

# Literary Representations of Non-Human World in Mate Dolenc's *Pes z Atlantide* (The Dog from Atlantis) and Bernhard Kellermann's *Das Meer* (The Sea): Two European Insular Cultures from an Ecocritical Perspective

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TANJA BADALIČ

*University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia*

The paper first shortly presents ecocriticism as a discipline studying the relationship between literature and the physical environment, as well as its practice, which encourages a more ethical interaction with the world. The main focus is set on the ecocritical view on Mate Dolenc's *Pes z Atlantide* and Bernhard Kellermann's *Das Meer* in order to find out how the non-human world is represented in both novels. Through representations of human relationship to the physical environment and the non-human animals the cultural identity of two European insular communities – those of Biševo and Ushant – is reflected. The ecocritical perspective on the novels thus offers a possibility of rethinking the material and cultural bases of European society and stimulates in the reader a more biocentric consciousness of the world.

*Key words:* ecocriticism, anthropocentrism, biocentrism, physical environment, European insular cultures



## INTRODUCTION

Mate Dolenc (1945), a contemporary Slovenian author, puts the sea in the centre of many of his latest literary works, particularly novels: “/W/ith his symbol of the sea, counterpoised to the world, he describes a vitalistic and ‘neo-pantheistic’ attitude that he developed into an adoration of the sea” (Zupan Sosič 2001, 45). The novel *Pes z Atlantide* (1993, *The Dog from Atlantis*) is undoubtedly one of them. The setting of the novel is a small Croatian island in the Adriatic Sea – Biševo,<sup>1</sup> where the first-person narrator spends his holidays and recalls fragmentary memories of the past mingled with the present.<sup>2</sup> In his work, Dolenc refers several times to the novel *Das Meer* (1910, *The Sea*) of the German author Bernhard Kellermann (1897–1951), which takes place on the Breton island of Ushant (Ouessant) in the Celtic Sea in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup>

Several parallels can be drawn between both works. First of all, in both novels the modest and traditional life of local people who are strongly connected to the natural environment, the sea in particular, is presented through the eyes of a first-person narrator, who comes from the Continental Europe.<sup>4</sup> By this means, the particularities of two different cultures – the Mediterranean and the Breton – are gradually revealed to the reader particularly by the representations of the non-human world. The relationship between humans and the natural environment is thus reflected in two different cultures within two different spaces and times. In both novels it seems that the non-human world (the non-human beings as well as other

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1 The island is situated in the middle of the Dalmatian archipelago, next to the island of Vis. The author does not explicitly mention the name of the island in the text, in which he refers only to its villages and to its natural attractions. However, at the beginning he dedicates the book to Biševo.

2 The novel ends with the beginning of the war in 1991.

3 Similarly to Dolenc, Kellermann never explicitly mentions the name of the island of Ushant, where he lived for several months in 1907.

4 In Dolenc’s novel the narrator comes from Slovenia, in Kellermann’s novel the narrator’s place of origin is not specified.



non-living entities of the physical environment, such as wind and sea) is represented as inspirited and voluble, as if intercommunicating with humans, who constitute its integral part.

Both works thus thematise the broad relationship between humans and the non-human world, while implicitly posing environmental and ethical questions, which makes them interesting for an analysis and comparison from an ecocritical perspective. The paper thus first shortly presents ecocriticism as a discipline studying the relationship between literature and the physical environment, as well as its practice, which encourages a more ethical interaction with the world. The main focus is set on the ecocritical view on Dolenc's *Pes z Atlantide* and Kellermann's *Das Meer* in order to find out how the non-human world is represented in both novels. Special stress is laid on the physical environment and the non-human animal, the dog in particular. Through representations of human relationship to the physical environment and the non-human animals the cultural identity of two European insular communities – those of Biševo and Ushant with Mediterranean and Breton peculiarities respectively – is reflected.

## ECOCRITICISM AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL FUNCTION OF LITERATURE

Ecocriticism represents “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment”, which takes “an earth-centered approach to literary studies” (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996, xviii). Ecocriticism's subject is thus the interconnection between nature and culture. This discipline was first limited to the study of representations of nature, to ecological themes and genres about nature, but later its thematic area broadened to include various theoretical questions, such as the criticism of anthropocentrism, relations between culture and nature, as well as man and the environment, thus contributing “significantly to the realization that man is defined not only by social relations, but to the same extent by natural environment” (Čeh Steger 2012, 199–212). The ecological turn has brought the awareness of the natural world into literary studies, “reorienting the



humanities toward a more biocentric<sup>5</sup> worldview” (Oppermann 2011, 230). Literature and its study can in some way help restore our connection to the Earth, since literature “generates knowledge” (ibid.). The basic premise of ecological criticism is that “human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and being affected by it” (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996, xix). The role of ecocriticism as a discipline in the humanities is thus to help understand the consequences of human actions for the planet.

