

## Reading and the Art of Leisure in Mörrike's "Wald-Idylle"



*Kenneth S. Calhoon*

In 1814, the painter Georg Friedrich Kersting produced a small canvas entitled *Lesender beim Lampenlicht* (fig. 1). The alliterative appellation is at odds with the prosaic theme. Depicted is a young man, wearily ensconced in a stack of papers or unbound volume. Several sealed letters are visible on his desk, and one supposes him working late into the night. A bell-cord indicates both the availability of a servant or secretary and the reader's own isolation. The lamp, a brass fixture with three candles and an opaque, black shade, casts patterns of shadow on the walls and ceiling, emphasizing the drabness of the surroundings and creating an atmosphere of claustrophobia—effects reinforced by the drawn window-shade, which extends the pale green of the adjacent wall. The draperies and the lamp itself import a degree of ornament into an otherwise austere room, whose furnishings, along with the complete absence of books, denote a professional, perhaps legal study. The spartan character of the space is consistent with the need for concentration (*Sammlung*), of which distraction and beauty are kindred foils. Emil Staiger, in suggesting that nocturnal silence envelops Kersting's reader with a "magical tone," occludes the sheer disenchantment of a world defined by the utility of literacy and the partitioning of the household into atomized cells.<sup>1</sup> The solitary scene presents a modern, bureaucratic counterpart to the *gotisches Studierzimmer* that Goethe's Faust, through recourse to magic, endeavors to flee.

<sup>1</sup> Emil Staiger. *Vor drei Bildern*. Zürich: Artemis, 1983, 23.



Figure I. Georg Friedrich Kersting: *Lesender beim Lampenlicht* (1814), Oil on canvas, 47.5:37 cm. Stiftung Oskar Reinhart, Winterthur

The oppressively bare wall—the fact that Kersting’s painting contains no painting—stresses a pervasive rationality and provides a field for the projection of shadows that direct attention to the lamp. Its glow muted, its flame emphatically eclipsed, the lamp is the source of an entropic diffusion that defines this space by its outer limits. Much as the plain wall is symmetrical with the drawn shade, both of them screens against the outside world, so the lamp displaces the hearth, whose unity of light and warmth fosters intimacy, pulling people and things into its magical orbit. While the lamp at the center of Kersting’s composition is the figure of an increasingly utilitarian world, the hearth is the focus of a nostalgia for a home-life as yet unshattered by the forces of industrialization. Both nineteenth-

century literature and social theory, recently discussed by Vincent Pecora as tandem responses to modern disenchantment, found a repertoire of positive imagery in the archaic household, locus of “a new sense of the sacred.”<sup>2</sup>

This “new sense” can be specified with reference to Eduard Mörike’s *Der alte Turmhahn*, a narrative poem that attests to the coalescence of the sacred with the intimate interior. A bronze weathercock, worn by more than a century of seasonal extremes, is removed from the roof of a village church and affixed to the rectory stove. A kind of family mascot, it is privy to the domestic scene, noting the many articles—books, furnishings, utensils, keepsakes—that (like the warmth radiating from the fire) fill this space and constitute it as a *milieu*.<sup>3</sup>

A profane object to begin with, the metal bird joins an array of inanimate things rendered sacred not only by the proximity to the church but by the stove itself, whose decorations give it the semblance of a cathedral (*Münsterbau*).<sup>4</sup> The weathercock, brought to life by the affections of his patron, suggests how an aesthetics, like “primitive” magic, “grants living power [...] to things increasingly dominated by the dead hand of rationality.”<sup>5</sup>

