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(Bad) Air and (Faulty) Inspiration: Elemental and Environmental Influences on Fontane

Evi Zemanek

One of the most prominent examples of proto-ecological thinking in Realist fiction is surely Wilhelm Raabe's novel *Pfisters Mühle* (1884).¹ Indeed, it is one of the very few nineteenth-century works of fiction that explicitly discusses early industrial pollution, in this case, of a river. In contrast to Raabe, Theodor Fontane (1819–1898), whose novels often portray Berlin's fin-de-siècle bourgeoisie and aristocracy, does not openly express concern for the environment in his fictions; hence, ecocritics have not taken much notice of his novels as of yet. Nevertheless, an attentive reader does find hints of environmental problems in marginal remarks made by Fontane's fictional characters. Apart from his novels, there are detailed but largely uncritical descriptions of anthropogenic landscape transformations, such as forest clearances or river regulations, in his voluminous travelogue-treatise *Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg* (1862–1889)—but this ample material requires a separate ecocritical analysis. In this chapter,

E. Zemanek (✉)

Freiburg University, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany

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however, I focus on another aspect that has not yet received any attention in research on the most prominent author of German Realism: his insistent preoccupation with air quality.

Air is mentioned more than 500 times in his novels, letters, diaries, and memoirs, and it evokes a broad semantic spectrum. While many writers were deeply impressed by colors, sounds, or tastes, and their aesthetics were thus based on visual, auditory, or gustatory perception, respectively—as in the case of the “Augenmensch” (“visual person”) Goethe, E.T.A. Hoffmann’s melopoetics, or Proust’s famous Madeleine effect—it is olfactory sensations that incite reflections, trigger memories, become conversational topics, and serve as metaphors in the works of Fontane. He was what could be called a “Nasemensch” (“olfactory person”) and had a fine sense of smell; in fact, he reshaped analyses of the environment with his sensory emphases.

In his childhood and early adulthood, Fontane witnessed the emergence of the Industrial Revolution in Germany. Later in the second half of the century, when he worked mainly as a journalist, air pollution became an increasingly visible problem as a result of rapid expansion of industrialization.² Toward the end of the century, Fontane anticipated a new era in his writings, although he could not have known that we now would consider his time, with its anthropogenic increase of atmospheric carbon dioxide, the beginning of the Anthropocene.³ Simultaneously, at the time when Fontane attained a reputation as a novelist in the 1880s, the myth of miasma—which had caused much fear of “bad air” for centuries—was gradually replaced by the germ theory of disease. Naturally, these environmental, scientific, and social contexts leave traces in Fontane’s writings.

Curiously, Fontane assesses air quality quite differently in his novels, diaries, memoirs, and letters. His treatment of the subject, its function, and the author’s intention depends on the genre, the medium of publication, and the expected readership. In his fiction, characters’ complaints about smoke rising from newly built factories, as well as men’s conversations about the weather or a female protagonist’s insatiable hunger for fresh air, are easily overlooked and often downplayed as mere clichés, and thus used for comic effect. However, as I demonstrate here, the causerie about air serves as a medium to both conceal and reveal atmospheric disturbances (in the sense of social conflicts). Beyond such humorous scenes, the scenes containing reflections on respiratory diseases, the controversial method of air therapy, and the aerial transmission of bacteria should be read in view of contemporary discourses on “bad air” and new findings

in bacteriology. Fontane’s imagination of air as a vibrant medium that interacts in various ways with humans has affinities with some ideas that have lately been (re-)conceptualized under the label of “new materialism,” especially Jane Bennett’s thoughts on “vibrant matter” and Stacy Alaimo’s concept of “trans-corporeality.” The traces of miasma theory in Fontane’s work could also be considered a form of what Buell termed “toxic discourse,” that is, in its broadest sense any rhetoric on pollution and the expressed “fear of a poisoned world” (639).

