

Aushandlungen religiösen Wissens /  
Negotiated Religious Knowledge

Verfahren, Synergien und produktive Konkurrenzen  
in der Vormoderne /  
Methods, Interactions and Productive Rivalries  
in Premodern Times

Herausgegeben von / Edited by

Annette Gerok-Reiter  
Anne Mariss  
Markus Thome

Mohr Siebeck

*Annette Gerok-Reiter* ist Inhaberin des Lehrstuhls für deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters im europäischen Kontext an der Universität Tübingen; 2014–2020 zus. mit Prof. Dr. Volker Leppin Sprecherin des Graduiertenkollegs „Religiöses Wissen im vormodernen Europa (800–1800)“.

*Anne Mariss* ist Akademische Rätin a. Z. am Lehrstuhl für Neuere Geschichte (Frühe Neuzeit) an der Universität Regensburg. Sie war von 2014–2016 Postdoktorandin im Graduiertenkolleg „Religiöses Wissen im vormodernen Europa (800–1800)“.

*Markus Thome* ist wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter und Koordinator Baudokumentation bei der Denkmalpflege des Kantons Bern. 2011–2018 Juniorprofessor für Kunstgeschichte an der Universität Tübingen und Mitglied im Graduiertenkolleg „Religiöses Wissen im vormodernen Europa (800–1800)“.

## Vorwort / Preface

Der vorliegende Band geht in großen Teilen auf eine Tagung des Graduiertenkollegs „Religiöses Wissen im vormodernen Europa (800–1800)“ zurück, die 2015 in Oxford stattgefunden hat. Gastgeberin war Almut Suerbaum, der wir für die herzliche Aufnahme im Somerville College, die zur Verfügung gestellten Räumlichkeiten und das Arrangement der Gesprächsmöglichkeiten mit vielen englischen Kolleginnen und Kollegen sehr danken. Unser Dank gilt ebenfalls Volker Leppin und den weiteren Herausgeberinnen und Herausgebern für die Aufnahme des Bandes in die Reihe „Spätmittelalter, Humanismus, Reformation“ sowie dem Verlag Mohr Siebeck für die gute Betreuung. Besonderen Dank möchten wir auch Alexa Bornfleth, Nina Holzschuh und Sanja Ketterer zukommen lassen, die den Band sorgfältig Korrektur gelesen haben, sowie Susanne Borgards, die die redaktionellen Abläufe durch alle Stufen geduldig und sachkundig geleitet und begleitet hat.

November 2019

Annette Gerok-Reiter, Anne Mariss, Markus Thome

ISBN 978-3-16-159195-2 / eISBN 978-3-16-159196-9  
DOI 10.1628/978-3-16-159196-9

ISSN 1865-2840 / eISSN 2569-4391 (Spätmittelalter, Humanismus, Reformation)

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliographie; detaillierte bibliographische Daten sind über <http://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.

© 2020 Mohr Siebeck Tübingen, Germany. [www.mohrsiebeck.com](http://www.mohrsiebeck.com)

Das Werk einschließlich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung außerhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlags unzulässig und strafbar. Das gilt insbesondere für die Verbreitung, Vervielfältigung, Übersetzung und die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.

Das Buch wurde von epline in Böblingen aus der Minion gesetzt, von Gulde Druck in Tübingen auf alterungsbeständiges Werkdruckpapier gedruckt und von der Buchbinderei Spinner in Ottersweier gebunden.

Printed in Germany.

## Natural Science and Religious Knowledge

Martin Opitz's Didactic Poem *Vesuvius* (1633)<sup>1</sup>

JÖRG ROBERT

Shortly before Christmas, on 16 December 1631, Mount Vesuvius shook the area around Naples with one of its most forceful eruptions since the famous one of AD 79. The eruption lasted until the beginning of the following year and claimed several thousand lives. The event turned into the first natural disaster of the Old World that was dealt with in multiple media; "gantz Welschland" was "mit schrecken und neuen zeitungen erfüllet";<sup>2</sup> as canon Lucas Holstenius from Hamburg put it. In quick succession eyewitness reports, illustrated pamphlets, chronicles, declamations and sermons appeared, attempting to explain and interpret the events.<sup>3</sup>

As a result, a poetry of catastrophe thrived. In the field of Neo-Latin literature, Jakob Bidermann's epyllion *Campanum, seu Vesuvius flagrans*, in 46 verses of ten hendecasyllables each, should be mentioned.<sup>4</sup> As early as 1632, in Rome, Urbano Giorgi published an anthology tellingly entitled *Scelta di poesie nell'incendio del Vesuvio* (Rome 1632).<sup>5</sup> Giambattista Basile, author of *Pentamerone*

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on my earlier article *Poetische Naturwissenschaft*. Martin Opitz' Lehrgedicht *Vesuvius* (1633), in: *Daphnis* 46/2 (2018) (Brill), p. 188-214. I would like to thank the publisher for the right to translate and reprint the article. I would like to thank Karoline Zawistowska for the translation of this text; cf. ROBERT, JÖRG, Martin Opitz: *Vesuvius*, in: Roland Borgards et al. (eds.), *Literatur und Wissen. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*, Stuttgart 2013, p. 301-305.

<sup>2</sup> Qtd. in: KRAFFT, MAURICE, *Vulkane, Feuer der Erde*, Ravensburg 1993, p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> Sources and records in SCHREUERS, ANNA, *Der Vesuvausbruch von 1631, ein Spektakel auf der Weltbühne Europa. Anmerkungen zu Joachim von Sandrarts Beitrag zum Theatrum Europaeum von Matthäus Merian*, in: *Metaphorik.de* 14 (2008), p. 297-332.

<sup>4</sup> KÜHLMANN, WILHELM, *Der Jesuitendichter und die Naturkatastrophe – Bemerkungen zur Kombinatorik von Textklassen und Diskursen in Jacob Bidermanns poetischer Verarbeitung des Vesuvausbruchs von 1631 (Campanum, seu Vesuvius flagrans)*, in: Reinhold F. Gleiß/Robert Seidel (eds.), 'Parodia' und Parodie. Aspekte intertextuellen Schreibens in der lateinischen Literatur der Frühen Neuzeit, Tübingen 2006 (Frühe Neuzeit 120), p. 209-240; ZITTEL, CLAUS, 'La terra trema'. Unordnung als Thema und Form im frühneuzeitlichen Katastrophengedicht. Ausgehend von Martin Opitz, "Vesuvius", in: *Zeitsprünge* 12 (2008), p. 385-427.

<sup>5</sup> For the best overview of literature regarding Mount Vesuvius in general see the compendium by BUCHHEIM, FEDERIGO (FRIEDRICH), *Bibliografia del Vesuvio*, Naples 1897, ref. p. 66f. on Giorgi. Also MURPHY, ALEXANDRA, *Visions of Vesuvius*, Boston 1978; GASPARIANI, PAOLO/MUSELLA, SILVANA (eds.), *Un viaggio al Vesuvio. Il Vesuvio visto attraverso diari*,

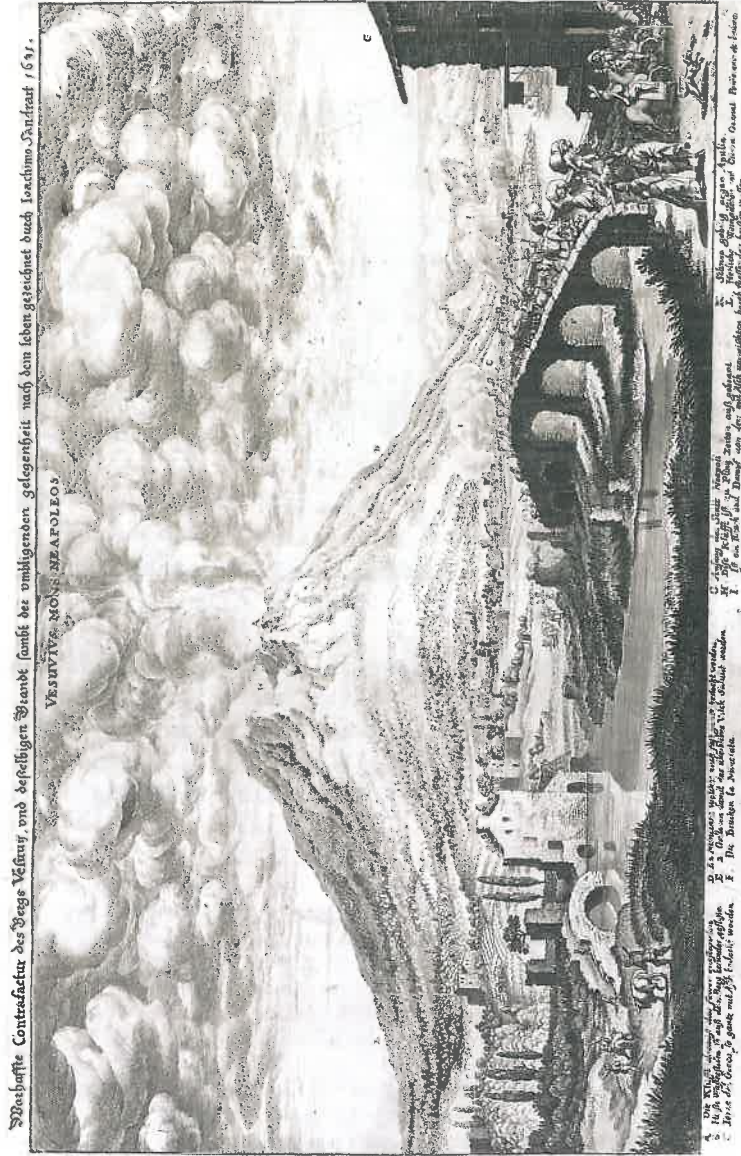


Fig. 1: „Wahrhafte Contracraftus des Bergs Vesuvij, und desselbigen Brandt sambt der umbligenden Gelegenheit nach dem leben gezeichnet durch Ioachimo Sandrart 1631“. Copperplate engraving by Merian after a drawing by Sandrart (1631). Theatri Europaei, Das ist: Historischer Chronick [...]. Frankfurt a. M.: Matthäus Merian 1646, Exemplar der Universitätsbibliothek Augsburg, 02/IV. 13. 2. 26-2, Tafel nach S. 510.