Animated by the “living power” that issues from the stove, the weathercock, still sensitive to the whims of climate, bears witness to a communal intimacy that is heightened by an awareness of the elements outside: “Davon vernahm ich manches Wort, / Dieweil der Ofen ein guter Hort / Für Kind und Kegel und alte Leut’, / Zu plaudern, wann es wind’t und schneit” (ll. 104–07).<sup>6</sup> Standing at the center of an enchanted space, the stove contrasts with the lamp in Kersting’s painting, whose light, as flat as the surfaces that reflect it, complements the motionlessness of the reader. His frozen concentration is not matched by Mörike’s provincial pastor, whom the weathercock observes preparing his sermon (fig. II), pausing once to trim the wick of his lamp, and succumbing to an almost Faustian restlessness, though in Biedermeier format:

<sup>2</sup> Vincent Pecora. *Households of the Soul*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Leo Spitzer. “Milieu and Ambience.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research: A Quarterly Journal* 3 (1942): 1–42; 169–218.

<sup>4</sup> Helmut Schneider. “Dingwelt und Arkadien: Mörike’s ‘Idylle vom Bodensee’ und sein Anschluß an die bukolische Gattungstradition.” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 97 (1978): 24–51.

<sup>5</sup> Pecora. 47, 53.

<sup>6</sup> All citations of Mörike’s poems are from Eduard Mörike. *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Jost Pefahl. Munich: Winkler, 1976, vol. I.



Figure II. Illustration of Mörike's *Der alte Turmhahn* from *Beschauliches und Erbauliches: Ein Familien-Bilderbuch von Ludwig Richter in Dresden* (1855)

—Freitag zu Nacht, noch um die Neune,  
 Bei seiner Lampen Trost alleine,  
 Mein Herr fangt an sein Predigtlein  
 Studieren; anderst mag's nicht sein.  
 Eine Weil' am Ofen brütend steht,  
 Unruhig hin und dannen geht;  
 Sein Text ihm schon die Adern reget;  
 Drauf er sein Werk zu Faden schläget.  
 Inmittelst einmal auch etwan  
 Hat er ein Fenster aufgetan—

(II. 144–53)

As if nostalgic for his previous perch, the weathercock delights in the chill air (*Sternenlüfteschwall*) pouring in through the open window, not to mention the view of snowy peaks glistening under the night sky. The weathercock is a liminal figure, lodged at the intersection of inside and out. Visible through the window, the landscape, a genre structured by the distance between viewer and spectacle, epitomizes

the aesthetic reemergence of the outside within. Like the fireplace, the stove is a monument to the same liminality. It is the traditional site of that mode of enchanted storytelling—the fairy tale or *Märchen*—wherein the familiar and unfamiliar merge. “Liminal,” from *limes*, with which the Romans designated both the boundary of empire and the threshold of home, is consistent with a less problematic consolidation of the household—something not contradicted in *Der alte Turmhahn*, identified by its subtitle as “eine Art Idylle” (“Hier wohnt der Frieden auf der Schwel’!” [l. 85]). The nostalgia for the enchanted household is thus encapsulated within a literary convention that keeps the archaic at arm’s length. Notorious for imposing leisure on the workaday world, the idyll provides Mörike with a playfully aestheticized framework for disengaging this nostalgia from true desire. The idyll is also the means with which Mörike presents reading as a quintessentially disinterested pleasure. In marked opposition to Kersting’s image, in which the renunciations of work correspond to an effectively windowless (and pleasureless) room, reading in Mörike is not only a leisurely activity, but one that takes place in open air and broad daylight. His “Wald-Idylle,” which commences with a scene of reading, reproduces the fairy tale within the idyll, exposing the dialectical introversion that preserves, citing Pecora, “an aristocratic [non-utilitarian] ethos within an aesthetic realm that can be inhabited [...] by even the lowliest, most sensual citizens.”<sup>7</sup>

Like various other examples from Mörike’s *Gedichte*, “Wald-Idylle” features a subject, book in hand, lost in reverie beneath a tree. Recognizable as the Grimms’ *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, the small volume is an artifact, not so much read as tenderly regarded, and gently graced by the woodland setting. Many eighteenth-century idylls made of such settings the scenes of erotic encounter, and in Mörike’s poem, the book, on whose open page filtered sunlight casts teasing ringlets of light, has an apparent surrogate status:

Unter die Eiche gestreckt, im jung belaubten Gehölze  
 Lag ich, ein Büchlein vor mir, das mir das lieblichste bleibt.  
 Alle die Märchen erzählt’s, von der Gänsemagd und vom Machandel-  
 Baum und des Fischers Frau; wahrlich man wird sie nicht satt.  
 Grünlicher Maienschein warf mir die geringelten Lichter  
 Auf das beschattete Buch, neckische Bilder zum Text.

