I, Jeffrey M. Packer, hereby submit this work as part of the requirements for the degree of:

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

in:

German Studies

It is entitled:

Negotiating the Borderland: Thresholds in Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Paul Celan, and Peter Handke

This work and its defense approved by:

Chair: Dr. Todd Herzog

Dr. Katharina Gerstenberger

Dr. Sara Friedrichsmeier
NEGOTIATING THE BORDERLAND: THRESHOLDS IN HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL, PAUL CELAN, AND PETER HANDKE

A dissertation submitted to the

Division of Research and Advanced Studies
of the University of Cincinnati

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTORATE OF PHILOSOPHY (Ph.D.)

in the Department of German Studies
of the McMicken College of Arts and Sciences

August 2004

by

Jeffrey M. Packer

B.A., Brigham Young University, 1996
M.A., Brigham Young University, 1999

Committee Chair: Dr. Todd Herzog
My dissertation, *Negotiating the Borderland: Thresholds in Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Paul Celan, and Peter Handke*, focuses on the threshold imagery of these three writers as a means of approaching the often contradictory issues of modernity in the twentieth century. Thresholds offer a literary means for writers to dwell momentarily in an instant of calm amidst the chaos of the modern world. By setting their works within threshold regions, these authors create new spaces that simultaneously maintain an element of separation from society and reestablish a relationship to it. Threshold metaphors are about transgressing boundaries and pushing the limits, but also about lingering in between them. A threshold functions as a bridge between extremes in which opposite sides of a paradox coexist. The thresholds I explore fall into three general categories: thresholds of time, thresholds of place, and thresholds of language. They take such forms as doorways, rivers, the instant between waking and sleeping, or a turn of breath before speaking. These three threshold types correspond to aspects of spatial, temporal, and linguistic fragmentation that are characteristic of the twentieth-century experience. The cause-and-effect relationship between the three becomes blurred as they come to represent a complex of ideas more than a linear progression from one to the next. These different types of thresholds can be combined to explore fragmentation on all levels as individuals negotiate the boundaries of speech and history and their position in them. I contend that the threshold as a metaphor can both define the phenomenon discussed above, and hint at a resolution of the fragmentation resulting from the pressures of modernity. The threshold becomes a symbol for symbolism per se, by standing as a part, or fragment, for the whole. And it is this wholeness informed and given depth by an awareness of fragmentation that can be discovered in the threshold.
Acknowledgments

This work would not have been possible without the constant help and support of my wife, Harmony Packer. She has been advisor, proofreader, cheerleader, and office manager all in one. Most of all she has been my best friend, providing patient support through long years of schooling and deserves as much credit for the completion of this work as I.
# Table of Contents

Note on Abbreviations ...................................................... -2-

Introduction ....................................................................... -3-

Hugo von Hofmannsthal and the *Erhöhte Augenblick* ..................... -14-

Paul Celan Between *Ich* and *Du* .............................................. -79-

Peter Handke an der Schwelle der Erzählung ................................... -134-

Conclusion: Wozu Dichter? ................................................ -203-

Works Cited ........................................................................ -209-

Index ................................................................................. -221-
Note on Abbreviations

Hugo von Hofmannsthal:
All citations from Hugo von Hofmannsthal are from the Gesammelte Werke in Einzelausgaben. Edited by Herbert Steiner.

A Aufzeichnungen.
D I Dramen I.
D II Dramen II.
D III Dramen III
D IV Dramen IV
E Die Erzählungen
GLD Gedichte und lyrische Dramen.
L I Lustpiele I
L II Lustpiele II
L III Lustpiele III
L IV Lustpiele IV
P I Prosa I
P II Prosa II
P III Prosa III
P IV Prosa IV

Paul Celan:
The works from Paul Celan are from Paul Celan: Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden. Edited by Beda Allemann and Stefan Reichert.

GW I Gedichte I
GW II Gedichte II
GW III Gedichte III
GW IV Übertragungen I
GW V Übertragungen II

Peter Handke:
AT Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter
CS Der Chinese des Schmerzes
DN In einer dunklen Nacht ging ich aus meinem stillen Haus
FE Die Fahrt im Einbaum oder das Stück zum Film vom Krieg
HB Der Himmel über Berlin: Ein Filmbuch
Th Noch einmal für Thukydides
W Die Wiederholung
WR Eine winterliche Reise zu den Flüssen Donau, Save, Morawa und Drina oder Gerechtigkeit für Serbien
ZR Aber ich lebe nur von den Zwischenräumen
Introduction: Wozu Schwellen

Close your eyes  Peter Handke tells his readers,  and out of the after image of the black letters arises the lights of a city.  The lights are not, however, those of the city center, but those of the periphery. At sunset, a lone observer stands and watches as a bus pulls up to its final stop and a line of people cross a bridge over the canal that marks the boundary between the city and the suburban village. For the observer, the bridge stands between two spaces, but belongs to neither. The moment on the bridge creates an open space, and out of this threshold-emptiness emerges a narrative.

In this dissertation, I will examine the role of the threshold in twentieth-century literature as a vehicle for self-exploration and as a means for the individual to connect with an other through language. Thresholds stand in contrast to the more common concept of the border. Much has already been written about boundaries and the crossing of borders in literature. Yet, in the majority of those texts, the emphasis is less on the border itself and more on the differences it creates. As Rüdiger Görner and Suzanne Kirkbright point out, borders both require that they be acknowledged, and demand that they be crossed. The border has to be defined before it can be overcome, yet its very existence supposes that it will be overcome at some point (9). Likewise, many works place the emphasis in what lies on either side of the border. Thus, they are often not concerned with the border region itself, but primarily with the process of crossing or transgressing the border, be it a border that marks a difference in gender,1 or a political,2 philosophical, racial, 

1Gender is seen as a border to be crossed or transgressed by a wide variety of writers. Most often, however, crossing gender boundaries is associated with questioning outdated social norms and providing a new way for looking at gender identity. Seldom is the border or the difference the actual subject of the discussion. Just one example is the third chapter of Cannon Schmitt’s *Alien Nation: Nineteenth-Century Gothic Fictions and English Nationality*.

2For a more detailed analysis of political borders, see, for example Dieter Lamping’s *Über Grenzen Eine literarische Topographie*. Philosophical, political, personal, and linguistic borders are discussed in *Boundary of Borders*, edited by Tadeusz Slawek. In most of the essays, the emphasis is on the differences they create. Scott Michaelsen and David Johnson’s book
In contrast to border imagery, the thresholds I will discuss focus on the metaphors that are used to constitute the gap between two concepts as a theoretical space of its own. The threshold both establishes a difference while it holds those differences together, revealing as it does the commonalities between them. For example, one of Celan's words for the threshold is meridian. A meridian is a great circle that circumscribes the earth, passing through both poles as it divides it into two hemispheres. But in the act of separating, it also joins the two halves together. In his speech upon receiving the Büchner literary prize, Celan finds in this threshold metaphor a means of reestablishing a connection to an audience that can share in his poetic work (GWIII 202). Although thresholds metaphors can be about transgressing boundaries and pushing the limits, they are also about lingering in-between them. A threshold delimits a this-side and a that-side but is not itself limited, because it is not a space in the normal definition of the word. Rather, it becomes a utopia that is neither inside nor outside, neither past nor future. A threshold therefore becomes a bridge between two extremes in which paradox and contradictions can coexist, at least momentarily. The threshold represents an open space open precisely because it is nothing but a boundary and exists not as a physical reality, but as a theoretical one. It is a dimension where the rules can be suspended, where contradictions can exist simultaneously without canceling each other out, where a writer is free to explore and experiment.

Thresholds are particularly prominent in the works of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Paul Celan, and Peter Handke. Each explores this trope in ways that are both unique and part of a larger tradition of threshold imagery. The thresholds I explore in this dissertation fall into three

Border Theory: the Limits of Cultural Politics also addresses a variety of political and ethnic/racial borders, especially as they relate to the U.S.-Mexico border and the representations of this space in the public dialogue. These references represent a sampling of the types of discussions surrounding borders and border crossing. An exhaustive survey of this topic is beyond the scope of this investigation.
general categories: thresholds of time, thresholds of space, and thresholds of language. The
temporal thresholds take the form of sunsets, or the moment between waking and sleeping.
Temporal thresholds also appear in Hofmannsthal’s *Augenblick*, Handke’s concept of
*Jetzmomente*, or anything that stands between two distinct periods of time. They describe the
moment of the present as a dimension between past and future and explore the interrelationship of
all three. In the process, they reveal the paradoxes presented by the present. In many ways this
aspect of time is the most difficult to perceive. The past can be remembered. The future can be
anticipated. But the present slips into the past so quickly that it is always just beyond
comprehension. One is never and always in the threshold of the present. Yet without it, all
connection to past and future are lost. By holding the moment open, writers can reestablish a
sense of history and coherent meaning for the individual.

Spatial thresholds link one physical space with another. They take the form of doorways,
gates, and especially rivers and bridges. They can stand between political, national, or ethnic
groups, or between one person and another, marking the difference between the two. Spatial
thresholds act as a neutral zone where the self and the other can come together without sacrificing
the individuality of either. Spatial thresholds can also represent a metaphorical point of crossing
over, as in Hofmannsthal’s *Der Tor und der Tod*, in which the protagonist Claudio stands literally
at death’s door. From this perspective, he can look back on his life and assess it in relation to his
pending death and realize that both combine to define his existence. Only in death does he come
to understand what it means to live.

With thresholds of language, authors explore the boundaries of speech, feeling out the
extremes between expression and silence. Thresholds of language, as such, appear most often in
the poetry of Paul Celan. He uses terms such as *Atemwende*, the turn of breath between inhaling
and exhaling at the moment before speech begins. The title to another volume, *Sprachgitter*
comes from the small window in a convent door through which nuns are able to speak with the
outside world. For Celan, it comes to represent the problematic nature of language. His understanding of language suitable for poetry closely follows Martin Heidegger’s distinction between idle talk (Gerede) and true, poetic speech. Heidegger argues that a true poem comes about when we have an experience with language, and language is brought to speech (161). This happens most often and most significantly at that point when normal speech fails. It arises when we cannot find the right word, or in the silence that ensues from being at a loss for words. In daily speech, people have no difficulty in expressing themselves because they only draw upon clichés that have lost their meaning through overuse. Only in those instances where daily language fails can a real experience with language take place. Common speech resorts to clichés to describe such situations, resulting in phrases such as, Words cannot describe... or, I can’t tell you how much... or, I can’t say... Out of this imposed silence, the poem has the opportunity to find expression. For Celan, these silences in which normal speech fails are closely linked not only to emotion, but also to the loss of language that resulted as a consequence of the Third Reich. In some way, the silencing of millions of voices serves as a new beginning for Celan. It creates in him a need to renew language.

Hofmannsthal and Handke describe moments of speechlessness in their works similar to those in Celan. However, the accompanying threshold is usually expressed in either temporal or spatial terms. Hofmannsthal’s Lord Chandos, for example, explores a way out of silence through the realization of the *Erhöhte Augenblick*. In many of these situations, the threshold will combine all three types of imagery to create an imaginary space, as with Celan’s rivers *nördlich der Zukunft*, in which spatial and temporal thresholds combine to create a dimension specifically for the purpose of exploring a language that will allow the poetic *Ich* to interact with its other, the *Du*.

The use and misuse of language enjoys a privileged position in the works of Hofmannsthal, Celan, and Handke. One can observe a progression of fragmentation in language
that begins with Hugo von Hofmannsthal and continues in Paul Celan and Peter Handke.

Hofmannsthal’s *Chandos Brief* can be read as an early example of a growing awareness of the inability of everyday language to express real experience. That words are becoming (or have always been) tainted so that their meaning is less and less accessible. Paul Celan, from the context of the Holocaust, works with a language burdened with the Tausend Finsternisse todbringender Rede imposed upon it by the violence of war and the Nazi regime. As a result, he must take his poetry to the very edge of comprehensibility, fragmenting it to the point of near destruction in order to salvage some portion of it still fit for use. Handke, then, represents a group of writers who must find a way back from the abyss, exploring possibilities of a literature not only nach Auschwitz but nach Celan. Much of Handke’s work can be seen as an effort to find his way back to narration out of a postmodern abyss of silence. It should be noted here that neither Hofmannsthal, Celan, nor Handke give any evidence that they believe in a so-called Sprachkrise as such. Each displays in his own way a remarkable faith in the power of language and literature to overcome the destructive potential of language that it is what we do with the language we use that makes the difference.

In many respects, however, language with its modern fragmentation is merely a symptom of a more general phenomenon of fragmentation and isolation in the twentieth century. The twentieth century is marked by an increased fragmentation of the individual and of the individual’s sense of connection to history. In his essay, *On the Concept of History*, Walter Benjamin compares a painting by Paul Klee to the modern world. In the painting, an angel, with its back turned to the future, opens its wings as a storm blows it into the future. In front of it, the wreckage of catastrophe after catastrophe piles up at its feet. Benjamin comments: Das, was wir den Fortschritt nennen, ist *dieser* Sturm (Benjamin I 698).

The catastrophes of modernity, argues J.W. Burrow, came about largely as a result of growing industrialization and nationalization. He maintains that the growing pace of
modernization led in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to increased social and class divisions and heightened anti-Semitism (Burrow 136). Indeed, Anthony Giddons explains how modernity produces *difference, exclusion*, and *marginalisation* so that modern institutions ironically proclaim the possibility for emancipation while they create mechanisms of suppression, rather than actualisation, of self (Giddons 6). This leads to a sense of existential isolation that prevents the individual from accessing the moral resources necessary to live a full and satisfying existence (9). Jacques Le Rider traces this crisis of identity through the works of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and argues that it occupies much of the literature and sciences of the turn of the century, especially Freud and Hofmannsthal (Le Rider 1).

The effects of modernity continued to multiply until they reached the twin extreme horrors of the Holocaust and nuclear warfare. These new realities, combined with the growing influence of mass media and a culture of advertising, created a renewed sense of a modern language in crisis. It led many writers and playwrights in the fifties and sixties, according to James Winders, to experiment with a new kind of theater that highlighted the absurdities of language debased by a culture of endless publicity and the stark dread produced by the real possibility of global catastrophe (Winders 170). Many of Handke's early plays, such as *Kaspar* and *Publikumsbeschimpfung* can be interpreted from this perspective.

Modernism, argues Burrow, was concerned with challenging the techniques of representation, verbal and visual, by which the illusion of a world of stable characters and things, governed by intention and causality, had been sustained (Burrow 240). He continues:

Life as experienced, and particularly in the typical modern experience of life in the city, with its moving crowds and traffic, was not like that. Its constantly shifting perspectives, seen, for example, from a tram or a train, its dazzling lights and screaming hoardings [sic], its countless meaningless, momentary encounters and avoidances, its fleeting juxtapositions of signs and objects, human beings and
machines constituted a new reality. (240)

As a result, the modernity of the twentieth century that forms the context for Hofmannsthal, Celan, and Handke promotes an environment in which the individual, isolated in a fractured history and isolated socially through an unreliable language, finds himself or herself marginalized temporally, spatially, and linguistically.

There is a complex cause-and-effect relationship between these different aspects of fractured modernity. Each is a product of the other. That is, each member of a society feels more isolated, more detached from the others as a result of a growing awareness of the fragmented nature of the language available. But it is also the other way around. Meaningless language itself can cause isolation. One can also argue that it is the compound interest of a history of war upon war that has created both. Each thread in the web is dependent upon the others.

I argue that the threshold as a metaphor can both define the problem I have just outlined, and hint at a solution although to say it provides the answer to the fragmentation of the twentieth century would be going too far. There is a correlation between the spatial, temporal, and linguistic thresholds in Hofmannsthal, Celan and Handke and the different aspects of fragmentation that describe the human experience in the twentieth century. Thus, spatial thresholds can be used to describe the growing distance in interpersonal relations. Celan’s Ich-Du complex and his use of rivers, such as in the poem In den Flüssen, function along these lines. Temporal thresholds, such as Hofmannsthal’s Augenblick or Handke’s concept of Jetzt, lend themselves to understanding the separation of the present from the past and the future, as well as their connection to the same. Finally, linguistic thresholds allow these writers to explore the fragmentation of language as they negotiate the borderland between speech and silence. In the process of this discussion, I hope to show the interrelatedness of the various thresholds. Each one helps to constitute the other. Because the German Geschichte makes no distinction between history and story, for example, there is an inseparable relation between the concept of time (as
expressed in historical events, for example) and narration. Narration is an act of speech and a means of reaching out to the other Celan’s Du, perhaps. If one learns how to connect to one, the others follow.

Hofmannsthall, Celan, and Handke each offer insight into this complex of ideas at three significant points in time. Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s works span four decades from the 1890’s until his death in 1929. They appear during a transitionary time in European history in which the influence of Austria is waning and the industrial and philosophical pressures of the new century are putting a real strain on the society. Hofmannsthal finds himself on the threshold between two eras and his works often reflect an attempt to retain the best of what has passed in an effort to find some stability in the future. He shares affinities both with writers who came before him and with those who follow after. He responded in his work to the literary, philosophical, psychological, and political issues of his day. He explored, for example, the implications of Nietzsche in a modern society (Del Caro, Hugo von Hofmannsthal 22), and incorporated and commented on concepts from other contemporaries such as Freud and Schopenhauer, who were radically reshaping the course of intellectual thought.

Thresholds allow Hofmannsthal to explore the artist/poet’s transition from a condition of preexistence to one of existence, or, as Adrian Del Caro puts it, from life as experienced as conditions instead of being consummated by actions (Hofmannsthal 54). The term Präexistence occurs a number of times in Hofmannsthal’s Ad me ipsum, and is referred to repeatedly in the secondary literature. Hofmannsthal uses it to achieve a balance in which the openness created in the potential of preexistence can exist simultaneously with the necessities of everyday life. Such a balance could only be temporary, existing in flashes of inspiration and insight experiences only possible in a threshold. Hofmannsthal’s thresholds most often express the potential in language, not its inability to express. Again, however, this potential is temporary at best. Del Caro talks about the lethal effect language has on life’s experiences. He maintains that however alive and
vibrant with presence the vision of the poet was originally, translated into the poet’s work it begins immediately to die, (Hofmannsthal 1). Still, Hofmannsthal acknowledges that only language, especially poetic language, can bridge the gap between the comprehension of presence and its articulation (11).

Celan was born in 1920 on the eastern frontier of the old Habsburg empire in Czernowitz, in the Bukovina province on the border between present-day Romania and the Ukraine. His home and his family both perished in the Holocaust and the tragedy of the Second World War. He first became widely known with the publication of his poem, Todesfuge, which eloquently and poignantly describe the horrors of the Nazi death camps. While very few of his later poems directly address the Holocaust, it remains an ever-present context in his works. In his Bremen Address, he captures what happened to the German language as a result of the Holocaust and reduces it down to its barest minimum as, Das, was geschah. Some see Celan’s poetry as an attempt to take back the German language from the Nazis to discover in it some primal language untainted by Auschwitz. George Steiner comments on the irony of the effect the National Socialists had on the German language. He argues that what the Nazi era produced was not an absence of language, but an immense outpouring of precise, serviceable words that recorded, catalogued, chronicled, set down [. . .] words [that] were committed to saying things that no human mouth should ever have said (Steiner 121-4). Through their misuse, these precise, serviceable words lost the ability to have any other meaning than that which the Nazis had assigned to them. Not only does this destruction of language through misuse create a silent hole in the language, but the events of the Holocaust also left no words to adequately describe the reality of the horror that Celan felt. In his efforts to reestablish a usable niche for himself in the German language, Celan changed the face of German lyric poetry, giving it a new direction and a new focus. Every German poet after Celan who has at his or her disposal the poetic language he created will be measured against the standard he set.
Peter Handke arrived suddenly on the literary scene at the 1966 meeting of the *Gruppe 47* at Princeton University, creating a controversy which he used to jump-start his career. Already in this early address, the use of a literary language had a prominent role. His works span the last quarter of the twentieth century and he continues to be productive into the twenty-first. During that time, he has experienced some of the major events of the end of the century. Most significant for him, due to his Slovenian heritage, were the fall of communism in eastern Europe and the growing nationalism and wars of the Balkan states. During the nineties, Handke wrote extensively on the shifting borders in the Balkans and the senselessness of the wars in the region.

From the beginning of his career, Handke has also had an abiding interest in a postmodern reception of language. He inherits this perspective not only from philosophers such as Heidegger and Benjamin, but also from the poetic tradition that runs through Hofmannsthal and Rilke as well as Paul Celan. Handke shares with Celan and Hofmannsthal an interest in exploring the possibilities and limitations of language. In a sense, Handke has had to work in the shadow of Paul Celan, whose poetry took language to the very limits of comprehension. Early in his career, Handke experimented directly with language. Works such as *Kaspar* and the poetry collection *Die Innenwelt der Außenwelt der Innenwelt* look specifically at how language is produced and the relation between language and the creation of a self-identity. In these early works, Handke, unlike Celan, eschews any attempt to reform or recover language from its recent past. Rather, he experiments with a postmodern approach to language, reveling in the interplay of sound and syllable, allowing the very meaninglessness of idle chatter to reconstitute new meaning. Later in his career, Handke becomes more interested in the means by which the individual is able to constitute identity from within a narrative. His novels of the eighties reflect this turn in his writing as he develops the storyteller as a threshold character who defines his or her existence through language.

Through the course of this dissertation, I intend to show how Hofmannsthal, Celan and
Handke participate in the continuum of twentieth-century thought as they utilize literary means to approach similar issues from their own unique perspectives in history. As they do so, each employs various threshold metaphors to allow often contradictory ideas to exist simultaneously. The threshold becomes a bridge connecting opposite sides of a paradox. In their works, these authors reveal the possibilities that dwelling in the threshold offers, but also the price that this dimension in between exacts from those wishing to enter.
Chapter 1

Hugo von Hofmannsthal and the *Erhöhte Augenblick*

Hugo von Hofmannsthal is a transitional figure at the turn of the twentieth century in German literature. His poetry, with its traditional construction in terms of rhyme and meter, relies heavily on the constructs and conventions of the preceding century. Yet he was fully aware of the growing influence of modern philosophy, psychology and politics on literature. He was one of the first, for example, to postulate on the consequences of Nietzschean thought (Del Caro *Hugo von Hofmannsthal* 22), and he also incorporated and commented on concepts from other contemporaries such as Freud and Schopenhauer, who were radically reshaping the course of intellectual thought. Thus, even as he looked to the past, his works pointed to the future, creating many paths that would prepare the way for writers such as Paul Celan and Peter Handke.

Hofmannsthal was aware of the possibilities and the limitations of modern literature and set about exploring both. He lived in a time when writers began to question their most basic assumptions, even language itself. This may be in part a result of Nietzsche’s call for a revaluation of all values (eine Umwertung aller Werte). Hofmannsthal was one of many writers to begin to approach literature with a whole new set of questions. Although his works and his demeanor are quite conservative in comparison to his contemporaries (especially expressionists like Benn and Trakl, etc.), his works reveal a degree of not only depth, but also breadth, in his knowledge, interests, and abilities. He never limited himself to a single genre, but chose, instead, to explore his ideas in a number of different forms, making him difficult to categorize in terms of traditional labels. He is one of the first truly twentieth century artists, crossing boundaries of genre as he participates in the intellectual development of the modern century.

In many of Hofmannsthal’s works, the threshold becomes a symbolic means for creating a locus in which the disharmonies of human experience can be resolved, if only for a moment. This moment is represented in a number of works as an enlightened or intensified moment in time, or
Margit Resch identifies this metaphor in Hofmannsthal’s work as the fundamental, unifying experience that permeates all of his writings from beginning to end, manifesting itself in a multitude of variations across all genres (Resch 2). She calls the Erhöhte Augenblick a symbolic experience in which the world gains a unique relationship to the individual, or the self.

Michael Hamburger likewise identifies the threshold as a recurring image closely related to many of the subtle threads (Hamburger 4) that link Hofmannsthal’s works. But where, as we shall see in Celan’s poetry, the threshold functions as an integral part of language itself, the threshold in Hofmannsthal’s works is the precursor to literature and language. The underlying tension in the threshold metaphor is that while Hofmannsthal recognizes the potential advantage of dwelling in a threshold moment, he is constantly aware of the impossibility of doing so. There is therefore a negative aspect to Hofmannsthal’s thresholds that strains against the positive. The threshold possesses both destructive and creative potential that are constantly in conflict with each other. His thresholds therefore often serve as a boundary marker that can be approached and whose limits can be explored from one side or the other. The threshold becomes a point to be crossed and re-crossed more than a dimension of its own to be dwelt in. It marks the line separating apodal opposites and therefore, as Resch points out, it also marks the contrasting elements as part
of a unified whole. While some of Hofmannsthal’s characters do manage to linger in the
threshold, the experience is fleeting at best, and seems to occur less frequently than in either
Celan’s poetry or Handke’s novels.

This chapter will examine the ways in which Hofmannsthal explores the contours of the
threshold as he deals with the paradoxical issues of his time. Hofmannsthal’s works explore, by
means of the threshold, the borders between life and death, speech and silence, and between being
and becoming. In the first section, I will examine early representations of death as a threshold in
Hofmannsthal’s poetry and in the lyric drama Der Tor und der Tod. In them, death becomes itself
a metaphor for other aspects of loss, decline, and decay. In the second section on Language, I
will look at the relation between death and the gap between speech and speechlessness as it
appears in Das Märchen der 672. Nacht and Ein Brief. In the final section, the concept of the
Erhöhte Augenblick that becomes prominent in Ein Brief is developed further in Augenblicke in
Griechenland as a means of self-discovery. In this work, as well as in Elektra and Andreas, the
threshold functions as a boundary to be negotiated between being and becoming.

Although the opposing pairs here are similar to those we will encounter later in Paul
Celan’s poetry, they take on a very different form in Hofmannsthal’s works. Hofmannsthal often
uses language to explore the borders of the Ich and to reach out beyond those borders. In
contrast, Celan explores a language that explores the dimension of the Du and so discovers the
Ich in relation to it as the other. In the process, the threshold becomes for Hofmannsthal a means
of coming to terms with opposing sides of the dialectic rather than a means for overcoming it.
Hofmannsthal’s use of the threshold is extremely widespread. However, the works in this
discussion outline the function of the threshold metaphor and provide an insight into the
complexity of Hofmannsthal as a modern thinker and writer.

**Life at the threshold of Death**

Much of Hofmannsthal’s poetry from the last decade of the nineteenth century describes
the dichotomy between life and death. In Ein Traum von grosser Magie, the poet assumes the role as the creator of life. In it, the dream functions as a realm of discovery and creation. The first stanza introduces the poem as the narrator’s account of a dream. For him the dream serves as the primary means for experiencing higher forms of life. Einige begreifen das Leben aus der Liebe. Andere aus dem Nachdenken. Ich vielleicht am Traum (A 108). Hofmannsthal’s connects his dreams to life, examining a part of life that is mysterious and unknown.

Ein Traum von grosser Magie

Viel königlicher als ein Perlenband
Und kühn wie junges Meer im Morgenduft,
So war ein großer Traum wie ich ihn fand.

Durch offene Glastüren ging die Luft.
Ich schlief im Pavillon zu ebner Erde,
Und durch vier offne Türen ging die Luft

Und früher liefen schon geschirrte Pferde
Hindurch und Hunde eine ganze Schar
An meinem Bett vorbei. Doch die Gebärde

Des Magiers des Ersten, Großen war
Auf einmal zwischen mir und einer Wand:
Sein stolzes Nicken, königliches Haar.

Und hinter ihm nicht Mauer: es entsand
Ein weiter Prunk von Abgrund, duklem Meer
Und grünen Matten hinter seiner Hand.

Er bückte sich und zog das Tiefe her.
Er bückte sich, und seine Finger gingen
Im Boden so, als ob es Wasser wär.

Vom dünnen Quellenwasser aber fingen
Sich riesige Opale in den Händen
Und fielen tösend wieder ab in Ringen.

Dann warf er sich mit leichten Schwung der Lenden
Wie nur aus Stolz der nächsten Klippe zu;
An ihm sah ich die Macht der Schwere enden.

In seinen Augen aber war die Ruh
Von schlafend- doch lebendigen Edelsteinen.
Er setzte sich und sprach ein solches Du

Zu Tagen, die uns ganz vergangen scheinen,
Daß sie erkamen trauervoll und groß:
Das freute ihn zu lachen und zu weinen.

Er fühlte traumhaft aller Menschen Los,
These dreams provide a window or a gateway to the subconscious as a part of reality inaccessible through ordinary experience. Yet, if one can gain access to it, the subconscious dream world provides an insight into a part of reality possessing the potential for great discoveries. The dream is more kingly than a strand of pearls, and associated in the poem with the fresh morning smells of a young sea. This is a somewhat curious metaphor, since one might consider the sea to be as old as the ages. Hofmannsthal suggests perhaps that the dream carries the dreamer back to some prehistoric era or apart from the restrictions of time.

The dreamer is separated from the world around him in the second stanza by his pavilion and the glass doors. These establish a definite interior/exterior relationship, just as we will see in Der Tor und der Tod. However, here the doors are wide open, suggesting a willingness on the part of the dreamer to interact with the outside. The open doors also establish the limited interior as a part of the limitless exterior. The pavilion therefore becomes the limited consciousness of the dreamer and his world of thought (Stern 33), while the open space beyond represents the limitless possibilities of the world without, which awaits him if he can find a way to tap into it.

The role of Hofmannsthal’s poet in this situation, according to Martin Stern, is to stand between the two spaces and act as a mediator zwischen dem Reich der Idee und der irdischen Erscheinung (33).

Also important here is the connection in the second stanza between the Morgenduft and the Luft that enters into the pavilion where the narrator sleeps. Twice in this stanza the air passes through the open doors, along with other dream figures, which precede the magician himself. The Morgenduft suggests that the dream occurs in the early hours of the morning, when the dreamer is in a state of Schlaftrunkenheit. This condition when one is neither asleep nor awake, but between the two, would provide the best opportunity to remain consciously aware of one’s unconsciousness. Hofmannsthal reinforces this possibility later on with the inclusion of the word Trunkenheit in the thirteenth stanza, just before the break.
The magician is both part of the dream and master over it, and is able to manipulate the scene at will. By Stern's interpretation he is both poet and creator. The magician touches the floor and the abyss as if they were water, and draws jewels from them. He has command over gravity as he jumps lightly from cliff top to cliff top. Yet, even though he controls the dream, he is also a part of it.

In seinen Augen aber war die Ruh
Von schlafend- doch lebendigen Edelsteinen.
Er setzte sich und sprach ein solches Du

Zu Tagen, die uns ganz vergangen scheinen,
Daß sie herkamen trauervoll und groß:
Das freute ihn zu lachen und zu weinen.

As we will see in the next chapter, this passage bears remarkable resemblance to Celan's work with the Du. Indeed Celan marked this section in his own copy, perhaps because of the way Hofmannsthal uses Du to represent an intimate connection of the magician with his environment. A peace both sleeps and lives in the eyes of the magician/poet. Combined with the ability to make present the days long past (by speaking Du to them), the magician becomes one who is free to roam both in time and in space, so that his consciousness encompasses all of them. In a very mystical sense he is one with the world in which he lives. Nearness and farness (proximity and distance) dissolve, as does the concept of size. All opposites are resolved come together in the creative abilities of the poet/magician.

At this point in the poem the narrative is broken by a dotted line that marks the transition from the experienced dream to the interpretation of that dream. The poet becomes part of something greater than himself in the act of creation. The spirit is the Cherub und hoher Herr, a creative force both in and around the individual. Hofmannsthal's Geist is a complex construct

---

1This poem echos the final lines of Manche Freilich, in which the poet senses the transcendence of his own existence Und mein Teil ist mehr als dieses Lebens / Schlanke Flamme oder schmale Leier (GLD 19).
that incorporates the intellect, the soul, and some universal element accessible beyond the
individual. It synthesizes concepts from Schopenhauer, Browning, and ancient Greece (Stern 35)
to intuit ideas beyond its own horizons, perhaps beyond mortal life. In a passage in *Ad Me Ipsum*
with the heading  the moment of death  Hofmannsthal expands on the spirit’s ability to reach
beyond the individual, . . .die Ahnung, es gebe Dinge, von denen die Seele wisse, ohne sie
berühren zu können. . . .Hier liegt es: nicht Seelenwanderung aber wir sind nur ein Teil von
ein, das in uns lebt, aber nich nur in uns wir sind wie einer in einer wandernden Schar dies:
Cherub und großer Her ist unser Geist  (A 261).

Thus, the poet stands between on the edge of the dream or at the point of death,
mediating between mortal limitations and immortal possibilities and taking part in creation. For
Hofmannsthal this creation takes place not only on an existential, but an artistic and even a
political level as well. Thus the one who grasps this greater spirit becomes a part of a higher
existence. 

Indem wir teilhaben, und je gewaltiger wir teilhaben. . . . so weit werden wir auch Teil
jenes Lebenden Höheren: eines höheren Europa  (A 261).

***

Hofmannsthal explores the opposite side of the life-death dichotomy in  *Erlebnis.*
Written in 1892 when Hofmannsthal was 18 years old, this poem is an early attempt to
contemplate death as a part of life. As in  *Ein Traum von grosser Magie,* this poem occupies a
twilit dreamworld. Here, however the dream is expressly between life and death.

Mit silbergrauem Duft war das Tal
Der Dämmerung erfüllt, wie wenn der Mond
Durch Wolkern sickert. Doch es war nicht Nacht.
Mit silbergrauen Duft des dunklen Tales
Verschwammen meine dämmernden Gedanken,
Und still versank ich in dem webenden,
Durchsichtigen Meere und verließ das Leben.
Wie wunderbare Blumen waren da
Mit Kelchen dunkelglühend! Pflanzendickicht,
Durch das ein gelbrot Licht wie von Topasen
In warmen Strömen drang und glomm. Das Ganze
War angefüllt mit einem tiefen Schwellen
Schwermütiger Musik. Und dieses wußt ich,
Obgleich ichs nicht begreife, doch ich wußt es:
Das ist der Tod. Der ist Musik geworden,
Gewaltig sehend, süß und dunkelglühend,
Verwand der tiefsten Schwermut.

Aber seltsam!
Ein namenloses Heimweh weinte lautlos
In meiner Seele nach dem Leben, weinte,
Wie einer weint, wenn er auf großem Seeschiff
Mit gelben Riesensegeln gegen Abend
Auf dunkelblauem Wasser an der Stadt,
der Vaterstadt, vorüberfährt. Da sieht er
Die Gassen, hört die Brunnen rauschen, riecht
Den Duft der Fliederbüsche, sieht sich selber,
Ein Kind, am Ufer stehn, mit Kindesaugen,
Die ängstlich sind und weinen wollen, sieht
Durchs offne Fenster Licht in seinem Zimmer
Das große Seeschiff aber trägt ihn weiter
Auf dunkelblauem Wasser lautlos gleitend
Mit gelben fremdgeformten Riesensegeln. (GLD 8-9)

The poem itself is a dream-like account of one crossing over into the realm of death. The valley is compared to the light of the moon shining through clouds. However, the narrator of the dream emphasizes that it is not night. It is also implicit that it is not day either, therefore setting the dream in the threshold between the two. The second two lines echo the beginning by comparing the twilit valley to the narrator's own dämmernden Gedanken.

The entire first section of the poem may be seen as the narrator's descent into the realm of death. It has a dreamlike quality to it that intermingles several different images to create a surreal perspective from which the concept of death can be explored. There is a mixture of the senses such as at the beginning: the silbergrauen Duft of the valley or the death-become-music that is sehnd, süß und dunkelglühend. Hofmannsthal creates a contradictory picture of death that nevertheless develops into a unified image. This is especially clear in his use of color. The first line describes the twilight as a silver gray, a color entirely consistent with the water imagery that pervades the poem. It is also appropriate for the color of a cloudy night or cloudy twilight thoughts. But the thoughts, and the dream transitions from a transparent sea to a flower, glowing
darkly dunkelglühend dominated by a yellow-red light. Both the silver-gray and the yellow-red lights would seem to be mutually exclusive the one cold and dark and the other warm and light, and yet both are a description of a kind of twilight. The valley becomes a valley of death, a passageway the narrator has been allowed to see and report upon, knowing what it is even though the experience lies just beyond comprehension.

The threshold border of the second half of the poem between water relates to the inability of the narrator to connect with the memories he is seeing. The longing he experiences for life is compared with being on a ship as it passes his hometown in the dying light of sunset. Here, death and lost memories are closely related. The narrator is able to look back on his life, but remains completely separated from it unable to interact with it. He sees himself as a child, standing on the shore. He is also able to see through his own open window and see light coming from his own room, but cannot enter and cannot see any details of what lies beyond.

Hofmannsthal’s own notes suggest that this poem illustrates or incorporates his concepts of preexistence and the process of coming to one’s own (zu sich selber kommen). This process emphasizes the need to cross over from preexistence into existence and come to one’s self at a higher level of existence (A 216). However, the poem describes a kind of homesickness and loss associated with memory and the inability recapture the past. It is like returning to the town where one grew up, finding it and the people in it so different, even though it hasn’t really changed that much from how one remembers it: one no longer feels a part of it. Yet it is still a part of one’s past and one’s memories and so the connection can never be severed entirely. Del Caro describes the poet’s plight as a longing for what is just beyond his reach.

---

2 Of the many attempts to define preexistence, a term from Hofmannsthal’s *Ad me Ipsum*, Werner Metzeler provides one of the most thorough. He describes the transition from preexistence to existence as a conscious decision to act, and through action an acceptance of guilt. Thus preexistence consists of an almost magical, but powerless potential, and existence represents the realization, and limitation, of the individual (49).
The poet’s longing is for the true, consummated life that he only intuits and glimpses, in passing, as he makes his approach to life, as he comes to himself. The childhood self symbolizes that life, and the poet-narrator of Experience is left with more than preexistence, but less than life. (Del Caro Hofmannsthal 56)

So it is that Hofmannsthal’s description of death is dominated by a melancholy longing a nameless sorrow and desire to return to life. It becomes a mourning for what was as a place one can never return to. In this experience of coming to know death there is both something gained and something lost. It is not altogether clear that this death is the physical death at the end of life, but rather an end and a beginning. The poet can see his younger self, and recognize the growth that has taken place, but he can never return to that state because of the threshold that can never be re-crossed.

***

Der Tor und der Tod also addresses the moment of death as the hour of increased enlightenment filled with both hope and regret. In this work, Hofmannsthal emphasizes the role of irony in art, in language, and in life that the higher level of knowledge or living comes only after it is too late to act upon it. The threshold functions here as the moment when one can come to terms with the irony that the moment itself imposes. Written in 1893, this lyric play is one of Hofmannsthal’s works in which thresholds are most prevalent. From the staging instructions at the beginning of the text, we learn that the room in which Claudio encounters death is a space bordered by thresholds on all sides. There is a glass door in the rear that leads to a balcony and the garden below. To the left, there is a double door (Flügeltür) and to the right, a similar one leads to a bedroom. Claudio sits at the window and looks out to the mountains in the distance. The window functions as the boundary between inside and outside, both connecting and separating the two spaces from each other. The room is enclosed and limited, but as with the pavilion in Ein Traum von großer Magie, the doorways and the window connect the room to
It should be noted that Pestalozzi reads less irony into Claudio's end than I, or critics such as Hammelmann, do. Instead, he sees Claudio's acceptance of death as a Nietzschean modification to Schopenhauer's concepts (131).

As the sun goes down and death approaches, the fool Claudio stands not only on the threshold of death, but at the limits between himself as a part of the greater world and himself as an aesthetic and isolated individual. The interiors and exteriors emphasize the contrast between an intellectual/aesthetic life as opposed to a life focused on action and participation, a life of experience.

Der Tor und der Tod consists almost entirely of the monologues of the individual

-24-

3It should be noted that Pestalozzi reads less irony into Claudio's end than I, or critics such as Hammelmann, do. Instead, he sees Claudio's acceptance of death as a Nietzschean modification to Schopenhauer's concepts (131).
characters primarily Claudio and Death. The work is both a drama and an extended poem; as such, it exists somewhere between the two genres, and constantly has to negotiate its relationship to its audience. Bennet argues that Hofmannsthal accomplishes this through the use of irony (Bennet 50). He contends that Claudio's assertion that he is not yet ready for death because he has not yet learned to live is typical, as shown in the speeches of the three apparitions, of most if not all of human experience (53). Claudio's habit of intellectualizing experience prevents him from a complete internalization of the process of living, so that his life becomes an experience corrupted by consciousness (54). He knows rather than feels what it means to live. By putting this poem into dramatic form, the reader as spectator associates Claudio's position with a more universal condition and identifies with his dilemma. Ironically, it is his active, conscious seeking of this comprehension that prevents him from finding it. But by placing Claudio in extremis, face to face with death Hamburger argues that Der Tor und der Tod becomes a critique of aestheticism from the inside. And in doing so, the work uncovers a much more radical and universal paradox (Hamburger 6).

When Death comes to take Claudio away, Claudio protests that he is too young, that he has not had the chance to experience life. Indeed Claudio had already lamented this fact before Death entered the scene. Claudio himself admits that he has spent his life on the sidelines, never becoming truly engaged in the world around him. When he claims that he has not had the chance to experience life, Death responds by parading the people from his life before him, to show that he did indeed have the opportunity for real experiences, but did not take advantage of them. The spirits that visit Claudio teach him or make him aware of the opportunities of life that he has missed. The stage directions state that Claudio stands in half-darkness on one side of the room as the three enter the room through the door on the right. The first of the visitors is Claudio's mother, who teaches Claudio what human closeness could have been for him (Hederer 115), and reemphasizes Claudio's identity as one who stands apart from the world around him. In turn,
Claudio's girlfriend speaks to him in terms dominated by memory and loyalty. The final visitor is the friend whom Claudio betrayed. Again in his speech, life and death are juxtaposed to underscore the pain Claudio's selfish isolation has caused. Common to all three is the rising awareness of missed opportunity.

