

# **The Role of Rhythm in the Works of Arno Holz, Stefan George, and Georg Trakl**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Trinity Term 2024

## Short Abstract

This thesis examines the central role of rhythm in the works of Arno Holz, Stefan George, and Georg Trakl. It argues that rhythm is both a map and a mirror, and that these poets used the concept to explore the composition of their poetry, its commitments and effects, and to engage productively with the rapidly changing circumstances of their times.

Recently, there has been a surge in scholarship concerning the wider importance of rhythm for a variety of disciplines and its merits as a critical approach. My thesis provides a case study of three seminal German-language poets around 1900 and shows how focussing on a seemingly universal concept like rhythm can result in highly individualised forms of expression. Although the individual poetic projects differ significantly, following the paths of rhythm in each can reveal the poets' outlooks and obligations towards their craft, and rhythm's significance in a wider historical and cultural context.

Examining these authors in combination – each vital to the development of different strands of German-language poetry in the decades surrounding the turn of the last century – through the lens of rhythm reveals new connections regarding intentions and interpretations of their works. All three had a shared interest in the conceptual powers of rhythm and how it can shape their poetry. Moreover, my thesis suggests that these approaches to thinking about and using rhythm live on in the poetry of contemporary authors, just as the heightened interest in the concept of rhythm today is comparable to the enthusiasm for it a century ago.

## Long Abstract

This thesis examines the central role of rhythm in the works of Arno Holz, Stefan George, and Georg Trakl, three poets essential to the development of different strands of German-language poetry in the decades surrounding the turn of the last century. In doing so, this thesis sets out on an in-depth case study of the symbiotic relationship between poetry and rhythm and argues that rhythm is not just an aesthetic or formal element of poetry but a multi-faceted, indispensable concept that fundamentally shapes poetological thinking and poetic expression. Rhythm, in this context, is both a structuring principle and conceptual tool that the three authors used to navigate their relationships with language, tradition, and their cultural environment. The discussion sheds light on various aspects of rhythm in poetry such as movement, oppositional configurations, imagery, thematic content, sense and world-making, and the self-stylisation of the poet.

The Introduction begins by investigating the basic assumption that rhythm and poetry are inseparable, even considered synonymous at times. To explore what rhythm does in and to poetry, it is essential to first analyse how it is understood by whom and in what kind of cultural environment. For this reason, the Introduction offers an overview of the historical development and understanding of rhythm in various contexts, before directing attention to the prevailing sense of arrhythmia experienced around 1900 in Germany, characterised by acceleration, anxiety, and disjointedness. This investigation does not limit the role of rhythm in poetry to metrical or prosodic patterns but instead inquires into the various ways in which rhythm can be understood more broadly within poetic practice. The thesis argues that rhythm and its significance in poetry are multifaceted, influencing not only the form of a poem but also its meaning, emotional impact and effects on the reader. Rhythm, then, can be understood as both a medium and a message,

carrying with it the historical and cultural contexts of the poem, the poet's intentions, and the possible interpretations by the reader.

Arno Holz's works provide the first major case study in this investigation. His approach to rhythm is revolutionary, both in its intention to reform German-language poetry in a radical way and in its rejection of traditional formal features of poetry such as metre, rhyme, and strophic organisation. By contrast, Holz advocates a poetry in which rhythm is the main formal element. He famously rejects poetry that pursues music through words as an end in itself in favour of a poetry that lives solely through its rhythm. Holz's poetics is most of all deeply rooted in a desire to break free from the constraints of tradition and to create a new poetic language that relies solely on rhythm, '[e]ine Lyrik, die auf jede Musik durch Worte als Selbstzweck verzichtet und die, rein formal, lediglich durch einen Rhythmus getragen wird, der nur noch durch das lebt, was durch ihn zum Ausdruck ringt.'

Holz's work is analysed as a groundbreaking attempt to redefine the relationship between poetry and rhythm. In renouncing metre and conventional poetic forms, he does not reject rhythm per se, but instead pursues a more fundamental, organic form of it that he believed could depict the essence of reality. Holz's understanding of rhythm is thus examined as a tool for both representation and resistance. My thesis argues that his approach to rhythm is closely connected to scientific and philosophical discussions of his time, which were increasingly concerned with notions of life and rhythm as a way to realign poetry with the world. Holz positioned rhythm as a connective tissue linking his theoretical reflections, to a large extent based on natural-scientific thinking, with his creative practice.

Holz's magnum opus *Phantasus* serves as the central text for this analysis. My thesis explores how his use of rhythm in this collection evolves over time and eventually culminates in a poetry where rhythm becomes almost overwhelming in its abundance. Rhythm threatens to overpower

the poetry itself, by putting the focus on the materiality of language and the physical effects of poetry. This thesis argues that this excess can be both stimulating and problematic, challenging more traditional modes of poetry but also putting at risk the very aims Holz wished to pursue. In its innovation and emphasis on the material qualities of language, Holz's later work is considered a precursor to later developments of poetry in the twentieth century such as concrete poetry.

As the second case study of this thesis, Stefan George's poetry offers a different perspective on the relationship between rhythm and poetry. Like his contemporary Holz, he intended a categorical renewal of German-language poetry; however, unlike Holz, who sought innovation by breaking from tradition, George chose to productively engage with poetic tradition in his highly stylised and chiselled poetry. For George, rhythm forms the initial inspiration from which his poetry emerges, but also the telos towards which his works aspire. This thesis examines how George's use of rhythm functions on multiple levels, encompassing aesthetic, philosophical, and communicative dimensions. Deeply linked to George's theory of 'geistige kunst', rhythm functions as one of the primary conveyors of 'maass und klang' and forms the basis for the creation and communication of meaning. This thesis demonstrates how George's conception of rhythm evolves with his poetry throughout his career, from his early works characterised by abstraction and aestheticism, laying the groundwork for his later, more rhetorically and politically inflected poetry.

Beyond its aesthetic and philosophical importance, rhythm in George serves crucial cultural and social functions, playing a key role in his self-stylisation as a poetic leader and the formation and maintenance of his literary circle, the 'George-Kreis'. Rhythm functions as a curatorial and gatekeeping mechanism for George, influencing not only the selection of words in his poems but also his choice of company. Access to his circle was often reserved for those who demonstrated a particularly high rhythmical inclination towards poetry and the right prosodic skill when reciting

it. In this context, rhythm becomes a shibboleth and a marker of poetic sensibility, separating his inner circle from the uninitiated.

A detailed analysis of George's metrical practices, especially his use of the Adoneus, reveals how George productively engages with past poetic practices while advancing his aim of renewing German-language poetry. This somewhat paradoxical approach reveals George to be his most innovative when appearing most conservative and offers insights into his self-image as a poet and his claim to radical singularity. Through close readings of key works, my thesis demonstrates how George's subtle use of the Adonic creates a connection between familiarity and strangeness, tradition and innovation. This proves central to his poetic project, allowing him to establish a distinctive voice rooted in tradition yet unmistakably modern.

The thesis argues that George's engagement with rhythm, far from being a mere formal concern, is also deeply linked to the content and themes of his poetry. Examining the appearance of rhythms in his poetry reveals a subtle but significant engagement with the natural world, often overlooked in scholarship. Furthermore, the examination of rhythm in the earlier works reveals the emergence of ethical and social concerns typically associated with his later poetry, demonstrating a continuity in his development sometimes eclipsed in standard critical accounts. By focusing on George's rhythmic and metrical thinking, my thesis provides a new perspective on his artistic and philosophical project, shedding light on a complex interplay between form, content, and cultural environment.

In contrast to both Holz and George, Georg Trakl's engagement with rhythm is far more subtle and less explicit, reflecting his personal approach to poetry. While the other two authors approach rhythm in a decidedly programmatic way, Trakl's relationship with the concept is more organic, unfolding mainly within the poems themselves and not in theoretical or poetological writings. My thesis examines how his understandings of rhythm reflect some of his broader existential and

aesthetic concerns, his sense of alienation and struggle to find meaning in a chaotic and disjointed world. This study traces Trakl's poetry from the early stages and the development of the 'Reihungsstil' to his later poetry and embracing of free rhythms. While more subdued than that of his contemporaries, Trakl's approach to rhythm is no less significant in its impact on German-language poetry.

Trakl's poetic practice is characterised by the interplay between rhythm, movement, and imagery. I demonstrate how he creates a dynamic rhythmical experience in his poems through the arrangement of images and subtle configurations of movement. His intention to create a poetry full of 'Bewegung und Gesichte' is manifesting in forms of rhythmical organisations that oftentimes operate independently of traditional formal features such as metre or rhyme. Both imagery and movement reveal themselves to be not only thematic elements but also structural ones that shape the rhythmic architecture of the poems. Sequences and juxtapositions of images oftentimes create a rhythm that oscillates between opposed states, such as speech and silence, revelation and concealment, or ascending and descending movements. The rhythms created by Trakl serve a dual purpose: reinforcing the impact of certain scenes and building a certain resistance against the 'Chaos von Rythmen und Bildern' that affects both his relationship to the external world and the creative process.

My analysis reveals that rhythm is crucial for Trakl to establish a processual approach to meaning in his poetry, on the one hand reflecting the disjointedness of the modern world he encountered and, on the other hand, distinguishing his work from poetry that seeks and demands fixed interpretative frameworks. This is especially evident in his later works, beginning with the poem 'Psalm', in which the incorporation of free rhythms allows for a wider range of interpretative contexts. Eventually, in his later and final poems such as 'Grodek', rhythm becomes a tool to navigate and articulate the unspeakable in the historical and cultural context of World War I. In

this poem, rhythm departs purposefully from more traditional tools such as metre and rhyme to become the preferred mode of making the inexpressible legible and struggling for new possibilities of poetic expression in an increasingly fragmented and turbulent world.

Throughout the thesis, the concept of rhythm is explored not only as a technical and formal aspect of poetry but also as a metaphorical, philosophical, and almost ideological construct. Rhythm is revealed to be a key means by which poets around the turn of the last century and the beginnings of the twenty-first century engage with language, themselves, and the world at large. It is indispensable for negotiating relationships and potential tensions between form and content, tradition and innovation, and the collective and the individual. By examining the works of Arno Holz, Stefan George, and Georg Trakl, each poet representative of a major school of writing in German-language poetry in the years following 1900, this thesis demonstrates that rhythm is a central concern in modernist poetics as a whole, and it is able to reveal some of the fundamental commitments of these poets to their craft, their readers, and the historical moment alike.

Besides poetry, this thesis furthermore engages with wider-ranging theoretical discussions about rhythm, drawing on a range of disciplines including linguistics, philosophy, and musicology. It situates the poets' thinking about and use of rhythm in the broader cultural context of the decades surrounding 1900, a historical period marked by a growing sense of arrhythmia, anxiety, disarray, and a corresponding interest in the concept of rhythm across a variety of fields. My thesis argues that Holz's, George's, and Trakl's engagement with rhythm is part of this larger intellectual and cultural endeavour to explore the possibilities of rhythm in their poetry as a way of understanding, representing, and partaking in the rapidly changing circumstances of the world at that time.

One of the key arguments of my thesis is that rhythm is not merely a formal or ornamental feature of poetry, most often encountered in the shape of metre, but a central constituent that connects to the very essence of poetry. With this thesis I challenge the still quite widely held view

of rhythm as a somewhat supplementary, subordinate part of poetry, arguing instead that rhythm is not only integral to the prosody of poems but also their meaning, impact, and poetological framework. Rhythm can be used to explore new forms of expression, prise open established norms, and engage with pressing issues of the time.

My thesis concludes by reflecting on the broader implications of this case study for the study of poetry and poetics. It takes key poets that are generally understood as representatives of three strands of poetic development at the start of the twentieth century (Naturalism, Symbolism and Aestheticism, and Expressionism) often thought of as entirely disparate. This thesis demonstrates that for all three rhythm was an essential preoccupation and a way of articulating – and renewing – their relationship with their poetry and the world. What is more, their approaches to redefining rhythm can be said to live on in the present day. The Conclusion simply points to the legacy of the three poets discussed in this thesis: Jan Wagner, who, like George, finds innovation and renewal in traditional poetic forms; or Ulrike Draesner, whose science-infused language experiments at times echo Holz's radical acceptance of the materiality of language backed by his positivistic theory of art; or the densely experiential imagery of Friederike Mayröcker, reminiscent of Trakl. Since the beginning of the new millennium and most certainly during the past fifteen years there again has been an increased scholarly interest in the study of rhythm across a wide gamut of disciplines. Like most of these studies, my thesis also proposes that the concept of rhythm can serve as a bridge between different disciplines and areas of study, such as literature, music, philosophy, linguistics, and other fields. I suggest that the heightened interest in the topic of rhythm observed today is very much comparable to the enthusiasm surrounding the concept a century ago in the decades around 1900. Again, the cultural context is one of major disruptions and disjointedness and my thesis suggests that rhythm offers the conceptual tools to adequately face, dissect, and respond to such upheavals – just as it has done before.

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# Acknowledgements

My profound gratitude, first and foremost, to my supervisor, Karen Leeder. Thank you to Georgina Paul and Ray Ockenden. Thank you to my examiners Charlie Louth and Rüdiger Görner.

Thank you to my funders at New College, Oxford; to the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages; to the Friedrich Schlegel Graduiertenschule at the Freie Universität, Berlin; and to the members of the Oxford German Graduate Seminar.

My deepest gratitude always to all my friends and family for their continued support.

## Abbreviations

- W Arno Holz, *Werke*, ed. by Wilhelm Emrich and Anita Holz, 7 vols (Luchterhand, 1961-64)
- SW Stefan George, *Sämtliche Werke in 18 Bänden*, ed. by Georg Peter Landmann and Ute Oelmann, 18 vols (Klett-Cotta, 1982-2013)
- DuB Georg Trakl, *Dichtungen und Briefe*, ed. by Hans Weichselbaum (Müller, 2020)

## Introduction

The main challenge when confronting the role of rhythm in poetry lies in its all-encompassing presence. Rhythm is so intimately embedded in the workings of poems that it is often considered synonymous with poetry as such; ‘we know poetry is rhythm’, notes W. B. Yeats.<sup>1</sup> Or, as Don Paterson states: ‘Rhythm is an inevitable feature of poetic speech.’<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it is such an inherent feature of poetry that it often simply – and somewhat paradoxically – completely escapes notice. While metre may be the most obvious manifestation of rhythm in poetry, the effects of rhythm are much larger, yet often more difficult to pin down. If it is frequently the perceived invisibility or marginal existence of certain characteristics in literature that encourages their investigation, the desire to reveal the invisible and make the inaccessible available, then it is precisely rhythm’s dual aspect – its pervasiveness and consequent elusiveness – that makes it such an intriguing topic of exploration. It is always abundantly present when one encounters poetry, yet only rarely does it take centre stage as an object of investigation in its own right.

Given its omnipresence, it is rather surprising that scholarship on poetry has not yet been able to provide an exhaustive explanation of what exactly it is that rhythm actually *does* in or to poetry.<sup>3</sup> In his 2016 lecture ‘Why Prosody and Rhythm Matter – in Poetry and in the Humanities at Large’, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht attempts to tackle the larger issue of prosody, which he considers synonymous with poetic form more generally, focussing on rhythm as its representative

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted in Richard Londraville, ‘Four Lectures by W. B. Yeats, 1902-4’, *Yeats Annual*, 8 (1991), pp. 78–122 (p. 89).

<sup>2</sup> Don Paterson, *The Poem: Lyric, Sign, Metre* (Faber & Faber, 2018), p. 341.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of these efforts in the wider context of the Humanities in general, see Isabel Zollna, ‘Der Rhythmus in der geisteswissenschaftlichen Forschung: Ein Überblick’, *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik*, 24.96 (1994), pp. 12–52.

constituent. According to him, ‘the question of the function of prosody is the most secret and most embarrassing blind spot of literary criticism and theory’. Indeed, the rhythmical nature of poetic texts is for the most part ignored by scholars in their various analyses. Gumbrecht pointedly remarks that if one considers scholarship on Baudelaire by most major critics, ‘they could have written absolutely the same thing [...] if Baudelaire had not written it in verse form.’<sup>4</sup> Although literary criticism and theory have in fact made ample attempts to catch hold of rhythm, it remains, as Ben Glaser notes, ‘a term at once suspicious and essential to the discipline of literary study’.<sup>5</sup> Rhythm, it appears, is equally as elusive as it is accessible and as absent as it is present in the context of literary analysis.<sup>6</sup> For Lexi Eikelboom, borrowing from Derrida, the concept of rhythm is a spectre haunting philosophy and she diagnoses a similar blind spot in philosophical scholarship: ‘The difference between these other categories – time, space, language, consciousness – and rhythm, is that all the others are already considered significant topics of study. They represent central philosophical categories. Rhythm, on the other hand, remains a ghost.’<sup>7</sup>

If indeed, as Gumbrecht suggests, the question of what rhythm does to poetry has not been settled yet (and perhaps does not have any definitive answer at all), this could suggest that the relationship between poetry and rhythm needs to be approached from a different point of view. As part of this thesis, I argue for a rethinking of this connection, which has often been portrayed as monocausal and unilateral. Rather than just asking, ‘What does rhythm do to poetry?’, that is to

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<sup>4</sup> Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, ‘Why Prosody and Rhythm Matter – in Poetry and in the Humanities at Large’, 12 May 2016 <<https://youtu.be/sndKn4mQh4I>>.

<sup>5</sup> Ben Glaser, ‘Introduction’, in *Critical Rhythm: The Poetics of a Literary Life Form*, ed. by Ben Glaser and Jonathan Culler (Fordham University Press, 2019), pp. 1–17 (p. 3).

<sup>6</sup> The same holds equally true for the study of rhythm in the context of musicology, as Wilhelm Seidel attests: ‘Was nach Riemann über den musikalischen Rhythmus geschrieben worden ist, erweist sich als höchst disparat: hinsichtlich des Interesses, der Methode, der Terminologie, des Objektes und der Ergebnisse. Dies gefährdet die Kontinuität des wissenschaftlichen Gespräches; es ist gegenwärtig fast unmöglich geworden, Standpunkte zu vergleichen und Kontroversen auszutragen.’ Wilhelm Seidel, *Rhythmus: Eine Begriffsbestimmung* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976), p. vii.

<sup>7</sup> Lexi Eikelboom, *Rhythm: A Theological Category* (Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 2.

assume 'rhythm to be a given, pre-existing formal element sorted out later through scansion, description, and taxonomy',<sup>8</sup> a different perspective needs to be taken into consideration, that is 'What does poetry/the poet do to rhythm?'. If rhythm is as ubiquitous and indispensable to poetry as it seems to be, the most significant avenues of investigation must arguably open up in the spaces where poet and poem acknowledge this fact and consciously engage with the obviousness of the concept, thereby making it their own. In their negotiation of rhythm, the authors examined in this thesis investigate what it means to make poetry and the effects it accomplishes.

Moreover, examining how these poets engage with rhythm reveals that it is much more than a mere formal element. It becomes a multifaceted instrument through which they explore imagery, movement, thematic relationships, and intricate processes of sense-making in their poetry and beyond. Arno Holz (1863–1929), for example, uses rhythm as a tool to unsettle the traditions of poetic language, paving the way for an unbounded display of the materiality of language. Stefan George (1868–1933), on the other hand, considers rhythm as a form of more controlled precision, where the measured metres of his poems allow connections between poetic traditions and his own self-stylisation to emerge. For Georg Trakl (1887–1914), rhythm is unruly, almost volatile, mirroring the unrest of both his environment and inner world, while also providing a tool to make sense of the upheavals of the modern world surrounding him.

Each of the three poets discussed in this thesis engages with rhythm not only along a few shared and consensual lines, influenced in part by their involvement in the contemporaneous intellectual environment. Rather, their relationship to rhythm is first and foremost a highly personalised one, just like the poetry itself through which their engagement with the concept reverberates. By considering both the cultural context as well as the habits of individual writers, it is possible to

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<sup>8</sup> Glaser, 'Introduction', p. 3.

shed some light on the most salient parts of the interaction between poetry and the concept of rhythm. What is more, it becomes clear how immensely varied the understanding of rhythm in poetry can be, even within a particular period. For the three authors at the core of this thesis, each representative of a major literary school around 1900, rhythm is central in laying the groundwork to influence German-language poetry at that time and pave the way for further poetic innovations of the twentieth century. There remains the challenge, however, as to how best to approach the topic at hand.

## **What is Rhythm?**

One possibility to narrow down the subject of the intricate interplay between poetry and rhythm is to define first what rhythm is. A useful minimal definition of the term ‘rhythm’ might be that of a regular pattern of events in the broadest sense. This can refer to, on the one hand, strong patterns of sound in music or of movements in dance. However, on the other hand, this can also be extended to include biological and natural rhythmical occurrences, such as the beat of the heart, sleeping or breathing patterns, day cycles, seasons, or possibly even all wave-based (that is, periodic) phenomena in general, such as sound and light. Just like poetry, the world and our daily lives seem similarly bursting with rhythms, which is one of the reasons why the concept is so hard to pin down. This is a fact that Eikelboom recognises too: ‘As with categories like space, time, language, and consciousness, rhythm is one of those phenomena in which human experience is steeped. Almost everything we do and the ways in which we understand the world are bathed in rhythm.’<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, to grasp the concept properly it needs to be approached in situ, that is to say within the poems themselves, as well as in connection with the poet’s historical and intellectual

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<sup>9</sup> Eikelboom, *Rhythm: A Theological Category*, p. 2.

environment. This will be the case in the three main chapters of my thesis, each of which is focussed on a single author and their respective understandings and usages of rhythm embedded in the wider cultural discourse in the decades surrounding 1900.

However, before delving into the specifics of how rhythm is understood and utilized by Holz, George, and Trakl, it is essential to sketch some important general aspects of rhythm and the development of scholarship on it, in order to develop an initial sense for its multi-faceted, conceptually slippery appearance. One of the major obstacles is that what rhythm is and what it does can only rarely be easily distinguished. It is often the case that a particular universal definition of rhythm emerges from a rather narrow function assigned to it in a rather specific context. As David Waterhouse explains in his 1982 essay ‘Towards a New Analysis of Rhythm in Music’: ‘Rhythm is a word, and like any word it is not defined by its etymology or by some objectively existing fact or concept, but by the way we decide to use it.’<sup>10</sup> Just as any ghost does, rhythm’s haunting presence has attracted countless speculations about its nature throughout its time and the history of these assumptions is itself fraught with tensions and possible impasses. Therefore, this approach can merely offer a first step into this topic but nevertheless reveals some of the most important themes.

The concepts of ‘rhythm’ and, closely related to it, ‘metre’, which is particularly prevalent when talking about rhythm’s involvement in poetry, have been part of cultural discourse since even before classical antiquity.<sup>11</sup> Both have existed alongside each other for a long time and it is especially through points of con- and divergence that some important discussions emerge, as Erwin Arndt

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<sup>10</sup> David Waterhouse, ‘Towards a New Analysis of Rhythm in Music’, in *Cross Cultural Perspectives in Music*, ed. by Robert Falck and Timothy Rice (University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 29–37 (p. 30).

<sup>11</sup> For concise overviews see Michael P. Schmude, ‘Rhythmus’, in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik: Band VIII*, ed. by Gert Ueding (De Gruyter, 2007), pp. 223–41; Michael P. Schmude, ‘Metrik’, in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik: Band V*, ed. by Gert Ueding (De Gruyter, 2001), pp. 1223–32.

and Harald Fricke also recognise: ‘Der Begriff [Rhythmus] gewann seine Konturen nicht zuletzt durch seine Abgrenzungen im Spektrum von “Periodizität”, “Metrum”, “Sprache” und “Musik”.’<sup>12</sup>

While it might not be possible, following Waterhouse, to capture those terms entirely just by way of their etymology, their origins nevertheless play an important role in how both ‘rhythm’ and ‘metre’ have been used throughout the centuries. Recognising the historical foundations and distinct characteristics of the two concepts can provide valuable insights into their functions and interplay in poetic expression and help guide further explorations.

## Rhythm and Metre

It is sensible to begin with an explanation of the concept of ‘metre’ since it appears definitionally much more stable. The origins of the term can be traced back to the ancient Greek *μέτρον* (*métron*), referring, in the broadest sense, to a kind of tool that is used to perform measurements. However, in contrast to rhythm, metre has been associated with poetry and prosody in general, and the theory of metre, or *μετρικὴ τέχνη* (*metriké téchne*), in particular almost from the very beginning. Consequently, since the theory of metre is most concisely described as the ‘Lehre von den Versmaßen und strukturbildenden Gesetzmäßigkeiten der Dichtersprache’,<sup>13</sup> metre in turn is best understood as ‘allgemeines Prinzip der Versstrukturierung’.<sup>14</sup> While Christoph Küper rightly points out that ‘der Grundbegriff METRUM [...] in verschiedenen Bedeutungen gebraucht [wird]’, all of these meanings – such as a system of versification and its sub-classes, or simply the designation

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<sup>12</sup> Erwin Arndt and Harald Fricke, ‘Rhythmus’, in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft: Band III*, ed. by Georg Braungart and others (De Gruyter, 2007), pp. 301–04 (p. 302).

<sup>13</sup> Schmude, ‘Metrik’, p. 1223.

<sup>14</sup> Christoph Küper, ‘Metrik’, in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft: Band II*, ed. by Georg Braungart and others (De Gruyter, 2007), pp. 591–95 (p. 591).

for a single metrical foot – are sufficiently well contained in the description of metre as a general principle of the structure of verses (or perhaps shaped language in general).

While metre has had explicit links to poetry since its very inception, this is not the case for rhythm. The first mentions of the term ‘rhythm’ can be found in pre-Socratic times, when *ῥυθμός* (rhythμός) is used to describe, in a broad sense, a sort of shape or a particular arrangement. Its perhaps very first occurrence is in a seventh-century BCE fragment by Archilochus, in which it appears as a ‘force that grasps us and gives us form even before experience’.<sup>15</sup> It has long been assumed that the word originally derives from *ῥέω* (rhéō), meaning ‘to flow’, which is perhaps best known for appearing in the aphorism *πάντα ῥεῖ* (panta rhei, ‘everything flows’ / ‘all things are in flux’), famously attributed to Heraclitus.<sup>16</sup> However, more recent scholarship suggests that the word instead might derive from the ancient Greek *ἔρῳω* (eryō), meaning ‘to pull, draw, tug’ as used when describing the action of drawing a bow.<sup>17</sup> These possible roots of the term prefigure two major ranges of meaning that are often called upon when discussing rhythm: the smooth flow of continuous and/or periodic movement on the one hand, and what Schmude calls a ‘Spannungsgefüge’ providing discontinuity and boundaries to movement on the other hand.<sup>18</sup>

The latter dimension of meaning, the idea of rhythm as a force with primarily formative and sometimes compelling, even coercive properties was especially prevalent in pre-Socratic times. In addition to Archilochus’s fragment, this notion features in writings by authors such as Pindar,<sup>19</sup> Xenophon and Aeschylus. One of the most striking examples, according to Vincent Barletta, appears in Aeschylus’s play *Prometheus Bound*. The relevant scene finds Prometheus recounting the

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<sup>15</sup> Vincent Barletta, *Rhythm: Form and Dispossession* (University of Chicago Press, 2020), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> While he often employs this verb, Heraclitus never explicitly uses the term *ῥυθμός*. Barletta, *Rhythm*, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Schmude, ‘Rhythmus’, p. 223.

<sup>18</sup> Schmude, ‘Rhythmus’, p. 223.

<sup>19</sup> Pindar’s particular kind of rhythm, famously rendered in German by way of Hölderlin’s ‘harter Fügung’, will be discussed in some more detail below in the context of Stefan George’s poetry.

various transgressions that lead to his imprisonment and eventually lamenting his current state with the words: ‘instead I have been disciplined in this merciless way’.<sup>20</sup> The key word in the Greek original, which Sommerstein renders as the phrase ‘I have been disciplined’, is a middle voice verbal form, *ἐρρυθμισμαι* (*errhýthmismai*) to be exact, based on the noun *ῥυθμός* (*rhythmós*). Even though Sommerstein’s translation is fitting in the overall context of the passage, it nevertheless somewhat obscures some further layers of meaning that are present in the Greek original. While ‘disciplined’ manages to capture the punitive aspect of the event, it fails to account for the formative dimension, which is the simple fact of Prometheus being bound to a new order. On the one hand, it could be said that Aeschylus thus transforms the abstract notion of a ‘Spannungsgefüge’ intrinsic to rhythm mentioned above into a concrete manifestation in the form of the iron chains that bind Prometheus to the mountains. On the other hand, this particular choice of words points towards the presentation of Prometheus’s punishment as a spectacle, a performance as Barletta notes.<sup>21</sup> With that, rhythm could be considered, in its basic meaning and usage, a ritualistic, form-giving power.

It was only in the fourth century BCE, beginning with Plato and others in his wake, such as Aristotle and his pupil Aristoxenus, that rhythm came to be associated more firmly and almost exclusively with concepts such as movement, time, measurement, and periodicity. A revealing indicator for this is the fact that from the first century BCE onwards, the Latin translation of rhythm has quite consistently remained *numerus*.<sup>22</sup> The core of those theories of rhythm is summarised well by Wilfried Neumaier in what he calls an ‘überhistorische Substanz der antiken Rhythmik’:

Ein Rhythmus ist eine endliche Dauernfolge. Die Rhythmen selbst sind offenbar spezielle gegliederte Bewegungen. Jeder anderen gegliederten Bewegung ist auf natürliche Weise ein Rhythmus

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<sup>20</sup> Barletta quotes here from the English prose translation by Alan H. Sommerstein. Barletta, *Rhythm*, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Barletta, *Rhythm*, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> Christian Grüny and Matteo Nanni, ‘Einleitung’, in *Rhythmus - Balance - Metrum: Formen raumzeitlicher Organisation in den Künsten*, ed. by Christian Grüny and Matteo Nanni (Transcript, 2014), pp. 7–14.

zugeordnet, der lauter gleichlange gleichnummerierte Glieder besitzt und dessen Pausen gleichnummeriert sind. Einschichtige Sätze lassen sich mit gegliederten Bewegungen identifizieren und besitzen dementsprechend auch einen natürlich gegebenen Rhythmus.<sup>23</sup>

Although, as we have seen, this summary clearly ignores much of the development of the understanding of rhythm that occurred before Plato, it gives sufficient insight into a specific type of understanding of what rhythm is understood to be, not only in antiquity but also far beyond. It brings back to mind the minimal, everyday definition of rhythm mentioned earlier and while this grounding of it in classical antiquity might not help us to get to the roots of rhythm's function in poetry, it highlights the extent to which routine understandings of rhythm are steeped in ideas of patterns of movement and temporality. Gaining a perspective on the origins of this notion can point towards possible next steps in approximating rhythm's functions.

Combining the pre- and post-Socratic definitions of rhythm also highlights the ways in which the two concepts of rhythm and metre might converge – or how they might differ. Whereas rhythm seems to carry connotations of a more general, natural, and freely flowing movement, metre is associated with a more artificial, abstract, and constrained pattern, which is most of the time explicitly tied to language (or also music). This opposition, which will resurface again in some points of the discussion, was already quite established in classical times, as Michael Schmude recognises in the case of language: 'Dabei ist – historisch gesehen – für die antike Theorie der *ρυθμός* (rhythμός) allgemein jeder durch zeitliches Regellaß gegliederte Bewegungsablauf, das *μέτρον* der an das sprachliche Material gebundene Versrhythmus'.<sup>24</sup> Since then, this 'grundsätzliche Gegensatz' has permeated the European history of metre up until present times.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Wilfried Neumaier, *Antike Rhythmustheorien: Historische Form und Aktuelle Substanz* (B.R. Grüner B.V., 1989), p. 114.

<sup>24</sup> Schmude, 'Metrik', p. 1224.

<sup>25</sup> Küper, 'Metrik', p. 593.

## The Development of Rhythm and Metre in the Context of German-language Poetry before 1900

Examining the later developments in the intellectual history of these two concepts, especially in the context of German-language poetry, reveals some further points of divergence. During late antiquity and the Middle Ages, the contrast described by Schmude largely persisted and seemed to evolve more and more into an opposition between newer, accentuating measures in prose (representing the proponents of rhythm) and the older, quantitative style of poetry (as dictated by metre).<sup>26</sup> Central to this evolution, inspired by the connotations mentioned above, is the notion of rhythm denoting a quality that is naturally inherent in language, while metre is understood to be the source of a certain external structure, into which the poet incorporates the language.

A few of the subsequent major changes in the understanding of and relationship between rhythm and metre can be located in the middle of the seventeenth century, when the roles of both concepts seemed to shift, not least through the efforts of Martin Opitz and his works on the reform (or rather the foundations) of German-language poetry.<sup>27</sup> These changes were prefigured by new developments in music, where bar lines had been introduced, helping to visualise the durations of individual sounds and indicate the next accentuated note.<sup>28</sup> At roughly the same time, the German language had almost entirely finished transitioning from Middle to New High German and with that, came to be dominated almost exclusively by qualitative stresses rather than quantitative ones.<sup>29</sup> In his efforts to elevate the new German language to the status of a sublime object of art, Opitz most importantly insisted that the classical metrical system, based on the length of individual

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<sup>26</sup> Schmude, 'Rhythmus', pp. 237–39.

<sup>27</sup> See Martin Opitz, *Buch von der deutschen Poeterey* (Müller, 1624).

<sup>28</sup> Kai Christian Ghattas, *Rhythmus der Bilder: Narrative Strategien in Text- und Bildzeugnissen des 11. bis 13. Jahrhunderts* (Böhlau, 2009), p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> For a more detailed overview of this transition see Theo Vennemann, 'Der Zusammenbruch der Quantität im Spätmittelalter und sein Einfluß auf die Metrik', *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur Älteren Germanistik*, 42 (1995), pp. 185–223, doi:10/g6bchp.

syllables, be carried over onto the accent-based system of New High German. Opitz argued against the invention of novel metrical rules and rather insisted on the creative adoption of classical ideas.<sup>30</sup> While this reform had the advantage of introducing an incredible wealth of new forms of poetic expression into the German language, it also complicated the relationship between the concepts of rhythm and metre and had a resounding impact on the understandings and roles of both.

Due to changes in the seventeenth century, described by Kai Christian Ghattas as a ‘Nachaußenstülpen’<sup>31</sup> of the body, the long-standing conceptual divide between rhythm and metre was further reinforced and made significantly more noticeable.<sup>32</sup> With metre’s position strengthened, rhythm appeared almost on the verge of disappearing. Whereas before the reform it had existed as an independent quality of language, it now became to a certain degree subservient to metrical form and could easily be discarded as the failed execution of the poetical intentions that the poet imposed upon the language. In turn, what was now considered to be ‘rhythmical’ had also been subject to change. With the prevalence of accent-based formal structures, rhythm developed an undeniably more material, even physical, dimension:

Die Aufmerksamkeit des Hörers oder Lesers eilt von Sprachakzent zu Sprachakzent und rezipiert die zwischen ihnen liegenden Silben als ein notwendiges Tal. Der Silbendruck der ‘Gipfel’ ist dabei mit dem Ausatmen verknüpft, mit dem also, was aus dem Körper herausdrängt. Er manifestiert sich als Anspannung verschiedenster Muskelgruppen, presst den Atem in einem kurzen Moment explosiv zusammen, um dann den Rest des Wortes schnellstmöglich anzufügen.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Schmude, ‘Rhythmus’, p. 240.

<sup>31</sup> Ghattas, *Rhythmus der Bilder*, p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> It could also be said that this turn marked the beginning of a certain understanding of rhythm and its functions that is mostly dependent on the underlying metrical structure of the text. That is to say, rhythm is only perceptible, or even existent, as long as it deviates from a regular, prescribed metre. In short, rhythm as unruly aberration. For example, this would make King Lear’s famous line in the third scene of the last act of Shakespeare’s play one of the most quintessential instances of rhythm, with the natural stress of the words grinding against the blank verse: ‘Never, never, never, never, never!’ William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. by R. A. Foakes (Nelson, 1997), p. 390. For a critique of this understanding of rhythm and metre see Hans Lösener, *Zwischen Wort und Wort: Interpretation und Textanalyse* (Fink, 2006), pp. 260–67.

<sup>33</sup> Ghattas, *Rhythmus der Bilder*, p. 25.

Thus, while Opitz's reforms had initially suggested a significant decline of rhythm's popularity, changing understandings of rhythm and its capabilities elevated it to a superior position around the middle of the eighteenth century<sup>34</sup> as the predominant medium especially for the expression of subjective feeling in poetry.

It was then at this point in time, during the latter half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and encouraged in part by the aesthetic theories of Karl Philipp Moritz and Johannes Georg Sulzer, that German poets, such as Klopstock, Herder, Novalis, and eventually Hölderlin and the early Goethe, (re)discovered rhythm, often free from metrical dicta as so-called 'freier Rhythmus'.<sup>35</sup> Without the constrictions of formal features such as stanzas, rhyme, or regular alterations of stressed and unstressed syllables, this development opened up possibilities of more subjective stylisations in poetry to a considerable extent.<sup>36</sup> Thus, while metre initially gained increasingly more momentum and its status appeared elevated above that of rhythm, the latter concept eventually (re)gained its prominence and distinctiveness.

Klopstock in particular played an important role in these developments and laid crucial groundwork for the conceptualisation of free rhythms around 1750, not least through his deep engagement with the works of poets such as Horace and, most important of all, from the 1760s onwards Pindar.<sup>37</sup> Klopstock's innovations, summarised in broad strokes, intend to move away from strict metrical patterning based on individual syllables and focus instead on larger groupings

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<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that the proper German term 'Rhythmus' did not find its way into the German lexicon before the eighteenth century. Before that, its Latin equivalents such as *numerus*, *impressio* or *corso* had been used. See Schmude, 'Rhythmus', p. 223; Arndt and Fricke, 'Rhythmus', p. 302.

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of the development and intellectual history of metrical theory and free rhythms in the German language, see Hannah Vandegrift Eldridge, *Metrical Claims and Poetic Experience: Klopstock, Nietzsche, Grünbein* (Oxford University Press, 2022); See also Elisa Ronzheimer, *Poetologien des Rhythmus um 1800: Metrum und Versform bei Klopstock, Hölderlin, Novalis, Tieck und Goethe* (De Gruyter, 2020).

<sup>36</sup> Schmude, 'Rhythmus', p. 240.

<sup>37</sup> Erik Schilling, *Liminale Lyrik: Freirhythmische Hymnen von Klopstock bis zur Gegenwart*, *Abhandlungen zur Literaturwissenschaft* (Metzler, 2018), pp. 72–73.

of words. Eventually, through various interactions related to qualities of expression and tone, a certain ‘Bewegung der Wörter’<sup>38</sup> emerges that takes into account acoustic, semantic, as well as affective qualities.<sup>39</sup> In short, his theories allowed for new levels of subjectivity in poetry to emerge, while still preserving resonances of the metrical traditions of classical antiquity. Since then, Klopstock’s work has been essential for many German-language poets that followed.

In the course of this thesis, free rhythms and bits of the discussion surrounding them will resurface at times, as Klopstock’s poetry and his theories are an important cornerstone in the German-language development of the understanding of rhythm and metre. Arno Holz, for example, dismisses the concept as it does not meet the requirements he envisions for rhythm. Stefan George is quite similar in that he takes umbrage at the seemingly antithetical meaning of the term free rhythm; however, at the same time, George could be considered to continue Klopstock’s tradition with his poetry, especially considering Hölderlin’s not inconsiderable influence on George.<sup>40</sup> Lastly, as Eldridge notes, also Georg Trakl’s poetry is ‘unthinkable without Klopstock’s innovations’.<sup>41</sup> It is especially in the discussion of Trakl’s works that free rhythms will play a more extensive role. When necessary, more details regarding each poet’s relationship with free rhythms will be discussed in the respective chapters below. For now, I should like to continue to explore some further dimensions of rhythm.

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<sup>38</sup> Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, ‘Vom Deutschen Hexameter’, in *Gedanken über die Natur der Poesie*, ed. by Winfried Menninghaus (Suhrkamp, 1989), pp. 60–156 (p. 114); See also Winfried Menninghaus, ‘Dichtung als Tanz – Zu Klopstocks Poetik der Wortbewegung’, *Comparatio*, 3 (1991), pp. 129–50.

<sup>39</sup> Eldridge, *Metrical Claims and Poetic Experience*, p. 68.

<sup>40</sup> See for this Schilling, *Liminale Lyrik*, pp. 295–313.

<sup>41</sup> Eldridge, *Metrical Claims and Poetic Experience*, p. 57.

## Rhyme, Reason, and Rhythm

So far, the discussion of what rhythm means and what it does has been closely following its etymology and the historical development of the concept. We now move on to some definitions and functions of rhythm that extend beyond these considerations, and I will begin to do so by returning to Gumbrecht. As previously mentioned, in his lecture he aims to approach the larger issue of prosody through the lens of rhythm. For this, he proposes his own minimal definition of the term, borrowing from Husserl's concept of the 'Zeitobjekt im eigentlichen Sinn', which serves as the 'practical solution to the problem whether a time object in the sense proper can have a form.'<sup>42</sup> These particular 'Zeitobjekte' are phenomena that can only be experienced in their development through time, such as language, music, and movement. Gumbrecht includes references to Niklas Luhmann, who defines form as 'simultaneity of self-reference and outside reference', similar to a circle, which can point towards both its inside and the area outside of it simultaneously. This definition is useful as it manages to combine the two main tendencies of the understanding of rhythm in antiquity: the very basic, formative character of rhythm, which often goes unnoticed, and its more mainstream temporal aspects. With this, Gumbrecht presents a powerful explanation of rhythm that not only accounts for its role in poetry but potentially encompasses all rhythmic phenomena in art and beyond. Central to this are the concepts of repetition and recognition; something can only acquire a form if it exhibits a (more or less) regular recurrence of shapes and patterns. However, this definition falls short of fully explaining what rhythm in fact does with poetry, necessitating the examination of specific instances of rhythmical function, as Gumbrecht also does in his lecture. As seen above, sweeping attempts to define what

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<sup>42</sup> Gumbrecht, 'Why Prosody and Rhythm Matter'; This definition was originally proposed by Gumbrecht in his 1988 essay 'Rhythmus und Sinn', where it reads: 'Rhythmus ist das Gelingen von Form unter der (erschwerenden) Bedingung von Zeitlichkeit.' Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, 'Rhythmus und Sinn', in *Materialität der Kommunikation*, ed. by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Pfeiffer K. Ludwig (Suhrkamp, 1988), pp. 714–29 (p. 717).

rhythm does in a top-down manner often fail to yield satisfying results, making it necessary instead to include or even perhaps begin with individual instances of rhythm.

An important dimension when discussing functions of rhythm is its connection to content and meaning. Gumbrecht notes a widespread belief, reinforced by the way poetry is taught in schools, that there exists a correspondence between poetic form, mainly represented by rhythm, and semantic content through the process of 'lyrical overdetermination'.<sup>43</sup> If true, this would imply that the form of a poem is always subservient to its meaning and that the only effects rhythm can have are of a semantic nature, supporting the respective content. That this does not necessarily have to be the case, however, is perhaps most evident in more experimental genres such as concrete or sound poetry; Christian Morgenstern's 'Fisches Nachtgesang' comes to mind, or Kurt Schwitters's 'Ursonate'. These poems do not refer to any external meanings but rather emphasise their own inherent materiality, yet they are rich in rhythm. On the contrary, in extreme cases like this, freed from any association to meaning, rhythm may unfold its powers even more, as a potent tool for creating raw affect that manages to bypass the rational faculties.

However, this does not imply that rhythm and meaning share no connection at all; rather, it suggests their relationship to be more intricate than the commonly held unilateral beliefs mentioned in Gumbrecht's lecture. The connection between poetry and an area closely related to meaning, that is truth, is also addressed in a short 2007 essay by Richard Rorty, titled 'The Fire of Life'. In this piece, to which Gumbrecht refers as well, Rorty reflects on the usefulness of books in preparing him for death:

However that may be, I now wish that I had spent somewhat more of my life with verse. This is not because I fear having missed out on truths that are incapable of statement in prose. There are no such truths; there is nothing about death that Swinburne and Landor knew but Epicurus and Heidegger

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<sup>43</sup> Gumbrecht, 'Why Prosody and Rhythm Matter'.

failed to grasp. Rather, it is because I would have lived more fully if I had been able to rattle off more old chestnuts – just as I would have if I had made more close friends.<sup>44</sup>

According to Rorty, then, the truth expressed in a text remains independent of the form, although he acknowledges that poetic form can have other advantages. While Rorty's statement seems sensible – clearly the fundamental meaning of a word does not drastically change just because it is embedded into a certain framework of rhythm – it fails to account for a certain effect of rhythm that does interfere with our perception of truth, albeit in an indirect way. As Jonathan Culler posits, one effect of rhythm is 'to lend authority to lyric pronouncements'.<sup>45</sup> As an example for this he quotes a statement by the rapper Jay-Z, who argues that it was in part because of the authoritative power of rhythm and one of its subtypes, rhyme,<sup>46</sup> that O. J. Simpson was famously declared not-guilty. This is an allusion to the infamous quip by Johnnie Cochran, one of Simpson's solicitors, in his closing statement, when referring to a pair of gloves that were seemingly too small for his client's hands: 'If it doesn't fit you must acquit.' While it is, of course, hardly convincing to deduce the innocence of an alleged perpetrator just by virtue of a non-fitting piece of clothing, it is the rhythmical connection between the two rhyming words that helps to persuade the listener of the factuality of the statement. Culler calls this 'the enchantment of rhyme'.<sup>47</sup> A similar mechanism is at work, as claimed by Gumbrecht, in the famous revolutionary chant *¡El pueblo unido, jamás será vencido!* ('The people united will never be defeated!').

It is not at all the factual correctness of the exclamation that conveys a truth but rather its rhythmical organisation and effect. Rorty certainly seems to be aware of this sort of power that poetry appears to possess, as he assigns to it a much more impactful experience than to prose:

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<sup>44</sup> Richard Rorty, 'The Fire of Life', *Poetry*, 191.2 (2007), pp. 129–31 (p. 131).

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 183.

<sup>46</sup> In that it is just the (periodically patterned) correspondence of certain sounds in language.

<sup>47</sup> Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, p. 184.

I found comfort in those slow meanders and stuttering embers. I suspect that no comparable effect could have been produced by prose. Not just imagery, but also rhyme and rhythm were needed to do the job. In lines such as these, all three conspire to produce a degree of compression, and thus of impact that only verse can achieve. Compared to the shaped charges contrived by versifiers, even the best prose is scattershot.<sup>48</sup>

The function of rhythm, then, from this perspective, is largely an affective one, capable of bypassing intellectual reasoning and creating a direct emotional effect. A view that is also shared by Nicolas Abraham: ‘Rhythm produces in the reader the fundamental affect of the entire poem.’<sup>49</sup> Going back to the first quotation by Rorty, it is now easier to grasp the importance of its second half, where he equates a life well-lived with having read more works of poetry. It may be the emotional effects of rhythm in particular that give poetry, especially familiar, memorised verses, qualities that are similar to those of lifelong friends.

Rorty’s remarks follow an idea first argued in one of his earlier works, where he discusses the relationship between imagination and meaning:

In an essay called ‘Pragmatism and Romanticism’ I tried to restate the argument of Shelley’s ‘Defense of Poetry.’ At the heart of Romanticism, I said, was the claim that reason can only follow paths that the imagination has first broken. No words, no reasoning. No imagination, no new words. No such words, no moral or intellectual progress.<sup>50</sup>

In positioning imagination at the base of intellectual progress, Rorty already touches upon the important aspects of the example from the Simpson trial. Only by way of the imagination was it possible to convince the jury in the trial of the defendant’s innocence, since the fit of the gloves of course did not have a direct rational relation to the truth of the claim. The main factor that helped to spur the imagination was the rhythmical quality of the statement that accompanied the presentation of the evidence. This close link between rhythm and imagination also comes into play in the two traditional Old High German ‘Merseburger Zaubersprüche’, which count as one of the

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<sup>48</sup> Rorty, ‘The Fire of Life’, p. 130.

<sup>49</sup> Nicolas Abraham, *Rhythms: On the Work, Translation, and Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Benjamin Thigpen and Nicholas T. Rand (Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 123.

<sup>50</sup> Rorty, ‘The Fire of Life’, p. 129.

oldest examples of poetic writing in the German language. They are incantations intended to aid in loosening the chains of an imprisoned warrior, or heal a horse's broken limb, respectively. The spells derive their power from the ability of rhythmical language to stimulate the imagination and conjure up actual past or purely imaginary scenarios. This, then, is able to inspire the unshackling or healing forces necessary when facing an emergency situation.<sup>51</sup>

The qualities that can be attributed to rhythm according to Rorty's argument or its roles in the functioning of incantations bear close resemblance to a further aspect that is quite commonly mentioned. It is a perspective of rhythm as part of poetry in line with the earliest interpretations of it in antiquity. This approach considers it to be a primordial feature, already existing before a poem emerges and then being materialised in the finished work to bring it to life fully. According to T. S. Eliot, 'a poem may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and [that] this rhythm may bring to life the idea and the image'.<sup>52</sup> Paul Valéry, too, holds a very similar view and writes: 'It was born, like most of my poems, from the unexpected presence in my mind of a certain rhythm.'<sup>53</sup> In that sense, the spells mentioned above could be described as an instrument to tap into this primordial source and reconnect with it. It is also a way to harness it, to turn the originally 'unexpected presence' into a controlled and purposeful tool that may just be capable of asserting its influence on the material world. For Virginia Woolf, as she writes in a 1926 letter to Vita Sackville-West, rhythm has a provenance that is similarly difficult to locate as is the case in Eliot and Valéry and forms the basis for the subjective aesthetic category of 'style': 'Style is a very simple matter; it is all rhythm. Once you get that, you can't use the wrong words. [...] Now this is very profound, what rhythm is, and goes far deeper than words. A sight,

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<sup>51</sup> This brings to mind the opposite scenario of Prometheus who was bound by rhythm instead of being released by its powers.

<sup>52</sup> T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (Farrar, Strauss, 1957), p. 38.

<sup>53</sup> Frédéric Lefèvre, *Entretiens avec Paul Valéry* (Le Livre, 1926), p. 62.

an emotion, creates this wave in the mind, long before it makes words to fit it'.<sup>54</sup> A sense of effortlessness linked with a sense of urgency characterise Woolf's definition of rhythm, 'a preverbal interaction between the self and the external world that results in some form of internal displacement', as Barletta comments.<sup>55</sup> Once again, this point of view incorporates elements similar to the magical power of charms.<sup>56</sup> With this, literature appears not to have been written, but rather conjured up through the pathways of rhythm.

In her 2020 study, *Forms of Poetic Attention*, Lucy Alford presents a perspective on poetry that connects well with the functions of rhythm mentioned so far. Alford considers poetry, and especially its formal features, in the context of various kinds of attention:

It is true that poetic language is densely formed. But what is formed *by* and *in* poetic language is an event of attention generated in the acts of both reading and writing. I suggest that a poem might be better understood not simply as a gathering of composed formal features, but as an instrument for tuning and composing the attention.<sup>57</sup>

This wider definition of poetry as a tool for interacting with attention is very similar to Charles Hartman's ideas about the function of prosody and rhythm that employ attention as their cornerstone: 'I want to suggest one [definition, LJD], however, that will provide a reasonable basis for a theory of prosody: *A poem is the language of an act of attention.*'<sup>58</sup> Hartman further defines prosody as follows: 'The prosody of a poem is the poet's method of controlling the reader's temporal experience of the poem, especially his attention to that experience.'<sup>59</sup> And, since he

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<sup>54</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: 1923-1928* (Mariner Books, 1980), p. 247.

<sup>55</sup> Barletta, *Rhythm*, p. ix.

<sup>56</sup> See also Woolf's comments on musical rhythm in her 1905 essay 'Street Music': 'The beat of rhythm in the mind is akin to the beat of the pulse in the body; and thus though many are deaf to tune hardly anyone is so coarsely organized as not to hear the rhythm of his own heart in words and music and movement. It is because it is thus inborn in us that we can never silence music, any more than we can stop our heart from beating; and it is for this reason too that music is so universal and has the strange and illimitable power of a natural force.' Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music', *National Review*, 45 (1905), pp. 144–48 (p. 147).

<sup>57</sup> Lucy Alford, *Forms of Poetic Attention* (Columbia University Press, 2020), pp. 3–4.

<sup>58</sup> Charles O. Hartman, *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody* (Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 12 (emphasis in original).

<sup>59</sup> Hartman, *Free Verse*, p. 13 (emphasis in original).

considers rhythm to be ‘the temporal distribution of the elements of language’, poetry therefore seems especially well-suited to display and present rhythm and have it steer the attention of the reader.<sup>60</sup> Similar to the interaction between the self and the outer world mediated by rhythm that Woolf proposed, Hartman and Alford suggest a transgression of boundaries in the interaction between poem and reader. According to Alford, there is a further trait of poetic attention that sets it apart from aesthetic attention in a more general sense: ‘However, poetic attention is unique and in some ways primary to aesthetic attention more generally. In poems, the otherwise shapeless medium of language becomes an object for the senses.’<sup>61</sup> It is, then, poetic attention, and with that also rhythm, as its main medium, that have the ability to translate the immaterial contents of poetry and give them an almost corporeal reality. It is an ability that Derek Attridge as well identifies as quintessentially linked to rhythm:

The engine that drives this sonorous and meaningful activity is rhythm: the continuous motion that pushes spoken language forward, in more or less regular waves, as the musculature of the speech organs tightens and relaxes, as energy pulsates through the words we speak and hear, as the brain marshals multiple stimuli into ordered patterns. To understand and enjoy poetry means responding to, and participating in, its rhythm – not as one of a number of features that make up the poetic experience, but as the heart of that experience.<sup>62</sup>

Perhaps connected to the conceptions above that consider rhythm a facilitator of border crossings is the fact that it is also often invoked as a metaphorical gauge or some sort of tuning fork to ascertain the status of someone or something in relation to their environment. However, the fuzziness that accompanies most of rhythm’s functions is also at play in this case. Eikelboom describes this quite well:

Imagine that I have recently moved to a new job in a new town and you ask me how I am settling in. If I were to tell you that I was getting into a rhythm, or, more likely, that I still needed to get into

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<sup>60</sup> Hartman, *Free Verse*, p. 14.

<sup>61</sup> Alford, *Forms of Poetic Attention*, p. 14.

<sup>62</sup> Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 1.

a rhythm but had not yet done so, you would probably know what I meant. Yet, if we stop to consider it, we find that what we mean when we refer to rhythm in this way is not at all clear.<sup>63</sup>

According to this understanding, rhythm has the function of a mediator between individual and its environment that is not simply defined along temporal terms but encompasses a holistic view of settling into a new place. Settling into a rhythm does not only mean coming to terms with a new kind of temporality but also embedding oneself into a new milieu and possibly the lives of new acquaintances.

