

# Writing Against Satiation: Uwe Timm in Latin America

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## I. General observations

Uwe Timm, one of the most creative authors of the present German literary landscape has written, as he put it to Paul Michael Lützeler, a “colonial trilogy”, namely *Morenga* (1978) about the German colonial past in Namibia, *Der Schlangenbaum* (1986) about a German development project in a Latin American country and *Kopffäger* (1991) about a fraudulent German broker who hides first in Spain, then in Brazil and is caught on Easter Island. In addition to *Morenga*, in 1981 Timm edited *Deutsche Kolonien*, photos from the former German colonies. And while he pursued his project to write *The Snake Tree*, he travelled through Paraguay, whereupon he wrote the essay “Reise nach Paraguay”, published in 1987.<sup>1</sup>

In order to explain the title of my contribution, let me start with a quotation by Timm himself who, after asking why the capitalistic societies are so resistant to social change, tries to define the function of literature: “Die Verhältnisse sind mit einer soliden Fettschicht der Zufriedenheit abgepolstert. Möglicherweise ist es aber auch Kummerspeck, den die Gesellschaft sich angefuttert hat, weil andere Wünsche verdrängt werden. Wäre das nicht die Aufgabe von Literatur, die sich politisch versteht, das kollektiv Verdrängte ins Bewußtsein zu heben und die geheimen Wünsche zu erforschen, indem sie die Bedürfnisse zur Sprache bringt, die Alltagsgewohnheiten mit dem Blick des Ethnologen studiert?”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Uwe TIMM, *Morenga*. München, Autoren-Edition, 1978. Taschenbuchausgabe. Köln, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1985; *Der Schlangenbaum*. Köln, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1986, quoted as SB; “Reise nach Paraguay”, in Armin Kerker (Hrsg.), *Im Schatten der Paläste*. Frankfurt/Main, Athenäum, 1987, pp. 105-118 quoted as RP; *Kopffäger. Bericht aus dem Inneren des Landes*. Köln, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1991; ed., *Deutsche Kolonien. Fotoband*. München, Autoren-Edition, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> “Las circunstancias están acolchonadas con un sólido tejido adiposo de satisfacción. Pero igual pudiera ser obesidad a raíz de la pesadumbre. que la sociedad ha

But before going on with this subject, it might be necessary to discuss some basic points that will support my further argumentation. In any intercultural dialogue, the participants have to bridge the gap between their different backgrounds and to negotiate an area of interplay. In this case there are involved the so called Third World on the one hand and German writers on the other. And not to forget, there is us, the commentators. We are, of course, obliged to define our standpoint as well. As a matter of fact, we have to acknowledge that postcolonial studies is a research field that eminently belongs to the thinkers coming from the former colonies. As Said pointed out: “ningún europeo o americano que estudie Oriente puede renunciar a las circunstancias principales de *su* realidad”.<sup>3</sup> With reference to our topic that means that no European can overcome the principal circumstances of *his* or *her* reality. But what am I, having lived half of my life in Europe and the other half in Latin America? Am I what my passport says? Am I both, or neither, or just in between? Since these questions are not easy to answer, it might be the best thing to formulate questions and only venture answers as a sort of hypotheses without forgetting from which standpoint they are stated. For it is less important to be right, than to be sensitive. So, let us start by questioning the terms of the general frame.

Following the famous essay by Salman Rushdie who claimed that “Commonwealth Literature does not exist”,<sup>4</sup> I deem it necessary to define my attitude regarding several terms of the topic. “Third World” —what is this? Does it exist? I dare say that it is a chimaera: a handy term to name a group of countries in opposition to other countries in either a contemptuous or a protective way. In this sense Sara Lennox states: “the term was originally intended to evoke revolutionary ideals on the model of the French Revolution’s ‘Third Estate’ [...], and it was also used as a positive form of self-identification by political spokespeople from non-Western countries in the sixties (*e. g.*, Fanon). But more recently it has been criticized as a construction that obscures

adquirido, comiendo por frustración, porque otros deseos quedan reprimidos. ¿No sería ésa la tarea de la literatura que se entiende a sí misma como políticamente comprometida subir a la conciencia lo colectivamente reprimido e indagar los deseos secretos, al someter las necesidades a discusión, al estudiar las costumbres cotidianas con el ojo del etnólogo?” (U. TIMM, *Vogel, friß die Feige nicht. Römische Aufzeichnungen*. Köln, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1989, p. 106.)

