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NATURE AFTER ROMANTICISM

LITERARY EXPLORATIONS OF THE NATURAL WORLD IN THE WORKS OF HEINE, LENAU, AND DROSTE-HÜLSHOFF

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ABSTRACT

During the Biedermeier period, literary representations of nature came to incorporate perspectives from the increasingly dominant natural sciences alongside the aesthetic conventions concerning the depiction of nature inherited from the late eighteenth century.

In a comparative study, the following thesis investigates how three of the period's most prolific writers, Heinrich Heine, Nikolaus Lenau, and Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, explored the natural world through a variety of literary forms and modes of expression. Although the concept of nature took on different functions within the literary oeuvre of these three writers, we are able to see similarities emerge in the way they forged intertextual connections with their Romantic predecessors. The period typical focus on historicity brought forth a literary style that was rich in allusions to an aesthetic tradition of representing nature, which was now being recontextualised. Thus, literature and nature alike appeared historically layered, heterogeneous, and even disharmonious, creating a contrast to the holistic concepts of nature and the *Kunstideal* prevalent at the turn of the century.

Through a close-reading of literary works that dealt explicitly with the relationship to nature, my analysis has retraced intertextual relationships as well as references to contemporary scientific, philosophical, theological, and political discourses. By investigating how Heine's early prose showed nature and society as intertwined, how Lenau's poetry radically questioned the possibility to have an aesthetic experience of nature, and Droste-Hülshoff juxtaposed scientific, aesthetic, and theological concepts of nature within her writing, we can see the multi-facetted character of literary concepts of nature in the 1820s to 1840s emerge.

By taking into consideration the embeddedness of these popular works of literature in their contemporary social context, the following thesis also seeks to understand how a changing relationship between nature and art reflects the new role of literature in a bourgeois *Wissensgesellschaft*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

'Die Geschichte der Literatur ist ebenso schwierig zu beschreiben wie die Naturgeschichte.'[1], Heinrich Heine wrote in 1833 in *Zur Geschichte der neueren, schönen Literatur in Deutschland*, which would later become known as *Die Romantische Schule*. His observation has served as a word of caution to the following analysis, which explores the historical interconnections of literature and nature during what is commonly known as Biedermeier period.[2]

While writing the following analysis, I, too, have encountered some of the difficulties concerning the description of literary history that Heine pointed out in *Die Romantische Schule*, for they continue to challenge literary historians across the divide of centuries. Amongst them, the need to choose, out of a great variety of literary phenomena, those works that are either representative or extraordinary, have contributed to canonized literary history or have remained previously unresearched, has prevailed in a manner similar to what Heine described:

> Aber wie in einem Wasserglas eine ganze Welt wunderlicher Tierchen enthalten ist, die eben so sehr von der Allmacht Gottes zeugen, wie die größten Bestien: so enthält der kleinste Musenalmanach zuweilen eine Unzahl Dichterlinge, die dem stillen Forscher eben so interessant dünken wie die größten Elefanten der Literatur.[3]

Equally valid remains his depiction of literary history as commonly resembling either a classification system focused on differentiating between literary phenomena or a general cultural history, in which literary works serve as examples and illustrations:

> Die meisten Literaturhistoriker geben uns wirklich eine Literaturgeschichte wie eine wohlgeordnete Menagerie, und immer besonders abgesperrt, zeigen sie uns epische Säugedichter, lyrische Luftdichter, dramatische Wasserdichter, prosaische Amphibien, die sowohl Land- wie Seeromane schreiben, humoristische Mollusken, usw. Andere, im Gegenteil, treiben die Literaturgeschichte pragmatisch, beginnen mit den ursprünglichen Menschheitsgefühlen, die sich in den verschiedenen Epochen ausgebildet und endlich eine Kunstform angenommen;[4]

[1] Heinrich Heine, *Sämtliche Schriften* [B], 6 vols., ed. by Klaus Briegleb (Munich/Vienna: Hanser, 1968–1976), vol. 5, p. 465.
[2] I will use the term Biedermeier period in accordance with Frierich Sengle's definition of the term *Biedermeierzeit* as a transitional period between the age of European idealism (until 1848/50) and the age of realism (from 1850 onwards), which he developed in the three volumes of Friedrich Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit. Deutsche Literatur im Spannungsfeld zwischen Restauration und Revolution 1815–1848*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1971–1980).
[3] B, vol. 5, p. 465–466.
[4] Ibid., p. 466.

To avoid these pitfalls of historiography, Heine proposed approaching literary texts as elements within greater historical constellations. These constellations involved what Heine called historical facts as well as literature, both deriving from epoch-defining ideas:

> Die großen Fakta und die großen Bücher entstehen nicht aus Geringfügigkeiten, sondern sie sind notwendig, sie hängen zusammen mit den Kreisläufen von Sonne, Mond und Sterne, und sie entstehen vielleicht durch deren Influenz auf die Erde. Die Fakta sind nur die Resultate der Ideen; […] aber wie kommt es, daß zu gewissen Zeiten sich gewisse Ideen so gewaltig geltend machen, daß sie das ganze Leben der Menschen, ihr Tichten und Trachten, ihr Denken und Schreiben aufs wunderbarste umgestalten? Es ist vielleicht an der Zeit, eine literarische Astrologie zu schreiben und die Erscheinung gewisser Ideen, oder gewisser Bücher, worin diese sich offenbaren, aus der Konstellation der Gestirne zu erklären.[5]

The reconstruction of such a historical constellation, without resorting to astrology,[6] has been the aim of my thesis. The central idea, which I have encountered in literary texts and contextualised with regard to scientific discoveries as well as philosophical and political perspectives emerging at the same time, an idea that indeed made its presence felt so powerfully that it dominated the thinking and writing of many authors in the first half of the nineteenth century, is that of nature.

Approaching nature as an idea embedded in a constellation will be helpful when dealing with such a multifaceted subject matter. Generally speaking, the term nature has had three different meanings: humanity's physical environment, a principle shaping all life on earth, and the character or essence of something. Colloquially, to say that something is natural can also mean that it is common sense, obvious or familiar. Often implications of all three meanings of the word come together when the term nature is used.

One of the most basic definitions of nature comes from the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, according to whom nature is that which we observe through the senses and differentiate from thought. This juxtaposition of thought and nature, which Whitehead described in *The Concept of Nature* (1920)[7], can be traced back to Kant, who defined the term nature in *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790) as 'Inbegriff aller Gegenstände der Sinne'.[8] According to Kant, we perceive nature as different from us and our own faculties of perceiving and understanding, and yet, through this very process, nature remains inextricably tied to our own ability to reflect on it. This dialectical entanglement of being separate from

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Although Feuerbach would recommend stellar observations as the first step towards analysis as well: 'Das Auge ist himmlischer Natur. Darum erhebt sich der Mensch über die Erde nur mit dem Auge; darum beginnt die Theorie mit dem Blicke nach dem Himmel. Die ersten Philosophen waren Astronomen': Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christenthums* (Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1841), p. 7.

[7] Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[8] Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, ed. by Heiner F. Klemme (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2009), p. 12.

nature but connected to it was central to the way nature appeared in literary texts during the first half of the nineteenth century. The influence of this idea can be detected in all areas associated with the term nature – landscape and environment, the force shaping the phenomena of the material world, and the essence or character of things beyond human intervention.

I will focus on literary engagements with this constellation in the time period between the Congress of Vienna 1815 and the German revolutions of 1848 and 1849. This period has been defined by Sengle as a bridge between aesthetic and philosophical systems adhering to idealism and those shaped by realism, something which can be also be detected in the various concepts of nature circulating alongside each other within the German-speaking cultural sphere.[9] The plurality and diversity of literary representations of nature during those transitional decades reflected changing attitudes towards nature as well as the experience of a rapidly changing natural environment. Changes in literary form and expression in the works of Heine, Lenau, and Droste-Hülshoff corresponded to changing philosophical and emotional attitudes to a natural world that was perceived as increasingly fluid and malleable.

The Changing Natural World of the Nineteenth Century

Nature in the sense of humanity's physical environment was subjected to fundamental transformations in the first half of the nineteenth century. Technological innovations at the onset of industrialisation, a changing legal framework redefining land ownership and agricultural practices, new means of transportation, as well as big infrastructural projects that reshaped whole landscapes radically altered the way people interacted with the natural world that surrounded them.

The nineteenth century began with a massive restructuring of the territory that the cultural sphere existed on. Under French influence, the mediatisation and secularisation taking place between 1803 and 1814 reduced the number of immediate vassals of the Emperor and therefore of independent German states from three hundred to thirty-nine. The German Confederation, founded after the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and partly replacing the Holy Roman Empire that had been dissolved in 1806, now served as a political and economic union and foundation for big infrastructural projects such as rectifying rivers and making them navigable, draining swamps and building roads, bridges, and train tracks. The

[9] In the following I will use the term 'Germany' as a synecdoche for the heterogeneous construct of the member states of the German Confederation that would eventually morph into the Deutsches Reich in the second half of the nineteenth century. Although only imaginary as a political reality during the Biedermeier period, the cultural unity of Germany and the concept of German literature had been popular since Herder (*Über die neuere deutsche Literatur*, 1767).

Rheinbegradigung, a monumental endeavour spanning almost the whole century, was begun in 1817, work on the River Main began in 1820, on the Elbe in 1821 and on the Danube from 1823 onwards. The Oder and the Neckar had already been rectified in the eighteenth century.[10]

Wetlands and swamps were drained and made arable. Remaining woodlands, which had become progressively scarcer since the seventeenth century, were cleared. These developments have to be understood in direct relation to the Prussian Reform Movement, which restructured the constitution in Prussia during the first decades of the nineteenth century and inspired similar legal reforms in other German states (the new Bavarian constitution of 1808, for example, legal reforms in the kingdom of Hanover in 1831–1833, and in the kingdom of Saxony in 1832).

Influenced by the Napoleonic Code, these reforms abolished serfdom and allowed all citizens to own land. The immediate consequence was that large landowners accumulated even more land, whereas destitute peasants were forced to either farm on previously fallow and often less fertile soil, or to move to towns and cities, where they would join the newly emerging proletariat. The commons, *Allmenden* in German, which had previously been used communally as pastures or for fishing, gathering wood, or fattening cattle, were mostly turned into private property. Woodlands that had previously belonged to the church or aristocratic landowners and preserved as hunting grounds were now transformed into farmland or used for lumber extraction. Around 1800 the fear of *Holznot*, a shortage or crisis of wood supplies, had led to new laws concerning the common use of woodlands and state ordered reafforestation programmes. Newly planted forests, mainly consisting of fast-growing conifers, altered the landscape, while the gradual transition from using wood and water to fossil fuels such as coal as sources of energy also helped restore and preserve forests throughout the German Confederation.

As historians such as David Blackbourn, Simon Schama and Joachim Radkau have shown, these fundamental changes to landscapes and natural resources were accompanied by new cultural practices of relating to the natural environment.[11] Projects such as the *Rheinbegradigung* were ripe with nationalist implications. The river had long been

[10] See Marc Cioc, *The Rhine. An Eco-Biography 1815–2000* (Washington: Washington University Press, 2002), pp. 52–54, as well as *Industrie-Natur. Lesebuch zur Geschichte der Umwelt im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Franz-Josf Brüggemeier and Michael Toyka-Seid (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 1995) p. 34, p. 93ff.

[11] See David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature. Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York/London: W.W. Norton, 2006), Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), Joachim Radkau with Ingrid Schäfer, *Holz. Ein Naturstoff in der Technikgeschichte* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1987) and *Natur und Macht. Eine Weltgeschichte der Umwelt* (Munich: Beck, 2000).

considered as a natural border between France and the German states and the question who controlled the Rhine had substantial political weight attached to it. After the Congress of Vienna, territories on the left bank of the river were under Prussian control, but also claimed by France. Political tension eventually escalated in the Rhine crisis of 1840, during which the Rhine became a popular feature in many German nationalist poems and songs, of which 'Die Wacht am Rhein' (1840) by Max Schneckenburger, 'Rheinlied' (1840) by Nikolaus Becker and 'Deutsches Kriegslied' (1841) by Ernst Moritz Arndt were the best known.

It was also along the banks of the Rhine that one of Germany's first efforts for environmental protection within Germany was recorded: In 1836, Prussia bought the Drachenfels, a hill close to Königswinter that had been previously used as a trachyte quarry, and stopped all quarrying in order to preserve the hill as it was. This was mainly due to demands made by members of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, who enjoyed walks along the river banks and for whom the picturesque view of the Drachenfels, which had been memorialised in Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812–1818), had become a central site of *Rheinromantik*.

These efforts to preserve the river banks in a pristine natural state stood in stark contrast to the infrastructural changes which made such picturesque spots accessible for an ever growing number of visitors. The first German steamship company was founded in 1825, and by 1860 already seven different companies were operating on the Rhine, carrying both cargo and passengers. The first railway line along the river connected Cologne and Bonn from 1844 onwards. Train lines had started appearing in the German Confederation in the second half of the 1830s. Although the first train lines were primarily connections between cities, they made travelling to natural sights easier as well. Nature tourism evolved in the first half of the nineteenth century, with members of the newly emerging *Bürgertum* visiting the Alps and the German uplands, rivers, heaths and moors, the Baltic and the North Sea. Whereas the typical eighteenth-century traveller still belonged to the nobility and would embark on a *Bildungsreise*, travel now became more regional, shorter, and not just educational but also recreational. The Baedeker travel guides, published since 1827, were written with a bourgeois readership in mind. In the 1840s, travel groups would become popular, a development that eventually led to the establishment of *Wandervereine* in the second half of the nineteenth century, such as the Schwarzwaldverein, founded in 1864 and Bildungsbürgerlicher Bergsteigerverein, founded in 1869, which not only organised hiking tours, but also built their own infrastructure such as trails and cabins.

Nature tourism especially became entangled with the German liberal-nationalist movement and its ideas about landscape, identity and belonging.[12] An example of the connection between landscape and nationalism in the first half of the nineteenth century is the construction of the Hermannsdenkmal near Detmold. Initially funded through the Verein für das Hermannsdenkmal established in 1837 and later financially supported by the Reichstag, the statue of Arminius embedded in the Teutoburg Forest was both a monument to a glorified past and a symbol of communal nationalist efforts. The fact that it was situated in a forest – supposedly the site of Arminius' victory over the Romans – also meant that visitors had to walk through the forest and up a hill in order to reach it, thus participating in an immersive process that merged history and nature.

Site-specific monuments, nature conservancy, and nature tourism all can be understood as indicative of a new understanding of the natural environment as the site of cultural and historical identity. They were also tied to new ways of controlling, shaping and maintaining nature through new technological interventions. The experience of nature so entangled with culture posed a challenge to previous philosophical and aesthetic concepts of nature, which had depicted the natural world as society's other. Whether nature had been imagined as the object of human admiration and reflection by Kant, depicted as a moral educator in the aesthetics of Schiller, as a divine unity by Goethe, or a mysterious alphabet by Novalis, the concept of nature in late eighteenth-century art and philosophy had been based on the idea that nature was separate, even if connected, to human life. The central assumption that man was free whereas nature was not informed, as we will see in the following overview, how these writers thought about nature. The late eighteenth-century emphasis on man's freedom as his decisive quality can be attributed to a philosophy of Enlightenment that focused on reason as a way out of self-imposed immaturity towards freedom, as well as the historical impact of the French Revolution as a struggle for liberty. As we will see, the notion that man was free from nature gradually became questionable after the turn of the century. As the natural sciences developed more complex models of ecological interdependence, the metaphysical concepts of nature, i.e. their significance for the spiritual and creative capacities of human development, appeared less certain to many writers. As we will see in the following chapters, along with the eighteenth-century concepts of nature, previous forms of representing nature in literature changed during the course of the nineteenth century. The poetry and prose I have analysed can in many ways be

[12] For an analysis of how the relationship between nature and nation evolved throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century see also Thomas Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature. Landscape Preservation and German Identity. 1885-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

considered as the result of a crisis in which a swiftly changing natural environment and new scientific discoveries about nature collided with the metaphysical concepts of nature inherited from what Heine called the 'Kunstperiode'. Because this heritage loomed so large and left such visible marks in the literary texts my analysis has focused on, I will attempt an inevitably brief overview of the metaphysics of nature in the late eighteenth century. This will help us situate the three writers whose works I am about to analyse within a wider historical context that they themselves were very conscious of. The literary, philosophical, and scientific approaches to nature I am about to survey, therefore, were broadly familiar to Heine, Lenau, and Droste-Hülshoff and need to be presupposed in the following study of their works in relation to nature.

Metaphysics of Nature: Idealism and Pantheism

Two main tendencies of approaching the significance of nature for human life can be detected in the literature and philosophy of the late eighteenth century: an idealism aimed at transcending nature through spirit, and a sensualist pantheism striving to reveal nature itself as divine. Schiller, following in the philosophical footsteps of Kant, can be considered as the most influential representative of the former, Goethe, influenced by the monism of Spinoza and the physico-theology of Klopstock, as well as by the natural sciences, was a proponent of the latter. The Jena Romantics, especially Novalis, oscillated between both positions and created a system that incorporated idealist as well as pantheist elements.

The concept of nature that Schiller developed in both his theoretical and literary works was based on the fundamental assumption that the physical and the metaphysical were separate yet connected. In his dissertation *Versuch über den Zusammenhang der tierischen Natur des Menschen mit seiner geistigen* (1780), he explored the duality of human existence as part sensual animal, part spiritual being. In his poem 'Die Künstler' (1789), the capacity to merge the sensual and the spiritual by making art was depicted as unique to man: 'Die *Kunst*, o Mensch, hast du allein'.[13] Schiller assumed that nature was a system governed by necessity, and that human freedom had introduced into it a division, which could be closed by art. By creating art, man would eventually reintegrate into nature in a manner that could also fulfil nature's essential purpose:

> Mit euch, des Frühlings erster Pflanze,
> Begann die seelenbildende Natur,
> Mit euch, dem freudigen Erntekranze,

[13] Friedrich Schiller, 'Die Künstler', in: Id., *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Gerhard Fricke, Herbert G. Göpfert, Herbert Stubenrauch, 5 vols. (Munich: Hanser, 1962), vol. 1, pp. 173–186, here pp. 183–184.

Schließt die vollendete Natur. [14]

Schiller further elaborated on the particular position that man as an artist inhabited in the natural world in the major aesthetic treatises he wrote during the 1790s, *Über Anmut und Würde* (1793), *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (1793–1795), and *Über naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795). All three were written under the impression of reading Kant, especially his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790). Therein Kant had focused on two aspects of nature: a) nature as the object of sensual perception that we consider to be different from us and governed by natural, unchangeable laws, which we assume to be necessary even if we do not fully comprehend them, and b) nature as an object of aesthetic contemplation. The latter allowed the human spectator through the experience of the sublime to realise his or her own ability to rise above the immediate impact of the sensual world and therefore helped in the development of what Kant called a moral feeling.[15] But not just the sublime, also beauty in nature or art informed the capability to judge morally:

> Der Geschmack macht gleichsam den Übergang vom Sinnenreiz zum habituellen moralischen Interesse ohne einen gewaltsamen Sprung möglich, indem er die Einbildungskraft auch in ihrer Freiheit als zweckgemäß für den Verstand bestimmbar vorstellt und sogar an Gegenständen der Sinne auch ohne Sinnenreiz ein freies Wohlgefallen finden lehrt.[16]

The ultimate purpose of nature with regard to human existence, according to Kant, was for nature to become free and self-aware in the human consciousness and to form culture: 'Also kann nur die Kultur der letzte Zweck sein, den man der Natur in Ansehung der Menschengattung beizulegen Ursache hat.'[17]

The concept of nature as crucial to man's moral education and art and culture as crucial to nature's completion reappeared in Schiller's works. In *Über Anmut und Würde* he described the relationship between beauty on one hand and grace and dignity on the other as analogous to the relationship between nature and art. Whereas beauty was given by nature and shaped by necessity, both grace (*Anmut*) and dignity (*Würde*) were results of deliberate, subjective acts. Without grace or dignity, men, too, would be solely regarded as beautiful, and therefore be reduced to a mere object, a part of the natural world and no longer set apart from the other creatures, which Schiller called 'Sinnenwesen'.[18] In contrast to such beings, man, according to Schiller, realised his own will in the world and did not simply obey natural

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[14] Ibid.
[15] Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2008), Allgemeine Anmerkung zur Exposition, pp. 136–137.
[16] Ibid., §59, Von der Schönheit als Symbol der Sittlichkeit, p. 257.
[17] Ibid., §83, Von dem letzten Zwecke der Natur, p. 355.
[18] Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 5, p. 435.

laws, he was therefore able to live and create as a free and moral being that Schiller called a 'schöne Seele', a beautiful soul.[19] The beautiful soul struck the perfect balance between sensuality and reason, and only by doing so made a symbiosis of nature and freedom possible. Such a person was exalted above animality by free will, and raised closer to God by making morally just decisions.

The moral education and the cultivation of the beautiful soul had already been the main focus of *Die Schaubühne als eine moralische Anstalt betrachtet*, which Schiller presented in 1784. Now he returned to the thought that art would help develop a moral relationship towards nature in *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*. In twenty-seven letters, Schiller described how humanity could be emancipated from nature through the freedom experienced in creative play. Letters 24 to 27, in particular, retrace a development that would lead man from a physical state of being at the mercy of nature through an aesthetic state, in which man freed himself from nature, towards a moral state, in which he ultimately mastered nature.

Schiller followed a similar triadic model of history in Über naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung. Here humanity had moved from a natural state, in which naïve art maintained a direct relationship to the natural form, to a cultural state of sentimentality, which was preoccupied with the loss of a direct relationship with nature. The third stage would be that of the ideal, in which man would create not after nature but alongside it by combining spirit, free agency and natural form. In the ideal state, nature would no longer be an object merely of sensual perception or aesthetic contemplation; instead, it would inspire a sense of moral appreciation:

> Daraus erhellet, daß diese Art des Wohlgefallens an der Natur kein ästhetisches, sondern ein moralisches ist; denn es wird durch eine Idee vermittelt, nicht unmittelbar durch Betrachtung erzeugt; auch richtet es sich ganz und gar nicht nach der Schönheit der Form. Was hätte auch eine unscheinbare Blume, eine Quelle, ein bemooster Stein, das Gezwitscher der Vögel, das Summen der Bienen u. s. w. für sich selbst so Gefälliges für uns? Was könnte ihm gar einen Anspruch auf unsere Liebe geben? Es sind nicht diese Gegenstände, es ist eine durch sie dargestellte Idee, was wir in ihnen lieben. Wir lieben in ihnen das stille schaffende Leben, das ruhige Wirken aus sich selbst, das Dasein nach eigenen Gesetzen, die innere Nothwendigkeit, die ewige Einheit mit sich selbst.[20]

Here the central aspect of both Schiller's and Kant's understanding of nature becomes clear:

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[19] Ibid., p. 467.

[20] Friedrich Schiller *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, in: *Schillers Werke. Nationalausgabe*, vols. 43–, ed. by Julius Petersen, Liselotte Blumenthal, Norbert Oellers et al., on behalf of Nationale Forschungs- und Gedenkstätten der klassischen Literatur deutschen Literatur in Weimar, Stiftung Weimarer Klassik, Schiller Nationalmuseum in Marbach (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1943–), vol. 20, p. 416.

According to their thinking, nature may itself be pure *physis*, but its purpose for and function in human life and consciousness was a metaphysical one. A reconciliation with nature through an emancipation from nature and the abandonment of the natural state in favour of a moral one was the ultimate goal of both art and culture in general.

This perspective on nature stood in stark contrast to how Goethe conceptualised nature as a constantly evolving self-contained system that in itself was divine. If Schiller called Goethe one of the few naïve poets after antiquity, then he ascribed an unmediated, direct approach to nature to his fellow poet. And indeed, in Goethe's thinking about art and nature, the latter did not need to be refined through the former. Instead, as he contemplated in the sonnet 'Natur und Kunst', spoken by a nymph in the one-act play *Was wir bringen* (1800), nature and art coexisted alongside each other:

> Natur und Kunst, sie scheinen sich zu fliehen,
> Und haben sich, eh' man es denkt, gefunden;
> Der Widerwille ist auch mir verschwunden,
> Und beide scheinen gleich mich anzuziehen.[21]

While nature and art did appear here as the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom as they did in Schiller's aesthetics, the final tercet of the poem suggests a harmonious balance of necessity and freedom, nature and art, rather than one completing and elevating the other[22]:

> Wer Großes will, muß sich zusammen raffen;
> In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister
> Und das Gesetz nur kann uns Freiheit geben.[23]

The idea that art could reveal something of the essence of nature, after careful study, but without surpassing it, was also the guiding thought in Goethe's short treatise on the different stages the relationships between art and nature could reach, 'Einfache Nachahmung der Natur, Manier, Stil' (1789):

> Gelangt die Kunst durch Nachahmung der Natur, durch Bemühung, sich eine allgemeine Sprache zu machen, durch genaues und tiefes Studium der Gegenstände selbst endlich dahin, daß sie die Eigenschaften der Dinge und die Art, wie sie bestehen, genau und immer genauer kennenlernt, daß sie die Reihe der Gestalten übersieht und die verschiedenen charakteristischen Formen nebeneinanderzustellen und nachzuahmen weiß: dann wird der

[21] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Was wir bringen*, in: Id., *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, 40 vols., ed. by Friedmar Apel et al. (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985–2013), vol. 2, p. 838.

[22] As Franz Koch has pointed out, such a depiction of nature and art as equals was a key feature of Classicism in comparison to Romanticism that could also be found in the works of Herder, such as the fourth volume of *Adrastea* (1802): 'Der Weisheit Ziel ist, sie in Eins umschließen, / Natur in Kunst, Kunst in Natur genießen.' Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Bernhard Suphan, 33 vols. (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1877–1913) vol. 23, p. 315f. See Franz Koch, *Goethes Gedankenform* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), p. 151f.

[23] Goethe, *Was wir bringen*, p. 838.

> Stil der höchste Grad, wohin sie gelangen kann, der Grad, wo sie sich den höchsten menschlichen Bemühungen gleichstellen darf.
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> Wie die einfache Nachahmung auf dem ruhigen Dasein und einer liebevollen Gegenwart beruht, die Manier eine Erscheinung mit einem leichten fähigen Gemüt ergreift, so ruht der Stil auf den tiefsten Grundfesten der Erkenntnis, auf dem Wesen der Dinge, insofern uns erlaubt ist, es in sichtbaren und greiflichen Gestalten zu erkennen.[24]

Compared to Schiller, whose aesthetics focused on the subjective spiritual experience of making or perceiving works of art, Goethe was mainly concerned with questions of form, which could be perceived through the senses. The visible and tangible shapes ('in sichtbaren und greiflichen Gestalten') mentioned in the passage above, remained the primary reality of both art and nature. In a review of the treatise *Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen* by Karl Philipp Moritz, published in 1788, Goethe even explained that the beauty of nature as well as the beauty of art had to be perceived as two parts of a whole:

> Was uns allein zum wahren Genuß des Schönen bilden kann, ist das, wodurch das Schöne selbst entstand: *ruhige Betrachtung der Natur und Kunst als eines einzigen großen Ganzen*. Denn was die Vorwelt hervorgebracht, ist nun mit der Natur verbunden und eins geworden und soll mit ihr vereint harmonisch auf uns wirken.[25]

The immediate harmonious effects that nature and art produced here became the most important criteria by which art should be judged. Goethe seemed to value the effects of sensory perception, the affective qualities of art and nature, above their capacity to inspire reflection and engage reason, as he wrote in 'Über Laokoon' (1798):

> Ein echtes Kunstwerk bleibt, wie ein Naturwerk, für unsern Verstand immer unendlich; es wird angeschaut, empfunden; es wirkt, es kann aber nicht eigentlich erkannt, viel weniger sein Wesen, sein Verdienst mit Worten ausgesprochen werden.[26]

It was also its sensory qualities that made sculpture, for Goethe, the epitome of a self-contained, complete work of art. In 'Über Laokoon' he admired the ability of sculptures to express an understanding of how the material world worked ('Lebendige, hochorganisierte Naturen', 'Charaktere', 'Ruhe oder Bewegung') through a composition that allowed certain aesthetic judgements to be made ('Ideal', 'Anmut', 'Schönheit') and to therefore merge art and nature in that one fecund moment Lessing had observed in the Laokoon group.[27]

Goethe's emphasis on the affective qualities of sensory perception not only resulted in Schiller describing him as one of the naïve poets, but also led to accusations of an all too

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[24] Goethe, 'Einfache Nachahmung der Natur, Manier, Stil', in: Id., *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, 40 vols., ed. by Friedmar Apel et al. (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985–2013), vol. 18, pp. 225–229, here p. 227.
[25] Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens*, 21 vols., ed. by Karl Richter et al. (Munich/Vienna: Hanser, 1985–1998), vol. 3.2, p. 273.
[26] Ibid., vol. 4.2, p. 73.
[27] Ibid.

worldly sensualism and a pantheism bordering on atheism. This critical assessment of Goethe by his contemporaries has to be seen in the light of the Pantheismusstreit of the 1780s, during which Jacobi and Mendelssohn clashed about their understanding of the extent to which Spinozist philosophy had influenced Lessing, and whether or not he had to be considered an atheist. The 'Studie nach Spinoza' that Goethe wrote in the mid 1780s can be considered as an indirect contribution to the controversy. Here Goethe mainly contemplated the relationship between the parts and the whole. He seems to have opted for a hesitant monism, acknowledging that manifold phenomena appeared separate to human perception, but also suggesting that this should be attributed to the limitations placed on human knowing, while, as the first sentence of the treatise had declared, being (*Dasein*), completeness, and eternity were actually one. This idea echoed Spinoza's *Ethica* (1677), in which he explained that the one power (*potentia*), due to which all particular things (*res singulares*) including man (*et consequenter homo*) existed, was that of God or nature (*est ipsa Dei sive naturae potentia*).[28] An assumed identity of God and nature, or more specifically, *natura naturans*, that is an active, perpetually moving and evolving nature, can be detected in Goethe's poetry as well as in his scientific studies of nature. The concept of a natural world in constant flux informed 'Über den Granit' (1784), the relationship between the parts and the whole of one organism the 'Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären' (1790). The explicit equation of nature with God was expressed alongside reflections on the interdependency of matter and spirit in a poem in 1826:[29]

> Was kann der Mensch im Leben mehr gewinnen
> Als daß sich Gott-Natur ihm offenbare?
> Wie sie das Feste läßt zu Geist verrinnen,
> Wie sie das Geisterzeugte fest bewahre.[30]

Goethe's one-ness of spirit and matter within a nature that was both material and divine also had a predecessor in Klopstock, whose ode 'Die Frühlingsfeier' (1771) enthusiastically

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[28] The full sentence reads: 'Potentia, qua res singulares et consequenter homo suum esse conservat, est ipsa Dei sive Naturae potentia.', Baruch de Spinoza, *Ethica*, ed. by Carl Gebhardt (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1977), Part IV, Proposito IV, Demonstratio, p. 450. In the context of the Pantheismusstreit, Jacobi maintained that Spinoza had been a panentheist rather than a pantheist. Two centuries later Whitehead distinguished his own panentheist concept of a dipolar God from Spinoza, whom he considered to be a pantheist, see Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1929). Goethe seems to have understood Spinoza as a pantheist as well. In a letter Jacobi he wrote: 'Du erkennst die höchste Realität an, welche der Grund des ganzen Spinozismus ist, worauf alles Übrige ruht, woraus alles Übrige fließt. Er beweist nicht das Daseyn Gottes, das Daseyn ist Gott.', see *Goethe-Briefe*, ed. by Philip Stein (Berlin: Otter Elsner, 1902), vol. 3, p. 50.

[29] The contemplative poem was inspired by what Goethe and his contemporaries believed to be the remains of Schiller, but DNA analysis conducted in 2008 had since proven that the bones stored in Fürstengruft in Weimar did not belong to the poet.

[30] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Die weltanschaulichen Gedichte, in: Id., *Werke*, 14 vols., ed. by Erich Trunz (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1948– 2008), vol. 1, p. 367.

praised the revelation of God's presence in all natural phenomena from oceans to drops of water, insects to thunderstorms. To interpret the natural world as a system of significant signs, although now with the artist, not God assigning significance to natural phenomena, was a tendency that can be detected in Goethe's pantheist writing – his use of the Gingko leaf in the poem 'Gingo biloba' (1815) comes to mind.[31] But whereas Goethe kept his detailed observations of natural phenomena mostly to his scientific studies, the Romantics, especially Friedrich von Hardenberg ('Novalis'), attempted to fully merge scientific and poetic approaches to nature in an all-encompassing system of what Schlegel called 'progressive Universalpoesie'.[32]

The Romantic System of Nature

The Romantic concept of nature which emerged in the intellectual networks of Jena and Berlin around 1800 was characterised by the acceptance of manifold approaches to it, which were ultimately supposed to form a system that was both perfect and progressive.

As a further development of Kantian philosophy, the Romantic thinker Johann Gottlieb Fichte divided the world into self and not-self ('Ich' and 'Nicht-Ich'). The latter was actively and creatively produced, not merely perceived, by the former. Kant's thing in itself therefore became irrelevant in the philosophy of Fichte. Nature, belonging to the not-self, was malleable and imperfect, not in itself the creative force of *natura naturans* and not a very central concept in Fichte's philosophy. For his student F.W.J. Schelling, on the other hand, nature became the main subject of history. In *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur als Einleitung in diese Wissenschaft* (1797) Schelling assumed an identity between spirit and nature, with nature as visible spirit, spirit as invisible nature:

> Die Natur soll der sichtbare Geist, der Geist die unsichtbare Natur sein. *Hier* also, in der absoluten Identität des Geistes *in* uns und der Natur *außer* uns, muß sich das Problem, wie eine Natur außer uns möglich sei, auflösen.[33]

In his *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* (1800), he developed this thought by pointing out how only in organic nature freedom and necessity appeared as one, so that freedom in nature is necessary, and necessity free. This, according to Schelling, creates a contrast to the existence of man, who finds himself positioned right between freedom and necessity:

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[31] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 66. For further reading on Goethe's concept of nature in relation to Romanticism see for example Regina Sachers, *Goethe's Poetry and the Philosophy of Nature. Gott und Welt 1798–1827* (Cambridge: Routledge, 2015), especially p. 19ff.
[32] Friedrich Schlegel, Fragmente [Athenäums-Fragment], in: Id., *Kritische Ausgabe seiner Werke*, ed. by Ernst Behler et al., 35 – vols. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1958–), vol. 2, pp. 165–255, here p. 182.
[33] F.W.J. Schelling, *Werke*, ed. by Otto Weiß, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Fritz Eckardt, 1907), vol. 1, p. 151.

> Die Natur in ihren zweckmäßigen Formen spricht figürlich zu uns, sagt Kant, die Auslegung ihrer Chiffernschrift gibt uns die Erscheinung der Freiheit in uns. In dem Naturprodukt ist noch beisammen, was sich im freien Handeln zum Behuf des Erscheinens getrennt hat. Jede Pflanze ist ganz, was sie sein soll, das Freie in ihr ist notwendig, und das Notwendige frei. Der Mensch ist ein ewiges Bruchstück, denn entweder ist sein Handeln notwendig, und dann nicht frei, oder frei, und dann nicht notwendig und gesetzmäßig. Die vollständige Erscheinung der vereinigten Freiheit und Notwendigkeit in der Außenwelt gibt mir also allein die organische Natur, und dies ließ sich schon zum voraus aus der Stelle schließen, die sie in der Reihe von Produktionen in der theoretischen Philosophie einnimmt, indem sie unsern Ableitungen zufolge selbst schon ein objektiv gewordenes Produzieren, insofern also an das freie Handeln grenzend, jedoch ein bewußtloses Anschauen des Produzierens, insofern also selbst wieder ein blindes Produzieren ist.[34]

Whereas nature acts unconsciously, humans are able to contemplate, reflect and act freely and consciously. In works of art human consciousness and unconscious nature come together in a fusion of what Schelling called 'Kunst', art, i.e. deliberate design and 'Poesie', poesy, i.e. unconscious impulse:

> Wenn nun ferner die Kunst durch zwei voneinander völlig verschiedene Tätigkeiten vollendet wird, so ist das Genie weder die eine noch die andere, sondern das, was über beiden ist. Wenn wir in der einen jener beiden Tätigkeiten, der bewußten nämlich, das suchen müssen, was insgemein *Kunst* genannt wird, was aber nur der eine Teil derselben ist, nämlich dasjenige an ihr, was mit Bewußtsein, Überlegung und Reflexion ausgeübt wird, was auch gelehrt und gelernt, durch Überlieferung und durch eigne Übung erreicht werden kann, so werden wir dagegen in dem Bewußtlosen, was in die Kunst mit eingeht, dasjenige suchen müssen, was an ihr nicht gelernt, nicht durch Übung, noch auf andere Art erlangt werden, sondern allein durch freie Gunst der Natur angeboren sein kann, und welches dasjenige ist, was wir mit Einem Wort die *Poesie* in der Kunst nennen können.[35]

The understanding of 'Poesie' that Schelling expressed here is in accordance with the concept of 'progressive Universalpoesie' that had been defined in the *Athenäums-Fragmente* (1798) by Friedrich Schlegel:

> Die romantische Poesie ist eine progressive Universalpoesie. Ihre Bestimmung ist nicht bloß, alle getrennte Gattungen der Poesie wieder zu vereinigen, und die Poesie mit der Philosophie und Rhetorik in Berührung zu setzen. Sie will, und soll auch Poesie und Prosa, Genialität und Kritik, Kunstpoesie und Naturpoesie bald mischen, bald verschmelzen, die Poesie lebendig und gesellig, und das Leben und die Gesellschaft poetisch machen, den Witz poetisieren, und die Formen der Kunst mit gediegnem Bildungsstoff jeder Art anfüllen und sättigen, und durch die Schwingungen des Humors beseelen. Sie umfaßt alles, was nur poetisch ist, vom größten wieder mehre [sic] Systeme in sich enthaltenden Systeme der Kunst, bis zu dem Seufzer, dem Kuß, den das dichtende Kind aushaucht in kunstlosen Gesang.[36]

Here 'Poesie' appeared as a heterogeneous conglomerate, a process of merging and dividing, or a system which incorporated different methodologies, genres, forms of knowing,

[34] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 281.
[35] Ibid., p. 291.
[36] Friedrich Schlegel, Athenäums-Fragment, in: Id., *Kritische Ausgabe seiner Werke*, vols. 35–, ed. by Ernst Behler et al. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1958–) vol.2, p. 182.

expressing and understanding. In a similar way Novalis described the diversity of approaches towards the natural world at the beginning of his fragmentary novel *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, written in 1798 and 1799 and published posthumously:

> Mannichfache Wege gehen die Menschen. Wer sie verfolgt und vergleicht, wird wunderliche Figuren entstehen sehn; Figuren, die zu jener großen Chiffernschrift zu gehören scheinen, die man überall, auf Flügeln, Eierschalen, in Wolken, im Schnee, in Krystallen und in Steinbildungen, auf gefrierenden Wassern, im Innern und Äußern der Gebirge, der Pflanzen, der Thiere, der Menschen, in den Lichtern des Himmels, auf berührten und gestrichenen Scheiben von Pech und Glas, in den Feilspänen um den Magnet her, und sonderbaren Conjuncturen des Zufalls, erblickt. In ihnen ahndet man den Schlüssel dieser Wunderschrift, die Sprachlehre derselben; allein die Ahndung will sich selbst in keine feste Formen fügen, und scheint kein höherer Schlüssel werden zu wollen. Ein Alcahest scheint über die Sinne der Menschen ausgegossen zu seyn. Nur augenblicklich scheinen ihre Wünsche, ihre Gedanken sich zu verdichten. So entstehen ihre Ahndungen, aber nach kurzen Zeiten schwimmt alles wieder, wie vorher, vor ihren Blicken.[37]

This passage can serve as an exemplary depiction of the concept of nature as it would be framed within 'progressive Universalpoesie'. Novalis, who merged his philosophical knowledge of the works of Spinoza, Kant, and Schiller (with whom he had studied) with scientific knowledge he had gathered as a scientist and inspector of salt mines, emphasized the manifold approaches to nature mirroring the manifold character of nature itself.

Like Schelling, Novalis relied on a figure of thought Kant had used in §42 of *Kritik der Urteilskraft* to describe nature as a system of ciphers. Man's sensory perception was not enough to decipher this mysterious alphabet of nature, since it appeared as if an alkahest, a universal solvent, had been poured over the human senses.

The 'Alkahest' alludes to the philosopher, physicist and alchemist Paracelsus, who had described such a solvent in 1500. The *Chiffernschrift* of nature in the thinking of Paracelsus was designed according to the doctrine of signatures, meaning that the appearance of things revealed their purpose and all of nature could theoretically be 'read' and understood by a knowledgeable mind, because God had designed it that way. This concept was adapted by Jakob Böhme in his book *De signatura rerum* (1622), which had a significant impact on Novalis and the other Romantics. But whereas Böhme had described nature as a book that had been written by God and could be read by mankind, they emphasised the mysterious, unreadable quality of nature.

Through the doctrine of signatures and the 'Universalpoesie', the Romantics forged a third way between nature as an object of moral education, as Schiller had perceived it, and the pantheism of Goethe. Instead, by being depicted as an essentially meaningful, but hardly

[37] Novalis, Die Lehrlinge zu Sais, in: Id., *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, 4+2 vols., ed. by Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960–1999), vol. 1, pp. 79–111, p. 79.

decipherable alphabet, nature itself became involved in the process of reading and interpreting God's will. By incorporating a plurality of approaches, the Romantics also anticipated the multifaceted concepts of nature that would emerge throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, as scientific theories and discoveries challenged previous holistic interpretations of nature.

The Evolution of Science

Romantic 'Universalpoesie' can be considered as an attempt to unite increasingly diverse approaches to the natural world within one system. This tendency to synthesize can be detected in Schelling's philosophy of nature and Novalis' *Das Allgemeine Brouillon* (1799), but also in the works of more scientific authors such as Lorenz Oken or the early writings of Alexander von Humboldt.

Oken began his career by following in the footsteps of Schelling – his first publication *Uebersicht des Grundrisses des Sistems der Naturfilosofie und der damit entstehenden Theorie der Sinne* (1802) clearly showed the influence of the philosopher. But Oken was also an empirical biologist: He described all organic life as a structure consisting of 'Urbläschen' in *Die Zeugung* (1805), which anticipated cell theory. He worked on the classification of life-forms and published an extensive study in comparative anatomy, *Beiträge zur Vergleichenden Zoologie, Anatomie und Physiologie* in the years 1806 to 1807. As the editor of the journal *Isis*, the founder of the Gesellschaft Deutscher Naturforscher und Ärzte in 1822, and author of the thirteen volumes of *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte für alle Stände*, von Oken was instrumental in ensuring that the natural sciences in Germany became popular and organised in a standardised manner.

Alexander von Humboldt's oeuvre reflects his gradual transition from a concept of nature that was still embedded in eighteenth-century metaphysics of nature to a materialist understanding of the natural world. In his early publication *Aphorismen aus der chemischen Physiologie der Pflanzen* (1794), he proposed a merging of general and natural history:

> Mit der allgemeinen Weltgeschichte tritt freilich unser Studium in eine noch nähere Verbindung und der Geschichtsforscher bedarf nicht nur der Naturgeschichte des Menschen, sondern auch unzählig viel anderer Naturkörper, um diese oder jene Reihe von Begebenheit zu übersehen und zu berichten.[38]

Here Humboldt still used the term 'Lebenskraft'[39] in order to describe a creative force that shaped organic life and set it fundamentally apart from inanimate nature. He later abandoned

[38] Alexander von Humboldt, *Aphorismen aus der chemischen Physiologie der Pflanzen* (Leipzig: Voss und Compagnie, 1794), p. VII.
[39] Ibid., p. XV, and especially 9f.

this assumption and declared all matter to be shaped by and subjected to the same laws of nature. Humboldt depicted this shift in his narration 'Die Lebenskraft oder der Rhodische Genius', published in Schiller's journal *Die Horen* in 1795, in which the philosopher Epicharmus elaborates:

> Reißt den Vorhang vor dem Fenster hinweg, daß ich mich noch einmal weide an dem Anblick der reichbelebten lebendigen Erde. Sechzig Jahre lang habe ich über die innern Triebräder der Natur, über den Unterschied der Stoffe gesonnen und erst heute läßt der Rhodische Genius mich klarer sehen, was ich sonst nur ahnete. Wenn der Unterschied der Geschlechter lebendige Wesen wohlthätig und fruchtbar aneinander kettet, so wird in der unorganischen Natur der rohe Stoff von gleichen Trieben bewegt.[40]

Schiller would later criticise Humboldt's approach to nature for being brazen, rough, and violent:

> Es ist der nackte, schneidende Verstand, der die Natur, die immer unfaßlich und in allen ihren Punkten ehrwürdig und unergründlich ist, schamlos ausgemessen haben will und mit einer Frechheit die ich nicht begreife, seine Formeln, die oft nur leere Formeln und immer nur enge Begriffe sind, zu ihrem Maßstab macht. Kurz, mir scheint er für seinen Gegenstand ein viel zu grobes Organ, und dabei ein viel zu beschränkter Verstandesmensch zu sein.[41]

This strong reaction shows how controversial different approaches to nature had become by the turn of the century. Three areas were especially divisive: the theory of evolution, the concept of extinction, and the vast, pre-human history of the earth. The thought that man was not exempt from these processes, but instead implicated in them like any other form of organic life, was particularly disputable.