What, then, happens when something or someone is ‘out of rhythm’? The outcomes clearly can vary in severity. It can have very real consequences that go far beyond a slight offset in synchronicity, especially when considering various biological rhythms. Arrhythmia of the heart is doubtless more serious in its consequences than a few uneven bars played by a marching band. Nevertheless, the ramifications, when it comes to rhythm in poetry, can at times almost seem to approach the seriousness of an irregular heartbeat, as the examples by Rorty or the O.J. Simpson trial demonstrate. Rhythm, then, does not only seem to be ubiquitous in poetry but also indispensable, sitting at the very heart of its mechanisms and effects.

Rhythm emerges as an indispensable and multi-faceted element not only in poetry but also far beyond, fundamentally shaping our experiences and interactions with the world. Drawing from Gumbrecht and incorporating historical and contemporary perspectives, rhythm is not merely a formal element but a dynamic force that is deeply interwoven in the very fabric of poetic expression. Its impact extends beyond the structural to the semantic and affective realms. Non-semantic, experimental poetry shows that rhythm alone can evoke profound emotional responses, bypassing intellectual reasoning. This affective power suggests that rhythm can lend persuasive power and

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<sup>63</sup> Eikelboom, *Rhythm: A Theological Category*, p. 1.

emotional weight to poetic announcements, transcending mere content in communication to engage with our deeper sensibilities. This aligns with the view of rhythm as a preverbal, primordial force that brings poetry to life. It often precedes and shapes poetic expression, serving as a facilitator for imagination and intellectual progress. Furthermore, it can act as a mediator between the individual and their environment, helping to create a sense of belonging and integration. The consequences of being 'out of rhythm' can be significant, highlighting rhythm's essential role in maintaining harmony and coherence, whether in poetry or in life more generally. Ultimately, it appears to be less of a feature of poetry and more of a central constituent of its conception and experience and it is through rhythm that poetry achieves its meaningful and vital status in the field of human expression.

### **Discussions of Rhythm and Metre around 1900 in Germany**

The following three chapters of this thesis examine three poets central to German literature around the turn of the last century – Arno Holz, Stefan George, and Georg Trakl – and investigate how and why they approached rhythm. All three authors understood rhythm as a tool to investigate poetic practices, find new means of expression, and underpin their poetic intentions. They found themselves working and writing in a time when an interest in rhythm was pervasive, its presence nearly universal not only in poetry but across the arts and various intellectual landscapes. However, it was also a time that was decidedly arrhythmic (bringing to mind Eikelboom's discussion of rhythm) in that the often abrupt and radical changes that the modern world brought about instilled a profound feeling of uprootedness in society at large. Holz, Trakl, and George thus needed to grapple in their works with the twofold influences of rhythmic prevalence and arrhythmic disruption.

Rhythm's significance lies in its function within the works of these three poets and its interactions with their poetry. For Holz, rhythm was mainly a tool and connective element to

pursue no less than a radical revolution of poetic language at that time. George found in it, among other features, essential means to connect to tradition and develop a poetic identity, while Trakl used it to negotiate the appearances of images and meanings in his poems and their relationship to the world. Collectively, these three poets suggest a portrait of the various challenges that writers encountered in the cultural and societal landscapes around 1900, a time when numerous ideas about rhythm were in circulation, influencing their works.<sup>64</sup> Below, I would like to briefly sketch the rhythmical climate in which they found themselves to provide a starting point for further explorations.

Many of the cultural upheavals and changes around the beginning of the twentieth century were connected to rhythm. In many ways, the cultural environment then can serve as a large-scale case study to explore the question of what happens when certain things find themselves out of rhythm and, in turn, the concept itself becomes a term of contention. Due to this, Massimo Salgaro and Michele Vangi even speak of a prevailing ‘Mythos Rhythmus’ around the turn of the last century, which promised to be both a representation of the societal and cultural environment back then and, somewhat paradoxically, a possible tool to free oneself of those circumstances.<sup>65</sup> There was a widespread belief that the individual was out of step with the current times and in order to get back into the rhythm, as it were, many thinkers across a variety of disciplines turned their attention towards a closer inspection of the concept itself. Rapid technological and societal changes demanded new methods of adjustment and, according to Christine Lubkoll, an orientation towards concepts of rhythm has been representative of most transitional periods in European cultural history. The outgoing nineteenth century with its steady push towards acceleration and

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<sup>64</sup> For an insightful and detailed account of the importance of rhythm around that time in a mostly Britain- and America-focused context, see Laura Marcus, *Rhythmical Subjects: The Measures of the Modern* (Oxford, 2023).

<sup>65</sup> *Mythos Rhythmus: Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur um 1900*, ed. by Massimo Salgaro and Michele Vangi, Aurora – Schriften der Villa Vigoni, 3 (Steiner, 2016).

modernisation proved to be a perfect breeding ground for this and, following Lubkoll, also re-invigorated the tension inherent in the relationship between rhythm and metre.<sup>66</sup>

Many developments in the arts, literature or music were closely connected to novel manifestations of rhythm or reassessments of it as a more overarching concept. To consider just one of the more striking examples, as far as classical music was concerned, its era of Modernity could be considered to be fully ushered in by an event that initially gave the impression of being very much out of rhythm. On 29 May 1913, Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* celebrated its premiere in Paris and delivered a radical rhythmical shock to the heart of the European musical establishment at that time. Although more unconventional harmonics had quite established themselves by then, with the likes of Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler, Claude Debussy and the Second Viennese School surrounding Arnold Schoenberg leading the way, it was the rhythmical innovation of Stravinsky that truly marked the major paradigm shift happening in classical music.<sup>67</sup> Astonishingly, although much more severe in their effects on the listeners than the tonal innovations had been, the new rhythms on display were ultimately embraced much more readily by other composers and audiences alike. To borrow a term mentioned earlier, Stravinsky's *Rite* is a 'Nachaußenstülpen' of the body par excellence, its rhythms affecting the bodies of the dancers as well as the audience without detours. It is especially this immediate physical connection that allowed for the composition, as unsettling as it was at the premiere and still is to this day, to be accepted into the canon of classical music practically after just a handful of performances.

However, around 1900, the influence of rhythm quickly expanded, and it proliferated from the arts into many other disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, pedagogy, and sociology. An

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<sup>66</sup> Christine Lubkoll, 'Rhythmus: Zum Konnex von Lebensphilosophie und ästhetischer Moderne um 1900', in *Das Imaginäre des Fin de siècle: Ein Symposium für Gerhard Neumann*, ed. by Christine Lubkoll (Rombach, 2002), pp. 83–110 (pp. 83–84).

<sup>67</sup> Alex Ross, *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (Fourth Estate, 2012), pp. 80–82.

illuminating and infamous example for this is the educator Rudolf Bode, founder of expressive gymnastics and from the 1930s onwards ardent supporter of National Socialism. His emphasis on the physical dimensions of rhythm brings to mind the overwhelming effects of Stravinsky's ballets. The thoughts in his 1923 collection of essays *Rhythmus und Körpererziehung* can serve as a benchmark to reveal the pervasive enthusiasm extended towards rhythm in the preceding decades and illustrates major parts of the coordinate system in which the concepts of metre and rhythm were situated:

Vor allem gilt dies für die Frage nach dem Wesen des Rhythmischen in seiner Gegensätzlichkeit zum Metrischen. Diese Frage birgt das Zentralproblem nicht nur der körperlichen Erziehung, sondern der Erziehung überhaupt. In ihm sind alle Gegensätze eingeschlossen, deren Nichterkennen und daraus folgende Vertauschung und Verwechslung einen der wesentlichen Gründe für die zur Zeit herrschende babylonische Begriffsverwirrung bildet. Das Organische im Gegensatz zur Maschine, die Seele im Gegensatz zum Geist, das Individuum im Gegensatz zum Ich, die Natur im Gegensatz zum Gesetz, das Wirken im Gegensatz zur Tat, der Lebensbetrieb im Gegensatz zum Machtwillen, die Ethik im Gegensatz zur Moral, das Volk im Gegensatz zum Staat, der Eros im Gegensatz zum Logos: all diese Urgegensätze wirbelt eine instinktos gewordene Gegenwart blind durcheinander, sich selbst schließlich der Möglichkeit beraubend, Freund und Feind klar zu unterscheiden.<sup>68</sup>

It is obvious that this paragraph quickly goes far beyond the scope announced by the title of the collection, which reveals itself as a thinly veiled pedagogical venture. The excerpt draws distinct boundaries between rhythm and metre and presents them as an antagonistic pair that stands in for a wide gamut of contemporary cultural and political conflicts.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, it is first and foremost a political impetus that appears to motivate Bode's remarks. He himself, after joining the NSDAP

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<sup>68</sup> Rudolf Bode, *Rhythmus und Körpererziehung: Fünf Abhandlungen* (Diederichs, 1923), p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> Interestingly the wording 'babylonische Begriffsverwirrung' used by Bode finds a much later echo in the opening paragraph of Thomas Mann's 1951 novel *Der Erwählte*, where a very similar metaphor is used in the context of a description of ringing bells: 'Glockenschall, Glockenschwall supra urbem, über der ganzen Stadt, in ihren von Klang überfüllten Lüften! Glocken, Glocken, sie schwingen und schaukeln, wogen und wiegen ausholend an ihren Balken, in ihren Stühlen, hundertstimmig, in babylonischem Durcheinander. Schwer und geschwind, brummend und bimmelnd, - da ist nicht Zeitmaß noch Einklang, sie reden auf einmal und alle einander ins Wort, ins Wort auch sich selber [...].' Thomas Mann, *Gesammelte Werke in Einzelbänden: Frankfurter Ausgabe: Der Erwählte* (Fischer, 1980), p. 7. Christine Lubkoll chooses this very passage as point of departure for her overview of the concepts of rhythm and metre and considers it an example of the description and literary stylisation of the basic anthropological phenomenon rhythm. See Christine Lubkoll, 'Rhythmus und Metrum', in *Literaturwissenschaft: Einführung in ein Sprachspiel*, ed. by Heinrich Bosse and Ursula Renner (Rombach, 1999), pp. 103–21.

in 1932, would later become group leader in the *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* in 1933 and, in 1935, an important part of the *Reichssportschule* of the *Reichsnährstand*. He also founded the aptly named *Deutscher Rhythmusbund* in 1926. However, notwithstanding the political dimensions of the passage, it nevertheless illustrates succinctly some of the major directions that dominated the cultural discussions surrounding rhythm and metre at the turn of the century. Part of these was the fundamental antagonism between the two concepts, each of them individually equipped with their respective value judgements and arsenal of metaphors. While, as Bode's statement makes clear, rhythm is generally considered to be a positive, natural, and instinctual force, metre, on the other hand, is thought to be negative, unnatural, and intellectual; in short: rhythm is good, metre is bad.

Connected to this assessment of the two concepts is moreover a diagnosis of the times that Bode had in common with many of his contemporaries and which I have already addressed above. Described by him as an 'instinktlos gewordene Gegenwart', society and its culture around the turn of the century were often viewed as a 'time out of joint', a deficient reality dominated by the new beat of industrialised economy and far removed from the organic roots of rhythm. Following Gabriele Brandstetter, it can be considered a 'Zeitalter [...] der Arrhythmie'<sup>70</sup> and various efforts emerged that made it their main objective to restore rhythm to the world. Taking Bode's commentary and its broader implications as a point of departure, I will highlight some of the most important waypoints of the theoretical discussions around 1900 and the various understandings of rhythm and metre they employed.

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<sup>70</sup> Gabriele Brandstetter, 'Rhythmus als Lebensanschauung: Zum Bewegungsdiskurs um 1900', in *Aus dem Takt: Rhythmus in Kunst, Kultur und Natur*, ed. by Christa Brüstle and others (Transcript, 2005), pp. 33–44 (p. 31).

Closely connected to thoughts about cultural arrhythmia and disconnect at that time are discussions surrounding anxiety and nervousness related to drastic societal changes that began to form from the 1880s onwards.<sup>71</sup> As Michael Cowan states, the essential role of nervousness in the cultural debates around 1900 was ‘its status as the quintessential condition of psychic passivity’.<sup>72</sup> In order to overcome this overarching feeling of passivity, a counter movement developed that focused instead on an active education of the body as well as of the mind, the eponymous ‘Cult of the Will’ of Cowan’s study, and to which Bode could be considered to belong. Rhythm is linked to this in various ways, not least because the concepts of nervousness, that is neurasthenia, and arrhythmia were often used almost synonymously, for example by the economist and sociologist Karl Bücher, who will be discussed in more detail below.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, approaches to remedy the alleged nervousness of the age that focused on rhythm – the experience and execution of it – seemed to be quite obvious solutions.

As mentioned, the overarching cultural discourse at the turn of the last century was permeated by a strong feeling of disconnect and being out-of-joint, a cultural arrhythmia, as it were. The deficiencies of the modern present were oftentimes counteracted by the belief in some idyllic original state of humanity to which one could return. Rhythm, it appeared, could often serve to bridge the gap between the inadequate and unnatural state of the present, and this highly desirable, yet vague, place of longing. When Charles Darwin’s *Descent of Man* was first published in 1871 it famously dethroned humanity from its elevated position in nature and positioned it firmly amid

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<sup>71</sup> Michael J. Cowan, *Cult of the Will: Nervousness and German Modernity* (Penn State University Press, 2008), pp. 21–22; For more details on the late nineteenth century as the age of nervousness, see Michael Worbs, *Nervenkunst: Literatur und Psychoanalyse im Wien der Jahrhundertwende* (Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1983); Richard Krafft-Ebing, *Nervosität und Neurasthenische Zustände* (Hölder, 1895); Joachim Radkau, *Das Zeitalter der Nervosität: Deutschland zwischen Bismarck und Hitler* (Propyläen, 2000).

<sup>72</sup> Cowan, *Cult of the Will*, p. 8.

<sup>73</sup> Cowan, *Cult of the Will*, p. 197.

the rest of organic life. However, it also meant, to a certain extent, the possibility of a reunification of humanity with nature. Through the discovery of the common origins between man and animal, Darwin put the primitive state in which humans can be one with nature again back within realistic reach and all that was needed was a vehicle that was able to induce this state. An important link between animals of all kinds, as Darwin recognised, was revealed to be rhythm: ‘The perception, if not the enjoyment, of musical cadences and rhythm is probably common to all animals and depends on the common physiological nature of their nervous system.’<sup>74</sup> This is perhaps one of the earliest examples of the nearly mythological qualities that were ascribed to at that time and which Salgaro and Vangi allude to in their analysis.

Rhythm thus quickly acquired the status of mediator between the fragmented world created by the changes of Modernity and the utopia located in the abstract yearning for a harmonious coexistence with nature.<sup>75</sup> The concept became an instrument of subversion, counteracting the negative effects of rapid technological and societal progress. In the wake of Darwin’s publication, other sciences quickly followed suit in discovering the conceptual surplus value that the concept of rhythm could provide. In the social sciences, for example, it was Bücher leading the way with his seminal work *Arbeit und Rhythmus* (1909).<sup>76</sup> It is an economical perspective on the nature-focused yearning described above and a comparative study of the nature of labour between modern society and indigenous peoples. Arguing that the concept of work prevalent in indigenous societies is vastly superior to modern conceptions, it aligns strongly with the enlightenment tendency to romanticise

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<sup>74</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (Murray, 1871), p. 333.

<sup>75</sup> Perhaps the most extreme instances of this urge towards nature was the *Lebensreform* movement and its prominent proponents such as Rudolf Steiner, Sebastian Kneipp and Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach.

<sup>76</sup> Karl Bücher, *Arbeit und Rhythmus* (Teubner, 1909).

and idealise the ‘noble savage’.<sup>77</sup> According to Bücher, a more ‘primitive’ understanding of work would bring society not only closer to nature but also to art:

Zunächst wirkt künstlerisches Bilden und Gestalten an und für sich anregend und spornt beim Fortschreiten des Werkes immer wieder vom Neuen zur Tätigkeit an. Aber auch mit der Vollendung des Geschaffenen erkaltet nicht die Freude an ihm. [...] Da in der Regel jeder sein Arbeitsprodukt auch selbst zu gebrauchen beabsichtigt, so teilt sich die Freude und die Ehre des Besitzes schon der Seele des Arbeitenden mit und ermuntert ihn um so mehr zur Ausdauer, je näher das werdende Erzeugnis der Vollendung kommt. Das Gewordene selbst wieder trägt nach Ursprung und Bestimmung ein ausgesprochen individuelles Gepräge; als Verkörperung der individuellen Arbeit und als Ausrüstung für das Leben wird es recht eigentlich zu einem Stück der Person, die es schuf. [...] In dieser fortdauernden Gemeinschaft des Produzenten und des Produktes liegt gewiss ein kulturförderndes, die Arbeitsmühe erleichterndes Moment. Was heute nur der bildende Künstler, der Dichter, an ihren Werken erfahren, dass sie Ruhm bringen, das war gewiss ursprünglich jedem gelungenen Erzeugnis der Menschenhand eigen. Und die Freude des Schaffens, die der Kulturmensch fast nur noch bei der Geistesarbeit recht empfindet, muß den Naturmenschen überall beseelt haben.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, against the backdrop of modern labour conditions that increasingly remove the worker from his creation, via the dichotomy of producer and product amongst other factors, indigenous ways of working can provide a more unobstructed relationship between workers (or, in this case, artist, too) and their work. Bücher even goes so far as to believe (economic) work to be the basis for the specific art of poetry, mediated by the rhythmical movements of the body and the songs sung by the workers: ‘Es ist die energische rhythmische Körperbewegung, die zur Entstehung der Poesie geführt hat. Insbesondere die Bewegung, die wir Arbeit nennen.’<sup>79</sup> Therefore, the link between work, poetry and also music can be found in rhythm, according to Karl Bücher.

While Bücher suggests that in order to reconcile modern society with the changed circumstances brought about by industrialisation one must return to a more primordial state of mind and work, other approaches were developed that favoured a more adaptive stance towards the changed means

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<sup>77</sup> Massimo Salgaro and Michele Vangi, ‘Der Mythos Rhythmus’, in *Mythos Rhythmus: Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur um 1900*, ed. by Massimo Salgaro and Michele Vangi, Aurora – Schriften der Villa Vigoni, 3 (Steiner, 2016), pp. 11–26 (p. 18).

<sup>78</sup> Bücher, *Arbeit und Rhythmus*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>79</sup> Bücher, *Arbeit und Rhythmus*, p. 365.

and movements of production. One of these contrary voices belonged to the German American psychologist Hugo Münsterberg, one of the pioneers in the field of applied psychology. In his 1912 work *Psychologie und Wirtschaftsleben* he argues that humans should adapt to the rhythmic requirements of the workplace. His argument has the same point of departure as the life reform movement, albeit reaching a different conclusion. While he also asserts that the advent of large-scale machine-based methods of production lead to the loss of a basic, natural rhythm, he argues that the new, artificial ones could indeed optimise human movement:

Die rhythmische Tätigkeit bedeutet notwendigerweise psychophysische Ersparnis, und diese Ersparnis ist instinktiv in der ganzen Kulturgeschichte angestrebt. Die Wiederholung der Bewegung, wie der Rhythmus sie erlaubt, macht keine wirkliche Wiederholung des psychophysischen Impulses notwendig. Die Hemmungen fallen weg, und die bloße Nachwirkung erlaubt eine Ersparnis bei dem erneuten Impuls. Die Geschichte der Maschine zeigt sogar, daß die neueren technischen Entwicklungen nicht nur die Arbeitsteilung schon zur Voraussetzung hatten, sondern für die zerlegte Arbeit bereits eine weitgehende, dem psychophysischen Organismus angepasste Rhythmisierung der Arbeit in den Werkstätten vorfanden. Die Maschine hat dann zunächst häufig nur die rhythmischen Bewegungen des Menschen nachgeahmt.<sup>80</sup>

It might sound surprising that Münsterberg does not consider the novel rhythmic movements of the machines a completely new and alien development for society but rather thinks of them as a natural evolution of the original human movements that existed long before the invention of machines. While he does indeed concede that a certain acceleration inherent in the rhythms of automation led to a de-synchronisation of movements,<sup>81</sup> Münsterberg nevertheless upholds the view that an assimilation of the human rhythm to the changed conditions of work will not only result in a harmonious relationship but will further increase productivity.

Even though Bücher's and Münsterberg's perspectives are diametrically opposed, they nonetheless both consider rhythm to be an essential tool to reconcile the modern individual with

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<sup>80</sup> Hugo Münsterberg, *Psychologie und Wirtschaftsleben: Ein Beitrag zur angewandten Experimental-Psychologie* (Barth, 1912), p. 97.

<sup>81</sup> Münsterberg, *Psychologie und Wirtschaftsleben: Ein Beitrag zur angewandten Experimental-Psychologie*, p. 97.

the living conditions at that time. As Salgaro and Vangi point out, especially the framework put forward by Bücher closely approaches more modern understandings of performance and in particular modern dance.<sup>82</sup> It is then not surprising that one of the most potent expressions of the new advocacy for the regenerative powers of rhythm was to be found in the aesthetics and, above all, the pedagogics of dance.<sup>83</sup>

One of the major proponents of dance-therapy around 1900 was the Swiss composer, musician, and educator Émile Jacques-Dalcroze, who also happened to be the teacher of Bode. In 1911 in Hellerau near Dresden he founded, together with Wolf Dohm, the famous *Bildungsanstalt für Musik und Rhythmus*, a school originally intended to instruct its students during their two-year stay in music, dance, and rhythmical gymnastics.<sup>84</sup> Jacques-Dalcroze considered mental conditioning as an essential part of physical education.<sup>85</sup> He advertised a strong bond between the body and the brain and wanted to instil in his students an absolute command of their movements at all times. Jacques-Dalcroze's project emerged very much from a desire to counteract the increasing arrhythmia of the times. One of the more widespread consequences of this process of losing touch with the environment was an overstimulation of the senses, resulting in hypersensitivity of the

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<sup>82</sup> Salgaro and Vangi, 'Der Mythos Rhythmus', p. 19; See also Brandstetter, 'Rhythmus als Lebensanschauung: Zum Bewegungsdiskurs um 1900', pp. 38–39.

<sup>83</sup> The turn of the century saw an almost explosive expansion of the popularity of dance and the development of completely new dance styles. As the following analysis by Siegfried Kracauer in his work *Das Ornament der Masse* (1925) illustrates, dancing even became so popular that rhythm started to lose its status as mediator and slowly became an end in itself: 'Der moderne Gesellschaftstanz, dem Gefüge der in den Zwischenschichten geltenden Bindungen entfremdet, neigt zur Darstellung des Rhythmus schlechthin; statt daß er bestimmte Gehalte in der Zeit zum Ausdruck brächte, ist diese selber sein eigentlicher Gehalt. War in Epochen des Beginns der Tanz eine Handlung des Kultus, so ist er heute ein Kult der Bewegung, war früher der Rhythmus eine erotisch-seelische Bekundung, so möchte heute der sich selbst genügende Rhythmus die Bedeutung aus sich erst entlassen. [...] Gewiß, der Tanz überhaupt als zeitliches Ereignis kann das Rhythmische nicht entbehren; doch es ist ein anderes, ob es durch den Rhythmus das Eigentliche erfährt oder in den Rhythmus an sich das uneigentliche Ende findet.' Siegfried Kracauer, *Das Ornament der Masse* (Suhrkamp, 1963), p. 41. Rhythm, therefore, could not be considered a mere tool anymore that links the modern individual to a more natural state but ultimately became the desired state itself.

<sup>84</sup> The same year, Bode established his gymnastics school in Munich.

<sup>85</sup> Cowan, *Cult of the Will*, p. 180.

nervous system and a loss of control over bodily movements. In order to oppose this involuntary rhythm, Jacques-Dalcroze required a rigorous education of the body through the power of will.

It is exactly this intellectual method that ultimately led Rudolf Bode to the decision to break ties with his former teacher, since he thought the physical conditioning by mental means to be against the vitalist-natural principles of rhythm that he championed. Again, as was the case with Bücher and Münsterberg, both men had the same aim, that is to counteract the decay of the deficient, modern reality; however, the means with which to reach this aim differed substantially.

Around the time of Darwin's publication, a clearly delineated antagonism between rhythm and metre (or 'Takt') did not yet exist. However, as can be seen, most of the theories above feature this contrast at least in their undertones (Bode, for example, very aggressively already). It was only with the emergence of Ludwig Klages' philosophy of life that the two concepts fully gained their sharp contours. His work *Vom Wesen des Rhythmus*<sup>86</sup> is largely based on considerations of his that go as far back as 1913, and it was first publicly delivered in the form of a lecture in 1922 but not published as a book until 1934. The short work presents perhaps most succinctly the opposition of rhythm and metre as it permeated the cultural discourse around 1900. As Klages states: 'Der Takt wiederholt, der Rhythmus erneuert.'<sup>87</sup> This short verdict finally provided the various proponents of rhythm with a negative opposition and functioned as a summary of the above-cited passage taken from the introduction to Rudolf Bode's work. 'Takt', or metre, is considered by Klages to be rationalistic, mechanical and man-made, a stand-in for the negative effects and phenomena of the age. Rhythm, on the other hand, is first and foremost an instinctual, dynamic, and natural force.

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<sup>86</sup> Ludwig Klages, *Vom Wesen des Rhythmus* (Kampmann, 1934).

<sup>87</sup> Klages, *Vom Wesen des Rhythmus*, p. 32.

As shown above, exploring rhythm as a cultural and societal phenomenon around 1900 and the years after reveals its profound significance in shaping the intellectual climate of that era. The turn of the last century witnessed a profound re-evaluation of rhythm as a concept transcending the arts, and it emerged as a vital vehicle to navigate the advances and disruptions brought about by modernity. Many thinkers were especially concerned with the dichotomy between rhythm and metre that reflects broader tensions within the rapidly modernising society. This period was marked by a palpable sense of disconnection, an overarching feeling of being out of step with the accelerated progress of modernity, which led to a widespread struggle to realign with the new rhythms imposed by these changes. In this context, the concept of rhythm appeared not only as a musical or artistic element but rather evolved into a fundamental metaphor for understanding and attempting to navigate the upheavals and changes accompanying the modern age.

The pervasive influence of rhythm extended far beyond the arts and permeated into various other disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, pedagogy, and sociology. Figures such as Bode or Jacques-Dalcroze championed the importance of rhythm in physical education, arguing that reconnecting with natural rhythms could alleviate the negative effects of industrialisation and modern life. It is especially Bode's alignment with National Socialism in his later years that underscores the potentially radical and highly dangerous political dimensions that these concepts could acquire, as rhythm lends itself to being appropriated into ideologies seeking to restore some natural order in the face of tumultuous societal changes.

Ludwig Klages' sharp delineation between the concepts of rhythm and metre in a way summarises the philosophical underpinnings of the overarching debate and provides a framework that resonated through many of the discourses of the era. By positioning rhythm as an instinctual and renewing force in opposition to the repetitive and mechanical nature of metre, he represents many thinkers of a similar kind that tried to find balance and meaning in the many fragmentations

of modernity. Klages further reinforced the notion that rhythm was central to the societal and cultural concerns around 1900, the concept as such serving as a reflection of contemporaneous anxieties as well as a panacea for navigating all the new complexities of that time.

### **Rhythm in Poetry around 1900: Arno Holz, Stefan George, and Georg Trakl**

Rhythm, with its dual heritage of fluidity and structure, emerges eventually not only as a formal element but rather as a dynamic constituent, permeating poetic expression and human experience alike. In addition, the conceptual dichotomy between rhythm and metre had reached an advanced stage of articulation by 1900. The broader existential and epistemic anxieties and developments connected to rhythm of course also influenced German-language literature more generally and poetry in particular around that time. For example, one of the major debates that concerned the literary environment then was the so-called ‘Sprachkrise’, major parts of which reflected the more universal tensions mirrored in the discussions of rhythm and metre. Rapid modernisation brought about a fundamental crisis of representation in literature and many writers began to lose faith in language’s ability to adequately capture and convey the complexities of human experiences in a quickly changing world. One of the most important documents of this crisis is Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s very well-known 1902 work ‘Ein Brief’, a fictional letter by Lord Chandos addressed to Francis Bacon. It describes the former’s steadily growing inability to utilise language to articulate his thoughts and feelings, leading to a fundamental disconnect from reality: ‘Mein Fall ist, in Kürze, dieser: Es ist mir völlig die Fähigkeit abhanden gekommen, über irgend etwas zusammenhängend zu denken oder zu sprechen.’<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Hugo von Hofmannsthal, ‘Ein Brief’, in *Werke in zehn Bänden*, 10 vols (Fischer, 1999), x, pp. 21–32 (p. 25).

It is within this context that the importance of rhythm in German-language poetry grew and reached new levels of intensity. Just as composers such as Stravinsky were looking for new musical form to liberate themselves from the constraints of traditional music and regain their footing in the disjointed modern times with the help of rhythm, poets such as Holz, George, and Trakl utilised the concept to break free from the limitations of language and create new forms of expression, and possibly find coherence and meaning in the ever-evolving modern world. Rhythm, during this time, cannot merely be seen as a stylistic or formal concern but a fundamental aspect of the poets' engagement with the world surrounding them. It served as a vehicle to explore new poetic practices, investigate complex thoughts and emotions, and provide a counterpoint to the often overwhelming sense of arrhythmia brought about by the massive changes of modernity. The analyses in the coming three chapters delve into how each of these poets utilised the concept of rhythm to navigate cultural, intellectual, and personal challenges of their time, reflecting both rhythm's general pervasiveness and the multiple upheavals that characterised their era.

All three authors discussed in the coming chapters not only acknowledge the specific circumstances of their times in their relationships with rhythm, but their works also exhibit many of the other functions and qualities ascribed to the concept, mentioned earlier in this discussion. Arno Holz approached it as a radical tool for revolutionising poetic language. His innovative experimentations were a broad attempt to distance himself from the constraints of traditional poetic forms and to capture as accurately as possible the immediacy of modern life. Rhythm's role in Holz is especially strong when it comes to connecting his poetic practice with his theoretical considerations, functioning as a mediating agent between both areas of his works. Stefan George, in contrast, found in rhythm a way to transport meaning and to develop and assert a distinct poetic personality. For him, rhythm was not just a technical feature but a central building block of his aesthetic vision. His poetry, as a synthesis of tradition and innovation, often employs precisely

controlled metrical structures and his engagement with classical poetic forms demonstrates how traditions can be revitalised in a modern context and used to forge a modern poetic identity. On the level of content, George negotiated rhythm via temporal markers and their imposed structuring, while revealing elements of the natural world in his poems, often overlooked by scholarship. Lastly, Georg Trakl considered rhythm a metaphorical embodiment of poetry as well as a placeholder for the chaotic circumstances of his environment. He employed it to mirror certain emotional and psychological states and saw in it a way to make sense of the fragmentations of the modern world. While he initially composed strongly metrical poetry, metre, as opposed to rhythm, eventually provided for him rather a baseline from which further rhythmical disruptions could be explored. Thus, the question of what rhythm does to poetry is best approached by first asking what poets do to rhythm, which is what the following three chapters will explore.

## Arno Holz's Revolution of Poetry: Rhythm and Lines

In a commentary on the life and works of Arno Holz, Alfred Döblin offers the following description of him: 'Arno Holz war ein Mann, der früh erkannte, daß er im deutschen Schrifttum eine Mission zu erfüllen hatte.'<sup>1</sup> Within this quotation we read both the possibly deficient state of German-language literature around 1900 but also a certain kind of appreciation due to the fact that in Döblin's eyes Holz succeeded. The mission mentioned, which Holz pursued with great enthusiasm and confidence,<sup>2</sup> is the rejuvenation of German poetry. The titles of his various programmatic and theoretical writings starting in 1891 with *Die Kunst – Ihr Wesen und Ihre Gesetze*, followed by *Revolution der Lyrik* and the essays 'Die befreite deutsche Wortkunst' or 'Die neue Form und ihre bisherige Entwicklung' clearly highlight his aspirations to become the harbinger of a new age of German-language poetry. Less obviously perhaps, the title of his second collection of poetry *Das Buch der Zeit: Lieder eines Modernen* published in 1886 when Holz was only in his early twenties and for which he was awarded the Prussian Schiller prize, also speaks of a similar revolutionary and modernising spirit.<sup>3</sup> This intense desire to revitalise the poetry of his time expressed itself, on the one hand, as a (more often than not polemical) rejection of past and contemporaneous literature and their conventions. On the other hand, Holz aimed to develop a

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Döblin, *Arno Holz: Die Revolution der Lyrik: Eine Einführung in sein Werk und eine Auswahl* (Steiner, 1951), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> At times, Holz seemed almost too confident in his endeavour, a fact that critics noted and on which he himself ironically commented: 'Aber das eine wenigstens haben mir bis auf den heutigen Tag selbst meine verbissensten Widersacher gelassen: ich litt noch nie an Selbstunterschätzung.' Arno Holz, *Das Werk X: Die neue Wortkunst: Eine Zusammenfassung ihrer grundlegenden Dokumente* (Dietz, 1925), p. 533. Or, as Walther Kiaulehn puts it: 'Holz war ein charaktvoller Mann mit einem starken Hang zur Rechthaberei'. Walther Kiaulehn, *Berlin: Schicksal einer Weltstadt* (Beck, 1976), p. 363.

<sup>3</sup> Hermann Bahr, *Kritische Schriften IV: Studien zur Kritik der Moderne*, ed. by Claus Pias (VDG, 2006), p. 61.

new theory of art that would form the foundation upon which his revolutionary language of poetry was to be constructed.

This theory, as will be shown in more detail below, is deeply rooted in a close relationship between art, nature, and language, with the concept of rhythm being afforded a crucial role in linking these three areas. Holz developed his theory around rhythm alongside a rich discussion in literary circles among authors and critics such as Johannes Schlaf, the Hart brothers, Edgar Steiger, Karl Freiherr von Lewetzow, and Rudolf Steiner.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, by arranging his theory around the centre of a certain notion of rhythm, Holz positioned himself within the debate outlined in the Introduction that permeated philosophy, the natural sciences, music, and the visual arts, all of which contributed to the widespread ‘Mythos Rhythmus’ at that time.<sup>5</sup> I argue that this extensive consciousness of and discussion about rhythm influenced why and how Holz engaged with the concept and explains why he made it the centre of his poetry.

What, then, is the sort of rhythm that is found in his theory and poetry? According to Isabel Zollna, a major component of rhythm’s allure is the enormous malleability inherent in the concept itself.<sup>6</sup> For Holz, too, the notion of rhythm goes far beyond the minimum definition of a simple periodical patterning. That is why, approaching this topic in the context of his works, it proves useful to start by considering him in contrast to one of his contemporaries, Stefan George, whose relationship to rhythm will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. While George pursued the same aim of developing a new poetic language in German, both his poetry and its

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<sup>4</sup> Lubkoll, ‘Rhythmus’, p. 100. For a comprehensive compilation of writings relevant to this debate see also *Literarische Manifeste der Jahrhundertwende 1890-1910*, ed. by Erich Ruprecht and Dieter Bansch (Metzler, 1970), pp. 5–81.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Salgaro and Vangi, ‘Der Mythos Rhythmus’.

<sup>6</sup> Zollna, ‘Rhythmus in der geisteswissenschaftlichen Forschung’, pp. 1–2; See also for the ‘erhebliche[n] Schwierigkeiten’ that rhythm causes scholarship Gesine Lenore Schiewer, *Poetische Gestaltkonzepte und Automatentheorie: Arno Holz – Robert Musil – Oswald Wiener* (Königshausen & Neumann, 2004), pp. 200–02.

preconditions stand in stark contrast to Holz's. Jürgen Brokoff, for example, in his study on the notion of 'pure poetry', considers the project of George's early works (especially until the 1899 collection *Teppich des Lebens*) to be one of abstraction, an attempt to renew language by liberating it from its 'Lebensabhängigkeit'.<sup>7</sup> Brokoff further notes that Holz's 'Neuheitsanspruch [...] sich in gewisser Weise komplementär zu dem Anspruch von George verhält'.<sup>8</sup> While George attempted to purge any traces of ordinary life from poetry and its language in order to transform them into an independent, primarily abstract art, Holz made his case for a poetry that is strongly grounded in the experience and perception of the world, a poetry, as it were, that is almost nothing but 'Lebensabhängigkeit'.

This dependence on the concept of life and a deeply-rooted confidence in the material world and how both connect to rhythm is perhaps most succinctly expressed in the following statement by Holz, in which he describes the sort of poetry he strived to create: 'Eine Lyrik, die auf jede Musik durch Worte als Selbstzweck verzichtet und die, rein formal, lediglich durch einen Rhythmus getragen wird, der nur noch durch das lebt, was durch ihn zum Ausdruck ringt.'<sup>9</sup> While rejecting the abstract style of poetry George and the followers in his 'Kreis' advocated, Holz's point of attack was nevertheless similar: poetry's form. As central formal element he embraced a rhythm that is alive with the content it expresses. Choosing this as the cornerstone of his poetry, he turned away from most of the traditional formal aspects such as regular metre, rhyme (albeit only to a certain extent) or the division of poems into individual stanzas/strophes. As mentioned in the

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<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Brokoff, *Geschichte der reinen Poesie: Von der Weimarer Klassik bis zur historischen Avantgarde* (Wallstein, 2010), pp. 445–506.

<sup>8</sup> Brokoff, *Geschichte der reinen Poesie*, pp. 448–49.

<sup>9</sup> Arno Holz, 'Selbstanzeige', in *Werke V: Das Buch der Zeit, Dafnis; Kunsttheoretische Schriften*, ed. by Wilhelm Emrich and Anita Holz (Luchterhand, 1962), pp. 62–76 (p. 69). Materials from this edition henceforth cited as W V BZ, W V D, and W V KT respectively. This citation would thus read W V KT, 69.

Introduction, Holz also decidedly distanced himself from any association with the concept of free rhythms, demanding instead a necessary/essential ('notwendig') rhythm:

Der famose 'freie Rhythmus' führt seinen Namen mit Recht. Er ist in der That so frei, als dies der Dichter für seine Bequemlichkeit, oder, was meist wohl noch 'treffender' sein dürfte, für sein mangelndes Unterscheidungsvermögen, wünscht. Der notwendige Rhythmus, den ich will, darf sich solche, oder auch nur ähnliche Scherze nicht mehr erlauben.<sup>10</sup>

Such a strong focus on re-defining the formal demands of poetry is not surprising in light of Holz's self-imposed mission to reinvent poetry and thus an emphasis on the material from which it is created, that is language, seems a suitable point of departure to achieve this aim. However, his main purpose always remained to create poetry, and discarding its traditional identifying formal features also put at risk the very thing he wanted to preserve, that is poetry as a preminent art form, distinctively singular and different to other, more prosaic modes of writing. Rhythm, thus, also runs the risk of becoming a double-edged sword for Holz's oeuvre, both advancing his reinvention of poetic language and at the same time potentially jeopardising its success.

As the quotation above indicates, for Holz, rhythm does not solely belong to the formal realm of poetry. It also functions as a mode of engaging with the world and therefore, in turn, can influence how the world, perhaps best represented by the reader, is able to interact with the poems. Affording it this substantial a role in his theory of art and the realisation of his poetic vision, Holz makes rhythm a key theoretical instrument and it is for him both an artistic tool as well as an effect that emerges in and through the poetry.

The focus of this chapter will be Holz's theoretical writings, some of his earlier poetry and his sprawling magnum opus, the collection of poetry *Phantasmus*. He started working on programmatic writings early in his career, the first of which was published seven years after the 1883 collection of poetry *Klinginshertz!* and only five after the aforementioned *Buch der Zeit*. As will be shown

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<sup>10</sup> Arno Holz, *Revolution der Lyrik* (Sassenbach, 1899), p. 45.

below, assuming a close relationship between Holz's poetic theory and poetic practice is one thing; whether the latter is a stringent and successful realisation of the former is another. Nevertheless, *Phantasia* could be considered to occupy an important place in the relationship between the theoretical and practical spheres. As Holz's masterpiece, it is the project to which he devoted most of his time and creative output and he worked on it with varying intensity for more than forty years, from 1885 until his death in 1929. It is also in *Phantasia* that the new rhythms of Holz's poetry are pushed to their extremes. At the same time, comparisons to earlier, more moderate versions are illuminating. The very beginnings of this magnum opus can be found in the cycle of thirteen poems 'Phantasia' in *Buch der Zeit*. The first part of a stand-alone collection of poetry titled *Phantasia* was then published in 1898, with the second part following in 1899 and in total comprising one hundred poems. Holz then continued to work on and expand the collection until the publication in 1924/25 of the last authorised version before his death as part of his collected works, *Das Werk*. This version spans 1345 pages, divided into nine books and contains a total of 139 poems.<sup>11</sup> Although there exists no authorised edition of *Phantasia* more recent than this, Holz kept expanding and reworking it and the results were then eventually published as 'Nachlass' in 1961/62 as part of the most recent edition of his works, now containing 147 poems on more than 1500 pages. This process of obsessive reworking and addition is almost paradigmatic for Holz and also characterises to some degree his theoretical work, which he developed through a series of writings that intersect, are combined and expanded. Holz's iterative work on *Phantasia* in some ways reflects qualities of the poems found in it, where the language eventually becomes an ever-finer approximation of what it wants to express, a fact that will be explored in more detail below.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Franz Kleitsch, *Der 'Phantasia' von Arno Holz* (Triltsch, 1940), pp. 2–6.

<sup>12</sup> This also brings to mind a quality of Trakl's relationship to rhythm when it comes to the processual treatment of meaning in his poems and which will be discussed in more detail below.

Before approaching the theoretical writings to trace the genesis and developments of Holz's aesthetic ideas, the following section will first concentrate on Holz's works before the publication of *Phantasia* and his initial theoretical deliberations, which set out his aesthetic and poetic programme in a more systematic manner. Knowing that rhythm is to play an important role in these later writings, the earlier texts can help shed light on the often-complicated relationship between theory and practice and how these complications reflect potential pitfalls associated with the concept of rhythm in more general terms. In addition to the reconstruction of Holz's theory, this section will focus on some of the threads that connect his thoughts to contemporaneous discussions of rhythm and subsequently also open up his poetry to be read in the context of this environment. These connections and the effects of rhythm in particular in the poetry of *Phantasia* will be elaborated in the third section. Again, that rhythm plays an important role in the theories of Holz and that he intended to use it to rejuvenate German poetic language is quite clear. Yet exactly how these efforts manifest themselves is not.

### **'Modern sei der Poet': Before *Phantasia* and the Relationship between Theory and Practice**

Holz made his early critique of the literary establishment most explicit in a newspaper article originally published as an open letter in three parts in the *Kyffhäuser Zeitung* in 1883 (initially under the *Deckmantel* of 'Heinrich v. Ofterdingen'<sup>13</sup> but eventually revealing his true identity in the later parts).<sup>14</sup>

Denn die Dichtkunst unserer Tage ist eine wesentlich *reproduktive* [emphasis Holz, LJD] und tritt als solche die Bahnen, welche der produktive Klassizismus, und zwar – was sehr bemerkenswert ist – nicht nur der des vorigen Jahrhunderts allein, dem dichterischen Talent erschlossen hat, breit; so breit, daß heut auch der Minderbegabte 'in einer Sprache, welche für ihn dichtet und denkt' ein

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<sup>13</sup> Calling to mind the novel fragment by Novalis of the same name from 1802, or E. T. A. Hoffmann's 1818 novella *Der Kampf der Sängere*.

<sup>14</sup> The letter is addressed to Richard Fellner who was responsible for the newspaper's section titled 'Colloquium'.

gewisses praktisches [later changed to 'poetisches', LJD] Etwas zu Stande zu bringen vermag; woher es denn auch kommt, daß – Gott sei's geklagt – der schon polizeiwidrige Dimensionen annehmende Dilettantismus nie üppiger in's Kraut geschossen ist, als grade in unseren Tagen!<sup>15</sup>

As mentioned above, the formal elements of poetry are crucial when it comes to Holz's denunciation of the poetic language of his time and this fact also becomes obvious in this excerpt. What he decries is a mostly nonreflective reproduction of past poetic traditions in the poetry of his day. It is, to a certain degree, a 'Lebensunabhängigkeit' that catches his attention here and which he laments. This critique is based on the fact that the formal repertoire of poetic language has grown so sophisticated and in turn so bland and ill-suited to grasp the complexities of life that creating poetry with the help of these instruments has become a trivial and mechanical act, according to Holz. In this section I want to focus on this interdependence between the poet and life, language, and form, and also between theory and practice. Viewing poetry through the lens of rhythm affords Holz the tools to negotiate these interdependencies and substantiate his critique. It is further surely no coincidence that it was Novalis, whose aegis Holz claims for himself in the letter above, who also made a fundamental connection between rhythm and method: 'Alle Methode ist Rhythmus. Hat man den Rhythmus der Welt weg – so hat man auch die Welt weg.'<sup>16</sup>

Although Holz's poetry does not fully come into its own until his *Phantasus*, it is already in his earliest creative works that first indications of the later tendencies can be seen, together with the seeds for his theoretical works. It is not least because of this fact that George Schulz-Behrend considers the *Buch der Zeit* to be the inevitable point of departure for a serious engagement with

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<sup>15</sup> Arno Holz, 'Ein offener Brief an Herrn Richard Fellner [Die Dichtkunst der Jetztzeit] I', *Kyffhäuser-Zeitung (Organ der Deutschen Studentenschaft): Wochenschrift für alle Universitäts-Angehörige deutschen Stammes und deutscher Zunge*, 22 October 1883, pp. 38–40 (p. 39).

<sup>16</sup> Novalis, 'Das Allgemeine Brouillon – Materialien zur Enzyklopädistik 1789/99', in *Schriften: Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs: Historisch-kritische Ausgabe III*, ed. by Richard Samuel (Kohlhammer, 1960), pp. 205–478 (p. 309).

any stage of Holz's literary project.<sup>17</sup> Going back even a little further than this collection, I would like to begin with two smaller poems that he composed in 1884 and first published in Wilhelm Arent's anthology *Moderne Dichter-Charaktere* the following year. They are part of a grouping of smaller, humorous poems titled 'Berliner Schnitzel', which are, as the name implies, little scraps of poetry, mostly quite ironic, even sarcastic, in tone. They make clear Holz's striving for the modernisation of poetry and, in addition, even of the poet himself:

1.  
Kein rückwärts schauender Prophet,  
Geblendet durch unfassliche Idole,  
Modern sei der Poet,  
Modern vom Scheitel bis zur Sohle.

2.  
Verruchtes Epigonthum,  
Egypter- und Teutonenthum,  
Daß dich der Teufel brate!  
Schon längst sind wir fascikelsatt,  
Grinst doch durch jedes Titelblatt  
Das Dante'sche ‚Lasciate‘!<sup>18</sup>

As Sandra Pott notes, the 'Schnitzel' stem from a time when Holz's engagement with the contemporary literary scene consisted mostly of biting critiques and this also holds very true for these two poems.<sup>19</sup> The beginning of the first one initially allows for two interpretations. The oxymoronic construction in the first line could either be read as a rejection of the notion of the poet as a prophet in general or only as a 'rückwärts schauender' in particular.<sup>20</sup> While Pott opts for

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<sup>17</sup> George Schulz-Behrend, 'Das Fremdwort in Arno Holz' "Buch Der Zeit", *Monatshefte*, 39.8 (1947), pp. 528–36 (p. 528). He is echoing a statement by the literary historian and ardent National Socialist Josef Nadler, who considers this collection to be the 'Grundbestand und Binnenkern' of Holz's literary works. Josef Nadler, *Literaturgeschichte des deutschen Volkes Band III* (Propyläen, 1938), p. 616.

<sup>18</sup> Arno Holz, 'Berliner Schnitzel', in *Moderne Dichter-Charaktere*, ed. by Wilhelm Arent (Friedrich, 1885), pp. 148–50 (p. 148).

<sup>19</sup> Sandra Pott, *Poetiken: Poetologische Lyrik, Poetik und Ästhetik von Novalis bis Rilke* (De Gruyter, 2004), p. 282.

<sup>20</sup> Although the poem is written too early to make this a viable reading, it is hard not to think of Stefan George whenever the figures of prophet and poet are conflated.

the former,<sup>21</sup> I would argue for the latter, especially in light of the rest of the poem. The rhyming pair ‘Prophet’ and ‘Poet’ puts both figures in relation to each other and suggests that the role of the poet should also be that of a prophet, albeit not one looking backwards into the past but rather one that is ‘[m]odern vom Scheitel bis zur Sohle’. It is clear that Holz intended to portray himself as exactly such a sort of visionary; one does not need to look further than the titles of his various publications for confirmation.

The rather pejorative tone regarding past poetic traditions is strengthened by another rhyme, ‘Idole’ and ‘Sohle’, and some of the negative connotations associated with ‘Idole’ itself. This sets the tone of the poem even more firmly as a programmatic rallying cry in favour of the modern poet. However, a latent tension remains, an ‘Unterton der aufhorchen läßt’, as Helmut Henne also observes.<sup>22</sup> The source of this unresolved tension is found in the ‘unfaßliche Idole’, where the adjective carries the double meaning of being both unbelievable, that is surpassing the norm, and also being beyond conception and comprehension. It is a tension that spreads out from this point into the rest of the poem and becomes palpable in the general discrepancy between its form and its content. The poem becomes a rallying cry of the modern poet precisely through the means of the ‘Idole’, an appeal for the transformation of language in the form of what should be overcome. Here, the content makes a promise that the form is not able to realise (yet). However, beginnings of this can be found in the pivotal point of the word ‘unfaßliche’, which resists proper integration into the rhythm of the rest of the poem and thus carries in itself the kernel of rhythm’s promises.

The second ‘Schnitzel’ is more sarcastic and derogatory in its tone and focuses more on the contemporary production of poetry, albeit with a programmatic punchline at the end. The output

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<sup>21</sup> Pott, *Poetiken*, p. 282.

<sup>22</sup> Helmut Henne, *Sprachliche Spur der Moderne: In Gedichten um 1900: Nietzsche, Holz, George, Rilke, Morgenstern* (De Gruyter, 2010), p. 1.

of the ‘verruchtes Epigonthum’ might be overwhelming in quantity (‘fascikelsatt’) but rather underwhelming in quality. Quoting the inscription above the gate of hell in Dante’s *Comedia*, ‘Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch’intrate’ (‘Abandon all hope, you who enter [here]’), Holz posits that no reader should hold out hope of finding any kind of salvation or promise in the pages of these derivative creations. This declaration seemingly spells the end of modern German-language poetry using the very material he accuses his contemporaries of recycling.

Paradoxically, this imperative can be interpreted as the very starting point of Holz’s own poetic project, echoing the self-encouragement of the previous poem above. The implication is that a renewal of poetic language must begin with abandoning past hopes and promises; only then is the poet able to venture further. However, from this, a crucial tension arises: Holz’s denunciation of tradition is, necessarily, articulated through the very means of this tradition itself. I argue that this inherent contradiction by no means undermines his critique but rather intensifies it. The backdrop of tradition is needed to provide necessary tension for Holz’s critique to resonate effectively. Of course, Holz’s ‘Schnitzel’ are deeply ironic in tone and more often than not irony works towards defusing tension. Nevertheless, here, the ironic use of traditional rhymes and forms serves a dual purpose quite in favour of this tension. On the one hand, it demonstrates Holz’s mastery of conventional poetic form, lending additional authority to his criticism. On the other hand, it underscores the apparent pervasiveness of these traditions, suggesting that even when rejecting them, a poet cannot easily escape their influence.

In summary, while the impetus of both poems is to denounce poetry that is overly reliant on past traditions, the latter more explicitly illustrates what is perhaps the main point of contention that Holz holds against his contemporaries: an outdated poetic language that needs to be overcome if the imperative of ‘modern sei der Poet’ is to be realised. However, it should be noted that Holz’s critique seems to be just as much a denunciation *of* language as one *through* language. This is

perhaps also the reason why the rigorous renunciation of more traditional poetic forms that he preaches could not be fully realised in the rhythmical predispositions of his works. Owing to the satirical and parodistic nature of his attacks, they are most of the time quite similar in language and tone to the grievances that they lament. The fact that this is the case for the ‘Berliner Schnitzel’ seems to be almost a truism, since Holz’s attack on poetry itself takes the form of a poem and therefore has to resort to the linguistic means that are available to this particular literary form. In addition to this ironic edge, this method helps to give his critique an almost light-hearted satirical slant, emphasising via exaggeration that the long-known means of poetic expression have become obsolete. In particular, the poems highlight Holz’s virtuoso command of rhyme, which is perhaps most impressively showcased in his play *Die Blechschmiede* or the collection of poetry *Dafnis* and which Conrad Wiedemann even identifies as his prime contribution to the advancement of German-language poetry – ahead even of all other innovations.<sup>23</sup>

If the poems above call for the modernisation of the poet, the following works appear to reverse this imperative and could be considered to announce instead ‘Poet sei die Moderne’, while also bringing rhythm more prominently into the equation. The excerpts below come from the very first section titled ‘Zum Eingang’ after the introductory ‘Widmungsepistel an meine Freunde’ in Holz’s *Buch der Zeit*. They constitute, as do the ‘Schnitzel’ above, an ironic commentary on poetry and its makers at that time. More pointedly executed though, the following extracts demonstrate the

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<sup>23</sup> Conrad Wiedemann, ‘Schwierigkeiten mit “Dafnis”’: Gedanken zu den Barocknachdichtungen von Arno Holz’, ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold, *TEXT+KRITIK*, 121 (1994), pp. 84–95 (p. 88). In fact, Holz had such an awe-inspiring command of traditional poetic forms that some critics only saw him as a ‘Formartisten’ par excellence, as did Hermann Bahr: ‘Arno Holz ist ein starkes, ehrliches und kühnes Talent, aber von einer ganz besonderen, in Deutschland sehr seltenen und bisweilen wünschenswerthen Art: er ist ein rein formales Talent – in der Form allein sucht er das Wesen der Kunst. Gedanken, Probleme, Leidenschaften – überhaupt der ganze Inhalt der Kunst gilt ihm gering. Er achtet bloss auf die Technik des Künstlers, auf das procédé, wie die Franzosen sagen, bei denen solche Naturen viel häufiger sind.’ Bahr, *Kritik der Moderne*, p. 61. This, of course, is quite the opposite of Holz’s self-image and what he intended to achieve as a poet.

examination of the conditions of modern society and its relationship to language and poetry; to a certain extent even, the relationship between the poet himself and the language of his own poetic creations.

Denn mir schlägt nicht das Wort den Takt  
zum Reigen selbstischer Gedanken,  
ein Löwe, hat es seine Pranken  
tief in mein Herzfleisch eingehackt.

Nur, daß es mich nicht jäh zerfleischt,  
such ichs mit Liedern zu beschwören,  
doch nicht beim Rauschen alter Föhren,  
die nachts ein schwarzer Aar umkreischt.

Auch nicht ins Grab der Lorelei  
verirrt sich mehr mein schwankes Steuer:  
die Zeit verliebter Abenteuer,  
für mich ist sie schon längst vorbei!

