Heideggerian Ecopoetics and the Nature Poetry Tradition: Naming and dwelling in Loerke, Lehmann and Bobrowski

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1. Heidegger's conception of dwelling and poetry in ecocritical perspective

"Dichterisch wohnet der Mensch", Martin Heidegger cited Friedrich Hölderlin in a public lecture in 1951, taking the line as a textual reference point for the explication of his own views on dwelling and poetry. In another lecture given in the same year, he asserted: "Die Sterblichen wohnen, insofern sie die Erde retten." Poetically man lives, or dwells, and mortals dwell in that they save the earth.[1] Jonathan Bate has recently drawn together these two enigmatic statements, elucidating them with reference to other related passages from Heidegger's work, in an 'ecopoetic' which is summed up at its simplest and boldest in the assertion: "Poetry is the place where we save the earth" (Bate 2000: 283). Heidegger is one of several politically conservative German thinkers whose responses to the development of technology and social modernisation in the first half of the twentieth century have been cautiously reexamined for their ecological potential – others include Ludwig Klages, Ernst Jünger and his brother Friedrich Georg Jünger[2] – alongside those of their left-wing contemporaries Ernst Bloch and Theodor Adorno. But Heidegger, whose thinking turned decisively towards *physis* and the Earth in the mid nineteen-thirties, and who in his later work transferred to poetry the hopes he had once notoriously placed in the regeneration of society by National Socialism, has provided a particularly fruitful philosophical basis for ecocritical theorising and textual analysis, despite the political problems with which he confronts the critic.

In the final chapter of *The Song of the Earth*, Jonathan Bate explores the usefulness of Heidegger's ideas in defining the potential of creative writing, and particularly poetry, to further the ecological project. The distinctive

contribution of poetic writing, he argues, lies less in a crude attempt to promote ecological arguments than in "a *poiesis* (Greek 'making') of the *oikos* (Greek 'home' or 'dwelling-place')" (p. 245). Bate uses the term 'ecopoetics' for both poetic and critical practices, defining the latter in Heideggerian terms as seeking "not to enframe literary texts, but to meditate upon them, to thank them, to listen to them, albeit to ask questions of them" (p. 268). Informed by her reading of post-Heideggerian studies by Yves Bonnefoy, Michel Haar and Michael Zimmermann, Kate Rigby has since confirmed the philosopher's importance for ecocritical analysis, but voiced a number of reservations and introduced modifications, which I discuss below.[3]

Though he is concerned with the arts in general, Bate assigns to poetry a privileged place, because of its special ability to provide glimpses of utopia – without deceiving us into accepting them as reality. In *poiesis*, he writes, the poet imagines himself at one with nature again, as in childhood. But the introduction of language to convey the experience simultaneously opens up a gap between the subject and nature. The attempt to reanimate the moment of union linguistically is a seeking after lost nature (p. 75). Poetic language is "a special kind of expression which may effect an imaginative reunification of mind and nature, though it also has a melancholy awareness of the illusoriness of its own utopian vision" (p. 245). Writing, he paraphrases Heidegger, is the archetypal place of severance and alienation from earth, but poetry is "a special kind of writing […] which has the peculiar power to speak 'earth'. Poetry is the song of the earth" (p. 251).

Though Bate draws quite extensively on other cultural theorists in the course of his book, it is Heidegger who he finds most congenial. Heidegger's alignment with the Nazis between 1933 and 1936, his disregard for democracy and his anti-Semitism, from all of which he never subsequently distanced himself satisfactorily,[4] are troubling factors which necessitate a reformulation of his concept of dwelling so as to avoid its elitist and racist implications. This is, however, only one instance of the awkward historical links between environmental fundamentalism and totalitarian political ideologies (see Biehl and Staudenmaier 1995). Bate refers to Anna Bramwell's account of the political history of ecological thinking in the twentieth century (Bramwell 1989), which is focused (rather one-sidedly) on

the connections between Deep Ecology and fascism, cites Luc Ferry's denunciation of ecologism as inherently fascist in *The New Ecological Order* (Ferry 1995), and alludes to the Social Darwinism and racism of Ernst Haeckel, concluding:

> Nature is so various that no consistent political principles can be derived from it. […] When ecopolitics is developed into political system, its case […] is hopeless. It may become fascism (Darré), or romantic neofeudalism (Ruskin), or utopian socialism (William Morris, Murray Bookchin), or philosophical anarchism (William Godwin, Peter Kropotkin). Whatever it becomes, it ceases to be ecopoetics. (pp. 267f.)

His solution is to draw a line between *ecocriticism* (as a form of criticism comparable to feminism and postcolonialism, setting out to change society) and *ecopoetics*. The latter, with which he is claims to be exclusively concerned, has less to do with "assumptions or proposals about particular environmental issues" than with "reflecting upon what it might mean to dwell with the earth". Further, "works of art can themselves be an imaginary state of nature, imaginary ideal ecosystems, and by reading them, by inhabiting them, we can start to imagine what it might be like to live differently upon the earth" (pp. 250f.). Bate's personal preference is most clearly expressed where he writes: "Ecopoetics must concern itself with consciousness. When it comes to practice, we have to speak in other discourses" (p. 266). He nevertheless acknowledges the "dilemma of Green reading": "that it must, yet it cannot, separate ecopoetics from ecopolitics". In practice, as we shall see below, Bate goes beyond "pre-political" ecopoetics (ibid.) to a form of criticism which is very much mindful of the political intention and impact of a given work.

A second distinctive feature of Bate's conception of the function of poetry as facilitating dwelling, and resisting the self-destructive forces in modern civilisation, is that it embraces Heidegger's metaphysics. In the German philosopher's conception of poetic creation as 'Entbergen' (a translation of the Greek *alétheia*, meaning 'revelation', 'unconcealment' or 'letting be'), he finds confirmation of his own conviction that poetry performs a religious function, giving us access to reality in a way ordinary language cannot:

> For Heidegger, poetry can, quite literally, save the earth. […] For Heidegger, language is the house of being; it is through language that unconcealment takes place for human beings. By disclosing the being of entities in language,

the poet lets them be. *That is the special, the sacred role of the poet.* (p. 258. My emphasis)

To secular readers and critics this sacralisation of poetry will seem a throwback to the poetics of Romantic pantheism. (It is therefore more to Rigby's taste than to Garrard's.) Whereas religious feeling has been a powerful force behind environmentalist commitment, and nature spirituality played its part in the green movement in Germany in the nineteen-eighties, it cannot be relied on as the sole basis for the ethics of our relationship with the natural environment. Nor would Bate's ecopoetic give insight into the work of some of the foremost twentieth-century German poets writing on nature, such as Bertolt Brecht. However, we shall see that it provides a congenial framework for discussion of the central tradition of German twentieth-century nature poetry – a genre rooted in Monism.

Bate stands on less controversial ground in his explication of Heidegger's critique of technology, an understanding of which is necessary to appreciate the role of poetry in "saving the earth". Heidegger was acutely conscious of the tendency of the modern age to exploit nature with ruthless rationality, and of the danger of this stifling other possible ways of interacting with nature. Modern technology is characterised by a "challenging-forth" ("Herausfordern") and "setting-upon" ("Stellen") things, which reduce not only the things themselves, but also humankind, to raw material or "Bestand" ("standing reserve"), and restrict human living to mere production and consumption.[5] Heidegger regards technological creation as a legitimate activity, indeed a quintessential human one. But we need, rather than continuing the contemporary scientific "enframing" and "harnessing" of nature, to develop that earlier, alternative form of *téchne* he calls *poíesis*. The *poíesis* of the fine arts is a form of *téchne* which originally indicated a bringing forth of the true into the beautiful (Heidegger 2000: 35). The acts of poets and artists are ones of reception as much as production, responding to the call of "unconcealment". Poetry is thus a "presencing", not a mere representation. Technology too has the potential to be a "Her-vor-bringen", an "ins Erscheinen bringen", an "in den Vorschein bringen" (i.e. a mode of bringing forth, presencing and revealing).

Poetry is for Heidegger both a model for human production and the prime medium through which we explore our connection with and dislocation from the earth. Its supremely important function is enabling us to *dwell* on the earth. Taking the phrase "poetically man dwells" from Hölderlin's late poetic fragment 'In lieblicher Bläue', he asserts that poetry is "what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling" (English translation 1975: 218; German original 2000: 196). The poet's task is not least to recall the wholeness of being in the face of the ravages of industrial development; indeed, Heidegger appears to be saying in 'Wozu Dichter?': "To look out for the integral entirety of beings is to take a hint from the phenomena of advancing technology, a hint in the direction of those regions from where, perhaps, an originary, constructive overcoming of the technical could come" (English translation 2002: 217; German original 1977: 290).[6] The poet must then be capable of discerning the danger that is assailing man in his very being (p. 294).

In 'Bauen, Wohnen, Denken', one of his more intuitive and poetic essays, "wohnen" is associated not only with feeling at home in and being content with a place, and belonging, but also with cultivating it and safeguarding it against thoughtless exploitation. Living on the earth in this fuller sense is a specifically human form of being. It implies awareness of our participation in nature and our own mortality, and a will to engage in "building" activities that cultivate and organically construct. Through a series of etymological connections (2000: 150f.), Heidegger links dwelling and building with being at peace, sparing and preserving, concluding:

> Die Sterblichen wohnen, insofern sie die Erde retten […]. Die Rettung entreißt nicht nur einer Gefahr, retten bedeutet eigentlich: etwas in sein eigenes Wesen freilassen. Die Erde retten ist mehr, als sie ausnützen oder gar abmühen. Das Retten der Erde meistert die Erde nicht und macht sich die Erde nicht untertan, von wo nur ein Schritt ist zur schrankenlosen Ausbeutung. (p. 152)

Mortals "dwell" in that they save the earth, but less in the sense of snatching things away from danger than of setting them free into their own essence. "Saving" is then the opposite of the modern urge to master the earth, subjugate and despoil it.

In obscure but poetically suggestive lines, Heidegger writes of a primal oneness of the "fourfold" of earth and sky, divinities and mortals:

> Aus einer *ursprünglichen* Einheit gehören die Vier: Erde und Himmel, die Göttlichen und die Sterblichen in eins. Die Erde ist die dienend Tragende, die blühend Fruchtende, hingebreitet in Gestein und Gewässer, aufgehend zu Gewächs und Getier. […] Der Himmel ist der wölbende Sonnengang, der gestaltwechselnde Mondlauf, der wandernde Glanz der Gestirne, […]. Die Göttlichen sind die winkenden Boten der Gottheit. Aus dem heiligen Walten dieser erscheint der Gott in seine Gegenwart oder er entzieht sich in seine Verhüllung. […] Die Sterblichen sind die Menschen. Sie heißen die Sterblichen, weil sie sterben können. Sterben heißt, den Tod *als* Tod vermögen. […] Diese ihre Einfalt nennen wir *das Geviert*. (2000: 151, 152)[7]

Rigby's interpretative paraphrase is helpful: the "fourfold" comprises the Earth, understood as the land itself, waterways and the biotic community; the sky with night and day, the seasons and the weather; the traces of an absent God; and fellow humans, who live in the knowledge they will die.[8] Dwelling is tantamount to living in this fourfold, which involves sparing the earth, and restoring it to its true being: "Die Sterblichen *sind* im Geviert, indem sie *wohnen*. Der Grundzug des Wohnens aber ist das Schonen. Die Sterblichen wohnen in der Weise, daß sie das Geviert in sein Wesen schonen" (p. 152). Saving the earth, receiving the sky, awaiting the divinities and learning to accept death are the four ways in which we spare the fourfold and initiate ourselves into our own essential being (p. 153). To dwell, Rigby interprets, is to create and caringly maintain a place of habitation in the fourfold, and it behoves us in particular to preserve things and places which themselves disclose the interweaving or "gathering" of these four elements. This involves attuning ourselves in what we think and say, do and make, to the natural environment (the land, plants, animals and the climate), and leaving open a space for the possibility of the divine, while assenting to our mortality and the ties that bind us to our fellow mortals (2001b: 10).

