

☐ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

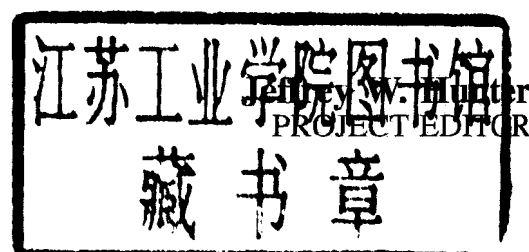
CLC

236

Volume 236

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and
Other Creative Writers



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Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 236

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Contemporary Literary Criticism

Preface

Named “one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years” by *Reference Quarterly*, the *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 2,000 authors now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 include authors who died after December 31, 1959. Previous to the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially important to today’s reader.

Scope of the Series

CLC provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author’s career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete bibliographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

Organization of the Book

A *CLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Thomson Gale, including *CLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *CLC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *CLC* volume in which their entry appears.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in the series as well as in other Literature Criticism series.

An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *CLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, films, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces an annual cumulative title index that alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in *CLC* and is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Werner Herzog

1942-

(Full name Werner H. Stipetic) German screenwriter, director, and producer.

The following entry provides an overview of Herzog's career through 2006. For additional information on his life and works, see *CLC*, Volume 16.

INTRODUCTION

A prolific and critically acclaimed filmmaker, Herzog has garnered praise for helping spark a renaissance in German cinema in the 1960s and 1970s. He has demonstrated intense dedication to the production of his films, often shooting under dangerous conditions and using unconventional techniques to realize his vision. Herzog has written and directed both feature films and short documentaries, many of which center on characters marginalized from society.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Born September 5, 1942, Herzog grew up in a small village in Bavaria, then later moved to Munich with his mother and two brothers. Herzog developed an interest in films at an early age, taking a job in a steel factory while he attended high school to pay for his first short films. He studied history and literature at the University of Munich, later attending the University of Pittsburgh. In 1962, Herzog finished his first short film, *Herakles*, and the following year he created his own production company. He received an award for his film *Letzte Worte* (*Last Words*; 1967) at the Oberhausen Film Festival in that year. He has written screenplays for and directed over fifty films. Herzog has also acted in a number of movies and has directed operas.

MAJOR WORKS

Lebenszeichen (1968; *Signs of Life*), Herzog's first full-length film, takes place in Crete during World War II and centers on a wounded soldier who threatens to destroy the Greek island with explosives. Herzog released two documentaries in 1971—*Behinderte Zukunft* (*Handicapped Future*) and *Land des Schweigens und der Dunkelheit* (*Land of Silence and Darkness*)—both of which focus on issues concerning the disabled.

Based on an historical account of a Spanish conquistador's failed attempt to find El Dorado, the mythical "city of gold," *Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* (1972; *Aguirre: The Wrath of God*) is widely considered Herzog's greatest film. The movie follows Lope de Aguirre's expedition down the Amazon River; as he travels deeper into the jungle, his journey becomes more perilous and eventually drives him insane. The true story of a boy raised in isolation inspired *Jeder für sich und Gott Gegen Alle* (1974; *Every Man for Himself and God Against All*; also titled *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*), one of Herzog's best-known films. The young boy, Kaspar Hauser, mysteriously appeared in Nuremburg in the 1820s, barely able to walk and unable to speak, read, or write. After citizens of the town taught Hauser to communicate and helped him assimilate into society, a stranger stabbed and murdered him. To play the title role, Herzog cast Bruno S., a factory worker and street musician with no acting experience who had spent several years in mental institutions. Bruno S. also starred in 1977's *Stroszek*, in which he played a street musician living in Berlin after his recent release from prison. Along with a prostitute and an elderly man, *Stroszek* immigrates to Wisconsin with the aim of improving his life. *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) tells the story of a man seeking to make a fortune in the rubber industry in order to finance his dream of building an opera house in the jungle of Peru. The making of the movie—especially a scene in which thousands of natives pull a steamship over a mountain without the benefit of special effects or camera tricks—generated controversy and became the subject of a documentary by Les Blank titled *Burden of Dreams. Wo die grünen Ameisen träumen* (1984; *Where the Green Ants Dream*) is set in Australia and concerns a clash between a mining company and a group of aborigines trying to prevent the destruction of their sacred land.