Nein, mitten nur im Volksgewühl,  
beim Ausblick auf die großen Städte,  
beim Klang der Telegraphendrähte  
ergießt ins Wort sich mein Gefühl.  
(W V BZ, 24)

The form of the poem provides a stark contrast to Holz's later works and exhibits extensively all the features that he would eventually discard. It is composed in a regular iambic tetrameter and divided into quatrains with an embracing rhyme scheme. Here, 'das Wort' as a generalised placeholder for language functions as the driving force behind the 'Takt' of poetry. This choice of word also prefigures Holz's future steering towards rhythm in opposition to metre, as the latter has mostly been associated with what could be called 'Takt'.<sup>24</sup> The poet becomes only a secondary power in the process of creation, subservient to the lion that is language and whose claws are deeply embedded in his heart. Poetry, in turn, is portrayed as a means to alleviate the dangers originating

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<sup>24</sup> Lubkoll, 'Rhythmus und Metrum', p. 106.

from language, ‘such ichs mit Liedern zu beschwören’. This effect of poetry on language, however, cannot be achieved through more traditional poetic images, neither through ‘Rauschen alter Föhren’ nor by conjuring up the ‘Grab der Lorelei’ or ‘verliebte Abenteuer’. Instead, true feeling can only be put into words when being fully submerged in modernity and all its turmoil and upheavals: ‘mitten nur im Volksgewühl’ and by incorporating the very products of modernity with their new sounds (‘Telegraphendrähte’). What is offered here is a potential resolution to the dilemma expressed in the two poems from *Moderne Dichter-Charaktere*. In order to reconcile form and content, language has to venture out into the (modern) world, experience it visually as well as aurally. It is implied that the ‘Wort’, the material and shape of what is to be expressed, needs to follow its content, which in turn is derived directly from observations of the world.

Continuing further through ‘Zum Eingang’, the connections between modern times and poetry are explored in more detail and again the need for a new kind of poetry is reinforced. Perception and ensuing analysis of the world increasingly rely on rhythmic phenomena and their resonances with poetic language:

Mir schwillt die Brust, mir schlägt das Herz  
 und mir ins Auge schießt der Tropfen,  
 hör ich dein Hämmern und dein Klopfen  
 auf Stahl und Eisen, Stein und Erz.

Denn süß klingt mir die Melodie  
 aus diesen zukunftsschwangern Tönen;  
 die Hämmer senken sich und dröhnen:  
 Schau her, auch dies ist Poesie!

[...]

Auch harft sie nicht als Abendwind  
 nur in zerbröckelten Ruinen,  
 sie treibt auch singend die Maschinen  
 und pocht und hämmert, näht und spinnt.  
 (W V BZ, 26)

Here, the crucial imperative mentioned above is eventually put into practice when the ‘Hämmern und [...] Klopfen’ of modernity are recognised as being poetry in their own right, figuring the modern times themselves as a kind of poet (the second person singular pronouns in those lines refers to the ‘junge Zeit aus Blut und Eisen’ mentioned earlier in the poem) (W V BZ, 26). Ultimately, the promise of reciprocity is redeemed in full when poetry itself is described as a force behind the changes and advances of the modern times: ‘sie treibt auch singend die Maschinen | und pocht und hämmert, näht und spinnt.’<sup>25</sup>

The entire poem then ends with one final farewell to the overcome idols of the past and an enthusiastic reception of the new, youthful times:

Drum ihr, ihr Männer, die ihrs seid,  
zertrümmert eure Trug-Idole  
und gebt sie weiter, die Parole:  
Glückauf, glückauf, du junge Zeit!  
(W V BZ, 28)

The assessment that Holz’s poems in *Buch der Zeit* are still ‘gänzlich im Bann der konventionellen Sprache’, according to Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs, is only partly tenable.<sup>26</sup> Inherent in and expressed through them is, instead, the sort of tension that is also found in the earlier poems. While it is true that they still hark back to and rely on this ‘vernutzte Sprache’ as she puts it, the poems increasingly register the boundaries of this language and the need to establish new ways of relating word and world to each other.<sup>27</sup> For critics such as Dieter Burdorf it is exactly this engagement with tradition that gives the early works of Holz their unique ‘Formimpulse’.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> To a certain extent this is exactly the opposite of Rilke’s description of machines in his *Sonette an Orpheus*: ‘Sieh, die Maschine: | wie sie sich wälzt und rächt | und uns entstellt und schwächt.’ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sämtliche Werke I*, ed. by Ernst Zinn, Rilke-Archiv, and Ruth Sieber-Rilke (Suhrkamp, 1955), p. 742.

<sup>26</sup> Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs, ‘Sprache Und Wirklichkeit Bei Arno Holz’, *Poetica*, 1 (1967), pp. 44–66 (p. 48), doi:10/g6bchg.

<sup>27</sup> Strohschneider-Kohrs, ‘Sprache Und Wirklichkeit Bei Arno Holz’, p. 48.

<sup>28</sup> Dieter Burdorf, *Poetik der Form: Eine Begriffs- und Problemgeschichte* (Metzler, 2001), pp. 403–04.

Holz's critiques of the literary establishment reveal profound dissatisfactions with the poetry of his contemporaries, deeming them overly reproductive and estranged from the complexities of modern life. Especially his satirical poems highlight the need for modernising poetry and the poet's role. These works juxtapose traditional poetic forms with Holz's calls for renewal and underscore this productive tension between novel content and traditional forms. Poems from *Buch der Zeit* further explore the relationship between modernity and poetic expression, arguing for a new language that is better suited to capture contemporary experiences. Ultimately, these earlier works lay the foundation for Holz's later, radical poetic innovations, a poetry that ideally should both reflect and respond to the complexities of modern life.

As far as rhythm is concerned, it can be considered a critical lens for Holz and it emphasises his vision of a new poetic language rooted in contemporary reality. It comes explicitly into play in a variety of ways. It is through rhythmical phenomena that modernity finds its way into the poems, its thudding hammers and pounding machines.<sup>29</sup> Rhythm forms the 'connective tissue' between the outside and inside of the poem and can potentially provide a space where language and form, poet and world are able to meet.<sup>30</sup> In line with this, Erich Funke identifies a certain 'innere Form' that is constituted by the true rhythm of *Buch der Zeit* and less so by the formal repertoire that Holz conjures up.<sup>31</sup> Although I would agree with the general direction of his argument, I suggest seeking to situate rhythm on neither side of the rift between inside and outside. Rather, it should

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<sup>29</sup> Rob Burns considers these excerpts and *Buch der Zeit* in general to be one of the first examples of German-language working-class literature. See Robert Alasdair Burns, 'The Work of Arno Holz and Its Relationship to Aspects of Twentieth Century German Literature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 1978), pp. 8–33.

<sup>30</sup> Laura Marcus uses the same vocabulary when describing this function of rhythm in a wider, interdisciplinary context. Laura Marcus, 'Rhythm and the Measures of the Modern', in *Beyond the Victorian/Modernist Divide*, ed. by Anne-Florence Gillard-Estrada and Anne Besnault-Levita (Routledge, 2018), pp. 211–27 (p. 211). I developed these ideas before the posthumous publication of Marcus's book on rhythm, which made me aware of her work on the concept. See also Marcus, *Rhythmical Subjects: The Measures of the Modern*.

<sup>31</sup> Erich Funke, 'Zur Form des "Phantasmus"', *The Germanic Review*, 15.1 (1940), pp. 50–58 (p. 51), doi:10/g6bchc.

perhaps be considered part of both the rift and the connection itself, as the poems also suggest. While pointing to the barrier that exists between content and form, rhythm at the same time becomes part of the form through the content and thus a creative force in its own right. As will be shown below, this conceptualisation of rhythm in Holz's oeuvre will find an explicit, also typographical, expression in *Phantasus*.

Besides the separation and convergence of different spheres, issues belonging to the two major areas of Holz's output and their relation to each other should be addressed as well. It is important to differentiate between Holz's programmatic writings and the actual poetry. While the theory he develops in his programmatic writings might call upon the concept of rhythm to serve a specific function in his poetry, the eventual effects and phenomena that the rhythms of the poems produce might not necessarily be entirely congruent with his theoretical intentions. A possible conflation of the two spheres could in part be attributed to Holz's own aspirations with regard to the relationship between them. He himself considers his theories to be ultimately subservient to the practical process of creating poetry and as a mere means to an end:

Ich entsann mich noch zur rechten Zeit, daß ich die Theorie ja nicht der Theorie wegen getrieben hatte, gegen Entree und zum allgemeinen Besten, sondern still in meinem eigenen Kämmerlein für mich selbst und nur, um der verflixten Praxis besser beizukommen. (W V KT, 17)

Theory, for Holz, is thus never just an end in itself, without connection to its possible practical applications. His impetus is to reform how poems are written, 'die verflixte Praxis' in his words, and thinking about theory might be for him no more or less than a necessary evil. This might lead one to read certain effects of the poetry as merely fulfilling the promises of the theory and, in turn, to overlook or perhaps prematurely dismiss interpretations that would prove to be at odds with Holz's programmatic intentions. It is exactly this close relationship between theory and practice that renders the task of uncoupling them both difficult and therefore all the more important. These are, of course, problems facing anyone writing on an author, who both produced theoretical and

creative works. In the case of Holz, however, the obstacles are amplified by the very choice of the concept that lies at the heart of his theory: rhythm. The conundrum that has to be faced is the juxtaposition of Holz readily invoking rhythm as the cornerstone of his reform of poetic language and the terminological uncertainty inherent in the concept itself.

In order to attempt to shed light on this challenging area, Holz's theoretical considerations will firstly be retraced and contextualised in his contemporaneous cultural environment. His theories will then be compared and contrasted with analyses of his creative output. The focus will be on intersections between the two areas as well as on potential divergencies with the aim of unfolding in its full breadth the importance that the concept of rhythm is afforded in Holz's oeuvre. I argue that the relationship between theory and practice and the role that rhythm plays in this can be conceptualised in a similar way as the figuration of rhythm above. Although it forms a connection between the two areas it becomes most striking when it points towards the gaps that might open up between them.

## **Art, Nature, and X: Holz's Theory of Art**

The very first of Holz's more extensive programmatic writings is the work *Die Kunst – Ihr Wesen und ihre Gesetze*,<sup>32</sup> first published in 1891 and shortly afterwards updated and published under the amended title *Die Kunst – Ihr Wesen und ihre Gesetze. Neue Folge*.<sup>33</sup> Coinciding with the initial publication of his poetry collection *Phantasia*, he published the so-called 'Selbstanzeige' in the journal *Die Zukunft*.<sup>34</sup> Probably the most important text of Holz's earliest theoretical writings is the 1899 *Revolution der Lyrik*, which also contained a more recent and stylistically altered version

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<sup>32</sup> Arno Holz, *Die Kunst – Ihr Wesen und ihre Gesetze* (Issleib, 1891).

<sup>33</sup> Arno Holz, *Die Kunst – Ihr Wesen und ihre Gesetze. Neue Folge* (Issleib, 1892).

<sup>34</sup> Arno Holz, 'Selbstanzeige: Phantasia. Berlin. Johann Sassenbach', ed. by Maximilian Harden, *Die Zukunft*, no. 23 (1898), pp. 210–19. The piece does not have its own title but was originally published in a section called 'Selbstanzeigen' and is therefore often simply referred to as 'Selbstanzeige'.

of the 'Selbstanzeige'.<sup>35</sup> The last major publication in Holz's oeuvre of greater significance for his theory is the final volume of his collected works, published in 1925 and titled *Die neue Wortkunst: Eine Zusammenfassung ihrer ersten grundlegenden Dokumente*.<sup>36</sup> As the title implies, it consists of an updated reprint of *Die Kunst* and two other parts, 'Evolution des Dramas' and 'Evolution der Lyrik'. The latter one forms a collection of Holz's writings on the theory of poetry, containing the pieces 'Die befreite deutsche Wortkunst' (originally published in 1922), 'Idee und Gestaltung des Phantasmus' and 'Die neue Form und ihre bisherige Entwicklung'.

*Die Kunst* sets the scene for perhaps one of the most poignant passages in Holz's programmatic works, possibly even any poetological writings of that period more generally. Therein, writing from a positivist point of view, he sets out to discover with seemingly scientific precision and methodology the basic law governing not only literature but all of art. Eventually he arrives at his infamous mathematical-aesthetic formula that establishes a basic relationship between art, nature and the means through which art is created. In *Die Kunst*, the concept of rhythm does not yet play the substantial part it will be afforded in the later iterations of Holz's theoretical endeavours. This is mostly due to the fact that here he is above all concerned with the formal groundwork and not yet interested in the actual application of his theories. That being said, the treatise contains passages in which it is possible to identify traces of rhythm in the gaps between the lines.

'Es ist ein Gesetz, daß jedes Ding ein Gesetz hat' (W V KT, 4). This simple axiomatic statement, inspired by Holz's studies of the works of Mill, Comte and Spencer, forms the starting point for his venture to establish a theory of art.<sup>37</sup> Certain of this, he concludes that the same must also hold true for art: 'Daß diese Kunst von der allgemeinen Regel eine Ausnahme bildet, daß sie ihre Werke

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<sup>35</sup> Holz, *Revolution der Lyrik*.

<sup>36</sup> Holz, *Das Werk X: Die neue Wortkunst: Eine Zusammenfassung ihrer grundlegenden Dokumente*.

<sup>37</sup> For a thorough account of the link between Holz and Mill especially see Schiewer, *Poetische Gestaltkonzepte und Automatentheorie*, pp. 119–55.

keinen Gesetzen unterworfen sieht, behauptet heute freilich kein auch nur einigermaßen gebildeter Mensch mehr' (W V KT, 7). Although Holz's aim ultimately concerns literature and its conditions of production, it is not the art of writing to which he now turns in order to deduce the general law that he is looking to establish. Instead, he will consider the art of painting and employ it as the basis of his observations. The reason for this temporary orientation towards painting is not that Holz considers it superior to literature. It is more that, according to him, a clear demarcation between what is considered art and what is *not* does not yet exist, since this very boundary would only be a direct result of the project that he is undertaking (W V KT, 11).

With that, Holz's line of argument reaches its core statement. Assuming that it should be possible to use as an example the most trivial phenomenon of painting imaginable, he devises a thought experiment<sup>38</sup> wherein a small boy draws something on a piece of slate and then hands it to Holz without, at first, giving away what the drawing is meant to represent. (W V KT, 12). He then describes contemplating the boy's drawing:

Und ich wagte den Versuch! Ich setze ihn hierher aus meinen Papieren: Vor mir auf meinem Tisch liegt eine Schiefertafel. Mit einem Steingriffel ist eine Figur auf sie gemalt, aus der ich absolut nicht klug werde. Für ein Dromedar hat sie nicht Beine genug, und für ein Vexierbild: 'Wo ist die Katz' kommt sie mir wieder zu primitiv vor. Am ehesten möchte ich sie noch für eine Schlingpflanze, oder für den Grundriß einer Landkarte halten. Ich würde sie mir vergeblich zu erklären versuchen, wenn ich nicht wüßte, daß ihr Urheber ein kleiner Junge ist. Ich hole ihn mir also von draußen aus dem Garten her, wo der Bengel schon auf einen Kirschbaum geklettert ist, und frage ihn: 'Du, was ist das hier?' Und der Junge sieht mich ganz verwundert an, daß ich das überhaupt noch fragen kann, und sagt: 'Ein Suldat!' Ein 'Suldat!' Richtig! Jetzt erkenne ich ihn deutlich! (W V KT, 12)

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<sup>38</sup> Simply by using a thought experiment to elucidate his argument, Holz builds on an important strand of positivist thinking of the outgoing nineteenth century. Although thought experiments have been an important part of philosophical and scientific thinking for centuries, the perhaps most famous ones, such as the triad of Schrödinger's cat, Maxwell's demon and Einstein's elevator in modern physics all originated in the late 1800s and early 1900s. For more detailed accounts of the relationship between scientific experimentation and Holz's theory see Gunhild Berg, 'Arno Holz's Formula of Art: Aesthetics as an Experimental, Mathematical Science', *Variations*, no. 21 (2013), pp. 37–50, doi:10/g6bch2. Alexander Nebrig has written concisely about the more general relationship between Holz and knowledge in Alexander Nebrig, 'Entbindung von der Disziplin: Arno Holz' Begründung des Lebenswissens im "Phantastus"', in *Das Wissen der Poesie: Lyrik, Versepiik und die Wissenschaften im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Henning Hufnagel and Oliver Krämer (De Gruyter, 2015).

It is interesting to note here that Holz does not recognise the subject of the drawing until the boy informs him of his intention. At the same time, this excerpt seems to suggest that the possibility of a work of art having multiple concurrent interpretations hinges very much on the complexity exhibited in the artwork itself. Apparently, the drawing of the little boy is 'zu primitiv' to combine the 'Vexierbild' of multiple valid interpretations into just a single representation. The most important aspect here, for Holz, is the artist's intention, and less so the actual implementation of it. It also does not seem to be of very much significance to him that the representation be a precise and objective representation of reality since he is entirely satisfied once the child claims the drawing represents a 'Soldat'. Also striking here is the autonomy that language is afforded in contrast to the representation of reality in art as language seemingly can dictate, to a certain extent, what is represented after the fact.

The thought experiment eventually leads to Holz's verdict about the general law that, according to him, underpins and governs all of art and its various subdisciplines and takes the form of a short mathematical formula:

Schiebe ich nun für das Wörtchen Resultat das sicher auch nicht ganz unbezeichnende 'Schmierage' unter, für Ziel 'Soldat' und für Lücke 'x', so erhalte ich hieraus die folgende niedliche kleine Formel: Schmierage = Soldat - x. Oder weiter, wenn ich für Schmierage 'Kunstwerk' und für Soldat das beliebte 'Stück Natur' setze: Kunstwerk = Stück Natur - x. Oder noch weiter, wenn ich für Kunstwerk vollends 'Kunst' und für Stück Natur 'Natur' selbst setze: Kunst = Natur - x. (W V KT, 14)

On the surface this appears to be, again, a reproduction of naturalistic epistemology that affords art only a subservient position in relation to nature. Considering this formula in isolation, art by itself does not even have the capability of doing anything but taking away from the ideal of nature since the x in the equation is assumed to be greater than zero. However, as with the situation in the thought experiment above, the understanding of nature that Holz is hinting at seems to be different than the conventional naturalistic one. Nature is not an immutable and objectively existing external point of reference for him, it is rather the content and intention of what becomes

actualised in art. It is because of this that the 'Suldat' of the little boy can be just as much nature as a soldier, a dromedary, or a vine. This is also made more explicit later in the text when Holz expands on his understanding of nature in a rebuttal to the critique of Arthur Moeller-Bruck about the exact understanding of nature:

Herr Möller-Bruck verschimpft meine Formel  $K = N - x$  in ' $K = N + y$ ', indem er '+ y' = 'Vorstellungsbild' setzt, und in seiner Einfalt, um nicht zu sagen Einfältigkeit, merkt er nicht, ahnt er nicht einmal, daß dieses 'Plus', dieses 'Vorstellungsbild', mit meinem N einfach identisch ist. (W V KT, 37-38)

Relevant for Holz is thus not nature 'an sich' but rather the already processed and contextualised image of it that is formed in the mind.

It is worth pointing out, that the very fact of Holz using the structure of a mathematical formula here to express the fundamental law of his conception of art points towards one of the fissures that exist between his theory and practice. Formulae, as the name implies, are first and foremost formal structures and aim in a highly efficient way towards precision and compression of highly complex ideas into simple symbolic representations.<sup>39</sup> A very similar function is often ascribed to the structures of poetry, which have the ability to compress a surplus of meaning, such as intricate emotions and imagery, into a reduced space.<sup>40</sup> In fact, it is not only meaning that can be condensed like this but also broader concepts such as history and tradition. In this way, paradoxically, the form that the law takes expresses a direction that is opposite to that of the law itself. Instead of a one-to-one correspondence between form and content it points towards a possible imbalance, the former overshadowing the latter. Eventually, this imbalance, which is only hinted at here, also carries over into Holz's poetry in *Phantasus*, albeit with the sides of the scales reversed: overwhelming content that may threaten to explode the form.

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<sup>39</sup>  $E=mc^2$  is perhaps the most well-known example of a profound and abstract physical concept being compressed to a maximal degree.

<sup>40</sup> It is exactly this power of compression that Rorty points to in his quotation cited in the Introduction.

As it is the case for almost any mathematical equation, the crucial element is the unknown variable  $x$ . The identity of the as yet unknown factors influencing the  $x$  is revealed when Holz translates the mathematical formula back into language: ‘Die Kunst hat die Tendenz, wieder die Natur zu sein. Sie wird sie nach Maßgabe ihrer jeweiligen Reproduktionsbedingungen und deren Handhabung’ (W V KT, 16).<sup>41</sup> The statement becomes even clearer, when Holz in a later addition to the text changes the wording of the assertion: ‘Die Kunst hat die Tendenz die Natur zu sein; sie wird sie nach Maßgabe ihrer Mittel und deren Handhabung’ (W V KT, 30). The gap between the ‘Vorstellungsbild’ and art, which is denoted by the  $x$ , is therefore essentially influenced by the kind of medium that is used and, more importantly, *how* this medium is handled. The medium for the art of literature, of course, being language.

Starting with a seemingly rather abstract endeavour, Holz arrives at the quite practical conclusion that the most important factor for art being able to reach its full potential is the means by which art is created. Literature, therefore, is mostly governed by language and to make significant contributions and changes to the field of literature it would first and foremost be necessary to make significant contributions and changes to the language that is used. The importance of and need for this insight is perhaps most obvious in the comment cited above, where Holz insists that his theory only exists ‘um der verflixten Praxis besser beizukommen’ (W V KT, 17).

Although Holz’s treatise sets out from a Naturalist point of view, it is not the epistemological framework that is of importance to his project, but rather the tools of investigation that are provided by this framework. Gesine Lenore Schiewer also observes that it is ‘die Bedeutung

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<sup>41</sup> It is also worth noting here is the ambivalent phrasing of the statement, whose first part is homophonic to ‘Die Kunst hat die Tendenz, wider die Natur zu sein’, which effectively reverses the meaning of the statement. Considering Holz’s staunch insistence on the auditory nature of his poetry and language, it seems curious that he does not address this fact.

positivistisch-naturwissenschaftlichen Denkens für Holz' Konzept in einer Übertragung und Anwendung entsprechender Methodiken in den Bereich kunstwissenschaftlicher Theoriebildung zu sehen.<sup>42</sup> This, in a sense, is congruent with Holz's decision to pursue theory for the sake of practice, where the tools and means carry more weight than any possible conceptual presuppositions ever could. Eventually, this is also the reason why, when Holz sets out to renew German-language literature and achieve his *Revolution der Lyrik*, such careful attention is devoted to the 'Erneuerung ihres Sprachbluts' (W V KT, 32). The observations here point forwards to the following sections below in that they explain Holz's general attraction to unfolding his thought within scientific concepts and ideas. In a more particular sense, what is made explicit here is a tendency that is highly significant for his understanding and use of rhythm. This tendency is a certain autonomy of language that is not subservient to the programme of art, which means that the material is able to uncouple itself from the content.

## **Towards a Theory of Poetic Language and Its Rhythm**

It is only after *Die Kunst* that Holz began to incorporate rhythm into his theories more explicitly. Later writings, such as the 'Selbstanzeige' (part commentary on his *Phantasus*, part aesthetic treatise) build on the earlier theoretical foundations and develop this aesthetic framework alongside its application in his creative output. The path towards rhythm is paved with similar critical comments on contemporary verse as can be found in his earliest publications:

Die Verse selbst der Allerjüngsten bei uns unterscheiden sich in ihrer Struktur in nichts von den Versen, wie sie vor hundert Jahren schon Goethe gekonnt, und wie diese sich ja auch wieder nicht von den Versen unterschieden hatten, wie sie bereits das Mittelalter skandierete, oder wenn man noch weiter will, die Antike. Man kann in die Lyrik – wenigstens in die niedergeschriebene der Kulturvölker, die andere, über die genügende Dokumente noch nicht vorhanden sind, entzieht sich leider unserer Beurteilung – zurücktauchen, so tief man will: man wird, rein formal, so unzählige

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<sup>42</sup> Schiewer, *Poetische Gestaltkonzepte und Automatentheorie*, p. 149.

Abänderungen es durch alle Völker und Zeiten auch erfahren, stets auf das selbe letzte Grundprinzip stoßen. (W V KT, 64)

This 'letzte Grundprinzip' that he laments is the dependence of poetry on its formal components, a reliance that, according to him, has turned into a hegemony. This rejection of the overly formal composition of poetry is just one half of Holz's theoretical turn towards the concept of rhythm. In order to investigate the other half, it is necessary to step back a little and take a look at the wider cultural context.

It was certainly not by chance that rhythm attracted Holz's attention, since the concept in itself was broadly debated, as addressed in the Introduction and, not least, it was seen to provide an antithesis to a wide-ranging issue that permeated contemporary literature at this point. Around 1900 a plethora of increasingly diverse and individual means of literary expression developed such as Impressionism, Neoclassicism, Neoromanticism, Decadence and many others, which could not be easily subsumed under a single, overarching concept.<sup>43</sup> Holz, of course, also took note of this and diagnosed the conditions in his unique style:

Die deutsche Literatur der letzten fünfzehn Jahre kann unter irgend einen ästhetischen Begriff nicht gebracht werden. Sie ist ein ungeheurer Kuddelmuddel, in dem es von den heterogensten Dingen schwappt.<sup>44</sup>

Regarding Holz's own place among this 'Kuddelmuddel', criticism usually places him under the banner of Naturalism. The question of whether Holz could be considered to be part of the 'Naturalismus' of his time is difficult to answer and perhaps also less important, not least because of the debatable usefulness of confining art to the segmentation of periods or movements more generally, but also because, in any case, the concept of Naturalism in particular is in itself fairly

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<sup>43</sup> Erich Ruprecht, 'Einführung', in *Literarische Manifeste der Jahrhundertwende 1890-1910*, ed. by Erich Ruprecht and Dieter Bänsch (Metzler, 1970), pp. xvii–xlii (p. xvii).

<sup>44</sup> Holz, *Revolution der Lyrik*, p. 45.

contentious.<sup>45</sup> However, as shown above, his theory of art could certainly be considered to subscribe to a decidedly Naturalist epistemology, at the heart of which would lie objectivity and precision. This often causes Holz's aesthetic theory to be understood as a genuinely Naturalist one, a claim that is only cautiously tenable, and which might have inspired Moeller-Bruck to describe Holz's works as 'konsequenter Naturalismus'.<sup>46</sup> While it is true that Holz used Naturalist material as a point of departure for some of his deliberations, he aimed in most cases for a radical break with these established norms. In addition, although he initially followed the Naturalist doctrines of Zola, he soon left them behind in favour of his own ideas.<sup>47</sup> In short, Pols describes Holz's project as both developing already existent tendencies and inciting a revolution that consciously breaks with earlier literature.<sup>48</sup>

In fact, it is especially in seizing on the concept of rhythm that Holz, at least from 1898 onwards, could be described as anti-Naturalist to a high degree. In response to the identification of naturalist tendencies with novel modern concepts such as mechanisation and a strong belief in the natural sciences and the causalities that dominate them, vitalist alternatives to the naturalistic mantras grew more and more popular. According to Ruprecht, one of the most profound of the opposing forces to emerge was the concept of life:

Eine weitere Möglichkeit zur Gewinnung einer gültigen Epochenkategorie bietet ein Phänomen, das sich im Grunde jeder Programmatik entzieht und fast übereinstimmend in dieser Zeit als Erfahrung des 'Lebens' [emphasis Ruprecht, LJD] bezeichnet wurde. Hatten die Naturalisten die Welt als kausal und mechanisch bestimmte Wirklichkeit gesehen und in der Kunst reproduziert, so erfuhr die

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<sup>45</sup> Gijsbert Pols, *Naturalistische Moderne: Arno Holz und Lodewijk van Deyssel* (Nodus Publikationen, 2015), p. 36.

<sup>46</sup> Arthur Moeller-Bruck, *Die moderne Literatur in Gruppen- und Einzeldarstellungen IV: Die deutsche Nuance* (Schuster & Loeffler, 1899), p. 21.

<sup>47</sup> Helmut Scheuer, *Arno Holz im literarischen Leben des ausgehenden 19. Jahrhunderts (1883-1896): Eine biographische Studie* (Winkler, 1971), p. 115.

<sup>48</sup> Pols, *Naturalistische Moderne*, pp. 120–21. See also Holz's own account about his revolution and evolution: 'Der Titel dieser Schrift, ich weiß sehr wohl, hätte daher eigentlich auch nicht *Revolution* der Lyrik lauten dürfen, sondern das Richtige wäre *Evolution* der Lyrik gewesen. Trotzdem wählte ich den „falschen“. Denn ich sagte mir: ein Titel muß wie ein Plakat sein. Erst die Wirkung, dann die Richtigkeit. Im Text dann nachher umgekehrt [emphases by Holz, LJD].' Holz, *Revolution der Lyrik*, p. 65.

Generation der Jahrhundertwende das Leben als dynamisch flutende Bewegung, die keine Begrenzung, Vereinzelung und Isolierung kennt.<sup>49</sup>

Ludwig Klages also needs to be mentioned as one of the leading philosophers of life who, for example, answered the question of ‘Was ist der Künstler?’ as follows: ‘[D]er Künstler ist vor allem Liebhaber des Lebens – des Lebens und seiner Reize.’<sup>50</sup>

This, then, is the second thing that occasioned Holz’s turn towards rhythm in his theoretical writings. His appreciation of life, which was most probably fuelled by his engagement with the natural sciences and theories by scientists such as Ernst Haeckel or writers such as Wilhelm Bölsche, coupled with his disdain for poetic traditions and their repertoire of forms made him embrace rhythm as an approach to productively reconcile these two tendencies. For example, in his 1871 *The Descent of Man* Charles Darwin characterises the perception of rhythm as an essential feature inherent in all lifeforms: ‘The perception, if not the enjoyment, of musical cadences and rhythm is probably common to all animals’.<sup>51</sup> Already encountered in the Introduction of this thesis, this statement presents rhythm as a means to reunite humanity with its more natural origins. It is also in this feature of rhythm that Holz finds a way to achieve his aim of developing a viable realisation of his theory of art in the language of poetry:

Eine Lyrik, die auf jede Musik durch Worte als Selbstzweck verzichtet und die, rein formal, lediglich durch einen Rhythmus getragen wird, der nur noch durch das lebt, was durch ihn zum Ausdruck ringt. Eine solche Lyrik, die von jedem überlieferten Kunstmittel absieht, nicht, weil es überliefert ist, sondern weil sämtliche Werte dieser Gruppe längst aufgehört haben, Entwicklungswerte zu sein, habe ich in meinem Buche versucht. (W V KT, 69)

It seems that in Holz’s eyes, just as rhythm can function as a mediator to access the primal past of humanity, it can similarly serve to strip back poetic language to its origins and enable it to express its contents clearly without any of the potential blurring caused by artistic devices.

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<sup>49</sup> Ruprecht, ‘Einführung’, p. xx.

<sup>50</sup> Ludwig Klages, ‘Aus einer Seelenlehre des Künstlers’, in *Blätter für die Kunst. Eine Auslese aus den Jahren 1892-1898*, ed. by Stefan George and Carl August Klein (Bondi, 1899), pp. 138–42 (p. 243).

<sup>51</sup> Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 333.

## ***Phantastus*: The Rhythms of Lines**

Before turning now to the collection *Phantastus* in order to consider it in more detail in the context of Holz's theoretical deliberations and his efforts to implement them in his creative work, I would like to examine two areas of his formal innovations in more detail, namely rhymes and lines. With rhythm at the centre of his conception of poetic language and resolutely dismissing conventional regular metre, Holz discards one further linguistic feature of poetry:

Wozu noch der Reim? Der erste, der – vor Jahrhunderten! – auf Sonne Wonne reimte, auf Herz Schmerz und auf Brust Lust, war ein Genie; der tausendste, vorausgesetzt, daß ihn diese Folge nicht bereits genierte, ein Kretin. (W V KT, 69)

As he explains further, dismissing rhyme as a formal element also has a quite trivial mathematical reason, since rhyme-based poetry would shrink all available vocabulary a priori by up to seventy-five per cent (W V KT, 70).<sup>52</sup> While it is certainly true that rhyme restricts the choice of potential vocabulary, this effect is by no means as extensive as Holz claims, since he forgets to take into account, as Burdorf also recognises, that conventional end rhymes only restrict the word choices at the end of any given line and not for each individual word in a poem.<sup>53</sup>

Looking back at the poems from the period around the publication of *Buch der Zeit*, it seems that rhyme in particular is one of their more conventional features that manages to heighten the effect of the poems precisely by highlighting the very inner tension that gives them their edge. In fact, Holz himself later realised the positive effect of rhyme and decided to re-introduce it into his poetry, as he explains in 'Idee und Gestaltung des Phantastus':

Rein 'technisch' bemerke ich noch: ich hatte in meiner 'Revolution der Lyrik', die zu meinem einschlägigen Schaffen die theoretische Grundlage gab, in meinem Eifer als Praktiker einen kleinen logischen Schnitzer verbrochen; den einzigen, dessen ich mich schuldig weiß. Nämlich den Reim völlig auszumerzen, statt ihm, wie den übrigen überlieferten Hilfsmitteln, sekundäre Bedeutung zu belassen! Ich nagele dies hiermit fest und freue mich dieses Fehlers, da ich sonst, ohne ihn, wie ich

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<sup>52</sup> He puts forward a similar argument in 'Die befreite Wortkunst' specifically referring to the scarcity of rhymes in the German language (W V KT, 80)

<sup>53</sup> Burdorf, *Poetik der Form*, p. 377.

das Gefühl habe, nie die Stufe erreicht haben würde, auf der ich, wie ich glaube, heute, künstlerisch, stehe. (W V KT, 98)

Again, he defends his assertion that no formal element should be used only for its own sake but rather always with the intended effects in mind. Every formal feature that might arise from his poetry should be a direct consequence of the content expressed in it.

Relinquishing two of the main defining characteristics of poetry (rhyme – although only partly – and metre), Holz, in turn, focuses more on a third structural element and arguably the only one remaining to him by which poetry can still be delineated from prose: the line. Whereas in his ‘Selbstanzeige’ the reason he gives for strengthening the significance of the single line is still a largely typographic one – he soon decided to print his poetry oriented along an imaginary middle axis (W V KT, 72) – Holz later considers lines to be the essential rhythmical element of his poetry.<sup>54</sup> He likens it to the foot, the smallest metrical unit in scansion-based poetry: ‘Die letzte “Einheit” der bisherigen Metrik war der Versfuß. Die letzte Einheit meiner “Rhythmik” ist eine ungleich differenziertere: die Zeile’ (W V KT, 92). Eventually the typographic dimension and the rhythmical effect merge in Holz’s thinking and he subsumes both under a phenomenon that he calls ‘Ohrbild’:

Ich nenne das durch diese ‘unsichtbare Mittelachse’ erzeugte ‘sichtbare Etwas’ das Ohrbild eines Gedichtes. Seine gewissermaßen ‘typographische Musik’ verrät mir, falls in dem Ganzen noch irgendwo heimlich ein Fehler steckt, diesen Fehler schon immer ‘rein von außen’! Je gegliederter ein ‘Inhalt’, um so gegliederter sein Ohrbild. Stoßen zum Beispiel zwei Zeilen aufeinander, die von gleicher Länge sind, so sagt mir meine Erfahrung: hier kann unmöglich schon alles stimmen! Hier muß, falls Parallelismus nicht ausdrücklich beabsichtigt ist, irgend etwas ‘nicht in Ordnung’ sein. (W V KT, 94)

The dominating formal feature in his poetry, then, is the line and it is also in the lines and their connections to what surrounds them that the relations between language and world, writing and

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<sup>54</sup> In a critique of Holz’s formal inventions, Johannes Schlaf decries ‘Mittelachsenpoesie’ as a mere temporary fashion: ‘Eine dieser Erscheinungen ist die kürzlich aufgekommene Mode, den Text eines Gedichtes um eine Mittelachse herum zu ordnen, bei der leider gerade Dichter von der Bedeutung eines Richard Dehmel und Arno Holz tonangebend sind.’ Johannes Schlaf, ‘Alexandrinismus’, *Wiener Rundschau*, 1 October 1899, pp. 532–34 (p. 532).

reading, and tradition and innovation become perceptible. To borrow one of Glyn Maxwell's images from his book *On Poetry*: 'In my work the white is everything but me, and the black is me.'<sup>55</sup> In a wider sense, lines therefore demarcate boundaries between different spheres and for Holz the most important boundaries are the ones between his own works and tradition, and between word and world.<sup>56</sup> In Holz, lines are not just structural components but serve as fundamental rhythmical units. The lines themselves, through their length, breaks and arrangement on the page work together to create an inner rhythmical flow that is enhanced by dynamic forces within the lines, imbued with a sense of movement and energy through contrasts and interactions between those binary relations.

Turning now to *Phantasia*, I would first like to give a brief overview of the work as a whole. As mentioned, it is generally considered to be Holz's magnum opus, to which he devoted most of the second half of his life. This can be seen by way of the epic proportions alone to which it ballooned over the years. The content is seemingly all-encompassing and is meant to transport a certain 'Weltbild' that includes, as Franz Kleitsch puts it, both 'ein ganzes Leben, und ein ganzes Zeitalter'.<sup>57</sup> Autobiographical, historical, and scientific influences feature heavily in its content, which also influences the overall structure of the work. Some important scientific influences are the Darwin-inspired biological theories of Ernst Haeckel, especially his 'biogenetisches Grundgesetz' according to which 'die Ontogenesis oder die Entwicklung des Individuums, eine

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<sup>55</sup> Glyn Maxwell, *On Poetry* (Oberon Books, 2016), p. 21. See also his thoughts about line breaks: 'Much contemporary verse is colloquial, prosaic, apparently "free", going about its business without rhyme or meter or stanzaic pattern of any kind. But such poems, to survive, need two essential components: first their makers need to have truly mastered line-break, which is simply to say that he or she can keenly feel the pressure of silence; second, the poem must act upon you in a way that resembles a human encounter.' Maxwell, *On Poetry*, p. 32.

<sup>56</sup> The latter pair of which is separated by only a 'cheap little initial' as Vladimir Nabokov would have it. Vladimir Nabokov, *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (Penguin, 2015), p. 379.

<sup>57</sup> Kleitsch, *Der 'Phantasia' von Arno Holz*, p. 32; See also Carola von Edlinger, *Kosmogonische und mythische Weltentwürfe aus interdiskursiver Sicht: Untersuchungen zu 'Phantasia' (Arno Holz), 'Das Nordlicht' (Theodor Däubler) und 'Die Kugel' (Otto zur Linde)* (Lang, 2002).

kurze und schnelle [...] Wiederholung der Phylogenesis oder der Entwicklung des zugehörigen Stammes ist'.<sup>58</sup> The very first scene of the final version describes such a recapitulation and will now be the starting point to enter the work.

The original version taken from the very first publication of *Phantasia* as an independent collection of poetry in its own right published in 1898 is as follows:

Sieben Billionen Jahre vor meiner Geburt  
war ich eine Schwertlilie.

Meine Wurzeln  
saugten sich  
in einen Stern.

Auf seinem dunklen Wasser  
schwamm  
meine blaue Riesenblüte.<sup>59</sup>

The influence of Haeckel's theories is quite readily visible, as the subject of the poem describes its own development that is also congruent with the development of all nature itself. The spread of the content, which remains by and large constant throughout the various iterations and edits of the poems, is staggeringly extensive. Although there is very little action explicitly described – which rests mostly on the two verbs 'saugen' and 'schwimmen' – the text implies a recapitulation of the entire history of organic life that is compressed into only a handful of lines. Due to the lack of movement in the poem, its overall impression seems rather static and the only two verbs that could indicate some form of animation instead provide a sense of arresting peacefulness rather than liveliness.<sup>60</sup>

Again, Holz refers back to poetic traditions, at the same time bringing back to mind his choice of pseudonym in the letter quoted above, that is Novalis and the symbol of the 'blaue Blume' first

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<sup>58</sup> Ernst Haeckel cited in Kleitsch, *Der 'Phantasia' von Arno Holz*, p. 47.

<sup>59</sup> Arno Holz, *Phantasia*, 2 vols (Sassenbach, 1898), p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Kleitsch, *Der 'Phantasia' von Arno Holz*, p. 22.

found in his *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. The flower is a paradigmatic stand-in for tendencies in Romantic literature and perhaps even a pars pro toto for German-language poetry more generally. Most commonly, it is invoked to point towards feelings of longing and poetic completion and appears here slightly distorted as a 'blaue Riesenblüte'. While this reference is still easily recognisable at this stage of the poem's development, it becomes increasingly obfuscated in later versions, broken apart by various insertions and hidden behind a wildly proliferating foliage of linguistic determinants. This process could be considered an expression of Holz's renewal of poetic language and the overcoming of traditions on a smaller scale, on the one hand. However, on the other hand, this also points towards the potential pitfalls of this project, where the iterative convergence of content through ever more precise linguistic approximations leads to the loss of the content rather than its disclosure.

The next iterations of the beginning of the poem are two examples that Holz himself chooses to demonstrate the effects of his carefully crafted lines and illustrate his method of achieving the rhythm he intends:

Sieben Billionen Jahre vor meiner Geburt  
war ich eine Schwertlilie.

Meine suchenden Wurzeln  
saugten sich  
um einen Stern.

Aus seinen sich wölbenden Wassern,  
traumblau,  
in neue, kreisende Weltenringe,  
wuchs,  
stieg, stieß,  
zerströmte, versprühte sich – meine dunkle Riesenblüte!

Die Worte selbst scheinen mir eisern richtig. Ich fände an ihnen nicht einen Laut mehr zu ändern! Trotzdem war es mir noch nicht gelungen, ihre innere Melodie auch schon nach außen zu projizieren, was von einer tadellos vollendeten Niederschrift unbedingt gefordert werden dürfte, und diese tadellose Niederschrift müßte nach dem jetzigen Stande meiner technischen Einsichten und Fähigkeiten lauten:

Sieben Billionen Jahre vor meiner Geburt  
 war ich  
 eine Schwertlilie.  
 Meine suchenden Wurzeln  
 saugten  
 sich  
 um einen Stern.

Aus seinen sich wölbenden Wassern,  
 traumbrau,  
 in  
 neue,  
 kreisende Weltenringe,  
 wuchs,  
 stieg, stieß,  
 zerströmte, versprühte sich – meine dunkle Riesenblüte!

Man lese, laut, 'beide Projektionen', wäge ihre Werte aufmerksamst an einander ab, und das Ergebnis wird sein: erst durch die zweite, so absolut ihre Worte die kongruierend gleichen sind, drücken sich plastisch 'die Dinge' aus, die hinter der ersten zum Teil noch verschwommen und wie unter Schleiern lagen! Erst jetzt, erst in dieser vollkommeneren zweiten Fassung, wirkt jedes Wort mit seinem ganzen, ursprünglichen Vollklang, in reinsten Kristallklarheit, und ergibt sich so restlos die innerste Bedeutung, die überzeugende Sinnfälligkeit dessen, was ich durch diese Worte hatte 'zum Ausdruck' bringen wollen! (W V KT, 92-93)

With these revisions and Holz's commentary, the individual line becomes the element in his poetry that is best suited for him to embody the poetry he is aiming for, and which guarantees that each word can maintain its fundamental 'Vollklang', that is its meaning depending on the relevant contextual conditions. The line with its intended content therefore functions just as much as a syntactic element as it is an acoustic one, producing a 'Dichtung fürs Ohr' (W V KT, 106). The importance of the content over the form can be observed especially well when directly comparing the two stages of the poem with each other. Increasingly, the individual lines become the embodiment of singular instances of content and meaning, gaining autonomy as opposed to more cohesion-focused, interrelated arrangements and thereby bringing into existence Holz's unique rhythm.

Alois Brandstetter argues that, when looking at the entirety of *Phantasmus*, rhythm seems to be only a secondary phenomenon that is completely overshadowed by the effects of the arrangement of the lines and their focus on the syntagmatic dimensions of language:

Zuwenig wird dabei beachtet, daß der Rhythmus ein sekundäres Phänomen ist, eine Hyperstruktur, die auf dem Fundament einer Satzordnung durch Satzglieder (oder deren Teile), syntaktischer Neben-, Über- oder Unterordnung aufruht, grammatischen Gegebenheiten, denen unsere Interpunktion bis zu einem gewissen Grade Rechnung trägt, die sie aber stellenweise auch verdeckt. Diese vorweg gegebene Gliederung eines sprachlich artikulierten Gedankens macht Holz zum tragenden Ordnungsprinzip in seinem *Phantasmus*. Als Modell kann die mit einem Satzglied oder einem in sich Struktur zeigenden Satzgliedteil gefüllte Zeile gelten. Das Syntagma wird, veranschaulicht durch die Druckanordnung, zu einer autonomen ästhetischen Qualität.<sup>61</sup>

Continuing with his commentary on the two versions of the poem presented by Holz, Brandstetter further recognises that the bond between individual clauses and the lines of the poem becomes increasingly less prominent.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, he eventually concludes that it is this “Artigkeit” der Grammatik’ in particular that fuels the ‘Andersartigkeit der Lyrik’<sup>63</sup>. That is perhaps also the reason why he further argues: ‘Im *Phantasmus* bewährt sich die Grammatik als Kosmos.’<sup>64</sup> Thus, the ‘Weltbild’ unfolded in the collection increasingly becomes a world of language, separating itself from the content that it was originally intended to embody. While the content is stretched thinner and thinner in the expanses of new material, world-building begins to be replaced by word-building.

That the effects of Holz’s focus on the individual lines of the poem go beyond the grammatical dimension and that they eventually might appear estranged from the original intentions becomes especially apparent in later stages of the poem, when the lines exhibit an asymptotically converging approach to the intended ‘Vorstellungsbild’ and create a rhythm out of

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<sup>61</sup> Alois Brandstetter, ‘Gestalt und Leistung der Zeile im “Phantasmus” von Arno Holz: Ein Beitrag zur Ästhetik der Syntax’, *Wirkendes Wort*, 16.1 (1966), pp. 13–18 (p. 13). Schiewer also notes that the dynamism of Holz’s poetry is mostly owed to syntagmatic effects. Schiewer, *Poetische Gestaltkonzepte und Automatentheorie*, p. 245.

<sup>62</sup> Brandstetter, ‘Gestalt und Leistung der Zeile’, p. 17.

<sup>63</sup> Brandstetter, ‘Gestalt und Leistung der Zeile’, p. 18.

<sup>64</sup> Brandstetter, ‘Gestalt und Leistung der Zeile’, p. 14.

repetitions and recommencements. The first of the two later stages is the last version that Holz himself authorised, cited from the part titled ‘Die neue Form und ihre bisherige Entwicklung’ in ‘Evolution der Lyrik’.<sup>65</sup> The other version was first published as part of the ‘Nachlass’ in the five-volume edition of his collected works edited by Wilhelm Emrich and Anita Holz.

The last version, whose publication Holz authorised personally reads as follows:

In  
tiefem,  
bannendem, webendem  
Nachtschlaf,  
durch  
purpurn balliges  
Gedicht,  
aus überweltlichem Sphärenlicht ein erdleiblosgelöstes Glanzgesicht,  
raunte sich mir, kündete sich mir, gestaltete sich mir  
die  
Gewißheit:

.....

Sieben Billionen Jahre vor meiner Geburt  
war ich  
eine Schwertlilie.

Meine suchenden Wurzeln  
saugten  
sich  
um einen Stern.

Aus seinen sich wölbenden  
Wassern,  
narbenblattgriffelig, goldpfeilfädenstäubig,  
traumblau,  
in  
neue,  
wallende, werdende, wogende,  
brauende, brodelnde,  
kreisende  
Weltenringe

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<sup>65</sup> Due to Holz’s many revisions of *Phantasia* throughout the years and across a variety of publications, the exact order of revisions can appear a bit opaque at times.

wuchs,  
 stieg, stieß,  
 steilte, teilte, spielte,  
 verglühte, zerströmte, versprühte  
 sich,  
 Flammenkugelmeteore,  
 Kometenkaskaden, Planetenbuntkränze  
 verschwenderisch um sich regnend, verspenderisch um sich segnend,  
 vergeuderisch  
 um sich schwingschlaudernd,  
 meine  
 dunkel metallische, halkyonisch phallische, klingend kristallische  
 Riesenblüten-Szepterkrone!

.....

Noch  
 in mein schweres Frühauferjachen, in mein Wiedermenschwerden, in mein Wiederwachen  
 sturzlachte,  
 sturzjubelte, sturzleuchtete  
 ihre Kraftstolzfreude, ihre Schöpfermutanforderung, ihre  
 Zuversicht!  
 (W V KT, 129-31)

In comparison, what follows is the version from the 'Nachlass':

#### SELBSTSICHERER AUFTAKT

In  
 letztem, tiefem,  
 bannendem, webendem, lastendem  
 Nachtschlaf,  
 durch  
 purpurn ... balliges  
 Gedicht,  
 aus überjenseitlichem Sphärenlicht ein erdleiblosgelöstes  
 Glanzgesicht,  
 raunte sich mir, kündete sich mir, gestaltete  
 sich mir  
 die  
 Gewißheit:

Sieben Billionen ... Jahre ... vor meiner Geburt  
 war ich  
 eine Schwertlilie.

Meine suchenden Wurzeln  
 saugten

sich  
um einen Stern.

Aus  
seinen sich wölbenden  
Wassern,  
blumenblätternarbig, goldpfeilfädenstäubig,  
traumbrau,  
in  
neue,  
wallende, werdende, wogende,  
braunende, brodelnde,  
kreisende  
Weltenringe  
wuchs,  
stieg, stieß,  
steilte, teilte, spielte,  
verglühte, zerströmte, versprühte  
sich  
geheimnisträchtigt, geheimnismächtigt,  
geheimnishehrst  
sich selbst begattend, sich selbst befruchtend, sich selbst beschattend, sich selbst  
zerzeugend,  
Flammenkugelmeteore,  
Kometenkaskaden, Planetenbuntkränze  
verschwenderisch  
um sich regend, verspenderisch um sich segnend,  
vergeuderisch  
um sich  
schwingschleudernd,  
meine  
dunkel-metallische, halkyonisch-phallische, klingend-kristallische  
Riesenblüten-Szepterkrone!

Noch  
in mein  
schweres Frühauferjachen, in mein Wiedermenschwerden, in mein wieder volles Erwachen  
sturzlachte,  
sturzbubelte, sturzleuchtete  
ihre  
Kraftstolzfreude,  
ihre Schöpfermutanfeuerung, ihre  
Zuversicht!  
(W I, 7-8)

Although both of these last versions are considerably more expansive than the first two, the depicted content could be considered to remain relatively constant throughout all four stages of

the evolution of the poem, as mentioned above. Factually, it is and stays a description of the lyric subject of the poem describing its memory of being a primordial iris, growing with its roots wrapped around a planet.<sup>66</sup> What is added later is an almost narrative framing that aims to situate the act of remembrance inside a dream, bringing to mind the origins of the collection's title in Greek mythology, where *Phantasos* is one of the sons of *Hypnos*, the god of sleep, who can transform into any object at will.

As Christine Lubkoll notes about these later stages of the poem (specifically the last authorised version; however, the same holds true, perhaps even more so, for the 'Nachlassfassung'):

Nicht nur verweisen die zahlreichen, geradezu inflationär verwendeten Verben auf eine permanente Dynamik [...]; sondern vor allem inszenieren sie diese Bewegung sprachlich, bis hin zu einer Hoch- oder Überspannung der schöpferischen Energie, so daß der Rhythmus selbst zum Gegenstand des Gedichts erhoben wird.<sup>67</sup>

Following Lubkoll, the poem, in a sense, could be said to increasingly lose its grip on reality and a description of the external world originally intended to be mediated via rhythm becomes not just a mere description of the rhythm itself but an outright experience of it. It is, however, also possible to read this process not as a departure from a meaningful description of the world but rather as a rigorously implemented act of mimesis. Thinking back to the excerpts from *Buch der Zeit*, this then could be the exact moment when the rhythms of modernity start to transform into the poem itself.

Thus, while the poem offers an almost ungraspable sense of detail, the most significant changes do not concern its content but rather its unique rhythm and the effects of it. One of these effects is the heightened awareness of the poem towards its own quality of being a written poem and communicating its own sense of materiality to the reader. This is set up in the first few lines when

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<sup>66</sup> This scene further brings to mind rhythm's possible role in reconnecting humanity to its original natural state, as discussed above.

<sup>67</sup> Lubkoll, 'Rhythmus', p. 106.

the genesis of the subject's insight into its own past is described as arriving through a 'purpurn balliges, | Gedicht'. Here, Holz's wordplay juxtaposes the poem itself with the 'Ge-Dicht', the thicket- or undergrowth-like feature of the subject's state of sleep. With that, the poem becomes synonymous with a condition that is solely described through its quality of being coagulated material, an impression that is reinforced by the adjective 'ballig'. The two lines that immediately follow seem to pay tribute to this fact by contrasting the relative sparseness of the lines before with excessive description and the single-pulse rhythm of 'Gedicht' explodes into the two lines with six strong beats each: 'aus überweltlichem Sphärenlicht ein erdleiblosgelöstes Glanzgesicht, | raunte sich mir, kündete sich mir, gestaltete sich mir'. This is also apparent in the fourth version of the poem, albeit executed in a slightly different manner. There, the lines read:

purpurn ... balliges  
 Gedicht,  
 aus überjenweltlichem Sphärenlicht ein erdleiblosgelöstes  
 Glanzgesicht,  
 raunte sich mir, kündete sich mir, gestaltete  
 sich mir

This consciousness of the materiality of the poem is achieved less through an agglomeration of rhythmic pulses than through the absence of one, the slight indication of a pause or hesitation. Three dots separate the adjectives that determine 'Gedicht', shifting the emphasis firmly onto the latter of the two. '[B]allig' becomes therefore even more closely linked to 'Gedicht' and stands out as the vital quality of the noun it describes. The rhythmic effect of the initial pause then carries over into the following lines, where the rhythm continues to lose some of its former smoothness, not least due to the two added enjambements. Through this, the entire impression of this passage becomes one of hesitation, leaving the forward-surg-ing impetus of the earlier version behind and ironically contradicting its self-description as 'SELBSTSICHERER AUFTAKT'. At the beginning of the following block even more ellipses are added, further emphasising the tentative atmosphere.

Again, however, there are no substantial changes regarding the content; the majority of the poem's evolution is due to rhythmical (re)organisation.

