

## Son of the soil and Son of Óðinn: unveiling a farmer's Eddic poetry (1920) and colonial Germanic concepts of nature in South West Africa, now Namibia

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# Son of the Soil and Son of Óðinn

*Unveiling a Farmer's Eddic Poetry (1920) and Colonial  
Germanic Concepts of Nature in South West Africa, Now  
Namibia*

## Introduction

Focusing on the triad of literature, culture, and nature by purposefully connecting ecocriticism and Old Norse studies also means learning from the reception of Old Norse texts and mythology after the Middle Ages. This includes researching their misuse and misinterpretation for right-wing ecologist, racial, and colonial purposes. In the face of crises, threats, and changes, humans tend to seek orientation in myths: 'Mythological narrations combine things from a sphere out of time and space with things of the here and now. [...] Myths offer meaningful explanations for the otherwise inexplicable.'<sup>1</sup> This strand of reception is neither interested in critically reading medieval texts as a possible source of inspiration for an urgently needed shift in mentality to address the current environmental crisis,<sup>2</sup> nor in deepening substantiated academic knowledge about medieval cultures, literatures, and the relationship between medieval people and their environment. Rather, it is about using Old Norse texts to interpret or confirm one's own experiences, opinions, and worldviews. An ecocritical perspective must therefore also focus on the relationship between the physical environment and medieval mythological literature received in translation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Junginger, 'The Revival', p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> To White Jr. 'Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen'. In search of an 'alternative Christian view', White Jr. proposes St Francis of Assisi as an inspiration for a shift in mentality. White, Jr., 'The Historical Roots', pp. 9–14.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Glotfelty's definition of ecocriticism in Glotfelty, 'Introduction', p. xviii.

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Although the reception of German *Edda* translations is an integral part of the nineteenth century and the Wilhelmine era (1888–1918), it has remained unresearched in the former colony of German South West Africa (GSWA), later South West Africa (SWA), now Namibia (NAM).<sup>4</sup> This underestimated strand of instrumentalizing Old Norse mythology links colonial desires of the German Empire to the völkisch movement, the agrarian ruralism of the anti-Weimar Republic Artamanen movement, and National Socialist ideas of *Lebensraum in the East*.<sup>5</sup> Analogies can also be found in today's right-wing inspired environmentalism of the *Rechte Landnahme* (right-wing land grabbing) which describes a phenomenon in Germany known since the 1990s but ideologically rooted in the völkisch and the Artamanen movement of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries: members of the New Right, a new völkisch movement, settle in sparsely populated rural areas in Germany, buying and operating organic farms, and putting into practice their idea of the *Kulturrevolution von rechts* (cultural revolution from the right) by spreading racist and völkisch attitudes among their neighbours. Their domestic settlement goals seem to be colonially inspired in that they show structural analogies to colonial ambitions and aim at successively achieving a shift in discourse by establishing an ethnically homogeneous peasant society often built on Germanic rites and a Germanic nature religion allegedly derived from Old Norse mythology.<sup>6</sup>

Based on my decolonizing, ecocritical analysis and interpretation of records written between 1911 and 1924 in GSWA and SWA by Wilhelm Ludwig Geverhard Elmenhorst (1890–1964), I show how the imagination of a Germanic colonizer, Germanic nature mythology, and colonial pastoral aesthetic in an individual's autobiographic view on historical events converged to legitimize hubristic claims to the rightfulness of Germanic nature experience, territorial expansion, and colonial

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- 4 The territory referred to here was a German colony called Deutsch-Südwestafrika (German South West Africa, GSWA) from 1884–1914. It was occupied in 1914 by the South African Union shortly after the beginning of the First World War and became its administrative zone South West Africa (SWA) in 1915. From 1919, it was League of Nations Mandate South West Africa of the South African Union, which manifested the name SWA. The United Nations proclaimed 'that in accordance with the desires of its people, South West Africa shall henceforth be known as "Namibia"' in the UN Resolution 2372 (XXII) from 12 June 1968, p. 1. Since it gained independence as the Republic of Namibia (NAM) in 1990, the name Namibia prevailed. In respect of the process of decolonization and in acknowledgement of the fractured history, I use the changing names according to the respective period or point in history I am referring to. For the history cf. Wallace, *A History of Namibia*. When I refer to the geographical area, I use the adjectival term 'south-west African'.
- 5 The idea of creating *Lebensraum in the East* (literally: living space in the East) by colonizing eastern Europe had already been developed in the early 1920s in völkisch nature religious circles and the Artamanen movement; cf., e.g., von Schnurbein, *Norse Revival*, p. 192. The made-up word 'Artamanen' was interpreted as 'keeper of the soil'; Brauckmann, 'Nach dem Vorbild der Artamanen', p. 52.
- 6 The term *Landnahme* (land grabbing) alludes to Old Norse *landnám*, i.e. the settlement of Iceland around AD 874. For *Rechte Landnahme* (right-wing land grabbing), cf. Brauckmann, 'Nach dem Vorbild der Artamanen', pp. 52–58. For connections to völkisch ideas and the glorification of the Germanic, cf. Speit, 'Völkische Erweckung', pp. 62–72, and Franke, 'Argumentationsmuster von RechtsextremistInnen', p. 55. Cf. also the concept of Asatru by the *Verein für germanisches Heidentum* quoted in von Schnurbein, *Norse Revival*, p. 134, and pp. 183–85 on Asatru as a nature religion.

revisionism because of allegedly good German-Germanic governance.<sup>7</sup> Analyses of Elmenhorst's autobiographical notes, colonial poems, and echoes of Old Norse mythological texts combined with philological research into how the *Poetic Edda* was retold in a particular context and at a particular historical point in time, help to understand the intricate connections of text, culture, and nature in an ecocritical way, as well as reveal something of the human mentalities that jeopardize respectful human–nature relations even today.<sup>8</sup>

## Texts Investigated

Elmenhorst's texts are unique in transmission but representative in content. Although most of them remained unpublished, they show in part characteristics of the colonial as well as the early postcolonial German *Südwestler Literatur* (Southwestern Literature). Through performative passages addressed to an audience, it becomes clear that Elmenhorst had intended many of his texts to be published, but he only seems to have found the opportunity to publish a few poems and newspaper articles: poetry and anecdotal contributions to magazines are said to exist or have existed in various minor print media from about 1911 to 1968.<sup>9</sup> Among Elmenhorst's published works is his dissertation.<sup>10</sup> There is evidence of one posthumously published poem and one posthumously published journal article.<sup>11</sup>

German Southwestern Literature was written by unprofessional writers — adventurers, farmers, itinerant traders, craftsmen, miners, and colonial officials — and displays corresponding qualities in language and style. It is marked by a heroic-hegemonic idealization of colonialism, colonial revisionism, and the refutation of the *Kolonialschuldfrage* (lie of colonial guilt) that German colonizers were confronted with in the *Blue Book* — a report that served to prove German incompetence in the

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7 Original texts contain nationalist, racist, and inappropriate vocabulary, ideologies, and worldviews. As the author of this contribution, I distance myself from these vocabulary, ideologies, and worldviews in the most explicit way. Nevertheless, I chose to reproduce all material unchanged and uncensored, and translated it into English equivalents in order to provide an authentic insight into the texts. All translations into English are my own unless otherwise indicated.

8 This chapter builds on source material and takes up aspects from the research project 'Vom Schüler einer christlichen Kolonialschule zum Verehrer Wotans. Der schriftliche Nachlass von Wilhelm Ludwig Geverhard Elmenhorst. Ein Beitrag zur Aufarbeitung deutscher Kolonialgeschichte' (January 2019 to December 2022), generously funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation, Germany. By placing the source material, its analysis, and interpretation specifically in the context and framework of ecocriticism and decolonization, this chapter opens a new perspective on Elmenhorst's written legacy and emphasizes the importance of studying the reception and translation of Old Norse texts from an ecocritical point of view. While the historical part of the funded research project is carried out by my colleague Dr Sybille Bauer, I focus on the textual and literary part of Scandinavian Studies. Bauer and Egerer, *Vom Schüler einer christlichen Kolonialschule zum Wotansverehrer*.

9 Cf. NWLGE Priv. 01, p. 3.

10 Elmenhorst, *Das Haus in Südwest-Afrika*.

11 Nordenburg, *Südwestafrikanische Geschichten*, p. 25; Elmenhorst, 'Tier- und Naturbeobachtungen'.

colonies and was used to justify the German Empire's ceding of all its colonies in the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>12</sup>

The texts I examine in this chapter disprove the earlier view claimed by Keil that German Southwestern Literature should be distinguished from *völkisch* literature, although it conveys ideas of racism close to the *völkisch* ones. A racially understood Germanic 'Aryan cult' which was also combined with extreme anti-Semitism, Keil claims, plays no role in German Southwestern Literature.<sup>13</sup> However, several of Elmenhorst's texts as well as the Germanic and Aryan cult he practises textually in his *Eddic Poetry*, a text central to my investigation, disprove Keil's claim.<sup>14</sup> They suggest looking at connections between Germanomania and German colonialism as well as at least differentiating between unpublished and published works of German Southwestern Literature.

Unlike the already well-researched discourse history and aesthetics of *Edda* reception and unlike the political and ideological instrumentalization of Old Norse mythology in continental Europe around 1900,<sup>15</sup> Elmenhorst's texts offer insights into the thoughts and experiences of an ordinary man in a German colony. That they shed some light on the uncharted part of *Edda* reception in GSWA and SWA is what makes these personal records notable. Although they are the only known and transmitted evidence of productive *Edda* and Old Norse mythology reception in German translation in GSWA and SWA so far, examining Elmenhorst's milieu suggests that the discourses he addressed were fairly well known in semi-educated, pseudo-intellectual colonial circles.

12 Cf. Keil, *Die postkoloniale deutsche Literatur in Namibia*, pp. 237–44; cf. also Silvester and Gewalt, *Words Cannot Be Found*.

