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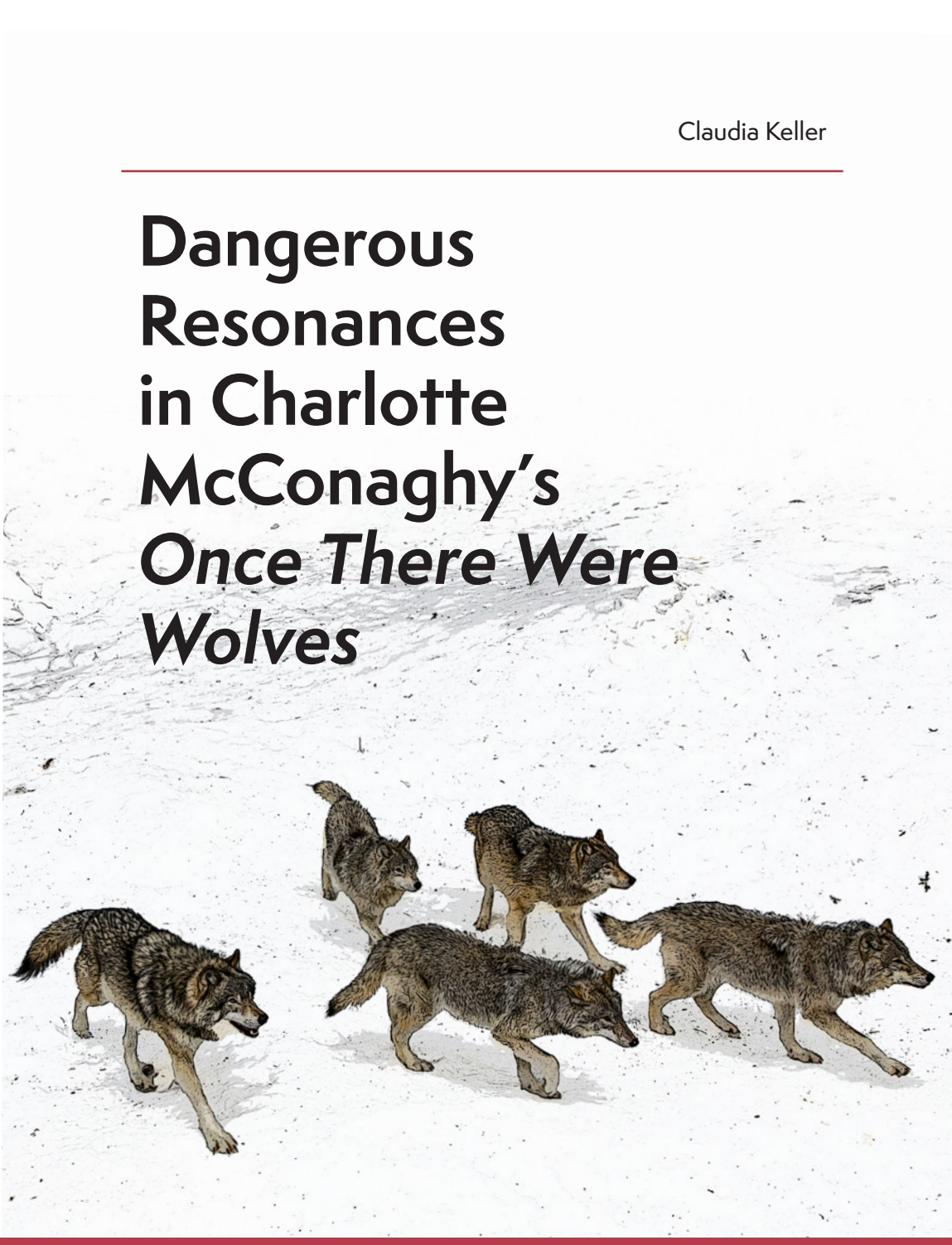
Dangerous Resonances in Charlotte McConaghy's *Once There Were Wolves*



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ABSTRACT

Charlotte McConaghy's novel *Once There Were Wolves* tells the story of the reintroduction of wolves in the Scottish Highlands, thereby bringing the concept of rewilding – an innovative form of biodiversity conservation – into fiction. This novel shows how, within the paradigm of biodiversity, 'plant perspectives' and the search for a language of resonance must be considered in the broader ecological context, alongside the wolves. The article analyses how the novel highlights the importance of resonance through the protagonist Inti Flynn's special relationship with plants, while also critically reflecting on this concept by depicting a resonance catastrophe – arising from Inti's overly symbiotic relationship with her sister and the wolves. The conservation effort only succeeds, and the trees begin to grow over the bare hills, when Inti and the initially opposed local sheep farmers come together. Thus, this article argues, the novel demonstrates that contemporary conservation issues require a critical discussion of both the lack and excess of resonance in our relations to nature, fostering a mutual transformation of both ecologists and the local population in their relationships with each other and with nature.

