THE BRIDGE IN GERMAN POETRY:
ITS SYMBOLIC FUNCTIONS

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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The Ohio State University
1972

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincere thanks to Professor Hugo Bekker, my adviser, whose Summer, 1970 seminar on motifs in German poetry furnished the impetus for this dissertation.
AUTObIOGRAPHY

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INTRODUCTION

Since the age of German Classicism the bridge has functioned as a significant poetic symbol. However, critical activity tracing it as a motif or analyzing it as a symbol is virtually non-existent. One study, "The Bridge: A Study in Symbolism" by Dr. Paul Friedman, treats the psychoanalytic importance of the bridge in dreams, but only alludes to its significance as a literary symbol. Friedman mentions the influence of the bridge "upon the fancy and fantasies of man"\(^1\) and invites further study regarding its literary significance: "Perhaps the bridge's clearest, creative expression may be found in the works of writers and poets which afford many truly illuminating examples of bridge symbolism. It is remarkable that as one examines these expressions of creative imagination, they seem to offer compelling proof that the author has projected himself

\(^1\)Paul Friedman, M.D., "The Bridge: A Study in Symbolism," The Yearbook of Psychoanalysis, IX (1953), 27.
into this symbol. But such analysis is left to literary
researchers." Rudolf Erckmann mentions in his article
"Bahn, Brücke, Tunnel" that the bridge is "Eine bedeutende
Gestaltung" in German poetry and briefly examines Fontane's
"Brück am Tay" and Stadler's "Fahrt über die Kölner
Rheinbrücke bei Nacht." Yet Erckmann hardly penetrates the
surface of these poems, and draws only facile conclusions:
"Mit 'Brücke' verbanden sich leicht die Vorstellungen von
Triumph über die Natur und die Abgründe, von Wagnis, Kühnheit
des Menschen, von Höhe, Flug, Himmel, All, vom Aufstieg ins
Göttliche hinauf." A closer view of these poems is
necessary.

Because there is so little material available, a
study of the bridge symbol is a unique undertaking. Elisabeth
Frenzel cites the dearth of motif and symbol studies in
general: "Untersuchungen über die Art der Struktur und
Funktion von Symbolen und Symbolgeweben liegen bisher nur
spärlich vor." This dissertation will not treat the symbol

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2 Friedman, p. 273.

3 Rudolf Erckmann, "Bahn, Brücke, Tunnel: Eine Arbeitsreihe

4 Elisabeth Frenzel, Stoff-, Motiv- und Symbolforschung
(Stuttgart, 1963) p. 97.
in regard to such genres as the novel, novella, or the short story, where it also frequently occurs, but will be limited to the aspect of the bridge in poetry. Eight poems have been selected from a group of over one hundred where the bridge plays a role. These eight were not only selected on the basis of artistic merit, but also because of the variety of literary eras and poetic subgenres represented. Poems where the bridge had little figurative value, such as Gertrud von le Fort's "Deutsches Leid"\(^5\) or David Friedrich Strauss' "Ermunterung"\(^6\) were not considered. An index provides the reader with

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\(^5\) Gertrud von le Fort, Werke (Stuttgart, 1956) p. 88.

Deutsches Leid

Schiffer, zieh fort die Brücke,
Du lockst mich nimmermehr an Bord,
Ich weiss von keinem Glücke,
Ich weiss von keinem Zufluchtsort.

Ich würde doch entbehren
Bei ihres reichen Tisches Brot,
Ich würde mich verzehren
Nach meiner Heimat bitter Not,

Und ob sich draussen weiten
Noch Länder froh und gastbereit,
Und ihre Arme bieuten
Wie fremder Mütter Lindigkeit:

Ich stünde doch in Ketten
Mitten im festlich hoben Saal,
Ich könnt' mich niemals retten
Vor meines Volkes Schuld und Qual.

---

\(^6\) David Friedrich Strauss, Gedichte (Bonn, 1911) p. 22.

Ermunterung

Fort mit deinem alten Laster!
Allen Missmut ausgefegt!
Für die Wunden, die es schlägt,
Reicht das Leben auch das Pflaster.

Riss der Strom hinweg die Brücke,
Mutig in den Kahn hinein!
Nahm die Kugel dir ein Bein,
Greife rüstig nach der Krücke!
the names and authors of poems not discussed.

The period of time considered extends from Hölderlin until Gottfried Benn. This period has not been indiscriminately selected since the bridge as a symbol does not exist significantly in poetry before 1800. Speculation as to why this is so is an interesting topic, but lies beyond the limits of this dissertation.

The bridge as a symbol will be discussed within the content of each individual poem. It will be shown that although the bridge may appear only once in several poems, its significance is such that it becomes the central symbol of each poem. In order to indicate this significance a full discussion of each poem is needed.

The arrangement of the poems analyzed is chronological. Not only is this a logical order to follow, but one which affords a comparative view of the bridge symbol through successive literary eras. Poems to be interpreted are: "Heidelberg" (Friedrich Hölderlin), "Wenn tiefe Schwermut meine Seele wäget..." (August von Platen), "Die Alte Brücke" (C.F. Meyer), "Brück am Tay" (Theodor Fontane), "Venedig" (Friedrich Nietzsche), "Pont du Carrousel" (R.M. Rilke), "Fahrt über die Kölner Rheinbrücke bei Nacht" (Ernst Stadler), and "Am Brückenwehr" (Gottfried Benn).
A treatment of the general characteristics of the bridge symbol as well as a comparison of its various functions within the eight poems will be discussed in the conclusion.
Heidelberg

Friedrich Hölderlin

Lange lieb' ich dich schon, möchte dich, mir zur Lust,
Mutter nennen, und dir schenken ein kunstlos Lied,
Du, der Vaterlandsstädte
Ländlich schönneste, so viel ich säh.

Wie der Vogel des Walds über die Gipfel fliegt
Schwingt sich über den Strom, wo er vorbei dir glänzt,
Leicht und kräftig die Brücke,
Die von Wagen und Menschen tün.

Wie von Göttern gesandt, fesselt' ein Zauber einst
Auf die Brücke mich an, da ich vorüber ging,
Und herein in die Berge
Mir die reizende Ferne schien,

Und der Jungling, der Strom, fort in die Ebene zog,
Traurig froh, wie das Herz, wenn es, sich selbst zu schön,
Liebend unterzugehen,
In die Fluten der Zeit sich wirft.

Quellen hattest du ihm, hattest dem Flüchtigen
Kühle Schatten geschenkt, und die Gestade sahn
All' ihm nach, und es bebte
Aus den Wellen ihr lieblich Bild.

Aber schwer in das Tal hing die gigantische,
Schicksalskundige Burg nieder bis auf den Grund,
Von den Wettern zerrissen;
Doch die ewige Sonne goss

Ihr verjüngendes Licht über das alternde
Riesenbild, und umher grünte lebendiger
Epheu; freundliche Wälder
Rauschten über die Burg herab.

Sträußchen blühten herab, bis wo im heitem Tal,
An den Hügel gelehnt, oder dem Uferhold,
Deine fröhlichen Gassen
Unter duftenden Gärten ruhn.
Eins zu sein mit allem, das ist Leben der Gottheit, das ist der Himmel des Menschen... In seliger Selbstvergessenheit wiederzukehren ins All der Natur, das ist der Gipfel der Gedanken und Frueden.¹

These words express Hölderlin's view regarding the unity of man and nature. Many poems of his later years are concerned with this theme, such as "An den Aether," "Die Eichbume," "Die Musse," "Der Wanderer," "Der Neckar," "Der Main," "An den Frühling," "Der Winter," "Heidelberg." All possess a joyfulness and optimism in life, and illustrate Hölderlin's aphorism: "Der hat viel gewonnen, der das Leben verstehen kann, ohne zu trauern."²

"Heidelberg," written in 1800, is representative of Hölderlin's nature philosophy. The spirit of the divine, which the poet seeks elsewhere in the distant past or future, he now finds in the natural beauty of the city and the surrounding countryside. The ode, called by Mörke "das schönste Hölderlinische Gedicht,"³ celebrates the communion between individual and nature, and expresses Hölderlin's gratitude to Heidelberg for revealing to him the unity pervading all life: "Vom ersten bis zum letzten Worte strömt die Rede
vom Ich des Dankenden und Feiernden einfach dem vertrauten
Du der Landschaft zu... des Dankes dafür, dass das Bild der
Stadt dem Heimatlosen eine Möglichkeit zum "Bleiben im Leben'
hat aufgehen lassen." A study of the images used in the poem
will reveal the extent to which Hölderlin integrates the realms
of man and nature.

The ode begins with a paean of love and admiration for
the city:

Lange lieb' ich dich schon, möchte dich, mir zur Lust;
Mutter nennen, und dir schenken ein kunstlos Lied,
Du, der Vaterlandsstädte
Ländlichschönste, so viel ich sah.

An immediate intimacy is established in the "du" address.
Although the first two stanzas are in the present tense, the
poem describes a past event. The first and last words of the
first stanza, "lange" and "sah" indicate this expanse of time.
The poem represents a sublimation of thought and feeling, as is
evidenced by the meticulous revisions which Hölderlin made
of the initial draft. The poet wants to present a "Kunstlos
Lied," emphasizing reliance on the heart and intuition
rather than contrived mental processes. Its inspiration is not
based on ceremony and formality, but is "mir zur Lust."
As in a mirror the poet glimpses the longings of his
own heart reflected in the city.

The intimacy which Hölderlin feels between his inner-self
and the city is more than personal. The city has nurtured, protected, and appeased him so that Hölderlin expresses his love as a son would to his mother: "möchte dich... Mutter nennen." This desire for familial ties is extended in the third verse with the word "Vaterlandsstädte" which not only completes the parental association, but also graphically ("Vaterlandsstädte") produces a union between the father "Länd" and mother "Stadt." The following word "Ländlichschönste" refers to the natural beauty of the city. The reader connects "Ländlich" with the "land" of "Vaterlandsstädte" and thus the three elements—country, city, and natural rural beauty—become one composite and inseparable whole. It is the unity of these elements of which the poet longs to becomes part. He wishes to become a member of this organic family and feel a kinship with nature as do his figurative father and mother. This familial association is consistent with Hölderlin's other writings, in which he longs to place himself in the divine family of nature:

Auch wir sind also Kinder des Hauses, sind es und werden es sein... O nehmt die allesversuchenden Menschen, nehmt die Flüchtlinge wieder in die Göttlerfamilie, nehmt in die Heimat der Natur sie auf, aus der sie entwichen. 6 (italics added)

Although Hölderlin was in Heidelberg on only three occasions before writing the poem, 7 he is able to feel the tranquility and security of a long-sought "Heimat."
This introductory stanza functions as a prelude to the poem proper. It contains the unifying elements to be developed in the following stanzas. The remainder of the fourth verse, "so viel ich sah," refers to the means by which Hölderlin is able to find harmony between man and nature: visual impressions are most prominent in the poem and act as a medium of communication between the poet's soul and Heidelberg in its natural setting.

The second stanza describes Heidelberg more closely and establishes its bond with nature:

Wie der Vogel des Walds über die Gipfel fliegt,
Schwingt sich über den Strom, wo er vorbei dir glänzt,
Leicht und kräftig die Brücke,
Die von Wagen und Menschen tön.

An element of the city, the bridge, and an element of nature, a bird, are brought into comparison: "Wie der Vogel des Walds über die Gipfel fliegt, / Schwingt sich über den Strom ... die Brücke." As both the bird and the river are in motion ("... der Vogel ... fliegt"; "Der Strom ... vorbei dir glänzt,...") the bridge also appears to be in motion: "schwingt sich" is used as a metaphor to suggest the activity of, on and around the bridge. The bridge itself is teeming with the activity of men and wagons. Later the poet, too, is integrated into this sphere of activity. The bridge is not an inanimate object, but an organic part of the natural scene depicted; it participates
in the final harmony achieved. The peaks over which the bird flies are compared to the river over which the bridge is spanned. The peaks imply height and distance of vision and are much like the river which flows "fort in die Ebene" enabling the poet to glimpse "die reizende Ferne." A universal, far-reaching view of nature is presented. The principal environments of air, land, and water are depicted with the forest ("Vogel des Walds"), the river, and the bird in the air.

Man and the city he has built are an integral part of this organic picture and are in constant communion with the natural elements. The shores of Heidelberg look after the river gleaming past ("wo er vorbei dir glänzt, ..."; "... die Gestade sahn / All' ihm nach, ..."). The scene is accented by the bridge, itself a symbol for that which unites and consolidates. Not only does the bridge bring men into accord and communication, but it functions also as an instrument which brings them into contact with nature: the poet views the landscape from the bridge. In addition to the visual perfection established, an aural harmony is achieved as suggested with "tönt" ("... Die von Wagen und Menschen tönt.") What is normally a cacophony of unbleeding sounds becomes on the bridge a euphony of musical tones. This verb is typical of what MÜrike characterized as "das feine Gefühl."
of the poem. Hölderlin changed the verb from "rauscht" to "tönt" after studying a verse from Pindar, which advises poets to represent an object according to its inner form, rendering "seine Treue, die Art, wie eines in sich selbst zusammenhängt." Just as the bridge is in accord with the nature surrounding it, so the men on the bridge are in harmonious rapport. Man, nature and bridge are in symmetry.

The bridge, then, becomes a symbol of what binds man to man and man to nature: "Brücke ist ein gültig gewordenes Symbol des Verbindenden." The bridge's description as "leicht und kräftig" implies the ease and facility (seen already in "tönt") as well as the endurance and reliability of the communication which it symbolizes.

The third and fourth stanzas move the poem into the realm of personal experience, and focus on the bridge as the central image:

Wie von Götttern gesandt, fesselt' ein Zauber einst
Auf die Brücke mich an, da ich vorüber ging,
Und herein in die Berge
Mir die reizende Ferne schien,

Und der Jüngling, der Strom, fort in die Ebne zog,
Traurig froh, wie das Herz, wenn es, sich selbst zu schön,
Liebend unterzugehen,
In die Fluten der Zeit sich wirft.

The previous lines were of a general nature and served to describe the background against which Hölderlin now perceives
his own communion with nature. The present tense is changed to the preterite to describe a specific event of past experience. A transition in time is accomplished, the symbolic bridge fusing the past moment with the present: "Die Brücke verbindet Menschen, Länder, Zeiten." (italics added). The reader transfers his previous associations of the unifying aspect of the bridge to the poet, who is standing transfixed by the unity of life he observes. As the "Wagen und Menschen," he, too, participates in the exphony of sound.

Yet the poet has also transcended the world of "Wagen und Menschen." For him the experience is divine: "Wie von den Göttern gesandt." The phrase "da ich vortüber ging" holds more significance than a newly found appreciation of nature, for it simultaneously designates Hölderlin's passage into a transcendental world. The bridge acquires an additional meaning: "Die Brücke, reines Sinnbild des Uebergangs, wird nicht ob ihrer malerischen Bedeutung im Stadtbilde, sondern ob ihrer schicksalshaften Bedeutung für den Dichter selbst genannt und herausgehoben." He is able to glimpse "das Göttliche Eine in der Tiefe, was alles Lebendige zieht."

In the first draft of his poem, Hölderlin is more explicit as to his motivation for praising the city:

Ach! Da ich müssig und still über die Brücke ging
Bin vertriebener Wanderer
Der von Menschen und Büchern floh.\textsuperscript{14}

He is fleeing the confining, philosophical world of Fichte
and Schiller which he experienced in Jena:\textsuperscript{15}

Die Brücke wird Symbol des Übergangs schlechthin,
denn sie hat auch dem Dichter den Übergang von
der Flucht zur Ruhe, vom 'Irrsinn' zum Geborgensein,
von der unheimischen Fremde, vom 'Blend' zur Heimat
geschaffen... Die Möglichkeit eines Übergangs ist
für ihn ein Schicksal, eine Gnade, dass er, in
seinem Daseinsgrunde verstrickt, in seiner Naturinnigkeit
erschüttert, unter dem Zwang der Selbstbehauptung
einem übermächtig-fremden, mit Biseksüle ihm
umfangenden Bereich geistiger Bildung entflohen,
die Harmonie und Ruhe dieses Landschaftsbildes, und
in ihm die reine Ordnung der Natur, finden durfte.\textsuperscript{16}

The wanderer is thus able to find solace in the bosom
of nature. Yet a mere understanding and appreciation of
nature are insufficient for him. He feels he must immer
himself totally in nature to absorb its essence: "Nun muss
sich Hölderlin einer anderen umfassenden Liebe widmen."\textsuperscript{17}
Yet such surrender also entails innate dangers: the loss of
will and individuality, self-resignation and abandonment.

Such an alternative now presents itself to the poet in
the figure of the river flowing into the distance. Hölderlin
looks into "die reizende Ferne" where all limiting, defined
boundaries vanish and all objects merge into a whole. The
river, unaware of any dangers which fate might bestow, is
represented as a youth ("...der Jüngling, der Strom,...") who
rushes onto the plain to embrace the unity it seeks. The
poet's heart, which identifies with the river's longing,
is described as "traurigfroh":

Traurig, sofern es ein Abschied von allem liebend
Vertrauten, und mehr noch, sofern es ein Aufgeben
des Selbst ist, ein Abstreifen der schönen Lebens-
gestalt, deren reiner Bewahrung ein Grundtrieb der
Individualität gilt, -- und doch froh, weil solches
Sichaufgeben zugleich ein Sichhingeben, ein Sichlösren
aus der Erstarrung ist, das dem Herzen als Geschick
und höchster Sinn aller Gestalt bewusst wird und ihm
eine tiefe Lust, ein freudiges Schaudern erregt.18

The poet's heart becomes so full of its own love ("sich selbst
zu schön") that it willingly surrenders itself to "die Fluten
der Zeit" in an effort to become part of the divine whole:

Das Herz ist nicht der Geist, der wägt und prüft
und alles unterscheidet... In der festen Helle des
Tags ersehnt es trunken Dämmerung... Das innige
zieht, des Göttlichen in Natur und Mensch... steigert
sich so in ihm, ... dass es, schwindelnd, nicht
mehr als Besonderes da sein, sondern im Geliebten
untergehen will.19

Such willful submission is similarly evidenced in Hölderlin's
"Rhein" hymn:

... Wie Bezauberte flehen

Die Wälder ihm nach und zusammensinkend die Berge.

The bridge on which the poet is standing thus becomes also a
symbol for the passage of man from individuality to joyful
acquiescence in matter: "Die Seligsten fühlen nichts von
Selbst,"21 claims Hölderlin. In "die Fluten der Zeit" the
poet is not longer restricted to one time and one being,
but caught up on the continuum of all times and all ages:
"Die Fluten der Zeit bedeuten ein unwiederbringliches Dahin."\textsuperscript{22}

This submission of oneself is also manifested in the syntax and verse structure of the third and fourth stanzas. Both stanzas comprise one complete sentence, beginning with the enchantment of the poet and concluding with his longing for dissolution in the currents of time. All is said as if in one breath, in one moment of sublime revelation: "Hier erfüllt sich in dem Uebergang von dem festen Gesetz zu einem, scheinbar, hahllos mit den Fluten der Zeit hingleitenden Rhythmus das Sterben des Herzens, seine Lösung von dem auf Dauer gerichteten Geist."\textsuperscript{23}

Not only the poet, but also the city wishes to submit itself to these divine, unifying forces. Heidelberg seeks to build a harmonious rapport with the Neckar by giving up part of itself. The city provides sources to the river so that something of itself may be with the river when it reaches its distant goal: "Quellen hattest du ihm, ..." It also soothes the river on its long journey with cooling shadows: "... hattest dem Flüchtigen kühle Schatten geschenkt,..." The city's shores gaze after the river protecting it and also longing to be a part of it: "... und die Gestade sahn
All' ihm nach... " Finally, in perhaps the
most charming image of the poem, the city's shores mirror
themselves in the wavelets of the rushing stream: "... und
es bebte aus den Wellen ihr lieblich Bild." The city thus
becomes a spiritual part of the river, for its image trembles
("beben") within the river's being: "So nimmt er das
liebliche Bild der Stadt und ihrer Gestade mit auf seinen
Weg als Inbild geborgenen, glücklichen Daseins; ... es
schwingt und zittert in ihm, in seinem Wellengange nach." 24
There is a festive spirit shared as the river flows toward its
own dissolution, much like the festive spirit present before
Empedocles' death. Again the bridge symbol comes to mind.
All things of nature are in joyous communion; nothing
remains isolated: "Alles ist aufeinander und miteinander
auf das grosse Ziel hinabgestimmt, 'zur höchsten Schönheit
zu reifen,' alles lebt im gleichen Geist." 25

The sixth stanza introduces an element of antinomy into
this idyll of harmony and perfection:

Aber schwer in das Tal hing die gigantische,
Schicksalsskundige Burg nieder bis auf den Grund,
Von dem Wettern zerrissen; ...

The castle stands as a counter-image to the youthful river;
the word "aber" introduces a view opposite to that of the
preceding lines. Unlike the youthful river, the castle
does not dissolve itself in the eternal forces of nature and hence represents man's conquest over nature. Unlike the river, the castle is acquainted with the forces of nature, having suffered from the wind and storm which have attempted to consume it. Erosive forces have weathered its features, and its baroque architecture is no longer distinguishable. The castle reveals an aspect of nature differing from the previous stanzas. It stands as a monument of admonition to the dangers that nature's fate can bestow.

Yet Hölderlin does not view these erosive forces negatively, for they are only a part of nature's organic process. The youthful Hyperion is at first unable to understand these detrimental powers in nature. Only later does he grasp their essence:

Muss nicht alles leiden? Und je trefflicher es ist, je tiefer! Leidet nicht die heilige Natur?
O meine Gottheit! Dass du trauern konntest wie du selig bist, das konnt ich lange nicht fassen.
Aber ohne Tod ist kein Leben.26

In the same work, Hölderlin views the potentially destructive thunder cloud merely as that which rocks the cradle of the gods: "... und him und wieder durch die Stille fernher tönt die Donnerwolke wie ein schlafender Riese, wenn er stärker atmet in seinen furchtbaren Träumen."27
Thus the castle is not a pessimistic element of the poem but represents an expanded view of life. Although it does not surrender itself as does the river, it nevertheless appears inextricably combined with the natural setting. Its giant hulk hangs down into the valley as if it were part of the landscape: "schwer in das Tal hing die gigantische, schicksalskundige Burg nieder bis auf den Grund, ..." The castle is a product of man's culture. But this culture is mellowed in its combination with nature, just as nature is controlled by man's intervention. A classical harmony is thus created and the castle becomes a mark of man's cultural achievement over nature. Nature and culture form a synthesis, a theme which often occupies Hölderlin:

Again the image of the bridge is evoked, and now becomes an instrument of synthesis to join antithetical viewpoints. The sun soothes and rejuvenates the weathered remains of the castle—-even it is not excluded from the healing powers of nature. The word "doch" indicates reconciliation for the castle despite its unyielding temperament:

Doch die ewige Sonne goss
   Ihr verjüngendes Licht über das alternde Riesenbild,...

The final synthesis of thesis and antithesis is reflected in the words "ewig...verjüngend...altern." Hölderlin maintains that nature embraces even opposing aspects of life. Korff explains:

Nicht fühlt sich der Dichter von diesen so entgegengesetzten Eindrücken verwirrt, sondern so wie er ahnt, dass auch der Geist der Unruhe der Sonn der Natur und mit dem Geiste der Ruhe aus einem Schosse geboren ist, so stehst er überhaupt Natur und Leben mit allen ihren Gegensätzen als ein Ganzes an, und sein Naturglaube ist fromm genug, um diese Gegensätzlichkeit als höhere Gesetzlichkeit der Natur zu fühlen. 29

The castle becomes ensconced in living nature, which benevolently covers its deteriorating walls:

... und umher grünle lebendiger
Epheu, freundliche Wälder
Rauschten über die Burg herab.

The final stanza of the poem continues and completes this natural organic process:
Sträuchte blühten herab, bis wo im heitern Thal,
An den Hügel gelehnt, oder dem Ufer hold,
Deine fröhlichen Gassen
Unter duftenden Gärten ruhn.

There is constant downward motion evidenced as all levels of nature progressively interconnect-- from the "ewige Sonne" down to the castle and the valley and further down to the hills, the river banks and finally the gardens, under which the cheerful streets and pathways repose: "...schwer hieng die Burg nieder bis auf den Grund,... Wälder / Rauschten über die Burg herab. ... Sträuchte blühten herab,... Unter duftenden Gärten..." This cascading motion is seen graphically in the indented verse structure of each stanza. The poet, still transfixed by the enchanting experience on the bridge, observes now the unity of man and nature. The city-- its castle, streets and pathways-- is all part of man's culture, yet becomes now a living part of the ivy, shrubs ("Sträuchte") and fragrant gardens comprising nature. The "duftenden Gärten" indicate an olfactory harmony in addition to the visual and aural harmonies already established. All is in symmetry and festive rapport: "freundliche Wälder," "heitern Thal," "dem Ufer hold," "fröhlichen Gassen." Everything finds relation to something else: the shores gaze at the river, and the river reflects their image in return; the pathways
are "dem Ufer hold" or "an den Hügel gelehnt." 30  Emil

Staiger points out that even insensitive verbs are given
direction and purpose in the poem:

Und dassja gar nichts einsam, nur für sich allein,
zu leben scheine, dass überall Transition sei, sind
den intransitiven Verben, oft mit grosser Kühnheit,
richtungweisende Wörter beigefügt: Der Strom 'glänzt
dir vorbei', die Ferne 'scheint herein', lebendiger
Bfeu 'grümt umher', und Sträucher 'blühen herab'.
Alle Teile sehnen sich, einander zu berühren oder
inneinander überzugehn. Und so wird Heidelberg in
seiner Landschaft zum vollkommenen Bild der
liebetrunkenen Einheit des gesamten Lebens... 31

The symbol of the bridge remains finely integrated
into every aspect of the poem, always indicative of the
dynamic forces joining man and nature:

Die Schönheit des Bildes liegt gerade in den sanft
gleitenden Übergängen von Berg und Tal, Land und
Stadt, Vergangenheit und Gegenwart, Ruhe und
Bewegung, Nähe und Ferne, in der gefühlsmässigen
Einheit dieser Gegensätze, die als Gegensätze nur
noch der Verstand bemerkt... Von dem abgetrennten
Menschen zur Götterfamilie der Natur gibt es
eine Brücke: die Sehnsucht, selige Hingabe, die Liebe
(italics added).