13 Cf. Keil, *Die postkoloniale deutsche Literatur in Namibia*, pp. 253–54 n. 311. I do not have the space to explain the anti-Semitism and racism in Elmenhorst's unpublished texts here in detail. However, I wish to point out a passage of Elmenhorst's anti-Semitic text *Was ist der Kernpunkt der Judenfrage?* (What Is the Key Point concerning the Jewish Question?), NWLGE Priv. 14.21, p. 4, written as early as 1910 by the twenty-year-old Elmenhorst: 'Der nordische Mensch ist die Eroberernatur [...] Was frueher durch das Schwert errungen wurde, wird heut durch Erfindung, Technik und Organisationskraft erreicht. Der alte Kampfgeist formt sich allmaehlich in Unternehmmergeist um, der eben so erobert, wie frueher das Schwert. [...] Eroberer! [...] Menschen nordischen Blutes. Sowie dieses Blut verwaessert, verfaellt auch der Typ. Demgegenueber steht der Jude, der nicht erzeugt, sondern erzeugen laesst. Der nicht kauft, um zu verbrauchen, oder zu verteilen, sondern um zu verhandeln! Nicht um Geld zu v e r d i e n e n, sondern um Geld zu h a e u f e n, das von Anderen verdient wurde! [...] Diese Spaltung in der Bevoelkerung, in der der Jude als Parasit lebt, ist schon ebenso alt, wie das juedische Volk selbst' (The Nordic man is the conqueror type [...]) What was won in former times by the sword, is achieved today by invention, technology, and organizational power. The old fighting spirit is gradually transformed into an entrepreneurial spirit, which conquers just as the sword did in former times. [...] Conquerors! [...] People of Nordic blood. As this blood deteriorates, so does the type. In contrast to this stands the Jew, who does not produce, but lets produce. Who does not buy to consume, or to distribute, but to negotiate! Not to e a r n money, but to a c c u m u l a t e money, which was earned by others! This division in the people, in which the Jew lives as a parasite, is already as old as the Jewish people itself). Original emphases. Cf. also NWLGE Priv. 15.

14 Cf. SUB HH NWLGE A 1 and SUB HH NWLGE A 3.

15 Cf., for example, Zernack and Schulz, *Gylfis Täuschung*.

The first part of the primary texts consists of Elmenhorst's handwritten notes during his time in GSWA and SWA from 1911 to 1924 and has been known since 2015. It is archived in the State and University Library of Hamburg.<sup>16</sup> The second part was only rediscovered in September 2020 and is still in private ownership of the Elmenhorst family, who have generously granted permission to examine it.<sup>17</sup> It comprises mainly typescript material from 1910, and 1924 to 1990.<sup>18</sup> In all, it is very rare and historically valuable material, as well as highly individual and personal, comprising, for example, notebooks and bundles of paper sheets with poems, short stories, a novel, essays, memoirs, letters, and drawings. To present a more complete picture, I include additional archival material of various provenance, as well as transcripts of structured interviews with people who knew Elmenhorst personally.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of their source value and the way they can be evaluated, official historical documents, such as matriculation certificates and signed date-stamped forms, are distinctive compared to autobiographical-narrative documents, such as CVs written by Elmenhorst himself for applications, and are especially compared to the numerous texts he produced of lyrical, novelistic, belletristic, essay, or treatise character. This chapter uses the first type of source material for historical contextualization, the second for showing Elmenhorst's autobiographic views and self-perception, while the third is the primary object of literary research.

## Elmenhorst's Life

Knowledge about Elmenhorst's life aids understanding of his texts. His socialization and education provide background information that help to situate his records in the context of Old Norse mythology reception.

Son of a globally dispersed merchant family, Elmenhorst was born in Dockenhuden near Hamburg in 1890 and died there in 1964.<sup>20</sup> After a rather mediocre performance at three different schools, he eventually passed the final examination on 24 March 1908.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Referred to as SUB HH NWLGE.

<sup>17</sup> Referred to as NWLGE Priv.

<sup>18</sup> Texts after 1964 are written by Elmenhorst's wife, Ada Maria, née O'Swald. For Ada Maria, cf. Strutz, *Hamburgisches Geschlechterbuch*, p. 276, and Ihonor, *Hamburgisches Geschlechterbuch*, p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> Further archival and interview material is cited at the respective point of reference.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Strutz, *Hamburgisches Geschlechterbuch*, pp. 275–76 and Ihonor, *Hamburgisches Geschlechterbuch*, pp. 27–29. After consulting archival materials it became clear that the information about Elmenhorst given in both editions of the *Hamburgisches Geschlechterbuch* is inaccurate and seems to be partly based on unproven (family) stories rather than archival evidence and facts. The school exam Elmenhorst took was called the *Einjährigenexamen* (one-year exam). Successful candidates were allowed to enter a one-year voluntary military service or pursue vocational training but were not admitted to university.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. DITSL Elmenhorst, manuscript, curriculum vitae for application to the German Colonial School, written by Elmenhorst, dated 14 May 1908, fol. 1<sup>r</sup> and DITSL Elmenhorst, manuscript, extended curriculum vitae for application to the German Colonial School, written by Elmenhorst, dated 9 June 1908, fol. 8<sup>r</sup>. The DITSL archive and library in Witzenhausen does not provide an item signature,

On 26 June 1908, Elmenhorst joined the *Deutsche Kolonialschule* (German Colonial School) in Witzenhausen as a trainee.<sup>22</sup> His father's New York and Hamburg company had presumably already gone bankrupt under mysterious circumstances by that time.<sup>23</sup> Shortly after, on 19 December 1908, his father died.<sup>24</sup> Elmenhorst left the German Colonial School on 20 August 1909 without completing his education. He neither graduated as a trainee in practical crafts nor as a lecture hall student of theoretical and scientific subjects. It is unclear whether he left the German Colonial School due to the poor financial situation of the family after the bankruptcy and death of his father, due to an increase in school fees, or due to his (continued) mediocre performance.<sup>25</sup> On 21 October 1909, he enrolled at the University of Leipzig to study agriculture. He belonged to a duelling student fraternity, was successful on the fencing floor, and

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but only uses the term *Schülerakte* (student file) combined with the respective student's name. These student files are usually a non-chronologically arranged collection of sheets consisting of forms, letters, postcards, certificates, resumes, transcripts, newspaper clippings, photographs, and similar handwritten, typescript, or printed materials.

- 22 Cf. DITSL Elmenhorst, manuscript, completed form for admission to the German Colonial School Witzenhausen, signed by Elmenhorst's father Friedrich Wilhelm Elmenhorst, dated 26 June 1908, fol. 13<sup>r</sup>. Cf. also Fabarius, *Der deutsche Kulturpionier*, Jahrgang 8, Heft 2, 1907–1908, p. 22.
- 23 Cf. DITSL Elmenhorst, manuscript, note on a postal money order for the treasury of the colonial school Witzenhausen, signed by Arnold Otto Meyer, dated 30 June 1908, fol. 14<sup>r</sup>. Arnold Otto Meyer, Emily Elmenhorst's father and Elmenhorst's maternal grandfather, paid the school's tuition fees.
- 24 Cf. DITSL Elmenhorst, manuscript, written by Elmenhorst to Ernst Albert Fabarius, principal of the German Colonial School, concerning the death of his father, dated 24 December 1908, receiving date stamp 30 December 1908, fol. 16<sup>r–v</sup>. Cf. also Strutz, *Hamburgisches Geschlechterbuch*, pp. 275–76, and Ihonor, *Hamburgisches Geschlechterbuch*, pp. 27–29.
- 25 Cf. DITSL Elmenhorst, printed card of thanks for condolences, receiving date stamp 9 January 1909, fol. 19<sup>r</sup>; DITSL Elmenhorst, manuscript, letter of thanks for condolences to Ernst Albert Fabarius, principal of the German Colonial School, written by Elmenhorst's mother Emily Elmenhorst, dated 10 January 1909, fol. 20<sup>r–v</sup>; DITSL Elmenhorst, manuscript, judgement on work in the greenhouse, dated 14 to 19 December 1908, fol. 15<sup>r</sup>; DITSL Elmenhorst, manuscript, judgement of the gardeners and the forester about Elmenhorst, undated, fol. 24<sup>r</sup>; DITSL Elmenhorst, manuscript, judgement of the craftsmen about Elmenhorst, undated, fol. 25<sup>r</sup>; DITSL Elmenhorst, manuscript, informal report as a draft of the leaving certificate from the German Colonial School for Elmenhorst covering the period June 1908 to autumn 1909 with some handwritten remarks, undated, fol. 26<sup>r</sup>; and DITSL Elmenhorst, manuscript, letter to Ernst Albert Fabarius, principal of the German Colonial School, written by Elmenhorst's mother Emily Elmenhorst, dated 3 October 1909, fol. 28<sup>r–v</sup>. The reports attest Elmenhorst's unsteadiness and fluctuating diligence with the overall remark of good skill and satisfactory performance and conduct. The principal and the school's board refused to make a final assessment followed by a rejection of responsibility for Elmenhorst's transfer to a colonial economic profession. Later Elmenhorst claimed in his exhaustive, subjectively toned, and self-promoting CV written for his application as a doctoral student to the University of Hamburg that he left the German Colonial School because 'das dort gebotene nicht genügte' (what was offered there was not enough). Cf. Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 364–13 Fakultäten/Fachbereiche, Phil. Fak. Promotion Nr. 121, Wilhelm Elmenhorst, p. 11. The historical and political events as well as a few biographical data described in the CV archived in Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 364–13 Fakultäten/Fachbereiche, Phil. Fak. Promotion Nr. 121, Wilhelm Elmenhorst, can be proven by other sources. Many details in this CV are performative and strategic. Therefore, this CV rather gives insight into how Elmenhorst viewed himself and his life: he regarded himself as a victim of unjust historical forces, mainly the English and the French, and saw himself as a highly capable academic and researcher.