As the procession begins, Death positions himself in the doorway to the bedroom. The spirits that he calls forth enter into the room through this door. By taking possession of the threshold between an inner and an outer reality, Death forces Claudio to stand literally at Death's door and review the repeated failures of his short life. As Claudio begins to accept his fate, he sees his death more as a new beginning than as the end, a claim that Death ironically refutes in his final speech. Claudio makes a number of statements in the end that equate life with death and death with life. Da tot mein Leben war, sei du mein Leben, Tod! (GLD 219). In this moment, the boundaries between life and death grow less distinct as the one passes over into the other.

. . .Was zwingt mich, der ich beides nicht erkenne,
Daß ich dich Tod und jenes Leben nenne?
In eine Stunde kannst du Leben pressen,
Mehr als das ganze Leben konnte halten,
Das schattenhafte will ich ganz vergessen
Und weih mich deinen Wundern und Gewalten.
. . .Dann schwinde alles blasse Leben hin:
Erst, da ich sterbe, spüre ich, daß ich bin. (219-20)

In these lines the difference between life and death begins to dissolve. Death is somewhat amused by what Claudio has to say: that a mortal can find meaning in meaninglessness, read what has not been written, and find ways in the pathless dark beyond mortality. Claudio is finally reconciled to his fate, even if he is wrong about it. This makes him a fool even more than the way he has wasted his life and hurt every one around him. His truly aesthetic life reveals itself as empty and

---

4The passage thematically predicts Hofmannsthal's later works, especially Elektra and Andreas, in which memory and mourning play an important role.
unfulfilling, not truly life as it could be lived, involved in the world and the people that constitute it.

In life, Claudio closed himself off from the world inside his own room. Erwin Kobel writes about the connotations of closure in Claudio's name and its relationship to the conflict between art and reality through its inherent reference to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Der Name Claudio hat für Hofmannsthal nicht nur einen Bezug auf das lateinische Wort für einschließen, sondern auch auf Hamlets bösen Stiefvater: Claudio is ein Stiefvater seines besseren Selbst (32). Looking at platonic definitions of art and aestheticism, Kobel describes the relationship of art to the things they represent in Claudio's world. Claudio exists in the timelessness of the world of ideas (29), but is separated from true existence. Als Sein steht Claudio dem Werden gegenüber, steht er außerhalb des Lebens. In seiner Sterbestunde enthüllt sich ihm die Fragwürdigkeit dieser Position (31). As a result, Claudio is alive, but has never really lived. Claudio's status as one who is closed is reflected not only in his name but in the setting of the room. He is separated both physically and intellectually from the realities that are merely represented by his art and the other objects in his room. In striving for the ideal represented in art, Claudio misses out on the knowledge and growth that first-hand experience could have brought.

The thresholds in *Der Tor und der Tod* mark distinct boundaries between the interior and exterior, between past and present, and between the rational and the irrational. In this work, the threshold is a line to be crossed a single time. However, Claudio exposes his unfulfilled potential by closing himself off from what could have been, by failing to execute the transition offered to him. Claudio, as the closed individual, has shut himself off from the possibility of fulfillment. He is incapable of crossing the threshold and becoming complete. In his *Ad me Ipsum*, Hofmannsthal would describe Claudio's condition as one of Präexistenz. He expresses thereby Claudio's potential and his inability to transform that potential into reality.
Selbstanklage sich auf die schwankende Zugehörigkeit zum Reich des Ewigen und des
Vergänglichen, auf die Unfähigkeit jeden einzelnen Augenblick durch den Überschwang ins Reich
des Ewigen zu heben?! (sic) (A 215). This passage further clarifies the relationship between
Claudio, the meaning of his name, and the significance of the threshold to this work. Claudio's
destructive side displays personality traits that result in his being unable to make the definitive
transition from the fleeting and temporary (vergänglich) nature of his current state into the realm
of the eternal (ewig). In other words, Claudio stands on the brink of a discovery that will allow
him to progress to the next, and perhaps higher level of himself, and yet is unable to do so
because he has enclosed himself in the aesthetically perfect, but isolated and limited world of his
room. He never does find a way out. As he dies, the character Death responds to his moment of
perceived enlightenment with sarcasm and irony. Claudio does not learn to live in life, and will
hardly do so when he is dead. Death makes it clear that the darkened path outside Claudio's door
will not be lit as Claudio has supposed. It is perhaps important that the audience never sees
Claudio leave his room. His body remains on the floor in the middle of the stage as Death
resumes his playing and exits through one of the doorways. Outside, the three visitors can be
seen behind the figure of Death, followed by a Claudio gleichende Gestalt. The figures, the
dead body, and the trailing spirit are all visible at the same time, suggesting a continuing division
in Claudio's identity. He is still apart from the other figures.

H.A. Hammelmann argues that Claudio has so insulated himself in a risk-averse
aestheticism that he only learns at the very end that life exacts a price through a combination of
joy and pain. However, Claudio's insight tragically fails to be of any benefit to him because it
comes too late.

. . .he has wasted his life in eternal toying and trifling when death comes to fetch
him the first reality he has encountered. Claudio, the aesthete who surrounds
himself with beauty, but cannot truly enjoy it, is detached from life, closed as his
name would seem to emphasize to all true experience, for fear of the pain it may bring to him and of the pain he might inflict on others by action; he becomes aware too late that he cannot enjoy the world without suffering and that the most cruel pain is that inflicted by indifference, by coldness of the heart. (Hammelmann 201).

Finally, Hofmannsthal’s *Der Tor und der Tod* uses irony to examine the fundamental paradoxes of poetic language. Poetry, in playing with language metaphorically, reveals the true nature of language in general and so suggests what Goethe calls our godlikeness, our presence at the generating center of the real (Bennett 60). Hofmannsthal deals with the creative/destructive quality of language. It is part of the knife’s edge that the poet walks when composing a work. Language is the material the poet uses to create a work of art, and there is at work in it a constant interplay between poetry as an object (a work of art) and poetry as an experience or an intimation of reality. The word is only real when it exists in that moment of creation between poet and reader/listener. But as soon as one becomes aware of poetry as language, as words, then those words cease to have that quality of living reality. Again returning to Bennett, . . . no sooner do we experience the vision of our centralness in an eternally harmonious nature than the vision automatically fails us. We can realize the truth only by forgetfulness or sacrifice, only by turning our backs on it, like Claudio in his final speech (61). By staging the play on the threshold between life and death, Hofmannsthal tries to find that point of balance between comprehension and knowledge, while still remaining aware of the impossibility of finding a resolution between the two. One cannot be conscious of one’s own unconsciousness. Truth therefore requires irony; in order to be expressed, it must be toyed with and shown cloaked in indirectness, as Death shows it to Claudio, and as Hofmannsthal himself shows it in the medium of drama, by enforcing, or at least encouraging our own enactment of it. (Bennett 62). Hofmannsthal celebrates the human spirit even as he mocks it and himself. The
young Hofmannsthal was himself inclined toward the aesthetic, devoted more to art and intellect than to physical existence. His play shows the need for a constant negotiation of the threshold space between the two so that both can be maintained.

**Between Speech and Speechlessness**

The role of language in defining the line between life and death becomes increasingly important in Hofmannsthal’s works, especially in the narratives leading up to and around the turn of the twentieth century. Two of these, *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht* and *Ein Brief*, also known as *Brief des Lord Chandos*, appeared together in a single volume in 1905. On the surface, the two works seem very different from each other, and one might ask why Hofmannsthal would include *Ein Brief* in a collection of narrative stories. Traditionally, critics have viewed *Ein Brief* as an expression of Hofmannsthal’s so-called *Sprachkrise* marking the boundary between two phases in the author’s literary career (Wittmann 60). But one can also read *Ein Brief* as an independent work of art with literary merit of its own instead of solely as a key to unlocking the hidden meaning in Hofmannsthal’s writing. Both deal with the irrationalities of modernism as Hofmannsthal navigates the boundaries between speech and silence, the rational and the insane, and fantasy and reality.

*Das Märchen der 672. Nacht* is an anti-fairytale about the fall of one man from reason into insanity. As an allegory of life, *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht* can be seen as an attempt to find a connection to the *Unendliche*. But both his attempt and his fall are linked to his growing alienation from language. The merchant’s son fails in the end because he is unable to understand the meaning of the symbols before him (Brion 292). The story has the ability to reach beyond the limits of its own narration and hint at more universal ideas. As Hofmannsthal explains in *Der Brief des letzten Contarin,*

> Jeder Gegenstand. . .ist eine Anweisung, ein Surrogat eines schöneren: . . jedes Haus ist nur ein Balkon, auf dem unsere Wünsche ins Unendliche schauen, ein
Hofmannsthal combines the conventions of the fairytale with his own style to create a work which illustrates the inability of the individual to find a firm foundation in the modern world. Hofmannsthal’s fairytale is at its heart a voyage from the rational into the irrational. At each stage of his journey into the city, the merchant’s son crosses a threshold into a new space of greater and greater irrationality. The story is also a passage from an aesthetic deadness into a brief moment of life which leads the merchant’s son to a more literal death.

Gabriele Inacker addresses the monologic nature of modern literature and its influence on this story. Citing Gottfried Benn, (94) she notes that the sense of alienation characterized by the hero in this story is typical of modern literature. Hofmannsthal points out as early as 1895 the alienating effects of the modern era. His Märchen illustrates the fatal result of the inability to extend beyond one’s self. The merchant’s son’s world had space in it for just one person. Everyone else in the story exists as an object or as a possession.

The anxiety which Das Märchen der 672. Nacht presents the reader is very similar to that in Ein Brief. We can already see in this story the beginnings of Hofmannsthal’s ideas about the nature of language. Hans-Jürgen Schings calls the text a metaphor for the inescapability of life (Schings 561), while Marcel Brion calls the journey of the merchant’s son a journey into the underworld and considers this story to be the key to the collective works of Hugo von Hofmannsthal (Brion 285). However, like any fairytale, Das Märchen der 672. Nacht is open enough to allow for a wide variety of interpretations, and there is no question that the story has an uncanny ability to provoke strong emotions in the modern reader. Lawrence Frye best explains

---

5 These concepts will find even greater development in later works such as Augenblicke in Griechenland and will be discussed in more detail then.
The primary difference, according to Bruno Bettelheim, between a traditional *Märchen* and the invented *Kunstmärchen* is that a *Kunstmärchen* does not resolve the basic conflict, it does not rescue the reader from the abyss as does a traditional fairytale (Bettelheim 11).

Because it is a *Kunstmärchen*, it does not provide a harmonious resolution to the conflict. The merchant's son cannot find his way out of the labyrinth of the city. As an allegory of life (Schings 533), this story is far more effective in its refusal to let the reader off with a comforting resolution to the conflict.

The use of language and the merchant's son's inability to find a connection to the world through language is central to understanding why the son comes to a tragic end. Hofmannsthal introduces many of the themes that will reappear later in *Ein Brief. Das Märchen der 672. Nacht* begins with a description of a merchant's son in the middle of a peaceful existence he has created for himself. From the start, the mixture of fairytale and modern elements becomes apparent. The hero is both young and handsome, and, like many fairytale heroes, no longer has a father or a mother. One would expect him to be a prince, but as is more fitting for a modern tale, he is the son of a successful merchant. In accordance with fairytale tradition, he is not given a name, but is known only as the merchant's son.

Soon after his 25th year, the merchant's son removes himself from the everyday world to his garden in the country. There he is surrounded by beautiful things in a world of sublime peace (*Die Erhabenheit der Ruhe*) (E 8). This garden is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden; it is a

---

6 The primary difference, according to Bruno Bettelheim, between a traditional *Märchen* and the invented *Kunstmärchen* is that a *Kunstmärchen* does not resolve the basic conflict, it does not rescue the reader from the abyss as does a traditional fairytale (Bettelheim 11).
paradise, the göttliche Werk aller Geschlechter (8). The merchant’s son has constructed a very ordered, rational space about him in which he is in total control. Within the confines of his own environment he has an almost godlike authority and an ability to determine its exact makeup. Everything is rationalized, ordered, set in its place, controlled. In the end, however, it is all destroyed by a fear that he might lose it. As Schings points out, the garden is not as paradisiacal as one might expect it to be (Schings 538). Fear and thoughts of death and the beginnings of his alienation from his surroundings already intrude on the merchant’s son while he is still in his refuge. Instead of being cast out of the garden, he chooses to leave of his own free will.

Inacker argues of Märchen der 672. Nacht that in a fairytale, there is little or no difference between the interior and the exterior representation of any symbols (74). That is, there may be no separation between the subjective and the objective so that objects can be used to represent elements of a person’s character. In the case of the merchant’s son, this means that the descriptions of the servants and of his household not only indirectly characterize him, but are also outer representations of his inner self; they are projections of his persona that, taken together, create a psychologically constructed image of him and point to his eventual demise. The inability of the merchant’s son to distinguish between outer and inner realities, or his inability to individuate himself from his possessions leads to his eventual death.

The merchant son’s relationship to his four servants contributes to his uneasiness and his desire to get away. He has released all but four of his servants, and these four are more possessions to him than they are people. He thinks about them in much the same way he does the works of art that fill his house. The early section of the story describes his thoughts on each of his servants. As the descriptions progress, it becomes clear that the one characteristic all four have in common is some form of speechlessness. Although they are his servants, he seldom speaks with them (9). He keeps the old woman with him because, although she seldom speaks, her voice reminds him of his mother and his childhood. He is intrigued and perhaps frightened by the
youngest girl's refusal to speak with him. He feels awkward in her presence after she breaks her leg because she rejects him with her zusammengebissenen Lippen (10). For a long time afterward, the merchant's son does not trust himself to speak with her. In contrast, he feels very comfortable around his male servant, in part because this man is always able to guess wordlessly (schweigend) what his master wants or needs (11) and speech is not needed between the two. Likewise, the connection with the fourth servant, the older girl, as an almost untouchable object of eroticism is centered around language. Each servant has a way of communicating with the merchant's son without speaking. This seems to account for both why he has kept these four with him and why they fill him with a deadly uneasiness, a tödliche Angst vor der Unrinnbarkeit des Lebens (13).

By using fairytale motifs as a mechanism for driving the narrative, Hofmannsthal creates a dual world of inner dream and outer reality for the merchant's son to move through (Inacker 76). The counterbalance to the garden is the labyrinthine city. Once the merchant's son enters the city, he enters an increasingly confusing and fear-engendering maze from which he cannot escape. He crosses over into an irrational, modern world beyond his control. It is important to note, however, that he cannot escape only because he refuses to see and comprehend his predicament. To the end, he avoids responsibility for his own situation. Because the garden-paradise no longer provides the peace that it did in the beginning, the merchant's son must leave it to recover what was lost. He hopes that by leaving he will be able to rediscover an Anhaltspunkt (17), something he can hold onto that will provide meaning for his life. Brion suggests that the merchant's son leaves in order to seek absolute truth (Brion 289). However, because everything and everyone remains an object to him, he fails in the end to find what he is looking for.

The merchant's son's path through the city is both meandering and senseless, characterized by his inability to find a connection to the world. It is remarkable in this passage how many times Hofmannsthal makes reference to speechlessness in one form or another. A
jeweler wraps up his gifts *ohne ein Wort zu sprechen* (19). In a greenhouse, he encounters a girl who reminds him of his youngest servant, especially as she reacts to him. She has an angry, hateful look that fills him with a nameless fear (*namenlose Furcht*) (21). As he tries to come in closer contact with her, she tries, without saying a word (*ohne ein Wort zu reden*), to force him out of the greenhouse. Again he has failed to make contact, which leads to an even deeper level of speechlessness. Trapped in the greenhouse, he wants to cry out, but he is afraid of his own voice (22).

The fear and growing darkness with which the merchant’s son is confronted is characterized by a sense of emptiness. Brion describes the landscape through which the merchant’s son wanders as a place of *Leere und Ewigkeit* (Brion 289). As he escapes the greenhouse, he has to cross a board over the empty air to find his way back to the street. He literally faces the abyss (E 24). Yet, even though he makes it safely across, his safety is only temporary. The streets into which he walks are also empty of life. He comes finally to the Kasernenhof of the soldiers. Although there are soldiers and horses present, the court also has an empty, lifeless feeling to it. The soldiers hardly speak a word to him or to each other (25). They just silently carry their sacks of bread.

The merchant’s son, as he attempted with the little girl, tries to give one of the soldiers money. This seems to be an attempt to buy a connection (an *Anhaltspunkt*) to this world from which he has been alienated. His attempts, however, are doomed to fail because he never comprehends the nature of the world in which he has found himself. As long as he treats his servants and the people he encounters as objects that can be bought or owned, they will remain foreign to him and he will never be a part of them. His money falls at the feet of the soldier’s horse, and as he tries to recover it, he is trampled to death. With his death, the last shreds of his sanity fall away, and his life is revealed in its speechless emptiness.
Mit einer großen Bitterkeit starrte er in sein Leben zurück und verleugnete alles, was ihm lieb gewesen war. Er hasste seinen vorzeitigen Tod so sehr, daß er sein Leben hasste, weil es ihn dahin geführt hatte. Diese innere Wildheit verbrauchte seine letzte Kraft. Ihm schwindelte, und für eine Weile schlief er wieder einen taumeligen schlechten Schlaf. Dann erwachte er und wollte schreien, weil er noch immer allein war, aber die Stimme versagte ihm. Zuletzt erbrach er Galle, dann Blut, und starb mit verzerrten Zügen, die Lippen so verrissen, daß Zähne und Zahnfleisch entblößt waren und ihm einen fremden, bösen Ausdruck gaben. (28)

For Brion, the merchant’s son’s death is a just punishment for the guilt he takes upon himself because he never understands that the only way to form a true relationship with the objects which were so important to him is through love (300). Speech is not possible with objects, but only with other individuals capable of empathy and love. Chandos comes to a similar conclusion in his letter, but takes it one step further. He maintains that it is possible to form a relationship even with inanimate creatures, but only in the presence of love (PII 16). When this condition is met, perfect unity between two individuals is possible. The one becomes a part of the other and both understand. Because the merchant’s son never understands this, he loses everything in the end and dies in complete isolation. His death is dominated by his speechlessness. He wants to cry out, but he cannot because even his own voice has failed him (28).

***

Ein Brief represents a renewed expression of themes already apparent in earlier works, and particularly in Das Märchen der 672. Nacht more than it signals a sudden change in Hofmannsthal’s way of writing. While both works express a sense of detachment from the surrounding world and from the language used to describe it, the idea of skepticism toward language is more developed in the Chandos-Brief and it is perhaps more polished and subtle than in Märchen.

-36-
So much has already been written about Ein Brief and it is so wrapped up in the history of Hofmannsthal reception, especially surrounding his so-called Sprachkrise, that one often fails to see Ein Brief, also referred to as the Chandos Brief, as a work of literature in its own right, and that it should be analyzed as such. The letter is both a construction of, as well as a commentary on, language. It employs many of the same metaphors that he used in the works we have already discussed. Among these are a number dialectic pairs, including concepts of interior versus exterior, and speech versus silence. Binding each pair together is the temporal threshold of the Augenblick.

Ein Brief is a fictional letter of Lord Phillip Chandos to Sir Francis Bacon, supposedly written three hundred years prior to Hofmannsthal in 1603. In the letter, Chandos excuses himself for his failure to write during the past three years. He describes a gradual process of alienation from the world that has prevented him from finding adequate words to express himself. Many have suggested that Chandos’ crisis explains Hofmannsthal’s renunciation of poetry. They turn Ein Brief into a autobiographical essay, in which the fictional Chandos is a thin mask over Hofmannsthal’s own inability to continue writing poetry.7

Although this position is not as commonly held as it once was, it is still prevalent enough that it deserves some brief rebuttal. Hofmannsthal’s turning from poetry to other forms of expression is much more complicated than a loss of poetic inspiration. Chandos describes his crisis as a complete inability to express himself through language, a total disconnect between his experience and his attempts to articulate or represent those experiences in any way. This was never the case for Hofmannsthal, as he continued producing literary works in the form of dramas, essays, libretti, and short stories until the end of his life. Instead, the period around the turn of the century in which he wrote the Chandos-letter was a time of transition for Hofmannsthal in which

7Edward Underwood, whose work is certainly exemplary, but by no means unique in this argument, outlines a number of parallels between Chandos and Hofmannsthal’s own life (156).
the demands of home, family, and children began to put new demands on the poet. Er war als Familienvater und Ehemann mehr Mensch wie andere Menschen und weniger Dichter. He became, as a result, more a person like other people and less the poet (Resch, Seltenen Augenblicke 10). 8

The central threshold theme in Ein Brief is that of the Augenblick. Within its central concept of the present, the word Augenblick also carries the connotation of the perspective of the viewer and therefore the viewer's subjectivity. Literally it is that which is seen by the eye. It is an instantaneous perception, perceived immediately without an intervening medium of time or space and therefore not in need of interpretation. Yet this presents a paradox, for Chandos attempts to describe the conditions under which these moments of insight can continue to exist worin diese guten Augenblicke bestehen for a longer period of time. Andreas Härter points out, however, moments do not continue, they pass away: Augenblicke bestehen nicht; sie vergehen (87).

The inability to hold an instant in time to remain forever in the instance of the present is a quality time shares with language, which has life only in the moment that it passes from one person to another. Chandos attempts to describe in words something that he has experienced which supercedes those words.

3In a letter to Ottonie Gräfin Degenfeld dated 9 July 1912, Hofmannsthal writes: dies ist ja wirklich nichts Kleines: wieder produktiv werden das sagt sicher leicht, aber es heißt mit seinem ganzen Ich hinüber in eine andere Welt, die tausend Fäden und Häckchen loskriegen an denen es hängt, Kinder und Vater, Haus und Wirtschaft und Briefzeug und was sich alles nicht zerreißen läßt sondern nur mit behutsamen Fingern ablösen - hoffentlich gelingt, in den letzten Jahren kann ich nur wenige Tage, wenige verstreute Augenblicke zu den eigentlich produktiven rechnen, in früheren Jahren war ich nicht reicher, ärmer vielleicht, einsamer sicher, aber es kam öfter zu dem namenlos beglückenden Einklang zwischen außen und innen, Ich und Welt ohne die möchte ich nicht leben was ist alles andere dagegen? Der Einsame, Einschichtige kommt leichter zu solchen Augenblicken, ich bereue aber nicht, daß ich ein Mensch bin wie andere Menschen, Kinder habe, ein Haus für sie aufrecht halte so befremdlich es mir manchmal ist.

-38-
Es wird mir nicht leicht, Ihnen anzudeuten, worin diese guten Augenblicke bestehen; die Worte lassen mich wiederum im Stich. Denn es ist ja etwas völlig Unbenanntes und auch wohl kaum benennbares, das in solchen Augenblicken, irgendeine Erscheinung meiner alltäglichen Umgebung mit einer überschwellenden Flut höheren Lebens wie ein Gefäß erfüllend, mir sich ankündet. (P II 14)

Härter sees in this passage a situation in which the battle for the moment also becomes a battle against the distance that expressing the moment creates (87). In an instance of perception, (Augenblick) an experience presents itself as both proximate and immediate and therefore not in need of interpretation. However, expressing or relating anything about the experience requires that it be translated into language. Thus the immediate must be mediated and what was proximate becomes merely approximate, acquiring distance. Language dictates that that which was present in the Augenblick becomes merely represented, and therefore less. Chandos seeks words which can hold the presence of the eternal in the present: Aber es sollten besondere Worte sein: solche, die die Gegenwart des Unendlichen in sich präsent hielten. Chandos Ausbruch hätte also nicht Entfernung aus dem Augenblick, sondern dessen Ausdehnung auf eine Rede von ihm sein sollen (Härter 95). Chandos breakout should not therefore be a removal from the moment, but the continuation of it into a form of speech that includes it.

Hofmannsthal employs the concepts of interiority and exteriority to describe his growing alienation from everyday language. In the opening sentences, Francis Bacon has recommended medical treatment to Chandos um [s]einen Sinn für den Zustand [s]eines Innern zu schärfen (P II 7). Chandos then builds on this theme in the following paragraphs. Chandos responds by explaining how his inner malady has exterior origins. It is a shortcoming of language, as he explains, and its inability to penetrate to the innermost nature of things, that is at the heart of the problem.
Allein ich bin es ja doch und es ist Rhetorik in diesen Fragen, Rhetorik, die gut ist für Frauen oder für das Haus der Gemeinen, deren von unserer Zeit so überschätzte Machtmittel aber nicht hinreichen ins Innere der Dinge zu dringen. Mein Inneres aber muß ich Ihnen darlegen, eine Sonderbarkeit, eine Unart, wenn Sie wollen eine Krankheit meines Geistes, wenn Sie begreifen sollen, daß mich ein ebensolcher brückenloser Abgrund von den scheinbar vor mir liegenden literarischen Arbeiten trennt als von denen, die hinter mir sind und die ich, so fremd sprechen sie mich an, mein Eigentum zu nennen zögere. (8)

This passage is central to the concept of the inner world. The language, the rhetoric, or the manner of speaking, although perfectly suitable for ordinary use, is, when reduced to its most basic form, incapable of true expression that approaches the innermost nature of things. In this sense, true is important, since ordinary language, as he explains, can be nothing more than a lie.

Chandos condition before his crisis is described as happy and enlivened/invigorated (belebt), as was his writing of the time. But now he hesitates to accept these texts as his own, being separated from his past writings by the abyss that has distanced his present self from them. In his description he also draws a connection between language, truth and its interiority.

Und aus dem Sallust floß in jenen glücklichen, belebten Tagen wie durch nie verstopfte Röhren die Erkenntnis der Form in mich herüber, jener tiefen, wahren, inneren Form, die jenseits des Geheges der rhetorischen Kunststücke erst geahnt werden kann, die, von welcher man nicht mehr sagen kann, daß sie das Stoffliche anordne, denn sie durchdringt es, sie hebt es auf und schafft Dichtung und Wahrheit zugleich, ein Widerspiel ewiger Kräfte, ein Ding, herrlich wie Musik und Algebra. Dies war mein Lieblingsplan. (9)

Notice the association Chandos makes between depth, truth, and the inner form. This was his perception of his writing that it discovered or was able to reach or penetrate (durchdringen) so
that it could create Dichtung und Wahrheit zugleich. This is an anachronistic reference to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's autobiography inserted by Hofmannsthal, which also explores the boundaries between truth and fiction. With it, Hofmannsthal may be suggesting that poetry and truth are polar opposites, which can only coexist in the life of a literary genius. In creating a literature that taps into inner forms, Chandos thought he could write a work that was both a poetic work of literature and a factual, accurate record. It would be art and science in one, and hence a replay of eternal powers, like a perfect mingling of music and algebra. These thoughts and plans existed in a language jenseits des Geheges, that is, beyond the normal enclosure of rhetorical forms, crossing again over literary boundaries.

Hofmannsthal's Brief incorporates a constant interplay between the inner and the outer as Chandos passes in and out of a deeper relationship with language. In one passage he describes his feelings of unity with objects about which he has read: ich sehnte mich hinein in diese nackte, glänzenden Leiber...verschwinden wollte ich in ihnen und aus ihnen heraus mit Zungen reden (9, emphasis added). This passage reflects his pre-crisis fantasy of the relationship between experience and language. Speaking in tongues expresses the desire to speak in a universally understandable language a desire to speak perfectly. Such a language belongs, or belonged, to a time in Chandos' life when all of existence was dominated by an inner unity, with no substantial difference between the physical and the spiritual or intellectual...überall war ich mitten drinnen, wurde nie ein Scheinhaftes gewahr: oder es ahnte mir, alles wäre ein Gleichnis und jede Kreatur ein Schlüssel der anderen (10). He equates signifier and signified, so that to the individual positioned between them, everything becomes a text that can be read.

The exploration of the interior of things, however, cannot sustain itself, and it begins to break down. Chandos describes the deterioration of his ambitions as a gradual process. It is a departure from the garden of paradise that marks the unity that has heretofore dominated
Chandos' speech and that the deterioration will continue until it progresses to complete
disintegration.

Es zerfiel mir alles in Teile, die Teile wieder in Teile, und nichts mehr ließ sich mit
einem Begriff umspannen. Die einzelnen Worte schwammen um mich; sie
gerannen zu Augen, die mich anstarrten und in die ich wieder hineinstarren muß:
Wirbel sind sie, in die hinabzusehen mich schwindelt, die sich unaufhaltsam drehen
und durch die hindurch man ins Leere kommt. (13)

In his naive state there is a quality of paradise and the growing awareness that such a
paradise cannot endure indefinitely. In this respect, Ein Brief possesses a traditional triadic
structure, and assumes an almost fairytale-like quality. Its form creates an expectation that
Chandos will emerge from his crisis with a sense of redemption a synthesis of inner unity and
outer fragmentation as opposing aspects of reality.

Es möchte dem, der solchen Gesinnungen zugänglich ist, als der wohlangelegte
Plan einer göttlichen Vorsehung erscheinen, daß mein Geist aus einer so
aufgeschwollenen Anmaßung in dieses Äußerste von Kleinmut und Kraftlosigkeit
zusammensinken mußte, welches nun die bleibende Verfassung meines Innern ist.

(11)

In the midst of his growing crisis, Chandos' intellectual state is described as the extremity of
smallness and powerlessness. The Äußerste stands in direct contrast to his innermost self, his
Innern. Thoughts shoot through a web of ideas out into the emptiness. Whereas the inside is
colonized by wholeness, the outside, the exterior, which is the realm of expression (Ausdruck),
is dominated by emptiness.

9There are some compelling parallels between this passage and the Partikelgestöber in
Celan's Engführung (GW1 197), which also references of eyes and of storms. Compare, for
example, Celan's Orkan to Hofmannsthals Wirbel.
Awareness of the conflict between inner harmony and outer emptiness begins the process through which Chandos loses his ability to speak. At first, he experiences a sense of uneasiness (unbehagen) when using words such as *Geist*, *Seele*, or *Körper*. Chandos uses the word *ausprechen* again emphasizing the exteriority of his uneasiness. This he juxtaposes in the next sentences with his inner inability to bring out (*herausbringen*) a judgment concerning political affairs, because, as he states, the words *zerfielen mir im Munde wie modrige Pilze* (12). The words swirl as if in a storm about him, falling apart, losing all meaning.

In this state of external fragmentation, Chandos begins to seek a safe haven from the emptiness that surrounds him, a haven that will require a physical or mental transportation from one space to another. *Ich machte einen Versuch mich aus diesem Zustand in die geistige Welt der Alten hinüberzuretten* (13, emphasis added). Chandos searches for limits in a literary or linguistic realm characterized by a harmony of limited and ordered concepts: *Harmonie begrenzter und geordneter Begriffe* (13). The emptiness left by the limitless possibilities of the exterior are, nevertheless, void of any connection to reality. It leaves Chandos completely incapable of thought, word, or action. Wunberg sees this outer emptiness as evidence that Chandos' crisis with language is inseparably connected with a crisis of the self. *Aus dem Chandosbrief wird deutlich, daß die Sprachkrise sich weder genetisch noch systematisch von der des Ich und des Bewußtseins trennen läßt* (112). Thus, the inner and outer spheres of existence represent a conflict of the inner self set in opposition to an external reality, and make clear the awareness of the incongruity between the two. Chandos is therefore unable to escape his crisis by crossing over to the limited, rational world of the ancients: *Ich konnte nicht zu ihnen hinüber* (P II 13).

---

10 This inability has to be viewed somewhat ironically, since of course it is Chandos whom Hofmannsthal has write this very eloquent explanation of his inability to write.
At stake here is also the conflict within Chandos between his need for rationality, as embodied in his relationship with Francis Bacon, and his awareness of an irrational, inner mysticism as described by Metzeler. Both of these directions are present in *Ein Brief*, and it is a conflict that is never completely resolved. Rather, Chandos must negotiate the boundary between the two extremes, recognizing the demands of each. A rational language capable of expressing an absolute sense of inner unity does not exist, at least not as a reliably accessible tool of communication.

Twice Chandos is overcome by moments of panic as he becomes aware of the limitations of his own language. The first of these experiences comes when he upbraids his own child for telling a lie. As he scolds her, however, he has to admit to himself how seldom any speech ever approaches truth. Confronted with his own hypocrisy, he flees through the door and is only able to recover somewhat after taking a ride through open fields. Here there is a firm connection between his panic and the need to escape the confined space. The need to express himself (*sich äußern*), because it cannot be satisfied through speech, must take a more literal, physical form. Thus Chandos, to find relief, must physically leave a space that could represent his inner self, and move to a freer, but less articulate outer existence. Later, he is again overcome as he considers the works of Seneca and Cicero. Instead of being able to immerse himself in their works as he had earlier planned, something holds him apart from them. Chandos describes it as being able to watch a dance or a play/game (*Spiel*). . . .das Tiefste, das Persönliche meines Denkens, blieb von

---

11 A relationship described in detail by Wunberg (110) that emphasizes Bacon's contributions to the enlightenment.

12 While Metzeler does not directly analyze *Ein Brief* in its entirety, his discussion of mysticism and crises in Hofmannsthal emphasizes the importance of the mystical throughout the author's work and explains how mysticism contributes to the concept of *Sprachskepsis* (102).

13 The word *äußern* does not appear in the text, but the concepts Chandos describes are consistent with the connotations of the word as relating to the exterior: *aus, außen*, etc.
ihrem Reigen ausgeschlossen (13). As before, he is overcome with panic and must again flee into the open ich flüchtete wieder ins Freie. In both instances, there is a sense of loneliness, *Einsamkeit*, resulting from the process of his inner fragmentation, that accompanies his panic and flight. Chandos feels the loss of wholeness and can only find relief by attempting to flee from its source.

These extremes of interior and exterior exist at the very limits of language. Chandos attempts to articulate his constant transition from one state to the other from the unified whole to the fragmented individual, from the rational to the irrational, and between the abstract and the concrete. All of these are at play in his constant use of the metaphors of interior and exterior. In this sense, Hofmannsthal does not describe a threshold as a place of its own, but as a border to be constantly crossed, because it is impossible to remain on either one side or the other.

The young, naive Chandos, with his grandiose plans, existed entirely within the sphere that offered an illusion of unity and wholeness, unaware of the complexities concealed in his naive one-sidedness. Ironically, however, the whole must include the ambiguities and the fragmentation of the exterior, else it would not be the whole. Hence, the mature Chandos finds it difficult or even impossible to express a wholeness that includes the fragmentary. He is left with a mostly empty existence that is only occasionally interrupted by brief moments of escape from the dull colorless life that remains to him. These moments can be seen for the purposes of this investigation as a threshold experience. Chandos calls them belebende Augenblicke (14). As before, Chandos cannot describe these moments adequately in words: Es wird mir nicht leicht, Ihnen anzudeuten, worin diese guten Augenblicke bestehen; die Worte lassen mich wiederum im Stich. The moments fill him, mostly through an encounter with a simple object or creature, with a sense of wonder Diese stummen und manchmal unbelebten Kreaturen heben sich mir mit einer solchen Fülle, einer solchen Gegenwart der Liebe entgegen. . .daß mein beglücktes Auge auch ringsum auf keinen toten Fleck zu fallen vermag (16).
Chandos attempts to explain these experiences by citing two examples. First he imagines the death struggles when he has to poison rats in the cellar. He sees in his mind their panic as they seek to escape the cellar. The incident mirrors his own panic and flight from his daughter’s room. The second example comes from a memory of reading of the destruction of Alba Longa, imagining the death of a mother with her children about her.\textsuperscript{14} Both experiences occur in his absence; that is, what Chandos describes is his imagination of an event, not the actual observations or memories of them. Yet he describes these moments of insight both as memories and as the fullest, most sublime presence: die vollste erhabenste Gegenwart (15). Every way in which he describes his epiphanal moments involves a threshold experience. They are instances in which his inner and outer realities come in contact with each other. These opposing forces may often turn out to be ultimately incompatible over time, but for those brief moments when he can stand between them, touching on both, Chandos is filled with insight that defies expression. It is this inability to express that is the cause of his despair.

The moments of insight do, however, generate a degree of sympathy in Chandos, and something more than sympathy. The \textit{Augenblick} partakes of mystic elements of unity: ein ungeheures Anteilnehmen, ein \textit{Hinüberfließen} in jene Geschöpfe oder ein Fühlen, daß ein Fluidium des Lebens und Todes, des Traumes und Wachens für einen Augenblick in sie hinübergeflossen ist von woher? (15, emphasis added). The experience is a flowing across and together of mutually exclusive forces and contradictory possibilities. They meet, and, for a moment in time and space, are present together. They become the presence of the eternal, die Gegenwart des Unendlichen.

\textsuperscript{14}Werner Kraft sees in these instances a symbol for decline and destruction (\textit{Untergang}). For him the rats especially represent apocalyptic tendencies and a premonition of future gas chambers. (Kraft 22).
It should be noted here that Chandos does not claim that there is no language capable of expressing these moments, only that such a language exists outside of rational understanding, or outside the rational possibilities currently available to him. He stands therefore at the limits of language, but not at the limits of expression. Chandos cannot recreate the essence of presence and wholeness in a language form that can only re-present objects events and ideas incompletely and imperfectly. However, he suggests that such a language could exist, and makes several attempts to describe it.

He conceives a form of physical and mental body language in which the body contains the codes necessary for comprehension. This body language also characterizes the statues in *Augenblicke in Griechenland*, which we will explore later. This language would be a form of thought that would be more immediate, more fluent, and more glowing than ordinary words (19). As Wunberg describes it, Chandos may have lost speech as a tool, but in exchange has gained thought (115). Chandos relates this hypothetical thought-language to normal spoken language with its tempestuous dance but transfers the locus of the new language from the exterior to the interior:
Es sind gleichfalls Wirbel, aber solche, die nicht wie die Wirbel der Sprache ins Bodenlose zu führen scheinen, sondern irgendwie in mich selber in den tiefsten Schoß des Friedens (19).

Chandos has in mind a utopic language in which all things are self-evident in an eternal present: eine Sprache, in welcher die stummen Dinge zu mir sprechen, und in welcher ich vielleicht einst im Grabe von einem unbekannten Richter mich verantworten werde, (20). With this language, an Adamic tongue, one could call down the cherubim from heaven (16).

Chandos is at a loss for words because he has bought into the rational worldview of the Enlightenment, yet he can see what this has cost him in terms of ideas that cannot be encompassed in that system of reason. In this respect, Kraft’s apocalyptic interpretation of decline may be right on. However, it is more likely that Hofmannsthal foresees not the gas chambers of the Third Reich (Kraft 22), but the gassed trenches of the First World War, which marked the end of the Austrian empire. The Chandos-Brief thus becomes a statement on some of the core conflicts of modernism, especially the anxiety over unchecked progress and the individual’s inability to cope with change. The work plays on the thresholds of these conflicts, using fractured language as a representative of many issues as it illustrates the untenability of dwelling forever on either one side or the other, demonstrating instead the need to continually cross from one to the other.

**Being and Becoming and the Search for Identity**

Written several years after *Ein Brief*, the three essays that comprise *Augenblicke in Griechenland* represent in many ways a continuation of the crisis in *Ein Brief*. They continue the dichotomy between interior and exterior spaces and flesh out the concept of an ideal language. Most importantly, the essays expand on and emphasize the role of the *Augenblick* both in art and in establishing the identity of the individual.

In 1908, Hugo von Hofmannsthal stepped off the ship in Athens for his first and only visit in Greece. His stay was short, and, according to journal entries, something of a disappointment. However, he spends the next six years writing three essays about his experiences there. His
Augenblicke in Griechenland reveal little about Hofmannsthal's time in Greece, but a great deal about the author himself and his perception of the role of the artist in a modern, rapidly evolving, and secular world. Hofmannsthal's works operate on the threshold between a reflected outer world and the introspective inner world of dream and memory. Accessing the dreamworld or the world of memory is accomplished by stepping out of the flow of time and into the timelessness of the Augenblick. For a brief moment, one may be able to catch a glimpse into the eternal and perhaps return with a small piece of it. Art therefore becomes an exercise in crossing and re-crossing the social, psychological, linguistic, and spiritual borders that defined his world.

The three essays that comprise the Augenblicke in Griechenland were written following Hofmannsthal's trip to Greece in 1908. The first essay was published immediately thereafter, and a volume containing all three essays appeared in 1917. They appear during a transitional time in European history in which the influence of Austria is waning and the industrial and philosophical pressures of the new century are putting a real strain on the society. Hofmannsthal finds himself on the threshold between two eras and his essays reflect an attempt to retain the best of what has past in an effort to find some stability in the future. Hofmannsthal's travels through Greece come across as a search for something that can withstand the onslaught of time, for something immune to the Vergänglichkeit that is all about him. The themes of eternity and timelessness contrasted against decay and decline appear repeatedly throughout the three essays. The narrative is constructed from a series of heightened moments, or Augenblicke, from Hofmannsthal's excursion through Greece. With each he creates an image which provides a momentary insight into eternity. The Augenblick, then, represents the present as a threshold between the past and the future.

Throughout the essays, Hofmannsthal also makes use of the literal elements of the word. The Augenblick is what is perceived by the eye in an instant of time so that that instant becomes an active process of creation. According to Bärbel Götz, because the accounts of his journey are
not entirely faithful to the actual events, but have been selectively altered by the artist to emphasize certain points, the author becomes a reflective observer whose works aim at a symbolic enrichment of what is seen and experienced (Götz 77). In this respect, the *Augenblicke in Griechenland* bear a striking resemblance to Handke's *Noch einmal für Thukydides*, both as a collection of essays about a trip into southern Europe,¹⁵ and more importantly, as a series of momentary experiences from which he draws a deeper meaning pointing to something universally applicable and attaching historical significance to otherwise mundane events.

The first essay, *Das Kloster des Heiligen Lukas*, tells of Hofmannsthal's arrival at a monastery in the Parnassus mountains near the ancient city of Delphi. The high point of the first essay takes place at dusk, evoking the magic of that hour that so often occurs throughout Hofmannsthal's writing. At the end of a long day of travel, Hofmannsthal arrives at his destination and takes in the apparent timelessness of the scene.