In the decades before Darwin published his *On the Origin of Species* (1859), the theory of evolution began to take shape in the works of various biologists and geologists across Europe. Among them was Karl Friedrich Kielmeyer, who developed a comparative anatomy of organisms based on their capacity to change between 1790 and 1793 and suggested in lectures different stages of development detectable in the animal world.

Much more influential, however, was Jean-Baptiste Lamarck. In his *Philosophie Zoologique* (1804) and *Histoire naturelle des animaux sans vertèbres* (1815–1822), he considered these stages to have resulted from random adaptation to environmental conditions and an ever-increasing complexity of lifeforms through historical development. His assumptions about the development of species and the history of the earth were based on the principle of epigenesis, a gradual transformation shaping the life-cycle of plants and animals that Caspar David Wolff described in his *Theoria generationis* (1759). The

[40] Alexander von Humboldt, 'Die Lebenskraft oder der Rhodische Genius. Eine Erzählung', in *Die Horen*, vol. 1 (1795), pp. 90–96, here p. 94.
[41] Friedrich Schiller in a letter to Körner of 7 August 1797, in: *Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Körner*, ed. by Klaus L. Berghahn (Munich: Winkler, 1973), pp. 169–271, here p. 270.

proposition that through cell differentiation and a growing complexity of organs life developed in a succession of different forms, which Wolff had applied to individual organisms, Lamarck now transferred to whole species. According to him, species did not become extinct, but instead changed through the process of transmutation and became almost unrecognisable. Fossils of life-forms that no longer existed were therefore interpreted as residues of earlier developmental stages belonging to still existing animals or plants.

The geologist Charles Lyell applied a similar principle of gradual change to the history of the earth in the three volumes of *Principles of Geology* (1830–1833), but denied the transmutation of species in favour of a more stable system of life-forms. His observation followed the concept of actualism, which had been anticipated by Buffon in his *Histoire Naturelle* (1749) and made well-known by James Hutton in *Theory of the Earth* (1788). Actualism suggested that the earth had been shaped through long and gradual transformations such as ice ages, not sudden and cataclysmic events such as floods or the eruption of volcanoes. Species had become extinct because they could not adapt to changing climatic conditions.

This central aspect of actualism was challenged in the first half of the nineteenth century repeatedly by Georges Cuvier. In his *Recherches sur les ossemens fossiles* (1812) and *Discours sur les Révolutions de la surface du Globe* (1825) he described the history of the earth as a series of catastrophic events, which had radically altered the surface of the planet. Species, according to Cuvier, became extinct in the chaotic upheavals that affected all life on earth, such as the deluge described in the book of Genesis. Through divine intervention, species could be created spontaneously after such catastrophic destruction, an aspect of catastrophism that was mocked by Lyell, but which also made Cuvier's concept more popular, because it meant that catastrophism was theoretically compatible with Christian creationism.

The controversy between actualism and catastrophism in the 1820s and 1830s had been preceded by the Neptunist-Plutonist controversy of the late eighteenth century, during which the Neptunist Abraham Gottlob Werner had argued that the surface of the earth had been shaped by oceans, whereas Plutonists, or uniformitarianists like Hutton or Humboldt had attributed greater importance in the formation of the earth to volcanic activity. It also anticipated the 'Materialismusstreit' of the 1840s, which debated the compatibility of natural sciences and Christian faith.

The fear of a chasm opening up between science and religion, as well as the possibility of catastrophic events in the past and their probability in the future, whether in

the form of gradually encroaching ice or sudden flood or fire, inspired a negative outlook on nature that found its expression in apocalyptic visions of destruction and desolation. Similarly, the idea that humankind might be subjected to processes such as evolution and extinction resulted in anxieties about man's place in the history of the earth and inspired depictions of nature as cold, careless or downright evil.

These sceptical or pessimistic perspectives on nature were also informed by the cultural impact of natural disasters. The Lisbon earthquake in 1755 had interested Rousseau, who assumed it had been caused by overpopulation and interpreted it as a warning sign against urbanism, Kant, who speculated that subterranean gases had been the catalyst, and Kleist, who was still inspired by the event in 1806, when he was writing *Das Erdbeben in Chili*[42]. A series of volcanic eruptions, among which the 1814 eruption of the Mayon in the Philippines, and the 1815 eruption of the Tambora in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) were the biggest, resulted in 1816 in the Year Without a Summer. Global temperatures decreased rapidly by 0.4 to 0.7 °C, causing crop failure and food shortages in the following year. In light of concepts such as catastrophism, these events were perceived as signs of the volatile and potentially dangerous constitution of nature, which posed a threat to human existence.

Finally, the French Revolution was described by many contemporaries as akin to a natural disaster. Metaphorically, the violent upheaval and the destruction of a former state order was often described as a flood or a volcanic eruption. Here freedom and nature seemed to mingle in a destructive way, leading conservative voices all over Europe to interpret the common people as a violent force of nature that should not be freed from traditional society's moderating influence. A literary example can be found in Schiller's 'Lied von der Glocke' (1798) with its depiction of natural forces let loose from human control, in this case a rampant fire, destroying what people had laboriously built:

> Die freie Tochter der Natur.
> Wehe, wenn sie losgelassen,
> Wachsend ohne Widerstand,
> Durch die volkbelebten Gassen
> Wälzt den ungeheuren Brand!
> Denn die Elemente hassen
> Das Gebild der Menschenhand.[43]

[42] Although the novella tells the story of the 1647 earthquake in Santiago de Chile, Kleist's depiction of chaos and upheaval threatening an almost ideal state of being appears to have been strongly influenced by the debates on theodicy in the wake of the Lisbon earthquake. Kleist clearly saw human wickedness working in conjunction with natural disaster: the earthquake alone does not result in disastrous consequences, but its impact is amplified by human behaviour, which has slowly corroded the very substance of the town.
[43] Friedrich Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 2, p. 433.

The literary depiction of catastrophic natural events in the works of Kleist and Schiller expressed a growing uneasiness with the potential destructive forces of nature that could not be pacified by the new findings of the emerging empirical sciences. Instead, as scientific theories revealed the extent to which human life was embedded in natural history, previous forms of philosophical understanding and aesthetic representation of nature became problematic. A swiftly changing natural environment, new models explaining the history of the earth and the development of species, as well as the experience of natural disasters, generated an attitude of concern towards a seemingly disharmonious nature that often found its way, as we will see in the following chapter, into literary representations of nature.

Research Perspectives on the Nineteenth Century

The aforementioned plurality of aesthetic, political and philosophical programmes, ideological affiliations, and intellectual groups which were so characteristic of German culture during the Biedermeier is also reflected in the variety of research approaches to the period. The heterogeneity begins with the historical framing of the epoch: whereas terms such as *Restauration*, *Nachklassik*, or *Spätromantik* emphasise that these decades came after the historical 'Kunstperiode', *Vormärz* indicates that this period leads up to the revolutionary events at the end of the 1840s.

Friedrich Sengle has captured the ambivalence of the age in his monumental work *Biedermeierzeit*, in which he stated that these different cultural phenomena were in fact all symptoms of one slow, fundamental transition. Sengle described the epoch as a system of coordinates, with cultural currents, writers and thinkers as points within the system. A similar understanding of the time as one of very different parallel transformations has informed Reinhardt Koselleck's concept of 'Sattelzeit', which extends from around 1750 to 1870.

It was precisely this ambivalent, Janus-faced character of the period that made a comparative approach to its literary representations of nature appear promising. Heinrich Heine, Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, and Nikolaus Lenau were contemporaries, all born between 1797 and 1802 in various German-speaking territories. They moved, however, in intellectual circles so distinct from each other and were perceived as following such contrasting aesthetic programmes that they sometimes appear to have lived in different societies altogether. In some ways, this was true: Although intellectual networks within the German speaking cultural sphere became increasingly close-knit, travelling within the German Confederation became safer and easier, and the nationalist movement worked

towards a unification of a federal state, Heine, Droste-Hülshoff, and Lenau all lived in different sovereign states. Their religious, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds were also very different: whereas Lenau was born in Csátad in the eastern part of the Austrian-Hungarian empire into impoverished, Catholic nobility, Heine's upbringing took place in the urban environment of Düsseldorf, where his family belonged to the assimilated Jewish bourgeoisie, and Droste-Hülshoff belonged to one of the oldest Catholic aristocratic families in Westphalia, and received a traditional private education. This variety in backgrounds and lifestyles offers a cross section through the heterogenous fabric of the epoch and allows sometimes surprising parallels to be discovered.

Analysing their poems and prose writings, as well as passages from their letters and journals, alongside each other therefore offers a new perspective on the variety of aesthetic discourses and literary explorations of nature in the aftermath of Romanticism and Weimar Classicism and during the first half of the nineteenth century. Studying the works of three writers who belong to one generation has been especially rewarding in this historical context, because German language writers of the period were very much concerned with their own historicity and the fact that they were either *Epigonen* – too young to belong to the Romanticism and Classicism of the turn of the last century – or caught in a state of latency, awaiting future reconciliation, revolution, or a conservative *Restauration*.

In this context, nature was both a concept that had been inherited from literary and philosophical predecessors of the late eighteenth century and one that was pointing towards an uncertain future. Traditional styles, especially the popular *Naturlyrik* of Romanticism and Classicism, still exerted a strong influence on the succeeding generation of writers. However, these literary conventions were often alluded to in their works as antiquated or inadequate modes of representation. They appeared as relics of a tradition, fossilised or atrophied forms, unable to capture the character of the complex nature that natural sciences described or that began to emerge out of the close entanglement of nature and culture. In the following chapters, I will explore how new forms of representing nature emerged out of the confrontation between old and new, as the concept of nature gained new significance in the bourgeois society of the nineteenth century. Whereas the Romantic legacy remained a strong point of reference, I will show how literature increasingly interacted with new philosophical perspectives, observations of the social sphere and discourses in the natural sciences within the constellation surrounding the idea of nature.

Impulses to re-examine the relationship between literature and nature in such an expanded manner have come in the last decades from the field of eco-criticism. Timothy

Morton's critical work on the legacy of the Romantic aesthetics of nature has inspired new ways of looking at the historical intertwinement of aesthetics and our understanding of nature.[44] In recent years, the works of Kate Rigby on negative ecopoetics, i.e. the way literary form imagined a reconciliation with the natural world through leaving gaps and dissolving traditional forms, has cast an illuminating perspective on German-language literature during the nineteenth century.[45]

In my analysis, I have based my thoughts on the works of literary scholars, historians and scholars of cultural studies in order to present the most nuanced possible view of nature in the first half of the nineteenth century. Thus, the relationship between this multi-faceted and ambiguous concept and the conventions, traditions, restrictions as well as liberties of the literary form will be illuminated in its complexity and hopefully cast some light on the reciprocal process through which the idea of nature and art, especially literature, shaped each other.

[44] See Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Harvard MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[45] Kate Rigby, 'Nature, Language, and Religion: Herder and Beyond', in: Ecological Thought in German Literature and Culture, ed. by Gabriele Dürbeck et al. (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2017), pp. 31–42, 'Art, Nature and the Poesy of Plants in the Goethezeit' in *Goethe Yearbook* 22 (2015), pp. 23–44, and '"Come forth into the light of things": Material Spirit as Negative Ecopoetics' in: *Material Spirit. Religion and Literature Intranscendent* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), pp. 111–128.

2. *Green Fairy-Tales and Sweet Atoms*
Nature and Society in Heine's Early Works

On 23 November 1825, Heinrich Heine sent a copy of his yet unpublished *Die Harzreise* to Wilhelm Gubitz, editor of the literary magazine *Der Gesellschafter*. In the accompanying letter, Heine expressed his hope that Gubitz would leave the prose work mostly as it was, not breaking it up too often ('dass Sie den ganzen Aufsatz nicht zu oft abbrechen'[46]), especially not tearing apart the depictions of nature ('besonders nicht bey Naturschilderungen'[47]). It is a curious detail of the tumultuous publication process the first instalment of *Reisebilder* had to endure that Heine's anxiety over the form of the text and the format of its publication would be linked to the 'Naturschilderungen' contained therein. The literary treatment of nature became, as we will explore in the following analysis, a pivotal figure which Heine used to reflect and depict his shift from poetry to prose writing in the 1820s. In order to understand why Heine referred back to the role of nature in his writing while negotiating with his publisher Gubitz, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at the circumstances that surrounded the publication of *Die Harzreise*.

In 1825, Heine had been all but coerced by Friederike Robert into sending the first copy of his travelogue to her brother Gottlieb Braun, who was the editor of the *Rheinblüten* almanac. Robert was also the sister-in-law of Rahel Varnhagen, the salonnière who had been vital for Heine's introduction into the literary circles of Berlin in the early 1820s and whose associates could not be easily refused by an up-and-coming writer. Thus, Heine agreed to send his *Harzreise* to Braun despite feeling reluctance towards the publication form of the almanac in general. Only after it had become clear that the next edition of *Rheinblüten* was put on hold and would not be published in the foreseeable future did Heine demand the copy of his manuscript back from Braun. The delay was disastrous for Heine, who had clearly envisioned a publication closer to the time. With the threat of further retardation looming over *Die Harzreise*, he wrote to Robert in October 1825: 'Dies wäre mir nun jetzt recht fatal, indem meine Einsendung, die Harzreise, wegen ihres vielfältigen die Gegenwart anspielenden Inhalts, eigentlich als Novität gedruckt werden musste.'[48]

[46] Heinrich Heine, *Säkularausgabe* [HSA], ed. and published by Nationale Forschungs- und Gedenkstätten der klassischen deutschen Literatur in Weimar and Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, vol. 20 (Weimar/Paris: 1970–), p. 223.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., pp. 217-218.

After retrieving the manuscript and sending it to Gubitz instead, Heine felt, as he admitted to Moses Moser in a letter on 8 January 1826, cheated of the fame of true contemporaneity, which would have surely been his, had he only published the year before. The sense of urgency and restlessness concerning the publication that is so palpable in Heine's correspondence cannot simply be chalked up to the anxieties of a young writer trying to find his footing and place in the German literary scene. Clearly Heine envisioned *Die Harzreise* not only as a literary novelty, but more precisely as a commentary on contemporary life, a kind of literature that did not aim to convey a sense of completeness and autonomy, but rather bore the marks of its close contact, its involvement with society. This concept of literature showing clear signs of being subjected to and imbedded in social practices informed, for example, Heine's demand to have passages which did not pass the strict pre-censorship marked as absent by dashes instead of omitted from the text (a literary strategy born from restriction that Heine took to extremes in the second part of *Reisebilder*, in which chapter XII of *Ideen. Das Buch Le Grand* consists almost solely of dashes, only leaving the words 'Die deutschen Zensoren' and 'Dummköpfe' on the page[49]). As we will see, this concept of the literary work of art as something not independent from society, but interlaced with it, corresponds to the concept of nature that Heine unfolded in his prose writing. Heine's nervousness about Gubitz's edition – which would, after all, prove justified, as the version of *Die Harzreise* that was finally published in *Der Gesellschafter* in fourteen instalments over the course of January and February 1826 had been severely altered by the editor, who for example, did not include the requested dashes indicating censored passages – included the treatment of 'Naturschilderungen', because they were evidently very important to Heine (he pointed them out in letters to Ludwig Robert in March 1825 and Rudolf Christiani in May 1825 as well). And yet the very fact that Heine would ask his editor to treat his descriptions of nature of all things with the utmost care does appear strange initially. At a time when the Carlsbad Decrees of 1819 had resulted in the Twenty-Sheet-Clause that subjected all written material under twenty sheets (approximately 320 pages) to a restrictive pre-censorship, Heine's evident concern for his nature descriptions instead of, say, his controversial observations on social life and the political and economic situation in the German Confederation seems slightly incongruous. It is only when we take into consideration a comment Heine made in a later letter to Christiani that we can contextualise his unusual emphasis on 'Naturschilderungen'. Here Heine linked the treatment of the natural world (and, more precisely, of the concept of landscape) with the treatment of the

[49] B, vol. 3, p. 283.

censored text as he wrote: 'Die Harzreise ist jetzt an Gubitz abgegangen, und ich bin neugierig wie viel Tannenbäume mir die Censur aus dem Oberharze streichen wird.'[50]

The metaphor depicting the interferences of censorship inflicted upon a text as cuts made into the tree population of a forest leads us straight to the core of Heine's concept of nature. Both works of art and the fabric of the natural world, books and trees, are shown to be subjected to similarly controlling and configuring forces. By aligning the forest and his writing about it through the common denominator of them being *something to be interfered with*, Heine destabilised the claim to autonomy of both art and nature, exposing them as equally implicated in social practices (censorship, the cutting of wood). The importance Heine assigned to his 'Naturschilderungen' therefore derives from the fact that in them nature once again became a cipher for art– this time around not in order to emphasize their equally ahistorical remoteness from society, as the writers of Romanticism and Weimar Classicism had done, but, on the contrary, to show their social character. Just as Heine's *Die Harzreise* was conceptualised as closely linked to contemporary society, nature within the text is never depicted as 'the other' to society. Instead Heine described a complex, reciprocal relationship between social and natural forces, tied together by both rejection and attraction. The conflict that derives from such a double-bind mirrors that of art, which, as Heine claimed in the 1820s, could no longer strive to embody something timeless, independent and whole (a concept he attributed to the 'Kunstidee' of Goethe, as he explained in his 1828 review 'Die deutsche Literatur von Wolfgang Menzel'). Both art and nature in Heine's eyes became something that was simultaneously the product of the society that had shaped and conceptualised it and the moment of irritation and subversion that pulled the social fabric apart. Heine therefore acknowledged that at the core of both nature and art in their relation to society lay a structure that was of paramount importance to German idealist thought after Kant: the principle of dialectics.

The influence of both Kantian and Hegelian thought on the young Heine has been well studied and documented.[51] For the following analysis it will be helpful to remember that Heine appreciated Kant's progressive and emancipatory impulse, but disliked what he considered to be a disproportionate focus on the faculties of the mind – reason and rationality – and a neglect of the body. In *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*, written in his Paris exile in the early 1830s, Heine would call Kant the 'große Zerstörer im

[50] HSA, vol. 20, p. 225.
[51] For Kant and Heine see for example Malter: 1997, Altenhofer: 1993, Hildebrand: 2001; for Hegel and Heine Windfuhr: 1972, Heise: 1973, Hermand: 1976, Krüger: 1977, Zinke: 1979, Lefebvre: 1986, Presner: 2003.

Reich der Gedanken',[52] revolutionary and terrible in his thoughts, but leading a life that was mechanical and devoid of sensuality. In *Die Harzreise*, the narrator's dreams are haunted by a spectre dressed in transcendental grey, quoting Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and, in a logical but disturbing volte, proving its own non-existence. The trajectory of cold rationality that ends up being hostile towards itself and transforming life into a ghostly, body- and bloodless existence, continues after waking when the narrator, now on his way through the Harz mountains, encounters a man who points out to him 'die Zweckmäßigkeit und Nützlichkeit der Natur'.[53] 'Solange er neben mir ging', complains the narrator, 'war gleichsam die ganze Natur entzaubert, sobald er aber fort war, fingen die Bäume wieder an zu sprechen, und die Sonnenstrahlen erklangen und die Wiesenblümchen tanzten, und der blaue Himmel umarmte die grüne Erde.'[54] Although the fellow wanderer claims that only sick people are susceptible to seeing ghosts and therefore he, in his robust health, never encounters them, the connection between his perception of reality and the spectre appearing in the narrator's nightmare is clear enough: both reduce life in its sensual immediacy to something that solely reflects instrumental reason. For Heine, Kant's splitting of the world of things into noumenon and phenomenon left subjects trapped in their thoughts, unable to encounter the outer world in the form of an enigmatic, enticing and enchanted nature.

Heine's stance on Hegel is similar. While Heine, who heard Hegel lecture in Berlin in the early 1820s, was taken with the notion that history worked itself out in a constricted double movement of advances and retreats, it was again the overemphasis on spirit and the continuous movement towards its domain that repelled Heine about Hegel. If Hegel's triadic structure moved from being through nothingness to becoming by the force of thought alone (through understanding, reason and speculation) then Heine mocked this way of thinking in *Die Harzreise* as 'apothekenartig', challenging it with a contrasting vision of a truly dialectical interpenetration of inner and outer worlds:

> Unendlich selig ist das Gefühl, wenn die Erscheinungswelt mit unserer Gemütswelt zusammenrinnt, und grüne Bäume, Gedanken, Vögelgesang, Wehmut, Himmelsbläue, Erinnerung und Kräuterduft sich in süßen Arabesken verschlingen. Die Frauen kennen am besten dieses Gefühl, und darum mag auch ein so holdseliges Lächeln um ihre Lippen schweben, wenn wir mit Schulstolz unsere logischen Taten rühmen, wie wir alles so hübsch eingeteilt in objektiv und subjektiv, wie wir unsere Köpfe apothekenartig mit tausend Schubladen versehen, wo in der einen Vernunft, in der anderen Verstand, in der dritten Witz, in der vierten schlechter Witz und in der fünften gar nichts, nämlich die Idee, enthalten ist.[55]

[52] Heinrich Heine, Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland, in: B, vol. 5, pp. 505–641, here p. 595.
[53] B, vol. 3, p. 130.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid., p. 160.

Without jumping too much ahead in our analysis we should bear in mind that Heine envisioned the struggle which would propel humankind from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom to be solved not by spirit alone, but by a reconciliation of body and spirit. This, as we will see, informed his concept of nature as not severed from society but deeply connected to it. For Heine, nature was not some static otherness in the past or far away – on the contrary, it was something deeply personal, concerning the relationship between body and spirit, and at the same time something that could not be explored individually, but that instead had to be transformed by society and throughout history.

The Harz as a Literary Landscape

The Harz region, which Heine visited in the spring and early autumn of 1824, would have been the perfect place to study such an entwinement of nature and society during the first half of the nineteenth century. Not only was the region known for both its traditional artisanal communities and a still relatively intact medieval mining system powered by hydraulic energy – pockets of pre-modern life that were increasingly pushed back by advancing industrialisation – but the Brocken also held a special cultural significance as the highest peak in all of the northern German states and had been associated with witchcraft for centuries and linked to supernatural activities since the Middle Ages, which made the place a popular site for literary portrayals in the eighteenth century. In 1777, decades before the 'Walpurgisnacht' scene in his *Faust*, Goethe had written the poem 'Harzreise im Winter' about his ascent of the Brocken. Georg Christoph Lichtenberg described a supernatural vision of the mountain in his dream-essay *Daß du auf dem Blocksberge wärest* (1799), and in 1788, a very young Novalis wrote a poem entitled *Der Harz*, praising the Harz mountains as 'Muttergebürg'[56] and the Brocken as the quintessential German mountain. Travelogues of Brocken excursions, as Jost Hermand has shown in his commentary in the Düsseldorf edition of Heine, were a staple of sentimental writing in the 1770s and prints of Harz landscapes became widely popular domestic ornaments during the 1780s.[57]

Novelty or originality was therefore not what one would hope to find in a region so steeped in cultural references, and Heine made it quite clear in both his letters and in his prose writing that for him visiting the Harz, and especially its highest peak, the Brocken, in the 1820s meant partaking in the literary mapping of culturally charged territory with a long-standing legacy. In a letter to Moses Moser, dated 4 April 1824, he related the deep

[56] Novalis, *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe*, ed. by Hans Joachim Mähl and Richard H. Samuel, 3 vols. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999), vol. 1, p. 13.
[57] DHA, vol. 7.2, p. 518f.

unhappiness he felt on the mountain back to folklore, wishing for the devil to take back 'his beloved mountain' ('hol der Teufel seinen geliebten Blocksberg'[58]). Later that year, when Heine visited the Harz for a second time, he felt compelled to address Goethe directly, writing in a letter to the great predecessor: 'auf dem Brocken ergriff mich das Verlangen zur Verehrung Göthes nach Weimar zu pilgern.'[59] The Brocken, at this point, was not only a site of general cultural significance, but, more specifically, very much Goethe's mountain, an idea that Heine continued to elaborate on in *Die Harzreise*. Günter Saße has even argued that Goethe was the hidden destination of Heine's journey all along and that the literary account of it was only cut short before the narrator reaches Weimar because Heine's actual meeting with Goethe turned out to be a bitter disappointment.[60] Opposed to this rather defeatist reading of Heine's endeavour we may also interpret a literary journey through the Harz written in the 1820s that does decidedly *not* turn towards Weimar (but instead to Hamburg, a place of very different cultural significance as we will see later) as a deliberate and emancipatory move that offered an alternative ending to a time-period which Heine associated so closely with Goethe and which he finally, in *Französische Maler* (1831), would come to call 'Kunstperiode'[61]. In his later writings Heine emphasised this periodisation, confidently calling himself the first modern poet of German literature in *Geständnisse* (1854), but in the 1820s, overcoming the lingering influence of Goethe was still a long way off, as Heine was in the process of searching for new literary forms that would undermine the dominant aesthetics of the *Kunstperiode*.

Many references throughout *Reisebilder* still bear witness to the strong presence of Weimar and Jena – the very first impression of the Brocken in *Die Harzreise*, for example, is depicted as predetermined and framed by the cultural context provided by the 'große, mystische, deutsche Nationaltragödie vom Doktor Faust.'[62] 'Mir war immer', muses the narrator while ascending the mountain, 'als ob der Pferdefuß neben mir hinauf klettere, und jemand humoristisch Atem schöpfe.'[63] The image clearly conveys the idea that the narrator is not travelling alone but always remains in the company of a literary tradition. Even though the poem at the beginning of *Die Harzreise* expresses an escapist desire to seek refuge from

[58] HSA, vol. 20, p. 156.
[59] Ibid., p.175.
[60] See Günter Saße, 'Wandern auf doppeltem Boden. Heinrich Heines Harzreise', in *Heinrich Heine. Neue Lektüren*, ed. by Werner Frick (Freiburg i.B.: Rombach, 2011), pp. 73–91.
[61] HSA, 12.1, p. 47.
[62] HAB, vol 3, p. 140.
[63] Ibid.

the falsehood and pretence of society in nature, the wish to look down gleefully upon what has been left behind, it soon becomes clear that society will not be overcome quite so easily.

Journeying through a territory so markedly shaped at every turn by numerous cultural mediations can be read as both a continuation and a renunciation of Romantic concepts of creation. Alluding to motives from folk and fairy tales and incorporating them into a new piece of literature, as Heine does with his references to the Brocken, can be considered a cornerstone of the Romantic literary repertoire. Yet the sense of acute historical situatedness and the way social interaction with landscape in *Die Harzreise* shapes the experience of nature and the literary depiction of it stands in stark contrast to the concept of creativity based on genius which Friedrich Schlegel in his *Ideen* 1800 described as humanity's natural state of being ('Genie zu haben ist der natürliche Zustand des Menschen; gesund mußte auch er aus der Hand der Natur kommen […]'[64]). In fact, for Schlegel (and for the majority of German idealist thinkers), the very capacity for original creation not *after* nature, but *like* and *alongside* nature was what made man belong to the natural world: 'Der Mensch ist ein schaffender Rückblick der Natur auf sich selbst.'[65]

For Heine, though, this mirror-like relationship had been disrupted by the forces of history. Following the line of thinking developed in Schiller's 1795 treatise *Über naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung* that, as I mentioned in my introduction, in many ways played a pivotal role in connecting the thinking about nature and literature of the late eighteenth century to that of the early and mid-nineteenth century,[66] Heine saw a permanent and unbridgeable fissure where Novalis had striven for a complete merging of nature and the world of the spirit through the sense of wonder conveyed by fairy-tales ('In einem ächten Märchen muß alles wunderbar – geheimnißvoll und unzusammenhängend seyn – alles belebt. Jedes auf eine andere Art. Die ganze Natur muß auf eine wunderliche Art mit der ganzen Geisterwelt vermischt seyn.'[67]). For Heine, art could never reconcile what art itself had torn apart in the course of its own historical development, which is why he wrote in *Die Romantische Schule* about a poem from the Romantic collection *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* by Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano:

> Welch ein schönes Gedicht! Es liegt in diesen Volksliedern ein sonderbarer Zauber. Die Kunstpoeten wollen diese Naturerzeugnisse nachahmen, in derselben Weise, wie man

[64] *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe*, sect. 2, vol. 11, p. 258.
[65] Ibid.
[66] For an exploration of the often very influential but (especially compared to the figure of Goethe) sometimes hidden or rather indirect role Schiller's aesthetics played throughout the first half and the middle decades of the nineteenth century see James Rolleston, 'The Legacy of Idealism. Schiller, Mörike and Biedermeier Culture', *Modern Language Quarterly* 51.4 (1990), pp. 491–512.
[67] Novalis, *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, ed. by Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960–1999), vol. 3, p. 280f.

> künstliche Mineralwässer verfertigt. Aber wenn sie auch durch chemischen Prozeß die Bestandteile ermittelt, so entgeht ihnen doch die Hauptsache, die unersetzbare sympathetische Naturkraft.[68]

Through the act of imitation, the folksong-like Romantic poem, which Heine here characterised as a sentimental one in the Schillerian sense, only emphasized the sheer impossibility of accessing a natural state beyond the boundaries drawn by society and tradition. As Michael Perraudin has shown, by the 1820s, the folktale and folksong revival had already evolved into a complex network of tradition, imitation, and original creation.[69] Writers such as Heine alluded to recently written poems like those of Wilhelm Müller, which in turn alluded to a tradition of older folk-songs, making the claim to authenticity questionable and turning the act into a pure display of historical intertextuality.

In the same vein, for a writer as painfully aware of his historical situatedness as Heine, a literary excursion to the Harz in the 1820s was an acknowledgement of the fact that he was retracing the journeys of writers before him, incorporating their legacy into his own innovative work instead of creating 'naturally'. The solitary freedom apart from society in which the 'natural' genius would be inspired is only briefly envisaged in the initial poem of *Die Harzreise*:

> Schwarze Röcke, seidne Strümpfe,
> Weiße, höfliche Manschetten,
> Sanfte Reden, Embrassieren –
> Ach, wenn sie nur Herzen hätten!
>
> Herzen in der Brust, und Liebe,
> Warme Liebe in dem Herzen –
> Ach, mich tötet ihr Gesinge
> Von erlognen Liebesschmerzen.
>
> Auf die Berge will ich steigen,
> Wo die frommen Hütten stehen,
> Wo die Brust sich frei erschließet,
> Und die freien Lüfte wehen.
>
> Auf die Berge will ich steigen,
> Wo die dunklen Tannen ragen,
> Bäche rauschen, Vögel singen,
> Und die stolzen Wolken jagen.
>
> Lebet wohl, ihr glatten Säle,
> Glatte Herren! Glatte Frauen!
> Auf die Berge will ich steigen,
> Lachend auf euch niederschauen.[70]

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[68] B, vol. 5, p. 450.
[69] See Michael Perraudin, *Heinrich Heine. Poetry in Context. A Study of Buch der Lieder* (Oxford/New York/Munich: Berg, 1989), especially the chapter 'Heine and the Folk-song', pp. 143–186.
[70] B, vol. 3, p. 103.

As the journey progresses, though, it quickly becomes apparent that, as Nigel Reeves has pointed out '[t]he narrator sets out to escape from Philistines and to laugh at them from above only to find that he has to laugh at them face to face.'[71] Society has already encroached on the Harz and the Brockenhaus, erected in 1800 to accommodate the steadily rising numbers of visitors as the narrator dutifully relates, is filled with people ('das Haus voller Gäste'[72]). Many of them are students like the narrator himself. They conduct themselves in a way that emphasises the generality of the whole Brocken experience, breaking it down into short common phrases and integrating it into stereotypical student behaviour, the very same rowdy *esprit de corps* that the narrator had hoped to escape in the first place: 'da wird in die Wangen gekniffen, gesungen, gesprungen, gejohlt, man fragt, man antwortet, gut Wetter, Fußweg, Prosit, Adieu.'[73]

It is important to note that the social structures in which the narrator finds himself once again entrapped in the Brockenhaus are bourgeois, urban forms of socialising – precisely not the pious, simple life which the initial poem would assume can be perhaps still be found in the huts of the Harz miners. Countryfolk in Heine's writing are rarely, if ever, Philistines. Instead, what *Die Harzreise* (as well as the subsequent 'Reisebild', *Die Nordsee*) really shows is the encroaching influence of modern, urban life onto a countryside that the late eighteenth century had tended to portray as a refuge and a sanctuary for a sort of old and natural way of life. In an ironic twist, Heine depicted the natural world of the Harz mountains spoilt by the very people who had been lured there by Romantic promises of authentic, unsullied nature. Their behaviour, although it appears to be motivated by a desire for Romantic immersion in the realm of nature, is shown to be disruptive and oppressive in both its practices of interaction and in its ways of perception and conceptualisation.

For example, *Die Harzreise* describes an observation deck, which had been erected on the Brocken's peak to guide and structure the experience of the visitors. The historian Philipp Prein has stressed the importance of such devices to control visual perception in order to

[71] Nigel Reeves, *Heinrich Heine. Poetry and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 25. The German word 'Philister', which has a meaning similar but not identical to the English 'Philistine', originated in the academic language of the early modern period, indicating people who were not members of the university. It had become a popular term in the late eighteenth century when it underwent a semantic shift and began to denote people who were educated but lacked a sense of genius and true wit. For further reading on the topic see also *Philister. Problemgeschichte einer Sozialfigur der neueren deutschen Literatur*, ed. by Remigius Bunia et al. (Berlin: Akademie 2012). In the following, the English word philistine and philistines will be used, but, as Reeves has suggested, capitalised in order to emphasize that the slightly different German meaning applies here.
[72] B, vol. 3, p. 141.
[73] Ibid.

create a uniform mode of nature appreciation in the nineteenth century.[74] A key element of this was the spectators' removal from the surrounding nature. Landscapes were perceived from the aloofness of an elevated position that was often achieved with the help of platforms like the one erected on the Brocken or by cutting down trees to create curated vistas. Thus, landscapes were permanently altered and restructured to fit certain aesthetic expectations, which, in a movement recalling a Moebius strip, had supposedly been inspired by them. In fact, landscape aesthetics in the nineteenth century derived from a mixture of encounters with cultural landscapes[75] and artistic traditions. Prein assumes that many of the nineteenth-century visual arrangements both in parks or gardens and in areas that were perceived as rather more unruly and wild, were inspired by panoramas, circular paintings patented in 1781 depicting land- or cityscapes in toto. These images of 'la nature à coup d'oeil' enabled a fusion, as Charlotte Bigg explains, of scientific knowledge and aesthetic ideals into the impression of an absolute visual apprehension of that which lies before the spectator.[76] Both the painted versions of the panorama and those which were realised as visual arrangements in the actual landscape therefore served to convey a sense of clarity and harmony that starkly contrasted with inner city life, which by the mid-nineteenth-century was often perceived as speedy, chaotic, alienating and overwhelming.

The population of German towns and cities was continuously growing throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. After the Prussian Reform Movement abolished feudal serfdom in 1807, thousands of people with new-found legal rights to travel and work freely who could not afford to acquire their own land moved into urban areas. This resulted in overcrowded cities, their streets filled with smoke and waste from which people had every reason to escape to the countryside. There, as Blackbourn has shown, technological innovations helped restructure whole landscapes as rivers were rectified, swamps drained and forests managed and cultivated in order to guarantee safe travel and economic prosperity. At least in this sense the popular perception of the countryside as a harmonious place and safe haven held true for a landscape in which all traces of wilderness were slowly disappearing and the threats formerly posed by swamps, uncontrolled rivers, and unmanaged forests were fading, in short: because the conquest of nature was in full swing. And yet, the

[74] See Philipp Prein, *Bürgerliches Reisen im 19. Jahrhundert: Freizeit, Kommunikation und soziale Grenzen* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005).
[75] For the rise of the term 'cultural landscape' (Kulturlandschaft) in the nineteenth century see Kerstin Potthoff, 'The use of 'cultural landscape' in 19th century German geographical literature', in: *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift – Norwegian Journal of Geography* 67.1 (2013), pp. 49–54.
[76] Charlotte Bigg, 'The Panorama, or La nature à coup d'oeil' in *Observing Nature – Representing Experience: The Osmotic Dynamics of Romanticism 1800–1850*, ed. by Erna Fiorentini (Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 2007), pp. 73–97.

regional tourism promised a relief from the complexities and the chaos of modern life, precisely because what it suggested was a return to nature. Modelled on Goethe's 'Osterspaziergang' in *Faust*, which contrasts a grim, constrained existence behind city walls with the freedom and 'Hoffnungsglück' found in the surrounding valleys and meadows, forests and mountains were presented as an alternative realm untouched and unspoilt by modern civilisation – as Großklaus and Oldemeyer have called it, 'Natur als Gegenwelt'.[77] Goethe's emphatic line 'Hier bin ich Mensch, hier darf ich's sein' (the term 'Mensch' here evoking a human being that is neither citizen nor subject, but that falls back, blissfully, into a natural state of being) resonates with the ideas that lead the narrator of *Reisebilder* to seek out the mountains as expressed in the initial poem.[78] However, his subsequent experience in the Harz reveals how Goethe's praise of the true and authentic self to be found in nature has crafted yet another cultural frame to structure such an experience of nature and turn it into a social one. The depiction of the sunset on the Brocken's peak is a prime example of the social character of nature in *Die Harzreise*. As we will now see, talking about nature – in the double sense of characters talking about nature and the narrator then reporting on these utterances and depicting people in interaction with nature – becomes the focal point of Heine's attention here. On the Brocken's peak, Heine shows us his narrator moving smoothly through different social settings, embedded in a discourse about nature that he sometimes copies and mostly mocks. Ritchie Robertson, following the line of thought developed by Jeffrey L. Sammons, who has drawn attention to the multi-faceted narrator- and author-persona(s) Heine created in both his fictional writing and in his letters,[79] speaks about Heine's creation of an ever-elusive fictional identity or 'literary mask'[80] that the narrator slips on in order to seamlessly alter his verbal registers and blend into diverse social settings, all the while keeping a critical distance. The social mechanisms that draw the narrator-persona in on the Brocken are described through the effect one of the other visitors, an elegant young woman, has on him. Her mere presence on the observation deck is experienced by the narrator as a subtle guidance that tells him exactly what kind of behaviour is permitted, instead of enforcing strict prohibitions:

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[77] *Natur als Gegenwelt. Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte der Natur*, ed. by Götz Großklaus, Ernst Oldemeyer (Karlsruhe: Löper, 1983).
[78] *Goethes Werke*, ed. by Erich Trunz, vol. 3, p. 36.
[79] See Jeffrey Sammons *Heinrich Heine, The Elusive Poet* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1969) as well as *Heinrich Heine: A Modern Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).
[80] Ritchie Robertson, '"Herr Peregrinus": Persona, Race, Gender in Heinrich Heine's Die Harzreise' in *Brücken über dem Abgrund. Auseinandersetzungen mit jüdischer Leidenserfahrung, Antisemitismus und Exil. Festschrift für Harry Zohn*, ed. by Amy Colin, Elisabeth Strenger (Munich: Fink, 1994), pp. 145–157, here p. 145.

> Ich meine nicht die gewöhnliche, steife, negative Vornehmheit, die genau weiß, was unterlassen werden muß; sondern jene seltenere, freie, positive Vornehmheit, die uns genau sagt, was wir tun dürfen, und die uns, bei aller Unbefangenheit, die höchste gesellige Sicherheit gibt.[81]

Likewise, the way people conduct themselves up on the Brocken is highly regulated and coercive, but does not result from directly palpable measures imposed on them from the outside. Instead, the mere presence of other people is enough to activate internalised behaviours and to facilitate certain conversations, as the narrator's own words and actions demonstrate. The permissive, regulating effect of the other visitor prompts him to engage her in a conversation about the beauties of nature, transforming the experience of being on the mountain's peak into a social one above all things. The narrator produces a map and pretends to possess great knowledge of geography only so he can lecture her 'mit echter Dozentenmiene'[82] – a re-enactment of the calculated and rather hollow academic world of Göttingen he was so desperate to leave behind in the beginning of the story. Accordingly, his own behaviour catches him by surprise ('zu meiner eigenen Überraschung'[83]), which emphasises the self-alienating character of the experience. In a way, lecturing the woman on geography is not really something the narrator does, but much rather something that is done through him. Just as the observation deck physically alters the visitors' perspective and knowledge of the literary tradition surrounding the Brocken informs the experience of ascending to its peak, the presence of other visitors creates a social setting that enables and enforces a specific performance of the self, which the narrator adopts before he is even fully aware of it. The fact that the narrator is clearly guided by a romantic inclination towards his conversational partner does not diminish the fact that what we are witnessing is socialisation in real time. On the contrary: the desire to be noticed by a potential love interest is only an intensified version of the more general driving force behind all social interaction, namely the need to be in some way acknowledged by the other. As Reeves has shown insistently, love – with all its allure and its pain - was in Heine's eyes never a mere personal matter, but a deeply political one. Thus 'his treatment of the subject [i.e. love, G.J.] is almost always related in some way to his view of society'.[84] Love became, according to Reeves, 'Heine's yardstick of contemporary society's worth'.[85] The fact that love in his works is so seldom fulfilling or reciprocated therefore points towards Heine's general critique of contemporary society as failing its members in providing for them a fundamental sense of

[81] B, vol. 3, p. 143.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Reeves 1974, p. 73
[85] Ibid., p. 75.

acknowledgement and belonging. Instead, the creation of a social persona, as we are able to see in the Brocken scene, is depicted as an alienating and unsatisfying endeavour. If we consider the fact that for Schlegel women's capacity to love paralleled men's capacity for creating out of genius and that both of these natural, human forces combined brought forth the perfect kind of society ('da Liebe für die Frauen ist, was Genie für den Mann, so müssen wir uns das goldene Zeitalter als dasjenige denken, wo Liebe und Genie allgemein waren'[86]) then Heine, in contrast, depicted an age that was lacking in every way. Nature became implicated in this critique because Heine understood it to be interconnected with society and essentially social in character. On the Brocken's peak, nature becomes a mere talking point, a way to connect with other people or to distinguish oneself from them, while the social sphere is also depicted as the kind of second nature as which both Hegel and then later Marx described it.[87]

Before continuing with the analysis of the Brocken scene, which we will identify as the central culmination point on which the structure of *Die Harzreise* hinges, it will be essential to take a look at its embeddedness in the whole *Reisebild*. The description of the Brocken is framed by two literary approaches towards the natural world which stand in stark contrast to the peak scene. Both are, in different ways, indebted to a Romantic tradition of nature depictions. However, as we will see, while the first one – a solitary walk through the forest that turns fairy-tale-like – ultimately proves to be part of a historical discourse on nature that has become obsolete and that could only ever lead to the social utilisation of nature we see on the peak, the second depiction – a visionary encounter with natural beauty as a harmonious interplay of social and material forces in the city of Hamburg – alludes to a reconciled socialised nature yet to be established through both political and literary intervention. In both descriptions, Heine does not simply continue or discard Romantic motifs and stylistic devices, but instead rearranges and reinvents them, as we will now be able to observe, in a way that referenced literary history as well as Heine's own earlier poetry, situating *Die Harzreise*'s nature depictions not only in a literary lineage, but also within the oeuvre of its author.

[86] *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe*, sect. II, vol. 11, p. 258.

[87] For Hegel's use of the term second nature see G.W.F Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, 3 vols., ed. by Eva Moldenhauer et al. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1970), vol. 3, § 410 A, p. 184. For Marx concept of a metabolic relationship between nature and society see MEGA^2, section 2, vol. 4.3, p. 838.

Before *Die Harzreise*'s narrator reaches the highest peak of the Harz he experiences benevolence from what he calls the spirit of the mountains towards him, the 'Dichtermensch'.[88] In the morning he is allowed to see the Harz as it is seldom seen – 'er ließ mich diesen Morgen seinen Harz sehen, wie ihn gewiß nicht jeder sah'[89] – : marvellous and mysterious, yet filled with significance and, most importantly, *eloquent*. As the narrator walks through the forest he notices how trees, flowers, weeds and springs begin to communicate with him through various sounds and gestures. As Hans Blumenberg has shown in *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*, the ancient concept of a hidden language or a secret scripture contained within natural shapes, forms and patterns, gained new popularity amongst the Romantics who transformed the concept of an essentially decipherable world whose signs could be read and understood by human beings into the image of a loquacious, but also inscrutable nature that only temporarily granted intuitions or intimations to people.[90] In the aforementioned *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* for example, Novalis described humankind as embedded in an all-encompassing system of nature, which remains opaque even to those who actively try to explore and comprehend it.[91]

The nature Heine evoked in the forest at the foot of the mountain appears to be closely related to this concept of a language of nature that could be detected but only partially understood. Although the narrator mentions listening in on the secret history of the origin of plants, the forest stays enigmatic and mysterious, as it appears that the trees understand the narrator rather than the other way around – 'die rauschenden Tannen verstanden mich'.[92] The whole encounter appears emotive, sensuous, and erotically charged, with flowers expressing their desire towards the wanderer: 'wie mit tausend Mädchenaugen schauen uns an die seltsamen Bergblumen, sie strecken nach uns aus die wundersam breiten, drollig gezackten Blätter'.[93] The relationship between narrator and forest is described as analogous – for example when the Harz is depicted as both seen and seeing: 'Aber auch mich sah der Harz, wie mich nur wenige gesehen, in meinen Augenwimpern flimmerten eben so kostbare Perlen wie in den Gräsern des Tals.'[94]

[88] B, vol. 3, p. 137.
[89] Ibid.
[90] See Hans Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1981), pp. 246–247.
[91] See Novalis, *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, in: *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, vol. 1, pp. 79–11
[92] B, vol. 3., p. 137.
[93] Ibid., p. 139.
[94] Ibid., p. 137.