This unity is seen finally in the picture of the gardens which,
like the city of Heidelberg itself, are products of man's
cultivation of nature.

The bridge is also a product of man's culture: "Die Brücke
ist als Kunstwerk, gestaltet nach Leitbildern der Natur,.. gesehen....
Eine solche kultur- wie naturverbundene Brücke ist ein Zeichen,
und der Mensch kündigt seinen inneren Zustand an je nach
der Art, wie ihm Brücke gelingen." As a symbol of synthesis, the bridge represents the artist's ability to bring inner peace and harmony to the erstwhile dissonant world described in the first draft of the poem. Hence the bridge becomes itself a classical symbol of the reflective mind contemplating "ein kunstlos Lied" and making of it a work of art. The poet's tranquillity is seen in the final word of the poem "ruhm". All is reconciled in a final repose with nature. Such sentiment is echoed by Hyperion: "Versöhnung ist mitten im Streit, und alles Getrennte findet sich wieder. -- Ewiges, ewiges, glühendes Leben ist alles."
Footnotes


3. Eduard Mörike, **Briefe** (Tübingen, 1942), p. 626.


6. Hölderlin, **Sämtliche Werke**, III, p. 211.

7. See Beck, pp. 266 - 269.

8. Mörike, **Briefe**, p. 626.


11. Klein, p. 408.


Beck, pp. 267 - 268.

Beck, pp. 267 - 268.

Klein, pp. 408.

Beck, p. 270.

Staiger, p. 17.


Quoted by Staiger, p. 18.

Staiger, p. 18.

Staiger, p. 20.

Beck, p. 271.

Korff, Goethezeit, III (Leipzig, 1940) 394.


Korff, III, p. 400.

Korff, III, p. 399.
30
This is similar to "Hälfte des Lebens," which shows the relation of land and lake: the land hangs into the lake "mit gelben Birnen" and "voll mit wilden Rosen."

31
Staiger, pp. 15 - 16.

32
Korff, III, p. 401.

33
Klein, p. 408.

34
Sonnet 36

From: Sonette aus Venedig

August von Platen

Wenn tiefe Schwermut meine Seele wieget,
Mags um die Buden am Rialto flittern:
Um nicht den Geist im Tande zu zersplittern,
Such ich die Stille, die dem Tag besieget.

Dann blick ich oft, an Brücken angeschmieget,
In öde Wellen, die nur leise zittern,
Wo über Mauern, welche halb verwittern,
Ein wilder Lorbeerbusch die Zweige bieget.

Und wann ich, stehend auf versteinten Pfählen,
Den Blick hinaus ins dunkle Meer verliere,
Dem fürder keine Dogen sich vermählen:

Dann stört mich kaum im schweigenden Reviere,
Herschallend aus entlegenen Kanälen,
Von Zeit zu Zeit ein Ruf der Gondoliere.
Was ist das Menschenleben, wenn wir es recht bedenken? Ein unseeliges Gemisch von den dunkelsten Träumen und rohsten Wirklichkeiten, und was ist ein Traum anders, als ein vorübergeendend Nichts, und was ist die Wirklichkeit anders, als ein Ding, das in den Schranken der Gegenwart liegt, und was ist die Gegenwart endlich? Der Stoff zu künftiges Sein, ein in eiliger Flucht vorbeistreichendes Wesen, das kein Mensch erfasst, das sich in jeder Minute zur Vergangenheit umwandelts. Was ist das Leben anders als ein Spaziergang um das verborgene Grab? 1

These words, written by Graf August von Platen in 1815, evince the poet's characteristic view of life. Such pessimism pervades his works and often assumes a bitterness reminiscent of Heine—"Es gibt so viel in der Welt, was mich wünschen macht, dass ich niemals geboren wäre.... Die Menschen behagen mir immer weniger. Ich liebe niemand von allen, die mich umgeben." 2 With the aloof perception of an artist, Platen looked on society from the viewpoint of a remote observer: "Ich betrachte alles, ich beobachte die Menschen und ihre Werke, aber ich lebe nicht mehr mit ihnen: ich stehe im Parterre statt auf der Bühne." 3 Platen's isolation from society led him to withdraw into himself where he found equal loneliness and despair:

Ich bin verschlossen in mich, wie ein Leichnam ... Nichts fühle ich mehr und deutlicher als meinen Unwert. Warum
leben solche Menschen, wie ich, die nichts sind und
nichts sein können? Wenn ich das schlechte Urteil
betrachte, das ich selbst über mich fühle, so
schaudere ich, wenn ich daran denke, was andere von
mir halten mögen. Ich bin eine links angehängte,
nichts geltende Null...⁴

Such an expressed futility is evidenced in Platen's
ponge aus Venedig written in 1825. Although several of
the seventeen sonnets exhibit peace and inner harmony, others,
such as the one to be examined, manifest Platen's frustration.
"Wenn tiefe Schwermut meine Seele wieget! is the last of the
Venetian cycle and reveals the essence of the poet's melancholia
and isolation. His sentiments are ensconced in the sonnet form
which is especially propitious to the antithetical nature of
Platen's personality:

Im Sonnet gelingt es dem Dichter, seinen Zwiespalt
und seine Disharmonie harmonisch zu gestalten,
weil das Somett selbst vielfach ein streng geprägter
Ausdruck menschlichen Zwiespaltes ist.⁵

An examination of the form and images in "Wenn tiefe Schwermut
meine Seele wieget" will reveal its inherent contrasting
elements.

The first quatrain establishes the melancholy isolation
of the poet as contrasted to the commercial activity of the
city:

Wenn tiefe Schwermut meine Seele wieget,
Mags um die Buden am Rialto flittern: ...
Platen seeks the serenity of the night which enables him to reflect upon his melancholy in solitude:

Um nicht den Geist im Tande zu zersplittern,
Such ich die Stille, die den Tag besieget.

The alliterative "w" and "s" sounds and long vowels of the first verse slow the cadence of rhythm to aurally evoke the poet's morose condition: "Wenn tiefe Schwermut meine Seele wieget." This verse is also characterized by disyllabic words which further retard the rhythm and produce a monotony which expresses the weariness of the poet's soul: "Wenn tiefe Schwer/mut mei/ne See/le wie/get." In order to achieve this disyllabic consistency, Platen changes the normally monosyllabic "wiegt" to two syllables: "wieget." The two syllables of "wieget" denote the movement inherent in the meaning of the word (one thinks of a cradle rocking back and forth) as well as the instability of the poet's mental condition. Yet the musicality inherent in "wieget" also reveals the poet's fascination with his melancholy state. He narcissistically cherishes his weariness much as later in the poem he is intrigued by the decay of the city.

The second verse counteracts the slow, melancholy rhythm of the first. The short vowels and preponderance of monosyllabic words connote the liveliness and excitement of the marketplace which they describe: "Mags um die Buden am Rialto Flittern."
The "Buden am Rialto" represent the commerce and communication from which the poet wishes to remain aloof. "Flittern" contrasts with "wieget" in the lightness and buoyancy of its sound. It evokes a visual image of the glittering, colorful life of the marketplace.

But Platen is indifferent to such life, as suggested by the word "mags":

Wenn tiefe Schwermut meine Seele wieget,
Mages um die Buden am Rialto flitern.

The poet remains apathetic to the clamor of the marketplace, because it promises only diversion and not fulfillment. He must leave its distraction "um nicht den Geist im Tande zu zersplittern." "Zersplittern" not only rhymes with "flitfern" of the preceding verse to suggest its association with life, but also connotes the violent, shattering forces with which life threatens the creative "Geist." For Platen, the "Geist" must maintain its autonomy from life in order to remain productive. Any temptation to dally ("im Tande") in life will distract the poet from his artistic dedication. Therefore he must seek stillness and serenity, "das ruhende Sein, das ihm grösser als die wälzende Lebensbewegung des Tages ist":

Um nicht den Geist im Tande zu zersplittern,
Such ich die Stille, die den Tag besieget.
The final verse restores the alliterative "s" sound of the first verse; the distractions that life proffers have been surmounted and the poet's reflection continues as though uninterrupted by the second and third verses. The "s" sound whispers the stillness which the poet seeks:

Wenn tiefe Schwermut meine Seele wieget, ...
Such ich die Stille, die den Tag besieget.

"Besieget" recalls "wieget" of the first verse not only in its rime and disyllabic structure, but also in its musicality and the motion it suggests. "Tag" recalls "flittern" associated with the life which the poet now disregards. The last verse represents a return to the poet's quest for peace after the disturbance of verses two and three.

In the second quatrains the poet directs his glance at various aspects of the landscape. His vantage points are the many bridges that transverse the canals of Venice: "Dann blick ich oft, an Brücken angeschmieget, ..." The poet uses the plural ("Brücken") and the adverb "oft" to denote the frequency of his melancholy state in which he seeks stillness. His use of the plural also suggests an aimless wandering, an indifference already expressed in "mags." The bridge functions as an instrument which joins the separate realms presented in
the poem. Not only does it connect the Rialto district with the more isolated areas of the city, but it metaphorically connects the interstice between the clamor of the marketplace and the stillness, between day and night, between joy and melancholy, and finally between "Seele" and "Geist" -- life and art.

In the first stanza the poet was lured by the life of modern Venice as represented in the Rialto. But he has now regarded this life and now in the second stanza is beckoned by the moribund, decaying aspect of the city. He becomes fascinated by this decay which reveals the final symbolic use of the bridge: it represents the passage from life to death. Platen himself participates in this eroding process. He is not merely standing on the bridge, he is "an Brücken angeschmieget": "Er ist nicht handelndes, selbstgewisses Wesen, er ist gleichsam selbst Ding, bewegungslos, ohne Tätentrieb, ein Teil des Leblosen."7

Platen's obsession with decay continues throughout the second stanza. From the bridge the poet observes the quiet ripples of the wavelets below him:

Dana blick ich oft ...
In öde Wellen, die nur leise zittern.

The image of the poet looking into the water has narcissistic connotations: the word "öde" which he uses as an adjective
for the waves actually describes the desolate isolation of Platen's own soul. In Sonnet 35, Platen uses the mirror image for a similar purpose:

Das Auge schweift mit emsigem Bestreben,
Als ob zurück in seinem Spiegel bliebe,
Was länger nicht vor ihm vermag zu schweben: ...

The waves, "die nur leise zittern," suggest the passivity and stagnation of his inner-self. "Leise zittern" and "halb verwittern" in the following verse are in contrast to "flitern" and "zersplittern" of the first stanza which signified clamorous, colorful life. The rime has remained consistent, but, as with the poet on the bridge, the realm has changed from that of life to decay and deterioration. Platen glimpses in the decaying landscape the decay within himself-- the bridge becomes a symbol of the poet's identification with the city: "das Gedicht bildet die vereinende Begegnung zweier Leidensgeführten ab, des Dichters und der Stadt, die beide an einem unerfüllbaren Wunsch erkrankt sind; ..."³

The third and fourth verses continue to reveal the poet's inner condition:

... Wo über Mauern, welche halb verwittern
   Ein wilder Lorbeerbusch die Zweige bieget.

The image of the "Mauer" is similar to that of the bridge, except that it represents the division between two realms rather than the transition (i.e. the process of decay) between
them. However, the wall itself, like the city, is in the process of decay ("Mauern, welche halb verwittern..."). "Halb" suggests the semi-comatose state of the poet: his mind is alive ("...Um nicht den Geist im Tande zu zersplittern, ..."). in its ability to fashion verse, yet the poet also perceives the decay ("verwittern") within himself.

The branches of a wild laurel tree hang over the wall. The laurel alludes to the traditional celebration of artistic achievement in Greek and Roman antiquity. Platen is enticed by the laurel bush, because it represents the art to which he aspires in the midst of decay. The "Geist" of the first stanza which has shunned life now finds solace in a background which reflects its own condition. The laurel is the perfect image for the poet to frame his thoughts. 9 But the plant itself shows deterioration. The laurel bush, normally having straight, stiff branches, is now seen drooping over the wall:

Wo über Mauern...
Ein wilder Lorbeerbusch die Zweige bieget.

The branches hang down "über Mauern"; they are no longer in the realm of life within the city. They have crossed, like the poet's inner-self, into the realm of moribund isolation. The laurel bush is also "wild," suggesting its solitude
and detachment from the cultured life of the city. This solitude is emphasized by the fact that the laurel bush is a rare sight in Venice—when one sees it, it is alone, surrounded by stone and cement. 10

The second quatrain thus represents the poet's change of view from the life of the Rialto to the decaying beauty of the city. The stillness in which Platen has sought solace and revelation becomes "die Grösse des Unterganges, es ist keine schaffende, anfeuernde Macht, der es sich hingibt. Er spürt die Düsternis des Verfalls, sieht nur die Spuren einer versunkenen Welt, die nicht mehr sein wird." 11

Consistent with sonnet form, the tercets are set off from the quatrains by a caesur. Platen now turns his glance from objects in the near vicinity to the unending horizon of the sea:

Und wann ich, stehend auf versteinten Pfählen
den Blick hinaus ins dunkle Meer verliere,
dem förder keine Dogen sich vermählen: ...

The lonely figure of the poet projects from the posts which support the bridges as well as the city. Just as Platen seems to be part of the bridge on which he is standing ("am Brücken angeschmäget"), he also appears as an inanimate extension of these petrified supports ("stehend auf versteinten Pfählen"). "Versteinten" conveys this inanimate condition reflecting the death
and decay for which Venice is a symbol. "Stehend" is also significant in suggesting that which is stationary and without life. The "Stille" which the poet sought in the first stanza is now achieved in the whispering "s" alliteration ("stehend, versteinten") as well as in the images which evoke only a static condition.

The second verse similarly elicits association of desolation and death:

Und wann ich ...
Den Blick hinaus ins dunkle Meer verliere, ...

"Dunkel," describing the sea, evokes the somber mood of the poet and relates to the darkness he sought in the first stanza.

"Verlieren" in the first tercet connotes the poet's feeling of loneliness and desolation described already with the "Öde Wellen" of stanza two. But his dilemma has now intensified: the "Wellen" have become a "Meer," the depth and size of which imply only futility for the melancholy poet:

Verlassenheit, Einsamkeit ... das Schweigen des Meeres ist die Antwort auf alle metaphysischen Fragen, die die geschauten Zeichen des Verfalls dem Menschen stillen. Diese Antwort ist endgültig. Die Unendlichkeit im Symbol des Meeres scheint sie selbst zu geben. Vor dieser Erkenntnis bleibt alles menschliche Tun gleichgültig.12

The sea is no longer symbolically married to the land in an annual ceremony by the Doge;13 now it is aloof from the land reflecting the aloofness of the poet from the life.
of the city. Here the symbol of the bridge acquires an additional meaning: it links the glorious past history of Venice and its festivals to the present, decaying city. There is no more union or communication either for the poet or for the city, only gradual deterioration and finally death. The "ver-" prefixes of the verbs also suggest this passing away and demise: "verwittern... versteinten... verlieren... vermählen."

The isolation of the third stanza becomes futility in the final stanza:

Dann stört mich kaum im schweigenden Reviere,
Merschallend aus entlegenen Kanälen,
Von Zeit zu Zeit ein Ruf der Gondoliere.

The poet has attained the tranquillity he sought at the beginning of the poem. The alliterative "s" sound in the first stanza ("Schwermut... Seele... Such... Still... besieget") associated with the melancholy solitude of the poet is now restored: "Dann stört mich kaum im schweigenden Reviere..."

He is no longer disturbed by the enticement of life, the "Ruf der Gondoliere." Yet the serenity Platen has achieved is not a comforting serenity. It is rather a momentary compromise he accepts as an alternative to his inner dilemma. The phrase "Von Zeit zu Zeit," then, refers not
only to the sporadic calls of the gondoliers, but also to
the recurrent periods of depression when the poet reflectively
seeks an answer to the meaning of existence (this recurrence
of melancholia was already evidenced with "dann blick ich oft,
an Brücken angeschmieget"). But there is no answer and Platen
must reconcile himself to passive acceptance of his situation:
"Mit dem verklingenden Ruf der Gondoliere endet das Sonett...
ohne befriedigendes Ergebnis, ohne eine letzte Lösung für
die Fragen des Lebens."^{14}

The "schweigenden Reviere" again echoes the poet's
solitude and alienation from life. The normal human activity
implied in the word "Reviere" (a district or quarter) is here
negated with silence--an allusion to the poet's rejection
of life in the first stanza. Similarly, the "entlegenen
Kanälen" in the second verse reflect the poet's remoteness
and distance from the noise ("herschallend") and excitement
("flittern") of life. The canals, which form a network of
arteries throughout the city, allow commerce and symbolize
the communication which Platen repudiates ("entlegenen Kanälen").
The "Ruf der Gondoliere," a call which summons one to life
and community, is treated as indifferently by the poet as in
the first stanza ("Mags um die Buden am Rialto flittern").
Platen remains as isolated from life as the island of Venice from the mainland of Italy.

The isolation and decay which Platen portrays in this poem are expressed abstractly with symbols and metaphors rather than as a direct personal experience. The poet attempts to disguise his emotions with a veil of objectivity. In this respect the poem attains a classical character. Platen uses representative images and is careful to avoid conceits which would betray his psychological predicament. His metaphors are typical rather than individualized:

Grüßer als alles Einzelne soll der künstlerische Geist sein, der es bewältigt und zu einem Ganzen zusammenfasst. Nur das Typische, das Stellvertretende erscheint. Nur so, in einer vergeistigten Sinnlichkeit und einer vollendeten Form glaubt der Klassizist dem Gegenstand gerecht zu werden; und die sinnenhafte, baukünstlerische Leistung, die wir Venedig nennen, ist ja aus bedeutenden geistigen Voraussetzungen entstanden. 15


Yet Platen is not successful in conveying a classicist's impression of Venice. He is never able to exclude his
personal "ich" from the objective images which he creates:

"Platen kann sich selber gegenüber dem Objekt niemals ausschalten ... Seine Subjektivität und Reflexion hindern diesen unechten Klassiker daran, zur architektonischen Gedichtform nun auch die entsprechende Anschaulichkeit, aja Plastik der Bilder zu finden... So rächt sich der abstrakte Begriff, den er vom Schönen hat, immer wieder."\(^{16}\)

Platen attempts to disguise his inner insecurity through art: "Eine Mauer trennte ihm Leben und Kunst... Heimatlos in der Wirklichkeit, suchte er seine Heimat in den Gefilden des Geistes."\(^{17}\) Like the baroque poets, Platen sought to reconcile the confusion of his own life by devotion to form and composition: "Dichter hiess ihm Künstler an sich, l'art pour l'art- Künstler."\(^{18}\) Platen himself emphasized the artist's necessity to subjugate life to art: "Das Genie ist angeboren und geht dem Leben voraus, die Kunst muss gelernt werden und ist die höchste Aufgabe des Lebens für den, der Genie besitzt."\(^{19}\) But the reader is not deceived by Platen's dispassionate aestheticism: "Seine Dichtungen offenbaren, dass jenes Kühle, Harmonische der dichterischen Form und die stolze Ruhe und Ueberlegenheit des Künstlers nur Gebärde war, Maske der Unnahbarkeit... Die Harmonie schöner
Form musste die Disharmonie seines Innern verhüllen.\textsuperscript{20}

His striggency of form only betrays the intensity of his inner dilemma, Hans Löwald remarks:

Die höchste Selbstverleugnung des Künstlers und das Selbstvergessen, wonach er mit der strengen Form strebt, um sich von seinem Zwiespalt zu befreien, wird ihm ungewollt immer zum geistigen Selbstbildnis, weil die Kunst nur eine andere Erscheinung des Lebensgesetzes ist. Von seiner Spannung kann er sich also nicht erlösen, und je mehr er danach trachtet, um so eher bricht die Disharmonie seines Inneren durch die erstrebte Harmonie der Form, der jene verdecken soll. Die Form straft ihn Lügen, wenn er sie leidenschaftlich zu erzwingen versucht.\textsuperscript{21}

The decadence he views in Venice is only a reflection of the decadence which he feels within himself:

Platen versucht seine Zerrissenheit zu verbergen, und das führt folgerichtig zur Erscheinung der Krise im Gedicht selbst, in die Gefahr der Spannung und des Gegensatzes von Gehalt und Gestalt; denn jedes Kunstwerk spiegelt ehrlich das Wesen seines Schöpfers, auch gegen dessen Absicht, wieder.\textsuperscript{22}

Platen's homoerotic tendencies, which often drove him to melancholy and despair, are not directly evidenced in this poem, yet it may be concluded that the poet is trying to conceal a psychological problem in the guise of form.\textsuperscript{23} Form becomes a type of self-discipline to retard the destructive forces he feels within himself. Yet his tragic inward dilemma breaks through all attempts to veil it with form and objectivity, and in this sense his poetry becomes
genuine confessional lyric. The symbol of the bridge represents in the final analysis the passage from objectivity to subjectivity, not subjectivity to objectivity as Platen hoped: "Die Objektivität ist eben Schein, denn Platen verbirgt, indem er offenbart--offenbart, indem er verbirgt."24
Footnotes


2 Platen, Tagebücher, p. 183.

3 Platen, Tagebücher, p. 194.

4 Platen, Tagebücher, p. 176.


6 Theodor Schultz, Platens Venedig-Erlebnis (Berlin, 1940), p. 104.

7 Schultz, p. 104

8 Lewald, p. 60.


11 Schultz, p. 104.

12 Schultz, pp. 104 - 105.

Schultz, p. 105

Klein, p. 662.

Klein, p. 521.

Emil Ermatinger, Die deutsche Lyrik seit Hölder, II (Berlin, 1925) §43.

Ermatinger, p. 244.

Philipp Witkop, Die Deutschen Lyriker, II (Berlin, 1921) 124.

Ermatinger, p. 244.

Lewald, p. 37.

Lewald, pp. 41 - 42.

Platen's lack of stability is partially explained by his homoerotic inclinations which plagued him from early youth. Unfortunately these inclinations remained unreciprocated, and the consequent frustration often resulted in extreme depression and suicidal tendencies. Menel comments: "Die Aussichtlosigkeit seiner homosexuellen Wünsche hat Platen früh erkannt, aber natürlich vermochte die intellektuelle Einsicht nicht gegen die Gewalt so tief angelegter Triebe. Schon mit
neunzehn Jahren, als blutjunger Offizier, dachte er an Selbstmord, und um die Zeit seines 26. Geburtstags schrieb er, die Neigung, die ihm die Vorahnung eingepflanzt habe, mache ihn unergründlich unglücklich: "Nie Erwiderung, noch weniger Befriedigung hoffend, wird mein Zustand immer drückender... O Gott, gib mir keine Zukunft." (Henel, pp. 154-155)

One might go so far as to say that Platen dwells on the decay of the city because it manifests the illness of his own mental condition. His unreciprocated, homoerotic tendencies resulted in a longing for death:

Weil ich Liebe für so manche nährte,
Glaubt ich töricht an Erwiderung;
Spott nur wurde meinem geist'gen Streben,
Und dem Streben meiner Seele Spott;
O betaue dies verwelkte Leben ... !

And further in his poem "Tristan":

Wer die Schönheit angeschaut mit Augen
Ist dem Tode schon anheimgegeben,
Wird für keinen Dienst auf Erden taugen,
Und doch wird er vor dem Tode weinen,
Wer die Schönheit angeschaut mit Augen ....

Ach, er möchte wie ein Quell versiechen,
Jedem Hauch der Luft ein Gift entsaugen
Und dem Tod aus jeder Blume riechen:
Wer die Schönheit angeschaut mit Augen,
Ach, er möchte wie ein Quell versiechen.

(August von Platen, Dichtungen, p. 115)

Platen's mental condition was partly due to the idealistic expectation he had for a homosexual relationship: "Die Liebe zu einem Weibe, wenn sie glücklich ist und der Vereinigung nichts im Wege steht, ist gleichwohl einem Stufenwechsel der Jahreszeiten unterworfen, hat ihren Sommer und Winter. Die Liebe zu einem schönen Freunde, nie gestört durch Begierde, nie gestört durch Befriedigung, erscheint mehr als beständiger Frühlings. Es ist reine Begierung für die schöne Form." (Platen, Tagebücher, pp 78 - 79).

But Platen's ideals were shattered by the discovery that a homoerotic relationship must also include sexual activity. The "Begeisterung für die schöne Form" revealed
to him inherent contradictions which are manifested in the contradiction between the form and content of his poetry. Witkop explains: "Die Wirklichkeit täuschte, die Natur log. Sie schuf Formen, denen Mein Gehalt entsprach, Schönheit, des Körpers, die nicht des schönen Geistes Ausdruck war. Wieder und wieder sah sich seine Liebe von der Natur verraten, beschmutzt, in den Staub ermiedert. Platen sagte: "Ich lernte ihn kennen und konnte nicht mehr achten, was ich liebte. ... Seine Sitten sind äusserst verderbt, seine Gespräche roh und flach; er ist gefühllos wie ein Stein und hat keinen Begriff von Liebe und Freundschaft."


Klein, p. 515. The bridge symbol likewise figures significantly in several other poems in Platen's Sonette aus Venedig:

1. "Wie rafft' ich mich auf in der Nacht, in der Nacht, ..."

2. "Mein Auge liess das hohe Meer zurücke, ..."

