

[Note to readers: this is an older essay; it was written c. 1984 and hasn't been revised since. (I still believe much of it, but it would need work.) Because computers have changed so much since then, this version lost its footnote numbers, its n-dashes, and a host of other typographic details. It has most of the illustrations, but some are missing—it's readable without them. Please send comments, suggestions, etc., to me via the website, www.jameselkins.com.]

NIGHT, COLORSTORMS, AND THE UNNATURAL:
EMIL NOLDE'S SEARCH FOR RULELESS COLOR

James Elkins

The painter had found himself,
and colors were his language.
Nolde

Tropensonne (Tropical Sun, Plate I) was painted shortly after March, 1914 in a most obscure part of the world: the outpost of Kåwieng in Neu-Mecklenburg (now New Ireland). Aside from its location, which is certainly more exotic than Gauguin's Tahiti, it seems the painting is fairly straightforward. Its subject matter is clear—once the viewer recognises the distant shapes on the horizon as trees—and it has simple forms and few colors.

There are in fact only six pigments: two warm, two cool, and black and white. The red sky and sun are painted in Scharlachzinnobler, our scarlet vermilion, and the darker sky is a wild, sultry madder, possibly violet Krapplach, which is close to our manganese violet. Opposed to them are a green and blue: the cold green is probably Malachitgrün (close to our "emerald green"), and the light blue under a breaking wave is helles Kobaltblau, modern

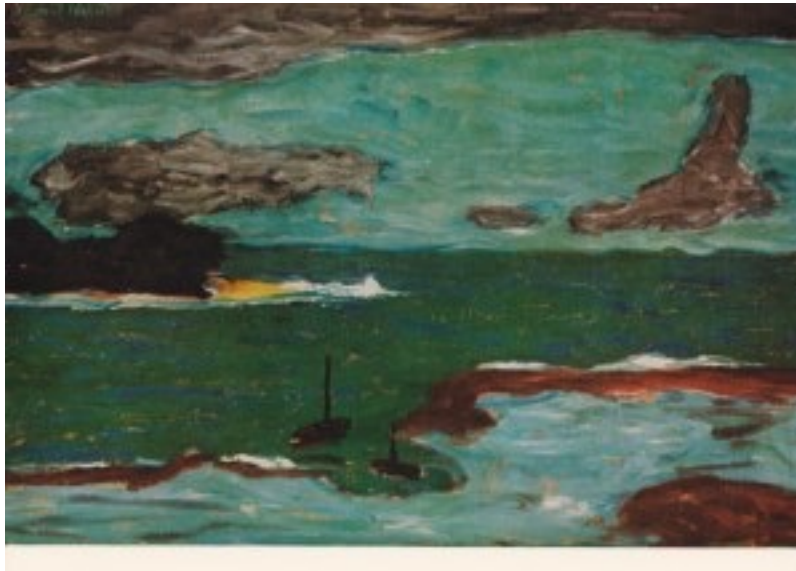


cerulean blue. These four are alternated and mixed with a white, probably Zinkweiss, and Elfenbeinschwarz, ivory black.

Listing the colors like this brings out several things. First: the painting's quality of natural simplicity is deceptive—its colors are two carefully picked pairs of strong pigments rather than the more common, greyer hues Nolde might have chosen if his intentions had been more simply naturalistic. Second: even though it is possible he was matching colors to what he saw, the eccentric and mechanical choice of pigments suggests that he was not. It is a difficult question to decide, since the sun is often red and the sea can be green. In this case Nolde provides at least a clue to the role of mimesis, since he recalls in the autobiography *Mein Leben* that he painted inside a converted police detention building at some distance from the sea, with his “powerful, rich colors” ranged around him (“mit den herrlichen reichen Farben um mich herum”). Most probably he did not even have a sketch of the scene in front of him.

The colors have another odd quality: they are opaque and flat, so that the sun appears to be pasted onto a colored background, rather than floating in empty atmosphere. Paintings like Munch's *The Scream* teach us that schematized forms and limited palettes do not entail a sacrifice of atmospheric qualities. Munch's painting has a mixture of the colors of sunset—white, yellow, pink, red, and some blue—and together they reproduce both the

painter's signature undulating line and an equally familiar streaked cloudy translucence. An oil underpainting aids this, showing through casein and pastel highlights, relieving flatness and suggesting a swirling atmosphere. Tropenzone's sky on the other hand, has only two hues in opaque color areas, and what feeling of transparency there is has been achieved incidentally, by roughness of brushstrokes. Tropenzone's sky is closer to what Constable called a "white sheet," a backdrop without depth. A collaged sun is pasted to it, and it hangs there, without gravity and with no more power to illumine than a paper-patch sun has to shine on an Albers collage.



Nusa lik (Plate 2) was also done at Kāwieng. It has been reproduced as a pendant to Tropenzone, and there is some evidence Nolde may have thought of it that way. The harbor at Kāwieng, represented by two vessels, is seen from the Schleinitz mountains; and across a narrow strait is the island of Nusa (not Nusa lik, as Nolde thought). With the help of maps it is possible to be specific about some of the deviations from the real scene. Kāwieng has no strongly marked bay, but an undulating coastline ending in a small promontory, and it could not have been seen from the height Nolde suggests. These formal liberties are paralleled by the odd choice of color, which is quite similar in overall scheme to that of Tropenzone: and here the effect, even more clearly than in Tropenzone, is dissonant. The cerulean blue of the small wave in Tropenzone is the principal color in Nusa lik. Again it is paired with a dissonant malachite green, but here the pairing is more complex, since the green-blue pair occurs once in the ocean and again, heightened with white, in the sky. And as in Tropenzone, the green-blue pair is opposed to a warm pair, this time scarlet vermilion and yellow. The colors are not mixed to suggest the nuances of actual landscape, but remain in rather distinct opaque areas, and vie in disharmonies. Even with the observation that his

colors are intentionally dissonant, it is still not clear whether Nolde was reproducing or inventing colors. He did not choose to paint the sun in *Tropensonne* green—and to that extent he is obeying realist dicta—but he did make the two adjacent coastlines of *Nusa* like red and yellow. Neither painting is consistently anti-realist in color. It is better to speak of a deliberate use of color that does not respond to simple realist or anti-realist criteria. This kind of color, which I will call “unnatural,” is the product of a series of developments in Nolde’s art, which together show that paintings like these are attempts at an intuitive, ruleless color, whose origin is a wish to remain hidden, meaningless to public analysis. The simplest, least satisfactory means for expressing this sense of isolation were developed as early as 1900.

Night

And also black, black, nights must exist, to
unbind the deepest, most human feelings.

[Ob wohl nicht auch die schwarzen, schwarzen
Nächte sein mussten, um tiefsliegende
eigenmenschliche Empfindungen zu lösen.]

Nolde

Before the wild colors began to appear in Nolde’s painting, there was a period in which he hardly used colors at all, and preferred muted earth tones shrouded in mist or sunken in darkness: a period that may be called *Night*. Nolde painted a number of subdued nocturnal landscapes in the years 1900 to 1903, all dark, simple, vague in outline to simulate night vision, and all showing the flat landscapes of his homeland. He had been to Paris at the beginning of the period (his first trip was in the fall of 1899), but the bright colors of Impressionism took several years to filter into his work. As Carl Einstein pointed out, his paintings before 1903 were not so much a reaction against Impressionism as against his own previous work.

The predecessors of the paintings of night were, appropriately enough, bright landscapes and townscapes in the German Realist tradition. Plate 3 is a favorite subject, the *Grünau* (or *Grün Au*), a marshy stream that ran just a hundred meters behind the village of Nolde, where the painter was born under the name Emil Hansen. When he was eleven, the village of Nolde had four houses, and the *Grünau* with its reedy banks was the only natural feature beyond the criss-crossed corn and potato fields (plate 1).



He spent his childhood in the village, and even preferred the more complete isolation of the Grünau and the empty fields around it. In this rendering, done in 1894, there is bright, hazy sunlight from directly above. In the tradition of German Realism, when shadows occur they are bright patches under eaves and trees, not long glancing rays or Baroque-style alternating light and darks. The colors, like those of the contemporaneous Munich realists such as Philipp Röhth, Otto Strutzel, and Hermann Lindenschmidt, are subdued, low chroma earth tones, bleached with white. Nolde did a number of these paintings in the decade 1890–1900, depicting houses, barracks, and castles in and around Munich and St. Gall, Switzerland, where he taught from 1892 to 1898. His series of grotesque heads and anthropomorphized mountains date from the end of this period, but whatever anxieties he felt—and his unreflective account in *Mein Leben* is not much help here—they were not directly expressed in the landscapes. But Night fell suddenly in 1900 and the Grünau was plunged in darkness (Plate 4).

