grande* 24, 27)

The stream resumed its talking, which would go on without interruption till morning...

And that was all, except for the heavy bass voice of the water and its perpetual talking. It was the water's turn to speak, which it did every night and all night long... (*Terror* 18, 20-21)

The examples of a narrative voice pertaining to the mountain itself are more difficult to decide on unambiguously, probably because the novel builds exactly on the uncertainty and hesitation that I already mentioned as cornerstones of the fantastic genre according to Tzvetan Todorov. It seems as if it were easier to enact the mountain as a viewer, even if that is also a difficulty. Interestingly enough, there are passages in the novel which can be indirectly read as a reflection on focalization. A good example is the following, where the possibility of an external focalization (which in narratology means a form of disembodied perspective) is questioned rhetorically ("but who could have seen him?"):

Le ciel là-haut faisait sans se presser ses arrangements ; peu à peu, on voyait les petits nuages blancs descendre. De là-haut, le chalet n'aurait même pas pu se voir, avec son toit de grosses pierres se confondant avec celles d'alentour, et les bêtes non plus ne pouvaient pas se voir, tandis qu'elles s'étaient couchées dans l'herbe et faisaient silence. Il y avait que le ciel allait de son côté, – nous, on est trop petits

pour qu'il puisse s'occuper de nous, pour qu'il puisse seulement se douter qu'on est là, quand il regarde du haut de ses montagnes [...] Les petits nuages blancs descendaient ; – et lui, pendant ce temps, Joseph était sorti et allait dans le pâturage, mais qui aurait pu le voir ? Est-ce qu'il comptait seulement ? N'étant même plus un point, lui, parmi les gros quartiers de rocs, qu'il contournait ; *non vu, non entendu*, vu de personne, entendu de personne ; n'existant même plus du tout par moment, parce qu'il disparaissait dans un couloir. (*La grande* 66-67, my emphasis)

The sky was unhurriedly attending to its own affairs as, bit by bit, you saw the little white clouds come down. From up there, you could not even have seen the hut, the big stones of its roof blending with the others all about, nor could the cows have been seen, as they lay there in the grass. The sky went its own way – we too small for it to bother itself about us, even to suspect that we were there when it looked down from its mountaintops [...] The little white clouds were lowering – and he, Joseph, meanwhile, had come out and was going to pasture, but *who could have seen him?* Did he really count? Being no longer a tiny speck among the great slabs of rocks he was winding through: *not seen, not heard*, seen by no one, heard by no one, even at moments passing completely out of existence when he disappeared into some gorge. (*Terror* 52-53, my emphasis)

It can be argued that this possible case of external focalization could rather be interpreted as a case of imagined internal focalization (which in narratology is the sight of a character), in the sense that what is imagined is the sky's perception in a human-like matter. The question is, however, whether the internal focalization of the mountain in the extract above is only abstract and hypothetical. It is hardly comparable to the following extract, where the internal focalization is mentioned only as a virtuality:

Et lui [Joseph] devenait cependant de plus en plus petit, et on l'aurait vu s'élever et en même temps disparaître, – s'il y avait eu quelqu'un pour le voir. (*La grande* 134)

He [Joseph], meanwhile, got smaller and smaller. One could have watched him soar and vanish – had there been anyone to watch. (*Terror* 110)

This quotation would illustrate well the technique that David Herman called *hypothetical focalization* and which is defined like this: “What I shall go on to characterize as ‘hypothetical focalization’ entails the use of hypotheses, framed by the narrator or a character, about what might be or have been seen or perceived – if only there were someone who could have adopted the requisite perspective on the situations and events at issue” (1994: 231). But does hypothetical focalization concern even the longer extract above? This is what can be implied from the rhetorical question “who could have seen him?” and the answer “not seen, not

heard” (see the emphasized words in the extract above). But if no one saw him or heard him, how could Joseph, when he disappears momentarily “into some gorge” disappear from the field of vision of somebody who seems to watch from above?