While serious concerns about health risks are quite rare in Fontane’s fictions, they are a guiding theme in his letters, where most mentions of bad air are due to his meteosensitivity or meteopathia. He not only struggles with health problems ostensibly resulting from weather phenomena like wind, air pressure, temperature, and humidity or dryness but also suffers more than his fictional characters, because he is actually convinced that his writing depends on good air, and thus blames bad air when he lacks concentration and imagination. Fontane’s conviction that this virtually invisible medium has positive and negative effects on his writing will be compared here with traditional ideas of inspiration, such as the poet’s inhalation of a poetic spirit as a prerequisite for creativity. Ultimately, rereading Fontane in light of these contexts and theories promises insights into how air pollution can affect poetic production.

In two of Fontane’s novels, the conversing characters casually mention seeing dense smoke. When in *Cécile* (written 1884–1886, published 1886) the newly arrived guests at a health resort in the Harzgebirge watch the smoke rising from factory chimneys in the lowlands up to the mountains where they are staying, they mockingly recall that this place, Thale, is widely advertised as a “climatic spa.” Half annoyed and half amused, one of them asserts: “Na, meinetswegen; Rauch conservirt, und wenn wir hier vierzehn Tage lang im Schmook hängen, so kommen wir als Dauerschinken wieder heraus.” (17, “Oh well, smoke has preserving effects, and if we have ourselves cured here for 14 days we will end up as gammon.”)⁴ This humorous remark indicates an awareness of expected influences on the human body and health. Interestingly, when referring to the smoke, one of the speakers uses the term “ozone,” which is quite rare and thus stands out in nineteenth-century fictional prose. As a trained pharmacist, Fontane must have noted that the gas was discovered in 1839 by the German chemist Christian Friedrich Schönbein, and that it received much attention in chemical research in the second half of the century.⁵ However, nothing was then known about its crucial role as a greenhouse

gas (incidentally, the anthropogenic depletion of the stratospheric ozone layer was first discovered in 1970 by the Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist Paul Josef Crutzen who coined the term Anthropocene). At the time when Fontane referred to ozone in three of his novels, all written in the 1880s (*L'Adultera*, *Stine*, and *Cécile*), it was commonly considered a natural and especially healthy component of the air, and climatic spas used to advertise their assumed higher ozone concentrations, although contemporary encyclopedias already alerted to its potential harmfulness for the respiratory system.⁶ When the tourists from Berlin come to Thale looking for ozoniferous air in *Cécile*, they are instead confronted with factory smoke which they ironically praise as the "ozone" of the Industrial Age. If they notice the smoke without feeling seriously bothered, this is only because the wind blows it away so it can be observed with some aesthetic pleasure.

In *Frau Jenny Treibel* (published 1892), the smoke stems from the Treibel family's own dye factory (producing the so-called Berliner or Preußisch Blau for the Prussian Army), and when the wind blows from the "wrong" direction, the stench ruins the family's dinner parties (16–17). But since there are great advantages to living on the compound of the factory, the owner's family accepts the annoyance, and the narrator ironically downplays it by mentioning that the family schedules its dinner parties according to the actual direction of the wind, while old Treibel raises his chimneys every year. The narrator's tone discreetly reveals Fontane's own skepticism when alluding to the questionable nineteenth-century practice of continually raising chimneys in an attempt to dilute and disperse harmful smoke (Andersen and Brüggemeier 68). In passages like these, Fontane subtly writes environmental history.

Among all of his fictional characters, old Dubslav von Stechlin, the protagonist of Fontane's last novel *Der Stechlin*—which appeared shortly before his death in 1897/1898 and which he himself called a "political novel"⁷—is the only one who openly criticizes the Prussian "Industriestaat" (72, "industrial nation"), and his world view probably bears most resemblance to the author's own opinions. In one of the many disputes about the new face of the world at the turn of the century, which is represented by industrially transformed landscapes, Dubslav laments that he cannot become accustomed to the glass factory in Globzow near his own country estate at Lake Stechlin (incidentally, this lake, which in the 1960s was used as a reservoir to provide cooling water for a nuclear power plant, today is famous for its exceptionally good water quality).