In his article ‘Nature and Silence’ Christopher Manes presents an aspect of our society’s relationship with the non-human world, which emerged from the studies of animistic cultures: namely, in Western culture – in literate societies generally – nature is silent. Unlike Western culture, animistic cultures see the natural world as inspirited: for them, beside people, also animals, plants, and inert entities, such as stones, rivers and wind are perceived as being articulate and able to communicate and interact with humans (Manes 1996). In Manes’ opinion, “to regard nature as alive and articulate has consequences in the realm of social practices” (Manes 1996, 15). Moreover, because of this apparent silence that surrounds the human subjectivity an ethic of exploitation of nature has emerged, producing “the ecological crisis that now requires a search for an environmental counter-ethics” (Manes 1996, 16).

In the history of Western representations of nature, Manes (1996, 17) continues, “nature has grown silent in our discourse, shifting from an animistic to a symbolic presence, from a voluble object to a mute object”: the discourse – the reason – attributed to nature the role of silence and instrumentality. The faith in reason, intellect and progress has created “an immense realm of silences, a world of ‘not saids’ called nature, obscured in global claims of eternal truths about human difference, rationality and transcendence” (ibid.). In Manes’ opinion, we need

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5 Biocentrism, unlike anthropocentrism, affirms “the intrinsic value of all natural life and displac[e] the current preference of even the most trivial human demands over the needs of other species or integrity of place” (Clark 2014, 2).



a new language, free from directionalities of humanism – a language of ecological humility that comes from deep ecology (ibid.). He also argues that “attending to ecological knowledge means metaphorically relearning ‘the language of birds’ – the passions, pains, and cryptic intents of the other biological communities that surround us and silently interpenetrate our existence” (Manes 1996, 25).

Scott Slovic, on the other hand, stresses the importance of the psychological phenomenon of “awareness” or “attentiveness” of nature writers. Slovic equates the attentiveness to our place in the natural world with the attentiveness to our very existence. According to him, nature writers study the phenomenon of environmental consciousness and attempt to stimulate this heightened awareness among their readers (Slovic 1996, 355). Yet, he warns: “To write about a problem is not necessarily to produce a solution, but the kindling of consciousness – one’s own and one’s reader’s – is a first step, an essential first step” (Slovic 1996, 364). Slovic, however, concludes that a sense of that awareness is a “condition, which helps us to act responsibly and respectfully” (Slovic 1996, 368).

In sum, such concern for becoming open to the non-human environment and ideas of relearning in order to re-establish our relationship, or rather communication with nature, are also present in Mate Dolenc’s and Bernhard Kellermann’s novels. This can be perceived on several levels, such as the representations of non-human animals and other phenomena of the physical world, as well as the relationship between humans and their physical environment.

## REPRESENTATIONS OF NON-HUMAN WORLD IN MATE DOLENC’S *PES Z ATLANTIDE* AND BERNHARD KELLERMANN’S *DAS MEER*

### THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

While discussing the non-human world the physical environment, place in particular, has to be considered. Place in effect plays a pivotal role in understanding the self. For instance,



Neil Evernden (1996, 101–3) maintains that discoveries in biology change our sense of self, teaching us that “the establishment of self is impossible without the context of place” and that “there is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in-context, individual as a component of place, defined by place.” Similarly, the environmentalist Paul Shepard (1977, 32) argues “knowing who you are is impossible without knowing where you are.” Correspondingly, Cheryll Glotfelty states “literature, via metaphor, should help us to feel the relatedness of self with place” (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996, xxviii). Through the concept of place authors in their literary works can thus express the sense of self of the characters, as well as their dependence and interconnectedness with the environment. Accordingly, literature can subversively draw attention to ecological and ethical problems which are present in the culture of a place. Nonetheless, place can also be tied to the idea of humans as Earth-keepers rather than Earth-exploiters, which is still present in several indigenous societies around the world. For instance, the example of certain African traditional indigenous societies demonstrates that “Earth keeping” provides us with a model for preserving the earth while also being a form of critique of those local and global practices, such as capitalism and consumerism, which have contributed to the degradation of the environment (Holm et al. 2015, 988). Inert entities, such as wind, water and rocks, will also be discussed in this part.

