Chapter 7
The "Tropological Nature" of the Poet in Müller and Benn

Robert Müller's novel *Tropen. Der Mythos der Reise. Urkunden eines deutschen Ingenieurs* (Tropics. The Myth of a Voyage. Documents of a German Engineer, 1915) and texts by Gottfried Benn show how closely 'primitive thinking' and metaphor are connected in primitivist discourse of the early twentieth century. Müller's novel, to which the bulk of the following chapter is dedicated, revolves around the homonymic quality of its title, *Tropen*. The text constructs multiple connections between the jungle (the tropics, or in German, *Tropen*) as the home of the 'primitive' and the linguistic figure of transference (tropes, or in German, *Tropen* as well) along the course of its protagonist's quest for both origins and futurity. In the final part of the chapter, I attend to Gottfried Benn's early work and poetological reflections during the early 1930s. In these texts, Benn is also concerned with the polyvalent tropics, whose primeval vegetation, however, he shifts to the human body, which figures as an inscription of the archaic.

A Biological Reverie

Schiller's declaration, "they are what we were," which I discussed at length in the introduction, echoed throughout the cultural history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This formula took on a new form in the context of the human sciences that developed at that time and that understood man as a historical being. A century earlier, equating non-European peoples, children, or animals with the supposed origins of humanity was nothing more than an analogical operation. But in the context of the human sciences, this analogy soon acquired the status of fact inasmuch as ethnology, developmental psychology, and psychopathology now claimed to have empirical evidence that qualities of the original species were *in fact* present in indigenous cultures, children, and the mentally ill. Such arguments were supported by temporal models based on the notions of survival, the recapitulation of phylogeny in ontogeny, and regression.

The models of survival and recapitulation, in particular, reduced the distance between the modern era and the presumed first beginnings of humanity. Not only did indigenous peoples as a whole represent a survival of the original state, but such survivals abounded even in modern Europe according to the so-

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110695090-007

cial anthropologist E. B. Tylor. "In our midst," he writes, one still encounters numerous "primaeval monuments of barbaric thought and life."[1] For Tylor, these survivals involve particular collective patterns of behavior, whereas early twentieth-century individual psychology was interested in survivals of an archaic psyche that could affect not only entire cultures – as in Jung's theory of a collective unconscious – but also adult individuals who were seen to retain the patterns and contents of the child's psyche. Moreover, according to the theory of recapitulation, the child's mind corresponded to that of archaic man, and therefore just a few years, not millennia, stood between modern Europeans and the 'barbarous' origins of their culture. Psychoanalysis furthermore held that many components of this childlike, ancient mind were still present in the modern adult and could dominate mature thinking in the process of regression.

Tylor presented an idealist argument inasmuch as he traced the survivals back to passed-down cultural traditions. Psychologists, by contrast, tended to hold the materialist position that an organic memory exists, thus producing a biological version of "they are what we were." As demonstrated in Chapter 3, this perspective is closely related to Ernst Haeckel's popular theories, specifically on biogenetic law, according to which "*ontogenesis is a brief and rapid recapitulation of phylogenesis*."[2] Haeckel maintains not only that humans, as a species, can look back on an ancestral line reaching back to single-cell organisms but furthermore that the life of each individual, which begins with a single cell, repeats the course of phylogeny as a whole. He suggests that the past lives on in the present in multiple ways. Following Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck, Haeckel posits a mnemonic connection between his contemporaries and their ancestors and is convinced that traces of their experience are archived in the biological achievements that they have inherited from their non-human forebears. From this biogenetic perspective, the "they are" in the phrase "they are what we were" refers not just to unicellular organisms (and even inorganic life) but also to organs and physiological processes in human beings of the present. They originate in earlier stages of development and store the experiences that led to their development in the first place. Thus Haeckel regards his contemporaries as possessing organic memory: not only are "they" what "we were," but rather *we still are* – through our bodies – *what they were*.

1 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 19.

2 Haeckel, *The Riddle of the Universe: At the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Joseph McCabe (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1900), 81. Emphasis in original.

Examples of this assumption abound in the human sciences of the early twentieth century, each stranger than the next. Thus, the paleoanthropologist Edgar Dacqué writes:

> At first, [humans] must have possessed amphibious and reptilian-looking features. Perhaps he had the sluggish gait of amphibians and webbed fingers and toes [...]. With [...] reptiles he may have shared a partially horny armored body [...]. But with both groups hypothetical prehistoric man probably had [in common] a fully developed parietal organ, i.e., a fully developed eye-like opening on the top of the skull.[3]

According to this anti-Darwinian position, humans did not become humans at the end of phylogenesis but were humans from the very beginning, and the various animals split off from this archetypal form. It follows that the organic memory of humankind reaches back into the most ancient times. Dacqué speaks of this especially when discussing the parietal eye of primordial "man," a feature connected to an "even older stage than that of the primeval amphibian or fish"; its traces, he maintains, may still be found in the human being of the present in the pineal gland, which he identifies as a receded pair of eyes.[4] Dacqué devotes so much attention to the parietal eye's survival because he wishes to rouse the "essentially intellectual man" of his own time to reactivate his "natural vision" (*Natursichtigkeit*), which, in his estimation, represents the "oldest state of mind" and is directly linked to this (supposed) organ.[5] From this reactivation, he proclaims, with prophetic pathos, the coming of a "great world epoch with new mental and physical possibilities that will emerge as we discard the cerebral intellectual state."[6]

The scientific community welcomed and elaborated upon Dacqué's claims that primeval qualities have survived and can be reactivated. Thus, his colleague Eugen Georg asserts that the human organism still contains "about 200 ancient organs," at least in rudimentary form.[7] Inasmuch as every feature of the human body must serve a purpose, he interprets these remnants as sites of possible revival:

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3 Edgar Dacqué, *Urwelt, Sage und Menschheit. Eine naturhistorisch-metaphysische Studie* (Munich: Walter de Gruyter, 1924), 70–71.

4 Dacqué, *Urwelt, Sage und Menschheit*, 73.

5 Dacqué, *Urwelt, Sage und Menschheit*, 250, 232.

6 Dacqué, *Urwelt, Sage und Menschheit*, 250.

7 Eugen Georg, *Verschollene Kulturen. Das Menschheitserlebnis. Ablauf und Deutungsversuch* (Leipzig: Voigtländer, 1930), 149.

> For if all these features (whenever they were acquired) – amphibian-like internal organs, reptilian ornaments [*Reptilienrequisiten*], parietal eye, mammalian rudiments – were constantly dragged along, smuggled through all biological ages in fragments [*Organtorsi*], doesn't it look as if there was some higher intention behind it all, [...] to be activated again one day if necessary?[8]

Reactivation will achieve synthesis in what Georg calls "Quintenary Man," when the "dreamlike-elementary experience of the world" of "Tertiary Man" and the "gnawing intellect" of "Quaternary Man" give way to "prophetic wisdom."[9]

In light of such speculative paleo-anthropological theories, the reason for my reference to "reverie" in the subtitle to this chapter section should be clear. As noted in the introduction, the term comes from Gaston Bachelard, who uses it to point out that scientists are rarely motivated by an objective attitude toward what they examine so much as they are guided by affects, needs, and ideas.[10] (We can leave the question open as to which emotional needs might have motivated these paleoanthropologists. Yet, all of the following are evident in their megalomaniac heralding of a new age and unwillingness to subject speculations to critical examination: the narcissism of viewing humanity as not only the crowning achievement but also the starting point of creation, the possessive need to ascribe special abilities to human beings, and a scientific will-to-power.[11]) Bachelard also uses "scientific poetry" as a synonym for reverie; its forms of expression and procedures, he stresses, are governed by *poèmes,* not *theorèmes.*

The pattern of argument underlying "they are what we were" functions as one such *poème*. In contrast to what scientific writings purport, this formula was not a matter of discovery and subsequent verification; instead, it shaped broad swaths of European cultural historiography (albeit in versions that varied according to their respective epistemic contexts). It should not be understood as a scientific insight so much as a template for speculative knowledge formation: a scheme into which conjectures about human origins are integrated time and again. Furthermore, texts like Dacqué's can also be said to share an affinity with poetic reverie because they take up literary works of the past – especially accounts of myth – and formulate hypotheses on their basis. In other words, these sources are no longer understood as fiction but as historical records

8 Georg, *Verschollene Kulturen,* 149–150.

9 Georg, *Verschollene Kulturen,* 150.

10 Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire,* 6.

11 Gaston Bachelard, "Scientific Objectivity and Psychoanalysis," in *The Formation of the Scientific Mind*, trans. Mary McAllester Jones (Manchester: Clinamen, 2002).

from the past, "a time," as Dacqué puts it, "when myths were still experiences, i. e., real."[12]

Conversely, speculative science and its *poèmes* correspond to literary texts that make massive use of science and its daydreams in order to pick up on them, reflect on them, and possibly spin them further. This is exemplified, as the next sections will show, by the work of Robert Müller and Gottfried Benn.