As a matter of fact, the possibility of the top of the mountain watching the characters is explicitly mentioned, for instance in the extract below:

Ils étaient regardés seulement, depuis là-haut, par cette bande de ciel bleu ; [...] sans s’occuper de vous, avec son horlogerie ; et des hommes sont dessous, mais est-ce qu’ils sont seulement vus ? est-ce qu’ils comptent seulement ? quand il y a ces quatre points, et ce cinquième ; [...] Et quatre hommes là, vus ensemble, puis un cinquième qui s’éloigne d’eux, allant dans la direction du glacier. (*La grande* 99-100)

They were watched only by that blue strip of sky overhead; [...] Paying no heed to you, the beautiful weather went on in its way up there with its own clockwork; and the men below, are they so much as seen? Those four specks, and that fifth one, do they count at all? [...] And there they were, four men seen together, then a fifth one going off somewhere in the direction of the glacier. (*Terror* 81)

Here too, there is an ambiguous second person pronoun, which can be interpreted as if the characters were the narratee, and the “blue strip of sky” were a homodiegetic narrator addressing them. Such an interpretation could seem far-fetched at a first sight, but it is confirmed by the internal focalization from the last part of the extract and by the fact that this focalization belongs undoubtedly to that strip of sky.

But once again, if it is explicitly mentioned that no one saw this, who then is talking? Is this hypothetical focalization connected to a hypothetical voice, which is not really materialized? As a matter of fact, the voice of the mountain is not always hypothetical. In the following extract, the words of the mountain are actually quoted:

C’est que la montagne à présent nous montrait ce qu’elle sait faire.

Elle avait mis de nouveau sur elle une grande lumière, avec un air parfaitement pur, et puis nous disait : « Vous voyez... quand je veux... » Elle mettait sur elle ce beau vêtement d’air transparent pour n’être plus cachée, elle nous montrait toute la combe, nous disant : « Venez voir... » (*La grande* 121)

The fact is that the mountain was now showing us what she could do. With her air of great purity, she had once more arrayed herself in brilliant light and then was telling us: “Well, you see? ... when you really try ...” No longer willing to be hidden, she had put on this beautiful garb of translucent air, was showing us the whole valley, telling us: “Come look...” (*Terror* 98-99)

Admittedly, the voice of the mountain here is quoted as if the mountain were a character in the diegesis, and is thus not the narrator’s voice, but the fact that the mountain actually

has a voice opens up the possibility of the mountain being a narrator too. It might of course be stated that even inside the diegesis, this is nothing more than the simple case of a figure of speech, namely a personification. The voice in that case would not be disembodied; it is rather that the mountain is anthropomorphized, as a stylistic device. But even if that is plausible for this extract, it is not the case for the other ones above, where the uncertainty of the source of the narrative voice doesn't allow a simple conclusion of the mountain being personified.

...

An even subtler form of disembodiment of a narrative voice is to be found in the other text by Ramuz that I want to study: the short story "Scène dans la forêt". This story, written in 1946, just one year before the writer's death and ten years after the novel studied above, is another good example of Ramuz's view on nature as a revenging God. Indeed, what happens is that the tree that four men are cutting down falls on one of them and kills him. This could of course have been just a coincidence, if it weren't that even here, nature is personified in subtle ways, as I will show below.

The story is a good example of Ramuz's style, especially when it comes to his idiosyncratic use of verb tenses, as commented on by critics (cf. Carrard 314 and Parris 130). These critics have difficulties explaining Ramuz's apparently ungrammatical use of tenses, viewing it sometimes as regional Swiss French usage. Such an explanation is not satisfactory in all cases, as can be seen, for instance, at the beginning of the short story:

Ils étaient en train d'abattre un hêtre dans une coupe rase dont ils avaient été chargés par la commune. Ils étaient quatre : deux vieux et deux jeunes ; les vieux maniaient la hache. Les coups *s'entendent* de très loin. (Scène dans la forêt 151, my emphasis)

They were felling down a beech in a clearcut area they had been put in charge of by the municipality. There were four of them: two old men and two young men; the old men were using the axe. The blows of the axe *are heard* from far away. (my emphasis and my translation).

The strange thing here is the sudden change from the French imperfect tense (the *imparfait*) to the present tense. How can this change of tense be interpreted, without imputing it to a regional particularity of Swiss French? There are several possible explanations. One is that the present tense concerns a commentary by a homodiegetic narrator with internal focalization, in other word a character from the story, who hears the sounds from a place in the diegetic world. The problem then is that the *imparfait* had previously situated the narrator temporally outside the diegesis, giving the reader the impression that the narration was ulterior, that is, that the events are told after they happened. How can the narrator then suddenly hear sounds coming from the diegesis?

