Art’s Challenge: An Analysis of the Role of Aesthetics in the Work of Hugo von Hofmannsthal

by

Marlo Alexandra Burks

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Marlo Alexandra Burks 2016
Art’s Challenge: An Analysis of the Role of Aesthetics in the Work of Hugo von Hofmannsthal

Marlo Alexandra Burks

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures
University of Toronto

2016

Abstract

Art poses itself to us as a challenge: when we confront a work of art, we are in turn confronted with the question of how to be after the encounter. My research pursues Hofmannsthal’s treatment of this challenge by examining his depiction of the aesthetic encounter in literary form. I argue that Hofmannsthal’s evolving understanding of the aesthetic begins to incorporate the ethical by way of a dialogical structure that emerges out of the encounter with art, things, and people. This kind of encounter is characterised simultaneously by the viewer’s creative boldness and reverential humility. To illustrate this, I analyse a selection of Hofmannsthal’s works treating the aesthetic and its role in the encounter. In Chapter 1, I consider the meaning of beauty in Das Märchen der 672. Nacht, a tale which depicts uncanny encounters with beautiful objects. For Chapter 2, I offer a reading of Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten, a series of fictional letters which culminate in an encounter with Van Gogh’s paintings. Augenblicke in Griechenland, the focus of Chapter 3, explores what I interpret to be the dialogical nature of the encounter with art of the past. In Chapter 4, the final chapter, I analyse the tale Die Frau ohne Schatten (which forms a pendant to Das Märchen der 672. Nacht) with a view to the parallel stories of the two-fold rebirth of art and ethical human relations. Hofmannsthal’s work almost never ends in resolution, except in such fairy-tale stories as Die Frau ohne Schatten. But even the resolution of this story is, from a certain
perspective, a false one. An analysis of the marriage of ethics and aesthetics leads us to an inescapable aporia. Hofmannsthal’s way to the aporia, however, is one that raises fundamental questions about our understanding of art, what it does, and how we respond.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am not the only person who has made a commitment these five years: my family, my research committee, and my friends have all stuck it out. My name is on the title page, but many people have contributed to the existence of this dissertation.

Van Gogh once said that, in order to do a good job, one must live well, eat well, be able to smoke one’s pipe in peace, and drink coffee. I have had significant material support, which has allowed me to do most of those things. I hope the work I have done will justify those investments. Financial support from the Connaught Fund, the Joint Initiative in German and European Studies and the DAAD, the Jackman Humanities Institute, the School of Graduate Studies, and the Goethe-Universität Frankfurt allowed me to complete my research without having to take on too many extra jobs. I was able to do research in Germany on several occasions at the Goethe-Haus in Frankfurt. In Mannheim, I drank coffee in the mornings under the trees in front of one of the great examples of Baroque architecture; where the pale pink flagstones and the air, even in the 40-degree summer heatwave, worked with me as inspiration. Solitude and what German speakers call Muße – ‘leisure’ doesn’t quite translate the word, nor do ‘ease’ or ‘rest’: perhaps simply time is the word I am looking for – are necessary for creation.

My dissertation advisor, John Zilcosky, has been precisely what I needed in an advisor: reliable, encouraging, challenging (a word you, dear reader, will probably be sick of by the time you have reached the last page of this dissertation!), and flexible. Most of all, though, he has been a wonderful interlocutor who has helped me to be more assertive in my writing. I thank him, also, for pointing me to Benjamin’s evaluation of Kafka and the notion of beautiful failure.

My committee members, Willi Goetschel and Christine Lehleiter have done more than was required of them as committee members. During the writing phase of this dissertation, I had hour-long conversations with Professor Goetschel around some of the philosophically frustrating issues in Hofmannsthal’s work, and Professor Lehleiter has been the critical but kind voice that questioned logical connections and helped me to be clearer in my explanations. I could not have wanted more from a committee; their dedication to ‘my’ project is inspiring.

I want to also mention my MA thesis advisor, Hans-Günther Schwarz, with whom I continue to work, and who has also been a constant support. We are now finalising a translation of
Hofmannsthal’s writings on art for *German Texts in English Translation*, and it was he who, in 2009, introduced me to *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht* and the beautiful world of carpets.

But whatever failures and flaws there are in this project – I should hope they are, if nothing else, at least a little beautiful! – are mine.

Family and friends have offered a different kind of support. My father, who could not witness this project’s completion, would often ask me about it and let me talk incessantly. He is the person who taught me my first few German words and would occasionally use them in E-Mails. *Gesundheit! Ich liebe Dich, Dein Vater*. My mother, who has been through and seen so much over the years, is a model of strength for me. There aren’t words for what her presence in my life, especially these last few years, has meant to me.

My partner and colleague Andrew, the most relentless of all ‘encouragers’ has been there at every stage. I only hope I can be for him what he has been for me. And Nathaniel: whom I have seen in the last four and a half years grow in maturity, talent, and kindness, and who has on many occasions brought me back down to earth, and also lifted my spirits. These two human beings are with me day-in and day-out. Presence is a funny thing, and not as easy as we think. I am thankful for their presence.
# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgments** ......................................................................................................................... iv

**Table of Contents** ............................................................................................................................... vi

**Introduction** ........................................................................................................................................... 1

**Chapter 1: On Beauty and Power** ......................................................................................................... 12
  Beauty Lost – Das Märchen der 672. Nacht ......................................................................................... 17
  Beauty Regained .................................................................................................................................... 40

**Chapter 2: The Dialogue of Colours** .................................................................................................... 58
  The Mal de Débarquement .................................................................................................................. 62
  “Ein europäisch-deutsches Gegenwartsgefühl” ................................................................................. 72
  Of Ghosts and Colours: From Phenomenological Crisis to Aesthetic Resolution? ....................... 84

**Chapter 3: Moments of Hubris and Humility** ..................................................................................... 126
  Eternity’s Call at “Das Kloster des Heiligen Lukas” ........................................................................... 129
  Poetic Wanderings in “Der Wanderer” .............................................................................................. 136
  There is Vengeance in Heaven for an Injured Dog .......................................................................... 141
  Prelude to the Aesthetic Encounter .................................................................................................. 151
  “In diesem Augenblick geschah mir etwas” ..................................................................................... 165

**Chapter 4: The Tale of an Aesthetic Theodicy** ................................................................................... 182
  The Blue Palatial Vestibule ................................................................................................................ 190
  A Yellow River Leads to the City of Woe: The Birthplace of the Artist ........................................... 199
  An Aesthetic Encounter at the Eleventh Hour ................................................................................... 213
  The Labour of Beauty .......................................................................................................................... 228
  Of the Rising and Setting Sun ............................................................................................................ 235
  Echoes and Colours ............................................................................................................................ 248
  Reverse Midas: Gold, Stone, & Gordian Knots ............................................................................... 255
  A Märchen as “lovely as a Persian carpet, and as unreal” ................................................................. 266
CONCLUDING REMARKS: ART’S STUBBORN SILENCE .................................................................271

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..........................................................................................................................277
INTRODUCTION

The work of art presents itself to us as a challenge.

In German, the word I am thinking of is Herausforderung; when we stand before a work of art (in physical or imaginary space), we are confronted with the question of how to react, how to be, after the encounter. It is a challenge, too, for us to say why a work of art has – or fails to have – a particular effect on us, how it pushes us out (heraus) of our habitual attitudes through its call to us, its provocation. Why is it that we stand with wonder before a painting, can become lost in a piece of music, whether it is Mozart’s animated Zauberflöte or the hums of the Berlin electronic music scene, and can almost sense the movement of dance in our limbs while we watch in stillness? Why does art sometimes make us angry or fill us with dread, imagined or real? These might seem idle questions since they have no definitive answer. If there were such an answer, we might well have arrived at it by now, after more than 250 years of concentrated philosophical and artistic effort. But we have not, and the question still stands, art still provokes us into responding. In spite of ourselves, we ask, perhaps because the effect of art is in some way vital to us, because we wish to be able to experience such confrontations again, with variation, and we would like to know how to preserve not the fleeting moments themselves, but the conditions under which they are possible.

In 1934 Paul Valéry described such a tendance infinie: the aesthetic awakens our senses to a longing for the infinite. This is made manifest in our desire to hold on, to repeat, to expand. 1 Or, to speak with Nietzsche: “Doch alle Lust will Ewigkeit –, will tiefe, tiefe Ewigkeit!” (Also sprach Zarathustra 400).

As advocates for the study of the humanities, we are often asked to justify our work, and often this question is put in terms of usefulness (particularly financial usefulness). The question is a bit unfair if we presuppose that the arts and humanities are defined precisely by their resistance to

---

1 “[...] et d’ailleurs à toutes les espèces de sensation, à tous les modes de la sensibilité dans lesquels l’action consciente peut intervenir pour restituer, prolonger ou accroître ce que l’action réflexe toute seule semble faite pour abolir. [...] L’ensemble de ces effets à tendance infinie que je viens d’isoler, pourrait constituer l’ordre des choses esthétiques” (“L’infini esthétique” 1343).
instrumentalisation. “All art is quite useless,” to speak with Oscar Wilde. Art is a provocation to question our full reliance on utility.

The question of the importance of art is broad, deep, and old. If its longevity is any indication of its import, then it is not surprising that we still ask the question: why art? Plato’s famously ambivalent (and poetic) representations of the effects and social dangers of art, Aristotle’s more adamantly positive evaluation in the Poetics, Pseudo-Longinus’s take on the sublime and the observer’s active participation in the aesthetic experience – all these have influenced the way we talk about art and what it does. In the modern era, under Kant’s analysis, a beautiful object appears to have a purpose, yet we cannot conceive what its purpose might be – in this, it remains free. Art need not, indeed it should not present to us objects wherein we can descry some specific, intended concept: it is rather through free play that we experience a work of art. But Kant is also, importantly, a proponent of the ethical significance of aesthetics. In the third Critique he expounds the theory of aesthetic judgment alongside teleological judgment and begins to draw a connection between the two. He points out that our experience of the beautiful (and the sublime), along with the cultivation of the sciences, prepares us for moral judgment (432-33). Schiller takes this further in his letters Über die Ästhetische Erziehung, claiming that art – in its beauty – is not merely one of many routes to human freedom, it is the route. He asserts in the second letter, “daß man, um jenes politische Problem in der Erfahrung zu lösen, durch das ästhetische den Weg nehmen muß, weil es die Schönheit ist, durch welche man zu der Freyheit wandert” (312). Art has great social relevance, because it represents for him that realm where the fragmentation of the human being may be overcome through the appeal to both sides of human nature, the “physische” and the “moralische” as he writes in the twentieth letter (375). Hegel takes a soberer position, admitting that art is one expression of Geist’s self-unfolding; philosophy, however, is where this becomes truly intelligible to the human being, and it is for this reason that he sees poetry as the highest of the arts, for poetry tends towards philosophy. This hope in the powers of the “freie Vernünftigkeit des Menschen” soon comes under attack, however, especially in the philosophy of Schopenhauer,

---

2 This phrase comes from the Preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray (17).

3 “Doch gerade auf dieser höchsten Stufe steigt nun die Kunst auch über sich selbst hinaus, indem sie das Element versöhnter Versinnlichung des Geistes verläßt und aus der Poesie der Vorstellung in die Prosa des Denkens hinübertritt” (Ästhetik I/II 149).
who gives pride of place to art (and above all the immediacy of music); he underlines, however, that the experience is fleeting, that it does not offer a “bleibende allgemeine Erkenntniß,” and as such does not permanently banish suffering. What actually brings us closer to the ideal is not art, but rather a life of resignation such as the holy achieve (Welt als Wille und Vorstellung 335). But the importance of art and its place is consistent with Schopenhauer’s pessimism: for life itself is fleeting – and thus he can say that a work of art has the capacity to reveal life to the viewer: “Siehe hier, das ist das Leben!” (479). Nietzsche, in a similar rapture, will go so far as to proclaim that “nur als aesthetisches Phänomen ist das Dasein und die Welt ewig gerechtfertigt” (Die Geburt der Tragödie 43).

There has been no abatement to the question, even in our own time: Hans Robert Jauß, a kind of Aristotle to Adorno’s Plato, writes in response to the latter’s negative dialectic a new justification for the arts in Kleine Apologie der ästhetischen Erfahrung. Art, Jauß argues, serves, and is meant to serve, a social function through its threefold catalytic operation: poiesis, aisthesis, katharsis. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, on the other hand, sees art as “Erlebnis,” that is, as an opportunity for providing the conditions for a particular way of being in an epiphanic moment (“Epiphanien” in Dimensionen ästhetischer Erfahrung).

So we see that we cannot simply ignore the question of art and its ‘value’; it has been raised, and we are called to address it ever anew. Art seems to exist in the tension between the poles of usefulness and enjoyment (which has no specific purpose) – Horace’s aut prodesse aut delectare, infused as it were with Kant’s Zweckmäßigheit ohne Zweck. And yet art is not always enjoyable in the sense we might expect; indeed, it quite often opposes our expectations and desires. The aesthetic encounter – or “Erlebnis,” in Gumbrecht’s terminology – can be a highly unsettling one. This is also the case for the Austrian writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874-1929), 4 who wrote with these aesthetic and ethical concerns constantly in mind. They came to shape his work, and are like the silent actors in a play with many acts and no conclusion.

---

4 Throughout the dissertation I will be referring primarily to the Kritische Ausgabe of the Sämtliche Werke (abbreviated SW followed by volume number and page number; where helpful, I shall also include an abbreviation of the volume title as indicated in bibliography), though on occasion I will use the older editions, Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden (abbreviated GWE, followed by volume title abbreviations as indicated in bibliography) and Gesammelte Werke in Einzelausgaben (GW followed by volume title abbreviations as indicated in bibliography).
My aim in this dissertation is to show how Hofmannsthal attempts to work out the characteristics and importance of the aesthetic by rediscovering its ethical moment. That is not to say art should be tendentious or have a political agenda; these are adherent qualities to art (and can often mar it). What Hofmannsthal wishes to explore is that which is already potentially there in the encounter with art, and which has the capacity on the one hand to awaken a desire adequately to respond (i.e. the *provocation*) and, on the other, to initiate some kind of transformation in the viewer/listener/reader. I hope to demonstrate in my readings of Hofmannsthal’s work how the harmonious marriage of ethics and aesthetics remains always elusive.

A quick note on terminology: I understand ‘the aesthetic’ here in a very simple sense, namely, as that which has to do with the heightened perception and awareness that comes about in the encounter with art, including works of art and other objects perceived through a lens commonly reserved for art. I have restricted my study to texts which treat things that are commonly acknowledged as works of art, not because Hofmannsthal did not think *other* things failed to awaken similar responses and questions, but rather because those things that we consider works of art are already charged with an unsettling ambiguity. His text *Ein Brief* (1902) is famous for its identification of ‘things’ as catalysts for epiphanic moments. Pestalozzi argues however that, with time, Hofmannsthal’s “erhöhte Augenblicke” increasingly fall under the purview of art: “Die Kunst und mit ihr die Vergangenheit entfremden das Ich nicht mehr sich selbst, sondern erwecken es gerade erst zu sich. Das heißt, Kunstwerke sind es nun, welche den erhöhten Augenblick auszulösen in der Lage sind” (134). Pestalozzi’s argument works for the texts he chooses, but I would like to modify the argument a little. First: there is always a moment of self-“Entfremdung” in the “erhöhter Augenblick,” even if there is also a return to the self (this persists even into the later texts, like the 1919 tale *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, discussed in Chapte 4). Second: it is not only works of art as such (nor even increasingly they) that provide the opportunity for such moments. Encounters with people and other things can also induce such moments. Nevertheless, it does seem that each of these instances is best understood in relation to the aesthetic, and works of art are often not far from the scene. My question approaches the topic from the other direction: I do not ask what the “erhöhter Augenblick” is (or becomes); my concern is what the aesthetic encounter (as an “erhöhter Augenblick”) does in Hofmannsthal’s work.

From this frame of inquiry and evaluation, art carries with it its ethical other – other things do not necessarily do this. A cup, considered simply as a cup and not as an aesthetic object, generally
poses no threat to us. From the aesthetic lens however, things (works of art in particular) have challenged us with their ambiguous status since Plato’s warnings of art’s power to manipulate, despite his own affinity for myth, and Aristotle’s counterclaim that art serves a cathartic function. For the fin-de-siècle world of disenchantment, art was proffered anew as a secular *alter deus*, providing a house for homeless piety, ritual, and passion. In this regard we must consider “Aestheticism”: this word refers, for some, to a way of living, and for others, to a new way of seeing. In both instances, the risk is that Aestheticism too devolves into a religion or pseudo-religion, reintroducing all the problems that the worship of gods presented us. For this reason, it is lampooned as often as it is valorised. But the subsequent rejection of Aestheticism came at a price, too: by stripping art of all semblance of sanctity in the broadest sense of the word, we have institutionally, as Heidegger argued, rendered it powerless and not worthy of consideration at all – it is, after all, usually the first subject in schools to be eliminated from curricula. On the other hand, art historically has been appropriated for political or profitmaking purposes, inspiring our fears again of art’s potential as a tool of manipulation. Hofmannsthal himself was guilty of this at the start of World War One – an artistic transgression and political position he came to regret. On one of the final blank pages of his copy of Nietzsche’s *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, he wrote:


Art loses something when it adopts a moralising tone, and in this way too it can become dangerous. Terry Eagleton writes: “If the aesthetic is a dangerous, ambiguous affair, it is because [...] there is something in the body which can revolt against the power which inscribes it; and that impulse could only be eradicated by extirpating along with it the capacity to authenticate power itself” (*Ideology of the Aesthetic* 28). For Hofmannsthal too, the aesthetic is both dangerous and potentially, if only momentarily, liberating. While Hofmannsthal is not as outspoken about the political and ideological implications of the aesthetic as Eagleton, he is acutely aware of this potential.
The standard narrative of Hofmannsthal’s own artistic trajectory relates that, after his early success as a consummate poet in the symbolist manner, he turned away from verse poetry around 1902, devoting himself instead to the more socially oriented arts – those of theatre and opera. While Hofmannsthal for the most part did not continue to publish new poems, the reasons given by scholars often draw a colourless caricature of an artist who rejected the solitary world of the “lyrical-I” of poetry for the popular world of the masses (or the “Volk” – with all its connotations). This is correct in a broad sense, but if we take the statement at face value, we risk artificially dividing Hofmannsthal’s works into two distinct phases, defined by his interest in the “social,” and missing the much more interesting nuances of ambivalence and ambiguity in his depiction of the aesthetic. Hofmannsthal was, even in his early lyrical poetry, always concerned with questions of the broader and deeper connections between people and the world, including the things in it, and the responsibility that both constitutes and grows out of those connections: his concerns were, we might say, the social and, broadly, ethical implications of his art. But his medium of choice was always artistic. Even his essays abound in extravagant metaphors, lyrical rhetoric, and strange images that appeal to precisely those people we might call “Aesthetes”: his love for the arabesque turn of a phrase might seem simply precious, but this belies a deeper, unsettled relationship between aesthetics and ethics that awakens in readers a critical impulse that follows after in the wake of the aesthetic encounter.

It must be made clear from the start: for Hofmannsthal aesthetics is never subsumed under ethics, nor the other way around. During his entire literary career, from about 1890 till his death in 1929, Hofmannsthal for the most part adhered to the rule of l’art pour l’art, or art for art’s sake. What this aspect of Aestheticism meant for Hofmannsthal, however, was distinct from those aspects of Aestheticism exhibited by the likes of Oscar Wilde, whose works Hofmannsthal regarded very highly, but whose life he saw as having been ultimately whored out to hedonistic – as distinct from Epicurean – consumption. For Hofmannsthal, the aesthetic cultivation of the self was not

---

5 This reading persists to this day: Teona Djibouti’s recently published dissertation Aufnehmen und Verwandeln (2015), for instance, repeats this narrative.

6 Thomas A. Kovach gives a succinct account: “Having recognized and criticized the alienation from life characterizing the Aestheticism that constituted the milieu of his earlier life and work, he was concerned henceforth to find what he called a ‘Weg zum Sozialen’ in his writing” (A Companion to the Works of Hugo von Hofmannsthal 4).
destructive per se, but it required more than mere stylisation. In turn, art required more of an engagement of the self with the external world than an imagined divine irony alone could afford.

In Baudelaire’s poem “Élévation,” we are told: happy is he who hovers of above life and understands effortlessly the language of flowers and silent things. This is the poet, performing in his poetic/priestly act the raising (“elevation”) of the consecrated and transformed host – the words of the poem. Stefan George’s translation and transmission of Baudelaire introduces to German literature a petrified world of glorified art. In the post-Baudelaire context, and even with George, who stylised himself as a priestly and prophetic poet, the menacing countenance of such a crystallised world begins insidiously to assert itself. The question at the end of the garden poem in George’s Algalab (in Hymnen, Pilgerfahrten, Algalab 96) throws doubt onto the entire project of the poeta alter deus – and George has written this doubt into his own poem:

Wie zeug ich dich aber im heiligtume
– So frage ich wenn ich es sinnend durchmaß
In kühnen gespinsten der sorge vergaß –
Dunkle große schwarze blume? (16-20)

The context of forgetting is important – with George, eight years before Freud’s Traumdeutung, we have a poetic expression of the idea of the return of the repressed within the realm of the aesthetic itself. For Hofmannsthal, whose work often lays stress on remembering, the crystallised world is set up against the world of growth and decay, and the speaker in his 1891/92 symbolist poem “Mein Garten” (SW I Gedichte 20) finds himself longing – and perhaps attempting to resist this longing – not for the eternal, ethereal world, but for the world of organic, breathing life fated to decay. Thus, while the speaker can assert: “Schön ist mein Garten mit den goldnen Bäumen,”

7 “Heureux celui qui peut d’une aile vigoureuse / S’élancer vers les champs lumineux et sereins ; / Celui dont les pensers, comme des alouettes, / Vers les cieux le matin prennent un libre essor, / - Qui plane sur la vie, et comprend sans effort / Le langage des fleurs et des choses muettes!” (15-20).

8 For the important role of forgetting and not being able to forget, see Matussek, “Tod und Transzendenz im geistigen Raum. Das Gedächtnistheater des jungen Hofmannsthal.” Cf. also Mayer’s comments on Ariadne auf Naxos – Ariadne is a woman who cannot forget (Hugo von Hofmannsthal 103). The Ägyptische Helena engages with the conflicting desires to forget and to remember. Memory also has an ethical import: cf. Hofmannsthal’s annotation to Freud’s Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens: “Vergesslichkeit aus Geringschätzung des Andern” (SW XL Bibliothek 214, *FDH 1308). The marker *FDH refers to the catalogue number in the Freies deutsches Hochstift.
the repeated use of ellipses betrays that which is not said, but rather merely suggested and perhaps reminisced, namely his desire to be in that other, living garden, as he says, “wo ich früher war.” This sounds like Romantic longing, but it is in fact quite different. Whereas in Novalis’s writings there is a longing for an imagined Golden Age, here we have a longing for that which is precisely not golden – or at least for that which is not solid gold.9

Ever concerned with, and almost pathologically afraid of losing the ability to distinguish between the external world of reality and the world of fantasy and art, Hofmannsthal frequently expresses in his letters precisely this fear of confusion, and it is a constant theme of his own literary production. Life might be reduced to a figment of the imagination, a solipsistic or narcissistic dream, or an unreal creation akin to art: or alternatively, things in their otherness – aesthetic or otherwise – might well have the uncanny power to threaten the sovereignty of the subject. These are some of the hallmarks of Hofmannsthal’s literary modernism. I would like to suggest that his response to the dilemma is one that reveals certain affinities for what later comes to be known as philosophy of dialogue, as represented first and foremost in the work of Martin Buber – a contemporary and correspondent of Hofmannsthal’s. Yet Hofmannsthal’s literary responses never end in resolution of the problem, but, again and again, in aporia, expressing a simultaneous allure and fear of the abyss into which category distinctions like subject and object or reality and fantasy collapse.

Hofmannsthal’s odyssey to the aporia is one that illuminates fundamental questions about our assumptions concerning art, what it does, and the implications of how we respond. In this respect, my dissertation offers an important qualification to Carl Schorske’s influential study, Fin-De-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture. Schorske gives a sensitive reading of Hofmannsthal’s ambiguous views on art, but to my mind he tends to represent art too often as something to flee to, or even from; in conjunction with this, he lays perhaps too much emphasis on the conservative elements (present though they are) in Hofmannsthal’s artistic endeavours.10 My research has

9 It will come as no surprise that one of the earlier titles of the poem is “Midas’ Garten.” See SWI 135. The theme of gold will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

10 Throughout his book, Schorske characterises art at the turn of the century as a manoeuvre of avoidance. Consider his comments on Klimt’s Beethoven Frieze: “This psychological posture is classic for the weakened ego finding in fantasy a substitute for power over reality: wish is king; encounter is avoided” (258); and describing the aesthetic experience, he writes: “It gives form to the feelings arising out of experience, but not to the experience itself. By the
resulted in not a contrary reading, but rather a reading with a different emphasis: for Hofmannsthal, the encounter with art is a challenge to be taken up and responded to. Art confronts us with the challenge of relating ourselves to the world – and not by simply adopting old moralities. There is undeniably a conservative strain in Hofmannsthal’s work, but it is there as part of a dialogue. Past ideologies and works of art ‘endure’ in a sense, and should be preserved, but they are never stable. And Hofmannsthal never presents the past in an idealised fashion (unless only ironically) as something towards which the present should reach back in facile emulation. In his work we see a desire to find a new way of engaging with the world aesthetically. We might think of this as an attempt to invent a new idiom for that ironic distance – one that builds a bridge to the unreachable other of past, present, and future. This dissertation looks at how Hofmannsthal attempts this.

In Chapter 1, “On Beauty and Power,” I begin with Hofmannsthal’s representative early work: to this end I offer a reading of the *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht* (1895), focussing on the depiction of the unsettling force of beautiful people and things; I then follow this line of inquiry into the more programmatic text, *Ansprache gehalten von Hugo von Hofmannsthal am Abend des 10. Mai 1902 im Hause des Grafen Karl Lanckoroński*. My main question here is: what does beauty mean

very fact of standing for life, art separates us from it” (311). Schorske is charitable towards Hofmannsthal, whom he characterises as having “sought to return art to ethics, aesthetic culture to society, and his cultivated class to fruitful participation in the body social” (311). On the one hand, “he returned to revitalize a traditional morality of personal responsibility; on the other, he thrust forward toward depth psychology and the affirmation of instinct” (313); “Hofmannsthal had rescued the function of art from the hedonistic isolation into which his class had carried it and had tried to redeem society through art’s reconciling power. But the rifts in the body social had proceeded too far. Society could tolerate tragedy or comedy, but not redemption through aesthetic harmonization” (318). I’m not convinced Hofmannsthal was as consistently optimistic about art’s potential as Schorske makes him out to be. Hofmannsthal certainly needed art, but, in contrast to Rilke perhaps, he was interested more in art’s provocative, rather than redemptive potential.

11 In this respect, I agree with Katherine Arens’s understanding of Hofmannsthal’s “conservatism”: “Hofmannsthal is by no means simply looking backwards (as critics like Michael Steinberg argue), but rather continuing a long-term project begun at the start of his career: the renovation of western traditions for a new generation. […] these essays [the late essays] document Hofmannsthal’s hopes for a cosmopolitan art that was not elitist or nationalist – an art that mediates rather than excludes because it grows from the historical experience of the group, not just from an elite” (“Hofmannsthal’s Essays: Conservation as Revolution” 182). More broadly, I also see my project in relation to the work of Jacques Le Rider and that of Mathias Mayer.

12 Hofmannsthal’s understanding of the relation of contemporary art to the art of the past is closely aligned to T.S. Eliot’s understanding of tradition – new works of art are to be ever in relation with the past, which itself is altered by the new works of art; related to this is the notion of responsibility, which Hofmannsthal develops in his *Ansprache*. Eliot writes: “[…] the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities” (“Tradition and the Individual Talent” 49-50). Hofmannsthal’s work, however, will also have a strongly future-oriented component, especially in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. 
for Hofmannsthal? And by ‘mean,’ I also mean: what does beauty do? This short text, with its aesthetic imperative ("beauty," Hofmannsthal states, places demands upon us) is a theoretical foundation for Hofmannsthal’s discussion of aesthetics, and its images and paradoxes will continue to reverberate through till the last chapter of this dissertation.

Chapter 2, “The Dialogue of Colours,” analyses Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten with the intention of showing how the aesthetic discussion takes up and responds to social (economic) questions with the help of Georg Simmel’s Philosophie des Geldes, and to the existential and phenomenological uncertainties of the time. Art is not “safe” from becoming a commodity, and selling art is beyond neither the letter writer – a man who returns from abroad – nor Hofmannsthal, nor, of course, the artist looking to survive from his work. We see that art cannot repair the world, but neither does it simply ignore the problems of society by causing us to retreat inward in a purely narcissistic gesture of self-involvement. Profoundly paradoxical in nature, art is presented as a world closed unto itself and distinct from the world of everyday experience, but it is also in itself open, neither indicating a particular purpose or direction for life, nor, however, lost to the chaos of indefiniteness.

In Chapter 3, “Moments of Hubris and Humility,” I analyse the semi-autobiographical text from the years 1908 to 1917, Augenblicke in Griechenland. The ‘moments’ referred to in the title lead up to a dialogical encounter with the ancient Greek past. This encounter with otherness through art awakens the traveller to a new understanding of the nature of ethical response and responsibility. This chapter elaborates a number of themes addressed in Chapter 2, with greater emphasis on the otherness present within the aesthetic encounter, and with the ensuing ethical call to responsibility. The ethical moment in the aesthetic thus becomes more explicit.

In the fourth and final chapter, “The Tale of an Aesthetic Theodicy,” I offer a study of the novella Die Frau ohne Schatten, a tale which in many ways responds to the Das Märchen der 672. Nacht. First written as a libretto for Richard Strauss during World War One, the story of Die Frau ohne Schatten serves as an allegory for the development of the artist, of new art, and of ethical relations. While formally the most aesthetically constructed of Hofmannsthal’s works, the thrust of the story is akin to that of a Bildungsroman – that most ethical of genres – tracing the development of mutual respect between characters as each comes into his or her own. This is by far the longest chapter, in part because this is also by far the longest text, but also because it is of great importance for the
argument: it takes up again many of the motifs from the earlier texts in such a way as to call into question the possibility of an aesthetic theodicy.

In each chapter, I show how Hofmannsthal’s views concerning the aesthetic develop and are given expression under different literary conditions. My guiding questions in reading these texts are: what is the role of aesthetics in these works? What is art’s challenge? In the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I offer a few remarks for further consideration of the tension between aesthetics and ethics in Hofmannsthal’s œuvre in light of the preceding readings.

The aesthetic moment called Hofmannsthal again and again to portray it and tease it out, without destroying the structural integrity of works of art. The threads always threaten to disappear through his hands and into the shadows. But the chiaroscuro of aesthetics – its capacity for simultaneous clarity and obscurity – gives relief to his entire work. And lurking ever in those shadows, so to speak, is the question of ethics in art: Is art dangerous? Can art ‘teach’ us virtue? Is art isolated from the messy, mercenary world, or part of it? Can art redeem us, save us from ourselves, or bring us to ourselves – or does it threaten to overcome us with its beauty, with its grotesquery, or with its reason-defying bizarre and mystical overtures? Must we save art? Must we bring a sacrifice to its altar – or does it come to us?

And if art in its uncanny otherness does approach us, how do we respond?
CHAPTER 1: ON BEAUTY AND POWER

Das Märchen der 672. Nach (1895, henceforth referred to as the Märchen) is in many ways an appropriate introduction to Hofmannsthal’s ambivalent and shifting depictions of the effects that beautiful objects have on the observer. We can see in this early work several themes that Hofmannsthal revisits repeatedly in his later projects, as if working with the same foggy image but sketching it from different angles and under various lights, always attentive to the inherent instability and malleability of his material, the aesthetic. This is not surprising: scholars such as Jacques Le Rider, Mathias Mayer, Waltraud Wiethölter and Thomas A. Kovach have pointed to several thematic continuities within Hofmannsthal’s work.¹³ That is not to say that Hofmannsthal is simply rehashing the same material. One of the ideas germane to any discussion of aesthetics – that elusive concept of beauty, namely – undergoes significant development in Hofmannsthal’s work, especially in the early years leading up to 1902. The Märchen depicts the struggle with understanding how to relate to the beautiful in its threatening ambiguity. There has been much secondary literature on the story, most of which responds to and often confirms Richard Alewyn’s reading: “Das Leben [...] läßt seiner nicht spotten. Verstoßen wird es böse und rachsüchtig” (175).¹⁴ This chapter will trace the development of Hofmannsthal’s understanding of beauty and how it is initially pitted against “Leben” by first offering a reading of Das Märchen der 672. Nach. We shall see, however, that the story is not simply a warning against the dangers of Aestheticism, as much secondary literature would have us believe,¹⁵ but rather a far more complex, if at times fraught, engagement with the power of beauty. In effect, beauty, particularly as it occurs in the

¹³ The view propounded by Janik and Toulim in their influential book Wittgenstein’s Vienna (1973) that with Ein Brief Hofmannsthal is dealing with “a crisis that compelled him to reject all that had gone before” (114) is an oversimplification. There is much textual evidence to the contrary – as we shall see in this and in subsequent chapters.

¹⁴ For a brief overview of the literature related to Das Märchen der 672. Nach, I refer to the recent study by Imke Meyer, whose focus on the creation of an artificial world formulates Alewyn’s thesis anew.

¹⁵ Ulrike Weinhold’s Künstlichkeit und Kunst is one such example. See Gregor Streim, Das ‘Leben’ in der Kunst for an overview of this tendency and a defence of reading Aestheticism in a more positive light.
work of art, does not necessarily offer an asylum from life; and if it does not entangle the subject in the unpleasantness and suffering of life, it at the very least reminds him of his own mortality.

Hofmannsthal’s treatment of beauty in the *Märchen* leads us then to the more theoretical and discursive writings on beauty in art, in particular the *Ansprache gehalten von Hugo von Hofmannsthal am Abend des 10. Mai 1902 im Hause des Grafen Karl Lanckoroński* (henceforth referred to as the *Ansprache*). Hofmannsthal develops a notion of beauty as a threat to the coherence and stability of the subject, yet he argues that beauty also has the concomitant power to awaken in the subject a greater awareness of the self in its relation to the world. If “Aestheticism” refers to a life of beauty, it is important to understand what that beauty entails, and that it is not to be equated with pleasantness alone. Aestheticism always possesses within it the danger of collapsing into its opposite: the pursuit of beauty with the intention of rejecting all which seems not to fall under this category – namely, the ugly, the unpleasant, the discomforting. This isolationist tendency of Aestheticism results in Aestheticism’s implosion and an *anaesthetisation* of the world. But a more nuanced, dialogical understanding of beauty would result in a different kind of aestheticism, one that is born out of a different relation to art and the world, a relation of confrontation rather than disengagement.

In this chapter I will examine two important moments for Hofmannsthal’s understanding of beauty: in the *Märchen*, the beautiful life is revealed to be precisely not the ivory tower we might wish it to be (and any attempt to render it such is an injustice to art). The *Ansprache* then extends this line of reasoning by emphasising the power of art to pull out of ourselves entire worlds of feeling, drawing us into relation with a non-solipsistic history of creativity. By focusing attention on specific passages in these two short texts, I hope to articulate a foundation for Hofmannsthal’s movement towards a dialogical understanding of the aesthetic as it will later be developed in *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* and *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, and then incorporated into *Die Frau ohne Schatten*.

When we talk about aesthetics around 1895, and in this *Märchen*, we cannot avoid gesturing to Aestheticism, which leads us to two distinct but related discussions: [1] the presence of beauty in one’s surroundings as constituting the aesthetic *lifestyle* (the life of the aesthete, or potentially of
the decadent\textsuperscript{16}); [2] the aesthetic \textit{gaze} one directs at all the objects and people in one’s world. Hofmannsthal relates these two conversations by exploring their opposites, showing the impossibility of ignoring the ugliness of life, but also the power beauty can exact on the subject (i.e. the viewer, reader, listener, etc.). Even at this still early stage in his writing, we can see how Hofmannsthal already shifts the emphasis from the \textit{unidirectional} aesthetic gaze to the \textit{response} that the gaze emanating from the aesthetic object calls forth. In the \textit{Märchen}, this response is expressed as a threatening reversal of the gaze, which parallels a reversal of the will and thereby functions as a challenge to the main character’s attempt at a distanced disengagement with the world. In saying this, I do not wish to repeat the well-worn and potentially reductive narrative of the merchant’s son who leaves his ivory-tower existence, prompted by some inner sense of guilt (i.e. regarding his Aestheticism), and enters into the ‘real world’ where he is then punished by reality. This reading is too one-sided,\textsuperscript{17} and misrepresents the second half of the story, where “reality” is in fact stranger and more dream-like and thus, within the narrative, more artfully and aesthetically constructed than the secluded life at home portrayed in the first half. As we shall see, a close reading of the text frustrates the simple binary oppositions of the individual and society, art and life, and guilt and punishment. What I wish to emphasise with this reading is how the beautiful already resists the merchant’s son’s attempt to escape whatever would upset the balance he has constructed. Beauty is more powerful and dangerous – though not only in the sense implied by a Platonic scepticism towards art – than we perhaps give it credit.

Important for this new and dangerous engagement with the world is the widespread turn-of-the-century interest in perception generally, and not only in impressionistic psychology, whereby the viewer gathers impressions and creates out of these impressions a “reality” (exemplified in the

\textsuperscript{16} See also the opening paragraphs of Oliver Simons “Nachbilder des Orients – Hugo von Hofmannsthals Märchen der 672. Nacht.”

\textsuperscript{17} Even Hammond’s otherwise sensitive readings of Hofmannsthals’s relation to Aestheticism and Décadence repeat the formula that the merchant’s son’s Aestheticism “ultimately provokes society into exacting its own revenge against him” (‘Hugo von Hofmannsthals’s \textit{Das Märchen der 672. Nacht and the Trials of Oscar Wilde}” 447). It is not my intention to challenge the validity of this reading so much as to show that there is more going on, particularly in its portrayal of antagonistic forces – including chance, which is motivated as it were from within the self. Cf. Hofmannsthals’s letter to Richard Beer-Hofmann from 15 May 1895: “Das Fallen der Karten […] erzwingt man von innen her; das ist das tiefe grosse wahre wovon dem Poldy seine Geschichte [\textit{Der Garten der Erkenntnis}] ein hilloses und mein Märchen ein kindlich rohes allegorisches Zeichen sein soll” (48).
writings of Ernst Mach\textsuperscript{18}, but also in the growing interest in the phenomenon, the object,\textsuperscript{19} and our perspective vis-à-vis the world of things. Hofmannsthal’s own personal connection to the developments within phenomenology should be kept in mind when reading even these early works of his. Aside from the trivial biographical connection – Hofmannsthal was a distant relative by marriage of Edmund Husserl – it has been argued that Hofmannsthal’s writings might have exerted an influence on Husserl’s development of the phenomenological reduction.\textsuperscript{20} In a letter to Hofmannsthal, Husserl suggests a parallel between Hofmannsthal’s supposed presentation of the “pure” aesthetic attitude in his early dramas and the phenomenological method (a suspension of habitual existential attitudes) necessary for the critique of knowledge. What is common to both is an interest in how to face the external world: but aesthetics, as one aspect of this confrontation with the world, need not, indeed should not, be bracketed off from life and experience. Husserl, however, did not ever fully develop the aesthetic side of his phenomenology,\textsuperscript{21} and Hofmannsthal (who did not, as far as we can tell, respond to Husserl’s letter), no trained philosopher, developed the phenomenological side as it were incidentally within the realm of his art.

In his notes \textit{Ad me ipsum}, Hofmannsthal identified the ambiguity of his own aesthetic attitude towards the things of life, pointing specifically to \textit{Das Märchen der 672. Nacht}:

\begin{quote}
Epochen der Freundschaft mit Poldy (“Kaufmannsohn” “Garten der Erkenntnis” [...]):

das Hauptproblem dieser sehr merkwürdigen Epoche liegt darin, daß Poldy vollständig (ich weniger vollständig, sondern ausweichend, indem ich eine Art Doppelleben führte) das Reale übersah: er suchte das Wesen der Dinge zu spüren – das andere
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18} The importance of Mach’s views was announced by Hermann Bahr in his essay \textit{Das unrettbare Ich}. Judith Ryan has treated the topic of psychology at length in \textit{The Vanishing Subject}.

\textsuperscript{19} Claudia Bamberg in her book \textit{Hofmannsthal: Der Dichter und die Dinge} refers in this regard to the “\textit{theatrum mundi} der Dinge” (233). The theme of theatricality and things is developed at greater length in Chapter 2: The Dialogue of Colours.

\textsuperscript{20} See Huemer, “Phenomenological Reduction and Aesthetic Experience.” Huemer argues that Husserl’s phenomenological reduction was inspired by a creative misunderstanding of Hofmannsthal’s portrayal of the aesthetic experience. Husserl would later criticise the phenomenological reduction because it leads only “to a solipsistic point of view that cannot provide a foundation to explain intersubjectivity” (124). While I do not entirely agree with Huemer’s reading of Hofmannsthal’s \textit{Ein Brief} – a critical text for his argument – as merely an expression of a language crisis, I accept the general direction of the argument and in particular the importance placed on the problem of intersubjectivity.

\textsuperscript{21} See Sven-Olov Wallenstein, “Phenomenology and the Possibility of a Pure Art.”
Any reading of the Märchen must therefore take into account this Janus-faced situation: we are dealing on the one hand with a particular kind of ideality made manifest, for Leopold (“Poldy”) Andrian at least, in art (“er suchte das Wesen der Dinge”), and, on the other hand, the other face of things, “das Reale.” The exclusion of either is dangerous. Indeed, a certain conception of das Schöne Leben comes under attack in the Märchen: namely, that conception which is one of isolation, an attempt to avoid whatever is unpleasant or threatening. But, as Alewyn emphasised, the repressed can return – from the other side too, we should add. It works both ways: we cannot simply dismiss the aesthetic any more than we can dismiss ‘life’; more specifically, we cannot dismiss that aspect of the aesthetic that draws us out of our habitual mode of existence – in Nietzschean terms, we might say the Dionysian; in Freudian terms, our unconscious drives. For this still relatively early stage of Hofmannsthal’s poetic treatment of the aesthetic, it is important to keep in mind the necessary presence of these shadowy agents.

This is a highly wrought Märchen, written in a sensuous language. It cannot be read as a simple allegory whose plot and characters correspond to a particular, closed meaning condemning the aesthetic. It must also be experienced as a work of art itself, as engagement and play with the senses as much as with the mind, and it should be read in terms of the Goethean symbol – i.e., in its insurmountable openness – a notion Hofmannsthal also presents in Das Gespräch über Gedichte eight years later. In the Gespräch, Gabriel differentiates between poems and “Erzählungen,” the latter of which “können Situationen schaffen” (SW XXXI 78). In the Märchen, the situation becomes the site for the manifestation of the openness of the symbol. I will therefore begin the analysis of the Märchen as the story itself begins: with the situation.

---

22 Hofmannsthal develops his interest in “Das andere Gesicht der Dinge” in Augenblicke in Griechenland, discussed in Chapter 3.

23 This is also the criticism Hofmannsthal levies against Oscar Wilde, whose works he nevertheless valued for their aesthetic brilliance. See his essay entitled Sebastian Melmoth (SW XXXIII RA2 62-65). For a thorough study of Hofmannsthal’s early views on Wilde’s aesthetics, see the dissertation by Charles H. Hammond, Jr.

24 This will be particularly important for Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten as well.
“Ein junger Kaufmannssohn, der sehr schön war und weder Vater noch Mutter hatte, wurde bald nach seinem fünfundzwanzigsten Jahre der Geselligkeit und des gastlichen Lebens überdrüssig” (SW XXVII 15). So begins the story Das Märchen der 672. Nacht. “Schön” is one of the first adjectives used. It not only describes the merchant’s son, it also sets the atmosphere and situation of the Märchen. The word is then repeated again and again like a leitmotiv; in the opening paragraph alone the word appears every few sentences: “der sehr schön war,” “die Schönheit keiner einzigen Frau,” “seiner schönen Hände,” “die Schönheit der Teppiche,” “tiefsinnigen Schönheit,” “seine Tage bewegten sich schöner.” The word continues to resurface throughout the text, but its prevalence in the opening sections is particularly powerful, so much so that we nearly become, like the merchant’s son, “überdrüssig.” Once we are aware of it, we cannot help but notice it. Yet towards the end of the story, the last use of the word refers to a lost world. Here, we are bombarded with the word, as if it had no real meaning except in the frequency of its attribution. It is an almost cliché trope – merely another characteristic of a familiar portrait. We should also notice that each of the merchant’s son’s attributes has a formulaic significance for the entire plot of the story (not surprisingly, given the genre): he is jung, schön and überdrüssig. It is particularly the last of the three, this tendency to lacklustre and disengagement, that would seem to typify the object of Hofmannsthal’s criticism – the attitude of the Dekadenten – yet we are given rather little information and should not condemn the merchant’s son right away. He does not seem to harbour any misanthropic tendencies or desires; we are merely told that he is weary of society. Why? We could perhaps read his weariness as what Adorno in “Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft” calls the “Idiosynkrasie des lyrischen Geistes gegen die Übergewalt der Dinge,” that is, “eine Reaktionsform auf die Verdinglichung der Welt, der Herrschaft von Waren über Menschen” (52).

25 Subsequent references to the Märchen, unless for purposes of clarification, will include only the page numbers.
26 See also Briese-Neumann’s comments on this division, esp. 174-75.
27 Cf. Wolfdietrich Rasch, particularly his sections on “Welthaß und Willensschwäche,” “Ästhetizismus” and “Lebensferne und Isolierung.” The merchant’s son embodies all of these. See also Hermann Bahr’s essay “Décadence”: “Die Décadence der Montesquiou und Wilde ist eine Ausflucht von Dilettanten, die ein rechtes Gefühl der Kunst, aber die schöpferische Kraft der Künstler nicht haben” (172). See also Bernheimer.
His identity as a merchant’s son would suggest that the kind of dealings he has with people and things might often be characterised by an over-valuing of commercial interactions. Furthermore, as the son of a merchant, his identity is already framed in opposition to the previous (absent!) generation; he has inherited this kind of relation to the world. At this point, it is worth returning to the above-quoted note from *Ad me ipsum*, wherein Hofmannsthal too suggests with his reference to the “Hauptproblem dieser sehr merkwürdigen Epoche” the broader social and cultural stakes. The relation between subject and object has been altered in all areas of life – in physics, art, philosophy, psychology, economics, and in the day-to-day interactions with other people. Philosophers, artists and dilettantes alike attempt to negotiate this new relation.

What role does art play in all this? To answer this question, we must take into account that the decadent Aesthete – and Adorno’s “lyrischer Geist” – surrounds himself with beautiful objects and works of art, setting up an artificial world in opposition to the hostile “natural” world, the beautiful in opposition to the ugly. Beautiful art in this sense serves as a barrier as much as a projection of one’s idea of beauty, that is, it should pose no challenges to the Aesthete, who can then enjoy his surroundings, for it is here that he discovers meaning, life, and symbol – those things which seem to lie beyond the mercenary relations of life. This is now attributed to Schönheit:

---

28 The tension between the commercial and the aesthetic is central to the *Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* (Chapter 2).

29 In contrast, Hinrich C. Seeba argues that “Hofmannsthal and many of his contemporaries, who considered themselves members of the cultural elite, if not the ruling class, seemed to live in denial of the alarming signs of what was in store for them. As if his great-grandfather had not been the Jewish merchant Isaak Löw (1761-1849), who came to Vienna from Bohemia in 1794 to develop the silk industry and who was ennobled by Austrian Emperor Franz I in 1827 to become Edler von Hofmannsthal, and as if his own father – like the fathers of Freud and Schnitzler – had not lost a fortune in the stock market crash of the 1870s, Hofmannsthal [...] enjoyed living the spoiled life of an aristocrat [...]” (“Hofmannsthal and Wiener Moderne,” 33). Yet even an early passage like this one in the *Märchen* would suggest otherwise – namely that Hofmannsthal was more self-reflective (and perhaps self-parodic) than his critics have given him credit for. Ulrich Weinzierl’s *Hofmannsthal. Skizzen zu seinem Bild* is in this respect more nuanced and supported by evidence.

30 I explore Hofmannsthal’s engagement with sociology and the work of Georg Simmel (especially his *Philosophie des Geldes*) in Chapter 2.

31 Cf. Alewyn, who writes of the similar figure Claudio in *Der Tor und der Tod*: “Unfähig, etwas zu erleben, weder ein Ding noch ein Du, unfähig zu handeln, unfähig auch nur zu genießen, lebt er ohne Welt und ohne Schicksal in dem Kerker seines Ichs dahin. Das schöne Leben verkehrt sich aus einem Segen in einen Fluch” (68). The absence of a “Du” will become more explicit when we look at *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* and the later works.
Hofmannsthal draws attention to the materiality, the tangibility of these relations. Silk, carved wood, metal: the beauty of all this has a meaning he would never have guessed. Again, we see here that it is not that the merchant’s son has collected these items and invested them with meaning and value. Rather, the beauty of their materiality, of their “Dinglichkeit” has struck him out of nowhere: form and colour render perceptible both life and meaning, which perhaps otherwise remain unexpressed in the merchant’s son’s life. It is no wonder this produces an intoxicating vision of the cosmic connectivity of the world: the union of idea and form, symbolised in the carpet, enriches his life; he sees in it a perfection, a unity, a divine image of all generations, spanning space and time, and it is something he can possess, not only in the material sense, but in the ideal sense as well.

“Possess” is a word to make us pause, for here we reach a truly difficult moment for interpretation. What does it mean to possess? The word suggests two quite different intentions. On the one hand, these aesthetic objects are the inheritance (“Erbe”) of previous generations, of the absent parents. We might think of the oft-quoted definition of “modern” from Hofmannsthal’s first essay on d’Annunzio: “Modern sind alte Möbel und junge Nervositäten” (GW RA I 176) and catch in this phrase the strains of embitterment. But possession also seems to suggest continuity, preservation, Bewahrung, and with this, responsibility. This great inheritance and divine work of all peoples

32 For some of the many meanings of this literary motif, see Hans-Günther Schwarz, Okzident – Orient 183-88. We will encounter this image again in Die Frau ohne Schatten (Chapter 4).

33 The notion of preservation is elaborated in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten.
is, if accepted, an enormous thing indeed. And it is at precisely this high point that Hofmannsthal’s irony cuts across the page like the weft does the warp:

Doch er fühlte ebenso die Nichtigkeit aller dieser Dinge wie ihre Schönheit; nie verließ ihn auf lange der Gedanke an den Tod und oft befiel er ihn unter lachenden und lärmenden Menschen, oft in der Nacht, oft beim Essen. (16)

These beautiful fabrics woven with such artistry as to be “bedeutungsvoll” and full of “tiefsinnige Schönheit” are equally characterised by their “Nichtigkeit.” Why this change in tone? These lofty, beautiful works of art are works of vanitas because they do not ward off thoughts of mortality: in fact, they evoke them. Even if we are to equate art with the eternal – it exists long after its maker and awakens a sense of the infinite – it nevertheless does not allay the anxiety around the fact that human life is short, giving credence to the saw: ars longa vita brevis. Surrounding oneself with such profound beauty is not equivalent to drawing a warm cloak around oneself in an attempt to stave off the elements. Beauty like this enlivens the surroundings of the merchant’s son, but the objects are also mementos mori – they confront him with the inevitability of death and transience. Beauty too must die. This seems to me to be the point that scholars have not adequately addressed in their readings of the Märchen. The merchant’s son has not been able to reckon with his mortality, and art does not offer asylum to those in flight: the very life in the work of art (“wie alle Formen und Farben der Welt in seinen Geräten lebten”) conjures its counterpart; this problem for the merchant’s son only worsens as the narrative progresses, but it is not a problem with the aesthetic, with art, or even with Aestheticism as such. We stop short if we merely see art in the Märchen as “lifeless.” On the contrary, art can be full of life and life’s counterpart: death. But instead of looking death – above all as it must be understood in the context of his life, that is, isolated and disconnected – in the face, so to speak, the merchant’s son attempts to mask any meaninglessness (equated with ugliness), to ignore any symptoms of a potentially incipient existential illness within himself yet beyond his control; he tries to “aestheticise” death in the hope

34 Similarly baroque themes abound in Hofmannsthal’s earlier works as well. Der Tor und der Tod as well as Der Tod des Tizian offer examples of the problem, which is taken up again later (and more famously) in Jedermann. The late tragedy Der Turm likewise can be read as a meditation on ars moriendi/ars vivendi.

35 Hammond writes of the objects’ “artificial and lifeless artistic beauty” (“Hugo von Hofmannsthal and the Trials of Oscar Wilde” 447), in effect ignoring the description of these objects as “nichts Totes und Niedriges.”
of rendering it harmless (in effect *anaesthetising* himself to it), but also in the hope of rendering it meaningful:


The merchant’s son is like the speaker of Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale,” half in love with easeful Death. A death adequate to a beautiful life, full of “tiefsinnge Schönheit,” would not be so unwelcome a guest. It is the potential unpleasantness of death – above all in its incomprehensible Otherness – that the merchant’s son seeks to avoid. Unsurprisingly, this mechanism of distancing by means of the aesthetic typifies his approach to the other people in his life as well, for the living also manifest the ultimately unapproachable, inaccessible foil to his subject position.

As said before, the merchant’s son shows no sign of wilful misanthropy, nor does he lead an entirely solitary life, even if he has reduced his society to the four servants, whom he holds dear and without whom he cannot imagine living. Yet these four servants seem to pose a threat to his own life by the strength of their very presence.\(^ {38}\) The language of the narrative at this point oscillates between depictions of life and death, the distinction becoming increasingly blurred just as the gestures “die er so gut kannte” begin to change; their presence is oppressive precisely because these overpoweringly *alive* servants are either marching towards *death* or into a “gleichsam lustlose” life, a realm beyond his knowledge and beyond his control, and yet ever

\(^{36}\) A similar hunting motif appears in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (see Chapter 4).

\(^{37}\) Thomas Mann puts the latter saying (ostensibly a Turkish adage) in the mouth of Thomas Buddenbrooks, who, having finished his own house, begins to sense the inevitable decline. The deeper connections between decline, fulfilment, and bourgeois establishment cannot be addressed here, but certainly deserve exploration.

\(^{38}\) In the second half of the story, this is revealed as the threat of absence. Fearing he will lose his favourite servant, the merchant’s son ventures out of his summer residence and returns to the city. In losing his servant, he is losing a part of *his very self*, as if he could still recognise it in and displace it onto other people and objects which he presumes to “possess” both materially and epistemologically.
increasingly resembling his own lifeless existence; such life has become a euphemism for meaninglessness – not death per se, but lifelessness in its various manifestations.\(^{39}\) This march towards lifelessness is accompanied by the “Anderswerden ihrer Züge,” that is, by an increasing lack of familiarity, a distancing and becoming other. Reading (or projecting) into their lives thus, he is then disturbed to, and yet repeatedly does imagine his gaze returned by the two servant girls, their eyes now set upon him, those of the elder “mit einer unbestimmten, ihn quälenden Forderung, die der Kleineren mit einer ungeduldigen, dann wieder höhnischen Aufmerksamkeit, die ihn noch mehr quälte” (19). Hammond and Csúri read this “Forderung” as an expression of erotic attraction (see Hammond “Das Märchen” 454), which the merchant’s son is unable to recognise, let alone return. This may indeed be part of the issue, but this reading should not exclude further exploration of this dynamic. Whether or not the gaze is explicitly erotic (or derisive, as in the case of the younger girl), the fear and vulnerability associated with being seen at all, with being the object of another subject’s attention, seems to be the deciding factor for the tone of the passage – indeed of the whole Märchen. The subject’s (i.e. the merchant’s son’s) vulnerability will eventually carry over to those situations in which one feels gefordert by the uncanny life of aesthetic objects as well. This vulnerability will culminate in powerlessness and death. Here, the young man accustomed to acting the observer begins to feel himself, as the object of such a gaze,\(^{40}\) like a hunted animal, caught in and fully aware of his inadequacy: “ihm war, sie sahen sein ganzes Leben an, sein tiefstes Wesen, seine geheimnisvolle menschliche Unzulänglichkeit” (19). This “menschliche Unzulänglichkeit” is the cause for his sense of shame because this is what constantly and quietly threatens to undermine his artfully constructed, beautiful world. Life and its shadow—self death are what he wishes to escape, but cannot. Instead, he is seized by “eine tödliche Angst vor der Unentrinnbarkeit des Lebens” (19), which his servants force him to bear witness to. The anxiety stems not simply from the sense that they see him in his inadequacy, but rather, “daß sie ihn zwangen, in einer unfruchtbaren und so ermüdenden Weise an sich selbst zu denken” (19). His inadequacy, which he is forced to acknowledge, is tied to this existential necessity, to this

\(^{39}\) This too will be taken up again in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten.

\(^{40}\) What does it mean to be the object of the gaze? The challenging reversal is what makes this such a rich image and one that is used in literature to great and varied effect, from Kafka’s Der Hungerkünstler to Thomas Bernhard’s short text “Umgekehrt” from the collection Stimmenimitator (44). For a treatment of the philosophical importance of the gaze around the turn of the century, see Strathausen, esp. 26-29.
inescapability, to this *anangke* that is life – the life of sudden self-awareness in the face of others. And beauty, we shall see, is complicit in this realization of humility.

The sensation of being watched is often read as a symptom of schizophrenia or related psychotic illness (e.g. Wunberg, *Der frühe Hofmannsthal* 57-58). This is one plausible reading, but I also see in the merchant’s son’s unease a burgeoning sense of his own aesthetic gaze being directed back upon him. Moreover, in privileging the ‘schizophrenic’ reading, we are in danger of ignoring the fact that this was a literary trope familiar to Hofmannsthal already from his encounter with Symbolism. In Baudelaire’s “Correspondances” we read:

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers  
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;  
L’homme y passe à travers de forêts de symboles  
Qui l’observent avec des regards familiers. (1-4)

In *Das Märchen*, Hofmannsthal invokes Baudelaire’s poem while laying emphasis on different aspects of this gaze-motif, creating an entirely different atmosphere. In Baudelaire, “nature” is like the Greek hyle, the matter which issues forth “confuses paroles.” As the person (artist) passes through this forest of symbols, *they* observe *him* – with “des regards familiers.” At the heart of Baudelaire’s poem is “unité” (6) and the identification of a space wherein “Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent” (8). Yet where Baudelaire emphasises *correspondance* and *familiarity*, Hofmannsthal evokes the uncanny: familiar, yet strange and threatening. Hofmannsthal is in fact bringing together two aesthetic traditions: that of Baudelaire, and that of John Keats. Indeed, in his copy of Otto Weininger’s *Geschlecht und Charakter*, Hofmannsthal noted Weininger’s quotation from Keats’ letter to Richard Woodhouse and wrote beside it: “Der Kaufmannssohn” (*SW XXVII EI* 210). Keats’ notions of the “chameleon poet” as well as “negative capability” are combined with Baudelaire’s gaze of the symbols to render an observer caught between familiarity and non-identity, disturbed by this reversal of roles announced in the aesthetic encounter.

There is a particularly rich scene in which the servants’ role of disturbance becomes clear. The beauty of art is juxtaposed to that of the human being, with the result that we start to become aware of both existential and phenomenological oppositional pairs – death/life, immortality/mortality,
hard/soft, metal/flesh – only to have this structure then dismantled. It is also the moment at which the prose text becomes so evocative that the narrator’s distance from the narration collapses. In this episode, the merchant’s son observes in a mirror the reflection of the elder of the two girls carrying two bronze Indian deities, such that she appears to be approaching him. The two statues, serving as placeholders for immortality and the deification of art, form a rigid frame within a frame, around the “living” girl:

die dunklen Köpfe aber mit dem bösen Mund von Schlangen, drei wilden Augen in der Stirn und unheimlichem Schmuck in den kalten, harten Haaren, bewegten sich neben den atemenden Wangen und streiften die schönen Schläfen im Takt der langsame Schritte. Eigentlich aber schien sie nicht an den Göttinnen schwer und feierlich zu tragen, sondern an der Schönheit ihres eigenen Hauptes mit dem schweren Schmuck aus lebendigem, dunklem Gold, zwei großen gewölbten Schnecken zu beiden Seiten der lichten Stirn, wie eine Königin im Kriege. (20)

The use of free indirect speech and the assumption of the evaluative habits (“Eigentlich aber [...]”) of the merchant’s son blur the boundary between narrator, narration, and narrated – right at the moment of the aesthetic encounter: that is, the encounter with the girl and the religious-aesthetic accoutrements, the bronze deities, taken together as a single aesthetic vision. Hofmannsthal will use this literary signal again in the later tale, Die Frau ohne Schatten. In the present episode, his use of this poetic device is effective because it lulls the reader into a similar aesthetic attitude, creating in effect an analogical (literary) aesthetic encounter for the reader, thereby multiplying the reflections as it were. The language too is heavy in places like the bronze deities, particularly in the slowly rolling rhythms and the prevalence of darker, long vowels in the first sentence of this quote, as well as the frequent use of alliteration: the sinuous initial syllables (“sch”, “s”) trace the

41 Cf. notes to “Diese Rundschau” from 1904: “falsch: jedes Kunstwerk als definitiv anzusehen; immer zu sagen: er hat das aufgegeben, er wendet sich jenem zu, er sieht nur das; er meint also das und das; falsch das definitive | falsch: alle billigen Antithesen wie ‘Kunst’ und ‘Leben,’ Aesthet und Gegentheil von Aesthet” (SW XXXIII RA2 234).

42 See Hofmannthal’s own comments on narration: the narrator “findet am wenigsten den Mut, das Gewebe der Motive aufzulösen; er hat ja gerade alle Mühe darangestellt, das Außen mit dem Innen, Faden um Faden zu verknüpfen und nirgends den Faden hängen zu lassen, den man herausziehen könnte” (“Die ägyptische Helene” in SW XXXI 216; qtd. in Simons 9). In such moments of narration, the narrator too becomes entangled in the narrative and cannot comment from an outsider’s position.
twisting metal, echoing the grandeur and heaviness again in the word pair “großen gewölbten,” terminating in the alliterated stop consonants of “Königin im Kriege.” We experience in literary form something of what the merchant’s son sees, above all as a result of the mood (Stimmung) Hofmannsthal creates with this sonorous and sensuous language. Hofmannsthal draws us into the world of the merchant’s son and into the aesthetic moment, where “living” hair at once serves as a contrast to the hard, non-living icon, and yet adopts the aesthetic characteristics of that icon – it is metallic, decorated and ornamental in effect (“großen gewölbten Schnecken”), and heavy, like the language of the passage.

Yet precisely at this juncture when distinctions are blurred, the merchant’s son steps back, re-establishing a distance (as does the narrator): he imagines in this living figure a queen in war – and one wonders if his vision hasn’t been suggested to him by his reading. The aesthetic draws him (and the narrator, and us) in, but with his aesthetic gaze he distances himself again: “Er wurde ergriffen von ihrer großen Schönheit, aber gleichzeitig wußte er deutlich, daß es ihm nichts bedeuteten würde, sie in seinen Armen zu halten. Er wußte es überhaupt, daß die Schönheit seiner Dienerin ihn mit Sehnsucht, aber nicht mit Verlangen erfüllte” (20). The merchant’s son’s distance exemplifies the perspective Kant discusses in the Kritik der Urteilskraft under the section on Geschmacksurteil (47-49): he seems to hold an uninterested appreciation for his servant’s beauty, which allows him to look at it, but not to desire it. Yet in this passage the sense of being arrested

43 “Stimmung ist die Gesamtheit der augenblicklichen Vorstellungen, ist relatives Bewußtsein der Welt: je nach der Stimmung denken wir über das Geringste und Höchste anders, es gibt überhaupt keinen Vorstellungsinhalt, der nicht durch die Stimmung beeinflußt, vergrößert, verwischt, verzerrt, verklärt, begehrenswert, gleichgültig, drohend, lind, dunkel, licht, weich, glatt, etc. etc. gemalt wird. Der Gott des Satten und der Gott des Hungernden sind zweierlei, zweierlei ist heiß und kalt für den Indianer und den Europäer, zweierlei der Klang jedes Namens, der Anblick jedes Buchstabens für den Renaissancemenschen und uns etc. etc.” (SW XXXIV 325). For more on the importance of Stimmung as a poetic device of Hofmannsthal’s, see Gisbertz. Stimmung is understood here in terms of the aesthetic experience. See Gumbrecht: “Vor dem historischen Hintergrund des vollzogenen Prozesses der Moderne kann man vorschlagen, jede Erfahrung, in der sich uns die Spannung und Simultanität von Sinneffekten und Präsenzeffekten auferlegt (im Gegensatz zum Normalfall des Alltages, wo wir allein Sinneffekte registrieren), als ‘ästhetische Erfahrung’ anzusehen” (Stimmungen lesen 15). David Wellbery, further, rightly highlights the physical and reverberative aspects of Hofmannsthal’s understanding of Stimmung: “Die poetische Stimmung entsteht dort, wo sich das körperliche gewebe aus Regungen in einer sprachlichen Bezugskonfiguration, in deren Wörtern sich ebenfalls Vergangenes gespeichert hat, entlädt. Und sie entbindet – von der Rezeptionsseite aus gesehen – dort ebenfalls einen solchen Schwingungskomplex” (“Stimmung” 717). This will be apparent in Augenblicke in Griechenland as well.

44 “Am Nachmittag, bis die Sonne hinter den Bergen hinunterfiel, saß er in seinem Garten und las meist in einem Buch, in welchem die Kriege eines sehr großen Königs der Vergangenheit aufgezeichnet waren” (18). This is a reversal of the notion that art imitates life; here, life imitates art. Oscar Wilde’s The Decay of Lying takes up this position with the most conviction. Hofmannsthal too echoes it in places.
(“ergriffen”) before the aesthetic, in all its Medusalike ambiguity, challenges the coolly objective reflection, which might indeed occur at the same time (“aber gleichzeitig wußte er”) yet which nevertheless in the attempt to explain the situation comes only after the involved and aesthetically bewildering description. The aesthetic moment of encounter is thus broken down: it is the momentary experience of sense perception, simultaneously set at a distance via description, for description can exist only from a distance. We might say that the merchant’s son wants to be a narrator – while the narrator in turn slips into identifying with the merchant’s son! This is both formulated and actualised in the paradox of free indirect speech – or as it is called in German, erlebte Rede, literally “experienced speech.”45 What Gumbrecht calls the “ästhetisches Erlebnis” (“Epiphanien” 206) is rendered literally and within the nexus of “erlebte Rede” (my emphasis) but then, in a second move, is rendered into an object of study.

Dangerous desire as well as the risk of losing oneself or one’s ego is ‘tempered’ as it were by being translated into an epistemological matter (“Er wußte [...]”). There is in this whole depiction a vague sense of threat; something of medieval Persian poetry’s dangerously enticing Locken46 is present in the girl’s hair – or more precisely, in the adornment of her hair. Anticipating Ernst Jentsch’s 1906 definition of the uncanny as a psychic uncertainty resulting from the ambiguity of objects47 – when lifeless things seem to be animate and when living beings seem inanimate – Hofmannsthal deftly conveys with this passage the unsettling nature of beauty. Kenneth Gross puts it well: “We indeed find many cases in which the life released in the object entraps us in turn” (The Dream of the Moving Statue 9). What I want to emphasise here is how this art/life confusion culminates in a reversal at the end of the first section of the Märchen. The beauty of the young servant girl awakens in him a desire that he then seeks to fulfil in the beautification of his


46 See e.g. Hammer-Purgstall’s translation of the poem “Kraflosigkeit der Talismane”: “Um von den Zaubereien / Des Bösen zu befreien, / Sind Amulett und Talisman. / Wer aber kann mich retten / Vor jenen Zauberketten, / Die mir die Locken legen an?” (7-12).

47 “Unter allen psychischen Unsicherheiten, die zur Entstehungsursache des Gefühls des Unheimlichen werden können, ist es ganz besonders eine, die eine ziemlich regelmässige, kräftige und sehr allgemeine Wirkung zu entfalten im Stande ist, nämlich der Zweifel an der Beseelung eines anscheinend lebendigen Wesens und umgekehrt darüber, ob ein lebloser Gegenstand nicht etwa beseelt sei, und zwar auch dann, wenn dieser Zweifel sich nur undeutlich im Bewusstsein bemerklich macht” (“Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen” 197).
surroundings. He leaves the scene and searches in a greenhouse for an aromatic equivalent for this beauty, “die ihn verwirrte und beunruhigte” (20). Unlike the beauty he has found in books and the intricate patterns of woven fabrics, the beauty he sees in the servant girl, mingled with that of the bronze deities, disquiets him; this encounter with the beautiful person – and the inability to fully distinguish between the effects of the beauty of the human being and the beauty of art – thwarts conceptual categories, highlighting this experience’s kinship to the sublime. There are good reasons for keeping this comparison in mind: the categorical distinction between the experience of beauty and the experience of that which confounds human reason by its size or force is here called into question. Hofmannsthal, like the Romantics before him, chooses to portray the sublime in the beautiful. In this Märchen (with one foot in the tradition of the Kunstmärchen) we see Hofmannsthal exploring a new way of presenting this confusing and unsettling state: the aesthetic bewilderment is tied to existential uncertainty in the face of the other. Thus, whereas Meyer-Sickendieck emphasises the intentional absurdity of the plot and the absence of cause-and-effect – a feature which, he argues, distinguishes this fin-de-siècle Kunstmärchen from earlier (Romantic) examples of the genre – I wish to underscore another aspect that Meyer-Sickendieck mentions but does not further develop: the “Kontemplation fremden Lebens” and the feeling of “Befremdlichkeit” (316). “Kontemplation” is a double-edged sword. When contemplating something or someone, there is always a negotiation of distance. The merchant’s son wishes to safeguard his subject position by regarding the other from a distance. When that distance is compromised, the safety of the subject position is threatened. In the scene at hand, we witness the confusion and disquiet caused by the sublime present in a vision of beauty which challenges the traditional subject-object hierarchy, as well as any possible easy partition between life and not-life. Already we see the beginnings of a dialogical structure in formation, prompted by subject’s no longer feeling “Herr in seinem eigenen Haus” before the sublimely beautiful, which might well, under other circumstances, not only arrest the subject but put him into a death-like catatonic state.

48 It is not without reason that philosophers (Burke, Mendelssohn, Kant) have often treated the beautiful and the sublime together under the heading of aesthetics.

49 In §27 of Kritik der Urteilskraft, Kant writes that the sublime awakens “ein Gefühl der Unlust, aus der Unangemessenheit der Einbildungskraft in der Größenschätzung zu der Schätzung durch die Vernunft und eine dabei zugleich erweckte Lust” (154-55).

50 In Die Frau ohne Schatten (Chapter 4), the Kaiser is in fact literally petrified.
The narrative structure is also helpful in situating the ethical question. Though Meyer-Sickendieck emphasises the lack of causality, the Märchen is constructed in such a way as to play with our constant search for a structure of cause and effect: we are encouraged to question the merchant’s son’s actions and, more importantly, his reactions in the presence of the beautiful. In the second half of the Märchen, Hofmannsthal will present us with a figure who seems on the one hand quite willing to be generous, desiring to help others – but we know that he has the luxury of offering help on his own terms; that he does so as a way of covering over what is unpleasant should be kept in mind. What is perhaps more interesting is that even the beautiful carries with it something that the merchant’s son wishes to ignore. The diptych structure of the story – divided into two parts – serves as a physical, visual, and narrative analogy of the call (the aesthetic provocation) and the response. Not quite fully mirror-like, it emphasises similarities with a difference.

But before we move to the second half, let us return to the present aesthetic encounter, to the act of response en miniature. Here, in the vision of a beautiful young woman set against the lifeless, temporal persistence (or resistance) of formed metal, the sublime – and the merchant’s son’s anxiety – is localised. How does this happen, and why? The enframement of the young woman within statues is imperfect: it is rather a blurring of the lines of demarcation between life and art. The human element threatens to upset the Kantian aesthetic experience of beauty, and it challenges the viewer’s perception of those assumed boundaries; equally, the worked statues highlight the mortality but also the unreachable otherness of the woman, and of art. Unlike the Persian carpet, which reminds the merchant’s son of his mortality, the cosmic unity of the world, and the generations of fruitful creativity, the servant girl awakens in him something more than a melancholic sense of distance and inevitable decay. She, together with the deities at her side, issues a challenge to him because she can look back at him and remind him of his powerlessness to possess and preserve this beauty. Even the word choice – “Sehnsucht” instead of “Verlangen” – suggests the perpetual nature of a desire impossible to satisfy, an addiction predicated on a distance that cannot be traversed. The etymological associations with illness (Sucht) tinge the word. Verlangen on the other hand suggests with its homophonic verb a different relation to desire: duration, necessity, and involvement. The merchant’s son’s response is to retreat, to disengage himself from this dynamic, threatening situation. His desire for possession is wedded to his desire for Ruhe, for stasis, but not the kind of stasis that involves the finality of commitment. He wishes to rest, for a moment, in peace, as it were, and in the calm forgetfulness sealed off from the chaos,
the turmoil, and the threats of life that lurk behind the image. He walks along the river bank where gardeners and flower sellers live, searching yet knowing full well of the futility of his quest, for a flower or spice that might give him “für einen Augenblick genau den süßen Reiz zu ruhigem Besitz [...] welcher in der Schönheit seiner Dienerin lag, die ihn verwirrte und beunruhigte” (20, my emphasis). But his experience of beauty can no longer accommodate this duality; there is no simple one-to-one correspondence.51 If life is defined through the reality of mortality, the unpredictable, the ugly, and the chaotic – and in the second half we see this definition worked out further – then he seeks to replace and to repress this encounter with life and art by masking it with the scent of flowers and spice. And yet it is telling that he searches for a solution in possession (“Besitz”) of the most ephemeral of senses! Even the location (the river bank) calls to mind to the Heraclitean/Parmenidean bind in which we are all caught. The desire for the security of possession and peace leads him to some of the most familiar symbols of transience: flowers and their scent.

The transitional moment comes when the merchant’s son searches for a substitute – in vain. To speak in terms of tragedy: here we have a moment of reversal, but without the satisfaction of recognition. Indeed, the unconscious seems to speak best through its opposite: wandering around the various plants, the verses of a poem come to mind, unbidden, repeatedly and even “gegen seinen Willen,” offering an inverted image of his own activity: “In den Stielen der Nelken, die sich wiegten, im Duft des reifen Kornes erregtest du meine Sehnsucht; aber als ich dich fand, warst du es nicht, die ich gesucht hatte, sondern die Schwester deiner Seele” (20-21). The sophistication of this passage lies in the repeated, frustrated attempts to set up one-to-one correspondences via a direct relation of parallel equivalents; instead, it articulates a double-chiastic structure of correspondence: in this way, Hofmannsthal once again draws attention to the constructed character of the Märchen, to the woven material of its words, its fabric.52 Having been inspired by the living

51 Cf. Bamberg: “Schönes Ding und Mensch sind weder austauschbar noch ineinander übersetzbar, sie korrespondieren nur entfernt miteinander und stehen in keinem zeichenhaften Zusammenhang, wie sich überhaupt beide, Dinge und Mensch, nicht seinen eigenwilligen Sehnsüchtigen fügen, sondern schon hier leise ihr Eigenrecht behaupten. Nicht nur die Menschen, auch die Dinge lassen sich, wenn man so will, nicht ‘verdinglichen’” (Hofmannsthal: Der Dichter und die Dinge 234).

52 Cf. Poesie und Leben: “Ich weiß nicht, ob Ihnen unter all’ dem ermüdenden Geschwätz von Individualität, Stil, Gesinnung, Stimmung und so fort, nicht das Bewusstsein dafür abhanden gekommen ist, dass das Material der Poesie die Worte sind, dass ein Gedicht ein gewichtloses Gewebe aus Worten ist, die durch ihre Anordnung, ihren Klang und ihren Inhalt, indem sie die Erinnerung an Sichtbares und die Erinnerung an Hörbares mit dem Element der Bewegung
and aesthetically reified vision of the servant girl, the merchant’s son seeks her corresponding, non-threatening, equivalent in the pleasantness of some scent or other. He does not find it. The verse in his head speaks to the same condition – the inspiration and subsequent failure of one-to-one correspondence – from what initially seems to be the opposite set of circumstances: having been inspired in and amidst the scent of flowers and ripe corn, the unspecified “Du” awakens his desire, yet upon finding this “Du,” he finds only its shadowy double, its non-presence, the “Schwester deiner Seele.”

If we disentangle this structure, we discover a few important points concerning beauty and its relation to the real. As we have seen, the merchant’s son wishes to move away from the human to the non-human, from the threatening to the non-threatening, from life to anaesthetised sensory pleasure, from the human being and society to isolation and the “aesthetic” (understood in a particular sense). This is one direction. But it can also be read in reverse: he is moving away from a reified beauty, a hard and heavy beauty that seems to suggest stasis, to the very image of transience and weightlessness: to the scent of flowers. Accompanying this movement is a desire for the real as opposed to the substitute; or perhaps instead a desire for the substitute as opposed to the real! But which is the real, original beauty, and which the substitute? This question is announced in the irrepressible lines of the poem, the speaker of which, beginning from the opposite pole, seeks the “Du” – which he had intuited in the fleeting, sweet scent of carnations and ripe corn – in the human being; but upon finding this sought-after human “Du,” he realises it is but a

---

53 Cf. the passage in *Ad me ipsum*: “Fällt das Wesen aus jener Totalität (Praexistenz Schicksallosigkeit) heraus, so ist es in Gefahr, sich zu verlieren, zu verirren: es sucht das zu ihm Gehörige, Entscheidende, das Äquivalent” (*GW Aufzeichnungen* 217). See also the passage concerning Des Esseintes’s pursuit of scent in the tenth chapter of *À rebours*: “Fatigué par la ténacité de cet imaginaire arôme, il résolut de se plonger dans des parfums véritables, espérant que cette homéopathie nasale le guérirait ou du moins qu’elle retarderait la poursuite de l’importune frangipane” (216).

54 Martin Buber will characterise this *Doppelgängertum* as “Selbst-Widerspruch.” In a few sentences he manages to outline the merchant’s son’s inward and outward narrative trajectory, especially as developed in the second half of the story: “Wenn der Mensch das Apriori der Beziehung nicht an der Welt bewährt, das eingeborene Du nicht am begegnenden auswirkt und verwirklicht, dann schlägt es nach innen. Es entfaltet sich am unnatürlichen, am unmöglichen Gegenstand, am Ich; das heißt: es entfaltet sich da, wo es gar keinen Ort zur Entfaltung hat. So entsteht das Gegenübertreten in sich selbst, das nicht Beziehung, Gegenwart, strömende Wechselwirkung, sondern nur Selbstwiderspruch sein kann. Der Mensch mag ihn als eine Beziehung, etwa als eine religiöse, auszudeuten versuchen, um sich dem Grauen des Doppelgängertums zu entwinden: er muß immer wieder das Trügerische der Deutung entdecken. Hier ist der Rand des Lebens. Ein Unerfülltes ist hier in den wahnwitzigen Schein einer Erfüllung geflüchtet; nun tastet es in den Irrgängen umher und verliert sich immer tiefer” (*Ich und Du* 84-85).
pale image of what he had sensed before. We are back to “das Hauptproblem dieser sehr
merkwürdigen Epoche”: which realm should be privileged: the aesthetic or the living? This critical
passage in the Märchen – it is also the point of transition to the second part of the story – reveals
this aporetic moment in the throes of desire: the confusions of original and copy, of real and unreal,
of art and life, of the aesthetic, the erotic, and the ethical, of the solitary and the social, are all tied
together in this structural chiasm, located at the figurative threshold between reality and dream, and at the structural threshold between parts one and two.

After receiving a strange and threatening letter from the messenger of the Persian prince
concerning an unnamed crime committed by his favourite servant, the merchant’s son elects to
venture out of his summer residence and return to the city, but fails to find the messenger at home
and now, given the lateness of the day, must find a place to spend the night. Wandering into the
poorer parts of the city like a foreigner, lost in thought and half in a dream-like state, he sees little
along his path that could be called “schön”: even the flowers are “häßlich” and “verstaubt” – this
is a world fallen into disrepair, not looked after, not preserved or cultivated. This counterworld is
new to him, but it is also oddly familiar: “Er stieg weiter und kam oben in ein Viertel, das er sich
nicht entsinnen konnte, je gesehen zu haben. Trotzdem kam ihm eine Kreuzung niederer Straßen
plötzlich traumhaft bekannt vor” (22). We cannot say, as Hammond does (455-56), that the
merchant’s son is, in this second part, woken from the dream of his artificial world. This world,
too, is dreamlike – which is poetically appropriate, given the previously discussed intermingling
of dream and reality, art and life. And if it is meant to present a “reality,” then it is a reality suffused
with experiences of déjà-vu, foggy memories from a mysterious past, uncanny moments of

55 Impressed by the story, Schnitzler questioned Hofmannsthal’s motivation for the title. In a letter written on 26
November 1895, he suggests the story resembles a dream more than a Märchen (63-64). Yet, as we can see, there is
no clear distinction between the dream and reality, and the Märchen, conceived under the sign of fantasy, is capable
of weaving the two together.

56 The unnamed transgression is a common theme in Hofmannsthal’s work; it is present in Der Kaiser und Die Hexe
and, perhaps most memorably, in the Gespräch über Gedichte: there, in the myth-like explanation of the origin of the
symbol, a man is described as being consumed with a sense of being hated by the gods – it is not explained why he
feels this guilt, and it is in an attempt to atone for this mysterious original sin that he makes an offering to the gods
(cf. Schaedler, Gestalten 4).
deceptive correspondence, and even animation of the inanimate. A reading that seeks to preserve a tidy distinction between dream and reality does not take into account these literary elements.

The merchant’s son enters into the world of the uncanny at the moment he recognises the familiar in these unpleasant and unfamiliar surroundings: he enters a jeweller’s shop and decides to buy a gift for one of his servants (an ambiguous act of generosity on the one hand, and a desire to further furnish his surroundings on the other). While there, he notices a “sehr schön gehaltenen Gemüsegarten” (24). Up till now, his journey has been relatively uneventful, even if his surroundings have been a far cry from the beauty and luxury with which he is familiar. But upon entering this neighbouring garden, he opens himself up not to the beauty of the flora or the countless exotic scents he expects to find, but to a surprising series of uncanny visions that trigger indistinct but powerful memories. The narrative of the second section repeatedly and explicitly invokes descriptions from the first section, establishing a number of negative correspondences that invite the reader to try to unravel the weave of the story. But the Märchen is tightly constructed, and it uses this construction to draw attention, above all, to the precariously tense situation of the merchant’s son. We feel that Clotho has been walking in his shadow the entire time. Ironically, it is these darker reflections that make it possible to call the Märchen “schön.” As Heike Grundmann observes, Hofmannsthal understands beauty here not merely as “Sinnesreizung, sondern als Realisation einer Korrespondenz zwischen Innen und Außen, bei der sich der (Kunst-) Gegenstand in ein Symbol verwandelt” (11). Grundmann is drawing on the definition of “symbol” offered by Baudelaire’s poem (alluded to earlier) and by Gabriel in the Gespräch über Gedichte; there the interlocutor describes the origin of poesy in the mysterium of identity between the priest and the sacrificial animal – an image to which we shall have recourse to return. In the context of the Märchen, these notions are still implicit and not fully worked out. Nevertheless, we should add to Grundmann’s observation here that in Das Gespräch über Gedichte Gabriel emphasises that symbols do indeed mean (he uses the verb “bedeuten” intransitively), but we should not say what they mean (SW XXXI 79) – in other words, we must hold meaning in abeyance; “bedeuten” is understood here as an immediate, intransitive gestus. In the Märchen, we see the tension between a desire to endow correspondences with a particular meaning, and the impossibility of doing so. The Märchen is a wonderful example of this beautiful construction of correspondences; the irony is that the correspondences are deliberately made to be uncanny and, in the fictional dream-like context of the Märchen, they portend death, but they do not mean death; there is no necessary link
between the two. There has been much psychoanalytic analysis on the theme of mirroring in this story, and the narrative does lend itself well to this interpretive strategy. But, as is clear from the quote above, these sorts of doublings have an aesthetic function in addition to the psychological, drawn in large part from Baudelaire. Further, these correspondences are imbued with an unspoken ethical dilemma: how does the merchant’s son relate to the world?

