Utopian Themes in Monika Maron’s Novel *Animal Triste*

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The prevailing interpretations of Monika Maron’s novel *Animal Triste* (1997), which originally appeared in 1996, have focused on the theme of a love story made possible by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the ensuing unification of the two German states. Read against this historical background as paramount for the understanding of the work, the novel’s reception has been two-fold. It has either been interpreted as solely a romance between an East German woman and a West German man, or it has been seen as the depiction of an identity crisis of the female protagonist during the aftermath of the collapse of the German Democratic Republic. Both these interpretations focus on the different social, historical, and ideological backgrounds of the two main characters. They take into consideration the influence that the protagonists’ different paths through their respective past lives had on their identities and thus on the relationship. The perceived differences are seen as the source for the unbridgeable gap and are, therefore, interpreted as the cause for the ultimate failure of their affair. Thus Marcel Reich–Ranicki, critic czar of the Federal Republic of Germany, has described Maron’s novel as “one of the most beautiful love stories of the last years. ... A highly erotic book of extraordinary intensity.” Arguing with Reich–Ranicki’s evaluation, Alison Lewis interprets the failure of the love story as a process due to the repression of past traumas by the female protagonist and her inability to come to terms with them. She examines themes of personal and collective remembrances and the effects of repression and repetition on memory in the context of Maron’s own repressed past. Lewis puts emphasis on the author’s involvement with the Stasi, the East German security police, which had emerged in 1995 (Lewis, 1998: 30-46). Gabriele Eckart, however, is not convinced that the historical background is the main factor for the failure of the love affair between the narrator and her lover. She regards the unification of the two Germanies and the possible identity crisis of the East German woman as a minor thread within the plot itself. According to her, the story of an “Animal Triste” could have been placed in any city and is not dependent on a particular historical background at all (Eckart, 1997: 315-21).

Although the connection to real historical events appears to be so obvious, the readers will detect during a close examination that this love story is set solely in the mind of the main character, a paleontologist working at the Natural History Museum in former East Berlin; it is told as a reminiscence, as if it had ended thirty or fifty or forty years ago (AT 11). It is the fantastic–utopian mental reconstruction by a middle-aged woman who, after her relationship ended, continues to live in this temporally removed mindset. The readers meet her at
this point in her life. She seemingly remains untouched by the reality around her, for several decades, as the readers are made to believe. Therefore, the love story in Maron’s novel will be analyzed in utopian terms. The term “utopia/n” as it is understood in this essay will be defined based on Richard Saage’s and Hiltrud Gnüg’s characterizations of utopia. Then, the story will be outlined, and finally, it will be shown that, with the help of stylistic means, content interpretation, and themes borrowed from German Romantic thought, *Animal Triste* can indeed be read as a utopian novel.

The terms “utopia” and “utopian” will be understood as a state of mind, as static and not evolving, as something the narrator clings to as long as she can endure it. She positions her love affair in the past, as an event that is anchored in time but also temporal and that is destroyed when it is confronted with its possible fulfillment. This utopia, nevertheless, is directed toward the future, but as soon as this future becomes present, it cannot hold up to its perceived or expected promise. Through her lover’s death and the narrator’s clinging to her reminiscences which progress in a circular manner, the love story is returned to unreality, to a utopia outside of time and place.

Thus the narrator was able to live for years in the illusion of the love affair but eventually is ready to break out of its confinement when it appeared to have become fixed, when it is no longer open–ended. According to Barbara Holland–Cunz it is especially important for utopian writing by women that the end remains open, that the telos is a process rich in conflicts, but not a static ideal. How a “personalized” utopia fails through the process of remembering and the gradual recollection of actual events is depicted in Maron’s novel.

