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Towards an Ecological Catholicism: Marian Pilgrimage in the Anthropocene

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Abstract: This article analyzes how the author and environmental activist Carl Amery draws together the topics of Catholicism and ecological criticism in the pilgrimage novel *Die Wallfahrer*, or *The Pilgrims* (1986). The novel depicts the journeys of four pilgrims to the Marian shrine at Tuntenhausen in Bavaria. In their journeys towards the surprising and unorthodox Virgin Mary of Tuntenhausen, the pilgrims anticipate their ultimate journey towards Gaia, the earth goddess in Greek mythology, and the inspiration for the Gaia Hypothesis, which proposes that the Earth evolves as a system in which organisms are an active, fundamental component. This article explores how the novel recasts the pilgrim journey as a journey towards an ecological consciousness of humans' creatureliness and increasingly detrimental impact on the web of life. Particular focus is placed on the way Amery dramatizes the connection between salvation history and the Gaia theory that has lately received renewed interest in the context of the Anthropocene debate.

Keywords: Marian pilgrimage; Gaia; Anthropocene; Bavaria; ecology; Catholicism; soteriology

1. Introduction

In his magnum opus, the novel *Die Wallfahrer*, or *The Pilgrims* (1986), the author, environmental activist, and co-founder of Germany's Green Party Carl Amery draws together the topics of Catholicism and ecological criticism through pilgrimage. With chapters written in baroque German and Bavarian dialect, the novel is linguistically challenging and has never been translated into English. In this paper, I hope to make *The Pilgrims* accessible to a broader audience because it uniquely re-frames ecological crises through pilgrimage. The novel depicts four pilgrimages to the church at Tuntenhausen, in Bavaria, Germany, where pilgrims honor the Virgin Mary and ask for and commemorate miracles. The pilgrim journeys in the novel take place during critical times over four centuries: the Thirty Years' War, the Enlightenment, the "Gründerzeit" or economic and industrial boom in nineteenth-century Germany, and the Second World War. Although separated by hundreds of years, the pilgrimages are connected by their common goal, Tuntenhausen, and by encounters with Marian figures.

The pilgrims making the journey to Tuntenhausen come from not only a variety of historical, but also social and economic backgrounds. The first of them, Andreas Gropp, is a poor hermit. The group of pilgrims traveling to Tuntenhausen to perform a penitential drama during the Enlightenment includes a priest, a doctor, and a brewer's daughter. Innozenz Maria, traveling to Tuntenhausen in the 19th century, is a member of the Bavarian nobility. Count Marco von B.-Guadagni, a descendent of Innozenz Maria, must come to terms with his Jewish heritage during the Second World War. I will follow the journey of Count Innozenz Maria because it is the most deeply embedded in the novel's ecological subtext, and will follow to some extent that of Andreas Gropp because of relevant correlations between the pilgrimages of the count and the hermit.

The novel opens with an epigraph from the 18th-century German poet Novalis: "Ich sehe dich in tausend Bildern, /Maria, lieblich ausgedrückt" ("I see you in a thousand images, /Mary, sweetly

expressed”) (Amery 1986, p. 6).¹ Amery’s novel offers the reader a thousand images of the Virgin Mary, but in an unexpected ecological framework, painted against the backdrop of the Anthropocene. As they come into contact with these different images of the Virgin Mary, the pilgrims do not become more aware of their spiritual state, as might be expected in a pilgrimage, but rather of their own physicality and their status as living creatures, and of the impact of humanity on the biosphere. In this paper, I will contextualize this journey within the broader Anthropocene debate, and argue that the novel recasts the pilgrim journey as a journey towards an ecological consciousness of humans’ creatureliness and increasingly detrimental impact on the web of life.

The pilgrims begin their journey to the church in Tuntenhausen with different motivations: fulfillment of a vow, healing, fear of the End Times, and confession. None of these motives have anything to do with the environment. However, as they journey, the pilgrims come into contact with Marian figures—women sharing and refashioning features of the Virgin Mary—who little by little place each pilgrim’s motivation and journey into a larger ecological context. Before they shift the focus of the pilgrims outwards towards the biosphere, they first turn the pilgrims’ attention to themselves. They make the pilgrims aware of their own physicality and creatureliness, which Eric Santner describes as “the peculiar proximity of the human to the animal at the very point of their radical difference” (Santner 2006, p. 12). This “radical difference” in Amery’s novel appears in the depiction of the human as a religious animal, a difference that melts away during pilgrimage and encounters with Marian figures.

The Marian figures often appear to the pilgrims during the most physically challenging moments of the pilgrimage; one of the pilgrims, Andreas Gropp, a deathly ill hermit traveling during the time of the Thirty Years’ War, encounters a Marian messenger as he struggles to climb the mountainous path to the shrine. Another group of pilgrims has a vision of the future as they seek shelter from a violent storm. As they respond to the extreme physicality of the pilgrim journey and the messages of the Marian figures, the pilgrims come to recognize their frailty, their status as creatures, and their interconnectedness with other life forms, both human and non-human. Although the pilgrims are confronted with their frailty on the one hand, they are confronted with the strength and power of humanity on the other. The Marian figures also show them how their own lives impact other life. In a vision of the future they show one pilgrim the environmental impact of his political program on the Bavarian landscape. Each time they meet the pilgrims, the figures increasingly expand the scope of the pilgrims’ focus, ultimately extending it to the biosphere.