The Tropics

In Robert Müller's novel *Tropen*, the plot proper starts in the second chapter with a voyage down a river – a primitivist topos since Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). In Conrad's novella, Marlow tells his companions on a ship anchored on the Thames how once, attracted to the last uncharted "blank spaces" on his map of the world, he entered the employ of a Belgian trading company and captained a river boat up the Congo.[13] He experiences the journey as one into the "heart of darkness" – to an encounter with Kurtz, the head of an ivory trading station, who for Marlow epitomizes the "darkness" that marks the barbarous conduct of European colonializers. Conrad's story has been read as a criticism of the methods and effects of colonization in the Congo Free State in particular and of the hypocrisy of the supposed civilized world more generally, which, under the pretext of philanthropy, indulges a brutal appetite for power and wealth. At the same time, readers have noted the racist portrayal of the native population, who are not only depersonalized (becoming an anonymous mass) and dehumanized (portrayed as suffering creatures), but also used to represent the natural state of "darkness" and "horror" that lurks within all human beings and resurfaces in the colonizers under the effects of the wilderness.[14] It hasn't been unequivocally proven that Robert Müller read *Heart of Darkness*, but he is supposed to have counted Conrad among his favorite au-

12 Dacqué, *Urwelt, Sage und Menschheit*, 35. This is also connected with "Henri Bergson's 'commitment' to the intuitive method" (Marcus Hahn, *Gottfried Benn und das Wissen der Moderne* [Göttingen: Wallstein, 2011], 604).

13 Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Owen Knowles and Allan H. Simmons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 8.

14 First noted by Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," in *Heart of Darkness: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism*, ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: Norton, 1988).

thors,[15] and as Matthias Lorenz has recently demonstrated in a comparative reading of the two works, it seems very likely that he knew *Heart of Darkness* as well. Thus, the charismatic American Slim, who incites Brandlberger, the first-person narrator of *Tropen*, to search for gold in the jungle, can be read as a "revenant of Conrad's Mr. Kurtz" inasmuch as he "shares several characteristics with him and bears his name in 'diagonal' translation," i.e., from the German word *kurz* (meaning short) to the English "slim."[16]

Müller's connection to another pioneer of literary primitivism is even more pronounced. As Monica Wenusch and others have shown, Müller engaged intensively, from at least 1913, with the writings of the Danish author Johannes V. Jensen. The latter's *Skovene* (Forests, 1904; published in German as *Wälder* in 1907) "clearly, deeply, and demonstrably"[17] influenced his novel of the tropics. Jensen's narrative also begins with a river journey that takes a European explorer into the tropical forests of Birubunga – which amounts to a trip back to a primeval time and simultaneously into his own interior: "into a perspective that had been forgotten, but which I knew."[18] The explorer's clichéd intentions in striving for heroic masculinity – by climbing a hitherto unconquered mountain and killing a tiger – fall flat, and scholars have persuasively interpreted them as parody used intentionally by Jensen to ridicule the naïve yearning for adventure among his contemporaries, caught up in their own fears and fantasies, and to tell them to instead "explore their own psyche."[19]

In terms of both plot and character, Müller's novel displays many similarities with its two predecessors.[20] However, its formal complexity and reflection on language and literary craft, which radicalizes Jensen's insight into the imaginary nature of colonialist journeys into the jungle, go further still. Let us first return to the river journey. What Conrad and Jensen only hint at is made explicit in Müller's novel: the voyage follows the scheme of regression into ontogeny and phylogeny, which ultimately determines the entire plot.[21] In its beginning, Brandl-

15 See Matthias N. Lorenz, *Distant Kinship. Entfernte Verwandtschaft: Joseph Conrads "Heart of Darkness" in der deutschen Literatur von Kafka bis Kracht* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2017), 182.

16 Lorenz, *Distant Kinship*, 187.

17 Wenusch, Monica, *"... ich bin eben dabei, mir Johannes V. Jensen zu entdecken..." Die Rezeption von Johannes V. Jensen im deutschen Sprachraum* (Vienna: Praesens Verlag, 2016), 275.

18 Johannes V. Jensen, *Wälder*, in *"Die Welt ist Tief." Novellen* (Berlin: Fischer, 1912), 168. See Wenusch, *"... ich bin eben dabei,"* 275–297, for a comparison of *Tropen* and *Skovene*.

19 Volker Zenk, *Innere Forschungsreisen. Literarischer Exotismus in Deutschland zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Oldenburg: Igel, 2003), 78.

20 See also Zenk, *Innere Forschungsreisen*, 103–111.

21 In keeping with the discourse of the day, which associates this mode with insanity, the travelers are later called "madmen." Cf. Thomas Schwarz, "Robert Müllers *Tropen* (1915) als neuras-

berger, dozing on his boat, has the impression "of [having] already [...] experienced all this once before"[22] and arrives suddenly at the following insight:

> In the depths of my consciousness, in the mines of my origins, there slumbered the mood, from prehistoric times, of millions of beings; the maternal suckle and flow of the stream, the incubating warmth of the surroundings, the solicitous calm of idleness had coaxed my primal instincts. How long it had been: ... twenty-three years and nine months ago, my life as one of those gristly cells had reached its peak. My identity with this state was established. Down at the bottom of these viscous fathoms dwelt beings whose dear friend I once had been.[23]

The journey up the jungle is experienced as a return to both an individual and human past. Time has stood still here, so that what has long since passed in Brandlberger's own life and human history is still present. Foreign space is reinterpreted as the survival of the self's origins. Brandlberger finds that the swampy river of the jungle has preserved the initial state of phylogeny, which had been recapitulated in Brandlberger's prenatal existence:

> In ancient times, stem cells settled all over these jungle puddles, scurried greedily along the edges of alien growths, let their pennated antennae flutter under the intermittent gush of waters flowing together and fished with sinewy muscles for other organisms [...]. These forms of life all around [...] once were me.[24]

This passage shows the influence of Haeckel, whose narrative of human development and assertion of the biogenetic law likewise follows a double (onto- and phylogenetic) regression back to the "stem cell" and "a corresponding, unicellular ancestor, a [...] Laurentian protozoon."[25]

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thenisches Aufschreibesystem," in *Neurasthenie. Die Krankheit der Moderne und die moderne Literatur*, ed. Maximilian Bergengruen, Klaus Müller-Wille, and Caroline Pross (Freiburg: Rombach, 2010).

22 Robert Müller, *Tropen. Der Mythos der Reise. Urkunden eines deutschen Ingenieurs. Herausgegeben von Robert Müller. Anno 1915*, ed. Günter Helmes, 3rd ed. (Hamburg: Igel Verlag Literatur & Wissenschaft, 2010), 17.

23 Müller, *Tropen*, 19.

24 Müller, *Tropen*, 19 – 20.

25 Haeckel, *The Riddle of the Universe*, 84. Müller was familiar with Haeckel's biogenetic law; cf. his letter dated 4 June 1912, in which he calls his own psyche a "well-preserved record" (*Abschichtungsexemplar*) (in Robert Müller, *Briefe und Verstreutes* [Paderborn: Igel, 1997], 50); see Christian Liederer, *Der Mensch und seine Realität. Anthropologie und Wirklichkeit im poetischen Werk des Expressionisten Robert Müller* (Würzburg: Königshausen + Neumann, 2004), 66; and Thomas Schwarz, *Robert Müllers Tropen. Ein Reiseführer in den imperialen Exotismus* (Heidelberg: Synchron, 2006), 69.

Indeed, Haeckel's considerations also explain why Brandlberger can remember his prenatal and phylogenetic past. For Haeckel, humans' remote unicellular ancestors are still present in multiple ways in modern men. To begin with, the life of the human organism depends on that of the cells constituting it. More still, Haeckel follows Lamarck in positing the existence of a mnemonic connection between man and his ancestors. Even on the most archaic level, "sensations may leave a permanent trace in the psychoplasm, and these may be reproduced by memory."[26] Accordingly, the character portrayed by Müller, a reader of Haeckel, is able to experience the memory, induced by nature in the tropics, of having existed as a "nibbling bundle of cells [...] in the water."[27]

The jungle does not only preserve life on the cellular level. Brandlberger also rediscovers later stages of the evolutionary "scale"[28] – for instance, he sees "his nerves' mode of life" in the panther and the victory of his "democratic nerves" over the "cosmic principle of satiated spiritual calm" (*Weltprinzip der fetten Seelenruhe*) in the butterfly.[29] Elementary characteristics of his own nature are embodied by animals living in this habitat, which he interprets as survivals of corresponding phylogenetic stages of human development. This embodiment provides the basis for Brandlberger's participatory experiences with these animals, which involves an anthropomorphization of animals and conversely the zoomorphization of humans.[30]

The "Indians" of the novel play a particularly important role in Brandlberger's recapitulation of phylo- and ontogenesis. The three jungle travelers in the novel live with them for a spell, and their shaman, Zana, accompanies them until the end of the journey. For Brandlberger, the indigenous people represent an evolutionary stage of life geared entirely toward sensuality and carnal pleasure, in particular. For this reason, he calls them "priests of the senses."[31] The priestess of this priestly people is Zana, who thus embodies her people and

26 Haeckel, *The Riddle of the Universe*, 117–118.

27 Müller, *Tropen*, 20.

28 Liederer identifies three developmental stages in Müller's work: vegetative, primitive man; rational and civilized man; and the new man. He finds five corresponding dimensions of perception: being (a line) and stationary space (a plane or surface) for the first stage, depth and time for the second, and absolute consciousness transcending time and space (language, mind, image, paradox) for the third (*Der Mensch und seine Realität*, 135–174).

