

## RELUCTANT AFFINITIES

Rainer Maria Rilke and Richard Dehmel

By Carly McLaughlin (London)

Zwei Dichter verehren die Lyriker der Jugend von heute vor allem anderen als ihre Vorbilder: die Willensmenschen verehren Dehmel, die tatenlosen Träumer aber, die sehnsüchtigen Betrachter, die Stimmungsmenschen, die Dämmernmenschen verehren Rilke.

ALBERT SOERGEL

Von allen deutschen Dichtern der jüngsten Epoche hat sich keiner zuverlässiger, keiner überraschender und keiner glücklicher entwickelt als Rilke – wenn wir Richard Dehmel aus dem Spiel lassen wollen, der in unserer Lyrik ja eine Rolle selbstverständlicher Überlegenheit hat, wie etwa Gerhart Hauptmann in der Dramatik.

STEFAN ZWEIG

By implicit consensus among the majority of current literary historians, Richard Dehmel stands as a minor poet of the *Jahrhundertwende*. Once hailed by Alfred Soergel as “der größte lyrische Künstler unserer deutschen Gegenwart”, Dehmel has since been excluded from a poetic canon now largely shaped by a notion of *poésie pure*, made up of poets like Stefan George, Hofmannsthal and Rilke.<sup>1)</sup> He now survives through brief comments in literary histories, or in poetry anthologies, and in spite of his extensive oeuvre, there is no critical edition of his work; all these are factors which have further contributed to his marginalisation. Whilst Dehmel’s minor status seems to forestall any critical interest in his work, however, it is this very status which will serve as a starting point of this discussion. In his essay ‘What Dante means to me’, T. S. Eliot speculates that it is the minor poet, and not the ‘grand masters’ such as Dante, Shakespeare or Homer, who is more likely to have influenced modern canonical writers. Eliot’s line of reasoning constitutes a persuasive incentive for the reappraisal of writers like Dehmel:

Such early influences, the influences which, so to speak, first introduce one to oneself, are, I think, due to an impression which is in one aspect, the recognition of a temperament akin to one’s own,

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<sup>1)</sup> ALBERT SOERGEL, *Dichtung und Dichter der Zeit*, Leipzig 1911, p. 612.

and in another aspect the discovery of a form of expression which gives a clue to the discovery of one's own form. [...] But the poet who can do this for a young writer, is unlikely to be one of the great masters. The latter are too exalted and remote [...] whereas the smaller poet, who has directed one's first steps, is more like an admired elder brother.<sup>2)</sup>

Rilke's acknowledgement of Dehmel in a letter of 1924 as one of the most influential figures on his early work adds further weight to the line of reasoning taken up by this essay.<sup>3)</sup> Dehmel's presence in Rilke's 1898 Prague lecture ›Moderne Lyrik‹, the significance of which has thus far been overlooked precisely because of Dehmel's current marginal status, indicates his former established position in the poetic canon of the *Jahrhundertwende*. Furthermore, Dehmel's extensive network of literary contacts, documented in his correspondence with other writers such as Thomas Mann and Hofmannsthal, corroborates Eliot's argument that it is precisely figures such as Dehmel who may offer fresh insights into a specific period of literature, and the literary trends and values which defined it.<sup>4)</sup> Hence, an investigation into the relationship between Rilke and Dehmel now seems timely. The former's lecture on ›Moderne Lyrik‹, presented not long after his first meeting with Dehmel, will serve as a framework in which to explore their relationship. This lecture constitutes the most significant statement on Dehmel by Rilke; moreover, its contextualisation of his work within the contemporary poetic canon lends insights into the aesthetic values shaping Dehmel's reception. Yet further references to Dehmel elsewhere in Rilke's writing indicates that he remained important to Rilke for the rest of his career: Dehmel is mentioned in ›Briefe an einen jungen Dichter‹ and in other much later letters. All of these texts, the Prague lecture, the letters to Franz Kappus of 1903 and the later letters to Gräfin Sizzo and Nanny Wunderly-Volkart, represent significant phases not only in his relationship to Dehmel but also in his own work. This indicates that his relationship with Dehmel is inextricably linked to Rilke's own artistic development. In order to demonstrate this, a comparative reading of selected poems will serve not so much to argue a case of influence, but to bring to light certain *affinities* between their works. Ultimately, as well as furthering the case for a reappraisal of Dehmel, this article will also contribute to an area of Rilke research which has been overlooked precisely because of Dehmel's later marginality.

## I.

Rilke first met Dehmel on a January afternoon in 1898, less than two months before he delivered his Prague lecture ›Moderne Lyrik‹. Rilke had written to Dehmel

<sup>2)</sup> T. S. ELIOT, What Dante means to me, in: To criticise the critic and other writings, London 1965, p. 126. See also What is minor poetry?, in: On poetry and poets, London 1957.

<sup>3)</sup> See PAUL JOHANNES SCHINDLER (ed.), Richard Dehmel. Dichtungen Briefe Dokumente, Hamburg 1963. Hereafter, references to letters in this collection will appear in the text.

<sup>4)</sup> Letter to Alfred Schaer, 26.2.1924, in: RAINER MARIA RILKE, Gesammelte Briefe in 6 Bänden, 5<sup>th</sup> volume: Briefe aus Muzot 1921–1926, Leipzig 1937, p. 253.

the previous month hesitantly requesting a chance to meet and to discuss his own work. With the letter he enclosed a copy of his most recent work ›Traumgekrönt‹. The letters exchanged around this time read like those of a disciple approaching a master, a dynamic enjoyed by Dehmel in his relationships with other writers, such as Hans Carossa and Else Lasker-Schüler. In his friendship with Rilke, however, it was a dynamic which would shift radically over the following years. The subsequent encounter took place in Dehmel's apartment at a party attended by other prominent figures of the Berlin art and literary scene. A letter written to his friend Wilhelm von Scholz just days after this meeting expresses Rilke's disappointment at having failed to have much time alone with Dehmel. At the same time, this very letter bears witness to the significance of the encounter not only for Rilke himself but for his concept of modern lyric poetry; much of the letter touches on several issues which would develop over the following weeks to inform the main body of the lecture.<sup>5)</sup> Hence, the new acquaintance with Dehmel serves as the background for the discussion of modern lyric poetry in both the letter and the later lecture; in this way Dehmel is, from very early on, inserted into a contemporary discourse of modernity as defined in ›Moderne Lyrik‹. The very title of the lecture secures Rilke's position within the wider contemporary debate about modernity and engages him in dialogue with, for example, Hermann Bahr's ›Die Moderne‹ of 1890 or the earlier manifestos of the Naturalists.<sup>6)</sup>