acquired a scar on his left cheek, of which he was very proud.<sup>26</sup> On 11 April 1911, he headed for GSWA, left the university without a degree, and de-registered in absentia on 2 June 1911.<sup>27</sup> He stayed in GSWA and SWA until 1924, with only a few months of interruption from September 1913 to January 1914, when he was recovering from malaria in Hamburg.<sup>28</sup> He seems to have arrived in GSWA on 31 May 1911 and was, at first, together with former schoolmates from the German Colonial School (amongst them his friend Felix Ulrich Meier), at the farmstead Wolfstal in the Omaruru district.<sup>29</sup> He stayed barely a month and left the farm ostensibly because he had grown tired of his friends' nagging about his time-consuming passions, most likely hunting, writing poetry, singing, smoking, drinking, and the adventurous *Risikosucht* (risk addiction) he seems to have been well known for.<sup>30</sup>

During the first two-and-a-half years, he moved as a freight driver and itinerant trader with ox-carts through GSWA and worked as a mine worker and an overseer of Indigenous mine workers in the copper mine of Tsumeb.<sup>31</sup> In 1914, he built his first farm.<sup>32</sup> At the beginning of the First World War, he enlisted as a war volunteer and was assigned to the Border Guard North in 1915. The task of the Border Guard North was to provide an infrastructure (well construction, road building, food supply, etc.) in northern SWA to ensure the withdrawal and surrender of the *Schutztruppen* (Protection Troops) from the south which were far outnumbered against the forces of the South African Union, and to secure the northern border against the Portuguese in Angola, at that time Portuguese West Africa. According to his own account, Elmenhorst had to conduct negotiations with Indigenous chiefs in northern SWA and Portuguese West Africa. Because he knew the country and seemed to be fluent in Indigenous languages, he did not belong to a permanent military unit but was deployed on various occasions as a scout and interpreter.<sup>33</sup>

As of August 1914, SWA was occupied by the South African Union and eventually became its administrative zone in July 1915. Back on his farm, Elmenhorst discovered

26 Int. Meier; NWLGE Priv. 01, p. 2; and Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 364–13 Fakultäten/Fachbereiche, Phil. Fak. Promotion Nr. 121, Wilhelm Elmenhorst, p. 11.

27 Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 364–13 Fakultäten/Fachbereiche, Phil. Fak. Promotion Nr. 121, Wilhelm Elmenhorst, p. 11. Cf. Leipzig, Universitätsarchiv Leipzig (UAL), Quästurkartei Wilhelm Elmenhorst, and Leipzig, Universitätsarchiv Leipzig (UAL), UAL, Rep. 01/16/07/C/072 Bd. 01.

28 Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 364–13 Fakultäten/Fachbereiche, Phil. Fak. Promotion Nr. 121, Wilhelm Elmenhorst, p. 11.

29 AdK, letter from 13 June 1911.

30 Cf. AdK, letters from 13 January 1911, 30 April 1911, and 6 July 1911.

31 By capitalizing the word 'Indigenous' throughout, I am following a convention explicitly mentioned by Sámi researcher Harald Gaski in the US-American *Scandinavian Studies* journal, cf. Gaski, *Indigenous Elders' Perspective and Position*, p. 259. Capitalizing 'Indigenous' is a common practice in Indigenous Studies and is also practised by the editors of the *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies* journal, cf. Egerer, *Exploring Transcultural Community*.

32 According to Elmenhorst's own account in Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 364–13 Fakultäten/Fachbereiche, Phil. Fak. Promotion Nr. 121, Wilhelm Elmenhorst, p. 11.

33 Cf. NWLGE Priv. 04, Elmenhorst's report on his exploration through the previously inaccessible Ovambo territory. Cf. also Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 364–13 Fakultäten/Fachbereiche, Phil. Fak. Promotion Nr. 121, Wilhelm Elmenhorst.



that he had lost nearly all of his livestock. His hard-earned new livestock fell victim to a lung disease allegedly spread by the English. Eventually, he had to hand over his farm to the English because the contract of sale was lost in the First World War and he could not produce proof of his rightful ownership.<sup>34</sup> He moved in with a former schoolmate from the German Colonial School, Otto March, who owned the farm Treuenfels, and formed a community of interest with him. After Otto March had died of the Spanish flu on 19 November 1918, Elmenhorst started over again for the third time on the farm Ondongandji in the Omaruru district about 200 km north-north-west of Windhoek.<sup>35</sup> He finally had to give up this farm in 1922 because of what he later called the harassment of the English. For approximately the last year in SWA, he moved in with another friend, Albrecht Freiherr von Maltzahn. During these years, periods of existential need had led Elmenhorst to spend weeks in the bush with Indigenous people, mainly Ovambo and Herero, bartering and trading with them.<sup>36</sup> The loss of his farm property on three occasions, the destruction of his existence due to the historical events of the First World War 1914–1918, and the loss of the German colonies in the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 had affected Elmenhorst heavily. Because of the ceasefire in 1915, the defeat in the First World War, and the loss of the colonies in 1919, Elmenhorst had a profound hatred of the English and the French which he expressed in many of his poems. He also despised the Weimar Republic. In some of his poems, colonial revisionism and Germanic rapture clearly emerge along with a nostalgic view clouded by Germanic mythological enthusiasm.<sup>37</sup>

## Productive *Edda* Reception: From the German Empire to South West Africa

Elmenhorst embarked on many of the problematic discourses of his time, creating anthropocentric and even Germanocentric, highly idiosyncratic, radical views on the unique and privileged relationship between the Germanic man and nature. Some of these views are preserved in a bundle of ninety-four sheets of paper handwritten in German, entitled *Eddische Lieder ein Epos in Stäben nach alten Skaldengesängen* (Eddic Poetry an Epic with Alliterations Based on Ancient Skaldic Poetry, henceforth *Eddic Poetry*), disclosing its provenance with 'beendet 20 Juli 1920, Ondongandji' (completed

34 According to Elmenhorst's own account in Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 364–13 Fakultäten/Fachbereiche, Phil. Fak. Promotion Nr. 121, Wilhelm Elmenhorst, pp. 11 and 12.

35 Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 364–13 Fakultäten/Fachbereiche, Phil. Fak. Promotion Nr. 121, Wilhelm Elmenhorst, p. 13. Cf. DITSL March, printed card, announcement of engagement of Otto March and Annemargret Kühne, dated October 1912, fols 76<sup>r</sup>–77<sup>v</sup>; DITSL March, manuscript, letter by Otto March's father Albert March with a short account of his son's life to be printed in the memorial edition of *Der Deutsche Kulturpionier*, dated 14 May 1919, fol. 94<sup>r-v</sup>, and Fabarius, *Der Deutsche Kulturpionier, Gedächtnisnummer*, pp. 39–40.

36 According to Elmenhorst's own account in Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 364–13 Fakultäten/Fachbereiche, Phil. Fak. Promotion Nr. 121, Wilhelm Elmenhorst, pp. 12–13.

37 Cf. SUB HH NWLGE A 3.

20 July 1920, Ondongandji).<sup>38</sup> Elmenhorst's *Eddic Poetry* echoes and rewrites mainly Old Norse mythological and heroic material from the *Poetic Edda*, the *Prose Edda*, and *fornaldarsögur*, but also the *Song of the Nibelungs*.<sup>39</sup> The first section of *Eddic Poetry*, a paratext I refer to as the prologue, functions as a focal point for Elmenhorst's colonial Germanic nature religion and is key for my further investigations: it is both an appeal to potential readers as well as a first-person narrator's self-reflection strongly gesturing towards the author, Elmenhorst. Faith in Óðinn, the alleged greatest god of an ancient Germanic people, is at its thematic centre. Some passages read like a personal creed:

/Der/ [Mein] Gott /unserer germanischen Ahnen/ [...] ist Wotan! Odhin, Odhr! (d.h. Athem, Seele, Luft, Geist, Wind nach der germanischen Wurzel.)<sup>40</sup>

(/The/ [My] God /of our Germanic ancestors/ [...] is Wotan! Odhin, Odhr! (i.e. breath, soul, air, spirit, wind according to the Germanic root).)

To Elmenhorst, the animistic and pantheistic Óðinn<sup>41</sup>

braust im Sturme, er reitet auf jagenden Wolken. Sein lichtiges Auge strahlt am Himmel und spendet Segen, Leben und Kraft. Sein blindes Auge leuchtet am nächtlichen Firmament und beherrscht den Kosmos. Im rollenden, donnernden Gesang der Spären [*sic!*] tönt Sein Lied. [...] Er sprengt die schwellende Knospe, er türmt die

38 SUB HH NWLGE A 1, pp. 1<sup>r</sup> and 94<sup>r</sup>. *Eddic Poetry* also exists in the slightly revised later hardcover typescript version NWLGE Priv. 11 from 1923, which underlines the value the text had for Elmenhorst. This shows that he was intensively occupied with Old Norse mythology for at least three years, 1920 to 1923.

39 *Eddic Poetry* contains nine thematic sections with headings: i. 'Eddische Lieder' (Eddic Poetry), ii. 'Licht! Ein Lied vom arischen Geiste' (Light! A Song of the Aryan Spirit), iii. 'Saga' (Saga), iv. 'Wotan' (Óðinn), v. 'Völuspá' (Völuspá), vi. 'Hagen — Ein Lied von der Treue' (Hagen — A Song of Loyalty), vii. 'Alarich in Athen' (Alaric in Athens), viii. 'Der Kampf auf Samsey' and 'Das Hervörlied' (The Fight on Samsey and The Hervör Song), ix. 'Concept zu Hagen — ein Lied von der Treue' (Draft of Hagen — A Song of Loyalty). Cf. SUB HH NWLGE A 1, pp. 1<sup>r</sup> and 2<sup>r</sup>, 11<sup>r</sup>, 17<sup>r</sup>, 20<sup>r</sup>, 24<sup>r</sup>, 56<sup>r</sup>, 66<sup>r</sup>, 72<sup>r</sup>, and 79<sup>r</sup>, 85<sup>r</sup>. 'Alaric in Athens' stands out because the section refers to the king of the Visigoths who to my knowledge is not a prominent character in Old Norse tradition. Elmenhorst was most likely inspired by Dahn, *Stilicho*, when creating this text. The headings of section ii and vi contain expressions that point towards Germanic ideology and heroism. Some headings indicate connections to Old Norse texts as well as mythological and heroic characters, with a slightly cryptic *Saga* — a kind of personified female storyteller related to the Old Norse *völva*. The final section is an earlier draft of section vi, added as a loose-leaf appendix.