This kind of natural setting brings to mind Spinoza's concept of *natura naturans*, an active, expressive nature that reaches out to the narrator, engulfs him, and speaks to him, instead of being merely spoken to or about (like Spinoza's counter-concept, the purely mechanical, dead *natura naturata*). Especially interesting in this context is the distinctively gendered characterisation of the surrounding forest. While comparing the whispering of the trees to the sound of 'Mädchenzungen' and the appearance of flowers to 'Mädchenaugen' follows a conventional line of feminising nature, Heine here twists the common dynamic of a male artist advancing on a passive female nature as his object of inspiration and self-recognition. Instead, the natural world appears to be pursuing the narrator, a motif Heine returns to at the very end of *Die Harzreise* where the personified rivers Ilse, Selke, and Bode are depicted as active agents, requesting to be described in song or comparing themselves to the narrator, as the river Bode does: 'du gleichst mir im Stolz und im Schmerze, und ich will, daß du mich liebst'.[95] Here, Heine offered a reversal of not only the conventional structure of the analogy, which would usually have the narrator discover similarities between the human self and nature, but also desire is placed, at least momentarily, on the side of nature – Bode is the one demanding love from the narrator. Interestingly then, out of the three rivers, it is Ilse who intrigues the narrator the most, precisely because she gazes at him with both great intensity and 'unwiderstehlicher Gleichgültigkeit'[96], irresistible indifference. We encounter this enchanting and dangerous quality repeatedly in Heine's descriptions of female figures, especially those associated with natural forces and, even more specifically, water, for example in his famous Loreley poem. In his adaptation of the traditional folklore material – and in direct opposition to Lore Lay's tragic destiny in Brentano's older ballad *Zu Bacharach am Rheine* – Heine depicted the siren-like Loreley as a powerful witch, whose beautiful singing causes sailors to crash their vessels into the rocks, while she goes on combing her golden hair unperturbed. The similar characterisation of Heine's Ilse and Loreley reveals an entanglement of motifs and associations, which derives from the complex position the 'water woman' (Wasserfrau) occupied in the collective cultural imagination of the nineteenth century. As Henriette Herwig has shown, the popularity of the Wasserfrau motif had surged around the turn of the century, with Goethe, la Motte Fouqué and Brentano re-imagining stories of seduction and danger brought on by the irresistible fluidity of these half human, half creaturely chimeras. For Herwig, Heine's Loreley is already a reference to this recent literary history, as she analyses the poem as a sort of poetic critique of

[95] Ibid., p. 164.
[96] Ibid.

Romanticism, with the beguiling song (Romantic art) diverting the attention of the sailors from the rocks hidden beneath the water (reality).[97] Following this interpretation, the metaphoric meaning becomes even more intriguing if we consider the fact that nature (the water of the Rhine) is shown to be working together with art (the Loreley's song) in order to hide reality, which ultimately leads to disaster. And yet, it seems to be this very combination of song and water, indifference and desire, that creates a specific allure, which can also be found, albeit in a slightly more benign manner, in the characterisation of the river Ilse. Put in a simplified and schematic way both characters are:

Female
Associated with water
Singing
Indifferent
Desirable/desired
Dangerous and/or frustrating

The act of singing carries a certain significance beyond being a popular folktale feature: in Heine's whole oeuvre songs can be read as the cipher of authentic expression. Singing as a form of communicating in a melodic and dynamic language is depicted in stark contrast to the solidifying crafts of writing and printing and is repeatedly associated with fluidity, movement and musical qualities. Thus through the different layers of meaning and the various characteristics of the Loreley and Ilse, these are pivotal figures which Heine uses to reflect on the equally evasive and alluring character of both nature and art. Pierre Hadot has elaborated on this theme in his essay *The Veil of Isis*, which retraces the legacy of Heraclitus' formula *phusis kruptesthai philei* that has been commonly translated as 'nature loves to hide' throughout the history of Western thought and art.[98] Like Blumenberg with eloquent nature, Hadot follows the trace of a hidden nature from antiquity to the late eighteenth century, when a veiled, elusive personification of nature appeared in Schiller's ballad *Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais* as well as in the response of Novalis to it, *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*. In the latter, it is love – and more precisely the rekindling of a former love – that facilitates the unveiling of Isis. Heine's *Die Harzreise* applies a similar pattern when in the midst of herbs whispering secrets among themselves, and faced with the river's intriguing indifference, the erotic

[97] See Henriette Herwig, 'Sirenen und Wasserfrauen: Kulturhistorische, geschlechterdiskursive und mediale Dimensionen eines literarischen Motivs', in *Heine-Jahrbuch* 47 (2008), pp. 118–140.
[98] See Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*, transl. by Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 2006), especially pp. 91–100.

encounter with nature collapses back into the vision of a former beloved. In both cases, the turn towards a past desire is mediated through a dream – Ilse reminds the narrator of a sweet creature inhabiting his dreams while in the forest, as everything turns more and more bewitched and magical, it seems to the narrator as if an old dream has come to life, prompting the loved one to reappear. The former lover is thus doubly removed from the narrator's presence, a mere memory of a dream. Nonetheless her return marks both the climax and the ending of both scenes. The magical, dream-like encounters dissolve into daylight, the narrator escapes the spell of the siren song and directs his attention back to the real world: other visitors on the Brocken's peak or people in the city of Hamburg, respectively. Thus, the sequence of events in both scenes laid bare would look something like this:

> solitude in nature – nature's indifference – dream – love's reappearance – dissolution – return to society

Keeping this structure in mind, I will argue in the following that these two similar, yet different scenes have a poetological dimension, which points towards Heine's past and his poetry of the 1820s, especially the cycles *Lyrisches Intermezzo* and *Die Heimkehr*, and that reflects his subsequent turn from poetry to prose writing, all through a changing depiction of the natural world. As we will see, nature becomes a concept through which Heine can explore problems of artistic expression, coinciding with Hadot's observation that treating nature and art as analogues prompted two historically dominant modes of dealing with the problem and promise of a hidden nature: the Promethean and the Orphic. As Hadot explains, the Promethean mode tries to pry into nature's secrets by subjecting her to some sort of impact, be it magical, ritual or technological, in order to change her, while the Orphic mode recreates and comprehends nature's secret through science or art, all the while preserving her enigmatic character. The Orphic mode, as Hadot writes, is especially concerned with matters of form (art as well as nature holding a tension between the general and the particular that manifests itself in the process of form construction). Since the question of form and the search for appropriate literary representation is especially vital for Heine in relation to his own shift from poetry to prose writing in the 1820s, we will now, alongside *Die Harzreise*, take a closer look at one of his early poems, *Lyrisches Intermezzo XXXVII*, in which nature and the reappearance of the beloved play key roles.

The Loss of Authenticity as a Poetic Moment in Lyrisches Intermezzo

The cycle of poems *Lyrisches Intermezzo* overall follows the pattern of a tragic love story that is metaphorically connected to the seasons: sixty-five short poems reminisce about a

love that blossomed in spring and was later, in winter or autumn, lost to either death or marriage to another. Poem number *XXXVII* is situated right in the middle of the composition, in the aftermath of the great loss. The first two stanzas acrimoniously describe the Sunday walk of merry Philistines, who set out to greet nature's beauty and fail spectacularly at their task; the last two strophes then depict the narrator, who stays in the darkness and isolation of his room and is visited by a ghostly former love. The constellation of the two contrasting moods, the poetic device of the abrupt *Stimmungsbrechung* that Heine so often used, has been prefigured in poem *XXXI* of the cycle in a less mocking and acerbic manner:

> Die Welt ist so schön und der Himmel so blau,
> Und die Lüfte die wehen so lind und so lau,
> Und die Blumen winken auf blühender Au,
> Und funkeln und glitzern im Morgentau,
> Und die Menschen jubeln, wohin ich schau, –
> Und doch möcht ich im Grabe liegen,
> Und mich an ein totes Liebchen schmiegen.[99]

While the beautiful morning in its earnest appreciation of nature is reminiscent of Goethe's 'Osterspaziergang', poem *XXXVII* then swiftly eradicates the very sentiment that the world is beautiful and instead shows those clinging to such presumptions as ridiculously misguided Philistines:

> Philister in Sonntagsröcklein
> Spazieren durch Wald und Flur;
> Sie jauchzen, sie hüpfen wie Böcklein,
> Begrüßen die schöne Natur.
>
> Betrachten mit blinzelnden Augen,
> Wie alles romantisch blüht;
> Mit langen Ohren saugen
> Sie ein der Spatzen Lied.[100]

The lack of proper hearing that characterises the Philistines, their inability to tell sparrow from songbird, gains its importance from the significance of the song-motif, which we have mentioned above. *Lyrisches Intermezzo* will later be published by Heine as part of the collection *Buch der Lieder*, book of songs – a metaphorical entanglement of the two modes of literature which Heine grappled with, the fluid song and the solidified book. Here Heine challenges the Romantic appropriation of songs through the *Volkslied* revival by showing how, through a process of popularisation and trivialisation, the very promise of a direct and emotional experience was corrupted and reduced to an imitation of itself. What the merry Philistines do is but a mimicry of Romantic sentimentality – they perform a certain outward

[99] B, vol. 1., p. 87.
[100] Ibid., p. 89.

behaviour while lacking the inner experience (that would have been signified by real listening and true songs), all the while mistaking one for the other.

Now, the poet in his room is shown to not only occupy a different physical space, but to be quite attuned to that inner world which the Philistines try futilely to discover by going out into nature:

> Ich aber verhänge die Fenster
> Des Zimmers mit schwarzem Tuch;
> Es machen mir meine Gespenster
> Sogar einen Tagesbesuch.
>
> Die alte Liebe erscheinet,
> Sie stieg aus dem Totenreich,
> Sie setzt sich zu mir und weinet,
> Und macht das Herz mir weich.[101]

Ultimately, feelings do triumph here – the poet's heart is softened by the weeping of his former love. It is crucial, though, that his feelings are generated not by a living, breathing being, but by a memory alone. In other words, the poem shows a love that, in order to be felt with authenticity and intensity, has to be lost. Loss is the predominant emotion expressed in most of Heine's early poetry. As mentioned before, it is the other side of the coin that is desire. Love, or desire, rarely appear in Heine's writing without being entwined with loss in some sense. Accordingly, in *Lyrisches Intermezzo XXXVII*, love is but a ghost, a shadow of both the former emotion and the lost object of desire. Nonetheless, that ghost's weeping is shown to soften the poet's heart. The contrast between soft and hard is used in several of Heine's early poems as a metaphor for direct and mediated forms of expression, for example in *Traumbilder I*:

> Geblieben ist mir nur, was glutenwild
> Ich einst gegossen hab in weiche Reime.[102]

Thus, the confrontation with the lost love works as the catalyst for unearthing some sort of soft, pliable and therefore true feelings. On a more abstract level this means that the way to authenticity leads through loss, absence and, more important still, their recognition and reflection. The lack of true feelings displayed by the Philistines is therefore not simply contrasted with the true feelings of the poet, but instead a whole different mode of feeling is introduced. While the former seek out an affirmative experience – they go outside, they aim to greet nature – the poet both literally and figuratively retreats to an inner world and

[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid, p. 20.

preoccupies himself with the afterlife of an affective relationship. He therefore places a distinct absence and its conscious reflection at the very centre of the poem.

It is only in relation to that recognition and subsequent literary expression of lack and loss that a possibility of truth appears to open up. The softened heart of the poet hints at a true sensitivity that the Philistines in their robust, worldly joy clearly lack. It is striking that the second half of the poem is devoid of such cloying diminutives as 'Röcklein' and 'Böcklein', which Heine liked to employ to signal that feelings or expressions were somewhat artificial and superfluous. Thus, the poem seems to suggest that there is indeed authenticity found in the act of mourning and in isolating oneself from society – even though, as the covering of the window with a black shroud suggests, this very act is also a form of staged emotionality. The thought that a deliberate creation of an emotional state, the use of props and stage dressings, can harbour a kernel of true feeling (and might indeed be the only refuge of true feelings) is one Heine returns to repeatedly in his poetry. The most striking example is *Die Heimkehr XLIV*. A comic actor, surrounded by sets painted in a Romantic manner, realises that he has, in acting out an emotion, actually experienced it, for he has 'mit dem Tod in der eigenen Brust / den sterbenden Fechter gespielet'[103]. What sets apart the truly sensitive and authentic artist from the ignorant Philistine is therefore not an authenticity of feeling, but instead the dawning realisation that the only authenticity achievable is the one found in artificiality. Reeves has shown how this holds true for Heine's poetry on a much more general level as well. For the folk-song materials and motifs we find, especially in *Lyrisches Intermezzo*, but generously strewn throughout all of Heine's early poetry, can be interpreted as the same old drapes and props, no longer promising originality and unmediated feelings, but instead revealing their own hollowness and thereby, in a way, regaining the power of true expression. As Reeves explains, the stars, flowers and birds of the *Volkslied* genre were already conventional and overused when Wilhelm Müller employed them in his cycle *Siebenundsiebzig Gedichte aus den hinterlassenen Papieren eines wandernden Waldhornisten* (the monstrosity of the title with its awkward alliteration at the end proof enough of the collection's conscious artificiality, a ridicule of Brentano's and Arnim's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*). Both Müller and Heine (who sent Müller a dedicated copy of *Lyrisches Intermezzo* in 1823) were reusing form and imagery of the Romantic folk-song revival in a way that drained and exposed them as congealed, convoluted and artificial. They were, in other words, explicitly transforming the *Volkslied* into a *Kunstlied* before confronting it with the disillusionment of nineteenth-century reality. 'One can hear the voice

[103] Ibid., p. 130.

of the socially sophisticated', notes Reeves, 'reproducing the favourite images of the folk-song: beneath the rosy cheeks of the peasant boy are the weary eyes and drawn features of the worldly-wise.'[104]

The modern writer, then (and this was, during the 1820s, the ultimate role that Heine began to envisage for himself, seeing that it united all the different masks and voices he liked to employ), would have no longer hoped for his creation to be a work of natural genius. Only Philistines could still do so in the 1820s. History had forced the poet to look at poetry and find it wanting and it was from this experience of loss – unbeknown to those bourgeois, proud of their *Bildung*, who were out there frolicking and still reaching for the Romantic dream of true emotion and the beauty of nature – that Heine created his early poems.

Returning to *Lyrisches Intermezzo XXXVII*, we can clearly observe how the experience of the mourning poet is juxtaposed with that of the merry Philistines; a central dichotomy that can be graphically depicted in the following way:

Philistine	narrator
outside	inside
expression	introspection
false	true
nature	loss

These two realms do not merge or interact in any way, because both the poet and the poem effectively shut out the Philistine's outside world by hanging a black cloth in the window and changing the focal point to the inner reality of the room and the poet's mind and heart. In that sense, the poem closes itself off, hides away from the natural world and instead ends up in the inner world of the poet. Thus, the poem as a whole follows the course of a gradual and continuous introspection which leads further and further away from the activities and sentiments of other people, from the outside world in general, from life and society. The form of the poetic juxtaposition creates a strict divide between the outside and the inside, the poet and the social as well as the natural world. In Heine's poetry, we can repeatedly detect a distinctive discord between the poet and the natural world that surrounds him (see for example *Lyrisches Intermezzo XXVIII*, *Die Heimkehr III* and *LX* to name a few) alongside projections of the poet's feelings onto the outside world (*Die Heimkehr LXXI*). In both cases the interaction between – to use the most general terms here – poet and world stays quite limited and in the end all of it is always rooted in the poet's inner life.

[104] Reeves, *Heinrich Heine. Poetry and Politics*, p. 45.

The Progressive Permissiveness of Prose

Now, if we return to the two scenes in the *Die Harzreise*, we find that this structure is turned inside out. While the poems limit themselves to a rather static confrontation between two modes of experience – the superficial and outward-orientated one of the Philistines and the inward-looking one of the poet – the prose writing of *Reisebilder* develops a dynamic narrative progression, in which the outside world stimulates the inside and the other way around, both fulfilling and sublating a Romantic ideal of the merging of inner and outer life. Hence the appearance of lost love, which was only possible under the condition of deliberate exclusion from the outside world in *Lyrisches Intermezzo XXXVII*, has now become entangled with the forest and the rivers. Heine weaves allusions to his poetry into the very fabric of *Die Harzreise:* the motif of eloquent, communicative nature, which is so striking in both the forest scene and in the encounter with the three rivers, can also be found in several poems of *Lyrisches Intermezzo*: Here we encounter the language of stars (*VIII*), roses telling each other fairy tales (*IX*), talking trees (*XLIII*) and whispering flowers (*XLV*). Love or the loved one manifesting in a dream or the experience of love happening as if it were in a dream is a recurring motif in *Lyrisches Intermezzo V*, *IX*, *XVI*, *LII*, *LV* and *LVI* as well. Heine did not simply repeat these motifs as if they carried a fixed meaning: instead he reconfigured and recontextualised them in a way that transformed them into indicators of a change from one literary form into another.

When the beloved reappears from beyond the grave, *Lyrisches Intermezzo XXXVII* ends with the sense of loss and mourning pivotal to the inner world of the poet, but *Die Harzreis*e lets its narrator continue on his journey and turn back to observe other people's interaction with their surroundings. The return to society is the crucial element, which allows Heine to develop a concept of a socially implicated nature throughout his *Reisebilder*. The narrator's ascent to the Brocken's peak, after the apparition of his beloved dissolves, marks an end and overcoming not only of the solitary erotic encounter, but, if we take the allusions to *Lyrisches Intermezzo* into consideration, of Heine's own poetry. As the narrator encounters a lady on the mountain he muses:

> Als ich noch ein Knabe war, dachte ich an nichts als an Zauber- und Wundergeschichten, und jede schöne Dame, die Straußenfedern auf dem Kopf trug, hielt ich für eine Elfenkönigin und bemerkte ich gar, daß die Schleppe ihres Kleides nass war, so hielt ich sie für eine Wassernixe. Jetzt denke ich anders, seit ich aus der Naturgeschichte weiß, daß jene symbolischen Federn von dem dümmsten Vogel herkommen, und daß die Schleppe eines Damenkleides auf sehr natürliche Weise naß werden kann.[105]

[105] B, vol. 3, p. 142.

This retrospective view of childish reveries seems to be a nod to Heine's own earlier writing, namely the fairy-tale motifs of his poetry. They might have been overcome, but they are not simply left behind. Instead, the poet, who, in the prologue of *Lyrisches Intermezzo*, sat in the dark and dreamt of a mermaid 'im rauschenden Wellenschaumkleide',[106] has left his 'Poetenstübchen'[107] and, as the narrator of *Reisebilder*, has integrated traces of his own poetic past into this newfound mode of expression (Heine spoke in a letter to Müller on 7 June 1826 of the all-encompassing, wide-open arms of prose writing, which welcomed him – 'Die Prosa nimmt mich auf in ihre weiten Arme' – allowing him now to express himself freely in a multitude of modes and registers). It is not so much that those fairy tales and dreams that used to keep the poet spellbound or whose loss he mourned no longer carry their allure and are now dragged out into the bright light of reason and exposed as unreal – they were already depicted as spectres and flights of fancy in Heine's cycles of poems, in which part of the frustration and unhappiness expressed throughout stems from the very fact that those dreams and visions are purely subjective experiences (see the prologue of *Lyrisches Intermezzo* as well as *Lyrisches Intermezzo XLIII*, *XLVI*, *LX*, *Die Heimkehr I*, *XXIII*) that have kept the poet from achieving objective satisfaction in the real world (*Lyrisches Intermezzo XXIX*). Heine's prose writing then acknowledges both the pull and the deception of such reveries, but by confronting them with that which has been learned through natural history (which was at that time still synonymous with natural science) it integrates them into an objective reality. In the scene at hand, the ostrich feathers, which used to hold some private meaning in the magical thinking of a younger narrator, are now traced back to their material origins, the bird from which they were originally taken. Nature, then, is no longer a passive landscape waiting to be infused with the narrator's own imagination, but there is indeed a materiality and sensual solidity to it.

Whereas Heine's poetry mourns that which is lacking in the subjective experience, *Reisebilder* turns to what is there instead, out in the open, in the objective acts and conventions that shape society (the next twist awaits of course when Heine, in a truly dialectical fashion, shows this objective to develop out of the subjective and to stay tied to it inextricably). Nature became the focal point of that change because, like art, it had been conceptualised – falsely, as Heine was now eager to show – as something independent from

[106] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 74.
[107] Ibid., p. 75.

the rest of society, an assumption that is radically challenged and exposed as illusory throughout *Reisebilder*.

The sunset scene on the Brocken's peak, to which we will now return, can be considered a prime example of the way Heine depicts nature as something experienced through the lens of social interaction alone. The setting of the sun is mediated through metaphors and wedged in between conversations that are barely interrupted ('Derweilen wir sprachen begann es zu dämmern'[108]) to experience the natural phenomenon that has drawn people here together in the first place. Even during a quarter of an hour of reverent silence, the narrator's attention stays with the people gathered on the observation deck, 'Studenten, Handwerksburschen und einigen ehrsamen Bürgerleuten samt deren Ehefrauen und Töchtern, die alle den Sonnenuntergang sehen wollten'.[109] The sunset is described only indirectly as we see it through the eyes of the people present, as a reflection upon their faces and as the sense of a specific cultural experience it evokes:

> Es ist ein erhabener Anblick, der die Seele zum Gebet stimmt. Wohl eine Viertelstunde standen alle ernsthaft schweigend, und sahen, wie der schöne Feuerball im Westen allmählich versank; die Gesichter wurden vom Abendrot angestrahlt, die Hände falteten sich unwillkürlich; es war, als ständen wir, eine stille Gemeinde, im Schiffe eines Riesendoms, und der Priester erhöbe jetzt den Leib des Herrn, und von der Orgel herab ergösse sich Palestrinas ewiger Choral.[110]

As Hermand has remarked, other literary rendering of Brocken excursions of that time would have emphasised the sublime nature of the experience by inserting a poem or changing the tone from prosaic to lyric in order to convey a sense of awe and wonder. Heine instead used the image of a cathedral which seems to have sprung right from the distinctly Catholic and medieval imagination associated with the older of the two women who accompany the narrator on the peak. In *Die Romantische Schule* in 1833 Heine would return to the image of the cathedral as he described the immediate effect the medieval architecture could still have on a person entering the church in his day and age:

> Wenn wir jetzt in einen alten Dom treten, ahnen wir kaum mehr den esoterischen Sinn seiner steinernen Symbolik. Nur der Gesamteindruck dringt uns unmittelbar ins Gemüt. Wir fühlen hier die Erhebung des Geistes und die Zertretung des Fleisches.[111]

Even though the church has lost its former position in society and the meaning behind the symbols and forms are no longer immediately accessible, the animosity towards the senses seems to linger in the remaining structures. The sublimity people appear to experience – in

[108] Ibid., p. 144.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] DHA, vol. 8.1, p. 133.

both the cathedral of *Die Romantische Schule* and inside the cathedral of nature on the Brocken – is depicted as one that connects the Kantian elevation of the spirit, which is supposed to lead the subject to freedom and exhilaration through experience of the sublime as one of triumph of human consciousness over the natural world, to bygone forms of spiritual bondage and a hostile stance towards all things bodily and sensuous. However, as Heine pointed out in *Die Romantische Schule*, the former power of the church has been broken and the cathedral is reduced to a hollow shell of itself, its original significance no longer heartfelt or accessible. Thus, like the Philistines in *Lyrisches Intermezzo*, the spectators on the Brocken perform an empty ritual that has solidified to pure form devoid of meaning, a development that becomes obvious when, on the Brocken's peak, a young merchant and fellow traveller, willing to express his admiration for the natural world, but unable to forge a true connection, exclaims: 'Wie ist die Natur doch im allgemeinen so schön!'[112]

Kate Rigby has remarked that this single proclamation contains everything Heine disliked about his contemporaries' infatuation with so-called beautiful nature: pomposity and ignorance and concealed deep within it, as we see further below, the barely suppressed desire to homogenise and dominate the experience of nature, denying whole social groups access to it.[113] The exclamation plunges the narrator right back into a 'Werkeltagsstimmung'[114] and prompts him to continue his conversation with the two women. The sunset provides the starting point for a meandering conversation which moves on from lavish metaphors of the sun – 'Die Mutter äußerte: die in Nebel versinkende Sonne habe ausgesehen wie eine glühende Rose, die der galante Himmel herab geworfen in den weit ausgebreiteten, weißen Brautschleier seiner geliebten Erde'[115] – to cover a random assemblage of fashionable topics such as 'Angorakatzen, etruskischen Vasen, türkischen Shawls, Makkaroni und Lord Byron'.[116]

Once more we encounter the familiar concept of *Stimmungsbrechung* as the banal and the poetic meet, but here the effect is quite a different one compared to the use of the device in Heine's poetry. Whereas the poems usually create a sharp contrast between the feelings

[112] B, vol. 3, p. 145.
[113] See Kate Rigby, '"Wie ist die Natur doch im allgemeinen so schön!" – Heine's Green-Edged Sword of Satire' in *Groteske Moderne, Moderne Groteske. Festschrift für Philip Thomson*, ed. by Franz-Josef Deiters, Axel Fliethmann, Christiane Weller (St. Ingbert: Röhrig, 2011).
[114] B, vol. 3., p. 145.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid. Macaroni was a pejorative term referring to the mid-eighteenth century cultural phenomenon of overtly fashionable men behaving in an especially affected and artificial manner, a kind of behaviour Heine repeatedly ridiculed in his writing (see for comparison the two young men reciting Ossian in *Die Harzreise* or the character of Gumpelino).

of the poet and his surroundings and follow a dichotomous structure (as we have seen above in the juxtaposition of poet and Philistine), the prose writing of *Die Harzreise* creates a mesh structure, a 'Lappenwerk'[117] as Heine himself called it, in which different moods and registers blend into another, even in the very language of the narrator. Yet the enumeration of artefacts of everyday life mixed with allusions to art and nature serves another purpose here as well: this conglomerate helps to characterise the older of the two women, the mother, as a collector of cultural references. When her daughter expresses concern that the effect of nature's phenomena may be weakened through overexposure to them – which Heine shows to be a justified fear, as the rapid return to conversation and 'Werkeltagsstimmung' has just shown – the mother corrects her by referring to a passage in Goethe's *Briefe aus der Schweiz*. Here Goethe claims that even though the intensity of a natural phenomenon's first impression (he is referring to a tremendous rock on a mountain pass) cannot be felt twice, an inner growth is gained through the repeated confrontation with it or thought of it.[118]Such an imagination of growth, a wealth of experience which is steadily accumulated, characterises the quantitative approach of the older woman. As she quotes 'Sonnenuntergangsstellen'[119] from Byron's poetry it becomes clear that her approach to art as well as to nature is that of a collector. She transforms poems and experiences into collectables, artefacts, stripping them of their own unique and enigmatic qualities. The nature that spoke in the depth of the forest has now become the nature spoken of, talked over, transferred into well-worn imagery and kept at arm's length, ready to be used as a form of social currency. The woman's deep misunderstanding of the true character of both art and nature is emphasized by the fact that Raphael's paintings in St. Peter's basilica, which she has claimed to have seen during her *Bildungsreise* through Italy, as Hermand has pointed out, do not exist. This is of course something that Heine would expect his well-educated readers to pick up on, creating a sort of *Bildungsbürger* in-group banter, in which the readers can observe themselves almost falling into the same trap of accumulative behaviour as the older of the two women.

The younger one, worrying about the authenticity of it all, seems to be much more after Heine's and his narrator-persona's heart, but it is clearly her mother that we hear more of, as she is the one representing that unique combination of a rationalised nature and the

[117] HSA, vol. 20, p. 184
[118] Goethe, *Briefe aus der Schweiz*, in: Id., *Poetische Werke. Kunsttheoretische Schriften und Übersetzungen*, 22 vols., ed. by Siegfried Seidel (Berlin: Aufbau, 1965–1978), vol. 15, p. 478ff.
[119] Ibid.

cultivation of a decidedly irrational feeling of nature, which Klaus Pabel identifies as the central dialectic of nature in the early nineteenth century.[120]

The two women figures are placed at exactly that junction between feeling and rationalisation of feeling, or sentiment and empiricism, as Sengle described it, that was so typical for the period. The older woman is acquisitive in regard to both art and nature because she is sentimental about them, and sentimental because she is accumulative. If we take into consideration the Biedermeier obsession with collecting, classifying and preserving things, we can see how this way of thinking influenced social practices and vice versa. Nature and art were the two areas that were perhaps most caught up in this entanglement, a particular bourgeois brand of rationality shot through with irrationality – a dangerous combination, as we can see when we focus our attention on Heine's depiction of the political components of this form of nature appreciation. As Rigby has pointed out, it is no mere coincidence that the same young merchant, who proclaimed nature's general beauty, turns later out to be an anti-Semite. Seven years after the Wartburg Festival, German nationalism was streaked with xenophobic tendencies, especially anti-Semitism and anti-French resentments. Heine connected here already reformist and Romantic concepts of society, as they had found an exemplary expression in the foundation of the Deutsche Tischgesellschaft in 1811, to exclusive concepts of nature, which would become the basic principle for establishing the naturalised concept of *Volk* as opposed to *citoyenneté*.[121] The naturalisation of authoritarian thinking is a process that Heine showed, among other things, as stemming from a depletion of form in a society overly focused on sentimentality.

Another poignant scene that depicts this development occurs in *Die Harzreise* after the sun has set on the Brocken. As they turn to leave, the older of the two women makes yet another reference to Goethe, asking the narrator if he has read *Werther* – the name mentioned perhaps with the hope of it taking on that same enigmatic quality the name Klopstock carried for Lotte and Werther. The Klopstock scene in Goethe's novel is one of great sensuality and emotiveness, in which the fresh and fragrant nature laid out after a thunderstorm mirrors as well as amplifies Lotte's and Werther's awakening feelings for each other. The fact that in

[120] 'Der Rationalisierung der Natur folgt die Irrationalität der Naturgefühle, der technisch-industriellen Ausbeutung die sentimentale Harmonisierung. Was an Tauschwerten aus der Natur herausgeholt wird, wird in Gefühlswerten wieder hineingesteckt. Heines Naturdarstellungen sind ständige Vernichtungen solcher in Naturgefühl eingebildeten "Unmittelbarkeiten"', Klaus Pabel, *Heines 'Reisebilder'. Ästhetisches Bedürfnis und politisches Interesse am Ende der Kunstperiode* (Munich: Fink, 1977), p. 100–101.

[121] For further reading on budding German nationalism during the first half of the nineteenth century, see for example the very recent publication *Das Wartburgfest 1817 als europäisches Ereignis*, ed. by Joachim Bauer, Stefan Gerber, and Christopher Spehr (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2020), as well as Stefan Nienhaus, *Geschichte der deutschen Tischgesellschaft* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2001).

Heine's Brocken scene the reference to *Werther* is followed by a tirade of banal conversational topics exposes the void of meaning and feeling hidden inside the form. A Goethe reference, in Heine, is not enough to evoke the same sensual bliss Werther experiences as he hears Lotte say 'Klopstock!'. A similar pattern of literary references which have lost their power through conventionalisation is pursued again a little while later when the narrator observes two young men, who, anxious to praise the night, recite Ossian (and speak in an Ossianic manner) at the Brockenhaus. At one point they quote *Werther*'s Ossian scene directly, strengthening a connection that a contemporary audience would have recognised immediately for what it is. The allusion to Ossian is one that in particular calls authenticity into question, as the alleged ancient epic songs that inspired Herder and Goethe were, when Heine was writing *Die Harzreise*, widely known to be much more recent creations written by their supposed collector James Macpherson in the 1760s. Thus, Heine not only references Goethe referencing Ossian here, but exposes a falsification, almost forgery of feelings at the very core of the referencing system that the Brocken visitors use to give shape to their experience of nature. It is therefore only to be expected that the two men in their quest to sing hymns to the night sky should be severely misguided: Instead of opening a window, they open a closet, and without noticing their mistake, continue to serenade the night, confusing a pair of yellow leather trousers with the moon. They end up trapped inside the closet, weeping and vomiting, cut off from the outside world. It is a cruel image that Heine shows us here, and one with homophobic and misogynistic undertones, for it is the effeminate and affectionate mannerism of the two men that becomes entangled with a lack of authenticity in their depiction. This is a recurring phenomenon throughout *Reisebilder*: On one side, the notion of any authenticity without inauthenticity and reflection is radically challenged, on the other, creative expression is often associated with a sensual, erotic way of relating the self to the world that is very clearly linked to an ideal of male virility that comes quite close to the very concept of creation out of genius that Heine has rejected at other times. This inconsistency can be understood as a direct consequence of Heine's praise of the body as the place where banality and the restrictions of a literary tradition could be momentarily overcome and the endless chain of references would come to a halt. Ascribing to bodily sensations a potential for truth beyond sentimental experience is what brought Heine close to sensualist thinking; however, it was his conceptualisation of the body as a social construct that made his writing echo utopian socialism, as we can observe in the final scene of *Die Harzreise*.

The body and the senses triumph here[122] as the narrator finally looks back on his travels in the Harz mountains – having neither arrived in Goethe's Weimar nor returned to stifling Göttingen, but instead enjoying the first day of May in the cosmopolitan and modern city of Hamburg. All that has happened before and all the experiences that were burdened by tradition seem to dissolve like a feverish dream as only the present moment remains. This, of course, is already a poignant statement, a declaration against the overpowering influence of literary tradition. Hermand has interpreted the conclusion of *Die Harzreise* as a life-affirming re-imagining of Werther: the shot, which was fired on the Brocken at dusk, and which did not find an echo then, resounds again – this time, though, the narrator is quick to assure us, it is not a pistol being fired at all and instead we hear the sound of his love suddenly and quite violently bursting open to flower. As Hermand observes, the fate Goethe assigned to the protagonist of his *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (1774) has been avoided: Whereas Werther kills himself after he and Lotte have shared another moment of illicit passion while reading Ossian, Heine's narrator returns to society.[123]

It is in the midst of the city, then, surrounded by common people, some of them even those who live on the margins of society – orphans, beggars, country women and brokers – that the narrator regains, at least momentarily, a sense of authenticity beyond reference. Embedded in the social context of urbanity he can link his heart to a flower once more, albeit a strange and rare one, an aloe, that would seem misplaced in a traditional *Volkslied*.[124] This strange flower though, the narrator's heart, is suddenly as fragrant as the landscape before Lotte and Werther and befuddles the senses as the body reclaims its dominance over the spirit. Losing his sense of 'wo die Ironie aufhört und der Himmel anfängt', the narrator experiences May Day in Hamburg as a visionary realisation of a social-utopian impulse: Amidst a sea of life and flowers all people are unified under the sun with its 'tolerantesten Strahlen'.[125] The conventional dichotomy between city and country has been subverted as nature pours into the city in the form of fragrant blossoms, morning mist and light. In

[122] At least in the version Heine published by Hoffmann and Campe in *Reisebilder von H. Heine. Erster Theil, Hamburg, bey Hoffmann und Campe. 1826*, in which the ending in Hamburg as well as the beginning in Göttingen were newly included.
[123] See Jost Hermand, *Der frühe Heine. Ein Kommentar zu den Reisebildern* (Munich: Winkler, 1976), p. 59ff.
[124] The aloe, however, might also be an intertextual reference to the finale of E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Meister Floh* (1822), in which a thistle blossoms suddenly, signifying the passionate consummation of love during the wedding night: ‚Es war Mitternacht, als plötzlich der balsamische Geruch der großblumigen Fackeldistel den ganzen weiten Garten, das ganze Landhaus durchdrang.', E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Poetische Werke*, 6 vols. (Berlin: Aufbau, 1958–1963), vol. 6, p. 184.
[125] B, vol. 3, p. 164.

addition, the emphasis on the body and the senses creates a very different kind of reconciliation with nature than the one attempted on the Brocken's peak. While the latter tried to follow a somewhat conventional Romantic strategy of experience that is aimed at a transcendence witnessed through the sublimity of nature (the people on the mountain are, after all, compared to a congregation gathered to witness the transubstantiation, literally a transformation of matter through spirit), Hamburg's May morning points in the opposite direction, towards a state of bodily bliss in which the narrator fantasises about a complete dissolution of the self, a sort of tabula rasa or reversal of creation, through which an ultimate reintegration into matter becomes possible:

> Es ist noch früh am Tage, die Sonne hat kaum die Hälfte ihres Weges zurückgelegt, und mein Herz duftet schon so stark, daß es mir betäubend zu Kopf steigt, dass ich nicht mehr weiß, wo die Ironie aufhört und der Himmel anfängt, daß ich die Luft mit meinen Seufzern bevölkere, und daß ich selbst wieder zerrinnen möchte in süße Atome, in die unerschaffene Gottheit [...][126]

The vision takes the reconciliatory moment back to a primordial chaos, to an atomic level of being, before even the Godhead constituted itself. The sweetness of the atoms echoes a sentiment the narrator expressed as he was leaving the Brocken: 'Was mich betrifft, so habe ich in der Naturwissenschaft mein eigenes System, und demnach teile ich alles ein: in dasjenige, was man essen kann und in dasjenige, was man nicht essen kann.'[127] What was said partly in a joking manner as an act of defiance towards an all-encompassing scientific classification and rationalisation of nature carries nonetheless an element of truth. For it becomes clear that Heine's vision of a real reconcilement with nature is mediated through the body.

The body, though – the final scene in Hamburg shows that clearly – is that which connects the self to both nature and society. This is essentially what the other visitors on the Brocken got wrong: The nature they were looking for in the Harz is already part of them. Nature will not be found, the ending of *Die Harzreise* seems to suggest, by going back to green fairy-tales, by leaving the city as a synecdoche for society behind or by hiding in the escapist realm of subjectivity. Instead, the only way to nature that Heine envisages here leads forward, through a reintegration of matter and mind, body and spirit, self and society on a physical, even atomic level. As a literary form, *Die Harzreise* mirrors this very process: as a permissive and open structure, the *Lappenwerk* integrates and reconfigures, continues Romantic conventions and contextualises them, entangling tradition and vision, and finally

[126] Ibid., pp. 165–166.
[127] Ibid., p. 156.

developing a relationship between nature and literature that is reciprocal, historical, and sensual at the same time.

3. Weltschmerz in the Wilderness
The Experience of Nature in Lenau's Poetry

The works of the Austrian-Hungarian poet Nikolaus Lenau (born as Nikolaus Franz Niembsch Edler von Strehlenau) continued where my analysis of Heine's depiction of nature left off: the poetry he wrote and published during the 1830s was centred around the longing for and impossibility of reintegration into nature, either through aesthetic experience or literary representation.

However, compared to Heine, who sought out sensual reunification through a socialisation of nature, Lenau was less focused on the social dimension of nature. His poetry reflected on the subjective experience of a natural world that no longer offered solace, but instead revealed a confrontation with the fundamental disjointedness and estrangement running through nature. In doing so, Lenau's poetry progressed from the Romantic tradition of a holistic and cyclical concept of nature expressed through relations of similarity, towards an aesthetics of estrangement and duality, in which form and content had split apart to reveal their incongruity. While Heine forged a way to depict modern nature through an oscillation between prose and poetry, and Droste-Hülshoff changed literary registers by writing nature poetry that encouraged its readers to approach her poetry with a scientific mindset, Lenau insisted on the primacy of poetry regarding the depiction of subjectivity, even if this entailed troublesome encounters with the disunity of the self. 'Vielleicht ist unser unerforschtes Ich', he wrote in the poem 'Doppelheimweh' (1837), 'vor scharfen Augen nur ein dunkler Strich, / In dem sich wunderbar zwei Welten schneiden.'[128] The uncharted territory of the self constituted the great absence around which Lenau's poetry gyrated. In this regard his writing exhibited clear parallels to that of late-Romantic authors such as Joseph von Eichendorff or E.T.A. Hoffmann, who also emphasised the uncanny side of the self that appeared to be unfamiliar and inaccessible or even resistant to the transformative forces of the Enlightenment. However, Lenau, born in 1802, belonged to a generation of writers less grounded in the literary conventions and world-views of the late eighteenth century and more orientated towards aesthetics and sentiments that, beginning with Heine, would from then on be considered 'modern'.

The exceptional timeliness of Lenau has not only been acknowledged by posterity, but was also noted by his contemporaries – Heine remarked after the other's death in 1850

[128] Nikolaus Lenau, *Werke und Briefe. Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe* [LHK], ed. by Helmut Brandt, Gerhard Koselleck et al., 7 vols. (Wien: Deuticke Klett Cotta, 1989–2004), vol. 5.2, p. 576.

that Lenau's poetry was not primarily an individual achievement, but produced by the 'Weltgeist' of a specific era.[129] Both Heine and Lenau downplayed the share taken by the artist's character in producing the work of art, while also describing each other's writing as a product of their time. Lenau criticised what he considered to be the insincerity of Heine's writing, but also regarded it as a necessary feature of a specific stage of literary history, when he commented: 'Er ist der Satyr unter den Göttern, und hat etwas zu bedeuten in der Literaturgeschichte. Es mußte auch so einer kommen', and, later: 'In ihm [Heine, G.J.] steckt ein großer Dichter, vielleicht der größte Lyriker. Heine ist uns sehr nothwendig. Dieß Element in der Literatur kann man gar nicht entbehren.'[130] By pointing out the historical position of Heine's poetry rather than its universality, Lenau expressed a perspective on literature's historicity that has been previously identified as one of the period-typical features that literature in first half of the nineteenth century frequently exhibited and which was also applied to new concepts of nature. By placing Lenau's poetry of the 1830s in its historical context, I aim to show how his historical depiction of nature derived important impulses from a scepticism typical of the Austrian late Enlightenment, an engagement with both natural sciences and Hegelian philosophy of nature and history, liberal enthusiasm, as well as from a critical recourse to Romantic nature poetry and Schiller's aesthetics, and from an orientation towards the musicality and expressiveness of Beethoven's compositions. The way in which tension between those diverse stylistic and thematic characteristics was reconfigured within Lenau's poetry of nature marked a decisively new approach to the relationship between nature and literature after the *Kunstperiode*. By analysing selected poems, passages from the long epic poems *Faust* (1837) and *Savonarola* (1837), as well as extracts from letters Lenau wrote to various friends and fellow writers, this chapter will trace the emergence of Lenau's concept of a transient, fluid, and mortal *natura naturans*, hardly contained in the solid, literary forms of conventional poetry, ever threatening to undermine them, and, precisely for that reason, serving as an identificatory form for the ruptured modern self in its non-identity. My aim is to highlight nature as a concept that allowed Lenau to challenge the assumed representability of subjective experience through poetry.

Poems such as 'Meeresstille' (1832), 'Der Urwald' (1835), 'Niagara' (1836) and 'Verschiedene Deutung' (1836), the forest passage in *Faust* as well as the *Weihnacht* passage in *Savonarola*, and the later poems, 'Das Kreuz' (1841), 'Beethovens Büste' (1841), and

[129] In his unpublished notes he wrote: 'Es ist nicht der arme Ungar Niembsch oder der Handlungsbeflissene aus Lippe-Detmold, welcher das schöne Gedicht hervorgebracht, sondern der Weltgeist, nur diesem gebührt der Ruhm […]', HGW, vol. 6, p. 664.
[130] As reported by Anton Schurz in: *Lenau's Leben, großentheils aus des Dichters eigenen Briefen, von seinem Schwestermanne Anton K. Schurz* (Stuttgart/Augsburg: J. G. Cotta'scher Verlag, 1855), p. 226.

'Waldlieder' (1843), repeatedly return to a thought that had been explored in one of Lenau's earliest poems entitled 'Glauben. Wissen. Handeln' (1829) and presented as an 'allegorical dream'. Here Lenau retold the history of humankind in which 'Roma', 'Hellas', and 'Germania' appear as representatives of different peoples and ages, as well as the Biblical Fall of Man as the story of an individual's gradual estrangement and loss of faith through misguided thirst for knowledge:

> Und in der Forschung Wälder trat, ein Tor, ich
> Aus jenem gottbeseelten Paradies,
> Und all des Herzens fromme Lust verlor ich,
> Seit ich des Glaubens treue Spur verließ.[131]

Whereas Schiller, in his 1785 'An die Freude', envisioned a harmonious interplay of science and art moved by joy ('Aus der Wahrheit Feuerspiegel / lächelt sie den Forscher an'[132]), leading to eternal life ('Auch die Toten sollen leben!'[133]), the only solution Lenau's poem offered to the restless and ruptured self was to endure the sadness of its existence and carry it like a veil until death:

> Erst wenn wir uns zu seligem Vergessen
> Hinlegen in das traute, dunkle Grab,
> Löst er von deinem Angesicht sich ab
> Und hängt sich an die säuselnden Zypressen.[134]

Because of the emphasis placed on the despairing alienation experienced by solitary, wandering figures (he repeatedly wrote about Ahasver, the Wandering Jew, for example, as we will see below), as well as the explicit enthusiasm for death, both Lenau's contemporaries and his posterity have tended to interpret his poetry as a form of genuine self-expression, reading his poems as testaments of subjective experience instead of poems *about* the nature of subjective experience. This notion has been reinforced by the poetic quality of Lenau's life, which, due to a combination of deliberate self-stylization on his part and tragic events that happened to him, included an unstable and impoverished childhood and youth in Buda, Pest, Pressburg (Bratislava) and Vienna, periods of extensive travel, his taking advantage of an inheritance to establish himself as an independent artist, and finally, in 1844, a complete mental and physical breakdown at the age of forty-two that led to his hospitalisation in mental institutions in Winnenthal near Stuttgart and Vienna.