In many ways, Rilke's attempt to determine the nature and meaning of modernity simply adds to the polyphony of modernist discourses which prevailed at the end of the nineteenth century, rather than quelling it. Yet unlike that of Arno Holz, for example, Rilke's concept of modern poetry remains independent of any uniform aesthetic programme; his discussion of modern lyric poetry extends from the Berlin Naturalists, to Stefan George, and the Viennese poets, Hofmannsthal and Peter Altenberg. Their modernity is not defined by a common aesthetic, but by their shared passion for beauty which, according to Rilke, is the language of nature. Consequently, Liliencron and Dehmel, George and Hofmannsthal are equally modern in their common fight "unter der Fahne der Schönheit" (SW 5, 376). It is against this criterion that poets are measured and it is precisely this which enables Liliencron to be hailed as *the* modern poet, and Dehmel to be discussed alongside Stefan George, both of whom were widely regarded as representing opposite poles of the poetic canon around 1900. In this way, the lecture can also be read as a preliminary framework for Rilke's highly distinct and personal aesthetic vision which would take shape over the subsequent years.

<sup>5)</sup> Brief an Wilhelm von Scholz (31.1.1898), in: RILKE, Sämtliche Werke in sechs Bänden, ed. by the Rilke-Archiv, Frankfurt/M. 1966, Volume 6: Malte Laurids Brigge, Prosa 1906–1926, p. 1153–1160. Hereafter, references to this edition of the collected works will appear in the text with the abbreviation SW followed by the volume number and page number.

<sup>6)</sup> HERMANN BAHR, Die Moderne, in: Die literarische Moderne, Dokumente zum Selbstverständnis der Literatur um die Jahrhundertwende, ed. by GOTTHART WUNBERG, Frankfurt/M. 1971. Further references appear in the text.

Both the letter to Scholz and the lecture single out Dante as the first modern poet. More specifically, and in a striking anticipation of Eliot's essay, it is Dante's preoccupation with the self which constitutes his modernity; Rilke asks of Scholz "Und was ist "moderner" als dieses unermüdliche und erbarmungslose Sich-selbst-suchen!" (SW 6, 1159). The concern that poetry should stem from real emotion is central to his argument; lyric poetry should be the reworking of the poet's own "Gefühlsstoff". Once translated into the register of the lecture, the letter's 'search for the self' has become "Aufrichtigkeit". Rilke's poetic modernity is thus founded on what now appears to be a very unmodern discourse of the self, for his lecture implicitly harks back to a tradition of sincerity and authenticity which, heightened by his frequent references to poems as "lyrische Geständnisse", includes Rousseau and Augustine. This emphasis on "Aufrichtigkeit" suggests a desire to reinstate the poet's personality and to shift the focus from the outside world to internal reality, thereby countering Naturalism's dictum of "Wahrheit".<sup>7)</sup> Rilke's aesthetic vision does not aim at a faithful production of reality, rather it is premised on a turning inwards, a realism or naturalism of the soul:

Man lernte die eigene Seele betrachten, wie früher die äußere Umgebung, man wurde auch hier Realist und Naturalist den intimen, inneren Sensationen, wie vorher den äußeren Ereignissen gegenüber und lernte wie früher die Welt, nun ebenso die eigene Seele kennen [...]. (SW 5, 370)

Sincerity was evidently a value which informed other contemporary aesthetic judgements, as references to this in connection with Dehmel also echo in other discussions of the time.<sup>8)</sup> Furthermore, this confessional dimension of poetry also underlies Dehmel's own early poetics, as is clear from these lines of an early poem: "Gedichte sind keine Abhandlungen; | meine Gedichte sind Seelenwandlungen."<sup>9)</sup> This echoes the foreword to his first volume of poetry ›Erlösungen‹, published in 1891, in which he makes the request, "[...] diese Seelenwandlung zu lesen als die Geschichte einer Jugend, eben nicht bloß als ein Bändchen von Gedichten zu durchblättern!"<sup>10)</sup> However it is a foundation which he would later come to reject in an attempt to move away from the immaturity of his earlier poetry, as the following extract from his diary of 1894 declares:

<sup>7)</sup> See for example the programmatic statements of Arno Holz or the Hart brothers, reprinted in: *Naturalismus, Manifeste und Dokumente zur deutschen Literatur 1880–1900*, ed. by MANFRED BRAUNECK and CHRISTINE MÜLLER, Stuttgart 1987.

<sup>8)</sup> See HARRY GRAF KESSLER, *Das Tagebuch 1880–1937*, 2 volumes, ed. by GÜNTER RIEDERER and JÖRG SCHUSTER, Stuttgart 2004, volume 1: pp. 298 and 410.

<sup>9)</sup> RICHARD DEHMEL, *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Bänden*, Berlin 1906–1909, volume 1: *Erlösungen*, p. 1. Further references appear in the text with the abbreviation GW followed by the volume and page number.

<sup>10)</sup> DEHMEL, *Erlösungen*, *Eine Seelenwandlung in Gedichten und Sprüchen*, Stuttgart 1891. Further references in the text.

Bis jetzt nämlich war in meiner Kunst noch zu viel Tagebuch enthalten, zu viel Beichte, zu viel Wahrheitsrenommage à la Rousseau, eben zu viel "Selbstentblößung"; und daher auch zu viel Reflection. Das wird nun anders werden.<sup>11)</sup>

Interestingly, it is this rejection of a preoccupation with the self which informed ›Weib und Welt‹ (1896), the work which Rilke took to be proof of Dehmel's sincerity. Dismissing his first three works as the work of a "Poseur", Rilke introduces Dehmel's most recent book as a truer reflection of the poet himself and states: "Sein jüngstes Buch [...] ist ihm viel *ähnlicher*" (SW 5, 375, my italics). As the letter to Scholz indicates, the encounter with Dehmel in person did not only serve as a moment to reassess modern poetry, but also brought about a reappraisal of Dehmel's work: "[...] wenn ich seither eines von D.'s [Dehmels] Büchern lese, kommentire ich mir manche Stellen anders und lese solche ohne Schaden, welche ich früher überschlag in dunkler Furcht, Feindliches oder Fremdes drinnen zu finden" (SW 6, 1153). This echoes a letter to Dehmel written three days later which explains how the acquaintance provided a relieving insight into his often dark and intimidating poetry:

[...] eine neue Nuance in Ihren Liedern ist mir durch Ihre Persönlichkeit erklärt und verdeutlicht worden; u. zw. kann ich Stellen, welche ich früher gern flüchtig überlas, weil ich etwas Fremdes oder Feindliches in ihnen argwöhnte, nun anders begreifen, und die Furcht vor ihrer Tiefe ist vorbei.<sup>12)</sup>

The similarity in language between the two letters highlights Rilke's aversion to something very specific in Dehmel which underlies his persistently ambivalent attitude towards him and his work. Highly significant here is the direct link established between a poet's personality and his work, which in Rilke's view is central to aesthetic value. Throughout the lecture, Rilke appropriates qualities of character and turns them in to aesthetic judgements; Dehmel's work is at one point described as being "dem unsympathischsten Pathos benachbart" (SW 5, 375). Again, this assertion of a correspondence between the poet and his work endorses a confessionalism which has echoes of Rousseau.