40 SUB HH NWLGE A 1, p. 2<sup>r</sup>. In quotations, [square brackets] indicate erased letters, words, or passages in the manuscript. Letters, words, and passages added above or below a line or in the margin of the manuscript are set within /forward slashes/. An ellipsis [...] within quotations indicates words or sentences omitted from the original manuscript text. The bracketed [*sic!*] indicates wrong or unconventional writing or expressions.

41 Elmenhorst denies that a Germanic religion was pantheistic. However, according to the context, he obviously misunderstood the word's meaning, confusing it with 'polytheistic'. Elmenhorst's imagination of an animistic Óðinn meets the requirements of a pantheistic god: he conceptualizes Óðinn as being present in all nature phenomena. In the same paragraph, he emphasizes that Óðinn is a monotheistic god based on the claim that other deities and characters known from Old Norse texts are not independent entities, but emanations and personifications of this one god's manifold traits. This underscores Elmenhorst's pseudo-intellectual, pseudo-academic habitus and his personal (and spiritual?) need to syncretistically merge Christianity with a Germanic Óðinn's religion. Cf. SUB HH NWLGE A 1, pp. 4<sup>r</sup>–5<sup>r</sup>.

massigen Felsen zu Bergen und himmelanragenden Schroffen. Er lebt im Stein, in der Pflanze, im Tier, in [m]/D/ir Er stürzt sich mit donnerndem Tosen im Sturzbach zu Tale und streicht im lauen Frühlingswind segnend über die Lande<sup>42</sup>

(roars in storms, he rides on chasing clouds. His bright eye shines in the sky and gives blessing, life, and strength. His blind eye shines in the nightly firmament and dominates the cosmos. In the rolling, thundering song of the spheres His song resounds. [...] He bursts the swelling bud, he towers the massive rocks to mountains and sky-high rugged cliffs. He lives in the stone, in the plant, in the animal, within [myself] /you/. He plunges with a thunderous roar in the torrent to the valleys and strokes blessing over the lands in the mild spring wind.)

In the prologue of *Eddic Poetry*, Elmenhorst establishes a relationship with nature by means of an animistic concept of Óðinn and presents ways of imagining nature and Germanic descendants' relationship to it. He directs an urgent appeal to potential readers to experience the god's omnipresence in nature, claiming that an inherited Germanic nature religion is also present in the south-west African veldt:

Gehe hinaus, du germanischer Nachfahre! Gehe hinaus ins freie, weite Feld, gehe in den brausenden Wald, liege unter schimmerndem Segel auf schäumender See, reite durch einsame, mondbeglänzte Steppe! — Alles gleich! — Nur öffne dein Herz und lass ihn hinein wehen in deine Brust: Odhin, Odhr, — Wotan!<sup>43</sup>

(You, Germanic descendant, go out! Go out into the free, wide plain, go into the rustling forest, lie under a shimmering sail on the foamy sea, ride through the lonely, moonlit veldt! — All the same! — Only open your heart and let him blow into your chest: Odhin, Odhr, — Wotan!)

European German-speaking *Edda* reception from about 1800 to 1920 serves as a reference point for Elmenhorst's colonial one. It was characterized by many essentialist equations and uncritical synonymizing, partly disguised as academic knowledge. Highly complicated interweavings of literary, musical, and other art forms promoted this reception process: by 1900, Old Norse mythology had already been appropriated in the German Empire. Its medieval textual sources were barely culturally and linguistically theorized outside a predominant 'Germanic' reading. At the end of the First World War, the Germanic revival showed itself in a multitude of facets and built on the equation of North Germanic and (pan-)Germanic.<sup>44</sup> Old Norse became synonymous with Germanic, which was essentially considered German.<sup>45</sup>

42 SUB HH NWLGE A 1, p. 2<sup>r</sup>, original emphasis.

43 SUB HH NWLGE A 1, p. 7<sup>r</sup>.

44 Cf. Zernack, 'Germanische Restauration und Edda-Frömmigkeit', pp. 143–48.

45 The synonymous use of 'German' and 'Germanic' can be traced back to Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. Cf. Wyss, 'Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm', pp. 257–58. Wyss refers, amongst others, to Wilhelm Grimm's following text on the ideal of nature poetry, written as early as 1808: Grimm 'Über die Entstehung der altdeutschen Poesie und ihr Verhältnis zu der nordischen', pp. 92–170. Cf. also Grimm

German was imagined as national, and a true national attitude in a German-Germanic sense was pagan.<sup>46</sup> Alleged Germanic paganism was put on a level with Germanic nature mythology and religion: in the nineteenth century, myths became available for religious actualizations in collective identity formation processes.<sup>47</sup> Richard Wagner popularized the myths in his operatic cycle *The Ring of the Nibelung*, and systematically constructed and mythicized the alleged Germanic antiquity, thus manifesting the synonymous use of German and Germanic. Wagner cultivated an imaginative, creative, dramatized, and fictionalized approach to the texts. His concept of myth introduced a further component: the Germanic was seen as aesthetically universal.<sup>48</sup> German was thus not only synonymized with Germanic and national, but also endowed with heroism and cultural hegemony, which provided a basis for colonial, *völkisch*, and National Socialist interpretations.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the colonization of territory declared as uncultivated *terra vacua* could easily be understood as an expression of Germanic heroism. The idea that the *Edda* had transmitted ancient content nurtured the hypothesis of Germanic continuity characterized by the assumption of a millennia-long survival of Old Norse mythology attributed to natural processes and the rough life of people with and in nature.<sup>50</sup>

Along with this came hybridizations: classical and Old Norse gods and heroes, as well as Christ, merged with ideas of soteriology, chiliasm, and neopaganism.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, Old Norse mythology became part of the everyday culture: gods of the Wagnerian type were very common in advertising, and companies used them for products and branding.<sup>52</sup>

## The Germanic Colonizer's Idiosyncratic Way of Appropriating Nature

Elmenhorst's texts are not only embedded in the general European history of *Edda* reception but also use highly individualized strategies of appropriating south-west African nature. Although he imagined himself to be part of a Germanic continuity and — as a Germanic man — in close relationship with his natural environment, from an ecocritical perspective, his texts contribute to deepening the duality and

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'Vejledning til det islandske eller gamle nordiske sprog, af Rasmus Kristian Rask (Anleitung zu der isländischen oder altnordischen Sprache, von R. Chr. Rask., Kopenhagen, bei Schubothé 1811)', p. 65.

46 Cf. Zernack, 'Germanische Restauration und Edda-Frömmigkeit', p. 147.

47 Dusse, 'Religiöse Eddarezeption', p. 520.

48 Heesch, 'Richard Wagner', p. 689 and pp. 695–96.

49 On the history and operation of the *völkisch* movement cf. Puschner, 'Völkische Bewegung', pp. 643–48.

50 Cf. also Heesch, 'Kontinuität', p. 321.

51 Especially so after the German Empire lost the First World War in 1918 and, shortly after, as a result of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, all its colonies. Cf. also Zernack, 'Germanische Restauration und Edda-Frömmigkeit', p. 149, and pp. 151–52.

52 Zernack, 'Werbung', p. 740.

divide between nature and humans. In Elmenhorst's view, Germanic continuity and greatness explain and legitimize the Germanic colonizer's relationship with an Óðinn-animated nature. Consequently, nature — and especially the alleged *terra vacua* of colonial territory — is the genuine space for a free Germanic man to roam. To Elmenhorst, this was an attitude to life which he expressed in many of his poems where he romantically defined life itself as hunting, roaming, riding on horseback, and singing songs:

Solang noch mein Auge die Ferne durchschweift | Und kann meiner Kugel  
gebeten | Die Faust zur flimmernden Klinge greift. | Und das Herz sich nicht  
sehnt nach Frieden | Solang ich noch bäumende Rosse zwing | Mit der Meute die  
Steppe durchjage | Solang ich noch lachende Lieder sing | Und nicht verzweifelnd  
klage | Solange ist das Leben noch mein.<sup>53</sup>

(As long as my eye still searches the distance | And can command my bullet |  
The fist grasps the flickering blade. | And the heart does not long for peace |  
As long as I still master the rearing horses | Chase with the pack through the  
veldt | As long as I still sing laughing songs | And do not lament in despair |  
Life is still mine.)

Sources suggest that Wagner-inspired enthusiasm for Old Norse mythology, indian-  
thusiasm, and colonial romantic exoticism were driving forces for Elmenhorst's views  
on and relation to nature. Already in his letter of application to the German Colonial  
School in 1908, he presents playing outdoor games as a qualifying asset and suitable  
preparation for becoming a colonial farmer:

Schon als kleiner Junge spielte ich in den Kiesgruben Dockenhudens, deren  
Hügel und Schluchten [...] von einem wahren Urwald bedeckt waren, Indianer.  
Hier bei [*sic!*] hatte eine Partei feste Wohnsitze und wurde von der andern mit  
wildem Geheule überfallen. Lange Stöcke sausten als Lanzen durch die Luft,  
Pfeile mit Hollunderspitzen [*sic!*] flogen uns um die Ohren und klatschten  
gegen die Schilde.<sup>54</sup>

(Already as a small boy, I played Indians in the gravel pits of Dockenhuden,  
whose hills and gorges were covered by a real jungle [...]. Here one party had  
permanent homes and was attacked by the other with wild howling. Long  
sticks rushed through the air as lances, arrows with elder tips flew around  
our ears and clapped against the shields.)