<sup>3</sup> Edward SAID, *Orientalismo*. Trad. de María Luisa FUENTES. Madrid, Libertarios, 1990, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Salman RUSHDIE, “‘Commonwealth Literature’ does not exist”, in S. RUSHDIE, *Imaginary Homelands. Essays and criticism, 1981-1991*. London, Granta/Penguin, 1991, pp. 61-70.

the heterogeneity of the countries to which it refers".<sup>5</sup> When used by the thinkers of former colonies, "Third World" was opposed to the First and Second World, or capitalist and socialist bloc, and Third World was meant as potentially bloc free. This state of affairs does not apply anymore. When the expression is used by members of the "First World" in an attitude of superiority, it may be harmful and is, in any case, inadequate. Because, even when there is an asymmetry in political, military and economic power, in technological and educational attainment, that is not true in the case of culture. It is important to underline that no cultural inferiority is implied, even though many members of the First World and even of the Third World seem to think so. The term "non-Western countries" with regard to Latin America is not too felicitous either, because of the weight of the creole and mestizo population. To varying degrees all Latin American countries represent hybrid cultures whose prehispanic and European roots are not always brought together. In a mode similar to the arguments by Said about orientalism, Latin America has been defined by Latin American thinkers (e. g. Edmundo O'Gorman) as a utopia, as an invention of Europe. We have to analyse "Postcolonial German Literature" before the background of these statements.

This brings us to the second questionable term: The postcolonial view is normally understood in Latin America as the view of the former *colonized* (e. g. *La visión de los vencidos*, ed. by Miguel León-Portilla). When we speak of the former *colonizer's* view, we have to mark the distinction sharply. Now, "postcolonial German literature" presupposes former German colonies. But the Germans had none in Latin America. On the whole continent of the Americas, independence had been consolidated long before the Germans dreamt their dream of colonies and a "space in the sun". It is a curious fact that the Germans in many Latin American towns call themselves "Deutsche Kolonie" as if they had come to colonize the spot. We would need a careful study about the etymology of this term before we can know more about the connotations.

But one thing must not be ignored. The military energy of Prussia and, above all, the rudeness and horrors of the Third Reich have built up once and for all the image of Germans as the fiercest imperialists. And there are many traces of this imago-type in the Latin American literature. We have to take

<sup>5</sup> Sara LENNOX, "Enzensberger, *Kursbuch*, and 'Third Worldism'. The Sixties' Construction of Latin America", in Sigrid BAUSCHINGER und Susan L. COCALIS, eds., "Neue Welt"/"Dritte Welt". *Interkulturelle Beziehungen Deutschlands zu Lateinamerika und der Karibik*. Tübingen und Basel, Francke Verlag, 1994. pp. 185-200, here p. 197.

into account as well that Latin America has provided a home to both victims and victimizers of the Nazi regime, as reflected in Timms novel *Der Schlangenbaum*. In consequence, the former colonized do not see Germany as an exception in the colonial past. It is impossible to ignore this fact, when we study the “interfaces of Western and Third-world cultures”.

Considering the general frame of “the Third World through European eyes”, I would like to define roughly three manners of viewing and describing:

1. *Supposed superiority*: The writer comes, sees and judges, in an indulgent or contemptuous way, but always from an arrogated position of superiority, according to the (ethnocentrically reduced) Greek motto: The Westerner is the measure of everything.

2. *Estrangement*: The writer recognizes the otherness and describes it, but from outside. The texts are documents of infelicitous acts of communication. The other culture is seen as a strange, inscrutable world, where the standards learned at home fail completely:

3. *Permeability*: The writer exposes him- or herself to the otherness, without judging, disposed to accept the changes possibly entailed. The texts witness this empathy.