The landscape opens up a dream-like perception of the author's surroundings which brings close all that is unachievable, unnamable, and distant. Del Caro has shown how the depths of a well in Hofmannsthal's poetry represent the individual self, which is his ultimate goal and also his undifferentiated source (Del Caro *Hofmannsthal* 26). It is therefore likely that Hofmannsthal's

---

¹⁵ Greece is the end goal of both journeys, although they take very different routes to get there. By invoking the name of the historian Thucydides, the line between story and history and emphasize the role of the observer/narrator as a co-creator of one's reality.
There is a marked similarity, in its usage at least, between this Von Lippe zu Lippe and Celan’s Von Schwelle zu Schwelle. A possible interpretation for each is a direct, unmediated communication between two otherwise separated individuals.

In this moment, a brief discussion takes place between one of the priests and a servant standing on the threshold of the monastery. The content of the exchange is mundane, but Hofmannsthal hears something that partakes of the eternity of the moment. . . .dies hat einen Rhythmus in sich, der von Ewigkeit her ist. Dies reicht zurück, dies Lebendige, wohin die uralten Ölbäume nicht reichen. Homer ist noch ungeboren, und solche Worte, in diesem Ton gesprochen, gehen zwischen dem Priester und dem Knecht von Lippe zu Lippe (14-15).

The vicinity of the Oracle also lends a sense of the magical or the mysterious to the setting, and represents the first possibility for finding the eternal in ancient Greece. Hofmannsthal comments on the grove of olive trees, which has grown up on the site of the ancient city. These trees, although already centuries old, are too young to remember Delphi and its temple. Compared to the temple, these ancient trees are still young, giving the place a sense of the eternal age that is both unachievably distant, and yet still near at hand. This is the central paradox of this particular space. The Greece of Hofmannsthal’s narrative hints at possibilities existing apart from ordinary space and time, and yet still just beyond reach.

The second essay, Der Wanderer, although written some years later, picks up where the previous one left off at the monastery. In contrast to the first essay, the threshold moment has shifted from the historically oriented and retrospective dusk, to the anticipatory dawn. The tone of the second essay is much more introspective, signaled in part by the change in setting.

---

16 There is a marked similarity, in its usage at least, between this Von Lippe zu Lippe and Celan’s Von Schwelle zu Schwelle. A possible interpretation for each is a direct, unmediated communication between two otherwise separated individuals.
Hofmannsthal describes the setting as a timeless loneliness (*zeitlose Einsamkeit*), very much in the romantic tradition, which he shares with his companion in a discussion of shared memories of common friends and experiences. This dawn threshold, as we will see again in Celan’s works, is a place of memory and a place of dialogue where many things that are absent or distant in time and space come together.

Aber die tiefe und gleichsam zeitlose Einsamkeit, die uns umgab, das körperlose Erhabene der Umgebung. . . die strahlende Reinheit der Morgenstunde. . . dies alles machte unsere Einbildungskraft so stark, daß jedes Wort, von einem ausgesprochen, den Geist des andern mit sich fortriß und er mit Händen zu greifen wählte, was dem andern vorschwebte. (16-17)

The description here is also reminiscent of Chandos’ account of his pre-crisis life in its almost magical idealism. In diesen Minuten sehen wir alles rein: die geheimnisvolle Kraft Leben lodert in uns nur als Enthüller des Unenthüllbaren (18). The combination of the time, the speech, and the process of being underway (*Unterwegssein*) allows the companions to approach an eternal moment where all possibilities are open to them.

Just as in the Chandos letter, however, the serenity and the idealism cannot endure. The conversation turns to a particular memory of a struggling youth—a poet who despises his own work. This memory brings their conversation to a halt: Und nun sehen wir ihn abyssinisches Gebirg herabgetragen kommen, einsamen Felspfad herunter, schweigende Luft: eine ewige Gegenwart (20). The previous promise of sunrise is burned away with this memory. Fast drohend blicket die Morgensonne auf die fremde ernste Gegend. Weggezehrt war das selbstverständliche Gefühl der Gegenwart. . . (20).
The memory of the suffering youth introduces and parallels the fate of the wanderer who becomes the main subject of this essay.\footnote{In the description of their youthful friend, the travelers imagine or can see in their minds (it is more than simple imagination) their friend being brought to them on a stretcher . . .auf uns zu. As the vision fades they see in the distance another young man, this time presumably not a memory, coming toward them . . .auf uns zu. The parallelism firmly establishes a connection between the remembered friend and the personality/fate of the approaching wanderer.} As their conversation fades into silence, they see a solitary individual approaching. This person, a fellow German, suffering from fever, torn feet and hands, lost and unable to speak the language, is unwilling to accept any help that distracts him from his goal. Hofmannsthal and his companion are finally able to help the castaway (as he calls him), but only on the stranger s terms. Despite being near death, the man possesses a will that is remarkably strong, and leaves a deep impression on the travelers. Later, as the companions come to a stream where the castaway had been a few hours before, Hofmannsthal drinks, and instead of seeing his own face reflected in the water, he sees the face of the lost young man as well as many other faces from his earlier memories.

Nothing in me knew at this moment what to say, whether it was strangers under the strangers who had turned their faces toward me or whether somewhere at some time I had said: „My friend!“ and heard: „My friend!“ Without transition something was present in me, something faraway, lovely-afraid, engulfed. . . . (25)

The reflection on the water s surface emphasizes the juxtaposition of surface and depth, and of past and present. In the depths, hidden by the reflection, the opposition and the distance between the stranger and the self begin to vanish. The water s reflection elicits a reflection of memory and also a mental reflection. Mirror, memory, and mind all are brought into presence on the surface of the water. The memories threaten to sweep him away, to strip him of his own identity: Ein Etwas blieb irgendwo über diesem kreisend, nichts als ein Staunen, ein
Nirgendhingehören, ein durchdringendes Alleinsein  (P III 25). At the point of losing himself in his memories, he must answer the question, Wer bin ich? The question raises a crisis of identity. Asking it calls one's self-evident existence into doubt, as if a judgment or a self-judgment hangs in the balance.

A partial answer comes almost in the process of the asking. It is as if the crisis itself is the answer. Da, im Augenblick des bangsten Staunens, kam ich mir wieder  (25). The ability to question his own identity becomes here the force required to assert his existence. Coming to that point, however, requires that Hofmannsthal as an individual explore his own boundaries and confront the multiple possibilities of the reflections that threaten to either swallow him up or wash him away. In that moment alone can he find the words to define his own identity. As Hofmannsthal explains in the final paragraph of the essay, Einmal offenbart sich jedes Lebende, einmal jede Landschaft, und völlig: aber nur einem erschütterten Herzen  (26). The revelations he seeks come only when he is willing to acknowledge the abyss and the possibility of oblivion that the answers may bring.

The third and final episode in Augenblicke in Griechenland, Die Statuen, returns to sunset as its setting. The symmetry of the settings is striking the middle story occurring at sunrise with the two framing stories taking place at sunset. In this final essay, the setting of the sun seems to have even more significance than in the other two. The German word used here is Sonnenuntergang, or simply, Untergang. Literally a going under, the word carries with it here the connotation of something coming to an end not just the end of a day, but perhaps also the end of an era. Jacques Le Rider finds a parallel here with Nietzsche's Geburt der Tragödie (Hugo von Hofmannsthal 193) and relates Untergang to Nietzsche's sense of loss. The setting brings into

---

18One's identity is also closely connected to one's beliefs- one's religion. Indeed, Jacques LeRider mentions in his commentary on Augenblicke that religious crisis and the loss of faith are part of what makes up the significance of this work. (Le Rider, Hugo von Hofmannsthal 192).
sharp relief the historical context prior to the first world war from which Hofmannstal is writing. The tone of the first half of the essay especially emphasizes this sense of loss. Sitting in the ruins of the Acropolis, Hofmannsthal feels none of the life in the place that perhaps his expectations had led him to hope for. Everything alive about the place was in the past gewesen (P III 27). The sunset creates a unique atmosphere that both breathes life into the place (the Acropolis) and reinforces its lifelessness, or emphasizes its own transience (Vergänglichkeit).

Das Hervorströmen der Schatten hatte etwas Feierliches, es schien das Letzte vom Leben, das noch in ihnen war, in einem abendlichen Trankopfer sich hinzugießen auf diesen Hügel, auf dem selbst die Steine vom Alter verwesten. Ohne mein Zutun wählte mein Blick eine dieser Säulen aus. Sie schien irgendwie aus der Gemeinschaft der übrigen wegerückt zu haben. Es war eine unsägliche Strenge und Zartheit in ihrem Dastehen, zugleich mit meinem Atemzug schien auch ihr Kontur sich zu heben und zu senken. Aber auch um sie spielte in dem Abendlicht, das klarer war als aufgelöstes Gold, der verzehrende Hauch der Vergänglichkeit, und ihr Dastehen war nichts mehr als ein unaufhaltsam lautloser Dahinsturz. (27-8).

Notice the tensions between Strenge and Zartheit. The passage embodies the overall tension between animate and inanimate and between present and past. The last light of day draws the last bit of life from Hofmannsthals surroundings. The pillar that catches his attention as standing apart from the others (das Dastehen) appears at that moment to draw breath and life from the observer. However, the last golden rays of light also make clear the impermanency of even these ancient stones, much like the olive trees of the first essay. Everything is coming to an end, so that the pillars ruined standing there is more reminiscent of an unstoppable falling away (ein unaufhaltsam lautloser Dahinsturz) a testimony of its impermanence.
Hofmannsthal poses two further questions in this third essay that seem related to the 
Who am I? of the previous essay. Looking at the ruins he asks, Diese Griechen, fragte ich in 
mir, wo sind sie? The second question is almost the same as the first: Wo ist diese Welt, und 
was weiß ich von ihr? By this world Hofmannsthal means the classic/romantic world of the 
Greeks, the ideal presented by Winkelmann, Goethe, and the other Neoclassicists (LeRider Hugo 
von Hofmannsthal 190). Where are the gods that inhabited the temples? His answer: Hier! oder 
nirgends (P III 30). Echoing the final line of the first essay (Stunde, Luft und Ort machen alles), 
Hofmannsthal declares Hier ist die Luft und hier ist der Ort. Dringt nichts in mich hinein? The 
moment is dead in its unfulfilled expectations. Hofmannsthal climbed the mountain of the 
Acropolis hoping to find ancient Greece. He was looking for the temple there. What he found 
instead were ruins and reminders of the transience of all things. He was looking for the eternal, 
for something that would bring him in touch with the answers he sought in the previous episodes. 
The temples of Greece would seem to be the very place that a German (or Austrian) scholar 
educated in the classical tradition might go to find answers. But as we have discussed, he was 
disappointed in his original attempt.

Always in these Augenblicke Hofmannsthal finds enlightenment where he does not expect 
it. In this case, he finds a sacred place not in the Athenian temple, but in a museum, which he 
hopes houses objects which have withstood the forces of time (32-3). His description of the 
museum bears a striking resemblance to the temple he had been looking for. Temples in every 
culture have several attributes in common, particularly in that they are marked by a separation of 
progressively sacred spaces. As Hofmannsthal climbs the Acropolis to the Parthenon, the first 
structure he would have encountered is the Propylaia, which marks enclosure of the temenos and 
separates the temple grounds from the secular world. The Parthenon itself was divided into three 
chambers: a treasure room, the pronaos, and the naos. Of these, the naos is the most important. 
It was the innermost chamber of the building, and the structure that housed the colossal gold and
ivory statue of Athena. Access to this room was limited to just the priests or priestesses dedicated to the temple and its goddess, and it would have been guarded to prevent the average person from gaining access to the interior and to the statue.

Structurally, the museum Hofmannsthal visited bears little resemblance to the Parthenon. Yet, Hofmannsthal’s description of the museum suggests many of the major attributes of a traditional temple. The first of these is the entryway. Here stands the gatekeeper of the building, the museum curator. He stands on the portal (Schwelle) deciding who may and who may not enter the museum. This first room of the museum houses a large, three-headed statue that was a part of a pediment that predates the Parthenon. Something in it or in the curator—perhaps it is the combination of the two—repulses Hofmannsthal. He turns his back on it and moves deeper into the museum (P III 35).

The next room, is not described in any detail other than as a place of increasing twilight (wo es stärker dämmerte). In this it is roughly parallel to the pronaos, and serves as a quieting moment before proceeding to the next room. As the sun gives out its last light, Hofmannsthal crosses the final threshold and enters the inner chamber, or what would be the sacred naos of the museum. This is an important moment in the essay. Hofmannsthal crosses over into a new space in which his questions about the eternal and about identity converge in a single phenomenon.

As he enters this third room, he encounters not the goddess Athena, but five female statues, or Korai, arranged in a semi-circle. In this moment, he says something happens that invokes a nameless terror, ein namenloses Erschrecken. Hofmannsthal begins to sense that he has discovered the timelessness the eternities not just within the limits of this enclosed room, but within the limits of himself aus unmeßbaren Fernen eines inneren Abgrundes (36). At the moment of entry, in this Sekunde des Eintretens Hofmannsthal makes full use of the multiple meanings of the word Augenblick, so that the moment is dominated both by his own observations and the statues’ gaze.
In ihrer vollkommenen Ruhe, bis zum Rande gefüllt mit Leben, schienen sie an sich herabzublicken, vor sich hinzublicken, aber sie sahen mich nicht. Trotzdem [. . .], sie waren nicht blicklos: dies mochte an dem wunderbaren Leben liegen, mit dem das obere Lid beladen war, und das gegen die Nasenwurzel hinströmte und sich unter den Augen mit erhabenem Ernst verlor. (36).

The faces of the statues become hieroglyphics, readable images or signs to be deciphered. Under their gaze, Hofmannsthal recognizes his own role in creating the eternal: that what he sees in the statues is a result of what is in him a function of what he has chosen to read into them or a function of the meaning he has actively assigned to them. The eternal nature of the korai is not possible without his willing participation. Unbedürftig bin ich auch ihrer. Ich brauche sie nur, wie sie mich brauchen. Sie stünden nicht vor mir, wenn ich ihnen nicht von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit hülfe, sich aufbauen (42).

In this condition of timelessness and in his own private temple Hofmannsthal is the high priest, ready to offer up his sacrifice, which seems to be an affirmation of his own existence. denn ich bin der Priester, der diese Zeremonie vollziehen wird ich auch das Opfer, das dargebracht wird: das alles drängt zur Entscheidung, es endet mit dem Überschreiten einer Schwelle, mit einem Geländetsein, einem Hier mit diesem Dastehen [like the pillar on the Acropolis, but with more power] hier, ich inmitten dieser: noch ist das Ganze Gegenwart, in ihren rieselnden Gewändern, in ihrem wissenden Lächeln. . . nichts bleibt zurück als eine todbehauchte Verzagtheit. (37 emphasis added)

The essays in their entirety seem to be a search for an identity not bound by time or space. For the moment of his encounter and his sacrifice, which he finds and comprehends and brings to a close by crossing over the threshold. The insight into himself is only momentary. The irony of timelessness is that it never lasts for very long but it leaves echoes that persist in memory. In the
seeming safety of the sanctuary there is also an underlying atmosphere of threat or foreboding brought on by his awareness of the impermanence of the encounter. The smiles of the statues that so entrance Hofmannsthal also fill him with dread of impending chaos (38). They move in and out of presence and absence shifting from being near and comprehensible, to being far off and unapproachable. The distance, however, is one of depth and surface, as with the water’s surface at the spring. When Hofmannsthal perceives the outer surface of the statues, they are nothing more than objects of stone. But for brief moments, when he penetrates below the surface and into the depths of their gaze, they open to him an entire universe (39). The surface of the clothing on the statues, like the surface of water, suggests the depths of eternity, and it binds Hofmannsthal to them.

These surfaces participate in the multiple paradoxes in these essays between past and present, the real and the imaginary, and the mortal and the eternal. They hint at the depths which they conceal and represent in these essays the interplay between the conscious and the subconscious and the need for both in constructing the self. In the presence of the statues, Hofmannsthal feels a sleep come over him lasting for just a few breaths that is closer to death than the normal long sleep of night (40). This again is a threshold situation. Hofmannsthal approaches in this brief dream the boundary of the self. He describes a condition in which he gains true insight into his own identity which, however, verges on a complete dissolution of that identity. Thus, it is a fullness of life threatened by the very real possibility of death. The statues he describes not as being present, but as being distant. They actively take him somewhere into a distant place irgendwohin ins Unendliche, (40). At the same time, he takes them with him daß ich sie wieder nicht eigentlich als Gegenständigem Staunen irgendwoher rufe... (40). Hofmannsthal is both active subject and passive object, crossing back and forth between these two states. This continual loss and gain of subjectivity he relates to memory, which is both sweet and frightening.


Hofmannsthal feels an affinity to the statues because they embody a completeness of depth whose surface does not stand as a barrier or a limitation, but as an entry point to a dimension or a world of the eternal lacking any limits. It is an inner eternity, an inner reality that is only accessible when one is willing to explore the limits of its boundaries.

Hofmannsthal encounters the eternal in the museum and not at the sites where one would expect eternity or timelessness to be readily evident. With this shift, the museum assumes the role of the modern temple. Robin Rhodes defines a temple as a nexus point between the mortal and the immortal.

The site of a temple is a monumental point of transition, a transition between god and human, and the temple is the appropriately monumental ritual, the bridge, that makes the meeting possible. On these sites humankind comes face to face with permanence, a confrontation that is not a comforting one. These points of spiritual transition smell not of cool rationality, but of emotion and dread. (Rhodes 19-20)

The Parthenon originally may have been an effort to inject reason into a chaotic world to control it through balance and order and reason. Rhodes calls it a cumulative reaction to [the emotional impact of nature], a human counterbalance, the other side of Ritual (24-26).
Parthenon in this respect is very different from the earlier temples of the Myceneans. Where the archaic, pre-Periclean sculptures emphasize emotion and dread through twisted and grotesque forms, the classical sculptures, which bring nature under control with mathematical precision. Such a place is supposed to be fixed with a sense of adamantine permanence (18). However, Hofmannsthal has exactly the opposite experience with them. He is disappointed by the ruined pillars of the Parthenon. Their decay signals to him the decay of the rational world that reason cannot hold up by itself forever. On the other hand, he is also repulsed by the serpentine three-headed statue from pre-classical times as an expression of the chaos and power of the completely irrational.

As a middle ground between the two is the modern museum. In it is room for both extremes of the rational and irrational. It becomes a reassertion of the order that the Parthenon sought to establish, while it also acknowledges the chaotic elements to some extent that existed prior to the Periclean temple. In its inner sanctum Hofmannsthal discovers the korai. They were both expressions of an ideal and as grave markers. As such, Rhodes believes they bridged the gap between the mortal and the immortal of individual men and women (Rhodes 8). The korai become a memorial a means for bringing present one who is absent. They are, according to Catherine Keesling, a permanent and visible reminder of the dedicator (Keesling xiii). They are clearly different from classical sculpture. They represent stylized ideal instead of a formal perfection. Yet they are also nothing like the demonic chaos represented in the three-headed serpent. They are somewhere in between. For Hofmannsthal they represent a synthesis of both.

Hofmannsthal finds in Greece intonations of timelessness surrounded by the evidence of Time's ultimate dominion. But in the museum, Hofmannsthal discovers within himself the ability to grasp the eternal and in so doing, learns of an essential element of his own identity and his own potential. If eternal timelessness can exist, then not it is in the endurance of any object: the irrefutable law of time is the constancy of change. Nothing will last forever unaffected by time. If
the Eternal exists, therefore, only in the momentary perception of the *Augenblick*. Eternity cannot be experienced except as it is created from moment to moment through the constitution of one’s own identity. This act of creation, however, only comes with the risk, and maybe even the necessity of becoming lost in one’s own creation. Nevertheless, Hofmannsthal recognizes the potential in these moments. He concludes his essays with a question: *Wenn das Unerreichliche sich speist aus meinem Innern und das Ewige aus mir seine Ewigkeit sich aufbaut, was ist dann noch zwischen der Gottheit und mir?* (42). For one open to the potential of the moment, the possibilities for creation are endless.

***

Hofmannsthal also struggles with modernism and its uncertainties in *Elektra*, in which he deals with some of the psychological conflicts and contradictions that were developing around him. But where Hofmannsthal in *Augenblicke in Griechenland* is able overcome some of those contradictions through acceptance of the very paradoxes that are at their core, Electra’s fragmented identity is destroyed by the contradictions about her. The play, written in 1903 and later turned into a Strauss opera, is a careful adaptation of Sophocles’ material. It examines the void left by the weakening patriarchal power structure and the role of women in a disintegrating society. As such, it comments not only on Hofmannsthal’s own Viennese society, but also addresses other more universal themes. Perhaps most important of these is the concept of loss and the modern world’s inability compensate for what is lost on a societal level as a result of progress.

Hofmannsthal’s *Elektra* begins with several servants drawing water from a well in the rear court of the palace of Agamemnon. They gossip about the crazed daughter of the house, Electra, who comes every evening at sundown to lament the death of her father at the hands of her mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus. Entirely consumed by her grief, Electra’s life has been taken over by the memory of her father and the need to avenge his death.
The servants announce that sundown is Electra’s hour—the time when she commemorates the death of her father at the hands of her mother and her mother’s lover. It is within this threshold hour as the day is dying in which the events of the play take place. For Electra, the threshold becomes therefore the site for mourning, remembering, and avenging. She is the keeper of her father’s memory, and this task has consumed all other aspects of her personality. As the one who remembers, Electra is faced with an impossible task. Jean Wilson says she exemplifies both the utter necessity and the sheer impossibility of the responsible project of remembering (Wilson 202). She is contrasted with her sister, Chrysothemis, who is also a prisoner of the house, but who, unlike Electra, longs for freedom so that she can marry and enjoy the fruits of motherhood. She insists to her sister that if she just give up her anger and let go of her sorrow—in essence forget the past—then all will be well. Her task of remembering is impossible because of the pain it generates for herself and for those around her. However, forgetting would be equally impossible because it would insure that the loss of the father would be a complete and irrevocable loss. Thus she can neither afford to remember, nor to forget, but must somehow, impossibly, negotiate the conflict between the two.

Hofmannsthal’s play differs from Sophocles in several significant ways, many of which determine the manner in which thresholds are employed in the setting. Hofmannsthal’s Elektra takes place entirely at the rear of the house belonging to Clytemnestra. The door opens on the back courtyard where the servants do their work and draw water. As in many other Hofmannsthal works, the scene begins with the setting of the sun. Both of these elements are in contrast to the Sophoclesian version of the drama, which takes place on the front steps of the palace and begins with the coming of dawn. Sophocles’ play also focuses more on the acts of Electra’s brother, Orestes, whereas Electra is the central figure for Hofmannsthal. The differences in focus and setting are closely related, conscious changes on Hofmannsthal’s part. Shifting the setting from the beginning to the end of the day, and from the front court to the rear court does
several things at once. The play takes on a retrospective or regressive mood rather than a progressive one. In Sophocles, the attitudes of Orestes and his servant are positive, full of hope and expectation, as would be signaled by the beginning of a new day. But in Hofmannsthal's version, Orestes plays only a minor role, and is overshadowed by Electra's dark negativism. Setting the play at sunset has a likewise negative effect, signaling the end of what was, with no real hope of improvement in the dark of the night. Further, displacing the action from the open front court to the confined rear court signals a similar change in the outlook of the play. Electra's options are much more limited than Orestes'. She is confined by walls of tradition and memory, and in the end, cannot hope for a satisfactory resolution to her conflict. This becomes a statement and maybe a prophecy for the modernism of the emerging twentieth century. Jacques Le Rider comments on the progression of the Electra material from Sophocles to Hofmannsthal and the influence that modernism and postmodernism had on Hofmannsthal's adaptation.

The first modernism, that of Hölderlin, set a woman, Antigone, against a corrupt, but still all-powerful male world. The Viennese (post)modernism of 1900, as represented by Hofmannsthal, finds no masculine role which is still worthy or capable of standing against Electra. The authoritarian world of Creon still had a certain coherence, in the world of Aegisthus, in the ruined palace of Agamemnon, Electra alone for the feeble Orestes is of small help to her must rebuild the whole house: masculine values have been swept away, but the utopia of matriarchy has been irreversibly discredited by the barbarity of Clytemnestra. The law of the father is abolished, and men seem incapable of resuming responsibility for the world order for which they were once chiefly answerable. (Le Rider Modernity and Crisis 155)

To develop his argument, Hofmannsthal makes use of the many psychological elements latent in the Electra material. The work may perhaps be interpreted as an experiment with the so-
called Electra complex, which was popularly seen as a female equivalent to Freud's well-known Oedipal complex. Freud describes the Oedipal complex as the developmental stage in which a young boy sees his father as a rival for the affection of his mother. However, Freud rejected the existence of the so-called electra-complex (Freud 24). Instead, he attempted to adapt his male processes of sexual identity for women. During the female version of the Oedipal complex, which is much more complicated for the young girl than it is for the young boy, the girl rejects her mother for not having supplied her with a penis and shifts her affection to her father, and later, therefore, transfers this affection to her husband or partner.\(^{19}\) The complexity of this mother-daughter relationship has a direct effect on the play. Elektra probes the fearful mystery of the ambivalent and violent relationship between daughter and mother. . . (Le Rider Modernity and Crisis 155). The processes both in Freud's analysis, and in Hofmannsthal's work take on a highly symbolic connotation, representative of many aspects of relation between men and women beyond the sexual base. Penis envy functions as a metaphor for any lack. In Elektra, all positive male influence is lacking, either from her murdered father or her absent brother. Also lacking is any sign that anyone besides Electra herself is aware of their absence. Children are also absent, and Electra's sister, Chrysothemis embodies this female desire for motherhood. Electra, however, because she sees her mother as the source of her want, has rejected any maternal possibility just as she has rejected her own mother.\(^{20}\)

Transference also plays a role in this work. Each supporting character becomes a projection of an aspect of Electra herself, or her desires. That is to say, each character is more important for what he or she represents than who he or she is. By Hofmannsthal's own admission, the self is itself nothing more than a metaphor (PII 83). Therefore, the characters in

\(^{19}\) That Freud reveals obvious sexist tendencies in his basic assumptions about the superiority of one sex over the other does not require further explanation here.
Electra are not merely characters, but symbolic figures with more than one referent, vehicles charged with a diverse freight of meanings (Martens 66). Even more overtly than in Märchen der 672. Nacht, each character represents a aspect of the main character that receives outward expression in another person. Therefore, Electra and Clytemnestra are seen to represent the past versus the present, Electra and Chrysothemis being versus becoming, and Electra and Orestes words versus deeds (66). These differences mark a boundary between the characters that distinguishes one from the other, but at the same time binds them together as well, not as individual subjects, but as manifestations of a single psyche.

Electra stands in reflection of her mirror projections mother, sister, brother, father that, if she were capable of assimilating or identifying with them, would enable her to form a complete individual. Yet, she is unable to do so. Memory is overpowering without the ability to forget just as forgetfulness is debilitating without memory. The same can be said of words/action (Orestes), etc. Electra is bound to her thresholds of time and space to the courtyard and her hour of sunset and is incapable of crossing over or moving freely through the others. Thus the threshold becomes an expressly negative space in this drama. Electra dies in apparent ecstasy and joy over the fulfillment of her desires, yet ironically apart from the celebration, release, or reunification with her brother and sister. Fragmented, she dies because she is no longer has a place in the new order.

The play is molded by spatial, temporal, and psychological thresholds and the spaces they create. Each space has to be viewed in the context of the interior/exterior/interior oppositions set up at the beginning of the drama. The courtyard in which the drama takes place is behind the palace; as a part of the palace grounds, it is enclosed on all four sides. On one side is the palace with its darkened doorway. On another is the row of servants quarters. On the third side is the

21 The exception is the side facing the audience, which becomes a threshold or a boundary in a very different sense.
gate leading to the outside from whence Orestes will come. The courtyard is thus an enclosed exterior that is neither truly inside nor outside. The real interior is reserved for the palace itself, and this is the place that Electra, of all the main characters, does not or cannot enter. She makes her first entrance on the stage from that door, but does not return. The palace is no longer the house of Agamemnon, although it may be said that his memory resides there, but rather the domain of the mother, Clytemnestra. From a psychological perspective, the doorway may be seen as the entryway through the vagina to the mother’s womb; it is a place that everyone in the work enters, with the exception of Electra herself. The house is the mother’s space. Electra is born out of it, but as the non-maternal female, she has rejected the mother in favor of the father’s memory. Perhaps because of this decision, Electra is incapable of acting on her own. She has forsaken her true power as a sexual being and a mother and is left with nothing but words to convince others her sister and her brother to act on her behalf. It is then somewhat ironic that she turns out to be, even in her impotence, the most powerful and most dominant person on the stage.

In his stage directions of the 1903 production, Hofmannsthal makes clear that the significance of the doorway/threshold and its emphasis on inner and outer space should be conveyed in the lighting: Das Innere des Hauses liegt zunächst ganz im Dunkel, Thür und Fenster wirken als unheimlich schwarze Höhlen. Further, the outer world beyond the gates the space belonging to Orestes was to be lit brighter than the courtyard that is Electra’s space.

Es ist ein Element der Stimmung, daß es in diesem traurigen Hinterhof finster ist, während es draußen in der Welt noch hell ist. In diesem offnen Thor erscheint die dunkle Gestalt des Orest. Alles spielt nun bei zunehmender Dunkelheit die Dauer des Stückes ist genau die Dauer einer langsamen Dämmerung bis die Vertraute erscheint, um Orest ins Haus zu rufen (97).

---

22 See Leonhard M. Fiedler’s Der Sturm Elektra (96)
It is significant that the action takes place within the twilight between sunset and the total
darkness of night. Electra exists not only spatially between two opposites, but temporally as well.
She is a transitional character incapable of completing that transition. Wilson links the middle
ground of prophecy to the power of words, so that language is the prophetic space that links the
past with the present. Elektra's lot has been to occupy the curious middle space of prophecy;
she operates in the wilderness territory between no longer and not yet; hers is a paradoxical
neither/nor existence (Wilson 197). One can compare this nicht mehr/noch nicht with
Celan's schon nicht mehr/immer noch in the Meridian speech, which is the space in which a
poem exists am Rande seiner Selbst (GWIII 197). Handke's concept of jetzt as the moment of
insight is also a similar idea. All three represent aspects of the individual as a part of and apart
from the modern world. The moment jetzt lies between past and presence, between potential
and realization. It becomes a threshold that must be navigated repeatedly.

Electra, however, is unable to navigate this threshold. Hofmannsthal wrote, Übergang
von der Prae-existenz zur Existenz: dies ist in jedem Übergang, jedem Tun. Das Tun setzt den
Übergang aus dem Bewußten zum Unbewußten voraus. Die Schwierigkeit der Tat für Elektra
(A 226). He clearly saw Electra's inability to act as an inability to transition or to cross over from
the conscious to the unconscious, just as Electra cannot enter the darkened palace. She must
remain a fragmented subject. As such she becomes an icon well suited to represent the modern
age.

. . .Hofmannsthal, when he penetrates through to the deepest levels and
redisCOVERS, beneath Sophocles, the previous, oriental stage of Hellenic culture,
brings us back to the archaic matriarchy described by Bachofen. . . .The force
opposed to Elektra is not the male world of law, but the terrifying Magna mater,
Clytemnestra. The invisible ghost of Agamemnon, murdered by this sanguinary
mother, obsesses conscience and memory. But it is the mother who rules. And
that rule knows no law, but follows the course of a blind and chaotic violence. (Le
Rider Modernity and Crisis 154)

It is possible that Hofmannsthal, as Le Rider would seem to suggest, that Hofmannsthal is commenting on the decline of a masculine/patriarchal world (i.e. the Habsburg Monarchy) and rejecting the matriarchal alternative as unsuitable. Electra is ultimately, despite her dominance, an impotent heroine. She fails in every aspect of her desire to get revenge against her mother, since it is through deeds, not words, that one is redeemed: nur der ist selig, der seine Tat zu tun kommt (D II 67). But this failure is in itself ironic. Hofmannsthal sums up her character by saying that Electra is no longer Electra, just because she has dedicated herself entirely to being Electra (qtd. in Hamburger 88). Thus, Electra's self-sacrifice or self-renunciation on one level is her self-fulfilment on another (Hamburger 88). Electra's tragedy lies in her inability to unite with her siblings or her mother, her psychic projections because she remains fixated on a single aspect of her persona revenge.

***

The final work I would like to discuss is Hofmannsthal's novel fragment, Andreas. It was written between 1908 and 1926, with the major portion of the existing chapter being written between 1912-1913. The novel was intended to be a Bildungsroman in the tradition of Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, with the fragmentation and reunification of the individual as its central theme. This gives it, although set in the late seventeenth century, a very modern feel. The narrative follows the journey of a young man, Andreas, who comes from a family recently raised to the

23Lois Cech points out the irony in Electra's failure, citing Electra's specific failures for achieving happiness: Rich is the irony when Electra has not touched Orestes, selig/wer ihn anrühren darf; has not given Orestes the axe, [selig] wer das Beil/ihm aus der Erde gräbt; has not held the torch, [selig] wer die Fackel/ihm hält; has not opened the door, [selig] wer die Tür ihm auftut; nor listened to the action, selig/wer an der Tür e horchen darf (Cech 383). The stage directions (Dramen II 68) make it clear that she has done none of these things; most importantly, she has not provided her brother with the axe with which to exact her revenge. Thus she has nothing to do with the death of her mother and remains an entirely passive observer.
minor nobility, from his home in Vienna through Carinthia (Kärnten) down to Venice. Early in his travels, Andreas is joined by the scandalous Gotthilff, who practically forces himself into the young man’s service. Together they come to the Farm estate of the Finazzer family, a place almost utopic in its romantic appeal and its oneness with its environment. While there, Andreas meets Romana, the daughter of the house, and falls immediately in love with her and begins to fantasize about a future in the country with Romana and their many children.

In the night, however, Gotthilff’s actions put an end to his dreams. Gotthilff rapes a servant girl and leaves her tied naked to the bed. Then he sets fire to the house and runs off with Andreas’ horse and half of his gold, which was sewn into the saddle. To make things worse, the horse which Gotthilff bought with Andreas’ money the day before turns out to have been stolen previously from the Finazzers, leaving Andreas without transportation and stuck in a very awkward situation.

In the completed portion of the text there are two significant passages that make overt use of threshold imagery. The first concerns Andreas’ relationship with Romana and his desires toward her. In the first night at the Finazzer household, Andreas is filled with desire for Romana. He arises and enters the hallway. He soon finds himself in front of Romana’s bedroom door. Andreas finds the door left ajar, as if she were inviting his entry. He fantasizes again of viele unschuldige feurige Umarmungen (E 143) and of the children that they will raise. As he silently enters the room, however, he is disappointed to find that one of the old servants is sharing the room with Romana. His intentions frustrated, he must escape as silently as possible.

Andreas is not ready at this stage of his development for a union with Romana. Preventing him is the memory of his own violent nature, which makes him for the moment incompatible with the Romana-ideal. In the night, he improperly violates a boundary by entering the bedroom. When he is unable to complete a union with Romana, he has to also leave her
Andreas Thomasberger shows how the mirror is related in Hofmannsthal to truth and fragmentation (5-6). Hofmannsthal writes: *Alle Wahrheiten, die formulierten und die nur dunkel gefühlten, verhalten sich zur Wahrheit wie die Trümmer eines Spiegels zu dem ganzen großen Spiegel: Sie sind dasselbe.* Further, in a letter to Edgar Karg von Bebenburg, 11 July, 1903, (qtd. in Thomasberger 7) Hofmannsthal writes: *geistige Vorgänge [. . .] kann man nur durch Vergleiche, durch Spiegelbilder des Naturlebens ausdrücken.*

Later that night Andreas falls into fitful dreams. In his dream, Romana runs before him in her peasant’s clothing, barefoot, through the streets of Vienna. She enters the Spiegelgasse, the mirror-alley near his parent’s home. Surrounded by people, she disappears into a house. He tries to follow, but is hindered from doing so by the intervening memories from his childhood. On the doorstep (that is, in the threshold) lies a miserable cat, whose back Andreas broke when he was a child.

“. . . vor der Tür, durch die er jetzt Romana nach mußte [lag] ein Wesen und setzte sich gegen ihn in Bewegung: es war die Katze, der er einmal mit einer Wagendeichsel das Rückgrat abgeschlagen hatte, und die so lange nicht hatte sterben können . . . Es hilft nichts, er muß über sie weg. (146)

Inside, he can hear Romana scream, but he cannot cross the doorway and get to her. She is unreachable. He wakes at dawn in the half-light, but before day.

For Andreas, the threshold can be a place of violence. The screams in his dream echo the real screams of the servant girl that woke him. The violent acts of his servant, Gotthilff reflect on Andreas, who can only think of the old saying *Wie der Herr so der Knecht* as the Master, so the servant (149). This suggests that Gotthilff is merely a projection of Andreas’ inner potential a potential now revealed to himself both in the form of the dream and the deeds of his alter-ego. Andreas must admit that he is not yet prepared for the happily ever after that he had envisioned.
for himself. Thus, Andreas arrives in Venice disillusioned, with very little money, too ashamed to return home and too poor to continue as he had planned.

In Venice, Andreas soon meets the wunderbare Freundin, as one of the fragments is subtitled. Prior to beginning work on Andreas, Hofmannsthal read Morton Prince’s The Dissociation of a Personality, a psychological study of an American woman with multiple personality disorder. This became the basis for the Maria/Mariquita character, and one of the proposed major premises for the entire book (Alewyn, 114). Maria and Mariquita are alternate personalities of the same woman. Maria is religious, restrained, introverted, and melancholy. She is also dignified and respectable. Mariquita, on the other hand, is none of these things. She is sensual and outgoing, liberated, yet held prisoner by her association with Maria. Andreas is drawn in different ways to both of them, yet the two personalities are completely incompatible with each other, and fight for control of their shared body.

If Romana represents the center point of his soul (E 159), Maria and Mariquita represent the extremes. Andreas knows that he is meant to return to Romana but not until he can do so as the same person, and as someone else (161). Romana is a balance of the two extremes represented in Maria/Mariquita. She has about her an air of naive, innocent sexuality but is at the same time fully aware of herself as a sexual person. She possesses a natural goodness. She runs about with bare feet, cares for the graves of her dead siblings, and is most at home in the natural setting of the fields and forests of the country estate. She represents an ideal of completeness for which Andreas is not yet ready. He must overcome his own fractured nature by resolving first his relationship with the even more literally fractured Maria/Mariquita.

Andreas’ second threshold experience comes the first time he meets Maria. All indications point to the scene as being central to the rest of the planned manuscript. As in Elektra and Ein Brief, this scene again highlights the contrasts between interior and exterior existence. The tone of the entire passage is introduced by this lack of time or this being outside of normally measured
time. Andreas has gone with Zorzi the painter to visit Nina, the oldest daughter of the household in which he is staying. As Zorzi prepares his introductions, the wait becomes extended and time begins to lose its meaning. Es verging nun eine Spanne Zeit, deren Dauer Andreas nicht hätte mit Sicherheit bestimmen können. Andreas wanders away and comes to an archway at the end of the lane. Leading from the arch he sees a narrow bridge crossing a canal to a small brick church. The arch and bridge separate the church from the rest of the scene. The bridge, church and plaza on which it stands are described as feeling deserted and lost der ganze Platz hatte etwas Verlorenes und Verlassenes (176).

The church itself has something of the temple/museum from Augenblicke in Griechenland about it. The entrance to the church does not seem to fit with the rest of the structure. It is framed by a marble colonnade, with an antique gable and an inscription (177). In other words, it resembles the entrance to a Greek temple. To enter, Andreas must part a curtain like the one in the museum that separates the sacred inner space from the outer world. The interior of the church is shrouded in holy twilight (178), and there in front of the altar, like the statue of Athena or the statues in Augenblicke, or the virgin Mary (or all of these together) is Maria. It is clear that she is suffering or struggling with some sort of inner turmoil. We learn from the notes that it is at the moment when she sees Andreas that the Mariquita half of her persona begins to come to the surface. Andreas turns to leave. But at the curtain blocking the doorway, he turns again and sees that what he thinks is a different woman has taken the mourning woman’s place. This new person fixes him with her eyes.

Er tat lautlos die wenigen Schritte, die ihn vom Ausgang trennten, und bestrebte sich, den Vorhang so wenig zu heben, daß kein Strahl vom grellen Licht hineindringend die heilige Dämmerung, in welcher er die Bekümmerte zurückließ, verstörte. Dabei ging sein Blick unwillkürlich noch zum Betstuhl zurück, und was
er nun wahrnahm, erstaunte ihn freilich so, daß er in den Falten des Vorhangs selber, und atemlos, stehenblieb (178).

His standing in this place between inside and outside is connected to her transformation. Maria becomes in this moment Mariquita. It is as if her own dualistic nature is triggered by his already well-established fragmented personality. For a brief instant, all four conflicting personalities are present there together. Clearly these are the two individuals to whom the subtitle die Vereinigten the unified ones refers.

Finally, the notes on possible continuations of Andreas and the suggestions that Hofmannsthal left behind indicate the further usage of thresholds in the story. The unfinished sections also made an impression on Paul Celan, as he made many markings in his copy of the book. A closer examination of some of the passages Celan highlighted provides a final insight into Hofmannsthal's use of thresholds and leads into a further discussion of Celan's work.