29 Müller, *Tropen*, 89.

30 For a thorough discussion, see Liederer, *Der Mensch und seine Realität*, 113–123.

31 Müller, *Tropen*, 59. Schwarz demonstrates that the practices Brandlberger observes and adopts are sadomasochistic and situates them in the context of contemporary sexology (*Robert Müllers Tropen*, 175–193).

their principle of life.[32] Almost more important than her priesthood, however, is the fact that she is both an "Indian" and a woman. In Brandlberger's eyes, woman – in contrast to man – "has never left the tropics"; in other words, women still inhabit an earlier stage of human history. Zana therefore proves to be doubly 'primitive,' predestined to represent sensuality and sex.[33]

As in his encounters with the jungle river and animals, Brandlberger rediscovers a part of himself among the people living there. The "Indians" remind him of his "most audible wishes, physical desire."[34] Life in their midst soon transforms the white men into "barbarians" who indulge their instincts: "Barbarian forms of life acted on patented rights; where spiritual hollows stretched wide, dark movements occurred, frothing out from deserts of blood. Primordial forces began to stir."[35] At the end of the expedition, in the company of supposed cannibals, Brandlberger finally rids himself of all the remaining inhibitions European culture has imposed on him.

> I [...] became familiar with a stage where the primal drives of man, hunger, and love become to a certain degree identical. My heightened nervousness mobilized all the ancient dispositions harbored within. It overturned inhibitions put in place by millennia of culture, to which a chain of thirty generations had held firm.[36]

Although Brandlberger fails to notice as much, such behavior on the part of the travelers reveals a difference between the "neo-barbarians" and the tribespeople. For the "Indians" have at their command a particularly elaborate – and therefore "cultivated"[37] – understanding of sensuality. Accordingly, the novel speaks of their "physical refinement," their art of extracting "the honey of bodily presence from life,"[38] and "physiological enlightenment."[39] The rebarbarized Europeans, on the other hand, live out raw, uncultivated drives – which

32 See Liederer, *Der Mensch und seine Realität*, 51.

33 Zana represents the pars pro toto not only of her people, but also of the jungle, which Müller codes as feminine – or, more precisely, maternal (with the ambivalence this entails). See Schwarz, *Robert Müllers Tropen*, 68–70. Compared to the female characters in Jensen and Conrad (who belong to the scenery, as it were), Zana plays a much more active role, a variant of the femme fatale. On the role of sexuality in Müller's novel (also in the context of literary primitivism), see Eva Blome, *Reinheit und Vermischung*, 164–189.

34 Müller, *Tropen*, 89.

35 Müller, *Tropen*, 51.

36 Müller, *Tropen*, 280.

37 Müller, *Tropen*, 72.

38 Müller, *Tropen*, 58.

39 Müller, *Tropen*, 72; Müller-Tamm draws attention to the "organized social system" of the jungle inhabitants (*Abstraktion als Einfühlung*, 351).

lead to three mysterious sexual murders.[40] Nonetheless, Brandlberger equates this behavior of the "rebarbarized" with the ways of the "Indians." He identifies the "Indians" (or their stand-in, Zana) with the "sensuality of the [jungle] nature" and the "terrible, confusing drive" also raging in the "white man" when he states, "I think of *drive*, the tropics in the nature [*Gemüt*] of the white man."[41] Because of this misidentification and the resulting misunderstanding of the culture of the jungle inhabitants, the travelers' expedition can only fail. They violate the customs of their hosts when one of their number gives free rein to his lust, interrupts a ritual dance between Zana and the chief, and challenges the latter to a duel – in which he dies. Here (and in contrast to Conrad's novella), the text is wiser than its homodiegetic narrator in that it provides the reader with insight into the culture of the jungle people and into the Europeans' mistakes that it denies Brandlberger.

Other passages also make it clear that the novel adopts a critical stance toward its narrator, Brandlberger. This includes the failure of the three Europeans' hunt for treasure and of Brandlberger's project to bring forth a new human race. As the putative editor, "Robert Müller," writes in the foreword, Brandlberger was unable to found the "Freeland colony" that he intended to establish and was killed in an "Indian uprising."[42] Moreover, the editor's prefatory remarks identify the explorer as an outdated – and not particularly likeable – "type":

> Hans Brandlberger was a young man of the dawning twentieth century and quite like all other young people of that ancient time, [...] without any real talent or character, indeed hardly a spiritual person [...], too lax and troublesome [...], petty, [...] amoral – always a little angry and irritated with himself.[43]

40 Accordingly, Schwarz's diagnosis of sadomasochistic practices (*Robert Müllers Tropen*, 175–193) should be qualified: the "Indians" have cultivated them, whereas the travelers – who are inexperienced in this regard and have repressed such desires until now – lose control when they succumb to them; in consequence, their actions lead to murder-rape.

41 Müller, *Tropen*, 26. Emphasis in the original.

42 Werkmeister therefore speaks of the novel's postcolonial perspective (*Kulturen jenseits der Schrift*, 370). This argument finds support in the parody of typical gestures of conquest, which Schwarz observes by reading Theodor Koch-Grünberg's Amazon ethnographies alongside the novel (*Robert Müllers Tropen*, 107–115).

43 Müller, *Tropen*, 7–8.

Thus, from the outset readers are encouraged to adopt a skeptical attitude toward the narrator of the supposed travelogue, in keeping with the editor's own "suspicion."[44]

The relationship between Brandlberger and the story he tells of the jungle inhabitants is characterized by othering and nostrification, features also found in the works of Conrad and Jensen.[45] On the one hand, the "Indians" – especially at the beginning of the encounter – are denigrated as "animals" and rigorously set in opposition to the white men, who put on the airs of infinitely superior "masters." At the fore stands their distancing from the natives, with whom as few common traits as possible are acknowledged: "It would have been embarrassing to find our equal [*einen Duzbruder*] among these beasts."[46] Brandlberger retains this bearing to the very end, seeing a wildcat in Zana and fancying himself a "new man" facing this "primeval woman" (*Urweib*).[47] At the same time, however, the "Indians" are also nostrified to the European narrator inasmuch as he understands them as the survival of an earlier stage of human development and as representatives of the lost characteristics of modern-day men. Thus, it is not the case that the civilized Europeans discover the sophistication of tribesmen; instead, they discover their own latent barbarism.

But othering and nostrification do not contradict so much as complement each other, for the latter concerns strangers who are already othered. They are animals from Brandlberger's perspective, but Europeans once were animals, too – and still are, beneath the surface. Nostrification does not involve approaching or relating to the tribespeople, then; instead, the Europeans project an estranged version of themselves onto them, a tendency that Brandlberger occasionally recognizes in moments of reflection. The process of nostrification culminates in identification. Indeed, Brandlberger asserts in the final sentence of the novel, "I am the tropics." [48] This returns to themes already introduced at the start of the novel, when he reflects on his "identity with" the "condition" of the jungle river.[49]

Identification in the novel follows the pattern of appropriation by continuing the imperialist gesture of the "master's" superiority. It is connected with the assertion that "northern man" is the proper carrier of the tropics: "He, the north-

44 Müller, *Tropen*, 8. For discussion of the foreword, see Dietrich, *Poetik der Paradoxie. Zu Robert Müllers fiktionaler Prosa* (Siegen: Carl Böschen, 1997), 17–22.
45 On the double strategy of othering nostrification, see Michael C. Frank, "Überlebsel," 160.
46 Müller, *Tropen*, 48. On animalization, see Liederer, *Der Mensch und seine Realität*, 113–119.
47 Müller, *Tropen*, 276.
48 Müller, *Tropen*, 283.
49 Müller, *Tropen*, 19.

erner [*Nordländer*], is much more southern [...] in his instincts than the southernmost race."[50] At the same time, identification is accompanied by a distancing gesture: the journey into the jungle was supposedly only made for the purpose of study, to observe the "primordial existence" of humankind. For the European traveler seeks to appropriate this origin only so that primeval sensuality and civilized rationality may achieve synthesis in a "new man [*neuer Mensch*]."[51] As Brandlberger declares: "We are conquering the savage [...]. Now, we're taking back for ourselves what we had traded for our brains, but without giving anything back. We're holding on to our possessions."[52]

Similar to Brandlberger's position, Müller vehemently criticizes exoticism in this novel and elsewhere. Yet at the same time, or at least in the early 1910s, he had been a passionate supporter of imperialism. The idea that the "new man" is supposed to be a hybrid of the inhabitants of the jungle and Europeans does not mean – either for Brandlberger or the author – that the foreign is accepted on its own terms, or that the categories of self and other are deconstructed (as has been claimed[53]). On the contrary, this concept of the "new man" stands under the sign of imperial ambitions. As Thomas Schwarz has demonstrated, Müller understands "hybridization as an imperialist project."[54] The task is to incorporate the foreign in order to balance out deficits of one's own, thereby ensuring continued dominance. In this spirit, Müller's essay "Was erwartet Österreich von seinem jungen Thronfolger?" (What does Austria expect of its heir to the throne? 1915) claims that the "circulation and metabolism of a civilized nation [*Kulturstaat*]" are "dependent on the fodder" it gets its hands on: a "filthy but imposing process of digestion" comprises the "healthiest way to prepare a highly evolved brain."[55] In *Tropen,* this process takes the form of Brandlberger seeking