To understand the Night paintings—and through them, the storms of color that followed—it is helpful to rapidly distinguish several traditions of night in painting. First, two traditions to which Nolde's art was not related: the Graumaler and the tradition of Claude Lorrain. The former, the painters of the brown history paintings the Impressionists abhorred, were following what they took to be the pinnacle of the hierarchy of the genres. Their Academic subjects demanded deep shadows, which together with deep varnish created what Richard Muther called "dunkle Schluchten," a "braune Sauce" into which the details were lost. Nolde's paintings were also different from the long tradition of dusk, dawn, and twilight paintings which Marcel Roethlisberger has traced back through Turner to Claude Lorrain (and eventually to the Venetians and Giorgione). In that tradition dusk is golden, even when the sun has set (or is about to rise), the atmosphere glows with a clear

light, and high clouds are torched in rose. Nothing is opaque; everything has the half-spiritual, half-formal quality Runge called *Durchsichtig* (transparent). This peaceful and tender spectacle of night is evident in Kaspar David Friedrich's *Frau in der Morgensonne* (1818), in which night is departing, and in *Neubrandenburg* (1817), where night is about to arrive. A related light appears in Böcklin's early works from the years 1846-1850, which were influenced by Friedrich.

But in Nolde's paintings the darkness is a vague, opaque gloom, a dusky topography where a clear, bright sky or sun would be out of place. (When Nolde painted a brilliant crimson sun in 1895, he said he didn't know what to do with it, and it sat in his studio for eight years until he could make use of its color and sharpness.) The tradition informing Nolde's Night paintings has its ultimate origin in the *Caravaggisti*, and specifically in the *Bamboccianti*, Dutch and Flemish landscape and genre painters who worked in seventeenth century Naples and Rome. Their landscapes are often dark to the point of opacity instead of lucent depth; Paolo Bril loved especially the engulfing dark woods of oncoming night, and Adam Elsheimer—model for so many of these tendencies—loved tumultuous, spotlight hillsides with thrashing branches, which he could sit and draw “for hours.” These are the origins of the dusky genre on which Nolde drew; but to explain the meanings it had to him, we must skip ahead several centuries.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Romantic poets like Goethe and Novalis intensified these rustic and religious connotations. Night was no longer the clear and crisp place Elsheimer had represented, but blurry and evanescent; in Mörike's words,

The backdrop is a misty form
Of quiet forest and dim field,

As lightly sketched as dreams are drawn. To poets like Hölderlin and Lenau, night was at once solemn and soft:

Gaze on me, thou eye of darkness,
Fill me, boundlessness of might —
Solemn, tender, dream-pervaded,
Sweet, unfathomable night!

Musical nocturnes, which Liszt called “pieces designed to portray subjective and profound emotion,” did not appear under their French title until John Field's pieces were published in Leipzig in 1814; but years before, Czerny had been certain that Beethoven's so-called “Moonlight Sonata,” Op. 27 / 2 / i (written in 1801) was a noctourne expressing “a spirit crying in the distance.” Nocturnes including the Moonlight Sonata's first movement have a characteristic soft, continuous ostinato bass in which individual notes are not melodic but

contribute to the tone color: like the images in Mörike and Lenau, they are soft and unfocussed.

The insubstantiality of night, established in Germany in the first decades of the nineteenth century, was taken up by the French plein air painters. Millet and his followers painted dawn and dusk scenes, and Millet even drew and painted soft noctournes such as the wonderfully evocative *Starry Night* of c. 1850, whose exaggerations of shooting stars and strange circling mists bears comparison with Van Gogh's *Starry Night*. Some later plein air painters specialized in dusk and night scenes. Vittore Grubicy (1851-1920) and Jean Charles Cazin (1841-1901) produced large numbers of simple, quickly sketched night landscapes; and like Nolde, Cazin particularly loved small, abandoned streams near the coast. Flat land, mostly moors and saltwater marshes, were a frequent subject, and the Lowlands were often identified explicitly, as in Jules Dupré's *Le moulin au bord de la mare*.

This tradition flourished in Germany in several generations of painters including August Bromeis (1813–1881), Adolf Menzel (1815–1905), Richard Burnier (1826–1884), and later Philipp Helmer (1846–1912) and Johann Karl Lucas Heffner (1847–1914). Siegfried Wichmann, in his excellent study of nineteenth century Munich landscape painters, names Eduard Schleich d. Ä. as the preeminent Munich master of a special genre, paintings of moors in early morning light. Schleich also did small studies of windmills in a roughly delineated manner very close to Dupré's. In Wichmann's words, Schleich favored a "flickering, nocturnal Topaz brown" ("nächtlich flackerndes Topasbraun") that graded to a dark grey brown—close to Nolde's palette in the years 1900-1903. Nolde may have seen Schleich's paintings or those of his pupils in Munich as early as 1888, when he worked there in furniture factories.

Moonlit landscapes (*Mondscheinlandschaften*) and evening landscapes (*Abendlichtlandschaften*) were widespread by the middle of the century, and the genre spread to England, where it was taken up by G. F. Watts, a painter Nolde admired. Nolde also mentions the Danish painters Jens Ferdinand Willumsen (1863–1958) and Svend Hammerschøi (1873–1948), and he studied under Adolph Hölzel—all of whom produced *Abendlichtlandschaften*. A further painter praised by Nolde, Christian Rohlf, painted blurry moonlit scenes. Even Piet Mondrian made use of the tradition in the 1907–8 *Mill on the Gein*.

By that time the genre had developed a fairly standard late Romantic iconography, first articulated by poets such as Novalis and Lenau in the 1830's:

The sun sinks, weary
Day is gone. Light sleeps—
Willow branches trail dark waters

Of the pond, deep, motionless.

Tears flow: I have left her.
On the banks, willows
Rustle, sedge shivers
And trembles, sighing.

Through the darkness and sorrow
Of deep distance, through low
Rushes, in mirrors of water, in silence,
The evening star glitters.

Nolde's Moonlit Night has all of these: rushes or sedge, moonlight, and a willow dragging its leaves in a pond. Like the poem, it excludes the forsaken lover (the poem only says "I have left her") and leaves the viewer to guess at emotions and narratives.

Along with the fondly repeated iconography of Night went a distinctive color scheme, defined by an absence of color, an eclipse of light. Trakl sets out this negative palette in the poem "On the Moors":

Wanderer in black wind; lightly the dry reed
Whispers in the stillness of the moor. Under grey heavens
A flight of wild birds passes,
Crosswise, over dark water.

...

Apparition of Night: toads plunge out of silvery waters.

Black and grey, necessarily approximated in the paintings by dark earth tones, are relieved by the silver waters (or silvery stars or moon). Sometimes even the illumination seems to be cancelled by the surrounding dark: "The moon blooms on black water, / Its fragrance streams through the night, / Dark, attenuated clouds / Lie mute on the edge of the heavens." Here as elsewhere, it is not so much that strong colors are absent as that they are blacked out—in painter's terms, it is not as much chroma that is lowered as value.

Nolde did a few paintings in which these tonalities were intentionally lightened. In *Heimat* (1901; Plate 5) the colors are the same siennas, umbers, and green earths as in *Moonlit Night*. The green is not strong Chromoxydgrün or Malachitgrün, as in *Tropensonne*: here the hues are less strident and browner than in the later painting, as if they are struggling out of their native darkness. Nolde's technique, in which a greasy

medium is brushed (or rather, smeared) in a primitive fashion from side to side, suffers when



it is brought to light.

Even in its seventeenth century beginnings, Night was more than an emblem of rusticity or a convenient cover for refugees and bandits: it was also the setting for witches' sabbaths. In the nineteenth century, too, immersion in night involved something more sinister than ordinary dreaming. Goethe had already asked "what walks at night / through the labyrinth of the heart," and Büchner's evocation of Lenz at the coming of night turns Goethe's question into the feeling of hopelessness characteristic of impending psychosis:

But only as long as daylight filled the valley could he endure it; toward evening a strange awe took possession of him, he felt like running after the sun; gradually, as objects became more shadowy, all appeared so dreamlike, so antagonistic to him; he was seized with fear, like children left to sleep in the dark, it seemed to him he was blind. Now his terror grew, the nightmare of madness sat at his feet, the unalterable thought that all was a dream opened

to him; he clung to every object. Shapes passed swiftly before his eyes, he tried to hold them....

To the Symbolists, night was not just alive with witches or robbers but was itself alive, a potentially sinister source of animist spirit. Maeterlinck's *Loiseau bleu* imagines Night is the most powerful force of a dreamlike Nature:

THE CAT: Listen to me!... All of us here, Animals, Things, and Elements, possess a soul which man does not yet know... This is what I have just learned from my old friend, Night, who is also the guardian of the mysteries of life....