Herzog produced more documentaries later in his career. In 1984, he produced *Ballade vom kleinen Soldaten* (*Ballad of the Little Soldier*), which explores the Miskito Indians' fight against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and focuses on the child soldiers involved in the conflict. Herzog explored the topic of war again in his films *Lektionen in Finsternis* (1992; *Lessons of Darkness*), which portrays the oil fires set in Kuwait after the Gulf War, and *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* (1997), concerns Dieter Dengler, a German-American pilot who served in the Vietnam War. Enemy fighters shot down Dengler's plane and interned him in a hellish

prisoner-of-war camp. The documentary recalls Dengler's daring escape. *Grizzly Man* (2005) tells the story of Timothy Treadwell, a man who moved to Alaska and dedicated his life to protecting and preserving grizzly bears. A bear attacked and killed the activist and his girlfriend in 2003. The Directors Guild of America awarded Herzog the Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Documentaries prize for his work on this film.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Reviewers have often commented on Herzog's eccentric filmmaking strategies, including his decision to hypnotize the cast of *Herz aus Glas* (1976; *Heart of Glass*) and to shoot a documentary from the site of a volcano as it threatened to erupt. As Michael Atkinson has stated, "Herzog has always worked on the desperate edge of semiprofessionalism, preferring a scattershot, ill-prepared plunge into the unknown in which the lunatic lyricism of exploding nature and freak occurrence can overwhelm planned storymaking." Critics have also noted Herzog's use of symbols and allegory in his films. Addressing the fact that Herzog has shot films in several different locations across the globe, Scott B. Watson has asserted that "[m]any of Herzog's most potent images are landscapes and the memory of his films is dominated by their exotic landscapes." Critics have praised Herzog's ability to depict extreme human situations and conditions in his films. Gideon Bachmann has observed Herzog's "total disregard for the subtle traditions of compromise. Nothing is sacred; least of all the established language of the cinema. Frontally, physically, we are exposed to loneliness, frailty, fear; but also to strength, confidence, self-reliance. Perhaps no other filmmaker has ever so extolled the innocent spirit of man, and few have so clearly shown how little space it is accorded in modern life."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Herakles [director] (film) 1962
Spiel im Sand [*Game in the Sand*] [screenwriter and director] (film) 1964
Die Beispiellose Verteidigung der Festung Deutschkreuz [*The Unprecedented Defence of the Fortress Deutschkreuz*] [screenwriter and director] (film) 1966
Letzte Worte [*Last Words*] [screenwriter and director] (film) 1967
Lebenszeichen [*Signs of Life*] [screenwriter and director] (film) 1968
Die Fliegenden Ärzte von Ostafrika [*The Flying Doctors of East Africa*] [director] (documentary film) 1969

