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ECOLOGICAL POETRY:
ITS CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS A NEW VIEW
OF THE WORLD

I. Ecology as a secular duty: Can we save the earth?

Ecology¹ has been a hot topic of discussion for quite a few years. Today, philosophers, physicists and politicians concur in regarding it as one the most important problems of the twentieth century, as the problem of existence *katerochen*. Most governments of industrially developed countries have tried to obviate the threat of man-made pollution and destruction and the impact of industrialization on the life-supporting surface of the world.

The therapies proposed and employed, however, are mostly technologically oriented. Ecology is regarded as an economic issue, something to be dealt with under the premises of modern sciences.

One and a half years ago the magazine *Dialogue* published a series of articles under the heading: Can we save the earth? For many of us this heading may smack of sensationalism, reminiscent

¹Definition of ecology: 2. used *attrib.* (and *absol.*) with reference to ecological issues such as industrial pollution considered in a political context; *spec.* applied to various political movements (esp. in western Europe) which represent the environmental or 'green' interest; *Oxford English Dictionary*, eds. J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, Oxford, 2nd ed. 1989, Vol. V, 58.

of trashy national papers wilfully arousing excitement, shock or an intense emotional response. But *Dialogue* is not a gutter publication, it does not belong to the tabloid press.

The magazine is published by the American Government, more specifically, by the United States Government Editorial Office in Washington. It calls itself a "quarterly journal of significant thought and opinion on social, political, economic, and cultural issue in the United States". Naturally it emphasizes the fact that the opinions within are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the United States' Government. Nevertheless this magazine is still a semi-official organ, and every *Dialogue* article deserves careful attention. In my opinion, it is one of the most important American magazines.

The editors of *Dialogue* introduced this series of articles on the state of the world with a quote from Barry Commoner who made a name for himself 20 years ago as an ecologist. "The environment", says Commoner, "is a complex subtle balanced system, and it is this integrated whole which received the impact of all the separate insults inflicted by pollutants. Never before in the history of this planet has its thin life-supporting surface been subjected to such divers, novel and potent agents".

The introduction ends with a quote from Buckminster Fuller: "We are not going to be able to operate our spaceship Earth successfully nor for much longer unless we see it as a whole spaceship, and our fate as common. It has to be everybody or nobody".²

The two quotes epitomize the general character of the introduction. It points out that individual countries do not have individual, autonomous ecosystems, that the entire world is affected by everything having to do with environment, climate and pollution. But the rest of this issue of *Dialogue* is slightly different in outlook and ideology.

One of the main experts interviewed by *Dialogue* is Lester Brown. He acts as the main witness in this matter. Brown is founder and director of the Worldwatch Institute in Washington

² *Dialogue*, 3, 1989, p. 10.

D. C. He is editor of the annual publication *State of the World*, founded in 1984. In addition to the Year Book the institute publishes the results of research on special environmental problems, some in several languages and in editions exceeding 100.000. World-watch is one of the most important centres for environmental research today.

For Lester Brown, the future of humanity looks pretty grim. The health of the world is on a steady decline, as he explains at the beginning of the *Dialogue* interview. There have not been any improvements in any individual sectors since the publication of the first *State of the World* issue. Each year the forests are getting smaller, and the deserts larger. The topsoil is getting thinner in much the same way as the ozone layer. The carbondioxide content in the atmosphere is burgeoning, different species of animals are dying out by the hundreds; environmental contamination by exhaust, soot, pesticides, and every other possible kind of poison has already reached a critical juncture, and continues to increase.

The diagnosis of the patient "World" is altogether devastating. Every doctor agrees that it will not hold on much longer unless something is done immediately. But what *can* be done? The last question asked of Lester Brown was, "what would it take to write an upbeat *State of the World* report?"³ This was his reply:

The question we're trying to raise is, do we want to save the Earth? If we do, then we've got to think about some serious reordering of priorities. We estimate that taking the basic steps will cost about \$150.000 million a year. That seems a lot, but it's also only one-sixth the world's combined military budgets-about \$900.000 million a year.

