

Ecological Destruction and Consumerism: A critique of modern society through the works of the contemporary German author Ilija Trojanow

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Abstract

Literature that engages with the theme of anthropogenic climate change carries the potential of awakening the reader's curiosity by creating a dimension in which the effects and impacts of the crisis are tangible. The urgency and unpredictability of climate change are articulated through reflections that combine societal, cultural and political issues associated to the phenomenon, hence encouraging a deeper understanding of the environmental crisis in today's society.

*The article examines the novel *EisTau* by Ilija Trojanow to navigate the political and economic aspects of anthropogenic climate change.*

*I reflect on the employment of fiction in finding ways to develop attentiveness to nature, whilst exposing how *EisTau* questions the power relations between culture, politics and economy, in a bid to influence the current state of affairs. I argue that the depiction of the effects of climate change and the melting of glaciers enable public agency, whilst encouraging the rethinking of the environmental crisis and the acknowledgment of its connection to capitalism and to the constant accumulation of goods. I observe how the exposure of the interconnectedness of climate change and capitalism encourages behavioural changes that lead to the adoption of alternative lifestyles that can halt the disastrous effects of climate change and prompts readers to develop a sense of care for the non-human world.*

Keywords: climate change; Ilija Trojanow; consumerism; glaciers; global warming; capitalism.

Narrating Climate Change

As we negotiate the anxieties and fears surrounding climate change, literature can play an important role. It can offer an affective space in which to reflect upon the societal, political and cultural roots of the crisis and to envision alternatives.

A writer who has much to offer to our understanding of climate crisis as a problem rooted in deeper social, political and cultural conditions is Bulgarian born author Ilija Trojanow: acclaimed writer, editor, publisher and translator, who holds a prominent role within the contemporary German literary scene and whose strong voice spans across a wide range of genres, including travel, ethnography and climate change fiction. His continuous efforts to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers make him a multifaceted international writer able to use his work to demonstrate how the confluence of different cultures deconstructs prejudices and constrictions. Trojanow's ability to combine different aspects of the environmental crisis encourages deeper reflections on the effects of climate change and on the relationship between humanity and nature. His interest in environmental decline dates back to his youth, when, during a class trip in north Kenya, he personally witnessed the effects of global warming on the population and on nature. Since then, he has expressed the importance of representing climate change in literary fiction and using different means such as interviews, essays, articles but most of all with his elegiac novel *EisTau* (2011). During an interview, he openly expresses the importance of engaging with environmental issues, for he considers that not doing so 'would mean succumbing to the blindness of an age that is pillaging the present and burdening the future' (Woodbury, 2020). With his novel Trojanow motivates readers to find new ways of halting the effects of climate change, whilst promoting social justice and encouraging reflections that move beyond the borders of individuality. Trojanow combines political, economic and social aspects to showcase the unsustainability of modern lifestyles and convey the urgency of climate change. The elegiac tone used by the author exposes how *EisTau* mourns the destruction of the environment that has not yet occurred, but will be if the consumerist lifestyles dictated by capitalism and consumerism are not being withheld.

EisTau, published in 2011, addresses the interconnected issues of global warming, tourism, art, science and the inability of communicating the effects of human-caused climate change. The novel gives insights into how modern politics and economy shape society's understanding of nature and its exploitation, therefore encouraging a rethink of the relationship that humanity has with the surrounding environment. Trojanow's ability in describing natural landscapes modified by anthropogenic climate change

enhances the understanding of the implications and the possible future effects that the environmental phenomena will have on global society. The novel seeks to explore the physical, social and psychological consequences of climate change (**Goodbody, 2013: 94**) through the life description of its passionate main character, Zeno Hintermeier.

Zeno, a former glaciologist, abandons his academic career, after experiencing the melting of an alpine glacier that had been the object of his studies for many years. The communicative strength of Trojanow's message is articulated through the angry and wounded voice of the main protagonist, who collects his thoughts in a notebook during the time spent as a tour guide on the luxury cruise ship MS Hansen. Zeno's personal journal is a combination of present and past experiences that make him aware that scientific knowledge alone is insufficient in the understanding and communication of the environmental crisis. He believes that a full appreciation of the surrounding environment can only occur by combining science with a personal and intimate relationship built to nature. The mourning for the lost alpine glacier, in association with the passivity that his former students, his ex-wife, the cruise ship passengers and Paulina, his Pilipino lover, show when confronted with the destructive power that humanity exerts on the environment, make Zeno angry and hopeless towards a possible societal change.