Maßnahmen gegen Fanatiker [*Measures Against Fanatics*; also titled *Precautions Against Fanatics*] [director] (film) 1969
Auch Zwerge Haben Klein Angefangen [*Even Dwarfs Started Small*] [screenwriter and director] (film) 1970
Behinderte Zukunft [*Handicapped Future*] [director] (documentary film) 1971
Fata Morgana [screenwriter and director] (film) 1971
Land des Schweigens und der Dunkelheit [*Land of Silence and Darkness*] [director] (documentary film) 1971
Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes [*Aguirre: The Wrath of God*] [screenwriter and director] (film) 1972
Die Große Ekstase des Bildschnitzers Steiner [*The Great Ecstasy of Woodcarver Steiner*; also titled *The Strange Ecstasy of Woodcarver Steiner*] [director] (documentary film) 1974
Jeder für sich und Gott Gegen Alle [*Every Man for Himself and God Against All*; also titled *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*] [screenwriter and director] (film) 1974
Herz aus Glas [*Heart of Glass*] [co-screenwriter with Herbert Achternbusch and director] (film) 1976
La Soufrière [director] (documentary film) 1977
Stroszek [screenwriter and director] (film) 1977
Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht [*Nosferatu the Vampyre*] [screenwriter and director] (film) 1979
Woyzeck [*Werner Herzog's Woyzeck*] [screenwriter and director] (film) 1979
God's Angry Man [director] (documentary film) 1980
Of Walking In Ice: Munich-Paris, 11/23 to 12/14, 1974 [screenwriter and director] (documentary film) 1980
Werner Herzog Eats His Shoe [screenwriter] (documentary film) 1980
Fitzcarraldo [screenwriter and director] (film) 1982
Ballade vom kleinen Soldaten [*Ballad of the Little Soldier*] [co-screenwriter with Denis Reichle] (documentary film) 1984
Gasherbrum—der leuchtende Berg [*The Dark Glow of the Mountains*] [director] (documentary film) 1984
Wo die grünen Ameisen träumen [*Where the Green Ants Dream*] [co-screenwriter with Bob Ellis and director] (film) 1984
Portrait Werner Herzog [director] (documentary film) 1986
Cobra Verde [*Slave Coast*] [screenwriter and director] (film) 1987
Wodaabe—Die Hirten der Sonne [*Herdsmen of the Sun*] [director] (documentary film) 1989
Echos aus einem düstern Reich [*Echoes from a Sombre Empire*] [screenwriter and director] (film) 1990
Schrei aus Stein [*Scream of Stone*] [director] (film) 1991
Lektionen in Finsternis [*Lessons of Darkness*] [director] (documentary film) 1992
Glocken aus der Tiefe [*Bells from the Deep*] [director] (documentary film) 1993
Tod für fünf Stimmen [*Death for Five Voices*] [screenwriter and director] (film) 1995
Little Dieter Needs to Fly [director] (documentary film) 1997

Mein liebster Feind—Klaus Kinski [My Best Fiend] [director] (film) 1999
Julianes Sturz in den Dschungel [Wings of Hope] [director] (documentary film) 2000
Invincible [screenwriter and director] (film) 2001
**Ten Thousand Years Older* [director] (short documentary film) 2002
Wheel of Time [director] (documentary film) 2003
Incident at Loch Ness [co-screenwriter with Zak Penn] (film) 2004
The White Diamond [director] (documentary film) 2004
Grizzly Man [director] (documentary film) 2005
The Wild Blue Yonder [screenwriter and director] (film) 2005
Rescue Dawn [screenwriter and director] (film) 2006

*Included as a segment in the documentary *Ten Minutes Older: The Trumpet*.

CRITICISM

Gideon Bachmann (essay date autumn 1977)

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[In the following essay, Bachmann reflects on Herzog's career as a filmmaker.]

What disturbs and attracts us at once in any film by the young German film director Werner Herzog is his total disregard for the subtle traditions of compromise. Nothing is sacred; least of all the established language of the cinema. Frontally, physically, we are exposed to loneliness, frailty, fear; but also to strength, confidence, self-reliance. Perhaps no other film-maker has ever so extolled the innocent spirit of man, and few have so clearly shown how little space it is accorded in modern life.

In describing the characters he prefers to depict, I find myself using terms that would also apply to Werner Herzog himself. Directness of approach, disdain for social conventions, naïveté, fearlessness, immediacy, doing everything by oneself, reliance on the tangible things alone, a love for objects and nature, the implacable drive to conquer obstacles. Herzog has come to the cinema as his heroes make their first appearances in his films: suddenly, there is physical presence.