This sounds like a scene from Karl May's popular *Winnetou* book series which caused  
a German obsession with Indigenous peoples of North America, today known as

53 Cf. also SUB HH NWLGE A 3, fol. 35<sup>v</sup>, poem dated 22 April 1917.

54 DITSL Elmenhorst, manuscript, extended curriculum vitae for application to the German Colonial School, written by Elmenhorst, dated 9 June 1908, fol. 9<sup>r</sup>.

indianthusiasm, from the late nineteenth century to the present.<sup>55</sup> Later, Elmenhorst expressed his admiration for Karl May and his controversial books in a letter from 18 April 1948.<sup>56</sup> As a boy, Elmenhorst likely read some of the numerous German children's and young adult books that glorified the journey to a colony as well as the encounter with and the defence against Indigenous people as an initiation to manhood.

The correspondence of Ernst Albert Fabarius, principal of the German Colonial School, shows that Felix Ulrich Meier, Elmenhorst's schoolmate, friend, and later temporary travel companion in GSWA, was enthusiastic about Richard Wagner. Elmenhorst may have shared this passion already as a schoolboy. The records prove that Elmenhorst saw Richard Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung* between 1929 and 1941.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, it may be assumed that as a child, Elmenhorst collected pictures of Old Norse gods, for example, from chocolate wrappers. The chocolate factory Gartmann in Hamburg-Altona for example issued a collective picture series of Old Norse gods.<sup>58</sup>

Already the teenager Elmenhorst's attitude is likely to have been in line with the ambitious goals of the principal of the Christian-oriented German Colonial School, Ernst Albert Fabarius. Fabarius saw his educational institution as a *Pflanzstätte* (planting ground) for *neudeutsche Kulturarbeit* (new German cultural work),<sup>59</sup> evoking a metaphorical equation between colonially agro-cultivated nature and culture. Fabarius's *Kolonialpädagogik* (Colonial Pedagogy) was based on a strict boarding school regime with the credo of discipline, order, and subordination.<sup>60</sup> With the Colonial School's motto 'Mit Gott für Deutschlands Ehr | Daheim und überm Meer' (With God for Germany's Honour | At Home and over the Sea), Fabarius wanted to qualify people to pursue economic, not missionary, colonial interests.<sup>61</sup> Regarding economic success, Zernack, for example, has illustrated how the iconography of Norse gods and myths in mass product advertising spanning various economic sectors around 1900 allegorized the figure of Germania and thus corresponded to the Wilhelmine view of history. Firm belief in technological progress, economic efficiency of German industry, and its global interconnectedness were inextricably linked to the names and representations of the Old Norse gods.<sup>62</sup> Discourses like these made it easy for Elmenhorst to combine Old Norse mythological characters with German-Germanic colonial economic success.

55 For a general overview over the German phenomenon and Indigenous reactions, cf. Lutz, Strzelczyk, and Watchman, *Indianthusiasm*. Cf. also the documentary by Taylor, *Searching for Winnetou*.

56 Cf. NWLGE Priv. 14.19.9.

57 DITSL Meier, manuscript, letter by Felix Ulrich Meier's father Dr P. J. Meier to Prof. Ernst Albert Fabarius, principal of the German Colonial School, dated 1 April 1909, fol. 21<sup>v</sup>. NWLGE Priv. 02.32.20, p. 1<sup>v</sup>.

58 Cf. Zernack, 'Werbung', pp. 744–45.

59 Fabarius, *Der deutsche Kulturpionier*, Jahrgang 8, Heft 2, 1907–1908, p. 7.

60 Linne, 'Koloniale Infrastruktur', p. 127.

61 Cf. Fabarius, *Der deutsche Kulturpionier*, Jahrgang 1, Heft 1, 1900, p. 5 and Fabarius, *Der deutsche Kulturpionier*, Jahrgang 9, Heft 2–3, 1909, pp. 7–25.

62 Cf. Zernack, 'Nordische Götter in Werbung und Propaganda', pp. 324 and 354–59.

Elmenhorst's adventurous, romantic, contemplative rapture for south-west African nature and his Germanic-Ödinistic obsession built on each other. He wanted to live a free life that included both periods of roaming, hunting, and travelling as well as periods of settling down on an idyllic farm,<sup>63</sup> uniquely mixing Germanic continuity, heroism, nature mythology, religion, and colonial pastoral aesthetic in his texts. Elmenhorst applies all three kinds of the 'pastoral' identified by the ecocritic Terry Gifford: he emphasizes the retreat from densely populated, industrial, and economically shaped areas to the (colonial) countryside and the south-west African veldt, contrasts the rural with the urban utilizing an allegedly free (colonial) nature versus settled areas, and 'obscures the realities of labour and hardship' by idealizing rural life.<sup>64</sup> From an ecocritical perspective, all three pastoral idioms are highly problematic because they reinforce and reproduce Elmenhorst's anthropocentric, egocentric, and Germanocentric worldview as well as prevent him from cultivating a respectful reciprocity with his environment. They become even more problematic when viewed from the perspective of decolonization.

The investigation of the colonial pastoral aesthetic is part of the larger field of postcolonial ecocriticism or (as I prefer to call it because it is an ongoing process) decolonizing ecocriticism, a field that has emerged in the last twenty years with the convergence of two previously independent scholarly discourses, postcolonial studies on the one hand, and on the other hand, ecocriticism.<sup>65</sup> In Elmenhorst's view, the colonial nature experience brings out a Germanic man's best character traits, for example, toughness:

Bin manchen Tag, manch klare Nacht geritten. | Manch langen Treck zog ich  
durch [fernes] /wildes/ Land | Hab oftmals Hunger, öfter Durst gelitten | Doch  
hat Verzagen nie mein Herz gekannt.<sup>66</sup>

(I rode many a day, many a clear night. | Many a long trek I went through  
[distant] /wild/ land | I often suffered hunger, more often thirst | But  
despondency has never known my heart.)

After the Treaty of Versailles, however, Elmenhorst writes nostalgically:

Wie oft hab ich im wilden Busch gelegen, | Fernab der weißen Siedlung und  
Kultur | Wie oft zog ich auf kaum bekannten Wegen. | Das Raubzeug folgte  
meiner Wagenspur | Wie oft ritt ich in kaum bewohnten Landen | Wo noch  
das Hochwild seine Stätte hat. | Wo die Giraffen und die Elefanten | Noch ganz  
vertraut verhoffen an der Pad. | [...] | In klaren Himmel steile Palmen ragen |

63 In both cases — while trekking and on his farmstead — he longed for the company of a woman, cf. for example SUB HH NWLGE A 3, fols 27<sup>r</sup>–28<sup>r</sup>, 43<sup>r-v</sup>, 47<sup>r-v</sup>. Even if Elmenhorst's ideas show similarities to the beliefs of völkisch Germanic nature religious groups in the decades around 1900, there is no evidence that he belonged to one of these groups or read writings by one of their ideological leaders. For a short overview of such groups cf. von Schnurbein, *Norse Revival*, pp. 181–98.

64 Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 33 with reference to Gifford, *Pastoral*, pp. 1–12.

65 Mackenthun, 'Postkolonialer Ecocriticism', p. 81.

66 SUB HH NWLGE A 3, fol. 20<sup>v</sup>, poem dated March 1915.

Im Feld, der Kaffer ist noch wild und frei. | Pferd, Hund und Büchse und ein  
Ochsenwagen | Das war noch Afrika! Heut ist auch das vorbei!<sup>67</sup>

(How often did I lie in the wild bush, | Far from white settlement and culture |  
How often did I wander on hardly known paths. | The predators followed my  
wagon trail | How often did I ride in the sparsely populated land | Where still  
the big game has its place. | Where the giraffes and the elephants | Still check  
quite familiarly by the path. | [...] | In clear sky steep palms rise | In the field,  
the Kaffir is still wild and free. | Horse, dog, and rifle, and an ox-cart | That  
was Africa! Today that's over too!)

With this poem, Elmenhorst obliterates the existential need that led him to 'freely' roam the south-west African nature by ox-cart freight driving. What is more, the poem's sentimental lyrical 'I' (which strongly points towards Elmenhorst) is blind to any historical knowledge of, for example, the genocides committed by the troops of the German Empire in 1904 and 1905 in the war against Indigenous peoples who had never been in a 'free' paradisiacal state since colonization had begun. Indigenous people, animals, and plants are mere staffage in Elmenhorst's idiosyncratically charged African nature. Instead of a respectful experience of south-west African nature and a respectful relation to Indigenous people, his pastoral colonial romanticism expresses hegemony and distance between the colonizer and colonized land. Given the fact that Elmenhorst's relationship with nature builds on his Germanocentric misinterpretation of Old Norse mythology, the term environmental racism might even apply to the attitude presented in his texts. Environmental philosopher Deane Curtin defined environmental racism as 'the connection [...] of race and the environment so that the oppression of one is connected to [...] the oppression of the other.'<sup>68</sup> In Elmenhorst's view, it is only the Germanic descendant who has the privilege of experiencing and appropriating south-west African nature.