Dolenc’s novel is imbued in the basic ambivalence between land and sea, real world and Atlantis: the narrator, in fact, runs away from a civilisation charged with time and materialism to a genuine and natural life at the seaside (Resinovič 1995). The sea and the barely inhabited island, which are reminiscent of the allegorical Atlantis, are represented as a remedy for the civilizational fallacy (ibid.). Dolenc, as a keen spearfisherman, devotes several passages to the underwater world and life in it, particularly when talking about spearfishing. For instance, during spearfishing the narrator meditates on how little people know about “the other world”, which “stands on its head, in the opposite way of the world on which we stand” (Dolenc



1993, 11).<sup>6</sup> According to him, the sea is everything: “The sea is everywhere, in us and around us. Sometimes we just do not see it, sometimes we just do not feel it, let alone smell it, but this does not mean that it is not there” (Dolenc 1993, 7). The island of Biševo, which is covered in woods and Mediterranean flora, is compared to the rocky, infertile island of Kellermann’s novel where “there was neither tree nor shrub” (ibid.). Unlike Kellermann’s roaring sea, Dolenc’s sea is the “warm and nice sea of the Mediterranean” (Dolenc 1993, 8). Dolenc’s narrator, however, seems to perceive the sea and the island as an inspirited entity, a complete “FORMA VIVA” (ibid.). He considers himself an “insuloman”<sup>7</sup> – a descendant of Atlantis who longs for the lost island, therefore creating a new one – Biševo – where he would be accepted. Namely, the island and its sea accept only “insulomen” while expectorating others “who are happy going back to their concrete, asphalt, plastic, and gasses” (Dolenc 1993, 30). The “insulomen” who persist on the island, on the contrary, learn to feel the unimaginable: they, for instance, can hear the grass growing, the fish swimming, and the sea breathing. The non-human world even communicates with them: “It’s only sea-gulls... or perhaps the combination of all voices and their echoes, the assembly of rocks, waves, winds and animals, which all together call out my name” (Dolenc 1993, 63). Furthermore, the physical environment of the island makes them reflect about their true identity: “Where do I come from? Why? And where am I going to?” (Dolenc 1993, 78).

Throughout Dolenc’s novel the sea is represented as timeless and as an eternal substance, however, it seems that newcomers from the continent do not understand it, since they cannot feel the sea, the land and their non-human inhabitants anymore: they only bring death (spearfishing), pollution (the discarded accumulator in the sea), and destruction (war). Still, it is precisely the sea, which exerts the greatest influence on a genuine “insuloman”, such as the narrator: when underwater, he hears

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6 The fragments from both novels were translated into English by the author of this paper.

7 The same word is used in Slovene.



it ceaselessly calling his name. It seems, however, that he is not able to respond to its call: he does not let it absorb him completely, because he still belongs to the civilised, external world. The relationship between humans and their natural environment therefore remains only superficial, since humans have lost their sense of nature. Only the modest local people, represented almost as Earth-keepers, persevere on the island, despite all: “Thus in a circle, as usual” (Dolenc 1993, 109). However, they are also, almost imperceptibly, becoming affected by the external world in the guise of tourism.

The interconnection between the physical environment and all living entities, the fluidity of identity and the transforming of one entity into another is also omnipresent in Dolenc’s novel. For instance, the reason for the good quality of the insular wine is the excellent position of the vineyards. Namely, the vines grow on the ground where soldiers from World War II were buried. The juice of grapes is thus literally created from a universal energy which decants from one entity to another: from human flesh and blood to the soil, finally returning back to humans through wine. Or, as the narrator states by rephrasing Christ’s words: “The fish are my flesh and wine is my blood” (Dolenc 1993, 62). Following this idea of fluidity other reflections of the narrator become clear: “To me it has always seemed that the sea turns up if you set fire to a mirror” (Dolenc 1993, 16).

