Poor Henry! He wants nothing more than to represent nature as it is, and yet again and again his art drifts away from reality toward fantasy. What is the problem? I will argue that his difficulties lie less in his (or his author’s) psychological problems (Adolf Muschg and Gerhardt Kaiser) than in the nature of art as a representational medium and a commodity that circulates within society. The semiotic and economic aspects of modern art that militate against naïve realism are symptomatic of what Keller terms the “monstrous abstraction” of modern life. As a result, *Der grüne Heinrich* is a realistic novel about the limits of realism, whose guilty protagonist blames himself for problems intrinsic to the work of art in the age of abstraction.