Despite the fact that a myth has grown up around him, nobody could be less of a riddle than Herzog. He answers his own telephone, lives with a wife and a son

in a suburb of Munich, cuts his films in a spare room in his mother's house, where he also keeps a sound transfer machine in his old bedroom, drives the production van all the way from Bavaria to the Western coast of Ireland and back again, while his three-man crew sleep in the back, skis and plays soccer to perfection, and will answer interviewers' questions, despite their repetitiveness, with the same freshness and innocence that he applies to every new film project. "The only way to stop smoking," he says, "is to stop smoking." He has applied the same principle to film-making.

This Huckleberry Finn of the movies is now 35, but has been using cameras since he was 19, when he decided that there was no point in submitting scripts to producers and took a factory job to finance his first shorts. Although Germany had lost its film industry in the war and its talented film people even earlier through emigration, the mid-sixties saw a revival of interest in the craft and young people were openly rebelling, writing manifestos and attacking the sclerotic traditions that had petrified the commercial cinema. Everybody was suddenly making movies.

Oberhausen, a grey town in the Ruhr coal district, an unlikely place for the renaissance of a visual art form, sported a yearly, wintery film festival, where nobody ever left the warm uterus of the town's art hall, and where incessant screenings, round-the-clock protest meetings, and tons of German sausage consumed in the smoky corridors joined to create what must now with some nostalgia be considered a revolutionary atmosphere. Werner Herzog got his first film prize here. It was for his fourth short, the most expensive he had made. *Last Words* had cost what was then the equivalent of about \$7500. A lot of money for a welder in 1967.

There was never any question in Herzog's mind that he was destined to become a major film-maker. Probably artists wouldn't be what they are if they didn't have this faith, but there was really not much he had to go on, besides his stubbornness and conviction. He had no money, no connections, no training. He was a difficult child; his mother says that when he was young, he was always in a rage, it was his nature. According to her, he never had real friends, couldn't create real contacts, and would sit for hours in his room staring at an object. He didn't have to study, she says, he just knew everything.

"Werner remembers the slightest details; he knows, sees, understands. But explaining is not his nature. Everything goes into him and comes out transformed. He can't bear to see suffering, but the idea of death makes him fight. Although I think that when he had himself converted to Catholicism at the age of 15 it was because the local priest played soccer."

From the very beginning Herzog tackled his own fate, steered his own course. "I decided there was no point in

wasting time in growing up, so I went straight from youth to being about 35, to accepting responsibilities.”

To accept responsibilities meant to become a filmmaker, meant to deal creatively with his obsessions. It also meant that private life and work became one, that the line between fact and invention became indistinct. The stories that Herzog tells about his own life began sounding vaguely like scenarios. When he tells three interviewers three diverging stories about a fight he had with the actor Klaus Kinsky in the middle of the Amazon jungle, all three versions sound authentic. But when I question a friend of mine who was present at the time, it becomes clear that all three are invented.

Herzog, almost surely the most important new film director of the current generation (and I am saying “almost” because one does not, after all, see everything), refuses the interpretation that in part he invents his life as he goes along. To him who embroiders every version of a story with detail, atmosphere and quotes, it doesn’t seem like invention. But it is precisely this conviction that there is no separation between fact and what the fact has become in his mind which then transmits to us so strongly the feeling that his visions have general meaning. A good part of the secret of his film-making success lies in this ability to convince the viewer that Herzog’s version of truth is in fact truth.

By now, Werner Herzog has made six feature films and ten shorter ones, none of which have failed to arouse controversy, but the fascination we feel is not primarily for the films: it is for the man behind them, for this child-like adventurer, who has dared to break the cardinal rule of the cinema: that no man can make films alone. And one who uses the freedom he has conquered for non-selfish purposes. Because Werner Herzog, despite everything, is not interested in success.

What he is interested in, and why he makes films, can only be termed a mission: the physical contest with life, the need to cleanse the human soul of the age’s impurities, the dedication to the idea of work, the responsibility to history. “Nothing in my life,” he says, “is a question of choice; the thing wants out. I have always known that I was going to make films, and I always know what the next one will be.”