As they appear and re-appear throughout the pilgrimages, the Marian figures function as typological figures; namely, they point to an archetype, and draw events together. The word “typology” comes from the Greek word τύπος, meaning a “blow,” and was used to talk about the impression a seal would make on wax. Typology, in the biblical exegetical tradition, refers to persons or events that serve as a pattern for others (Woolcombe 1957, pp. 60–61). Amery’s novelistic typology functions similarly to what K.J. Woolcombe considers a typological “method of writing,” which he defines as “the description of an event, person or thing in the New Testament in terms borrowed from the description of its prototypical counterpart in the Old Testament” (ibid., pp. 39–40). Throughout the novel, persons, events, and things are described in terms borrowed from the description of their prototypical counterparts in earlier pilgrimages. Some of the novel’s pilgrim characters immediately identify certain women they encounter as apparitions of the Virgin Mary. Others do not. However, shared features, similarities in descriptions, biblical and Christian cultural references, and repeated messages that span centuries form a novelistic typology that I argue allows certain female figures to be interpreted as Marian figures. Unlike the figure of Mary in classical typology, who points to Christ and his incarnation, the Marian figures in Amery’s novel point to Gaia, the earth goddess. Although centered on different figures, the two typologies are part of larger stories of the redemption

¹ Citations from *Die Wallfahrer* are hereafter cited in text as *DW*. All English translations are my own.

of humankind. With his new typology, Amery depicts a shift from a Christocentric to a biocentric worldview without abandoning Christian spiritual or Catholic cultural allegiances.

2. An Ecological Pilgrimage

The novel's Marian figures set the pilgrims on a path consisting of three stations: recognition of their own creatureliness, their entwinement with other life forms, and the entwinement of humanity as a whole with the life composing the biosphere. This path can be seen in the journey of one of the pilgrims, Count Innozenz Maria, a Bavarian nobleman living near Tuntenhausen in the mid-19th century. Innozenz Maria plays an active role in Bavarian political life, heading a party to support Bavarian farmers and traditional, Catholic values. Above all things, the count values purity, both physical and moral (values he sees as lacking in his own time). His esteem of purity is reflected in his hobby, the study of contemporary Marian art, in particular, art of the Nazarene school (DW, pp. 188–90).² He appreciates the simplicity of the depictions of Mary and finds them fitting for the age in which he lives:

In einer Epoche der zunehmenden Verwüstung der Sitten schien es ihm von der Vorsehung gewollt zu sein, daß sich dieser Verwüstung die gleichfalls ständig wachsende Verehrung der Virgo Intemerata, der Unbefleckten Jungfrau, entgegenstemmte; eine Verehrung, die in der zunehmenden Engelhaftigkeit des Marienbildes ihren Ausdruck findet. (DW, pp. 155–56)

In an age of increasing devastation of morals, it appeared to him to be the will of providence that the ever-growing cult of the Virgo Intemerata, the Immaculate Virgin, a cult that finds its expression in increasingly angelic pictures of Mary, should make a stand against this devastation. (DW, pp. 155–56)

The count understands Marian art as filling a lack in contemporary society. The extreme purity of the Nazarene Marian depictions acts as a counterweight to the perceived modern immorality that so deeply disturbs the count: “[. . .] vor allem aber die wahrhaft übernatürliche Reinheit, die Überwindung des Geschlechtlichen und der ihm benachbarten sinnlichen Reizungen, die sich mit dem Aufstieg der Nazarener-Schule siegreich durchgesetzt hatte, ernteten den wärmsten Beifall, genossen die volle Unterstützung des Grafen” (“[. . .] above all, the truly supernatural purity, the overcoming of the sexual and the related sensual stimulations that were victoriously established with the rise of the Nazarene School, reaped the warmest applause, enjoyed the full support of the count”) (DW, p. 155). Innozenz Maria himself reflects the trend of growing veneration of the Virgo Intemerata; the count's name, Innozenz (Innocence) Maria, recalls the innocence and purity of Mary. His lifestyle, one of piety, abstinence, and discipline, reflects his devotion to the immaculate Mother of God. The count identifies and supports in these pictures of Mary the “overcoming of the sexual” and “sensual stimulation.”

The count's extreme ascetic lifestyle, however, has psychological and physical consequences that manifest themselves as psychosomatic conditions; he suffers from extreme constipation, a physical ailment that reflects a deeper psychological ailment—a tendency to block out all physical and moral impurities in life. His desperation for relief from his physical ailment leads him to turn to the darker powers of a witch-like healer. Having found prayer and modern medicine ineffectual against his extreme constipation, Innozenz Maria turns to the unorthodox healer Apollonia. While at her home, he gives up his life of abstinence and physical discomfort, taking up the use of tobacco, swearing, and committing adultery. To relieve his subsequent guilt, he then becomes part of the papal army in Rome, an international army raised to uphold papal power in the wake of Italian unification and democracy.

² For more on the Nazarene aesthetic and movement, see Cordula Grewe's *Painting the Sacred in the Age of Romanticism*, and Mitchell Benjamin Frank's *German Romantic Painting Redefined*.