"Aufrichtigkeit" remains an ambiguous term throughout the lecture, largely because Rilke fails to define it specifically. Moreover, the term is used interchangeably throughout; in its most unproblematic usage, it refers, as indicated above, to a naturalism of the soul. The term becomes problematic however when it is applied equally to Dehmel and Stefan George. How is it possible to maintain this discourse of sincerity within the Georgan realm of 'l'art pour l'art'? Evidently, in this context, sincerity cannot be taken to denote a confessional lyricism, or to capture, as Lionel Trilling defines it, "a congruence between feeling and avowal".<sup>13)</sup> Since both of

<sup>11)</sup> DEHMEL, *Bekenntnisse*, Berlin 1926, p. 31f.

<sup>12)</sup> RILKE, *Briefe aus den Jahren 1892–1904*, ed. by RUTH SIEBER-RILKE and CARL SIEBER, Leipzig 1939, p. 54. Further references appear in the text.

<sup>13)</sup> LIONEL TRILLING, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, London 1972, p. 7.

Eliot's essays on Dante, ›What Dante means to me‹ (1950) and the earlier ›Dante‹ (1929), form a link between sincerity and modernity, a brief consideration of his interpretation of the term may serve to elucidate its use by Rilke. For Eliot, as with Rilke, sincerity is a characteristic of modern times:

When I say the 'modern mind', I mean the minds of those who have read or could have read such a document as Rousseau's *Confessions*. The modern mind can understand the 'confession', that is, the literal account of oneself, varying only in degree of sincerity and self-understanding [...].<sup>14)</sup>

Eliot makes a crucial distinction between a sincerity of personality and that of the soul. The former, he argues, is to be found in the modern press and prioritises a link between personal experience and avowal. The latter aims only at the expression of those aspects of human existence which have 'some philosophical and impersonal value'.<sup>15)</sup> In the essay ›Tradition and the Individual Talent‹, the same argument is expressed as follows: "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality."<sup>16)</sup> It follows then that poetic confessionality, which does not necessarily bear any correlation to actual events, still has a claim to a certain form of truth or sincerity. It is perhaps in this light that a sincerity shared by both Dehmel and George becomes conceivable.

Rilke's failure to define his term satisfactorily is arguably one of the main weaknesses of the lecture; these different, often irreconcilable, strands of thought bear witness to the naivety and immaturity of his work at this time. Nevertheless, certain aspects of the lecture demonstrate its distinctly Rilkean usage which looks forward to the more sophisticated, complex approach of his later work. From the outset, Rilke isolates two qualities which define the modern poet; firstly, his preoccupation with beauty, which here serves not as an aesthetic quality but as a manifestation of the hidden aspects of nature, and secondly, his aptitude for listening to the secret language of nature. Both qualities demonstrate an equal concern for the unseen and the unspoken, the prioritisation of "Wesen" over "Schein", of the invisible world of emotions over the visible outside world. This is an idea which is present in, for example, Hermann Bahr's essay ›Die Moderne‹ (1890) which also appropriates terms such as "Wahrheit", "Aufrichtigkeit" and "Gefühl". Rilke's preoccupation with sincerity can in this way be regarded as a contribution to a wider and already existing dialogue. Bahr's relevance to Rilke's concept of modernity is suggested by the extensive discussion of Bahr's skills as a literary critic which takes place in the second half of the Prague lecture. This is corroborated by certain parallel themes and images between the lecture and Bahr's essay. Bahr, for instance, locates truth not in the objective portrayal of the outside world, but in subjective thoughts and emotion and expounds an aesthetics based on the internalisation of the outside world:

<sup>14)</sup> ELIOT, Dante, in: *Selected Essays*, London 1950, p. 233.

<sup>15)</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>16)</sup> ELIOT, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, in: *Selected Essays*, p. 10.

Wir haben nichts als das Außen zum Innen zu machen, dass wir nicht länger Fremdlinge sind, sondern Eigentum erwerben. [...] Wir wollen sie [die Wahrheit] einführen in die Seele – der Einzug des auswärtigen Lebens in den inneren Geist, das ist die neue Kunst. (Bahr, 54)

For Rilke and Bahr, the prioritisation of the inner world which distinguishes the modern author is closely related to the second aspect of modern lyric poetry, namely the simultaneous act of listening to nature, which usurps the visual emphasis of the Naturalists. The parallels between Rilke's lecture and Bahr's essay are especially illuminating at this point because of their mutual use of metaphors of summer to denote the artist figure. Rilke credits Dehmel with having initiated "die Poesie des Sommers" and having left behind "das deutsche, alte Frühlingsgefühl" (SW 5, 375). That summer is to be understood as a metaphor for Dehmel's modernity is corroborated by Bahr, who exclaims with a pathos typical of contemporary programmatic statements of modernity: "Wir wollen die Fenster weit öffnen, dass die Sonne zu uns komme, die blühende Sommer des jungen Mai. Wir wollen alle Sinne und Nerven auf tun, gierig, und lauschen und lauschen" (BAHR, 53). Through his preoccupation with the self and his enforced loneliness, the modern poet becomes a listener, rather than a speaker, of nature's silent language – a distinction which informs Rilke's mature aesthetic vision and provides the foundation for the ›Duineser Elegien‹. Dehmel's ability to translate hidden aspects of the world was acknowledged by Rilke in his first letter to Dehmel, in which he described many of the poems from ›Weib und Welt‹ as "Offenbarungen" (Br. 1892–1904, 27). In ›Moderne Lyrik‹ this prophetic talent of Dehmel is defined as "Verheißungen des Neuen" (SW 5, 375). This concept of the poet as listener is also a theme which runs through Dehmel's first volume of poetry ›Erlösungen‹; the lines of the poem ›Erste Sehnsucht‹ allude to this: "Hinein ich lauschte in dies trunkne Werden, | ein einzig lauschend Aug' und Ohr und Herz" (›Erlösungen‹, 3). Rilke's idea of a subjective communion with the outside world, of speaking not *of* things but *with* things, finds parallels too in the exclamation from another poem in the same volume: "Ich habe eine Welt in meinen Sinnen, | die ihr nicht ahnt mit euern Biedergeistern!" (›Erlösungen‹, 5). It is clear that for both writers, a sensory understanding of the world constitutes the beginning of an aesthetic process. This emphasis on the senses coupled with the concern for lyric sincerity gives rise to a representation of the outside world which is necessarily distinct from that of the Naturalists and Impressionists. Dehmel clearly possesses the qualities which, in Rilke's eyes, make him a modern poet.