KEYWORDS

resonance, biodiversity, conservation, ecology

Charlotte McConaghy's 2021 novel, *Once There Were Wolves*, accomplishes two things which are quite unique in the context of literature that deals with biodiversity conservation and also elaborates on how to contribute to solving the ecological crisis by telling a fictional story: first, it portrays the concept of rewilding within a fictional narrative; second, it reflects on the significance and the danger of resonance in the implementation process of such an innovative conservation project.

The story is told by the main protagonist Inty Flynn who works for the organisation 'Wolf Trust' which started as the 'Cairngorms Wolf Project' in collaboration with 'Rewilding Scotland'. Several wolf packs are being reintroduced to manage the deer population and prevent them from eating the trees to which Inti, as I will show, has a special relation. The rewilding initiative aims to facilitate the reforestation of the barren hills and restore the ecosystem – but it is a project that faces resistance

from the local community which depends on sheep farming for its livelihood and which is afraid of the damage that the wolves may cause.

With this, the novel raises the question of how a new relationship between humans, wolves, and trees can be established. In its fictional adaptation of this new conservation approach, it demonstrates the ability of literature to integrate various perspectives and thereby also identify potential challenges. Unlike most conservation debates, which only consider such rewilding projects from an ecological perspective, the novel integrates the social and interpersonal questions that accompany the establishment of such a new relation to nature in all its ethical, aesthetic and affective dimensions.

In this case it is a conflict between two different worldviews: the rewilding enthusiasts with their 'biophilia' (Wilson 1984) on the one hand and the resource oriented, anthropocentric perspective of the locals on the other. But it is also a conflict that arises because of what I would call a 'resonance catastrophe', a term normally used for a bridge collapsing when soldiers' marching in step collides with the bridge's own natural frequency. While resonance typically involves two distinct frequencies coming together, meaning both bodies resonate with their own voices, in this case mutual amplification leads to destruction. The novel shows how Inti's excess of selective empathy and resonance leads to an escalation of the conflict and a catastrophe that casts a critical light on the current discourse around symbiosis, empathy and resonance.

In the following discussion, I will first focus on the concept of resonance and then demonstrate, through the novel's conflict progression, how resonance is conceptualised and critically reflected upon, ultimately leading to a new relationship among humans and between humans and biodiversity. The term I would like to borrow from Anna Lowenhaupt-Tsing to describe this conflict-laden process is 'productive friction': 'the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference' (Lowenhaupt-Tsing 2005: 3).

DANGEROUS RESONANCES

'When we were eight, Dad cut me open from throat to stomach' (McConaghy 2021: 1). This first sentence of the novel is not only powerful and disturbing and immediately raises the question of how this

voice with a slashed stomach is still able to narrate. It also makes it clear that the resonances in this novel are the opposite of harmless and harmonious: 'I had always known there was something different about me', Inti Flynn admits, 'but that was the day I first recognized it to be dangerous' (McConaghy 2021: 2). Her mirror-touch synaesthesia momentarily turns her into the hare her father is just killing. Inti describes her brain's special ability to replicate the sensory experiences of living beings,[1] which heightens resonance to a momentary state of identification, as an amplification of the so-called normal state of the brain, because every human being has a tendency towards empathy: 'We are hardwired for empathy' (McConaghy 2021: 2).[2] This human tendency towards empathy is highlighted in the novel through the special condition and is made the subject of a social experiment.