Dwelling, in this sense, possesses a clear ecological dimension, but it does not imply nature conservation to the exclusion of inhabitation and sensitive construction: our relationship with the things among which we live must be guided by the need to "bring the fourfold into the things". We must

learn not only to *nurse and nurture* the things that grow, but also to specially construct things that do not grow, i.e. to *build*:

> Dwelling preserves the fourfold by bringing the essence of the fourfold into things. But things themselves secure the fourfold *only when* they themselves *as* things are let be in their essence. How does this happen? In this way, that mortals nurse and nurture the things that grow, and specially construct things that do not grow. Cultivating and construction are building in the narrower sense. (1993: 353; original German 2001b: 153)

In view of the racist dimension of Heidegger's conception of dwelling, Bate undertakes a threefold modification. First, he stresses the need to shift the association of dwelling with the ethnically or politically defined *Volk* or nation to one with the inhabitants of a locality, province or region. Secondly, he draws attention to the leanings of Heidegger's ecopoetic to Burkean conservatism and the defence of class interests, and stresses the need to distinguish between ownership and belonging: "To inhabit is not to possess. Dwelling is not owning." Indeed, poets who find their home in a specific environment often have "an imaginative, not a proprietorial, interest in belonging". Finally, it follows that the ecopoetic vision must be "inclusive, not exclusionary", i.e. open to outsiders and newcomers (p. 280). Bate demonstrates the possibility of such an ecopoetic with reference to poems written before and during the First World war by the quintessentially English, unmilitaristic Edward Thomas, but his argument hinges above all on discussion of the poem 'Todtnauberg' by Paul Celan, probably the foremost German (Jewish) poet of the Holocaust. (This enigmatic poem, which was written after a visit to Heidegger's Black Forest home in 1967, appears to record how Celan sought in vain a healing word from the philosopher concerning the past, but nevertheless ended by confirming his sharing of his host's poetics of dwelling.)

Drawing on Michel Haar, Kate Rigby reconfigures Bate's interpretation of Heideggerian "dwelling" in two subtle but important ways. Heidegger's sense of dwelling was, she argues, certainly by the nineteen-fifties, and possibly already in the mid-nineteen-thirties, not dependent on place of birth, let alone ancestral belonging. It is rather "an achievement, something which we have to learn again and again, something which involves conscious

commitment, not something that is in any sense ‘in the blood’” (2001: 11). Secondly, she detects a recognition, in ‘… dichterisch wohnet der Mensch …’, that some form of loss or exile is intrinsic to dwelling. That we must first encounter the absence or strangeness of a place before we can begin to attune ourselves to it in dwelling. Poets admit us to dwelling precisely to the extent that they allow even the most familiar things to appear in all their strangeness, as if encountered for the first time (pp. 11f.). This finds support in Heidegger’s conception of the poetic language which “has the peculiar power to speak ‘earth’” (Bate) as being characterised by a particular type of image, which allows the familiar to appear in all its strangeness. The poetic image seeks to reveal the essence of things without subjugating them to the structures of abstract, rational and instrumental human thought. Poetic images are “not mere fantasies and illusions but imaginings that are visible inclusions of the alien in the sight of the familiar” (English translation 1975: 226; German original 2000: 204f.).

The role of poetry in fostering dwelling is further explored by Heidegger in the essay ‘Wozu Dichter?’, and revisited at the end of ‘Die Frage nach der Technik’. There is a parallel between Heidegger’s faith in the ability of poetry to preserve the humanness of man and the thingness of things in the age of capitalism and the nuclear arms race (1977: 292), and Adorno’s conception of the potential of art to gesture toward utopian solutions by reproducing the beauty of nature, with its promise of freedom, peace and belonging. According to Heidegger, our very “unshieldedness” (“Schutzlossein”), the inevitability of our own death and the patent possibility of the self-extinction of humankind through nuclear war afford a glimmer of hope. They may bring us to cease to repress knowledge of our mortality, and recognise in death the supreme law, one which sets us on our “way to the other side of life, and so into the whole of the pure draft”: “Er [der Tod] ist es, der die Sterblichen in ihrem Wesen anrührt und sie so auf dem Weg zur anderen Seite des Lebens und so in das Ganze des reinen Bezugs setzt” (p. 304).

Poetic language does not seek to describe, but to evoke the wholeness of being, which manifests itself precisely in its concealment, by means of images (2000: 205). “The poetic saying of images gathers the brightness and sound of the heavenly appearances into one with the darkness and silence of

what is alien" (English translation 1975: 226; German original 2000: 205). The idea implicit in the terms 'sound' and 'silence' that nature constitutes a 'silent' language, whose sounds convey the essence of things, and that these may be interpreted intuitively by the poet, and articulated in human language, is familiar from Herder's writings on the origin of language, and played a central role in Romantic poetics. Its presence in Heidegger's thinking is surprising, given that its 'logical' explanation lies in the premodern and pre-Kantian conception of a unity of mind and matter, and intrinsic correspondences between the spheres of natural phenomena and the intellect. It confirms the Neoplatonic metaphysical basis of this aspect of his philosophy, which is also hinted at in his systematic use of metaphors of light for the appearance of the divine.

2. Poetry as an articulation of nature's sounds and as a translation of its signs: Naming, saying and singing

For those who listen attentively, the language of nature is, according to Heidegger, a quality latent in all human language. Poets' special ability is to recognise it and allow it to speak out in their work. "Strictly, it is language that then speaks", he writes:

> Man first speaks when, and only when, he responds to language by listening to its appeal. […] Language beckons us, at first and then again at the end, towards a thing's nature. […] But the responding in which man authentically listens to the appeal of language is that which speaks in the element of poetry. The more poetic a poet is […] the greater is the purity with which he submits what he says to an ever more painstaking listening. (1975: 216; German original 2000: 194)

Poetry "corresponds" to authentic language, which directs us towards the treu being of things. It is a "response" to the latter's "appeal", in which the intensity of poetic concentration is determined by the purity with which the poet grounds his words in a painstaking process of listening. There is a paradoxical freedom to be gained from such speaking, which involves becoming "one who listens, though not one who simply obeys" (English translation 1993: 330; German original 2000: 26). Bate expands on this simultaneous listening and speaking of poetry, which is carried out through *naming*, *saying* and *singing*. Naming, he notes, gives form to as yet formless perception. Delineating and

"revealing" the perceived object, it effectively brings it into existence as an entity in its own right. (This is the basis of pre-scientific belief in the "magic" power of language to create, which is reflected in the Biblical account of the creation by the word of God.) However, naming is an act which in normal circumstances today epitomises the human domination of nature, in that it subjugates things to categories designed around human perception and the satisfaction of human needs. Bate's ecopoetics implicitly involves a different, poetic kind of naming, in which "to name a place is to allow that place its being" (p. 175), and poets let being truly be by naming and saying it.[9]

For Heidegger, poetry is also distinguished by being *singing*. Echoing Joseph von Eichendorff's quintessentially Romantic poem 'Wünschelrute' ("Schläft ein Lied in allen Dingen, / Die da träumen fort und fort, / Und die Welt hebt an zu singen, / Triffst Du nur das Zauberwort"), in which the poet imagines himself freeing the Earth from an enchanted sleep, and redeeming it by divining its secret, he describes it as a "re-singing" of the poem of the earth (2000: 204). In 'Wozu Dichter?', Heidegger asserts similarly that to be a poet means "singing, to attend to the track of the fugitive gods" (2002: 202). Singing is saying "in a greater degree", "turned away from all purposeful self-assertion" (English translation 2002: 237; German original 1977: 316).

Besides revealing things, naming, saying and singing can be acts of recalling, which preserve what is vanishing (including ways of life or endangered plant species). Heidegger quotes from a letter of Rainer Maria Rilke's:

> Our task is this, to imprint this provisional, frail earth so deeply, sufferingly and passionately that its essence rises up again within us "invisibly". *We are the bees of the invisible. We gather constantly the honey of the visible, in order to preserve it in the great golden hive of the Invisible.*" (English translation 2002: 231; German original 1977: 308. Emphasis in original)

Bate concludes that "a refuge for nature, for the letting-be of Being, must be found in poetry" (p. 264). The "saying" of poets, Heidegger comments, more complicatedly but also more suggestively, again with reference to Rilke, "concerns the remembering (making inward) reversal of consciousness which turns our defencelessness into the invisibility of world inner space" (English translation 2002: 233f.; German original 1977: 312). Poets turn the unwholeness of human defencelessness into the wholeness of worldly

existence (p. 316). It is no accident that this sense of the ability of poetry to serve as a spiritual-intellectual refuge, not merely compensating for sufferings in the real world of unemployment, political oppression and war, but also in some way healing the wounds inflicted by these, was formulated in the political, economic and social turmoil of the immediate post-war years. Similar ideas played an important role in the writing of poets of Inner Emigration such as Oskar Loerke and Wilhelm Lehmann. Yet they have a potentially problematic dimension. This became apparent after the Second World War, where nature poetry ignored human suffering and continued to focus on seeking to let beings unfold in the language of the poem.

Heidegger not only draws on the poets Hölderlin and Rilke, he also illustrates his conceptions of dwelling and poetry with reference to Goethe and Schiller, Trakl and Celan. However, the relevance of Heideggerian ecopoetics to the work of some of the twentieth-century German poets most explicitly concerned with nature and our relationship with it, namely the 'Naturlyrik' of Loerke and Lehmann, Kramer and Eich, Huchel and Bobrowski, Krolow, Becker and Kirsten, remains curiously unexplored. In the following, I ask to what extent the issues it addresses and the questions it raises may be applicable to two of them – Oskar Loerke, whose writing spans the period from the turn of the century up to the nineteen-forties, and the East German Johannes Bobrowski, who wrote most of his poems in the late fifties and early sixties. Neither of these, it should be noted, appears to have been directly informed by Heidegger. Loerke was exceptionally widely read and absorbed many influences, but perhaps owed most to Schopenhauer and the Monism of Gustav Fechner. Bobrowski was primarily indebted to Hölderlin and the counter-Enlightenment thinker Johann Georg Hamann. That they should, nevertheless, possess affinities with Heidegger is unsurprising: in their responses to the disorientation resulting from twentieth-century modernisation and the experience of war and dictatorship, the poets, like the philosopher, drew on Hölderlin's world view of a modern world abandoned by the gods, in which the poet must seek out the traces of the divine.

Loerke and Bobrowski also shared Heidegger's understanding of a mystic link between word and thing in the authentic language of nature to which poetry constantly aspires. Responding to the epistemological and

linguistic crisis of modernity, they sought to develop an alternative way of speaking of nature to the language of instrumental reason, articulating a relationship different from the anthropocentrism of the technologically enhanced but phenomenologically impoverished scientific gaze. The traditional notion of a "language of nature" served to counter what David Ehrenfeld has called the "arrogance of humanism" (Ehrenfeld 1978), which is otherwise present in Heidegger's conception of human language as the "house of being". Taking issue with the implication that signification is an exclusively human prerogative, which Bate makes explicit in his formulation: "Things need us so they can be named" (2000: 265), Kate Rigby asks how the naming which is central to language can avoid being an inherently "enframing" activity, ignoring the qualities of the things themselves, and overriding the pattern of interrelationship prevailing between them. If poetic naming is to differ from ordinary language, the poet must devise practical ways of making it so (2001b: 12f.).