The arrival on the MS Hansen of the artist Dan Quentin will eventually compromise Zeno's stability to the point of deciding to hijack the ship and leave the passengers and the crew members stranded on the Antarctic ice. Dan Quentin's desire to stage a fake SOS on the ice in order to draw public attention onto global warming contributes to Zeno's awareness on how modern society is unable to fully comprehend the dangers of environmental destruction and pushes him to a point of no return: suicide.

The book is divided into two parts: 12 chapters introduced by geographic coordinates that trace the route of the cruise ship and numbered with roman numerals, and a second set of 12 chapters written in a different font, numbered using Arabic numerals and described by Gabriele Dürbeck as 'cacophonous intermediate chapters' (**2017a**). The different fonts and numeric systems contribute to the creation of an invisible dividing line that runs throughout the novel and creates two different temporal spheres: the encounter of Zeno's present and past in the first 12 chapters, whilst the future of the cruise ship and its passengers is described in the second set of 12 chapters. The first strand represents Zeno's journal: descriptions of everyday life on the ship, his interactions with fellow crew members and people encountered during his journey, and the relationship with Paulina, to whom Zeno cannot commit entirely due to his inability of building social relationships. The second strand exposes memories from his childhood,

his failed marriage and the melting of an alpine glacier. These two strands, that form the chapters introduced by roman numerals, serve the purpose of constructing the protagonist, since they follow Zeno's character development: from the sadness felt by the death of the glacier to the anger and disillusionment felt whilst on the cruise ship. Both strands show how Zeno's internal conflicts make him an unconventional main character, who is torn between emotion, scientific expertise and rationality. The chapters introduced with Arabic numerals hence representing the third strand, consist of radio messages, news flashes, references to porn and sex, and phrases mimicking the advertisement language. They follow a different time pattern, for they start from the point in which Zeno's journal is interrupted and preannounce the hijack of the cruise ship. The information contained in these chapters aid readers to fill the empty gaps left by Zeno's journal about the rescue of the stranded people, as well as the fate of the cruise ship and Zeno himself. Their rhythm is faster, slogans such as 'do your looting while supplies last' (Trojanow, 2016: 71) and statements such as 'he who destroys nature is killing God' (Ibid: 37) confer the text a negative and obscure tone, since they refer to the appropriation of someone else's goods during catastrophes or wars in the case of 'looting' or comparing the exploitation of nature with the murder of God.

The novel defined roman à these (Goodbody, 2013) for its ability to offer a commentary on modern society, speaks to what Hans Adler and Sonja Klocke describe as 'engaged literature': a debatably inferior offspring of high literature that exposes the controversial ties between society and literature (2019: 1). The device mainly used to intervene in non-literary contexts enables authors to engage with themes that go beyond the borders of literary confinement, to encourage new perspectives and new behavioural attitudes, by questioning existing orders (Ibid). The first to introduce the term was Jean-Paul Sartre. Within the wider concept of Littérature engagée Sartre included any form of literary production that engaged with the political, social, religious and ideological aspects of the time. French existentialists were to include aspects of reality in their work and present the readers with enough elements to prompt them to comprehend and criticise contemporary aspects pertaining to the spheres of politics, society and culture, implying that literature had lost the connotation of 'l'art pour l'art' and served the purpose of modifying the surrounding world (Wilpert, 2013: 211).

EisTau engages with the non-literary context of climate change and questions the power relations between culture, politics and economy, in a bid to influence the current state of affairs. The connection between the text and the social context is in line with one of the main aspects of engaged literature: the expression of its contemporality, for engaged literature is always literature of a present, that always creates a distance

through which the reader is encouraged to engage (**Adler & Klocke, 2019: 4**). The reader is hence encouraged to critically reflect on the depicted topic through the distance created between text and reality. The said distance is obtained through the different temporal perceptions of reality, that make the author and the reader contemporaries, but leave the reader the necessary room to reflect on the themes included in the work. Trojanow does not set the novel *EisTau* in a specific time frame, but makes the melting of glaciers the focal point of interest, to address humanity's role in shaping the future of the planet. It is indeed a natural phenomenon that since the early 2000s has dramatically increased from the Antarctic to Greenland, so a scenario easily identifiable, that however still leaves the necessary room for the reader to take on an active role in the perception of its causes and its gravity. The novel fits into the framework of environmental criticism, for it demonstrates how Trojanow's 'storytelling and image-making shape[s] humans' real-life interactions with the natural world in ways that are historically and culturally distinctive' (**Buell et al., 2011: 419**). In other words, the analysis of *EisTau* illustrates how the author attempts to activate public concern on environmental issues to promote possible changes in modern lifestyles. The novel engages with climate change on a multitude of levels – personal, cultural, societal, political and economic - to promote a deeper understanding of the connections that climate change has with other aspects of everyday life, such as consumerism or more in general, capitalism that inevitably rely on the exploitation of nature. The reflection on the melting of glaciers prompts Trojanow's engagement with the effects that society's consumerist lifestyles have on planet earth. He addresses modern relationships to nature and at the same time warns society about the devastating effects of their actions.