Admittedly, this passage could be read as a general observation, meaning that in general such sounds are heard from far away. It could thus be a simple case of gnomic present, or an authorial intrusion, not involving internal focalization, since no specific person really hears the sounds. However, the idiosyncratic changes between past and present in the story, which in most cases cannot be put on the account on any general observation, open other possible interpretations in this case. One such can be that this is a disembodied voice of a similar kind to the one in *Terror in the Mountain*, but not thematized or discussed, only suggested by subtle means such as the changes of tenses and of pronouns, and especially by the focalization (since focalization is connected to all human senses, not only to seeing, according to Genette 1988: 64). However, such a conclusion presupposes a metaleptic transgression, that is a transgression of the narrative levels. Indeed, the extradiegetic narrator hears the sounds coming from the diegesis, or what Genette calls “the world of which he tells,” which should be ontologically separated from “the world in which he tells.” (1980: 236). This would mean that the narrator has crossed the boundary between the two worlds and has entered into a kind of physical contact with the events of the story through his or her senses, and thus through focalization.

There are several arguments in the short story in favor of such a metaleptic breach. One is to be found in the words right after the passage analyzed above:

Le tronc fait caisse de résonance et le son, renvoyé d’arbre en arbre à travers la forêt, fait qu’elle s’émue tout entière. (Scène 151)

The trunk of the tree becomes a resonance chamber and the sound, thrown around from one tree to another, makes the whole forest vibrate. (my translation)

The forest here is seen as a book, the trees being its pages, a book which vibrates and comes to life in the mind of the narrator, who actually seems to perceive it with his or her senses even if he or she is not a part of the narrated world. Viewing the forest, or nature in general, as a book is consistent with Ramuz’s style in general, as I illustrated it above, in the analysis of *Terror in the Mountain*. But the most important aspect in the perspective of this paper is that Ramuz’s texts are good examples of how a medium such as literature can use one of its most distinctive features, that is narration, in interesting, subtle and innovative ways in order to suggest that nature can become man’s enemy if their symbiosis is destroyed. The following, much more recent example, a feature film from 2018, sees man and nature in a conflictual relation too, but here, nature is less powerful and needs man’s help to survive. However, formal innovations highlight even here the complexity of the relation, seeing it as both difficult and symbiotic.

4. Man as Nature's Saviour: *Woman at War*

The second media product to be analyzed is a feature film: an Icelandic-Ukrainian coproduction from 2018 entitled *Woman at War* and directed by Benedikt Erlingsson. The plot of the film is completely centered on the main character, Halla, a choir conductor and eco-activist, played by Halldóra Geirharðsdóttir, and on her attempts to sabotage an Icelandic aluminum plant. From this point of view, the film would fit much better than Ramuz's work Alexa Weik von Mossner's definition of environmental narrative, that is "any type of narrative, in any media that foregrounds ecological issues and human-nature relationships" (2017: 3). It could even be argued that one of the film's intentions actually is "bringing about social change" (2017: 3), something that von Mossner considered as optional for environmental narrative. However, at the same time as Halla sabotages this plant in ingenious, but dangerous ways, an application she made years earlier to adopt an orphan child from Ukraine is approved. The film follows the two different lines of plot in parallel, showing thus that illegal activism can very well be compatible with a humanistic act, or that destruction stands against stability or construction.

Even if the plot is thrilling, the merits of the film lie rather in its cinematic language, as critics have noticed. Just to mention one reaction, Peter Bradshaw, from *The Guardian*, finds the film "confidently and rather stylishly made" (2018). However, Bradshaw finds this stylishness a bit exaggerated and unmotivated, especially when it comes to the use of music:

There is also a lot of Icelandic folk music from a tuba, accordion and drums trio, and a rather beautiful singing group, whose performances turn out to be diegetic. That is, the camera pans around to show the musicians themselves, standing weirdly, incongruously in the background of the shot, variously trilling or parping away. It is a comic effect that is a bit distracting, subject to diminishing returns, and which ironises and undermines the action and obstructs your natural tendency to invest emotionally in Halla's dilemma (Bradshaw, 2018).

It is not my aim to contradict Bradshaw's opinion, but as a specific feature, the use of music is one of the most interesting details of *Woman at War*. I will come to that a little later, since it is one of the intermedial aspects that deserve a special attention in this film. But before that, I would like to highlight that intermediality is used in general in innovative ways in this film when approaching ecocritical questions.