An overwhelming number of correspondences in this second section reintroduce people and images from the merchant’s son’s past and present. I wish to draw attention to a few of these correspondences in order to show how the Märchen develops the sense of confusion and discomfort already evoked in the encounter with the servant girl and the two statues in the first section. In most of these subsequent encounters, the merchant’s son feels an ever-growing sense of anxiety or dread, much in the Kierkegaardian sense, for he does not understand the cause or the reason. Nevertheless, his dread has a distinct character: in it, there is the uncanniness of the Doppelgänger, the fear of death portended in such visions, the growing persistence of the ugliness of life as a challenge to everything the merchant’s son has lived for.

The first truly unsettling encounter of the second half of the story takes place, with biting irony, in the hortus conclusus. As a literary motif, the garden is open to as many possible meanings as the symbol – it cannot be reduced to one idea. We have already seen in “Mein Garten” how for Hofmannsthal the garden is a metaphor that lends itself to completely contradictory significations, depending on what attributes it is lent. Hofmannsthal’s friend Leopold von Andrian had also already started writing Der Garten der Erkenntnis – the protagonist of which fails to achieve the

57 See, for example, Waltraud Wiethölther (Geometrie des Subjekts) und Dorrit Cohn (‘‘Als Traum erzählt’’).
58 ‘‘Baudelaire verwandelt die Korrespondenz im Sinne eines expressiven Symbolismus in ein subjektives, dynamisches Verhältnis, bei dem sich die Bilder in Relation zueinander sowie zur Imagination des Dichters befinden: ‘‘Tout l’univers visible n’est qu’un magasin d’images et des signes auxquels l’imagination donnera une place et une valeur relative; c’est une espèce de pâturage que l’imagination doit digérer et transformer’’ (Salon de 1859 1044; qtd. in Grundmann 110).
59 There is remarkably little literature on Kierkegaard’s influence on Hofmannsthal. Kobel (Hugo von Hofmannsthal), however, does occasionally make reference to Hofmannsthal’s having read Kierkegaard.
60 Ursula Renner (“Pavillons, Glashäuser und Seitenwege”) and Alexej Žerebin have noted the anticipatory character of the first section in this respect: there, the merchant’s son sits contentedly in his garden, until he senses his servants watching him. In this later garden, the gaze takes on a malevolent character. For other examples of the use of the garden in fin-de-siècle literature, see Koebner, “Der Garten als literarisches Motiv um die Jahrhundertwende” and Schorske 265-303.
longed-for “Erkenntnis” – and we have also seen how George uses the metaphor. It comes as no shock then that the merchant’s son should enter the garden abutting the jeweller’s shop. The cultivated world of the garden represents the possibility of re-establishing that (aesthetic) order of living with which the merchant’s son is familiar. But, as Žerebin notes, this is not simply about escaping the world he perceives as ugly. It is perhaps more importantly about the desire for a certain kind of Erkenntnis, to be achieved through aestheticizing all areas of life; quoting Freud, Žerebin points out that this is “unheimlich,” for “unheimlich ist alles, was ein Geheimnis, im Verborgenen bleiben sollte und hervorgetreten ist” (Žerebin, s.p.). This helps to explain the merchant’s son’s desire to enter – and stay in – the garden. What guides him is his fascination, his insatiable gaze, his overwhelming desire to take in the unknown world, to comprehend totality through the world of aesthetic correspondences: “Der Kaufmannssohn [...] trat ein und fand eine solche Fülle seltener und merkwürdiger Narzissen und Anemonen und so seltsames, ihm völlig unbekanntes Blattwerk, daß er sich lange nicht sattsehen konnte” (24). The narcissus points clearly to narcissism (and by extension to the less appealing side of aestheticism), and the ephemerality of the anemone (the wind-flower according to its Greek etymology) speaks to transience and death. Vanity in both its senses is pictured here. Narcissism in this light can be seen as a futile and misguided attempt to maintain the integrity of the self in the face of one’s own transience. Hofmannsthal brings the two together in the poem “Über Vergänglichkeit” (SW I Gedichte 45):

Dies ist ein Ding, das keiner voll aussinnt,
Und viel zu grauvoll, als daß man klage:
Daß alles gleitet und vorüberrinnt.

61 Žerebin sees the “Gartenerlebnis” in Das Märchen in accordance with symbolic poetry. The merchant’s son in the first half is able to spot correspondences and see the connectivity of all things; he further believes himself to be in possession of his surroundings. “Durch diese Erkenntnis besiegt er das Andere [...]. Das Gefühl des magischen Weltbesitzes verleiht ihm königliche Würde, stiftet die Beziehung zwischen dem Gartendasein des Ästheten und dem Schicksal ‘eines sehr großen Königs der Vergangenheit,’ von dem der Kaufmannssohn in seinem Garten liest.” This interpretation is compelling: the desire to triumph over the Other is evident in the merchant’s son, but it does not explore the accompanying feeling of anxiety that comes with the desire for possession and “Erkenntnis”: this anxiety permeates practically all of Hofmannsthal’s gardens. Even in the poem “Der Kaiser von China spricht:” (SW Gedichte I 72) the ambiguous last two lines (40-41) threaten to reverse the subject-object hierarchy of perspective: “Bis ans Meer, die letzte Mauer, / Die mein Reich und mich umgibt.”

Und daß mein eignes Ich, durch nichts gehemmt,
Herüberglitt aus einem kleinen Kind
Mir wie ein Hund unheimlich stumm und fremd. (4-9)

The first line recalls Hofmannsthal’s understanding of the poetic symbol – i.e., something which resists all attempts at total comprehension, something which has infinity as its modus essendi; moreover, this (what we might again call) *sublime* characteristic is so “grauenvoll” as to render complaint and lament superfluous. But superfluity also characterises this way of being, this ever-changing, ever-slipping away from what *is* into what *becomes*; the symbol, too, is characterised by its overflowing, inexhaustible meaning. This rampant change, this utter lack of stasis and stability, this simultaneous slipping away from childhood and into the known-unknown of the uncanny (“unheimlich stumm und fremd”) can indeed be felt as “grauenvoll.” In the garden too, things slip away, into the shadows, trapped in the uncanny: having lost himself in observation while the sun slowly sinks, the merchant’s son is suddenly aware of the passing of time, yet he still wishes to go and look into the second glasshouse, if only briefly, through the windows. But, peering through the glass, he is shocked (“erschrak er plötzlich sehr heftig,” 24) to see the face of a four-year old child pressed against the glass, glaring at him; having just overcome the initial surprise, he is shocked yet again, “Denn das Kind, das ihn regungslos und böse ansah, glich in einer unbegreiflichen Weise dem fünfzehnjährigen Mädchen, das er in seinem Hause hatte” (24).

In his quest for correspondences, he finds distortion and parody. Ursula Renner notes that the “Bezug zwischen Ding, Zeichen und Bedeutung ist einem Leer-Lauf aus Analogien zum Opfer gefallen” and links this to the more explicit treatment of this failure of correspondence in language as depicted in the *Brief* of Lord Chandos (426-27). The correspondence of this four-year old child to the fifteen-year old servant girl is one that remains incorrigibly indeterminate. And yet, from the perspective of the reader, these various images do have a kind of loose connectedness: true, it is something “das keiner voll aussint, / Und viel zu grauenvoll, als daß man klage”; yet we too look for the correspondences, even in parody. He sees (and we with him) the servant girl in the child and is confronted with the contradiction of the ostensibly stable self in the passing of time, and with the identity of two separate entities – “Alles war gleich,” the narrator repeats as if on the one hand to confirm, on the other to modify and thereby upset that confirmation. Indeed, the whole passage is characterised by repetition in diction, initiated by shock: “erschrak er plötzlich”;
In his essay on Walter Pater, Hofmannsthal writes: “Wir sind fast alle in der einen oder anderen Weise in eine durch das Medium der Künste angeschaute stilisierte Vergangenheit verliebt. Es ist dies sozusagen unsere Art, in ideales, wenigstens in idealisiertes Leben verliebt zu sein” (GW Prosa I 204). For the merchant’s son, the idealised world mediated by art has slipped away and been replaced by absurdity (“ohne sich umzusehen, mit einem dumpfen Gefühl, wie Haß gegen die Sinnlosigkeit dieser Qualen, ging er,” 27, my emphasis). Having managed to escape the prison-like garden, he longs for his idealised past in the form of his bed; he becomes a child, more childlike in his fear than the child who stood before him and challenged him and his notion of the beautiful. 

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the frequency of the word “schön” decreases drastically after the beginning of the story, and the last use of the word refers to the past – both his own, and a literary, imagined past:

Mit einer kindischen Sehnsucht erinnerte er sich an die Schönheit seines eigenen breiten Bettes, und auch die Betten fielen ihm ein, die der große König der Vergangenheit für sich und seine Gefährten errichtet hatte, als sie Hochzeit hielten mit den Töchtern der unterworfenen Könige, für sich ein Bett von Gold, für die anderen von Silber; getragen von Greifen und geflügelten Stieren. (27)

Here “schön” is clearly connected with the past – and, above all, with the imaginary past. And there is another correspondence: the bed he imagines belongs in the finished house of the Turkish proverb: “Er sagte: ‘Wenn das Haus fertig ist, kommt der Tod,’ und sah jenen langsam heraufkommen über die von geflügelten Löwen getragene Brücke des Palastes, des fertigen Hauses, angefüllt mit der wundervollen Beute des Lebens.” The parallel between the bed “getragen von Greifen und geflügelten Stieren” and the palace bridge,63 “von geflügelten Löwen getragene”

---

63 The bridge, another important motif in Hofmannsthals’s work, features in Das kleine Welttheater, “Reitergeschichte,” “Das Erlebnis des Marschalls von Bassompierre,” Die Frau ohne Schatten, as well as in the little-known poem, “Wir gingen einen Weg mit vielen Brücken,” and even as a pun on the name of the Doctor and the popular card game in Der Schwierige. It also appears in another place here in the Märchen as a counter-image to the bridge of the merchant’s son’s imagination. In order to leave the garden, he must cross a bridge above an “Abgrund”: 
reinforces this connection to death. Beauty, too, is put to rest for the remainder of the story. The word does not appear again. If there is a substitution at work here, it is what the merchant’s son would understand to be the opposite of beauty. In his quest for a bed, this travesty of a medieval knight finds himself first “zu den niedrigen Häusern gekommen,” then to soldiers’ barracks. The soldiers speak to him incomprehensibly, and this stirs him out of “seinem achtlosen Dahingehen” (27). The smells are repellent, and the horses look angry, ugly, and wretched, just as the soldiers do.

In a gesture of generosity – also, surely, a desire to allay his own feelings of discomfort⁶⁴ – he reaches into his pocket to pull out a few coins, thereby reintroducing mercantile means of dealing with the world he had sought to escape. This attempt at exchange, however (another failure of one-to-one correspondence!), succeeds only in provoking antagonism. He had already tried to give a few silver coins to the child in the garden in a failed attempt to mollify her animosity; she then let them fall, worthless, into the void.⁶⁵ Reaching to pull out one of his remaining gold coins, a thought seizes him – “als ein plötzlicher, undeutlicher Gedanke ihn hemmte” (29) – he pulls out his hand “unschlüssig,” perhaps sensing in this moment that his gift will be of no value to a poor man, in whose possession it would only rouse suspicion. Inadvertently, in this one gesture, he tosses out the piece of jewellery intended for the old woman, and, bending down to retrieve it, is kicked by one of the horses violently in the loins – a gesture to the merchant’s son’s utter lack of power: his money is worthless, he is in effect castrated and, in a broader sense, rendered incapable of productivity or creativity. He is then brought to his final resting place: a low, iron bed, and here he dies, alone, renouncing his entire life and “alles, was ihm lieb gewesen”: “Er haßte seinen vorzeitigen Tod so sehr, daß er sein Leben haßte, weil es ihn dahin geführt hatte” (30).

He dies with an expression on his face resembling that of the horses: pained and ugly. He has become his own grotesque parody. If the merchant’s son in some way “deserves” this fate, then it

“ein Brett über leere Luft [...]. Dort, wo das Brett wie eine Enterbrücke auf dem Rand der Plattform aufruhte, hatte das Gitter eine kleine Tür” (26).

⁶⁴ The face of one of the horses reminds him of a poor man he once saw come into his father’s shop: the man was being hounded because he was discovered to be in possession of a gold piece and would not say how he had obtained it.

⁶⁵ “Das Kind nahm sie und ließ sie ihm vor den Füßen niederfallen, daß sie in einer Spalte des auf eine Rost von Brettern ruhenden Boden verschwanden” (25).
must be because his life – according to his own adage – has led him to this death, as Hofmannsthal indicated to Beer-Hofmann from 15 May 1895: “Das Fallen der Karten […] erzwingt man von innen her […]” (48). But what aspect of his life has led him to this death? Part of the difficulty with interpreting this Märchen is the absence of a contrastive figure. We see no portrait of joy anywhere – in neither the rich luxury of the merchant’s son’s surroundings, nor, of course, in the decrepit and miserable city. As with the fantastic logic of the carpet, all things here are connected. Luxury is woven with poverty, pleasure with pain, joy with suffering; the merchant’s son’s only hope for meaningful human interaction, it seems, is in his servant, whose continued presence is threatened. Hegel’s lordship–bondage dialectic is full at work here: self-recognition, and recognition of the other, is never fully achieved, and yet the “master” needs the “slave” (the servant in this case): they are in fact mutually dependent, and we can imagine the fate of the servant will also be an unpleasant one.

How does the beautiful fit into this? Where does art come in? Gregor Streim has convincingly argued for a more nuanced understanding of Hofmannsthal’s position vis-à-vis Aestheticism more broadly: one of the most important distinctions to make with relation to the power of art is that between the artist and the dilettante, the latter embodying a strange hybrid of the scientist and artist. The dilettante seeks to grasp the aesthetic in conceptual terms, to render it an object of Wissenschaft, and in doing so, neutralises it. The artist, by contrast – and the aesthete may go either way – engages with the work of art, contributing to its expansion rather than trying to subsume it under a conceptual totality. Hofmannsthal himself expresses this productive kind of reception in Shakespeares Könige und grosse Herren. Ein Festvortrag. He describes reading Shakespeare as “eine Lust und eine Leidenschaft, eine bewußtlose empfangene Gabe, eine angeborene Kunst vielleicht wie Flötenspielen oder Tanzen, eine zerrüttende und stumme innere Orgie” (77). That is, to be struck by a work of art in this way is also to become a kind of artist, to

66 This resembles Nietzsche’s critique of Schopenhauer. See Streim. See also Hofmannsthal’s note on the Dilettantengarten in footnote 62.

67 We can see Hofmannsthal anticipating in places Levinas’ critique of Western philosophy’s privileging of totality (resulting in totalitarian thinking). Levinas proposes an alternative end: infinity (Totality and Infinity). The crucial difference between the two thinkers is that Levinas, in this book and indeed throughout most of his philosophical journey, maintained a highly sceptical stance towards art (see his most virulent attack: “La réalité et son ombre”). Though he came to adjust these views later in life (see Esterbauer), Levinas initially saw art as a way of avoiding responsibility and as an ultimately distracting enterprise. Hofmannsthal, while indeed struggling with the effects of art, comes to a different conclusion, as will become clearer in the next chapters.
respond to this received (and conceived) gift. Yet nowhere do we see the merchant’s son responding in this spirit – even his altruism is consumed by an inner egotism. He contemplates, he admires, he possesses (or believes to possess), but he does not respond to beauty’s challenge. In this respect he is indeed like the dilettante, imagining himself to be a stable observer, letting the impressions of life wash over him. He has the prerequisite appreciation for beauty, yet he lacks the artistic-productive perception and reception – we should think of the dual meaning of the German Empfänglichkeit (as opposed to Empfindung) – necessary to give this fantasy life and meaning – which would mean, too, acknowledging and living with death. Some fourteen years later, Rilke’s narrator in Malte Laurids Brigge suggests that we carry our deaths with us: when we are born, a death is born as well. We see this fin-de-siècle concern present in Das Märchen der 672. Nacht as well, and tightly woven into it is our experience of the beautiful and its challenge to the coherence and stable position of the subject, and its own breath of death. As in Malte, there are hints in the Märchen that this role of art as an intensified experience of the interconnectedness of life on the one hand, and a challenge to notions of the stable, isolated self on the other, becomes increasingly important in a world organised around economic exchange, the desire for possession, and the passivity induced in the pleasure had from watching, unresponsive, as the world passes by; or rather, the only response the merchant’s son knows, is exchange value, compensation, substitution: in aesthetic terms, one-to-one correspondence. As much as the merchant’s son wants to escape this society (he is “überdrüssig,” and very much the modern Hegelian figure of tragedy and to substitute for it that which is beautiful, he is still a product of that society; his reception of art, his inability to respond with that creative spirit, reflects as much upon his culture and society’s relation to creativity as it does upon his own. Read through the prism of Malte, but also, more importantly, through the Märchen itself and Hofmannsthal’s reception of Nietzsche’s Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen, this death, we see, reflects the ineluctable workings of anangke, present here, albeit anonymously, in the form of society and death itself. To speak with Mathias

---

68 Cf. Streim (“Einleitung,” esp. 88-90) and Grundmann 158.


70 Hofmannsthal’s critique of society’s failure to appreciate the role of the artist is most explicit in Der Dichter und diese Zeit.
Mayer, whose characterisation of the merchant’s son’s death strongly echoes Rilke’s *Malte* as well: “Sowenig er damit seinen individuellen Tod stirbt, sowenig hat er seinen Lebensweg gefunden” (*Hugo von Hofmannsthal* 126).

**Beauty Regained**

Neither artistic beauty, nor human beauty, nor the love of beauty is the cause of the merchant’s son’s downfall. But neither is beauty content to be the mere alternative to what is ugly and unpleasant. In the *Märchen*, beauty has the capacity to make us aware, sometimes painfully so, of the precariousness of our situation. Beauty adopts out of necessity the tactics of the ugly and grotesque by reminding us of our mortality – as in the encounter with the girl and the bronze deities. At the end of the *Märchen*, the beauty of the narrative depicts the grotesque face of death.

Buried in this *Märchen* is a nuanced understanding of beauty, not yet fully articulated, but which may have acted as a stepping stone to certain of Hofmannsthal’s later conjectures. It is interesting to observe in connection with the *Märchen* a fragment of Hofmannsthal’s own experience of the ugliness and brutality of that which challenges the notion of beauty as simply the opposite of ugliness. In his highly descriptive and psychologically driven letter (4 May 1896) to fellow author and friend Leopold von Andrian – a man who, as mentioned earlier, was also in 1895 engaged in grappling with the implications of an aesthetic lifestyle, culminating in his novella *Der Garten der Erkenntnis* – we see that Hofmannsthal’s experience bears a remarkable resemblance to his descriptions from the previous year of the ugliness of the city in the *Märchen*. From Tlumacz: “Alles was mich umgibt, ist häßlicher als Du denken kannst. Alles ist häßlich, elend und schmutzig, die Menschen, die Pferde, die Hunde, auch die Kinder.” He also experiences this *Häßlichkeit* as an ambiguous, anonymous threat:

---

71 Cf. Pestalozzi, “Wandlungen”: “Es ist bei Hofmannsthal unentscheidbar, ob seine literarischen Gestaltungen von Sinnlosigkeit und Augenblicke auf solche Erlebnisse zurückgehen oder nicht eher umgekehrt diese Erlebnisse sich den literarischen Gestaltungen verdanken” (133). Again, we may refer to the aestheticist notion popularised by Wilde in *The Decay of Lying*, that life imitates art. We see with Hofmannsthal a tantalizing ambiguity, one, it seems, he wishes to preserve.
Gestern bin ich abends über einen alten Bettler, der im Halbdunkel auf allen vieren in mein Zimmer gekrochen ist und mir die Füße geküßt hat, so erschrocken, daß ich nachher ermüdet und verbittert war, wie nach einer vergeblichen großen Gefahr ... Ich begreife nicht, wie alle diese Dinge eine solche Gewalt über mich haben können. (Hofmannsthal and Andrian, Briefwechsel 63-64)

The important distinction between Hofmannsthal and the merchant’s son is Hofmannsthal’s recognition that it is important to experience this side of life. It has for him an unquestionably positive value: “Solche Zustände sind eigentlich ängstliche. Aber sie sind auch wieder ganz gut. [...] sie erweitern den innern Sinn, sie bringen vieles wieder, was wie vergraben war. Ich glaube, das schöne Leben verarmt einen. Wenn man immer so leben könnte, wie man will, würde man alle Kraft verlieren” (64). The destabilising threat to an orderly life of comfort which itself leads to a kind of melancholy lassitude, has the power to shake him out of his lethargy: “Wenn ich hier in der Nacht aufwache, bin ich so stark bei mir selbst, wie schon sehr lange nicht. Ich komme so zu mir zurück, wie einer der fortwährend Theater gespielt hat, zwar eine Rolle die diesem Wesen geheimnisvoll nachgeahmt ist, aber doch eine Rolle” (64). The sensation of returning to oneself is made possible precisely under these threatening conditions; they have the power to allow him to see the “other” life in a new light, to see the show of it all. Behind this lies the influence of Nietzsche, whose Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen Hofmannsthal had read for the first time three years earlier. One particular passage, which Hofmannsthal has marked in his “Taschenausgabe,” reads: “--- anstößig ist aber alles wahrhaft Produktive ---” (*FDH 1756: 76).72 It seems Hofmannsthal’s experiences validated the statement for him; or perhaps Nietzsche’s statement gave a kind of validity or vocabulary to Hofmannsthal’s experience: that which is shocking, scandalous, even repulsive, results in some sort of production. The moral value of this productivity is ambiguous; we might say it is beyond good and evil. And for Hofmannsthal, we might conjecture, this productivity can be read in terms of aesthetic creation. (Die Frau ohne Schatten will similarly look at the metaphor of sexual reproduction as a kind of aesthetic productivity.) We shall soon see that this “Betrachtung” of Nietzsche’s becomes a necessary component for Hofmannsthal’s positive reassessment of the beautiful in art; schön comes to take on a new

72 The marker *FDH refers to the catalogue number in the Freies deutsches Hochstift – which holds much of what remains of Hofmannsthal’s library – and the second number refers to the page in that edition.
dimension (already hinted at in the *Märchen*, but made most explicit in the *Ansprache*), and it takes this dimension, oddly enough, from the experience of what is repulsive or threatening, *anstößig*.

Indeed, after this positive experience of the ugly, Hofmannsthal-as-reader radiates his appreciation for the beautiful just a day later (“Am 5ten weitergeschrieben”). While perusing Otway’s *Venice Preserv’d* in all the discomforts of a dirty stable (calling to mind the horses in the *Märchen*), something inexplicable is awakened in him: “Ich kann Dir nicht sagen, warum das so etwas seltenes und schönes war” (64-65), and, flummoxed, he grapples for an explanation:

Ich habe die Schönheit des Hereinkommens und Abgehens aller Personen gespürt, die Schönheit des Beisammenstehens von zweien oder dreien, und die Schönheit aller ihrer Reden und Gegenreden. Ich glaube, das ist etwas ungeheuer seltenes und damit es geschehen konnte, haben alle diese besonderen Umstände da sein müssen, das tagelange Alleinsein, die schlechten Nächte, und der Anblick so vieler elender Menschen, ja ihr Geruch und ihre Stimmen. (64-65)

His appreciation for what is *schön* has been restored, renewed, and rediscovered in the gestures and situations, as if kindled by his jolting experience from the day before. As a result, “Schön” has been revised to incorporate explicitly – and to some extent depend on – beauty’s shadow-side, its other; this rare (“seltenes”) experience of beauty was made possible precisely by his hostile surroundings. That is not to say that this is merely a matter of comparison, like feeling happy by default during the brief absence of sadness: this would be tantamount to rejecting what came before in favour of what is pleasant. On the contrary, Hofmannsthal suggests that these “Umstände” created the conditions for the positive (productive) experience of das *Schöne* – he therefore incorporates, rather than rejects, what is *anstößig*, to use Nietzsche’s terminology. Nor is it too great a leap to see in Hofmannsthal’s identification with the author (“Ich habe eine Stunde lang so geliebt, wie der Dichter es geliebt hat” (64) an identification with himself *through imperfection*, and here the conviction of his tone escalates: “Wunderschön ist es auch, in einem Kunstwerk die Schwäche des Künstlers zu fühlen, die Stellen, wo er aus Unzulänglichkeit und Sehnsucht nach der Schönheit sonderbar und gewaltsam wird” (65, my emphasis). Hofmannsthal, unlike the merchant’s son, values the shortcomings of being human in his striving towards beauty (here understood in the Enlightenment sense of perfection, but coupled with a Romantic yearning); in
fact, in this moment, they are “wunderschön.” Here I would disagree with Eva Blome’s reading of Hofmannsthal’s views on beauty: she sees in his early description of modernity – namely the “instinktmäßige, fast somnambule Hingabe an jede Offenbarung des Schönen, an einen Farbenakkord, eine funkelnde Metapher, eine wundervolle Allegorie” 73 – the criteria for “Weltabgewandtheit,” which she then also reads into Ein Brief; her argument is that Lord Chandos’ impassioned attention to random objects (265-66) illustrates this same “Weltabgewandtheit.” Blome is correct to note the similarity between the two depictions, but there is an important difference in Chandos’ case, which we can understand in the context of Hofmannsthal’s reflections on his experience in Tlumacz as well as his reflections on Otway’s Venise Preserv’d: neither Chandos nor Hofmannsthal are displaying mere “Weltabgewandtheit” in their appreciation for this lowly aspect of beauty; rather, Hofmannsthal seems to be tentatively suggesting a new potential for aesthetic engagement with the world, one that acknowledges the frailty of humanity, incorporating it into the aesthetic as a challenge, rather than avoiding it altogether. Under this new attitude, the merchant’s son’s own “menschliche Unzulänglichkeit” would be understood to be part of what makes beauty possible.

As we can see, even early in his writing career, Hofmannsthal’s views on aesthetics were driven in large part by a “Weltzugewandtheit” – or at least a desire for this – in the form of action and vitality, and this presupposes the acceptance of an engagement with the world, even in the form of suffering. 74 It is no surprise that Goethe had such an influence on Hofmannsthal’s relation to art and his portrayal of it. With her 1947 study Hugo von Hofmannsthal und Goethe, Grete Schaedler addressed Goethe’s and Hofmannsthal’s emphasis on the necessity of turning towards the outer world as a way of thwarting the potentially self-destructive (and Narcissistic) interiority of the artistic personality. And again, like Nietzsche, Hofmannsthal is keenly aware of the need to escape the cycle of interiority by giving external form to what is felt. 75 A text such as the essay on

73 “Gabriele D’Annunzio,” GW RA I, 176.

74 The inclusion of suffering as part of the aesthetic experience is developed in Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

75 Cf. Nietzsche’s critique of the weak-willed German interiority in Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen: “[E]twas recht wird der Ausländer immer behalten, wenn er uns vorwirft, daß unser Inneres zu schwach und ungeordnet ist, um nach außen zu wirken und sich eine Form zu geben. Dabei kann es sich in seltenem Grade zart empfänglich, ernst, mächtig, innig, gut erweisen und vielleicht selbst reicher als das Innere anderer Völker sein: aber als Ganzes bleibt es schwach, weil alle die schönen Fasern nicht in einen kräftigen Knoten geschlungen sind: so daß die sichtbare That nicht die
D’Annunzio’s new novel shows this well: the words “Leben,” “tun,” “wollen”\textsuperscript{76} and a sense of suffering in the world are always tied to “Schönheit”:


In other words: one has to suffer with dignity through the pains of the world, one has to experience the testing of one’s power as well as humiliation, in order for Schönheit to shine forth. In the examples given in the quote above – one taken from myth and one from epic – we see that this is a criterion overreaching the boundaries of genre and even begins to test that boundary between “life” and “art.” As Hofmannsthal makes explicit in \textit{Poesie und Leben}, this experience is necessary not only in the depiction of a character, but also in the reception of a work of art: “nur mit dem Gehen der Wege des Lebens, mit den Müdigkeiten ihrer Abgründe und den Müdigkeiten ihrer Gipfel wird das Verstehen der geistigen Kunst erkauft” (\textit{GW Prosa I} 263). Yet art is not meant to imitate life. In this lecture, Hofmannsthal uses Stefan George’s anti-Naturalist vision of an \textit{absolute Dichtung} to combat the proliferation of a poetry taking its sustenance from “real life” to the detriment of the art itself. It is for this reason that he identifies such a strong divide between poetry and life, maintaining that there is no \textit{direct} path from one to the other (16). Like the Romantics,\textsuperscript{77} Hofmannsthal asserts that the language of everyday life is distinct from the language of poetry, and we must understand this divide in the context of the literary world at the time:

\footnotesize

Gesammtthat und Selbstoffenbarung dieses Inneren ist, sondern nur ein schwächlicher oder roher Versuch irgend einer Faser, zum Schein einmal für das Ganze gelten zu wollen” (272).

\textsuperscript{76} In the even earlier text from 1891, “Das Tagebuch eines Willenskranken” (\textit{GW Prosa I} 22-35) we see the theme of productivity in artistic creation already present; in “Der neue Roman von D’Annunzio,” however, the explicit connection to beauty is made clearer.

Hofmannsthal’s argument is that we should not attempt to make art mirror life as precisely as possible, for in doing so, we neglect the cultivation of the creative element – in effect, laming art, rendering it lifeless. Hofmannsthal’s irony is incisive: “Sie wundern sich über mich. Sie sind enttäuscht und finden, daß ich das Leben aus der Poesie vertreibe” (18). On the contrary, it is the facile imitation of life as present in the work of “Dilettanten” that drives the life of poetry out of poetry. “Ich weiß, was das Leben mit der Kunst zu schaffen hat. Ich liebe das Leben, vielmehr ich liebe nichts als das Leben” (18). What does life have to do with art? Without experiencing the polarities of life, art has nothing to say to us, no substance, no reason to exist.

Beauty seems to have fallen out of the picture here, but it has not. Let us return to the D’Annunzio essay. In the following passage, Hofmannsthal describes the lifeless figures of D’Annunzio’s novel Le vergini delle rocce:

Es kann einer hier sein doch nicht im Leben sein: völlig ein Mysterium ist es, was ihn auf einmal umwirft und zu einem solchen macht, der nun erst schuldig und unschuldig werden kann, nun erst Kraft haben und Schönheit. Denn vorher konnte er weder gut noch böse Kraft haben und gar keine Schönheit; dazu war er viel zu nichts, da doch Schönheit erst entsteht, wo eine Kraft und eine Bescheidenheit ist. (GW Prosa I 235, my emphasis)

But is not the aesthetic identified through Schönheit? Hofmannsthal’s terms seem to get lost in one another, but if we tread slowly we might be able to follow their paths. What pushes the character into life is a mysterium: it is something we cannot give adequate word to – there is no terminological correspondence – as he also points out in Poesie und Leben: “und die wahrhaft Verstehenden sind wiederum schweigsam wie die wahrhaft Schaffenden” (GW Prosa I 267). There are however certain terms that create a space for witnessing what happens in the emergence of the possibility of “Kraft” and “Schönheit,” yet he follows this with the statement: “da doch Schönheit erst entsteht, wo eine Kraft und eine Bescheidenheit ist.” This certainly sounds like circular reasoning: “Bescheidenheit” and “Kraft” are necessary for the emergence of “Schönheit” and “Kraft” itself – here the terms are so tangled that we see neither beginning nor end, neither cause

---

78 This would be what Naturalists in line with Arno Holz’s formulation would strive for: Kunst = Natur - x, with ‘x’ approaching zero (“Die Kunst: Ihr Wesen und ihre Gesetze,” 111). Though he disagreed with this theory of art, Hofmannsthal did make use of several of the literary devices advanced by Naturalism.
nor effect. Is this sloppy logic, deliberate obfuscation, or an inevitable and necessary confusion of terms and meanings that illustrate Hofmannsthal’s position? Again, much like Schlegel and Novalis, Hofmannsthal is advocating something similar to the 53rd Athenäums-Fragment: “Es ist gleich tödlich für den Geist, ein System zu haben, und keins zu haben. Er wird sich also wohl entschließen müssen, beides zu verbinden” (173). This binding, or weaving, is precisely part of Hofmannsthal’s argument, and to create one-to-one correspondences would be counter to the necessary superfluity of art. The paradox of origin (Kraft and Bescheidenheit being the ‘origin’ of Kraft and Schönheit) is one he connects explicitly with art in the Persian carpet motif in Die Frau ohne Schatten, and which was hinted at in both the image of the carpet in the Märchen der 672. Nacht and the lines of verse the merchant’s son remembers concerning the quest for “Du.” “Bescheidenheit” and “Kraft” must, to speak with Nietzsche, “in einen kräftigen Knoten geschlungen [sein]” (Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen 272).

Hofmannsthal had already hinted at the connection between Bescheidenheit and Schönheit in his letter to Leopold von Andrian, where he notes that the experience of beauty was tied on the one hand to the experience of the wretchedness of life and, on the other, to the experience of the author’s humanity, his weakness and his inadequacy – those characteristics which the merchant’s son attempted to neutralise. In the essay on D’Annunzio’s novel, these features are grouped under the term Bescheidenheit. Hofmannsthal develops and refines this relationship between power and humility in his understanding of beauty just a few years later in the Ansprache gehalten von Hugo von Hofmannsthal am Abend des 10. Mai 1902 im Hause des Grafen Karl Lanckoroński, to which I shall now turn.

In 1902 Hofmannsthal was asked to provide a few opening remarks at the house of Graf Lanckoroński before an audience invited to a viewing of Lanckoroński’s overwhelmingly eclectic art collection. Hofmannsthal’s intention with Ansprache was to set the mood, as far as that was possible, and, I shall argue, to bring the audience into a responsive frame of mind for viewing the

79 Le Rider rightly identifies the element of Bescheidenheit in Ein Brief: “Die neue Existenz, die Chandos im zweiten Teil des Textes zu führen lernt, ist ein weniger berauschendes und weniger ungewöhnliches Leben. Doch seine neue Haltung der Bescheidenheit und geistigen Schlichtheit öffnet ihm der Zugang zu einer ethischen und intellektuellen Kreativität, die von größerer Dauer und Festigkeit ist” (128). We can now see that this “neue Haltung” of Chandos is a necessary element which Hofmannsthal came to identify quite early on.
works of art surrounding them. He compares his words to musical\textsuperscript{80} accompaniment: “Denn es ist mir oft erschienen, dass Musik eine solche Gewalt hat, schöne Gebilde leben zu machen” (SW XXXII RA2 7). We have already seen in Das Märchen der 672. Nacht how powerful Stimmung can be for Hofmannsthal, and here we see him speaking about his own half-poetic address as something meant to facilitate the reception of beauty – as something which has the power to bring these beautiful works of art to life. But what does beauty mean in this context? In referring to the paintings,\textsuperscript{81} he writes:

\begin{quote}
Sie sind wie die Schatten, die den Odysseus umlagern und alle vom Blut trinken wollen, lautlos, gierig aneinander gedrängt, ihren dunklen hohlen Blick auf den Lebenden geheftet. Sie wollen ihren Anteil haben am Leben. Ja sie scheinen von einer eigenen verhaltenen Energie zu erglühen und zu erzittern, wenn man sie nicht beachtet. (7)
\end{quote}

An echo of Das Märchen der 672. Nacht\textsuperscript{82} is present in this passage: life is in some sense pulled from the subject into the surroundings – in the Märchen, it is the (aesthetically) servants who perform this role. In the Ansprache, it is explicitly art, and in this case: “schöne Gebilde.” But if Hofmannsthal is alluding to the dangerous side of art, silently invoking Plato’s criticism, why is he doing this? He is not doing so in order to show that art corrupts as such; rather, he wishes to inform us that it is capable of sending us into a potentially ecstatic state of self-forgetfulness – in itself an ambiguous state that can be life-affirming or life-negating. We become, in this very specific sense, a sacrifice to art: we give it life. But art gives us something in return, and it does this through its material, shaped by human hands, and through that material’s power to suggest. We are back to the letter Hofmannsthal wrote to Andrian, only here we see the dizzying effect of such a recognition of the hand at work. The following passage saw almost no changes in the

\textsuperscript{80} Other important examples of texts which use music as Stimmung include Der Abenteurer und die Sängerin, Ariadne auf Naxos, Die Frau ohne Schatten and Der Turm. For the symbolic importance of music, see Martin Eric Schmid’s study Symbol und Funktion der Musik im Werk Hugo von Hofmannsthal.

\textsuperscript{81} I will be referring to the written, edited version as given in the Kritische Ausgabe. Hofmannsthal revised the address before having it published. See the Entstehung (SW XXXIII RA 2, esp. 251-52).

\textsuperscript{82} See the Erläuterung (SW XXXIII RA 2, esp. 265-66).
different manuscripts, so we can assume Hofmannsthal read this vertiginous sentence aloud, pulling his listeners into its whorl:

Und so vermag ein hangendes [sic!], ein hingebreitetes Gewebe für einen Augenblick gleichsam seinen Geist auszuhauchen: während es einer unterm Reden, unterm Schweigen starr ansieht, wird sich ihm auf einmal offenbaren, dass da Geknüpftes ist, von Menschenfingern in endlosen Stunden zu Tausenden von Knoten Zusammengeknüpftes, und einen Augenblick wird dies tausendfach aufleuchten und die erstarrte Lebendigkeit, die Form gewordene Willkür der zusammentreten den Farben und Schattierungen erkennen lassen, wie eine nächtliche Landschaft unter einem grossen Blitz die Verknüpfung der Strassen und das Zusammentreten der Hügel für einen Augenblick erkennen und dann wieder ins Dunkel zusammensinken lässt.\(^83\) (7-8)

Else Lasker-Schüler said it more succinctly in one line of her cosmically tinged erotic poem “Ein Alter Tibetteppich”: Maschentausendabertausendweit;\(^84\) and Stefan George said it more esoterically, foregrounding the cryptic revelation in his poem “Der Teppich.”\(^85\) But Hofmannsthal wants to draw us in, he wants his listeners to follow the thread into the weave, to see the knots and ties. Hofmannsthal’s tapestry is waiting to reveal its life, like George’s “Der Teppich” from \textit{Teppich des Lebens} (40): “Und keiner ahnt das rätsel der verstrickten .. / Da eines abends wird das werk lebendig” (7-8). This momentary revelation of endless connectivity (both “zusammen” and

---

\(^83\) Hofmannsthal uses an almost identical image in “Dämmerung und nächtliches Gewitter,” the notes to which explain the threshold experience that initiates one into adulthood and life: “Die schlimmste Anfechtung für den Knaben: wie ihn der Zweifel anfängt, ob denn an dem Ganzen etwas dran sei – wie er die Kraft der Landschaft und Mannheit, die aus ihr empörwächste, bezweifelt – und dann mit einem Ruck dies alles auf sich zu nehmen bereit ist und alles was daraus entstehen möge, Böses, Gemischtes, Drohendes auf sich zu nehmen und durchzustehen, \textit{also zu leben}. Er war am Rand einer solchen Verzweiflung gewesen, daß ihm geschenien war, es greife eine Mutterhand-Mörderhand nach \textit{ihm}, die doch nach einem Wesen neben ihm griff – und er vermöchte es nicht zu sondern. – (Hebbels Gemütsverfassung in der schlimmsten Zeit seines Lebens.)” See Hofmannsthal, “Dämmerung und nächtliches Gewitter,” 440. That Hofmannsthal uses the same image to describe the encounter with the aesthetic is revealing: the encounter with art is the encounter with the other, conveyed by a vision of the intricacies of bonds – and thereby also an encounter with the self through the other. The effect hinges on the response: does the boy (Knabe) or the viewer (in the \textit{Ansprache}) respond to the challenge, or retreat?

\(^84\) Else Lasker-Schüler’s poem “Ein alter Tibetteppich” was published in the 41st issue of the first volume of the weekly journal \textit{Der Sturm} in 1910.

\(^85\) “Sie wird den vielen nie und nie durch rede / Sie wird den selten selten im gebilde” (15-16).
“knüpfen” appear in one form or another four times, at one point together as “Zusammengeknüpftes”) seems itself to spin the sentence into rolling repetitions with variation, emphasising the convergence of material and content, the creation of form out of volition (“Form gewordene Willkür”). And yet, sustaining this tension for longer than a moment seems too much. It all sinks away again – together nevertheless, preserving the connectivity – into darkness.

There is a cultural-critical impulse behind this description of the revelatory power of beautiful art which becomes more apparent if we compare this passage to one which Hofmannsthal marked in his copy of Nietzsche’s *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*. Referring to the “Innerlichkeit” of the German people, Nietzsche writes:

Dabei kann es [unser Inneres] sich in seltenem Grade zart empfänglich, ernst, mächtig, innig, gut erweisen und vielleicht selbst reicher als das Innere anderer Völker sein: aber als Ganzes bleibt es schwach, weil alle die schönen Fasern nicht in einen kräftigen Knoten geschlungen sind: so daß die sichtbare That nicht die Gesammtthat und Selbstoffenbarung dieses Inneren ist, sondern nur ein schwächlicher oder roher Versuch irgend einer Faser, zum Schein einmal für das Ganze gelten zu wollen. (272)

Hofmannsthal’s passage echoes this concern by identifying in the collected works of art (the carpet being one of the most vivid examples of this) precisely that connectedness, that “kräftiger Knoten” absent in the German people. This absence of strong ties, this weak, loose indecisiveness (recall the “unschlüssig” gesture of the merchant’s son) means that the action taken by the German will reveal nothing about the complex inner world, for thought and form do not cohere. Hofmannsthal writes of Zutätigkeit: “Das Ungeheure des Lebens ist nur durch Zutätigkeit erträglich zu machen, immer nur betrachtet, lähmt es.”^{86} This suggests the kind of action that is creative, that fuses form and content, that is aesthetically productive^{87} and – at least for a moment – revelatory and self-transcending, while it is also a kind of self-formation.

---

^{86} Quoted in Alewyn, *Über Hugo von Hofmannsthal* 150.

^{87} We should keep in mind the ambiguity of productivity; Schuster, who uses the term “produktionsästhetisch” hints at the potentially negative side of this – that the events of life serve only an aesthetically productive purpose. I discuss this further in Chapter 2.
Furthermore, while music provides the atmospheric context for such a revelation of art, Hofmannsthal goes further in suggesting that works of art are perhaps particular instances of an experience that can take place with any thing that has these elements which define beauty. Again, the context in which the word “schön” is used here is of great importance: “Es gibt Momente, und sie sind fast beängstigend, wo Alles rings um uns sein ganzes starkes Leben annehmen will. Wo wir sie alle, die stummen schönen Dinge, neben uns leben fühlen und unser Leben mehr in ihnen ist als in uns selber” (8, my emphasis). The beautiful is characterised by its conceptual and linguistic silence and its capacity to instil something akin to fear (“fast beängstigend”). And while this aspect of beauty is not restricted to art objects, art as a medium of silent articulation (i.e. not naming the thing) is a privileged location for such moments, which, importantly, are potentially accessible to anyone, and which can reveal the connectivity of the world: “Jeder von uns, auch wenn er dieses Haus nie betreten hat, wird hier herumgehen wie in der Heimat seiner Träume. Denn unsere Existenzen sind mit den Existenzen dieser Gebilde durchwachsen” (8). The two existences are inseparable, they are interdependent, and this makes the exchange – here portrayed as the sacrifice and the revelation – possible. We may recognise in this “Heimat [unserer] Träume” strains of the Freudian unconscious, and Hofmannsthal was indeed reading the work on hysteria by Freud and Breuer at the time; and for Hofmannsthal, this extends beyond the individual. Moreover, there are also hints of Goethean notions of the daemonic creative faculties: “[…] wie sie da stehen, umwebt vom Geheimniss der ungeheuren hinabgesunkenen Zeit, sie fassen uns dämonisch an: und jedes ist eine Welt, und alle sind aus seiner Welt, die uns durch sie anruhrt

88 This is most clear in Ein Brief, often referred to as the Chandos letter.

89 The unnameable, as already mentioned in the Introduction, is a motif found throughout Hofmannsthal’s work: this fascination with the limitations of language and that which exists beyond everyday correspondences (the idea of aedequatio) is one that reaches back to the Romantics (Novalis, Schlegel) but found renewed interest in the Symbolists and later the Sprachphilosophie of the time. A key name in this connection is Fritz Mauthner, with whose Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache Hofmannsthal was familiar. Mauthner and Hofmannsthal corresponded during this time, acknowledging their shared concerns. See Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Fritz Mauthner, Der Briefwechsel.

90 Cf. the similar disposition of the boy in “Dämmerung und nächtliches Gewitter”: “Er war am Rand einer solchen Verzweiflung gewesen, daß ihm geschienen war, es greife eine Mutterhand-Mörderhand nach ihm, die doch nach einem Wesen neben ihm griff – und er vermöchte es nicht zu sondern” (40).

91 For another aspect of the potential Freud/Breuer connection, namely the re-working of the concept of catharsis in art, see the editors’ notes in the critical edition of the Ansprache: “Es ist nicht bekannt, ob bzw. in welcher Form Hofmannsthal diesen Gedanken tatsächlich vortrug. Deutlich ist jedoch, daß er in einen bestimmten Stadium der Vorbereitung das Aus-uns-heraus-locken ganzer Welten des Fühlens (S. 11, 25f) durch die Kunst als therapeutischen Weg im Sinne der ‘Studien über Hysterie’ beschreiben wollte” (SW XXXIII RA 2 253).
These works of art are, in a sense, our shadow-selves, yet they also are a world unto themselves. It is this ambiguity of identity vs. non-identity that gives them that strange familiarity and destabilising potential, and it is also what will lead Hofmannsthal to develop a more *dialogical* conception of the aesthetic experience. Here is one of the first expressions of this dynamic: “Es lebt für uns, es lebt durch uns. Es ist etwas in uns, das diesem Weltbild antwortet” (9, my emphasis). Hermann Broch in his study *Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit* comments on this defining aspect of the word “schön.” He notes first that the “Rückfindung zur Voll-Identifikation” is the:

höchsterreichbare Ekstase, wahrscheinlich sein [human-kind’s] höchsterreichbarer Lebenswert überhaupt, und da eben dem Künstler diese Voll-Identifikation mit seinem Objekt zur Aufgabe, ja zur moralischen Aufgabe gestellt ist, hat sein Werk ihr Ausdruck, ihr Bild, ihr Symbol zu sein, wird es selber ekstasierend und gewinnt hierdurch jene spezifisch kunstwerkliche Qualität, für die das Wort *schön* geprägt worden ist. (153)

Broch’s comment is one of the few to address the specificity which the word “schön” had for Hofmannsthal: but he does so in very general terms, asserting rather than demonstrating. The *Ansprache* helps to substantiate Broch’s interpretation, but we see also that there is an element important to Hofmannsthal’s understanding of “schön” that is not emphasised by Broch: namely, that this is not the moral duty of the artist alone. By invoking this word, the viewer too – artist or not – must also realise the consequences of taking the object world seriously, appreciating its resistance to possession. The potential power of the word “schön” for Hofmannsthal means that one recognises the other and oneself simultaneously, in one gesture.

These beautiful images are a world to which we respond: the character of that response depends on our understanding of the character of the encounter. As we have already seen in *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht*, the engaged response is neither automatic nor guaranteed. At most we can say that it is prompted by this dual characteristic of beauty: its familiarity and its threatening character. Jentsch’s *Unheimliche* describes this ambiguity: “Diese Ohnmacht erzeugt daher leicht das Gefühl, von einem Unbekannten, Unbegreiflichen *bedroht* zu sein, das dem Individuum ebenso rätselhaft ist, als gewöhnlich seine eigene Psyche auch” (204, my emphasis). For Hofmannsthal we could equally say that beauty has an *unheimlich* character. Additionally, it is a provocation, a challenge,
a call to respond. For the remainder of the address, Hofmannsthal develops this notion of beauty, reflected not only in the visual (or poetic) content of the work of art, as in the “Durcheinanderspielen zweier Gestaltenreiche [i.e. of the tapestries], wie es traumhafter kaum gedacht werden kann,” but also in the gift-aspect of art. In the second half of the address, Hofmannsthal reverses the sacrifice metaphor used in the first half. There he writes (and says) of the “schöne Gebilde”: “Sie sind wie die Schatten, die den Odysseus umlagern und alle vom Blut trinken wollen, lautlos, gierig aneinander gedrängt, ihren dunklen hohlen Blick auf den Lebenden gehetzt. Sie wollen ihren Antheil haben am Leben” (7). And here: “Und nun die endlose Welt der Gemälde: sie hängen da, und immerfort ergiesst sich aus ihnen in uns, wie in ein geräumiges Becken, ein Längstvergangenes als Gegenwärtiges” (9). Beautiful art both takes and gives. And this is what the viewer does too when confronted with the breath of eternity hinted at in these products of human creation: “Ja, geformt haben Tausende, haben die Einzelnen und die Völker, und was sie zur Form emportreiben konnten, das lebt ewig: Kunstwerk, Symbol, Mythos, Religion” (10). This is not a question of whether a work of art will survive a fire or a flood, or whether a religion will continue to exist after being succeeded by another. All of these are just as subject to ending as life itself is. Yet they, in their limited existence, have something time-defying about them in that they can at least outlive their creators; more than this, they have the capacity to evoke the past and the future, i.e. that which is beyond the hic et nunc of the individual. At this point Hofmannsthal’s poetic language grows in intensity, just as he approaches the crux of his address – that is, art’s imperative.

---

92 Hofmannsthal’s conception of the gift will be elaborated in *Augenblicke in Griechenland* in particular (see Chapter 3).

93 On a literary-history note, it is worth pointing out that Hofmannsthal’s imperative predates Rilke’s “Du mußt dein Leben ändern” by six years. Thus claims, such as Jahraus’ (“Die Provokation der Wahrnehmung”) that Rilke’s “Appel” is “neu und verweist auf eine Revolution lyrischer und literarischer, ästhetischer und kultureller Paradigmen” (123) are somewhat hasty and read Rilke without reference to earlier iterations of the same “Revolution” of these paradigms. Out of a scholarly sense of caution, I will not make the claim that Hofmannsthal’s aesthetic imperative is new, but it is important to recognise that the “Revolution” did not begin with Rilke, though he may certainly have given a lasting voice to it. At best, we can say that their imperatives are, while perhaps slightly different in emphasis, part of a larger aesthetic movement in Europe and closer than either Hofmannsthal or Rilke might imagine (for their tense but respectful relationship, see the Introduction to the correspondence between Rilke and Hofmannsthal). Jahraus comments on Hofmannsthal’s aesthetic reservations about the appeal, but does not show how close the two writers are. It seems Hofmannsthal was sympathetic to the suggestion in Rilke’s poem, but not to the execution. Claudia Bamberg notes (263, fn63): “Obwohl er den Archäischen Torso Apollos ‘das vollendetste dieser Bilder,’ d.h. der Neuen Gedichten nennt, stört in [sic!] der Rhythmus des letzten Verses: ‘[…] die letzte Zeile (mit dem Enjambement vorher) kann nicht als rhythmische Einheit gefaßt werden – das könnte sie nur, wenn der kleine Schlußsatz auf dem das ganze Gewicht liegt, als eine Folgerung (oder gefolgerte Zusammenfassung) auf den ersten
Denn wenn es uns versagt ist, den Geist der Zeiten betrachtend zu erkennen, so ist uns dafür gegeben, ihn zu fühlen, wenn er fordernd uns überfällt, mit dem Anhauch des Andersseins uns verlockend und quälend, beklemmend und bezaubernd. (10)

Hofmannsthal knows quite well we can never comprehend the past – epistemologically, but we can sense it, and this we can do through art. This happens in the challenge (“fordernd”) that befalls us, as if we had no choice in the matter. One must respond in some way to that which is other than oneself – a theme that will be important throughout Hofmannsthal’s œuvre. For Hofmannsthal, this is not an ordinary demand; it is more akin to a divine command in its transcending the limitations of time and self: “Und so tritt eine unendliche Forderung an uns heran, dem inneren Gleichgewicht höchst bedrohlich: die Forderung, mit tausendfachen Phantomen der Vergangenheit uns abzufinden, die von uns genährt sein wollen” (11). We cannot remain apathetic, for this concerns us. These phantoms are a part of our own existence, and to ignore their demand is to reject one’s participation in this world – which we have brought about with the invocation of that single word: “Denn ein solches Anrecht, aus unserem Innern sich zu nähren, räumen wir ihnen ein, indem wir sie ‘schön’ nennen. Es gibt kein stolzeres, kein gefährlicheres Wort. Es ist das Wort, das am tiefsten verpflichtet” (11). The word is lofty, even prideful (“stolz”) because we have an intimate connection to these objects we call beautiful and in some way identify with them. This opens up a world of reciprocal offering and receiving and presupposes our adequacy to the task: “Indem wir dieses Wort aussprechen, sagen wir, dass etwas in uns durch das Kunstgebilde erregt wird, wie nur Gleiches durch Gleiches erregt werden

94 Broch, too, was aware of this and quickly qualifies his term “Voll-Identifikation” while expounding on the unfinishable task at hand: “[…] statt mit einem statischen Objekt hat man es also mit einem ungemein fluktuierenden zu tun, und statt eines einzigen Identifikationsaktes ist eine ganze Kette hievon erforderlich, eine ganze Kette von Symbolgebungen, von Symbol-Symbolisierungen, die in ihren ersten Gliedern noch eine gewisse Ähnlichkeit mit der primitiven Metapherkonstruktion aufweisen mögen, dann aber weit darüber hinausreichen, um vermittels ständig enger werdender Anschmiege an die Realität schließlich, wenigstens der Idee nach, im dargestellten Realitätsschnitt ein Totalsymbol der Welt zu liefern, das tat twam asi der Kunst.” At some point, the chain must be cut so that a work of art can be finished (153). These problems – the instability of the subject and object and the tensions inherent in the infinite nature of the task – are more clearly evident in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten and Augenblicke in Griechenland (Chapters 2 and 3).
We become as much an object of that word as we are the subject that speaks it, insofar as our identity is upset and cast into the world of the work of art:

Und indem unser Mund es wieder und wieder auszusprechen von einer tiefen Magie gezwungen wird, nehmen wir an dem ungeheuren Reich der Kunst einen so ungeheuren Antheil, als wären es tausende Seelen in uns, die sich im Acte des ästhetischen Geniessens regen [...]. (11)

Again, there is a reversal of terms: we have a share in the kingdom of art, just as much as the work of art desires to have a share in life (“Sie wollen ihren Antheil haben am Leben” 7). We create this space of mutual coexistence with the other when we invoke the word “schön,” and this is an Acte – a word that emphasises again the creative aspect of the reception of art. But surely this seems prideful. Yet in the case of art, the situation – potentially at least – moves beyond the narcissistic and hubristic tendencies because it opens up the space for dialogue and a new experience of the world.

The dénouement:

Aber beruhigen wir uns: die Forderung, welche die Welt der Schönheit an uns stellt, jenes dämonische Aus-uns-heraus-locken ganzer Welten des Fühlens, diese Forderung ist nur so gigantisch, weil das, was in uns ihr zu entsprechen bereit ist, so grenzenlos gross ist: die aufgesammelte Kraft der geheimnisvollen Ahnenreihe in uns, die übereinander gethürmten Schichten der aufgestapelten überindividuellen Erinnerung. (11)

Most of the works of art displayed in the house of Lanckoroński were indeed far from contemporary. Trecento and Quattrocento paintings, statues, as well as works of art from the Far East surrounded the viewers, breathing into the air temporal, geographical and cultural difference.

95 Hofmannsthal is relying on the Pre-Socratics, but also on Goethe here. See the Erläuterung to this sentence (270). His understanding of “schön” will come to change by emphasising simultaneous otherness with sameness.

96 Just three years later, Rilke, too, will emphasise the supraindividual quality of memory as it is experienced in the reception of art: “Mir ist zu Mute wie einem, der Sie an Ihre Kindheit erinnern soll... nein, nicht nur an Ihre: an alles, was je Kindheit war; den es gült, Erinnerungen in Ihnen aufzuwecken [...]]” (Rodin 207).
And in our capacity to designate these works of art “schön,” entire worlds are drawn out of us (“jenes dämonische Aus-uns-heraus-locken ganzer Welten des Fühlens”) as if to contribute to this beauty, to draw us into participation, or, as another version of the text has it, into what Hofmannsthal calls “Communion.” In being pulled out of our mundane subjective existence, the world of the beautiful sets us in relation with the other. In yet another version of the text, the question of the subject receives slightly different treatment: “Hier scheinen wir etwa in Gefahr, uns selbst zu verlieren: großer Irrthum! Hier werden wir erst geweckt, uns selber zu besitzen: denn wir schaffen ja den unsterblichen Inhalt dieser Gebilde, indem wir sie lebendig nachfühlen” (255). Perhaps Hofmannsthal left this out of the final version because it did not flow into the subsequent conclusion seamlessly enough. His discussion about the beautiful at this precise point is less about losing oneself and finding oneself again than it is about the direct implications of the word itself; Hofmannsthal wants to awaken a sense of enthusiasm, not offer promises as explicit as self-discovery; perhaps, even, he had his doubts. Instead he ends his address with Goethe’s comment on enthusiasm, complementing his own guiding, preparatory remarks:


We are left at the end of the Ansprache with the sense that Hofmannsthal, in an effort to convince his listeners of the greatness of their task, must rely on religious language. This is certainly not an uncommon manoeuvre, but it risks displacing the discussion of the experience of art into the realm of mysticism, moving away from the very “life” that Hofmannsthal wishes us not to forget. This is not surprising; it is also what gives his address its poetic quality. Nevertheless, as if acknowledging the limits of the effects of art, Hofmannsthal seems to retreat into a position that relies on the capacities of the observer. But as we have seen, beauty itself can, at unexpected

---

97 “Denn Genießen ist eine starke Communion. […] Und thun Sie den Schritt über die Grenze die keine ist, zwischen sacralen und profanen Schöpfungen und tausendfach werden sie Anregungen empfinden, Erregungen, die dienen tief eingeklemmte Affecte abzureagieren: Dumpfheiten loszuwerden, uns in fremden und doch vertrauten Elementen zu (1) wälzen (2) werfen” (261-62).

98 Heinz Schlaffer characterises much of German literature as an ever renewed engagement with religion.
moments, awaken the observer to the precariousness of the subject position, particularly in its capacity as Anstoß.

***

Understanding Hofmannsthal’s use of the word “beauty” is crucial to appreciating his literary works and helps us to give form to that aesthetic experience that so tenaciously resists definition. We can only hope to sketch it, and to meditate on and respond to those moments in Hofmannsthal’s work where this theme presents itself. Das Märchen der 672. Nacht asks us what to do when confronted with the beautiful: to flee, to render impotent, or to engage? In beauty, there is the intimation of mortality, the threat of self-dissolution, even suffering, but there is also the sense of interconnectedness with the unreachable other; paradoxically, this reintroduces the self that had been lost. There is familiarity and foreignness, and, perhaps most importantly, there is a call to respond to these threats to the subject, and to the impressiveness of the work. The Ansprache makes this last point clearest, and it also explains why enthusiasm is part of that experience. It is one of the productive ways to respond and engage.

In a letter Hofmannsthal wrote in 1923 to his daughter, Christiane von Hofmannsthal, we see this sense of beauty in its inseparable, if also uneasy, connection to life, the call to engagement; for this cautious acknowledgement – and even the fear of the suffering of life – stayed with Hofmannsthal long after Das Märchen der 672. Nacht, long after Tlumacz. He writes, addressing the theme “Liebeskummer”:

Nicht als ob das Leiden aus dem Dasein auszuschneiden wäre: nein es ist der eigentliche Inhalt unseres Daseins und auch was wir das Schöne nennen, ist ohne das Leiden nicht denkbar – ja es ist die Blüte die aus dem Leiden hervorwächst aber es ist ein Anderes ob wir leiden müssen und wovor keine Schutzwehr uns bewahren kann, oder ob Du Dich in ein unnotwendiges Leiden halb spielend halb begehrlieh verstrickst. Hier ängstet mich nun die Verantwortung dass ich Dich so außerhalb der Convention leben lasse, die eben die natürlichen Schutzmauern der Existenz sind. (qtd. in Weinzierl 216)

It is remarkable that, in a letter to his daughter almost 30 years after Das Märchen der 672. Nacht we see the same devotion to an understanding of the beautiful in relation to suffering. Beauty is
not an escape from suffering, it is the “Blüthe” that grows from it. Yet underlying this is still the concern, the worry and sense of responsibility, that one might not be fully protected, that one might die full of regret, having failed in one’s responsibilities, having failed to adequately respond.
CHAPTER 2: THE DIALOGUE OF COLOURS

In *Philosophie des Geldes* (1900) Georg Simmel presents a kaleidoscopic view of *fin de siècle* society. The society itself, one can argue, does not seem to have a particularly pleasing form, but Simmel’s portrayal of it is rich with analogies, associations, prismatic diversions, trenchant and at times frustratingly conflicting observations, all softly rounded out with a kind of wistfulness usually reserved for the poetic arts. At a certain point, it becomes difficult not to read the work as an aestheticisation of society rather than an intellectually rigorous and critical work of either philosophy or sociology. But Simmel’s analogical and aesthetic approach is not without justification insofar as it allows one to see certain constellations in society from new perspectives. And as David Frisby reminds us in the introduction to his translation of Simmель’s *Philosophie des Geldes*, “we should take this aesthetic dimension seriously and clearly distinguish it from a tendency towards the aestheticization of reality, since the two are not synonymous. Indeed, in some respects, the aesthetic dimension in theorizing can be seen to be coterminous with modernity itself” (Simmel, *Philosophy of Money* 53, my emphasis). In other words: Simmel cannot escape his modern culture of hypersensitivity, so he uses it as a tool to create a speculum societatis which highlights the interactive exchanges – social, economic, and otherwise – or *Wechselwirkungen* of that society.

---

99 See Sibylle Hübner-Funk’s contribution to *Ästhetik und Soziologie um die Jahrhundertwende: Georg Simmel* (“Ästhetizismus und Soziologie bei Georg Simmel”) and the resulting heated discussion, printed in the same volume. Hannes Böhringer (“Die ‘Philosophie des Geldes’ als ästhetische Theorie”) and Klaus Lichtblau (“Das Pathos der Distanz”) have likewise contributed thoughtful points to the discussion, especially regarding the positive potential of such an aestheticised view (Böhringer) and the function of distance in viewing society both aesthetically and sociologically (Lichtblau).

100 Cf. Sonja Engel, “Der Typus des Fremden”: “Tausch sei, so schreibt Simmel in der *Philosophie des Geldes*, ‘das reinste soziologische Vorkommniss,’ ‘die vollständigste Wechselwirkung.’ Simmel leitet diese Analogie aus einem allgemeinen Sprachgebrauch her, denn man tauscht mit anderen nicht nur Geld und Waren, sondern auch Blicke, Küsse, Gedanken, Ideen, Erfahrungen. So sei der Mensch, überspitzt ausgedrückt, auch als ‘das tauschende Tier’ anzusehen” (143). Hofmannsthal, it should be noted, marked the following passage in his copy of *Die Philosophie des Geldes*: “Vielleicht kann man dieser Reihe hinzufügen, der Mensch sei das *tauschende* Tier; und das ist freilich nur eine Seite oder Form der ganz allgemeinen Charakteristik, in der das spezifische Wesen des Menschen zu bestehen scheint; der Mensch ist das *objektive* Tier. Nirgends in der Tierwelt finden wir auch nur Ansätze zu demjenigen, was man Objektivität nennt, der [end of pencil making] Betrachtung und Behandlung der Dinge, die sich jenseits des subjektiven Fühlens und Wollens stellt” (*Philosophie des Geldes* *FDH* 1910: 288).
Seven years later Hofmannsthal was reading *Die Philosophie des Geldes* with great attentiveness, as his numerous pencil markings show. The same year – 1907, which also happens to be the year Rilke has his “Cézanne-Erlebnis,” to which I will be returning – Hofmannsthal began writing two important works dealing with aesthetic encounters before a socially and ethically charged background: the first, *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, is the focus of this chapter. The second, *Augenblicke in Griechenland* – a work that took him much longer to complete – is explored in the next chapter. Like many of Hofmannsthal’s texts, *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* was initially conceived as an ambitious project: it was to consist of a number of volumes treating several generations of the protagonist’s family. For reasons unclear, perhaps as a gesture of brevitas, Hofmannsthal abandoned the project quite early after having a mere five of the letters published. I will avoid lengthy speculation as to the text’s curious history, but it is worth considering here briefly for aesthetic reasons. *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* forms not only the beginning of a quickly abandoned project; it is also, in its five letters, an emphatically torn example of Hofmannsthal’s writing, exhibiting in form and fate a *Zerrissenheit* similar to that which it portrays. Indeed, *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* bears some resemblance to Hofmannsthal’s novel-fragment *Andreas*, and this is more than a structural affinity; many of the characters initially planned for *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* found their way into the *Andreas* fragments. Hofmannsthal’s failure to realise his novelistic intentions for both works might very well spring from a recognition that the novel as a literary genre steeped in the tradition of ethical and aesthetic education would not most effectively demonstrate the internal contradictions and fragmentation of a protagonist destined *not* to follow a progressively linear model of *Bildung* or *Entwicklung*, but rather a *circular* path of returning to the “self.” Unlike the more ‘complete’ novels of German literature (Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* novels, for example) or the *Bildungsromane* of other European literatures, *Andreas* and *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* are truncated, and even defined by their truncation, more akin to Novalis’ *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* with its unfinished development and predilection for fantastic visions. Yet *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* is not a *Künstlerroman* either. This is not a story about the development of moral character, or artistic

101 For the history of its composition, see the Entstehungsgeschichte in SW XXXI: Erfundene Gespräche und Briefe (416-23) and Ellen Ritter’s article, “Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten.”

102 By way of contrast, Hofmannsthal’s complete works – e.g. *Die Frau ohne Schatten* – are often decidedly unrealistic.
ability. We might say there is a moral dimension, but it hovers above the action, suspended in the material of the aesthetic. While the longer novel form does accommodate subplots, detours, and aesthetic encounters, the fragmentary nature of these letters has the aesthetic advantage of performing its subject matter: the ecstatic moment of the aesthetic encounter, cut off from the rest of the character’s experiences, and cut off from the narrative elaborations in the unfinished Andreas.

The letters were never published together in Hofmannsthal’s lifetime; nonetheless, there inheres within them a line of continuity that has become evident in the more recent editions, ranging from the easily purchaseable Reclam Erzählungen (edited by Ursula Renner-Henke) to the Kritische Ausgabe. I suspect that part of that continuity has to do with Hofmannsthal’s interest in the society that Simmel presents, aspects of which are then taken up into an aesthetic discussion with Van Gogh’s work as its point of orientation. The fragmented structure of publication is perhaps indicative of Hofmannsthal’s awareness that the whole lacks a novellistic coherence: the ethical implications of the industry of art production and modern consumerism sit ill at ease with the powerful, simultaneously personal and transcendent moment of the encounter with the other in the work of art. Interest in the “productive failures” of Hofmannsthal is gaining momentum: next year (2017) the Hofmannsthal Gesellschaft will be hosting a conference on Hofmannsthal’s “produktives Scheitern.” What this means exactly remains to be seen; it is evident that Hofmannsthal’s work – and Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten is a particularly illustrative

103 The first three found an audience with the journal Morgen in the summer of 1907, while the last two were published in Kunst und Künstler in early February of 1908 under the title “Die Farben. Aus den ‘Briefen des Zurückgekehrten.’”

104 In the secondary literature treating Hofmannsthal’s relation to Simmel – there is not much of it – no one has gone into any detail about Simmel’s importance for Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten. Frisby in his introduction to the English translation of Philosophie des Geldes does indeed mention this importance, but his aim is to contextualise the contributions made by Philosophie des Geldes and to identify areas of influence – not to discuss Hofmannsthal; instead, he cites Ellen Ritter’s explanatory notes from the Kritische Ausgabe. Lorenz Jäger has focused on Christianas Heimreise in relation to Philosophie des Geldes and writes the following about Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten: “Nun ist die Kulturkritik [in den Briefen] eine naheliegende, aber vielleicht allzu griffige Weise, über Hofmannsthals Verhältnis zu Simmel zu sprechen” (98). It might well be that the Kulturkritik is an all too obvious choice for the purposes of reception study; but for our purposes – that is, the exploration of how the aesthetic operates and is thematised in Hofmannsthal’s work – this connection may prove to be a fruitful one. Ritchie Robertson’s “Hofmannsthal as Sociologist” certainly points in this direction, but only discusses the first three letters.
example – is interesting at least in part precisely because of the mysterious allure achieved in its internal discord, especially in regards to ethics and aesthetics.\textsuperscript{105}

A few words about the overall structure are thus necessary: the collection of fictional letters portrays a financially established man just returned from travelling the world on business (the nature of which is not explained). The year is 1901, that is, one year after the publication of \textit{Philosophie des Geldes}, and upon his return to Europe after eighteen years, the writer of the letters – henceforth referred to as the \textit{Zurückgekehrter}\textsuperscript{106} – can no longer hold any meaningful concepts ("Begriffe" 151) about his own culture at the beginning of the new century. At the personal level, people seem to be incomplete, internally fragmented, and distracted; more broadly, the capitalistic world in which he operates leaves no room for non-utilitarian avenues of life – particularly where the imaginative faculties are concerned. Indeed, throughout the first letter the \textit{Zurückgekehrter} denies several times that he is a dreamer of any kind, despite the dream-like quality of his memories and thoughts and his later designation of these thoughts as "Träume" (159). The last two letters recount an aesthetic encounter, which, it would seem, restores the \textit{Zurückgekehrter}'s confidence in life such that he can accomplish his work as an exemplary capitalist and thereby embody, as some scholars would argue, the idea of a human being of practical activity rather than passivity\textsuperscript{107} – yet this is a deceptive resolution. The end, I shall argue, is not only about a successful capitalistic endeavour, nor is it an untainted triumph of "das Tätig-Praktische" (Coghlan 36); it is an unresolved struggle with the demands of capitalist society and the awareness that art, while it may provide a moment of relief in its inherent openness, contains its fair share of suffering as well. Hofmannsthal’s spin on the matter is neither wholly optimistic nor pessimistic, but rather an attempt to creatively respond to – to borrow Simmel’s term at the risk of misapplication – the \textit{Wechselwirkung} of social life and art.

\textsuperscript{105} Hofmannsthal’s marriage of the aesthetic and ethical spheres occurs – significantly – not in a novel, but in a later fairy-tale/novella: \textit{Die Frau ohne Schatten}, discussed in the last chapter of this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{106} Ursula Renner (\textit{Zauberschrift der Bilder}) uses an alternative designation: the \textit{Kaufmann}. Though the writer of the letters never uses the term himself, we know he is a travelling businessman. Renner’s designation is also appropriate because it establishes a thematic (and contrastive) link to the merchant’s son (\textit{Kaufmannsohn}) of the \textit{Märchen der 672. Nacht}. I have chosen to use \textit{Zurückgekehrter}, however, because the idea of “return” (\textit{zurückkehren}) will come to be just as important. I refrain from using the English “returnee” here because the English term, unlike the German, has military and/or refugee connotations that do not make sense for the fictional writer of these letters. The term “returnee” is also relatively new and would not have been used during the turn of the century.

\textsuperscript{107} This is essentially Brian Coghlan’s argument ("The whole man must move at once: Das Persönlichkeitsbild des Menschen").
I will discuss the letters from three angles: 1) the characterisation of Germany around the turn of the century and the text’s cultural critique; 2) the subsequent anxiety born out of a phenomenological crisis; and 3) the aesthetic and, from a certain perspective, deceptive resolution in a capitalistic context. The false ending reintroduces the initial ambiguity of the enquiry that guides this dissertation as a whole: how does the aesthetic function in the text, and more specifically, what is the nature of the challenge it issues to us? Does the ethical appear, and if so, how? As with the Märchen der 672. Nacht, we must always take into account the literary nature of the text: that is, to a large degree, we can say that what the text says is influenced by how it says it. This means that the text’s fragmentary state as well as the structural echoes within it will play an important role for interpretation. The realism is not sustained, and thus any sense of completion we might have, as from a Bildungsroman for example, is absent.

The Mal de Débarquement

The letters begin abruptly in April 1901. There is no addressee named, no introduction to the letters’ content as in the more frequently studied letter of Lord Chandos, and no indication of what letters precede this one or what their contents might have been. The reader is thrown into the middle of things with a word that presumes some sort of continuity with or connection to an epistolary narrative that, for us at least, does not exist. The letters end as a fragment, but they also begin as one, torn from an original context which never was: “April 1901. So bin ich nach achtzehn

108 Just this year Alice Bolterauer published a slim book entitled Zu den Dingen. Das epiphanische Ding-Erlebnis bei Musil, Hofmannsthal, und Rilke. I share many of her arguments, but her book’s intention is different from that of this chapter: she offers a brief overview of authors at the turn of the century with similar concerns (they “haben in der Auseinandersetzung mit dem Ding eine Möglichkeit gesehen, gleichzeitig die Probleme und Krise der Zeit zu reflektieren bzw. darauf zu antworten und ihre Kunst in einem sozialen, philosophischen und ästhetischen Kontext zu verorten” (15). In light of the similarity of our theses, I hope this chapter will serve as an elaboration of one of the exemplary texts for this topic. Bolterauer chooses Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten as an example, but she devotes little space to analysis of it (discussion occupies only three and half pages), opting instead to talk about the text in a broad and general manner.

109 Claudia Bamberg offers interpretations for both texts but notes – correctly, to my mind – that “Die Arbeit am Medium der Sprache lässt sich demnach hier [i.e. in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten] besonders gut und vielleicht differenzierter noch als im Brief des Lord Chandos untersuchen und herausarbeiten” (264). Bamberg focusses on the “Verquickung von sprachlichem Prozess und innerem Geschehen” that occurs in the last two letters.
Jahren wieder in Deutschland, bin auf dem Weg nach Oesterreich, und weiß selbst nicht, wie mir zumuth ist” (151).

We see quickly that our disorientation and sense of being cut-off from some original context is shared by and intensified in the Zurückgekehrter, whose very first sentence announces one of the most profound and enduring kinds of ignorance to plague humanity: the lack of self-knowledge. Paradoxically, it is the naive (and later challenged) belief in having been certain of things at some point that has led to this uncertainty. “Auf dem Schiff machte ich mir Begriffe, ich machte mir Urtheile im Voraus” (151) – a perfectly reasonable thing to do. Nietzsche’s description of the “ungeheure[s] Gebälk und Bretterwerk der Begriffe, an das sich klammernd der bedürftige Mensch sich durch das Leben rettet” (Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge 887) is surely lurking beneath the text, as is Goethe’s critical distinction in the Maximen und Reflexionen between Allegorie (proceeding from Begriff) and Symbol (proceeding from Idee).110 Begriffe and Allegorie are associated with stasis and finitude; Symbole and Ideen with flux and infinity. The Zurückgekehrter, presumably a “bedürftiger Mensch” clinging to his Begriffe, is describing the process of mental preparation for his return; this preparation involves recalling his memories of home, organising his remembered impressions, and developing out of them concepts adequate to their content. But, in the four months since his return, these Begriffe have been exposed as irreconcilable with the reality he now faces; then again, even an intellectually sound Begriff will often founder when it meets with provocation.111

110 No. 1112: “Die Allegorie verwandelt die Erscheinung in einen Begriff, den Begriff in ein Bild, doch so, dass der Begriff im Bilde immer noch begrenzt und vollständig zu halten und zu haben und an demselben auszusprechen sei.” No. 1113: “Die Symbolik verwandelt die Erscheinung in Idee, die Idee in ein Bild, und so, dass die Idee im Bild immer unendlich wirksam und unerreichbar bleibt und, selbst in allen Sprachen ausgesprochen, doch unaussprechlich bliebe” (904, my emphasis). Cf. also Heidegger’s “Ursprung des Kunstwerkes”: “Das Kunstwerk ist zwar ein angefertigtes Ding, aber es sagt noch etwas anderes, als das bloße Ding selbst, ist ἄλλο ἀγορεύει. Das Werk macht mit Anderem öffentlich bekannt, es offenbart Anderes; es ist Allegorie. Mit dem angefertigten Ding wird im Kunstwerk noch etwas Anderes zusammengebracht. Zusammenbringen heißt griechisch συμβάλλειν. Das Werk ist Symbol” (4). This parallels the move in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten from the phenomenological to the aesthetic focus, but it is worth noting that Hofmannsthal elsewhere attributes a similar symbolic property to things which are not works of art (e.g. trees and wells). The division between works of art and other objects is, in this respect, not clear. While in many respects Heidegger’s “Ursprung des Kunstwerkes” will be useful as a point of comparison, it is important to note that Hofmannsthal’s approach is more adamantly “dialogic” in the sense that any revelation from the encounter with a work of art is intended as an opening of dialogue. The relative success or failure of this dialogue is a further question to consider.

111 In this respect, Simmel comments: “wozu wir allein intellektuellen Inhalten gegenüber in der in Begriffen und ihrer logischen Verknüpfungen sich bewegenden Sprache ein zulängliches, von der individuellen Disposition relativ
The Germany which the *Zurückgekehrter* encounters is *bürgerlich*, and the now fairly well established bourgeoisie is driven by the desire for capital and the exchange of goods and services for money. There is, amidst this superficial prosperity, a growing hollowness, an unfulfilled and unarticulated desire.\(^{112}\) Without his knowing it, the returned merchant himself is implicated in this situation which he, after his 18 year absence, can now see. Even though he is a man with no time for fanciful thoughts (he again protests),\(^{113}\) his own desires and the distance gained on his travels nevertheless produce the space for these very fancies and dreams: wholeness, truth, home, meaningful interpersonal relationships. “Ein zerspaltenes Gefühl von der Gegenwart, eine zerstreute Benommenheit, eine innere Unordnung, die nahe an Unzufriedenheit ist” (151): this is the Germany he encounters, and it is also a reflection of his own sense of being lost precisely where he is supposed to feel at home. The European sickness has infected him. He is, to quote Rilke’s first elegy, “nicht sehr verläßlich zu Haus […] in der gedeuteten Welt” (12-13). This *inadaequatio* between his *Begriffe* and what he now perceives to be reality would not be such a problem if it were not for what has replaced them – namely the “zerspaltenes Gefühl.” Here we have the crux of the issue at stake for the *Zurückgekehrter*: his relation to both the world around him and himself has been shaken apart. The “ungehеure[s] Gebälk und Bretterwerk der Begriffe” to which he had clung while still on board the ship has eroded in these new acidic climes where he finds himself now stranded.\(^{114}\) He feels himself too as being *zerspalten* – he is internally fractured, fully sensing the separation of body and mind: “und fast zum erstenmal im Leben widerfährt mir’s, daß ein Gefühl von mir selbst sich mir aufdringt” (151). This metaphysical *mal de débarquement* is triggered not by getting off the boat and setting foot upon terra firma once more after a long voyage, but rather by leaving the firm land of what seemed to be an ordered worldview and and

---

\(^{112}\) Simmel writes of this as well in “Rodins Plastik” (235). See also “Der Dichter und diese Zeit”: “sie suchen etwas anderes als die einzelnen Dinge, die in der Luft hängenden kurzatmigen Theorien, die ihnen ein Buch nach dem anderen darbietet: sie suchen, aber es ist ihnen keine Dialektik gegeben, subtil genug, um sich zu fragen und zu sagen, was sie suchen; keine Übersicht, keine Kraft der Zusammenfassung […] Sie suchen, mit einem Wort, die ganze Bezauberung der Poesie” (*SW XXXIII RA* 2 133-34).

\(^{113}\) “Und jedes Geschöpf, das mir erschien – nein, denn ich bin kein Visionär und meine Geschäfte gestatteten mir keine Hallucinationen”; “denn ich bin kein Tagträumer und führe keinen Dialog mit den Ausgeburten meiner Einbildungskraft” (156).

\(^{114}\) The motif of the “Schiffbrüchiger” will recur in *Augenblicke in Griechenland*. 
stepping into the whirling flux of reality. Indeed, the whole of Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten might be said to be constructed around such reversed or intentionally mismatched metaphors. Solid ground is where we are least stable. It is not surprising that this has a physical manifestation as well (“und ist es auch in mir etwas schwerer und dumpfer geworden, so wie mein Körper, den ich in den Districten nie gespürt habe und nun – wenn das nicht eine angeflogene Hypochondrie ist – zu spüren anfange?” 151). Let us look more closely at what sets him so ill at ease.

With the attentiveness of an industrious merchant, he lists off his various interactions with the Germans, and yet this listing leaves him still lost for words: “und [ich] weiß nicht, was ich sagen soll [...]. Und warum ist mir nun, als verliere ich den Boden unter den Füßen?” (152). In accordance with Simmel’s analysis of the common, if flawed, identification of what is “reasonable” with what is self-serving, the successful merchant admits that he has no obvious reason for complaint: “Auch ist mir niemand anders als loyal begegnet, ich habe meine javanesisch-deutschen Negociationen besser abgewickelt, als ich mir hätte träumen lassen, und bin heute frei, und dazu zwar nicht reich, aber unabhängig, was mehr ist” (152). By all accounts – his own included – he is successful in this world. Yet his freedom is defined here by fiscal independence. Simmel refers to this financial ‘freedom’ as a “negative Freiheit” in his “Selbstanzeige” from 1901, and attending this freedom is the striking absence of “Persönlichkeit.” The last sentence of the “Selbstanzeige,” which Hofmannsthal marked in his copy of Philosophie des Geldes, reads: “So erklärt es sich, daß

---

115 Kafka’s “Begonnenes Gespräch mit dem Beter” from 1909 (published also posthumously as part of Beschreibung eines Kampfes) describes a similar situation with the phrase “eine Seekrankheit auf festem Lande” (Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmentene 89). The narrator in that story explains this situation thus: “Deren Wesen ist so, daß Ihr den wahrhaftigen Namen der Dinge vergessen habt und über sie jetzt in einer Eile zufällige Namen schüttet” (89). Shortly thereafter, the supplicant/interlocutor describes his relation to the things of the world in a fashion similar to that of Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten (and of the earlier Chandos Letter): “Es hat niemals eine Zeit gegeben, in der ich durch mich selbst von meinem Leben überzeugt war. Ich erfrage nämlich die Dinge um mich nur in so hinfälligen Vorstellungen, daß ich immer glaube, die Dinge hätten einmal gelebt, jetzt aber seien sie versinkend. Immer, lieber Herr, habe ich eine so quälende Lust, die Dinge so zu sehn, wie sie sich geben mögen, ehe sie sich mir zeigen. Sie sind da wohl schön und ruhig” (91).

116 Later he will even speak of an “Übelkeit” (166). Cf. Bernheimer’s chapter one discussion of sickness in Nietzsche and the diganosis of decadence (Decadent Subjects).