3. "Dies Labyrinth von Brücken und von Gassen, ..."
Die Alte Brücke

Conrad Ferdinand Meyer

Dein Bogen, grauer Zeit entstammt,
Steht manch Jahrhundert ausser Amt;
Ein neuer Bau ragt über dir:
Dort fahren sie! Du feierst hier.

Die Strasse, die getragen du,
Deckt Wuchs und rote Blüte zu!
Ein Nebel netzt und tränkt dein Moos,
Er dampft aus dumpfem Reussetos:

Mit einem luftgewobnen Kleid
Umschleiert dich Vergangenheit
Und statt des Lebens geht der Traum
Auf deines Pfades engem Raum.

Das Carmen, das der Schüler sang,
Träumt noch im Felsenwiederklang,
Gewiehern und Drommetenhall
Träumt und verdröhnt im Wogenschwall.

Du warst nach Rom der arge Weg,
Der Kaiser ritt auf deinem Steg,
Und Parricida, frevelblass,
Ward hier vom Staub der Welle nass!

Du brachtest nordwärts manchen Brief,
Drin römische Verleumdung schlief,
Auf dir mit Süldern beuteschwer
Schlich Pest und schwarzer Tod daher!

Vorbei! Vorüber ohne Spur!
Du fielest heim an die Natur,
Die dich umwildert, dich umgrünnt,
Vom Tritt des Menschen dich entsöhnt!
"Ich möchte mir das Reden ganz abgewöhnen, ich möchte wie die Natur in lauter Zeichnungen sprechen."¹ This desire to form pictures from words, expressed by Goethe, is raised to a higher level in the poetry of Conrad Ferdinand Meyer. His work reflects the wish to fashion symbols in order to create a universal language.

Meyer's many visits to the Engadin mountain region of Switzerland were the inspiration for the majority of his nature poetry.² The poet could feel a unity with nature not experienced in the city. His sister Betsy reports of Meyer's "Fähigkeit sich in das Leben und Weben der Natur traumartig zu versenken. In solchen Stunden fühlte er sich mit ihr verwandt und glaubte sogar bis auf einen gewissen Grad an ihre bedeutsamen Winke und Vorzeichen, an das Omen."³

"Die Alte Brücke," written and published in 1869 and revised several times before achieving final form in 1882, was included in
the section "In den Bergen" of Meyer's collected poems. It expresses Meyer's ability "sich traumartig in das Leben und Weben der Natur zu versenken" and his conviction that life is reflected symbolically in nature.

The first stanza contains an element of this dreaminess which pervades the entire poem. As the poet observes the bridge, his attention is drawn to its age:

Dein Bogen, grauer Zeit entstammt,
Steht manch Jahrhundert ausser Amt; ...

"Graue Zeit" suggests the indistinct and shadowy past which shrouds the bridge's existence. It evokes the fantasy characteristic of the poem and anticipates the historical panorama delineated in the following stanzas. The vagueness of "graue Zeit" and "manch Jahrhundert" contributes to the timeless quality of the bridge. It has stood from time immemorial and continues to stand as a monument for all ages. The arch is initially emphasized ("Dein Bogen..."), because it has provided strength and ensured the bridge's longevity. It metaphorically provides the basis of support from which Meyer constructs his poem. Although the bridge has long become obsolete for utilitarian purposes, it lives on in its symbolic value for the poet. This value is evidenced in the
immediate intimacy established in the "du" form of address
("Dein Bogen ... Du feierst...").

The illusionary character of the old bridge is contrasted in the third and fourth verses by reference to a new bridge:

Ein neuer Bau ragt über dir;  
Dort fahren sie! Du feierst hier.

It is described as a "Bau," a construction, which accomplishes the pragmatic purpose of supporting traffic ("Dort fahren sie! ..."), but does not have the dreamy, timeless value of the older structure; "Das neue Bauwerk trägt den Verkehr, während das verfallende dämmert im Traum des Geschichtlichen dahin." This contrast is emphasized by the alliterative associations juxtaposing the two bridges: Bogen/Bau, fahren/feierst.

Like the new bridge, the old bridge also supports life, yet life which is celebrated in stillness and beauty. "Fahren" indicates only transportation; it is more prosaic in contrast to "fahern" which evokes tradition and solemnity— the solemnity which instills a reflective attitude in the poet and induces him to ponder the bridge's significance. The exclamation point ("dort fahren sie!") suggests the haste and excitement with which life passes over the new bridge. Whereas the new bridge symbolizes transitory time, the old bridge symbolizes all time. Its arch has borne the weight of many
years and linked the centuries. The last verse contrasts the bridges syntactically: the adverb-verb-subject order of "Dort fahren sie!" is reversed in describing the new bridge: "Du feierst hier." The final "hier" not only presents a contrast to the "dort" of the new bridge, but describes the nearness of the poet to the old bridge and designates the area to be described in the following stanzas. The span of time represented by the bridge is great, but the space in which events occur is small (there is further reference to this smallness in the "engem Raum" of the third stanza).

The second stanza completes the structure of the old bridge with the mention of the street over the arch: "Die Strasse, die getragen du, ..." Each element of the bridge contributes significantly to the overall symbolism conveyed. This street over the arch does not teem with traffic as the new bridge; it too bears life, yet life as represented by the growth of nature: "Die Strasse... / Deckt Wuchs und rote Blüte zu!" This picture of nature is not merely decorative but becomes vividly animate through word associations: "Wuchs" not only designates the greenery and weeds which cover the bridge but is also associated with "wachsen" indicating the organic growth inherent to the scene. Similarly, "rote Blüte" not only refers to the red flowers adorning the bridge, but is suggestive of red blood which sustains life. By this token,
the bridge and its arch take on an anthropomorphic quality; the poet does not only address the bridge with "du" because of familiarity with what it represents, but also because he visualizes the bridge as an organic being. The phrase "graue Zeit entstammt" in the first stanza suggests a natural organic origin rather than a construction ("Bau") as seen in the new bridge. Similarly, the sentence "Du feiert Welt" implies an animate being rather than a utilitarian structure. The arch "carries" the street ("Die Strasse, die getragen du, ...”).

The naked, lifeless stone of the bridge is no longer visible, but is covered with blossoming life: "Die Strasse.../ Deckt Wuchs und rote Blüte zu!" The entire scene is infused with nature, and all is drawn into the celebration ("feiern") of organic life. The colorfulness of the green plants and red flowers embellishes this scene and helps to blot out the grayness of the bridge’s past. The festive mood of the celebration is evidenced by the exclamation point at the end of the second verse. It is this natural, organic aspect of the bridge that absolves it of man’s intrusion in the last stanza.

The final two verses of the second stanza introduce the fog which surrounds the bridge and saturates its moss:

Ein Nebel netzt und tränt dein Moos,
Er dampft aus dumpfem Reussgetos:...

The fog obscures the clarity of the natural picture: the present gradually fades into the past as the mist issues forth
from the raging waters beneath and enshrouds the bridge in a veil. The grayness associated with fog recalls the "graue Zeit" of the bridge's origin. This penetration of fog is reflected in the subtle intensification of verbal meaning: at first the fog moistens the moss and then soaks and saturates it: "Ein Nebel netzt und tränt dein Mosh, ..." Meyer shows a slow, natural transition from the real world of the present to the past world of dreams. The bridge, itself a part of nature, becomes a symbol of this transition between present and past. In the final verse of the second stanza the mist steams up from the river cascading through the Reuss gorge: 5 "Er dampft aus dumpfem Reussgetos: ..." The sound of "dampft" combined with "dumpfem" reproduces the turbulence ("Getos") of the waters below. 6 Thus there is an aural element in addition to the visual impression already conveyed in the poem. Meyer follows a principle of his friend and mentor Friedrich Theodor Vischer: "Der Dichter wird der Natur ein Auge geben, dass sie geistig blicke, und einen Mund, dass sie rede." 7

Another poem by Meyer, "Nicola Pesce," 8 describes a diver who has forsaken the world and retreated to a dream kingdom in the depths of the ocean. The water purifies him by providing an element in which he can immerse himself and
become a part of nature. The old bridge too has left the real world and is saturated by the fog representing the world of dreams:

Das Wasserreich bringt erlösende Kühle und entrückt der Welt, lässt aber das Erleben zum Traum verblassen... Emil Staiger und Heinrich Henel sind sich einig, dass hier der Dichter wie sonst nirgends in seinem Eigensten zu fassen sei. Kühle, Ruhe und sinnendes Träumen ist der wahrste Klang Meyers Werk.

Thus the bridge becomes a symbol of the link between the real world and the intangible world of dreams.

This world of dreams is fully achieved in the third stanza:

Mit einem luftgewobnen Kleid
Unschleiert dich Vergangenheit
Und statt des Lebens geht der Traum
Auf deines Pfades engen Raum.

Like former images in the poem, the "luftgewobnen Kleid" veils the bridge and imparts a life-like quality to it.

"Luftgewoben," describing the encroaching fog, expresses the cloak of illusion which surrounds the bridge and anticipates the "Traum" in the third verse. It marks the transition from fog which can be seen by the eye, to the dream which can only be seen in the imagination. For Meyer this transition is a natural process accomplished by a combination of the fog and air ("luftgewobnen"). A raiment is woven from the air which brings both the poet and bridge back into the "graue Zeit" of the past. This weaving process recalls
Betsy's quote about her brother: "Er hatte die Fähigkeit sich in das Leben und Weben der Natur traumartig zu versinken."

Figuratively it is the poet's own imagination that is reconstructing, "weaving," events of the past. In order to illustrate this process Meyer creates a garment to clothe what is abstract and intangible. "Umschleiert" is consistent with "Kleid" and "-gewoben;" because it conveys not only an idea but a picture which can be visualized and is therefore all the more vivid. The "um" in "umschleiert" implies that the transition from reality to dream, initiated by the gradual penetration of the fog, is complete. The spirit of the past permeates the entire scene.

But this dream world is not a final world for Meyer, as suggested by "schleiert": it is only an imaginary world where reality is momentariness veiled and indistinct but nevertheless immanent. Meyer is not a romantic, for he never loses sight of the real world. But in visionary moments such as this one he was able to combine reality and dream, and symbolized the union of these realms with the bridge. Meyer's "teacher" Vischer noted: "Eigentlich gefällt es mir so ganz doch immer nur da, wo es traumhaft aussieht. Freilich doch auch im Deutlichen, Klaren. Aber beides kann sich ja gut vereinigen."
These two realms of reality and dream are juxtaposed in the third verse. The "Leben" refers to the life which normally traverses the bridge. It is "Leben" in the sense of the everyday traffic and commerce alluded to in the function of the new bridge: "Dort fahren sie!" But the old bridge has a visionary rather than a utilitarian function: it evokes a view of the past that everyday life does not allow. Although its path is narrow ("engen Raum"), this dream nevertheless reveals a multitude of past events in the following stanzas. It is like a baroque mirror-cabinet, which, though small, prismatically reflects many different views of the room in which it stands. One object is reflected differently depending on the angle and level of each mirror. The narrowest room appears augmented, multiplied in a hundred different aspects. So too with the dream on its narrow path: within it is contained the potential to reveal every aspect of life. Here again Meyer uses concrete images to express abstract concepts: the dream is given substance by tangibly placing it as a wanderer ("geht der Traum") on the narrow path of the bridge.

The first three stanzas of the poem form a prelude for the review of historical events which follows. With the
fourth stanza the present tense changes to the preterite
whereupon a panorama of past events is portrayed. This
structure is similar to the "Rahmenzählung" technique which
Meyer employs in his novellas. It enables him to view life
indirectly and obliquely and therefore in greater perspective
than an interpretation of present circumstances allows. Witkop
reminds: "Ein rückschauender Geist sucht in historischer
Betrachtung den verhaltenen Anteil am Leben, den die Wirklichkeit
doch überreiten würde." Many types of persons and different
epochs are manifested in this historical vision to indicate
its scope and potential as well as to provide the poet with a
deeper understanding of the present world.

This view of the past commences with the troubadours and
minstrels who passed over the bridge singing their Latin
songs during the Middle Ages:

Das Carmen, das der Schüler sang,
Träumt noch im Felsenwiederklang...

The melody of this song has not been erased by time, but is
still echoed by the surrounding cliffs. The rime of "sang"
and "klang" emphasizes the continued presence. It is not,
however, an audible melody, but one that is dreamily evoked
in the poet's inner senses ("träumt noch im Felsenwieder-
klang"). The envisioned song of the past is thus made
concrete, and past is united with present by the association
of sound reverberating between the cliffs. These cliffs are
a part of nature, and nature transmuted through the poet's imagination reproduces the past.

This echo of musical harmony is not the only sound elicited from the past. Also present are sounds of urgency and tension:

Gewieher und Drommetenhall
Träumt und verdröhnt im Wogenschwall.

These loud, unharmonious sounds recall the crashing of the "Reussgetös" in stanza two. The neighing of horses suggests an element of turmoil and commotion contained in the past. The horses as well as the resonance of trumpets ("Drommetenhall") evoke the tumult of an ancient battle. These sounds too are tangibly reflected in nature. They are echoed in the surging waves ("Wogenschwall") of the canyon below.

"Wogenschwall" suggests the swell and turbulence representative of "Gewieher und Drommetenhall." It is in contrast to the more musical connotation of "Felsenwiederklang." The melody of the carmen continues to resonate ("träumt noch"), whereas the loud, alarming sounds which are conjured up quickly vanish ("träumt und verdröhnt"). The stanza thus anticipates the conclusion of the poem where all the events of history are reconciled with nature, and peace and harmony return. Meyer uses nature as a tool to artistically demonstrate the contrasts of life. He is "weaving" a vision
of the past by selectively imparting details to nature.

The fifth and sixth stanzas describe a colorful procession of people who have crossed the bridge:

Du warst nach Rom der arge Weg,
Der Kaiser ritt auf deinem Steg,
Und Parricida, frevelblass,
Ward hier vom Staub der Welle nass!

Du brachtest nördwärts manchen Brief,
Drin römische Verleumdung schlief,
Auf dir mit Söldnern beuteschwer
Schlich Pest und schwarzer Tod daher!

Not only the lower classes of the "Schüler" and the "Söldner" are portrayed, but also nobility (Parricida) and the emperor. This variety of people and classes is presented to evoke a kaleidoscopic pageant of history.

Yet aside from the scholars who sing their carmen Meyer depicts a negative view of humanity. The bridge itself assumes a pejorative connotation in the first verse where it is identified as "der arge Weg nach Rom." It must share the guilt of the reprobates such as the murderer Parricida or the scandalous Roman emperor who have crossed it. Mercenaries have used the bridge to carry their plunder across the Alps: "... Auf dir mit Söldnern beuteschwer..." It becomes the focal point between north and south and has thus experienced a cross-section of humanity ("Du brachtest nördwärts manchen Brief... Du warst nach Rom der arge Weg.")
The final verse of the sixth stanza "... Schlich Pest und schwarzer Tod daher," denotes the physical manifestations of man's crimes, as well as relating the infamous role the bridge plays in transmitting the plague from country to country. It is consistent with Meyer's attempt throughout the poem to render abstract concepts (wickedness, calumny) in concrete terms (plague, the black death). "Schwarzer Tod" visually represents the death which accompanies these criminals.

However, the "schwarzer Tod," which signifies man's association with evil is counterbalanced by the colorfulness of the historical pageant passing in review. Just as the disturbance of the neighing horses and the resounding trumpets are contrasted with the songs of the scholars, the dark side of humanity is countered by the majestic multitude of figures.

Much as the "Gewieher und Drommetenhall" is swallowed by the waves and disappears, so in the final stanza the parading figures of history have vanished. The bridge is absolved of man's intrusion:

Vorbei! Vorüber ohne Spur!  
Du fieles heim an die Natur,  
Die dich umwältet, dich umgrünt,  
Vom Tritt des Menschen dich entwöhnt.

The bridge and its abiding quality, as symbolized by the strength of its "Bogen," remains after the men and events have dissolved. The animation and movement evoked in the
poet’s vision give way to peace and harmony.

This alternating process of movement and cessation is a principle of Meyer’s art. He maintains that literature depends on motion for its effect: “Bewegung—sei es der unaufhaltsame lyrische Herzensdrang, sei es der epische Wanderschritt, sei es der stürmbeugte Segel dramatischer Leidenschaft—ist und bleibt die wesentliche Schönheit aller Dichtung.” Meyer’s sister comments on the motion observed in the waters under the Teufelsbrücke, which was the inspiration for “Die alte Brücke”:


Yet this movement is finally balanced by the repose and tranquillity of nature, in the reflective stillness of "feiern" as expressed in the first stanza. Helene von Lerber states:


The final stanza leaves the momentary realm of dreams and
returns to the reality of the present world: "Vorbei! Vorüber ohne Spur!" "Vorbei!" not only refers to the expired events of the past, but also to the vanished moment of the dream. Yet in this moment the poet has been able to grasp the symbolism of the bridge and arrives at a deeper understanding of life. The bridge not only represents a uniting of past and present, of dream and reality, but also of nature and poet. Meyer based his symbols on these visionary moments:

Das Symbol beruht auf den schnellsten und oft widrigen Verknüpfungen des Traumes; Gleichsetzungen finden statt, die nur für den Augenblick des starken Gefühles gelten können und dann wieder verfliegen.

The bridge reverts to the natural elements surrounding it. The use of "fierest heim" is consistent with Meyer's view in the introductory stanzas that the bridge itself is an organic component of nature. "Fierest heim" does not have the connotation of decay or deterioration, but rather the bridge's simple regression to its "Heim"--the natural state from which it evolved in the gray and distant past. "Umwildert" connotes this natural state which absorbs the past culture associated with the bridge. "Umgrünt" designates nature's victory over man's interference, whereby natural green coloring overcomes the blackness of death ("schwarzer Tod" in the preceding stanza). "Umwildert" and "umgrünt" also recall "umschleiert" in the third stanza, but now the present
world of nature rather than the past realm of dreams encompasses the bridge.

Nature absolves the bridge of man's influence: "Vom Tritt des Menschen dich entsättigt!" It is the new structure that now carries men. The colorful types and classes of people presented in the vision are juxtaposed to modern humanity in the general and colorless term "Menschen." "Rote Blüte" also contrasts with the drab "Menschen" who cross the newer bridge. For the old bridge there are no different types and no class distinctions anymore: it is exonerated from one and all. The specific vocabulary used to describe this absolution ("entsättigt") has religious connotations. Meyer deviates from traditional Christian standards and reappplies Christian terminology in a secular framework. No longer Christ, but nature, redeems. It is in this context that "rote Blüte" in the second stanza implies the redemption found in Christ's blood. But "rote Blüte" is secularized and refers to the natural beauty which redeems the bridge.20 Nature assumes a similar religious connotation in other poems by Meyer, such as "Himmelsnähe":

...Bald nahe tost, bald fern der Wasserfall, Er stürzt und stürzt, nun rechts, nun links verweht, Bin tiefes Schweigen und ein steter Schall, Bin Wind, ein Strom, ein Atem, ein Gebet!
Nur neben mir des Murmeltieres Pfiff,
Nur übe mir des Geiers heiser Schrei,
Ich beim allein auf meinem Felsenriff
Und ich erforde, dass Gott bei mir sei. 21
(italics added)

In nature Meyer is able to find "die Ruhe und Harmonie des Unvergänglichen." 22 This harmony "tönt als tiefster Grundklang seiner Dichtung durch, und liegt in der Erfahrung begründet, dass alles mit den übrigen vergangenen Dingen zu einer einzigen 'friedvollen Macht' verschmilzt, in der auch jede Schuld aufgehoben ist." 23 This harmony is achieved in Meyer's poetry through the use of the symbol, such as the old bridge, which renders in concrete terms that which is abstract or intangible. Such use of the symbol displays affinities to the classical tradition:

Symbol ist die Beziehung eines Inneren durch ein Äusseres, eines Seelischen durch ein Körperliches, eines Abstrakten durch ein Konkretes. So ist es die Brücke, die die Gegensätze der Welt, Geist und Materie, vereinigen will-- in dieser Tendenz zur Harmonie liegt das klassische Moment. 24

This "klassische Moment" is likewise seen in the harmony which Meyer observes in nature:

At the time Meyer wrote "Die alte Brücke," he was striving to emulate the clarity and objectivity of classical poetry:

Dass die Bergwelt, besonders in seinem lyrischen Werk, einen grossen Raum einnimmt, ist begreiflich, weil ihm hier das Grosse, Wuchtige, Gestaltete, Klare in seiner reinsten Form entgegentrat... deshalb rang Meyer darum, alles Verschwommene, allzu Romantische seines Wesens abzulegen, um ganz 'wirklich' zu werden. 26

This attempt to achieve classical realism is evidenced by the lack of the first person in "Die alte Brücke." Although the poem relates a personal experience, Meyer avoids any mark of individuality in his form and the universal scope of his images—his "überpersönliche verallgemeinerte Sinnbilder." 27 Hence Meyer mitigates his subjectivity in devotion to artistic form: "Meyer hatte die Aufgabe seine Leidenschaft zu verhüllen durch die Mittelbarkeit der Form und durch ihre käare Umrissenheit." 28 The life that he experienced was through art, as evidenced in the envisioned historical procession of the poem. Meyer found real life, as represented by the new bridge, colorless and uninspiring; it is in the old bridge that life becomes vivid and profound. The bridge therefore becomes a symbol of the transition from art to life:

Nicht durch das Leben war er zur Kunst gekommen, sondern durch die Kunst zum Leben. Die Kunst hatte ihm die Möglichkeit gegeben, das Leben, das ihm in seiner unmittelbaren Gewalt unerträglich gewesen wäre, von sich abzurücken, es nicht mehr
ruhlos und fordernd, sondern still und bildhaft zu 
sehen. Sie hatte ihm die Möglichkeit gegeben, von 
seiner grimmambuschten Höhe aus betrachtend, 
ohne sich in sein dunkles Gedränge zu mischen, ohne 
sich in die Verlorenheit der Erlebnisse zu wagen, 
die seine zarte Natur zertrümmert hätten. Sie 
hatte ihm die Möglichkeit gegeben, nicht in der 
stürmenden, wühelnden Gegenwart, sondern in der 
beruhigten klaren Vergangenheit zu leben.

Yet the life represented is hardly objective life, 
though Meyer does aspire toward a classicist objectivity.
It remains rather a product of his poetic fantasy, much as 
he has "woven" nature to create an artistic tapestry. Just 
as real life holds no interest for Meyer, life as represented 
through art has no sustained presence for him: his dream is 
soon "Vorbei! Vortüber ohne Späs!" In the end Meyer is left 
amone, like the old bridge, solemnly reflecting upon his 
alienation from art as well as life. One senses that the poet 
is talking to himself and establishing his own sanctuary 
in nature when he says, "Dort fahren sie. Du feierst hier."
Footnotes


6. In order to achieve this onomatopoeia, Meyer changed the original "Er steigt aus dumpfem Reussgetös" to "Er dampft aus dumpfen Reussgetös." Heinrich Kraeger, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer. Quellen und Wandlungen seiner Gedichte (Berlin, 1901), p. 203.


9. A similar event is experienced by Wulfrin in Meyer’s novella Die Richterim: "Wulfrin gelangte an den Strom, der hier ohne
Gewalt und Sturz Klippen und Felsen brüct überflutete.
Das Mondlicht verlickte ihn sich auf ein Felsstück
zu lagern und wunsch- und schmerzlos mit den Wellen
dahinzufliessen. Er wurde sich selbst zum Traume."

10
Wiesmann, p. 155.

11
Quoted by Linden, p. 224.

12
Philipp Witkop, Die Deutschen Lyriker von Luther bis Nietzsche,

13
For a comparison of the bridge symbol in Meyer's conception of
history, his Auf Ponte Sisto is valuable: (Werke, III, p. 116)

Süß ist das Dunkel nach Gluten des Tages! Auf dämmernder Brücke
Schau ich die Ufer entlang dieser unsterblichen Stadt.
Burgen und Tempel verwachsen zu einer gewaltigen Sage!
Unter mir hüten der Strom manchen verschollenen Hort.
Dort in der Flut eines Nachkommens Gespenst! Ist es ein Flüchtlicher Kaiser?
Ist es der "Jakob vom Kahn", der Buonarroti geführt?
Gellend erhebt sich Gesang in dem Boot zum Ruhme des Liebchens.
Horch! Ein lebendiger Mund fordert Nebendiges Glück.

14
F. Schiller, Werke, III, p. 69. Tell to Parricida in Wilhelm
Tell (Act V):
"Ihr steigt hinauf, dem Strom der Reuss entgegen
Die wildes Laufes von dem Berge stürzt -- ...
Und seid ihr glücklich durch die Schreckensstrasse, so kommt ihr auf die Brücke, welche
stürzet..." (Italics added).

15
Meyer frequently uses the Engadin region as a symbol of the
joining between north and south. Max Nussberger
comments: "Meyers Reisen fassen das Engadin als
Grenzgebiet des Nordens und Südens und lassen die
Kennzeichen der verschiedenen Zonen als Gegensätze
aufeinanderstossen, bald um sehnsüchtig in die Ferne zu träumen, bald um den Weg zurück zu ergründender Selbstbetrachtung zu nehmen.” Max Nussberger, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, Leben und Werke (Frauenfeld, 1919), p. 77.

16


17


18


19

Linden, p. 225.

20

Louis Wiesmann refers in this respect to the "heidnische Gedanken" contained in the poem. But Meyer does not reject the notion of God, but modifies it to his own purposes. Wiesmann, p. 51.

21

C.F. Meyer, Werke, no. 73, I.

22

Wiesmann, p. 153.

23

Wiesmann, p. 153.

24

Linden, p. 207.

25

Linden, p. 225.

26

Helene von Lerber, p. 162.