While in Rome, the count contracts amoebic dysentery, an infection of the intestines caused by a protozoan (DW, p. 357). After having spent most of his life in pursuit of purity and in abhorrence of the sensual and physical, the count dies completely out of control of his bodily functions and surrounded by excrement. However, he no longer feels exiled from the physical and organic side of life. The stops on the count's pilgrimage, forcing him to acknowledge his creatureliness, make this reconciliation possible. He has learned to give up his vision of an Immaculate Virgin and a completely sanitary world. Perhaps most importantly, he learns to see himself as an organic, physical creature. The trajectory of his pilgrimage ultimately leads to penitence, acceptance of his creatureliness, and, paradoxically, as will be explored later, his purification at the end of the novel. Innozenz Maria's pilgrimage to Tuntenhausen turns his own conceptions of the Virgin Mary upside down. His journey along paths of immorality and impurity leads him away from Nazarene images of an Immaculate Virgin and her life of moral perfection. Instead, it prepares him to consider and appreciate the lives of microorganisms within the web of life, and for a future encounter with Gaia, the archetype of the novel's Marian figures. As his pilgrimage forces him to confront and accept his own creatureliness, Innozenz Maria takes a step towards a new ecological consciousness.

2.1. A New Soteriology

Each stop on Innozenz Maria's pilgrimage leads him to further consider his own status as a creature embedded in the biosphere, and will point not to the Immaculate Virgin, but ultimately to the earth goddess Gaia. At the very end of his journey, Innozenz Maria does not find the Virgin Mary, but rather the archetype to whom the Marian figures he and other pilgrims encountered during their pilgrimages pointed. He finds "[...] die Herrin der Tiere und ewig unverletzliche Jungfrau-Mutter—ja, noch genauer und mächtiger benannt [...] die GAIA" ("[...] the Lady of the animals and the eternally inviolable Virgin-Mother—yes, yet more precisely and more powerfully named [...] GAIA") (DW, p. 391).

Before he comes face to face with Gaia, Innozenz Maria comes to experience her grace; his encounters with dung, excrement, and the unclean eventually reveal themselves to be part of his *Heilsgeschichte*, or salvation history. Although he seeks escape from the filth in the world as he goes to Tuntenhausen, Innozenz Maria's path to the shrine leads him towards that which he desires to avoid, foreshadowing the trajectory and end of his pilgrimage (an end occurring millions of years after his journeys to Tuntenhausen and Rome). The pilgrim path embarked upon on the count's trip to Tuntenhausen does not lead to greater purity, but a loss of innocence, and contact with physical and moral filth. Paradoxically, this journey towards impurity situates Innozenz Maria in a larger story of salvation as it prepares him to accept Gaia's future offering of evolutionary purification, the chance to begin the evolutionary cycle all over again after humanity has caused an ecological disaster destroying all life on the planet. Although embedded in the framework of Christian salvation history, the novel's depiction of Gaia and her grace imbues this framework with an ecological twist and offers the pilgrims a new way to conceive of the biosphere and their relation to it.

In the Christian theological tradition, salvation history is essentially the story of God's enactment of his plan of salvation for sinful humanity. Ernst Benz describes this salvation history as consisting of three periods. The first, the time before Christ, begins with God's creation of the world, and is a time of promise. The second, the time after Christ, is a time of promised fulfillment. With the coming of Christ and his death and resurrection for the salvation of humanity from sin, fulfillment has already begun. The third period is the coming time of complete fulfillment and judgment (Benz 1977, p. 3). John Hill writes that this salvation history, while marked by a strong teleological trajectory, cannot be generalized as a linear view of time and history: "when we think of the biblical conception of history, we must think of a providential teleology in which a pattern of symbolic prolepses is superimposed upon an essentially linear temporal progression that leads from the Creation to the Last Judgment: rather than a simple horizontal line, biblical history is a helix spiraling upward through shadowy types to truth" (Hill 1997, p. 128). This salvation history, then, while teleological, is revealed through

repeating figures and events. In a similar way, Gaia's grace and salvation history, a central tenet of the radical ecological Catholicism Amery stages in *Die Wallfahrer*, takes shape through typological Marian figures and prefigurative events.

Through typological Marian figures that point to Gaia, Amery re-imagines Christian salvation history. He rewrites the story with a new sin, a new savior, and a new eternity. In this story, humanity's damnation results not from their disobedience to God, but from their disregard for their own creatureliness and violence against the biosphere and the life forms within it. This sin necessitates a savior, but not the biblical Christ. Instead, Gaia steps forward to extend mercy to the devastated biosphere.

2.2. Gaia Theory

Amery's Gaia not only shares characteristics of the Virgin Mary, but also of the mythological goddess and Gaia theory, a central point of reference in early earth system science. In Greek mythology, Gaia is the earth goddess; she creates the earth, mountains, sea, and sky, Ouranos, to whom Gaia bears many children. Ouranos hates his children, and hides them in the depths of the earth so that Gaia cannot give birth to them. In her distress, Gaia convinces the youngest of her many unborn children, Kronos, to carry out a scheme to punish Ouranos. When Ouranos comes to Gaia in the evening for sexual relations, Kronos uses a sickle to cut off his father's genitals. Gaia's 12 children, the Titans, are then born (Kerényi 1979, pp. 18–22).

James Lovelock, a physiologist and inventor, references this primordial Greek goddess in his Gaia hypothesis, in which he makes an argument for understanding the earth as animated. He argues that the Earth is exceptional because it evolves as "a system in which the organisms are an integral part," a system he names Gaia (Lovelock 2000, p. 128). He writes that the earth is peculiar and privileged from the other planets because its atmosphere is in a state of chemical disequilibrium, a state that renders it a living planet. Those planets with an atmosphere in a state of chemical equilibrium are dead stars (ibid., pp. 21–23).