## II.

It was his admiration for ›Weib und Welt‹ which prompted Rilke to initiate correspondence with Dehmel in November 1896, and invite him to contribute a piece for the next number of ›Wegwarten‹ (Br. 1892–1904, 26). On the evening of the Prague lecture, Rilke recited several poems which he had selected himself from ›Weib und Welt‹. His admiration for the work is clear from the first letter to

Dehmel: he establishes 1896 as “das glorreiche Jahr” in which works by both Dehmel and Liliencron were produced, and he exclaims: “Jedes dieser Bücher hat ein Stück Ewigkeit in sich!” (Br. 1892–1904, 27). In a later letter of December 1897 he refers to Dehmel’s newly published poem ›Lebensmesse‹ as “unsagbar herrlich” (SCHINDLER, 21.12.1897, 197). The singling out of this poem is highly revealing, for it touches on several themes which would preoccupy him in his later work. The poem presents a chorus of figures attempting to come to terms with the meaning of existence in the knowledge that death is an equal part of life. Their realisation “wie das Leben | aus der Werkstatt des Todes sprüht” has echoes of Malte’s Parisian epiphany regarding the concomitance of life and death (GW 3, 151). This vision of life and death is central to the later ›Duineser Elegien‹, which also share certain common themes with Dehmel’s poem. Central to both works is the figure of the hero, indicating a common engagement with Nietzsche. Dehmel’s hero is the model of “der Mensch, | der dem Schicksal gewachsen ist” who initially rejects his beloved to dedicate himself to his task, which is life itself. The concept of existence as a task from which one should not be distracted finds expression too in Rilke’s first elegy in the lines: “Das alles war Auftrag. | Aber bewältigtest du’s? Warst du nicht immer | noch von Erwartung zerstreut, als kündigte alles | eine Geliebte dir an?” (SW 1, 686). Equally revealing, however, are the differences; whereas Dehmel’s hero returns to his beloved, the ›Duineser Elegien‹ continues to uphold the ideal of unrequited love. Love, particularly erotic love, forms a central aspect of Dehmel’s poetic vision, which may be a significant factor in Rilke’s inability to fully embrace Dehmel’s work, as is suggested by the ›Briefe an einen jungen Dichter‹, discussed below.

Hence, Rilke’s letters and his request to Dehmel for poetic contributions to ›Wegwarten‹, are not simply an expression of his admiration, but also an implicit acknowledgment of their common artistic concerns. There is much in Dehmel which could be read as an anticipation of Rilke’s later poetry. Though it is problematic, and perhaps undesirable, to point to moments of direct influence, there are aspects of Rilke’s early work which bear a striking similarity to Dehmel’s poetry. Rilke dedicated one of the poems from the ›Mütter‹ cycle of *Advent* to Dehmel, and its depiction of the figure of “das Weib” as a fusion of maternal and sexual elements has clear traces of Dehmel’s work (SW 1, 139). The early poems published as ›Leben und Lieder‹ in 1894 resonate with images and language to be found in Dehmel’s first two volumes of poetry ›Erlösungen‹ (1891) and ›Aber die Liebe‹ (1893). Likewise, Rilke’s ›Wunsch‹ displays a patriotism and nationalism more typical of Dehmel and for which indeed he would later come to despise Dehmel (SW 3, 16/17). The following verse of an untitled poem (1892) reads as a manifesto for a hedonistic, Dionysian “Lebensbejahung” which formed part of Dehmel’s own *Lebensphilosophie*:

Ich lieb ein pulsierendes Leben,  
das prickelt und schwellet und quillt,  
ein ewiges Senken und Heben  
ein Sehnen, das niemals sich stillt. (SW 3, 31)



These lines echo a verse from Dehmel's poem ›Drei Ringe‹:

Raum! Raum! brich Bahnen, wilde Brust!  
 Ich fühl's und staune jede Nacht,  
 daß nicht bloß Eine Sonne lacht;  
 das Leben ist des Lebens Lust!<sup>17)</sup>

The poem by Rilke suggests that all the qualities attributed to Dehmel in ›Moderne Lyrik‹, such as “glühender Glanz”, “der unermüdliche Kämpfer”, are equally applicable to early Rilke. It is perhaps this early affinity with the Dionysian in Dehmel which made Rilke so keen to distance himself from him later on.

Perhaps more revealing is the similarity between the *Stimmungslyrik* of ›Wegwarten‹ and many of Dehmel's lyric poems (see, in particular, SW 3, 113–119). Here, both poets display a shift from the confessional lyricism of their early poetry to a poetic model founded on a merging of inner and outer reality and the concentration of an emotion into a single image. A comparison between Rilke's ›Abendgedanke‹ and Dehmel's ›Manche Nacht‹ highlights this parallel adjustment in their poetics. The first verse of Rilke's poem is as follows:

Die Ferne dunkeln schnell,  
 still wird die Welt,  
 die Sterne funkeln hell  
 am Himmelszelt. (SW 3, 44)

Dehmel's poem opens with:

Wenn die Felder sich verdunkeln,  
 fühl ich, wird mein Auge heller;  
 schon versucht ein Stern zu funkeln,  
 und die Grillen wispern schneller. (GW 3, 30)