The ability for empathy, on one hand, and the necessity for critical distance, on the other, are two opposite positions embodied rather schematically by Inti's parents in the novel. Inti and her twin sister, Aggie, grow up between a mother who prosecutes femicides and other acts of violence committed by men against women, and a father who lives in the woods as a self-sustainer. The mother distrusts everyone and attempts forcibly to build a protective shield for Inti, because she fears that her daughter's mirror-touch synaesthesia will make her experience all the evil that exists between humans with her own body. In one scene she cuts into her own fingers and thereby into those of her daughter, until Inti can no longer feel anything. But, of course, she cannot cure her daughter with that either (McConaghy 2021: 19–20). The father, on the contrary, firmly believes in a love that exists between all living beings and teaches his daughters the language of resonance during the periods when the three of them live together in the wilderness of British Columbia for several months each year. Unlike the mother, who wants to protect Inti from her special condition, he regards her mirror-touch synaesthesia as the 'greatest gift'; he believes that empathy and compassion are the most important qualities in life (McConaghy 2021: 36). It's hardly surprising that Inti feels closer to her father and his way of

1 'My brain recreates the sensory experiences of living creatures, of all people and even sometimes animals; if I see it I feel it, and just for a moment I am them, we are one and their pain or pleasure is my own.' (Ibid.: 6)

2 For the theory of mirror neurons underlying this statement, see Rosa 2016: 246–69.

thinking: 'I chose to live by my dad's code, and it was easy until it wasn't' (McConaghy 2021: 36). While Inti acknowledges the potential risks associated with her mirror-touch synaesthesia from an early age, only after the escalation in the context of the rewilding project does she realise that her mother could be correct, and she begins to understand that this unique ability is not only her greatest strength but also her greatest weakness.

With this, the novel accomplishes more than many theoretical elaborations on the concept of resonance: for instance, Hartmut Rosa, in his comprehensive study on the subject, has emphasised the importance of resonance without adequately reflecting on its potentially problematic aspects. Only after approximately 280 pages of his extensive theory, does he refer for the first time to the physical phenomenon of 'resonance catastrophe'. Rosa himself quotes the example of a bridge collapsing when soldiers in-step marching collides with the bridge's own natural frequency (Rosa 2016: 282). However, his theory could have benefited from a more critical examination of the phenomenon, similar to what Fritz Breithaupt (2017) has done for the related concept of empathy.

Such critical perspectives on empathy and resonance would be particularly important for the current ecological discourse. While, following in the footsteps of Rosa, resonance is currently seen as an important element in overcoming the social-ecological crisis (Artmann 2023), a better integration of critical positions, as articulated for example by Niklas Luhmann in 1988 are needed. Luhmann identified not only lack of resonance but also excess of resonance as potential dangers. He rather prophetically foresaw that ecology and politics could intensify each other to such an extent that they would lead to 'escalation of resonance', ultimately resulting in a resonance catastrophe characterised by mutual negation and paralysis (Luhmann 1988: 225–26). In order for positions like these to regain a stronger presence in the current ecological discourse, it is essential to have texts like McConaghy's, which, while it does not tackle structural issues and largely overlooks the political dimension, still demonstrates on the level of a local community what I, with reference to Lowenhaupt-Tsing, call 'productive friction'.

HUMAN-TREE RELATIONS

I will now first trace the process by which the novel builds the concept of resonance and then show how the resonance catastrophe unfolds. As I have already mentioned, Inti's father represents the possibility of a language of resonance between humans and non-human beings. Particularly significant in this regard are the plants, especially the trees, which shape Inti's childhood memories. The father teaches his girls how to believe 'the trees of this forest [as] our family' and how to listen to their language coming from a 'beating heart we can't see': '"It's here, beneath us"', the father tells them,

> 'This is how the trees speak with and care for each other. Their roots tangle together, dozens of trees with dozens more in a web that reaches on forever, and they whisper to each other though their roots. They warn of danger and they share sustenance. They're like us, a family. Stronger together. Nothing gets through this life alone.' He smiled then, and asked, 'can you hear the beating?' and we could, somehow we could. (McConaghy 2021: 15)

These statements by the father paradigmatically represent the discourse surrounding the so-called 'Wood Wide Web',[3] as discussed by authors like Suzanne Simard (2021) or Peter Wohlleben (2015).[4] The notion that trees are interconnected through their roots, the hypothesis that they assist each other and the metaphor of a non-semiotic language of heartbeat are all elements of the currently fashionable ecological discourse on interspecies resonances.