Colonial pastoral aesthetic idealizes a presumed pristine, paradisiacal nature, euphemistically paraphrasing land appropriation.<sup>69</sup> Indigenous people are portrayed in clichéd terms as wild, free, and thus as a natural, unspoiled part of a colonial pioneer idyll. In his nostalgic poem, Elmenhorst lays the foundations for the colonial revisionist ideas to which he adhered until his death.<sup>70</sup> He actualizes land appropriation, expresses his awe for the south-west African nature, and dreams about a continuing

67 SUB HH NWLGE A 3, fol. 81<sup>r</sup>, poem dated 8 August 1920.

68 Curtin, *Environmental Ethics*, p. 145.

69 Cf. Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 31.

70 Elmenhorst pursued colonial revisionism intensively even after his return to Germany. In December 1926, in an act of revanchist nationalism, he wrote an urgent appeal to the former Emperor Wilhelm II who at that time had already been exiled in Doorn, The Netherlands: 'Ihr dürft nicht resignieren, dürft nicht schweigen! Immer und immer wieder muß der Ruf nach Rückgabe der geraubten Kolonien erschallen! Wir brauchen nicht nur Kolonien, wir sind es auch den Eingeborenen schuldig ihnen Treue zu halten! — Treue um Treue!' (You must not resign, you must not be silent! Again and again, the call for the return of the stolen colonies must echo! We do not only need colonies, we also owe it to the natives to be loyal to them! — Loyalty for loyalty!), NWLGE Priv. 13.1, p. 9.



life in the heart of nature, implicitly fostering ideas of good and helpful Germanic colonialism.<sup>71</sup> An idealized, natural *terra vacua* is set up against anti-urbanistic sentiments and functions as part of a subtle, ideological 'tool of oppression'.<sup>72</sup> In a later undated typescript of a hunting story Elmenhorst articulated his civilization pessimism and anti-urbanism thus:

Monatelang haben wir so gelebt, weitweg [*sic!*] von all dem, was unsere europäischen Mitmenschen 'Kultur' nennen. Uns aber war dies Dasein lieber, als all die missverständene Zivilisation, die heut [*sic!*] die Stelle der wirklichen Kultur in Europa vertritt! — Es war ein Leben voll glücklicher Naturnähe und nur das harte Muss trieb uns wieder zurück in den Bereich der Ansiedlungen. Schwere Herzens nahmen wir Abschied von jenen freien, unberührten Steppen.<sup>73</sup>

(For months we lived like this, far away from everything that our European fellow human beings call 'culture'. But this way of life was dearer to us than all the misunderstood civilization, which today takes the place of the real culture in Europe! — It was a life full of joyful closeness to nature and only the hard necessity drove us back to the settled area. With heavy hearts we said goodbye to those free, untouched grasslands.)

With his colonialist view, Elmenhorst reduces the south-west African land to a highly selective, ideological construct of nature that serves his Germanomania-inspired fantasies.

Mistaking Vikings for his Germanic ancestors and building on heroic Germanic continuity, Elmenhorst constructs a legitimizing Germanic colonizer narrative and charges the south-west African nature by comparing it to areas that were the target of Viking invasions. He analogizes Viking raids with colonizing processes of the Wilhelmine era. In January 1914, Elmenhorst was recovering from malaria in Hamburg but he was eager to return to the colony. In a notebook entry (cf. Figure 11.1), he expresses his desire, identifying himself with a glorious ancestor who sailed across the ocean, a

Wikingerjarl & seiner Feinde Schrecken | Ein starker König auf der grauen Flut, |  
Ein Baum der Schlacht, ein Herrscher unter Recken | Der mir vererbt mein  
wildes Friesenblut.<sup>74</sup>

(Viking Jarl and his enemies' horror | A strong king on the grey tide, | A  
tree of battle, a ruler among knights | From whom I have inherited my wild  
Frisian blood.)

Defending the German colony in the First World War was a heroic action for Elmenhorst, and one through which the Germanic man could prove his ancestral heroism:

71 Cf. Mackenthun, 'Postkolonialer Ecocriticism', p. 83 with quotation and reference to Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, pp. 53–54 and 62, who describes this as 'literary naturism'.

72 Mackenthun, 'Postkolonialer Ecocriticism', p. 82 with quotation and reference to Di Chiro, 'Nature as Community', p. 311.

73 NWLGE Priv. 7.22.

74 SUB HH NWLGE A 3, fol. 25<sup>v</sup>, poem dated 10 January 1914.

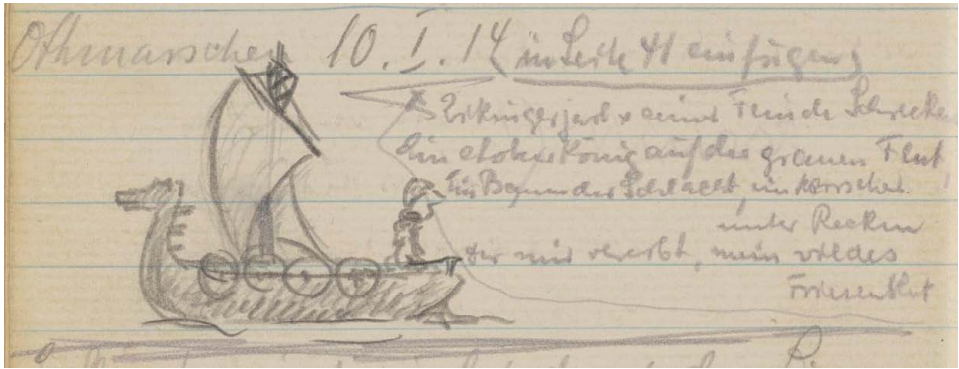


Figure 11.1. Elmenhorst's drawing of a Viking ship and verse about his alleged Viking ancestor and conqueror dated 10 January 1914, SUB HH NWLGE A 3, fol. 25<sup>v</sup>. Reproduced with permission of Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg, Von-Melle-Park 3, D-20146 Hamburg, Germany.

Auch hier! Im fernsten Winkel deutscher Erde! | Hebt unser Banner! Dass es  
trotzig weht! | Bis dass der letzte Mann auf müdem Pferde | Zu Tode wund vor  
Walhalls Toren steht.<sup>75</sup>

(Here too! In the farthest corner of German soil! | Raise our banner! That  
it may wave defiantly! | Until the last man on a tired horse | Sore to death  
stands before the gates of Valhalla.)

In Elmenhorst's texts, nature functions as a setting on which he acts out his Germanic convictions and ideology of conquest, neither relating to the African environment nor its suppressed Indigenous inhabitants.<sup>76</sup> From his point of view, he presents a future-oriented, Germanic culture that he believes to be deeply anchored in the nature mythology of the *Poetic Edda*. Elmenhorst internalized and combined the aforementioned attitudes into an idiosyncratic and life-guiding worldview that is evident in his records, notebooks, poems, and *Eddic Poetry*.

## The Germanic Colonizer's Strategies for Appropriating Text

The *Poetic Edda* offers a textual basis and focal point with the help of which Elmenhorst assembles his individual nature experiences into a coherent and meaningful whole. In the decades preceding and following 1900, Old Norse academic research was not

<sup>75</sup> SUB HH NWLGE A 3, 1 fol. 2<sup>r</sup>, poem dated 10 September 1914. Elmenhorst mentions Okaruquejo as the place of origin, most likely today's Okaukuejo in the Etosha National Park in the north of Namibia. This geographical region would fit with Elmenhorst's employment in the Border Guard North.

<sup>76</sup> For analogies in North America, cf. also Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, pp. 35, 49–50, and 52.

concerned with gaining in-depth and critically reflective knowledge about the culture and literature of Nordic antiquity. As Stefanie von Schnurbein has pointed out, Germanic belief and Germanic research at that time shared certain epistemological interests in the contexts of nationalism, völkisch ideology, and the anti-civilizational movement of *Lebensreform*.<sup>77</sup> These epistemological interests were indeed linked to the idea that studying Old Norse texts could lead to a change in mentality, but not in the sense White suggested over five decades later, that an ecocritical study of medieval texts could lead to a rethinking of the exploitative mentality rooted in Christianity.<sup>78</sup> Rather, Elmenhorst's contemporaries were concerned with a return to an alleged pagan, heroic Germanic mindset that legitimized imperial rule. The Germans were to recall their Germanic origins in order to secure Germanic continuity which had been handed down in texts such as the *Poetic Edda* and made accessible to the general public in translations.

Philological investigation revealed that in his *Eddic Poetry*, Elmenhorst compiled considerable passages from the German *Edda* translation by Hans von Wolzogen, editor of Wagner's music-philosophical journal *Bayreuther Blätter* 1878–1938. Von Wolzogen's edition refers to Simrock's, Hahn's, and Lüning's earlier publications.<sup>79</sup> This small duodecimo book was an ideal pocket companion during forays into the south-west African veldt. Elmenhorst studied it intensely and was inspired by two of von Wolzogen's ideas: first, all *Eddic Poetry* is nature mythology, revealing a deep connection of the Germanic people with nature, the gods and stories being cryptic mythological symbols of nature and seasonal phenomena to be decoded.<sup>80</sup> Second, from nature mythology, von Wolzogen develops an incoherent system of nature mysticism with the help of esoteric nature–culture

77 von Schnurbein, 'Nordisten und Nordglaube', p. 319.

78 White, Jr., 'The Historical Roots', pp. 12–13.

79 von Wolzogen, *Die Edda*. According to his preface, with his translation and edition Wolzogen wished to combine two earlier modes of informing German-speaking people about the *Edda*: on the one hand, he used Simrock, *Die Edda*, which he considered a literal translation of the original [*sic!*] text, cf. von Wolzogen, *Die Edda*, p. 14. Today's research, however, sees Simrock's translation as national-patriotic. To Simrock himself, the *Poetic* and the *Prose Edda* together were the 'nordische Bibel' (Nordic Bible), cf. Simrock, *Die Edda*, p. 319. Simrock accused the Germans of blindness to their own faith and demanded that they turn to their inherited Germanic belief, cf. Baden, 'Karl Joseph Simrock', pp. 555–56. On the other hand, von Wolzogen consulted Hahn's German edition, whose translation he regarded as conveying the content via free rewriting, in which the ancient poetry and the Nordic spirit were equally preserved, cf. von Wolzogen, *Die Edda*, p. 14. Cf. also Hahn, *Die Edda*. Von Wolzogen also suggests that using his translation and Lüning's edition would satisfy those who wished to read the Old Norse original [*sic!*], cf. von Wolzogen, *Die Edda*, p. 14. Cf. also Lüning, *Die Edda*. That Elmenhorst knew and used von Wolzogen's annotated *Edda* translation is also proved by the bibliography added to one of his later texts, NWLGE Priv. 15. However, no evidence exists whether Elmenhorst read Simrock's or Hahn's translations, or used Lüning's edition and glossary.