(ll. 1–6)

<sup>7</sup> Pecora 70 is paraphrasing Schiller’s view on aesthetic education.

The far-off staccato of a woodsman's axe modulates to music, a sign of the mediation thanks to which these treasured tales delight but do not satiate ("wahrlich man wird sie nicht satt"). The faint sound of chopping frames the leisure of reading and signals the distance that defines this shaded enclosure as an essentially domestic space. The reader's trance is broken by the sudden appearance of the woodcutter's young daughter, whose carefree venture into the forest is insured by her father's presence:

Plötzlich da rauscht es im Laub—wird doch Schneewittchen nicht  
 kommen,  
 Oder, bezaubert, ein Reh? Nicht doch, kein Wunder geschieht.  
 Siehe, mein Nachbarskind aus dem Dorf, mein artiges Schätzchen!  
 Müßig lief es in Wald, weil es den Vater dort weiß.

(ll. 11–14)

The explicit contrast to "Snow White," in which the fear of the forest is at once a fear of the mother, foregrounds an insouciance underwritten by a father's protection. The child now seated at his side, the subject recounts the story of the incomparable maiden whose life is repeatedly threatened by her mother ("Welchem der Tod dreimal, ach, durch die Mutter gedroht" [l. 18]). When the recitation is interrupted by a nightingale singing close by, the interceding lines abandon the elements of the fairy tale in favor of more pointedly classical allusions:<sup>8</sup>

—So weit war ich gekommen, da drang aus dem nächsten Gebüsch  
 Hinter mir Nachtigallschlag herrlich auf einmal hervor,  
 Troff wie Honig durch das Gezweig und sprühte wie Feuer  
 Zackige Töne; mir traf freudig ein Schauer das Herz,  
 Wie wenn der Göttinnen eine, vorüberfliegend, dem Dichter  
 Durch ambrosischen Duft ihre Begegnung verrät.  
 Leider verstummte die Sängerin bald, ich horchte noch lange,  
 Doch vergeblich, und so bracht ich mein Märchen zum Schluß.—

(ll. 35–42)

Followed by a resigned and seemingly indifferent return to a story he characterizes as "his," this intermezzo (it is punctuated as such) is the fullest expression of the bucolic genre, which in "Wald-Idylle" serves as a casement within which the fairy tale, with its evil mothers and

<sup>8</sup> Helmut Schneider. "Die sanfte Utopie," afterword to Schneider, ed. *Idyllen der Deutschen*. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel, 1981, 414–15.

menacing forests, is rendered benign. The peasant world is projected as a world without lack, and what appears as nature is actually civilization in natural disguise. When the child's older sister enters the forest with lunch for her father, she is seen through an aperture in the foliage as through a window:

Und durch die Lücke sogleich erkenn ich die ältere Schwester;  
 Von der Wiese herauf beugt nach dem Walde sie ein,  
 Rüstig, die bräunliche Dirne; ihr brennt auf der Wange der Mittag;  
 (ll. 45–47)

The strapping maid's sunburnt cheeks highlight the pallor not only of Snow White's complexion but also of the shaded pages themselves, their contents yielding but rarified sustenance compared to the rich and refreshing milk in the young woman's basket ("fett ist und kühle mein Mahl" [l. 50]). With its unmistakably maternal connotation, the milk restores an order so utterly distorted in the fairy-tale world, in which a mother delivers a vile apple, or where starving children—Hänsel and Gretel—hallucinate food. The latter example illustrates the fantasy that translates a mother's inability to feed her children into the desire to kill, even devour them. At once a veiled projection of a father's impotence, this fantasy is subsumed by the idyllic *locus amoenus*, which centers on the distant though reassuring echo of the father's axe ("wir folgten dem Schalle der Holzaxt; / Statt des Kindes wie gern hätt ich die Schwester geführt!" [ll. 51–52]).