There are three main episodes that characterise this relationship of resonance and the significance of trees for Inti: on one occasion, the father leads his two daughters to a place where all the trees have been cut down, leaving only one large, old Douglas fir standing amidst the desolation. This fir, 'was to be the tree that would change his life'; it was the catalyst for the father's transformation from a logger to a conservationist (McConaghy 2021: 17). The moment he saw it during a logging operation, he was so impressed that he decided to save it and to quit his profession. When Inti asks her father if the tree is lonely, he affirms it,

3 The term 'Wood Wide Web' was coined by David Read and was used on the cover of *Nature* to draw attention to the influential study by Simard et al. 1997.

4 The English translation of the book was published only a year after the original: Wohlleben 2016.

as the tree is 'one of the last of its kind': 'It's a threatened species now. Ninety-nine per cent of old-growth Douglas firs have been cut down' (McConaghy 2021: 17). The old and lonely Douglas fir in this scene becomes a symbol of species extinction and what E.O. Wilson referred to as the 'Eremozoic era', or 'the age of loneliness'.[5]

In the second episode, many years later, Inti takes her father and Aggie to visit the largest and oldest living being on earth, the 'trembling giant' Pando, as she explains to them, 'the oldest living thing on this planet, and the largest'; all his individual trees are each part of this one single enormous organism (McConaghy 2021: 72). They undertake this journey with the aim of healing their father: although Inti's father initially asserted the importance of unity, he has consistently led a solitary life with minimal social connections. At some point during Inti's and Aggie's youth, he gradually slipped into a state of mental absence, leading to moments of forgetfulness about his surroundings and occasional displays of aggression (McConaghy 2021: 70). In this scene, the fear of losing the connection to the father is closely intertwined with the apprehension of losing this remarkable organism, as articulated by Inti: '[I]t's dying. We're killing it' (McConaghy 2021: 72). As the father connects with Pando, he momentarily recognises his adult daughters. Inti, overwhelmed by this sensation, is also able to open herself to this experience of connection, both with the human and non-human members of the family: 'I pressed my cheek to one of the tender, elegant trunks. Wind whispered through its naked branches and against my eyelids, my lips. A kiss. I could almost hear it breathing, could feel its heartbeat beneath and around and above me, the oldest language of all' (McConaghy 2021: 72). Similar to her childhood experiences when she first sensed the Wood Wide Web and her connection to it, this also constitutes an immersive resonance experience. It emerges as a connection through a non-semiotic language between her and the Pando, and also with her father. Pando, whose name signifies 'I expand' and represents both an individual and a system, asks for a re-evaluation of the concept of 'tree-ness' (Fredericks 2023: 134). Thus, this episode in the novel serves as a significant symbol of a paradigm shift towards a

5 'The human hammer having fallen, the sixth mass extinction has begun. This spasm of permanent loss is expected, if it is not abated, to reach the end-of-Mesozoic level by the end of the century. We will then enter what poets and scientists alike may choose to call the Eremozoic Era – The Age of Loneliness' (Wilson 2016: 9).

particular focus on symbiotic and resonant relationships, as expressed by Scott F. Gilbert, Jan Sapp and Alfred I. Tauber in the slogan: 'We are all lichens' (Gilbert, Sapp and Tauber 2012: 341). In this part of the plot, the novel represents an attempt to acknowledge mutual dependencies as the foundation for a changed relationship with nature.

In the third scene, situated at the end of the novel, Inti is once again leaning against a tree, this time giving birth to her child. This happens when she is on her way home on a freezing night after having had to kill one of the wolves, and, again, she is accompanied by the trees: 'The trees above and around. They sway. I am home here, and so glad. It is right that I'm here after all. It was always going to be here' (McConaghy 2021: 240). While the birth itself happens relatively quickly, the long journey back home through the snow and the night poses a significant danger to her and the child. However, the forest and its inhabitants come to their aid: She sees her long-deceased father leading her through the darkness before he disappears in the snowfall (McConaghy 2021: 241–42). At one point, she no longer has the strength to continue and finds herself surrounded by wolves. They don't attack her, but gather protectively around Inti and the child, providing warmth and safety (McConaghy 2021: 242–23). In this scene, the fantasy of resonance is taken to the extreme, showcasing a successful interplay between humans, trees and wolves.