80 Cf. von Wolzogen, *Die Edda*, p. 22. Von Wolzogen's *Edda* translation is unique because it is to my knowledge the only one of that time assigning parts or whole songs of the gods to a particular season. However, a similar seasonal organization of rituals and nature spirituality can nowadays be found in Asatru, cf. von Schnurbein, *Norse Revival*, p. 183.

analogies from which he derives ethical and religious convictions of the alleged Germanic people. Elmenhorst follows von Wolzogen from nature mythology to nature mysticism and adds a further idiosyncratic analogy: he transfers both the contents of particular songs of the gods and von Wolzogen's interpretations to his individual-biographical and the historical-temporal context. Von Wolzogen's *Edda* translation and interpretation become a true Germanic worldview as well as a theory applicable to life practice and experience to Elmenhorst. In the following, I exemplify this with *Edda* songs Elmenhorst uses as evidence in the prologue of his *Eddic Poetry*.

### ***Grímnismál, Vafþrúðnismál, and Lokasenna (Ægisdrekka)***

The ecocritic Lawrence Buell points out that 'aesthetics can become a decisive force for or against environmental change.'<sup>81</sup> Buell's work encourages a thorough ecocritical reading of literary texts to discover different, i.e. ecocentric or anthropocentric, ways of imagining relationships between humans and nature. Reading von Wolzogen's German *Edda* translation and especially his explanations of eddic songs also reveals a relationship between text, humans, and nature. The leading aesthetic trope of von Wolzogen's text is the symbol: to von Wolzogen, Old Norse gods and their actions become multilayered indicators of natural phenomena. Without questioning this, Elmenhorst applies anthropocentric and Germanocentric views and, like von Wolzogen, symbolically transfers the meanings of these phenomena to the culture, politics, and society of his time.

Von Wolzogen interprets *Grímnismál* as a myth of summer and thunderstorms or winter and night in which Óðinn, the god of summer, is in captivity to Geirrðr, the giant of winter or demon of thunderstorms. The eventual killing of Geirrðr with his own sword — the last lightning of the dying thunderstorm — signifies the victory of summer and light over winter and darkness. Geirrðr's son Agnarr, by contrast, won the favour of Óðinn because he gave him a refreshing potion, thunderstorm rain, and eventually recognized the disguised god who made him the new king. Óðinn crowns himself in a nature-mystical way in the rejuvenated Other, i.e. both characters named Agnarr are not only Óðinn's protégés but his reincarnations, mirroring the perpetual return of the seasons.<sup>82</sup> Neither von Wolzogen nor his epigone Elmenhorst are aware of *Grímnismál* being gnomic poetry, Óðinn's wisdom monologue.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, von Wolzogen reads *Vafþrúðnismál* as a fight between sun and winter, the victorious sun being the all-encompassing Óðinn. To von Wolzogen, Óðinn is *Urlichtmacht* (primordial power of light) and *absolute Lichtgottheit* (absolute deity of light).<sup>84</sup> In *Lokasenna*, which is, according to von Wolzogen, a late summer and fall myth, Óðinn

81 Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 3.

82 von Wolzogen, *Die Edda*, pp. 75–77.

83 von See, La Farge, and Schulz, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, 1.2, pp. 1204–1209 and 1216.

84 von Wolzogen, *Die Edda*, p. 76 and p. 129.

incorporates an earth deity, whose elements have intercourse to create harvest.<sup>85</sup> To prove that the multiple names for Óðinn refer to the seemingly contradictory character traits of an omnipresent, animistic, pantheistic, and all-encompassing monotheistic god, Elmenhorst cites von Wolzogen's *Grímnismál* translation stanza 54 without identifying his quotation. He deviates minimally from von Wolzogen and tailors the quotation to his own ends by emphasizing Óðinn, The One, with capitalization and exclamation mark:

Jetzt heiss ich Wotan! Dir war ich ein Schrecker | Und Donnerer hiess ich vor  
diesem! | Wabrer und Schläfrer und Waltegott, | Schöpfer und Totenschiffer. — |  
Das bin ich den Asen! Doch alle sind hier | Zu Wotan, dem EINEN geworden!<sup>86</sup>

(Now my name is Wotan! To you I was a Frightener | And Thunderer was  
my name before this! | The One who billows and lulls and the ruling god, |  
Creator and Skipper of the dead. — | That's me to the Aesir! But all have  
here | become Wotan, the ONE!)

This diffuse 'all-in-one' syncretism makes alleged Germanic concepts adaptable to Christian ones and, for Elmenhorst, may have functioned as a means of self-assurance and identity construction because he had to reconcile his experiences as a former student of a Christian Colonial School, a colonial farmer dependent on natural phenomena for successful agricultural production, and, most importantly, as a Germanic man, although humiliated and deprived of his property. Despite this, he still believed in 'The One', i.e. Óðinn, and echoes von Wolzogen:<sup>87</sup>

Er, Wotan, tritt sich selbst gegenüber, er bekämpft und besiegt sich selbst, [und]  
/unter/ den verschiedensten Namen und Gestalten. Denn er ist ebenso gut Gott  
des Lichtes, wie der Finsternis, Gott der sengenden, reifenden Hochsommerglut,  
wie Gott der eisigen Winterkälte.<sup>88</sup>

85 This also includes various possible trinities as for example 'Wodan' the 'Sonnenauge' (Óðinn, eye of the sun), 'Loge' or 'Weih', the 'brennende Hochsommerglut' (Loki or Vé, the burning summer heat), and 'Häner' or 'Wille', the 'Inbegriff des durch die Luft verbreiteten und zumal auch des im Wasser sich spiegelnden Wolkenreiches' (Hönnir or Vili, the epitome of the cloud realm spread through the air and especially of the cloud realm reflected in the water), von Wolzogen, *Die Edda*, p. 99. Elmenhorst adds another trinity, Hárr, Jafnhárr, and Þriði (High, Equally High, and Third) from Snorri Sturluson's *Gylfaginning*, SUB HH NWLGE A 1, p. 8<sup>f</sup>.

86 SUB HH NWLGE A 1, p. 8<sup>f</sup>, original emphasis. Cf. also von See, La Farge and Schulz, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, 1.2, p. 1473: the idea in the cited verse, that Óðinn is the origin of all the names, gods, and events, suggests that von Wolzogen's source, presumably an edition of the Old Norse text, derived from AM 748 I a 4<sup>to</sup> (A), from c. 1280–1320, which has the reading 'er ek hygg at orðnir sé | allir at einom mér' (all of whom I believe have become | me, the one). In contrast, Codex Regius GKS 2365 4<sup>to</sup> (R), from c. 1260–1280, has 'ek hygg at orðnir sé | allir af einom mér' (of which I believe that they originated | all from me, the one).

87 Cf. also NWLGE Priv. 15, where Elmenhorst tries to mingle Germanic and Christian faiths by reinterpreting Christ as a Germanic man. On the Aryanized *Deutschchristentum* (Germanic Christianity) cf. also Puschner, 'Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Gott', pp. 36–39.

88 SUB HH NWLGE A 1, p. 4<sup>f</sup>. Cf. also von Wolzogen, *Die Edda*, pp. 76–77.

(He, Wotan, faces himself, he fights and defeats himself, [and] /under/ the most diverse names and guises. For he is as well the god of light, as of darkness, the god of the scorching, ripening midsummer heat, as the god of the icy winter cold.)

While von Wolzogen is content with a nature-mythological and nature-mystical interpretation of the eddic songs, Elmenhorst goes one step further: he concludes that the grandeur and the magnificence of faith in an omnipresent, animistic Óðinn implicitly legitimize the omnipotence and greatness of the Germanic people.<sup>89</sup>

## *Hávamál*

Von Wolzogen also translates and interprets *Hávamál* within the multilayered, symbolic framework of nature mythology: Óðinn's shining, seeing eye and his dark, blind eye are attributes of the god of natural cycles, both day and night, light and darkness, summer and winter.<sup>90</sup> From Óðinn's self-sacrifice, von Wolzogen derives 'die mystische Weiterbildung des einfachen Naturmythos' (the mystical development of the simple nature myth):<sup>91</sup> Óðinn 'lebt um unterzugehen; er weihet sich dem Untergange um wiederzukehren' (lives to perish; he consecrates himself to perish in order to return).<sup>92</sup> Óðinn's mystical secret is thus the emergence of new life from death. Elmenhorst transfers this thought of a mystic cycle to the decline and resurgence of the Germanic people: culturally and historically, the cyclically returning Óðinn proves the rightfulness of Germanic revival. This corresponds with Elmenhorst's call to self-sacrifice, with which not only the resurgence of a strong Germanic people but also the regaining of the former colonial power are connected:

Du siehst ihn auftauchen aus dem Nebel der Zeit, den alten herrlichen Heergott!  
Den Gott der Kraft, der Wahrheit und des Lichtes! — Wotan! — Lüge und Feigheit, Gewinnsucht und Kriecherei, Faulheit und Kampfesfurcht sind ihm verhasst. Nur den ehrlichen, tapferen Kämpfer lässt er eingehen nach Walhall, der strahlenden Burg im Wipfel der Weltesche. Die Furcht vor dem 'Strohtod' ist nur die Furcht für kampffesscheu und feige gehalten zu werden, die einzige Furcht, die der Germane kennt.<sup>93</sup>

(You see him emerging from the mists of time, the ancient, glorious god of the armies! The god of power, truth, and light! — Wotan! — Lies and cowardice, greed and sycophancy, laziness, and fear of battle are hateful to him. Only the honest, brave fighter is allowed to enter Valhalla, the shining castle in the top branches of the world ash tree. The fear of the 'death on straw'

89 Cf. SUB HH NWLGE A 1, p. 3<sup>f</sup>.

90 Cf. von Wolzogen, *Die Edda*, p. 177.

91 von Wolzogen, *Die Edda*, p. 178.

92 von Wolzogen, *Die Edda*, p. 177.

93 SUB HH NWLGE A 1, p. 9<sup>f</sup>.

is only the fear of being taken for battle-shy and cowardly, the only fear the Germanic man knows.)