(1636), published a Petrarchan sonnet comparing the glow of the volcano to the harshness of the lady: “Ein Berg zerschmilzt und dein Herz wird zu Stein”<sup>6</sup> Even though the term ‘theodicy’ was coined later by Leibniz, the earthquake inevitably provoked theological concepts of punishment and justification which were discussed widely. Unlike the earthquake of Lisbon (1755), which was to effectively shake up the concept of ‘the best of all worlds’,<sup>7</sup> the eruption of Mount Vesuvius was (still) regarded as an affirmation of this perfect world order. As with comets, floods and other natural catastrophes, the eruption was seen as a miraculous sign from God (in the sense of Romans 1,18–21), calling for a change of direction.

Among the documents in German one text stands out: written by Martin Opitz (1597–1639), it was entitled simply *Vesuvius*, subtitle *Poëma Germanicum*.<sup>8</sup> Opitz wrote the text shortly after the volcanic eruption in the winter of 1632/33, which brought about changes both for the author and in the Thirty Years’ War.

On 16 November 1632, the Swedish King Gustav II Adolf lost his life in the battle of Lützen, and the rise of Wallenstein began. By September 1632, Opitz’s

lettere e resoconti di viaggiatori, Naples 1991; ABATINO, ELIO, *Vesuvio. Ein Vulkan und seine Geschichte*, Naples 2002; RICHTER, DIETER, *Der Vesuv. Geschichte eines Berges*, Berlin 2007.

<sup>6</sup> KRAFFT, *Vulkane* (cf. n. 2), p. 140.

<sup>7</sup> Exemplary: BREIDERT, WOLFGANG (ed.), *Die Erschütterung der vollkommenen Welt*, Darmstadt 1994; LÖFFLER, ULRICH, *Lissabons Fall – Europas Schrecken. Die Deutung des Erdbebens von Lissabon im deutschsprachigen Protestantismus des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 1999; KÜHLMANN, WILHELM, *Das Erdbeben von Lissabon als literarisches Ereignis*. Johann Peter Uz’ Gedicht *Das Erdbeben* im historisch-epochalen Kontext, in: *Jahrbuch der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften für 2005*, Heidelberg 2006, p. 92–96; AREND, STEFANIE, *Alte oder neue Katastrophendiskurse? Seneca, Plinius, Opitz, Voltaire*, in: Gerhard Lauer/Thorsten Unger (eds.), *Das Erdbeben von Lissabon und der Katastrophendiskurs im 18. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2008 (Das 18. Jahrhundert. Supplementa 15), p. 337–350.

<sup>8</sup> First edition: Martini Opitii *Vesuvius. Poëma Germanicum*, Brieg: Augustin Gründer 1633. See final edition Martin Opitz: *Weltliche Poemata 1644*. Erster Teil, ed. by Erich Trunz, Tübingen 1967, p. 31–102 (abbreviated as WP in the following); other writings following: Martin Opitz: *Gesammelte Werke*, 4 vols. (7 Teilbände), ed. by George Schulz-Behrend, Stuttgart 1968–1990 (MOGW). A critical edition of *Vesuvius* within the context of this publication will be published shortly: Martin Opitz: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5: *Werke 1630–1633*, ed. by Gudrun Bamberger and Jörg Robert, Stuttgart 2020. Literature on *Vesuvius*: GRIMM, GUNTER E., *Literatur und Gelehrtentum in Deutschland. Untersuchungen zum Wandel ihres Verhältnisses vom Humanismus bis zur Frühaufklärung*, Tübingen 1983 (Studien zur deutschen Literatur 75), p. 202–222; BECKER-CANTARINO, BARBARA, *Vesuvius. Poema Germanicum. Opitz und der Dreißigjährige Krieg*, in: Ead. (ed.), *Martin Opitz. Studien zu Werk und Person*, Amsterdam 1982 (Daphnis 11/3), p. 501–518; HÄFNER, RALPH, *Götter im Exil. Frühneuzeitliches Dichtungsverständnis im Spannungsfeld christlicher Apologetik und philologischer Kritik* (ca. 1590–1736), Tübingen 2003 (Frühe Neuzeit 80), p. 200–224; ID., *Naturae perdiscere mores. Naturrecht und Naturgesetz in Martin Opitz’ wissenschaftlichem Gedicht ‘Vesuvius’*, in: *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* N. F. 19/1 (2009), p. 41–50; ROBERT (cf. n. 1); ZITTEL, *Unordnung* (cf. n. 4); ALBERTSEN, LEIF L., *Das Lehrgedicht. Eine Geschichte der antikisierenden Sachepik in der neueren deutschen Literatur mit einem unbekanntem Gedicht Albrecht von Hallers*, Aarhus 1967, p. 76–107; LANGER, LEO, *Der Vesuvius von Martin Opitz*. Schulprogramm, Brünn 1896.

'catholic era'<sup>9</sup> under the burgrave Christoph von Dohna had come to an end. The poet, a protestant, changed allegiances and started serving the protestant Piast duke Johann Christian von Brieg. In return, Opitz dedicated his newly finished poem *Vesuvius* to the latter. It was published as a separate print in 1633 – just like his important war poem *Trostgedicht in Widerwertigkeit des Krieges*, which he had written as early as 1621. *Vesuvius* was to become one of the most successful poetic works of Martin Opitz. Gottsched, Bodmer and Breitinger would still regard it as the central German contribution to the genre of didactic poems. In research, however, Opitz's text has long been viewed very negatively: Leif Albertsen, in his *Geschichte des deutschen Lehrgedichts* (1967), states that in *Vesuvius*, Opitz asks obsolete questions in an unsuitable manner.<sup>10</sup> This implies two allegations, which do not only address Opitz, but didactic poetry<sup>11</sup> itself. From the point of view of literary history, the poet is accused of falling behind the geological-scientific knowledge of his time (argument of anachronism), while on the other hand, he is charged with the synthesis of incompatible

<sup>9</sup> Cf. SZYROCKI, MARIAN, Martin Opitz, München 1974, p. 95.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. ALBERTSEN, Lehrgedicht (cf. n. 8), p. 84.

<sup>11</sup> The research on didactic poetry, which can only be summarized in a general way here, tends to use a narrow and differentiated generic definition, which seems to be fulfilled by few of the early modern texts (in contrast to the situation of Neo-Latin epics). In the following, I will use the rather pragmatic definition by KÜHLMANN, WILHELM: s. v. Lehrdichtung, in: Harald Fricke (ed.), *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*, vol. 2, Berlin/New York 2007 (first 2000), p. 393–397, here p. 393: Lehrdichtung is a "überwiegend versgebundenes Schrifttum zur Vermittlung von Sach-, Verhaltens- und Orientierungswissen", which – as should be added – follows a genealogy mainly going back to antiquity (Hesiod, Empedocles, Lucretius, etc.). The term 'Lehrgedicht' is first used with terminological precision, but partly referring to other text types (fable), by Harsdörffer (e. g. in his edifying collection *Nathan und Jotham: das ist Geistliche und Weltliche Lehrgedichte* [1659]). For a more recent conceptual history we must refer to Gottsched. In his *Critische Dichtkunst*, he writes an extensive history of the didactic poem. Besides the term 'Lehrgedicht', he also uses 'dogmatisches Gedicht'. Gottsched, Johann Christoph, *Ausgewählte Werke*, 12 vols., Berlin/New York 1968–1987 (Ausgaben deutscher Literatur des XV. bis XVIII. Jahrhunderts), here vol. 6.2, p. 499–514 (Anhang II, 1.6.: "Von dogmatischen Gedichten"). Gottsched refers to Henricus Stephanus' collection of antique didactic poems, entitled *Poesis philosophica* (Geneva 1573). The modern term 'wissenschaftliche Poesie' (cf. SCHMIDT, ALFRED-M., *La poésie scientifique en France au seizième siècle*, Paris 1938) is favoured by Ralph Häfner (HÄFNER, Götter im Exil [cf. n. 8], p. 203) and, ultimately, is emphasized by Kühlmann (KÜHLMANN, WILHELM, *Wissen als Poesie. Ein Grundriss zu Formen und Funktionen der frühneuzeitlichen Lehrdichtung im deutschen Kulturraum des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin/Boston 2016 [Frühe Neuzeit 204]). This connects the discussion to the prospering field of 'Wissenspoetologie'. Cf. BORGARDS, ROLAND et al. (eds.), *Literatur und Wissen. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*, Stuttgart 2013. More recent research on the didactic poem in the field of the early modern epic has focused mainly on questions of genre. Cf. ROHMER, ERNST, *Das epische Projekt. Poetik und Funktion des 'carmen heroicum' in der deutschen Literatur des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Heidelberg 1998; CZAPLA, RALF GEORG, *Epen oder Dramen? Gattungstheoretische Überlegungen zu Andreas Gryphius' lateinischer Bibeldichtung*, in: *Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik* 32 (2000), p. 82–104.