The suggested material nature of the poem is closely linked to its status as a written object. While Holz claims that the effect of the rhythms in his poetry ultimately should be to evoke an 'Ohrbild', many of the idiosyncrasies have barely any effect on the acoustic appearance of the poem.<sup>68</sup> Reading 'Ohrbild' figuratively, it no longer describes an aural or acoustic phenomenon but rather the manifestation of the poem on the page. By virtue of its arrangement along a central axis, each of the poem's lines extends outwards from a central point, not unlike the ears on the side of a head. This layout also leads to a fundamentally different experience when reading. Lacking a fixed starting point on the left side of the page, the centred lines force the eyes of the reader to continuously scan the page for the beginning of each line. Coming to the end of each individual line, the eyes have to jump anew into the unknown only to be caught again by the words of the following line. This is an effect that is purely visual and impossible to recreate solely through sound and it depends largely on the material quality of the poem. This also underpins Brandstetter's seemingly tautological comment, when he states: 'Man muß den *Phantasus* mit den Augen lesen!'<sup>69</sup> While reading, self-evidently, is usually done with the eyes, Holz's poem forces the eyes of the reader into a more engaged and active role than conventional, left-aligned text tends to do.

In contrast to this poem, I now would now like to focus on a second poem that was also part of the collection throughout all of its iterations. The title of the poem is 'Erklingende Geige' and it describes a scene between two individuals (which is left uncertain in the first version, but it is

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<sup>68</sup> Holz considered poetry that was not written in order to be read aloud and heard almost a degradation of the genre: 'Richtig, das ist sie zunächst: Dichtung fürs Ohr, nur fürs Ohr. Nicht fürs Auge, wozu sie im papierenen Zeitalter herabsank.' (W V KT, 106)

<sup>69</sup> Brandstetter, 'Gestalt und Leistung der Zeile', p. 18.

safe to assume that a romantic couple is described) sitting on a garden bench while the moon is rising and a violin is sounding. First, again, is the version from the first printing of the collection:

In einem Garten  
unter dunklen Bäumen  
erwarten wir die Frühlingsnacht.

Noch glänzt kein Stern.

Aus einem Fenster,  
schwellend,  
die Töne einer Geige...

Der Goldregen blinkt,  
der Flieder duftet,  
in unsern Herzen geht der Mond auf!<sup>70</sup>

The rather conventional Romantic scene is quiet, serene, and remarkably simple, especially when compared to the complex cosmos that is conjured up in the 'Schwertlilie' poem above. The modifications here are similar to the others and in general amount to a heightened detail of description almost to the degree of overdetermination and added line breaks. The rhythmic flow is appropriate to the scene, as Kleitsch observes, slow and steady to emulate the quietness of the night.<sup>71</sup> However, there remain some distinct differences, both with regard to content and form which become especially apparent in the last version.

In the first edition of Holz's collected works, the poem takes the following form:

In einem Garten, unter alten Bäumen,  
auf  
dunkler Moosbank, Hand in Hand,  
sinnend, schweigend,  
zwiesam,  
erwarten wir  
die Frühlingsnacht.

Noch

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<sup>70</sup> Holz, *Phantasia*, p. 10.

<sup>71</sup> Kleitsch, *Der 'Phantasia' von Arno Holz*, p. 25.

glänzt kein Stern.

Die  
Büsche verdämmern.

Plötzlich,  
aus einem Fenster,  
leise,  
getragen, schwellend,  
die  
tiefen, reinen, perlend feinen,  
steigend ringenden,  
sehnend schwingenden, selig singenden,  
flutenden, glutenden,  
goldglitzernden,  
silbersanften, silberlichten, silbersüßen  
Schmelztöne einer Geige.

Der Goldregen blinkt ... der Flieder duftet,  
in  
unseren Herzen,  
traumhold, traumrot, traumgroß,  
geht  
der Mond auf!<sup>72</sup>

And lastly, the final version published in the 'Nachlass', which contains comparatively few changes:

In  
einem Garten, unter alten Bäumen,  
auf  
dunkeler ... Moosbank ... Hand in Hand,  
sinnend, zwiesam, schweigend,  
erwarten wir ... die Frühlingsnacht.

Noch  
glänzt kein Stern.

Die Büsche ... verdämmern.

Plötzlich, aus einem

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<sup>72</sup> Arno Holz, *Das Werk VII: Phantasia I* (Dietz, 1925), pp. 225–26.

Fenster,  
 leise ... getragen ... schwellend,  
 die  
 tiefen,  
 reinen ... perlend ... feinen,  
 steigend  
 ringenden, sehnend schwingenden, selig singenden,  
 flutenden, glutenden,  
 goldglitzernden,  
 silbersanften, silberlichten, silbersüßen  
 Schmelz-  
 Töne einer Geige.

Der Goldregen blinkt; der Weißlieder  
 duftet;  
 in  
 unseren Herzen,  
 traumhold, traumrot, traumgroß,  
 uns befriedend, uns  
 berücksend, uns bezaubernd, uns beglückend,  
 uns  
 glanzschauerdurchrieselnd,  
 geht  
 der Mond auf!  
 (W I, 274-75)

In general, as was the case before, the content remains the same throughout all three iterations, although minor variations are added. Most striking perhaps in that regard, is the modification ‘plötzlich’ before the acoustic centre of the poem is reached with the description of the sounds of the violin. It is also this change that is most at odds with the original as the sudden appearance of soft sounds seems if not implausible then at least highly inappropriate to the situation and atmosphere described. Instead, this modifier seems to befit more aptly the veritable onslaught of adjectives that accompanies the further description of the sounds. In line with this observation, it seems that, more and more, acoustic phenomena are translated into visual ones.<sup>73</sup> Holz ultimately decided to undo certain changes between the first and second revision, such as reintegrating the

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<sup>73</sup> Kleitsch, *Der ‘Phantasia’ von Arno Holz*, p. 26.

‘plötzlich’ into the following line and thereby lessening its semantic impact. Perhaps that is precisely because some of the alterations would stand too much at odds with the overall impression to be conveyed.

Essentially, the evolution of ‘Erklingende Geige’ from its initial version to its final form in the ‘Nachlass’ offers perhaps a miniature view of Holz’s general poetic project. The measured tranquillity of the scene is transformed by the introduction of line breaks and the proliferation of adjectives, in the last part especially (although still much more subtly here than in the poems above). The perhaps more conventional flow of the first iteration appears much more disrupted, syncopated rhythms begin to dominate, and, as before, additional ellipses are introduced. The biggest changes concern the last part, where numerous adjectives and enjambement are added:

uns befriedend, uns  
berückend, uns bezaubernd, uns beglückend,  
uns  
glanzschauerdurchrieselnd,

These additions further complicate the rhythm and result in a rhythmical crescendo, which echoes the overall emotional intensity of the scene. Thinking back to Holz’s aesthetic-mathematical formula, this last part illustrates well his attempts at an ever-decreasing value of the ‘x’, approaching nature through art as closely as possible by the means of rhythm. However, this pursuit of accurate representation via rhythmic complexity also is bound to reach its limitations as the final part of this poem shows. As the language becomes more rhythmically intricate it also becomes much more artificial, thereby increasing the distance to that which should be represented.

Interestingly, the whole poem also brings to mind Holz’s concept of the ‘Ohrbild’, in that the poem depicts the translation of an acoustic phenomenon into a visual one. Fundamentally, the sounds of the eponymous ‘[e]rklingende Geige’ are translated into words on the page and thereby made visible. Although the ever-closer approximations in the revisions try to render the experience more accurately, they also inevitably draw the attention much more towards the written nature of

the poem, just by virtue of expanding the amount of material that can be seen on the page. As far as the rhythmical changes are concerned, they both support but also appear to hinder the aim of an accurate description of the violin's sounds. While the softly undulating adjectives underscore these very same qualities of the instrument, the added enjambement and ellipses seem to work against this.

The two poems compared above represent extremes on two opposite ends of a spectrum as far as one specific feature is concerned, that is the relationship between content and form. In the 'Schwertlilie' poem a vast expanse of content is condensed into just a few lines of text and the expansion of its form and language through the various revisions follows this almost literally ungraspable unfolding of the universe that the poem describes. In 'Erklingende Geige', however, the situation is the opposite, and an almost minute singular moment of heightened atmosphere and feeling is expanded to enormous proportions. Another aspect in which both poems differ is their respective relationship to the traditions of poetry. Whereas the sujet of the first one is unlikely to have many similar predecessors, if any at all, in German-language poetry, the latter describes the decidedly conventional, if not generic, and much-explored circumstances of a lovers' tryst in a gently unfolding night accompanied by a violin's tender notes.

It is especially this attitude towards tradition that invokes the poems from *Buch der Zeit* analysed earlier in this chapter, which investigate a form of inner tension that resembles this one, albeit, again, through a certain reordering of configurations. Those earlier poems explore the contents of modern society and find in its rhythmical phenomena a fitting opposition to their (still) rather traditional forms. Here, in 'Erklingende Geige', the new, expansive form of Holz's lines finds its counterpart in the sentimental, borderline clichéd scene and the conventional echoes.

This relationship calls to mind Maxwell's statement above on the configuration of black and white in a poem and how the latter is representative of anything that is outside the poem, including

any potential influences through lines of poetic traditions. The later iterations of 'Erklingende Geige' add a lot of extra 'black', as it were, material that goes against the traditional norms in its new rhythms and lines that explode from the centre into either side of the page. It is interesting to note, though, and this only becomes sufficiently clear in the very last version of the poem, that a lot of the 'black' added gives rise to breaks and openings where the 'white' can, again, seep through. While above I considered this to be a potential shortcoming, a failure of the rhythmical changes to support the accurate mimetic description of the poem's content, it is possible to interpret it quite differently. I argue that it is indeed in these new gaps and openings created by the modifications of the poem's rhythm that a particular tension can re-emerge, the sort of tension that is similar to the one discovered above in Holz's earliest poems. For example, the rather relentless rhythmical impact of the second iteration appears lessened in the final version by these breaks and pauses, allowing the traditional motifs to shine through the added material more clearly and effectively.

Paradoxically, the changes of rhythm, in particular the breaks and openings, serve a dual purpose then. On the one hand, they disrupt the flow of Romantic motifs, fragmenting the serene nature of the scene. On the other hand, they also create moments of reflection, which might invite the reader to linger longer on the Romantic imagery of the softly sounding violin and the 'glanzschauerdurchrieselnd' rising moon.

What, ultimately, is the nature, or meaning, of rhythm that emerges from these poems? It appears that it is one that originates in small, individual nuclei of content and meaning, which are then successively, iteratively ever-closer approximated. It might perhaps be best to imagine this process as two counter-rotating spirals, one of them steadily tightening inwards, towards the centre of a content that needs to be expressed, while the second, representing the material dimension, including language itself, expands continuously further away from this centre. While in the first poem the latter movement seems to dominate, the analysis of the second poem suggests an

inversion of this hierarchy. Thus, at times, it may almost seem like the new rhythm that Holz executes in his poetry sets itself against the original intentions of his mission to revolutionise German-language poetry of his day. To recall, he aimed for a poetry that would rely less on formally structured words used as an end in themselves and more on a rhythm ‘der nur noch durch das lebt, was durch ihn zum Ausdruck ringt’ (W V KT, 69). Now the constantly growing accumulations of words encountered in the poems above could be read as an expression of this ‘was durch ihn zum Ausdruck ringt’, that is a successive approximation of the world expressed in Holz’s new rhythm. ‘Ringt’ seems to be the operative word here, since the expanded revision of the poem expresses and reiterates the almost laborious nature of this process, which in itself is perhaps an echo of the frenetic rhythms of modern life.

It is, however, also not entirely implausible to consider those expanding word clusters a symptom of Holz’s becoming entangled in a self-cultivated thicket of language. The genuine achievement of his new poetic language appears to lie in between those two extremes, when the autonomy of language productively meets the mimetic imperative of the world, ultimately resulting in a particular form of poetic tension. As mentioned in the Introduction, some of the etymological roots of rhythm point towards an understanding of the concept as a configuration of moments of tension, a ‘Spannungsgefüge’. Holz certainly seems to seize on this feature of the concept in the poems discussed above and therefore not only pays tribute to the general enthusiasm concerning rhythm around 1900 but also to some of its specific powers that have been inherent in it since the very beginning.

## **Conclusion: Rhythm, Tradition, and Legacy**

It is undeniable that the concept of rhythm plays an important role in the works of Arno Holz, and it permeates the various strands of his oeuvre from the beginning. First and foremost, it forms the link between his more general theory of art and the specific demands he puts forth for the

development of a new poetic language in Germany around the turn of the twentieth century. The fact that rhythm can act as a bridge to connect his theoretical and creative endeavours is not least due to the conceptual malleability inherent in rhythm itself and the popularity the concept enjoyed in the sciences and arts alike when Holz was developing his ideas. Aside from this more overarching role, rhythm is crucial on a smaller scale for the two sides of his oeuvre. On the one hand, as is the case for his theory, it provides a function that is similar to its more general role, that is connective. Rhythm enables Holz to link the late nineteenth-century positivist foundation of his theory to the laws of art that he aims to develop. On the other hand, in his poetry, rhythm becomes the defining characteristic of his poetic form: vehicle both for his critique of, in his view, outdated formal elements of poetic language and the realisation of his personal innovations.

The main aim that Holz pursued was a radical renewal of poetic language, very similar in intent to the efforts of other German-language poets around the turn of the twentieth century, such as Stefan George, whose works will be the focus of the following chapter. However, although both chose a comparable point of attack to achieve this aim, they differed vastly in their methods. While for George, art was the primary focus around which his formal rejuvenation of poetry should develop, Holz chose to focus on life instead and intended to render it as thoroughly as possible in his poetry. This enthusiasm for life was one half of the motivation that made him embrace the concept of rhythm. The other half was influenced by his stance towards history and tradition. Wanting to surpass the, in his eyes, overly formal repertoire of conventional poetry, he was drawn to rhythm as it was part of new developments of the moment and had an inherent, unprejudiced malleability, which made it possible for Holz to connect it to contemporaneous scientific discourse and his poetry alike.

Following the fundamental rules Holz sets out in his theory, his poetry aims to be a representation of the world with near perfect fidelity. This means that language itself is to be

subservient to the content it expresses, and, in turn, all formal characteristics of language need to be optimised with this goal in mind. In pursuing this aim, Holz dismisses much, if not all, of the poetry of his contemporaries, mostly due to the fact that he considers their language to be an end in itself, a self-referential game based on unsubstantial poetic traditions. However, the innovative potential of his own poetry and with that the critique of past poetic forms both seem to be executed best in the earlier phases of his creative works. Especially his poetic critique appears at its strongest when the execution of his own theories is arguably at its weakest, when he does not aim for a complete closing of the gap between content and form but instead finds room for a productive tension between both, eschewing a total congruence between the What and the How. This can be observed in his 1886 *Buch der Zeit*, which presents a poetry that is perhaps formally as traditional as possible for its time, while the content reflects the changed and continuously evolving circumstances of the modern world. From this arises a particular tension that can indeed still be perceived in the later poems of the *Phantasus*, albeit at times with a somewhat weakened impact. There, it sometimes runs the risk of being overwhelmed and drowned out by the sheer materiality of the poems with their rampant and borderline narcissistic proliferation of language. However, the poems still manage to retain certain breaks and openings out of which this tension may arise again, in line with some of rhythm's oldest attributes related to forms of tension.

Particularly interesting in the context is the role of poetic tradition and Holz's relationship with it. Again, while he claims to be radically opposed to productively engaging with it, an analysis of his poetry can reveal a different perspective. Especially 'Erklingende Geige' presents a fascinating interplay between Romantic clichés and his modern conception of rhythms. The idyllic scene is subtly subverted by Holz's rhythmic disruptions, ellipses, breaks, enjambment, and congesting adjectives, which inject a sense of modern dissonance into the invoked tradition. However, these fissures also allow Romantic topoi to appear more vividly. Thus, in a sense, rather than completely

discarding tradition, Holz unintentionally revitalises it by way of rhythmic innovation, ultimately discovering a productive, dynamic tension between the two.

Rhythm further highlights another gap as well as a link between the two tendencies in Holz's poetry that, despite his own negative attitude towards tradition, would come to influence two major developments of German-language poetry in the twentieth century. On the one hand, his quite resolute insistence on life and the prioritised expression of it in poetic form above all varieties of artistic devices could be considered to pave the way for the Expressionist movement, as Döblin's quotation above suggests and as Strohschneider-Kohrs also observes.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, at the opposing end of this spectrum, there is an atomisation and autonomisation of the material of language itself at work in many of the *Phantasmus* poems, which seem to shift the focus away from any notion of 'world' almost entirely to 'word' instead. At its most extreme it appears, however, removed from any kind of meaning or relation to the world expressed in the works. Holz's contemporary Rainer Maria Rilke also recognised this and denounced it as the blindspot of Holz's poetic project (here specifically commenting on *Phantasmus*):

Seine Gedichte muten an, wie eine phantastische sinnliche Prosa, deren Worte bald 20 mannhoch in einer Zeile stehen [...]. Hört man die Verse lesen, so kommt man gar nicht dazu, dies zu vermuten; was man dann vernimmt, ist eine bunte, teilweise unklare Prosa, in welcher dann und wann eine Alliteration oder eine onomatopoetische Verbindung auffällt, oder durch Wiederholungen eine Störung bewirkt wird. Von dem neuen Rhythmus, der bei Mombert [the poet Alfred Mombert, LJD] oft anklingt, dem breiten diphthongischen Wechselklang, der sich unterscheidet von dem engen Hebung-Senkung-Maß und mit diesem zu einer reizvollen Sensation aufwächst, kann ich in diesen Proben nichts finden.<sup>75</sup>

However, this specific manifestation of Holz's new rhythms might not be as unsuccessful as Rilke claims. In its radical decoupling of the words from the world, this tendency could be considered to have lived on far beyond Holz in the forms of concrete poetry by authors of the Wiener Gruppe

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<sup>74</sup> Strohschneider-Kohrs, 'Sprache Und Wirklichkeit Bei Arno Holz', p. 65.

<sup>75</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Moderne Lyrik', in *Sämtliche Werke V*, ed. by Ernst Zinn, Rilke-Archiv, and Ruth Sieber-Rilke (Suhrkamp, 1996), pp. 360–94 (p. 383).

or as Helmut Heißenbüttel recognised, for example.<sup>76</sup> Holz set out to create a new, rhythm-based poetic language that was supposed to sever all ties with any lines of tradition and instead solely rely on its own lines. In an almost ironic turn of events, through his rigorous enforcement of this, he became the precursor of a further, by now quasi-traditional poetic practice and achieved something quite removed from what his poetry originally set out to do.

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<sup>76</sup> Rob Burns, *The Quest for Modernity: The Place of Arno Holz in Modern German Literature* (Lang, 1981), pp. 216–17; See also Helmut Heißenbüttel, 'Ästhetik der Wortkunst: Arno Holz und sein "Phantasmus"', ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold, *TEXT+KRITIK*, 121 (1994), pp. 64–75.

## Stefan George's Artificiality: Rhythm between Pure Poetry and Metrical Rhetoric

Like Holz, Stefan George's aim around the turn of the last century was to revolutionise German-language poetry. However, while Holz intended to radically break with tradition in favour of innovation, George decided to consciously embrace it and develop his poetry in a complex dialogue with it. I argue that George's understanding and use of rhythm are central to this dialogue. Besides other functions, it is a foundational element – especially in his earlier works – in his pursuit of a sort of 'pure poetry', that is poetry as an autonomous artform, with a particular focus on form, abstraction, and aesthetic experience. It is also crucial in laying the groundwork for the rhetorical and ethical concerns that emerge in his later poetry. Rhythm is not only a linguistic structure for George but also points towards deeper relationships between meaning, language, and subjectivities created in and through the poems. It is essential in bridging aesthetic, philosophical, and rhetorical concerns and allows his poetry to extend far beyond mere abstraction.

Before exploring more deeply how rhythm operates in George's works, a brief overview of his oeuvre is necessary. Rhythm's significance for George often intersects with features that are characteristic of particular phases of his creative output, making a consideration of these periods useful for fully understanding rhythm's role.

It has often been noted in scholarship that George's poetic production can be divided into four more or less distinct periods. First are the earliest attempts at poetry in his youth, which were only made available to the public belatedly in the collection *Die Fibel: Auswahl erster Verse*, published

in 1901, more than ten years after the composition of the poems.<sup>1</sup> By then, George had already made a name for himself as a poet with several other collections of poetry, starting with three self-published works, successively released in each of the first three years of the 1890s, titled *Hymnen*, *Pilgerfahrten* and *Algabal* respectively. This trilogy was followed in 1895 by *Die Bücher der Hirten- und Preisgedichte, der Sagen und Sänge und der Hängenden Gärten* and the 1897 collection *Das Jahr der Seele*, which contains George's perhaps single most famous poem 'Komm in den totgesagten park und schau'.<sup>2</sup> With *Das Jahr der Seele*, which George R. Urban describes as perhaps the most musical of George's collections,<sup>3</sup> this early period of George's work could be considered concluded, as the following 1899 (post-dated to 1900) collection, *Der Teppich des Lebens und die Lieder von Traum und Tod. Mit einem Vorspiel*, already pre-empt the later stages of his oeuvre and presents a mixture of earlier and later poetic tendencies.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, George already began to work on *Der Siebente Ring*.

After *Teppich des Lebens*, the next major publication was the 1903 anthology of early prose works *Tage und Taten: Aufzeichnungen und Skizzen*, but it was not until 1907 and the publication of *Der Siebente Ring*, his seventh collection of poetry, that what is considered to be George's middle period fully began. This was followed seven years later with *Der Stern des Bundes*, with which this era of his poetry found its conclusion. The next major collection, *Das neue Reich*, was to be his last,

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<sup>1</sup> While this volume includes some of his early attempts at poetry, George's first serious artistic creations in general could be considered his translations of Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal*. Manfred Durzak, *Der Junge Stefan George* (Fink, 1968), p. 114. Although the full set of George's *Umdichtungen* was not published until 1901, he started working on them as early as 1890.

<sup>2</sup> Armin Schäfer on the status of this poem as part of a common cultural wealth of knowledge: 'Und auch sein [Stefan George, LJD] Ruf als Lyriker ist ramponiert. Ein, zwei seiner Verse sind in den ewigen Vorrat deutschen Kitsches eingegangen: Kaum naht der Herbst, greift man fast automatisch zu "Komm in den totgesagten Park und schau:"'. Armin Schäfer, *Die Intensität der Form: Stefan Georges Lyrik* (Böhlau, 2005), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> George R. Urban, *Kinesis and Stasis: A Study in the Attitude of Stefan George and His Circle to the Musical Arts* (Mouton, 1962), p. 189.

<sup>4</sup> Some scholars, such as Dieter Lamping, have located the beginning of this transitional, and in a certain sense more traditional, phase as early as in *Das Jahr der Seele*. Dieter Lamping, *Das lyrische Gedicht: Definitionen zu Theorie und Geschichte der Gattung* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), p. 154.

published in 1928 (as part of the *Gesamtausgabe*) only five years before his death, and offers the most important examples of George's 'Spätwerk'. Although it contains some poems that were completely new, most of it is comprised of works that were composed many years before the publication (some even as early as 1908) but were held back, as well as others that first appeared in scattered publications and were now to be disseminated more prominently.<sup>5</sup>

Although such a condensed overview of George's oeuvre and the division according to these categories must run the risk of blurring important distinctions, the different phases nevertheless establish reference points that can aid in exploring the poetry and shedding light on some of the more salient features. As the chapter's title indicates, two poetic tendencies dominate George's work and divide it roughly into two halves with *Der Teppich des Lebens* being midway. On the one hand, there is the almost absolute abstraction in the pure poetry of his early works, which exhibit a 'ästhetische Radikalität' that sets them apart from his later works.<sup>6</sup> The very first scholarly study of George's early poetry even pays tribute to this fact in its very title, *Die Erneuerung der deutschen Dichtersprache in den Frühwerken Stefan Georges*.<sup>7</sup> Dieter Lamping claims in a similar vein that George stands at the very beginning of modern German poetry, especially in his early poems.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, George's later works increasingly exhibit rather more rhetorical and political tendencies that give the poems a social and ethical slant and mark a departure from the earlier, more artistically focused direction.

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<sup>5</sup> For more detailed overviews and timelines see *Stefan George – Werkkommentar*, ed. by Jürgen Egyptien (De Gruyter, 2017); and also *Stefan George und sein Kreis: Ein Handbuch*, ed. by Achim Aurnhammer and others, 4 vols (De Gruyter, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Brokoff, *Geschichte der reinen Poesie*, p. 182.

<sup>7</sup> Hubert Arbogast, *Die Erneuerung der deutschen Dichtersprache in den Frühwerken Stefan Georges: Eine stilgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Böhlau, 1967).

<sup>8</sup> Lamping, *Das lyrische Gedicht*, p. 148.

One of the most frequently invoked qualities of Stefan George's poetry is its linguistic virtuosity, which manifests itself in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most recognisable feature is a highly variable and peculiar syntax that distinguishes itself, among other characteristics, by abundant inversions and anticipations, a tendency which is prominently displayed in George's habit of placing the genitive attributes before their respective nouns (see for example 'junger wellen schmeichelchore' or 'der glatten fluten dunkelglanz' in 'Weihe', the first poem of his first volume *Hymnen*).<sup>9</sup> A second, immediately recognisable idiosyncrasy of his style is the distinctive lexis of many of the poems, rife with neologisms and little-used or anachronistic vocabulary. The third stand-out quality of his style is the prosody, which is arguably more elusive than the other two features, as its effects tend to be more muted than the obvious strangeness of vocabulary and syntax. In truth, it is perhaps more tangible, due to it contributing to the poems' much commented-on artificiality, their chiselled and imposing appearance. All three qualities work together in creating George's distinctive style, which spans the aesthetic concerns of his earlier poetry through to the more ethical tendencies of his later works. However, it is rhythm that allows the poems to be viewed most comprehensively. It is an important reference point both for George's creative process and the readers' reception of the poems. This enables a perspective that allows the works to be examined with respect to their artistic properties while also extending the outlook beyond the poems' existence on the page towards their effects.

This access that rhythm allows seems especially pertinent today, as the majority of recent scholarship has been less interested in George's poetry itself, favouring instead political, sociological, scientific, or religious perspectives in the works of George and the *Kreis*, with only a

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<sup>9</sup> Stefan George, *Sämtliche Werke in 18 Bänden*, ed. by Ute Oelmann, 18 vols (Klett-Cotta, 1982), II, p. 10. Henceforth cited as SW.

few putting the poetry at their centre.<sup>10</sup> In particular, potential links between Stefan George and National Socialist thought, anti-Semitism, and also paederasty have been explored; sometimes at the expense of philological rigour. Nevertheless, and certainly with regard to the more rhetorical nature of George's later works, there are questions his oeuvre has to face, as Braungart correctly points out: 'Rhetorische Poesie ist An- und Hinsprache. Sie will immer, wie jede rhetorisch gerichtete Äußerung, beim Adressaten etwas bewirken: aufmerksam machen auf etwas, überzeugen, kritisieren, schmähen und verwerfen – also: Einstellungen verändern.'<sup>11</sup> An examination of George's poems and poetics through the lens of rhythm is able to allow this balancing act between serious consideration of the artistic material and attention to concerns external to the poetry, between aesthetical radicality and rhetorical address, and can aid in developing a more integrated view of his poetry through a dialogue with the poems. In any case, there is certainly a need to delve deeper into George's poetics and the inner workings of the poems themselves, since thus far, very few systematic studies of such aspects exist, Renate Birkenhauer's largely language-focused exploration of his poetics of rhyme being a notable example.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Verkannte Brüder? Stefan George und das deutsch-jüdische Bürgertum zwischen Jahrhundertwende und Emigration*, ed. by Gert Mattenklott, Michael Philipp, and Julius H. Schoeps (Olms, 2001); *Wissenschaftler im George-Kreis: Die Welt des Dichters und der Beruf der Wissenschaft*, ed. by Bernhard Böschstein and others (De Gruyter, 2005); Korinna Schönhärl, *Wissen und Visionen: Theorie und Politik der Ökonomen im Stefan-George-Kreis* (Akademie Verlag, 2009); *Das Ideal des schönen Lebens und die Wirklichkeit der Weimarer Republik: Vorstellungen von Staat und Gemeinschaft im George-Kreis*, ed. by Roman Köster and others (Akademie Verlag, 2009); *Stefan George: Dichtung, Ethos, Staat: Denkbilder für ein geheimes europäisches Deutschland*, ed. by Bruno Pieger and Bertram Schefold (Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2010); Gunilla Eschenbach, *Imitatio im George-Kreis* (De Gruyter, 2011); *A Poet's Reich: Politics and Culture in the George Circle*, ed. by Melissa S. Lane and Martin A. Ruehl (Camden House, 2011); Jan Stottmeister, *Der George-Kreis und die Theosophie* (Wallstein, 2014); *Stefan George und die Religion*, ed. by Wolfgang Braungart (De Gruyter, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Wolfgang Braungart, 'Poetik, Rhetorik, Hermeneutik', in *Stefan George und sein Kreis: Ein Handbuch*, ed. by Achim Aurnhammer and others, 4 vols (De Gruyter, 2016), II, pp. 495–550 (p. 497).

<sup>12</sup> Braungart, 'Poetik, Rhetorik, Hermeneutik', p. 497; Renate Birkenhauer, *Reimpoetik am Beispiel Stefan Georges: Phonologischer Algorithmus und Reimwörterbuch* (Niemeyer, 1983).

## Rhythmical Preliminaries

The poetry of Stefan George and Arno Holz, as discussed above, could hardly be any more dissimilar. Nevertheless, there are certain striking similarities in their attitude towards rhythm that can provide a suitable point of departure for exploring the wider importance of rhythm in George's oeuvre. This comparative approach is best applied to the early phase of his writing, on the grounds that these works were largely written during a time when he was engaged with and developing ideas opposed to naturalistic approaches in literature and theory prevalent at that time.

As mentioned, the poetic projects of both poets share the basic impetus to renew German-language poetry around the turn of the twentieth century. This shared aim eventually resulted in two practically opposite types of poetry.<sup>13</sup> However, despite significant differences regarding the realisation of their intents, both authors nevertheless developed some similar opinions. For example, George and proponents of Naturalism alike vehemently denounced epigonal tendencies in poetry, with Emanuel Geibel being perhaps the most notorious representative of this undesirable quality.<sup>14</sup> What is more, both of them had a common, substantive interest in the formal demands and challenges that a new kind of poetry would entail; and while Holz eventually decided to dispense with most of the traditional formal features, such as verses, stanzas, metre, diction, and rhyme (albeit only initially), George was very conscious of those traditions and shied away from discarding them, a fact that leads Manfred Durzak to judge the novelty of George's poetry as follows: 'Es wäre also verfehlt, von einem extremen Neubeginn in Georges Dichtung zu sprechen.'<sup>15</sup> If Holz's approach was centred around innovation, then George strived for perfection. There is also the fact that George was decidedly more conventional than the proponents of

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<sup>13</sup> Brokoff, *Geschichte der reinen Poesie*, pp. 448–49.

<sup>14</sup> Durzak, *Der Junge Stefan George*, p. 96.

<sup>15</sup> Durzak, *Der Junge Stefan George*, p. 97.

Naturalism in political terms, which could result in mistakenly inferring an analogous lack of innovation when it came to language. However, as Armin Schäfer claims, more often than not it was in fact the more politically conservative authors such as Nietzsche, Valéry and likewise George, who produced the most linguistically modern poetry in their respective times.<sup>16</sup>

The major differences in approach can be outlined roughly along the poles of content and form, or nature and art. For Holz, ideally no separation at all should exist between these fields and there was no question whatsoever about the hierarchy involved. He considered form to be absolutely subservient to content and strove for his art to reflect reality as closely as possible (although the last chapter has shown that the relationship between both is much more intricate on closer inspection). George, on the other hand, advocated a poetry that effectively reverses this hierarchy, especially in his earlier works. At his art's core was to be a dominant attention to form, independent of any efforts to reflect reality. As Durzak puts it: 'George betont das Eigenrecht der Form.'<sup>17</sup> I will argue that this artificiality is closely linked to conceptions of rhythm, both in the sense of virtuosic composition and a particular attitude towards nature, which, as will be shown below, takes a more complex shape than the widespread claims of an outright rejection of the natural world.

First hints as to what role rhythm plays for George can be found in the general sense of aesthetics that dominate his earlier collections of poetry, before a more detailed shape emerges in explicit poetological remarks as well as in the poems themselves. This early extreme aestheticism, the 'Eigenrecht der Form', was not only a feature of the poems themselves but influenced everything around and about them. Among other things, in 1904 George helped to develop a new font, based on his own handwriting, to ensure the complete artistic integrity of his poetic project.<sup>18</sup> Not least

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<sup>16</sup> Schäfer, *Die Intensität der Form: Stefan Georges Lyrik*, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Durzak, *Der Junge Stefan George*, p. 101.

<sup>18</sup> A singular feat, according to Roland Reuß: 'Sie ist die einzige Druckschrift, deren Schnitt und Zurichtung direkt auf die Initiative eines namhaften Schriftstellers zurückgeht und die für die Außendarstellung seines Werkes mehr oder

due to George's collaboration with the artist Melchior Lechter from *Das Jahr der Seele* onwards until *Der Siebente Ring* (with *Der Teppich des Lebens* being the first lavishly decorated volume), his collections of poetry changed from being books 'containing' art into works of art in their own right, with elaborate ornamentation and use of colour to great effect. Even the author himself seemed to embody qualities that made himself part of this 'Gesamtkunstwerk'.<sup>19</sup> In the recollections of a sometime friend of his, the English composer Cyril Scott, George is described less as an ordinary human and more as a product of imagination, the epitome of the poet:

Looking back over the years of my long life, during which I have come into contact with many eminent men of various nationalities, I still regard Stefan George as the most impressive personality I ever met. There have been poets who gained renown through the quality of their works and yet whose physical appearance did not suggest any special *Genialität*. But Stefan George was not only a great poet but was blessed with the advantage of *looking* like one to the fullest extent – or perhaps I should say, looking like what we imagine a poet ought to look like.<sup>20</sup>

It appears that the distinctive aestheticism of George's works not only affected his poetry and the ways in which it was presented but it also fundamentally influenced his own appearance and persona. Behind Scott's memories resonates a simple assumption about the reciprocal relationship between art and artist. To put it bluntly: in order to create great art, one should look the part. While this is obviously not the case, the quotation nevertheless reveals fundamental aspects of George's aesthetic attitude: the all-embracing scope of his project and a deep interconnectedness between all things aesthetic. Of course, the impression described by Scott resulted in a large extent from George's general desire to extend the aesthetic realm of the poems and to showcase his art in the most appropriate way. As it were, he unquestionably wanted to fit

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weniger unverhüllt essentielle Geltung beansprucht hat.' Roland Reuß, 'Industrielle Manufaktur: Zur Entstehung der "Stefan-George-Schrift"', in *Stardust: Post für die Werkstatt: KD Wolff zum Sechzigsten*, ed. by Doris Kern and Michel Leiner (Stroemfeld, 2003), pp. 168–91 (p. 168).

<sup>19</sup> George also had the acumen of successfully marketing his art: 'Souverän beherrschte George, der um den Warencharakter seiner Kunst wußte, die Regeln des literarischen Markts.' Schäfer, *Die Intensität der Form: Stefan Georges Lyrik*, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> Cyril Scott, 'Reminiscences of Stefan George', *German Life and Letters*, 12.3 (1959), pp. 186–90 (p. 186), doi:10/fkfm5q, emphasis in the original.

the part. Changing how he presented himself in order to match his poetry was just the next logical step after fine-tuning the physical layout of the collections. However, as Scott's clarification at the end suggests, this process certainly cuts both ways, and it is also the poetry itself which prompts the imagination to create an image of the person behind the words. It seems that the aestheticism that dominates in George's earlier poetry not only strives towards transforming reality into art and abstraction but also is an indication of the fact that art begets art. In this instance, this can range from the presentation of the poetry to the stylised persona of the poet himself. It is, as it were, the process of creation and everything that comes with it that draw attention to the aesthetic realm. As such, rhythm could be considered a key indicator for connections and relationships of this kind, as it is able to efficiently shed light on the artificiality of poetry, while simultaneously being one of the main constituents of the effects created by the artwork.

An example of the extent of reciprocity between the art of poetry and art in more general terms is George's poem 'Ein Angelico', which has frequently been the subject of critical attention, not least because of its numerous poetological implications.

#### EIN ANGELICO

Auf zierliche kapitel der legende  
 – Den erdenstreit bewacht von ewgem rat ·  
 Des strengen ahnen wirkungsvolle sende –  
 Errichtet er die glorreich grosse tat:

Er nahm das gold von heiligen pokalen ·  
 Zu hellem haar das reife weizenstroh ·  
 Das rosa kindern die mit schiefer malen ·  
 Der wäscherin am bach den indigo.

Der herr im glanze reinen königtumes  
 Zur seite sanfte sänger seines ruhmes  
 Und sieger der Chariten und Medusen.

Die braut mit immerstillem Kindesbusen  
 Voll demut aber froh mit ihrem lohne  
 Empfängt aus seiner hand die erste krone. (SW II, 27)

This sonnet is not only ekphrasis, a description of a particular painting, *The Coronation of the Virgin* (1434-35) by Fra Angelico, housed in the Louvre, but can be understood as a painting in its own right, as Rey Conquer points out.<sup>21</sup> It describes the creation of a painting (as the title indicates, the question of which painting in particular is irrelevant) through a process of abstraction: ‘Zur Sprache kommt der Kunstprozeß, nicht das vollendete Kunstobjekt.’<sup>22</sup> For this, the second quatrain constitutes the most meaningful passage, where the colourful material of the artwork is assembled through the borrowing of colour from other objects. Each of the colours described has a different origin and different qualities. The gold, taken from ‘heiligen pokalen’, is imbued with a strong physicality since the material is synonymous with its colour. In contrast to the preceding line, the second colour is not named but rather suggested through the object associated with it, the ‘reife weizenstroh’. It is uncertain whether the pink hue in the third line is obtained directly from the children, or the pieces of slate with which they draw.<sup>23</sup> Nägele, for example, decides upon the former interpretation. However, the latter seems slightly more plausible, since if it were indeed the case that the pink was associated with the children themselves, the exact source of the colour would still remain uncertain (is it the children’s clothes or perhaps their rosy cheeks?). It seems therefore more plausible that the pink is abstracted from the slate and more appropriately associated with the act of painting than being a quality of the children.<sup>24</sup> The line pertaining to the last colour, indigo, also leaves room for interpretation regarding the exact source. Nägele gives as possible interpretation either the washed-out colour of the fabrics or the reflection of the sky on the stream’s surface, with the second reading adding a further layer of being mediated

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<sup>21</sup> Rey Conquer, *Reading Colour: George, Rilke, Kandinsky, Lasker-Schüler* (Lang, 2019), p. 51.

<sup>22</sup> Rainer Nägele, ‘Jenseits der Mimesis: Stefan George: “Ein Angelico” und Günter Eich: “Verlassene Staffelei”’, *Neophilologus*, 59 (1975), pp. 98–108 (p. 99), doi:10/b3fvnb.

<sup>23</sup> Nägele, ‘Jenseits der Mimesis’, p. 102.

<sup>24</sup> In fact, slate does not necessarily need to be ‘slate’-coloured and occurs also naturally in varying shades and combinations of green and red.

by the image.<sup>25</sup> What is described is, thus, not merely a list of colours and their respective origins but rather a chain of different segments of reality and acts of abstraction.<sup>26</sup>

Looking at the poem through a poetological lens would mean an equivalence between the creative process as it is described and the making of this particular poem and poetry in general; after all, the indefinite article in the title hints towards generalisation.<sup>27</sup> Brokoff considers this ‘gewaltsame[r] Abstraktionsprozess’ described here a reflection of George’s renewal of poetic language by way of uprooting the linguistic material out of its common context.<sup>28</sup> However, this process can be considered to cut both ways, as Ray Ockenden recognises. He suggests the poem be read as less of a form of abstraction than more of the opposite, a form of concretisation, returning art to its mundane origins: ‘Liest man sie [the lines, LJD] aber unvoreingenommen, haben sie einen anderen Sinn: Fra Angelicos Bild, so weltfremd es in seinem Sujet und in der Herbheit seiner byzantinischen Formen erscheinen mag, wirkt durch seine Farben lebensnah, sogar alltäglich.’<sup>29</sup> Nature, thus, is not just a servant to art, as has often been claimed in the context of George’s poetry, but in Ockenden’s view quite the reverse. What is at stake in a larger sense is a complex interaction of interwoven areas and acts of creation or reflection. Art, and especially poetry, is

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<sup>25</sup> Nägele, ‘Jenseits der Mimesis’, p. 103.

<sup>26</sup> This artistic nesting-doll could extend even further, when one takes into account that George’s poem was possibly not only inspired by the painting but also by Théophile Gautier’s description of it: ‘Le *Couronnement de la Vierge*, de Fra Beato Angelico, semble peint plutôt par un ange que par un homme. Le temps n’a pas terni l’idéale fraîcheur de ce tableau délicat comme une miniature de missel, et dont les teintes sont prises aux blancheurs des lis, aux roses de l’aurore, à l’azur du ciel et à l’or des étoiles. Aucun des tons fangeux de la terre n’alourdit ces formes sérapiques faites des vapeurs lumineuses.’ Théophile Gautier, *Guide de l’amateur au Musée du Louvre: Suivi de la vie et les œuvres de quelques peintres* (Charpentier, 1882), pp. 88–89; See also Klussmann’s comment in the discussion following Jaeggi’s presentation. Urs Jaeggi, ‘Am Nullpunkt der Öffentlichkeit’, in *Stefan George Kolloquium*, ed. by Eckhard Heftrich, Paul Gerhard Klussmann, and Hans Joachim Schrimpf (Wienand, 1971), pp. 100–18 (p. 112).

<sup>27</sup> Conquer, *Reading Colour: George, Rilke, Kandinsky, Lasker-Schüler*, p. 45.

<sup>28</sup> Brokoff, *Geschichte der reinen Poesie*, p. 483.

<sup>29</sup> Ray C. Ockenden, ‘Mensch und Natur in der Dichtung Stefan Georges’, in *Stefan George: Dichtung, Ethos, Staat: Denkbilder für ein geheimes europäisches Deutschland*, ed. by Bruno Pieger and Bertram Schefold (Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2010), pp. 353–96 (p. 365).

shown to be indebted to this net of correspondences and gains its potency by establishing as well as sustaining them.

This example reveals, I suggest, a particular property of George's poetry that can be linked to conceptions and properties of rhythm. As the highly artistic and aesthetically complex make-up of George's books in general and their almost through-composed quality already suggest, if rhythm is important for his works, this importance cannot solely depend on linguistic phenomena (which most certainly are highly important) but can also be found in the connectedness between different domains of life and work, or poems and collections. The relationship between art and nature is part of this, just as it is the case for Holz's poetry, and I will talk more about this below. For now, this more generalised mesh of connected areas is the central claim that 'Ein Angelico' puts forward for itself and a variation of this can also be found in other poems by George.

All of this, I argue, gestures towards a facet of rhythm that David Nowell Smith, following Heidegger's famous reading of George's 'In stillste ruh', the penultimate poem of *Das neue Reich* (SW IX, 110), has suggested, in that it is indicative of a broader rhythmical unfolding that is not only found in the prosodic elements alone but also in the oscillations of the paired images. These are in order: 'jäh ein blick' and 'sichre Seele', 'Der feste Stamm' and 'spät ein Sturm', 'meer' and 'muschel' and they represent just as much a pattern of signification, through their metonymic relationships, as they adhere to a certain linguistic patterning, by way of alliterations and repetitions.<sup>30</sup> Heidegger, in his analysis, refers to rhythm in terms not of 'Fluß und Fließen sondern Fügung'. This term is a multi-faceted notion, whose meaning oscillates between destiny, and with that also coincidence, and conjunction.<sup>31</sup> It is also a word that invites connections to craft and the

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<sup>30</sup> David Nowell Smith, 'What Is Called Rhythm?', in *Critical Rhythm: The Poetics of a Literary Life Form*, ed. by Ben Glaser and Jonathan Culler (Fordham University Press, 2019), pp. 40–59 (p. 54).

<sup>31</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe Band 12: Unterwegs zur Sprache*, ed. by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Klostermann, 1985), p. 217. This, of course, immediately brings to mind the term 'harte Fügung', which was first

craftsman.<sup>32</sup> Rhythm, thus, not only shapes the linguistic structure of George's poems but is also indicative of deeper ontological connections.

One of the poems that illustrates these aspects well is 'Die Spange', the final poem of the collection *Pilgerfahrten* (1891) and another representative of George's numerous highly charged poetological poems.<sup>33</sup> It demonstrates more concretely what is described above.

DIE SPANGE

Ich wollte sie aus kühlem eisen  
Und wie ein glatter fester streif ·  
Doch war im schacht auf allen gleisen  
So kein metall zum gusse reif.

Nun aber soll sie also sein:  
Wie eine grosse fremde dolde  
Geformt aus feuerrotem golde  
Und reichem blitzendem gestein.  
(SW II, 54)

The material clasp that the poem conjures up points towards the connecting function of the poem in the context of the volume (which from 1898 onwards brings together George's first three books of poetry), where it forms a transition into the immediately following collection *Algabal*. As William Waters notes, the almost decadent opulence displayed in the poetry of this subsequent collection, especially in contrast to the intentions of *Pilgerfahrten*, is figured in the 'grosse fremde dolde' wrought from gold and adorned with gems.<sup>34</sup> Hubert Arbogast, on the other hand, reads the poem as a testament to the failed self-actualisation of the poet according to his own design and

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introduced by George's friend Norbert von Hellingrath in connection to Hölderlin's Pindar translations, to which we will return below.

<sup>32</sup> My gratitude to Ray Ockenden for this suggestion.

<sup>33</sup> Like 'Ein Angelico', this poem is also connected to Théophile Gautier in that it takes inspiration from his poem 'L'Art'. Jutta Schloon, 'Das Buch der Sagen und Sänge', in *Stefan George – Werkkommentar*, ed. by Jürgen Egyptian (De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 124–39 (p. 130).

<sup>34</sup> William Waters, 'Stefan George's Poetics', in *A Companion to the Works of Stefan George*, ed. by Jens Rieckmann (Camden House, 2005), pp. 25–49 (p. 26).

the subsequent reversal that turns interiority into exteriority.<sup>35</sup> Fundamentally, however, the poem presents a double relation between art and reality: a description of the clasp – usually and primarily a rather crude object, its function superior to its form – being turned into an object of art. This very process itself is then translated into the art of poetry and through this transfiguration the clasp regains aspects of its original usefulness and can act again as a connecting element between the two collections of poetry. In a certain sense, it is only through this back-and-forth that the text acquires its status as a poem and, simultaneously, the poem is able to then assert its meaningfulness.

‘Die Spange’ picks up on some of the nuances contained in the understanding of rhythms as ‘Fügung’, meaning both a crafted conjunction as well as a more organic unfolding. On the one hand, the poem presents the poet in the role of the craftsman, masterfully assembling the materials of object and poem alike. On the other hand, the clasp itself is presented as a confluence of similar levels of meaning, not least through the tension between intention and actual execution in the first part of the poem, ‘Ich wollte’ and later ‘doch’. Crafting the clasp, and with it the poem, then, is figured as an act of ‘Fügung’. It is just as much an act of almost accidental conjunction as it is deliberate manual creation.

Further implications, especially important for the wider context of George’s poetry, can be found in a passage where Nowell Smith, tracing Henri Meschonnic’s reflections on rhythm, muses on the relationship between rhythm, sense, and a collective we that is addressed through rhythm:

The question of rhythm is thus, from the start, also a question of sense: rhythm is something sensed, something that appears in sense, but is also sense-giving, sense-making. And rhythm is also a question of subject – of the ‘we’ who are oriented in sense, who have been configured in and by rhythm, who are subjects of, and subject to, rhythm, sense.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Arbogast, *Die Erneuerung der deutschen Dichtersprache in den Frühwerken Stefan Georges: Eine stilgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, p. 130.

<sup>36</sup> David Nowell Smith, ‘Rhythm-Sense-Subject, or: The Dynamic Un/Enfolding of Sense’, *Comparative Critical Studies*, 15.3 (2018), pp. 349–67 (p. 350), doi:10/g6bcjj.

Following this, I suggest that rhythm is of crucial importance for George's poetry and can itself act as a clasp between the two major tendencies in his poetics and the corresponding segmentation of his oeuvre into different creative periods, both of which can appear at times rather disparate. Rhythm can bridge the gap between the pure poetry commonly situated in the earlier phases and the more rhetorical character, including ethical and social dimensions, of the 'Spätwerk'.

### **Programmatic Writings and Beyond**

Before looking in more detail at how rhythm appears in George's poems, both as an element of their content and in its more recognisable form, prosody, I will outline some important aspects in his programmatic writings that will provide a backdrop to the analysis of the poems. As before, it might be worth situating the outset of George's and his circle's programmatic stance and some of the conclusions alongside Arno Holz's perspective, not only to highlight divergencies but also rare similarities. The focus, however, will be on the differences.

Just as Holz's and George's respective understanding of poetry and its language diverged, so too did their attitudes towards theoretical and especially explicitly poetological writing, with Holz affording these kinds of texts a significance in his oeuvre more or less on a par with his poetry. In this regard, George was much more in favour of art that led by example rather than exhaustive, if not exhausting, theoretical excursion and instead preferred to let his poetry speak for itself. This is not to say that George and the people surrounding him did not publish any such writings; in fact, some of them even went on to become just as famous as his poetry.<sup>37</sup> Most were published between 1892 and 1919 in the journal *Blätter für die Kunst*, which was founded by George himself and nominally published by his friend Carl August Klein, and which functioned just as much as a

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<sup>37</sup> Waters, 'Stefan George's Poetics', p. 25.

mouthpiece for the aesthetic, and later also more political, tenets of the members of the George-Kreis as it was a platform for their literary creations.<sup>38</sup> However, George mostly preferred the more subtle voice of poetry to straightforward announcements in programmatic texts when it came to addressing the inner workings of his craft.<sup>39</sup> It is not least because of this that Waters suggests as ‘the first principle’ of George’s poetics ‘the reticence of art’.<sup>40</sup>

This lack of poetic explicitness is one of the reasons why the task of approaching the role of rhythm in the works of George is, in a certain sense, much less obvious than is the case for Holz. The works of the latter present alongside his poetry a more or less systematic aesthetic framework centred around the concept of rhythm and thus enables rhythm to be considered both as a core theoretical construct and an intrinsic formal feature of his poetry; this, as has been explained, provides an opportunity to consider it a connecting element between these two areas of Holz’s works. This, of course, also potentially gives rise to the notion that the rhythms of the poems are implementations of what is set out in the theory, pointing more towards what *should* be than what *is*. Holz elevated the role rhythm was to play in his poetry to such an extent that it was easy for him to lose sight of the effects it de facto created. As I have shown, this meant that the efforts to implement his theoretical aims at times ran the risk of outpacing the execution of his poetic critique, especially in the later works.

Rhythm in George’s poetry, by contrast, is largely free from these strong normative biases and instead emphasises its actual function within the art, focusing more on what it accomplishes rather than highlighting any divisions or connections between theory and practice. While it is the case

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<sup>38</sup> *Blätter für die Kunst*, ed. by Carl August Klein and Stefan George, 1892.

<sup>39</sup> However, some of George’s collections of poetry do have a very strong programmatic character, such as *Algabal*. Joachim Jacob, ‘Hymnen Pilgerfahrten Algabal (SW II)’, in *Stefan George und sein Kreis: Ein Handbuch*, ed. by Wolfgang Braungart, Stefan Breuer, and Ute Oelmann, 4 vols (De Gruyter, 2016), I, pp. 107–21 (p. 111).

<sup>40</sup> Waters, ‘Stefan George’s Poetics’, p. 25.

that for both authors rhythm is linked to the establishing of connections, this aspect for Holz seems much more self-referential than in George's oeuvre. In the latter, it is less tied to the consolidation of the connection between theory and practice than a sense of meaningful structuring in and between the poems themselves. Furthermore, rhythm seems to be situated at opposite ends of the creative process for these authors. For Holz, the circumstances of the world find their appropriate expression in poetry through rhythm, a rhythm as we have seen, 'der nur noch durch das lebt, was durch ihn zum Ausdruck ringt' (W V KT, 69). For George, in contrast and as will be shown in detail below, this relation appears to be reversed. For him, rhythm stands at the very beginning of poetry, in fact, the origins of many of his poems were long periods of gestation of rhythmical sound patterns in his mind, as his friends reported.<sup>41</sup> George would thus start with rhythm and develop the poem as a whole and the worlds it depicts from there. To this can be added an observation related to the practice of recitation, according to which, as Michael Winkler remarks, access to George's inner circle was initially 'decided not so much by analytic intellectual comprehension as by almost spontaneous submission to the force of carefully modulated rhythms and sounds'.<sup>42</sup> Rhythm was therefore essential not only for the composition and reading of poems; a proper understanding of it also functioned as a gatekeeper to George's companionship and helped to cultivate an aura of seeming exclusivity. Here it is important to highlight the relationship between the intellectual and rhythmical sphere of poetry, which follows the popular demarcation mentioned earlier that often situates rhythm, as a bodily phenomenon, in opposition to cognitive phenomena; a contrast that accompanies many of the poetological discussions related to George and the *Kreis*.

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<sup>41</sup> Wolfgang Osthoff, *Stefan George und 'Les deux musiques'* (Steiner, 1989), p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Winkler, 'Master and Disciples: The George Circle', in *A Companion to the Works of Stefan George*, ed. by Jens Rieckmann (Camden House, 2005), pp. 145–59 (p. 149).

Although small in number, some explicit theoretical considerations by George and his followers on the theme of rhythm do exist. They can be traced back to the beginnings of George's creative work, and the conditions he set out for poetry and art more generally, borrowing from the concept of *l'art pour l'art*. The defining term for him is 'geistige kunst' and it makes its first appearance in the introductory remarks to the first issue of *Blätter für die Kunst*, published in 1892:

Sie [the publication, LJD] will die GEISTIGE KUNST auf grund der neuen fühlweise und mache – eine kunst für die kunst – und steht deshalb im gegensatz zu jener verbrauchten und minderwertigen schule die einer falschen auffassung der wirklichkeit entsprang.<sup>43</sup>

Before rejecting the content-centred practices of contemporary naturalist tendencies to mimetically reproduce reality, this announcement introduces 'geistige kunst' as a counter proposal.<sup>44</sup> What exactly this intellectual, or spiritual, art should entail is missing from the statement. For now, it remains more a cry of opposition than a mature poetic concept. Recalling the opposition mentioned earlier, one could be tempted to associate with the derided Naturalist tendencies a certain, more physically oriented art. This, however, would be difficult to substantiate. Braungart, in reference to this potential 'körperliche kunst', claims that it could perhaps be found in George's later works and in relation to the Maximin-cult or a more general appreciation of youth. At this point, however, as Braungart further elaborates, this is not yet the case.<sup>45</sup> While there is a case to be made that this overtly bodily element appears more prominently in the later works, it was already in play from the very beginning and the rejection here is concerned mostly with the physicality of Naturalist literature, especially drama. It is not only the preference for rhythmical instead of intellectualised recitation of the poems that corroborates this claim but also George's admission that he had a special appreciation of the bodily aspects of language from an early age.

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<sup>43</sup> *Blätter für die Kunst: Eine Auslese aus den Jahren 1892–98*, ed. by Carl August Klein (Bondi, 1899), p. 11.

