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Dynamic Stillness

Philosophical Conceptions of *Ruhe*
in Schiller, Hölderlin, Büchner, and Heine



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Preface

For centuries the German word *Ruhe* has had almost magical associations.¹ Religious thinkers considered repose a principal attribute of God, poets wrote odes to stillness, and heroes strove for a goal of tranquillity and composure. Through a study of *Ruhe* one can recognize the evolution of several distinct traditions in German intellectual history. Drawing upon a large number of primary texts and the few secondary works which address the topic, I differentiate in this study four kinds of *Ruhe*. First, religious: In the mystic-pietistic tradition in Germany stillness is considered not only a characteristic of divinity but also a necessary precondition of man's oneness with God. Second, aesthetic: In the eighteenth century Winckelmann, who considered sculpture the highest of aesthetic forms, argued that stillness is a facet of all great art. Third, psychological-moral: From Stoic texts such as Seneca's *De tranquillitate animi* and later writings such as Spinoza's highly popular *Ethics* many a German sought to achieve the *Gemütsruhe* of a life in harmony with the laws of the cosmos. Fourth, political: At least since the *Allgemeines Landrecht für die preußischen Staaten* of 1794 Germans have associated political stabilization with *Ruhe*. According to this influential document the citizen is obliged to preserve „Ruhe und Ordnung“; the state in turn guarantees „Ruhe und Sicherheit“.

Besides analyzing *Ruhe* according to the spheres in which it functions, one can make a distinction, as Hölderlin does, between a „lebendige“ and a „leere Ruhe“, what I call dynamic and deficient stillness. In the first half of this study I analyze the eighteenth-century concept of dynamic stillness; here I offer new readings of Schiller's essay *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* and Hölderlin's novel, *Hyperion*. In the second half I analyze Büchner's story *Lenz*, in particular its inversion of the traditionally positive associations of *Ruhe*, and I consider Heine's *Zeitgedichte* and his satire *Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen* in the context of the increasingly pejorative association of *Ruhe* with political quietude.

¹ I often resist translating the word „Ruhe“ so as not to lose its multiple associations. Possible English translations cover a wide range and include such diverse words as quiet, calm, peace, detachment, death, harmony, sleep, collectedness, inactivity, serenity, order, resignation, composure, equanimity, stillness, repose, tranquillity, silence, and rest.

Ruhe is a prominent term that enters into a remarkable number of literary works from Meister Eckhart's sermons to Peter Handke's *Kaspar*.² I have focused on four authors whose works occupy significant positions in the development of the concept. While I view the works within their specific intellectual-historical contexts, I focus on the texts themselves. In each chapter the reader will find new interpretations. These range from major reinterpretations, like the reevaluation of the category "idyllic" in *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, the rereading of the conclusion of *Hyperion* and of the discourse on art in *Lenz*, to a more modest introduction of new dimensions to our understanding of the works in question, for example, the relation of the naive and sentimental to the philosophical discourse of the late eighteenth century, the significance of allusions in *Hyperion* to Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and Schiller's *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, and the importance of dormant regeneration for an understanding of Heine's *Zeitgedichte*.

Rather than burden the reader with a schematic history of the concept at the outset of this study, I have tried to allow both a conceptual and historical description of *Ruhe* to emerge simultaneously from my discussion of the individual texts. Dynamic stillness is analyzed in chapters one and two, deficient stillness in chapters three and four. The traditions of aesthetic, religious, and psychological-moral stillness are discussed in the context of Büchner's inversion of these traditions, and the politics of *Ruhe* is viewed together with Heine's critique of political quietude. In each case a central text or set of texts presents us with the starting point for a consideration of the philosophical and historical dimensions of *Ruhe*. By analyzing the works not only in their intellectual-historical contexts but as aesthetic constructs, I have tried to avoid the commonest danger of intellectual-historical studies – treating texts merely as documentary proof of a particular historical development. Competing discourses, narrative levels, rhetorical language, and other „intrinsic“ features occupy prominent positions in my analyses.

Finally, besides attempting to combine close textual readings with an awareness of intellectual-historical context, I have found it useful to adopt a proleptic approach, particularly in the first two chapters, where my readings challenge both traditional and poststructuralist interpretations.

² A list of authors who wrote odes and hymns to stillness becomes quite long, even if one limits it to a time span of one generation. In the late eighteenth century alone one thinks of Friedrich Leopold Stolberg („Die Ruhe“ 1772), Gotthold Friedrich Stäudlin („An die Ruhe“ 1784), Friedrich Matthison („An die Stille“ 1787), Christian Ludwig Neuffer („An die Ruhe“ 1791, „Die Ruhe. Eine allegorische Hymne“ 1800, „Hymne an die Ruhe“ 1805), Heusinger („An die Ruhe“ 1797), and Hölderlin („Die Stille“ 1788, „An die Ruhe“ 1789, „An die Stille“ 1790).