Within the theoretical framework of utopian criticism, Bolshevism, Socialism, and Marxism are regarded as possible realizations of a political utopia. Now the collapse of the social orders of the authoritarian type like that of the former Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic seems to mark the end of such a political entity. Socialism had been played with for 45 years, but had been unable to assert itself either against the “lure” of the West or explore the possibility of a third way, a “Socialism with a human face.” In fact, the general consensus appears to be, according to Saage, that political utopia has surpassed its own future. To demonstrate his point, he gives an overview of political utopia (reaching from Thomas More *Utopia* to Bloch’s study *The Principle of Hope* to Bolshevism) to arrive at the concept of a “lived utopia” in the niches of society. In today’s world, this seems to be the only possible one. Saage ends his survey with the warning that even individual dreams, hopes, and ideals of a better and more fulfilling life have to guard against a tendency to become totalitarian, as had been the case in the political reality of the former Eastern Block Countries. But a successful defense against totalitarianism would only be possible if the ambitions of the protagonists remain within the sphere of the private and individual. Such signs of an individualized utopia can be identified in Maron’s female protagonist in *Animal Triste*: she creates for herself a niche away from society in which she can live in her utopian world until she herself eventually makes the decision to break out of it. In her novel, Maron does not create a perfect political state but lets her protagonist live in a perception of happiness that is
utopian. This exalted state is achieved by the narrator by consciously excluding reality, an endeavor that ultimately is destined to fail.

The breakdown, or failure, of the socialist political utopia, according to Saage, was evident in the fall of the Soviet Union; but a retreat into the private seems also to be doomed because a negative end is anticipated and thus brought about, as can be seen in the behavior of the narrator in Animal Triste. The eventual disappointment is anticipated so that it might be bearable. (“Enttäuschung” is the German word for “disappointment” or “dis-illusionment,” and it can be interpreted as meaning that the “Täuschung,” the illusion was brought to the fore, that by being disillusioned one actually loses the illusion that one had fallen prey to.) In this sense, the outcome can be seen as a positive, healthy development, as a return to reality.

The remembering process in Animal Triste serves this end. It forces the utopian creation to come face to face with reality thereby stripping it of its fantastic and always elusive lure. Frigga Haug in her essay on feminism as political utopia finds that the discussions about the loss of utopia really mourn the disappearance of a “beyond” while in reality and, in contrast, utopian thought lost its presence on earth, in the here and now. Haug observes furthermore that, with the collapse of the former socialist countries, the wishes tied up in bourgeois settings are finally released into shining hope and designs of liberation. Here again a parallel to what Maron’s protagonist is striving for can be detected: she has created a utopian love story, suspended and unattached to social or even individual reality (her lover is married). It is made possible only by the collapse of the real existing socialism in the former German Democratic Republic and is launched into an undefined time and place. At one point, she even wants to believe that in order for her to have met her lover, the Berlin Wall needed to have fallen first.

As Hiltrud Gnüg in her 1999 study of utopia and the utopian novel (Gnüg, 1999) states: the starting point of utopian thought is usually the assessment of the present reality (as in the political, economical, psychological state (of mind)). (Abrams, 1988: 195). Reality is generally perceived as wanting, as lacking, and therefore in need of improvement. The author’s visions are then developed within the plot of the story. Gnüg places the homo faber at the beginning. He/she is forced to create a more satisfying order of living based on reason and rationality. His/her creation is a counterproduction to the social reality as it exists and in which laws perceived as unjust and unfair obstruct the happiness of the people (Gnüg 8/9). This theme is more evident in Maron’s earlier novel Flugasche than in Animal Triste. Even though the utopian visions here are created in direct contrast to the experienced socialist reality, they, too, take on a “private” character. They are not state utopias in the wake of More, etc., but remain within the framework of personally achievable tasks. As such, they are an integral part of the story line and are used as a temporary escape from reality. This exemplifies that utopian thought needs the tension with the actual historical reality in order to thrive. (Gnüg, 1999).

Since Utopia is fictional, it needs a story line. The narrative, however, can still be totally imaginative and its goals not even realizable. Gnüg quotes definitions of utopia from the 20th century to underline this point: the Spanish–German dictionary translates the term utopian as “impossible, fantastical,” and the 1947 Duden, the
German references work, defines utopia as “passion, rapture, effusion, fantasy” (Gnüg, 1999: 11). Utopia has also been defined as representing an ideal, nonexistent political state and way of life. These definitions are all applicable to Maron’s novel Animal Triste. It describes an ideal way of life for her main character, a life of love driven by her desire for it never to end, which the narrator is, supposedly, able to adhere to for an unspecified number of years.