<sup>44</sup> George and his circle were not alone in using this term around the turn of the century. See for example Wassily Kandinsky, *Über das geistige in der Kunst: Insbesondere in der Malerei* (Piper, 1912).

<sup>45</sup> Braungart, 'Poetik, Rhetorik, Hermeneutik', p. 502.

He claims for example that he had ‘ganz früh – acht-neunjährig – Gefühl für die Süßigkeit der Sprache, für ihr Körperhaftes bekommen’.<sup>46</sup> It is therefore clear that any poetic considerations from then on could not persist without at least some amount of physicality involved.

The sentiments found in the first issue of the *Blätter* are more explicitly elaborated on in one of the later issues in October 1894 under the headline ‘Über dichtung’, quoted here from the edition of George’s collected works, the publication of which he himself supervised:

Den wert der dichtung entscheidet nicht der sinn (sonst wäre sie etwa weisheit gelahrtheit) sondern die form d.h. durchaus nichts äusserliches sondern jenes tief erregende in maass und klang wodurch zu allen zeiten die Ursprünglichen die Meister sich von den nachfahren den künstlern zweiter ordnung unterschieden haben. (SW XVII, 69)

Although ‘geistige kunst’ is not specifically mentioned, the conception of form that George unfurls here is largely congruent with the critical consensus about the nature of his novel conception of art. According to Arbogast, it can all be reduced to ‘Primat des Stiles über die Objekte der Darstellung’ and is mostly a matter of selection and orderliness.<sup>47</sup> However, the idea of art for its own sake is developed further in order to reach beyond the relationship between form and content. Meaning is added as a new dimension and subsequently also subordinated to the dominance of the formal aspect, most importantly the rhythmical elements of ‘maass und klang’. The first term in particular is an important component of George’s rhythmical conception, and it connects areas such as metre, criticism of contemporary developments in society, and conceptions of nature; part of which will be explored in more detail below.

However, it is important to note that ‘sinn’ in this context might be more akin to a mere summary of the content of a poem, which is in itself completely decoupled from form. True understanding of poetry is rather related to the aspect of sensuousness inherent in ‘sinn’, according

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<sup>46</sup> Kurt Breysig, *Stefan George: Gespräche, Dokumente* (Castrum Peregrini Presse, 1960), p. 14.

<sup>47</sup> Arbogast, *Die Erneuerung der deutschen Dichtersprache in den Frühwerken Stefan Georges: Eine stilgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, p. 93.

to George and as pointed out above by Nowell Smith. This quality is also suggested in poems such as 'Ein Angelico', where it is especially in the material description of the artwork that it becomes graspable in its 'sinn'. This quality is, in particular, a sort of 'wirkung' and for George also closely entwined with a rhythmical aspect.<sup>48</sup>

Ein weiterer ring der gesellschaft ist für kunst noch nicht zu gewinnen solange man nicht zu scheiden vermag zwischen der wesentlichen wirkung des kunstwerkes und der gemeinen stofflichen anregung durch das erzählte (anekdotische). kunstverständnis ist nur da zu finden wo ein kunstwerk als gebilde (rythmisch) ergreift und ergriffen wird.<sup>49</sup>

This excerpt brings back the 'sinn' of the earlier quotation in the form of 'stoffliche anregung durch das erzählte'. Art in general and, more importantly, poetry in particular, are described in terms of a highly condensed, formal creation, 'gebilde'.<sup>50</sup> This points towards the important element of craft in art, as 'Die Spange' poignantly shows, but also its general cultural and societal context, an expression of language's independence from the artist, as Braungart observes.<sup>51</sup> The conventional hermeneutical dimensions of the interaction between poem and reader are largely negated in favour of an almost intuitive coupling through rhythm. This mechanism brings to mind Heidegger's 'Fügung' and the continuation of this concept by Nowell Smith, a sense-making springing from rhythmical patterns and coupled interactions.

In a way, the strict formal restraints that ought to dominate poetry are a way of liberating it from the dependence on the factual content of reality. This sentiment is perhaps most fittingly expressed in George's seemingly paradoxical aphorism that 'strengstes maass ist zugleich höchste freiheit.' (SW XVII, 69) Rhythm is here presented as a vehicle to universalise the experience of

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<sup>48</sup> The meaning of the word itself oscillates between a kind of action, an effect, or even some form of texture, a 'Teppich'.

<sup>49</sup> Klein, *Bf&K Auslese*, p. 24.

<sup>50</sup> For a more detailed perspective on this aspect of George's poetics see Ute Oelmann, 'Das Gedicht als "Gebilde": Zur Poetik des jungen Stefan George', in *'Sinnlichkeit in Bild und Klang': Festschrift für Paul Hoffmann zum 70. Geburtstag* (Hansgerd Delbrück, 1987), pp. 317–25.

<sup>51</sup> Braungart, 'Poetik, Rhetorik, Hermeneutik', p. 503.

writing poetry as well as the experience of reading or hearing it read aloud. In fact, George found it quite difficult to write a poem based on factual content alone: ‘Das Schwierigste sei, über eine reine Tatsache ein Gedicht zu machen.’<sup>52</sup> As Christophe Fricker elaborates, this statement does not refer to Naturalistic technique but ‘die Bereitschaft, sich auf die äußerste, überraschende Wirklichkeit einzulassen.’<sup>53</sup>

## **On the Connection between Nature, Rhythm, and Time**

One characteristic of rhythm that frequently appears in George’s poetry is one that is less related to linguistic properties and more to the content of the poems. In particular, this role of rhythm is closely connected to his depiction of natural phenomena and their temporal significance. However, while most of this happens on a content-related level, it is intimately linked to George’s ideas concerning the right ‘maas’ and even provides a bridge towards a more detailed exploration of metre in his poetry.

As Ray Ockenden observes, a prominent theme in most of George’s poetry is the relationship between man and nature, an issue that is often negotiated on the basis of a finely tuned attention to rhythmical events, such as the changing of the seasons.<sup>54</sup> Already in the ‘Aufschrift’ of *Hymnen*<sup>55</sup> spring is used as a temporal marker of ‘dies lied’, the synecdochally invoked collection of poetry, which then ‘spielt durch ein jahr’ (SW II, 8). Looking at other collections, the title of the 1897 collection *Das Jahr der Seele*, indicates a close kinship to nature and the changing of seasons. It is a volume consisting of three distinct cycles of poetry (not unlike George’s earliest collections) and not only does it contain his single most popular poem, ‘Komm in den totgesagten park und schau’,

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<sup>52</sup> Berthold Vallentin, *Gespräche mit Stefan George: 1902–1931* (Castrum Peregrini Presse, 1961), p. 99.

<sup>53</sup> Christophe Fricker, *Stefan George: Gedichte für Dich* (Matthes & Seitz, 2011), p. 165.

<sup>54</sup> Ockenden, ‘Mensch und Natur’, p. 362.

<sup>55</sup> The ‘Aufschrift’ was only added retrospectively to the second edition in 1898.

but is perhaps also his most popular collection overall. Its last sections are titled *Überschriften und Widmungen* and *Traurige Tänze* respectively, whereas the first part is in itself conceived as a triptych of three smaller, more or less self-contained, groupings of seasonally inflected poetry, *Nach der Lese*, *Waller im Schnee*, and *Sieg des Sommers*. These three cycles leave a gap exactly where *Hymnen* sets in and are dedicated to autumn, winter, and summer respectively.

The patterning and structuring functions of rhythm and nature are furthermore distinctive for one of George's prose pieces, 'Der kindliche Kalender'. It is part of the collection of prose sketches *Tage und Taten: Aufzeichnungen und Skizzen*, first published in 1903 (however, the 'Kalender' was not part of it until a later edition in 1925).<sup>56</sup> Here, the year is not only segmented by the four seasons but also, and indeed predominantly, through religious rituals and traditions. The text sets in with a description of the weeks following Christmas, the 'Erscheinung des Herrn', and Epiphany and then continues through the year, mentioning all major events of the liturgical calendar, to eventually come full circle with the last sentence being dedicated to the season of advent, the 'Kunfttage' (SW XVII, 14-15), eventually ending with the 'erwartungen der nahen Weihnacht' (SW XVII, 16). Descriptions of nature and the changing seasons are almost exclusively interwoven with religious feasts: 'Mit Pfingsten begann der sommer und die gesänge im wald und am flusse' (SW XVII, 15). There is only a single sentence in the whole text that is solely a description of nature and not combined with references to liturgical dates, though it still maintains the rhythmic-temporal tenor: 'Die schwalben und die störche kehrten wieder' (SW XVII, 15). Here, coexistence between mankind and nature is largely presented along the lines of a temporal rhythm that is both a prerequisite for the realisation of nature in general and a harmonious relationship with it in

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<sup>56</sup> See for more details Jürgen Egyptien, 'Tage und Taten', in *Stefan George – Werkkommentar*, ed. by Jürgen Egyptien (De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 797–816.

particular. It is also the rhythm of religious ritual that seems most suited to blend in with nature's processes, which might also be due to the pagan influences connected to a number of catholic practices.

The poem 'Mühle lass die arme still' from *Pilgerfahrten*, however, presents this sort of conflation between liturgical ritual and the seasons of nature in a different, rather disharmonious way, when the budding spring becomes a mortal danger to a group of young girls:

Mühle lass die arme still  
 Da die heide ruhen will.  
 Teiche auf den tauwind harren ·  
 Ihrer pflegen lichte lanzen  
 Und die kleinen bäume starren  
 Wie getünchte ginsterpflanzen.

Weisse kinder schleifen leis  
 Überm see auf blindem eis  
 Nach dem segentag · sie kehren  
 Heim zum dorf in stillgebeten ·  
 DIE beim fernen gott der lehren ·  
 DIE schon bei dem naherflehten.

Kam ein pfiff am grund entlang?  
 Alle lampen flackern bang.  
 War es nicht als ob es riefte?  
 Es empfangen ihre bräute  
 Schwarze knaben aus der tiefe ..  
 Glocke läute glocke läute!  
 (SW II, 34)

This poem, according to Schäfer, oscillates between silence and event (mediated by sounds and movements).<sup>57</sup> It describes a group of young girls walking back home in early spring after having celebrated their First Communion. On their way, the girls tragically drown in a lake, whose weather-weakened icesheet was unable to bear their weight. Their death is morbidly figured as their marriage to the 'schwarze knaben' lurking in the depths of the water. This image originates in the

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<sup>57</sup> Schäfer, *Die Intensität der Form: Stefan Georges Lyrik*, p. 79.

popular portrayal of the 'Erstkommunion' as a marriage to God and can also be found in the 'Kindliche Kalender', when a procession of children on the day of their First Communion is described as a bridal procession: 'Am Weissen Sonntag weckten uns in der frühe die choräle von den türmen und wir stellten uns auf um den zug der kleinen bräutigame und bräute zu sehen die zum erstenmal zum Tisch des Herrn zogen' (SW, XVII, 14). This merging of multiple catholic sacraments could be seen to culminate in the final line, where the ringing bell could signify either a wedding, a first eucharist, or the sombre sounds of a passing bell announcing the death of the children.

Here, the rhythms of nature seem to stand in conflict with the patterns of ritual, as the balmy weather occasioned by the beginning of spring eventually results in the children falling through the ice and drowning. This oppositional tendency is personified in the obscure creatures that inhabit the lake and, according to Robert Vilain, the '[s]chwarze knaben' represent 'demonic forces of nature threatening the life of spiritual devotion'.<sup>58</sup> This relation between religious ritual and seasons of the year is touched upon already in the first two lines, when the speaker appeals to nature for the harsh winds of winter to end with an almost prayer-like formula. However, the plea, as it is uttered, evidently reverses 'Ursache' and 'Wirkung',<sup>59</sup> and portrays the windmill as being the source of the supposedly deathly winds. With those first lines, the poem situates itself in the immediate vicinity of prayers and church songs. However, this notion stands at odds with the metrical conception of those first lines and the poem as a whole, as Schäfer notes, since the trochaic tetrameter clashes with the expected rhythmical conception of church prayers or songs.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Robert Vilain, 'Stefan George's Early Works 1890-1895', in *A Companion to the Works of Stefan George*, ed. by Jens Rieckmann (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), pp. 51-77 (p. 57).

<sup>59</sup> 'Wirkung', slightly transformed, is again afforded an important role.

<sup>60</sup> Schäfer, *Die Intensität der Form: Stefan Georges Lyrik*, pp. 79-80.

Perhaps it is this mismatch between the intended rhythmical incantation and its rhythmical implementation that introduces the wider discrepancy that is at play in the poem. This rhythmical discordance seems to affect the relationship between seasonal and liturgical patterns. It also appears to be representative of a series of metrical, hermeneutical, and textual ambiguities in the poem, some of which only appear at a second glance. The starting point is the unstable state of the command in the first two lines, also precarious is the description of the children walking as ‘schleifen leis’, which Schäfer recognises, too, as ‘schleifen’ is inherently not a quiet action.<sup>61</sup> In the last stanza, the ambiguities move to an intradiegetic level with the description of the cracking ice. While the sound of a breaking ice sheet indeed has whistle-like qualities, comparing it to a scream or call, which the wording suggests, ‘War es nicht als ob es rief?’ might be less persuasive. However, again the wording is ambiguous; and this line could just as well be interpreted as the beckoning call of the dark creatures awaiting their brides-to-be. This leaves the overall impression of the poem to be one of patterning out of joint, underpinning the wider correlation between rhythm and the creation of meaning.

As mentioned, the poem presents a relationship between rhythm and nature that seemingly stands at odd with earlier observations about their harmonious coexistence. However, the poem’s first line and its subtle reversal of cause and effect, marks a shift of tone for the following depiction of nature’s life-threatening power. The winds that eventually cause the ice to melt and the girls to drown appear no longer as an act of nature and are instead figured as a direct product of civilisation. With this, the poem already prefigures the civilisation-critical tone that is a major element of George’s middle and later works.

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<sup>61</sup> Schäfer, *Die Intensität der Form: Stefan Georges Lyrik*, p. 80. I would, however, be hesitant to agree that the children are indeed skating and not simply walking on the ice; if the former, ‘schleifen’ would certainly prove more appropriate but it does not seem to fit in well with the overall context.

The analyses above show that nature is especially important for George when it can function as a temporal marker and its changing seasons become less an experience to live through than the source of more abstract patterns and rhythms. In this sense, nature is closely tied to George's ideas of 'maass' and embodies one of the areas where the correct measure is realised and can become accessible. At the other end of the spectrum, however, is the complete absence of measure, a hubristic 'maasslosigkeit' that George situates, with a decidedly critical tone, in the architectural aggrandizements of modern cityscapes and various other alleged achievements of his time. As Ockenden mentions, what George despised most about the modern city was its 'Maßlosigkeit, die für eine ganze Geisteshaltung steht'.<sup>62</sup> This attitude is especially recognisable in the first book of the collection *Der Stern des Bundes*, which as a whole presents a scathing critique of the 'alle Werte auflösenden Moderne in ihrer liberal-kapitalistischen, westlichen Version'.<sup>63</sup> Most striking in this regard is the fourth poem in the second group of ten, which is one of George's most infamous works, where the overconfident transgressions of modern architecture lead to inevitable death through war and disease:

Ihr baut verbrochende an maass und grenze:  
 ›Was hoch ist kann auch höher!‹ doch kein fund  
 Kein stütz und flick mehr dient . . es wankt der bau.  
 [...]  
 Zehntausend muss der heilige Wahnsinn schlagen  
 Zehntausend muss die heilige seuche raffén  
 Zehntausende der heilige Krieg.  
 (SW VIII, 34)

Modern cities and their architecture push nature, and rhythm with it, to the fringes. Modernity therefore becomes 'maasslos' in a twofold sense, losing both its sense of moderation and the

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<sup>62</sup> Ockenden, 'Mensch und Natur', p. 360.

<sup>63</sup> Jürgen Egyptien, 'Der Stern des Bundes: Zweites Buch', in *Stefan George – Werkkommentar*, ed. by Jürgen Egyptien (De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 531–43 (p. 543).

patterning that rhythm provides. Therefore, for George, conceptions of rhythm are closely linked to expressions of socio-critical tendencies. For him, a time out of joint is to a large extent synonymous with a time out of step.

One last aspect that I should like to mention concerns the question of George's aestheticism in a larger sense. The poem 'Flurgottes Trauer', from the first of the three books of *Bücher der Hirten- und Preisgedichte, der Sagen und Sänge und der hängenden Gärten*, might offer an idea of the relationship between a basic sense of temporality mediated by rhythm and George's aestheticism overall. In the poem, a faun laments the fact of his lacking beauty, after having failed to seduce a group of girls:

Erst als ich an dem flachen borne trinkend  
 Mir widerschien mit furchen auf der stirn  
 Und mit verworrenen locken wusst ich ganz  
 Was sie zischend durch die lüfte riefen  
 Was an der felswand gellend weiterscholl.  
 Nun ist mir alle lust dahin am teiche  
 Die angelrute auszuhalten oder  
 Die allzuschwache weidenflöte lockend  
 Mit meinem finger zu betupfen · sondern  
 Ich will den abend zwischen grauen nebeln  
 Zum Herrn der Ernte klagen sprechen weil er  
 Zum ewigsein die schönheit nicht verlieh.  
 (SW III, 15)

This second half of the poem points towards a literary topos that will also be of significance for the discussion of metre that will follow below. Here, the faun appears as an inversion of the mythological Narcissus. While the mythological character falls fatally in love with his likeness looking up towards him through the water, George's version is left rather repulsed by his hideous mirror-image. Even though both figures are directed towards a state of self-awareness, their respective aesthetic experiences are situated at diametrically opposed ends of the spectrum. The poem's key lines in this context are its final two, describing the faun's despair after having become aware that while he may have immortal life, it is one to be lived in a disfigured state. Turning his

realisation at the very end on its head, one is reminded of Narcissus's fate, since he is the one who eventually does not have 'zum Schönsein die Ewigkeit', as it were. The poem's conflation of these two perspectives hints towards a fundamental relationship between temporality and aesthetic experience. It seems, in the case of the faun as well as his counterpart, Narcissus, that an eternal life, which is for all intents and purposes timeless, stands at odds with beauty. Essentially, the poem thus negotiates the connection between time and the possibility of aesthetic experience and its fulfilment. This suggests a further important role for rhythm in George's works, since it appears to be a basic facilitator of temporality per se, as parts of the analyses above have shown. Then, if rhythm provides the possibility of temporality, it must also be an important prerequisite for aesthetic conceptions more generally and poetry in particular. This certainly seems to hold true, considering George's attitude towards rhythm expressed in his programmatic writings.

While those are all important characteristics of rhythm in the context of George's poetry, perhaps the most interesting and rich area to explore rhythm is its concrete linguistic manifestation in the poetry in the form of metre. Central to the following discussion will be a metrical form that is closely linked to the mythical figure of Narcissus, and which not only occupies an important place in George's poetry but is vital for a major part of the poetical tradition upon which his oeuvre is built.

### **On Metre in General and the Metrical Figure of the Adoneus in Particular**

Practically the entirety of George's poetry is written in strict metre (except for some of his very earliest works, parts of *Zeichnungen in Grau*, found in *Die Fibel*) and as we have seen, thinking about and searching for the right 'maass' was an integral component of his poetic endeavours, in socio-cultural contexts as well as part of poetic craftsmanship. He also paid particular attention to metrical characteristics when translating poetry from other languages into German. In fact,

metrical fidelity was at times far more important to him than an accurate rendering of the content, as is the case with his Dante translations.<sup>64</sup>

In that regard, an exploration of metre in George's work might be helpful to get to the heart of the role that rhythm plays in his poems. Metre is furthermore one of the more significant aspects that demonstrate the difference between Holz's and George's conceptions of innovation. For Holz, this meant leaving behind what came before him, while George engaged with classical poetic forms by embracing and striving to perfect them. It is, of course, not at all uncommon to compose poems in adherence with metrical rules, not least because poetry is quite often simply considered synonymous to metrically patterned language. However, considering the literary-historical context of that time, George's decision does seem striking, especially in light of his ambitions to renew German-language poetry; an undertaking that at first glance might be better supported by an approach more similar to Holz's. George faced a particular predicament: on the one hand, adhering too closely to the metrical conventions of past poetic traditions, especially Romantic songs and strophic forms, could have relegated George too easily into the same league as epigonal German poets such as Geibel. On the other hand, George's demand for poetic freedom was preconditioned on the expression of 'strengstes maass' and he quickly discarded certain attempts at metrical innovation, such as free rhythms, which he could be said to use for example in *Zeichnungen in Grau*. See, for instance, the first few lines of the poem 'Ein Sonnenaufgang':

Vor kurzem entzündete sich  
 Auf dunklem ofen des himmels  
 Nach kalter winternacht  
 Die neue sonne.  
 Nun zeigt sie sich im ersten leuchten  
 Sie schimmert still.  
 Mit den wolken die sie umflattern

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<sup>64</sup> Francesco Rossi, 'Dante-Übertragungen', in *Stefan George – Werkkommentar*, ed. by Jürgen Egyptien (De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 675–91 (p. 689).

Die ihren glanz widerspiegeln  
 Erhellte sie spärlich  
 Die morgendämmerung.  
 [...]  
 (SW I, 76)

This rejection of free verse resulted in his famous verdict: ‘Freie rhythmien heisst soviel als weisse schwärze · wer sich nicht gut im rhythmus bewegen kann der schreite ungebunden’ (SW XVII, 69). Closely related to this dismissal of free rhythms is his attitude towards the French Symbolists and their concept of *vers libre*.<sup>65</sup> By choosing a more conservative approach to metre, he positioned himself very consciously in opposition to this and other European literary movements, as he was afraid to be recognised merely as their German-language counterpart.<sup>66</sup> Of course, metre was not the only motivation for this decision as it was also an important part of his highly self-conscious strategy, the aim of which was to position George as a highly singular poet. Looking at his poetry then, one recognises that he eventually created his own middle-ground, that is strict adherence to metre and mostly, in the earlier works at least, rhyme, while avoiding most of the stock strophic forms.

More comprehensive and detailed examinations of the metrical aspects of George’s poetry have largely been absent in scholarship. Recently, however, Markus Pahmeier published a small study concerning the use and function of one metrical feature in particular, the Adonic, or Adoneus,<sup>67</sup> in George’s verse.<sup>68</sup> Pahmeier owes much to Winfried Menninghaus’s insightful 2005 exploration of Hölderlin’s poem ‘Hälfte des Lebens’, which devotes a large section to the same metrical figure and its relevance not only for this particular poem but also more generally for Hölderlin’s works

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<sup>65</sup> The same holds true for the English free verse or the Italian *verso libero*.

<sup>66</sup> Maik Bozza, *Genealogie des Anfangs: Stefan Georges poetologischer Selbstentwurf um 1890* (Wallstein, 2016), pp. 22–23.

<sup>67</sup> Henceforth both denotations will be used interchangeably.

<sup>68</sup> Markus Pahmeier, ‘Sapphischen Tones: Der Adoneus in Stefan Georges Lyrik’, ed. by Wolfgang Braungart and Ute Oelmann, *George-Jahrbuch*, 11 (2016/2017) (2016), pp. 211–30, doi:10.1515/9783110486971-013.

overall.<sup>69</sup> While Pahmeier has already identified a number of important passages in George's work that feature the Adonic, his analysis is by no means exhaustive and overlooks some of the more salient instances, especially when it comes to uses and effects of the Adoneus that might go against a more traditional line of interpretation. It is undoubtedly worthwhile to expand on this groundwork and shed some light on a few additional examples, while also taking into consideration the more general significance of the Adoneus for George's poetry and how it relates to the importance of metre and rhythm for his works.

Exploring the entire wealth of metrical forms in his poetry is far beyond the scope of this thesis. The following investigation into his use of the Adoneus is therefore intended as a case study that proves to be rewarding for various reasons. On a fundamental level, the rich poetic and scholarly tradition that is attached to this metrical figure makes it possible to engage with concerns intrinsic as well as extrinsic to George's poetry from a shared starting point that lies within the poems themselves. As mentioned before, bridging this divide can help to re-evaluate his poems throughout the different creative periods and shed light on convergences, divergences and tonal nuances previously unnoticed. This approach also enables us to gain valuable insights from the poetry itself into how George perceived himself as a poet and how he used his engagement with poetic traditions to shape this perception.

The classical Adoneus is a five-syllable metrical figure and typically consists of a dactyl followed either by a spondee or trochee. In the German language it is most frequently realised in the latter form, thus / x x / x (this is also the case in other stress-timed languages). For example, the title of Hölderlin's poem at the centre of Menninghaus's essay, 'Hälfte des Lebens', adheres to this pattern.

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<sup>69</sup> Winfried Menninghaus, *Hälfte des Lebens: Versuch über Hölderlins Poetik* (Suhrkamp, 2005). It has also inspired similar approaches with regard to other poets such as Rilke as in Charlie Louth, 'Rilke's *Sonette an Orpheus*: The *Tombeau*, Dance, and the Adonic', *The Modern Language Review*, 110.3 (2015), pp. 724–38.

In this form, the slight ritardando of the cadence seems to lend itself fittingly to the intended tone suggested by the provenance of the metrical group. Its name originates in the ritualistic plaintive cry ᾠτὸν Ἄδωνιν, which can also be found among Sappho's fragments. This in conjunction with its falling cadence has led to it most often being associated with sorrowful situations and expressions. In addition, it forms the final metrical grouping in many other surviving Sapphic stanzas and is often counted among the various basic cola of Aeolic verse.<sup>70</sup> Although more recent ancient Greek scholarship avoids designations such as 'Adonic' or 'Adoneus' and the endings of Sapphic stanzas often tend to be scanned differently nowadays (namely as an acephalous Pherecratean), it is highly probable that for poets such as Goethe, Klopstock and Hölderlin, who all made more or less extensive use of it, this pattern was indeed a metrical reality and they therefore engaged with it as such.<sup>71</sup> It is equally probable that the same held true for George himself, taking into account that the more major shifts in scholarship that occasioned the re-evaluation of the Adoneus did not happen until the middle of the twentieth century.<sup>72</sup> Important in this context is the fact that this mode of engaging with this particular metrical figure is closely coupled to the various implications that its provenance and name suggest, and those pre-coded characteristics may be called upon anytime a poet makes use of the Adonic. One of these implications is a close relationship between content and form. Given that the figure takes its name from an expression of deeply felt lament, one can hardly help but make similar associations when it occurs in other contexts, almost regardless of the authorial intent behind it. In the same vein, this means that poets are able to employ the Adonic as a conscious means to engage with poetical traditions, conjure up such associations on purpose or consciously decide to subvert those very expectations. One of the

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<sup>70</sup> M. L. West, *Greek Metre* (Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 30.

<sup>71</sup> Menninghaus, *Hälfte des Lebens*, p. 22.

<sup>72</sup> Menninghaus, *Hälfte des Lebens*, p. 20.

many examples of the latter is the conflation of solemn memorial and the rather more joyful activity that is dancing in Rilke's *Sonette an Orpheus* by way of the Adonic, which Charlie Louth very convincingly reveals.<sup>73</sup> This, in fact, also holds true for certain moments in George's poetry when the Adoneus appears. While most of the time it means an affirmation of the origins and traditions inscribed in the metrical group,<sup>74</sup> it can also act as a disruptive element and undermine those very attributions constructively.

More specifically, according to Pahmeier's analysis, George uses the Adonic in his poetry mainly for three reasons: to avoid syncopation, as a building block of dactylic verse, or as the central metrical feature of a poem.<sup>75</sup> A tentative overview suggests that the Adoneus occurs particularly often in the earlier and later works, and less so in the middle, transitional period. The main thrust of Pahmeier's argument, when it is not concerned with the more technical uses of the Adonic, is that, using this metrical figure, George's poems gain a more Sappho-like, lamenting tone compared to the usually more prevalent Pindaric impression.<sup>76</sup> The former is commonly associated with softness and mourning, while the latter belongs to the context of major events and deeds, elevated and prophetic – presumably harsher – in tone; a contrastive pair that is quite often also negotiated along the lines of a female-male dichotomy.<sup>77</sup> Equally, regarding the literary history of ancient Greek lyric poetry, Pindar and Sappho stand at two opposing ends of a spectrum: whereas the former's songs are mostly choral lyrics, even if not sung, and therefore occupy a decidedly public

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<sup>73</sup> Louth, 'Rilke's *Sonette an Orpheus*', p. 738.

<sup>74</sup> See Pahmeier, 'Sapphischen Tones', pp. 229–30.

<sup>75</sup> Pahmeier, 'Sapphischen Tones', p. 214.

<sup>76</sup> Pahmeier, 'Sapphischen Tones', pp. 214–15.

<sup>77</sup> For Pahmeier, at least, this tonal effect seems more linked to the content of a poem than its metrical characteristics, as one of his prime examples for a harsher tone is an excerpt from George's 'Der Krieg'. Pahmeier, 'Sapphischen Tones', p. 214.

domain, the works of Sappho (and Alcaeus, too) have a much more private and singular core, always looking to express individual emotions.<sup>78</sup>

Although Pahmeier analyses many of George's poems that use the Adonic, the important question of what happens when the links between, for example, content and form traditionally implied by the Adoneus are challenged remains unaddressed. In fact, George's engagement with the Adoneus proves to be at its most interesting exactly when it departs from the template that provenance and tradition have imposed on this metrical figure. The global significance for the use of the Adonic in George's works, especially in the earlier collections, is influenced by a variety of factors. An important key to the understanding of George's use of and relationship to the Adoneus is undoubtedly the influence of Hölderlin. While the majority of George's and his circle's engagement with Hölderlin and his works did not happen until after 1909 and Hellingrath's discovery of the Pindar translations and early-1800s poetry, it is reported that George already started to engage with Hölderlin's works as early as 1895.<sup>79</sup> Thus, it can be assumed that even some of the very earliest of George's poems already carry traces of his engagement with Hölderlin's works as well as with Hölderlin's persona and self-understanding as a poet. As the analysis below will show, the Adoneus as a metrical figure is not only suitable for poets to engage with literary-historical traditions via metre but it can also offer insights into the (intended) self-image of the poets that choose to use it; not least because of the fact that Sappho and her works occupy such a paradigmatic position in the history of poetry.

Perhaps the most obvious point of reference that connects George and Hölderlin is Pindar. For Hölderlin, much of his self-image and his popular reception alike are influenced by his relationship

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<sup>78</sup> Winfried Menninghaus, 'Sappho und Hölderlin', in *Was aus dem Bild fällt: Figuren des Details in Kunst und Literatur*, ed. by Ralph Ubl and others (Fink, 2007), pp. 141–64 (p. 154).

<sup>79</sup> Henning Bothe, *Ein Zeichen sind wir, deutungslos: Die Rezeption Hölderlins von ihren Anfängen bis zu Stefan George* (Metzler, 1992), p. 118.

to the Greek poet. Similarly, George, in turn, was heavily influenced by Hölderlin, especially from 1909/10 onwards and George even praises him as a ‘*verjünger der sprache und damit der verjünger der seele*’ (SW XVII, 60). Much of the Pindaric tone in George’s later works can indeed be attributed to this indirect reception of Pindar. However, when looking at the history of reception of Hölderlin and his poems, it can be argued that it was not until Hellingrath’s work that the popular understanding of the poet shifted and that he came to be the archetypal Pindaric *poeta vates* mostly as a result of the wider George Circle’s engagement with him and the intense focus on his later works (which certainly are expressively Pindaric in tone). In fact, before this it had not been uncommon to think of Hölderlin mostly in Sapphic terms, be it his reputed handsomeness, sensitivity, or the softness of his verse, which all fit well with Romantic ideals surrounding poetry.<sup>80</sup> Hölderlin’s use of the Adonic around 1800, and also before, could be considered an attempt to infuse his poetry with the essences of Aeolic poetry in general and Sappho’s lyrics in particular, that is: softness, elevating private expression, and putting the focus on the individual. Just as much as Hölderlin’s use of the Adoneus signified an opening up of his poetry towards other voices than Pindar, George’s harking back to this particular figure can mean a conscious dilution of Pindaric influences, certainly in the later works. In the case of his earlier works, however, I would argue that the Adonics signify a tendency that is also concerned with how he is perceived as a poet. Not least, because, as will be shown below, when the figure is used it brings with it associations of reflection and self-image. The Adoneus as the archetypal Sapphic metre also embodies characteristics that are typical for her poetry in general – singularity above all – and George understood this. Using the Adoneus, then, was a possibility for George to claim this feature for himself and his poetry. His

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<sup>80</sup> Menninghaus, ‘Sappho und Hölderlin’, p. 163.

intent was to achieve innovation by referring back to traditions and this becomes especially evident when looking at how exactly he engaged with the metrical figure.

As one of the prime examples for a Sapphic tone in George, Pahmeier mentions ‘Lesbos’, one of the Baudelaire translations, which is relevant also for very concrete thematic reasons. Particularly of interest are its last two strophes, which concern Sappho’s unrequited love for Phaon and her subsequent suicide:

Sappho · am tag ihrer lästerung beute der toten ·  
 Als sie durchbrach des erfundenen brauches gewalt  
 Und ihrer schönheit zur äussersten ernte erboten  
 Rohem arm der mit hochmut das opfer vergalt  
 Sapphos · am tag ihrer lästerung beute der toten.

Seit jener stunde ergeht sich Lesbos in klagen ·  
 Trotz aller ehren die ihm nun das weltall erzeugt  
 Lauscht es bei tag und bei nacht dem getöse der plagen  
 Das von den öden gestaden den himmel ersteigt ·  
 Seit jener stunde ergeht sich Lesbos in klagen.  
 (SW XII/XIV, 139)

The lines quoted here are organised for the most part in dactyls with Adonics concluding every other line. To name only a few: ‘beute der toten’, ‘ernte erboten’, and of course ‘Lesbos in klagen’. All these examples share, to a certain extent, congruence between content and supposed effect of their poetic form. They are all concerned with woeful circumstances and thus their association with the Adoneus and its lamenting tone comes readily and can be conclusively argued. However, not all of the Adonics occurring here carry the same weight. Dactylic lines in general have the tendency to conclude with Adonics, not least because the Adoneus could be considered in principle just a catalectic dactylic dimeter. The biggest impact could usually be ascribed to Adonics that occur as their own separate line or colon (a grammatically but not necessarily logically complete

linguistic grouping),<sup>81</sup> an example for which would be ‘beute der boten’. There are some instances, however, where the Adoneus is much more subtle in appearance, or, in the words of Menninghaus, ‘latent’.<sup>82</sup> A good illustration for this is the Adoneus in ‘*getöse der plagen*’ from George’s translation. Ascribing a meaningful weight to Adonics like this is usually only justifiable if they occur with high frequency or act as supplements to other, more explicit manifestations of it. In contrast, ‘Lesbos in klagen’ could not only be considered a separate colon but it is furthermore set off metrically from the rest of the line and concludes not only it but the poem as a whole, making it a highly prominent instance of the Adonic. In general, however, it seems that Pahmeier, when analysing the poems metrically in search for the Adoneus, quite often does not consider verses as being divided into separate cola. His method of scanning seems to orientate itself by the next smaller rhetorical unit, the comma; an approach somewhat reminiscent of Klopstock’s scansion according to ‘Wortfüße’. This, at times, can lead to, on the one hand, discrepancies between Pahmeier’s and other, more cola-focussed ways of reading and, on the other hand, slight exaggerations when it comes to ascribing meaning to more latent Adonics. At times, his approach seems a bit too reductive, for example, when Pahmeier claims that the Adonics that arise from prevented syncopations generally create a lamenting tone: ‘George vermeidet also öfters Synkopen, um durch den Adoneus, der dabei entsteht, für Momente einen klagenden bzw. bittenden Ton zu erzeugen oder um durch ihn ein Gedicht auf eine Klage zulaufen zu lassen.’<sup>83</sup> While this interpretation is very much in line with the effects classically attributed to Adonics, a more nuanced approach would certainly be more in the interest of the metrical complexity and virtuosity of George’s verses.

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<sup>81</sup> Cola often used to be set apart from the rest of the text by an interpunct, a punctuation mark also frequently used by George and quite often to the same effect.

<sup>82</sup> Menninghaus, *Hälfte des Lebens*, p. 25.

<sup>83</sup> Pahmeier, ‘Sapphischen Tones’, p. 221.

Nevertheless, whether occasional passages that seem like Adonics at first glance can indeed be considered meaningful occurrences of this particular metrical figure is also, I would argue, very much dependent on the context surrounding the composition of the work. Considering the Baudelaire translation at hand and the topics addressed in it, which are highly conducive to allusions to the intertwined tradition of the Adonic with Sappho and her poetry, for example, it certainly seems plausible to consider even rather latent passages as conscious insertions by George, meant to interact with the literary-historical backgrounds that accompany the metrical figure.

A good example for a latent appearance of the Adoneus in George's original works is the famously poetological poem 'Mein garten bedarf nicht luft und nicht wärme' from the collection *Algabal* with its symbolically charged 'schwarze blume'. Braungart claims that this central symbol of the poem, which is also metrically marked by a staccato of trochees, is representative of the 'ungeheure poetische Inszenierung der Kälte der Moderne, aus der nichts hervorgehen kann'.<sup>84</sup> Together with the oft-invoked Pindaric tone, this sort of characterisation has often been claimed as the defining mode of George's poetry. However, when examining the poem, it is possible to identify a softer tone that subtly counteracts this tendency.

Mein garten bedarf nicht luft und nicht wärme  
 Der garten den ich mir selber erbaut  
 Und seiner vögel leblose schwärme  
 Haben noch nie einen frühling geschaut.

Von kohle die stämme · von kohle die äste  
 Und düstere felder am düsteren rain ·  
 Der früchte nimmer gebrochene läste  
 Glänzen wie lava im pinien-hain.

Ein grauer schein aus verborgener höhle  
 Verrät nicht wann morgen wann abend naht  
 Und staubige dünste der mandel-öle  
 Schweben auf beeten und anger und saat.

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<sup>84</sup> Braungart, 'Poetik, Rhetorik, Hermeneutik', p. 532.

Wie zeug ich dich aber im heiligtume  
 – So fragt ich wenn ich es sinnend durchmass  
 In kühnen gespinsten der sorge vergass –  
 Dunkle grosse schwarze blume?  
 (SW II, 63)

Although the content of the poem presents the artificiality of George's poetic realm, its metre is punctuated by occasional Adonics, some more prominent than others: 'luft und nicht wärme', 'leblose schwärme', 'kohle die äste', 'kohle die stämme', 'staubige dünste', 'Schweben auf beeten', and 'kühnen gespinsten'. While they are by no means the dominant metrical grouping, these interspersed, latent Adonics provide a soft contrast to the harsh environment of artifice that is unfolded in the poem; especially when compared to the final line, which presents the poetological point of culmination in the form of the symbolic black flower with a more decisive rhythmicity. As Mario Zanicchi asserts, the poem presents the dialectic character of George's poetics, promoting artificiality while being very conscious of its poetic unproductiveness.<sup>85</sup> Apparently the notion of 'pure' poetry could be considered to be challenged by the rhythm of the Adoneus, and with that the elements inherent in its tradition are also introduced. It is not only a softer tone but also a more personal, perhaps even ethical one. This creates a sense of the poetic garden being no longer insular and hermetic but rather prepared to engage with a world outside artifice. Towards the end of this part, we will return to a very similar field of topics with another poetological, garden-themed poem by George. However, in the following, we will look at what exactly happens when George engages more consciously and overtly with the Adoneus and its implications.

Much like the language that George himself invented, which he called 'lingua romana' and which was for him a method of citation of various linguistic elements and an opportunity to subvert

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<sup>85</sup> Mario Zanicchi, 'Algabal', in *Stefan George – Werkkommentar*, ed. by Jürgen Egyptien (De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 60–89 (p. 68).

literary traditions,<sup>86</sup> he used the Adonic not only to conform with traditional poetic models but also, as mentioned, to productively engage with and possibly upend those expectations. The following poem, ‘Lass deine tränen’ from *Pilgerfahrten*, gives insight into how George engaged productively with poetic form and tradition through the figure of the Adonic.

Lass deine tränen  
Um ein weib ·  
Falsch ist dein wähen ·  
Ruh und bleib!

Merk ob am boden  
Schnee schon taut ·  
Wärmender odem  
Beete baut!

Vor seine feier  
Juni schliesst  
Ob ohne schleier  
Du sie siehst?

Lass deine tränen  
Um ein weib ·  
Falsch ist dein wähen  
Ruh und bleib!  
(SW II, 36)

The poem has a simple, ballad-like structure, consisting of four four-line stanzas assembled from alternating Adonics and Cretics, with the last stanza being a repetition of the first, except for the missing interpunct in the second to last line. Focal point is the repeated exhortatory remark that begins the poem and condenses the main message, which is to cease worrying about a woman’s love and instead live in a state of what Klussmann calls ‘männlich heitere[r] Eigenständigkeit’.<sup>87</sup> This prominent position at the beginning of the stanzas that George affords the Adoneus is already

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<sup>86</sup> Giulia Radaelli, ‘Stefan Georges lingua romana und “das dichten in fremdem sprachstoff”’, ed. by Wolfgang Braungart and Ute Oelmann, *George-Jahrbuch*, 11 (2016/2017) (2016), pp. 59–88 (p. 71), doi:10.1515/9783110486971-006.

<sup>87</sup> Paul Gerhard Klussmann, *Stefan George: Zum Selbstverständnis der Kunst und des Dichters in der Moderne* (Bouvier, 1961), p. 93.

quite unusual from a more traditional point of view, considering that the metrical group tends to appear at the very end of the Sapphic stanza. Furthermore, taking into account the fact that Adonics make up half of the poem, the use of the metrical figure here appears similar to the role that Menninghaus ascribes to it in Hölderlin's 'Hälfte des Lebens', when he identifies it as the 'metrische Signatur' of the work.<sup>88</sup> However, it is not only the positioning of the Adonic in the poem that is unusual, but also the content expressed through it. When comparing this poem to the excerpt of the Baudelaire translation above, the relationship between content and form appears to be inverted. Whereas in the translation the Adonics largely function in accordance with its more traditional usage and help to emphasise the woeful circumstances described, 'Lass deine tränen' uses it to the opposite effect, seemingly responding directly to his Baudelaire translation.<sup>89</sup> Here, instead of acting as catalysts for deeply felt expressions of lament, the most prominent Adonics rather act as inhibitors of certain affects, exclaiming prohibitions of sorrow: 'Lass deine tränen' and 'Falsch ist dein wännen'. The tone is encouraging, yet somewhat brash, and emotion is not encouraged or possibly even reinforced but instead should be harnessed and disciplined. This fits well with one of the overarching themes of the collection as a whole, which Maurizio Pirro identifies as 'Erfahrung der Selbsttherapie und der Bändigung von Leidenschaften'.<sup>90</sup>

The poem brings into focus the interference between two different, if not opposing levels of meaning implied by the content on the one hand, and poetic form on the other. Whereas the Baudelaire translation above presents a congruent overlap of both, George's original poem presents the two layers askew, decoupling content and form and thereby challenging expectations set by

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<sup>88</sup> Menninghaus, *Hälfte des Lebens*, p. 19.

<sup>89</sup> George reportedly wrote the poem in the same month he began working on his Baudelaire translations. Osthoff, *Stefan George und 'Les deux musiques'*, p. 124.

<sup>90</sup> Maurizio Pirro, 'Pilgerfahrten', in *Stefan George – Werkkommentar*, ed. by Jürgen Egyptien (De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 43–59 (p. 51).

poetical traditions and arguably customary uses of metrical figures. This work, just like the translation above, demonstrates that George was well aware of the provenance of the Adonic and the implications of its use. However, he displays this figure in 'Lasse die tränen' with an almost ironic veneer. He responds to the mourning and grief inherent in the traditional plaintive cry with an enthusiastic renunciation of these elements, the contrast between (expected) content and form heightening the message's impact. It is a conscious playing with expectations and the updating of formal traditions in poetry.

There is another poem in *Pilgerfahrten* that is very similar in tone to 'Lasse die tränen' and which shares with it the themes of independence and emotional restraint often found throughout the collection. Its first line, too, is an exhortation that takes the form of an Adoneus, 'Schweige die klage!':

Schweige die klage!  
 Was auch der neid  
 Zu den gütern beschied.  
 Suche und trage  
 Und über das leid  
 Siege das lied!

So will es die lehre  
 Er tat es in ehre  
 Schon wieder ein jahr.  
 Der ost wie der süd  
 Ein täuscher ihm war  
 Und nun ist er müd.

Am fuss einer eiche  
 Da schuf er ein grab  
 Für mantel und stab ·  
 Sie wurden zur leiche:  
 Nun rüst ich zur fahrt  
 Von fröhlicher art.

Dann brach der damm  
 Verhaltenen quellen ·  
 Sein auge ward feucht  
 Er stöhnte... mir deucht  
 Ich soll auch am stamm

Meine leier zerschellen.  
(SW II, 44)

Arbogast considers this poem to be an almost archetypical summary of the hymnic ambitions of George's early works, whereby the poet aims to conquer any form of private experience through the act of composing poetry ('über das leid | Siege das lied!').<sup>91</sup> While 'Lasse die tränen' remains unclear about the methods to reach (emotional) independence, this text presents poetry as a tool to achieve it. A striking fact is that George seems to have, quite surprisingly, borrowed from Richard Wagner, namely the second act of his *Götterdämmerung* when Siegfried is accused by Brünnhilde and the first verse of the poem is sung verbatim.<sup>92</sup>

The Adoneus appears throughout the poem, both as an independent verse and as part of a longer line. The most prominent instance is, again, the poem's very first line: 'Schweige die klage!'. Further examples are 'Suche und trage', 'fuss einer eiche', and 'leier zerschellen', with some being more latent than others. One of the more borderline Adonics when it comes to the relationship between scansion and units of meaning is, with an upbeat, 'Verhaltenen quellen',<sup>93</sup> which Pahmeier nevertheless considers one of the prime examples for the poem's overall Sapphic tone.<sup>94</sup> However, while the poem certainly has a markedly Sapphic slant to it and the traditional correspondence between content and metre is upheld in the case that Pahmeier highlights, the general tendency seems to be one of a slight displacement between the two layers. In this regard, 'Schweige die klage!' is very similar to 'Lasse die tränen' above, in that it is an exhortative prohibition of lament (unusually, 'schweigen' is used transitively here) with the metrical signature of the Adoneus.

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<sup>91</sup> Arbogast, *Die Erneuerung der deutschen Dichtersprache in den Frühwerken Stefan Georges: Eine stilgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, p. 135.

<sup>92</sup> Osthoff, *Stefan George und 'Les deux musiques'*, pp. 125–26.

<sup>93</sup> If this line were to appear in a different context, I would quite probably not follow Pahmeier and scan it as an Adoneus with upbeat. An alternative, arguably more plausible, reading would scan it as a Paeon secundus (iamb plus pyrrhic) followed by a trochee.

<sup>94</sup> Pahmeier, 'Sapphischen Tones', p. 221.

Considering the fact that this appears at the very beginning of the poem, the characteristics of all following Adonics have to be considered in this light. As Pirro notes, the poem's theme is the 'genesende Kraft des Ästhetischen' contrasted with the transience of human existence.<sup>95</sup> Thus, while 'Lasse die tränen' heads in a similar direction in that it sets a form of stoic independence against expressions of (negative) emotions, 'Schweige die klage!' goes further and contextualises this renunciation of private experiences with the healing properties of aesthetic experience mediated by the poet. Echoing Arbogast's findings, the domination of private experience could be said to also enter the poem in a very literal way, since the negative affects are, after all, part of the poem and are not at all 'verschwiegen'; however, the only possibility for them to enter the poem is through an almost ironic use of metre and recourse to the poetic traditions associated with it. Although the poem is to some degree a testament to singularity and independence, its message is achieved and communicated through the means of a certain interdependence between content and form, and tradition and renewal of poetry.

When looking further into George's earlier collections, it is possible to find additional examples for this pattern of discord between the lamenting tone that the Adoneus traditionally commands and the content expressed through it. The decadent atmosphere of the poem 'Becher am boden' from the collection *Algabal*, the content of which is permeated by a wealth of classical references, seems to be metrically dominated by the Adoneus, in line with the classical slant of what it depicts:

Becher am boden ·  
 Lose geschmeide ·  
 Frauen dirnen  
 Schlanke schenken  
 Müde sich senken ·  
 Ledig die lende  
 Busen und hüfte ·  
 Um die stirnen

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<sup>95</sup> Pirro, 'Pilgerfahrten', p. 54.

Der kränze rest.

Schläfernder broden  
 Traufender düfte ·  
 Weinkönig scheidet!  
 Aller ende  
 Ende das fest!

Rosen regnen  
 Purpurne satte  
 Die liebkosen?  
 Weise matte  
 Euch zu laben?  
 Malvenrote ·  
 Gelbe tote:  
 Manen-küsse  
 Euch zu segnen.

Auf die schleusen!  
 Und aus reusen  
 Regnen rosen ·  
 Güsse flüsse  
 Die begraben.  
 (SW II, 69)

As Jeffrey D. Todd notes, this poem is among the numerous expressions of Algalab's will to power.<sup>96</sup> This collection is heavily inspired by the extravagant Roman emperor Heliogabalus and anecdotes about his life, many taken from the *Historia Augusta*. This particular poem depicts one of the most notorious incidents of his reign: a lavish feast, whose guests, after having fallen asleep, are smothered to death by masses of roses on the emperor's orders.<sup>97</sup> It is furthermore a good example for the formal variety and virtuosity that can be found in George's early poetry and, according to Zanucchi, the structure of the poem is one of the rare Symbolistic experiments of his early volumes, as it adheres to a highly unusual rhyme scheme (namely *abcddefcga fbeg hijikllmh*

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<sup>96</sup> Jeffrey D. Todd, 'Stefan George and Two Types of Aestheticism', in *A Companion to the Works of Stefan George*, ed. by Jens Rieckmann (Camden House, 2005), pp. 127–43 (p. 132).

<sup>97</sup> Besides George's depiction, perhaps the most famous artistical rendering of this event is Lawrence Alma-Tadema's 1888 painting *The Roses of Heliogabalus*.

*nmjk*).<sup>98</sup> This experimental, Symbolist context enables the Adonics scattered throughout the poem to have even more impact than they would gain in perhaps more traditional formal environments as their appearances are less predictable and more prone to disrupt possible expectations. In a sense, here, George's recourse to poetic tradition might even support a more radical renewal of poetry than what could have been achieved solely by Symbolistic means. In addition to this, the poem again demonstrates George's cautious attitude and claim to singularity when it came to (mistakenly) being too closely associated with other European literary movements, especially Symbolism: although he certainly was influenced and inspired by their style, he made sure to always stay at a safe distance.

As Zanucchi aptly recognises, the text is dominated by a dichotomy between life and art, culminating in the sovereignty of art and a very concrete manifestation of the lethality of beauty.<sup>99</sup> With the depiction of this contrast, the poem calls on a topos mentioned above, namely the myth of Narcissus. This association is, of course, further supported by the overall theme of Algabal's self-love that runs through the collection. However, 'Becher am boden' in particular connects to the myth not only because of its general theme but further links can be made due to some more nuanced elements. One characteristic that is central to most of the various versions of the myth is a distinctive spatial configuration: Narcissus, situated above the water surface, looking down onto his own reflection and bending his body towards his likeness. Essentially it is beauty performing a descending movement. In George's poem this pattern is realised by the shower of roses, a stand-in for beauty per se, that eventually suffocates the guests.<sup>100</sup> Both scenarios are fatal, albeit the victims differ.

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<sup>98</sup> Zanucchi, 'Algabal', p. 77.

<sup>99</sup> Zanucchi, 'Algabal', p. 70.

<sup>100</sup> In his analysis of Hölderlin's poem, Menninghaus also recognises a theme of downward movements that permeates the poem. Menninghaus, *Hälfte des Lebens*, p. 48.

The fact the poem realises this kind of theme through the use of Adonics is not surprising. Adonics have the tendency to appear in works that are connected in one way or another to the mythological figure of Narcissus and various versions and interpretations of the myth, the most common being Ovid's 'Echo and Narcissus' from his *Metamorphoses*. Considering the origin of and connotations attributed to the metrical figure, which takes its name from Adonis, whose beauty is at least as highly praised and proverbial as Narcissus', it seems an apt choice to represent the essence of the myth. Just like the mythological story, the Adoneus combines beauty and death. 'Becher am boden' contains multiple Adonics, especially at the beginning, setting the tone of the poem. Examples are: 'Becher am boden', 'Lose geschmeide, 'Müde sich senken', 'Ledig die lende', 'Busen und hüften', 'Schläfernder broden', 'Traufender düfte', and 'Weinkönig scheidel'.

Perhaps even more so than in the poems before, the tone here borders on the ironic, conflating the decadent, self-indulgent melancholy and stupor of a post-feast hangover with the lament over the death of a lost lover by way of the Adoneus. Their use in this context seems almost like a caricature, with their own poetic history being deliberately upended. In the latter half of the poem, the slight melancholy infused by the Adonics disappears, with the only Adoneus being 'Purpurne satte', and makes way for the ecstatic description of the lethal rain of petals, dominated by a rapid trochaic pulse. This poem acts as a testament to the potential and variability of the Adoneus and George's sophisticated knowledge and use of metre.

As stated above, due to the Adonic's origin and its falling cadence, it has been predominantly associated with and used to create rather sorrowful impressions. However, the poems by George analysed above have shown that they can be used to different effects. What the poems above have in common is that the Adonics usually appear either stichic, as an isolated line, or as part of a longer, non-Adonic line; but none feature several instances of the figure in direct succession. What happens, then, when multiple Adonics are strung together in the same line of

verse? In his analysis of Rilke's *Sonette an Orpheus*, Charlie Louth examines the dance-like qualities created by Rilke's use of varying metres, with the Adoneus in particular, and considers them a direct expression of the 'intense musicality' of these late works.<sup>101</sup> In fact, this musical quality is strongest when multiple Adonics encounter each other and are combined successively in the same line. This converts the conventionally falling tone of the single, isolated Adoneus with its quietly subsiding final tap (as mentioned above, the second half is commonly realised as a trochee) into a lively, almost waltz-like rhythm and thus the metrical figure becomes more an expression of continuing movement than ultimate stasis, a metrical form of 'lifeblood'.<sup>102</sup>

The poem 'Nachmittag' from the collection *Hymnen* is an example for this second aspect of the Adoneus that comes to light when several of them are used together; however, it still retains some of the other qualities of the figure. It contains an apt display of the 'höchste freiheit' that George aims to find in 'strengste[m] maass', combining the exhausted enthusiasm that can be detected in 'Becher am boden' and transporting the Adoneus into an environment of almost feverish fervour.

#### NACHMITTAG

Sengende strahlen senken sich nieder  
 Nieder vom wolkenfreien firmament ·  
 Sengende strahlen von blitzender kraft.