It is not just the sight of the glass factory and its emissions that ruin the idyllic scenery typical of northern Brandenburg and disturb the old nobleman. Dubslav also surprises the reader with reflections on sustainability. He principally condemns the mass production of instruments (in this case, glass retorts) sold to and used in innumerable chemical industries, which emit noxious substances and thus ultimately contribute to the destruction of people and things. Imagining a toxic, smoky world and a perishing civilization, he even predicts a "global inferno" (coining the inventive term "Generalweltanbrennung" [80]). However, his opinion, which is ridiculed by his acquaintances, has no political effect: in his candidacy for the Reichstag, he loses his position to his political opponent who promotes social democracy, just like pastor Lorenzen, his opponent in the ongoing private dispute. Recurring to the same aerial imagery, Lorenzen coins "Sauerstoff" ("oxygen") as a metaphor with an entirely positive connotation when he predicts a new democratic era as "eine Zeit mit mehr Sauerstoff in der Luft, eine Zeit, in der wir besser atmen können. Und je freier man atmet, je mehr lebt man." (324, "a time with more oxygen in the air, a time in which we can breathe more easily. And the easier you breathe, the more you live.") Here, oxygen is particularly associated with freedom from aristocratic domination and class conflicts, whilst in other novels it signifies freedom from patriarchy or, more generally, social conventions. Ironically, the new epoch whose beginning is being hailed is a time with more carbon dioxide in the air—that is, the Anthropocene. Old Dubslav, at least, has breathing difficulties and thus has to die along with the old times: he suffers from "Wassersucht" (dropsy), in other words, cardiac insufficiency, whose symptom is, significantly, cardiac asthma. He is not, in fact, Fontane's only character suffering from a respiratory disease.

In Fontane's novels, women especially long for clean, fresh air, which is highly symptomatic for their unease. They frequently open the windows with desperate gestures or run outside in many revelatory scenes. Once outside and away from the constrictive rules of social conduct, they are suddenly free to build castles in the air: consider, for example, Effi Briest, Cécile, and Melanie (from *L'Adultera*) who all dream of equal relationships and thus turn to other men while trying to escape their unhappy marriages with their domineering older husbands. In Fontane's most famous novel, *Effi Briest* (published as serial novel in 1894–1895), the air is mentioned numerous times, because Effi, as a "Naturkind" (41, "child of nature"), is characterized by her "Luftbedürfnis" (335, need for air). Surprisingly, this central metaphor and its broad ramifications have been

ignored by scholars who discuss Effi's psychological profile. Her loveless marriage with Innstetten literally takes her breath away and she suffers from "katarrhalischen Affektionen" (263, "catarrhal affections"), even though they live near the Baltic Sea.⁸ Significantly, the illness does not improve after their divorce, because the adulterous Effi is not allowed to return home by her parents and is sent to an ordinary boarding house in Berlin where the air is even worse (309). Her mother explicitly says that Effi's privation of fresh air forms part of her punishment (301). When Effi's ex-husband finally allows her to see their only daughter, Effi becomes so angry about Annie's loyalty toward her father that she has a choking fit, after which the doctor insistently recommends a change of air (326). Her chronic cough only improves after her parents allow her to move back home, and she temporarily recovers when spending her days outdoors. But in the end she dies from a cold because she enjoyed too much cold night air, or, in view of its metaphoric meaning, because she enjoyed freedom (345). Unlike the generations before her and some of her contemporaries, Effi is not afraid of cold air and night air (synonymous with "bad air"), which were thought to spread disease. According to miasma theory (miasma means "pollution" in ancient Greek), it was believed that poisonous air rises from the soil, or, more precisely, from rotting water and organic matter.⁹ In other words, environmental factors were blamed for diseases, and matter was considered an agentic force, even when invisible and thus not recognizable as "alive"—ideas that have lately been revived and reconceptualized within the theoretical framework of new materialism (Abram, Alaimo, Bennett).