Rigby suggests three practical ways in which poets can decentre the subject, and join their voice to that of the land. The first is by foregrounding the materiality of language: i.e. sounds and rhythms, metrical and phonetic patterns. A second is by weaving a web of meanings within the poem and between it and its intertexts, so as to mimic the complex interrelationships in natural systems. Finally and most importantly, the poet can and must celebrate the world beyond the text: the sounds, motions, colours and forms of the sustaining Earth (ibid. 13). We shall see how Loerke and Bobrowski develop corresponding strategies.

A second, related caveat of Rigby's with regard to Bate's ecopoetics[10] is her insistence on recognition that there could be a mode of being going beyond what it is possible to express in human language. Acknowledgement of our inadequacy in this respect is necessary, she argues, to avoid the ethically troubling hierarchy present in some of Heidegger's statements, long after his shift away from the strong anthropocentrism of *Sein und Zeit*. Drawing on Michel Haar, she calls for a "negative ecopoetics", one more Rilkean than Heideggerian, in which "poetry sings the sayable world, but so as to let it be beyond every name" (p. 15). The poetic work, she suggests, can save the Earth by disclosing it as only partially and imperfectly sayable: by

drawing attention, for instance, to its own status as text and as a mode of enframing, or by foregrounding the non-equation of word and thing. Poetic strategies include disavowals of sayability, moments of semantic incoherence, and accentuation of the formal qualities of texts which declare them to be human artefacts rather than self-disclosures of nature.[11] German nature poetry in the mid-twentieth century possesses an old-fashioned confidence in the power of the poetic word to express reality, and its conception of nature as dependent on human articulation in order to come into the fullness of being, would seem at first glance diametrically opposed to such ecological humility. However, we shall see that it embraces other aspects of the ecopoetics of negativity.

3. Oskar Loerke

Loerke's poetry is concerned with dwelling, in the broader sense of making us at home on the earth, by attuning us to the natural environment and making us conscious of our own mortality and aware of the presence of the divine. However, the term 'wohnen' does not feature significantly in his poems, and he does not seek to foster identification with or promote the cultivation of specific places, let alone safeguard them against exploitation. Indeed, Loerke might seem a subject unlikely to reward ecopoetic examination, given the uncertainty of readers about the reality of the natural objects in his poems, which is reflected in the recurring debate in the secondary literature as to whether he should be classified as a 'nature poet' at all. Loerke's landscapes defy conventional distinction between mimetic description and extensions of the self or projections of the poetic subject. He himself repeatedly asserted that his poems originated in personally experienced situations and places. He responded indignantly, for example, to a review of his volume *Der längste Tag*, which interpreted his poems in terms of images, that he gave the world as it was, "imageless and large with things" ("Ich gab die bilderlose, dingegrosse Welt" – Loerke 1996: 17). However, his poetic landscapes are curiously generalised. Actual places, for instance in the mountains of the Mittelgebirge or the woods of the island of Rügen, are internalised in a 'Binnenraum' of the intellect or spirit. "Der Abendflieger schwebt am Fensterkreuze. / Sein Klang schraubt ihn zum Binnenraum herein, / Wo

Aldebaran schon und Beteigeuze / Und fremder Lichter andre längst sich reihn", he writes in the poem 'Namen' (Loerke 1983: 369).[12] "Gebirge wächst, wo sonst nur Angst gedeiht, / In mir", the poem 'Gebirge wächst' opens, and continues: "Sich selber weiß – ich frage nicht – / Das Reich der Tiere in mir und der Pflanzen" (pp. 331-3).

Loerke, who is generally regarded as one of the most important, but least accessible German poets in the first half of the twentieth century, is a thinking, dialectical writer rather than one expressing moods, feelings or impressions, and his empathy with nature is based on the abstract principle of its underlying rhythms and musicality rather than the beauty of plants, animals or landscapes. Though his childhood and teenage years were spent on the family's farm in West Prussia, he was a city dweller for most of his adult life, whose experience of nature was restricted to travels in his twenties, and, in his later years, holidays and the garden of his house in the leafy Berlin suburb of Frohnau. Urban settings are as common as rural ones in his poems, and the city is no counterpoint to the country, but equally a site of potential experience of the divine. Loerke is a complex writer – for all the inwardness of his verse, he grapples consistently with socio-political issues – who studied philosophy, history, languages and music. He read widely (Herder, Goethe, Jean Paul, Novalis and Stifter were among the authors he found most congenial) and absorbed themes and poetic techniques from world literature. (Essays and poems reflect, for instance, his admiration for Pe-lo-thien, the Chinese poet of the Tang dynasty, whose work he first made acquaintance with in an anthology of translations of Chinese poetry published in 1905.) References to literature, music and art are as much in evidence as the natural environment, and Loerke's poems are constructed as much from intertexts (the Bible and the speeches of Buddha, Greek myth and folk tales, and German literature from Walther von der Vogelweide to Hölderlin and Goethe) as from the physical world around him. They thus combine historical and geographical specificity with the timelessness and universality of metaphor, traditional mimesis with textuality.[13]

Loerke's diaries show the foundations of his poetics were laid down in the first decade of the century, and belong in the context of Neoromanticism.[14] He was influenced by Maeterlinck and George, and shared the cosmic world

view of contemporaries such as Julius Hart, Arno Holz, Theodor Däubler and Alfred Mombert. He was probably already acquainted with the writings of Gustav Theodor Fechner and the Monist thinking of Ernst Haeckel before he met the influential literary editor Moritz Heimann, with whom he was to work together in the S. Fischer publishing house from 1917 on, and shared his interests with the members of the literary 'Donnerstagsrunde' assembled by Heimann during the First World War.[15] By 1910 he had found his own voice, developing distinctive poetic themes and techniques, and he experienced a breakthrough in 1913, when he was awarded the Kleist prize. During the First World War he came into his own as an outsider, and was for a time at the forefront of literary developments through his links with the Expressionist movement. In the twenties Loerke's prose writing, essays and poetry were, however, virtually ignored by all but a small circle of friends. The poems he is best remembered for today are probably those written during the Third Reich, when nature poetry became one of the principal vehicles for articulation of the stance of opposition to the Nazis ranging from non-cooperative refractoriness and recalcitrance to passive resistance and (still outwardly unpolitical) literary dissidence known as Inner Emigration.

In Loerke's poems the landscape is experienced as a manifestation of the divine. "Ein Gott, im Anschaun seiner selbst versteint, / Dünkt das Gebirg. Kleid Gottes ist die Schicht / Von Erde, die sein Leben hüllt", he writes in 'Göttertragik' (p. 67). The poet's task is to record his intuitive recognition of the eternal being or order behind the chaotic world of surface appearance: "Denn fremd ist nichts, was ewig, / Nur fremd manchmal sein Kleid. / Und uns soll nicht verwirren / Die formverwirrte Ewigkeit" ('Ein Traum', pp. 38-40). The timeless constellations in the heavens above, which are echoed in the ever repeated cycles of birth and death in the natural world below, provide consolation for our human inadequacy, fragmentation and mortality through the promise of participation in their perfection and permanence. The poem 'Mystische Sicht' depicts a natural world animated by the spirit of the earth, in which the branches of a tree swaying in the wind gesture to the stars, their "brothers":

So steigt die dumpfe Erde in den Baum,
Der aus ihr wächst,

Und wiegt die starren Glieder in den schwanken Gliedern.
Und er sieht, der schwarze Stern,
Aus grüner Seele brausend,
Nach hellen hinüber
Und streichelt brüderlich und scheu nach ihnen hin,
Als wären sie ganz nahe.
So wohnt die Erde denn im Wipfel ihrer Bäume? –
Sie sinnt sich aus in allen Wesen,
Wird nie zu Ende kommen. (pp. 334f.)

The influence of the mid-nineteenth-century Monist Fechner is evident here, and in entries in Loerke's diaries ascribing a soul to elements in the landscape, comparable to the human soul, as an explanation of its emotional impact on and communication with the subject. The turn of the century witnessed, according to Eric Jacobsen (2005: 89), a "veritable Fechner-revival". In the years leading up to the founding of the Monist League in 1906, his two most poetically speculative works, *Nana, oder über das Seelenleben der Pflanzen* (1848) and *Zend-Avesta oder über die Dinge des Himmels und des Jenseits: vom Standpunkt der Naturbetrachtung* (1851) were reprinted and read avidly alongside such popular scientific works as Ernst Haeckel's *Welträtsel*: *Gemeinverständliche Studien über monistische Philosophie* (1899), which expressed exuberant admiration for all living things, and Wilhelm Bölsche's *Das Liebesleben in der Natur* (1898-1903), which argued that all things had a common purpose, namely to love and to evolve in their capacity to love.

In the eighteen-fifties, Fechner had been one of the foremost defenders of the panentheist world view against the empiricist scepticism of his contemporaries Rudolf Virchow and Emil Dubois-Reymond, and the materialist reductionism of Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Vogt and Ludwig Büchner. Building on the Romantic physicist Lorenz Oken's conception of correspondences between the human organs of perception and the creatures in the plant and animal worlds (in *Lehrbuch der Naturphilosophie*, 1811-12), he developed a theory of psycho-physical parallels between the human, animal and plant kingdoms, the planetary system and the cosmos. Behind this stood the German tradition of dual-aspect Monism. Initiated by Herder and Goethe, who drew on Spinoza's theory of mind and matter being equal attributes of the infinite being, this philosophy had received its classical

exposition in Schelling's *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* (1797). Fechner's ascription of souls to all living beings, and also the moon, the sun and the stars, which he saw as ultimately united in a 'world soul', placed humanity in a position mid-way in terms of complexity between the smallest entities and the divine whole. Fanciful as these speculations were, they had and have, as Jacobsen notes, like the Lovelock/Margulis Gaia-theory of the nineteen-seventies, the advantage of endowing nature with subjectivity and intrinsic value (Jacobsen 2005: 84f.). The embeddedness of humans in nature they implied provided an alternative to Cartesian dualism and presupposed that creation was not there purely for humans' benefit. Fechner's writings thus implied an ecological value system more strongly than any Monist cosmology had done before and anticipated today's pathocentric eco-humanism (ibid. 325).

An aspect of Monist thinking which particularly attracted poets at the turn of the twentieth century, when the despiritualisation of nature was progressing apace, was the idea that aesthetic appreciation of nature provided presentiments of the world soul. Heinrich and Julius Hart, Wilhelm Bölsche and Bruno Wille, members of the Friedrichshagener Kreis, had stressed the religious value of the aesthetic experience of nature in their writings since the early eighteen-nineties. However, the great populariser of this idea was Ernst Haeckel, whose *Kunstformen der Natur* (1899-1904) presented natural beauty as a pathway to the spiritual, arguing that even the simplest forms of life were 'ensouled' and possessed artistic creativity. In 'Maienmeditation', Loerke sees the all-pervading spirit of the universe in the flowers of chestnut trees lit up by evening sunshine: "Es ist der Geist, der in den Stämmen fährt, // Der dunkel auffährt, immer auf und auf, / Aus ewiger Mitte ein Getrief, Getrauf". Man is estranged from mother nature, but can experience the great unity of being in an aesthetic shock which transcends time:

Du Geist, – ich Geist, wir kennen uns nicht mehr,
Und fahren aus demselben Grunde her.

Zerwrungen ist die lange Nabelschnur
Zur selben Muttergottes der Natur.

Wir Menschen sind ihr nur in Schauern treu:

Der Zeiten Schichten wirbeln dann wie Spreu,

Wir sehn Äonen eng im Augenblick (pp. 71f.)