As with Hölderlin's mental illness decades earlier, Lenau's contemporaries were quick to assume a connection between his affliction and the Weltschmerz present in his

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[131] LHK, vol. 1, p. 187.
[132] Friedrich Schiller, 'An die Freude', in: Id., *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1, pp. 133–135, here p. 134.
[133] Ibid., p. 135.
[134] LHK, vol. 1, p. 190.

poetry. Certainly, Lenau's temperament played some role in his bleak depictions of the world, but to assume that these derived from an unfiltered sentiment disregards the deliberate act of artistic self-fashioning as a sentimental poet. Lenau's extravagant style and mannerism that contrasted starkly with the mostly bourgeois lifestyle of the other members of the Seracher Kreis[135] who surrounded him, and his letters, in which he described himself as solely devoted to his poetry to the point of self-sacrifice, were artistic strategies Lenau relied on to carve out a specific identity as a poet.

Reading Lenau's poetry as purely sentimental and essentially personal expression also fails to notice the aesthetic, theological, and philosophical context to which these poems belonged. Lenau, who had studied philosophy in the early to mid 1820s in Vienna, engaged with different historical and contemporary philosophies throughout his whole working life up to his breakdown.[136] As a young man, he had been influenced by his reading of Spinoza and traces of the Spinozistic duality of an active, divine *natura naturans* in contrast to a passive, dead, empirical *natura naturata* can be detected in his poetry ('Waldlieder', for example). Klopstock, Schiller, and Novalis remained important figures of reference concerning the relationship between art and nature, although, as the following analysis will show, Lenau historicised their aesthetics, depicting them as former holistic ideals of art and nature not fit for the disharmonious modern world. Instead, Byron's poetics of inner strife were as important for the young Lenau as Beethoven's music, which he perceived as 'naturwüchsig' in its emotional impact, was for the older. Lenau was also interested in philosophies of nature that had a scientific or materialist focus, although he did not engage as intensely with contemporary scientific discourse as for example Droste-Hülshoff did. Instead, the thinking of Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert, which was both scientific and philosophical, and later Hegel's attempt to establish philosophy as a 'Wissenschaft' were important references for Lenau in the 1830s.

In addition, Lenau was engaged with theological discourses of his time. He had an intellectually fruitful friendship with the theologian Hans Lassen Martensen, whose

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[135] The Seracher Kreis was a network of poets with an interest in Romanticism, who met in the early 1830s at Schloss Serach, the summer residence of Alexander von Württemberg. Among the otherwise less eccentric writers, Lenau appears to have been especially fascinated with the 'Romantic' character of Alexander, who he described as 'wild und muthig, ritterlich u. herzlich' in a letter to Anton Schurz, 8 November 1831, LHK, vol. 5.1, p.114. For further reading see Otto Borst, 'Lenau und der Seracher Kreis' in *Lenau Forum* 1 (1969), pp. 3–11.

[136] For an overview of Lenau's reading materials see Carol A. Leibiger, 'Habent sua fata libelli: Der Inhalt der Bibliothek Nikolaus Lenaus als Hinweis auf die belletristischen und philosophischen Einflüsse auf sein Werk.', *Lenau Jahrbuch*, vol. 29 (2003), pp. 71–89. For further contextualisation of Lenau's philosophical interests see for example Norbert Eke and Karl Jürgen Skrodzki, *Lenau Chronik 1802–1850* (Vienna: Deuticke, 1992), Michael Ritter, *Zeit des Herbstes. Nikolaus Lenau. Biographie* (Vienna: Deuticke, 2002), Hansgeorg Schmidt-Bergmann, *Nikolaus Lenau. Zwischen Romantik und Moderne* (Vienna: Edition Praesens, 2003).

exploration of the autonomous self within a religious context along with his critique of modernity inspired Lenau's *Faust*. Through Martensen, Lenau became acquainted with Franz von Baader, whose concept of *Weltseele* understood nature in the tradition of Jakob Böhme as the place for divine revelation. As we will see below, Baader's concept of *Weltseele* would lead Lenau to a deeper understanding of Hegel's *Weltgeist* as a historical force moving through a succession of destruction and sublation. Before this backdrop, the emphatic glorification of death and annihilation that was so characteristic for Lenau's poetry and the typical Weltschmerz we encounter therein, can be reassessed as a zeitgeisty sentiment rather than an individual worldview.

The fact that Lenau's life and poetry were throughout the nineteenth century often perceived as intrinsically linked, with his melancholic poetry stemming from personal Weltschmerz rather than philosophical contemplation, is largely due to a variety of biographical accounts which were published after Lenau's death in 1850 and which depicted the poet's life and work in such a manner.[137] Anton Schurz, Lenau's brother-in-law, and author of the popular biography *Lenaus Leben. Großentheils aus des Dichters eigenen Briefen. Von seinem Schwestermann* (1855), employed two images that Lenau himself had used in his poetry to speak about the poet's existence: a cross, and a small boat rowing through a storm.

Ferdinand Kürnberger's popular novel *Der Amerikamüde* (1855), a fictional account based on Lenau's journey to America, helped to further memorialize Lenau as a troubled Byronic figure and cemented the perception of him as a poet of true sentiment rather than rhetorical finesse. This biographical perspective dominated Lenau scholarship in the nineteenth century beginning with Berthold Auerbach's 1867 talk 'Der Weltschmerz mit besonderer Beziehung auf Nicolaus Lenau'. The early twentieth century saw an orientation towards historicizing Lenau in a way more akin to how Heine had described him, that is, as a child of his time, his poetry contributing to general tendencies within literary history and the history of thought.[138] Additionally, around the centenary of Lenau's birth, several publications show a heightened interest in Lenau's literary concept of nature.[139] Anton Korr

[137] Examples would be Theodor Opitz' *Nikolaus Lenau. Eine ausführliche Charakteristik nach seinen Werken* (1850), Karl Mayer's *Nikolaus Lenaus Briefe an einen Freund* (1853), J.M.H. Doering's *Nikolaus Lenaus Biographie* (1853), Emma Niendorf's *Lenau in Schwaben. Aus dem letzten Jahrzehnt seines Lebens* (1855), and Karl Landsteiner's *Über Lenaus Geistesproceß. Eine Studie* (1862).

[138] This perspective informed works such as Leo Greiner's *Lenau* (1904), Wilhelm Alfred Braun's *Types of Weltschmerz in German Poetry* (1905), Wilhlem Alexander's *Die Entwicklungslinien der Weltanschauung Nikolaus Lenaus* (1914), and Johannes Deutsch's *Zur Psychologie und Ästhetik der Lyrik: Untersuchungen an Lenau* (1914).

[139] Examples are Camillo von Klenze's *Lenau's Nature Sense* (1895) and *The Treatment of Nature in the Works of Nikolaus Lenau: An Essay in Interpretation* (1902), Theodor Gesky's *Lenau als Naturdichter* (1902), Julie

especially gave a detailed account of the various ways Lenau's poetry and letters interacted with the philosophy of nature from Schelling to Hegel, but did not further elaborate on the tension between literary form and philosophical content which can be detected in Lenau's poetry.[140] This line of thought was picked up again in the second half of the twentieth century. As Richard Dove has shown in his analysis of Lenau's rhetoric of lament, the possibilities and limitations of the poetic form to convey the experience of nature became a central focus of Lenau's poetry.[141] Scholars such as Dove, Mary C. Crichton,[142] Hansgeorg Schmidt-Bergmann[143] and, most recently, Stefani Kugler,[144] have developed approaches to Lenau that neither attempt to explain his poetry from his biography, nor disregard the specific historical context in which it was written. They consider Lenau's self-fashioning as a poet and the way he referred to contemporary discourses beyond the literary sphere as integral parts of the reconfiguration of the role that would be assigned to poetry and the poet in emerging modern bourgeois society of the nineteenth century. Kugler, for example, has analysed Lenau's America poems against the backdrop of expansionist settler politics of the 1830s and as part of a European culture of exoticism, which, even while mourning the demise of North American indigenous culture, ultimately served to support its extinction. This approach demonstrates the importance of re-examining Lenau's poetry in a way that takes into consideration the politics of poetry and the reciprocal relationship between society and art, even – as was often the case with Lenau's poems– if art presented itself as a timeless and universal antithesis to society. In this regard, the parallels between the transformations which both the concept of literature and that of nature underwent during the first half of the nineteenth century, and which I have already explored in the previous chapter with regard to Heine, became apparent in Lenau's oeuvre as well. After Kant had postulated the fundamental autonomy of art creating independently alongside nature, the early Romantics August Wilhelm Schlegel and Novalis, as well as Schiller, had taken this thought a step further by envisioning art as the crucial instrument for facilitating the potential and progressive perfectibility of nature. Continuing such a hierarchization in favour of art, Hegel

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Adam's *Der Natursinn in der deutschen Dichtung: neue Folge (von Lenau bis auf unsere Tage)* (1908), Eugen Greve's *Die Naturschilderung in den Dichterwerken Nikolaus Lenaus* (1910).

[140] See Anton Korr, *Lenaus Stellung zur Naturphilosophie* (Aachen: Deterre, 1914).

[141] Richard Dove, 'The Rhetoric of Lament: A Reassessment of Nikolaus Lenau', in *Orbis Litterarum* 39 (1984), pp. 230–265.

[142] Mary C. Crichton, '"And no birds sing": Lenau's desolate Urwald' in *Michigan Germanic Studies* 1 (1975), pp. 152–164.

[143] Hansgeorg Schmidt-Bergmann, *Ästhetismus und Negativität. Studien zu Nikolaus Lenau* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1984).

[144] Stefani Kugler, '"Ein ungeheuerer Vorrath der herrlichsten Bilder erwartet mich dort…". Dekadenz und Exotismus in ausgewählten Reisegedichten Nikolaus Lenaus', in: *Ambulante Poesie*, ed. by Johannes Görbert and Nikolaus Immer (Heidelberg: Springer, 2020), pp. 179–205.

had concluded in his lectures on aesthetics in the 1820s that the beauty of nature ('das Naturschöne') was a mere antecedent of the superior human beauty of art ('das Kunstschöne'). This created an inner tension, or dialectical dynamic, within Hegel's definition of art as simultaneously a timeless ideal and a product of history, shaped by a specific *Volksgeist*, i.e. a society's culture at a moment in time. Nature, in this conception, had taken on the role of a raw material that needed to be moulded through both subjective will and collective skill in order to ascend from merely appealing to the senses towards an embodiment of the ideal. The Hegelian ideal resulted from the spiritual conceptualization of an idea and its realisation in the world of the senses. Lenau arrived at a similar thought about the idealisation of nature in art in a letter to Anton Schurz in 1832. In reference to a poem that Schurz had sent him, Lenau wrote:

> Ich will dir einen Vorschlag machen. Mir ist nämlich diese Idee beigefallen. Wie wäre es, wenn Du Gleichnisse aus der Natur nähmest, liebliche und erhabene, wie Du's eben brauchst, diese Gleichnisse aber auch wieder in Deiner Tyrolersprache, der treuherzigen, einfachen, aussprächest. Idealisiert müssten die Naturerscheinungen seyn einerseits, popularisiert aber andererseits. Ich glaube, das hat noch kein Mensch versucht. Ich bin nicht recht im Stande, Dir meine Gedanken ganz deutlich zu machen. Ich meine so: die Auffassung der Naturerscheinung und die Gestaltung derselben zum Symbole müßte ganz ideal seyn, die Darstellung dieses Symbols aber müßte tyrolisch seyn. Also – – genug, du verstehst mich schon. Es müßte eine grosse Wirkung thun. Die ganze Natur zur Landmännin zu machen, zur schönen Tyrolerin; wäre gar nicht übel. Probier's nur, Tonerl, es wird sich machen.[145]

This passage, in which Lenau appears to propose a new way to bridge the gap between the universal ideal and the particular, historically, here even regionally concrete, sensual realisation, is one of the many examples of his preoccupation with the relationship between nature and literature, or, more precisely, poetry, in 1832. Towards Schurz, Lenau emphasised the spontaneity of his deliberations, giving the impression of letting him witness the emergence of a thought in progress ('Mir ist nämlich diese Idee beigefallen', etc.). Other letters from the same winter and spring also gave accounts of Lenau's acute need to develop new, innovative forms of poetic engagement with a natural world that he perceived as beginning to undergo radical transformation, which he described in a letter to Sophie Schwab on 16 February 1832. Here Lenau combined an entropic vision of a dying nature and a rapidly cooling planet with the loss of a loquacious nature, embodied by a nightingale (an image that would reappear prominently in Lenau's letters from America):

> Ein heimlicher Umgang mit der Melancholie in den einsamen Wäldern der Poesie wird mir doch erlaubt seyn? Allerdings hat Schwab [Sophie's husband, Gustav Schwab, G.J.] Recht, wenn er mich einer gewissen Eintönigkeit beschuldigt. Aber ich habe wenig Hoffnung, daß es anders kommen werde; ich glaube vielmehr, je näher man sich an die Natur anschließt, desto mehr wird man ergriffen von dem Geiste der Sehnsucht, des schwermütigen

[145] Letter to Anton Schurz, 19 May 1832, LHK vol. 5.1, p. 196f.

> Hinsterbens, der durch die ganze Natur (auf Erden) weht. Ja, theure Freundin, unsere Mutter Erde ist im Sterben begriffen. Sie werden wissen, daß sich die Todeskälte von den beiden Polen immer weiter nach den noch warmen Gegenden der Erde verbreitet, wie der sterbende Mensch zuerst an den Extremitäten erkaltet. Die süsse Nachtigall ist zusammt den Rosenlauben aus Island verschwunden. So muß die Nachtigall immer weiter wandern, und was aus ihrem Liede so schmerzlich tönt, ist die Klage um das gestorbene Vaterland, und die prophetische Kunde vom Tod, der uns immer näher kommt. Ich möchte das Lied der lezten Nachtigall auf dem lezten Rosenstrauche hören.[146]

The vision of a gradually freezing earth incorporated recent scientific theories and discoveries about ice ages, which had become widely known and accepted as historical facts by the 1830s and still fascinated and disturbed Lenau's contemporaries in equal measure – Droste-Hülshoff's poem 'Die Mergelgrube' (1844), which I will analyse in the following chapter, can be considered as a prime example of a poetic reflection on the anxieties that the possibilities of geological deep time continued to induce in its readers. In comparison Lenau's geological understanding concerning the history of the earth was not as substantial as Droste-Hülshoff's; however, the gradually cooling earth was a core idea of Plutonism. Plutonism (or Vulcanism), which assumed that magmatic activity had shaped the face of the earth, was, as we have seen in the introduction, still a quite popular idea about the earth's origins and historical development in the 1830s and present in the theories developed by Lyell, although Lenau's bleak vision of a frozen world was not necessarily part of Plutonism and seems to owe more to the Weltschmerz so characteristic of his literary works.

The image of a dead and desolate nature also appeared in a letter to Emilie von Reinbeck on 8 June 1832, in which Lenau developed yet another possible poetic device for writing in a new way about nature:

> Ich dachte über die geheimnißvollen Gesetze der Kunst, und wie viel neue Gattungen der Poesie noch zu finden wären. Was hält meine l. Freundin von folgender Idee:
> Einzelne Züge der Natur, wie sie uns vorliegen, ohne Versification, ohne Ausführung ins Genaue, blos neben einander hingeworfen, gleichsam in poetischer Situationszeichnung. z. B.:
> Abend; – grüne Wiese, – zerstreute Weidenbäume, – Unkenruf im Sumpfe; – grauer Himmel – es regt sich kein Lüftchen – immer tieferes Dunkel – ein verlorner Freund. – – Tiefe Schätze, theure Freundin, liegen in der Situation. Liesse sich nicht eine Reihe solcher Skizzen mit Wirkung ausführen?[147]

As he did in his proposal for an idealisation and popularisation of nature poetry to Schurz, Lenau expressed the wish to have an impact or effect ('Wirkung') on potential readers with this kind of nature writing, this time through an almost impressionistic way of arranging poetic fragments that would capture the ephemeral character of nature in a poetic sketch of a situation ('in poetischer Stimmungszeichnung'). Although a strong emphasis on

[146] Letter to Sophie and Gustav Schwab, 16 February 1832 in: LHK, vol. 5, pp. 170–173, here p. 170–171.
[147] Ibid, p. 204.

temporality and presence can be observed in Lenau's poetry, it should be noted that both poetic recommendations were made to other people, and presented as ideas or artistic experiments that Lenau invited them to try. He himself went on to write nature poetry neither in a regional dialect as he seems to advise Schurz to do, nor in the manner of a poetic sketch as he demonstrated for Reinbeck. Instead, as the following analysis will show, his poetry progressed through three stages in the 1830s and early 1840s, with his last poem, 'Blick in den Strom' (1844), reaching a simplicity and austerity of form bordering on repetitiveness in combination with a complex temporality and an ambivalent fluidity of sentiment towards the natural phenomenon of a flowing stream.

To retrace the steps that led Lenau to this nature poetry, it is helpful to begin in the early 1830s. The year 1832 has often been considered a turning point in Lenau's conceptualisation of the relationship between nature and literature. His letters clearly show the importance nature had gained for him during that time: out of thirty-nine documented letters written by Lenau in 1832, roughly a fourth mention the term explicitly. While Lenau had planned at the beginning of the year to move to Munich in order to study with Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert, author of the popular scientific *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft* (1808),[148] this initial plan was put on hold when Lenau prepared to travel to North America instead. In February he had completed the 'Schilflieder', a cycle of five poems centred around a pond and the feeling of longing for an absent lover, or, if a remark in a letter to Joseph Klemm that accompanied the 'Schilflieder' can be taken as an indication – 'Bei uns, Bruder, ist die Zeit der Liebe, täuschen wir uns nicht! vorüber'[149] – mourning the absence of love itself, in a fashion similar to some of Heine's *Lieder*. Indeed, as the letter to Klemm continued, the longing for earthly love had been replaced, in a true fashion of Romantic sublimation, by longing for the transcendental: 'Der Ernst des höhern Lebens hat uns ergriffen, und die Sehnsucht nach einem andern Dasein.'[150] Considered in this context, 'Schilflieder' can be associated with stage one in the transformation of the relationship between nature and literature in Lenau's oeuvre: they appeared as a reminiscence of the poetic conventions and sentiments of Romantic nature poetry, yet also lamented the impossibility of continuing that very tradition. By March, before 'Schilflieder' had even appeared in print, Lenau had made the decision to travel to North America, which he justified in a letter to Karl Mayer as a crucial step in his artistic development. In a passage that has

[148] Ibid., p. 166.
[149] Ibid., p. 175.
[150] Ibid.

often been quoted in order to point out the profundity of Lenau's radical self-fashioning as an artist devoting his life solely to poetry, he explained:

> Ich brauche Amerika zu meiner Ausbildung. Dort will ich meine Fantasie in die Schule – die Urwälder – schicken. Mein Herz aber durch und durch in Schmerz maceriren, in Sehnsucht nach den Geliebten. Künstlerische Ausbildung ist mein höchster Lebenszweck, alle Kräfte meines Geistes, das Glück meines Gemüthes betracht' ich als Mittel dazu. Erinnerst du dich an das Gedicht von Chamisso, wo der Mahler einen Jüngling ans Kreuz nagelt, um ein Bild vom Todesschmerze zu haben? Ich will mich selbst ans Kreuz schlagen, wenn's nur ein gutes Gedicht gibt.[151]

Lenau's willingness to let life and art collapse into one in such a violent fashion in order to let the subjective experience take over the empty centre left behind by objective truth (be it religious, philosophical, aesthetic, or scientific) was one that would reappear frequently in his poetry ('Das Kreuz' 1841 would be a drastic example). Whereas in Chamisso's poem 'Das Kruzifix' (1834), to which Lenau refers here, the artist crucifies another in order to depict a suffering Christ who appears 'wie der Natur […] abgewonnen', Lenau considered it necessary for the artist to suffer, and to become soft and fragmented through suffering (which he described with the help of the unusual culinary metaphor of being macerated by pain).

The inability of the poetic form to represent subjective experience adequately in relation to the movement of history became a defining feature of the second stage of Lenau's nature poetry in the mid 1830s, which included the America poems as well as the long narrative poems *Faust* and *Savonarola*. In Lenau's late poetry, i.e. 1837 and after, a new enthusiasm for music as – according to Hegelian aesthetics – the least sensual, most spiritual, and most subjective art form, can be detected. Lenau merged this emphasis on musicality's subjective nature with an emphatic longing for the dissolution of the subject, with the effect of creating poetry that ultimately reflected on its own future demise as part of a necessary dialectic in the historical trajectory of art.

The following analysis will take a closer look at some selected poems and passages that best exemplify the different stages of the metamorphosis which the relationship between nature and poetry underwent within Lenau's poetic oeuvre. Instead of assuming one causally determined, linear course, I will explore continuities, contradictions, and dialectical structures within Lenau's poetry in a way that does justice to the reciprocal relations of nature and literature therein. The analysis will put a specific emphasis on the second stage, during which Lenau wrote his America poems and worked on both *Faust* and *Savonarola*; these show an especially dense and complex poetic treatment of the concept of nature.

[151] Ibid., p. 181.

Lenau's 'Schilflieder' were composed as a traditional, and at the same time complex song cycle. Perhaps for that reason, and because they mark a threshold between Romantic poetry and the epigonal engagement with it, they became instantaneously popular when they were published in the spring of 1832 and are still Lenau's best-known poems. As with many song-poems from that period, the fame of 'Schilflieder' also benefited from being set to music first by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, and then several others such as August Klughardt, Kurt Weill and Alban Berg.

Lenau had written several other short series of nature poems before. 'Die Waldkapelle' in 1828, consisting of three poems and centred around a chapel in a forest and the experience of loss of faith, still has a minimal narrative structure, although the human experience of a sceptic confronted with his own loss of faith and, as a result, the terror of mortality, seems to be dwarfed by evocative landscape depictions. The verbalisation of human suffering (the sceptic curses and rages against an absent God) contrasts with the increasing muteness of nature – 'Und die Natur verstummt, im Dämmerlicht / Schwermütig ihrem Tode nachzusinnen.' – and echoes, perhaps, the silence that falls in Goethe's 'Über allen Gipfeln' (1780/1815). Whereas Goethe's short poem offered a pantheistic vision of reintegration into the totality of nature – the silence of birds and trees both preceded and predicted the silence of the lyrical Du – the sceptic in Lenau's 'Die Waldkapelle' remained isolated and separated from both God and nature.

'Wanderung im Gebirge', a miniature collection consisting of ten poems concerned with different aspects of a walk through the mountains in 1830, abandons a strict narrative structure and focused instead on arranging memories in a prism-like fashion. Here nature appeared as a remedy to scepticism. Towards the middle of 'Wanderung im Gebirge', the experience of the sublime intensified both the confrontation with dreaded mortality and refreshed a sense of vitality. While the last stanza of 'Einsamkeit' issued a warning to the sceptic:

> Komm, Gottesleugner, Gott zu fühlen;
> Dein Frevel wird auf diesem Rand
> Den Todesabgrund tiefer wühlen,
> Dir steiler türmen diese Wand! – [152]

the first stanza of 'Die Ferne' expressed a sense of freedom discovered through a newly established union with nature:

[152] LHK, vol. 1, p. 168.

Des Berges Gipfel war erschwungen,
Der trotzig in die Tiefe schaut;
Natur, von deinem Reiz durchdrungen,
Wie schlug mein Herz so frei, so laut.[153]

Like 'Die Waldkapelle' and 'Wanderung im Gebirge', the 'Schilflieder' depicted a world at dusk, with the sun setting over a pond in a forest. While the style remained relatively regular and simple – all five poems consist of three or two stanzas, encompassing four trochees with a rhyme scheme abab – the setting of 'Schilflieder', which might have appeared straightforward at first glance (a pond at dusk, a melancholy wanderer musing on his lost beloved), actually depicted a quite complex situation full of temporal and spatial ambiguities. From the very beginning, it remains unclear, for example, if the pond and the lyric I actually reside in the same space. Although the repeated use of the localising preposition 'here' seems to suggest such a cohesion, the lyric I does not actually appear as a wanderer in the forest, but instead thoughts about the absent beloved are interspersed with an imagined presence of the lover within the setting of the pond, lending the poems their dream-like quality. This impression is reinforced by the abrupt changes between a quiet evening in poems one, three, and five, and rain and thunderstorms, depicted in poems two and four, which make a coherent time-frame of one evening appear very unlikely. Although the first poem begins with a seemingly concrete setting –

Drüben geht die Sonne scheiden,
Und der müde Tag entschlief.
Niederhangen hier die Weiden
In den Teich, so still, so tief.[154]

the third poem then seems to make a much more general statement about a routine of remembering and mourning the lyric I regularly engages in:

Auf geheimen Waldespfaden
Schleich ich gern im Abendschein
An das öde Schilfgestade,
Mädchen, und gedenke dein![155]

This practice of mourning, called 'Deingedenken' in the final poem, anchors 'Schilflieder' in the elegiac tradition of poetic lamentation, although what exactly the object of its mourning is remains ambiguous. The seemingly obvious answer would be the beloved girl, who is either directly addressed ('mein Liebstes', 'Mädchen') or whose attributes are referenced ('deine Liebe', 'deiner Stimme Klang', 'deinen lieblichen Gesang' 'dein langes Haar'), and who has somehow been lost to the lyric I, who remembers her with great pain.

[153] Ibid., p. 169.
[154] Ibid., p. 41.
[155] Ibid.

However, taking into consideration Schiller's treatment of the elegy in *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795), where he had defined the elegiac poetic mode as one that was primarily concerned with expressing the disunity between ideal and nature, Lenau's 'Schilflieder' can also be interpreted as poems mourning the loss of coherence between art (as a mode of expression) and nature (as an experience). The former unity is only accessible through lamentation, which, at least momentarily, allows the features of the beloved/the ideal to reappear in the natural world that surrounds the lyric I. In this context the title-giving reeds take on a specific role. As the wind moves through them, they emit mourning sounds which are similar to the song of the former beloved but which are also, quite literally, 'Schilflieder', songs of the reeds:

> Wenn sich dann der Busch verdürstet,
> Rauscht das Rohr geheimnisvoll,
> Und es klaget, und es flüstert,
> Daß ich weinen, weinen soll.
>
> Und ich mein', ich höre wehen
> Leise deiner Stimme Klang
> Und im Weiher untergehen
> Deinen lieblichen Gesang.[156]

Not only does the sound the wind makes in the reeds self-reflexively refer back to the poems themselves, but singing reeds also allude to the mythological figure of Syrinx, one of the nymphs attending Artemis, who, pursued by Pan, escaped him by turning herself into reeds, only to be cut by Pan to make his famous syrinx pipe. Thus 'Schilflieder', far from being poems merely about personal grief, circle around the theme of loss in a much more general sense: the separation between lovers also conveys the historical separation of nature and ideal, and, by referring to the invention of the syrinx pipe as a stand-in for the invention of musical poetry, contemplate disunity and loss as core principles of artistic expression. Mourning and lamentation as modes of poetic expression seem to become the focus of 'Schilflieder', until the last stanza does not even mention the absent lover as a separate object of mourning any longer, but completely merges her with the poetic practice of remembering:

> Weinend muß mein Blick sich senken;
> Durch die tiefste Seele geht
> Mir ein süßes Deingedenken,
> Wie ein stilles Nachtgebet![157]

With remembering and mourning appearing as substitutes for unity with the actual object, Lenau, in opposition to Schiller and the Romantics, no longer regards art as initiating a

[156] Ibid., p. 42.
[157] Ibid., p. 43.

process of nature's gradual perfection, but instead 'Schilflieder' show poetry as a place for reflecting on the fundamental inadequacy of poetic representation. The pond, which, in the fourth poem, briefly reflects lightning in the sky, can be read as a symbolic image encapsulating Lenau's problematisation of the relationship between nature and representation. Schiller's philosophical poem on art, 'Die Künstler' (1789), praises reflections on water surfaces as prefigurations of art's ability to reflect and represent the sensually perceived natural world in a way that brings nature to a higher state of completion:

> Gefällig strahlte der Kristall der Wogen
> Die hüpfende Gestalt zurück.
> Wie konntet ihr des schönen Winks verfehlen,
> Womit euch die Natur hilfreich entgegen kam?
> Die Kunst, den Schatten ihr nachahmend abzustehlen,
> Wies euch das Bild, das auf der Woge schwamm.[158]

Whereas Schiller depicted the relationship between art and nature as a progressive refinement of the latter through the former, leading towards an elevation of nature in art by using images of clarity, brightness, growth and ascent, Lenau's 'Schilflieder' rely on natural images that convey a sense of darkness, obscurity, mystery, and depth. In the first poem, both the suffering of the lyric I and the pond at dusk are described as silent and deep ('still', 'tief'), scarcely illuminated by the evening star and by the memory of the beloved respectively. Instead of gaining clarity through a harmonious interplay of art and nature, both the self and the natural world seem to darken further in the second poem:

> Trübe wird's, die Wolken jagen,
> Und der Regen niederbricht,
> Und die lauten Winde klagen:
> 'Teich, wo ist dein Sternenlicht?'
>
> Suchen den erloschnen Schimmer
> Tief im aufgewühlten See.
> Deine Liebe lächelt nimmer
> Nieder in mein tiefes Weh![159]

In the fourth poem, after sundown, the pond finally produces a 'vergänglich Bild', a short-lived image reflecting a natural world that in itself appears as evanescent as lightning illuminating a stormy night sky – a natural phenomenon characterised by both its brevity and the catastrophic, destructive potential it harbours:

> Durch den Himmel wild
> Jagen Blitze, bleich;
> Ihr vergänglich Bild
> Wandelt durch den Teich.[160]

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[158] Friedrich Schiller, 'Die Künstler', in: Id., *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1, pp. 173–186, here p. 176.
[159] LHK, vol. 1, p. 41.
[160] Ibid., p. 42.

The fleeting image reflected upon water – or rather, moving through the water, 'durch den Teich' – and the song of the reeds can be considered poetic emblems of an art that is both ephemeral and concerned with loss. Bearing in mind the traditional association of both water surfaces and reeds with art production, and, more specifically, with art as either a mimetic or an idealizing practice reflecting or perfecting nature, 'Schilflieder' appears to mourn an ideal relationship between art and nature, which the previous generation of writers such as Schiller strove for. By contrast, Lenau's elegiac poems with their emphasis on opacity, darkness, depth, and nature as a secretive, reluctant other, seem more closely related to Novalis' *Hymnen an die Nacht* (1799/1800), but are devoid of the Christian belief in salvation and a life in the hereafter that the hymns display. The lowering of the gaze and the turn towards an inner world of remembrance at the end of the fifth and final poem express resignation, rather than the discovery of an inner nature, or microcosm, as August Wilhelm Schlegel described it in his 1802 lecture 'Über das Verhältnis der Schönen Kunst zur Natur; über Täuschung und Wahrscheinlichkeit; über Styl und Manier'.[161] In Lenau's 'Schilflieder' neither the spiritual inner world, nor a sensually perceived outer nature offer the clarity or abundance that Schlegel described. Instead, absence remains at the centre of the poems, with the inner and outer worlds temporarily reflecting each other, but never merging and progressing towards the Romantic ideal of symbiosis. Despite this tension and disunity becoming apparent, 'Schilflieder' still follows a cyclical structure and creates a mirror-like correspondence between the natural world and the feeling of loss the lyric I expresses. This duality was to remain a defining feature of Lenau's nature poetry, but changed drastically throughout the 1830s, as I will show in the following analysis of the poems which were written after Lenau had bid the Romantic tradition of nature poetry farewell and had begun to explore a less cyclical and much more dynamic concept of poetic form.

American Nature

Some of the most striking examples of Lenau's changing poetics of nature are the America poems, some written during his journey to North America in 1832/1833, but mostly in the following years. The America poems mostly circle around three natural phenomena: the

[161] 'Wo aber soll der Künstler seine erhabne Meisterin, die schaffende Natur finden, um sich mit ihr gleichsam zu berathen, da sie in keiner äußeren Erscheinung enthalten ist? In seinem eignen Innern, im Mittelpunkte seines Wesens durch geistige Anschauung kann er es nur, oder nirgends. Die Astrologen haben den Menschen *Mikrokosmus*, die kleine Welt genannt, was sich philosophisch sehr gut rechtfertigen läßt.', August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgaben der Vorlesungen*, ed. by Ernst Behler and Ursula Behler, 22 vols. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1989), vol. 1, p. 295.

ocean [the 'Atlantica' series: 'Meeresstille', 'Die Seejungfrauen', 'Seemorgen' (all 1832)] , the primeval forest ['Der Urwald' (1835), Das Blockhaus (1838), Der Indianerzug (1832)], and the Niagara Falls or big rivers ['Die drei Indianer' (1834), 'Niagara' (1836), 'Verschiedene Deutung' (1836)]. The primeval forest also reappears in *Faust*, the river in *Savonarola*.

Exploring the way Lenau infused natural images with historicity will be key to understanding how he reconceptualised the relationship between nature and literature beyond the Romantic formula for a poetic anticipation of a reconciliation between nature and spirit. Within the America poems, a noticeable shift takes place from more narrative poems ('Der Indianerzug', 'Die drei Indianer') towards a more contemplative mood ('Der Urwald') and greater abstraction of the poem's subject-matter ('Verschiedene Deutung'). One of the first poems Lenau wrote on his American journey, 'Meeresstille', which reflected on the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean, was attached to a letter to Emilie and Georg von Reinbeck sent from Ohio in March 1833. Here nature appears as a force that exerts a subtle and mysterious influence on human life:

> Wie mich oft in grünen Hainen
> Überrascht' ein dunkles Weh,
> Muß ich nun auch plötzlich weinen,
> Weiß nicht wie? – hier auf der See.
>
> Trägt Natur auf allen Wegen
> Einen großen, ewgen Schmerz,
> Den sie mir als Muttersegen
> Heimlich strömet in das Herz?
>
> O, dann ist es keine Lüge,
> Daß im Schoß der Wellennacht
> In verborgener Genüge
> Ein Geschlecht von Menschen wacht.
>
> Dort auch darf der Freund nicht fehlen,
> Wie im hellen Sonnentag,
> Dem Natur ihr Leid erzählen,
> Der mit ihr empfinden mag.
>
> Doch geheim ist seine Stelle
> Und Geheimnis, was er fühlt,
> Dem die Tränen an der Quelle
> Schon das Meer von dannen spült.[162]

With its focus on the opacity and mysteriousness of nature's connection with human thoughts and sentiments (words meaning 'secretive' and 'secret' occur three times in this

[162] LHK, vol. 1, p. 269.

passage), Lenau continues the Romantic topos of a hermetic code embedded in nature that we have already encountered in Heine's *Harzreise*. As in Heine's talkative forest, the sea resembles the description of the natural world that Novalis gave in the first passage of *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* (1799/1802), in which artists, scientists, or other observers of natural phenomena reach a brief sense of premonition without ever gaining an abstract and definite understanding of nature: 'So entstehen ihre Ahndungen, aber nach kurzen Zeiten schwimmt alles wieder, wie vorher, vor ihren Blicken.'[163] But whereas the 'Ahndungen' of Novalis, mysterious as they were, lead the protagonists in the fairy-tale of Hyacinth and Rosenblüthe embedded in *Die Lehrlinge* to be finally united with nature in love, the lyric I in Lenau's 'Meeresstille' remains separated not only from nature, but also from his mysterious doppelgänger which he envisions at the bottom of the sea. As he had already done in 'Schilflieder', Lenau focuses on the capacity of water to conceal and dissolve in its depth rather than its transparency or the reflective properties of its surface. Another recurring feature of the natural world that Lenau had already emphasised in 'Schilflieder' and that he also pointed out in his descriptions of American nature, was its silence. Lenau commented repeatedly on the absence of songbirds, especially nightingales, in North America and attributed this perceived muteness of nature to a general lack of sentiment and fantasy. In his letter to Emilie and Georg von Reinbeck he complained about a nature devoid of sentiment and fantasy – the very things he had described in previous letters as the features of nature he was most looking for on his journey (to Karl Mayer, 12 March 1832: 'Dort will ich meine Fantasie in die Schule – die Urwälder – schicken', and to his sister Therese and her husband Anton Schurz, 16 March 1832: 'Ein ungeheuerer Vorrath der herrlichsten Bilder erwartet mich dort, eine Fülle göttlicher Auftritte, die noch daliegt jungfräulich und unberührt, wie der Boden der Urwälder. Ich verspreche mir eine wunderbare Wirkung davon auf mein Gemüth'). The nature he now depicts appears depleted and lifeless, expressionless and silent:

> Die Natur ist hier entsetzlich matt. Hier giebt es, wie Sie wissen keine Nachtigall, überhaupt keine wahren Sangvögel. Dies scheint mir ein poetischer Fluch zu seyn, der auf dem Lande liegt, und von tiefer Bedeutung. Der Natur wird es hier nie so wohl ums Herz, oder so weh, daß sie singen müßte. Sie hat kein Gemüth und keine Fantasie, und kann darum ihren Geschöpfen auch nichts dergleichen geben.[164]

[163] Novalis, *Werke*, ed. by Gerhard Schulz (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1981) pp. 95–128, here p. 95.
[164] Ibid., p. 235–236.

Lenau attributes this moribund state of nature to the absence of spirit[165] in North America. In the same letter, when talking about his 'Atlantica' poems, amongst which was 'Meeresstille', Lenau describes the ocean as a geographical and historical border, which spirit would not cross. America, he writes, is truly the place where history ends and sets like the sun (the 'Untergang' which the first stanza of the poem describes):

> Amerika ist das wahre Land des Unterganges. Der Westen der Menschheit. Das atlantische Meer aber ist der isolierende Gürtel für den Geist und alles höhere Leben. Ich weiß nicht, ob nicht Alles was ich hier niedergeschrieben, äußerst geistlos ist u. langweilig, ich kann es hier nicht beurteilen. Ich bitte daher geziemendst Alles, was Ihnen abgeschmackt erscheint, auf das Amerikanische Klima zu schieben.[166]

The close connection between the climate of a country and what was imagined as the historically determined collective spirit of its people was a popular figure of thought since the eighteenth century, when Herder had drawn a causal connection between climate and culture.[167] In the first half of the nineteenth century, especially during the 1820s, Hegel and the geologist Carl Ritter had based their concepts of a gradual, successive historical progress of civilizations on the idea that different climatic zones produced different kinds of culture. For Ritter, America signified the last stage in a long line of human development.[168] This theory incorporated the tradition of thinking about the history of humankind in geographical terms as a gradual progression of wisdom and religious truth from the East (where the monotheistic religions had originated) to the West, a tradition that was revived in the context of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century interest in the Middle East, its history and culture (Schiller's 'Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais' as well as Novalis 'Die Lehrlinge zu Sais' can be considered literary examples). Ritter's assumption that America would be the ultimate destination of history further developed the idea of history progressing steadily westwards in the process of its continuous refinement and development.

This perspective was turned on its head in Lenau's poem 'Der Urwald' (1835), in which America is the place where both natural and human history come to an end, but instead of completion they reach a state of decline. Lenau's poem reveals the illusory character of America as the 'new world' promising liberty and prosperity for all, by transforming the primeval forest into a place signifying demise, disappointment, and death:

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[165] The German word 'Geist', which Lenau used, had, especially in the first half of the nineteenth century, a philosophical dimension that the English 'spirit' does perhaps not fully convey. Geist would mean here not just something that was not matter, but rather a collective cultural force or a guiding historical principal.
[166] Letter to Emilie and Georg v. Reinbeck, 5 March 1833, in: LHK, vol. 5, pp. 235–242, here p. 242.
[167] Stephan Günzel has given an overview of the philosophical dimension of climate in the Enlightenment in 'Geographie der Aufklärung. Klimapolitik von Montesquieu zu Kant', in *Aufklärung und Kritik*, vol. 2 (2004), pp. 66–91.
[168] For further reading on Ritter's view of America see *Carl Ritter. Zur europäisch-amerikanischen Geographie an der Wende vom 18. zum 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Manfred Büttner (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1980).

Die Sonne war geneigt im Untergang,
Nur leise strich der Wind, kein Vogel sang.
Da stieg ich ab, mein Roß am Quell zu tränken,
Mich in den Blick der Wildnis zu versenken.
Vermildernd schien das helle Abendrot
Auf dieses Urwalds grauenvolle Stätte,
Wo ungestört das Leben mit dem Tod
Jahrtausendlang gekämpft die ernste Wette.
Umsonst das Leben hier zu grünen sucht,
Erdrücket von des Todes Überwucht,
Denn endlich hat der Tod, der starke Zwinger,
Die Faust geballt, das Leben eingeschlossen,
Es sucht umsonst, hier, dort hervorzusprossen
Durch Moderstämme, dürre Todesfinger.[169]

This morbid landscape appears analogous to the desolate state of the poem's protagonist, who, while resting on the forest floor, fears that his own productivity could all too soon resemble the quiet forest. With the Romantic 'Ahndungsblumen' perishing, silence and death settle over the natural world and the poet alike:

Wo sind die Blüten, die den Wald umschlangen,
Wo sind die Vögel, die hier lustig sangen?
Nun ist der Wald verlassen und verdorrt,
Längst sind die Blüten und die Vögel fort.
So sind vielleicht gar bald auch mir verblüht
Die schönen Ahndungsblumen im Gemüt;
Und ist der Wuchs des Lebens mir verdorrt,
Sind auch die Vögel, meine Lieder, fort;
Dann bin ich still und tot, wie dieser Baum,
Der Seele Frühling war, wie seiner – Traum.[170]

As Kugler has shown in her recent analysis, Lenau's description of American nature as fatigued and degenerate was influenced by ideas the eighteenth-century scientist Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon had developed in his *Histoire naturelle* (1749–1788). Although Buffon's hypothesis, according to which the stunted growth of American plants and animals compared to European wildlife was a sign of a previous process of degeneration, was already considered outdated in the first half of the nineteenth century, Lenau referred to it in two separate letters.[171] He however changed the focus from non-human life to human society, which Buffon had explicitly excluded from his degeneration theory in the third volume of his natural history. For Buffon, man was decidedly set apart from other animals through God's will, and human life, being the result of both evolution and miraculous intervention, was therefore exempt from the degenerative process that he observed in animals and

[169] LHK, vol. 2, p. 53.
[170] Ibid., p. 54.
[171] See letter to Emilie and Georg von Reinbeck, 5 March 1833, LHK, vol. 5.1, p. 235, and letter to Anton Schurz, 8 March 1833, ibid., p. 274.

plants.[172] In a similar, if less metaphysical line of thinking, Jean-Jacques Rousseau considered 'dégénération' as the state of human alienation from nature, not a natural process that happened to people, but something brought upon modern people by themselves, as he wrote in his *Discours sur l'inégalité* (1755). In the nineteenth century, the concept of degeneration began increasingly to appear in a context where it had both biological and moral implications, as Jutta Person has shown in her study on the origins of late nineteenth-century pathography.[173] Heine's poem 'Entartung' (1844) serves as an example showing how well-established the discourse of human life implicated in a natural process of degeneration had become by the mid nineteenth century. Lenau's letters expressed similar sentiments a decade earlier. On 5 March 1833 he wrote to Emilie and Georg von Reinbeck:

> Ihre Rauheit ist aber nicht die Rauheit wilder, kräftiger Naturen, nein, es ist eine zahme, und darum doppelt widerlich. Büffon hat Recht, daß in Amerika Menschen und Thiere von Geschlecht zu Geschlecht weiter herabkommen. Ich habe hier noch keinen muthigen Hund gesehen, kein feuriges Pferd, keinen leidenschaftlichen Menschen.[174]

Three days later the same thought reappeared in a letter to Anton Schurz: 'Daß hier Menschen und Thiere von Geschlecht zu Geschlecht weiter herabkommen, ist manchem Naturforscher bereits aufgefallen.'[175] He combined this observation about the degenerate state of humans and animals alike with a description of American nature as cold, monotonous, and silent:

> Hier lebt der Mensch in einer sonderbaren kalten Heiterkeit, die ans Unheimliche streift. Größtenteils gewiß ist dies das Werk der Natur. Die Natur selbst ist kalt. Die Conformation der Berge, die Einbuchtungen und Thäler, Alles ist gleichförmig und unfantastisch. Kein wahrer Singvogel; Alles ist nur Gezwitscher und unmelodisches Geflüster. Selbst der Mensch hat keine Stimme zum Gesang.[176]

In Lenau's poetry, the process of degeneration also threatened the life of Native Americans. In his poems 'Die drei Indianer' and 'Der Indianerzug', he depicted the indigenous people of North America in sharp contrast to the degenerate settlers, who were about to expel them from the land of their ancestors. The Native American characters Lenau depicted were neither moribund nor silent and very much connected to the natural world that surrounded them. In 'Der Indianerzug', the whole forest echoes their plight: as deer fleeing from the

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[172] See Georges-Louis Leclerc du Buffon, 'Historie naturelle de l'homme. Variétés dans l'espèce humaine', in: Id., *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière*., 44 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1749–1804), vol. 3 pp. 371–530. German translations were published from 1752 on. For further reading on the place of man in Buffon's natural history, see Claude Blankaert, 'Buffon and the Natural History of Man. Writing History and the "Foundational Myth" of Anthropology', in *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 6 (1993), pp. 13–50.
[173] See Jutta Person, *Der pathographische Blick. Physiognomik, Atavismustheorien und Kulturkritik 1870–1930* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), especially p. 144f.
[174] LHK, vol. 5.1, p. 235.
[175] Ibid., p. 247.
[176] Letter to Joseph Klemm, 6 March 1833. LHK, vol. 5.1, p. 243.

flames join the lamentation, the alliteration 'Wildes Wehgeheule' emphasizes the melodic quality of their mourning, a significant detail considering the aforementioned silence used to characterise American nature. Woken by the deer and lured closer by the artificial daylight of the forest fire – 'von dem falschen Tageslicht betrogen' – flocks of birds fly to their certain death, perhaps offering an explanation for the later lack of songbirds Lenau noticed. It appears certainly possible that Lenau, who walked along the Susquehanna from Baltimore to Pittsburgh in October 1832,[177] and wrote 'Der Indianerzug' sometime between 1833 and 1834, commented on actual changes to the environment he may have witnessed. By the early 1830s, the river and the surrounding area had undergone massive alterations caused by human impact. As early as the eighteenth century the river had become a central waterway, which turned into a fully developed navigable network, the Pennsylvania Canal system, between 1824 and 1860. Especially after the Port Deposit Bridge was erected in 1818, and the Union Canal, completed in 1828, connected the Susquehanna and Schuylkill Rivers, industry, trade and agriculture flourished along the river banks. Aside from these more recent transformations of the environment, which Lenau perhaps took notice of, the river had become known as the site of the Sullivan-Clinton Expedition, a military campaign during the American War of Independence. Led by the generals John Sullivan and James Clinton in 1779, this campaign against Loyalists and the Iroquois Confederacy was built on a scorched earth policy of destroying Iroquois villages, crops, orchards, and infrastructure, causing death and destruction and prompting thousands of Iroquois refugees to flee towards Buffalo and the Niagara Falls. James Fenimore Cooper mentioned a specific detail of the Sullivan-Clinton Expedition, the erection of a dam to make the Susquehanna navigable, in the 1832 introduction to the first volume of his *Leatherstocking Tales* series, *The Pioneers, or The Sources of the Susquehanna; a Descriptive Tale*, first published in 1823. Translated quickly into German and published in 1824, *Die Ansiedler*, which focused as much on ecological responsibility as on freedom and wilderness, became widely popular with German readers. Although 'Der Indianerzug' depicts the destruction of indigenous land for agricultural purposes and not in a military context, both Cooper and Lenau used the Susquehanna River as a backdrop for fundamental historical changes that had a lasting impact on the relation between indigenous culture and the natural environment. The motif of the noble Native American – often portrayed as either fearsome warrior or wise chief – threatened by the settler culture of modern civilization, also appeared in the writings of Johann Gottfried Seume ('Der Wilde', 1810), Adalbert von Chamisso ('Der Stein der Mutter

[177] LHK, vol. 1, p. 588

oder die Guahiba Indianerin' and 'Rede des alten Kriegers Bunte-Schlange im Rat der Creek-Indianer', both published in 1831) and Karl Postl (who published *Tokeah; or the White Rose* under his better-known nom de plume Charles Sealsfield in 1829; a German version was published in 1833). The notable popularity of this character cliché can be attributed to a very specific ideological formation, the origins of which can be traced back to eighteenth-century, mostly French, writing on 'native' peoples. Writers such as Bougainville, Diderot, Rousseau, Chateaubriand, and Herder helped establish a discourse of glorification of what was imagined as a more natural, or at least uncivilized, way of life.