We've become hooked on a military definition of security over the past 40 years, and yet for some countries encroaching deserts could be a far greater threat. We need to go back to the drawing board and rethink security. In the end, security is an economic issue. If a coun-

³ *Dialogue*. 3, 1989, pp. 11-16.

try is losing its soils and its forests, it will eventually lose its productive capacity. Despite our technological advances, we are still as dependent on photosynthesis as we ever were.

If we decide we want to save the Earth, then it's going to take a substantial effort and some hefty upfront outlays for planting trees, planting families, conserving soil, increasing energy efficiency, developing renewable-energy resources, protecting biological diversity and reducing Third World debt. Almost all these investments will pay substantial returns.⁴

I have given the quotation in full because it is typical of a certain attitude towards ecology. Even Lester Brown is convinced that "a serious reordering of priorities" is necessary if we want to save the earth. But his priorities refer to money. He advises us to invest our money differently, and he even promises that we shall invest profitably if we do as he says.

This is a classical example of an exercise of the calculating faculty, as Percy B. Shelley would have called it. In his *Defence of Poetry*⁵ this poet claims that the cultivation of the mechanical arts and sciences may have enlarged man's dominion over the external world. But by enslaving the elements, man has enslaved himself.⁶ He resembles the notorious novice in the art of magic who has worked charms which he cannot unsay.

Thus it is natural and legitimate to regard Lester Brown's position and that of the pragmatists as fostered by the scientist's attitude to the world. The theory of modern sciences is based on the ideals of technical progress, the conquest of nature, rationality and rationalism. All these factors have led to the ominous developments of today and to the apocalyptic vision of a world in the throes of death. C. P. Snow said in his notorious book *The*

⁴ *Dialogue*, 3, 1989, p. 16.

⁵ P. B. Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry* (1840); rpt. in his *Complete Works*, ed. Roger Jugpen & Walter E. Peck, Vol. VII, New York, 1965, pp. 105-140, here: p. 140.

⁶ *Ibid.*

*Two Cultures*⁷ that only the natural scientists had the future in their bones. Meanwhile, this view seems to be outmoded. Natural scientists are now sceptical when it comes to the question of progress. "Where does progress lead?"⁸ would be their immediate reaction. The function of technology as a guide line for man's affairs in this world has been given up, and with it the uncritical belief in progress.

The humanities and the sciences are in this respect no longer two "separate cultures", as Snow and many others have postulated. Even among scientists a sensitivity to the risks of an acritical belief in technology becomes prevalent. Representatives of the humanities and the sciences seem more and more aware of the fact that they are sitting in the same boat. Both sides acknowledge that the problems of today cannot be solved by the outdated habitual ways of thinking and living of former periods, and certainly not within or by the extant institutions.

II. The contribution of the sciences.

Scientists dealing with ecology proclaim tenets that conjure up a kind of *déjà vu*-experience on the side of literary historians. Some of our colleagues dismissed their theories disparagingly as a rehash of romantic beliefs. This criticism was for instance directed against Fritjof Capra, Professor of Theoretical Physics at the University of California at Berkeley who demanded that the world should no longer be seen as an ensemble of independent things and beings but rather as a network or, better (because the word network has mechanical associations) as an organism. No creature or thing, he says, exists for and by itself. It is embedded in all-encompassing structures and can only be understood on the premise of a universal togetherness and totality. This way of thinking he calls "ecological". He demands an "ecology of depth".⁹

⁷C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, Cambridge, 1969.

⁸See Fritjof Capra, *Der kosmische Reigen*, Bern, 1982.

⁹Willi Oelmüller, ed., *Fortschritt wohin?*, Düsseldorf, 1972.