The motif of kinship between humans and animals and plants is found in many poems. In 'Die beiden unsichtbaren Heere', the poet guides a moth gently away from his desk lamp, because he recognises "Du *lebst* und also bist du *meinesgleichen*", and that "Die Kräfte bleiben nicht in Grenzen / Gezirkt, und Tier und Mensch und Pflanze tauschen" (p. 82).[16] In a late poem, 'Ende', which imagines the feelings of a tree which has just been felled, death is described as a transition to another, superior form of being:

Ein Schwindel faßt es,
Und es geht unter.
Doch im Erlöschen,
Mit neuen Organen,
Ahnt es läuten seinen Wandel,
Der ihm stumm war achtzig Jahre […] (p. 452)

There is a parallel here, as in the earlier poem 'Die Wurzeln' (in which the poet dreams he is a giant oak, spreading its roots all over the world), not only with Fechner and Haeckel, but also with the cosmological musings in Bruno Wille's widely-read novel *Offenbarungen des Wachholderbaums* (1901). Wille's protagonist learns from a juniper tree, the voice of the cosmic spirit of the universe, that all material is linked with spirit. The human soul is composed of smaller souls, and itself part of larger souls. The death of a tree or of an individual is a trivial change in the life of the oceanic *Allseele*, a mere exchange of partners in the eternal dance of the tiniest atomic souls. The human soul thus continues to exist after death as a psycho-physical presence in the cosmos (Jacobsen 2005: 267f.). The spirit of life unites all living things within a single organism, and the self extends beyond the body to the environment as a sphere surrounding it, which he calls "Umleib" (p. 269).

Loerke's importance lies less in the poetic transmission of this Monist cosmology and nature religiosity, which now seems quaintly antiquated, than in his inflection of it in confrontation with modernity.[17] His poems express the alienation of modern man from nature, and the post-Nietzschean generation's break with the established church. The Expressionist anguish of 'Die Einzelpappel' (pp. 26f.), 'Meeressturm im Samland' (p. 41), 'Die Ebene' (p.

115) and ‘Wiederkehr’ (pp. 119f.) reflects a personal crisis of faith in which Loerke broke with the Christian piety he had been brought up in, but also the experience of his contemporaries. The syncretist religiosity he subsequently articulates is characterised by sombreness of tone, and a stress on the stern and distant side of nature. In the afterword to the volume *Der Silberdistelwald*, which is addressed to Wilhelm Lehmann, he wrote in 1934:

> Ich lernte bei Dir das immer geschehende Jüngste Gericht gewahren. Ich lernte bei Dir: Im Dasein des Grünen Gottes (kühler und weniger bestimmt gesagt: der Natur) – in seinem bloßen Dasein als dem währenden Vollzug seiner Gesetze liegt dieses Gericht: das mildeste und härteste, das denkbar ist. Im Niederfall eines Borkestücks von der hundertjährigen Platane ergeht sein Spruch, im unsichtbaren Altern aller Blätter und aller Adern in den Blättern, im Flug und Schritt der vieltausenderlei Zeiten auf Erden: durch unser Trauern und Freuen scheint das Endgültige. (1958, I: 681f.)

Loerke is separated from Fechner by a distinctly modern sense of subjection to laws of nature which are coldly indifferent to the fate of the individual. Transience, suffering and death, and a mixture of resignation and stoic fortitude in the face of these are the central themes in his poetry. For all his apparent confidence in the divinity and purpose of nature and human life, and in the power of the poetic word, Loerke responds to the dual crisis of modernity: alienation from the natural world and language scepticism. The loss of belief in a direct relationship between word and thing, theorised by Ferdinand de Saussure in his writings on the arbitrariness of the relationship between signifier and signified, and described so memorably in Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s fictional letter of Lord Chandos (1902) as a “disintegration of words in the mouth like mouldy mushrooms” (Hofmannsthal 1976: 14), leads him, as we shall see below, to argue, like Heidegger, that there are other, poetic ways of speaking of things capable of truly representing their essence.

Loerke’s reaction to the despiritualising of nature through contemporary science was complex: on the one hand, as we have seen, he compensated for the disorientation and loss of meaning in modernity by positing an underlying unity of being (“The world knows its grounding thought, otherwise it would not exist” – 1958, I: 652). However, important elements in his poems run counter to the holist-mystical paradigm: they tend to foreground the difficulties experienced by the subject in recognising this unity, and are no

mere reconciliatory affirmation of life, but reflect a view of human existence as suffering, and indeed celebrate suffering as a path to redemption.[18]

'Nachtwanderung zu Tal' (pp. 44f.), which speaks of a mysterious music drawing the poet on, conveying "the meaning of the earth, painful and invisible", reflects a melancholy awareness of the illusoriness of the poet's glimpses of utopia. However, the darker side of Loerke's writing is perhaps best illustrated by 'Sonnwendlied der Vögel', where the birds are compared to seers and prophets. Their magical song sings of the foundations of all Being, which are governed by the daily and annual course of the sun. But its golden wheel rolls inexorably onwards, oblivious to the suffering and death of the individual birds:

Da oben geht ein goldnes Rad,
Das Erden zu Aposteln hat
Und alles auf den Erden.
Wir tragen all einen Mühlenstein,
Der Ast ist zu dünn, wir sind zu klein,
Wir werden müde werden. (pp. 19f.)

Loerke is often referred to as a poet of Magic Realism. In the section of his study of the author entitled 'Dichtung als Dasein: Magische Verse', Walter Gebhard distinguishes between two respects in which Loerke's writing may be described as 'magic'. On the one hand, objects in the natural world constitute magic "figures", and on the other, linguistic metaphors convey these in the poem. In the first sense of the word, configurations of things become transparent, revealing a historical or mythical event or cosmic correspondence in an epiphanic moment of mystical insight. This blossoming of normally insignificant things into representative significance is experienced as if they were speaking to the poet: the unexpected coincidence of different spheres of reality seems magical in its transcendence of time and place. In the second sense, 'magic' alludes to the layering of different spheres of reality in the poetic word (for instance through synaesthesia or metaphor). The simplicity of the 'right' word, which has been arrived at intuitively and represents a perfect match of art, language and reality, is experienced as 'given'.

The definition of the term 'Magic Realism' by Michael Scheffel in his study of the phenomenon (Scheffel 1990) captures a further important aspect of Loerke's poetry. Scheffel proposes that Magic Realism be regarded as a

generic stylistic concept (originating in art criticism, it has been used variously for the literature of Inner Emigration, early postwar writing, and the Latin American novel), which possesses a distinct historical focus in German literature between the nineteen-twenties and the nineteen-fifties. Magic Realism is a post-Expressionist movement distinct from the superficial realism of New Sobriety. It combines precision with atmosphere, and realistic detail with dream imagery, and reveals a hidden meaning between the lines of the visible phenomena of the landscape, through meticulous reproduction of the world of visible objects. By dint of 'hyperrealist' magnification, familiar objects become mysterious cyphers of a reality which is experienced as strange and riddlesome. Magic Realism lives from tensions between the material and the imagined, the near and the far, the idyllic and the sinister. Typically, peaceful scenes bathed in a harmonious afterglow are framed against the background of a dark, threatening world. The Neoromantic cosmic experience of coincidence of macrocosm and microcosm, of union, participation and plenitude, remains central to Magic Realism, but it is now predominantly situated in an eerie, morbid, enervating atmosphere of "lethargic presentiment" ("träge Erwartung", p. 98), and accompanied by a feeling of loneliness and helplessness. The quest for a "long lost knowledge of the whole", as Martin Raschke puts it in a programmatic essay, is prompted by cultural pessimism and political foreboding. "The uncanny", he writes, "is caught in the noose of the familiar and trusted" (see Scheffel 1990: 95).

Though Loerke was a generation older than the Magic Realists at the centre of Scheffel's study (which is principally concerned with the prose writing of Kasack, Kreuder, Lampe, Lange, Langgässer, Raschke and Saalfeld), and is not discussed there, he has been identified by Burkhard Schäfer (2001) as an important precursor of the movement. His poems certainly express, like their stories, novels and essays, a longing for harmony, while acknowledging alienation and fear, and reflect the fundamental ambivalence of the order of nature summed up by Scheffel in the term "sinister idyll" (p. 99). Like the work of these "visionaries craving order but perceiving decomposition", they articulate the paradoxical fusion of "fragmentation of the world of things on the one hand, and its harmonisation in an ultimate, invisible order on the other" (p. 112).

Schäfer, who builds on Scheffel's study of Magic Realism, but is led by his particular focus on the motif of waste land and post-industrial wilderness (*Ruderalfläche*), and its use as a figure of poetological reflection, to examine different authors, is prompted by Scheffel's preoccupation with the "Zwischengeneration" or interstitial generation of German writers in the nineteen-thirties and forties to reflect on the nature poets as a "Zwischenmoderne" (p. 76). Located between High Modernism (1890-1925) and the second phase of Modernism in the nineteen-sixties, both of which emphasised textuality and the autonomy and materiality of the signifier as opposed to traditional mimetics, he describes the Magic Realist nature poets as offering a response to the crisis of (nature) aesthetics in modernity which was essentially conservative, but less anachronistic than a "hybrid coincidence of modernity and traditionalism". Outsiders on the literary scene in the nineteen-twenties, they established a language of peripheralness which acquired acute political significance after 1933. Even during the period of High Modernism, by no means all writers had belonged to the avant-garde, which denied the possibility of authentic, non-clichéd articulation of natural beauty in art. This literary project of German nature poetry, which fell out of favour during the post-war phase of economic, industrial and technological development, began to attract interest again in the nineteen-eighties. Jörg Zimmermann ended his overview of the history of nature aesthetics in 1982 with a call for redefinition of the artist's task in such a way as to make clear the responsibility towards nature as "a purpose in itself": "The includes the possibility of relating art to nature again, mimetically, but in a non-trivial, self-reflexive form" (1982: 147).

To what extent, then, does Loerke's poetry possess an ecopoetic dimension, and seek to further dwelling through naming and singing? Gebhard describes Loerke's poetry as an attempt to "house" the reader in nature, by granting him or her participation in a reality which is timeless and transcends suffering (Gebhard 1968: 134). In the poem 'Gebirge wächst', a hut high up in the Dolomite mountains, threatened by avalanches but surrounded by timeless forests, wild animals and stern, snowcapped mountains is envisaged; it becomes an image for the poem, as a "Haus für Menschengäste / Im Labsal und im Wehsal Ewigkeit" (p. 331). And in one of

his essays on Chinese literature, Loerke compares the work of the poet with that of the architect, as a creation out of nothing, giving form to the formless, so there is “something there which can be entered into and lived in by living things”:

> Der Pinsel tuscht Verse, an allen Wegbiegungen treten sie auf, emsige Baumeister, um eine Architektur aus dem Nichts zu errichten, damit etwas da sei, was von den Lebewesen betreten und bewohnt werden könne. […] Aber auch die Menschen müssen aus dem Schlaf der ungeschichtlichen Gestaltlosigkeit erlöst werden, damit sie in das Diesseits der Anschaulichkeit erwachen. (1958, II: 634).