Some writers definitely belong to one group, but many of them show elements of the three approaches in different texts or even in one and the same text.

## II. Uwe Timm and Latin America

Uwe Timm has been cooperative and generous in different interviews, so that we need not guess as to his relation to Latin America. He explains, for example, to Ingo Stoehr: “Erstens war für mich aus der Kindheit kommend dieser Wunsch nach Afrika und auch Lateinamerika sehr prägend, weil ich mit meiner damaligen Situation, etwa der sehr autoritären Erziehung, äußerst unzufrieden war. So gibt es sicherlich einen sehr tiefsitzenden Grund, in ein anderes Leben hineinzuschauen, das eine größere Möglichkeit der Freiheit und der Entfaltung der Sinne erschließt”.<sup>6</sup> As a student in Paris he heard the lectures of Levy Strauss. Since 1969, Timm has been married to Dagmar Ploetz: “Meine Frau

<sup>6</sup> “Primero, y desde la infancia, fue determinante para mí este deseo de conocer a África y a Latinoamérica, porque estaba sumamente descontento con mi situación de entonces, por ejemplo con esa educación tan autoritaria. Así que seguramente haya una razón muy profunda de querer conocer otro tipo de vida que abre oportunidades mayores de libertad y de desenvolvimiento de los sentidos”.

ist in Argentinien aufgewachsen, hat dort Abitur gemacht und ist dann nach Deutschland gekommen, um Germanistik zu studieren. Hier habe ich sie dann kennengelernt. Dadurch war dann auch buchstäblich eine familiäre Verbindung zu Argentinien gegeben".<sup>7</sup> Thanks to his wife, Timm got to know the Latin American fictional works long before normal German readers. Timm's reception of the great Latin American novelists is crucial in his own development: "die Literatur Lateinamerikas, die ich dank meiner Frau [...] sehr früh habe kennenlernen können. Die Erfahrung, daß man erzählen kann, war schon wichtig. Das ist ja eines der Schlüsselprobleme gewesen zu der Zeit, [...] Die These, man könne nicht mehr erzählen. Diese Einengung hat mich damals so geärgert, daß ich dachte: Natürlich kann man erzählen, und das ist ganz selbstverständlich, und überall auf der Welt wird nach wie vor erzählt".<sup>8</sup> This quotation marks an essential point for the postcolonial dialogue, since it shows the productive reception in the other direction that starts with the generation of Hugo Loetscher, Uwe Timm and the younger writers like Christoph Janacs, Leopold Federmaier and others.

In *Der Schlangenbaum* a heedful reader will discover many allusions to or borrowings from Eduardo Galeano, Augusto Roa Bastos, Alejo Carpentier, Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez (see the careful study by Klaus Meyer-Minnemann in Durzak/Steinecke: *Die Archäologie der Wünsche*). There is even an explicit reverence for the *Realismo mágico*, in English words from a local doctor: "This country is a miracle. Because it is a continual transformation from rational structures to shit and then from shit to fairy tales and finally to real miracles" (SB 265).

Timm's first motive for travelling was discontent with his own reality and the wish to find other models of community life: "Es gibt also ganz andere

<sup>7</sup> "Mi mujer se educó en Argentina, allí hizo su bachillerato y luego vino a Alemania para estudiar germanística. Aquí la conocí. Gracias a esto se dio, literalmente hablando, un vínculo familiar con Argentina". (Ingo R. STOEHR, "Eine Entdeckungsreise ins eigene Bewusstsein. Eine Unterhaltung mit Uwe Timm", in *Dimension*<sup>2</sup>. *Contemporary German-Language Literature*, Vol. 2, Nr. 3, September, 1995, pp. 334-357, p. 338.)