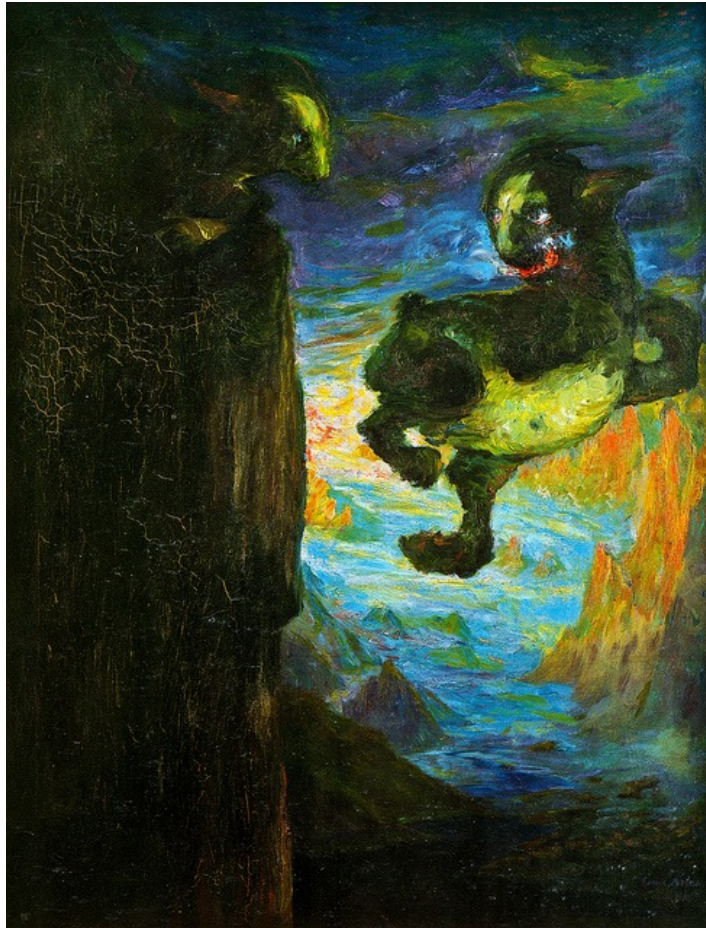
Rilke, too, rhapsodized on a mutable, animistic Night in his cycle of the same name: "Night, O face against my face / dissolved into deepness. / You my wondering look's most immense preponderance." Nolde was not a stranger to such feelings: in the fall of 1883, when he was sixteen, he was possessed by "confused feelings" ["unbestimmten Gefühlen"] and lay down in a harvested cornfield. At first he lay face up, imagining himself to be Christ (the more often quoted portion of the episode), but then he turned and lay in a furrow, "dreaming, with the uncertain belief that the entire great, round, wondrous earth was my lover [Geliebte]." In the spring of 1901 Nolde was in Lildstrand "in the Northwest corner of Denmark." It was a period of utter isolation. A letter dated 10 July describes his barely controlled hallucinations and incidentally shows how he was seeing color. Alone for days on end, he had long periods in which he ran in random directions, out of control. Toward the end of one such period he writes (using the third person to express his disorientation):

Then he sits hunched over [gebückt] behind a dune and buries his empty hands in the deep sand. Night sinks in black gloom [Schwarz] to earth, the heavens are a cold blue [Kaltblau], the dunes are grey, it will rain. [ML, 33]

Here the colors and experience of night are unconsciously used to give a poetic end to his day's wanderings. The painter who boasted he had only read one book in his life was living the poetic and pictorial traditions of night.

Nolde also knew more specific fantasies, visions, and fairy tales, and he drew (and hallucinated) a wide variety of creatures—Spuken, Schreckfiguren (terrifying figures), nächtliche Fabeltiere (mythical nocturnal animals), unheimliche Gestalten (strange forms), "Nachtwandler [sleepwalkers], Sonnenanbeter [sun worshippers], and I don't know what else." In pictures depicting such creatures, Nolde allowed himself a few intense colors scattered in darkness. Lildstrand provides a setting and suggests the pictures' limited

palette: “It was difficult for me to find a suitable style. Colors did not suit me. I went on



long walks, where no one usually went, over the dunes and rose-red heaths” (ML, 88). (One of the most difficult tasks in lecturing on Nolde is to convey the sense of a life lived utterly without a neurotic fear of psychosis, a life that comprehended Spuken as natural accompaniments of an extreme and ongoing isolation. Today we give our ghosts tawdry scripts of revenge, so they evoke a narrower expressive range centering on fear and revulsion. A contemporary who went through one of Nolde’s “dreaming” or “wandering” episodes would probably note it in a diary as evidence of some pressing psychic pathology.)

Vor Sonnenaufgang (Before Sunrise, 1901; Plate 6), with its two unnamed Spuken, uses crimson, chromium oxide green, and an ultramarine tint. The color precedent for such fantasies is von Stuck, who had rejected Nolde’s application to study under him in 1898. Von Stuck’s paintings of Night, such as the garish, brooding Judith and Holofernes of 1927, have the same nearly black background shot through with sienna, crimson, green, and ultramarine. His colors have been described as “phosphorescent gleams,” and the phrase is apt for a variety of nocturnal images that occur around the turn of the century. Deep

torchlight shimmering with phosphorescence is also familiar in early Kandinsky paintings and Jugendstil canvases.

In outline, then, this is the Night that Nolde painted in the years 1900–1903 and returned to sporadically throughout his life. It was an antidote to the public light of German Realism, and an escape into the immaterial, the formless, and the colorless. When it was illuminated at all, its highlights served to pick out half-seen specters. These Spuken, “unknown in cities,” as Nolde said, and their curtains of blackness, guarded the intimacy of the paintings and their sentiments—but at the same time, remote landscapes and arcane monsters made a public declaration of that private content. Much of the later work can be understood as an attempt to remove even these signs announcing private content: without stage tricks and apparitions, the paintings could be wholly inaccessible to the profane, who expected rules, labels, theories, and other public declarations of sense.

Colorstorms

...with this [invitation] we'd like to pay our debt of gratitude for your colorstorms.

- Karl Schmidt-Rottluff to Nolde, inviting him to join the Brücke

In a world of colors I wanted

To shed the dust of common day.

- Stefan George

Nolde never developed a coherent theory of color, or even a consistent lexicon of color meanings. Instead color invaded his experience as an unpredictable intimate certainty. Here Kandinsky's elaborate metaphor appears by contrast precious and overintellectual (he said “tones”—colors—in the outside world produced sympathetic vibrations in the analogous strings of the soul.) Nolde thought that animals crying at night sounded “piercingly yellow” (“gellender Gelb”) and “dark violet,” and described his wife Ada's singing voice as “between rose red and dark lilac” (ML, 167, 188, 278). Contemporary painters—but not Old Masters—could be described just in terms of color: Heckel and Kirchner painted “Farbenfreudige” pictures (roughly: pictures joyous on account of their color). Colors, Nolde said, sought out painters' eyes (ML, 165, 167). He often spoke solely in terms of color and made naïve connections between color and ideas. “I loved the blooming colors of flowers and the purity of the hues,” he declared: “Men's destinies are not always so important and beautiful, but they also end in fire or in the grave” (ML, 148). Mein Leben is filled with color

at the expense of form, composition, and line, so much so that there is room for doubt about Nolde's sincerity and his reasons for stressing color. His most direct and innocent pronouncements on color are wildly synaesthetic, unsystematic, unanalytic:

Yellow can express happiness and then again pain. There is flame red, blood red, and rose red. There is silver blue, sky blue, and thunder blue. Every color harbours its own soul, delighting or disgusting or stimulating me.

And again:

Colors, the material of the painter: colors in their inner life [Eigenleben], crying and laughing, screaming, fortunate, ardent and holy [heiss und heilig], like love songs and amorous [songs] [Liebeslieder und Erotik], like melodies and chorales [Gesänge und Chorale]!

When he says colors "cry and laugh," he is as outside of color theory as Heidegger was outside science. Color should develop "through" the painter, he thought, like "ores and crystals, moss and algae" (ML, 205).

Given this unsystematized experience, we can expect a wide range of evanescent color schemata in his work; and in fact, his "color delirium" (Farbendelirium) embraced at least five styles in quick succession. In each case the absorption of the style was less an attempt at imitation than a modification springing from his ongoing desire to keep his works ruleless and guileless and not to dog publicly accepted styles.

During his studies with Hölzel in 1899 and his exposure to Monet, Renoir, and Pissarro in 1900, Nolde had done isolated paintings in bright colors, but the real flood of color did not come until 1903. By the end of 1904 he was able to try the transition to bright colors: "As an experiment," he writes, "I painted pictures in the grayest gray, so that water and sky flowed together... and then returned to the fullest colors, the colors I loved because they were so beautiful, so hot and frosty, melancholy and jubilant" (ML, 113). Gosebruch reads this passage as a willful reinterpretation of Impressionism, but it is also a reaction against the Night paintings, and evidence that he meant to step back from his previous work.

The first colorstorms are at the farthest remove from the Night paintings, but they have neither the *clarté* and *lumière* of the French Impressionists nor the *Helligkeit* and *Lichtdurchlässigkeit* of the German Impressionists. After the early *Frühling im Zimmer* (Interior in the Springtime, 1903), they are done in obstinately opaque, thick, layered strokes, as the Night paintings of the years before had been. The Portrait of Schmidt-Rottluff (Plate 7) uses heavy pigments and a uniformly high chroma to work against any sense of transparency. Nolde avoided Liebermann's tender blues and greens and Slevogt's

favorite lemon yellow and cerulean blue. The jubilant airiness of paintings like Slevogt's



Seeräuber (1914) is the kind of practice the Portrait of Schmidt-Rottluff opposes. Perhaps farthest from Nolde's style and temperament is the extreme transparency of Lovis Corinth's paintings such as the Am Putztisch (1911) in which glassy shards of light shine in delicate tints of lemon yellow and chromium green. Nolde's colors are both more opaque and wilder than their German Impressionist counterparts. His shadows are not the "deep purple red [or] soft olive green" that Hamann and Hermand describe, but pure, thick cobalt green and blue.