The poems in which Loerke writes of our participation in the transience and suffering which accompanies all life, and stresses our link through the spirit with other aspects of nature, great and small, can be seen as seeking to make us at home on the earth. He touches on the idea of an equality of all being at one point, in ‘Das unsichtbare Reich Sebastian Bachs’, where he says of the invisible realm of music and the spirit: “Dort sind alle Wesen gleich: / Nicht an Stimme und Gesicht, / Doch an Ehre, Recht und Licht” (p. 495). More generally, his poems are a response to the erosion of reality in modernity comparable with the Rilkean conception of poets imprinting the “provisional, frail earth so deeply, sufferingly and passionately” on themselves “that its essence rises up again” within them, and thus preserving the memory of disappearing things, like bees gathering the honey of their essence in an invisible hive. What Loerke admires in Pe-lo-thien, for instance, is above all the Chinese poet’s ability to “transform the world by observing it, to destroy and reconstruct it, discovering it in the distance of what is close and the closeness of what is distant” (1958, II: 609). In a world of fragmentation, alienation and suffering, the poem performs a quasi-sacred function, storing away the traces of utopian wholeness.[19]

The consolation provided by nature’s permanence and harmonious order in a world of transience and vicissitude took on a new dimension during the Third Reich, when Loerke was dismissed from his position as Secretary of the Literature Section of the Prussian Academy of Fine Arts and all but excluded from the literary world. He now envisages nature as an unassailable invisible realm, providing refuge for a community of the spirit, the outcast and persecuted, in which the poet finds peace and companionship with other

representatives of culture throughout the ages (see ‘Die Verbannten’, pp. 396f., ‘Der Wald der Welt’, p. 466 and ‘Das unsichtbare Reich Sebastian Bachs’, pp. 495-8). In the poems of the volumes *Der Silberdistelwald* (1934) and *Der Wald der Welt* (1936) it is a matrix of values of lasting validity, transcending contemporary reality, a metaphor for humanist cultural tradition and the cultural being of humanity. However, as Gerhard Schulz has commented in his article on ‘Zeitgedicht und innere Emigration’ in *Der Silberdistelwald* (Schulz 1984), Loerke’s conception of nature remains characterised by ambivalences and contradictions. To a certain extent these may be attributed to mood swings between optimistic defiance and melancholy pessimism. Though nature is timeless, it is also defenceless. In the poem ‘Gebirge wächst’ (pp. 331-3), which has already been shown to exemplify the poet’s mediation between the outer and inner worlds, and to present poetry as a safe house for Loerke’s companions in spirit, in the shape of a climber’s hut high in the mountains, the forest is described as surviving natural disasters such as avalanches and regenerating. However, the poem ends darkly, with the mountains saying their primeval power has sapped by the ‘un-power’ of humans: their brows are faded and their voices have echoed into silence (p. 333).

‘Die Laubwolke’ (p. 449), in which a deciduous tree provides one of the iconic images of Inner Emigration, contrasts with this in imputing to nature, despite its fragility, a fundamental strength and ability to last. The Chinese poet Lao Tse’s motto “Constant is what is easily injured” serves as a model for survival in adversity. One of Loerke’s best-known poems because of its political significance as an expression of faith in the ability of the human spirit and cultural tradition to endure oppression, expressed in lines echoing Goethe and Hölderlin, combining the concrete with the abstract, the hymnic with the didactic, and the timeless with immediate political relevance, ‘Die Laubwolke’ presents nature’s annual cycle of renewal as impervious to the saws and axes of gardeners and loggers, whatever the fate of the individual tree. The poem expresses an ultimately subversive conviction that the ordered universe will survive its human violation.

The laws of nature, experienced elsewhere as crushing the individual, are here a source of reassurance to the suffering, and though Loerke’s

conception of nature is on the whole one of a dynamic process, there is a tendency in the poems written during the Third Reich to represent it as static, as for instance in the poem ‘Tannen’:

Ihre Schatten schlugen viel Zirkel im Grase,
Der Fingerhut dorrt in der Apothekervase,
Die Tannen ragen reglos noch immer

Mit grünen Bärten, mit moosigem Schurze,
Es endigt das Menschenleben, das kurze –
Die riesigen Tannen ragen noch immer:

Die Sonne, vom Berge schräg zerschnitten,
Ist heute abend nach hundert Jahren nicht tiefer geglitten,
Die grünen Türme ragen wie damals, wie eben. (p. 399)

Even nature’s indifferent otherness becomes paradoxically comforting, because it signifies a sphere free of short-sighted human desires (“Kurzstrebigkeit” and “Vormundsucht” – 1958, I: 688). Though nature never becomes identical with human principles and concerns, its embrace is experienced on the whole profoundly positively. “Mein Haus, es steht nun mitten / Im Silberdistelwald”, Loerke writes in the mysteriously beautiful poem of the same name (p. 402). “Forest of the world” and “Silver thistle forest” are images for a harmoniously structured world of morality and enlightenment. However, the relationship between humankind and nature is one of mutual dependence. In Pan’s shadow, worldly strife is at peace. But his sleep can be disturbed: “Wenn wir Pans Schlaf verscharren, / Nimmt niemand ihn in Schutz”. A falling star becomes a token of communion between heaven and earth, and a symbol of the reciprocally caring father-son relationship between nature and the poet:

Vielleicht, daß eine Blüte
Zu tiefer Kommunion
Ihm nachfiel und verglühte:
Mein Vater du, ich hüte,
Ich hüte dich, mein Sohn (ibid.)

Loerke’s dwelling is, unlike Heidegger’s, inclusive and open to “Zeitgenossen aus vielen Zeiten”, i.e. all of good intention. Rather than being associated with possession, ancestral or racial belonging, it is something earned by the individual through engagement in the world of the spirit, the intellect, culture and moral values. For all the anthropocentric bias of his conception of

language, we shall see in the following that Loerke also acknowledges a certain linguistic autonomy of nature, which goes some way towards meeting the requirements of an ecologically sound poetic.

In various places, Loerke wrote of nature's dependence on human transformation in order to attain completion and form. An entry in his *Gedanken und Bemerkungen zu Literatur und Leben* written in 1927 asserts that naming grants phenomena permanence, by developing and unfolding the experience of them: "Erst wenn die Sprache bis dahin noch nicht erfaßte Dinge erfaßt, sind sie in der Welt. Sonst aber gehen sie vorüber, auch für den, der ihr Urerlebnis hatte, weil er diesem Urerlebnis nicht genügend weit nachgegangen ist, weil er es nicht entfaltete" (1996: 22). The poetic word extracts the spiritual essence from transient materiality, he notes in a commentary on *Till Eulenspiegel*: "Das magische Wort hat den Geist der Verweslichkeit abgejagt" (1958, II: 639). Indeed, it is capable of preserving and redeeming reality, as he writes in an essay on Chinese literature. Poetry, unlike the everyday language of contemporaries, possesses a holy and demonic power, it has the ability to invest non-being with new existence: "Das magische Wort ist der letzte Heiland, wenn alles zerbricht: das ganze, klare, treffende, erkennende, tragende, trächtige, – nicht das zergliedernde, knechtisch mitteilende, nur einkaufende und ausgebende, herumirrende, schönrednerische" (1958, II: 633).

Poems concerning naming include 'Die Vogelstraßen', in which nature is described as "waiting anxiously" for the poet to give it meaning (p. 256), and 'Der Dichter', in which Loerke writes, echoing the Platonic and Gnostic understanding of creation through divine light, that mortal things are dependent on us to bring them to life:

Dein Urlicht treibt die Berge herrenlos,
Und es bewegt die Länder ernst und groß
Wie Meer! – Doch Sterbliches, darauf entsprungen,
Erwartet starr das Licht von unsren Zungen. (p. 238)

The image appears again in 'Namen' ("Du nährst das mitgenommne Erdenlicht" – p. 369). By addressing things, we bring them into existence, and by giving nameless things our names, we overcome transience. However, if

the dumb things rely on our naming them, it is an action through which we also learn about ourselves:

Sprichst du sie an, die fern ist viele Leben,
So schwebt die Kugel unter deinen Schuh.
Den namenlosen unsre Namen geben,
Uns Kindern spielt es die Äonen zu.

Auch unter dir die nahen Dinge kamen,
Die stummen wie vor deinen Mund
Und bitten dich um neue Namen,
In ihnen machen sie dir selbst dich kund. (pp. 369f.)

Loerke's conception of naming also corresponds to Bate's ecopoetics in that it reflects a belief, like that of Heidegger, that poetic language constitutes a particular way of naming things, one which lets them be, and brings them into a fuller being. If poetic language gives existence to unarticulated experience, it is neither through pure subjectivity nor by dint of mere technical skill. The poet responds rather to beings, which seek entry into the poem, Loerke writes in the afterword to *Der Silberdistelwald*:

> Ich hatte mein Erleben heimzuleiten in die Form seiner Existenz durch Sprache. In ihr wird keine begnadungslüsterne Beichte angenommen, ebensowenig wie in den musikalischen Formen. Und auch keine Technik schafft Existenz. [...] Ich stand vielmehr in einem Zustrom der einfachen Dinge und Wesenheiten, die keine Bedingungen für ihren Eintritt in das Gedicht mitbrachten, außer daß sie darauf drangen, ihre volle Wirklichkeit zu behalten. (1958, I: 683f.)

In later poems such as 'Die Rast' (pp. 350f.), this voicing of nature takes on a distinctly political dimension. On a stormy autumnal walk through the mountains, the trees lashed by the wind seem to reflect the helplessness of the individual. However, descending into a sheltered valley for a rest, the poet sees the buds on the trees in their protective casing, safe from the rigours of winter and awaiting the next spring. Friends, as he describes them, who have never broken silence, open themselves, and their languages are silent in the poet's words: "In mir übt seine Sprache verfrüht / Der Wipfel: er enthüllt sich, er blüht." Loerke's stance during the Third Reich ranged between political non-conformity and passive resistance, but the liberation of nature is unmistakably linked with human liberty and justice in his poetic project. In the poem 'Katakombe', he exhorts his companions, thinkers and artists who are.

Like the Early Christians, forced to live in catacombs, to search for the magic word which provides protection from the night:

Sucht Katakombenbrüder für das Wort.

Es pflanzt den Hall aus Gott im Hohlen,
Und Nachhall klärt sich auf zum Urbefehl:
Da kreist, zum Schweben herbefohlen,
Das All, verheimlicht erst, dann ohne Hehl.

Resede schaukelt und Limone.
Es sammelt den versprengten goldnen Hort
Die Nacht nicht ein; sie weiß, er wohne
Befreit, verbürgt im Katakombenwort. (pp. 481f.)

Loerke's diction is here old-fashioned, his poetic form conventional, and his belief in the power of the human word seemingly untroubled by modern linguistic scepticism. Yet he was from his earliest writings conscious of the barrier between self and 'speechless' life, and his poems express sensitivity towards the violation of reality in human language. The poet's words and images are not imposed on nature arbitrarily, but arrived at through communication with it. The speaker opens himself up to the mineral, vegetable and animal world by looking and listening, his speaking earth is a submission to its need for self-reflection which demands of the subject forgetting of the self and imaginative empathy. Commenting on the poem 'Gebirge wächst', Loerke uses the mystical expression "hollow" ("Höhlung") for the sphere in which nature is experienced as communicating with him.

[Das Irdische] zeugt durch Schwere, Gestalt, Wachstum, Entwicklung wie mit lauter schweigenden Stimmen für sich selbst. Wenn ich im Sehen und Hören nicht mit mir selbst zu sprechen anfing, sprach doch das Geschaute und Erhorchte in jener Höhlung, in der es mit mir allein war, zu mir. […] Heute kann ich mich fragen, ob es damals von mir nicht vermessen war, das nicht metaphorisch, sondern geradezu mitzuteilen, so geradezu, daß die Berge selbst redeten. Aber: ist es eine auf den Stein übertragene Menschenrede? (1958, I: 654).

The initial focus of attention on the physical appearance of things becomes a feeling of them from within. The poetic symbol, which unites rational thought, feeling and imagination, fuses the dual aspects of being, the physical and the spiritual. "Das benennende Wort ist glücklich mit sich selbst", Loerke writes, "weil es nicht ziert und nicht lügt, was es immer benenne" (1958, II: 638).