<sup>8</sup> "la literatura de Latinoamérica que, gracias a mi mujer, llegué a conocer muy temprano. La experiencia que es posible narrar fue muy importante. Pues fue uno de los problemas clave de aquella época, [...] La tesis que ya no se puede contar. Esta limitación en aquel entonces me dio tanto coraje que pensé: claro que es posible narrar, y es algo que se entiende por sí mismo, y en todas partes del mundo se sigue narrando". (Manfred DURZAK, "Die Position des Autors. Ein Werkstattgespräch mit Uwe Timm", in M. DURZAK und Hartmut STEINECKE (Hg.), *Die Archäologie der Wünsche. Studien zum Werk von Uwe Timm*. Köln, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1995, pp. 311-354, p. 326.)

Lebensformen, d. h. Effizienz und Konkurrenz sind durchaus kulturelle Dinge und nicht naturgegeben und so definiert, daß sich eine Gesellschaft von vorneherein darauf hinentwickeln muß".<sup>9</sup> The writing about such alternative cultures represents the second motive for journeys. In the interview with Mechthild Borries, Timm tells her how he travelled in Namibia to make field studies and educate himself for the writing of *Morenga*. In South America, Timm visits Argentina repeatedly, but Paraguay and Brazil as well, and they all appear in *The Snake Tree*, although the place of the main action is not explicitly named. Nevertheless, the dream of freedom and more pleasant forms of life is shattered by the crude reality of the totalitarian regimes at the time of the visits.

Knowing this, we have the key to reading "Reise nach Paraguay". At the beginning, the text seems to be a typical travelogue. Like so many others it starts with observations made from the plane. The writer notes what he sees, then what he hears from the taxi driver, from the hotel owner. One may ask: Is this going to be one of the usual reproductions of stereotypes? Let a Latin American reader see such a statement as: "Es ist eine, für Südamerika, ganz ungewöhnlich saubere Straße" (RP 105 f)<sup>10</sup> and infer the presupposition: The streets of South America are normally dirty: mustn't he or she think that this is just one more of those colonial writers who travel in order to produce exotic pictures for their bored compatriots? But the farther you read, the more you'll have to revise your impression. At the end, the author concludes with regrets: "Und irgendwann einmal, später, [muss man] auch über die Schönheit des Landes [reden] und jene Balladen, die auf Guaraní von seiner traurigen Geschichte singen, über die Mennoniten, die den paraguayischen Urwald roden und über jene Chaco-Indianer, mit denen man sich tatsächlich auf Plattdeutsch unterhalten kann" (RP 118).<sup>11</sup> No, this is no simple report of a pleasure journey, this is a political address, a warning with intent to give international publicity to the abuses of the Stroessner regime: "Wenn es dazu noch gelingt, die internationale Öffentlichkeit zu mobilisieren, kann das eine oder andere

<sup>9</sup> "Luego hay formas de vida totalmente diferentes, o sea la eficiencia y la competencia son ciertamente fenómenos culturales y no dadas por la naturaleza y definidas de manera que una sociedad desde un principio tuviera que evolucionar hacia ellas". (I. R. STOEHR, "Eine Entdeckungsreise...", in *op. cit.*, p. 344.)

<sup>10</sup> "Es, para Latinoamérica, una calle insólitamente limpia".

<sup>11</sup> "Y alguna vez, más tarde, habrá que hablar de la belleza del país y de aquellas baladas que cantan su triste historia, en guaraní, y de los menonitas que roturan la selva paraguayana y de los indígenas del Chaco con los que efectivamente se puede conversar en bajo alemán".

erreicht oder aber verhindert werden”(RP 116).<sup>12</sup> It is due to his engagement in the student’ movement of ‘68 and his membership in the German Communist Party for several years, that Timm had connections in Paraguay and got information normal tourists would never have access to. So, he felt obliged to divulge what he learned about the political reality in Paraguay. And the appeasing compromise of the hotel owner at his arrival: “Die Bevölkerung ist zufrieden. Sie können sich selbst überzeugen” (RP 107)<sup>13</sup> is refuted by an overwhelming description of injustice, abuses, tortures committed under the sceptre of Alfredo Stroessner. This is certainly not the view of a colonial writer. It is the voice of a German intellectual, aware of the awful recent past of his own country, who tries to make a contribution to the fight against dictatorship. It is a text of solidarity, with the aim to give moral support to the victims of the regime: “Goosen sagt, in den neun Monaten Gefängnis war es für das Überleben wichtig zu wissen, daß er draußen nicht vergessen war, daß man um sein Recht kämpfte, das heißt um seine Freiheit. Diese Unterstützung ist es, die, je breiter und internationaler sie wird, den Opfern der Stroessner-Diktatur eine Chance gibt” (RP 118).<sup>14</sup>