27

28
Klein, p. 619.

29
Witkop, p. 246.
"Wann treffen wir drei wieder zusammen?"
"Um die siebente Stund, am Brückendamm."
"Am Mittelpfeiler."
"Ich löche die Flamm."
"Ich mit."
"Ich komme vom Norden her."
"Und ich vom Süden."
"Und ich vom Meer."
"Hei, das gibt einen Ringelreim, Und die Brücke muss in den Grund hineinl"
"Und der Zug, der in die Brücke tritt Um die siebente Stund?"
"Bi, der muss mit."
"Muss mit."
"Tand, Tand
 Ist das Gebilde von Menschenhand."

Auf der Norderseite, das Brückenhaus--
Alle Fenster sehen nach Süden aus,
Und die Brücknersleut ohne Rast und Ruh
Und in Bangen sehen nach Süden zu,
Sehen und warten, ob nicht ein Licht
Übers Wasser hin "Ich komme" spricht,
"Ich komme, trotz Nacht und Stimmesflug,
Ich, der Edinburger Zug."

Und der Brückner jetzt; "Ich seh einen Schein
Am andern Ufer. Das muss er sein.
Nun, Mutter, weg mit dem bangen Traum.
Unser Johnie kommt und will seinen Raum,
Und was noch am Baume von Lichtern ist,
Zünd alles an wie zum heiligen Christ,
Der will heuer zweimal mit uns sein--
Und in elf Minuten ist er herein."

Und es war der Zug. Am Süderturm
Keucht er vorbei jetzt gegen den Sturm,
Und Johnie spricht: "Die Brücke noch!
Aber was tut es, wir zwingen es doch.
Ein fester Kessel, ein doppelter Dampf,
Die bleiben Sieger in solchem Kampf.
Und wie's auch rast und ringt und rennt,
Wir kriegen es unter, das Element.

Und unser Stolz ist unsre Brück;
Ich lache, denk' ich an früher zurück,
An all den Jammer und all die Not
Mit dem elend alten Schifferboot;
Wie manche 'liebe Christfestnacht
Hab' ich im Fährhaus zugebracht
Und sah unsrer Fenster lichten Schein
Undzählte und konnte nicht drüber sein."

Auf der Norderseite, das Brückenhaus
Alle Fenster sehen nach Süden aus,
Und die Brücknersleut ohne Rast und Ruh
Und in Bangen sehen nach Süden zu;
Denn wütender wurde der Winde Spiel,
Und jetzt, als ob Feuer vom Himmel fiel,
Erglüht es in niederschiessender Pracht
Überm Wasser unter... Und wieder ist Nacht.

"Wann treffen wir drei wieder zusamm?"
"Um Mitternacht, am Bergeskamm."
"Auf dem hohen Moor, am Brlenstamm."
"Ich komme."

"Ich mit."

"Ich nenn euch die Zahl."

"Und ich die Namen."

"Und ich die Qual."

"Hei!
Wie Splitter brach das Gebälk entzwei."
"Tand, Tand
Ist das Gebilde von Menschenhand."
Fontane's "Die Brück am Tay" is a "Gelegenheitsgedicht":
it is developed from a single event and portrays the
consternation which this event generated among contemporaries.
On the night of December 28, 1879, the mid-section of the
railroad bridge over the Firth of Tay in Scotland collapsed
during a violent storm, carrying with it a train from
Edinburgh bound for Dundee. With over two hundred people killed,
the accident was the worst rail disaster of the century.¹ The
event was publicized throughout the world, causing alarm and
incomprehension at how a structure of such technical skill and
engineering could fail.

There was no acceptance of the disaster; it was problematic
and demanded explanation. Many people, among them Fontane,
attributed the tragedy to man's boldness and arrogance in
defying the storming elements, as indicated in a newspaper
report of January 9, 1880: "In der Silvesternacht
war nun ein furchtbarer Sturm, so dass die Anwohner es
für eine Vermessenheit hielten, wenn der Edinburger Zug die
Passage wage." (italics added).² Fontane, who wrote his ballad in the week following the accident on January 6, 1880, portrays the disaster vividly by combining realistic and supernatural elements to emphasize man's folly in a technical age.

The poem is constructed in three parts which juxtapose the two spheres of the real and the supernatural. The first stanza depicts the gathering of the witches and their predictions, the second through sixth stanzas describe events in the human sphere, and the final stanza returns to the mythical landscape of the witches and the fulfillment of their prophecy. It is significant that the middle section of the ballad, representing human activities, is inserted between sections dominated by the supernatural realm. Such a framework suggests the superiority of the supernatural world. The powerlessness of the human realm in the middle section is also reflected thematically in the collapse of the bridge's "Mittelpfeiler."

This juxtaposition of real and supernatural worlds is already seen in the two lines prefacing the poem, "28. Dezember 1879" and the quotation from Macbeth, "When shall we three meet again?" The exact date of the tragedy, designating the rational world, is contrasted to the irrational sphere of
the witches. These introductory lines function to make the reader aware of the dual realms present in the ballad.

By his use of Shakespeare, Fontane immediately places us in a mythical world which is starkly contrasted to the world of the middle section. By virtue of form and literary allusion, Fontane raises journalistic material to the status of art.

The first verse of the poem is a direct translation of the Shakespeare quotation cited: "Wann treffen wir drei wieder zusammen?" Its function is to transfer the ominous mood associated with the well-known scene from Macbeth to Fontane's poem. Fontane admired Shakespeare's ability to create atmosphere² and utilizes the effect of the first scene for his own purposes.

As in Macbeth, the witch's query is answered by lomation as well as time:

"Um die siebente Stund, am Brückendamm."
"Am Mittelpfeiler."

The exact hour is mentioned ("Um die siebente Stund") in contrast to the vaguer answer given in Macbeth: "When the hurlyburly's done, / When the battle's lost and won."
Fontane thus seeks to provide realistic detail to avoid a totally mythical atmosphere. This detail is also indicated in the meeting place agreed upon by the witches: "Am Brückendamm" is narrowed even more specifically in the following verse to "Am Mittelpfeiler."

The ubiquity of the supernatural realm is suggested in the different directions from which the witches arrive:

"Ich komme vom Norden her."
"Und ich vom Süd'en."
"Und ich vom Meer."

Forces from various and distant regions converge on the bridge to form a focal point of future events. The anticipated disaster promises mirth and celebration for the witches: "Hei, das gibt einen Ringelreihn, ..." The joy implied in "Ringelreihn" is contrasted in the following verse by the devastation and tragedy to take place: "und die Brücke muss in den Grund hinein." The rhyme of "Ringelreihn" and "hinein" emphasizes this tragic contrast.

"Ringelreihn" also characterizes the structure and tone of the first stanza. The brevity and exchange of the witches' statements create an atmosphere of excitement and expectancy. Each statement modifies and supports the other to produce a verbal "Ringelreihn." The circular
pattern of dialogue formed by each witch speaking in turn elicits a visual impression of "Ringelreihn." The frequent use of "und" to connect the statements of alternating speakers ("Und ich vom Süden" ... "Und ich vom Meer." ... "Und die Brücke..." ... "Und der Zug") reproduces the rhythm of a round dance. Again, the joviality inherent in the tone and rhythm of the stanza is in stark contrast to the tragic forecast of misery and suffering. Fontane is successful in writing a ballad in the original sense of the word—he creates a dance through the medium of language.

The ballad form is also supported by the frequent repetition of statements. The unanimity of the witches' decision regarding the fate of the train is echoed in the triple repetition of "Muss":

"...muss in den Grund hinein"
"Ei der muss mit."
"Muss mit"

"Muss" also emphasizes the inevitability of the witches' decision. The repetition of "Um die siebente Stund" in the twelfth verse again injects a realistic detail into an otherwise mythical atmosphere.

The refrain "Tand, Tand / Ist das Gebilde von Menschenhand" is sung by the witches in unison and underscores the
dance-like rhythm of the first stanza. It illustrates the omnipotence of the supernatural world over the world of men. Even before the human realm is introduced in the poem it is declared as trifling and debilitated. The actions of men portrayed in the following stanzas will thus appear pathetic and meaningless in face of supernatural forces already presented.

The second stanza brings us to the setting referred to in the first stanza and introduces the human realm. Although the metaphysical world is no longer present, there is a continuity established between stanzas: the sea and directions of north and south mentioned in the first stanza are echoed in references to the water and the north and south shores in the second stanza:

Auf der Norderseite das Brückenhaus -
Alle Fenster sehen nach Süden aus, ...
... ob nicht ein Licht
Uebers Wasser hin ...

Unlike the first stanza, however, there is a note of impatience now present. All windows look southward toward the bridge as if the house had turned itself in expectancy of the train ("Alle Fenster sehen nach Süden aus."). The bridgekeeper and his wife also look southwards at the bridge
anxiously awaiting their son:

Und die Brücknersleut ohne Rast und Ruh
Und in Bangen sehen nach Süden zu.

The alliteration of "ohne Rast und Ruh" suggests the restiveness of the couple. "Ohne Rast und Ruh" and "Bangen" describe their tenseness and contribute to the suspenseful atmosphere of the stanza. The repetition of "sehen" as well as the "ich" of the train intensifies the mounting stress of the vigil:

"alle Fenster sehen" ... "und in Bangen sehen" ... "sehen und warten"; "Ich komme..." ... "Ich komme..." ... "Ich, ..."

The style and structure of the second stanza also reflect strain and impatience. The first and second verses break off abruptly, and the resulting anacoluthon produces a disturbing, alarming effect. The ensuing repetition of "und" suggests hastiness and anxiety: "Und die Brücknersleut... / Und in Bangen ..." This repetition of "und" is also evidenced at the beginning of each stanza in the middle section:

Und der Brückner jetzt: ...
Und es war der Zug ...
Und unser Stolz ist unsre Brück

An electrified atmosphere is created in anticipation of the train and the ensuing tragedy.

The drama of the situation is made more vivid and suspenseful by the monologue of the train. The train in the poem is not
an inanimate means of transportation; in balladesque personification it becomes an active participant in the events as viewed by the parents. Self-confidence and pride issue forth from the repeated "ich" of its assertion: "Ich ... ich ... ich, der Edinburger Zug." This repetition emphasizes the train's claim to superiority over the natural elements: it comes "trotz Nacht und Sturmesflug." The repeated "ich... ich... ich" also elicits the sensation of steady speed and powerful driving; the sensation of watching a steam locomotive in full gallop. It is also significant that the train speaks before man as the first representative of the human realm in the poem: the technological and supernatural rather than the human and supernatural are the antagonists in the ballad. The train is symbolic of modern technology, and man becomes subservient to the mechanical sophistication he has created.

In the third stanza the waiting and impatience of the couple seem for a moment to be rewarded. A light appears on the opposite shore in answer to their anxious vigil: "Und der Brückner jetzt: 'Ich seh einen Schein / Am andern Ufer.'" This light is a foreseen reality for the practically-minded father, who intrepidly states: "'Das muss er sein.'" ... "'Und in elf Minuten ist er herein.'" For him
the future is calculable. He does not perceive the tragic ambivalence of meaning in the word "Schein." He needs only to be convinced by the light that meets his eyes, and this for him becomes a reality. The old man can hardly await the arrival of the train; the report at the beginning of the stanza remains elliptical without a verb, suggesting impulsiveness and urgency. The joy of anticipation is evident; there is no time for explanation: "Und der Brückner jetzt: ..."

But in spite of the old man's assurance there is a retarding element in the third stanza. Between the light of the train and the light of the Christmas tree lies the dark "bange Traum" of the mother. Beside the confidence of the practical father is the mother's persistent fear of the uncertain. About what she is dreaming we are not told, but the "bange Traum" intimates the presence of the supernatural and heightens the suspense. The dream is a somber presentiment, but it is subordinated to the confidence pervading the stanza.

This confidence is also evidenced in the domestic image of the Christmas celebration:

"... Unser Johnie kommt und will seinen Baum, Und was noch am Baume von Liebtern ist, Zünd alles an wie mum heiligen Christ ..."
The reference to Christmas is not intended as a contrast to the pagan supernatural world of witches. It is a sentimental image evoking middle class tranquillity and comfort. The certainty that Christ and His birth provide for such a family is doubled this year ("heuer zweimal") and adds to the father's certainty that the train will arrive: "in elf Minuten ist er herein." The Christmas scene also provides a stark contrast to the impending doom of the accident. The "Schein" -- the light of the train and the light of the Christmas tree, as well as the light from the windows of the house -- provides false security and equivocates the real meaning of "Schein" for the poem; all that which the father sees and relies upon is only illusion.

In the fourth stanza the scene changes to the locomotive about to enter the bridge. The bridgekeeper's certainty appears confirmed in the first verse: "und es war der Zug." His son Hohnie, aboard the train, speaks with even more confidence than his father. He emphasizes the strength of the locomotive and its superiority over the elements: "Wir zwingen es doch" .. "Ein fester Kessel, ein doppelter Dampf, die bleiben Sieger..." "... Wir kriegen es unter, das Element." He also has implicit confidence in the bridge:
"Unser Stolz ist unser Brück." "Stolz" characterizes Johnnie well. His "hybris" is that of the technical person certain that man's technical abilities have surpassed the forces of nature. Johnnie's "hybris," which does not admit to the existence of intangible or supernatural elements in nature, brings about his doom.

Yet Johnnie's pride and self-confidence are not entirely unthreatened in the third stanza. The train "keucht" and the storm "rast und ringt und rennt." "Rast und ringt und rennt" evidence the fury of the storm; all three verbs are indicative of turbulence. The motion of the storm's rage is not only inherent in the meaning of the verbs. Their placement after one another with the reiterated "und ... und" creates a repetitiveness suggestive of movement. The alliteration in "rast und ringt und rennt" implies the constant, unyielding assault of the storm. Just as the "bange Traum" of the mother undermines the security of the father in the second stanza, the "panting" train and the relentless storm undermine Johnnie's vaunted superiority and again serve to intensify the suspense. The reader is made constantly aware of the portentous forces delineated in the first stanza. A structural "bridge" comprised of supernatural elements therefore connects the first and last stanzas.
Johnie entrusts himself unquestionably to the reliability of the locomotive and the bridge even in the midst of the storm. He emphasizes the superiority of the machine: "Ein fester Kessel, ein doppelter Dampf, / Die bleiben Sieger in solchem Kampf." In contrast to the "Ich ... ich ... ich, der Edinburger Zug," representing the machine, Johnie assumes a more dependent role with "wir." He cannot function alone—his strength relies upon the strength of the locomotive and the bridge: "Wir zwingen es doch," "wir kriegen es unter..."

This dependency is also evidenced in Johnie's parents' reliance on the bridge for their livelihood— they are BBrücknerslaut," and live in a "Brückenhaus."

Johnie's monologue is continued in the fifth stanza. His "hybris" continues to assert itself; "ich lache, denk ich früher zurück ..." Johnie's pride now turns to ridicule as he scorns the old ferryboat which hesitated to defy the elements. The old days (implied in "früher zurück" and "alten Schifferboot") when man had to rely on his own strength to cross the inlet are in contrast to the modern age when he relies on technology. Johnie laughs now at "all den Jammer und all die Not" and considers it surmounted. He
does not know the far deeper "Jammer und Not" in which he is entangled. Johnie's confidence enables him, like his father, to turn his thoughts from the storm to the Christmas celebration. He is now able to anticipate spending it with his family in contrast to former years:

Wie manche liebe Christfestnacht
Hab ich im Führhaus zugebracht
Und sah unser Fenster lichten Schein
Und zählte und konnte nicht drüber sein.

Johnie's glance is transfixed by the same "Schein" as his father--he glimpses the illusionary safety and security of his home rather than the danger of the storm. The sight of the illuminated windows in the house, suggesting warmth and domesticity, becomes itself like a Christmas tree to Johnie's eyes. Unlike the old days, he now feels assumed of his arrival despite the raging elements. Again the Christmas scene has a sentimental, almost melodramatic function in view of the disaster to come. The next stanza changes its setting once again to this domestic Christmas scene and from there we experience the final catastrophe indirectly as observers.

Still in the sixth stanza Johnie's parents peer toward the light of the locomotive which is to bring their son home. The first four verses of the second stanza are repeated,
completing the framework of the human realm:

Auf der Norderseite, das Brückenhaus
Alle Fenster sehen nach Süden aus,
Und die Brücknersleut ohne Rast und Ruh
Und in Bangen sehen nach Süden zu; ... 

The repetition of these lines provides more than a heightening of suspense. The effect of the four verses is intensified from the anxiety and impatience of the second stanza to alarm and terror. The father no longer admonishes his wife to abandon her "bange Traum" but is now himself fearful. The storm becomes more furious: "Denn wütender wurde der Winde Spiel." The alliterative "w" again signifies the relentlessness of the storm. Just as the witches consider the catastrophe a joyous event ("einen Ringelreihn"), the wind's turbulence is regarded as playful frolic ("Spiel"). There are no bounds or ethics in the supernatural realm-- machine and man alike are helpless playthings, dangling marionettes who only possess the illusion of power and grandeur.

In a scene reminiscent of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorra, man's pathetic claims to superiority-- his locomotive and his bridge-- are struck down by a fire from heaven. The light which meant safety and security now becomes a scorching flame which ironically appears splendidous ("Pracht") in the darkness. It is the tragic beauty of this destruction that
the witches anticipated in the first stanza. The statement of one of the witches, "Ich lösche die Flamm...", now becomes clear. They not only extinguish the light of the locomotive and the flame of life, but also the fire of man's overweening pride.

Only three verses are needed to destroy the hope and "hybris" of man as portrayed in the preceding thirty-seven verses. The destruction is powerful--a "niederschissende Pracht." Man's total incapacity now becomes evident; in four words the last verse falls irrevocably into darkness and oblivion: "... Und wieder ist Nacht." The tension and suspense inherent in the preceding stanzas are now relieved with the falling rhythm and laconic diction. The brevity with which the catastrophe occurs produces the frightening effect intended by Fontane: "Wenn Kürze die Seele des Witzes ist, so ist Kürze auch die Seele des Schreckens, des Schauders, des Gespensterischen."

These events of the visible, human realm are thematically and structurally enclosed in a framework comprising the demonic, supernatural forces. Two similarly constructed stanzas consisting of dialogue, and parallel in rhythm and imagery introduce and conclude the poem. There is no report
or narrative as in the middle part. The desultory, abrupt
dialogue and split verse structure are in contrast to
the regularity of the eight-verse middle stanzas, where man's
security and self-confidence are evidenced in the tight
structure, the simple couplets, and the clear metrical
and syntactical organization.

The final stanza returns to the supernatural realm.
The witches have observed the fate of the bridge and the
train with its passengers. "Der Winde Spiel" has subsided, and
the witches have attained their goal. The first verse
of the poem is repeated and like a leit-motif reinvokes the
forbidding atmosphere of the first stanza. In contrast
to the introduction, however, the time and place agreed
upon no longer describe a specific setting. Midnight,
the traditional bewitching hour, as well as the location,
"Bergeskamm... hohen Moor ... Erlenstamm," emphasize the tran-
scending mythical realm. Like spectral reporters
the witches happily anticipate providing an account
of the "Zahl," "Namen," and "Qual" of their victims.
"Hei!" repeats their jubulance of the first stanza: "Hei! das
gibt einen Ringelreihen!" Again their joy is in contrast to
the tragedy they have caused: "Zahl," "Namen" and "Qual" report the material, existential and spiritual suffering inflicted. The triple sound of the long "a" produces an ominous effect culminating in "Qual." The witches rejoice over the destruction of the bridge: "Wie Splitter brach das Gebälk entzwei." One can hear the collapsing girders in the sound of "Splitter." They rejoice like children who have knocked over a house of cards. The final chorus of triumph, where the crones joins hands for their "Ringelreihn," reflects the insight of the poet--an insight which is not far removed from *memento mori*: "Tand, Tand ist das Gebilde vom Menschenhand."

The first and last stanzas constitute a removal from reality, enabling Fontane to treat the disaster poetically, The artistic distance achieved distinguishes the poem as a "Kunstballade"--the facts having been filtered through the poet's aesthetic sense and given new form and significance. This artistic distance is immediately evidenced in the borrowed Shakespeare quotation which imposes a mythical realm over the material world. Initially it appears ironic that Fontane would use Shakespeare to preface a ballad depicting a catastrophic event, until one realizes
that the inspiration for the poem was not the train wreck
itself, but the train wreck as it appealed to Fontane's
aesthetic eye. He uses the event to express something far
more profound than a journalistic account could relate.
Such an interpretation counters any claims that Fontane
is primarily a realist. On the contrary, he wishes to
show how reality is subjugated to intangible forces.

Also in the middle section Fontane carefully maintains
poetic distance in an effort to avoid the brutality of
the situation. The accident is not depicted directly from
Johnnie's perspective, but rather is viewed indirectly from
the shore. We hear the fury of the elements and see the
splendor of the "Feuer vom Himmel" rather than the crass
destruction of train and bridge. Fontane is more intent
on a poetic than a realistic effect, as Fritz Martini comments:
"Das eigentliche Geschehen kommt ja nicht auf den
faktischen Vorgang, sondern auf seine inneren, ideellen und
gfühlhaften Bedeutungen." 5 The selective, aesthetic eye
of the artist is continually at work--we see snapshots
of action rather than the whole event. It is this aesthetic
eye accompanied by the poet's insight which gives the event
its significance.
The bridge has not been mentioned extensively in this discussion, because it has an overall rather than specific significance. It functions thematically, structurally, and symbolically in the poem. Thematically it represents the epitome of achievement in the technological age. It forms an image of man's superiority over nature, a superiority which is only illusionary and must crumble in the face of greater powers. Structurally, the bridge is evidenced in the contradictory, intangible elements of the poem's middle section---the mother's "bange Traum" the raging storm--elements which maintain suspense and connect the first and last stanzas. Fontane derives this structural principle from Börries von Munchhausen's ballads: "'Die Brück am Tay bietet demnach ein Musterbeispiel für die Theorie Börries von Munchhausen mit einem oberen Vorgang und dem sinnlich wahrnehmbaren Teil ("der Brücke"), das beide verknüpft und in unserer Ballade sogar als Titel genannt wird." Symbolically the bridge represents Fontane's artistic sovereignty. He crosses a figurative bridge from reality to myth. Whereas the material bridge over the Tay collapses, the symbolic bridge is successful
as evidenced by the triumph of the witches in the final stanza. Only art is capable of revealing the intangible forces which pervade the material world.
Footnotes


3 "Die Landschaftsschilderung hat nur noch Wert, ... wenn sie den Zweck verfolgt, Stimmungen vorzubereiten oder zu steigern. Das Muster auch hierfür ist Shakespeare ..." Sämtliche Werke, I, p. 40.

4 Sämtliche Werke II, 8, p. 357.


6 Brüning, Kurt, Die deutsche Ballade (Frankfurt am Main, 1966) p. 111.
Venedig

Friedrich Nietzsche

An der Brücke stand
jüngst ich in brauner Nacht.
Fernher kam Gesang:
goldener Tropfen quoll's
über die zitternde Fläche weg.
Gondeln, Lichter, Musik--
trunken schwamm's in die Dämmerung hinaus...

Meine Seele, ein Saitenspiel,
sang sich, unsichtbar berührt,
heimlich ein Gondellied dazu,
zitternd vor bunter Seligkeit.
-- Hörte jemand ihr zu?...
Friedrich Nietzsche wrote "Venedig" in the fall of 1888 shortly before his mental collapse. Nietzsche's style, vigor and poetic vision reach their zenith in the works written in this last year of his intellectual life. In the preface to his autobiography, Ecce Homo, in which "Venedig" appears, Nietzsche writes:

An diesem vollkommenen Tage, wo alles reift und nicht nur die Traube braun wird, fiel mir eben ein Sonnenblick auf mein Leben: ich sah rückwärts, ich sah hinaus, ich sah nie so viel und so gute Dinge auf einmal.

Yet in this aura of harmony and well-being Nietzsche was never able to discount his fear and loneliness: "Ich weiss das Glück, nicht ohne Schauder von Furchtsamkeit zu denken." Such contradictory elements of harmony and alienation pervade "Venedig."
The poem represents Nietzsche's attempt to assimilate the objective phenomena perceived by his senses, in order to bring the outwardly observed beauty within himself. The first stanza indicates this with the images of "brauner Nacht" and "goldener Tropfen." In the second stanza the internalizing process is augmented and embraces the innermost recesses of the poet's soul; "Meine Seele, ein Saitenspiel, sang sich, unsichtbar berührt..." The final achievement of the poem is more than a mere aesthetic appreciation of the Venetian scene, for it assumes deeper connotations of a spiritual nature with the words "heimlich...unsichtbar...berührt...Seele...Seligkeit." The poem represents an intensely personal experience combining the internal spiritual realm of the poet with the objective outer world. Yet in the last line this harmony is shattered by the fear of loneliness--the "Schauder von Furchtsamkeit" mentioned earlier. Nietzsche cannot perpetuate this perfected moment, and realizes his essential isolation: "Hörte jemand ihr zu?" The shock of alienation must follow successful communion with the outer world. A close examination of the images and sounds of the poem will reveal the levels on which Nietzsche finds harmony with the objective world, although this harmony is destroyed in the last verse.
The first stanza of the poem embraces Nietzsche's physical situation. He is standing at the bridge and his senses are responding to the visual and aural stimuli surrounding him. The reader is able to visualize the spatial relation of sights and sounds to the poet: "Fernher kam Gesang...", "Goldener Tropfen quoll's ... weg", "trunken schwamm's in die Dämmerung hinaus." Although the images of the first stanza are impressionistic ("brauner Nacht," "goldener Tropfen"), the scene itself has not yet been totally assimilated by the poet. The transference from the physical to the spiritual self takes place principally in the second stanza, where we are no longer aware of distance and direction. The outer scene has been transmuted to an inner landscape which is "unsichtbar" and "heimlich." The poet speaks now of his soul as a lyre which plays in harmony with the outward beauty he observes:

Meine Seele, ein Saitenspiel,
sang sich, unsichtbar berührt,
heimlich ein Gondelied dazu, ...