Many ecologists would readily admit that the philosophical and epistemological principles of the new lore are not at all original, but at the same time they would insist that their inferences drawn from alleged stereotypes are quite alien to the purposes and positions of idealism and romanticism. They point out that a new consciousness is coming to birth which is deeply rooted in spiritualism and religion.

According to these ecologists, man's new world-view will eventually result in a new frame of mind. If self-assertion and the struggle for survival were previously the centre of attention, the focus will increasingly shift towards integration and adaptation. Man develops a new sensitivity for the differences and similarities between various creatures, also within a given species, not least within the human race.

This adaptation cannot occur on a purely rational level. Man is also *zoon* and therefore entangled in irrational relationships of totality which cannot be understood on rational premises alone. Intuitive thinking will come into its own, as a higher stage of appeal. It supplements analysis by a totality of observation and, more important, by empathy. A revaluation will take place which focuses on intuitive, emotional, feminine qualities thus complementing man's rational and intellectual faculties. Values will change as a result of this: expansion will develop into moderation, exploitation into preservation, leadership into partnership, antagonism into togetherness.

What I have labelled "the contribution of the sciences" cannot be seen as a result or a byproduct of scholarly work. Academia was only of minor importance for the spreading of these and similar ideas. Today it is clear that we have to do with a new ideological movement. It gained momentum in the 1970s. Motivation and intention developed out of heterogeneous areas: the women's movement, peace movement, Taoism, Buddhism, native American

G. Altner, *Fortschritt wohin? Der Streit um die Alternative*, Neukirchen, 1984.

E. Drewermann, *Der tödliche Fortschritt. Von der Zerstörung der Erde und des Menschen im Erbe des Christentums*, Regensburg, 1982.

philosophy, etc. They all have in common that they regard Western culture as outmoded, degenerate and in the process of dissolution. They speak of the new movement as an "ascending culture".¹⁰ Capra e.g. is convinced that the demise of Western civilisation will continue, since it is based on views and attitudes proven to be false.

III. The problem of perspective: anthropocentric versus biocentric

The premise of the old ethos was anthropocentric. Man considered himself to be the centre and ruler of the world. He was convinced that all of nature focuses on himself, the crown of the creation. Just how strongly influenced human thought and activity was by this assumption is especially evident in poetry. James Thomson summarizes the relationship of man to the world: "Man superior walks/Amid the glad creation, musing praise/And looking lively gratitude...".¹¹ It is only logical that man becomes the measure of all things. "The proper study of Mankind is Man", according to the leading English classicist,¹² and the romantics pretty much shared this view. According to Percy B. Shelley, poets are the "unacknowledged legislators of the world".¹³ The spirit of the world and the age speaks via the poet: "It is impossible to read the compositions of the most celebrated writers of the present day without being startled by the electric life which burns within their words. They measure the circumference and sound the depths of human nature with a comprehensive and all-penetrating spirit... it is less their spirit than the spirit of the age".¹⁴

The romantics have already recognised that seeing everything

¹⁰Capra, *Reigen*

¹¹James Thomson *Spring*, (1728); rpt. in his *Poetical Works*, ed. James Logie Robertson, London, 1965, p. 9, 11. 170-172.

¹²Alexander Pope, "Essay of Man", V. 237. ff.

¹³P. B. Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry* (1940); rpt. in his *Complete Works*, ed. Roger Jugpen & Walter E. Peck, Vol. VII, New York, 1965, pp. 105-140, here: p. 140.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p.140.

solely from a human perspective is certainly a limitation. But what other perspective do we have? Man can only portray the intrinsic value of things from his own perspective. John Keats coined the term 'negative capability'. By this he meant the sensual ability to grasp beauty without involving it in a philosophy, or as he wrote, "without any irritable reaching after fact and reason".¹⁵ His ideal is based upon the refusal of personal preconceptions and terms in order to put oneself intellectually in the other's categories and thus sense and feel as the other does: "O for a Life of Sensations rather than of thoughts".¹⁶ Goethe had a similar appeal for a dialogue with nature. His highest ideal is that there should be an unadulterated meeting of man and nature by a transfer of subjectivity to the other. Viktor von Weizsäcker explains in his concept of *Gestalt* that man must participate in life in order to be able to describe it. The ego must merge with the id.¹⁷