In contrast to Effi, her husband Innstetten actually fears air as a medium of contagion. Shortly after moving in together, he lectures his young wife (who then still hopes for a happy marriage) that bacteria ("Bazillen") which "circulate in the air" are more dangerous than the Chinese ghost, whose existence he purposely does not deny, in order to make his insecure wife more dependent on him. Of course, he does not know that he is inhabited by billions of harmless and even beneficial bacteria that constitute the human microbiome. But as someone who knows something about "bad bacteria"—many of them had just been discovered in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s—his knowledge thus transcends the vague theory of miasma as an invisible threat. Innstetten's fear of bacteria might well have been incited by one of the leading bacteriologists of Fontane's time, Robert Koch (1843–1910), who, among many other things, discovered the pathogenic agent causing tuberculosis and made the germ

theory of disease public in order to promote hygiene and ultimately overcome miasma theory.¹⁰ Regardless of whether it was the miasma myth or new findings within the germ theory, both could be reconsidered as forms of "toxic discourse." In Fontane's works, we find a sensitive "toxic consciousness" (Buell 642) relating to several quite different phenomena.

Before Koch introduced tuberculin in 1890 as a remedy for tuberculosis (which did not have the desired effects, rather the opposite, and an antibiotic was available only half a century later), German doctors, being pioneers in this domain, devised open-air therapy to be performed at climatic spas. Places with good air were made accessible and numerous resorts were opened around mid-nineteenth century, when tuberculosis was one of the most common causes of death in Europe. As is well known, tuberculosis ("Schwindsucht") mainly depicted as a women's disease, was then a topic in vogue, and climatic spas slowly became a favored setting for novels.¹¹ However, the explicit discussion of open-air therapy is quite rare in literature. We can nevertheless find it in Fontane's *Cécile*, whose fragile female protagonist suffers from nervous affection and needs fresh air just like Effi, although she differs significantly from her in character, representing an old-fashioned type of woman. Gordon, a tourist who falls in love with this married woman in Thale, is absolutely convinced of the salubrious effects of fresh air. He states: "Luft ist kein leerer Wahn" (58, "Air is not just a phantasma") alluding to Schiller's ballad "Die Bürgschaft," where the same words are ascribed to fidelity instead of air. He also proclaims a radical medical reform: in the future, he imagines cheerfully, people will be prescribed "drei Wochen Lofoden [sic!], sechs Wochen Engadin, drei Monate Wüste Sahara" (58, "three weeks Lofoten, six weeks Engadin, three months Sahara"). The great advantage of air therapy lies in its ubiquity, as he explains ingeniously: "man kommt Tag und Nacht aus dem Heilmittel nicht heraus" (58, "day and night you are involuntarily exposed to this remedy"). This character articulates the awareness that humans are "ultimately inseparable from the environment" (Alaimo 2) and that their body is no sealed entity, "not a solid object but a terrain through which things pass" (Abram 230), as two well-known voices of material ecocriticism put it. Like Fontane, Abram thinks of the air as one of the elements that passes through humans whose bodies are open to the winds (230). For such "interconnections, interchanges, and transits between human bodies and nonhuman natures," which also include "unwanted actions" between human bodies, chemical agents, and toxic substances, Alaimo has coined the term "trans-corporeality" (Alaimo

2). We know that Fontane shares Gordon's opinion, because we find this passage with almost identical wording in a letter to his daughter dating from August 18, 1884.¹² Here, he also imagines that other medicines so far produced by pharmacists will be replaced by an air cure, since types of air come in "hundreds of nuances," which "mean everything" ("daß die Luftarten in ihren hundert Nüancen *alles* bedeuten"). Thus, there is bad air and good air: human well-being, in his eyes, depends entirely on air quality.