Andreas relation with Maria and with Sacramozo appears to be at the center of the unfinished sections. Together, the three form a bizarre love triangle in which each competes for the attention and affection of the others. Sacramozo, the Maltese knight, is for Andreas both a mentor and a rival. The knight is a philosopher and a poet, and as such helps Andreas to learn about himself. In their discussions, the two also discuss the role of poetry in life. The statements themselves are rather disconnected, but it seems clear that there is a relationship here between poetry, life, and memory. Several statements in Andreas that appear in relative proximity to each seem to comment on the role of thresholds in literature: Poesie hat es ganz und gar nicht mit der Natur zu tun. Die Durchdringung der Natur (des Lebens) beim Dichter ist Voraussetzung das Unmögliche ist das eigentliche Gebiet der Poesie Das Hohe erkennt man an den Übergängen. Alles Leben ist ein Übergang. (E 201). These passages are all marked by Celan. Poetic language is something to be penetrated and, when penetrated, allows the poet to overcome or
stop time. The penetration of time and the transcendence of it (Übergang) becomes the means by which the poet creates presence. In so doing, the poet discovers the godly or the eternal, and can comprehend unity. Hence, Sacramozo states überall ist Alles, aber nur im Augenblick (202). Penetrating into the Augenblick in turn is associated with memory.

Sacramozo beanstandet Wort und Begriff in die Tiefe dringen, man sollte es ersetzen durch gewahr werden sich erinnern . . . .Im Geistigen gibt es keine Stufen, nur Grade der Durchdringung. Der Geist ist ein Tun, vollkommen oder minder vollkommen. Sie halten die Welt an einem Teil auf, zu denken (202-3).

In many respects, Hofmannsthal’s work opens the way for Celan later in the century, and invite Celan to take Hofmannsthal’s ideas to the next logical level. Three Celan poems at least can be traced to Andreas. The first (with a double-underline in Celan’s copy) is a French phrase: pointe acérée de l infini (E 204), which becomes the title of Celan’s poem À la pointe acérée (GW I 251). The phrase means roughly upon a sharpened point. The phrase is originally a quote from Baudelaire: [. . .] il n est pas de pointe plus acérée que celle de l infini (there is no sharper barb than that of the infinite) (Schulz 209). By appropriating this quote, Otto Pöggeler argues that Celan takes his own stand on one of the basic questions of modernity.


Celan’s poem thereby becomes an even sharper barb than either Baudelaire or Hofmannsthal could have imagined.
The other two are Solve (GW II 82) and Coagula (GW II 83). Together the two terms represent opposing phases in the alchemical process (Olssen 269). Hofmannsthal calls them the universale Lösemittel and the universale Bindemittel and sees in them representations of love and life and the ability to resolve a moment of higher existence out of the two: den Moment aufopfern für das daraus herzustellende Höhere, Reinere, dieses Höhere, Reinere zu fixieren (E 237). So the higher, more pure moments of life and love have to be freed dissolved from the everyday, and then they need to be fixated to be preserved, by means of the coagulant. The irony of this formulation is that in the fixing, that which one seeks to hold is again lost through that very attempt. Celan’s poems that bear the titles Solve and Coagula suggest that Solve may have something to do with language and the unspeakable in language grave trees set afloat set free in a river of unspeakable names and hidden writings. Coagula resolves a single name out of that river and fixes it in the poem: Rosa. It is a reference to Rosa Luxemburg. The poem mentions several specific items that have meaning in the context of her murder.25 In Hofmannsthal’s words, she is perhaps the moment of something higher and more refined in the eyes of Celan’s poem.

These passages give us a great deal of insight into Hofmannsthal’s views on art and poetry as a means of accessing deeper levels of thought and understanding. He shared with Celan an interest in dreams as a window to another world. David Miles explains how his literature occupies a middle ground between these two worlds.

Hofmannsthal conceived his own art, of the poetic image in particular, as arising precisely at that point where the world without the world of the mirror impinged upon the world within that of the dream. Existing on the borderline between sight and insight, the real and the symbolic, the immanent and the transcendent,

25 Anders Olsson gives a more detailed interpretation of both of these poems, explaining many of the hidden references as they pertain both to Rosa Luxemburg and to alchemy.
Hofmannsthal's image forms his entire aesthetic. . . . The key to this conjunction of two worlds in one image lies above all in the phenomenon of memory. Again and again Hofmannsthal likens memory to a world that is of reality and yet also somehow beyond it, much like the world of dreams. (Miles 13-14)

Accessing the dreamworld or the world of memory is accomplished by stepping out of the flow of time and into the timelessness of the Augenblick. For a brief moment, one may be able to catch a glimpse into the eternal and perhaps return with a small piece of it. His works are an exercise in crossing and re-crossing the social, psychological, linguistic, and spiritual borders that defined his world.

The interrelationship of ideas throughout of Hofmannsthal's works suggests a deeper significance in all of them. Both Hofmannsthal and Celan confront the abyss of modernity in surprisingly similar ways given their apparent dissimilarities. Hofmannsthal raises questions about the nature of language and about the individual's relationship to the world that will become popular with writers and philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Franz Kafka, Peter Handke, Paul Celan, and many others throughout the twentieth century. Thus, the crises that so many critics attribute to Hofmannsthal's own writing does not, in fact, represent a serious conflict in himself, but foretells a crisis which will confront an entire epoch of writers.

Hofmannsthal was not alone at the turn of the century in his interest in thresholds and borders. Many of his contemporaries worked with similar themes. What separates Hofmannsthal from other writers of his time is his awareness of the costs of transgressing certain borders.

Unlike such authors as Proust, Rilke, Joyce, and Mann, who are largely concerned with seeking out timeless realms of human experience and with creating temporal stasis within their works in order to refute time's flow, Hofmannsthal is much
more concerned with the tragic situations that arise when one admits that time, with its ineluctable dimensions of hoping and remembering is an inescapable fact of life, no matter how much one may theorize about transcending it. (Miles 70)

Thus, memory becomes one mechanism by which the dialectic of time and timelessness can coexist. For Hofmannsthal, however, neither memory, as a representation of the past, nor the *Augenblick* of the present are places in which one can dwell permanently. Rather, truly poetic existence can only come about through a constant crossing and re-crossing of the borders between past and present.
Like Hofmannsthal, Paul Celan employs thresholds to create a literary space that challenges the reader's perception of memory, life and death, and of language itself. But where Hofmannsthal is able to describe many of the issues that will come to dominate German literature in the twentieth century, Celan presses the issues to their final extreme. Hofmannsthal, for example describes a growing ineffectiveness of language available to him. In contrast, Celan pushes language at times beyond the point of comprehensibility in order to rediscover a language that can again be effective. In this situation, the threshold becomes the space between the two extremes represented by truly meaningful poetic speech on the one side, and utter speechlessness on the other. In it, each can coexist without canceling the other out.

The Holocaust, ever-present in the background of all of Celan's poetry, is the driving force behind many of Celan's innovations. In his 1958 speech upon receiving the literary prize for the city of Bremen, Celan describes the effect the Holocaust had on his approach to poetry. Even before the war, however, literature and poetry already figured prominently in his life before the war. Celan was born in 1920 on the eastern frontier of the old Habsburg empire in the Bukovina province on the border between present-day Romania and the Ukraine. It is itself a threshold region not only in that it is situated between east and west, but also in that it is quite literally Celan's utopia. It is place that no longer exists. In his poetry, the threshold often describes a location outside the normal limits of space and time. In so doing, they harken back to this lost utopia. The city in which he was born, Czernowitz, was home to a German-speaking Jewish community, and also a rich linguistic heritage of Romanian, Ukrainian and Yiddish literature.
In addition to Celan, Emil Franzos, and Rose Ausländer, Dietmar Goltschnigg lists more than fifteen writers from the Bukovina (9).

Celan describes it in the Bremen Address as a place with a rich literary heritage: es war eine Gegend, in der Menschen und Bücher lebten (GWIII,185).¹

However vibrant the literary community was, it nevertheless remained isolated from the geographic and literary-cultural center of German society. This distance was made even greater by the events of 1933 to 1945. Celan struggles to even give a name to this period: Das Erreichbare, fern genug, das zu Erreichende hieß Wien. Sie wissen, wie es dann durch Jahre auch um diese Erreichbarkeit bestellt war (185). Celan either cannot or will not give a name to the atrocities of the Holocaust. Instead, he couches his words in negative euphemisms, evasions, and circumlocutions. In doing so, however, he strikes at the heart of the problem. The Nazi past robbed Celan of his home, his family and his future. All that remained was his language, but even this could not survive untouched.

sie [the German language] mußte nun hindurchgehen durch ihre eigenen Antwortlosigkeiten, hindurchgehen durch furchtbares Verstummen, hindurchgehen durch die tausend Finsternisse todbringender Rede. Sie ging hindurch und gab keine Worte her für das, was geschah; aber sie ging durch dieses Geschehen. Ging hindurch und durfte wieder zutage treten, angereichert von all dem. (186)

Here, Celan expresses one of the primary paradoxes of his writing. The very language that is his only tool to come to terms with these unspeakable crimes is the property of the perpetrators of those crimes. Celan has no choice but to find a way to appropriate for his own purposes a language that he sees as fundamentally corrupted. The term angereichert, because it refers both to the enriching and the purification of ores, suggests a similar process that happened with

¹In addition to Celan, Emil Franzos, and Rose Ausländer, Dietmar Goltschnigg lists more than fifteen writers from the Bukovina (9).
language as a result of the Holocaust. Celan was conscious of the damage the Holocaust had done to the German language and the need for its renewal. His language therefore seeks to be mindful of the past and yet in some way free from it. He could only use such all-inclusive phrases as that which happened to refer to the tragedies of the past. However, Celan infuses such phrases with new life so that in their very austerity they become more effective and more accurate than even the most detailed descriptions could be.

Celan wrote at a turning-point in the history of German lyric poetry. As Jean Firges points out, the traditional forms had no words to express the horrors of the Third Reich:

Das Unaussprechliche der Greuel und Gewalttaten des Dritten Reiches kann nicht in der überkommenen poetischen Sprache gesagt werden. Es muß eine neue poetische Sprache gefunden werden, und Celan unterzieht sich dieser einsamen und mühevollen Innovationsarbeit. Das geht nicht ohne Dekonstruktion der traditionellen rhetorischen und poetischen Stilformen. (8)

This quote is in many ways just a repetition of what Celan himself says in the Bremen speech combined with Adorno’s much misused statement about a poem after Auschwitz being barbaric. What is striking about what Firges says, however, is that Celan consciously undertook an Innovationsarbeit. Celan brought a new perspective to the German language. With the exception of a brief period in Austria after the war, Celan never lived where German was the language of the predominant culture. He was constantly surrounded by linguistic influences that would both enrich his vocabulary and distance it from standard German. This factor alone would make Celan’s own personal dialect difficult to understand. When combined with its efforts to recover a part of the German language not tainted by its Nazi past, however, Celan’s writings become, as Adrian Del Caro puts it, introspective to the point of being enigmatic, even alienating. (Paul
Celan 17). Celan changed the face of German lyric poetry gave it a new direction and a new focus. Every German poet after Celan has at his or her disposal the poetic language he created and each will be measured against the standard he set.

Thresholds in Celan’s writings appear in a number of different forms. They address many different concepts that interact and reinforce each other as they deal with some of the central issues in Celan’s works. Most of them arise from the various conflicts that arose as a result of das, was geschah. Amy Colin describes Celan’s work as an untiring struggle to create out of his German mother tongue, which had gone through the thousand darknesses of murderous speech, a valid means of responding to the Holocaust [. . . .The poems] reflect a survivor’s desperate attempt to articulate, in the language of those who murdered his people, his experience of the catastrophe (Colin ix).

Language, specifically the gap between speech and silence, forms therefore one of the primary threshold regions in Celan’s work. Writing was his way of working through his emotions about what had happened. As he writes, memories come to the surface in his poems. They confront the desire to forget the pain of the past with the need to remember. Accordingly, the threshold between remembering and forgetting also becomes an important threshold region. But memory for Celan also meant remembering the dead and holding their lives present in memory. In this way, poetic speech and memory become the means for Celan to explore the boundaries between life and death and perhaps reconnect with those who have passed on.

Each of these thresholds offers Celan the possibility, however small, of connecting with another who could possibly relate to him and perhaps understand. He compares a poem to a message in a bottle:
Das Gedicht kann, da es ja eine Erscheinungsform der Sprache und damit seinem Wesen nach dialogisch ist, eine Flaschenpost sein, aufgegeben in dem gewiß nicht immer hoffnungsstarken Glauben, sie könnte irgendwo und irgendwann an Land gespült werden, an Herzland vielleicht. Gedichte sind auch in dieser Weise unterwegs: sie halten auf etwas zu. (GWIII 186)

In many poems, Celan will describe a utopic space where an Ich and a Du can meet and interact. This space is often unreal, being nördlich der Zukunft, or jenseits der Menschen. Yet it is the place where the gap between Ich and Du is overcome, and in the process of overcoming this gap, his utopic thresholds assume reality. Celan describes his writing as an attempt to grasp or create reality (ein Versuch, [. . .] Wirklichkeit zu entwerfen).

Thus, the realities that Celan sought to create work to overcome the paradoxes inherent in his past, his origins, and his language. His work attempts to resolve often unsuccessfully a contradiction of opposites. It has to close the gap between opposites and show how they compliment each other or illustrate how the difference between them ultimately dissolves. The threshold functions so well as a metaphor in these situations because it becomes a means of providing a space between apparent opposites or contradictions, revealing them as interrelated and interdependent concepts. In this chapter, I will show how Celan uses threshold imagery to map out the conflict between life and death, between dreaming, sleeping and waking, between remembering and forgetting, between speech and silence, and finally between Ich and Du.

Because he takes language to its extremes, his poetry demands a very careful reading. Bianca Rosenthal comments that no real end is in sight to the controversies over Celan’s work because his many-faceted texts constantly give rise to new readings and new interpretations (167). Like others, Rosenthal labels his poetry as hermetic (170). Yet Celan consistently
refuted this designation (Lyon 171), and admonished that the reader should just read the poems and understanding would come of itself: das Verständnis kommt von selbst (Chalfen, 7). Celan leaves it ambiguous whether the poems themselves are understandable and that everything the reader needs is provided within the text of the poem, or if he means to say that the interpretation the reader provides was the source understanding. Lyon argues that Celan’s comments about the non-hermetic readability of his poems is essentially true. He concludes, however, that as a reader of Celan’s poetry one must know much, read much and to be ready in the end to acknowledge his poems as indeterminate, open creations, for which every possibility of an absolute interpretation would be entirely foreign (189). Lyon also suggests that Celan’s poetry must be explored on a number of levels in order to come to a better understanding of it (172).

The reader must also consider, as Joachim Seng points out, that each poem derives meaning from its context within the cycles of the individual volumes (11). They each participate as part of a larger dynamic, interacting with the poems that precede it and those that come after.

In this chapter, I have endeavored to approach Celan’s poems from as many different perspectives as possible. I have found it useful to examine Celan’s poems with respect to the constellations of words within them. That is, many poems and terms within the poems become more comprehensible when viewed in relation to similar poems.

Every one of Celan’s poems functions on multiple levels. Two of his best-known poems, Todesfuge and Engführung directly illustrate the multivalent thematic structure that is perhaps less apparent, but nevertheless present in nearly all of his poems. On the surface, Engführung would appear to fit well in an examination of thresholds in literature. One might assume it describes some sort of narrow passageway: a choke point between two more open spaces. It recalls Celan’s Bremen address, where he describes a landscape in which language and
literature had to pass through a narrowing furchtbares Verstummen of the Holocaust (GWIII, 186), before it could emerge on the other side.

Although the term Engführung may suggest this process of passing through, the term in fact comes from music theory and refers to the compounding of musical themes one on top of the other much like in a fugue. Todesfuge and Engführung clearly demonstrate this approach to poetic writing. In each, Celan proceeds musically, introducing first one idea, one theme, and then another and another until they all form a unified, yet multi-faceted whole. Celan uses this system of overlapping themes throughout his work, so that there is a constant interaction between the poems. In my discussion of Celan’s poetry, I take much the same approach. This chapter will explore how the thresholds in Celan’s poetry function within the complex of imagery and give depth to his work as a whole. Proceeding from one theme to the next, each section shows how the threshold functions in a bridging capacity, drawing the opposites together while still maintaining the distance between them. As each new theme is introduced, I will show how it interacts with the others, forming a complex tapestry of ideas, each of which lends meaning and significance to Celan’s work in general.

Death and Life

While Celan’s attempts to come to terms with death unarguably inform all of his writing, it is seldom possible to define a single poem as a Holocaust poem, or even just a poem about death. His Todesfuge illustrates what Amy Colin calls the double bind of his work (45). The poem is beautiful, and yet, perhaps because of its beauty, intensely horrifying. The poem is not simply about the Holocaust or rather, it is not a simple poem about the Holocaust it also participates in the body of German literature that precedes it. It is an remarkably aesthetic poem.

2See the footnote of the Tübinger Ausgabe of Sprachgitter, 88.
But as Del Caro points out, one must be careful not to negate the pain of the poem by concentrating on its aesthetics. One often fixates on the aesthetic, or perceived aesthetic dimensions of the poems, effectively silencing them despite Celan’s anguished screams (3).

The Holocaust hides in the shadows of all of Celan’s work. In his 1961 Büchner Prize address, Der Meridian, Celan argues that all modern poems are bound to the historical context in which they were created: Vielleicht ist das Neue an den Gedichten, die heute geschrieben werden, gerade dies: daß hier am deutlichsten versucht wird, solcher Daten eingedenk zu bleiben? Marlies Janz points out that Celan is referring here specifically to the 20th of January, the date on which the Final Solution to the Jewish Problem was worked out at the Wannsee Conference in 1942 (105).

But even though the Holocaust, especially as it relates to the death of his mother, occupies many of Celan’s early poems, he dealt with death in other forms as well. Centrally located in Von Schwelle zu Schwelle is a poem dealing with the death of Celan’s first son. The volume is dedicated to his wife, Gisèle Lestrange, making it one of only a few dedicated works in his Syre. Celan commented also that the volume took shape as a result of the death of their first son François (Pöggeler, Textgenese 192). It seems therefore logical to assume that the Du in many of the poems in this volume could refer either to his wife Gisèle or to their son, as is the case in Grabschrift für François. The poem illustrates the multiple thematic layers typical of Celan’s writing. Specifically, it portrays birth and death as threshold passages into other realms of darkness. As it does so, it touches on a number of the themes common to many of Celan’s threshold poems.

---

3 Espenbaum, Sie, Der Reisekamerad, and Chanson einer Dame im Schatten are just a few examples.
Die beiden Türen der Welt stehen offen: geöffnet von dir in der Zwienacht. Wir hören sie schlagen und schlagen und tragen das Ungewisse, und tragen das Grün in dein Immer.

Oktober 1953 (GW1, 105)

Grabschrift für François begins with a pair of doors that have been opened. The title of the poem suggests that it is the son of the author who does the opening. The two doors of the world that mark the child’s entrance into mortal life and his passage back out of it, are very close together. The poem creates a triple threshold in which our reality is but a passageway between the two uncertainties beyond birth and death. The child opens the doors in der Zwienacht, perhaps best translated as in the twi-night. Klaus Manger gives three possible interpretations of this neologism. He points to the dualism of the prefix zwie that always creates a difference between two opposite sides. Therefore the Zwienacht could be two nights bordering a single day, or it could be a single night that acquires different meanings from its past and its future, or it could refer to a night for two, for a pair that shares the night, as in the parents that share the grief over their lost child (Manger, 370).

Zwienacht also plays on the word Zwielicht, or twilight. But where twilight describes the half light of either sunrise or sunset, twi-night emphasizes the half-darkness of the same time. Thus, as Manger states, it becomes the opposing element of traditional twilight. It parallels the half light illuminating the threshold between light and darkness. However, the prefix zwie, or two, also implies a darkness emanating from two sources, here from the doors of birth and death. The darkness is the unknown beyond the parents’ sphere of experience. The Zwienacht therefore
represents both a spatial and temporal threshold that marked the life and death of the newborn child.

This poem confronts the uncertainty of what lies beyond this life and mourns the parents' inability to be with their son. It is, in the end, a poem about death and coming to terms with it. We speak of someone who has died as having passed away, as if the person had gone somewhere else, somewhere inaccessible to the living. Because we do not understand and cannot explain death, we affix terminology to it that links it with birth and that often relies on threshold imagery. The act of crossing over occupies a major portion of our mythology. The most significant element of birth and death is that they are a fundamental part of everyone's existence. They are universal to the human experience. The child briefly opens the doors of life, only to have them both shut again almost immediately. Wir hören sie schlagen und schlagen, the repetition of the closing creates both a visual and an audible image of both doors closing forever. It reiterates the finality of the action and ensures the ambiguity of what lies beyond in either direction. The act of closing reminds the reader of the transitory nature and the immediacy of one's mortal existence of one's momentary existence in the present.

Although the poem focuses on the death of a single child, it also relates to Celan's efforts to deal with death in general. The child crosses over from life to death, reminding the poet of his position between them. But the open doors may allow for others to come through as well. Even though there is no direct reference to the Holocaust in this poem, the death of his son would have reminded the poet of the other deaths he has faced, especially his parents' deaths in the concentration camps, tearing open the old wounds of the past. But it is unclear if this new tragedy would make the past easier or more difficult to deal with. Because the doors close almost
as quickly as they open, they leave little opportunity to see what lies beyond or to touch those who have already crossed over.

Despite the prevailing dark feel of the poem, the final two lines offer a thin ray of hope to its otherwise hopeless tone. Klaus Manger comments on Celan’s play on the word *Immergrün* (372). But where Manger argues the image of the evergreen tree only promises an enduring memory, one could conclude that Celan is searching for evidence of something more. Evergreens have come to be associated with Christmas, and with the birth, resurrection and eternal life of Christ. It suggests that Celan is reaching for a hope of a life beyond this one. While Celan certainly had a dubious relationship with any concept of heaven, this poem suggests at least a desire a wish for it to exist. He would like to hope that there is a place where both his son and his mother wait for him. If there is a green place where the dead can continue to exist for Celan, however, it is most likely, as Manger suggests, in the lives and memories of the living. The we of the poem, the father and mother, must carry forever in their memories both the uncertainty and the hopeful greenness. The poem is a *Grabschrift*, an epitaph written on a gravestone. This makes it both an act of language and an act of memory. The poem stands as a memorial to Celan’s son, a way of immortalizing him in writing. It is a means of holding the child in memory.

*Grabschrift* is the first poem of the cycle *Mit wechselndem Schlüssel*, (With a variable key) and begins the process of explaining the function of those keys. In the poem *Mit wechselndem Schlüssel*, the various or changing keys open the house in which the snow of the silenced ones is found. The keys are related to blood and pain, but also to words, suggesting a relationship between speech/silence and violence. *Grabschrift für François*, like *Mit wechselndem Schlüssel*, illustrates the relation between death, pain, memory and language especially translated language. The *tragen* of the final two lines is reminiscent of
übertragen, or translation. In German, the word suggests a literal carrying over from one language to another. In the poem, both the greenness and the uncertainty are carried over into the child’s immer (forever). So there is a sense of translating and a sense that something is lost in that translation.

The poem offers two possible activities surrounding the threshold: One can cross over it, or one can linger within it. In this poem, both actions are present. The child passes through both doors of the world across the thresholds of birth and death. It suggests birth as the ultimate threshold experience of life. An infant passing out of the birth canal an extreme Engführung perhaps into life and consciousness. The infant leaves an interior space, defined by confinement and darkness, goes through the ordeal of birth and comes into a world of light and space. Despite what we know about the biology and science of procreation, there is still a great deal of wonder surrounding it. In a sense, the baby comes from nowhere. It is an interior life made exterior.

Death is in some respects a reversal of this process, although it is much less understood. Even as the child passes through, the parents linger in between. Thus, the mortal existence becomes itself a mere threshold instant holding apart the two unknowns beyond. The child passes from one threshold to the other almost immediately. In describing this event, the poem gives depth to the thresholds of the title of the volume in which it appears. It suggests some possibilities about what the thresholds refer to. The theme is repeated in other poems of the cycle in which the von X-zu X construct appears in the context of life and death and crossing over. One such poem in which the doubled threshold appears in the title is Von Dunkel zu Dunkel.

**VON DUNKEL ZU DUNKEL**

Du schlugst die Augen auf ich seh mein Dunkel leben.
Ich seh ihm auf den Grund:

-90-
In this poem, as in Grabschrift für François, there is a close, interwoven relationship between life and death. The repeated darkesses in the title of this poem also represent thresholds through their parallel structure with Von Schwelle zu Schwelle. The paired darkesses also recall the twin doors and the darkesses radiating from them in Grabschrift für François. In both, the darkness as a depiction of death also has an element of life to it. Seen even in its most fundamental nature auf den Grund the darkness still lives. This poem also makes use of a combination of other threshold aspects. In addition to the life/death complex, it also explores the relation of life and death to dreaming and waking. It also deals with the role dreaming plays in the language, as seen in the ferry imagery of the final line. I will discuss this poem in the context of the relation between death and language through translation in more detail later in the chapter.

Here, however, I wish to focus on the way the poem explores the boundary between life and death. The imagery in this poem points toward both. It is in constant tension with itself, which is created in part by the tension between the grammatical elements. The verbs of the first stanza are about life and waking: the eyes open, the Ich sees, the darkness lives. The verbs stand in contrast to the repeated darkness in the title and the doubtful questions and the almost melancholy resignation to life in the second stanza.

A Du the other opens its eyes. Doing so presupposes that the eyes were previously closed, suggesting either death, or its metaphorical equivalent, sleeping. The open eyes, however, enable the Ich of the poem to see the vitality of his own darkness. Dunkel, most commonly an adjective in German, is given here the weight of a noun. In addition, the darkness itself,
something more often associated with the idea of death or sleep, has life. It is a phrase reminiscent of the black milk in *Todesfuge* that juxtaposed life-sustaining milk with black death and ashes of Auschwitz.

Taking the darkness in the title as thresholds parallel to those in *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle* and the related dual thresholds in *Grabschrift für François*, the darkness may also represent a passageway into and out of life. The third line reestablishes ownership of the darkness and repeats the fact that it lives. But living death is a contradiction in terms. The *Ich* takes possession of the darkness: auch da ists mein und lebt. All aspects of living, being, and dying have a part in the darkness. It is unlikely that *Von Dunkel zu Dunkel* refers literally to the life of an individual as is the case in *Grabschrift*. Rather, there is something living that passes between the *Ich* and the *Du*. However, viewed within the context of the other poems, more possibilities open up and must be considered. What is it that dies and what lives on? What kind of life does the *Ich* see in the darkness? The poem leaves these questions largely unanswered. The second stanza turns away from the dubious certainty of the first lines. Celan asks here if it is possible to formulate words about (his) darkness that approach its most elemental form. Will the darkness awake and have life after he has expressed it, or will the words die unread or uncomprehended on the page? There is uncertainty about the ability of poetic language (or language in any form) to translate to come across from one person to the other.

Out of this uncertainty arises a gap between the *Ich* and the *Du*, which also functions as a threshold in this poem. The questions of the second stanza imply that there is doubt that the other, the *Du*, will ever receive the message. Celan suggests much the same idea with his *Flaschenpost* analogy in the Bremen address (GWIII, 186), in which there is only a slim
chance but a chance nonetheless that a message set adrift will ever wash up on a receptive shore. Celan’s language is dark, but it lives as long as the Ich can possess it.

The ferryman of the final line most immediately suggests Charon, the ferryman on the river Styx, who carries the dead over (setzt-über) into Hades. With this reference, Celan makes it clear that he is not only writing about something dying in the transferral of language, but also about death itself. This relationship between sleep and death and language is developed further in Dein vom Wachen (GW II, 24), which parallels a number of images found in Von Dunkel zu Dunkel. As in Von Dunkel zu Dunkel, Celan uses the image of the ferry in conjunction with the inverted setzt-über to combine the ideas of language (in this case the written or read language) with death.

Still, the initial image of the poem, the element that introduces a threshold into the poem is the concept of dreaming and waking from the dream. It is odd that the dream itself causes the waking. It creates something of a paradox since the dream is only possible while the dreamer remains asleep. On the other hand, the dream as a portion of the subconscious and therefore not under our control the way waking thoughts are is only accessible when it occurs at that border region between sleeping and waking.

Dreaming, Sleeping, and Waking

What kind of reality do dreams represent? If Celan’s poetry in fact is ein versuch, Wirklichkeit zu entwerfen (GWIII 186), then how did Celan understand this reality and how do we access it? Although the answers are never readily forthcoming, the poem Im Spätrot helps to strengthen the relationship between sleep, death, and language. By occupying the threshold between the conscious and the subconscious, the world of dreams becomes the space where the
There are a number of striking similarities between Celan’s *Im Spätrot* and C.F. Meyer’s *Im Spätboot*. Meyer’s poem also deals with the intersection between dream and death. The correspondences merit further investigation.

Im Spätrot

Im Spätrot schlafen die Namen:
einen
weckt deine Nacht
und führt ihn, mit weißen Stäben entlang-
tastend am Südwall des Herzens,
unter die Pinien:
eine, von menschlichem Wuchs,
schreitet zur Töpferstadt hin,
wo der Regen einkehrt als Freund
einer Meeresstunde.
Im Blau
spricht sie ein schattenverheißendes Baumwort,
und deiner Liebe Namen
zählt seine Silben hinzu.

The title of the poem *Im Spätrot* offers yet another version of a threshold, this time, a chronological one. It suggests the last hint of light at sundown. The late red is the absolute end of the day before it turns to night. The space created exists, therefore, more in time than in temporal space. The poem is the second in *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle*, and consists of a single stanza composed of 14 lines and two complete sentences. In the late red of sundown, the names sleep: your night wakes one of the names and leads it along the south wall of the heart tapping and feeling out the way with blind man’s canes. The opening lines of this poem establish its surrealistic, dreamlike tone. In the process, it develops the relationship between dreaming and remembering. It exists on the border between the conscious and the subconscious. Walter

---

4There are a number of striking similarities between Celan’s *Im Spätrot* and C.F. Meyer’s *Im Spätboot*. Meyer’s poem also deals with the intersection between dream and death. The correspondences merit further investigation.
Benjamin explains how this region between waking and sleeping is particularly important for defining a reality that partakes of both:

Denn nur vom anderen Ufer, von dem hellen Tage aus, darf Traum aus überlegener Erinnerung angesprochen werden. Dieses Jenseits vom Traum ist nur in einer Reinigung erreichbar, die dem Waschen analog, jedoch gänzlich von ihm verschieden ist. Sie geht durch den Magen. Der Nüchterne spricht vom Traum, als spräche er aus dem Schlaf. (Benjamin IV 86)

Benjamin's use of river imagery describes a dream world that resonates in a number of Celan's poems, such as In den Flüssen, discussed later. Winfried Menninghaus comments that Benjamin is concerned in his discussion not with eliminating the threshold between dream and reality, but with the appropriation of dream images in the conscious mind jenseits vom Traum (42). The moment between sleeping and waking in both Benjamin and Celan becomes a moment for generating and preserving memory. A dream is only perceived in consciousness as a memory, not the dream itself. It has to be viewed von dem hellen Tage aus.

The line unter die Pinien appears to begin a new idea, even though it is still part of the first sentence. It further locates the meeting place of the Ich and the Du under the pines. Notice here that the prepositional phrase unter die Pinien is accusative it indicates a continuation of the motion begun in the previous line. Immediately after the pines follows a colon. This marks the end of the first section and the beginning of the next. It is parallel in structure to the earlier colon preceding the masculine einen. Here, the feminine eine follows the colon, completing a male-female encounter within the time and space of the poem.
The poem includes a torrent of pronouns that resist any effort to unravel them. The one, being feminine, likely refers back to one of the pines, which has a person's size. This pine steps forward to the potter's city. Jean Firges sees the potter as a creator, and points to biblical sources. Der Töpfer, der aus einem Klumpen Lehm eine perfekte Form knetet, ist schon im Alten Testament ein Bild für den Schöpfer, der den Menschen aus Erde schuf (68). Firges refers to a passage from the poem Assisi that mentions a potter's hand. If there is indeed a connection between that poem and this one, then the potter's city refers to St. Francis's Assisi in Umbria, or more generally, the city of the creator, perhaps Jerusalem in the Holy Land. By extension, it becomes a place of creation, the space or topos of the poem itself. There is, however another possibility. The Töpferstadt calls to mind a room full of urns on display at the Buchenwald concentration camp, which were sold to the families of the victims after their death. The trees of the poem also point to some parallelism with the Buchen which gave the concentration camp its name. Such a city suggests a darker possibility for the potter. The existence of both possibilities in the same poem reveals its constructive/destructive dichotomy of the interaction between dream and reality. In this potter's city, the rain comes in as a friend of an ocean hour. With the word Meeresstunde, Celan creates a catachrestic dimension that exists precisely neither in time nor in space. As such, it would be another utopic threshold a no-place in which the poem exists with its own set of realities.

In the image Celan warps reality. The hour can speak, and it speaks im Blau in the blue, not out of the blue, as the English phrase goes, but from within the blue of the sea. The blue stands in contrast to the red of the evening. There are three colors listed specifically: red, 

5 von menschlichem Wuchs = from/of a human growth could either mean it is humanoid in appearance or the size of a human. The second seems the most logical.
white, and blue. There is a marked progression from one color to the next especially from the late red of sunset to the deep blue of night an hour later. The *Im Blau*, as Peter Horn points out, parallels both thematically and structurally the *Im Spätrot* of the title (372). The day has passed over into night. The blue also suggests the depth of the sea, and as with Hofmannsthal’s deep wells, these depths become the subconscious depths of the soul.

In the second sentence, the role of language assumes dominance as the creative act. The subject *sie* refers back to one of the feminine antecedents of the first sentence most likely the pine tree, since it speaks a shadow-promising treeword (*ein schattenverheißendes Baumwort*). Celan often used anthropomorphized trees to represent the dead. In *Landschaft*, for example, he calls poplar trees *people of this earth*:

*Landschaft*

> Ihr hohen Pappeln Menschen dieser Erde!
> Ihr Schwarzen Teiche Glück ihr spiegelt sie zu Tode!

> Ich sah dich, Schwester, stehn in diesem Glanze. (GW I, 74)

Celan associates the reflection of the poplar tree in the pond with the memory of his dead sister. A poplar tree is likewise juxtaposed with water and loss in *Ich hörte sagen*. The female pine that speaks in *Im Spätrot* likely refers to the memory of a female family member who has passed away. The speaking is accompanied by the act of counting, or adding. The verb *zählen* is conjugated here in the present singular, but there seems to be no good candidate for the subject. Love is declined (*deiner Liebe*) in the dative. Johann Firges transliterates the line so that it becomes *Namen der Liebe* (140). Thus, the *Namen* which recall the masculine name wakened at the beginning of the poem add their syllables to the words of love spoken by the female other.

If, as Horn says, the red infers a sleeper on the threshold of consciousness (370), then the blue from which the pine speaks would indicate some deepening in the level of consciousness of
the sleeper. In addition to the repetition of blue and red, the word Namen is also repeated in the second sentence. The word Liebe echos the earlier Herzen. The Baumwort also repeats the idea found in the Pinien such that the word that comes from a pine tree might be expected to be a tree-word. The word promises shadows, recalling the night, and also the red of sundown with which the poem begins. Thus, the final sentence of the poem is a reflection and a fulfillment of the beginning. It gives the poem a cyclical structure and provides a degree of closure. But here, as in many Celan poems, it is not a perfect cycle, but a spiral. The poem returns to the beginning, but not quite in the same place, for there is progression that has occurred.

Firges combines the idea of progression with memory and with the generation of speech.

Im Baumwort tritt das Gewesene als Zukünftiges in die Anwesenheit des Wortes (142). Past, present, and future must all come together to create a word, but in the tree-word, the future leads to the past as much as the other way around. Each affects the other and is itself affected so that the word be it a memory, poetry, or art requires constant reinterpretation. Both Horn and Firges read the tree metaphor as a cipher for memory and forgetting and for the generation of language (Horn 370 and Firges 140). By situating the tree within multiple thresholds, these thresholds, then, become a place of remembering that which was forgotten, as they recall that which was forgotten into a language. One must then ask what sort of language should memory appear in? It may seem strange that memory often appears in a forgotten language, or in a poetic language filled with anachronisms, archaic terms, and dense, difficult constructions. The poem alienates and creates distance as it opens up a space in which it can exist. The paradox of remembering something that has already been forgotten and is gone requires a space of its own, one apart from the completely rational.
A great deal of research has been done already concerning Celan’s poetry as dialogue. In addition to Celan’s own comments about poetry’s dialogic nature (GWIII, 198), the works of Monika Schmitz-Emans, Sieghild Bogumil, Jürgen Lehmann, and Theo Buck are just a few examples.

A number of themes of trees and water that were introduced in the first poem of *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle*, *Ich hörte sagen,* reoccur in *Im Spätrot*. Both are related to forgetting. In *Im Spätrot*, the pine takes on human form, or is of human size, so that it almost becomes a person—a woman perhaps. In *Ich hörte sagen*, the poplar tree has arms instead of branches. In both, the trees are feminine, and can walk. The pine of *Im Spätrot* is a guide to the name, leading it blindly along the southern wall of the heart. If the tree represents the subconscious or memory or even a forgotten memory—an idea reinforced by the sleeping names, then this poem describes the process of regenerating speech out of the forgotten. Thus, the threshold is a place for remembering. It is only by remembering that an idea can come to life out of the dream. It has to wake up and it has to be shared.

It is worth noting, however, that language or speech in Celan’s poetry also very often means naming. Hence, it is no coincidence that the poem begins and ends with names. In addition, the language of this poem is decidedly dialogic in nature, as is much of his work. The dialog has a masculine and a feminine component, with the feminine being the active member. A feminine night wakes the masculine name at the beginning of the poem. Further, the syllables are his syllables but it is the feminine pine who speaks. The poem suggests that speech cannot be recalled from memory without love. The word love is so loaded with connotation and emotion that it is nearly impossible to say what it really means and how Celan uses the word here. But its inclusion in the poem is no accident, especially given the inclusion of the heart metaphor earlier in the poem.

---

6A great deal of research has been done already concerning Celan’s poetry as dialogue. In addition to Celan’s own comments about poetry’s dialogic nature (GWIII, 198), the works of Monika Schmitz-Emans, Sieghild Bogumil, Jürgen Lehmann, and Theo Buck are just a few examples.
One of the prominent thresholds in the poem is the phrase *Südwall des Herzens*. Wall sounds like the English *wall*. And indeed the meaning appears to be very similar. According to Grimm's Dictionary, the boundaries of a city are marked by its wall: durch den *wall* werden die grenzen einer stadt bezeichnet (*Wall* def. f). The wall therefore becomes a metonym for the city itself. This concept of metonymy is very reminiscent of one of Handke's definitions of the threshold, in which he states the threshold stands as a part for the whole (*Handke, Der Chinese des Schmerzes* 122-34). In Grimm's dictionary, all the definitions have to do with the fortification of a city, so that a German *Wall* is the protective wall of a fortress. If we accept the idea of defense as integral to the definition of *Wall*, then there is a sense of defense connected with the south-wall of the heart. The phrase also creates another space in which the events of the poem can occur. It is a *Herzland*, along the lines of the Bremen speech, where the *Ich* and the *Du* have the possibility of encountering one another. However, it is also a blind space and a dark one. The south wall of the heart is a place where the name and the night must feel their way with blind man's canes. It is also a threshold that is quickly crossed over, for the pair in the poem moves immediately from there to under the pines.

Silvio Vietta discusses the relationship between blindness and language in Celan's poetry:

Die Sprache vollzieht dialektisch einen Umschlag von einem Bedeutungsbereich in einen anderen. Das Motiv des Erblindens oder der Nacht signalisiert den Umschlag der Sprache in die Region des Erwachens und eigentlichen Sehens, die Region des Gedichts (94). In his analysis, he also comes close to seeing the role that thresholds play in blindness, seeing and language, although he does not express his ideas in those terms.

---

7 One should note also that the German cognate for *town* is *Zaun* or fence, where the fence around it represents the whole town.
Denn die im Motiv des Erblindens liegende Abhebung von der Außenwelt bezeugt, daß die Sprache sich ihrer Eigenwirklichkeit bewußt ist. Sie weiß, daß sie nicht Außenwelt beschreibt. Indem sie die Grenze ausdrücklich zieht, gewinnt sie die Freiheit, den eigenstrukturierten Nacht-Todesraum zu entwerfen. Erst im bewußt vollzogenen Umschlag entwickelt sich die Eigenwirklichkeit des Gedichts. (94)

The blinded subject is necessarily turned inward to a reality of death and night. Vietta argues that this is the space in which language is most free. It is interesting that Vietta calls this poem a love poem, even though he never explains why other than to say that the poem creates a space in which an encounter with the *Du* can occur (95). This encounter comes about through the act of naming. In many instances it is possible to substitute *Worte* for *Namen*. For Menninghaus, the two are identical in certain situations (*Magie der Form* 29).

There are a number of contradictions and dichotomies in this poem between waking and sleeping, between consciousness and unconsciousness, and between speech and silence. Yet another is between remembering and forgetting. One could also add the dichotomy of day and night evoked by the title or the line between light and dark described by the shadow. Many of these ideas are combined into single words or phrases like *schattenverheißendes Baumwort*, so that all of the opposites come together in this phrase to create the nexus of the poem. If the threshold motif is present in this poem, then it not only creates a space for an encounter with a *Du*, but also makes possible a space or a moment where both sides of the dichotomy—both halves of the mutually-exclusive pairs—can be given equal value. The threshold becomes a vantage point where both sides, for example, consciousness and unconsciousness, can exist at the same time.
Vietta equates shadows in Celan's poetry with death, and comments on the interaction of death with life: die poetische Sprache Celan's schöpft aus dem Tod ihr Leben und ist sich dessen bewußt (97). The contrast between life and death and the awareness of the fact that the poem generates life out of death illustrates how mutually exclusive ideas can be maintained in a threshold space. However, it may not be death in the physical sense, but an observation on the nature of being. Light will exclude darkness, memory will replace forgetting. Waking puts an end to sleeping.

