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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE IMAGE OF THE
AESTHETE IN THE EARLY PROSE WORKS OF
HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Eric Rolan Dixon
May 1992

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my wonderful wife Angela, without whose love, sacrifice and support for this insane venture, I would still be miserably pursuing a career in retail.

To Jack Heyward and Edna Pierce Dixon, I would like to say that “bragging rights” are not exclusive to parents. There is no person, whom I call my friend, who does not know of my mother’s wonderful writing, her open-mindedness, her love of nature, her work at the Clinch River Raptor Center, or that she is simply the best mother that ever existed. There is also no person, with whom I am more than casually acquainted, who does not know of my father’s struggle up from poverty, his persistence in getting an education and becoming an engineer, the fact that he provided for, and took care of his family through many hard times, or that he made it possible, and gave me the inspiration to come to this point in my life. To you my parents, I dedicate my Masters Degree; and I will use it only to brag about you.

Acknowledgements

I should like to thank Professor Carolyn Hodges for her patience and advice in the preparation of this thesis. Thanks go also to Professors Nancy Lauckner, and John Osborne, who served as my committee. I extend special thanks to Professor David Lee and to the family of Gerti Wunderlich for providing financial support for my studies in Germany and Austria. Furthermore, I express my undying gratitude to Ingrid L. McMillen, Chrystal Steffens, Mary Hoak and especially Winkie Ilic for serving as my sounding boards and helping me adjust to and cope with life as a graduate student.

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to show the development of Hofmannsthal's attitudes toward aestheticism and the role of the artist in society as manifested in his early prose works. Relatively little criticism has been written on these works. The majority of the secondary sources deal either with Hofmannsthal's poetry, most of which preceded the prose works, or his operas and librettos which he wrote later in life in collaboration with Richard Strauss.

Chapter I deals with the early growth of Hofmannsthal's very strong opinions about aestheticism as seen in his prose poetry. In these prose poems one often sees a sharp criticism of some of Hofmannsthal's own contemporaries who, through cryptic elitist aestheticism, wished to reestablish Viennese writing as a high art form and were unyieldingly critical of those who would not follow them. Possibly for this reason, Hofmannsthal kept all but one of these critical prose poems in a personal journal which he never intended to publish. In the first of these prose poems entitled "Die Rose und der Schreibtisch," written in 1892, Hofmannsthal subtly and comically attacks the elitist pride which he perceives in his contemporaries. Over the approximately three years in which Hofmannsthal wrote all but two of his prose poems, one sees a progression in his attitudes, culminating with a focus on the negative effects of elitist aestheticism on the aesthete.

Chapter II shows the further development of this theme as it is seen in Hofmannsthal's later prose works. In these stories, such as Das Märchen der 672. Nacht, written in 1895, Hofmannsthal shows how the aesthete's

exclusive pursuit of beauty causes him to lose the ability to perceive life in a realistic way, and how this distorted perception causes him to overlook all signs of danger and leads inevitably to his death.

The conclusion of this thesis is meant to show that Hofmannsthal continued to develop this theme much later in his life. His essay entitled "Sebastian Melmoth," written in 1906, is a powerful portrayal of the rise and fall of Oscar Wilde. In this essay Hofmannsthal points out Oscar Wilde's terrible internal conflict between his elitist aesthetic rejection of reality on the one hand, and his undeniable drive to be one with reality on the other. When Wilde finally reaches his breaking point, he rushes headlong into the ugliest and most dangerous situation and, having taken on the alias Sebastian Melmoth, dies ruined and unknown.

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Introduction

Hugo Laurenz August Hofmann Edler von Hofmannsthal was born on February 1, 1874, in Vienna. He had a mixed family background consisting of a German-Jewish, Italian, and Austrian heritage and he was raised as a Roman Catholic. He had private tutors to the age of eleven, and then from 1884 to 1892 he attended the Wiener Akademisches Gymnasium in the Beethovenplatz (Bangerter 2). From 1892 to 1894 he studied law at the University of Vienna and passed the Staatsprüfung in 1894. According to Jacobs, he also attended the lectures of a Professor of Aesthetics, Alfred Freiherr von Berger, and met regularly with a group of young writers and poets at the Café Griensteidl at the Michaelerplatz during his years of law study (11). At the Café Griensteidl he read many of his early poems and verse plays and was regarded as a prodigy. There he was introduced to Hermann Bahr, Arthur Schnitzler, Richard Beer-Hofmann, and Stefan George. Because as a student he was not allowed to publish under his own name, he published works of poetry, verse plays, and prose pieces under several pseudonyms, including Loris, Loris Melikow, Theophil Morren (for "Gestern"), and once the comical name Archibald O'Hagan, B.A. (Jacobs 10-11).

During his school years Hofmannsthal was not a normal school boy. He was an avid reader and became well versed in the literatures of Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, England, and, especially, France. It quickly became apparent to his teachers and other students that he was somebody out of the ordinary (Bangerter 2). Hofmannsthal was fascinated by the beauty and complexity of the art and literature of his time. He

attended lectures on the style of aestheticism, was exposed in his studies to the French symbolists, and wrote his poems, prose, and verse plays in these styles which very much impressed him. His early interest and success with symbolist poetry caused him to be dubbed an aesthete. As he grew older, however, and became more a part of the writers' group at the Café Griensteidl, he began to see problems with the direction in which their elitist views were taking him as an artist. Stefan George wanted very much to make Hofmannsthal a part of his group of artists, through whom he intended to dominate German literature. "At one stage in the correspondence between the two poets, George speaks of his endeavor 'to establish a salutary [sic] dictatorship in our literature'" (Hammelmann 20). George's poetry was obscure and esoteric and was written for an elite few. He published his works and the works of other poets in the group in his journal entitled Blätter für die Kunst. At first Hofmannsthal felt a part of this group and submitted his works to the journal, but he was troubled from the beginning by George's esoteric philosophy in which reality and life played little, if any, part.

The two poets first met at the Café Griensteidl in December 1891 when Hofmannsthal was seventeen years old. At this age he had already amazed the literary community of Vienna with the mastery of his poetry and his insightful literary criticism. He had studied and admired the works of symbolist writers and in many ways felt drawn to the ideals of aestheticism, but he always had a sense for the connectedness of art and life. He had established artistic opinions and believed that art should symbolize aspects of life and that reality should be the inspiration for art. By January

1892, only one month after their first meeting, there was already great tension between the two artists. Bangerter notes:

In an undated letter which Hofmannsthal received on January 10, 1892, George lamented that the "meaningful intellectual alliance" that he had anticipated was not really possible because "each has already arrived at a specific turn of life, within which he is confined and from which he can never remove himself." (4)

After this they saw each other very rarely, but, as noted by Bangerter, Hofmannsthal did continue to contribute to Blätter für die Kunst, for which he wrote his verse play Der Tod des Tizian for the first issue in October 1892 (5). According to Bangerter, by July of 1893 Hofmannsthal wanted to "divorce himself from further involvement with George's circle and wished to be viewed as an 'occasional collaborator, and otherwise as a neutral member of a well disposed public'" (6). Bangerter notes that George was unwilling to accept those terms and announced that Hofmannsthal had ended his active collaboration with the journal. He states, however, that in spite of this break, poems and other writings that Hofmannsthal had already submitted for publication continued to appear in Blätter für die Kunst in almost every issue until 1897 (6).

In Hofmannsthal's early works are seen the seeds and early growth of a literary philosophy which would guide the changing nature of his artistic expression throughout his life. As a teenager, he impressed and astounded the literary community of Europe with his lyric poetry, lyric dramas, and critical essays. These works showed such remarkable insight into the complexities of life and of the world that he quickly became a

valued member of that literary community. As noted by Bangerter, "Many of his contemporaries found it extremely difficult to reconcile the maturity and evident mastery evinced in his writings with the teen-aged poet-critic who had written them" (3).

Having been confronted with George's elitist views, Hofmannsthal began very early to question his own purpose as an artist and to recognize the power and wonder of life, which he perceived as being ignored or rejected in George's style of elitist aesthetic writing. Hofmannsthal developed a philosophy that art must remain connected to life and that the artist must be relevant to his culture. As he matured, these ideas became an ever more pervasive part of his writing. He wrote fewer and fewer lyric poems and instead experimented with other genres such as the prose poem, narrative prose, drama, opera, and the essay. Hofmannsthal's prose poems such as "Gerechtigkeit" (1893) and "Das Glück am Weg" (1893) portray the disillusionment of the aesthete who suddenly faces and becomes a victim of the reality which he has denied.¹ In chapter one of this thesis I will concentrate my discussion on Hofmannsthal's prose poetry.

His longer narrative prose works, such as Das Märchen der 672. Nacht (1895), Reitergeschichte (1898), and Das Erlebnis des Marschalls von Bassompierre (1900), show the aesthete's denial and disillusionment turning into a complete inability to function adequately in the real world, and as a consequence, leading inevitably to his death. Of these three stories, Das Märchen der 672. Nacht provides a particularly good example

¹ The prose poems discussed in this thesis and the essay "Sebastian Melmoth" are reproduced in the Appendix.

of this sequence of events; therefore, in chapter two of this thesis, I will concentrate my discussion of the narrative prose works on Das Märchen.

Chapter I

Prose Poetry

During Hofmannsthal's short-lived and somewhat tenuous collaboration with Stefan George and his followers, he developed very strong opinions about the purpose of art which would shape much of his thinking and be the major theme in many of his works throughout his career. "Stefan George was a literary elitist. That is, he believed in a literature written by and for a select few" (Bangerter 4). His poetry contained cryptic allusions and metaphors designed to trigger the thoughts of scholars and his peers whom he considered to be worthy of his art. George's motivations in his art were purely aesthetic and esoteric. The young Hofmannsthal, who was interested in music, dance, and the theater, wanted to make art relevant to the masses. It was Hofmannsthal's view that art should "symbolize, rather than . . . imitate, life" (Bangerter 23) and that "art separated from life is the very symptom of the end of a civilization" (Hammelmann 19). Hammelmann refers to a letter in which Hofmannsthal "wrote to George outright that he saw the vocation of the poet in a 'mingling with the throng', in 'that speaking to the crowd, into the crowd, which is the duty of each artist in his own sphere'" (20).

Hofmannsthal was interested in a very wide range of art forms which he felt connected him and the world of art with society. One critic notes:

Hofmannsthal's attitude to George indicated his suspicion of esoteric aims in art, and his need to feel that art linked him with life rather than separating him from it. His varied

interests, which included those of the theatre, mime, and dance, alienated George, who regarded these as detrimental influences. (Jacobs 16)

Although Hofmannsthal had this belief in the connectedness of art and life, he did experiment with many different writing styles, including some styles similar to George's.

In 1892, at the age of eighteen, Hofmannsthal had already proven his talent as a writer. During this time he was reading a tremendous amount of French literature and was experimenting with many of the styles and genres of these French works in his own writing. One of these genres was the prose poem, which was originated by the Parisian poet Yvette Guilbert, to whom Hofmannsthal dedicated his prose poem number ten (Erzählungen 2: 403). The prose poem is so named because it is written in prose form, often containing a somewhat developed story line. What sets it apart from other prose pieces, however, is its compactness and its singularity of purpose. As in a traditional poem, every expression has a reason for being included and is intended to lead the reader to the final meaning of the work. Many of Hofmannsthal's early prose poems were very cryptic in form, containing references to various literary and art works to which he was being exposed in his studies at the time under the guidance of his tutor Gabriel Dubray. He never intended, however, to publish these prose pieces and they were, indeed, not published until after his death.

Hofmannsthal's displeasure with George's ideas is clearly demonstrated in his first prose poem, written in 1892, entitled "Die Rose und der Schreibtisch" (Erz. 2: 227), in which he ridicules the elitist's rejection of reality. In this work, Hofmannsthal portrays a conflict between a porcelain

rose representing the pure aesthetic beauty of art, and a natural rose representing the beauty of nature. "Ich weiß, dass Blumen nie von selbst aus offenen Fenstern fallen. Namentlich nicht bei Nacht" (227). These first two lines set up, in the imagination of the reader, endless mysterious and romantic possibilities for how and why a rose might appear suddenly in front of a person upon a snow-covered street at night. They point out the numerous symbolic meanings and emotional circumstances which are often associated with a natural rose, and which transcend mere aesthetic beauty. The third sentence, however, proclaims that these deeper meanings are not important to this poem. The narrator then continues with a physical description of the scene. However, the significance of these endless possibilities and symbolic meanings is the true focus of this prose poem.