The fact that the air's quantity and flow are also crucial factors is illustrated in one of the funniest scenes of the novel, when Cécile's husband St. Arnaud and her admirer Gordon passionately disagree over the question whether the windows should be opened or closed during train rides (Fontane, *Cécile* 69–70). Cécile's need for fresh air, paradoxically combined with the intolerance of ventilation, sparks the witty argument between the two rivals, who both reveal their (growing or waning) sympathies for Cécile in their attitude toward fresh air. For their opposing positions, Fontane invents the terms "Ventilations-Hasser" versus "Ventilations-Enthusiasten" ("ventilation haters" vs. "ventilation lovers"). Although their verbal exchange has comic effects, Fontane himself took the matter quite seriously, as we know from his letters where he professes being a "Ventilationshasser" (which is why he is more than happy about the invention of fly screens letting in fresh air without a draft, as he tells his wife in a letter).¹³ Regarding the scene in the novel, it suffices to say that the liking or disliking of fresh air is a question of principle. First, it shows how a health matter is turned into a moral one when both the advocate and the adversary of fresh air claim moral superiority; and second, it demonstrates how air (and the conversation about it) is used as a metaphor to both conceal and reveal conflicts and atmospheric disturbances.¹⁴

Since most of his novels are (at least partly) set in Berlin, the author's favorite topos, mentioned so many times that not all can be listed here, is the "Berliner Luft" (Berlin air), signifying three different things: the typical Berlin weather, the city's characteristic odor(s), and its specific social atmosphere.¹⁵ Since Fontane's narrators mostly speak as either one of the bourgeoisie or the gentry, the prevalent conversational subjects are fits of meteopathia or the destination of the next "Landpartie," which is essential to the plot since various lovers find each other during "outings" (e.g., Corinna and Leopold in *Frau Jenny Treibel*), and because love grows best in natural environments (e.g., the love of Lene and Botho in *Irrungen, Wirrungen*). Fontane's characters frequently escape from the stuffy, tiring

city to their country estate, while the stench to which the lower class is exposed is rarely mentioned; this marks one difference between "realist" and "naturalist" poetics.

Other than in his fiction, Fontane demonstrates significant awareness of smell in his letters and memoirs: he complains about the stench coming from the Spree and the small channels, about sewage water in the streets, the smell of dung and rotten food, and generally about various human and chemical evaporations. When the so-called Canal-Luft is combined with bad weather, Fontane suffers "eine völlige Nervenpleite" ("a total nervous collapse").¹⁶ Indeed, the stench must have been overwhelming before the Berlin sewage system was gradually completed in the early 1890s. Fontane's address at Potsdamer Straße, where he lived during the last three decades of the century, was not far from the Landwehrkanal, one of Berlin's major canals. Surprisingly, in his personal and autobiographical writing, stench is not just a characteristic trait of the metropolis, but sometimes the ostensibly clean country air stinks, too.¹⁷ As Fontane openly admits, he is very sensitive to odors and even likes to describe his unpleasant olfactory adventures, especially in his letters to his wife. Even in Krummhübel in the Riesengebirge (today Karpacz, Poland), the climatic spa he visited almost every summer from 1884 to 1892 in order to experience the well-reputed good air, he has cause for complaint. Among other things, he complains about the stench coming from water closets, which gives him headaches but nevertheless inspires him to write a feature he would entitle "Das Oertchen" ("The Restroom")—if he could ever bring himself to carry out this idea, for which he had already collected data. He stresses that, although this may sound like a joke, he is seriously bothered by the smell (and, incidentally, prefers to frequent his own secret open-air toilet in the woods). Digressions like this, half-serious, half-humorous, and a bit vulgar, cannot be found in Fontane's fiction.