Poetry is for Loerke, as for Heidegger, a re-singing of the song of the earth, bringing it to shine and sound, and disclosing being in a magic incantation: “Meine Verse”, he writes in the essay ‘Meine sieben Gedichtbücher’, “erzählen […] mehr, als daß sie singen, und wenn sie im Gesang erklingen, so ist das mehr der Gesang der Dinge als meine Stimme” (1958, I: 653). The poem ‘Wechselgesang’ suggests the whole of creation has sprung from a primeval melody (echoing Eichendorff), and that the poet enters into an antiphonal chant with nature, in which each intensifies the other:

Ich töne wie die Blätter tönen,
Sie spielen lauter, was ich meine,
Ich bin schon kühner, was ich scheine,
Woran sie tönend mich gewöhnen.
[…]
So schließt Musik den Weg zum Kreise,
Umkreist sich selbst mit ihrem Wege.

Sie hat sich selber fern im stillen,
Vielleicht auch Mensch und Baum ersonnen:
Wir sind beschlossen wie begonnen
Sibyllenmund nach ihrem Willen. (p. 217)

The rhythm and the sounds of the words are here as important as their meaning. In the chapter on Loerke’s poetology in his *Theorie des modernen Naturgedichts*, Christian Kohlroß has written of Loerke’s view of rhythm as the poietic principle in nature, the *natura naturans* which it is the business of the poet to mimic (2000: 101-47). The quasi-divine creative force can appear as flowing water, as a tree, in the forms of the spiral and the wedge, and take on human form as Pan or a nymph. However, as Loerke writes in a much-quoted passage from his poetological essays, these are only superficial manifestations of the fundamental rhythm which is universally present in creation:

Noch im wortlosen Vorstellen, noch im Schlaf, noch im Unterbewußtsein zählen und schlagen die schweigenden Laute ihren einstigen und künftigen Takt. Dem Narren mag das Narretei heißen, die Dichter erkannten das Schicksalhafte darin an. Die Sprache, aufgehoben in Schrift und Gesang, strebt diesem physisch-metaphysischen Symbolum zu. (1958, I: 703)

Rhyme and assonance weave a magic web of sound in the poem, echoing and alternating with, amplifying and clarifying the underlying harmony of nature. Rhyme in particular is a form of synthesis, bringing together in words what belongs together in reality. Loerke writes of “der Urdrang des Reimes, zu gesellten Dingen lebendige Geister zu gesellen, damit sich der Bestand der Schöpfung selbst begreife und durch Begreifen seiner Beziehzungen vermehre” (p. 716). “Der Reim macht heimisch in der Welt, er trifft überall brüderliche Geschlechter an”, he later notes (p. 726). Poetry is thus a synthesising activity, in which the world is made conscious of its structure (Kohlroß 2000: 107f.). The abstraction and distortion of discursive human language (and philosophy) normally prevent us from speaking meaningfully about metaphysical things, but poetic language, with its verses, rhymes, rhythms and symbols, finds a way of doing so, and of expressing the Earth.

Not the least of Loerke’s ecopoetic achievements lies in his distinctly modern stress on the strangeness of nature, his respect for its otherness, his acknowledgement of the limited nature of our understanding of its language, and his recognition of the imperfection of our speaking of it in the poem. “From the start”, writes Gebhard, Loerke “keeps at a pious distance from the sphere of beings”, despite his readiness in the early work to engage in pantheist empathy and ecstatic union with nature (p. 17) Nature admits man, but simultaneously excludes him. The trees, which spring from the earth, grow and express their essence, and the birds, which defy gravity by hovering and flying, are privy to universal knowledge, but man, rendered impure through his consciousness, is denied more than occasional, fleeting access to “never awakened slumber in the life of the universe” (‘Abendstimmen der Einsamkeit’, p. 107). A simultaneous concealing and revealing is present in nature’s visual communication with humans, through mysterious feathers and signs. In ‘Nächtliche Kiefernwipfel’ (pp. 411f.), for instance, the poet tries in vain to read the ideogrammes sketched by the pine branches against the moonlit sky, which seem to be “imparting the inner meaning which they see to the passing wind”.

The inadequacy of human language is illustrated by ‘Gebirge wächst’: the rocks speak to the poet, and the “sphere of the minerals” within him answers. “Du hörst uns Berge, hörst uns ohne List, / Ach, sag es nicht den

Leuten. / Sie fassen schwer, was einfach ist / Und doppelt nicht zu deuten" (p. 332). Nature's haughty detachment from humankind is perhaps clearest in 'Das Unentrinnbare' (p. 309) and the cycles 'Die ehrwürdigen Bäume' (pp. 460-5) and 'Der Steinpfad' (pp. 529-43), which is set in Loerke's garden. The peach trees reject the poet's advances when he believes he hears them speak: "Ich frage: sprichst du? – "Deine Rede!" / Die Pfirsichkugeln glühn Urfehde" (p. 529). His clumsy approaches and longing for companionship are met by supreme indifference:

Fühlst du dich fremd auf deinem Pfade,
So flehe nicht um Fremdlings Gnade,
Denn Fremde sind wir, die da grünen,
Die niemals sich zu dir erkühnen
Wie du zu uns. Alldonner schallen –
Verlassen bist du von uns allen. (p. 533)

Loerke thus credits language with the ability to gain access to and preserve reality, and to articulate the sensation that other life awakes within him, but he frequently speaks of the barriers, distance and detachment encountered, and posits the linguistic "conquering" of poetry as a contemplative taking possession, free of physical violence. For this reason Tgahrt describes Loerke's conception of language as "a complicated marriage between language mysticism and common sense" (Loerke 1996: 88). Essential prerequisite for the harmonious union with nature which remains present in later poems of Loerke's such as 'Besuch der Berge bei mir' (p. 555) is an attitude without ulterior motivation, or "ohne List" on the part of the subject. This presupposes rejection of an instrumental relationship with nature. In the poem 'Gestaltung', the trees, which are "displeasingly distant yet joined to us" ("befremdend fern und doch gesellt"), insist that no one has ever been possessed of them without setting aside their power over them, in a quasi-Schopenhauerian relinquishment of the will: "Kein Mensch war je von uns besessen, / bevor er seine Macht vergessen. / Vergiß: schon prägt sich unsere Spur. / Gedenk: sie lischt. Versuche nur!" (pp. 461f.).

As we have seen above, there are traces of a sense of the need to protect nature in Loerke's poems. 'Gebetsfrage' is not, perhaps, one of Loerke's best works, and he did not publish it in his lifetime, but its unusually open criticism of the abuse of our custodianship of plant and animal life

deserves mention. Loerke asks God the father why he has endowed us with an intellect which is so destructive and the source of such suffering, why he stands silently by as we fell trees and slaughter calves:

Um Kälber hab ich oft geweint,
Die wir die stahlen, Vater.
Ihr Fuß hüpft heute aus der Hütte,
Ihr Blut hüpft morgen in die Bütte.
Du strafst uns nicht. Ist denn dein Herz versteint? (p. 585)

The decentring of the subject which is implicit in Loerke's poetic aim to let things speak and be through his verse, in his definition of the special task of poetry as "Gesicht der Welt festzuhalten" (1996: 43), and in his acknowledgement of our imperfect understanding of nature, is occasionally explicit, as for instance in the "God of thunder's" admonition: "Ich schuf die Welt nicht um der Menschen Willen" (p. 498). Another aspect of the ecopoetics of negativity may be found in Loerke's attempt to convey the meaning of the world, which is expressed obliquely, through negation and fragmentary juxtaposition of the visible and the invisible worlds. The obscurity of certain of his poems, his love of paradox and riddle, and his preference for suggestive questions, his heaping of negation, layering of metaphors and absence of clarity as to who is speaking are all poetic strategies which reflect the ultimate unsayability of the religious mystery of communion with nature which he openly acknowledges, for instance, in 'Mit Sankt Francisci Geist':

Doch blieb das liebe Wunder wahr
Nur eine winzige Sekunde.
Es fiel mit meinem Wort vom Munde, –
Und *das* kannn ich nie wieder sagen. (p. 96)

Loerke's poems are characterised by deceptively simple diction, a laconic layering of themes and shifting approaches. Their blend of pessimism and optimism, melancholy and celebration, renunciation and the aspiration to transform society, and the quest for compensation for the disorientation of modernity in the comforting harmony of nature with dogged determination to challenge those in power, is unique. However, their inflection of traditional themes and poetics to the end of correcting the anthropocentrism of the age, seeking to counter the distortion of our lives through instrumental objectivisation, is paralleled in the nature poetry of Johannes Bobrowski.

4. Johannes Bobrowski

Born in 1917, Johannes Bobrowski was a generation younger than Loerke. His poems were influenced by Magic Realism, but sound quite different from Loerke's, with their laconic suggestiveness and mysteriously obscure images. Formally, too, they have little in common, being written (like the poems of Rudolf Alexander Schröder, Josef Weinheber and Friedrich Georg Jünger in the nineteen-twenties and thirties), in free rhythms. Bobrowski's model was the eighteenth-century adaptation of the Pindaric ode by Klopstock and Hölderlin, in which irregular cadences, recurring phrases and patterns of images replaced rhyme and metre as structuring principles and facilitated the expression of emotion, spontaneity, imagination and freedom from restraint.[20]

Like Loerke, whose poetry he admired as a young man, and later remembered with affection,[21] Bobrowski spent most of his adult life living in Berlin, but drew on childhood memories of the countryside in the extreme Eastern part of Prussia. Born in Tilsit, he moved, following postings of his father's in the state railway company, first to Königsberg, where he attended secondary school, and then to the Friedrichshagen suburb of Berlin in 1937. However, the lost home he subsequently dreamed and wrote about was the farming country in the Lithuanian hinterland of the border town of Tilsit, among whose villages, woods and lakes he spent many holidays with relatives of his mother's. Bobrowski's grandparents had been Baptists, he grew up as an active member of the Lutheran church, and joined the Bekennende Kirche, which adopted an oppositional stance towards the Nazi authorities in the Third Reich. By the time the two-year compulsory military training he had begun in 1937 had come to an end, war had broken out. He served in Poland, France and, after the invasion of Russia, again on the Eastern front. In June 1941 he witnessed a pogrom instigated by the invading forces in Kaunas, in which nearly four thousand Jews met their death (see Tgahrt 1993: 467). He was only to return to East Berlin in 1949, after four years as a prisoner of war in Russian labour camps.

Living after the war, and in the GDR, Bobrowski wrote in a very different political context from that of Inner Émigrés such as Loerke and Lehmann. The theme of loss of the homeland in the East, which was treated

in West Germany by writers from Günter Grass to Horst Bienek, was still too closely associated with revanchist nationalism in the nineteen-fifties and sixties for it to be acceptable in the GDR. The state was dependent on good relations with its communist neighbours (especially the Soviet Union and Poland, from which so many Germans had been expelled when territories were ceded to these countries). The approach to writing prescribed by Socialist Realism also implied unwavering support for scientific and technological modernisation, to which we have seen twentieth-century nature poetry on the whole constitutes a critical response. Bobrowski's prolonged struggle to come to terms with the past, mourning loss and confronting guilt, involved simultaneously acknowledging and distancing himself from his poetic affinities with an essentially conservative lyric tradition lamenting the lost *Heimat* and childhood oneness with nature. His particular transformation of the poetic legacy of nature poetry was achieved by pursuing a quasi-didactic mission to remind his fellow Germans of their historical subjugation, exploitation and extermination of their Eastern neighbours, and by finding a new poetic language as a legitimate form in which to express it.[22]

The difficulties he faced in the process may be seen in the evolution of his plans for a "Sarmatian Divan" (echoing Goethe's *West-östlicher Diwan*) recalling and preserving the lost East in the memory, lamenting it, but at the same time naming the guilt pertaining to his countrymen.[23] Initial ambitions to present the landscape, people, mentality, history and culture of the Russian, Polish, Baltic and Jewish ethnic mix, and to expiate the historical guilt of the Germans, are gradually refined and purged of elements of folklore and touches of the noble savage in the description of the native Prussians. In Bobrowski's evocation, which interweaves recent history and childhood memories with the prehistory and history of the area, and mythical elements, personal loss is subsumed in collective experience, and the very word 'Heimat' is avoided (see Tgahrt 1993: 314 and 319-45).