Except in the beginning, Nolde did not use more than a small fraction of the approximately one hundred fifty colors commercially available in 1903 (the Frühling im Zimmer uses about ten). He was more interested in what we would call "formal disjunctiveness," and he could achieve it by doing color violence to the delicate palette of Impressionism. His outdoor scenes have little Flüchtigkeit or Pikanterie, and they are not involved in Impressionism's Nuancen kult. The farmers in Erntetag (Harvest Day), like the flowers and springtime scenes in other canvases, are contradicted at every point by violent colors, applied so simply that no joy can be taken in their nuances. A useful term here is

Verfremdung, “alienation,” as it has been used by Weisstein to describe the effect on atonal music when it includes quotations from conventional tonal work, as for example in Schönberg’s atonal waltzes Op. 23. Nolde’s use of Impressionism is a Verfremdung insofar as it lodges Impressionism’s harmonies in a dissonant context.

Schmidt-Rottluff’s invitation to Nolde to join the Künstlergemeinschaft Brücke mentions his Farbstürmen specifically, and speaks of the rest of his work only in general terms. A month before the invitation, in January 1906, Nolde had seen the work of van Gogh, Gauguin, and Munch at the Folkswang Museum, and later that year he had his uneventful encounter with Munch. Their initial influence prompted Nolde to give up Impressionist daubs for Postimpressionist color areas. The turning point seems to have occurred in the fall of that year, when he stayed at Cospeda (outside Jena) while Ada continued to seek help for her illnesses (ML, 144). Selz has called the painting Dorf Cospeda (Plate 8, below) Impressionist, and more specifically it derives from a Klimtian, Jugendstil palette. The background is a mosaic of cerulean blue and a violet Krapplach (madder lake), of which there were several varieties. Both are highlighted with white, and the light tonality is reinforced with dappled white, terre verte, and orangefarbiges Kadmium. The same variegated surfaces and tonalities occur in Klimt’s Mohnweise (1907), and his Bauergarten from the year before, both of which also have bluish and violet backgrounds overlaid with warm hues. This characteristically Jugendstil palette is evoked in a poem by Wilhelm Weigand: “The rosy glow of evening pales / Over purple-yellow trees. / Your white hands linger / Your white hands dream / In the fish pond’s bluish stream.”

In the years that followed the Postimpressionist strain became more pronounced. The Herbstwald (Autumn Forest) of 1910 has only four colors. Its tree trunks are resolutely blue, as in Klimt’s Avenue of the Schloss Kammer (1906) and other paintings, but unlike

Klimt, Nolde has applied his colors in solid patches. Narrative paintings like the Tanz um



das Goldene Kalb (Dance Around the Golden Calf) are the heirs of this Postimpressionist practice, and Nolde continued to use variants of the style his whole life.

One more, related influence appeared before the advent of what I am calling “unnatural” color: that of Whistler’s monochromes. The 1911 Autumn Sea is nearly monochromatic, and may be the earliest example of Whistler’s influence. Nolde painted both diurnal and nocturnal monochromes, and experimented with bichromatic paintings such as the blue and green Seascape of 1913. As in the case of his earlier adaptations, these paintings alter crucial aspects of their models: in this case his colors are far from the thin glazes and translucent scumbles favored by Whistler.

Hence in the years of Nolde’s Farbendelirium (approximately 1903–1908), there are at least five color styles: an early essay in French Impressionism; a reaction against German Impressionism; a growing interest in Postimpressionist color areas; an experiment with

Jugendstil color; and variations on Whistler's nocturnes. Nolde imagined his versions of these five styles as natural, inevitable adaptations, and they served to put his stamp on each, invest each with his nonverbal, rural nature—Nolde would have said a “Northern” quality—by making the transparent opaque and the harmonious dissonant. These oxymorons are part of the “strategy,” if that word is not already too strong: they block an easy, theoretical reading of color schemata. Nolde was casting about, not for a “solution” or a place in the avant-garde but for an irresolvable difference that would keep his work ruleless, unattached to isms, eigenartig.

The Unnatural

It sounds odd for a painter to say he paints for himself alone. Pictures can be so beautiful, that profane eyes cannot even see them.

- Nolde

Vincent van Gogh described his “arbitrary” color practice this way:

I paint... as faithfully as I can, to begin with. But the picture is not finished yet. To finish it I am now going to be the arbitrary colorist. I exaggerate the fairness of the hair, I get to orange tones, chromes and pale lemon yellow. Beyond the head... I paint infinity, a plain background of the richest, most intense blue I can contrive....

Here he is not really being “arbitrary” but is combining two discrete techniques: he “exaggerates” colors by increasing their chroma, and he adds colors that are possible colors of real objects, as a blue background may be a sky or a wall. What is “arbitrary” is his whim—what his eye lights on, what he thinks stands in need of extraordinary emphasis. Nolde, too, had confined himself to what Weisstein has called “some sort of more or less violent distortion” of color. But distortion and exaggeration are alterations made on fundamentally naturalistic underpinnings—as van Gogh says, the “faithfully” painted original remains underneath. But there was also a practice beyond even these loosened associations with the regimen of naturalism: a deliberately anti-natural colorism that did not begin by matching but by making.

The precedents for this must be sought not in painting but in Symbolist poetry, which had already explored the possibilities of applying color modifiers to inappropriate concrete nouns. As Françoise Meltzer has observed, the “dissonance” thereby created is a general strategy that includes synaesthesia as a special case. Not all concrete nouns and

unusual color modifiers produce synaesthetic effect: take for example “J’ai rêvé la nuit verte.” Meltzer sees the entire technique as an attempt to avoid the literalness of the object in question, without erasing it altogether. In her words, this sense of color “has no prescribed signifié but rather moves directly from the signe to connotation.” A similar idea had been applied to painting in 1903 by Hermann Rohr, who declared that there should be paintings “so liberated from things that people have to stop trying to find any relation to reality in them and asking what it essentially is: for essentially color is nothing but color.”

Color that is “nothing but color” would have been familiar to Nolde from more prosaic sources. In his five years of work in furniture factories (1884–1889), making myopic architectural renderings and carving ornaments, he had plenty of time to acclimatize to the bright primary-color “peasant” decorations that were widely admired. The furniture that was produced during those years in Worpswede, Flensburg, and Berlin shows the bright colors Nolde would have encountered. It is significant here that when Worringer uses the term *Unnatürlich* he does not mean modern painting but ornamental and geometric styles. In Nolde’s case it would be wrong to overlook the possible influence of the bright peasant clothing both of Munich and of the area where he was born. When Nolde describes Ana’s naïve and unhappy journey to Berlin, he says she was dressed (for a stage show) as a peasant woman in “bright red and yellow.”

This indistinct sense of color as “nothing but color” is, I think, close to Nolde’s conception, and certainly closer than the various critical theories of color that attempted to explain the colors after the fact. It is essentially different from Kandinsky’s total separation of color and signifier. *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (1912) is, among other things, a theory allowing colors to drop their signifiers: Kandinsky says of the artist that “his open eye shall be judged [gerichtet] by his inner life.” Kandinsky’s conception is different from the Symbolist use of color, which weakened but did not break the tie to the signifier; and it suggests that only a total break from signifiers could generate a consistent color theory. Walter Sokel’s careful analysis of the Kantian epistemology behind Expressionism has been influential (Meltzer’s article owes its basic proposition to him), but it is easily oversimplified into the claim that Expressionism produced “unrealistic” colors “abstracted” from reality, a view that misses the essential tension I am trying to outline here. Intermediate solutions preserve some ties between color modifiers and objects but break others or let them “boomerang,” in Meltzer’s words, from modifier to inappropriate object and back to modifier. Because such solutions behave erratically and personally, no theory can comprehend them: they are safe from criticism, and become effectively ruleless color languages.

Nolde's color must also be distinguished from symbolic uses such as van Gogh's Heavenly blue backdrops. When Mallarmé used blue in his poems, he was—consciously or unconsciously—drawing on the symbolic meaning of blue (=eternity, distance) first codified in the Middle Ages. But unlike the Symbolists, Nolde avoided the kind of color consistency that can accumulate symbolic meaning, as Mallarmé's palette does upon repeated reading. Nolde's colors do not work toward interpretation or away from it, because their meanings are constantly changing. It is this specific mode that I am calling unnatural, to distinguish it from color that is "natural" (realist), symbolic (or Symbolist), or antinaturalist (abstract).

