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A Bridge to the Eifel: Clara Viebig and her Literary Style

By
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Abstract

Clara Viebig was a woman author in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century, transitioning into the twentieth century. Viebig was born in Trier at the southern end of a region in western Germany known as the Eifel. Her works often utilized the landscape and countryside of this area, which has given them a unique dynamic. Although Viebig's technique has been examined in light of various literary styles, including naturalism (Krauss-Theim), neo-romanticism (Fleisscher), and *Heimatkunst* (Ecker), it has never been examined for its own unique merit. I believe that landscape plays a particularly profound role in shaping and influencing Viebig's characters, whether symbolically or as an actual character or personification within the story itself. I examine her use of landscape in the short story, "Am Totenmaar" from the collection *Kinder der Eifel* to show the impact of landscape on the characters of the story, and ultimately, the reader. My analysis will provide an increased understanding of the value of her works, her insights into the spiritual relationship of human beings to home and land, and her significant position in the development of German women's writing.

Introduction and Thesis

On July 17, 1930, the German newspaper, *Volkswacht Bielefeld*, exclaimed, “Welch eine Frau!” (Im Spiegel, Aretz 156), “*What a woman!*” in an article on the occasion of Clara Viebig’s seventieth birthday. This was over one hundred articles published about Viebig on or around that day. The well-praised woman was Clara Viebig, an authoress in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century, transitioning into the twentieth century. Viebig was born in Trier at the southern end of a region in western Germany known as the Eifel and would make her birth place famous through her writings.

Landscape plays a particularly profound role in shaping and influencing Viebig's characters, whether symbolically, or as an actual character or personification within the story itself. In this paper, I examine her use of landscape in the short story, “Am Totenmaar” from the collection *Kinder der Eifel* to show the impact of place on the characters of the story, and ultimately, the reader. My analysis will provide an increased understanding of the value of her works, her insights into the spiritual relationship of human beings to home and land, and her significant position in the development of German women's writing.

Viebig's literary style using landscape has been examined in light of various literary styles, including naturalism (Krauss-Theim), neo-romanticism (Fleisscher), and *Heimatkunst* (Ecker), but it has never been examined for its own unique technique. Landscape and nature play a particularly profound role in shaping and influencing Viebig's characters, whether symbolically or as an actual character or personification within the story itself. In analyzing the use of landscape in Viebig’s works, I expect to

gain insight into how our position and relationship to the land around us, as individuals, affects and influences our perception and ontology.

In the broadest respect of this paper, I intend to call attention to the dangers of scientific categorization and discuss why some authors are forgotten. Today, the name of Clara Viebig is no longer so widely recognized, like it was on her seventieth birthday. She, like many others, has not lost any of her potency or her applicability in modern times. Rather, she has just been forgotten. I assert that an increased understanding of the relationship to place, as seen in Viebig's stories, will help to illuminate man's own motivations and decisions in the Twenty-first century, where it is evermore urgent to understand the relationship to environment around us.

Clara Viebig, the Eifel and its Importance

Clara Viebig was born on July 17, 1860 in the small but ancient town of Trier, next to the famous Porta Nigra. She was the daughter of Ernst Viebig, a member of the Prussian High Council for Civil Service. The Viebig's were originally from Posen in West Prussia, modern-day Poznań in Western Poland, but moved to Trier because of Ernst's work as an administrator. The Viebig's were raised in a predominately Lutheran area, but Trier was almost completely Catholic. Young Clara learned from her earliest years to be religiously tolerant. After eight years in Trier, Ernst was transferred to Düsseldorf and the family moved into the Rhineland.

After the death of Ernst in 1881, Clara Viebig moved with her moved to Berlin and began to pursue a college education, first as a singer. After attending lectures on the writings of Zola, she began to try her own writing. She married the Jewish publisher,

Friedrich Cohn, in 1896 after he was introduced to her work through the famous realist author, Theodor Fontane. During their first meeting, Friedrich commented about her work: “Mein liebes Kind – das ist schlecht, aber Sie haben Talent” (Stern 28) *My dear child, that is terrible, but you have talent.*¹ Friedrich learned to love both her and her work, remaining happily wedded until his death in 1936.