In this context the German expression: “Das ist doch utopisch!” (That’s utopian!) comes to mind. It expresses the sense that a project or expectation is unrealistic and/or unrealizable. The exclamation also anticipates the ultimate failure of the longed for outcome of such project or expectation: For the narrator in Animal Triste this means that in the end she realizes two things. One, that her lover Franz will not move in with her despite the fact that they cleared a room in her apartment for his possessions. Although Franz had asked where he might put his desk (AT 236) she does not really want to believe that he will move in with her. The second is that she, the protagonist, does not want to come out of her unique affair with Franz as merely an ordinary couple married for life. This would be a feasible task, but would redirect her utopian cravings to a bourgeois reality from which she wants to escape in the first place, because it appears to her as unsatisfying and even trite. She strives for the impossible: a love in life and death (AT 93). She wants to live an archetypal love story that bears no comparison to any other love, past or future.

The narrator of Animal Triste works as a paleontologist in the Natural History Museum in former East Berlin. She remains nameless, but the readers are supplied with a close description of her body, her appearance, and her negative attitude towards both (AT 13). She calls her lover, a hymenopterologist from Ulm, Franz. This is not his real name, but she is unable to associate it with any other man she has known during her life, thus making her love experience with him unique. She muses about the sound of this name – the vowel “a” is pronounced similarly to the “a” in the English word “card”- and comes to the conclusion that the dark sound of the vowel rhymes with those in the German words for “grave” or “coffin.” (AT 18). These words point to a finality, a theme of love in the beyond that is familiar from the German Romantic period. This point will be addressed later on.

The time of her initial meeting with Franz seems to already foreshadow this finality. She does not encounter him until after a life–changing, near death experience in the streets of Berlin. During this event, it seems to her that somebody unknown to her, has turned off the electricity in her brain. After she survived this mysterious episode, the protagonist resolves to live her life as a never ending, uninterrupted love story (“eine nicht endende, ununterbrochene Liebesgeschichte,” AT 13). She chooses to interpret the simulation of her death as a good omen, as an incentive to change her life, and as a chance for a new beginning. Her new motto becomes: “Man kann im Leben nichts versäumen als die Liebe" (In life, one can miss nothing but love), a sentence that is repeated three times throughout the book (AT 23, 29, 229). A year after the incident, she meets Franz under the skeleton head of the brachiosaur, her pet project, in the Natural History Museum in East Berlin. The encounter is described as fate: I did not search for him, and I did not expect him, she says.
Ich habe ihn nicht gesucht, und ich habe ihn nicht erwartet,” AT 23–24). An illicit affair ensues, of unclear duration, which ends one night in autumn, when Franz leaves her to never return. At that time, fifty or forty or sixty years ago, she decides to add not another episode to her life (“als ich beschloß, den Episoden meines Lebens keine mehr hinzuzufügen,” AT 10). It is at this stage of herself as suspended in time that the readers meet her.

The story of her affair with Franz revolves around two locations. They are actual physical places, but simultaneously suspended in time. She embarks on her utopian reflections by remembering them: as such launching pads, they have become sacred to her. The first is the spot under the skeleton head of the brachiosaurus in the Natural History Museum. This is where they first met and where Franz supposedly said: A beautiful animal (“Ein schönes Tier” AT 24). Like a mantra, the narrator repeats these words to herself every time she wants to relive the initial encounter and begin her love story anew. These words are so important to her because nobody else sees the skeleton like that. She interprets Franz’ utterance as having established a special bond between them. The other physical location is her bed. She has kept the bed sheets, unwashed after their last love-making: the top sheet, which is imprinted with colorful flowers which remind her of meat-eating plants, and the black bottom sheet that preserves so “clearly and beautifully” two spots of her lover’s sperm (AT 14). She declares that she constantly invents the evening, some forty or fifty years ago when her lover sat on her bed, leaning with a straight back against the wall, surrounded by the carnivorous plants, as she invented all other evenings with her lover after he had disappeared. Thus time passes and still does not pass, it remains static in its circular progression. (“Den Abend vor vierzig oder fünfzig Jahren, an dem mein Geliebter mit geradem Rücken an die Wand gelehnt und von fleischfressenden Pflanzen umrankt in meinem Bett saß, erfinde ich, seit er vergangen ist, wie alle anderen Abende mit meinem Geliebten auch. So vergeht die Zeit und vergeht doch nicht...” AT 18). Later, she remembers Franz again on the bed, as if on a meadow in summer, lying between carnivorous plants (AT 56). The sheets as proof of their love’s consumption and the pillow talk in her mind she is able to preserve, but the place under the brachiosaurus’ head is later ‘desecrated’ by a visit of Franz’ wife and will never be the same.[17]