When the opposites touch briefly at the threshold between them, an Ich encounters a Du the Ganz Andere. The names in the poem are the others, but there are a number of possible forms that these others take. The names are the names of dead who have passed on. But they are also the names of those people whom Celan is trying to reach through his poem. I maintain, however, that the names recall an other that has been forgotten, or that stands at risk of being forgotten.

The first line of the poem connects a number of topics together Im Spätrot schlafen die Namen. The late-red establishes the threshold location of the poem. The names can be seen as a metonymic presentation of absent individuals. They are possibly the names of loved ones who have already passed on and are only reachable in this twilight borderland between sleeping and waking. As names, they exist primarily as fragments of language, to be called into existence to be made present only when they are named. But the sleeping also suggests a breaching of the threshold of the subconscious The names have to be awakened from out of the dream world of the subconscious. If they are not, they remain forgotten forever within the deep blue dream. This
poem, however, does not suggest that all is lost. It does acknowledge the dark possibility, the
terrible possibility that if the lost are forgotten, then they are truly lost forever. This is the abyss
that confronts each poem, and is implicit in the whole cycle. Celan, however, provides a way out,
a possibility for the immortality of those who are absent. Celan creates a language that allows
that which is absent to be present in it. It is a language that is also consciously aware of its own
function in this process as the locus and creator of memory.

Memory and Forgetting

The process of remembering the forgotten is central to the poem Die
Schwermutsschnellen hindurch. This poem is aware of the abyss before it. The process of
remembering carries with it the possibility of being caught up in the grief the memory invokes.
But with the possibility for wounds comes also the opportunity to heal. Celan combines, as he
does in many poems, a feeling of despair with a potential for salvation.

_DIE SCHWERMUTSSCHNELLEN HINDURCH,_
am blanken
Wundenspiegel vorbei:
da werden die vierzig
entindeten Lebensbäume geflößt.

Einzige Gegen-
schwimmerin, du
zählst sie, berührst sie
alle.
(GWII 16)

_Die Schwermutsschnellen hindurch_ is the sixth poem in the collection, _Atemwende_. It
consists of two stanzas of one sentence each. It shares many images with the poem _Im Spätrot,_
written more than ten years earlier in _Von Schwelle zu Schwelle_. _Im Spätrot_ also features an
anthropomorphized tree in a body of water, and counting also appears to be an act of memory
and an act of inclusion. But the remaining images in _Im Spätrot_ revolve around dreaming,
suggesting not only a link between language and dreaming, but the role of memory in this process as well.

The passive first sentence in which forty de-barked trees (*Lebensbäume*) are set afloat is contrasted with the active second sentence in which a female swimmer, swimming against the river’s current, counts and touches each of them. The tension is not just between passive and active but also between stasis and transience. The line breaks in the first stanza occur for the most part at the end of complete ideas, whereas in the second stanza, both words and ideas seem more fragmented. Hans-Georg Gadamer points out that it is important to note which words stand alone in a line and which words mark the end of a line (35), so that *hindurch* and *vorbei*, both compound prepositions indicating the movement of something past a stationary point, stand out in the first stanza of the poem. By the same note, the bareness of the mirror also has special emphasis, since it stands alone in a line for itself. If Celan were to write the two phrases parallel, then *am blanken/Wundenspiegel vorbei* would be a single line just like *Die Schwermutsschnellen hindurch*. However, breaking it up this way preserves the rhythmic parallelism of lines 1 and 3, while it also gives added emphasis to the mirror and its wounded. Nothing is reflected in the mirrored surface of the river except perhaps pure, shining light, leaving the image open for the trees and the swimmer to fill.

The second stanza introduces a antithetical movement to the flow of the river. The individual phrases and even individual words are broken up across lines, suggesting a fragmented relationship contrasting with the river’s constancy. The first line, *Einzige Gegen-*, highlights the contrary motion of the swimmer in the next line. It also emphasizes her isolation, her distance or separation, or perhaps her uniqueness from the *Ich* of the poem. She is alone, but reaches out to the trees that have been floated. The two phrases in the first stanza establish the threshold of the
The river itself marks an irretrievable moment in time, suggesting the clichéd idea that you can never step in the same river twice. The melancholy rapids also create a sense of tension in its paradox. Rapids usually connote a wild ride, a desperate struggle at a fast pace. Melancholy, on the other hand, is a slow, dragging conflict with time itself. The German Schwermut connotes gravity and a burdened existence. The rapids become a desperate yet slow motion struggle against despair, with the river as the threshold in which it takes place. The rivers in Atemwende, such as in this poem and in In den Flüssen, are personal, and provide an access point where the narrative Ich can encounter a poetic Du. Through the stripped trees, death is made into very present element associated with that Du. Elsewhere in Celan’s work, his anthropomorphized trees stand as representatives for at least the memory of people. Their uprightness, their limbs, strength and verdancy make trees an obvious metaphor both for life itself and of an idealized humanity. However, their lack of bark in this poem contradicts their status as Lebensbäume. Since the bark is the living part of a tree and without it, the tree dies, being debarked suggests they have been killed. Yet they are still Lebensbäume living trees. The paradox makes the reader aware of the possibility of both the life and the death in this poem.

Having been felled, stripped of their bark, and floated down the river in preparation to be made into lumber also suggest that the trees are being exploited, commercialized, or stripped of their humanity, of the part of the trees that gives them life. In effect, it brings the Holocaust once again as a possible context. It suggests violence having been done prior to the beginning of the poem. In the process it also comments subtly at the commercialization of language, or the way the Holocaust becomes instrumentalized in the rhetorical language of commercialized discourse. Such a language is stripped of any real meaning.
In addition to the river with its melancholy rapids, the *Wundenspiegel* is also a type of threshold, because the way mirrors can link an inside and an outside space. It is related closely to the surface of water. This is in part because of the reflective nature of the surface of water, but also because the depths under the surface can represent the subconscious. Mirrors often act the same way, such as in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* or Rilke’s *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*. The surface of a mirror marks the boundary between the two worlds. However, the mirror in this poem as a wound-mirror adds a new dimension. It is clear and open perhaps open to interpretation, or not yet burdened with prior meanings. Yet its woundedness suggests that any image it reflects will not be whole. It is reminiscent of the dream that translates a wounded text (*sie setzt / Wundgelesenes über*) in *Dein vom Wachen*.

Likewise the motion of the trees passing through the rapids recalls the idea of *über-setzen* in that poem. But there is little to support the idea that *Die Schwermutsschnellen hindurch* is a poem primarily about the creation of language. Instead, this poem seems to be more about the painful albeit necessary preservation of memory, a process that is connected here to thresholds in a way similar both to dreaming and to the creation of language.

The two distinct and opposite motions in *Die Schwermutsschnellen hindurch* reinforces the paradox of motion in stasis. It becomes a way of describing the process of memory. In the first stanza, the trees are set afloat in the river so that they can pass through the rapids and past the mirror. The opening lines set up a single point of reference in the river where the action begins. The point becomes the moment of the present past which the river flows. In the second stanza, however, a contrary motion is introduced. The *Gegenschwimmerin* moves in the opposite direction of the trees. She fights against the current, counting and touching each tree. As she

---

9 *Dein vom Wachen* is discussed in greater detail below.

-106-
does so, time passes around her and she moves about in both the past and the present. This process represents the act of remembering.

The final line, alle, being a single word, assumes the weight of the entire poem. It is the final focal point and stands in contrast to the einzige that begins the stanza. Nothing is left out, all of the trees are included and remembered. If the forty are counted and touched, they cannot be forgotten. They are known. It has a biblical feel to it, as does the number 40 earlier in the poem. Pöggler sees the forty trees as a reference to Celan’s age—he was 43 at the time he wrote the poem and the poem as a way of looking back over his life to that point (226). He also notes that the number forty is a transition, or crossing point (Übergang) related to the people of Israel crossing the Jordan after forty years in the wilderness. In this sense, with the trees representing years of life, the identity of the swimmer takes on an even greater significance as the embodiment of memory and the means by which the past years are made present again. She becomes a presence throughout Celan’s life. Because she has touched all the trees, she has a part in everything Celan has done to that point. If seen as Celan’s mother (one possibility), then the swimmer is her memory that has been with him through all the difficulties—the melancholy rapids, etc. But the swimmer could just as well represent almost any idea that is grammatically feminine die Erinnerung perhaps, or, as Gadamer suggests, time itself (48) die Zeit. More likely, however, seems the possibility that the river itself represents time as it flows past. To linger in the Augenblick of the present, the swimmer has to strive continually against the river’s pull.

Memory in this poem, and in many others, is closely tied to a sense of necessary pain. The trees of life (Lebensbäume) have been denuded, robbed of the bark that gives them life. They pass through melancholy and endure wounding. Yet, to forget pain is itself a source of pain, of
wounding. It is therefore necessary for the swimmer to hold pace with the current, to fight against it, maintaining the paradox. Stopping the pain of memory requires that one hold on to it; keeping it present so that its loss does not make the cost of it even greater. In the moment of touching and counting, both needs are met. The past is held present in memory and the pain within it is acknowledged and in doing so is diminished without being made less.

**Language and Silence**

The rapids discussed in the poem above echo the river imagery of the poem *In den Flüssen*, which immediately precedes it in the volume *Atemwende*. But even though both rivers are associated with some element of time, the function of the river is not identical in both poems. The melancholy rapids are something to be passed through and suggest an ongoing journey. The location of the narrative *Ich* in *In den Flüssen*, however, is fixed, and the focus is more on an ongoing process rather than a journey.

*In den Flüssen nördlich der Zukunft*  
werf ich das Netz aus, das du  
zögernd beschwerst  
mit von Steinen geschriebenen  
Schatten. (GWII 14)

Language and dialogue, and the tension between speech and silence are the focus of this poem. Here again the threshold plays a central role in establishing the topos of the poem. The river itself connotes the flow of time, but also points to an existence outside of the normal perception of time, since the rivers are north of the future. The phrase prepares the way for the songs to be sung beyond mankind that will appear later in the cycle in *Fadensonnen*. North of the future is a no-place, a u-topia in which the impossible and the inconceivable can become reality. The river marks the boundary between a reality beyond the reach of time and our own,
time-bound, comprehensible world.\textsuperscript{10} Standing in the river, the \textit{Ich} occupies the threshold between two realities and can partake of both.

In den Flüssen describes an act shared by an \textit{Ich} and a \textit{Du} that revolves around the creation of written language. The \textit{Ich} casts a net that the \textit{Du} has weighed down with shadows written by stones (von Steinen geschriebenen/ Schatten). The placement of \textit{Du} at the end of the second line emphasizes, according to Gadamer, the need the \textit{Ich} has for the \textit{Du} (36). The one casting the net cannot accomplish his or her task alone, but requires the other's help. Both must work together in the threshold-region north of the future. The poem illustrates in a single sentence the interaction between two subjects in a dialogue. The casting of the net is an act of faith very much like the sending of a letter via the Flaschenpost of the Bremen speech. There is no guarantee of success in either attempt, but only the hope of a chance meeting. However, the threshold of the river, while maintaining this difficulty of connecting with an other, also creates a sense of inevitability. Being in the river recalls a metaphor from Martin Buber, whose works Celan read extensively. Buber describes an encounter between an \textit{Ich} and a \textit{Du} on a narrow ridge, where, if a meeting can take place at all, it will be unavoidable (\textit{Das Problem des Menschen} 406).

In fishing, a net is weighed down with stones for two reasons. First, the extra weight aids in casting the net evenly, giving it substance that makes it throwable. Second, the stones allow the net to stand under the water, so that something may be caught (36). However, in this poem, it is not the stones that weigh down the net, but shadows. Both stones and shadows seem to have special meaning for Celan. Dietlind Meinecke has shown how stones often connote

\textsuperscript{10}There is perhaps some irony here, since our world is seldom comprehensible. It may only seem that way. The poet perhaps seeks out a dimension north of the future to make an idea comprehensible that under normal circumstances is not.
silence (77), and Bernard Fassbind makes the argument that shadows in this poem may carry with them the idea of memory (179). If these relationships hold true in this poem as well, as I believe they do, then they help explain the activity in which the Ich and the Du participate in this poem. It suggests that the other's painful memories somehow facilitate the interaction between the two and their combined effort to preserve that memory in writing.

Such a one-to-one replacement of terms, however, oversimplifies the poem. There is much more at work here. The inversion von Steinen geschriebenen Schatten recalls the phrase nördlich der Zukunft of the first line because both are unexpected and impossible in a physical world. It is just as impossible to write on a shadow with a stone as it is to find a place north of the future. Both help develop the utopic nature of the threshold in the poem. The dark shadows and the heavy stones therefore give a sense of melancholy to the poem. But these elements are necessary; their presence opens the poem to a sense of promise which ties the second half of the poem back into the first. As Gadamer points out, a shadow is always cast, and where a shadow is cast there is always darkness as well as radiance and light (35). A cast shadow also recalls both the cast net and the stone that usually makes the throwing possible. These images carry with them their opposites and in doing so, they complete the poem.

Writing and the shadows associated with writing are again the central theme of the poem Das Geschriebene. In it, the darkness revealed in the word is contrasted with the possible light that poetic language can provide.
Das Geschilderte höhlt sich, das
Gesprochene, meergrün,
brennt in den Buchtten,

in den
verflüssigten Namen
schnellen die Tümmler,

im geewigten Nirgends, hier,
im Gedächtnis der über-
lauten Glocken in wo nur?,

wer
in diesem
Schattengeviert
schnaubt, wer
unter ihm
schimmert auf, schimmert auf, schimmert auf? (GW II 75)

The first stanza describes the current decayed state of language. Sich höhlen is not commonly used in normal speech. The German proverb, stetes Wasser höhlt den Stein (steady water hollows the stone), is the most common usage of the verb höhlen. It describes a constant process by which solid rock is eroded to form a cave. The erosion in the poem, however, is self-inflicted, so that the written word undercuts its own foundation. The hardness dissolves under the constant drip, freeing the word from its relation to its referent. The certainty of language available to the poet has been lost. Through the erosion, the spoken word, already liquified, is also broken down, but not by a slow and steady process, but by a violent burning in the bays. The paradoxical burning of the water has an alienating effect, suggesting a much more desperate situation for the spoken word when compared to the written. The somewhat archaic phrase also reminds the reader of the impermanent nature of the language we use.

There is a striking parallel use of vocabulary between this poem and many of the others already discussed. The water imagery reveals an affinity in this poem to the rivers and other instances of water already discussed in connection with other poems. The sea-green (meergrün)
has much the same feel as the blue (*im Blau*) of the poem *Im Spätrot*. Both associate the depths of the sea with deeper levels of consciousness. In both, the water is standing a contrast to the flowing rivers in *Die Schwermutsschnellen hindurch* or *In den Flüssen*. It possesses a sense of darkness and mystery, which further links it to *Im Spätrot*. Both poems also use names (*Namen*) as a metonym for a language arising from these shadowed depths. Out of the liquified names spring dolphins. The freedom and playfulness of the thought depicted in these lines points to the possibility that something living may still emerge from the dark sea of eroded words.

Das Geschriebene seeks both to find the location where a living language is still possible, to which it gives at least a partial answer, and also asks who can produce such language. This question, however, the poem leaves unanswered. In this poem, Wolfgang Kopplin says language stands both as a wall and a bridge between experience and consciousness of that experience (30). He sees in this poem an illustration of one of the basic paradoxes of language and thought: that one cannot conceive of an idea except through language, even though language only exists as an expression of ideas.

> Was man nicht denken kann, kann man nicht sagen. Dieser sehr einfache, auch umkehrbare Zusammenhang zwischen Erkenntnis der Wirklichkeit und Sprache läßt nicht zu, daß irgend etwas in menschlicher Sprache Gesagtes ohne jedweden Realitätsbezug existiert, daß irgend etwas Geschriebenes direkt ins Dunkle, Undenkbare greift. (30)

Thus, there exists a threshold in all language between speech and silence, between what is speakable and what cannot be spoken. By extension, this linguistic threshold constitutes a threshold between the conceivable and the inconceivable. Language itself marks the line between the two. By linking speech with silence, poetic language provides access to the unknown.
Situating this poem at the threshold of accessible language is one of its primary objectives. Kopplin points out to this end that the locative preposition *in* is the only word that appears in each of the three stanzas (31). The location of the poem, and with it the location of poetic language, progresses from a burning bay to a liquified name to an eternal nowhere and memory until it arrives in a shadow-quarter (*Schattengeviert*). Celan shrouds the poem in contradictions. He describes a name that is both nowhere and here, absent but present; it is present, but only as a memory. The name springs forth like a dolphin out of the darkened speech-become-water, but presumably disappears just as quickly into its depths. If, as Kopplin maintains, the poem asks about the location of language, then it does so in an unorthodox manner. It first gives the possible, if dubious, answers: in the burning bays, in the liquified (changing) language, present in an eternal nowhere. It then follows up with an almost desperate question: but where? (wo nur?) The question breaks in, interrupting the final location, leaving the final *in*-preposition unresolved.

The locations introduced in each prepositional phrase bear some relation to each other. The first two are impossible water images: a burning bay and liquified names. Neither has any reference to a physical reality. They are contrivances of language, the reality of which can exist only *in* a threshold dimension of language they exist only in an eternal u-topia, a no-where (im geewigten Nirgends). However, this no-where is also *hier* here in the present, and also in memory between past and present.

This presence, this no-where that emerges from memory, is finally described in the poem as a *Schattengeviert*.11 The constellation of all these terms creates a tension in the poem between

---

11*Geviert* here may be a reference to a discussion in Martin Heidegger’s *Unterwegs zur Sprache* in which he describes *Geviert* as the world that gives rise to language. Heidegger’s *Geviert* is a fourfold world of heaven and earth, mortal and godly that name and give rise to...
the degraded, dilapidated state of modern language and the occasional moment when real expression breaks through. But even then, poetic language or even simple communication is not guaranteed. The final stanza asks who will wallow in the darkness and merely snort out \textit{(schnauben)} something meaningless, and who will be able to make use of the moments of pure language when they surface and shine forth \textit{(wer/ unter ihm/ schimmert auf...)}. The triple repetition of the final line comes across as a plea for someone who can both produce and appreciate these rare moments of poetic language.

The paradoxes make this a poem about language that progresses far beyond its linguistic origins. Many of the threshold themes come together in this poem so that it appears to be a self-reflective poem about poetry when, in fact, much more is at stake. By touching on memory through the sea imagery, it establishes a context that would suggest Celan’s struggles with the past. Yet, the Holocaust is only dimly perceptible in the background. It serves to remind the reader of the creative/destructive role that memory plays in poetic language. The poem is aware both of the dangers involved in reaching into the shadows, and it is also aware of the potential rewards of doing so, however remote and however fleeting. In many respects it is similar to the poem \textit{Fadensonnen}:

\textbf{FADENSONNEN}

über der grauscharzen Ödnis. 
Ein baum-
hoher Gedanke
greift sich den Lichtton: es sind
noch Lieder zu singen jenseits
der Menschen. (GWII 26)

naming (22). This concept is also closely related to Heidegger’s definition of the threshold as the difference that both binds together and holds apart (24).
The songs that are still to be sung are beyond mankind, even though the light from them only breaks through in narrow threads of light and sound. A pure language is possible, but terribly difficult and, like the surging dolphins, or the threads of light, or even the child passing from threshold to threshold in Grabschrift für François, pure language is fleeting. It is accessible only under certain conditions. One has to go to meet it in its own dimension. For Celan, language often exists in a memory made present, for example, in the memory of the over-loud bells of Das Geschriebene. In Fadensonnen, it is again a tree, or a tree-high thought, that is able to grasp the light-sound of language. If, as in other poems, the tree here is a personification of someone who is gone, then memory again plays a role in the generation of speech and language. In Jewish mysticism, however, a tree also stands for the life that survives beyond death and renews itself from death (Pöggeler, Spur des Worts 227). The thoughts and the memories of the past survive the blackened wasteland of history and are therefore able to grasp the songs that are to be sung. The poem Fadensonnen remains purposefully ambiguous about where the wasteland is, or if the region beyond mankind lies in the past, present, or future. Beyond is simply beyond. The source of the light and the tone associated with it and therefore the element of lyric language stands apart from everyday experience, accessible only at a few points.

---

Ian Fairley comments about Fadensonnen: If readings of this poem share any common ground, it is by way of response to the principal question which the writing puts: where are we to place (or understand) the threshold beyond which we are beyond / mankind? Grammatically, the poem describes a terrain of possibility[...]. Are there still, as there once were, songs to be sung? Or are these songs as yet unsung; is their time still to come? (Fairley 4)

Space does not permit me to expand further here on this poem, given the great number of interpretations of it. I discuss the relationship between the term Fadensonnen and Celan’s concept of the meridian and its function as a threshold in greater detail in From Thou to Thou: An Examination of Paul Celan’s Threshold Imagery (77-82).

-115-
Über-setzen and Über-treten

Pure, lyric language is accessible to Celan within the threshold, in a region or dimension lies between memory and forgetting, between the conscious and the subconscious, and, most importantly, on the border between speech and silence. Accessing that language, however, is only the beginning. Once the Ich gains access to speech, it is still necessary to return with it out of its dimension so that it may be transmitted further and shared with a Du. The process becomes an act of translation. The German übersetzen, a literal setting over, makes this process much more apparent. In Celan’s work, the act of translation marks the distinction between spoken and written language. As was seen in Das Geschriebene, there is a pronounced difference in the poem between written and spoken language. Written language is hollowed out, eroded. Spoken language, while dark, still has some life and the possibility that some light will surface out of it. What then, are the possibilities for the written word? Celan suggests that the act of translation is difficult to separate from an act of violence. Such is the case in Dein vom Wachen.

DEIN VOM WACHEN stößiger Traum.
Mit der zwölfmal schrauben-
förmig in sein
Horn gekerbten
Wortspur.

Der letzte Stoß, den er führt.

Die in der senk-
rechten, schmalen
Tagschlucht nach oben
stakende Fähre:

sie setzt
Wundgelesenes über. (GWII 24)

This poem begins with a list of conditions or a list of objects and ideas that culminate in a final translation. The first item listed is the dream that paradoxically drives the dreamer from
waking. A nightmare will often cause the dreamer to come awake with a start, but here the exact opposite is true. The dream startles the dreamer from waking presumably deeper into sleep and unconsciousness. The image has an alienating effect, setting the poem apart from everyday realities. However, it also shifts the locus of the poem out of consciousness and into a threshold region between waking and sleeping.

The second item reminds the reader that this dream threshold is also the home of language especially written language. A trace of a word (Wortspur) is inscribed in a spiral twelve times around a horn. The carving of the word-trace is an act of writing. Renate Böschenstein-Schäfer associates the horn in the poem with the door of horn in The Odyssey that leads to true dreams (229). In this interpretation of the poem, which compliments its linguistic aspects, the poem points toward some truth not accessible to the conscious mind. As it is formed, the carved language also creates a wound in the horn. Thus, if there is a truth to be found, however, it has only left a wounded trace in the word carved into the horn. As elsewhere, written language is difficult, and often fragmentary, leaving little that is comprehensible.

The poem progresses through the last start (der letzte Stoß), the last impulse that the dream can give. The image here is possibly of a ram butting with its horn a reference to the horn in the previous stanza. However, the verb butt seems an inappropriate translation given the centrality of dreaming and language to the rest of the poem. Rather, it is the last effort of the word or the dream to prod out of waking. This Stoß parallels the stößiger Traum in the first line.

The final item in the poem’s list is a ferry which is poled upward in a vertical, narrow ravine of day (der senk- / rechten, schmalen / Tagschlucht). The image presented is reminiscent of the narrow threads of light in Fadensonnen that, if they give any light at all, give it only in a
very restricted sense. The use of depth and verticality here is akin to Hofmannsthal's use of the same images to represent the subconscious and the origins of language, especially in poems such as Weltgeheimnis and Ein Traum von grosser Magie. The latter of these two also describes the world of dreams as a source of understanding. Celan, however, strips the images of much of the romanticism and ornamentation that still exists in Hofmannsthal's work. In Celan's poem, the emphasis focuses on the resistance and the difficulty of moving the ferry toward the daylight.

The effort to do so is necessary, nevertheless. The ferry is the vehicle that can cross the gap between dream and waking and bring the written word with it. This third stanza ends with a colon setting up the final two lines of the poem: sie setzt / Wundgelesenes über. As in Von Dunkel zu Dunkel, Celan here inverts the word über-setzen, so that it connotes both the act of transporting across a body of water and the act of translation. In both poems, über-setzen is associated with a ferry or a ferryman, and therefore with Charon, who ferries the dead over the river Styx. His presence in the poems places dream language not only on the threshold between waking and sleeping, but also between life and death. Also echoed here is the Wundenspiegel of Die Schwermutsschnellen hindurch, in which pain and memory intersect. Because the writing of the word-trace creates a wound as it is carved, it again emphasizes the creative/distructive dichotomy in language. A horn is dead tissue growing from a living creature, and as the location of language, it occupies therefore a middle ground between life and death. Poetic language thereby becomes a point of access to the past and a means of communing through memory with those who have passed on.

Both Dein vom Wachen and Von Dunkel zu Dunkel occupy that space between dream and wakefulness. This is the region in which language becomes accessible. However, the act of translation in Dein vom Wachen turns into an act of violence that goes beyond the simple
idea that something is lost in the translation. Rather, the language translated out of the dream is itself read from a wound. As a representation of the truth (as Homer’s doorway to true dreams), the words of the horn are also a wounded truth or reality. In his Bremen address, Celan explains how getting at such a reality is the objective of his generation. In commenting on his search for an open reality, he said, Es sind die Bemühungen dessen, der . . . mit seinem Dasein zur Sprache geht, *wirklichkeitswund* und Wirklichkeit suchend (GWIII 186, emphasis added). Poetic language for Celan is aware both of its own wounded nature and of the fact that it is still the only alternative to complete silence. Translating a dream into reality and into written language gives the dream life in the very instant that it also ceases to live. The process guarantees that guilt will be a part of the word-trace that remains. Yet, despite its imperfections, language is the vehicle available to him.

Translation and its connection to death is explored further in Von Dunkel zu Dunkel (GWI 97). Death is the dark unknown, and yet, in Von Dunkel zu Dunkel, it comes to life, and the *Ich* sees darkness living not just superficially, but *auf den Grund*, to its very core. In returning to this poem now, I would like to focus less on the aspects of life and death, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, and concentrate instead on the role of translation in the creation of poetic language.

Winfried Menninghaus interprets the poem almost entirely from a linguistic perspective (*Magie der Form*, 170-171). The question Setzt solches über? at the beginning of the second stanza has two different meanings here. In it, Celan separates the verb *übersetzen* into its component parts. The *über-setzen*, therefore, is both the act of transporting the darkness across so that it can be understood by some other as well as an act of translating. The first meaning connotes transference. It asks if the darkness is capable of bringing one across the threshold.
Perhaps it is not just the darkness that is intended as the antecedent for *solches*, but the entire process of eye-opening and the seeing of the living of darkness. If one follows this second possibility to its logical conclusion, then the first question of the second stanza asks if opening and seeing can lead to anything positive. The waking of the second stanza and the eye-opening of the first stanza express parallel ideas. They also recall waking dream of *Dein vom Wachen*. Thus, the question may read: Is the opening of the eye and the seeing of the darkness a true awakening? Does it offer any hope? Does the transference offer any possibility for truly understanding anything of value? The first three lines, although they convey certainty, must mingle that certainty with dark despair.

The last three lines, although uncertain questions, leave open at least the possibility of hope. Über-setzen as an act of translation transfers meaning from a form which is incomprehensible to another form which can be understood. Normally we think of *übersetzen* in terms of foreign languages, but one can also translate a difficult passage into the same language by making it more comprehensible. Either way, translating is a function of language. The poem may be asking, therefore, if it is possible that, as one sees with the help of another, one can come to an understanding with the other within that silence at the threshold of speech. However, since language can only come about through an act of translation, and since Celan associates this act with Charon and death, there is the inescapable conclusion that poetic language carries its own death within it, or at least originates in the space between existence and oblivion.

The poem ends with a final question linked to the first: *Wes Licht folgt auf dem Fuß mir,/ daß sich ein Ferge fand?* Celan breaks this question up into two lines so that it sounds like two separate questions. The first part bears some resemblance to a passage in the 119th Psalm, which reads *Dein Wort ist meinem Fuß eine Leuchte, ein Licht für meine Pfade* (Psalms 119:105).
This verse compares God’s word to a means by which one may see. It is a light which in the 107th verse also gives life, much as the Ich can see his life when the eyes are opened. The word is a light by which one may see and live, but what about a word that is only an absence? What light does a word shed that is never spoken? Would it not be darkness? If the word brings life, then the word that is silence must bring a life very similar to death. This possibility leads to the second half of the question, which asks whose light shone so that a ferry was found. In contrast to the Judeo-Christian reference of the previous line, Celan reaches for an image of the ferryman from classic mythology to conclude the poem.

The two lines together force the reader to reevaluate the relation of each of Celan’s images to their traditional usages as they appear in literature. The word may be a lamp for one’s feet, but instead of lighting the way to God and Eternal Life, the word lights the way to death. In turn, death is normally associated with darkness. Here, however, darkness lives and brings sight. Death is therefore a complimentary component of life. Both life and death arise from language consisting more of silence than of speech. This type of reevaluation of expectations is a productive approach to any of Celan’s poems, and to the way one deals with language in general.

Von Dunkel zu Dunkel is a poem which juxtaposes opposite ideas and creates from them a thought that allows the reader to see both sides, both the potential light and the death that language brings.

Closely related to the idea of translation (über-setzen) is the concept of transgression (über-treten). Both terms are expressly acts of crossing over from one metaphoric space to another and are therefore inseparably connected to the poetic threshold. Translation by its nature implies language and an effort to carry over some aspect of that out of silence. Transgression, by its association with translation, becomes a part of Celan’s language. But writing from and
transgressing the threshold also allows the many other themes and many contradictions to be present in a single poem. Such is the case with Gemeinsam.

**GEMEINSAM**

Da nun die Nacht und die Stunde, 
so auf den Schwellen nennt, 
die eingehn und ausgehn,

guthieß, was wir getan, 
da uns kein Drittes den Weg wies,

werden die Schatten nicht 
einzeln kommen, wenn mehr 
sein soll als heute sich kundtat,

werden die Fittiche nicht 
später dir rauschen als mir

Sondern es rollt übers Meer 
der Stein, der neben uns schwebte, 
und in der Spur, die er zieht, 
alacht der lebendige Traum. (GWI 86)

Gemeinsam is the fourth poem of the cycle Sieben Rosen Später of Celan's volume *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle*. In it, there is a constant crossing of boundaries, a transition between in and out. In his book, *Schwellenkunde*, Winfried Menninghaus comments on Walter Benjamin and the act of crossing over, or transgressing a threshold. For Menninghaus, and Benjamin, a threshold is both a comforting and a frightening crossing point (Übergang). Menninghaus says that a threshold is delimited at its extremes by security and terror: Geborgenheit und Schrecken sind die Extreme der Schwellen-Topographie, (36). He associates crossing the threshold with transgression: it is an act that must later be atoned for. The German word for transgression is übertreten, or stepping over very similar to the ein-und ausgehen in the first stanza of Gemeinsam. The night crosses and re-crosses the threshold as it becomes itself a threshold in which a transgression takes place. It condones a deed that would be considered taboo had it
occurred during the light of day. The night, however, turns a blind eye, leaving the couple to find their own way. The transgression of the threshold in the poem also produces a sense of bittersweetness. There is a sense of guilt that will have to be accounted for, and with it pain. At the same time the *Ich* and the *Du* accept the pain as the price for their new creation.

Many of the words in this poem connote a potential in language for both the bitter and the sweet. Here and in other poems by Celan, stones often stand as silent witnesses to the actions of the poetic *Ich*. In the final stanza, a stone rolls over the ocean which had hovered near the *Ich* and the *Du* in the night. The stone also creates a path (*Spur*) in which they spawn their dream. Lielo Anne Pretzer also remarks on the presence of stones in Celan’s poems, and particularly on the function of stone imagery in relation to Gemeinsam and *Ich hörte sagen*. She notes that stones often appear in proximity to death and pain and are linked to language (122). The stone in *Ich hörte sagen* (GW I 85) is also a silent witness encircled by a word to the drowning of an anthropomorphized poplar tree. The proximity of the two poems in *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle* links them thematically and suggest that the stone imagery functions similarly in both. However, where the stone in *Ich hörte sagen* is witness to a death, in Gemeinsam witnesses a dubious act that leads to a living dream.

Through this linguistic association with both life and death, stones in Celan’s poetry can also connote a sense of guilt. In *Welchen der Steine du hebst*, for example, stones are associated with language and with the potential for destruction. By lifting a stone, one uncovers a life that needed the stone’s protection. It is left it naked. The poem ends with the parallel construction *welchen der Worte du sprichst /du dankst/ dem Verderben* (GWI 129). Speaking can therefore also be an act of violence, destroying even while it creates. It is an inescapable dilemma. As one truth is revealed in language, another is covered over. Handke’s
Loser character in *Der Chinese des Schmerzes* also lifts a stone to put a stop to an act of racism. In doing so he comes to belong zur Volk der Täter (Handke 108). But even though the racism is arguably worthy of punishment, Loser’s action is still an act of murder that has its own consequences. This episode is explored further in the chapter on Peter Handke.

On first reading, *Gemeinsam* appears to be a love poem to the author’s wife, Gisèle. Indeed, the *laichen* of the final stanza supports this interpretation. In its modern usage, *laichen* refers to spawning or laying eggs in water. The literal meaning of the word comes from a late Middle High German noun and refers to a love play or a love song. The poetic *lay* is the closest English cognate, thereby establishing a linguistic connection to the mediaeval epic lays and the action in the dream of the final stanza. The dream becomes a physical act as well as a linguistic act. But the connection to spawning also opens up new possibilities in the poem. There is the element of creating life, as well as the very sexual and sensuous aspect of love suggesting what the unnamed act was that was done in the second stanza. Implicit also in this sexual act, however, is also the prospect of death. Salmon, after swimming up the river, surviving the open sea, the fisherman, the bears, overcoming the (melancholy?) rapids and every other trial along its journey, come at last to the spawning grounds, where they mate by laying down their eggs and milt. The process is almost like a dance, with the mating pair passing over and around each other, turning and returning to the starting place. Having mated, the life cycle of the salmon is complete, and they die shortly thereafter. There is life and death as well as rebirth. The parents die as the young are born. Jerry Glenn argues that the poems in *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle* look forward with a greater degree of optimism than his previous works, revealing a hesitant search for new values (77). Thus, the living dream spawned act in the poetic language of the threshold leaves open the possibility that new life can arise despite the transgression in the night.
Ich-Du

Like many other of Celan’s poems such as In den Flüssen, Fernen, Zwiegestalt, von Dunkel zu Dunkel, Gemeinsam also describes an activity performed by an Ich and a Du. The relationship between the two in these poems shows a strong affinity toward Martin Buber’s treatise Ich und Du and toward Buber’s philosophy in general. In Ich und Du, Buber describes the constant movement back and forth between an unmediated relationship with the other as a du, and a mediated, measurable relationship with the other as a thing. Buber says there are two basic words: I-Thou (Ich-Du) and I-It (Ich-Es) (79). These two words are more descriptive of ways for an individual to relate to the world than they are actual words. Ich-Es is a rational way of looking at the world. Everything is measured and comprehensible because there are limits and boundaries to everything. It is the tangible side of a person’s existence. Buber emphasizes, however, that this is only a part of the human experience.

The other part comes from the basic word Ich-Du. The Ich-Du has no borders and is not measurable, but has its basis elsewhere. The world of the Ich-Es is based on experiences with things, as in Ich erfahre etwas (80). In contrast, the realm of the Ich-Du is based on relation.

Wer Du spricht, hat kein Etwas zum Gegenstand. Denn wo Etwas ist, ist anderes Etwas, jedes Es grenzt an andere Es, Es ist nur dadurch, daß es an andere grenzt.

Wo aber Du gesprochen wird, ist kein Etwas. Du grenzt nicht.

Wer Du spricht, hat kein Etwas, hat nichts. Aber er steht in Beziehung (80).

The everyday experience we have with the world can be described with Buber’s Ich-Es relationship. In Ich-Es, everything is limited and stable. But Celan takes the reader into a reality

---

14 For a more detailed exploration of the connection between Buber and Celan’s dialogic writing, see Bernard Fassbind’s Poetic des Dialogs.
dominated by the *Ich-Du* relationship that, while it is not always stable, offers new possibilities for discovering other realities and for connecting with that other. For both Celan and Buber, this relationship can only occur in a threshold of language. Buber contends: Unser Du-Sagen . . . haftet an der Schwelle der Sprache *(Ich und Du* 81). In the threshold of *Ich-Du*, there are no boundaries (8). The possibilities are wide open because nothing mediates the experience. Nothing comes between the *Ich* and the *Du* that could filter the experience or create distance between the two.

The word *Ich-Du* is described as a lyric moment, and can be part of one’s experience with a text (Kepnes 81). But one cannot dwell forever in the *Ich-Du*. It is a temporary phenomenon, like Hofmannsthal’s *Augenblick*. An encounter with a *Du* requires the *Ich* to step out of the physical sphere and discover the *Du* beyond time and space: [Ich finde] den Menschen, zu dem ich Du sage, nicht in einem Irgendwann und Irgendwo vor. Ich kann ihn hineinstellen, ich muß es immer wieder, aber nur noch einen Er oder eine Sie, ein Es, nicht mehr mein Du *(Ich und Du* 83). The relationship of *Ich-Du* exists in a threshold apart from ordinary experience.

The world of *Ich-Es*, in contrast, is the material world of experience (Erfahrung). Only occasionally and for brief moments may one enter into the world of relation (Beziehung) of *Ich-Du*. But it is the repeated crossing over into *Ich-Du* that allows insight into one’s humanity.

Die Du-Momente erscheinen in dieser festen und zuträglichen Chronik als wunderliche lyrisch-dramatische Episoden, von einem verführenden Zauber wohl, aber gefährlich ins Äußerste reißend, den erprobten Zusammenhang lockend, mehr Frage als Zufriedenheit hinterlassend, die Sicherheit erschütternd, eben unheimlich, und eben unentbehrlich. Da man aus ihnen doch in die Welt zurückkehren muß, warum nicht in ihr verbleiben? (101)
Although Buber privileges the moments of *Ich-Du* over the more permanent *Ich-Es*, this region is in no way a dimension of comfort. *Ich-Du* poses questions more than it provides comfort as it challenges the safety of *Ich-Es*. Being in an unmediated *Ich-Du* relationship is a necessary part of being human, but it cannot be a permanent condition. Und in allem Erst der Wahrheit, Du: ohne Es kann der Mensch nicht leben. Aber wer mit ihm allein lebt, ist nicht der Mensch (101).

Hofmannsthal experiences something similar when he encounters the korai in the Acropolis Museum. He feels a moment of oneness with the statues that illuminates his self-understanding. Handke also describes a similar situation, most notably at the end of *Der Himmel über Berlin*, in the union between an angel and a mortal woman in which the two become *einsam*. They stand in an *Ich-Du* relationship to each other.

Celan's *Gemeinsam* expresses an idea similar to the way Handke uses the word *einsam* in *Der Himmel über Berlin*, discussed in the next chapter. It illustrates an interaction between the poetic *Ich* and the *Du* which takes place on the threshold of night and, by extension, on the threshold of a dreamworld. The poem describes an encounter whose only witness is the night in which it occurs. The night has no voice to respond to the lovers' actions and the poet, or the *Ich*, takes the silence to be tacit approval of their actions. The word *Gutheißen* often suggests marginal approval of normally questionable actions.

But this is already a contradiction. In the poem there is no mention of the night being silent—no active *schweigen*. In fact, the opposite is true. The night and the hour name those who cross over the threshold into their world. *Gutheißen* also appears as a conscious speech act. However, the active going in and out of the third line suggests the night could be the *dritte* that does not show the way. The activity contrasted against the absence of events that should have occurred creates a separation between the *Wir* that is together and any third party that should
guide them, but chooses not to. *Gutheißen*, then, despite its being an active verb, only offers a silent approval. Just as *schweigen* is an active to fall silent, the night signals its approval by not actively condemning the pair. The behavior of the two in the threshold is met with a response that falls somewhere between the borders of speech and silence.

The enjambement of the verb *guthieß* ties the actions of the first stanza with the actions of the *Ich/Du* while still maintaining the isolation the *einsame-Gemeinsamkeit* of the *Ich* and *Du*. The night and the hour in which their deed takes place is a silent observer. Yet there is still tension in this word. Literally, *gutheißen* would mean to call good implying an active involvement. But the verb is separated from its subject by the gap between stanzas, suggesting an affinity more to the object *was wir getan* than to the subject. Celan creates a sense of back-and-forth, an *ein-und ausgehn* between activity and passivity, silence and speech. The poetic *Ich* claims there is no third to show them the way, yet the night seems a very real, if silent, third agent in this poem.

The naming takes place on the thresholds where the *Ich* and the *Du* commit their unnamed act. Through their action, they become a *wir*, a single, coexistent entity. *Was wir getan* echoes the *das, was geschah* from Celan’s *Bremen* speech, but with some notable changes. In the *Bremen* speech, *was geschah* is done by a third person the perpetrators of the Holocaust. In contrast, *was wir getan* includes the poetic *Ich* himself. Both imply some degree of darkness. Yet, the *was wir getan* of *Gemeinsam* has a more optimistic feel to it. It represents a beginning more than it does an ending. The subtle reference, however, serves to remind the reader that this poem is also about speech creation and the price the *Ich* incurs through that act. Just as language in the *Bremen* Speech had to pass through the *tausend Finsternisse totbringender Rede*, through *fürchterliches Verstummen*, to emerge afterward enriched by the
experience, the *Ich* and the *Du* have to pass through the night and the shadows before their dream can come into being. In *Gemeinsam*, the actions of the *Ich* and *Du* also result in enriched language, or perhaps an enriched life that will be the result of their actions.