With the rise of Hitler, Clara and Friedrich had her share of trials, she having married a Jewish husband and he being Jewish. The Nazis tried to convince Viebig to change her stories and was eventually forbidden to write during the war (Aretz, *Mein Leben* 210). The Nazis forced Friedrich to shut down his publishing company, but he died before the persecution forced him into a concentration camp. Viebig’s son Ernst was forced to flee to Brazil because of his mixed blood and his earlier association with the communist party (Stern 149). Viebig immigrated with him, but came back in 1938 because of homesickness, a remarkable action in its own right. She lived out the war in Zehlendorf, just outside Berlin and would die there in 1952. She could never abandon her attachment to her three homes, Trier, Düsseldorf, and Berlin, all of which she wrote about in her works (Aretz, *Im Spiegel* 88).

Although, she only lived in Trier for eight years, it influenced her works the most. The area had special significance to Viebig. Trier is at the southern end of the Eifel, a large forest on the western German border with Luxemburg and Belgium, covering nearly 5,300 square kilometers up to the Rhine in the east and Aachen in the north. The region itself is an ancient volcanic hotspot, stemming millions of years back. Through the eons, a forest grew and covering much of the barren landscape, although in the winter the landscape can seem as barren as it was millennia ago. It became exceptionally green and

¹ All translations into English have been done by the author in italics, following the German.

the rough terrain turned into rolling forested hills, freckled with lakes and pastures.

Like something out of a dream, or perhaps like Vergil's descriptions of Elysium, the Roman paradise after death, the Eifel is unanimously recognized for its beauty by those who venture its territories. Perhaps that is why the Roman Emperor selected Trier as the location for his Western Roman Empire. Trier remained an important destination in the Christian Roman Empire as the location of one of the first Christian churches north of the Alps, and into the medieval ages, through the power of the Archbishopric of Trier. After the middle ages, Trier declined significantly in political importance, strategic vitality, economic centrality, and religious centrality. Nevertheless, Trier remained a focal point of another kind for Clara Viebig.

It was an epicenter of two ancient traditions; the natural and the human. After the Romans stamped the inheritance of the western European tradition upon the already ancient landscape of volcanic craters and lakes, the perfect situation was created for Viebig to discover her literary style, when she arrived in the middle of the nineteenth century. Viebig would utilize these circumstances and as a young girl would grow up in this environment of ancient contrasts. This laid the seedbed for creativity and expression that produced over twenty novels or collections of short stories.

An elderly Viebig stayed in her homeland, despite one of the Nazi regime's reign of terror. Her decision to stay in Germany demonstrates a remarkable loyalty to the land she called home, not the political state. Her land was important to her and she expressed this love through her literary works.

Neo-romantic, Realist, Naturalist, Heimatdichterin, or just plain Viebig

Scholars have attempted to categorize Clara Viebig's writing style into one "ism" or another ever since she began writing. Perhaps as a remnant of the attempts to make literature a scientific endeavor, scholars continually attempt to categorize and group authors. Some critics categorized Viebig as a naturalist, others as a realist, still others as what is termed in German as a Heimatdichterin² or a poet of the homeland, but still many other critics concluded that it was some kind of mixture. Exploring this dispute in categorization is important to understanding Viebig's style and effect as an author.

At the very least, all critics agreed that Viebig was a "disciple" of Emil Zola, the famous French naturalist (Stern 49; Aretz, *Im Spiegel* 100); indeed Viebig had admitted it herself in an interview in 1930 (Fleissner 918). And almost every critic had to consequently admit that she was a naturalist, but naturalism was too late stylistically for her to be a pure naturalist. Even Zola's work in 1897 was departing from this niche and drifting into other styles. The 1890s were the times of the neo-romantic and even the expressionism was finding its early roots (Aretz, *Im Spiegel* 84).