Bobrowski's first volume of poetry, *Sarmatische Zeit* (1961), is focused on the landscape inhabited by generations of his family in the border country between East Prussia and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, Poland and western Russia. The name he gives it, 'Sarmatia', was that used in the ancient world to designate a geographically remote and little-known area bounded by the

Polish river Vistula in the West and the Russian Volga in the East, the Baltic in the North and the Caspian and Black Seas in the South. Its wide plains, traversed by major rivers and dotted by lakes, forests, meadows and swamplands, were inhabited by nomadic cattle-raising tribes.

Bobrowski's Sarmatia is then a historical concept avoiding the implications of terms from more recent political geography, stretching back through the centuries into prehistoric times. Frontiers and political allegiances had shifted repeatedly here: the German presence goes back to the twelfth century, when the Knights of the Teutonic Order, invited to subject and convert the heathen Borussians (the original Prussians) who inhabited the coastal area between the Vistula and the Memel, Germanised the region, brutally slaughtering many of the original Balto-Slavic population. Bobrowski stresses the polyglot, multi-ethnic and multi-religious background. Sarmatia is, however, also a mythical entity: Rankl has pointed out the phonetic parallel of the name with Arcadia, and the qualities of the classical *locus amoenus* it possesses as a sphere in which man lives in harmony with nature (see Rankl 2002: 116-8).

Many of Bobrowski's poems – 'Die Spur im Sand' (Bobrowski 1987: 28),[24] 'Kaunas 1941' (pp. 60f.), 'Gedenkblatt'(p. 97), 'Else Lasker-Schüler' (pp. 117f.), 'Ikone' (p. 122), 'Bericht' (p. 133) are among the more obvious – bear relatively direct witnesss to the recent past, hinting at German guilt (Bobrowski's poems are not least an expiation of the sense of personal guilt stemming from his own involvement in the invasion of the East), and preparing the way for what he refers to as an age of neighbourliness, "without fear" (see 'Absage', p. 73). The final section of 'Die Spur im Sand', a poem concerned with the persecution of the Jews, reads:

Weil deiner Väter Gott
uns noch die Jahre
wird heller färben, Aaron,
liegt die Spur
im Staub der Straßen,
find ich dich.
Und gehe.
Und deine Ferne
trag ich, dein Erwarten
auf meiner Schulter. (p. 28)

The somewhat surprising affinity with the Jews which Bobrowski expresses here goes beyond recognition of a shared Old Testament God (he remained a practising Christian): in their historic plight he found a parallel with his own loss of childhood *Heimat*, and in them possible models for coming to terms with this and reinhabiting the earth. In 'Holunderblüte' the flower of the elder becomes a correlative for the traumatic experience of the Kaunas pogrom, which must not be forgotten: "Leute, es möcht der Holunder / sterben / an eurer Vergeßlichkeit" (p. 94). The guilt incurred by the SS and by the regular German army, is subsumed in other poems under centuries of German aggression towards their Eastern neighbours. 'Pruzzische Elegie' (pp. 33-5) is a song "bright with angry love", but "dark, bitter with grieving", recording the Borussians' "never sung fall", that is their defeat in 1283, and the ultimate extinction of their culture and language (which was Slavic, but with Nordic influences) in the seventeenth century. 'Gestorbene Sprache' integrates words of the Borussian language. Associated with the call of the birds and animals, the sounds of wind and water in the landscape, in much the way that Lehmann had as a young man idealised the Irish language as one uncorrupted by the abstraction and rationalisation of modern life, Borussian becomes a lamenting and avenging force:

Der mit den Flügeln schlägt
draußen, der an die Tür streift,
das ist dein Bruder, du hörst ihn.
Laurio, sagt er, Wasser,
ein Bogen, farbenlos, tief.

Der kam herab mit dem Fluß,
um Muschel und Schnecke
treibend, ein Fächergewächs,
im Sand und war grün.

Warne, sagt er und *wittan*,
die Krähe hat keinen Baum,
ich habe Macht, dich zu küssen,
ich wohne in deinem Ohr.

Sag ihm, du willst
ihn nicht hören –
er kommt, ein Otter, er kommt
hornisssenschwärmig, er schreit,
eine Grille, er wächst mit dem Moor
unter dein Haus, in den Quellen

flüstert er, *smordis* vernimmst du,
dein Faulbaum wird welken,
morgen stirbt er am Zaun. (p. 26)

Implicit in the brotherhood of crow, otter and cricket, despite their threats, is the vision of a way of life in harmony with nature akin to Heideggerian dwelling. However, Bobrowski differs from Loerke and Lehmann in presenting this as inseparable from social justice and from openness to ethnic and cultural diversity. The river poems 'Die Daubas' and 'Die Düna' contain lines which evoke the concept of dwelling: "Wo denn / wollen wir bleiben? / Immer ist es die Erde, / der Grund, da wir liegen werden" (pp. 69f.). "Ich will vom Atem der Ströme / leben, vom Sprind / trinken, das Irdische trinken, / die Nacht, vom Geheimnis der Tiefe / unter dem Gras" (p. 58).

Over and again, particularly in the later poems, Bobrowski calls for a receptivity to the voices of nature which borders on acceptance of an animistic world view. In the 'Pruzzische Elegie' he conjures up a timeless, mythical past in which people lived a simple, rural, often nomadic way of life, in a pleasant, wooded land, washed by foaming seas. Their woodland groves are marked by the smoke of sacrificial pyres, for the Borussians had no temples, but, like the Celts, worshipped in the forests, cremating and burying their dead there. The poem gathers the traces of their existence, which remain in the names of mountains, rivers and roads, in songs and sagas, and are present in the rustling of the lizard and the gurgling of waters on the bog:

Namen reden von dir,
zertretenes Volk, Berghänge,
Flüsse, glanzlos noch oft,
Steine und Wege –
Lieder abends und Sagen,
das Rascheln der Eidechsen nennt dich
und, wie Wasser im Moor,
heut ein Gesang, vor Klage
arm (p. 35)

The poem opening the volume *Sarmatische Zeit*, 'Anruf', invokes intimate childhood memories of landscape and culture and laments the loss of this home, which has been "fortgeschenkt", or "given away for nothing". Oblique allusions to German aggression over the centuries and his own wartime experiences in occupied West Russia (wolves, a hunter, a yellow rock) end in

what seems a hint at promise of reconciliation (in the Christian symbol of the fish), and reference to a time when he, a stranger, will be welcomed:

Wilna, Eiche
du –
meine Birke,
Nowgorod –
einst in Wäldern aufflog
meiner Frühlinge Schrei, meiner Tage
Schritt erscholl überm Fluß.

[…]

Heiliges schwimmt,
ein Fisch,
durch die alten Täler, die waldigen
Täler noch, der Väter
Rede tönt noch herauf:
Heiß willkommen die Fremden.
Du wirst ein Fremder sein. Bald. (p. 3)

Here as elsewhere, the fragmentation of the opening lines, the archaic ring to the vocabulary, which underscores his conjuring up of the past, the syntactic contraction and dislocated word order, the line divisions and free rhythms, which slow readers, making them weigh up the semantic possibilities of each word, can all be regarded as techniques through which Bobrowski draws attention to the textual status of the poem, and by implication to the unsayability, in normal, rational human language, of of certain aspects of the being of things, thus approximating to the negative poetics of which Rigby writes.

From the early nineteen-sixties onwards Bobrowski wrote fewer poems about the subject of historical guilt and more on nature and the poet's relationship with it. He commented repeatedly on the necessity to listen to, and speak, the sounds and the signs of nature: "Rede: Die Wälder tönen, / den eratmenden Strom / durchfliegen die Fische, der Himmel / zittert von Feuern." ('Der Wanderer', p. 88) In 'Wetterzeichen', the poet converses "laut mit dem Sommerlicht // und den Vögeln / gegen den Abend, im Dunkel / den Fledermäusen", he listens to the flowing of the river and recalls perceiving signs in nature: "ich halt einen Baum, ich red noch: / Wir sahen kommen die Zeichen / und schwinden, her durch die Stille / zwei Federn fielen herab" (pp. 98f.).[25]

‘Immer zu benennen’ formulates a poetic imperative reminiscent of Rilke’s ninth Duino Elegy, an act of naming essential to the integration of the human in the natural sphere:

Immer zu benennen:
den Baum, den Vogel im Flug,
den rötlichen Fels, wo der Strom
zieht, grün, und den Fisch
im weißen Rauch, wenn es dunkelt
über die Walder hinab.

Zeichen, Farben, es ist
ein Spiel, ich bin bedenklich,
es möchte nicht enden
gerecht.

Und wer lehrt mich,
was ich vergaß: der Steine
Schlaf, den Schlaf
der Vögel im Flug, der Bäume
Schlaf, im Dunkel
geht ihre Rede – ? (p. 143)

The influence of Bobrowski’s eighteenth-century Königsberg compatriot Johann Georg Hamann, for whom poetry was a medium of revelation, an imitation and reflection of divine creation, building on the system of cyphers revealing God’s presence in nature, is visible in the opening lines. And the final section implies a conception of the task of the poet not so different from Loerke’s, as a diviner, who must awaken the slumbering speech of nature by saying or singing the Earth.[26] As Anders Strand has pointed out, Bobrowski’s poems belong to the Orphic tradition of Hölderlin and Rilke (and to a lesser extent also Loerke and Lehmann), in which the poet revisits the (mythical) past in an effort to restore lost wholeness and harmony, just as the singer from Thrace descended into the realm of the dead, seeking to reawaken Euridice through the power of his love and his his song. Strand writes of the traditional belief in the ability of the Orphic gaze to transcend the coordinates of time and space, and read the deeper structure of being through the signs of things (Strand 1999: 153f.).

But the central section of the poem reminds us that recalling forgotten, intuitive childhood knowledge is a tricky business, ever on the verge of anthropocentric arrogance. Dwelling and speaking appear equally problematic

in ‘Herberge’, which laments the absence of communication between the poet and nature. Nature provides a shelter or house in which the poetic *persona* can remain, but the shades of the past permit him no rest. The voices he hears are foreign, and he hears them with an uncomprehending ear:

Komm und geh und kehr wieder,
komm und bleib, ein Haus,
Nebelhaus, steht vor dem Wald,
Dächer aus Rauch,
Türme aus Vogelrufen,
Birkenzweige abends verschließen die Tür.

Ruhlos liegen wir dort,
Schattentuch auf der Schulter,
um die Fischerfeuer
gehn mit den rötlichen Flossen
die Lüfte, du sprichst, fremde Stimme,
ich hör dich mit fremdem Ohr. (p. 168)

In ‘Schattenland’, Bobrowski appears to reach a subtly different conclusion: in an age of shadows, to be able to live, to dwell, one *must* learn to speak with the voice of nature: “wer hier lebt, / spricht mit des Vogels Stimme” (p. 160). This is consonant with the conception of the poet’s task as bringing the landscape back to life, as he urges in ‘Wiedererweckung’: “Zähl / die Gräser / und zähl / Fäden aus Regenwasser, / und Licht, die Blättchen / zähl, und zeichne ein / deine Schritte, Wildspuren, / und Stimmen, beleb / mit Worten / das Blut in den Bäumen und / den Lungen” (p. 203).