In his lectures on the new climatic regime, Bruno Latour revisits Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis and situates it in the midst of current debates regarding the Anthropocene. Latour writes that Lovelock's hypothesis could be seen as a reversal of the Copernican revolution; while Galileo made earth part of a galaxy, one planet among others, Lovelock takes earth out again, putting it into a privileged position (Latour 2017, pp. 80–81). According to Latour, Lovelock uses the figure of Gaia to articulate that the earth is animated without painting it as a system: "His problem is indeed to understand in what respect the Earth is active, but *without endowing it with a soul*; and to understand, too, what is the immediate consequence of the Earth's activity—in what respect can one say that it *retroacts to the collective action of humans?*" (ibid., p. 86). Latour goes on to argue that while Lovelock explains the earth's behavior by the work of living organisms, by seeing the earth as active and animated, Lovelock does not suggest that Gaia is a superorganism or goddess (ibid., p. 93).

A difficulty with the Gaia system, Latour notes, is the tendency to see Gaia as a single agent: "Now the problem Lovelock saw very well is that, in the literal sense, in the objects he studied, *there are neither parts nor a whole*" (ibid., p. 95). In technological systems, which Latour contrasts with Gaia, if there are parts fulfilling a function within a whole, there is a need for an engineer, or Providence, to give the parts a function to fulfill a greater whole. Latour argues that Lovelock's Gaia theory does not paint the earth as a technological system, but rather explores how agencies connect without conceptualizing them as part of a whole. In order to do this, Latour writes, Lovelock encompassed living entities within the "fragile envelope that he called Gaia" without unifying them (ibid., p. 98). The organisms within and composing Gaia do not adapt themselves to an environment, but rather bend the environment around themselves in order to promote their own development. According to Lovelock, there is not an inanimate environment to which organisms adapt. All organisms modify their neighbors for their own benefit, so it becomes impossible to distinguish between environment and organism (ibid., pp. 98–100). In the Gaia hypothesis, earth is not an empty shell. All living organisms

are agents; not only do humans adjust the environment in which they live, but also other organisms, especially bacteria:

With Gaia, Lovelock is asking us to believe not in a single Providence, but in as many Providences as there are organisms on Earth. By generalizing Providence to each agent, he ensures that the interests and profits of each actor will be *countered* by numerous other programs. The very idea of Providence is blurred, pixelated, and finally fades away. The simple result of such a distribution of final causes is not the emergence of a supreme Final Cause, but a fine *muddle*. This muddle is Gaia. (ibid., p. 100)

Latour goes on to argue that this muddle describes and offers an explanation for the quickly changing earth of the Anthropocene. In his fourth lecture, Latour writes about the conclusion of the 34th International Geological Conference in 2012. At the end of the conference, it was decided to consider declaring a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene. Given a tentative start date of 1800, approximately the beginning of the industrial revolution, it would mark the end of the Holocene, or what is considered the current geological age (ibid., pp. 113–14). In the Anthropocene, humans would be designated the most significant force affecting the development of the earth (ibid., p. 112). What Latour finds significant in the summary of the conference is that it suggests that the Holocene is over, that we must now consider that “the Earth is becoming sensitive to our actions and we humans are becoming, to some extent, geology!” (ibid., p. 113) Living in the Anthropocene means viewing the biosphere as sensitive, viewing it as Gaia, “the name proposed for all the intermingled and unpredictable consequences of the agents, each of which is pursuing its own interest by manipulating its own environment” (ibid., p. 142). In Amery’s novel, Gaia takes on a form that incorporates elements of mythology, Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis, and Catholicism.³ This figure, like Lovelock’s Gaia, is active and encompasses all living entities, including the microorganisms Innozenz Maria originally detests. These entities she encompasses affect each other and the environment, such as the protozoans that kill Innozenz Maria, and Innozenz Maria’s plan to industrialize farms in Bavaria that ultimately causes great ecological destruction. Introduced slowly through Marian figures, Gaia only takes center stage at the end of the novel.

3. Facing Amery’s Gaia

Gaia comes forward in what is entitled the “heretical conclusion” of the novel. This conclusion takes place 50 million years in the future. One of the pilgrims, Innozenz Maria, awakens to sunshine and beautiful vegetation, and finds he has evolved into bodiless being. He is met by a leporibock, or *Ungulagus silvicultrix*. Described by Dougal Dixon in his book *After Man: A Zoology of the Future*, in which Dixon speculates how life on earth will evolve after a period of mass extinction, the leporibock is a hoofed mammal related to the hare or rabbit (Dixon 1981, pp. 38–39).⁴ Able to sense Innozenz Maria’s bodiless presence, the leporibock approaches the pilgrim to announce the grand entrance of Gaia, the prototype that the Marian figures foreshadowed throughout the centuries of pilgrimages to Tuntenhausen:

[...] wer anders hätte den Gesandten zur ersten Kontaktaufnahme geschickt, den *silvicultrix*, wenn nicht die Große Hirtin selbst, die Herrin der Tiere und ewig unverletzliche Jungfrau-Mutter—ja, noch genauer und mächtiger benannt [...] die GAIA. (DW, p. 391)

³ Although Amery does not directly reference Lovelock’s Gaia Hypothesis in *Die Wallfahrer*, in an interview with Axel Goodbody in 1998, Amery states that at the time he was writing the novel he took part in a conference on Gaia with James Lovelock and Lyn Margulis. His reflections on the Gaia theory give credence to the idea of understanding the novel’s Gaia figure in light of Lovelock’s hypothesis. See the interview in Goodbody’s *The Culture of German Environmentalism*, pp. 13–29, esp. 23–24.