From this brief overview of the tree-centred episodes, it becomes evident that the novel establishes a language of resonance, particularly through the adaptation of the ecological discourse concerning the Wood Wide Web and tree communication. The criticism regarding the lack of scientific evidence behind these narratives, and especially the so called 'Wood Wide Web', formulated, for example, by Justine Karst et al., is not taken into account (Karst, Jones and Hoeksema 2023). Rather it becomes clear that these scenes exemplify in an almost prototypical manner that nature has become, as Hartmut Rosa described it, 'one – or perhaps even the – central resonance sphere of modernity' (Rosa 2016: 455–56).[6] The main motivation for the biologist Inti in her fight for conservation is what Rosa refers to as the 'ecological fundamental fear

6 Translations from this book are my own; in the original: 'Tatsächlich ist jene Emanzipation die Voraussetzung dafür, dass die Natur zu einer – oder vielleicht sogar zu *der* – zentralen Resonanzsphäre der Moderne werden konnte.'

of late modernity': 'Not that we might lose nature as a resource, but that nature could fall silent as a resonance sphere' (Rosa 2016: 463).[7]

However, there are already some fractures in this picture of resonance: Inti and Aggie fail to rescue their father from his increasing isolation, leading him to one day disappear into the forest – merging into one with it, but also abandoning his human existence. Consequently, the resonance relationships in these three scenes are marked by some elements of uncertainty: in the above quoted scenes of her childhood and with the Pando, Inti only hears the heartbeat of the trees 'somehow' (McConaghy 2021: 15) and 'almost' (McConaghy 2021: 72). The childbirth scene in which the wolves keep her and the baby warm could be described as 'kitsch' in the sense that it is naively comforting, to use Adorno's definition (Adorno 1970: 248), [8] if not adhering to the conventions of a fairytale, a genre with which the novel already plays through its title. Thus, a marker of uncertainty is also introduced here: Inti wakes up alone in the morning and wonders 'if they were real' (McConaghy 2021: 244).

With the introduction of this language of cross-species relations, the novel slightly pushes the boundaries of what we consider possible in reality. At the same time, it also highlights that resonance is the result of our ability to compare, to imagine and to desire – and of the rhetorical strategy of metaphors.

PROBLEMS OF REWILDING IN THE PARADIGM OF BIODIVERSITY

The forest that continually 'calls' (McConaghy 2021: 253) and speaks to Inti is the centre of the novel, making it an example of 'plant perspectives'. But it is not presented for its own self. Rather the return of the trees to the Scottish mountains is depicted in the context of cross-species relationships with the wolves.

In doing so, the novel positions itself also as part of what I would call the transformative paradigm of biodiversity – that is, a new way of

7 In the original: Die 'ökologische Grundangst der Spätmoderne' and: 'Nicht dass wir die Natura als Ressource verlieren, sondern dass die Natur als Resonanzsphäre verstummen könnte.'

8 In the original: 'mit einem Beiklang des dümmlich Tröstenden'.

perceiving and narrating 'nature'.[9] Biodiversity, a term coined in 1986 (Takacs 1996), is both an ecological concept and an 'a term of action' (Norton 2007: 369) bridging science, politics and society. It is associated with a new perspective that does not view the collective singular 'nature' as something opposed to humans but instead places the complexity of cross-species relations at its centre. In this sense, the novel no longer focuses on species preservation in the traditional sense or the conservation of an intact nature but rather on the coexistence of various (also re-introduced) species.

This also means that, even though the trees are central to Inti as 'family members', the novel shows that the search for a language of resonance is about the complex relationships within ecosystems.[10] The extent to which the novel is part of this paradigm can be exemplified by the following passage, in which Inti gazes on the landscape where her rewilding project is situated:

> Not long ago, not in the grand scheme of things, this forest was not small and sparse but strong and bursting with life. Lush with rowan trees, aspen, birch, juniper and oak, it stretched itself across a vast swathe of land, colouring Scotland's now-bare hills, providing food and shelter to all manner of untamed things.
> And within these roots and trunks and canopies, there ran wolves.
> Today, wolves once again walk upon this ground, which has not seen their kind in hundreds of years. Does something in their bodies remember this land, as it remembers them? It knows them well; it has been waiting for them to wake it from its long slumber. (McConaghy 2021: 5)

The phrase 'bursting with life', the enumeration of various tree species with their diversity of colours and the reference to the function of these trees for 'all manner of untamed things', meaning various wild animals and the home they make for the wolves, all represent the biodiversity discourse, which consistently emphasises the variety and beauty of co-existing life forms. Moreover, the depiction of wolves moving

9 Cf. my current research project at the University of Zurich with the title 'Narrating Variety. Biodiversity as Paradigm of Transformation in Science and Literature': https://www.ds.uzh.ch/static/cms/pfs/personen.php?detail=402&get=rs (accessed 30 Sept. 2023).