elements from a poetic perspective. The didactic poem is seen as a monstrous hybrid form, connecting heterogeneous, even disparate elements – knowledge and literature – and failing both of them (argument of hybridity). Starting with those two verdicts, I would like to emphasize three points which trace the tense triangular relationship between literature, science and religion in early modern times: firstly, I would like to reconstruct Opitz's poetry of the *carmen heroicum* ("heroisch getichte"). Here, the didactic poem proves to be a genre of rejected autonomy. Secondly, I will place *Vesuvius* in the field of genre tradition and the poetics of knowledge, focusing especially on the interplay of natural science and religious knowledge. This leads to the question of textual organization and presentation.

### 1. Rejected Autonomy

For Martin Opitz, *Vesuvius* was anything but a by-product. Just how central the poem was for his poetological agenda is illustrated by the fact that the poet put it first in his last edition<sup>12</sup> of the *Weltliche Poemata* (1644), released posthumously. Apparently, this was an act of 'Werkpolitik',<sup>13</sup> referencing poetological assumptions set forth in his *Buch von der Deutschen Poeterey*: in the fifth chapter, dedicated to *inventio* and genre poetics ("Von der zuegehoer der Deutschen Poesie"), didactic poems and epic poems are subsumed as "Heroisch getichte" (*carmen heroicum*):

"Ein Heroisch getichte (das gemeiniglich weitleufftig ist / vnd von hohem wesen redet) soll man stracks von seinem innhalte vnd der Proposition anheben; wie Virgilius in den büchern vom Ackerbawe thut: 'Quid faciat lætas segetes, quo sidere terram. [...]'"<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Afterword Trunz (cf. n. 8), p. 3\*.

<sup>13</sup> MARTUS, STEFFEN, *Werkpolitik. Zur Literaturgeschichte kritischer Kommunikation vom 17. bis ins 20. Jahrhundert mit Studien zu Klopstock, Tieck, Goethe und George*, Berlin/New York 2007 (*Historia Hermeneutica* 3), who on pages 24–31 refers to Opitz's *Teutsche Poemata* and the fate of the editions of Opitz's works.

<sup>14</sup> Opitz, Martin, *Buch von der Deutschen Poeterey*. Studienausgabe, ed. by Herbert Jauermann, Stuttgart 2002, p. 26; on Opitz's genre poetics cf. ROBERT, JÖRG, 'Vetus Poesis – nova ratio carminum.' Martin Opitz und der Beginn der "Deutschen Poeterey", in: Jan-Dirk Müller/Id. (eds.), *Maske und Mosaik. Poetik, Sprache, Wissen im 16. Jahrhundert*, Münster et al. 2007 (*Pluralisierung & Autorität* 11), p. 397–440; TRAPPEN, STEFAN, *Gattungspoetik. Studien zur Poetik des 16. bis 19. Jahrhunderts und zur Geschichte der triadischen Gattungslehre*, Heidelberg 2001 (Beihefte zum *Euphorion* 40), p. 37–77; TRAPPEN, STEFAN, *Dialektischer und klassischer Gattungsbegriff bei Opitz. Ein übersehener Zusammenhang zwischen Aristoteles, Scaliger und der deutschen Barockpoetik*, in: BORGSTEDT, THOMAS/SCHMITZ, WALTER (eds.), *Martin Opitz: Nachahmungspoetik und Lebenswelt*, Tübingen 2002 (*Frühe Neuzeit* 63), p. 88–98.

Opitz's definition raises certain questions. There is no clear labelling of either narrative or didactical-reflecting poetry.<sup>15</sup> This does not necessarily need to be understood as a "völlig diffuse[s] Gattungsverständnis",<sup>16</sup> it is rather a conceptual confusion (weak hypothesis) or a conscious synthesis (strong hypothesis). In the case of Opitz, there is much to be said for this second hypothesis: didactic and heroic epics are connected on a formal level by their use of the Alexandrine as *versus heroicus* (analogous to the Latin hexameter). As for the content, the "heroisch getichte" are characterized by their extent ("weitleufftig") and the social differentiation ("von hohem wesen"). The latter seems to be applied mainly to narrative, grand 'Virgilian' epics. One could argue that *Vesuvius* also deals with 'higher nature', even: God. As the *Iliad* describes the wrath of Achilles, *Vesuvius* deals with the wrath of God faced with a barbarized humanity. What is surprising is that the examples given in the following are exclusively old and new didactic poems (leaving aside the Greek tradition!): Virgil's *Georgica*, Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, Guillaume du Bartas's *La Sepmaine; ou, Creation du monde* (1578), as well as Opitz's own *Trostgedicht*, published in 1633. In order to understand it, one should look at the apologetic preliminaries of the *Poeterey*, chapters two and three, in which Opitz tries to protect poetry from its critics. He puts forward a dangerous thesis: poetry is more than fabrication, and a poet more than 'just' a writer. The beginning of the second chapter states:

"Die Poeterey ist anfanges nichts anders gewesen als eine verborgene Theologie / vnd vnterricht von Göttlichen sachen. Dann weil die erste vnd rawe Welt gröber vnd vngeschlachtet war / als das sie hette die lehren von weißheit vnd himmlischen dingen recht fassen vnd verstehen können / so haben weise Männer / was sie zue erbawung der Gottesfurcht / gutter sitten vnd wandels erfunden / in reime vnd fabeln / welche sonderlich der gemeine pöfel zue hören geneiget ist / verstecken vnd verbergen müssen."<sup>17</sup>

Taking up an old argument by Aristotle, Opitz regards poets as "die ersten Väter der Weißheit".<sup>18</sup> Poetry is aesthetic instruction (moral-religious dimension) or

<sup>15</sup> On the didactic poem in German literature, besides KÜHLMANN, *Wissen als Poesie* (cf. n. 11), cf. also KRÄMER, OLAV, *Poesie der Aufklärung: Studien zum europäischen Lehrgedicht des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin/Boston 2017 (linguae & litterae 61).

<sup>16</sup> CZAPLA, *Epen oder Dramen?* (cf. n. 11), p. 91.

<sup>17</sup> Opitz, *Poeterey* (cf. n. 14), p. 14. On this passage cf. my reflections in: ROBERT, JÖRG, *Ethnofiktion und Klassizismus. Poetik des Wilden und Ästhetik der 'Sattelzeit'*, in: Jörg Robert/Friederike Günther (eds.), *Poetik des Wilden. Festschrift für Wolfgang Riedel*, Würzburg 2012, p. 3-39, here p. 26-28.

<sup>18</sup> Id., p. 15; on the topos cf. CURTIUS, ERNST ROBERT, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*, Tübingen/Basel 1993 (first 1948), p. 221-234. In connection with the passage in Opitz, Ralph Häfner refers to an elegy by Daniel Heinsius to the diplomat Jan Rutgers entitled [...] *poetas ac praecipue Homerum & Hesiodum primos sapientiae auctores esse*. HÄFNER, *Götter im Exil* (cf. n. 8), p. 201. Most recently, WELS, VOLKHARD, *Manifestationen des Geistes. Frömmigkeit, Spiritualismus und Dichtung in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Göttingen 2014 (Berliner Mittelalter- und Frühneuzeitforschung 17), p. 293-346, here p. 293, has noted "dass der Begriff der

knowledge transfer (epistemological-didactical dimension). That this personal union of poet and theologian has been overcome historically ("erste vnd rawe Welt") is understood by implication. In evolutionary terms, the didactic poem is an atavism, a reserve of a pre-modern, stratified society in which civilization could only be achieved by asymmetrical communication ("weise Männer" vs. "gemeine[r] pöfel"). The didactic poem attempts to reach back behind the process of functional differentiation and once again assembles the spheres of theology, science and poetry under the auspices of the latter.