In the third and fourth stanzas list the potential consequences of the actions during the night. Two events are listed that will NOT occur: the shadows will not come individually, and the wings will not batter one (*mir*) earlier than the other (*dir*). In their given form, the project a potential catastrophe that is mitigated somewhat by the double negations. There is a subtle undercurrent of defiance in the poem, or perhaps an insistent willingness to accept the consequences of their actions. This willingness opens the way for the final stanza. Because the *Ich/Du* acted despite the lack of guidance and despite the darkness and the shadows that threatened, the living dream in the final line becomes possible.

Thresholds play a significant role in developing the topography of *Gemeinsam*. It is one of the few Celan poems that actually has the word *Schwelle* in it. Pretzer sees the threshold in this poem as boundary between dreaming and waking, or between dream and a higher level of consciousness, and indeed many of the images have a dream-like quality about them. Certainly the floating stone and rustling wings, as well as the final word (*Traum*) suggest that this poem is about some sort of dream state. But there are other possibilities for the threshold as well. The poem emphasizes the threshold's transitory nature. The repeated going in and coming out, a crossing-over-and-back, the constant transgressions and re-transgressions marks the threshold region as a place dominated by action.

Thresholds in Celan's poetry often open a space that allows him to create a linguistic reality and a dialogue that could not exist elsewhere. That is certainly the case here as well. The
act of naming is inseparably connected to the process of speech creation. However, the poem does not tell us exactly what is named, only where it happens. Thus, was wir getan becomes an act of creating language that arises out of silence. It is also dialogic, since it is created by the combined action of the Ich and the Du. This creation is only possible within the active threshold that goes in and out about the Ich/Du.

If it is true that Gemeinsam is a love poem, then it is necessary to ask what kind of love poem it is and how everything else that happens in the poem fits within that context. This love poem is one that admits and accepts both the bitter and the sweet. It acknowledges that a life together with someone (gemeinsam) is not always a smooth road. It is a risk entering into a relationship where love is at stake. One is left bare before that person, at risk of crossing over some forbidden line of transgressing the space of the other. There is no instruction manual for how to proceed, no third is going to show the way. But the poetic Ich in this poem accepts this and accepts that whatever happens, happens to both of them. The third stanza begins with the consequences of what they did: werden die Schatten nicht/ einzeln kommen... The anticipated conclusion of this idea is that the shadows will no longer come singly, but rather the opposite that is, in pairs or in multiples. Your shadows will become my shadows, your trials my trials, etc. But this is not how the poem continues. Instead, Celan gives us the final stanza with the rolling, floating stone and the living dream. He leaves the negative implied within the structure of the poem what is left unsaid is here very much a part of the poem and cannot be forgotten but emphasizes the rewards of taking the risk. The living dream, the love song, as a part of laichen, is not even possible without the risk. Poetic language shares the same fate: without the risk of failure, poetry is not even possible.

15Silvio Vietta, among others, makes this assertion (96).
Conclusion

When one reads Celan’s poetry, one is constantly confronted with the conflict and paradox of extremes. Celan’s place in history gives his work an authority that few other poets can match. From his Bremen and Büchner-Prize speeches we learn a little about what poetry meant to him. It was his refuge from the storm, his attempt to come to terms with the pain, the loneliness, and the isolation that he faced in the wake of the Holocaust.

In dieser Sprache habe ich, in jenen Jahren und in den Jahren nachher, Gedichte zu schreiben versucht: um zu sprechen, um mich zu orientieren, um zu erkunden, wo ich mich befand und wohin es mit mir wollte, um mir Wirklichkeit zu entwerfen. (GWIII 186)

His poetry gave him a voice—a means of reaching out and finding an access point to a society that had shut him out. The language of poetry for Celan was a means of orienting himself and a means of discovery. However, Celan was also aware of the precariousness of that voice and of the possibility that it would fall silent.

. . .das Gedicht zeigt, das is unverkennbar, eine starke Neigung zum Verstummen. Es behauptet sich erlauben Sie mir, nach so vielen extremen Formulierungen, nun auch diese, am Rande seiner selbst; es ruft und holt sich, um bestehen zu können, unausgesetzt aus seinem Schon-nicht-mehr in sein Immer-noch zurück. (199)

For Celan, poetry was something he could enter into a place connected to reality but outside of it. It is much like the thresholds described in this chapter, and it is surrounded by paradox. The place in which poetry resides is a moment of presence (198), and it is open, endless, but empty.

__________________________

16 Ulrich Baer calls Celan the last modern poet because his fragmented poetry represents the final breakdown at the end of modern tradition (1).
The place where poetry resides is a dimension that both exists and cannot exist. It is a utopia, a linguistic construct: der Ort, wo alle Tropen und Metaphern ad absurdum geführt werden wollen (199).

The reality of poetry was the place where Celan reached out to an other that would be able to understand. He saw poetry as a dialogue, even if an uncertain one. He calls his poems a message in a bottle that may possibly wash up on someone’s heartland (186). A poem was for him a way for language to find a voice Wege, auf denen die Sprache stimmhaft wird, es sind kreatürliche Wege, Daseinsentwürfe... (201).

In both the Bremen and the Büchner-Prize speeches there is an element of hope that speaks out from the surrounding despair. But both of these speeches come at a unique time in Celan’s career. The end of the war was more than a decade in the past, so the immediate shock of the Holocaust had perhaps worn off. In the poetry of the time we also see a turn to other topics— an increased interest in language, Jewish chassidic mysticism, etc. And people were indeed beginning to listen to him and connect with him, as the awarding of these two prizes makes clear. Celan married, started a family and had more or less steady employment. There was reason to believe that hope could prevail. Celan’s writing at the time reflects this. While never completely positive, the poems of Von Schwelle zu Schwelle, and to a lesser extent, Die Niemandsrose acknowledge a possibility of connecting with others who may be able to share his views. The threshold serves as the metaphoric access point to his unique language and poetic world. His later poetry expresses little of the optimism of these middle works, which perhaps explains the diminished frequency of threshold images.

I have attempted to show how the various functions of the threshold overlap and intertwine how they intersect with each other, how there are a number of paradoxes and
contradictions that can only exist together within the threshold. Death helps to define life. The necessity of memory arises out of the need to forget. Sleep comes to represent both death and forgetting. Sleep is a necessary element in dreaming; however, it finds its most powerful expression on the threshold of waking. Each of these metaphors become thresholds in which the poetic Ich can encounter its other, the Du. The interconnections continue endlessly. Yet, in nearly every one, the role of language rises to the surface. Celan’s work is often self-reflective, exploring in many cases the limits of language and expression. It is often noted how Celan takes language to its extreme, to the outer edges where it threatens to be silenced completely. But it is at that extreme threshold between speech and silence, he is able to express himself with a degree of eloquence that would not be possible otherwise.

Celan’s poetry still speaks to a large audience. It continues to resonate because people find their own access points to it where they can encounter his voice and become the Du to whom the poems speak. These moments, like thresholds, are often brief, almost imperceptible, but they touch upon a reality that exists only in his language, if one is willing to make the effort to find it.
Chapter 3

Peter Handke an der Schwelle der Erzählung

From the beginning of his career, Peter Handke has had an abiding interest in a postmodern reception of language. He inherits this perspective not only from philosophers such as Heidegger and Benjamin, but also from the poetic tradition that runs through Hofmannsthal and Rilke as well as Paul Celan. Even though their literary productions differ radically on the surface, there is an underlying similarity between Celan’s tacit acceptance of a language fragmented by the Holocaust and Handke’s unrestricted reveling in an equally fragmented postmodern language. Handke’s work reveals an awareness of the distance between a sign and the object it represents and its effect on the distance between the individual and the other between Ich and Du that characterizes so much of Celan’s poetry.

Handke also represents a return to an earlier form of literature more characteristic of Hofmannsthal. This is not to say that Handke is the synthesis of Celan and Hofmannsthal. Rather, Handke’s works resemble Hofmannsthal’s stylistically while expressing an awareness of the weight of history, thanks at least in part to writers such as Celan.

The following chapter will examine the interrelationship in Handke’s writing between language, time, and space, and his ability to create a time and a space within narration in which he can reestablish a lost connection to family, to the Other, and to his own place in history. The first section will address the act of observation as a prerequisite to narration in Der Chinese des Schmerzes (1983). In this work, Handke also explores the definition and function of the threshold.

---

1 Peter Handke’s arrival on the literary scene at the 1966 meeting of Gruppe 47 at Princeton University and his subsequent rise as a literary force have been well documented. Already in this early address, the use of a literary language had a prominent role. See especially Christoph Bartmann’s Suche nach Zusammenhang: Handkes Werk als Prozeß and the collection Peter Handke edited by Raimund Fellinger.
The second section investigates more specifically Handke’s *Auseinandersetzung* with language, looking at *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter* (1970), *Die Wiederholung* (1986), and *In einer dunklen Nacht ging ich aus meinem stillen Haus* (1997). The third section will deal primarily with the role that history plays in narration—the role of the story in history. During the nineties the possibilities in *Geschichte* took two very different directions for Handke. We will look first at the aesthetically-oriented *Noch einmal für Thukydides* (1995) which explores the significance of the history of a single moment at a specific point—the history of the small things. In this work Handke explores the moment in a way very similar to Hofmannsthal’s *Augenblicke in Griechenland* or his *Chandosbrief*. In sharp contrast to this approach is the play *Die Fahrt im Einbaum: oder das Stück zum Film vom Krieg* (1999), which laments or condemns the destructive use of language as rhetoric in the propagation of war. In the final section, we will turn to Handke’s collaborative work with Wim Wenders, *Der Himmel über Berlin* (1986), and see how a historical split which has created both a history of peace and a history of war has its resolution on the individual level.

In each of these works, Handke employs a variety of threshold images to explore an existential world. It is neither possible nor desirable to separate each of these categories into specifically spatial, temporal and linguistic spheres. I argue that while language, time and space are each dimensions for themselves in Handke’s writing, they remain intricately intertwined so that each helps constitute the other in an interdependent and evolving system. Out of this system arises a concept of history, or *Geschichte*, which creates a coherent narrative out of a fragmented postmodern existence, and allows the individual to find a way out of isolation and reconnect with society.
Handke shares with Celan and Hofmannsthal an interest in exploring the possibilities and limitations of language. In a sense, Handke has had to work in the shadow of Paul Celan, whose poetry took language to the very limits of comprehension. Celan’s last poems were so fragmented and so close to crossing the threshold into incoherency, that it would be impossible for another writer to follow down precisely the same path. So those who followed, by necessity had to take a somewhat different approach. Early in his career, Handke experimented directly with language. Works such as Kaspar and the poetry collection Die Innenwelt der Außenwelt der Innenwelt look specifically at how language is produced and the relation between language and the creation of a self-identity. In these early works, Handke, unlike Celan, eschews any attempt to reform or recover language from its recent past. Rather, he experiments with a postmodern approach to language, reveling in the interplay of sound and syllable, allowing the very meaninglessness of idle chatter to reconstitute new meaning. Handke’s early novel Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter is still very much in this tradition. But it is a much later work, Der Chinese des Schmerzes, which illustrates the mature Handke’s ability to approach the question of language in the twentieth century in a much more complex way. He confronts the emptiness left by a modern language consumed with inflammatory, commercial, or meaningless rhetoric by promoting a narrative of simple existence free from such obstacles.

The Observer at the Threshold: Der Chinese des Schmerzes and the Threshold Defined

In this novel, Handke displays a greater awareness for the way in which language can be used to constitute a place and a time for an individual. It is this work more than any other that details the function of the threshold as a region that helps the individual situate her- or himself in relation to the rest of the world. The threshold becomes a necessary bridge to discovering one’s
own history or narrative.\textsuperscript{2} Handke’s novel covers the whole spectrum of possibilities for the threshold metaphor. It is also the only example among the works in this dissertation of a book which focuses on the threshold as the leitmotiv for the entire work.

Andreas Loser, history teacher and self-proclaimed \textit{Schwellenkundler}, finds himself at a turning point in his life. He has taken leave of his job, and has estranged himself from his wife and his son. He spends his days mostly walking the paths on the outskirts of Salzburg. Andreas Loser is a man in limbo. He is \textit{lose} loose, unattached to anything throughout most of a narration in which almost nothing occurs. Loser’s story takes place between actions. Before the narration begins, Loser has taken leave of his teaching position and he has stepped out of the activity of daily life. He constantly wanders, but never arrives. Yet, Loser’s actions seem to have no direct consequences. \textit{Der Chinese des Schmerzes} is a narrative about being and seeing and also about narration itself. Handke attempts to remove everything from the narrative that isn’t part of seeing or being. And even though he is not completely successful in this, the novel has a sparseness about it that places the focus firmly on this interaction between observation and language.

The work is divided into three sections: \textit{Der Betrachter wird abgelenkt}, \textit{Der Betrachter greift ein}, and \textit{Der Betrachter sucht einen Zeugen}, plus an epilogue. The emphasis here is on the narrator as observer. He has a privileged point of view unusual for a first-person narrator as one both outside and inside the narration itself. Key to understanding this connection seems to be the symbol of the bridge with which Handke begins and ends the novel. The bridge is an opening threshold metaphor in a book filled with thresholds of all kinds. The observer, standing in the

\textsuperscript{2}The title is likely a reference to Martin Heidegger’s essay \textit{Die Sprache}, in which Heidegger discusses Georg Trakl’s poem \textit{Ein Winterabend}. Prominent in the essay is a discussion of the line \textit{Schmerz versteinerte die Schwelle}. Heidegger uses the line to expand on his ideas of the creation of art and language from a moment of rupture within the threshold.
middle of the bridge, is in a position perhaps the only position possible that enables him to tell this particular story. The threshold for Handke is an open/empty symbol, one that he feels free to fill or define perhaps because even as he does so, the threshold symbol empties itself again, ready to be redefined. Es war eigentlich keine Wärme, sondern ein Aufwallen; keine Leere, sondern ein Leer-sein; weniger mein persönliches Leersein, als eine Leer-Form. Und die Leerform hieß: Erzählung. Sie hieß aber auch, daß nichts passierte (CS 11). These empty forms can often be found in Handke’s works on the borders between natural and man-made environments, in places that are still open, still free, yet still a part of a human experience. In an interview with Herbert Gamper, Handke explains how the emptiness at the edge of a city functions as a threshold and as a place where a narration can begin:

Also es [die Leere] war immer am Rand, z.B. am Stadtrand, z.B. an der Grenze zwischen Wald und Steppe, es ist ja seltsam: immer an Grenzen, oder besser gesagt, auf Schwellen. Immer da. Es hat immer auch mit der Nähe, mit der Erreichbarkeit (vielleicht noch besser) der Menschenwelt zu tun, nie in der Wüste zum Beispiel, und nie irgendwo im Hochgebirge[. . .]. Also in dieser Leere, da tauchen die Vorfahren, die Nachkommen, die ganze Menschenwelt[. . .]die möchte sich bevölkern, die Leere. (Zwischenräume 112-13)

The empty thresholds allow Handke to populate the space with a story while also maintaining its emptiness at the same time. This particular threshold is open and apart from an already signified city landscape, but still connected to it. That is, the city has already had a meaning or even a history assigned to it, but the border region around it is still a place where something, a story or a history, can be created.
Handke’s thresholds can be broken down into general categories of time, space, and language. In *Der Chinese des Schmerzes* he makes use of all three. In particular he employs thresholds of time and space to enable his protagonist, Andreas Loser, to define his own history (*Geschichte*). Handke constantly plays with the dual meaning of *Geschichte* in a way that the artistic narrative, or the ability to narrate at all, is inseparably connected to history as it is represented in the past, present, and in the future. Narrative language is therefore expressly an act of time. But in doing so, Handke also shows how language as a set of individual signs and symbols functions in the creation of a specific time. In one scene, Loser joins a group of friends; a banker, a painter, a priest, and a few others gather together for a game of cards. As the game is beginning, Loser asks the priest if there is any mention of thresholds in the religious tradition. As the priest thinks about this question, each of the others gives an account of his own experience with thresholds. What results is a composite definition or a listing of the possibilities that the threshold as image can offer. The most significant of these may well be Loser’s final comment on the topic. When asked if he is trying to test the group with his question, Loser replies *Nein, nicht testen, sondern zum Erzählen bringen. Ich habe nämlich bemerkt, daß es nichts gibt, womit man andere so zum Erzählen bringen kann wie mit der Frage nach der Schwelle* (CS 133). The threshold becomes a means for overcoming his inability to express himself. Again with Herbert Gamper, Handke describes the threshold as a place that provides a moment in which to catch one’s breath before continuing on. It creates an open space in which to express an inner impression.

...dieses Innehalten, auch wenn gar keine dingliche Schwelle ist, schafft dann die Schwelle, die dann in der Regel fruchtbar sein kann. Also nur das Stehenbleiben oder das sich verlangsamen schafft schon den Schwellen-Ort. ...Die machen die
Erfahrung beschreiblicher. Die helfen mir auch dazu, das in die Außenwelt zu übertragen ich glaub das Wort übertragen ist richtig also die Empfindungen, die ja sprachlos sind, anhand von Anschaulichkeiten sprach . . . sprachmächtig oder wie auch immer zu machen. (Zwischenräume 184)

The priest emphasizes the power such conceptual thresholds can have, especially as they are found within one s self. Jeder Schritt, jeder Blick, jede Gebärde sollte sich selber als einer möglichen Schwelle bewußt werden und das Verlorene auf diese Weise neu Schaffen (CS 128).

Handke in his writing often explores the boundaries of language. But Handke s thresholds also take on a physical dimension as well, while still maintaining their multifaceted symbolic meanings. For Handke, the threshold is both a border/liminal space as well as a center. Jürgen Egyptien sees Handke s concept of the threshold as a spatial equivalent of the temporal nunc stans (standing now the present) and as the locus of epiphany (Egyptien 50). The concepts of space and time come together in the threshold, creating a historical perspective, aware of past and future in the moment of the present. According to Pia Janke, it also provides for a new beginning, where the borders or limits become the center, and a gate to the new world (Janke 101). Indeed, Janke sees thresholds in Handke s work as a necessary link to the past: . . . so ist bei Handke die Initiation gerade an die Bewahrung der Grenze gebunden. Das Tor zur neuen Welt muß erhalten bleiben, um das Bindeglied zur alten, zum Vergangenen, nicht zu verlieren (101).

One of the most important points made by the priest is that the threshold is, unlike a border, a place for itself a place both of testing and of protection (126). His statement calls to mind, for example, the Hebrews in Egypt, who were commanded by Moses to paint their thresholds (lintels) with the blood of the Passover lamb, so that the destroying angel would not
take their first-born. In this sense, the threshold became the locus of both the testing of the people’s faith and obedience, and the means for their protection.

In his descriptions of the threshold, the priest often brings up similar dialectical relationships brought together in the threshold so that the it stands as a part for a whole. Thus the threshold in the Bible can represent both heaven or hell, (pearly gates vs. the gates of Hell), salvation (Ich bin die Tür. Wer durch mich eintritt, wird gerettet) or damnation.

Thomas Barry notes that many critics of Handke’s early works seemed to miss the fundamental existential import of Handke’s early efforts (Postmodern Longings 89). He attributes Handke’s use of a distorted language to a personal concern with the experiences of alienation and dislocation generated by the uncritical use of word and sign (89). It is not language itself that is responsible for the growing sense of alienation in a postmodern world. Rather, it is the unthinking use of language a lack of awareness of the power of language that leads to its misuse. Handke’s response to this potential for alienation in language comes in his search for what Barry and others have called the static moment that will help overcome the fragmentation that characterizes a postmodern world.

This longing for stability/wholeness/harmony in a fragmented and destabilized postmodern (or has it ever not been so) world is, and has been, the central project of Handke’s writing. . . .Handke has realized, as have all those who have been behind bars (existential or otherwise), Schopenhauer and Nietzsche included, that the creative imagination provides a way out, even if it only lasts a moment.

---

3Loser calls himself a Schwellenkundler. He states early in the book that as an amateur archeologist, he has specialized in finding the thresholds of old structures, in the belief that by finding these empty or absent spaces, the entire layout of the building or even the entire town can be determined (25).
Handke's quest may be for the static moment, but his characters achieve, at best, only a momentary transcendence. (Barry 98)

This emphasis on achieving momentary transcendence of the prison house of language (98)\(^4\) translates into an increased incidence of temporal thresholds in Handke's works. Handke explores over and over, like Hofmannsthal, the moment of the present, both by expanding the moment outward, and by dwelling in it. As he does so, he describes minute details in a snapshot manner. This allows him, together with the reader, to get inside an instant of time that can exist only as long as it is described linguistically. The paradox, of course, is that the moment never lasts, and must ultimately pass away. This is also what Hofmannsthal discovers/explains in his Chandosbrief. Handke's emphasis on such Jetztmomente places the focus of any action on the moment in which it occurs.

Handke shares with Celan a desire to search out metaphors or images that have not yet been burdened with a history of signification. But where Celan often accomplished this through the use of neologisms and obscure technical terminology, Handke discovers his metaphors in more everyday objects to which he supplies his own significance. In Die Wiederholung, for example he makes repeated reference to a blind window and an empty cattle trail as visual metaphors to which he can attach any significance he wishes. In Der Chinese des Schmerzes, the open metaphors take two primary forms. The first is a simple stone or more precisely the moment a stone is thrown. The second is the metaphor of the threshold itself.

The central event in Der Chinese des Schmerzes also involves a previously empty sign der Steinwurf Loser's cast stone. It comes as Loser is walking on the Mönchberg in Salzburg. He

\(^4\)Here one must think of Celan's Mit wechselndem Schlüssel which also describes language as a kind of prison house (GW I 112).
finds a swastika painted on a tree. Seeing it, he picks up a stone and runs after the graffitist. At the highest point on the mountain, he catches up to a man with a spray can, throws his stone, and kills him.

The action, which in real time would have lasted just a minute or two, takes up the better part of seven pages. With the throwing of the stone, Handke says he was looking for a metaphor that was still free of a long tradition: Also ist es [der Steinwurf] noch frei, es ist eine freie Stelle in der Tradition von Erzählen (Zwischenräumen 21). Despite Handke's assertion, there seems to be a relatively long history of stone throwing in literature, especially from the Bible, with the expression of Jesus He who is without sin, let him cast the first stone. Closer to hand, however, is Celan's poem Welchen der Steine du hebst, in which Celan emphasizes the connection between the words we use and the violence that has been done with them in the past. Welches der Worte du brauchst/ du dankst/ dem Verderben (GW I 129). Celan suggests that there is no sign that has not been tarnished by a long history of connotations, that does not also contain countless deaths by association. Nevertheless, Handke claims to search for such open metaphors/signs possessing a naive, unspoiled quality: ...also ich entdecke an einem unschuldigen Gegenstand, an einem urwüchsigen, naturwüchsigen Gegenstand das Zeichen, da diesen sozusagen über sich selber hinausgelten läßt. (Zwischenräume 24-25). These signs, he says, almost create themselves, without requiring that he impose meaning on them (25). It is possible that Handke is very much aware of the historic connotations of stone throwing and its association with guilt, in which case his statement becomes ironic and more in line with Celan's poem. In this sense, then, no sign is guilt-free.

The opposite of the supposedly open stone metaphor is the swastika sign that incites Loser's action. It too was once an open sign, a symbol that once had eine ganz unschuldige
The reference is reminiscent of Martin Buber’s use of the *Grat* in *Ich und Du* which is the threshold region most likely to enable the *ich* to encounter the Other (Buber 406).

Bedeutung (CS 97), but whose meaning has been spoiled by its association with Nazism. Its recent history does not allow for any of its other meanings to coexist. For this reason Loser seems to have trouble even naming it. He calls it first a dickschwarze Krummbalke, and Kriegsbemalung, (96) followed by Schwarzhelle, and the more common Hakenkreuz and Swastika (97). He also calls it a verfluchtes Mal (98), a Unheilandrohung (98), and perhaps most importantly, an Unbild (97). He has encountered the ultimate closed symbol, one that is precisely nicht leer (100), and no attempt to rename it can change its meaning in the slightest. It can only be overcome through its annihilation.

The act of throwing the stone takes place in a variety of thresholds. It participates in each of the three threshold categories that are central to my dissertation. That is, in the scene we find thresholds of time, space and language that then deal with issues of narration, the individual, and the individuals relation to the other and to his own history/narrative. Loser’s understanding of the unsign of the swastika and the meaning of his own action against the vandal all take place within a threshold experience. As he sees the swastika painted on the tree, his first thought to himself is Jetzt! (96). With this utterance, Loser seems to enter a threshold of timeless presence. Loser takes in details that should not be visible to him as he takes off in a dead run. These observations, strangely, are also within thresholds. He sees, for example, a woman in a fur coat at the narrowest point of the mountain, wo dieser sich fast zu einem Grat verengt (98). Below, the cars on the bridge wiederholten sich im spiegelnden Wasser darunter als vielfach vergrößerte, anfang- und endlose Schattenkarawane (99). Loser claims that nothing escaped his attention as he ran.

5The reference is reminiscent of Martin Buber’s use of the *Grat* in *Ich und Du* which is the threshold region most likely to enable the *ich* to encounter the Other (Buber 406).
The moment Loser throws the stone becomes a turning point in his life and in the story. In this threshold, he goes beyond his role as an observer and becomes an agent, capable of action. Moreover, he gains the ability to name things. The spray can becomes more accurately to him a Bombe, and the vandal becomes a Hinderer (Adversary), which he identifies as more accurate translation for the biblical concept of the evil one (101). Loser experiences a moment of triumph upon realizing what he has done, exclaiming das ist meine Geschichte. . . . Meine Geschichte ist mein Halt. Now, he says, he belongs zum Volk der Täter (108). It is clear that the word Geschichte here refers to both meanings of the word as history and as narration. The act of annihilation becomes also an act of creation. It takes place temporally, in this jetztmoment, and physically, at the highest point of the mountain where the road stretches between two long rock walls in a threshold. Here, Loser finds a handhold (Halt) that allows him to reconnect to himself by finding a self-narrative, while at the same time he steps over into the human world, into the world of the doers. Thus, his act is a rite of passage, a stepping over or an Über-tretung into history, narrative and others. Loser’s act, his crime, is doubly a crossing-over. Just as in Celan’s poetry, every word and every act carries with it a consequence and creates guilt. But to not act, to do nothing suggests an absence of life, perhaps a guilt in absentia.

It is possible to see the entire work as a dream in the threshold between a consciousness we control and a sub-consciousness we can never be aware of. The narrator invites the reader to close the eyes as the work begins. Perhaps he does the same himself, because as his narration ends, he opens his eyes, takes a breath, and looks into the emptiness into the narrative empty-form (242). At the end he falls asleep and dreams, Der Erzähler ist die Schwelle. Dazu muß er einhalten und sich fassen. Was ist der Reim auf Schwelle? (242).
Handke begins his work *Der Chinese des Schmerzes* with the imperative *Schließe die Augen, und aus dem Schwarz der Lettern bilden sich die Stadtlichter* (7). Axel Gellhaus comments on the opening of the novel as a threshold experience designed to engage the reader, to make the reader aware of an inner eye with which the novel should be read (Gellhaus 29). It quickly becomes clear that Handke’s story is one of transitions. That is to say, it is not about what happens before and after so much as what happens during the process of the transition itself. He describes a settlement on the periphery of Salzburg, separated from the city by an *aus dem Hochmittelalter stammende Kanal* (8). The settlement is *jenseits der Stadtgrenze*. On one side of the canal is the turn-around for the electric bus and on the other side is the settlement. A yellow sign on which the word Salzburg appears with a red line slashed through it marks the end of the city and the beginning of the settlement. Over the canal between the two there stands a small bridge. The narrator tells us that it is not yet night, suggesting that the story, as in *Das kleine Welttheater*, begins on a bridge in the twilight between day and night.

Handke returns to the bridge theme in the epilogue. Standing on the bridge, the narrator has a clear view of both sides, becoming again the observer. Together with the canal, he associates the bridge with an almost religious experience (256). But above all it is a place where he can simply exist. *Das Gebirgswasser des Kanals, eisig, kühlt den Puls. Einmal, hier stehend, ist er: Ich bin* (251). In the epilogue, Handke clarifies the relation between the threshold and narrative language as an act of observation, and an existential awareness of the self. The bridge provides a space in which he can simply exist, outside the demands of time, without the need to do anything more than observe the goings-on around him. From this perspective, he is able to become the narrator, bound through his narrative to the world around him.
Handke inherits a literary tradition that mistrusts the very words used to build it. This is particularly evident in his early novel *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*. Even though *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter* represents a return to narration for Handke, as Doris Runzheimer suggests (71), the actual plot of the story plays at best a secondary role to the inner conflicts of the protagonist. It can be summed up in a few sentences. Joseph Bloch, a retired soccer goalie, believes he has lost his job as a mechanic. At least he interprets the look the foreman gives him to mean that he has been fired. He wanders around Vienna for a few days and is attracted to the woman at the ticket counter of a movie theater. After going home with her and spending the night, Bloch spontaneously strangles the woman and boards a bus for an unnamed border town. There he stays in the inn of a former girlfriend and observes the village as they search for a lost schoolchild. Each day he reads in the paper that the police are gradually finding clues that will lead them to him as the murderer of the young woman in Vienna. However, the book ends before this can take place.

*Die Angst des Tormanns* is often compared to a detective story, if perhaps an unusual one. It is clear, however, that neither the skeletal plot nor the barely recognizable genre conventions play the most significant role in the novel. Rather, Handke may be playing with the significance of their very absence. Bloch, possibly schizophrenic (Mixner 41), suffers from an inability to read the signs in his everyday world. Or rather, he suffers from an overdeveloped

---

6While this is also true of *Der Chinese des Schmerzes*, as I have already stated, plot plays an even more insignificant role here.

7Segooris (46), Blattner (4) and Klinkowitz (38) all comment on the crime novel aspects of *Tormann*.
ability to read these signs so that everything he sees begins to take on a multitude of meanings that then overwhelm him.

Thresholds play an important role in developing Handke’s perception of the language problem. The alienation that Josef Bloch experiences in his perception of language also has repercussions in his perception of time and interpersonal relations. Thus, he gradually becomes cut off, entirely unable to perceive or relate to the world beyond his own consciousness, calling that very consciousness into question.

The goalkeeper as a metaphor is the first significant threshold element in the novel. The book begins with an epigraph: Der Tormann sah zu, wie der Ball über die Linie rollte. . .

Richard Firda interprets this line from the context at the end of the book in which Bloch explains the dilemma of the goalkeeper and his inability to read the signs presented to him by the kicker (Firda 66). The interaction between goalie and kicker can be seen in this light as a semiotic allegory in which the ball signifies the inability of the one to communicate with the other. Will the ball successfully arrive in the goalie’s hands, or will he miss it entirely? The goalie must be able to read the opponent’s moves if he is to succeed in intercepting the ball before it can pass him by. There is nothing in the novel that really hints at a way of overcoming the fragmentation and isolation Bloch experiences. Even the goalie’s ability to stop the ball in the final segment only serves to emphasize the protagonist’s inability to do the same both literally and metaphorically.

In German, the Tormann is literally the gate-man, the one who stands at the gate and either watches as the ball rolls across a line, as in the epigraph, or watches as the ball comes directly into his hands, as happens at the end of the book. But there are other possibilities as well. Handke’s Tormann may be related to Claudio, Hofmannsthal’s Tor/fool whose own self-indulgence prevented him from experiencing existential life. Both Claudio and Bloch perceive the
world from within their own confined space. But where Claudio’s reality is limited to the confines of his own room, Bloch is an observer of but never a participant in everything that happens beyond the enclosed spaces in which he finds himself. Two passages in particular illustrate this point. When Bloch arrives at the border village after having killed the girl from the movie theater, he visits an old girlfriend who runs a restaurant. He and the woman sit down to have a conversation. But instead of focusing on her and what should be a significant dialogue Bloch’s attention is entirely on the objects he observes through the door in the kitchen (AT 35). In another scene, Bloch sits in a café and observes everything around him in fragments, as if each image stood apart from the others, like a snapshot. Looking outside, either through an open door or a window, he can see a part of the market square that again reminds him of a photograph or a postcard. What he sees becomes a kind of language for him:

Bloch war gereizt. Innerhalb der Ausschnitte sah er die Einzelheiten aufdringlich deutlich: als ob die Teile, die er sah, für das Ganze standen. Wieder kamen ihm die Einzelheiten wie Namensschikider vor. Leuchtschriften, dachte er. So sah er das Ohr der Kellnerin mit dem einen Ohrklips als ein Signal für die ganze Person; und eine Handtasche auf einem Nebentisch, die ein wenig aufgeklappt war, . . . stand für die Frau, die dahinter eine Kaffeetasse hielt und mit der andern Hand, nur ab und zu bei einem Bild stockend, schnell eine Illustrierte durchblätterte. Ein Turm von ineinandergesteckten Eisbechern auf der Theke wirkte wie ein Vergleich für den Wirt . . . (76)

The process seems almost painful to Bloch. Objects lose their substance and become mere symbols, distanced from the reader/observer Bloch by an intervening barrier of meaning. The details distract him to such a point that he is no longer able to see things in their entirety, but only
as fragmented elements. In later works, especially *Die Wiederholung*, we will see how Handke returns to the role of metonymy, the process by which a part comes to stand for the whole, in a way that recognizes the process more positively.

If the Tormann Bloch is related to Hofmannsthal’s *Törrischer Mann*, then it must be in his inability to connect with the other people he encounters in his life. For Bloch cannot understand any of the people with whom he comes in contact, nor can he make himself understood. On the morning of his second day in the border town, Bloch has a conversation with the housekeeper in which neither understands the other. The conversation takes place on and through the threshold of his and other rooms. Erst durch die Tür entschuldigt sie sich, aber Bloch verstand sie nicht. He follows her into the hall, but she has already moved on to the next room. He responds with an überdeutlichen double turning of his lock, closing himself off in his own room. Apologizing a short time later, he tells the girl it was all a misunderstanding. She agrees, but thinks they have misunderstood each other in an entirely different way. The conversation continues in this fashion with each speaking past the other about completely meaningless issues until the girl gives up on the conversation in frustration. Thus the threshold in *Angst des Tormanns* becomes instead of a locus of understanding, as in so many of Celan’s poems, almost a total barrier to communication and human interaction. This is significantly different from the manner in which thresholds appear in Handke’s later works, so it is interesting to note that here, at this early stage in his writing, the threshold metaphor has assumed such a negating role in language.

The novel is clearly postmodern in its approach to narration and composition. In it:

an eagerness for depth is replaced by a fascination with surface: texts are therefore writerly rather than readerly, for there is no compulsion to find meaning
beyond the author's performance on the page, which the reader is invited to re-create. Yet the product is not meaningless, because writing can be celebrated for the human activity it really is, rather than for its futile attempt to represent something else. (Klinkowitz and Knowleton 5)

As a barometer for the state of language and literature at one of the turning points in Postmodernism, *Die Angst des Tormanns* provides a point of transition for our discussion of thresholds. Handke makes no attempt to go beyond diagnosing a condition nothing is resolved by the end of the book. The protagonist is at best only able to recognize his inadequacies, but cannot overcome them. By the end, Bloch translates everything he sees into words, but these words are isolated from each other in the text. 

Schaum 9 floß 9 die 9 Haustorstuften 9 herab 9 Federbetten 9 lagen 9 hinter 9 den 9 Fensterscheiben 9 (AT 108). Each word is isolated from the next, creating a collection of fragments instead of a unified sentence. Likewise, the logical progression of his actions also disturbs him, and he seeks to eliminate any cause-and-effect in his behavior. He tries to avoid the necessity of one word following the next or one action proceeding logically from the one before it to the one after, thus creating an illusion of continuity of narration where he feels one does not exist. 

Warum mußte daraus, daß er hier ging, etwas gefolgert werden? Mußte er begründen, warum er hier stehenblieb? Warum mußte er, wenn er an einem Schwimmbad vorbeiging, etwas bezwecken? (109). These attempts nonetheless fail in the end, for he must explain to himself why he should not have to explain. 

Diese so daß, weil und damit waren wie Vorschriften; er beschloß sie zu vermeiden, um sie nicht . The sentence breaks off suddenly in the middle of his explanation. He is caught in the inescapable paradox of his own tortured logic.
Bloch’s inability to make use of a fragmented language leads him to other aspects of fragmentation and isolation as well. He is a character completely cut off from any meaningful interaction with his environment. Lacking the ability to create, or at least to comprehend the narrative of his own life, he exists, detached from both his past and his future, in a torturous eternal present. Temporally, spatially, and linguistically he is trapped in the in-between of a threshold existence which is of his own making and which he cannot comprehend. The entire setting of Bloch’s world can be characterized by thresholds. Spatially, Bloch has fled Vienna for an unnamed border town. The border is marked by a no-man’s-land filled with mines, guard dogs, and watch towers. The village’s liminality is paradoxically central to its identity. The descriptions of the town resemble Richard Firda’s description of Griffen, where Handke spent most of his childhood (Firda 1). Griffen lies on the border of the former Yugoslavia in the Austrian province Carinthia, a historically disputed region home to both ethnic Slovenians and Germans. Thus, this borderland region exists between two cultures and has assumed a unique dual cultural identity that continues to this day (1).

Temporally, the body of the novel takes place between what should be the most significant events of the work. That is, it takes place between the time of the murder and Bloch’s capture. Yet neither the murder nor his capture play a significant role in Bloch’s existential crisis. The murder is recounted in such a matter-of-fact way that there seems to be no difference between the significance of this act and what Bloch eats for breakfast. Likewise, the progress of the police investigation is only revealed indirectly through newspaper articles. Moreover, Bloch’s capture does not make it into the narrative at all, although one is led to believe that his arrest is inevitable. Instead, the majority of the narrative takes place in this waiting period between the event and its necessary consequence. This in-betweenness of time is further emphasized by the linguistic
thresholds, by Bloch s existence between signifier and signified. Bloch has become disconnected from language by its very overabundance. He feels a compulsion to assign meaning to everything he sees to the point that none of it has any meaning anymore.

***

Where Die Angst des Tormanns exposes a postmodern world as a fractured, almost schizophrenic existence dominated by its incomprehensibility, Die Wiederholung explores ways of coming to terms with these same issues and even possibilities for moving forward. In it, Handke ties the concepts of repetition and memory as elements of narrative to the threshold metaphor. In doing so, he creates a space for himself in postmodern thought for his own unique ways of overcoming the silence of meaningless language, as it is expressed in Die Angst des Tormanns and Der Chinese des Schmerzes. In it, as in Der Chinese des Schmerzes, literature (or story-telling) becomes a space for itself in which memories can come into being.

Die Wiederholung is a semi-autobiographical work told from the perspective of a middle-aged man looking back a quarter of a century at his younger self. The protagonist, Filip Kobal, a thinly veiled proxy for Handke himself, reflects on a journey he made as a twenty-year-old student from his home in Carinthia into the northern Yugoslav province of Slovenia, his family's ancestral home. The summer after graduating from the Gymnasium, Filip takes off on his own in search of traces of his older brother, Gregor. Twenty years older than himself, his brother, after being drafted into the German army in the Second World War, went AWOL to join a partisan group in Slovenia and then disappeared. Filip's knowledge of his brother is limited to a few letters, the stories now grown into legends told by his family, and the notebooks on horticulture Gregor left behind from his time studying in Maribor, in Slovenia. Also included in his schoolbooks is a Slovenian-German dictionary that becomes important later in the story.
Both time and place in the setting of this story function as thresholds. They also reflect the fragmentation that has often led to forming thresholds in Handke's works. Time is never linear in the narrative, but jumps back and forth between three different periods. The story begins: Ein Vierteljahrhundert oder ein Tag ist vergangen, seit ich, auf der Spur meines verschollenen Bruders, in Jesenice ankam. The story is itself an act of memory in which the opening sentence serves to bring together immediately two otherwise widely separated moments in time. As the story progresses, the narrator will continue to jump freely from one memory to another, bringing events from other decades, and sometimes even other centuries into the present of his own story, so that all of these memories of his own past and the past of his ancestors serve to form his own identity. At the beginning, however, he describes himself as a young man who leaves his home in zwiespalt torn, or not whole, not really knowing who he is or wants to be now that he has finished his schooling. To the extent that the story tells of Filip's journey of self discovery, the novel resembles a traditional Bildungsroman, although his path will prove to be more circuitous and internal than the model Goethe established.

The geographical location of the story also reflects Filip's split nature. Austrian Carinthia and Yugoslav Slovenia were once considered a single region, divided only by the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Richard Firda calls Carinthia the ancestral and linguistic home of those Austrians confined to Carinthia under the exigencies of twentieth-century European history (Firda 127). The Kobal family has both an Austrian and a Slovenian heritage that pulls Filip Kobal in two directions. Filip's lost brother Gregor becomes the main focus for the Slovenian part of his own identity, because he both studied in Slovenia and later disappeared there.
Because Filip shares the fragmented identity of his homeland, he must explore both halves before he can resolve his own sense of incompleteness. At the beginning of the novel, Filip finds himself at a turning point in his life, not really knowing where he belongs. He is a young man in search of himself. His childhood has made him progressively isolated from everyone that could potentially be a part of his life. His father is an authoritarian figure whom he identifies with the Yugoslavian dictator Tito. His sister is mentally impaired, and his mother, the one anchor in his life, is ill, both physically and emotionally. In addition, through his schooling, he has gradually withdrawn himself from his home town so that he no longer feels a part of the community, or comfortable with the other people his age. At the same time, he does not identify with the other students either in the Internat or at the public gymnasium, and he keeps himself mostly apart from social groups there as well. Consequently, Filip feels most at home when he is on the train or the bus, traveling between his various destinations (W 63). Traveling, or being underway, created for him both a time and a space filled with an anonymous population with which he could identify.