The similarity in language and imagery between the two verses is striking, indeed on a first reading there is not much that distinguishes them. Both use the same rhyme pattern and capture the light | darkness dichotomy of the poem in the rhyme “dunkeln”/“funkeln”. Rilke's poem makes greater use of the formal aural aspects: the sounds of lines one and three virtually mirror each other, but apart from a single common reference to the aural aspect of the scene, both poems capture the visual image of the paradoxical encounter between darkness and light. Yet Dehmel, whilst maintaining a clarity equal to Rilke's poem, also achieves something more subtle and complex within his quatrain. The second line points to a simultaneous process occurring within the poetic voice; the singular “mein Auge” implicates the imaginative faculties, the mind's eye of the observer, and alludes to an internalisation of the scene. This is further suggested in the following line in the use of “versucht”, indicating an anticipation of the shining stars rather than their actual presence. In this poem, Dehmel displays a complexity and subtlety of expression which is actually

<sup>17)</sup> DEHMEL, *Aber die Liebe. Ein Ehemanns-und-Menschenbuch*, Munich 1893, p. 162.

more typical of Rilke's later poetry. Rilke's poem actually predates Dehmel's by two years and thus the possibility of reciprocal influence must also be acknowledged. The similarity may also be explained by Dehmel's tendency to rewrite and improve poems written by himself or other writers. On the other hand, it is equally likely that they were both drawing from the same concentrated pool of language and imagery also frequented by other contemporary lyric poets.

A comparison between one of Dehmel's best known poems ›Die stille Stadt‹ and Rilke's ›Im alten Hause‹, from ›Das Larenopfer‹, highlights once more a common use of themes and images. Although the form of each poem differs, the final two verses highlight the resemblances. Rilke's verses read:

Die Stadt verschwimmt wie hinter Glas.  
Nur hoch, wie ein behelmter Hüne,  
ragt klar vor mir die grüspangrüne  
Turmkuppel von Sankt Nikolas.

Schon blinzelt da und dort ein Licht  
fern auf im schwülen Stadtgebrause. –  
Mir ist, daß in dem alten Hause  
jetzt eine Stimme 'Amen' spricht. (SW 1, 9)

The final verses of Dehmel's poem are as follows:

Von allen Bergen drücken  
Nebel auf die Stadt;  
es dringt kein Dach, nicht Hof noch Haus,  
kein Laut aus ihrem Rauch heraus,  
kaum Türme noch und Brücken.

Doch als den Wanderer graute,  
da ging ein Lichtlein auf im Grund;  
und durch den Rauch und Nebel  
begann ein leiser Lobgesang,  
aus Kindermund. (GW 3, 118)

Both poems capture exactly the same moment of dusk, in which darkness and mist descend over the town sprawled out below. It is a moment which threatens to overwhelm the comforting signs of civilisation and there is a sense of impending loneliness, which although more explicit in Dehmel's poem ("als den Wanderer graute"), is also suggested in Rilke's simile "wie ein behelmter Hüne". Both poems seek out the lights of the town for the glimmer of hope and comfort they seem to offer in their signalling of human existence. But the ultimate reassurance in both poems comes in the form of a human voice, which brings redemption from loneliness through language and faith. At the same time, however, the poems also document their increasing stylistic differences; whilst Dehmel's ›Die stille Stadt‹ remains free of similes, Rilke's use of comparative images in the first two lines looks forward to the complex imagery of his later poetry. The "mir ist" of the final quatrain also heightens this allusion to another, analogous and imaginary world.

It is hardly controversial to state that the later complexity and subtlety of Rilke's poetics surpass Dehmel's work, and this is clearly one major factor in their gradual distancing from one another. Be that as it may, it should not be overlooked that their own poetic visions continued to have striking parallels. As with Rilke, Dehmel defined himself explicitly against the aesthetic foundations of Naturalism and its prioritisation of the outside world:

Diese beiden [Gerhart Hauptmann und Arno Holz] fassen die Einzelseele als abhängig von der sinnfälligen Außenwelt auf, während ich grade der Meinung bin, daß diese "Welt" durchaus der Seele unterthan ist, vielfach sogar dem bewußten Willen. Ich stelle die Innenwelt (in der Bedeutung Allseele) gar nicht erst im Gegensatz zur körperlichen Außenwelt, denn sie sind gegensätzlich nur dem Anschein nach, für unsern Verstand; in Wirklichkeit bilden sie die eine, unteilbare Welt.<sup>18)</sup>

However, unlike Rilke and Bahr, Dehmel was quick to distance himself from the counter-Naturalist's model of sincerity, which he referred to as "rednerische Ichsucht". As an alternative he endorsed an aesthetics which would merge the subjective with the objective, whilst taking into account the importance of the poet's subjectivity in the creative process (AB, 3.10.1891, 65). Dehmel's modernity in this respect is evidenced by a statement which predates ›Moderne Lyrik‹ by several years and which reads like the foundation of a modern poetics: "Wenn wir erst aufhören werden, uns durch ertiftelte Wahrheitsmäztchen oder gespreizte Confessionsattitüden interessant zu machen, dann wird es uns vielleicht gelingen, späteren Generationen interessant zu werden" (AB, 15.12.1893, 140). In his essay ›Kunst und Persönlichkeit‹, which has striking similarities with Eliot's thoughts on the relationship between poetry and personality, Dehmel puts forward a poetics based on an "Unpersönlichkeitsbedürfnis" (GW 8, 154). It is this concept which informed the poetic process of ›Weib und Welt‹ (1896), the work which Rilke hailed as evidence of Dehmel's modernity. It is highly revealing, then, that Rilke's own work from this point is marked by a departure from an aesthetic of sincerity towards a model of poetic objectivity which culminates in the ›Neue Gedichte‹.

In 1902, Dehmel published ›Zwei Menschen‹, a poetic representation of his vision of "WirWelt", a physical space in which the dualities of human existence dissolve, in which emotion and topography become fused in a single synaesthetic experience. The parallels between this and Rilke's "Weltinnenraum", explored in later poems such as ›Ausgesetzt auf den Bergen des Herzens‹ or ›Es winkt zu Fühlung‹, and the cycles ›Duineser Elegien‹ and ›Sonette an Orpheus‹ are highly convincing. Both Rilke's concept of "Weltinnenraum" and Dehmel's "WirWelt" do not simply mean an internalisation of the outside world as called for by Bahr, for this upholds the duality of "Außenwelt" and "Innenwelt", rather they strive towards the total collapse of any distinction between the two. A verse from ›Zwei Menschen‹,

<sup>18)</sup> DEHMEL, letter of 1.8.1899, *Ausgewählte Briefe aus den Jahren 1883–1920* in 2 Bänden, Berlin 1922/1923, volume 1, p. 333. Hereafter, references appear in the text with the abbreviation AB, followed by the volume number, date of letter and page number.

included in a letter of 1899 to Ida Auerbach, his future wife, anticipates in many ways Rilke's own vision:

Ich lernte meine Sehnsucht stillen,  
ich bin so gotteins mit der Welt,  
daß nicht ein Sperling wider meinen Willen  
vom Dache fällt. (AB, 14.6.1899, 314)

The following verse from › Es winkt zu Fühlung ‹ springs immediately to mind:

Durch alle Wesen reicht der eine Raum:  
Weltinnenraum. Die Vögel fliegen still  
durch uns hindurch. O, der ich wachsen will,  
ich seh hinaus, und in mir wächst der Baum. (SW 2, 92)

Overall, the similarities between the two poets must bear witness to the inevitable exchange and influence of contemporary trends and moods. The concepts of “WirWelt” and “Weltinnenraum”, for example, are grounded in the monist discourses of the *Jahrhundertwende*. At the same time, however, all of the above examples also allude to the significance of Dehmel for Rilke's early work and thus for a greater understanding of Rilke's *œuvre* as a whole. Although the lyrical expression of their common vision is undeniably more powerful in Rilke's ›Duineser Elegien‹, the significance of ›Zwei Menschen‹, with its concept of “WirWelt” and its emotional topography, must not be overlooked. The parallels between their emerging aesthetic visions lend further weight to the suggestion that Dehmel had a profound influence on Rilke.

### III.

The letter to Scholz sheds light on another focal point of Rilke's Prague lecture, namely the significance of Alfred Mombert's contribution to modern lyric poetry. The lecture establishes Mombert as one of the most significant figures in Rilke's poetic canon, and he is placed by Rilke at one end of the spectrum of lyric poetry, with Stefan George at the other. In so doing, Rilke establishes a poetic scale which slides between form and formlessness, and in the broader context of his work, the unrestrained emotion of Mombert and the austere clarity of George can be seen to represent extremes within Rilke himself, as well as contemporary lyric poetry. Yet this polarisation of lyric poetry through Mombert and George forms a constellation which contrasts with accounts by contemporaries such as Hofmannsthal, Theodor Heuss and Julius Bab, who placed George opposite Dehmel.<sup>19)</sup> Rilke seems intent on excluding Dehmel from his established position in contemporary poetry.

<sup>19)</sup> JULIUS BAB, Von den Meistern der Lyrik, in: Die Neue Rundschau 7/3 (1909); THEODOR HEUSS, Vor der Bücherwand. Skizzen zu Dichtern und Dichtung, ed. by FRIEDRICH KAUFMANN and HERMANN LEINS, Tübingen 1961.

Nevertheless, there are aspects of the lecture which betray Dehmel's continuing central presence in the lecture. It is highly revealing, for example, that the language which Rilke uses to portray Mombert echoes the discussion of Dehmel. In Mombert, Rilke senses "ein ganzes Chaos von Gefühlen, Sehnsüchten und Entzürnungen"; words such as "strömen" and "Eruptionen" heighten his excesses of emotion (SW 5, 377). Dehmel is captured through similarly dynamic language, with verbs such as "ringen", "berauschen" and "glühen", which, moreover, carries echoes of his first volume of poetry ›Erlösungen‹ (SW 5, 375). Yet Rilke appears reluctant to address this side of Dehmel directly; this is reinforced by the sense of trepidation with which he is introduced into the lecture: "Eine Gefahr hingegen liegt in dem glühenden Glanze Richard Dehmels [...]" (SW 5, 375). This sense of danger echoes the fear which Rilke linked to a reading of Dehmel's earlier works, apparently caused by the threat of violence and chaos inherent in his work. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, Rilke avoids discussion of the most controversial aspect of Dehmel's poetry, namely its erotic and sexual nature. Although he is critical of the censorship of one of Dehmel's poems, the eroticism of Dehmel's poetry is glossed over in the phrase "dem lächelnd-leidenden Glück der Mutterschaft" (SW 5, 375). Whether deliberate or not, this emphasis on the maternal dimension of love is a misrepresentation of Dehmel's depiction of the female figure as predominantly erotic. Whilst the female figure in Dehmel's work is a fusion of maternal and sexual instincts, the redemptive potential of erotic love is always prioritised over the maternal, and hence constitutes the underlying force of his poems. This distorted reading of Dehmel's poetry along with his reluctance to place him in a central position in modern lyric poetry exposes an unstated aversion on Rilke's part to something in Dehmel. Rilke seems reluctant to give any impression of a direct affinity with him; yet the parallels established between Dehmel and Mombert, both implicitly and explicitly, suggest that the discussion of Dehmel continues under the auspice of Mombert. This is further suggested in Rilke's misrepresentation of Dehmel's relationship with Mombert, which he claims is mainly one of influence: "Daß Dehmel in Mombert dieses Wildwerden seines eigenen Ichs liebt, ist begreiflich; denn er sieht nur seine mächtigere Energie, ohne seine wütende Blindheit zu bemerken, die Freund und Feind nicht mehr zu trennen weiß" (SW 5, 377). This jars with Mombert's own view of their relationship which he regarded as being rooted in a master-disciple dynamic (SCHINDLER, 19.4.1898 and 27.7.1909, 164/167). That the discussion of Mombert is also largely about Dehmel is backed up by factual circumstances. What the letter to Scholz reveals is that before the meeting with Dehmel in January 1898 Rilke did not know of Mombert or his work. The letter written to Dehmel soon after their encounter also confirms that it was actually Dehmel who introduced Rilke to Mombert. It is clear then that not only did Rilke familiarise himself with Mombert's work in the short space of time before the lecture, but that Mombert's poetry is inextricably linked to Rilke's own personal acquaintance with Dehmel.