In order to stress the relevance of poetry, the poet has to refute its autonomy (in the sense of self-reference and self-reflexiveness). Poetry as didactic writing is functional and heteronomous. Just like the general concept of 'aesthetic instruction', up until Lessing and Schiller,<sup>19</sup> it serves pedagogical, social and anthropological purposes outside of itself (heteronomy qua function), but also incorporates the knowledge of other fields (heteronomy qua inclusion). In the *Poeterey*, Opitz counters the thesis "die Poeterey bestehe ja bloß in jhr selber" (autonomy qua *techné*) with the thesis "[poetry], die doch alle anderen künste vnd wissenschafften in sich helt".<sup>20</sup> In this, he follows the topic of *laus eloquentiae*, coined by Cicero, according to which formed speech – be it fettered or not – "sets no boundaries or limits to [his] claims".<sup>21</sup> In poetry's claim of universality, autonomy and heteronomy coincide in a paradoxical manner: only poetry is able to be more than itself. It is autonomous because it is heteronomous. In our context, this means that the dignity of poetry is its 'truth', i. e. the scientific and religious knowledge it imparts. In this, it excludes everything which is fabricated. Reference replaces fiction. The literary aspect of the *carmen heroicum* neither lies in its form (*elocutio*) nor its fiction (*inventio, fictio*), but in its purpose of transforming science into religious knowledge and habitualizing it. The didactic poem is literature which denies being literature (in the sense of fiction). It is a form of rejected autonomy. Only the didactic epic – not the historical-mythological epic in the wake of the Aeneid – can claim to write the truth ("mit Warheit

'verborgenen Theologie' nicht auf den Neuplatonismus verweist, sondern auf den Gottesbeweis e consensu gentium, der im Calvinismus große Bedeutung hat."

<sup>19</sup> The tension between autonomy and heteronomy remains inscribed into the form of the didactic poem and the thought of 'aesthetic education'. Even Schiller, one of the foremost thinkers of aesthetic autonomy, still deals with this tension. Cf. ROBERT, JÖRG, "Die Kunst, o Mensch, hast du allein." *Kunstreligion und Autonomie in Schillers Gedicht Die Künstler*, in: Cornelia Remi/Gideon Stiening/Frieder von Ammon (eds.), *Literatur und praktische Vernunft. Festschrift für Friedrich Vollhardt*, Berlin/Boston 2016, p. 393-412. On the problem of autonomy in premodern aesthetics cf. GEROK-REITER, ANNETTE/ROBERT, JÖRG, *Reflexionsfiguren der Künste in der Vormoderne. Ansätze – Fragestellungen – Perspektiven*, in: Annette Gerok-Reiter/Jörg Robert/Anja Wolkenhauer/Stefanie Gropper (eds.), *Reflexionsfiguren der Künste – Formen, Typen, Topoi*, Heidelberg 2019, p. 11-33.

<sup>20</sup> Opitz, *Poeterey* (cf. n. 14), p. 17, chapter III.

<sup>21</sup> Cicero, *De Oratore I*, tr. by Edward W. Sutton, London 1967, p. 51-53.

schreibe", *Vesuvius*, p. 43). However, this focus on 'truth' vs. 'fiction' turns the didactic poem into a precarious and paradoxical form, a borderline case of poetry, as shown in Batteux' definition: "Daher kann man das didaktische Gedicht überhaupt beschreiben: die Wahrheit in Verse gebracht; und, zum Gegensatz, die andere Gattung der Poesie: die Erdichtung in Verse gebracht."<sup>22</sup>

The position reached by Opitz and Batteux can be understood as a defiant answer to a verdict put forward by Aristotle in his *Poetics* (1447b).<sup>23</sup> "Homer and Empedocles have nothing in common except the form of verse they use; so it would be fair to call the former a poet, but the latter a natural scientist rather than a poet."<sup>24</sup> Aristotle's exclusion of the didactic poem from poetry has no practical impact in antiquity, as shown by the rich tradition of didactic epics beginning from Lucretius, which always refer back to Hesiod, Empedocles and Parmenides, as well as by the sparse poetological reflection about the didactic poem itself.<sup>25</sup> Changes to this only appeared in the modern reception of *Poetics* since Robortello's *Explicationes* (1548). The necessity to align the Aristotelian position on didactic poetry with the actual production of didactic poems arose only then.<sup>26</sup> The resulting "kaleidoscopic variety of teachings"<sup>27</sup> defines poetological discussions until the 18th century, while the practical application – especially in German-speaking areas – remains strangely untouched by this. The peak phase in the reception of Aristotle's *Poetics* between 1750 and 1800 became a heyday of didactic poetry, too – often because of and with recourse to the German tradition introduced by *Vesuvius*. This paradox is nowhere more obvious than in the case of Lessing, who published a total of nine didactic poems between 1748 and 1752, among them the famous fragment *Die Religion*,<sup>28</sup> only

<sup>22</sup> Batteux, Charles, Einleitung in die schönen Wissenschaften. Nach dem Französischen des Hrn Batteux, mit Zusätzen vermehret von Karl Wilhelm Ramler, vol. 3, Wien 1770, p. 95.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. FABIAN, BERNHARD, Das Lehrgedicht als Problem der Poetik. Die nicht mehr schönen Künste. Grenzphänomene des Ästhetischen, ed. by Hans Robert Jauß, München 1968 (Poetik und Hermeneutik 3), p. 68-89.

<sup>24</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, tr. by Malcolm Heath, Harmondsworth 1996, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> FABIAN, Lehrgedicht (cf. n. 23), p. 68-74.

<sup>26</sup> ROELLENBLECK, GERD, Das epische Lehrgedicht Italiens im fünfzehnten und sechzehnten Jahrhundert. Ein Beitrag zur Literaturgeschichte des Humanismus und der Renaissance, München 1975.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. FABIAN, Lehrgedicht (cf. n. 23), p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> FICK, MONIKA, Lessing-Handbuch. Leben - Werk - Wirkung, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., Stuttgart/Weimar 2010, p. 111-114; SIEGRIST, CHRISTOPH, Das Lehrgedicht der Aufklärung, Stuttgart 1974; NISBET, HUGH BARR, Lessing. Eine Biographie, München 2008, p. 110-112; HOHENBERG, OSKAR, Über Lessings Lehrgedichte, Berlin 1883. On *Die Religion* MULTHAMMER, MICHAEL, Lessings 'Rettenungen': Geschichte und Genese eines Denkstils, Berlin/Boston 2013 (Frühe Neuzeit 183), p. 228-237; MAHLMANN-BAUER, BARBARA, Lessings Fragment "Die Religion" und das Saatgut, das in "Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts" aufgegangen ist, in: Christoph Bultmann/Friedrich Vollhardt (eds.), Gotthold Ephraim Lessings Religionsphilosophie im Kontext. Hamburger Fragmente und Wolfenbütteler Axiomata, Berlin 2011, p. 27-72; VOLLHARDT, FRIEDRICH, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, München 2016, p. 24-32; an appraisal of the 'smaller' frag-

to repeat Aristotle's verdict a few years later, in the pamphlet *Pope, ein Metaphysiker!* (1755), which he published together with Mendelssohn: "Lucrez und seines gleichen, sind Versmacher, aber keine Dichter."<sup>29</sup> In his essay on *Didactic Poetry* (1827), Goethe at least refers to "didaktische oder schulmeisterliche Poesie" as "ein Mittelgeschöpf zwischen Poesie und Rhetorik" which varies in poetic value.<sup>30</sup> As a "Ab- und Nebenart" of the actual "Naturformen der Dichtung", its value remains uncertain: In Goethe's natural poetology, which correlates a literary and a biological system of genres, the didactic poem is a non-viable, even monstrous organism which challenges the natural order of genres. It is therefore an almost impossible requirement, "ein Werk aus Wissen und Einbildungskraft zusammenzuweben: zwei einander entgegengesetzte Elemente in einem lebendigen Körper zu verbinden."<sup>31</sup>

## 2. Poetics of Knowledge

For Aristotle, Lessing and Goethe, the didactic poem is a precarious genre, because it transcends, in part or as a whole, the borders of poetry. They each emphasize different points: while Aristotle contrasts poetry and natural philosophy ('physiology'), Lessing stresses the traditional opposition of *poeta* and *versificator*; for Goethe, however, it crosses the boundaries into rhetoric. Older research on the didactic poem argues from a scientific point of view. Its argument – as illustrated in the quote by Leif Albertsen – targets the inadequacy of poetic depiction for scientific content. This compatibility of poetry and knowledge, however, is not something Opitz would compromise. As we have seen, it is rather his main apologetic argument. The didactic poet does not create fiction, but rather interprets, by transforming natural philosophical knowledge into religious knowledge, as will become clear later on. This transforming interpretation is based on a method which is by no means obsolete in the face of 'new science': the ideal of a poetic or philological natural science. The title *Vesuvius* already sends two signals. For one, it announces a scholarly, academic treatise in the style of Athanasius Kircher's *Mundus subterraneus* (1664, <sup>2</sup>1678), written in Latin. On the other hand, it signals a link to the tradition of Latin and Neo-Latin poetry. Examples

ments with an interest in natural science in: GÜTHKE, KARL S., 'Nicht fremd seyn auf der Welt'. Lessing und die Naturwissenschaften, in: Lessing Yearbook 25 (1993), p. 55-79.