Within a budding German nationalist movement, the 'noble savage' character was then turned into an identificatory figure, especially in the context of anti-French resentment in the nineteenth century, that often took on the shape of a critique or rejection of all things civilized, artificial, and decadent. Here the idealization of the 'noble savage' merged with a fascination for ancient Germanic peoples who were imagined as the true ancestors of modern Germans, connected with them through the centuries via language, sentiment, and landscape. For writers such as Klopstock, who published a trilogy of plays, the so-called 'Barditen', celebrating the life of the quintessential Germanic hero Arminius (Hermann) in the 1760s and 1770s, the central source material for imagining the character and culture of the ancient Germans remained Tacitus' *Germania*, a description of the Germanic tribes in the first century AD. Although Tacitus' report is nowadays considered a tendentious piece of political writing that followed certain conventions and established narratives, throughout *Germania*'s long history, many details concerning the customs of Germanic peoples found their way into literary works as well as into the collective imagination. The idealisation of the German forest as both an actual place and a symbol of German identity and resilience (especially in contrast to the 'forest-less' cultures of France, England, or the Mediterranean countries) emerged in this context as well. In the wake of the Romantic revival and reimagining of German vernacular art, and especially within the process of nation building in the first half of the nineteenth century, the German forest evolved into a complex metaphor for 'Germanness' and a refuge of true sentiment and art from the destructive forces of modernity and civilization.

Lenau's 'Der Indianerzug' derives some of its imagery from this semantic field. Not only does the forest appear as the true ancestral home of the indigenous peoples of America threatened by modern settler culture, but their customs show several distinctive similarities to Tacitus's description of Germanic culture, for example burying the dead in the forest, sleeping under the open sky and openly breastfeeding children ('Da legt der Mann sich hin,

dem Schlaf zu weichen, / Die Mutter ihren Säugling an die Brüste'). Even the oak – here presumably the North American white oak, not the European variety – which had become a symbol of the German character in both poetry and painting, features prominently in 'Der Indianerzug' as well as in other poems Lenau wrote about the American forest.

All this considered, it should be noted that Lenau's relationship to German nationalism was an ambivalent one. Lenau was by no means an avid proponent of German nationalism or political poetry. He frankly expressed his disdain for the latter in the poem 'Die Poesie und ihre Störer' (1838) and mentioned his desire to distance himself from politics as one of the reasons he would like to travel to America in a letter to Schurz: 'Auch wird's mir lieb seyn, wenn ich eine zeitlang nichts von der verdammten Politik werde zu hören kriegen. Bruder, die Politik ist wirklich was Eckelhaftes, zumal wenn man ein ewiges Politisiren hört, wie hier zu Lande.'[178] His depiction of Native Americans seems to have tied into a much more general world view that hailed freedom and wilderness as heroic modes of being, independently of political affiliations or the project of nation-building. There can be found, for example, noticeable parallels in terms of style as well as content in 'Der Indianerzug' and some of Lenau's 'Polenlieder', a collection of poems lamenting the failed Polish November Uprising of 1830 and 1831 against the Russian Empire. Such sentimental political poetry can be considered as part of 'Polenschwärmerei', a sense of kinship with Polish liberals that was expressed in various German liberal circles and which led not only to practical acts of solidarity through the establishment of 'Polenvereine', but also gave rise to the popular poetic genre of 'Polenlieder'. Lenau wrote such song-poems between 1831 and 1838, after the Polish uprising had been crushed – a historical defeat reflected in their decidedly melancholic tone. In both 'Der Maskenball' (1831) and 'Der Polenflüchtling' (1833) the forest appears in a manner similar to the North American primeval forest in 'Der Indianerzug' as a place of rest and refuge from a hostile world. In 'Der Maskenball', the American forest is even explicitly alluded to as a place of freedom and mourning:

> Nach der Freiheit Paradiesen
> Nehmen wir den raschen Zug,
> Wo in heilgen Waldverliesen
> Kein Tyrann sich Throne schlug.
> Weihend mich mit stillem Beten,
> Will den Urwald ich betreten,
> Wandern will ich durch die Hallen,
> Wo die Schauer Gottes wallen;
> Wo in wunderbarer Pracht
> Himmelwärts die Bäume dringen,
> Brausend um die keusche Nacht

[178] Letter to Anton Schurz, 16 March 1832. LHK, vol. 5.1, p. 185.

Ihre Riesenarme schlingen.
Dort will ich für meinen Kummer
Finden den ersehnten Schlummer;
Will vom Schicksal Kunde werben,
Daß es mir mag anvertrauen
In der Wälder tiefem Grauen,
Warum Polen mußte sterben.
Und der Antwort will ich lauschen
In der Vögel Melodeien,
In des Raubtiers wildem Schreien
Und im Niagararauschen.[179]

Not only do the *Polenlieder* and the America poems rely on similar forest imagery or references to the same natural phenomena but they are also connected by their formal resemblance. The *Polenlied* 'Die nächtliche Fahrt' (1838), for example, which describes the journey of a Voivode (a Slavic term for a military commander) and his companion fleeing on sleighs from Russian troops at night through a wintry, silent forest, is stylistically very similar to 'Der Indianerzug': both poems have almost the same length, encompassing 27 and 23 four-line stanzas respectively, and following a regular pattern of rhymed iambic pentameters, in the case of 'Der Indianerzug' with abab rhymes, in 'Die nächtliche Fahrt' with abba rhymes. The iambic pentameter, slightly longer than the common *Volksliedstrophe* and a popular dramatic metre since the German Shakespeare revival in the second half of the eighteenth century, emphasizes both the actuality of the historic events and their gravity. Instead of alluding to the supposed timelessness of the *Volkslied*, the use of the iambic pentameter suggests the particular historicity of the subject matter. Although Lenau detaches the motif of the forest from a semantic field specific to a pre-Vormärz liberal German nationalism, emphasizing the similarities between the plight of German liberals and that of Native Americans and Polish insurgents, he nonetheless preserves the particularities of each historical context. Thus, the confrontations between indigenous people and settlers in North America or Polish revolutionaries and the Czarist imperial power appear as moments of actualization within a long history of mankind's struggle for freedom.

What Rolf-Dieter Kluge has observed regarding Lenau's *Polenlieder* can be applied to an understanding of the America poems as well: they do not follow the conventions of political *Tendenzdichtung* by commenting on recent events, propagating political approaches, or expressing programmatic sentiments.[180] Instead, they aim to inspire affective

[179] LHK, vol. 1, p. 83.
[180] See Rolf-Dieter Kluge, 'Polen im Leben und Werk von Nikolaus Lenau vor dem Hintergrund der schwäbischen Polenbegeisterung 1830'*,* in*: Europäische und regionale Bezugssysteme im Spiegel von Lenaus Dichtung Beiträge der Stuttgarter Lenau-Tagung vom 25. und 26. Mai 2000*, ed. by Horst Fassel and Annemarie Röder (Tübingen: Institut für donauschwäbische Geschichte und Landeskunde, 2002) pp. 17-28.

participation in his readers rather than contemplation or deliberation as Droste-Hülshoff's poetry does. Evocative nature imagery such as the silent wintry forest in 'Die nächtliche Fahrt' or the burning trees in 'Der Indianerzug' contributes to this effect by setting a specific 'Stimmung' corresponding to the events the poem recounts, enhancing and shaping the experience of the reader. Whether Lenau's poetry is set in Poland or North America, wilderness repeatedly appears as a refuge or counterweight to destructive societal forces that are encroaching on the natural world and the individual self alike.

However, the relationship between the natural world and the historical struggle of indigenous peoples in 'Der Indianerzug' does not rest solely on an atmospheric connection or a metaphorical function. Instead, Lenau's poem not only conveys a specific mood of melancholia and devastation, but also captures the tangible and concrete changes the Susquehanna region underwent during the nineteenth century. Pennsylvania had acquired the denominator *sylvania* from the Latin *silva*, 'forest', to indicate the thick woods that used to be a feature of the area. In the nineteenth century Pennsylvania became the prime source of lumber in the U.S. and the Susquehanna River turned into a main route of transportation with millions of logs floating on its surface down to the sawmills around Williamsburg every day. Intensive deforestation throughout the nineteenth century, not only due to the timber industry, but also to the production of charcoal, led to the loss of around two-thirds of the Pennsylvanian woods by 1895. Lenau's description of the plight of woodlands can therefore be considered both a metaphor of the violent destruction of indigenous ways of life in the context of colonialization, settler culture, and nation-building in the US and an actual observation – the natural world of North America Lenau encountered in the 1830s was not the untouched primeval forest he might have envisioned prior to his journey, but a landscape in the process of being radically altered through human intervention.

The same applies to the Niagara Falls, the one natural sight that Lenau had singled out as an important inspiration for his future poems, the 'Niagaralieder' he intended to sing. He memorialized the cataracts, which he visited in March 1833, in three separate poems, 'Niagara' and 'Verschiedene Deutung', published together in July 1836, as well as 'Die drei Indianer', which Lenau first mentioned under the title 'Niagara' in a letter to Schurz on 7 May 1834. The three poems make use of the Niagara motif in different ways: while 'Die drei Indianer' includes the falls primarily as a narrative element, 'Niagara' depicts the river flowing towards the cataracts as both a natural phenomenon and as a metaphor of the trajectory of history and the relationship of the present to the future, and 'Verschiedene Deutung' centres on a comparison between the waters of the Niagara Falls and the

constitution of the self. What unites these diverse poems is the same atmospheric and thematic significance of the flowing water leading to the falls – in a manner similar to 'Der Indianerzug', the Niagara poems are also focused on the inescapable fate of both mankind (collectively as well as individually) and nature moving steadily towards a state of decline. In 'Die drei Indianer', the first poem in which the Niagara motif appears, the demise of the indigenous people and nature imagery are interwoven once more. Unlike the Native Americans in 'Der Indianerzug', who are depicted as only reluctantly leaving their homeland, the old man and his two sons to whom the title of 'Die drei Indianer' refers to, are shown as intent on killing themselves by letting the river carry their oarless bark down the river and into the falls. Their death appears as an inversion of the successful seafaring of the settlers, which the old man in his speech has described as a sort of complicity between them and the forces of nature:

> 'Fluch den Weißen! ihren letzten Spuren!
> Jeder Welle Fluch, worauf sie fuhren,
> Die einst Bettler unsern Strand erklettert!
> Fluch dem Windhauch, dienstbar ihrem Schiffe!
> Hundert Flüche jedem Felsenriffe,
> Das sie nicht hat in den Grund geschmettert!'[181]

The curse that will come for the new masters of the land has already appeared in 'Der Indianerzug', but in 'Die drei Indianer' the words of the old man have taken on a prophetic quality that identifies the future of European settlers with the present demise of the indigenous people. In days to come, the poem seems to suggest through its character's speech, all that will be left of the settlers and their way of life will be last traces, 'letzt[e] Spuren'. They too will have vanished into obscurity, with their culture and customs reduced to vestiges. This prospect adds another dimension to the aforementioned resemblance between political struggles in Europe and the plight of indigenous people in North America that Lenau's poetry emphasised. Seen from this perspective, what divides those two groups is not geographical distance or cultural difference, but historical asynchronicity.

By anticipating similarities between the demise of Native Americans or Polish refugees, and the coming dissolution of other societies, Lenau's poetry alludes to the same framework of evolutionary history which he mentioned in his letters when referencing Buffon's concept of degeneration. America then would have come to signify a place or point, both geographically and historically, where mankind had reached a specific state of decay (a thought Lenau repeatedly expressed in his letters, in which he described how German immigrants would lose their candour and character once they had been settled in America

[181] LHK, vol. 1, p. 328.

for a while[182]). Lenau had reason to assume that his audience in Europe – for he made it clear, albeit in a joking manner, that he was not writing his poems about America for Americans, when he remarked in a letter to Anton and Therese Schurz: 'In den Urwäldern wird mir kein Bär was vorlesen, und die Affen werden für die Dauer ein schlechtes Publikum seyn für meine poetischen Produktionen […]'[183] – would have been familiar with biological theories of gradual transformation of life aside from Buffon, such as Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's principle of transmutation, as well as contemporary theories of cultural history that incorporated ideas of both progress and regress, such as Auguste Comte's model of three historical stages of social evolution, or Hegel's philosophy of history (which would become important for Lenau later on) that followed the movement of spirit through historical moments of estrangement and reconciliation. Thinking about history (both natural and socio-cultural) in terms of linearity and development was therefore a staple in the 1830s.

Within that context, a noticeable tendency in German literature of the 1820s and 1830s, that can also be considered a characteristic feature of Lenau's writing, was a melancholic sense of lateness, even belatedness. Karl Immermann's satirical novel *Die Epigonen* (1836) mocked a whole generation of writers for imagining themselves in the succession of great artists and thinkers, always overshadowed by them. A similar sense of belatedness and cultural deterioration was expressed in poetry such as Emmanuel Geibel's poem 'Die Epigonen' (1836/37), or August von Platen's 'An eine Geisblattranke' (1834). Both poets relied on plant imagery in order to depict epigonic lateness – in Geibel's 'Die Epigonen' small flowers blossom where oaks used to stand ('Und weil die Eichen nun verschwunden, / Brüsten sich stolz die Blümelein'[184]), in Platen's 'An eine Geisblattranke' a small flower found late offers inspiration in otherwise dire and desolate times ('Wert ist wohl die spat gefundne Blume, / Daß ein Jüngling in sein Lied sie mischt / Sie vergleichend einem Ruhme, / Der noch wächst, da schon so viel erlischt'[185]). This connection between nature imagery and epigonal consciousness conveyed two ideas at once: it emphasized the origin of concepts of evolution and degeneration in the field of natural history, and it showed the embeddedness of contemporary poetry in the literary tradition of Romantic nature poetry,

[182] See letter to Anton Schurz, 8 March 1833: 'Mancher der eingwanderten und nun seit mehren Jahren hier ansäßigen Deutschen versichert: ein sehr feuriges temperament herüber gebracht, es aber hier bis auf die letzte Spur einer Aufwallung verloren zu haben.', LHK, vol. 5.1, p. 247. The use of such similar phrases – 'letzt[e] Spuren' and 'letzte Spur' – might be a mere coincidence, but it is worthwhile noting that they both appear in the context of the settlers' fate.
[183] Letter to Anton and Therese Schurz, 21 April 1832, ibid., p. 189.
[184] Emanuel Geibel, 'Epigonen', in: *Geibels Werke*, 3 vols., ed. by Wolfgang Stammler (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1915–1918), vol. 1, p. 62.
[185] August Graf von Platen, 'An eine Geisblattranke', in: Ib. *Werke in zwei Bänden*, ed. by Kurt Wölfel and Jürgen Link (München: Winkler, 1982), p. 43.

thus demonstrating the very dependency on the previous generation of poets that both poems addressed.

In Lenau's case, the sense of epigonic lateness took on a much more dramatic quality. The imagery he used to depict the demise of the indigenous people in 'Der Indianerzug' and 'Die drei Indianer' is not that of late blossoming flowers, but of a forest fire and a river running toward a waterfall. In 'Niagara' and 'Verschiedene Deutung', history and the self are shown in a state of approaching disintegration. In 'Niagara', originally entitled 'Nah und Fern', the harmony of a melodious and gentle river is abruptly interrupted in the middle of the poem, turning into a loud and fast streaming torrent, that obscures the sound of the nearby cataracts. And although the sixth stanza imitates this development phonetically by suddenly disrupting the otherwise trochaic metre with an inverted foot in line 21, accompanied by a prominent chain of alliterations – 'Die Stromschnellen stürzen, schießen'[186] – 'Niagara' does not merely depict nature mimetically. Instead, the water's movement is described in relation to the tension between dream, premonition and knowing as well as between present and future, creating a complex temporal and epistemic metaphor in order to describe the relationship between poetry, nature, and history. From the murmur of a sweet dream in the first stanza, the river then enters a state of premonition or foreboding of its own coming demise in the form of a fall:

> Wo des Niagara Bahnen
> Näher ziehn dem Katarakt
> Hat den Strom ein wildes Ahnen
> Plötzlich seines Falls gepackt.[187]

This premonition leads to a rush of destruction: first the mimetic relationship between the river as a mirror of the surrounding natural world is destroyed in a fashion that resembles an iconoclasm, then the river hurries along, driven by the urge to further its self-annihilation (closely resembling the three characters of 'Die drei Indianer', who deliberately aid their own demise):

> Erd und Himmels unbekümmert
> Eilt er jetzt im tollen Zug,
> Hat ihr schönes Bild zertrümmert,
> Das er erst so freundlich trug.
>
> Die Stromschnellen stürzen, schießen,
> Donnern fort im wilden Drang,
> Wie von Sehnsucht hingerissen
> Nach dem großen Untergang.[188]

[186] LHK, vol. 2, p. 57.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Ibid.

The immediate proximity of the cataracts, marked previously by sound, becomes less pronounced the wilder and louder the river itself grows and the wanderer, who had been able to perceive the falls from afar can no longer hear them, as he draws closer to the cataracts:

> Den der Wandrer fern vernommen,
> Niagaras tiefen Fall
> Hört er nicht, herangekommen,
> Weil zu laut der Wogenschall.
>
> Und so mag vergebens lauschen,
> Wer dem Sturze näher geht;
> Doch die Zukunft hörte rauschen
> In der Ferne der Prophet.[189]

Here the prophet appears as an antithesis to the three Native Americans, who become one with the stream and to the wanderer, who also enters into a more direct contact with the natural environment. The prophet however serves as an alter ego of the poet: he is separated from nature, keeps himself far from natural phenomena, and at the same time by doing so apprehends the natural world more completely and accurately than those who merge with it. In poems such as 'Die Poesie und ihre Störer' or 'Der Rationalist und der Poet', Lenau emphasises a specific sensibility to perceive the natural world as the mark of the true poet. And yet, the poets Lenau depicts seem far from partaking in that harmonious process of perfectibility between art and nature that Schiller in 'Die Künstler' (1789) described as 'zusammengatten'.[190] Whereas Schiller used water imagery in order to describe how mankind had learned from nature herself how to refine, improve, and perfect inner as well as outer nature, merging spirit and matter into a harmonious whole, Lenau did not share such an explicit faith in humanity's progress almost half a century later. The accelerating river in 'Niagara' can no longer hold the beautiful image reflected on the water; instead, the poet as prophet bears witness to an approaching fundamental destruction. This destruction, which Lenau encapsulates in the image of the cataracts, eventually encompasses the very constitution of the self, which Schiller had depicted as improved and purified through the aesthetic process. In the final image of 'Die Künstler', the refraction of light into the coloured spectrum of a rainbow reveals an underlying unity that is established through the gaze of the spectator:

> Wie sich in Sieben milden Strahlen
> Der weiße Schimmer lieblich bricht,
> Wie sieben Regenbogenstrahlen
> Zerrinnen in das weiße Licht:
> So spielt in tausendfacher Klarheit

[189] Ibid.
[190] Friedrich Schiller, 'Die Künstler', in: Id., *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1, pp. 173–186, here p. 176.

Bezaubernd um den trunknen Blick,
So fließt in *einen* Bund der Wahrheit,
In *einen* Strom des Lichts zurück![191]

In stark contrast to Schiller's traditional use of the rainbow as a classic symbol of the Noachic Covenant signifying unity between God and his creation, which in 'Die Künstler' emphasised the unity of different epistemic approaches in relation to the manifold nature of truth,[192] Lenau reconfigures the image in 'Verschiedene Deutung' in a way that puts emphasis on the fragmentation instead of the reunification and reintegration of the self:

Verschiedene Deutung

I
Sieh, wie des Niagara Wellen
Im Donnerfall zu Staub zerschellen,
Und wie sie, sprühend nun zerflogen,
Empfangen goldne Sonnenstrahlen
Und auf den Abgrund lieblich malen
Den farbenreichen Regenbogen.
O Freund, auch wir sind trübe Wellen,
Und unser Ich, es muß zerschellen,
Nur sträubend in die Luft zergangen,
Wird es das Irislicht empfangen.

2
'Trüb, farblos waren diese Fluten,
Solang sie noch im Strome wallten;
Sie mußten vielfach sich zerspalten,
Daß sie aufblühn in Farbengluten.
Nun fliegt ein jeder Tropfen einsam,
Ein armes Ich, doch strahlen sie
Im hellen Himmelslicht gemeinsam
Des Bogens Farbenharmonie.'[193]

Not only does Lenau in this poem formally investigate the relationship between plurality and singularity by separating the same image into two different parts, but the poetic form scarcely preserves the lyric I from the fundamental disintegration the poem talks about. The first person singular has all but vanished, appearing instead not as a subject but as an object ('unser Ich', 'Ein armes Ich'). When considered alongside the more narrative poems such as 'Der Indianerzug' and 'Die drei Indianer', and even the symbolic landscape of 'Niagara', 'Verschiedene Deutung' is the most abstract of the America poems, offering a meditation

[191] Ibid., p. 186.
[192] For further analysis of the relation between epistemic approaches and the truth in Schiller's poem, see Alessandro Costazza's investigation of elements of aesthetic theory in 'Die Künstler', Alessandro Costazza, ''Wenn er auf einen Hügel mit euch steiget, Und seinem Auge sich, in mildem Abendschein, Das Malerische Tal – auf einmal zeiget.' Die ästhetische Theorie in Schillers Gedicht Die Künstler.', in: *Prägnanter Moment. Studien zur deutschen Literatur der Aufklärung und Klassik. Festschrift für Hans-Jürgen Schings*, ed. by Peter-André Alt et al. (Würzbug: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002), pp. 239–263.
[193] LHK, vol. 2, p. 56.

on the fragmentary nature of the self, first through a comparison with the spray of the Niagara Falls in the first part, and through a metaphorical merging of self and waterfall in the second.

The plurality of the self that emerges here was a popular concept in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. From Goethe's famous lines 'Fühlst du nicht an meinen Liedern, / Daß ich eins und doppelt bin?'[194] to Friedrich Schlegel's remark 'niemand kennt sich, insofern er nur er selbst und nicht auch zugleich ein andrer ist',[195] the art and art theory of the *Kunstperiode* were, as Winfried Menninghaus has shown, obsessed with a presupposed duality of the self, which was envisioned in form of a double, or through the process of duplication.[196] Lenau on the other hand conceptualised the twofold self not as a double, but as a former whole split in half. By doing so he gradually transformed the Romantic concept of self-reflection into the key concept of modern subjectivity: alienation. Bound up with the constitution of the alienated self as the split, ruptured or divided entity depicted in 'Doppelheimweh' and 'Verschiedene Deutung', there often appeared the fantasy of self-annihilation – a feature also of Romantic poetry such as Novalis' *Hymnen an die Nacht*. But whereas Novalis's longing for eternal night and boundless slumber, as we have already seen, remained rooted firmly in a Christian belief in a life in the hereafter – the final hymn to the night entitled 'Sehnsucht nach dem Tode' envisions a final resting place in the care of a heavenly father – Lenau's fragmented self does not move towards transcendence, but transformation or dissolution within the boundaries of an earthly existence.

America, through the way Lenau bestows psychogeographical significance on it, becomes a place that offered a glimpse into a historical state of decline, the relationship between spirit and nature eroded and humankind left with self-annihilation as the only possible way out of this dilemma, since neither nature nor society offered any kind of relief. In his letters, Lenau noted how the culture he encountered in the United States of America had not developed organically and therefore remained artificial and bloodless ('Doch ist selbst diese Kultur keine von innen organisch hervorgegangene, sondern eine von aussen gewaltsam und rapid herbeigezogene, bodenlose, und darum gleichsam mühselig in der Luft schwebend erhalten.'[197]), but also emphasised the overwhelming influence of a natural world that was, as he described it, cold, monotonous and silent. In 'Der Urwald', as seen above, Lenau returns to this image of a silent forest and, by collapsing natural history and the history

[194] Goethe, *Werke*, ed. by Erich Trunz, vol. 2, p. 66.
[195] Friedrich Schlegel, Über Lessing, in: *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe*, ed. by Ernst Behler, pp. 100–146, here p. 116.
[196] See Winfried Menninghaus, *Unheimliche Selbstverdoppelung. Die frühromantische Grundlegung der Kunsttheorie im Begriff absoluter Selbstreflexion* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1987).
[197] Letter to Anton Schurz, 8 March 1833, LHK, vol. 5.1, p. 247.

of humankind into one, connects it to the concept of 'Wildnis', wilderness – a kind of nature that has not been transformed through art in the way Schiller described in 'Die Künstler', but instead has regressed into a 'wild' state in which death has triumphed over life. With the depiction of wilderness as not only untamed, unrefined nature, but as a natural world barren of spirit, a natural world consisting merely of matter, Lenau clearly takes issue with Schiller's ideal of nature's perfectibility through art as well as the Romantic project of integrating the self and nature into one great system of similarities and reflections. Instead, the only ways in which Lenau's poetry envisages any kind of unity beyond the fragmented self are self-annihilation or disintegration.

This becomes most strikingly clear in the characterisation of the protagonists Lenau chose for his two long epic poems *Faust* and *Savonarola*, who embody two ways of reacting to the predicament of human existence. Faust, as he confesses in a 'Waldgespräch' with Mephistopheles, is haunted by his fear of insignificance and mortality and therefore is easily tempted by Mephistopheles to sever all ties with both religion and nature in the hope of gaining eternal life on earth:

> Das leuchtet ein! es gilt, daß ich die Seele
> Aus Christus und Natur heraus mir schäle.
> Ob ich mit ihm, mit ihr zusammenhange,
> Umkreist mich unentrinnbar eine Schlange.
> Ist Christus Gott, und folg ich seinem Schritt,
> So bin ich, sei es auch auf Himmelspfaden,
> Der Schuh nur, den sein Fuß erfüllt und tritt,
> Ein niederes Gefäß nur seiner Gnaden.
> Ists die Natur – bin ich ein Durchgang nur,
> Den sie genommen fürs Gesamtgeschlecht,
> Bin ohne Eigenzweck, Bestand und Recht,
> Und bald bin ich verschwunden ohne Spur.[198]

Separated from both God's grace and from natural unity and wholeness, Faust finally realizes that his life has been reduced to a mere creaturely existence and kills himself as a result, irretrievably losing his soul to Mephistopheles.

In contrast to Lenau's Faust, who longs for permanence, the very impermanence of earthly existence offered hope for a reunification with God in the narrative poem *Savonarola*. Lenau not only depicts the Renaissance preacher Girolamo Savonarola as an opponent of petrified clericalism, but also, rather anachronistically, ascribes to him a specific hostility towards pantheistic nature worship.

The theological content of 'Savonarola' merged elements from the Reform Catholicism of the Austrian Enlightenment with the Hegelian *Vermittlungstheologie* of Hans

[198] LHK, vol. 3, pp. 204–205.

Lassen Martensen, with whom Lenau was in close contact while working on *Savonarola*. The central idea of *Vermittlungstheologie*, which envisioned consciousness progressing through various stages of experience, moving towards an ever more perfect kind of self-realisation and self-sublation, appears in Savonarola's sermon on the theological significance of Christmas. Here Lenau once again uses the image of a stream in order to reflect on the transient nature of human existence:

> Wenn Nachts im Wald die Vögel schweigen,
> Und wenn das Wild im Dickicht ruht,
> Und wenn kein Windhauch in den Zweigen,
> Dann hörst du einsam nur die Flut;
>
> Du siehst den Quell zu Thale rinnen,
> Er schimmert hell im Mondenschein,
> Du denkst: 'Ich muß wie er von hinnen,
> Wär' ich wie er, so hell und rein!'
>
> 'Er treibt auf Erden seine Wogen
> Und eilt ins heimathliche Meer,
> Und ist, wie er einst ausgezogen,
> So rein bei seiner Wiederkehr!'[199]

What had enraged Faust becomes here a source of comfort and reassurance: the mortal self is imagined as dissolving in a greater unity with God just as the stream dissolves in the sea. That this reunification of matter and spirit will not take place on earth, but in a realm beyond nature, even if nature serves as a reminder or symbol of the hereafter, becomes clear as Savonarola's sermon progresses. Ahasver, the Wandering Jew, a character Lenau returned to time and time again, appears here as an embodiment of metaphysical doubt and overt sensualism, bound to an endless earthly existence:

> Kennt ihr den Strauch im Waldesgrunde?
> Kein Blümlein blüht in seiner Näh,
> Kein Vogel singt in seiner Runde,
> Den Wandrer faßt ein dunkles Weh!?
>
> Wohl stürbe gern in seinem Grame
> Der Strauch der jene Dornen trug;
> Doch muß in alle Welt sein Same
> Fortwandern mit dem Windesflug.
>
> Nach seines Fluches altem Brauche
> Geht Ahasver noch auf und ab,
> Und bricht sich von dem Dornenstrauche
> Alljährlich seinen Wanderstab.
>
> Der Strauch – das ist das F i n s t e r k a l t e
> In der Natur, das nur versehrt;

[199] Ibid., vol. 4, p. 28.

Und Ahasver – das ist der alte
Unglaube, der stets irrefährt. – –

Naturvergöttrer! ihr Geäfften
Des Wahnes, wollt in Sumpf und Riet
Den Irrwisch an den Leuchter heften;
Er leuchtet nur, indem er flieht!

Allgöttler! eures Gottes Glieder
Streift hier vom Baum der Wintersturm;
Dort schießt den Gott ein Jäger nieder;
Hier nagt er selber sich als Wurm.[200]

Here Lenau attacks both the pantheism of Spinoza, whose concept of divine nature had fascinated him as a young man, and that of Goethe, whose sensualism he criticises harshly. For Lenau's Savonarola, it is crucial that humankind should overcome the creaturely existence to which Faust saw himself reduced and be transformed from 'thierischen Gestalten' into spiritual beings, not just because it would save humanity, but also because it could salvage nature, too, from the influence of sensualism and pantheism, which Lenau, alluding to the Christmas sermon in a letter to Justinus Kerner, had called 'alten Dämon, das pantheistische Luder'[201]. A reformed church instead would organise, as Lenau wrote in a letter to Martensen, every aspect of earthly existence in such a manner that 'alles Leben nichts anders ist als eben ein freudiges Unterordnen u. Conspiriren der einzelnen Organe zum großen Werke des Geistes'[202]. This would effectively restore paradise on earth, as it is envisioned at the very end of *Savonarola*:

Die Herzen werden sich versöhnen
Einst unter Einem Freudenzelt,
Und die Natur wird sich verschönen,
In Liebe athmen wird die Welt.[203]

God's grace appeared here as the necessary element that would reconcile the human condition with nature, as Lenau contemplated in his diary in 1837: 'Ich fühlte, daß die Kluft zwischen dem Leben des Menschen und der ihm kalt gegenüber trotzenden Natur eine unausfüllbare sei, und daß die Creatur eines Mittlers bedürfe, damit sie nicht verzweifle und untergehe.'[204] With *Savonarola*, Lenau once more seemed to explore the possibility of making art into this mediator, although ultimately this long poem, like the more scientifically inclined *Faust*, also ended with the death of the protagonist and a sense of resignation.

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[200] Ibid., p. 30.
[201] Letter to Justinus Kerner, 23 January 1837, HKA vol. 5.1, p. 476.
[202] Letter to Hans Lassen Martensen, HKA vol. 5.1, p. 354.
[203] LHK, vol. 4, p. 33.
[204] *Lenau und Sophie Löwenthal. Tagebuch und Briefe des Dichters nebst Jugendgedichten und Briefen an Fritz Kleyle*, ed. by Ludwig August Frankl (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1891), p. 63.

Whereas the finale of Goethe's *Faust II* (1832) had a mystical chorus proclaim 'Alles Vergängliche / Ist nur ein Gleichnis', Lenau's poems dwell on the mere hope that this might be the case without offering any consolation. Here the Romantic idea of the poem as a metaphor for the nature of the world comes to a halt. While late eighteenth-century poets such as Novalis professed their belief that through the act of Romantic poetization the totality of the world would become visible within the work of art, Lenau's poetry of the 1830s mostly expresses a longing for such totality instead. His poems show a deeply divided world, in which the modern subject appears as a gap in nature and yet is also subjected to nature's mortality. American nature did indeed prove fruitful for furthering Lenau's artistic education: after his return to Europe, his poetry explores the idea that no matter in which part of the world, the self is fundamentally severed from the natural world and therefore can only be negatively expressed within the poetic form.

In the last stage of his poetic engagement with nature, Lenau increasingly moved towards a historical concept of nature, in which modern man and his limited self were only a transitional stage, as the following overview will show.

The Future of Nature: Lenau's Late Poetry

Until his breakdown in 1844 put an end to Lenau's artistic work, his productivity never ceased. In a letter to Sophie von Löwenthal, dated 8 June 1843, he admitted to fantasizing about working himself to death, like the silkworm in Goethe's *Torquato Tasso* that through the act of producing silk hastens its own death, turning his own insides into a work of art.[205] Although the poetry Lenau wrote in the late 1830s and early 1840s kept the elegiac character of his previous poems, it nevertheless began to incorporate a more concrete historical awareness concerning the future of nature and humanity.

In two allegorical poems, 'Die Poesie und ihre Störer' (1838) and 'Der Rationalist und der Poet' (1838), the poet once again appears as the confidant of nature and her champion in a fight against utilitarianism and rationality. That Lenau considered this fight an uphill battle against more powerful and widespread historical forces becomes clear when poetry at the end of 'Die Poesie und ihre Störer' turns her back on the rough crowd, choosing to leave contemporary society behind. Lenau considered empiricism and sensualism to be the dominant ways in which his contemporaries conceptualised nature and deemed both

[205] 'Verbiete du dem Seidenwurm zu spinnen, / Wenn er sich schon dem Tode näher spinnt./ Das köstliche Gewebe entwickelt er / Aus seinem Innersten und läßt nicht ab / Bis er in seinen Sarg sich eingeschlossen', J.W. v. Goethe, *Torquato Tasso*, act 5.1, l. 3083–87, in: *Goethes Werke*, 14 vols., ed. by Erich Trunz (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2000), vol. 5, pp. 73–167, here p. 156.

inadequate, as poems such as the two mentioned above, but also ‘An die Biologen’ (1837), ‘Dichters Klagelied über das junge Deutschland’ (1838), and ‘Die Frivolen’ (1843) show.

Turning away from empiricism, Lenau moved in the other direction and, instead of depicting the natural world, wrote a poem which praised Beethoven’s music for evoking feelings akin to those inspired by the encounter of natural phenomena. In ‘Beethovens Büste’ (1841) the poem’s narrator returns to his room and experiences joy upon seeing his bust of Beethoven, which evokes strong sensual memories of listening to the composer’s music:

> Ha! ich fand des Mannes Büste,
> Den ich höchst als Meister ehre
> Nebst dem schroffen Urgebirge
> Und dem grenzenlosen Meere.
>
> Ein Gewitter in den Alpen,
> Stürme auf dem Ozeane
> Und das große Herz Beethovens,
> Laut im heiligen Orkane,
>
> Sind die Wecker mir des Mutes,
> Der das Schicksal wagt zu fodern,
> Der den letzten Baum des Edens
> Lächelnd sieht zu Asche lodern.[206]

Beethoven’s compositions, which Lenau had encountered both as a listener and as a violinist, are described here as ‘dem Naturgeist / Abgelauschte Lieder’ not because of their mimetic relationship to natural sounds, but because they prompt a kind of emotional response usually reserved for oceans, mountains, thunder storms, and the night sky. The poem reflects this stylistically as well: Although there are some phonetically complex parts (in particular, the ninth stanza uses a lot of striking s-alliterations), for a poem about music, ‘Beethovens Büste’ is not very focused on sound, but rather on visuality.[207] The sight of Beethoven’s bust (and not a sound) reminds the poem’s protagonist of the effects hearing the composer’s music has had on him. Based on the strong emotive qualities of Beethoven’s music, he compares it to the sublime experience of natural phenomena. Several of these natural phenomena – the sea, especially waves, the moon, stars – are the same ones Clemens Brentano used in his poem ‘Nachklänge Beethovenscher Musik’ (1834). Brentano’s poem described the inner process of the artist creating music in a God-like fashion, not guided by his senses, but by his inner world (‘Nein, ohne Sinne, dem Gott gleich, / Selbst sich nur

[206] LHK, vol. 2, p. 273.
[207] For more on the role visuality played for the perception of Beethoven’s music, see Werner Telesko, ‘Beethoven und die naturräumliche Visualisierung des Komponisten als Verkörperung der schöpferischen Natur’, in *Beethoven visuell: Der Komponist im Spiegel bildlicher Vorstellungswelten*, ed. by Werner Telesko et al. (Vienna: Hollitzer, 2020) pp. 35–70.

wissend und dichtend, / Schafft er die Welt, die er selbst ist').[208] Lenau's Beethoven poem, by contrast, is not focused on the process of creation, but on the experience of listening. However, the poem neither tries to emulate the experience, nor is it describing an experience that is happening as the poem develops. Instead 'Beethovens Büste' removes the experience of Beethoven's music even further from its readers, by depicting the memory of an experience.

Distance from experience became one defining feature of Lenau's late poetry. The protagonist of the last, unfinished epic poem Lenau worked on, Don Juan, was, after Faust and Savonarola, the third incarnation of the modern subject grappling with the hopelessness of the human condition. But instead of Faust's fear and Savonarola's faith, Don Juan's character is defined by an essential detachment from the world, an all-encompassing ennui. In marked contrast to Byron, who had worked on a humorous satirical poem based on the same material from 1818 until his death in 1824, Lenau depicts Don Juan as tired and world-weary, bored by spiritual diversions and sensual pleasures alike, unable to love and enjoy, and irrevocably severed, as he acknowledges, from nature:

> Schenk ein; doch plag dich nicht in schlechten Bildern,
> Den Wandel meines Lebens abzuschildern.
> Stoß an! der wiedergrüne Wald soll leben!
> Die Vögel, die verliebt im Laube schweben!
> Der Bach, aus dem das Wild Erquickung trinkt!
> Das Moos, worauf Umarmung heimlich sinkt!
> Sie sollen leben, lieben und genießen!
> Mir aber wird kein frisches Grün mehr sprießen.[209]

Don Juan's state appears to result from a historical consciousness that increasingly conceptualised the modern self as a historical interim, a necessary stage in the development of the relationship between spirit and nature that needed to be surpassed, or, to use a Hegelian term, sublated, that is abolished, but also preserved, and fundamentally transformed in the process. According to reports from Max Löwenthal, Lenau had come to revaluate Hegelian philosophy in the early 1840s, commenting in October 1840: 'Hegel ist von kolossaler Denkkraft, seine Dialektik vermag Felsen zu spalten.'[210] Two years later, Lenau acknowledged Hegel's significance for the development of human thought:

> Ich war bis vor einem Jahre einer der heftigsten Gegner Hegels, damals studierte ich aber ein paar Werke von ihm und erkannte, daß doch nur auf der von ihm gebrochenen Bahn die

[208] Clemens Brentano, *Werke*, ed. by Wolfgang Frühwald et al., 4 vols. (Munich: Hanser: 1966–1968), vol. 1, pp. 308–11.
[209] LHK, vol. 4, pp. 314–315.
[210] *Lenau und die Familie Löwenthal: Briefe und Gespräche, Gedichte und Entwürfe*, ed. by Eduard Castle (Leipzig: M. Hesse, 1906) p. 157.

> Menschheit kann befreit werden. Überhaupt ist es doch etwas Schönes um die Zeit, wo alles, woran Jahrtausende geglaubt und fortgebaut haben, in Frage gestellt wird.[211]

In both statements reported by Löwenthal, Lenau emphasises and even praises the destructive potential of Hegelian thinking by depicting it as a natural force in the process of splitting rocks and forging ways (literally breaking a way: 'auf der von ihm gebrochenen Bahn'), but also calling these acts beautiful and colossal. In doing so, Lenau obeyed the aesthetic tradition of the sublime, but removed the sublime experience even further from material reality than Kant. In his poetry, however, Lenau explored ways of depicting the abstract movements of Hegelian philosophy in a concrete and tangible manner.

In the poem cycle 'Waldlieder' (1843), perhaps the most Hegelian of Lenau's works, the idea that destruction and creation are two aspects of the same dialectic becomes the guiding poetic principle. Focused on the motif of the forest, the nine poems of 'Waldlieder' show different historical stages in the relationship between self and nature. Christian elements, such as the cross or the churchyard, appear alongside fairy tale motifs like the fairy queen and the magic horn, as well as pagan and mythological figures such as Merlin, a Norn, Pan, and Leander's lover Hero. God is explicitly mentioned and, in the seventh poem, directly addressed, but it remains ambiguous if this is a Christian God, some other divinity, or perhaps the ancient gods Merlin follows in the fifth poem. The relationship between nature and the self is described in terms of being wounded and healed, although as it becomes apparent already in the first poem, in this case being wounded comes as a blessing bestowed by nature upon the lyrical I:

> Natur! will dir ans Herz mich legen!
> Verzeih, daß ich dich konnte meiden,
> Daß Heilung ich gesucht für Leiden,
> Die du mir gabst zum herben Segen.
>
> In deinen Waldesfinsternissen
> Hab ich von mancher tiefen Ritze,
> Durch die mir leuchten deine Blitze,
> Den trüglichen Verband gerissen.[212]

The wound of nature's 'harsh blessing', which the lyrical I has previously tried to escape or hide under bandages, is revealed in the sixth poem as universal mortality, which affects human beings and the rest of nature alike. 'Waldlieder' develops different ways of reacting towards this fundamental natural condition – Merlin's magical and erotically charged immersion in nature, for example, or entering into a dreamlike and childlike state of

[211] Ibid., p. 231.
[212] LHK, vol. 2, p. 309.