Hofmannsthal emphasizes the dynamic qualities of life in the description of the cold rose which has suddenly appeared before the narrator of the prose poem. He describes it as "noch schlank, nicht aufgeblättert, und vor Kälte ganz ohne Duft" (227). This is a description of a rose rendered stagnant by the cold, but all of these elements hint at the possibilities of change which merely lie dormant in the frozen rose and provide a feeling of anticipation about what the rose could become. Although the rose described here is closed up and seemingly dormant, and thus static like its porcelain representation, the words "noch schlank" could only be used to describe a living rose. The word "noch" specifically implies the possibility of change, of which the porcelain rose is, of course, incapable. The second element of the phrase, "nicht aufgeblättert," is a further hint of the dynamic nature of the living rose. "[U]nd vor Kälte ganz ohne Duft" tells the reader that only the cold prevents the rose from

emitting its fragrance, something that the porcelain rose can suggest by virtue of its appearance but not imitate.

The narrator then takes the rose home, places it in a very small Japanese porcelain vase upon his writing desk and lies down to sleep. This sequence contains symbols which are very important to the overall meaning of the poem. The "ganz kleine japanische Vase" is a symbol of pure aestheticism. Japanese artisans, famous for being above any personal praise about their art, have always adhered to a strict code that the beauty of the work should stand alone; the Japanese vase was also held to its own strict standard, as J. F. Blacker states in his 1922 book, The ABC of Japanese Art: "The flower-vases for ceremonial bouquets were of the most delightful forms, upon which the decoration was applied so as to contrast with, not to rival, the beauty of the floral arrangement" (254). In Hofmannsthal's prose poem, the vase is not a representation of anything in nature, and its size limits its actual usefulness to its aesthetic appeal. For this reason it is a symbol of the aesthete's single-minded pursuit of beauty. His placing the vase on his desk symbolizes that it is through the medium of writing that he himself produces aesthetic works of art. However, by putting the living rose into the vase, he shows an appreciation for life and the ability to mix the essence of life with the pure aestheticism of the vase. This wish to combine reality with the aesthetic aims of art was one of the major points of friction between Hofmannsthal and George.

One style that Hofmannsthal often experimented with in his poetry, and later developed very successfully in his prose works, was the dream state. As noted by Hammelmann, Hofmannsthal perceived dreams as an inseparable part of reality: "... in the third 'Terzine' the lines: 'we are such

stuff as dreams are made of,' he sees dreams ever alive and present in our reality, revealing to us our true selves" (12). The dream is used in many of Hofmannsthal's prose poems and is strongly suggested in "Die Rose und der Schreibtisch." Having placed the rose in the vase upon the desk, the narrator lies down to sleep. The first sentence of the next section, "Nach kurzer Zeit muss ich aufgewacht sein" (227), suggests the possibility that he really is not awake but is instead dreaming. The idea that the narrator in this prose poem is dreaming indicates that his true feelings are being portrayed. The fact that the subject matter of the dream is a conflict between a man-made representation of a rose and a natural rose suggests that the conflict between art and life is an important, although possibly hidden, subject in the mind of the narrator.

The narrator describes the room lit by the starlight on the edge of night. As he breathes he smells the scent of the warmed living rose, and he hears a soft voice. The voice is that of a porcelain rose, which he describes as being an old Viennese style inkwell. Its form establishes that it is of the old accepted aesthetic Viennese style. The porcelain rose makes remarks about the narrator and about the living rose that he has placed on the desk. The porcelain rose, being a man-made object of art, represents the viewpoint of the elitist aesthete who believes that art is an improvement upon reality. Thus the porcelain rose, in this case, probably represents Stefan George and his followers. Therefore, this art object has an imperious belief in its own aesthetic perfection. The artificial rose exclaims: "Er hat absolut kein Stylgefühl mehr, . . . keine Spur von Geschmack." The next line of the narrator, "Damit meinte sie mich" (227), suggests the position of Hofmannsthal, who felt that such a sentiment

could be directed toward him. It is quite possible that he had already experienced this sort of attitude from George or one of his group. By the time Hofmannsthal had written this prose poem, apparently in October of 1892, he had had numerous disagreements with George about artistic style. All of this was certainly still fresh in his mind and was most likely the impetus for his writing of "Die Rose und der Schreibtisch." The final exclamation of the porcelain rose, "Sonst hätte er unmöglich so etwas neben mich stellen können," and the narrator's reply, "Damit meinte sie die lebendige Rose" (227), show absolute disdain on the part of the porcelain rose for the commingling of life and reality with art. This is representative of the sentiment which Hofmannsthal perceived from George and his followers.

"Die Rose und der Schreibtisch," like many of his other prose poems, shows Hofmannsthal's distaste for the ideas put forth by Stefan George. This distaste later led to more developed opinions about the connectedness of art and life and the role of the artist in society. Hofmannsthal believed in the necessity for a connection between art and life. His idea that the separation of the two "is the symptom of the end of a civilization" (Hammelmann 19), was echoed by the idea that when an artist separates himself from life and reality, he loses his relevance and thus is unable to understand life or to be understood by others. He contended that it was "his duty as an artist" to keep the living tradition of his culture alive by binding his art intimately to reality, thereby preserving its relevance to the masses (Hammelmann 19).

Hofmannsthal's criticism of the elitist artists, such as George, became more and more pronounced. In May 1893, in his fifth prose poem, entitled

"Gerechtigkeit," he points out the lack of understanding of reality exhibited by the aesthete and his subsequent lack of relevance to his society. This prose poem is set in a garden, a place of tremendous natural beauty, ripe with the raw material for the effete artist to weave his beautiful lines. The garden is a place visited often in Hofmannsthal's works. In his untitled prose poem number thirteen, Hofmannsthal describes a very similar scene of the artist in a garden. "Dichter sitzt im Garten (lebend oder ehern, Beethoven) Kinder spielen, Spatzen fliegen um ihn, Blumen fallen auf ihn" (Erz. 2: 232). This prose poem paints a picture of a beautifully aesthetic scene, a beauty which represents merely the surface of reality.

"Gerechtigkeit" (Erz. 2: 228) begins with an aesthete in the center of a garden, thus in the middle of an aesthetic world, his own world, completely separated from reality. The narrator, concentrating only on aesthetic qualities, the surface of reality, describes the scene of the garden with many adjectives which paint a one-dimensional picture of the action there: "In der dünnen durchsichtigen Luft schwebten Bienen zwischen den rosenrothen über und über blühenden Pfirsichbäumen hin und her" (228). In this mode, the narrator continues to describe the world which he has created in his mind. A young angel enters the garden, and the narrator views him too in the same one-dimensional style:

Er trug Schnabelschuhe, an der Seite hieng ihm ein langer
Stossdegen und im Gürtel ein Dolch. Brust und Schultern
deckte ein feiner stahlblauer Panzer, auf dem spielte die
Sonne, und weisse Blüthen fielen auf sein dichtes langes
goldblondes Haar. (228-29)

The angel's dog precedes him into the garden and the narrator describes him as "ein grosses hochbeiniges zierliches Windspiel" (228). In his description, the dog is personified and seems to take on a role of worshipper in the perception of the narrator: ". . . der Hund sprang neben des Herren Weg im Grase her, von Zeit zu Zeit mit Liebe zu ihm aufschauend" (229). The narrator is unable, or unwilling, to see the reality of the situation. As the angel comes toward the narrator, a young child catches the attention of the angel. The narrator sees the world, or at least the aesthetic world of the garden which he has created, as centering around him, and thus wonders only if the angel will want to speak to him. The child in the garden quite possibly represents the narrator's own childhood, when he was able to approach life with innocent curiosity, rather than seeing the world through the distorting eyes of an aesthete.

The child walks up to the angel and looks at his shoes, and with the innocence of youth exclaims, "Schöne Schuh hast Du, sehr schöne!" (229). At this, the angel, stopping to speak to the child, tells him that the shoes come from the robe of the mother of God. Not until this point does the narrator notice the shoes, but he describes them in a way as to dismiss them as unimportant: "Jetzt sah ich: die Schuhe waren aus Goldstoff und irgendwelche rothe Blumen oder Früchte eingewebt" (229). This shows the narrator's lack of curiosity about the detail of life. He is really only capable of describing the angel in a general artistic way, as if he is viewing a beautiful painting. The angel tells the child the story of how the holy apostle Peter had accidentally torn the robe worn by the mother of God while trying to get her attention. The angel addresses the child by saying:

“Da wurde der Mantel weggelegt und für uns auf Schuh verschnitten.” The child then simply remarks: “Sehr schön sind die Schuh!” (229).

This story, hardly the kind one would expect from an angel, depicts an incident which could have happened to any mortal. This shows that the angel is communicating with the child on a very human level, with no artificial or aesthetic pretext. The angel and the child seem to communicate on a common level of which the narrator is incapable. The lack of understanding exhibited by the narrator is underscored by his next thoughts:

Eine unsägliche Gehobenheit kam über mich bei dem Gedanken, dass er auch zu mir reden würde. Denn auf den einfachen Worten, die über seine Lippen sprangen, lag ein Glanz, als dächte er dabei an ganz etwas anderes, dächte verschwiegend mit unterdrücktem Jubel an paradiesische Glückseligkeiten. (229)

His belief that the angel must be thinking about the wonders of paradise, while communicating with the child, shows that he has created an artificial image of the angel for himself, and is thus incapable of understanding the angel's true nature or his relationship to the innocence of the child.

The angel stands before him, as the narrator hoped he would. In greeting, the narrator stands up and removes his hat. He then suddenly realizes that the angel is looking at him with an extremely displeased expression, and that the dog is also staring at him curiously. Displeasure is the last thing that the narrator expects in his beautifully created garden from his wonderfully created angel, and he is caught off guard by the angel's first question: “Bist Du ein Gerechter?” (229). Hofmannsthal's

choice of the concept of "Gerechtigkeit" seems, at first glance, to be a curious one for the purpose of showing the artist's lack of contact with or understanding of reality. However, given his view that it is the "duty" of the artist "to keep his art tied to reality, and in so doing, to prevent the decline of his society" (Hammelmann 19), justice, as well as any other abstract moral virtue, is certainly a fitting concept. The narrator in the garden answers the angel's question with as much lack of understanding as he had exhibited upon observing the conversation between the child and the angel: "Ich bin nicht schlimm. Ich habe viele Menschen gern. Es gibt so viele hübsche Dinge" (229). This last response shows that, when pressured, the narrator automatically falls back on his artificial world of aesthetics. The angel utterly rejects this response and repeats the question impatiently, as if the man had not answered, and starts to pull his dagger out of its sheath. In terror the narrator tries desperately to understand the angel but finds himself unable:

. . . ich versuchte ihn zu begreifen, aber es gelang mir nicht;
mein Denken erlosch, unfähig den lebendigen Sinn des Wortes
zu erfassen; vor meinem inneren Aug stand eine leere Wand;
qualvoll vergeblich suchte ich mich zu besinnen. (230)

With his realization that he is incapable of comprehending the living meaning of the word, it appears that the narrator begins to grasp what is being asked and realizes how little he truly does understand about life. He then searches for excuses instead of an answer: "Ich habe so wenig vom Leben ergriffen . . ." (230). During this, the angel remains silent. The narrator then seems to go back to his trust in the aesthetic world in order to claim a deeper awareness of life:

“... aber manchmal durchweht mich eine starke Liebe und da ist mir nichts fremd. Und sicherlich bin ich dann gerecht: denn mir ist dann, als könnte ich alles begreifen, wie die Erde rauschende Bäume herauftreibt und wie die Sterne im Raum hängen und kreisen, von allem das tiefste Wesen, und alle Regungen der Menschen.” (230)

These lines seem to take the form of a soliloquy in which the narrator is possibly questioning the alternate reality which he has built for himself. He has believed that he understands the nature of the interwoven fabric of life, the world and the entire universe, and that this surely should mean that he is just. But now, faced with one of the basic concepts of life, he is incapable of any meaningful response and is seeing his ethereal world destroyed.