The bedroom with its meadow of carnivorous plants resembles a safe place for the narrator from which she reminisces about the conversations that took place during the first part of the nights Franz could spend with her. (He always leaves her at 12:30 a.m. to return to his wife.) These reflections, unperturbed by the life around her, constitute the core of her utopian vision. In her own words, these evenings are her inventions in which she loses her age and pretends to experience a “Jugendliebe,” the teenage love she never had. The relationship with Franz is seen as archetypal, unmatched by any other relationship in her life. It is also placed in the past, anchored in time, and as long as it stays unchallenged and unquestioned in her memory, she feels as if she were in the “airy interior of a globe” (AT 126). It seems to be the ultimate fulfillment, a timeless time that no counting device can order.[18] (AT 126).

But this globe starts ‘leaking’ when the remembering process can no longer be delayed, when the clash of her utopian visions with the outside world needs to be resolved, and when events outside of her control
permeate its boundaries. The instability and ultimate collapse of her utopia is foreshadowed by a variety of narrative devices such as: conscious remembering; former dreams that now become reality; stories about other couples’ lives; time references in which the spans of time that supposedly had passed are getting smaller; and, finally, the intrusion of ‘historical’ reality.

The readers encounter the conscious remembering process very early on in the novel when the narrator remarks: One thing or another has been coming back to me in the last weeks or years, which can only mean that my love for Franz for which alone I spent so many years in my apartment is slowly growing weaker. (“In den letzten Wochen oder Jahren fällt mir das eine oder andere wieder ein, was nur bedeuten kann, daß meine Liebe zu Franz, für die allein ich die vielen Jahre in meiner Wohnung verbracht habe, nun langsam nachläßt.” AT 39). Here, reality breaks in: the narrator analyzes that remembering will cause the decline of the absolute love. And the readers realize that, once she reaches the point of wanting to narrate the story to its end instead of always returning to the beginning, she has to follow through and will ultimately destroy her utopia.

Another device is the repeated hint at her ultimate dream from the times when she was not allowed to travel: a trip to Pliny Moody’s Gardens in South Hadley, Massachusetts, where she wanted to visit the famous fossilized prehistoric footprints of the dinosaur (AT 85, 87). This dream only holds her fascination as long as it remains illusive and cannot be fulfilled, as long as she cannot travel to the West because she is a citizen of the German Democratic Republic. When the narrator eventually does fly to New York, after the collapse of the Berlin wall, she has no desire to continue on but returns to Berlin before having seen the footprints. It seems that what had seemed “utopian” and therefore fascinating because of its unattainability before the fall of the wall lost its allure once it could be realized. The parallel to her affair with Franz is obvious: ultimately, the wish has a stronger attraction than its realization.

Another foreshadowing is achieved when the narrator remembers the love story of Emile and Sybille (AT 43–51). Emile, in early retirement because of health problems, cherishes his trips to West Berlin where he eventually meets Sybille. Their relationship flourishes as long as the wall is standing, but it breaks apart once it collapsed and they can actually live together. Emile becomes active in politics again and eventually dies of a heart attack, and Sybille returns to her work in her dance boutique. In this episode, the failure of the love story is unraveled and its outcome mourned. In contrast, the narrative about Karin and Klaus stages a worse scenario. They met as teenagers, then married and had children. Their relationship survived an affair Klaus had, and they find themselves back together after the fall of the wall for a continuation of their bourgeois bliss. Although Klaus and Karin were envied by the narrator as the ultimate teenage sweethearts whose relationship was so special and untested by prior or later love encounters (they embodied the “Jugendliebe” she never experienced), the daily grind of married life that followed horrifies her. She only wants to think of her affair with Franz as a “Jugendliebe,” and for that reason it is important that it never develop into anything as ordinary as Karin’s and Klaus’ “happily ever after.”