Romantic folklore. The different relationships to nature are also reflected in the variety of poetic styles Lenau employed in 'Waldlieder', from the *Volkslied* character of the fourth and sixth poems to the blank verse of the seventh poem (we will encounter a similar display of various poetic styles expressing different concepts of nature in Droste-Hülshoff's 'Die Vogelhütte' in the next chapter). Ultimately, the different ways of trying to reach poetic reconciliation with nature all fail, as the sixth poem reveals in a resigned tone:

> Daß alles vorübersterbe,
> Ist alt und allbekannt;
> Doch diese Wehmut, die herbe,
> Hat niemand noch gebannt.[213]

And yet, the forest remains not simply a place of death, but also of life, providing the kind of healing Lenau had emphasised in a letter to Emilie von Reinbeck, attached to which were the first of the 'Waldlieder':

> So ein paar Stunden in der Einsamkeit des Waldes verlebt, sind für ein in die Waldgeheimnisse eingeweihtes Herz von unermäßlicher Wohlthätigkeit, wenn ihm in seine schmerzhaftesten, sonst für kein Heilmittel zugänglichen Stellen von unsichtbaren Händen ein heimlicher Balsam geträufelt wird.[214]

This healing which the forest of 'Waldlieder' offers is a combination of a remembered past (in the fourth poem, memories assault the wanderer like bandits), a realisation of the rejuvenating 'Urjugendliche Frische' and 'Lebensfülle' of the forest, and then a gradual acceptance of its intrinsic mortality that also mirrors the condition of the lyrical I. In that sense, 'Waldlieder' offers neither a pantheistic vision of a reconciliation within the natural world, nor salvation in the sense of transcendence beyond it. Instead the poems anticipate the future reunification of nature and spirit in form of a mystical marriage followed by sublation, which would imply the end of the autonomous self.

The image of nature as spirit's bride, a secularised version of Mary as the bride of the Holy Spirit, was a recurring image in idealist philosophies of nature. Hegel also described the relationship between spirit and nature in his *Enzyklopädie* (1817/1830) in terms of matrimony, emphasising the potential dialectic union of these two antithetical entities.[215]Lenau connects the marital image of longing for unification to an immediate and ecstatic anticipation of death and to an afterlife within the other:

> Sehnsüchtig zieht entgegen
> Natur auf allen Wegen,
> Als schöne Braut im Schleier,

[213] Ibid., p. 315.
[214] Letter to Emilie von Reinbeck, 20 September 1943, LHK, vol. 6.1, p. 315.
[215] 'So ist die Braut die Natur, mit der der Geist sich vermählt.', G.W.F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, 3 vols., ed. by Eva Moldenhauer et al. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1970) vol. 2, Betrachtungsweisen der Natur, § 246, Zusatz.

Dem Geiste, ihrem Freier.

Tautropfen auf den Spitzen
Der dunklen Halme blitzen
Wie helle Liebeszähren,
Ein süß nach Ihm Begehren.

Sie schweigt, in Sehnsucht lauschend,
Dann plötzlich, freudig rauschend,
Scheint selig sie zu spüren,
Daß er sie heim wird führen.

All ihre Pulse beben,
In ihm, in ihm zu leben,
Von ihm dahinzusinken,
Den Todeskuß zu trinken.[216]

Reintegration of nature into spirit is here inextricably bound to self-annihilation. A similar fate seems to await the human soul, here compared to nature, which, in order to reunite with God, has to perish:

So lauscht und rauscht die Seele,
Daß Gott sich ihr vermähle,
Fühlt schon den Odem wehen,
In dem sie wird vergehen.[217]

The final poem remains unclear whether the two sides of the dual subject will collapse back into one, as the image of the waterfall and the stream in 'Verschiedene Deutung', and the stream and the ocean in 'Savonarola' suggested, or if the self will continuously move towards a reunification that only death can provide. The almost mystical conclusion the poem reaches after 'ein Verstummen, ein Entfärben' has taken place anticipates, rather than a union, an endless process of changing or exchanging, a continuous Hegelian dynamic:

In dieses Waldes leisem Rauschen
Ist mir, als hör ich Kunde wehen,
Daß alles Sterben und Vergehen
Nur heimlichstill vergnügtes Tauschen.[218]

'Tauschen', exchanging, the very last word of 'Waldlieder', seems to illuminate the poetic principle at work here as well: Lenau's poetry has become an illumination of the historical transmutations undergone by humanity's relationship to nature. Images and poetic conventions are reused and rearranged in order to expose their inner tensions and contradictions, but also the potential they offer for historical development. Whereas Heine chose a combination of poetry and prose in order to reflect on the socialization of nature,

[216] LHK, vol. 2, p. 312.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Ibid., p. 318.

Lenau focuses on the subjective experience of nature and its historicization. ‘Waldlieder’ re-introduce the lyrical I as the main protagonist of the poem cycle, where the subject emerges in a Hegelian fashion through a historical process as self-consciousness within nature.

In the following chapter, I will explore how Droste-Hülshoff engaged with the idea of a natural history beyond the human perspective – a drastic change from Lenau, whose poetry problematised the subjective perspective (and even envisioned its sublation), but nonetheless remained firmly anchored in it.

4. Between Sentiment and Science
Droste-Hülshoff's Poetry of Nature

The poetry Annette von Droste-Hülshoff wrote and published during the 1840s reflected a growing awareness that nature had become the subject matter of competing and partly exclusive orders of knowledge. With the natural sciences increasingly claiming hegemony over what nature entailed and what this implied for the human condition, Droste-Hülshoff incorporated scientific theories and discoveries into her poetry in a much more sophisticated manner than Heine or Lenau. Her quest for an aesthetic of natural sciences informed most prominently the long poem 'Die Mergelgrube' (1844), which I will analyse in detail and relate to contemporary scientific discourses. Although knowledgeable and interested in the empirical sciences, especially geology and biology, Droste-Hülshoff observed their advancement with caution and even concern. Her poetry reflected the anxieties these recent developments had caused in the post-Romantic cultural sphere and the uncertainties that man now faced not only regarding his place within the natural world, but also the possible means of representing nature beyond the scientific as well as literary conventions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Her poems 'Die Vogelhütte', 'Die Jagd', and 'Am dritten Sonntage nach Ostern' interact with poetological and theological concepts of nature and challenge the assumptions that poetry could reveal one holistic nature. Instead, these poems express an ambivalence that was transferred to the reader, who in turn was invited to contemplate and analyse not only the meaning of the poem, but also the multi-faceted character of nature and humanity's relation to it.

While the importance of the natural world within Droste-Hülshoff's oeuvre has been well documented and researched,[219] I hope to place her poetry of nature in a wider cultural and historical context in order to show how her literary explorations of nature can be considered a link between the Romantic aesthetics of nature and the naturalism of the second half of the nineteenth century.

Geological Poetry: 'Die Mergelgrube'

As Peter Schnyder has pointed out, 'Die Mergelgrube' oscillates between different tones and poetic traditions, merging characteristics of a didactic poetry, *Erlebnislyrik* and, by including

[219] For an overview of recent developments see Roland Borgards, 'Natur', in: *Annette von Droste-Hülshoff Handbuch*, ed. by Cornelia Blasberg, Jochen Grywatsch (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2018), pp. 649–658.

the shepherd's song as a poem inside a poem, a *Volkslied* (or rather, the parody of one).[220] This amalgam of poetic elements as well as the rapid changes of tone throughout the poem are not unique to 'Die Mergelgrube' or even to Droste-Hülshoff – we have encountered them in Heine's writing as well – but they do carry a certain significance in the context of the poem, because they follow a composition principle that mirrors the structural qualities of marl, the stone from which the poem took its title. Marlstone, a sedimentary rock, consists of a soft mixture of clay or limestone and calcium carbonate, in which small silicate minerals as well as bigger components like sand and gravel are embedded, making it a naturally heterogenous formation. In the nineteenth century, marl was frequently quarried and mixed in the soils of former wetlands to make them arable. To make marlstone the object of such an extensive and complex poem was an interesting aesthetic choice, since this kind of rock was neither rare nor in a conventional manner visually impressive, and had such an obvious connection to utility and to the great transformation of the landscape taking place throughout the nineteenth century. As Schnyder observes, the poem rests on small and seemingly inconspicuous details, which the narrator observes not from the commanding position of somebody with an overview of a panoramic scenery, but from the bottom of a pit, looking up at the sedimentary rocks rather than down on them. Compared to Goethe's poetic treatise on rock, *Über den Granit* (1784), for example, this shift in poetic perspective is indicative of a changing relationship between the self and nature, which Droste-Hülshoff reflects through her positioning of the narrator in 'Die Mergelgrube'.

By the time the narrator is introduced, he has already ventured deep down into the pit – 'Tief in's Gebröckel, in die Mergelgrube | war ich gestiegen' – and is therefore situated in an environment which completely surrounds and virtually engulfs him. This perspective emphasizes a sort of embeddedness which differs greatly from the tradition of nature poetry of Weimar Classicism, in which a central human figure would cast a glance over the natural world in the form of a landscape that could be assessed and appreciated as a totality and from a distance. As Roland Borgards has shown, Droste-Hülshoff, in comparison, often creates detailed environmental situations, in which all elements of a setting are shown to be codependent and interconnected.[221] In some respect, this immersion of the self in a natural environment resembles a Romantic approach to nature: Nature is perceived in a synaesthetic fashion, the all-encompassing experience of the marl pit is emphasized, the boundary

[220] See Peter Schnyder, 'Die Mergelgrube', in: *Droste-Hülshoff Handbuch*, pp. 242–247.
[221] See Roland Borgards, 'The Beetle Is in the Eye of the Beholder: Animal Ecologies, Situated Poetics and the Poetry of Annette von Droste-Hülshoff', in: *Texts, Animals, Environments. Zoopoetics and Ecopoetics*, ed. by Roland Borgards et al. (Freiburg i.Br.: Rombach, 2019), pp. 99–109.

between the inner world of imagination and the outer world of perception becomes porous as the narrator identifies himself with his natural surroundings. The inclusion of references to contemporary scientific discourses had been explored by the Romantics as well – we can find a similar connection between aesthetics and geology in Novalis' novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, for example. But whereas Romantic thinking had envisaged a metasystem of truth, be it philosophy as Fichte proposed or 'progressive Universalpoesie' according to Novalis and Schlegel, that would unify the different arts and sciences, as a post-Romantic writer of the Biedermeier period, Droste-Hülshoff depicts the variety of approaches to the natural world as competing and seemingly irreconcilable. Instead of merging and synthesizing, the poetry of Droste-Hülshoff depicts specific knowledge, emotional, religious and aesthetic experience alongside each other. In the case of 'Die Mergelgrube', her poem also emulates scientific methodology to a certain extent by transforming it into a request to interpret, question and analyse the poem and to evaluate the different concepts of nature presented therein.

The poem's initial appeal – 'Stoß deinen Scheit drei Spannen in den Sand'[222] – to a reader who is addressed as a former geologist equipped with spade, knowledge and interest, clearly exhorts us to search, dig and excavate, in other words: to engage actively with the poem in the quest for knowledge. The specific knowledge with which 'Die Mergelgrube' is interspersed comes mostly from the field of geology, a discipline that had rapidly changed and evolved into a modern natural science based on both empirical evidence and extensive theory during the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries as Martin J.S. Rudwick has shown in his study of the history of geology during that time.[223] Droste-Hülshoff's interest in geology was both theoretical and practical. She collected fossils and minerals both in Westphalia and around Lake Constance and studied geological reports alongside publications from the spectrum of life sciences and the philosophy of nature.

As Josefine Nettesheim, Walter Gödden, and most recently Cornelia Blasberg and Borgards have pointed out, Droste-Hülshoff was perceived by her contemporaries as remarkably well read and extensively educated. Her vast knowledge stemmed not from a formal academic training, which she was mostly barred from as a woman in the first decades of the nineteenth century, even had she not come from a conservative Catholic noble family.

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[222] Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe. Werke. Briefwechsel*, 28 vols., ed. by Winfried Woesler (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1978–2000), vol. 1.1, p. 50.
[223] See Martin J. S Rudwick, *Bursting the Limits of Time. The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Revolution* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Instead, Droste-Hülshoff's scholarship was derived from the unique position she occupied as both a beneficiary of what Gödden and Blasberg have identified as 'Adelsgelehrsamkeit', nobility's traditional education, which was passed along from one generation to another alongside scholarly artefacts such as books or collectibles, and a member of the newly emerging modern knowledge society (*Wissensgesellschaft*), which infused every aspect of the life of the middle and upper classes with an unprecedented need for the distribution of information and the acquirement of expertise. Droste-Hülshoff, who had been taught alongside her brothers as a girl, received a substantial education in the newly emerging natural sciences, which formed the basis for her own engagement with botany, geology, and natural history. From her letters we are able to deduce a continuous interest in natural sciences, as well as fringe sciences such as magnetism and holistic philosophies of nature in a more Romantic tradition – an eclectic array that was typical of the Biedermeier period. As Blasberg, Gödden and Nettesheim have shown, Droste-Hülshoff was part of the same social circles as the physician and proponent of Mesmerism, Joseph Ennemoser, and the naturalist Lorenz Oken. When we consider more specifically her engagement with geology, Blasberg, in her recent overview of Droste-Hülshoff's sources, records two interesting titles, which Droste-Hülshoff mentioned explicitly in letters: Horace-Bénédict de Saussure's famous travel account *Voyages dans les Alpes* (1779–96), which was translated into German in the 1780s, and which Droste-Hülshoff apparently read in the 1820s, and Jakob Nöggerath's *Das Gebirge in Rheinland-Westphalen nach mineralogischen und chemischen Bezügen*, published in four volumes consecutively from 1822 to 1826, which she asked Schücking in 1841 to send to her. That these two texts are available to us as verified examples of Droste-Hülshoff's reading material is significant, because they can be considered as start and end points of the founding epoch of modern geology, which developed precisely in the forty-year time span between their publication dates.

Saussure's description of the Alps is widely considered a founding document of modern earth sciences. As a detailed study of the topography of Mont Blanc, which Saussure climbed in 1778 with the explicit goal of exploring the mountain from a scientific perspective, the *Voyages dans les Alpes* were a first foray into a kind of geology that was based on the collection of detailed evidence and field work rather than the development of an all-encompassing inductive theoretical framework. Rudwick has shown how in the years that followed Saussure's ascent, the speculative scientific genre of geotheory was fundamentally transformed and eventually developed into evidence-based geology. By the time Nöggerath conducted his research in the 1820s and 30s, the theories of the earth, aimed

at establishing a comprehensive history of the whole planet through a hypothetico-deductive method, were already a thing of the past. Georges Cuvier can be considered the prototypical representative of a new era of geology, but he was only one amongst many scholars all over Europe who had begun to practise geology by exploring one specific area, usually over a long period of time, studying and classifying rock formations and fossils in great detail. In the German-speaking countries, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, a professor of medicine in Göttingen, published a handbook which included a large section on 'Petrefactenkunde' in 1779 and 1788, in which he emphasized, in a manner similar to Cuvier, the need for a unified classification of fossils as the basis for evidence-based explorations of the earth's history. When the geologist Leopold von Buch became a member of the Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften in 1806, he used his inaugural speech to draw attention to the importance of the name 'Geologie' as an indicator of a new empirical science that had to be clearly distinguished from the theories and methods of the former 'Geognosie'.

This new geology was not only something specialists were invested in, but the history of the earth enjoyed a widespread vogue in the 1840s and was of great general interest in educated circles all over Europe. Cuvier and the Scottish geologist Sir James Hall explicitly addressed a general public in their lectures and publications, inviting them to partake in the search for fossils or the examination of rock formations, much as the poem 'Die Mergelgrube' does with regards to its readers. Travel accounts, geological research reports and papers on the discoveries of fossils were published in periodicals with large circulations; works on geological matters were quickly translated and distributed across countries. Considering the intellectual milieu that Droste-Hülshoff was part of, it is highly unlikely that she had not heard of the discovery of spectacular fossils or new geological theories, even if she had not displayed a personal interest in the history and material structure of rocks and mountains and gathered first-hand experience in fossil hunting and collecting stones and minerals.

'Die Mergelgrube' is rife with specific allusions to geological contexts. Aside from a general engagement with the thematic field of earth history that is prominent throughout the whole poem, three distinct elements stand out, which allude to very specific geological problems and pivotal moments in the recent history of the discipline during the first half of the nineteenth century: erratic boulders ('Findlinge'), the remains of mammoths, and the thematic field of ancient Egypt. In one way or another, they are all connected to the one central question which geologists before Darwin asked themselves and which Droste-Hülshoff's poem insistently repeated: how was the former world, which was increasingly

reconstructed in great detail through the excavation and analysis of stones and fossils, connected to the present world and to human existence – 'War ich der erste Mensch oder der letzte?'[224]

Before analysing the three central elements in detail, I think it will be illuminating to look at their embeddedness in the poem and to relate these insertions to the general structure and tone of 'Die Mergelgrube'. As mentioned above, the poem initially invites its readers to dig deeper and to explore the marl pit for themselves. It is precisely this injunction that characterizes the poem as both an educational *Lehrgedicht* and as quite the contrary. Clearly filled with hints and allusions to the history of the earth, it does not unfold a whole theory of the earth's history or any sort of scientific or mythological origin story in a comprehensive manner from beginning to end. Indeed, despite its clearly abounding in references to certain ways of knowing, we could ask ourselves if 'Die Mergelgrube' truly conveys any knowledge at all. Instead, it seems to expect its readers to be able to pick up the clues and to identify the fragments of different geological discourses and debates by themselves. This of course follows the methodology of modern geology itself. Out of many dispersed fragments of fossils and rocks which can be found embedded in sedimentary layers, the geologist needs to come up with a cohesive historical backstory which brings all of them together and offers explanations for their origin and position. As Rudwick has shown, the beginning of modern geology in the second half of the eighteenth century saw a reconceptualization of the earth as both historical and fundamentally intelligible, even legible. Geologists such as Francois-Xavier Burtin, who published his *Oryctographie* in 1784, developed the notion that the earth could be effectively 'read' by analysing and deciphering fossils and minerals, which served as indicative signs or letters. This way of thinking about natural remains was adopted from archaeology, which had applied a similar approach to the study of excavation sites such as Pompeii and Herculaneum, treating them as documents of an old, vanished world that could be reconstructed if only one knew how to read and interpret the signs properly.[225] While the notion of a language or script of the natural world, that was only waiting to be deciphered, was, as we have already seen, a lingering legacy of Romantic thinking, nineteenth-century geology was clearly more pragmatic about the signs it had to identify, classify, catalogue and decipher. The first lines of 'Die Mergelgrube', as quoted above, give out clear instructions concerning the examination and subsequent interpretation of the natural world

[224] HKA, vol. 1.1, p. 51.
[225] See Rudwick, p. 203.

found in sedimentary layers of rock. One should be equipped with both tools and knowledge as one ventures out to conduct field work and gather empirical data, which will then be properly analysed and related to geological theories. The poem expects its readers to possess a certain amount of prior knowledge, which they are now invited to apply. This becomes clear not only in the way the specific geological discourses are never fully explained and at times merely alluded to, but also in the confrontation between the narrator and the naïve shepherd, who studies a children's book on the natural world and does not even seem to grasp the meaning of that. Readers of 'Die Mergelgrube' are clearly expected to recognize Bertuch's illustrated publications on natural history, to know them probably from their own reading experience as children, and to employ this previous knowledge to complete their impression of the shepherd as a simple-minded, humorous figure. The last line, in which the narrator imagines himself through the eyes of the shepherd, who must consider him to be insane, really drives the point home. The poem's readers are supposed to detect the irony in the statement, since from their own perspective as well as the narrator's, the shepherd clinging to his pre-modern, literal interpretation of the Biblical origin story would have to be considered the insane one. Unlike the shepherd, the readers can be expected to recognize the significance of fossils and sedimentary stones and integrate them into their scientifically informed understanding of the natural world. Therefore, the following analysis of the aforementioned three significant elements – boulders, mammoths and Egypt –, aims to understand them in their historical context of early nineteenth-century geology and to read them as clues pointing towards very specific discourses, just as 'Die Mergelgrube' invited its Biedermeier readers to do in 1844.

Erratic boulders in 'Die Mergelgrube' occur twice as a prominent and loaded metaphor. Droste-Hülshoff reflects here skilfully on the double meaning of the German word 'Findling' as a term used to describe foundlings and boulders alike by emphasizing the state of displacement and homelessness and the experience of unsettlement and disruption that both shared:

> Findlinge nennt man sie, weil von der Brust,
> Der mütterlichen, sie gerissen sind,
> In fremde Wiege, schlummernd unbewußt,
> Die fremde Hand sie legt' wie's Findelkind.
> O welch' ein Waisenhaus ist diese Heide,
> Die Mohren, Blaßgesicht und rote Haut
> Gleichförmig hüllet mit dem braunen Kleide!
> Wie endlos ihre Zellenreihn gebaut![226]

[226] HKA, vol. 1.1, p. 50.

[…]

Ich selber schien ein Funken mir, der doch
Erzittert in der toten Asche noch,
Ein Findling im zerfallnen Weltenbau.[227]

As Erika Schellenberg-Diederich has pointed out, the use of the term 'Findling' for erratic boulders was at that time a relatively new one; the terms 'Erratiker', 'Erratischer Block' or 'Geschiebe' had been traditionally used throughout the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries.[228] Now the term 'Findling', which emphasized both the sense of chaotic displacement and alluded to the fact that geologists or laypeople with an interest in geology frequently found and identified these boulders, captured the imagination of writers in the German language.[229] Droste-Hülshoff here used the term at first to talk about the displacement of boulders, which were found in regions far from the bigger rock formations they had at some point been part of ('weil von der Brust, | Der mütterlichen, sie gerissen sind'). She then lets her narrator identify himself with these boulders, envisaging himself just as displaced and far from home. The displacement of both the boulders and the narrator is embedded in a chaotic disruption and destruction of global dimensions: The heath resembles an orphanage ('O welch' ein Waisenhaus ist diese Heide'), the whole structure of the world seems to have collapsed ('im zerfallnen Weltenbau'). In order to understand why the implications of the boulders' unsettlement were so severe, we have to take into account the geological discourse of the previous decades.

The problem of erratic boulders – single blocks of stone found in an area which did not contain bigger, contiguous deposits of the same stone – was well known throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. In 1804, Erhard Georg Friedrich Wrede, a natural science teacher from Berlin, published his *Geognostische Untersuchungen*, exploring the question of how large blocks of granite, whose origins he traced back to Scandinavia, had reached the lowlands behind the coastline of East Prussia. A possible explanation he came up with was that at some point in the past, a cooler climate and lowered sea levels had allowed the boulders to travel across the Baltic Sea enclosed in ice sheets.

Ten years later, Leopold von Buch travelled to Switzerland and was puzzled by Pierre à Bot, a huge granite boulder in the midst of a limestone landscape close to Neuchâtel. In his treatise *Über die Ursachen der Verbreitung grosser Alpengeschiebe*, published in 1815, he

[227] Ibid., p. 51.
[228] See Erika Schellenberg-Diederich, *Geopoetik. Studien zur Metaphysik des Gesteins in der Lyrik von Hölderlin bis Celan* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2006), p. 45.
[229] See also Schellenberg-Diederich.

reported his findings: Pierre à Bot was not an isolated boulder, there were other, similar granite blocks scattered throughout the surrounding area. And although these boulders were clearly displaced, they were surely not distributed across the mountains in a completely random manner. Instead, Buch had discovered that they were only found at a certain height, forming a band that wound through the Rhône valley and that could be traced back to the Mont Blanc massif, which he then identified as the place of origin of these granite blocks.

Towards the end of his publication, Buch then asked tentatively what kind of forces could have possibly torn these boulders from the Mont Blanc massif and distributed them – evenly – throughout the valleys nearby. If Wrede's idea of a half-frozen Baltic Sea was novel, it appeared to his contemporaries as neither shocking nor implausible, for it was also in accordance with, for example, Lamarck's theory of a changing climate with periods of much lower average temperatures. The implications of Buch's findings were much more unsettling. Although he speculated about torrents of water moving about the mountains, it appeared to him ultimately doubtful that these enormous boulders could have been broken off and carried along by water. Another possible explanation, great eruptions which would have flung the boulders around like cannonballs, seemed equally unlikely. It is a sign of the times that Buch did not come up with an explanation of the boulder's movement in the end, but ended his exploration with more questions posed to the scientific community. While the geotheorists of the eighteenth century had generally been striving for a comprehensive and complete understanding of the history of the earth in their individual works, Buch's research publication can be considered an example of the new emerging kind of scientific approach, which was much more specialized, focused on one particular aspect of geological processes and was characterized by a certain trust placed in the scientific community as a whole to come up with more answers in the future. Traces of this open-endedness can be found in 'Die Mergelgrube' as well: It does not really come up with any satisfying answers or solutions to the problems and questions it poses. The poem is densely packed with allusions and implications, but, as mentioned above, it invites readers to ponder, evaluate and interpret rather than presenting them with a full-fledged model of how its different elements relate to one another and what exactly this could mean for the state of human existence.

Similarly, Buch's descriptions of boulders hinted at the possibility of them being moved gradually instead of suddenly, but he did not develop such a theory in his own work. Instead, this was left to Karl Friedrich Schimper, who in the mid-1830s, after observing erratic boulders in the Alpine foothills of Bavaria, began to develop the concept of 'Weltwinter' to describe a geological epoch that he eventually, in 1837, came to call

'Eiszeit'. The work of Schimper, who explicitly used the term *Findlinge*, was characterized by a conjunction between geological developments and the history of life forms, as Tobias Krüger has shown – a connection that von Buch had been previously hesitant to make.[230] While Buch had only hinted at the idea that the movement of erratic boulders in the Alps could be connected to greater processes taking place all over Europe or even on a global scale, and had also implied that perhaps these processes could be connected to Cuvier's analysis of fossils, Schimper now clearly spoke of a gradual climatic change, which had affected both the surface of the earth and the life of plants and animals. He sketched a transformation of enormous proportions that had happened over a long period of time, effectively refuting the core principle of catastrophism that Cuvier had proposed – and defended against Lamarck – and that had dominated geology for decades. The implications of this change in the thinking about the history of the earth were severe: while Cuvier's theory of a sudden disruptive event at the dawn of human history was still somewhat reconcilable with the Biblical history of the earth (although Cuvier only understood Genesis as one source text amongst many other non-Christian origin myths describing catastrophic natural events, especially floods, in prehistoric times, this still left room to insert a Christian origin story that did not outright contradict the Bible), the gradual transformations of geological formations and life forms did pose an obvious threat to a harmonious merging of science and theology. The fact that the erratic boulders in 'Die Mergelgrube' are so explicitly linked to a sense of being forlorn, without a home or a clear sense of belonging, is therefore a direct consequence of the geological implications which these 'Findlinge' brought with them. They are a sign, a synecdoche referring directly to the Ice Age as a new, unsettling fact of geology.

Interestingly enough, the first use of the term 'Eiszeit', ice age, by Schimper cannot be found in a scientific publication (Schimper never wrote a substantial book, but instead published his findings in smaller papers), but in a poem, his 'Ode an die Eiszeit', written in February 1837. As Krüger has pointed out, the poem is written in a jocular manner, combining the high tone of the ode, associated with eighteenth-century Classicism with an unusual, new object of glorification and praise, namely a geological epoch.[231] Although Schimper's ode is fundamentally different compared to Droste-Hülshoff's poem – it is, for example, much more homogenous in tone and form and does not include elements of *Erlebnislyrik* at all, lacking a protagonist or any kind of human agent experiencing the

[230] See Tobias Krüger, *Discovering the Ice Ages: International Reception and Consequences of a Historical Understanding of Climate* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 158–159.
[231] Krüger, p. 172.

geological development it describes – there are also striking similarities in the way the history of nature is depicted as one marked principally by disruption and destruction. The emphasis on desolation, which may ultimately lead to new life coming forth, but which is shocking nonetheless in its sweeping extent, is quite clear in both 'Die Mergelgrube' and in the following stanzas of 'Ode an die Eiszeit':

> Ureises Spätrest, älter als Alpen sind!
> Ureis von damals, als die Gewalt des Frost's
> Berghoch verschüttet selbst den Süden,
> Eben verhüllt so Gebirg als Meere!
>
> Wie stürzt der Schneesturm, welche geraume Zeit,
> Endlos herab! Wie, reiche Natur, begrubst
> Du lebensscheu dich, öd' und trostlos!
> Aber es ging ja zuletzt vorüber!
>
> Tief aus dem Grund brach Alpengebirg hervor,
> Brach durch die Eiswucht, deren erstarrter Zug
> Unendlich trümmervoll mit Blöcken
> Seltsam geziert noch den Kamm des Jura.[232]

While Schimper's poem is mostly focused on describing the violent but extremely long and slow geological processes during the Ice Age, Droste-Hülshoff's 'Die Mergelgrube' emphasizes the dire consequences this newfound scientific knowledge implied for the contemporary human spectator. Her narrator not only observes boulders and understands the massive transformations in geological deep time which placed them in their current spots, but clearly reflects on the meaning of this for the position of human beings in the present. This is why Droste-Hülshoff's poem addresses not a geological epoch, but its readers, and why the narrator's state of displacement is then compared to that of a 'Findling im zerfallnen Weltenbau' and then, as the poem progresses further, with the placement of a fossilized mammoth bone:

> Ha, auf der Schieferplatte hier Medusen –
> Noch schienen ihre Stralen sie zu zücken,
> Als sie geschleudert von des Meeres Busen,
> Und das Gebirge sank, sie zu zerdrücken.
> Es ist gewiß, die alte Welt ist hin,
> Ich Petrefakt, ein Mammuthsknochen drinn![233]

The petrified mammoth bone is yet another allusion to a very specific scientific discovery that had garnered great public attention and shifted the course of the history of geology in the beginning of the nineteenth century.

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[232] Quoted from *Karl Friedrich Schimper – Geschichte und Gedichte eines Naturforschers: Zu Schimpers 200. Geburtstag am 15. Februar 2003*, ed. by Susanne Bährle, Holger Schäfer (Schwetzingen: Schimper, 2003), pp. 145–147.
[233] HKA, vol. 1.1, p. 51.

In 1806, the Russian botanist and explorer Mikhail Ivanovich Adams returned to St Petersburg from a long excursion to Siberia, bringing with him the remains of a mammoth that had been discovered some years earlier by Ossip Shumachov, a hunter belonging to the indigenous Tungus people. The mammoth had been conserved in permafrost and after it had been extracted from the ice, most of its organs and flesh were eaten by wild animals, but Adams had been able to salvage most of its skeleton and its skin, which turned out to be an important clue that would challenge previously existing theories on mammoths, because it was covered with great quantities of woolly hair.

Other petrified mammoths had been discovered and described throughout the eighteenth century. Both Sir Hans Sloane and Johann Philipp Breyne had published on mammoths in the 1720s and 1730s, with the latter arguing that the mammoth was related to the African and Asian elephants that were still alive in the present day and speculating that the Biblical Flood might have carried the remains of these animals from their tropical habitat to such colder regions as northern Russia and the British Isles, where their skeletons had been found. The mammoth remained a source of fascination and puzzlement throughout the eighteenth century, especially after findings of teeth and bones of mammoths and mastodons in the valleys of the Hudson and Ohio Rivers. Since they did not seem to fit into preexisting categories of mammals, they were classified as *incognita*, unknown animals, which implied not only that their origin story and their relations to other animals was obscure but also that it was unknown whether or not they still existed somewhere on earth. When Meriwether Lewis and William Clark set out on their expedition to explore the North American continent towards the Pacific coast in 1804, President Thomas Jefferson still expressed his hope that they might possibly find a living relative of the mammoth somewhere.

Cuvier had examined mammoth skeletons in 1796 and had, through comparative anatomical studies, reached the conclusion in his publication *Espèces d'eléphans* that they were not directly related to modern-day elephants but that they belonged to a different, prehistoric species altogether. Here he also proposed the hypothesis that mammoths were truly extinct. Extinction was an intensely contested issue between geologists and biologists around the turn of the century. The mammoth became a linchpin in the question whether or not the history of the earth could be divided into two radically different epochs – a prehuman, or pre-Adamite world, inhabited by life-forms that were now mostly extinct, and the modern world of the present day, which was the only world ever inhabited by humans. Cuvier, as mentioned before, defended this binary model, which included his idea of a catastrophic

upheaval that had suddenly wiped out the former world. The biologist Lamarck contested this view and instead proposed the idea of a gradual transformism of one species into another, championing an early form of an evolutionary theory as opposed to the theory of revolutionary changes that Cuvier argued for.

Thus, by the time Adams returned with his findings from Siberia, the mammoth had already been established as a well-known fossil, with its meaning for the history of the earth and the development of species still vigorously debated. This explains why international acknowledgements and reactions to Adams' discovery were so swift. The Berlin-based mineralogist D.L. Karsten almost immediately published a German translation of Adams' article on the mammoth in a periodical and Wilhelm Gottlieb Tilesius von Tilenau, both a scientist and a draughtsman, reconstructed the mammoth in detailed drawings, which were published by the Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg in 1815. For Cuvier, the woolly mammoth was a proof of his hypothesis on extinction: the fact that these animals had been covered in thick, fleecy fur showed that they had not previously lived in warmer climates and their remains had been moved by the great flood, but instead had clearly lived in Arctic regions. That they could not be found still alive anywhere in the colder regions of the earth nowadays was in Cuvier's understanding evidence for their complete extinction.

Now, extinction itself would have been a complex and ambivalent concept for many thinkers of the time who, like Droste-Hülshoff, found themselves occupying a precarious position between scientific knowledge and either religious or humanist convictions about the origin and state of humankind. On one hand, Cuvier's theory, as mentioned above, allowed for an integration of the newest scientific insights into an essentially Christian understanding of the history of the world. On the other hand, the idea that whole species had existed and then perished seemed difficult to reconcile with the intentionality of Creationism as a theological principle. In 'Die Mergelgrube', Droste-Hülshoff also explored an additional unsettling dimension of extinction by making her narrator identify himself with the petrified mammoth, implying that, if other species had become extinct throughout the course of the earth's history, this could perhaps also mean that humankind would only inhabit the world temporarily. At first glance, this idea would directly contradict the common interpretation of the promise made by God in the Noachic covenant – 'I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth'[234] – as meaning that God would never destroy all life on earth again, but of course, if we take into consideration the new developments in geology, for

[234] Genesis 9:11, here quoted from the New Revised Standard Version.

example Schimper's description of the Ice Age, Droste-Hülshoff could also imply here that the devastation of the earth by water was clearly not the only possible fundamental disruption that humankind could face. The fact that the narrator understands himself to be already enclosed by sediments and imagines himself in a state of petrifaction also emphasizes a further point that 'Die Mergelgrube' makes, namely that natural history and the history of humankind are not to be treated as two separate strands of development, but that they are alike and intertwined. Ancient Egypt, which is featured prominently in the second half of the passage in question, serves here as a symbol of this entwinement, as it offers yet another connection to a specific geological discourse.

The cultural significance of ancient Egypt as a literary motif was distinctly present throughout the eighteenth century.[235] In Schiller's ballad *Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais*, written and published in 1795, Egypt was already connected to the idea of arcane knowledge, usually associated with nature – an affiliation that Novalis also used in *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* four years later.

Napoleon's military expedition to Egypt between 1798 and 1801 inspired an intense engagement with the country's ancient past by archaeologists and geologists alike, as a multitude of artefacts, including documents and mummified animals, were brought to Europe to be examined. More than ever before, the collective imagination of European societies turned Egypt into a place of great antiquity and mystery, but also, based on the elaborate ancient mortuary cult that archaeologists began to reconstruct, into a symbolic place of death (a cultural attribution that had also long been based on the Biblical significance of Egypt as a country of bondage and suffering). For Cuvier, the analysis of mummified animals alongside the consultation of Egyptian hieroglyphs meant yet another chance to prove his theory of extinction and catastrophism right. When a mummified bird was brought to Paris in 1801, Cuvier did not rely solely on his examination of the mummy, but also compared his findings to ancient Egyptian art and the writing of Herodotus to prove that a previous identification of the bird as a yellow-billed stork had been false and that the bird was really an ibis, which, he claimed, did not belong to an extinct species, but was a relative of the African sacred ibis still alive in the present day.[236] This approach helped him

[235] See Eric Iversen, *The Myth of Egypt and its Hieroglyphs in European Tradition* (Copenhagen: Gad, 1961).
[236] See Caitlin Curtis, Craig D. Millar, and David M. Lambert, 'The Sacred Ibis Debate: The First Test of Evolution', *PLOS Biology* 16/10 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.2005558.

solidify the foundation of three core principles, which he was at the time defending against the transmutation theories of Lamarck and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire:

Firstly, that life forms were based on an ideal and did not change over time. They either existed in their ideal form or they became extinct.

Secondly, that no extinction of species had taken place during the time span of human history, which had begun after the last catastrophic upheaval and the subsequent reshaping of the earth into its modern form.

And thirdly, that cultural artefacts and sources from human history had to be consulted alongside the study of fossils and minerals, because they yielded important clues concerning the history of nature.

In his central work on fossils, the *Recherches sur les ossemens fossils*, published in five volumes from 1812 onwards, Cuvier even used a metaphor related to the analysis of ancient Egyptian cultural artefacts when speaking about his own work of comparative anatomy, which he described as deciphering the hieroglyphs of nature. As Cuvier was writing this, the Egyptian hieroglyphs had yet to be translated – the Rosetta Stone had been discovered in 1799, but a full comprehension of the hieroglyphs and the demotic script carved upon it was not achieved until 1822. In this sense, Cuvier's use of the hieroglyph metaphor emphasized his understanding of the historical position he found himself occupying: while he considered fossils as signs and indicators of the geological past, their full meaning for the history of the earth had yet to be conceived.

When Droste-Hülshoff was writing her poem in the 1840s, this history had been uncovered further and with dramatic implications. Consequently, the Egyptian passage of 'Die Mergelgrube' does show a parallel between the petrifaction of lifeforms described earlier and the cultural practice of mummification, suggesting a concurrence of natural history and human history, but the one as well as the other is shown as leading ultimately to desolation and death, as the narrator sinks down, fatigued and world-weary, burdened by the weight of history and knowledge:

> Und müde, müde sank ich an den Rand
> Der staub'gen Gruft; da rieselte der Grand
> Auf Haar und Kleider mir, ich ward so grau
> Wie eine Leich' im Katakomben-Bau,
> Und mir zu Füßen hört ich leises Knirren,
> Ein Rütteln, ein Gebröckel und ein Schwirren.
> Es war der Todtenkäfer, der im Sarg
> So eben eine frische Leiche barg;
> Ihr Fuß, ihr Flügelchen empor gestellt
> Zeigt eine Wespe mir von dieser Welt.
> Und anders ward mein Träumen nun gewandet,
> Zu einer Mumie ward ich versandet,

Mein Linnen Staub, fahlgrau mein Angesicht,
Und auch der Scarabäus fehlte nicht.[237]

The scarab beetle and the mention of a mummy clearly situate this passage in an imagined Egyptian scenery, in which the movements of insects from the narrator's actual surroundings, namely that of a deathwatch beetle (the colloquial German name of which is *Totenkäfer*, a denotation that already establishes another connection to the realm of death) and a wasp, are transformed into a scarab beetle, while the narrator himself turns into a mummy. This is the third identification between the narrator and an object of significance for the recent history of geology – after imagining himself as an erratic boulder, displaced in the remains of a ruined earth and then as the petrified bone of a mammoth, he now pictures himself as a mummy, silted and grey. The fact that this third object of identification is an artefact of human history rather than of geological history is significant: It emphasizes once more that 'Die Mergelgrube' is a poem not only about geology, but about the consequences of geology for human existence. Through the repeated process of identification Droste-Hülshoff has inserted her narrator into geological deep time. Furthermore, the combination of the three central elements – erratic boulders, the fossilized remains of mammoths and Egyptian mummies – throughout 'Die Mergelgrube' supported a further methodological point which Cuvier and other modern geologists had made: in order to bring forth a precise understanding of the earth's history, three different, specialized areas of research, namely the study of rock formations (geophysics), the study of fossils (geohistory) and the study of cultural artefacts (archaeology) needed to come together to form a comprehensive whole.

It is in this moment, which anticipates a systemic unification of disparate, even contradictive discourses, that 'Die Mergelgrube' once more drastically and abruptly changes its tone. A piece of fabric, which the narrator, still lost in his Egyptian reverie, had at first identified as Byssus, the textile in which mummies were wrapped, turns out to be nothing but sheep's wool:

Wie, Leichen über mir? – so eben gar
Rollt mir ein Byssusknäuel in den Schooß;
Nein, das ist Wolle, ehrlich Lämmerhaar –
Und plötzlich ließen mich die Träume los.
Ich gähnte, dehnte mich, fuhr aus dem Hohl,
Am Himmel stand der rothe Sonnenball
Getrübt von Dunst, ein glüher Karniol,
Und Schafe weideten am Haidewall.[238]

[237] HKA, vol. 1.1, pp. 51–52
[238] Ibid., p. 52.

Suddenly the narrator is brought back into the present moment and the modern world as he ascends from the marl pit. Here he encounters the shepherd, who, knitting and singing, seems to have sprung directly from the pages of an idyllic pastoral novel. The shepherd is, at first glance, characterized in a manner reminiscent of the popular *Naturkind* trope. He appears placid, meek and mellow to the extent where he begins to resembles the sheep around him:

> Dicht über mir sah ich den Hirten sitzen,
> Er schlingt den Faden, und die Nadeln blitzen,
> Wie er bedächtig seinen Socken strickt.
> Zu mir hinunter hat er nicht geblickt.
> »Ave Maria« hebt er an zu pfeifen,
> So sacht und schläfrig, wie die Lüfte streifen.
> Er schaut so seelengleich die Herde an,
> Daß man nicht weiß, ob Schaf er oder Mann. [239]

The depiction of country folk as childlike and simple-minded people with an immediate, physical connection to the material world that surrounded them can be considered a literary convention of the nineteenth century that we have already encountered in the works of both Heine and Lenau. Whereas the Native Americans Lenau described were already losing their organic connection to nature, the miners in Heine's *Die Harzreise* were portrayed as residing in a sort of enchanted pre-modern state devoid of the transformative powers of instrumental reason, unable to grasp such concepts as abstraction or exchange value. As Richard T. Gray has shown, after a historical delay in comparison to other European states, the first half of the nineteenth century saw massive transformations of the socio-economic sphere of the German speaking countries and a shift towards a modern, industrialized free-market economy.[240] This led to an uneven development during the first decades of the century that brought forth stark discrepancies between relatively modern, educated urban social groups and people who inhabited less developed regions with regards to living standards as well as cultural and political identity. Droste-Hülshoff had a keen interest in these processes and described them in great detail in her almost ethnographic writing on the rural people and culture of Westphalia (*Bei uns zu Lande auf dem Lande*, written in 1838–1844, published posthumously in 1862, *Westfälische Schilderungen*, written 1842, published 1845). Unlike Heine and Lenau, who, despite travelling extensively, based their lives exclusively in urban environments, Droste-Hülshoff, as a member of the landed gentry, identified with country life to a certain extent and often gave nuanced literary accounts of life in rural areas. Both Heine and Droste-Hülshoff depicted pre-modern life in the German countryside on the brink

[239] Ibid.
[240] Richard T. Gray, *Money Matters. Economics and the German Cultural Imagination, 1770–1850* (Seattle/London: University of Washington Press, 2008), p. 277.

of extinction as they portrayed rural societies in transition from a feudal to a capitalist system. But whereas Heine ascribed a certain nostalgic value to a state of being he understood as less alienated from the natural world, Droste-Hülshoff, in both *Die Judenbuche* and 'Die Mergelgrube', depicted the relationship of the rural population to nature as either shaped by superstition or utilitarian motives. The shepherd falls into the former category, as his reading and misunderstanding of Bertuch's *Bilderbuch für Kinder* emphasizes.

What truly turns him into a parody though, is his *Volkslied*-like song, in which he accumulates clichéd motifs from conventional nature poetry:

> Es stehet ein Fischlein in einem tiefen See,
> Danach tu ich wohl schauen, ob es kommt in die Höh';
> Wandl' ich über Grunheide bis an den kühlen Rhein,
> Alle meine Gedanken bei meinem Feinsliebchen sein.
>
> Gleich wie der Mond ins Wasser schaut hinein,
> Und gleich wie die Sonne im Wald gibt güldenen Schein,
> Also sich verborgen bei mir die Liebe findt,
> All meine Gedanken, sie sind bei dir, mein Kind.
>
> Wer da hat gesagt, ich wollte wandern fort,
> Der hat sein Feinsliebchen an einem andern Ort;
> Trau nicht den falschen Zungen, was sie dir blasen ein,
> Alle meine Gedanken, sie sind bei dir allein.[241]

The moonlit river, the beautiful forest, and the Rhine, which had been discovered as an ideal landscape for poetic contemplation by Romantics such as Byron, Friedrich Schlegel, and Brentano, and which had, when Droste-Hülshoff was writing 'Die Mergelgrube', recently become the object of an increasingly naturalized nationalist discourse in the context of the Rhine crisis of 1840, were all common and conventional nature motifs from popular poetry.