Although the images of the first stanza do not have the same degree of internalization as the second, the nature of the images used in the first stanza points toward the final harmony achieved. The first image encountered, that of the bridge, is not randomly chosen by the poet. It enables commerce and
communication between unconnected areas. This is exactly
the poet's condition-- he must "bridge" the interstice between
his inner self and the outer world. Nietzsche establishes
communication between his innermost soul and outer stimuli
and thus the bridge becomes a central image. The fact that
the poet is standing motionless at the bridge is significant.
He is figuratively placed between two realms which present differing
alternatives. His position between these alternatives creates
a tension expressed twice in the poem with the word "zitternd":
"goldener Tropfen quoll's über die zitternde Fläche weg" ...
"Meine Seele, ein Saitenspiel, sang sich ... zitternd vor bunter
Seligkeit."

The second image of "brauner Nacht" also supports the
ideal of two separate realms coexisting and complementing one
another-- those of day and night. "Braune Nacht" and later
"Dämmerung" signify an evanescent moment when daylight and
darkness appear combined. "Braun" is used similarly in the
initial quotation from Ecce Homo as the transition between
present and past: "An diesem vollkommenen Tage, wo alles reift
und nicht nur die Traube braun wird, fiel mir eben ein Sonnenblick
auf mein Leben:..."³ (italics added). Once again we think of
the bridge image, but now the bridge represents the passage
from day to night. The "braune Nacht" belongs to both realms
of light and darkness and yet is a transitionary moment independent of each. The harmony between daylight and darkness evokes a natural image which parallels the private harmony established by the poet between inner and outer worlds.

The "Gesang" and the "Gondeln, Lichter, Musik" in the first stanza also anticipate the final harmony achieved by the poet. The music is not only coming toward the poet ("Fernher kam Gesang..."), it is also combined with "Gondeln" and "Lichter" to go outward and pervade the entire evening scene ("trunken schwamm's in die Dämmerung hinaus..."). Thus a balance is achieved in the juxtaposition of "fernher" and "hinaus," which refer to the passage of music toward and away from the listener. The two words suggest the two realms represented in the poem—that which comes toward and becomes part of the poet ("Fernher"), and that which pervades the outer scene ("hinaus"). "Fernher" also suggests the isolation of the poet—until this moment he has been divorced from the outer stimuli which now enrich him inwardly. The music allows him to abandon his isolation and communicate with the outer world. A "bridge" of communication is established.

Nietzsche also integrates this music into the sounds of his poem. He uses the device of synesthesia to create a
union of normally separated spheres. "Goldener Tropfen"

describing the song combines aural and visual stimuli: the

richness of the "o" sounds produces a "golden" tone enabling
the reader to "see" the sounds and "hear" the color. Again the
initial image of the bridge is evoked by enjoining these normally
separate realms of color and sound.

The delicate balance achieved in the images of "braune
Nacht" and "goldener Tropfen" together with the static verb
"stand" produce a moment of tension. Nietzsche's poem has
caught this moment and made it stand still in time. The moment
might be pictured as a ballet dancer poised on one toe, standing
still, yet imperceptibly quivering ("zitternd") due to the
precariousness of his position.

The final two lines of the stanza support and expand the
preceding images:

4-5 goldener Tropfen quoll's
über die zitternde Fläche weg

6-7 Gondeln, Lichter, Musik
trunken schwamm's in die Dämmerung hinaus...

Again we are presented with an amalgam of visual and aural realms
in the words "Gondeln, Lichter, Musik." The poet treats these
as aggregated elements flowing into the sunset. "Trunken"
suggests the poet's intoxicated condition: his senses are
fully occupied in a brief moment of elation. The combined colors
and sounds effect a final harmony. "Quellen" and "schwimmen" are synonymous in suggesting the liquid motion with which the various elements combine and flow together to produce the poet's euphoria. This liquid motion is reflected in the liquid sounds of the "l's", "m's", and "n's": "trunken,... quellen... schwimmen..." The "brauner Nacht" mentioned in the second verse is now again alluded to with the word "Dämmerung" a moment when objects and colors are no longer distinct but appear to merge harmoniously (the impressionist Claude Monet used the sunset to achieve this illusion of harmony). Yet "trunken" also anticipates the final dissolution of harmony for the poet. It indicates an inherent instability which rends the perfected moment and leaves Nietzsche in isolation. "Trunken" characterizes an ecstatic moment which engenders its own destruction.

The three periods after the final word "hinaus" suggest the infinite journey of the color and music into the evening sunset. The picture of the outer scene thus becomes progressively larger and more universal as the poet's introspection becomes deeper and more in touch with his inner self. The three periods function also as a pause and a final transition from the poet's outer to his inner self. The "s" sound of the last verse ("schwamm's hinaus") is retained in the first two lines of the second stanza ("Seele, Saitenspiel, sang sich, unsichtbar),
forming an alliterative bridge between external and internal realms.

With the second stanza the Venetian landscape becomes assimilated. The words and images used allude to those of the first stanza, but now they concern the poet's soul and not his physical situation. The aspects of color and light are preserved but become intangible and muted privately within the poet's spirit. The song is still present ("Meine Seele, ein Saitenspiel, sang sich... ein Gondellied dazu...") but now becomes private ("heimlich") and inwardly contained ("sang sich"). The color of the scene remains ("bunter Seligkeit") but is now veiled ("unsichtbar") within the poet's intuition. The tension characterizing the outer scene ("goldener Tropfen quoll's über die zitternde Fläche weg.") parallels the potential within the poet's soul ("Meine Seele...sang sich...zitternd vor bunter Seligkeit."). The image of the gondola is carried from the first stanza ("Gondeln, Lichter, Musik") but is now combined with "Lied" ("Meine Seele...sang sich... ein Gondellied dazu") forming a word which juxtaposes the two media of sight and sound. The symbol of the bridge in the first stanza is now continued in the second with the image of the lyre ("Saitenspiel"). It is an instrument which attunes the poet's soul to the beauty of the outward scene ("Meine Seele sang sich... ein Gondellied dazu") and thus,
as the bridge, brings the two realms into harmony and communion.

The inner sphere of private experience in the second stanza represents more than a mere aesthetic appreciation for the poet. The intoxication of this moment becomes a spiritual experience for Nietzsche which approaches a mystical vision. The ambition of the mystic was to verbalize his innermost spiritual sensations through meditation. While standing at the bridge Nietzsche meditates also and turns his thoughts inward. The vocabulary he employs is close to that of the poetists. His usage of the word "berührt" to describe the communion of his soul with the outward scene ("Meine Seele... sang sich, unsichtbar berührt, heimlich ein Gondellied...") is of pietistic origin: "Die spezifische Bedeutung der starke Gefühlston des Wortes "rühren" scheint auf den Pietisten zurückzugehen, in seiner Anwendung auf deelische Vorgänge überraschend und häufig begegnet." The words "heimlich" and "unsichtbar" similarly denote the intuitive, individualized nature of the poet's experience and stem from mystical origins. Yet Nietzsche is not mystical in the traditional sense, for his communion is with the beauty which surrounds him. Nietzsche finds that which is divine in the realm of art.

The harmony achieved within the poem is also reflected in its innate musical qualities: "Von Musik ist nicht nur die
Rede, sondern die Sprache selber wird zur Musik.... Das Erlebnis bildet sich in den Tönen ab und schafft bisher unerhörte Gesetzmäßigkeiten. Nietzsche was continually preoccupied with music in his own essays (e.g. Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik). He found in the city of Venice the epitome of his musical endeavor: "Wenn ich ein anderes Wort für Musik suche, so finde ich nur das Wort Venedig."  

The alliterative qualities of the poem produce the most salient musical characteristics (Brücke-brauner, goldener Tropfen quoll's, Seele-Saitenspiel-sang sich-unsichtbar-Seligkeit). Words of music and song are frequent throughout the poem (Gesang, Musik, Saitenspiel, sang sich, Gondellied) and implement the harmonious exchange between exterior and interior realms. Yet the musical essence of the poem is more finely integrated. The tonal principles involved relies on a combination of vowels and liquid sounds—most frequently "l" and "n" and less frequently "m" and "r":

An der Brücke stand  
jüngst ich im brauner Nubbt  
Fernher kam Gesang:  
goldener Tropfen quoll's  
über die zitternde Fläche weg.  
Gondeln, Lichter, Musik—  
trunken schwamm's in die Dämmerung hinaus...  
Meine Seele, ein Saitenspiel,  
sang sich, unsichtbar berührt,  
heimlich ein Gondellied dazu,  
zitternd vor bunter Seligkeit.  
-- Höre jemand ihr zu? ...
The combination of these vowels and liquids produces long, liquid sounds which describe the flow of golden droplets:

\[ \text{goldener Tropfen quoll's...} \]
\[ \text{trunken schwamm's in die Dämmerung hinaus.} \]

The dark sounds of "U", long "u" and long "a" characterizing the motifs of the night and the song are reechoed within the poet's soul in the second stanza:

I. An der Brücke stand
\[ \text{jüngst ich in brauner Nacht} \]
\[ \text{Ferner kam Gesang.} \]

II. Seele, sang, Jemand, berührt, bunter,
dazu, zu.

Hence a tonal bridge has been formed between outer and inner realms.

The musical qualities of the poem are supported by the fact that Nietzsche sang this poem following his mental collapse while travelling from Turin, Italy, to Germany: "Die Melodie ist verloren; niemand hat sie aufgezeichnet. Aber es ist wichtig, dass Musik und Wort im Schaffen Nietzsches eng gebunden waren."  

Despite its imagery of color and light, the final stanza does not produce a visual effect at all, for it is the shimmering of the soul which is conveyed. Once again, as always in Nietzsche, the subject is the lonely individual consciousness, trying in its isolation to comprehend the universe by "vibrating" to it. The essence of the poem is the crystallization of the moment when, for an instant, the two are one, and the distinction
between the self and that which it perceives is obliterated. But only for an instant. The intuition of ecstasy is severed by the intervening awareness of isolation: "-- Hörte jemand ihr zu? ..." The hyphen serves to separate this last verse from the stream of consciousness built up in the preceding lines. It poses an unanswerable query, an insuperable obstacle: "ein fragendes Gedicht, eine fragwürdige Welt, wenn auch eine schöne Welt."²³

This question also introduces an ironic element. Somewhat like Heine, Nietzsche creates an idyllic moment only to destroy it in the end. He cannot conceive of pleasure without pain, and, like Heine, sees a fundamental doubleness and ambivalence of response which for him constitutes the highest art:


A moment of intense bliss and intoxication, of timelessness and perfection is what Nietzsche called the moment of Eternal Recurrence. This is seen again and again in Zarathustra; it is also evidenced in "Venedig"-- it is as though eternity breaks through into time; we inhabit for an instant a different world, life is at its highest intensity yet totally hushed
and still. Nietzsche's well-known description of Pan sleeping in the Wanderer und sein Schatten gives the essential points:

Wem ein tätiger und stürmreicher Morgen des Lebens beschieden war, dessen Seele Überfüllt um den Mittag des Lebens eine seltsame Ruhesucht, die Morden und Jahre lang dauern kann. Es wird still um ihn, die Stimmen klingen fern und ferner; die Sonne scheint steil auf ihn herab. Auf einer verborgenen Waldwiese sieht er den grossen Pan schlafend; alle Dinge der Natur sind mit ihm eingeschlafen, einen Ausdruck von Ewigkeit im Gesichte-- so dünkt es ihm. Er will nichts, er sorgt sich um Nichts, sein Herz steht still, nur sein Auge lebt-- es ist ein Tod mit wachen Augen. Vieles sieht er, da der Mensch, was er nie sah, und soweit er sieht, ist Alles in ein Lichtnetz eingesponnen und gleichsam darin begraben. Er fühlt sich glücklich dabei, aber es ist ein schweres, schweres Glück. -- Da endlich erhebt sich der Wind in den Bäumen, Mittag ist vorbei, das Leben reisst ihn wieder an sich, das Leben mit blinden Augen, hinter dem sein Gefolge herstürmt: Wunsch, Trug, Veggessen, Geniessen, Vernichten, Vergänglichkeit. Und so kommt der Abend herauf, stürmreicher und tatenvoller, als selbst der Morgen war. -- Den eigentlich tätigen Menschen erscheinen die länger währenden Zustände des Erkennens fast unheimlich und krankhaft; aber nicht unangenehm.10

But this song passage is not a poem. When Nietzsche uses this or similar material for direct expression lyrically, as in "Venedig," immediately an ambivalent situation occurs. Nietzsche cannot make his lyrical expression anything but ambivalent, just as Heine could not, and for fundamentally the same reasons. Though for Nietzsche, standing two generations later than Heine, this quality comes out more poignantly and is more agonizing, for he is less able than Heine to mask his pain in a joke or persiflage. For Nietzsche lyric expression, where language is freed from the obligation to portray anything
at all and becomes entirely its own master, where the writer is a maker and not an imitator--lyric expression is the noblest calling he can conceive. Yet lyric expression is also, as his innermost experience tells him, essentially circular and self-destroying. Nietzsche's work derives its pathos from the fact that he was unable ultimately to persuade himself of the sovereignty of language which poetry entails: "Die Dichter lügen zuviel."11
Footnotes


2 Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, p. 289.

3 Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, p. 261.


5 Johannes Klein, Die Dichtung Nietzsches (Munich, 1936) p. 86.

6 Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, p. 289.

7 Johannes Klein, Geschichte der Deutschen Lyrik (Wiesbaden, 1957) p. 663.

8 Klein, Geschichte der Deutschen Lyrik, p. 663.

9 Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, p. 284.

10 Nietzsche, Der Wanderer und sein Schatten, Werke 5, p. 189.

11 Nietzsche, Gedichte, Werke 2, p. 194.
Pont du Carrousel

R.M. Rilke

Der blinde Mann, der auf der Brücke steht, grau wie ein Markstein namenloser Reiche, er ist vielleicht das Ding, das immer gleiche, um das von fern die Sternenstunde geht, und der Gestirne stiller Mittelpunkt. Denn alles um ihn irrt und rinnt und prunkt.

Er ist der unbewegliche Gerechte, in viele wirre Wege hingestellt; der dunkle Eingang in die Unterwelt bei einem oberflächlichen Geschlechte.
"Pont du Carrousel," written by R.M. Rilke in Paris in 1902, was included in a volume of poems entitled Das Buch der Bilder. It is typical of Rilke's "Dinggedichte" in which the poet seeks to discover the inner essence of each "thing" and reveal its symbolic significance: "Jedes Ding ist ein Raum, eine Möglichkeit, und an mir liegt es, diese vollkommen oder mangelhaft poetisch zu erfüllen."¹ A study of the images in the poem and how they are integrated with the symbol of the bridge ("Pont") will illustrate Rilke's avoidance of outer reality and his concentration on the inner artistic spirit.

The poem centers around the figure of a blind man standing on a Bridge who represents the temporal and spatial centerpoint of existence: he is "das immer gleiche," "der Gestirne stiller Mittelpunkt" as well as "der unbewegliche Gerechte." His blindness shuts out the outer world and enables greater introspection. The blind man probes an inner world of thought and feeling not seen by those distracted by the visible world.² The import of the blind man is not immediately apparent, but becomes clearer as the poem progresses: it states his
significance as representing the central, inner world of the spirit around which all else revolves.

The blind man is "grau wie ein Markstein namenloser Reishe." "Markstein" is a metaphor which emphasizes the man's ability to define that which is otherwise vague or indistinct. Although the realms surrounding him are "namentlos," he can provide boundaries and identity. He is the only distinct point in an anonymous context. "Markstein" is the only tangible object in an otherwise nameless world.

The blind man represents a transition between realms. His intermediary condition is also seen in his position on the bridge. Like the boundary stone, he is not part of the lands which he divides, but provides a connecting point. "Grau" also connotes the man's intermediary standpoint as the color between black and white. This depiction of the blind man as a center is consistent throughout the poem.

The solitary condition of the man is also suggested in the first two verses. He stands as an isolated figure on the bridge--there is no one or nothing accompanying him. "Grau" and "Stein" connote a colorless, almost inorganic condition. He is not part of the realms for which he provides boundaries but is in a remote border position. In this aloof situation all seems distant and "namentlos." Rilke does not
view such isolation negatively. It is a necessary condition
when all things are revealed in their essence, "denn die
Dinge geben sich ganz nur, wenn sie in die bereiten
zurlichen Hände eines Einsamen geraten." Solitude offers
Rilke communion with the center of existence and removes
him from that which is superfluous or nonessential: "Vielleicht
kommt dort die Einsamkeit über mich und die grosse Stille,
nach der alles in mir verlangt; dann will ich still leben
im Umgang mit Dingen und dankbar sein für alles, was
Alltägliche abfällt von mir.... Meine Einsamkeit schliesst
sich endlich, und ich bin in der Arbeit wie der Kern in der
Frucht...." The "Kern in der Frucht" expresses the same
centrality and essence which Rilke describes in "Pont du
Carrousel."

Subsequent verses describe the blind man as the possible
"vielleicht") temporal as well as spatial midpoint of the
universe:

Er ist vielleicht das Ding, das immer gleiche
um das von fern die Sternenstunde geht,
und der Gestirne stille Mittelpunkt.

In referring to the blind man as "das Ding," Rilke raises
him to symbolic value consistent with the poet's "Dinggedicht."
For Rilke, the "Ding" is the inner essence of all outward
forms and phenomena--it cannot be named or defined but provides
each object with a specific identity. The poet's hesitancy to define what "das Ding" represents is expressed in the uncertainty of "vielleicht." When man is able to appreciate this essence, his inner being is augmented and enriched:

"Meine Welt beginnt bei den Dingen--; und so ist in ihr auch der mindeste Mensch schon erschreckend gross, ja, beinahe ein Uebermams." The blind man is a personification of that central essence which Rilke seeks to know in all things:

In jedem Ding will ich eine Nacht ruhen, wenn ich am Tage mit meinem Tun durch die anderen Dinge ging. -- Bei jedem Ding will ich einmal schlafen, von seiner Wärme müd werden, auf seinen Atemzügen auf und nieder träumen, seine liebe gelüste nackte Nachbarschaft an allen meinen Gliedern spüren und stark werden durch den Duft seines Schlafes und dann am Morgen früh, eh es erwacht, vor allem Abschied, weitergehen, weitergehen...

The poet himself is like the blind man, the "Ding" which represents the inner core of existence: "aus mir und alledem ein einzig Ding zu machen, Herr." This "Ding" does not change with time but remains always the same ("das immer gleiche um das von fern die Sternenstunde geht, ...""). The vastness of the outer world, already referred to in the second verse ("namenloser Reiche") takes on cosmic proportions with "Sternenstunde." Whereas time passes in the revolving outer universe, the blind man remains constant and is therefore
able to transcend time. "Sternenstunde" also implies an ordered, harmonious universe of which the blind man is the center. "Geht" refers to the movement of the stars in contrast to "steht" which indicates the stationary position of the blind man. "Von fern" once more emphasizes his aloofness from the outer world, although as the centerpoint he is its most integral part. Rilke seeks to overcome the transience of life by viewing it in its essence: "Das Ding ist bestimmt... von allem Zufall fortgenommen, jeder Unklarheit entrückt, der Zeit enthoben und dem Raum gegeben, ist es dauernd geworden, fähig zur Ewigkeit." "Der Gestirne stiller Mittelpunkt" is consistent with "Sternenstunde" in its reference to the stars but emphasizes the blind man's spatial rather than temporal situation. "Still" refers again to his stationary, unchanging condition, and "Mittelpunkt" restates his medial position suggested in the first two verses.

The blind man remains the focal point not only of the universe about him but of the poem as well. The first five verses comprise one sentence in which he is "wie ein Markstein," "das Ding, das immer gleiche," and "der Gestirne stiller Mittelpunkt." Although the fourth verse emphasizes
the "Sterenstunde" and the outer universe, the fifth verse concludes with the inner realm and the blind man as the "stiller Mittelpunkt."

The final verse of the first stanza presents the confused activity surrounding the blind man: "Denn alles um ihn irrt und rinnt und prunkt." "Alles" is a more general term than "Sterenstunde," which also revolves about the blind man. "Sterenstunde," however, suggests order and regularity, whereas "alles" combined with "irrt und rinnt und prunkt" implies universal disorder and confusion. This last verse thus disturbs the harmony implied in "Sterenstunde" and establishes yet a greater contrast between the blind man as the "stiller Mittelpunkt" and that which surrounds him. Also, the chaos of the outer world is reflected/in the syntax of the final verse: "Denn alles um ihn irrt und rinnt und prunkt" is not a complete sentence but a fragment dependent for its meaning on the preceding lines. "Irrt und rinnt und prunkt" restate and emphasize the motion of the outer world in contrast to the motionless inner realm ("stiller Mittelpunkt"). This motion is not only implied in the meaning of the verbs: their placement after one another with "und... und" creates a repetitiveness suggestive of movement. Yet there is no progression or specific order indicated in the verbal placement--
there is no rationale or direction towards anything. This
disorder is indicated with "irrt." "Prunkt," suggesting
superficiality and ostentation, is contrasted with the
rhyming "Mittelpunkt" characterizing the essential qualities
of the blind man.

There is a duality established in the first stanza
between stillness and motion, between inner and outer worlds,
between cosmos and chaos. The bridge becomes symbolic for the
passage from superficiality and transience to essence and
permanence: "Die Brücke führt hinüber zur Seite der Beständigkeit,
die dem Wankelmüt des Menschen gegenübergestellt wird."¹⁰
Rilke contrasts the "Ding" for which he strives with the
superficial outer world: "Alle Dinge sind so bereit, unsere
vielen und oft verirrten Gedanken und Wünsche zu bewirten,
für kleine Zeit... Denn da Menschen und Verhältnisse eigen-
mächtig sind und sich ewig verwirren, woran soll man sich
messen dürfen, wenn nicht an den willigen Dingen?"¹¹ The blind
man has been able to cross the symbolic bridge, because his
blindness has enabled him to become a part of the inward
realm and avoid the chaotic outer world.

The second stanza provides further illustration of the
thoughts presented in the first stanza. It continues to
describe the blind man as the only stability in the confusion of the outer world:

   Er ist der unbewegliche Gerechte,
in viele wirre Wege hingestellt;
der dunkle Eingang in die Unterwelt
bei einem oberflächlichen Geschlecht.

"Unbeweglich" refers again to the blind man's stationary position already established in "steh" and "stiller Mittelpunkt" of the first stanza. It recalls and emphasizes his identity as "das Ding" -- that which is immovable and permanent rather than in motion and unstable. For Rilke, stillness is a virtue which abides only in the "Dingen": "Eine Stille ist um die Dinge. Alle Bewegung legt sich, wird Kontur, und aus vergangener und künftiger Zeit schliesst sich ein Dauerndes: der Raum, die grosse Beruhigung der zu nichts gedrängten Dinge."12 Rilke always emphasized the stillness and isolation he needed: "Meine Arbeit war immer so sehr vom Alleinsein inspiriert, dass ich rein positiv, nicht aus Menschenscheu, um ihretwillen die Stille wünschen muss, besonders, wo so viel Hemmnis und Schrecken innerlich gutzumachen bleibt."13

"Gerechte" suggests the order and universal law which Rilke also associated with the "Ding" and which he uses as an additional characterization of the blind man ("der unbewegliche Gerechte"): "Die Dinge sind untrüglich! Sie enthalten am reinsten die Gesetze."14
found in this law is reminiscent of the harmony found in "Sternenstunde." To discover the beauty of an object is to discover its conformity to law: "Die Dinge sind vollkommen, sie stellen das Gesetz dar und die Gesetzmäßigkeit, die dauern..." 15

The following verse "in viele wirre Wege hingestellt;..." supplements "Denn alles um ihn irrt und rinnt und prunkt."

Consistent with his role as "das Ding," the blind man once more represents order in the midst of confusion: "Alle Dinge sind so bereit, unsere vielen und oft verirrten Gedanken und Wünsche zu bewirten, für kleine Zeit." 16 As unformer images, the man is placed in an intermediary position "in viele wirre Wege." Again he provides a point of reference and identity in an otherwise anonymous and chaotic outer world.

The final two verses again emphasize the transition between outer and inner worlds:

Er ist ...
der dunkle Bingang in die Unterwelt
bei einem oberflächlichen Geschlechte.

Just as the blind man stands on the bridge as a transitional point to the inner world, he stands as an entrance to the "Unterwelt." This "Unterwelt" is not to be interpreted as
a negative realm, but one which exists under the turbulent superficial world and thus symbolizes spiritual depth and essence. "Dunkle" characterizes this subterranean world by opposing it to the visible outer realm of the stars. "Dunkle" also corresponds to the darkness of the blind man's inner realm. Rilke relates darkness to the origin and essence of being:

Du Dunkelheit, aus der ich stamme,
ich liebe dich mehr als die Flamme. 17

Darkness is associated with the inner realm: "Noch vermischt mit Dunkel aus dem Innern." (italics added) 18 Just as blindness suggests introspection for Rilke, darkness implies depth of perception and being:

Ich liebe meines Wesens Dunkelstunden
in welchen meine Sinne sich vertiefen. 19

Much as the blind man is timeless ("das immer gleiche") as the centerpoint of the universe, Rilke conceives of night and darkness as representative of eternity:

Ich ertrug, vom befangenen Körper aus,
Nächte, ja, ich befreundete
ihn, den irdenen, mir der Unendlichkeit. 20

The "Unterwelt" is the inner realm to which the poet strives, a realm in which the "Dinge" prevail. The path to this inner realm is thus described as an "Abstieg":

Die Einsamkeit wird sich erweitern und wird eine dämmernde Wohnung werden, daran der Lärm der andern
fern vortübergeht... Der Abstieg in Ihr Einsames wird eine Einkehr, die zu eigenen, guten, reichen und weiten Wegen führen mögen.21

"Oberflächlichen Geschlechte" refers to the confused outer world already described in the verses "Denn alles um ihn irrt und rinnt und prunkt" and "viele wirre Wege." The superficiality ("oberflächlich") of this world was already suggested in the verb "prunkt." "Oberflächliche Geschlechte" is in direct contrast to "unbewegliche Gerechte": assonance and alliteration provide a comparison of sound ("unbewegliche" and "oberflächliche" are also the only five-syllable words in the poem), yet opposite realms are depicted. "Geschlechte," however, is the first word which specifically implicates the world of men as a part of that which "irrt und rinnt und prunkt." Rilke must be free of this world of men in order to view the inner realm of "Dinge": "Nur lebt man oft...völlig in der Welt der Dinge, wo Menschen nicht vorkommen, ... als wäre man der einzige Mensch."22 Simenauer comments on Rilke's opposing worlds of men and "Dinge":

Es gibt kaum eine Stelle von den Dingen bei Rilke, wo er sie nicht dem Menschen gegenüberstellt; der Mensch wird dabei immer zu leicht beunruhigt: er ist unzulänglich, immer willkürlich, er verwirrt sich ewig, ist zu eigenmächtig und vergänglich. Menschen können ihm nicht helfen, er ist von ihnen durch einen Zwischenraum getrennt.23
Rilke seeks to avoid all distraction in his effort to attain the essence of existence, represented in the poem by "die Unterwelt." The title of the poem is significant in that the bridge offers an alternative to the hectic outer world. The carrousel of life offers no direction but travels only in endless circles. The bridge provides a path to the inner realm of the spirit.