50 Müller, *Tropen*, 282.
51 Müller, *Tropen*, 276.
52 Müller, *Tropen*, 129.
53 See Riedel, "'What's the difference?' Robert Müllers Tropen (1915)," in *Schwellen. Germanistische Erkundungen einer Metapher*, ed. Nicholas Saul, Daniel Steuer, Frank Möbus, and Birgit Illner (Würzburg: Königshausen + Neumann, 1999), 69; Müller-Tamm, *Abstraktion als Einfühlung*, 353.
54 Schwarz, *Robert Müllers Tropen*, 221. See also 221–276, 305–320. Transferred to the register of sexuality, this fits with the sadism of the colonists (Schwarz, *Robert Müllers Tropen*, 175–193).
55 Robert Müller, "Was erwartet Österreich von seinem jungen Thronfolger?" in *Gesammelte Essays*, ed. Michael M. Schardt (Paderborn: Igel, 1995), 63. Also quoted by Schwarz, *Robert Müllers Tropen*, 76. Lucas Gisi, drawing attention to the same passage, points to the "founding of a new race as a brutal fantasy of colonization and subjugation" ("Die Biologisierung der Utopie als Apokalypse. Der neue Mensch in Robert Müllers *Tropen*," in *Utopie und Apokalypse in der Moderne*, ed. Reto Sorg and Stefan Bodo Würffel [Munich: Fink, 2010], 223).

to use Zana to breed a new humanity that, by incorporating tropical sensuality, would be immune to signs of European degeneration ("syphilis, consumption, and mobs") and thus ensure the superiority of the colonizer-race in the future. That the novel, at least in its frame narrative, also expresses reservations about such plans may reflect the doubts Müller would later entertain about his "imperialist megalomania."[56]

Accordingly, to follow Stephen Greenblatt's lead, Brandlberger's relationship with the inhabitants of the jungle can be read as metonymic.[57] It is not characterized by perceived similarity (that is, by identity and difference subsisting side by side) or impartiality (renouncing appropriation). Rather, the protagonist-narrator perceives the other as a part of what is actually already his own, something to be instrumentalized in order to fortify a position of strength and maintain supremacy. Correspondingly, the relationship between (northern) man and the tropics is also shaped in the novel as a metonymic one: at some points, man mirrors the tropics (he duplicates them on a small scale), and at others the tropics are only a mirror (in the sense of a product) of man.

Tropological Language

The novel posits a connection between the tropics (the jungle) and tropes (figures of speech) in several ways. First, it stresses that the jungle is only a linguistic image into which the European transfers a part of himself: "Why am I talking about the tropics so much? The savage doesn't know them, only the northerner does – they're a figure for his ardor and the burning fever in his nerves. They're his invention, a metaphor he creates."[58] The very beginning of the book already confirms this inasmuch as the jungle tropics admit representation only by means of an array of linguistic tropes. For instance, the descriptions of the river's course accumulate figures of image and sound in a striking manner: "linguistic realization itself *is* the jungle."[59]

56 See Schwarz, *Robert Müllers Tropen*, 73–82. In "Robert Müllers *Tropen* (1915) als neurasthenisches Aufschreibesystem" (155), Schwarz emphasizes that after World War I, Müller increasingly distanced himself from his "imperialist megalomania," and especially from the martial ideal of toughness associated with it, which also defines Brandlberger's fantasy of breeding a new race.

57 Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, chapter 3. On the two different attitudes toward the foreign, see page 135 of the same book as well as chapter 2 of the study at hand.

58 Müller, *Tropen*, 214.

59 Dietrich, *Poetik der Paradoxie*, 49–50.

Brandlberger's claim of the tropological nature of the tropics finds further confirmation in numerous references to the jungle as a fictional and literary environment. By way of the title, *Tropen* refers to a book, and its inhabitants are the novel's characters – specifically, the letters of the alphabet in the manuscript.[60] Brandlberger and Slim both announce their intentions to write a novel called *Tropen*;[61] and the latter even wants to have the "whole story told by someone who never has been in the tropics."[62] Such passages emphasize not only the tropics' fictionality[63] but also the writing process and the materiality of writing. The actual author, Robert Müller, who represents himself in the novel's subtitle as the editor of Brandlberger's work, claims to have found Brandlberger's "typewritten manuscript"[64] in his desk. In this same document, Brandlberger writes that he "is going upstream on a desk" (*als Schreibtisch einen Strom hinauf*) and will "write the story he has yet to experience" (*das Buch, das er erst erleben wird*).[65]

The tropics are the product of writing, then, and many of the people who appear on its pages are described as written characters: "He [Checho] was tall and thin, like a letter";[66] "[Meme's] calves stretched above flat, wide soles; between them, like the letter *M*, the upper part of his body hung suspended, a pliant pyramid of delicate bones, muscles and nerves."[67] Werkmeister has observed that the letters' pictoriality, not their symbolic function, occupies the foreground: writing itself "grows primitive."[68] At the same time, personages in the novel are identified quite literally as figures of speech, revitalizing a dead metaphor in the process. This reanimation of metaphor and its literal interpretation also point to a primitivistic use of language, passing from concept back to vivid description – both defining features of the 'primitive' use of language in contemporary theories of metaphor.

Second, the opposite claim is advanced (as noted above): "northern man" would be a mere trope (etymologically, a "turn") of the jungle:

> He [bears] the tropics within himself. [...] He's the means by which nature preserves the tropics, which are dying out. The tropics are the foundation of his organism and vital

60 See Werkmeister, *Kulturen jenseits der Schrift*, 373.
61 Müller, *Tropen*, 213, 234.
62 Müller, *Tropen*, 234.
63 For a detailed discussion, see Dietrich, *Poetik der Paradoxie*, 58–68.
64 Müller, *Tropen*, 6.
65 Müller, *Tropen*, 27.
66 Müller, *Tropen*, 36.
67 Müller, *Tropen*, 68.
68 Werkmeister, *Kulturen jenseits der Schrift*, 372.

> power; he is built following their principle, and everything is repeated within him in miniature. He, the human being, might be said to be a trope of the tropics [*im Verhältnis zu den Tropen ein Tropus*].[69]

Here, the connection is not linguistic so much as biological: the concept of the trope provides a metaphor for the metonymic relationship between the macroscopic tropics (of the primeval forest) and the microscopic tropics (of the human organism). Nature, not man, thus appears as the agent. Brandlberger finds that the original state of all life has been preserved in the jungle river, the source of human life from which physical existence – "nibbling bundles of cells"[70] – derives. The observation concerns the brain in particular, which has evolved from teeming cells: "It turns out that he, the northerner, has the tropics/tropes [*Tropen*] in him. [...] His brain, filled with a lush vegetation of tropics and metaphors [*Gleichnisse*], can be explained by the residues of his ancestry."[71] The tropics (*Tropen*) of the brain allude on the one hand to its organic composition, its development from rampant cells that still exist.

> My head on fire, I saw myself plunging into the unrealized possibilities of immature conditions, wild, primeval states and elemental battles, into the swamps of my blood and vegetal contentment. My brain cycled through the whole process through which the world had come to be and brought it forth anew.[72]

On the other hand, the tropes (*Tropen*) of the brain allude to figures of speech – that is, to the brain's creative force.

Thirdly, in this way the novel also establishes a semantic connection between tropes and the tropics, so that in German the word *Tropen* changes from a homonym into a polyseme. Linguistic acts of creation performed by the human brain obey the same principles as natural acts of creation in the jungle, for the latter has achieved biological immortality in the former. The same proliferation and crossbreeding are at work. The figures of speech are characterized as tropical tropes because they in fact originate in the processes of the tropics of nature.

Describing the tropics as a European trope and human beings as a trope of the jungle forges a causal chain that renders it impossible to distinguish between cause and effect: the primeval forest is a trope of man, who is a trope of the primeval forest, which is a trope of man, and so on. Man turns out to be an image of

69 Müller, *Tropen*, 282.
70 Müller, *Tropen*, 20.
71 Müller, *Tropen*, 234.
72 Müller, *Tropen*, 134.

an origin that is itself a metaphor made by man.[73] The identification of a first cause is replaced by the process of transference itself: all that exists emerges from this process. Both metaphorically and literally, the trope ascends to the position of the creative principle determining the world of the novel, *Tropen*.[74]

Brandlberger discovers this principle at the very outset of his journey, when he first encounters the jungle river: "*Tatwamasi:* it is you!" However, the way he handles the matter makes it clear that it is necessary for us to differentiate between specific tropes. Whereas metaphor is based on similarity and therefore the simultaneous perception of identity and difference, the novel's protagonist follows the principle of radical de-differentiation and identification.[75] As I noted above, this results in a *metonymic* construction or in a primitivistic, literal reading of metaphors. For Brandlberger, the tropes of language indicate an actual identity or at least an actual connection:

> So there I sat and felt that the equator really is a glowing hoop passing through the intestines. [...] I entertain relationships with a natural world that is female through and through. Sexuality floats over the waters, and I combine hymns of blood into a chorus. The forest is nature's immense heart, and the brown water of the river the holiest blood of my own.[76]

In light of his biogenetic convictions, we may be sure that Brandlberger means these words literally. However, taking things literally also leads to misunderstanding. For instance, when Slim speaks of streams extending from one person to another, Brandlberger thinks that he means the water where they have pitched camp, which he wants to follow in order to return to civilization.[77]

Brandlberger's de-differentiating attitude is clearly expressed in his habit of considering things that stand in relation to each other as "the same." For instance, in the following quotes:

> Whatever one experiences, it's always the same adventure; it doesn't matter if you fall into the clutches of a panther or under a bus, and what matters least of all is whether her name is Zana or Miss So-and-So.[78]

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73 Müller-Tamm aptly sums it up: "the subject is a mere metaphor of its irretrievable origins, at once the performer and the effect of historical projection" (*Abstraktion als Einfühlung*, 357).