<sup>29</sup> Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, Werke, vol. 3: Frühe kritische Schriften, ed. by Herbert G. Göpfert et al., München 1972 (rpt. Darmstadt 1996), here p. 637.

<sup>30</sup> Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, Über das Lehrgedicht, in: Id., Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens. Münchner Ausgabe, ed. by Karl Richter in Zusammenarbeit mit Herbert G. Göpfert et al., vol. 13.1.: Die Jahre 1820-1826, ed. by Gisela Henckman/Irmela Schneider, München/Wien 1992, p. 498f., here p. 498.

<sup>31</sup> Id., p. 499.

of this are the poem *De Aetna* (1496) by Pietro Bembo, as well as *De Aetna* from the Appendix Vergiliana (1st century BC), which Opitz, for the most part, simply translates or paraphrases.<sup>32</sup> The great Epicurean didactic poem *De rerum natura* by Lucretius is an obvious further example.<sup>33</sup> As the dominant, guiding pretext, it is not so much its definite Epicurean dogma that has an influence – this has been the subject of a polemical dispute since antiquity – but rather a specific habitus, which by means of *imitatio* becomes the preformed frame of reference and the space which enables scientific and religious insight. This habitus is determined by four aspects:

- a) **Rationalism:** Lucretius advocates a demonstrative ‘proto-enlightenment’ rationalism that seeks *objective*, natural causes (*naturae species ratioque*, Lucretius I, 149) in order to derive *subjective* attitudes – firmness of the soul (*ataraxia*), deification, etc. Natural sciences are the means to an (ethical) end.<sup>34</sup>
- b) **Habitus and social index:** Beginning with Lucretius, didactic poetry has always had a socially inclusive index; the attitude *is* the method. In the case of Opitz, this ethos is a stoical or neo-stoical one (following Justus Lipsius).<sup>35</sup> His three key terms are freedom from passion (*apathy*), self-sufficiency (*autarchy*) and steadfastness (*ataraxia*). Superiority and serenity point towards a socially exposed position, which in modernity conveys ideal religious role models and attitudes: the natural scientist views creation “vergnügt” from

<sup>32</sup> HÄFNER, Götter im Exil (cf. n. 8), p. 207 f. Opitz owned a manuscript of *De Aetna*, which however shows no traces of having been read. FRITZ, JOSEPH, Zu Martin Opitz philologischen Studien, in: Euphorion 26 (1925), p. 201–208; on the fate of the manuscript DE VIVO, ARTURO, Sulla tradizione manoscritta dell’ *Aetna*, in: Vichiana, N. S. 16 (1987), p. 85–102.

<sup>33</sup> On the subject of Lucretius himself, I refer to the concise depiction by ERLER, MICHAEL, Lukrez, in: Hellmut Flashar (ed.), Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie. Begründet von Friedrich Ueberweg. Die Philosophie der Antike, vol. 4: Die hellenistische Philosophie, Basel 1994, p. 381–490.

<sup>34</sup> Id., p. 440.

<sup>35</sup> On the subject of Opitz’s stoicism, which determines the reading of the figure of *constantia*, cf. ROBERT, JÖRG, Martin Opitz und die Konstitution der Deutschen Poetik. Norm, Tradition und Kontinuität zwischen “Aristarch” und “Buch von der Deutschen Poeterey”, in: Euphorion 98 (2004), p. 281–322, here p. 307–322. On Lipsianism in regard to history of style and politics cf. KÜHLMANN, WILHELM, Gelehrtenrepublik und Fürstenstaat, Tübingen 1982 (Studien und Texte zur Sozialgeschichte der Literatur 3), p. 204–255; on the differentiation between stoicism and genuine reception of Seneca in a very nuanced way cf. AREND, STEFANIE, Senecaische Kulturkritik in den Tragödien Gryphius’ und Lohensteins, Tübingen 2003 (Frühe Neuzeit 81). Besides, the works of HADOT, PIERRE (exemplary: Philosophie als Lebensform: Antike und moderne Exerziten der Weisheit, Frankfurt a. M. 2002) have shown how strongly the Hellenistic school of philosophy is bound together by a common goal, however different the dogmatics: an autopraxis constituting and stabilizing the subject. Michel Foucault, following Hadot, famously calls this “souci de soi”. These traces can be found in research on early modern times: not just because the texts from Seneca to Marcus Aurelius, as named by Hadot, are present especially in 17th century writing, but because those ‘exercices spirituelles’ are among the transdiscursive thought pattern of early modern times. It is not without reason that Hadot, in the title of one of the most momentous ‘autopractical’ texts of the early modern period, references Ignatius of Loyola’s *Exercitia spiritualia* (printed in 1548).

“oben her” (p. 49), “sicher und mit Ruhe des Hertzens” (p. 75). In order to do this, he frees himself from belief and superstition (lat. *religio*) which are being encouraged by the unrestrained mythological fiction of the poets. The right religion is determined by criticism of the wrong religion, superstition, which has an explicitly social index. This is true for Opitz: the “Hauffen” or “Pöbel” (p. 77) do not see, but merely wonder, because they cannot understand nature’s characteristics: “Doch wundert sich das Volck / und weil es bey den Sachen // Von ihrer Eygenschaft nicht Rechnung weiß zu machen // Gebraucht die Augen mehr als Sinnen und Verstand.” (p. 75) While in the light of the eruption “deß Volckes Hertzen zittern” (p. 60), the poet as religious interpreter keeps his calm.

- c) **Topics and competences:** *De rerum natura* by Lucretius ends in a description of the plague in Athens. The subject of pestilence and catastrophe has thus been established as a subject matter. Fracastoro writes a didactic poem about syphilis (1530), Opitz writes one about a volcanic eruption, and ‘Sturm und Drang’-poet J. M. R. Lenz describes *Landplagen* (1769).
- d) **Heteronomy of knowledge:** Neither poetry is autonomous towards science nor science independent of ethical and religious horizons. Contemplation of nature has essential psychagogical-ethical, therapeutic and consoling functions (cf. Epicurus’s *Tetrpharmakos*). The search for the *rerum causae* is an exercise in acquiring ethical or, as is the case with Opitz, religious dispositions. The didactic poem is thus homiletic rather than didactic, meant to eliminate metaphysical doubts and to compensate contingency. It is therefore an instrument of contingency compensation, a theodicy machine, with the poet acting as stand-in *homo compensator*.<sup>36</sup> This corresponds with an air of instruction.

Those four aspects are consolidated early on in the proem of *Vesuvius*, which attempts – not without tension – to create a hierarchical order of creation and creation, natural science and religious knowledge:

“Natur/ von derer Krafft/ Luft/ Welt vnd Himmel sind/  
Des Höchsten Meisterrecht/ vnd erstgebornes Kind/  
Du Schwester aller Zeit/ du Mutter dieser Dinge/  
O Göttin/ gönne mir daß mein Gemüte dringe  
In seiner Wercke Reich/ vnd etwas sagen mag  
Darvon kein Teutscher Mund noch biß auff diesen Tag  
Poetisch nie geredt: ich will mit Warheit schreiben  
Warumb Vesuuus kan Steine von sich treiben/  
Woher sein Brennen rührt/ vnd was es etwan sey  
Darvon der Glut sich nehrt. [...]”  
(WP I, p. 43)

<sup>36</sup> MARQUARD, ODO, Zur anthropologischen Karriere eines metaphysischen Begriffs. Studien, in: Id., Philosophie des Stattdessen, Stuttgart 2000, p. 11–29.



Not only do these lines aim to present Opitz as the founder of German poetry (“poetisch nie geredt”, the cultural-patriotic dimension), they also aim to legitimize poetry on the whole as a medium which recognizes and teaches the truth (epistemological dimension). The poet is cast in the role of a genealogist discovering family relations on the divine level: God is the father of nature, who in turn is mother of all things. As far as gender is concerned, the subordination of natural science (as ‘daughter’) under theology (‘science of the father’) is explicit. The claim of writing with truth (“mit Wahrheit schreiben”) aims to discard all poetic *figmenta*, stresses referentiality over fictionality and imagination. In order to achieve this, the poet needs to guard himself against the “Dichter Wahn” – meaning mythological explanations or religious heterodoxy:

“[...] es glaube keiner nicht  
 Diß was der Dichter Wahn von diesen Orthen spricht /  
 Vulcanus habe sie zu seiner Werckstatt innen /  
 Auß welcher solcher Plitz und Flammen sich entspinnen /  
 Wann er deß Jupiters Geschoß bey stiller Nacht  
 Sampt Brontes / Steropes unnd dem Pyracmon macht /  
 Daß Stahl vnd Amboß klinget. Sie nnen auch Giganten  
 So auff die Himmlischen auß stoltzem Grimm entbrandten/  
 Und worden endlich noch mit grosser Noth erlegt/  
 [...]”  
 Nun diese Freyheit ist Poeten ja zu geben /  
 Als Schülern der Natur / bey denen Steine leben /  
 Und Götter sterblich sind: ich habe mir erkiest  
 Sonst nichts hier an zu ziehn als was unlaugbar ist.”  
 (WP I, p. 61)

The criticism of myths is already present in Opitz’s most important pre-text, the poem *Aetna*, which campaigns against the *fallacia uatum* (v. 29).<sup>37</sup> True religion reveals itself by revealing the wrong one. The impulse to criticize *religio* has been established as a habitus of the genre since Lucretius – enlightenment not *against*, but *through* emulation.<sup>38</sup> The same holds true for the habitus of peace of mind, which is verbalized in the proem of the second book and would play a central role for the philosophy of the sublime in the 18th century. The poet sees, while the people, the “Hauffen”, simply stare. This elitist air is combined with a confessional, anti-Catholic dig: “Der allermeiste Hauffen / Kompt auff die Tempel

<sup>37</sup> Opitz practically translates the verses: Virgil, *De Aetna*, in: Appendix Vergiliana, ed. by Wendell V. Clausen et al., Oxford 1966, p. 42; cf. HÄFNER, Götter im Exil (cf. n. 8).