Thomas Mauch, the cameraman who shot all the early Herzog shorts and features, relates the story of their first meeting. Herzog was a totally unknown youngster, and they met in a Munich café. Herzog suggested Mauch work with him, since he would soon, without doubt, become Germany’s most important film director. It is to Mauch’s credit that he believed him; the man’s conviction carried the weight which has now been proven by history.

Herzog would be the first to object to the telling of this story, but it is not atypical. In fact, many accuse him of megalomania, but none deny him their admiration, certainly an uncommon combination. With awe, they repeat the stories he himself readily disburses: how he walked, one cold winter, all the way from Munich to Paris carrying a print of his most successful film to date, *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, to show to Lotte Eisner, a film historian he admires, who was then ill in hospital. “I had to do something for her. I simply knew that by the time I got there, she would be out of hospital. And she was.”

Or the story of the 350 monkeys he stole at a South American jungle airport by posing as a health inspector, because he felt that their sale to a high-bidding American by the Indians who had originally caught them for use in the end sequence of his film *Aguirre: The Wrath of God* was unfair, especially to the monkeys, who would certainly prefer scurrying back into the jungle after the filming to ending up in Florida zoos.

Or threatening the Greek army with firearms when it wanted to break up his shooting of a large-scale fireworks scene in *Life Signs* [*Signs of Life*], his first feature, shot in Crete. Surprisingly to all but Herzog himself the colonels then in power seem to have relented as easily as the dumbfounded South American airport police.

One of his favorites is how he got up in the middle of cutting a film in Munich because he overheard a radio report of an anticipated volcano eruption in Guadeloupe. He flew off there with his cameraman the very same afternoon, to shoot a documentary about a native farmer half-way up the slopes of the threatened mountain who, the radio had said, refused evacuation. The volcano, perhaps impressed by the mustachioed, unshaven intruder with the camera on his back, and despite the forecast and the 75,000 evacuees, didn’t erupt. Herzog is convinced it couldn’t, anyway. “We treated it with great disrespect, Jörg and I walked all the way up to the crater and pissed in it. The matter of fear doesn’t come up. Nobody else could have made the film, and somebody had to. I suppose you will realize from this that in some way I must have resolved the death question.”

One believes him, almost ashamed that one is likely to apply the brakes of reason. But it doesn’t matter, of course, whether what he says actually happened. What does matter is that one considers him, without wanting to, as a sort of prophet. What is much more complicated to discern is the prophecy he imparts. It is also the one thing he himself seems to have difficulty defining. So far, he has refused all attempts by outsiders to define it.

“People have pre-established ways of thinking, they are always defining me. But I am not a ‘German romantic’

as they called me in *Playboy*; I have very little to do with expressionism, as has so often been claimed, even by Chabrol; I am not a 'typically 19th-century artist' as Thomas Mauch calls me in his film about me; in fact, I am not 'German' in that generic sense. I am Bavarian, of the late Middle Ages. I am physical." Mauch insists that Herzog wanted to be considered, instead, a 16th-century artisan, "a ridiculous idea. He has nothing to do with the Renaissance. He is a mystic." Which Herzog again denies.

What he is sure of is his attachment to the physical world. Apparently he broke his leg twice: once when leaping out of a boarding-house window in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for obscure reasons, and once playing soccer, when defending the honor of his club, the Black-Yellows of Munich. His preferred photograph of himself shows him upside-down in mid-air, an embryonic shape in full winter gear with a childish joy on his face, caught in the midst of one of his many shows of prowess above a snowy slope during the shooting of *Heart of Glass*. He loves jumping and cavorting, and often forces his crew to follow his lead. Alan Greenberg reports walking with him one day in a forest and throwing a snowball at a faraway tree. He hit it dead center, unfortunately, because Herzog then forced each member of the crew to do likewise before they were allowed to walk on.