⁴ Amery uses the term “leporibock” to denote the *silvicultrix*, while Dixon uses the term “rabbuck” in his book. I will use Amery’s term in discussing excerpts from the novel.

[. . .] who else would have sent the ambassador to establish first contact, the *silvicultrix*, if not the Great Shepherdess herself, the Lady of the animals and the eternally inviolable Virgin-Mother—yes, yet more precisely and more powerfully named [. . .] GAIA. (DW, p. 391)

To his surprise, Innozenz Maria does not face a judging Christ upon a throne, but rather the earth goddess. The narrator describes this powerful, feminine being with three names. The first, “Great Shepherdess,” recalls Jesus, often called the “Good Shepherd” in the New Testament. This name, with the modifier “good” replaced by “great,” indicates Gaia’s power, and suggests it to be equal to or greater than the power of the Christian Son of God. It also portrays her as one who cares for living beings. Just as Jesus cared for his flock of followers, so Gaia, as Innozenz Maria discovers, cares for her flock. This flock, however, does not merely consist of the pilgrims or human followers, but all life forms, as her second title, “Lady of the Animals,” also suggests. Finally, the name “Eternally Inviolable Virgin-Mother” relates Gaia to the Virgin Mary and highlights her eternity, her power, and her motherly compassion.

In contrast to Lovelock and Latour, Amery denotes Gaia as a “she” and not an “it.” The Gaia Innozenz Maria encounters has a distinctly feminine persona. During their journeys to Tuntenhausen, all of the pilgrims meet a prefiguration of Gaia. Each of these prefigurations takes on the form of a young girl or woman that share similarities with the Virgin Mary. These figures surprise the pilgrims, as they lack several characteristics they expect to see in the Mother of God: beauty, power, purity, and motherhood. Instead, they encounter figures that have been victims of human violence and who ultimately point the pilgrims to become aware of the damage human action causes to the biosphere. When Innozenz Maria finally meets the archetype to which the Marian figures point, he encounters a powerful mother, a figure that embodies Marian litanies in ways he never expected. The narrator’s description of Gaia as a mother sets her apart from both the mythological figure and Lovelock’s Gaia; the mythological Gaia incites her children to carry out her plans of vengeance, and Latour writes that there is nothing at all motherly about the Gaia of Lovelock’s hypothesis (or that of myth) (Latour 2017, p. 82). Amery’s Gaia is not indifferent to the living beings within her; like a shepherdess and a mother, she cares for life forms.

Although Amery’s Gaia, like the Gaia of mythology and the Gaia hypothesis, is powerful, she is also benevolent. While Latour writes that “[t]here is nothing inert, nothing benevolent, nothing external in Gaia,” the pilgrims in Amery’s novel experience repeated benevolence from both Gaia and her forerunners (Latour 2017, p. 106). Along with an unorthodox message of penitence, the Marian figures also offer the pilgrims a glimpse into an unexpected future and mercy. The re-imagined salvation history they reveal also gives rise to a re-imagined eschatology; the Marian figures prompt Innozenz Maria not to look to the end times as punishment for sins against God, but rather to ask what kind of future comes from ignorance of his creatureliness—in other words, to consider the trajectory of the Anthropocene. As Innozenz Maria comes face to face with Gaia, he must also face the collapse of his conception of eschatology and reconceptualize his notions of final judgment and eternal benevolence.

One of the first glimpses into the future in the novel comes from his observation regarding the rise of industrialization in his own century. In a conversation with a friend, Innozenz Maria remarks on the increased mechanization he sees around him:

Das Lebenswasser ist jetzt in Bleirohre gefaßt, in metallene Adern, kann durch Auf- und Zudrehen administrativer Hähne in die eine oder andere Richtung geschickt werden—rechts, links, hinauf und hinab. Den Himmel sieht es nicht mehr. Das mag seine materiellen Vorteile haben, aber es ist kein Gleichgewicht mehr von Natur und Kunst. Hier hat kalte Mechanik gesiegt, und in mehr als einer Weise sind wir hier alle ihre Opfer. (DW, p. 39)

The lifewater is now contained in lead pipes, in metal veins; through the turning off and on of administrative spigots it can be sent in one or the other direction—right, left, up, down. It doesn’t see the heavens anymore. That must have its material advantages, but there is no

longer balance between nature and art. Here cold mechanics have prevailed, and in more than one way we are all their victims. (*DW*, p. 39)

The metaphor used to describe the water pipes, “metal veins,” likens the pipes to organic material, but at the same time suggests that the enclosure and instrumentalization of water is highly unnatural. Described as “life water,” water is not only portrayed as giving life, but as having a life of its own, a life that the pipes restrict. Enclosed in these metal veins, the water is no longer able to see the sky, nor to direct its own movement. These limitations, the count reflects, while bringing “material advantages” to humans, also disturb a delicate balance between nature and art, and eventually become detrimental to humans, whom Innozenz Maria describes as the victims of “cold mechanics.” A later vision of Innozenz Maria highlights the uncomfortable relationship between humans and the biosphere, their dual status as both offender and victim