This bridled but unashamed eroticism is consistent with a bucolic, fundamentally Edenic nature—an endless summer innocent of an outside. In the poem's reflective epilogue, the interiority of the idyll is literalized as a peasant dwelling in winter, its comfort the fruit of a woodcutter's toil:

Freund! du ehrest die Muse, die jene Märchen vor alters  
 Wohl zu Tausenden sang; aber nun schweiget sie längst,  
 Die am Winterkamin, bei der Schnitzbank, oder am Webstuhl  
 Dichtendem Volkswitz oft köstliche Nahrung gereicht.  
 (ll. 53–56)

Yet another figural use of food is supported by an imagined plentitude, which follows from the fairy tale's incorporation into a classical genre—one in which the fallen nature of these tales is redeemed. With its garden-like enclosure and concomitant exclusion of struggle, the idyll undoes the mythic fall from grace that cast "labor" as the dual affliction of meager harvest and painful childbirth. Harboring a

furtive desire to be wed to the young peasant woman, the speaker imagines a household teeming with offspring; this wish, which is simultaneously the fantasy of altering the circumstances of a fortuitous birth, makes the interior itself into a womb, both fertile and warm:

Ihr [der Muse] zu Ehren sei dir nun das Geständnis getan,  
 Wie an der Seite der Dirne, der vielgesprächigen, leise  
 Im bewegten Gemüt brünstig der Wunsch mir beschlich:  
 Wär ich ein Jäger, ein Hirt, wär ich ein Bauer geboren,  
 Trüg ich Knüttel und Beil, wärst, Margarete, mein Weib!  
 Nie da beklagt ich die Hitze des Tags, ich wollte mich herzlich  
 Auch der rauheren Kost, wenn *du* sie brächtest, erfreun.  
 O wie herrlich begegnete jeglichen Morgen die Sonne  
 Mir, und das Abendrot über dem reifenden Feld!  
 Balsam würde mein Blut im frischen Kusse des Weibes,  
 Kraftvoll blühte mein Haus, doppelt, in Kindern empor.  
 Aber im Winter, zu Nacht, wenn es schneit und stöbert am Ofen,  
 Rief ich, o Muse, dich auch, märchenerfindende, an!

(ll. 60–72)

The invocation of the muse marks this contented, insular household as a poetic invention, emphasizing how easy it is to imagine what one can only imagine. This gesture is discussed by Adorno with respect to another of Mörike's poems, "Auf einer Wanderung," which ends with the lines "Ich bin wie trunken, irreführt — / O Muse, du hast mein Herz berührt / mit einem Liebshauch" (ll. 17–19). Adorno glimpses here a final, fleeting glimmer of a classicism that strove to preserve a core of universal humanity in the face of social forces that were pressing it into the innermost recesses of private life. The Biedermeier interior offered refuge from the social, but in so doing bound the once self-sufficient and non-contingent Human to the random vicissitudes of individual fortune. Uniquely adept at conveying momentary impressions, Mörike's poetry is photo- and phonographic in its manner of arresting the ephemeral—of at once defying and underscoring the impermanence that, more and more, defines the age.<sup>9</sup> Appropriately, the transient speaker of "Auf einer Wanderung" is surprised and moved by a woman heard singing through an open window. The world seems to vibrate sympathetically with her voice,

<sup>9</sup> See Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981, 93–94.