In his quest of this inner world Rilke demonstrates a similarity to the Romantic poets. Like Rilke, Novalis sought to disregard the outer world and attain the inner spirit:

Wir träumen von Reisen durch das Weltall: ist denn das Weltall nicht in uns? Die Tiefen unseres Geistes kennen wir nicht.-- Nach Innen geht der geheimnisvolle Weg. In uns, oder nirgends ist die Ewigkeit mit ihren Welten, die Vergangenheit und Zukunft. Die Aussenwelt ist die Schattenwelt, sie wirft ihren Schatten in das Lichtreich. Jetzt scheint es uns freilich innerlich so dunkel, einsam, gestaltlos, aber wie ganz anders wird es uns drücken, wenn diese Verfinsterung vorbei, und der Schattenkörper hinweggerückt ist. Wir werden mehr genießen als je, denn unser Geist hat entbehrt...

... Die innere Welt ist gleichsam mehr mein als die Hüssre. Sie ist so innig, so heimlich. Man möchte ganz in ihr leben. 24

Rilke remarks in his Seventh Blegy: "nirgends wird Welt sein, als innem." 25 An earlier poem, "Die Insel," emphasizes the inner realm: "nah ist nur Innres; alles andre fern." 26 Rilke conceives of the inner realm as a "Weltall":

Und dieses Innere gedrängt und täglich mit allem überfüllt und ganz unsäglich... 27

(italics added)
Rilke's symbolic use of the bridge as a connective between inner and outer worlds is reminiscent of Novalis, who also seeks to establish such a union:

Wir müssen suchen eine innere Welt zu schaffen, die eigentliche Pendant der Äußeren Welt ist, die, in dem sie ihr auf allen Punkten bestimmt entgegengesetzt wird, unsere Freiheit immer mehr erweitert.\textsuperscript{28}

Rilke, living a century after Novalis, is a neo-romantic:

"Rilke ist nach seinem Allerlebnis, auch seiner Erfahrung überräumlicher und überzeitlicher Verbindungen ein Romantiker, ein Fortsetzer der deutschen Innerlichkeit... er ist es auch mit seiner Sehnsucht nach Transzendenz, ..."\textsuperscript{29}

Finally the bridge is a symbol for Rilke's poetic mind establishing an artistic harmony over external chaos—over the "wirre Wege" and that which travels in endless circles. The bridge becomes a passage to the realm of art, which is immutable ("das immer gleiche"), unerringly valid ("unbewegliche Geschiehte") and which provides identity ("Markstein") and access to the essence of all things ("das dunkle Eingang...")

The blind man, unable to see that which "irrt und rinnt und prunkt" turns his view inward to the ordered realm of art where he can attain a final composure and serenity.
Footnotes


2 The figure of the blind man is frequently used by Rilke. In "Das Lied des Blinden" the blind man alone lives and suffers within his inner realm:

"Ihr draussen rührt euch und rückt und bildet euch ein, anders zu klingen als Stein auf Stein, aber ihr irrt euch: ich allein lebe und leide und lärme." (Rainer Maria Rilke, Gesammelte Werke, II (Leipzig, 1930) 174.

In "Der Blinde" his sensitivity is emphasized:

"Nur sein Fühlen rührt sich, so als finge es die Welt in kleinen Wellen ein: ...." (Rilke, Gesammelte Werke, III, p. 174)

A short verse play "Der Blinde" reveals the blind man as isolated but rich in spirit:

Der Blinde:
Ich bin eine Insel und allein.
Ich bin reich.---
Jetzt geht alles in mir umher,
sicher und sorglos; wie Genesende
gehn die Gefühle, geniessend das Gehn,
durch meines Leibes dunkles Haus. ... (Rilke, Werke, II, pp. 156-158).

3 Quoted by Erich Simenauer, Rainer Maria Rilke, Legende und Mythos (Bern, 1953), p. 158.

4 Quoted by Simenauer, p. 159. His source is Rilke, Gesammelte Briefe 1902-1906, Nr. 43, p. 109. He uses an earlier edition of the Briefe than I.
Also in Rilke's poem "Die Frucht" the fruit appears as "der Mittelpunkt":

Die Frucht

Das stieg zu ihr aus Erde, stieg und stieg,
und war verschwogen in dem stillen Stamme
und Wurde in der klaren Blüte Flamme,
bis es sich wiederum verschwieg.

Und fruchtete durch eines Sommers Länge
in dem bei Nacht und Tag bemühten Baum,
und kannte sich als kommendes Gedränge
wider den teilnahmenvollen Raum.

Und wenn es jetzt im rundenden Ovale
mit seiner vollgewordenen Ruhe prunkt,
stürzt es, erzichtend, innen der Schale
zurück in seinen Mittelpunkt. (italics added)

Rilke, Werke, II, § 94.

6

7
Quoted by Simenauer, pp. 155-156. From Tagebücher aus der Frühzeit (Leipzig, 1942), p. 153, from the 10th of March, 1892.

8

9
Rilke, Briefe, I, p. 377.

10

11
Quoted by Simenauer, p. 156. From Briefe und Tagebücher aus der Frühzeit (1933). p. 242. In one of his "Sonnette an Orpheus" Rilke exhorts his readers to avoid confusion and seek the inner spirit:
Meide den Irrtum, dass es Entbehrungen gebe 
für den geschehnen Entschluss, diesen: zu sein! 
Seidener Faden, kamst du hinein ins Gewebe. 

Welchem der Bilder du auch im Innern geeint bist 
(sei es selbst ein Moment aus dem Leben der Pein), 
fühl, dass der ganze, der rühmliche Teppich gemeint 
ist. (Rilke, Werke, III, S. 366.)

22 
Quoted in Emil Gasser, Grundzüge der Lebensanschauung Rainer 
Maria Rilkes (Bern, 1925), p. 177. From his Rodin-Buch: 
"Was die Dinge auszeichnet, dieses Ganz-mit sich-
Beschäftigtsein..." (Essay from 1903).

13 
Quoted by Simenauer, p. 161. From Briefe 1914-1921, Nr. 114, 
p. 284.

14 
Quoted by Buddeberg, Rainer Maria Rilke: Eine Innere 
Biographie (Stuttgart, 1960), p. 69. From Briefe 
1902-1906, p. 35.

15 
Quoted by Simenauer, p. 156. From Briefe und Tagebücher 

16 

17 

18 
Quoted in Gasser p. 203. From Neue Gedichte II; 110,2. 
Other places where Rilke associates darkness with 
the inner soul?

"Es war als hätte Abelson mich nicht gehört. Sie sass da in 
ihrem lichten Kleid, als ob sie überall innen ganz dunkel 
waren, wie ihre Augen wurden". (italics added) From: Malte 
II, 106.

"Und in diesem Land (Russia), in welchem die Gründer die 
Berge sind, sind die Menschen die Abgründe. Tief, dunkel, 
schweigsam ist die Bevölkerung" (italics added) From: 
Geschichten vom lieben Gott, p. 78.
"... doch wir wöllen reifen,
und das heißt dunkel sein und sich bemühn."
(italics added) (From: *Neue Gedichte I*; 59,2)

19

20

21

22
Quoted by Simenauer, p. 155. From *Briefe 1907-1914*, Nr. 58, p. 128.

23
Simenauer, p. 156.

24
Quoted by Gasser, p. 71. From *Novalis*, ed. Minor, 2, 114, Nr. 16.

25

26
Rilke, *Werke*, III, p. 94.

27
Rilke, *Werke*, III, p. 94.

28

29
Fahrt über die Kölner Rheinbrücke bei Nacht

Ernst Stadler

Der Schnellzug tastet sich und stösst die Dunkelheit entlang.
Kein Stern will vor. Die ganze Welt ist nur ein enger,
nachtumschichter Minengang,
Darin zuweilen Fördernstellen blauen Lichtes jähe Horizonte
reissen: Feuerkreis
Von Kugellampen, Dämmern, Schloten, dampfend, strömend...
nur sekundenweis...
Und wieder alles schwarz. Als führen wir ins Eingeweide der
Nacht zur Schicht.
Nun taumeln Lichter her... verirrt, trostlos vereinsamt...
mehr... und sammeln sich... und werden dicht.
Gerippe grauer Häuserfronten liegen bloss, im Zwielicht
bleichend, tot -- etwas muss kommen... o, ich fühle es
schwer
Im Hirn. Eine Beklemmung singt im Blut. Dann dröhnt der
Boden plötzlich wie ein Meer:
Wir fliegen, aufgehoben, königlich durch nachtentrissne Luft,
onch übern Strom. O Biegung der Millionen Lichter,
stumme Wacht,
Vor deren blitzender Parade schwer die Wasser abwärts rollen.
Endloses Spalier, zum Gruss gestellt bei Nacht!
Wie Fackeln stürmend! Freudiges! Salut von Schiffen über
blaue See! Bestirntes Fest!
Wimmeln, mit hellen Augen hingedrängt! Bist wo die Stadt mit
letzten Häusern ihren Gast entlässt.
Besinnung. Einkehr. Kommunion. Und Glut und Drang
"Fahrt über die Kölner Rheinbrücke bei Nacht," written by Ernst Stadler in 1913, used the passage of an express train across a bridge to convey the poet's inner condition. The objectivity of the title is in contrast to the highly lyrical content and remains the only factual statement of the poem. Stadler combines dithyrambic lances with short verse fragments to form an affirmation of life and death in face of a pessimistic world.

The very opening verse demonstrates a divergence from the objectivity of the title. It offers imagery rather than description: "Der Schnellzug tastet sich und stösst die Dunkelheit entlang." The train becomes an animate being groping and searching in the night. The alliterative "s" sound emphasizes the steady, relentless thrust of the train against the darkness; "Der Schnellzug tastet sich und stösst die Dunkelheit entlang." Stadler's use of the train as a metaphor for his own condition becomes evident as the poem progresses.

The second verse expands the setting from the train to
the sky above: "Kein Stern will vor." The stars do not penetrate the darkness; the world is devoid of the light provided by nature. The verse emphasizes the blackness in which the train is groping and introduces the negative element which dominates the first part of the poem. The absence of the stars suggests the absence of any transcending values to oppose the gloominess of the scene.

In the second verse also the poet expands his view to form an image of the entire world: "Die ganze Welt ist nur ein enger, nachtumschienter Minengang ..." "Eng" defines the world narrowed by the absence of the stars, and "nur" further limits these boundaries. "Nachtumschienter" reiterates the pervasive darkness of the realm in which the train moves. The second part of the word ("nachtumschienter") -- literally "Railed around" -- indicates the confined condition of the world yet remains within the context of the initial image, the train. "Minengang," either a tunnel or a gallery, again implies the narrowness and limitation of the world in which the train gropes its way.

The following two verses continue to expand Stadler's view of the world:

Darein zuweilen Förderstellen blauen Lichtes jühe Horizonte reissen: Feuerkreis
Von Kugellampen, Dachern, Schloten, dampfend, strömend...
nur sekundenwėgs...
Although the natural light of the stars is absent from the world, artificial light ("Förderstellen blauen Lichtes") flashes intermittently in the darkness. "Förderstellen" and "Schnellzug" indicate a mechanized world of technology. The horizon ("... jühe Horizonte") is not lit by the sun but by the "Feuerkreis von Kugellampen, ..." The rapid sequence of objects ("Kugellampen...Dämmer...Schloten...") as well as "strömend" evoke the speed of the train. The convulsive nature of the technological world is indicated with "reissen." Industrial factories are suggested in the smoke issuing from chimneys: "Dämmer, Schloten, dampfend..." The random mixture of nouns and participles implies an amorphous, disjointed world. In contrast to the continuous glow of the stars, the artificial lights appear "zuweilen" and "nur sekundenweis" in the darkness: the technological realm is characterized by evanescence rather than permanence. The momentary flashes of light are reproduced syntactically with the fragmentary "... nur sekundenweis..." in the middle of the verse. Finally there is a regression to the blackness of night indicated at the beginning of the poem: "und wieder alles schwarz." The finality of "und wieder alles schwarz" emphasizes the inescapable dreariness of the technology enclosing man.
In the following verse Stadler alludes to the men within this technological world: "Als führen wir ins Bingeweid der Nacht zur Schicht." The poet now imposes himself on the outer world with his use of "wir." "Bingeweid der Nacht" is a restatement of "nachtumschienter Minengang." The night remains all-pervasive. Yet "Bingeweid der Nacht" is a more unpleasant image than "nachtumschienter Minengang." It also implies a limited, confined world, yet one containing inert, visceral matter. "Zur Schicht," in context with the factories and smokestacks of the preceding verse as well as "Bingeweid der Nacht," projects a negative image of industrial workers on the way to their daily shift.

The darkness is again interrupted by light as the train continues its journey. Once more it is not the serene, natural light of the stars but a chaotic medley of artificial lights:

Nun taumeln Lichter her ... verirrt, trostlos vereinsamt...
mehr ... und sammeln sich ... und werden dicht.

The lights do not provide aid or guidance in the darkness, but are themselves lost and isolated much like the groping train. There is dramatic intensification as the lights multiply and grow dense, indicating the progress of the train
from the outskirts to the center of the city. The juxtaposition
of fragments indicates greater and greater number:

trostlos vereinsamt ...
mehr ... und sammeln sich ... und werden dicht.

But this intensified anxiety hardly reaches a climax. The
light which is produced reveals only desolation and
hopelessness. Verbs of motion ("taumeln, sammeln sich") are
replaced by the stagnant "liegen blos." That which has been
shrouded in darkness appears lifeless:

Gerippe grauer H&Muserfronten liegen blos, im Zwielicht
bleichend, tot -- ...

The light of this verse ("Zwielicht") is the light within the
houses of the city. The illuminated windows make the houses
appear as skeletons, as pale ("bleichend"), naked facades
("liegen blos, H&Muserfronten"). "Zwielicht" also indicates
the eerie half-light cast over the scene--a half-light
evidenced in the dreary grayness of the buildings ("grauer
H&Muserfronten"). These drab skeletons manifest the
lifelessness of the city ("... im Zwielicht bleichend, tot--...").
"Gerippe" carries an equally negative anatomical connotation
as the workers going into the entrails ("Eingeweid") of night
to work their shifts. A bleak picture is painted of man and
the city in which he lives.
"Tot" concludes the first part of the poem and characterizes the view of the world presented. The express train has passed from darkness through light and back into darkness. The final tumult of lights only helps to reveal the nakedness and futility within the city. Into this pessimistic view Stadler's poetic "ich" intercedes. It breaks through the chaos and anticipates a new order: "- etwas muss kommen ... o, ich fühle es schwer / Im Hirn". It now becomes evident that the searching and anticipation of the train in the first verse ("Der Schnellzug tastet sich und stösst die Dunkelheit entlang.") reflects the search of the poetic "ich" which until now has only confronted oppression and desolation. The accumulation of lights and appearance of the naked house fronts described the poet's anxiety and consequent depression. The "etwas" which the poet anticipates promises a new optimism as indicated in the verb "Eine Beklemmung singt im Blut." No longer do discordant verbs such as "reissen" or "taumeln" appear. "Singt" indicates an element of harmony in the confusion and hopelessness. Anatomical imagery no longer evokes oppression ("Eingeweide") and death ("Gerippe"). "Hirn" and "Blut" imply life of the
poet's mind and body and his potential to overcome the chaos he glimpses.

As the train enters the bridge there is a sudden roar signifying Stadler's emancipation from all confining limitations: "Dann dröhnt der Boden plötzlich wie ein Meer." The sea suggests an open expanse of space which is in contrast to the "enger, nachtumschieneter Minengang" of the world in the first part of the poem. The sea is also a manifestation of nature which was absent from the technological realm ("Kein Stern will vor."). "Wie ein Meer" indicates the poet's capability of forming similes now with nature rather than the oppressive industrial realm ("Als führen wir ins Bingeweid der Nacht zur Schicht."). The bridge passes over the river which symbolizes the natural flow of life. The train becomes figuratively and literally a vehicle to bring the poet into contact with life.

In the following verse the collective "wir" reappears. Again Stadler embosses his lyrical "ich" on the outer world, but no longer does the former oppression appear ("Als führen wir ins Bingeweid der Nacht zur Schicht.") The verse rather suggests joy and transport:
Wir fliegen, aufgehoben, königlich durch nachtentrissne 
Luff, hoch übern Strom.

"Fliegen" and "aufgehoben" suggest a transcendence of the 
chaotic world depicted in the first part of the poem. The 
bridge symbolizes passage from disorder to the harmony 
anticipated in "singt." No longer is he confined within the 
darkness. His spirit is freed from the oppressive "Bingeweid 
der Nacht." "Nachtumschienter" is now replaced by 
"Nachtentrissne" indicating the poet's emancipation from the 
night. "Wir" no longer represents the worker, but the emanci-
pated spirit. "Hoch übern Strom" emphasizes the poet's 
transcendence of his previous environment described as "dampfend, 
strömend." "Königlich" indicates man's new status; he is 
no longer oppressed but in his newly attained freedom is 
under his own sovereignty.

The tone of the poem now becomes hymnic and elegaic as 
the poet rejoices in the flood of lights emanating from the 
bridge:

O Biegung der Millionen Lichter, 
Stumme Wacht, 
Vor deren blitzender Parade schwer die Wasser abwäts rollen. 
Endloses Spalier, zum Gruss gestellt bei Nacht!
The lights of the bridge stand out to beckon and greet man in the darkness. Unlike the lights in the first part of the poem, they are not scattered and isolated but appear harmoniously in an arc ("Biegung"). They do not serve to confuse an already chaotic world but function as a sentinel to provide guidance and help to those in the darkness. Although it too is a product of man's technology, the bridge symbolizes a redeeming rather than destructive aspect of the modern world. The poem itself is like a bridge which Stadler constructs to show his sovereignty over chaos and hopelessness. The bridge serves as a symbol to ennoble man rather than disgrace him (e.g. "Als führen wir ins Eingeweid der Nacht.")

"Blitzender Parade" indicates the festive atmosphere created by the glittering lights. In contrast to the pessimism of the workers passing through the entrails of night, optimism now prevails in a joyful parade of celebration. The transcending height of this festival is emphasized as the waters appear to roll downward from the high vantage point of the bridge ("... schwer die Wasser abwärts rollen"). The regularity suggested in "rollen" forms a contrast to the convulsive "reissen" and unsteady "taumeln" earlier in the poem. "Rollen" also characterizes the verse cadence.
of the second part; no longer are there interruptions (e.g.) "... nur sekundenweis...") or discordant mixtures of parts of speech (e.g. "Dschern, Schloten, dampfend, strömend...")

This new world is without bounds as suggested in "wie ein Meer" and now again with "Endloses Spalier." "Endloses Spalier" contrasts with "enger nachtumschieneter Minengang" as well as the transience of "zuweilen" and "nur sekundenweis."

"Spalier" (a cordon), like "stumme Wacht" protects those who enter the bridge from the darkness. The bridge is a greeting to those coming upon it in the chaos of existence: "Zum Gruss gestellt bei Nacht!"

The excitement and jubilation of the poet's soul now become evident with a series of exclamation points:

Endloses Spalier, zum Gruss gestellt bei Nacht!
Wie Fackeln stürmend! Freudigem! Salut von Schiffen über blauer See! Bestirntes Fest!
Wimmelnd, mit hellen Augen hingedrängt!

The death of the first part of the poem now becomes a festival of life as symbolized by the river passing under the bridge. The poet's joy comes to a climax as he is transported beyond all limits in revelation. A spiritual rapture is achieved, the one and two word exclamations suggesting the intensity of his joy. Lights now overwhelm the poet as he is enkindled with
joy and new life: "Wie Fackeln stürmend." No longer do chaotic bursts of light tumble forward to reveal death and hopelessness; the despair of "trostlos vereinsamt" now becomes the rapture of "Freudiges!" The greeting accorded by the bridge ("Zum Gruss gestellt bei Nacht") is reciprocated by the ships at sea. Loneliness and isolation are replaced by communion and salutation: "Salut von Schiffen über blauer See!" "Über blauer See" emphasizes the pervasiveness of the bridge's influence as a guiding beacon. The poet now uses symbols of life and nature to reflect the new life of his artistic inspiration. "Blauer See" associates the color blue with nature rather than artificiality ("Förderstellen blauen Lichtes"). In contrast to the initial scene of darkness where no star appears ("Kein Stern will vor"), the lights of the bridge are seen as a starred festival ("Bestirntes Fest!"). Point for point Stadler's previous pessimism turns to optimism as his spirit is regenerated. Teeming lights replace the darkness: "Wimmelnd, mit hellen Augen hingedrängt!" "Hellen Augen" oppose the darkness of "nachtumschierter Minengang" and the gloominess of "grauer Hauuserfronten ... in Zwielicht bleichend" and present another positive element in Stadler's repertoire of anatomical imagery. "Hellen Augen" restate the function of the bridge as a "stumme Wacht" to watch all who enter and protect them from the darkness.
"Hingedrängt" refers to the poet who continues to be transported into the spiritual realm by the brightness of the bridge. No longer must he actively push the darkness along ("stösst die Dunkelheit entlang") but is passively borne by the bright lights.

"Hingedrängt" concludes the second part of the poem and stands in contrast to "tot" ending the first part. Stadler has found the impetus and inspiration to seek further. No longer is he searching confusedly in the darkness, feeling his way ("tastet sich") with each step, but is on the way toward finding his goal, the "etwas" which is now described in the conclusion of the poem:

... Bis wo die Stadt mit letzten Häusern ihren Gast entlässt.

The excited tempo of the second part now subsides as the express passes over the bridge and out into the lonely stretches of the countryside. Stadler now reflects on the insights he has gained. The city and its skeletal facades are left behind: "... Bis wo die Stadt mit letzten Häusern ihren Gast entlässt." Once again the scenery reflects the state of the poet's mind-- a figurative bridge has been established
between inner and outer realms. Just as the flashing blue lights and the dead house fronts represented chaos and desolation and as the bridge and river offered transport and regeneration, so the long, lonely stretches ("die langen Einsamkeiten") and the bare banks ("Nackte Ufer") now represent reflection, meditation and stillness ("Stille ... Besinnung.seinkehr."). The darkness of night returns ("Nacht."), but it is not a darkness interrupted by intermittent flashes of light, but a darkness of introspection and meditation.

"Kommunion" suggests the spiritual fulfillment which Stadler has attained and is in direct contrast to "trostlos vereinsamt" in the first part of the poem. The poet has now achieved an inner calm ("Stille") as well as a sense of purpose and conviction ("Drang") in life. Passage over the bridge has given him spiritual guidance and direction, "Zum Letzten, Segnenden." He has been freed from the fetters of the limited technological world which only served to confuse and obfuscate the "etwas" which he had been seeking in the darkness. The intoxication of the long dithyrambic verses now becomes single world of release and satiation as the poet anticipates dissolution in the river of life.
Stadler's fulfillment is described in sensual and erotic as well as spiritual terms: "Zum Zeugungsfest. Zur Wollust." Total consumption of life as well as death includes physical satisfaction and fulfillment. "Zeugungsfest" recalls the celebration of "Bestirntes Fest." "Zum Gebet" recalls "Kommunion" and "Segnenden" and emphasizes the religious aspect of Stadler's experience. With "Zum Meer. Zum Untergang" this experience becomes complete as the poet lets the universe embrace his spirit. The sea, referred to twice before ("Dann dröhnt der Boden plötzlich wie ein Meer..."; "Salut von Schiffen über blauer See!") signified expansion which opposed the confinement of "enger, nachtumschieneter Minengang, ..." The sea also is the body of water receiving the Rhine river. Just as the Rhine terminates its existence by flowing into the sea, the poet's life proceeds toward extinction in the sea ("Zum Meer. Zum Untergang"). Stadler no longer views death negatively as in the first part of the poem. "Zum Meer. Zum Untergang." emphasizes death as a natural process and a final release from the restrictions of the world. The "Kölner Rheinbrücke," in the final analysis, is the bridge from the outer world to the inner self, from confusion and futility to harmony and purpose and from life to death.
The bridge holds significance for Stadler because it provides him with an optimistic rather than pessimistic view of death. It spans the river which offers the inspiration of nature rather than the oppression of the city. Finally, the symbol of the bridge represents the poet's artistic sovereignty ("aufgehoben... königlich") over a chaotic world.
Footnotes

1 The poet is able to break out of the misery which previously confined him. This release is reflected in the title of the collection in which "Fahrt über die Kölner Rheinbrücke bei Nacht" appeared: *Aufbruch*. Ernst Stadler, *Dichtungen*, pp. 150 - 184. vol. I.
Am Brückenwehr

Gottfried Benn

I.