The novel, however, is not about how Filip finds his way out of isolation and loneliness. Rather, it describes his efforts to come to terms with it, to accept himself and his position as an outsider so that it is no longer an alienating feeling for him, but a position or a perspective that allows him to function as his society's storyteller. The central driving force is his growing ability to read and to write. These two activities are inseparable acts for Handke's character.

Early in his journey, Filip finds himself looking into the face of a border guard who is hardly older than himself. Yet it shows in the soldier's posture, his voice, and his expressions that he, unlike Filip, has already found his place (W 13). Already at this point in the book we see the importance that thresholds play in the development of Handke's ideas. Further, these thresholds are immediately linked to language. For as soon as he crosses the border into Slovenia in the
Yugoslav Republic, the border guard explains to him the meaning of his name. The name Kobal is Slavic, and he is told it means der Raum zwischen den gegrätschten Beinen, der Schritt; und so auch ein Mensch, der mit gespreizten Beinen dastehe (10). Filip’s first border crossing is associated with the act of naming. It signals he is entering into a new space, almost a fairytale land, but also a land dominated by language. However, it is not just language, but translated language that will dominate much of the narrative. Thus, his Über-treten is at the same time an Über-setzen into a new language.

The first section of the book is entitled Das blinde Fenster. The section takes its name from a bricked-in window Filip sees on his way to the train station at the beginning of his journey into Slovenia. Only the outline of the window can now be seen. It reminds Filip of his brother, who in his childhood lost an eye to an infection, and so also possessed a blind window. The meaning of the window, says Filip, always remained undefinable (W 97) when he passed it in his childhood. However, on this day, in the context of his memory of his brother and his bad eye, the blind window takes on a new meaning. Und als ich später, am Abend des folgenden Tages, in der Bahnhofsgaststätte von Jesenice, das Schimmern des blinden Fensters bedachte, übermittelte es doch noch eine klare Bedeutung es bedeutete mir: Freund, du hast Zeit! (97).

The blind window recurs throughout the story as a sign constantly in flux. Michel Volker, for example, points out that the blind window often serves as a locus for memory (Volker 212), but there are other possibilities as well. It is an open symbol, a signifier without a (single) matching signified. On Filip’s first attempt at assigning meaning to it, he finds it linked both to the memory of his brother and as an element of time in itself. More exactly, the symbol of the blind window itself exists as a space in time, an open space in which chronological time (the linear
flow of time) means less than Filip’s ability to transport himself through the blind window metaphor into another time and space.

The first night of Filip Kobal’s journey combines the elements of alienation, being isolated on the outside, and speechlessness within a threshold space. Filip undergoes a process of trial and self-examination and eventually progresses to the beginnings of a resolution, preparing him for the rest of his experiences during his journey. Because he cannot afford the expense of a hotel room, Filip spends the first night of his journey in the train tunnel on the border between Austria and Yugoslavia. As a rite of passage, the series of events described here take on the significance of a birth, or perhaps a rebirth. His ordeal in the tunnel begins to pass in a series of momentary, yet endless nightmares (sekundenlange wie endlose Schreckensträume), in which any coherence in the dream is completely lacking. His initial emotion on this night is an intense feeling of guilt. Not, he says, because he has left his family behind, but because he is alone. In dieser Nacht erfuhr ich, wieder einmal, daß auch ohne besondere Untat, mutwillig allein zu sein, ein Frevel war. . . . Ein Frevel wogegen? Gegen mich selber (W 108).

Later he will explain how this guilt at being alone is related to the difficulties he feels with language. Once beyond human companionship, the objects around him lose all meaning: they no longer speak (hatten auch die Dinge keine Sprache mehr) (111) and become mute. Not only do they lose their meaning, but they lose their narrative power: Zwar sah ich die Zahl 8, eines Notenschlüssels, aber das war einmal; das Märchen von der S, der Acht und dem Notenschlüssel hatte seine Zeichenkraft verloren (112). Without human interaction, the normal language of ordinary objects loses all meaning, and the terror of his nightmares grow greater.\(^8\) They become

\(^8\)There would seem to be a connection here between Märchen and the English nightmare, which are both derived from the MHD maere. Handke repeatedly draws a parallel in this passage between narrative and Märchen. Filip’s nightmares are so frightening to him due
increasingly fragmented, disassociated, and disjointed, and they weigh him down until he says he is only able to utter words consisting entirely of consonants (*Mitlaute*). The words are more like a series of primal grunts, devoid of any meaning. His social isolation is expressed in and magnified by his inability to form coherent speech. Later in the passage, Handke contrasts the meaningless consonant-expression with a word consisting entirely of vowels (*Selbstlaute*), which provide some resolution to Filip’s crisis.

Filip is able to momentarily pull himself out of this crisis when, with great effort, he is able to put together two coherent sentences (*zwei klare, sich selbstverständlich auseinander ergebende Sätze*) (110). Doing so affords some release because through these sentences he discovers in himself an Other (*Ich hatte wieder ein Gegenüber*), a counter-part, represented by a child within him who could act as a sounding board, an audience for his story-telling. It is not necessarily grand narratives, however, that are at work here. Instead the narratives appear as the simple stories represented by everyday objects and simple, daily events. Having thus been set somewhat at ease, Filip is able to enter a state of half-sleep, where he is able to find for a time some element of rest.

The passage describes the process by which one person is able to step out of an almost desperate isolation through the use of language. The threshold of half sleep seems to function as a boundary which the protagonist crosses in two directions. When he enters into it, he finds relief, but once he is back out of it, the feelings of isolation become even greater than before.

Der Halbschlaf war sozusagen mein letzter Begleiter in die Menschenleere gewesen, mein Geleitschutz, der sich von einem Moment zum andern als Trugbild erwies... Verstummen: So außerhalb der menschlichen Gesellschaft hatten auch 

____________________________

to their complete narrative incoherence.
More important is the German letterfulness of Buchstäblichkeit.

(111)

Here, language and human interaction are intimately connected so that a loss of one results in a loss of the other.

The way out of this isolation or alienation then, also has to lead through language. That is, he has to continue his efforts stringing one sentence to another. But since it is the world that has lost its connectivity, Filip must also learn to read the signs in the world around him. In the growing light of morning, he begins a process of deciphering, of reading, and of writing. The tunnel and the valley in which he has spent the night begins to take on a new, more liberating character.

In mich aufgenommen hatte ich die Einzelheiten des Tals auch zuvor, nun aber erschienen sie mir in ihrer Buchstäblichkeit, eine im nachhinein, mit dem grasrupfenden Pferd als dem Anfangsbuchstaben, sich aneinanderfügende Letternreihe, als Zusammenhang, Schrift. (114)

As the landscape takes on definition in the growing light, it also assumes the quality of writing that Filip as a reader must decipher. The process of reading the landscape has a liberating effect on him as the literalness of his environment allows him to assume ownership of his situation. He begins to identify himself with his older brother and feels himself set free from the weight of the meaningless objects that dominated his night.

The experience becomes a threshold phenomenon. He explains the experience by contrasting the words consisting entirely of consonants, which characterized his oppressed, alienated state in the night, with a new word consisting entirely of vowels, the Latin Eoae, which

---

9 More important is the German letteralness of Buchstäblichkeit.
he translates as "Zur Zeit der Morgenröte" or the red dawn of morning. The threshold twilight of morning provides the point in time that allows the protagonist to escape from his speechless isolation. It also suggests something of independence. The words Handke uses are not the typical *Konsonanten* and *Vokale*, but *Mitlaut* and *Selbstlaut*. The vowels that form the liberating *Eoae* have the power to pronounce themselves. They have a meaning inherent in themselves, whereas the *Mitlaut* consonants depend on some external collaborative force to supply the meaning.

Filip takes another step toward self-discovery through his studies of his brother’s Slovenian-German dictionary. In it, he discovers seemingly magical words that appear to exactly correspond to the things they represent. Each of them creates an *Ein-Wort-Märchen* a single word that in itself tells a story. For Herbert Gamper, the reading of the dictionary becomes a pattern for reading the world. So kann die Lektüre des Wörterbuchs[. . .]zum Muster werden für die Lektüre der Welt und sie sogar ersetzen (Gamper 176). Through the book, that which is present assumes the status of absence so that the differences between perception, memory, and fantasy dissolve into one another in an act of narration (176).

Again, the relationship between memory and narration is emphasized. In the story, the dictionary words are given the power of world-images. Each story creates its own reality, its own world. [. . .]um jedes Wort, bei dem ich ins Sinnieren kam, bildete sich die Welt (W 205). As he reads, Filip Kobal is transported into a new world that is both firmly rooted in the reality of the objects the words describe, and yet possessing a kind of magic, a power in language of which he has so far been unaware.

However, it is not simply in the Slovenian words alone that he discovers this power. The narrator asks if it is not just his preference for the foreign language over his native German that
has created this word-magic (Ein-Wort Zauberkraft)(207). The answer is no. Rather, it requires both the single word on the left and the translation on the right to create a space between them in which so much takes place. Thus, his discoveries come through an act of translation that, while not quite analogous to Celan's physical Über-setzen, nevertheless suggests a process by which the reader-translator crosses over into an open space between the two languages.

According to Ulrich Wesche, Handke tries to create language that originates from objects themselves: Hier wird die Sprache wieder gegenständlich, geht vom Gegenstand aus, wird aus ihm hervorgeholt (Wesche 63). Wesche relates this objectified language to Handke's earlier use of threshold symbolism and describes Handke's use of threshold metaphors as parallel zur Natur. I find this comparison useful, and somewhat different than my usual definition of thresholds. If, as Wesche asserts, a threshold can simultaneously hold apart as it joins (62) then it creates a kind of metaphorical language that may well be described by a pair of parallel lines in contrast with a perhaps more traditional model of metaphor described by perpendicular lines. If one imagines a signifier at the end of one of the perpendicular lines and the signified at the end of the other, then the point at which they intersect is a metaphor that stands in the place of both. The problem is that there is no room in this definition in which to move. The object has been limited and sterilized by its definition.

In contrast, the parallel lines in which the signifier and the thing it signifies never meet but remain forever connected create between them a space. They become a threshold which is never crossed, in which a metaphor does not replace, but realizes im Cézanneschen Sinne, parallel zur Natur. (Wesche 63). This parallelism fits very well with Handke's description of the magic taking place in the dictionary. The Slovenian term on the one side and the German on the other
construct the space between them in which Filip has his experiences with language. The images originate out of the relation *between* the two languages.

Later in his journey, Filip finds himself sheltering from the weather in a *Doline*, a small valley or impression in the ground which provides him a moment in time in which to reconnect with his environment and with his past.

In diesem Schutz hatte man entweder Zeit, an jene Schlacht des Altertums zu denken, wo die Bora zwei gegenüberstehenden Heeren die Pfeile und Speere einerseits über die Köpfe der Feinde hinausgetragen und andererseits vor die Füße geworfen hatte, oder bekam, wie im fächelnden Westwind für den Wert der Naturdinge, Augen für das Menschenwerk, die Steinwälle ebenso wie die kleinen Holzgatter darin, ein Muster aus parallelen Stangen, geschnitten aus dem Gestrüpp nebenan, so schmal, so krumm, die Zwischenräume so groß, daß darin das Urbild eines Gatters, einer Tür, eines Tors, einer Pforte kenntlich wurde: So wie die Natur für das Ausformen von Kristallen die Zwischenräume nötig hatte, so das forschende Auge für das Innewerden der Urbilder. (W 276-277)

The combination of historical reference and observation of the present, both in terms of nature and human constructions, creates the possibility of rediscovering or reinventing or internalizing the essence of the place. The time and the place this particular locus has provided Filip creates not a vacuum or a void, but an open, empty space in which to grow intellectually.

In this quote, the doors and gateways—the threshold images—do not refer specifically to the space created itself. Instead, they hint at a future potential that he is in the process of discovering.

---

10The reference to crystals formed in the between spaces is reminiscent of Paul Celan's repeated use of geodes as a symbol, which form crystals inside of hollow spaces. For Celan, crystals can represent life and growth out of an inanimate object.
Just as the dictionary became a pathway into language, so each object observed, such as the wall in this passage, tells its own story, has its own history. By becoming observant, Filip finds himself transported into a new dimension of the story each object creates. It does not seem that Handke is after mimesis here; he is not trying to describe a process by which things are represented in their Urbild, or essential form. Rather, his observations lead to a unification of time. Objects become signs that, in their presence, embody a coherent narrative that can be captured or recaptured (wieder-holt). They suggest not only their past that cannot be brought back, but imply also a wide open future. When Filip becomes aware of this potential, he is transported into that world of possibilities.

. . .indem sie sich zu erkennen gaben, einprägten in sein Inneres, wo sie, im Gegensatz zu den Tropfsteinen, aufblühen und fruchtbart werden konnten, zu übertragen in gleichwelches Land, und am dauerhaftesten ins Land der Erzählung.


Here, as in other passages, discovering the story imbedded within an object becomes literally a process of translation. Handke’s word is übertragen by which he describes the creation of literature that simultaneously creates a world and transports its creator/observer/reader into a world that intermingles the past and the present, even as it only really exists in the present moment of its discovery. 11

Having completed his account of the journey, the older narrator says he saw his brother twice during his travels. The first time is in front of an inn in a small village in Karst. It remains

11 Using a device that appears repeatedly in Der Chinese des Schmerzes, Der Himmel über Berlin, and elsewhere, Handke again uses the word Jetzt! to describe the elusive concept of an ever-fleeting present.
somewhat ambiguous whether he sees someone that reminds him of his brother or whether he simply imagines his brother in this place. Most important is that he feels a momentary communion with his brother’s spirit, or with the memory of his brother.

Trat er wirklich ein? Nein, er stand vielmehr bloß da, unter dem Portal, auf der Schwelle, und obwohl ein großes Kommen und Gehen war, bildete sich um ihn herum ein freier Raum, welcher mir, mit dem Augenblick, seine Zeit, die Zeit vor dem Weltkrieg, wiederholte (313).

This threshold becomes an imaginary space where the two separated by time could meet and commune vereint in Trauer, Gelassenheit, Leichtsinn und Verlorenheit (314).

The second time he sees his brother is through a cellar window at a train station. Through the window he sees a bed with the sheets turned back for an expected visitor. Here, his brother’s memory exists as an absence. Filip imagines that it is his brother’s bed, and that he, the expatriate, was hidden there, cared for by a woman whose silhouette Filip could see upstairs. At this point, Filip realizes he has accomplished what he set out to do. Ich sah mich an einem Ziel. Nicht den Bruder zu finden hatte ich doch im Sinn gehabt, sondern von ihm zu erzählen (W 317).

In a letter, Gregor Kobal had written that he hoped the family would meet again someday im neunten Land. The reference is both to his Slovenian homeland and to a conceptual land with a fairytale-like quality to it. It emphasizes Handke’s perception of Slovenia as a near mythical or magical land in which storytelling is somehow more possible than it is in the Austria in which he grew up. But having experienced this mythical land and having discovered his brother in it, Filip is now able to return home. In reality, he has discovered what it was that so drew his brother to

12Handke later published a collection of discussions with the Slovenian author/journalist Jo-e Horvat entitled Noch einmal vom Neunten Land (Salzburg: Wieser, 1993) about Handke’s relationship with Yugoslavia/Slovenia since the publication of Die Wiederholung.
this place. He therefore can bring home with him also the presence of his brother because he has learned how to write about him from the context of his brother s chosen home. Filip can translate his brother s wish to be reunited in this land to his own home in Austria.


(317)

Again the process of remembering, as with Celan s Grabschrift für François, is a process of translation. Here also it is the process by which stories are told and the process by which a young man finds his way out of alienation and back to a connection with his past and with his family.

***

Ten years after writing Die Wiederholung, Handke turned his attention again to Austria and to Salzburg in the book In einer dunklen Nacht ging ich aus meinem stillen Haus. This text, together with the fairytale Lucie im Wald mit dem Dingsda, which appears two years later, mark another turning point in Handke s literary style (Borgards 17). Unlike his earlier novels, Handke even calls this work a novel and not a book or a narration as he does with his works in the 1980s. In some respects it is a re-turn. In the novel, Handke re-addresses many of the issues that interested him in the mid-Eighties. Andreas Loser, the protagonist from Der Chinese des Schmerzes, reappears in this novel to introduce the protagonist, known only as the pharmacist of Taxham. He points out the pharmacist to an unnamed friend, who is the actual narrator of the novel.
As a result, the way the novel presents itself is fragmented at best and occasionally confusing. The narrative style is very indirect, occasionally broken by fragments of dialogue from a later time between the pharmacist as storyteller and the narrator, who is to record the story. The narrative style with its interruptions lends itself to the overall topic of communication which the novel addresses. The round-about narrative style calls the narrator himself into question. The readers get the story second-hand and in such a way that they are left to wonder how much of the actual events remain intact. Introducing Andreas Loser early in the book has an effect on the tone of the novel, as well as on the expectations of the reader. And in some respects, this work is thematically a sequel to *Der Chinese des Schmerzes*. However, Handke's ideas on storytelling have evolved somewhat in the intervening years, and as it turns out, Loser plays a very minor role in the novel. Instead, the pharmacist of Taxham is a protagonist even more socially isolated and incapable of communication than either Andreas Loser or Filip Kobal. But unlike those earlier characters, for whom isolation was an obstacle to be overcome in order to find a path to narrative language, the pharmacist finds his isolation both liberating and confining at the same time. In this novel, Handke explores the means by which these conflicting effects of isolation can be resolved with one another.

The pharmacist relates to the narrator the events of an unexpected journey he took one summer through southern Europe. One dark, rainy evening, as the title suggests, the pharmacist leaves his home for a nearby restaurant. On the way, he stops in a thicket of trees where he is mysteriously struck on the head and knocked unconscious. After coming to, he continues toward the restaurant and finds that he is no longer able to speak. His muteness becomes the central fact of his journey. Because it is raining, he offers a ride home to the last two guests at the restaurant. Instead, the drive becomes a excursion through the passes and tunnels that mark the borders of
Austria and the surrounding countries. His passengers turn out to be a retired Olympic athlete and a once-famous poet, who accept him as their chauffeur. Their first destination is a house at the top of a mountain pass where they hope to find lodging for the night. The woman who owns the house, described only as die Siegerin, is an acquaintance of the Olympian. The house is situated precisely on a watershed; the water from the local spring flows both into the Black Sea, and into the Mediterranean. In the middle of the night, the woman comes to the pharmacist, and at first it appears she is intent upon a romantic encounter. But suddenly, she falls upon him in his bed and begins to beat on him violently. The pharmacist offers no resistance. At this point, he is still a mute non-participant in his own story. Events happen to the Pharmacist, but he plays no part in determining their outcome.

As the pharmacist, now the driver, and his two companions continue, they pass through a long straight tunnel. It is apparently the final tunnel of the journey and it is longer than all the others they have passed through before (DN 129). In it, space seems to take on a different dimension, creating a scene or a reality filled with hyper-sensations.

Ein Miniatur-Dia, grellfarben, überbelichtet, stand da vor ihnen auf eine sonst vollständig finstere Fläche projiziert, etwas wie ein Blattgrünflimmern und ein Felsflankenrotgelb.

Und für einen sehr langen Augenblick gab das dann den Eindruck, sie führen überhaupt nicht mehr, kämen nicht mehr von der Stelle, ja, seien sogar aus dem Raum geraten, würden höchstens noch zum Schein ein bißchen gerüttelt, und gleich käme das Aus welches Aus? das Aus. (130-131)

The perspective from within the dark tunnel looking out creates a two-dimensional frame for everything that can be perceived beyond the tunnel. This effect only becomes stronger as they
approach the opening. Schon zeichneten sich da Büsche und endlich auch Gräser ab, wie überdeutlich ausgeleuchtet, lebensechter als lebensecht, und dazu noch wie in Überlebensgröße (131).

The passage through the tunnel is associated in the text with both death and a new birth. The narrator calls it a Böse Passage, representing a battle with an almost certain death. It also calls to mind the now clichéd near-death experiences in which one is encouraged to go towards the light out of a dark tunnel. It signals an end of one stage of the pharmacist's journey. However, the passage through the tunnel also suggests the passage of an infant out of the dark womb and into the light of day. The narrator is indeed aware of this possibility. Ein neuer Tag hatte mit dem Verlassen des Tunnels begonnen, oder konnte beginnen, auch dank dieses Tunnels hier. Seltsames Abenteuer. Ein heutiges? (133)

One major change that is immediately apparent is the effect this moment at the tunnel's mouth has on the passengers of the car. One of them claps his hands in excitement, and there is an air of anticipation that something unexpected is about to happen. Further, as a shared experience, the pharmacist for the first time no longer feels isolated. The moment at the mouth of the tunnel allows him to think of himself, the poet and the Olympic athlete together in the first person as we instead of I and them. This marks a significant step in his finding a way back to speech out of his mute isolation.

In the end, this story is primarily an individual's journey through his own isolation as he recovers his ability to associate with others. The journey itself is highly metaphorical and raises other questions. How, for example, does it differ from Die Wiederholung, which also deals with language and the individual, and the ability to narrate a story?
In one respect, this story differs in that Filip Kobal’s isolation is mostly self-imposed, and the resolution seems fairly certain even from the beginning. By borrowing from the *Bildungsroman* tradition, the reader automatically assumes that as the young man comes of age and completes all of his rites of passage, the conflict will in the end be resolved. Here, however, the protagonist is a middle-aged adult, and the resolution is no longer quite so certain. Likewise, the wound that induces his speechlessness is not self-inflicted, but seems to be a result of an exterior attack, even if, as learned later, the pharmacist is responsible for its continuation.

As they travel, the pharmacist and his two companions pass through a number of locations with the same name as other famous locations St. Quentin, Venice, Jerusalem, Troy, Dallas, Boston, etc. (137). Eventually, they finds themselves in the southern European (Spanish) city of Santa Fe. The actual country in which this Santa Fe is found, however, seems unimportant. The pharmacist’s journey takes him both everywhere and nowhere. He crosses through what can only be described as a literary landscape that has little connection, if any, to any real location. This is in stark contrast to the first section of the book, which is very specifically placed in one distinct suburb of Salzburg.

The narrator describes Santa Fe as the City of Night Winds, a city that exists on the edge of the savanna. As discussed earlier, Handke often situates his characters on borders between civilization and nature, finding that this threshold region yields the literary insights that he is seeking. Here, Santa Fe is a double threshold. Just as Celan works out ideas north of the future, the city represents a non-existent (utopian) space in which the author is free to manipulate the events and his characters at will. Thus, the night wind in the city on the edge of

---

13See the discussion of *In den Flüssen* in the Celan chapter.
the savanna provides the pharmacist with a kind of strength that for him justifies his speechlessness.


The passage represents the high point of his speechlessness, the point where the benefits of isolation and muteness allow the narrator a new level of freedom.


This extended quote exemplifies the tone throughout the middle section of the book. By this point, the pharmacist has separated himself from his traveling companions, his wife, his son, and everyone else with whom he might have a social or emotional connection. His isolation liberates him from all social limitations. The realization is a threshold moment for him. First, the narrator
describes the episode as a night wind moment, in which he has wandered toward evening to the area of town built on the edge of a cliff. The experience, then, takes place on the border between day and night on a cliff between heaven and earth, in an unreal city situated between civilization and nature. On this threshold, he discovers a trope for his own isolation. He becomes a single person one to himself. The feelings of euphoria, however, are not permanent. The very next paragraph describes another night wind moment in which an owl spits a regurgitated mouse onto his head, destroying the romanticism of the impression.

The pharmacist progresses in Dunklen Nacht through several stages in his journey. The first stage is in Salzburg. The second begins with being hit on the head or being attacked the moment when he is struck dumb. This second phase continues through the journey with the poet and the Olympic athlete to the city of Santa Fe. Throughout this period, the pharmacist no longer sees himself as a pharmacist, but as a driver (der Fahrer, der Fahrende). In the third stage, the driver becomes a wanderer as he leaves Santa Fe on foot and begins to cross the Spanish steppe or savanna on foot. In the final stage of the journey, the pharmacist is reunited with the woman who beat him during the night on the pass. She takes him by bus back to Salzburg via a circuitous route. In all, his journey lasts from early summer to late autumn.

Throughout the novel, the muteness of the narrator plays a central role. During his journey he is almost completely silent and no one seems to notice. When he expresses any wants, he makes himself understood through hand gestures and body language. His companions converse with him, but never seem to notice that he does not respond. The first break in his silence is reminiscent of Der Chinese des Schmerzes. In that novel there comes a point where the observer must cease to be an observer and take direct action. Loser's action transforms him into a Täter, a doer with his own history/story. In Dunklen Nacht, the continuation of the
pharmacist's story likewise depends on his taking action. After being separated from them for some time, he comes upon his traveling companions being attacked by a young man with a knife. The pharmacist realizes that he cannot simply stand by or look the other way. Ich merkte: Meine Geschichte stand auf dem Spiel. . . Hätte ich weiter bloß zugeschaut, wäre es aber um sie geschehen gewesen, auch alles Vorangegangene nichtig (221-222). In contrast to Loser's action, however, which is tied to his inability to name, the pharmacist's ability to act revolves around his ability to break his silence. Where Loser is confronted with a swastika as a destructive sign (written language), the pharmacist, to maintain ownership of his own story must utter a single, spoken (and negating) nein to stop a similar form of violence.

The youths who attack his companions are described as being aggressive and their actions a prelude to war or at least to greater conflict. By standing up to them, by negating their actions, the narrator also rejects their violent movement. Interestingly enough, the young men who form this gang have developed their own language (218), having rejected the normal language of the society. With this language they attempt to take possession of the land, especially the places that could be seen as thresholds: Draußen im Freien behaupteten diese manchmal gar nicht so Jungen mehr und mehr den Vordergrund. Die zentralen Plätze, die Brücken, selbst die Eingangstore zu den öffentlichen Gebäuden waren schwarz fast nur von ihnen (217). The narrator has to counter with the same weapon, and defend his story (history) with a vocal negation to drive the gang members out of these threshold places. Otherwise, his passive silence would imply an acceptance of their violence and an abandonment of his companions, negating all that they had experienced together.

His action is an essential part of creating the personal narrative that leads to the pharmacist's self-definition. Always there is a tension in the narration between loneliness and
association with society between individuality and community. This is one of the primary tensions Handke tries to address in this work and elsewhere. He often expresses the tension in terms of resolving an inner and an outer space. Handke's pharmacist abandons the city of Santa Fe in favor of the isolation of the surrounding steppe, or outer space, where he can be completely alone with his muteness. It is this solitude that allows him the opportunity to find his way back to narration. This opportunity comes precisely because of the paradox the steppe, or savanna, presents. So fehlte mir nichts the pharmacist says of this time, Aber gerade, wenn mir nichts fehlte, fehlte mir manchmal fast alles (244-245). A little later he notes this condition of isolation and lack (yet lacking nothing) enables him to narrate (Erzählen).

The word Erzählen here means to describe, to narrate, to tell a story, to explain. From its root zählen, the closest English relative is probably to recount. His act of counting, or recounting establishes order in the events of his story. In his recounting, he is not even sure who his audience is, nor does it seem terribly important, for he begins to tell a story more for the story's own sake than for the possibility that it may be received by anyone else, even himself. It is, after all, at this point still a mute recounting, void of any words at all. Rather, the beginnings of a story exists more as a series of observations or as a sense of heightened awareness of his surroundings, so that he is more in touch with his environment, a part of it.

derartiges Erzählen, schuf Übergänge, brachte zum Aufschauen, auch im Sinn einer Aufschau, Vogelschau, Adlerschau! (245-246)

His heightened awareness becomes itself a threshold to narrative that brings inside and outside together, making of them a complete whole, and in the process, Handke's narrator draws a parallel between seeing/observing and language.

In *Die Angst des Tormanns*, it is precisely Bloch's inability to see the order, associations, and interconnectedness (through zählen/erzählen) in the objects he observes that leads to his neurosis and to his speechlessness. He observes everything in minute detail, but cannot understand the parts as belonging to a larger, complex whole (Lex 13). This marks perhaps a distinct difference, arrived at gradually, between Handke's earlier and later writings. In contrast to *Tormann*, the individual observations in the above passage from *dunklen Nacht* are themselves complete narrative units and serve as points of transition to other observations and other narratives which then join together to form a larger story/Geschichte.

There finally comes a point, however, when the mute wanderer of the steppe must find a more concrete way out of his isolation and return from the wilderness. He is able to do so with the help of the woman who beat him earlier in his travels. The entire scene has something Messianic about it. It calls to mind Jesus’ forty days of fasting in the wilderness. The narrator lies in an opening among pine trees. The very last light of the day shines through the trees, projecting a red light on a nearby rock wall. Death is the primary descriptor of this passage. He lies deathly tired (sterbensmatt), and his time is up (seine Zeit war um). As he lies there, he breaks out in a death-sweat (Und jetzt brach ihm der Todesschweiß aus), more viscous than a normal sweat, which no longer allows his skin to separate him from the outside world.
It is as if the narrator himself is at the end of a very long fast in the wilderness and finds himself on the threshold of death. This is heightened by placing it at the end of the day. His sweat is reminiscent of the blood Jesus sweats in his suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane. Also, in the midst of his suffering comes his salvation in the form of the woman previously mentioned. Only her shadow appears on the wall and says to him: Hör auf, das Lebende zu suchen unter den Toten hier! (266). This is almost a direct quote from the Gospel of Luke when the angel tells Mary Magdelene that Jesus has been resurrected. The messianic references signal a rebirth of the narrator, who overcomes a dead language to reacquire the ability to tell a story. Here, the female voice tells the narrator that he has reached another turning point and must find his way at last out of his isolation.

With the help of her motivation, he is able to eventually find his way out of the steppe and back into civilization. With the woman, he returns by roundabout paths to his home in Salzburg,
his fragmented story intact. Once there, he is able to relate or recount his adventure to his friend, who writes it all down.

Handke's work, in contrast to Celan and Hofmannsthal, turns from a discussion of Sprache itself to the idea of Geschichte as an artifact of language or as the result of language. It also plays an important role here, as well as in many of his other works, in exploring the act of observation and a growing awareness of environment at the beginnings of language.

So wird die subjektive Erfahrung, auf die eine absolute Sprachskepsis sich gerade nicht mehr zu bauen getraut, zum Maßstab Handkescher Sprachskepsis. Aus der Authentizität des individuellen Erlebens heraus wird eine produktive Umsetzung der Sprachskepsis in literarische Sprachkritik und innovative literarische Verfahrensweisen möglich. (Göttsche 228)

Literature, or, more directly, in In einer Dunklen Nacht, the ability to narrate arises not out of a skepticism of language itself as it does in Hofmannsthal, but from personal experience that serves to mediate the writer's alienation from his language. The experience mediates the writer's detachment from language, allowing him or her to see skepticism as a tool for production instead of as an obstacle.

The History of the Moment: Thresholds of Time

For Handke, history seems to be a concept that consists of combining a certain point in time with a distinct point in space to create a specific occurrence of language. The point where these three come together are often represented as a threshold in Handke's writing. As with Hofmannsthal, thresholds of time in Handke's writing inevitably refer to the Jetztmoment, or Augenblick of the present. Handke's collection of essays, Noch einmal für Thukydides, takes its title from the Athenian historian from the fifth century B.C. Thucydides is known for
documenting the Peloponnesian war between Athens and Sparta which began in 431 and ended in 404. He is also a contemporary of Pericles, the Athenian ruler responsible for the building of the Parthenon. Thus there is a connection here between Handke’s essays and Hofmannsthal’s *Augenblicke in Griechenland* discussed earlier. As a historian, Thucydides used literary narrative structure to create a work that is both history and literature. By exploiting the features common to all narratives, explains Tim Rood, Thucydides was trying not only to explain the course of one war, but also to tell a broader story about the way individuals and states behave (Rood 10). This led him to use detailed descriptions in his writing. P.A Brunt says of Thucydides that he was of all ancient historians the most vivid and exciting teller of a story each phrase can be like a camera shot (Brunt 403).\(^\text{14}\)

Handke draws on Thucydides’ descriptive, literary-historical style and adapts it to his modern context. His collection seems equally informed by Walter Benjamin’s essay, *On the Concept of History,* which outlines the role of the historian in modernity. It is clear Handke was familiar with this essay. He briefly makes reference to Benjamin’s essay in a scene in *Der Himmel über Berlin.* In one important passage, Benjamin comments on a painting by Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus,* which he sees as the embodiment of history, its back turned to the future, and the debris of all of history’s catastrophes piling up at its feet.

> Aber ein Sturm weht vom Paradies her, der sich in seinen Flügeln verfangen hat und so stark ist, daß der Engel sie nicht mehr schließen kann. Dieser Sturm treibt ihn unaufhaltsam in die Zukunft, der er den Rücken kehrt, während der

\(^{14}\)This opinion appears to go all the way back to Plutarch, who claimed Thucydides could make his narrative like a painting (Rood 3).
Benjamin’s concept of history, combined with Thucydides’ style of storytelling provides Handke’s narrative with its meaning. Benjamin’s essay is a relatively short, but dense collection of thoughts and theories on ways of interpreting history in the light of modernism. Benjamin attributes a kind of weak messianic power (694), or promise of the future, associated with the past such that the past has certain deterministic claims on the present. In other words, past and present determine one another and cannot be seen as being separate. Thus, *Das wahre Bild der Vergangenheit huscht* vorbei. Nur als Bild, das auf Nimmerwiedersehen im Augenblick seiner Erkennbarkeit eben aufblitzt ist die Vergangenheit festzuhalten. . . Denn es ist ein unwiederbringliches Bild der Vergangenheit, das mit jeder Gegenwart zu verschwinden droht, die sich nicht als in ihm gemeint erkannte, (695).

For Benjamin, writing history is not about relating events as they really were, but about appropriating a memory wie sie im Augenblick einer Gefahr aufblitzt (695). Therefore, a historical materialist is aware of his or her role as the creator of history. Writing history becomes a process of seizing the images from the past and making sense of them in the context of the present by bringing them to a standstill.

*Auf den Begriff einer Gegenwart, die nicht Übergang ist sondern in der die Zeit einsteht und zum Stillstand gekommen ist, kann der historische Materialist nicht verzichten. Denn dieser Begriff definiert eben *die* Gegenwart, in der er für seine Person Geschichte schreibt. Der Historismus stellt das ewige Bild der Vergangenheit, der historische Materialist eine Erfahrung mit ihr, die einzig dasteht. (702)*
In Benjamin’s view, the past and the present cannot predict the future, but they are connected to it, and can perhaps help one to understand it. Past and present together form a gateway or threshold which leads to the future.

Bekanntlich war es den Juden untersagt, der Zukunft nachzuforschen. Die Thora und das Gebet unterweisen sie dagegen im Eingedenken. . . . Den Juden wurde die Zukunft aber darum doch nicht zur homogenen und leeren Zeit. Denn in ihr war jede Sekunde die Kleine Pforte, durch die der Messias treten konnte. (704)

From this point of view, the future holds primarily the possibility of redemption, or the eventual resolution of the crises of dangerous moments that constitute the past and the present.

In his essays, Handke attempts to capture a moment in time using Thucydides’ method of creating detailed, snapshot-like descriptions of events of a specific place and time. The present is portrayed as a unique moment, a gateway, between a catastrophic past and an optimistic promise of the future. Handke does not describe incidents which one would normally consider historical. Instead, he describes simple observations from his garden, from a train station, from a hotel room window. In the first essay, Für Thukydides, for example, Handke describes a pair of yellow butterflies on a spring morning. He ends the essay with Das waren die Ereignisse des Vormittags am 23. März 1987 (Th 10). Each of the essays is given a specific date and place almost like a newspaper byline and many of them end with a similar phrase implying that the events he has described are indeed the most important things that have happened on this day in history.

Where Thucydides provides us with a history of war, Handke contrasts a parallel history of peaceful alternatives to other, more violent events. In one section, Versuch des Exorzismus der einen Geschichte durch eine andere, for example, Handke notes that the hotel in which he is staying was once used for torture by the Nazis. The reference is very casual, inserted almost as an
afterthought into the description of the hotel. Yet this is clearly the one story he is trying to exorcize by means of another. As the alternate story, Handke provides a description of the train station outside his hotel window on a Sunday morning. Handke uses the image of the butterfly to tie this story thematically to the others. The narrator describes what he sees out his hotel window, and in the process transports himself into the scene. The narrator becomes a pedestrian, short-sleeved, moving with a purpose up the rail path. Beside him on the tracks lands a blue butterfly, which blinks in the sunlight and turns in a half circle.

Nowhere in the essay does he consider if it is possible to exorcize the past, or if it even should be attempted. It is not an attempt to cover over what happened in this place or an attempt to forget the past, just an optimistic view of an alternative. Handke’s version of the story comes across as a Story-as-things-should-be, perhaps a celebration of the fact that the horrors of this place are now a half a century in its past. Another story, one of children screaming for joy instead of for sorrow, has had the chance to replace it. As with the other stories, Handke presents a single moment in time, but it is an image aware of the past, that the space in which it occurs already possesses a history, so that even in his simple narration, the echoes of the past still reverberate.

Not all of the essays, however, seem as historically self-aware. One particularly interesting essay is Die Stunde zwischen Schwalbe und Fledermaus. In it, Handke returns to the familiar threshold of sundown. The title refers to the author’s desire to experience the moment at sundown between the last swallow and the first bat. It is not the first bat itself he wants to see like seeing the first star appear in the sky but the moment before the first bat appears after the last swallow has departed. In other words, it is a moment of absence, of emptiness that he wants to see in addition to the Aufblitzmoment of the first bat’s appearance.
As in the other essays in this volume, Handke provides an exact time and place for the event which he describes: 24 March, 1989 in Linares im bergigen Nördlichen Andalusien, an einem Karfreitag, nach einer Nacht mit dem unaufhörlichen Trommelschlag. . . . This exact documentation is important in maintaining the historical, analytical tone of the work, but it also serves to contrast the romantic, idealized descriptions of the events he chooses to describe.

What is absent from this essay is any sort of epiphanous moment accompanying the author’s experience. Handke does not gain any new insight into himself. Instead, his narrative style in the second half of the essay, in which the first bat appears, sounds as if he were doing a play-by-play for a football match. Indeed, this is the metaphor Handke chooses to describe the interaction between the birds, which are leaving the pitch, and the bats, which, having warmed up elsewhere, come storming onto the field. There is a moment between them, however, when the heavenly playing field is vollkommen leer . . . spannend leer (78). There is no explanation nor any suggestion that this moment of emptiness has any meaning outside of itself. Nowhere in the essay is there an explanation for why Handke wants to experience this intermediary moment, yet his desire is immediately and perhaps universally understandable, requiring no explanation. So the essay may in fact be an example of pure aestheticism in the Symbolist tradition.

The possible connotations beyond the words themselves or any extra-textual commentary present in the essay is, at best, very subtle. Elsewhere, especially in Die Wiederholung, Handke, in the tradition of Hofmannsthal’s poetry, is concerned about symbols as carriers of meaning in themselves that is, it is not what the metaphor signifies but the significance of the metaphor itself that is important. In this respect, Handke draws, like Hofmannsthal and Celan, from the tradition of the French Symbolists of the late nineteenth century.
There are numerous works that attempt to define Symbolism as a literary movement. For my argument I take a relatively broad definition of the term. Laurence Porter writes that Symbolism is defined as a movement that systematically deploys a strictly limited repertoire of recurring metaphors as the primary materials for poetry (Porter 16). He adds that a Symbolist poem proper would be tightly organized around a central presiding metaphor (16). Handke's writing is perhaps most characteristic in that he consistently returns in later works to themes and metaphors he has previously introduced. This is readily evident in In einer dunklen Nacht as well as in Lucie im Wald mit dem Dingsda, but also in other works. Porter's definition also applies to many of Celan's poems and collections of poems. Indeed, the connection between both Celan and Hofmannsthhal and the French Symbolists has been well documented. Further, Philip Wheelwright defines a symbol as a signifier standing for some larger meaning or set of meanings which cannot be given, or not fully given, in perceptual experience itself (Wheelwright 92). In other words, a symbol, especially in the context of the Symbolist movement, can represent an absence. This also seems appropriate to Handke's work, especially in the context of the Fledermaus essay.

There are other possible definitions of Symbolism that could help explain Handke's Thucydides essays. Enid Peschel describes the Symbolist tradition as follows:

. . .the symbolists do not wish merely to describe; instead, they aim to re-create through their words a state of being, a feeling, a glimmer, a vision. They want the reader to sense, and to react to, the experience itself. Seen this way, symbolism is above all an attempt to transmit by means of symbols frequently by means of a

\[\text{15See for example, Robert Vilain's } \textit{The Poetry of Hugo von Hofmannsthhal and French Symbolism} \text{ or the introduction to Otto Pöggeler's } \textit{Spur des Worts}. \]

-182-
poetic language that the poet must invent the mysteries that palpitate beneath appearances. A symbol is something that stands for or represents something else. It calls attention to itself while also suggesting far more than it is itself. (2)

Thus, Symbolism in Handke's work may be more about establishing a mood, or expressing an idea through metaphor that can go beyond the words themselves. However, this raises a problem. It implies a distinct metaphysical predisposition in Handke's writing that is not immediately evident. Such neo-platonic metaphysics would not likely fit into their world-views. This is especially true of Hofmannsthal and Handke, but also to some extent of Celan as well. Yet they cannot entirely escape the ramifications of the metaphysical aspects inherent in language itself. Thus, Hofmannsthal refers to himself as a Mystiker ohne Mystik, while Scott Abbott calls Handke a writer of post-metaphysical metaphysics. They express the need to acknowledge some experience of the transcendental in a modern world that attempts to disavow any accessibility to such. In other words, there is something about Handke's descriptions that suggests a transcendental reality by the very fact that it is written in such realistic, matter-of-fact terms. It is the very absence of any real commentary, of any expression of insight that invites the reader to assign some meaning to it. The reader is given a signifier a threshold moment of absence between swallows and bats and encouraged to fill it, or to see beyond into the absence as something having meaning in itself. Even without an explanation by the author, the description does not leave the reader untouched. The result is a form of literature that participates in the modernist literary legacy from which it comes, while it at the same time carves out a unique identity for itself in a postmodern world.