Die südenklare luft in mittagstille.  
 Längs den palästen starb der menge wimmeln  
 Auf der fliesen feuer-bergender fläche.  
 Mit stummen zinnen und toten balkonen  
 Die langen mauerwälle starr dastehn  
 Heisshauchend wie wirkende opferöfen.  
 In den höfen umragt von säulengängen  
 Der versiegten brunnen kunst versagt ·  
 Auf beeten wo der büsche blätter sich krümmen  
 Halbverdorrter blumen odem lagert.

Sengende strahlen senken sich nieder

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<sup>101</sup> Louth, 'Rilke's *Sonette an Orpheus*', p. 727.

<sup>102</sup> Louth, 'Rilke's *Sonette an Orpheus*', p. 734.

Nieder vom wolkenfreien firmament.

Und dem Einsamen der mit entzücken sie fühlt  
 Der des gemaches duftender kühle entfloh  
 Gegenglut für zerstörende gluten suchend  
 Stetig sie auf scheidel und nacken scheinen  
 Bis er rettender schwäche erliegen darf  
 Hingleitend bei eines pfeilers fuss.

Sengende strahlen senken sich nieder.  
 (SW II, 14)

The poem describes an unbearably hot afternoon, causing the crowds to retreat to cooler places to find refuge from the scorching heat of the sun. Meanwhile, a lonely figure wanders the deserted palace square and purposely exposes himself to the blistering rays of sunshine, welcoming them with 'entzücken'. The poem's key passage is the twice repeated phrase 'Sengende strahlen senken sich nieder', which is made up of two Adonics in direct succession. Similarly to 'Becher am boden', the Adoneus appears here in connection with a downwards motion: whereas above the roses were falling, here the sunbeams reach towards the ground. The devastating effect of the sunlight is supported by the line's alliteration of four sibilants. The two Adonics retain, at first glance, almost none of the figure's more traditional sense of sorrowful lament. Instead, their coupling introduces a dancing rhythm into the line that adds a layer of pained excitement to the phrase.

Throughout the poem, the lament inherent in the history of the Adoneus is transformed into a form of delirious enjoyment and the heat of the sun is eventually more a source of pleasure than pain, a pharmakon for the just as intensely burning blaze in the mind of the 'Einsamer'. The refrain-like, repeated invocation of the poem's first lines adds to this effect. Gradually, meaning and context that surround the initial line are stripped away until only the bare heat and madness caused by the 'sengende strahlen' prevails. Looking back at David Nowell Smith's thoughts mentioned above, the rhythm of this line created by the two successive Adonics could be considered to convert sense into sensation, meaning into madness. In a sense, however, in doing so the poem

also reinstates some of the traditionally more essential elements to the Adonic. Its namesake is a plaintive cry, after all, occasioned by an event that is for all intents and purposes far removed from reason and an expression almost completely dictated by laws of sensation and emotion. Thus, while at first glance venturing further away from the original intentions of the Adoneus than perhaps any of the poems above, 'Nachmittag' manages best to capture and exhibit a major part of its essence.

Considering this layer of the Adoneus in the context of rhythm overall also sheds light on some of the aspects mentioned above. While we encountered rhythm at the beginning of this chapter as an accompaniment to the process of sense-making, George demonstrates with this poem that it can also function to do almost the very opposite. The rhythm of the successive Adonics and its implications support the poem in drifting towards a state of confusion and seemingly contradictory sentiments. Coming back to the categories of Pindaric and Sapphic tones in George's works, this poem could be considered an amalgam of the harsher tendencies of the former and the softer inclinations of the latter. A violent environment is integrated into the soothing cadence of the Adoneus.

With the dance-like qualities of the successive Adonics being employed here, this poem invokes an important aspect of George's oeuvre, especially with regard to poetological considerations and connections to rhythmicity in general. George's very last collection of poetry, *Das neue Reich*, contains a poem titled 'Der tänzer' which has strong poetological tendencies and whose programme reveals important aspects not only in the context of its collection but for George's work as a whole. It describes a group of dancing children:

#### DER TÄNZER

Im garten wiegt der kinder ringelreihn ·  
 In weiche luft des abends dringt ihr sang  
 Sie ziehn in paaren schwingen sich im kreise  
 Und hüpfen nach des gleichen liedes weise  
 Wie sie sich froh die kleinen hände leihn!  
 Doch Einer gibt den takt an und den gang.

Wie leicht sein fuß sich dreht und schnellt und säumt  
 Wie beugt die hüfte sich gewandt und sacht!  
 Im dunkel zittert seines haares schimmer  
 Er ist der leuchtstern mitten im geflimmer  
 Er ist die ganze jugend wie sie träumt  
 Er ist die ganze jugend wie sie lacht.  
 (SW IX, 84)

Although all the children in the group seem to be dancing to ‘des gleichen liedes weise’, there is one figure in particular on which the poem lays its focus: a singular dancer whose abilities far outshine those of the crowd. Fricker describes the poem and especially the meaning of the principal dancer, as it were, as follows:

Leichtigkeit, Geschwindigkeit und Behutsamkeit ergeben das Bild einer vollendeten Gestalt. Im Tänzer selbst hat sich die Anmut der Bewegungen scheinbar von selbst entwickelt. Man sieht nicht mehr, ob sie erlernt oder geübt wurde. Der Tänzer ist nun ein Lehrer, der durch sein Vorbild seine maßvollen Bewegungen auf die Kinder überträgt und dafür sorgt, dass ihnen diese Bewegungen zur Natur werden. Abschließend wird er ‘die ganze Jugend’, der Repräsentant seiner Generation. Er handelt für sie, indem er sich in einer besonderen Weise bewegt und von den anderen anerkannt wird.<sup>103</sup>

The master-dancer becomes a substitute for the master-poet, who epitomises similar skills, such as ‘maßvolle Bewegungen’, which, when transposed to the art of writing poetry, would mean an understanding of rhythm and metre. Connecting the assertion of this poem’s poetological statement to the findings above, it seems that especially sequences of multiple Adonics and their ability to embody dance-like qualities are predestined to not only represent and communicate poetological ambitions in poetry but also realise them.

The second part of Fricker’s analysis further highlights an important aspect of the poem’s proposition. Not only does the dancer become a substitute for the poet, but he also becomes, to a certain extent, a substitute for the whole crowd of dancing children surrounding him. Fricker’s last sentence could be taken as a concise description of George’s poetic project as a whole. His intention

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<sup>103</sup> Fricker, *Stefan George: Gedichte für Dich*, p. 159.

was to move (write) in a special way and be acknowledged by the others. However, it is not just acknowledgement that the poem suggests, but rather a sense of public responsibility born out of personal accomplishment. In doing so, the poem connects to a line of thinking that has been suggested above by Nowell Smith in his comments on the capabilities of rhythm, especially the intertwining of sense with rhythm and the feedback of this process that reaches back towards the subject, raising the question ‘of the “we” who are oriented in sense, who have been configured in and by rhythm, who are subjects of, and subject to, rhythm, sense’.<sup>104</sup> Even though the status of the principal dancer is highly singular and original, it nevertheless allows for an opening up towards a collective ‘we’, a poetic direction that ‘Mein garten bedarf nicht luft und nicht wärme’ already suggests.

‘Der tänzer’ was first published in George’s last collection published in 1928. However, as *Das neue Reich* contained poetry that was written as early as twenty years before that, this does not automatically imply that the poem is only representative of his *Spätwerk*; although the mere fact of it being included in the collection does shift its standing towards this assessment. The poem does certainly already carry traces of the ethical slant that his later works display more overtly than the earlier poems. At the threshold between these two phases stands the next poem.

Now, to conclude this excursion through the importance of Adonics especially for George’s early poetry, I would like to examine a poem that is in many ways a counterpart to ‘Mein garten bedarf nicht luft und nicht wärme’. It is titled ‘Gartenfrühlänge’ and first appeared in the collection *Der Teppich des Lebens und die Lieder von Traum und Tod. Mit einem Vorspiel*, which stands, as mentioned, halfway between George’s earlier poetry and his late works.

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<sup>104</sup> Nowell Smith, ‘Rhythm-Sense-Subject’, p. 350.

## GARTENFRÜHLINGE

Schimmer aus lichtgoldnem blatte  
 Treibt aus dem waldigen finster . .  
 Dass die bescheidene ginster  
 Ruhe der trauer beschatte!

Nah in den gärten duften die mandeln  
 Dort sah ich augen voll glut und traum  
 Ich will die gärten wieder durchwandeln  
 Hände baden in blumigen flaum.

Seltnerer vögel gefieder  
 Büsche in zierlichen kegeln!  
 Trunkene falter segeln  
 Reicher ertönen dort lieder.

Kostbarer wie sie die quelle verstreut  
 Schmächtigem springbrunn funken entstieben . .  
 Werden sie leuchten leuchten mir heut?  
 Werd ich die süssen traum-agen lieben?  
 (SW V, 74)

Just like ‘Mein garten bedarf nicht luft und nicht wärme’ above, this poem conjures up a literal garden of poetry. Many of the images used above return here, such as the almonds. Yet, the two depictions could not be any more different. Compared to the barren and colourless garden of the earlier poem, this one presents a lively, almost Edenic, vision populated with a variety of plants and frolicking animals. While the first garden is artificial and devoid of sensuousness, this one is presented at its most organic and overflowing with sensory markers. Almost antipodal, too, are the appearances of the Adonics in both poems. While they are subdued, sparse and mostly latent in ‘Mein garten bedarf nicht luft und nicht wärme’, here they are pronounced, numerous and obvious. Following ‘Nachmittag’, the Adonics appear here also in direct succession in the same line, culminating in the last two lines that belong to perhaps the most memorable and distinct endings in George’s oeuvre and are made almost solely of Adonics: ‘Werden sie leuchten leuchten mir heut? | Werd ich die süssen traum-agen lieben?’ Nina Herres claims the following about the final lines: ‘Waren also die Motivlagen im Wortlaut zuversichtlich dem Traum zugewandt, so

schleicht sich der Tod über den klassischen Klang seiner Klage unweigerlich in die Verse'.<sup>105</sup> Based on the accumulation of multiple Adonics in the same line, especially in successive ones, I would argue that the classical mourning tone of the metrical group disappears almost completely and is overshadowed by the flowing, dance-like effect of the sequence. What begins softly in 'Mein garten bedarf nicht luft und nicht wärme' is steered into a more decisive direction here.

### **Conclusion: A Poetic Craft Rooted in Rhythm**

The concept of rhythm is afforded an important role in the works and poetics of Stefan George. First and foremost, it forms a basis out of which his poetry can emerge. As the analysis of his poetological and programmatic remarks has shown, rhythm stands at the very beginning for him when conceiving poems, and also constitutes part of the *telos* that his works should aspire to reach. The concept of rhythm further has social and political implications for his poetic practice. As mentioned, access to his circle and companionship was often reserved for people who showed a particularly high rhythmical inclination towards poetry and reciting it. Rhythm, therefore, could also be seen as an aspect of curation and gatekeeping for George that enabled him to select not only the most suitable words or images to develop his art but also the best-fitting company to do so. Rhythm is furthermore intimately connected to George's conceptions of aesthetics and meaning; overall, it is an integral component of his theory of 'geistige kunst'. As the main purveyor of 'maass und klang', rhythm forms the basis for the communication of meaning.

Although nature has often been identified as being afforded negligible significance in George's poetry, rhythm plays an important role when the topic does manage to work its way into his oeuvre. Most of the 'natural' content is negotiated through rhythmical phenomena such as the changing

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<sup>105</sup> Nina Herres, 'Die Lieder vom Traum und Tod', in *Stefan George – Werkkommentar*, ed. by Jürgen Egyptien (De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 307–22 (p. 316).

of the season or also, in a more abstract sense, various liturgical events that are connected to the natural seasons. The way in which nature appears in his works also allows for a sense of temporality to emerge, which functions as a prerequisite for the overarching aesthetic experience of and mediated by his oeuvre.

However, perhaps the most interesting aspects of rhythm in George's poetry are, by the very nature of his poetical style, metrical concepts. As was shown on the basis of a detailed discussion of the importance of a particular metrical figure, the Adoneus, especially in George's early poetry metre is more than a formal feature for him. Through this particular manifestation of rhythm, his poems are able to productively engage with poetic traditions, while still propelling forward his larger aim of renewing German-language poetry. This results in the perhaps paradoxical situation that George's poetry is possibly most inventive when it is, at first glance, the most conservative. Indeed, the incorporation of Adonics into his poetry, allows also insights into his self-image as a poet and the radical singularity he wished to claim for himself. They were furthermore a tool with which he was able to set himself apart from other contemporaneous literary movements in Europe, while never losing sight of the wider tradition of Western poetry and the productive impulses it could provide. The Adonics are furthermore able to instil small traces of ironic or perhaps even humorous engagement with literary traditions into his poetry, a tone which his poetry has often been claimed to lack. In addition, the analysis of Adonics in the early works has shown that some poetological tendencies, which are usually claimed to not appear until his later works, are already germinating and growing in the first half of his productive period. In this sense, rhythm generally, and particularly a certain engagement with metre, provides a tool to pry open the, at first glance, cold aestheticism of these earlier poems. It opens up space for some deeper and ethical concerns to surface, indicating that even in perhaps George's most formally controlled works, there exists an underlying current towards broader and more engaged themes.

## Rhythms and Ruins: Georg Trakl's Images, Meanings, and Metres

The focus, previously, has been on two authors who quite explicitly placed rhythm at the centre of their work (Holz much more so than George). This, however, is certainly not the case for the oeuvre of Georg Trakl, where rhythm plays a much less obvious role, albeit, I argue, by no means a less important one. For him, rhythm, at the most primal level, appears as a metaphorical embodiment of poetry per se and can therefore also be considered a fundamental component of all his poems. At the same time, he further uses the idea of rhythm to indicate circumstances that are external to his poetry and which, at times, have the potential to impinge on his life and also his creative endeavour. Just like his poetry, Trakl's engagement with rhythm was a lifelong process, undergoing constant development, starting out with conventional rhymes and metres before engaging with the 'Reihungsstil' and eventually arriving at free rhythms. While the earlier two chapters just briefly touch on the topic of free rhythms, a concept that both Holz and George are rather dismissive about, it will be more pertinent to the following discussion of Trakl's poetry.

Furthermore, rhythm is an essential component in Trakl's ideas about aesthetics and his poems' complex relationship with meaning and how it can emerge in and through them. In this regard, rhythm is often closely tied to movement, another vital concept for Trakl's poetry. From the beginning it is through depictions of movement and movements created by certain arrangements of images in the poem that rhythm manifests itself in his works. It is, however, especially during the later and last stages of Trakl's work that rhythm starts to establish itself in innovative and more tangible ways in the form of free rhythms that aid him in articulating issues and circumstances that tend to resist other forms of poetic expression. First, in order to trace the appearance and function

of rhythm in Trakl, it will prove worthwhile to contrast his life and work with that of the two other authors discussed above.

Both Trakl's poetry and indeed his biography are notably different to those of the authors discussed above, Arno Holz and Stefan George. Although born considerably later, in February 1887,<sup>1</sup> his untimely death at the beginning of November 1914, not long after the outbreak of the First World War meant that the others substantially outlived him. Trakl's relatively short life may be one of the reasons his creative output is considerably smaller in size than that of the other two authors. However, despite their small number, his poems had a resounding impact on the development of German-language poetry around the beginning of the twentieth century and beyond. It is in part due to his much smaller oeuvre and the nature of this work that it is distinctly harder to pin down the role of rhythm in Trakl's poetry compared to Holz and George. Besides his poems, he left behind very little to no theoretical, poetological, or programmatic writings. In the works of the other poets, as shown in the earlier chapters, rhythm emerges as a concern that is crucially linked to the inner workings of their respective poetry; however, it is also a feature that is very much present on the surface of their writings. A major reason for this is that both afford rhythm a prominent place in their theoretical and poetological discussions. For Trakl, however, writing was always about *poetry* and hardly ever *about* poetry. This lack of an explicit theoretical foundation and poetological remarks also contributes to the sense that his poems to this day are considered difficult to access and enigmatic in their meaning.<sup>2</sup>

For all their differences, Holz and George undoubtedly shared a desire to radically transform and reinvigorate the poetry of their times, yet ultimately created starkly contrasting works. Trakl,

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<sup>1</sup> Compared to 1863 for Holz and 1868 in George's case.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Williams, 'Georg Trakl and the Blindness of Poetry', in *The Dark Flutes of Fall: Critical Essays on Georg Trakl*, ed. by Eric Williams, Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture, 50 (Camden House, 1991), pp. 85–114 (p. 85).

by contrast, had no such intentions and his distinctive poetry resulted from a markedly different attitude towards the role, if any, it was to play in the wider German-language literary environment. In fact, there is hardly any evidence that Trakl was especially interested in these circles and his own involvement with them. There certainly were attempts to engage with this scene in his younger years, when Trakl became part of a loose literary circle called 'Minerva' sometime between 1904 and 1906, where he mostly presented shorter prose pieces. However, after numerous disappointments when his texts were not chosen for publication, he stopped attending the meetings and from this point on also seemed to become indifferent towards organised literary groupings more generally.<sup>3</sup> Even though this experience significantly diminished his eagerness to see his works published, he never gave up his efforts entirely as his numerous publications in *Der Brenner* and two collections of poetry assembled in his lifetime clearly show.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, not unlike his poetry, Trakl remained somewhat of a misfit throughout his life and never managed, nor properly attempted, to gain a foothold in the relevant literary environments. He tended to avoid conflict and certainly was not one to defend or push through his agenda by way of lengthy discussions.<sup>5</sup> This could also explain his relatively small theoretical output since the lack of such interactions further entailed a reduced need to explain his poetry and clarify its intentions, be it verbally or on paper. This raises the question of where, besides the poems themselves, his poetics, and more specifically his understanding of rhythm, can be found.

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<sup>3</sup> Hans Weichselbaum, *Georg Trakl: Eine Biographie* (Müller, 2014), pp. 44–45.

<sup>4</sup> Trakl saw only one of the collections published. The collection *Sebastian im Traum*, although it had been print-ready for a while before Trakl's death, was only published posthumously.

<sup>5</sup> Weichselbaum, *Georg Trakl: Eine Biographie*, p. 98.

## Rhythms Outside the Poetry

The only behind-the-scenes insights that Trakl offers consist of a number of observations scattered loosely throughout his correspondence and these rare statements oftentimes do not concern poetry per se nor are they highly elaborate. Looking at a chosen few of these passages might nevertheless allow a first approximation of the poetic concerns important to Trakl and how they are connected to the concept of rhythm. It is by no means possible to construct a fully-fledged theory from these few lines and paragraphs; still, they can provide valuable assistance in shedding light on some important aspects, which can then be unfolded alongside detailed analyses of the poems themselves.

The very first passage to be examined is chronologically the very last that was composed and concerns a pair of concepts that, as will be shown in more detail below, point towards essential features of Trakl's poetry. It is a sentence from an unsent letter to the architect Alfred Loos written in June 1914, less than six months before Trakl's death, intended to accompany a proof copy of his last published collection, *Sebastian im Traum*. In this excerpt, Trakl sets out some explicit demands for his poetry and what it means more generally for a poem to be considered a work of art in the first place:

Wenn diesem Buch auch noch sehr vieles mangelt, vor allem jene Harmonie und Klarheit, die ein Gedicht erst zum Kunstwerk macht, so glaube ich doch, daß an meiner Arbeit jedermann die lebendige Kraft, die den Menschen zu sich selbst führen kann, wird schätzen dürfen; ist mir doch zu Mute, als lernte ich in unsäglicher Mühsal langsam das reden, was die Seele will.<sup>6</sup>

First, Trakl makes clear that the specific art that is poetry for him should convey harmony and clarity, although admitting that both are still lacking in the collection at hand. Second, he regards poetry as a means of self-discovery that is nevertheless intended to be as universal as possible. Although he is aiming at an abstract discovery of the self, for 'den Menschen' per se, the wording

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<sup>6</sup> Georg Trakl, *Dichtungen und Briefe*, ed. by Hans Weichselbaum (Müller, 2020), p. 567. Henceforth cited as DuB.

of the phrase suggests that primarily he might have the reader in mind. The phrase ‘das reden was die Seele will’, however, quite likely also refers to the author, that is himself. Achieving knowledge of the self is indeed a concern that appears to permeate many of Trakl’s poems. The wording of this passage brings to mind as well a line from one of the other poems contained in the collection, titled ‘Frühling der Seele’, which reads: ‘Es ist die Seele ein Fremdes auf Erden’ (DuB, 141). Heidegger’s study of Trakl, ‘Die Sprache im Gedicht: Eine Erörterung von Georg Trakls Gedicht’, famously takes this line as a starting point and comments on it ‘[d]och wie merkwürdig’.<sup>7</sup> Trakl’s comment in this letter remains vague and enigmatic and it proves worthwhile to explore further passages in his correspondence to contextualise the aspects addressed here. It is particularly Trakl’s demand for universality here that points towards at least one further paragraph in his letters addressing quite similar concerns.

The passage in question is found in a letter to Erhard Buschbeck, most likely written in mid-January 1912. Trakl sent a poem, presumably ‘Vorstadt im Föhn’,<sup>8</sup> in the hopes of seeing it published in the Viennese journal *Der Brenner*, to which Buschbeck had close connections.<sup>9</sup> Before posting the poem to his friend, Trakl had subjected it to extensive revisions and enclosed a letter, in which he comments on the final version and its superior quality compared to earlier drafts: ‘Anbei das umgearbeitete Gedicht. Es ist umso viel besser als das ursprüngliche als es nun unpersönlich ist, und zum bersten voll von Bewegung und Gesichtern’ (DuB, 526). The letter then continues with one of the rare passages that allow insights into his poetics and in which he

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<sup>7</sup> Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 36.

<sup>8</sup> Even though Buschbeck himself claims that the poem in question was ‘Klagelied’, this seems unlikely according to the most recent research. For a detailed discussion about the exact dating of this letter and the identity of the enclosed poem see Eberhard Sauermaun, ‘Die Chronologie der Briefe Georg Trakls’, *editio: Internationales Jahrbuch für Editions-wissenschaft*, 4 (1990), pp. 205–28 (pp. 208–12).

<sup>9</sup> Trakl’s hopes were not in vain and he made his debut in *Der Brenner* with this poem in May 1912. Hermann Zwerschina, *Die Chronologie der Dichtungen Georg Trakls* (Inst. für Germanistik, 1990), pp. 252–53.

seemingly elaborates on the first of the three qualities mentioned and his difficulties with achieving it. Trakl asserts the importance of an impersonal artistic achievement devoted to truth and its depiction: ‘Du magst mir glauben, daß es mir nicht leicht fällt und niemals leicht fallen wird, mich bedingungslos dem Darzustellenden unterzuordnen und ich werde mich immer und immer wieder berichtigen müssen, um der Wahrheit zu geben, was der Wahrheit ist’ (DuB, 527). Impersonality thus seems to mean a representation of the facts of the world as they present themselves without interference from the poet. In a sense, this demand is related to the one encountered above in that it argues for the universal validity of the poems. However, while in the first example the reception of the poems is central, here the focus lies on their creation. Hence, for Trakl, an impersonal poem and its universal validity can in turn enable a more generalised notion of self-discovery. While the other two thirds of the assessment, movement and images (for which Trakl employs the somewhat dated term ‘Gesichte’,<sup>10</sup> further implying visions or even religious visitations<sup>11</sup>), remain unaddressed by Trakl, they are most likely not any less important. Both can be expected to play an important role not only in this particular poem but also in the overall conception of his poetics at that time, since he identifies them as essential contributors to what he deems a significant improvement of his work. Although rhythm is not explicitly mentioned in this passage, the concept still lurks in the background of Trakl’s observations, since it is potentially the foremost feature of poetry that is able to depict movement and communicate it effectively beyond the boundaries of mere textual description. As mentioned in the Introduction, rhythm at its most basic level can often be understood as giving a shape and order to movement; in turn, rhythm is able to inspire

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<sup>10</sup> This choice of words also evokes the assonant pairing of ‘Gesichte’ and ‘Gedichte’. A self-referential pun, which for example also appears in the final line of Stefan George’s ‘Komm in den totesagten Park und schau’, where the ‘herbstliche[s] Gesicht’ (SW IV, 12) brings to mind the poem itself, the ‘herbstliches Gedicht’, as it were.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, according to a medical report made shortly before Trakl’s death, he had been experiencing hallucinations occasionally ever since childhood. Georg Trakl, *Dichtungen und Briefe: Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Walther Killy and Hans Szklenar, 2 vols (Müller, 1987), II, p. 729.

movement, as is the case for dance. In Trakl, as will be shown in more detail below, rhythm often emerges as a result of movement depicted in the poems' images and their interactions among themselves.

There are two instances in Trakl's correspondence where he makes use of the term rhythm, albeit both times without explicit connection to poetic concerns. The context, nevertheless, makes it possible to draw a line from these statements to more explicit poetic considerations, as mentioned above. The first mention of rhythm is from a letter to Buschbeck, sent around the end of January 1912, only shortly after the redraft of 'Vorstadt im Föhn' and its accompanying message. The letter was most likely attached to yet another draft of one of Trakl's poems, titled 'Heiterer Frühling', which was to be published in *Der Ruf*, a journal that Buschbeck was co-editing.<sup>12</sup> Here, rhythm appears as a placeholder for the enclosed poem: 'Indem ich Dir diese wenigen Rythmen [*sic*] aus meinem Inferno übermittle, teile ich Dir mit daß ich Eueren Brief erhalten habe' (DuB, 527). Besides rhythm's function as *pars pro toto* for poems, another plausible interpretation is that this line refers to the whole of the letter, implying that 'Rythmen' also references the message itself and therefore takes on a much broader meaning. This extended significance could possibly even entail a general notion of language itself. Both variants, however, certainly share the implication that what is being transmitted here, notwithstanding the exact content, is simply a sign of life and possibly even survival, since the words are being sent 'aus meinem Inferno', a phrasing that also expresses a certain braveness or even recklessness. As seen in the very first excerpt from Trakl's correspondence discussed here, poetry for him carries a universalised importance and plays an important role in understanding life and navigating, or indeed, enduring it. The fact that the word

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<sup>12</sup> For details about the exact dating of the letter and the enclosed poem see Sauer mann, 'Die Chronologie der Briefe Georg Trakls', pp. 219–21; Zwerschina, *Die Chronologie der Dichtungen Georg Trakls*, pp. 181–82.

‘rhythms’ functions as this multivalent metaphor here, suggests strongly that the concept more generally might take on an equally significant role in the poetry itself.

A further mention of the term can be found in yet another, albeit earlier, letter to Buschbeck from the second half of July 1910. In a way, this passage is an amalgam of the previous ones since certain keywords from the later letters are already being used by Trakl. Again, the word rhythm does seem to be used in a rather figurative manner, although with different nuances compared to above:

Aber ich bin derzeit von allzu viel (was für ein infernalisches Chaos von Rythmen [*sic*] und Bildern) bedrängt, als daß ich für anderes Zeit hätte, als dies zum geringsten Teil zu gestalten, um mich am Ende vor dem was man nicht überwältigen kann, als lächerlicher Stümper zu sehen, den der geringste äußere Anstoß in Krämpfe und Delirien versetzt. (DuB, 520)

The background of the letter is the presumed plagiarism of Trakl’s poem ‘Gewitterabend’ by Ludwig Ullmann, which initially caused much upset.<sup>13</sup> Trakl had already addressed the matter in a message to Buschbeck a few days earlier, where he also gave an outline of his personal process of composing poetry, specifically, his ‘bildhafte Manier, die in vier Strophenzeilen vier einzelne Bildteile zu einem einzigen Eindruck zusammenschmiedet’ (DuB, 519). Weichselbaum, for example, considers these two passages in conjunction. He links Trakl’s ‘bildhafte Manier’ with the ‘Reihungsstil’ (which will be discussed in more detail below) slowly emerging in Expressionist poetry at that time,<sup>14</sup> and considers its use as a tool to manage the irritations of the external world, the ‘Chaos von Rythmen und Bildern’.<sup>15</sup> However, a slightly different reading of this particular chaos seems at least equally plausible. The structure and context of the sentence suggests that Trakl is not referring to the external world but rather the poetry he is currently working on. The

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<sup>13</sup> Weichselbaum, *Georg Trakl: Eine Biographie*, p. 82.

<sup>14</sup> For a recent overview of Trakl’s relationship with Expressionism see Peter Sprengel, ‘Trakl und der Expressionismus’, in *Trakl-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, ed. by Philipp Theisohn (Metzler, 2023), pp. 81–88.

<sup>15</sup> Weichselbaum, *Georg Trakl: Eine Biographie*, pp. 86, 91.

confluence of the concepts of rhythm and imagery does invoke poetry reduced to its essential form: a combination of images through and in rhythm. If, in fact, Trakl considers this combination as being synonymous with poetry, then his poetic efforts would most likely be focused on these two elements in particular. Indeed, the wording is very similar to ‘Bewegung und Gesichte’ mentioned above, with the second nouns being for all intents and purposes synonymous, while the first concepts are intimately related.

In summary, five important keywords in the poetics of Georg Trakl emerge from this investigation of his correspondence. First, clarity and harmony as demands integral to his poetic art, second, images and movement as vital contributors to the quality of his poems, and third, most importantly, rhythm, as perhaps the most malleable and elusive of those key notions, taking on a variety of roles. In order to explore the importance of those features for Trakl’s poetry and what role they play in his more general poetic concerns, it is of course necessary to look at their working in the poems themselves. Before doing so, however, I will give an overview of how they connect to some major themes that have emerged in the history of Trakl scholarship to uncover the most salient points of approach when analysing the poems.

## **The Roles of Meaning and Aesthetics**

The very first two keywords, ‘Harmonie und Klarheit’, introduced from Trakl’s letters are perhaps the easiest to grasp conceptually out of the five, but they are arguably also the most difficult to comprehend in the context of his works. His poems often tend to be described as difficult, cryptic, or disharmonious.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it is perhaps neither meaning nor understanding that he has in mind when seeking clarity, and neither unity nor peacefulness when his intention is harmony. It

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<sup>16</sup> In this superficial respect, Trakl’s self-assessment of *Sebastian im Traum* as lacking harmony and clarity could be considered indeed accurate.

is difficult to ascertain the exact meaning of these criteria. Firstly, as mentioned, Trakl did not elaborate further on this comment. Secondly, since he personally did not consider those aims to be completely achieved in *Sebastian im Traum*, the collection does not, in his opinion at least, exemplify these qualities fully and therefore would be a somewhat unreliable source when looking for answers. Thirdly, it is of course never a given that a poet's theoretical considerations are realised and elaborated consistently in the actual poetry. Nevertheless, the poems themselves and associated scholarship are the best choices to turn towards in a search for possible answers.

It is especially the hermetic and interpretatively challenging nature of the poems that has almost become a truism in research on Trakl. In fact, most of recent scholarship essentially defends the assumption 'dass in Trakls Dichtung eine eigenständige, autonome Sprache oder Sprechweise entwickelt wird.' This private language is supposedly based on a limited repertoire of imagery and expressions which are mainly connected through tonal or syntactic relations.<sup>17</sup> Inspired by Trakl's own vocabulary, the metaphor of 'dunkler Wohlklang',<sup>18</sup> or some similar variation of 'dunkler Ton', has frequently been invoked in order to highlight the obscurity and opaqueness of his poetry, paired with his almost musical mode of expression. The two perhaps most famous of the many examples of the proliferation of this metaphor in the community of Trakl critics are Erich Bolli's 1978 monograph *Georg Trakls 'dunkler Wohlklang': Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis seines dichterischen Sprechens*<sup>19</sup> and Albert Berger's study on the language of Trakl's poetry *Dunkelheit und Sprachkunst:*

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<sup>17</sup> Stephan Jaeger, "Die Finsternis flammenden Sturzes": Das Lesen dynamischer Bilder und deiktischer Räume in Georg Trakls Lyrik', in *Bildersprache verstehen: Zur Hermeneutik der Metapher und anderer bildlicher Sprachformen*, ed. by Ruben Zimmermann (Fink, 2000), pp. 363–85 (p. 365).

<sup>18</sup> From the poem 'Abendlied (DuB, 63).

<sup>19</sup> Erich Bolli, *Georg Trakls 'dunkler Wohlklang': Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis seines dichterischen Sprechens* (Artemis, 1978).

*Studien zur Leistung der Sprache in den Gedichten Georg Trakls*;<sup>20</sup> considering their publication dates, this could likely also be the result of a historical trend in scholarship.

In part, this tendency in Trakl's poetry is related to general developments in literature around 1900. A much-repeated claim about European literature, and especially poetry, at that time is that meaning was increasingly losing its importance and that modern writing was becoming progressively more undecipherable. For example, Gotthart Wunberg notes: 'Unverständlichkeit ist die dominante Leseerfahrung mit lyrischen Texten seit der Jahrhundertwende'.<sup>21</sup> He identifies as one of the key contributors to this tendency, among others, the growing autonomisation of individual lexemes brought about by the positivistic historicism that dominated German literature throughout the nineteenth century.

According to him, this eventually led to the development of novel poetic and linguistic techniques intended to destabilise the connection between signifier and signified. This resulted in such 'nonsense'<sup>22</sup> as some of Hofmannsthal's poetry ('Lebenslied' as perhaps the most prominent example), Huysmans's vast catalogues of objects, Marinetti's word-clusters, or, most importantly for the topic at hand, the asyndetically strung-together images in Expressionist poetry.<sup>23</sup> This 'Reihungsstil', which was briefly addressed above, can be found most prominently in famous exponents such as Jakob von Hoddis's 'Weltende' or 'Die Dämmerung' by Alfred Lichtenstein. Trakl's poetry, especially the works of his middle period and a few of the later poems, also often exhibit features that could be considered consistent with this type of Expressionist style.<sup>24</sup> In fact,

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<sup>20</sup> Albert Berger, *Dunkelheit und Sprachkunst: Studien zur Leistung der Sprache in den Gedichten Georg Trakls* (Notring, 1971).

<sup>21</sup> Gotthart Wunberg, *Jahrhundertwende: Studien zur Literatur der Moderne*, ed. by Stephan Dietrich (Narr, 2001), p. 46.

<sup>22</sup> In the most literal sense of the word and without any implied value judgement.

<sup>23</sup> Wunberg, *Jahrhundertwende: Studien zur Literatur der Moderne*, pp. 55–56.

<sup>24</sup> While it has been pointed out in scholarship that one of the major differences between Trakl's and van Hoddis's or Lichtenstein's poetry is the decidedly parodistic and humorous tone of the latter two, they nevertheless all share the

according to Hans-Georg Kemper, it was Trakl himself who was instrumental in the development of the style around 1910.<sup>25</sup> Some scholars, among them Alfred Doppler, even go as far as to suggest that Trakl was the very first German-language poet to demote the leading role of meaning when it came to interpretation: ‘In den Traklschen Gedichten ist somit der Interpret deutscher Lyrik (historisch gesehen) zum ersten Mal mit der Tatsache konfrontiert, daß die symbolische Bedeutungsebene der Worte und Bilder nicht mehr die entscheidende Rolle spielt.’<sup>26</sup> Thus, looking for meaning in his poetry primarily in a hermeneutical sense is bound to be fraught with numerous pitfalls.

The ‘Reihungsstil’ makes heavy use of what Wunberg calls ‘asyndetische Reihung’,<sup>27</sup> whereby the logical progression of poetic images is abandoned in favour of a looser and associative stringing together of disparate perceptions and tableaux. In addition, the images oftentimes subvert standard poetic imagery through increasing obscenity and even outright ugliness.<sup>28</sup> However, while considered collectively and in sequence the images often seem to border on the absurd, this does not need to be the case for the individual images themselves. For example, the singular perceptions presented in Trakl’s earlier works never completely leave the realm of mimetic representation.<sup>29</sup>

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feature of the ‘Reihungsstil’. See for a more detailed discussion Karl Ludwig Schneider, ‘Arbeitsgespräche: Georg Trakl und der Reihungsstil’, in *Salzburger Trakl-Symposion*, ed. by Walter Weiss and Hans Weichselbaum (Müller, 1978), pp. 115–23. Therein, Walter Weiss addresses the differences in more detail and in connection to a certain syntactical dynamism: ‘Mir ist bei Trakl gerade bei diesen reihenden Gedichten aufgefallen, daß ein ganz bestimmtes Satzmodell vorherrscht, nämlich der Aussagesatz gegenüber dem Handlungssatz – und das gilt keineswegs für die expressionistischen Reihungsgedichte. Deshalb entsteht auch der Eindruck, daß sie viel dynamischer seien im Vergleich zu Trakl-Gedichten.’ Schneider, ‘Arbeitsgespräche: Georg Trakl und der Reihungsstil’, pp. 117–18.

<sup>25</sup> Hans-Georg Kemper, “‘Und dennoch sagt der viel, der ‘Trakl’ sagt’”: Zur magischen Verwandlung von sprachlichem “Un-Sinn” in Traklschen “Tief-Sinn””, in *Georg Trakl und die literarische Moderne*, ed. by Károly Csúri (Niemeyer, 2009), pp. 1–30 (p. 5); Hans-Georg Kemper, ‘Vorwort’, in *Gedichte von Georg Trakl*, Universal-Bibliothek, 17511 (Reclam, 1999), pp. 7–10 (p. 9).

<sup>26</sup> Alfred Doppler, ‘Poetische Verfahrensweisen’, in *Die Lyrik Georg Trakls: Beiträge zur poetischen Verfahrensweise und zur Wirkungsgeschichte* (Müller, 2001), pp. 60–71 (p. 67).

<sup>27</sup> Wunberg, *Jahrhundertwende: Studien zur Literatur der Moderne*, p. 138.

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed account of this topic see Christoph Eykman, *Die Funktion des Häßlichen in der Lyrik Georg Heyms, Georg Trakls und Gottfried Benns* (Bouvier, 1985).

<sup>29</sup> In contrast to radically surrealist images such as Lautréamont’s famous encounter between sewing machine and umbrella (‘la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d’une machine à coudre et d’un parapluie’). In Comte de

However, in the course of Trakl's poetic development, the perception of reality is increasingly replaced by the expression of internal experiences, as Christoph Eykman recognises: 'Die empirisch wahrnehmbare reale Welt ist nicht mehr Gegenstand der Mimesis. Der Dichter sucht vielmehr dem innen Geschauten zum Ausdruck zu verhelfen.'<sup>30</sup> According to Karl Ludwig Schneider, his poetry thus presents itself as 'mosaikartige Arrangements von Satzfragmenten und einzelnen Worten, deren gedanklicher Zusammenhang entweder gänzlich fehlt oder verborgen und verwischt ist.'<sup>31</sup> While this is certainly a valid perspective, certain effects in the poetry of Trakl, some of them related to rhythm, allow for a more cohesive reading.

The isolation of images via the 'Reihungsstil' therefore leads to an increasing loss of context for interpretation, obscuring the meaning of the poem as a whole and rendering the hermeneutic process all but impossible. Those tendencies, however, are not only limited to the poems of Trakl written in this particular style, even though they form a large part of his oeuvre. The challenges are also very much present in the poems belonging to his later creative periods up until his death. It is certainly the case that the observation of hermeneutic difficulties has become to some extent commonplace in Trakl scholarship. Among others, Mathias Mayer postulates that, when confronted with his poetry, one has to face an inherent loss of semantic control over the poems.<sup>32</sup> In light of this, Erik Schilling advocates a mainly descriptive approach, which would put the focus on the function of the images rather than their meaning and thus could preserve the poems' polyvalence while still offering some access to them.<sup>33</sup>

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Lautréamont, 'Les Chants de Maldoror', in *Œuvres complètes de Isidore Ducasse*, ed. by Guy Lévis Mano (Agence Centrale de Librairie, 1938), p. 256.

<sup>30</sup> Eykman, *Die Funktion des Häßlichen in der Lyrik Georg Heyms, Georg Trakls und Gottfried Benns*, p. 58.

<sup>31</sup> Karl Ludwig Schneider, *Der bildhafte Ausdruck in den Dichtungen Georg Heyms, Georg Trakls und Ernst Stadlers* (Winter, 1968), p. 89.

<sup>32</sup> Mathias Mayer, 'Nietzsche-Verwerfungen bei Georg Trakl', in *Friedrich Nietzsche und die Literatur der klassischen Moderne*, ed. by Thorsten Valk (De Gruyter, 2009), pp. 87–100 (p. 87).

<sup>33</sup> Schilling, *Liminale Lyrik*, pp. 264–65.

However, as much as these traits of Trakl's poetry complicate the process of interpretation, the poems' idiosyncratic dark tone also gives rise to forms of aesthetic expression and appreciation. In the view of Walther Killy, who categorises Trakl's poems as 'dunkelschöne Gebilde',<sup>34</sup> those elusive qualities form the source of a particular magic that precedes signification and that constitutes the heart of the aesthetic appeal of Trakl's works: 'Diejenigen [Verse, LJD] Trakls sind von einem dunklen Zauber, der fühlbar wird, ehe sich der Sinn erschließt.'<sup>35</sup> In addition, Ludwig Wittgenstein, as perhaps one of the most prominent admirers of Trakl's poetry,<sup>36</sup> expresses a similar sentiment, shortly after the death of the poet, in a letter to Trakl's friend and publisher Ludwig von Ficker, having read the two poems 'Helian' and 'Kaspar Hauser Lied': 'Ich danke Ihnen für die Zusendung der Gedichte Trakls. Ich verstehe sie nicht, aber ihr *Ton* beglückt mich. Es ist der Ton der wahrhaft genialen Menschen.'<sup>37</sup> Thus, these comments suggest that there seems to be a common thread that connects the hermeneutical problems that Trakl's poems typically pose with their particular aesthetic principles. With this relationship between meaning and beauty, the poems further exhibit quintessential modern features, according to Kemper, whereby it is exactly the undecipherable nature of the poems that creates an impression of beauty, which, in turn, restores a certain amount of intelligibility and purpose: 'Deshalb besteht auch zwischen 'schön' und 'unverständlich' eine unauflösliche Interdependenz. Ja, Unverständlichkeit wird verständlich als Bedingung der Schönheit des modernen Gedichts.'<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Walther Killy, 'Bestand und Bewegung in Gedichten Georg Trakls', in *Festschrift für Bernhard Blume: Aufsätze zur deutschen und europäischen Literatur*, ed. by Egon Schwarz, Hunter G. Hannum, and Edgar Lohner (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), pp. 246–57 (p. 249).

<sup>35</sup> Walther Killy, *Wandlungen des lyrischen Bildes* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), p. 113.

<sup>36</sup> Wittgenstein reportedly gifted Trakl the considerable sum of 20.000 Kronen (via their mutual friend Ludwig von Ficker) shortly before the beginning of World War I as a token of his appreciation. However, when trying to collect the money from the bank, Trakl apparently experienced a panic attack and had to abandon the attempt. Rüdiger Görner, *Georg Trakl: Dichter im Jahrzehnt der Extreme* (Zsolnay, 2014), p. 271.

<sup>37</sup> Ludwig von Ficker, *Briefwechsel 1914–1925*, ed. by Ignaz Zangerle and others (Haymon, 1988), p. 53, emphasis in the original.

<sup>38</sup> Kemper, 'Zur magischen Verwandlung von sprachlichem "Un-Sinn" in Traklschen "Tief-Sinn"', p. 29.

In fact, as can be seen in a letter Trakl sent to Irene Amtmann in the first half of October 1911, when it came to beauty, especially an idolised, perfected version of it, he was rather dismissive. According to him, it ran the danger of inducing mindless looking in whoever experienced it:

Man könnte mich vielleicht undankbar schelten, unter diesem wunderbaren reinen Himmel der Heimat so zu sprechen – aber man tut gut daran, sich gegen vollendete Schönheit zu wehren, davor einem nichts erübrigt als ein blödes Schauen. (DuB, 526)

Even though this passage refers to the visual beauty of his homeland's landscape, it is also applicable to his poetry. First and foremost, this is evident from the arguably unpleasant imagery Trakl uses, which prevents the poems from drifting off into 'vollendete Schönheit'. In addition, obscuring meaning and complicating hermeneutic insight has a similar effect; certainly, when it comes to the prevention of 'blödes Schauen'.

All this background confirms the suspicions that 'Harmonie und Klarheit' in Trakl's poems are not found in their conventional manifestations. Indeed, it could very well be that Trakl perhaps had a quite literal, musical definition of harmony in mind when referring to this quality. If so, it could then be found in the musical dimensions of his poetry, briefly addressed above.<sup>39</sup> However, I argue that Trakl's particular understanding of harmony needs to be approached differently. If there is harmony, it is tied to a congruous relationship between individual parts of a single poem or across multiple works;<sup>40</sup> and if there is clarity, it does not relate to any determinable, fixed meaning to be unearthed. Rather than approaching a final and fixed meaning, the important purpose of Trakl's poetry seems to be an iterative process of making sense, of the world, himself, and his poetry alike. Even more so, a process, I argue, inherent in individual, completed poems and not just their various stages of development in time. It stands to reason that pursuing the idea

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<sup>39</sup> For example, see for an engaging analysis of Trakl's poems and their musical interpretations Laura Gerber-Wieland, *Textur in Wort und Klang: Die Lyrik Georg Trakls und die Trakl-Lieder Anton Webers im Spannungsfeld von Sprache und Musik* (Rombach, 2002).

<sup>40</sup> A relationship that a musical mode of expression may quite possibly help to establish.

of rhythm in his poetry could provide insights into this process, judging by the way he uses the word in his letters. Approaching the concept through a detour via two of the other keywords mentioned in the letter, 'Bewegung und Gesichte', proves worthwhile as those are prominent features of his poetry and closely linked to rhythm.

## **Movement, Rhythm, and Images**

In the history of Trakl scholarship, the topic of 'Gesichte', images and visions, has received ample attention, certainly far more than the concept of movement. One reason for this is surely the more extensive definitional range of the former. Imagery, as seen above, is also overtly connected to other key issues such as meaning, interpretation, and the aesthetic in Trakl's oeuvre. Hence, it is indeed reasonable to centre an analysis of these around the images that he employs. While there has been criticism that touched on the subject of movement, much of it uses a rather metaphorical understanding of it when connecting it to the author's works. Walther Killy's essay 'Bestand und Bewegung in Gedichten Georg Trakls',<sup>41</sup> for example, presents a general discussion of the poet with a heavy focus on his biography in light of the qualities mentioned in the title. A further example is Peter von Matt's psychoanalytically informed piece of criticism 'Die Dynamik von Trakls Gedicht',<sup>42</sup> a heuristic approach to Trakl's works that demonstrates the dynamic fluctuation of the reader between assigning meaning and destroying it when engaging with the poems. Along similar lines and perhaps most recently, Stephan Jaeger's 2001 monograph *Theorie lyrischen Ausdrucks: Das 'unmarkierte Zwischen' in Gedichten von Brentano, Eichendorff, Trakl und Rilke*<sup>43</sup> brings the term 'Bewegung' into play by examining a certain approach to reading Trakl's poems

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<sup>41</sup> Killy, 'Bestand und Bewegung'.

<sup>42</sup> Peter von Matt, 'Die Dynamik von Trakls Gedicht', in *Das Schicksal der Phantasie: Studien zur deutschen Literatur* (Hanser, 1994), pp. 277–91.

<sup>43</sup> Stephan Jaeger, *Theorie lyrischen Ausdrucks: Das 'unmarkierte Zwischen' in Gedichten von Brentano, Eichendorff, Trakl und Rilke* (Fink, 2001).

that focusses on lyrical expression. However, none of these critics has chosen to consider the movement found in Trakl's poems in its own right.

One of the very few studies to take movement explicitly into account is Karl-Ludwig Schneider's 1968 analysis of pictorial expression in the works of Heym, Trakl and Stadler. Regarding Trakl, he identifies what he calls the 'dynamisierende Metapher' as one of the most common types of metaphors in Trakl's oeuvre. Its function – according to Schneider – mainly consists of animating inanimate objects, while never reaching the status of full personification.<sup>44</sup> However, his analysis remains largely concerned with broader linguistic observations and thus lacks close readings of Trakl's poems that would enable a more nuanced investigation of the role that is afforded to movement. Although Schneider's findings do remain rather superficial (at least as far as movement is concerned), his results nevertheless underline the close relationship between imagery and movement that Trakl's letter above also articulates.

Besides Trakl's letter mentioned above, the importance of an analysis of his poetry along the lines of movement is also exposed in a quantitative analysis of the bare material. This reveals the most common verbs to be, besides 'sein' (with a total of 493 occurrences), 'gehen' (124), sinken (96), 'sehen' (89) and 'fallen' (85).<sup>45</sup> From this raw data alone, a prominent tendency of Trakl's poetry can be glimpsed. Often sombre in tone, his works feature scenes of decay and demise – 'Verfall'; he even initially planned on publishing his first collection 'Gedichte' under the title 'Dämmerung und Verfall'.<sup>46</sup> While this approach of course only offers rather superficial insights, it still suggests that a closer inspection of concepts of movement is bound to reveal important aspects about Trakl's poetry.

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<sup>44</sup> Schneider, *Der bildhafte Ausdruck*, pp. 143–46.

<sup>45</sup> Heinz Wetzel, *Konkordanz zu den Dichtungen Georg Trakls* (Müller, 1971), p. 813.

<sup>46</sup> Killy, 'Bestand und Bewegung', p. 249.

As above, these aspects also include the aesthetic qualities of Trakl's poetry. Görner, for example, considers the slow movements of Trakl's poetry as an act of resistance, beauty taking a stand against the increasing ugliness of the times:

Denn Trakls Lyrik ist in erster Linie entschleunigte Bewegung, gelegentlich beinahe anti-kinetisch, angstvoll, aber anti-nervös und doch von sprachdramatischem Eigenwert und ästhetischem Eigen-Sinn. Sie versteht sich als *pro memoria* des Schönen in einer dezidiert unschön werdenden Zeit.<sup>47</sup>

This assessment is similar to Kemper's opinion above, according to which the incomprehensibility of the poems is the precursor of their aesthetic appeal. Therefore, in a way, both movement and the perceived hermeticism in the poetry are considered two sides of the same coin in that they both work in the service of aesthetic creation. However, keeping in mind Trakl's statement mentioned above, in which he declares himself against 'vollendete Schönheit' and the thoughtless beholding it induces, it is clear that in order to generate the intended aesthetic effect both movement as well as hermeticism also have to work *against* beauty in a certain way.

As stated earlier, there is a close connection between movement and rhythm. On the one hand, linguistic rhythm, for example, manages to convey movement independently of a description on the level of content. On the other hand, images of movement and the movement of images in a poem can create a singular kind of rhythm that is not directly connected to any linguistic features. Just as the former cannot be solely explained by the language of linguistics and metre, the latter is not exhaustively explained through hermeneutic means.

What is more, Trakl's usage of the word 'rhythm' in his letters point towards the role the concept plays in the mediation between his poetry and his involvement in the world. Rhythm appears as a component that he considers integral to his writings, even employing it as a general placeholder for his poems. In addition, it takes on the role of embodying circumstances external

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<sup>47</sup> Görner, *Georg Trakl: Dichter im Jahrzehnt der Extreme*, p. 145, emphasis in the original.

to his poetry, particular living conditions or challenges that, on the one hand, might threaten the possibility of creative production. On the other hand, the double role that Trakl assigns to rhythm in this sense also means that it is able to function as a gateway for the world to enter his poems and a means of coping with factors possibly beyond his grasp and control, a specific process of making sense, as mentioned above and important in the context of one of the most striking formal changes in his oeuvre, free rhythms.

### **First Free Rhythms**

Before moving onto the elements of movement and imagery and the role both play in the rhythmical architecture of Trakl's poems, I would like to begin by discussing free rhythms in his works. When Trakl first began writing poetry, his style was very much in keeping with more traditional approaches. Before adopting his 'Manier' of the 'Reihungsstil' mentioned above, for example, his poems generally adhered to a strict metre and rhyme scheme. However, it did not take long for him to develop a way of writing that was entirely his own, albeit also not entirely disconnected from certain historical and also contemporaneous developments in German-language poetry. As mentioned, one of the most striking formal changes in his work, aside from the 'Reihungsstil', after the initial abandonment of regular schemes and rhyme schemes is his subsequent orientation toward the use of free rhythms in the later and last stages of his work.

In general, scholarship considers this important stylistic change to be most distinctly marked by Trakl's poem 'Psalm', published at the start of October 1912.<sup>48</sup> While first indications of these significant developments can certainly be found in other, slightly earlier poems, such as 'Klagelied' for example, which will be discussed in more detail below, 'Psalm' nevertheless constitutes an

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<sup>48</sup> It was most likely written just the month prior. Zwerschina, *Die Chronologie der Dichtungen Georg Trakls*, p. 228.

important pivotal moment, after which free rhythms can be considered quite firmly fixed in Trakl's works and his style fundamentally changed. The poem is furthermore important in that together with similar poems such as 'De profundis' it has laid the foundation for other such 'Gegenpsalme' in the later development of German-language poetry, most notably Paul Celan's 'Psalm' or 'Tenebrae'.<sup>49</sup>

Still, although 'Psalm' may be the first highly prominent example of his use of free rhythms, it certainly only marks the beginning of a henceforth continually changing and developing characteristic of Trakl's style in the later and last stages of his work. Those developments are important not only for his own poetry but indeed for the history of German-language poetry in its entirety, as Dietz recognises:

Nicht nur, weil diese [free rhythms, LJD] in weit höherem Grade Mißverständnissen ausgesetzt sind als die tradierten Vers- und Gedichtformen, sondern vor allem, weil diese 'freyrhythmischen' Formen bei Trakl auf dergestalt eigenartige und selbstständige Weise weiterentwickelt und verwandelt werden, daß man sie – zusammen mit ähnlichen Versuchen Rilkes – als eine der großen formalen Errungenschaften moderner Lyrik werten muß.<sup>50</sup>

What exactly those inventions and transformations look like will be discussed in detail on the basis of an analysis of one of his most famous poems, 'Grotek'. For now, however, considering 'Psalm' can help shed light on some of the features that appear characteristic for Trakl's personal style of free rhythm, in particular at the very beginning of this stage in his creative development.

Es ist ein Licht, das der Wind ausgelöscht hat.  
 Es ist ein Heidekrug, den am Nachmittag ein Betrunkener verläßt.  
 Es ist ein Weinberg, verbrannt und schwarz mit Löchern voll Spinnen.  
 Es ist ein Raum, den sie mit Milch getüncht haben.  
 Der Wahnsinnige ist gestorben. Es ist eine Insel der Südsee,  
 Den Sonnengott zu empfangen. Man rührt die Trommeln.  
 Die Männer führen kriegerische Tänze auf.  
 Die Frauen wiegen die Hüften in Schlinggewächsen und Feuerblumen,  
 Wenn das Meer singt. O unser verlorenes Paradies.

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<sup>49</sup> Achim Geisenhanslüke, 'Trakls lyrische Einflüsse und Intertexte', in *Trakl-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, ed. by Philipp Theisohn (Metzler, 2023), pp. 71–79 (p. 78).

<sup>50</sup> Ludwig Dietz, *Die lyrische Form Georg Trakls* (Müller, 1959), p. 12.