Naturally there are mixtures of overtly symbolic color and color with no communicable or comprehensible symbolic meaning. Munch's *Jealousy* (1894-5) is an instructive example of overtly symbolic use of anti-naturalist color, which receives its meaning from the title and its narrative implications (one face is green and another crimson). Paintings like the *Death Chamber* (1894-5; Plate 23) are not as easy to decipher without further information; but the colors of the faces (three reddish, two greenish, and one white) invite interpretation in terms of mental states. Gauguin's early *Vision after the Sermon* is slightly less explicable—its vermilion field is certainly symbolic, since it functions to indicate the spiritual nature of the vision, but it is hard to say—again, without information from outside the picture—why it should be red, and what the red may express. A later canvas, the *Horsemen on the Beach* (1902) uses a similar device, but this time the symbolic intent is strongly elusive. Gauguin's shadowless rose beach does not symbolize a vision and fails to suggest a single, expressible mental state.

The rose beach is what Däubler called a "color without a designation [ohne Bezeichnung]," a color which describes nothing. Denecke thought Nolde's colors were expressions of essential qualities (the idea to which Rohr had objected), but he also came close to describing Gauguin's kind of anti-symbolic color: "The particular art of choosing colors [Farbwahl], completely unnatural [unnaturalistische] colors, is no longer astonishing... the depiction of objects has been almost completely overcome." This kind of subtraction of (symbolic or descriptive) meaning makes the *Farbwahl* a private matter. It excludes both public meaning (as conveyed by realist palettes) and comprehensible symbolic meaning (as in some of Munch's works); it is here that Nolde's interests lay. His early paintings of *Night and the lonely Danish coast* or *Schleswig-Holstein moors* are replete with an uncommunicated isolation. Their darkness "erases the signifier" in a more literal way than symbolist poetry can by its inappropriate color modifiers. But unexpectedly, paintings full of color can be even more hermetic, since they can contain a private color language comprehensible only to the painter and those few who share his experiences.

The private languages of modernism have been studied in music and poetry, though they are strongest in the latter. At the same time Schönberg was working on the Second String Quartet (1907), Trakl was developing his own color imagery, full of private, unnatural connotation. Part II of his “Elis” names blue deer, blue fruit, and blue doves; and “A Winter Night” sings a litany of color: “Black frost.... / A red wolf strangled by an angel. / Your walking legs clash like blue ice.” There are twelve colors in all, in a strange mixture of symbolic (Trakl’s use of “Blau” has been interpreted by Heidegger as a symbol for “the holy”), realist (“the rose-silver day”), and antirealist (“black frost... silver snow”). The color language, if it is that, remains personal since the colors are not consistently symbolic, realist, or anti-realist. If all the colors in the poem had been anti-realist, its esoteric color meanings would once again have become exoteric, and the poem would signify an satiric attack upon appearances or conventions. Trakl and Nolde practice “flawed” arts, to an analogous effect: they remain utterly sealed by allowing some colors remain open to conventional and consistent interpretive programs. By the same logic, Kandinsky’s theory makes his work public, even if it does not account for the inner necessity governing each individual color choice, and despite the fact that that paintings are so much more complex than the theory that the latter is all but useless.

Private “color languages”—in quotation marks since true languages have known lexica attached to relatively stable meanings—such as Trakl’s and Nolde’s cannot be explained. They can either be criticized irrationally, in paeans to their numinous incomprehensibilities, or else simply affirmed and described for that same quality (as I am doing here). Irrationalist criticisms, such as Däubler’s description of Kandinsky, can achieve poetic connections:

Our butterfly souls bloom, [they] shine upwards in their blue freedom.
Impetuous streams of gold pour into cloud casts. We present man and forest
with red beauty. We write of white simplicity. Shavings from violent yellow
stretch into blue inevitabilities.

In Däubler’s text some colors are solid things with attributes [“Ausfälle aus Heftiggelb”] and others move ambiguously and unpredictably from subject to predicate. His evocations speak convincingly about the apperceptions of color he found in Kandinsky, but they do not help to map meanings of individual paintings.

It is quicker to assert that the colors cannot be decoded. Morgan quotes Stefan George’s preference for “a language inaccessible to the profane multitude,” and Nolde himself had a similar wish (see the epigraph to this section). Indeed, Morgan’s idiosyncratic title, “Secret Languages,” could profitably have been changed to “Private Languages,” with

its explicit reference to Wittgenstein, and his infamous “conclusion” to the *Tractatus* (“What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.”).

Nolde painted in several modes of unnatural color. One is derived from painters like Redon, with their propensity to distinguish forms and colors in normally flat and monochromatic objects. The 1913 *Vase of Flowers* has colors that belong neither to the flowers nor the vase, but to the atmosphere in which they both dissolve. Nolde painted this way principally in later works. The *Frühmorgenflug* (Early Morning Flight) of 1940 reverts to this technique: the sky bursts into colored forms, and the two enigmatic, floating *Fabeltiere* are violet, yellow, mauve, red, and white. In the *Freigeist* (Free Spirit) of 1906 Nolde assigns the garment of each figure a color which is, in a general sense, symbolic of the mental state of each. The colors are not naturalistic, even though fabrics can be dyed any hue, because they are not modified from observation. In Nolde’s words, such colors “follow the turning from optical, external attractions [Reiz] to the felt, inner world” (ML, 157). These colors, however, are not symbolic in the literal way we say a person is “green with envy” or “purple with rage,” and not even in the less stable way in which Munch indicates jealousy with red and green. Nolde’s colors are without explicable connection to the obvious psychological states of the three figures and the “implacable” artist.

Flat areas of color with no communicable meaning are most effective when they are not tied to figural paintings, so that they are also free of narrative and psychological connotation. The *Nusa lik* and *Tropensonne* (Plates 1 and 2) have this at its most developed. If Nolde’s evaluations of Gauguin are taken as acknowledgment of his indebtedness, then Nolde’s South Seas trip may be more significant than it has been taken to be: it was the quarter of the world where Gauguin’s colors has been developed and where Nolde was able to forge his own version of them.

Tropensonne’s colors are not wholly anti-realistic (the sun is stark, but not unbelievably so) but they make no attempt to capture the beauties of sunset, even in the schematic way that Chekhov did in that small masterpiece “Gusev,” in which a character dies, and is mourned by a sunset filled with meaningless colors and incomprehensible symbols. Nolde’s colors lack what Wittgenstein called “color logic.” They are inconsistently dissonant, common and uncommon, “arbitrary,” paired, realist, anti-realist, and “unnatural”; and typically harsh, opaque, and unmixed.

Explicating this alogic is like describing a high wall: it says nothing about what lies beyond. Nolde’s privacy was a guiding impetus in his life, and the unnatural color in paintings like *Tropensonne* was its perfect expression, the place where it could sing without being heard. My analysis of color in terms of a psychology of usually happy but sometimes desperate isolation also accounts for a central fact of Nolde’s life: his name. Selz, following

Nolde, says he changed his name from Hansen because Hansen was a common name, and in order to separate his youth from his life as a painter. But his identification was also with the name of his tiny village, and was therefore also an identification with isolation, a declaration of his separate childhood (Plates 3, 4). In the 1880's Nolde was nothing but four farmhouses, their yards and fields, and a little stream. All his life Nolde lived in such places: Lildstrand, Cospeda, Alsen ("dieser Weltfernten Ecke," "this corner far from the world"), Soest, and even Käwieng, where *Tropensonne* was painted—and their isolation became part of his art.

Notes

[These have become detached from the text:
that's one of the drawbacks of computer files that are this old!]

Nolde, *Mein Leben* (Cologne, 1976). p. 204. Henceforth ML and page number.

New Ireland is part of the Bismarck Archipelago, northeast of New Guinea. The choice of Nolde for the expedition is a result of the two kinds of ethnographic illustration in use during the period: that of social anthropology and physical anthropology. Some studies, modelled after those of researches like Carl Heinrich Stratz and Julius Lippert, involved detailed drawings of exact proportions, and were frequently attempts to work out ethnographic definitions and the physical anthropology and etiology of race. Others, of which Nolde's is an example, stressed social anthropology and often employed Impressionist illustration in an attempt to lend atmosphere to descriptions of primitive culture. An earlier German expedition to New Guinea, Dr. Schnee's, provides an additional example of the second type. See his *Bilder aus der Südsee* (Dietrich Keimer, Berlin, 1904). Thus, although it is initially surprising that Nolde was chosen for such an expedition, he fit adequately into one of the preferred modes of illustration. Today there would be no place for him.

Color determinations can never reach perfect certainty without the electron microprobe and chemical analysis of thin sections of paintings, but identifications like these can be made reasonably secure by tabulating a concordance of pigments available at the time and their modern equivalents. In Nolde's case the indispensable source is Heinrich Ludwig's *Die Technik der Ölmalerei...* (Leipzig, 1893), 2 vols., esp. vol. 2, pp. 138-177, which lists all the pigments available in Germany in 1893. In 1903 Friedrich Laenicke's *Handbuch der Ölmalerei* appeared, which gives an updated list (pp. 40-74). Their lists can be translated into modern terms with the help of sources such as Hilaire Hiler's *Notes on the Technique of*

Painting (New York, Oxford University Press, 1935) and the classic work by L. Doerner, *The Materials of the Artist*, tr. E. Neuhaus (New York, 1934). “Emerald green” is in quotation marks since copper arsenate is now avoided; originally copper arsenate green was known as Deckgrün, Schweinfurt green, or vert Paul Véronèse.