117 “Für die gewöhnliche – nicht gerade vertiefte – Anschauung ist das Ich im Praktischen nicht weniger als im Theoretischen die selbstverständliche Grundlage und das unvermeidliche erste Interesse; [...] Der Erfolg davon ist, daß das Handeln im selbstischen Interesse als das eigentliche und einfach ‘logische’ gilt. Alle Hingabe und Aufopferung scheint aus den irrationalen Kräften des Gefühls und Willens zu fließen, so daß die bloßen Verstandesmenschen dieselbe als einen Beweis mangelnder Klugheit zu ironisieren oder als den Umweg eines versteckten Egoismus zu denunzieren pflegen. Gewiß ist dies schon deshalb irrig, weil auch der egoistische Wille eben Wille ist, so gut wie der altruistische, und so wenig wie dieser aus dem bloßen verstandesmäßigen Denken herausgepreßt werden kann [...]” (Simmel, Philosophie des Geldes 605, my emphasis).
unsere Zeit, die, als Ganzes betrachtet, trotz allem, was noch zu wünschen bleibt, sicher mehr Freiheit besitzt als irgend eine frühere, dieser Freiheit doch so wenig froh wird. –” (Philosophie des Gelds 723; *FDH 1910: 424). While our protagonist may have gained financial capital in his transactions, his identity – that is, his unified subject position, his “Self” – comes under threat in this new world: “Ich möchte in mir selber blühn, und dies Europa könnte mich mir selber wegstehlen” (152). He risks losing possession of himself (note that the existential worry is economically charged) and becoming, to borrow a phrase from Musil (another avid reader of Simmel), a Mann ohne Eigenschaften, joining in the ranks of those who exhibit that Charakterlosigkeit which defines the style of life in a modern money economy. According to Simmel: “Wie es an und für sich der mechanische Reflex der Wertverhältnisse der Dinge ist und allen Parteien sich gleichmäßig darbietet, so sind innerhalb des Geldgeschäftes alle Personen gleichwertig, nicht, weil jede, sondern weil keine etwas wert ist, sondern nur das Geld” (595).118

The Zurückgekehrter grapples for words to explain this character-lacking “Existenzgefühl” (152), but he knows full well his words are doomed to inadequacy: “ich quäle mich zurück in den Gebrauch einer Kunstsprache, die mir in zwanzig Jahren fremd geworden ist” (152). In attempt to resist lapsing into this artificial language, like Lord Chandos he elects to write in an idiom that is deliberately “weitschweifig oder ungeschickt” – at least insofar as he does not find concepts to represent the situation; nor does he usually proceed from concepts (inspite of his forming “Begriffe” during the return voyage). His way of interpreting the world comes from:

Eher eine gewisse praktische Erfahrung, aus den Gesichtern von Menschen oder aus dem, was sie nicht sagen, etwas abzunehmen, oder eine kleine Kette von unauffälligen Details hinreichend zu dechiffrieren, um allenfalls den Gang der Dinge bei einem Geschäftsabschluß oder einer Krise im Verhalten anderer zu mir oder untereinander irgendwie vorauszusehen. (152)

His practical experience, varied and rich as it is, has helped him to interpret the world in all sorts of situations, including his career; but eventually even practical experience, which relies on a certain level of consistency and predictability, is not enough. The irony is almost tragic: we the readers (especially if we are familiar with *Ein Brief*) can tell by the symptoms what is coming, yet the man who can detect an imminent crisis in others does not know he is soon to experience a crisis of his own.\(^{119}\) The irony is also structural: he is at a loss because one of the only great pieces of wisdom he has collected over the years is being challenged as he writes – and even by writing itself, insofar as *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* remain fragmentary and internally divided, given that Hofmannsthal never had them published together. In this *Welt ohne Eigenschaften*, a world without that which one can properly call *one’s own*, even character is broken apart, exchanged, and sacrificed to the general flux like most everything else. The age-old critique of *Charakterlosigkeit* that found vehement expression in the likes of Hölderlin\(^{120}\) has renewed exigency. In defiance (or denial?), the *Zurückgekehrter* holds to that wise saying – one to which Hofmannsthal alludes in several texts – as an ideal of unity of movement and composure maintained *while moving* through the flux: “The whole man must move at once” (153). The *Zurückgekehrter* purports to have glimpsed the realisation of this ideal in other places and cultures, from the exotic to the traditional, and even to the very centre of modern commerce, where “in den U.S. meine ich, dieses fast wahnwitzig wilde und zugleich fast kühl besonnene ‘Hineingehen’ für eine Sache” characterises the keen businessman (153).

What the *Zurückgekehrter* perhaps has not realised is that this kind of dedication and conviction of character bears much in common with the aesthetic. Referring to Hofmannsthal’s lyrical dramas, Seeba describes the *homo sociologicus* as “Träger vorgeformten Rollen,” and as therefore resembling the *homo aestheticus* (*Kritik des ästhetischen Menschen* 17). That is, like an actor on

\(^{119}\) As he will later tell us: “Ich habe gar keine gute Zeit hinter mir und weiß es vielleicht erst seit einem gewissen kleinen Erlebnis, das ich vor drei Tagen hatte” (165).

\(^{120}\) It has been suggested by scholars (most fervently by Barbara Wiedemann, “Die Scheltrede des Zurückgekehrten”) that the first three *Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* take Hölderlin’s *Scheltrede* from *Hyperion* as their model. On the other hand, in *Über das Studium griechischer Poesie* F. Schlegel writes of the “Charakterlosigkeit der Deutschen,” though he acknowledges the positive potential of such a versatile culture (257). This potential will also come to light in the *Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*. The hope for such a culture is echoed in Van Gogh’s (and Puvis de Chavannes’) hope for a better future for artists. Van Gogh writes: “Jene Hoffnung Puvis de Chavannes’ soll und muss sich verwirklichen: es gibt eine Zukunftskunst und sie muss so schön und jung sein, dass, wenn wir ihr jetzt unsere eigene Jugend opfern, wir an Lebensfreude und Frieden gewinnen müssen” (*Briefe* 104-05).
stage (be it imagined or real) in an artificial world, so too the person in society has a role to play. In order to play it well, one must play it with conviction. This comes down to giving (aesthetic) form to what is formless. In its early stage, this act presents itself as caricature, but ideally it moves away from one-sidedness and hyperbole to embrace the openness and subtlety of symbol while still giving form.\textsuperscript{121}

True: we might not get the part with the most lines. But that is not the Zurückgekehrter’s point. Even the lowly fisher and his “tierisches Hängen mit dem Blick am Zucken einer Angelschnur” (153) has this mark of directedness within him; and with his last example, the Zurückgekehrter completes the economic spectrum, ranging from the American businessman to the mendicant monk: “denn es kann ein großer Zug darin liegen, wie einer fischt, und ein größerer Zug als Du Dir möchtest träumen lassen,\textsuperscript{122} darin, wie ein farbiger Bettelmönch Dir die irdene Bettelschale hinhält – wenn etwas der Art mir unterkam, so dachte ich: Zuhause!” (153). Yet while the two extremes – capitalist and monk – are linked together in their conviction of the roles they have taken on, there is a sense that the monk\textsuperscript{123} is accorded a more remarkable place (at least by way of contrast) with his “größerer Zug als Du Dir möchtest träumen lassen” – perhaps because of his unusual status as one who has given up everything and now must beg for basic necessities.\textsuperscript{124}

---

\textsuperscript{121} Hofmannsthal theorised this early in in his short piece “Franz Stuck” and even relates it to the progression from black and white sketches to colour paintings: “Von der Karikatur besitzt er [Stuck] die Gabe der eindringlichen, übereindringlichen Charakteristik. Das ist das Wesen der Karikatur: ganz eine Eigenschaft, ganz ein Zustand zu sein, borniert von Gesichtsausdruck bis zum Ausdruck der Spitzen der Schuhe, oder ganz Staunen, nichts als Staunen […]. Hier hat Stuck viel von den Japanern. Nach jahrelanger Arbeit mit einem witzigen, pointierenden, linienklugen Zeichenschrift erwachte in Stuck naturgemäß eine starke Sehnsucht nach der Farbe, nach Farbentrunkenheit” (“Franz Stuck,” 530-31). We might say the Zurückgekehrter undergoes a similar aesthetic evolution, from his encounter with Albrecht Dürer’s copperplate prints to his encounter with Van Gogh’s vividly coloured paintigs.

\textsuperscript{122} The phrase strikes one as deliberately Shakespearian, recalling Hamlet’s line (in the German translation) (I.v.): “Es gibt mehr Ding’ im Himmel und auf Erden, / Als Eure Schulweisheit sich träumt, Horatio” ( Cf. also the German translation of Much Ado About Nothing, I.iii: “Aber, Bruder, ich kann dir seltsame Neuigkeiten erzählen, von denen du dir nicht hättest träumen lassen.”) For the German Shakespeare quotes I am using Schlegel’s and Tieck’s translations respectively (Shakespeares Werke, Vol. 6: 28-29 and Vol. 7: 84-85). Within Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten, the phrase also recalls the Zurückgekehrter’s self-assessment: “ich habe meine javanesisch-deutschen Negociationen besser abgewickelt, als ich mir hätte träumen lassen” (151).


\textsuperscript{124} Perhaps Hofmannsthal was thinking of the Franciscan model of living: nihil habentes, omnia possidentes. The line comes from the second epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, Chapt. 6 and is quoted in Philosophie des Geldes. Hofmannsthal wrote next to this passage in parentheses: “(der Dichter)” (*FDH 1910, 245).
These roles enacted with conviction and devotion (the religious undertone is intended and will be developed) remind the Zurückgekehrter of home, or at least of what he once considered to be home: “Indem die Dinge an meine Seele schlugen, so war mir, ich läse ein buntes Buch des Lebens, aber das Buch handelte immerfort von Deutschland” (153). What is “Zuhause”? What is Germany? For the Zurückgekehrter, home is familiarity; it is the acknowledging response from the outside world that affirms his existence, and this includes people as well as things. It is the place of correspondances, the place the merchant’s son in Das Märchen der 672. Nacht also seeks. This acknowledgement is “nichts Ausgesponnenes, sondern etwas Blitzhaftes, das da war, während ich lebte, und oft in Momenten, wo mein Denken und alle meine Nerven vom Leben so angespannt waren wie möglich” (154). In this peculiarly modern, hypersensitive state, he is aware of home. This notion is also tied to a sense of something like a spiritual communion: Hofmannsthal’s depiction – drinking water from a constantly flowing fountain in Upper Austria – conjures images of the communion drink that, given the right disposition or intentionality, has the same meaning everywhere, indeed is the same everywhere:


Like ritual, this meaning is re-enacted and re-established in different times and places. Only in the southern US, once the water and air had become too different – presumably they are not endlessly adaptable to one’s subjective perception! – does the Zurückgekehrter lose this feeling of communion with that place of his childhood and with Germany. Yet this sentiment and intensity found expression in other moments, encounters, and scenes – and other things (“Dinge”).¹²⁵ He lists them off like fleeting but significant impressions, each with its own peculiarity, each

¹²⁵ See Claudia Bamberg’s Hofmannsthal: Der Dichter und die Dinge. This book (2011) has filled a great desideratum in Hofmannsthal studies by examining Hofmannsthal’s “dingorientierte Poetik” (27).
connected by its evocative power, and each having something of this involvement. There is here neither cold observation nor Gleichgültigkeit.126

Yet there is more to these moments than this. For the Zurückgekehrter and his perception of the world, they gain their meaning insofar as they are also external guarantors of existence.127 As an example, the Zurückgekehrter writes of the old walnut tree in Upper Austria he knew so well as a child. He knows that upon seeing it again, this:

gespaltene Nußbaum, der immer am spätesten von allen Bäumen seine Blätter bekam und am unwilligsten von allen sie dem Winter preisgab, der wird in all seiner Schiefheit und seinem Alter irgendwie ein Zeichen geben, daß er mich erkennt und daß ich nun wieder da bin und er da ist, wie immer [...]. (155)

In this respect, we should note the careful, almost empathetic description of the tree: it is crooked and split, perhaps having at some point been struck by lightning. It seems hardened to resist assault, reluctant to give up its leaves, yet it is also formed by its wounds and suffering, bearing, to speak with Nietzsche, “die Wunde des Daseins” (Geburt der Tragödie 115).128 It has a will of its own, even if it cannot always realise that will, and it will speak to the Zurückgekehrter in its own peculiar, but lucid language – through the breath of the wind.129 Even if this personification is all a product of the Zurückgekehrter’s imagination, of his own subjectivity, it nevertheless says

126 Consider, by way of contrast, the phenomenological gaze, which Husserl likens to the aesthetic. We shall see in the final letters that the aesthetic evokes quite a different sort of gaze: the viewer relates to the object in a way that is precisely not “gleichgültig.”

127 Cf. Antje Büsgen’s entry in the Rilke-Handbuch: “Das Bedürfnis nach existentieller Selbstvergewisserung, also Fragen der Lebensführung und Arbeitsweise als Künstler: R[ilke] fand hier Antworten in der Beschäftigung mit August Rodin (1840), Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890) und Paul Cézanne (1839-1906)” (131). Torsten Hoffmann explores this in “Kunstefahrung als Icherschließung” in his discussion of Rilke’s “Rodin-Vortrag”: “Sein zunächst ungenannt bleibendes Ziel ist es, seinen Zuhörern den Umgang mit Kunst als eine existenzielle Erfahrung nachvollziehbar zu machen, die das eigene Leben bestätigt oder (wie im Fall des Archaischen Torsos) in Frage stellt, in jedem Fall aber den Betrachter in seinem Persönlichkeitskern berührt bzw. ihm einen Zugang zu dem, was Rilke ein Paar Jahre früher als die zweite Welt seiner Seele bezeichnet hatte, überhaupt erst eröffnet” (290).

128 The problem of suffering – and what to make of it – will resurface in the Van Gogh paintings and is also an important aspect of Augenblicke in Griechenland (Chapter 3) and Die Frau ohne Schatten (Chapter 4).

129 The Zurückgekehrter’s walnut tree has a descendent in Brecht’s poem, “Morgendliche Rede an den Baum Green” and a cousin in the first of Rilke’s Duineser Elegien (“Es bleibt uns vielleicht / irgend ein Baum an dem Abhang, daß wir ihn täglich / wiedersähen” (13-17). We might also think of the encounter with the tree as an encounter with a “Du” as in Martin Buber’s Ich und Du. The suffering tree also recalls Nietzsche’s nineteenth aphorism from the Fröhliche Wissenschaft, “Das Böse”: “Prüft das Leben der besten und fruchtbarsten Menschen und Völker und fragt euch, ob ein Baum, der stolz in die Höhe wachsen soll, des schlechten Weters und der Stürme entbehren könne [...]” (64).
something about how the \textit{Zurückgekehrter} creates meaning and relates to the world. It is by acknowledging the existence of things in their particularity, and also in the common struggle of (and for) existence, that the \textit{Zurückgekehrter} can detect his own being.

The \textit{Zurückgekehrter}’s knowledge of his own existence is thus predicated upon 1) the existence of things in the external world, to which he attributes a degree of autonomy and will (distinguishing his situation from that of the merchant’s son)\textsuperscript{130} and which have also suffered some trial of existence; and 2) on those things giving him a sign of acknowledgement. Only then can the tree be an existential guarantor.

But now, no matter whom or what he meets, he cannot find these signs of confirmation.\textsuperscript{131} This is not the Germany he remembers, and he begins to doubt the veracity – though not the importance – of his memories. The “Spiegel der wehmütigen Erinnerung” (155) through which he entered his imaginary Germany has been replaced with a mirror of the society that reveals to him nothing of what he thought he would see: the Germany he remembers “war mehr eine Ahnung als eine Gegenwart, wie dies Herüberwehen der Seelenhaftesten, des Wesenhaftesten und des Ungreifbarsten” (155). This is not to say that what the \textit{Zurückgekehrter} entertained before has no validity: on the contrary, we have an established contrast between the values located in the realm of \textit{Geist} (“es war der geistigste Reflex,” 155) set up over and against the world of perceived reality, or \textit{Wirklichkeit}. The tension between the fictional/imaginary world of \textit{Geist} and the world of \textit{Wirklichkeit} becomes increasingly strained, and the man who has hitherto led a grounded, practical life with no real challenges to his perception of the world now must face the discrepancy between

\textsuperscript{130} Cf. Alewyn: “Kein Stein rührt sich um seinetwillen vom Fleck. Ja, seine Verlorenheit beruht eben darin, daß sich die Dinge so gänzlich ungerührt verhalten, daß sie überhaupt keine Notiz von ihm nehmen, genau als wären sie ganz allein und er nur leere Luft. So, weiß man auf einmal, sind die Dinge, wenn sie unter sich sind: herzlos, häßlich und unsagbar traurig. Unfähig, sich selber herzustellen, ungeborene Schatten, so stehen sie herum, stumm, ja böse wartend auf die Erlösung” (150). This nearly metaphysical indifference of things characterises for Hofmannsthal the absence of form, a world before the existence of things and before the generative cosmos: “Chaos als totes dumpfes Hinlungern der Dinge im Halblicht” (qtd. in Alewyn 150).

\textsuperscript{131} For more on the aspect of the semiotic crisis in this text, see Renner’s chapter on \textit{Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten} in \textit{Die Zaubererschrift der Bilder} and Sabine Schneider’s \textit{Verheißung der Bilder} (esp. 232). For Scharnowski, on the other hand, this text is not about the loss of the ability to interpret the world, but rather the loss of immediacy, that is, a loss of that position from which one does not even need to interpret the world. Scharnowski’s argument presupposes that the \textit{Zurückgekehrter} lived (or thought he lived) in this immediacy, but this reading goes a bit too far. The \textit{Zurückgekehrter}’s relation to the world has changed, but it is hard to argue that he ever had (or thought he had) and \textit{immediate} knowledge of the world. He has always interpreted it, whether he knew it or not, and his self-analysis suggests he is more of the sentimental rather than the naïve type.
the “Figuren” which his own mind – that is, his mind as “ein Gewoge, ein Chaos, ein Ungeborenes” – produces and what he sees in the “real” Germany (155-56).

Because *Begriffe* cannot begin to intimate this world of figures and shapes, we are presented with an oblique, suggestive outlining of a paradoxical *something* too great to be conceptualised – “der Reflex zahlloser ineinander verflochtener Lebensmöglichkeiten” – yet which can be caught on a breeze and felt by the senses: “Es war der zarteste Duft eines ganzen Daseins, des deutschen Daseins. Besser kann ich es Dir nicht sagen” (155). A second time, the *Zurückgekehrter* resorts to listing the expressions of this realm, moving from figures to situations, to states of mind, yoking together various opposing tendencies and defining moments in life up to and including “letztes Bette, letztes Daliegen und Sterben” (156). And all of this was in some mysterious way held together; in other words, it all moved at once, together, in this Germany. Though the *Zurückgekehrter* asserts (yet again! – doth he protest too much?) that he is no day dreamer, and that these are not figments of his imagination, we are left to wonder (and we can only wonder) what it was he sensed and, if it really was there, what its ontological status might be and why it is gone: they were all “whole,” and – so he ends his first letter: “das sind die heutigen Deutschen nicht” (156). Why is there such a great discrepancy between the Ahnung of wholenesss from before and the fragmentary condition of Gegenwart?

“*Ein europäisch-deutsches Gegenwartsgefühl*”

In the second and third letters, we have a more intensified depiction of the situation and a gradual movement towards the moment of crisis. But we should pay attention to this movement not just in its intensification, but also in the particular instances of repetition and parody that give shape to the character of the *Zurückgekehrter* and the irony of the piece as fragmented text lamenting the loss of an impossible social (and by extension aesthetic) “whole” that perhaps never existed to begin with.

In a kind of self- and social analysis, the *Zurückgekehrter* attempts to locate what he finds so irritating about this present reality in its fragmentariness. He proceeds in what would seem to be a logical fashion, but all of his evidence resists logical explanation.\(^{132}\) Even his starting point

\(^{132}\) Cf. Simmel’s comments on the dual role of the intellect and money: “Das Geld stellt Handlungen und Verhältnisse des Menschen so außerhalb des Menschen als Subjektes, wie das Seelenleben, soweit es rein intellektuell ist, aus der
contains an irrational core: the presumption that the face is the visual locus of personality, capable of revealing something about the person to whom the face belongs. Ulrike Renner notes: “Eine spätere Notiz zum Andreas-Roman lautet: ‘Das Unendliche in den Gesichtern – aber zusammen gebracht zur prägnanten Einheit’ (SW XXX 358), d.h. auch diese ‘Physiognomik’ ist eine prägnante Gestalterfahrung” (Die Zauberschrift der Bilder 392). This harks back to Novalis, who refers to the “Heilige unerforschliche Hieroglyphe jeder Menschengestalt!” (qtd. in Dangel-Pelloquin 55) – and thus comes into conflict with the anti-Romantic society in which the Zurückgekehrter finds himself. Yet for the Zurückgekehrter, even this intuitive rather than objectively demonstrable method of correspondence is beginning to fail. Faces have well nigh lost the ability to speak with conviction: “Wie selten begegnet mir ein Gesicht, das eine starke, entschiedene Sprache redet” (157); they are passive and confused, having been inscribed upon rather than speaking their own language: “so ohne Freiheit, so vielerlei steht darauf geschrieben, und alles ohne Bestimmtheit, ohne Größe” (157). The Hieroglyph of the human face is thus seen only in its frustrating ambiguity and inability to convey anything at all specific. It is indeed “unerforschtlich,” but this in itself is not the problem for the Zurückgekehrter; what is missing is that Heiligkeit of which Novalis speaks, or something akin to it – a point to which I shall return shortly. Even those faces of men in power betray a distressing timidity and uncertainty of self. Everything is mixed up and nothing stands out. A sad parody of the “Herüberwehen des Seelenhaftesten, des Wesenhaftesten und des Ungreifbarsten” and “der zarteste Duft eines ganzen Daseins” (155), this is but a “geistiger Geruch, etwas namenlos Bestimmtes und doch kaum Sagbares” which “verfolgt mich, […] ein Gegenwartsgfühl, ein europäisch-deutsches Gegenwartsgfühl” (158). We might think of Zarathustra’s desire for good air, and indeed Hofmannsthal was drawn to the following passage from Zur Genealogie der Moral:

Wer nicht nur seine Nase zum Riechen hat, sondern auch seine Augen und Ohren, der spürt fast überall, wohin er heute auch nur tritt, etwas wie Irrenhaus,-, wie

persönlichen Subjektivität in die Sphäre der Sachlichkeit, die es nun abspiegelt, eintritt. Damit ist ersichtlich ein Überlegenheitsverhältnis angelegt” (602).

133 See Dangel-Pelloquin’s article, “‘Ah, das Gesicht!’” in Poetik der Evidenz. “Gesichter sind bei Hofmannsthal dramatische Orte, an denen sich Verwandlungen abspielen, Figurationen eines Umschwungs, einer Spannung, eines Kontrastes” (58).

134 See also SW XXXI 304, the Erläuterung to 56,7.

Along this passage Hofmannsthal noted:

gegenwärtiger
europäische
Zustand, unter einem Blitz erblickt

His *Zurückgekehrter* would have agreed.

The “Gegenwartsgefühl” takes on a particular, increasingly negative dimension the more the *Zurückgekehrter* writes – a sort of *allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Schreiben*. Faces come to mean more for him, the more he writes. Very nearly quoting Novalis now, he sees faces as “eine Hieroglyphe, ein heiliges, bestimmtes Zeichen. Darin steht eine Gegenwart der Seele” (159). But here, in the faces of reality, any soul he detects flits away as soon as it appears: “aber es huscht wieder weg, aber es ist ein ewiges Kommen und Wegfliegen wie in einem Taubenschlag” (159). Presence of soul, according the *Zurückgekehrter*’s understanding, is something eternal, out of time, whereas the presence of soul he sees now shows itself in merely the blink of an eye, the beating of a dove’s wing as it comes and goes, doomed to disappear under time’s tide. According to Simmel, this is typical of modern urban life and its “historisches Symbol,” money. Thus Simmel: “Für den absoluten Bewegungscharakter der Welt nun gibt es sicher kein deutlicheres Symbol als das Geld. Die Bedeutung des Geldes liegt darin, daß es fortgegeben wird; sobald es ruht, ist es nicht mehr Geld seinem spezifischen Wert und Bedeutung nach” (*FDH 1910: 552-53). The soul – in an unexpected comparison to money – is also in a state of persistent restlessness. Thus Simmel: “Es ist nichts als der Träger einer Bewegung, in dem eben alles, was nicht Bewegung ist, völlig ausgelöscht ist, es ist sozusagen actus purus; es lebt in kontinuierlicher Selbstentäußerung aus jedem gegebenen Punkt heraus und bildet so den Gegenpol und die direkte

---

135 Cf. Hofmannsthal’s letter to George from 27. August 1902, where he instead emphasises the *relative* quality of the “Bestimmtheit” of the hieroglyph: “Die schöne Hieroglyphe des menschlichen Gesichtes in ihrer weicheren unbestimmteren Formung ist so viel für die Einbildungskraft” (qtd. in *SW XXXI* 304, Erläuterung to 56.7). The *Zurückgekehrter*’s quest is for definiteness, but what will “heal” him from his sickness is impossible to define.
Verneinung jedes Fürsichseins" (*FDH 1910: 511).

There is, as mentioned, something missing in these faces: what is missing is precisely what characterises the Goethean symbol, namely, an open-endedness suggested in the “Bild”: “der eine große, nie auszusprechende Hintergedanke, der stetige, der in guten Gesichtern steht, der wie ein Wegweiser durch die Wirrnis des Lebens auf den Tod und noch über den Tod hinaus weist [...]” (Briefe des Zurückgekehrten 159). But instead we have an oddly closed circuit, with no direction other than the eventual return to and the repeated flight from the self. The parallel which Simmel notices in money and its having been raised to an end in itself is hinted at already by the absence of a “Wegweiser,” which always points beyond itself.

In other words, this “Gegenwartsgefühl” is characterised by an inability of the soul to point, or look, beyond the self, in spite of the continual movement. In an attempt to escape an ouroboric fate, the soul runs from itself (“ewiges Kommen und Wegfliegen”) but cannot seem to escape its own confined system. In contrast, the symbolic structure of pointing to something beyond, in the context of Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten, is connected with devotion. The spiritual or religious undertone is important here as well: in all this distracted motion there is no direction, no commitment, and so every act and every word falls prey to Gleichgültigkeit. Simmel’s assessment that “innerhalb des Geldgeschäftes alle Personen gleichwertig [sind], nicht, weil jede, sondern weil keine etwas wert ist, sondern nur das Geld” (Philosophie des Geldes 595) finds expression here as well. Gleichgültigkeit is not the result of a well-balanced account. It is the result of distraction and loss of direction. Its mask is what Simmel would call a blasé attitude, but its face and language are precarious and unsure (SW XXXI 159). The actions of Gleichgültigkeit are contradictory, often destructive. The Zurückgekehrter’s reproof is full of indignation, yet is itself cool and cutting:

136 Hofmannsthals has this and the previously quoted passage marked as well.

137 In Die Frau ohne Schatten, Hofmannsthal lends this image another meaning altogether, drawing from Herbert Silberer’s study Probleme der Mystik und ihrer Symbolik. With reference to the word “Gott,” Silberer writes: “Und hier möchte schon der ‘circulare,’ kreisförmige Charakter des ganzen hermetischen Werkes auffallen, da doch der zur Vorarbeit, zur Reinigung, notwendige himmlische Mercur selbst ein Geschenk Gottes ist; der Anfang hängt vom Ende ab, setzt dies voraus. Das Bild der prima materia ist nicht umsonst eine Schlange, die den Schwanz im Maule hat. Ich kann indes vorläufig auf das Problem, das hier auftaucht, nicht näher eingehen; nur mit einem Wort sei angedeutet, daß das Ende dem Anfang als Ideal vorschweben kann” (I have rendered in bold the text which Hofmannsthal marked, *FDH 1904: 100).

Is nothing sacred? Can the face be a hieroglyph without that “Heiligkeit” of which Novalis speaks, and for which there must also be a “Frömmigkeit”? Has the world fallen into an impossibly relativistic whirlpool? These are the questions the Zurückgekehrter asks, and he sees only how a smug satisfaction over balanced books (and balanced moralities) leads to the hubristic destruction of respect for ideas, history, things, and even people.\textsuperscript{138} Anything and everything can be justified because there is no stable measure of things. This also means that people, in their insecurity and loss of direction, can easily be manipulated, given the right kind of charisma: propaganda feeds the ego.\textsuperscript{139} In this respect, Ritchie Robertson mentions the unsavoury historical background for the comment regarding the “halb erschlagenen Chinesenweiber”: Kaiser Willhelm II addressed German troops in 1900 with words of incitement calling for merciless violence in the name of Germany: “Wie vor tausend Jahren die Hunnen […], so muß der Name Deutscher in China auf


tausend Jahre durch euch in einer Weise bestätigt werden, daß niemals wieder ein Chinese es wagt, etwa einen Deutschen scheel anzusehen” (qtd. in “Hofmannsthals as Sociologist” 237).

Surely there is something to the fact that the Gesichter of these women are treated with such disregard for humanity. In the broader context of human rights, and in the context of Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten with its emphasis on the Heiligkeit of the Hieroglyphe (in particular of the face), this is utterly reprehensible. But surely there must be something of people’s will that remains not fully committed in these acts (one would hope). In one of the variants of the dialogue “Furcht,” there is a definition of Frömmigkeit articulated with reference to the art of dance: “Tanzen heisst sich ganz und rein hingeben können. Nun ist dies. Dies ist Frömmigkeit. So waren unsere Mütter, Darum blieb der Fluss in seinen Grenzen  Darum trug der Ölbaum. Darum gab der Brunnen” (SW XXXI 388, spacing as in original). “Frömmigkeit” is to give oneself over to something. It exhibits the same deictic structure as the symbol. Further, it seems to establish context for the flux – it does not halt it, but it (ideally) keeps it from inundating the world and resulting in the loss of character. Even the tree (here: the “Ölbaum”; in the letters: the “Nußbaum”) which bears intransitively (“Darum trug der Ölbaum.”) does so out of Frömmigkeit. The spring, that magical place from the Zurückgekehrter’s childhood, gives out of Frömmigkeit. This kind of devotion in a person would entail ‘the whole man moving at once’; it is a kind of poising of the will, an intentionality or a posture of being, and act of giving in one gesture. It is not restricted to human beings, but rather seems to characterise some unnamed current in the world itself. “Bin ich vielleicht selber ein frommer Mensch? Nein. Aber es giebt auch eine Frömmigkeit des Lebens,” the Zurückgekehrter writes, suggesting that this is not a matter of praying in a church or temple: “und der Glaube an die Gin-Flasche kann noch eine Art von Glaube sein. Aber hier, unter den gebildeten und besitzenden Deutschen, hier kann mir nicht wohl werden” (161). The Gegenwartsgefühl is stifling, and so very precarious. Every act is performed without devotion,

140 Cf. the Opfer image in Gespräch über Gedichte: there, the image of sacrifice is used to explain the moment of simultaneity, the traversal of difference, which is the symbol. Here, we have another dimension to this image of sacrifice: that of giving oneself over, of extending oneself beyond the quotidian limits of subjectivity. This is taken up again with greater consequence in Augenblick in Griechenland (as discussed in Chapter 3), and made explicitly ethical in Die Frau ohne Schatten (Chapter 4). Cf. also Goethe’s definition of Frömmigkeit: “Frömmigkeit ist kein Zweck, sondern ein Mittel um durch die reinste Gemüthsruhe zur höchsten Cultur zu gelangen” (Maximen und Reflexionen 815).
without giving – and without giving space\textsuperscript{141} for the imagination: and all the intellectual training and money in the world cannot change that.\textsuperscript{142}

At the beginning of the third letter, the Zurückgekehrter briefly recapitulates his critique. What follows is a counter-image that also prefigures letters three and four. The rhetorical move of describing the current situation and presenting an alternative is surely a familiar and practical structuring device of persuasive argument, but it serves another purpose as well: it prepares both the reader and the Zurückgekehrter himself for the “Erlebnis des Sehens”\textsuperscript{143} depicted in the last two letters, which, in turn, begin to destabilise the structure of argument established in the first three letters. That is, the third letter looks motivically both forward and backward, thereby highlighting the structure of relationality between the letters. This middle letter, the hinge, serves ultimately to put into question not only the coherence of modern society (already questioned in the first two letters), but also the coherence of one man’s thoughts: is memory to be trusted? And: what is the relation between art and ‘reality’? The third letter, both in structure and in content, oscillates between the present and the past, the imagination and the exterior world, and art and reality.

The first part of the letter looks back to the previous two in that it continues the cultural critique, though this time from the perspective of what he calls “eine wahre Dichtigkeit der Verhältnisse” (161, my emphasis). That is, a relationality which would hold the whole person, and the whole culture together, is absent. He sees this binding element is present in the English (despite his

\textsuperscript{141} The importance of space is elaborated to a greater degree in Augenblicke in Griechenland (see Chapter 3). See also the connection between atmosphere and painting in Braegger’s Das Visuelle und das Plastische (26).

\textsuperscript{142} Even from an economic point of view – and as Derrida has shown in Donner les temps, it is nearly impossible to think of the gift outside of economic circulation (thereby rendering the “pure” gift impossible) – this is a failure; for there is no opportunity for a moment of reciprocity (for instance, in the form of an answer) or exchange without the moment of giving, and without the given (and giving) space. See also the role of space as \textit{khôra} in Chapter 3.

explicit desire not to move to London)¹⁴⁴ and in the Maoris, different though their cultures are. This is what makes community possible: “das Gemeinschaftbildende, all das Ursprüngliche davon, das was im Herzen sitzt” (161). But for community to be possible there must also be a commonly understood language, and that, too, is absent. The Zurückgekehrter is not presumptuous – he grants that he might very well be wrong, simply unprepared and lacking in the education needed to understand this world. But when we think of Bildung “im europäischen, im heutigen Sinn” (161) we cannot help but recall Nietzsche’s very condemnation of this Bildung! And this sort of Bildung will, presumably, not help the Zurückgekehrter – or anyone else for that matter¹⁴⁵ – when it comes to experiencing the world in a meaningful way, that is, in a way that also involves the imaginative faculty. Instead of the new kind of information-driven education which seeks to provide people with the pre-formulated answers to equally pre-formulated questions – we can recognise here the transformation on both sides of the Atlantic from Bildung (if there ever was such a thing) to Ausbildung – what the Zurückgekehrter has is something else: experiences. Importantly, these are aesthetic experiences in a broad sense – books he read and pictures and scenes he saw as a child which left him with an openness to similar experiences later in life. What connects these early aesthetic experiences is precisely that sense of strength and Frömmigkeit which he sees missing in the present:


---

¹⁴⁴ See Briefe des Zurückgekehrten 164.
¹⁴⁵ Schuster notes that the Zurückgekehrter is by no means the only person in his society experiencing this alienation; alienation is a specific characteristic of this society (160). The same could be said about the education, which, as Simmel notes, is not as ‘democratic’ as we like to think it is (and his critique is as relevant today as it ever was): “Die scheinbare Gleichheit, mit der sich der Bildungsstoff jedem bietet, der ihn ergreifen will, ist in der Wirklichkeit ein blutiger Hohn, gerade wie andere Freiheiten liberalistischer Doktrinen, die den Einzelnen freilich an dem Gewinn von Gütern jeder Art nicht hindern, aber übersehen, daß nur der durch irgend welche Umstände schon Begünstigte die Möglichkeit besitzt, sie sich anzueignen” (606).
¹⁴⁶ As pointed out in the Kritische Ausgabe, this is not a direct quote, but probably refers to Vergil’s Aeneid I, 203: “forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit” and Aeneid X, 782: “dulcis moriens reminiscitur Argos” (Aeneid vol. 1: 7; vol. 2: 92).
He is not advocating a blind patriotism – his reference to the Germans’ dehumanising treatment of the Chinese during the Boxer Rebellion suggests he would not stand for such chauvinism\(^\text{147}\) – but he does miss the heroic devotion and conviction even in the face of death. And all this is nowhere to be found in Germany now, a country that cannot or will not honour memory by living, but would rather erect questionable memorials to mythologised figures.

And now comes the turning point: “Und dann: da hatte mein seliger Vater in Gebhartsstetten eine Mappe mit Kupferstichen des Albrecht Dürer” (162). For Hofmannsthal’s Zurückgekehrter, who saw the prints on many occasions and up close, Dürer’s work serves as a cultural link to the past, something with which one could identify and yet which is not contemporary. It is fascinating in its difference and perhaps comforting, too, in its familiarity and ability to maintain this cultural link and stave off a total cultural amnesia: Argos meminisse juvat. The Zurückgekehrter’s childhood connection to these copperplate prints is, however, one full of ambivalence. “Wie vertraut und fremd zugleich waren mir die alten Blätter, wie zuwider und wie lieb zugleich!” (162). Nevertheless, the uncanniness of these prints has more to offer than a link to the past: as aesthetic depictions,\(^\text{148}\) they exhibit a remarkable unity for the Zurückgekehrter. Though he does not say so explicitly, we can gather from what he writes about the prints that they have for him a “wahre Dichtigkeit der Verhältnisse”: “Die Menschen, die Ochsen, die Pferde wie aus Holz geschnitzt, wie aus Holz die Falten ihrer Kleider, die Falten in ihren Gesichtern” (162). The wooden quality permeates everything, and the folds and wrinkles of the clothes correspond to those of the faces.

\(^{147}\) While never quite chauvinistic, Hofmannsthal’s less than commendable behaviour during the First World War betrays a painfully ironic biographical turn (Weinzierl 60-69). His initial open enthusiasm for the war changed as the war continued however, and by 1917 he was thoroughly disillusioned. In a letter to Ottonie Gräfin Degenfeld from 1923 he writes: “Mit Grausen sehe ich aus den Memoiren von Paléologue, zusammengehalten mit denen von Tirpitz, jetzt mit denen von Conrad, daß die ganze Schuld am eigentlichen Ausbruch bei uns liegt, Berlin u. Wien – und alles grausige Zerfahrenheit, Dummheit, Nicht-durchdenken – ein Handeln wie nur mit halbem Bewußtsein – man muß sich in diesen Gedanken retten: daß – je größer die Katastrophe, umso weniger sich das Schicksal mit ihrer Motivierung abgibt” (see Epilogue in the Freies Deutsches Hochstift exhibition catalogue from 2014, Österreichs Antwort: Hugo von Hofmannsthal im Ersten Weltkrieg. Exponate und Transkriptionen).

Here, the faces are integrated with the environment, in contrast to the faces of “reality” the Zurückgekehrter has already described: “So verwischt sind die meisten Gesichter, so ohne Freiheit, […] ohne Größe” (157). The contrast to reality is made less clear, however, in the Zurückgekehrter’s quest for clarity through revision and intensification in the process of writing: “so unwirklich, überwirklich” (162). What initially seemed to be a mere negation is qualified as more than real and even above reality. Thus the ontological distinction of art is still maintained, but it is here made to occupy a more privileged position than the traditional Platonic ordering would have it. Just as land and sea have switched places, so too have art and reality.

The effect which this Überwirklichkeit has on the young boy is extraordinary. The prints wield power over him: “Aber nahe gingen sie mir, in mich hinein drang eine Gewalt von ihnen und ich glaube, ich werde auf dem Todtenbett noch sagen können, was für einen Hintergrund das Meerwunder hat oder der Einsiedler mit dem Todtenschädel” (162). The power of these prints is thus expressed in their having imprinted themselves on the Zurückgekehrter’s memory. They are prints of cultural memory, but as if clarified through personal memories. They come to represent more than themselves, for they are also connected with his father’s authoritative declaration: “Das ist das alte Deutschland” (162). We could easily see the psychological impact of this childhood memory: it is, to put it boldly, traumatic. Sometimes the boy asks to see the prints, and sometimes he runs from them, unable to view them any longer. In his connecting the Dürer prints to his environment, he notes: “Diese Verbindung einer Wirklichkeit mit einem Eindruck von Bildern, einem halben Schrecken, einer Art von Alp war seltsam genug. Aber seltsam und tief sind alle Dinge, die uns in der Winterzeit [or: “Kinderzeit”]150 widerfahren” (163, my emphasis). They

---

149 CF. SW XXXI 470: “Gefährlichkeit jeder halben verwischten allgemeinen Rederei über unsere Zeit, unsere Eigenschaften […].”

150 The Kritische Ausgabe has “Winterzeit” but other editions have “Kinderzeit.” I have consulted with Drs. Katja Kaluga and Konrad Heumann regarding this matter. Dr. Kaluga was kind enough to look for an answer to this discrepancy: “Eine Niederschrift der Passage liegt nicht vor, daher gibt es auch keine Varianz. Die Textgrundlage, der im ‘Morgen’ abgedruckte Brief, ist in beiden von Ihnen angegebenen Fällen korrekt wiedergegeben (ich habe den Band nochmals zur Hand genommen). Es ist möglich, daß ein bereits in dem beim ‘Morgen’ eingereichten Typoskript steckender Fehler der Grund war – oder Hofmannsthal nahm keine Fahnencorrirkur vor und hat die Stelle selbst nicht bemerkt.

Vielleicht wagte die Editorin Ellen Ritter einen so weitgehenden Eingriff wie “Kinderzeit” für “Winterzeit” nicht, obgleich er dem Sinn der Stelle entspricht und somit gerechtfertigt gewesen wäre. Da sie leider verstorben ist, können wir sie nach ihren Beweggründen nicht befragen. Der Band ist bereits so alt, daß mir dazu keine Unterlagen bekannt sind” (personal email correspondence from 14 September 2015).
permeate his entire childhood without his knowing it (so he realises now), such that he eventually becomes unknowingly complicit, perpetuating their ghostly yet exaggerated presence in reality: “unbewußt bevölkerte ich doch mit den Schattengeberden dieser überwirklichen Ahnen die einsamen Stellen im Walde […]”, and at one point in the text, we are not sure if he is talking about his real, recently deceased ancestors or the cultural ancestors he recognises in the prints – both seem so commanding and convincing in their gestures ¹⁵¹: thus he populates with “Schattengeberde,”


As in the case of the merchant’s son, here too reality takes on and is defined by the fantastic world of art – in this case, visual art as well as literature. Of course it is important to maintain a distinction here: these “Schattengeberde” remain shadows. They do not supplant the “real” world, but rather lend it depth and relief, revealing its contours, perhaps shaping them to a certain degree, but never fully overtaking this object-world. “Es war alles anders in den alten Bildern als in der Wirklichkeit vor meinen Augen: aber es klaffte kein Riß dazwischen” (163). Nevertheless, this kind of “Zusammengehen” is one that privileges the “unwirklich, überwirklich,” perhaps because of the insistent, exaggerated and confident gestures: “denn es lag in mir, daß ich das Wirkliche an etwas in mir messen mußte und fast bewußtlos maß ich an jener schreckhaft erhobenen schwarzen

¹⁵¹ In this respect, the Zurückgekehrter is very much like Malte Laurids Brigge: Both fictitious writers extol, with a certain amount of ambivalence none the less, the powerful presence of the older generations. This comparison can be extended to their take on how best to die (discussed below). See also Simmel: “Die eigentümliche Abflachung des Gefühlslebens […]; die Leichtigkeit intellektueller Verständigung […]; die Tendenz zur Versöhnlichkeit, aus der Gleichgültigkeit gegen die Grundfragen des Innenlebens quellend, […] bis zur Idee des Weltfriedens, die besonders in den liberalen Kreisen, den historischen Trägern des Intelлектualismus und des Geldverkehrs gepflegt wird: alles dies entspringt als positive Folge jenem negativen Zuge der Charakterlosigkeit. An den Höhenpunkten des Geldverkehrs wird diese Farblosigkeit sozusagen zur Farbe von Berufsinhalten” (Simmel 595-96).
Zauberwelt und strich alles an diesem Probierstein, ob es Gold wäre oder ein schlechter gelblicher Glimmer” (164). Again, the irony here is – whether the Zurückgekehrter is supposed to be aware of it is up for discussion; Hofmannsthal certainly is\(^{152}\) – directed at the Zurückgekehrter and his ability to detect (as he detects others’ crises but not his own); but it is also aimed at anyone who presumes to know exactly where the line between reality and dream is. The magical black world of the prints is the touchstone for determining what is truly gold. Does reality pass the test and turn out to be ‘real’ or only fool’s gold? The answer: “[Ich] sehe, daß sie mir nicht bestehen und komme nicht darüber hinweg” (164).\(^{153}\)

We might question the method: but then again, reality cannot be measured against itself – that would be tautological. And so the Zurückgekehrter chooses a method which we might again call “weitschweifig oder ungeschickt,” like his writing style (152). He knows this is “Kinderei” (164), yet he cannot help but subject his surrounding world to this touchstone. And the consequences extend beyond the social isolation he must bear. For the Zurückgekehrter, like the merchant’s son of the Märchen der 672. Nacht, the art of living is intimately connected with the manner – and place – of dying: “Und ich möchte in diesem Deutschland nicht sterben. […] wo man nicht sterben möchte, dort soll man auch nicht leben” (164). The merchant’s son resented his life because of his disgraceful, ugly death; the Zurückgekehrter desires a peaceful death – aesthetically pleasing in its own way. The places he has in mind are either “schön” or “still” (the first word occurs twice, the second three times), and permeating the air is “ein Bereitsein […], ein Gesammeltsein” (165). The places he describes are lovely enough to persuade us all to resolve any qualms we might have about death. But, “Hier ist es nicht heimlich. Wie in einer großen ruhelosen freudlosen Herberge ist mir zumuthe. Wer möchte” – his question appeals to us as well – “in einem Hotel sterben, wenn es nicht sein muß” (165). Like Rilke with Malte Laurids Brigge, Hofmannsthal raises a larger issue here: the aesthetic aspect of dying is tied to rest, and in this society the Zurückgekehrter sees neither beauty, nor peace, nor preparedness. Dying here, like dying in hotel (or a hospital for Rilke),

\(^{152}\) The gold metaphor is a particularly rich one (pardon the pun) for Hofmannsthal. I discuss this in more detail in subsequent chapters.

\(^{153}\) What Alewyn writes of Claudio (Der Tor und der Tod) applies here – and in the subsequent texts – as well. The rift between reality and the possibilities that Claudio imagined results in a failure to live in the present such that “er jede Erfahrung an seiner Erwartung mißt, und wo sie nicht entspricht, verwirft, und sich darauf versteift, auf die vollkommene Erfüllung zu warten” (70). Augenblicke in Griechenland and Die Frau ohne Schatten likewise treat the discrepancy between expectations (often linked to a sense of entitlement) and reality.
emphasises the transience of life without celebrating its potential for metamorphosis. Worse than merely ugly, it is anonymous. It is a place you pay to stay at overnight.  

But now, at the end of his third letter, the Zurückgekehrter confesses that he does not know where he wishes to go. There is still – he is a man of his society, though he does not feel it – much to do.

**Of Ghosts and Colours: From Phenomenological Crisis to Aesthetic Resolution?**

In the final two letters, we are presented with the personal consequences of the Zurückgekehrter’s return. His “Unbehagen in der Kultur” finally manifests itself as a psychological sickness – recalling his allusion to a potential Hypochondrie in the first letter – the symptoms of which are a loss of sense for the reality of things; that is, it manifests itself as a phenomenological crisis. We can certainly read the text psychologically, and Hofmannsthal’s interest in Freud (particularly Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens) and Morton Prince (The Dissociation of a Personality) as well as Otto Rank provides ample intertextual evidence for such a reading. This line of inquiry, however, would require its own chapter, and goes beyond the scope of the discussion at hand, which will be focussing on phenomenological and aesthetic aspects, especially as they relate to the cultural critique of the first three letters. While Hofmannsthal does not write in a philosophical manner, the Briefe des Zurückgekehrten (as well as other of Hofmannsthal’s texts, notably Ein Brief) do betray a fascination for that which also interested psychologists and philosophers at the time; Franz Brentano, Ernst Mach, Wilhelm Dilthey and Edmund Husserl would all find in Hofmannsthal a literary colleague in the phenomenological/psychological inquiry into Wahrnehmung. Incidentally, Hofmannsthal did attend lectures given by Brentano, and Ursula Renner suggests that the “Erlebnis des Sehens” is to some degree inspired by Dilthey’s Erlebnis und Dichtung, a work Hofmannsthal greatly admired. Husserl’s relationship to Hofmannsthal is less easy to tease out, but in these final two letters, the phenomenological segues into the aesthetic, primarily by way of questioning the status of reality and art, and, by extension, the possibility of community and dialogue.

---

154 Cf. the opening paragraphs of James Clifford’s essay “Traveling Cultures” (96).

155 See Huemer and Hirsch.
The culture of Germany and Europe at the turn of the century leads to this phenomenological crisis and feeling of sickness familiar to us from other texts written around or shortly after the composition of *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, like Kafka’s *Beschreibung eines Kampfes* (1909) and Rilke’s *Malte Laurids Brigge* (1908-1910), and even later from Jean-Paul Sartre’s *La Nausée* of 1938. The *Zurückgekehrter* has lost his sense of orientation; reality becomes not just ephemeral – though it is also this – but ghostly, tentative, and hollow in comparison to the Germany he imagined while on his travels. In the third letter, he has already written of the people: “Und nun sehe ich seit vier Monaten in die Gesichter der Wirklichen: nicht als ob sie seelenlos wären, gar nicht selten bricht ein Licht der Seele hervor, aber es huscht wieder weg, aber es ist ein ewiges Kommen und Wegfliegen wie in einem Taubenschlag” (159). In the fourth letter, the *Zurückgekehrter* describes how this fleeting reality comes to be characterised not by presence, but by absence, an “hauntology” in Derrida’s sense. This dizzying destabilisation of reality results in what he calls: “die Krise eines inneren Übelbefinden; dessen frühere Anwandlungen freilich waren so unscheinbar gewesen, wie nur möglich” (165). This “Übelbefinden” is insidious, creeping into the *Zurückgekehrter*’s life and poisoning his environment until the physical objects lose their place – their doubtable existence is one of debt. Again, listing serves as an attempt to reestablish the presence of the particular objects; the *Zurückgekehrter* must list them, he says, “oder diesen Brief zerreißen und das weitere für immer ungesagt lassen” (166). This is the third list so far, and at this point it becomes necessary to consider the motive behind such lists. Let us consider their content: the first list consisted of meetings with the *Zurückgekehrter*’s German contemporaries and their failure to awaken that recognition he sought; the second identifies the moments during his travels that, by contrast, *did* provide him with a unity of meaning (imagined though it was). This third list reveals the motivation behind the first two instances of listing: to list, to write something down, to attend to it and give it form, is to render it, in some essential way, *real*; but this reality is not identical with the reality of the meetings, memories, and things, nor can it ever be. Nevertheless, their reference on paper, and their being shared with another person (the reader), is a testimony to their significance. Further, the listing is what allows the *Zurückgekehrter* to move forward and write about his experience: acknowledging their specificity is a precondition for the expression of
the aesthetic encounter to come. The listing is also, it would seem, a way of pinning things down from a distance, of lowering an anchor and perhaps combatting some of the nausea.\footnote{Cf. Orth: “Ontologische Statusfragen der herkömmlichen Metaphysik werden unterlaufen, indem zunächst einmal auf Erscheinungen verwiesen wird, wie sie einem Beobachter in dieser oder jener Stellung zur Wirklichkeit in verschiedenen Gruppen von Erscheinungen gegeben sind, eben erscheinen. Solche erscheinenden Tatsachen, Phänomene, sind zu beschreiben, möglicherweise auch zu erklären und zu berechnen, kurz: in ihrem Zusammenhängen zu erforschen ohne sich in spekulativen oder auch nur in kritizistischen Konstruktionen zu ergehen” (“Wilhelm Dilthey und Franz Brentano zur Wissenschaftsforschung” 27). Hofmannsthal shows how this method of fixing the world falls apart in the phenomenological crisis.}

Zuweilen kam es des Morgens, in diesen deutschen Hotelzimmern, daß mir der Krug und das Waschbecken – oder eine Ecke des Zimmers mit dem Tisch und dem Kleiderständer so nicht-wirklich vorkamen, trotz ihrer unbeschreiblichen Gewöhnlichkeit so ganz und gar nicht wirklich, gewissermaßen gespenstisch, und zugleich provisorisch, wartend, sozusagen vorläufig die Stelle des wirklichen Kruges, des wirklichen mit Wasser gefüllten Waschbeckens einnehmend. \footnote{I’d like to express my gratitude to Christine Lehleiter for pointing out a thorn here. Works of art are objective cultural objects which, in their number could also potentially overwhelm the subject. So why do the works have a ‘positive’ (or so it seems) effect on the \textit{Zurückgekehrter}? Perhaps it is because of the \textit{Zurückgekehrter’s} long absence; he has not seen works of art in years. Or perhaps it is the peculiarly subjective quality of Van Gogh’s paintings that saves him from this fate. On the other hand, as Hang-Sun Kim points out, we shouldn’t focus too much on the paintings’ subjective quality, for “[h]owever direct and personal the appeal of this art, it does not operate outside the realm of concepts and symbols entirely. Nor does it allow the viewer to have an immediate subjective response to the} What we have is an inversion of the typical ontological order in which the physical object is more “real” than its representation (much as land and water have already switched places). The work of art, the dream, the memory: all these are supposed to be of lower orders than the physically present; yet the merchant first describes the Dürer prints as “unwirklich” and then, as if seeking greater precision, “überwirklich.” By contrast, the real \textit{Krug}, the real \textit{Waschbecken} – these are “nicht-wirklich,” “ganz und gar nicht wirklich.” In this Biedermeier room of familiar objects, things are not quite as they should be. In fact, they seem not \textit{to be} at all.

If we look at the structure of this diagnosis of the phenomenological crisis, we notice that it has the same pattern as the cultural critique, thus suggesting there is a link between the two – perhaps we even have something akin to what Simmel would, in his \textit{Philosophische Kultur} (1911), call the “tragedy of culture”: that is, the objective world we have created gains the upperhand such that we are overwhelmed by our own creations.\footnote{In \textit{Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten}, we are presented in}
the first instance (the cultural critique) with the privation of character as a result of modernity, and in the second (the phenomenological crisis) with the privation of presence. In the first instance we are then given a series of counterexamples; here as well. We even see a link to the cultural critique in the Zurückgekehrter’s socially-charged word choice: “In den andern Ländern drüben, selbst in meinen elendesten Zeiten, war der Krug oder der Eimer mit dem mehr oder minder frischen Wasser des Morgens etwas Selbstverständliches und zugleich Lebendiges: ein Freund. Hier war er, kann man sagen: ein Gespenst” (166). Even houses (though not, as in Malte, “verfallene traurige Häuser […] , sondern das Aller trivialste von heutigen oder gestrigen Fassaden,” 166)\(^\text{158}\) and trees – in contrast to the walnut tree of his childhood – induce this nausea with their ghostly, non-real aspect. And in contrast to the breath of life (like “der zarteste Duft eines ganzen Daseins,” 155), we have yet again something like a “geistiger Geruch, etwas namenlos Bestimmtes und doch kaum Sagbares […] ein Gegenwartsgefühl, ein europäisch-deutsches Gegenwartsgefühl” which earlier “verfolgte” the Zurückgekehrter (158). Now the “Gegenwartsgefühl” has caught up with him. There is similarity to but also intensification of the description: “und zugleich zitterte etwas durch mich hin, etwas, das mir die Brust entzweiteilte wie ein Hauch, ein so unbeschreibliches Anwehen des ewigen Nichts, des ewigen Nirgends, ein Atem nicht des Todes, sondern des Nicht-Lebens, unbeschreiblich” (166). We have moved even further away from a satisfactory description, starting at the already deficient “etwas namenlos Bestimmtes” and progressing to something which is positively “unbeschreiblich”; at the same time, this airy nothingness has not only moved closer, it has permeated the Zurückgekehrter so that he now senses himself differently, just as he felt his body for the first time upon arriving (151). He feels his “Brust” – that is, his centre – as internally split. The image of a Faust racked with doubt (“Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust”) or Parzival’s opening “zwîvel” has been adapted to emphasise the actively separating, dissociating implications. Parody and dissociation are also worked into his description of the landscape\(^\text{159}\) – the world; rather, reality is still being represented through the intervention of a cultural mediator” (65-66). I suspect it has to do with the recognition of otherness in the paintings, and the potential for a dialogical aesthetic.

\(^\text{158}\) Cf. Malte Laurids Brigge: “Wird man es glauben, daß es solche Häuser gibt? […] Aber, um genau zu sein, es waren Häuser, die nicht mehr da waren […]” (749-51). Rilke goes on to focus on a remaining wall. Interestingly, Hofmannsthal in his notes to the Briefe des Zurückgekehrten had at one point intended to allude to a similar moment in Musil’s Törleß: “einsame Zeit: das Geheimniss über dem er brütet: das Doppelte, das sich vereinigen muss. (Der Anblick der Mauer in dem Roman Törless.)” (SW XXXI 426, N1).

\(^\text{159}\) By way of contrast the landscape in Augenblicke in Griechenland has a familiar and charitable physiognomy: “Die Berge riefen einander an; das Geklüftete war lebendiger als ein Gesicht; jedes Fältchen an der fernen Flanke eines Hügels lebte: dies alles war mir nahe wie die Wurzel meiner Hand. Es war, was ich nie mehr sehen werde. Es war das
stage, as it were – as he now sees it: “das nahm ein Gesicht an, eine eigene zweideutige Miene so voll innerer Unsicherheit, bösertiger Unwirklichkeit: so nichtig lag es da – so gespensthaft nichtig – [...]” (167).

In the context of this ghostly quality of reality, Jörg Schuster draws our attention to Hofmannsthal’s own confession of his fear that ‘real’ people and things might be stolen away into his fantasy. Schuster cites a number of letters written to Christiana Gräfin Thun-Salm, the most striking of which dates to early January 1908 – that is, about a month before the last two letters of Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten were published. In that letter, Hofmannsthal writes of the potential removal of that which “einem das Leben schöner, reicher und lieber macht, [...] [und welches] durch den gefährlichen Anhauch der poetischen Vision von sich weg, aus dem Leben weg in die Traumwelt hinüber zu treiben [könnte]” (170, my emphasis). Schuster reads this, and indeed most of Hofmannsthal’s epistolary writings – fictional and nonfictional – as a way of creating distance, of aestheticising the other to the benefit of his work: “Doch ‘gefährlich’ ist dieser ‘Anhauch’ nur für das ‘Leben,’ nicht für die Poesie” (Schuster 37). His evidence is strong. He cites for instance Hofmannsthal’s letter to Helene von Nostitz (15 May 1907), in which Hofmannsthal writes that he needs Nostitz “sehr notwendig für mein Leben, für das Leben meiner Phantasie oder meiner Gedanken.” Schuster argues: “die correctio ist aufschlussreich: Das Leben wird hier auf einen produktionsästhetisch relevanten Aspekt reduziert” (37). “Reduziert” is, however, only one way to read the sentence; it fails to appreciate Hofmannsthal’s ambivalence as it is given form in the ambiguity of the sentence: it is not certain, for instance, that the movement from “mein Leben” to “das Leben meiner Phantasie oder meiner Gedanken” is merely a “correctio”; it can also be read (simultaneously perhaps) as an amplificatio, a broadening of the spectrum of her effect on him, combined with an intensification, through specification (not unlike the Zurückgekehrter’s listing) of the aesthetic. Schuster’s reading, echoing that of Schorske, seems to suggest that we can have closer access to other people, and that art is a way of distancing oneself from life and society. But this is an oversimplification of the matter: in spite of Hofmannsthal’s desire for community, he constantly reminds us that our condition is always also one of isolation – the very monologic

Gastgeschenk aller der einsamen Wanderer, die uns begegnet waren” (SW XXXIII RA2 191). See also the landscape in Andreas: “Jener Berg, der vor ihm aufstieg und dem Himmel entgegen pfeilerte, war ihm ein Bruder und mehr als ein Bruder [...] und wie er hinübersah war er gewahr daß der Berg nichts anderes war als sein Gebet. Eine unsagbare Sicherheit fiel ihn an: es war der glücklichste Augenblick seines Lebens” (SW XXX 76).
quality of the letters seems to emphasise this – inspite of our friends, lovers, and communities. Aestheticisation is not so much an act of distancing – we are already placed at a distance – as it is a reification or acknowlegement of that condition. Believing that we can live life immediately is as much, if not more so, a sickness as trying to give form to our frustration with this condition.

Indeed, if we look again more closely at the letter to Christiana Gräfin Thun-Salm, we see that Schuster presents only one side of the story. There are several remarkable things about this letter in connection with Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten. First, we note that there is a potential for being pushed out of life (wegtreiben), reminiscent of the Zurückgekehrter’s fear, “dies Europa könnte mich mir selber wegstehlen” (152). Our so-called ‘reality’ steals, or pulls away, the self; the poetic vision drives away the ‘real’ other. They are mirror images of each other, and bring to mind again the contrary motion of the buckets in the well of the metaphor in Poesie und Leben: “Das Wort als Träger eines Lebensinhaltes und das traumhafte Bruderwort, welches in einem Gedicht stehen kann, streben auseinander und schweben fremd aneinander vorüber, wie die beiden Eimer eines Brunnens” (GW Prosa I 263). Second, we should pay attention to how this displacement – on either side – occurs: namely, with a breath. In Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten, it is “ein Hauch, ein so unbeschreibliches Anwehen des ewigen Nichts” which threatens the subject; in the letter to the Gräfin, it is “durch den gefährlichen Anhauch der poetischen Vision” which threatens real people and things. Again, the two letters – one fictional, one not, but both nevertheless artfully constructed – seem to describe the same movement from opposite perspectives. From the perspective of ‘real’ life and the ‘real’ letter, art is the danger. But from the perspective of the ‘fictional’ letter and the ‘fictional life’ of the Zurückgekehrter, a fictionalised ‘reality’ seems to be the danger.

To do justice to this knotty issue, we have to look closely at the third and fourth letters’ depiction of the aesthetic encounter and what leads up to it. In light of this general existential malaise and phenomenological precariousness, the Zurückgekehrter attempts a self-diagnosis. He is not naïve; rather, he is fully aware of the possibility that this is all but an instance of severe hypochondria, brought about by something that “in der europäischen Luft für den bereitzuliegen scheint, der von weither zurückkommt, nachdem er sehr lange, vielleicht zu lange, fort war” (167). This is the first instance of self-reflection with respect to the possibility of having been away longer than necessary. Has the Zurückgekehrter abandoned something? Has he been avoiding something? Or has he, like Iwein, simply been enjoying his âventiure, without considering how much time has
passed, without fulfilling his responsibility to return home punctually? Or is this a broader issue of time always being out of joint? This is all speculation – we never get to learn what it was that started him on his journey, or why it took eighteen years – but it is also a sly gesture on Hofmannsthal’s part. While working on *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, Hofmannsthal was also writing a series of notes for a monologue, or “zweistimmiges Selbstgespräch” (*SW XXX* 466). The speaker was a “Revenant” – that is, a ghost, a spirit who has returned. Not only the monological quality, but also the link between ghostliness and returning comes into focus. The Zurückgekehrter experiences the world as ghostly, but, as the man who has returned, as the man who feels separated from his body and who experiences the world ‘at a distance’ as it were, he is also the revenant. In the parlance of the late twentieth or early twenty-first century, we might speak of a “para-subjective seeing.”

What is it about the revenant that makes it so powerful a trope? For Hofmannsthal’s revenant, there are two voices: “(innere Unterstimme, Vorwürfe aussprechend, Oberstimme beschwichtigend)” (*SW XXX* 177). An internal, unannounced but socially conditioned conflict seems to be present in the Zurückgekehrter as well.

Simmel, again, comes to our aid in detecting this conflict. The Zurückgekehrter now explicitly links his nausea to the money he has made, or rather, to that which money has come to mean. That is, in fact, the one thing that has become clear:

> Ich kann heute nicht in klare Worte bringen, was wirbelnd durch mein ganzes Ich ging: aber daß mein Geschäft und mein eigenes erworbenes Geld mich ekeln mußten, […] ich hatte zwanzigtausend Beispiele in mich hineingeschluckt: wie sie das Leben selber vergessen über dem, was nichts sein sollte als Mittel zum Leben und für nichts gelten dürfte als für ein Werkzeug. (167-68)

As with the inversion of reality and non-reality, so too money has been attributed a significance not essential to it. He continues:

> Um mich war seit Monaten eine Sintflut von Gesichtern, die von nichts geritten wurden als von dem Geld, das sie hatten, oder von dem Geld, das anderen hatten. Ihre Häuser, ihre Monumente, ihre Straßen, das war für mich in diesem etwas

---

This lines up perfectly with Simmel’s diagnosis that, “Je mehr das Leben der Gesellschaft ein geldwirtschaftliches wird, desto wirksamer und deutlicher prägt sich in dem bewußten Leben der relativistische Charakter des Seins aus” (716). Capitalistic gain is growth without character, without life, a virus, like the “schleichende Infektion” that has taken hold of the Zurückgekehrter. The modern preoccupation with money has morphed into something akin to a religion, so thoroughly has the new way of life imbied in the desire for the growth of capital for its own sake – a veritable “Nicht-Existenz” (168). Yet this way of thinking has pervaded even the merchant’s own life such that the physical objects before him exist, like money, only as provisional things, waiting in anticipation. Money, as a symbol of modern flux, comes to stand in for a view of a world that resists reification. Faces appear again, yet they are so warped, carried by the flood of exchange, that they become, like the landscape described above, a parody of faces, a “Fratze.”

It seems he has found his sought-after, commonly understood language after all (i.e. money), but it is not the language he expected. An hour before a very important meeting, completely unable to speak on behalf of his company’s interests, he contemplates his options: “In den großen Straßen herumzugehen war unmöglich; irgendwo hineingehen und Zeitung lesen war ebenso unmöglich; denn die redeten nur allzusehr dieselbe Sprache wie die Gesichter und die Häuser” – that is, the language of greed and Geld (168). In effort to escape the noise of this ‘language’ he ducks into a “stille” side street, tracing the typical flight from unpleasantness of “reality,” or rather, the insecurity of his notion of reality. The expected stillness, contrasting with both the hectic movement and the noise of the bigger streets,\(^\text{161}\) initiates the Zurückgekehrter into an atmosphere quite different from what he has experienced thus far, and yet, it will also be strikingly familiar to what the Briefe des Zurückgekehrten have already portrayed. He notices, first, a placard advertising an exhibition of paintings and illustrations and decides that this will distract him from his “unsinnigen Gedanken” (168).\(^\text{162}\) As a man in spiritual crisis might find himself guided

\(^{161}\) The desire to avoid the crowdedness of city life was made popular by Benjamin, quoting Simmel, in his Baudelaire essay (Frisby, Fragments of Modernity 77-79).

\(^{162}\) Formally, this repeats the structure of flight depicted in Das Märchen der 672. Nacht, but with key differences. Whereas the merchant’s son flees the uncanny juxtaposition of human and work of art for pleasant fragrances, the
imperceptibly to a place of worship, so this Rückgekehrter enters a gallery, not consciously looking for guidance, though, as he says: “es gibt keine Zufälle, und ich sollte diese Bilder sehen, sollte sie in dieser Stunde sehen, in dieser aufgewühlten Verfassung, in diesem Zusammenhang” (168). The fortuitous nature of this situation – and the contrast to his “aufgewühlten Verfassung” – renders it that much clearer in its singularity. The sense that it was meant to be also suggests the Rückgekehrter has attributed to this experience a sense of fatedness, of Schicksal. For the reader, the experience is already laden with the meaning attributed to it retrospectively by the author of the letters. Interestingly, he attempts, as he has frequently done so far, to catalogue what he saw: the number and kind of works, the colours. Indeed, his tone is quite cool, characterised by the Gleichgültigkeit of the phenomenological gaze, until he mentions the colours. The pictures

schienen mir in den ersten Augenblicken grell und unruhig, ganz roh, ganz sonderbar, ich mußte mich erst zurechtfinden, um überhaupt die ersten als Bild, als Einheit zu sehen – dann aber, dann sah ich, dann sah ich sie alle so, jedes einzelne, und alle zusammen, und die Natur in ihnen, und die menschliche Seelenkraft, die hier die Natur geformt hatte, und Baum und Strauch und Acker und Abhang die da gemalt waren, und noch das andre, das, was hinter dem Gemalten war, das Eigentliche, das unbeschreiblich Schicksalhafte – das alles sah ich so, daß ich das Gefühl meiner selbst an diese Bilder verlor, und mächtig wieder zurückbekam, und wieder verlor! Wie aber könnte ich etwas so Unfaßliches in Worte bringen, etwas so Plötzliches, so Starkes, so Unzerlegbares! (169)

The initial confusion, which hitherto manifested itself in terms of a vague disjunction of things from reality, now has been given form (and Schicksal); it has been reified in the work of art, and set in motion by the overwhelming intensity of colour. The senses are bombarded by what we might call a Neue Sinnlichkeit. The excited pace of the text – strengthened by repetition and intensification with each new beginning (“dann aber, dann sah ich, dann sah ich sie alle so”) – reflects this bombardment with an altogether new tone for the Briefe, evoking the mystical language of the visio and locating a substantial, unified otherness that has specificity and existence; first the internal cohesion of this world (a closed and self-sufficient, aesthetic world), then the

Zurückgekehrter abandons the noxious air and lifeless world of things and directs himself towards art – and the humanity discernible in it.
sense of the artist behind it all – formed by nature and in turn a giver of form – then finally that essential thing. This recalls a much earlier, critical piece by Hofmannsthal: his 1893 “Die Malerei in Wien.” In this early text Hofmannsthal expresses an urgent concern for the proper reception of art:

Unser Publikum setzt sich vor einem Bild zu allen möglichen Nebensächlichkeiten des Kunstwerkes in Beziehung, nur nicht zur Hauptsache, zum eigentlich Malerischen; es interessiert sich für die Anekdote, für kleine Mätzchen und Kunststückchen, für alles, nur nicht für das eine Notwendige: ob hier eine künstlerische Individualität die freie Kraft gehabt hat, eine neue, aus lebendigen Augen erschaute Perzeption des Weltbildes in einer Weise darzustellen, die sich der Seele des Betrachters zu übertragen geeignet ist. (GWE RA I 526-27).

The Zurückgekehrter – perhaps because he has been spared the eighteen years of growing philistinism – is able to and does see what he suspects is the essential in these paintings, and in them he sees too that they were made by a “künstlerische Individualität” who had the “freie Kraft” to give form to his perception of the world-picture. The emphasis on the human activity should not go unnoticed. In Chapter 1 I referred to Hofmannsthal’s experience reading Otway’s Venice Preserv’d and his recognition of the faults and greatness of the human being who composed it. Likewise, in the Ansprache, Hofmannsthal draws our attention to the constructed, created nature of the knotted tapestry, “[…] von Menschenfingern in endlosen Stunden zu Tausenden von Knoten Zusammengeknüpftes […]” (SW XXXIII RA2 7-8). His appreciation is an aesthetic one in so far as it responds to the sensible elements of the work of art, but in addition to this he almost always invokes the person behind the work’s existence and the effort, work, and even suffering that went into the creation. And so once again, we have found the existential guarantee, as we saw with the walnut tree. For the suggestion here is that, in this vision, in confronting such works of art, one will in some sense lose oneself. But then there must be a self to lose in the first place; thus one also gains knowledge that the self exists over and against, and ultimately in relation to the “Einheit” of the paintings. Simmel puts it this way, again establishing the contrast to the non-artistic sphere of things that have been made solely for the purposes of profit: “Das Kunstwerk ist unter allem

163 The importance of work will play a great role in Die Frau ohne Schatten as well. See Chapter 4.
Menschenwerk die geschlossenste Einheit, die sich selbst genügendste Totalität – selbst den Staat nicht ausgenommen” (629). Further, “Das Kunstwerk fordert nur einen Menschen, diesen aber ganz und seiner zentralsten Innerlichkeit nach: es vergilt dies dadurch, daß seine Form ihm der reinste Spiegel und Ausdruck des Subjekts zu sein gestattet” (630). This applies both to the artist and to the ‘receiver’ of the art. For the first time in two decades, perhaps longer, the Zurückgekehrter himself is able to exhibit a Frömmigkeit that involves giving himself over to a work which requires him totally, and insofar as it requires him totally, it allows for a sense of the self as, in this moment of Hingabe, whole.\footnote{Cf. The \textit{Varianten} to the \textit{Ansprache}: “Hier scheinen wir etwa in Gefahr, uns selber zu verlieren: großer Irrthum! / Hier werden wir erst geweckt, uns selber zu besitzen: denn wir schaffen ja den unsterblichen Inhalt dieser Gebilde, indem wir sie lebendig nachfühlen” (\textit{SW XXXIII RA 2} 255).} The work of art, in l’art pour l’art fashion, is a world unto itself. In the \textit{Ansprache} Hofmannsthal asserts: “Ist es doch die Natur in ihrer Totalität, die sich durch die Farbe dem Auge zu offenbaren strebt. Spricht doch zu dem Maler, wie zu dem Dichter, eine Sprache, so manngfaltig, so verwickelt, mit tausendfältigem Hüben und Drüben, Oben und Unten, Zuvor und Hernach […]” (\textit{Ansprache} 9). That is, the totality is experienced only in its impossible contradictoriness; it is given a frame, a stage upon which to present itself, in the particular work of art, at this particular hour, and here, in the effect of the colours.\footnote{Cf. Hofmannsthal’s essay “Die Bühne als Traumbild,” which also evokes the notion of suffering before a kind of phenomenological uncertainty: “Wer die Bühne aufbauen wird, muß durchs Auge gelebt und gelitten haben. Tausendmal muß er sich geschworen haben, daß das Sichtbare allein existiert, und tausendmal muß er schaudernd sich gefragt haben, ob denn das Sichtbare nicht, vor allen Dingen, nicht existiert. Der Anblick des wohlbekannten Baumes, den der Vollmond verwandelt, zum König über seinesgleichen erhebt, muß ihn erschüttert haben. Er muß Liebe, Haß und Furcht gelitten haben und gespürt haben, wie Liebe, Haß und Furcht ein vertrautes Tal, ein gewohntes Haus, ein höchst gewohntes Gemach verwandeln, daß er jenes Höhle des Hades gleich, deren Wände sich grinsend verzerrten, wenn der blutschänderische Muttermörder sie betritt. De Quincey, Poe, Baudelaire sind seine Lieblingsbücher. An ihren dauernden furchtbaren feierlichen Träumen mißt er die Macht und die Farbentiefe seiner eigenen Träume” (\textit{SW XXXIII RA} 42). Note that the artist, like the Zurückgekehrter, measures not reality against imagination, but his dreams against his art. The stage – because its erection results from having suffered, and having doubted reality – is in this instance the standard.}
und die direkte Verneinung jedes Fürsichseins” (714). The work of art, in this case, has cordoned off a space for autonomy and particularity. Yet, as Nietzsche reminds us:

Von diesen Intuitionen aus führt kein regelmäßiger Weg in das Land der gespenstischen Schemata, der Abstraktionen: für sie ist das Wort nicht gemacht, der Mensch verstummt, wenn er sie sieht, oder redet in lauter verbotenen Metaphern und unerhörten Begriffsfügungen, um wenigstens durch das Zertrümmern und Verhöhnern der alten Begriffsschranken dem Eindrucke der mächtigen gegenwärtigen Intuition schöpferisch zu entsprechen. (“Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge” 887ff) 166

The Zurückgekehrter has found himself in this position. He does not remain silent, but he recognises the futility of trying to give a naturalistic representation of the encounter with the works of art. Listing off the scenes and objects portrayed in the paintings does nothing to reify a subjective experience; instead, he must make use of “unerhörten Begriffsfügungen [der] mächtigen gegenwärtigen Intuition schöpferisch zu entsprechen.” To do this, he devotes most of the remainder of this letter to a kind of hymn to the power of colour, and returns to this again in his final letter.

At this point it is worth referring to the growing interest in colour around the turn of the century. 167 As already mentioned, 1907 was a year that marked not only Hofmannsthals fascination with Van Gogh, but also Rilke’s fascination with Cézanne. 168 The two authors’ writings on the subject of


167 As Carlpeter Braegger had already shown in 1979 (Das Visuelle und das Plastische), the importance of visual art for Hofmannsthal’s literary practice was established early on. Braegger’s study includes a reading of Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten that is compatible with what I argue: Braegger suggests that part of Hofmannsthal’s Kulturkritik was catalysed by the relative dearth of art in Germany before and at the turn of the century; art was, for Hofmannsthal, as it was for Meier-Graefer, a sign of the culture (92-95). This reading extends into his later work, and into the crafts as well. In an address held before the Österreichischer Werkbund in 1919, Hofmannsthal wrote of the “schönen, qualitativ hochstehenden, mit Liebe gefertigten Waren” as “ein Exponent des österreichischen Kultur” (SW XXXIV RA3 239), “während er Anzeichen einer ‘erschöpften Kultur’ (P III 459) dort findet, wo der bürokratische Baugeist ‘ein bloß Formales der Kultur als ein Herrschendes bewahren zu können’ glaubte (P III 458)” (Braegger, Das Visuelle und das Plastische 95).

168 Rilke’s turn away from Van Gogh came about in the wake of his discovery of the latter’s all-too-conscious composition of his paintings. Rilke, for whom an excellent work of art must be completed in a trance-like, wholly sub-conscious state of mind, found Van Gogh’s meticulousness and his ability to speak coherently about his own work a disappointment. He describes this in the Briefe über Cézanne: “Daß man Van Gogh’s Briefe so gut lesen kann, daß
colour in painting are remarkable for the many points of contact; that both authors felt the epistolary form (Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten and the so-called Briefe über Cézanne, collected in the Briefwechsel with Clara Rilke-Westhoff) was an appropriate medium for presenting the experience is also worth considering. That is, both attempt to give form to the aesthetic experience and reveal, in the context of the letter, that this is ultimately impossible. Nevertheless, Rilke wanted his letters published, and Hofmannsthal’s fictional letters were written to be published from the beginning. One wonders if there was some undocumented contact between Rilke and Hofmannsthal during this time that led to their treatment of the topic. In any case, it seems they came to their particular formulations independently, and at about the same time (summer 1907). It is not my aim to go into great detail about Rilke’s “Cézanne-Erlebnis” and compare it to Hofmannsthal’s depicted “van Gogh-Erlebnis”; studies on Rilke and Hofmannsthal abound, and this topic goes beyond the intentions of this chapter. Nevertheless, there will be occasion to compare and contrast the two descriptions; this will, I hope, give greater articulation to a text that is, even for Hofmannsthal, rather difficult!

The Zurückgekehrter’s initial description of the colours is simple enough, evoking something of the superlative intensity of a medieval illuminated manuscript: “Da ist ein unglaubliches, stärkstes Blau, das kommt immer wieder, ein Grün wie von geschmolzenen Smaragden, ein Gelb bis zum Orange” (169). Yet very quickly the Zurückgekehrter changes his approach, instead describing the colours’ power to suggest something of that Frömmigkeit he has been missing in all his encounters and interactions with this new Germany. This Frömmigkeit is not explicitly referenced, but the description is by now familiar:

text continues...
Aber was sind Farben, wofern nicht das innerste Leben der Gegenstände in ihnen hervorbricht! Und dieses innerste Leben war da, Baum und Stein und Mauer und Hohlweg *gaben ihr Innerstes vor sich*, gleichsam *entgegen warfen* sie es mir, aber nicht die Wollust und Harmonie ihres schönen stummen Lebens, wie sie mir vor Zeiten manchmal aus alten Bildern wie eine zauberische Atmosphäre *entgegenfloß*: nein, nur die Wucht ihres Daseins, das wütende, von Unglaublichkeit umstarrte Wunder ihres Dasein *fiel* meine Seele an. (169, my emphasis)

Indeed, these colours *do illuminate* as in a manuscript: and what they illuminate is, likewise, a stance so devotional (note the use of “gaben” and “entgegen warfen”), that it begins to reach towards sacrifice. But this sacrifice is not self-annihilation. If anything, it dramatises the struggle against annihilation, against the fall into the lacklustre deportment of a “Nicht-Existenz” or a “Nicht-Leben.” The colours display instead an energetic and assertive movement: *Wucht* instead of *Wollust und Harmonie*; their innermost life “fiel [seine] Seele an” instead of flowing to him, as before. The image of *Frömmigkeit* here is anything but the quiet attitude of passivity. It is self-assertive, yet in this self-assertion there is also an altruistic moment. In his reading of *Ein Brief*, Schuster suggests that this directionality (there “entgegenheben”; cf. here “entgegenwarfen,” “entgegenfloß”) “täuscht darüber hinweg, dass keinesfalls ’die stummen und manchmal unbelebten Kreaturen’ aktiv sind, dass es zu keiner wirklichen Interaktion oder Kommunikation kommt, sondern dass die Belebung der Kreaturen auf einem Deutungsakt des Subjekts beruht” (152). The directionality is thus, if we follow Schuster, more of a projection than anything else. He might well be right. The highly personal nature of the experience – which the *Zurückgekehrter* has already highlighted – again would point to this. Further, the subsequent description seems to apply just as much to the *Zurückgekehrter* as it does to the visual experience:

[…] ein Wesen jeder Baum, jeder Streif gelben oder grünlichen Feldes, jeder Zaun, jeder in den Steinhügel gerissene Hohlweg, ein Wesen der zinnerne Krug, die irdene Schüssel, der Tisch, der plumpe Sessel – sich mir wie neugeboren aus dem furchtbaren Chaos des Nichtlebens, aus dem Abgrund der Wesenlosigkeit entgegenob, daß ich fühlte, nein, daß ich wußte, wie jedes dieser Dinge, dieser

172 Schneider makes the observation that this is a “Drama der letzten Dinge” which is “performativ vorgeführt” and notes that several elements of classical rhetoric (the *figurae sententiae*) are present in the text (223, and footnote 62).
Can we presume that these depicted pitchers and tables and bowls – all things which the *Zurückgekehrter* had earlier experienced as not real – have truly been through this fight for existence which the *Zurückgekehrter* portrays? Is this the positive image of that which the *Zurückgekehrter* earlier described, with reference to himself, as “ein Gewoge, ein Chaos, ein Ungeborenes” (155)? If we subscribe to Nietzsche’s *Wunde des Daseins* (which even seems to resonate in the “Wucht” and “Wunder ihres Daseins”), then yes. Art exposes the wound of existence, and is born out of it, but it does not heal it.173 In a similar vein, Hofmannsthal wrote an essay in 1905 about Hermann Stehr’s book, *Der begrabene Gott*, where he praises the book for taking the reader into depths, wo wir nie waren. Es sei denn, indem wir litten. […] Aber hier hat das Namenlose seinen Namen bekommen, das Stumme seine Sprache und das Gestaltlose seine Form. Hier haben Schöpferhände der Finsternis ein Gesicht gegeben und aus dem Alpdruck etwas gebaut und gebildet. Und wir erkennen die dumpfen Tiefen schwerer Stunden wieder (*SW XXXIII RA2* 69-70).

Anyone who has suffered knows the fear of anonymity, formlessness, and the shadow of lifelessness. This book, Hofmannsthal argues, gives a face to such suffering. The human hands that can give the darkness a face do us all a service insofar as they give form to that which in its formlessness makes us feel powerless; they render its visage visible (to the eye or to the imagination), and allow us to recognise it, now with the “Pathos der Distanz.”174 The paintings the *Zurückgekehrter* sees are performing the same function. At the end of the essay, Hofmannsthal writes two more sentences important in this context, showing a remarkable consistency of thought: “Und noch ein Wort: Groß, groß, groß. Und noch eins: Ehrfurcht” (71). This greatness and the

173 The relation between birth and art will be explored more in the context of discussing *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (Chapter 4).

174 See Lichtblau.
Ehrfurcht, related to Frömmigkeit, are present in the paintings as well. For Hofmannsthal, greatness and Ehrfurcht, or Frömmigkeit, must coexist if the depths of being are to be given form.

And art works, as creative products of expression (a sentence later the Zurückgekehrter refers to a “Sprache” which speaks into his soul), gives these things which have suffered through the storm a place to exist; in this way, suffering is as much a precondition for the success of this struggle as is the willingness and devotion of the artist’s hand. They are all “ein Wesen” – they have all suffered through birth out of a “fürchterlichen Zweifel” and are all made of the same thing, of paint on canvas; a microcosm, “eine Welt” (170) as an answer to the Zurückgekehrter’s struggle to locate the world and things around him. The aesthetic – the colours and the created nature of the paintings – are what allow him finally to set foot on terra firma, “wie eine[r], der nach ungemessenem Taumel festen Boden unter den Füßen fühlt und um den ein Sturm rast, in dessen Rasen hinein er jauchhzen möchte” (170). That which earlier “wirbelnd durch mein ganzes Ich ging” (167-68) has been externalised – or exorcised? – such that he stands in the calm and silent centre, while the storm churns around him. The storm is the “Wucht ihres Daseins,” and he finds himself engulfed by it, yet still, in a gallery, surrounded by paintings. The coloured forms have within them this raging storm, and they in turn are born in it: in a storm “gebaren sich mir zu

---

175 “Ehrfurcht” will likewise be an important motif in Augenblicke in Griechenland and in Die Frau ohne Schatten.