Die Nymphen haben die goldenen Wälder verlassen.  
 Man begräbt den Fremden. Dann hebt ein Flimmerregen an.  
 Der Sohn des Pan erscheint in Gestalt eines Erdarbeiters,  
 Der den Mittag am glühenden Asphalt verschläft.  
 Es sind kleine Mädchen in einem Hof in Kleidchen voll herzerreißender Armut!  
 Es sind Zimmer, erfüllt von Akkorden und Sonaten.  
 Es sind Schatten, die sich vor einem erblindeten Spiegel umarmen.  
 An den Fenstern des Spitals wärmen sich Genesende.  
 Ein weißer Dampfer am Kanal trägt blutige Seuchen herauf.

Die fremde Schwester erscheint wieder in jemens bösen Träumen.  
 Ruhend im Haselgebüsch spielt sie mit seinen Sternen.  
 Der Student, vielleicht ein Doppelgänger, schaut ihr lange vom Fenster nach.  
 Hinter ihm steht sein toter Bruder, oder er geht die alte Wendeltreppe herab.  
 Im Dunkel brauner Kastanien verblaßt die Gestalt des jungen Novizen.  
 Der Garten ist im Abend. Im Kreuzgang flattern die Fledermäuse umher.  
 Die Kinder des Hausmeisters hören zu spielen auf und suchen das Gold des Himmels.  
 Endakkorde eines Quartetts. Die kleine Blinde läuft zitternd durch die Allee,  
 Und später tastet ihr Schatten an kalten Mauern hin, umgeben von Märchen und heiligen Legenden.

Es ist ein leeres Boot, das am Abend den schwarzen Kanal heruntertreibt.  
 In der Düsternis des alten Asyls verfallen menschliche Ruinen.  
 Die toten Waisen liegen an der Gartenmauer.  
 Aus grauen Zimmern treten Engel mit kotgefleckten Flügeln.  
 Würmer tropfen von ihren vergilbten Lidern.  
 Der Platz vor der Kirche ist finster und schweigsam, wie in den Tagen der Kindheit.  
 Auf silbernen Sohlen gleiten frühere Leben vorbei  
 Und die Schatten der Verdammten steigen zu den seufzenden Wassern nieder.  
 In seinem Grab spielt der weiße Magier mit seinen Schlangen.

Schweigsam über der Schädelstätte öffnen sich Gottes goldene Augen.  
 (DuB, 53-54)

As implied by the conventional understanding of the term free rhythms, this poem exhibits neither any discernible regular metre nor rhyme scheme. In his analysis, Dietz refers to it as 'erste Versuche in reimlosen Versen ohne festes Metrum'.<sup>51</sup> As the title suggests, the overall tone of the text is Biblical and is quite probably even an explicit reference to Psalm 130.<sup>52</sup> One of the major influences for Trakl when writing the poem was the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud, a fact that has often been

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<sup>51</sup> Dietz, *Die lyrische Form Georg Trakls*, p. 91.

<sup>52</sup> Görner, *Georg Trakl: Dichter im Jahrzehnt der Extreme*, p. 131.

noted in scholarship.<sup>53</sup> With metre and rhyme missing, most of the more conventional rhythm-facilitating formal features are absent, however, there are certainly other elements here that create a strong sense of rhythm.

Immediately striking in this regard are the incantation-like, anaphoric repetitions in the first four lines, with smaller echoes of this formula occasionally appearing throughout the rest of the poem.<sup>54</sup> As is the case for large parts of the poem, this particular phrasing is heavily influenced by Rimbaud.<sup>55</sup> These first four lines imbue the beginning of the poem with a strong rhythmical sense of immediacy and urgency, setting the tone for everything that follows. All the subsequent images and scenes then appear against the backdrop of this insistent initial beat, which is occasionally recalled by subsequent references to the characteristic opening phrasing. In a way, the regularity of a steady metre is thus replaced by the persistent presence of this short, rhythmical unit, which does not carry much meaning of its own but rather acts as a linguistic pointer, not entirely unlike how some stresses function in metrical patterns.

Another important and perhaps even the most prevalent element related to rhythm in the poem is also closely related to phrasing on a macro-level rather than smaller rhythmical units. This effect emerges mostly through the interactions of the sentences and the length of the individual lines. At first glance, it is obvious that the line endings mostly tend to coincide with the endings of the individual sentences (there are only five lines in total where this is not the case). Only occasionally is the integrity of a sentence subordinated to the structure given by the lines and there is not a

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<sup>53</sup> See for example Richard Millington, *The Gentle Apocalypse: Truth and Meaning in the Poetry of Georg Trakl* (Camden House, 2020), p. 83.

<sup>54</sup> 'De Profundis', written almost at the same time as 'Psalm', also begins with the same anaphoric structure.

<sup>55</sup> Millington, *The Gentle Apocalypse: Truth and Meaning in the Poetry of Georg Trakl*, p. 85.

single instance of enjambment proper throughout the entirety of the poem.<sup>56</sup> In this regard, Trakl's adoption of free rhythms here is to a large extent still indebted to the conventions that govern the 'Reihungsstil' in that each line appears to present a self-contained image with little to no logical connections to the surrounding lines. The effect of this is still very much one of isolation, presenting each of the images as a self-sufficient part of a longer series of beats. However, this impression is at least partly counteracted by the anaphoric, pulse-like beginning of the poem that gives rise to the illusion of a fragile semantic coherence, the echoes of which are then sustained throughout rest the poem.

This sense of a larger semantic connection at play in the poem further points towards one of the most significant changes in this poem as compared to Trakl's earlier works, according to Millington. In his view, the significant innovation of 'Psalm', beyond the use of free rhythms, is 'that the speaker's historical consciousness has now become more sustained and explicit'.<sup>57</sup> This would mean that with the formal changes related to the introduction of free rhythms into his poetry, Trakl also managed to integrate a poem's individual perspective more coherently into the larger context given by a more general and perhaps even superior context of meaning. On the one hand, this development brings to mind Trakl's demands for poetry, one of which is that it must be first and foremost impersonal, a requirement which 'Psalm', in the light of this reading, certainly achieves. On the other hand, it might be possible to connect this turning point in his poetry to certain conceptions surrounding rhythm that Trakl mentioned in his letters. 'Psalm' thus articulates a desire that was very much a concern of his also in real life, where the 'Chaos von Rythmen und Bildern' ran the risk of encroaching on him and his poetry. This desire is the

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<sup>56</sup> While in this case the sentences form the most important rhythmical units and are considered above the order given by the lines, this power dynamic appears reversed in the poems written shortly before Trakl's death. This will be discussed in more detail in the analysis of 'Grodek' below.

<sup>57</sup> Millington, *The Gentle Apocalypse: Truth and Meaning in the Poetry of Georg Trakl*, p. 88.

blending in of a smaller part, be it oneself or a poem, into the wider frame of a complex of meaning, be it the environment of daily life or an overarching historical perspective. This could also be an instance of Trakl's process of making sense, the impetus to integrate smaller parts into the whole of a larger cohesive complex. Thus, the rather radical detachment from metre and rhyme visible in 'Psalm', can also be understood to mark a certain shift in Trakl's attitude towards meaning. It appears as if the loosened linguistic and prosodic restraints allowed him a more flexible approach towards integrating his poems into a larger context of interpretation, which in turn provides them with a sturdier footing as far as sense-making is concerned.

In conclusion, the rhythmical features of Trakl's early uses of free rhythm still retain certain characteristics of the 'Reihungsstil' that was mostly dominating in his poems before 'Psalm'. However, it is certain that his poetry underwent significant changes that influenced his works well into the later creative periods. One of the most striking attributes of these new developments is the interplay between sentence structure and the organisation of the lines in the poem. In the early phase of Trakl's forays into free rhythm, this mostly manifests itself in shorter sentences that are superior to the order imposed by the lines. A contrast to this will be 'Grodek', discussed below, where this hierarchy is upended, giving rise to interlocking structures. In addition, with the introduction of free rhythms, Trakl also found opportunities to embed his poems into wider contexts, in this case a historical one, as an expression of his desire to make sense of his works and the world around him. It is especially this incentive which will become even more prominent in the later stages of his poetry, as the analysis of 'Grodek' below will show.

### **'Vorstadt im Föhn' and 'Klagelied': 'Bewegung und Gesichte'**

In order to begin a closer investigation of movement, imagery, rhythm, and the connections between them in the poetry, it is worth taking a closer look at the poems 'Vorstadt im Föhn' and 'Klagelied', as suggested by the context of Trakl's letter to Buschbeck. As mentioned, research

strongly supports the hypothesis that the poem sent with the letter is ‘Vorstadt im Föhn’ rather than ‘Klagelied’, contrary to what Buschbeck himself suggested. Nevertheless, an examination and comparison of both works along the lines of ‘Bewegung und Gesichte’ can provide valuable insights not only regarding the individual poems but also more general tendencies in Trakl’s oeuvre. As will be clear at first glance, both works present themselves quite differently right from the start even though they were both written between the end of 1911 and the beginning of 1912.<sup>58</sup>

‘Vorstadt im Föhn’ will be analysed first since its style is perhaps most representative of the overall tendencies prevalent in this period of Trakl’s oeuvre. It was written at the end of 1911 and first published in the journal *Der Brenner* the following year.<sup>59</sup>

Am Abend liegt die Stätte öd und braun,  
Die Luft von gräulichem Gestank durchzogen.  
Das Donnern eines Zugs vom Brückenbogen –  
Und Spatzen flattern über Busch und Zaun.

Geduckte Hütten, Pfade wirr verstreut,  
In Gärten Durcheinander und Bewegung,  
Bisweilen schwillt Geheul aus dumpfer Regung,  
In einer Kinderschar fliegt rot ein Kleid.

Am Kehricht pfeift verliebt ein Rattenchor.  
In Körben tragen Frauen Eingeweide,  
Ein ekelhafter Zug voll Schmutz und Räude,  
Kommen sie aus der Dämmerung hervor.

Und ein Kanal speit plötzlich feistes Blut  
Vom Schlachthaus in den stillen Fluß hinunter.  
Die Föhne färben karge Stauden bunter  
Und langsam kriecht die Röte durch die Flut.

Ein Flüstern, das in trübem Schlaf ertrinkt.  
Gebilde gaukeln auf aus Wassergräben,  
Vielleicht Erinnerung an ein früheres Leben,  
Die mit den warmen Winden steigt und sinkt.

Aus Wolken tauchen schimmernde Alleen,  
Erfüllt von schönen Wägen, kühnen Reitern.

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<sup>58</sup> Zwerschina, *Die Chronologie der Dichtungen Georg Trakls*, pp. 210, 252–53.

<sup>59</sup> Zwerschina, *Die Chronologie der Dichtungen Georg Trakls*, pp. 252–53.

Dann sieht man auch ein Schiff auf Klippen scheitern  
 Und manchmal rosenfarbene Moscheen.  
 (DuB, 49)

Formally, the poem is rather conventional. It consists of six strophes of four lines each written in iambic pentameter and follows a regular enclosed rhyme scheme. Its content, however, and especially in combination with some details of its formal features, is anything but conventional. The poem depicts tableaux of a city in turmoil, supposedly caused by the strong Föhn winds sweeping through it.<sup>60</sup> On the surface, a quasi-apocalyptic scene is presented, not entirely dissimilar from other works of early Expressionist poetry such as van Hoddiss's 'Weltende', or Georg Heym's 'Die Vorstadt', both published in 1911.<sup>61</sup> 'Vorstadt im Föhn' adheres to the principles of Trakl's 'Manier' mentioned above, many of which are most noticeable in his middle period and largely congruent with features of the Expressionist 'Reihungsstil'. For the most part, singular images confined to individual lines are presented in rapid succession, connected, if at all, more by associative similarities than a coherent textual structure. Recalling Trakl's own litmus test, the poem is supposed to be 'unpersönlich' and 'voller Bewegung und Gesichte', which, according to Wechselbaum, is foremost a way to cope with the sensory overload of industrialised modern life at that time, an overwhelming chaos of rhythm and images.<sup>62</sup> There certainly can be no doubt that 'Gesichte' form an integral part of the poem, as they are even invoked almost literally in the fifth strophe: 'Gebilde gaukeln auf aus Wassergräben'. However, I would suggest that their distinct effect only fully unfolds in the interplay with the movements in them and through the wider context of the rhythms of the poem as a whole.

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<sup>60</sup> The city in question is most likely Salzburg. According to Görner, Salzburg is, in fact, the only location in Trakl's poetry that is consistently and conclusively identifiable. Rüdiger Görner, *Landschaft im (Alp-)Traum: Zu einem Motiv Georg Trakls im erweiterten Umfeld*, ed. by Sabine Eickenrodt and Jozef Tancer, Pressburger Akzente, 5 (édition lumière, 2014), p. 16.

<sup>61</sup> Sprengel, 'Trakl und der Expressionismus', p. 85.

<sup>62</sup> Wechselbaum, *Georg Trakl: Eine Biographie*, p. 91.

One important aspect concerning rhythm in the context of this poem is the fact that most of it is created independently of the order imposed by the metre. As mentioned, the metrical structure is dominated by a regular iambic pentameter with barely any irregularities. Rhythm, in this poem, gains most of its saliency not due to metre or possible aberrations in it, but rather through the configurations of the images and interactions between them, patterns of movement, and linguistic or prosodic features such as punctuation and rhyme. Looking at these effects more closely can offer valuable insights into Trakl's relationship with rhythm in so far as they help to illustrate the importance of the concept for his earlier poetry, which stands in stark contrast to his later and last works, where rhythm is arguably more visible due to his abandoning of regular metrical structures and adopting a style mostly dominated by free rhythms, as the analysis of 'Psalm' revealed and which will be looked at in more detail below.

To begin with, 'Vorstadt im Föhn' is indeed impersonal. First evidence for this is the fact that no discernible lyric subject appears in the poem.<sup>63</sup> In addition, most of the images concern inanimate nature or flora and fauna; only few human figures appear in the rapidly painted juxtapositions of impressions. When they do appear, it is only as a generalised part of an anonymous collective such as 'Kinderschar' or 'Frauen'. In the case of the latter this anonymisation even reaches an almost dehumanising extent, as they are described as an 'ekelhafter Zug voll Schmutz und Räude'. This image combines a biological element, as it constitutes an echo of the 'Rattenchor' mentioned two lines earlier, with a mechanical component, recalling the train mentioned in the first strophe. It therefore denies the women any form of natural individuality in

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<sup>63</sup> Although I would argue that this is not a necessary criterion for a poem's claim to universality, it can be a sufficiently important one.

a twofold manner. In general, the poem's figurations of disgust are linked to a 'Körperlichkeitsdiskurs', as Björn Hayer notes, and which adds to the general air of impersonality.<sup>64</sup>

Regarding the 'Kinderschar' things are a little different. Even though it is still an anonymous collective noun, this is put into perspective by the striking speck of colour that is the red dress that leaps from the faceless crowd of children.<sup>65</sup> However, it remains a generalised description rather than an individual, personal one. As will be shown below, this image does nevertheless play another important role in the interpretation of the poem. There are also other markers that could suggest an involved, human perspective implicit in the poem, though this is most likely not the case. For example, the only emotion that is explicitly mentioned, 'verliebt', is attributed to the faceless mass of rats and the sole sign of a human utterance, '[e]in Flüstern', dies away unheard. It seems that for Trakl, in this poem, 'unpersönlich' not only meant the withdrawal of the personality of the author from the poem to achieve a point of view as universal as possible, but also, in a sense, the removal of any human perspective whatsoever.

Concerning the roles of movement and rhythm in the poem, there are several elements that can potentially interact with each other and need to be considered together. For one, there is the movement depicted in the individual images, then, on a macro-level, a certain direction of movement of the poem in its entirety, which in part emerges through interaction of various movements on a smaller scale. As far as rhythm is concerned, there are, of course, phenomena of linguistic rhythm that need to be considered, but also structural elements, such as strophes and lines, and the interaction between these two facilitators of rhythms. As mentioned, the images, the

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<sup>64</sup> Björn Hayer, 'Vorstadt im Föhn', in *Trakl-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, ed. by Philipp Theisohn (Metzler, 2023), pp. 247–48 (p. 247).

<sup>65</sup> This image brings to mind the girl in the red coat from Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List*, who is both a symbol of innocence and striking individuality against the backdrop of the Nazis' transgressions and urge for Gleichschaltung.

way they are ordered and potentially repeated, also contribute to a sense of rhythm, which can interact with the linguistic and structural elements.

On the micro-level, the rhythm of the images is defined and dominated by the movement depicted in them. There are barely any images that are completely devoid of any sign of movement, even if it is only implied, for example the ‘Donnern eines Zugs vom Brückenbogen’. The individual movements of the images combine to give an overall rhythmic impression of the poem, that can be identified as a correlate to the winds. Each strophe has the tendency to start with downwards movements and finish with upward motions in the second half. The first strophe, for example, begins ‘liegt die Stätte’, while the final line depicts the hectic upwards fluttering of sparrows; or the ‘geduckte Hütten’ in the second strophe’s first line are contrasted by the flying red dress in the last line. This flying red speck of colour is then further complemented by the blood-spewing channel of the slaughterhouse in the fourth strophe. Thus, the overall rhythmic impression determined by the images is an undulating up-and-down, much like the ‘Gebilde’ in the poem, which ‘mit den warmen Winden steigt und sinkt’.

Görner identifies a different kind of overarching movement in this poem, more purposeful and progressive than erratic and undulating, comparable to ‘einem *per aspera ad astra*, einem Weg vom Ekelhaften ins Schöne, von der blutigen Wirklichkeit in die “rosenfarbene” Verklärung als gesteigertem Schein’.<sup>66</sup> This progression is certainly recognisable, albeit, I would argue, constantly subverted through the changeable logic suggested by the rising and falling movements of the titular winds depicted in the poem’s images. For this reason, I would disagree with a rather strict teleological reading, something also supported by the image of the capsizing ship in the penultimate line. In fact, the final strophe could convincingly be read as a depiction of the

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<sup>66</sup> Görner, *Georg Trakl: Dichter im Jahrzehnt der Extreme*, p. 102, emphasis in the original.

‘Gebilde’, the potential ‘Erinnerungen an ein früheres Leben’ mentioned in the line before and thus would rather point towards a retreat into realms of sheltered and glorified recollection than hopeful and exploratory transfiguration. However, as Hayer notes, as the poem progresses it notably moves successively from the profane to the metaphysical.<sup>67</sup> This is supported, I argue, by the almost mirage-like property of the Föhn to enhance visibility, seemingly bringing into reach visions of faraway places of longing, yet without the realistic possibility of ever reaching them.<sup>68</sup>

When it comes to the role of rhythm in the language and its interactions with the imagery, it is necessary to look beyond metre, not least since the regularity of it in ‘Vorstadt im Föhn’ renders a dialogue between itself and the images rather improbable. Trakl himself suggests as much, when he describes his ‘bildhafte Manier’, the mechanism he put at the heart of his poetic expression at that time (DuB, 519). For this technique, possibly for the Expressionistic ‘Reihungsstil’ in general, the essential unit is the image, typically contained in a single, almost isolated, line. Therefore, it may be necessary to broaden the focus and look beyond metre for rhythmic patterning that can interact with the images. At first glance, the poem seems to adhere quite faithfully to the mode of the ‘Reihungsstil’, but a closer inspection reveals a much more intricate composition of relationships between lines and images that is dependent on syntactic features and punctuation, as well as the rhyme scheme, which itself acts as a linguistic binding agent between individual lines. This, in turn, facilitates the emergence of certain rhythmical patterns that play an important role not only in this poem but in other parts of Trakl’s oeuvre as well.

As mentioned, the rhyme scheme throughout the poem is a regular enclosing rhyme. This means that the connections between images in the first and final line of each strophe and,

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<sup>67</sup> Hayer, ‘Vorstadt im Föhn’, p. 248.

<sup>68</sup> Although the mechanisms behind each phenomenon are entirely different, the optical illusions caused by Föhn winds and a Fata Morgana are comparable.

respectively, the two middle lines are perceived more pronounced than for other, non-rhyming combinations of lines. In addition, there is the tendency of the first half of strophes, as described above, to depict images with downwards-directed movement, while the second half tends to provide an upwards moving contrast. These clashing inclinations form the source of a subtle basic tension inherent in the poem between the conjunctive function of the rhyme and the diverging contents of the images, thereby subtly subverting the linguistic connection. On the one hand, this effect underlines the already existing tension in the different movements of the images. On the other hand, it is a further argument against a potential teleological reading of the poem, since no resolution of the tension is reached.

In contrast to the perceived stability of the formal features such as rhyme and metre, Trakl's use of punctuation in this poem offers much more variance and enters into an additional dialogue with the images and their content. Comparing the punctuation across all the strophes, some patterns can be identified. For example, the first, fourth and sixth strophes exhibit a similar structure, whereby the first two and the last two lines, respectively, form a complete sentence ending with a full stop. Here again, the rhyme scheme is a source of tension, this time in conjunction with the syntactic coupling. Strophes three and five also share a syntactic setup, in that their first lines contain a short, isolated sentence, with the last three lines combined into one overarching, longer sentence. Only the second strophe with its single sentence spanning the whole four lines does not have a counterpart in the poem. Looking at the first strophe, each line describes only a single image, all of which are nevertheless not entirely independent of each other. The description of the air in the second line connects to the setting mentioned in the first and the dash that concludes the third line creates the effect of the thundering sound of the train seemingly dissipating both into the following line, across the boundaries of the rhyme scheme, and the blank space of the page. It is perhaps the most striking line transition in the poem, considering that it is the only line ending in

a dash. Some lines conclude unpunctuated, namely the first and third in the fourth strophe and the second to last line of the final strophe. Especially the first of these three is noteworthy in the context of this poem since it contains the only enjambement. Regarding the syntax and structure of the lines, the only difference between the first and last strophe is the above-mentioned dash. In fact, looking at the content, it would have been somewhat more appropriate to place it in the sixth strophe instead, emphasising the almost hopeful, dreamlike tone of the poem's concluding line.

While the lines of the poem mostly follow the Expressionist logic of the 'Reihungsstil', their relationships and linguistic elements such as syntax and punctuation reveals a more intricate configuration. The composition of the third and fifth strophes, for example, is based around a single image in their first lines that sets the theme and tone for the following three lines. On the one hand, this effect again counteracts the perceived coherence signalled by the enclosing rhymes. On the other hand, and this is especially the case in the third strophe, it intensifies the oddity and shock of the conflation between the crowd of women and the mass of scavenging rats.

As already alluded to above, of particular importance for the poem's message and its aesthetic configuration is the image of the red dress flashing in the crowd of children in the second strophe: 'In einer Kinderschar fliegt rot ein Kleid.' For one, although it remains an essentially anonymous symbol, it nevertheless imbues the otherwise wholly impersonal setting of the poem with a sense of individuality. With this, it stands in for the process of integrating the self into the poem without jeopardising the generalised artistic integrity of the work of art that is the poem. The image provides an insight into the process of self-discovery that Trakl is aiming for in his works. Again, movement plays an important role for this, since the image is not static, the dress becomes perceptible because it is in motion, 'fliegt', and not just solely *is*.

It would also be possible to read this passage with respect to Trakl's relationship to meaning and how it appears or is produced in poetry. The flashing image of the red dress could stand in

paradigmatically for certain points of crystallisation in his poems, to which meaning can adhere, yet a final semantic fixation is held constantly just out of reach. On the one hand, this highlights the processual nature of his approach towards meaning. On the other hand, it provides something of a counterpart to the approach towards sense-making that 'Psalm' presented. There, the process is figured as the integration of a smaller part into the larger context of a more encompassing whole, whereas here it is a small, singular expression of individuality that stands out against a backdrop of a wider scene of indifference. What both have in common, however, is their attitude towards the ephemeral and aporetic nature of sense-making.

With regard to Trakl's aesthetics, the image is important as it exemplifies a process by which he intends to keep the 'vollendete Schönheit' at bay. The image in itself does have an inherent beauty. Indeed, in the eyes of Barbara Frischmuth, for example, it is 'eine der schönsten Lyrikzeilen, die ich kenne'.<sup>69</sup> Yet, this impression is soon counteracted by the poem, when, two strophes later, the red dress reappears, transformed into the blood that gushes from the slaughterhouse into the river. Beauty, then, is suddenly transformed into abject ugliness, which nevertheless still retains its aesthetic merit, not least because of the fact that it is integrated into the overall composition of the poem and so closely linked to the image from which it originates.

In his interpretation of the poem, Görner specifically comments on the degree of intentionality that contributed to the poem and the effect it has on the reader:

Diese Gedichte, 'Vorstadt im Föhn' gewiss, gleichen Nährböden für geistig-emotionale Miasmen. Beim Lesen und Hören dieser Gedichte herrscht akute Ansteckungsgefahr, die vor allem darin besteht, dass der kritische Widerstand gegen diese Art des Dichtens langsam erlahmt, noch verstärkt durch die hypnotische Wirkung, die von diesen Gedichten ausgeht. Es wäre zu plump, davon auszugehen, Trakl habe mit solchen Gedichten Selbsthypnose betrieben. Denn das setzt seitens des

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<sup>69</sup> Barbara Frischmuth, 'Flüstern und gaukeln', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 12 July 1997, section Bilder und Zeiten, p. B4.

Dichters ein Ausmaß an Intentionalität und subtiler Reflektiertheit voraus, das sich in dieser Form bei Trakl nicht nachweisen lässt.<sup>70</sup>

While this quotation suggests that the intentions and effects of the poem were perhaps not as clear to Trakl himself as they present themselves, it nevertheless touches upon an important aspect. In a way, the poem could be considered an attempt at self-inoculation, a possible antidote to the external ‘Chaos von Rythmen und Bildern’ that Trakl describes in his letters. By manifesting poetically the very things that besiege his existence in the environment of the real world, he manages to harness those intrusions in a productive manner and pass this effect also onto the readers. A substantial element of this effect are the poem’s rhythmical properties. On the one hand, the regularity of the metre and rhyme scheme establish a hypnotic undertow, helping to pull author and reader alike into the visions conjured up in the poem; a consequence that the macro-level organisation of rhythm also supports. On the other hand, the occasional rhythmical aberrations embedded into this ostensible smoothness do not only underpin the imagery but also tend to create a certain resistance to them.

In the following, looking at ‘Klagelied’, the focus will shift towards different themes even though the discussion still centres on questions of rhythm, movement, and images. As mentioned, Buschbeck, quite probably erroneously, identified ‘Klagelied’ (published only as part of the ‘Nachlass’) and not ‘Vorstadt im Föhn’ as being the poem attached to Trakl’s letter.<sup>71</sup> Although both poems were written at roughly the same time, it is obvious at a first glance that the following is a very different kind of poetry compared to ‘Vorstadt im Föhn’. However, an analysis along the

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<sup>70</sup> Görner, *Georg Trakl: Dichter im Jahrzehnt der Extreme*, p. 104.

<sup>71</sup> Before research revealed that Trakl’s letter most likely does not refer to ‘Klagelied’ but ‘Vorstadt im Föhn’ instead, most scholarship, understandably, tended to interpret the poem as though it were the text in question. Hans Esselborn, for example, considers this version of the poem a sort of ‘Selbstzensur’, a redraft of an earlier poem, which was ‘ein Jugendgedicht wohl in der Art der anderen aus der Sammlung von 1909, also subjektive Stimmungslirik.’ Hans Esselborn, *Georg Trakl: Die Krise der Erlebenslyrik* (Böhlau, 1981), p. 179.

lines of 'Bewegung und Gesichte' can unearth potential similarities and other qualities that are of overarching importance for Trakl's poetry.<sup>72</sup>

#### KLAGELIED

Die Freundin, die mit grünen Blumen gaukelnd  
 Spielt in mondenen Gärten –  
 O! was glüht hinter Taxushecken!  
 Goldener Mund, der meine Lippen rührt,  
 Und sie erklingen wie die Sterne  
 Über dem Bache Kidron.  
 Aber die Sternennebel sinken über der Ebene,  
 Tänze wild und unsagbar.  
 O! meine Freundin deine Lippen  
 Granatapfellippen  
 Reifen an meinem kristallinen Muschelmund.  
 Schwer ruht auf uns  
 Das goldene Schweigen der Ebene.  
 Zum Himmel dampft das Blut  
 Der von Herodes  
 Gemordeten Kinder.  
 (DuB, 293)

As the title suggests, the poem is composed with the tradition of the Biblical poetic laments found in the Book of Lamentations in mind. This connection, however, seems to depend more on a thematic than structural or linguistic affinity. The original Hebrew text of the Lamentations mainly follows an alphabetical or alphabetical-acrostic form, with each song consisting of 22 lines (or multiples of that) and each line (or cluster of lines) beginning with each of the 22 consonants of the Hebrew alphabet in order. This structure serves mostly pedagogical, mnemonic, and certain aesthetic purposes (albeit there exists no critical consensus regarding the exact features of the aesthetics) and intends to give an impression of completeness.<sup>73</sup> In contrast, Trakl's poem consists

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<sup>72</sup> Saueremann vehemently rejects any relationship between the features mentioned in the letter and 'Klagelied', albeit with questionable arguments. For example, according to him, the poem cannot possibly be 'unpersönlich' since it contains an explicit lyric subject.

<sup>73</sup> Otto Kaiser, 'Die Klagelieder', in *Das Alte Testament Deutsch: Das Hohelied, Klagelieder, Das Buch Ester*, ed. by Hans-Peter Müller, Otto Kaiser, and James Alfred Loader (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), pp. 93–200 (pp. 99–100).

of 16 lines in total (not including the title) and does not adhere to the alphabetical-acrostic form of its Biblical predecessors. In addition, the poem follows neither a discernible metrical structure nor any consistent rhyme scheme, whereas 'Vorstadt im Föhn' is comprised of six four-line strophes in iambic pentameter with an enclosing rhyme. The non-existent rhyme scheme (except for the identical end rhymes 'Lippen' and 'Ebene') also means that there are no a priori linguistic connections between individual lines, as is the case for 'Vorstadt im Föhn' with its enclosed rhymes. The formal structure of 'Klagelied' alone is not enough for it to stand naturally within the tradition of Lieder in German-language poetry. Although the genre of the 'Lied' allows for large variations in both structure and content, up until at least the nineteenth century most songs featured homogenous metrical strophes with consistent end rhymes.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, the form of 'Klagelied' alone does not support a classification as Biblical lament or song.

Especially striking is the departure from what is usually considered to be Trakl's *modus operandi* in this period, that is the Expressionistic 'Reihungsstil'. Very much still in use in 'Vorstadt im Föhn', this method of combining disparate images line by line into a poem seems to have been abandoned here. This, in fact, situates the poem much closer to the works of Trakl's later periods, for which free rhythms are characteristic. As mentioned above, scholarship has identified his poem 'Psalm', which was written in September 1912, as being the starting point of this radical shift in his style.<sup>75</sup> With 'Klagelied' being composed almost a year before 'Psalm', it is quite clear that the first signs of this shift set in much earlier than that. For Ludwig Dietz, for example, one of the defining formal features of this poem is that it illustrates Trakl's tendency to let the ends of sentences (or at least pauses in the sentence) coincide with the ends of the lines, as is the case for

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<sup>74</sup> Ulrich Müller, 'Lied', in *Metzler Lexikon Literatur: Begriffe und Definitionen*, ed. by Dieter Burdorf, Christoph Fasbender, and Burkhard Moennighoff (Metzler, 2007), pp. 435–37 (p. 436).

<sup>75</sup> Zwerschina, *Die Chronologie der Dichtungen Georg Trakls*, p. 228; For a brief discussion of Trakl's creative periods see also Jaeger, *Theorie lyrischen Ausdrucks*, p. 202.

some of his rhymed poetry<sup>76</sup> and as is certainly the case for ‘Psalm’ as seen above. However, looking at the poem itself, this does not seem to be the case entirely and the lines are able to assert themselves against the structure of the sentences, even without the assistance of features such as metre or rhyme.

Looking at the overall rhythmical structure of the poem, its organisation on the macro-level splits the poem into three major parts, which are separated by two rhythmical caesurae of two lines each. Those cuts are marked by the closely related exclamations ‘O! was glüht hinter Taxishecken! | Goldener Mund, der meine Lippen rührt’ and ‘O! meine Freundin deine Lippen | Granatapfellippen’ respectively.

While the structure of the poem seems to bear no resemblance to the expectations set by the title, the content has decidedly Biblical overtones, mixing moods and imagery from the Book of Lamentations as well as from The Song of Songs. The poem begins with a picturesque, almost Romantic scene set in ‘mondänen Gärten’ resembling the idyllic setting of the Biblical Garden of Eden.<sup>77</sup> However, what is referenced here is most likely the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed on the eve of his crucifixion. Against this background Trakl describes an animated figure, ‘[d]ie Freundin, die mit grünen Blumen gaukelnd | spielt’, whose actions are suspended in the hyphen that concludes the second line and spill over into the lines that follow. Although most likely coincidental, this mirrors the use of the hyphen in the third line of ‘Vorstadt im Föhn’, where a similar effect of suspension is achieved. In this case, however, the perceived suspension is abruptly interrupted by the exclamatory ‘O!’ at the beginning of the following line, whereas the sounds of the train and the fluttering sparrows in the poem above are allowed to merge undisturbed. The key

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<sup>76</sup> Dietz, *Die lyrische Form Georg Trakls*, p. 92.

<sup>77</sup> It is also almost impossible not to hear the rather nonsensical pun ‘mondänen Gärten’ here.

word in the description of movement here is the present participle ‘gaukelnd’, which Trakl intriguingly also uses in ‘Vorstadt im Föhn’ and which describes a rather unusual erratic and directionless movement.<sup>78</sup> It further serves to denote the action of performing magic, deceiving, or conjuring up visions, which is close to the way it is used in the poem above. Reading these first two lines in the context of Trakl’s possible commentary on the poem, the action described can be considered as a confluence of ‘Bewegung’ and ‘Gesichte’. ‘Gaukelnd spiel[en]’ becomes therefore the playful act of conjuring up visions and images and a preview of the poem’s prevalent mode of expression.

After this, the poem moves on to a description of both the girl’s mouth and the lips of the subject:

Goldener Mund, der meine Lippen rührt,  
Und sie erklingen wie die Sterne  
Über dem Bache Kidron.

Although it is likely that the golden mouth described here refers to the mouth of the girl, this is not confirmed until later in the poem when the subject again describes her facial features: the exclamation ‘O! meine Freundin deine Lippen | Granatapfelliippen’. Wacker, for example, identifies in this image a reference to the topos of the ‘Musenkuss’.<sup>79</sup> Following this, what is depicted here is a process of (failed) inspiration. To describe this relation between both mouths, the verb ‘rühren’ is used, which in this context of course relates to the effect the girl’s mouth has on the subject’s lips. Nevertheless, the literal and original meaning of ‘rühren’ is ‘to cause movement’ and thus the subject’s lips are described in a dynamic state. Even the meeting between

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<sup>78</sup> Although by no means conclusive evidence, this further supports the idea that both poems were written chronologically very close to each other.

<sup>79</sup> Gabriela Wacker, ‘Georg Trakl: Prophetische Sprachfiguren’, in *Poetik des Prophetischen: Zum visionären Kunstverständnis in der klassischen Moderne* (De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 256–414 (p. 302).

the two mouths described later in the poem carries undertones of movement: ‘Granatapfellippen | reifen an meinem kristallenem Muschelmund.’ Although the metaphor of ripening invoked here is not explicitly connected to movement, this particular wording suggests at least a sense of direction, if not a converging movement towards each other. The initial state of movement is elaborated in the seventh line that likens the lips to the stars which ring out ‘[ü]ber dem Bache Kidron’. The movement caused by the ‘[g]oldener Mund’ is translated into the movement of sound. The Brook of Kidron and the Kidron Valley, the Biblical landscapes invoked here, derive their name from the Hebrew root *q-d-r*, whose possible meanings range from ‘dark’ and the causative ‘to darken’ through to ‘to mourn’ and ‘mourning’. This gives the comparison employed here, ‘Und sie erklingen wie die Sterne | Über dem Bache Kidron’, an oxymoronic aspect, since the stream that is invoked carries within its name already a darkness that no number of stars could possibly permeate. By way of the comparison this darkness is transformed into silence, an ‘erklingen’ that instantaneously fades away.

With the mention of Kidron, the poem shifts its tone and adopts a decidedly darker mood. The crucial shift happens in line seven: ‘Aber die Sternennebel sinken über der Ebene’. As the conjunction ‘aber’ indicates, this image presents a contrast to the metaphor of the stars mentioned earlier. Whereas at the beginning the stars stand stationary in the sky – or perhaps are just in the process of rising, a spatial ‘erklingen’ – they are now in the process of sinking towards the earth. Following this reading, ‘das goldene Schweigen der Ebene’ that eventually comes to rest on top of the couple depicted in the poem becomes both a result and a counterpoint to the sinking stars: the ‘goldene Mund’, which at the beginning breathes life into the lips of the subject, turns here into a depersonalised ‘goldenes Schweigen’ that calmly envelopes the plain.

The poem then ends with another image full of movement, describing the skywards-steaming blood from the remains of the mass-infanticide committed by Herod the Great:

Zum Himmel dampft das Blut  
 Der von Herodes  
 Gemordeten Kinder

This image brings to mind the striking visual of the blood-spewing slaughterhouse in ‘Vorstadt im Föhn’: ‘Und ein Kanal speit plötzlich feistes Blut | vom Schlachthaus in den stillen Fluß hinunter.’ Whereas in that case, the movement is directed downwards, here the heat of the blood rises upwards into the sky.

Although Trakl quite probably is not talking about the poem at hand in his letter, it is nevertheless still possible to consider it ‘zum bersten voll von Bewegung und Gesichtern’ (DuB, 526).<sup>80</sup> When reading the poem, movement appears in various configurations and functions. First, it provides a certain macro-rhythm, lending a structural framework to the poem. As stated above, the poem does not seem to adhere to the formal constraints of the genre implied in the title. Instead, figurations of movement guide the reader through the poem and divide it roughly into three parts, each of them dominated by movement that is directed first upwards, then downwards and lastly upwards again. In this respect, the poem bears a certain resemblance to ‘Vorstadt im Föhn’, in which the images work together to create an overall impression of up-and-down rhythm that mimics the motion of the wind mentioned in the title.

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the movements described in the poem form a rhythm that can be read poetologically. The poetological significance of the interaction between movement and images becomes first apparent in line five when the act of speaking, or rather singing, is described in terms of movement: ‘Goldener Mund, der meine Lippen rührt’. The lips that are animated here belong to the mouth of the poetic subject, which acts as a placeholder for the

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<sup>80</sup> Here, again, the relevant passage in its entirety: ‘Anbei das umgearbeitete Gedicht. Es ist umso viel besser als das ursprüngliche als es nun unpersönlich ist, und zum bersten voll von Bewegung und Gesichtern’ (DuB, 526).

possibility of poetic expression per se. When the golden mouth returns later in the poem it is changed into its opposite, the mute and immobile ‘goldene[s] Schweigen’, which muffles both the poetic subject and its partner. This creates the impression of an oscillating rhythm that moves between the extreme points of speaking and silence, disclosure and concealment.

The lines marking the rather abrupt turning point of the poem are again images that contain movement: ‘[a]ber die Sternennebel sinken über der Ebene, | Tänze wild und unsagbar’. The sinking movement of the stardust is here juxtaposed with and modified by the movement of dance.<sup>81</sup> The amalgamation of movement in this image echoes the qualities of the playful first lines of the poem. Here, too, the action described is somewhat erratic, namely ‘wild’ and, just like above, ‘Bewegung’ and ‘Gesichte’ encounter each other. In addition, the wild and excessive nature of the dancing movement recalls Trakl’s ‘zum bersten voll’ comment in his letter. To a certain extent, the erratic, aimless quality of the movement described in this image enters into a dialogue with the overall shape that is more clearly structured along definitive vertical directions, and it challenges the promises of predictability and stability contained within this structure. The crucial line is ‘Tänze wild und unsagbar’, which condenses central qualities of the poem into a single, compact expression.<sup>82</sup>

Perhaps the element that deserves the most attention here is the qualification of the wild dance with the adjective ‘unsagbar’. The meaning of this adjective in the context of the poem is, on the one hand, an extension and an escalation of the first adjective, ‘wild’. Read along these lines, the dance defies the boundaries of appropriate linguistic description due to its wild nature. The second

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<sup>81</sup> In light of the Biblical imagery inscribed in the poem the dance could be a nod towards the dance of Salomé, the archetypical, murderous *femme fatale* around the turn of the last century. It would be easy to confuse Herod the Great, who was responsible for murdering the children and to whom the poem alludes, with his son Herod II, the father of Salomé. However, even with this (false) direct connection missing, the overall imagery, setting, and vocabulary of the poem would still give enough textual evidence to warrant this interpretation.

<sup>82</sup> Counting the title of the poem, the line would constitute the exact numerical centre of the poem.

dimension to this line is revealed when it is read in the context of the other passages in the poem that discuss the possibility and impossibility of articulation. While line five suggests movement as at least linked to linguistic expression, perhaps even preceding it, lines 12 and 13 conflate the inexistence of movement with the existence of silence. Line eight, 'Tänze wild und unsagbar', now seems to contradict these two observations by intertwining movement with ineffability. However, it needs to be highlighted that while very similar, 'Schweigen' and 'unsagbar' describe two different situations. While the former describes a final, definite result, the latter merely describes an impossibility and by no means a certainty. In qualifying the dance as unspeakable, the poem both addresses and embodies an impossibility that might be inherent in language as such. As is the case with any type of movement, dance can only be translated into language insufficiently – if at all. However, the type of articulation offered in the poem is one that is self-conscious of its own limitations and openly approaches the relationship between language, imagery, and movement. The 'gaukelnd' movement presented here carries within itself the potential of creating imagery and vision or, in Trakl's words, 'Gesichte'. At the same time, this very movement potentially resists the act of signification through language and thus is able to function as both conductor of and hindrance to the emergence of poetic meaning.

The questions posed by the poem tie in with the considerations about the wider relationship between meaning, aesthetics, movement, and rhythm, addressed above. Movement appears in the images in various configurations and, on the one hand, is the source of a macro-rhythm that lends the text a stabilising structure, while, on the other hand, it also becomes an innately destabilising factor, calling into question the very possibility of meaningful poetic expression itself. This is all embedded into a wide array of Biblical references, which, although numerous, are difficult to assemble into a coherent interpretive framework. It is, again, predominantly the *process* of making sense that constitutes the nucleus of the poem and not the meaning possibly resulting from it.

In some ways, even though Trakl's verdict in his letter was most likely not directed at 'Klagelied', it seems to embody the qualities he was looking for. While 'Vorstadt im Föhn' seems to approach the challenges head-on, 'Klagelied' provides a more delicate demonstration of the matter. The latter also marks a significant departure from the former in that it abandons most of the formal elements that were integral to Trakl's poetry at that time and paves the way for the later and last stages of his poetry, one example of which was analysed above and two more will be analysed in more detail below. The first will be 'Ruh und Schweigen', which is both a self-referential commentary on Trakl's way of composing certain poems and an example of the use of images of movement to create certain rhythmic tensions in the poem. The second and final poem to be discussed will be 'Grodek', the last poem ever written by Trakl and which is often considered to be the culmination of his artistic development. 'Grodek' recapitulates a theme already encountered in 'Klagelied', that is, the possibilities and boundaries of meaningful poetic expression and it provides a striking example for the flexibility of Trakl's formal technique and in particular his use of free rhythm.

### **'Ruh und Schweigen' and Rhythmical Tensions**

The poem 'Ruh und Schweigen' was most likely written in September 1913 and first published in *Der Brenner* in 1913 and then, posthumously, in 1915 as part of the collection *Sebastian im Traum*.<sup>83</sup> It introduces the collection's subsection 'Siebengesang des Todes' and is often considered as an exemplary representation of Trakl's hermeticism.<sup>84</sup> The poem is closely connected to

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<sup>83</sup> Zwerschina, *Die Chronologie der Dichtungen Georg Trakls*, pp. 231–32.

<sup>84</sup> See for example: Wunberg, *Jahrhundertwende: Studien zur Literatur der Moderne*, p. 46; Joerg Schäfer, 'Der Herbst des Einsamen', in *Menschheitsdämmerung: Interpretationen expressionistischer Lyrik*, ed. by Horst Denkler (Fink, 1971), pp. 18–32 (pp. 19–20); Helmut Uhlig, 'Vom Ästhetizismus zum Expressionismus', in *Expressionismus: Gestalten einer literarischen Bewegung*, ed. by Hermann Friedmann and Otto Mann (Rothe, 1956), pp. 84–115 (p. 112); Jaeger, 'Das Lesen dynamischer Bilder und deiktischer Räume in Georg Trakls Lyrik', p. 367.

‘Verklärter Herbst’, which was written in the spring of 1912 and published in the 1913 collection *Gedichte*.<sup>85</sup> Its concluding lines are as follows:

Es ist der Liebe milde Zeit,  
 Im Kahn den blauen Fluß hinunter  
 Wie schön sich Bild an Bildchen reiht –  
 Das geht in Ruh und Schweigen unter.  
 (DuB, 35)

This excerpt is often read in the context of Trakl’s poetic style in general and manages to condense some key aspects of his poetry. Eduard Lachmann, for example, recognises in these lines a self-description of the author’s style pertaining to the asyndetically strung-together imagery, basically the ‘Reihungsstil’: ‘Mit dem Vers “Wie schön sich Bild an Bildchen reiht” hat Trakl seinen eigenen Stil trefflich gekennzeichnet, er reiht Bild an Bild aneinander ohne logische Verknüpfung.’<sup>86</sup> Many critics consider this passage in the light of repetition and cyclical structures in Trakl’s poetry, especially in relation to the later poem ‘Ruh und Schweigen’, which adopts part of the excerpt above as its title. Wolfgang Braungart therefore claims in his study on the poetics of literary cycles that Trakl’s ‘immer wieder beobachtete[s], relativ enge[s] motivisch-thematische[s] Spektrum’ contributes vitally to the formation of cyclicity and fundamentally repetitive structures in the two collections of poetry. For Braungart, these structures can take the form of either overarching thematic connections between the poems or continuous, sequential orders. Braungart thus considers the ending of ‘Verklärter Herbst’ to be an ironic commentary on the very possibility of sequential ordering but nevertheless reads the resumption of these words in the later poem ‘Ruh und Schweigen’ as a genuine testament in favour of the coherence and inherent sequential nature

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<sup>85</sup> Zwerschina, *Die Chronologie der Dichtungen Georg Trakls*, pp. 246–47.

<sup>86</sup> Eduard Lachmann, *Kreuz und Abend: Ein Interpretation der Dichtungen Georg Trakls* (Müller, 1954), p. 21.

of Trakl's works.<sup>87</sup> In contrast to Braungart, Klaus Weissenberger interprets the poem in light of a development in Georg Trakl's poetry that promotes disparity and discontinuity of the imagery and specifically refers to the end of the poem

in dem die im Gedicht implizierte Kontinuität und Korrespondenz von erfahrenem Wirklichkeitszusammenhang und Integrationsmodell – 'wie schön sich Bild an Bildchen reiht' – nur dazu gedient hat, um mit dem überraschenden Bruch – 'das geht in Ruh und Schweigen unter' – eingerissen und damit als Illusion entlarvt zu werden.<sup>88</sup>

Hence, for Weissenberger, the ending of 'Verklärter Herbst' first highlights the mimetic potential of the images presented in the poem, only to expose this potential as an illusion.

Indeed, it is especially the mimetic potential of the poem that provides an initial angle of approach when taking a closer look at 'Ruh und Schweigen':<sup>89</sup>

Hirten begruben die Sonne im kahlen Wald.  
Ein Fischer zog  
In härenem Netz den Mond aus frierendem Weiher.

In blauem Kristall  
Wohnt der bleiche Mensch, die Wang' an seine Sterne gelehnt;  
Oder er neigt das Haupt in purpurnem Schlaf.

Doch immer rührt der schwarze Flug der Vögel  
Den Schauenden, das Heilige blauer Blumen,  
Denkt die nahe Stille Vergessenes, erloschene Engel.

Wieder nachtet die Stirne in mondenem Gestein;  
Ein strahlender Jüngling  
Erscheint die Schwester in Herbst und schwarzer Verwesung.  
(DuB, 113)

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<sup>87</sup> Wolfgang Braungart, 'Zur Poetik literarischer Zyklen: Mit Anmerkungen zur Lyrik Georg Trakls', in *Zyklische Kompositionsformen in Georg Trakls Dichtung: Szegeder Symposium*, ed. by Károly Csúri (Niemeyer, 1996), pp. 1–27 (p. 25).

<sup>88</sup> Klaus Weissenberger, 'Das Durchbrechen des Traditionellen Modellbezugs, dargestellt an Georg Trakls Sonetten', in *Internationales Georg Trakl-Symposium: Albany, N. Y.*, ed. by Joseph P. Strelka (Lang, 1984), pp. 187–96 (p. 187); See also Walter Methlagl's analysis in which he reads these two lines as an explanation for the 'Reihungsstil' of Trakl's earlier works. Walter Methlagl, 'Zur "ewigen Wiederkehr" in Trakls Lyrik', in *Zyklische Kompositionsformen in Georg Trakls Dichtung: Szegeder Symposium*, ed. by Károly Csúri (Niemeyer, 1996), pp. 107–20 (p. 112).

<sup>89</sup> For a detailed psychologically-informed analysis of the poem see Laura Cheie, 'Georg Trakls "Ruh und Schweigen". Kreative Bilddynamik im Modus des Obsessiven', in *Georg Trakl und die literarische Moderne*, ed. by Károly Csúri (Niemeyer, 2009), pp. 99–111.

Not only does the poem's title quote Trakl's work itself, but it is also worth noting that the content of the poem seems at least to reflect what the title promises. Following Jaak de Vos, it quite likely is Trakl's intention 'in der kompositorischen Anlage Bilder zusammenzubringen, die sich unter dieser Umschreibung sinngerecht subsummieren lassen.'<sup>90</sup> And indeed, the predominantly nocturnal imagery seems to represent almost nothing but stillness and silence. In addition, the poem is quite literally one of the quietest in Trakl's whole oeuvre, since it does not contain a single description of either noise or sound.<sup>91</sup>

With respect to formal features, the poem seems to find a middle ground between 'Vorstadt im Föhn' and 'Klagelied' discussed above and approaches a style quite similar to what will be seen below in 'Grodek', which was written a year after 'Ruh und Schweigen'. It consists of four strophes of three lines each, which do not adhere to any discernible rhyme scheme (a potential end rhyme is perhaps to be found in the third strophe where 'Vögel' and 'Engel' form a slightly dissonant pairing; additionally, '[w]ohnt' in the second strophe connects to 'Mond' in line four). The relationship between syntax and lines is not quite as flexible as in 'Klagelied' but certainly more so than in 'Vorstadt im Föhn'. The majority of the sentences coincide with the end of a line and each strophe ends with a full stop. That said, each contains at least one enjambement, and all of them, except for the third, are built around the contrast between two longer and one significantly shorter line. The two most striking of these enjambments are found between lines two and three, 'Ein Fischer zog | in härenem Netz den Mond aus frierendem Weiher' and eleven and twelve, 'Ein strahlender Jüngling | erscheint die Schwester in Herbst und schwarzer Verwesung.'

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<sup>90</sup> Jaak De Vos, 'Die Quadratur des Kreises: Überlegungen zum zyklischen Kompositionsprinzip in Trakls Lyrik', in *Zyklische Kompositionsformen in Georg Trakls Dichtung: Szegeder Symposium*, ed. by Károly Csúri (Niemeyer, 1996), pp. 121–47 (p. 139).

<sup>91</sup> There is an overall vagueness of sound descriptions in Trakl's poetry, on which Görner comments as follows: 'Aber es "klirrt" eben in Trakls Gedichten nicht, weder hier noch irgendwo sonst in seinem Werk. Er beharrt auf dem "Tönen", und sei es noch so dissonant gemeint.' Görner, *Georg Trakl: Dichter im Jahrzehnt der Extreme*, p. 106.

As was the case for 'Psalm', some of the most interesting formal features here are the relationships and proportions between the individual lines of the poem and how they are connected to the sentences and phrases. At first glance, the contrast between two longer lines and a shorter one, containing just three words, dominates all strophes bar one and all of these instances are marked by an enjambment. The shorter lines follow a shifting pattern: the second line in the first strophe is short, the first line in the following strophe, none in the third, and the pattern repeats. Since the third strophe is not integrated into this permutation, it gains a somewhat parenthetical character, a short aside before the poem can return to its usual rhythm before its conclusion.

The beginning of the poem describes two simultaneous movements that are oriented along opposite directions: while shepherds bury the sun in the woods, a fisherman hauls his net in from the lake, which contains the moon. The effect of this is heightened by the enjambment.<sup>92</sup> What this first strophe suggests is the depiction of an autumnal/wintery scene (as implied by the absence of leaves on the trees, 'im kahlen Wald', and the coldness of the lake, 'aus frierendem Weiher') in the evening, with the sun setting in the foreground and the moon rising simultaneously in the background. As Jaeger suggests, this impressionistic perception of a potential onlooker can indeed be translated into a factual description.<sup>93</sup> However, Trakl transports this scene into a more surreal context of human actions, by blending natural phenomena in the background, setting sun and rising moon, with the movements in the foreground, shepherding and fishermen casting nets.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Heinz Wetzel, *Klang und Bild in den Dichtungen Georg Trakls* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), p. 79.

<sup>93</sup> Stephan Jaeger, 'Intensität statt Hermetik: Zur Theorie von Textbewegungen in Trakls Lyrik am Beispiel der Gedichte "Siebengesang des Todes" und "An die Verstummen"', in *Georg Trakl und die literarische Moderne*, ed. by Károly Csúri (Niemeyer, 2009), pp. 77–98 (p. 82).

<sup>94</sup> A similar arrangement of images also appears in the poem 'Jahreszeit' from the 'Nachlass'. In that case, however, the images are clearly separated: 'Ein Fischer zog sein Netze ein. | Dann kam die Dämmerung übers Feld.' (DuB, 286).

The first strophe can be considered an illustration of the stage of development that Trakl's use of metre, rhythm and imagery reached in the works of his middle creative period, as Esselborn argues:

Die Mechanisierung und Stauung des Metrums zeigen die krisenhafte Veränderung der Tradition bei Trakl, aber seine spezifische Lösung, die sich in Versen seiner mittleren Werkphase realisiert, geht in eine andere Richtung. Es ist die szenische Sprache, die den Rhythmus als Ergebnis einer Körperbewegung in einen übergreifenden Handlungszusammenhang integriert.<sup>95</sup>

These changes in Trakl's treatment of rhythms are also already noticeable in 'Klagelied', when much of the movement in the images arise from gestures of the mouths or the erratic dances that are mentioned. In this case, what happens is almost quite literally the translation of movements of the body into a more comprehensive context of natural phenomena.