74 Contra Werkmeister, this "pure mediality" has nothing to do with the "primitive coincidence of signs and things" (Werkmeister, *Kulturen jenseits der Schrift*, 377); in the first case, emphasis falls on the material nature of the sign, and in the other, on the materiality of the object.

75 See Werkmeister, *Kulturen jenseits der Schrift*, 371.

76 Müller, *Tropen*, 24–25.

77 Müller, *Tropen*, 236.

78 Müller, *Tropen*, 26.

> Where one reality exists, there can also be another. [...] So analysis is the same as synthesis.[79]
>
> Isn't everything always the symbol of one and the same thing: the human being?[80]
>
> Everything takes on a meaning; I'm moved to see how facts and symbols come together and yield the same thing.[81]

These passages make it clear that for Brandlberger similarity always flows into identity. The way he understands tropological phenomena slips toward metonymy, taking figurative language literally and ignoring the interplay of identity and difference.

Symbolic transfer, which usurps the principle of a first cause in the novel, to Brandlberger amounts to a projection mechanism for creating tropes of oneself. A case in point is the scene illustrating Brandlberger's "tropical delirium." In keeping with the phrase's double meaning,[82] the madness to which the Europeans succumb is not just a physical fever but also a fit of tropological identificatory transference. When Brandlberger – affect-driven and without apparent motivation – shoots a pair of storks, he reasons as follows:

> You're aiming at something outside yourself, a beautiful, red fetish – a red ideal – and ultimately you mean yourself. But if, one day, you make the formal decision to do yourself harm, then absent-mindedness will take care of that and you'll do it to your neighbor. You execute yourself in a doll – man, you're suspicious; it looks to me like you're an incurable poet.[83]

The fit leads to the blurring, if not the complete collapse, of differences between self and other, whether human or animal. Brandlberger *is* the stork; he kills himself in it, as he later does in his companions. His affective participation does not involve exchange with the other, but blindness to the other in a delusive self-reflection: the stork and his companions are mere "dolls" for a (mis)identifying transference of himself.

79 Müller, *Tropen*, 235.
80 Müller, *Tropen*, 244.
81 Müller, *Tropen*, 276.
82 On the discourse of *Tropenkoller*, see Schwarz, *Robert Müllers Tropen*, 159 – 163.
83 Müller, *Tropen*, 215 – 216.

Poets

As I noted in the previous chapter, Hugo von Hofmannsthal derived the poetic symbol from the sacrificial ritual. Brandlberger's reflections on killing the pair of storks follows the same logic: one who executes himself in an animal is an "incurable poet" because he transfers himself to another.[84] The poetic self that was killed in the stork concerns a "type" that gives itself over "to its atavism," that is, whose body and behavior still attest to the animal(s) he once was at earlier stages of evolution. Brandlberger accepts "only things and creatures similar to himself, or that have been drilled into him."[85] By way of the sacrificial animal, Brandlberger, the poet, defines himself as a type lying in wait for similarity, language providing the decisive hints: "Haven't you noticed that madmen are fatalists about language? Watch out, man. Coincidences in language are the destinies of thought."[86]

At the same time, however, Brandlberger acts counter to this type when he kills the storks because the act demanded a "further education," a search for something different. This search he immediately attributes to "the conquerors, the colonizers": "They go for it and hold fast to life."[87] Brandlberger also calls people like this poets: "a kind of poet, with healthy [...] digestion, at least. When they have cramps and vomit, they're at the peak of contentment. Above all other states, this is poetry, and they thrive on it."[88] Turning away from similarity and seeking out the unknown therefore does not occur for the sake of recognizing the unfamiliar, but in order to appropriate it. As in Hofmannsthal's rite of sacrifice, a primitivist motif is used here to justify the poet: anthropophagy. However, it does not derive from substitution (the act of sacrifice) so much as incorporation/digestion (cannibalism). Here, Müller takes up the metaphorical imagery from the *Thronfolger* essay, which discusses imperialist states "eating up" colonized territories and "digesting" them as well as "sucking in the globe" and "pumping the marrow of the earth" into their "brains."[89] Müller's return to

84 Müller, *Tropen*, 216.
85 Müller, *Tropen*, 217.
86 Müller, *Tropen*, 264.
87 Müller, *Tropen*, 217.
88 Müller, *Tropen*, 217–218.
89 Müller, "Was erwartet Österreich," 64. Also quoted in Schwarz, *Robert Müllers Tropen*, 76. Schwarz connects Müller's reflections with the *Will to Power*, where the power of a people is said to depend on incorporating "foreign" material and "transforming it into blood, so to speak" (Schwarz, quoting Nietzsche, *Robert Müllers Tropen*, 221).

the metaphor of cannibalism in *Tropen* points to the imperialist ambitions of the poet developed there.

The novel also describes the new type of poet as the forerunner of a "new man," who Brandlberger sees emerging in himself. This ideal is characterized by its synthesis of "primitive sensuality" and civilized intellect – a topical notion in primitivist discourse contemporary to the book. He states, "I climbed down the ladder of evolution, and now I'm climbing back up. Soon I'll be with the man of the future again, having been among the beings of prehistory."[90] The journey into the jungle amounts to a regression into the future, a sensual, post-rational mode of existence (which, as the reader already knows thanks to the novel's preface, Brandlberger will not achieve[91]). The rationalism of Europe is not replaced by "dream logic" (evident in Slim's tendency toward pan-signification) so much as by insight into the relativity of waking thought and nighttime visions: "Both experiences are real, only the accent has changed. [...] After all, what's logical interpretation but something illogical – a mere interpretation, poetry."[92]

At issue stands an inversion effect, much discussed in the psychology of perception of the time, which Brandlberger discovers at the outset of his journey[93] – for instance, when looking down from the ship into the world "upside down" in the water:

> I practiced a little, and before long I could snap back and forth like a thin sheet of metal. This sensory illusion worked perfectly. It was just the accent moving around – that's it, the

90 Müller, *Tropen*, 89. On the three stages, see Liederer, *Der Mensch und seine Realität*, 135–174.

91 Müller-Tamm observes that the journey only appears to be going backwards because (supposed) prehistory is in fact a "culturally specific self-projection defined by the biological and cultural-theoretical thought patterns of evolutionism" (*Abstraktion als Einfühlung*, 356). In other words, the voyager never gets away from his own time and culture. Gisi also points out that this goal is never achieved and therefore speaks of a "paradoxical utopia" ("Die Biologisierung der Utopie als Apokalypse," 223). Liederer resolves the contradiction by claiming that for Müller humankind "always [stands] on the threshold of the next anthropological stage of evolution: in the process of becoming, because the reader represents the 'last rung' of its realization" (*Der Mensch und seine Realität*, 142).

92 Müller, *Tropen*, 226.

93 According to Werkmeister, the figure of inversion (which he traces back to Erich Moritz von Hornbostel's experimental psychology, among other sources) plays a "key role in primitivistic discourse" (*Kulturen jenseits der Schrift*, 354) to the extent that it represents upside-down ethnology – the "primitivization" of thinking and literature (355); Müller's "project of inversion" makes it impossible to separate normal and altered states (356). Before Werkmeister, Müller-Tamm had already pointed to the relevant intertext in experimental psychology (*Abstraktion als Einfühlung*, 364–365).

> accent! I had it. The accent reflects whole perspectives, whole realities rest on it. By so-called sensory illusion, I could turn the world upside-down and make another one. So who can say which one's right and which one's wrong?[94]

Rational thinking and dream logic are but one of many examples of this shift in accentuation in the novel. The accents fall differently in the dream, inverting the images presented by rational thought. As Brandlberger notes in the same passage, linguistic tropes produce the same effect: "Does it mean nothing when we speak in symbols and parables – is the refreshment of a fertile lie nothing at all?"[95] "Symbols," for him, enact "accentuated reflections" that make the world appear "in reverse."[96]

However, Brandlberger's reaction to the epistemological doubt caused by the inversion-effect is not to affirm the higher truth of the inverted world. Instead, he recognizes the relativity of perception and how it is processed. He preaches a paradoxical way of thinking that can think image and counter-image at one and the same time. The sensual, post-rational man is characterized by such thinking; and at the the same time he is the product of such a paradox: "One age [i. e., that of sensuality, NG] is the paradox of the other [i. e., that of rationality, NG]."[97] Insofar as it sublates rationality and dream, thinking-in-paradox resembles dreaming reason or analytical dreaming: seeking knowledge, but with the help of imagination, intuition, and creative combinatorics. Liederer therefore calls it "somnambulistic-intuitive thinking" that enables "insight according to the principle of creative synthesis."[98]

Unmasking logical interpretations to be a form of literary art,[99] Brandlberger formulates an epistemological critique: the world of rational thought is as fictional as the world of dreams. At the same time, he performs a constructivist turn.[100] Both worlds are the creation of a perceiving and interpreting subject: "It's just a matter of our preference, our creative will for change [...]. Learn to scan the meter of reality [*Lernet die Wirklichkeit skandieren*]!"[101] "We were the first to find out there's no reality, and we're also the first to invent new ones