<sup>38</sup> This might explain why Opitz, in *Schaefferey*, lets the nymph speak of giants under the local Sudeten mountains: “Wißet daß Sicilien nicht allein Cyclophen / vndt Theßalien Titanen getragen hatt; es liegen allhier zweene mächtige Giganten / welche sich eben wie jene an dem himmel zue vergreifen vntr standen / vndt von den göttern vntr diese klüfften sindt verstoßen worden. Sie haben den geschmack des schwefels noch anjetzo nicht verlohren / vndt riechen nach dem plitze vndt donner / darmit sie Jupiter hatt herab gestürzt”. Opitz, Martin, *Schäfferey von der Nimfen Hercinie*, ed. by Peter Rusterholz, Stuttgart 1969, p. 45.

zu mit heißer Brunst gelauffen / Sagt seine Sünden auff”.<sup>39</sup> By calling Catholic churches ‘temples’, he moves them towards the area of pagan superstition.<sup>40</sup> They take the space of the temples of pagan gods mentioned at the end of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*. Thus, while Opitz rejects all mythological explanations of natural phenomena, *Vesuvius* is replete with mythology. In the wake of Horace, Opitz invokes the *licentia poetarum* (“diese Freyheit ist Poeten ja zu geben”). In this, he combines modern rationalism with the motif of *poeta creator*: the poet is free to make the inanimate come to life (through metaphors, metonymy, personification, etc.). This puts him on the same level as *natura naturans*, mentioned in the first verses of the proem. Art is the continuation of nature by different means.<sup>41</sup>

For Opitz, classical mythology is legitimate as linguistic ornament, i. e. in the form of prosopoeia, in a metonymic or allegorical sense – as can be seen in the *Buch von der Deutschen Poeterey*.

“Die nahmen der Heidnischen Götter betreffend / derer sich die stattlichsten Christlichen Poeten ohne verletzung jhrer religion jederzeit gebrauchet haben / angesehen das hierunter gemeinlich die Allmacht Gottes / welcher die ersten menschen nach den sonderlichen wirkungen seiner vnbegreiflichen Maiestet vnterschiedene namen gegeben / als sie / wie Maximus Tyrius meldet / durch Minerven die vorsichtigkeit / durch den Apollo die Sonne / durch den Neptunus die Lufft [bezeichnet] [...], ist allbereit hin vnd wieder so viel bericht darvon geschehen / das es weiterer außführung hoffentlich nicht wird von nöthen sein.”<sup>42</sup>

Mythology is a sign of “zierlichkeit” and elegance, serving “zue besseren fortpflanzung vnserer sprachen”, as described in the preface to *Poeterey* (p. 13). On the other hand, it is a genre marker, because Opitz and his hymn on Mother Nature follow the Venus hymn of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*:

*Aeneadam genitrix, hominum divumque voluptas,  
 alma Venus, caeli subter labentia signa  
 quae mare navigerum, quae terras frugiferentis  
 concelebras; per te quoniam genus omne animantum  
 concipitur visitque exortum lumina solis [...]*

<sup>39</sup> WP I, p. 60.

<sup>40</sup> More specifically, the practice of ‘confession of the mouth’ (*confessio oris*) is criticized. Cf. Hieronymus Welsch’s travel writing: Welsch, Hieronymus, Hieronymi Welschen selbsterfahrne Reiß Beschreibung, Nürnberg 1659, here Cap. XIV, p. 80–83: “In der gantzen Stadt war anders nichts / als Buß predigen / Betten / Litaney singen / Beichten / *communiciren*”. Quoted from KÜHLMANN, Jesuitendichter (cf. n. 4), p. 219, n. 28.

<sup>41</sup> In a poem to his friend, the painter Bartholomäus Strobel (*Über deß berühmten Mahlers Herrn Bartholomei Strobels Kunstbuch*), Opitz attributes the power of continuing the productive principle of nature to the art of painting, albeit with critical portents. ROBERT, JÖRG, “geschwister Kinder”. Bildtheorie und Paragone bei Martin Opitz, in: Id. (ed.), *Intermedialität in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Berlin/New York 2017 (Frühe Neuzeit 209), p. 322–346.

<sup>42</sup> Opitz, *Poeterey* (cf. n. 14), p. 19f.

“Mother of Aeneas’ sons, joy of men and gods, Venus the life-giver, who beneath the gliding stars of heaven fillest with life the sea that carries the ships and the land that bears the crops; for thanks to thee every tribe of living things is conceived, and comes forth to look upon the light of the sun.”<sup>43</sup>

Opitz explicitly mentions this passage as a model in his *Buch von der Deutschen Poeterey*. But it comes with a warning: “Nachmals haben die heiden jhre Götter angeruffen / das sie jhnen zue vollbringung des werckes beystehen wollen: denen wir Christen nicht allein folgen / sondern auch an frömmigkeit billich sollen vberlegen sein.”<sup>44</sup>

The obligation of *imitatio* is overarched by the commitment to Christian *aemulatio*. The substitution of pagan entities with Christian ones is not fully realized in the poem. Just like Lucretius astonishes and irritates his reader, who is well-versed in the Epicurean doctrine, Opitz does not banish all reminiscence of the classical tradition. He escapes this mechanism by emphasizing – contrary and in parallel to the Lucretian doctrine – the Hesiodic teachings of the poet-theologian, who performatively retraces the genealogy and birth of the Gods in the opening part.

### 3. The Book of Nature

*Vesuvius* consists of three parts which form a framework structure: an extensive introduction, which lays down the goals and conditions of the project, is followed by a scientific main part stating the geological explanations of the catastrophe and offering a scientific theory of volcanism and earthquakes. In itself, the scientific core of the middle parts of the poem is autonomous; in the sense of Lucretian proto-rationalism, it presents the reasons for volcanism and remains free of theological arguments. Earthquakes and volcanism are attributed to natural processes in the core of the earth.<sup>45</sup> In this, Opitz follows a theory dating back to antiquity (Aristotle, Lucretius, Seneca), according to which strong winds in porous ground ignite flammable substances like alum and sulphur, leading to discharge of pyroclastic flows. In the words of Opitz:

“Der ganze Boden hier sey vmb vnd vmb durchfahren  
Mit Löchern da der Wind sich dringet auß vnd ein/  
Darinnen Schwefel auch gebürtig pflegt zuseyn

<sup>43</sup> Titus Lucretius Carus, *De rerum natura*, vol. 1: Prolegomena, text and critical apparatus, translation, book I, tr. by Cyril Bailey, Oxford 1963, p. 177, v. 1.1-5. The Venus proem is notoriously problematic in Lucretian research, which here sees the poet contradicting himself. It is regarded as a conscious provocation, even a ‘test’ to see if the reader has really understood the teachings of Epicurus, by Michael Erler (ERLER, Lukrez [cf. n. 33], p. 412).

<sup>44</sup> Opitz, *Poeterey* (cf. n. 14), p. 27.

<sup>45</sup> ZITTEL, *Unordnung* (cf. n. 4), p. 412-414.

Der Glut vnd Feuer hält. Das kann vns Baja weisen/  
Vnd wo die Seelen hin zur Höllen sollen reysen  
Der schwarze Teich Avern. [...]”  
(WP I, p. 67)

This explanation, as mentioned before, is based on state-of-the-art scientific knowledge, represented especially by Seneca’s *Naturales Quaestiones*: around ten years later, René Descartes will confirm it in his influential theory of the world in *Principia philosophica* (1644). For Opitz, it is important to provide some sort of scientific explanation of the phenomena, no matter *which one*. Amassing arguments, even uncoordinated ones (i. e. 29 points that prove the mortality of the soul), is a strategy which goes back to Lucretius.<sup>46</sup> The search for natural causes is at the centre of the text, but it is not its *telos*, because in the end, geology moves towards a theological perspective. In a comforting and scolding speech, Opitz interprets the eruption of 1631 as a sign of God’s wrath against the “Barbarey” (p. 83) of the civil war in faraway central Europe: “Dein Ves(u)vius ist hier” he calls out to the (German) reader. Natural science and theology are not in contradiction with each other. God uses nature’s signs to communicate with humanity. But humanity is not willing to understand the language of nature:

“[...] Diß alles ist Natur; wir aber sind so gar  
Geblendt vnd verstockt / daß wir in allen Wercken  
Deß weisen Schöpfers Macht vnnnd Ordnung nimmer mercken /  
Als wann was newes sich / wie schlecht es auch mag seyn /  
Für vnsern Augen zeigt. [...]”  
(WP I, p. 76f.)