On his way to pray at the Marian shrine at Tuntenhausen, Innozenz Maria has a vision of the pilgrim path to Tuntenhausen many years in the future. As the count rides his horse along the meandering dirt track to Tuntenhausen, the path suddenly transforms before his eyes: all curves in the path have disappeared. The winding pilgrim path has become a modern, paved road. It is a straight line, marked with metal signs and traffic lights flashing garish, unnatural colors (*DW*, pp. 168–69). The count finds the sight and its creators unfamiliar: “Eine andere, ganz und gar fremde Lebensform war hier am Werk gewesen—eine maschinelle Rasse [. . .]” (“Another completely foreign life form had been at work here—a mechanical race [. . .]”) (*DW*, p. 169). Although Innozenz Maria’s vision of the road to Tuntenhausen is an easily recognizable, even everyday sight to the 21st-century reader, the count does not recognize the modern road as the product of humanity (much less a product of his own beloved project for increased production and sanitation in the Bavarian farmlands). He attributes the modern road to mechanical beings, a foreign form of life.

While Innozenz Maria expresses doubt that humans could produce this road, the vision of another pilgrim, the 17th century hermit Andreas Gropp, confirms that this road is indeed a creation of humanity. Two hundred years before Innozenz Maria begins his pilgrimage, the hermit Gropp sets off to the Marian shrine at Tuntenhausen. Like the count, Gropp suffers from an illness (fever and intestinal troubles foreshadowing the count’s amebic dysentery) and travels to Tuntenhausen in hope of relief. Like the count, his understanding of the Virgin Mary changes during his pilgrimage. Expecting a Madonna of Victory, a warrior Madonna who will support the Catholic cause in the Thirty Years’ War, Gropp meets an unlikely Marian messenger, a young, mentally disabled woman. While he immediately identifies the young woman, Mali, as a messenger, he discounts the possibility that she could be the Virgin Mary as she is bow-legged and disabled, not at all how he would expect the Virgin to appear (*DW*, pp. 67–68). However, after a brief interaction with the woman, in which he comes to realize she pronounces the letter “r” as “l,” Gropp recognizes the name Mali as Mary, and understands his messenger as a sign of the Virgin’s protection and presence: “Der Name der Jungfrau, gepriesen sei sie, auf der Höhe der Scharte mitgeteilt. Ob er auch wandle im Schatten des Todes: behütet ist er.” (“The name of the Virgin, blessed be she, imparted on the heights of the wind gap. Even if he [Gropp] too is walking in the shadow of death, he is protected.”) (*DW*, p. 70). This messenger reappears hundreds of years later in the form of Innozenz Maria’s mentally disabled daughter, who repeats an incomprehensible message about “Glopp” (*DW*, pp. 67–70, 161). Like the count, Gropp sees terrifying and confusing visions of the future. Gropp’s vision indicates that “foreign life form” of Innozenz Maria’s vision, modern humanity, has an antagonistic relationship with the other life forms inhabiting and composing the biosphere. His vision further suggests that humans have not only created this “mechanical race,” but that they are responsible for their actions affecting the web of life:

Gericht, das sie selber angerichtet haben, soviel versteht er schon von ihrem Sinnen und Trachten. Das war Menschenwerk, Herrschaftswerk, wie es die Stadt selber gewesen, das Werk von vieltausend hellen Köpfen, von Leuten, die viel von der Schöpfung verstanden und von der Kunst, andere Leute zu befehlen, und von beidem nicht genug. [. . .] Wußten

nicht, daß sie pfeilgrad auf dies zugelaufen waren, auf diese tote Stadt und Zeit, wolltens vielleicht nicht, wolltens aber doch, weil sie ein für allemal Sieger sein wollten über alle Kreatur, den Fluch über Adam und Eva dem Herrn und der Himmelskaiserin einfach wieder zurück an den Kopf schmeißen. Und da haben sie gesiegt, haben alle Geschöpfe besiegt, alle Kreatur auf Erden, haben nur nicht rechtzeitig bedacht, daß sie dazugehören, daß sie in ihre demütige Sterblichkeit gebunden [. . .] sind [. . .]. (DW, pp. 82–83)

That they brought about this judgment themselves, that much he could understand from their musings and strivings. This was the work of humans, work of domination, just like the city, the work of thousands of bright minds, of people that knew a lot about creation and about the art of commanding other people, but not enough about either. [. . .] They didn't know that they were headed arrow-straight for this dead city and time. Perhaps they didn't want to, or maybe they did, because they wanted once and for all to be victors over all creatures, because they just wanted throw the curse the Lord and the Queen of Heaven had put on Adam and Eve back in their faces. And they had prevailed, they had vanquished all creatures, every creature on earth, only they didn't consider in time that they belonged to these creatures, that they were bound together with them in their lowly mortality [. . .]. (DW, pp. 82–83)

The end times and judgment moving towards the pilgrims is not the end times of the Middle Ages, end times ordained by the Christian God. Gropp recognizes from the “musings and strivings” of the people in his vision that this coming judgment is one that humans have made for themselves. He comes to understand that in forgetting their creatureliness and their embeddedness in the biosphere, humans ultimately become victims of their own efforts. The curse of the Garden of Eden is not merely that humans seek to be like God, but that they forget their status as creatures and their “lowly mortality” (DW, p. 83). The sin of Adam and Eve leads not to separation from God, but separation from the web of life.