Combining the scientific evidence of climate change into fiction enables the creation of an 'imaginative repertoire', that gives the reader the possibility to contemplate alternative futures or landscapes as reality (**cf. Macfarlane, 2005**). The combination of present behaviours and future consequences allows the author to debate, sense and communicate the causes and effects of climate change, whilst promoting feelings that could induce readers to envisage the imminent threat posed by the phenomenon (**Ibid**). With the reflection on the interconnection between art and environmental destruction, Trojanow complies with one of the main functions of literature: create alternatives. Imagine a reality that distinguishes itself from the alleged evidence of the existing relationships (**Mangold, 2015**). Therefore, he conveys the political and social values of climate change through the fears and anxieties of his main character, aiming to encourage possible changes in the reader's mental disposition.

EisTau disrupts the human-nature dichotomy by intertwining the decline of nature with the psychological and physical decline of its main character, hence nature and humanity are merged into one single element, both condemned to the same demise. The alpine glacier has lost its quality of natural element and is described as suffering and dying and not simply as turning into water:

A dying glacier sounds different than a healthy one, it gives off a powerful rattle when it bursts along a crevasse, and if you listen closely you can hear the melt flowing into the underground lakes speeding the erosion of the wrinkled body. (Trojanow, 2016: 44)

Zeno will feel physical pain caused by a heart attack and emotional numbness caused by the loss of the beloved glacier, to which he had built a personal relationship:

Then I lay down the scree, all balled up, a picture of misery, I would have welcomed any emotion that didn't hit me like a positive lab test result. Not knowing what else to do, I stayed like that until a hiker put his hand on my shoulder to check on my condition. (Ibid: 79)

The melting of the glacier deprives Zeno of the joyous feelings of survival and symbolizes the connectedness between humanity and nature.

A further element of interest for the critical reflection on the destruction of nature is the choice of setting: a ship. In his essay *Requiem for the Future. How to write a novel on the climate catastrophe (2010)* Trojanow explains the choice of using the metaphor of the ship in *EisTau*, since it is a moving non-place, with uncertain destination. The ship is a means of transport carrying moving bodies of travellers who, although interacting with each other, still experience a sense of solitude that causes 'an overburdening or emptying of individuality' (Augé, 1995: 87). The means of transport is shaped into a 'place of memory', a non-place that is 'a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity' (Ibid: 77-78). The peculiarity of the setting lies within the fact that Trojanow is combining movement with distance by placing a diverse range of travellers onto a ship, who, in a state of personal loneliness, experience the vanishing of the landscape without 'really' seeing the places they come across during the journey. The images of the landscapes are created by the words of Zeno: the lonely traveller who observes the destruction of nature and reflects upon the responsibilities of man. During a conversation with a fellow crew member, the two argue:

Fog is setting in, it's not rising off the sea but hovering above it [...]. Now the iceberg behind is discernible only by its base. A bird slips out of the mist and flutters past. "And a good south wind sprung up behind; / the Albatros did follow." "We humans have eyes made for hunting," says

Jeremy, "our nose could fall off without great loss to our senses, our ears serve only to uglify our face, but our eyes are sharp and alert, they can be relied upon." "Especially," I add, "when they fix on something in order to kill it." (Trojanow, 2016: 100)