10 In a typical manner for biodiversity narratives, the relationship between the forest and the wolf as a charismatic mammal species stands *pars pro toto* for the complexity of all living diversity. In her book *Imagining Extinction*, Ursula Heise (2016) shows how many biodiversity narratives employ the rhetorical device of synecdoche (pp. 22–24).

among the roots, trunks and canopies, along with the emphasis on the mutual memory shared by the landscape and the wolves, illustrates that biodiversity is framed as a relationship of resonance in this novel. Like in a fairytale, they awaken each other from a 'long slumber'.

This also shows how the paradigm of biodiversity is connected to the goal of seeing nature in a new way. In the words of David Takacs, who has extensively examined the idea of biodiversity: 'Conservation biologists have generated and disseminated the term biodiversity specifically to change the terrain of your mental map, reasoning that if you were to conceive of nature differently, you would view and value it differently' (Takacs 1996: 1). This is precisely the position held by Inti and her team from the 'Wolf Trust' organisation, as they articulate at the beginning of the novel in the context of an information evening for the local villagers: 'What we have here in Scotland … is an ecosystem in crisis. We urgently need to rewild' (McConaghy 2021: 23). The reintroduction of the wolf as apex predator in a trophic cascade would have the potential to reforest the barren hills of Scotland and simultaneously engage in climate and biodiversity conservation, as Evan promotes: 'With their [the wolves'] return the landscape will change for the better – more habitats for wildlife will be created, soil health increased, flood waters reduced, carbon emissions captured. Animals of all shapes and sizes will return to these lands' (McConaghy 2021: 23). In this way, the novel situates itself within the ecological discourses that associate the loss of large herbivores and carnivores in our landscapes with ecosystem degradation. Since the groundbreaking Rewilding Project in Yellowstone Park, where wolves were reintroduced in 1995/6, the positive effects, particularly on forest regeneration and biodiversity, have been extensively studied (Beschta and Ripple 2016).[11]

However, the implementation of such projects is by no means easy – neither in reality nor in the novel. As George Monbiot describes in his book *Feral*, there are efforts also across Europe, including those led by the organisation Rewilding Europe, founded in 2011, to reintroduce bears, wolves, lynxes, as well as bison and wisent (Monbiot 2013: 106).[12]

11 For the current state of positive effects cf. https://www.yellowstonepark.com/things-to-do/wildlife/wolf-reintroduction-changes-ecosystem/ (accessed 30 Sept. 2023).

12 On the state of the current discussion, cf. e.g.: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/nov/24/landscape-of-fear-why-we-need-the-wolf-rewilding-scotland (accessed 30 Sept. 2023).

In the UK, such projects have not progressed as far as in other parts of Europe. One reason for this is the geographical isolation that makes it challenging for animals, particularly wolves, to migrate naturally into the area.

Monbiot describes his encounter with Alan Watson Featherstone, the founder of Trees for Life, a conservation organisation dedicated to restoring the Caledonian Forest. According to Monbiot's account, Featherstone shared a vision during their walk that goes far beyond merely planting trees: 'My aim is to have wolves back in Scotland by 2043. That would be 300 years after the last one is said to have been killed here. It's one generation from now. Ecologically, they could live here today. The obstacles are cultural and economic' (Monbiot 2013: 106).[13] Monbiot, who at this point seems to be hearing for the first time from someone genuinely committed to implementing this idea, expresses his astonishment: 'Was this possible? Permissible? Even to imagine?' (Monbiot 2013: 106). *Imagining* the wolf's return has considerably expanded in the decade since the release of Monbiot's book. It is likely that Featherstone's imagination of reintroducing wolves in the Caledonian Forest served as an inspiration for the organisation 'Rewilding Scotland' in McConaghy's novel.