and the wanderer finds himself transported beyond the city gates, where the sounds of a rushing brook and mill supplant the singing as a source of ecstasy. The epigrammatic “O Muse” complements the transition to landscape, an objective expression of the unseen inside, from within which the tender voice issues. Likened to a “choir” of nightingales, the woman’s voice echoes the sudden but short-lived singing of the same bird in “Wald-Idylle,” figure of a vanished inspiration (“ich horchte noch lange / Doch vergeblich”). In both poems, the sound of industry—the ringing of a woodcutter’s axe or water spilling over a mill-wheel—resonates musically in the outer world, and the recollected muse joins with images of hypothetical and, as such, *aestheticized* labor. The final invocation is thus an appeal to the pleasures of the mind that, at the poem’s outset, are conspicuous as the joy of reading, which in turn confirms the compounded interiority of the idyll itself. With its regimen of exposure, the fairy tale becomes the inside of the idyll, which revels in the artifice of a denatured world. Adorno’s analysis of “Auf einer Wanderung,” in which two idioms are mutually relativizing, is doubly applicable to “Wald-Idylle” with its dynamic interplay of neo-classical and (post-)romantic genres: “Die gesellschaftliche Kraft im Ingenium Mörikes jedoch besteht darin, daß er beide Erfahrungen, die des klassizistischen hohen Stils und der romantischen privaten Miniatur verband und daß er dabei mit unvergleichlichem Takt der Grenzen beider Möglichkeiten inne ward und sie gegeneinander ausglich.”<sup>10</sup>

Fairy tale and idyll intone two distinct temporal registers, one enveloped (like memory) within the other. The sound of the axe, which enables the child to enter the forest unafraid, recalls contrastively a time in which men were somehow helpless to protect their children (Hänsel and Gretel’s father also being a woodcutter). The epilogue to “Wald-Idylle”—the hyphenated title may now be seen to suggest an oxymoron—presents domestic qualities that the fairy tale famously lacks. The peasant world is liberated from the exigencies of poverty and toil, but what otherwise would pass as naiveté is masked within the cultivated artifice of the idyll. Might it not be that Mörike’s poem reveals the “self-serving loop” whereby, following Michael Taussig, adults imagine the imaginations of children? Taussig ventures that societies *recruit* childishness, installing the child as mediator of a pre-patriarchal time whose fearsome denizens “discovered or

<sup>10</sup> Theodor Adorno. *Noten zur Literatur*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1980, I:95–96.

invented the tricks later appropriated by murderous men.”<sup>11</sup> In a familiar discussion of how fairy tales may help the child “bring his inner house into order,” Bruno Bettelheim enlists these stories in the face of mounting rationalism, but in terms that take up fantasy in the name of utility: *The Uses of Enchantment*. On the value of fairy tales, Bettelheim cites Schiller, confirming the complicity of German idealism in the logic whereby innocence (of childhood, of the archaic household) is thinkable only in opposition to the disenchanting world from which it offers refuge.<sup>12</sup>

Within the framework of a pacified nature, Mörike’s speaker, in narrating “Snow White,” instructs the young child in the horrors to which children themselves are purportedly witness. The terrors of Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann* proceed from the scene in which the father, his pipe and slippers fetched for him, reads to his children beside a crackling fire. The fireplace is the site of a tranquility undone by the flaming cauldron that kills the father, much as the witch’s oven in “Hänsel and Gretel” manifests an extreme ambivalence toward both the womb and household fantasies organized around the hearth. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, for whom the history of artificial lighting entails the progressive pacification of fire, cites Johannes Feige’s analysis of the appeal that stove and flame exercise over the village-dweller’s imagination: “Sie [die Komplexität ‘abendlicher Wohnraum’] umfaßt die Behaglichkeit und Traulichkeit des warmen, nur spärlich erleuchteten Raumes, die Verbundenheit der um Licht und Ofen eng Beieinandersitzenden.”<sup>13</sup> In the same vein, Ferdinand Tönnies describes the hearth as the veritable life-source at the center of the domestic *Gemeinschaft*: “Und wie Wald, Feld und Acker die natürliche äußere Sphäre, so ist der Herd und sein lebendiges Feuer gleichsam der Kern und die Wesenheit des Hauses selbst.”<sup>14</sup>