176 Cf. Rilke who, in remarkably similar fashion, writes in Briefe über Cézanne: “Kunstdinge sind ja immer Ergebnisse des in Gefahrgewesen-Seins, des in einer Erfahrung bis ans Ende-Gegangenseins, bis wo kein Mensch mehr weiterkann. Je weiter man geht, desto eigener, desto persönlicher, desto einziger wird ja ein Erlebnis und das Kunstding endlich ist die notwendige, ununterdrückbare, möglichst endgültige Aussprache dieser Einzigkeit… Darin liegt die ungeheure Hilfe des Kunstdings für das Leben dessen, der es machen muß, – daß es seine Zusammenfassung ist; der Knoten im Rosenkranz, bei dem sein Leben ein Gebet spricht, der immer wiederkehrende, für ihn selbst gegebene Beweis seiner Einheit und Wahrhaftigkeit, der doch nur ihm selber sich zukehrt und nach außen anonym wirkt, namenlos, als Notwendigkeit, als Wirklichkeit, als Dasein –” (Briefwechsel 594). The motif of the return is likewise present in both writers’ descriptions. Bamberg has shown that Hofmannsthal’s fascination with things is not simply that of “eines Vorbereiters” (see Bamberg 36-45, esp. 38).

177 Simmel too emphasises the clarifying process things undergo when they are artistically represented: “Das Kunstding endlich ist die notwendige, ununterdrückbare, möglichst endgültige Aussprache dieser Einzigkeit… Darin liegt die ungeheure Hilfe des Kunstdings für das Leben dessen, der es machen muß, – daß es seine Zusammenfassung ist; der Knoten im Rosenkranz, bei dem sein Leben ein Gebet spricht, der immer wiederkehrende, für ihn selbst gegebene Beweis seiner Einheit und Wahrhaftigkeit, der doch nur ihm selber sich zukehrt und nach außen anonym wirkt, namenlos, als Notwendigkeit nur, als Wirklichkeit, als Dasein –” (Briefwechsel 594). The motif of the return is likewise present in both writers’ descriptions. Bamberg has shown that Hofmannsthal’s fascination with things is not simply that of “eines Vorbereiters” (see Bamberg 36-45, esp. 38).


liebe diese Bäume, mit den Wurzeln starrend in der Erde, mit den Zweigen starrend gegen die Wolken, in einem Sturm gaben diese Erdenrisse, diese Täler zwischen Hügeln sich preis, noch im Wuchten der Felsblöcke war erstarrter Sturm” (170). The storm is also the “Antwort” from the “unbekannte Seele von unfaßbarer Stärke” (170), and it is in this sense that the Zurückgekehrter feels himself like someone who wishes to enter into it, rejoicing (“in dessen Rasen hinein er jauchzen möchte”). The calmness and (aesthetic) distance – achieved paradoxically by being in the centre of the storm – give to him the space requisite for desire, will, and relation, and even that Frömmigkeit which had been absent – in him – all along. Heidegger’s words will later echo this idea of re-positioning through speaking: Van Gogh’s work “hat gesprochen. In der Nähe des Werkes sind wir jäh anderswo gewesen, als wir gewöhnlich zu sein pflegen” (Ursprung des Kunstwerkes 21). With Hofmannsthal, however, there is an emphasis not on speaking alone, but on answering. Now that the Zurückgekehrter can see the world, he wishes to join in, to remove the distance, rejoicing, and give himself over as well, in answer to the soul who painted this world of revealed connectivity – not, importantly, a world that is taken up by some larger entity, but one which rather allows for one’s shifting place in the weave, and in the text.


180 Things were described above as having lost their place, “gespenstisch, und zugleich provisorisch, wartend, sozusagen vorläufig die Stelle des wirklichen Kruges” (166). Now the “Wucht ihres Daseins” is reborn in the storm. This has a parallel in Heidegger’s depictions of Lichtung and Verbergung: “Wahrheit geschieht nur so, daß sie in dem durch sie selbst sich öffnenden Streit und Spielraum sich einrichtet. […] Eine wesentliche Weise, wie die Wahrheit in dem durch sie eröffneten Seienden einrichtet, ist das Sich-ins-Werk-setzen der Wahrheit” (49). The “Sich-ins-Werk-setzen der Wahrheit” is a paraphrasis for art (25).

181 Heidegger’s comments on Van Gogh’s painting of the “Bauernschuhe” resemble Hofmannsthal’s primarily in the idea of revelation of truth as event. “Van Goghs Gemälde ist die Eröffnung dessen, was das Zeug, das Paar Bauernschuhe, in Wahrheit ist” (“Ursprung des Kunstwerkes” 21). Concomitant with this is an a-typical subject position. In order to witness the event of truth, we must be shaken out of our everyday habits of thought when we confront the aesthetic, according to Heidegger: “Dazu ist nötig, daß zuvor die Schranken des Selbstverständlichen fallen und die geläufigen Scheinbegriffe auf die Seite gestellt werden” (24-25).

The experience of interconnectivity is not only mediated by colour, it exists, for the *Zurückgekehrter*, in the colours themselves. He can feel:

[…], konnte das Untereinander, das Miteinander der Gebilde fühlen, wie ihr innerstes Leben in der Farbe vorbrach und *wie die Farben eine um der anderen willen lebten* und wie eine, geheimnisvoll mächtig, *die andern alle trug*, und konnte in dem allem ein Herz spüren, die Seele dessen, der das gemacht hatte, der mit dieser Vision sich selbst antwortete auf den Sturkrampf der fürchterlichsten Zweifel, konnte fühlen, konnte wissen, konnte durchblicken, konnte genießen Abgründe und Gipfel, Außen und Innen, eins und alles im zehntausendsten Teil der Zeit, als ich da die Worte hinschrieb, und war wie doppelt, war Herr über mein Leben zugleich, Herr über meine Kräfte, meinen Verstand, fühlte die Zeit vergehen, wußte, nun bleiben nur noch zwanzig Minuten, noch zehn, noch fünf, und stand draußen, rief einen Wagen, fuhr hin. (170, my emphasis)

I have included almost the entire sentence in this quote because it is remarkable, first, for its length, but also for its rhythm, and, most importantly, for its gradual descriptive movement from the centre of the storm to the open city street, enacting aesthetically in its syntax, length, and persistence the connectivity which it describes, and the openness of the effect ("fuhr hin"). This long, insistent sentence merits attention. This connectivity is not casual; it is intended, and it too is an example of *Frömmigkeit*. Colours bear each other, reminding one of the tree that bears out of *Frömmigkeit* ("darum trug der Ölbaum" SW XXXI 388). And insofar as the colours bear each other, we can see the “Herz” of the person who gave these colours their place and in creating this vision “sich selbst antwortete auf den Sturkrampf.” The artist, with his “Seele von unfaßbarer Stärke” was strong enough to paint, in spite of the great doubt that threatened him. Painting was his defiant, world-forming answer to the abyss – and he gave this answer to himself. Yet in doing

---

183 C.f. Rilke’s description of the colours in the Cézanne paintings: “Ich wollte aber eigentlich noch von Cézanne sagen: daß es niemals noch so aufgezeigt worden ist, wie sehr das Malen unter den Farben vor sich geht, wie man sie ganz allein lassen muß, damit sie sich gegenseitig auseinandersetzen. Ihr Verkehr untereinander: das ist die ganze Malerei” (Briefe über Cézanne 627-28). Further, Rilke sees in the colours of Cézanne’s paintings a sacrificial component as well: “[…] schwächere Lokalfarben geben sich ganz auf und begnügen sich damit, die stärkste vorhandene zu spiegeln. In diesem Hin und Wider von gegenseitigem vielartigen Einfluß schwingt das Bildinnere, steigt und fällt in sich selbst zurück und hat nicht eine stehende Stelle. Nur dies für heute … Du siehst, wie schwer es wird, wenn man ganz nah an die Tatsachen heran will…” (Briefwechsel 631).
so, he also gave the paintings their existence, and thus gave their potential audience (the Zurückgekehrter) a new world-picture ("Weltbild") as well. This self-centred act thus is also altruistic by nature of its effect and its inherent Frömmigkeit, but it is also knowingly artificial, i.e. aesthetic, expressing a desire to see the world as picture – a Weltbild in the Heideggerian sense of the term – but in a new way. When Heidegger writes in Ursprung des Kunstwerkes “Das Werk stellt als Werk eine Welt auf” (31) he is suggesting that the work – the object – is the creator of the world, but we must also remember, he reminds us at the beginning of that text, that the work is created by and creates the artist. The genetic origin gets lost in circularity (“So müssen wir den Kreisgang vollziehen,” 3). In a similar manner, the content of this aesthetic answer – the colours bearing each other in support – plays up the interdependence and confusion of internal and external worlds, of subject and object, and can thus be conceived as a gesture of altruism just as much as it is one of egotism, highlighting an ethical moment in the dialogical (if also circular) movement of the aesthetic.

The gesture of Frömmigkeit spins the wheel and seems to allow for that communion with the observer in his aesthetic enjoyment – perhaps the highest point for the Zurückgekehrter is that moment of enjoying the contrasts brought together: “konnte fühlen, konnte wissen, konnte durchblicken, konnte genießen.” But Genießen is more complicated than we might think it is; for Hofmannsthal, behind the enjoyment is always the awareness that something has been sacrificed: there is always an absence even in the moment of most profoundly felt presence and immediacy, thus reintroducing a challenge to the notion of communion as coexistence – something always goes missing in the calculation. As discussed in chapter two with reference to the Ansprache, uttering the word “schön” already involves a certain Frömmigkeit of Genießen as well: “Und indem unser Mund es wieder und wieder auszusprechen von einer tiefen Magie gezwungen wird, nehmen wir an dem ungeheuren Reich der Kunst einen so ungeheuren Antheil, als wären es tausende Seelen in uns, die sich im Acte des ästhetischen Geniessens regen […]” (SW XXXIII RA2 11). In this moment the Zurückgekehrter does not express this feeling of vulnerability, though in

---

184 That is, if we have an artistic receptivity for things. Art reception for Hofmannsthal involves something of an artistic productivity as well, if not expressed, then at least in the imagination. Cf. Der Dichter und diese Zeit: “Denn er [der Dichter] leidet an allen Dingen und indem er an ihnen leidet, genießt er sie” (SW XXXIII RA2, 138). This notion has its predecessor in Goethe’s “An Suleika” (West-östlicher Divan 66). Suleika’s perfume can please only because thousands of roses have been sacrificed in the process (“Dir mit Wohlgeruch zu kosen, / Deine Freuden zu erhöhn, / Knospend müssen tausend Rosen / Erst in Gluten untergehn” 1-4).
the fifth letter he will. For the moment, he feels master of himself – finally – and of his actions. As if “doppelt,” he no longer senses internal separation (dissociation) so much as multiplication.\(^{185}\) He experiences the internal chasm in a positive rather than negative, privative fashion. He is able, as it were, to embrace the Other within. And with this awareness of doubleness comes also double perspective: he is here, amidst the paintings, but also acutely aware of the passing of time, of the impossibility of the sustained moment: this doubleness\(^{186}\) gives him the ability to direct himself to the task at hand – wholly so, and with that he “fuhr hin.”

The conference, with its financial interests, is introduced in the same tone; there is no abrupt shift, and we see how, from the Zurückgekehrter’s point of view, the financial world can be ‘conquered’ by a heightened awareness of the relations of things in the world. There is something kunstmärchenhaft about this bringing together of the different spheres: in Heinrich von Ofterdingen, Novalis notably gives the Kaufleute the role of describing poetry to the young Heinrich. The economic and the poetic, in such a world, are not seen as contradictory spheres fighting for the resources of the human spirit. On the contrary:

Jedermann sucht seine Bedürfnisse auf eine gesellige und reitzende Art zu befriedigen. Der Kaufmann befindet sich wohl dabei, und wird geehrt. Die Künste und Handwerke vermehren und veredeln sich, den Fleißigen dünkt die Arbeit leichter, weil […] er […] sicher ist, die bunten Früchte manichfacher und belohnender Beschäftigungen dafür mizugenießen. Geld, Thätigkeit und Waaren erzeugen sich gegenseitig, […] und das Land und die Städte blühen auf. (23, my emphasis)

This world exists, of course, only in fantasy. Capital, in this case, is not a dead-end; instead, it is part of a larger cycle of activity and production and enjoyment of wares and works; the one does

\(^{185}\) Split personality and schizophrenia are familiar themes in Hofmannsthal’s work, especially Andreas. Here we have the positive correlative, which identifies the multifaceted (i.e. many-faced!) nature of the soul: others, including ancestral others, are present within the self. Depending on the circumstances and perspective, this can have the effect of empowerment or it can be overpowering.

\(^{186}\) Cf. Wellbery (“Die Opfer-Vorstellung”): “die ästhetische Gegenwart hofmannsthalischer Prägung ist Gleichzeitigkeit, in die sowohl Vergangenheit als auch Zeit eingehen, ohne jedoch […] ihren Zeitindex gänzlich abzustreifen” (287). With respect to the passage in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten, I would add that the “Zeitindex” acquires a new quality in this moment of “Gleichzeitigkeit”: the Zurückgekehrter’s sense of passing time is heightened, but he is no longer concerned about it.
not eliminate the other, but rather encourages growth – even the imagery is that of a flowering plant: “und das Land und die Städte blühen auf.” Today, we use this imagery without even thinking about it. We “grow” everything: analysts and managers are supposed to help us “grow” our business, “grow” our capital, “grow” our networking opportunities. Our cultural obsession with growth is a decidedly economic (rather than ecological) one, inspired by fear of loss, recession, returning to some former state (zurückkehren). But what makes capital grow? Is it, in fact, the unmoved mover, the new god? Must it be appeased? The Zurückgekehrter had earlier written: “Ich möchte in mir selber blühn, und dies Europa könnte mich mir selber wegstehlen” (152).

Perhaps capital, like its divine predecessors, the other capricious gods, demands a sacrifice from time to time; to grow, it parasitically steals from the other faculties of human experience. And one in particular: the imagination. We shall recall how often the Zurückgekehrter has written that he had no time to imagine things, to tarry with the creatures of his imagination. He is no daydreamer, nor could he have been, he says. Yet if the imaginative faculty is necessary for the human experience, then it would seem art is a potential corrective to the “europäisch-deutsches Gegenwartsgefühl” (158). Certainly the letter seems to suggest something of the sort: perhaps there is the possibility for reconciliation. “Konferenzen von der Art, wo die Größe der Ziffern an die Phantasie appelliert und das Vielerlei, das Auseinander der Kräfte, die ins Spiel kommen, eine Gabe des Zusammensehens fordert, entscheidet nicht die Intelligenz, sondern es entscheidet sie eine geheimnisvolle Kraft” (170, my emphasis). If we did not know any better, we might think this were a matter of art, not economics. Appealing to the fantasy, to variety (as in Hogarth’s “composed variety”), to play, the connectivity of things and the secret faculty – all of this sounds like art. Can there be a poetry of economics? Perhaps yes, and perhaps this is the awareness that has been awakened in the Zurückgekehrter during the aesthetic experience: he now sees the world, including the economic world, with the sensitive eyes of poetry: “Ich konnte für meine Gesellschaft mehr erreichen, als das Direktorium mir für den denkbar günstigsten Fall aufgelegt hatte, und ich erreichte es, wie man im Traum von einer kahlen Mauer Blumen abpflückt” (171, 187)

---


my emphasis). With the business growing, he can finally pluck the flowers of his investment, as if in a dream – so says the man who never has day dreams. And we should recall that the wall – here, as in Törleß, as in Malte, and even as in Hesse’s Steppenwolf – is a surface for projection. His life, in this moment, has become dreamlike, but also in some way cinematic, or perhaps theatrical. Again, we have the reverse image of Alewyn’s reading: “Das Leben [...] läßt seiner nicht spotten. Verstoßen wird es böse und rachsüchtig. Es kehrt zurück als Feind. Es lagert sich am Wege und legt Schlingen aus nach dem, der ihm entrinnen will” (175). In the Briefe des Zurückgekehrten, the imaginative, creative, aesthetic world has been ignored in favour of utility. We might thus reformulate Alewyn’s statement: “Der Traum [...] läßt seiner nicht spotten.” The dream here stands in metonymically for the aesthetic. It is that creative element, manifested convincingly in the paintings of Van Gogh, that does not attempt to reproduce reality, but rather to create a world out of a profound existential and phenomenological doubt. The repressed has returned: initially in its malicious form – i.e. the non-reality of the objects around him – and finally in its positively poeticised, aesthetic form.

Simmel makes the argument that “alle Kunst verändert die Blickweite, in die wir uns ursprünglich und natürlich zu der Wirklichkeit stellen” (658). This seems to be precisely what the Zurückgekehrter has experienced:

Sie bringt sie uns einerseits näher, zu ihrem eigentlichen und innersten Sinn setzt sie uns in ein unmittelbares Verhältnis, hinter der kühlen Fremdheit der Außenwelt verrät sie uns die Beseeltheit des Seins, durch die es uns verwandt und verständlich ist. Daneben aber stiftet jede Kunst eine Entfernung von der Unmittelbarkeit der Dinge, sie läßt die Konkretheit der Reize zurücktreten und spannt einen Schleier zwischen uns und sie, gleich dem feinen bläulichen Duft, der sich um ferne Berge legt. (658-59)

189 Hofmannsthal would later make the connection explicit with his 1921 essay “Der Ersatz für die Träume.” There he writes that city-dwellers, particularly those who have been sacrificed to the modern industrial way of life, have become machines, a tool among tools (“Werkzeug unter Werkzeugen,” GWE RA2 141); in this world – strikingly similar to that which the Zurückgekehrter sees – only numbers have speech: “[...] das einzige, was spricht, ist die Nummer” (141). Unable to dream, such people “wollen ihre Phantasie mit Bildern füllen, starken Bildern, in denen sich Lebensessenz zusammenfaßt” (141). Be it a canvas or a movie screen, people flee “von der Ziffer zur Vision” (144).
The Zurückgekehrter has achieved that bird’s eye perspective, the gift of Zusammensehen; he sees things at a distance, through a coloured haze, yet he also sees things up close: “Die Gesichter der Herren, mit denen ich verhandelte, kamen mir merkwürdig nahe” (171). In this moment, the nearness and the distance are united.

The Briefe could end here, in this moment of paradoxical union. It would thus end on a poetic, fantastic note, unscathed by further doubts. But the fourth letter continues with a postscript that functions like a pointe in a metaphysical poem. In his postscript, the Zurückgekehrter takes up this notion of distance and closeness and renders it aporically, putting into question the idea that the world of business and the world of art can exist in an unproblematic union. At the same time, the tension between the desire for community and the desire for isolation is brought into focus. The Zurückgekehrter identifies the artist as “Vincenz van Gogh” (sic!): “Es ist etwas in mir, das mich zwingt zu glauben, er wäre von meiner Generation, wenig älter als ich selbst” (171). Why is he compelled to think this? He is adopting a language reminiscent of that of the second later, in which he mentions the “Gegenwartsgefühl” which “verfolgt” him: “warum sag’ ich ‘verfolgt mich’? – warum nicht ‘erfüllt mich’?” (158). The dates of the paintings force him to imagine the painter as a contemporary. But we might well ask: why “zwingt”? Why not simply “Ich denke”? As in the first case, “das erste Wort sagt die Wahrheit” (158). Thus even in this moment of community, there is a tension: does the Zurückgekehrter see this moment of shared suffering as a positive thing, or does he, as Rilke says of Van Gogh in his Briefe über Cézanne, find it in some way “zerstörend”: “[…] kaum war Gauguin da, der ersehnte Genosse, der Gleichgesinnte –; da mußte er sich schon aus Verzweiflung die Ohren abschneiden […]” (Briefwechsel 595). Goethe, as Schneider points out, drew attention to the dangers of dealing with colour: “Denn es hatte von jeher etwas

190 Cf. Hofmannsthal’s note (N8) to the Gespräch über Gedichte: “Was wir für die verklärnde Macht der Entfernung halten (der Vergangenheit, der räuml. Ferne, der Standesferne) ist die poetische Macht in uns, das poetische Vermögen, die synthetische Kraft: der Bettler insofern er ins Fenster des Reichen hineinblickt, ist poetisch; der Greis insofern er an seine Kindheit zurückdenkt; der arme Mensch insofern er mächtige gebietende Personen imaginiert” (SW XXXI 324).

Gefährliches, von der Farbe zu handeln [...]. Hält man dem Stier ein rotes Tuch vor, so wird er wütend; aber der Philosoph, wenn man nur überhaupt von Farbe spricht, fängt an zu rasen” (Verheißung der Bilder 225 and fn77). For Hofmannsthal’s Zurückgekehrter, these two dangers are united; the danger comes from the closedness that is expressed by colour and which challenges the philosopher’s habitual distance.192 A similar fear of closing the distance, of leaping into the abyss – understood as fear of intimacy, but also fear of identification or loss of self – is to be found in Thomas Mann’s Der Tod in Venedig: there, the narrator remarks on the embarrassment and impotence of the viewer that ensues when an artist crosses the barrier between his art and the viewer, that is, becomes too intimate.193 Zilcosky argues that, given the similarities between Tadzio and Aschenbach, “A relationship with this narcissistic double would signify the ‘return home’ (Heimkehr) and to ‘himself’ (in sich) that Aschenbach dreads” (211, fn19). The expressive affinities between Mann’s and Hofmannsthal’s texts raise the question: to what has the Zurückgekehrter returned? To home? To himself? And do we read this as an ewige Wiederkunft des Gleichnen, or is such a return via intimate contact even possible? We shall return to these questions at the end of the chapter, but for now we must consider the effects of the Zurückgekehrter’s desire to maintain the security of distance.

If indeed there is a desire to maintain distance from the work of art (and the artist), then perhaps that is what prompts the Zurückgekehrter to entertain the following idea: “Ich weiß nicht, ob ich vor diese Bilder ein zweites Mal hintreten werde, doch werde ich vermutlich eines davon kaufen, aber es nicht an mich nehmen, sondern dem Kunsthändler zur Bewahrung übergeben” (171). With this consideration, the Zurückgekehrter has introduced a whole new set of problems. He is, first of all, acknowledging and supporting the commercialisation of art. This in itself can perhaps be explained: from his new perspective of things, he can see the practical connection between money and art clearly: the artist, after all, has to make a living (the financial vicissitudes Van Gogh suffered are well known).194 The suggestion here would be that we should not try to sequestre the

192 This supports Hermann Broch’s interpretation of Hofmannsthal’s understanding “daß Dichtung, soll sie zur Läuterung und Selbstidentifizierung des Menschen fügen, sich in seine Antinomien-Tiefe zu stürzen hat, durchaus im Gegensatz zur Philosophie, die am Abgrundrand bleibt und, ohne den Sprung zu wagen, sich mit bloßer Analyse des Geschauten zufriedengibt” (Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit 176).
193 See Zilcosky, Uncanny Encounters 131.
194 “Ein Grund zu arbeiten ist, dass die Bilder bar Geld sind. Du wirst mir sagen, dass dieser Grund erstens recht prosaisch, zweitens nicht wahr ist; aber es ist doch wahr. Ein Grund nicht zu arbeiten ist, dass zunächst Leinwand und
aesthetic object and preserve its “sanctity” by refusing to treat it as a saleable commodity. It is true that the young Hofmannsthal, in the spirit of the sickened Zurückgekehrten, wrote in 1890 his “Verse, auf eine Banknote geschrieben” (SW II Gedichte 2 29) the following:

Was Kunst und was Natur im Wettkampf schafft
Feil! alles feil! die Ehre selber feil!
Um einen Schein, geträumter Rechte Theil

Und meiner Verse Schar, so tändelnd schal,
Auf diesem Freibrief grenzenloser Qual,
Sie schienen mir wie Bildwerk und Gezweig
Auf einer Klinge tödtlich blankem Stahl ....

(58-64).

What makes the anger particularly acerbic is not simply the realisation that art is a secular commodity, but that its very existence and circulation depend upon this banknote, whether we read the banknote metaphorically or literally (though how could such a long poem fit on a banknote?).

To follow the biographical thread a little further, Hofmannsthal himself collected art – and sold it, when he found himself in financial straits for too long a period of time after the First World War and while working on one of the most demanding projects of his life, Der Turm. In a letter to Burckhardt, he writes: “Es ist nicht Geld, sondern Freiheit. [...]” (qtd. in Renner, Zauberschrift der Bilder 374-75). The very real concerns for personal economic stability reintroduce the power of

Farbe Geld kosten. Nur Zeichnen ist billig” (Van Gogh, Briefe 54). In a later letter, he gives a description of the ideal conditions for his work (what in German one might call “Muße”): “Um gute Arbeit zu machen, muss man gut wohnen, gut essen und in Frieden seine Pfeife rauchen und seinen Kaffee trinken. Damit will ich nicht sagen, dass es nicht noch andere Gute giebt, jeder soll so machen, wie es ihm am besten zusagt, aber mein System scheint mir besser als alle anderen” (84).

that “negative Freiheit” which is financial independence – that is, if one wishes to make art, at least. In a sense, nearly all verses are written on banknotes. In *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, purchasing the painting is, from the side of the *Zurückgekehrter*, a sensible investment (and here our idealistic sensibilities might well be offended); but it is also an acknowledgement of necessity. Buying the painting is, moreover, also a way of supporting artistic endeavours. And finally, it can be seen as a positive *response* to both painting (the product and the activity) and painter.\(^{196}\)

What might still trouble us are his thoughts on what to do with the painting – to give it to an art dealer for preservation. Few scholars have tried to interpret this frustrating moment. Like Coghlan, Ursula Renner sees the paintings as having given back to him his “tätiges Vermögen,” “so daß er, wieder seiner selbst sicher, auch als Geschäftsmann erfolgreich agieren kann” (Renner 408). We could thus interpret his actions in light of his being a *Geschäftsmann*, who now can close deals with the aid of that *Frömmigkeit* or devotion he has been missing since his return. Moreover, not all *Kunsthändler* are created equal – presumably the *Zurückgekehrter* would find a trustworthy, knowledgeable person (perhaps like Meier-Graefe or Théo van Gogh).\(^{197}\) But why not have the paintings present? Gottschlich-Kempf makes the (more convincing) case that the *Zurückgekehrter’s* act is one of “Abwehr” – an action of mixed feelings combining the old desire to preserve\(^{198}\) with the desire to never again experience this moment for fear it might reveal itself as false or ineffective the second time around (*Identitätsbalance im Roman der Moderne* 302). In a similar vein, Scharnowski argues that this moment recalls the “gefährlichen und derealisierenden” approach to his own memories, “der letzten Endes eben jenes tatsächlich

---

\(^{196}\) Hofmannsthala marked the following passage in *Philosophie des Geldes* with two daggers, “[...] selbst für feinere und der Sache lebende Menschen kann in dem Gelingen der Leistung nach der ökonomischen Seite hin ein Trost, Ersatz, Rettung für die gefühlte Unzulänglichkeit nach der Seite des Haupterfolges hin liegen; zum mindesten etwa wie ein Ausruhen und eine momentane Verpflanzung des Interesses, die der Hauptsache schließlich gewachsene Kräfte zuführt” (*FDH* 1910: 313).

\(^{197}\) Van Gogh himself had at one point planned to be an art dealer, like his brother Théodorus, and his uncle. Furthermore, it was his brother the art dealer who introduced him to the revolutionary new way of painting: “In 1885 besuchte er einige Monate die Akademie und ist im Frühjahr 1886 in Paris, wo er durch seinen Bruder, den feinsinnigen Kunsthändler Theodor van Gogh, die Kunst der Impressionisten kennen lernt und mit einigen in persönliche Berührung kommt” (see Margarete Mauthner’s introduction to Van Gogh’s *Briefe* *FDH* 5050: 1-2).

\(^{198}\) In the first letter of the text, the *Zurückgekehrter* had already expressed this desire with respect to the character of the German figures he imagined, and which he could enjoy (!): “Ihr Starkes und ihr Schwaches, ihr Rauhes und ihr Sanftes kam gleichzeitig zu mir, und ich konnte es genießen, konnte ihrer Geschöpfe und des Lebens ihrer Geschöpfe genießen, träumend vom Verlorenen oder vorahnend, vorwegnehmend Freuden der Wirklichkeit, vorbehalten, wie ich mir schmeichelte” (156, my emphasis).
lebendige Verhältnis zwischen Ich und Welt latent bedroht, das in dem van-Gogh-Erlebnis vermeintlich gewonnen wurde: Ein Bild soll gekauft, besessen und archiviert werden, womöglich als Kapitalanlage verfügbar sein, wird also eben dem Prozeß ausgesetzt, in dessen Verlauf die Dinge unter dem Einfluß des Geldes verschwinden” (59).

Gottschlich-Kempf’s point about “Abwehr” is key: though given the preceding sentence (“Es ist etwas in mir, das mich zwingt zu glauben […]”), I suspect this Abwehr has more to do with a desire for keeping this subjective, aesthetic world separate from the ‘real’ world, and to prevent any ensuing experience of the works’ “Weltentzug und Weltzerfall.” 199 Yet in this desire is an economic contradiction (money pulls art into the world), that in turn reveals the conflicting nature of the aesthetic experience to begin with: this closed world has a context, and that context is the ever-changing ‘real’ world which frames it. The aesthetic – like the sacred – exists within the secular and quotidian reality. The paintings are born out of what is ‘real,’ but then they are also able to create a more convincing, more assertive reality than that out of which they are born (“aus einem fürchterlichen Zweifel an der Welt,” 170). The contemporary dates of the artist make it that much more real, that much more a part of the society in which it is housed. Whether the Zurückgekehrter wishes to preserve the aesthetic moment from reality, himself from community, his finances from loss, or the painting from deterioration is all up for discussion: that Hofmannsthal has his Zurückgekehrter consider handing it over to an art dealer – to someone whose job it is to sell art – for preservation is deliberate: it puts into question any simple reading of the text that would take the Zurückgekehrter to have undergone a thorough transformation. Transformed he has – though not in the way we might initially think. In other words, this is not – nor can there ever be – a transformation that disregards the entire foregoing world. The Zurückgekehrter is still a merchant, and he is still subject to embodying and replicating the contradictions of his world.

199 The notion that works of art lose presence is seen particularly in Augenblicke in Griechenland. Heidegger speaks of the Greek temples thus: “Die Werke sind nicht mehr die, die sie waren. Sie selbst sind es zwar, die uns da begegnen, aber sie selbst sind die Gewesenen. Als die Gewesenen stehen sie uns im Bereich der Überlieferung und Aufbewahrung entgegen. Fortan bleiben sie nur solche Gegenstände” (Heidegger, “Ursprung des Kunstwerkes” 26-27). Interestingly for Hofmannsthal, one can still have a profound aesthetic experience in the encounter with such works of art, even if they are already “gewesen.” See my discussion of the third section of Augenblicke in Griechenland in Chapter 3.

200 Cf. Hofmannsthal’s notes to his Brief an einen Gleichaltrigen (the imaginary addressee of which he imagined to be Martin Buber): “Der natürliche Zustand des modernen Individuums ist Verzweiflung” (212).
Again, the _Briefe_ are not finished, even after the postscript. There is one final letter that Hofmannsthal published, in which we find a carefully constructed destabilisation of what has preceded it. Here, Hofmannsthal silently integrates a sociological and psychological perspective into what most scholars (also rightly) interpret in terms of a mystical experience. Yet this sociology is not an academic one, and in this respect we can again see Hofmannsthal’s reception of Simmel at work. Both the catalyst and the context for this ‘sociology’ is an aesthetic one: that is, the realm of art, perceived by the senses, is the occasion for this particular ‘mystical’ moment, as well as for the psychological and ultimately aesthetic (viz. literary) exploration (we might say with Freud, the _Traumarbeit_) of that moment and similar experiences. The _Briefe des Zurückgekehrten_, structured around reflections and parodies, is itself a highly self-reflexive aesthetic product. The _Traumarbeit_ thus occurs within the context of yet another kind of _Traum_ – the literary text. All this reflexivity raises the issue of Narcissism once again: is the production and reception of art condemned to the solipsistic, mirroring interiority of the artist or the viewer? To my knowledge, no one, with the exception of Ursula Renner, has looked at the structural complexity of the _Briefe_ as whole. Renner does not suggest that the text is responding to or acting as a translation of the aesthetics of relation that, we shall see, characterise Van Gogh’s work. In this last letter, we see how Hofmannsthal’s aesthetic sociology of colour attempts to show the relation between aesthetics and ethics through that kaleidoscope which, at the very least, gives us a text which is itself structured around these

---

201 Cf. Grundmann: “Reine Anschauung statt eindeutiger Übersetzung des Gesehenen in eine fixierte Bedeutung prägt die Apperzeption des Zurückgekehrten. Eine andere Hermeneutik tritt hier somit an die Stelle einer durch die Erinnerung an alte Kulturgüter der eigenen Nation vermittelten Identität. Sein ist nicht mehr im Bezug auf das eigene Volk oder die Höhenkammkunst und Philosophie dieses Volkes zu denken, sondern wird als etwas Überzeitliches, Transnationales und ‘Mythisches’ gedacht – in höchster Abstraktion: die schroffe, chaotische und doch einer geheime Ordnung unterworffene Fülle einer sich vermischeinenden Welt von Farben, deren jede ihr Sein aus der Nachbarschaft mit anderen Farben gewinnt. Identität wird so von etwas Konstantem, das jeder Wirklichkeitswahrnehmung zugrunde liegt, zu etwas Relationalem, sich in jedem Moment neu Bildenden” (293). While I agree in principle with Grundmann’s observation that this is a move towards “etwas Relationalem,” I remain sceptical regarding her assertion that this can be characterised as an “Überzeitliches, Transnationales und ‘Mythisches’” moment – at least, not restrictively. Hofmannsthal takes pains to emphasise both the “Überzeitliches” as well as the temporal nature of the experience; even though the _Zurückgekehrter_ has travelled, the transnational never comes up explicitly, at least not in the sense suggested by scholars’ interest today in the concept of “transnationalism”; and while this experience might have elements that are reminiscent of myth, it is not clear what Grundmann means by this in the case of the _Briefe des Zurückgekehrten_. My reading thus comes to a similar conclusion regarding relationality, but it does so by a different avenue, and with different implications.
relations: it is a text which we can enjoy aesthetically, and one which also poses, in its own dialogic structure, the ethical question of the relation between egotism and altruism.

Each letter is an end: a closed text, usually marked by a time and place. The letters can be read in isolation, but we know that they follow from previous letters, and lead to subsequent letters. They are isolated moments set into a series of moments, like beads on a chain; their overall effect is produced not in isolation, but in relation. They betray the same characteristics of words in a sentence, whereby the meaning of a word is established by its relation to other words in the sentence. The smallest unit of meaning never originates in the one word, but rather in the relation between words. Thus when the Zurückgekehrter begins his ‘last’ letter, it is with deliberate reference to the preceding one, and even echoes the in medias res quality of the first letter: “Was ich dir schrieb, wirst du kaum verstehen können, am wenigsten, wie mich diese Bilder so bewegen konnten” (171). By referring to the last letter, this sentence heralds the focus of this letter, establishing a link between the two. By emphasising the singularity of the event – the subjectivity of it – he is also attempting to set this event in relation to others, and to create out of it something that can be shared, from different sides. “Es wird dir wie eine Schrulle vorkommen, wie ein Vereinzeltes, wie eine Sonderbarkeit, und doch – wenn man es nur hinstellen könnte, wenn man es nur aus sich herausreißen könnte und ins Licht bringen” (171). He is describing here three processes in one: the writing process, the communication process, and the productive-creative process, using a turn of phrase that is reminiscent of Meier-Graefe’s description of Van Gogh’s process: “Er malte seine Bilder nicht, er stiess sie aus […]. Er fühlte sich nicht dabei, war eins mit dem Element, das er darstellte, malte sich selbst in den lodernden Wolken […]” (SW XXXI 421, my emphasis). The gesture is slightly modified in Hofmannsthal’s text: rather than pushing the pictures out – an image akin to that of giving birth – the Zurückgekehrter desires to pull them out, recalling Dürer.202 Again, the subtle relation between the pushing and pulling – movements which also suggest giving and taking – is lurking under the surface of the Zurückgekehrter’s letter. This is also the basic, organic movement of relation, and of dialogue: taking and giving.

---

What is it that he wishes to draw out and expose? — The effect of colours. And Van Gogh’s paintings, with their intense use of contrastive *Farben* as opposed to gradual changes in *Ton*, are a well chosen place of orientation. But why colour? Why not the form, the line, the chiaroscuro? Why is colour the source of the effect? The use of colour in this manner expressed something modern: painters around the last part of the 19th and early part of the 20th century had ‘discovered’ (or rather re-discovered) the expressive, affective quality of colour. On a psychological and sociological level, this makes perfect sense: the colours initially appear “grell” to a man accustomed to *Atelierbraun*. Further, the colours act as a positive reworking of the placard-speckled city, with its chaotic palette meant to distract, entertain, and advertise, the general effect of which might very well be a kind of *Farblosigkeit* of modern urban society. The colours here, however, reveal with the same means a new kind of harmony: not “die Wollust und Harmonie” that the *Zurückgekehrter* might expect to see, but rather a different kind of correspondence, born out of the “Wucht des Daseins” (169). As Meier-Graefe has it:

> Die Woge, die den Schiffbrüchigen schreckt [and we might think of the *Zurückgekehrter* here], beschreibt eine göttliche Kurve, und selbst das entsetzte Gesicht des Unglücklichen, der sich an die Planke klammert, wirkt harmonisch in diesem Taumel der Wasser. So ordnen sich in den Bildern Van Goghs, die ein Paroxysmus der Naturerfassung entstehen liess, die fragmentarischen Teile zu einem Gleichklang von Farben und Linien […]. Die Wildheit wird Dekoration. (passage marked by Hofmannsthal in *FDH 1696: 136; qtd. in SW XXXI 421-22) In a similar fashion, what strikes the *Zurückgekehrter* is the relation between the colours. At first, they shock: but unlike the colours of the city which risk cancelling each other out, here in the

203 See the passage which Hofmannsthal marked in his copy of Meier-Graefe’s *Impressionisten*: “Der Gegensatz zwischen Ton und Farbe ist nicht etwa rein technischer Art, sondern geht auf tief eingreifende menschliche Eigentümlichkeiten zurück. Ein Mensch wie van Gogh musste darin den Unterschied von Rassen und Kulturen erblicken. Als er daher einsah, dass er, um zum Ziel zu kommen, aus der Zweifelhaftigkeit vor ihm stand, eins machen müsse, mag er sich wie ein Mensch ohne Seele vorgekommen sein. Er hörte eine Sprache, in der man – das ahnte er – hundertmal mächtigere Dinge sagen konnte, als in den heimatlichen Lauten, und musste sich eingestehen, dass ihm kein einziges ihrer Worte geläufig war. Die Einsicht in die Wohltaten der Syntax dieser Sprache liefert das vornehmste Element der modernen Entwicklungsgeschichte” (131).

204 I borrow the term from Spengler’s *Untergang des Abendlandes* (324).

paintings they are organised into a “composed variety” (Hogarth) in order to reveal and enhance each other. Just as these letters are fragments of a larger epistolary novella, so too do they work together, producing a “Gleichklang” of images and phrases. In one of the notes to the Briefe des Zurückgekehrten, Hofmannsthali went so far as to write: “das grenzenlos relative der Farbe: jede Farbe existiert nur durch ihre Nachbarschaft” (SW XXXI 437, N28). This note is an existential distillation of Van Gogh’s observations that colours appear only when their complements are also present. Otherwise they appear “farblos”: “Lieber Gott, natürlich, wenn man trockenen Sand in die Hand nimmt und ihn dicht vor die Augen hält – auf diese Weise angesehen, sind Wasser und Luft farbenlos. – Kein Blau ohne Gelb und ohne Orange, und wenn ihr blau malt, malt doch gelb und orange auch – hab’ ich recht?” (52). This aesthetic rule is taken up and made a central point in the context of the Briefe des Zurückgekehrten, showing again how relationality is necessary for the perception of a thing’s existence. This clearer vision of existence is accompanied by the aesthetic perception of harmony, that “wahre Dichtigkeit der Verhältnisse” alluded to in the third letter (161).

In order to illustrate (in black and white text) the effect of this Gleichklang, the Zurückgekehrter first turns to the story of Rama Krishna which he had once heard and which had made a deep impression on him. The story of the Brahman’s Enlightenment experience highlights the visual moment in which Rama Krishna fell to the ground and stood up, as if reborn. The visual experience is, not surprisingly, one characterised by the the relation of two colours: “Und nichts als dies, nichts als das Weiß der lebendigen Flügelschlagenden unter dem blauen Himmel, nichts als diese zwei Farben gegeneinander, dies ewige Unnennbare, drang in diesem Augenblick in seine Seele und löste, was verbunden war, und verband, was gelöst war […]” (172, my emphasis). These two colours juxtaposed are what spark this moment of Enlightenment. Yet for the reader this moment has another significance; again Hofmannsthali is playing with mirrors and adapting an earlier image to a different context. The birds, here designated as “Flügelschlagenden” recall the “Taubenschlag” of the “ewiges Kommen und Wegfliegen” (159). The anxiety associated with transience, as so often in Hofmannsthali’s work, has been reworked into a moment of wonder. The loosening and binding likewise have an aesthetic correspondence in the image of the material woven or knotted together to form a carpet, a tapestry, a text – this loosening and tying together
returns again and again in Hofmannsthal’s work as an image of art and its portrayal of the ethical world of ties.\footnote{We have already seen this to some degree in Chapter 1 with the \textit{Ansprache} as well as the carpet in the \textit{Märchen der 672. Nacht. Die Frau ohne Schatten} (discussed in Chapter 4) will take up this motif to even greater effect.}

The relational quality of colours becomes more explicit in the personal example that follows. The \textit{Zurückgekehrter} has given an example borrowed from someone else, but he too has experienced this kind of power before while once on board a ship: and he starts to ask the question that almost all scholars tend to focus on: does this “power” have its origin in the colours, or in the \textit{Zurückgekehrter} himself?

\begin{quote}
Sagte ich nicht, die Farben der Dinge haben zu seltsamen Stunden einen Gewalt über mich? Doch bin’s nicht ich vielmehr, der die Macht bekommt über sie, die ganze, volle Macht für irgendeine Spanne Zeit, ihnen ihr wortloses, abgrundtiefes Geheimnis zu entreißen, ist sie nicht in meiner Brust als ein Schwelken, eine Fülle, eine Fremde, erhabene, entzückende Gegenwart, bei mir, in mir, an der Stelle, wo das Blut kommt und geht? (173)
\end{quote}

This passage has given many scholars food for thought: Antje Büssgen sees the \textit{Zurückgekehrter}’s ‘Van-Gogh-Erlebnis’ as one that ultimately, as this passage could suggest, originates in the self, as monological, doing away with dialectic (and duality) of any kind insofar as this “Farbmystik” is an “Aufhebung des Gegensatzes von Subjekt und Objekt, von Welt und Seele” (521). In her reading of Hofmannsthal’s text, along with Benn’s “Garten von Arles,” as part of a broader “Eigentlichkeitsdiskurs,” she concludes that: “Das ‘Eigentliche’ wird nun dort gesucht und behauptet, wo die dissoziierten Teile – seien es Subjekt und Objekt oder Wort und Ding – nicht dialektisch miteinander vermittelt oder versöhnt werden, sondern letztlich unverbunden nebeneinander stehen und nur in einem ekstatisch-visionären Moment als Einheit \textit{imaginiert} werden” (534, emphasis in original). Yet this reading only works if we ignore or overlook important features of Hofmannsthal’s text. As Ursula Renner reminds us: “Diese besonderen Augenblicke werden nicht durch Erinnerungen oder Tagträume ausgelöst, sondern etwas in der \textit{äußereren Wirklichkeit} erhält unvermittelt die Signatur einer ‘natürlichen’ Zeichensprache. [...] sie
stiften Sinn” (Zauberschrift 389, my emphasis). The Zurückgekehrter is quite aware of this, and even his questioning suggests there is something other than himself involved, even if he has no direct access to it: what do we make of the “fremde, erhabene, entzückende Gegenwart” if we are to assume this is an “Aufhebung des Gegensatzes von Subjekt und Objekt” which then only turns out to be “imaginiert.” Similarly, Schuster rhetorically states: “Und so bleibt unsicher, ob sich das Gegenüber nun selbst hervorbringt, oder ob es nicht doch das Ich ist, das die Gegenstände erschafft, da doch ‘alles in mir war’” (Kunstleben 569). On the contrary, the very fact that the Zurückgekehrter oscillates from one point of view to the other and back again – is it from him, is it from the objects – suggests that there is never a single origin, even an imagined one. Rather, we have a priori a relational, dynamic understanding of this moment as a division in unity. That this may all take place subjectively, for the Zurückgekehrter, is not the question at hand: what is in question is whether the subject can exist without reference to the outside; and: what is the nature of this relation between subject and object? The Zurückgekehrter goes on to question his own powergame thus: “Aber wenn alles in mir war, warum konnte ich nicht die Augen schließen und stumm und blind eines unnennbaren Gefühles meiner selbst genießen, warum mußte ich mich auf Deck erhalten und schauen, vor mich hinschauen?” (173). And he is right to do so.

Just as earlier the Zurückgekehrter’s knowledge of his own existence was found to be predicated upon the existence of the external world which also knows suffering, so here too his enjoyment of his sense of self depends on an altruistic gesture of the world: “dies heilige Genießen meiner selbst und zugleich der Welt, die sich mir auftat, als wäre die Brust ihr aufgegangen, warum war dies Doppelte, dies Verschlungene, dies Außen und Innen, dies ineinanderschlagende Du an mein Schau geknüpft?” (173) The Du in this case is a bit mysterious, and I have not found a single

---

207 While the experience is not brought about by personal memories, these nevertheless play a great role in preparation for the encounter with the work of art. The Zurückgekehrter, by remembering the ambiguous feelings of his child-self before the Dürer prints, is in effect preparing himself in a manner similar to that advocated by Rilke: “Es ist diese Kombination von Rezeptionssteuerung und Anregung zur individuell-unterschiedlichen, ‘freien’ Erinnerungsarbeit, mit der Rilke sein Publikum zur Teilnahme an einem interaktiven Prozess animieren will” (Hoffmann, “Kunsterfahrung als Icherschließung,” 291).

interpretation of it in the secondary literature. In one of his notes to the *Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, Hofmannsthal writes: “hier ist ein Überwinden aller Hemmungen ein fast wüthendes Du” (SW XXXI 438, N32); and in his notes to *Gespräch über Dichtung*, we find the following reference to Novalis:

Novalis:

Wir sollen alles in ein Du, ein zweites Ich verwandeln; nur dadurch erheben wir uns selbst zum großen Ich. (SW XXXI 324, N8)

The *Du* is “ein zweites Ich” not merely in the sense of a projected subjectivity, but more so in the presupposition that the world itself is a living “Ich” in its own right. That is, while the drama might play in the head of the subject, that subject must at least entertain the idea that “alles” has a subject position, to which he or she has no access. The statement is a paradox: only by recognising that we are not the only I’s, only by positing the I’s of others and of the world, can we be “great.” Hofmannsthal is reworking the notion he developed in the *Ansprache*: there, he says that when we behold works of art and call something beautiful, we are subject to the great demand of the world of beauty: “diese Forderung ist nur so gigantisch, weil das, was in uns ihr zu entsprechen bereit ist, so grenzenlos gross ist: die aufgesammelte Kraft der geheimnisvollen Ahnenreihe in uns, die übereinander gethürmten Schichten der aufgestapelten überindividuellen Erinnerung” (11). In positing – or recognising – the “Du,” the *Zurückgekehrter* is also answering to a demand of the world of beauty. Almost two decades later Hofmannsthal will write notes to a planned “Brief an einen Gleichaltrigen” whose imagined recipient was to be modelled on Martin Buber. Amongst those notes we find the following: “Eines Freundes Da-sein gibt Maß. Müller-Hofmann. Man verbreitet durch ihn die Erlebnisbasis. Es ist immer das ganze Du, uns daran zu erproben” (SW XXXI 214). I’d like to suggest we read the “Du” in the *Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* as a precursor to the “Du” Buber writes of in *Ich und Du*, for in this book we find many parallels with Hofmannsthal’s depiction of this aesthetic experience. Buber writes (in a vein similar to but

---

distinct from Novalis\textsuperscript{210}): “Der Mensch wird am Du zum Ich. Gegenüber kommt und entschwindet, Beziehungsereignisse verdichten sich und zerstieben, und im Wechsel klärt sich, von Mal zu Mal wachsend, das Bewußtsein des gleichbleibenden Partners, das Ichbewußtsein” (97). Important to keep in mind is that this “Beziehungsereignis” is not a permanent one: “Denn wohl verblaßte immer das Du der Beziehung wieder, aber es wurde damit nicht zum Es seines Ich, nicht zum Gegenstand eines unverbundenen Wahrnehmens und Erfahrens, wie es fortan werden wird, sondern gleichsam zum Es für sich, zum vorerst Unbeachteten und der Erstehung in neuem Beziehungsereignis Harrenden” (Ich und Du 38).

This Du is integral to the Zurückgekehrter’s experience (“Erlebnisbasis”) of colours: “Farbe. Farbe. Mir ist das Wort jetzt armelig. Ich fürchte, ich habe dir nicht erklärt, wie ich möchte. Und ich möchte nichts in mir stärken, was mich von den Menschen absondert” (174, my emphasis). These letters, monologic in nature, are nevertheless an attempt to express to someone else as much as to oneself something that is inexpressible: the word – the specific word “Farbe” but also language in general, is and always will be “armelig” in this respect. He senses his own life in the revelation of that which is nothing but “Wucht und Fremdheit” –

\begin{quote}
Wenn das sich auftut und wie in einer Welle der Liebe mich mit sich selber in eines schlingt. Und bin ich dann nicht im Innern der Dinge so sehr ein Mensch, so sehr ich selber wie nur je, namenlos, einsam, aber nicht erstarrt im Alleinsein, sondern als flösse von mir in Wellen die Kraft, die mich zum auserlesenen Genossen macht der starken stummen Mächte, die rungsum wie auf Thronen schweigend sitzen? Und ist dies nicht wohin du auf dunklen Wegen immer gelangst, wenn du tätig und leidend lebst unter den Lebenden? (174)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{210} Buber makes this clear: “Es geht hier durchaus nicht mehr bloß um das aufnahmebereite und zum Symphilosophieren geneigte Du, vielmehr vorzugsweise gerade um das widerständige, weil wahrhaft um den Andern, den anders und anderes Denkenden; also auch nicht um ein Brettspiel im Turmgemach des Ätherschlosses, sondern um ein verbindliches Lebensgeschäft auf der harten Erde, bei dem man unerbittlich der Anderkeit des Andern gewahr wird, sie aber nun nicht etwa vergegenwärtigungbar beficht, sondern ihre Beschaffenheit in das eigne Denken aufnimmt, auf sie hin denkt, eben sie denkerisch anspricht” (Zwiesprache 179).
This experience is a different kind of community, but a community nonetheless. It is one characterised by the shelter of waves – as if the *Zurückgekehrter* were once again at sea\(^{211}\) – but also the comfort of anonymity and the recognition of difference. To be “namenlos” is to be beyond *Begriffe*. To be able to feel alone in the company of others, but not lonely, and to belong, to have the sensation of being in the midst,\(^{212}\) and to have the same capacity of creating waves (“als flösse von mir in Wellen die Kraft”) is to feel human, and to see the connection of things in the flux: the waves resonate with each other, and yet accompanying this is the suggestion that there is suffering involved, perhaps even a sense of guilt.\(^{213}\) The suffering, we see, is present in the colours themselves: “Und warum sollten nicht die Farben Brüder der Schmerzen sein, da diese wie jene uns ins Ewige ziehen?” (174) The colours have pulled the *Zurückgekehrter* into “das Ewige,” a dialogue with an openness like that of the symbol.\(^{214}\)

But in art there is also a sense of sacrifice.\(^{215}\) Meier-Graefe wrote of Van Gogh: “Es ist, als habe ein Einziger den Vorwurf gegen den Egoismus unserer ganzen Epoche gefühlt und sich hingeben, ganz wie einer jener grossen Märtyrer, deren Geschicke uns aus fernen Zeiten

\(^{211}\) This suggests something of Freud’s “ozeanisches Gefühl” described in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (6-7), though here the emphasis is on a sense of belonging, not dissipating.

\(^{212}\) Hofmannsthal uses variations of this image elsewhere, e.g. in the poem “Der Kaiser von China spricht.” (*SW Gedichte I* 72). In the poem, the Kaiser resides “In der Mitte aller Dinge” (1) and observes the world he has created, separated by concentric walls – “Bis ans Meer, die letzte Mauer, / Die mein Reich und mich umgibt.” The poem is shot through with ambiguity at almost every level. The central position suggests control, but also a self-constructed prison; the walls are initially solid, but the last wall is the threatening flux of the sea. In *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, a similar structure is apparent, but the tone is entirely different. Those powers that surround the *Zurückgekehrter* are on the same level: they are not his subjects, but rather his brothers. The surrounding ‘walls’ are waves to begin with, and they flow outward.

\(^{213}\) Cf. the essay on D’Annunzio’s new novel: “Es kann einer hier sein und doch nicht im Leben sein: völlig ein Mysterium ist es, was ihn auf einmal umwirft und zu einem solchen macht, der nun erst schuldig und unschuldig werden kann, nun erst Kraft haben und Schönheit” (*GW Prosa I “Der neue Roman von D’Annunzio,”* 235). The notion of *Schuld* has long been acknowledged as a condition for entering into “Existence” or life. See Walther Brecht, “Grundlinien im Werk Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s” (esp. 173).


\(^{215}\) In *Ich und Du*, Buber will make a similar assertion, namely that the act (“Tat”) in art consists of an “Opfer” and a “Wagnis” (84). In Chapter 4, I will explore these terms with reference to *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, the text which explores these two aspects of art most vividly. See also Wellbery’s discussion of the “Opfer” in *Ein Brief*: “Symbolträchtig – wirkungsmächtig als Seinsenthüllung – werden Bilder, die versteckt oder offen einen Opfervorgang aufrufen. Dieser Evokation des Opfers verdanken die ‘guten Augenblicke’ ihre Faszination” (“Opfer-Vorstellung” 298).
überliefert werden” (Impressionisten 143). Following this albeit hagiographic (and hyperbolic) logic, it is Van Gogh’s Frömmigkeit that resounds, wavelike, in his colours, which carry each other, and some of which in a similar manner display a willingness to recede in order that others may shine forth more brilliantly. It is this gesture of giving oneself over that allows for the viewer to be pulled into “das Ewige,” beyond the limitations of our concepts. Perhaps the sacrificial aspect is an atonement as well, for as Simmel says: “Diese Umformung, die sie [i.e. die Wirklichkeit] auf dem Wege in unser Bewußtsein erleidet, ist zwar eine Schranke zwischen uns und ihrem unmittelbaren Sein, aber zugleich die Bedingung, sie vorzustellen und darzustellen” (659, my emphasis). But the religious language of sacrifice and suffering should not fool us: for Hofmannsthal, this is aesthetic piety (not quite a religion unto itself) and should be understood metaphorically: art has no adequate real-world equivalent, and those with this peculiar aesthetic sensibility cannot bask innocently in the sensation of mystical union between art and reality; one must acknowledge the suffering that reality undergoes when observed, for it must, as it were, be bracketed off. In art, it is further manipulated and fashioned, but in this manipulation a new kind of world is born. Van Gogh writes: “Ich übertreibe wohl ’mal oder ändere am Motiv, aber ich erfinde nie das ganze Bild, im Gegenteil, ich finde es sogar fertig vor und brauche es nur aus der Natur herauszuschälen” (Briefe 85). But the “revelation” of art is barely a revelation at all – except insofar as it reveals the precarity of an objective reality and our comprehension of it. Perhaps the best way to counteract this Erleiden, then, is not to work immitatively or with the assumption that the world is as we perceive it, but rather to engage with it by representing it symbolically, expressively, and most of all, creatively, by letting something in it be born. The innovative use and newly discovered life of colour in Van Gogh’s paintings would, for Hofmannsthal, never heal the ewige Wunde des Daseins, but it would at least be as a sign of profound respect for the inevitable suffering of existence. The image of the artist as martyr or as sacrificial victim is just that – an image. Art has no salvific power. In another note, Hofmannsthal writes with typical ambivalence: “Die Maler sind da, uns mit der Erscheinung auszusöhnen, der Erscheinung ihr Pathos

216 Cf. Rilke’s Briefe über Cézanne: “[…] schwächere Lokalfarben geben sich ganz auf und begnügen sich damit, die stärkste vorhandene zu spiegeln. In diesem Hin und Wider von gegenseitigem vielartigen Einfluß schwingt das Bildinnere, steigt und fällt in sich selbst zurück und hat nicht eine stehende Stelle” (Briefwechsel 631).

zurückzugeben. Aber vielleicht gilt auch von ihnen wie von den Dichtern das Wort: wir sind nicht
die Ärzte wir sind der Schmerz” (SW XXXI 438, N32). Pain does not heal the wound, which we
have also helped to created, but rather makes us more sensitive to it.218

The letter “concludes” with this new understanding of colours as “Brüder der Schmerzen,” and
with an apology for his outlook: “Solange nicht höhere Begriffe und die ebenso lebendig in mich
hineingreifen, mir solche Vermutungen verächtlich machen, will ich mich an diese halten” (174).
That is, he will hold to his open symbolic Farben instead of the closed Begriffe with which he
began his letters. If there is an arc to this fragmentary text, we might locate it in a progression from
Begriff to symbol, here articulated as Farbe, capable of pulling us into eternity, or into the eternal
openness of the fragment. Farben are open-ended. They bear each other up, and they express
something of the human being behind them, something of the commonality of human beings, of
the Wunde des Daseins. And while there may be no perfect, immediate communication between
subject and object, there is instead the deictic gesture of giving form (even if it is unfinished) in
response to what one sees, hears, and receives. This is the poetic Wechselwirkung, the open
dialogue. The text – itself “wirklichkeitswund und Wirklichkeit suchend,” to quote Celan219 – has
no resolution.

***

In 1906 and 1907 respectively, Ernst Mach and Edmund Husserl each describe a similar
Erlebnis.220 Husserl writes:

218 Cf. Hermann Broch: “[…] er erkannte die Gefahren des Pan-Ästhetizismus: die Idee von einem Kunstwerk, dessen
Universalität infolge Symbolreichtums schließlich All-Erkenntnis vermitteln sollte, zeigte sich ihm als verurteilt, am
Ende ins Leere zu stoßen, weil das Schöne, auch wenn man es mit dem Nimbus der Religiosität umgibt, nie und
nimmer zu einem Absolutum erhebbar ist und daher erkenntnisstumm bleiben muß” (154).

219 Bamberg (262) quotes Celan in reference to Ein Brief, but the phrase is perhaps even more appropriate in the
context of Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten, a work that attempts to render the moment in text – after the fact. Celan
writes: “Das Gedicht ist nicht zeitlos. Gewiß, es erhebt einen Unendlichkeitsanspruch, es sucht, durch die Zeit
hindurchzugreifen – durch sie hindurch, nicht über sie hinweg […]. Das Gedicht kann […] eine Flaschenpost sein […].
Sie kann irgendwo an Land gespült werden, an Herzland vielleicht […]. Es sind die Bemühungen dessen, der,
überflogen von Sternen, die Menschenwerk sind, zeitlos auch in diesem bisher ungeahnten Sinne und damit auf das
unheimlichstte im Freien, mit seinem Dasein zur Sprache geht, wirklichkeitswund und Wirklichkeit suchend”
(“Ansprache anläßlich der Entgegennahme des Literaturpreises der Freien Hansestadt Bremen” 129).

220 I quote from Manfred Sommer’s essay “Leben aus Erlebnissen. Dilthey und Mach” (55-79, here 77-78).
Natürlich, daß es Nichts nicht geben kann, das ist selbstverständlich. Aber ein bloßes “Gewühl von Empfindungen,” ein Durcheinander, das in der präempirischen Zeitfolge so unvernünftig aufeinander folgt, daß keine Dingauffassung sich darin erhalten und durchhalten kann, ein bloßes Empfindungsgewühl, sage ich, ist ja nicht ein absolutes Nichts, es ist nur nichts, was eine dingliche Welt in sich konstituiert. Warum muß aber eine Welt existieren? … Ich sehe in der Tat nicht ein, daß sie das müßte. Das betrifft die Welt im weitesten Sinn, einschließlich das Ich als Persönlichkeit und andere Ich … So kommen wir auf die Möglichkeit phänomenologischen Gewühls als einziges und letztes Sein, aber eines so sinnlosen Gewühls, daß es kein Ich gibt und kein Du gibt und daß es keine physiche Welt gibt. *(Husserliana XVI 288f.)*

Mach, describing a similar *Erlebnis*, but from its positive aspect, writes:

> An einem heiteren Sommertag im Freien […] erschien mir einmal die Welt samt meinem Ich als eine zusammenhängende Masse von Empfindungen, nur im Ich stärker zusammenhängend. Obgleich die eigentliche Reflexion sich erst später hinzugestellte, so ist dieses Moment für meine ganze Anschauung bestimmend geworden. *(Die Analyse der Empfindungen 24, fn.1)*

The typical conditions of modern urban life provide for such a confusion of impressions and senses, as Simmel has made clear. From the sociological perspective, this results in *Charakterlosigkeit* on the level of the individual and of society. *Money* is its “historisches Symbol.” The typical conditions of modern psychology and phenomenological perception likewise provide for that confusion of impressions that interested the likes of Brentano, Mach, Dilthey, and Husserl. This confusion results in the destabilisation of one’s mental and existential framework for understanding the world, leading to a confused sense of orientation: the *Zurückgekehrter’s mal de débarquement*. The typical conditions of modern art provide for a creative expression of – though not a solution to – this uncertainty. In this text, Hofmannsthal takes colour as an example, though he might have equally talked about *linie* or *surface*.221

---

221 In one of his title lists for a collection of his works, Hofmannsthal notes on 4 September 1911: “8. Die Linie a im Verhältnis zu Ingres / b der Aufsatz Ingres / c Begierde u. Form. / 9. Die Farbe Van Gogh” *(SW XXXI 420).* The *Zurückgekehrter’s* placement of the effects of colour over music is likewise contextual. Music will be just as important
Art is not “safe” from becoming a commodity – and selling art is beyond neither the Zurückgekehrter nor Hofmannsthal himself. It cannot repair the world, but neither does it simply ignore the problems of society by turning inward in a pure Narcissism. Art is contradictory in nature: it is a world closed unto itself and distinct from the world of everyday experience, but it is also in itself open, neither presenting a particular purpose or direction for life, nor, however, lost to the chaos of indefiniteness. In the chapter on Mahomet in the Westöstliche Divan, Goethe writes of the Märchen: “Ihr eigentlicher Charakter ist, daß sie keinen sittlichen Zweck haben und daher den Menschen nicht auf sich selbst zurück, sondern außer sich hinaus ins unbedingte Freie führen und tragen” (150). The same could be said about the role of colour in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten. Oddly enough, it seems to be precisely this quality that allows for an ethical moment in art itself: that is not to say that we find in Van Gogh’s paintings ethical prescripts or moral lessons; rather, in the open and yet closed structure itself we see the conditions for an

as colour in his later texts. In Der Turm, for instance, Sigismund is most affected by music. In Die Frau ohne Schatten (both the opera and the tale) music and colour mutually heighten each other’s effect. See also Hofmannsthal’s short essay “Über moderne englische Malerei”: “Ihm [the viewer] wird für eine Zeitlang vielleicht alle andere Kunst neben dieser reizlos und unvornehm, ja etwa leer und gemein vorkommen. Und auch wenn er dann wieder in die elementaren Offenbarungen des Genius, als sind Landschaften von Whistler, Menschenköpfe von Rembrandt, Musik von Mozart, mit atmenden Freuden hinabgetaucht ist, wird er bekennen, es gibt ursprünglichere Weise, dem Herrn zu dienen, aber nicht edlere, noch reinere” (GWE RAI 552).

222 Bolterauer writes: “Die Dinge – Gießkanne oder Egge, Fernglas oder Fliegenpapier – sind dann nicht bloß Dinge, die zu einer Form von zweiter Natur geworden sind, selbstverständlicher Bestandteil eines ‘normalen’ lebens und eines ‘durchschnittlichen’ Haushalts, also, Dinge, die Zähmung und Praktikabilität und Kultur und Wachsamkeit in sich tragen, und in sich verkörpern, sondern Dinge, die sich gegen ihre Inanspruchnahme als konsumierbare Begleiter zur Wehr setzen und von ihrem Betrachter und/oder Benutzer eine Infragestellung all dieser scheinbaren Selbstverständlichkeiten verlangen” (19-20). That the Zurückgekehrter does in fact wish to purchase the painting and hand it over to a Kunsthändler (for a rainy day?) but not to view it again might suggest that he is aware of the work’s resistance to “Inanspruchnahme.” Nevertheless, the work of art is subject to becoming capital. Hang-Sun Kim has also commented on this ironic manoeuvre: “Ultimately ‘Briefe des Zurückgekehrten’ testifies to Hofmannsthal’s belief in the enduring relevance of a class of cultural producers in an increasingly individualistic and egalitarian age. The irony, however, is that in order to play an influential role they may have to produce an art that hides this very influence. Van Gogh’s art accomplishes this by emphasizing the subjective nature of art itself. In this way, he allows the bourgeois subject to appropriate his art in a manner that does not challenge his self-perception and privileged social status” (“Unser Dasein starrt von Buchern” 68).

experience that allows the subject temporarily to experience him- or herself as a likewise simultaneously open and closed being that exists in relation to the world. The experience is twofold. It is the moment when the soul or subject returns to the body, before taking flight again, but it is also the moment when the subject senses the existence of another, distinct, subject. The charge of Narcissism is, in a way, already moot.224 That is, insofar as we create, we are creating for others as much as for ourselves. There is no simple division between egotism and altruism. Furthermore, true egotism is utterly impossible in a certain light. If it is anything at all, it is an expression of desperation, a desire to have the self as a stable self; it is a disposition of miserliness and misery.

For Hofmannsthal, we are outside ourselves, in others, as much as others are in us. The Zurückgekehrter is a Zurückgekehrter not simply in the sense that he has returned to Germany, but rather insofar as he has, for a brief time at least, returned to himself. He has found – again to speak with Paul Celan – a meridian.225 For Hofmannsthal this meridian is an aporia, gone again as soon as it arrives: it is something like the beat of a wing of a dove one might hear in the dovecote that we ourselves are:


224 See N8 for “Der Revenant”: “Immer noch die Vorwürfe der Wortkunst. Immer den Vorwurf wenn ich von den Tänzerinnen dem Lügner dem Schauspieler dem Narren dem Gärtner spreche so spreche ich von mir. Aber vergesst ihr den dass ich indem ich von mir spreche, eigentlich von Euch spreche, nämlich von dem Unscheinbaren in Euch, dem was ihr als Kinder hattet da ihr alles liebet, dem was Eure Entscheidungen versteckt beeinflusst, dem was ihr hinter Eurem Rücken begeht (Psychopath. des Alltaglebens) dem was doch eigentlich das Element ist in welchem ihr athmet” (SW XXXI 179).

225 The manuscript of Celan’s Dankrede for the Büchner-Preis mentions Hofmannsthal several times (see the “Personenregister” in Der Meridian); it should come as no great surprise then if we catch strains of a turn-of-the-century poetics: “Meine Damen und Herren, ich finde etwas, das mich auch ein wenig darüber hinwegtröstet, in Ihrer Gegenwart diesen unmöglichen Weg, diesen Weg des Unmöglichen gegangen zu sein. Ich finde das Verbindende und wie das Gedicht zur Begegnung Führende. Ich finde etwas – wie die Sprache – Immaterielles, aber Irdisches, Terrestrisches, etwas Kreisförmiges, über die beiden Pole in sich selbst Zurückkehrendes und dabei – heitererweise – sogar die Tropen Durchkreuzendes –: ich finde... einen Meridian” (Der Meridian 12).
mit anderem. Wir sind nicht mehr als ein Taubenschlag. (Gespräch über Gedichte 76)
CHAPTER 3: MOMENTS OF HUBRIS AND HUMILITY

Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, a literary work based on the author’s travels in Greece, depicts three distinct but interrelated “moments,” to each of which is devoted an entire section of the text. These moments are expressed as encounters with places, people, and lastly with art in the form of a group of archaic Greek statues or korai. Scholars have tended to read this text and these moments biographically – they are indeed based on Hofmannsthal’s personal experiences while travelling in Greece with his friend Harry Graf Kessler and the French artist Aristide Maillot – yet Hofmannsthal carefully arranges the events in reverse chronology, setting the aesthetic encounter at the culminating point of the text. This literary reworking can be understood as a response to the events which occurred during Hofmannsthal’s travels in Greece, and, more specifically, to the encounter with the statues at the end of the text. Hofmannsthal thereby creates the conditions for his audience likewise to have an aesthetic encounter. In this chapter I intend to show that underwriting the narrator’s encounters with places, people and works of art, it is the encounter with otherness, particularly as expressed in the work of art, that renders communication and transformation of the subject possible, thereby drawing the narrator into a dialogical relationship of response made manifest as poetic responsibility.

226 Hofmannsthal began working on his literary rendition of the events in 1908, and the first section, “Ritt durch Phokis,” as it was previously called, was published the same year in *Morgen* (19 June 1908). I will be offering a close reading of the final (1923) version of the text which includes all three sections; this is a somewhat shorter and more elegant version than that of the 1917 text. My reading of *Augenblicke in Griechenland* would be longer but not significantly enhanced by taking the 1917 version as my basis.

227 Claudia Bamberg (*Hofmannsthal: Der Dichter und die Dinge*) argues the opposite: “Vermutlich jedoch wäre das Erlebnis [in the museum] ohne die Erfahrung der ersten beiden Augenblicke nicht möglich gewesen; ohne die gleichsam geschichtsphilosophische Vorbereitung wäre der Erzähler kaum ins Museum gegangen – er musste zunächst bitter erfahren, was er draußen, in Natur und Landschaft, vor allem aber auf dem chaotisch anmutenden Trümmerfeld der Akropolis verloren hat” (297). This line of argument would work in terms of arranging the moments artistically and for effect, but the fact is that Hofmannsthal’s arrangement does not match that of reality. He had no problem entering a museum during the first few days of his trip, before many of the other events described. See the section *Entstehung*: “[…] die dargestellten Ereignisse entsprechen in ihrer Abfolge nicht der Chronologie der Reise, sondern dem Plan Hofmannsthals, dem Leser *vom starren Aussen bis ins glühende Innere* zu führen, wie es in einem Brief an Paul Zifferer von 1917 heißt (‘Zeugnisse’). Die Ausführung dieses Vorhabens erstreckte sich nahezu über ein Jahrzehnt” (*SW XXXIII RA2* 643).
There are certain identifiable tendencies in the criticism of this text: scholars alternately lay emphasis on the constructedness of *Augenlicke in Griechenland* (as “Gestaltungsakt”)\(^{228}\), on the autobiographical elements and the quest for the self,\(^{229}\) and on the mystical tone and atmosphere created by and portrayed in the piece.\(^{230}\) My reading will borrow from all these interpretations, but I would like to demonstrate how the aesthetic moment in particular takes up all of these concerns; it is for this reason that the text is structured as it is. This makes the task of the reader complicated, but rewarding: if we read the text from beginning to end, we will observe a clear trajectory and dramatic intensification emerging out of otherwise discrete moments. In fact, this connective trajectory significantly qualifies Hofmannsthal’s earlier statements (1892) concerning the way one should approach travel writing, which he likens to a Chinese picture book: “Denn die Bilder des Lebens folgen ohne inneren Zusammenhang aufeinander und er mangeln gänzlich der effektvollen Komposition” (*GW Prosa I* 77). There seems to be no necessary relation between the moments, yet the poetic impulse is to seek out, even to create, such *correspondances*, resulting in “effektvollen Komposition.” This raises the question: is *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, with its many moments of corresponding imagery and almost leitmotivic construction, still travel-writing? Or, to what extent has Hofmannsthal moved away from the view articulated in *Südfranzösische Eindrücke*? I am inclined to see his middle and later writings, such as those on Greece,\(^{231}\) as a deliberate move away from this earlier prescription of impressionistic representation; for the later Hofmannsthal, the connections may not be there by necessity, but they can be located, created, projected, and constructed in the “Gestaltungssakt” to which Gerke refers. Christopher Meid has shown how Hofmannsthal takes up the aesthetic tools at his disposal to write a “Reisebericht” that refuses to offer even a semblance of objectivity: *Augenblicke in Griechenland* is, in many respects,

\(^{228}\) Ernst-Otto Gerke refers to this as a “Gestaltungssakt” (*Der Essay als Kunstform* 160).

\(^{229}\) Bärbel Götz takes a more psychoanalytic approach, reading the text much like one would a patient, arriving at the conclusion that the encounter with the statues is a renewed experience of the mother-child unity (98) that exists before birth, as well as a moment of the self’s sense of omnipotence.

\(^{230}\) Both Eriwn Kobel and Hans-Jürgen Schings take up the mystical by emphasising Hofmannsthal’s presentation of universal connectivity. Schings in particular draws on the writings of Meister Eckhart, Angelus Silesius, and Martin Buber. Friedmar Apel takes this up within the context of literary constructedness. Important to our discussion – and unfortunately Apel does not explore this further – is a reference to Gershom Scholem’s observation that the mystical moment is experienced, on the one hand, as formless nature and, on the other, as “unendliche Plastizität” (71).

\(^{231}\) Hofmannsthal will take up this travel experience yet again in his introduction to Hanns Holdt’s book of photography, *Griechenland: Baukunst, Landschaft, Volksleben* (1923).
not about “Greece” as a place to be studied, observed, or reported on; it can only be experienced by the subject in a way that rejects essentialism and clear definitions.\footnote{Both Schings (“‘Hier oder nirgends’”) and Santini (“‘Wir wollen in uns spazierengehen’”), like Meid, identify the style of \textit{Augenblicke in Griechenland} as sui generis, something Hofmannsthal strove for in the context of contemporary travel writing, particularly about Greece – Gerhart Hauptmann’s \textit{Griechischer Frühling}, for instance, had been published shortly before Hofmannsthal’s \textit{Augenblicke}.}

Yet, as we shall see, this does not take away from the “reality” of Greece, rendering it \textit{merely} a product of the imagination, nor does the work amount to a hagiography of the subject; rather, it presents a twofold recognition: on the one hand, of the impossibility of ever fully understanding the Other, even in a transformative encounter; on the other, of the need for (at least) two – be they subjectivities or simply existences – in any meaningful experience, transcending narcissistic or solipsistic modes of being. In this second recognition we see the dialogic structure of Hofmannsthal’s aesthetic at work. Indeed, the many correspondences in the text seem to intimate a dialogical exchange on the structural level, functioning as it were as metaphor for dialogue. While my main interest for the question of the role of aesthetics – again understood in this broader, dialogical sense – lies in the third section of \textit{Augenblicke in Griechenland}, “Die Statuen,” it is important to understand how motifs in the first two sections relate to, inform, and are refashioned in the third. For this reason I shall first turn to “Das Kloster des Heiligen Lukas,” then proceed to “Der Wanderer,” and at the end of this chapter address the encounter with the statues. Though originally published separately, the first section sets the stage for the work as a whole, introducing certain motifs that are adapted and further developed in the subsequent sections: the importance of space as productive atmosphere; the connection between the religious and the aesthetic; the paradoxical coexistence of the high and the low (the simple and the sublime); and the structural relationship of call and response as a religious, ethical, and aesthetic attempt to bridge the distance between the self and the Other.

Thus, as in \textit{Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten}, this text explores the potential of the aesthetic encounter to create a sense of community. Many of the motifs from that text (and from \textit{Das Märchen der 672. Nacht} as well as the Lanckoroński \textit{Ansprache}) return in this one: memory, uncertainty about reality, failure to comprehend the other. The powerful encounter with the work of art – here as in \textit{Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten} – is staged as a liberating moment of breaking
through habits of thought and being. And, as in *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, that moment is figured paradoxically within the dialogical structure of the aesthetic. Subtle differences however allow for an alternative exploration of the aesthetic and its ethical content. In *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, the letter writer, a merchant, returns to Germany only to find his country utterly foreign to him. It is only through (contemporary) art and the humanity behind it that the world and the things in it can as it were come to life again for him. In *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, the situation is reversed: *artists* are travelling away from home, and the foreignness of Greece becomes, towards the culmination of the text, almost unbearable. We will see that, embroidered in this embellished travel narrative, there arises again the question of the aesthetic, its role in the world, and our response to it. With different literary means – and a different kind of aesthetic encounter – Hofmannsthal again asks us to consider the provocative challenges of art.

**Eternity’s Call at “Das Kloster des Heiligen Lukas”**

Atmosphere, as one of the qualities that colours the way we perceive the world, is intimately linked to the aesthetic. While this notoriously vague word (and those in its semantic field) has drawn much attention recently from philosophers and literary historians such as Gernot Böhme, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, and David Wellbery, for the purposes of the discussion in this chapter, I shall restrict my reading to Hofmannsthal’s comments and their relation to *Augenblicke in Griechenland*. *Stimmung*, which carries with it the meaning of atmosphere, mood, and even of musical tuning and voice (*Stimme*) often mediates between observer and object and, as several scholars have pointed out, even blurs those distinctions, muddling any clear picture we might hold of the world. It can refer to the internal, psychological stance of the observer as well as the external environment and how it touches us. It is, according to Hofmannsthal, the Gesamtheit der augenblicklichen Vorstellungen, ist relatives Bewußtsein der Welt: je nach der Stimmung denken wir über das Geringste und Höchste anders, es gibt überhaupt keinen Vorstellungsinhalt, der nicht durch die Stimmung beeinflußt,

---

233 E.g. see Anna-Katharina Gisbertz (“Zu einer Stimmungspoetik”), David Wellbery (“Die Opfer-Vorstellung”), Konrad Heumann (“Stunde, Luft und Ort machen alles”).

234 Cf. Gumbrecht, who links weather and tonal phenomena in how they ‘hit’ our bodies (*Stimmungen lesen* 11).
The role of atmosphere for the encounter is of utmost importance in that it reminds us of the fact that the subjective experience cannot exist without the world outside; yet, at the risk of sounding redundant, what the subject does with this world is subjective. Nevertheless, the “Vorstellungsinhalt,” the content of imagination, is painted (“gemalt”) according to the Stimmung. Thus Stimmung can result in a creative response in the imagination of the subject; it has a potentially aesthetic quality not only in its influence on the external surroundings, but also in the response to its influence. And it is no mere whim that prompted Hofmannsthal to conclude “Das Kloster des Heiligen Lukas” with the sentence: “Stunde, Luft und Ort machen alles” – hour, air, and place make everything (185). Atmosphere or Stimmung is the space which is either conducive or destructive to the production of a response.

In this context it is worth noting Hofmannsthal’s interest in the works of Georg Büchner during this period. Dietmar Goltschnigg has discussed the influence of Büchner’s Lenz on Hofmannsthal’s Andreas (Georg Büchner und die Moderne 39); in both texts, the eponymous protagonists’ psyches are portrayed as interwoven with the landscape. A parallel can be found in Augenblicke in Griechenland, which Hofmannsthal was writing around the same time as he was working on his drafts of Andreas. Thus the initially objective description of this world – the first sentence is purely indicative, absent of any judgment or qualification: “Wir waren an diesem Tag neun oder zehn Stunden geritten” (180) – gives way to a highly nuanced painting of the world opening up before the traveller. I choose the word “painting” deliberately, given that for Hofmannsthal Stimmung affects the way we “paint” the world (hence “gemalt” in the passage quoted above). In a note to


236 Harry Graf Kessler in a letter to Hofmannsthal (18 July 1908) suggested Hofmannsthal strike this sentence, “[d]enn erstens verstehe ich ihn nicht; er bleibt für mich in seiner Beziehung auf das Ganze unklar: ein Orakel. [...] Und zweitens schließt der vorhergehende Satz das Stück auf das Befriedigendste” (qtd. in the “Zeugnisse” to Augenblicke in Griechenland, 703). Hofmannsthal, as we see, did not follow Kessler’s advice. The penultimate sentence – “So klang dieses Zwiegespräch” – must therefore be read in context of the concluding sentence.
Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten, Hofmannsthal writes in a similar vein: “So wirkte Natur auf mich und hier war etwas gemaltes. Hier war eine menschliche Sprache. In einem Blitz habe ich Function des Künstlers geahnt” (SW XXXI 438). We see that here – as in Augenblicke in Griechenland – there is a link between that something painted (whether with paint or metaphorically) and human language, which suggests to us a communicative function of the artist. In Augenblicke in Griechenland, the traveller/narrator experiences a similar phenomenon: the landscape (like the “Natur” of the Briefe) and the events that occur are collected in an undeviating rhythm of simple, repetitive syntax; the language itself remains undisturbed and calm in expressing what a viewer (Hofmannsthal eschews the subjective first person in favour of the impersonal “man”) might see through the veil of distance: “und man schaute hinab und hinüber wie von einem Altan” (181). We are given a view of the landscape as if it were a painting, apprehended by sight. The menschliche Sprache, though, has yet to announce itself.

We are gradually visually guided into the monastery proper, and made aware of the picturesque quality of the unchanging scene. We seem to be closing in on the picture frame in the form of a door: “In der Mauer zur Linken war eine kleine offene Tür; in der Tür lehnte ein Mönch” (181). But now that we have arrived, the prosaic style changes, though quite subtly, neither giving up the tone of serenity already set, nor yielding completely to passivity. Hofmannsthal introduces rhetorical repetition and anaphora, charging the sentences with a more energetic and assertive tenor, and he adds a single word that, seen in light of its Hofmannsthalian connotations, contrasts with the tone hitherto established: “Das schwarze lange Gewand, die schwarze hohe Kopfbedeckung, das lässige Dastehen mit dem Blick auf die Ankommenden, in dieser paradiesischen Einsamkeit, das alles hatte etwas vom Magier an sich” (181). In Hofmannsthal’s work, the figure of the Magier or, alternately, the Zauberer is one often associated with the daemonic aspects of art. The Magier is a being possessed of great creative force, but he has made his abode in a magical world of splendid isolation; he is not subject to the forces of a world of suffering. As Hofmannsthal writes in the 1896 poem, “Ein Traum von großer Magie” (SW I 52): “An ihm sah ich die Macht der Schwere enden” (24). The monk, too, inhabits a space isolated from the sorrows of the world (“in dieser paradiesischen Einsamkeit”). His very posture confirms this, for he leans languidly at the doorway, undisturbed, gazing at the visitors as they arrive. There is something of majesty and self-possession here, for this is the first time in the text that someone else is portrayed as commanding the faculty of sight; with this gaze, directed at the narrator,
Hofmannsthal opens the possibility for co-presence and multiple perspectives. And yet the monk’s location – at the threshold – also announces an ambiguity, made even more prominent in his countenance, creating a definite disturbance in the scene: “Er war jung, hatte einen langen rötlich blonden Bart, von einem Schnitt, der an byzantinische Bildnisse erinnerte, eine Adlernase, ein unruhiges, fast zudringliches blaues Auge. Er begrüßte uns mit einer Neigung und einem Ausbreiten beider Arme, darin etwas Gewolltes war” (181, my emphasis). The monk recalls the serene icons of holy men (“byzantinische Bildnesse”); yet this description also brings to mind the proud and unperturbed, calculated posture of a dandy, thereby introducing the connection between the religious and the aesthetic/aestheticised ways of life: both are lives full of contradictions: seclusion and communion, humility and a sense of election, the knowledge of connection to that which is greater than the self, and the unfathomable distance to the Other. The odd posture and gesture of the monk, the unsettled force behind his face, at the threshold, and this thing willed yet unnamed serve as the first indications of a powerful otherness and resistance to simple patterns of identification and definition; it is the first small and silent wave in what will result in a series of parallel, more intensified images, approaching and beckoning the traveller, and even eventually placing demands upon him in the moment of the aesthetic encounter.