The poem ‘Ebene’ may serve as a final example of the poet’s self-exhortation to listen to the voice of nature, dwell, and speak the Earth:

[…] Mit dem Wind

kam ich herauf den Berg.
Hier werd ich leben. Ein Jäger
war ich, einfing mich
aber das Gras.

Lehr mich reden, Gras,
lehr mich tot sein und hören,
lange, und reden, Stein,
lehr du mich bleiben, Wasser,
frag mir, und Wind, nicht nach. (p. 80)

The lyrical subject, formerly a hunter (a term which possesses aggressive military connotations in Bobrowski’s writing), desires to live here, and to live

peacefully. Embraced by the grass, he wishes to learn its speech and mode of being, to learn constancy from the stone, to learn from the water to stay, and to live unquestioned by the wind. Everything in the landscape reveals traces and voices of the past, everything witnesses to past guilt and suffering, as well as love and happiness. This poem, on one level a personal lament for Bobrowski's lost homeland, perhaps best exemplifies the inclusive ecopoetic open to outsiders called for by Jonathan Bate. Reflecting "an imaginative, not a proprietorial, interest in belonging" (Bate 2000: 280), it recalls the sense of dwelling identified by Rigby as originating in loss end exile, and constituting a reinhabitation, in a process involving conscious commitment and sustained effort (Rigby 2001: 11f.).[27] But the sense of dwelling present in the work of both poets examined here suggests that each contributes in his own way to the relational understanding of selfhood based on active identification with wider circles of being which is at the heart of Deep Ecology's corrective to utilitarian assumptions about our interaction with the natural environment.

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[1] See Martin Heidegger, '… dichterisch wohnet der Mensch …' and 'Bauen, Wohnen, Denken', in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Heidegger 2000: 191-208 and 147-64, here pp. 191 and 152). In view of the idiosyncrasies of Heidegger's language, I quote in the following from translations of his works: Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter (Heidegger 1975) and Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings* (Heidegger 1993). The essay 'Poetically Man Dwells' is in Heidegger 1975: 213-29; 'Building Dwelling Thinking' in Heidegger 1993: 347-63. The sentences quoted above are pp. 213 and 352 respectively.

[2] Thomas Rohkrämer has for instance written on Klages and Ernst Jünger (1999: 162-211 and 301-38), and Stefan Breuer on Friedrich Georg Jünger (1995: 121-53).

[3] Greg Garrard has also engaged with Heidegger. See, in addition to Bate 2000, Rigby 2001b and 2004, Garrard 1998. Further references to Heidegger may be found in Glotfelty and Fromm 1996 and Coupe 2000. American critics such as David Abrams, Leonard Scigaj and Louise Westling have also explored the relevance of phenomenology to ecocriticism, but focused on Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who devotes greater attention to corporeality and human participation in the larger community of kindred beings in the biosphere (see Westling 2006). Gernot Böhme's ecological aesthetics, which builds on Hermann Schmitz's theory of atmospheres (see Gernot Böhme 1995), is an example of the productive development of Heideggerian phenomenology in the German-speaking world, which would, as Rigby notes, reward further examination in the context of ecocritical theory.

[4] See for instance Thomas Rohkrämer, 'Martin Heidegger, National Socialism, and Environmentalism', in Brüggemeier, Ciok and Zeller 2005: 171-203.

[5] See Martin Heidegger, 'Die Frage nach der Technik' (2000: 7-36, here 15-18). Translated as 'The Question Concerning Technology' (1993: 311-41, here 320-2).

[6] 'Wozu Dichter?', in *Holzwege* (Heidegger 1977: 269-320). The essay, which was delivered as a lecture in 1946 and first published in 1950, is translated in Heidegger 1975 (pp. 89-142). However, I quote here and in the following from a more recent translation by Kenneth Haynes, which is closer to the original (Heidegger 2002: 200-41).

[7] "By a *primal* oneness the four – earth and sky, divinities and mortals – belong together in one. Earth is the serving bearer, blossomong and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal. […] The sky is the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, […] The divinities are the beckoning messengers of the godhead. Out of the holy sway of the godhead, the god appears in his presence or withdraws into his concealment. [...] The mortals are the human beings. They are called mortals because they can die. To die means to be capable of death *as* death. […] This simple oneness of the four we call *the fourfold*." (1993: 351f.)

[8] It is also helpful to know that the mysterious term "fourfold" is derived from the Pythagorean *tetraktys*, a mathematical symbol of the cosmos alluding to the four elements.

[9] Bate elucidates his account of Heidegger's thinking (p. 265) with reference to Rilke's ninth Duino Elegy: "Perhaps we are *here* in order to say: house,/ bridge, fountain, gate, pitcher, fruit-tree, window, –/ at most: column, tower? … but to *say* them, you must understand,/ oh to say them *more* intensely than the Things themselves/ ever dreamed of existing" (quoted from Rilke 1987: 199). The act of naming possesses similar significance for Loerke and Bobrowski, as we shall see.

[10] In *Topographies of the Sacred*, Rigby lists four main shortcomings in Heidegger's thinking from an ecocritical standpoint: his conceptions of nature and place are not in practice politically neutral; his insistence on a gulf between humans and animals is unjustifiable; his claim that the things need us so they can be named reveals anthropocentric hubris; and his consideration of Greek and German as the only languages which can answer the call of being exposes him as a cultural chauvinist (2004: 7f.).

[11] Rigby returns to the idea of a negative ecopoetics in *Topographies of the Sacred* (2004: 119-27), as one which recognises the work of art is no substitute for nature, and constantly reminds us of how it always falls short of conveying the experience of nature. She follows Heidegger in describing us as called on to respond to the self-disclosure of the other, but agrees with Haar that in order to protect the otherness of the earth from disappearing into a humanly constructed world of words, we must acknowledge the inadequacy of our response and show that we remain open to what lies beyond the self and the text.

[12] Loerke's poems are cited in the following, with page number, from the revised text edited by Reinhard Tgahrt (Loerke 1983). His essays are quoted from the two-volume edition of *Gedichte und Prosa* prepared by Peter Suhrkamp in 1958.

[13] Edith Rotermund thus comments in her study of the imagery of Loerke's poetry that the images are "an end in themselves", "inasmuch as they are an expression of an ecstatic state and constitute an inner landscape". We can thus speak of an "expressive landscape" (Rotermund 1962: 172).

[14] Walter Gebhard's book on Loerke's poetic theory and practice (Gebhard 1968) is most helpful in understanding the principles underlying it. See also Kohlroß 2000.

[15] See Reinhard Tgahrt's note in Loerke 1996: 82 on the Donnerstagsrunde, Gebhard 1968: 31 and 268-71 on the importance of Fechner for Loerke, and Loerke 1996: 61 for the titles of books of Fechner's which are among those still in Loerke's library.

[16] 'Kosmische Verwandlung' (pp. 318f.) reflects a position close to the Buddhist conception of the transmigration of souls. See also the motif of human "brotherhood" with nature, which is present in the poems 'Brüder' (p. 63), 'Das Wort' (p. 79) and 'Einschlafen auf dem Fischdampfer' (p. 157), and implicit in 'Mit Sankt Francisci Geist' (pp. 95f.).

[17] Gerhard Schulz (1984) describes the central themes in Loerke's work, for instance the quasi-religious cultural mission of the poet, his cosmic/ mystical world view, the idea of poetry as translation of the language of nature, the lament over social exclusion of the writer from bourgeois society, and his conception of nature as refuge, as in themselves banal and derivative. His originality is located in their shifting and at times contradictory combination in pursuit of self-knowledge, in the context of contemporary political reality.

[18] In his account of Loerke as mid-way between Nietzsche's life-affirmation and Schopenhauer's ascetic resignation, *Überwindung des Welt-Leids. Loerkes Lyrik im Spannungsfeld zwischen Nietzsche und Schopenhauer* (1992), Thomas Pieper describes the poet's prescription for redemption as ascetic and monastic. Pieper argues that Loerke advocates meditative devitalisation and an ultimately life-denying form of self-discovery, and that his construction of nature may avoid the twin dangers of the sentimental/ idyllic and human domination, but involves a melancholy sense of the helplessness of the individual.

[19] Gebhard comments in greater detail on the similarities and differences between the poetic theory and practice of Loerke and Rilke (1968: 37f.).

[20] I am particularly indebted in the following to David Scrase's helpful introduction to the poet and his excellent translations in *Understanding Johannes Bobrowski* (1995), also to John Wieczorek's authoritative study the Bobrowski's life and works, *Between Sarmatia and Socialism* (1999).

[21] See Tgahrt 1993: 273, 274, 291f., 295, 304. Bobrowski's relationship with Lehmann's poetry was by contrast one of distant respect mixed with irritation. Lehmann, who tended to be dismissive of the efforts of younger poets in the postwar years, criticising the lack of botanical detail in their work, showed an unexpected interest in Bobrowski when he made acquaintance with the latter's poems in 1963, aged over eighty (see Tgahrt 1993: 97-9).

[22] Tgahrt writes, with a sensitivity perhaps born out of his own geographical displacement, of the extent of Bobrowski's moral and aesthetic achievement, putting behind him any hope of regaining his lost childhood home, and constantly rejecting and reworking drafts of his poems

about it over a period of some twenty years before his first poetry volume was published. Tgahrt comments how “danach, in einer anderen Sprachbewegung und in einem weiteren Kontext, es ihm möglich wird, ‘zurückzurufen’, ‘herzurufen’, ohne zurück zu wollen und ohne mißverstanden zu werden. Dem entspricht, so scheint es, ein poetisches Verfahren, das zurück*greifen* kann, bewahren, aufheben, aber mit dem Aufgehobenen nicht mehr zurück*fällt*.” (1993: 266)

[23] Tgahrt quotes from letters revealing the “fear and trembling” with which Bobrowski wrote, and the painful effort involved in his determination to arrive at a form and language permitting him to remember, mourn, conjure up the past and express hope for the future again (ibid. 319 and 290).

[24] Bobrowski’s poems are cited, with page number only, from volume 1 of the *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Eberhard Haufe in 1987.

[25] The motif of birds’ feathers as pointers to nature’s secrets, which may have its origin in the Grimms’ Fairy Tale ‘The Three Feathers’, where they magically point the king’s youngest son the way to his fortune, was by this time a familiar topos in nature poetry, having appeared in poems of Loerke’s, Lehmann’s and Günter Eich’s.

[26] See Bobrowski’s comment in a letter to Peter Jokostra in 1959: “Ich hab ein ungebrochenes Vertrauen zur Wirksamkeit des Gedichts, – vielleicht nicht ‘des Gedichts’, sondern des VERSES, der wahrscheinlich wieder mehr Zauberspruch, Beschwörungsformel wird werden müssen.” (Tgahrt 1993: 411)

[27] Bobrowski introduced a reading in 1963 with the provocatively optimistic argument that advancing technology meant the age of taking possession of territory and laying claim to it was coming to an end, rendering invalid concepts such as ‘Heimat’ and ‘Heimweh’ (longing for the Heimat), the nation state and national consciousness. “In this awareness”, he announced, “I have sketched out an overview of what is irrevocably disappearing, in an area in which these claims to living space [he uses the Nazi word ‘Lebensraum’] were taken particularly seriously: but as a traveller, a person merely passing through, no longer belonging there, as someone who comes and goes away again.” (Tgahrt 1993: 325)