94 Müller, *Tropen*, 38 – 39.
95 Müller, *Tropen*, 39.
96 Müller, *Tropen*, 40.
97 Müller, *Tropen*, 39.
98 Liederer, *Der Mensch und seine Realität*, 199.
99 Müller, *Tropen*, 226.
100 See Müller-Tamm, *Abstraktion als Einfühlung*, 365 – 366, as well as 368 – 380 (on "phantoplasm"); see Liederer, *Der Mensch und seine Realität*, 187 – 203.
101 Müller, *Tropen*, 39.

over and over!"[102] Scholars often deem this perspective a legacy of Nietzsche. In fact, it radicalizes the latter's position: instead of depicting creative activity as *failing* to capture the world-in-itself, it affirms – and celebrates – the insight that what has been produced is *the only* true reality. Consequently, then, Brandlberger declares, "Observing and learning something from nature means creating something new in it. Seeing and producing are one and the same."[103]

The poet's task, in Müller's novel, is to disclose the world-as-poetry and thereby create conditions favorable for the emergence of the new human race. In his capacity as poet, Brandlberger stands at the dawn of a new age. The novel he wishes to write – or has already written – is meant to fulfill this objective: "I proclaim the mirror, the world upside-down, paradox! This will be my other great contribution to humanity."[104] Brandlberger does not only sermonize this insight; the novel *Tropen* also already realizes it, confronting the reader with an inverted and paradoxical world that leads to unfamiliar thought processes and gaps that encourage further creative thought.[105]

For Brandlberger, the jungle represents the survival of an early stage of humankind, and it functions as a "paradox of another [epoch]"[106] from which the European travelers and the book's readers descend. As such, they encounter here an "upside-down" world where it is not intellect but the senses, not individuated life but communal participation, not logic but "the wildest thinking"[107] that determine life for the "Indians'" and eventually for the foreigners. Their life is governed by habits of mind deriving from language, madness, and dream and that are defined by the principle of de-differentiating transference described above.

This way of thinking is not only depicted when Brandlberger falls victim to tropical fever. Since he is the narrator of the novel, it shapes the novel's characterization and narrative style as a whole. According to him, he and his companions indulge in the "wildest thinking":[108] "That's how brains work [*das ist das System der Gehirne*]. They stand under each other's spell";[109] "we've all become

102 Müller, *Tropen*, 224.
103 Müller, *Tropen*, 235.
104 Müller, *Tropen*, 40.
105 Dietrich's analyses fall under the heading of the "poetics of paradox," which, in his eyes, shapes Müller's fictional prose (*Poetik der Paradoxie*, 72–80). At the same time, the affirmation (or normalization) of paradox coincides with the "logic of myth" (75). With Liederer, I would assign them to different levels of evolution, however.
106 Müller, *Tropen*, 39.
107 Müller, *Tropen*, 224.
108 Müller, *Tropen*, 224.
109 Müller, *Tropen*, 236.

the same person since we've had to live together like this."[110] The novel puts this dissolution into effect when, toward the end, the characters merge with each other more and more. Clear characterization and demarcation of characters yield to their condensation and displacement.[111] As a result, it is often ambiguous who is who, or who has done what. For instance, "The man uttered that deep rutting cry, then I saw him sitting quietly in the boat. There I sat myself. The boat was gliding off, over two worlds."[112] Or: "Indeed, [van den Dusen] now looked a bit like Slim."[113] And: "You [Brandlberger] really look like Slim! If only you knew how much you're like him!"[114] Such displacements make it impossible to solve Slim's crime-novel-like murder: "How did it all happen? You know? No. And you? Me neither."[115] The same effect is brought about inasmuch as the narrative style increasingly lacks logical order.[116] Linear progression is replaced by a network of scenes whose chronological sequence and causal connections necessarily remain opaque to the reader, in some cases because they are recounted in different versions (e. g., the deaths of Rulc, Slim, and van den Dusen).

The novel does not only present characters who think "wildly"[117]; it is itself determined by this "wildest thinking."[118] Thus, it presents an inverted world to the European reader. Together, the reader's world and the world of the book form the paradox that is thematized as the trigger for insight into the *poietic* nature of everything encountered. In addition, the novel stages further paradoxes (e. g., different accounts of the same death noted above).[119] Through these internal events and the manifest contradiction between the novel and real life, the

110 Müller, *Tropen*, 266. Liederer provides further examples (*Der Mensch und seine Realität*, 77–86); see also Müller-Tamm, *Abstraktion als Einfühlung*, 360; as well as Riedel, "'What's the difference?'" 72–76, who speaks of "mythical thought" in this context.

111 See Werkmeister, *Kulturen jenseits der Schrift*, 371.

112 Müller, *Tropen*, 269.

113 Müller, *Tropen*, 258.

114 Müller, *Tropen*, 266.

115 Müller, *Tropen*, 249.

116 On the novel's narrative technique, see Müller-Tamm, *Abstraktion als Einfühlung*, 348–350; Liederer, *Der Mensch und seine Realität*, 224–233; Dietrich, *Poetik der Paradoxie*, 30–36, 48–68; Gardian, *Sprachvisionen*, especially 154–169.

117 Brandlberger is not distinguished by paradoxical reasoning – as Liederer claims – so much as by wild thinking, in relation to which Schwarz discerns an affinity to the paranoid "writing-down-system" of Daniel Paul Schreber ("Robert Müllers *Tropen* [1915] als neurasthenisches Aufschreibesystem," 147).

118 Müller, *Tropen*, 224.

119 See Liederer, *Der Mensch und seine Realität*, 198–201, for discussion of the murders as examples of "paradoxical parallel- or alternative realities."

reader confronts mounting perplexity – the true jungle of *Tropen* ("I think this jungle [i.e., the novel] is inaccessible to the reader"[120]). Both the novel and the world it depicts demand another way of thinking, one that does not resolve paradox but aims to integrate it into one's own view of the world. This way of thinking is aware of its *poietic* force, the ability to perceive and/or create other (and contradictory) worlds through interpretation. Accordingly, as Christian Liederer has shown, the poet Robert Müller induces those who "enter" the tropics of *Tropen* to modify their thinking and complete the events described in creative fashion.[121] Thereby, the reader comes to do what Brandlberger envisions: to contribute to the development of the "new man" whom he sees already announced in himself.

What is the relationship between the constructivist project of this 'new poet,' for whom Brandlberger wishes to clear the way by means of what he writes, to the imperial ambitions of this poetic ideal within the novel? It would seem that a more refined version of incorporating the foreign is at work, insofar as the foreign world is here reduced to a mere construction. Although the same holds for the world of the familiar, this constructivist turn does not delight the "Indians" so much as the Europeans. The familiar, not the foreign, profits from reality being constructed (in keeping with certain historical, sociological, and material preconditions the foreigners do not share).[122] And it is not the foreigner, but the European who, on the basis of this insight, wants to create a new race and to instrumentalize the foreigner without letting him in on his plans. In this constructivist imperialism, it is not European civilization that disappears from the world stage (instead it turns into a civilization of colonizers) but that of the so-called 'primitives,' who are destined to serve as breeding stock. It is much easier to justify brutal colonial practices if the worlds they destroy are nothing more than constructions of reality anyway, not the (only) reality of other human beings. The creative freedom of seeing the world only as one wants combined with political power amounts to such willful ignorance of others' 'perspectives' (which, for them, are realities) that destroying these same people is seen as acceptable – and is often even carried out. Against this background, the idea that the world is nothing more than a trope does not mean that the differences between the self and other are valued. Instead it signifies that one has the license to turn the other into a metonymy of the self where the jungle is European poetry

120 Müller, *Tropen*, 234–235.

121 See Liederer, *Der Mensch und seine Realität*, 355–369.

122 "Phantoplasm" might also be understood to point to how fantasies rest on certain material preconditions and to this extent are not arbitrary (or equally available to all); see the next footnote.

and can be 'reworked' at any time. Needless to say, this reworking has material consequences for other people and the milieu they inhabit: namely, brutal repression or even extinction. This may be the sinister deeper meaning of Brandlberger's polyvalent concept of "phanto-plasma":[123] the biopolitical consequences of Europeans' imperial fantasies.[124]

Returning to Primordial Slime

Müller stages Schiller's "they are" through an exotic locale and its foreign inhabitants, both of which represent survivals of the phylo- and ontogenetic past. Gottfried Benn relocates this topological and chronological scheme to the body. While Müller merely hints that primordial, tropical vegetation also determines the cerebral physiology of modern Europeans, this relationship is Benn's central focus.[125] In "Unter der Großhirnrinde. Briefe vom Meer" (Below the Cerebral Cortex: Letters from the Sea, 1911), one of his first literary efforts, his early scientific interests in evolutionary biology, neurophysiology, and psychiatry converge. In this fictional letter written during a trip to the seaside, the first-person narrator

123 The term has elicited any number of belabored interpretations, which Liederer discusses in detail (*Der Mensch und seine Realität*, 264–369). For his own part, Liederer considers the "'nature' of phantoplasm" to be "what is mutable, floating, and preliminary," that is, the "*variability of form*" (266; emphasis in original); worlds created by different principles are therefore different phantoplasms (356). Müller-Tamm has offered a substantive corrective by pointing out that the terms mark "the physiological quality of all transmitted and projected perceptions constituting the world" – with an emphasis on *physiological*. She points out that *plasma* is a biological concept circulating broadly because of Haeckel; for Müller, however (and in contrast to Haeckel), the term "no longer designates the materiality of psychic functions, but instead refers to reality as the effect of psychic functions" (*Abstraktion als Einfühlung*, 370).