But can man really think like an animal or even a stone? We know today that there is no scientific fact independent of human consciousness, that everything depends on human dispositions and values. Thought and research are only possible within a paradigm set by man himself. Heisenberg said: "We can never speak about nature without also speaking about ourselves. Thus nature avoids fixation in comprehensible terms by the inevitable disturbance connected to every observation. While it was originally the goal of every study of nature to describe nature as it really is or should be – that is, without our intervention or observation – we now recognize that this goal is unattainable".¹⁸

¹⁵Letter to his brothers George and Tom from 21 (27?) December, 1817, Oxford Anthology of English Literature, *Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Harold Bloom and Lionel Brilling, Oxford, 1973, pp. 764-769. here: p. 765.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 765.

¹⁷From: Günter Altner, *Die Überlebenskrise der Gegenwart*, Wiss. Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1987, pp. 164-168. Altner refers to V. von Weizsäcker, *Der Gestaltkreis. Theorie der Einheit von Wahrnehmen und Bewegen*, Stuttgart, 4 1968.

¹⁸W. Heisenberg, "Die Goethesche und die Newtonsche Farbenlehre im Licht der modernen Physik", in: H. Mayer, ed., *Goethe im 20. Jahrhundert. Spiegelungen und Deutungen*, Hamburg, 1967, p. 430.

Thus the question of which part human thought plays in the new world view is raised. Are human morals and ethics in the same category with similar qualities as those of animals? Are men more advanced than animals? This question has not yet been answered satisfactorily, not even the most radical representatives of the ecology-oriented sciences. Their view of the world was and is still, for all intents and purposes, humanistic – that is focused on man. The parts of the world and cosmos are still seen and classified from man's point of view. The occasional expansion of the notion of family to include metaphorically all forms of life including plants and animals, is not even all that new; St. Francis supports similar ideals in his *Sun Song*.¹⁹ He taught that man and nature are one, and that we thus act in our own interests when we respect the interests of nature, especially of animals.

Poets concur with cultural philosophers and ecologists on this critical point. They even seem to have preceded the ecologists in this non-anthropocentric view of creation.²⁰ Poets are certainly much more definite than the theoreticians when they point out that there are forms of life and parts of nature independent of man, whose being and intrinsic value man cannot define or understand.

The new poetic perspective can be called biocentric. The practical result might be that the author attempts to put himself in the place of a fish, a bird or a predator in order to stop thinking like a human but rather act and react as an animal counterpart.²¹

Ted Hughes has demonstrated most successfully what results this kind of shift of viewpoint can produce. He has written numerous animal poems from the point of view of the respective animal. In these poems he has attempted to put himself in place of his subject and *to think* (if this verb is justifiable) like a bird, a

¹⁹San Francisco, "Canticle of the Sun", George R. Kay, ed., *The Penguin Book of Italian Verse*, Harmondsworth, 1958.

²⁰See K. M. Meyer-Abich, *Wege zum Frieden mit der Natur*. Praktische Naturphilosophie für die Umweltpolitik, München/Wien, 1984, pp. 190-191. Meyer-Abich suggests a fixation of the legal situation of nature in its relationship to man. He demands indemnity for the parts of the environment affected when, in certain situations, human interests have been given priority.