In a certain sense, the novel *Der Schlangenbaum* redeems the promise to speak about the beauty of the region where the three countries meet, of the history of the Mennonites. And the Chaco-Indian, grown up in the neighbourhood of the Mennonites and speaking fluent Low German gets a key position, he is called Juan, was educated by missionaries, studied ethnology in Berlin, and can’t go home to join his people because of the political oppression in Paraguay: “Und wollen Sie nicht zu ihren Leuten zurück? Dat geit nich, ik will schon, aber de General nich” (SB 77).<sup>15</sup> He works as an interpreter at the paper mill under construction and makes an ethnological study about the German engineers working at that place.

But, why did it occur to Timm to write this novel about the German project to build a paper mill in the hinterland of Argentina? The purpose for the Paraguayan essay is quite clear, as I tried to show. So is the motive for *Morenga*. As a child, Timm heard in his paternal house how the former

<sup>12</sup> “Si, además, se logra movilizar al público internacional, será posible alcanzar algo y, también, evitar una que otra cosa”.

<sup>13</sup> “La población está contenta. Podrá usted mismo convencerse de ello”.

<sup>14</sup> “Dice Goosen que, durante los nueve meses de prisión fue importante, para sobrevivir, saber que afuera no lo habían olvidado, que luchaban por su derecho, o sea por su libertad. Este apoyo, mientras más amplio e internacional se haga, es lo que les dará una oportunidad a las víctimas de la dictadura de Stroessner”.

<sup>15</sup> “Y, ¿no quiere usted volver con su gente? —No es posible, yo sí quiero, pero el general no”.

comrades of his father used to tell their “heroic” adventures in Southwest Africa. As a student, Timm participated in a demonstration in Hamburg, where they demolished the statue of a colonial officer. *Morenga* certainly was a long-term project to represent the colonial past of Germany in a postcolonial view (cf. the essays of Jost Hermand, Rainer Kußler, Peter Horn in Durzak/Steinecke). But Timm did not intend to write a novel about Argentina, it rather came into existence in spite of him, due to an encounter in the hinterland of Argentina with a German engineer in an expensive but shabby suit: “Ich habe mich nur eine halbe Stunde lang mit ihm unterhalten und bin dann weiter gefahren. Aber er hat in meinem Kopf weitergewirkt und wollte, daß ein Roman aus ihm wird”.<sup>16</sup> In the interview with Durzak he remembers: “Ich habe also in Argentinien einen deutschen Ingenieur getroffen, der eine Papierfabrik bauen wollte, und die versank im Sumpf. [...] Ich habe mit dem nur eine gute Stunde gesprochen, und das ist der Hintergrund, von dem diese Figur ausgeht”.<sup>17</sup> And to Mechthild Borries he explains: Ich “habe dort eines Tages jemanden getroffen, der erzählte, er habe eine Papierfabrik bauen sollen, und diese Papierfabrik stand aber auf einem Grund, der sumpfig war, der nicht der eigentliche Baugrund war, und dieser Neubau verschwand sozusagen im Sumpf beim Bau. Das ist so die Potenzierung dessen, was man sich als ‘sinnvolle’ Entwicklungspolitik denken kann, und der hatte eine Spanischlehrerin, die eines Tages verschwand, das war die Zeit der Diktatur von Videla und die Zeit derer, die da einfach verschwanden, und der Mann war aus seiner Bahn rausgeworfen worden, der war zwei Monate im Land und hatte alles hingeschmissen, der war ein anderer geworden, ein Fremder, der sah ziemlich abgerissen aus, aber es war ein Bauingenieur, der irgendwann mit seinem ganzen Beruf und mit seiner ganzen Sehweise, mit seiner Vorstellungsweise das nicht mehr in den Griff bekam”.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the

<sup>16</sup> “Sólo estuve platicando con él por media hora y luego seguí mi viaje. Pero él siguió dentro de mi cabeza y quiso transformarse en novela”. (I. R. STOEHR, “Eine Entdeckungsreise...”, in *op. cit.*, p. 340.)