The most interesting example is the ways ecocritical questions often are presented indirectly, namely by what Lars Elleström would call "media representation", that is "one medium that represents another type of medium," (2014: 11). The most obvious example of such a case is the representation of TV sets, such as for example 17 minutes into the 1 hour 36 minutes of the film, when Halla is doing her gymnastics exercises at home, and puts the

TV on just as background. But what seems to be innocent background images and sounds is actually a documentary about climate change and its results, and the camera sometimes lingers on the TV set even when Halla disappears from the room. So this case of media representation can function also at a metadiegetic level as a way to establish an important theme in the film, the climate change, a theme that is of course connected to Halla's climate activism. By letting the TV set showing this in the background, almost by mistake, the theme of the climate change is only suggested, and it is up to careful viewers to make the connection between the different narrative levels. A positive effect of doing this is that the climate change theme becomes less conspicuous, and thus less pedagogical. And being too pedagogical when approaching environmental themes in aesthetic media can undermine the expected effects. As Greta Gaard claims, it is naïve to believe that "simply learning the facts about environmental devastation is sufficient to inspire action" (2011: 48).

Another interesting scene where media representation is used when presenting ecocritical questions is similar to the TV set scene, in the way it presents the questions indirectly. Indeed, in a humoristic scene that contrasts with the importance of the question, 36 minutes into the film, Halla's written declaration of her activism is not shown directly, but indirectly, on the screens of the smartphones of different people. The ecocritical content, this time, is clearer than in the TV set case. The discourse is clearly climate activist, and it is more foregrounded than before. Still, by representing the declaration indirectly, on small phone screens, the theme seems to lose its importance and is pushed at a metadiegetic level.

What is interesting in relation to this episode is that the first ones to discover Halla's message are the musicians in the trio I mentioned before. The problem with this trio is that its existence in the diegesis is uncertain, no matter what Bradshaw states in the quotation above. As I will show below, these musicians are placed at an extradiegetic level, even if the narrative levels are ingeniously mixed up in the film. So, by showing Halla's declaration at an extradiegetic level, the environmental discourse is pushed to the background, letting Halla's adventures occupy the foreground. But this does not really mean that the environmental questions lose their importance. What is achieved by thus splitting the narrative levels is an impression that environmental issues are there all the time, on their own, and with their own story and temporality.

A similar narrative split is achieved through what I already touched upon: the use of music. Indeed, music in this film is connected very ingeniously to narration, since a specific narrative device, metalepsis, is constructed through music. Metalepsis was first defined by French theorist Gérard Genette as "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by the diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse" (Genette 1980: 234–235).

It might seem inappropriate to connect music to narration, and especially to a specific narrative device that depends on a narrator. However, music has already been approached

in such contexts, for instance by theorist Werner Wolf. He coined the term “musical metalepsis”, which he contrasted with verbal or pictorial metalepses, that is metalepses constructed through verbal or pictorial means. As it appears clearly in Wolf’s article, instrumental music alone, as a media product, cannot achieve metalepses. It does so only when it is incorporated in film: “what in ‘absolute’ instrumental music would be impossible but which the plurimedial combination of music, narrative and the moving image in the sound film can produce, namely musical metalepsis” (Wolf 2019: 29).

In this paper, I follow Wolf’s definition of the concept of musical metalepsis, and look at how music can be used in order to create metalepsis, since *Woman at War* is particularly interesting from this point of view. Indeed, Bradshaw is right to point out that what is noteworthy with the use of music in this film is the performance of the musicians. Admittedly, the music itself is important in the film, from different point of views. Already the fact that Halla is a choir-leader, with several scenes presenting her while leading the choir, is a sign that music should be given particular attention. The score itself, specially composed for the film by Davíð Þór Jónsson, is original in its minimalism. Generally, it seems to be used in conventional ways, meaning the ways it has been established in classical Hollywood film. But there is much more to it. To start with, still in the traditional way, music highlights the double action of the film. The Icelandic music trio, who play the drums, the piano and the accordion, generally play music that reinforces the atmosphere of danger that has to do with Halla’s sabotaging the of the aluminium plant. The other group, a Ukrainian female choir singing folk songs, is used for the other plot line, that is the adoption of the Ukrainian orphan. The fact that the two groups only play together at the end, when Halla meets the girl she adopts, could be seen as a metaphorical use of music, to clarify the plot.