²¹T. H. White, *The Once and Future King*, London, 1958, p. 41 ff.

mammal or a fish. Obviously Hughes knows that he cannot really experience the world as an animal does. But, in spite of this, he manages to convey to the reader an empathetic impression of the species. In his portrayal of the pike, for example, he suggests a foreign, secretive, unattainable, and dangerous intelligence which has no analogy to humans. He puts himself in the hawk's place to see and judge the world through the eyes of the bird. But this remains, of course, a mere attempt at transcribing the thoughts of a hawk, if the hawk could think and speak. Every poet is limited by preconceptions and human modes of expression.²²

Many modern poets make the otherness of nature their subject. Nearly all poetry anthologies contain poems dealing with nature and its value as regarded from a non human perspective. God or the Gods were hidden in Nature, so Derek Mahon says, in "The Banished Gods" before man came into being.²³ But today the gods have been banished and replaced by man.

One of the ever recurring problems is the enmity between man and nature. Michael Hamburger deplores that even the everlasting circle of life is exclusively evaluated under human criteria. Adam's prerogative will eventually result in the destruction of the earth.²⁴ Philip Larkin feels that the last state of the world is at hand. He knows that change is the law of nature, but the speed of change in our days indicates that the end is near. "I just think it will happen, soon".²⁵

There are many authors, particularly women who demand an entirely new attitude towards nature. Judith Wright has her doubts whether it is not already too late, but at the same time she believes that "nature can heal itself after many wounds". If man should

²²Ted Hughes, "Hawk Roosting", in his *Lupercal*, London, 1960, p. 26. See Egbert Faas, *Ted Hughes. The Unaccommodated Universe*, Santa Barbara, 1980, p. 199.

²³Derek Mahon, "The Banished Gods", in: D. A. Enright, *The Oxford Book of Contemporary Verse 1945-1980*, Oxford, 1980, pp. 274-5.

²⁴Michael Hamburger, "Weeding", in: John Wain ed., *Mythology of Contemporary Poetry: Post-war to Present*, London, 1979, p.101.

²⁵Philip Larkin, "Going, going", in: *High Windows*, London, 1974, pp. 21-22, hier: p.22.

disappear, what would the world be like? In what way would the animals see the world? "In a burned out summer, I try to see without words/as they do. But I live through a web of language".²⁶

IV. Towards a new mythology ²⁷

Ultimately, the question concerning the new relationship between nature and man is whether rationality alone can realize the notion of humanity, whether there can ever be a non-relativistic rationality. That this has lately been called into question with increasing frequency is no secret. But obviously this position is not generally shared. In one of the last Lang Verlag catalogues (III, 1988) I found an entry for a book by Gregor Paul: *Mythos, Philosophie und Rationalität*. The brochure says the following about the book's content:

- 1) non-relativistic rationality is an indispensable regenerative idea, especially today. For it is, more so than any previously known alternatives, better suited to promote and realize the idea of a general humanity.
- 2) Philosophizing is more rational and, in this regard more conducive to the interests of humanity than mythologizing. Philosophizing is generally to be given preference over mythologizing".

This appears to be a late and outdated refutation of P. B. Shelley's *Defense of Poetry*. The arguments brought forward have already been reduced *ad absurdum* by the romantics. Poets would no

²⁶ Judith Wright, "Summer", in: *Phantom Dwelling*, London, 1985, p. 44.

²⁷ Here myth is used in the sense of Richard Chase's definition as a form of narrative of archetypal symbols. The myth-making relationship to the world is by no means restricted to the "unconscious artistic process" of nature. See R. Weimann, *Phantasie und Nachahmung. Drei Studien zum Verhältnis von Dichtung, Utopie und Mythos*, Halle, 1970, p. 142. Weimann's (marxist) attitude towards literature is based upon the dogma of iconoclasm: Literature must be the mark of social reality. Myth, on the other hand, is for Weimann the expression of human matter-of-fact in an enigmatic world. Thus he speaks of illusion "which, unfortunately", was absolute and believed" (p. 11).

longer argue this way today. The alternative to rationality is not irrationality. We are more inclined to call the opposite or supplementary position of rationality something on the order of imagination, intuition, creativity. Romantics have always held these qualities up against scientists' mechanical rationality. They viewed the poet as creator, and many important poets today think of themselves as myth-makers. They know that only in a mythological context are they able to give form and sense to the subordinated chaos of the world. Thus, it has been determined repeatedly that one of the essential qualities of modernist poetry is the search for a new mythology.