According to his autobiographical novel *Meine Kinderjahre* (My Childhood Years), written at the age of 74, he had always been sensitive to all kinds of odors and had even fallen ill due to bad air. He recalls the stench coming from his father's chemist laboratory as well as from a cesspool next to his family's house in Swinemünde that allegedly caused an enduring malaria-like fever responsible for his lifelong feeble health condition (Chap. 4). Although he knows better, the old man here returns to miasma theory. When he speaks of "malaria," he not only refers to the tropical disease but literally to the term's original Italian meaning, "mala aria" for "bad air," which was thought to cause malaria (formerly

called "marsh fever"), one of the diseases Fontane feared most (but never contracted). In a letter written from Berlin to his absent wife dating from 1862, however, he explains his recurring feverish condition as caused by dust: "Ich bin jetzt ganz sicher, daß es eigentlich der Staub ist was mich hier krank macht. Diese 100,000 Partikelchen setzen sich überall in die Haut ein und reizen und prickeln; das erzeugt diesen unbehaglichen, fieberhaften Zustand." ("I am now convinced that what makes me feel so sick here is actually the dust. These 100,000 tiny particles invade every pore of my skin and cause irritation and tingling; that is the reason for this uneasy, feverish condition.")¹⁸

Retrospectively, he clarifies in his memoir that there was no case of typhoid fever, then also called "Nervenfieber"¹⁹ ("nervous fever"), in his family during his childhood, but he suffered from a severe case of it later, in 1841, when it was epidemic in Germany. And he wrestled with what he thought to be resurgences of typhoid during the following 30 years.²⁰ Although the bacillus that causes typhoid was discovered in 1880 (by Karl Joseph Eberth, a German bacteriologist), and although the disease is transmitted mainly via contaminated water and food, *Meyers Großes Konversationslexikon* tells its readers as late as 1909 that it was transmitted by air (848). This belief is imbedded in the etymology of the word typhoid which comes from the ancient Greek word for "damp," "mist," or "smoke." In this encyclopedia article, recent scientific findings, resonances of miasma theory, and amateurish suggestions for therapy fuse into a curious blend. Incidentally, a "recurrent fever," or "Rückfalltyphus," is also mentioned here (851), but Fontane most probably contracted an acute rheumatic fever in 1842, accompanied by rheumatic heart disease that may have resulted in chronic heart failure (Gravenkamp 94–95, 114–115). In 1853, he was hospitalized for suspected tuberculosis; in any case, he suffered from lung disease, which might have been responsible for his lifelong anxiety. His letters document that he was always afraid of catching a cold, to which he had a predisposition: he seems to have had chronic catarrhal rhinitis (Gravenkamp 94–106). To protect himself, he constantly wore a shawl or "Cachenez" that provoked humorous remarks and even a funny portrait caricature by August von Heyden (the portrait "Fontane with Cachenez" is reprinted in Gravenkamp 107).

Fontane's self-diagnoses are based on anxieties rather than on proven knowledge, just as generally "toxic discourse is plainly a discourse of allegation rather than of proof" (Buell 659). As a pharmacist, Fontane received some medical training in the late 1830s and 1840s, but he

did not significantly deepen this knowledge during the rest of his life (Gravenkamp 7). For the purposes of this essay, however, the mere fact that Fontane repeatedly articulates an awareness of the permeability of his own body and its interaction with the (sometimes toxic) environment is more important than the comparison of his own assessment of his illness with the state of knowledge at his time. Although he is often caught up in his individual fears and aversions, he is generally correct in his suspicion that air pollution of all sorts can cause various (environmental) illnesses.