The more common pigments that could have been substituted are: Grüne Erde, Ultramarin Blau, and various rothe Eisenoxydfarben.

ML, p. 274. The fact that Nolde painted at some distance from the sea may be inferred from his description of walking to the building and from a map of Kåwieng (see n. 10).

Constable thought of a “white sheet” as an ideal, since it is a perfect solution to a common realist problem: how to minimize obtrusive brushstrokes in the sky and make it recede behind the landscape. Nolde’s depiction makes no effort to distinguish the brushstrokes of the sky or seascape, or to hide either. The entire tradition of cloud studies, which begins with Goethe (1779), and includes Kaspar David Friedrich, is concerned with backlighting, crepuscular rays, cloud types, and similar phenomena that do not concern Nolde.

Though several factors can help to make the choice, such as the typically higher amounts of dust in the sunset sky, there is no intrinsic difference between sunrise and sunset, and nineteenth-century studies typically concentrate on the cloudless sky. The standard source is still Minnaert, *The Nature of Light and Color in the Open Air* (New York, 1958), but see the wonderful studies by P. Gruner and H. Kleinert, *Die Dämmerungserscheinungen* (Hamburg, 1927); and J. M. Pernter, *Meteorologische Optik* (Vienna and Leipzig, 1906).

He names a series of paintings done at Kåwieng (*Tropensonne*, *Palmen am Meer*, *Stiller Südseeabend*, *Südsee Krieger*, *Junge Braune Mutter*, *Frauen im Ufersand Hockend*) and then introduces *Nusa lik*, “eine kleine schöne Insel... Wir gingen dann Umher und saßen auch zuweilen am jenseitigen Strand, schweigend vor dem weiten, stillen Ozean, so groß und wiet, als ob die Ewigkeit dahinter wohne,” thus setting it off from the *Tropensonne* and its companion pieces. (ML, p. 276.)

Nusa and *Nusa lik* are a north-south pair of islands one half mile off the east of Neu-Mecklenburg, approximately 150° 45' E, 2° 35' S. since the view is out into open ocean, the island is *Nusa*, and *Nusa lik* would be off the picture to the left.

These conclusions are based on Japanese war maps in the collection of the Regenstein library at the University of Chicago.

ML, 207. Compare Nolde, *Das Eigene Leben* (Köln, 1967), third ed., p. 170: “the South does not know the twilight hour.”

And the equally flat landscapes around Copenhagen, where Nolde moved in 1900.

Carl Einstein, *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1926), p. 113: “Man hat die Bilder dieser Jahre [Einstein is referring specifically to the period before 1900] allzu oft in

Gegensatz zum Impressionismus gestellt, vielleicht aber verlieren sie ihre gern überbetonte Besonderheit, wenn man die nicht allzu überraschende Fortsetzung romantischen Phantasierens erblickt.”

See Siegfried Wichmann, *Meister / Schüler / Themen / Münchner Landschaftsmaler im 19. Jahrhundert* (Herrsching, 1981), pp. 226-227.

Richard Muther, *Studien* (Berlin, 1925), quoted in B. Hamann and J. Hermand, *Impressionismus* (Berlin, 1960), pp. 269-270.

Böcklin's *Wettertannen* (1849) is a ringing example of the clear sky and darkening earth characteristic of the style. Marcel Roethlisberger, *Im Licht von Claude Lorrain* (Munich, 1983). Kaspar David Friedrich also did a dawn scene of Neubrandenburg. The *Frau in der Morgensonne* was known as *Frau vor der untergehenden Sonne* (Börsch-Supan and others), but it has recently been argued that it represents a sunrise. See Werner Hofmann et al., *Caspar David Friedrich, 1774 – 1840* (Munich, 1974), p. 222. The closest Friedrich came to Nolde's *Night* paintings is the *Two Men Watching a Sunset* of 1819 in the National Gallery, Berlin: it is both dusky and untypically soft-edged.

Nolde's *Night* is also distinct from the typical Expressionist night of materialism, although it partakes of that tradition peripherally. Materialism's night is concerned with urban scenes: see R. Heller, “‘The City is Dark’: Conceptions of Urban Landscape and Life in Expressionist Painting and Architecture,” *Houston German Studies I*: 42-57. Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* contains many images of darkness and night connected with materialism: he speaks of a “spiritual night” (distantly echoing Hölderlin) and “spots [which] appear on the sun, [so] the sun grows dark.” *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, pp. 28, 30, 31, 33, 58, 60, 61. In Nolde's work during the years 1900 – 1903, the great majority of dark paintings are of the countryside, and can only be said to be anti-materialist by implication or omission. What is dark in them is not the unspiritual world, but the spiritual one.

Nolde, *Das Eigene Leben* (Flensburg, 1949), second ed., p. 141, 142. See also *Jahre der Kämpfe*, second ed., p. 96, quoted in Martin Gosebruch, *Nolde Watercolors and Drawings* (London, 1972), p. 17. Nolde says that in such cases “my remedy... has been immediately to put the pictures away as a secret that even I was not allowed to know.”

Scenes of nocturnal gloom were not the exclusive property of the Bamboccianti: Caravaggisti such as Mola painted very dark paintings; and Caracciolo painted a *Flight into Egypt* with only hints of landscape. Mola did a number of dark landscapes during his “early Roman period”; see Richard Cooke, *Pier Francesco Mola* (Oxford, 1972). Painters like Caracciolo often reduced landscapes to faint streaks of umber. The two very different ways of darkening landscape ran in parallel traditions through the nineteenth century.

“In Nebel ruhet die Welt, / Noch träumen Wald und Wiesen”; from “Septembermorgen,” tr. J. A. Tobin, in Angel Flores, ed., *An Anthology of German Poetry from Hölderlin to Rilke in English Translation* (New York, 1960), p. 244.

“Weil auf mir, du dunklen Auge, / Übe deine ganze Macht, / Ernste milde, träumerische, / Unergründlich süsse Nacht!” From “Bitte,” in *Gedichte* (1932), tr. D. Durling, in Flores, op. cit., p. 213.

Liszt’s remark is quoted in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (New York, 1980), vol. 13, p. 258b. For Czerny’s opinion see his *On the Proper Performance of All Beethoven’s Works for Piano*, ed. Paul Badura-Skoda (Vienna, 1970), p. 49.

For an example by Cazin see Émile Michel, *Les Maîtres du Paysage* (Paris, 1906), title page and p. 520. It is significant that Michel chooses the simplest and darkest landscape of the entire survey to illustrate the title page, opposite a frontispiece by Hobbema, as if to represent the old school and poetic new school. Michel says several times that Cazin’s style is “très personnel,” and reports “Il aimait ces contrées misérables et abandonnées... en Hollande, les plages ignorées où se perd quelque mince cours d’eau,” a description is reminiscent of the Grünau farther north.

Wichmann, op. cit., pp. 112-113, and figure 485.

See *ibid.*, *Monscheinlandschaft mit Windmühlen* (1851), figure 251.

The stay of 1898-1899 was closer in time to the Night paintings, and he may have seen Schleich’s paintings then.

He studied Watts in 1899, and in 1909 ranked him along with Böcklin as “the most significant [painters] of our time.” See the letter to Hans Fehr, 5 March 1909, in Paul Westheim, ed., *Künstlerbekenntnisse* (Berlin, n.d.), p. 237, quoted in Peter Selz, *Emil Nolde* (New York, 1963), p. 11, n. 4. Hammerschøi’s stark Landscape is reproduced in C. Laurin et al., *Scandinavian Art* (New York, 1922), p. 385. American painters who took up the style are evidence of its ubiquitousness. Ryder and Inness are perhaps the best known, but exhibitions and auctions were full of brooding paintings by artists like Ralph Albert Blakelock, J. Francis Murphy, Alexander Wyent, and Homer Martin. One example among many is *American Paintings*, collection of C. Humphreys (American Art Association, Feb. 14, 1917).

Flores, op. cit., p. 214, my trans. In a letter of 6 June 1838 Lenau apologized for speaking of macabre subjects by claiming it was “ärger als ein kunstkennerischer blumenmalereibesprechender.” N. L., *Briefe an Sophie von Löwenthal* (1834-45) (Munich, 1968), p. 97.

Georg Trakl, “On the Moors,” trans. Robert Grenier, in G. T., *A Profile*, ed. Frank Graziano (Logbridge-Rhodes, 1983), p. 43.

In *Lyrik des Jugendstils* (Reclam, Stuttgart, 196), p. 21, my trans. In a letter of 31 July, 1892, van Gogh discusses various shades of gray and a “gloomy landscape” in much the same terms. See *The Letters of V. v. G. to His Brother, 1872–1886* (London, 1927), vol. 1, pp. 482-486.