Otto Fleissner went so far to assert that Viebig was actually a neo-Romantic with some influences from realism and the writings of Maria Ebner-Eschenbach (Fleissner 925). Fleissner's analysis discussed largely the interesting uses of religious symbols and images in Viebig's works, but not very much about her use of landscape and nature. This false approach (and perhaps that anxious drive to explain away anomalies that occurred outside the literary period of the day, neo-romanticism,) contributed to Fleissner's

² Also referred to as Heimatkunst

analysis.³

Most other critics certainly did not fully agree with Fleissner's conclusions. Viebig was a naturalist, but also something else. It was difficult to deny through the connection with Zola that she was anything else but a naturalist. Her works were filled with connections to nature and the consequences on human beings when they deny those innate attachments to the earth. Naturalism is a style related to realism in that it shows both positive and negative actions committed by individuals, without objectivity; any artificial happy endings, romantic tragedy, or strange superstitions (Kächler 205). In this case, industrialism and urbanization are causing over indulgence and a severance with the land and nature that had always supported people before. So the critics engaged in this debate around the occasion of Viebig's seventieth birthday largely concluded that it must be some kind of mixture of styles.

One journalist articulated the argument that Viebig's style fell more into the direction of "mixturism", if I may so term it at this point, meaning that Viebig's work is not necessarily confined to any one category. The argument follows:

"Eine Schülerin Zolas, die bedeutendste deutsche Naturalistin, sagen die einen, -nein, die stärkste Realistin unserer Literatur meinen die anderen, denn:

Wirklichkeit, nackte Wirklichkeit ohne ihre Betrachtung durch das menschliche Herz, ohne ihre Deutung durch die menschliche Seele, das sei Naturalismus, und darum sei die Viebig deren menschlich verstehendes Lächeln, deren lauschende Güte überall fühlbar bleibe, eben eine große Realistin" (Aretz, *Im Spiegel* 100).

"A student of Zola, the most important German naturalist, say some, -no, the

³ Attempts to turn literature into a science occurred during the nineteenth century may have biased Fleissner's conclusions about Viebig's style. Assembling theories and corollaries always require creating a sound theory without anomalies (Popper), which appears to be Fleissner's goal.

strongest realist in our literature say the others, then: the truth, the naked truth without the subjectivity of the human heart, without allusion to the human soul, that would be naturalism, and therefore Viebig would also be of the school of the man's comforting smile, the common decency that remains detectable, even the greatest realist."

The commentary is rife with the flatteries of a typical newspaper journalist trying to sell his article, but it fails to escape the trail of "-isms". The conclusion that Viebig is a "true realist" still clings to the closely defined parameters of a literary scientist. It remains categorization, a practice this is commonplace, but maybe it should not be.

Modern interpretations, like Guntermann's at a 1998 literary conference, also pursue this attempt to categorize Viebig. One theory raised by Guntermann asserts that "Clara Viebig ist Deutschlands männlichste Dichterin" (Guntermann 197) "Clara Viebig ist the most manly writing of Germany" and that there are gender and sexual themes throughout her stories, asserting a woman's power. Guntermann also raises the hero's journey and even weather as other themes in Viebig's writing (207), as well as her use of dialect in her novels (243). This evidence suggests she belongs with Heimatkunst (Ecker 1997) and naturalism.⁴ Indeed, these evaluations are valid statements concerning Viebig's stylistic leanings, but they do not capture the whole picture; there is more to her than just these stylistic categories.

Other contemporary literary critics of Viebig did not so quickly attempt to wrap Viebig up and her writings into one stylistic package. Many critics acknowledged that there was more going on in her works than can be summed up with one term. Dr. Ludwig

⁴ Interestingly enough, there was an artist, Fritz von Wille, who provided illustrations for Viebig's *Kinder der Eifel* (Guntermann 201), which only adds to the homey, pastoral element in Viebig's writings.

Feuchtwanger remarked for example:

“Aber diese Geschichten mit Etiketten, wie “Realismus” und “Heimatkunst”, zu erledigen, ist doch grundfalsch. Clara Viebig ist nicht nur die Dichterin der Eifel, ihrer Landschaft, ihrer Luft, und ihrer Menschen. ... Wer kann das von den Modernen noch wie sie? (Aretz, *Im Spiegel* 44).