As Bradshaw notices, music is also used in unexpected ways in *Woman at War*. One of the most unexpected ways is related to metalepsis, and it happens already in the first scene. Indeed, while the credits still run, the music used as introduction to the film suddenly seems to lose its extradiegetic status, since the Icelandic trio appears in the frame, when the camera pans the beautiful Icelandic landscape. They stay there, “weirdly, incongruously” in the field, as Bradshaw rightfully notices. Bradshaw is wrong, I argue, when he considers that music thus turns out to be diegetic. Indeed, just because the musicians are visually represented does not mean that they become characters in the diegesis. It is a misconception, only caused by the conventions from traditional films, that everything that is seen on the screen exists at the same level. It is enough to reconsider this by applying the mode of hearing, which should apply in the same way: everything that is heard in the film exists at the same level. Which obviously is not true, since extradiegetic music, or extradiegetic narrators in form of voice off, are used frequently. So why couldn’t extradiegetic elements be visually represented on the screen without “distracting” the viewers, as Bradshaw claims?

What interests me from the perspective of this paper is the reason and the effect of the metaleptical use of music in this first scene and in the film in general. Besides from being a “stylish” narrative device, musical metalepsis here can be connected to the film’s ecocritical subject. By the bringing together the extradiegetic and the intradiegetic in this conspicuous way, that is by placing a musical trio with their instruments in the beautiful Icelandic landscape, a possible effect is the overbridging of the frontier between the storyworld and the real world outside. This bringing together the extradiegetic and the intradiegetic is used in the same conspicuous way later on in the film, in the scene that I already mentioned above, when the TV set shows a documentary about climate change while Halla is doing her gymnastics exercises. The musicians are placed metaleptically then too in an incongruous environment, that is in Halla’s home, and it is they who choose the TV channel, as if to highlight the film’s ecocritical theme. But the most interesting thing for us is the way in which this is achieved, that is by using complex narrative devices such as metalepsis. And it is not only the complexity, or the stylishness of the device, to use Bradshaw’s pejorative adjective, that is interesting. Indeed, I argue that the device has another possible goal, which is to suggest that nature is asking for help across the narrative levels, and it is up to us humans to react.

The following case to be studied adopts a different perspective, seeing nature as even more fragile than in the case of *Woman at War*, but at the same time as indestructible. And the way in which this is done is also subtle from a narrative point of view.

5. Nature as Last Resort: *Wall-E*

The third case studied represents another media type: animated film. It is the Pixar computer animated film *Wall-E*, directed by Andrew Stanton in 2008. The film is undoubtedly an example of environmental narrative, since the plot is an imagined life in a future after the destruction of nature on earth. The only surviving humans have left on a spaceship, and only left garbage behind them. A number of generations after, around 700 years later, the spaceship is travelling aimlessly in space, waiting for a sign from earth that nature is starting to recover and makes life there possible again. The only living thing left behind is a cockroach, a tribute to these incredible survivors. There is also the main character, a humanoid robot called Wall-E, whose task is to clean up the garbage that drowned the planet and destroyed its natural life. The other robot left on earth, Eve, makes its appearance later, since its only aim is to inform the crew on the spaceship when nature is starting to come back to life on earth.

Nature is thus an all-important feature in the film, and the ways it is addressed and represented are extremely interesting. There have been critical voices of the nostalgic

description of nature before man, considering it naïve, and guilty of the film's didactic perspective on ecology. In her review of the film for *Los Angeles Times*, Charlotte Allen (2008) considers for instance that the film "never even goes near the climate-crusading vocabulary of 'global warming,' 'carbon footprints,' or even 'green'". This is where a closer reading of the film's representation of nature can come handy, since I argue that things are more complex than Allen considers.

It is true that nature has a nostalgic aura in *Wall-E*, standing in contrast to the man-built cities that caused its extinction and to the man-built environment on the spaceship. This latter point is particularly interesting to study closer, since even if the spaceship is artificial and sterile, reminding rather of a gigantic mall or a luxurious cruiser, and even if no plants or trees exist there because of the lack of sunlight, there are small attempts at replicating details of natural environments from earth. Thus, the roof of the spaceship looks like a sunny sky with some small white clouds, and around the pools there are holograms of palm trees. It is exactly in this imitation of nature that the nostalgic aspect lies, since these objects function as memories of what nature was long ago for these offspring of the last humans. They make part of the common memory of life on earth, of an original natural state beyond their reach. Apart from the artificial sky and the holograms of trees, these space travelers have only access to representation of nature in films or books.