The angel remains silent, staring at him with utter contempt. The narrator is overcome by a crushing awareness of his inadequacy, which makes him feel as though he is blushing with shame (230). Although the angel has guided the man toward it, the narrator comes to his feeling of inadequacy on his own. He attaches words to what he assumes the angel is thinking, effectively portraying his own painful enlightenment and catharsis: “Was für ein widerwärtiger hohler Schwätzer!” (230). This is most likely an extreme expression of the direction of the development of Hofmannsthal's belief in the need for a connection between art and reality. At the time that this was written, Hofmannsthal was also creating poetry which was highly admired by artists in George's circle and was submitting works to Blätter für die Kunst, although he disagreed with George's elitist principles. This situation inevitably led to a powerful internal conflict for

Hofmannsthal, which would cause him to question his own effectiveness and relevance as an artist. This conflict would follow Hofmannsthal throughout his life and would recur as a major theme in many of his future works.

As the angel turns to leave, he says: "Gerechtigkeit ist alles, Gerechtigkeit ist das Erste, Gerechtigkeit das Letzte. Wer das nicht begreift, wird sterben" (230). Here the angel warns the narrator that if he is not able to understand a basic concept of life, he will die. In the context of this story and of Hofmannsthal's life, the death of which the angel warns is most likely the death of the poet's art. However, in many of his later works, Hofmannsthal develops the theme of the actual death of the aesthete being brought on by a failure to understand the complexities of life.² As the angel leaves the garden, the narrator seems distraught by his failure to impress the angel, and he watches the angel's every movement as the latter disappears down a stairway. It is as though the narrator's hopes all lie in the angel's return and acceptance but instead, he is forced to watch his hopes die with the angel's final disappearance.

"Gerechtigkeit" depicts an aesthete who, comfortable in his artfully created world, is confronted with the reality which he has denied. Higher reality, as represented by the angel, shows complete disdain and rejection of the aesthete in the garden as a result of his lack of understanding of a concept which is basic to life. The narrator has trivialized everything which is real, by simply recreating it in his own artificial image. He has blinded himself to the deep significance of a concept such as

² Das Märchen der 672. Nacht, Reitergeschichte and Das Erlebnis des Marschals von Bassompierre are narrative prose works which contain this theme.

“Gerechtigkeit,” for he has always concentrated on the aesthetic aspects of life which are easily seen and easily described.

As Hofmannsthal developed his views about the role of the artist in society, he was certainly not simply pointing an accusing finger at other artists like Stefan George. “Gerechtigkeit” is as much an inward-directed criticism as it is a criticism of other aesthetes. Hofmannsthal was raised in a society which had a long tradition of aestheticism in its art as well as in its social structures, and he was for a time an integral part of that tradition in creating his poetry. As noted by Jacobs:

An over-simplified view of Hofmannsthal in his youthful period, held by critics who were contemporary with him, and persisting for about ten years after his death, made him out to be a decadent aesthete, or an ethereal poet, touched by the finger of the gods, or a kind of neo-platonic sleepwalker. (12)

These critics, however, were probably not even aware of the existence of his prose poems, which were published from a personal notebook long after his death. During his early years as a writer, Hofmannsthal was witnessing what he thought of as the impending death of his culture, which he felt was caused by the lack of relevance of art to the people of that culture (Hammelmann 19). Feeling it his duty as an artist to turn back this tide of destruction, he became determined to change his own style of writing in order to be more relevant. He developed his themes with a focus on reality, and was soon able to see much greater wonder in life than he ever had in purely aesthetic works of art. In his prose poem number 19 from 1893, entitled “Stunden des tiefen Mitfühlens” (Erz. 2: 234), he

explains these new feelings and waxes rather didactic about the future of the message and its seriousness:

Für mich das Leben ein Wunder; dessen Formen noch ohne Rücksicht auf Inhalt lauter Venerabilia; diesem Zustand entspringen solche Darstellungen des reinen Sinnenlebens, der Seelenverfassungen wie meine Prosagedichte.

Gerechtigkeit? ein Sinn? nicht blosses Bestaunen dessen das da ist; vor und nachher treten die Stunden heran. (234)

Here he is suggesting that readers of "Gerechtigkeit" should not simply marvel at its beauty as a work of art, but should learn from it. This same didactic message about the artist's role in society becomes ever more personal from the time of "Gerechtigkeit" on.

In the only one of Hofmannsthal's prose poems for which he sought publication, "Das Glück am Weg" (Erz. 1: 7), one finds a seemingly autobiographical sketch of an aesthete struggling with the conflict between his artistic nature, on the one hand, and his wish to view the world in real terms and not deny reality, on the other. Hofmannsthal wrote "Das Glück am Weg" around the end of May or the beginning of June 1893, shortly after writing "Gerechtigkeit." Inspiration for the setting of "Das Glück am Weg" came from a trip which he took on September 21, 1892, with his French tutor Gabriel Dubray from Port Saint Louis to Marseille. In a letter to his mother on the following day, Hofmannsthal wrote of his journey by boat in a style very similar to his prose poems:

Die Bootsfahrt dauerte 5 Stunden (bei fast völliger Windstille) und war auf dem lichtblauen phosphoreszierenden Meer mit Leuchttürmen und aufspringenden Delphinen bei durch-

sichtiger sternheller Dämmerung unsagbar schön. (Erz. 1: 199)

In this letter to his mother one sees some of the same descriptions which he later uses in the story "Das Glück am Weg." As in "Gerechtigkeit," the theme of "Das Glück am Weg" could be described as the disillusionment of the aesthete confronted with a reality which is more penetrating than his own imagined one. However, in this story it seems likely that Hofmannsthal himself is the artist who experiences that disillusionment.

"Das Glück am Weg" is an allegorical journey; literally, it is a journey by boat on the French Riviera, but figuratively, it is Hofmannsthal's journey into a new way of viewing the world, in which he learns to embrace reality and reject his tendency toward esoteric expression in his art. The story begins with the first-person narrator: "Ich saß auf einem verlassenen Fleck des Hinterdecks auf einem dicken, zwischen zwei Pflöcken hin- und hergewundenen Tau und schaute zurück" (7). The "verlassene[r] Fleck des Hinterdecks," an isolated point at the rear of the ship which has been forgotten or abandoned by others on the ship, symbolizes that he is still clinging to the last remnants of his aesthetic tendencies. His sitting upon a rope which is wound between two pegs suggests that his seat there is somewhat precarious, and, symbolically, that he is holding on tenuously to his inclination towards esoteric description. The fact that he is looking back to his point of departure shows that he still longs for what he is leaving behind on his journey.

He then portrays the vanishing horizon, although he can barely see it for the haze and the distance. His depiction of the scene shows the paradox which he is facing in his journey away from aestheticism. On the one

hand, he describes a coastline which is all but invisible to him: "Rückwärts war in milchigem, opalinem Duft die Riviera versunken . . ." (Erz. 1: 7), but on the other hand, he remembers the coastline as though it were a painting and thus claims to see clearly

. . . die gelblichen Böschungen, über die der gezerrte Schatten der schwarzen Palmen fällt und die weißen, flachen Häuser, die in unsäglichem Dickicht rankender Rosen einsinken. Das alles sah ich jetzt scharf und springend, weil es verschwunden war, und glaubte, den feinen Duft zu spüren, den doppelten Duft der süßen Rosen und des sandigen, salzigen Strandes. (7)

The phrase "weil es verschwunden war" shows that he is now viewing the scene of the coastline internally, with the eye of the artist which Hofmannsthal often refers to as the "innere[s] Aug" ("Gerechtigkeit," Erz. 2: 230; "Das Glück am Weg," Erz. 1: 9). With the inner perception of the artist, the narrator believes that he can sense the beauty of the shore and can smell the mist from it. However, he fights his tendency to confuse an internal artistic image with the truth: "Aber der Wind ging ja landwärts, schwärzlich rieselnd lief er über die glatte, weinfarbene Fläche landwärts. So war es wohl nur Täuschung, daß ich den Duft zu spüren glaubte" (7).

The next sequence of the prose poem evokes images contained in the letter which Hofmannsthal had written to his mother from Marseille the day after his actual journey on September 21, 1892, in which he describes the dolphins which gather around the boat. The prose poem continues:

Dann sprangen dort, wo golden der breite Sonnenstreifen auf dem Wasser lag, drei Delphine auf und sprudelten sprühendes Gold und spielten gravitatisch und haschten sich heftig

rauschend und tauchten plötzlich wieder unter. Leer lag der
Fleck und wurde wieder glatt und blinkte. (7)

In the prose poem the dolphins seem to play the role of disrupters of the dream by disturbing the ribbon of gold which appears to radiate from the ship toward the land. This band of gold is symbolic of the connection which the narrator feels between himself and the beautiful shoreline of the Riviera. By breaking this bond, the dolphins serve as an omen to the narrator that this artistic connection is false and that it is fleeting.

The next sequence in "Das Glück am Weg" shows that the narrator is still in grave danger of being seduced back into the unreal world of aestheticism. Instead of recognizing the actions of the dolphins as an omen, the narrator merely creates another imaginary image, in which he sees the dolphins as the heralds of Neptune, the god of the seas. Yet, in his completely fabricated description of what could follow the dolphins, there is the hint of an omen of danger, which he entirely overlooks. This indicates that the narrator is allowing himself to be pulled into a world in which he can no longer comprehend the difference between reality and the creations of his imagination; for him Neptune is "kein langweiliger, schwarzbärtiger Gott, wie sie ihn zu Meißen aus Porzellan machen, sondern unheimlich und reizend, wie das Meer selbst, mit weicher Anmut, frauenhaften Zügen und Lippen rot, wie eine giftig rote Blume . . ." (7). In his description of Neptune with feminine features, he has unwittingly foreshadowed what is in store for him on his journey.

Pulling himself back into the world of reality, he spots a black point far off on the horizon and, after an hour, knows that it is a ship. He notices that the ship is coming toward his and that the two ships seem to be

on a collision course, although still far apart. Even from this distance he can already clearly make out the mast and the riggings, and even the golden nameplate. He then takes his telescope, which he describes as being a very good one. It brings a clearly framed round portion of the foreign ship very close to him, perhaps too close for comfort, for he feels like an intruder looking through a window at people whom he does not know.

He views in his framed picture a young blond woman, and gives a detailed description of her appearance:

Ich sah alles ganz deutlich: den dunklen Polster, in den sich die Absätze der kleinen, lichten Halbschuhe einbohrten, den moosgrünen breiten Gürtel, in dem ein Paar halboffene Rosen steckten, rosa Rosen, la France-Rosen. (Erz. 2: 8)

The description of this woman contains parallels to that of the angel in "Gerechtigkeit": The narrators of the respective stories portray the woman and the angel as being young and blonde, then focus on their shoes and the fact that they are wearing green. These parallels suggest that, in both of the stories, the aesthetes can only perceive these characters according to how they wish them to be. The narrator in "Das Glück am Weg" recreates the woman as an objet d'art. The roses, which he describes as being stuck in her green belt, seem to him to represent France, and perhaps also nature, as if these roses were really some of the climbing roses which he had seen along the Riviera.

He makes assumptions about her. He wonders if she is sleeping but decides that she is not, because the expression on her face is not that of a sleeping person. Although this assumption would seem to be based on reality, even this reality is questionable, because he has forgotten that the

woman is so far away and that he is only observing her by artificial means. When she looks up in his direction he is startled and embarrassed that he is staring at her:

Ihr Blick lief über mich, und ich wurde verlegen, daß ich sie so anstarrte, aus solcher Nähe; ich senkte das Glas, und dann erst fiel mir ein, daß sie ja weit war, dem freien Auge nichts als ein lichter Punkt zwischen braunen Planken, und mich unmöglich bemerken könne. (8)

By looking through the telescope, he creates his own imaginary world, in which he can be intimately involved with everything that the instrument brings to him, including the woman. Only after putting down the telescope does he realize that she is so far away, and upon looking through it again, he returns to his artificial world and decides that he knows the woman.