For now, however, the traveller is led into the monastery grounds, perceiving everywhere a constant rhythm “gleich weit von Hast und von Langsamkeit,” and catches the strains of psalms being sung, “gleich weit von Klage und von Lust, etwas Feierliches, das von Ewigkeit her und weit in die Ewigkeit so forttönen mochte” (182). Erwin Kobel is one of the few scholars to have devoted attention in the secondary literature to this moment:

Als das Endlose weist also der Gesang im Kloster des heiligen Lukas über sich hinaus. Sich hebend und sich senkend, tönt er in jedem Augenblick, gleichsam quer zu der als horizontale Erstreckung vorgestellten Zeit, zur Ewigkeit hin und von der Ewigkeit her. Der Gesang ist das Widerspiel zwischen Menschen und Gott (181).

Indeed, the entire religious atmosphere can be read as a preparation for the aesthetic atmosphere to come; alternatively, through Hofmannsthal’s writing, the religious space has itself been

---

237 Again, we might refer to the image of the poet-as-magician in “Ein Traum von großer Magie” (SW I 52): “Dann warf er sich mit leichtem Schwung der Lenden – / Wie nur aus Stolz – der nächsten Klippe zu” (22-23).
aestheticised; song and scenery are expressions of this correlation. Kobel’s astute observation about the physical and religious nature of song, spreading through time as space does nevertheless neglect one important aspect: the ambiguity of the word “mocht,” which might well be interpreted in the sense of possibility or wish. The reality of the song’s traversing space from and back to eternity is qualified by this “mocht” at the end of the sentence. Indeed, there is further support to this qualification to be found in the narrator’s description of another sound emanating from the voice of an unseen singer: “Das Echohafte, das völlig Getreue jenem feierlichen, kaum noch menschlichen Klang, das Willenlose, fast Bewußtlose schien nicht aus der Brust einer Frau zu kommen. Es schien, als sänge dort das Geheimnis selber, ein Wesensloses” (182, emphasis mine). The inconclusiveness of “mocht” has given over now to appearance (“schien”) and to the irrealis mood, the subjunctive “sänge,” whereupon the narrator discovers the voice is neither that of a woman nor that of the secret itself (deliberately not expounded upon), but that of a young boy, striking in his beauty beyond the simple division of gender, a kind of answer to Goethe’s Mignon and precursor to Thomas Mann’s Tadzio.

And yet this boy does embody duration, repetition, and ritual conveyed through the ages. He is still young, yet in him we see the coming generation of monks performing the same ancient rituals manifest in song.239

Es vollzog sich, was sich seit einem Jahrtausend Abend für Abend an der gleichen Stätte zur gleichen Stunde vollzieht. Welches stürzende Wasser ist so ehrwürdig, daß es seit zehnmal hundert Jahren den gleichen Weg rauschte? Welcher uralte Ölbaum murmelt seit zehnmal hundert Jahren mit gleicher Krone im Winde? Nichts ist hier zu nennen als das ewige Meer drunten in den Buchten und die ewigen Gipfelkronen des schneeleuchtenden Parnaß unter den ewigen Sternen. (183)


239 Cf. Gregory Nagy’s definitions of myth (related to song) and ritual: “Ritual is doing things and saying things in a way that is considered sacred. Myth is saying things in a way that is also considered sacred. So ritual frames myth” (5).
The ritual of gesture and song repeats, cascading through the generations seemingly without end. Few things in the world (art perhaps being one of them) are comparable to this enduring enactment; and yet it is re-enactment, each and every time. It is the same and different – not dasselbe, but rather das Gleiche. The existence of the ritual depends on the monks performing it, and on the coming generations, on the next boy with a beautiful voice. And these monks, as monks, find in this ancient ritual a home for a fervour that seems to exist in them just as much as they exist in it: “In der erhabenen Gelassenheit ihres Gesanges zitterte eine nach alten Regeln gebändigte Inbrunst” (183). Stimmung is calling.

The Stimmung here is paradoxical: it is the tantalising nearness of the unattainable. And again for Hofmannsthal this is not a matter of identity, but of sameness, established through participation: “Der gleiche Boden, die gleichen Lüfte, das gleiche Tun, das gleiche Ruhn. Ein Unnennbares ist gegenwärtig, nicht entblößt, nicht verschleiert, nicht faßbar, und auch nicht sich entziehend: genug, es ist nahe. [...] und es ist kein Traum” (184, my emphasis). It is in this paragraph, at the end of the first section, that Hofmannsthal switches tenses, bringing that distance of the past into the present of the text; past is in conversation with the present. It is near to the reader as well. I say “Stimmung is calling” not simply as a literary flourish: for Hofmannsthal, there is something inexpressible (for which “Stimmung” seems as good a placeholder as any) which is calling through time, calling for a response by making its presence known.240 The narrator overhears two men conversing:

Dies Zwiegespräch ist klein zwischen dem Priester und dem dienenden Mann. Aber der Ton war aus den Zeiten der Patriarchen. [...] dies Unscheinbare, diese wenigen Worte, gewechselt in der Nacht, dies hat einen Rhythmus in sich, der von Ewigkeit her ist. (184)

---

240 On the relation between presence (or more specifically “Präsenzeffekte”) and Stimmung see the chapter “Stimmungen lesen: Wie man die Wirklichkeit der Literatur heute denken kann” in Gumbrecht’s Stimmung lesen (7-34).
Ewigkeit is transported on the wings of such small things: the “Unscheinbare,”241 the gestures, the few words exchanged.242 We can understand what prompted Kessler to express preference for the text’s conclusion with the sentence: “So klang dieses Zwiegespräch” (185). Yet for Hofmannsthal this “Zwiegespräch” exists in Stimmung, evoking and re-enacting a sense of continuity, connecting the conversation to the space; just as the scent of wax, honey and incense which fills the air is in fact the redolence of song (182), so too is there a very real, physical sense in which “Stunde, Luft und Ort machen alles.”

While the Augenblicke can be read as a series of self-sustaining moments juxtaposed with one another, any interpretation of the text will benefit from a reading that finds in these discrete moments intentional and meaningful repetition; put another way, Hofmannsthal’s writing continuously – we might even say ritualistically243 – returns to images and forms of expression already presented in the text, rendering them familiar while not neglecting their particularity in context and their “Einmaligkeit”; for, as Gabriel says in Gespräch über Gedichte, the eyes of poetry see everything for the first time.244 It is with such eyes that we should read Augenblicke in Griechenland: each moment is a distinct “Ereignis”; yet in its distinction it is possible to see its relation to other moments. The paradox of the encounter lies in its preservation of distance and

---

241 Cf. Der Dichter und diese Zeit, where Hofmannsthal speaks of the poets of his time: “das unscheinbarste Dasein, die dürtigste Situation wird ihren immer schärferen Sinnen seelenhaft [...].” (SW XXXIII RA2 140).

242 Hofmannsthal thus stands in a long tradition of what Sulpiz Boisserée has, in referring to the brothers Grimm, called the “Andacht zum Unbedeutenden” (Boisserée 72). This appreciation for the importance of details and small things takes on a particular symbolism-inspired emphasis in the second half of the nineteenth century for people like Walter Pater, and in the twentieth becomes an indispensable point of orientation for Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin. Cf. Aleida Assmann, “Hofmannsthals Chandos-Brief” (esp. 276).

243 Cf. Bernard Neuhoff, “Ritual und Trauma. Eine Konstellation der Moderne bei Benjamin, Freud und Hofmannsthal”: “Es geht um eine Sprach- und Ausdrucks-Findung, die selbst Ereignis ist. Genau an dieser Stelle hat – so die leitende These dieser Studie – das Ritual seine spezifische Funktion. Das Ritual erscheint als Möglichkeit, traumatische Augenblicke zu kommunizieren und symbolisch zu verarbeiten, ohne ihren Ereignischarakter zu neutralisieren” (185). Neuhoff further argues that, for Benjamin, the question of “Ereignis” is often aesthetically motivated (205); I would add that this applies to Hofmannsthal as well.

244 Cf. Kobel’s discussion of Der Abenteurer und die Sängerin, esp. 100-03. There is also a sense in which “Einmaligkeit” functions as a life-changing moment; in Die Frau am Fenster (SW III Dramen I 112), this is implied as the moment of a maltreated woman’s self-assertion in the matters of love. Dianora loves a man other than her violent husband and defends herself before the latter thus: “Doch meinst du, ich bin eine von den Frauen, / die hinter Kupplerinnen und Bedienten / ihr Glück versteckt, dann kennst du mich sehr schlecht. / Merk auf, merk auf! Einmal darf eine Frau / so sein, wie ich jetzt war, zwölf Wochen lang, / einmal darf sie so sein! Wenn sie vorher / des Schleiers nie bedurfte, ganz gedeckt / vom eignen Stolz, so wie von einem Schild, / darf sie den Schleier einmal auch wegreißen / und Wangen haben, brennend wie die Sonne. / Die’s zweimal könnte, wäre fürchterlich.” The importance of singularity in repetition is a motif evoked throughout Augenblicke in Griechenland.
difference – here depicted as a component of *Stimmung* and the language for which it sets the scene – as well as individuality; that is, there is no full identity: “genug, es ist nahe.”

The *Stimmung* of the monastery is a thoroughly religious one, but many of the factors that make it religious also make it aesthetically evocative. The landscape is like a painting; ritual – an interruption in linear temporality – finds expression in the music of a boy’s voice (*Stimme*); and even the monk with his ambiguous gaze seems to hint at the caricature of the artist as solitary magician as well as the disturbance below the seemingly calm surface of a world of harmonious and pleasing images. The “Echohafte” of the voice in the monastery, the *Stimme*, calls – and it desires to be answered by another, different voice, adequate to but different from itself. Like the nymph Echo, whose unrequited desire for the beautiful Narcissus leads to her downfall, the voices of the monastery seem, in their peaceful seclusion, destined for a life of eternal solitude and yearning. But where is Narcissus in this analogy? He will appear in the narrator himself, though not for some time, and only distortedly.

**Poetic Wanderings in “Der Wanderer”**

While the first section focused on establishing a particular *Stimmung* and allowing the inexpressible sensation of “Ewigkeit” to shine through in the small exchanges, it is personal experience which comes to the fore here in the second section of the text, “Der Wanderer.” This in effect answers the call with an uncanny otherness whose depiction has much in common with the Narcissus figure hinted at in the first section. Leaving the cyclical “Rhythmus” of the priests’ conversation, a rhythm “der von Ewigkeit her ist” (184), and the “Echohafte” of the singing voice, the traveller and his companion take to the road once more, where they engage in conversation before encountering another traveller. It is in wandering, in passing through the landscape by foot, that the contrast between transience and eternity is made increasingly more explicit, characterising the travellers’ perception. Personal memories and faces now become the focus of “einer der seltsamsten und schönsten Gespräche, dessen ich mich entsinnen kann,” the narrator states (185). It is to this *schönes Gespräch* – that is, a dialogue treated aesthetically, and one which further prepares us for the encounter with the German traveller – that that I would now like to turn.
As we have already seen in chapter two, from at least the time of the *Ansprache* (1902), Hofmannsthal had a very nuanced understanding of the word “schön,” which is also evoked repeatedly at important moments in *Augenblicke in Griechenland*. While in English we might render the word “schönste” as “loveliest” or “nicest,” this doesn’t seem to capture what Hofmannsthal means. The “schönes Gespräch” consists not in a merely enjoyable exchange of information or opinions; instead, the travelling companions take turns evoking memories of significant encounters with other people, investing them with new life; each memory then calls up other memories, each face answering the previous one; and so the conversation sustains itself, a sea of ever-changing faces gradually swelling up from the past. The atmosphere, too, plays an important role, as it did in the first section. At the foot of Mount Parnassus – the famed home of the muses – along the path where Oedipus is said to have journeyed, the clarity of the air and lack of sleep, and the sense of connection to the past and to myth have prepared their imagination for these visions of past personal encounters, lending this dialogue of memories a poetic air, inspired by the muses and enwrapped in myth, much as the monks’ rituals call upon the past. Thus, even though these memories stem from the individual subject, they are nevertheless born of a context: the external world, expressed as atmosphere, suggests a temporal otherness, and the memories may well be, in their very distance, close to myth.

Just as there is a correlation between the external world and the vividness of memory, so too do the memories make the travelling companions acutely aware of their own existence: “Unsere Freunde erschienen uns, und indem sie sich selber brachten, brachten sie das Reinste unseres Daseins herangetragen” (186). We should bear in mind that for Hofmannsthal this mutual dependence is already understood as a condition for *beauty*; this, as one of the “schönste” conversations, is consonant with the definition outlined in the *Ansprache* – as is the description of the travellers’ utterances as “ernst und von einer fast beängstigenden Klarheit” (186). Even if Hofmannsthal’s readers are not familiar with the *Ansprache*, the use of the word “beängstigend” lends the necessary gravity that contributes to the 1902 definition of beauty. Thir clarity is daunting; and this contributes to the beauty of this conversation. As if reasserting the intrisic dialogical condition of beauty, it seems that part of the source of this anxiety is the impossibility of determining a single originary source; that is, where does this sense of presence originate: in the person recalling, or in the vision recalled, in the subject or the object? Again, the diction here resembles that of the *Ansprache* with its reference to mutual sustenance. In the *Ansprache*: “Denn
ein solches Anrecht, aus unserem Innern sich zu nähren, räumen wir ihnen ein, indem wir sie »schön« nennen” (76, my emphasis in italics); here, we have the counterpart: “Gestalt auf Gestalt kommt heran, sättigt uns mit ihrem Anblick, begleitet uns, verfließt wieder” (186, my emphasis). The faces of memory have a life of their own, yet, like ancient Greek spirits in Hades, they wait their turn to drink from the libations and speak: “andere, anklingend, haben schon gewartet, nehmen die leere Stelle ein, beglänzen einen Umkreis gelebten Lebens, bleiben dann gleichsam am Wege zurück, indessen wir gehen und gehen, als hinge von diesem Gehen die Fortdauer des Zaubers ab” (186). The notion of sustenance already brings to mind mortality and our common weal’s dependence on other existences and the external world; and Hofmannsthal’s image – “indessen wir gehen und gehen” – again recalls Odysseus, or for that matter Oedipus on his journey, or Dante in his soul’s medieval quest through the realms of the dead.

Though structurally and motivically similar, Hofmannsthal’s writing has a very different tenor, and this comes out most explicitly in his description of the faces. Like Rilke or Benjamin later, Hofmannsthal again locates significance in the smallest of things: “Indem sie vor uns lebten und uns anblickten, waren die kleinsten Umstände und Dinge gegenwärtig” (186). The faces they encounter even recall the description of the priests’ dialogue: the travellers imagine hearing the tone of the faces’ voices, the “scheinbar unbedeutende kleine Sätze” (186) and yet contained in these sparse words is the entire human being, and more:

und ihre Gesichter sind mehr als Gesichter: das gleiche wie im Ton jener abgebrochenen Sätze steigt in ihnen auf, kommt näher und näher gegen uns heran, scheint in ihren Zügen, im Unsagbaren ihres Ausdrucks aufgefangen und darinnen befestigt, aber nicht beruhigt. Es ist ein endloses Wollen, Möglichkeiten, Bereitsein, Gelittenes, zu Leidendes. Jedes dieser Gesichter ist ein Geschick, etwas Einziges, das Einzelnste, was es gibt, und dabei ein Unendliches, ein Auf-der-

\[245\text{ For more on this topic, see Claudia Bamberg’s introductory chapter in Hofmannsthal: Der Dichter und die Dinge (13-53, esp. 13-21).}\]

\[246\text{ It is unclear whether Hofmannsthal is writing of the faces of memory or the faces of the living encountered on the road. The dreamlike confusion of reality and memory is already at play – “und die Berge waren in diesem lautlosen, bläulichen Leben der Luft nicht wirklicher als die Erscheinungen, die uns begleiteten” (186) – and has even greater significance for the final section of Augenblicke in Griechenland as well as Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten and, as we have seen, Das Märchen der 672. Nacht.}\]
Reise-sein nach einem unsagbar fernen Ziel. Es scheint nur zu leben, indem es uns anblickt: als wäre es unser Gegenblick, um dessenwillen es lebe. (186)

The duration of a life, determined by time, is necessarily fragmentary; it is never complete nor closed.247 At best, “our little life is rounded with a sleep.” Life is akin to the “abgebrochenen Sätze” which likewise are caught up in the “Unsagbaren ihres Ausdrucks,” restlesslly wandering, unable to encompass the entirety of being. In this passage we see the Nietzschean and Schopenhauerian Will at work (“ein endloses Wollen”) as well a Büchnerian248 recognition of suffering (“Gelittenes, zu Leidendes”). This is the fate of humanity, which should come as no surprise, for the face here is also fate (“Jedes dieser Gesichter ist ein Geschick”); and, if we take the face to be the “geometrischer Ort der inneren Persönlichkeit, so weit sie anschaubar ist,”249 then we are also not far from that dark Pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus and his 119th fragment: character is fate (Fragments 69). Each face shares in the same fate, yet it does so individually: each face is das Gleiche, not dasselbe. This fate in which all faces share is an unfinished narrative, a wandering (“ein Auf-der-Reise-sein”) or pilgrimage to some impossibly distant goal. In other words: the face is open-ended even in its individuality. The face is, to borrow the Romantic term again, a “Hieroglyph” (as it was in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten).250 Alternatively, we could call it a symbol, as described in Gespräch über Gedichte. Its open-endedness is made even more explicit in the statements that follow: “[A]ber auch die Geschicke sind nicht alles. In jedem, der uns grüßt,

---


248 While Schopenhauer’s notion of suffering is likewise omnipresent for the fin-de-siècle, Büchner’s (purported) specific take on it (at least at the end of his life) was closer to Hofmannsthals. The words attributed to Büchner on his death-bed – “Wir haben der Schmerzen nicht zu viel, wir haben ihrer zu wenig, denn durch den Schmerz gehen wir zu Gott ein! Wir sind Tod, Staub, Asche, wie dürften wir da klagen?” – can be found in several places in Hofmannsthal’s notes. See Kobel Hugo von Hofmannsthal (327).

249 Simmel, “Die ästhetische Bedeutung des Gesichts” (39). See also Dangel-Pelloquin, “Ah, das Gesicht!” (54).

250 For Hofmannsthals use of the face as a hieroglyph, see the Erläuterung to “Geschichte der Frau von W.”; “Vermutlich geht dies auf Novalis zurück, der in den Fragmenten schreibt: ‘Religiosität der Physiognomik. Heilige unerforschliche Hieroglyphe jeder Menschengestalt!’ (Sämtliche Werke III 161)” (SW XXXI 304). Pauget notes aptly the etymological importance of the senses in the word: “Le réel immédiat ne manifeste pas un ordre intelligible. Il déçoit par son opacité et ses contradictions. Il paraît informe. L’œuvre d’art au contraire est une matière qui a reçu forme, qui manifeste un ordre, une intention. Elle est ‘hiéroglyphe’ – le mot apparaît dans ce texte, comme dans les Briefe des Zurückgekehrten, à propos des statues: il est question du ‘hiéroglyphe de leur visage.’ Or le hiéroglyphe est, étymologiquement, le signe qui rend l’invisible présent aux sens” (76).
ist ein Ferneres noch, ein Jenseits von beiden, das uns anrührt. Wir sind wie zwei Geister, die sich zärtlich erinnern, an den Mahlzeiten der sterblichen Menschen teilgenommen zu haben” (186-87).

The likening of this encounter to that of spirits who once partook in the communion of mortals is once again reminiscent of Ancient and Classical Greek thought – we do well to think of Plato’s Symposium. The Greek word means “to drink together.” Such communal repasts served not only as an opportunity to enjoy the company of others; they were an opportunity to carry out custom, themis, and to establish relationships based on hospitality, which was then given material representation in the form of a gift. Gadamer reminds us in Die Aktualität des Schönen that the symbol (symbolon), which became so important for art, is, for the ancient Greeks, precisely this gift of hospitality. It is a gift, furthermore, of recognition: “eine Erinnerungsscherbe.” In love, but also in “die Erfahrung des Schönen” – and this includes the here discussed “seltames und schönes Gespräch” – one is able to experience the open-ended “Beschwörung einer möglichen heilen Ordnung, wo immer es sei” (43). The faces the travellers see are “Erinnerungsscherben,” symbols that recall those “Mahlzeiten der sterblichen Menschen.”

Yet, for Hofmannsthal, this is not entirely a “Beschwörung einer möglichen heilen Ordnung.” It is a confrontation with the persistent and ever renewed suffering and solitude of human life. Hofmannsthal draws our attention to one figure in particular: “der am unsäglichsten gelitten hat [...]. Er ist arm und leidet, aber wer dürfte wagen, ihm helfen zu wollen, maßlos einsam” (187). This unnamed figure, whose extremity of situation and being is ironically characterised by the limits of language (“unsäglich”), is the poet Rimbaud, the young man who rejected his identity as poet, who chose a solitary wanderer’s life out of contempt for his former self and situation. Impoverished, the young man set out to secure financial stability, but in doing so, strove “gegen den eigenen Dämon um ein Ungeheures [...], ein nicht zu Nennendes” (187). This thing that shall not be named is, we can ascertain, at the very least wrapped up in his spurning both human relationships and his poetic genius. Even in his remembered incapacitation, we see that he will not be borne down the hillside easily: “er will steil hinab, ohne Weg, schnell. Unsagbare Auflehnung, Trotz dem Tod bis ins Weiße des Augs, den Mund vor Qual verzogen und zu klagen verachtend”

---

251 A re-evaluation of Hofmannsthal’s writings on the themes of propriety, tact and custom (Sitte, Gebräuche, Taktgefühl) would benefit from a look into his understanding of the Ancient Greek themis.

252 See the Erläuterung to 187, 4 (108).
This is the spirit of defiance – a much more forceful (“gewaltiger” 187) version of the monk in that “paradiesischen Einsamkeit” with his “unruhiges, fast zudringliches blaues Auge” and gesture, “darin etwas Gewolltes war” (181). The face of Rimbaud exhibits these qualities – solitude and independent will – and reveals them in the context of suffering while, as Wellbery aptly points out, recalling the face of the merchant’s son on his deathbed (“Die Opfer-Vorstellung,” 301).

As if to corroborate this image of the defiant, solitary wanderer, the atmosphere too takes on an antagonistic quality: “Fast drohend blickte die Morgensonne auf die fremde ernste Gegend. [...] Fremde Schicksale, sonst unsichtbare Ströme, schlugen in uns auf Festes und offenbarten sich” (188). These fates and faces, strange perhaps by nature of their reluctance to partake in the “Mahlzeiten der sterblichen Menschen,” nevertheless approach the conversing travellers. The shared, though internal, world of memory thus appears to extend its sphere of influence outward just as much as the environment is said to affect the world of interiority. Whereas at the monastery of Hosios Loukas we are left with an emphasis on the external world in the phrase “Stunde, Luft und Ort machen alles,” here Hofmannsthal draws from the subjective, internal world of reminiscence a literary anticipation of an actual encounter with another human being, one of these “fremde Schicksale.” Just as the external presupposes the internal and vice-versa, so too do the subjective and objective worlds presuppose each other. The external world and circumstances had set the scene for one of the strangest and most beautiful conversations; now subjectivity and even the implicit sense of responsibility253 that accompany this beautiful conversation seem to prepare the reader and the travellers for an encounter with what lies outside of them, for an encounter with the Other. How will this look, and what does it require?

There is Vengeance in Heaven for an Injured Dog

“Der Wanderer,” this second section of Augenblicke in Griechenland which has been the subject of the ‘poetic wanderings’ till now, does not actually begin with the title “Der Wanderer.” Set above this section heading is an epigraph in Greek: εἰδὴ καὶ κοινὸν ἔρνος, a quote Hofmannsthal had taken from Gilbert Murray’s The Rise of the Greek Epic: “There is vengeance in heaven for

253 Again, I am relying on Hofmannsthal’s statement in the Ansprache that “schön” is “das Wort, das am tiefsten verpflichtet” (SW XXXIII RA 2 11).
an injured dog.” Murray’s work was crucial to Hofmannsthal’s literary treatment of his 1908 Greek travels, and the many markings he made in his copy of the The Rise of the Greek Epic [*FDH 1738] are evidence of an intense engagement with the classicist’s thought. As Schings has pointed out, Murray’s studies are echoed repeatedly in Augenblicke in Griechenland in the form of a call to a “sense of social responsibility” (Schings 377). To say that there are Erinyes even for injured dogs is an ancient Greek approach to acknowledging the final equality of all beings; like the medieval and baroque images of Death-the-Leveller, all beings are, at death, equally entitled to justice and vengeance – even the maimed, like Oedipus, like Rimbaud. Murray notes: “If you made a man your slave, that showed you did not regard him with aidôs. [...] Of course a wrong done to a slave was hated by the gods and, one might hope, duly avenged. But that was the same with animals” (Murray 110, fn1).

But what do dogs have to do with “Der Wanderer”? No dogs are mentioned, yet the question of how to treat the Other – be it human or animal – is omnipresent. This, again, is a question of the subject entering into a relationship of responsibility with the “object,” the external world, the stranger, or even the past. Rimbaud is a tragic figure not only because, as a poet, he suffered, but also because his life was one filled with contempt for his “eigenen Dämon” as well as for community; this was his hubris, his hamartia. Like Oedipus, whose path the traveller’s have been

---

254 The dog in Andreas is another example of Hofmannsthal’s taking up the notion of the final equality of beings and the consequences of failing to acknowledge that equality. In that novel-fragment, the dog is the object of twelve year-old Andreas’s sadistic brutality (born out of a kind of possessive jealousy) – and his actions come back to haunt him, both in his desire to return to that time, when “das Unendliche” touched him, and in his desire for a canine companion, which he knows he could never again have. Notably for the context of Augenblicke in Griechenland, the dog approaches Andreas with a “Demut” which is “unbegreiflich” (SW XXX 70; contrast Kafka’s image of the dog as an animal laden with shame. K.’s final words in Der Process describe his death: “Wie ein Hund!” sagte er, es war, als sollte die Scham ihn überleben.” See the “Ende” notebook to Der Process, vol. 1.11: 25). There are other examples in Hofmannsthal’s work of inflicted suffering or sacrifice associated with extraordinary sensation. (One particularly disturbing image is that of the crucified sparrow-hawk in “Dämmerung und nächtliches Gewitter,” 437). Wellbery argues convincingly that the sacrifice is part of what gives “die ’guten Augenblicke’ ihre Faszination” (“Opfer-Vorstellung,” 298). Similarly in Ein Brief, as Wellbery points out (295), the writer tells of his vision of dying rats in a cellar with “modrigen Mauern,” echoing his description of the words which “zerfielen mir im Munde wie modrige Pilze,” as if the cellar were the writer’s own oral echo chamber projected outward (SW XXX 51, 49). There thus seems to be a link between the ‘subject’ and the ‘object’ here. The artist too is, like the dog, a sufferer; and in that suffering there is also pleasure: “Denn er [der Dichter] leidet an allen Dingen und indem er an ihnen leidet, genießt er sie” (Der Dichter und diese Zeit, SW XXXIII RA2 138). In general, it might be argued – though I cannot go into detail here – that Hofmannsthal’s images of sacrifice move from sacrifice of the other to sacrifice of the self; yet in all of these, there is a strange tangling of existences. This is why it is such a powerful trope for the symbol in Gespräch über Gedichte (SW XXX 80-81).
tracing, Rimbaud did not know, or rather, he refused to acknowledge his identity; in doing so, he also cut himself off from community. He failed to develop a sense of social responsibility.

The meeting with the man in memory has anticipated the meeting with a ‘real’ man, a German, whose life in many ways mirrors that of Rimbaud’s – he is a formerly strong, young man of twenty-one, now weakened by time and pain. He is helpless and barefoot. His face is described as “elend” and his eyes are like those of a “gequälte[s] Tier” (188), reminiscent of Murray’s injured dog. Yet unlike Rimbaud, he is trying to return home from his travels. This “Schiffbrüchiger” is ill and in need of rest; he nevertheless refuses to retrace his steps and return to a place nearby where he could convalesce. Instead, he sets himself a strictly linear path forwards, as if towards death, much like Rimbaud’s desire to be born “steil hinab, ohne Weg, schnell” (187): “Sonderbar unwirklich dies, wie er so mit Schweigen auf seinen Tod zuging [...]” (191). But his initial refusal gives way to consent: he agrees to be accompanied to a town in the direction he wishes to travel, and to be tended to: “und die Wegweiser halfen ihm, den sie den ‘fremden Herrn Bettler’ nannten, und banden ihn mit Anstand und Ehrerbietung” (189). Here we see the man in need accepting help, and in doing so, he is treated with respect; his aidôs is recognised:

The disinherited of the earth, the injured, the helpless, and among them the most utterly helpless of all, the dead. All these, the dead, the stranger, the beggar, the orphan, the merely unhappy, are from the outset αἰδοῖοι, ‘charged with αἰδώς.’ [...] It is the counterpart of what we, in our modern and scientific prose, call ‘a sense of moral responsibility’ or the like; the feeling roused more or less in most people by the existence of great misery in our wealthy societies. (Murray 109-110)

This encounter with a living man of sorrows has disturbed the narrating traveller such that he becomes acutely aware of the inhospitable foreignness of the air in which they travel. They arrive at the spring where the German had earlier drunk, and, bowing down (very nearly mimicking the religious gesture of proskynesis, prostration whereby one kisses the ground), they take a drink from this same spring. Remembering the German wanderer and his suffering, the narrator suddenly feels

255 The term suggests also someone who has escaped from the sinking ship – perhaps of Rimbaud’s “Bateau ivre.” It further recalls the Zurückgekehrter after he exchanges his place on ship for a nauseous persistence on land.
the antagonism of the world ("wie ein einziger Feind," 190), as if sharing in that suffering. The troubles of the German traveller become his own as he recalls the face inscribed with pain:

Sein Gesicht blickte mich an, wie früher jene Gesichter mich angeblickt hatten; ich verlor mich fast an sein Gesicht, und wie um mich zu retten vor seiner Umklammerung, sagte ich mir: "Wer ist dieser? Ein fremder Mensch!" Da waren neben diesem Gesicht die anderen, die mich ansahen und ihre Macht an mir übten und viele mehr. (190)

This one face has now joined the ranks of those faces of memory, and in doing so has unleashed the power of the others, such that the power of the gaze ("Sein Gesicht blickte mich an") threatens to disrupt the cohesiveness and sense of presence of the self: "Ich verlor mich fast an sein Gesicht."
The desire to *rescue* ("retten") the self works like a deliberate response to Ernst Mach’s well-known four-word sentence from the *Beiträge zur Analyse der Empfindungen*: “Das Ich ist unrettbar” (20). The coping mechanism used to achieve distance from such shame-conjuring faces is to deny their familiarity, to deny any relation or point of commonality – to label them “fremd.” But this refusal is tantamount to ignoring that “sense of social responsibility.” Not surprisingly, this repressive instinct backfires: the faces of the past reassert themselves in the form of what seems to be an early memory, yet the narrator, speaking now in the third person, does not identify it explicitly as his own. Precisely the opposite of *erlebte Rede*, whereby the third person narrator approaches that of the first person, here we have a deliberate distancing in the language used: the narrator describes his own vision by sacrificing his first-person perspective for the third, essentially rendering in literary form the sensation of the doubled self described in *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* (“daß ich das Gefühl meiner selbst an diese Bilder verlor, und mächtig wieder zurückbekam, und wieder verlor! […] und war wie doppelt, war Herr über mein Leben zugleich, Herr über meine Kräfte, meinen Verstand, fühlte die Zeit vergehen,” (169-70). Yet here, the experience is more traumatic than transformative, split rather than multiplied, and motivated by memories of the past rather than an encounter in the present moment:

---

256 Cf. Murray, again referring to that quality the ancient Greeks called αἰδοίοι: “It was an emotion, the keener because it was merely instinctive and was felt by a peculiarly sensitive people; an emotion of shame and awe, and perhaps something like guilt, in meeting the eyes of the oppressed of the earth; a feeling that a wrong done to these men is like no other wrong; that what these men report of you ultimately in the ear of Zeus will outweigh all the acute comments of the world and the gratifying reports of your official superiors” (110).

The young boy is overwhelmed by the individual suffering of each soldier; and this suffering cannot be assuaged by any actions the boy might take. As in the Iliad’s catalogues of those dead and about to die, the intensity and amount of suffering grows, etched as it is upon each and every face; and the boy senses that anonymous enjoinderment to take responsibility for all, and he would – if he could, hence the subjunctive hätte – draw each of these faces into himself, all of them strangers, and all of them individuals, yet united in the human experience of pain and suffering.

This awakens in the boy a desire to feel, to touch each one with his sympathetic counting, his acknowledging the other. Though he does not experience the suffering of the other directly, he is an active viewer of it, a witness, and his mere existence apart from this makes him sense in his being – again, indirectly – a kind of guilt: Schuld. Powerless to change their fate, his own is nevertheless affected.

This vision compels the narrator to turn his earlier question to himself: this time, he does not ask “Wer ist dieser?” and respond with “Ein fremder Mensch!” Instead he asks: “Wer bin ich?” (191).

This question comes as a response to the many faces flooding his child self’s view; it is a moment of being overwhelmed completely, nearly replaced by one’s past, and yet it is also the moment where the self exists in communion with others; this is symbolised by drinking and partial submersion in water. At one point in his notes to the Ansprache, Hofmannsthal approaches a similar dramatic peak when describing the confrontation with a work of art:

Wir sehen uns umgeben von schönen Formen und Farben.
Genießen auf den ersten Blick vielfaches Gebilde der Natur und der Menschenhand. [...] “Kunstfreund” ein gefährliches Wort, nicht ohne dämonischen Inhalt.
Hier scheinen wir etwa in Gefahr, uns selber zu verlieren: großer Irrthum!

Wir sehen uns umgeben von schönen Formen und Farben.
Hier werden wir erst geweckt, uns selber zu besitzen: denn wir schaffen ja den unsterblichen Inhalt dieser Gebilde, indem wir sie lebendig nachfühlen. (SW XXXIII RA 2 255)

How do we relate this dramatic moment to the narrator’s encounter with the faces of memory? Again, the Ansprache points to the potentially positive, if also painful, effects of recognising the “übereinander getürmten Schichten der aufgestapelten überindividuellen Erinnerung” (11) in one’s own psychic organisation.  

The traveller experiences in this division of the self an opportunity to experience the self as other; here, he observes at a distance his younger self, the boy. Yet he also then must make the journey back to his present “self.” Paradoxically, this happens precisely when, caught in a state of wonder, he fears most the total loss of his identifiable self:

Da, im Augenblick des bangsten Staunens, kam ich mir wieder, der Knabe sank in mich hinein, das Wasser floß unter meinem Gesicht hinweg und bespülte die eine Wange, die aufgestützten Arme hielten den Leib, ich hob mich, und es war nichts weiter als das Aufstehen eines, der an fließendem Wasser mit angelegten Lippen einen langen Zug getan hatte. (191)

The dénouement is so quick as almost not to exist. In one sweeping sentence Hofmannsthal brings together the most intense moment and the return to the mundane, uniting the two seemingly mutually exclusive experiences of life, linking them with the simultaneously ordinary and highly ambiguous, symbolic image of water. As Narcissus, the narrator bows down to the water – and like Narcissus, he does not recognise himself (“Wer bin ich?”). But water also carries with it the opposite connotations of the symposium he shares with his former self – and with the German

257 As the editors Konrad Heumann and Ellen Ritter have pointed out in the Erläuterung, Hofmannsthal had at the time been assimilating into his own work the hypothesis raised by Freud and Breuer in Studien über Hysterie, namely that memory is organised as a structure of stratified layers. Hofmannsthal uses this image then to explain how an encounter with a work of art can have a – necessarily limited – (self-)revelatory effect on the viewer (253).

258 Cf. his note from from 4 January 1894, inspired by Ernst Mach: “Wir sind unserem Ich von Vor-zehn-Jahren nicht näher, unmittelbarer eins als mit dem Leib unserer Mutter. Ewige physische Kontinuität” (GW Aufzeichnungen 107, spacing in original).
traveller he had encountered earlier – yet it is also an image of renewal, of cleansing, of life, and of the flux of the world. With this gesture he also reveals the identity of the self precisely in its multiplicity, in its participatory existence. This is the moment when Narcissus listens to Echo and recognises the similarity and the difference; even once the “Knabe” has sunk again into the narrator’s being, the latter still experiences the world as at once split and unified. He speaks of his body as both separate from and one with himself. “[D]ie aufgestützten Arme” hold up “den Leib.” He does use the first-person pronoun and perspective here, but there is a reflexive element that renders the subject split, an object separate from itself: “ich hob mich.” Finally, this most intense of moments thus far described is swept up entirely into generality, as if it were nothing more than some person – any person – standing up from taking a drink of water. In the end, the individual is just as much himself as he is everyman, just as everyman partakes of existence. In his notebooks, Hofmannsthal writes, referring to his play Gestern: “Das Gedächtnis gehört nur dem Körper: er reproduziert scheinbar das Vergangene, d.h. er erzeugt ein ähnliches Neues in der Stimmung. Mein Ich von gestern geht mich so wenig an wie das Ich Napoleons oder Goethes” (GW Aufzeichnungen 93). In Augenblicke in Griechenland, this is fully overturned. The traveller’s “Ich” from yesterday is still present and relevant to him, as is the “Ich” of others – be they soldiers, wanderers, or injured dogs.

The ethical implication that the being of others is of relevance to the traveller is, furthermore, a thing of beauty. This is not immediately apparent, but as early as 1894/95, Hofmannsthal was working on this image connecting the aesthetic with the ethical in a strikingly similar fashion. In a fragmentary but nevertheless revealing note from those years, he writes:

> Verwandtschaft der schönen Dinge in der Zeit, und tiefer Sinn davon: die Bilderbücher von Crane, Verwandtschaft derer von verschiedenen Zeiten [...] So umschweben uns die parallelen Gebäuden der Unzähligen, unzählige Gesichter beugen sich mit uns Wasser [zu] trinken, greifen mit uns in die Zweige. (GWE RA III 391-92, spacing as in original)

---

259 In *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, for instance, the golden water is referred to as “das Wasser des Lebens.” See also Belma Çakmur’s Hofmannsthals Erzählung *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, esp. 206.

260 Cf. the *Ansprache*, where Hofmannsthal asks with reference to the works of art: “Wer ist unter uns, der sagen könnte: ‘Was gehen sie mich an?’ Wer könnte sie aus seinem Fühlen und Denken leichter herausschneiden als ein Stück Fleisch aus seinem Körper?” (8).
The kinship of beautiful things transcends generations, revealing a moment of sameness in spite of the incorrigible onward-moving linearity of historical time. Thus Walter Crane’s images can share in their beauty with the medieval or – according to Pater, Hofmannsthal’s source – renaissance world’s celebration of the senses. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Hofmannsthal locates the countless faces kneeling down to drink of the same water we drink – the same unnamed inspirational source – in the invisible enchanted world-garden. The water in this *locus amoenus* is then transformed in *Augenblicke in Griechenland* into an “actual” water source, where “real” travellers – including the weary German – drink. The “unzählige Gesichter” in the garden become the “unzählig viele, ermüdete, verstaubte Gesichter” in memory, revived, surfacing at the moment of drinking like one’s reflection upon bending down towards the water. Likewise, both the enchanted garden and the vaguely hostile landscape of rural Greece are the site of “wandeln”: walking and changing, the German verb containing both meanings.

And it is no coincidence that both drink from the same source of inspiration and life. In the *Ansprache*, the subject and the beautiful object exist in a relationship of mutual exchange. The narrator’s relationship to his memories of past encounters has a similar structure. Yet, as was already made clear in the first section of *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, the exchange must take place somewhere; there is always reference to, whether silent or explicit, a third term, often the setting or atmosphere. In the case of the faces of the soldiers, the narrator maintains that “ihre Gesichter sind mehr als Gesichter,” elaborating thus: “Jedes dieser Gesichter ist ein Geschick, etwas Einziges, das Einzelnste, was es gibt, und dabei ein Unendliches, ein Auf-der-Reise-sein nach einem unsagbar fernen Ziel” (186). We might very well read this “unsagbar ferne[s] Ziel” as that fate (“Geschick”) shared by everyone who lives and suffers, yet unique always in its specific manifestation: individual death. The river is an image of life as much as it is of death, for it is also Acheron, the river of woe. This woe is integrated into the mere act of taking a drink of water: “Da, im Augenblick des bangsten Staunens [...] und es war nichts weiter als das Aufstehen eines, der an fließendem Wasser mit angelegten Lippen einen langen Zug getan hat” (191). This radical levelling of experiences – bringing together the ecstatic and the mundane – does indeed find its most final actualisation in death, the most mundane and the most ecstatic *Augenblick* we can imagine.

As we saw in *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht* and the letters Hofmannsthal wrote during his time in Tlumacz, the witnessing of others’ suffering – if it cannot be experienced directly – is for
Hofmannsthal potentially the grounds for an experience of beauty. It must be emphasised once again that this is not just a matter of knowing beauty through its opposite, ugliness; the foundation of beauty, if there is one, is the ugliness of suffering, like the mud out of which the lotus grows. In *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, we see this pattern repeated and elaborated upon: here, the singularity of an event that revealed to the narrator the suffering of others becomes the underpinnings for the experience of beauty, while the text’s evocative qualities intensify the sense of beauty. In the few hours after this moment at the river, the narrator gazes at a landscape, “der keinen Namen hat”; and yet this anonymity speaks:

> Die Berge riefen einander an; das Geklüftete war lebendiger als ein Gesicht; jedes Fältchen an der fernen Flanke eines Hügels lebte: dies alles war mir nahe wie die Wurzel meiner Hand. Es war, was ich nie mehr sehen werde. Es war das Gastgeschenk aller der einsamen Wanderer, die uns begegnet waren (191).

The vulnerability of the self and the confrontation with death (in one of its many forms) has opened up the opportunity to witness life external to the self: the earth itself proudly exhibits life in every crease of its physiognomy, and this life is close to him, recalling the phrase from the first section: “genug, es ist nah.” Yet this is all nearer than near, it is almost a part of him, like the “Wurzel [s]einer Hand,” recalling the image for relation Hofmannsthal uses in the last terza rima and the set-off last line in “Über Vergänglichkeit” (*SW I Gedichte* 45):

> Dann: daß ich auch vor hundert Jahren war
Und meine Ahnen, die im Totenhemd,
Mit mir verwandt sind wie mein eignes Haar,

> So eins mit mir als wie mein eignes Haar. (10-13)

This relation to one’s forebears is extended outward to humanity and finally to the world. And yet there is no delusion of grandeur in this; it does not give the narrator a sense of power or stability of being. It is also singular in incarnation; he will never see it like this again. And yet he calls this the “Gastgeschenk” of all the lonely wanderers encountered, the gift of hospitality being a symbol that suggests the infinite relationship of reciprocity between the individual other, the covenant between host and guest; if the *Gastgeschenk* is a symbol, that is, something that has a complement elsewhere, it is also nevertheless *still unique*, still “einmalig” in its moment; to see with the eyes
of poetry is to see everything for the first time, to see its separation, and to do so requires the knowledge of suffering: “Einmal offenbart sich jedes Lebende, einmal jede Landschaft, und völlig: aber nur einem erschütterten Herzen” (191). To those who have witnessed or become cognisant of affliction, beauty is a gift.

In his copy of Murray’s *The Rise of the Greek Epic*, Hofmannsthal made a note on the endpaper: “Der Bettler der Hilflose beladen mit αἰδώς” (space in original). *Aidōs* is that which, in heaven, may be attributed even to injured dogs; on earth, it is the gift which the impoverished and afflicted have the right to bestow: the gift of beauty. Yet with this gift comes the awareness of taking on an unpayable debt. The luxury to enjoy the aesthetic all too often comes at the expense of others’ well-being. Whereas Hofmannsthal makes the connection to the sociological and economic forces explicit in *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, here they are rendered as an existential problem, for beauty bears upon it the mark of suffering; it is not a place of solace, but rather a fraught reminder of relation through participation, as well as of the great divide between the subject and that which is taken to be the “object.”

Once one is aware of the violent sacrifice at the altar of beauty, one cannot experience the same simple pleasure and enjoyment of seeing a work of art fashioned out of human misery by human hands, nor does “aestheticising” the unpleasant simply neutralise it by making it more palatable. We can read Hofmannsthal’s work as an *exploitation* of the unpleasant – making it the material of his art – but we would not be saying anything Hofmannsthal did not already know, nor would it make us, the critical reader, in any way “morally superior” to the writer. As readers, we are equally implicated. Hofmannsthal consciously uses the unpleasant to literary effect – but he is also aware that the aesthetic is not an anaesthetic. Art is born out of a desire to make manifest indirectly what will not be articulated directly (it is perhaps the weakness of Naturalism that it wishes to present society objectively, something art cannot achieve); for Hofmannsthal, the artist is always involved, interested, and implicated in the object, which comes to have a life – and demands – of its own; indeed, some works of art are even capable of making us uncomfortably aware of the unpayable debt and that impassable divide, issuing a command to us to give up something of our own inner world to keep alive what the artist began.
Prelude to the Aesthetic Encounter

The notion of poverty introduced in the second section takes on yet more importance in the third and final section, “Die Statuen.” The rich semantic field of the word is, in “Die Statuen,” most essentially expressed as privation, distance, and humility. Yet we shall see that it is precisely such negative qualities that makes an experience – in this section, the aesthetic experience – rich, valuable, full of meaning, but also fragmentary; in turn, this wealth of meaning rests on the awareness of a dependence on poverty.

The third moment of Augenblicke in Griechenland is prepared for by a series of failed moments which raise the question: will this be a failed moment as well? That depends on what one is looking for. The reader witnesses the successive disappointments of a man vainly seeking the life of ancient Greece in the present-day ruins – the traces of that civilisation – surrounding him. Only a day after his encounter with the wanderer from Lauffen an der Salzach, his powerful vision at the spring, and the train ride during which he saw in the living landscape the “Gastgeschenk aller der einsamen Wanderer” (191) – only a day after this whirlwind of experience, he finds himself in the disappointing anticlimax of the present. Indeed, as if ashamed, he wants to forget the German traveller (and the pain of others) and ignore the traces of this encounter: “Aber mich verlangte nicht, noch weiter daran zu denken. ‘Gewesen’, sagte ich unwillkürlich und hob den Fuß über die Trümer, die zu Hunderten hier umherlagen” (191). The irony of this statement becomes apparent when we see that “gewesen” refers not only to the man of yesterday, but to the surroundings of the present; the traces of the encounter might be repressed, but they are disguised and reintroduced into the traces of an ancient civilisation. The narrator’s desire to forget the encounter with the man affects his reception of the world around him, for now things take on a painful quality of transience as they threaten to slip out of the reach of the present. Even the stones on the hill seem now “vom Alter verwesten [sic!]” (192). Thus, whereas the encounter of the day before had awakened the memories of yesteryear and the potential of life in memory and landscape, we have here the desire to forget the discomfort of that encounter, resulting in the narrator’s vision of a landscape receding into the past, being drained of life. The narrator wishes to seize control and halt the flow of time, ever out of joint, by placing the past securely in the past, and holding the present in the here and now; but the wish is never fulfilled.

Hofmannsthal expresses this disjunction subtly, such that the temporal disconnection finds spatial expression as well. The narrator views the world around him, in this case, selecting a pillar from
the scene: it is a thing of solidity and stability, and it is a monument to past cultural achievement. Let us look more closely: what is peculiar about the narrator’s view? He sees the pillar as though it were intimately linked to his own being and its mode of existence and behaviour dependent upon his own life-giving breath; he is transposing that feeling of shared existence: “[...] zugleich mit meinem Atemzug fühlte ich auch ihren Kontur sich heben und senken” (192). Yet the selection of the object of his gaze – Pygmalion-like in its inspirational power – is beyond his control: “Ohne mein Zutun wählte mein Blick [...]” (192). Much like Sappho’s gaze in her phainetai moi, the eyes here seem to be somehow separate from the willing self; this distance creates a sense of poverty rather than possession (self-possession or otherwise). And yet this poverty, or lack, is ironically presented in terms of the richness of gold: “Aber auch um sie spielte in dem Abendlicht, das klarer war als aufgelöstes Gold, der verzehrende Hauch der Vergänglichkeit” (192). What unites the pillar and the observer is neither the observer’s megalomaniac gaze, nor his quickening artist’s eye, but their shared golden transience, which is ultimately a kind of enslavement to time.

The issue of poverty versus wealth is a constant issue for Hofmannsthal – its most obvious expression perhaps being the play Jedermann. In Augenblicke in Griechenland, we have seen it alluded to in the wanderer and Rimbaud. Indeed, even in Hofmannsthal’s early writings, Gold and Geld have an important connotation for our topic: the poet or artist, portrayed as a reverse Midas, is the figure whose craft has the power to imbue a lifeless object with something much like life; whereas Midas turns living things into beautiful, but lifeless gold. Hofmannsthal’s interest in the writings of Georg Simmel, whose Philosophie des Geldes he was reading around 1906-07 (Lorenz Jäger 98), is further indication that the connection between wealth and poverty was a mainstay in his writing. Here, the gold of the sun is rich, and the enjoyment of beauty, as mentioned above, is often considered a privilege of the wealthy. For Hofmannsthal, a man quite familiar with the life of the privileged, this is not enough: wealth is never rich enough to purchase

---

261 Ending as a fragment, the poem (Sappho 31) links physical dissociation with poverty. In the translation by Anne Carson: “and cold sweat holds me and shaking / grips me all, greener than grass / I am and dead - or almost / I seem to me. / But all is to be dared, because even a person of poverty[.]”


263 I discuss this in more detail in the previous chapter on Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten.
meaningful experience; one must know poverty too. With reference to the 1896 poem “Manche freilich,” Judith Ryan states quite perceptively:

poetic utterance and what Pater called the ‘hard gem-like flame’ of passionate engagement in the present moment are not at all sufficient. The poet’s privileged position does not permit him to forget the problem of social class, illustrated at the beginning of the poem by the image of an ancient galley in which the free enjoy the vast perspectives of life above deck while the slaves toil away to their death below. *(The Vanishing Subject 122)*

An awareness of poverty, then, is necessary for the appreciation (the “vast perspectives of life”) and creation of beauty. Hofmannsthal thus critiques his own narrator, who wishes to forget and leave the suffering of others in the past; yet he cannot, if he is to see the world with the eyes of poetry, ignore the world’s own misery:*264:* for the world too slips away from him as he walks. Even images of wealth, such as the gold of the sun, are in Hofmannsthal’s work almost invariably subject to recession and transience. As Hofmannsthal will later write in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*: “Die Augenblicke sind rinnender Goldstaub” *(SW XXVIII Erzählungen I 129)*. Moments – and that includes the moments in Greece – are likened to flowing gold-dust: “rinnender Goldstaub”; “aufgelöstes Gold”; “der verzehrende Hauch der Vergänglichkeit.” Such moments are rich, yet they always coexist with deprivation, whether potential or actualised. This is why the gold of these moments is portrayed as flowing; they are neither solid nor stable. Midas, as Mayer has pointed out, is a metamorphosis of Pygmalion: he freezes the motion of organic nature into inert gold. Yet for Hofmannsthal, art reveals itself to be always in motion, slipping out of one’s hands, exposing the uncomfortable relation between poverty and wealth as well as well as absence and presence. He puts into poetic form what Alexis de Tocqueville wrote about industrialisation: “From this filthy sewer pure gold flows. Here humanity attains its most complete development and its most brutish; here civilisation works its miracles, and civilised man is turned back almost into a savage” *(Journeys to England and Ireland 107-08)*; and he is even close to the socialist critique of William Morris:

---

*264* Lorenz Jäger sees sociology as a “Zwillingsschwester seines Werkes” (96).
The *necessity* of the time, I say, is to feed the commercial war which we are all of us waging in some way or another; if, while we are doing this, we can manage, some of us, to adorn our lives with some little pleasure of the eyes, it is well, but it is no *necessity*, it is a luxury, the lack of which we must endure.

Thus, in this matter also does the artificial famine of inequality, felt in so many other ways, impoverish us despite of our riches; and we sit starving amidst our gold, the Midas of the ages. ("The Socialist Ideal. I. Art" 257-58)

An impulse to uphold Midas’s alchemic art drives the narrator to the pillar: “Ich wollte hinübergehen zu ihr; es trieb mich an, ein Gefühl der Enttäuschung versehrte mich im voraus” (192). The narrator in this moment does not realise it, but his own desires are an echo of those attributed to the poet Rimbaud: “Der um Geld zu ringen meinte, um Geld, um Geld, und gegen den eigenen Dämon um ein Ungeheures ringt, ein nicht zu Nennendes” (187). Though the narrator is not striving for money per se, he is striving for that security that comes with permanence, that security which the gilded life of the wealthy often seems to offer but cannot; he is looking for that ever-present golden life of luxury that seems to be fading away even as the sun sets. Yet in this attempt to forget the suffering of others, there is some unnameable force that drives him back to this realisation – and Hofmannsthal lets neither reader nor narrator repress this. Note the use of the impersonal neuter pronoun, suggestive of the Freudian “es”: “es trieb mich, um sie herumzugehen; die abgewandte Seite, dorthin, gegen den Untergang der Sonne, diese versprach mir das eigentliche Leben” (192); the narrator has already noted the (anticipated) disappointment. The following paragraph confirms this: everything in Athens he has seen, everything in Greece, all of it is of the past, all of it a tribute to decay, absence, the dearth of presence, frustrating Midas’ art with the tireless persistence of time. Even memory, which before had held such power, seems now to be only of a second order to itself, useless for *Vergegenwärtigung*, for rendering the absent present and real, enlivening it. Having descended a rung on the ontological ladder, memory of memory only distorts; indeed, its ontological status resembles that of art much maligned in Plato’s *Republic*:

---

265 This recurring motif is even more explicit in *Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*. 

The description of images intertwining is not new to us: it was an important leitmotif for *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht* and was also used in the *Ansprache.* In both of the earlier instances, the effect of this weaving is a revelation of vitality, of life and connectedness; here the image is transformed so that the individual ties are loosed; the identities meld and distinction disappears, becoming *formless* rather than “Form gewordene Willkür” (*SW XXXIII RA 2* 8). The language here subtly recalls that used to describe the sunlight three paragraphs earlier. First, the past participle used above to describe the gold, “aufgelöst,” reappears here, “als löste ich sie auf,” thereby introducing by way of the subjunctive tense the possibility – but not the reality – of the subject acting upon an object. The atmospheric quality, too, is underlined in this moment, except that the golden light is replaced with a greenish smoke; and even the distortion (“verzerrten”) is as much a distorted auditory echo of “der verzehrende Hauch der Vergänglichkeit” as it is a visual one; dissolving (“als löste ich sie auf”) and dissipating (“Hauch der Vergänglichkeit”) the earlier description, while at the same time recalling them, as memories.

The attempt to render presence tangible and lasting has failed marvellously in both instances: neither pillar nor memories of memories can fulfil the narrator’s desire for presence and for an escape from the past and its reminders of poverty. His response is yet again reminiscent of the figure of Rimbaud, above all in its disdainful tone: “Daß sie längst dahin waren, darum haßte ich sie, und daß sie so rasch dahingegangen waren” (192). This sentence is also remarkably similar to the merchant’s son’s renunciation upon his deathbed: “Er haßte seinen vorzeitigen Tod so sehr, daß er sein Leben haßte, weil es ihn dahin geführt hatte” (*SW XXVIII* 30). This disdain colours his entire judgement of the cultural artefacts the ancient Greeks had left behind, and does so once

---

266 “Und so vermag ein hangendes, ein hingebreitetes Gewebe für einen Augenblick gleichsam seinen Geist auszuhaken: ... [es] wird sich [...] auf einmal offenbaren, dass da Geknüpftes ist, von Menschenfiguren in endlosen Stunden zu Tausenden von Knoten Zusammengeknüpftes, und einen Augenblick wird dies tausendfach Geknüpftes aufleuchten und die erstarrte Lebendigkeit, die Form gewordene Willkür der zusammentretenden Farben und Schattierungen erkennen lassen, wie eine nächtliche Landschaft unter einem grossen Blitz die Verknüpfung der Strassen und das Zusammentreten der Hügel für einen Augenblick erkennen und dann wieder ins Dunkel; zusammensinken lässt” (*SW XXXIII RA 2* 7-8).
again in an antagonistic spirit akin to Plato’s critique of art in the Republic, expanding that critique to the Greek pantheon:

Schon war ja alles nicht, indem es zu sein glaubte! Und darüber schwebend die ewige Fata Morgana ihrer Poesie; und ihre Götter selber, welche unsicheren vorüberhastenden Phantome [...]. Götter, ewige? Milesische Märchen, eine Dekoration an die Wand gemalt im Hause einer Buhlerin. (192-93)

The critique rests on an ontology that identifies the true with existence and its eternal ebb: art is no longer, precisely insofar as it believed itself to be. This curious statement – attributing the faculty of belief to the ostensibly inanimate object – suggests that these figures, names, and fragments have a more ambiguous ontological status than perhaps initially supposed. They seem to have a domain of activity (belief), making them in this respect subject-like – i.e., not merely objects for the subject’s cognition and gaze; they are also subjects in their own right – a factor which I would like to suggest for Hofmannsthal raises the phenomenological experience to the aesthetic: this will be made more clear in the encounter with the statues. I classify these things as part of the aesthetic because the narrator himself describes the “Fata Morgana ihrer Poesie” which hovers above them. The aesthetic is a Fata Morgana, and rightly so. We need not go back as far as Plato to understand the importance of this mirage-like quality; Nietzsche’s Über Wahrheit und Lüge speaks precisely to this aspect of non-identification, of uncertainty and slippage, and Oscar Wilde’s The Decay of Lying celebrates it. For even if we can attribute a “subjective” quality to these aesthetically experienced objects and thoughts, they are not; their coherence is always in the process of dissolving and reforming. Art is evanescent; and so are the “eternal” gods, those “vorüberhastende Phantome” whose existences have been relegated to murals in some lover’s house. Hofmannsthal’s narrator cannot locate the gods in their exile. He is as if caught between the narrator of Heine’s “Die Götter Griechenlands” (from the Nordsee-Zyklus) and Schiller’s Die Götter Griechenlandes – with Heine’s lyric voice, he could well say “Ich hab euch niemals geliebt, ihr Götter! / Denn widerwärtig sind mir die Griechen, / Und gar die Römer sind mir verhaßt” (64-66); yet in the next moment he seems to mourn this loss, questioning: “Wo ist diese Welt und was weiß ich von ihr! rief ich aus. Wo fasse ich sie? Wo glaube ich sie? Wo gebe ich mich ganz an sie?” (193). Here he speaks the Schillerian: “Schöne Welt, wo bist du? – [...] Ausgestorben trauert das Gefilde, / Keine Gottheit zeigt sich meinem Blick, / Ach, von jenem lebenwarmen Bilde / Blieb der Schatten nur zurück” (145-52). A Nietzschean or Wildean view would embrace the lie
as part of the truth of art – and would see nothing wrong in this. Hofmannsthal, too, shares this view: there is no direct link between art and life; art is not meant to represent à la Naturalism the “real” world; what’s more, there is no “real” world that can be adequately represented. Yet again, we must keep in mind Ryan’s point that, for Hofmannsthal, passionately embracing the here and now is not enough by itself. Art fails as an escape from temporality and pain. But maybe that is not the point of art.

I have mentioned Plato in this chapter more than once, primarily in the context of his sceptical stance towards art. There is another aspect of the figure of Plato that links him to other figures in _Augenblicke in Griechenland_, namely Hofmannsthal’s narrator, the German wanderer, and Rimbaud – and even perhaps the young Byzantine-faced monk with his ambiguous posture. What links these figures is a deliberate separation from the world, a disdain, even a hint of arrogance. Thus the vision of Plato:

[…]
da traf mich ein Blick; tief und zweideutig wie von einem Vorübergehenden. Er ging und war mir schon halb abgewandt, verachtungsvoll auch dieser Stadt, seiner Vaterstadt. Sein Blick enthüllte mir mich selbst und ihn: es war Platon. Um die Lippen des Mythenerfinders, des Verächters der Götter, spielten der Hochmut und geisterhafte Träume. In einem prunkvollen, unbefleckten Gewand, das lässig den Boden streifte, ging er hin, der Unbürger, der Königlicher; er schwebte vorüber, wie Geister, die mit geschlossenen Füßen gehen. Verachtend streifte er die Zeit und den Ort, er schien vom Osten herzukommen und nach dem Westen zu entschwinden. (193)

Plato becomes a place-holder for several qualities already in play in _Augenblicke in Griechenland_. First, his gaze meets the narrator, not the other way around. The narrator, again, is the object of the gaze as much as he himself is a gazer. Plato’s gaze and the “lässig” brushing of his gown upon the ground recall the figure of the monk from the _Kloster_ and his “lässige Dastehen mit dem Blick auf die Ankommenden” (181). Plato’s gaze is “zweideutig wie von einem Vorübergehenden”: here we are reminded of the wanderer. Moreover, if we are inclined to an intertextual reading, we are thrown into an abyss of allusion and suggestion. We can think back to Hofmannsthal’s laudatory yet eerie poem “Einem, der vorübergeht” with its poetic reference to (and distortion of) Stefan George, depicting the power of another person to reveal to oneself aspects yet unknown.
Thus “Sein Blick enthüllte mir mich selbst und ihn” recalls the poem’s first two lines: “Du hast mich an Dinge gemahnet, / Die heimlich in mir sind.” This passage in *Augenblicke in Griechenland* also seems to be a reference to Baudelaire’s “À une passante” and George’s translation (“Eine Vorübergehende,” 1901). In the Baudelaire poem and in George’s translation, we see imagery similar to that of this passage on the phantom Plato; in both the poem and the description of Plato, special attention is drawn to the hem of the garment, “das lässig den Boden streifte.” This is where high meets low. In the poem, a majestically melancholy woman walks by, “Soulevant, balançant le feston et l’ourlet” (George: “Ihr finger gravitätisch / Erhob und wiegte kleidbesatz und saum”). The presentation of Plato, thus, diverges from the image in Baudelaire and George. Plato’s disdain is not for the low, as might be read in the image of the lady lifting her skirt to keep it clean. Rather, his disdain is for the high, or the high-seeming – he is a “Verachter der Götter,” as well as a disdainer of art (again, associated with “high culture” and the delusion of wealth); and yet in this disdain he too betrays “Hochmut”: the arrogance of the mythmaker, the poet. Plato is a perfect figure for Hofmannsthal at this point because he embodies the essential paradox of the aesthetic: its power, its ineffectuality (Plato is an insubstantial phantom), its height and depth. Plato is sceptical of art’s deception and power over the passions, yet he is a great artist himself: “Um die Lippen des Mythenerfinders, des Verächters der Götter, spielten der Hochmut und geisterhafte Träume.” As Goethe’s *West-östlicher Divan* has it: “Dichten ist ein Übermut, / Niemand schelte mich!” (“Derb und tüchtig” 1-2). Goethe’s poem is an apology for the artistic hubris of the poet who defies rational logic. Yet as we have seen, the lowly monk in “Das Kloster des heiligen Lukas” displays something suggestive of *Hochmut* as well. Regarding the poet, this arrogance is displayed in the very act of writing: *Dichten* is the haughtiness, it is prideful, the devil’s work in its demonic as well as daimonic dimension. The image moving forward with the feet held together is borrowed here (as in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*) from Goethe’s *Faust*; Faust sees a “Zauberbild” (prefiguring Hofmannsthal’s frequent use of this word as a metaphor for a work of art) which he believes to be his Gretchen, yet it is the work of demonic magic: “Sie schiebt sich langsam nur vom Ort, / Sie scheint mit geschlossenen Füßen zu gehen. / Ich muß bekennen, daß mir däucht, / Daß sie dem guten Gretchen gleicht” (4185-88). In the sceptic Plato too there is a streak of Mephistopheles. Art, even as a creative product of the poet as *alter deus*, has something vaguely diabolical about it.
Yet Hofmannsthal, in grappling with the place and purpose of art, is not satisfied to leave it all up to arrogance (though a certain amount of arrogance be necessary for the act of creation). The narrator himself takes on the role of the Vorübergehender. Jerry Glenn (“Hofmannsthal, George, and Nietzsche”) has suggested that Nietzsche’s Zarathustra is also lurking behind the words of the poem to George, namely, when the Narr counsels Zarathustra to abandon the city: “Habe doch Mitleiden mit deinem Fusse! Speie lieber auf das Stadtthor und – kehre um!” And Zarathustra, grown weary from the Narr’s ramblings, concludes: “‘wo man nicht mehr lieben kann, da soll man – vorübergehen! –’ [...] Also sprach Zarathustra und gieng an dem Narren und der grossen Stadt vorüber” (221). If Nietzsche’s Zarathustra was an influence on the poem, it seems to have had an even stronger role to play in Hofmannsthal’s characterisation of this ghost of Plato, a figure which combines the image of passing by with that of disdain for the city and the times (and more broadly, temporality itself): “Verachtend streifte er die Zeit und den Ort, er schien vom Osten herzukommen und nach dem Westen zu entschwinden” (193).

This disdain has the function of revealing to the narrator his own artistic weakness: “und meine Schuld lag am Tage. Es ist deine eigene Schwäche, rief ich mich an, du bist nicht fähig, dies zu beleben. Du selbst zitterst vor Vergänglichkeit, alles um dich tauchst du ins fürchterliche Bad der Zeit” (193, emphasis mine). In a gesture of frustration, the narrator decides that, if he cannot exercise his creative powers, he will at least read, forgetting for the moment, perhaps, that active reading involves creativity and a certain self-sacrifice as well.267 His choice of reading matter is also significant: Philoctetes, reminiscent of Oedipus, is wounded in the foot and cannot walk without constant pain; the German wanderer, too, walked barefoot, suffering the entire way. Philoctetes makes one uncomfortably aware of one’s guilt, bringing up once again the importance of the face. Gilbert Murray says of him: “So when Philoctetes charges Neoptolemus to look him in the face: τον προστρόπαιον, τον ικέτην, οι σχέτλιε; he means: ‘Me, charged with the wrath of God; me, who kneel before thee, O hard heart’” (109). Zarathustra, we shall recall, is urged to have pity on his own feet and not enter the city. Plato practically hovers, his feet bound together, neither one touching the ground. The verb vorübergehen is closely associated with the feet – gehen, to

267 See in particular Hofmannsthal’s Shakespeare’s Könige und Große Herren: “Und nun ist er, der Leser, nur ein Instrument: nun spielt das Buch auf ihm” (SW XXXIII RA2 81). That is, the reader must adopt the receptive attitude of the artist. Like Keats’ “negative capability,” Hofmannsthal’s poetic receptivity problematises the subject-object hierarchy.
walk, and walking in this setting brings constant reminders of the passing away (das Vorübergehen) of time, as we saw at the beginning: “‘Gewesen’, sagte ich unwillkürlich und hob den Fuß über die Trümmer, die zu Hunderten hier umherlagen” (193). Indeed, though frustrated with the unclear motives of Odysseus in Philoctetes, the injustice that seems to govern so much of human actions, and the incomprehensibility of fate, the narrator nevertheless sympathises with Philoctetes, thereby establishing a connection to his dramatic fate. Indeed, though frustrated with the unclear motives of Odysseus in Philoctetes, the injustice that seems to govern so much of human actions, and the incomprehensibility of fate, the narrator nevertheless sympathises with Philoctetes, thereby establishing a connection to his dramatic fate. Yet there is something of a dramatic irony in this identity; the narrator does not seem himself to be aware of it, instead focussing on the incomprehensibility and vanity of the dramatic action, underscoring the necessity of Philoctetes’ presence, “daß ohne Philoctetes selber die Stadt nicht fallen kann” (194). The Sophoclean drama, beautifully written and enchanting, does not explain why the sufferer need suffer; nor does it explain why the other characters do not see the importance of this man who has suffered. It is this incomprehensibility of the ignoring of suffering that causes him to lay the book down: “Dies war alles fremd über die Maßen und unbetrehtbar” (194, my emphasis). The narrator-reader cannot be the stage upon which Sophocles’ drama plays out. At this moment, a breeze blows by, tempting him with the scent of acacia and strawberries, ripe corn, and the dust of the streets. We are back to the refrain: Stunde, Luft und Ort machen alles. Yet here he says: “Ich wollte nicht. Ich bückte mich, steckte mein Buch zu mir und wandte mich zum Gehen” (194). He walks away, rejecting not only the demands of a book, but also the temptation to enjoy the most transient of sensory delights: scent – itself but air, blown away.

Even Zarathustra’s response to the Narr – “Ich verachte dein Verachten” (220) – is repeated in the narrator’s response: “Unmögliche Antike, sage ich mir, vergebliches Suchen. – Die Härte dieses Wortes ergözte mich. – Nichts ist von allem diesem vorhanden” (194). The unbridgeable chasm between the narrator and this “unmögliche Antike” is coloured, first, by the unavoidable transience of things; it is as if only the shell of the ancient world were left behind, its substance or essence having long since taken flight into the air: “Hier, wo ich es mit Händen zu greifen dachte, hier ist

See also André Gide’s Philoctète (1898), in which Philoctetes is portrayed as a writer. Little has been written on Hofmannsthal and Gide, but Chryssoula Kambas (“Walter Benjamin und der deutsch-französische Dialog”) mentions Gide’s acquaintance with Hofmannsthal (through Harry Graf Kessler) around 1900 (135).

Like Gide’s character, the poet in Hofmannsthal’s Dichter und diese Zeit is a figure whose presence is not desired; domiciled under the stair of his own house – “gewiesen zu den Hunden” (!) – he experiences simultaneously “ein ungeheures Leiden” and “ungeheueres Genießen,” yet his presence remains unobserved: “Er ist da, und es ist niemandes Sache, sich um seine Anwesenheit zu bekümmern” (137).
es dahin, hier erst recht” (194). Again, the sentence is more than an expression of frustration; it is a careful reworking of the ancient Greek (and Roman) encounter with the shades. Achilles sees a dream image of Patroclus and tries to embrace him, to no avail. Odysseus, likewise, in his *katabasis* thrice tries to embrace his mother Anticleia, and thrice encounters only air. Now the narrator is faced with physically tangible ruins: pillars, books, rocks, temples; but he cannot grasp antiquity. Its essence, its meaning, its explanation for the absurdity of life and the necessity of unjust suffering, are absent. All this slips from him as the shades from Achilles’ and Odysseus’ searching arms. The only possible response he can entertain is to abandon it for lost, and to walk on: “Ich hob den Fuß, um die gespenstische Stätte des Nichtvorhandenen zu räumen” (194).

Despising that which seems to have no presence, the traveller betakes himself to a place where he expects to be surrounded by real presence – namely, a museum, with “Kostbarkeiten [...] die aus dem Schutt der Gräber kommen: sie haben der Gewalt der Zeit widerstanden, für den Augenblick wenigstens, sie sprechen nur sich aus und sind von vollkommener Schönheit” (194). This hope is influenced not by a worldview associated with antiquity, but rather by a modernity enamoured with the small things that, in their simplicity and presence, are beautiful and promise a place of respite from an incomprehensible world. That is, Hofmannsthal’s narrator wishes to escape *to the present*, to his present, to Vienna in the first decade of the twentieth century. And he thinks he can achieve this by surrounding himself with things of enduring presence. Rilke in his essay on Auguste Rodin writes the following concerning “things” and their particularity: “Was die Dinge auszeichnet, dieses Ganz-mit-sich-Beschäftigtsein, das war es, was einer Plastik ihre Ruhe gab; sie durfte nichts von außen verlangen oder erwarten, sich auf nichts beziehen, was draußen lag, nichts sehen, was nicht in ihr war” (159). The emphasis on autotelic existence – on answering to no purpose other than its own existence – is what is meant by “autonomy of art,” here attributed to things. On 8 August 1903, Rilke writes to Lou Andreas-Salomé more specifically of “Kunst-Dinge”: “Das Ding ist bestimmt, das Kunst-Ding muß noch bestimmter sein; von allem Zufall fortgenommen, jeder Unklarheit entrückt, *der Zeit enthoben und dem Raum gegeben, ist es dauernd geworden, fähig zur Ewigkeit*” (*Briefe aus den Jahren 1902 bis 1906* 112, my emphasis). The discrete existence of an (art) thing, a *Kunst-Ding*, is furthermore removed, or at least potentially removed, from ravenous time, and given over to space – the space, in this instance, being the museum. Yet the art-object itself *is*, in one respect, a museum itself: it houses the beauty that otherwise would be subject to decay, yet it does not do so by imitative representation; instead,
it does so through evocation or suggestion, by absence of the thing it suggests. Hofmannsthal, like Rilke, is fully aware of the suggestive potential of art objects (heir to symbolism that he is), and infuses this potential with his own melancholic nuance. The object exists as a productive absence; the presence of the thing is a monument to that, and the museum is a mausoleum, with an aesthetic turn of the screw.

Hofmannsthal makes use of the Hegelian tradition here, yet he tempers it with his own sensibility when emphasising the ambiguity of the relation between phenomenon and observer. He introduces his reader first to a familiar setting, only then to upset the reader’s (and the narrator’s) expectations. The Hegelian beginning is part of the received tradition, the framework of thinking and apprehending the world that the narrator is used to. In his lectures on the philosophy of art, Hegel writes of the first art, architecture: “Die Architektur ist nur Einschränkung des maßlosen Raums, ein Partikularisieren des allgemeinen Raums. | Geschlossene Umgebung ist der Begriff der Architektur, Begrenzung der organischen Natur. […] das erste ist Formung des Unorganischen und zwar äußerliche” (Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst 208-09). Hofmannsthal highlights the architecture in his description of the museum, “das aus unscheinbarem Mauerwerk an den Abhang hingebaut ist” (194), thus drawing attention to these ancient architectural structures’ dependency on their environment in order to limn the strangely self-contained symbolic qualities of the art objects the narrator is about to see. This contrast between the dependency of the architecture and the self-sufficiency of the symbolic art-objects segues into the Symbolist air of turn of the century Vienna as the narrator very nearly quotes Hofmannsthal’s own 1896 poem, “Die Beiden,” and even uses an image similar to one prominent in Das Märchen der 672. Nacht. The narrator moves from a general remark about these Kunst-Dinge to a particular, if hypothetical, example: “Ein Becher gleicht der Rundung der Brüste oder der Schulter einer Göttin. Eine goldene Schlange, die einen Arm umwand, ruft diesen Arm herauf” (194). The tumbler evokes (ruft herauf) the curve of a goddess’s breast or shoulder; in a similar gesture, the poem of 1896 opens: “Sie trug

---

270 Cf. Mallarmé’s influential distinction: “Nommer un objet, c’est supprimer les trois quarts de la jouissance du poème qui est faite de deviner peu à peu : le suggérer, voilà le rêve. C’est le parfait usage de ce mystère qui constitue le symbole : évoquer petit à petit un objet pour montrer un état d’âme, ou, inversement, choisir un objet et en dégager un état d’âme, par une série de déchiffrements” (Sur l’évolution littéraire 700).

271 Cf. Hofmannsthal’s Einleitung to Holdt’s Griechenland; there Hofmannsthal emphasises the novelty and foreignness of the experience of Greece. The intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries accompany the traveller only up to a certain point, but eventually: “wir lassen sie zurück” (v).
den Becher in der Hand –/ Ihr Kinn und Mund glich seinem Rand –, [...].” The physical body is not only compared with, it is also spatially juxtaposed to and expressed with reference to the *Becher*. They share a space of existence, calling each other and responding in the open framework of the symbol. In a similar manner, the golden serpent once wound round an arm evokes the arm itself, now gone. Art recalls life through evocation and suggestion. The snake recalls the arm; but it also, elliptically, recalls another ekphrastic moment: the serpentine coils of gold in the servant girl’s hair in *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht*, where again the living is framed by and arises out of a description of golden ornamentation, incidentally suggesting not only Midas (and his poetic counterpart), but also Medusa: “die dunklen Köpfe aber mit dem bösen Mund von Schlangen, drei wilden Augen in der Stirn und unheimlichem Schmuck in den kalten, harten Haaren, bewegten sich neben den atmenden Wangen und streiften die schönen Schläfen im Takt der langsamen Schritte” (*SW XXVII* 20). The pull of such things is strong, for they promise duration: “Ich will dorthin. Es ist vergeblich, ringen zu wollen um das Unerreichliche” (*Augenblicke in Griechenland* 194). Underlying this again is the desire to fix beauty in space, if it cannot be done in time: like the *Kunstgespräch* of Büchner’s *Lenz*, during which the eponymous protagonist expresses a desire to fix beauty with a Medusa-like stare so that it might be preserved and shared with others, this desire for preservation suggests a deeper discontent and suffering of loss. Turning something to gold or to stone: this is the mythical expression of the desire to overcome the poverty that arises from death and absence.

But to what degree can we rely on this economy of presence? The narrator himself, recalling yet again the image of Rimbaud and his “ringen” – “Der um Geld zu ringen meinte, um Geld, um Geld, und gegen den eigenen Dämon um ein Ungeheures ringt, ein nicht zu Nennendes” (187) – knows that any supposed essence or true being of Greek antiquity is unattainable, and so sets his sights on the lowly, the graspable, the *Kunst-Dinge* which paradoxically in their unassuming presence suggest the life by which they were once surrounded. Schopenhauer makes a similar

---

272 There is another connection to the *Märchen der 672. Nacht* – namely the literary-oriental atmosphere. In the *Einleitung* to Holdt’s *Griechenland*, Hofmannsthal writes: “Man sagt mir: Dies ist das Licht Kleinasiens, das Licht von Palästina, von Persien, von Ägypten [...]” (v).

273 The gaze of Medusa works both ways: in the merchant’s son’s case, the snakes are part of the hair of the servant girl, fixing the viewer in their presence; on the other hand, the image of the Medusa-stare is fixed in the *Märchen* itself and in the aesthetic gaze. In the last third of *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, a similar double gaze will be an important part of the aesthetic moment.
remark in identifying seemingly ordinary things as potential sites for the aesthetic experience: “[...] so ist auch jedes Ding schön” (Welt als Wille und Vorstellung I: 298). In another place, Hofmannsthal refers specifically to this universalising tendency in tantalisingly suggestive terms that nevertheless indicate a shift in emphasis. His notes to the never realised “Das Gespräch und die Geschichte der Frau von W.” include the observation: “Gesicht – Hieroglyphe. Es gibt keine hässlichen Menschen” (56). I agree with Wellbery that Hofmannsthal emphasises precisely the seeming insignificance of things in their potential to elicit an awakening in the observer – that is, Hofmannsthal does not adhere to a hierarchical order of the arts, nor does he deny everyday objects this capacity for such powerful encounters. Nevertheless, to say that anything can bring about this experience is not tantamount to saying that everything will. Hofmannsthal gives preference to certain symbols, and the face – there are no ugly people – is one of the most dynamic and persistent. In the final encounter, the beautiful thing is joined to the beautiful face, yet we shall see a departure from Schopenhauer’s aesthetic moment as a serene, “schmerzenlose[r] Zustand” (Welt als Wille und Vorstellung I: 280) and from Chandos’ experience in the face of only (ostensibly) insignificant objects.

Upon entering the museum the narrator encounters something far grander than the charming but unassuming Becher with its wispy hints and playful, even erotic, suggestion. He encounters something that challenges the categories of significance/insignificance too, like the uncanny confusion of life and art in the image of the servant girl carrying the two bronz deities in Das Märchen der 672. Nacht. As if on a pilgrimage to a holy site, the narrator’s experiences culminate at the altar of the aesthetic. He encounters something that seems not merely to suggest a former life (safely stowed away in the past), but to have a life of its own, and to issue a challenge to his possession of his own presence, which he had till now taken for granted. His disdainful flight – a response to the poverty of others as well as his own powerlessness – does not lead him to a safe-haven of forgetfulness amidst beautiful objects. He encounters in this moment instead the provocative challenge of art.

274 See Wellbery’s comment on this notion and its presence in Ein Brief in “Die Opfer-Vorstellung” (284)
“In diesem Augenblick geschah mir etwas”

The first half of this third section has been concerned with the poverty of presence, and its second half presents a complement: the overwhelming presence of the other, combined with the poverty of language to adequately render that presence again to an audience, to represent it. This situational reversal is as the opening of half of the blinking of the eye, the Augenblick – the moment as the blink of an eye, always being a double motion of closing and opening. Indeed this final moment takes up the very idea of the Augenblick as a visual and, more broadly speaking, visceral or bodily experience: hence the importance of aesthetic mediation and the plasticity referred to by Gershom Scholem (see fn5 above). But we have here further a refiguring of the aesthetic experience; a movement away from a Kantian aesthetic judgement of the beautiful or sublime to a focus on the dialogical aspect of the experience; that is, here the observation involves the observer. While the aesthetic distance is maintained, it is not one of disinterest. Though we are not exactly in the realm of an Epicurean aestheticism that enjoys pleasure in the absence of pain, Walter Pater, with his Epicurean propensities, is perhaps closer than we think, if we take his celebration of “passion” to embrace all the passions, including that of suffering. Hofmannsthal, I shall argue in this section, addresses the sadness and suffering alluded to in Pater’s text by incorporating it into his peculiar version of the aesthetic experience.

Ineffability is the common denominator of two seemingly disparate states that, when joined, trace the span of the human being’s experience and delineate, insofar as it is possible to do so, the ultimate paradox of the conditio humana: the moment of movement between joy and suffering. The narrator’s frustrated attempts to delineate the moment result in a proliferation of descriptions strung together by colons, with each successive phrase serving as an attempt to clarify and inch closer towards an adequate description; yet with each phrase, the immeasurability of the moment overwhelms the words. Hofmannsthal’s sentences form a wavelike rhythm; the iterations and reiterations of this unutterable presence do not cease until reaching the vision of that mysterious, time-defying smile – here gracing the faces of the korai – that has played so central a role in the long history of aesthetic discussion:

In diesem Augenblick geschah mir etwas: ein namenloses Erschrecken: es kam nicht von außen, sondern irgendwoher aus unmeßbaren Fernen eines inneren Abgrundes: es war wie ein Blitz: den Raum, wie er war, viereckig mit den getünchten Wänden und den Statuen, die dastanden, erfüllte im Augenblicke ein
völlig anderes Licht, als wirklich da war: die Augen der Statuen waren plötzlich auf mich gerichtet und in ihren Gesichtern vollzog sich ein völlig unsägliches Lächeln. (195, my emphasis)

Expressible only obliquely, this “etwas” is described as an “Erschrecken,” the source of which is located, if it can be located at all, in that distance within the interior abyss, its temporal quality conveyed only as an instant, as a flash. This resembles the visionary Augenblick described in the Ansprache: there, a hanging tapestry has the capacity to illuminate the “Form gewordene Willkühr der zusammentretenden Farben und Schattierungen” (SW XXXII RA2 8) – that is, the connectivity of things has been rendered aesthetically manifest. The surroundings in which this “etwas” takes place – its atmosphere – is a kind of Hofmannsthalian version of the Platonic khôra, that space described in the Timaeus (52a-b) wherein things come into being and form is given (as in the smile: “[es] vollzog sich ein völlig unsägliches Lächeln”). It is the space of the universe of forms and their representation. Hofmannsthal gives this space an aesthetic emphasis: this is where the work of art can reveal form, and in doing so, it does, as scholars have affirmed, involve a moment of “Ich-dissoziation.” But what is it about the aesthetic experience and momentary revelation according to Hofmannsthal that brings us back to ourselves? Again, we must look to the challenge of art, that is, to beauty’s capacity to awaken a response. Khôra too prepares us for such an answer. Keeping beauty’s call to responsibility in mind, we see that Hofmannsthal’s “Raum” would in at least one respect be closer to Derrida’s explanation of the khôra than, say, Heidegger’s Lichtung, insofar as there is ultimately a call of responsibility within this form-producing space. We see this for instance in Derrida’s analogy between Socrates and khôra:

Irremplaçable et implaçable place depuis laquelle il reçoit la parole de ceux devant lesquels il s’efface mais qui la reçoivent de lui car il les fait ainsi parler. Cette place introuvable, Socrate ne l’occupe pas mais c’est celle depuis laquelle, dans le Timée

275 Thus the sensation of being seen by one’s fellow human being (as the merchant’s son of the Märchen der 672. Nacht feels watched by his servants: “ihm war, sie sahen sein ganzes Leben an, sein tiefstes Wesen, seine geheimnisvolle menschliche Unzulänglichkeit,” 19) is here evident in the work of art. Rilke, in a similar fashion, takes up the notion in his 1908 “Archäischer Torso Apollos.”