It is important in this context to remember that, as we have already pointed out in the chapter on Heine's treatment of the Romantic perspective on nature, when Droste-Hülshoff parodied a poetic style that had by then become obsolete, she focused mostly on contemporary popular literature and poetry that had already trivialized the Romantic tradition of literary depictions of nature and reduced it to a literary cliché. Thus in 'Die Mergelgrube', we can detect traces of a serious engagement with the Romantic tradition alongside the humorous evocation of a *Volkslied* operating largely on such clichés and that is meant to be perceived as simplistic, naïve and ridiculous. The inserted shepherd's song serves as an exemplification of a kind of literary engagement with nature that, unlike the rest of Droste-Hülshoff's poem, is not based on a keen observation of a specific environmental

[241] HKA, vol. 1.1, p. 52.

setting – instead of the marl pit as a natural phenomenon right in front of the narrator and the shepherd, his song evokes in a very roundabout way a river that is nowhere near[242] – but instead derives purely from a cultural convention. The song's regular rhyme scheme – three stanzas consisting of two rhyming couplets each – serves as a contrast to the overall often irregular and less predictable poetic rhythm of 'Die Mergelgrube' and stresses further the over-simplification of the shepherd's perspective on the natural world. Thus the target of Droste-Hülshoff's ridicule here is precisely the trivialization and simplification of nature through a kind of popular poetry that claims to follow a Romantic tradition. Again, this alludes to a context which contemporary readers would have been familiar with – the matter of trivialization, of the bourgeois commodification of art and the integration of artistic practices as a sort of harmless pastime into the day-to-day life of an ever-growing educated middle class was a commonly discussed topic in Biedermeier culture.[243]

The engagement with a historically complex Romantic approach to nature in 'Die Mergelgrube' turns out to be much more nuanced and sophisticated then the parody of a *Volkslied* in the shepherd's song. We have already mentioned an intertextual link between Droste-Hülshoff's poem and Novalis's *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* through the motif of Egypt, which occurs prominently in both texts and the general theme of knowledge of the natural world that they share. A third point of contact between Novalis and Droste-Hülshoff is their engagement with the subterranean. As we have already pointed out in the chapter on Heine and as Helmut Gold has shown, the hidden world below ground was an object of Romantic fascination and repeatedly found its way into literary texts.[244] For Novalis, who had studied geology under Abraham Gottlob Werner in Freiberg, conducted his own geological research, and worked as an assessor of salt mines, the subterranean represented a realm of wisdom and wonder, the mines enabling people to enter the hidden treasure chambers of nature ('verborgenen Schatzkammern der Natur'[245]) as they are called in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. The way Novalis depicted the experience of going underground in his literary writings as a

[242] An object of humorous critique that seems to echo both the much more acerbic closet scene in Heine's *Die Harzreise*, in which a pair of yellow trousers gets mistaken for the moon as well as a passage in the third chapter of *Die Bäder von Lucca*, that describes how the ridiculous character Gumpelino quotes an atmospheric passage from Shakepspeare's *Romeo and Juliet* about a melancholic dusk settling, while he and the narrator are experiencing a sunny Italian morning.

[243] For further reading on the discourse of trivialization in nineteenth century literature see also Georg Bollenbeck: ''Mich lockt der Wald mit grünen Zweigen aus dumpfer Stadt und trüber Luft.' Zu Trivialisierungstendenzen des Wandermotivs in der Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts', in: *Sprachkunst* 9 (1978) pp. 241–271.

[244] See Helmut Gold, *Erkenntnisse unter Tage: Bergbaumotive in der Literatur der Romantik* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990).

[245] *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, vol. 1, 'Heinrich von Ofterdingen', pp. 183–370, here p. 242.

joyful and fascinating adventure stands in stark contrast to both Heine's and Droste-Hülshoff's description of the subterranean as a place of danger and disillusionment. Although Droste-Hülshoff's marl pit resembles more a grave ('Katakomben-Bau') or an auction stall ('Trödelbude', 'Gant') than a treasury, it is clearly not without its allure, although what the narrator of 'Die Mergelgrube' discovers is neither enchantment nor reassurance in the beauty of nature, but rather the signs of destruction and extinction as necessary and undeniable elements of the natural history of the earth. Had nature, in the Romantic tradition, come to signify a mysterious totality, which was revealed to those who ventured below ground, then the same journey underground now showed nature as the site of the most violent and fundamental historical progressions. As Droste-Hülshoff was writing 'Die Mergelgrube', recent geological explorations of the subterranean, like the famous investigation of the Kirkdale caves in Yorkshire in 1821 by the Oxford geologist William Buckland, had changed the connotation of caves, mines and pits from places of wonder at the ahistorical beauty of nature to places where one could gaze into the terrifying abyss of geological deep time. Buckland's Kirkdale studies were hailed at the moment of their publication as a prime example of geology's ability to really reconstruct a moment in history and to let an audience experience the past through a sort of scientific story-telling, a fact that Buckland's colleague William Daniel Conybeare highlighted in his poem 'The Hyaena's Den at Kirkdale near Kirby Moorside in Yorkshire, discovered A.D. 1821', as we can see in the stanzas quoted below:

> But of all the miraculous caves
> And all of their miraculous stories
> Kirby hole all its brethren outbraves
> With Buckland to tell of its glories.
>
> Bucklandus ipse loquitur
>
> Ages long ere our planet was formed
> (I beg pardon) before it was drown'd,
> Fierce and fell were the monsters that swarmed
> Roared and rolled in these hollows profound.
>
> […]
>
> Mystic Cavern, the gloom of thy rock,
> Shedding light on each point that was dark
> Tells the hour by Shrewsbury clock,
> When old Noah went into Ark.
>
> By the crust of thy Stalactite floor,
> The Post-Adamite ages I've reckoned,
> Summed their years, days & hours & more,
> And I find it comes right to a second.

Mystic Cavern, thy chasms sublime,
All the chasms of History supply,
What was done ere the birth day of time,
Thro one other such hole I could spy.[246]

Like Schimper's 'Ode an die Eiszeit', Conybeare's humorous poem mostly expressed a sense of elation about new scientific discoveries as it focused on the powers of geology to bring the past to life, making prehistoric times not only intelligible, but almost tangible. In comparison, Droste-Hülshoff's poem has a very different tone: Far from revelling in the past coming to life, it mostly expresses the anxieties and uncertainties that came with the present being reduced to a fleeting moment by the onslaught of the sheer immensity of times gone by. While Schimper and Conybeare placed their focus on the new geological insights themselves, Droste-Hülshoff depicted geology as both a portal to a past world and as a potential threat for modern man. As her narrator's mind runs through several different geological discourses, it becomes clear that the question of how human beings fit into these newly unfolding historical processes is the central cause of the combination of fear, fascination and fatigue which the poem expresses. As Droste-Hülshoff was writing 'Die Mergelgrube', the point in time at which human beings entered history was still up for debate and the question whether or not modern human beings had ancient predecessors was yet unanswered. The uniformitarianism developed by Charles Lyell in the 1830s claimed that the earth's history was a result of continuous processes of transformation that were still happening in the present day, eradicating the divide between the former world and the modern world. As early as 1827 Lyell privately followed Lamarck when he speculated that human beings must have evolved out of other species, possibly apes, adding a new concreteness to the general interconnectedness of life-forms, which Lamarck and Oken had already proposed on a much more general level. While the endless chains of cells ('Wie endlos ihre Zellenreihn gebaut!') in 'Die Mergelgrube' alludes to Oken's theory of cellular relations between all living beings, the question how modern man fitted into an evolutionary system remained unanswered. It would be two more decades until Darwin would publish *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 and Lyell his *Geological Evidence of the Antiquity of Man* in 1863, closing the gap between modern and ancient human life, but for the time being, the general anxiety about human origins prevailed, prompting the poem's urgent question 'War ich der erste Mensch oder der letzte?'.

[246] William Daniel Conybeare, 'The Hyaena's Den at Kirkdale near Kirby Moorside in Yorkshire, discovered A.D. 1821' (Oxford/London: 1822), facsimile print, Oxford Bodleian Libraries.

The motif of the last man had been given a literary form twice in the first half of the nineteenth century; first in 1815 by Jean-Baptiste Cousin de Grainville with *Le Dernier Homme* and then in 1826, when Mary Shelley published *The Last Man*. Both texts tell stories about a future in which humanity has come to the brink of extinction. Grainville described a world in which all people but one man and one woman have become sterile. After finding each other they are ultimately prevented from reproducing by the reappearance of Adam, the first man, who informs them about God's plan to have the history of humanity end with them. Shelley's novel depicted a group of characters trying to escape the spreading plague that had ravaged humanity at the end of the twenty-first century and one after the other succumbing to either some illness or dying in accidents, until the protagonist Lionel remains as the sole survivor and becomes the last man.

Both Grainville and Shelley depicted the history of humankind ultimately leading to a dead end after bringing forth increased isolation and uncertainty for modern man. The allusion to Native Americans ('Blaßgesicht and rothe Haut') belonged to the same historical discourse that had informed Lenau's America poems. As Ritchie Robertson has shown, Droste-Hülshoff's metaphor suggested that the extinction of indigenous peoples – and perhaps all people – was part of natural history: if other lifeforms had vanished or turned to stone, then this demise could possibly await modern man as well.[247] These are the anxieties that Droste-Hülshoff's narrator confronts as he descends further into both the marl pit and his own mind. Caught up between different scientific discourses, he shows similarities to Lenau's solitary figures and Heine's detached observers. What is striking here is the way Droste-Hülshoff activated her readers to join her narrator in his quest. As we have mentioned above, the beginning of the poem, with its injunction to dig deeper, can be considered as an invitation to investigate and interpret. When we take a closer look at the temporality of the poem, we notice that the whole experience of the narrator in the marl pit, as well as his confrontational encounter with the naïve shepherd, have already happened, as they are recalled mostly in the past tense. The meeting between narrator and shepherd is partly recalled in the present tense, lending a sense of immediacy to the scene, but then reverting back into the past tense, clearly marking the episode as finished and over by the time the reader arrives at the poem's beginning.

The excavations and observations of the reader in the very first part of the poem, however, happen in the present tense, insistently situating the readers in act of reading and

[247] See Ritchie Robertson, 'Faith and fossils. Annette von Droste-Hülshoff's poem Die Mergelgrube''in: *Das schwierige neunzehnte Jahrhundert. Germanistische Tagung zum 65. Geburtstag von Eda Sagarra im August 1998*, ed. by Jürgen Barkhoff et al. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), pp. 345–354.

interpreting. Thus, the narrator's experience turns into yet another piece of anecdotal evidence to consider alongside the geological discourses the poem alludes to. This activation of a reflective and responsible reader was in accordance to the changed practices of the knowledge society during the Biedermeier period, the influence of which can be detected in literary works as well as in publications of popular sciences.

When James Hall published his *Revolutions on the Earth's Surface* in 1814, he included a map pointing to specific sites at Corstorphine Hill near Edinburgh, inviting his readers to go there and see for themselves the grooves and scratches in the rock, which he considered evidence for an enormous diluvian wave that had moved massive boulders and which he therefore called 'diluvian facts'. Just as this new kind of geology expected educated laypeople to actively engage with the theories and methods that were presented to them, instead of blindly trusting the work of experts, Droste-Hülshoff's poem does not present itself as a closed-off masterpiece of inspiration, but instead invites its readers to a dialogue based on a shared cultural background and previous knowledge.

'Die Mergelgrube' therefore can be considered a document of the changing function of literature and the understanding of readership during the first half of the nineteenth century. Poetry was no longer perceived as a revelation, but instead became a reflection of its readers. In accordance with this, nature, as we encounter it in Droste-Hülshoff's poetry, was turned into a multidimensional object of various competing discourses, which could be assessed and experienced from many different angles: Through scientific exploration, aesthetic contemplation, theological revelation, psychological projection, or as a place of convergence with the non-human. In Droste-Hülshoff's oeuvre we can find examples of all these approaches to the natural world and usually they are shown to be interconnected, either harmoniously completing each other or, perhaps more often, creating conflict and tension, which the Biedermeier reader would have had to contemplate cautiously and navigate with great care. Whereas the poetic depiction of scientific discoveries was perhaps the most striking feature of Droste-Hülshoff's poetry of nature, it was completed by her reflections on the aesthetic and theological dimension of nature, which I will explore in the following.

Aesthetic Contemplation of Nature: 'Die Vogelhütte'

'Die Vogelhütte' depicts, as Grit Dommes has remarked, a human-made structure embedded in a natural environment, placed there for a very specific purpose, namely the observation and attraction of birds by a fowler.[248] The narrator of the poem has sought refuge from a

[248] See Grit Dommes, 'Die Vogelhütte', in: *Droste-Hülshoff Handbuch*, pp. 225–230, here p. 225.

torrential rainstorm here, and while he waits for the rain to come to an end, he contemplates both his immediate surroundings – describing the rain outside and the interior of the cabin in great detail – and the production and reception of poetry. As it turns out, the sudden rain has prevented him from reaching a nearby castle in time for a reading of his poetry, which he now fears will be misrepresented and criticized in his absence – a drastic intervention of nature, so it seems, that now inspires an exploration of the relationship between nature and aesthetic form.

Dommes as well as Winfried Woesler have pointed out how this specific conflation suggests the possibility of reading 'Die Vogelhütte' as a poem highly concerned with poetry and poetics, especially with the writing of poetry in relation to nature.[249] The setting appears at the same time to be extremely plausible and strikingly symbolic. The poet observes nature through the confinements of the poetic form (the cabin), at the same time embedded in and kept apart from his natural surroundings (a distance that is emphasized by the rain, which drenches the heath, but never touches the narrator in the cabin, although he comes to fantasize about it). Meanhwile the reading of his poetry takes place in a sphere that is spatially as well as socially distinct from the surroundings of the poet (the castle). The explicit reference to the title that was eventually given to the cycle of poems in which 'Die Vogelhütte' was published – 'Hier möcht ich Heidebilder schreiben'– marks the cabin as the imaginary place from which Droste-Hülshoff's poetic exploration of the heath commenced, consequently turning all aspects of the small cabin into symbols for different elements of the cycle's poetic structure. As Grywatsch has shown, this ties into Droste-Hülshoff's extensive use of topography as a metaphor for poetry, which allowed her to reflect on her own poetics through a process of spatialization.[250] As we will see in the following analysis of 'Die Vogelhütte', this spatialization not only served as a metaphorical exploration of the poetic structure of a poem and its relationship to the natural world, but also enabled Droste-Hülshoff to integrate into her poetry an explicit reflection on the context in which her poetry would be read and speculations on how it might be received by a specific audience.

As we will see, 'Die Vogelhütte', in a manner not unlike the one we have been able to detect in 'Die Mergelgrube', tapped into previous knowledge that it ascribed to its readers and therefore invited a specific engagement with the poem as a contribution to a discourse and dialogue about the form and function of nature poetry.

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[249] See Dommes again as well as Winfried Woesler, 'Annette von Droste-Hülshoff: Die Vogelhütte. Eine Interpretation', in: *Natur im Blick. Über Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, Goethe und Zeitgenossen*, ed. by Franz Schwarzbauer, Winfried Woesler (Bern: Peter Lang, 2017), pp. 47–65.

[250] See Jochen Grywatsch, 'Poetische Imagination und räumliche Struktur. Zu einer Poetologie des Raumes bei Annette von Droste-Hülshoff', in: *Droste-Jahrbuch* 7 (2009), pp. 69–94.

'Die Vogelhütte' consists of four distinct parts, which are focused on various aspects of the location and experience of the narrator as well as different elements of the poetic relationship to nature. The parts are clearly defined and separated by their varying rhyme schemes and metres, creating the impression of four different poems contained in one and therefore reflecting, in miniature, the larger context of the poem cycle as a collection of various poetic forms. At the same time, the juxtaposition of these different poetic modes of expression creates a noticeable comic effect: the selection of one form over another begins to appear slightly arbitrary and the rapid changes between poetic forms (from the extremely long lines of the first part, with their resemblance to ancient octameters, to the lively abab rhyme structure of the second part, and the comparatively short lines of the final part that resembles a sonnet) makes their execution seem like a game, played solely to provide some sort of divertissement in the confinements of both the cabin and the poetic space. From the perspective of an 1840s readership familiar with almanacs, literary periodicals and anthologies as a common feature of Biedermeier literary culture, this conspicuous accumulation of poetic forms pointed towards the superficiality of mass-produced trivial poetry widely published and read during that time – a point that is further emphasized in 'Die Vogelhütte' by the description of literary circles coming together in a comfortable salon to read poetry without a true understanding of its value:

> Denk ich an die heitre Stube, an das weiche Kanapée,
> Und wie mein Gedicht, das meine, dort zerlesen wird beim Thee:
>
> Denk ich an die schwere Zunge, die statt meiner es zerdrischt,
> Bohrend wie ein Schwertfisch möcht ich schießen in den Wassergischt.[251]

The critique of contemporary trivial literary culture can be considered a link to the shepherd's song in 'Die Mergelgrube', but also to other poetic depictions of trivialization in the collection of Droste-Hülshoff's poems published in 1844, for example in 'An die Schriftstellerinnen in Deutschland und Frankreich' in *Zeitbilder*, as well as 'Der Theetisch', and 'Dichters Naturgefühl' in *Scherz und Ernst*. It is striking that both 'An die Schriftstellerinnen' and 'Dichters Naturgefühl' explicitly show trivialization in relation to a poetic rendering of the natural world. In 'An die Schriftstellerinnen', female writers are criticized for either following an outdated Romantic-bucolic tradition in depicting nature as a mysterious object of desire, or dissolving completely in sensual unity with the world. Instead, the poem calls on them to show moderation when turning attention to the true voice of nature – 'Weckt der Natur geheimnißreichste Laute'[252] –, which is described as a temple

[251] HKA vol. 1.1, p. 39.
[252] Ibid., p. 18.

not built by human hands (interestingly enough the metaphor of nature as a temple also appears in 'Die Vogelhütte' , this time with an ironic twist, which will be further analysed below). In a similar fashion, in 'Dichters Naturgefühl', the narrator describes his own approach to nature, which is characterized by attentiveness and adeptness, previous knowledge and even expertise (as insinuated by the self-description as a 'Kenner'[253]), as well as a realistic assessment of the physical challenges of walking through a boggy forest (he wears rubber boots), which is then presented in stark contrast to the completely deluded attitude of a young man he encounters, who seems unaware of his natural surroundings and instead lost in the imaginary world of novels, plays, and poems, such as Schiller's *Don Carlos* and 'Der Jüngling am Bache', and the fairy-tales from *The Arabian Nights*.[254]

Thus, keeping this recurrent conjunction of trivial poetry and nature as a poetic object in Droste-Hülshoff's work in mind, the variety of different poetic styles displayed in 'Die Vogelhütte' alludes to a central point the poem makes, namely that modern nature poetry cannot speak about nature without speaking about conventional nature poetry first. The change in the perception of the narrow confinements of the cabin, which is at first perceived as a sort of grave or prison by the narrator and then, in his imagination, gradually transformed into a hermitage, begins to make sense if we read 'Die Vogelhütte' in this way: The only way out of the constrictive web that tradition has cast over the relationship between nature and poetry is through an active and explicit engagement with this aesthetic legacy. The disappearance of nature behind literary conventions was something that Heine, as we have already seen, had also noticed and depicted in both his poetry and his prose writing. But while Heine's reaction to this dilemma was to explore the way of negative poetics of nature which revealed nature to be deeply entangled in social processes and vice versa, Droste-Hülshoff introduces other approaches aside from aesthetic contemplation into her poetry to show nature as something that ultimately eluded an exhaustive poetic rendering.

Strewn throughout 'Die Vogelhütte', we can find signs which point to these other approaches to understanding the natural world, integrated as objects into the interior of the cabin and therefore explicitly embedded in the poetics Droste-Hülshoff proposes here. The hammer and hat point towards geological explorations such as are undertaken in 'Die Mergelgrube'. That they are forgotten and left behind once the narrator returns to the castle could be considered a hint that this approach to the natural world is not welcomed and

[253] Ibid., p. 181.
[254] For further reading on the contrasting figures of the poet and the young man see Frauke E. Lenckos, 'The Sublime, Irony, and "das Wunderbare" in Annette von Droste-Hülshoff's poetry', in *Colloquia Germanica*, 29.4 (1996), pp. 303–321, especially pp. 308–310.

cherished in some literary circles that resist a scientific understanding of nature. The discussion of possible titles for the poem, which the narrator feels inspired to write, also reflects the expectation to infuse a nature poem with metaphysical meaning:

> Hier möcht ich Heidebilder schreiben, zum Exempel:
> 'Die Vogelhütte', nein – 'der Heerd', nein besser:
> 'Der Knieende in Gottes weitem Tempel.'[255]

The fact that although the narrator here considers 'Der Knieende in Gottes weitem Tempel' as the superior title, we as readers already know that the actual title of the poem will end up being 'Die Vogelhütte', points perhaps towards another process of contemplation and deliberation yet to come. The temporality implied herein further emphasizes the poem as an open construct, a work-in-progress. While the reader is already directly involved in the creative process, invited to contemplate possible titles for the poem – and thereby simultaneously reflecting on the different perspectives on nature as a material reality seen through the window of a cabin or as a sacred realm of divine revelation – the difference between the title suggested in the poem and the title eventually given to it also implies yet another step in the process of completing the poem. Therefore, neither the poem nor nature seems to be a fixed entity, which is presented to an audience in a definite form, but instead the genesis of the poem explicitly becomes part of the poem. In a way, this is of course a continuation of Friedrich Schlegel's Romantic concept of irony as a disclosure of the artistic process within the object of art. The self-conscious ruminations of 'Die Vogelhütte''s narrator, especially in the second part of the poem, in which he reflects on the poetic process as well as the possible ignorance of his future audience, fit very well into Schlegel's definition of irony as 'permanente Parekbase',[256] a constant disruption of the narrative flow to draw attention to the fact that the reader encounters a work of art. The narrator's casual remark about the Romantic appearance of nature in the same passage – ''S ist doch romantisch'– even seems to cleverly suggest an ironic use of Romantic irony. The conclusion that Droste-Hülshoff's poem reaches towards the end, though, clearly marks 'Die Vogelhütte' not as a Romantic, but as a post-Romantic poem about the aesthetic contemplation of nature.

The last two parts of the poem are set after the rain has stopped and the narrator has left the confinement of 'Die Vogelhütte'. Dommes and Grywatsch have drawn attention to the significance of the literary trope nature-after-rain. In the nineteenth century, the most popular reference would have been to Klopstock's deeply religious ode 'Die Frühlingsfeier'

[255] Ibid., p. 40.
[256] Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe*, vol. 18, p. 85.

(1771) and to the subsequent famous Klopstock allusion in Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* in 1774. We have already encountered a humorous engagement with this heritage in Heine's *Die Harzreise*, where the notion of immediately reacting to a natural phenomenon by referring back to literature – as Werther and Lotte do – was caricatured and ridiculed. Droste-Hülshoff's engagement with the trope is more subtle. In 'Die Vogelhütte', Klopstock's conflation of the greatest possible emotional experience with the observation of the tiniest living creature – the sight of a 'Frühlingswürmchen' moves the narrator to a tearful contemplation of his own existence in the great order of things – is turned into a mere observation of small insects, the great emotional reaction of the narrator is completely omitted. In fact, the narrator, who is so very present in the other three parts of the poem all but vanishes in this passage. Instead, a beetle takes on a central role, as it is not only described in great detail, but also given both its vernacular and its scientific name, included in a footnote:

> Jedes Kräutchen reckt sich auf,
> Und in langgestrecktem Lauf,
> Durch den Sand des Pfades eilend,
> Blitzt das gold'ne Panzerhemd
> Des Kurier's;* am Halme weilend
> Streicht die Grille sich das Naß
> Von der Flügel grünem Glas.
>
> *Buprestis, ein in allen Farben schimmernder Prachtkäfer, der sich im Haidekraut aufhält[257]

Footnotes are a common and, considering the genre of nature poetry at the time, highly unusual feature in Droste-Hülshoff's poetry. She included a footnote on the scientific name of clover, trifolium, in 'Der Weiher', explained in another footnote that 'Haidemann' in the poem of the same name referred to a specific kind of fog and not to a spectre, and added a footnote to the poem 'Der Säntis', in which she elaborated on Säntis being the highest mountain of the Swiss Alpstein massif. By adding a footnote with the scientific name of a beetle to a passage that otherwise celebrates the emergence of a renewed, glimmering, beautiful natural world after a rainstorm in a manner reminiscent of Klopstock's ode suggests that – in comparison to Heine – Droste-Hülshoff considered Klopstock's religious celebration of nature not ridiculous, but perhaps incomplete.

As Dommes and Heselhaus have pointed out, 'Die Vogelhütte' does not try to evoke an immediate experience of nature; instead, it shows poetic renderings of nature as always

[257] HKA, vol. 1.1, p. 42.

culturally mediated in advance.[258] While this certainly holds true, the poem perhaps goes even further not only in deconstructing the poetic experience of nature as premediated, but also in advocating a more multi-faceted approach to the natural world in general – after all, inserting scientific terminology is not the last step the poem takes. Instead, the final part describes the re-insertion of the narrator into society, clearly marked by the stroke of the clock from the castle's tower. The figure of the solitary self returning to society after an immersive experience of nature occurs in several different forms throughout the *Heidebilder* cycle – we have encountered it in 'Die Mergelgrube' when the narrator emerges and meets the shepherd, but it is also the final element of both 'Der Hünenstein' and 'Der Knabe im Moor'. The last part of 'Die Vogelhütte', with its loose sonnet form, marked by dashes that suggest an ongoing thought process, casts a different light than the previous parts of the poem on the society that awaits the narrator in the castle. Perhaps the members of the literary circle have been 'discret', considerate and understanding, waiting for the poet to arrive from his exile, which he suddenly cannot imagine imposing on himself any longer:

> Ich weiß es nicht, ich kann es nicht begreifen,
> wie ich so gänzlich mich vom Leben schied –
> doch freilich – damals war ich Eremit![259]

The experience inside the cabin, the solitary reflection on the poetics of nature are abruptly relegated to the past, the hermit appearing as yet another strange and outdated role a poet could play, while the present, conclusive moment of the poem becomes one of reintegration of poetry into society. Perhaps the implied change of the title from 'Der Knieende in Gottes weitem Tempel' to 'Die Vogelhütte' can even be considered to be the result of a conversation that is about to happen. In this sense, 'Die Vogelhütte' not only turns a poem about poetry and nature into a space for reflections on broken subjectivity, as Dommes concludes, but it ultimately emphasizes a dialogue structure that involves an engagement with poetic conventions, scientific discourse and religious tradition as much as it implies an active role of the readership. In this sense a poem such as 'Die Vogelhütte' connects the self-reflection of poetry through Romantic irony to a Biedermeier subjectivity that evolves through dialogue and discourse both in a social setting and in the engagement with scientific knowledge and poetic tradition. Nature, in this context, becomes not something that is revealed through poetry, but rather something that is constructed in a web-like discourse, with poetry being able to inspire and facilitate a multidimensional engagement.

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[258] See Dommes, p. 228 and Clemens Heselhaus, 'Die Heidebilder der Droste', in *Jahrbuch der Droste Gesellschaf*t 3 (1959), pp. 145–172, here p. 151.
[259] HKA, vol. 1.1, p. 42.

Natural Revelations: 'Am dritten Sonntage nach Ostern'

Compared to the poems we have previously discussed, 'Am dritten Sonntage nach Ostern', which was written slightly earlier than 'Die Mergelgrube' and 'Die Vogelhütte' in the spring of 1839, at first glance depicts (scientific) knowledge in a very negative light as the often referenced line 'Mein Wissen mußte meinen Glauben tödten' seems to pointedly display.[260] Throughout the poem, the presence of nature, exemplified by birds, woods and changing meteorological phenomena such as thunderstorms, winds and rainbows, is juxtaposed with the apparent absence of God, who is mostly referred to in direct conjunction with an explicit negation: 'Ich sehe dich *nicht*!', 'Du thust es *nicht*;', 'Schaut *nicht* der Herr zu diesen Fenstern aus?' 'Ists deine Leuchte *nicht*, gewaltig Wesen?'.[261]

Befitting the context of *Das geistliche Jahr*, a collection that follows the structure of a lectionary in assembling pericopes, short passages from scripture assigned to each Sunday and holiday of the liturgical year, and pairing them with a poem that engages with the central theological significance of the pericope, the poetry of 'Am dritten Sonntage nach Ostern' is completely devoid of the humorous tone that is so frequently detectable in Droste-Hülshoff's secular poetry. Instead the despair of the poem's narrator becomes palpable through the repetition of questions and appeals to an apparently absent and unconcerned God, who is searched for, but never found in the natural world.

In his study on the imagery of *Das geistliche Jahr*, Stephan Berning has traced this focus on the natural world as a presumed place of divine revelation back to the tradition of pietist literature of the seventeenth century, which saw the emergence of a particular genre of spiritual writing that combined pericopes with educational poems concerned with natural phenomena.[262] The metaphor of the great book of nature, which we have already mentioned above, carried an explicit religious connotation here, suggesting a deliberate act of creation, a form of divine authorship behind the appearance of the physical world. As Berning has pointed out, this meant that nature and natural phenomena were not simply used in a metaphorical way to speak about theological questions, but instead the book of nature became a second, separate set of signs, which the faithful observer could study alongside the Bible and which could analogously reveal God's presence.

In contrast to the pietist tradition of pericopes and nature poems, the narrator of 'Am dritten Sonntage nach Ostern' at first denies the revelatory quality of nature adamantly in

[260] HKA, vol. 4.1, p. 67.
[261] Ibid., pp. 67–68, emphasis G.J.
[262] Stephan Berning: *Sinnbildsprache. Zur Bildstruktur des Geistlichen Jahrs der Annette von Droste-Hülshoff* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1975), pp. 20–21.

the poem's initial line: 'Ich seh dich nicht!'. The setting of the poem, as it is depicted in the second stanza, shows some striking similarities to the fowler's hunting cabin in 'Die Vogelhütte':

> Heiß ist der Tag;
> Die Sonne prallte von meiner Zelle Wand,
> Ein traulich Vöglein flattert ein und aus;
> Sein glänzend Auge fragt mich unverwandt:
> Schaut nicht der Herr zu diesen Fenstern aus?
> Was fragst du nach?
> Die Stirne muß ich senken und erröthen.
> O bittre Schmach!
> Mein Wissen mußte meinen Glauben tödten.[263]

The confinement to a room that is described as a cell ('Zelle'), which carries connotations of both a prison and a cloister, a window for birds to fly through and a solitary narrator are all elements that Droste-Hülshoff would employ again 'Die Vogelhütte'. As Thomas Wortmann has shown, 'Am dritten Sonntage nach Ostern' also contains an intertextual engagement with Klopstock's 'Die Frühlingsfeyer', which we have already encountered as a point of reference in 'Die Vogelhütte'.[264] The very different tone and atmosphere of 'Am dritten Sonntag' compared to 'Die Vogelhütte' is partly due to the different ways in which Droste-Hülshoff adapted the meteorological situation of Klopstock's ode in the two poems. While 'Die Vogelhütte' describes continuous, strong rain that eventually ends and reveals a glittering, refreshed heath in the sunlight, 'Am dritten Sonntage' follows Klopstock more closely by depicting a sunny day turning stuffy and oppressive before the air is cleared by a thunderstorm, followed by rain and ultimately a rainbow as the sun breaks through the clouds once more. If we read the third and fourth stanza of 'Am dritten Sonntage' alongside the passage from Klopstock's ode in which the weather changes, we can see how meticulously Droste-Hülshoff crafted her poem as an alteration of 'Die Frühlingsfeyer'. Her narrator searches for God in the unfolding thunderstorm, but recollects only what she has read and what she knows about thunderstorms:

> Die Wolke steigt,
> Und langsam über den azurnen Bau
> Hat eine Schwefelhülle sich gelegt.
> Die Lüfte wehn so seufzervoll und lau
> Und Angstgestöhn sich in den Zweigen regt;
> Die Heerde keucht.
> Was fühlt das stumpfe Thier; ists deine Schwüle?
> Ich steh gebeugt;
> Mein Herr berühre mich, daß ich dich fühle!

[263] HKA, vol. 4.1, p. 67.
[264] Thomas Wortmann, 'Am dritten Sonntage nach Ostern', in: *Droste-Hülshoff Handbuch*, pp. 143–147.

Ein Donnerschlag!
Entsetzen hat den kranken Wald gepackt.
Ich sehe, wie im Nest mein Vogel duckt,
Wie Ast an Ast sich ächzend reibt und knackt,
Wie Blitz an Blitz durch Schwefelgassen zuckt;
Ich schau ihm nach.
Ists deine Leuchte nicht, gewaltig Wesen?
Warum denn, ach!
Warum nur fällt mir ein was ich gelesen?[265]

In comparison, Klopstock's thunderstorm is experienced as a revelation, making visible the omnipresence of an otherwise invisible God:

Die Morgensonne wird schwül!
Wolken strömen herauf!
Das ist sichtbar der Ewige,
Der kömmt!
Nun fliegen, und wirbeln, und rauschen die Winde!
Wie beugt sich der bebende Wald!
Wie hebt sich der Strom!
Sichtbar, wie du es Sterblichen sein kannst,
Ja, das bist du sichtbar, Unendlicher!

Der Wald neigt sich!
Der Strom flieht!
Und ich falle nicht auf mein Angesicht?

Herr! Herr ! Gott! barmherzig! und gnädig!
Du Naher!
Erbarme dich meiner!
Zürnest, du, Herr, weil Nacht dein Gewand ist?
Diese Nacht ist Segen der Erde!
Du zürnest nicht, Vater!
Sie kömmt, Erfrischung auszuschütten
Über den stärkenden Halm!
Über die herzerfreuende Traube!
Vater! du zürnest nicht![266]

The striking similarities in what the two poems describe only serve to underline the difference in how the experience of the thunderstorm is perceived and interpreted by the poems' narrators. The enthusiastic and joyous affirmation of faith in 'Die Frühlingsfeyer' gives way to uncertainty and need for reassurance in 'Am dritten Sonntage', which seems partly to derive from the very fact that the narrator is haunted by both literary tradition and scientific knowledge. In a manner similar to the prefiguration of religious revelations depicted in the Old Testament, which are referenced both in the first and in the sixth stanza of 'Am dritten Sonntage', Klopstock's ode seems to have become a literary paradigm of the

[265] Ibid., pp. 67–68.
[266] Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, 'Die Frühlingsfeier' in: Id., *Werke und Briefe. Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, by Adolf Beck et al. (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2010), vol. 1.1, pp. 170–181, here pp. 176–178.

poetic experience of God in the natural world – to the dismay of Droste-Hülshoff's narrator, who is now not only burdened by her knowledge of the natural world, but also by the weight of a literary legacy, while all she desires is a direct, even physical union with God. The last line of the third stanza, 'Mein Herr, berühre mich, daß ich dich fühle!' emphasizes this point by reversing the motif of *noli me tangere*, the refusal of Christ to be touched by Mary Magdalene after his resurrection. In St John's Gospel, the touching and not touching of the resurrected Christ becomes a core theological issue, as Mary Magdalene obeys his command and is still assured of his presence, while the doubting Thomas needs the reassurance of a tactile experience and is therefore implicitly classified as a lesser believer ('Have you believed me because you have seen me?', asks Jesus of Thomas in John 20:29, 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'). The notion of believing without evidence, or even despite evidence that would suggest the absence of the divine, as the only true kind of faith is reflected as well in the pericope preceding 'Am dritten Sonntage nach Ostern' – 'Ueber ein Kleines werdet ihr mich sehen'– from John 16:16. The line is uttered after the last supper, when Christ bids farewell to his disciples. It simultaneously offers reassurance that he will return and predicts a future test of faith during a coming time of absence of his divine presence: 'Über ein kleines, so werdet ihr mich nicht sehen, und aber über ein kleines, so werdet ihr mich sehen;'– 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.' In the context of Christ's imminent departure (from both his disciples and the world), the emphasis is put here on the importance of a steadfast faith despite a lack of sensual certainty. Accordingly, the passage ends with the proclamation of Christ's ascension – 'I have overcome this world!' – a rejection of any form of worldly existence and a clear orientation towards transcendence instead of sensual certainty or evidence-based empiricism.

A similar disregard for earthly reality and a strong association of nature and worldly knowledge with vanity is a recurring theme throughout *Das geistliche Jahr* – in 'Am dritten Sonntage nach Ostern' only the afterlife can promise revelations beyond the fog-like obscurity of false wisdom ('eitler Weisheit Nebelschemen') and in 'Am ersten Sonntage nach h. drey Könige', the knowledge derived from studying nature is considered futile and vain:

> Ich habe dich in der Natur gesucht,
> Und weltlich Wissen war die eitle Frucht.[267]

[267] HKA, vol. 4.1, p. 7.

Although Droste-Hülshoff continued a Baroque tradition of associating the world with vanity and depicting nature not as a place of revelation, but of earthly knowledge, this line of thinking is interrupted in the fifth stanza of 'Am dritten Sonntage nach Ostern'. Here the darkness of the thunderstorm as well as the dark despair of the narrator are finally lifted and nature suddenly appears in a new light of grace and reconciliation:

> Das Dunkel weicht;
> Und wie ein leises Weinen fällt herab
> Der Wolkenthau; Geflüster fern und nah.
> Die Sonne senkt den goldenen Gnadenstab,
> Und plötzlich steht der Friedensbogen da.
> Wie? wird denn feucht
> Mein Auge, ist nicht Dunstgebild der Regen?
> Mir wird so leicht!
> Wie? kann denn Halmes Reibung mich bewegen?[268]

In a refusal of the aesthetic conventions of the sublime, it turns out to be not the spectacular power of the thunderstorm, but instead the soft sound of the rain, which deeply moves the narrator. Here the most minuscule phenomenon of nature, the friction between blades of grass, has the greatest effect. This sudden renunciation of almost catastrophic spectacles of nature in favour of small and seemingly mundane natural phenomena continued a notion that was already present in Klopstock's ode, in which tiny insects and single drops of water contained the ability to reveal the divine presence, just as much as the violent powers of thunderstorms. In this, both Klopstock and Droste-Hülshoff followed a tradition most famously represented by Barthold Heinrich Brockes, whose *Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott, bestehend in Physicalisch- und Moralischen Gedichten*, published in nine volumes between 1721 and 1748, celebrated the revelatory capacities of small natural phenomena such as insects and inconspicuous plants such as heather. In 'Am dritten Sonntage nach Ostern', the experience of the narrator also echoes the revelation of the prophet Elijah, who is made aware of God's presence not by a storm, an earthquake or a fire, but by the soft whispering of the wind, which Luther translated as 'stilles, sanftes Säuseln' and the King James Bible as a 'still, small voice'[269].

If we take into consideration that 'Am dritten Sonntage nach Ostern' is as much concerned with the natural world as it is with a literary tradition of nature as a place of revelation – Klopstock, Baroque poetry and the Bible are, as we have seen, all sources of influence for Droste-Hülshoff's literary imagery – then the emphasis put on the softness of the vocalization of God seems to harbour a poetic significance as well. What the last stanza

[268] Ibid., p. 68.
[269] I King 19:12

ultimately attempts to express is a teleological entwinement of both notions that were central throughout the poem: the world is vain in its fallen state, and yet not completely desolate and meaningless. Instead, it remains interspersed with small, almost epiphanic moments, which can be witnessed by paying close attention to the natural world. If we apply this theological principle to Droste-Hülshoff's poetics of nature, the attention she paid throughout her oeuvre to aspects of the natural world that were not conventional subjects of nature poetry, such as moss, filaments of water, marl, insects, or grass, clearly resonated with this idea.[270] The very fact that, as both Berning and Wortmann have pointed out, the unity of self, nature and God in 'Am dritten Sonntage nach Ostern' remains fundamentally broken, seems to lend the poetic mediation through the careful and well-informed rendering of specific natural phenomena an added urgency.

The influence of the Catholic Church in the German-speaking countries during the first half of the nineteenth century had been waning due to its loss of political, economic, and symbolic power in the wake of the extensive secularization movement from 1800 onwards. Whereas Protestantism found a way to intertwine with the newly emerging institutions of a bourgeois society, Catholics often developed private cultural practices of religious life.[271] The conflation of poetry and Christian – especially Catholic – piety in the nineteenth century had begun with the religious revival of late Romanticism. Friedrich Schlegel, Brentano, Eichendorff, and Görres understood their writing as a stronghold of religious sentiments against the destructive powers of rationality in both the philosophy and political culture of their time. As Jutta Osinski has shown, the literary Biedermeier piety of such authors as Droste-Hülshoff differed fundamentally from these late Romantic poetic projects. While the former were still indebted to a notion of aesthetic totality, the latter mostly offered a retreat into a private sphere of religious contemplation.[272] In accordance to this tendency, the traditional form of the lectionary that Droste-Hülshoff chose for her religious poetry seems to imply a reading situation that is characterized by a sort of solitary, scholarly engagement with both scripture and poetry. In this sense, the focus on divine revelations happening on a smaller scale served to make a further point, directly related to

[270] This focus on natural phenomena that were commonly considered small and insignificant was a prominent feature of physico-theological writing. See Wolfgang Philipp, *Das Werden der Aufklärung in theologiegeschichtlicher Sicht* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957).

[271] Although the mass pilgrimage to the Trierer Rock, during which half a million Catholic pilgrims came to Trier in the summer of 1844, can be considered a prominent counterexample. This well-organized public display of Catholic piety was part of the church's strategy to defend traditional forms of faith in a climate of secularisation and internalisation of religiosity.

[272] See Jutta Osinski, 'Katholische Restauration und "Biedermeier": Ästhetik, Religion und Politik in spätromantischen Harmoniemodellen. Sieben Thesen', in: *Zwischen Goethezeit und Realismus. Wandel und Spezifik in der Phase des Biedermeier*, ed. by Michael Titzmann (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002), pp. 183–195.

the cultural climate of the time: If God was present in the smallest of insects or droplets of water or blades of grass, then one did not need to look out for great signs, which would draw a lot of attention, meaning that even in a society which seemed to offer less and less space for religious truth, God could be assumed as a lasting presence, albeit an inconspicuous and silent one. Thus, in the context of nature as a space for divine revelation, 'Am dritten Sonntage nach Ostern' showed how religious conviction could slip through the cracks of that very knowledge which threatened to eradicate faith without discrediting scientific approaches to natural phenomena. This happens in accordance with the rejection of Feuerbach's anthropological explanation of religion which Droste-Hülshoff expressed in 'An die Schriftstellerinnen in Frankreich und Deutschland' on the grounds that this internalization of God reduced nature to mere matter:

> Ihr hörtet sie, die unterdrückten Klagen
> Der heiligen Natur, geprägt zur Dirne.
> Wer hat sie nicht gehört in diesen Tagen,
> Wo nur Ein Gott, der Gott im eignen Hirne?[273]

Instead of such a duality between God and the world, 'Am dritten Sonntage nach Ostern' carves out a space for divine presence in nature that is marked pointedly by its inconspicuousness, commanding the full attention of the faithful seeker.

Considering Non-Human Nature: 'Die Jagd'

Thus far our analysis of Droste-Hülshoff's poetry has mainly revealed a typical Biedermeier attitude of self-awareness, composure and precise observation based on specific previous knowledge as the preferred way of engaging with the natural world. This, of course, reinforced a concept of nature as the other, the object of domination through either scientific knowledge or aesthetic perception. Even the religious significance of nature as a realm in which the presence of God could be revealed through the contemplation of his absence served in a way the higher purpose of connecting the doubtful human self with the divine. The entanglement of the self in a natural environment, which Borgards finds in Droste-Hülshoff's poetry, has therefore been solely interpreted as the object of poetic reflection. To get a more complete understanding of Droste-Hülshoff's poetics of nature, it will be crucial to explore the moments in her writing that blur the boundaries of the self, so that an immersive experience of nature seems to become feasible through a poetic convergence with the non-human.

[273] HKA, vol. 1.1, p. 18.

One poem that derives its dynamic from this shift of focus towards the non-human actors inhabiting the natural world is 'Die Jagd', the second poem of *Heidebilder*. While most of the poems we have previously discussed featured a narrator whose perception and prior knowledge clearly coloured the experience that the poem evoked, 'Die Jagd' does not rely on such an involvement of a recognizable identificatory human figure. Instead it develops a decentred perspective that sometimes aligns closely with that of a fox, but overall stays versatile, fluid and hard to grasp. Two-thirds of the poem are devoid of an immediate human presence – although the wind sometimes carries the sound of a human voice through the forest – and dominated by the interaction between wild and domesticated animals around a clearing and a bog pond, known as a *Kolk*. The poem evokes a secluded place, almost hidden from the world: the word 'Dickicht', thicket, is repeated four times to describe the dense undergrowth of the surrounding forest, and the *Kolk*'s unique trait as a body of water that is not fed by a river or a spring, but instead relies solely on precipitation to sustain itself, seems to emphasize the remoteness and self-containment of the place, alluding to traditional depictions of the *locus amoenus*. Despite this, the clearing is also distinctly presented as a liminal space, where wild and domesticated nature interact, since it serves both as a habitat for wild animals and as a pasture for cattle. The approaching pack of hounds adds another layer of cultural significance to the natural environment. Droste-Hülshoff's initial plan to give the poem the title 'Weidendes Vieh' or 'Jagd und Weidendes Vieh'[274] further underlines the importance of the poem's setting in both a pasture and a hunting ground, showing a natural environment as an intersection of different kinds of human interaction with nature. In comparison to 'Die Vogelhütte', which is also set in a hunting cabin, but clearly focused on the narrator's experience of the place, 'Die Jagd' mostly emulates the perspective of the non-human participants. Even when a member of the hunting party finally steps onto the scene in the fourth stanza, he is observed and described from an outside perspective:

> Das grüne Käppchen auf dem Ohr,
> Den halben Mond am Lederband
> Trabt aus der Lichtung rasch hervor
> Bis mitten in das Haideland
> Ein Waidmann ohne Tasch und Büchse;
> Er schwenkt das Horn, er ballt die Hand,
> Dann setzt er an, und tausend Füchse
> Sind nicht so kräftig todtgeblasen,
> Als heut es schmettert über'n Rasen.[275]

[274] See the documentation on the development of 'Die Jagd' in HKA vol. 1.2, p. 719.
[275] HKA, vol. 1.1, p. 38.