The narrator searches through his memories to find out when and where he has known her, but in each of the images that he conjures up, she appears like a shadow and then vanishes. Because he decides that he does not truly know her, he is overwhelmed by a feeling of emptiness. He then perceives that he does indeed know her, not as people normally know each other, but as an artist knows beauty. To this man, she is no longer a human being, but a mere symbol of beauty in nature and art:

Gewisse Musik hatte mir von ihr geredet, ganz deutlich von ihr, am stärksten Schumannsche; gewisse Abendstunden auf grünen Veilchenwiesen, an einem rauschenden kleinen Fluß, darüber der feuchte, rosige Abend lag; gewisse Blumen, Anemonen mit müden Köpfchen . . . gewisse seltsame Stellen in den Werken der Dichter, wo man aufsieht und den Kopf in

die Hand stützt und auf einmal vor dem inneren Aug' die goldenen Tore des Lebens aufgerissen schienen. . . . (9)

She is to him a symbol of beauty, which is so much a part of his life; thus, he believes that he knows her, but he is blind to the fact that she is a human being who is living her life, with all of its true beauty and ugliness, independent of his esoteric assumptions. Thus, ironically, that which he considers a gift, the ability to see and express the wonder and beauty that he perceives in life, his "innere[s] Aug,'" is the very agent of his blindness to reality. This blindness is central to the theme in many of Hofmannsthal's works.

Although "Das Glück am Weg" does indeed seem to be self-critical on Hofmannsthal's part, it certainly makes hidden reference to the works of other artists. Set apart from other paragraphs is the single sentence: "Alle diese Dinge dachte ich nicht deutlich, ich schaute sie in einer fliegenden, vagen Bildersprache" (9). This very likely refers to the poetry of Stefan George, whose method was to write vague, ethereal poetry, the sole function of which was to paint beautiful pictures in the minds of the readers, with neither regard for nor connection to any deeper meaning based on reality. Thus it seems that this disregard for reality, in order to pursue beauty exclusively, was what most troubled Hofmannsthal about George's works. However, it is likely that Hofmannsthal himself felt a tendency toward this same form of artistic expression, devoid of all connection to reality, and feared being seduced onto its path of blindness.

As the narrator tells himself of the many ways in which he knows the woman on the other ship, he falls ever deeper into his fantasy world, and again the garden takes its place in the aesthete's imagination: ". . . und ich

käme aus dem Garten und bliebe unter ihr stehen . . ." (10). The garden is a leitmotif which recurs in many of Hofmannsthal's prose poems and represents the realm of the artist, where nothing exists but the beauty which he perceives.³

The narrator believes that the woman is speaking, even flirting with him through her movements, as if all that she does is meant to send a signal to him:

Es liegt unendlich viel in Bewegungen: sie sind die komplizierte und feinabgetönte Sprache des Körpers für die komplizierte und feine Gefallsucht der Seele, die eine Art Liebesbedürfnis und eine Art Kunsttrieb ist: Koketterie ist ein sehr plumpes Wort dafür. (10)

His imagined world is a very intricate and beautiful one, and he is completely convinced of its reality. He allows himself to believe that his whole future, his fortune and happiness, radiate from the unknown woman, because she represents, to him, the beauty which he pursues in his life: ". . . vor allem mein Glück lag darin ausgedrückt, die Bürgerschaft meines tiefen, stillen, fraglosen Glückes" (10). With his high expectations, the narrator leaves himself open to disaster, and the story reaches its climax, heading inexorably toward catastrophe. This peak in the narrator's expectations and his inevitable slide into hopelessness provide an exact parallel to the scene in the garden in "Gerechtigkeit" in which the angel finally approaches the narrator and, instead of speaking the wondrous

³ "Gerechtigkeit": "Ich sass mitten im Garten" (*Erz.* 2: 228); "ein Prosagedicht" no. 13: "Dichter sitzt im Garten . . ." (*Erz.* 2: 232); prose poem no. 22, N2: "König Cophetua: In seiner Stadt kunstreiche Gärten wie auf Louis XIV-Gobelins" (*Erz.* 2: 237).

words of paradise, asks the fateful question which reveals the narrator's ignorance of life. In "Das Glück am Weg," the turning point comes as the man realizes, with an utterly numb feeling, that the two ships are again taking diverging paths. At this point, the woman stands up, looks at the other ship, and seems to shake her head at him as a sign of rejection. As the two ships move further and further apart, the man's whole imaginary world, which has become the only reality he knows, sails away with the other ship:

. . . es war einfach, als glitte dort mein Leben selbst weg, als
Sein und alle Erinnerung, und zöge langsam, lautlos gleitend
seine tiefen, langen Wurzeln aus meiner schwindelnden Seele,
nichts zurücklassend als unendliche, blöde Leere. (10)

The parallels to "Gerechtigkeit" are evident throughout this prose poem, but the most obvious of these is found as it nears its conclusion, in the woman's descent of the ship's stairway, which Hofmannsthal describes in exactly the same manner as the angel's descent at the end of "Gerechtigkeit": "In hilfloser Angst sah ich ihr nach, wie sie mit langsamen Schritten schlank und biegsam eine kleine Treppe hinabstieg, wie Ruck auf Ruck in der Luke der grüne Gürtel verschwand, dann die feinen Schultern und dann das dunkelgoldene Haar" (10).

As the woman disappears down the stairway, the man shows his continuing failure to comprehend reality, in that he still does not realize that he never knew her, and that she is simply a stranger living her own life. His connection to her, through his telescope, is one-directional, in that it is only in his imagination, and is one-dimensional, in that he can only perceive her as a work of art. However, even her departure does not bring

him out of his fantasy world. As her image fades, his fantasy merely turns to horror: "Für mich war es, als hätte man sie in einen schmalen kleinen Schacht gelegt und darüber einen schweren Stein und darauf Rasen. Als hätte man sie zu den Toten gelegt, ja, gar nichts konnte sie mehr für mich sein" (11). His statement that she could never again be anything for him shows that he remains unaware that she never really was anything for him, and that any connection which he may have perceived was simply in his imagination.

As the foreign ship sails away, it turns slightly and reveals its shining nameplate, which appears to be a confirmation of his fantasy world: "Es waren vergoldete Genien, goldene, an das Schiff geschmiedete Geister, die trugen auf einem Schild in blinkenden Buchstaben den Namen des Schiffes: 'La Fortune' . . ." (11). For Hofmannsthal, this very likely represents his waning youthful inspiration and aesthetic sensitivity which he now rejects, but upon which he, at the same time, still reflects longingly. As an autobiographical allegory, "Das Glück am Weg" shows the young Hugo von Hofmannsthal on a journey into a future in which he sees the world in realistic terms. In order to make this journey, however, he must witness the death of his earlier way of viewing the world. "Das Glück am Weg" begins with the narrator on a ship resisting a tendency toward flowery description and artistic embellishment, but it concludes with a man seduced back into an artificial world and being crushed by it.

In Hofmannsthal's prose poems one sees the evolution of his mistrust for limited aesthetic description. In these works, he develops the theme of man's blindness to life, brought about by his reliance on his understanding of beauty and his decided disregard for reality. Hofmannsthal's mistrust of

aestheticism first appears in his prose poem "Die Rose und der Schreibtisch." This mistrust is seen in this prose poem as a basic, satiric criticism of the ideals of the aesthetic movement, primarily those of Stefan George. His criticism of aestheticism becomes more pronounced in "Gerechtigkeit," in which he portrays the situation of a man faced with reality and unable to understand the basic concepts of life. Finally, "Das Glück am Weg" presents an apparent criticism of Hofmannsthal's own inclination toward aesthetic expression in an allegorical journey in which he is seduced back into the fantasy world of aestheticism from which there is no escape.

Chapter II

Das Märchen der 672. Nacht

While Hofmannsthal's prose poems, written almost exclusively in 1892 and 1893, clearly show the onset and early development of his mistrust for elitist aestheticism, his later prose works, including Das Märchen der 672. Nacht (1895), Reitergeschichte (1898), and Das Erlebnis des Marschalls von Bassompierre (1900), show the further development and solidifying of this mistrust. In these narrative prose pieces Hofmannsthal develops the idea that the aesthete's failure to understand reality will unavoidably lead to his death. With the exception of "Das Glück am Weg," Hofmannsthal did not intend his prose poems to be published; however, he actively sought publication for these later prose works. The main characters in these stories represent aesthetes who exhibit either a decided lack of, understanding of, or lack of attention to reality, yet Hofmannsthal has refrained from using artists or poets as protagonists, thereby avoiding the appearance of any direct personal criticism of Stefan George or his followers. In these stories, he uses characters such as military officers or rich young members of the merchant elite or of the nobility instead of artists to represent people who are rendered blind to reality by their single-minded pursuit of beauty. In each of these stories this blindness leads inevitably to the death of the character.

Das Märchen der 672. Nacht provides an excellent example of the aesthete's disillusionment and his subsequent decline and unavoidable death.

This death which the aesthete experiences symbolizes the loneliness and disillusionment which Hofmannsthal felt in his early years as a poet:

The exhaustion of Hofmannsthal's early lyrical gift thus coincided with a growing recognition that for an artist isolation, however splendid, must inevitably lead to sterility. He began to realize that the loneliness and the pessimism, no less than the Weltangst of his adolescence were all one, and had their roots in tragic non-attachment to that which was close at hand. (Hammelmann 20)

As early as 1892, Hofmannsthal had expressed his "intent to write 'a fairy tale, golden brown and orange,' from the tales of the Arabian Nights" (Bangerter 33). In 1894 he began this task, and during the year 1895 completed Das Märchen der 672. Nacht. This fairy tale, however, is not meant to imitate any of the actual stories of the Arabian Nights. As noted by Margaret Jacobs,

K. Mommsen has provided a clue to his choice of this title; she points out that in the version which Hofmannsthal read (Tausend und Eine Nacht. Arabische Erzählungen. Deutsch von Max Habicht, Fr. von der Hagen und Carl Schall. Neu herausgegeben von Karl Martin Schiller. Leipzig, 1926) the tales between the 568th and the 885th Night were not numbered as nights, since they were an interpolation taken from other sources to fill a gap in the Arabian Manuscripts. (22)

Jacobs then goes on to suggest that Hofmannsthal's choice of the 672nd night may have been his "esoteric way of indicating that he was not re-

writing any of the tales, but making his own original contribution, while adopting the role of the oriental story-teller" (22).

Das Märchen der 672. Nacht, with its nightmarish quality, is a portrait of a young, rich, and handsome son of a merchant who has separated himself from life and surrounded himself with beautiful objects which he uses as substitutes for his emotions and for his relationships with other human beings. Within his dream world, he is insulated from reality and, therefore, has lost his ability to comprehend the complexities of the real world. He no longer sees the events of life in a realistic way and thinks of his death as a glorious and romantic end. Having secluded himself in his country estate, he has dismissed all of his servants except for four whom, for one reason or another, he finds pleasing. The merchant's son feels a powerful connection to and responsibility for these servants, who have been a part of his family's household throughout their entire lives and have been passed on to him as if they were part of his father's estate. He does not seem to realize that the isolation from their former lives, which he has imposed upon them by bringing them with him to his secluded country estate, is destructive to them. They appear almost as ghosts who simply do their duties, neither communicating with each other nor with the merchant's son. Their lives seem to be in a state of atrophy because of their separation from society, and they all appear to be moving helplessly through a meaningless life toward a meaningless death. They stare at him constantly, as if with contempt and resentment. He feels their stares, but will not allow himself to acknowledge or even to consider that he is the cause for their misery. He does not view them as individuals but merely as a single unit and an extension of his own being. Therefore,

when he receives a letter accusing his valet of a horrible past misdeed, he fears that all four of them will be taken from him and sees the accusation as an attack on his own person: "Er sah schon seine vier Diener aus seinem Hause gerissen und es kam ihm vor, als zöge sich lautlos der ganze Inhalt seines Lebens aus ihm . . ." (*Erz. 1*: 21). This fear draws him out of his protected world to meet his fate. It is ironic that it is his servants' past ties to life, and not his own, which force him back into the real world, as if he were lured there in order for them to exact revenge upon him or simply as their means of escape from his smothering world of solitude.