276 See Timaeus in the Complete Works (1254-55).

277 Cf. Gregor Streim, Das Leben in der Kunst (208-09) and Grundmann, Mein Leben zu erleben wie ein Buch (117). Grundmann further points out that this is a moment wherein we seem to be in danger of losing ourselves, but we rather are more likely to find ourselves.
et ailleurs, il répond à son nom. Car il faut toujours, comme chôra, “l’appeler de la même façon.” (*Khôra* 281, my emphasis)

There is a call in the *khôra*, as there is in the aesthetic space. Responding to one’s name and doing so in a like (or adequate) fashion are demanded of the viewer (or listener). For Derrida, this further involves effacement. In Ancient Greek theatre, this effacement was performed by the humble character of the *eiron* (*eíρων*), whence the phrase “Socratic irony” and, further down the line, our own literary understanding of the term. The effacement can be expressed as privation of any real referent. 278 In Hofmannsthral’s text too, there seems to be no real referent (the critique of Naturalism is still hale and hearty in this piece): “den Raum [...] erfüllte [...] ein völlig anderes Licht, als *wirklich* da war” (281, my emphasis). And yet for Hofmannsthal, the work of art – “Form-gewordene Willkür” – will *take on* a face in this space, uniting humility and hubris, and it is furthermore the face which issues the call or responsibility. Both Derrida and Hofmannsthal emphasise the uncharacterisable space of *khôra*, yet Hofmannsthal uses this space as a stage280 for the work of art and its ironic face.281

Keeping in mind the notion that “schön” is “das Wort, das am tiefsten verpflichtet,”282 we see this expression of responsibility emanating from the eyes of the statues, “plötzlich auf mich gerichtet,” as the narrator says. Standing before the Greek statues is presented as a moment of “Erschrecken”;

---

278 “Privé de référent réel, ce qui en effet ressemble à un nom propre se trouve aussi appeler un X qui a pour propriété, pour *physis* et pour *dynamis* dira le texte, de n’avoir rien en propre et de rester informe (*amorphon*). Cette très singulière impropriété, qui justement n’est rien, voilà ce que *chôra* doit, si l’on peut dire, *garder*, voilà ce qu’il faut *lui garder* (*Khôra* 271).

279 The word “wirklich” will have a decidedly positive connotation later in the text.

280 Cf. Ascarelli, who emphasises the performative qualities of this “scene”: “In questo museo trasformato in palcoscenico, con la luce artificiale e un sipario che si abbassa, Hofmannsthal mette in movimento la statua, come aveva messo in movimento le incisioni di Hogart nel Cavaliere della rosa e il Concerto campestre di Giorgione in Sommerreise, sfidando il tempo e immergendo quelle immagini nella contemporaneità di un teatro auratico e nel presente dell’atto del guardaré” (64).

281 In the tale *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, Hofmannsthal will do something similar, creating a *realm of art*, as distinct from, but intimately connected to the realm of *reality*.

282 Braegger (*Das Visuelle und das Plastische*) notes the connection to the *Ansprache* as well and traces this back to Lafcadio Hearn’s *Kokoro*, which Hofmannsthal had read in 1901. (Hofmannsthal would later write the introduction to the German translation of the book). Thus Braegger: “Hearn erklärt dort die Erschütterung durch das Schöne aus der Vorstellung des orientalischen Ego, das nicht individuell ist und aus der Vorstellung des vielfachen Selbst in der buddhistischen Metaphysik” (118-21, here 120). For more on Hofmannsthal’s estimation of Hearn, see Freny Mistry’s article, “On the Notion of ‘Präexistenz’ in Hofmannsthal.”
being subjected to the statues’ gaze is indeed one of those thoughts that “can make us tremble.”

The phrase refers to Levinas, and it might seem strange to invoke the name of a man who wrote so eloquently on the nefarious character of art; yet Hofmannsthal himself has already done this for us in his vision of the phantom Plato. All three thinkers – Plato, Hofmannsthal, and Levinas – are wrestling with similar issues: art threatens to overtake us, to steal us away from reality by offering a fantasy world; it is, like writing, a pharmakon, a drug with the capacity to heal and to harm. This is part of the irony, and part of the danger. Hofmannsthal clearly falls on the side of art, but he does so in a way that attempts to take into account its ambiguity and its positive as well as negative potential. And he does so with remarkable prescience, as if anticipating Levinas’ critique. In “Reality and its Shadow” Levinas argues that art inspires disengagement. Of particular relevance to our discussion of “Die Statuen,” Levinas uses Pygmalion’s statue as an example par excellence for art:

The artwork does not succeed, is bad, when it does not have that aspiration for life which moved Pygmalion. But it is only an aspiration. The artist has given the statue a lifeless life, a derisory life which is not master of itself, a caricature of life. Its presence does not cover over itself and overflows on all sides, does not hold in its own hands the strings of the puppet it is. (The Levinas Reader 138)

The lifeless statue and other works of art by their very nature, according to Levinas, induce a kind of stupor in the observer: “Do not speak, do not reflect, admire in silence and peace – such are the counsels of wisdom satisfied before the beautiful” (141). The statues are, for Hofmannsthal too, speechless in that they, as Levinas says “have mouths but do not speak” (141); but Hofmannsthal does attribute faces to them (a distinctly ethically charged image for both Hofmannsthal and Levinas) and, more essentially, a physicality which demands response, and even responsibility – a power which Levinas would not acknowledge to be in the statues. Levinas would argue against any kind of phenomenological or aesthetic mediation in the confrontation with the face:

Infinity presents itself as a face in the ethical resistance that paralyses my powers and from the depths of defenceless eyes rises firm and absolute in its nudity and destitution. The comprehension of this destitution and this hunger establishes the

---

283 This is how Derrida describes the work of Emmanuel Levinas (“Violence and Metaphysics” 82).
very proximity of the other. [...] To speak to me is at each moment to surmount what is necessarily plastic in manifestation. To manifest oneself as a face is to impose oneself above and beyond the manifested and purely phenomenal form [...]. In Desire are conjoined the movements unto the Height and unto the Humility of the Other. (*Totality and Infinity* 200-01)

We see remarkable parallels between Levinas’ description of the encounter with the face in its “ethical resistance” and the encounter with the statues’ faces – with their aesthetic resistance. One might argue, again along Platonic lines, that in the statues we have only *images* of faces (that is, the phenomenological and ultimately aesthetic intermediary, not self-made, mute, existing but not alive), but for Hofmannsthal these images call attention to and validate physical existence. They possess, through their very plasticity and Medusa-like gaze, their own means to call to the observer and recall that “nudity and destitution”; the Paterian sadness and suffering has remained with us. More importantly, the statues are a site wherein “are conjoined the movements unto the Height and unto the Humility of the Other” – and for Hofmannsthal, these movements of recognising the Other involve a return to the self. Both height and humility, hubris and humbleness are united in the work of art. So let us turn to the statues once again.

“Erschrecken” is the traveller’s first (involuntary) response to the statues’ eyes and the “unsägliches Lächeln” – the smile associated with the beauty and mystery of the Mona Lisa as much as with the archaic smile of a statue like the Peplos Kore of Athens. It is worth lingering on this smile, which in the secondary literature on *Augenblicke in Griechenland* has received surprisingly little attention; and yet this image is key to the passage and is even brought into temporal conjunction with self-awareness: “Zugleich wußte ich: ich sehe dies nicht zum erstenmal” (195). Erwin Kobel and Zsuzsa Breier acknowledge that, with this smile, Hofmannsthal would be thinking of Leonardo da Vinci; Kobel calls this an ‘archäisches Lächeln,’ which, while certainly not incorrect – it is the proper term from an art historical perspective – is inadequate since it does not account for the timelessness and even the modernity of the moment; nor does Kobel ask what this *Lächeln* could be suggesting. He leaves the allusion unexplored. Breier practically dismisses the image of the smile as well as that of the eyes altogether, limiting their function to that of memory’s handmaidens: “Der Blick und das Lächeln der Statuen sind nur insofern von Bedeutung, als sie eine Erinnerung hervorrufen” (15). It seems to me that Hofmannsthal’s images are more complex and meaningful. To help us understand what else these eyes and mouth –
perhaps the most expressive parts of the face in Western physiognomy might suggest, we can again refer to Hofmannsthal’s vast library. Hofmannsthal is deliberately drawing on Walter Pater’s essay on Leonardo da Vinci (in *The Renaissance*), parts of which he had translated some years earlier. Towards the beginning of the essay, Pater identifies two of Leonardo’s early influences—“the smiling of women and the motion of great waters”—the beautiful and the sublime (67). That the moment of “Erschrecken” in “Die Statuen” should be connected with the faces and smiles of the korai is meaningful first of all insofar as it unites the beautiful and the sublime in one aesthetic experience; this is anecdotal evidence for Hofmannsthal’s statement concerning beauty in the *Ansprache*. It is another variation on the image of the servant girl from *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht*; here, the statues which have the power to captivate the viewer in his beholding. Furthermore, the “unsägliches Lächeln” is practically a translation of what Pater identifies as the “germinal principle” of Leonardo’s work, namely “the unfathomable smile, always with a touch of something sinister in it” (79). Here too, the uncanny announces itself. La Giaconda’s smile, the most well known of such enigmatic expressions to grace canvas, embodies for Pater countless fates and histories, radiating outward from the present moment, as much an expression of today as of yesteryear, as familiar as it is strange. Hofmannsthal has located this smile in the korai, such that the narrator too recognises something of the countless fates and stories in these faces—not just his own, but others well. This is what infuses beauty with the sublime: in these smiles and gazes is something greater than that which gives them physical form. In other words, we are talking yet again about the symbol, though now with reference to its overwhelming, even ominous, signifying potential. Yet the symbol exists in part because of its form. Hegel’s definition of beauty (“das sinnliche Scheinen der Idee” in *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* 151) is still relevant here. The physical instantiation of the idea (i.e. of the generations) is necessary for our apprehension of that idea.

Part of what makes this moment so impressive is Hofmannsthal’s resistance to using the idea of totality as a final negation of particularity. Instead, communion is emphasised, as it was in “Der

---

284 For the importance of the face and physiognomy in Hofmannsthal’s texts (especially as a reception of the work of Rudolf Kassner and Georg Simmel), see the brief but informative essay by Dangel-Pelloquin, “‘Ah, das Gesicht!’ Physiognomische Evidenz bei Hofmannsthal” in *Poetik der Evidenz*. Dangel-Pelloquin’s study focusses on the faces of people, but as we see in *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, the physiognomic interest can be expressed in the treatment of the inanimate as well—memories, landscapes, and art.
Wanderer": “[…] in irgendwelcher Welt bin ich vor diesen gestanden, habe ich mit diesen irgendwelche Gemeinschaft gepflogen und seitdem habe alles in mir auf einen solchen Schrecken gewartet, und so furchtbar mußte ich mich in mir berühren, um wieder zu werden, der ich war” (195, my emphasis). The repetition of the demonstrative pronoun (diesen) highlights the importance of particularity and nearness; on the other hand, one can indeed be lost in a place and time defined only by vagueness, suggesting the indefinite rather than the definite: “In diesem Augenblick geschah mir etwas”; “es kam nicht von außen, sondern irgendwoher”; “in irgendwelcher Welt”; “irgendwelche Gemeinschaft” (195, emphasis mine). This dreamlike state, this realm “Out of Space — out of Time” as Poe would say, is Atlantis, is Thule, is the world of suspension between definitudes, the “Präexistenz” Hofmannsthal mentions in *Ad me ipsum* and which scholars frequently invoke. It is a moment of shared ritual – each repeated performance a unique occurrence (here, before the statues) yet partaking in a common practice – and a rite of passage, as Hofmannsthal clearly indicates, subject to the laws of neither space nor time:


The “Gelandetsein” is a clear reference to the “Schiffbrüchiger” from the “Der Wanderer”; it establishes again a connection between the two defiant figures, yet this link is one of humility, of giving up: “ich vielleicht auch das Opfer.” I would argue that here we have an indirect description of the poet-figure. The poet as priest (related to but distinct from the poet as *alter deus*)

285 Edgar Allan Poe, “Dream-Land”


287 Claudia Bamberg correctly notes that both the third “Augenblick” and Rike’s poem “Wendung” (written in June of 1914) treat in similar fashion the question of “Schauen” – but she does not mention the other important point of connection: that of sacrifice. Printed above the poem and below the title is a quote attributed to Rudolf Kassner: “Der Weg von der Innigkeit zur Größe geht durch das Opfer” (Rilke, *Werke* 2: 82).
in German literature is a familiar trope. Novalis famously noted in the *Blüthenstaub*: “Dichter und Priester waren im Anfang eins” (*Schriften* 2: 441) But the connection between religion and the poet goes farther back, and Lenz even wrote – quite boldly – in the *Anmerkungen übers Theater*: “Von jeher und zu allen Zeiten sind die Empfindungen, Gemütsbewegungen und Leidenschaften der Menschen auf ihre Religionsbegriffe gepfropfet, ein Mensch ohne alle Religion hat gar keine Empfindung (weh ihm!), ein Mensch mit schiefer Religion schiefe Empfindungen und ein Dichter, der die Religion seines Volks nicht gegründet hat, ist weniger als ein Meßmusikant” (35). Yet if art is to be a substitute for religion, there must be a way whereby the mystery is made manifest and aesthetic (plastic or otherwise). For Hofmannsthal, this is most elegantly achieved in the symbol, the idea of identity that is *das Gleiche*, but not *dasselbe*. In the *Gespräch über Gedichte*, the definition of the symbol is one of identity between the sacrificer and the sacrificed: the man dies in the moment, for the moment, with the animal he sacrifices. Here we see something similar, except that the scene is more elaborate, the paradoxical nature of the identity more prominent: “Geselligkeit” and “Erbangen und Verzagen” coexist. Furthermore, we see the movement that comes from this participatory identification: “Das alles drängt zur Entscheidung.” This is not a decisionist philosophy in the sense of Carl Schmitt – it is not about the existence of authority justifying the content of the decision – but rather about the necessity of response, of the *Tat*: “Es endet mit dem Überschreiten einer Schwelle, mit einem Gelandetsein.” This action is, for Hofmannsthal, a poetic rite.

“In diesem Augenblick geschah mir etwas.” This sentence opens the long paragraph detailing the auratic experience, but it seems to end as quickly as it came on: “Da verlischt schon dies in ihre versteinernden Gesichter hinein, […] nichts bleibt zurück, als eine totbehauchte Verzagtheit” (195). The face – both in art and in life – is the window to this chaos, this ultimate confusion from which the ordered cosmos must again and again be separated. These statues preserve and reenact that moment of being in the world before the separation of light from darkness, though the text suggests their original confusion exists beyond that separation vestigially in the work of art. This can be seen in the image of petrification as a continual process, rendered grammatically as a present participle: “Da verlischt schon dies in ihre versteinernden Gesichter […]” (195). Crossing the threshold is a kind of death, and whatever remains after this event still is tainted with that death. But why is “Verzagtheit” the remaining factor? The moment of identification – which seems not only to have threatened the observer’s independent existence, but even to have killed some part of
him – gives way to impenetrable difference. And yet this is, we shall see, what makes this moment great. The foreignness, the separation, and the non-identity must also be in place for something to be experienced at all. The aesthetic distance is one way of making this possible. The statues’ physical outline is as much a rift in space (frustrating any totalising identification) as it is a demarcation of their physical presence; at every point along this line of demarcation there is an abyss of difference.

“Statuen sind um mich, fünf, jetzt erst wird mir ihre Zahl bewußt, fremd stehen sie vor mir, schwer und steinern, mit schiefgestellten Augen,” the narrator goes on, drawing attention to the particularity of the physical statues before him and to their now seemingly static presence (note the change from “versteinernenden” to “steinern”; the ritual has been fulfilled). He counts them – five – repeating the child’s counting of the soldiers’ faces, only here the number is finite. Indeed, it is now the finite, the limiting Umriß of materiality – in short, their physical presence which will now challenge the observer’s notions of life, of subject and object, and of reality itself. The narrator writes, among other details, that there is a life which plays around their chins: they have in their aesthetic presence an aesthetic vitality which appears to have been given them by that moment of strange identification between observer and observed. And yet now, given that life, they stand before him, utterly foreign and unattainable symbols of the original chaos: “Stehe ich nicht vor dem Fremdesten vom Fremden? Blickt nicht hier aus fünf jungfräulichen Mienen das ewige Grausen des Chaos?” (195).

There is a fear of chaos, but the statues, in their imposing physical presence, nearly force a response – which takes the form of a Paean, a hymn to Apollo – from the observer: “Aber, mein Gott, wie wirklich sind sie. Sie haben eine atemberaubende sinnliche Gegenwart” (195). The description atemberaubend operates chiastically with the above “totbehauchte Verzagtheit” said to have been left behind. Whereas before, held in the throes of ambiguity, the narrator is left with a despondence,

---

288 Cf. Charles Baudelaire’s preface to the works of Edgar Allan Poe: “Cette force primitive, irrésistible, est la Perversité naturelle, qui fait que l’homme est sans cesse et à la fois homicide et suicide, assassin et bourreau ; — car, ajoute-t-il, avec une subtilité remarquablement satanique, l’impossibilité de trouver un motif raisonnable suffisant pour certaines actions mauvaises et périlleuses, pourrait nous conduire à les considérer comme le résultat des suggestions du Diable, si l’expérience et l’histoire ne nous enseignaient pas que Dieu en tire souvent l’établissement de l’ordre et le châtiment des coquins ; — après s’être servi des mêmes coquins comme de complices! tel est le mot qui se glisse, je l’avoue, dans mon esprit, comme un sous-entendu aussi perfide qu’inévitable” (“Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe” v).
the only quality of which is that it has upon it the breath of death, here the narrator’s breath is taken away in amazement at the form and its life. This form is made manifest, first, as the reality of physical presence (the phenomenon), a presence appropriately likened to the temple with its architectonic clarity and its privilege as the site of sacrifice and ritual, and also as a metaphor for the body itself. No surprise then that the sentence that follows establishes the link between the body and the face, the seat of represented personality: “Ihre Feierlichkeit hat nichts von Masken: das Gesicht empfängt seinen Sinn durch den Körper” (195).

Moving from the temple of the body to the inner sanctum of the face with its commanding presence and distinction, we trace the quiet trajectories from both the phenomenological and the religious to the aesthetic. As Walter Pater writes in his essay on Winckelmann: “Greek art [...] is entangled with Greek religion” (128). Greek religion, he says, like all religions, is founded on a “pagan sentiment” that “measures the sadness with which the human mind is filled, whenever its thoughts wander far from what is here, and now” (129). Hofmannsthal identifies this pagan sentiment as common to religion, art, and phenomena generally; that is, what unites all three is the condition of difference, distance, and absence. Yet Hofmannsthal does not forfeit the notion of participation – rather, he elevates it: “Sie nehmen an Dingen teil, die über jede gemeine Ahnung sind” (196). This heralds the intensification of the phenomenological, that is, the aesthetic: “Wie schön sind sie!” (196). But what is beauty here? It is not the the pleasant loveliness of the objects the narrator had expected to find, but something overpowering that emanates from the statues’ bodies: “Ihre Körper sind mir überzeugender als mein eigener. [...] Ich habe nie zuvor etwas gesehen, wie diese Masse und diese Oberfläche. War nicht für ein Wimperzucken das Universum mir offen?” (196).

The universe’s revelation through the physical presence of the statues seems a thoroughly mystical moment. The narrator aptly compares himself to a dreamer, for he follows a path much like that which Poe describes in “Dreamland” (Collected Works 343-44):

By a route obscure and lonely

---

289 In older versions of the text, the narrator contemplates gazing upon the urns and goblets of the past which suggest but also subdue the power of eternity, resulting in the calm pleasantness of beauty without the disturbing, sublime element: “Der Mäander, mit dem sie verziert sind, bringt das Motiv der Unendlichkeit vor die Seele, aber so unterjocht, dass (1) unsere Unruhe nicht erwacht (2) | es (1) uns (2) unser Inneres | nicht gefährdet | . In der Ergötzung des Auges (1) befriedigen sich die Sinne (2) sind die Sinne befriedigt (3) geben sich die Sinne zufrieden | und ihr Streben nach Unendlichkeit (1) eingeschläft (2) schläft ein | “ (Varianten 674).
Haunted by ill angels only,
Where an Eidolon, named NIGHT,
On a black throne reigns upright,
I have reached these lands but newly
From an ultimate dim Thule-
From a wild clime that lieth, sublime,
Out of SPACE – out of TIME. (1-8)

But dreams – and poetry – have a special connection to reality, as an aphorism from *Buch der Freunde* shows: “Indem man von der Wirklichkeit irgend etwas Zusammenfassendes aussagt, nähert man sie schon dem Traum, vielmehr der Poesie” (*GW Aufzeichnungen* 45). For *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, it is the realm of physical reality that houses this eternity, providing the material for its expression: “es ist das Geheimnis der Unendlichkeit in diesen Gewändern” (196, italics mine). The walls might initially seem to be an inadequate structure to hold eternity, yet we should perhaps be more specific: they hold, like the face, the *secret of eternity* – they are the temple that houses the mystery. The material is, in a remarkably Hegelian sense, adequate to the idea. The statues’ physical presence – their grandeur – is in this aesthetic, sensual moment nevertheless receding and unattainable. They can be approached, but they can never be assimilated into the identity of the subject; to touch them would yield nothing of the mystery of their reality. At this point it is worth referring to a moment in the earlier version of the text. In an excised passage, the museum caretaker approaches the narrator and in fact encourages him to touch the works before him: “[...] berühren Sie, wenn Ihr Auge nicht genügt, mit den Händen des Kenners den ehrwürdigen Stein. Denn sie sind, das sehe ich auf den ersten Blick, nicht Deutscher und Archäologe, sondern Franzose und Künstler.’ Ich entzog mich seinem Geschwätz und trat in den ersten Raum” (*Varianten* 682). The narrator’s rejection of the caretaker’s advice resembles Zarathustra’s actions: “Also sprach Zarathustra und gieng an dem Narren und der grossen Stadt vorüber” (221). Like the fool, the caretaker (a physically almost grotesque figure) is not entirely wrong, but he is prey to his own cleverness. Not only is he wrong in identifying the narrator as a Frenchman; his simple division – French / German – is one that is too easy and, historically speaking, rather inaccurate. The Austrian identity may well be generally located somewhere between the German and the French; but it was a German, Winckelmann, who is remembered for
having elevated the sense of touch in the aesthetic encounter with the art of antiquity. Hofmannsthal’s narrator, however, is neither anthropologist nor “Künstler” in the rigid sense implied by the caretaker; he is indeed an artist, but he is an artist aware of the impossibility of true contact through touch, yet neither is the gazing eye alone sufficient.

Knowing this, the narrator draws an important conclusion in light of this encounter: “Wer diesen wahrhaft gewachsen wäre, müßte sich anders ihnen nahen als durchs Auge, ehrfürchtiger zugleich und kühner. Und doch müßte ihm sein Auge dies gebieten, schauend, schauend, dann aber sinkend, brechend wie beim Überwältigten. –” (196). For our discussion, this serves as one of the most important statements in the entire text; it is the conundrum of Hofmannsthal’s artist-viewer. Just as critical observers have become artists, so too artists must become critical observers, while preserving their identity as creators. They must approach with Ehrfurcht, as one would approach an altar. Yet the eye, in all its metaphorical multivalence, is a necessary medium for that approach; as an affected observer, one responds by sinking, bowing, breaking, and ultimately being overpowered by the vision of the divine, falling into a proskynesis, recalling the earlier moment when the traveller takes a drink from the spring, and in that moment losing hold on his sense of self: “Mein Auge sank nicht, doch sank eine Gestalt über die Knie der einen Priesterin hin, jemand ruhte mit der Stirn auf dem Fuß einer Statue. Ich wußte nicht, ob ich dies dachte, oder ob dies geschah” (196). Again, there is a sense in which the self is separated from itself in the aesthetic encounter, as one having a near-death experience. Yet unlike the earlier instance, here the grammatical subject “Ich” is still present; that is, here the self experiences itself as multiplicity (as in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten).

But the artist is not only ehrfürchtig; the artist is also bold, defiant when necessary (and sometimes, too, when not). Pride functions as a necessary antidote that accompanies its correlative poison –

---

290 This portrayal of Winckelmann was familiar to Hofmannsthal. Cf. Pater’s description: “How facile and direct [...] is this life of the senses and the understanding, when once we have apprehended it! [...] Here, then, in vivid realisation, we see the native tendency of Winckelmann to escape from abstract theory to intuition, to the exercise of sight and touch” (“Winckelmann,” The Renaissance 118).

291 An aspect of this is constitutive of beauty for Moritz as well: “Nun gründet sich aber der Genuß des Schönens stets auf Liebe und Zärtlichkeit, insofern es uns jedesmal auf eine Weile aus uns selber zieht und macht, daß wir über seinem Anschau nur uns selbst vergessen” (“Die Signatur des Schönens” 298). In Augenblicke in Griechenland, however, “Zärtlichkeit” is replaced by the “namenloses Erschrecken,” the uncanny presence of Otherness.
that is, whatever might stifle the creative force, be it the anxiety of influence,\footnote{Braegger argues that Hofmannsthal possesses a “zarathustrischen Hochmut” – that is, the “Adler-Mut” that is opposed to tradition (“Dem Nichts ein Gesicht geben” 322), but then three pages later curiously qualifies this statement in saying Hofmannsthal was “in stärkerer Bindung an die Tradition” and attempted to pass on their “Formen” (325).} the sense of inadequacy, or the deference to an object more idolised than aestheticised. Defiance and self-assertion through creating that which is beyond the self rise to meet the aesthetic object, itself a formidable intoxicant that has the power to heal and to overwhelm. The Platonic pharmakon reasserts itself in the Augenblicke in Griechenland and elsewhere – we might again refer to the West-östlicher Divan and the deliberate confusion of “Gift” and “Theriak,” poison and its antidote. Thus we read in the poem “Fetwa” the words of Ebusuud praising Hafis for his poetry, but warning against the excesses of aesthetic indulgence: “[...]
Aber hie und da auch Kleinigkeiten / Außerhalb der Grenze des Gesetzes. / Willst du sicher gehn, so mußt du wissen / Schlangengift und Theriak zu sondern [...]
” (3-6). In “Der Deutsche danke,” which follows, we read the counterstatement: “Denn gerade jene Kleinigkeiten / Außerhalb der Grenze des Gesetzes / Sind das Erbeteil, wo er übermütig, / Selbst im Kummer lustig, sich beweget. / Schlangengift und Theriak muß / Ihm das eine wie das andre scheinen” (3-8). As in Goethe so too in Hofmannsthal we witness the yoking together of opposites. Both Ehrfucht and Kühnheit must be present to even approach such an encounter, to see the world with the eyes of the poet.

It might seem we have strayed away from the aesthetic, but the notion of beauty is always present. It is beauty which announces this grappling with the moment. And if we are unsure, Hofmannsthal himself has already told us, for example, in one of his essays on D’Annunzio, “da doch Schönheit erst entsteht, wo eine Kraft und eine Bescheidenheit ist” (GW Prosa I “Der neue Roman von D’Annunzio,” 235). We can understand the importance of Kraft and Kühnheit in the approach, and even in the creative response. Art transcends the rules of the quotidian. But how do we explain the Bescheidenheit necessary for the generation of beauty, and the Ehrfurcht needed in approaching it? Hofmannsthal has repeatedly invoked communion and participation, and it is this which allows him to conclude the Augenblicke in Griechenland with the triumphal sentence: “Wenn das Unerreichliche sich speist aus meinem Innern und das Ewige aus mir seine Ewigkeit sich aufbaut, was wäre dann noch zwischen der Gottheit und mir?” (196). Scholars have not offered a satisfying interpretation of this sentence. Breier simply calls it “radikal” (16), but does not elaborate. Schings refers to the “Kühnheit der Schlußwendung,” but he does not explore this further either (“Hier
oder nirgends” 388). Braegger (Das Plastische und das Visuelle 110), on the other hand, makes an interesting point in referring to the much later introduction Hofmannsthal wrote to Hans Holdt’s *Griechenland*: Hofmannsthal writes with self-reflection and a worry familiar to us from Chapter 2: “Vielleicht erfassen wir eine ganze Gestalt, die in Marmor vor uns aufsteht, noch immer mit einem romantischen Blick. Vielleicht leihen wir ihr zuviel von unserer Bewußttheit, von unserer ‘Seele’” (viii). We also find an interpretive clue in the *Ansprache* from 1902:

> Die Forderung, welche die Welt des Schönen an uns stellt, jenes dämonische Ausuns-heraus-locken ganzer Welten des Fühlens, diese Forderung ist nur so gigantisch, weil das, was in uns ihr zu entsprechen bereit ist, so grenzenlos gross ist: die aufgesammelte Kraft der geheimnisvollen Ahnenreihe in uns, die übereinander gethürmten Schichten der aufgestapelten überindividuellen Erinnerung. (11)

From this “Romantic” point of view, we are more than merely individuals; at the moment of such an encounter, we live beyond our selves, and we offer ourselves up as *Nahrung* or *Speise* to the other. Where does this ability to offer ourselves up come from? Again, the 1902 *Ansprache*: “Denn ein solches Anrecht, aus unserem Innern sich zu nähren, räumen wir ihnen ein, indem wir sie ‘schön’ nennen” (11). In *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, the narrator has emphatically designated the statues “schön.” Moreover, the beauty of these statues is tied to something else – to something we might call a phenomenological suffering, or sadness. I have already discussed the role of suffering in Hofmannsthal’s *Märchen der 672. Nacht* and *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, and here it takes several forms – its most explicit being the depiction of the German wanderer. But even in the statues – these nonhuman entities – we are made privy to a peculiar kind of suffering that arises from phenomena and speaks to the passing away of great things. Even here there is a continual ebb and flow. Hofmannsthal’s narrator cannot be a Winckelmann, for his experience of the phenomena is fundamentally different. Having offered himself up to the ecstatic moment of the encounter with the beautiful – his own *katabasis* – he is then “returned” (the *anabasis*) and given an understanding of the transience even of that atemporal moment, and of the interdependent relationship of human being to artwork necessary to give the moment vitality. Hermann Broch in his influential and sympathetic study *Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit* describes Hofmannsthal’s *Augenblicke* in terms of a “dichterische Ekstase” (116) whereby the artistic mind finds its way back to “Voll-Identifikation, [...] zur Präexistenz” (116). The question remains though: is this a
“Voll-Identifikation”? Broch qualifies his statement: the artist, like anyone, must deal with the “ungemein fluktuerenden” (117). In *Augenblicke in Griechenland* we see a heightened awareness of the foreign, of the impossibility of penetrating the surface of things, and in this a typically finde-siècle appreciation for the surface and relief of things. As Hofmannsthal himself writes in *Buch der Freunde*: “Man muss das Tiefe verstecken. Wo? An der Oberfläche!” (*GW Aufzeichnungen* 47). The love for the surface of things is part of the new aesthetic views which gravitate to the reception and appreciation of art’s – especially painting’s – simple materiality: *ligne, surface, couleur*. But what is this surface? It is anything but stable. In fact, it is unstable to the point of no longer being a surface: “Es wäre ja undenkbar, sich an ihre Oberfläche anschmiegen zu wollen. Diese Oberfläche ist ja gar nicht da – sie entsteht durch ein beständiges Kommen aus unerschöpflichen Tiefen.” The surface is not; it becomes – and insofar as it comes into being, it passes away as well. And this is the point at which we cannot speak of art as a petrified garden, frozen in eternity, though we may often treat it as such. In this moment, the narrator is able to experience, even outside of the ecstatic – yet in the flux – a communion, tinged with the melancholy of untraversable distance and universal difference of what is foreign, what is other.293 “Sie sind da und sind unerreichlich. So bin auch ich. Dadurch kommunizieren wir” (196).

***

As with *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, we might here be tempted to call this encounter a mystical one and leave it at that. The religious tone, the temporal suspension, and the feeling of dissociation would all support such an interpretation. I would agree that the first part of the encounter is very much this kind of experience: the contraction and expansion of space, the very notion of the *Reise* (as pilgrimage or as metempsychosis), and the sacrifice all read like a medieval dream vision. And it might not be a coincidence that Hofmannsthal wrote on the final leaf of his copy of Murray’s *The Rise of the Greek Epic* the name “Buber,” as if that philosopher’s *Ekstatische Konfessionen* were lurking in the back of his text. Yet in as much as Hofmannsthal adopts much of the imagery

associated with the ecstatic, mystical experience as outlined in that book, he uses it in such a way as to create a thoroughly literary text representing an ultimately aesthetic moment. For Buber, the mystical, ecstatic moment is characterised by *Einheit*; for Hofmannsthal, the *Einheit* is impossible except as participation, and even this comes about with the recognition of unreachable otherness; at the same time, Hofmannsthal stresses the dialogical reciprocity in the encounter: “Sie sind da und sind unerreichlich. So bin auch ich. Dadurch kommunizieren wir” (196). This is not an *ekstatische Konfession* in the sense that Buber describes. Rather, it seems more to be part of “[u]nser menschliches Lebensgetriebe” (Buber xi). Similarly stirring moments can affect the soul, but:


No, this last of the *Augenblicke* does not exhibit that unity, but comes about in the face of the Other. If anything, *Augenblicke in Griechenland* has more in common with Buber’s later work on dialogical philosophy, here anticipated in Hofmannsthal’s depiction of the work of art. Some fourteen years later Buber will write about art in a way that recalls *Augenblicke in Griechenland*: “Auf die Gegenständlichkeit geprüft, ist die Gestalt gar nicht ‘da’; aber was wäre gegenwärtiger als sie? Und wirkliche Beziehung ist es, darin ich zu ihr stehe: sie wirkt an mir wie ich an ihr wirke” (*Ich und Du* 17). The surface, too, is not there, but is in becoming; and both the viewer and the statue have the power to affect each other through a kind of identification. We thus have depicted here an instance of what Hofmannsthal refers to in *Buch der Freunde* as the generation of “das Plastische”: “Das Plastische entsteht nicht durch Schauen, sondern durch Identifikation” (*GW Aufzeichnungen* 73).
The hierarchy of the gaze must be overturned in that momentary loss of the sense of Ego (the self standing in opposition to the other): and yet it is the very unreachableness for Hofmannsthal that is the commonly shared feature of existence. The ontological (not simply epistemological) realisation of this comes about in the aesthetic encounter, suggesting that art, too, participates in that dialogue that recognises and can only exist in conjunction with the other. This is for Hofmannsthal the ethical moment in art. But it remains to be seen whether the ethical moment in art can ever be realised in the world beyond the page, and beyond the gaze.
In the preceding chapters, I have offered readings of three main fictional or semi-fictional texts: the Märchen der 672. Nacht, Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrter, and Augenblicke in Griechenland. In each of these texts we have seen either latent or explicit examples of a dialogical aesthetics at work, invoking a structural principle from ethical discourse, but never fully uniting the aesthetic with the ethical. In the case of Die Frau ohne Schatten (published 1919), the ethical happy-ending finds expression within an aesthetic context, suggesting, at least formally, a union of the two. We have a narrative situation characterised by the development of what Hegel would call reciprocal recognition (gegenseitige Anerkennung), resulting in the reciprocal animation of the other. In Ad me ipsum, Hofmannsthal refers to it as the “allomatische Lösung.” The development of the self within and through a relationship, moreover, is so dependent on the other, that the ethical tips into the existential. The presence or absence of reciprocal recognition is made into a matter of life and death. In other words, the situation in Die Frau ohne Schatten is much more clearly charged with a concern for the ethical. Rather than existing as an undercurrent that comes to the fore only in particularly moving (especially aesthetic) encounters, the ethical takes centre stage in this work, and the aesthetic seems initially to recede into the background. Despite this, the effectiveness of the aesthetic is in no way compromised, nor is its role reduced. For example, this tale engages explicitly and extensively with literary traditions, perhaps more so than any other of Hofmannsthal’s writings. Ultimately, what might have been a fairly straightforward story (complete with a moral at the end) about establishing ethical relationships turns out to be the most aestheticised work of all the texts we have explored thus far. This affects how Hofmannsthal talks

---

294 Judith Ryan (“Die ‘allomatische Lösung’: Gespaltene Persönlichkeit und Konfiguration”) develops the notion of “allomatische Lösung” or “gegenseitige Verwandlung,” terms which Hofmannsthal introduced in Ad me ipsum. Seelig (“Musical Substance and Literary Shadow”) argues that Hofmannsthal abandons the aspect of simultaneity, at least in terms of form, that characterises the “allomatische Lösung” present in the opera. In other words, the “allomatische Lösung” takes different characteristics depending on the medium. Its effect – the transformation of the people involved – remains the same in both arguments. See GW Aufzeichnungen: “Die gegenseitige Verwandlung. ‘Die Frau ohne Schatten’: Triumph des Allomatischen. Allegorie des Sozialen” (218).

295 Ellen Ritter writes: “The multiplicity of literary sources, backgrounds, and references characterizes his entire literary oeuvre. But nowhere else are they as concentrated as in Die Frau ohne Schatten. […] He draws from world literature as if from a well, and thus unites the most varied times and places” (“Hofmannsthal’s Narrative Prose,” 81-81).
about the ethical. Just as beauty cannot be, as Hermann Broch says, “ihre eigene kritische Instanz” (Hugo von Hofmannsthals und seine Zeit 154), neither can ethics. Ostensibly one of Hofmannsthal’s most morally charged undertakings, Die Frau ohne Schatten is one of the most aesthetically refined.

Like many of Hofmannsthal’s texts, Die Frau ohne Schatten has a complicated textual history; Ellen Ritter has explored this most comprehensively. Its slightly older and more famous sibling, the opera of the same name, is the subject of more articles than the prose tale, but for the purposes of my inquiry, the prose tale yields more striking results. Hermann Broch noted that James Joyce and Hofmannsthal had much in common, but differed most in their manner of expression and its associated art-form, Joyce being the more musically driven and confessional: “Wenn Musik in letzter Größe, etwa bei Bach, sich als tiefstes Selbstbekenntnis auffassen läßt, so ist Malerei äußerste Objekterkenntnis, und es wäre daher mit gutem Fug zu vertreten, daß der Musiker Joyce von allem Anfang an – am deutlichsten im ‘Portrait’ – Bekenntnisdichtung angestrebt hat” (162). While one might question Broch’s understanding of Bach’s music – and of Hofmannsthal’s own musicality of language – his analogy nevertheless suggests much about Hofmannsthal’s object-centred narratives. Hofmannsthal certainly appreciated the power of music – whether it was more analagous to “Selbstbekenntnis” for him is questionable – but himself often admitted his lack of talent in that art genre. Yet writing librettos – and contributing ideas for the visual frame and staging for the music – was a way of entering the world of music through the plastic. That he found in the “Stoff” of Die Frau ohne Schatten more than he could bring to the opera can perhaps also be interpreted in this context: the prose Märchen (with its fantastic setting and characters) is much more descriptive, and the visual elements are alluded to much more than in the libretto. This is of course also necessary, for opera has the advantage of existing on a stage. But the prose Märchen has the advantage of guiding the mind’s eye and portraying the impossible. On a stage full of light and colour and sound all simultaneously demanding of the audience their rapt attention, it becomes more difficult to point to particular, meaningful visual symbols, especially if they are intended for the mind’s eye. The music cuts through all and has no difficulty asserting itself.

296 See the Entstehung in SW XXVIII EI 270-82.
But the prose tale is interesting for the purposes of this study also because of what Hofmannsthal added to the story. Key to the analysis in this chapter will be, for instance, the motif of the carpet, the elaborate description of the Emperor’s petrification (the human being transformed into a work of art), and the explosion of colour at the end of the story. The carpet-motif is absent from the opera, the statue receives less attention, and the colours – while they lend themselves to visual display – are not attributed the same significance in the opera as in the Märchen, nor are they as ubiquitous at the conclusion of opera.

From this brief description of the reasons for choosing the prose Märchen over the opera, we can already see how tightly the themes of this dissertation are woven together in this prose work. This prose Märchen responds to Das Märchen der 672. Nacht, in a number of ways, as scholars have pointed out. It invokes the world of the imagined Orient, carpets included – and their effect on the viewers; the world is further divided into three realms (the spirit realm or “Geisterreich,” the Emperor’s palace, and the world of the working class) but takes place primarily in two, paralleling the distinction between the aesthetically constructed world of the merchant’s son’s secluded abode and the dank, unpleasant atmosphere of the city; the story follows a trajectory of ‘descent’ to an ‘underworld,’ a katabasis, but unlike the Märchen der 672. Nacht, it is followed by an ascent or return, the anabasis, in a movement of transfiguration. Most importantly, in both tales, the question of beauty and the confrontation with works of art complicate an easy division between life and art.

In 1949, Alewyn formulated his oft-cited interpretation of Das Märchen der 672. Nacht thus:


297 See Seelig, “Musical Substance and Literary Shadow?” Seelig succinctly argues for the aesthetic improvements achieved in the prose version of the story: “[...] by boldly going beyond the operatic substance of the original, Hofmannsthal succeeds not only in finding for the original a more satisfying aesthetic-ethical shadow, but also in jumping over his own” (70).

298 See Alewyn 181, whom I discuss below. See also in particular Hans-Günther Schwarz, Orient – Okzident (175-88); Ellen Ritter further notes the contrastive fates of the merchant’s son in Das Märchen der 672. Nacht and the Empress in Die Frau ohne Schatten (“Hofmannsthals Narrative Prose” 77).
Alewyn reads *Die Frau ohne Schatten* as a response to *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht* and this problematic situation. But Alewyn’s assertions – many of which I agree with – require more demonstration. As recently as 2014, Teona Djibuti took up Alewyn’s notion, but to my mind, not critically enough, and she repeats the master narrative thus:

Mit *Die Frau ohne Schatten* zeigt sich die Veränderung im Werk des Dichters; während die Jugenddichtung Hofmannsthals vom einzelnen Individuum aus gestaltet ist und das soziale Verantwortungsgefühl erst gar nicht zur Sprache kommt, verketten sich in der symbolischen Märchenwirklichkeit von *Die Frau ohne Schatten* die Einzelgeschicke der vier handelnden Gestalten zu einer Schicksalsgemeinschaft. (197)

Equating the group-dynamic with a shift in concern for the “soziale Verantwortungsgefühl” is misleading. First, we have already seen that it is problematic to argue that the topic of “soziale Verantwortungsgefühl” is not broached before this point. Throughout Hofmannsthal’s œuvre, the theme of social responsibility is interlaced with the question of art’s power. Further, focusing on the individual does not exclude considerations of the social; on the contrary, for Hofmannsthal, the social is thought through the individual in relation to other individuals. Aspects of Djibouti’s argument would make more sense for the opera, the conclusion of which has all four characters’ fates revealed simultaneously; in the Märchen, however, as Seelig has pointed out, “each couple [receives] consecutive narrative attention” (“Musical Substance” 62-63). The focus on the “personal, private, and above all, sequential development of loving relationships,” as can also be seen in *Der Rosenkavalier*, lends the Märchen a similar “aesthetic rightness” (65).

---


300 Elsewhere, Djibuti also repeats the master narrative of Hofmannsthal’s literary development: “Während die früheren Gestalten Hofmannsthals sich gegenüber dem Leben ohnmächtig und bedürftig verhielten, sich nur im ästhetischen Raum aufgehoben und glücklich fühlten, läßt Hofmannsthal die Figuren seiner späteren Werke sich mit dem Leben auseinandersetzen, er gibt ihnen die Kraft, die er selbst nach dem Wandel gefunden hat” (200). If we consider the figures of Sigismund from Hofmannsthal’s late work *Der Turm* and Andreas from the eponymous novel-fragment, we cannot come to this conclusion so easily. Many of the “Figuren seiner späteren Werke” are in fact often characterised by their powerlessness, or by their incompleteness. Djibuti mentions Sigismund’s failure earlier (160) but does not seem to let this fact influence her conclusion. It might indeed be argued that Sigismund has been lent “Kraft,” but the meaning of this “Kraft” – for Sigismund dies – must be explained.
If we are to agree with Alewyn, we must show in what this “Wandlung” consists; and it is in no way a refutation of earlier work, nor a heralding of a sudden, new interest in social or ethical concerns. Transformation incorporates what was before, but changes it, and in the case of *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, clarifies it – we might speak of “transfiguration” (“Verklärung”) instead of transformation. Not only the broader narrative strokes – a protagonist from a world of beauty descending to the world of ugliness – but also particularly rich motifs, such as the carpet, recall the earlier work. But *Die Frau ohne Schatten* is a response not only to themes present in *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht*. It also takes up and transfigures motifs from *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* and *Augenblicke in Griechenland*. The katabasis and corresponding anabasis structure of *Augenblicke in Griechenland* and the motif of return in *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* are both present in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, though clarified into a magical, seemingly permanent resolution. Colours, which played such a great role in *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, again take on an important symbolic vibrancy; and even the uncanny gaze of the statues in *Augenblicke in Griechenland* is refashioned to give the even more uncanny motif of petrification as burial alive, *Versteinerung*.\(^{301}\) its full weight. In *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, the human being becomes stone, more specifically: a statue. This is a work of art which is bereft of life, or, to borrow the description from *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*: from the petrified Emperor there is released “ein so unbeschreibliches Anwehen des ewigen Nichts, des ewigen Nirgends, ein Atem nicht des Todes, sondern des Nicht-Lebens, unbeschreiblich” (166). Sacrifice and guilt, courage and humility, all written upon the face, will push the narrative to its climax. And finally, connecting all four texts is an interest in the question of possession: of things, of people, of beauty. The objectifying, never fully comprehending gaze will, once again, prove insufficient. Instead, a kaleidoscopic multiplicity of gazes must emerge. Identities change, and subject and object positions, which in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* find representation particularly in the people themselves, are revealed to be illusory, even if there remains a hierarchy, and even if it is a *Märchen*.

---

\(^{301}\) In the libretto, the Empress decries her husband’s fate: “Lebendig begraben im eigenen Leib!” John Zilcosky has noted (“The Times in Which We Live”) that being buried alive was one of the greatest sources of trauma for trench soldiers. The premier of the opera *Die Frau ohne Schatten* was deliberately set back till peace was declared, and though this world is a fantastical one, it is not unreasonable to see in some of its themes echoes from the times in which Hofmannsthal, too, lived. *Der Schwierige*, likewise, deals with the motif of burial alive in trenches. See also Inka Mülder-Bach, “Herrenlose Häuser.”
In this *Märchen*, unlike the *Anti-Märchen* from 1895, the resolution is a happy one, but it is achieved artificially, artfully, through a logic of deus-ex-machina in the guise of sacrifice: ultimately, the kind of harmonious resolution – a veritable aesthetic theodicy – achieved in the tale (and in the opera) perhaps cannot be so easily translated into other genres, such as the novel, with its indebtedness to realism – unless we are speaking of a novel in the sense Novalis had in mind. The characters in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* are not novellistic, and although they are treated with subtlety and given a complexity of emotion, they are more like the characters of Shakespeare’s *Tempest* than of his *Hamlet*, still somehow of the aether, even if they gain shadows in the end. The ethical resolution might just be too magical to serve as a model for our world. But that should not detract us from the beauty of it, nor from the problem that still remains unresolved, but conscientiously acknowledged *via negativa*. The *Märchen* is the least real of all literary genres, but the best suited to let positive ethical relations play out aesthetically. While formally the most aesthetically constructed of Hofmannsthal’s works, the story itself is akin to that of a *Bildungsroman* with its ethical impulse, tracing the development of mutual respect between characters as each comes into his and her own. But the *Märchen* is explicitly not a *Bildungsroman*, but rather a genre that explores the bold possibilities of what is unreal, rather than any realistic possibilities which might be implemented in life.\(^{302}\) Art for Hofmannsthal always remains silent when it comes to ethical precepts. In this chapter I intend to show how the role of the aesthetic, in a ‘moral’ drama of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ decisions, is that of a tacit but ever-present supporting actor, without whose presence the entire aesthetic comedy would fall apart.

In discussing the relation between the ethical and the aesthetic in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, I will proceed as I have in the other chapters of this dissertation; that is, I will follow the narrative of the text and highlight recurring themes as they are taken up and developed. Because of the length of this chapter (and the story it examines), it will be helpful to have a brief overview of the sections of this chapter.

\(^{302}\) Cf. his injunctions to the craftsmen in “Die Bedeutung unseres Kunstgewerbes für den Wiederaufbau”: “Werden Sie darum […] nie im engeren Wortsinne politisch. Gerade jenseits der Politik, jenseits dessen, was wir bisher Politik zu nennen gewohnt waren, ergeben sich für geistige Gemeinschaften die allergrößten Möglichkeiten. Werden Sie nie offiziell. Treten Sie dem Staate stark gegenüber, stark durch Ihre Eigenart, Kräfte fördernd und gebend, aber werden Sie womöglich nie ein Teil der Staatsmaschinerie” (*SW XXXIV RA3* 247).
In the first section, “The Blue Palatial Vestibule,” I read the set-up with an eye to a number of incipient themes: the role of time, which is qualitatively different in the aesthetic encounter; instances of convergence of art and the ethical response (or lack thereof); the two contrasting worlds, one of which is beautiful and isolated, the other ugly and crowded; the curse as an ethical admonition; the descent into the dark world of humanity; and the allure of money and, in particular, beauty. All of these are figured dually, that is, both the ethical and the aesthetic situating of these themes is relevant to their expression and narrative function.

In the second section, “A Yellow River Leads to the City of Woe: The Birthplace of the Artist,” we are provided a view of an aesthetic hell, a place noxious to the senses with echoes of a modern urban landscape and suffering. Of particular interest in this section is the Empress’s response to her vision of this suffering: her empathy is portrayed in terms that call to mind Hofmannsthal’s characterisation of the artist-figure. She – and we – see how her life is intimately connected to others’ lives. By contrast, the Dyer’s Wife has something of the ‘dilettante’ about her; she is easily led astray by stronger figures. But we also see in her as well as in the Empress a tension between desire and the ethical and aesthetic forces that hold the characters together in the narrative.

Section 3, “An Aesthetic Encounter,” follows the Emperor on his journey into the cave where he encounters his unborn children and a work of art unlike any he has seen before. The guest-host dynamic discussed in Augenblicke in Griechenland is again at work but is also refigured in terms of the generational question: children are wiser than their parents, who must nevertheless bestow the children with life. Failed dialogue and a lust for possession result in the Emperor’s petrification.

In “The Labour of Beauty” Hofmannsthal returns us to the world of poverty, but shows us also the work involved in producing coloured fabric and threads – like those used to make carpets. There is a dual focus on the beauty produced and the ugliness of conditions necessary for that production of beauty. The importance of ceremony and method of work function, if not as a social commentary, at least as an alternative vision of labour. The generational question is once again broached, this time in respect to self-definition and maturation.

Section 5, “The Sun Rises and Sets,” shows how Hofmannsthal conceives of maturation: it is a process of recognising, as in the aesthetic encounter, the essential otherness of a human being. This section is also a preparation for the resolution at the end of the story, and it gives relief to some of the central paradoxes at the heart of Hofmannsthal’s understanding of the aesthetic: the
sacrificial imagery which Hofmannsthal so often invokes is shown in its primal duality – as a ritualistic act of piety that can easily be turned into an aestheticised veil for murder and destructive impulses generally. With this comes the question of generational continuity: the survival not only of genes, but of art. This section is two-fold: it traces the actions of the Dyer Barak and his wife, as well as the demise of the Nurse, which itself is figured aesthetically as a silencing. Ethically, the Nurse’s disappearing act is renunciation in its negative form: the decision no longer to engage.

The sixth section, “Echoes and Colours,” analyses the Empress’s encounter (audial and visual) with generations past and future. The aesthetic element in particular plays an important role in her recognition: it is what makes the scene extraordinary. But it is appearance as apparition: the unborn children she sees are magical, shimmering, iridescent, but they are insubstantial. Even their appearance is constantly changing, reflecting the ephemerality of life – for which they yearn.

The seventh section is the last of the close reading. “Reverse Midas: Gold, Stone, & Gordian Knots” reflects on the aesthetics and ethics of rebirth, the knot’s transformation into an embrace, and the role of sound. The close relation of metamorphosis and metaphor help us to understand how the Empress comes to herself and realises her power. Because of the importance of sound in this final section, I also, at particular moments, compare the prose text with the score. The ending was one of the points of difference Hofmannsthal himself emphasised, and his distinction is helpful for understanding the ‘how’of the text: and in the ‘how’ lies all the difference.303

At the end of the chapter, I offer some final reflections on this tale’s status in the question of the ethical content of art, of aesthetics’ capacity to comment on ethics and vice-versa, and its power of effect. The circumstances of its composition are addressed primarily only at the end in order to let the piece first speak ‘for itself’ (insofar as that is possible) in its supposed aesthetic autonomy; then, at the end, we can consider some of the ‘real world’ matters that compromised and enabled its composition.

303 The Marschallin says towards the end of act 1 of *Rosenkavalier*: “Und in dem ‘Wie,’ da liegt der ganze Unterschied” (*SW XXIII Operndichtungen I* 37).
The Blue Palatial Vestibule

*Die Frau ohne Schatten* begins, like the *Märchen der 672. Nacht*, with a description of the world that the main character, the “eifersüchtig behütete” Empress, inhabits: a secluded blue palace on an island in an almost magical, typically German *Kunstmärchen* setting – an imaginative space removed not only from the reader’s world, but also from the harsher climes of other, impoverished people in the tale itself (*SW XXVII EI* 109). The story begins elliptically, not with the actions of the Emperor or the Empress, but with the thoughts of the Empress’s Nurse, as she nostalgically recalls in the early morning darkness how the Empress, before her marriage to the mortal Emperor, could change her shape at will and live as any and all creatures. The world of the palace is thus more of a world in between worlds, suspended between dream and reality. In many ways, this world is antagonistic to the characters’ development. Neither here nor there, neither this nor that, there is something ontologically ambiguous about the place the three characters – Emperor, Empress, and Nurse – inhabit. We soon learn that this ontological uncertainty, which we can already see resembles that “Nicht-Leben” described in *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, has a correspondingly suspended temporality. Their former (magical) world might be said to exist before time – it is a world akin to that “Praeexistenz” Hofmannsthal writes of in *Ad me ipsum*:

Glorreicher, aber gefährlicher Zustand.

ihre Qualitäten: frühe Weisheit […]

Angehöriger einer höchsten Welt: millenarische Anklänge […]

Das Über-ich: ‘und mein Teil ist mehr’ etc. Das Ich als Universum […]

Bangen und Sehnsucht diesen Zustand zu verlassen: auf welchem Weg?

---

304 Unless otherwise indicated, subsequent citations will refer to the critical edition and will be marked with page numbers only.


306 Kobel rightly argues that the Emperor prevents the Empress from growing into her adult role (272), but fails to see that Empress is just as implicit in this suspension of time – as much as he prevents her from becoming a mother, she has not made him a father. She wishes to hold on to the “Flitterwochen” just as much as the Emperor does, as will become evident in her nostalgically rehearsing the moment of their meeting to the Nurse.
Verknüpfung mit dem Leben. Durchdringen aus der Praeexistenz zur Existenz. (213-14)307

Completely free, the *Feentochter* could be anything and everything, without having to choose a final form. Now exiled from that world, she and her Nurse find themselves in the vestibule to a seeming Hell – where Hell is the world of mortals.308 Both meanings of *felix culpa* are at work here: this movement into the in-between world of the blue palace proves to be a happy fall; later, the Empress will also commit a crime: the happy fault, as it were.

The tale begins with the Nurse, however, for an important reason: she embodies the principle of division and is, despite herself, a helpful Mephistopheles.309 Though she wishes to return to the magical realm of Keikobad, the realm of the Empress’s father, she is forced to be here. Her allegiance is likewise divided – she is the guardian of the Empress, who wishes to stay in the world of her beloved Emperor, but she is also, like Aeschylus’ furies, operating according to a moribund law: that of Keikobad. It is thus her aim to prevent the Empress’s life from moving forward, so that they both can ultimately return to the magical realm. This kind of return is regression, but it expresses a frustration with the inexorable onward trek of time, itself characterised by the stifling of growth and change through its chronic regularity. This becomes clear when Hofmannsthal reveals the Nurse’s limited understanding of time. It has been nearly twelve months since she and the Empress have moved to the Emperor’s palace; in this interval, the Empress has not gained a shadow, and if she does not before the year is up, the Emperor will turn to stone. This is the curse

307 Hofmannsthal borrowed the term from Lafcadio Hearn. See Freny Mistry’s study “On the Notion of ‘Prä-Existenz’ in Hofmannsthal.” The term also has hints of Pater’s and Nietzsche’s interpretations of Dionysos, combining with and absorbing the spirit of Apollo. It likewise alludes to the ambiguity of art as both dangerous and life-giving.

308 Hofmannsthal used the metaphor in a letter to Strauss from 2 January 1914: “Ich glaube auch, daß Ihr Weg bei der Komposition dieser drei Akte genau der des Dante sein wird: aus der Hölle durchs Fegefeuer in den Himmel des dritten Aufzuges” (Strauss–Hofmannsthal Briefwechsel 256).

309 Goethe’s *Faust*, particularly the second part, was one of Hofmannsthal’s main sources of inspiration for *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. Goethe’s later writings generally exerted a great influence on the composition of the story (see Entstehung in *SW XXVIII* EI 277-78). See also Hofmannsthal’s essay “Goethes Opern und Singspiele,” wherein he writes of *Faust II*: “der zweite [Teil] ist eine Kette von Festen und Feierlichkeiten, er ist voll Zeremoniell und Liturgie, er ist, als Ganzes genommen, das Fest aller Feste und, da er auf Schritt und Tritt Musik postuliert, die Oper aller Opern” (*SW XXXIV* RA 249-53; 252). See also the characterisation in the section on “Quellen” for the opera (*SW XXV.1* Operndichtungen 3.1 156).
of which the Nurse is aware, but which the Empress has – somehow, miraculously – forgotten.\footnote{On the theme of forgetting in Hofmannsthal’s operas, see e.g. Maria Euchner, “‘Ein Gemenge aus Nacht und Licht, schwarz und hell’” and Matussek, “Tod und Transzendenz im geistigen Raum.”} In the moments just before dawn – that twilit time between light and dark – the Nurse reminisces, forgetting the present, until “mitten in ihre träumenden Gedanken brach mit Gewalt das widerwärtige zweideutige Gefühl der Gegenwart,” echoing almost exactly the Zurückgekehrter’s “zerspaltenes Gefühl von der Gegenwart” (109; \textit{SW XXXI} 151). This hell for the Nurse is characterised in part by its temporality. And just as the feeling of the present breaks forcefully into her consciousness, so too does Keikobad’s twelfth Messenger, blue and covered in shining armour of fish scales,\footnote{The fish motif will recur throughout the tale; here its effect is merely startling.} demanding of her an answer to his question: “Es ist an mir zu fragen, an dir zu antworten. Trägt sie diesmal ein Ungeborenes im Schoß? Ist das Verhaßte in diesem Monat geschehen? Dann wehe dir und mir und uns allen” (110). His brash manner is explained by the Nurse’s failure to keep better watch on the Empress, but the Nurse’s response – “Sollte ich einen glitschigen Fisch im Wasser mit meinen Händen packen?” (110) – reveals the task every guardian must face: how to hold onto that which is entrusted to one’s care? At some point, all inevitably slips away, like time and water. But the Nurse thinks too lightly of time and is happy to learn that three days remain before the Emperor will turn to stone and she and the Empress can return to Keikobad’s realm. The Messenger chastises her once more: “Wer hat dich belehrt, sagte er, die Augenblicke gegeneinander abzuschätzen? Nimm dich zusammen und wache über ihr mit hundert Augen. Das goldene Wasser ist auf der Wanderschaft, es wäre nicht gut, wenn sie ihm begegnete” (110). In other words, the Nurse’s estimation of time as quantifiable leads her to neglect its indefinable, qualitative side: for her, time is the serpentine Chronos – in some sense a reflection of her own snakelike nature\footnote{The first reference to the Nurse’s snakelike nature occurs on page 111, though only implicitly: “mit zweideutiger Zärtlichkeit betrachtete sie ihr Pflegekind.” Her “zweideutige Zärtlichkeit” is later evoked in the Empress’s indignant outburst: “Voran, du Umständliche, du Doppelzüngige […]. Du bist mir schlimmer als ein Drache” (116).} – rather than the qualitatively different Kairos – the time of the aesthetic or mystical experience – which the Messenger clearly fears.

We have seen Kairos at play in several instances already, in the \textit{Ansprache}, in \textit{Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten}, and in \textit{Augenblicke in Griechenland}. All those visionary moments took place in the time of Kairos. Now in \textit{Die Frau ohne Schatten} we have again the two species of time
contrasting with each other: the Nurse has been counting the fruitless months and days as they die away; each day is the same as all the rest, and the rhythm of the days is monotonous and predictable. The Emperor goes out to hunt and returns late at night to the Empress to sleep with her (111). This repetition of the same is an attempt on the part of the Emperor as well as the Empress – very much like that of the Nurse – too hold on to something cherished, to possess something eternally – “Doch alle Lust will Ewigkeit –, will tiefe, tiefe Ewigkeit!” All three characters at this point are thus possessed by their desire to retain something of the past, something that could slip through their fingers into oblivion. For the Nurse, the goal is to return to that former state, to repurchase what was lost; for the Emperor and the Empress, the goal is to re-enact each day their moment of falling in love. One might say they are trying to capture their moment of Kairos and smuggle it into the regularity of Chronos.

In the Emperor’s case, this sort of regularity induces blindness to the flow of time, which has several repercussions. With the Messenger now vanished, the Emperor enters the scene, and while his presence at this point is only very briefly treated – his description takes up only eighteen lines – the gestures of his person are telling. In the opera, the Emperor has a memorably long aria in which he waxes lyrical about his hunt – of the gazelle transformed into the Empress, of his red falcon who disappeared after being chastised by the Emperor for causing injury to the fairy-child, the future-Empress. He even talks to the Nurse briefly. In the prose Märchen, the situation is quite different. With a few simple strokes we learn three important things about the Emperor: 1) rising fully clothed from his bed, he seems not to have engaged in sexual activity with the Empress, thus not impregnating her, meaning she will still cast no shadow; 2) his activities are repetitive (as described above), determined by “Gewohnheit” (111); 3) he is blind to beauty and its ethical command. The last point is, granted, an inference, but it is one that is informed by Hofmannsthal’s other writings. It is suggested in the narration by the way in which he encounters the Nurse: “Der Kaiser trat leichten Fußes über den Leib der Amme hinweg, die ihr Gesicht an den Boden drückte. Er achtete ihrer so wenig, als läge hier nur ein Stück Teppich” (110). Like the souls in Dante’s vestibule to Hell, the Emperor (and the Empress, it might also be argued) is neither good nor evil; the Emperor’s failure is one of sight – again, a strikingly Dantinean “sin,” to follow the analogy.313

313 The Emperor’s explicit failure of visual and ethical recognition distinguishes him from the merchant’s son of Das Märchen der 672. Nacht. It is interesting to note though, that while sight is important, it is easier to close one’s eyes
The scene of the blue palace resonates with the later depiction in the fourth chapter of the realm of unborn children, and this commentary of the Emperor’s in particular serves as a subtle but defining moment in the tale. This is the first time the Emperor’s ethical insufficiency – we might say immaturity – is presented, and it is done so by way of reference to a work of art, the carpet. Like the merchant’s son of Das Märchen der 672. Nach, the Emperor is in possession of many beautiful objects. But the Emperor takes no notice of them, and – worse yet – he takes no notice of the living being at his feet, whom he treats as he would a “mere” piece of carpet. This lack of attention is blindness to beauty and deafness to the ethical call to responsibility. He has time for neither nurse nor art, but only for himself. The dramatic tension for the Emperor is focussed in the carpet, as will be made clear by the second appearance of a carpet in the fourth chapter of the tale. The later intensified imagery will show how problematic the Emperor’s arrogance (or ignorance) is. Hans-Günther Schwarz puts it succinctly: “dem Kaiser [müssen] die Augen geöffnet werden – für den Teppich, wie für das Leben” (Orient–Okzident, 184). For now, however, he is set only on fulfilling his own desire: to re-enact the pursuit, to go on the hunt.

The Empress, upon waking from unpleasant dreams, repeats to the Nurse the story of that fateful hunt that brought the two lovers together and sent the red falcon flying – not just to let the reader know the background (the narrative voice could just as easily have filled us in), but to show how than it is to close one’s ears, and Hofmannsthal plays with this in the text. Towards the end of the text, the sense of hearing forces the characters to evaluate and confront the ethical implications of their decisions.

314 See also Pannwitz’ remarks on the concept of marriage in the tale. Contrary to more contemporary scholars (e.g. Pia Janke, “Schattenlose Frauen”), he sees in Hofmannsthal’s depiction of marriage not a re-assertion of socially or religiously conservative mores, but a relationship of strength and unification of divided beings: “Das ist neue Religion. Das Sakrament der Ehe, doch nicht bürgerlich, auch nicht priesterlich, sondern elementar. Die Ehe als die vollkommene mit den Seelen die Sinne tragende und in der Verschlingung die Zukünftigen einbegreifende und also eigentlich von ihnen bereitete und geleitete Vereinigung der Geschlechter. Das ist kein Protest gegen die moderne spielerische Laszivität und große Passion, sondern etwas einfach Stärkeres und Volleres selbst, es ist eine ausschöpfende, synthetischere, komplexere, vollkommener Liebe, es fordert nicht, die Ehe heilig zu halten, sondern es zeigt, was Ehe (jenseits aller Begriffe und Gesetze und Bindungen) bei den Elementen ist, daß es da etwas gibt, dem gegenüber das, was als Gipfel erschien, eine schlammige Niederung ist” (376-77).

315 My M.A. thesis, Das Licht der Künste (57) and Teona Djibouti’s published dissertation Aufnehmen und Verwandeln (190) develop this argument as well.

316 See Frink’s article “The Hunting Motif in Hofmannsthal’s Work,” which concludes that the “hunt almost always symbolizes a sexual relationship which is not a fulfilling one. The hunt depicts the initial encounter between the two partners, or shows that their acquaintance has not produced true intimacy and union” (691). We might extend this argument: in Die Frau ohne Schatten, both hunter (Emperor) and hunted (the “Feentochter” before she becomes the Empress) are caught up in their active and passive roles respectively, but are both ultimately hindered by this repetition. Only later will they switch roles, such that the Emperor is rendered passive and the Empress becomes the agent.
the Empress, too, replays this moment everyday, even before those who witnessed it at the time: “die Geschichte jener Jagd und ersten Liebesstunde kannte sie [die Amme] genau genug: dies alles war wie mit einem glühenden Griffel ihrer Seele eingebrannt” (113). The Nurse becomes angry, however, when the discussion shifts to the subject of the Empress’s dreams: namely, human beings. Because the Empress is in danger of becoming human herself – by gaining a shadow – the Nurse is keen to see that the Empress remains secluded from other human beings who, unlike the wealthy and handsome Emperor, are ugly, both in face and in soul. “Gräßlich genug […]. Es war an deinem Gesicht zu lesen, daß du von Häßlichem träumtest” (113). Having been caught by a mortal being, the Empress nevertheless does not see that the Emperor, too, belongs to the human race, which fills her with dread: “Warum,” she asks, “sind Menschengesichter so wild und häßlich, und Tiergesichter so redlich und schön?” (113). Reversing the typical characteristics of human and animal, the Empress – who, Miranda-like, might never in fact have seen human beings beyond those in her dreams and those at the palace – attributes wildness and ugliness to the former, tameness and beauty to the creatures of nature. She further makes the cliché equation between ethical and physical beauty, but her desire not to ‘mix’ with that which is ugly is a product of ignorance and seclusion – first in her father’s realm, and now in the blue palace. In other writings Hofmannsthal has had his characters say precisely the opposite: we might recall once more the fragments from “Das Gespräch und die Geschichte der Frau von W.”: “Gesicht – Hieroglyphe. Es gibt keine hässlichen Menschen” (SW XXXI Erfundene Gespräche und Briefe 56). The Empress’s assumptions that the world of humankind is ugly and vile are untested, and it is the curse of petrification laid upon the Emperor – of which she is soon to be reminded – that prompts her to face the reality corresponding to her nightmares and learn to see beauty where ugliness lives. The red falcon suddenly appears with her talisman – upon which the curse is etched – and leaves the Nurse and Empress once more. Like the merchant’s son, the Empress must, in order to find a shadow, descend into the hideous lower world: the aesthete’s City of Dis. She must break out of the deadly cycle of repetition.

The Empress experiences a moment of recognition, not simply of the curse, but of her place in the world. Like the Emperor she has till now been blind, and this blindness once again is figured as a potentially destructive indifference, much like the Emperor’s failure to regard and be mindful of the Nurse and art (“Er achtete ihrer so wenig, als läge hier nur ein Stück Teppich,” 110). The Empress explains: “Ich wußte nicht, daß ihnen dieses dunkle Ding [der Schatten] so viel gilt. Fluch
über mich, daß ich es alles habe gleichgültig anhören können, als ginge es mich nichts an! Ich selber werde sein Tod sein, darum, weil ich auf der Erde gehe und keinen Schatten werfe!” (114, my emphasis). The Empress, like the Emperor, has failed to recognise something of great importance – the shadow: that cipher for what it is to be human. But it is the “magical picture” and the “Schriftzeichen” upon the little object that alerts her to her error. While not explicitly an encounter with a work of art (as in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten or Augenblicke in Griechenland) this reunion with the talisman recalls the power that Walter Pater ascribes to beautiful, if seemingly trivial objects: “That sense of fate, which hangs so much of the shaping of human life on trivial objects, like Othello’s strawberry handkerchief, is thereby heightened” (“Two Early French Stories,” The Renaissance 6). Quite literally, the talisman – a beautiful, pale white stone upon which the cyphers glow like fire (SW XXVIII EI 114) – is an object upon which the fates of the Emperor and the Empress hang. And the pictorial quality of the talisman further suggests its ability to open the eyes, to depict something that one has hitherto failed to see.

Now desperate to rescue her beloved, the Empress pleads to the Nurse, who knows the cities and the villages below, to help her obtain a shadow, no matter how: “Zeige mir, wo ich ihn finde, und müßte ich mein Gewand abwerfen und hinabtauchen ins tiefste Meer. Weise mich an, wie ich ihn kaufe, und müßte ich alles für ihn geben, was die Freigiebigkeit meines Geliebten auf mich gehäuft hat, ja die hälffe des Blutes aus meinen Adern!” (115, my emphasis). The Empress will indeed purchase a shadow, but with this purchase comes the commentary – much as in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten – that, though everything might have a price, not all things should be treated as commodities. The purchase of a shadow, like the purchase of a soul, is more than an economic transaction, as Chamisso’s Peter Schlemihl demonstrates; but this the Empress has not yet understood. At present, she is rather motivated by her desire to save her beloved (which in itself can be read as a self-centred desire to retain one’s property), and realises further that the Nurse has known all along, fuelling her anger and sending her into a moralistic state as confused as it is strong: while blaming herself, she also blames others – and rightly so, from a plot standpoint; but this state is also one that will blind her, at least temporarily, to the effects of her own actions.

With this, however, comes a sense of time quite different from that of the Nurse’s:

317 Walking on the earth is a sign of human mortality. It is taken up again later in the text with respect to ghost-like unborn children.
Ich will die Frist nicht wissen, vielleicht läuft sie in dieser Stunde ab, und ich könnte erstarren, wenn ich es wüßte. [...] Hier und nicht anderswo wird der Weg angetreten, heute und nicht morgen, in dieser Stunde und nicht bis die Sonne höher steht. [...] Kein Wort, rief die Herrin, als das Wort der Wegweisung, keine Ausflüchte, den du weisst, keine Zögerung, denn mir brennen die Sekunden auf dem Herzen. (115-16)

Like the red falcon which, “in einem Nu” (114) had taken again to the skies, the Empress wants to seize the moment rather than measure the moments against each other, as the Nurse is wont to do. The *hic et nunc* imperative of desire is, in its active quality, distinct from the desire to tarry in the sweetness of the honeymoon, or before a work of art – or the hesitation before taking decisive and life-changing action. Akin to the hunt, this spirit of adventure seeks its fulfillment in the pursuit and capture of something outside the palace; but unlike the Emperor’s hunt, that of the Empress is motivated by a different temporal sensibility: “denn mir brennen die Sekunden auf dem Herzen.” Driven by this nearly Faustian exigency, the Empress must move forward, and downward, into the city.

But the Nurse’s response is hesitant not only because she wishes to return to the magical realm, but also because she has seen and abhors the human race, aesthetically and ethically: “Schlimmer als ein Drache, abscheulicher dem Auge, widerwärtiger der Seele, sagte die Alte und sah der jungen Frau starr ins Gesicht, ist ein Mensch” (116). The source for this repulsion can only be one thing, for there is only one thing that the Nurse really has come to understand about human beings: they are, at base, mercenary and venal beings: “Ich weiß, daß ihnen alles feil ist” (117). On the one hand, this means that the Empress has a chance of purchasing a shadow, since everyone, according to the Nurse’s experience, is a Peter Schlemihl, willing to sell his shadow – or his soul – for riches of one sort or another in return. In the context of the works discussed in this dissertation, this plot point is of great importance in that it explicitly attributes venality to human exchanges of any kind. In *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht*, it might be argued that the merchant’s son tries twice to buy his way out of an uncomfortable situation. But even here we could argue that his motivation is not entirely narcissistic, since this purchasing could, alternatively, be interpreted as a gesture of magnanimity. The early *Märchen* is deliberately ambiguous in this respect. Similarly, *Die Briefe des Zuruckgekehrten* suggests something of the loss that inheres in the commodification of art, but it is equally ambiguous in its ‘real-world’ view of the artist as part
of an art industry and as someone whose well-being is dependent on the financial success his or her work. Equally a part of the Zurückgekehrter’s motivation to purchase the painting is the desire for ownership and control. This kind of possessive desire returns in Augenblicke in Griechenland in its existential as well as social implications; the desire for money as a rejection of one’s art (as with Rimbaud, “Der um Geld zu ringen meinte, um Geld, um Geld, und gegen den eigenen Dämon um ein Ungeheures ringt, ein nicht zu Nennendes,” 187) as well as the motif of gold and petrification (discussed at greater length in the following section). The myths of Medusa and Midas likewise find expression in Die Frau ohne Schatten, and the rejection of one’s “Dämon” is refigured as the giving up of the shadow in return for eternal beauty (also figured economically). In the Nurse’s characterisation of the human beings, the mercenary question is raised in stark terms. At what point is the ‘exchange’ adequate? Can humanity – or art – be translated into monetary figures representing value?

Breaking off at this assessment, the Nurse suggests that the Empress write a letter offering a fictional explanation for her absence from the blue palace, should her absence be discovered. This motivic leap – from the theme of money to the theme of writing, deciphering, and knotting – is one that is of great importance at this juncture. It is a counterbalance to the Empress’s indignation and the Nurse’s pessimistic abhorrence of humanity. It announces confusion as well as entanglement. The letter itself is aesthetically beautiful, but it does nothing to allay the Empress’s fears, suggesting that this beautiful world alone cannot defend her from what is “unheil”:

Wie harmlos immer sie die Zeichen setzte, wie schön sie sie anordnete, immer wieder schien sich die Ankündigung des Unheils durchzudrängen. Alles schien ihr zweideutig, die schönen Zeichen selber wurden ihr fürchterlich, unter Seufzern brachte sie den Brief zu Ende, eine kristallene Träne fiel auf die Schwanenhaut.

(117)

Written upon no common parchment, but upon “Schwanenhaut,” this note, with its lovely letters, is the beginning of the destabilisation of the beautiful world. While still of this world, it points in its impotent beauty to a different world productive of destitution, even to a kind of damnation (“Unheil”). And yet the missive is wrapped in a “perlengestickten Tüchlein” and tied with the hairband of the Empress such that only the Emperor himself might untie the knot. Like the Talisman, the “Tüchlein” – a textile article that foreshadows the carpet to come – as well as the
leather hairband recall those aesthetic items that bear with them something of the characters’ fates. The “Tüchlein,” like the strawberry handkerchief in Pater’s *Othello* example, envelops the fate of the Emperor, while the Empress’s hairband, serving as a tie, is reminiscent of the golden hairbands in the scene of *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht*, on the one hand suggesting the strange similitudes between life and art and, on the other, offering an alternative model of connectivity – one that is not economic in nature, but rather narrative (linking the two *Märchen*) and existential.

The letter, like the words upon the Gate of Hell, announce the Empress’s resolution to enter that world which might very well be “unheil” – but it also implicates her, for the first time, in an act of deception. This raises the question: is the Empress, too, a Faustian figure? Of course her motivation is different: she wishes to save the Emperor. But this could also be phrased differently: in effect, the Empress wants to live and be productive, much like her Goethean counterpart. We have already seen that the Nurse bears traces of Mephistopheles – and not only Goethe’s, but perhaps surprisingly, Marlowe’s. Her disgust at the world recalls that of Mephistophilis who says, in answer to Faustus’ question of how Mephistophilis was able to leave Hell to be amongst the living (147). The words could equally be spoken by the Nurse:

Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.
Think’st thou that I, who saw the face of God,
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells
In being deprived of everlasting bliss? (1.3.77-81)

The elision of the difference between Hell and Earth is telling. In *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, “Heaven” for the Nurse, is Keikobad’s realm of timeless beauty and endless possibility; all else is hell in comparison. But it is her experience of the lower pits of a worldly Hell that make her qualified to be the Empress’s guide in the quest for a shadow.

*A Yellow River Leads to the City of Woe: The Birthplace of the Artist*

Having disguised themselves to be as inconspicuous as possible – assuming the degradation hinted at in the Emperor’s disregard for the Nurse and floor-adorning carpets – the two travellers descend into the city unnoticed: “Niemand achtete der Beiden” (118). As in the *Märchen der 672. Nacht,*
here too we have reversed imagery in the presentation of the city: even the colours are calculated
to be complementary opposites: instead of the crystal clear blue of the palace, we have the dirty
yellow water of the river which “trug große Flecken von dunkler Farbe dahin, die sich aus dem
Viertel der Färber, das oberhalb der Brücke lag, immer erneuten” (118). The tainted yellow
water will direct them to their goal, but as they travel, crossing the bridge, they pass a veritable
aesthetic hell, involving nearly all the senses: the stench rising from the tanneries (where one finds
the poorest of the poor), the sight and smell of hanging skins, the clangour of hammers, the smell
of hooves burnt for shoe fitting. Masses of people crowd around the Empress, disorienting her in
the process: like the modern metropolis, this city overwhelms the senses and awakens an unnamed
anxiety and nervousness. The opera, too, expresses this modern nervousness around the chaos of
war, as Strauss’ 1942 reflections confirm. In “Erinnerungen an die ersten Aufführungen meiner
Opern,” Strauss writes: “‘Die Frau ohne Schatten,’ das Schmerzenskind, wurde in Kummer und
Sorgen während des Krieges vollendet […]]. Diese Kriegssorgen haben wohl auch der Partitur,
oben gegen die Mitte des 3. Aktes eine gewisse nervöse Überreiztheit eingetragen, die sich
schließlich im Melodram ‘entspannte’” (SWXXV.1 Operndichtungen 3.1 671). Though the setting
is presented as an imaginary city located in an imagined Orient, this is the stuff of a Baudelaire
poem. But it is also a place we have seen before through Hofmannsthal’s narrators’ eyes. As in
Augenblicke in Griechenland, our attention is drawn to the multitude of faces, as well as to the
desire to walk away, as Plato, Rimbaud, and the German traveller also wished to do. Like the
narrator in that text, the Empress is overcome by another emotion – one in conflict with the desire
to flee. This emotion is roused by the faces:

Das Furchterliche in den Gesichtern der Menschen traf sie aus solcher Nähe, wie
noch nie. Mutig wollte sie hart an ihnen vorbei, ihre Füße vermochten es, ihr Herz
nicht. Jede Hand, die sich regte, schien nach ihr zu greifen, gräßlich waren so viele
Münder in solcher Nähe. Die erbarmungslosen, gierigen, und dabei, wie ihr

318 Cf. Alexis de Tocqueville’s description of the Manchester waterways: “It is the Styx of this new Hades” (Journeys
to England and Ireland 107).
319 Cf. Frisby’s citation in Fragments of Modernity of Oehler’s arguments regarding Baudelaire’s portrayal of
modernity: “Having liberated modern aesthetics from its mesmerism with a timeless past, Baudelaire did not intend
that the presentation of modernity would replace it with the aesthetics of a timeless present. Indeed, he intended the
aesthetic representation of the ‘modern’ world, often as its opposite, one that would reveal the ‘harsh refuse of
modernity,’ ‘the savagery that lurks in the midst of civilisation’ and its ‘living monstrosities’” (20).
vorkam, angstvollen Blicke aus so vielen Gesichtern vereinigten sich in ihrer Brust.

(118)

This passage echoes aspects of the *Ansprache* as well; yet what was there a metaphor is here a physical threat to the Empress. There the works of art are “wie die Schatten, die den Odysseus umlagern und alle vom Blut trinken wollen, lautlos, gierig aneinander gedrängt, ihren dunklen hohlen Blick auf den Lebenden geheftet” (*SW XXXII RA2* 7). The works of art as well as the faces and hands of the people in the crowd are portrayed as desiring to possess. They are threatening and “gierig.” In the works of art, however, this experience is transfigured: “sie fassen uns dämonisch an: und jedes ist eine Welt, und alle sind aus einer Welt, die uns durch sie anrührt und anschauert bis ins Mark” (*SW XXXII RA2* 8-9, my emphasis); in the case of the Empress, the experience presents itself as a real physical threat. But here too, as so often with Hofmannsthal, there is a chiastic relationship between the real and the imagined that precludes a simple division between the two. The encounter with the work of art is presented in the indicative, the mood of reality – it is actually happening: “Sie fassen uns dämonisch an.” By contrast, the ‘reality’ of the Empress’s experience is qualified by one word: “Jede Hand, die sich regte, schien nach ihr zu greifen” (118, my emphasis). This might seem like splitting hairs, but the effect this moment has on the Empress bears such a strong resemblance to that brought about by encounters with works of art that the dream-like quality of the ‘real’ world, once again yokes it chiastically to the qualities of ‘reality’ in the art world.  

As in Baudelaire’s work, ugliness is here made the object of an aesthetic depiction of what might very well refer to modernity, yet infused with a Hofmannsthalian sensibility for empathy (inspired by Keats):


---

320 Cf. the discussion of the chiastic relationship between reality and imagination on page 29 of Chapter 2.
The depiction of the masses at the beginning of this passage is not simply yet another fleeting poetic representation of the impoverished, chaotic state of Europe in turmoil; the “Knäuel” also foreshadows, by way of contrast, the more orderly knots of the central work of art in this text – the carpet – and it harkens back to the tied hairband. But the “Knäuel” – literally thread or yarn wound into a ball – is the precursor to the ties and knots: the “Knäuel” must be unwound before the ties are formed. The material is the same, yet it is presented in different ‘stages’ of production. The ball of thread must be present for a beautiful carpet to exist. Underlying this is the suggestion that the world above (the blue palace) depends on the world below, or, at the very least, is tied to it.

Thus an ethical question arises out of this aesthetically charged situation: does this tale present a justification of the status quo of exploitation? Do the privileged – in order to remain privileged – require that the underprivileged remain in their state of poverty? I think Hofmannsthal’s tale answers this question in the negative (though only in the context of the Märchen) – as shall become apparent. The phrasing and the perspective of that answer bring about complications of their own, which I will address at the conclusion of this chapter.

I would like to return to this passage to address another ethical gesture. The narrator presents the Empress’s limited point of view: the “Knäuel” threatens to pull her under and suffocate her. But this “ball of thread” will later unravel and be re-tied, coming to signify the aurea catena homeri, just as in Das Märchen der 672. Nacht and in the Ansprache. The focus on the “Maulesel” contributes to this consideration on a number of levels as well. It spurs the Empress to recall her ability to take on animal form at will: that is, she is in some essential way connected to the animal. The familiar gaze of the animal is comforting, for it reminds her that she is – though lost in the midst of this mass of strangers – not alone. As in Raskolnikov’s dream of the abject horse, the

321 Hofmannsthal thus revisits in Märchen-form the connection between the upper and lower worlds he rendered lyrically in “Manche freilich” (SW I Gedichte I 54): “Doch ein Schatten fällt von jenen Leben / In die anderen Leben hinüber, / Und die leichten sind an die schweren /Wie an Luft und Erde gebunden” (11-14).