On the one hand, the passage exposes humanity's destructive capacities: The squinty eyes, that do not register what they see but respond to movement and indistinctly destroy everything, voices the author's profound criticism towards humanity's blindness of their own destructive power. On the other hand, it exposes the force of the words used by the author in describing the landscape, for they convey mystery and sadness in constructing the visual image of a melted iceberg recognisable only by its base. Moreover, the choice of the ship suggests that Trojanow draws on the trope of foolishness, as confirmed in the essay *Requiem for the Future* (Trojanow, 2010), since he quotes the satirical works *Das Narrenschiff* by Sebastian Brant and the remake *Ship of Fools* by Katherine Porter (*ibid*). Both works employ the trope to criticise the vices and the weaknesses of humankind and showcase how humans inadvertently indulge in their folly, caused by pride and gluttony (*ibid*). In *EisTau*, the critique of human 'blindness' towards anthropogenic climate change permeates the novel from beginning to end and it exposes the vital role played by literature in finding ways of imagining an altered future that can overcome feelings of denial and scepticism that surround environmental decline. Trojanow's narrative choice of constructing a main character who expresses his personal feelings of anger towards society's unawareness of the environmental crisis, can trigger in the reader the desire to question and analyse the personal relationship held to nature. The author exposes and underlines how global society indulges in a consumer-oriented lifestyle responsible for the extremely high CO₂ carbon emissions, that are destroying the Antarctic or what he claims to be the last 'Terra Nullius' (Trojanow, 2010). The Latin term stresses the fact that the Antarctic is still a pristine and wild country, unspoiled by human activity, and therefore needs to be safeguarded from humanity's desire to expand, conquer and draw capitalist advantage from its exploitation.

The Intermingling of Fact and Fiction

A new poeology is created from knowledge of the world (Fasthuber, 2007). The affirmation made by Trojanow during an interview with *Der Standard* voices the weight the author assigns to the act of research prior to writing his novels. Travelling to the places he wishes to depict in his fiction is a common practice for Trojanow, since it allows him to bring elements of reality, plausibility and credibility into his writings. Before venturing into the creation of a novel dealing with climate change, Trojanow decided to travel to the place of his creative interest and after

embarking on the cruise ship MS Nordnorge in Ushuaia, he was able to see and unravel the beauties of the Antarctic ice. The trip is described in an article, entitled *The last Emptiness* (2008) published by Zeit Online and on his personal website, and anticipates some of the images and experiences the reader will encounter in the novel, for the glaciologist he has so masterfully constructed in *EisTau* travels along the same route as Trojanow himself.

The trip is undertaken with the scope of witnessing in person the melting glaciers upon which the storyline of the novel is constructed and served the purpose of experiencing emotions that Trojanow conveys into the novel to mentally transport the reader to the last barriers of civilisation (Trojanow, 2010). The choice of setting serves as example to encourage readers to feel real life emotions and develop a sense of care that embraces the non-human world, for the devastating effects of global warming are becoming increasingly visible on the pristine Antarctic that to some extent is still untouched by human disturbance.

The inclusion of personal life experiences adds a sense of reality to Trojanow's novels that initiates reflections on societal, political and cultural aspects related to the causes and effects of climate change. In the discussion on the message articulated through his novel *Is Climate Change a Theme for Literature? About my book EisTau* (2013), Trojanow reiterates the natural beauties of the Antarctic, but stresses the importance of preserving such beauty. He believes that the safeguarding of the environment can only be achieved if humanity recognises the destructive power it possesses and the danger that maintaining current lifestyles represents for the survival of the planet. The novelist depicts images of ruined whaling stations, calling them rusty exhibits of mass destruction (Ibid), and reflects on the incapability of 19th and 20th century whalers to foresee that their activity could possibly one day lead to the extinction of the animals they were slaughtering. This is what Trojanow describes as the sad story of human greed and self-indulgence (Ibid) caused by our capitalist society that destroys nature to produce unnecessary goods, available to consumers who are narcotised and unable to see how the reliance on fossil fuels will ultimately lead to the destruction of our planet (Ibid). Trojanow concludes the essay by asserting that the greatest responsibility of our time is to end capitalism, end our Take-make-waste-economy (Ibid), for global warming will only bring about wars, mass refugee waves and famine, but he does not give any indications on how to end capitalism nor does he delve deeper into the connection between capitalism and climate change. *EisTau* on the other hand, reflects on the interconnection between art and politics by navigating through the possibilities of political engagement prompted by the actions of the main character (Gerstenberger, 2019).