In Kellermann’s novel the idea of fluidity and interconnection is visible, for instance, in the conception of breathing: “And what else is human breathing, I am asking myself, if not the breathing of the sea, from which we stem?” (Kellermann 1975, 112).<sup>8</sup> However, the sea in Kellermann’s case is represented as dark and dangerous. Local people respect it while at the same time being attracted to its unknown essence. On the example of an old local man – Jean Louis, also called “the king of the sea”, – the strong connection of local people with the sea is presented: “The king of the sea moved in this desert of

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8 The quotation is also to be found at the beginning of Dolenc’s novel.



water as safely as in his own home. He knew its every span and he did not have to be alert” (Kellermann 1975, 63). The narrator, on the contrary, likes to venture out to sea, but seems to be too audacious even for local people. The reason for his coming to the austere island is blurred: he alludes that he lives there in order to “listen to the sea and to fish” (Kellermann 1975, 72–3), but it seems that for him the island represents a sort of escapism. His communicating with animals and other inert entities, such as waves, sand and the wind, is stressed several times. Similarly to Dolenc’s narrator, Kellermann’s narrator hears the call of the sea: “The sea was calling me. I was gazing at it and it was inviting me with thousands of hands” (Kellermann 1975, 146). But, unlike Dolenc’s Mediterranean Sea, the Celtic Sea seems to warn the narrator to leave the island, which does not accept him.

The environmental pollution in Kellermann’s novel is outlined only through the black smoke of the steamers.<sup>9</sup> Riding aboard one of them, on his way back to the continent, the narrator perceives the “European face” with all its commodities: “From the periphery of civilization I jumped directly into its boiling centre” (Kellermann 1975, 191). Unlike the island, Europe in the narrator’s eyes represents the world “with a saint’s aureole and murderer’s hands” (Kellermann 1975, 76), which is “starting to stink” (Kellermann 1975, 77).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, approaching the continent and listening to the engines of the “big steely heart of Europe” he realizes that he does not belong to the island anymore: “The waves, the wind, the broad sea – I am not theirs anymore” (Kellermann 1975, 192). However, during one last listening to the outer world it seems that the narrator seizes the call of nature and understands what it has been trying to communicate to him.

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9 It must be noted that pollution in the 1900s, when the novel was published, was not as big a concern as it is nowadays.

10 The statement could also be understood as an announcement of the World War I.



## THE NON-HUMAN ANIMAL

Timothy Clark states that in the question of the animal, ecocriticism finds perhaps its most striking ethical challenge (Clark 2014). Animals in our everyday life are exploited for food, materials, experiments, work, entertainment etc. Humans in their anthropocentrism want to dominate and take advantage of every living being which seems to be valuable exclusively according to the point of view of humans. Writing about animals poses a particular challenge, since an animal ethics often concerns “the animal as an individual existence, more in a way in which a person is considered,” while also bringing with it the question of anthropomorphism: “How to represent animal lives in human language and culture without illusion or injustice?” (Clark 2014, 179). Moreover, representations of non-human animals in literature can be considered as a strong criticism of anthropocentrism. Namely, the resemblance of animals to humans on the one hand and their otherness on the other were probably the reasons of their representations in art, painting and literature; animals are therefore a sort of a known stranger, and for this very reason it is worth considering how well do we know them through literary and literary critical discourse (Kernev Štrajn 2007).

In Dolenc’s and Kellermann’s works animals are represented in different ways, above all as companions, food, a source of earnings, a working force, sport (spearfishing) and as a part of the natural environment. Both Dolenc and Kellermann lay great stress on sea animals, since the life of local people mostly depends upon them. However, the human manner of treating animals varies in both works. The narrator in Dolenc’s novel, for instance, describes the vivid underwater life in detail and wonders about the life of the fish. He reflects on the purpose of an animal and its intrinsic value: “/the conger meandered/ to an exact destination as if it knew exactly where it was going. As you sometimes see a dog in the street, which is going somewhere, and you ask yourself, where is it going so determinedly and without hindrance? And you certainly know that the dog knows. Thus, the conger also knew” (Dolenc 1993, 14). In doing so, the author tries to go beyond his anthropocentrism and attempts to show another perspective (the



perspective of another entity), which does not take the human as centre or norm. This shift in perspective clearly suggests an insight into a more biocentric consciousness of the world.

The description of the underwater life in Dolenc's novel is not embellished. However, the narrator argues that two fish struggling with each other are not enemies: they just perceive each other as food and fight without hatred. He states that in the sea there are countless battles, however, there is no hatred. This shows the author's attempt to de-anthropomorphise the fish, which are, unlike humans, killing each other just in order to survive. Yet the statement is still made from a human perspective and is hence anthropocentric in a weak sense.