But to write off these stories with etiquettes such as “realism” and “homeland literature” is fundamentally wrong. Clara Viebig is not just a poet of the Eifel, its landscape, its air, and its people ... Who among the modern writers can write like she can?

This critic stumbled onto the more interesting idea about how we should regard Viebig. Certainly she has parallels and common threads with these other styles, but none of them can fully categorize her.

In the end, Viebig may be impossible to categorize and perhaps should not be categorized into any one style. Viebig’s gender is one major reason suggested by this journalist to explain why Viebig cannot really be assigned a style.

“Ja vielleicht wäre sie auch ganz ohne Zolas Einfluß dahingekommen. Denn diese Art von Naturlaismus, die man in ihrem Schriftwerke vorfindet, ist weniger eine Art der literarischen Darstellung als eine Art des Sehens, eine Weltanschauung eigener Prägung, und darum verliert auch jeder Versuch, ihren Naturalismus an dem der führenden Erscheinungen zu messen, allen Wert. Clara Viebig’s Schau ist aus ihrer Natur aus dem engen Verbundensein vom Menschen mit der Erde, ist aus ihrem fraulichen Instinkt heraus erklärlich, ist hauptsächlich durch ihre Frauennatur bedingt, die viel näher an Realität und Tatsache gebunden ist als jedes männliche

Naturell" (Aretz, *Im Spiegel* 27).

"Yes, perhaps [Viebig] would have come to Naturalism entirely without the influence of Zola. This type of Naturalism, that one find in here works, is less a type of literary presentation than a type of seeing, a perspective of one's own formation and therefore every attempt to measure her naturalism with the earlier appearances of naturalism loses its value. Clara Viebig's perspective is out of her own nature, out of the close-connectedness of man to the earth, and is explained through her female instinct, through her determined female nature, that is much closer bound to reality and fact than any male disposition."

Viebig has her own unique style that is not reflected in one single style. The well-known archetype of Mother Nature may be what the critic is discussing here. Viebig's femininity helps her understand nature in a way that no male can. This is perhaps why her unique quality cannot be matched into one single style. These styles had been dominated by masculine scholarship and Viebig, in the end, cannot be associated with any one style for this reason. In this light, Friedrich Cohn's comments about her writing being „terrible“ but talented corresponds well with a masculine inability to understand her naturalist style.

Thus, Viebig's naturalism was not really naturalism in the traditionally accepted sense of scholars. It was her own naturalism, independent of any network of scholarship. Another woman in her Doctorate thesis argued, „Clara Viebig's Werk ist nicht naturalistisch GEWOLLT, es ist naturalistisch GEWORDEN, weil es ihrem Wesen und ihrer Weltanschauung gemäß so werden mußte“ (Wingenroth 32), *Clara Viebig's work was not INTENDED to be naturalistic, it BECAME naturalistic, because it had to be so according to her perspective and her very being.* Viebig's style was a part of her soul and

for that reason it was unable to be anything else.

Literature profits from this habit of categorizing in some aspects, but my task with this paper has been to highlight why this useful tool can also be a dangerous practice. Once an author has been categorized and analyzed that may also consequently mean that he or she has been accounted for and can be forgotten. The once wildly successful authoress was considered one of the greatest of her time (Aretz, *Im Spiegel*), but she is barely recognizable today, even in academic circles. Unfortunately, this trend of categorization is still at the core of literary analysis and may have filtered down into the broader aspects of modern Western society, with the trend toward videogames and television over reading and self-enrichment. But despite categorization, what is it about her style that makes it worth the argument? Viebig's discussion of nature, especially landscape is not only a unique application of nature, but it also contains literary coordinates for the understanding the soul.

Clara Viebig's Spiritual Landscape and "Silent Art"

Having argued that Clara Viebig's style is unique and should not be categorized, it is immensely difficult to completely abandon this network of categorizing definitions and tools in discussing Viebig's use of landscape and nature and still be understood. Viebig does have many commonalities overlapping with other styles and theories and I will use some of these terms to continue my discussion of some of her short stories in an early collection of hers, *Kinder der Eifel*. Thus, I will still utilize these terms in order to better understand Clara Viebig's application of nature in her works.