The novel is an example of '*littérature engagée*' because it illustrates how contemporary literature can engage with very specific ecological and conservation topics in the current context of climate crisis and biodiversity loss. It takes on a mediating role in conveying this ecological knowledge to an audience that might not otherwise be exposed to it. And it does even more. While George Monbiot dismisses the reasons for the difficult implementation of rewilding in Britain with the statement, 'Perhaps Britain is the most zoophobic nation in Europe' (Monbiot 2013: 106), the novel demonstrates that such overbearing attitudes among ecologists and their resonance fantasies are also part of the problem. It shows that the aim associated with the biodiversity paradigm – to change the mental maps – does not follow the pattern of a fairytale but requires an engagement with the fears of the local population.

13 Since Featherstone has not yet been able to realise his dream, he resorts to using 'human wolves' to scare away the red deer: https://alanwatsonfeatherstone.com/a-night-with-the-wolves/ (accessed 30 Sept. 2023).

SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

On the evening when Evan presents the rewilding project to the villagers, he does so in the fashion of a typical researcher by presenting data on ecosystem degradation and its restoration. The reaction to his speech among the villagers varies 'between pissed off, bored, and plainly confused'. (McConaghy 2021: 23) When Inti tries to address the deeply rooted fear that wolves would attack humans, she reverses the perspective: 'We [the humans] are the people killers, the children killers. *We're* the monsters' (McConaghy 2023: 26). But this sentence obviously further escalates the tensions between her team and the locals – not least because, as it will turn out in the end, this sentence is a truly dramatic irony.

The escalation occurs, on the one hand, as a conflict between the local population and the wolf scientists and shows how conservation projects should not be done to the people but with the people. From that information evening onwards, a negative dynamic unfolds: Inti and Aggie are threatened and a wolf is shot by a villager. There is a human death and Duncan MacTavish, the police officer who becomes Inti's lover and the father of her child, is attacked and his dog brutally killed. It is a fight based on the mistrust between the two frontiers of the locals and the ecologists.

Yet, on the other hand, it becomes increasingly clear over the course of the novel that this conflict is not just about the two value systems of the wolf scientists and the sheep farmers, but that also a dangerous resonance catastrophe is unfolding: step by step the reader learns about Aggie's traumatic past, dominated by domestic violence. In the present of the plot, Aggie is mute and unable to care for herself, never leaving the house. Inti and Aggie continue to live in their symbiotic relationship, but Aggie has more and more become Inti's 'shadow sister': the sister hidden from everyone, but also – metaphorically – Inti's dark part that is always with her and only sets her free at the very end to live her own life (McConaghy 2021: 248). And finally, it is revealed, as Inti has not been able to see because of their close relationship: it was not, as assumed by the villagers, the wolves that committed the violent crimes, but Aggie (McConaghy 2021: 246–48). Officially the story of the wolf attack is maintained, but, for Inti, this insight is bitter as she realises who actually was the 'monster': '[A]s it turns out, we were the ones

who couldn't be trusted' (McConaghy 2021: 249). The dramatic irony is fulfilled.

Not only does Inti have to admit that her attempt to protect the wolves has failed and the locals' prejudice is confirmed. What is even more significant is that Aggie, who seemed closest to her, was indeed a stranger. With the crime of Aggie, Inti's 'shadow sister' (McConaghy 2021: 248) being revealed, it becomes clear that neither the symbiotic relationship between Aggie and Inti nor Inti's special ability of empathy can protect their loved ones and the wolves. On the contrary, it is the excess of resonance in this relationship that leads to the catastrophe: Inti's symbiotic relationship with Aggie prevented her from perceiving the dangerous dynamics unfolding around her. Although she was aware that her special neurological condition could jeopardise the project's success, this self-awareness did not lead to a change in her behaviour. She remains blind to her sister's paranoia and her capacity to commit violence, and also to her own prejudices and her own trauma that she seeks to heal through the forest and the wolves.

At the end of the novel, the contrast between the visionary ecologists and the ignorant villagers has dissolved into ambivalences. Inti, from whose perspective the novel is told and who initially seems to be on the 'good' side because of her ecological consciousness and her ability of resonance and empathy, turns out to be the one causing violence and distress, together with her sister Aggie. She has to transform the pattern of empathy and critical distance that she inherited from her parents: the scepticism that Inti inherited from her mother is initially directed only towards the villagers, while the resonant love from her father is only focused on the trees and the wolves – a dichotomy that will be overcome only at the end of the novel. For this to happen, Inti must question her father's concept of resonance and the all-encompassing resonant love for all living beings, just like her mother who responds sarcastically to Inti's praises: 'You mean the madman who lives out in the wilderness alone and doesn't have contact with other humans? That Dad?' (McConaghy 2021: 35).