The merchant's son, having separated himself from his own past, the city environment in which he grew up, and having enclosed himself and his servants in a world of aestheticism and isolation, is now only capable of a cloudy, dream-like *déjà vu*, with neither concrete memories nor understanding of his past. He is unable to perceive any of the true beauty, ugliness or danger in this world which was once his home but is, nevertheless, drawn to it, or pushed back into it, as if by some powerful force which he is unable to control.

Hofmannsthal's treatment of the aesthete's lack of recognition or understanding of his own past is, however, not new or unique to this story. The circumstances of his fourth prose poem, entitled "Traumtod," written in November 1892, show remarkable parallels to the story of the merchant's son:

Unten schlafende Stadt. Unendlich bedeutungsvolle Punkte,
ganz anders wie die Wirklichkeit; Gegenden die ich nie
gesehen habe, von denen ich aber weiss, sie sind dies und das.

Park auf Terrasse. (Modenapark), kleine Vorstadtgasse--
Vaterhaus;

laufen ans Fenster, sehnsüchtig: Überbeugen, Sturz, (Erz. 2:
228)

This prose poem presents a scene which effectively condenses the story of the merchant's son into a few short lines. The narrator, dreaming, is high above the city, looking down on a landscape which he describes as "Unendlich bedeutungsvolle Punkte, ganz anders wie die Wirklichkeit . . ." This line symbolizes the aesthete's distorted view of life. The aesthete, living in an ethereal world, looks down onto reality and his own place of origin and is no longer familiar with that world and has even lost his ability to function effectively within it. The narrator of the prose poem says that these are areas that he has never seen before, but that he knows of them. He then lists more specifically the places to which he is referring, and it becomes apparent that he should indeed recognize these areas, but has merely lost touch with them because of his artificial way of viewing life: "Park auf Terrasse. (Modenapark), kleine Vorstadtgasse--Vaterhaus . . ." (228).

The merchant's son in Das Märchen also views the world in a distorted way and is, therefore, also incapable of truly acknowledging his own past. After finally being drawn out of his safe artificial world, he wanders through the city looking for a place to stay for the night, and he thinks of himself as being out of place: "Neugierig, wie ein Fremder, ging er durch die bekannten Straßen . . ." (Erz. 1: 22). Although the streets are familiar to him, he does not pay attention to where he is going, and he

turns down a street which takes him into a poor and possibly dangerous section of town. Finding himself in an alley which ends in a stone stairway, he climbs the steps, looking around him as he comes to the top. He cannot remember ever having seen this area, but in some dream-like way, he recognizes it: "Er stieg weiter und kam oben in ein Viertel, das er sich nicht entsinnen konnte je gesehen zu haben. Trotzdem kam ihm eine Kreuzung niederer Straßen plötzlich traumhaft bekannt vor" (22). At this point he enters a sort of maze within which he is no longer in control of his destiny but is merely led or pushed fearfully through, toward his death.

He thinks about his servants constantly and feels that they are a physical part of him: "Er sah schon seine vier Diener aus seinem Hause gerissen und es kam ihm vor, als zöge sich lautlos der ganze Inhalt seines Lebens aus ihm . . ." (21). This connection, however, is not like a normal relationship between human beings, but more like a responsibility for possessions which have been passed on to him by his father. He feels his servants' animosity toward him, and in an attempt to keep his sense of connection with them, or perhaps simply to soothe his own conscience for being the cause of their misery, he enters a small jewelry store to buy them gifts. It seems that the only way he feels comfortable in showing any affection for them is through aesthetic objects, rather than any display of emotion.

While in the jewelry store, he looks through a small window and sees a beautiful vegetable garden and two glass greenhouses, which obviously belong to the neighboring house. The jeweler leads him to the garden gate and knocks, but it soon becomes apparent that nobody is home. Although he knows that it would not be proper simply to walk into the garden, the

merchant's son, drawn to the beautiful greenhouses by his aesthetic impulse, asks the jeweler to let him in, and to explain the intrusion to anyone, should he be discovered. Entering the first greenhouse, he finds narcissi and anemones.⁴ These flowers have such an attraction for him that he cannot stop looking at them, and he remains in the greenhouse until he notices that the sun has gone behind the buildings. The greenhouses in this scene represent an artificial aesthetic world, in which the merchant's son believes that he will feel most comfortable. As noted by Margaret Jacobs, the narcissus flowers are very likely "a deliberate evocation of the young man's beauty and his narcissism"; she goes on to point out a correlating passage from the first part of Märchen: "Denn oft schöpfte der Kaufmannssohn einen großen Stolz aus dem Spiegel" (170).

After noticing that it is getting late, the merchant's son decides to leave the garden in order to find a place to stay. However, he finds that a young girl, who looks very much like his youngest servant, but who is only about four years old, is staring at him with a menacing expression through the glass of the greenhouse and has locked the door. He tries to stroke her hair, and even to give her money, but she is completely unresponsive to him and merely glares at him maliciously. This girl seems to represent the unspoken attitudes of his servants. Finally escaping from the greenhouse

⁴ "Narcissus fell violently in love with himself on beholding his image in a spring, and wasted away with desire until he was changed into the flower which afterward bore his name; anemones are the flowers of Adonis, whom Venus loved because of his extraordinary beauty, and whom she changed into a flower when he was chased by a wild boar. It is clear from Hofmannsthal's diary (Aufz., 117) that he knew of the neo-platonic interpretation of the myth of Narcissus (v. Plotinus, Enneads I, vi, 8), since he refers there to 'Das Buch über die eleusinischen Mysterien von Taylor' (i.e., Thomas Taylor's Dissertation on the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries, 1790)." (Jacobs 170-71, n. 17.)

through a small door, he finds himself in an enclosed alley. A man-sized hole in the wall (where construction is being done) leads to a deep chasm which has only a plank crossing from the wall to a platform on the other side, where there is an iron gate. Because he is too afraid to go back to the greenhouse, he steps out onto the plank. As he crosses, he looks down and knows that if he were to fall, he would die. He comes to the gate at the other side, but as he struggles to open it and keep his balance, he loses his footing on the plank and almost falls. He manages to hold on to the gate but vividly imagines falling and is terrified. He is, however, finally able to throw himself through the gate and lies panting on the other side.

In this episode, the merchant's son follows his inclination to seek out beauty and goes to the greenhouses, yet he shows no understanding of the reality or danger involved in his decision. He is ever haunted by unpleasant images of his servants and is driven by his own emotions and inner character which he has denied and forgotten in shutting himself off in his aesthetic lifestyle. Because of his isolation and rejection of life, he is not able to cope with the real world into which he has been thrust. After his experience with the child, he is frightened by the mere rustling of leaves and by the shadows in the greenhouse. He builds up so much fear in a situation which would probably be embarrassing at the worst, that he runs headlong into a life-threatening situation.

The last line of Hofmannsthal's prose poem entitled "Traumtod" could serve as an excellent symbolic six-word summary of the end of Das Märchen der 672. Nacht: "laufen ans Fenster, sehnsüchtig: Überbeugen, Sturz," (Erz. 2: 228). Instead of running to a window, the merchant's son walks through the dangers of the city. As he wanders through the city

looking for a place to sleep, he does not think clearly about this task, but he dreams instead about a great king of the past and longs for his own bed and the safety of his aesthetic world:

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

A reference to "der große König der Vergangenheit" is also seen earlier in the story, as the merchant's son romanticizes about a glorious death:

Er begriff, daß der große König der Vergangenheit hätte sterben müssen, wenn man ihm seine Länder genommen hätte, die er durchzogen und unterworfen hatte vom Meer im Westen bis zum Meer im Osten, die er zu beherrschen träumte und die doch so unendlich groß waren, daß er keine Macht über sie hatte und keinen Tribut von ihnen empfing, als den Gedanken, daß er sie unterworfen hatte und kein anderer als er ihr König war. (22)⁵

Having been separated from his aesthetic world and finding himself lost and tired in the unforgiving environment of the city, the merchant's son

⁵ The great king of the past who would have to die if he were to lose his lands which stretch from the ocean in the west to the ocean in the east, may possibly be Kaiser Wilhelm I (1797-1888), whose empire did indeed stretch from the Iberian Peninsula in the west to what is now Iraq in the east, although Margaret Jacobs suggests in her notes that the king is "probably Alexander the Great" (170, n. 12).

thinks again about "der große König der Vergangenheit," this time possibly longing for a glorious death to relieve him of his misery.

In the prose poem, the narrator bends over out of his window and falls, a fact which suggests that he dies, hence the title, "Traumtod." In the nightmare which the merchant's son experiences, a similar sequence of events occurs. As the merchant's son bends over to pick up the cheap piece of costume jewelry which he has bought for his servant, he is kicked by a soldier's horse. Thereupon, he experiences his own "Sturz"; however, his death is not simply implied, but is a horrendously tormenting death. His actual death is in sharp contrast to the glorious and beautiful death which he has imagined. The merchant's son is blind to all of the real dangers and omens of disaster which present themselves to him, until it is too late to escape them. For this reason, the onset of his actual death angers him and leaves him disillusioned.

This preoccupation with an artificial image of the world and consequent blindness to reality which leads the main character to be struck down unexpectedly by death is a major theme in some of Hofmannsthal's other narrative prose works. In a discussion of Reitergeschichte, Margaret Jacobs draws a comparison among three of Hofmannsthal's stories based upon the sudden deaths of the main characters and their lack of awareness, in spite of numerous warnings, of death's approach:

As in the Märchen der 672. Nacht, death strikes a man down quickly when his mind is elsewhere, when, in spite of omens, he is totally unaware of its nearness. The force of the conclusion in both stories owes something to the effective shock caused by the sudden advent of death from an unex-

pected quarter. This feature provides a link between these stories and Das Erlebnis des Marschalls von Bassompierre.

(33)

Although each of these stories has characters, setting and plot, which are unique to the individual story, they all have a common central theme: the main character is so intent upon the pursuit of beauty that he loses his ability to perceive life in a realistic way. This distorted perception of reality causes him to overlook all signs of danger and leads inevitably to his death.

Conclusion

In 1902 Hofmannsthal wrote an essay entitled "Ein Brief von Phillip Lord Chandos an Sir Francis Bacon," in which the imaginary Lord Chandos, explaining his reasons for his decision to give up any further literary pursuit, expresses the feeling that words are inadequate to describe effectively even the most basic aspects of life. Many critics have suggested that this work was a major turning point or watershed in Hofmannsthal's career as a writer: "It was when he had reached this point that Hofmannsthal was able, in writing his famous imaginary 'Chandos Letter' (August 1902), to face and state, and in this way to overcome, his experience" (Hammelmann 17). However, in light of Hofmannsthal's works which precede and those which follow "Ein Brief," and of statements which Hofmannsthal himself made about the essay, the idea that this work was a crucial turning point in his life seems an oversimplification of his literary dilemma. As noted by Lowell Bangerter,

. . . the initial stimulus for the Chandos letter came not from his crisis, but rather from Francis Bacon's essays. In a letter to Leopold von Andrian, dated January 16, 1903, Hofmannsthal illuminated the genesis of "A Letter" as follows: "In August I often leafed through the essays of Bacon. I found the closely personal nature of this era attractive, and dreamed myself into the way in which these people of the sixteenth century perceived antiquity. I then had the desire to create something in this literary tone. The content, which I had to

borrow from a personal inner event, a living experience, in order not to have a cold effect, simply added itself." (27-28)

According to Bangerter, scholars have developed a standardized explanation of the relationship between "Ein Brief" and the events from Hofmannsthal's own life (27). He goes on to say:

The accepted view has been recapitulated by the critic Donald G. Daviau as follows: "After a richly productive decade as a lyric poet and lyric dramatist, Hofmannsthal experienced a crisis in his productivity around 1900, which caused him to renounce the writing of poetry in order to devote himself to the new goal of achieving more popular success in the theater." (27)

Although Bangerter does not pursue this topic much further, it is apparent that he does not accept the standard explanation. In the narrative prose works which Hofmannsthal wrote before "Ein Brief," one can see a definite pattern in the development of strong views concerning the proper relationship between art and life. It is these same deeply felt opinions which Hofmannsthal exploits as material for the purpose of adding emotion to what is essentially a work of art, which he titled "Ein Brief."