But attempting to arrest the utopia and to freeze it in time poses its own problems and will ultimately prove to have been futile. Readers, just like Maron’s protagonist, are interested in the process of establishing a
utopia, but get bored with descriptions of its well functioning. This means for Maron’s novel that the fulfillment of her protagonist’s dreams, the actual living together with her lover, is also perceived as static, unchangeable, thus boring and therefore ultimately undesirable: the protagonist kills her lover at the moment when the dream is about to become reality. This reality becomes unattractive to the narrator who dreads a life as an ordinary married couple like that of Karin and Klaus alluded to earlier. She wants her love to remain at the animalistic and archaic level. Therefore, at the time when the utopian wish was about to be fulfilled (when Franz wanted to move in with her) she pushes him in front of an oncoming bus to prevent the wish to become true.[19] (AT 238). The private utopia lasted only as long as it remained untouched by reality, as long as it occurred in a state of limbo, or was suspended somewhere outside of real life. This is a typical trait of utopian novels as was pointed out by Gnüg.

Furthermore, Gnüg observed, that utopian fiction has one main problem: it produces esthetic boredom. [20] (Gnüg, 1999: 18). Stylistically, in Animal Triste, this state of limbo is marked by an unusual use of time references. They place the story into an unspecified point in the past when the narrator is already a hundred or maybe just ninety years old, and they are repeated many times throughout the first half of the novel. The nearer the narrator gets to make the decision to tell the story to the end, the shorter the time spans in these time references become. Here we have the temporal distancing found in utopian works. The references to time disappear completely only after reality has broken into the novel, and the utopia has been destroyed.

The protagonist also tries to arrest or ignore time. To achieve this, she avoids or destroys devices that might tell her that time has passed and is still passing. She breaks all mirrors in her apartment, so that she may not see her aging body reflected back to her. Although she cannot avoid feeling the changes her body goes through, she tries hard to ignore them. During all this time, she supposedly had hardly any contact to the people surrounding her, excluding those she met on trips to the bank and the markets in the streets.

Although Maron’s narrator does not seem to interact with people when she lives in her utopian state of mind, the readers still find references to the actual historical time in form of a powerful satirical description of the forty-five years of the GDR regime.[21] Within utopian fiction, according to Gnüg, the history or the background of the individual, his/her experiences, anxieties, wishes, and contradictions have a certain importance and, not unlike their role in the novel of consciousness, they influence the narrative perspective (Gnüg, 1999: 19).

The imagined state of bliss in which the narrator lives, does not want to let this reality intrude. But she is eventually unable to totally exclude it. It does break through, especially the events that mirror her own state of being. The story is written from the future looking back into the past. This past is recognizable as the historic time of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, when the forty years of gang domination which ought to be regarded as mutation doomed for death had just ended. (“... vierzig Jahre Bandenherrschaft, [die] als eine todgeweihte Mutation anzusehen [war]” AT 31). Now, the readers also learn the approximate age of the narrator: the power of love grabs her in her middle years.[22] (AT 59). It coincides with the end of the strange time during which it was possible for a gang of gangsters camouflaged as a liberation movement to hermetically close off the entire
East European mainland including the interior seas, a few offshore islands and the occupied territorial waters from the rest of the world and to identify themselves as the legal rulers of the respective countries. That happened as a consequence of a war which a national, namely German, gang had started and lost. Among the victorious powers was a West Asian republic which had already been ruled by said liberty gang and which, as winner's award, was given Eastern Europe to which half of Germany belonged, including the half of the city of Berlin, ...[23] (AT 30-31). This time has finally come to an end.

Thus something new is starting in the narrator's environment. It mirrors the change that is taking place in her own life, literally the joining of two entities that had been separated. This is true on the personal level (narrator meets Franz) as well as on the political level (East and West Germany unite). At this level of reading it would be possible to understand the story as a metaphor for a failed utopia of a united Germany in which both the East and the West would play an equally important role rather than former East Germany being annexed by the West. Within the scheme of unification, Franz would embody the West, but he would be swallowed up by the all encompassing flowers (run down economy of the former GDR which is swallowing up the money pumped into the state by the West?) of the East. Of the bedclothes, the pillow case and the cover have the carnivorous flower design, while the sheet is black, thus resembling a coffin, his death bed.

Maron’s female protagonist kills her lover, because (politically) a symbiosis could only be possible if the West would relinquish its claim of superiority (which did not happen). In political reality, the German Democratic Republic was annexed by the Federal Republic, which means that the woman would have to have given up her identity. But this was not the anticipated end: At the beginning of the novel the narrator says: When I was young ... there was so much youth, so much beginning in me that an end could only be imagined as violent and beautiful. I was not destined for a slow decay, that I knew for sure. (“Als ich jung war ... war so viel Jugend, so viel Anfang in mir, daß ein Ende sich nur gewaltsam und schön denken ließ; für den allmäßlichen Verfall war ich nicht bestimmt, das wußte ich genau.” AT 9). Nevertheless, at the end of the novel she endures exactly this kind of decay (by shutting herself into her utopian dream). Historically, some citizens of the former German Democratic Republic suffer similarly by holding on to the transfigured memories of a life that was regulated and predictable thus seemingly granting a certain type of happiness.