Georg Büchner, “Lenz,” trans. Michael Hamburger, in G. B., Leonce and Lena, Lenz, Woyzeck (Chicago, 1972), p. 41.

Maurice Maeterlinck, “L’Oiseau bleu,” trans. A. T. de Mattos (New York, 1917), p. 57.

Trans. Michael Hamburger, in *German Poetry, 1910–1975* (Manchester, 1976), p. 21.

ML, 26. An example of the stress which has been put on the first part of the experience is Pois, E. N. (Washington, University Press of America, 1982), p. 25.

ML, 88 and passim. On 4 September 1944 Nolde wrote: “My art is a rural art. It believes in all human qualities and in primitive beings which scientific research rejected long ago and which can indeed no longer be found in cities.” Quoted in Werner Haftmann, E. N., *Unpainted Pictures* (New York, 1965), text before fig. 26. This is the most humorous, and most sober, of many similar pronouncements and anecdotes about the Spuken. I would interpret the joke as an indication that Nolde sincerely believed in such apparitions, and felt a little uncomfortable about it.

See Pois, op. cit., pp. 46-47, for another description of the palette as “alternating gloomy and garish colors.” Heinrich Vogeler, for example, begins a poem with an image of a faint star reflected in a pool, but inclines to other sources of illumination and color: “A butterfly moves from bloom to bloom, / Glow-worms shine at our feet, / The flowers nod and greet.” (*Lyrik des Jugendstils*, op. cit., p. 34, my trans. “Ein Falter von Blume zu Blume zieht, / Glühwürmschen leuchten zu Füßen, — / Die Blumen nicken und grüßen.”)

In later years, Nolde returned to the colors and subject matter of the Night period in such works as the *Dark Sea at Seebüll*, in which a yellow light glows from the edges of a deep blue cloud, and the *Mühle* of 1924, which is deep purple and green except for the glowing gold cloud and phosphorescent windmill (Plate 14).

Pois, op. cit., p. 46, says of *Sonnenaufgang* that it “contains overtones both of thinly veiled aggressive tendencies and of stark, terrifying loneliness.” Both psychological qualities are depicted literally instead of (say) allegorically, so they become part of the unhidden, public content of the painting.

“...wir haben ihnen hiermit den Zoll für ihre Farbstürme entrichten wollen.” Quoted in ML, 146.

Stefan Georg, *Gedichte*,

The closest Nolde comes to Kandinsky's allagory is a note written 30 May 1943 in which he declares "Colours are my notes, which I use for form harmonizing or contrasting sounds and chords." See Haftmann, *op. cit.*, text after figure 17.

Even though he does not develop a theory of color, Nolde may well have had a motive for stressing color in the autobiography (it plays a lesser role in the letters, but a comparable one in the published notes), and it is worth considering the issue since it bears on the use of *Mein Leben* as an historical document. Nolde had been under criticism from early on for a poor command of form. In 1911 Schieffler said Nolde "saw the world not in lines but in colors," and in 1926 came Carl Einstein's attack in his *Kunst in des 20. Jahrhunderts*. To Einstein, "this pathetic believer [pathetische Gläubige] has hardly given us any new spatial form [Raumform]." (See Selz, *op. cit.*, p. 12; Gustav Schieffler, introduction to *Das Graphische Werk von Emil Nolde bis 1910* (Berlin 1911), quoted in Reed, *The Robert Gore Rifkind Collection, German Expressionist Art* (Los Angeles, 1977), p. 84; Einstein, *op. cit.*, p. 118; and ML, 188.)

In the face of such criticism Nolde's failure to develop a theory of color seems like a deliberate strategy, a claim that intense and unmediated experience and naïveté can prove his truthfulness and incidentally excuse his disinterest in form. There is some truth in this reading, but it implies that Nolde was capable of an effective degree of clear thought about his position. The text of *Mein Leben* speaks against this, because of its very simple sincerity. Unreflective, innocent statements like the following are not apt to be made by a canny, analytic mind: "Fujiyama, with its smooth, pretty conical form and flat peak, could be taken as a perfect symbol for Japan" (ML, 252). Passages like this, and the affecting tales scattered throughout the autobiography, set a limit to the amount of deliberate dissembling we should attribute to Nolde. The only thing he claims is the knowledge that knowledge itself is not necessary for painting; and many of his short, aphoristic paragraphs, which seem theoretical and out of place in the text, are commonplaces of the criticism of the day. (See ML, 104–08, esp. 205, and 252, and compare "the best thing about a work of art is what cannot be learnt," a note written 7 June 1943, quoted in Haftmann, *op. cit.*, text before figure 12.)

It is usually apparent when he appropriates opinions, and the effect is almost plagiaristic, as for example when he breaks off an artless description of his arrival in Neu-Mecklenburg to quote a letter that contains observations such as this one: "Primitive people [Urmenschen] live in their nature, are one with it and a part of its great unity [ganzen All]" (ML, 274). It seems likely, therefore, that whatever public motives he had for stressing color, they were easily overwhelmed by his natural, nonverbal, unconceptual responses. Such observations (such as the passage describing the "inner life" of colors) ring true in context and in relation

to the colors which he used in the paintings, since show only the inevitable regularity of habit, not the predictable order of a theory.

Quoted by Werner Haftmann, *op. cit.*, text following figure 17. The note was written 30 December 1942.

Jahre der Kämpfe, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-101; and see Haftmann, *op. cit.*, text following figure 17: "I delighted in colors, and it seemed to me that they loved my hands." (Written 15 January 1943.)

The name *Farbendelirium* was given by Nolde to one of his paintings. See ML, 143, and Emil Nolde, *Briefe aus den Jahren 1894–1926*, ed. Max Sauerlandt (Hamburg, 1967), second ed., letter of 11.III.08, p. 71.

Martin Gosebruch, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

See Karl Scheffler, *Deutsche Maler und Zeichner im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1919), p. 149-152. Scheffler says Liebermann "übergeistert" the plein air painters with his *Helligkeit*.

Nolde's dislike of Corinth was certainly partly political in nature: he describes Corinth's power over the Secession, and adds the image of Corinth walking through the room, pressing his hands to each woman's breasts in turn. But he also realized that Corinth developed an affinity to Expressionism (*Briefe*, *op. cit.*, letters of 25.I. 26, p. 117, and 15.6.25, p. 172; and ML, 210, where he comments that Corinth took Kokoschka's "ibeautiful blue")—and this may have piqued his resentment.

Hamann and Hermand, *op. cit.*, p. 284. The shadows in *Anna Wied's Garten* (Anna Wied's Garden, 1907) are a blue and green in a dissonant pair, and they are quite different from the mellifluous Impressionist shadows, which tend to be uniform blue (or purple) and do not jar with one another. The highlights in the painting are also unusual by Impressionist standards: Scharlachzinnobler and Karmin, mixed with white. One of the reds is "warm mischende," and the other is "kalt mischende," so that when they are mixed with white, one gives a warm tone and the other a cool tone. (Ludwig, *op. cit.*, p. 159 ff.) Carmine and vermilion had been used together in the Renaissance—Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* is an example—but more commonly they make a dissonant pair. (See Arthur Lucas and Joyce Plesters, "Titian's 'Bacchus and Ariadne'," *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 2 (1978): 25-48, esp. p. 41.) Nolde's combination of the two reds with the green / blue pair compounds the disharmony and produces an unexpectedly unpleasant effect. *Frühling im Zimmer* was the last time Nolde used the "light golden brown" that Hamann and Hermand mention as a characteristic Impressionist color (its use extends back to the Rococo); and *Anna Wied's Garten*, with its two dissonant warm colors and two dissonant cool colors, already looks forward to the *Tropensonne* and *Nusa lik*.

Ulrich Weisstein, "Expressionism: Style or Weltanschauung?" *Criticism* IX (1967): 51-52. An intentionally startling fragment of tonal music in an atonal setting can be sarcastic (as in Ives' Second String Quartet) or have a kind of acid humor (as in Bartok's Fifth String Quartet), but it makes the music as a whole harder to understand, more private. In this respect Haftmann's characterization of Nolde's style as "ecstatic Impressionism" evokes the violence of his technique but misses its characteristic and crucial use of color.

Haftmann, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

The meeting with Munch is related in ML, 143-144, and the visit to the Volkswang Museum is alluded to on p. 135. Nolde says he got to know van Gogh, Gauguin, and Munch, "in Munich and Berlin."

Variants included Pfirsichblütenroth, Rosenroth (rose madder), Purpurroth, Violet-Roth, and gebrannter rother- and violettblauen-Krapplach. See Ludwig, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-165.