The movements depicted oscillate not only between opposing directions but also between standstill and continuation. After the digging of the shepherds in the first line is completed, it is immediately superseded and counteracted by the action of the fisherman, creating a tension between these opposing forces. Along with the images, the overlapping up and down movements create a sense of spatial totality, reaching from the inside of the earth and the bottom of the pond towards the sky. However, while the digging seems to come to a close, the hauling of the nets only seems to approach a standstill, never quite ceasing its movement, as suggested by the mirroring of its action in the 'frierendem Weiher'. The freezing pond is therefore described as a process and not in terms of a stagnant state. The following strophe connects to the freezing pond by substituting for it the image of a blue crystal:

In blauem Kristall  
Wohnt der bleiche Mensch, die Wang' an seine Sterne gelehnt;  
Oder er neigt das Haupt in purpurnem Schlaf.

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<sup>95</sup> Esselborn, *Georg Trakl: Die Krise der Erlebenslyrik*, p. 69.

It seems that the freezing process of the pond finds its completion in the image of the crystal in the beginning of the second strophe. At the same time, it is possible to read this blue crystal as a counterpart to the blueness of the sky, thus providing a concrete figuration of the upper limit of the space that is conjured up in the first strophe. The poem suggests also a certain permeability between the two spheres of earth and sky as a pale human is described inside the blue crystal, ‘die Wang’ an seine Sterne gelehnt’, which further supports the reading of the crystal being representative of the sky and the opening up of a cosmic space between man on earth and the stars in the sky.<sup>96</sup> However, the relationship between humans, crystal and the space that is created is multi-faceted. Tensions arise through mutually opposing movements the same way as they do in the first strophe.

The first of these tensions is a result of the conjunction between the first and the second strophe. If the blue crystal is read as an image for the sky, then its spatial limitations immediately counteract the vastness of what it is supposed to represent.<sup>97</sup> Secondly, there is tension in the lines of movement in the poem. The very first encounter between the sky and human happens in the first line, when the shepherds bury the sun. This encounter is repeated in lines six and seven, as the result of an upward movement of the ‘bleiche Mensch’ towards the sky. Therefore, opposing directions are again juxtaposed. Thirdly, the way these two lines are linguistically connected creates an ambiguity of movement in itself. As Russel E. Brown points out, the disjunction ‘oder’, which connects the lines ‘Wohnt der bleiche Mensch, die Wang’ an seine Sterne gelehnt; | Oder er neigt das Haupt in purpurnem Schlaf’ acts as a marker of uncertainty, suggesting a mediation between

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<sup>96</sup> See for this line of interpretation especially Károly Csúri, ‘Theorie und Modell, Erklärung und Textwelt: Über Trakls “Ruh und Schweigen”’, in *Weltbürger – Textwelten: Helmut Kreuzer zum Dank* (Lang, 1995), pp. 128–51 (pp. 139–40).

<sup>97</sup> Jaeger, *Theorie lyrischen Ausdrucks*, p. 214. For the general importance of crystals in literature around 1900 see Ulrich Johannes Beil, *Die Wiederkehr des Absoluten: Studien zur Symbolik des Kristallinen und Metallischen in der deutschen Literatur der Jahrhundertwende* (Lang, 1988).

two equally possible actions.<sup>98</sup> This can be read, on the one hand, as a further symptom of the overlap of two opposing directional movements, as the movement of the human up towards the stars is put in relation to the sinking movement of the head. On the other hand, this ambiguity puts the very act of the ‘Mensch’ arriving among the stars into question and linguistically undermines its semantic fixation.

While the second strophe ends with a break suggested by the disjunction ‘oder’, the third strophe sets in with a marker of temporal continuity, underlining the continuity of the structurally opposing movements:

Doch immer rührt der schwarze Flug der Vögel  
Den Schauenden, das Heilige blauer Blumen,  
Denkt die nahe Stille Vergessenes, erloschene Engel.

The continuity implied by ‘immer’ of the first line is counteracted by the act of remembrance that is described in the following two lines of the strophe. In paraphrasing this act as ‘[d]enkt die nahe Stille Vergessenes’ and therefore clearly demarcating a ‘then’ that is different to a ‘now’, the poem highlights the discontinuity inherent in this action. Paradoxically, as Jaeger rightly points out, this very act of recalling the past is itself something that suggests continuity: ‘Das verlorene Element, die “erloschenen Engel”, das “Heilige blauer Blumen” – deutlich an die Sprache der Romantik erinnernd –, selbst dargestellt als Kontinuität, die geweckt werden muß, wird erinnert.’<sup>99</sup>

Wieder nachtet die Stirne in mondenem Gestein;  
Ein strahlender Jüngling  
Erscheint die Schwester in Herbst und schwarzer Verwesung.

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<sup>98</sup> Russel E. Brown, ‘The Motif of Uncertainty in Trakl’s Poetry’, in *Internationales Georg Trakl-Symposium: Albany, N. Y.*, ed. by Joseph P. Strelka (Lang, 1984), pp. 46–66 (p. 56).

<sup>99</sup> Jaeger, *Theorie lyrischen Ausdrucks*, p. 214.

The last strophe reprises certain elements that appear earlier in the poem. In the ‘Stirne in mondenem Gestein’ the reader can recognise again the image of the ‘bleicher Mensch, die Wang’ an seine Sterne gelehnt’ from line five and the ‘[w]ieder’ here is echoing the ‘immer’ from line eight, introducing again an oscillation between continuity and cessation. In addition to the tension created by these two movements, the last strophe introduces the interplay between the sister as redeemer and saviour, ‘Ein strahlender Jüngling’, and a tendency to demise and decay, ‘Herbst und schwarzer Verwesung’. In its final strophe the poem gives rise to the possibility of opposing the continuity of decay as it appears most prominently in the third strophe. Against the backdrop of this almost inevitable decline, the quasi-messianic figure of the sister is introduced, which serves to counteract the deterioration and, in turn, create a different constant. Not only does this interaction resume the superposition of upward and downward movements as it appears throughout the poem, but in doing so acts further as an exemplary expression of tensions of movement that permeate the poem in general.

These findings, at first glance, appear to be at odds with the context that is implied by the title of the poem. While it still holds true that the poem is perhaps unusually silent, it is not at all ‘ruhig’. In fact, movement and the tensions contained in it emerge as a major driving force behind it and this very reluctance to stand still is concisely encapsulated in the almost defiant line ‘[d]och immer rührt der schwarze Flug der Vögel’. To be able to situate the position of ‘Ruh und Schweigen’ in Trakl’s works, it is useful to recall the origin of the title: ‘Wie schön sich Bild an Bildchen reiht – | Das geht in Ruh und Schweigen unter.’ (DuB, 35). Critics have read the first line of this excerpt as a stand-in for the ‘Reihungsstil’ of Trakl’s earlier poetry. Assuming this and reading the ending of ‘Verklärter Herbst’ as perhaps a preliminary poetological forerunner to the later poem ‘Ruh und Schweigen’, the latter can certainly be read as an evolution of Trakl’s poetic style. The asyndetically strung-together images evolve into interwoven, fluctuating clusters of

movement. While Trakl's earlier imagery is dominated mostly by singularity and independence, 'Ruh und Schweigen' creates a movement of continuity and decay, which is not resolved in the poem.

Indeed, as the poem itself demonstrates, these tensions are also inherent in the engagement with past poetic traditions. Borrowing from Brigitte Peucker's reading of Trakl's poems in the light of belatedness and recursion/reworking of past poetic traditions,<sup>100</sup> the tensions in 'Ruh und Schweigen' created by the rhythm of the images are an expression of the tensions between Trakl's reliance on the tradition before him and his urge to update them in his own poetic language. As described above, these traditions appear in the poem as recursions and continuities that induce tensions between a traditional repertoire of images and Trakl's own visions of demise and decay, between continuity and disruption, and between movement and standstill. However, very much contrary to the ending of 'Verklärter Herbst', those interactions do not 'gehn in Ruh und Schweigen unter.'

### **'Groddek': Sentences, Lines, and Exploring the Limits of the Unspeakable**

The following poem, titled 'Groddek', is with near certainty the last poem ever written by Trakl. It was composed in various stages throughout the months of September and October 1914 as a reaction to his experiences in the Battle of Gródek and its gruelling aftermath.<sup>101</sup> Trakl sent it via post to Ludwig von Ficker, only a few days before his death on 3 November, together with another poem, titled 'Klage'. The poems were accompanied by a short note, containing, besides a last will

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<sup>100</sup> See for an interesting discussion of Trakl's poetry in the context of Goethe's 'Der Wanderer' Brigitte Peucker, 'Trakl's Descent into Language', in *The Dark Flutes of Fall: Critical Essays on Georg Trakl*, ed. by Eric Williams, *Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture*, 50 (Camden House, 1991), pp. 191–202.

<sup>101</sup> The poem joins the ranks of others named after other significant locations in Trakl's life such as Mönchsberg, Hohenburg, and Anif.

and testament, the ominous declaration: ‘Ich fühle mich fast schon jenseits der Welt’ (DuB, 574).<sup>102</sup> The poem was then first published posthumously in the *Brenner Jahrbuch 1915*.<sup>103</sup>

Am Abend tönen die herbstlichen Wälder  
 Von tödlichen Waffen, die goldnen Ebenen  
 Und blauen Seen, darüber die Sonne  
 Düstrer hinrollt; umfängt die Nacht  
 Sterbende Krieger, die wilde Klage  
 Ihrer zerbrochenen Münder.  
 Doch stille sammelt im Weidengrund  
 Rotes Gewölk, darin ein zürnender Gott wohnt  
 Das vergoßne Blut sich, mondne Kühle;  
 Alle Straßen münden in schwarze Verwesung.  
 Unter goldnem Gezweig der Nacht und Sternen  
 Es schwankt der Schwester Schatten durch den schweigenden Hain,  
 Zu grüßen die Geister der Helden, die blutenden Häupter;  
 Und leise tönen im Rohr die dunkeln Flöten des Herbstes.  
 O stolzere Trauer! ihr ehernen Altäre  
 Die heiße Flamme des Geistes nährt heute ein gewaltiger Schmerz,  
 Die ungeborenen Enkel.  
 (DuB, 168)

Being Trakl’s very last written work, ‘Grodek’ is universally considered to be one of his most important poems and is often regarded as an almost archetypical example for all the poetic tendencies characteristic for his late works.<sup>104</sup> As suggested above, while ‘Psalm’ is the very starting point for Trakl’s incorporation of the technique of free rhythms into his poetry, it is here where his use of them reaches its most advanced and individualised expression.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Due to this striking paratextual framing of the poem, Andrzej Pilipowicz even goes as far as considering it part of Trakl’s prose works. Andrzej Pilipowicz, *Die Transgressionen der Bibelfiguren in der Prosa von Georg Trakl* (Lang, 2017), p. 11.

<sup>103</sup> Zwerschina, *Die Chronologie der Dichtungen Georg Trakls*, pp. 179–80.

<sup>104</sup> In total, Trakl’s entire final creative period is comprised of only about a dozen poems, all written in or after July 1914. See for more details Berger, *Dunkelheit und Sprachkunst*, p. 30.

<sup>105</sup> To highlight the significant changes throughout Trakl’s poetry as a whole, it might be worthwhile to contrast ‘Grodek’ here with his very first poem ever published, titled ‘Aufforderung’. Frankly, it also makes for quite an emotionally devastating read, seeing the somewhat hopeful and determined atmosphere of departure that the 20-year-old author evokes in the poem transformed into the desolate landscapes of ‘Grodek’ only seven years later. It first appeared in a 1907 school paper, as Weichselbaum notes in his ‘Nachwort’ (DuB, 584).

Säume nicht! Kurz ist der Tag  
 Und flüchtig die Stunde der Jugend.

The poem comprises 17 lines without any discernible regular metre, rhyme scheme or other more conventional feature of poetic form. As with 'Klagelied', 'Ruh und Schweigen', and 'Psalm', the most striking and important formal characteristics of 'Gródek' are found in the interactions between its sentences and syntactic units and the individual lines, and in particular the possible tensions arising between the two. The poem is marked by the tendency towards longer sentences that are then cut into shorter fragments by the organisational principle of the lines. This is essentially a reversal of the hierarchy between these two structures as it appeared in 'Psalm' and indeed, in most of Trakl's poetry before the very last stage. In these earlier poems the sentences tend to strive towards terseness and more often than not readily accommodate the superior structure as given by the segmentation of lines in the poem. Here, in contrast, the sentences themselves seem to carry more power and seem to visibly struggle against the structure determined by the line endings. Berger even identifies this as the defining feature of all the poems written towards the end of Trakl's life during his final creative period: 'Diese rhythmisch-dynamische Struktur, das Widerspiel zwischen der Abgeschlossenheit des Verses und dem vorwärts drängenden Satz, ist das hervorstechende Merkmal der letzten Periode in Trakls Lyrik.'<sup>106</sup> The poem, therefore, transcribes its occasion and theme, the carnage that Trakl witnessed at Gródek, into its formal dynamics. Although it might be an exaggeration to speak of a battle between the sentences and

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Raffe dich auf und geh  
Mit ehernen Schritten durchs Leben.  
So nur bringt es Gewinn.

Wache am Tag!  
Sonst weckt dich am Abend die Reue.  
Und die versinkende Helle  
Deutet dir, was du verlorst –  
Unwiederbringlich.  
(DuB, 177)

<sup>106</sup> Berger, *Dunkelheit und Sprachkunst*, p. 74.

lines, the relationship in the poem is certainly one largely defined by tensions and the structure implied by this antagonism.

On the level of content, then, the poem is presumably a description of the eponymous battle and its consequences. However, this might only hold true for the first half of the poem in a wider sense, after which it becomes increasingly more difficult to reconcile the images that appear with a factual description. The turning point is marked by line 10, which reads: ‘Alle Straßen münden in schwarze Verwesung.’ The poem as a whole appears more like a means of processing than the attempt of an accurate eyewitness account of the fighting, a fact that is certainly not surprising in the context of Trakl’s writings. It is indeed the case that several themes addressed in the poems discussed above reappear in ‘Grodek’. One of these, for example, is the interplay between a personalised and more generalised notion of poetry. Here, both ideas are of importance, as Patrick Bridgwater notes: ‘On the surface “Grodek” appears to be perhaps the most impersonal “front-line poem” ever written; beneath the surface it is desperately, painfully personal’.<sup>107</sup> This is a process that is perhaps similar to the one at work in ‘Vorstadt im Föhn’, where the generalised perspectives of the poem emerge from an originally personal and intimate point of view. Jaeger, therefore, situates the tone of ‘Grodek’ between impersonal factual description and subjective, involved expression.<sup>108</sup> Doppler, too, makes a similar argument, claiming that the poem transforms personal fate into a general human catastrophe: ‘Trakl stellt in seinem letzten Gedicht ein Geschehen dar, in dem ein persönlich erfahrenes Unheil als universelle menschliche Katastrophe erfahrbar wird.’<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Patrick Bridgwater, ‘Georg Trakl and the Poetry of the First World War’, in *Londoner Trakl-Symposium*, ed. by Walter Methlagl and William E. Yuill (Müller, 1981), pp. 96–113 (p. 108).

<sup>108</sup> Jaeger, *Theorie lyrischen Ausdrucks*, p. 216.

<sup>109</sup> Alfred Doppler, *Die Lyrik Georg Trakls: Beiträge zur poetischen Verfahrensweise und zur Wirkungsgeschichte* (Müller, 2001), p. 80. Jacques Le Rider comes to a similar conclusion and likens ‘Grodek’ in that respect to another of Trakl’s poems, namely ‘Passion’: ‘Die Logik der Farben und die Landschaftsmotive (in ‘Passion’, die Explosion des Gartens; in ‘Grodek’ die Verdichtung und Zuspitzung der obsessiven seelischen Landschaft Trakls) legen den Schluss nahe, dass ein persönliches Erlebnis zur Chiffre eines Weltzustandes und ein apokalyptisches Ereignis der

However, while both poems might share in the same basic assumption, they differ significantly in their conclusions drawn from it. The earlier poem, 'Vorstadt im Föhn', presents a rapid succession of images and descriptions of the turbulent scenes unfolding at its centre. 'Grodek' instead introduces a linguistically and thematically fragmented account, where gaps and omissions are the main driving forces not only behind the conception of its content but also its formal and linguistic design.

There is also a strong connection between 'Grodek' and 'Klagelied' when it comes to basic questions about the possibilities of poetic expression. The account given in the poem is more characterised by its omissions than its inclusions. Most of its references to the eponymous battle are vague and rather generalised imagery of war often in archaic, irony-tinged register, such as 'tödlichen Waffen', '[s]terbende Krieger', 'zürnender Gott' or 'vergoßne Blut', than specific, identifiable markers of factual events. Regarding these elisions in the description, Görner considers 'Grodek' as a form of self-therapy for Trakl, indeed a 'Selbstbetäubung', since the text leaves out explicit imagery of all the horrors of war that Trakl surely must have experienced in the battle. He further concludes that this could be read as an admission of failure of poetic form when faced with these kinds of horrors and compares the poem to similar attempts by Ernst Jünger:

Lesbar ist dieses Gedicht jedoch auch als verdecktes Eingeständnis, dass die lyrische Form überfordert sein könnte, wenn es um die Darstellung solchen Grauens geht. Gerade die frühen Kriegstagebücher Ernst Jüngers zeigen – und darin liegt ihre besondere Bedeutung –, wie ein junger Schriftsteller angesichts des Krieges neue Darstellungsformen erprobt.<sup>110</sup>

In short, 'Grodek' presents itself as an elaboration of the question as to how, if at all, poetry might be able to portray that which is inherently not possible to portray, or, in other words: what happens

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Menschheitsgeschichte, der Erste Weltkrieg, zum Gleichnis der eigenen Existenz werden.' Jacques Le Rider, 'Zur Intermedialität von Text und Bild bei Trakl', in *Georg Trakl und die literarische Moderne*, ed. by Károly Csúri (Niemeyer, 2009), pp. 113–22 (p. 121).

<sup>110</sup> Görner, *Georg Trakl: Dichter im Jahrzehnt der Extreme*, p. 274.

when poetry tries to say that which is unspeakable, ‘unsagbar’. Considering the poem in this light allows one to draw a direct line to ‘Klagelied’ and the questions it poses regarding this issue, as seen above. Görner may interpret the poem as a concession that the literary form of poetry itself could be overwhelmed when faced with such a task. However, I would argue that Trakl negotiates in ‘Grodek’ exactly what might have to be demanded of poetic form in order to accomplish such a purpose and speak of that which is arguably unspeakable.

As mentioned, the predominant formal and rhythmical features of the poem are the effects created by the relationship between the syntactic units and the lines. This, therefore, is also the space where many of the questions about the changes necessary to accommodate the unspeakable are debated. Looking closely at the interactions between both parts, the development follows a path similar to the content, with a caesura in line 10 and a stark contrast between the first and second half. While the first part is characterised by longer sentences, which the lines struggle to contain, the latter is increasingly paratactic, calmer, and more measured.<sup>111</sup> In the first half, this leads to the somewhat paradoxical phenomenon that the bond between sentence and line becomes much stronger, even though they are seemingly fighting against each other. In particular, as Wetzel claims, the style of the first half of the poem is dominated by the so-called ‘Hakenstil’, which, in contrast to the ‘Reihungsstil’, features a stronger interconnection between sentences and lines and often leads to the emergence of caesurae in the middle of the individual lines.<sup>112</sup> This is strongest at the very beginning of the poem, as he explains:

Eine der eindrucksvollsten Verschränkungen steht im Beginn von Grodek; hier zeigt sich, wie die vielen Einschnitte — die der Zeilengrenzen und die syntaktischen — von den Einheiten der Sätze und Zeilen überwölbt werden, so daß sich zwar einerseits kein weit gespannter rhythmischer Bogen ergibt, andererseits aber auch das Staccato kurzer Einheiten verhindert wird, weil die Einheiten der

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<sup>111</sup> Berger, *Dunkelheit und Sprachkunst*, pp. 76–77.

<sup>112</sup> Wetzel, *Klang und Bild*, p. 102.

Sätze die Zeilengrenzen überbrücken und damit abschwächen und die Einheiten der Zeilen die Zäsuren.<sup>113</sup>

Thus, the rhythmical effects in the first half of the poem create a certain sense of harmony, a fluent merging of sentences and lines instead of antagonism. The longer, hypotactic sentences spill from line to line with various enjambments. In these first few lines the perspective of the poem is distanced and focused on almost scenic descriptions, the speaker floating above the battlefield. Were it not for the words mentioned above that clearly mark this as a post-battle scene, it could be easily mistaken for one of Trakl's typical, melancholy and discomfiting-idyllic evening tableaux. Content and rhythmical effects are therefore aligned with each other. While the supposed idyll of the landscape is encroached upon by the horrors of the war, the rhythmical organisation between sentences and lines works similarly, yet in reverse: the antagonism between them, which first catches the eye then resolves itself into the legato of their intertwining. Linguistic fragmentation thus seems to lead to the paradoxical perceived effect of an increased unity; at least in the first half of the poem.

The motivation behind these formal choices seems yet again to be Trakl's urge to make sense of the world and the events unfolding around him. An important formal manifestation of this impetus is his increasing use of hypotactic sentence structures in 'Grodek', as Millington recognises: 'Its return to hypotaxis signals a more urgent interest in making sense of the events depicted rather than, as in the poems of the preceding months, leaving this sense to be inferred from his scenic descriptions and emotional responses.'<sup>114</sup> The actual content of the descriptions becomes less important and instead the focus lies on the process of making sense. It does not seem of interest that the unspeakable is actually spelled out but rather the mechanisms behind the

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<sup>113</sup> Wetzel, *Klang und Bild*, p. 77.

<sup>114</sup> Millington, *The Gentle Apocalypse: Truth and Meaning in the Poetry of Georg Trakl*, p. 226.

pronouncement, the syntactic and formal prerequisites that might allow for these pronouncements to occur. Again, this development comes to an abrupt halt with the turning point in line 10, which contains the simple, axiomatic statement ‘[a]lle Straßen münden in schwarze Verwesung’. With this, the perspective of the poem shifts and moves from a wide-angle, landscape-focused description to an equally expansive historical view concerning the fate of civilization in more general terms, also marked by the appearance of the saviour-like figure of the sister. This changed perspective also entails an alteration in the rhythmic organisation of the poem’s second part, whereby the sentences become more paratactic in nature and start to fit more neatly into the structure prescribed by the lines. The rhythms also exhibit a more metrical slant, with some passages being reminiscent of hexameters. It is now no longer the process of making sense that is paramount but rather the proclamation of (factual) observations, a narrowing towards finality as predicted by line 10, yet also an arguable opening up of the poem’s earlier, restrained point of view.

When first discussing free rhythms in Trakl’s poetry, ‘Grodek’ was suggested as a sort of end stage of a development at the beginning of which stand poems like ‘Psalm’. Indeed, there are certain similarities between both poems that are worthy of investigation. ‘Psalm’ unfolds against the background of a strong historical perspective, thereby exemplifying Trakl’s attempts to integrate smaller conceptual parts into larger contextual frameworks, which the poem supports through its rhythmical structures. Thus, to a certain extent, form and content could be said to be congruent in the case of ‘Psalm’. In ‘Grodek’, the setup is similar as far as the presence of a strong historical perspective is concerned. However, content and form drift apart and create an atmosphere quite unlike what can be encountered in ‘Psalm’. While the earlier poem presents its historical backdrop as a strong support of what the poem itself is unfolding, ‘Grodek’ presents this background as an inherently destabilising force that eventually leads to the downfall of civilisation. What appears as

the only redeeming factor in this process is the formal structure especially in the first half of the poem.

‘Grodek’ is at its core a poem of omissions. As mentioned, its content is more defined by what it does not mention rather than what is presented. This, of course, also carries over into how it presents itself on a formal and linguistic level. Perhaps the most obvious omissions are the missing traditional poetic forms of expression such as metre, rhyme, and strophes. One of the most striking linguistic observations is the unusually high number of elided letters in the poem. These are: ‘goldnen’, ‘vergoßne’, ‘mondne’, ‘goldnem’ and lastly ‘ungebornen’. As the lines do not have to adhere to the constraints of a metre, there would normally not be any necessity for Trakl to transform the words in this way. It is a virtually futile act to make the words bend to the will of formal constraints that do not exist. As it were, this amounts to acts of unnecessary linguistic violence and it is perhaps possible to consider these physical deformations of words as being representative of the traumatic physical and mental violence prevalent in the battlefields. It could also be a sign of the unspeakable working against its inclusion into the structure of the poem. Much like the soldiers that are able to reintegrate into the world only as maimed individuals, expression in poetry becomes similarly damaged. On a wider scale, this could be connected to the overarching tendency in Trakl of a ‘verdunkelnden Verfall’, whereby the poems towards the last stages become increasingly darker and disintegrate, on the level of content as well as form.<sup>115</sup> However, although this seems to fit the overall tendency of Trakl’s works, I would argue that this does not hold up entirely, at least when looking at ‘Grodek’. While it is true that the overarching direction here is dominated by a strong sense of decay and decline, it is in the formal elements of the poem that a

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<sup>115</sup> Eric Williams, ‘Schweigendes Tönen: Zur Wiederkehr der Flöten’, in *Zyklische Kompositionsformen in Georg Trakls Dichtung: Szegeder Symposion*, ed. by Károly Csúri (Niemeyer, 1996), pp. 149–67 (p. 150).

possible type of resistance to this tendency becomes palpable. Especially the first part with its intertwining rhythmical dynamic is important for this.

‘Grodek’ is furthermore a poem about the disintegration of metre, an illustration of the ‘ruins of metre’ mentioned in the title of this chapter. While its first half is mostly dictated by the use and effects of more freely used rhythms, its second half incorporates stronger hints towards classical metrical poetry, with its dactylic constructions, mid-line caesurae and involved syntax. All of this is juxtaposed with the descriptions of a civilisation in fatal disarray, which suggests that language itself might also be in the process of succumbing to this very fate.<sup>116</sup> Examples for this can be found in lines such as ‘Zu grüßen die Geister der Helden, die blutenden Häupter;’, or ‘Und leise tönen im Rohr die dunklen Flöten des Herbstes. | O stolzere Trauer! ihr ehernen Altäre’.

‘Grodek’, then, is about the unspeakable and how poetic form might be able to accommodate it. One of the key features of rhythm in Trakl’s poetry is its use in the processes of making sense and this is also the case in his very last poem. Instead of being about the breakdown of poetic form itself in the light of the horrors of WWI that the author experienced, the poem shows how the form might be able to find ways to express these impressions. The rhythm of the linguistic material becomes more important than the overarching context of a historical framework as was the case in ‘Psalm’. In ‘Grodek’, the ruins of civilisation that Trakl experienced in the weeks before his death are transformed into the ruins of metre and captured by the novel architecture of the lines and sentences of his free rhythms. While in earlier poems it was mostly a rhythm created by images, movements, and the interactions between both, the rhythmical effects of the later poems rely increasingly on the bare material of words and phrases and its liberation from traditional formal

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<sup>116</sup> As is the case with many of Trakl’s other poems, only the quasi-messianic figure of the sister might provide some soothing relief, although not least the characterisation of her movements as ‘schwanken’ and her being a mere shadow do raise doubts regarding this reading.

constraints. In a sense, the overarching rhythmical order of 'Grodek' is one oscillating between revelation and concealment, between articulating the unspeakable and remaining overwhelmed by the sheer impossibility of attempting it.

The profound complexities in 'Grodek' serve as a marker for the paradox inherent in most of Trakl's creative pursuits. An attempt to articulate the unspeakable within a world that has come to defy coherent articulation. This last of Trakl's poems is a culmination of his poetic development in that it straddles the line between form and formlessness, representing the decay of both external reality and its own internal order. The free rhythms interacting with the fractured remnants of classical metre reflect the efforts to extract meaning from a world descending into chaos. This tension not only mirrors the cataclysmic events of war but are a wider reflection of the potential limits of poetic expression *per se*.

The rhythmic complexity of 'Grodek', I argue, lies at the heart of the poem's intentions and effects, by embodying both the fragmentation of the external world and the attempt to give form to the inexpressible. Here, rhythm is not just a formal feature but rather the emotional core. It is characterised by the interplay between longer, flowing sentences and mostly abrupt line changes that results in a dynamic friction reflecting the struggle between longing for coherence and an overburdening tendency towards disintegration. The poem's structure is dominated by a deliberate rhythmic progression, with the first half being governed by a rhythm that tends towards continuity despite the breaking-up of form. However, this inclination towards rhythm is subverted by the force of the content. The rhythm then shifts, becomes more paratactic and the earlier, tentative fluidity gives way to a more fragmented rhythm, containing scattered ruins of classical metre. This goes hand in hand with a change of perspective, the personal transforming into the universal, the immediate terrors of the battlefield turn into the overarching decline of civilisation. Ultimately,

‘Grodek’ is as much about the disintegration of rhythm, and with that poetry itself, as it is about its will and power to persist.

### **Conclusion: Rhythm as Metaphor and Process**

When compared to Stefan George and Arno Holz, the role of rhythm in the poetry of Georg Trakl is much more subdued and therefore much more difficult to unearth. However, I would argue, it is certainly not of any less importance because of this. To a certain extent, the development of Trakl’s poetry could be considered an amalgam of the other two authors analysed in this thesis. He begins with strongly metre-focused poetry before transitioning to free rhythms via the ‘Reihungsstil’ and then eventually focusing on works that put the formal unit of the line at the centre of their rhythmical effects. Nevertheless, while Trakl certainly shares some characteristics with Holz and George, their works, biographies, and personalities all differ significantly.

In Trakl, one of the biggest obstacles when approaching the question of the status of rhythm in his works is the fact that there are barely any theoretical or poetological writings to draw on. However, as the analysis of his letters has shown, it indeed is an important component when it comes to his conception of poetry and his thinking about the effects, intentions, and context of his poems. On a very basic level, it is a metaphorical embodiment of poetry, on the one hand. It is also a placeholder for the possibly chaotic circumstances of the world that impinge on Trakl and his poetry. The letters further show that the appearance of rhythm in his poetry is closely linked to other subjects and themes such as movement, imagery, aesthetics and the production of meaning, or, more accurately, the process of making sense. Intending to create a poetry that is full of ‘Bewegung und Gesichte’, it is especially in his early and middle periods that rhythm makes itself known in a significant way through images.

Even in poems that are still largely organised by means of more traditional formal features, as is the case for ‘Vorstadt im Föhn’, most of the rhythmical organisation and effects happen

independent of metre or rhyme. Images and other factors create overarching rhythms that, on the one hand, work together to reinforce the impact of the scenes depicted in the poem. On the other hand, they help to build up a resistance in the author and reader alike to a certain 'Chaos von Rythmen und Bildern', which affects Trakl's creative process as well as his relationship to the world external to his poetry. Rhythm is thus a tool of self-inoculation against the impingements and difficulties of poetry and life alike.

Another important aspect of rhythm in Trakl is its relationship to the aesthetic effects appearing in his poetry. In his view, an unblemished form of beauty would make for deficient poetry since it would relegate the reader to being a mere onlooker. The rhythms created by the movements of images can help burst through this state of stupefied seeing and create a more involved aesthetic experience. Again, this is most strongly noticeable in the poems adhering to the aesthetics in line with Expressionistic 'Reihungsstil'. While the later poems also follow this logic to a degree, they shift their view in order to potentially incorporate larger perspectives and contexts to create this more involved experience.

This leads to perhaps the most important but also most complex task that rhythm accomplishes for Trakl. It is a vital aid in exposing and facilitating the processual attitude towards meaning that distinguishes his works. Instead of a fixed meaning to be unearthed, that which stands at the centre of his poetic production is the process of making sense, a coming to terms with events external as well as internal to the poems. This becomes most striking in the poetry from his late middle period onwards, beginning with 'Psalm' as a turning point. Together with the introduction of free rhythms into his poetry, Trakl also invites the possibility of incorporating larger interpretative contexts. Although this still does not lead to a final and complete reconciliation of his poetry with external event, a coming together of word and world, it nevertheless highlights the process that might be necessary to do so.

Most remarkable in this context are the developments in the last stages of his poetry, with 'Grodek', effectively his magnum opus and legacy, leading the way. In poems such as 'Klagelied' and 'Ruh und Schweigen', and culminating in 'Grodek', rhythm serves as a tool for articulating the unspeakable. In these poems, linguistic rhythms that depart from more traditional tools such as metre and rhyme become the preferred mode of making the inexpressible legible. This rhythmical innovation marks a significant contribution to German-language poetry far beyond the middle of the twentieth century and writers such as Paul Celan. Unlike Holz and George, who explicitly sought to revolutionise and redefine the literary landscape, Trakl's legacy is one rather marked by subtle yet profound transformation, where rhythm facilitates new possibilities of poetic expression in an increasingly fragmented world.

## Conclusion

From its outset, this thesis has underscored the deep symbiotic relationship between poetry and rhythm, prompting a thorough evaluation of what rhythm accomplishes in relation to poetry and poetic form. While the Introduction took Yeats's statement about the correspondence between poetry and rhythm as its starting point, the relationship between the two is much more intricate and goes significantly beyond a mere equivalence. The investigation into rhythm's role is inextricably linked to how the concept itself is understood, demanding a concurrent exploration of its nature and its function. By and large, the essence of rhythm is profoundly influenced by its user – the poet's intent and the linguistic medium they use to articulate their artistic vision. This inquiry, then, hinges on what is revealed when poetry is examined through the lens of rhythm. How does such an approach diverge from other modes of engaging with it? It cannot be denied that a poet's grasp and employment of rhythm influences not only the structural integrity of their verse but also the emotional resonance and interpretative layers experienced when reading it. Rhythm, thus, serves as a litmus test for a poet's dedication to their craft. To ask what a poet's use of rhythm is, therefore, is to interrogate their conception of poetry itself. Similarly, reading rhythm in a poem necessitates considering both the interpretation and the experiential, quasi physical effects of the poem – effects that often transcend mere semantic interpretation.

As demonstrated, the turn of the last century witnessed an explosion of interest in rhythm, a concept that transcended artistic disciplines and became a focal point in scientific as well as philosophical discourse. In this period, marked by a profound sense of temporal disjunction, societal upheaval, and generalised anxiety, rhythm eventually emerged as a potential panacea, map and mirror alike, a metaphorical, and also at times quite literal, guide through the chaos and

accelerating pace of modern life. For German-language poets at that time, rhythm remained not only a technical concern but became a central part of their artistic philosophies, offering a means to both engage with and reshape the traditions of the past.

While poetry is inherently very closely intertwined with rhythm, the historical and cultural circumstances in the decades surrounding 1900, a period of accelerated change, conveying a sense of being ‘out of rhythm’, contributed to a more widespread sensitisation to rhythm as an area of exploration – and potential salvation. Thus, in poetry, where rhythm is practically omnipresent anyway, it somewhat paradoxically leapt into the foreground even more, an all-pervading component of poetic craft and poetological thinking. Most importantly, writers needed to confront rhythm in its totality much more consciously than before, far beyond the narrow boundaries set by metre or prosody. And this also gave rise to new opportunities to rethink the relationship between poetry and rhythm and the role of the concept itself.

This thesis’s focus has been on three key figures – Arno Holz, Stefan George, and Georg Trakl – whose writings are considered essential for their respective literary schools, all three being canonical authors of German-language poetry. Their diverse approaches to rhythm exemplify the range of possibilities in German poetics around 1900. While Arno Holz worked against the backdrop of Naturalism, Stefan George wrote in the wakes of Symbolism and Aestheticism; and the third, Georg Trakl, however, is universally considered to be a forerunner of Expressionism. Yet they all have a common preoccupation with rhythm as both a formal and, more importantly, conceptual tool. By examining their works, this study argues for a broader, comprehensive approach to understanding the role of rhythm in poetry, one that recognises both its particular and universal dimensions. Limiting the analysis to a single literary movement or intellectual context would risk oversimplifying the relationship between rhythm and poetry and in turn sacrificing the nuances that arise from considering the broader historical and cultural landscape.

As explored in previous chapters, rhythm persistently defies easy definition and categorisation, the very ambiguity ingrained in it contributing to its widespread appeal and versatility as a poetic and poetological tool around the turn of the last century. This fundamental openness of the construct undoubtedly seems to be one of the main unifiers inherent in all three writers' attitudes towards rhythm, even as their individual practices diverge considerably in intent as well as execution and effects.

Examining rhythm in the works of Holz, George and Trakl, how they thought about the concept itself but also how it is used in their poetry, we gain insight into the overarching mechanisms and aims of their poems, how they thought about language, their art, and the world at large. It is not surprising, then, that two of them, Holz and George, chose rhythm to be at the very centre of their respective poetic theories. It was in fact the main vehicle to drive forward their intended revolutions of German-language poetry around the turn of the last century – albeit in very different directions. With rhythm's well-established ties to poetry and the popularity at that time surrounding the concept as such, it provided the optimal conditions to open a dialogue with past traditions and at the same time lay the foundations of future evolutions of poetry.

Holz, for instance, viewed rhythm as the linchpin of his radical rejection of traditional poetic forms, pushing the boundaries of language to its limits in his magnum opus *Phantasmus*. In order to revolutionise the formal repertoire of poetry, Holz completely renounced the use of conventional form and abandoned metre, rhyme, and other forms of organisation such as stanzas and strophes. His intentions were a radical rejection of tradition and an absolute acceptance of rhythm as the sole formal feature of his new poetry. Holz famously proposed '[e]ine Lyrik, die auf jede Musik durch Worte als Selbstzweck verzichtet und die, rein formal, lediglich durch einen Rhythmus getragen wird, der nur noch durch das lebt, was durch ihn zum Ausdruck ringt' (W V KT, 69). Rhythm, for him, was primarily a means to overcome what came before him and develop his own

relationship between his theoretical considerations and poetic practice and also facilitate the engagement of his poetry with things external to it, to represent the world, that is.

In his treatment of rhythm, Holz engaged both with contemporaneous scientific and philosophical discussions occurring around him and with some of the more general understandings of the mechanics of rhythm discussed in the introduction. The overarching role of rhythm in Holz's poetic project could thus be summarised as that of a connective tissue. It links theoretical discussions outside his writings to his own poetological reflection and is required to actualise this theoretical foundation in his creative works. Rhythm, in addition, was Holz's main instrument to conceptualise his relationship to life and reality beyond his poetry, that is a tool of representation. He aimed to capture the world as accurately as possible by way of depicting its forms in rhythms.

His engagement with the concept, thus, offers valuable insights into the relationship between rhythm and poetry more generally. Recalling Yeats's statement quoted at the very beginning of this thesis, ascribing an equivalence between rhythm and poetry is not too unreasonable, yet this has mostly been a theoretical or metaphorical consideration. Holz's poetry, however, in its later and last stages, presents itself largely as the practical implementation of Yeats's verdict. Holz intended to oppose a time widely considered very much out of rhythm with a poetry of rhythmical wealth, quite literally so. In most examples of his works rhythm is more than abundant, it becomes overwhelming, especially in the later iterations of *Phantasia*, where the wildly proliferating rhythms run the risk of overwhelming the poetry itself, leaving behind little else than the intoxicating materiality of language and almost purely physical enjoyment of its rhythms. In fact, the effects of *Phantasia* are comparable to the unusual rhythmical excesses of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, which shocked and excited audiences when the composition was first presented. However, what the poems gain in sheer physical power through this excess of rhythmical material, they appear to lose in referential capabilities; that is the mediation, even creation of meaning and managing the

direction of the reader's attention. While the introduction pointed out the role of rhythm as a facilitator of meaning, Holz's *Phantasmus* at times demonstrates the opposite: such dominant rhythms that any other meaningful material contained in the poems is at risk of being drowned out and any connections to representation of the external world potentially severed. The disproportionately large amount of attention directed at the bare rhythmicity of language is converted almost completely into physical affect, bypassing higher-level cognitive processes. With this, Holz's works add an emancipatory aspect to rhythm in poetry, a way to liberate language from the intrusiveness of interpretation, paving the way for later literary movements such as concrete poetry.<sup>1</sup>

Above I argued that Holz's critique of tradition is most effective in the context of his more conventional poetry, where the friction between his new concepts of poetic rhythms and traditional forms can serve to spark the fire of his poetic revolution, whereas the unbounded excess of the last *Phantasmus* iterations remains largely devoid of this productive tension.<sup>2</sup> However, even in *Phantasmus* openings remain where revolution and evolution productively interact. His poetics as a whole also exhibits this type of tension, namely in the relationship between his theories and their realisations in his poems. Despite championing rhythm to such a large extent, Holz's theory is at its core very much influenced by the logic of metre as it were, its powers of compression and authority. This is best seen in his infamous mathematical-artistic formula:  $\text{Kunst} = \text{Natur} - x$ .<sup>3</sup> The Introduction discussed rhythm in the context of a 'Spannungsgefüge', yet in rather abstract terms. Holz's poetics

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<sup>1</sup> This is similar to the effects of presence that Gumbrecht describes. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford University Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Jan Wagner, for example, makes a similar argument: 'Ein Gedicht ist beides zugleich, kunstvolles Regelwerk und kunstvoller Regelbruch.' Jan Wagner, 'Das Stück Eis auf dem Ofen: Ein Gespräch', in *Die Sandale des Propheten* (Berlin: Bloomsbury, 2011), pp. 86–94 (p. 87).

<sup>3</sup> Arno Holz, 'Die Kunst – Ihr Wesen und ihre Gesetze', in *Werke V: Das Buch der Zeit, Dafnis; Kunsttheoretische Schriften*, ed. by Wilhelm Emrich and Anita Holz (Luchterhand, 1962), pp. 1–46 (p. 14).

and poetry demonstrate well that this seems to be not an optional quality but rather an essential part of the mechanics of poetry.

As mentioned, the concept of rhythm is almost infinitely malleable. This is the reason why Stefan George's highly stylised, chiselled poetry can be so completely different to Holz's *Phantasia*, although he also explicitly aimed for a revolution of the German poetic language through rhythm. In Holz, rhythm proliferates and in doing so reveals the material of language, increasingly obscuring the representation of the external world, which was supposed to be depicted. In George, however, rhythm helps to reveal parts of the world that often go overlooked in his oeuvre. Natural phenomena, for example, are negotiated mostly by way of rhythmical markers in the poems, adding a more vital and grounded dimension to the famously artificial makeup of his works. Similarly, following certain metrical traces exposes subtle, ironic undertones in the poems that seem to go against the intended, stern self-stylisation of George as a poet.

In a way, investigating rhythm in the context of George's poetry often means investigating the self-stylisation of the author. His most prominent way to employ rhythms is via metre, using its capacities for meaningful compression and compact recollection to productively engage with past poetic traditions, while at the same time promoting his intentions of establishing his own standing in his poems and the poetical environment around the turn of the last century. The rhythms of metre, especially in his earlier poetry, are paradoxical in their effects. They are simultaneously unoriginal in their quotations and reiteration of bygone poetic projects, yet highly original, providing unique points of culmination of his own self-image as a poet and role as harbinger of a new poetic era. Rhythm in George, predominantly in the form of metre, is both an identity-establishing force as well as a means of assimilation. However, just as it can function as a gateway into the poetics of a given poet, George further employs it outside of his poems, as a gateway into his inner circle, a sort of shibboleth, as it were. Access to his 'Kreis' was only granted to people who

demonstrated the right aptitude for a particular kind of reading poems aloud. Rhythm, thus, not only helped to curate his distinguished poetry but also, and perhaps even more so, his social company and following.

Rhythm as metre is, in George, to a large extent a unique characteristic that sets his poetry apart aesthetically from most of the other poets writing at that time. However, the overarching role of rhythm in his conception of poetry and his own poetic identity is rhetorical and political in nature. In the Introduction, I briefly outlined the persuasive powers of rhythm; George taps into this potential while adding his own twist to it. While most of the rhetorical powers of rhythm seem to originate from its more physical and instinctual qualities, circumventing the mind and agitating the body into action, George's use of metres is highly cerebral, and yet, I argue, no less convincing for it. Especially when contrasted with Holz's complete rejection of conventional metres, George's subtle use of them highlight how powerful, well-dosed dialogues with tradition can propel the project of a poetic revolution. George's poetry shows that reading rhythms can mean reading both for and against tradition, and that even supposedly outmoded conventions are able to spark innovation. He further demonstrates that not only rhythms, but metre as well can foster dialogue and multiplicity, between aesthetics and ethical impetus, between rhetorical gravitas and tonal levity, and between external voices and one's own poetic identity.

While Holz's and George's engagement with the concept of rhythm is explicit and quite often programmatic, Georg Trakl's ideas about rhythm unfold mostly in the poetry itself. Although starting his literary career in a style very much based rather on metre and rhyme, he quickly abandoned this approach and developed a much more personal relationship with rhythm and the place it was to take in his poetry and life. Unlike the other two authors, he did not incorporate the concept into extensive written poetological or programmatic considerations. Instead, rhythm as a subject appears explicitly only in a few instances scattered throughout his correspondence. As such,

reading rhythm in Trakl can serve as the antidote to any temptation to identify it as a theoretical concept that is merely grafted onto the poetry. However, this also means that it is substantially more difficult to grasp Trakl's relationship with rhythm. Interestingly, this elusiveness also performatively emulates certain features that characterise rhythm in his works, especially when it comes to the relationship with meaning and the circumstances of his times.

Rhythm enters the works of Trakl subtly, be it via quasi off-hand comments in his letters, or particular configurations of movements and images in his poems. Out of these, two key characteristics can be discerned: a certain disruptive power as a vital facilitator of the aesthetic effects of the poetry, and processual qualities that work in correspondence to the mechanisms of making sense that are at play in Trakl's works. It is especially the second of these roles of rhythm that defines Trakl's place in the trio of authors discussed in this thesis. His stance towards the concept and what it can express is in many ways similar to his attitude towards poetry and the world at large: it is a feeling out of the contours, an iterative, asymptotic approach that puts an emphasis on rhythm's powers of continuity rather than definitiveness. For Trakl, meaning is not something fixed, but something created, or rather constantly in the process of being created, an iterative mechanism of making sense, as it were.

This process of making sense is not just a facet of his poetry, but can also be seen in his grappling with the rapidly changing and devastating circumstances of his times.<sup>4</sup> As the excerpts from Trakl's letters reveal, his understanding of rhythm could be connected to the ideas put forward by Rorty and mentioned in the Introduction, where he forms a link between the practice of reading poetry and living a fulfilled life. Trakl uses rhythm as a type of placeholder, it appears, not just for poetry

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<sup>4</sup> This also brings to mind Eikelboom's references to the relationship between rhythms and the process of settling in.

in general but also the external circumstances in which poetry can be written. In particular, rhythms act as a stand-in for all the various encroachments that modern life produced around 1900. A reaction that is in line with the identification of certain harmful rhythms with the rapidly accelerating conditions of that time. However, simultaneously, rhythm also represents poetry as a whole for Trakl, an equivalency that has often appeared in the course of this thesis. However, while Holz may take this to the extreme, overburdening his poetry with rhythms, Trakl negotiates this in a much more subdued manner.

Trakl wanted to work through the crafting of his poetry and make sense of the world in which he found himself, quite often simultaneously. As Rüdiger Görner rightfully notes, his repeated efforts when composing and re-writing poetry could often be considered an attempt to persist in a somewhat ruined world: ‘Es ist kein Kalauer, zu vermuten, dass Trakls viele Fassungen, die er von Gedichten entwarf, auch Ausdruck seiner Bemühung gewesen sind, selbst Fassung zu gewinnen angesichts dessen, was er vom Zustand (seiner) Welt sah oder zu erkennen glaubte.’<sup>5</sup> In this thesis I have argued that this process is also relevant on a smaller level, inside the individual poem as a concluded work. Perhaps the biggest external historical factor in the development of the rhythms in Trakl’s poetry is the First World War. His later and last poems especially figure as an attempt to grapple with this immense caesura and the fragmented and ruinous rhythms in ‘Grodek’ especially can stand as a testimony to Trakl’s perspective on an, in his view, equally ruinous world. The unruly rhythms in ‘Grodek’ and the other last-stage poems could also be read as Trakl’s refusal to follow the imposed rhythms of war, its perilous circumstances of life and brutal routines.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Görner, *Georg Trakl: Dichter im Jahrzehnt der Extreme*, p. 257.

<sup>6</sup> Yopie Prins makes a similar case for the popularity of Sappho’s Fragment 16 and its rhythms around WWI, which indicated a wish to live in a world beyond the destruction of war. Yopie Prins, ‘Sapphic Stanzas: How Can We Read the Rhythm?’, in *Critical Rhythm: The Poetics of a Literary Life Form*, ed. by Ben Glaser and Jonathan Culler (Fordham University Press, 2019), pp. 247–73 (p. 263).

In sum, the three poets discussed in this thesis – Holz, George, and Trakl – each engaged with rhythm in ways that reflect their poetics and the historical context in which they wrote. In their works it becomes evident that rhythm is neither just a formal element of poetry, nor completely identical with it, but a fundamental marker of poetic intent and a vehicle for exploring the deeper connections between language, art, and the human experience. The meaning and impact of the concept of rhythm in poetry, much like the poetry itself, are continuously shaped by the various interactions between poet, reader, and the cultural moment alike, making rhythm a vital and variable contributor to poetic expression.

However, as mentioned before, the role of rhythm for these three poets and during that particular period extends far beyond poetological and poetic considerations, which is an aspect I should like to highlight before concluding this thesis. The concept and the dominant discussions around it provided them with essential means to engage with the accelerated changes in the cultural and societal landscapes in the decades surrounding 1900. These responses can range from considering rhythm an antidote or catalyst; they may be conscious decisions or happen despite other intentions of the poet. Nevertheless, the exploration of rhythm often seems to function as a placeholder for a more extensive settling into the transformations of modernity.

Holz, in his early works especially, appears to respond with his poetry to the particular circumstances caused by societal upheaval and rapid industrialisation. In a way, his attitude towards rhythm and radical rejection of almost all formal features can be seen, on the one hand, as a representation of the new, faster pace of life and the breakdown of traditional societal structures. Thus, by allowing rhythm to dominate his poetic form, he could be considered to mirror the chaotic and unmediated circumstances of his times. On the other hand, by embracing the concepts of rhythm and life alike, and by allowing the language in his poems to (over)flow organically,

especially in his *Phantasus*, Holz's poetic project seems to provide an antidote to the often heavily mechanical automatisations of modern life.

George, in contrast, appears to view rhythm as a more structured vehicle to respond to the disruptions of his age. The meticulously crafted metres of his poetry provided a certain sense of control and order in a world that many perhaps perceived as slipping out of harmony and rhythm. In George, to a certain extent, rhythm therefore becomes also a tool of resistance, representing a deliberate and disciplined stance against the (alleged) disintegration of culture.

In the case of Trakl's works, rhythm emerges as a rather existential coming to terms with the heightened fragmentation of both the world and the self, particularly when facing the horrors of World War I. While the poems with largely 'Reihungsstil'-dominated rhythms could just as well be considered mimetic approaches towards these issues, it is especially in his later poetry where the increasingly fragmented rhythms reflect the violence and disillusionment that permeated most of society. As Trakl struggled to make sense of a collapsing reality and his own self as part of this very world, his poems with their irregularities and disruptions, in tandem with their striking imagery, evoke the nature of experiences in the early twentieth century.

In short, and quite simplified, the poets discussed in this thesis could stand as representatives of three paradigmatic approaches: Holz confronting and mimicking modernity, George resisting by imposing order, and, lastly, Trakl's internalisation of the age's fragmentations. In all three poets, then, rhythm can be understood as negotiating the tensions, dissonances, and uncertainties of their age, be it by mirroring or critiquing them.

Lineages of the individual engagements with rhythm discussed in this thesis persist up until the present day, and this, too, is the case for a more general enthusiasm for rhythm and conscious engagement with the concept. Jan Wagner, for example, mirrors George's commitment to traditional poetic forms while pursuing innovation. Wagner's attention to metrical precision and

consciousness of subtle rhythmic modulations speak of a keen awareness of rhythm's capacity to invigorate poetry and simultaneously ground it firmly in past poetic practices. Ulrike Draesner, on the other hand, in her science-infused poetry could be considered to echo Holz's radical embrace of language's materiality backed by his positivistic theory of art. Similar to his poetic project, Draesner often explores the intersection between poetic form, philosophical reflection, and science.<sup>7</sup> Friederike Mayröcker's poetry and its dense, disparate imagery evokes the tensions that are also present in the works of Trakl.<sup>8</sup> Her understanding and use of rhythm often emanate an existential unease and disjointedness that are characteristic of Trakl's later poems. Mayröcker is also similar in her attitude towards the unspeakable and the perhaps inherent chaos of (post)modern existence, whereby the rhythms in her poems seem to both reflect and resist this tendency. These are just three examples, and I am confident that exploring such lineages in more detail would be a promising area for future research.

Lastly, I argue, instead of asking 'What is rhythm?', further research could also examine in more detail the question of 'Why Rhythm?'. In recent years, since the beginning of the new millennium and certainly during the past fifteen years, there has been a noticeable resurgence of scholarly interest in the concept of rhythm across a wide gamut of disciplines, including literary criticism, musicology, linguistics, philosophy, and others. In the course of this thesis, I have referred to a number of these publications, however, many more belonging to a variety of academic disciplines have been published.<sup>9</sup> Like most of these studies, my thesis also argues that the concept of rhythm

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, Durs Grünbein could be considered to continue a blend of both George's and Holz's legacies with his interests in metre and science. For details on Grünbein in these contexts see Karen Leeder, 'The Poetry of Science and the Science of Poetry: German Poetry in the Laboratory of the Twentieth Century', *German Life and Letters*, 60.3 (2007), pp. 412–29, doi:10/c63kwr; Eldridge, *Metrical Claims and Poetic Experience*, pp. 215–58.

<sup>8</sup> With Paul Celan perhaps being one of Trakl's most prominent successors in the twentieth century.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example: *Resonanz – Rhythmus – Synchronisierung: Interaktionen in Alltag, Therapie und Kunst*, ed. by Tiemo Breyer and others, Edition Kulturwissenschaft, Band 108 (Transcript, 2017); Matthew Campbell, *Rhythm and Will in Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); Julian Caskel, *Die Theorie des Rhythmus: Geschichte*

can serve as a bridge between different areas, even some that appear rather disparate at first glance. This heightened interest in rhythm today, I suggest, is very much comparable to the enthusiasm surrounding the concept a century and more ago in the decades around 1900. Back then, many scholars and artists alike were coming to terms with the disorientating consequences of accelerated technological advancement, changing social dynamics, urbanisation, and various crises. Today's globalised and digitised world creates very similar conditions that invite an exploration of rhythm as a vehicle to navigate and make sense of our reality. Current life is perhaps even more complex and overwhelming than a hundred years ago with its high tempo of (quite often questionable) information flows, unstable economies, environmental crises, and, finally, a global pandemic that practically threw the whole world off its rhythm. Again, rhythm is called upon, not least due to its potential to mediate between individual and environment, body and mind, and arts and sciences. Perhaps, I suggest, the concept of rhythm itself has even become one of the 'old chestnuts' that Rorty refers to in his essay. A peculiar place of comfort, helping to both reflect and resist disturbances and instabilities, possibly even helping to live more fully. In a certain sense, then, poetry and rhythm may indeed be thought of as interchangeable.

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