322 See Hofmannsthal’s note from 15 August 1913 for Andreas: “Die wahre Poesie ist das arcanum, das uns mit dem Leben vereinigt, uns vom Leben absondert. Das Sondern – durch Sondern erst leben wir – […] aber wie das Sondern, so ist auch das Vereinigen unerlässlich, die aurea catena Homeri” (SW XXX 107, N73).

323 This also bears a strong resemblance to the epigraph in Augenblick in Griechenland, εἰδοὶ καὶ κοινὸν ἐρνύεις: there is vengeance in heaven for an injured dog.
animal here is struck by his (perhaps tyrannical) rider, awakening in the Empress a sympathy that will later come to guide her actions. Her question – “Ist es an dem?” – is akin to that posed in *Crime and Punishment*. Who is responsible, and to whom does “dem” refer? This is ambiguous, but it is clear that the Empress’s sense of responsibility grows as she becomes ever more deeply entangled in this other world; the more she becomes a witness to the underbelly of the beautiful life at the blue palace, the more difficult it is to disentangle her fate from others’. What is more disturbing is the implicit link to her former life, but in reverse: here, the “Esel” attempts to avoid injuring the Kaiserin, as the rider strikes him violently upon the head. This re-enacts with subtle differences the scene of the hunt, in which the Empress, changing from gazelle- to human-form, is attacked by the red falcon clawing at her head; the falcon is chastised by the Emperor. The rider and the Emperor are thus portrayed as performing similar actions. This can only help to underline the strange connection between the seemingly beautiful world above and the hideous world down below.

As she and the Nurse approach the house of the Dyer (Barak) and his wife – their destination – she witnesses more evidence of the antagonistic spirit driving the world: in particular, the destructive repurcussions of production. Before encountering Barak or his wife, they overhear Barak’s three brothers complaining that the wrongs of the Dyer’s Wife are greater than those already inflicted upon them. Once whole in body, they now are fragments of their former selves, fragments of modernity even, to borrow David Frisby’s phrase. One had lost his eye to an angry bailiff, one had lost his arm in an oil mill accident, and one was crippled after being trodden on by a camel – a fate the Kaiserin had only just now narrowly escaped. Their bodies bear the mark of their sufferings. The oil mill accident, in particular, points to the ever-present, dangerous working conditions for the lower class. Furthermore, though these are characters in a fairy tale, contemporaneous readers might well have thought of other mutilated bodies – those of World War One veterans. This fictional world makes use of unsettlingly familiar images from reality. Ugliness is equally the stuff of aesthetics, and part of its effect, like that of beauty, is to disturb.

---

In this ugly world there is one beautiful person: the Dyer’s Wife, who, Cinderella-like, must slave away at home and shine in her beauty through the dirt of her daily life. But her physical beauty has led to “Hochmut” and “Bosheit” (120). She is contrasted with her husband not only in physical form – to the Empress, Barak is “abschreckend häßlich” – but also in movement and attitude. Barak bears all the signs of his job as a dyer: his hands are stained dark blue and he carries a great bale of scarlet red cloth intended to be used on a saddle. This he then heaves onto his back, “der stark war wie der eines Kameles: das war Barak, der Färber” (120). Against the “Hochmut” of his wife, Barak’s humility seems almost exaggerated. The saddlecloth he carries turns him into a beast of burden (he leaves “gebeugt wie ein Lasttier,”120). Though he is ugly, he is industrious and active. His wife, on the other hand, would fit perfectly into Brueghel’s 1557 depiction of “Desidia.” Initially sitting on the ground and staring blankly into space, she moves only once her husband has gone, performing her quotidian tasks with utter listlessness: “Sie ging träge durch Zimmer und stieß mit schleppendem Fuß einen alten Steinmörser um, […]. Sie bückte sich halb es aufzusammeln, aber mit einem verächtlichen Zucken ihrer Lippen ließ sie es sein” (120-21). She puts a few things in order by shoving them with her feet, contemptuous of her position, and tires quickly. Like her Brueghelian counterpart, she is primed for manipulation. She strokes her narrow hips and smiles, signalling to the Nurse that she is their target: “Wir sind soweit,” the Nurse whispers (121). The Dyer’s Wife is, admittedly, a caricature: she is young and beautiful (like the merchant’s son) and disdainful of her husband. Like Narcissus, she would have no one who is not as beautiful as she – particularly not when her own beauty is threatened thereby. Pregnancy and children would mar her “auserlesene Schönheit,” the thing she prizes most highly (121). She is, in her lassitude and her refusal to reproduce, the very opposite of her husband, the arduous worker who delights at the thought of children. She is an allegorical figure of idleness and unproductivity – which later turn out to be an expression of the negative powers of both a baroque and modern sense of vanity. Yet there is more to her story than idle discontent, for she has been placed into this position by force, not by free will, and her resistance, though in itself problematic, can be, if not justified, at least explained. She is a child in two senses. Under the (albeit benevolent) rule of a husband old enough to be her father, she lacks the freedom – and responsibilities – of adulthood. Further, her desires and behaviour are that of a child: upon entering, the Empress trips, and the

325 See Pieter van der Heyden’s engraving after Pieter Bruegel the Elder.
Fäberin “mußte laut auflachen wie ein Kind und vermochte mit Lachen lange nicht aufzuhören” (121). And, as in the case of the royal pair, she is held in stasis by a dilletantish infatuation with beauty – her own, in this case – and unable to see how her fate is entwined with others’ fates. Like the slumbering woman at the centre of Brueghel’s “Desidia” engraving, she is vulnerable to the demons which surround her. And there are demons.

Like the devil, the Nurse creates a fictional tale to explain their presence, and also eventually to tempt the Dyer’s Wife to relinquish her shadow – and with it the possibility of children. Fiction here is not only a story; it is a tool for manipulation, and it appeals to the Dyer’s Wife’s desires and weaknesses, and above all to her narcissism:

Du bist es, die Seltene, Auserlesene unter tausenden […]. Du bist es, die über ihren eigenen Schatten springt, die abgeschworen hat ihres Mannes unablässiger, vergeblicher Umarmung […]. Du bist es, welche die ewige Schlankheit des unzerstörten Leibes gewählt hat und abgesagt in ihrer Weisheit einem zerrütteten Schoß und den frühwelken Brüsten. – Die Alte sprach diese Sätze mit lauter Stimme und mit einer Art von feierlichem Singsang, und die abscheuliche Fratze, die sie sich für die Menschenwelt angelegt hatte, glich wirklich dem Kopf einer aufgerichteten gesprenkelten Schlange. (123)

The litany-like sing-song rhythm of the Nurse’s words and her appeal to the Dyer’s Wife’s uniqueness work like a parody of earlier aestheticist ideology. Like a great artist, she belongs, because of her extraordinary beauty, to an elect group of people; she is ‘too rare’ for this common world. In earlier versions of the text, her desire to stay eternally beautiful is coupled with a desire for money. Her plans curiously echo the repeated instances of money falling to the ground in Das Märchen der 672. Nacht: “Aber den Preis will ich kennen um den ich mich verkaufe und da ich zu den Bettlern gehört habe mein Leben lang Aber zuvor will ich ausprobieren, wie einem

---

326 She is also later described as behaving like an “unwilliges Kind” (123).

327 We might hazard a biographical connection at this point: the Nurse resembles Stefan George in her powerful presence and magical words, and even in her manner of speaking them. The young Hofmannsthal had written the poem “Der Prophet” (SW II Gedichte 2 61) after his meeting the charismatic but threatening George. In it he describes the prophet’s voice thus: “Von seinen Worten, den unscheinbar leisen, / Geht eine Herrschaft aus und ein Verführen […]” (11-12). By analogy, Hofmannsthal would be in the position of the Dyer’s Wife.
Reichen zu mut ist, und wenn es mir passt will ich den Markt auskaufen [und] Gold unter die Leute werfen” (368, spacing in original). The market scene was excised from the final version of the text, but the underlying notion remains: the Dyer’s Wife is willing to sell her shadow for the preservation of her beauty and the promise of a happier world.\textsuperscript{328} The Nurse’s words are delivered in so solemn a manner through her “zauberisch beredte Zunge […], daß es klang wie eine Lobpreisung, es war durchflochten mit Prophezeiung und verknüpft mit der reizenden Botschaft von einem unbekannten Liebenden” (123). The power of the Nurse’s art causes the Dyer’s Wife to feel alternately feverish and cold, full of curiosity and shame, ready even to weep. The intensity of this emotional response to the fiction is due in part to its manipulative quality – its appeal to the Dyer’s Wife’s situation and her hopes – and to its aesthetic-rhetorical delivery. Perhaps coming from an old woman with an ugly face (more precisely: a face made ugly for the occasion: she is a kind of reverse Frau Welt), these words of promised beauty surpassing transience are even more compelling. The religious idiom, further, makes of the Dyer’s Wife a thing of worship – “O Herrin, erbarme dich unser und willfahre uns, die wir dir dienen wollen!” (124).

To demonstrate their alacrity, the Nurse begins magically fulfilling the tasks that the dumbfounded and half-sceptical Dyer’s Wife commands. But in all the confusion, the Empress hears what no one else can. The seven fish which have been thrown into a pan to fry begin to cry out in singing tones: “Mutter, Mutter, laß uns nach Haus / Die Tür ist verriegelt: wir finden nicht hinein” (125). In the opera libretto, these voices are sung by children, heightening the agony and pathos in their entreaty. Meanwhile, the Nurse has given the Dyer’s Wife a pearl hairband and a mirror to occupy herself. Both are oblivious to the “kläglich” singing fish. This is the second\textsuperscript{329} of a number of intensifying moments wherein the Empress is shown to bear the characteristics of the artist. This comes at just the right time, for though the Empress and the Dyer’s Wife are shown initially to have a number of characteristics in common – childlike attitude and beauty above all – it is now, once the Dyer’s Wife has been given a mirror, that the contrast is made all the sharper. The self-


\textsuperscript{329} The first instance was the encounter with the horse.
oriented gaze of the Dyer’s Wife is reversed in the Empress’s externally-directed perception. Having descended to the world of man, relegated in this moment literally to the shadows, disguised, and sensing the suffering of others, the Empress allegorically portrays the traits and condition of the artist more than any other character in the story. Richard Alewyn summarises Hofmannsthal’s views succinctly and in such a way that not only recalls the latter’s Der Dichter und diese Zeit, but, even more so, Die Frau ohne Schatten:


Fickert and Celms characterise the Emperor as the poet or artist figure (37), but given Hofmannsthal’s description in Der Dichter und diese Zeit, from which Alewyn draws his characterisation, it is more reasonable to see the Empress in this role. The Empress, like the “Dichter” must descend, disguised, from the blue palace (her ‘ivory tower’) to the markets and streets of the city, and, also like St. Alexius, finds herself in the house of time – a new temporal sphere, breaking from the chronological repetition of her days – and cowering in dark corners where she sees and hears what others fail to detect. No one recognises her – and not even the Nurse really knows her – and she will experience suffering, for she, like St. Sebastian, must give all things access to her soul. This is her life’s path in broad strokes.

Chapter three shows more clearly the dynamic of the world the Empress has entered, which will be important for her later decisions. The Dyer Barak is shown to be a caring, respectful and industrious man. Like the Empress, he is empathically gifted: he leaves extra food for his brothers, should they wake hungry; he does not touch his wife, though he desires her; and at the break of dawn he rises to begin his work some distance from the house so as not to arouse his sleeping wife (128). Yet despite these positive qualities, he also lacks an understanding for the feelings of his
wife: having himself eaten of foods that have been blessed with the “Segen der Befruchtung” (130), he hopes to – by force of magic – create the conditions for having children, against his wife’s will. Her protest, replete with angry repetition, bespeaks her underlying condition of bondage:

Aber triefäugige Vetteln, sagte sie mit schiefem Mund, müßt ihr wissen, die Sprüche murmeln, müßt ihr wissen, haben nichts zu schaffen mit meinem Leibe, und was dieser Mann in sich gegessen hat vor Nacht, müßt ihr wissen, das hat keine Gewalt über meine Weibschaft. (130)

Her condition – that of being an object of desire and a vessel for children – is thus more complicated than that of Narcissus; her self-oriented gaze is coupled with resentment towards those who have made of her an object to be possessed. She does not wish to be desired by others. Referring to her admirer, whom the Nurse mentions again after the Dyer has left, she exclaims “ich bin seiner überdrüssig, bevor ich ihn gesehen habe. Die Begehrlichen sind einander gleich auf dieser Welt, und ihr Begehren ekelt mich” (132). Indeed, her gaze easily slips into that of melancholy as she contemplates the futility of trying to improve her situation: “[…] es kommt nichts für mich, als was schon gewesen ist. Ich bin wie eine angepflöckte Ziege, ich kann blöken Tag und Nacht, es achtet niemand darauf […] und so lebe ich einen Tag um den andern, und das geht so fort, bis ich dein runzliges Kinn habe und deine rinnenden Augen, ich Unglückselige” (132). Her laments recall almost verbatim other passages in the text: she is already “überdrüssig, bevor ich ihn [her admirer] gesehen habe,” just as she earlier described herself as “satt worden der Mutterschaft, ehe ich davon gekostet habe” (123). Both might be opportunities for meaningful social and ethical relationships, and her weariness recalls that of the merchant’s son who became “bald nach seinem fünfundzwanzigsten Jahre der Geselligkeit und gastlichen Lebens überdrüssig” (15). In Die Frau ohne Schatten, however, this weariness is tied to a particular qualitative understanding of time. Her day is one of monotony: repetition without meaningful experiences, without beautiful moments. She lives day in, day out, prematurely fatigued, towards her death, like the servants of the merchant’s son.330 This repetition also recalls, parodically, how the Emperor

---

330 “Er fühlte mit der Deutlichkeit eines Alpdrucks, wie die beiden Alten dem Tod entgegenlebten, mit jeder Stunde, mit dem unaufhaltsamen leisen Anderswerden ihrer Züge und ihrer Gebärden, die er so gut kannte; und wie die beiden Mädchen in das öde, gleichsam lustlose Leben hineinlebten. Wie das Grauen und die tödliche Bitterkeit eines
and Empress spend their days; they succumb to monotony in their attempt to relive the same extraordinary moment every day. And even in the image of the face growing old, its youth trickling (“rinnend”) away, there is an allusion to an earlier carpe diem admonition made by the Nurse: “Die Augenblicke sind rinnender Goldstaub” (129). Time is not flying; it is trickling away like the tears soon to appear on the Dyer’s Wife’s face. It is flowing like the mysterious “goldenes Wasser” referred to in the first chapter of the story (110), but it is also, even in its golden moments, dissolving away, rich but ephemeral like gold dust in an hourglass. The Dyer’s Wife’s seemingly superficial fears and concerns are revealed in these laments to be suffused with a deeper melancholy born from the experience of transience and the boredom that comes from an inexorably linear experience of time, devoid of beautiful, enlivening moments. She is not only an object of other people – she is an object of time.

The Nurse plays on her vanity, but also treats her like a thing – a work of art, in fact. But she is the Nurse’s work. When the Dyer’s Wife notes a fragrance in the air, the Nurse remarks: “Es ist kein Ambra, es sind keine Narden […], es ist der Duft der Sehnsucht und der Erfüllung. […] Ruhig, du Unnennbare, du bist es selber, […] dein Hauch ist süßer als Narden, deine Blicke sättigen mit dem Feuer der Entzückung” (133). Fully beholden to the charming words of the Nurse, the Dyer’s Wife is rendered physically weak; this corresponds to a weakening of her will. She sinks into the Nurse’s arms, just as her announced admirer enters the room.

The admirer is no man, however, but a demon: an Efrit who has the power to take whatever shape he wills (contrasting with the the Empress, who has lost this ability). Like Barak, he is strong like an animal (“seine Gegenwart war stark und lauernd wie eines Tieres,” 133). Though he is beautiful, the Empress sees in him “die unbezähmbare Gier, die seine Züge durchsetzte, [und] ließ ihr sein furchtbaren, beim Erwachen vergessenen Traumes, lag ihm die Schwere ihres Lebens, von der sie selber nichts wußten, in den Gliedern” (19).

Gesicht abscheulicher erscheinen als selbst eines der Menschengesichter, die ihr auf der Erde begegnet waren” (134). Physical beauty without humanity is much more hideous than humanity without physical beauty, and the untameable rapaciousness far outstrips that of the human because it is in someway essential to the Efrit: it is unchangeable. The Efrit is a purely antagonistic figure without saving graces; we can sympathise with no aspect of his being. And just as earlier the Empress was overcome with sympathy for the suffering beast of burden, here she is equally moved, though now by righteous indignation, for she recognises that the Dyer’s Wife, at heart, does not want to enter into the alliance this way. This is conveyed to the reader most effectively by the description of gestures and gazes: Hofmannsthal focusses on the hands and the eyes, those parts of the body that function most immediately as metaphors for will and the power to paralyse:

Der Efrit ergriff mit beiden Händen die Handgelenke der Färberin und zwang sie, zu ihm aufzusehen; ihre Blicke konnten sich des Eindringens der seinigen nicht erwehren: sie lag ihm offen bis ins Herz hinein […] seine Hände lagen auf ihrem Nacken und die Worte, die seinen Lippen schnell entflossen, klangen schmeichelnd und drohend zugleich. Die Kaiserin wollte nicht hinsehen und sah hin. Sie begriff nicht, was sie sah, und doch war es nicht völlig unbegreiflich: das beklemmende Gefühl der Wirklichkeit hielt alles zusammen. (134)

Like an unwilling witness to violent seizure or rape, the Empress is confounded, but cannot turn away: for not only is she a witness, she is also implicated in the crime. What is particularly unsettling to her is the Dyer’s Wife’s half-assent: “Warum erwehrt sie sich seiner nur halb!” But we can understand the Dyer’s Wife’s lack of will when we understand the enchanting power of the gaze and the spoken words. Moreover, the Empress too, in her inaction, is assenting. She further asks: “Um was geht es zwischen diesen Geschöpfen?” (134); the answer, of course, is: the shadow and (pro)creative potential she wishes to gain from this exchange. But this is not the deal into which she thought she was entering. The Nurse takes a moralistic stance in explaining the situation, but it is one that is driven by a malicious desire to see humans suffer (perhaps because she too has suffered at the hands of humans): “Ruhig, sagte die Alte, ruhig, sie ist eine Verschämherin und muß gebrannt werden im Feuer des Begehrens” (134). Her logic of contrapasso goes too far, however: the Dyer’s Wife only partly desires; but she does not fully assent – yet – to the Efrit’s will: her very hesitation affords her the opportunity to pull herself away from him just before Barak re-enters. At this moment, the Empress’s empathic sense is awakened
further: she steps in between the Dyer’s Wife and the Efrit, whose terrifying face she now boldly confronts:

[D]urch seine zwei ungleichen Augen grinsten die Abgründe des nie zu Betretenden herein, ein Grausen faßte sie, nicht für sich selber, sondern in der Seele der Färberin, daß diese in den Armen eines solchen Dämons liegen und ihren Atem mit dem seinen vermischen sollte.[…] Ein ungeheures Gefühl durchfuhr die Kaiserin vom Wirbel bis zur Sohle. Sie wußte kaum mehr, wer sie war, nicht, wie sie hierhergekommen war. (136)

Hofmannsthal has brought his readers to the edge of the abyss before. We catch a glimpse in the Märchen der 672. Nacht when the merchant’s son must traverse a makeshift bridge, a board leading to a door through which he can escape the nightmarish garden he had entered (SW XXVIII EI 26-27). It is present in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten, when the objects around him retreat into an “Abgrund der Wesenlosigkeit” (SW XXXI 170) and when the paintings of Van Gogh, by contrast, are born out of that very abyss. There is, as well, in Augenblicke in Griechenland an “innerer Abgrund” which opens in the confrontation with the statues. In Die Frau ohne Schatten the abyss is almost always at the periphery of the text, and sometimes it is acknowledged, as in this moment: the eyes of the Efrit reveal a grinning – not a gaping – abyss which is both enticing and menacing. Like the faces of the smiling Korai in Augenblicke in Griechenland, the Efrit’s face too is an abyss, but here the total loss and enslavement of the self would be ensured, were that threshold ever to be crossed. The Empress knows this because she feels what the Dyer’s Wife feels – even the Empress’s desire for Barak to return might well and truly be the Dyer’s Wife’s desire. At this point, we cannot tell what experience belongs to whom. Reality is oppressive to the Empress because other people’s sensations bombard her. But it also holds everything together – and it reveals to the Empress her connection to this world.

The Dyer’s Wife’s final decision to join the Efrit comes, therefore, as even more of a shock to the Empress. Barak – having come home from the market with children and a great variety of food introduces a chaotic but celebratory atmosphere to the hitherto solemn air of the house. His three brothers and the accompanying flurry of children are rambunctious and happy to feast upon such a great assortment of food – but the Dyer’s Wife is anything but pleased, and again we sense that Barak, despite all his good intentions, has no eyes for his wife’s suffering: alternating between
feeding delicacies to the children and to his own wife, “Er bemerkte es nicht, daß sie an den Bissen würgte und unter seinen Liebkosungen starr blieb wie eine Tote” (137). He treats her like a child or a play-thing, but also wishes for her to share in his joy and desire for children. Singing jauntily out of tune, he then gently tosses one of the children to his wife, who responds by violently spurning the gesture, quickly standing up, and knocking the child down, who then rolls into the open fire. Chaos ensues as the other children cry and pull their sister to safety, and the Dyer’s Wife cries out hysterically, suffering from a fit of fury and frustration at her situation. The Efrit seems now a better alternative to this life which has been thrust upon her. The intensity of her physical response results in a kind of rigor mortis setting in: “Das Schreien hatte aufgehört, aber ein Krampf zerrte alle Glieder der Färberin. Sie bleckte die Zähne gegen ihren Mann, als sie ihn gewahr wurde, und steiß zu der Alten hervor: – Schaff mich fort, du weißt die Wege [...]” (138).

The Empress’s face in this moment indicates an extreme situation and change, a “Verwandlung” as Dangel-Pelloquin would argue: its intensity and suddenness are typical for Hofmannsthal’s “Gesichterpoetik” (“Ah, das Gesicht!” 63). Dangel-Pelloquin mentions the importance of the face in Die Frau ohne Schatten at the moment when Barak and his wife are re-united. We might add that the frozen grimace – like that found on the merchant’s son at his hour of death – is the contrasting moment of isolation. The Dyer’s Wife is now lost to her husband. Later in the story, the frozen face of the Emperor will likewise serve as an externalised form of separation. On the level of the plot, all of the characters pull away from each other. But the repetitions of and variations on familiar phrases and images draw these forces into a centre-seeking motion; as the characters move away from each other into ever more intense states of isolation, the aesthetic web of the story pulls them together ever more tightly.

---

332 At the end of the tale, he sings again, but in a manner quite different.

333 In this moment, the Empress and the Dyer’s Wife are brought together in their desire to be led by the Nurse. In the first book, the Empress demands that the Nurse show her the way to the shadow, but quickly recognises that the Nurse does not, in fact, know exactly where they must go, even if she has an idea of how to arrive there. In the libretto version, the Empress even uses the same words as the Dyer’s Wife does here: “du weißt die Wege, / du kennst die Künste, / nichts ist dir verborgen / und nichts zu schwer. / Schaff mir den Schatten! / Hilf deinem Kind!” (SW XXV.1 Operndichtungen 3.1 16). These words are echoed and altered for the situation in the Dyer’s Wife’s “schaff mich fort, du weißt die Wege.” Later the the narrator will have occasion to note: “Die Amme wußte wohl, welchen Weg sie nun zu nehmen hatte” (176).
An Aesthetic Encounter at the Eleventh Hour

The fourth of the seven sections of *Die Frau ohne Schatten* is the midway point of the story, yet it is set in the evening of the third day – thus reminding us in the narrative pace itself not to weigh the seconds against each other! The pace of the story has been a rapid one until this point, and it is appropriate that this ‘eleventh hour’ should have a quality quite different to the relentlessly forward moving, countable days that have led up to it. The fourth book shifts scenes completely as we now follow the Emperor on his quest for the red falcon. It is in this chapter that the aesthetic encounter takes place, and, for the span of this chapter, the reader is given the impression of time slowing down, while in fact a great many things happen in what seems like a moment. We might again refer the two Ancient Greek concepts of time: the forward moving Chronos, and Kairos – the moment when everything can happen. But if Kairos is the great moment of opportunity, the Emperor fails to seize it. Like a young, naive Parzival in his conversation with the ailing Anfortas, the Emperor misses his opportunity by failing to behave and speak in a compassionate and humble way. In terms of dialogic philosophy, he neglects to speak the “du” that is required for relation. But this is figured not only ethically; his aesthetic reception is equally characterised by a possessive and possessing desire for ownership. The law of *contrapasso* is at work here as well: rather than possessing an object, he becomes an object held in place.

In the fourth chapter we return to the beautiful world of the Emperor on the quest for his red falcon. Although at the beginning we are given an impression of a cold-hearted man who exacts a draconian law (“Auf deinen Kopf, sagte er leise, daß wir in dieses Revier den roten Falken finden und ihn wiedergewinnen, wir beide, du und ich,” 140), his face changes when he thinks of his wife, and the landscape around him takes on a form that reflects his inner reveries of the letter she sent him:

Der Kaiser sah hinab: Glanz ohnegleichen lag auf den Tälern und Bergen […]. In der Ferne kreuzten sich Bergkämme, […]. Niemals glichen sich zwei dieser Klippen, aber Alles ging leuchtend ineinander über wie die Zeichen in dem Brief der Kaiserin, die alle wundervoll waren, keines dem andern gleichend, und nirgends ein Anfang zu finden – das Ende verflocht sich mit dem Anfang, so als ob in unsäglicher Scheu und Schamhaftigkeit die Anrede vermieden sein sollte; und ein solcher reiner, starker Duft, wie über diesen Schluchten hin und her wogte, drang aus dem Brief für den Einen, dem er zu lesen bestimmt war. In der Erinnerung schloß der Kaiser unwillkürlich die Augen, der Knabe las ihm jetzt Gnade und Milde vom Gesicht […] (141)

The very gesture of the Emperor’s head suggests inwardness: he looks “hinab,” and sees, like Novalis’ narrator in *Hymnen an die Nacht*, a world of incomparable beauty. The shape this beauty takes, furthermore, is informed by his love for his wife. Even the crisscrossing mountain crests seem to suggest the subtle interlocking twists of the letter the Empress wrote to her beloved. With end and beginning disappearing into one another, the physiognomy of the landscape recalls Goethe’s *Maximen und Reflexionen*: “Der ist der glücklichste Mensch, der das Ende seines Lebens mit dem Anfang in Verbindung setzen kann” (*SW XXVIII EI*, Erläuterung 431). This “Glück” is characterised in Hofmannsthal’s passage as something that inspires a tactful reticence akin to the sense of awe before the sublime. The “unsäglicher Scheu und Schamhaftigkeit” easily find their places in the semantic field that includes those other words associated with the aesthetic encounter: *Bescheidenheit* (Chapter 1 of this dissertation); *Frömmigkeit* (Chapter 2); *Ehrfurcht* (Chapter 3).

The “Duft,” recalling “der Duft der Sehnsucht und der Erfüllung” which the Nurse identifies as emanating from the Dyer’s Wife (133), is tied to nostalgic memory but also to future-oriented desire: in other words, that which is not present. As Hofmannsthal writes in both versions of *Die Wege und die Begegnungen*: “[…] es ist sicher, daß das Gehen und das Suchen und das Begegnen irgendwie zu den Geheimnissen des Eros gehören. Es ist sicher, daß wir auf unsrem gewundenen Wege nicht bloß von unsren Taten nach vorwärts gestoßen werden, sondern immer gelockt von etwas, das scheinbar immer irgendwo auf uns wartet und immer verhüllt ist” (*SW XXXIII RA 2* 155, 160). This gives credence to the Emperor’s assertion in his memorable aria in the opera that his hunt is always for the sake of the Empress. Indeed, the Empress is the true object of his hunt: “[…] wenn ich jage – / es ist um sie / und aber um sie! / Und was ich erjage / mit Falke und Hund,
The Emperor’s aria is never rendered directly in the prose text; rather, the meaning is obscured under the shroud of desire (“immer verhüllt”). Thus, even though the Emperor’s ostensible purpose is to recover his falcon, the underlying impulse is less clear to him. He is drawn into the cavernous interior of the earth: a womb, surely, but also a place of inward reckoning with the self.

At this moment the narrative turns to the falconer and the boy attendant. As the boy narrates the Emperor’s disappearance into a cave the falconer watches as the found falcon lights upon a “blitzgetroffenen Eiche, die unten üppig fortgrünnt” (143). The tree might seem initially to be but another detail in the story; yet, as we have seen, the tree that has suffered and grows verdant and strong after the storm is a powerful image of life. Like the walnut tree in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten or the olive tree in the dialogue “Furcht,” the oak tree here symbolises what all those with shadows must go through, and what the Emperor has not yet experienced. For just as the Empress must learn suffering, so too must the Emperor, in his own way. This is precipitated by his desire, which leads him into the cave. But the tree’s further symbolic meaning – that of a temple – is also invoked here. In Book VI of Virgil’s Aeneid, the entrance to the underworld is marked by an elm tree; and Aeneas, to enter into the underworld in the first place must present the Sibyl with the golden bough he has torn from an oak tree. But even before this, in Book III, the Polydorus episode links the branches of a bush to the arms of men: having been killed and transformed into an arborial tomb, Polydorus bleeds as his branches are broken. There are numerous other examples of suffering trees and trees as shrines that we could take – the point is that here too in Die Frau ohne Schatten the tree is no incidental detail; it not only acts as a familiar monument to pain, but also marks the entrance to the cave temple, and to the underworld of spirits.335

Through the reported speech of the boy attendant, we learn that “Die Höhle müsse ein altes Gewölbe sein: sie habe behauene Wände und wohl auch einen anderen Ausgang” (143). No

335 Spyros Papapetros is presently working on the link between trees and architecture for his third book, The Prearchitectonic Condition. See also his On the Animation of the Inorganic (273-75). His comments on Daphne are also relevant in this context.
natural phenomenon, this setting is, in the opera, described explicitly as temple-like (“einem mächtigen tempelartigen Eingang ins Berginnere”; „das Innere eines tempelartigen Raumes,” *SW XXV.1 Operndichtungen* 31. 50; 71); there is something sacred or at least otherworldly about this place. As in *Augenblicke in Griechenland* when, at *Hosios Loukas*, the narrator hears a singing which seems to be “das Geheimnis selber” (*SW XXXIII RA* 2 182), here too the Emperor is drawn by a singing voice. Even the element of repetition is present here: “die singenden Stimmen, das Unerklärliche, die Umstände des Ortes bannten alle seine Sinne. Gerade hier drang alles tief in ihn, er war im Bereich seines ersten Abenteuers mit der geliebten Frau” (*SW XXVIII* 144). As Schmid has put it: “[d]a wo das Gefüge [der Welt] zerbricht, erklinkt Musik” (*Symbol und Funktion der Musik* 152). The Emperor raises again the question Hofmannsthal poses in *Augenblicke in Griechenland*: is repetition possible? What is “Einmaligkeit,” and can so intense an experience as the first “Liebesstunde” be repeated? As if the narrator and the Emperor for a moment become one, the intensity of the question gains the upper hand in a striking but brief moment of free indirect speech – as if foreshadowing the impending encounter – at precisely the point when the senses are fully enraptured³³⁶ – heralded by song: “Jene unvergeßliche erste Liebesstunde war ihm nahe, sein Blut war bewegt, daß er die seltsame Grabeskühle kaum fühlte, die aus den Wänden des Berges und von unten auf ihn eindrang. Für ein neues Abenteuer wäre kein Platz in ihm gewesen – oder doch? wer hätte es sagen können” (144). A possible answer to this question might indeed be given in *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, if we compare the singing voices here with the boy’s voice in the earlier text: “In der erhabenen Gelassenheit ihres Gesanges zitterte eine nach alten Regeln gebändigte Inbrunst” (183). That is, there is something familiar here, some element of ritualistic repetition which is the same and different – not *dasselbe*, but rather *das Gleiche*. Desire or longing is what draws the Emperor into the cave, but it is not just his own longing; it is also the existential longing of the singing voices.

---

³³⁶ Cf. similar moments of intensity in *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht*, when the narrator’s voice nearly unites with that of the merchant’s son in the moment he sees the servant girl carrying the two bronze deities. *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* and *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, written from the first person point of view, adopt the opposite approach, namely, the depiction of an out-of-body experience – the outward moving distancing of perspective rather than the closing in of it. *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, while written from a third person perspective, nevertheless also invokes the out of body experience later on. More than any of the previous texts, *Die Frau ohne Schatten* plays with perspective as if playing a game of chess with itself.
But rather than singing in exaltation or praise, as in *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, the voices here sing in despair: “Was fruchtet dies, wir werden nicht geboren!” (144). Again, the painfully liminal aspect of this vestibule of not-living is brought to the fore. But unlike the vanity of a life led unlived (like that of the Dyer’s Wife or the servants in *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht* or even the modern Europeans of *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*), this sung phrase springs from the desire for a chance to live – but the chance must be given first. In short: the Emperor and Empress must be generous, not possessive. The gifts of beauty and hospitality which were so important in *Augenblicke in Griechenland* are united here in the gift of life. As in *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, so here the guest-host relation dramatises the (internal) changes which the protagonists undergo.

We have a second meal scene, paralleling in strange ways the earlier depiction of Barak and his pathetic attempt to feed his wife as well as the many children that had gathered around him. Both meals end in frustration, though the frustration takes a distinct form in each case: in the earlier instance, the meal leads to hectic movement, the threat of children being burnt, and general chaos and anger. In this later scene, a cold stasis ensues.

The setting and action depicted are entirely orderly – beautiful even – but pervaded by a deathly chill, calling up the old notion of art as a kind of death. As the Emperor enters, he sees a table set for two – for himself and the Empress, as we later learn – and a young boy hurrying to and fro, bringing out the remaining golden bowls and fine goblets. It seems the singing had come from this boy. But this sacred atmosphere is an inversion of that portrayed in the first section of *Augenblicke in Griechenland*: there, the openness of the landscape, the light and clarity of the air, and the time of day, the very place itself emitted a sensation of eternity expressed in the eternal return of tradition and ritual. Here, the atmosphere is different: “[es] atmete das Ganze eine seltsame altertümliche Pracht, die dem Kaiser die Brust beengte” (144). They are in the womb of the earth, but it is cold, like a tomb. Even though there is certainly something temple-like about this location, it is no Hosios Loukas, open to air and light. Here, light functions unnaturally: six great lamps grace each side of the table, but at one end – the place for the Emperor – the light is inexplicably

---


338 See Mathias Mayer, “Midas statt Pygmalion.”
stronger than at the other. Light seems to correspond to presence. The dimmer the light becomes, the more obvious the absence of the one meant to sit at the other end of the table: the Empress.

This stage is the setting for an unusual act indeed: the child who has brought in the table settings does not speak first, but instead bows, recalling the multiple instances of this gesture in *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, and demonstrating his knowledge of the custom of *proskynesis*: “Er drückte die Hände über die Brust zusammen und verneigte sich […]. Der Knabe neigte sich vor dem Kaiser bis gegen die Erde und sprach kein Wort. Aber er wies mit einer ehrfurchtsvollen Gebärde auf den einen Sitz am oberen Ende der Tafel” (145). The gesture of respect before one of higher rank is not only a sign of humility – although it is certainly this – for it is accompanied by a voice from behind that calls: “Es ist an dem!” The attribution to the Emperor of the responsibility to respond is on the one hand a sign of traditional respect: Do not speak before being spoken to. But it is also an indication that the Emperor is supposed to initiate the dialogue – and indeed, their lives. In this moment, all depends on him. But, like the medieval Parzival, he is slow to recognise his duty: “Es dauerte einen Augenblick, bis sich der Kaiser besann, daß es in jedem Fall an ihm wäre, die ersten Worte zu sprechen” (145).

The children grow in number, and one in particular – a girl, somewhat older – deserves particular attention. Like the servant in *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht*, she bears in her arms a work of art with religious significance, though this time it is not bronze statues, but a carpet which she herself has woven. The girls’ gaits are also related in their contrast: the girl in *Das Märchen* “ging langsam und mit Anstrengung, aber ganz aufrecht … [und] schien […] nicht an den Göttinnen schwer und feierlich zu tragen, sondern an der Schönheit ihres eigenen Hauptes mit dem schweren Schmuck aus lebendigem, dunklem Gold, …” (20). Rhythmical but heavy, her movement mimics the movement and sounds of the sentence, as discussed in Chapter 1. The girl in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, on the other hand, “glitt mehr als sie ging auf den Kaiser zu” (145) – indeed, at the end of this chapter, the girl moves again “als ob sie mit geschlossenen Füßen auf ihn zugehe” (157), explicitly linking her movements with those of the ghost of Plato in *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, and a whole host of otherworldly beings in Hofmannsthal’s writing. At this moment in the

---

339 Mathias Mayer’s essay “Geschlossene Füße” traces the image, which occurs in a number of Hofmannsthal’s texts, and which “nimmt seinen Ausgang in der ägyptischen Plastik, steht dann aber ganz im Zeichen der göttlichen Bewegung, die den Tod transzendiert. Die Darstellung des Leichnams wandelt sich zum Abbild übermenschlicher Existenz” (62). In the context of *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, this image is used to depict the “Schritt ins Leben” as well
chapter, she seems to glide, and the effect is one of elegance and grace, but it also shows ontological difference.

Kneeling nearly to the floor, she presents the rolled up carpet to the Emperor and speaks. Though unborn, she, unlike the servant figure in Das Märchen der 672. Nacht, offers up both pictures (the carpet) and words (dialogue) to the Emperor:

[…] vergib, sagte sie, daß ich dein Kommen überhören konnte, vertieft in die Arbeit an diesem Teppich. Sollte er aber würdig werden bei der Mahlzeit, mit der wir dich vorlieb zu nehmen bitten, unter dir zu liegen, so durfte der Faden des Endes nicht abgerissen, sondern er mußte zurückgeschlungen werden in den Faden des Anfanges. – Sie brachte alles mit niedergeschlagenen Augen vor; der schöne Ton ihrer Stimme drückte sich dem Kaiser so tief ein, daß er den Sinn der Worte fast überhörte.

This and her subsequent explanation of the carpet’s manufacture – for it is made by hand – link several important aspects of the story together. Indeed, this is the central image in the central chapter of the story. The girl’s Arbeit or labour on the carpet draws our attention to the difficulty and demand of the craft. Such toiling craftsmanship – we might think of the memorable phrase in Psalm 90, “Mühe und Arbeit” – is key to the work’s being “würdig”: the thread of the end must be woven together with the thread of the beginning. The suggestive potential of this image is manifold: it refers, first, to an unusual technical mastery of carpet weaving – as Hans-Günther Schwarz has pointed out: “Das Verweben von Anfang und Ende des Fadens, ohne ihn abzuschneiden, verweist darauf, daß es sich hier um keinen gewöhnlichen Teppich handeln kann. Dieses Verweben muß als eine Metapher für Ganzheit, für eine ewige Gebundenheit gesehen werden” (Orient-Okzident 184). Indeed, we are given a perfect example of that world described in the Ansprache of 1902:

as the “Schritt in den Tod” – the Emperor, once petrified, has his feet in a sense bound like those of the unborn children, but he does not move. Punning on the situation, Mayer notes “zum Zeichen statuarischer Unlebendigkeit erstarrt er zu Stein und kann nur durch den mutigen Schritt seiner Frau erlöst werden” (59). For Hofmannsthal, the challenges faced by ethical love have a counterpart in aesthetics, which he gestures towards in Ad me ipsum: “Gefahr, daß das Ego die Liebe verlerne: ästhetisch gesprochen, daß die Forme erstarren” (GW Aufzeichnungen 240-41).
Und die Gewebe hangen still, und lautlos leben in ihnen die Gestalten. Sie scheinen nicht so mächtig, sich unser zu bemieistern, und sind es doch, wie sehr! Was für ein sonderbarer Traum ist ein früher Gobelin! Welche ganz gebundene, besondere Welt! [...] Es lebt für uns, es lebt durch uns. Es ist etwas in uns, das diesem Weltbild antwortet. (SW XXXII RA2 9, my emphasis).

The “ganz gebundene, besondere Welt” laid at his feet calls to mind the images of the knotted “Tüchlein” holding the letter closed, as well as the mountain landscape, and, finally, the knotted heart – all clarified in the cold air of the temple-cave, like Stefan George’s “Im Unterreich,” separated from the living, breathing world of growth and rot. All the elements and emblems of the Emperor’s life and personhood – the hunter, the lover, the falcon – are brought together into an orderly, symmetrical form; not a bacchanalia of tangled bodies, but an Apollonian harmony of symmetry. The circularity of uniting end and beginning is a sign of perfection, but it is also chilling. As is typical of Hofmannsthal’s writing, a long, run-on sentence winds its way through harmonious descriptions only to end abruptly, in this case not breaking the rhythm, so much as the magic of portrayed life:

Das Gewebe war unter seinen Füßen, Blumen gingen in Tiere über, aus den schönen Ranken wanden sich Jäger und Liebende los, Falken schwebten darüber hin wie fliegende Blumen, alles hielt einander umschlungen, eines war ins andere verrankt, das Ganze war maßlos herrlich, eine Kühle stieg aber davon auf, die ihm bis an die Hüften ging. – Wie hast du es zustande gebracht, dies zu entwerfen in solcher Vollkommenheit? – (147)

Like the “fuhr hin” passage of Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten (SW XXXI 170) this sentence brings together seemingly disparate moods: the beauty of connectivity and the cold air emanating – unlike breath – from the carpet of such perfection. As Schwarz has pointed out, this carpet’s visual motifs function as a mirror of the Emperor’s life; I’d like to suggest the carpet functions as a mirror furthermore by revealing to the Emperor his own coldness and failure to be creative and procreative, to act in ways which involve reaching beyond the self. The chill rises “bis an die Hüften,” linking him with the merchant’s son of Das Märchen der 672. Nacht, who dies after being kicked in the groin, essentially emasculating and castrating him. But rather than being concerned about the spreading chill, the Emperor asks how the carpet was made, and in the child’s response,
we have an “Aussage über Kunstproduktion schlechthin” (Schwarz Orient–Okzident 185), but one that speaks, quoting Wieland’s Musarion, of ideal art:

Ich scheide das Schöne vom Stoff, wenn ich webe; das was den Sinnen ein Köder ist und sie zur Torheit und zum Verderben kliert, lass ich weg. […] Beim Weben verfahre ich, sagte sie, wie dein gesegnetes Auge beim Schauen. Ich sehe nicht was ist, und nicht was nicht ist, sondern was immer ist, und danach webe ich. (147)

This process of refinement through separation contrasts with the process of connection through weaving. It is also a description of Hofmannsthal’s artistic practice during the war years. Hofmannsthal wrote to Raoul Auernheimer: “es stecken sechs Jahre Arbeit in dem Buch, alle guten reinen Momente, die ich diesen finsteren Jahren entreißen konnte, und eine unsägliche Bemühung – das geht aber niemanden was an, hoffentlich haftet nichts davon als Schwere dem Buch an” (qtd. in SW XXVIII EI 424). Yet it also recalls the original separation common to many myths and religions. Ovid’s Metamorphoses opens with chaos and the separation of the elements, out of which is born a world: the first metamorphosis; the Book of Genesis tells of the separation of matter, space, and time out of the void: Tohuwabohu. The creation of the work of art – its genesis – is in miniature the creation of cosmos from chaos. In Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten, chaos is referred to in connection with “ein Ungeborenes” (155-56), and works of art exemplify the productive instance when things can be reborn (“wie neugeboren”) from out of the terrifying “Chaos des Nichtlebens” (Briefe des Zurückgekehrten 170). In Die Frau ohne Schatten, the situation is similar, with a crucial difference: the children here desire, too, to be born, but not out of a terrifying chaos. They do not know chaos, nor do they know suffering; they know only unnamed longing to be born into the world and leave what Hofmannsthal calls the “Praeexistenz” of this underworld. The work of art which is born out of a division of “das Schöne vom Stoff” is thus a product of sifting or carving away the base matter. Paradoxically, the “Stoff” could equally refer to the very material out of which the carpet is made – “Stoff” as textile. But this work of art

340 See the Erläuterung to Die Frau ohne Schatten (SW XXVIII EI 431-32).

does not exist in the here and now, nor is it consigned to the realm of “Nichtexistenz”; it is, we see, in a vestibule, awaiting existence, awaiting the opportunity or Kairos to break into living time.

Yet in addition to this rarefied view there is an aesthetic and ethical connection to life beyond the vestibule (whether palatial or “praexistential”). At the emperor’s strange questions, some of the younger children must make great efforts to avoid laughing out loud, recalling the Dyer’s Wife’s uncontrollable laughter. The children of this beautiful realm of rarefied art are thus linked to their opposites: the adults of an ugly world that attacks the senses. Moreover, the carpet’s very manufacture depends not only on the weaver, but also – as Schwarz has pointed out (Orient–Okzident 186) – on the dyer. Barak and his wife are thus linked with the childish gestures as well as the magnificence of handiwork. We have already seen in the dyers’ quarter the squalor and toil where the threads and cloths are made brilliant. In real works of art, below the shining surface there is the shadow of labour: colours are the “Brüder der Schmerzen” here as in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten.

This handiwork however is one of unsurpassed flawlessness, just as the beauty of the children is of a kind the Emperor has never hitherto seen. But for it to be real, it must exist in conjunction with the work of living, breathing (and dying) craftsmen. It is separated from time just as it is separated from suffering. The girl’s method is a reflection of the Emperor’s understanding of the world, of his seeing: “Beim Weben verfahre ich, sagte sie, wie dein gesegnetes Auge beim Schauen” (147), that is, by being blind to what earthly beauty is. He, too, separates, segregates, isolates, and preserves, but fails to connect. His questioning is in the same spirit as his desire: “die Lust des Besitzenwollens” nearly overcomes him and he must master himself not to touch the children. All of his questions operate according to a logic of separation, division, analysis, definition: as he wishes to possess these beautiful children, so too he wishes to possess a knowledge based on simple oppositions. He enquires of the children: “Ist das Haus nahe oder fern? […] Ist das das Ende einer Reise oder der Anfang? Liegt mehr vor euch oder mehr hinter euch?” (148, my emphasis). But there are no simple answers. As Hofmannsthal has it in his notes to Diese Rundschau:

falsch: jedes Kunstwerk als definitiv anzusehen; immer zu sagen: er hat das aufgegeben, er wendet sich jenem zu, er sieht nur das; er meint also das und das; falsch das definitive
richtig: die Production als eine dunkle Angelegenheit zwischen dem Einzelnen und dem verworrenen Dasein anzusehen (SW XXXIII RA 2 234-35)

The Emperor must learn a “Neues Sehen,” a mature appreciation for that which is not “definitiv,” for that which is beyond “alle billigen Antithesen,” for the product of a murky affair between the individual and existence. The children, furthermore, answer in paradoxes and upset the parent-child hierarchy by highlighting the Emperor’s own childlike ignorance. They teach him humility in their gestures, bowing while responding:

Deine Fragen sind ungereimt, o großer Kaiser, wie eines kleinen Kindes. Denn sage uns dieses: wenn du zu Tische gehst, geschieht es, um in der Sättigung zu verharren oder dich wieder von ihr zu lösen? Und wenn du auf Reisen gehst, ist es, um fortfuibleibien oder um zurückzukehren? (148)

These questions do not deter him from trying to attain his desire: like Pygmalion responding in a manner all too sensually to Galatea, the Emperor is transfixed by the beauty of the girl’s hand – which, importantly, looks like alabaster: “Der Kaiser sah nur ihre Hand, die unvergleichlich schön war und von Alabaster durchscheinendem Glanz. – Ihr seid’s, die ich besitzen und behalten muß, rief er aus, es sei auf welchem Wege immer!” (148). As Mathias Mayer has convincingly argued in “Midas statt Pygmalion,” Goethe disdained the idea that Pygmalion should fall in love with his statue and thus succumb to a low form of sensualism. We might say the Emperor has a similar problem, though it is coded differently: in typical Hofmannsthalian terms, his desire is one of possession. The Emperor is like a spoilt child: “Ich bin gewohnt, zu erreichen, was ich begehre!”

342 “New seeing” occupied writers and visual artists from Cézanne in painting to Rilke and Hofmannsthal in literature and August Endell in architecture (e.g. Schönheit der grossen Stadt, 1908) in architecture. Ursula Renner in Die Zauberschrift der Bilder writes: “Es geht ihm einerseits um eine Opsis, die neue Dinge sehen will, wie in den Naturwissenschaften des 19. Jahrhunderts, andererseits und vor allem aber um ein Schauen, das die Dinge neu sieht – und darin den Menschen etwas was von sich begreifen läßt. […] Um andere Dinge anders zu sehen braucht es eine besondere Art der Aufmerksamkeit für die Gestalt der Dinge und ihren Zeichencharakter, für den Prozeß der Semiose” (13). Cf. the importance of “schauen” in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten on page 117 of Chapter 2.

343 Here too we see the theme of the return. Cf. Hans Karl’s dialogue with Helene in Der Schwierige, where he attempts to say something “über mein Fortgehen und natürlich auch über mein Wiederkommen. Eines motiviert ja das andere” (SW XXII Dramen 10 129).
he cries, shocking the children around him. But their response is again and again one of “Ehrfurcht,” though now mixed with “Zärtlichkeit und namenloses Bangen” (149), for they want to live, but they depend, like Anfortas, on the Emperor’s words. He intimates this, and searches in himself for the decisive question – one that would somehow be different from those he has been posing – but cannot find it: “ihm war, als schwebte sie schon auf seinen Lippen, aber er vergaß sie” (149).

At this point, a new spectacle seizes the Emperor’s gaze. The patterns and movement of the two dimensional colourful carpet are now acted out in a pageant before his eyes as he sits at the table still. More children rush towards the table in orderly fashion to deck it. The Emperor asks why everything is being done in such hurried fashion, but the answer he receives only reinforces how fundamentally otherworldly this place is: “Sage diesem, er solle sich die nötige Zeit lassen. – Die Zeit? sagte das Mädchen und sah ihn mit verlegenem Ausdruck an. Wir kennen sie nicht, aber es ist unser ganzes Begehren, sie kennen zu lernen und ihr untertan zu werden” (149). The desire to be subject to time is tantamount to desiring life.

The children then put on a “Schauspiel” (151) before the Emperor, flawlessly weaving through each other, performing in movement the carpet’s motionless intricacies. Again, the Emperor expresses the desire to possess these graceful and gracious figures: “er wollte sie bei sich festhalten, geriete darüber auch die Ordnung der Tafel und alles in Verwirrung” (151). At this moment, he exhibits behaviours and desires similar to that of Barak: a love for his future children (whom he does not yet recognise as his own children) seizes him and, like Barak in the earlier meal scene, “er wollte den Mund der Kinder mit der köstlichen Speise anfüllen, aber sie bogen sich nach rückwärts und lehnten mit flehender Gebärde ab. Er griff nach ihnen, aber er griff ins Leere, nur ein Anhauch eisiger Luft, wie wenn eine Tür ins Freie sich aufgetan hatte, traf seine ausgestreckte Hand und sein Gesicht” (151). He wishes to feed the children as Barak fed the village children and attempted to feed his wife. Of the Japanese Buddhist proverbs collected by Lafcadio Hearn, whose writings Hofmannsthal knew well, we find one that speaks to precisely this situation: “Ko wa Sangai no kubikse. A child is neck-shackle for the Three States of Existence” (In Ghostly Japan 182). Hearn’s footnote to this proverb offers this explanation:

That is to say, The love of parents for their child may impede their spiritual progress – not only in this world, but through all their future states of being, – just as a
*kubikasè*, or Japanese cangue, impedes the movements of the person upon whom it is placed. Parental affection, being the strongest of earthly attachments, is particularly apt to cause those whom it enslaves to commit wrongful acts in the hope of benefitting their offspring. (182)

Both Barak’s and the Emperor’s affections are a potential threat to their own and their children’s (and beloveds’) well-being. This overabundance of affection takes the form of feeding, that is, controlling the site of the *logos*. What initially seems like an act of affection easily collapses into one of aggression. But the children cannot be had, held, or controlled. Like Odysseus in the underworld who tries thrice to embrace the ghost of his mother, or like Aeneas who does the same in the presence of the ghost of Creusa and later the ghost of his father, the Emperor cannot hold onto what he sees. On the level of the narrative, he is in an underworld and has to do with pre-existent beings whose very corporeality is doubtful. In terms of the Emperor’s character development, we see that he has not overcome his desire to possess – he has not learnt the art of living “mit leichtem Herz und leichten Händen, halten und nehmen, halten und lassen...” And it takes the paradoxical dialogue, the aesthetic-induced bewilderment, and the physical restraint achieved through petrification to show the Emperor what he has not been able to see.

Time seems now to speed up again, and the children grow older with each breath; the face of one of the girls becomes “schärfer, fremder […]. Der Kaiser war betroffen wie noch nie. – Wer bin ich, sagte er zu sich selber, und wo bin ich hingeraten?” (152, my emphasis). Like the traveller in *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, the foreignness of the other prompts the question of one’s own identity. And again, as in *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, this takes place amidst a communion of sorts: though, significantly, it is only the Emperor who drinks. The children act as hosts to their guest-father, showing to him the mystery of “die vollkommene Ehrfurcht” (152), for it is the Emperor and the Empress who have the power to bestow life upon these children. But the absence of the other – in this case, the Empress – grows increasingly conspicuous; the children begin to draw attention to this fact by presenting bowls and food to an invisible guest at the other end of the table, only to walk away in tears. One boy even asks the Emperor, as the latter gradually becomes cold and stony:

---

344 The phrase is sung by the Marschallin in Der Rosenkavalier, but is a quote from Gottfried Keller. *SW XXIII Operndichtungen* 139.

Although the “Sie” of the first sentence is capitalised in the critical edition, it is lower case in earlier editions and probably is a third person singular pronoun rather than a second person formal pronoun – elsewhere, the children use the informal ‘du’ when speaking with the Emperor. This might therefore be a reference to the absent Empress, and, on a grander scale, to the futility, vanity, and meaninglessness of their graceful arts – both aesthetic (the carpet, the pageant) and social (the meal). The Emperor’s response is dramatically ironic: “Zum Zeichen, daß er niemandem erlaube, zu ihm von seiner Frau zu sprechen, und daß er sich von niemand zwingen lassen würde, preiszugeben, was ihm allein gehörte, sah der Kaiser starr vor sich hin” (155): in other words, his actions seem deliberate – his gaze is fixed before him – but they are the result of both a metaphorical hardening of the heart and a ‘real,’ i.e. physical petrification. When the boy makes an allusion to the unfair treatment of the Falcon, the Emperor grits his teeth – another sign of rigidity, this time at the site of logos: he becomes incapable of dialogue just as he is becoming incapable of walking. This is in fact the second time the Emperor’s teeth are mentioned: two pages earlier Hofmannsthal refers to the Emperor’s changing expression thus: “Des Kaisers Miene wechselte, und sein Mund öffnete sich plötzlich und verriet, indem die Zähne sich für einen Augenblick entblößten, eine Ungeduld, die nicht mehr zu bezähmen war” (152). In both instances, the Emperor’s expression is linked to that of the dying merchant’s son of Das Märchen der 672. Nacht: “Zuletzt erbrach er Galle, dann Blut, und starb mit verzerrten Zügen, die Lippen so verrissen, daß die Zähne und Zahnfleisch entblößt waren und ihm einen fremden, bösen Ausdruck gaben” (30). Both characters are fixed in their rigidity – a corporeal manifestation of a particular attitude towards life that contrasts with the flexible tree that suffers through and survives the storm. The desire to fix things down, to hold and preserve, is actualised as a contrapasso in both the Emperor and the merchant’s son. Again we find support for this in Hofmannsthal’s notes to the text, wherein the cook (another child) says to the Emperor:
Du selber bist ein Koch unter den Köchen du bereitest dir köstliche Speise im köstlichen Gefäße: aber du hast eine Zutat vergessen: das Hässliche. – so auch hast du das goldene Wasser vergessen! […]

Aus Wunden will sie zu dir sprechen. Ihr Leib will blutend aufgehen. Die Verwirrungen sind nötig und die Scham und die Beschmutzung. (308, N31, spacing in original)

Excising the Jesus-martyr imagery, Hofmannsthal writes the final version of the text so that it is not so explicit – nor so violent. Rather than a crucified Jesus, the Empress is more akin to a Siddhartha Gautama whose family has tried to shield him from seeing the sufferings of the world. The sentiment is present in the children’s reminding the Emperor of his attempts to create a beautiful, secluded world safe from all suffering and filth: “Du hast sie mit Mauern umgeben […]. Er faßte auf, daß die Kinder dies mit wechselnden Stimmen sangen. – Dies ist der Gesang, den ich hörte, als ich draußen stand, sagte er zu sich” (156). Like the sirens singing, calling on Persephone, the children’s song (bemoaning the absence of the Empress) has lured the Emperor into the underworld. Their refrain echoes the sentiments of the Empress and speaks to that “Scham” and “Beschmutzung” referred to in the above note: “Dir, Barak, bin ich schuldig!” (156). Barak lives in a world where “das Hässliche” is part and parcel of life, and though flawed, he is a man who affirms not only his own life, but the lives of others: for this reason the children now bow in his honour, leaving the Emperor standing “unbeachtet in der Mitte” (156). He is now experiencing the same treatment he had dealt others, in particular the Nurse in chapter one: “Der Kaiser trat leichten Fußes über den Leib der Amme hinweg […]. Er achtete ihrer so wenig, als läge hier nur ein Stück Teppich” (110). And as he asks repeatedly who Barak is, he hears only as answer: “Nur ein Gran von Großmut!” (156-67). The girl he asks begins to grow more like the Empress in appearance, but the Emperor sees only the admission of something he does not wish to acknowledge, and his warm affection instantly transforms into its cruel opposite, reawakening the destructive impulse of the hunt: he desires to kill his own unborn children because they show him something he wishes not to see. Anger seizes him – literally:
Er haßte die Botschaft und die Botin und fühlte sein Herz völlig Stein geworden in sich. Ohne ein Wort suchte seine Hand nach dem Dolch in seinem Gürtel, um ihn nach dieser da zu werfen, da er ihn nicht nach seiner Frau werfen konnte; als die Finger der Rechten ihn nicht zu fühlen vermochten, wollten ihr die der Linken zur Hilfe kommen, aber beide Hände gehorchten nicht mehr, schon lagen die steinernen Arme starr an den versteinten Hüften und über die versteinten Lippen kam kein Laut. (157).

The desire for possession easily slips into violence when any sort of resistance is encountered. The Emperor’s failure to possess “nur ein Gran von Großmut” translates into his failure to possess himself; his body revolts and does not heed his will – or rather, it heeds a deeper drive (a “Todestrieb” perhaps?) to petrification. This is the literary depiction of Hearn’s kubikasé – the Japanese cangue, a device which restricts movement and serves to punish and humiliate. As the children disappear and the ceiling opens up to reveal the solitary night sky – “die Sterne sahen herein” – the Emperor is left silent and alone, turned to stone. Having treated the world as his object, he has himself become an object – in fact, he has become a parody of a work of art.

**The Labour of Beauty**

Meanwhile, in the other ‘underworld’ of human beings, we get to see the other side of art production. Chapter five is shorter and less cryptic than chapter four, but functions as an instructive counter-image for the production of art, which I would like to highlight here. The narrative import of chapter five is easy enough to reconstruct. On the following morning, the Dyer’s Wife wishes not to see the Empress and sends her off to assist Barak in his work. When they return, the Nurse gives Barak a drink that puts him to sleep so that the Dyer’s Wife can make her way to the river unimpeded to sacrifice her shadow and her unborn children, but the Empress, who now clearly sees the good in Barak, awakens him by the power of her will. The situation is further complicated

345 Cf. Das Märchen der 672. Nacht: “Er haßte seinen vorzeitigen Tod so sehr, daß er sein Leben haßte, weil es ihn dahin geführt hatte” (SW XXVIII E1 30).

346 Cf. Hofmannsthal’s note, wherein the children ask the Emperor: “[…] gibst du dich beim Jagen nicht hin und wenn du ein schönes Weib siehst, willst du nicht mitten in sie hinein wie der mörderische Pfeil” (333 N52).
by the fact that the Dyer’s Wife seems not entirely devoted to relinquishing this life. As the half-unconscious Barak stumbles around, still affected by the potion, he reveals an animal nature never seen in him before, and it is only once he is fully awake again that he comes to sense his great mistake – he feels remorse for marrying so late in life and subjecting the Dyer’s Wife to the consequences of his choice.

Barak occupies more of the story in this chapter than heretofore. Though we have already seen how assiduously he works, in this chapter, Hofmannsthal offers us more naturalistic details to highlight the grit and dirt involved in the production of beautiful textiles. In light of the preceding chapter, this labour is of great significance: it is that essential ingredient – “das Hässliche” – which is added to the mix of the narrative. We see him not just loading the dyed fabrics upon his back to take them to market; here he is cleaning them of blood and dirt:

> Mit einem Bein ums andere gleichmäßig tretend, walkte er den Schmutz und das Blut aus dem Gewand eines Schlachters [...]. Der Färber hatte das ausgetretene Gewand auf reine Bretter ausgebreitet und strich es außs neue mit weißem Ton an. Die Kaiserin half ihm dabei. Das blutig gefärbte Abwasser rann aus dem umgestürzten Schaff in die Gosse. Die beiden arbeiteten eifrig und sahen nicht herüber. (159; 160)

After washing the clothes, he lays the freshly died fabrics out with great care:

> Die Kaiserin [...] fand auf dem flachen Dach den Färber, der noch keuchte, und dem der Schweiß mit blauer Farbe vermischt von der Stirne rann, und sie wischte ihn mit ihrem Tüchlein das Gesicht ab, indessen er mit den großen Hände ganz zart die aufgehangenen Strähnen Blaugarn auseinanderlößte, daß die Luft zu der inneren Farbe zutrete und sich auch im Innern das schmutzige Gelbgrün in leuchtendes Blau färbte; das Kleid des Schlachters hing schon an der Trockenstange. (162)

In both of these scenes of work there are a number of points to which Hofmannsthal draws his readers’ attention. In the process of washing, the Dyer is doing in the ‘real’ world what the child in the underworld did in order to fashion her fantastic carpet: “Ich scheide das Schöne vom Stoff [...] das was den Sinnen ein Köder ist und sie zur Torheit und zum Verderben kliert, lass ich weg”
The “Schmutz” and “Blut” are driven out of the fabric by the work of the Dyer, indeed, by his very body ("gleichmäßig tretend, walzte er…"). He then restores the brilliance of the clothing with weissen Ton.” The dirtied run-off drains away, presumably into the yellow river the Empress and the Nurse had seen earlier. That is, it never really goes ‘away.’ Blood and dirt run through the city’s nervous system. And just as the signs of labour course through it, so the dyes adhere and colour all they come into contact with, marking the dyers, mixing with their sweat. But the real test of all this physically demanding work is the degree of care: the great lumbering Barak’s hands move with surprising delicacy, “ganz zart,” to make sure that every single strand has access to air. For all the roughness of this man’s manners, he is adroit, and his precision manifests a devotion and attention that contrast sharply with the carelessness of the Emperor. With these qualities, he is able to effect almost magical transformations: bloodied, dirtied clothes are made to gleam white, and yellow-green fabrics are cleaned and dyed to a brilliant blue.

By assisting Barak, the Empress learns to appreciate his work and person. In earlier versions of the prose text, Hofmannsthal spends a great deal more time on the Empress’s reaction to this work, and the words she uses even recommend a comparison with the pageant of the underworld. In one particularly laudatory passage one discovers many thematic points already touched on:

Die Ceremonien die er macht: die schönen Wege im Wasser: wie für Genien. Er tut alle Ungeborenen zu Ehren die reinlichen Sonderungen [...] die Wege und die Vereinigungen, die seine gesegneten Hände bewirken, die Herrlichkeit der Farben und ihre Bescheidenheit, geleitet die Zauberkräft seines Gemütes: die Liebe zu seinen Werkzeugen: die Gelassenheit mit der er arbeitet und die fromme Sorgfalt auf ein Ziel: die Ehrfurcht vor sich selber und die Wegbereitung für ein Höheres —

---

347 The river “trug große Flecken von dunkler Farbe dahin, die sich aus dem Viertel der Färber, das oberhalb der Brücke lag, immer erneuten” (118).

348 One new production of the opera, incidentally, completely misses (or perhaps chooses to ignore) this point. In Claus Guth’s 2012 production for La Scala and Covent Garden, Barak is robbed of his defining work and made instead a tanner in order to highlight the misogynist undertones of the story. This alteration of course severely changes the character and the audience’s perception of the relationships portrayed in the opera. Losing his artist’s/alchemist’s capacity for transforming matter (dying fabrics, infusing them with brilliance and new life), Barak is portrayed “stripping and gutting a gazelle that, in the person of the Empress, represents the feminine ‘other’ of which he remains oblivious” (Quantrill, “An elegantly staged subversion,” s.p.). The ‘subversion’ here is forced and results from a problematic depiction of the character. It also jars with the Empress’s positive assessment of Barak. Nevertheless, this production does show (if inadvertently) how important Barak’s occupation is in his character.
so künstlich arbeitet er. Wie hast Du mir nicht gesagt, dass die Menschen so
gut sind? [...] (364 N85, spacing in original).

The tone of this passage is perhaps too sentimental for the otherwise relatively reserved style of the prose tale. It is also too expository for a *Märchen* – and for an opera – though for the purposes of supporting a reading, the passage effectively evinces how important the depictions of work are for Barak’s character and for the Empress’s compassion for him. The reference to ceremony – like the meal of the underworld – can perhaps best be understood when we take into account Nietzsche’s aphorism “Jetzt und ehemem”:

Ehemals waren alle Kunstwerke an der grossen Feststrasse der Menschheit aufgestellt, als Erinnerungszeichen und Denkmäler hoher und seliger Momente. Jetzt will man mit den Kunstwerken die armen Erschöpften und Kranken von der grossen Leidensstrasse der Menschheit bei Seite locken, für ein lüsternes Augenblickchen; man bietet ihnen einen kleinen Rausch und Wahnsinn an. (*Die fröhlichen Wissenschaften* 122)

Hofmannsthal’s and Strauss’s work with Max Rheinhardt and the founding of the Salzburger Festspiele attest to Hofmannsthal’s devotion to the reinvigoration of festivals and ceremonies. It is not simply about pomp and circumstance and distraction, but rather about celebrating humanity – and that means humanity’s trials too. Both Nietzsche and Hofmannsthal see this in terms of something “higher” – those moments which do not cloud vision with spectacle, drawing our attention away from the “Leidenstrasse,” but rather those which raise up and clarify those moments that are mysteriously integral to being human. In Barak’s case, his work is ceremony: a celebration of existence. And even though he is dyeing cloths, not weaving them, the movement of his hands traces the same motions as a weaver’s. Yet all this is done in a spirit quite different to one of Promethean antagonism; it is rather imbued with a more ‘Eastern’ “Gelassenheit,” as well as a

---

349 Cf. Hofmannsthal’s letter to Strauss form 13 June 1913: “[...] ich darf im Konzentrieren nicht über eine gewisse Grenze herausgehen, sonst verarme ich den Stoff, die Figuren verlieren ihren Reiz (der im psychologischen gebrochenen Konturen liegt), sie werden schematisch und das ganze trivial-opernhaft” (Qtd. in Knaus 19).

350 Hofmannsthal’s interest in Eastern schools of thought is well documented. In contrast to Nietzsche, his views were much more ambiguous, at times (especially early on) suspicious of what he (via Nietzsche) saw as Eastern thought’s nihilistic tendencies, but generally more welcoming. We have already seen, for instance, specific (positive) references
humility before and honoring of these small actions. This work is described in the note by the Empress as “gut” – a rejection of the Nurse’s assessment of humanity’s decrepitude. In the final text, the Empress says to the Nurse: “Dieser soll seinen Lohn haben” (162). The Nurse’s response shows how far she is from understanding what the Empress has understood: “Lohn? […]. Womit hätte der Elefant sich Lohn verdient?” (162).

The Dyer’s Wife, too, sees nothing of the beauty of Barak’s work. Instead, she is enthralled by the beauty of the Efrit. Indeed, she is precisely one of “die armen Erschöpften und Kranken” of which Nietzsche speaks: she even refers to herself as “krank” (159), and while she knows the source of her sickness – the Nurse’s introducing the Efrit to her – she still desires him for his ability to draw her away from “der grossen Leidenstrasse der Menschheit”:

Sie war schön in diesem Augenblick und von ihrem jungen Blut durchströmt, daß sie glühte, und die Alte betrachtete sie mit Lust. – Nein, nein, rief sie plötzlich mit leidenschaftlichem Entzücken, er ist schön, ache doch nicht auf mich, du Närrin, er ist schön wie der Morgenstern, und seine Schönheit, das ist das Widerhaken an der Angel […]. (161, my emphasis)

In no other passage of similar length does does the word “schön” appear with such frequency and insistence. The Dyer’s Wife is schön in her desire; she is gleaming, much like the Empress, though from fantasy rather than from nature. Her threefold invocation of the Efrit’s beauty then emphasises how beauty can conquer without words. The Efrit presents her with the opportunity to experience a beauty she has never known, yet behind it all one suspects that this is simply a manœuvre: “Jetzt will man mit den Kunstwerken die armen Erschöpften und Kranken von der grossen Leidenstrasse der Menschheit bei Seite locken, für ein lüsternes Augenblickchen; man bietet ihnen einen kleinen Rausch und Wahnsinn an.”

In spite of her desires, the Dyer’s Wife also recognises that her actions are harmful. When Barak is given the sleeping potion, she is angered (contrary to the Nurse’s expectations) and wavers
to Hindu and Buddhist concepts in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten. For more on Hofmannsthal’s relation to Asia broadly, see Zelinsky. See also Freny Mistry, “The Concept of Asia in Hofmannsthal’s Prose Writings.”
between her decision to sacrifice the unborn children together with her shadow, and the sense that her actions are futile, even wrong, under these circumstances:

Verfluchte, schrie die frau, soll er mir wieder und wieder entkommen! […] Sie trat dicht an den Leib des Schlafenden heran […]. Dann seufzte sie aus der Tiefe ihrer Brust: O meine Mutter, und noch einmal: O meine Mutter! […] Wehe, sagte sie, und seufzte noch einmal, werde ich das Korn sein, wird er das Huhn sein und mich aufpicken! Werde ich das Feuer sein, wird er das Wasser sein und mich auslöschen! Denn ich bin an ihn gekettet mit eisernen Ketten. […] [Dann] kam eine fürchterliche Ungeduld über sie; sie warf sich über den Liegenden und riß an ihm aus allen Kräften. – Barak, schrie sie ihm ins Ohr, du sollst mich hören, denn jetzt gilt es! (163).

The Dyer’s Wife’s reactions are confused for a number of reasons. Though she desires to escape her prison (she is chained, “gekettet,” to her husband), she recognises that absconding like this leaves Barak no chance to defend himself. In fact, it seems she even wants him to fight for her, hence her frustrated cry: “soll er mir wieder und wieder entkommen!” But then there is also the sense that this chain is one not of bondage, but of fate. Her marriage has been arranged – by her mother.\(^{351}\) In fact, this functions in the story as the exact counterpart to the Empress’s marriage to the Emperor. The Empress fell in love with and married the Emperor contrary to of the wishes of her father Keikobad; the Dyer’s Wife married the Dyer according to the wishes of her mother. We cannot speak here only of a tyranny of fathers, nor of a tyranny of men. If there is supra-individual conflict, it is a generational one that involves both the father and the mother: not quite a “collective oedipal revolt” (Schorske xviii), nor a collective revolt à la Electra, although the text might suggest that at first glance. Schorske is right to emphasise the fact that one generation defines itself against another. But what is more interesting is the fact the Hofmannsthal’s tale is not about two conflicting generations, but about countless generations that define themselves both through and against each other. The four main characters are at the point of transitioning from being defined as children to being defined as parents – but ‘parents’ here is not to be taken only literally.

\(^{351}\) At the beginning of the next chapter, she repeats the cry: “O meine Mutter […] welche Kräfte hast du mir zugemutet, da du mir auferlegtest, den, welchen du mir zugeführt hast, auf immer lieben zu können! und wo hättest du dergleichen Kräfte mir mitgegeben?” (167).
Metaphorically, it is about the process of ‘maturation’ through socialisation (turning the gaze from self to other) and developing one’s capacity for creation. In Hofmannsthal’s artist, the two develop together and reinforce each other.

At this moment the Empress – that is, the artist figure – has already entered unnoticed and begins to cry at the sight, but her crying betrays a change in her person: “mit sprachlosem Staunen sah die Amme, daß ihr Wasser aus den beiden Augen schoß, daß ihr Gesicht in Schmerz und Tränen schwamm, wie das einer sterblichen Frau” (163). Her compassion for both Barak and his wife stems from her recognition that her actions are destroying the lives of two people. This suffering lends her a mortal aspect (as well as a moral compass). This, coupled with her powerful will, allows her to reanimate Barak’s body, but he remains somewhere between being asleep and awake; believing his children murdered or stolen away, he picks up a hammer and swings it, hoping to strike the culprit, all the while showing a remarkable resemblance to the Efrit: “In sein Gesicht trat ein Ausdruck von Stärke und Wildheit, die nie ein Mensch an ihm gesehen hatte, die tiefste Kraft seiner dunklen Natur trat heraus” (165). Significantly, this raging man is calmed by the familiar, ugly voices of his brothers: in a reversal of the Dyer’s Wife’s enthrallment at the untold beauty of the Efrit, Barak is released from his “Rausch und Wahnsinn” by precisely the opposite: that which is ugly, but familiar: “Die Brüder schrien auf ihn hin, der vertraute Laut ihrer Stimmen schien ihm an die Seele zu dringen” (165). At this he wakes from his rage, and, entirely overcome with shame, makes a gesture that, in this story as elsewhere in Hofmannsthal’s work, demonstrates a profound appreciation for humility: he kneels to the floor before his wife to ask forgiveness.

It is often said that the opera Der Rosenkavalier was written with a gesture to Le Nozze di Figaro. Die Frau ohne Schatten is supposed to have its operatic ancestor in Die Zauberflöte. But in this case there is a moment which Die Frau ohne Schatten (both opera and prose tale) shares with Le Nozze di Figaro. In Mozart’s opera, the count asks the countess for forgiveness, which she grants him. Here, the Dyer asks forgiveness of his wife, but she does not grant it him – yet. In his moment of repentance he is sorry for having married so late, for holding the delusional hope that he would live a long life with riches and children. It seems he is sorry for something else, too, but cannot say it; this moment connects him with the Emperor, who could not formulate the decisive question to the children before him. Barak “wollte noch etwas sagen, aber es kam ihm nicht über die Lippen” (166).
The emotional states do not add up: Barak is remorseful, his wife cold and unforgiving, the Nurse confused, and the Empress suffering compassionately. At the end of this chapter, one has the feeling that everything is out of sorts, all the threads hanging loosely, untied. And yet the play between beauty and ugliness as well as compassion and coldness is clearly guiding the narrative as well as the aesthetic arc.

**Of the Rising and Setting Sun**

The penultimate chapter, like the chapter preceding it also comparatively short, presents the moment the narrative has been leading up to: the Dyer’s Wife sacrifices her shadow and with it the seven children (represented in the seven fish she casts away). But it is also in this chapter that she sees the error of her actions; parallel to this, Barak (who has now, it seems, fully lost his mind) will come to see the error of *his* ways and recognise the unreachable otherness of his wife – that essentially distanced aspect of being that can neither be held nor had: the Nietzschean “Pathos der Distanz” is, for Hofmannsthal, potentially available to everyone. In this chapter of the story, we should therefore consider further the idea of maturation through the other. As in *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, there is a realisation of the other’s essential distance and independence; it is in recognising this essential difference that the characters are able to develop into themselves. Likewise, the motif of *Hingabe* or *Frömmigkeit*, which we saw developed in *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, is played with in this section in both its positive and negative ramifications. Finally, beauty in its various manifestations guides the reader through the characters’ developmental states. Above all, this is inscribed upon their faces. As in *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, the face here is (à la Levinas) the site of reckoning, of ethical resistance. But it is also, in Hofmannsthal’s work at least, figured as beautiful. It is the point of convergence of the ethical and the beautiful, a new *kalokagathia* which is not based on that which is pleasing to the senses, but rather results from a kind of sympathetic reverberation between two distinct but connected beings. It would be fair to argue that Hofmannsthal’s presentation of beauty in the face of the other is much inspired by his understanding of the effects of aesthetic beauty – that is, of art. The “Pathos der Distanz” is not so much the origin of the difference between “gut und schlecht” (*Zur Genealogie der Moral* 226) as it is the indication for a development of a sense that recognises the reverberating beauty of otherness.
Indeed, it is with a vision of beauty that the Dyer’s Wife’s resolve begins to waver. She decides first that “es ist Zeit, daß ich kein Kind bin” and undertakes to speak to her deceased mother’s spirit and thereby “mich losmache[n], denn sie hat mir auferlegt, was ich nicht länger tragen will” (167). The irony is that these are still the words of a wilful child, one who protests a burden simply out of petulance. We know this is the case because only a paragraph later, when wandering through the poorest part of town, she remarks in a manner most strange, even poetic:

Schmutzig ist ein kleines Kind, und sie müssen es dem Haushund darreichen, um es rein zu lecken; und dennoch ist es schön wie die aufgehende Sonne; und solche sind wir zu opfern gesonnen. – Es war ein ganz seltsamer, fast singender Ton, in dem sie es sagte. (168)

This short and strange passage is indicative of the overall atmosphere into which the narrative is being driven: like the dark sky and growing wind that has moved into the day-time scene, the words of the Dyer’s Wife give the impression of an unstable mind, verging on the storm of madness. As if at any moment they might crystallise, her comments seem oversaturated with meaning. Handing the child over to be licked clean by the dog on the surface is an image of utter destitution: there is not even clean water to wash away the dirt. But the dog has a particular significance for Hofmannsthal. In *Der Dichter und diese Zeit*, the poet is “gewiesen zu den Hunden” (*SW* XXXIII RA2 137). In a quite literal sense, this is precisely what would happen to the dirty child, linking the child (if only vaguely) to poetry. But the association becomes clearer with the word “schön” and the simile of the sunrise, itself an image of newness, hope, the start of a new day, and light, which, of course, is needed if shadows are to be cast, and which subsequent generations represent. A dirty child is beautiful like this, striking, natural, and bright, made clean by the dog/poet. We might even go further and interpret the singing tone in which the Dyer’s Wife makes this remark as her having come under the influence of the unborn children, who are associated with singing. But singing might equally be a palliative measure; the Dyer’s Wife seems here to see the tragedy in which her actions would result, and she must somehow make the decision less painful. The image and act turn in on themselves: sacrifice becomes a euphemism for murder.

It is perhaps not surprising then that, once she has reached her mother’s grave, the Dyer’s Wife sinks into that familiar position of *proskynesis*. But it functions too as a parody (and one suspects Hofmannsthal was well aware of his own penchant for the devotional gesture): deep in prayer, the
Dyer’s Wife “bog die Stirn gegen den Stein” (168), but as she arises, her movement is not that of a devout or divinely inspired woman: on the contrary, “ihr Aufspringen war wie eines Tieres, in dessen Gebäude kein Gedächtnis wohnt von der letzvertrostrichnen Sekunde. Ihr Gesicht glich sich selber nicht mehr; sie war schöner als je; ihr Haar hatte sich gelöst und flog um sie” (168). As if her fear has transformed her, she now resembles a beautiful beast of prey – or a god. The wild hair suggests initially something of the Bacchic “Rausch.” 352 This new beauty of the Dyer’s Wife’s is, whether of manic or divine ecstasy, unencumbered by anxiety over time’s relentless passage. She has become pure dynamism. Having thrown off the yoke of “ein[] alte[s] Gesetz” (168), she has broken the law that held her stiffly in her place. Whereas her movements earlier were that of a melancholic listlessness – a kind of slow process of petrification – they are now that of a fleet-footed creature, running from something. The Parmenidean and Heraclitean tendencies are at work in the Dyer’s Wife, though neither is presented as particularly advantageous.

As much as she runs, the voice of her mother is always near. Sound has a way of oppressing its hearer, even more so than visual stimulus can oppress the eye. If we are quick enough and have the advantage of foreknowledge, we can turn away from Medusa’s gaze, but no matter how hard we plug our ears, the determined tinnitus of our subconscious will be heard: “Sie taumelte, als hätte sie einen Schlag empfangen, und fuhr mit der einen Hand zu ihrem Kopf, gegen das Ohr hin. […] Die Stimme! […] Meiner Mutter Stimme! sie ist an meinem Ohr. Hörst du sie nicht? […] Barak! […] Nach ihm ruft sie” (168-69). After much running, the Dyer’s Wife finally collapses, and to revive her, the Nurse demands that all the surrounding people in the crowded area give her air. All but one leave: a child, importantly, who seems not to be of this world, but rather somehow of the magical realm, for the child – reminiscent of the children of the underworld – “hielt eine hölzerne Schale hin, die angefüllt war; es war, als hätte es sie aus der Luft genommen” (169). As if temporarily removed from that cavernous place, this child possesses the power of summoning something out of thin air (an ability shared by the Nurse and a minor character introduced in the final chapter). Important here is the irony: it is the child who offers the revivifying water to the Dyer’s Wife (alluding to the golden water – the water of life), but from this water is emitted a scent

---

like that, “der vor dem Kommen des Efrits den Raum erfüllt hatte” (169). This child is clearly not of this world, but its identity is still ambiguous: is this the shape-shifting Efrit? Is it a mirage that carries with it the redolence of magic? Is it an unborn child? The very mystery of the child’s identity is part of the aesthetic of confusion that permeates the story. The child is a cipher: “Das Kind war nicht mehr da” (169).

After being revived, the Dyer’s Wife, the Nurse and the Empress proceed towards the house, where they see everything has been torn from its place and chaos reigns – a complete inversion of the orderly, attentive world Barak had cultivated before. The description of this chaos is also telling: “Sein Gerät lag in Unordnung vor ihm; all seine Spachteln und Schaufeln, hölzerne, zinnerne und hörnene Löffel, groß und klein als hätten Kinder alles im Spiel herumgestreut” (170). We then learn that, having completely lost his mind, he imagines he is speaking to his “[f]leißige Kinder, sagte er, reinliche kleine Hände, sagte er, und nickte gütig” (170); showing them the dyeing process, he reveals also to the reader the sacrifices involved in such a practice: “Wir nehmen die Farben aus den Blumen heraus und heften sie auf die Tücher, so auch aus den Würmern, und von den Brüsten der Vögel dort, wo ihre Federn leuchtend und unbedeckt sind” (170). Readers might once again recall the West-Östlicher Divan poem “An Suleika.” Suleika’s perfume exists because of the sacrifice of thousands of roses: “Dir mit Wohlgeruch zu kosen, / Deine Freuden zu erhöhn, / Knospend müssen tausend Rosen / Erst in Gluten untergehn” (1-4).

This concern for the process – we have seen it several times in this chapter – stems not from a rejection of the symbolist potential to suggest through minimal, vague description; on the contrary, there are plenty of ‘symbolist’ moments of deliberate reticence: the role of the falcon is hinted at but unclear; the description of the characters is vague and allegorical rather than realistic. Yet there are plenty of instances in the plot where Hofmannsthal indulges in description and detail. Why? More so than Augenblicke in Griechenland or Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten or even Das Märchen der 672. Nacht and the Ansprache, the prose tale Die Frau ohne Schatten has at its core a twofold interest: the effect and the genesis of works of art. And the genesis has an effect on its creator. When Barak’s orderly world of work is turned upside down, it reflects upon his psychological state: unhinged, his body is as if “von keinem Geiste gelenkt” (170). Working conditions are intimately related to the well-being of the artist/labourer. This sad chaos – both internal and external – has made production impossible.
We might ask why Hofmannsthal presents this new ‘how-to’ passage at precisely this point in the narrative. Though there have been a number of meditations on the process of art production, none has been so explicit as this. The depiction of Barak speaking to his imagined children is full of pathos, in part because he clearly wants to pass on his art to the next generation. In other words, this is one moment when the motivic thread of art production crosses the thread of reproduction. The desire to pass on knowledge of a craft has in this instance at least two objects: that the life of things be carried forth, and that the next generation enjoy and appreciate this art.