But happiness, just like her utopia, remains elusive to the narrator of Animal Triste. Reminiscing about one of Franz’ visits on the “carnivorous meadow,” the narrator reflects about the nature of happiness. She comes to the conclusion that it is unattainable. Therefore, whatever is attainable, must be false happiness. Franz does not really comment, and she realizes that she wished for this absolute happiness too strongly. Here we have another parallel to the novel Flugasche and the ultimate futility of wishes and desires: Christian, a long time friend of Josefa’s, voices his thoughts on how fragile wishes and especially wish fulfillment can be. He says to her: one can definitely want something, really desire it, imagine it again and again until one is quite certain that one wants it. And then, when it has become true as one has really and strongly desired, it is something different. That could be possible, couldn’t it? Josefa just simply says no.[24]

The narrator in Animal Triste is not as certain. She realizes that if true love and happiness are
unattainable it would also mean that love could only exist outside of real life. This would inevitably lead to the
destruction of the lovers,[25] (AT 56, 58) as proven by the continuous enjoyment provided by the timeless
stories familiar from world literature such as Tristan and Isolde, Romeo and Juliet, Anna Karenina, and
Penthesilea.

The closer the narrator comes to breaking out of her utopia, the more she quotes sentences from
German romantic texts.[26] (AT 147, 132, 194). For the second half of the novel, Penthesilea’s cry: to win you
or to perish (“dich zu gewinnen oder umzukommen”) becomes her driving force. Here the novel gains affinity
to the romantic notion of true love being found in the ever after that was alluded to earlier.

In *Animal Triste*, however, the narrator has no intentions of following her dead lover, but rather
pretends to be waiting for his return. She reminisces: when I met Franz for the first time, it (i.e., love) was free.
It is this freedom that gets lost as the love story unfolds. Only since Franz has left her and she waits for him
without hope for his return does she find herself in unity with love again: the outcome of the utopian love story
has regained its suspended status, its freedom to develop.

Reality does not set back in until she mentally has ended her love affair with Franz. Once the resolution
has been reached to narrate the story to its end, she can also acknowledge the changes the city of Berlin has
been going through. She compares her state of mind and emotions to the physical appearance of the city:
streets ripped open, cables and pipes laying around everywhere like wasting innards; cranes bending over the
roofs like skeletons of dinosaurs. […] I was as broken apart as the city. Of it and me I could rightly claim: we
had gone crazy. (“die aufgerissenen Straßen, die Kabel und Rohre, die wie verwesende Eingeweide überall
herumlagen; die Kräne, die sich wie Saurierskelette über die Dächer beugten; […] so aufgebrochen wie die
Straßen der Stadt war ich. Von ihr und mir konnte man zu Recht behaupten, wir seien verrückt geworden“ (AT
208–209).

The imagined utopia, in this case her lover’s moving in into her apartment, the joining of their everyday
lives, bursts like a bubble when the present, i.e., the end of the relationship, is narrated: the protagonist kills her
lover by pushing him under an oncoming bus (AT 232, 237). This dramatic end means that she can only live
with this relationship as long as it stays in limbo, is not fully realized. It also means that she fears the finality of
her own realization because it would establish that her affair is over. Her thoughts would no longer be free to
play with different themes and endings. Furthermore, it becomes clear that her utopia could not weather the
test of reality, or that the protagonist was afraid that it would not survive the test of reality which could easily
be gray and triste.[27]

As the narrator admits that she invented the evenings of her encounters with Franz she, by doing so, also
invented herself as part of this utopian story. In the end, she annihilates that self or that part of her self that
is defined by her affair with Franz. By killing him, she ends the story that was her life story, that she kept alive
in her mind. The part of her that was involved in the story, her thinking, intellectual self, seized to exist. What
is left in the end, becomes the animal triste, the archaic, pre–human being, the wo/man after coitus, a sad being
which she likens to a brown female ape (“eine braunhaarige Äffin,“ AT 239). As such she finds herself among
other animals on the bed sheets in her bed, and thus becomes part of a community again that she had excluded herself from by her utopia. She had felt like that before when she was as free as an animal in New York ("tierhaft frei in New York," AT 219). Once she quits pursuing her utopian love story this feeling of freedom returns. It leaves her and her readers free from the utopian constraints, but also wondering what humankind without utopian visions would look like, and whether it would be like a reincarnated brachiosaurus, the epitome of excess, which the narrator fled from when leaving New York (AT 219).