Long before the Chandos letter, Hofmannsthal had been faced with, and almost immediately formed an aversion to, the elitist practice of finding new and cryptic ways of using language in writing poetry for the purpose of hiding the meaning from all except those who belonged to the elite group. As early as 1892, in his prose poem entitled "Die Rose und der Schreibtisch," he expresses penetrating critique of the attitude held by a number of his peers in the literary community: that art could improve

upon life, and thus provide its own reason for being created, i.e., l'art pour l'art. In 1893 Hofmannsthal wrote prose poems such as "Gerechtigkeit" and "Das Glück am Weg," in which he presents aesthetes who, because of their purely aesthetic mode of perception, are capable of only superficial understanding of life and suffer a downfall because of this inadequacy. Throughout the latter half of the 1890s, the idea that the person who concentrates only on the aesthetic qualities of life loses his ability to understand life seems to become more and more pronounced in Hofmannsthal's prose works such as Das Märchen der 672. Nacht, Reitergeschichte and Das Erlebnis des Marschalls von Bassompierre. In these works, as in the prose poems, the main characters are presented as seeing the world from the standpoint of an aesthete and as being out of touch with reality. However, the lack of understanding of life exhibited by the main characters of these stories inevitably leads to the death of the aesthete, rather than simply to disillusionment.

Throughout his life Hofmannsthal wrote many essays with an extremely wide range of topics. Through these essays he often addressed the theme of the artist, his art, and his role in society. In 1906 Hofmannsthal returned to this theme in an essay on Oscar Wilde entitled "Sebastian Melmoth." In this essay he develops a portrait of an aesthete who could not stand the sight of life. As in many of his previous prose works, Hofmannsthal presents an aesthete who has rejected reality and thereby has chosen the path to his own destruction. In Das Märchen der 672. Nacht, the merchant's son unwittingly utters what is for him an apocalyptic saying: "Wo du sterben sollst, dahin tragen dich deine Füße" (Erz. 1: 16). Although this saying does indeed come from an old Arab

proverb which refers to an uncontrollable destiny or fate,⁶ it is apparent in Das Märchen that the merchant's son has sealed his fate through his rejection of reality. In "Sebastian Melmoth" Hofmannsthal states, in a passage which is very similar to the proverb quoted in Das Märchen, that Oscar Wilde also sealed his destiny:

Oscar Wildes Wesen und Oscar Wildes Schicksal sind ganz und gar dasselbe. Er ging auf seine Katastrophe zu, mit solchen Schritten wie Ödipus, der Sehend-Blinde. Der Ästhet war tragisch. Der Geck war tragisch. Er reckte die Hände in die Luft, um den Blitz auf sich herabzuziehen. (128-29)

As the essay continues it becomes evident that the aesthete chooses his fate by denying and insulting life:

Die wundervoll geschliffenen Worte, die bis zum Schwindelnden mondänen und bis zur Gequältheit zynischen Sätze, die von diesen schönen, geschwungenen, verführerischen und frechen Lippen fielen, waren im Tiefsten gar nicht für das Ohr der schönen Herzoginnen gesprochen, sondern für das Ohr einer Unsichtbaren, die ihn mit Grausen lockte, wie die Sphinx, an die er unaufhörlich dachte, während er sie unablässig verleugnete, und deren Namen "Wirklichkeit" er nur im Munde führte, um ihn zu verspotten und zu demütigen. (129-30)

⁶ According to Margaret Jacobs' notes, "Katharina Mommsen [informed her] that there is an Arab proverb [which states]: 'Whither your feet carry you, thither must you go'" (169-70, n. 5.). The idea that death will come at the predestined time is a familiar Eastern conception, repeatedly recurring in the Arabian Nights.

During the period in Hofmannsthal's life from 1892 through 1906, between the creation of the first prose poems and "Sebastian Melmoth," a transformation in his life and his feelings about art becomes apparent. As a youth Hofmannsthal wrote beautiful poetry in the accepted style of the day, which was highly aesthetic. After being exposed personally as a writer and in his studies to other aesthetes who were very aloof and elitist, and who rejected reality as a force in their writing, he formed a distaste for pure aestheticism and developed a belief in the necessity of showing a connection between life and art. The Lord Chandos letter suggests that this transition was a difficult one, in that it deals with his loss of confidence in the efficacy of words by expounding the view that words are inadequate to express the wonder and complexity of life. This same sentiment is also seen in much of Hofmannsthal's personal correspondence: "As early as 1896 the poet wrote to Stefan George of his doubts 'whether I have any right whatever to allow words with which we denote values and judgments to pass my lips'" (Hammelmann 17). When he wrote his essay "Sebastian Melmoth," Hofmannsthal's opinions about the connection between art and life had become quite developed. By this time most of his artistic effort was devoted to writing dramas and creating operas, as part of his long collaboration with Richard Strauss.

Hofmannsthal's life, in particular his early career as a writer, is a fascinating study of the power of the human intellect to draw meaningful conclusions about life which go far beyond what one can perceive with the senses. Whether or not many of his contemporaries were ever able to understand or to allow themselves to be affected by his message,

his stance was clear: there is a deeper purpose for art, i.e., that art should help man to understand the wonders and complexities of life rather than separate him from it.

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APPENDIX

Appendix

1

Die Rose und der Schreibtisch.

Ich weiß dass Blumen nie von selbst aus offenen Fenstern fallen. Namentlich nicht bei Nacht. Aber darum handelt es sich nicht. Kurz, die rothe Rose lag plötzlich vor meinen schwarzen Lackschuhen auf dem weissen Schnee der Strasse. Sie war sehr dunkel, wie Sammt, noch schlank, nicht aufgeblüht, und vor Kälte ganz ohne Duft. Ich nahm sie mit, stellte sie in eine ganz kleine japanische Vase auf meinem Schreibtisch und legte mich schlafen.

Nach kurzer Zeit muss ich aufgewacht sein. Im Zimmer lag dämmernde Helle, nicht vom Mond aber vom Sternlicht. Ich fühlte beim Athmen den Duft der erwärmten Rose herschweben und hörte leises Reden. Es war die Porzellanrose des alt-wiener Tintenzeuges, die über irgend etwas Bemerkungen machte. „Er hat absolut kein Stylgefühl mehr,“ sagte sie, „keine Spur von Geschmack.“ Damit meinte sie mich. „Sonst hätte er unmöglich so etwas neben mich stellen können.“ Damit meinte sie die lebendige Rose.

26 Mai 1893

Gerechtigkeit

Ich sass mitten im Garten. Vor mir lief der Kiesweg zwischen zwei blassgrünen Wiesen aufwärts, bis wo der Hügel abbrach und sich der dunkelgrüngestrichene Lattenzaun scharf in der hellen Frühlingshimmel hineinzeichnete. Wo der Weg aufhörte hatte der Zaun eine kleine Thür. In der dünnen durchsichtigen Luft schwebten Bienen zwischen den rosenrothen über und über blühenden Pfirsichbäumen hin und her. Da knarrte oben das Lattenthürchen und zuerst sprang ein Hund in den Garten ein grosses, hochbeiniges zierliches Windspiel. Hinter dem Hund trat, das Thürchen hinter sich zudrückend ein Engel ein, ein junger blonder schlanker Engel, einer von den schlanken Pagen Gottes. Er trug Schnabelschuhe, an der Seite hieng ihm ein langer Stossdegen und im Gürtel ein Dolch. Brust und Schultern deckte ein feiner stahlblauer Panzer, auf dem spielte die Sonne, und weisse Blüthen fielen auf sein dichtes langes goldblondes Haar. So gieng er den Kiesweg herunter, die feine schwächliche Gestalt im enganschliessenden smaragdgrünen Wams, die Ärmel von der Schulter bis zum Ellenbogen gepufft, von da an eng bis über die Knöchel der hübschen Hände. Er gieng langsam, zierlich, die linke Hand spielte mit dem Griff des Dolches; der Hund sprang neben des Herren Weg im Grase her, von Zeit zu Zeit mit Liebe zu ihm aufschauend. Jetzt war er kaum mehr so weit, wie ein fünfjähriges Kind den Ball wirft.

„Wird er mich ansprechen, wenn er herkommt?“

In der Wiese spielte das kleine Kind des Gärtners mit abgefallenen Blüten. Es wackelte jetzt auf den Engel zu und schaute ihm auf die Füße. „Schöne Schuh hast Du, sehr schöne!“ sagte es. „Ja,“ sagte der Engel, „freilich, die sind vom Mantel der Mutter Gottes.“

Jetzt sah ich: Die Schuhe waren aus Goldstoff und irgendwelche rothe Blumen oder Früchte eingewebt. „Der heilige Apostel Petrus lief einmal der Mutter Gottes nach,“ sagte der Engel zu dem Kind, „weil er ihr etwas zu sagen hatte und sie hörte ihn nicht rufen und blieb nicht stehen. Und da lief er ihr nach und trat ihr in seiner Hast ein Stück vom nachschleppenden Mantel ab. Da wurde der Mantel weggelegt und für uns auf Schuh verschnitten.“ „Sehr schön sind die Schuh!“ sagte das Kind noch einmal. Dann gieng der Engel weiter, den Kiesweg weiter, der ihn an meiner Bank vorbeiführen musste. Eine unsägliche Gehobenheit kam über mich bei dem Gedanken, dass er auch zu mir reden würde. Denn auf den einfachen Worten, die über seine Lippen sprangen, lag ein Glanz, als dächte er dabei an ganz etwas anderes, dächte verschwiegend mit unterdrücktem Jubel an paradiesische Glückseligkeiten. Da stand er vor mir. Ich nahm grüssend den Hut ab und erhob mich. Als ich aufsah, erschrak ich über den Ausdruck seines Gesichts. Es war von wundervoller Feinheit und Schönheit der Züge, aber die dunkelblauen Augen blickten finster, fast drohend, und das goldene Haar hatte nichts lebendiges, sondern gab ein unheimliches metallisches Blinken. Neben ihm stand der Hund, ein Vorderbein zierlich gehoben und schaute mich auch mit aufmerksamen Augen an.

„Bist Du ein Gerechter?“ fragte der Engel streng. Der Ton war hochmüthig, fast verächtlich. Ich versuchte zu lächeln: „Ich bin nicht schlimm. Ich habe viele Menschen gern. Es giebt so viele hübsche Dinge.“

„Bist Du gerecht?“ fragte der Engel wieder. Es war, als hätte er meine Rede vollkommen überhört; in seinen Worten war ein Schatten von der herrischen Ungeduld, wie wenn man einem Diener einen Befehl wiederholt, weil er nicht gleich verstanden hat. Mit der rechten Hand zog er den Dolch ein klein wenig aus der Scheide. Ich wurde ängstlich; ich versuchte ihn zu begreifen, aber es gelang mir nicht; mein Denken erlosch, unfähig den lebendigen Sinn des Wortes zu erfassen; vor meinem inneren Aug stand eine leere Wand; qualvoll vergeblich suchte ich mich zu besinnen. „Ich habe so wenig vom Leben ergriffen;“ brachte ich endlich hervor, „aber manchmal durchweht mich eine starke Liebe und da ist mir nichts fremd. Und sicherlich bin ich dann gerecht: denn mir ist dann, als könnte ich alles begreifen, wie die Erde rauchende Bäume herauftreibt und wie die Sterne im Raum hängen und kreisen, von allem das tiefste Wesen, und alle Regungen der Menschen . . .“

Ich stockte unter seinem verächtlichem Blick; ein vernichtendes Bewusstsein meiner Unzulänglichkeit überkam mich, dass ich fühlte, wie ich vor Scham erröthete. Der Blick sagte deutlich: „Was für ein widerwärtiger hohler Schwätzer!“ Nicht eine Spur von Entgegenkommen oder Mitleid lag darin.