The Dyer’s Wife’s sacrifice of their children is thus a twofold blow to Barak. She will not have beauty passed on, but wishes to retain it for herself: in other words, to possess it eternally and exclusively: “es ist die Zartheit der Wangen auf immer, und die unverwelklichen Brüste, vor denen sie zittern, die da kommen sollen, mich zu begrüßen” (171). But again she is shown to be less decisive than she would have herself to be, for just as she is about to fulfil the deed and throw the fish (and thereby the lives of the unborn children) behind her, Barak takes a step towards her, and she loses that conviction:

Ihre Lippen bewegten sich, und sie murmelte die Worte, *aber es war, als wüßte sie es nicht*; sie hob die Hand mit den Fischen über die Schulter und warf, *aber wie im Schlaf*; sie tat das Bedingene, *aber so als täte sie es nicht*: ihre Augen hefteten auf dem Färber und ihre Lippen verzogen sich wie eines Kindes, das schreien will. [...] Sie tat ein paar unschlüssige Schritte, nirgend sah sie Hilfe und sie preßte den Mund zusammen und blieb stehen. (172, my emphasis)

There are many remarkable aspects about this passage. Hofmannsthal uses at this moment of metaphorical petrification the repetition with variation that gives his prose a sense of ritualistic fulfillment; and he does so with irony. The ritual itself is already compromised, and, as we shall see later, is ultimately invalid – due in part, it might be argued, to her very hesitation! The subjunctive mood and the comparisons (the ‘unreal’) come to have more weight than the indicative description (the ‘real’). The ritual, which seems embedded in the language itself, is a false sacrament.

---

353 In chapter four the unborn child speaks about how she weaves; in chapter five, we see how Barak works with the Empress, cleaning and dyeing fabrics.
Moreover, this is a moment that renders her yet again a child – indecisive and frightened, though ostensibly this is the moment at which she asserts herself. The word “unschlüssig” refers to the steps she takes – quite different from the “mutige[r] Schritt” (“Geschlossene Füße” 59) to be taken by the Empress – but also seems to refer to the fact that her words are endowed with the blessing of “Widerruflichkeit” (166). This step is not binding: first, because what she has done can be undone, and second because this act does not establish ties, but severs them. She wishes to sever her ties to Barak and future generations; and the ties of the fabrics and textiles that Barak dyes would effectively be severed as well.

Finally, the act paradoxically does not free her, but seems rather to entrap her by drawing Barak’s anger to her. Petrified with fear, she can neither speak nor move. She has become a statue, like the Emperor, with neither will nor words nor feet to help her. Those that come to her aid, ironically, are Barak’s brothers, who wish only that their brother not become a murderer: for that would be an act that could not be undone. The brothers manage to move her for a moment out of reach of her husband and bid her farewell, wishing upon her “einer Hündin Geschick” (173). Given the recent occurrence of the dog motiv (“Schmutzig ist ein kleines Kind, und sie müssen es dem Haushund darreichen, um es rein zu lecken” 168), this curse seems oddly fortuitous. It suggest that the Dyer’s Wife might suffer, but she might also be capable of finding beauty in this world of suffering. It seems telling that in this moment she raises herself up and knots (“schürzte”) her dress so that she can run – not away, but directly to her husband.

The description that then follows is from the perspective of the Nurse, who has been studying the struggling, flickering shadows and in the meantime lost sight of the Empress. She then sees that:

\[
Zu\text{ des Färbers Füßen lag eine weibliche Gestalt hingestreckt an der Erde, sie hatte das Gesicht an den Boden gedrückt, mit unsäglicher Demut reckte sie den Arm aus, ohne ihr Gesicht zu heben, bis sie mit der Hand die Füße des Färbers erreichte, und umfaßte sie. Der Färber schien sie nicht zu beachten. [...] Jetzt schob sich die Liegende auf den Händen näher heran und ihr Kinn drückte sich auf die Füße des}
\]

\[354\] The fish, we read a few lines later, do not quite make it into the fire. It is the Nurse who finally makes sure that they are in and burn.
The description is deliberately ambiguous. The woman lying at Barak’s feet, it would seem, is the Dyer’s Wife, who has just run in the direction of her husband. Her humble prostration suggests an appeal for forgiveness, which, in the light of her wavering actions, is certainly plausible. Barak’s reaction – he “schien sie nicht zu beachten” – repeats once more the gestural theme of not noticing. The unheard word that the prostrated woman mutters, likewise, repeats the motif of the unspoken word of the Dyer (he “wollte noch etwas sagen, aber es kam ihm nicht über die Lippen,” 166) and the unuttered question of the Emperor (“ihm war, als schwebte sie schon auf seinen Lippen, aber er vergaß sie,” 149). To the Nurse’s amazement, a “Lebendes” (contrasting with the figure outstretched “wie tot”) appears near her, stretches forth both her hands, and reveals herself to be the Dyer’s Wife. The Nurse is shocked, as she realises further “daß die Liegende die Kaiserin war” (174). This moment of confusion is calculated: it is the moment when the Empress and the Dyer’s Wife share a sense of ethical responsibility and it is a moment of profound equality. The Dyer’s Wife appropriately takes on a beauty more typical of that of the Empress: “eine wunderbare und dabei unschuldige Schönheit […]; die ungeheure Angst verzerrte sie nicht, sondern verklärte sie” (174). Like the Empress as gazelle, the Dyer’s Wife possesses a beauty that reflects both fear and innocence, but it is also one of intense bravery, for she stretches both hands out towards her husband (like the Empress has done in her prostration), as if to welcome death. Indeed, she is described as having a “todbereite[s] Gesicht,” recalling that laudatory moment in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten when ancient warriors355 are admired for their “Todesfestigkeit” (162). This moment is also typical of what Bohrer refers to as the “Plötzlichkeit” of the Augenblick. The weather – a phenomenon that, as we saw with Augenblicke in Griechenland fascinated and deeply affected Hofmannsthal – plays an equally important role in establishing the atmospheric conditions for the moment of transfiguration. I quote the following passage at length to show how Hofmannsthal must draw out the moment to give it literary and narrative force:

[d]ie Fackel lohte stärker auf, und das junge todbreite Gesicht vor ihm [Barak] leuchtete ihm entgegen, so plötzlich und so nahe, das er zurückfuhr. Etwas ging in

355 Self-sacrifice is, it should be noted, by no means restricted to the female sex. Sigismund in Der Turm is one of the most striking examples of this kind of courage.
seinem Gesicht vor, das niemand sehen konnte; es war, als würde innerlich eine
Binde von seinen Augen gerissen, seine und seines Weibes Blicke trafen sich für
die Dauer eines Blitizes und verschlangen sich ineinander, wie sie sich nie
verschlungen hatte. Er sah, was alle Umarmungen seiner ehelichen Nächte, deren
er siebenhundert mit seiner Frau verbracht hatte, ihm nicht gezeigt hatten; denn sie
waren dumpf gewesen und ohne Aug. Er sah das Weib und die Jungfrau in einem,
die mit Händen nicht zu greifen war und in allen Umschlingungen unberührt blieb,
und die Herrlichkeit und Unbegreiflichkeit des Anblicks schlug gegen seine Brust;
er zog die Luft ein durch die Nüstern seiner breiten Nase wie ein Tier, das vor
Schrecken stutzte, und seine riesigen erhobenen Fäuste zitterten. Das
undurchdringliche Geheimnis des Anblicks reinigte ihn wie ein Blitz von der
Schwere seines Blutes; in der Größe seines gewaltigen Leibes glich er einem Kinde,
dem das Weinen nahe ist. (174)

This description is like film slowed down so that we can linger on each frame individually – indeed,
we are told about even that which no one sees: the change in his face resulting from his vision.
The torch flickers; the face of the Empress lights up; he sees in this instant, in this literally intended
Augenblick, what he has never seen before: the gaze of his wife; the impotence of his earlier
unwanted embraces; and in this he sees the wholly other otherness of his wife’s being, the abyss
of her difference and the span of her ages: she is a young and innocent girl and a mature woman
in one. At this sight – much as in the aesthetic encounter – he is rendered powerless as his fists
begin to shake. He wavers, just as his wife had earlier done. And in this instant a weight is lifted,
he is as if cleansed, and, like a child, innocent and scared. He thus shares with his wife the beauty
of that which is “unschuldig,” but this beauty only comes as a result of having seen the abyss of
the other person.356

aufgegangen für das Ungreifbare, für jenes in ihr, das er nicht zu nehmen vermochte, auch wenn sie es hergeben
wollte. Er sieht zum erstemal in einem Seienden nicht das Vorhandene und Zuhandene, sondern das ungreifbare
Sein, und die ‘Herrlichkeit und Unbegreiflichkeit des Anblicks’ erschüttert ihn zutiefst, daß er einem Kind gleicht,
dem das Weinen nahe ist’ […] So wie er in ihr die Jungfrau und das Weib in einem sieht, sieht sie in ihm den Mann
und das Kind, Macht und Ohnmacht in einem” (277).
It is helpful to compare this passage with one from the *Ansprache*. In both passages, the image of a nocturnal landscape suddenly lit up by a flash of lightning is used to describe a revelatory moment. In the *Ansprache*, this takes place at just the right moment before a work of art, and it is to the work of art that the moment belongs (“sie kennen ein jedes seinen Augenblick, sich auf uns zu werfen”, 8); in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, before one’s own personal moment of maturation and recognition of the unreachable other. The *Ansprache* reads:

[... und einen Augenblick wird dies tausendfach Geknüpfte aufleuchten und die erstarrte Lebendigkeit, die Form gewordene Willkür der zusammentretenden Farben und Schattirungen erkennen lassen, wie eine nächtliche Landschaft unter einem grossen Blitz die Verknüpfung der Strassen und das Zusammentreten der Hügel für einen Augenblick erkennen und dann wieder ins Dunkel zusammensinken lässt. *(SW XXXII RA2 7-8)*]  

The moment in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* thus draws on both the aesthetic encounter and the ethical moment when one recognises “das ganz Andere” (Bohrer) as other. We might equally refer to the aesthetic encounter in *Augenblicke in Griechenland* when the traveller concludes: “Sie sind da und sind unerreichlich. So bin auch ich. Dadurch kommunizieren wir” (196); or to *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, when the writer of the letters contemplates: “dies heilige Genießen meiner selbst und zugleich der Welt, die sich mir auftat, als wäre die Brust ihr aufgegangen, warum war dies Doppelte, dies Verschlungene, dies Außen und Innen, dies ineinanderschlagende Du an mein Schaun geknüpft?” (173). All of these moments, we might say, are the triumph over that flight from frightening beauty which is narrated in *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht*. In refraining, Barak is acknowledging the power of the moment of encounter before the embrace. In the short text *Die Wege und die Begegnungen*, Hofmannsthal imagines the erotic as tension, but also as an almost humble respect for distance, not free from that externally-directed yearning *eros* as such, but free nonetheless from the desire for possession, and exhibiting something of the innocence of animals:

Mich dünkt, es ist nicht die Umarmung, sondern die Begegnung die eigentliche entscheidende erotische Pantomime. Es ist in keinem Augenblick das Sinnliche so seelenhaft, das Seelenhafte so sinnlich, als in der Begegnung. […] Hier ist ein Zueinandertrachten noch ohne Begierde, eine naive Beimischung von Zutraulichkeit und Scheu. Hier ist das Rehhafte, das Vogelhafte, das
The encounter is, furthermore, figured as a greeting: that is, as an openness and invitation to communication. But communication must inevitably reconcile the contradictory elements of the other person, which is precisely what the Dyer’s Wife does: “sie […] öffnete sich ganz, diese Zweiheit in sich zu vereinen” (175). This communication is an idealised moment: her unkissed kisses are described as “perlend,” like tears might be, and she gives herself in “Umarmung ohne Umschlingungen und einem Kusse, indem die Lippen sich weder berührten noch trennten” (175). Recalling the strange paradoxes of the unborn children, this encounter is one that defies logic and exists as that unsubstantial rainbow that spans the “unaufhaltsamen Sturz des Daseins.”

It is also at this dramatic highpoint – one of many peaks in this narrative’s criss-crossing mountain range – that the shadow frees itself from the Dyer’s Wife and flees to the water, to where Keikobad’s Messenger appears. The shadow and Messenger fly past the Nurse in a curve (much like the flight path of the red falcon), utterly ignoring her presence. Only the Nurse and the Empress are left behind now at the end of this chapter, but the Empress is now also transfigured: “Unerträglich war es der Amme, das Gesicht zu sehen, das nun völlig dem Gesicht einer irdischen Frau glich” (176). In the moment the shadow has been freed from its rightful owner, the Empress has become “schuldig,” reflected now in her mortal’s face. Though the Nurse does not know the magic of the “Begegnungen,” she knows, like Mephisto, “die Wege”: “Die Amme wußte wohl, welchen Weg sie nun zu nehmen hatte” (176).

The opening section of chapter seven details the disappearance of the Nurse from the story. In effect, her parental role has been made redundant. This is shown partly in her increasing inability to comprehend the situation – we might say she exhibits a failure of imagination – as well as a shift in perspective. At the beginning of the chapter, she is at the centre and we see the world along with her; but she is pushed increasingly to the outside, and we are offered other perspectives, till finally she loses all agency as well as her way and poignantly disappears from the dramatic action.

357 Das Gespräch über Gedichte portrays the encounter this way: “Wie der wesenlose Regenbogen spannt sich unsere Seele über den unaufhaltsamen Sturz des Daseins. […] Genug, etwas kehrt wieder. Und etwas begegnet sich in uns mit anderem. Wir sind nicht mehr als ein Taubenschlag” (76).
of the story. It is worth considering her disappearance before we move on, because it serves as a precursor to the Empress’s story of development, exhibiting regression and ending in monological stillness.

The chapter opens with the Nurse and the Empress having landed on a river in the “Mondberge,” sailing along on a little boat that the Nurse had transformed from her overcoat. The Nurse has been the architect of their escape from the world of mortals back to the realm of Keikobad, and the Empress lies at her feet asleep, like Dante at the crossing of thresholds. This recalls the scene from the first book, in which the Nurse was awake well before the Empress, prepared to greet her with the day’s news and to hear of her nightmares. Even the Messengers are present – though they seem not to be interested in the two women gliding down the river: “keiner kümmerte sich um den Kahn und die Ankömmlinge” (177). But slowly things start to slip out of her grasp, at first rather innocently, as though obeying her will: her coat, “ohne ihr Zutun hatte […] sich sogleich in einen Kahn verwandelt” (178). At the same time, though she thinks all has worked out well, she cannot help but remember “den letzten Blick […], den ihr die Kaiserin gegeben hatte […]. Der Blick war ihr gräßlich in seiner Mischung von verzweifelter Angst und düsterem Vorwurf, dessen Sinn sie nicht begreifen konnte” (178). This is the first of many points which the Nurse cannot comprehend – and this increasing failure to comprehend, in conjunction with the increasing loss of control, foreshadows her imminent death. She is, quite suddenly, no longer in control of the boat. She cannot steer it, just as she cannot hold sway over the child she has long since looked after and cared for: “da fühlte sie, daß der Kahn seine Richtung änderte, so als würde er von dem einen Ufer her an einem Tau gezogen” (178). One of the former Messengers has pulled the boat to shore, at which point the Empress wakes up and “war leicht wie ein Vogel auf die feste Erde hinübergestiegen” (178). The sureness with which she steps out of the boat and onto shore recalls the feeling of the traveller in Augenblicke in Griechenland after viewing the statues: “mit einem Gelandetsein,” and unlike the Zurückgekehrter who feels only the unstable earth beneath his feet upon his return home, the Empress recognises the world of her childhood, but is initially full of anger at the Nurse as she realises she has been brought away from the people whom she has harmed. But again the Nurse is confounded: “Nichts von dem, was die Kaiserin bewegte, konnte sie begreifen,” and later “Nie hätte sie fassen können, daß diese, die unnahbar über ihr stand und vor Zorn bebte wie eine in weißen Rauch gehüllte Flamme, auf dunkler feuchter Erde vor den Füßen eines Menschen gelegen hatte” (179). The Nurse cannot reconcile the Empress’s great
power ("der Zorn ihrer Herrin hatte mehr Kraft über sie als die Besorgnis vor dem Boten," 179) with her having prostrated herself before such horrible creatures as human beings. And a fourth time the Nurse is baffled, as the Fisher-Messenger manages to trip her back into the boat and steer her away from the Empress. Upon leaving the boat, he ties a knot "den zu lösen ihr unmöglich war; sie begriff nicht, wie er dies so blitzschnell unterm Aussteigen vollbracht hatte" (180). Her confusion is thus in this last instance linked explicitly with the motif of the knot: the knotted "Tüchlein"; the "Knäuel" of people in the city; the perfect knot of the carpet; the crisscrossing mountain peaks; the knotted skirt of the Dyer’s Wife; the knot of the heart; the knot of the rope tethering the boat to an old willow stump. She can untie none of these; this failure results in her demise.

In effort to return to the Empress, the Nurse takes a shortcut but then comes across the Fisher’s hut and decides to look in through the window. At this point, as if already forshadowing the redundancy of her role, the narration offers for its readers an alternative perspective to that of the Nurse: namely, that of the Fisher’s Wife, whose gaze is one of supreme – in fact, supernatural – attention (for she sees through walls). She can interpret the slightest of gestures, and can read from faintly fluttering lips the thoughts and fears of her patient, the Dyer’s Wife. Moreover, unlike the Nurse, she is happy to have human company: “Abgeschlossen von den Menschen, wie sie lebte, war sie voll Freude, daß man die junge Frau ihrer Obhut anvertraut hatte” (181). The Nurse, by contrast, was full only of dread, disgust, and disdain. The Fisher’s Wife’s interest in the fate of the young woman is coupled with an assessment of the woman’s personality that is not entirely different to that offered by the Nurse in the second chapter, but it is more charitable, and indeed more complimentary: “Dabei ist sie eine Kühne und Ungebändigte, das sehe ich an ihren Händen, und eine Träumerin, und ihr Herz ist rein, aber der Spielball ihrer Begierden und ihrer Träume” (181). “Kühnheit,” as we have seen in previous chapters, is for Hofmannsthal associated with the poet; but the unbridled nature suggests a lack of humility, which is what makes the act of giving form possible. The focus on the hands is also telling: hands are used to shape and form material, and also to tie and loosen knots. The Fisher’s Wife “betrachtete mit der größten Aufmerksamkeit die Hände der Schlafenden, die sich ineinanderrangen und voneinander lösten” (180). This motion of the hands again calls up the image of the knot and its loosening. That she is a dreamer commends her to the poets, but her “untamed spirit” again makes her heart subject to whims, desires, and dreams, rather than their portrayer.
The Fisher’s Wife notices something else: the Fisher has brought in a large box, which she sees contains within it a sword and a red carpet. The work of art has been reworked into this blood-drenched carpet. It is the parodic counterimage of the carpet that quickens life. Here, the work of art is allied with the executioner. But the twists do not end here, for the judge is the water of life — “Das goldene Wasser!” (182). And though it speaks no judgement, “das goldene Wasser verwandelt das Unsichtbare” (182). Reversing the Midas theme and drawing again upon the notion of baptism, purification, and Lethe-like oblivion, it is the living, golden water which has the capacity to transform people, trumping the venal desire of people who wish to transform things into gold. This weird alchemy is the execution of the ultimate artistic trick: the flowing matter transforms the person.

This is the sign for the Nurse to leave the scene: she flees the house, just as the Fisher’s Wife arises to see who the eavesdropper might be. We return briefly to the Nurse’s perspective, but only at a distance as it were. There is no free indirect speech here; from the narrative third person we witness how her eyes are eventually shut. She wanders along the mountainside a while till she spots one of the Messengers showing “wie ein Führer dem Gaste, ehrerbietig die sicheren Steinplatten” to the man he is leading: Barak. Like the Fisher’s Wife, the Messenger shows a respect to this mortal creature which the Nurse cannot fathom. And again “der Name des goldenen Wassers [schlug abermals] an ihr Ohr” (183). The word is to her a source of anxiety and fear, and to name it is to evoke its power as well. Like the Dyer’s Wife who hears her mother’s voice – “sie ist an meinem Ohr” (168-69) – the Nurse’s source of anxiety is, at least in part, auditory. But in her anxious retreat and rejection of the word, she loses her way. The world becomes silent:

Sie rief gellend den Namen ihres Kindes, nichts antwortete, nicht einmal ein Widerhall. Nur ein Nachtvogel kam auf weichen Flügeln zwischen dem Gestein hervor, stieß gegen ihren Leib und taumelte gegen die Erde. Da warf auch sie sich zu Boden und drückte das Gesicht gegen den harten Stein. (183)

---

358 See Walter Pater’s “Conclusion” in The Renaissance: “Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity, disinterested or otherwise, which come naturally to many of us. Only be sure it is passion — that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake, has most. For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments’ sake” (“Conclusion” 153).
Hofmannsthal’s allusive prose here allows the Nurse to disappear from the narrative in a poignantly sad manner; it is sad because, for all her action in the story, she now exits the scene unheard. Once described as a “Doppelzüngige” (116), she now has no one to hear her, and she cannot even hear the echo of her self in response. The nightbird that tumbles to the ground after flying into the Nurse seems to reinforce how invisible she has become, serving only as a figure of retardation of movement. And yet this strange image seems to be the magic touch that kills her, or more precisely, allows her to give up, fall unseen, and press her face— the site of ethical resistance— into the hard, inanimate stone. The Nurse, with whom the tale began, has returned home. Çakmur proposes that the Nurse is “zur Bedeutungslosigkeit verdammt” (121). This is indeed one valid interpretation, for the Nurse veritably disappears in the last ‘act’ of the story, and no one questions her disappearance. On the other hand, we might argue precisely the opposite: if she is a kind of Mephistopheles, then she is also perhaps a spirit “die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft.” Her role is then not meaningless, so much as ironically meaningful in its failure. She is the retarding force that must be overcome. And yet she has a story all her own, and a sad, because solitary, demise.

Echoes and Colours

With the disappearance of the Nurse, the Empress is, for the first time, also alone. But she is alone with her memory, for the scene—the woods, the rock face—is the same as when she first learnt from her father that secret of metamorphosis. As the Dyer’s Wife had earlier called to her mother, so now the Empress calls to her father, echoing aspects of the chilling aria in Elektra, “Allein, weh ganz allein.” Both women are alone and calling to their absent fathers. In Elektra’s case, her father Agamemnon is dead, but his memory and unavenged spirit wield power over the living Elektra. The first few lines of the Aria, except for the name “Agamemnon,” might equally have been sung or cried by the Empress:

Allein! Weh, ganz allein. Der Vater fort,
hinabgescheucht in seine kalten Klüfte.
Agamemnon! Agamemnon!
Wo bist du, Vater? Hast du nicht die Kraft,
dein Angesicht herauf zu mir zu schleppen?
The Empress too is “ganz allein,” her father absent, perhaps indeed “hinabgescheucht in seinen kalten Klüfte” of this very landscape. Elektra cries out “Wo bist du, Vater?” while the Empress, in almost exact quotation, “rief [...] sehnllich, Vater, wo bist du? Das Wort verhallte” (183). The echoing of the word is a variation of Elektra’s repeated call: “Agamemnon! Agamemnon!” It also establishes a stark contrast with the Nurse’s cry from a paragraph earlier: “Sie [the Nurse] rief gellend den Namen ihres Kindes, nichts antwortete, nicht einmal in Widerhall” (183). Furthermore, as it was for Elektra, so this is “die Stunde” for the Empress. The decisive hour – the moment of Kairos – is upon her. Yet for every parallel move, there is a divergence. Unlike Elektra, who wishes to sacrifice others to the memory of her father, the Empress will sacrifice herself and her own happiness for the sake of others. It is also telling that, whereas Agamemnon is an absent ghost for Elektra, Keikobad is more an insubstantial presence for the Empress: “In seiner Unnahbarkeit fühlte sie ihn, auf ihrer Stirne leuchtete ein Abglanz von ihm” (184). This indirect presence – the shining light upon her forehead – is a precursor to the colour to come.

The suddenness of vibrant colour that overcame the Zurückgekehrter of the 1907/08 text is repeated now over a decade later, but with a twist. It is first of all, the sound of water that startles the Empress, for in this story, sound, colour, stone, and water all have interrelated parts to play. This sound of the water brings on the initial “Schauer,” at which point she turns around, as if turning from the past generation – that of her father – to the future generation, to see a tall boy standing before her – one of the unborn sons of Barak and his wife. Like the unborn children in the underworld seen by the Emperor, this child too displays an impossibly clarified work of art, though this time it is upon his own body:

> er trug ein Gewand von wunderbar blauer Farbe, nicht so, als hätte man ein weißes Gewebe in die Küpe gelegt, darin sich die Stärke des Indigo und des Waid vermischten, sondern so, als wäre die Bläue des Meeresgrundes selbst hervorgerissen und um seinen Leib gelegt worden. (184)

As with Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten, so here the colour itself – not the thing that has a colour – is the centre of focus. But behind this too are the words of the Dyer, who, in his state of madness, explained to his imagined unborn children how colour was lifted out (herausgenommen) from the
plumage of birds, from flowers, and from worms (170). What is more, these colours have the capacity to change; they are iridescent, perhaps suggesting something of the visual dance of colour one sees in a bird’s feathers, or in the washing of fabrics. The colour changes from the blues of the ocean floor to a nocturnal “Schwarzblau, bevor die ersten Strahlen der Sonne den Himmel erhellen” (184). Even the simile is telling: in the previous section the Dyer’s Wife described dirty children as “schön wie die aufgehende Sonne” (168); here we have the moment just before sunrise, just before birth, figured in the colours. Then another child appears, this time behind the trees, and with equally aesthetically magical features: “von den zierlichen wie aus Wachs geformten Füßen bis zu dem dunklen wie Kupfer schimmernden Haar glich es der Färberin” (184), and she glides “auf dem grünen Grund heran wie auf Glas, mit geschlossenen Füßen, und keine Art sich zu bewegen hätte besser zu der Zartheit seiner Glieder und zu den Farben, in denen es glänzte, passen können” (184). Like a wax figure, she is lovely, but not alive. Her feet are still bound. This is the plastic translation of the dark blue colour just before sunrise. These children are at the threshold of existence, but do not yet walk in the sun.

As more children arrive, the Empress asks: “Ihr bringt mir eine Botschaft?” The answers and the aesthetic display of colours are on equal footing here. In “answer” to the Empress’s question, the narrative’s indulgence in colour continues:

Tief und dunkel glühte sein Gewand auf aus dem Violetten ins Rote. Die Farbe schien aus der Ewigkeit her zu ihm zu kommen, so auch die Antworten, die langsam in ihm aufstiegen und zögernd den Rand seiner Lippen erreichten. – Wir bestellen nichts, wir verkünden nichts. Daß wir uns zeigen, Frau, ist alles, was uns gewährt ist. (185)

If colours could speak, this would perhaps be their answer. They can only show themselves. And even this is qualified, for when the Empress asks where one of the children has disappeared to, the

---

359 In a later description, the allusion is even more direct: “ein Kleid in herrlichen Farben, als wären sie von den Brustfedern eines Paradiesvogels genommen” (186). This idea of taking colours from nature was also hinted at in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten. See Carlpeter Braegger (103) and the discussion on pages 120-21 of Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

360 Cf. the description of one of the other unborn children before the Emperor: “als ob sie mit geschlossenen Füßen auf ihn zugehe” (157).
response she receives is simply that she is: “Da und nicht da, Frau, wie es dir belieben wird! […]”
und sein Gewand war wie Blut, das sich in Gold verwandelte; alle Bäume empfingen von ihm die
Bestätigung ihres Lebens, wie vom ersten Glanz der aufgehenden Sonne” (185). The words
exchanged between the Empress and the children are few, but focussed. Yet the colours seem by
far to speak more than the words: the image of the sunrise is once more invoked; it is the aesthetic
representation of an existential possibility, indeed, it is an existential possibility; and the image of
blood turning into gold, moreover, acts as a mirror image of the “goldenes Wasser” or “das Wasser
des Lebens” – which transforms spilt blood into life-affirming sunlight.

When we look at Elektra, once again, the contrast is clear: Elektra speaks of blood flowing everywhere, in masses
immeasurable, which the sun draws behind it:

[…] Von den Sternen
stürzt alle Zeit herab, so wird das Blut
aus hundert Kehlen stürzen auf dein Grab!
So wie aus umgeworfenen Krügen wird’s
aus den gebundenen Mördern fließen,
und in einem Schwall, in einem
geschwollnen Bach wird ihres Lebens Leben
aus ihnen stürzen […]

[…] wenn alles dies vollbracht und Purpur-
gezelte aufgerichtet sind, vom Dunst
des Blutes, den die Sonne nach sich zieht,
dann tanzen wir, dein Blut, rings um dein Grab […]!

(SW VII Dramen 5 117-18)

To this, Die Frau ohne Schatten offers a counterimage: blood red turns into life-giving gold water.
The “Bestätigung des Lebens” (185) is reminiscent of the existential guarantee afforded by the
walnut tree and later the colours in the paintings of Van Gogh in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten.
But as if to reinforce the ephemerality of such epiphanic moments, the gestures and ephemeral
colours change once more, sinking “aus dem Rot in das Violett, gleich einer Wolke am dunklen
Abendhimmel,” as one of the boys says to the Empress, reminding her of the importance of the
hour at hand (à la Elektra): “Nicht dir werden sie vorgeführt werden, Frau, sondern du wirst
vorgeführt werden, und dies ist die Stunde” (185). The colours thus act as a Vorspiel auf dem
Theater. The decisive encounter between the “Frau” and her unborn children is being prepared for by the play of colours: “Dunkel war sein Gewand, wie der nächtliche Himmel ohne Sterne” (185). The Kaiserin’s thoughts, likewise, are dark: “Ich hab mich vergangen […]. Sie senkte die Augen und richtete sie gleich wieder auf ihn” (185). These words and the gesture of humility are so effective that “er schien die Worte zu liebkosen” – an image of embrace without holding on that recalls the idealised embrace of Barak and his wife. And his response is to the point: “Das muß jeder sagen, der einen Fuß vor den andern setzt. Darum gehen wir mit geschlossenen Füßen” (186). The link between mobility and moral culpability recalls Kant’s “Wahlspruch der Aufklärung”:

Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Selbstverschuldet ist diese Unmündigkeit, wenn die Ursache derselben nicht am Mangel des Verstandes, sondern der Entschließung und des Muthes liegt, sich seiner ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Sapere aude! Habe Muth, dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen! ist also der Wahlspruch der Aufklärung. (Was ist Aufklärung 20)

The twist is in the focus: the Empress’s “Schuld” affects not only herself, but – and this is the emphasis – others as well. This is partly aesthetic: the simple dismissal of the ugly world below is a kind of “Unmündigkeit.” But it is also social: the lower, poverty-stricken realms are not to be treated as mere tools for the achievement of some goal. The Empress has realised this – and it is why she can stand before this aesthetic and ethical otherness, one of the unborn sons of the people whose lives she wishes not to destroy, and “ihre Ehrfurcht vor ihm, der so mit ihr sprach, war nicht geringer als die seine vor ihr” (186). I would suggest this “Ehrfurcht” is learned – perhaps from Barak, whose “Ehrfurcht” in labour the Empress had earlier so admired. But this scene of reciprocal gazes filled with “Ehrfurcht” further acts as a contrast to the Emperor’s interaction with his own unborn children. Two more children enter the picture with their equally “unbeschreiblich” colours, and explain to the Empress the distinction between her actions and those of their mother. The difference is a matter of time, and of seizing the decisive moment of opportunity. The actions of their mother happen in the passage of time as Chronos, and are revocable, but for the Empress, another law is at work: “Im Augenblick ist alles, der Rat und die Tat!” (186).
This moment heralds the onset of a strange collapse of time, as had happened earlier in the Emperor’s encounter with his unborn children. In both encounters, there is a moment of paradoxically still motion, or rather, a stillness that nevertheless suggests motion:

sie standen lächelnd da und glichen in der Bunheit ihrer zauberischen Gewänder und im Glanz ihrer Augen, die sie wechselnd senkten und aufschlugen, einer blühenden Hecke in der dunkeläugige Vögel nisten, und sie wiegten sich in einer Art von stillem Tanz vor der Kaiserin hin und her wie eine Hecke im Abendwind.

(187)

This second pageant-like display has more the character of a tableau vivant that is slowly dissolving as the children pull apart from each other and disappear, highlighting with the aid of an aesthetic display the insubstantial nature of their being. But the wind itself threatens to disperse them into nothingness, for it announces, breath-like, both life and mortality: “Ein Wind wie ein langgezogener Atem kam jetzt aus dem Berg hervor und das Laub fing an, heftig zu zittern. Die laue Luft zwischen den Bäumen und dem Fluß veränderte sich in feuchter Kühle wie in einem Grabgewölbe” (187). Just as with the earlier storm, changes in atmospheric pressure here portend the advent of the decisive moment, so here in this space as well. To the unborn children, this is a moment of fear: with life comes death, and, as if suddenly swept up by time, the children begin to age and show the signs of death:


But this strange death is ambiguous, for one wonders: what exactly would have died? They disappear like the colourful mist rainbows, into nothingness; yet they have not experienced life. This depiction of the vision of the children owes much to Shakespeare’s (staged) commentary on theatre:

And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp’d tow’rs, the gorgeous palaces,

---

The solemn temples, the great globe itself, 
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve, 
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded, 
Leave not a rack behind. (*The Tempest* 4.1.151-56)

Hofmannsthal worked Prospero’s soliloquy into his own poem “Wir sind aus solchem Zeug, wie das zu Träumen,” in which he likens dreams to laughing children (*SW I Gedichte I* 48). In the final terza rima and the last line (set-off from the rest of the poem), we read what might well be a poetic synopsis of *Die Frau ohne Schatten*:

Das Innerste ist offen ihrem Weben 
Wie Geisterhände in versperrtem Raum 
Sind sie in uns und haben immer Leben.

Und drei sind Eins: ein Mensch, ein Ding, ein Traum. (10-14)

If we read *Die Frau ohne Schatten* with reference to these images of a dream world dissolving away, but also being woven and always present within (like the carpet woven by the unborn children), the trinitarian moment of transubstantiation is one that is equally subject to the laws of evanescence. The fabric, the weave, the gorgeous blue palace, the shimmering colours, the pageant put on by the unborn children: all are a dream, but also a thing, and also, somehow, a person. This leap of logic is possible only in art. It is also why the unborn children speak in riddles. If we were to give an answer to the question, “what would have died?” the answer might well be: *Ein Mensch, ein Ding, ein Traum*. The Empress has understood this ethical connection with others, and she has understood it through the craft of art. Even the verb used suggests something of this: “sie fühlte sich an jene geschmiedet, in deren Dasein sie ungerufen hineingetreten war” (187, my emphasis). Having tread into their lives, one foot before the other, she has transgressed; but this transgression is also what allows her to take another, greater transgression, or rather, a Kierkegaardian leap: that of self-sacrifice.
Hofmannsthal’s vision of the poet as an “umgekehrter Midas” is elliptically elaborated and qualified in the second transformation scene of *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. The Empress, who has till now exhibited a number of the characteristics associated with the artist/poet, will perform the ultimate poetic rite of humility and self-sacrifice. The parallel stories of ethics and aesthetics cross in a kind of non-Euclidean narrative geometry, forming a Gordian knot (tied by Midas, according to mythology) such that the one is seen most clearly only through the lens of the other. In this section of the final chapter of the story, there is a rebirth not only of soul, but also of senses: the ethical rebirth occurs in tandem with an aesthetic rebirth, and both are brought about by a recognition of and response to human frailty and human strength. This recognition takes place, as it did in *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* and even more explicitly in *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, at the moment of seeing the irreducible difference of others. The curious phrase from *Die Briefe* – “dies ineinanderschlagende Du” – is imagined here as a new and clarified kind of embrace and union, like the embrace of the Dyer Pair. As noted earlier, Hofmannsthal’s dreamer in *Die Wege und die Begegnungen* esteems the encounter above the embrace, noting that “Ein Gruß ist etwas Grenzenloses.” He follows with an invocation of Dante’s *Vita Nuova* and the power of sound emanating from that which is different from the self:


We will see in this chapter a similar “Schreien des Fremden nach der Fremden,” but it will be answered by an embrace that is informed by a respect for unreachable otherness.

The “new life” is a new life *ethically*, but it is also new *aesthetically*, as is made clear when the Empress sees the unborn children of the couple whose life she has tainted. Indeed, even after they have gone and the Messenger has appeared, her senses are dazzled: “Noch war ihr der Sinn benommen, sie sah ihn ohne ihn zu sehen” (188). The strangely changing colours of the children’s garments as well as their disappearance before her eyes have left her sense of sight bewildered; it
seems appropriate, even alleviating, that she should then be led into a dark cave, where focus might be restored. But in the dark cave the senses are again activated to such a degree that her whole journey seems to have been an aesthetic one: the high room is like a temple, lit by a single torch which emits “einen wunderbaren Duft”; but it is a bath as well, “aber schöner und förstlicher als selbst die schönste der Badekammern in ihrem eigenen Palast,” and, in the presence of such beauty, she loses her self momentarily, “in der Betrachtung des wunderbaren Beckens, an dessen Rand sie stand” (188). Though mentioned almost incidentally, the phrase recalls Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten: “das alles sah ich so, daß ich das Gefühl meiner selbst an diese Bilder verlor, und mächtig wieder zurückbekam, und wieder verlor!” (169) as well as Augenblicke in Griechenland: “Sein Gesicht blickte mich an, wie früher jene Gesichter mich angeblickt hatten; ich verlor mich fast an sein Gesicht, und wie um mich zu retten vor seiner Umklammerung, sagte ich mir: ‘Wer ist dieser? Ein fremder Mensch!’” (190), and even the Ansprache notes: ‘Kunstfreund’ ein gefährliches Wort, […] Hier scheinen wir etwa in Gefahr, uns selber zu verlieren: großer Irrthum! Hier werden wir erst geweckt, uns selber zu besitzen: denn wir schaffen ja den unsterblichen Inhalt dieser Gebilde, indem wir sie lebendig nachfühlen” (SW XXXIII RA 2 255). The Empress seems in danger of losing herself – on both ethical and aesthetic grounds, for the anxiety of the decision she will soon have to make is already making itself felt aesthetically.

As with the storm earlier, the atmosphere begins to ring – literally – with tension. The tension is equally erotic, however: she feels the presence of her “Geliebter” and releases the most iconic sound of desire: “Ach! kam über ihre Lippen, schamhaft und sehnsüchtig zugleich, und der klanggewordene Hauch aus ihrem eigenen Mund machte, daß sie erglühte von oben bis unten” (188). Hofmannsthal’s paraphrasis is important: her “Ach” is a breath – a sign of life – become sound, “Klang” (recalling the “Form gewordene Willkür” from the Ansprache, 7-8). This sound even has something of a liturgical function, like bells at elevation. Indeed, something does rise: the water. And the water too makes a sound as it falls “mit einem dunklen Laut wie das Gurren von Tauben” (189), and as the water rises further, “die Säule gab, wie das Licht der Fackel sie berührte, einen schwellenden Klang, der ihr vor Süßigkeit fast das Herz spaltete” (189). In the much more foreshortened opera version, at this moment (“Weh mir! Erfüllt die Flucht!”) the tolling of “Chinesische Gongs” resounds from out of the long, chthonic bass notes and the horns, all

---

362 See the third scene of Die Frau ohne Schatten Studien-Partitur/Study Score (571), in volume 9 of the Complete Stage Works of Richard Strauss.
in pianissimo, but with their crescendo they introduce the revelation of the curse and the Empress’s wilful renunciation. This brief moment in the opera is one of the visual and aural highpoints as the Empress moves from singing, to wailing, and then finally to speaking her will sans musical accompaniment. This dramatic highpoint finds its prose translation in the description of the auditory landscape, which serves not as a background but as an agent: the sound practically cleaves her heart in twain. The aesthetic dimension is not only for the reader’s pleasure, it functions in the narrative itself as an agent.

The reverberations of climactic tension occur at the moment the Emperor is made visible, is born out of a “goldener Nebel” that recalls that definition of moments as “rinnender Goldstaub” (129). This moment is a confrontation with the Empress, caught between life and death: “er schien lastend wie ein mitten in den Teich gebautes Grabmal aus Erz” (189). Bereft of his protective weapons and leg braces, the statue has been rendered entirely vulnerable – “nur den leichten Jagdharnisch trug sie noch, wie zum Schmuck”; everything else was “völlig wie Marmor” (189). Both metallic and stone materials are invoked here, perhaps to situate the Emperor’s transformation in relation to the myths of Midas and Pygmalion. But there is something else at work: the statue is both dark and light, black and white, but devoid of colour. Robbed of protection, life, and colour, he stands there “unsäglich schön […] aber unsäglich fremd” (189). The beauty of art has triumphed, but it is a typically pale, lifeless beauty.

The Empress’s response is an inarticulate cry (in the opera, the singer screams), accompanied by a gesture that draws her into the familiar mythologies of metamorphosis: “sie warf sich hinein in das goldene leise wogende Becken; wie ein Schwan mit gehobenen Flügeln rauschte sie auf den Geliebten zu” (189). Like many mythological swan maidens, she is married to a mortal man and has lost her ability to metamorphose; but in distinction to such myths, the Empress’s swan transformation is both reversed (she transforms into a swan, rather than into a human) and purely one of simile: “wie ein Schwan […].” The Empress’s former metamorphic abilities have themselves been transformed into metaphoric power; but then this is the stuff of poetry.

The statue’s effect on her is above all troubling, because it shows her something of that which is most elusive to the understanding: death. In Augenblicke in Griechenland the Korai have a similar effect: they are both beautiful and foreign, displaying “ein unsägliches Lächeln” (195), which is echoed in the Emperor’s being “unsäglich schön […] aber unsäglich fremd.” Just the like the
ancient Greek statues, there is something utterly inaccessible ("wie eine aufgetane Kluft, aber ins Unendliche: je näher, je ferner," 189) in the petrified Emperor that shocks and terrifies the Empress. But her terror is mixed with the knowledge that this stone object is also her husband, and that she has the power to free him and herself. In her the aesthetic is mixed not just analogically with the ethical, but take form in the moral decision she faces. As their gazes meet, she sees in his eyes a fear that makes his visage "gräßlich," a description used elsewhere in the text to describe a number of instances: 1) her early dreams of people; 2) the many mouths of real people she encounters in the crowded streets of the city; 3) her own face full of fear and disquiet; 4) and the vanishing of the unborn children into thin air. All of these "gräßlich" situations are associated with powerlessness. As if to highlight the apparent helplessness of the situation, the golden light shifts, following the Emperor's gaze to a wall upon which the shadow of the statue falls. The Empress, however, still casts no shadow.

The statue is uncanny, because it is an embodiment (or entombment) of the human: the statue can move a little, but it cannot leave its spot; its face responds, but it is not alive: "Furchtbar wurde die Miene, die sich anspannte, drohte und doch nicht lebte" (190). The demand of the work of art is here united with the demand of the ethical relationship, concentrated in the face. It is more than the Empress can take, and so she turns away – but unlike the merchant’s son, she does not flee the scene. It is in this place that she must make a decision. And so the foreign shadow appears to her, offering her the bowl of golden water, more than humbly: “es war die Gebärde des Sklaven, der sich völlig dahingibt, auf Leben und Tod” (190). And here again the senses are explicitly brought to the fore: “Sie fühlte, wie sie die Sinne verlieren und trinken würde” (190). She would lose her senses in both senses of the word: losing the ability to see, feel, hear, touch, taste, but also losing her mind and consciousness. She would act fully anaesthetised. Drinking the water and appropriating the shadow of another would be a senseless act, on some level not even willed, and thus divorced from the impulse to establish ethical relationships with others: the will would be a negative one, an abnegation of the aesthetic and ethical senses. But before she drinks, another figure appears – one of the unborn children resembling Barak. This appearance represents an alternative possibility; now it is a matter of decision, not an unconscious act.

Of particular importance here is the description around this moment of decision. It powerfully recalls the aesthetic encounter in Augenblicke in Griechenland: an out-of-body experience, viewing the self and the statue from the third-person (a kind of reversal of the stylistic device of
free indirect speech) and seeing in this way the necessity of decision. In *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, the scene is that of a sacrificial rite, wherein the viewer sees himself as both priest and offering, which “drängt zur Entscheidung, es endet mit dem Überschreiten einer Schwelle, mit einem Gelandetsein” (195). In *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, the situation is similar, though here the priestess has in her hands the bowl of water: a potential libation. Her conscience takes for her, as for the Dyer’s Wife, the form of a voice which she cannot but hear. And this is intimately linked to the tones of reality. Indeed, the *visio* in *Augenblicke in Griechenland* is rendered as an aural phenomenon in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. The long passage here, as in similar passages in *Augenblicke in Griechenland* and *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, benefits from a close and comparative reading, particularly as many of the phrases and images are familiar but altered. This new context brings different features to light:


The auditory admonition experienced by the Dyer’s Wife earlier is reproduced here, though it is the curse of the father Keikobad rather than the curse of the mother. The body’s response is to dissociate: a common enough response in psychology and literature of the early twentieth century. But it is not just the psychological dissociation that is at play here; for it also has characteristics of that *ecstasis* that occurs in mystical moments, and in the aesthetic encounter, especially as presented in *Augenblicke in Griechenland*. The turn in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* is the

---

363 James Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Rilke’s *Malte Laurids Brigge* are two examples. Hofmannsthal’s interest in the dissociation of personality – especially his reception of Morton Prince’s 1906 study *The Dissociation of a Personality* – is well documented. See Ritter, “Hofmannsthal’s Narrative Prose,” 71.

364 See, e.g. Martin Buber’s description in the *Ekstatische Konfessionen* (esp. xxxi on “das Phänomen Projektion”).
evocation of reality, which holds everything together with iron chains (the negative image of the *aurea catena*). This recalls the scene with the Efrit, when the Empress felt powerless to help the Dyer’s Wife, as well as the Nurse’s fear: “mitten in ihre träumenden Gedanken brach mit Gewalt das widerwärtige zweideutige Gefühl der Gegenwart,” which in turn echoed the *Zurückgekehrter’s* “zerspaltenes Gefühl von der Gegenwart” (109; *SW XXXI* 151). Presence and reality are thus often referred to in this genitive structure of feeling: a feeling of presence, of reality. Usually this feeling is at best ambivalent. It is “zweideutig,” “zerspalten,” “beklemmend,” “furchtbar.” These are the iron chains of fate that make a prison of reality. But in the unreal world of the *Märchen*, there is the alchemical potential to transform these chains into gold. This is part of the imagined *vita nuova*, and it is already hinted at in this passage, ironically, in a complete reversal of the opera’s handling of the scene. In the opera, the music begins in *pianissimo*, and with the slow crescendo and introduction of gongs, it begins to swell and reaches such a height that the Empress’s singing transforms into a terrified scream (“ihren Lippen entringt sich ein qualvoll stöhnender Schrei”). The music then is abruptly stopped, leaving the Empress’s voice alone: but she does not sing. She *speaks* the formula of renunciation, as if breaking from the fairy-tale world of opera into the spoken world of ‘reality.’ She speaks, with a heavy pause before and after each word: “Ich will nicht!” *(Die Frau ohne Schatten Studien-Partitur* 587-88).

In the opera, this is incredibly effective. In the prose tale, Hofmannsthal reverses the change, but again, only metaphorically: the words rise from the depths of her being and leave her mouth:

> so als würden sie gesungen in großer Ferne; sie hatte sie nur nachzusprechen. Sie sprach sie nach, ohne Zögern. – Dir Barak bin ich mich schuldig! sprach sie, streckte den Arm mit der Schale gerade vor sich hin und goß die Schale aus vor die Füße der verhüllten Gestalt. Das goldene Wasser flammte in die Luft, die Schale in ihrer Hand verging zu nichts […] (191).

The golden water possesses the power of metamorphosis; the Empress, of metaphor. But metaphor, in this moment, becomes metamorphosis. The libation here is key. Hofmannsthal shares with Walter Benjamin an appreciation for the ancient Greek ritual: libation is a way of giving something

365 “Die Kaiserin wollte nicht hinschauen und sah hin. Sie begriff nicht, was sie sah, und doch war es nicht völlig unbegreiflich: das beklemmende Gefühl der Wirklichkeit hielt alles zusammen” (134).
The notion of the symbol as gift in *Augenblicke in Griechenland* is resuscitated here as libation, as giving back. This gesture of response makes transformation possible. What follows is indicative of this transformation: the water rises, carrying both the Empress and the heavy statue upwards as they embrace, as if weight had no bearing, till “sie fühlte sich hinabgerissen ins Bodenlose” (192). The abyss is the place of birth and death, like the *khôra*. It is here too that the symbolic sacrifice can take place: in *Gespräch über Gedichte*, the man dies for a moment with the animal he sacrifices. Here the the Empress is the priestess and the offering at once, and this is once again accompanied by a disturbance in the senses:

Vor unbegreiflicher Qual zerrüteten sich ihr die Sinne. Sie fühlte den Tod ihr eigenes Herz überkriechen, aber zugleich die Statue in ihren Armen sich regen und lebendig werden. In einem unbegreiflichen Zustand gab sie sich selbst dahin und war zitternd nur mehr da in der Ahnung des Lebens, das der andere von ihr empfing. In ihn oder in sie drang Gefühl einer Finsternis, die sich lichtete, eines Ortes, der aufnahm, eines Hauches von neuem Leben. Mit neugeborenen Sinnen nahmen sie es in sich: Hände, die sie trugen, ein Felsentor, das sich hinter ihnen schloß, wehende Bäume, sanften festen Grund, auf dem die Leiber gebettet lagen, Weite des strahlenden Himmels. (192)

We have here an itinerary for that which is sketched in *Augenblicke in Griechenland*: “das alles drängt zur Entscheidung, es endet mit dem Überschreiten einer Schwelle, mit einem Gelandetsein [...]” (195). The Empress, in pain, feels death and comes very near to it herself, perhaps she does die in this moment, much like the sacrificial animal in *Gespräch über Gedichte*. And her life travels into the stony limbs of the Emperor, imbuing him with life. The text switches for this brief time to free indirect speech, again heralding that moment of intensity, of dissolution of self – precisely when both Emperor and Empress feel the same thing. The narration is uncertain and even stylistically fragmentary, as if conveying fleeting thoughts: “In ihn oder in sie drang Gefühl einer

---

366 “Daher gebührt es sich, Ehrfurcht im Nehmen zu zeigen, indem von allem, was wir je und je empfangen, wir einen Teil an sie zurückerstatten, noch ehe wir des Unseren uns bemächtigen. Diese Ehrfurcht spricht aus dem alten Brauch der libation. […] – Ist einmal die Gesellschaft unter Not und Gier so weit entartet, daß sie die Gaben der Natur nur noch raubend empfangen kann, daß sie die Früchte, um sie günstig auf den Markt zu bringen, unreif abreißt und jede Schüssel, um nur satt zu werden, leeren muß, so wird ihre Erde verarmen und das Land schlechte Ernten bringen” (*Einbahnstrasse* 37-38).
Finsternis.” The passage is more impressionistic than any other in the text, adopting the blurred perception of the Empress and Emperor as they sense “mit neugeborenen Sinnen” the hands carrying them. Like newborns whose sight is undeveloped but also untainted, they are re-born, crossing the threshold into existence, into the light, as the entrance to the cave closes behind them, and the Empress senses the trees, the ground, the sky. The sense perception has something of memory about it: the memories of early childhood are like this, fragmentary, their outlines softened by time.

But there is something cinematic about this as well. Like a film shot from the first person point plural of view, we follow their impressions, but as the Empress looks into the sky, a transfer of perspective takes places: the perspective narrows momentarily and then broadens as the narrative lens pans out in order more objectively to encompass the Empress and the Emperor in the landscape: “In der Ferne glänzte der Fluß, hinter einem Hügel ging die Sonne herauf, und ihre ersten Strahlen trafen das Gesicht des Kaisers, der zu den Füßen seiner Frau lag, an ihre Knie geschmiegt wie ein Kind” (192). This change in perspective is necessary for the following description, for only with a broader perspective can the intricacy of relations be seen: the Emperor himself is like a child, and as the Empress rises she – finally – casts a shadow over him, building a bridge from one person to another. The bridge closes when, awakened by the Empress’s cry of delight at having caught sight of her own shadow, the Emperor awakens, and they wordlessly embrace: “ihre Schatten flossen in eins” (192).

A parallel shadow bridge forms between the Dyer pair as well, and, like the transition from stasis to motion that takes place in the Emperor, so too does the Dyer’s Wife undergo a visual transition. The bridge imagery as it is visually achieved in the opera, but with different emphasis: “Der Schatten, den die Färberin wirft, wird im Schlußtableau zur Brücke zwischen den Partnern – buchstäblich eine ‘goldene Brücke’ zwischen ihnen bauend; eine erpreßte Versöhnung also, wenn man es mit Adorno sagen will, die auf die wuchernd-anarchische Sexualität im Ehe-Konzept der Moderne – und ihrem Mangel an Willenskraft – schließlich folgt, keinesfalls zwingend, wie man hinzufügen möchte, sondern eher verlegen ein Opfern- und Verleiben setzend” (“Hofmannsthal’s ‘Zauberflöte,’” 241). His approach to reading the opera is essentially different from mine: by reading the opera as thematizing the problem of marriage and sexuality, he comes to different conclusions.
transformation: from wan colourlessness of fear to the brilliant colour of life. The Dyer pair are reunited in the same landscape, not far from the Emperor and Empress. The Dyer’s Wife carries the great basket containing the sword and blood-dyed carpet, where colours are concentrated and then explode, covering and imbuing the Dyer’s Wife with new life:

[…]

The moment the shadow returns is the moment colour returns as well: though the shadow itself has no colour, it is explicitly linked, for the Dyer’s Wife, to the brilliant shades of new life. From the blood of the carpet (and death) issue forth the colours of life. It is important here that they do not just adorn her; they permeate and enliven her. Colours here do the work of the artist. The Dyer’s Wife becomes like a work of art given life. Stepping away from the narrative for a moment, we see that Hofmannsthal is representing here his own poetic act: within the imagined ‘reality’ of the story, the Dyer’s Wife and the Emperor, as well as the Empress and the Dyer, have all been given a new life. Renewed life correlates to renewed aesthetic sensations: a statue is animated, and becomes human again; a deathly pale face is given the colour of life and the shadow of humanity. And all of it is enveloped by an aesthetic frame itself – the tale. They are indeed given a kind of life, but it is ultimately no Promethean act. It is humbler than that, and bolder too: for in this act, paradoxes and contradictions and reversals are possible and even demanded. The shadow bridge that forms between the Dyer pair is a visual echo of the rainbow-like soul spanning the abyss: “Wie der wesenlose Regenbogen spannt sich unsere Seele über den unaufhaltsamen Sturz des Daseins” (SW XXXI 76). Indeed, the colours of the rainbow are in the Dyer’s Wife herself.

_________________________

regarding such motifs. I am more interested in the broader questions asked by Hofmannsthal, who to my mind uses marriage in Die Frau ohne Schatten as an image rather than simply as a social commentary on marriage itself.
The gesture of art is a bold one in its attempt to undo what has been done, and to unite what is disparate. *Solve et coagula.* But for Hofmannsthal there is no artistic act without humility; here too, this is presented in the reciprocal prostrations of the married couples. “Er drückte die Hände vor der Brust zusammen und neigte sich vor ihr. Wie ein Stein schlug sie vor ihm hin, ihre Stirne, ihre Lippen berührten seine Füße”; “[…] wie dort die Färberin vor ihrem Mann warf er [der Kaiser] sich vor seiner Frau und verbarg sein zuckendes Antlitz an ihren Knien. Sie kniete zu ihm nieder, auch ihr war zu weinen neu und süß” (194). This “Gebärde der Demut” is the common denominator for all of the characters, men and women, the royal pair and the dyer pair. It is the other side of the “Kühnheit” exemplified in *Augenblicke in Griechenland:* “Wenn das Unerreichliche sich speist aus meinem Innern und das Ewige aus mir seine Ewigkeit sich aufbaut, was wäre dann noch zwischen der Gottheit und mir?” (196). The reciprocated gesture of respect reinforces the divine humanity in all the characters.

The end of the prose tale, as Seelig has emphasised in “Musical Substance and Literary Shadow,” does not review the fates of the characters simultaneously. Rather, each individual character is given individual attention: the “allomatische Lösung” is thus expressed differently in manner – but also in content. The Dyer pair are given a future full of the wonder of magical wealth – they have been magically lifted out of their destitution. They have a perfect fairy-tale ending. The magical carpet that had belonged to the Nurse now belongs to them and has taken the form of a boat that

---

369 Cf. the Note 68 to *Andreas:* “Solve et coagula. / Das Universelle Bindemittel: Gluten / Das universelle Lösemittel: Alkahest / In der Liebe is beides” (*SW XXX Roman Biographie* 102).

370 Hofmannsthal’s continued insistence on humility from both men and women has frequently been ignored (e.g. by Pia Janke and Marlies Janz) in readings that interpret the story as misogynistic. Janke writes, for instance: “So steht am Ende auch nicht ihre Unabhängigkeit, sondern ihr Eingebundensein im hierarchisch strukturierten männlichen Kosmos. […] Die Kaiserin und die Färberin wissen Bescheid. ‘In prüfenden Flammen gestählt,’ nah ‘der Schwelle des Todes’ sind sie ‘seligen Kinder Mütter geworden,’ rekapitulieren sie ihre Wege. Der Chor der Ungeborenen jubelt. Mit den Worten: ‘Vater, dir drohet nichts’ bestätigt er die Schlußkonfiguration – eine Konfiguration, in der die Frauen endlich das ihnen zugedachte Schicksal akzeptiert haben” (267). This reading does not adequately take into account the near-death experience of the Emperor, nor the madness of the Dyer. It also ignores that emphasis on mutuality in relationships, mentioning for instance that the Dyer’s Wife falls at her husband’s feet as a sign of female submission to the male, but not mentioning he also falls at hers, and that Emperor falls at the Empress’ feet at which point the Empress in return falls at his. Hofmannsthal’s portrayal may very well be ‘conservative’ in its representation of gender-roles (it is a fairy-tale set in the mythical orient), but not for the reasons given by Janke. Marlies Janz emphasises the “Tortur der Frau” but de-emphasises the – for Hofmannsthal meaningful – fear of being buried alive in one’s own body. She likewise attributes a “sicher unbewußte Lust an der detaillierten Beschreibung dieses [the Empress’s] Leidens” (*Marmorbilder*, 188). The descriptions of the Empress’s suffering are in fact vague, primarily emotionally-charged, and correspond to the sufferings of the poet, as Hofmannsthal elsewhere portrays them, and as I have argued in this chapter. The Empress is also the central figure for Hofmannsthal: it is appropriate then that her development receive the most attention.
extends to encompass all the metal bowls, brilliant textiles, and other “herrliche Dinge” which now they may take with them. Barak lifts his wife into the air and runs to the boat “wie einer, der tanzen will” (195). A figure full of colour, the Dyer’s Wife is set into the boat upon stacked carpets, while Barak sings “wie ihn niemand hatte singen hören” (195), thereby reversing the earlier presentation from the third chapter of singing out of tune. The new singing corresponds to a new ethical understanding and relation with his wife. As their boat departs, it leaves behind “eine goldene Spur auf dem flimmernden Wasser,” as might the setting sun. The pair’s fate is surrounded by beauty: celebratory colour, song, dance, and the beautiful things that are to accompany them on their journey: and all of this leaves behind it a kind of reverse-shadow: the golden trace upon the glistening water.

For the Emperor and the Empress, the end is similarly one of reconciliation and hope. Having sunk to his knees, the Emperor gazes into the sky at his falcon returning, while the Empress hears a song from the heavens: “Unbegreiflich fanden zarte Worte, leise Töne den Weg aus dieser Höhe zu [ihr].” This song is the only instance in the prose text given as it is in the libretto: it is kept in verse, separated from the rest of the text by its genre and its difference; like Goethe’s Chorus Mysticus at the end of Faust II, the singing voices celebrate the paradox of life, but with hope and praise replacing fear and curses. The voices of the unborn children singing even suggest a mystical union of host and guest in one image: “Wäre denn je ein Fest, / Wären wir insgeheim / Wir die Geladenen, / Wir auch die Wirte?” (196). It is eminently appropriate then that the Empress, upon hearing these sung words, makes a gesture of amazement – which also recalls the recurring gesture of humility: “Das Herz zitterte ihr, und die freien Hände […] falteten sich ihr in der Bewegung des Staunens über dem Leibe” (196). Even her apprehending understanding yields to the paradox of this music from the sky: “Sie wagte kaum zu fassen, was sie doch hörte, kaum zu begreifen” (196). The art of song is beyond possession. And what is inscribed, too, can be erased, leaving its trace only in the experience of the actors: the words of the curse etched upon the Talisman have been replaced “durch Zeichen und Verse, die das ewige Geheimnis der Verkettung alles Irdischen

372 The Kritische Ausgabe seems to have an error here. It reads: “Unbegreiflich fanden zarte Worte, leise Töne den Weg aus dieser Höhe zu dir” (196, my emphasis).
priesen” (196). The talisman – which in German might be translated as “Zauberbild,”373 or “magical picture” in English – has the last word. The picture has become magical, art is apotheosed. The opera version (as Musiktheater) endeavours to realise this visually. Götz Friedrich, the stage director for the seminal 1992 performance of the opera conducted by Georg Solti, wrote of the arts’ mutual striving thus:

In ihm wird der alte Streit ‘prima la musica’ – ‘prima la parola’ aufgehoben zugunsten einer neuen Qualität, die aus den Widersprüchen und Spannungen der verschiedenen in der Oper wirksamen Künsten entsteht: Wort und Ton, Literatur und Musik, dazu Bildende Kunst, Malerei, Bewegung etc. All dies wirkt miteinander und gegeneinander in einem lebendigen System von ‘lauter geheimnisvollen Beziehungen’. (Götz Friedrich, “Ich preise die Seltsamkeit,” 196).

_A Märchen as “lovely as a Persian carpet, and as unreal”_

Die Frau ohne Schatten – both the opera and the tale – is one of the most representative cases for Hofmannsthal’s fascination with the relation between the ‘real’ and the ‘unreal.’374 The central motif of the carpet raises question in the form of an image: the carpet is shown both in its real and its ideal production; it is ascribed magical properties, and it is a symbol of perfection and even happiness, for the theme of happiness is likewise one of connection, and return – though it is presented in an idealised, fairy-tale form.

The central tension in Die Frau ohne Schatten therefore cannot be reduced to the problem of marriage and children. It is as much, if not more, about the impossible reconciliation between the imagination and reality. Aesthetics and ethics are the warp and weft of the carpet: they are never the same, but without either, the fabric of human existence would come undone. Hofmannsthal’s strange mix of the real and the unreal – e.g. in the invocation or realistic detail and ideal images

373 See the Erläuterung to Hofmannsthal’s essay, “Goethes West-östlicher Divan” (SW XXXIV RA3 560)

374 The phrase in the title of this section is taken from Oscar Wilde’s _Picture of Dorian Gray_. Lord Henry Wotton comments, “I should like to write a novel certainly; a novel that would be as lovely as a Persian carpet and as unreal” (45). See also Schwarz’s comment: “Hier wird der Teppich zum Modell für die Romankunst des Symbolismus” (Orient – Okzident 9).
and riddles that defy logic – is a response to this double-drive, as well as an attempt to figure, to give form and colour to that drama of life. We see it in his use of colours, for instance, which (as in die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten) are presented as responding and changing in response to each other and even exhibiting, to speak with Sabine Schneider, the “Essenz des Dramatischen,” namely the “Gegenspielern von Kräften” (222). Although Schneider sees in Hofmannsthal’s understanding of colour a “forcierte Interpretation von Goethes weitaus starker auf harmonische Totalität zielenden Bestimmungen der Farben als stumme Sprache der Natur” (222), I think she is overstating the case: Hofmannsthal did indeed see colour as a “dramatic” – that is, agonistic – display, but also as a potentially harmonious depiction of the interconnectedness of things, as is made eminently clear in the motif of the carpet, and in the (controlled) explosion of colour at the end of the story. Fickert and Celms repeat the anti-aestheticist formula thus: “Significantly, in the opera, the character named die Kaiserin acquires a shadow and the ability to bear children after she has put the insubstantial world of the cult of beauty as expressed in art behind her” (37); but this assertion is based on an analogy with the figure of Claudio in Der Tor und der Tod, whom Michael Hamburger once called “the man without a shadow, the potential man incapable of crossing the threshold into reality” (qtd. in Fickert and Celms 37). While the opera (and the Märchen) bears a certain thematic resemblance to Der Tor und der Tod, Fickert and Celms suggest too close and too simple a correlation. The Empress never expresses a rejection of art – in either opera or the Märchen – and in fact art (song, the carpet, even the Emperor-as-statue) plays a significant role in her and the other characters’ transformation. At best, we could argue that narcissistic vanity is the thing rejected; and, as we have seen throughout this dissertation, Hofmannsthal does not portray art as necessarily coterminous with narcissism. The problem with Fickert and Celms’ reading lies in a too narrow understanding of art that scholars have attributed to Hofmannsthal, but which is not supported by the text. In Die Frau ohne Schatten art too experiences a kind of baptism in the (albeit fictional) world of “reality,” to use Hamburger’s term. The broader issue at stake is that this kind of “allomatische Lösung” between aesthetics and ethics is only ever imagined through art as a fairy-tale; Die Frau ohne Schatten is an aesthetic theodicy

375 Somewhat confusingly, Fickert und Celms end their article on a more conciliatory note: “Confronting a world on the brink of destroying itself in a senseless war (a redundant phrase) over the maintenance of a mordant status quo, the creators of the opera ‘Die Frau ohne Schatten’ turned Nietzsche’s plea for the revitalizing of all mankind into a somewhat bewildering but hopeful vision of a mythical world in which a union of the good and merciful (the province of morality) and the beautiful (the province of art) could prevail” (42).
where all characters and all plot points, all suffering and all paradoxes have their justification in the aesthetic whole. The carpet is a portrait of this theodicy, but its unreal status challenges the ethical expression of this aesthetic success, because its success is tied up in the form of the Märchen. It can thus only ever be an aesthetic theodicy.

The fairy tale – this most unreal of genres – is given the peculiar ability to incorporate the most diverse and arbitrary of elements. Goethe, again in his Maximen und Reflexionen wrote: “Die Gewalt einer Sprache ist nicht, daß sie das Fremde abweist, sondern daß sie es verschlingt.” Hofmannsthal underlined this in his copy of the Sprüche in Prosa. Maximen und Reflexionen (*FDH 1366). But to this, Hofmannsthal adds: “Wir schaffen uns einer am Andern unsere Sprache, beleben einer den anderen,” suggesting that this “Verschlingen” of the other occurs simultaneously with animation (SW XXXIII RA 2 236).

We see this ambivalent attitude in Hofmannsthal’s own comments as well. In a letter from 27 May 1918 to Ottonie Degenfeld, he wrote:


The “gräßlich” reality is contrasted starkly with the “erträumten Harmonien,” and yet these dreamt-up harmonies are perhaps even more necessary because of the horrors of reality – in this case, the First World War, recapitulating as it were Hofmannsthal’s experiences as a young man in Tlumacz. Strauss too makes this explicit (even in his off-putting patriotism) in a letter to Hofmannsthal from 8 October 1914:

---

376 Cf. Oscar Wilde’s Dorian Gray: “I should like to write a novel certainly; a novel that would be as lovely as a Persian carpet and as unreal” (45); and Schwarz’s comment: “Hier wird der Teppich zum Modell für die Romankunst des Symbolismus” (Orient – Okzident 9).

377 This is pointed out by Christoph König “Zur modernen Komplizenhaft zwischen Poesie und Philologie,” 308).

378 While I cannot go into detail here about Hofmannsthal’s complicated relation to the war, it is nevertheless important to point out the striking contrast between the happy fairy-tale ending of the Märchen and the bitter open wound left
Inmitten all des Unerfreulichen, das – ausgenommen die glänzenden Taten unserer Armee – dieser Krieg bringt, ist fleißiges Arbeiten die einzige Rettung. Sonst käme man um vor Ärger über die Tatenlosigkeit unserer Diplomatie, unserer Presse, des Kaisers Entschuldigungstelegramm an Wilson und all die Würellosigkeiten, die man sich zuschulden kommen lässt. (*Strauss–Hofmannsthal Briefwechsel* 289)

This diligent work in the sphere of art – evoking the “fleißige Kinder” and Barak’s own devotion (170) – has intrinsic value for him, and indeed seems necessary for survival.

But this is no easy task. On 4 January 1919, Hofmannsthal wrote to Strauss: “Das ‘Märchen,’ die schwerste Arbeit, die ich je unternommen, und die an meinen Charakter die größten Aufforderungen stellt […]” (*Strauss–Hofmannsthal Briefwechsel* 437). Perhaps this was not only because of the work’s densely woven material; perhaps it was also because this Märchen, lovely as a Persian carpet, is unreal. The negotiations between the necessities of creating and the ethical questions of the time (is art a luxury in war?) strain Hofmannsthal’s character, and result in a tale that imagines – must imagine – the impossible.

Reality is a challenge. No one would dispute that. But the work of art, too, presents itself to us – and to Hofmannsthal – as a challenge to be met. It isn’t immediately obvious, but art and war have something in common: they are situations *in extremis*. And war, too – as with the Futurists and, to a certain degree, Ernst Jünger – can be experienced aesthetically. With Hofmannsthal, one always has the sense that the aesthetic could very possibly send the subject, like Saint Catherine before Giotto’s *Navicella* mosaic, to the brink of existence. And there at the world’s edge we find a rickety bridge, or perhaps it’s after all that unsubstantial rainbow that spans the “unaufhaltsamen Sturz des Daseins,” crossing in a blur the unfathomable chasm between “Poesie und Leben,” reality and the unreal: the poles of existence. We cannot cross the bridge, for it wouldn’t hold our weight. Instead we experience the paradoxical reality of the unreal in the aesthetic encounter, in

by the war. For more on Hofmannsthal and the war, see *Österreichs Antwort: Hugo von Hofmannsthal im Ersten Weltkrieg*.

379 Papapetros recounts the story in *On the Animation of the Inorganic* (4).

380 See *Das Gespräch über Gedichte* (*SW XXXI* 76).
its effect of strangely persistent presence as it withdraws from our grasp. For Hofmannsthal, art invents an imaginary language for this, and is itself the invention.
CONCLUDING REMARKS: ART’S STUBBORN SILENCE

“[D]ie stummen schönen Dinge” (*SW XXXII RA2* 8) do not speak to us with a voice we can comprehend. Hofmannsthal insists upon this in an aphorism in *Buch der Freunde*:

> Die Menschen verlangen, daß ein Dichtwerk sie anspreche, zu ihnen rede, sich mit ihnen gemein mache. Das tun die höheren Werke der Kunst nicht, ebensowenig als die Natur sich mit den Menschen gemein macht; sie ist da und führt den Menschen über sich hinaus – wenn er gesammelt und bereit dazu ist. (76)

Works of art remain, despite our interrogations, stubbornly silent. The dialogical impulse within aesthetics then is not expressed as a conversation between familiars (essentially a monologue whereby the work tells us what we want to hear), but rather a conversation that one has with a stone, hewn by human hand or otherwise. Levinas said that statues “have mouths but do not speak” (*Levinas Reader* 141): the statues of *Augenblicke in Griechenland* smile in silence, and the petrified Emperor of *Die Frau ohne Schatten* has been sentenced to forced reticence. Works of art – including literature – never say just what we think they do. And good works of art are challenging in this respect: they lead us out of ourselves by their difference. And by their very refusal to speak, they provoke. In turn, when we call them “schön,” they respond with “die Forderung, welche die Welt der Schönheit an uns stellt, jenes dämonische Aus-uns-heraus-locken ganzer Welten des Fühlens” (*SW XXXII RA2* 11).

Language is a Pandora’s box of paradoxes in Hofmannsthal’s work. I cannot treat it here thoroughly, though art has much to do with language and vice versa: part of that connection is the question of relations of differentiation and similarity. This is where we see the ethical question of the individual’s relation to the world embedded in the aesthetic: for Hofmannsthal, art wants us to respond (or correspond) to its silence; and yet in our speaking, we know we are already saying too much. Caught in a double bind, we are supposed to respond, but we are supposed to remain tactful and discrete in that response, respecting the distance while acknowledging our shared participation in the world. This is perhaps the poet’s original sin – that he must ‘speak’ in some fashion; but that culpability is also responsibility, and vice-versa.
This is all very abstract: and for Hofmannsthal it must remain so. The ‘ethical’ in the aesthetic remains encased in the work of art like a precious gem. The imperative is a silent one; it has no ‘real’ content, and it cannot, because art is not the same as ethics. Harold Bloom pointed out in *The Western Canon* that we do not read *The Iliad* to look for good examples of moral behaviour, and if we were to organise a society based on what we read in books (or hear in music, or see in works of visual art), we would be in a sorry state indeed (29-30). Hofmannsthal is also of this camp, yet he is also an artist with an ethical conscience and sense of responsibility; he does not want *l’art pour l’art* to be an excuse for disengagement; or rather, he wishes to explore the particular kinds of engagement the aesthetic provokes.

*Die Frau ohne Schatten* is the most vivid attempt. It is a fairy tale about ethical relationships that form in response to and in conjunction with aesthetics. Aesthetics in turn are also ‘reborn’ the moment the main characters experience their personal ‘rebirths.’ The parallels are many, and at times they even seem to cross each other in a kind of non-Euclidean geometry, which might lead one to think Hofmannsthal is suggesting that aesthetics does translate into ethics and vice versa. But – as in Hofmannsthal’s letter of Lord Chandos, *Ein Brief* – there is an irony that pervades the whole set-up: the fact that *it is a set-up*. Depending on the hour, the air, and the place, Hofmannsthal’s irony can appear as a pessimistic optimism or an optimistic pessimism. *Die Frau ohne Schatten* as an “aesthetic theodicy” is perhaps hopeful, but it is a restrained hope, shaped partly in response to the crisis of the war. We might say with Kafka: “Es gibt unendlich viel Hoffnung, nur nicht für uns.” So how does one respond to the situation? Hofmannsthal did his best to avoid the danger of fighting, but found he could not escape the effects of the war either. Neither could his art. And so, as with so many things, he broached the topic of engagement slantwise, with irony.

“Das Element der Komödie ist die Ironie, und in der Tat ist nichts geeigneter als ein Krieg, der unglücklich ausgeht, uns die Ironie deutlich zu machen, die über allen Dingen dieser Erde walte” (“Ironie der Dinge,” *GWE RA2* 138). Hofmannsthal’s writing is not often humorous (except perhaps when tragedy slips into the farcical: as when the merchant’s son is kicked in the groin by a foul-tempered horse). But artists are said to have a heightened sense for the irony of things;

---

381 See the section “Für immer stolz und glücklich, diesem Volk anzugehören” in the programme to *Österreichs Antwort* (exhibition concept by Katja Kaluga).
indeed anyone who has experienced a crisis will: “Wer an das bittere Ende einer Sache gelangt ist, dem fällt die Binde von den Augen, er gewinnt einen klaren Geist und kommt hinter die Dinge, beinahe wie ein Gestorbener” (140).

If irony is the stuff of comedy (and the stuff of things’ relations to each other), then comedy need not end happily, nor even in marriage. Even if we naively wish for a work of art to ‘speak to us,’ it may not. It may even be saying the opposite of itself, or what we wish to hear. It may be stubbornly silent. Perhaps Die Frau ohne Schatten is a comedy in this sense. An aesthetic attempt to tie the world together results in a beautiful Gordian knot. When we untie that knot, we have only loose threads. Perhaps theodicy, too, should be taken with a pinch of salt: divine justice is here a kind of divine irony on the part of the story’s author.

I chose to analyse the texts I did in this dissertation for a number of reasons: they are frustrating, deal explicitly or implicitly with the challenges art poses to us, and are themselves unusual creatures often resulting from the that challenge.\(^3\)\(^8\)\(^2\) Das Märchen der 672. Nacht is an early example of how a work about unpredictable circumstances – about absurdity, in short – can be composed so tightly into an aesthetic mould. Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten threaten that mould by stuttering to a halt; even their publishing history during Hofmannsthal’s lifetime was characterised by fragmentation, and the aporia at the end leaves no satisfaction for the reader, but much to question. Augenblicke in Griechenland seems to address similar issues again, this time with more ‘success’ in so far as the text is complete (though it took many years longer than anticipated), but the aporia reappears at the moment of the aesthetic encounter; further, that final encounter is sequestered from any narrative momentum, existing only as Augenblick. Die Frau ohne Schatten is ostensibly the least problematic text in that it is aesthetically whole, but it is in fact the most problematic, presenting a mirror image of Das Märchen der 672. Nacht: it is a fairy-tale depiction of relationships with a happy outlook – a complete contrast to the Anti-Märchen with its unhappy, almost absurd ending. This, ironically, makes the ending of Die Frau ohne

\(^3\)\(^8\)\(^2\) Had I more space and time, I would have also looked at the Der Turm, with both of its endings, and Ariadne auf Naxos. Both offer instances of aesthetic encounters with music (which I was only able to touch on occasionally here), and both would help shape the question of genre: Der Turm is a “Trauerspiel” and Ariadne auf Naxos an opera.
Schatten even less satisfying than the absurd (if nevertheless aesthetically interesting) twist at the end of Das Märchen der 672. Nacht, because, written during the war, it rings – potentially at least – hollow. It does not ‘speak to us’ and the absurdity of our situation as we might wish. It does not console.

Still, Hofmannsthal’s irony couches this fairy tale in another layer: that of reality, which, itself being subject to the irony of things, is, according to one perspective at least, comedic.

Art is other. But then so are we.

In the unfinished novel Andreas, there is a scene in which the title character meets Nina for the first time, and in the room there is a freshly painted portrait of her with a great slit through it, as if it had been slashed with a knife (murdered, as it were). When asked to look at the painting, he sees, “es waren Ninas Züge aber kalt, gemein. […] Es war eines von jenen peinlichen Porträts von denen man sagen kann daß sie das Inventarium eines Gesichtes enthalten, aber die Seele des Malers verraten,” and when the painting’s subject, Nina, asks him his opinion, the first words out his mouth to her are: “Ich finde es recht ähnlich und recht häßlich” (93). This socially awkward and admittedly humorous situation sits (initially, at least) at odds with the experience of the Zurückgekehrter when he senses the “Seelenkraft” of the painter: “dann aber, dann sah ich, dann sah ich sie alle so, jedes einzelne, und alle zusammen, und die Natur in ihnen, und die menschliche Seelenkraft, die hier die Natur geformt hatte” (SW XXXI 169). “Seelenkraft” might be distinct from “Seele”; it is impersonal, or rather, it is personal but goes beyond itself.\textsuperscript{383} The painting in Andreas is bad because it is an attempt at copying reality, not forming nature. Ugliness here is ironic, because although the portrait resembles Nina (who is beautiful), it does not resonate with the viewer; it does not challenge or provoke, nor send us on a journey so that we might return. It is ugly not because it is unpleasant, but because it is lifeless, in spite of being lifelike.\textsuperscript{384}

\textsuperscript{383} Cf. T.S. Eliot: “The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living” (“Tradition and the Individual Talent,” 59).

\textsuperscript{384} Cf. Henry James’s The Wings of the Dove, in which the terminally ill character Milly stands before Agnolo Bronzino’s portrait of Lucrezia Panciatichi and recognises both with wonder and sadness how much she resembles the portrait – only there is still an element of strangeness about the painting: “She found herself, for the first moment, looking at the mysterious portrait through tears. Perhaps it was her tears that made it just then so strange and fair ...
We have seen that there can be no real marriage between aesthetics and ethics, or artistic ‘fantasy’ and ‘real’ life for that matter. Hofmannsthal’s work illustrates again and again negative examples that resonate, and positive examples that do not. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, the Hofmannsthal-Gesellschaft will be holding a conference in 2017 on Hofmannsthal’s “Produktives Scheitern.” Perhaps we could adjust the phrase a little, and speak of Hofmannsthal’s Schönes Scheitern, to use a phrase reminiscent of Benjamin’s words on Kafka’s “Scheitern”:


One of Kafka’s failures, according to Benjamin, was of hope – there is hope, and there is help from fools, but all that does us no good (114). Hofmannsthal knew he could not illustrate explicitly in literature how we learn to be ethical beings, and that art is no handmaiden to ethics, nor vice versa; but based on his writings we might conjecture that he held this hope. And this might be why he departed so drastically from his original conception of Die Breife des Zurückgekehrten as a long novel, and why we are left, in the case of Andreas, with a collection of fragmentary moments and events that do not add up to a coherent narrative. In another author’s hands, these potential novels might have depicted the Bildung of their protagonists. But Hofmannsthal never completed his work in that ethically charged genre of Bildungsroman, though he worked on it from the first decade of the 20th century till his death in 1929. At its best, Hofmannsthal’s work is not prescriptive; rather, it is experiential, and when it takes as its subject the aesthetic encounter, it does so in a way that emphasises the momentary nature of that encounter while creating the opportunity for an aesthetic encounter for the reader, in effect multiplying the event. We can discern a gesture suggesting an ethical content, as in the colours in Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten, the communication and communion with the other in Augenblicke in Griechenland, or even the carpet, the colours, and the stone statue in Die Frau ohne Schatten. But it is only in the last text that the aesthetic is

the face of a young woman, all splendidly drawn, down to the hands, and splendidly dressed ... And she was dead, dead, dead” (157).
associated with some unambiguously positive ethical effect on the characters, and that work is a fairy tale, the diaphanous, if also colourful, character of which cannot serve as a model for ethical behaviour. Hofmannsthal’s work is suffused with vague ethical concerns that cannot be shaken off, and these are almost always linked to or encased in the question of the effect of the aesthetic on human beings.

The failure to marry aesthetics and ethics in ‘real life’ adequately is a beautiful failure: beautiful in the sense that Hofmannsthal intended when he wrote of beautiful works of art in the Ansprache, “Denn ein solches Anrecht, aus unserem Innern sich zu nähren, räumen wir ihnen ein, indem wir sie ‘schön’ nennen. Es gibt kein stolzeres, kein gefährlicheres Wort. Es ist das Wort, das am tiefsten verpflichtet” (11). Beautiful in the sense that, as an artist, he felt an aesthetic responsibility to let go of himself and provide instead a space for art. And beautiful in the sense that, to use the language of ethics, all of these texts provoke us into engaging with them as something totally other. Beautiful is this failure which cannot help but try to imagine the impossible, even knowing it to be so.

Art is other. And in this there is an ethical moment in the encounter, which cannot be translated or realised, but must be acknowledged. That is the aporia. But it is also what makes Hofmannsthal speak:


385 Here too Hofmannsthal recalls Keats’ negative capability and looks forward to Eliot’s impersonal theory of poetry, which also makes use of the motif of self-sacrifice: “What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality” (52-53).


Gottschlich-Kempf, Simone. *Identitätsbalance im Roman der Moderne : Rainer Maria Rilke, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Robert Musil, Max Frisch und Botho Strauß*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2014


---. *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986. [cited as *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*]


---. Kritische Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke. 42 vols. S. Fischer Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1975-.


Kaluga, Katja. E-mail to Marlo Alexandra Burks. 14 September 2015.


Mistry, Freny. “The Concept of Asia in Hofmannsthals’s Prose Writings.” *Seminar* (13) November 1977:


Zilcosky, John. “‘The Times in Which We Live: Freud’s The Uncanny, World War One, Trauma.”’ Lecture for the German Studies Students’ Union. 1 April 2016.