At the same time, the mother's cynicism, which is directed towards the villagers, is transformed: during this process, the villagers increasingly appear in a positive light as the story progresses. Inti enters a relationship with Duncan and becomes acquainted with the social structures and customs of the community. She joins the local knitting

club, of which her strongest opponent, Red McRae, is also a member (McConaghy 2021: 186–90). And it is precisely Red McRae who will ultimately save Inti's life in the cold night when she gives birth to her child (McConaghy 2021: 245). As Inti begins to recognise her own weaknesses and shortcomings, Red McRae confesses that he knew 'it was evil' (McConaghy 2021: 250) to shoot a wolf.

At the end, Inti observes the sheep famers watching the landscape with binoculars and she realizes 'that the wolves are working their way into the hearts of the Scottish people' (McConaghy 2021: 255). And her daughter can witness the first effects of the wolves in the designated area for the scientific study: the tender shoots of willows and alders (McConaghy 2021: 256). While the excess of resonance has led to the catastrophe taking its course, the 'encounters across difference' (Lowenhaupt-Tsing 2005: 6) create the form of a productive friction that, amidst all the suffering and failure, enables a shared social transformation: the intrinsic values on the one hand and instrumental values on the other have both transformed into relational values. This leads to a different relationship not only between the conservationists and the villagers, but also between people and nature. In this way, the novel makes it clear that resonance with plants does nothing, but that biodiversity as a resonant, cross-species relationship must coincide with social resonance.

THE MORAL ADVENTURE OF LITERATURE

Charlotte McConaghy's novel, which explores the implementation of a rewilding project in fiction, is a good example of what Corine Pelluchon has called the 'moral adventure' of literature (Pelluchon 2018: 185–222). It is a laboratory for something that is yet to emerge – something that is still far away from being enacted but which can be envisioned and experienced in the process of reading. Fiction enables a kind of experimental action, inviting us on an adventure for which we might not yet feel ready in our real lives. In this sense, the search for a language of resonance and the process of moving away from an excess of resonance, as I have illustrated through the plot, can also be applied to the level of reception. By adopting Inti's perspective, readers initially join her in searching for a language of resonance, symbolised by Inti's unique condition: literature

as the possibility of becoming someone else. In a second step, however, readers also experience with her the process of critical reflection, developing with her a form of multi-perspectivity that overcomes the resonance catastrophe caused by an excess of selective empathy directed towards the wolves and her twin sister.

The process Inti undergoes to reach this point can be described with Timothy Morton's discovery of himself as the 'tragic criminal':[14] 'I am the criminal. And I discover this via scientific forensics. Just like in noir fiction: I'm the detective and the criminal! … Ecological awareness is that moment at which these narrators find out that they are the tragic criminal' (Morton 2016: 9). Inti is both a detective and a criminal, who ultimately comes to recognise the 'monster' in herself, leading to a process of reconsidering her values. The novel shows how biodiversity conservation cannot be achieved through argument alone, as ecologically sound and ethically considered as that might be. Literature as an art based on temporality shows how a new identity-forming narrative can only emerge situationally and in a certain context through the process of living together and, in the case of this novel, in resolving conflicts, and negotiating fears, allowing for ethical transformation of both sides.

With Inti's discovery that she is both the detective and the criminal, there arises the possibility for readers to understand themselves within this ambivalence. Through the process of distancing and the development of multi-perspectivity in the novel, there is also a move away from identificatory reading processes, as symbolised by Inti's mirror-touch synaesthesia. The novel invites us, its reader, to discover the criminal within ourselves – that is, to reflect on where in the reality of our present there is too little resonance and where there is an excess of it, which, according to Luhmann, can lead to paralysis. The awareness of our own fallibility leads to the recognition that the current climate and biodiversity crisis involves all of us in various ways – not only because, as Morton notes, everyone contributes to it through their actions, but also because all the good intentions always fall short of comprehending the complexity of the causes of the crisis. The potential of this novel lies in showing that an ecological awareness emerges not only from advocating for rewilding but also from acknowledging this dialectic.

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