"Ich habe weit gedacht, nun lasse ich die Dinge und löse ihre Ringe der neuen Macht.

Gehemt am Brückenwehr
die hellen Wasser rauschen
die Elemente tauschen sich hin und her.

Der Lauf ist schiefegrän, der Ton der Urgesteine, als noch das Mand alleine im Schichtenbau.

Des Sommers Agonie
gibt auch ein Rebgehänge, Kelter- und Weingesänge
durchstreifen sie.

Wessen ist das und wer? Dessen, der alles machte, dessen, der es dann dachte vom Ende her?

Ich habe weit gedacht, ich lebte in Gedanken, bis ihre Häupter sanken vor welcher Macht?"
"Vor keiner Macht zu sinken,  
vor keinem Rausch zur Ruh,  
du selbst bist Trank und Trinken,  
der Denker, du,

Du bist ja nicht der Hirte  
und ziehst nicht mit Schalmein,  
Wenn der, wie du, sich irrite,  
isst nie Verzeihn.

Du bist ja nicht der Jäger  
aus Megalith und Ur,  
du bist der Formenprüger  
der weissen Spur.

So viele sind vergangen  
im Bach- und Brückenschein,  
er kennt nicht das Verlangen  
zum Urgestein--:

Doch dir bestimmmt: kein Werden,  
du bleibst gebannt und bist  
der Himmel und der Erden  
Formalist.

Du kannst es keinem zeigen  
und keinem du entfliehn,  
du trägst durch Nacht und Schweigen  
den Denker-- ihn."
"Doch wenn dann Stunden sind,
wo ohne Rang und Reue
das Alte und das Neue
zusammenrinnt,

wo ohne Unterschied
das Wasser und die Welle,
das Dunkle und das Helle
das eine Lied,

ein Lied, das Stimme rief
gegen Geschichtsgewalten
das in sich selbst Gestalten
asiatisch tief--

ach, wenn däe Stunden dann kommen
und dichter werden und mehr
Sommer und Jahre verglommen,
singt man am Brückenwehr:

lass mich noch einmal reich sein,
wie es die Jugend gedacht,
lass mich noch einmal weich sein
im Blumengeruch der Nacht,

nimm mir die Hölle, die Hülle,
die Form, den Formungstrieb,
gib mir die Tiefe, die Fülle,
die Schöpfung-- gib!"
IV.

"Bist du auf Grate gestiegen, sahst du die Gipfel klar: Adler, die wirklich, fliegen schweigend und unfruchtbar.

Kürzer steht es in Früchten, früher, dass es verblich, nahe am Schöpfer züchten wenige Arten sich.

Ewig schweigend das Blaue, wer noch an Stimmen denkt, hat schon den Blick, die Braue wieder in Sehnsucht gesenkt.

Du aber dienst Gestalten über dem Brücke wehr, über den stumpfen Gewalten Völker und Schnee und Meer:

formen, das ist deine Frühe, der Rasse auferlegt, formen, bis die Hüille die ganze Tiefe trägt,

die Hüille wird dann zeigen, und keiner kann entfliehn, dass Form und Tiefe Reigen, durch den die Adler ziehn."
Gottfried Benn's "Am Brückенwehr" expresses the poet's self-criticism and self-reflection one year after Hitler had seized power. At the time the poem was written in 1934, Benn had rejected all affiliation with the Third Reich and recognized that his former "Träume der Vereinigung von Geist und Macht"\(^1\) could not be realized: "Es sind zwei Reiche."\(^2\) "Die Brückenwehr" signifies Benn's turn from politics to art and anticipates the course of his future work as a poet. Else Buddeberg comments: "'Am Brückenwehr' . . . ist sehr aufschlussreich für das, was grundsätzlich über das lyrische Ich von Benn gedacht worden ist; aufschlussreich auch über die Stimmung, in der er nach der Krise von 1933-1934 sich befindet."\(^3\) Benn realized that only in the realm of art could the creative synthesis of opposites come about which had failed in political life.

Benn begins his poem in a contemplative pose. The poet is standing on a bridge, he leans on the parapet over the rushing waters below. The first stanza introduces the poet's resolution to turn away from all restraints limiting his existence:
"Ich habe weit gedacht,  
nun lasse ich die Dinge  
und löse ihre Ringe  
der neuen Macht. ..."

Benn renounces "die Dinge," reality in the empirical sense, and releases "ihre Ringe," all causal relationships which lead in endless circles, and leaves them in favor of a mysterious "neue Macht," the true nature of which is not revealed until later in the poem.

The second stanza symbolizes Benn's passage from the "Dinge" to "der neuen Macht" with the image of the bridge:

Gelehnt am Brückenwehr  
die hellen Wasser rauschen  
die Elemente tauschen  
sich hin und her.

The brightness ("hellen") of the rushing water attracts the poet's eye. It draws his attention to the activity below, thereby diverting him from the "Ringe" of reality. "Hellen" also suggests the lucid, creative state of the poet's mind which has escaped the stagnation inherent in "ich habe weit gedacht." Whereas the "Denken" of his former existence remained unproductive and confined to "Ringen," "rauschen" and "tauschen" imply activity and even intoxication. It is in this activity experienced in nature that Benn discovers a recourse from the problems confronting him. "Elemente,"
the simplest forms constituting nature, imply the breakdown ("løsen") of all that which had formerly been unresolvable "Dinge." The liquid sounds of "lasse, løse, gelehnt, hellen, Elemente" emphasize the poet's fascination with the water and its power to dissolve ("løsen") all bonds. "Rauschen" and "Hin und her" imply a lack of order in contrast to the symmetry implied in "Ringe"--Benn now allows his senses to rule him rather than the logicality of his thought processes ("weit gedacht"). "Hin und her" also suggests the potential of the river to carry the poet back and forth in the flow of time, a thought occupying the two following stanzas.

The simplicity which Benn experiences in the elements appears in the primeval character of the third stanza. The "schiefergrau" water of the river transports the poet back in time ("hin") and awakens in him a vision of the primitive world where stones and rock strata existed, but no life:

Der Lauf ist schiefergrau
der Ton der Urgesteine,als noch das Land alleineim Schichtenbau.

"Ur" in "Urgesteine" indicates the poet's regression to a primeval world of nature. "Schicht" in "Schichtenbau" suggests the simplicity of this world and is reminiscent of "Elemente." "Allein" underscores this rudimentary condition, and simultaneously reflects the newly found seclusion of the
poet from the "Dinge" of reality.

The barren, primitive world is contrasted with the joy and celebration of life in the fourth stanza. The poet is carried forward in time ("her") to an autumnal view of life:

\[
\text{Des Sommers Agonie} \\
\text{gibt auch ein Rebgehänge,} \\
\text{Kelter- und Weingesänge} \\
\text{durchstreifen sie.}
\]

Nature again provides the poet with a visionary release from the strictures of reality. The "schiefergrau" rock strata are replaced by colorful images of Dionysiac pleasure:

"Rebgehänge, Kelter- und Weingesänge." Benn now envisions the emotional aspect of life ("rauschen") which offers emancipation from all factors limiting his existence.

Yet the vision which the poet sees reflected in "hin und her" of the river fails to explain the true nature of "der neuen Macht." Although Benn has crossed the figurative bridge from the "Dinge" to an intimation of the mysterious new power, his double experience of nature ("hin und her") gives rise to questions about the world, man and God.

In the fifth stanza Benn \textit{poses} to reflect on his vision:

\[
\text{Wessen ist das und wer?} \\
\text{Dessen, der alles machte,} \\
\text{dessen, der es dann dachte} \\
\text{vom Ende her?}
\]
The two questions ask whether the world, past and present, should be thought of as belonging to God, the creator of all things. Or does it belong to man, who, in contrast to God, regards everything in terms of transience and death ("vom Ende her")? The alliterating "w" and "d" ("Wessen ist das und _er, dessen, der alles machte, dessen, der es dann dachte...") recalls the poet's quandary of the first stanza ("Ich habe _eit gedacht, nun lasse ich die Dinge") and leads him back into the realm of thought ("dessen, der es dann dachte..."). "Wessen ist das...", however, questions the origin of "der neue Macht" which remains elusively hidden in the exchange of elements.

In the final stanza the poet does not offer any answer to the questions posed, but asserts their intensity and at the same time admits the powerlessness of his thoughts:

\[
\text{Ich habe weit gedacht, ich lebte in Gedanken, bis ihre H"aupter sanken vor welcher Macht?}
\]

Benn's attempt to release himself from the rings of reality has only succeeded in a momentary vision. The first verse of the stanza "Ich habe weit gedacht" repeats the first line of the poem to indicate the circular path ("Ring") leading the poet back to the beginning of his
dilemma. "Ich lebte in Gedanken" is essentially a restatement of "Ich habe weit gedacht," but provides added emphasis to Benn's predicament. The poet is unable to utilize this thought processes ("weit gedacht... Gedanken") either to answer the questions of the fifth stanza or to discover the true nature of the "neuer Macht." Such incapability forces the figurative heads of Benn's thoughts ("Gedanken... ihre H"upter") to bow themselves in bewilderment before the undiscovered "Macht." The first quartet must end in quandary with an unresolved question ("vor welcher Macht?"). The poet is thwarted and admits his mental impotence. Yet his open question reveals a continued desire to discover and understand the power confronting him.

Benn's attitude of resignation gives way in the second quartet to a critical imperative directed at the "du" rather than the "ich" of the poet. The use of "sinken" establishes a continuity between quartets while simultaneously contrasting the attitudes of the two speakers: the "ich" of the poet is dejected, yet the "du" remains firm:

"... bis ihre H"upter sanken
vor welcher Macht?"

"Vor keiner Macht zu sinken
vor keinem Rausch zur Ruh,
du selbst bist Trank und Trinken
der Denker, du ..."
Benn castigates himself for subjugating the powers of his mind to those of the "neue Macht." The stanza is an assertion of the ego: "vor keiner Macht zu sinken ..." It must not let itself be overcome by the creative "Rausch" ("vor keinem Rausch zur Ruh ...") as before in part I ("die hellen Wasser rauschen") and linger complacently in such a mood ("Ruh"), but be ever conscious that in its state of solitude it must depend entirely on itself: "du selbst bist Trank und Trinken..." "Trinken" means to fill oneself with content through thought, to achieve a final inner fullness and depth ("Trank"). Again the key woddle of the stanza are alliterated to provide added emphasis: "Rausch zur Ruh ... Trank und Trinken ..." The alliterated "d" of "der Denker du" is reminiscent of "dessen, der es dann dachte vom Ende her." (I, 5): in both verses the subject is the thinker, yet now he is viewed positively rather than negatively.

In the second and third stanzas Benn continues to profess himself as a man of intellect -- a "Denker" sharply distinguished from the "Hirt" and "Jäger" representing earlier epochs of human civilization:

Du bist ja nicht der Hirte
und ziehst nicht mit Schalmein,
wenne der, wie du, sich irrte,
ist nie Verzeihn.
Du bist ja nicht der Jäger
aus Megalith und Ur,
du bist der Formenräger
der weissen Spur.

"Schalmein," like "Weinergänge," uses a musical image to convey the emotional and idyllic aspect of life opposing the reality of "Dingen" and the logic of "Menge." Yet this idyllic, pastoral image of the shepherd is not left unqualified. He too, like Benn, is never destined to find forgiveness:

wenn der, wie du, sich irrte
ist nie Verzeihn.

Thus Benn once more, as with his vision in the first part of the poem, undermines his idyll by submitting it to the scrutiny of the critical mind.

The hunter in the following stanza provides a parallel image to the shepherd. Similar verse structure emphasizes this parallel:

Du bist ja nicht der Hirte ...
Du bist ja nicht der Jäger ...

Yet in this stanza the poet draws a contrast rather than a comparison with his subject. It reflects Benn's political rather than his moral self ("wenn der, wie du, sich irrte /
ist nie Verzeihn."). He rejects the National Socialist interest in heredity and genealogy, that man of the present is the same as the "Jünger" of antiquity and the great stone graves ("Megalith and Ur"). Now he is convinced that it is the artist's primary task to be a "Formenpräger," a concept of the nature of art which rulers of the German totalitarian state sharply rejected. "Weisse Spur" is then a metaphor for the white race, the European population of Western Civilization, from which Benn, unlike the National Socialists, did not see himself as separate. Benn remarks: "der abendländische Mensch unseres Zeitalters besiegt das Dämonische durch die Form, seine Dämonie ist die Form, seine Magie ist das Technisch-Konstruktive."

The fourth stanza expresses once again, in the face of the transience of everything that is human, a longing for regression into an archaic age, and at the same time a longing to escape from the pressures of contemporary political powers into the non-historical:

So viele sind vergangen
im Bach- und Brückenschein,
wer kennt nicht das Verlangen
zum Urgestein—:

Once more the image of the bridge on which the poet stands and the river appear. "Bach-schein" is a repetition of "die hellen Wasser" in the first part of the poem. The river becomes
now a symbol of life which flows and passes away, finally
entering the "Meer" of the absolute (this "Meer" appears in
Part IV, 4). Hence "Brückenschein" is symbolic for the transition
from life to death as well as from present to past ("wer
kennt nicht das Verlangen zum Urgestein."). "Urgestein"
again signifies Benn's desire to retreat to the life of sim-
plicity in nature evidenced in the first quartet ("der Ton
der Urgesteine").

Yet the hyphen at the end of the fourth stanza signifies
a sudden interruption of the poet's reverie. In the fifth
stanza Benn goes on to reject the "Verlangen nach Urgestein"
as a diverting temptation leading away from art and concentration
on form. He now becomes aware of his own fate as a "Formalist":

Doch dir bestimmt: kein Werden,
    du bleibst gebannt und bist
    der Himmel und der Erden
    Formalist.

The poet withdraws even more decisively from the world of
historical "Werden" which traces out an upward-leading line
of human development from the "Urgestein," the megalithic
culture, via the huntsmen and shepherds. In a letter of April
30, 1936, Benn confessed: "A bas-- die Geschichte! Jenseits
der Geschichte beginnt die Wirklichkeit, die anthropologische
Wirklichkeit der geistigen Formen." He now regarded his
task as the discovery of a perfected form of poetic expression which would embrace the whole realm of earthly being and the total existence of man ("Himmel und Erde"). He sees himself as bound, "gebannt," to his task as an artist, as a "Formalist." "Formalist" comprises an entire verse to provide emphasis and finality.

The last stanza is a variation of the first and emphasizes the solitude of the modern artist:

"... Du kannst es keinem zeigen
und keinem du entfliehn,
du trägst durch Nacht und Schweigen
den Denker -- ihn"

There is no one to whom the poet can exhibit the results of his rigid formalist art-- on the other hand he is at the mercy of persecution: "... und keinem du entfliehn, . . ." The final lines affirm, however, the constructive power of the intellect. Even as the world draws to its close, when there remains nothing but darkness and silence ("Nacht und Schweigen" appear as opposites to the metaphors of life: "die hellen Wasser, ... Bach- und Brückenschein, Weingesänge, Schalmeine") the poet remains the bearer and proclaimer of creative thought. In his turning away from current events, Benn assumed a need for silence: "Die Lage war nicht so, dass man noch für andere
sprechen konnte, zu anderen sprach, kaum drangen die Sentenzen
durch ein Zimmer, für sich allein trieb man die Gebilde vor."

In the last verse Benn objectifies the intellect within himself
to indicate the cool aloofness of the "Formalist": "Der
Denker, _du_ becomes "du trägst... den Denker-- _ihn._"

In the third quartet Benn once more becomes aware of the
rhythm of poetic creation in which hallucinatory states of
ecstasy, vision and intoxication alternate with a creative urge
controlled by sober consciousness. "Doch" introduces the
quartet signifying the contrast to be drawn with Part II, a
contrast which makes the synthesis of opposites in Part IV more
credible:

"Doch wenn dann Stunden sind
wo ohne Rang und Reue
das Alte und das Neue
zusammenrinnt, ..."

The renewed quotation marks as wœl as the absence of "du"
(Part II) indicate a parallel situation to the first quartet.
The poet looks at "Stunden" of inner absorption, when all
antitheses flow together. He then considers himself free from
the structures of position and order ("Rang" is reminiscent
of "Ring") as well as the remorse and repentence which hold
man in abeyance ("Reue"). The primitive and the modern
("Das Alte und das Neue") combine to form a continuity.
"Zusammenrinnt" is itself composed of two words which "run together" to form a new meaning. The bridge symbol is recalled in all of these images to indicate synthesis.

The second stanza continues the combination of opposites by using images which the poet glimpses from the bridge:

... wo ohne Unterschied
das Wasser und die Welle,
das Dunkle und das Helle,
das eine Lied, ...

The "Wasser" which indicates depth is no different from the "Welle" suggesting surface. This synthesis is strengthened by the alliterative "d" and "W" "das Wasser und die Welle."

The "Dunkle" characterizing the world of "der Denker" ("Nacht und Schweigen") is combined with "das Helle" characterizing the world of nature and the spirit ("Die hellen Wasser rauschen"). Each opposite is reconciled as part of an entire harmony-- "das eine Lied." "Lied" recalls the musical images of "Weingesänge" and "Schalmein."

The third stanza elaborates on this "Lied":

... ein Lied des Stimme rief
gegen Geschichtsgewalten
das in sich selbst Gestalten
asiatisch tief --

The song leads the poet away from the burdensome historical
world into the depths of the soul, back to the archetypal collective unconscious: "Die Seele aber trachtet nach Tieferem als der Erkenntnis, nach etwas Tieferem, das ihr Ganzheit und Vollendung gibt." Benn refers here to his idea of "hypermische Metaphysik," according to which the poet is a magician who can evoke ("ein Lied des Stimme rief") anew the myths of antiquity: "immer und zu allen Zeiten wird er wiederkommen, für den alles Leben nur ein Rufen aus der Tiefe ist, einer alten und frühen Tiefe, und alles Vergängliche nur in ihm Erinnerungen sucht." (italics added). In the period when "Am Brückenwehr" was written Benn had contrasted oriental knowledge ("asiatisch tief") of the soul and techniques of meditation with the world of history and National Socialist glorification of action: "Nur nicht handeln! Wisse das und schweige. Asien ist tiefer, aber verbirg es!" he wrote in Weinhaus Wolf. Benn also stated in his Ptolemäer: "Asiatisches durchkreuzte sehr häufig meine individuelle Penetranz, als deren Echtestes ich immer das Amorphe empfand, das Ambivalente ..." Benn emphasizes here in the third stanza, however, that introversion is not a sinking down into the formless and shapeless, but a different type of form ("... das in sich selbst Gestalten...") opposed to that of the "Formalist."
After the third stanza a notable rhythmical change takes place. The short and vigorous two and three beat idemtic lines give way to dactyls, which make the rhythm softer and more resonant. This singing rhythm is maintained until the middle of the fourth quartet, when the short rhythm of poems I - III returns:

ach, wenn die Stunden dann kommen
und dichter werden und mehr
Sommer und Jahre verglommen,
singt man am Brückenwehr: ...

"Ach" expresses the emotion which seizes the poet and separates him from his task as "Formalist." "... Wenn dann Stunden kommen ..." reiterates the first verse of the quartet ("'Doch wenn dann Stunden sind ...'")) to introduce a new flow of sentiment. These hours also produce the "Dichter" ("dichter werden"), but the "Dichter" who is devoted to depth ("... Gestalten asiatisch tief.")) rather than form. "... Und mehr Sommer und Jahre verglommen, ..." like a former verse ("ein Lied, das Stimme rief gegen Geschichtsgewalten") emphasizes the disappearance of all temporal limitations.

The poet glimpses a harmony enabling him to "sing" his "Lied" ("singt man am Brückenwehr: ..."). "Singt" not only refers to "Lied" but also to the previous musical images suggestive of emotion ("Weingesänge" ; "Schalmein"). The poet's
singing is reflected in his change from iambs to more resonant dactyls. Once more the image of the bridge is used ("singt man am Brückenwehr") to figuratively connect the realm of "Form" with the realm of "Tiefe" for which the poet now longs:

"... lass mich noch einmal reich sein, 
wie es die Jugend gedacht,
lass mich noch einmal weich sein
im Blumengeruch der Nacht,

nimm mir die Hülle, die Hülle
die Form, den Formungstrieb,
gib mir die Tiefe, die Fülle
die Schöpfung— gib!"

These final stanzas comprise an urgent plea, almost a prayer, to be given the fullness of life and be wafted away into the ecstasy of dream and intoxication. This plea for inner riches is partially answered in the fifth stanza by rich rimes ("reich sein ... weich sein"). "Noch einmal ... wie die Jugend gedacht" asks for a regression into childhood, an escape from the present to the simple existence, as Harald Steinhagen comments: "Sehnsucht nach Kindheit, in dem Ich und Welt noch nicht einander entfremdet waren."12 "Weich" opposes the rigid qualities of the "Formalist" who remains "bestimmt" and "gebannt." "Blumengeruch" emphasizes the use of the senses
rather than the intellect. The critical artistic effort which went into the "Hülle," the superficial aspects of the work, now appears as a "Hülle," a curse the artist has laid upon himself and from which he would like to be free. The assonance and alliteration of "Hülle / Hülle" and "Form / Formungstrieb" impart a musical quality to the stanza which opposes the rigidity of the "Formalist." "Nimm mir ..." comprising the first two verses is balanced by "Gib mir" comprising the final two. "Fülle" and "Hülle" oppose one another much like "Wasser" and "Welle" in the first stanza. Benn appeals for "Tiefe" (seen before in the third stanza as "asiatisch tief--") to counteract the shallowness of form, "Gib mir ... die Schöpfung" reflects "dichter werden" of the fourth stanza while the final "gib!" culminates the poet's entreaty for creativity.

The fourth quartet antithetically opposes Benn's wish for inner depth with the view of a mountain range:

Bist du auf Grate gestiegen,  
sahst du die Gipfel klar:  
Adler, die wirklichen, fliegen  
schweigend und unfruchtbar.

Mountains and eagles are images of silent clarity, strength and perfection, standing for the realm of absolute intellect
described already in Part II. Once more Benn addresses himself critically with "du." "Grate," "gestiegen," and "Gipfel" are alliterated to indicate their association: "gestiegen" not only refers to the poet's ascendance of the mountain ridges but also his upward glance toward the summit of poetic perfection. "Klar" is in opposition to "Rausch" and the confused "hin und her" of the river flowing below. The image of the eagle symbolizes the constructive mind and the fulfillment of Benn's poetic aspiration. "Schweigend" and "unfruchtbar" are positive, not negative attributes of the intellect. As described already in Part II, the "Denker" exists in a world of silence: "... du trägst durch Nacht und Schweigen den Denker -- ihn." Benn explains the need for silence in poetry: "Im Gedicht ist die Sprache zur Ruhe gebracht, und der Mensch lebt, gestillt, für einen Augenblick im Schweigen."13 "Unfruchtbar" indicates the poet's aloofness from the organic processes of life. For Benn, the artist exists in a sterile, ethereal realm: "Ist der Künstler nicht vielleicht a priori geschichtlich unwirksam, rein seelisch phänomenal ...?"14

The second stanza continues to contrast organic life to that which is "unfruchtbar":
Kürzer steht es in Früchten
Früher, dass es verblich,
nahe am Schöpfer züchten
wenige Arten sich.

The transience of everything earthly is part of purely biological life with its vegetative joy in existence, symbolized here by "Früchte," while the realm of perfected art is identified with eternity. It does not reach fruition only to pass away ("dass es verblich"). Yet few artists can approach the creator of such perfection: "nahe am Schöpfer züchten wenige Arten sich." "Sich züchten" indicates the aloofness of the artist's sphere from life: breeding or cultivation is emphasized rather than unrestricted growth.

"Ewig" at the beginning of the third stanza is in contrast to "kürzer" to indicate the absolute and transcendental nature of the artistic realm: "Ewig schweigend das Blaue..." "Schweigend" reiterates "schweigend und unfruchtbar" of the first stanza as well as "Nacht und Schweigen" of Part II, thus emphasizing the detachment of the artistic world. "Das Blaue," as Benn calls this sphere, has the same symbolic value as "l'azur" for the French symbolists Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Valéry: it is identical with the coldness and absolute silence of empty space. Benn comments in Weinhaus Wolf: "Es zählen nur die höchsten Sphären, und das Menschliche
zählt nicht dazu, eine erbarmunglose Höhe, unablenkbar
fliegen da die Pfeile, es ist kalt, tiefblau, da gelten nur
Strahlen, da gilt nur eins: erkenne die Lage, bediene dich
deiner Mittel, du bist verpflichtet zu deiner Mittel, du
bist verpflichtet zu deiner Methode, wo du erschufst, kannst
du nicht weichen—: Du stehst für Reiche, nicht zu deuten
und in denen es keine Säge gibt."15

The remainder of the third stanza contrasts "das Blaue"
with the emotional "Tiefe" of Parts I and III:

wer noch an Stimmen denkt
hat schon den Blick, die Braue
wieder in Sehnsucht gesenkt.

"Stimmen" opposes "schweigen" and suggests the activity,
communication, and life denied to the ethereal artistic realm.
The artist who does not maintain his austere devotion to
form will lose his vision ("den Blick") of the figurative
mountain peak of perfection and be caught up in the transience
of life. "Wieder in Sehnsucht" refers to the poet's longing
described in the third quartet ("lass mich noch einmal reich
sein ... lass mich noch einmal weich sein ...") as well as
"das Verlangen zum Urgestein" in the second. "Gesenkt" concerns
not only the poet's downward glance from the mountain region,
but also suggests his immersion, and hence extinction, in the
"Tiefe" of the river of life below (previously implied with: "bis ihre Hütter sanken ..." and "vor keiner Macht zu sinken ..."). The stanza is highly musical reflecting the emotion of life, yet it is not musical in overt images as before ("Weingesänge," "Schalmein," "singt man") but in its alliterative "s," "b," and "v" sounds: "schweigend / Stimmen / schon / Sehnsucht / gesenkt ...
Blaue / Blick / Braue ... Ewig / schweigend / wer / wieder." The stanza is also composed principally of deep, long vowels which aurally promote the mood of "Sehnsucht":

Ewig schweigend das Blaue
wer noch an Stimmen denkt,
hat schon den Blick, die Braue
wieder in Sehnsucht gesenkt.