In the epilogue to “Wald-Idylle,” the rhythmic trinity of “Winterkamin,” “Schnitzbank,” and “Webstuhl” locates the hearth at the heart of a social space defined by artisanal production. The interiority is emphatic: the fireplace provides warmth, even companionship,

<sup>11</sup> Michael Taussig. *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, 204–05.

<sup>12</sup> Bruno Bettelheim. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. New York: Knopf, 1977, 5. See Pecora, 15–16.

<sup>13</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch. *Lichtblicke: Zur Geschichte der künstlichen Helligkeit im 19. Jahrhundert*. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1986. 157.

<sup>14</sup> Ferdinand Tönnies. *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundbegriffe der reinen Soziologie*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991, 24.

articulating a boundary between inside and out, the sputtering fire a living, sounding counterpart to the falling snow (“wenn es schneit und stöbert am Ofen”). A space characterized by the immanence of social relations, this family setting is idealized in terms of the affective tie between a man and his tools (“Trüg ich Knüttel und Beil . . .”).<sup>15</sup> This image reverses the industrial history that gradually displaced a father’s labor away from the home. The narrative phase of the poem, which begins and ends with references to chopping heard from afar, foregrounds the invisibility of the father, in whose stead the speaker places himself.

Embedded within a self-consciously artistic genre, this fairy-tale interior achieves a social and aesthetic autonomy—a freedom from utility that depends on the effacement of the forces that sustain it. The idyll is the idiom that transforms the father’s work into a reassuring echo. What the idyll erases reappears in Mörike’s “Das verlassene Mägdlein,” a poem that reveals the ideological underside of “Wald-Idylle.” A servant girl, jilted by her lover, rises before daybreak to light the stove. Temporarily entranced by the flying embers, she embodies what Schivelbusch emblemizes as “der Blick in die Flamme”:<sup>16</sup>

Früh, wann die Hähne krähn,  
Eh die Sternlein verschwinden,  
Muß ich am Herde stehn,  
Muß Feuer zünden.

Schön ist der Flammen Schein,  
Es springen die Funken;  
Ich schaue so drein,  
In Leid versunken.

Plötzlich, da kommt es mir,  
Treuloser Knabe,  
Daß ich die Nacht von dir  
Geträumet habe.

Träne auf Träne dann  
Stürzet hernieder;  
So kommt der Tag heran—  
O ging’ er wieder!

<sup>15</sup> Alexander Mitscherlich. *Society without the Father: A Contribution to Social Psychology*. Trans. Eric Mosbacher. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969, 154–55.

<sup>16</sup> Schivelbusch 154.

Reminiscent of Goethe's "Gretchen am Spinnrad" ("Meine Ruh' ist hin [...]"), "Das verlassene Mägdlein" not only exposes a workaday reality, it narrates the process of disenchantment, showing this process to be as irreversible as the sunrise. "Früh," "Schön" and "Plötzlich," the words that initiate the first three strophes, describe an arc in which the liminality of twilight guarantees the dawn of recognition. This structure is general in Mörike, as exemplified by the proleptic "noch" of "Septembermorgen" ("Im Nebel ruhet noch die Welt, / Noch träumen Wald und Wiesen") or by the exquisite evocation of the pre-dawn hour in the first line of the first poem in the *Gedichte*, "An einem Wintermorgen, vor Sonnenaufgang": "O flauenleichte Zeit der dunklen Frühe!"<sup>17</sup>

As in "Das verlassene Mägdlein," the subject of "An einem Wintermorgen" relives past happiness as present sorrow, seeking solace in the enchanted remnants of a dying dream ("Seh ich hinab in lichte Feenreiche?"). The limits of consciousness appear as a "Pforte [des] Herzens," and scenes of recollected innocence, which are replete with pastoral associations, are opposed to a present sadness figured as a closed room:

Ich höre bald der Hirtenflöten Klänge,  
Wie um die Krippe jener Wundernacht,  
Bald weinbekränzter Jugend Lustgesänge;  
Wer hat das friedenselige Gedränge  
In meine traurigen Wände hergebracht?