The reason for Rilke's hesitant treatment of Dehmel is perhaps implicit in the use of the phrase "dieses Wildwerden seines eigenen Ichs". He states that it is this

phenomenon which attracts Dehmel to Mombert, but, as demonstrated above, this too is the focus of his own discussion of Mombert. The image suggests that the contained, sincere self, a figure which Rilke's posits as the origin of modern lyric poetry, is now not only threatened but threatening. What is alluded to here is a Dionysian fragmentation of the self, a shattering of the limits of selfhood beyond the very form of lyric poetry. The definition of Dionysian existence in his notes on Nietzsche's ›Die Geburt der Tragödie‹, ›Marginalien zu Nietzsche‹ (1900), written two years after this lecture echoes this diffusion of the self: "Das Dionysische Leben ist ein unbegrenztes In-Allem-Leben [...]" (SW 6, 1165). A few lines earlier he refers to "Die Verzückerung des dionysischen Zustandes mit seiner Vernichtung der gewöhnlichen Schranken und Grenzen [...]". Having embraced such an existence in the poem ›Ich lieb ein pulsierendes Leben‹ Rilke now seems wary of its consequences. Common to the remarks on Nietzsche and the lecture is the unsettling loss of boundaries, and both texts highlight aesthetic form as the antidote to the ensuing chaos. The lecture itself recovers from the threat inherent in the formlessness of Mombert and Dehmel by immediately initiating a discussion of George, for whom form represents the very essence of poetry. This turning away from Dehmel and Mombert looks forward to the emphasis on form which would shape Rilke's later poetry, in particular his ›Neue Gedichte‹ and ›Sonette an Orpheus‹. The structure of the lecture can hence be read as a mirror image of Rilke's own poetic evolution. In the context of the Prague lecture, Dehmel is redeemed by his longing for beauty and his prophetic qualities, and in Rilke's eyes this is what constitutes his modernity. Nevertheless, his ambivalence towards Dehmel is evident and anticipates the much more critical stance which he takes against him in ›Briefe an einen jungen Dichter‹.

#### IV.

Between Rilke's Prague lecture and the letter to Franz Kappus of April 1903 which focuses on Dehmel, Rilke's own aesthetic vision altered significantly.<sup>20)</sup> By the time of ›Malte Laurids Brigge‹ and the ›Neue Gedichte‹, Rilke's emphasis has shifted from an aural relationship with the world to a predominantly visual one. In Dehmel there is no such clear progression, yet his sensory relationship with the world is often conceived in similar terms to Rilke; a letter to Liliencron alludes to a visual process which foreshadows Malte's Parisian experience: "Und all das Sichtbare, das hab' ich von Dir gelernt, Detlev, von Dir! durch Dich hab' ich erst sehen lernen, Du Urmenschenkind! wie war ich früher taub und blind!" (AB, 13.2.1894, 145). In both poets, confessional lyricism gave way to a visual understanding of

<sup>20)</sup> RILKE, letter of 23.04.1903, in: Briefe an einen jungen Dichter, in: Werke. Kommentierte Ausgabe in 4 Bänden, ed. by MANFRED ENGEL and others, Frankfurt/M. 1996, Volume 4: Schriften, p. 522. Further references appear in the text with the abbreviation KA 4 followed by the page number.

the world, as the protagonist of ›Malte Laurids Brigge‹ later states: “Denn Verse sind nicht, wie die Leute meinen, Gefühle (die hat man früh genug), – es sind Erfahrungen” (SW 6, 724). The aesthetic measure of sincerity nevertheless continues to shape much of Rilke’s evaluation of Dehmel, even though his earlier conviction in Dehmel’s sincerity has been replaced by an assertion of his insincerity: “Seine dichterische Kraft ist groß und wie ein Urtrieb stark, [...]. | Aber es scheint, daß diese Kraft nicht immer ganz aufrichtig und ohne Pose ist” (KA 4, 521).

In comparison to the lecture, the letter discusses Dehmel’s treatment of sexuality more openly, and a moral objection now appears to colour Rilke’s view of Dehmel’s work, particularly his erotic poetry:

Da ist keine ganz reife und reine Geschlechtswelt, eine, die nicht menschlich genug, die nur männlich ist, [...]. Weil er [Dehmel] nur als Mann liebt, nicht als Mensch, darum ist in seiner Geschlechtsempfindung etwas Enges, scheinbar Wildes, Gehässiges, Zeitliches, Unewiges, das seine Kunst verringert und sie zweideutig und zweifelhaft macht. (KA 4, 522)

The world of Dehmel’s poetry is now characterised as being “voll Ehebruch und Wirrnis”, and this is directly linked with a declaration of Dehmel’s insincerity (KA 4, 522). Dehmel’s passion, which in ›Moderne Lyrik‹ was indicative of his modernity, is now viewed as a shortcoming and a necessary cause of his transience as a writer: “Sie [seine Kunst] ist gezeichnet von der Zeit und von der Leidenschaft, und wenig aus ihr wird dauern und bestehen” (KA 4, 522). This evidently flies in the face of his comment in the first letter to Dehmel of 1896. In spite of the continued affirmation of Dehmel’s poetic talent, Rilke’s initial enthusiasm has evaporated, and this is borne out by the interruption of their correspondence. Rilke’s only contact with Dehmel from this time onwards is concerned with purely practical matters, such as securing licensing rights for authors (SCHINDLER, 20.1.1903, 198f.).

Even though their correspondence came to an end it is clear that Rilke’s previous ‘mentor’ continued to preoccupy him; this is confirmed by two further significant statements on Dehmel after the latter’s death in 1920. The first statement takes the form of an extensive discussion in a letter of 1922, the tone of which implies a significant alteration in Rilke’s opinion of Dehmel.<sup>21)</sup> The causes for this radical shift can only be speculated upon but it seems likely that Rilke, along with many of his contemporaries, lost a great deal of respect for Dehmel in the light of his involvement with the First World War. To Rilke, who had always held up loneliness and homelessness as the only possible conditions for the artist, Dehmel’s blind nationalism must have seemed alien, if not repugnant. This is corroborated, in the letter, by Rilke’s recounting of a conversation he once had with Dehmel about his own need to detach himself from everyday German in order to be able to write poetry. For Rilke, Dehmel’s blank facial expression captured the irreconcilable differences between them. In the light of the events of recent years, Rilke

<sup>21)</sup> RILKE, Briefe an Gräfin Sizzo 1921–1926, ed. by INGEBORG SCHNACK, Frankfurt/M. 1977, p. 25. Further references appear in the text with the abbreviation BGS.

accuses Dehmel of ignorance of real life, of “ein nicht tief genug Gedacht- und Beobachtet haben” (BGS, 25). Clearly, Rilke’s poet figure as an observer of life remains consistent with that defined in the lecture twenty-four years previously, yet Dehmel is now viewed as someone who fails in this respect. Rilke refers to Dehmel’s dislike of “Schreibtisch-Literaten”, and his defensive tone suggests that he feels implicated in this, but he argues that Dehmel’s passion for real life has rendered him more blind:

Was seine Hervorbringung schwach, unwahr, überflüssig oder lächerlich macht, ist nicht sein Platz, an dem er sich hält, sondern daß er an diesem Platze [...] vom Leben absehen lernt, [...] daß er das Leben überhaupt nicht mehr gewahrt, sondern nur das Papier und den Tintenleck am Federfinger: das macht diesen – eminent deutschen – Typus so hoffnungslos und widerwärtig. (BGS, 25)

This overwhelmingly negative view does not however prevent Rilke from acknowledging Dehmel’s influence not only on himself but an entire generation of German writers.