There is a spiritual aspect to Viebig's use of landscape, especially in the short

story “Am Totenmaar” from *Kinder der Eifel*. It is partly a personification of the land and elements of nature, but also her description which weaves the land into the ambience of the story. “Am Totenmaar” is the story of a hard-working daughter, Annmarei, who dies in a snowstorm, fleeing her abusive shepherding father and her abasing work as a barmaid in the city tavern. In opening this tragedy, Viebig creates a frightening depiction of Totenmaar:

„Hoch oben in den Eifel Bergen liegt ein See, dunkel, tief, kreisrund, unheimlich, wie ein Kraterschlund. Einst tobten unterirdische Gewalten da unten, Feuer und Lavamassen wurden emporgeschleudert; jetzt füllt eine glatte Flut das Becken, wie Tränen ein Schale. Es geht hinunter in bodenlose Tiefe.

Keine Bäume, keine Blumen. Nackte vulkanische Höhen, gleich riesigen Maulwurfshügeln, stehen im Kranz, zu nichts gut als zu armseliger Viehweide. Mageres Strandgras weht, blasses Heidekorn duckt sich unter Brombeergestrüpp. Kein Vogel singt, kein Schmetterling gaukelt. Einsam ist's, zum Sterben öde!

Das ist das Weinfelder Maar, das Totenmaar, wie's die Leute heißen. Es hat keinen Abfluß, keinen Zufluß anders als die Tränen, die der Himmel drein weint. Es liegt und träumt und ist todestraurig, wie alles rings umher“ (Viebig, *Kinder der Eifel* 95).

“Up high in the Eifel there is a lake, dark, deep, circular, eerie, like a crater. Once, there stirred mighty subterranean forces, fire and masses of lava were thrust up; now a glossy flood fills the basin like tears in a cup. It flows down to a bottomless depth.

“No trees, no flowers. Just naked volcanic heights, like giant molehills,

*stand in a crown around the lake, useless except as poor feeding pastures.
Meager shoreline grasses labor in the wind, sickly heather seeds cower under the
blackberry thorns. Not one bird sings, no butterflies flutter. It is alone, a bleak
death.*

*“That is the Weinfelder Maar⁵. The “Maar of the Dead” as the people
say. It has no outlet and no inlet except as tears, that the Heavens pour into it. It
lies and dreams and is deathly sad, like all things round about it.”*

The first paragraph of this introduction foreshadows the imminent death of Annmarei at the aptly named “Maar of the dead”. By mentioning the once violent, but now dormant forces that created the maar, and comparing the lake at the maar to tears, the imagery of a funeral established i.e., with a corpse and expressions of mourning. The fate of the landscape represents what poor Annmarei will become, a lifeless corpse. The other imagery in the introduction parallels Annmarei’s desperate “loneliness” (Viebig, *Kinder der Eifel* 102) both in the town and in her relationship with her father. For example, the oppressed heather seeds and the lack of the normal positive signs in nature, birds singing, butterflies, flowers, etc. all support this loneliness in the figure of Annmarei.

After an intense beating by her father, Annmarei runs away in the middle of the night to the Totenmaar. Viebig once again sets the ominous mood in her description of the land, but adds an extra element:

*„Ringsum alles kahl, der Himmel grau mit schwarzen Wolkenballen, grau das
Maar; unheimlich schweigend lag es in seinem Becken. Grau auch jenseits das
Kirchlein, grau die verwitterten Kreuze.“ (Viebig, *Kinder der Eifel* 102).*

⁵ A maar is a geological term for a volcanic landform, resulting from explosive ash eruptions.

“All around everything is bleak, the heavens are gray with black balls of clouds, the maar is gray, and it lies eerily silent in its basin. Gray on the opposite side is the little chapel, and gray is the weathered cross.”