Gropp and Innozenz Maria's visions of humanity's and earth's trajectories share similarities with Lovelock's predictions of Gaia's future. Lovelock argues that Gaia, the earth conceived of as a physiological system, suffers from a “people plague” (Lovelock 2000, p. 155). He writes that “[h]umans on the Earth behave in some ways like a pathogenic microorganism. We have grown in numbers and in disturbance to Gaia, to the point where our presence us perceptibly disabling, like a disease” (ibid., p. 155). Lovelock maintains that current human actions and their consequences, namely, agriculture, deforestation, and pollution, render the earth less inhabitable for the living organisms that have been keeping the conditions of the earth favorable for life. These actions rendering the environment less favorable to life, he argues, could eventually lead to the elimination of the species causing the planetary illness (ibid., p. 25). Similarly, the “arrow-straight” trajectory of Innozenz Maria's road and the desire for mastery over nature leads humanity to destruction.

4. Gaia's Evolutionary Salvation

Despite the extreme disturbance of humanity to the biosphere, Amery's Gaia actively seeks the salvation rather than the punishment of humans. Millions of years after his pilgrimage to Tuntenhausen, Innozenz Maria still clings to the idea of a Day of Judgment. To his astonishment, he encounters no hellfire, but rather “very fearsome and great” mercy (DW, p. 393). He asks Gaia where the judgment is. In answer to his query, Gaia responds that there is no final reckoning, no book in which all misdeeds and good works are recorded and then weighed. She goes on to ask if he would have really wanted this judgment, explaining that all of humankind, even the pious Innozenz Maria, would have been found guilty: “Barmherzigkeit ists, daß keiner von euch wußte, wie die Bilanz aussehen würde . . . ” (“It's a mercy that none of you knew what the balance would look like . . . ”) (DW, p. 393). Gaia's mercy consists not of her careful weighing of every deed and misdeed, but rather in her abstention

from judgment. Even as she gives Innozenz Maria an inkling of the extent of human-caused planetary destruction, Gaia reveals the extent and the nature of her compassion:

Es gab genug Feuer, oja, und genug Abrechnung. Fast hättet ihrs geschafft, der Planet hat dir vielleicht ausgesehen, ein Durcheinander, die Photosynthese war fast hinüber, Ozon auch, das Methan war am Durchgehen, überhaupt die ganze Gashülle, das Klima war am Wackeln, und dann der Gen-Pool—ts ts ts. Also wenn es mit rechten Dingen zugegangen wäre, nach Recht und Gerechtigkeit, dann hätte man dicht machen müssen, aber dann hat mir die Thermodynamik doch noch einmal das Reich der Barmherzigkeit abgetreten, ich durfte aufräumen. [. . .] naja, du siehst, sie hat es wieder leidlich hingekriegt, die alte GAIA, über Ratten und Kaninchen, die Mittlerin zwischen dem Weltentod und dem irdischen Leben, *advocata nostra*. (DW, pp. 394–95)

There was enough fire, oh yes, and enough reckoning. You almost did it, the planet might have looked like you, a mess. Photosynthesis was almost over, ozone too; methane had almost caused a thermal runaway, even the atmosphere, the climate was tottering, and then the gene pool—tsk tsk tsk. So if it had to do with what was right, if it were according to justice and equity, then one would have had to fold. But then thermodynamics once again yielded me the realm of mercy; I was allowed to clean up. So, you see, she did it tolerably again, the old Gaia, through rats and bunnies, the mediator between the death of the world and earthly life, *advocata nostra*. (DW, pp. 394–95)

Gaia explains to Innozenz Maria that there is no need for hellfire; humanity has already punished itself. In their strivings to promote their own life, humans have destroyed other life forms, life forms that made human life possible. A little over 50 million years earlier, the hermit and pilgrim Andreas Gropp (whose journey and Marian messenger foreshadow those of Innozenz Maria) has a vision of a future world in which kingly lifestyles and fruity drinks in glasses with sugarcoated rims and springs of mint are the norm—the western world of the 21st century (DW, pp. 14–15). This future, made possible by the values associated with the Immaculate Madonna—complete detachment from the dirty and the creaturely—is far from harmless. In explaining her compassion, Gaia takes Innozenz Maria past a world of human prosperity and frosty drinks to the ultimate end of the straight, paved roads of his and Gropp’s nightmarish visions: destruction of the planet

Because humanity has already destroyed itself in its ambition to subjugate other life forms, Gaia does not pursue further punishment. She responds to the human-made ecological disaster not with righteous anger, but rather with the gentle, tired “tsk tsk tsk” of a mother rebuking a misbehaved child. Gaia further demonstrates motherly care for humanity and life through intercession. In her intercessory acts, Amery’s Gaia differentiates herself from Lovelock’s Gaia. Although both Gaias describe an animated, active planet rather than a passive globe, Amery’s Gaia acts with a purpose; she takes on human form in order to warn the pilgrims of impending disaster, and remakes the planet so that conditions will again be friendly to life, both human and non-human. Latour argues that Lovelock’s Gaia has no teleological purpose; Amery’s Gaia, on the other hand, enacts a plan of salvation, becoming a central figure in his radical, ecological Catholicism, a Catholicism that, although stripped of much Christian dogma, retains grace as a central tenet (Latour 2017, pp. 106–7). This grace manifests itself through Gaia’s salvation history, through typological Marian figures that draw Innozenz Maria and the other pilgrims into a plan of salvation.