To sum up, despite of its nostalgic aura, nature is represented in the film in ways which are far from simple and naïve, but rather impressive artistically. The first scene of the film is particularly eloquent from this point of view. Firstly, the lack of words and the length of this scene are arguments against the film's didacticism: much patience and attention are demanded of the viewer, since nothing is spelt out, but rather suggested. Secondly, the enormous piles of garbage built up by Wall-E during the centuries are visually reminding of trees. It is as if the ancient natural landscape were imitated with unnatural means. The grotesque similarity could be interpreted as a valorization of the former natural state of the planet, where not even a small plant exists any longer. But at the same time, the piles of garbage remind the viewer of skyscrapers, built by humans. In other words, it is not necessarily only the remote, untouched wilderness that represents nature as the object of yearning in *Wall-E*, but even the urban landscape, as for the second wave of ecocritics (cf Buell 2011: 93).

It might also seem naïve that the first sign of nature's recovery on earth is a small plant reminding both of an olive branch and of an apple seedling. The religious symbolism of both these trees would be another argument for the film's didacticism. However, the sublimity of the symbolism is played down by the fact that the plant was found in a refrigerator, which could be a reference to its possible function as food, and is planted by Wall-E in an old shoe. But beyond any discussion about naiveté, the fact remains that the plant represents nature, with its vital function for man, and in its fragility. Indeed, the small plant needs all the help

it can get for its survival, but at the same time, it has grown without any help from man, showing that nature finds its way somehow.

The very last scene in the film, or actually even beyond the last scene, since it is the scene of the end credits, underlines, again without words, the regenerative power of nature and of life. By using drawn pictures instead of computer-generated ones, and with very scarce motions, the scene shows what happens after the return of the spaceship on earth, starting with the recolonization of the planet. Surprisingly, what is told is an exact replica of the history of mankind as it is known, with a specific concentration on art through the millennia. Since nothing is told with words, it is up to the viewer to interpret whether this visual narrative means that the new inhabitants of earth repeat what they must have learned on the spaceship about their ancestors, or whether these inhabitants are in fact our ancestors. Whatever the interpretation would be, the narrative structure is circular, exactly by the reference to the real history of mankind, since the viewer is supposed to recognize the artistic references at the end of the film, as well as the ruins of the buildings and the films played on VHS at the beginning. It is thanks to this circular structure, by giving the impression that everything starts all over again ad infinitum, that nature appears as indestructible despite the fragility depicted in the film.

This might be seen as an overoptimistic ending, which could undermine the film's ecocritical agenda, confirming thus Charlotte Allen's contention about its didacticism and lacking insights in ecology. However, the analysis above has shown just a few of the complexities of the filmic language and especially of the film's narrative structure that stands in contrast with an alleged didacticism. The film's lacking insights in ecology are harder to dispute, but this might be because of the fact that *Wall-E* is an aesthetic media product, where ecocritical questions are mainly used as a pretext for artistic creation. Which does not mean that the ecocritical subject does not count at all. On the contrary, *Wall-E* is a successful example of the possibility to use aesthetic media in order to make a statement in the ecological debate.

6. Conclusion

Has the intermedial approach based on narratology shown anything about the relationship between man and nature in three cases that can be considered more or less as environmental narratives?

What can be concluded is that all these three cases are examples of subtle and complex forms of representation of nature. Besides, each media type represents nature in different ways, due to its affordances, but also due to the way the relationship between man and nature is seen. The first example, Ramuz's literary works, uses advanced narrative devices

such as hypothetical focalization, personification and disembodied narrative voice in order to suggest, rather than depict, the conflictual and destructive relation between man and nature. The second example, the feature film *Woman at War*, uses advanced narrative devices too, but involving the visual and the auditory modes, such as media representation or especially musical metalepsis, in order to highlight the film's ecocritical discourse, which otherwise seems overshadowed by a traditional plot. Finally, the third example, the computer animated film *Wall-E*, uses subtle means, such as visual iconicity, wordless narration or different animation techniques in order to suggest nature's fragility and indestructibility at the same time, as well as man's dependence on it. So what can be concluded is not that certain media types are especially well suited for ecocritical questions, but that it complex and subtle narrative devices are appropriate ways of expressing ecocritical questions without falling into didacticism.

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