In the fourth stanza the poet opposes the "Gestalten" to the "Stimmen" which call upon him to retreat within himself and free himself. In giving them form, Benn serves these "Gestalten." "Du aber" introduces the contrast to the preceding stanza:

du aber dienst Gestalten
Über dem Brückenwehr
Über den stumpfen Gewalten
Völker und Schnee und Meer.

The "Gestalten" exist in a transcendental region to which the "Formalist" aspires. They stand not only above the poet who figuratively remains on the bridge between "Rausch" and
"Form" ("Über dem Brückenzwischen"), but also above those realms of history and nature ("Völker und Schnee und Meer") which have become "stumpfe Gewalten." The "Denker" is neither the shepherd nor the hunter of antiquity: he remains aloof from the historical process, because for him there is "kein Werden." He is impervious to natural forces in his effort to achieve immortality ("Ewig schweigend das Blaue"). "Schnee" reflects the colorless, insipid "stumpfe Gewalten." "Meer" is that to which the river of life flows and hence a symbol of the biological extinction which the poet must overcome.

It is characteristic of empty transcendence, as the realm of absolute intellect and nothingness appear to Benn, that he does not name the "Gestalten," but in the fifth stanza formulates the "Gesetz der Form" which these "Gestalten" have imposed upon him:

formen, das ist deine Fülle
der Rasse auferlegt,
formen, bis die Hüllle
die ganze Tiefe trägt

Benn emphasizes that form affects not only him but the whole of humanity ("Rasse") which he represents ("du bist der Formenräger der weissen Spur.") The concept of inner "Fülle" referred to "Tiefe" and "Schöpfung" at the end of Part III.
"Fülle" now, however, stands for the artistic task of giving form and shape, the essence of which is external ("Hülle") and internal ("Tiefe") unity, to the completed work of art: "bis die Hülle die ganze Tiefe trägt." Hans-Dieter Balser remarks about this synthesis of "Hülle" and "Tiefe":

Die scheinbare Antithetik der Schlussstrophe des dritten Teils wird nunmehr aufgehoben. "Form" und "Tiefe," "Hülle" und "Fülle" sind keine Gegensätze, die sich ausschliessen, sondern sie können als Elemente dichterischen Schaffens nur zusammen wirksam werden. Traum und Rausch können für sich selbst nicht bestehen, und eben deshalb ist der Künstler aufgerufen, die endogenen Bilder der mystischen Partizipation in die Statik und Abgeschlossenheit der Form zu überführen, bis sie "die ganze Tiefe trägt."16

"Form," "Tiefe," "Fülle," and "Hülle" are the "Elemente" constituting the "neue Macht" which the poet glimpsed in the river at the beginning of the poem, but which he was yet unable to understand.

The final stanza of the poem completes the synthesis of opposites:

die Hülle wird dann zeigen,
und keiner kann entfliehn,
dass Form und Tiefe Reigen,
durch den die Adler ziehn.

No longer is "die Hülle" a "Hülle," but combines "Form" and "Tiefe" to become a "Reigen," a symbol of completion. In his
short story *Querschnitt* (1918), Benn expressed his concept of "Reigen": "Wenn wir lehrten den Reigen sehen und das Leben formend überwinden, würde da der Tod nicht sein der Schatten blau, in dem die Glücke stehen?"¹⁷ "Reigen" is reminiscent of the "Ringen" at the beginning of the poem from which Benn was trying to free himself. "Ringen" and "Reigen" are both circular forms, yet "Reigen" suggests music and movement which "Ringen" does not. Now the poet is no longer constricted within the confines of reality but had found the fulfillment and harmony of "der neuen Macht." Balser explains:

"Form" und "Tiefe" sind ein "Reigen"; aber die Tiefe erhält ihre Gültigkeit und Dauer erst in der Bindung durch die Form. Denn "Keiner ... wird den Schluss jener Mythe anders wünschen als dass Dionysos endet und ruht zu Füssen des klaren delphischen Gottes." (Benn: *Expressionismus*). Damit wird nun auch deutlich, was sich hinter der "neuen Macht" verbirgt, von der zu Beginn des Gedichts die Rede war: die Kunst als die "Antithese aus Rausch und Zucht," die zur Synthese im geschaffenen Kunstwerk führt.¹⁸

The artist is no longer an object of persecution as in Part II ("und keinem du entfliehen ...") but included in the harmony of which everyone is part ("keiner kann entfliehen"). The repeated image of the eagles ("durch den die Adler ziehn.") balances the "Tiefe" of the preceding verse ("dass Form und
Tiefe Reigen, ...") and provides final emphasis for the poet, who exists "nahe am Schöpfer."

The bridge is significant as a symbol of transition as well as union in this poem. As a symbol of transition it reflects Benn's rejection of his old National Socialist allegiance and his consequent embrace of art. Transition is also seen in Benn's shift from the real world to a world of "der neuen Macht." In conjunction with the river, the bridge becomes a symbol for the organic transition from life to death which the "Formalist" must overcome. As a symbol of union the bridge exerts its greatest significance in the poem. Benn as the artist stands at the junction connecting "Form" and "Tiefe," both of which are necessary for the completed work of art. It is in this position that the poet is able to find a harmony of extremes. The bridge is also employed structurally to create union: thesis and antithesis are reconciled in a bridge-like synthesis at the end of the poem. The bridge, finally, is also the poem itself, the very creation of which leads Benn from the causal relationships of reality ("Ringe") to the harmony and fulfillment of art ("Reigen").
Footnotes


5. Gottfried Benn, I, p. 70.


15
Benn, II, p. 140.

16

17
Benn, "Querschnitt," II, p. 77.

18
Balser, p. 139.
CONCLUSION

It would be presumptuous, on the basis of the foregoing examination of eight poems, to attempt to find a specific development in the bridge motif from Hölderlin to Benn. Indeed, it was not the purpose of this study to make a systematic analysis of the bridge symbol, but rather to observe its use under various conditions according to varying authors. Yet even within these few poems ideas recur with consistency and force so that one can hardly help making some general comments by way of summary on the functions of the bridge in German poetry.

The bridge is used primarily as a symbol of union. It joins that which is otherwise separated or divided. For Hölderlin the elements of city and country are brought into harmonious interaction. Nature, Heidelberg, and the poet are no longer individual entities, but complement one another in symmetrical unity. Platen uses the bridge as a symbol to identify himself with the decadence in which he revels: he is "an Brücken angeschmieget" and as such becomes a part
of the moribund city. Meyer utilizes the bridge as a fusing element between reality and dream, present world and past vision. "Die alte Brücke" stands as an ancient monument ("grauer Zeit entstammt") to join mature and poet in festive celebration ("Du feierst hier."). For Fontane, the bridge unifies the separate realms of reality and myth. The interaction of these two realms, however, does not produce harmony, but only the inevitable dissonance and catastrophe symbolized by the final destruction of the bridge. Nietzsche utilizes the bridge symbol to unite an outer, objective scene in Venice with the poetic realm within his spirit. A bridge of communication is established between external stimuli and internal sensitivity. In his last verse, however, Nietzsche finds himself unable to perpetuate this harmony and communication is lost. Rilke's blind man stands on the "bridge of the carrousel" which connects the chaotic outer world with the inner realm of the spirit. His blindness enables introspection and discovery of that which provides identity and permanence in a transitory existence. For Stadler, the bridge combines man with the optimistic and beneficial aspects of life and death in the face of an
oppressive technological world. It establishes communication ("... zum Gruss gestellt bei Nacht.") in an otherwise fragmented existence. Finally, Benn's bridge in "Am Brückenwehr" symbolizes union of the opposites "Form" and "Tiefe" to create the perfect art. The "neue Macht" represents the synthesis of opposing elements forming "das eine Lied."

Just as the bridge functions as a symbol of unity, it functions also as a symbol of transition between realms: between present and past, life and death, the confining world and the transcendental world, and between reality and dream or myth.

The transition from present to past is a frequent theme. Hölderlin refers to the past with "Lang lieb' ich dich schon .... fesselt' ein Zauber einst auf die Brücke mich an." His moment on the bridge marks his escape from the confining, philosophical world of Jena and his entrance into the solace of nature. Platen reflects on the past glory of Venice, comparing it with the present deterioration of the city: "und wann ich, .../ stehend auf versteinten Pfählen, / Den Blick hinaus ins dunkle Meer verliere, / Dem förder keine Dogen sich vermählen." Yet the poet does not genuinely regret the demise of the city's greatness; indeed, he indulges
himself in its decaying condition. Meyer, however, opposes Hölderlin's and Platen's interest in the present. He uses the bridge as a means of escape into the past, where he no longer experiences the colorless lives of "Menschen," but sees a vivid pageant of historical figures pass before his eyes. Fontane's ballad too views the past with admiration. The modern technological world has destroyed man's balance with nature. Johnie ridicules "das elend alte Schifferboot" of years past, when man did not arrogantly challenge the elements. Gottfried Benn also knows moments of longing for the past ("Verlangen nach Urgestein") where he hopes to find release from the stagnation and frustration of the present "Dinge" which enclose him.

The passage from life to death is alluded to in five poems. Hölderlin glimpses the acquiescence of the self in the forces of nature. His heart longs to become part of the all, like the river which flows into the sea:

Und der Jüngling, der Strom, fort in die Ebne zog, Trummigfroh, wie das Herz, wenn es, sich selbst zu schön, Liebend unterzugehen, In die Fluten der Zeit sich wirft.

Platen similarly loses himself in the sea ("Und wann ich ... den Blick hinaus ins dunkle Meer verliere . . .") which offers removal from the clamor of life ("Dann stört mich kaum . . ."
Herschallend aus entlegenen Kanälen."). Fontane pictures the passage from life to death in the tragedy of Johnie, who mistakenly thinks he can transcend nature through technology. The catastrophe emphasizes the weakness of the human realm and the transitoriness of life in face of the all-powerful forces of nature. For Stadler the Rhine river becomes a symbol of life which passes into the "Meer" of the absolute. Death has no pejorative connotation, but holds a final stillness, introspection, communion, and blessedness ("Stille... Besinnung... Einkehr... Kommunion...""). Benn too glimpses the transition from life to death in the river: "So viele sind vergangen in Bach- und Brückenschein, ...". The bridge is reflected in the water ("Brückenschein") as a symbol of this transition. As an artist, Benn must surmount the organic forces of nature in a quest for the immortality ("Doch dir bestimmt: kein Werden, ... Ewig schweigend das Blaue.").

The bridge frequently symbolizes the progress from the confining world to the transcendental world. Not only do Hölderlin and Platen find escape from the limiting forces in Jena and the Rialto, but Rilke too finds an alternative to the confining, circular path of the carrousel on the bridge which leads to the "stille Mittelpunkt" and to the values which
have transcended time ("das immer gleiche") and fallibility ("der unbewegliche Gerechte"). Stadler is released from the narrow, oppressive world of technology ("enger, nachtumschienter Minengang... Bingeweid der Nacht") into a transcendental sphere offering him new life ("Wir fliegen, aufgehoben, königlich durch nachtentrissne Luft, ..."). Like Rilke, Benn frees himself from the circles enclosing him ("... und lüse ihre Ringe") and passes into a transcending sphere of art "Über dem Brückeunwehr."

The transition from reality to dream or myth is seen in the poems of Meyer, Fontane, Nietzsche and Benn. Meyer leaves the world of reality, as represented by the new bridge, for the visionary world of poetic imagination: "Statt des Lebens geht der Traum auf deines Pfades engem Raum." Fontane juxtaposes the tangible with the intangible in his dual realms of man and witches. Fontane dissolves the real world in a world of the supernatural and myth. Nietzsche proceeds from a Venetian landscape to an introspective vision within his soul which is "unsichtbar" and "heimlich." Benn leaves the empirical world of causal relationships ("die Dinge") and in a Dionysian vision ("Die hellen Wasser rauschen") attains his first intimation of the elusive "neue Macht."
Finally, transition is seen from the objectivity to the subjectivity of the poet. Platen attempts to mask his inner turmoil in a guise of objective images and stringent form. However, one sees through this mask to view his obsession with decay. The poem, opposite from the author's intentions, brings us within a subjective sphere. Meyer, although utilizing no "ich" in his poem, and although he aims to achieve a classical universality with the bridge symbol, reveals his inability to sustain an artistic vision ("Vorbei! Vorüber ohne Spur."). Moreover, when he emerges from his vision, his choice of words reveals a colorlessly pragmatic view of reality ("Menschen... dort fahren sie"). Fontane takes an objective report of a rail catastrophe and transforms it into a subjective rendering of the foibles of the human spirit: "Tend, Tend ist das Gebilde vom Menschenhand."

Nietzsche transmutes an objective scene into a subjective experience only to objectify it again and realize his own alienation and the folly of his art. Rilke too proceeds from the objective "wirre Wage" and "oberflächliche Geschlechte" to the subjectivity of the inner spirit ("in die Unterwelt"). Stadler transforms an outer technological objectivity into an inner view of his soul. The express train itself becomes
less of an object and more of a metaphor as the poem progresses.

The bridge is a symbol for that which separates as well as that which unifies. The aloofness of the artist is seen in several poems. The bridges on which Platen aimlessly wanders separate him from the clamor of the marketplace. He is indifferent to the glittering shops of the Rialto or the call of the gondoliers. Meyer's "alte Brücke" similarly separates the poet, not only from life ("ein neuer Bau ragt über dir") but also from art, as symbolized by the evanescent dream. Nietzsche's poem illustrates the tragic alienation of the artist after an ephemeral moment of harmonious union. Rilke's *Pont du Carrousel* is fraught with images of aloofness and detachment. "Markstein" provides identity yet lies alone in a border position. The man's very blindness renders him incapable of communicating with the outer world. He is the midpoint of existence yet separate from the "alles" which circles about him. Stadler also perceives his loneliness after having crossed the bridge: "und dann die langen Einsamkeiten." Yet for Stadler as well as Rilke it is a positive loneliness of introspection. Benn is aloof with the clear perception of the artist: "Adler, die wirklich, fliegen schweigend und unfruchtbar." He is
the "Formalist" whose communication with others would endanger
his art:

wer noch an Stimmen denkt,
hat schon den Blink, die Braue
wieder in Sehnsucht gesenkt.

The bridge has a structural as well as thematic function.

A structural principle of Hölderlin's poetry relies on a
synthesis of thesis and antithesis. The bridge figuratively
reconciles the opposites of the youthful river and the ancient
castle. Such synthesis is expressed with "ewig ... verjüngend ...
altern." Fontane's "Brück am Tay" used the bridge structurally
to span the interstice between the supernatural realm of the
first and last stanzas. The bridge of the human realm falls
into the abyss, whereas the withbes remain to muse
triumphantly "am hohen Moor." The illuminated bridge ("O Biegung
Millionen Lichter") in Stadler's poem functions as a
structural center of the darkness presented on either side.

Whereas the lights in the first part of the poem only
emphasize the chaos of the darkness, however, the "Glut" of
the last part becomes an inner radiance of the spirit.

Benn reveals a similarity to Hölderlin in his use of a structural
thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The emotional moments
of "Fülle" and "Tiefe," resented in Parts I and III, oppose
the artistic permanence of "Hülle" and "Form" in Parts II and IV. A synthesis is achieved in the final two stanzas of the poem which combines "Hülle" and "Fülle" and which prepares the way for a new conception of art ("die neue Macht").

A structural synthesis is revealed also in the single words used by several authors. Separate words form a new meaning when combined. Hölderlin, for example, creates "Vaterlandsstädte" and "Ländlichschönste." Meyer combines several words to form "luftgewoben," "Felsenwiederklang" and "Wogenschwall." Nietzsche fashions "Gondellied" and Benn creates such words as "Brückenschein," "zusammenrinnt" and "Blumengeruch."

Structural synthesis is carried further in the alliterative and tonal quality of several poems. The "s" sound in Platen's sonnet, for example, is used to join separate verses which express a similar idea or mood. The melancholy sound of "Wenn tiefe Schwermut meine Seele wieget" is eliminated from the two following verses describing the life of the Rialto, and is then recalled in the fourth verse: "Such ich die Stille, die den Tag besieget." The "s" sound returns in the final stanza, emphasizing the poet's sustained melancholia: "Dann stört mich kaum in schweigenden Reviere, ...". Nietzsche
uses the "s" sound to join outer and inner realms:

\[ \text{trunken schwamm's in die Dämmerung hinaus...} \]

\[ \text{Meine Seele, eine Saitenspiel,} \]
\[ \text{sang sich, unsichtbar berührt, ...} \]

The "l" and "n" sounds are also instrumental in synthesizing the separate realms of the poem. Gottfried Benn uses alliteration of "w" and "d" as a leit-motif to recall the thought processes confining him:

\[ \text{Ich habe weit gedacht} \]
\[ \text{nun lasse ich die Dinge ...} \]
\[ \text{Wessen ist das und wer} \]
\[ \text{Dessen, der alles möchte} \]
\[ \text{dessen, der es dann dachte ...} \]

The final stanza repeats the first line of the poem to form a structural "Ring" and thus emphasize the poet's dilemma.

The tonal principle established in these and other poems is often manifested through the use of musical images. The harmony found in the bridge symbol is reflected in the predilection of poets to employ musical terminology. Thus Hölderlin expresses the symmetry of his condition with "tönt." Meyer describes the vestigial harmony of the past with "Felsenwiederklang" yet allows the cacophony of "Gewieher und Drommetenhall" to pass away in the swell of waves. The music inherent in Nietzsche's verse is orchestrated by his selection of images: "Gesang... Musik ... Saitenspiel ..."
Gondelliend." In face of the dissonance of the technological realm, Stadler anticipates future harmony with "singt": "Eine Beklemmung singt im Blut." In Fontane's ballad, the witches dance in a "Ringelreihn" indicating the joy and harmony of the supernatural realm as opposed to the sorrow and catastrophe of the human realm. Benn seeks the harmony of the past in his vision of "Kelter- und Weingesänge" and the shepherd with his "Schalmein." In these moments he longs for "Mas eine Lied" which reconciles all opposites, when "man singt am Brückenwehr." Like Fontane, Benn achieves his final harmony through a dance image: "das Form und Tiefe region."

Finally, the bridge symbolizes the poet's quest to achieve an artistic sovereignty over that which confronts him. It becomes a symbol for art itself which harmonizes all dissonant factors of the outside world. The bridge marks the poet's desire for ultimate order and composure. How and to what extent does each author attain such harmony?

For Hölderlin, the bridge is a Classical symbol. He aspires toward a universal tranquillity ("ruhn") within himself and all surrounding him. He controls his emotional desire to dissolve his longing heart in nature; the old castle admonishes him to maintain his cultural heritage and overcome
organic forces. The conclusion of the poem pictures a balance between man and nature: culture tempers nature ("lüftende Gärten") and nature embellishes culture ("Freundliche Wälder rauschten über die Burg herab."). The poet himself is a synthesis of cultural and natural elements.

Platen also ostensibly employs the bridge to establish his cultural identity with the city-- of Venice rather than Heidelberg. He is "an Brücken angeschmieget" and "stehend auf versteinten Pfählen." Platen's disciplined sonnet form evidences his technical sovereignty over his material, and at first one perceives a harmony in "dann stört mich kaum ..." Yet the frequent and consistent images of decay reveal all but this harmony. Unconsciously the poet reveals the decay seething within his own soul. In contrast to Hölderlin, there are no active forces of communication and reciprocation-- only the active "Geist," the poet's creative mind, unsuccessfully attempting to overcome the stagnation of his "Seele."

Unlike Platen, Meyer succeeds in achieving a final harmony. Yet it is not the Classical harmony of Hölderlin, but a harmony found exclusively within nature. Meyer is unable to sustain the artistic vision which links the bridge
with a cultural heritage. The bridge loses its cultural identity and returns to nature ("Du fielest heim an die Natur."). Art provides only an ephemeral, vicarious view of life. Only when the bridge leads the poet entirely within the realm of nature ("Deckt Wuchs und rote Blüte zu.") does he find celebration, redemption and permanence.

The bridge of Fontane's ballad represents an artistic transcendence over the dissonant human realm. His harmony is found neither in culture nor nature but in the artistic, mythical sphere of the supernatural.

Like Platen, Nietzsche fails to achieve final composure within his soul. For him lyric expression is essentially circular and self-destroying. It reveals only his own alienation and the inability of language to reconcile his unstable condition. He can no longer convince himself, as Hölderlin could, of the sovereignty of art over life. In contrast to Platen he is not capable of masking his pain, but ironically exposes it to emphasize his dilemma all the more poignantly.

Rilke, the Neo-romanticist, is unlike Nietzsche in that he can retreat entirely within himself and not feel the necessity to emerge in the "wirre Wege" of the outer world. The bridge
becomes a symbol of the art which establishes a final symmetry and universal law.

Stadler, like Fontane, transcends a superficial technical realm through art. Yet he does not take refuge in a mythical landscape as does Fontane. As an Expressionist, his symbolic bridge does not collapse, but is aglow with the lights which glorify man and send him on a journey affirming life and death. Through his creative process, Stadler restores not only himself but all men to a sovereign condition ("Wir fliegen aufgehoben, königlich"). The bridge marks the emergence of man from a limited technical realm to a spiritual rebirth ("Zum Segnenden ... Zum Gebet.").

Benn's "Am Brückenwehr" lacks the Messianic purpose of Stadler's poem. He is rather concerned, like Hölderlin and Rilke, with discovering the transcending values that will perpetuate him as a poet. His bridge leads to the values of the "neue Macht" -- "Form" and "Tiefe" -- whose synthesis he achieves in the final "Reigen" image of the poem.

It is significant that each poet equates himself with the bridge. Some (Fontane, Stadler) pass over it and reach the other side, while most (Hölderlin, Platen, Meyer, Nietzsche, Rilke, Benn) reflectively pause on the bridge.
to emphasize their identity with it. While most do not physically cross the bridge, their poems become all the more powerful when the authors figuratively arrive at the other side by virtue of their artistic creation.
APPENDIX

A list of the poems not used for discussion where the bridge symbol appears. Poems are listed by title or first line.

ANACKER, Heinrich:

Seebrücke im Sturm

BACHMANN, Ingeborg

Das Spiel ist aus

BECKER, Johannes

Stadt mit Brücke

BENRATH, Henry

Basel
Die Stadt

DEHMEL, Richard

Die Stille Stadt

EICH, Günter

Ende eines Sommers

FRBILIGRATH, Ferdinand

Die Seufzerbrücke
FRIED, Erich

Die Vogelbrücke

GAN, Peter

Die Brücke

HEISSENBUETTEL, Helmut

Topographie b

HEYM, Georg

Berlin
Die Dämonen der Städte
Die Heimat der Toten
Schwarze Visionen

HOBLERLIN, Friedrich

Patmos

HOBLERBRER, Walter

Gaspard

HOFMANNSTHAL, Hugo von

Vor Tag
Wir gingen einen Weg
Leben, Traum und Tod ...

HUCH, Ricarda

Venedig

JONAS, Erasmus

Elemente
KASACK, Hermann
   Gotische Brücke

KELLER, Gottfried
   Der Waadtländer Schild

KLESMANN, Eckart
   Gesang von den Trommeln

LILIENCRON, Detlev von
   Auf einer Brücke

MENZEL, Herbert
   Die Zugbrücke

MENGER, Conrad Ferdinand
   Auf Ponte Sisto

MIEGEL, Agnes
   Heimweh

MOEBIKE, Eduard
   Der Feuerreiter
   An Frau Pauline v. Phulz-Rieppur
      auf Ober-Moensheim

MOMBERT, Alfred
   "Ich sass wohl einst auf einer hohen Brücke..."
   Zehnter Denker: Die Brücke
NIETZSCHE, Friedrich

Nur Narr! Nur Dichter!

PLATEN, August Graf von

"Wie rafft' ich mich auf..."
"Mein Auge liess das hohe Meer zurück,..."
"Dies Labyrinth von Brücken und von Gassen..."

POINTEK, Heinz

Brückenromane
Unter der Eisenbahnbrücke

POLITZER, Heinz

Schlaflied unter der Brücke
Die Brücke

REINIG, Christa

Der Enkel trinkt

RUECKERT, Friedrich

Die Scheidungsbrücke

SCHNEIDER, Reinhold

Das Zeichen

SCHOLZ, Wilhelm von

Die Felsenbrücke
Brücken-Inschrift
SCHRODER, Rudolf Alexander

Die Brücke

SPITZELER, Carl

Das Brückengespenst
Dei Beiden Züge

STRUB, Urs Martin

Gemini

WEINHEBER, Joseph

"Die Brücke Blut, die zwischen Weib und Mann..."
Brücken Schlagen...

WOLF, Friedrich

Auf der Brücke (1944)

ZBCH, Paul

Die Eiserne Brücke (1913)

1. Bahnfahrt
2. Der Hafen
3. Die Andere Stadt
4. Die nuchterne Stadt

ZERKAULEN, Heinrich

Die Brücke
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3. Conrad Ferdinand Meyer

Primary Source:


Secondary Sources:


4. Theodor Fontane

Primary Sources:


Secondary Sources:


5. Friedrich Nietzsche

Primary Source:


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6. Rainer M. Rilke

Primary Sources:


Secondary Sources:


7. Ernst Stadler

Primary Sources:

Secondary Sources:


8. Gottfried Benn

Primary Source:


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