Ein hochmüthiges Lächeln verzog seine schmalen Lippen. Er wandte sich zum Gehen. „Gerechtigkeit ist alles,“ sagte er; „Gerechtigkeit ist das Erste, Gerechtigkeit das Letzte. Wer das nicht begreift, wird sterben.“ Damit kehrte er mir den Rücken und gieng mit elastischen Schritten den Weg nach abwärts; wurde unsichtbar hinter der Geissblattlaube, tauchte dann wieder auf und stieg endlich die Steintreppe hinunter, ruckweise verschwindend, erst die schlanken Beine bis zum Knie, dann die Hüften,

endlich die dunkelgepanzerten Schultern, das goldene Haar und das smaragdgrüne Barett. Hinter ihm lief der Hund, zeichnete sich am obersten Stiegenabsatz in zierlichscharfen Contouren ab und sprang dann mit einem Satz in's Unsichtbare.

Das Glück am Weg

Ich saß auf einem verlassenen Fleck des Hinterdecks auf einem dicken, zwischen zwei Pflöcken hin- und hergewundenen Tau und schaute zurück. Rückwärts war in milchigem, opalinem Duft die Riviera versunken, die gelblichen Böschungen, über die der gezernte Schatten der schwarzen Palmen fällt und die weißen, flachen Häuser, die in unsäglichem Dickicht rankender Rosen einsinken. Das alles sah ich jetzt scharf und springend, weil es verschwunden war, und glaubte, den feinen Duft zu spüren, den doppelten Duft der süßen Rosen und des sandigen, salzigen Strandes. Aber der Wind ging ja landwärts, schwärzlich rieselnd lief er über die glatte, weinfarbene Fläche landwärts. So war es wohl nur Täuschung, daß ich den Duft zu spüren glaubte. Dann sprangen dort, wo golden der breite Sonnenstreifen auf dem Wasser lag, drei Delphine auf und sprudelten sprühendes Gold und spielten gravitatisch und haschten sich heftig rauschend und tauchten plötzlich wieder unter. Leer lag der Fleck und wurde wieder glatt und blinkte.

Jetzt hätte es dort aufrauschen müssen, und wie der wühlende Maulwurf weiche Erdwellen aufwerfend den Kopf aus den Schollen hebt, so hätten sich die tiefenden Mähnen und rosigen Nüstern der scheckigen Pferde her-

ausheben müssen, und die weißen Hände, Arme und Schultern der Nereiden, ihr flutendes Haar und die zackigen, dröhnenden Hörner der Tritonen. Und in der Hand die rotseidenen Zügel, an denen grüner Seetang hängt und tropfende Algen, müßte er im Muschelwagen stehen, Neptun, kein langweiliger, schwarzbärtiger Gott, wie sie ihn zu Meißen aus Porzellan machen, sondern unheimlich und reizend, wie das Meer selbst, mit weicher Anmut, frauenhaften Zügen und Lippen rot, wie eine giftig rote Blume . . .

Über das leere, glänzende Meer lief schwärzlich rieselnd der leise Wind. Am Horizont, nicht ganz dort, wo in der kommenden Nacht wie ein schwarzblauer Streif der bergige Wall von Corsica auftauchen sollte, stand ein winziger schwarziger Fleck.

Nach einer Stunde war das Schiff recht nahe gegen unseres gekommen. Es war eine Yacht, die offenbar nach Toulon fuhr. Wir mußten sie fast streifen. Mit guten Augen unterschied man schon recht deutlich die Maste und Raaen, ja sogar die Vergoldung, dort, wo der Name des Schiffes stand. Ich wechselte meinen Platz, trug meinen englischen Roman ins Lesezimmer zurück und holte mein Fernglas. Es war ein sehr gutes Glas. Es brachte mir einen bestimmten runden Fleck des fremden Schiffes ganz nahe, fast unheimlich nahe. Es war wie wenn man durchs Fenster in ein ebenerdiges Zimmer schaut, worin sich Menschen bewegen, die man nie gesehen hat und wahrscheinlich nie kennen wird; aber einen Augenblick belauscht man sie ganz in der engen dumpfen Stube, und es ist, als ob man ihnen da unsäglich nahe käme.

Den runden Fleck in meinem Glas begrenzte schwarzes Tauwerk, messingeingefaßte Planken, dahinter der tiefblaue Himmel. In der Mitte stand eine Art Feldsessel, auf dem lag, mit geschlossenen Augen, eine

blonde junge Dame. Ich sah alles ganz deutlich: den dunklen Polster, in den sich die Absätze der kleinen, lichten Halbschuhe einbohrten, den moosgrünen breiten Gürtel, in dem ein Paar halboffene Rosen steckten, rosa Rosen, la France-Rosen . . .

Ob sie schlief?

Schlafende Menschen haben einen eigentümlichen, naiven, schuldlosen, traumhaften Reiz. Sie sehen nie banal und nie unnatürlich aus.

Sie schlief nicht. Sie schlug die Augen auf und bückte sich um ein heruntergefallenes Buch. Ihr Blick lief über mich, und ich wurde verlegen, daß ich sie so anstarrte, aus solcher Nähe; ich senkte das Glas, und dann erst fiel mir ein, daß sie ja weit war, dem freien Auge nichts als ein lichter Punkt zwischen braunen Planken, und mich unmöglich bemerken könne. Ich richtete also wieder das Glas auf sie, und sie sah jetzt wie verträumt gerade vor sich hin. In dem Augenblick wußte ich zwei Dinge: daß sie sehr schön war, und daß ich sie kannte. Aber woher? Es quoll in mir auf, wie etwas Unbestimmtes, Süßes, Liebes und Vergangenes. Ich versuchte es, schärfer zu denken: ein gewisser kleiner Garten, wo ich als Kind gespielt hatte, mit weißen Kieswegen und Pegonienbeeten . . . aber nein, das war es nicht . . . damals mußte sie ja auch ein kleines Kind gewesen sein . . . ein Theater, ein Loge mit einer alten Frau und zwei Mädchenköpfe, wie biegsame lichte Blumenköpfe hinter dem Zaun . . . ein Wagen, im Prater, an einem Frühlingsmorgen . . . oder Reiter? . . . Und der starke Geruch der taufeuchten Lohe und Kastanienblütenduft und ein gewisses helles Lachen . . . aber das war ja jemand Anderes Lachen . . . ein gewisses Boudoir mit einem kleinen Kamin und einem gewissen hohen Louis-Quinze-Feuerschirm . . . alles das tauchte auf und zerging augenblicklich, und in jedem dieser

Bilder erschien schattenhaft diese Gestalt da drüben, die ich kannte und nicht kannte, diese schmächtige lichte Gestalt und die blumenhafte müde Lieblichkeit des kleinen Kopfes und darin die faszinierenden, dunklen, mystischen Augen . . . Aber in keinem der Bilder blieb sie stehen, sie zerrann immer wieder, und das vergebliche Suchen wurde unerträglich. Ich kannte sie also nicht. Der Gedanke verursachte mir ein unerklärliches Gefühl von Enttäuschung und innerer Leere; es war mir, als hätte ich das Beste an meinem Leben versäumt. Dann fiel mir ein: Ja, ich kannte sie, das heißt, nicht wie man gewöhnlich Menschen kennt, aber gleichviel, ich hatte hundertmal an sie gedacht, Hunderte von Malen, Jahre und Jahre hindurch.

Gewisse Musik hatte mir von ihr geredet, ganz deutlich von ihr, am stärksten Schumannsche; gewisse Abendstunden auf grünen Veilchenwiesen, an einem rauschenden kleinen Fluß, darüber der feuchte, rosige Abend lag; gewisse Blumen, Anemonen mit müden Köpfchen . . . gewisse seltsame Stellen in den Werken der Dichter, wo man aufsieht und den Kopf in die Hand stützt und auf einmal vor dem inneren Aug' die goldenen Tore des Lebens aufgerissen schienen . . . Alles das hatte von ihr geredet, in all dem war das Phantasma ihres Wesens gelegen, wie in gläubigen Kindergebeten das Phantasma des Himmels liegt. Und alle meine heimlichen Wünsche hatten sie zum heimlichen Ziel gehabt: in ihrer Gegenwart lag etwas, das allem einen Sinn gab, etwas unsäglich Beruhigendes, Befriedigendes, Krönendes. Solche Dinge begreift man nicht: man weiß sie plötzlich.

Ja, ich wußte noch viel mehr; ich wußte, daß ich mit ihr eine besondere Sprache reden würde, besonders im Ton und besonders im Stil: meine Rede wäre leichtsinniger, beflügelter, freier, sie lief gleichsam nachtwandelnd auf

einer schmalen Rampe dahin; aber sie wäre auch eindringlicher, feierlicher, und gewisse seltsame Saitensysteme würden verstärkend mittonen.

Alle diese Dinge dachte ich nicht deutlich, ich schaute sie in einer fliegenden, vagen Bildersprache.

In dem Augenblick war uns das fremde Schiff recht nah; näher würde es wohl kaum kommen.

Ich wußte noch mehr von ihr: ich wußte ihre Bewegungen, die Haltung ihres Kopfes, das Lächeln, das sie haben würde, wenn ich ihr gewisse Dinge sagte. Wenn sie auf der Terrasse säße, in einer kleinen Strandvilla in Antibes (ganz ohne Grund dachte ich gerade Antibes) und ich käme aus dem Garten und bliebe unter ihr stehen, drei Stufen unter ihr (und mir war, als wüßte ich ganz genau, das würde hundertmal geschehen, ja beinahe, als wäre es schon geschehen . . .), dann würde sie mit einer undefinierbaren reizenden kleinen Pose die Schultern wie frierend in die Höhe ziehen und mich mit ihren mystischen Augen ernst und leise spöttisch von oben herab ansehen . . .

Es liegt unendlich viel in Bewegungen: sie sind die komplizierte und feinabgetönte Sprache des Körpers für die komplizierte und feine Gefallsucht der Seele, die eine Art Liebesbedürfnis und eine Art Kunsttrieb ist: Koketterie ist ein sehr plumpes Wort dafür. In dieser kleinen Pose lag für mich eine Unendlichkeit von Dingen ausgedrückt: eine ganz bestimmte Art, ernsthaft, zufrieden und in Schönheit glücklich zu sein; ganz bestimmte graziöse, freie, wohltuende Lebensverhältnisse und vor allem mein Glück lag darin ausgedrückt, die Bürgerschaft meines tiefen, stillen, fraglosen Glückes. Alle diese Gedanken waren ohne Sentimentalität, mit einer sicheren, ruhigen Anmut erfüllt. Dabei sah ich ununterbrochen hinüber.

Sie war aufgestanden und sah gerade zu uns her. Und da war mir, als ob sie leise, mit unmerklichem Lächeln den Kopf schüttelte. Gleich darauf bemerkte ich mit einer Art stumpfer Betäubung, daß die Schiffe schon wieder anfangen, sich leise voneinander zu entfernen. Ich empfand das nicht als etwas Selbstverständliches, auch nicht als eine schmerzliche Überraschung, es war einfach, als glitte dort mein Leben selbst weg, als Sein und alle Erinnerung, und zöge langsam, lautlos gleitend seine tiefen, langen Wurzeln aus meiner schwindelnden Seele, nichts zurücklassend als unendliche, blöde Leere. Mir war, als fühlte ich fröstelnd, wie durch diese Leere ein Lufthauch lief. Stumpf, gedankenlos aufmerksam sah ich zu, wie sich zwischen sie und mich ein leerer, reinlicher, emailblauer, glänzender Wasserstreifen legte, der immer breiter wurde. In hilfloser Angst sah ich ihr nach, wie sie mit langsamen Schritten schlank und biegsam eine kleine Treppe hinabstieg, wie Ruck auf Ruck in der Luke der grüne Gürtel verschwand, dann die feinen Schultern und dann das dunkelgoldene Haar. Dann war nichts mehr von ihr da, nichts. Für mich war es, als hätte man sie in einen schmalen kleinen Schacht gelegt und darüber einen schweren Stein und darauf Rasen. Als hätte man sie zu den Toten gelegt, ja, gar nichts konnte sie mehr für mich sein. Wie ich so hinstarrte auf das schwindende Schiff, das sich ein wenig gedreht hatte, kehrte sich mir unter Bord etwas Blinkendes zu. Es waren vergoldete Genien, goldene, an das Schiff geschmiedete Geister, die trugen auf einem Schild in blinkenden Buchstaben den Namen des Schiffes: „La Fortune“ . . .