In *Heart of Glass*, in fact, the film he shot in 1976 in Wyoming, Alaska, Utah, Bavaria, Switzerland and the Skellig Rock islands off the West Coast of Ireland, he pushed physicality to the extreme: he hypnotized all the actors to obtain a trance-like movement and a uniformity he considers impossible to achieve otherwise. Instructions were whispered in low tones to differentiate them from the technical instructions spoken in a normal voice to the crew. "If I had spoken normally, all the hypnotized actors would automatically have followed all the instructions I was giving the cameraman. Hypnotizing the actors wasn't, however, an attempt to control them more completely, as has been suggested. It was a stylistic effort. I wanted this air of the floating, fluid movements, the rigidity of a culture caught in decline and superstition, the atmosphere of prophecy."

Werner H. Stipetic (Herzog's real name) is a 1942 Virgo who spent the first 11 years of his life poor in a small Bavarian mountain village with his two brothers and his mother, whom he later followed to Munich, where he's lived ever since. Of his father he speaks with respect as a mixture of scientist and clochard, a man who never got anything off the ground throughout his life except a series of marriages and relationships with women, off whom he lived, fathering small tribes of children in various places. From him, Herzog says, he learned a lot: what not to do. But he admires his grandfather, an archaeologist who excavated the Esculapeion on the

island of Kos. When Herzog was 15, he went off to Greece to retrace the old man's steps, and finally shot his first feature there.

A good part of his life has been spent on the road. The Congo, where he got arrested, or was it Uganda? "They were violating the women," he says, "and they wouldn't believe that we were not mercenaries. Why would we be spending the hottest time of the year on the fringes of the Sahara?" In fact, he was shooting a documentary feature there, *Fata Morgana*. "It was the only time of the year in which we might hope to see a real one, an apparition, a *fata morgana*. Later, with seven Africans, he rented an apartment in Manchester, for a few abortive months of study, before transferring to Pennsylvania. "The first time I really got out from under," he relates, "is when I walked into Albania. It was one of those things that I needed to do."

His favorite film, *Even Dwarfs Started Small* (1969), was shot in the Canary Islands. It is a doom-laden Animal Farm and his most pessimistic statement on the *condition humaine*, and in it, as in all his films, the landscape plays a dramatic role. Jungles, deserts, islands, and mountain gorges are his favorite haunts, the more remote and inhospitable the better. This geographical restlessness perfectly parallels his mental one: the story of his life and the stories of his films are one continual struggle to overcome obstacles he himself alone sees, has created, or puts in the way of his films' heroes.

An innocent is thrown into the world, unprepared, encounters despair and destruction, fights with the means at his disposal, suffers, rebels, and loses, leaving behind an emptier, more desperate landscape. This, in a nutshell, has been the story line of each film Herzog has made. In each one he stresses one or another part of this odyssey, sometimes concentrating more on the individual and sometimes more on the society which that individual inevitably fights. All the films, practically, are descriptions of routes to death, but all are permeated by strapping life forces, by the sound of rebellious, impotent fury, by the threat of irrevocable fate.

Whether the self-destruction is as disdainful as in *Aguirre*, in which an upstart Spanish commander in the Incan era proclaims himself master of the continent when vultures are already pecking at his feverish eyes after he has managed to destroy all those about him in a vainglorious search for Eldorado; or mystical as in *Heart of Glass*, in which a shepherd prophet preannounces the end that will engulf his village; or symbolic of the low that slumbers in us all, as in his drive to break taboos in *Dwarfs* [*Even Dwarfs Started Small*], in which a society of Lilliputians explodes into anarchy and wilful rupture of the rules that make us human; or

even compassionate as in *Kaspar Hauser* [*The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*] and in his latest film, *Stroszek*, in both of which the main role is played by a somewhat half-witted Berlin factory worker of obscure origins, released into the world at the age of 23 from a long line of asylums and institutions—the films are all records of doomed struggles. But hardly ever in the history of the cinema has the depiction of doom carried so strong a message of life.

This in fact is probably as close as one can come to interpreting Herzog's prophecy: the comeuppance but probable end, in our epoch, of the idea of physical man, seen not philosophically or politically in the standard way as the individual fighting society, but as the animal fighting the machine, as the spirit of the species in a last, desperate sortie fighting the separation from the body.