This is especially true of modern poets who believe that poetry's function is to create rituals analogous to religion.²⁸ In this way they seek to restore the lost contact with the archetypal powers of being. Poetry contributes to this process inasmuch as it induces a new balance of the powers in nature and the cosmos which man has destroyed. Thus, many authors see poetry as an ersatz for religion, or even as a new religion itself. It teaches us to see the world as it really is, ruled by antagonistic powers, light and darkness, rise and fall, birth and death. Even pain and suffering are important parts of life, which, from the beginning, is a process towards death, but which always bears new life.

V. Distrust of Natural Science

The other side of the return to a mythical world view is the complementary deprecation of the natural sciences *because* they destroyed the myth. This can be illustrated very well by using as examples certain poems which deal with the first manned moon-landing of July 20, 1969.

The authors are not alone in their critical distance towards this event of the century. Natural scientists were also very critical of this particular step into space, and their criticism was aimed

²⁸Karl Heinz Göller. "Towards a New Mythology: The Poetry of Ted Hughes, English Poet Laureate", in: *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego*, Kraków, 1990, pp. 100-106.

at nearly all facets of the multi-billion dollar undertaking.

The negative reaction of most distinguished poets to the moon landing was by no means easily foreseeable. Even today many believe that it is the duty and responsibility of poets to praise man's great achievements in panegyric poems. The first moon landing was one such achievement. It appeared that a new phase of the development of humanity had begun. Man obviously had crossed borders which appeared to be fixed by man's own *physis* and by physics. Was the reaction of poets unanimously positive or enthusiastic? Not at all. Many well-known authors were sceptical, expressed uncertainty, and even indicated the step into space.

How can we account for this seemingly contradictory reaction to the moon landing? The sociologist Max Weber²⁹ describes the process of transition from the Late Middle Ages to our period as a gradual replacement of myth by reason. For people in the Middle Ages, the meaning of all worldly activity was obvious and could be expressed in images or myths. These meanings and structures got lost in the onset of Puritanism, Calvinism and Rationalism. Max Weber calls it the "demystification" of the world.

W. Haug³⁰ applied this term to literature. He demonstrates how demystified thinking in all European countries changed the worldview in poetry. The previously accepted meaning of the world was now questioned. The demystification process led to a separation of theological and scientific truth.³¹ The old security provided by myth was lost. A desire for the return of lost innocence overshadows much of the romantic literature. William Wordsworth's

²⁹ See Max Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf* Berlin, 1967, *passim*. For an explanation of this principle, see Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* Vol. I Tübingen, 1963, "Vorbemerkung", pp. 1-16.

³⁰ Walter Haug, "Wandlungen des Fiktionalitätsbewußtseins vom hohen zum späten Mittelalter", in: James F. Poag, Thomas C. Fox, eds., *Entzauberung der Welt: Deutsche Literatur 1200-1500*, Tübingen, 1989.

³¹ Richard J. Utz, *Literarischer Nominalismus im Spätmittelalter: Eine Untersuchung zu Sprache, Charakterzeichnung und Struktur in Geoffrey Chaucers "Trilus and Criseyde"*, Frankfurt a. M., Bern, New York, Paris, 1990.

"The World is too much with us"³² could be read and analyzed as an example of this.