Interestingly it is in this same letter that Rilke announces the completion of the ›Duineser Elegien‹ and ›Sonette an Orpheus‹ – a moment which perhaps enabled him to cast a more confident and objective glance over his earlier career. The Elegies and Sonnets appear to have established an inner peace within Rilke, which brings an end to a long struggle against the anxieties of influence and the presence of Dehmel within his own work. In this context, Rilke makes a revealing comment about Dehmel’s work which echoes elsewhere in the reception of Dehmel, namely the inconsistent quality of his poetry:

Meine Bewunderung für Dehmels Kunst war in meiner Jugend trotzdem sehr groß –, aber ich verstand schon damals sehr gut, als mir einmal jemand gestand, er habe mitten in einem schönen Dehmelschen Gedicht Angst umzublättern, denn es könne auf der nächsten Seite eine Brüskerie geschehen, die dem um so schmerzhafter sein mußte, der eben in die wahrhaftige Herrlichkeit einiger Verszeilen fühlend und mitwissend eingetreten war. (BGS, 25)

In the light of this, the letter reads as a kind of coming to terms with his relationship with Dehmel; having accounted for Dehmel’s “Geschmacklosigkeit” and, in spite of this, his influence on his own early work, Rilke arrives at the conclusion: “Aber warum ihn bekämpfen –, genügt es nicht, ihn zu übersehen?” For years Rilke depicted Dehmel as “der Ringende” and “der unermüdliche Kämpfer”, and yet it would seem that Rilke was as much a part of this fight as the figure whom he had always associated with violence and disorder.

Rilke’s last statement on Dehmel is a letter of November 1923, in which he discusses his reading of Dehmel’s selected letters, which were published two years after his death. Significantly, the preoccupation with authenticity is still there, yet it has become an ethical rather than an aesthetic value, and Rilke’s earlier conviction of Dehmel’s sincerity has been restored: “Ergreifend wie alles Menschliche, wie alle Versuche, im Menschlichen echt zu sein, ertraggebend und dabei womöglich noch gut! Und die Abgründe zwischen diesen seltsamen drei Ansprüchen an sich



selbst!"<sup>22</sup>) Once again, an encounter with the personality of Dehmel, albeit here an epistolary one, appears to re-establish for Rilke a comforting link between the poet and his work. In the light of the letters, he now sees Dehmel's life as a struggle to be good and true, and the critical distance which Rilke now appears to have over his own and Dehmel's work clearly influences the letter's reconciliatory tone, and enables him to arrive at this poignant conclusion: "Ich hätt ihn, ohne die Zerstretheit des Lebens leicht besser lieben können, als ich gethan habe: diese Einsicht ist nicht das Geringste, was mir diese Lektüre ergreifend macht, ja mich, fast mit Strenge, verpflichtet zu ihr" (BNW, 935). These later letters make it clear that Rilke's preoccupation with Dehmel extended far beyond any opportunism. Whilst Dehmel may well have at some point served as a useful literary contact for the young Rilke, this final comment is a clear admission of an underlying affinity between the mature Rilke and Dehmel.

### *Conclusion*

The various contradictory stages of Rilke's reception of Dehmel bear witness to a complex ambivalence not only towards his work but his personality, a factor which must be taken into account in Dehmel's reception amongst his contemporaries. In the light of Rilke's work, it becomes clear that the increasing distance from Dehmel is a direct and necessary consequence of his own aesthetic shift from the Dionysian abandon of his own early poetry, which links him inextricably with Dehmel and Nietzsche, to the Apollonian self-containment of his later work. Rilke's Prague lecture already shows traces of this subsequent rejection. The lecture thus indicates the extent to which Rilke's concept of modern poetry is rooted in his own distinct aesthetic vision. Yet the lecture also does something else: it places Dehmel within a discourse of modernity which is now no longer viable, because of its emphasis on the very unmodern, even anti-modern term sincerity. Modernity's language crisis makes terms such as sincerity appear archaic (see TRILLING). It follows then that the survival of other writers such as George and Hofmannsthal into literary posterity is certainly not due to their inclusion in Rilke's canon of modern lyric poetry, but rather their ability to be read within other modernist discourses. The disappearance of Dehmel from the poetic canon indicates that he existed within an aesthetic framework specific to his time, inside of which he was hailed as the greatest poet of the period, and outside of which he could no longer survive. The dichotomy between contemporary and current reception of Dehmel does indeed indicate a significant evolution in aesthetic parameters, and thus partly explains his present marginal status. Nevertheless, the parallels between Rilke's lecture and the critical writings of Eliot suggest the extent to which ›Moderne Lyrik‹ should be read as a serious and enduring statement about the aesthetic values of early modernity. Both

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<sup>22</sup>) RILKE, Briefe an Nanny Wunderly-Volkart, 2 volumes, Frankfurt/M. 1977, Volume 1, p. 935. Further references appear in the text with the abbreviation BNW.

Eliot and Rilke set out a framework within which Dehmel must resume a central position. The validity of their approach is also highlighted by recent shifts in critical approaches to the *Jahrhundertwende*. Rilke's paradigm of authenticity anticipates the increasing tendency to analyse the period according to themes, rather than aesthetic programmes such as symbolism, impressionism and neo-romanticism.<sup>23)</sup> Furthermore, there have been recent calls for a 'Bestandsaufnahme' of modern lyric poetry, in order to include more poetry than that which conforms to the notion of *poésie pure* in the poetic canon.<sup>24)</sup> In sum, these arguments converge to create a critical atmosphere in which a reappraisal of poets like Dehmel becomes possible. In conclusion, the relationship between Dehmel and Rilke serves as but one instance in a discussion which aims to question and problematise Dehmel's status as a minor poet of the *Jahrhundertwende*.

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<sup>23)</sup> WOLFDIETRICH RASCH's concept of 'das Leben' as a way of approaching the various aesthetic trends of the period is often seen as the pioneering example of this (RASCH, *Aspekte der deutschen Literatur um 1900*, in: *Zur deutschen Literatur seit der Jahrhundertwende*, Stuttgart 1967, pp. 1–48, here: p. 17.

<sup>24)</sup> See HANS OTTO HORCH's 'Lyrik', in: *Moderne Literatur in Grundbegriffen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. by DIETER BORCHMEYER and VIKTOR ŽMEGAČ, Tübingen 1994, pp. 251–262, here: p. 253.