Almost as if to assure himself of the continuity of the spirit, Herzog tends to use the same actors in practically the same roles and to repeat scenes within cycles of films. In *Stroszek* Bruno S., the actor of *Kaspar Hauser*, sets his truck off on a driverless, circular track, an image of desolation and of civilization's futility lifted bodily from *Even Dwarfs Started Small*, and Clemens Scheitz, the actor who played the glass factory owner's valet in *Heart of Glass*, enlarges and enhances his seconding role, accompanying a main character to doom, in *Stroszek*. It enlarges our understanding of the depth of a character depicted to know, for example, that Bruno's end (death? we do not know) on an out-of-operation snowlift in *Stroszek* relates to other uses of the same symbol in Herzog, for example the snowlifts in his *The Great Ecstasy of Wood-Sculptor Steiner* [*The Great Ecstasy of Woodcarver Steiner*], which is the story of a man obsessed by ski-jumping.

As Herzog advances deeper into ability and acceptance, he tends to expect more of this second-level understanding from his audiences, almost as if he were sure that those of today had seen his work of yesterday. *Stroszek*, a difficult film in itself, depicting a backwoods America seen through the eyes of immigrant naïfs, assumes its full meaning only when seen as a microcosm of Herzog's preoccupations: to give voice to the defeated in a magnificent but deathly pyre. As always in a Herzog film one begins to wonder how he manages to exclude himself from the doom he sees us all heading for.

Because he quite clearly does, and perhaps this exclusion is what has made so many of his critics consider him presumptuous. Talking to him about any subject calls forth the most convinced replies, and his scripts are full of definitive statements, more definitive than those of science, anyway. It becomes ever more complicated not to mix up Herzog with the characters he invents. I find myself in that cutting room in his

mother's apartment in Munich, quite capable of imagining him on a jutting rock deep in a Swiss valley, holding forth like Jeremiah to a group of fallen Swiss Children of God. Thank God I don't believe his modesty; it would have done little for Jeremiah, too.

One gets the feeling that thought and its dressing in language—communication—is but a necessary evil to him, and he does not, in fact, excel at it. In his citified Bavarian, interspersed with frequent "Gell's" ("Isn't it?" or "Don't you agree?") he makes you feel pretty silly for trying to understand his message with words. After all, that's not what he deals in. But he submits to questions (and that is the proper verb) because all means are justifiable when it comes to reaching people. Even critics may be instrumental in getting the films seen. And that is important to him.

What he does deal with is images, and apologetically (because of the comparison) he explains that the impressionists, or Michelangelo, or the cubist, changed our view of the world, our understanding of structures of the soul, through the updating of our feelings concerning light, space, environment, nature. "My characters have no shadows. They come out of the darkness, and such people have no shadows, the light hurts them. They are there, and then gone, to their obscurity. My films are instinctual, anthropological. I am not a theoretical person. I know that I have the ability to articulate images that sit deeply inside us, that I can make them visible. It is an athletic endeavor, like life itself. Things work inside of me for a long time, images become clearer, and at a certain point I just sit down and write the script in three days. There is always a key image; everything emerges from that, physically, not by analysis. I remember my childhood in isolated images, although it didn't last long. Once I saw God, maybe he was just a worker from the village, but he just stood there in the doorway one night when I was afraid and had crept under the bed, and I looked at him, and that's when I stopped being afraid."

Herzog is proud of being able to be alone, of not being afraid, although he won't say in so many words now that he isn't. But what he believes to be his achievements are that he thinks he could live totally alone if there was nobody left in the world (although, he adds, "despite my better judgement, I love and need people"); that he can do everything by himself, every physical thing that needs doing, and that he'd thus prefer to lose his eyesight rather than his legs; that he needs to show to the world that "one is still here"; and that he is sure that through film-making he will meet, as he has already done on occasion, brother souls who would help him in need, who sit there in the dark like him and suddenly realize, as he does when an inspired work explodes upon their senses, that they are no longer alone.