To cure his indispositions, which are very often also due to his meteorosensitivity or even meteoropathia, he frequently prescribed himself a change of air²¹ and visited various climatic spas, just like his fictional characters. But Fontane's own suffering is worse than theirs, since he is a writer: he does not just struggle with health problems, but is also convinced that his writing depends on good air. Undeniably, his great interest in air quality is motivated not by an environmental concern but rather by self-interest. From the Harz region—where Cécile sojourns, too—he writes to his wife on August 19, 1877: "Ich fühle nämlich, daß ich von dieser Luft lebe und daß nur sie mir die Kraft giebt, meine Arbeit zu machen." (*Ehebriefwechsel* 83, "I feel indeed that I subsist on this air, and that this air alone gives me the strength to do my work.") His work there mainly consists of the revision of his novel *Vor dem Sturm*. And from Norderney in the North Sea he reports on July 27, 1883: "*Die Luft ist himmlisch* und ihr allein verdank' ich es, daß ich meine Arbeit fertig kriege. In Berlin läg' ich längst krank auf der breiten Seite." (*Ehebriefwechsel* 356, "This air is heavenly, and thanks to it alone I can finish my work. In Berlin I would be lying in bed sick.") Here, he works on his novel *Graf Petöfy*. In order to optimize his working conditions, he either takes long walks in the morning—he amusingly speaks of "kleine Luftschnoperung" (*Ehebriefwechsel* 81, "a bit of sniffing")—or performs what he calls a "Naturcultus" ("cult of nature") every morning and every night at the open window; this ritual consists in looking at the mountains and inhaling the morning air. He also describes his breathing in and out deeply as doing "lung gymnastics" ("[Ich] turne mit der Lunge")—while his eyes savor the green and his ears relish the silence for 15 minutes. Then he is ready for "Kunst" (art), in this particular case, he means first reading and then writing.²² Significantly, he advances well in his writing whenever he is at climatic resorts. In Berlin, in contrast, he blames bad air for his inability to write.

Fontane's conviction of a causal connection between creative output and aerial input inevitably reminds us of traditional ideas of inspiration

(recall the term's derivation from the Latin "inspirare" for "blowing in," and "spiritus" for "air" or "breath"): "Since ancient times inspiration has been associated with breath, in the sense of [...] drawing air into the lungs, and spirit, in the sense of something from without that enters and inhabits, if only temporarily, the physical being."²³ It is, of course, the invisibility of the air that makes it the best medium of transport for invisible energies. The idea that the human subject is inhabited by something external that is part of nature (even when it is called "God") and that has certain effects is in accordance with the concept of trans-corporeality. Fontane's fictional characters see inspiration in general as some gift coming (undeservingly) from above and infusing knowledge,²⁴ and, in particular, as "God's breath," that blows only outside of Berlin: "Die Berliner Luft ist doch etwas stickig und hat nichts von dem Athem Gottes, der draußen weht und den die Dichter mit Recht so preisen." (*Irrungen, Wirrungen* 184, "The Berlin air, after all, is somewhat stifling; it is not like God's breath that blows outside and is praised by poets for good reason.") The writer's experience that inspiration is not available everywhere and "not always prompt to come when convenient or necessary"²⁵ affirms his dependence on the right moment and the ambience—or, more precisely, as Fontane tells us so many times, on a healthy environment and, ultimately, on good air. It has to be added, though, that his letters and diaries clearly show that inspiration is not enough; it is just the prerequisite for the hard work that follows.

In Fontane's work, we can witness how the traditional concept of inspiration characterized by its spiritual or religious connotations is being fused with and slowly replaced by more material considerations. Revising the widespread belief that in modernity we have outgrown the concept of inspiration,²⁶ I claim that it rather calls for a redefinition and becomes all the more acute in view of ecocriticism's goal to find out what happens to poetic production and texts in the face of the environmental crisis. Fontane's works not only show us the writer's dependence on air during his text production; his texts also bear traces of their aerial environment, meaning that natural conditions and cultural artifacts have fused inseparably. Incidentally, Abram goes even one step further when he locates the human mind and creativity not within the human subject, but in the material or elemental world (Abram).

This study provides ample evidence of a unique olfactory poetics and aesthetics that greatly profits from the uniqueness of air as an invisible, suggestive medium of exchange. Fontane's obsession with air is partly an

individual peculiarity resulting from his meteopathia; but it is also due to the contemporary discourses on bad air—bacteriology's triumph over miasma theory—and, above all, to the noticeable rise of industrial air pollution at the advent of the Anthropocene.