(ll. 18–22)

Common also to "Das verlassene Mägdlein," these "sad walls" are definitive in Kersting's *Lesender beim Lampenlicht*; it is worth noting how carefully the painter includes, in addition to the walls, both ceiling and floor, amplifying the sense of enclosure. Further linking these compositions is the utility that requires one to work deep into the night or to rise before daybreak. Kersting's reader, in whom servitude is reborn as renunciation, appears typical of the ascendant bourgeois who found pleasure in frugality.<sup>18</sup> This ethos is represented by the very lampshade, which seems to reject the Rococo and its predilection for translucent fabrics, gossamer light, and an aloofness of personal style.

<sup>17</sup> Heinz Schlaffer. *Lyrik im Realismus*. Bonn: Bouvier, 1984, 27–33.

<sup>18</sup> Jean Starobinski. *1789: Emblems of Reason*. Trans. Barbara Bray. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988, 70.

In stark contrast to Kersting's painting, Mörike's scenes of reading are leisurely, occurring out of doors and in filtered sunlight. The poem "Im Weinberg," the opening lines of which echo those of Hölderlin's "Der Rhein," presents a book, its "rococo" virtues consistent with the idyllic setting:

Droben im Weinberg, unter dem blühenden Kirschbaum saß ich  
Heut, einsam in Gedanken vertieft; es ruhte das Neue  
Testament halboffen mir zwischen den fingern im Schoße,  
Klein und zierlich gebunden [...]<sup>19</sup>

As in "Wald-Idylle," the subject is distracted from reading; the book's being unread focuses attention on its tangible, sensuous qualities. The speaker is stirred from his daydream by the sight of a butterfly, which is drawn to the book's gilded spine as to a flower. The butterfly lights, restoring the metonymy to which the object, a gift from a lost loved one ("es kam vom treuesten Herzen"), owes its appeal. In an age in which books are as much owned as read, decoration, typically in the form of ornamental vignettes, enforces the claims of nature in the face of growing instrumentalism.<sup>20</sup> We recall how in "Wald-Idylle" shadows cast on the open page create veritable illustrations ("neckische Bilder zum Text"). Likewise in "Waldplage" a reader, plagued by mosquitoes while reading Klopstock, jubilantly squashes one of these winged pests between the pages of the book ("nicht achtend eines schönen Buchs Verderb"), only to rediscover it as a pleasingly displayed specimen: "da liegst du plattgedrückt, / [...] Du zierlich Langgebeintes, Jungfräuliches!" (ll. 56–58). Never reluctant to make light of his own pedantry, Mörike describes the insect, the configuration of whose legs conforms to iambic trimeter, with its own three pairs of feet:

Geflügelt kommt es, säuselnd, fast unerhörbarlich;  
Auf Füßen, zweimal dreien, ist es hochgestellt  
(Deswegen ich in Versen es zu schmähen auch  
Den klassischen Senarium mit Fug erwählt).

(ll. 16–19)

<sup>19</sup> "Im dunklen Efeu saß ich, an der Pforte / Des Waldes, eben, da der goldene Mittag, / Den Quell besuchend, herunterkam." Friedrich Hölderlin. *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Günter Mieth. München: Hanser, 1978, I:354. I am indebted to Thomas Pfau for this suggestion.