Trojanow's attempts to elicit action and behavioural changes in readers are indicative of his quest to use fiction to explore the deeper connection between anthropogenic climate change and consumerism. He reflects on the low number of literary works set in the Antarctic, and observes how a possible explanation could lie within the fact that humans are mainly inclined to write about places they have populated and conquered. Therefore, a place like the Antarctic, that formerly does not belong to any country, is not chosen as the preferred setting for a work of fiction (Trojanow, 2010). This observation serves as a starting point for the critical interest represented by the novel *EisTau*, since the author argues the importance of creating a literary piece of work, that focuses on one character, an outsider, who with his life and his anger has attempted to fight against the destructive power of modern capitalism (Ibid). The scope of *EisTau* is to encourage the reader to identify and possibly embrace the main character's radical passion to safeguard nature. The message conveyed is the urge to recognise humankind's destructive power, enabled by society's inability to truly cherish nature, for it is blinded by the constant drive for economic growth and consumerism. The inclusion of historical facts and scientific truth is Trojanow's way of bringing fact and fiction into dialogue. He exposes the social assumptions and the cultural beliefs of climate change of our modern time. The insights into the effects of climate change are rendered through the depiction of the selfishness of the human characters in the novel, who believe that participating in an art installation will suffice to raise awareness on the environmental crisis. Nonetheless, what seems to be far from the passengers' concern is that their desire to cruise on a luxury ship in the Antarctic is amongst the main causes of the crisis. In describing the Chilean Eduardo Frei station in the Antarctic, Zeno is struck by the passenger's delight in discovering that the base resembles a 'normal village' with 'bank, post office, store, school and hospital', hence depriving the station of its real purpose: scientific research. The critique forwarded by Zeno highlights how humanity is on a constant strive for emblems that recall consumerism and human presence, but are prone to ignore that the 'true legacy of the human race [is]: rusty garbage' (Trojanow, 2016: 105).

The paranoia felt by the main character makes the issue of global warming far more urgent and pressing, since it questions the current knowledge on climate change, on capitalism and on the role of fiction in communicating scientific knowledge. The author demonstrates the importance of including details and personal knowledge of the described scenarios or, like in this case, of the effects of global warming, since it aids the reader in comprehending his poetic choices, as well as the distinction between fact and fiction.

Trojanow openly states in his essay *Requiem for the Future* that the message he intends to articulate with the novel *EisTau* is: if the Antarctic is destroyed, then humanity will be destroyed, too (**Ibid**). The truthfulness of the images depicted, such as the research stations, the effects of climate change and the melting of glaciers enable public agency, the rethinking of the environmental crisis and its connection to capitalism and to the constant accumulation of goods.

The Critique of Modern Society in *EisTau*

Zeno is a controversial and very ambivalent character: by no means a role model for the reader to follow, he constantly shifts from pro-environmental to arrogant, self-centred behaviours that make him an outsider. He is 'a prophet crying in the wilderness' (**Goodbody, 2013: 97**), implying that his words are wasted, for nobody is willing to listen. The biblical reference employed by the critic Axel Goodbody undermines the communicative strength possessed by Zeno, for the pessimism he feels enhances the urgency of acknowledging the effects of climate change. Zeno's helplessness and anxiety towards the unknown effects of climate change, challenge the reader to reconsider cultural beliefs and critically review the political and economic aspects of said phenomenon. Mr Iceberger (**Trojanow, 2016: 7**) as Zeno is nicknamed by fellow co-workers on the cruise ship, where he will spend his last days before deciding to take his own life, has a strong awareness of the consequences of climate change. He is however unable to positively articulate them, since 'he constantly offends others with his high-ground moral attitudes' (**Dürbeck, 2017b: 335**).

Zeno decides to abandon his university career after undergoing a profound life crisis triggered by the end of his marriage to Helene and a cardiac problem which forces him to undergo a bypass operation. However, the most important reason for his decline in mental health and desire to drastically change his life is represented by the melting of the alpine glacier to which he had built a paradoxical relationship, since the glacier has taken on human like qualities in the eyes of Zeno. Trojanow, connects Zeno with the glacier on a deep emotional level and describes them as 'an elderly couple' (**Trojanow, 2016: 44**). The personification of the glacier dramatizes the relationship between human and nature and adds importance to the safeguarding of the environment. Zeno feels the pain of the dying glacier; he is helpless and in mourning, for he has lost a beloved part of his life, the glacier, and with it, the hope of avoiding environmental destruction as a glaciologist.

The inability to avoid the disappearance of the glacier encourages him to accept the job as tour guide on the MS Hansen, where he believes he will have the opportunity to lecture the tourists about the natural beauty and the importance of glaciers. Zeno considers glaciers as enormous archives, for they retain 'every volcanic eruption, every eclipse, every atomic weapon test, every shift in the concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide' (Trojanow, 2016: 30). In short, glaciers register natural and man-made modifications of the environment, they combine the natural with the artificial and need to be safeguarded for a chance of survival. Zeno is aware of the importance of glaciers for human civilization but is disillusioned by society's behaviour and lack of understanding.