Each of the essays in this collection directly or indirectly infers a comparison between the story actually given and the natural proclivity for stories and narrations to be about great events
or conflicts. In one of the last essays, Kleine Fabel der Esche von München, is a description of
an ash tree in the center of Munich. It stands near the Siegestor on Leopoldstrasse. With its
inscription Dem Sieg geweiht vom Krieg zerstört zum Frieden mahndend, the arch forms a
sort of threshold with the past and stands with the tree both as a reminder of past aggression, and
as a symbol of hope for future peace.

By conjunction, the ash tree acts as a symbolic threshold between nature and civilization.
Mitten in der Stadt stand für den Augenblick der Stamm mit seinen Mehrfarben vor mir und
zugleich weit draußen, für sich, auf dem Land (Th 94). The tree itself is connected to history as
it becomes a story itself. Handke says the tree becomes itself an event in which colors and
textures and insects and other observations all happen as he circles around the trunk. Handke is
captivated by each little detail that, as he observes them, helps to remove him from the busy street
and the cacophony of the traffic, until all he can hear is the gentle rustling of the leaves in the
wind.

The tree serves as a nexus point of ideas which provides a context in history even as it
points to an alternative perspective. The different sides of the tree, with their different colors and
different activities, become for the observer a compass, suggesting a portal to far off places and
events from both his past and his future. It thereby provides direction and a natural order to the
rational but directionless chaos of the modern city.

At this point, however, the narrative takes an abrupt turn. Overwhelmed by the stimulus,
Handke decides to break off his observations and return on the following day. But when he
returns, he finds it nearly impossible to recreate his earlier experience. The essay evolves into an
introspection of the writing process.
Wohl sah ich in der kleinen Welt wieder eine größere, doch damit dies geschah, tat ich selber, über den bloßen Blick hinaus, etwas dazu; jene größere Welt ereignete sich nicht mehr so vollkommen zwanglos wie gestern. . . . trotzdem war mir zugleich, bei aller Aufregung des Schauens, als täte ich den Erscheinungen Gewalt an. (Th 96)

Even though he can see metaphoric meaning in the tree and the details of the tree, it still has the ability to take him to other times and other places. In some way this seems to lessen the experience of the tree itself as a tree, causing him to see his observations almost as an act of violence.

It is not until much later that he is able to return to the tree, avoiding it for many days as he walks through the park. When he does return, he is able to see the tree for itself: Da stand der Baum und verkörperte, wie kein anderes Ding, nichts als die Gegenwart, keine Mittelachse des Gartens mehr, keinen Blickfang, geschweige denn den Weltbaum (100). Because it does nothing but exist because it simply is the ash seems to be even more significant than before.

In this one brief essay we see the incorporation of a number of the issues common to Handke, Celan, and to Hofmannsthal. As with Hofmannsthal's statues in Augenblicke in Griechenland, Handke's tree shifts constantly back and forth throughout his essay between being a simple object and a symbol for something much more. For Handke, however the symbolic tree is less powerful than the simple existence of the tree itself. Yet, writing about it, or even thinking about the tree creates a distance from its reality, and must necessarily create a symbol out of the tree. Handke notes that his last recorded observation of the tree is November 2,

\[\text{(100)}\]

Likely a reference to the World Ash of Norse mythology which holds Heaven, Hell and the Earth together and which shelters man during the final battle of the gods.
1989 Allerseelentag the day to commemorate the dead. It is as if to remind the reader that nothing can stand altogether outside of history: ich versuchte an die Massen der Toten, der Ermordeten, zu denken, aber es gelang mir nicht; nur ein Wort, das sich in dem weiten Garten dann einstellte; Niemandsrose (100-101). It is interesting that at the end of this essay Handke should make reference to perhaps the best-known of Celan s collections. The reference suggests here Celan s dictum that all poems remain mindful of their dates: Vielleicht ist das Neue an den Gedichten, die heute geschrieben werden, gerade dies: daß hier am deutlichsten versucht wird, solcher Daten eingedenk zu bleiben (GW III 196). Handke s poetic essay exposes the difficulty of writing such a poem and the inadequacy of any symbol to truly do justice to the events they commemorate.

***

In Die Fahrt im Einbaum: oder, Das Stück zum Film vom Krieg, Handke takes a radically different approach to the concept of history. In Noch einmal für Thukydides, a specific time and place determined the nature of the story and the nature of the language used. In Die Fahrt im Einbaum, however, it is a specific use of language that determines the perception of a particular time and place. Where language in Thukydides is primarily a creative force, in Die Fahrt im Einbaum, it is decidedly destructive. Also important to the play is the use and misuse of language in the political debate and the ability of the press to control the discourse because it controls the means of dissemination. In this play the rivers are a middle ground. The dugout canoe from the title, which stands as a timeless symbol of peace, is a notable exception to the destructive rhetoric presented in the rest of the play.

Set a decade after the vorläufig letzten Krieg, this play addresses many issues surrounding the conflict in the Balkans. In it, two directors, one from America and one from
Spain, discuss their new project for a movie about the wars in the former Yugoslavia. Various figures step forward, portraying possible roles for the film. They represent the different perspectives on what happened during the war and why. One after another, a historian, a chronicler (who also happens to be one of the villagers involved in the ethnic cleansing), and three western journalists each tell their stories or voice their opinions about the war and the region in general. In the process, they attempt to assign responsibility and guilt for the atrocities that occurred.

Each in his or her own way displays some element of linguistic dysfunction. Typical of this is a passage early in the text, a conversation between the announcer, the tour guide, and the forest madman. It begins with the tour guide giving the background history of the city where they have all gathered from its prehistoric (Greek) roots to the present, focusing on what happened there during the various European wars. The forest madman interrupts him with a series of Urlaute primal noises, grunts, animal sounds, etc., that gradually become more comprehensible. These two, together with the announcer, briefly discuss what they did during the most recent war. As they do so, the conversation deteriorates into a series of obscenities, and then further back into the primal grunts and complete incomprehensibility. It is as if the talk of war can, in the end, have no coherence.

*Die Fahrt im Einbaum* is a continuation of the argument Handke began with *Gerechtigkeit für Serbien*. Up until the mid-1990s, Handke’s writing was mostly aesthetic and self-reflective in nature. Unlike writers such as Grass or Enzensberger or Böll most of whom are from the generation immediately preceding Handke, and whose primary discourse has to do with coming to terms with the Second World War Handke remained decidedly apolitical. However, with his growing interest in his Slovenian heritage and his increasing identification with
Yugoslavia, it seems natural that he would react strongly to the breakup of the Balkan states. In 1996, he published the travelogue *Eine Winterliche Reise zu den Flüssen Donau, Save, Morawa und Drine, Oder: Gerechtigkeit für Serbien* in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. In it, he presents a picture of every-day Serbian life that differed radically from the image portrayed in the popular press, and the western depiction of the Serbs as the aggressors in the Balkan conflict.\(^\text{17}\)

Accordingly, western journalists epitomize the misuse of language in *Die Fahrt im Einbaum*. They enter the stage covered in mud riding on mountain bikes.\(^\text{18}\) While expressing their disdain for the country, they reveal their personal opinions and biases about the war. One of them infuses his monologue with a string of nearly incomprehensible acronyms. His speech reveals the emptiness of his cold, rational newsspeak that fails to communicate anything. Another is openly hostile toward the country and admits he allowed his foreign interpreters to guide the direction of his stories.

\[\text{So gehaßt habe ich die hiesigen Völker, daß mein Dolmetsch aus dem Ausland kommen oder wenigstens vom Ausland geformt worden sein mußte . . . Und so waren die Gewährsmänner meiner Kriegsgeschichten in der Regel meine Übersetzer . . . Ja, sie waren es, die den Krieg erzählten und interpretierten ich gab es nur weiter. Sie waren es, welche die Gewichte setzten; die unterschieden zwischen den tausend kleinen, unwichtigen Wahrheiten und der einen großen.}\]

\(^{17}\) Its publication sparked the so-called *Handkestreit* in which the role of literary authors in political issues became a main topic. The justification for Handke’s position has been argued extensively both for and against, and I have no intention of going deeper into that argument here. Two books document well the arguments on both sides, and if readers wish to further explore this topic, they are referred to the collections edited by Tilman Zülch and Thomas Deichmann.

\(^{18}\)Bikers consistently have a negative connotation in Handke’s writing, no doubt due to his self-identity as a walker.
In a sense, the reporter disavows any ownership of the words he has written, and makes clear that after a while, the tone of his articles was already predetermined by his hate and the hate of the interpreters who served as his filters to the local culture.

And yet, it is their voices, aided by their privileged position as reporters, that determine the truth about what happened. They own die Sprache zu diesem Krieg (70), and they determine who may and may not voice a public (i.e., published) opinion about it.

Über diesen Krieg kann nur so gesprochen werden, wie wir darüber gesprochen haben und weiterhin sprechen werden. Eine andere Sprache zum Krieg als diese unsere ist eine Verhöhnung der Opfer (70). Handke makes it clear that he sees this voice as one-sided, thoughtlessly biased, and empty of real content.

In the play, the river occupies the central motif as a locus for conflict resolution. Standing in a corner through the entire play is a dugout canoe. The canoe and the rivers of Yugoslavia, the Donau, the Drina, and the Sava, on which it travels, embody a silent counterbalance to the empty divisiveness of the rhetoric of war. Anderer Herren Länder haben als Heiligtum ein Schloß oder einen Tempel. Unser Heiligtum hier ist der Einbaum. Am Fluß stehen: das ist Frieden. An den Flüssen stehen: das wird Frieden sein (115-116). As a border, the river stands between two countries, or between two peoples. As such, the river forms a threshold region where both (peoples) can come together and rediscover their common Yugoslavian heritage.

The same rivers on which the dugout floats represent borders in Gerechtigkeit für Serbien that mark the truncated Yugoslav republic and the center of Serbian nationalism. However, the
rivers also represent the traditional means of trade, mobility, and communication in the region. The rivers as borders stand between two peoples or two nationalities and instead of a means of dividing one nation from another, Handke sees the rivers as a means for bringing them together. He is particularly interested in his _winterliche Reise_ in the bridges that still join the warring factions of the former Yugoslavia together. At one point in the essay, Handke and a couple of Serbian friends, walk across a bridge over the Drina river to the Bosnian side. They speak for a while with the border guard there, whom Handke describes as having eyes filled with an unapproachable sadness. Nur ein Gott hätte die von ihm wegnnehmen können, und in meinen Augen floß die dunkle leere Drina als solch ein Gott vorbei, wenn auch als ein völlig machtloser (WR 100). Again here the river is a threshold space with the potential (albeit unrealized) to heal wounds and resolve differences between two countries that used to be united. For Handke, the Drina is a place that still embodies the hope for peace.


One must question, however, the utopic and overly romantic nature of Handke s position. At issue is the loss of his _Neunte Land_, a fairytale Yugoslavia relatively independent of East and West, whose diverse ethnic groups seemed to coexist for decades in relative peace. One wonders if it ever existed outside of the fantasy of Handke s writing. Yet, the possibility, the idea of a utopic Yugoslavia does exist in his writing, and so has a literary reality worth exploring. It is not
much different in this respect from Celan’s utopic thresholds, which likewise do not exist as a physical reality, in which the *Ich* and the *Du* can come together.

The dugout also has a utopic quality to it. Utopia refers literally to a place that is nowhere, that does not exist. The dugout can be found on the border between sleeping and waking, a theoretical space that is located nowhere. In the dream, according to Handke, one’s understanding is more clear than anywhere else (117). Within this borderland of river and half-sleep, the individual is not alone. Rather, a *Wir* exists like nowhere else (118). In this way, the rivers fit in with Handke’s utopic vision of the Balkans. Already in the opening lines the American director, John O Hara, states that he arrives in this country in no time (11), which, although he means the flight was short, also introduces the timelessness of the setting, the existence of a fragmented Yugoslavia outside of history, residing in no real time. Likewise, the country where the play takes place now exists in some non-existent location.

Mit dem Eintritt ins Land hier hätte ich nicht mehr sagen können, wo ich war.


Traumfremd. Traumnah. Jemand, der mir für unsern Film den Traum erklärt?

(12)

In another passage, the utopic theme is continued as one character describes his war-torn village as *Selo-ne-Selo*, translated literally as a place that is no place. This is where the dugout canoe can be found, outside of history, outside of a geographic reality, in a dreamworld where a *Wir* exists, peaceful and free of the meaningless language of war. It is both idealistic and impossible. Handke seems to recognize this with the sarcastic and ironic rhetoric that dominates most of the play. There is not a lot of space for optimism in Handke’s writing about the actual state of the
Balkan peninsula. Rather, he expresses a sense of loss and anger at those on all sides of the conflict and their abusive language that has played a role in destroying the region. His goal, as he states it, is to awaken a gemeinsame Sich-Erinnern and a gemeinsame Kindheit.


The river stands for a perhaps impossible possibility, or a paradox of a border that could and should be the means of joining together. The river metaphor here is reminiscent of the discussion earlier in this chapter of the threshold as a pair of parallel lines. The opposite shores are bound by the river, but never intersect. By skipping a stone across the river, Handke recalls the stone thrower in *Chinese des Schmerzes*. But there is no stone to be found that can skim to the other bank. The distraction fails; the bridge has a loose board in it. The other side is unreachable.

Handke is aware of the possibilities of this potential threshold region, and laments in his essay the political realities that prevent its realization.

**In the Space Between *Ich* and *Du*: In the Threshold of the Other**

The Wim Wenders film, *Der Himmel über Berlin*, which was co-written by Peter Handke, also explores the negative and divisive effects of war on society. In this film, however,

---

19Handke was responsible for all the major dialogues in the film and played a pivotal role in shaping the film aesthetically (Barry, *The Weight of Angels* 54). His texts served as a guiding light as the film evolved (Cook 165). There are also additional clues to Handke's
Handke takes a more affirmative view of the future, more along the lines of *Noch einmal für Thukydides* than *Die Fahrt im Einbaum*. In it, Handke employs spatial, temporal, and linguistic thresholds to explore a fragmented Berlin. As he does so, he develops a concept of *Geschichte*, which combines elements of place, time and language to construct a narrative space for his angels to exist.

Filmed in 1986, it takes place at the end of the Cold War, when the old systems are beginning to show cracks. The central icon of the film is the wall running through the city’s center. But Berlin is still divided, allowing the city to stand as a representative for the world as a whole. The city is one of the main characters of the film and each of the other characters are also divided, or fractured in a similar way. The angels Cassiel (Otto Sander) and Damiel (Bruno Ganz) observe the people of Berlin, reading their thoughts and recording their observations in notebooks. Coming together, they compare notes. Cassiel begins with the statistics for the day: the times of sunrise and sunset, the level of the Havel and the Spree. He then lists off the important events that have happened on this day in history twenty, fifty, and two hundred years in the past. Then the conversation takes a turn in the direction of Handke’s Thucydides essays. Cassiel gives the events of the present day. They are entirely ordinary incidents: a man stops and looks behind him, a woman closes her umbrella in the rain. Yet they are told with such a sense of wonder that these simple acts have the same weight and value as the historic events.

This movie is quintessential postmodernism, or at least an exemplary document describing the period of recent history in which it was made. In the process of the angels’ observations, the relationship between fragmentation and the threshold as a means for overcoming it becomes

contribution to the screenplay, which appear in the form of metaphors that are central to Handke’s other works.
evident. The opening scenes in the film present a rather negative picture of mortal existence, showing people alone in their thoughts amidst large crowds. Others appear on the edge of madness or wrapped in despair. At one point in the film, Cassiel listens to the thoughts of one man as he thinks about how people have become completely isolated from each other. Das deutsche Volk ist in so viele Kleinstaaten zerfallen wie es einzelne Menschen gibt (HB 62). Each person carries a border around with him or herself, and access across these borders is only possible with the correct password. This is Handke’s postmodern version of Celan’s Shibboleth, the password that separates the friend from the stranger. In this context, however, it is ironically preferable that no one can know the password for each individual, ensuring that the Germans will remain in their isolation and incapable of the atrocities that fill their past.

One of the main voices of the film, named Homer in the screenplay, is portrayed as an old and feeble man who could pass as a retired classics professor. He shows how history and especially here an artistic or narrated history has been turned on its head. The angels, especially Cassiel, encounter him in the Staatsbibliothek, and follow him as he wanders slowly about the city speaking to his muse. Homer laments that his audience no longer sits around him to hear the oratory. Rather, they have become themselves fragmented, sitting alone in libraries reading books, isolated from the others that belong to their community. He sees the world changing, coming into its twilight, die Welt scheint zu verdämmern. Through this decline, however, it is his ability to still tell the world’s story, to cobble a narrative together, that allows him to continue. The story is, as we saw in Der Chinese des Schmerzes, a means of protection: doch ich erzähle, wie am Anfang, in meinem Singsang, der mich aufrechterhält, durch die Erzählung verschont von den Wirren der Jetztzeit und geschont für die Zukunft (HB 56). His story creates coherence out of the chaos, creating an order that can survive past the immediate moment. Yet in the
postmodern world represented by Berlin, this ability seems to be getting ever weaker. Wandering along the Berlin Wall, searching for the former Potsdamer Platz, he has become den armen, unsterblichen Sänger, der, von seinen sterblichen Zuhörern verlassen, die Stimme verlor wie er vom Engel der Erzählung zum unbeachteten oder verlachten Leiermann draußen an der Schwelle zum Niemandsland wurde (60).

The storyteller Homer has been marginalized, like the wasted Potsdamer Platz, by the lingering effects of war. The devastation left by a century of modern warfare has prompted him to take a different approach to storytelling. His heroes, says Homer, are no longer warriors, but the things of peace die Dinge des Friedens, eins so gut wie das andere (56). He wonders that no one has found a way to tell an epic of peace, that somehow peace does not have the power to inspire the way war does. Homer’s lines are juxtaposed against images of the Second World War: air raid spotlights on overhead bombers, Trümmerfrauen working amidst ruined buildings, images of dead children lying as if peacefully asleep provide historical context not only for Homer’s thoughts, but for the entire film.

The angels’ perspective is one beyond the confines of time. Yet this eternal point of view has its limitations. In the film this is portrayed using black-and-white for everything seen from the angel’s point of view. They stand on the outside and have no power to interact with the people they observe. They can see everything and are thus all-knowing; yet this means they are also incapable of wonder or amazement. Damiel longs to overcome the limits his limitlessness imposes and become human, even if it means his mortal experience will encompass only a single, epiphanal moment.

Roger Cook compares the angels in Der Himmel über Berlin to Paul Klee’s Angelus Novus as it is described by Walter Benjamin. Because history is filled by the present (Jetztzeit or
now-time) (Benjamin 701), the present becomes an active force that constructs out of past experience as needed a picture of the future as we repeatedly, in continuously revised form, invoke it in the present (Cook 185). Damiel feels he can learn more from the now of the present in which he can be a part of the future, than he can from the timeless angelic eternal where he can only observe it.

Standing on a bridge in front of the Berlin Wall, he discusses the history and prehistory of this particular place with Cassiel. The river over which they stand ties the past to the present. They remember back to the moment when the river found its bed, marking the beginning of history. This event leads to a string of other natural developments as the Earth evolves around the place where the angels stand. Finally, the first biped, the first man arrives, from whom they learn to laugh and to speak. The arrival of man also marks the beginning of a new stage in history. Damiel explains:

Eine lange Geschichte! Die Sonne, die Blitze, der Donner oben am Himmel, und unten auf der Erde die Feuerstellen, die Luftsprünge, die Rundtänze, die Zeichen, die Schrift. Danach brach einer plötzlich aus dem Kreis und lief geradeaus. Solange er geradeaus lief und manchmal in Übermut kurvte, erschien er nur frei, und wieder haben wir mitlachen können. Aber dann, anders plötzlich, rannte er im Zickzack und die Steine flogen. Mit seiner Flucht begann eine andere Geschichte, die Geschichte der Kriege. Sie dauert noch an. (83-84)

As in the Thucydides essays, Handke again sets up this opposition between what we normally think of as the big events of history war and conflict and another, more subdued history of the small, peaceful things. The history of war may be on-going, but Cassiel reminds his friend that the other continues as well: Aber auch die erste, vom Gras, von der Sonne, von den Luftsprüngen,
von den Ausrufen, dauert noch an. There is little question about which of the two they value higher.

As the two disappear through the Berlin Wall, Damiel explains his desire to become human and create his own place in history.


The true privileged perspective is not objectivity from above or from the outside, but the limited, subjective view one gets in the midst of things. Thomas Barry sees in Damiel the conflict of the writer who must constantly strive to anchor the imagination in the concrete objectivity of reality common to many of Handke's protagonists (Barry, The Weight of Angels 56). The storyteller, or the writer, exists both in the spiritual world of the mind and in the physical world of reality, and must constantly explore the border between the two. Homer's narratives, his facility with an idea of Geschichte as words merges here with Geschichte as history. The two meet as an intersection of time and of language, existing in the present but aware of the past, and are revealed as being equal contributors to a single idea.

Driving Damiel's desire to cross over into mortality is his interaction with the French trapeze artist Marion (Solveig Dommartin). Her appearance coincides with the first use of color in the film. When he sees her, Damiel experiences a brief moment of human sensation, a taste for
what he is lacking. The circus she is performing with has run out of money and must close, bringing to an end her dream as an artist. She is also alone as a foreigner in Berlin. Nevertheless, the independence that arises out of her loneliness gives her a kind of power that attracts Damiel to her. She knows things that he can only guess at. After her final performance she is able to overcome any remaining despair and live in the moment: Einfach sagen können, wie jetzt gerade: Ich bin vergnügt. Ich habe eine Geschichte! Und ich werde weiter eine haben! (110). Damiel returns to her several times through the film.

His decision made, Damiel has to cross over from an existence in the eternal into the infinite limitation of the present, of the mortal now. This step is situated within multiple threshold images. Damiel comes to Marion in her dream as she adds her part to the Kind poem that opens the film.

Als das Kind Kind war, war das die Zeit der folgenden Fragen: Warum bin ich Ich und nicht Du? Warum bin ich hier und warum nicht dort? Wann begann die Zeit und wo endet der Raum? Ist das Leben unter der Sonne nicht bloß ein Traum? (118-119)

Time and space come together in the dreamscape, where angel and mortal can finally come together and touch hands, preparing Damiel to take the next step.

In the early hours of the morning, Damiel meets with Cassiel to tell him of his decision. The scene takes place in the no-man’s-land between the east and west sides of the Wall. The Wall becomes a physical representation of Damiel’s position between two modes of existence. From this perspective he can comprehend many of the experiences he has had in the previous days. Damiel justifies his decision to Cassiel with a variety of threshold metaphors that relate to the river of time.

(124)

When he says this, his face for a moment appears in color, as Damiel comes closer and closer to becoming human. In the dirt, a single set of footprints has become visible. The camera pans away for a moment and then pans back to Cassiel holding a lifeless Damiel in his arms as he carries him through the Wall. His crossing over into mortality is at the same time a death and a rebirth.

The final sequence of the film suggests a resolution of the fragmentation that has dominated throughout. Marion and the mortal Damiel come together at a bar. Marion explains the differences between being *allein* and being *einsam*.


Mit dem Zufall muß es nun aufhören! Neumond der Entscheidung! Ich weiß nicht, ob es eine Betimmung gibt, aber es gibt eine Entscheidung! Entscheide dich! Wir sind jetzt die Zeit. (161)

*Einsam* perhaps translatable as  *all-one*  is only possible for two people together. In the sexual joining of a man and a woman, the two become one, eliminating the boundaries between them. This act takes on a symbolic significance, an answer to the isolation brought on by a history of division. Thus, the unity (*Einheit*) of two individuals in a sense can create a threshold
moment in which the fragmented differences of the (post?)modern world are both celebrated and overcome.

Peter Handke explores the possibilities in language as a way out of the fragmentation in history. He turns to language as the means of creating continuity out of historic fragmentation. Thus, when Damiel exclaims that he wants to create his own history, he also means to construct a narrative that will define his life linguistically. Having entered the threshold of time, Damiel can come to terms with his mortality. The film concludes with Damiel writing down his discovery: I know now what no angel knows. Within this limited perspective, the possibilities have become limitless.

Conclusion

Much has been made so far of the similarities between Hofmannsthal, Celan and Handke. But Handke sets himself apart from the other two in several ways. He is the only one of the three that writes extensive novels. Hofmannsthal has just one novel fragment, and Celan barely any prose at all. In doing so, he puts a greater emphasis on narrative or story telling as a source of stability in a fractured society. Bernhard Sorg identifies the ability to narrate as the central role of the artist:

Indem der Künstler einer bedrohten und fragmentarisierten Welt die Kontinuität und Notwendigkeit des poetischen Erzählens entgegenhält, leistet er zweierlei: Er versichert sich einer Tradition menschlichen Fühlens und Sprechens, die nicht in purer Funktionalität aufgeht, eines mythischen Zusammenhangs, von dem er hofft, daß er durch keine Entwicklung je ganz destruiert wird; und er legitimiert sich als Garant einer transindividuellen Dauer, die nicht von der politischen Geschichte gewährt oder verweigert werden kann. (Sorg 60)
In many of Handke's stories, the threshold becomes a necessary turning point in which the hero discovers the means to create coherency in the midst of fragmentation. They revolve around a hero that, by regaining the ability to tell a story, are able to re-form connections with family, with friends, and with society as a whole. As such, the threshold is not always the locus for encountering the other, as is often the case in Celan's poetry. However, it does represent a fundamental precondition to reconnecting with the other through narrative.

Handke's writing is also decidedly more influenced by postmodern thought than the other two. He began his career as the postmodern movement was coming to the forefront of literary theory and criticism. He has therefore been associated with postmodernism throughout much of his artistic development. He contributed to the growth of a postmodern literature, especially with his early works such as *Angst des Tormanns*. But his later writings point perhaps to a way beyond the postmodern, into a type of literature that does not really have a name yet. Handke's later literature takes many of the postmodern ideals as given. They are no longer problems to be questioned, but fields to be explored. Instead of questioning the validity of the language and perhaps mourning the loss of a pure language, as is often the case with both Celan and Hofmannsthal, Handke sets about using a fragmented language in a fragmented world to discover the possibilities still readily available in this postmodern, linguistic reality. In doing so, he explores the means for continuing forward out of what appears to be the dead end of modernist avant-gardism, whose novelty for its own sake soon loses its novelty, and therefore its potency.

Handke's way out is to create stories with a new approach to narrative. He does not see narrative as a linear path that one can transverse from beginning to end, but as a spiraling course,

---

20 One notable exception is the meeting of Damiel and Marion in the dream on the threshold of half-sleep.

-201-
that crosses and re-crosses the same point, each time from a slightly different perspective. Hence comes the emphasis on the idea of repetition in Handke’s writing, as in the novel Die Wiederholung. In this context, the threshold becomes a symbolic representation of the literary focal point where space, time, and language fuse together to form a Geschichte, a constantly evolving narrative, mindful of the past, aware of the future, but always existing in the threshold of the present.
Hovering just below the surface during this entire project has been the question of the purpose of the writer and literature in twentieth-century culture. By reading the works of Hofmannsthal, Celan, and Handke, one begins to gain a historical perspective on the entire century. Each of them deals with the main issues of modernity in ways that are both unique to each author and yet reveal their common heritage. Out of their works, a literary progression begins to emerge that traces the outlines of the indeterminacy in modernism and postmodernism that Le Rider identifies as the crisis of identity in the twentieth century. They use the threshold to create a perspective between opposing ideas and opposing sides of a paradox in order to allow both sides to exist simultaneously. In doing so, they open up a space in which an individual identity can be constituted.

Hofmannsthal appeared early in the modernist tradition, when the underlying faith in rationalism and enlightenment was beginning to fall apart. Modernism, argues J.W. Burrow, was concerned with challenging the techniques of representation, verbal and visual, by which the illusion of a world of stable characters and things, governed by intention and causality, had been sustained (Burrow 240). Hofmannsthal, like Celan and Handke, often resorted to linguistic means to explore the implications of the crisis of modernity. By extension, they also address the implications for the individual, because language establishes the reality from which the self is constituted and provides the means for interacting with the other. Hofmannsthal’s Chandos represents the definition of the modernist rupture of language. The work identifies a growing doubt about the ability of language in a modern era to adequately communicate true experience. His increasing discomfort with language is paralleled by an increasing personal isolation. Only in
the brief moments of the  *Erhöhte Augenblick*  does Chandos find both a possible way out of his speechlessness and a means of self-discovery.

For Hofmannsthal, the threshold functions as a boundary to be negotiated between being and becoming. In this respect, he focuses on the potential of the individual and the often-missed opportunities for self-realization interspersed with fleeting moments of elevated existence that offer a glimpse of what could be possible if the individual could escape his or her limitations. The threshold becomes a point to be crossed and re-crossed more than a dimension of its own to be dwelt in. It marks the line separating opposing concepts of the self, of language, and of life. In so doing, Hofmannsthal identifies the contrasting elements as part of a unified whole.

Celan, as an author of high modernism, carries the idea of fragmentation and isolation to its ultimate extreme. The Final Solution, with its rational, systematic approach to genocide, stripped language of any reliability that may have been left to it. He was forced to work only with the fragments of usable speech remaining to him. As a result, his poetic language exists on the very edge of comprehension, accessible at a limited number of select points. For Celan, poetry was something he could enter into a threshold space connected to reality but outside of it, surrounded by paradox. The place in which poetry resides is a moment of presence (GWIII 198), and is open and endless, but empty. For Celan, the threshold likewise becomes a dimension that both exists and cannot exist. It is a utopia, a linguistic construct:  der Ort, wo alle Tropen und Metaphern ad absurdum geführt werden wollen,  (199). The reality of poetry was the possible-yet-impossible place where Celan reached out to an other, to a *Du*, that would be able to understand him and his perspective. He saw poetry, then, as a dialogue, even if an uncertain one.

Handke then, had to find a way to function in a postmodern literature that both acknowledges the modernist past, acknowledges the catastrophe, and yet has the force to find a
place for itself in its aftermath. He began in the late 1960’s with Celan’s fragmented language and gradually worked his way back to a form of narration and storytelling that no longer has the linear certainty of a grand narrative in favor of an ever-repeating, cyclical narrative that presents the individual as a construct of his own actions rather than the product of some exterior force. Handke proclaims, *Die Schwelle ist die Quelle* (CS 127). For him, the threshold is the source of the narrative self from whence identity in a historical context originates. Handke employs a variety of threshold images to explore an existential world. In his writing, he uses thresholds to intricately intertwine the dimensions of language, time and space so that each element helps to constitute the others in an interdependent and evolving system. Out of this system arises a concept of history, or *Geschichte*, which creates a coherent narrative out of a fragmented postmodern existence and allows the individual to find a way out of isolation and reconnect with society.

Yet these three authors do not avail themselves of such easy categorization. One problem with the modern/postmodern complex is that it sets up an artificial periodization that is not necessarily present. Le Rider, for example, places the beginnings of modernism with Hölderlin and identifies Hofmannsthal’s *Elektra* as potentially postmodern (Le Rider, *Crisis of Identity* 155). One could also make the argument that Celan’s works represent a significant enough break with the pre-war tradition that they constitute a new, postmodern direction in lyric poetry. On the other hand, Handke, who is easily the most postmodern of the three, also employs devices that are decidedly modernist. This is the case in the symbolist elements discussed in *Noch einmal für Thukydides*.

I argue instead that Hofmannsthal, Celan and Handke address issues that have changed very little over the course of the century. Their work suggests that postmodernism is a natural
outgrowth of modernism and not a radical break from it. Even strong proponents of
postmodernism admit that it shares much in common with the decadence of fin de siècle Vienna.\textsuperscript{21}

Others, more critical of the concept of postmodernism, disregard the difference between the two
altogether. Burrow, for example, concludes his discussion on modernity with the following
thought: Post-modernism in literature, for all the critical volubility expended on it, looks more
like a gloss on Modernism than its historical grave-digger. Modernism is our tradition (253).

The opposition between modernism and postmodernism illustrates a paradox of duality
that is apparent in each of these authors. In their writing, all three situate the threshold between
opposing pairs so that it appears that the threshold’s main function is to resolve the difference
between the two. Indeed the threshold does do this, revealing the interdependency that polar
opposites share with each other. For example, Celan shows how poetic speech can arise out of
speechlessness, or how memory is only possible after an event has first been forgotten. However,
what also becomes apparent is that each idea compounds upon other, related ideas, and that
simple dualism reveals a much more complexly textured pluralism.

This accomplishment, however, does not come without a price. All three are aware of the
costs involved in exploring a threshold existence. Hofmannsthal often expressed this cost as a
regret for the impermanence of the threshold. Chandos’ awareness of those rare moments of true
experience lessens his enjoyment of the mundane, everyday necessities of life. Hofmannsthal
expands on that idea in Augenblicke in Griechenland, where he shows that the revelations he
seeks come only when he is willing to acknowledge the abyss and push forward to the edge of
oblivion where self-actualization becomes a reality. In Elektra, Hofmannsthal created a

\textsuperscript{21}See for example, Matei Calinescu (7) or Le Rider’s comparison of Viennese modernity
to the Kulturkritik of the 1970s and 1980s (298).
marginalized character who is never able to overcome her conflicted nature because she either cannot or will not move beyond her threshold existence. As a result, her apparent victory leaves her with no alternative but her own death.

For Celan, the costs of entering into the threshold are often expressed in terms of mental anguish. Many of his poems occupy the space between remembering and forgetting and the conflicting need to do both. The memories of his lost family members constantly threaten to reopen old wounds. Yet the possibility of forgetting them is potentially even more traumatic. Celan also equates the guilt of forgetting with the guilt of creating language. For Celan, poetic language is aware both of its own wounded nature and of the fact that it is still the only alternative to complete silence. Translating a dream or a memory into reality and into written language gives it life in the very instant that it also ceases to live. The process guarantees that guilt will be a part of the language it creates.

Handke also incurs the cost of crossing the threshold in terms of guilt. In Der Angst des Tormanns, as well as in Der Chinese des Schmerzes and dunklen Nacht, becoming an active individual involves a transgression of social boundaries. Doing so has both positive and negative effects. While Loser’s act of stone throwing is a necessary step in the recovery of his place in history and in his ability to tell his own story, it also generates a sense of Grenzschwindel in him. Likewise, the Pharmacist in dunkle Nacht experiences a temporary benefit from his muteness. For a time it opens up his world to new possibilities, but in the end it threatens to take him beyond the Grenzen der Welt.

As Hofmannsthal, Celan, and Handke negotiate the border between memory and forgetting, they expose this process to the possibility of annihilation and death, but also to life. They utilize thresholds of space, of time, and of language to create a complex web of interactions
where contradictions can exist simultaneously without canceling each other out. Out of this complexity they produce a literature of reality that acknowledges all sides of the issues. The threshold imagery provides a point of view from which each author can describe the world while creating a space for himself within it.


Gellhaus, Axel. Über die Schwelle des Erzählens: Überlegungen zu *Der Chinese des Schmerzes* von Peter Handke. *Germanistik und Deutschunterricht im Zeitalter der*


Packer, Jeffrey M. *From Thou to Thou: An Examination of Paul Celan's Threshold Imagery.* MA Thesis, Brigham Young U, 1999.


Index

Ad Me Ipsum ........................... 10, 20, 22, 27
Alewyn, Richard ..................... 72, 209
Andreas ........ 16, 26, 38, 69-75, 137, 139, 165, 166, 214, 216, 218
Augenblicke in Griechenland ...... 16, 31, 47-50, 54, 62, 73, 135, 177, 185, 206
Baeer, Ulrich ........................ 131, 209
Bettelheim, Bruno .................... 32, 209
Bogumil, Sieghild .................... 99, 210
Bremer Rede ...................... 11, 79-84, 92, 100, 109, 119, 128, 131, 132
Brion, Marcel ......................... 30-32, 34-36, 210
Buck, Theo ........................... 99, 210
Cech, Lois Mary ..................... 69, 211
Chalfen, Isreal ....................... 84, 211
Chandosbrief 6, 7, 16, 30-32, 36-39, 41-48, 52, 72, 135, 142, 203, 204, 215
Colin, Amy ......................... 80, 82, 85, 210, 211
Del Caro, Adrian ................. 10, 14, 23, 51, 81, 86, 211
Der Tor und der Tod ............... 5, 16, 18, 23-30, 148
Elektra 16, 26, 62-69, 72, 205, 206, 211, 212
Fassbind, Bernard .................. 110, 212
Fiedler, Leonhard m. .............. 212
Firges ............................... 81, 96-98, 212
Freud, Sigmund 8, 10, 14, 65, 212, 216
Frye, Lawrence O. ................... 32, 212
Gadamer, Hans-Georg .............. 104, 107, 109, 110, 212
Goltschnigg, Dietmar .............. 80, 213
Götz, Bärbel ........................ 50, 213
Hamburger, Michael .............. 15, 25, 69, 213
Hammelmann, H.A. ................. 24, 28, 29, 213
Handke, Peter 1, 3, 4, 2-4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12-14, 77, 100, 124, 127, 134-143, 146, 147, 149, 151-153, 157, 158, 160, 161, 163-166, 169, 173, 176, 177, 179, 181, 183-187, 189-193, 196, 200, 201, 203-205, 207, 209, 211-216, 218, 219
Härter, Andreas .................... 38, 39, 214
Hedderer, Edgar ................... 26, 214
Heidegger, Martin 6, 12, 77, 134, 137, 212, 214
Horn, Peter Rudolph Gisela .... 97, 98, 116-119, 214
Inacker, Gabriele ................. 31, 33, 34, 214
Janz, Marlies ......................... 86, 214
Kepnes, Steven ...................... 126, 214
Kobel, Erwin ......................... 27, 215
Kopplin, Wolfgang ................ 112, 113, 215
Kraft, Werner ....................... 36, 46, 48, 52, 170, 215
Language 4, 4-6, 9, 10, 16, 26, 29, 30, 34, 36, 37, 39, 42, 44, 47, 48, 52, 68, 79, 81, 83, 89, 97-101, 108, 109, 111-113, 115, 116, 120, 121, 127, 128, 130, 133, 158, 168, 172, 188, 204, 206
Über-setzen 17, 68, 91, 93, 106, 115, 116, 118-120, 156, 161
Le Rider, Jacques .................. 8, 54, 55, 64, 65, 69, 203, 205, 215
Lehmann, Jürgen .................... 99, 215, 218
Lyon, James K. ...................... 84, 215
MangerManger, Klaus ............ 87, 89, 215
Märchen der 672. Nachtd 16, 30-33, 36, 37, 66, 157, 160, 209, 212
Martens, Lorna ..................... 66, 216
Meinecke, Dietlind ................. 109, 216
Menninghaus, Winfried .......... 95, 101, 119, 122, 216
Meridian, Der ....................... 4, 68, 86, 115
Metzeler, Werner ................... 22, 44, 216
Miles, David ......................... 76-78, 216
Olsson, Anders ..................... 76, 216
Pain 26, 28, 29, 63, 82, 86, 89, 107, 108, 118, 123, 131
Pestalozzi, Karl ...................... 24, 217, 218
Poems, Celan
Das Geschriebene 110-112, 115, 116
Die Schwermutsschnellen Hindurch 103, 104, 106, 112, 118
Engführung 42, 84, 85, 90
Espenbaum 86
Fadensonnen 108, 114, 115, 117, 211
Gemeinsam 122-125, 127-130
Grabschrift für François 86, 87, 89, 91, 92, 115, 165
Im Spätrot 93, 94, 97, 99, 102, 103, 112
In den Flüssen 9, 95, 105, 108, 109, 112, 125, 169
Landschaft 54, 97
Todesfuge 11, 84, 85, 92
Von Dunkel zu Dunkel 90, 92, 93, 118, 119, 121, 125
Welchen der Steine du hebst 123, 143
Poems, Hofmannsthal
Ein Traum von großer Magie 24
Erlebnis 15, 20
Manche Freilich ........................ 19
Pöggeler, Otto .......................... 75, 86, 115, 217
präexistenz .............................. 28
Pretzer, Lielo Anne ..................... 123, 129, 217
Resch, Margit ........................... 15, 38, 217
Rilke, Rainer Maria ...................... 12, 77, 134
Rosenthal, Bianca ....................... 83, 217
Schings, Hans-Jürgen .................. 31-33, 217
Schmitz-Emans, Monika ................ 99, 218
Schulz, Georg-Michael .................. 75, 218
Seng, Joachim ............................ 84, 218
Steinecke, Hartmut ...................... 218
Temples ................................. 51, 56-58, 60, 61, 73, 189
Thomasberger, Andreas ................. 71, 218
Thresholds
Augenblick ............................... 5, 6, 9, 14-16, 24, 28, 37-39,
........................................... 46, 48-51, 53, 54, 58, 62, 75, 77,
........................................... 78, 107, 126, 164, 167, 175, 176,
........................................... 178, 184, 199, 204
Dreams ................................. 17-22, 24, 34, 49-51, 59, 71, 76,
........................................... 93-96, 99, 102, 106, 116-120, 122-
........................................... 124, 129, 130, 145, 157, 191, 198,
........................................... 201, 207, 210, 218
Rivers ................................. 2, 9, 76, 93, 95, 104-109, 112, 118,
........................................... 124, 125, 169, 188-192, 196, 198,
........................................... 214
Time .......................... 4, 38, 50, 51, 74, 90, 119, 142, 207
U-topia ................................. 4, 108, 113
Underwood, Edward ..................... 37, 219
Vietta, Silvio ......................... 100-102, 130, 219
Wilson, Jean ............................ 63, 68, 219
Wittmann, Lothar ....................... 30, 219
Wolin, Richard ......................... 220
Wunberg, Gotthart ...................... 43, 44, 47, 220