The question of theodicy is therefore not a correct one. Nature and order are the same for Opitz. All the more noticeable, even contradictory, is thus the addition of bitterness, resulting from Lucretius’s anti-providential view of nature. It is true “daß doch alle Gaben / der gütigen Natur so viel Gebrechen haben” (p. 53). This unease with nature merges with an unease with the depths, more particularly with the realization that “das Erdrich / also weit sein grosser Umschweiff reichet / [...] löcherig und hol [ist]” (p. 63). Opitz’s image of nature as the opposing female authority to God the Father is set between those two poles – cosmos and chaos. And because of this, it is important to prove that the processes are entirely natural. Even anomaly – the new and the wonderful – is an extreme case of what is normal, safely included in an order of creation. Those who view nature “mit Augen der Vernunft” recognize that “in seines Schöpfers Werck [...] alles reich an Güte / Vnd voller Weißheit ist” (p. 44). God uses nature as a *medium*, in which there are no places of uncertainty, no sign-free zones of absolute contingency. Opitz uses the metaphor of the ‘book of nature’ in his role as poet and philologist. In this, he differs from Galilei’s use of the same metaphor: in his

<sup>46</sup> ERLER, Lukrez (cf. n. 33), p. 412.

*Il Saggiatore* (1623), Galilei had described philosophy as written ‘in the language of mathematics’ (“scritto in lingua matematica”), its signs being ‘triangles, circles and other geometrical figures’; mathematics, for Galilei as for his friend and correspondent Kepler, is ‘the language of God the Geometer’.<sup>47</sup> However, quantitative processes, which would determine the further progress of modern physics, are alien to Opitz. God is not the *deus geometer*, but rather a God of poetry, a *creator poeta*. Because of this, the interpretation of the book of nature requires the skills of a poet-philologist:

“[...] Die Welt das grosse Buch / auß derer Thun und Wesen  
Er von demselben kann auff allen Blättern lesen  
Der sie erschaffen hat / vnd seines Segens Krafft  
So reichlich in sie geußt. Solt’ vns die Wissenschaft  
Nicht frey vnd offen stehn / was wollten wir viel leben?”  
(WP I, p. 48)<sup>48</sup>

Of course this is a reaction to Augustinian invectives against curiosity (*curiositas*). Therefore, Opitz justifies his endeavours both in an anthropological and a theological way: within the order of creation, the contemplation of natural phenomena is both the prerogative and duty of humankind: “Alsdann kann erst ein Mensch sich einen Menschen nennen // Wann seine Lust ihn trägt und dringt sich in den Schoß / Und Gründe der Nature [...]” (p. 49). Revelation knowledge can not only be gained from holy texts. *Omnis mundi creatura quasi liber et scriptura* – this idea was used to forge a counterargument to the Augustinian criticism of *curiositas*. Poet and poetry are the means to make revelation knowledge in its double form – as book of books and book of nature – available as a guiding principle. Poetry therefore is a medium in all respects, and the poet is a mediator between nature, God and humanity. The question “Was diese newe Glut des Berges uns will sagen” is interpreted by Opitz according to his irenic position: as a warning against continuing the civil war (“Bürgerliche schwerdt”, p. 81) for its own sake:

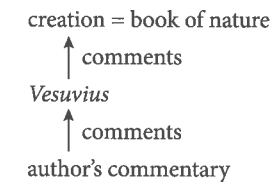
“ja daß auch Gott Cometen  
Gewässer / Donner / Plitz vnd Beben als Propheten  
Vnd Boten zu vns schickt / durch die er oft vnd viel  
Verkündigt wie sein Zorn an uns sich rächen will.  
[...] So hat man wargenommen  
Daß niemals diese Glut umbsonst herauff ist kommen/  
Sie führet dürre Zeit / vnd Pest vnd Schlacht mit ihr.”  
(WP I, p. 80)

<sup>47</sup> For all citations cf. BLUMENBERG, HANS, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*, Frankfurt a. M. 1981, p. 74f.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. WP I, p. 78: “Der H. Basilius sagt: Diese gantze Welt ist wie ein vollgeschriebenes Buch / welches uns die Ehre Gottes ankündigt / und die verborgene und unsichtbare Majestät Gottes durch sich selber fuorträgt.”

The metaphor of the book of nature turns God the creator into God the *author*. If creation is His “Werck”, then nature becomes understandable in categories of poetry and philology. *Poeta creator* and *creator poeta* relate to each other, they are – literally – a communicating team. From this constellation, a double commentary structure arises, as illustrated in the following scheme:

*Double commentary structure*



Thus the poem *Vesuvius* has a double status: on the one hand, it is a book about a book (the book of nature), which takes on the character of a commentary or an interpretation. This relation of text/book and commentary is then mirrored and doubled. It recurs within the text and the paratext. *Vesuvius* is ‘explained’ by a self-commentary which surprises by its typographical position and presentation, because Opitz does not leave his scholia to be printed subsequent to the text – like in all other texts of the *Weltliche Poemata* – but rather inserts the comment into the text itself. Fig. 2 gives an impression of this arrangement, in which the flow of the presentation is disturbed by large type commentary.

This arrangement of the text is not completely new or singular, but it is nonetheless unusual – especially within the context of Opitz’s own works. It is a typographical experiment which melds text and paratext. The hierarchical distinction between poetry and commentary is dismissed, just like the one between factual and linguistic commentary, and between scientific and poetic sources and authorities. Poet and commentator appear to be separate instances, since Opitz constantly refers to the ‘author’ of the poem (“Der Autor hat deß Statii Orth für Augen gehabt”, p. 51). Thus the commentary is – according to Gérard Genette’s typology – “fictive allographic”.<sup>49</sup> This presentation shows the performative dimension of the commentary: It emphasizes the role of *Vesuvius* as a new, authoritative model of German didactic poetry, connecting science and theology. The modern reader will notice not only the confusing arrangement, but also the selective choice of annotated parts. Important philosophical aspects like man’s position within creation (p. 44) remain unannotated, and only a poetic reminiscence of Propertius (*tum mihi naturae libeat perdiscere vitae*) is explained. It seems that the commentary mainly intervenes where the poetic text implies or integrates other texts or traditions. The commentary thus mainly shines a light on scriptural or traditional knowledge; it remains silent, however, when it comes

<sup>49</sup> GENETTE, GÉRARD, *Paratexts. Thresholds of interpretation*, Cambridge 1997, p. 189.

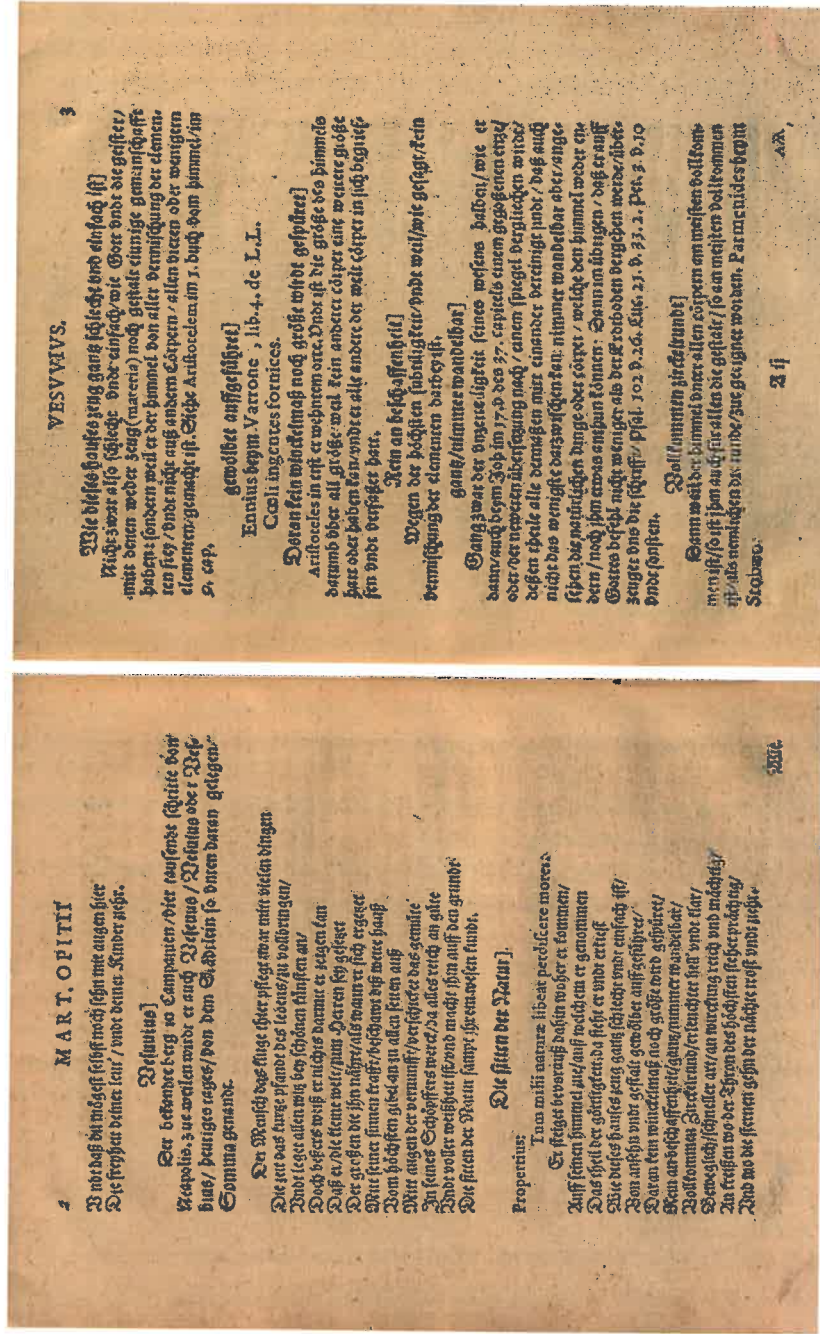


Fig. 2: Martin Opitz: Vesuvius. Poema Germanicum. Brieg: Augustin Gründer 1633, Exemplar der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München, Res/4 P. o.germ. 160, S. 2 f.