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Nevertheless, in Dolenc's work there are also clear representations of anthropomorphised underwater world. The narrator, for instance, describes it as a sort of an underwater kingdom with its castles and towers, in which fish are sunbathing, he discusses the intelligence of fish and even depicts a fish disapproving the human behaviour on the surface. The perspective is also inverted, in a scene of spearfishing when the fish feel through the vibrations of the sea that something is going on in their "homes" (Dolenc 1993, 35), and in an encounter with dolphins, which stare upon "the unfortunate mammals who had to leave the sea" (Dolenc 1993, 69). The reader is thus confronted with a non-human perspective, but nevertheless one needs to recognize that this still represents an anthropomorphic perspective.

Furthermore, Dolenc highly stresses the relationship between humans and the sea animals. Several times the reader bears witness to the gaze between a human and a fish. With regard to the gaze between a human and an animal Jelka Kernev Štrajn argues that the animal and the human gaze at each other over a "gulf of incomprehension": when the human realizes that the animal observes him just as he observes everything around himself, then he can perceive the gaze of the animal as something familiar: the animal is thus not only different, but also familiar (Kernev Štrajn 2007, 46).<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Dolenc also

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11 The importance of the gaze between a human and an animal is stressed several times in both novels.



includes multiples gazes in his work. For instance, the narrator turns his gaze from the dead fish's eyes to the vivid eyes of a woman, who is waiting for the hunter to come back with his prey. The shifting of gazes from human to animal, animal to human and, finally, human to human indicates the communication between different beings: it blurs the identity of an individual entity for the sake of all entities, thus demonstrating their interrelation. Moreover, killing and preparing of fish for eating are represented as a ritual of veneration. Yet, during spearfishing the narrator at some point disapproves of killing the fish, since he is not hungry. Besides, the recurrent motif of apologizing to a fish for killing it and the motif of killing only from need resemble, for instance, to the philosophy of the indigenous peoples of America who teach that humans should respect animals and kill them when there is a real need, and that after killing an animal, they should show respect and ask for pardon. In Dolenc's work the idea of humans as Earth-keepers can be thus clearly perceived.

Fishing plays an important role in both stories. Timothy Clark argues that "to go fishing is to open a temporary utopian space that is at once a form of escapism from daily society and its implicit if limited critique" (Clark 2014, 90). It seems that Clark's statement holds true for both novels. For instance, besides the narrator's venerated relation to fishing in Dolenc's novel, the attitudes to fishing of a local man Nikola and that of a Slovenian young tourist Štefan are also exposed. Nikola fishes only small fish and he refuses the help of other people that could increase his catch. Unlike Nikola, Štefan wants to catch only big fishes: "He did not catch any fish, he left the small ones be, he wanted the bigger ones" (Dolenc 1993, 76). For Štefan spearfishing is a way to confirm his own power and virility, while Nikola represents a modest local individual, who only takes from his natural environment as much as he needs in order to survive. The narrator, however, reflects on the abundance and its paradoxical consequences, while Štefan spearfishes in vain among plenty of evasive fishes: "Perhaps plenitude results in nothing" (ibid.). The reflection seems to include a strong criticism of modern society.



On the contrary, in Kellermann's novel fishing appears to be much rougher. Fish and other sea animals are treated as objects: they are considered as food or as a means of earning money. For instance, the narrator describes a fish struggling to escape from his angle, looking at him with anger: "It was looking at me with wide-opened, angry eyes, shaking of pain and fear, and swinging its tail. I grabbed it, I pulled out the angle, and then I hurled it in the middle of the boat" (Kellermann 1975, 60). In this scene the gaze between the animal and the human is explicitly hostile. A furious fish's gaze also occurs in another passage: "It was goggling at me all furious when I pulled it out from the water, but now it is lying here and the scales are falling off in every direction" (Kellermann 1975, 140). Unlike in Dolenc's novel, Kellermann's narrator does not feel any regret or even gratitude toward the fish. He is impassive to the fish's agony and treats it as a mere object. Moreover, the local fisherman Jean Louis is even more insensible and cruel. For example, he pulls the crabs' claws off yelling at them because they are defending themselves, or when the fish are struggling in agony he kicks them in order to make them quiet. Jean Louis, unlike Dolenc's Nikola, catches only big fish. Moreover, when a small fish swallowed the bait he angrily "crushed it inside the boat, so that the little fish yawned and instantly remained lying without moving" (Kellermann 1975, 63). Other passages on fishing include human cruelty towards the sea animals, such as pulling off crabs' claws when they try to resist, cutting lobsters' sinews, and grilling living crabs.