Innozenz Maria’s pilgrimage, with its different stops pointing him to recognize his own creatureliness and preparing him to meet Gaia, functions as what Charles Taylor terms a “higher time.” Taylor argues that in pre-modern times, time was organized into secular and higher times. Secular time, coming from “saeculum,” which means a century or age, he describes as ordinary time, the time in which we exist. It is linear, with events happening in sequence. This horizontal axis could be warped and foreshortened by the vertical flow of “higher times.” These higher times were part of God’s unchanging eternity existing outside of the horizontal, secular time. Events far apart in

secular time were understood to be drawn close together through their sequential placement in a divine plan. Easter, for example, was understood as high time that was especially close in proximity to Christ's crucifixion (Taylor 2007, pp. 54–59). In *The Pilgrims*, pilgrimage functions as a high time that pulls Innozenz Maria into proximity with not the Christian God's eternity, but Gaia's eternity and evolutionary plan of salvation. The typological figures the various pilgrims encounter over different centuries draw Innozenz Maria's pilgrimage into conjunction with the journeys of other pilgrims, such as the hermit Gropp, and embed all of their journeys into a larger story of evolutionary grace.

In this story of grace, Gaia takes on the role of intercessor, reinterpreting the roles of Christ and Mary as mediators. She does not mediate between God and Man, but between a biosphere becoming less friendly to life because of human action, and the earthly life that inhabits it. In contrast with the anthropocentric Christian tradition in which salvation history extends primarily to humanity, Gaia does not privilege human life above other life forms in her mediation. Humanity is neither the primary object of salvation, nor does human form serve as the means to achieve this salvation. Instead of sending God Incarnate to earth to redeem humanity, Gaia accomplishes her evolutionary mercy through "rats and bunnies."

Gaia further describes humanity as a mistake of evolution, a classification that Innozenz Maria has difficulty accepting. She declares that she will not allow the deadly mutation causing too much and yet not enough intelligence to take place again, and that humans will not rule the new world (DW, p. 395). Innozenz Maria comes to understand that he has a choice to make. If he desires a place in this new world, he must accept that his status and form in the biosphere will not be the same as before (DW, p. 395). Although Innozenz Maria's first reaction is to say "no" to the new world, a memory of a conversation with a Jesuit about the fall of Lucifer changes his mind. The Jesuit taught him that Lucifer, one of the most powerful angels in heaven, was offended when God revealed his plan to save humanity by sending his Son to earth as a baby. The debasement of God becoming man so deeply disturbed Lucifer's love of "above and below, order and hierarchy and purity" that he left heaven, and became God's arch enemy, the devil (DW, p. 397). As he remembers this story, Innozenz Maria suddenly sees his own similarities with Lucifer. He realizes that Gaia's offering to him is merciful, and that he must relinquish his own love of hierarchy and purity and accept her evolutionary grace.

Fifty million years after Innozenz Maria sets off on his pilgrimage that takes him through Tuntenhausen, a witch's farm, and Rome, he finally comes full circle, arriving in post-Anthropocene Tuntenhausen. At each of these stops, he is confronted with his creatureliness. Begun in search of freedom from his own physical ailments, Innozenz Maria's pilgrimage leads him to accept his own status as a creature, as a biological organism interconnected with other organisms. This acceptance of his own creatureliness ultimately prepares him to continue his pilgrimage towards ecological consciousness, and to say "yes" to Gaia's offering of new life.

5. Conclusions

The pilgrimage to Tuntenhausen paints the uneasy relationship between humans and the biosphere in a re-imagined soteriological framework. In his overview of Carl Amery's writings on environmental crisis, Axel Goodbody writes that the novel *The Pilgrims* "present[s] apocalyptic scenarios of the end of the world, seeking to shock and warn [its] readers, leaving open the question of mankind's ability to make the shift of consciousness needed to avert catastrophe" (Goodbody 2002, p. 135). The novel indeed presents a grim picture of humanity's current trajectory and of human impact on the environment. However, it also embeds this picture in a salvation history. When Innozenz Maria encounters Gaia, she offers him the potential to be remade, evolution rather than extinction. This offer of evolutionary salvation does not come without loss; Innozenz Maria must choose to let go of his anthropocentric worldview and embrace a biocentric one. However, Gaia's offer also indicates that Innozenz Maria has the ability to evolve both physically and intellectually, and gives him the choice to accept or reject this salvation.

The analysis of one of the four pilgrim stories portrayed in the novel, each one of which depicts this journey towards an ecological consciousness in similar but different ways, suggests that humanity indeed has the potential to make this shift of consciousness. As they travel the path to Tuntenhausen and encounter typological Marian figures, the pilgrims in Amery's novel ultimately make a journey towards consciousness of their creatureliness, their entwinement with other life forms, and their relation to the biosphere. Through its portrayal of four re-imagined Marian pilgrimages, Amery's novel offers a picture of an ecologically oriented Catholicism that functions as a space where this kind of consciousness can form. It rejects neither Christian beliefs nor ecological, evolutionary theory. Rather, it synthesizes them by pulling Christian beliefs into an ecological framework and by using Christian soteriology to describe Gaia theory. This Catholicism, centered on Gaia and her salvation history and revealed through typological Marian figures, challenges the pilgrims, and perhaps the reader, to remain open to evolution, to a new perspective on the web of life.

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