The depiction of a scientist as the main character is used as a tool by the author to combine scientific knowledge with emotion. Zeno abandons his career as a scientist but withholds his knowledge and intends to use it to encourage other to build personal relationships to the environment and hence engage with the environmental crisis at the level of individuality. The new setting, the mixture of hope, anger and disillusionment make him an unappreciated character, seen by his colleagues as an irrational and rancorous person, whose unpredictable fits of anger are like avalanches that destroy what they encounter:

The lecturers all start to sigh - here he goes again [...]. They know from experience that whenever Mr Iceberg waxes apodictic things will end apocalyptic. (Trojanow, 2016: 7)

The passage demonstrates Zeno's inability to communicate his scientific knowledge, since he becomes too angry to clearly state that 'we [humans] destroy everything aligned with nature' (Ibid). Zeno is however considered a hypocrite, especially by a barman in the Patagonian town of Ushuaia, for, although he knows how much of an environmental hazard a luxury cruise ship would be for the natural and pristine Antarctic, he still earns his money by guiding the tours, becoming part of the destructive power he criticises. The barkeep considers Zeno's pontifications 'nothing but talk', his indignation nothing more than 'a fart', and reflects that knowledge that does not move to action is far worse than ignorance (Ibid: 9). The encounter with the barkeep is the turning point that shapes Zeno's future behaviour, for he realises that it is time to take action against humanity's destructive power. He is aware that humanity, including the younger generations 'won't rest until they've consumed polluted squandered destroyed everything' (Ibid: 80). The style used by Trojanow is sharp, dry and harsh. The author conveys the message of environmental destruction using a fast-paced rhythm obtained by the minimal use of punctuation or, in this case, the total absence of commas to reiterate the clarity and importance of the message conveyed. The target of his attack here is that

of a young generation, who unaware of the damage that the consumer-oriented society has already exerted on their surroundings, remain oblivious and carry on with the lifestyle they have been brought up with.

The profound disinterest shown by the passengers towards the melting of the glaciers is at the root of Zeno's disillusionment in the novel, so he decides to commit a final act of violence by hijacking the cruise ship. The hijack can be read as Zeno's attempt to avenge the destruction of the environment, for he feels that nature can regain its supremacy only by destroying human life. Zeno's decision, however, reveals a paradoxical contradiction, since the hijack happens when the tourists and the crew members descend on the ice to stage a fake SOS, with the aim of raising awareness on environmental decline and the importance of nature. This represents a *mise-en-scène* or, more precisely, 'a funfair, Oktoberfest in the southernmost latitudes' (*Ibid*: 153), that itself harms the nature it aims to preserve, demonstrating the incapability of comprehending that it is human activities that lead to the ultimate devastation of nature. The choice of the words 'funfair' and 'Oktoberfest' showcase extreme spectacles of consumerist decadence and are employed by Trojanow to criticise the carbon footprint of the global population. The image of more than 300 people walking on the ice to create a fake SOS, recalls the connection between climate change and carbon emissions, for it alludes to the amount of carbon dioxide that the group releases in the atmosphere to reach the designated area, hence it alludes to the group's carbon footprint. Zeno's obsession with human footprints on the ice occurs once more within the novel, when the main character challenges a group of soldiers, who, whilst smoking amongst penguins, 'mar[ch] off', (*Ibid*: 107) leaving their footprints and cigarette stubs on the ice. Furthermore, the fake SOS is an art installation that, according to Zeno will not have any effect; on the contrary, it only serves to reiterate the scarce attention that human beings pay towards nature. He believes that art needs to be transformed, the SOS needs to be real if the act of protest is to be taken seriously. This is in stark contrast with Trojanow's personal beliefs, who during an interview with the newspaper *Der Standard* asserts:

I am always horrified when I am asked whether I consider literature to be an instrument of enlightenment. Yes, what else? The TV, for example? Literature must depict the present in the sense that it reflects and seeks to overcome the madness of one's own epoch. (Gmünder, 2011)

Trojanow stresses the importance of literature in provoking change and action, thus underlining how he uses his works to contribute to public discourse around political and social issues in an attempt to raise public awareness. Although Zeno possesses great scientific knowledge on