Other wild animals in Dolenc's work, such as birds, lizards, feral horses and mules, are mentioned to a smaller degree. However, the narrator shortly discusses about the endangered Mediterranean monk seal and tells the story of the last seal which was captured on the island: tied to a stake by local people, the animal tried to free itself but it broke its neck (Dolenc 1993, 81). The narrator, however, seems to write about this in a very unconcerned way.

In Kellermann's novel other animals are mentioned as well. Domesticated animals, such as horses, pigs, sheep, and wethers, are mostly represented as working force, food or a source of money. For instance, the sheep of the young local girl Rosseherre are



depicted as prodigious animals through the eyes of which “fear and respect were trickling” (Kellermann 1975, 49). The narrator stresses the sheep’s sense of smell as their sense of orientation in the world, thus trying to present them as unanthropomorphic as possible: “Sometimes they were sniffing with their meek, contented, camel-like snouts, fearfully withdrawing, since they were afraid of everything, the wind, the insects and even of the things that people do not see” (ibid.). However, the life of the domesticated animals on the island is depicted as arduous because of the barren land: “A hungry cow was standing near the path, deplorably mooing when we came closer. She was not bigger than a calf, a real dwarf cow. Actually, all the cows on the island are so small. Here, the animals do only what is indispensably necessary; the hens lay tiny, pigeon’s eggs” (Kellermann 1975, 45). Still, sometimes local people vent their frustrations on other beings or do them harm for the sake of pure entertainment. For instance, Yann, a local fisherman, shoots at animals just for fun, though in vain. Among wild animals, however, only birds are mentioned. For example, during the migration of birds the entire island makes a living out of those birds which hit the lighthouse and die. Furthermore, in Kellermann’s work, the communication between humans and animals and even among animals themselves is stressed. For instance, besides the narrator’s talking to his dog Poupoul, which will be presented further on, the narrator also talks to other animals. Even Poupoul itself communicates with other animals: “I heard them talking. When the parrot meaningfully broke into laughter, Poupoul replied with a furious yelping” (Kellermann 1975, 19).

## THE DOG

The dog plays, besides the sea, a pivotal role in both novels. In Dolenc’s case its importance is stressed already in the title. Moreover, in both novels the human relationship toward the dog, if compared to the relation toward other animals, indicates a strong speciesism. Nevertheless, the representations of dog differ. In Dolenc’s novel the dog comes to the island because its owner wants to get rid of it since it is old, and therefore

useless and inconvenient. The “dog from Atlantis” is depicted as a dog, which faithfully waits for its owner to come back, but passes almost unperceived by locals: “A dog silhouette, a dog apparition, a dog phantom, a dog guard” (Dolenc 1993, 6). The owner leaves the dog thinking that the animal will soon die of hunger, but the narrator reflects that the dog’s owner does not think much “neither about the nature of the dog nor about the nature of eternity” (Dolenc 1993, 13). In his reflection a strong criticism of anthropocentrism is present: humans exploit other animals as much as they can, but do not understand their true nature and value, and, above all, humans underestimate other beings. In fact, the dog despite all manages to survive. His ingenuity in finding food is described in detail: it takes his share from slops and from other animals: “It never chased away any animal, it took only what was offered and it never approached people” (Dolenc 1993, 87). Its modesty and adaptability to its environment keep it alive: it becomes a “fish dog” (Dolenc 1993, 100). The representation of the dog, however, tries to go beyond anthropomorphism. The narrator stresses several times that the dog’s world turns around its sense of smell. For instance, the dog lets Štefan approach it, because he smells of sea and not of humans, which confuses it. Yet, even though the smell of its owner disappears, the dog keeps coming back to the place where it has been abandoned. Another attempt toward a more biocentric approach in representing the animal is visible in the narrator’s reflection on the dog’s capacity of remembering: “How far back a dog’s memories can reach? As far as ours?” (Dolenc 1993, 87).