124 Yet Brandlberger only appears to have the last word. In fact, his theories break down to the extent, as Schwarz explains, that the novel identifies them as "formations of delusional systems" and showcases their "megalomania." Brandlberger's delusions of grandeur are deconstructed by the affinity of his "wild narration" to a "neurasthenic writing system" ("Robert Müllers *Tropen* [1915] als neurasthenisches Aufschreibesystem," 154).

125 For readings of Benn in the context of the history of science, see the following monographs: Regine Anacker, *Aspekte einer Anthropologie der Kunst in Gottfried Benns Werk* (Würzburg: Königshausen + Neumann, 2004); Ursula Kirchdörfer-Boßmann, *"Eine Pranke in den Nacken der Erkenntnis." Zur Beziehung von Dichtung und Naturwissenschaft im Frühwerk Gottfried Benns* (St. Ingberg: Röhrig, 2003); Gerlinde Miller, *Die Bedeutung des Entwicklungsbegriffs für Menschenbild und Dichtungstheorie bei Gottfried Benn* (New York, Bern: Peter Lang, 1990); and, most recently, Hahn, *Gottfried Benn und das Wissen der Moderne* (which incorporates earlier essays by the author).

– a former doctor and researcher (like Benn himself who had given up a career in psychology in favor of medical practice) – formulates a pointed critique of science, taking aim, in particular, at the paradigm of psychophysics, the associated theory of localization (which reductively traces all self-determined actions and abilities to specific centers in the brain), as well as epistemological constructivism (which deprives the self of an independently existing external world). The only scientific undertaking to escape criticism is paleoanthropology; indeed, it is used to construct a utopian return to archaic conditions.

At the beginning, the first-person narrator describes a regression that takes place along paleoanthropological and neurophysiological lines, both chronologically and in terms of the brain's structure. The journey involves going "back to the past" and simultaneously "sinking from the surface"; it leads from thinking that lies like "lichen [*Flechte*] on the brain," from nausea "above," on the "cerebral cortex," down toward a space "deep below in the mud," "in cracks, crevices, and under the foliage," to the "lower centers" "under the cerebral cortex."[126] The writing subject ("I") identifies with his "forefathers" – by which he means not just human ancestors but also primordial organisms of uncertain identity: "Maybe it wasn't a jellyfish, but just a pile of slime from a plant [...], from which everything else started."[127]

This retrograde fantasy is connected to an unconscious, vegetative state. The letter's writer relativizes thought as only one of various possible "cycles of the psychic process [...] which are just as lawful and regular."[128] One such (potentially "happier") process involves the "softening of the brain" (*Gehirnerweichung*), which brings about the same condition that the neuroanatomist Paul Emil Flechsig associated with instinctual and potentially criminal actions. But in contrast to Müller's Brandlberger, Benn's narrator does not want to act on these instincts; instead, the goal is a specific state of unconsciousness. What the first-person narrator develops in his regression fantasies is reminiscent of the "calm [...] dreamless sleep" that Flechsig describes as enveloping the body whose drives have been satisfied and cerebral function suspended.[129] The aim is to achieve a feeling of mute security in slimy caves, calling to mind a return to the uterus, though without explicit reference to ontogenetic regression. Correspondingly, the sea

126 Gottfried Benn, "Unter der Großhirnrinde. Briefe vom Meer," in *Sämtliche Werke. Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, vol. 7.1, *Szenen und andere Schriften*, ed. Holger Hof (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2003), 355–356.

127 Benn, "Unter der Großhirnrinde," 7.1: 356.

128 Benn, "Unter der Großhirnrinde," 7.1: 358.

129 Paul Flechsig, *Gehirn und Seele. Rede, gehalten am 31. Oktober 1894 in der Universitätskirche zu Leipzig*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Veit & Comp., 1896), 17.

to which the narrator has gone is declared the "Cambrian Sea" of prehistoric times. In writing the latter, the narrator performs the transition to the desired state through a shift in verbal tense. The letter begins in the simple past, establishing a distance between the narrator and the narrated events, and transforms into the present tense, thus lending the archaic world an imaginary reality: "I sank into ages past [...]. Huge, greenish dragonflies with heads as wide as a child's skull shoot through the air and deliver treacherous stings."[130]

At the same time, this work, but also other early writings by Benn, question such a descent inasmuch as it is repeatedly interrupted by thought or deferred to the future. The self-reflexivity of these texts, which pushes plot and/or dialogue into the background, can be traced back to a sentimental signature, to use Schiller's term.[131] Benn's oeuvre as a whole deals with the findings of natural science in a paradoxical manner. "Unter der Großhirnrinde" makes that particularly clear: On the one hand, the narrative "I" rejects the methods and worldview of natural science, dismissing its claims as relative or even false. On the other hand, the insights of natural science provide the basis for what the letter elaborates.[132] This takes place in a dual sense: Benn moves the narrator into the sentimental position, namely seeing the state of naivety, but being unable to return to that state due to the knowledge he has acquired in the meantime – regardless of whether or not it is false.[133] Also, Benn enlists bioscientific insights to sketch

130 Benn, "Unter der Großhirnrinde," 7.1: 356. In addition to meditation and sleep, the end of the letter presents a third possibility of return: the escapist cliché of vacation in Italy (horse-drawn carriages in Naples, warm sun on one's back, the roar of the ocean in one's ears, mountaintop vistas). The only original feature and point of interest in this passage is the infusion of archaic energy into the impressionist idyll: the ocean, where the narrator would find "Cambrian seas" again, is described as a "pool of cornflower blood" (363). The metaphor is vexing because it combines imagistic spheres with opposing connotations. In characteristic fashion, Benn stands commonplace utopias on their heads. A benign scene of nature and clichéd attitude ("I want to encounter things in a pure and brotherly way; [...] just look at them, contemplate them, smile at them, rejoice in them. Let the world grow around me like a meadow [of corn flowers]") turns into identification with "lower" life forms, both physiologically and "geologically," right down to plants and the sea, the starting point of all life.

131 On the sentimental in Benn, see Riedel, "Endogene Bilder. Anthropologie und Poetik bei Gottfried Benn," in *Poetik der Evidenz. Die Herausforderung der Bilder in der Literatur um 1900*, ed. Helmut Pfotenhauer, Wolfgang Riedel, and Sabine Schneider (Würzburg: Königshausen + Neumann, 2005), 196; and Riedel, "Wandlungen und Symbole des Todestriebs," 110–113; on Benn and Schiller, see Antje Büssgen, *Glaubensverlust und Kunstautonomie. Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen bei Friedrich Schiller und Gottfried Benn* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2006).

132 See Hahn, *Gottfried Benn und das Wissen der Moderne*, 81–84.

133 See Riedel, "Wandlungen und Symbole des Todestriebs."

the very archaic utopia to which the letter-writing ego wishes to return. In other words, there's no getting around the natural sciences. On the contrary, the longing of the letter-writer for an original state of naivety is doubly shaped by precisely these same fields, in that it is caused by them and in that they provide the template for his imagination of an original state.

The Body as Hieroglyph of the Archaic

Some twenty years later, Benn was no longer a candidate for an advanced degree in psychiatry. After a self-diagnosed depersonalization disorder, he had obtained accreditation in dermatological and sexually transmitted diseases and was operating, with some frustration, his own practice in Berlin-Kreuzberg. As his essays of the early 1930s demonstrate, the thought-figure, "they are what we were," still preoccupied him. But in contrast to what he had written in the early 1910s, his focus was no longer on the regression into primordial slime so much as revitalizing the memory of archaic ages stored in and activated by means of the body, which *Dichtung* (poetry/literature) is supposed to give voice to. In so doing, Benn followed the lead of speculative paleoanthropology.[134] In his 1930 essay, "Der Aufbau der Persönlichkeit" (The Development of Personality), he writes – like Eugen Georg before him – that the body harbors some two hundred rudiments dating back to the prehistoric emergence of human beings.[135] The lower parts of the brain and such bodily fluids as blood and pus – which earlier works describe as physical carriers of the archaic – are joined in this essay by the vegetative nervous system and endocrine system (among other organs). Time and again, Benn seeks out traces of ancient memories materialized here, which are supposed to still shape the personality of modern day individuals and can even be directly perceived in certain physiological processes (e. g., orgasm and intoxication).

However, Benn's claims about the immediate, physical experience of the archaic conflict with his repeated references to the body as a hieroglyph. Contemporary psychoanalytic theories on organic memory as well as on symbolization

134 For a thorough account of the theories of Dacqué and Georg, see Hahn, *Gottfried Benn und das Wissen der Moderne,* 151–173. On the author's "turn to primordial times" (125) in light of his reading of Jung and Erich Unger, see Dieter Wellershoff, *Gottfried Benn, Phänotyp der Stunde. Eine Studie über den Problemgehalt seines Werkes* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1986), 125–152; Kirchdörfer-Boßmann, *"Eine Pranke in den Nacken der Erkenntnis,"* 269–273n125.