glaciers and their endless importance, he reaches a total emotional breakdown when he realises his inability to stimulate protest. The decision to hijack the ship before jumping to his own death is a consequence of Zeno's total dismay and an attempt to make a political statement which will fail miserably, since the reasons that pushed Zeno to the violent act are undermined and completely ignored during the rescue of the passengers. The reason behind Zeno's action and its importance get lost in the midst of slogans and apparently senseless information that are included in the 12 chapters introduced by Arabic numerals. The peculiarity of these chapters lies in the fact that the ironic slogan-like sentences employed to reflect on tourism, sex and prostitution reproduce 'mass media's short attention span and the lack of profound analysis' (**Gerstenberger: 55**) behind the produced commentaries. If on the one hand they highlight the importance of communication, they also highlight the power possessed by mass media to undermine important information. The despair that drove Zeno to his act of self-destruction, because he felt sorry to be human under these circumstances loses its meaning when the stranded passengers are being rescued without a mention to Zeno's wish of preserving the Antarctic ice and the helplessness he felt towards the pressing issue of global warming. Zeno's suicide is 'a provocative challenge to the readers' (**Goodbody, 2013: 100**) that raises concerns about a successful intervention and adaptability to climate change. Explanations for Trojanow's choice of characterization which avoids emotional involvement between the reader and Zeno, can be found in the final pages of the novel, in which the author observes how human beings need to be shaken, frightened or pushed from their podium in order to be saved:

[...] I realize that we have to topple humans off their pedestal in order to save them [...]. Only big blows are capable of jolting mankind. (Trojanow, 2016: 157)

The description of a man who decides to take extreme measures, such as hijacking a ship and committing suicide because he finds it unbearable to be human in a parasitic system in which humanity only causes catastrophes (**Ibid: 145**), can be read as a wake-up call. Trojanow attempts to raise awareness on the most pressing issue of our time and stresses the importance of literature in the process. He voices his disbelief and discouragement through Zeno's voice, who observes how the power of changing the world is only assigned to canonical literature:

The classics are allowed to shine light into the darkness and fashion words worthy of chiselling into stone facades. Living authors, on the other hand [...] are expected to have more modest aims, to motivate here or agitate there, but under no circumstances should they propose to change the world. (Trojanow, 2016: 138)

Adapting to climate change and moreover understanding the causes and the gravity of the environmental catastrophe is not straightforward and easy; the world population needs to understand that '[B]usiness as usual is no longer an option' (Areeba Hamid quoted in Queally, 2019). According to the scientific research assessed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the world will undergo drastic modifications in the next few decades, if the global temperature increase is not kept below 1.5 °C. If 'business as usual' is the chosen option, then it needs to be taken into account that the survival rate, in many underdeveloped countries will radically decrease. Trojanow strongly criticises our capitalist society and as mentioned earlier, he believes that it is our duty to put an end to it. He highlights how modern society is reluctant to change, the tourists depicted in his novel are prone to take action for the safeguarding of the environment, but only in the form of an artistic installation. Before the SOS action, one entrepreneur argues: 'If I'm being called on to do something for the environment then count me in' (Trojanow, 2016: 116). It is important to note that the entrepreneur is willing to participate in the artistic demonstration, but not in a real protest, and only when 'called on' (*Ibid*) which implies that he, like the others, will not abstain from their destructive comfortable lifestyles once they return home. The importance to safeguard nature is undermined by the staged action and by the fact that the tourists are able to purchase souvenir photos recalling the performance at discounted rates (*Ibid*: 116-117). The protest activities are hence inextricable from consumerism. The implication that economic growth occupies a greater importance in today's society is thus clearly exposed and strengthened by the evident reluctance of characters in the text to change or to take action, that argue the inability to learn from history. Trojanow creates links between the present and the past to expose the relevance of comprehending history in order to avoid future disasters. The novel *EisTau*, especially for the choice of a main character, who is constructed as a non-hero, attempts to expose the links between the past, the present and the future, and between consumerism and environmental destruction that possibly aid readers in acquiring a greater understanding of the current environmental crisis and the consequences of consumerism.

A series of historical events included in *EisTau* showcase the human destructive power of the natural environment and are employed to inform about the present and predict possible future scenarios. The comparison that is thus enabled is between past patterns and present and future patterns, that could encourage reflections on the slow occurring dramatic consequences of climate change. The infamous historical events depicted can be read as the author's attempt to showcase past mistakes that can be prevented from occurring in the future. The passages have been woven

into the plot as discussions between the characters or in the form of short lectures:

The extermination of the Yahgan people who saw their territories being disrupted in the late 19th century by people attracted by the gold rush. The Falkland wars fought between Argentina and Great Britain over the control of the Falkland Islands. The attempt carried out by the Nazis in 1939 to claim parts of the Antarctic by dropping swastikas on to the ice from airplanes, and finally the paradox that one of the few “places in the world where nature reigns supreme”, the Falklands, has beaches that are covered in anti-personnel mines. There are also references to the killing of whales, seals and penguins to obtain fuel and to the volcanic eruptions on Deception Island, that in the late 1960s freed the island from human settlement. The island, which once held a whaling station, is an abandoned reminder of what Zeno argues to be:[...] a vibrant symbol of progress: destroying the essential to create the superfluous. (Trojanow, 2016: 7, 39-40, 43, 75, 124, 129)