Moreover, by talking to the dog, the narrator realizes that they seem strange to each other while at the same time being connected: “We were far from the world, alone and strange to each other, but I wanted to be its friend, because I thought that it is an unusual dog and that something must have been binding us together” (Dolenc 1993, 41). This passage confirms Kernev Štrajn’s statement that the animal is a familiar stranger. At last, it seems that the dog symbolises a longing for everything that is lost and fugacious: on the narrator’s level his youth, and on a general level a possibility of a genuine life – it seems that the



almost unperceived slaughter of the dog at the end means the end of hope which it symbolises (Resinovič 1995). Dolenc's dog thus can be perceived as an alter-ego of the narrator and of all those who have lost something that is impossible to regain, including the genuine nature represented by Atlantis. On the other hand, it can also be seen as a symbol of ingenious yet modest and persistent living beings (nature itself), which live in impossible conditions by taking from their environment only as much as needed in order to survive but are destroyed by the artificiality of human progress.

By contrast, the dog Poupoul in Kellermann's work is well provided for by its owner – the narrator himself. Poupoul is described as a retired ship-dog, which has been on all the seas. The dog is the only loyal companion of the narrator's solitary life since his arrival to the island, which makes their bond even stronger. Their communication is continuously emphasized: the narrator talks to the dog while the latter replies through body language or barking. The narrator frequently deliberately anthropomorphises his companion, so that Poupoul appears as human, or rather as an ideal human companion who is ready to sacrifice its own life for that of its human fellow. In doing that, however, the narrator ends to become zoomorphised himself: "I was moving forward on all fours and since I was also barking, Poupoul thought that I was of its breed. /.../ I hugged and kissed it: 'Poupoul, sweetheart, now we are both dogs'" (Kellermann 1975, 36). Similarly as in Dolenc's work, Poupoul's sense of smell is emphasized as the sense which orientates a dog's life. Besides, Poupoul's instinct – the attentiveness to the natural environment, which most humans have lost due to their estrangement to the outer world – saves the narrator from being killed several times. However, at the end the animal – the dog as the most loyal companion of a man – is the target of a perverted revenge between humans. The symbolism of the dog's corpse, which the sea tirelessly brings back to the shore and to its human fellow, is powerful: "Strange! I tried in three, four places, but every time Poupoul was brought to me again" (Kellermann 1975, 182). It seems that nature itself rejects the death of such a pure being by giving it back to the land, but at last the dog is absorbed by the



sea to which it belongs. Through the loss of his animal fellow, the narrator realizes that he has never belonged to the island since the latter has never really accepted him, and leaves it.

## CONCLUSION

Mate Dolenc's *Pes z Atlantide* and Bernhard Kellermann's *Das Meer* thematise the relationship between humans and the non-human world. The ecocritical view on both novels unveils the cultural identity of two small European insular communities – a Mediterranean and a Breton –, which is projected through the representations of the non-human world. These representations can be perceived as a criticism of the illusory fixity of the conventionally human (anthropocentric) perspective, which is deep-rooted in different European cultures, and can thus contribute to the reflection of otherwise unimagined modes of perception. In addition, the reflections of both narrators throughout the stories and their insights into local insular cultures from non-local (Continental) standpoints pose ethical and ecological questions. Unlike local people, who are at least in Dolenc's novel mostly presented as Earth-keepers, i.e. people who are strongly connected to their natural environment, the narrators are challenged to uncover the call of nature in themselves and to develop their attentiveness to the natural environment in order to restore the silenced communication between them and nature.

Moreover, it seems that the relationship between local residents and the local non-human world directly results from particularities of the two represented worlds: the Mediterranean and the Breton. In fact, Dolenc's narrator stresses several times the positive influence of the mild Mediterranean climatic and geographical conditions on people; this probably also has a positive effect on their relationship to the natural environment and non-human beings, while the rough natural conditions on the Breton island of Kellermann's novel seem to be reflected in the brutal manners of locals towards the natural environment, animals in particular. Both novels thus offer a rethink of the material and cultural bases of European society, while at the same time also encouraging a more biocentric consciousness of the



world. A more attentive approach to the natural environment, as presented in the analysed novels, would enable Western cultures to hear the call of nature and feel their interconnectedness with it, which would undoubtedly lead to more responsible actions regarding the environment. Western culture should relearn to understand nature just like Kellermann's narrator does at the very end of the novel: "I listened. Out there, there was the wind, the sea, out there, there were the voices, and I understood them".

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