"Über purpurgelben Bäumen / Bleicht des Abends Rosenglut. / Deine weißen Hände säumen, / Hände träumen / In der Weihers blaue Flut." From "Die Insel," in *Lyrik des Jugendstils*, *op. cit.*, p. 32, my trans. As the autumn approached Nolde began his departure from both Impressionist and Jugendstil color. The painting *Bäume* has an odd carelessness of execution and color: the hues are autumnal, but also violent and somewhat disturbing. The bright red, mauve, and ochre seem too strong to depict sky, leaves, and ground. That winter Nolde let the water in his watercolors freeze, so that ice crystals distorted the forms and pushed the colors into one another. The experiment has been seen as an early example of indeterminacy, a kind of pre-Dada gesture; but it also served as a strategy to avoid the Impressionism's control.

An interesting example is the early Heidenhaus, later repainted in bright patches of color.

The tradition of monochromatic paintings—Whistler's adopted term *noctourne* is misleading here because of its associations with the Night paintings—demands that they be blue or violet, no matter what time of day they represent. Munch's *Night* and Giovanni Segantini's *Wicked Mother* (1897) are both night scenes; but Monet's *Matinée sur la Seine* of the same year and his equally purplish *Waterloo Bridge*, *Effet de soleil dans la brume* are both daylight scenes. The tradition of monochromatic daylight scenes was known in Germany; it occurs for example in Anton Romako's *Gastein Valley in a Fog* of 1877.

The end of the period is not marked by an abrupt break. The turning points are *Freigeist* (1906) and the stay at Cospeda (1908); paintings like *Tropensonne* represent the highest development of these characteristics. A sixth influence, as Martin Gosebruch has pointed out, is the "powerful blues, yellows, and reds" of the *Blaue Reiter* school, which Nolde experimented with beginning in 1913. (*Tanz um das Goldene Kalb* is an example of the color scheme Gosebruch has in mind.) I disagree with Martin Urban's opinion that "[Nolde's] true

mode of expression, that of color” was “brought about by French Post-Impressionism,” since it appears Nolde did not know the Postimpressionists until after he had been recognized for his *Farbstürmen*; but I agree with Urban’s date for the change, 1904. See Martin Urban, *E. N. Landscapes* (New York, 1970), p. 16, and Gosebruch, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

Quoted in Nolde, *Forbidden Pictures, Watercolors 1934–1945* (Marlborough Ltd., London, 1970), pp. 9-10, 17-18, my trans. The notes were written 28 January 1945 and 5 June 1942.

The *Letters of Vincent van Gogh* (New York, 1932), p. 276 ff. See also the letter to Emile Bernard in which he speaks of the dangers of “abstraction”: “et alors l’abstraction me paroisait une voie charmante. Mais c’est terrain enchanté ça, mon bon! et vite on se trouve devant un mur.” M. Beerblock and L. Reolandt, eds., *Correspondence Complète de Vincent van Gogh* (Paris, 1960), 3 vols., v. 3, p. 413.

I am altering E. H. Gombrich’s expression, since Nolde did not copy colors from nature when he painted, but often made studies on the spot. The process of painting involved a personal choice of colors conditioned partly by memories of the scene. In that sense, making was part of the actual procedure of creating the work of art, and matching was not.

Françoise Meltzer, “Color as Cognition in Symbolist Verse,” in *Critical Inquiry* (winter 1971): 253-273, esp. pp. 256-7, 259.

Rohr, *Impressionismus* (1907), quoted in Werner Hofmann, *Modern Painting in Austria* (Vienna, 1965), p. 74.

See *Das Eigene Leben*, *op. cit.*, figures on pp. 73-75, and George Himmelheber, *Die Kunst des deutschen Möbels* (Munich, 1963), 3 vols., v. 3, pls. 939, 1097, 1098.

Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*.

ML, 119. Kandinsky mentions bright peasant clothing in his color theory, in connection with the great “intensity” and “strength” of red, and again when he speaks of violet as a color that is almost dead, like “slag,” and is worn as a color of mourning.

See Christel Denecke, *Die Farben im Expressionismus* (Düsseldorf, n.d.), esp. pp. 64-66, 97.

Walter Sokel, in *The Writer in Extremis* (Stanford, 1959); for the simplified view see for example J. D. Jump, ed., *The Critical Idiom*, vol. 29, *Expressionism*, by R. S. Furness (London, 1973), p. 15ff. Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (Berne, 1965), eighth ed., p. 133.

Meltzer, *op. cit.*, p. 266, n. 18.

Munch responded to the Symbolist conception of color “harmonies,” but did not provide psychological interpretations of the color symbolism of individual works, except to inconsistently identify blue with death. See R. Heller, *Munch, His Life and Work* (Chicago, 1984), p. 95.

Gauguin asserted that his colors were not those which are ordinarily seen, as for example when he claimed to see blue in a banana leaf, in addition to the green and red that he says Signac would see in it (*The Intimate Journals of Paul Gauguin*, tr. V. W. Brooks (London, 1923), p. 4). This kind of assertion is part of the conventional Symbolist attitude against copying appearances (see the letters to Émile Schufflenecker, 14 August 1888, 8 October 1888, 1 March 1899, and July 1901, in *Paul Gauguin, Letters to His Wife and Friends* (Cleveland, 1949), pp. 100, 104, 211, 228). When it came to actually explaining the colors he chose, Gauguin spoke only of “emotional choices” and “musical accords” (letter to his wife, 8 December 1892, in *ibid.*, p. 178; and letter to Daniel de Monfried, 8 December 1892, in *Lettres de Gauguin à D. d. M.* (Paris, n.d.), p. 63; and a letter of July 1899 in which he calls vermilion his “favorite color,” in *ibid.*, p. 147). The repeated assertions that he was unnatural and arbitrary (a word also used by van Gogh; see above) are the public face which is put to a very personal, unsystematic Farbwahl in which colors do not have single meanings—and in this, his practice resembles Nolde’s.

ML, 215, 277. In a letter Nolde declares that “Gar keinen anderen bildender Künstler weiss ich, ausser Gauguin und mir selbst, der aus der unendlicher Fülle der Urnaturlebens Bleibendes brachte.” ML, 274.

This occurs in a letter to Gauguin, quoted by him in the *Intimate Journals*. See John Boutlon Smith, “Strindberg’s Visual Imagination,” *Apollo* 92 (1970): 291.

Däubler, *Der Neue Standpunkt*, quoted in Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 39. Denecke, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

See Morgan, “Secret Languages: The Roots of Musical Modernism,” in *Critical Inquiry* (March 1984): 442-461, esp. p. 458. Compare Schönberg’s letter to Emil Hartzka on the possibility of filming *Die Glückliche Hand*: “My foremost wish is therefore for something the opposite of what the cinema usually aspires to. I want: the utmost unreality! The whole thing... Must never suggest symbols, or meaning, or thoughts, but simply the play of colors and forms.” *A. S. Letters*, ed. Erwin Stein (London, 1964), p. 44.

Trakl, *op. cit.*, pp. 36, 61.

Martin Heidegger, “Language in the Poem, A Discussion of G. T.’s Poetic Work,” in *On the Way to Language* (New York, 1971), pp. 159-198, esp. p. 166.

“Unsre Seelenfalter blühen, sternem empor in ihr blaues Freiheitsein. Rasche Golströme verwolken sich in Werken. Wir beschenken Mensch und Wald mit roter Schönheit. Wir wissen von weißer Einfalt. Ausfälle aus Heftiggelb langen in blaue Unabwendbarkeiten.” Däubler, *Der Neue Standpunkt* (Leipzig, 1916), p. 184.

Morgan, *op. cit.*

Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, tr. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London, 1961), p. 74. Compare Schopenhauer’s description of the result of a hypothetical

negation of the Will: “for those of us who are full of Will, it is nothing.” See Max Black, *A Companion to Wittgenstein’s Tractatus* (Ithaca, 1982 ed.), pp. 377-378.

See Nolde's description of the psychology of the figures in *ML*, 148.

The Oslofjord in *The Scream* and Kāwieng “harbor” in *Nusa lik* have sinuous coastlines framing bays harboring two summarily indicated ships. *The Scream* may well have been Nolde’s source for *Nusa lik*; he could have seen versions of it on several occasions. He first saw Munch’s painting at the Folkswang Museum in 1906, and he mentions an “Akt von Munch” in a letter of 6 June 1906. (*Briefe*, op. cit., p. 50.) Munch's painting *The Island* is also similar to *Nusa lik*, as is his *Starry Night* (see C. Laurin et al., op. cit., p. 587, and Heller, op. cit., p. 82, figure 124). But Nolde could also have gotten the painting’s snaking contours from other sources. One thinks of Hodler’s 1905 version of the *Genfersee von Chexbres*, or his *Eiger, Mönch, und Jungfrau im Mondschein*. The latter has cloud formations and a blue tonality similar to *Nusa lik*. Nolde may also have known Kolomon Moser’s cloud studies such as the *Mountain View*, which is even simpler than Hodler’s landscape. But all these are either monochromatic (in the tradition of Whistler’s monochromes) or else colored quite differently from Nolde’s painting. Any of them could have been the precedent for the painting’s simplicity and for Nolde’s accelerating interest in such possibilities (see Selz, p. 34: “*Nusa lik*... [is] one of the least representational landscapes Nolde ever painted...”).

Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Color*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe (Berkeley, 1978), *passim*.