NOTES

1. See, for example, the essays on Raabe by Wanning and Wilke.
2. For general facts about air pollution in the nineteenth century, see Andersen and Brüggemeier, Brüggemeier.
3. It is difficult to agree on a start date, since there are great differences in human impact on the ecological systems of the Earth's regions and continents. I follow Paul Crutzen who, in view of atmospheric evidence, proposed the Industrial Revolution as a date for the beginning of the new geologic epoch, while other scientists claim different dates (Crutzen).
4. Fontane's fictional and epistolary texts are all quoted after the *GBA* edition (= *Große Brandenburger Ausgabe*). All translations into English by Evi Zemanek.
5. See *Neues Konversations-Lexikon*, 2nd ed., vol. 12, 1866, pp. 462–464; *Meyers Konversationslexikon*, 4th ed., vol. 12, pp. 580–591, and, for comparison, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., vol. XI, p. 25–26. For a more detailed discussion of Fontane's particular view on ozone, see Zemanek "Das Ozon als Pharmakon in Fontanes literarischen, epistolarischen und autobiografischen Werken."
6. See the encyclopedias listed in note 5. For Fontane's mentions of ozone, see *Stine*, where Baron Papageno, whose nickname reveals that he is a comic character, ironically chooses an apartment on the upper floors because he likes the ozone in Berlin (58), and *L'Adultera*, where the expression "nur von Luft und Liebe leben" ("to live of love and air only") is replaced by living on "Ozon und Keuschheit" (35, "ozone and chastity").
7. Fontane in a letter to C.R. Lessing, 8 June, 1896, *Fontanes Briefe* 398, vol. 2.
8. See the article on "Husten" in the *Damen Conversations Lexikon* from 1835, here 359.
9. See also Cipolla.
10. See also Baldwin.

11. See Schader's study on tuberculosis that contains chapters on Paul Heyse's *Unheilbar*, Arthur Schnitzler's *Sterben*, and Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg*.
12. See Theodor Fontane to Martha Fontane from Krummhübel, *Familienbriefnetz* 274.
13. Fontane to his wife from Berlin on 1 July, 1862, *Ehebriefwechsel* 230; vol. 2.
14. See also Rubehn's prophecy spoken to his mistress that they will have to face difficulties and social exclusion in *L'Adultera*: "Und wir werden uns auf kältere Luftströme gefaßt machen müssen." (130, "And we need to be prepared to face colder air currents").
15. In *Irrungen, Wirrungen*, for example, the protagonist's uncle repeatedly complains about the "Berliner Luft" meaning the Berlin weather and the city's social and political atmosphere, 47–49.
16. Fontane in a letter to his wife on 20 August, 1880, *Ehebriefe* 240.
17. See, for example, Fontane to his wife from Wernigerode on 5 August, 1880, *Ehebriefwechsel* 228, Fontane to his wife from Thale on 10 August, 1877, *Ehebriefwechsel* 77.
18. Fontane to his wife from Berlin on 20 May, 1862, *Ehebriefwechsel* 184–185.
19. See also the article on "Typhus" in *Meyers Großes Konversationslexikon* from 1909, 848–851.
20. See Fontane, *Autobiographische Schriften. Von Zwanzig Bis Dreißig* 103.
21. See, for example, Fontane to his wife on 21 October, 1886, *Ehebriefe* 372.
22. All quotes: Fontane to his wife from Erdmannsdorf on 28 August, 1968, *Ehebriefwechsel*, 341–342.
23. Art. "Inspiration," *The Harper Handbook to Literature*, p. 243. On the association of air and inspiration, see also the interesting article by Stacey McDowell, although not relevant to the case of Fontane (McDowell 2011).
24. See *Der Stechlin* 186–187; *Die Poggenpuhls* 26–27; *Vor dem Sturm* 183.
25. Art. "Inspiration," *The Harper Handbook to Literature*, 243.
26. I am particularly referring to McDowell who states that "we have somehow outgrown the concept in our modern accounts of creativity" (21).

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