to central theses, apparently because the text itself serves as a commentary in those cases – with regard to the book of nature. Both commentaries complement each other and are repeated – according to the scheme illustrated above – on different levels.

Reading the book of nature is the privilege of the *poeta philologus*. His task is a kind of higher reading education, because God does also deal with the illiterate. This may have to do with the book of nature being a ‘dark’ text – to put it simply: poetry. The poetic microcosm of *Vesuvius* is an image of the macrocosm. This is also part of what is expressed in the image of poetry being a mimesis of nature (“nachäffen der Natur”). “Zier und Ordnung” (p. 76) define the works of God and the poet. The perfection of the natural structure is one of symmetry and disposition. This is why it is perfectly suited to the ideal circular shape, it is “Vollkommen zirckelrund” (p. 45). Just as the poet orders his words “in gewisse Reimen vnd maß”, God orders the cosmos according to measurements, numbers and laws.<sup>50</sup> Thus the actual catastrophe is this: in the end, the “schöne Creatur” (p. 76) has to abandon the linguistic order and renounce the ideals of “zierlichkeit” and *decorum*. In “diese[m] wilde[n] Krieg” (p. 44), with chaos and anomy raging, even the book of nature needs to put new aesthetic norms of expression to the test. The volcanic eruption shows nature in a state of emergency, also and above all in a linguistic one:

[...] Der Himmel schreyt vns zu/  
Steckt Wunderzeichen auß / die Erde hat nicht Ruh /  
Wirfft Feuer vmb sich her / die Luft muß Pest gebahren;  
es drohet die Natur [...].”  
(WP I, p. 83)

War dissolves the fundamentals of society – “Frieden”, “Eintracht” and “Recht” (p. 83). It changes civilizations back to “Barbarey” (p. 83); “wir wildes Volk” (p. 82), Opitz calls out. In miserable times, the poet needs to re-educate the people to faith and morality. The poet becomes a *poeta theologus*, attributing himself with the role of a patriotic preacher and prophet. His claim to the right of interpretation is connected to a social claim of validity. The crisis – the “Bürgerliche Schwerdt” (p. 81) threatening to annihilate Germany, like Vesuvius is threatening the Gulf of Naples – is also its capital and justification. Literature produces religious knowledge by mediating between natural science and theology. In the sense of this religious competence of contingency compensation, Martin Opitz from Bunzlau had to become a poet of catastrophe: both in his *Trostgedicht* and in *Vesuvius*.

<sup>50</sup> Opitz, Poeterey, ch. 2, in: MOGW II/1 (cf. n 8), p. 345. It is this thought of symmetry and proportion that serves as a link to the verse reform (a thesis which would need to be substantiated further). What is significant is that Opitz does not interpret the order of verses as something artificial and ‘made’, but as necessary in the ‘nature’ of German prosody and metrics. Cf. ROBERT, *Vetus Poesis* (cf. n. 14).

## 4. The Crisis of the Didactic Poem

This leads us to a short summary. *Vesuvius* is the document of a historical threshold situation. The text shows that the functional differentiation of societal subsystems – in this case, art, science and theology – between the 16th and 18th century was not a unidirectional process. The appeal to contemplate nature “mit Augen der Vernunft” (p. 44) includes a pre-adaptive element of modern knowledge societies, which is, however, always subordinated to the goal of generating (practical) religious knowledge. Enlightenment is not being pursued against the theological conception of the world, but rather in its name and from its centre. In this inclusive, theologically contained rationalism, we can see another genealogy of modern rationalism, which brings forth convergent solutions to empirical methods. Since Bacon’s *Novum Organum* (1620), the new science has had a habit of positioning itself against the excessive ‘admiration of antiquity’ (the so-called *praeiudicium classicum*) and on the side of the *Modernes*.<sup>51</sup> Knowledge springs from a combination of criticism of prejudice or authority on the one hand and empiricism on the other hand. Opitz’s pre-adaptive rationalism is not founded against the authority of the ancients, but in recourse to them, especially to the Lucretian tradition with its repertoire of autopragmatic techniques (‘exercices spirituelles’) and heroic gestures of exclusiveness. *Imitatio* becomes the propellant of enlightenment as much as of its *subversion*. The rise of didactic poetry between the 16th and 18th century shows the attempt to counteract the centrifugal forces of the modern differentiation between areas of knowledge and action, which has had long-lasting success.

The didactic poem of the 17th century is therefore not simply ‘pre-Copernican’: in the year 1633, both paradigms of early modern science – poetical-philological and empirical science, new *reading* and new *seeing* (in the sense of Galilei and Bacon) touch and overlap each other. Even Bacon reads his Lucretius. Even Kepler writes poetry, and even Galilei uses literary forms (like the dialogue) and gives lectures on the topography of Dante’s hell. The chronology underlines this conflict situation: *Vesuvius* is published in the same year in which Galilei revokes the Copernican teachings before the Roman inquisition (on 30<sup>th</sup> April) and begins writing his *Discorsi e Dimostrazioni Matematiche intorno a due nuove scienze*. Poetry, in *Vesuvius*, is not simply a cover or masquerade. Our examples show that the scientific and religious substance of the text cannot be separated from its form, i. e. its literary, medial and typographical “Äußerungsformen” and “Inszenierungsweisen”.<sup>52</sup> The intratextual commentary shows this on the level

<sup>51</sup> On this complex, referencing the ‘long’ history of the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, I would like to refer to the little-known, rich study by KAPITZA, PETER K., *Ein bürgerlicher Krieg in der gelehrten Welt. Zur Geschichte der Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* in Deutschland, München 1981.

<sup>52</sup> VOGL, JOSEPH, Für eine Poetologie des Wissens, in: Karl Richter/Jörg Schöner/Michael

of textual organization itself, which consciously abolishes the separation of text and paratext (commentary), because this would contradict the claims of a poetry, “die doch alle anderen künste vnd wissenschafften in sich helt”.<sup>53</sup>

The poetic form is thus a lot more than simple ‘staging’ and rhetorical-theatrical appearance. Didactic poetry transforms “Verfügungswissen” into “Orientierungswissen”<sup>54</sup>, i. e. religious knowledge; not only does the poet (as *poeta vates* or *theologus*) mediate between creator, creation and humanity, but also between two kinds of knowledge. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the didactic poem becomes the spearhead of the new poetics. In its claim to ‘truth’, it occupies an extreme position, which for Opitz is the Archimedean point of all poetry. When poetry is not fiction, but “die Wahrheit in Verse gebracht”<sup>55</sup>, it gains autonomy especially in its radical heteronomy, it becomes – as we have seen – autonomous-heteronomous. On the one hand, it serves as a religious and ideological basis, which it deducts from scientific reasoning. All science – as autonomous as it may be presented (in the central part of the text) – is ultimately bound by teleology, a mere means to an ethical-religious end. Conversely, it is this end which legitimates the development of a partly autonomous science that positions itself not against religious knowledge, but as a part of it. Didactic poetry of the early modern period is thus not so much an atavism in terms of genre, but a unique symptom of complex negotiation processes.

Titzmann (eds.), *Die Literatur und die Wissenschaften 1770-1830*. Walter Müller-Seidel zum 75. Geburtstag, Stuttgart 1997, p. 107-127, here p. 122.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. n. 20.

<sup>54</sup> In the vein of Jürgen Mittelstraß: “Verfügungswissen ist ein Wissen um Ursachen, Wirkungen und Mittel; es ist das Wissen, das Wissenschaft und Technik unter gegebenen Zwecken zur Verfügung stellen. Orientierungswissen ist ein Wissen um gerechtfertigte Zwecke und Ziele.” MITTELSTRASS, JÜRGEN, *Die Modernität der klassischen Universität*. Marburger Universitätsreden, vol. 23, Marburg 2002, p. 164.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. n. 22.