<sup>17</sup> “En Argentina encontré a un ingeniero alemán que quería construir una fábrica de papel que se hundía en el pantano. [...] Hablé con él sólo como una hora, y éste es el fondo del que sale esta figura”. (M. DURZAK, “Die Position des Autors...”, in *op. cit.*, p. 341.)

<sup>18</sup> “Un día me encontré allí a alguien que contó que tenía que construir una fábrica de papel, pero esta fábrica se erigía en un suelo pantanoso, que no era el terreno de obras previsto, y este edificio desaparecía en el pantano durante la construcción. Parece el colmo del sinsentido de lo que uno se imagina bajo una política de desarrollo adecuada. Y él tenía una profesora de español que un día desapareció, fue la época de la dictadura de Videla y la época de los que desaparecían sin más, y este hombre se había descañado, tenía dos meses en el país y lo había botado todo, se había convertido en otro, un



protagonist of *The Snake Tree* is a German called Wagner, and the whole novel is written from the point of view of this engineer. The author does not tell more than the protagonist knows and understands. Timm's aim is not so much to penetrate a strange culture, than to depict a German in a culture where his criteria fail. In the very first chapter the fact that the position of the sun on the southern half of the globe confuses his sense of orientation makes him formulate the programmatic statement: "Er würde umdenken müssen" (SB 14).<sup>19</sup> And at the end of the plot his conclusion is still more decisive: "Er würde sein Leben ändern müssen" (SB 296).<sup>20</sup> Wagner, an engineer in Hamburg, had accepted the task to take charge of the project in South America, thinking of it as a chance to escape from the stagnation of his daily routine, the dull family life and the wishless uniformity of his mind, and hoping to begin a new life full of fresh sensations. In this sense, Durzak calls Wagner Parzival, and Timm quite agrees with this interpretation that stresses the desperate search for the Grail. Other analysts underline the proximity to Homo Faber. Anyway, while Max Frisch' hero resists obstinately changing, Timm's engineer is disposed but unable to change. Homo Faber can't see but clichés, Wagner observes without judging, with amazement. The name of Wagner could remind us as well of the famous *famulus* of Faust: "Wie schwer sind nicht die Mittel zu erwerben, Durch die man zu den Quellen steigt! Und eh man nur den halben Weg erreicht, Muß wohl ein armer Teufel sterben" (562-566).<sup>21</sup>

I understand that Timm chooses the figure of Wagner because he allows him to question economic aid of the "First" to the "Third" World, especially in totalitarian regimes, and to question in a more general way the idea of progress: "Ich finde, es ist ein finsternes Buch. [...] Es nimmt zu einem Zeitpunkt, als politische Fortschrittsillusionen noch ganz kurrent waren, einen Zustand vorweg, der sich jetzt überall lähmend breit macht".<sup>22</sup> Now, this is the point where the ethnographer enters the scene and his quill (or PC) starts to scratch the grease of satiation and studies the daily habits, but —and this is

extraño, se veía bastante desastrado, pero era un ingeniero constructor, quien en un momento dado y con toda su profesión, su manera de ver y entender las cosas, ya no sabía manejar esto". (Irmgard ACKERMANN und Mechthild BORRIES, eds., *Uwe Timm*. München, Iudicium, 1988, [Pädagogische Verbindungsarbeit: Werkheft Literatur], p. 52.)

<sup>19</sup> "Tendría que cambiar su forma de pensar".

<sup>20</sup> "Tendría que cambiar su forma de vida".

<sup>21</sup> "Cuán difícil adquirir los medios, con los cuales se baja hasta las fuentes. Y antes de que hiciera la mitad del camino, un pobre diablo tendrá que morir".