The poets' voices themselves are even more distinct than the tenets of intellectual history. An exemplary case is Babette Deutsch's "To the Moon".³³ It has often been shown that *American* identity is above all based on myth, or as Thomas Bailey puts it, on "false historical beliefs".³⁴ During the 60's many of these beliefs were questioned. America was involved in the Vietnam War. The basic principles of American identity were suddenly derided and spruned, as e.g. manifest destiny, supremacy of the white race, primacy of the Nordics, frontier and the free West, the rags-to-riches dream.³⁵

Thus Babette Deutsch takes her stand. She opposes fervently Whitman's claim that 20th century poetry has no other function than to depict facts, scientific and otherwise. With total incomprehension she quotes Whitman's effusive exclamation in "Song of Myself": "Hurrah for positive science! long live exact demonstration".³⁶

In her poem, "To the Moon"³⁷ Deutsch indicts the violence done to the moon. After the moon landing, the moon will never again be what it was before. The poet fears that the moon will be an unsung victim in the future. She indicts the loss of mythology surrounding the moon for which there is no replacement. The world has lost something irretrievable because of the moon landing. It has become poorer.

Deutsch's poem will certainly provoke twofold, probably con-

³²William Wordsworth, "The World is too much with us", in his *Poems, in two Volumes and Other Poems 1800-1807*, ed. Jared Curtis, New York, 1983, p. 150.

³³Babette Deutsch, "To the Moon, 1969", in Robert Vas Dias, ed., *Inside Outer Space: New Poems of the Space Age*, New York, 1970, pp. 61-62.

³⁴Thomas A. Bailey, "The Mythmakers of American History", in: *Myth and American Experience*, eds. Nicholas Cords and Patrick Gester, Encino, Ca., 1978, pp. 1-16, here: p. 1.

³⁵Cf. Bailey, p.1.

³⁶Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* ed. and introd. by Carl Sandburg, n. p., 1921, repr. 1944, "Song of Myself", 23, p. 57.

³⁷Cf. fn 33.

tradictory reactions. The same is true of a second poem on the same subject, Wystan Hugh Auden's "Moon Landing".³⁸ Auden is certainly one of the most important English-American poets of the century, and his view of the first moon landing should therefore be taken seriously.

The use of the German word "menschlich" in the second stanza is an indication of what Auden has in view. The obvious motives behind the conquest of the moon are, in Auden's opinion, anything but praiseworthy. For him, the loud celebration of the successful adventure is a phallic triumph, whereby *phallic* also includes prepubescent associations. Those responsible for the noise, i.e., Werner von Braun & Co., are mere babblers who are not to be taken seriously.

The tone of the poem reveals that the author approaches his subject ironically. For him the moon landing is not as wonderful as the rest of the world thinks it to be. From the moment man first drew sparks from flintstone, the moon landing was just a matter of time. Nothing has changed radically for Auden. He still sees the moon as the queen of the heavens; her "old man" (the man-in-the-moon) is comprised, thank God, of gravel and not of protein; and he still visits the author in his Austrian country house. The man-in-the-moon's message has a basic meaning for Auden: irreverence, hybris is worse than superstition.

But what does it matter? Auden concludes none too seriously. Our apparatniks will continue in the future to raise the havoc we call history, and we can only pray that there will also continue to be artists, cooks and saints who make the world tolerable.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion I should like to say that poetry can and will be a factor for the establishment of a new world-picture. The subjects I have suggested are good example of the relevance of the genre

³⁸ Wystan Hugh Auden, "Moon Landing", in: *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson, London, 1976, pp. 632-3.

and of literary scholarship in general. This is good to know after we have been trying for decades to justify this "useless academia", as it has been called.

Young people in particular are being misguided to underestimate the global crisis, to internalize a drop-out mentality which contributes no help, except that it can be interpreted as a symptom of the current crisis itself. We must not leave the problem of ecology to the cranks, the nuts and the sects. It is far too important for that. We must also oppose the claim of political parties and ideologies which will monopolize the issue at hand.

Ecology is for everybody. It belongs in the classroom and the lecture halls. The teaching goal should be the recognition that nature has its own rights which are independent from the meaning of nature to man. But it should also become clear that environmental protection based on ethical motivation serves the interests of man. Ecology should be recognised as everybody's business and everybody's duty. It has to be everybody or nobody.