The dominance of gray in the description above is an allusion to the impending death of Annmarei, but now the chapel and cross have been added. Firstly, this effect compliments the general funeral-like atmosphere in the story, but it also attaches a certain aspect of spirituality, reminding the reader of Christianity and its beliefs; not only in an afterlife, but that evil deeds and sins must be punished. This Christian aspect will become more apparent as the story progresses.

During the night, as the story describes, an abnormally large snowstorm blankets the land. After a neighbor reports that she was not seen at work or in the city, the father goes to look for Annmarei. Viebig brings the ominous setting back again, as the father looks for Annmarei. “Nichts zu sehen! Kein Haus, kein Mensch! Nur das Maar in schweigender Majestät, ein Bild des Todes; an seinem Ufer das Kirchlein“ (Viebig, *Kinder der Eifel* 107). *“Nothing to see. No houses, not a soul. Only the maar in its silent majesty, a picture of death; and on its shore the little chapel.”* The chapel is highlighted as the only human structure, in compliment with the maar, reminding the reader that the harsh facts of nature remain, along with the hope provided by religion, but the religious beliefs are not to be seen. This symbol contributes to Viebig’s “silent art”, which will be discussed later. The Father is faced here with the prospect that his only child is dead and that he has caused it.

There on the lake, the father discovers that his daughter froze to death in the snow. Everything is now white instead of gray:

“Neben ihr liegt ein Bündel – alles weiß – die Füße stehen im Schnee,
Schnee liegt auf dem Rock -- -- --

„... Auf der glatten Mädchenstirn über der Nasenwurzel hat sich eine
ängstliche Falte eingegraben, gefrorene Tropfen hängen an den Wangen, aber der
Mund ist im Lächeln halb geöffnet.

„Die schneekalten Hände ruhn im Schoß, fest ineinander gefaltet.

„‘Da steht ein Baum,

Dahin leg‘ ich meinen Traum,

Dahin leg‘ ich meine Sünd.

Dann schlafe ich mit dem Jesus Kind

Mit Joseph und Maria rein,

Ganz sicher ein. Amen!’” (Viebig, *Kinder der Eifel* 108).

*“Next to her lies a bundle – everything white – the feet buried in snow,
snow lies on her shirt.*

*“...On the fair girlish forehead above the root of the nose, a fearful
wrinkle is indented, frozen tears hang on the cheeks, but the mouth is in a half-
open smile.*

“The hands frozen by snow rest in the lap, folded in each other.

“‘There stands a tree

There lay I my dream

There lay I my sin

There sleep I with the Christ child

With Joseph and Maria inside

Safely to abide. Amen!’’

The religious symbols here solidify the very subtle spirituality that Viebig is trying to demonstrate in her use of landscape. The tears of Annmarei are frozen, forever testifying of the father’s sin, as well as complimenting Viebig’s description of the lake (Viebig, *Kinder der Eifel* 95). Annmarei in her frozen state is now a unified extension of the landscape that has claimed her life. But the landscape is no longer a dark scene; it is white, purified and clean – a redemption. This symbolizes a salvation for Annmarei through death and the father is left cold with his tragedy. Annmarei’s half smile could also possibly affirm this state of salvation or refuge from the terrible life she had, but Viebig is intentionally vague. Thus, the frozen Maar is both an everlasting sanctuary to Annmarei, and simultaneously a cold condemnation of her father. Nature has been morphed by Viebig into a teacher. Viebig’s use of nature can teach individuals about the consequences of their actions.

Indeed, the father is not an entirely alienated character from the vantage of the reader. His perspective is just as carefully depicted as Annmarei’s indicating that his interaction with nature is just as important to the effect on the reader. Viebig wants her readers to understand the tragedy of both characters: the guilty father as well as the innocent Annmarei. This technique of relating both sides of this tragedy indicates a high level of stylistic mastery and complements the Viebig’s “silent art”.