<sup>22</sup> "Pienso que es un libro sombrío. [...] En un momento donde las ilusiones del progreso político todavía estaban a la orden del día, anticipa un estado que ahora se extiende de manera paralizadora en todas partes". (M. DURZAK, "Die Position des Autors...". in *op. cit.*, p. 336.)

important to see— not from the point of view of other cultures but from that of his countrymen living abroad. Latin America is present as a beautiful and frightening back-ground, there are some representatives of power, the Bolivian workers and some carefully observed people here and there in the country. But since they are seen through the eyes of Wagner, it is a distant view, with the exception of Juan, the interpreter, and Luisa, the Spanish teacher, both of whom disappear, for political reasons as the reader is led to infer. The title *Snake tree* is explained in this sense: Wagner sees and hears about a 170 year-old tree in the yard of a prison: When a prisoner did not get out of the prison, the people used to say, he was bitten by the snakes (SB 244). And a snake run over by Wagner's car the very first day is the beginning of all the mishaps, whose dynamics completely overtaxes the understanding of the German engineer.

Concerning clichés, Uwe Timm loves to make fun of the reader's expectations. For instance, one morning with a magically bloodlike sunrise, Wagner watches the Bolivian workers leave their cabins and make mysterious movements fixing the sun. The eagerness to hear about an ancient cult is mocked: The Bolivians turn around and zip up their flies (SB 119). And in another scene, it is not the Indian who makes fire with wooden sticks, but a North American military adviser (SB 126).

Adopting a rather pedantic reader's role, I might mention a tiny negligence of the author, when he has Luisa say "Buenos días" at sunset, instead of "Buenas tardes" (SB 160). In the mouth of Wagner this mistake would have been a typical interference and rather funny.

As I said before, it is the German community that is looked at through the lens of the ethnographer. For instance, the description of a party in a rich German's house in presence of an Argentine general is a masterpiece of sharp observation according to what Timm wants literature to be: "Literatur könnte, weil sie dem Subjekt neue Möglichkeiten —kognitive und emotionale— gegenüber dem *juste milieu* einräumt, diesem alltäglichen, überall zudringlichen Gerede, Gebrabbel, Geschrei, dem Zureden, Bereden, Herumreden und Überreden, also dieser von der Macht und den Herrschaftsinteressen in die Pflicht genommene Sprache, entgegentreten und einen Freiraum schaffen".<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> "La literatura, ya que ofrece al sujeto nuevas posibilidades —cognoscitivas y emocionales— frente al *juste milieu*, podría enfrentarse a estas diarias y omnipresentes habladoras, hablillas, patrañas, charlatanerías, chismorreos, chantaje, o sea a esta lengua agarrotada por el poder y los intereses del dominio y crear un espacio de libertad". (U. TIMM, *Vogel, friß die Feige nicht...*, p. 106.)

It seems to be the influence of Gramsci that helps him not to impose rigid preconceptions on the strange country, on the contrary to accept the otherness. Anyway, to come back to the three manners of viewing a foreign culture, in this case Latin America: *supposed superiority*, *estrangement* and *permeability*, Timm appears as a writer of the second category. Durzak asked Timm why he devotes so little attention to Luisa and Juan, why they remain pale and disappear. Timm sees his point: “Dieser Juan wäre genau die Gegenfigur die den Schlüssel für das Verständnis des Landes abgegeben hätte. Das war —darf ich jetzt mal sagen— mir vollkommen klar beim Schreiben. Ich habe diese Figur aber absichtlich nicht so benutzt”.<sup>24</sup> Timm wanted to illustrate the problem of progress and the decline of the land in a paradigmatic manner. And what he has brought back from the venture into the interior, are ethnologically sharpened eyes to study his own culture as if it were a strange one.

<sup>24</sup> “Este Juan sería exactamente la figura opuesta que podía haber dado la llave para la comprensión del país. Al escribir —puedo decirlo ahora— tenía plena conciencia de ello. Sin embargo, no aproveché la figura en este sentido deliberadamente”. (M. DURZAK, “Die Position des Autors...”, in *op. cit.*, p. 335.)