The verb ‘traben’, to trot, which is commonly applied to horses’ gait, but in ‘Die Jagd’ also describes the movements of a fox (‘Und zuckelt fürder seinen Trab’, ‘Gelassen trabt er, schleppt den Schweif’), associates the traits of animals belonging to the hunting party with those that are usually hunted.

The human presence in the last third of the poem is clearly depicted as an intrusion, disrupting the previous balance between wild and domesticated nature: The arrival of humans is marked by sudden loud noises – ‘Ein Schuß: “Halloh!” ein zweiter Schuß: “Hoho!”’, ‘Und dann – ein Schuß, und dann – ein Jubelschrei!’–, shots and a cry of joy echoing through the forest. The following hunter’s song and the sound of his bugle are described as equally loud and blaring (‘schmettert’). This final cacophony creates a stark contrast to the first four lines of the poem, which had evoked a great silence:

> Die Luft hat schlafen sich gelegt,
> Behaglich in das Moos gestreckt,
> Kein Rispeln, das die Kräuter regt,
> Kein Seufzer, der die Halme weckt.[276]

The silence in the beginning and the noise at the end of the poem frame a soundscape that is developed throughout ‘Die Jagd’ and that is indicative of the relationship between the human and the non-human, their convergence as well as their disparity. The silence of the first part of the poem is repeatedly interspersed with the sounds of the approaching hunting party and their hounds, but the sounds are still far away and integrated into the other noises audible in the forest around the clearing:

> Da horch, ein Ruf, ein ferner Schall:
> ‘Hallo! hoho!’ so lang gezogen,
> Man meint, die Klänge schlagen Wogen
> Im Ginsterfeld, und wieder dort:
> ‘Hallo! hoho!’ - am Dickicht fort
> Ein zögernd Echo, - alles still!
> Man hört der Fliege Angstgeschrill
> Im Mettennetz, den Fall der Beere,
> Man hört im Kraut des Käfers Gang,
> Und dann wie ziehnder Kranichheere
> Kling klang! von ihrer luft'gen Fähre,
> Wie ferner Unkenruf: Kling! klang!
> Ein Läuten das Gewäld entlang -
> Hui schlüpft der Fuchs den Wall hinab -
> Er gleitet durch die Binsenspeere,
> Und zuckelt fürder seinen Trab:
> Und aus dem Dickicht, weiß wie Flocken,
> Nach stäuben die lebend'gen Glocken,
> Radschlagend an des Dammes Hang;

[276] Ibid., p. 36.

Wie Aale schnellen sie vom Grund,
Und weiter, weiter, Fuchs und Hund.[277]

Several of the sounds described are not the kind a human ear would be easily able to pick up. While the buzzing of a fly trapped in a spider's web might still produce a noticeable noise, the walk of a beetle through weeds, or a berry falling to the forest floor, are sounds humans would not normally notice. Thus, the first part of 'Die Jagd' subtly suggests that the kind of perception depicted might not belong to a human being – it could possibly belong to the fox instead, or perhaps to some other animal possessing a more acute sense of hearing than humans. The repetition of onomatopoeic elements, especially in the first part of 'Die Jagd' ('Hallo! Hoho!', 'Kling! klang!'), further develops the perspective of the non-human by effectively softening the boundary between language and sound. The poem's strong emphasis on acoustics is also conveyed by the fact that the kind of hunt depicted here, the so-called 'Brackade', is commonly known as loud hunt, 'laute Jagd', because it relies so much on sound. 'Bracken', a pack of small hounds native to Westphalia, follow a scent while constantly signal-barking to inform the hunter of their whereabouts, thus allowing the hunting party to track their movements by ear. Droste-Hülshoff depicts what could be considered a seamless human-animal interaction through a constant communicative process between hound and hunter as an extremely disruptive practice, which even disturbs the poem on the formal level of metre and rhyme scheme and alters the length of the different sections the poem is divided in. While the first stanza, which follows fox and hound through the thicket, continues for the first forty-nine lines without interruption, and the second stanza, in which the herd of cattle grazes on the clearing, spans eighteen lines, the stanzas after the first shot is fired in line sixty-eight become noticeably shorter, spanning no more than nine lines. The hunter's song, crudely celebrating the fox's death and anticipating the following hanging and skinning, not only consists of two very short stanzas (covering five and six lines respectively) compared to the rest of the poem, but the lines themselves are also shorter and the simple rhyme scheme – both stanzas involve one rhyme (abxb) and otherwise non-rhyming lines –as well as the many repetitions of single words and whole phrases throughout the song, underline its vulgar and brutish character. The insertion of a simplistic song towards the end of the poem is a structure we are already familiar with from 'Die Mergelgrube'. The hunter's song in 'Die Jagd' resembles the shepherd's song in both form and function: Both mark a stark contrast to the surrounding poem's poetic qualities and sensibilities with regard to the natural world. They represent a form of regression to an all-

[277] Ibid.

too simplistic and misguided view of nature, which in 'Die Jagd' is not only depicted as naïve, but brutal and destructive. Thus, the victory, ostentatiously celebrated by the hunter in the end – 'Doch lauter, lauter schallt die Gloria / Braust durch den Ginster die Victoria:'– does not appear like a glorious occasion at all, but instead comes to signify deterioration, as the non-human finally succumbs to a loud and brash human presence.

Although the hunter represents this human presence in the most obvious and brutal way, 'Die Jagd' shows the relationship of humans with their natural environment also through the behaviour of domesticated animals. The hounds are clearly depicted as noisy and aggressive in comparison to the fox's sly and almost elegant demeanour and the roaring, stumbling cows are described as clunky and noisy intruders into the forest. Their presence leads from the first part of the poem, which, as Jochen Grywatsch has pointed out, describes a relatively undisturbed and self-contained nature devoid of human influences, over into the second part of the poem, in which human presence comes to be the dominant feature in the forest scene.[278]

The use of the forest as a pasture for cattle, a practice common in rural regions during the nineteenth century, especially in those parts that still had some common land, was part of a public debate about the ownership and exploitation of land and natural resources which Droste-Hülshoff addressed explicitly in *Die Judenbuche*. Throughout the novella, the protagonist Friedrich Mergel is corrupted by his uncle to take part in his wood theft enterprises, which leads to further criminal activity and finally murder. As Gray has pointed out in his analysis of *Die Judenbuche*, Droste-Hülshoff depicts wood theft – which was the most widespread and common criminal act in the German-speaking countries in the first half of the nineteenth century and especially prevalent in Westphalia with its dense forests – in ambivalent terms.[279] While Friedrich Mergel and his uncle are clearly shown to be villains, their moral failure is not necessarily attributed to the fact that they steal wood, but that they do so for financial profit. Gray has shown the extremely nuanced contemporary discussion on wood-poaching to involve opinions ranging from the condemnation of it as a criminal act to lenity towards members of the poor rural population collecting wood for their own sustenance.

Herding cattle into the forest to let them graze there was a similarly contested issue. With common lands becoming increasingly rare during the decades following the Prussian reforms of the early nineteenth century, small-scale farmers, who owned very little land or

[278] See Jochen Grywatsch, 'Die Jagd', in: *Annette von Droste-Hülshoff Handbuch*, ed. by Cornelia Blasberg, Jochen Grywatsch (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2018), pp. 221–225, here p. 222.
[279] See Richard T. Gray, *Money Matters*, p. 313f.

none, had to rely on the clemency of wealthy landowners to let them graze their cattle on their property. If we consider 'Die Jagd' in this context, then the hunt – a sport reserved for members of the nobility – and the cattle grazing in a forest that is clearly not intended to be used as a pasture – the thicket and the boggy ground would be obstructive and even hazardous for cows – could also point towards a double use of the forest that was indicative of a greater social conflict (a point that would have been underlined by the discarded title 'Jagd und Weidendes Vieh'). Grywatsch has pointed out that Droste-Hülshoff may have criticized the habits of the noble class she belonged to in a subtle way by depicting the senseless cruelty of the hunt, but he does not relate this to the grazing cattle (one of which is described as sickly), which could perhaps be considered as a stand-in for the needs of the rural poor.

Despite the underlying tension between the implied double use of the forest as both hunting ground and pasture, the grazing cows around the *Kolk* lake are at the same time an example of human utilization of the natural world and an image of almost idyllic coexistence between agricultural practices and a natural environment at a time when wetlands all over the German speaking countries were disappearing at rapid speed to give way to fields and pastures. Like the overgrowths of forests untouched by agroforestry that are so vividly depicted in 'Die Jagd', the bogs and moors, which are frequently featured in Droste-Hülshoff's poetry, were slowly vanishing at the time she was writing her *Heidebilder*. In this sense, while cattle grazing on a clearing might be considered intruders in the habitat of the fox, and even though they are indeed described as rather loud and ungainly, not really adapted to their environment, they still represent a harmonious way of bringing human culture and nature together, one which Droste-Hülshoff saw increasingly disappear. In this context, the hunt seems not only to depict the cruelty of the actual hunting practices of the nobility, but to allude to fundamental aberrations in the way humanity had come to relate to nature through domination. In comparison to the poems we have previously analysed, 'Die Jagd' then can be considered not only as a mediator between the different approaches to the experience of nature that educated Biedermeier readers would find themselves struggling to reconcile – scientific, aesthetic and theological perspectives – but as an alternative to and critique of these discourses. When the hunters' clunky and repetitive song overtakes the poem towards the end, this can be considered as both as a reference to the complicity of poetry in the process of dominating nature and as an insistence on the need for a radically different poetics of nature: As one hunter has killed the fox, whose elegant and swift movements had been analogous to the long first stanza consisting of four-footed iambics,

another hunter has destroyed Droste-Hülshoff's poem by drowning out its previous sound with his own noisy and crude song – the death of the fox becomes synonymous with the end of the poem. In this way, 'Die Jagd' reaffirms its own alliance with the non-human, whose perspective it depicts in the first two parts of the poem that Grywatsch has compared to Brockes' physico-theological poetics based on their almost documentary style.[280] For Gertrud Bauer Pickar, on the other hand, this blending of a human perspective into a natural environment is closely connected to the role of fantasy in Droste-Hülshoff's poetics. According to her analysis, the fantastical elements in Droste-Hülshoff's poetry emphasize its fictional nature. They mark the realm of literature as an impossible alternative space in which the boundary drawn around human existence, firmly guarded by society, can be lifted.[281]

Like Droste-Hülshoff's poetry, which depicted nature as a place where various concepts and perspectives intersected, its original Biedermeier readers would have considered themselves mediators between different discourses. The sense of existing in a historical moment of transition, as members of a society that was undergoing fundamental changes, was ever-present in the self-understanding of Droste-Hülshoff's contemporaries. We have already seen this notion pointedly expressed in Heine's self-identification as simultaneously the last of the Romantics and the first of the modern poets, as well as Lenau's poetic anticipation of the coming end of history. In the writing of Droste-Hülshoff we find no such self-stylization, but instead the suggestion of a dialogue between poem and reader, and an invitation extended to the audience to select from previously acquired knowledge and mediate between different orders of knowledge. Droste-Hülshoff's poetry did not necessarily evoke an experience, but depicted possibilities of experiences of nature alongside scientific perspectives or theological and aesthetic conventions of conceptualising the natural world. This implied a self-aware readership able and willing to interpret the poems and integrate them into their own world view.

This delegation of interpretative powers to the reader tied into a general scepticism directed towards authorities such as church and state, but also towards aesthetic authorities, like the writers of Weimar Classicism and Romanticism with their notion of autonomous and holistic art. The distrust in the public sphere as a typical feature of Biedermeier culture extended in Droste-Hülshoff's poetry to her approach to science. As we have seen, a poem

[280] See Grywatsch, 'Die Jagd', p. 224.
[281] See Gertrud Bauer Pickar, *Ambivalence Transcended. A Study of the Writings of Annette von Droste-Hülshoff* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1997), pp. 153–154.

such as ‘Die Mergelgrube’, which contains an abundance of allusions to very specific scientific discourses, does not glorify scientific discoveries, but instead reflects on the dire and unsettling consequences these changing views on nature could have for humanity.

In aesthetic terms, too, Droste-Hülshoff proposed a view on nature that was not the result of experience or immersion, but rather of deliberate analysis, calibration and discussion. ‘Die Vogelhütte’, for example, suggests a direct involvement of the reader in the project of harmonizing competing perspectives on the relationship between nature and poetry.

The puzzling paradox of a society that was exploiting natural resources and changing the natural environment at an unprecedented speed and on a much larger scale than ever before, but simultaneously tried to envision nature as a sort of compensatory realm, which we have already encountered in Heine’s work, has also clearly left its traces in Droste-Hülshoff’s writing, as the analysis of the poem ‘Die Jagd’ has shown.

Although her spiritual poetry, such as ‘Am dritten Sonntage nach Ostern’, tries to salvage the possibility of divine revelation in nature – and be it only through a distinctive absence of God – the nature poetry of Droste-Hülshoff depicts the natural sciences, especially geology and biology, and not theology, as the new dominant order of knowledge. Her poems emphasize the objectivity and certainty of empirical research and relegate the aesthetic, philosophical, or religious understanding of nature to the domain of personal sentiment.

5. *Conclusion*

This thesis has focused on the period roughly from 1815 to 1848, commonly known as the Biedermeier, and on the concept of nature during that time, as illustrated in the works of three major authors. The concept of nature that we have seen emerging through literary representation was contradictory, heterogeneous, and in flux. Nevertheless, its character during the Biedermeier era can be conveyed by contrast with the dominant conceptions of nature during the preceding and subsequent periods, though these can be indicated here only in a brief and cursory manner.

The multi-faceted character of nature in the Biedermeier period derived from the persisting tension between the aesthetics of nature that had flourished in the late eighteenth century and the ascendancy of empirical science regarding the definition of nature in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Previous holistic concepts of nature, the sensualist naturalism of Goethe, Schiller's metaphysical and moral nature, or the Romantics' universal spiritual system, had produced literary forms of expression that were inclined towards synthesis. Science was now delivering a very different picture of the natural world as shaped by cataclysms as well as gradual and irreversible transformations such as evolution and extinction. As a consequence, the aesthetics of nature had to change and adapt.

The writers of the Biedermeier period I have focused on, Heine, Lenau, and Droste-Hülshoff, developed new techniques of representation in part by mimicking the ways the new Biedermeier nature seemed to work: they dismantled literary traditions and constructed texts that included fragments, allusions, and intertextual references, but preserved a deliberately open and questioning form. They created poems and prose works with historical layers. They referred to scientific theories in their literary texts without turning them into *Lehrgedichte*, leaving their readers to work out the most plausible explanation for certain natural phenomena. They wrote almost sociological observations of newly emerging bourgeois nature tourism, behind which the purely aesthetic experience of nature disappeared almost completely. Repeatedly, they depicted a distance opening up between the expectation of a sublime encounter with nature and the confrontation with a natural world that seemed to exceed a human perspective, yet was shaped by humans, be it through technological interventions or social practices.

Portraying nature as a kind of continuous process without an internal divine *telos*, a Spinozan *natura naturans*, or as a network of life-forms developing alongside each other, but devoid of the Aristotelean unmoved mover at their centre, reflected the spirit of an age

that often understood itself to be thrown into a transformative process with an uncertain outcome. The gradual dissolution of absolutist governments that brought forth *Stände*- and *Berufsfreiheit* was accompanied by inner tensions threatening to split society. Animosities marked the relationship between liberal-minded bourgeois citizens, the representatives of oppressive politics during the Metternich era, and the suffering of a social group that would become known as the working class or, in the term coined by Saint-Simon and then used prominently by Engels and Marx from the 1840s onwards, the proletariat.[282]

These inherent conflicts stand in stark contrast to the still popular conception of the Biedermeier age as tranquil and homely. Although Sengle showed once and for all how Biedermeier culture and literature was anything but apolitical or harmless, a common impression remains that, compared to the literary predecessors of Weimar Classicism or Romanticism, Biedermeier writers, apart from the combative and explicitly political authors who emerged in the 1840s, focused their attention on the small and docile, on modesty and moderation. As Sengle pointed out, and as my analysis has confirmed, while the attention to details and matters of everyday life can be identified as a common feature of literature written in this period, the observation of small objects or ordinary occurrences did not offer consolation for historic uncertainties. On the contrary, as we have seen, small details in literary texts often gained an almost monstrous quality, eliciting both curiosity and anxiety. The depiction of these encounters illustrated what Sengle identified as a particular mix of empiricism and sensibility (modelled on the English cultural ideal which the emerging German bourgeois society adopted – or was forced to adopt – as an alternative to the tumultuous republicanism of France), which he considered the most characteristic and common approach to the world during this period. Regarding the relationship to nature, this allowed an integration of findings from the empirical sciences into a common understanding of the natural world, without completely abandoning the notion of an aesthetic and sentimental perception of nature.

Such a balancing act between empiricism and sensibility noticeably shaped the depiction of nature in the literary works that have been the focus of my analysis. We have seen how an ambiguous relationship to nature emerged when different views of nature collided within one literary text. Whereas Romantic writers such as Novalis, Schelling, or Schubert had attempted to merge scientific theories or popular scientific knowledge about natural phenomena with *Naturphilosophie* and aesthetic experiences of nature, the

[282] For more on the emergence of the proletariat in conjunction with literary phenomena of the time see Patrick Eiden-Offe, *Die Poesie der Klasse. Romantischer Antikapitalismus und die Erfindung des Proletariats* (Berlin: Matthes und Seitz, 2017).

Biedermeier period reflected an apparent incompatibility between these different understandings of nature. Romantic art had emphasised the interconnectedness of nature and human consciousness, with *Universalpoesie* acting as a synthesizing antidote to the dissolving properties of the mind, which Novalis compared to the 'Alkahest', a universal solvent. But as the nineteenth century progressed, the late eighteenth-century trust in art as an educator of both the senses and the spirit would steadily diminish as the cultural authority of the empirical sciences grew. Neither religion nor art could claim the same cultural prestige that the scientific approach to understanding the world gained in the post-1840 era.

The gradual process of secularisation that had accompanied the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and had found its expression in the dwindling legal status especially of the Roman Catholic Church in Germany resulted in the widely read critical analyses of religion in the mid nineteenth century. In David Friedrich Strauß' *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* (1835–36) and Ludwig Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1841), Christianity appeared as an anthropological need or a historical fact, but not a metaphysical necessity. Feuerbach saw religion emerging historically from the difference between man as a conscious being and the otherwise unconscious natural world that surrounded him. *Das Wesen des Christentums* begins with this fundamental differentiation:

> Die Religion beruht auf dem wesentlichen Unterschiede des Menschen vom Thiere – Thiere haben keine Religion.[283]

In his *Vorlesungen über das Wesen der Religion* (1846), Feuerbach further developed this idea, describing God as the result of the twofold human desire to personify and objectify the two things he encountered and could not fully comprehend, namely his own spirit and nature:

> Wie ich nun aber im Wesen des Christenthums zeigte, daß Gott nach seinen moralischen oder geistigen Eigenschaften betrachtet, Gott also als moralisches Wesen nichts Andres ist als das vergötterte und vergegenständlichte geistige Wesen des Menschen, die Theologie also in Wahrheit in ihrem letzten Grund und Endresultate nur Anthropologie ist; so zeigte ich im Wesen der Religion, daß der physische Gott oder Gott, wie er nur als die Ursache der Natur, der Sterne, Bäume, Steine, Thiere, Menschen, wiefern auch sie natürliche physische Wesen sind, betrachtet wird, gar nichts Andres ausdrückt als das vergötterte, personifizierte Wesen der Natur, daß also das Geheimniß der Physikotheologie nur die Physik oder Physiologie ist – Physiologie hier nicht in dem engeren Sinne, den sie jetzt hat, sondern in ihrem alten universellen Sinne, worin sie überhaupt die Naturwissenschaft bedeutete. Wenn ich daher meine Lehre zuvor in den Satz zusammenfaßte: die Theologie ist Anthropologie, so muß ich zur Ergänzung jetzt hinzusetzen: und Physiologie. Meine Lehre oder Anschauung faßt sich daher in die zwei Worte: Natur und Mensch zusammen.[284]

[283] Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christenthums* (Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1841), p. 1.
[284] Ludwig Feuerbach, *Vorlesungen über das Wesen der Religion. Nebst Zusätzen und Anmerkungen* (Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1851) p. 26.

Feuerbach's dissolution of theology and philosophy into anthropology and physiology reflected the changing spirit of the age, which saw an expansion and intensification of scientific research, a wide public reception of its findings, and an ongoing debate about how these new insights tied into questions that had traditionally been explored by philosophy and theology.[285] As the biologist Thomas Henry Huxley wrote in *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature* (1863), a book that quickly gained a wide readership and was translated into German in the year of its first publication:

> The question of questions for mankind – the problem which underlies all other, and is more deeply interesting than any other – is the ascertainment of the place which Man occupies in nature and of his relations to the universe of things. Whence our race has come; what are the limits of our power over nature, and of nature's power over us; to what goal we are tending; are the problems which present themselves anew and with undiminished interest to every man born into the world. Most of us, shrinking from the difficulties and dangers which beset the seeker after original answers to these riddles, are contented to ignore them altogether, or to smother the investigating spirit under the featherbed of respected and respectable tradition. But, in every age, one or two restless spirits, blessed with that constructive genius, which can only build on a secure foundation, or cursed with the mere spirit of scepticism are unable to follow in the well-worn and comfortable tracks of their forefathers and contemporaries, and unmindful of thorns and stumbling-blocks, strike out into paths of their own. The sceptics end in the infidelity which asserts the problem to be insoluble, or in the atheism which denies the existence of any orderly progress and governance of things: the men of genius propound solutions which grow into systems of Theology or Philosophy, or veiled in musical language which suggests more than it asserts, take the shape of the Poetry of an epoch.[286]

Whereas the answers previously given by theology, philosophy, and poetry had all been revealed to be 'mere approximations of the truth', Huxley continued, the physical sciences during the last fifty years had brought forth what Huxley called 'the proper understanding of his relations to the universe'.[287] This entailed an inquiry into the close relations between humans and the humanoid apes that Huxley described in the first chapter of his treatise and the acceptance of Darwin's principle of natural selection. Darwin published the hypothesis that species emerged through a combination of spontaneous variations in individual living organisms and environmental conditions acting together in a process of election in his *On the Origin of Species*, four years prior to the publication of Huxley's book. Evolutionary concepts and the idea of a struggle for existence had been widely received since the late eighteenth century: Jean-Baptiste Lamarck had depicted a process of transmutation, during which species developed continually towards more complex forms of life, in his *Philosophie*

[285] For further reading on the relationship between philosophy and the natural sciences see *Materialismus und Spiritualismus. Philosophie und Wissenschaften nach 1848*, ed. by Andreas Arndt and Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2000).
[286] Thomas Henry Huxley, *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1863) pp. 71–72.
[287] Ibid., p. 72.

zoologique in 1809. But Darwin's principle of evolution through random mutation and selection was yet another step away from the concept of a *telos* embedded within the history of nature. The position of man within such an inconstant and unpredictable natural world turned increasingly precarious, as the border separating human and animal life became porous. In the 1830s, Gustav Fechner and Hermann von Helmholtz conducted experiments on psychophysics and human perception, showing how human behaviour was influenced by the laws of physics, while Matthias von Schleiden and Theodor Schwann showed how the structure and behaviour of cells in plants, animals, and humans was essentially the same, an observation that would lead Rudolf Virchow to develop his human 'Cellularpathologie' in the 1850s. In the 1860s, the physician and paleoanthropologist Hermann Schaaffhausen, who had identified Neanderthal Man in 1857, began his lecture held before the Versammlung der Ärzte und Naturforscher in Frankfurt with an affirmation of man's belonging to the animal world:

> Es ist an dieser Stelle vor einigen Tagen gesagt worden, die Scheidewand sei gefallen zwischen Physik und Physiologie, zwischen anorganischer und organischer Natur. Wir wissen, dass sie auch gefallen ist zwischen dem Thier und der Pflanze. Fügen wir heute hinzu: auch zwischen der Vorwelt und der Gegenwart, auch zwischen Mensch und Thier![288]

Thus, the traditional concept of man as a two-sided being, belonging to nature physically and to spirit metaphysically, became obsolete. Instead, scientific observations indicated that human perception and behaviour were much more subject to the laws of nature than previously believed. This development was also expressed through a shift in the representation of the self from a dualism or the doubling of the self that was a popular feature in Romantic art towards the self as torn or split and alienated from itself, as we could see in the previous analysis.

The scientific classification of man's origin in the middle of the nineteenth century amounted to what Freud would later call the second great humiliation of humanity, bracketed by the Copernican revolution and his own discovery of the unconscious as an incomprehensible, yet powerful force within a person's mind.[289]

However, as the century advanced, a variety of new strategies to assign humanity a new and powerful role within the natural world emerged. What had been perceived as a loss of sovereignty over nature through the integration of man into the natural world was

[288] Hermann Schaaffhausen, 'Ueber die anthropologischen Fragen der Gegenwart. Ein in der Versammlung der Aerzte und Naturforscher zu Frankfurt a.M. am 23. September 1867 gehaltener Vortrag', in: Id., *Anthropologische Studien* (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1885), pp. 411–432, p. 411.
[289] See Sigmund Freud, 'Eine Schwierigkeit der Psychoanalyse', in: *Imago. Zeitschrift für Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften*, vol. 5 (1917), pp. 1–7.

compensated by an ever-increasing control over non-human nature. By the end of the century, technology and land reforms had transformed the landscape of what was now the Imperial State of Germany completely.[290] Rivers had been rectified and reined in, coastlines secured, and wetlands drained. Forests were now maintained systematically and reafforestation with European spruce and Scots pine, often planted in neat rows, replaced what had formerly been commonly used pastures, broadleaf and mixed coniferous forests and impenetrable undergrowth. Agriculture changed fundamentally in the middle of the century after the suspension of *Flurzwang* in more and more regions allowed farmers to disregard traditional systems of crop rotation and to focus on growing monocultures instead. After crop failures, combined with a growing mistrust in governing bodies, had resulted in food riots in the 1840s, securing food for the population through intensified agriculture gained political importance. In the midst of these transformed landscapes, heaths, areas with soils difficult to cultivate, were now perceived as remaining pockets of wilderness, although they usually had anthropocentric origins and were historic cultural landscapes.[291] Whereas previous centuries had considered human life confined to safe enclaves within wild nature, wild nature would now be relegated to a few protected areas within an otherwise humanized world.

Parallel to these efforts to tame and control outer nature, new methods promising to alter human nature came about as well. The second half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of psychology as a way of understanding man as an individual and of sociology as an approach to understanding society, both based on empirical methodology and quantitative analysis. The *Materialismusstreit* between biologists and physicians in the 1850s reflected the changing attitude towards human nature and was a contest for the right to interpret and define. The strictly dualist position that demanded a clear separation between the body as the object of scientific research and the mind or spirit as the subject matter of theology and ethics was now gradually superseded by a model of dependency which had human thought and sentiment emanate from its physical base, the brain.[292] As this understanding of human

[290] See Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2010).

[291] The heath already carried the connotation of a wild and uncanny place in the poetry of Lenau and Droste-Hülshoff, who both wrote *Heidebilder* cycles, as well as in Heine's 'Gespräch auf der Paderborner Heide' in *Junge Leiden*. Friedrich Hebbel depicted the heath in a similar manner in his poem 'Der Heideknabe' (1844). A prominent example from nineteenth-century English literature would be Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1878), in which the heath plays a central role as a wild and un-arable place resisting cultivation and civilisation.

[292] For futher reading on the Materialismusstreit see *Weltanschauung, Philosophie und Naturwissenschaft im 19. Jahrhundert*, vol. 1, Der Materialismusstreit, ed. by Kurt Bayertz, Miriam Gerhard, and Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2007).

life as natural gained dominance during the second half of the century, the focus shifted from the individual relationship between self and nature towards an understanding of society as natural. This gave rise to an idea that would only keep increasing its popularity throughout the century: that of the organic society. The Romantic notion of the *Volk* had largely been based on the idea that language, landscape, and temperament worked together to create what Johann Gottlieb Fichte had called in his *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (1808) an 'Urvolk'. Richard Wagner based his *Gesamtkunstwerk* on the ideal of an organic unity between individual, Volk, and mode of expression, defining the relationship between nature and humanity as the first and most fundamental one in his essay *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1850). Now the cultural concept of an organic Volk became intertwined with a biological understanding of human nature and its evolution. The natural history of the German people that Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl developed in the four volumes of his *Die Naturgeschichte des Volkes als Grundlage einer deutschen social Politik* (1851–69), for example, tried to establish *Volkskunde* as an empirical scientific discipline. Pseudo-scientific reasoning was also behind the emergence of eugenics, the idea that a population could be perfected through genetic selection and controlled procreation, made popular by the British anthropologist Francis Galton, as well as the development of new race theories. Although concepts that divided humanity into different races had emerged in previous centuries in the context of both colonialism and Enlightened anthropology, the imperial ideologies of the nineteenth century encouraged hierarchical models of human races supposedly based on biological taxonomy. The validity of these theories was contested by biologists such as Schaaffhausen, who demanded in a lecture delivered in 1857 that the natural sciences base their deductions on the assumption that all human races were equal, their differences marginal and resulting from cultural and historical variations rather than biological factors.[293] According to Schaaffhausen, the natural sciences, aside from making all human life safer, more prosperous and comfortable, served the goal of fulfilling an ancient human longing for self-knowledge:

> Die Naturforschung hat aber noch ganz andere Leistungen aufzuweisen, die, weil sie unserm geistigen Wesen zu gute kommen, höher zu schätzen sind als alle andern. Sie hat die Menschheit auf eine höhere Stufe der Selbsterkenntnis gehoben, die schon im Alterthum als das höchste Ziel menschlichen Strebens bezeichnet wurde.[294]

[293] See Schaaffhausen, 'Die Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts und die Bildungsfähigkeit seiner Rassen', in: *Anthropologische Studien*, pp. 222–235.
[294] Schaaffhausen, 'Ueber das geistige Wesen der Menschheit', in: *Anthropologische Studien*, pp. 466–492, here p. 467.

Like Huxley transferring the status of genius from the artist to the scientist in the passage quoted above, Schaaffhausen also depicted the natural sciences as the final harbinger of truth and self-knowledge after a long history, during which this task had been previously assigned to religion, art, and philosophy. With the cultural authority to answer man's ancient questions about his own nature and place in the natural order of things surrendered to the natural sciences, philosophy and art not only incorporated scientific perspectives and concepts as we have seen during the first half of the century, but they also explored how literature itself could follow the principles of the natural sciences.

The turn from geology towards the life sciences – biology and organic chemistry – as the leading scientific disciplines in the second half of the century, for example, resulted in the concept of life as a universal force moving and uniting all organisms gaining major cultural significance. Schopenhauer had prepared the ground for this perspective with *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1819, 1844*)*, in which he identified the Will as a central moving force shaping both the individual human life and the history of humankind. Although Schopenhauer had written most of his philosophical works in the first half of the century, his works received wider recognition only later in the century, when the concept of the Will as a vitalist life force, a moving principle, or an urge was taken up again, although with different connotations, by Wagner, Nietzsche, Jung, and Freud, as well as the *Lebensreform* movement. The emphasis placed on nature as a living, evolving entity revived the Spinozan concept of *natura naturans*, but also echoed Goethe's morphological concept of 'Und keine Zeit und keine Macht zerstückelt / Geprägte Form, die lebend sich entwickelt'.[295]

In the philosophy of Nietzsche, the will to power appeared as an element of life, that could master and dominate, but not surpass it. Being alive for Nietzsche equalled being within and behaving according to nature. In his philosophical writings after the mid-1870s, life appeared in conjunction with an appreciation of earthly worldly and bodily existence. In *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883–85), modern man is characterised as a hesitant and conflicted being, part worm, part ape, part plant and part ghost. In contrast to this feeble existence, Zarathustra announces the coming *Übermensch*, a new evolutionary stage of humanity, which will have discarded all metaphysical beliefs or hopes for the afterlife and will follow Zarathustra's exhortation 'bleibt der Erde treu und glaubt Denen nicht, welche euch von überirdischen Hoffnungen reden!'[296]

[295] J.W. von Goethe, 'Urworte. Orphisch' (1827), in: Id., *Die Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*, ed. by Deutsche Akademie der Naturforscher Leopoldina, 29 vols. (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1947–2011), vol. 1.9, p. 87, l. 10.
[296] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für alle und keinen* (Chemnitz: Ernst Schmeitzner, 1883), vol.1, p. 9.

Nietzsche returned to the same thought in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (1886), when he proposed that man had to reach a point of radical acceptance regarding his state as a natural being. After centuries of dualism that had favoured the mind over the body and suggested some form of metaphysical belonging, Nietzsche demanded that man recognise himself as the natural man, *homo natura*:

> Den Menschen nämlich zurückübersetzen in die Natur; über die vielen eitlen und schwärmerischen Deutungen und Nebensinne Herr werden, welche bisher über jenen ewigen Grundtext *homo natura* gekritzelt und gemalt wurden; machen, dass der Mensch fürderhin vor dem Menschen steht, wie er heute schon, hart geworden in der Zucht der Wissenschaft, vor der anderen Natur steht, mit unerschrocknen Oedipus-Augen und verklebten Odysseus-Ohren, taub gegen die Lockweisen alter metaphysischer Vogelfänger, welche ihm allzulange zugeflötet haben: "du bist mehr! du bist höher! du bist anderer Herkunft!"[297]

The term *homo natura* derived from the term *homo sapiens* which Carl Linnaeus had used in the 1758 edition of his *Systema Naturae*, in which he assigned man a position within the animal kingdom. Whereas the attribute *sapiens* had emphasised the knowledge and wisdom that set humanity apart from other animals, Nietzsche now demanded a naturalisation of the human condition in a way that was decidedly anti-materialist and anti-metaphysical and, in the tradition of Schopenhauer, placed great value on the individual. While the first half of the nineteenth century had been dominated by the philosophy of Hegel, who understood history as the progression of spirit through different stages of self-realisation, Nietzsche's philosophy of the *homo natura*, the embodied, natural man, reflected the demise of metaphysics and the ascendency of naturalism, the full integration of human life into nature, at the end of the century.

As a literary movement, the German naturalism of the 1880s and 1890s spanned a wide range of positions, which included the materialism of Conrad Alberti, who declared in his programmatic treatise 'Die zwölf Artikel des Realismus. Ein litterarisches Glaubensbekenntnis' (1889):

> Da alle Naturgesetze, welche die mechanischen Vorgänge in der physischen Welt regeln, auch alle geistigen Vorgänge bestimmen, so ist auch die Kunst genau denselben Gesetzen unterworfen wie die mechanische Welt.[298]

But naturalism could also comprise an almost idealist perspective on a harmonious core principle of nature that should be revealed through literary depiction, as Wilhelm Bölsche proposed in 1887:

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[297] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft* (Leipzig: C.G. Naumann, 1886) §230.

[298] Conrad Alberti, 'Die zwölf Artikel des Realismus. Ein literrarisches Glaubensbekenntnis' (1889), in: *Naturalismus. Manifeste und Dokumente zur deutschen Literatur 1880–1900*, ed. by M. Brauneck and C. Müller (Frankfurt a.M.: Metzler, 1987), pp. 49–56, here p. 50.

> Ich wahre durchaus den Standpunct des Naturforschers. Wenn aber ein derartiges ideales Princip sich von diesem aus für die ganze sichtbare Welt ergiebt, so hat auch der realistische Dichter ein Recht, sich seiner zu bemächtigen, es als 'Tendenz' in seinen Dichtungen erscheinen zu lassen. Tendenz zum Harmonischen, Gesunden, Glücklichen: – – – was will man mehr von der Kunst?[299]

What united naturalist writers as different as Alberti and Bölsche was the assumption that human life was embedded in the natural world and that literature had to reflect this through a truthful, detailed depiction of the conditions of human existence. This could lead to literary representations of social milieus that had not been prominently featured in the literature of bourgeois realism, such as the everyday life of industrial workers, prostitutes, or addicts, and a critique of industrialisation and urbanisation, but also to an optimistic view and positive depiction of technological and scientific advancements.

Both aspects of the relationship to nature are depicted as intertwined in one literary text that did not belong to the literary movement associated with the term naturalism, but was instead still navigating the terrain between aesthetic and pragmatic approaches to nature: *Pfisters Mühle* (1884). Its author, Wilhelm Raabe, was one of the first to describe the destruction of nature through industrialisation, but also showed his characters struggling to reconcile their aesthetic sentiments with their appreciation for scientific and technological progress.

Raabe centred his story about the price of progress around a now defunct mill and a beet sugar factory. The narrator Eberhart, the late miller's son, has returned to the site of his childhood to spend a summer vacation there with his wife. Writing in his *Sommerferienheft*, he recalls how the river had been polluted by the waste of the factory, destroying the ecosystem and ruining his father's livelihood and health.

From the very beginning, Raabe indicates that his novel is a historical account, written in a moment in which a fundamental transformation in the concept of nature has already taken place and Eberhart has long sold the mill and moved to Berlin:

> Ach, noch einmal ein frischer Atemzug im letzten Viertel dieses neunzehnten Jahrhunderts! Noch einmal sattelt mir den Hippogryphen; – ach, wenn sie gewußt hätten, die Leute von damals, wenn sie geahnt hätten, die Leute vor hundert Jahren, wo ihre Nachkommen das „alte romantische Land" zu suchen haben würden![300]

[299] Wilhelm Bölsche, *Die naturwissenschaftlichen Grundlagen der Poesie. Prolegomena einer realistischen Ästhetik*, ed. by Johannes J. Braakenburg (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1976), p. 50.
[300] Wilhelm Raabe, *Pfisters Mühle. Ein Sommerferienheft*, in: Id., *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Karl Hoppe and Jost Schillemeit, 20 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1951–1994), vol. 16, p. 7.

The landscapes of Romanticism, which had once been a signifier of a subjective experience of nature, now bear the marks of a century of land reforms, technological interventions, and changing agricultural practices:

> Das „alte romantische Land" liegt von neuem im hellsten Sonnenschein vor uns; wir aber erfahren mit nicht unberechtigtem Erstaunen, wie uns jetzt der „Vorwelt Wunder", die wir in weiter Ferne vergeblich suchten, so nahe – dicht unter die Nase gelegt worden sind im Laufe der Zeiten und unter veränderten Umständen.
>
> Zehn Schritte weit von unserer Tür liegen sie – zehn, zwanzig, dreißig Jahre ab –, als die Eisenbahn noch keine Haltestelle am nächsten Dorfe hatte – als der Eichenkamp auf dem Grafenbleeke noch nicht der Separation wegen niedergelegt war – als man die Gänseweide derselben Separation halben noch nicht unter die Bauerschaft verteilt und zu schlechtem Roggenacker gemacht hatte – als die Weiden den Bach entlang noch standen, als dieser Bach selber –
>
> Nun, von diesem letztern demnächst recht vieles mehr! Er fließt zu bedeutungs- und inhaltsvoll durch die Wunder der mir persönlich so nahe liegenden Vorwelt, von welcher hier erzählt werden soll, als daß über seine Existenz mit einem Sprunge oder in drei Worten weitergeschritten werden könnte.[301]

The historical layers that Droste-Hülshoff had explored in regard to geological deep time, Lenau to the historical dimension of subjectivity and Heine to the premediated character of social and aesthetic experiences of nature, Raabe now, towards the end of the century, depicts as the traces of very recent and ongoing societal transformations. Like Heine, he includes intertextual references to depictions of nature – the 'alte romantische Land' and the 'Vorwelt Wunder' were taken from the beginning of Wieland's narrative poem *Oberon* (1780). Whereas Wieland's poem unfolded as an orientalist fantasy set in a fictional version of the Middle East, the pre-industrial German countryside of Eberhart's childhood appears now in such an enchanted way to Raabe's narrator.

In a manner similar to Droste-Hülshoff, Raabe arranges different contemporary perspectives on the changing concept of nature alongside each other. Eberhart, who now leads an urban life as a teacher, appears detached from the landscape of his childhood, but reconnects with it by writing traditional nature poetry, which is included in his narrative. Eberhart's friend and teacher from youth, Adam Asche, on the other hand, as a chemist represents a scientific approach to nature. Throughout the story, he alternates between using his knowledge for preserving and protecting the old economic and ecological system (he investigates the pollution and supports the old miller in his lawsuit) and profiting from industrialisation as the shareholder of a factory. Both Eberhart Pfister and Adam Asche act and feel ambivalently towards the transformation and destruction of nature they are

[301] Ibid.

witnessing, welcoming progress while also lamenting the loss of an old idyll. This idyllic nature is mostly represented through the elegiac poem Eberhart writes and by intertextual references to depictions of nature, which mostly point back towards the eighteenth century and are inserted into the otherwise changed scenery of industrialisation. Raabe depicted the transformation of the countryside as a visible change, with factory chimneys emitting dark clouds into the sky, but also on a chemical level, with pollution changing the composition of the river's water.[302]

The final passage describes the chemist Asche back in Berlin, reading Homer in Greek, surrounded by the steam rising up from industrial laundries around him. The 'frischer Atemzug' that the narrator had promised in the beginning of *Pfisters Mühle* is not drawn any longer from the unpolluted air in the countryside, but instead from air that has been chemically disinfected:

> „Da habe ich mir denn das Griechische ein bißchen wieder aufgefärbt und lese so zwischendurch den Homer, ohne übrigens dir hierdurch das abgetragene Zitat von seiner unaustilgbaren Sonne über uns aus dem Desinfektionskessel heben zu wollen."–[303]

Asche's reference to the sun of Homer alludes to the ending of Schiller's poem 'Der Spaziergang' (1804), which praises the ever changing, ever constant character of nature:

> Aber jugendlich immer, in immer veränderter Schöne
> Ehrst du, fromme Natur, züchtig das alte Gesetz,
> Immer dieselbe, bewahrst du in treuen Händen dem Manne,
> Was dir das gaukelnde Kind, was dir der Jüngling vertraut,
> Nährest an gleicher Brust die vielfach wechselnden Alter;
> Unter demselben Blau, über dem nämlichen Grün
> Wandeln die nahen und wandeln vereint die fernen Geschlechter,
> Und die Sonne Homers, siehe! sie lächelt auch uns.[304]

What happens to the sun of Homer – and to our relationship with it – if it shines through the steam rising from a cauldron of disinfectant, remains undecided towards the end of Raabe's novel. Perhaps nature stayed constant throughout human history, but allowed for different stages of the relationship with humanity to evolve. Perhaps Asche was right to call the sun 'unaustilgbar', assigning restorative powers to nature that could not be destroyed through pollution or industrialisation. But perhaps the remark that Schiller's depiction of nature was

[302] For further reading on the motif of pollution and its poetic dimension, see Sabine Wilke, 'Pollution as Poetic Practice: Glimpses of Modernism in Wilhelm Raabe's *Pfisters Mühle*', in *Colloquia Germanica*, vol. 44.2 (2011), pp. 195–214.
[303] *Pfisters Mühle*, p. 178.
[304] Friedrich Schiller, 'Der Spaziergang', in: *Schillers Werke. Nationalausgabe*, ed. by Julius Petersen, Liselotte Blumenthal, Norbert Oellers et al., on behalf of Nationale Forschungs- und Gedenkstätten der klassischen Literatur deutschen Literatur in Weimar, Stiftung Weimarer Klassik, Schiller Nationalmuseum in Marbach, 43 – vols. (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1943–), vol. 2.1, pp. 308–314, here p. 314.

already worn out (‘abgetragen) also suggested that both nature and the way literature could approach it had been changed through human intervention irretrievably.

The writers of the Biedermeier age had not had to confront such drastic changes to the natural environment as Raabe witnessed late in the century. Nonetheless, they experienced the fundamental transformation of a holistic understanding of nature as the subject of aesthetic perception and spiritual revelation into an object of scientific exploration that would lay the groundwork for altering and controlling the natural world to an unprecedented extent. At the same time, human life, society and culture would be increasingly understood as part of nature, that is, determined by the laws of nature. Looking back, Rudolf Eucken would criticize the tendency of the nineteenth century to subordinate ‘alle geistige Leistung einem erweiterten Begriff der Natur’.[305] To return to Heine’s metaphor of the constellation, one could describe the first half of the nineteenth century as an enormous widening of the distance between the different concepts attached to the idea of nature, a centrifugal movement that would eventually allow for all aspects of life, human and non-human alike, to be implicated within this extensive network. Works of literature, instead of focusing on one aspect of nature, explored this network and reflected nature as the diverse and versatile object of scientific, aesthetic, political, and philosophical perception and economic utilisation.

In this sense, the Biedermeier writers whom this thesis has examined can be said to represent a distinct period in reflection on the relationship between humanity and nature. Their multifaceted, complex vision intervenes between the grand syntheses articulated around 1800 and the increasingly rigorous naturalism that predominates in the science, philosophy, and eventually in the literature of the later nineteenth century.

[305] Rudolf Eucken, *Mensch und Welt. Eine Philosophie des Lebens* (Leipzig: Quelle und Meyer, 1918), p. 194.

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