Viebig may have been attempting to explain what she was doing with this style of landscape spirituality that she conveys in “Am Totenmaar” during an interview late in her life. Viebig was asked about her strong feelings for the Eifel area and replied:

„Nirgendwo sind Heidentum und Christentum sich so auf den Fersen. Burgen

und Kirchen der Eifel aus Lavagestein, graue Vorzeit und leuchtend weiße Kapellchen auf Kraterkuppen: vor verfallenen Raubnestern die rotengemalten Wunden Christi am Kreuz. Eine Brücke schwingt sich, über die jeder gehen muß, der ganz verstehen will, was „Eifel“ heißt (Aretz, *Mein Leben* 142).

“Nowhere do Paganism and Christianity stand so close together. Eifel castles and churches are made out of volcanic rock, a gray prehistory, illuminating white chapels on top of calderas: apostate thieves’ dens stand before the red-stained wounds of Christ on the cross. A bridge stands, over which every person must travel, who wants to understand exactly what the “Eifel” means.”

Viebig’s comment on the paradoxical symbol of landscape, containing both Christian and non-Christian meanings affirms that her literary techniques were teaching tools, in a manner only she could accomplish. She has created double-edged sword effect in her stories, on the border between good and evil, which illuminates truth. This is the “bridge” that she has created in order to understand the Eifel, which she depicts as a reflection of our Selves, as human beings.

Essentially, Viebig’s effect is that, „Natur kann dem Menschen Schutz und Zuflucht, aber auch Bedrohung sein.” (Krauss-Theim 148) *Nature can be to man a shield and a sanctuary, but also a threat.* “Nature in Viebig’s work has become a Christ-like figure that can silently either exalt or condemn an individual on the inside, according to his or her own actions and efforts. It was probably Viebig’s greatest accomplishment to write in such a way that it is up to the reader to interpret this effect, as Gabrielle Reuter described it “eine Stilkunst” a *silent art*, “clear” and “neutral” (Aretz, *Im Spiegel* 172).

Kaiser Wilhelm II failed to understand this effect when he criticized Viebig’s

early works. “[Wenn] Kunst ... nichts weiter tut, als das Elend noch scheußlicher hinzustellen, wie es schon ist, dann versündigt sie sich damit am deutschen Volke” (Stern 48-49). *If art does nothing further than make human misery worse than it already is, then it will only disgrace the German people.*” It is doubtful that the Kaiser read many of Viebig’s works or understood them completely, thus he probably made the same mistake that is committed in modern times. He not only categorized, but he categorized falsely.

Conclusion

Clara Viebig was praised all her life for her many novels, but almost as quickly as she was praised she was forgotten in both Germany and abroad after her death. Viebig was published all over the world in multiple languages, including Chinese and Russian, but it is difficult to assign one cause for this result. The ideological battles of the twentieth century may have caused the public to forget the simple truths found in her application of landscape. Of course a large portion of the blame must be attributed to the dangers of categorization, which has been thoroughly discussed here. The decline of faith and religiosity in Western civilization could have also contributed to the decline of Viebig’s popularity. Whatever the reasons for the decline, Viebig’s work can now hopefully be examined in a new light.

Viebig’s style remains a unique application of nature as a moral, if not spiritual guide. In this regard Viebig’s Eifel can enlighten readers to strive for personal betterment. This ancient human history of the Eifel combined with the natural history creates a conflux of finite and divine qualities; a concept found in Christian theology,

namely that man is a combination of the finite and the eternal, nature being the eternal sphere. Viebig's "bridge to the Eifel" is consequently a bridge to human purpose and a bridge which can only be crossed by paying the toll of understanding one's environment.

As readers, perhaps all Viebig wants us to remember is what the character Marianne described in another one of Viebig's novels, "Eine Handvoll ist's: um die wir ringen, wir mühen uns darum unser Leben lang: eine handvoll Erde. Aber siehe, einzig die letzte, sie, die uns deckt, macht uns ganz glücklich – nur sie allein! Und sie nur gehört uns ganz!" (Viebig, *Eine Handvoll* 308). "*It's a handful of earth; for which we wrestle, we drive ourselves our entire life long: a handful of earth. Behold it however, the last and only thing, it, that covers us, makes us quite happy – only it! And only it really belongs to us.*" That handful of earth is our connection to nature and inevitably according to Viebig's interpretations our own Selves.

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