WORKS CITED


ENDNOTES

[1] The world becomes dream / the dream becomes world / and what one believes has / happened one can only see approach from afar.


Gegenteil sein Diesseits verlor. Oder anders: Der Zusammenbruch der ehemaligen sozialistischen Länder entläßt die in die klinischen Verhältnisse gefesselten Wünsche endlich wieder in schimmernde Hoffnung und Befreiungsentwürfe …

AT 51: „Manchmal glaube ich sogar, daß auch die Mauer in Berlin nur eingerissen wurde, damit Franz und ich uns endlich finden konnten.” (Sometimes I even believe that the wall in Berlin had to be torn down for the sole purpose that Franz and I could finally meet.)


[11] In the novel Flugasche, Maron’s protagonist, Josefa Nadler, envisions a friendlier, cleaner and more humane environment than the one she encounters. Her visions are mental constructs, they respond directly to the reality of the old and chronically malfunctioning nuclear power plant in B.(itterfeld) which emits its waste by spewing forth tons of flying ash per day. Josefa is supposed to write a report for her newspaper about the people of this town which is known as the filthiest in Europe. But instead of praising the accomplishments of socialism and glossing over its deficiencies she denounces the authorities and even instigates protest among the workers of the plant. Both these actions eventually cause her to lose her job.

[12] Gnüg (12) also observes that wanting and wishing are the impulses for all utopian writing.


[15] Maron has played with the theme of the impossible before. A good example is her novel Die Überläuferin (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988). In connection to the incident described in Animal Triste, a conversation came to mind that took place in this earlier novel between the characters Martha and Rosalind. They discuss the possibility that forgotten fairy tales would fly through time to fall on earth and engulf people for minutes, hours or even weeks and months. Most people captured in such a way would think that they were victims of a sensory illusion … Martha thought that such fairy tales would disable all laws of nature that might hinder them… (181–2).

[16] Towards the end of the novel, she meets Franz’ wife and hears from her that Franz has told her about the encounter immediately that night. Not only did they share this sacred moment, he recounted the encounter in such a way that not he, Franz, had voiced those words, but the narrator herself. Franz interpreted her admiration for the skeleton as a degree of naïveté that becomes almost adorable for people who have seen so many other animals of the world alive (AT 203-204).

[17] In German, the passage reads: "Für mich ist die Zeit mit Franz eine zeitlose, durch kein Zählwerk geordnete Zeit, in der ich mich seitdem befinde wie im luftigen Innern einer Kugel" (AT 126).

[18] In the novel, the readers are left wondering though, whether the protagonist did actually kill him or not, because she herself immediately voices doubts as to whether she actually did push him under the bus or not (AT 238).

[19] Gnüg 18, states that devils are notoriously more interesting than angels.

[20] Satire is related to utopian fiction as it depicts or makes fun of the shortcomings of an existing state (Gnüg 12).

[21] AT 59: “…jemand in einem Alter, zu dem für gewöhnlich erwachsene Kinder oder sogar Enkelkinder, ein erhöhter Cholesterinspiegel und drohende Herzinfarkte gehöre.” (Someone at an age to which usually belong grown children or even nieces and nephews, a raised level of cholesterol and threatening heart attacks.)


[24] AT 56: 58: Glück war das Unerreichbare. Was erreichbar war, mußte falsches Glück sein. … Franz sagt ja, daß ich mit meiner leichtfertigen Behauptung, das Glück sei das Unerreichbare, recht gehabt hätte, daß die Liebe nur außerhalb des wirklichen Lebens existieren könne, was unweigerlich zur Vernichtung der Liebenden führe.


[26] One might wonder if not Franz’ „hechtgraue Augen“ (eyes gray as a pike’s) and his gray coat have already foreshadowed this reality (AT 25, 27).