<sup>20</sup> See Walter Benjamin regarding *Jugendstil*: "Er mobilisiert alle Reserven der Innerlichkeit. Sie finden ihren Ausdruck ... in der Blume als dem Sinnbild der nackten, vegetativen Natur, die der technisch armierten Umwelt entgegentritt." *Illuminationen*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1977, 178.

While the inventively awkward “unerhörbarlich” accentuates the strained concession to meter, “Waldplage” evokes classical models in which finely crafted lines strive to simulate the objects they circumscribe. Mörike’s “Auf eine Lampe” and “Inscription auf eine Uhr mit den drei Horen” are serious exercises in the art of ekphrasis. In another, humorous example, a book—a volume of Catullus no less—implores a librarian to be lenient on the occasion of its tardy return: “Zwar nahezu zwei Jährchen blieb ich aus; jedoch / Nicht schmutziger, bei meiner Ehre, komm ich heim.”<sup>21</sup>

That books are subject to desecration is borne out also by the volume of Klopstock stained by a crushed insect—a fossil for some future reader to find. The materiality that invites touch implicates books in an enchanted milieu in which all physical things may become sacred. The weathercock of *Der alte Turmhahn* is one among many such relics. With music from the adjacent church filling the room, his eye follows the rays of the morning sun as they illuminate his patron’s possessions one by one, resting finally on the shelves of writings by noted regional theologians: “Da stehn in Pergament und Leder / Vornan die frommen Schwabenväter” (ll. 246–47). Yet like the butterfly that graces the New Testament in “Im Weinberg,” the sunlight seems indifferent to the sacred content of these venerable tomes, highlighting instead their bindings, which are redolent with age and handling.

“Wald-Idylle,” beginning with the image of shadows playing upon the pages of a book read out of doors, represents an ideal—the dual integration of nature and culture and of art and text. Book illustrators in the early nineteenth century strove to achieve this ideal by developing techniques that would enable printed images to fade naturally into the page rather than standing out in sharp relief. In an engraving from 1818, Thomas Bewick superimposed delicate sprigs of fern over a vignette, simulating (in sepia) the practice of pressing leaves and flowers between the pages of books. Commenting on Bewick’s innovation, Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner note suggestively that the Romantic vignette (which Bewick pioneered) is “not a window,” and we may perceive in their characterization an implicit description of the Romantic interior:

Dense at its center, tenuous on the periphery, it seems to disappear into the page. [...] The image, defined from its center rather than its edges, emerges from the paper as an apparition or fantasy. The uncertainty of

<sup>21</sup> “Herrn Bibliothekar Adelb. v. Keller (bei verspäteter Zurücksendung einer Ausgabe des Catullus).”

contour often makes it impossible to distinguish the edge of the vignette from the paper: the whiteness of the paper, which represents the play of light within the image, changes imperceptibly into the paper of the book.<sup>22</sup>

So understood, the engraved illustration emulates the structure of an enchanted space, which radiates from the center as from a glowing hearth. (The interior that Kersting depicts, by contrast, is a shield, its autonomy hard won). The epilogue to “Wald-Idylle,” which conjures just such a space, blends effortlessly into the idyll, whose meter and tone it replicates. The “uncertainty of contour” that Rosen and Zerner observe may remind us of Lukács and his evocation of an epic world in which the outlines of the soul and the contours of things were as yet indistinct. “Die Welt ist weit und doch wie das eigene Haus,” he writes, “denn das Feuer, das in der Seele brennt, ist von derselben Wesensart wie die Sterne.”<sup>23</sup> A world in which the paths of men were lit by heavenly bodies finds a last glimmer in “Das verlassene Mägdlein,” whose subject, under fading starlight (“Eh die Sternlein verschwinden”), stands at the stove and at the nadir of an enchanted age.

*University of Oregon*

<sup>22</sup> Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, *Romanticism and Realism: The Mythology of Nineteenth-Century Art*. New York: Norton, 1984, 81–84.

<sup>23</sup> Georg Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans*. Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1971, 21, 24.