As evidence, Elmenhorst selects lines from *Hávamál*. Again, he makes minor changes in von Wolzogen's text to adapt the passage to his particular view, leaving out the verse based on the Old Norse 'allþorfr ýta sonum | óþorfr ~~ýta~~ iotna sonum'<sup>94</sup> (very useful to the sons of men, useless to the sons of ~~men~~ giants) probably because this does not fit into the logic of his concept. He concentrates solely on Óðinn. Von Wolzogen interprets Óðinn's runic stanzas and self-sacrifice as the ultimate power of revival: if the god of the rising and the setting sun dies, he is resurrected by his own power, incorporating *Wiederkehr* (return).<sup>95</sup> Neither von Wolzogen nor his follower Elmenhorst think about gnomic poetry or textual influence.<sup>96</sup> To both of them, *Hávamál* is the most ancient Germanic poem, with Loddfáfnir being a representative of humankind to whom the teachings of self-sacrifice and return are transmitted by Óðinn himself.

Once again, Elmenhorst goes one step further than von Wolzogen, presents himself as a representative of the Germanic people in 1920, and re-proclaims Óðinn's teachings. Elmenhorst uses Loddfáfnir in two ways. On the one hand, he identifies with Loddfáfnir, since he has received Óðinn's teachings and is the one who now knows about them. On the other hand, Loddfáfnir stands for the collective of Germanic contemporaries to whom an Óðinn-like Elmenhorst, legitimized by his Germanic ancestry, addresses his appeals. As the spiritual son of Óðinn, Elmenhorst takes on the role of a re-proclaimer of the heroic Germanic nature mythology, builds on von Wolzogen's *Hávamál* translation, and preaches:

Und nun lege ich mit dem letzten Vers des Liedes von der ewigen Weisheit, diese Lieder in eure Hände, Ihr Stammesbrüder. — Der Germane, den Germanen.

Nun hab ich gesungen das Hohelied. | Hier in der Halle des Hohen. | Heil ihm der es lernt, | Heil ihm der es lehrt! | Das Heil all ihr Hörer | Nehmt euch zu Nutz.<sup>97</sup>

(And now, with the last verse of the Song of Eternal Wisdom, I place these songs in your hands, brothers of my tribe. — The Germanic man to the Germanic people.

Now I have sung the Song of Songs. | Here in the hall of the High One. | Blessed is he who learns it, | Blessed is he who teaches it! | Blessed are all you listeners | Make use of it.)

94 von See, La Farge, and Schulz, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, 1.1, p. 966. My double strikethrough in the quotation indicates the emendation in GKS 2365 4<sup>10</sup> (R) to which von See, La Farge, and Schulz refer. *Hávamál* is only transmitted in the Codex Regius GKS 2365 4<sup>10</sup> manuscript (R), from c. 1260–1280. Cf. von See, La Farge, and Schulz, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, 1.1, p. 448.

95 Cf. von Wolzogen, *Die Edda*, p. 177.

96 Cf. von See, La Farge, and Schulz, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, 1.1, pp. 462–73.

97 SUB HH NWLGE A 1, p. 10<sup>r</sup>.

Elmenhorst believes that if the Germanic people's god, Óðinn, has the power of revival, his acolytes too would return to imperial power.

## Text, Culture, Nature, and the Decolonizing Potential of Ecocriticism in Researching the Reception of Old Norse Texts

Back in Europe, Elmenhorst pursued an academic career at the University of Hamburg intending to become a researcher in SWA.<sup>98</sup> On 25 November 1926, he was awarded a Doctor of Philosophy with the thesis *Das Haus in Südwest-Afrika* (The House in South West Africa).<sup>99</sup> His major subject was *Völkerkunde* (Ethnology, actually better translated as Racial Studies) and he took further examinations in the minor subjects African Language and Colonial Animal Husbandry with the proof of very good scientific ability and education under the rectorate of Prof. Dr Bernhard Nocht and the deanship of the director of the Hamburg Museum für Völkerkunde (Ethnological Museum), Prof. Dr Georg Christian Thilenius.<sup>100</sup> On 30 July 1926, Elmenhorst de-registered from the university.<sup>101</sup> His dream of becoming a researcher never came true. In 1929, he married and started earning a living for his family with various building material businesses. On 1 May 1933, he became a member of the National Socialist Party (NSDAP).<sup>102</sup> When Germany was defeated in the Second World War, Elmenhorst's fantasy-infused reality collapsed: he never understood

98 Cf. Universitätsarchiv Hamburg, Best. 201c Abteilung 3 — Studium und Lehre, Immatrikulationskarten, Wilhelm Elmenhorst 1925, geb. 06.05.1890 and Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 364–13 Fakultäten/Fachbereiche, Phil. Fak. Promotion Nr. 121, Wilhelm Elmenhorst, p. 14. In his application for enrolment as a doctoral student at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Hamburg on 5 January 1925, Elmenhorst mentions his current profession as a farmer and researcher in SWA. He adds, however, that he is currently not professionally active. Elmenhorst was admitted as a doctoral student with a so-called *Kleine Matrikel* (small enrolment) because he did not fulfil the ordinary enrolment requirements due to his earlier unfinished education.

99 Elmenhorst, *Das Haus in Südwest-Afrika*.

100 Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 364–13 Fakultäten/Fachbereiche, Phil. Fak. Promotion Nr. 121, Wilhelm Elmenhorst, pp. 3 and 25. Cf. also Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 364–13 Fakultäten/Fachbereiche, Phil. Fak. Promotion Nr. 121, Wilhelm Elmenhorst, p. 13: in the CV that Elmenhorst attached to his application for a doctorate, he mentions that he had sent numerous artefacts to the Museum für Völkerkunde (Ethnological Museum) in Hamburg and to its director, Prof. Dr Georg Christian Thilenius, e.g. copies of rock drawings, excavation finds from inhabited caves, and a human skeleton. The zoological museum in Hamburg had received his plaster casts of animal tracks and worms.

101 Universitätsarchiv Hamburg, Best. 201c Abteilung 3 — Studium und Lehre, Immatrikulationskarten, Wilhelm Elmenhorst 1925, geb. 06.05.1890.

102 BArch R 9361-VIII KARTEI / 8030397. Ideological conviction and hope for financial improvement may, in equal measure, have motivated Elmenhorst to join. According to NWLGE Priv. 01, p. 6, Ada Maria Elmenhorst apparently regarded her husband as an intellectual academic and an educated man: neither Elmenhorst nor his wife seem to have realized that there is a difference between Old Norse mythology and National Socialism.



why the Germanic people had been defeated again, and why the return to Germanic greatness promised by the *Edda* did not happen.<sup>103</sup>

Reflecting on the relationship between literature, culture, and nature on the basis of Elmenhorst's textual production with the help of decolonizing ecocriticism also means asking what we might learn from it today. This approach involves looking at the complex reception history and aesthetic of Old Norse mythological texts: not only the medieval texts and their contents but also later retellings can be recontextualized by productive recipients and placed in new, unexpected relationships to nature and culture. Elmenhorst received Old Norse texts in German translation and interpretation, i.e. second- and third-hand. Unaware of misusing and misinterpreting these texts, Elmenhorst focused on their alleged Germanic nature mythology and nature mysticism to legitimize and glorify Germanocentric worldviews of German colonialism, supremacy, and racism. He adhered to mythological texts because their 'great number of figurative, emblematic, and mimetic components produce together the totalizing effect which is experienced as helpful in dealing with the contingencies of life'.<sup>104</sup> To Elmenhorst, Germanic continuity and heroism included the aspiration for new colonial territories and the continuation of imperial modes of ethnic dominance and land appropriation. In his view, a special nature mythological and mystical relation to nature, innate to the Germanic people, and the relationship to Óðinn, legitimized Germanic greatness and promised a German-Germanic return to imperial power. Elmenhorst built up his esoteric views with the help of von Wolzogen's fanciful edition of the *Edda*, which says nothing about the relationship of the Old Norse texts to nature, but rather about these texts' reception in the context of cultural, colonial, hegemonic, and spiritual desires present in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The *Edda* was regarded as occult Germanic wisdom.

This makes Elmenhorst a case in point for semi-educated citizens' blindness to the dangerous developments of their time. Today, Germany's domestic right-wing land grabbers build on similar discourses, combining them with a nature-oriented lifestyle, organic farming, and environmental protection.<sup>105</sup> Due to a lack of awareness, it takes time for people in affected regions to become aware of such activities that threaten democracy.<sup>106</sup>

Studying Old Norse texts from the perspective of ecocriticism should not stop at the threshold of the early modern period. As the contributions in this volume demonstrate, responsible and informed Medieval Scandinavian Studies conduct research on the Old Norse texts' relation to nature and culture in their historic contexts to elucidate possible, reflected, and critically informed readings. Furthermore, examining the productive reception of Old Norse texts in different historical contexts can contribute

103 Cf. NWLGE Priv. 01, p. 6, Int. Meier, and Int. Jens Elmenhorst.

104 Junginger, 'The Revival', p. 131.

105 Cf. Röpke and Speit, *Völkische Landnahme*.

106 Cf. Freitag, *Anschlussfähigkeit des Ökolandbaus für rechte Siedlungen gestern und heute* which is an example of an initiative that aims at educating and sensitizing both students of relevant programmes and the broader public concerning the issue of right-wing land grabbing and the ideological misuse of ecological thoughts in the wake of Old Norse, i.e. alleged Germanic, traditions.

to an awareness of misuse, misinterpretation, and new forms of (mis)readings that threaten and distort sustainable and respectful socio-ecological relationships between humans and nature. In this, Old Norse Studies, as well as the study of the reception of Old Norse literature and its translations, also contribute to decolonizing our minds in the process of discovering and creating critical, informed, diverse, inclusive, and equitable relationships between literature, culture, humans, and nature.

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**Structured Interviews: Audio Recordings and Transcripts**

Int. Jens Elmenhorst = Interview with Jens Elmenhorst, son of W. L. G. Elmenhorst.

Interview leader: Dr Sybille Bauer, Hamburg, 28 August 2018

Int. Meier = Interview with Prof Dr Christian Meier, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, son of Felix Ulrich Meier and foster-son of W. L. G. Elmenhorst from September 1945 until his high school graduation in 1948. Interview leaders: Dr Sybille Bauer and Dr Juliane Egerer, Hohenschäftlarn near Munich, 10 August 2019

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