The destruction of the necessary to produce the unnecessary is the main idea on which Trojanow bases his critique of capitalism. The historical episodes are linked to the current consumerist culture and refer to the tendency towards accumulation and superfluity brought about by modern capitalism (Trojanow, 2016: 65-66). Within the novel, there is also a mention of the Antarctic Treaty System, which aims to maintain the continent free of permanent human settlements and military activity, with the exception of temporary settlements for scientific research purposes. During a conversation between Zeno and Mary, the two contemplate the possibility and consequences should the treaty be invalidated and Zeno describes a scenario in which lobbyists would argue for the necessity of drilling for oil in the Antarctic and sacrificing the penguins, for humans cannot endure the shortage of raw materials only to safeguard expendable animals (Ibid: 93). Whilst questioning the strength of the treaty, Mary suggests that should it come to the point in which the luxurious lifestyles of the rich and powerful are endangered, a great number of people would have to willingly fight against the abuse of power carried out by lobbyists, to avoid the destruction of the Antarctic (Ibid). The scepticism that appears on Zeno's face regarding the possibility of joining in a fight against the powerful, opens scope for discussions on feelings of guilt and shame. Zeno is aware that his position on the cruise ship is questionable and that he is contributing to the destruction of the Antarctic, hence he is silently admitting that he is unable to fight against the strength of the powerful. The position of tour guide on a luxury ship in the Antarctic encourages the form of tourism that is jeopardizing the safeguarding of the Eternal Ice, but Zeno puts his personal need of sojourning in the ice first, which promotes

deeper reflection on personal responsibilities within the discourse of the environmental crisis.

Modern society is aware of the consequences that climate change will have on our future generations, but what is at stake is whether the awareness that humanity is responsible for climate change, suffices to make our generation, and our leading parties, change our attitudes and search for solutions that could enable change. Human beings should be encouraged to contemplate the kind of lifestyle they intend to adopt and the role they would like to occupy within society, in order to envision ideas, concepts and possibilities that deviate from the standard *modus operandi*, for problems cannot be solved with the same mental disposition that has led to them in the first place (Welzer, 2008: 266-267). Zeno too is aware that humans need to embrace change and set the desire for possessions aside. During a conversation with Paulina, she wrongly compares Zeno to the great explorers of the past, for she believes that Zeno wishes to decide the fate of the Antarctic like the explorers of the past (Trojanow, 2016: 61). This episode provides a crucial insight into Zeno's feelings of pain and desperation and delivers a plausible explanation for Zeno's ultimate act of violence, the hijack:

If you mean I don't want any people or fuel in the Antarctic, then you're right, I do want to determine what happens here. But I don't want to possess the place, that's the difference, I don't want to have any part of it named after me, I just want it to be left in peace. (Trojanow, 2016: 61)

The vigour used to explain Zeno's desire and voice his thoughts mirrors the urgency of the message Trojanow is trying to transmit through his main character: the necessity for humans to stay away from the Antarctic in order to avoid the destruction of the largest and last unspoiled wildness of our world.

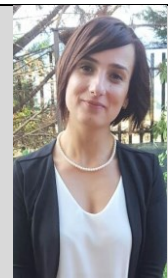
I read *EisTau* as a successful example of engaging in public discourses on climate change, whilst encouraging deeper reflections that combine political, societal and economic aspects of the environmental crisis. Trojanow intervenes in public discourses on climate change to motivate the reader into taking actions that widen the sense of responsibility and care for the environment. The author does not lecture the reader, nor chases them down a guilt trip by creating apocalyptic end-of-the-world scenarios, but by conveying emotions and exposing the long reaching negative effects that consumerism has on the environment. The urgency to take action against climate change is voiced through Zeno, who, torn between the guilt of working on a cruise ship and thus being an accomplice in the destruction of the 'last Terra Nullius' (Trojanow, 2010), believes that the only way to avenge nature is through acts of violence. However, since

the hijack committed by Zeno ultimately has no tragic effects, and the reasons behind it are silenced by mass media, *EisTau* represents a challenge to the reader, who is encouraged to find alternative lifestyles that combine political, social and cultural modifications able to reshape the relationship that humanity has to nature. The reader is encouraged to reflect on the destruction of the environment whilst being transported on a mental journey that reaches earth's southernmost continent, thus interrogating the globality of climate change and the human-nature interconnectedness.

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