Traumtod.

23 November <1892> 1/2 12 Uhr nachts.

Kerze ausgeblasen; Zimmer sinkt in Nacht. Draussen blinkt weisses beschneites Gartenhausdach, auf dem sich Fensterkreuz abzeichnet. Traum: Augen aufschlagen; liege auf dem selben Bett. Fenster erinnern an Schiffsluken. Draussen Bäume scheinen zu versinken. Zimmer steigt lautlos langsam auf, auf. Traumfähigkeit, gleichzeitig im Zimmer zu sein und durch den Fussboden durchzuschauen. Unten schlafende Stadt. Unendlich bedeutungsvolle Punkte, ganz anders wie die Wirklichkeit; Gegenden die ich nie gesehen habe, von denen ich aber weiss, sie sind dies und das. Park auf Terrasse. (Modenapark), kleine Vorstadtgasse--Vaterhaus;

laufen ans Fenster, sehnsüchtig: Überbeugen, Sturz,

ein Prosagedicht

Dichter sitzt im Garten (lebend oder ehern, Beethoven) Kinder spielen, Spatzen fliegen um ihn, Blumen fallen auf ihn.

3 Februar 1895.

König Cophetua: In seiner Stadt kunstreiche Gärten wie auf Louis XIV-Gobelins.

SEBASTIAN MELMOTH

Dieser Name war die Maske, mit der Oscar Wilde sein vom Zuchthaus zerstörtes und von den Anzeichen des nahen Todes starrendes Gesicht bedeckte, um noch einige Jahre im Dunkel dahinzuleben. Es war das Schicksal dieses Menschen, drei Namen nacheinander zu führen: Oscar Wilde, C 3 3, Sebastian Melmoth. Der Klang des ersten nichts als Glanz, Hochmut, Verführung. Der zweite fürchterlich, eines jener Zeichen, welche die Gesellschaft mit glühendem Eisen in eine nackte menschliche Schulter einbrennt. Der dritte der Name eines Gespenstes, einer halbvergessenen Balzacschen Gestalt. Drei Masken nacheinander: eine mit wundervoller Stirn, üppigen Lippen, feuchten, herrlichen, frechen Augen: eine Bakchosmaske; die zweite eine Maske von Eisen mit Augenlöchern, aus denen die Verzweiflung sieht; die dritte ein dürftiger Domino aus der Maskenleihanstalt, geborgt, um ein langsames Sterben darin vor der Blicken der Menschen zu bergen. Oscar Wilde glänzte, entzückte, verletzte, verführte, verriet und wurde verraten, stach ins Herz und wurde ins Herz gestochen. Oscar Wilde schrieb die Betrachtung über den Verfall des

Lügens, schrieb „Fächer der Lady Windermere“, schrieb „Salome“. C 3 3 litt. C 3 3 schrieb die „Ballade des Kerkers von Reading“ und jenen Brief aus dem Kerker von Reading, genannt „De profundis“. Sebastian Melmoth schrieb nichts mehr, schleppte sich in den Straßen von Paris herum, starb und wurde eingegraben.

Und nun ist Sebastian Melmoth, hinter dessen armen Sarg fünf Menschen gingen, so überaus berühmt. Nun ist alles, was er lebte, beging und litt, in aller Leute Mund. Nun wissen sie alle, daß er in einer Art von Kaninchenstall saß und mit den feinen, blutenden Fingern alte Schiffstau zu Werg aufdrehen mußte. In aller Munde ist dies von dem fürchterlichen Bad, in das er steigen mußte, dem schmutzigen Wasser, in das die Sträflinge der Reihe nach steigen mußten, und Oscar Wilde als der letzte, weil er der letzte in der Reihe war. „Oscar Wilde,“ sagte mit unbewegten Lippen einer hinter ihm, als sie im Gefängnishof auf und nieder geführt wurden, „Oscar Wilde, ich verstehe, daß Sie mehr leiden müssen als wir anderen alle.“ Auch diese Worte, die irgendein Sträfling, mit unbewegten Lippen und doch hörbar, in seinem Rücken flüsterte, sind heute sehr berühmt. Sie sind ein Detail einer Legende, die wundervoll ist, wie immer etwas wundervolles entsteht, wenn das Leben sich das Mühe nimmt, ein Schicksal dichterisch zu behandeln.

Aber man sagt: „Welch eine Wandlung!“ Man sagt: „Oscar Wilde, der frühere, und Oscar Wilde, der andere“. Man spricht von einem Ästheten, aus dem ein neuer Mensch geworden ist, ein Gläubiger, gar ein Christ. Man hat sich angewöhnt, von gewissen Romantikern gewisse Dinge zu sagen, und man wiederholt sie zu gerne. Man sollte sie nicht wiederholen. Erstens darum, weil sie wahrscheinlich schon das erstemal nicht ganz

richtig waren, und zweitens darum, weil die Zeiten sich verändern und es gar keinen Sinn hat, so zu tun, als ob die Dinge wiederkämen, während in Wirklichkeit immer neue, unendlich differenzierte, unendlich merkwürdige Dinge heraussteigen. Es hat gar keinen Sinn so zu sprechen, als ob Oscar Wildes Schicksal und Oscar Wildes Wesen zweierlei gewesen wären und als ob das Schicksal ihn so angefallen hätte wie ein bissiger Köter ein ahnungsloses Bauernkind, das einen Korb mit Eiern auf dem Kopf trägt. Man sollte nicht immer das Abgegriffenste sagen und denken.

Oscar Wildes Wesen und Oscar Wildes Schicksal sind ganz und gar dasselbe. Er ging auf seine Katastrophe zu, mit solchen Schritten wie Ödipus, der Sehend-Blinde. Der Ästhet war tragisch. Der Geck war tragisch. Er reckte die Hände in die Luft, um den Blitz auf sich herabzuziehen. Man sagt: „Er war ein Ästhet, und dann kamen unglückselige Verwicklungen über ihn, ein Netz von unglückseligen Verwicklungen“. Man sollte nicht mit den Worten alles zudecken. Ein Ästhet! Damit ist gar nichts gesagt. Walter Pater war ein Ästhet, ein Mensch, der vom Genießen und Nachschaffen der Schönheit lebte, und er war dem Leben gegenüber voll Scheu und Zurückhaltung, voll Zucht. Ein Ästhet ist naturgemäß durch und durch voll Zucht. Oscar Wilde aber war voll Unzucht, voll tragischer Unzucht. Sein Ästhetismus war etwas wie ein Krampf. Die Edelsteine, in denen er vorgab mit Lust zu wühlen, waren wie gebrochene Augen, die erstarrt waren, weil sie den Anblick des Lebens nicht ertragen hatten. Er fühlte unaufhörlich die Drohung des Lebens auf sich. Das tragische Grauen umlagerte ihn fortwährend. Unablässig forderte er das Leben heraus. Er insultierte die Wirklichkeit. Und er fühlte, wie das Leben sich duckte, ihn aus dem Dunkel anzuspringen.

Man sagt: „Wilde sprach geistvolle Paradoxa, an seinen Lippen hingen die Herzoginnen, seine Finger zerpflückten eine Orchidee, und seine Fußspitzen wühlten in Polstern aus alter chinesischer Seide, dann aber kam das Unglück über ihn und er wurde in das Bad gestoßen, aus dem vorher zehn Sträflinge gestiegen waren.“ Aber man muß das Leben nicht so banalisieren, man muß nicht alles auf das Niveau eines Unglücksfalles herunterzerren. Die wundervoll geschliffenen Worte, die bis zum Schwindelnden mondänen und bis zur Gequältheit zynischen Sätze, die von diesen schönen, geschwungenen, verführerischen und frechen Lippen fielen, waren im Tiefsten gar nicht für das Ohr der schönen Herzoginnen gesprochen, sondern für das Ohr einer Unsichtbaren, die ihn mit Grausen lockte, wie die Sphinx, an die er unaufhörlich dachte, während er sie unablässig verleugnete, und deren Namen „Wirklichkeit“ er nur im Munde führte, um ihn zu verspotten und zu demütigen. Und seine Glieder, die Orchideen zerpflückten und sich in Polstern aus uralter Seide dehnten, waren im Tiefsten voll fataler Sehnsucht nach dem gräßlichen Bad, vor dem sie doch, als es sie dann wirklich bespritzte, sich zusammenkrampften vor Ekel.

Darum muß es erschütternd gewesen sein, Oscar Wilde in einem Augenblick seines Lebens zu sehen. Ich meine in dem Augenblick, als er, über den niemand Gewalt hatte als sein Geschick, entgegen dem Flehen seiner Freunde und fast zum Grausen seiner Feinde zurückkehrte und den Queensberry verklagte. Denn damals muß die Maske des Bakchos mit den schön geschweiften, üppigen Lippen in nie zu vergessender Weise umgewandelt gewesen sein in die Maske des sehend-blinden Ödipus oder

des rasenden Ajas. Damals muß er um die schöne Stirn die Binde des tragischen Geschickes getragen haben, sichtbar wie wenige.

Man muß das Leben nicht schaler machen, als es ist, und die Augen nicht wegwenden, um diese Binde nicht zu sehen, wo einmal eine Stirn mit ihr umwunden ist.

Man muß das Leben nicht banalisieren, indem man das Wesen und das Schicksal auseinanderzerrt und sein Unglück abseits stellt von seinem Glück. Man darf nicht alles sondern. Es ist alles überall. Es ist Tragisches in den oberflächlichen Dingen und Albernes in den tragischen. Es ist etwas würgend Unheimliches in dem, was man Vergnügen nennt. Es ist Dichterisches in den Kleidern der Kokotten und Spießbürgerliches in den Emotionen der Lyriker. Es ist alles im Menschen drin. Er ist voll der Gifte, die gegeneinander wüten. Es gibt auf gewissen Inseln Wilde, die ihre Pfeile in den Leib ihrer toten Verwandten stecken, um sie unfehlbar tödlich zu vergiften. Dies ist eine geniale Art, einen tiefen Gedanken metaphorisch auszudrücken und dem Tiefsinn der Natur ohne viel Umschweife zu huldigen. Denn wirklich, die langsam tötenden Gifte und die Elixiere der sanft schwelenden Seligkeiten, alles liegt in unserem lebendigen Leib beisammen. Man kann kein Ding ausschließen und keines für so niedrig nehmen, daß es nicht eine sehr große Macht sei. Es gibt, vom Standpunkte des Lebens betrachtet, kein Ding, das „dazu gehört“. Es ist überall alles. Alles ist im Reigen.

Wundervolles Wort des Dschellaledin Rumi, tiefer als alles: „Wer die Gewalt des Reigens kennt, fürchtet nicht den Tod. Denn er weiß, daß Liebe tötet.“

Vita

Eric R. Dixon was born in Pasadena, Texas on August 27, 1964. In June 1982, he graduated from Clinton Senior High School in Clinton, Tennessee. From August 1982 to December 1984, Mr. Dixon studied at Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, and in January 1985 he transferred to East Tennessee State University in Johnson City to complete his studies. From July 1986 to August 1986, he studied at the Jugendbildungsstätte, Burg Hoheneck, in Bad Windsheim, Germany. In June 1987, he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Management and German from East Tennessee State University. Mr Dixon began a job in Sanford, North Carolina in July 1987 as a Management Trainee with the J. C. Penney Company, and in June 1988 was promoted to Merchandise Manager. In January 1990, he began his graduate studies toward a Master of Arts in German at the University of Tennessee. While in that program, he also worked as a teaching assistant in the Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages. The Master's degree was awarded in December 1991.

Mr. Dixon is a member of Delta Phi Alpha and a recipient of the Gerti Wunderlich Memorial Scholarship. After graduation, he will seek employment in education, continue seeking the meaning of life, and attempt to be a positive influence on the world.