135 Benn, "Der Aufbau der Persönlichkeit. Grundriss einer Geologie des Ich," in *Sämtliche Werke,* vol. 3, *Prosa 1* (1910–1932), ed. Gerhard Schuster (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987), 272.

shed light on the logic at work here (see Chapter 4). In the second part of *Thalassa: Versuch einer Genitaltheorie* (1924; *A Theory of Genitality*, 1938), Sándor Ferenczi speculated about a phylogenetic parallel between individual birth and the expulsion of humankind's distant ancestors from the water, noting

> the extraordinary frequency with which, in the most varied creations of the mind, both normal and pathological, in the products of the individual and the collective psyche, both the sexual act and the interuterine situation are expressed by the symbol of the *fish*, that is, the depiction of a fish moving or swimming in the water.

For Ferenczi, this symbol offers the opportunity to speculate about human origins in water in literal terms. The fish swimming is not a metaphor for the similar state of the embryo in the womb so much as its "primal scene." Prehistoric humanity emerged from these depths. In other words, "a bit of phylogenetic recognition of our descent" has been stored in this symbol.[136] Ultimately, Ferenczi's reflections result in a reverse symbolism. According to Ferenczi's theory, the fish in the sea cannot be understood as the symbol for "uterine existence." On the contrary, life in the womb amounts to a physical symbol of the "maritime existence" of humankind's "animal ancestor": "In accordance with the 'reversed symbolism' already met with several times, the mother would, properly, be the symbol of and partial substitute for the sea, not the other way about."[137] In sum, Ferenczi understood organs such as the uterus as physical symbols formed by mnemonically charged germ plasma for repeating phylogenetic catastrophes such as the expulsion of primitive humanity from water in an attenuated and modified manner, thereby relieving ancient trauma over the ages. From these ideas, he formed his theory of "bioanalysis," which applied psychoanalytic insights to the body itself, offering a hermeneutic approach to organic life.

Benn most likely read Ferenczi as his poem "Regressiv" (written in 1927 or before; "Thalassal Regression," 1953) cites the latter's concept of "thalassal regression."[138] This proximity to the psychoanalyst's reflections illuminates the poet's concept of the body recorded in his essays from the early 1930s. Like Ferenczi, Benn discerns both a natural and a symbolic side of the body. Thus, "Zur Problematik des Dichterischen" (On the Problematic of the Poetic, 1930) speaks of it as a "transcendence of non-metaphorical race [*Geschlecht*], [...] reality with

136 Ferenczi, *Thalassa*, 44 – 45.

137 Ferenczi, *Thalassa*, 54.

138 See Riedel, "Endogene Bilder," 186, and "Wandlungen und Symbole des Todestriebs," 106. The English translation of this poem was published as "Thalassal Regression," trans. Edgar Lohner and Cid Corman, *Quarterly Review of Literature*, 7 (1953): 290 – 297.

mad symbols, canon of the natural and hieroglyph formed from phantasms, matter without idea, yet the medium from which to drink magic."[139]

This figuration of the body as hieroglyph calls to mind the Romantic idea of nature as a hieroglyphic system. The hieroglyph is understood as a paradoxical sign that sublates its own signification, which promises unity between the signifier and signified. Indeed this sign is barely legible, i.e., the unity is as difficult to grasp as it is to communicate. In Romanticism, this task falls to artists and their work. Benn's conception of the body-as-hieroglyph realizes the Romantic hope for unity between signifier and signified on the basis of biology. For Benn as for Ferenczi, the modern human body does not stand in a relationship of similarity so much as one of identity with the archaic. It not only represents the archaic but *is* the archaic inasmuch as it has emerged from it. Deciphering its hieroglyphs also occurs along two lines. Not only can the archaic be read in organs and physiological processes, but it is simultanously experienced directly through the same body: the representation momentarily turns into the signified's presence. The "they" and "we" collapse, and the "are" and "were" coincide: We – the bodies of the present – are thus in this moment what they once were.

Reading the hieroglyphic body comprises a compulsive repetition of archaic experiences; it leads to a regression that simultaneously creates something new: "Everything takes shape out of [the body's] hieroglyph: style and knowledge"; "the body, suddenly, is the creative force; physical being [*der Leib*] transcends the soul."[140] In states of intoxication, "creative desire and pleasure" (*schöpferische Lust*) reemerge, which, for Benn, comprise the biological "law of the productive" (*Gesetz des Produktiven*): a constant alternation between giving form and destroying it.[141] However, Benn locates the decisive difference between the biologically driven creative productivity of supposed primordial humans (whose thinking Benn places in a "sphere of organic interests") and that of modern humans in the notion that the productivity of the latter is not simply determined by unconscious experience and bodily drives, but rather involves the *memory* of the archaic. This point enhances the distance already inherent in the temporal notion of memory and also in the symbolic character of the hieroglyph, where reading, i.e., a conscious, analytical, and thus more distanced approach, is indicated. In the penultimate paragraph of "Zur Problematik des Dichterischen," Benn

139 Benn, "Problematik des Dichterischen," in *Sämtliche Werke*, 3: 246.

140 Benn, "Problematik des Dichterischen," 3: 246; Benn, "Akademie-Rede," in *Gesammelte Werke in vier Bänden*, vol. 1, *Essays, Reden, Vorträge*, ed. Dieter Wellershof (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1959), 437

141 Benn, "Der Aufbau der Persönlichkeit," 3: 437–438. Cf. Miller, *Die Bedeutung des Entwicklungsbegriffs*, 211–225.

underscores this distance: "Mystical participation is over." But *memory* of mystical participation endures: "memory of its totalization is forever."[142] At issue here is not a sentimental longing for regression any longer, but a memory that is inscribed into the body. Accordingly, the "poet" has the task of tracking down such memories by yielding to the repetition compulsion, reading, and experiencing the archaic in the body's hieroglyphs in order to bring about a poetry that expresses the biological law of creation.

The Way to Fascism

Benn's bodily version of "they are what we were" no longer pretends to be interested in what or who is truly other. Instead, from the outset, it attends only to what is foreign within the self, in one's own body. Compared to the fantasies of Müller (or rather Brandlberger), this attitude avoids appropriating 'real-world' others (human beings).

At the same time, however, this does not occur in the name of acknowledging them so much as to affirm the self's superiority: everything already lies within and merely awaits reactivation. In the works discussed here, Benn does not yet make a turn toward *völkisch* thinking, but they are certainly compatible. Ernst Bloch notes as much in *Heritage of Our Times*, where he identifies the murmurs and flashes of primordial types in Benn's work as a language "only [...] of escape, of self-enjoyed frenzy, [...] of purely antithetical and hence insubstantial demonism" pointing to the nihilism at the heart of fascism.[143] Nor did the sentimental signature and reflection of memory prevent Benn from the lure of National Socialist ideology. Until at least the mid-1930s, he shared this ideology and supported it in the form a poetic vision that used a fascination with the archaic to bind collective conformity in a strict, martial form, and he deployed artistic support to cultivate, discipline, and "breed" (*züchten*) such submission.[144]

In the essay "Dorische Welt" (Doric World, 1934), for instance, an imaginary Sparta takes the place of the primal human community, the "strong, mighty, beautiful body of breeding and discipline" replaces the atavistic and ecstatic

142 Benn, "Problematik des Dichterischen," 3: 247.

143 Bloch, "Songs of Remoteness," in *Heritage of Our Times*, 182.

144 Gottfried Benn, "Dorische Welt," in *Sämtliche Werke,* vol. 4, *Prosa 2* (*1933–1945*), ed. Gerhard Schuster (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1989). Cf. Bernhard Fischer, "'Stil' und 'Züchtung' – Gottfried Benns Kunsttheorie und das Jahr 1933," *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 12.1 (2009).

body of 'primitive man,'[145] and the stone column, materializing the spirit of power, pushes aside states of intoxication and amorphousness.[146] The content changes, but the figure of thought remains the same: a remote "they" is identified with the "we" of the present, who are destined to inherit the past and complete it: "One can't say it's far off, the ancient world. Not at all! Antiquity is very close, completely within us; the cycle of culture [*Kulturkreis*] is not yet complete."[147] In carrying out this inheritance, the "poet" no longer exercises the function of re-experiencing the archaic physically; instead, he is to follow the "law" the Doric world imposes on the present: "a law for heroes alone, only for one who works in marble and casts heads with helmets."[148] Disciplined and strictly stylized poetry is meant to cultivate the modern warrior-race in a perversion of the humanistic ideal of education (*Bildung*) – analogous to the Spartan column (*Bildsäule*): "das bildet."[149]

145 Benn, "Dorische Welt," 4: 137–138.

146 "Die Macht reinigt das Individuum, [...] macht es kunstfähig" (Benn, "Dorische Welt," 4: 150).

147 Benn, "Dorische Welt," 4: 147.

148 Benn, "Dorische Welt," 4: 153.

149 "Human being, that's race with style" (*Der Mensch, das ist die Rasse mit Stil*) (Benn, "Dorische Welt," 4: 152). For Paul de Man, this perversion is inscribed in the very program of aesthetic education: "The aesthetic, as is clear from Schiller's formulation, is primarily a social and political model [...]. The 'state' that is here being advocated is not just a state of mind or of soul, but a principle of political value and authority that has its own claims on the shape and limits of our freedom." ("Aesthetic Formalization in Kleist," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1984], 264).