

Rudolf Kassner and Hugo von Hofmannsthal:  
Criticism as Art  
The Reception of Pre-Raphaelitism in *fin de siècle* Vienna

Steve Rizza

PhD in German Literature  
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## ABSTRACT

From their first meeting in 1901 to his death in 1929 Hugo von Hofmannsthal was an avid admirer of Rudolf Kassner's work. This study focuses on the origins of their friendship in their shared interest in nineteenth-century English art. Its aims are to reassess both writers' critical reception of Pre-Raphaelitism and give a fuller account of their relationship.

Chapter one traces this relationship from Hofmannsthal's enthusiastic reading of Kassner's volume of critical essays on nineteenth-century English art, *Die Mystik, die Künstler und das Leben* (1900), to Kassner's late essays on the poet. The body of the chapter analyses Hofmannsthal's three essays on English artists broadly classified as Pre-Raphaelites — 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' (1892), 'Walter Pater' (1894), and 'Über moderne englische Malerei' (1894). The origins of Hofmannsthal's critical engagement with Pre-Raphaelitism are presented in the context of his association with Stefan George and the aesthetic programme of the *Blätter für die Kunst*. The textual analyses draw attention to Hofmannsthal's understanding and practice of criticism as art, and to the changing images of aestheticism in these essays, his journals, and the lyrical drama *Der Tor und der Tod* (1893).

Chapter two presents the development of Kassner's conception of criticism in his work and correspondence of the 1890s. The opening section examines Kassner's provincial origins and his university education in Vienna and Berlin with particular reference to his rejection of orthodox academic positivism. The second section analyses Kassner's literary debut, the short story 'Sonnengnade' (1896), revealing the autobiographical dimension of the text and its significance for Kassner's early understanding of criticism. The third section examines Kassner's earliest work of criticism, his lost doctoral dissertation 'Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung' (1896), recently published in fragmentary transcript. The final section traces the development of Kassner's notions of criticism and his engagement with English literature in the period 1896–99. Particular attention is given to his fifteen-month stay in England and to his debt to the alternative literary canon of *Jung-Wien*. The concluding section summarizes the similarities and differences between Hofmannsthal's and Kassner's understanding of criticism, emphasizing their divergent attitudes to factuality and first-hand experience.

Chapter three opens with a consideration of the reception of *Die Mystik* in the periodical press, and goes on to present close readings of those essays in the volume dealing with the notion of criticism as art and Pre-Raphaelitism in its broadest sense (including Keats, Rossetti, Swinburne, and Burne-Jones). The textual analyses identify the distinctive features of Kassner's complex critical interpretations and suggest why they would have appealed to Hofmannsthal. The conclusion of the chapter returns to Hofmannsthal's initial response to *Die Mystik*, reassessing his estimation of Kassner as critic in the light of the findings of the preceding chapters, and contending that Hofmannsthal's enthusiasm was prompted by the significant differences between his and Kassner's interpretations of nineteenth-century English art.

The *Postskriptum* (in German) reviews the conclusions of the study as a whole, and suggests possible directions for future research into Hofmannsthal's and Kassner's engagement with England.

## DECLARATION

I, Stephen John (Steve) Rizza, declare that this thesis has been composed by me and is my own unaided work.

St Andrews 31.7.1995

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### RUDOLF KASSNER

- BaT *Briefe an Tetzl: Rudolf Kassners Briefe an seinen Jugendfreund Gottlieb Fritz aus den Jahren 1896 bis 1916*, edited by Ernst Zinn and Klaus E. Bohnenkamp (Pfullingen, 1979)
- EJ 'Rudolf Kassner: Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung. Studien zur allgemeinen Literaturgeschichte.' Auszüge aufgrund einer Abschrift herausgegeben und kommentiert von Klaus E. Bohnenkamp, *Hofmannsthal Jahrbuch zur europäischen Moderne*, 2 (1994), 21–78
- Gedenkbuch Kensik, Alfons Clemens and D. Bodmer (eds), *Rudolf Kassner zum achtzigsten Geburtstag: Gedenkbuch* (Zurich, 1953)
- KSW *Rudolf Kassner Sämtliche Werke*: Im Auftrag der Kassner Gesellschaft, edited by Ernst Zinn and Klaus E. Bohnenkamp, 10 vols (Pfullingen, 1969–1991)

### HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL

- A *Aufzeichnungen, Hugo von Hofmannsthal Gesammelte Werke in Einzelbänden*, edited by Herbert Steiner (Frankfurt a.M., 1958)
- Briefe I *Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Briefe 1890–1901* (Berlin, 1935)
- HGW *Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden*, edited by Bernd Schoeller and Rudolf Hirsch (Frankfurt a.M., 1979/1980)
- HSW *Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Sämtliche Werke: kritische Ausgabe*, edited by Rudolf Hirsch and others (1975–)
- RA I HGW 8, *Reden und Aufsätze I: 1891–1913*
- RA III HGW 10, *Reden und Aufsätze III: 1925–1929: Aufzeichnungen*

### STEFAN GEORGE

- BfdK *Stefan George Stiftung: Blätter für die Kunst*, 6 vols, Begründet von Stefan George. Herausgegeben von Carl August Klein: 1892–1919. Abgelichteter Neudruck zum Jubiläumsjahr 1968 (Düsseldorf/Munich, 1968).  
[Note: all quotations from this edition take the form I, i = Folge, Band, followed by page numbers in arabic.]
- GrBr *Briefwechsel zwischen George und Hofmannsthal*, second edition (Munich and Düsseldorf, 1953)

### PERIODICALS

All abbreviations for periodical titles are in accordance with those used in *The Year's Work in Modern Language Studies*.

### NOTE ON QUOTATIONS

Kassner's first works were published before the German spelling reform of the early twentieth century, and are reprinted in KSW in their original form. In order to avoid excessive and distracting interpolations, I have silently reproduced the vagaries of Kassner's orthography and grammar in my quotations — including his idiosyncratic spelling of Burne-Jones's first name as 'Edvard' — and have strictly limited the use of 'sic' to those cases where confusion might arise.

‘Alles, was über meine Werke zu sagen ist, steht in den Werken selbst; man muß nur von den Sachen her lesen, die Dinge richtig angehen, mit ihnen gehen, sie meditieren. Darauf kommt es an: *die Stelle* genau zu erfassen, sie nicht voreilig mit den Stellen anderer vergleichen, Einflüsse aufsuchen, Preise verteilen. Ich gebe zu, daß es nicht immer leicht ist, diese Stelle jeweils genau, unter allen Umständen genau, herauszubekommen. Aber warum soll so etwas immer leicht fallen? “Ich liebe es, daß sich die Dinge nicht preisgeben, daß sie mir widerstehen”, sagt Valéry irgendwo. Wer einmal ausführlicher über mich schreiben sollte, wird diese meine Stelle genau aufzuzeigen haben, im ganzen, an den einzelnen Werken.’ (Rudolf Kassner, *Gedenkbuch*, p. 185)

‘Kunst und Kritik, die ergänzenden Hälften des künstlerischen Lebens.’ (Hugo von Hofmannsthal, ‘Aufzeichnungen aus dem Nachlaß 1893’, RA III, p. 360)



## CHAPTER ONE

### HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL: THE ARTIST AS CRITIC

#### I INTRODUCTION: INTERSECTIONS, INFLUENCE OR IMITATION?

'Aber das Wunderbare am Leben des Geistes ist, daß wir als Nachahmende zu uns selber zu kommen vermögen.'  
(KSW IX, p. 354)

Rudolf Kassner first met Hugo von Hofmannsthal at the latter's house in Rodaun on Wednesday 4 December 1901. A week later, Hofmannsthal sent Kassner the following letter:

Sehr geehrter Herr Kassner!

Ich lese seit einigen Tagen an dem Aufsatz über Swinburne und werde immer stärker betroffen von der Tiefe dieser Sachen. Ich glaube, daß niemals in einem Buch so tief eindringende Gedanken über Künstler und Kunstwerke ausgesprochen worden sind; alles von Nietzsche ist ja viel allgemeiner.

Ich hatte das Bedürfnis, Ihnen ausführlicher darüber zu schreiben, bin aber immer sehr müde, weil ich tagsüber arbeite. Auch Ihr Buch trägt zu der Ermüdung bei, es ist von der Arbeit selbst nicht wegzuhalten, alles Tun und Denken ist durchsetzt von durchdringenden Strahlen und Spiegelungen. Das wird Ihnen ganz natürlich erscheinen.

Ich werde Ihnen von Wien aus eine Anzahl unbekannter Sachen von mir schicken lassen, meine paar Aufsätze, eine Art Märchen usf. Ich habe keine Ahnung, wie weit Sie sich für meine Arbeiten interessieren, ich bitte also für jeden Fall, darin, daß ich das tue, keine Aufdringlichkeit zu sehen. Es ist ja leicht, eine Sache ungelesen zu lassen.

Ich freue mich sehr, Sie bald wieder zu sprechen. Besonders darauf, die fruchtbaren, begrifflich kaum faßbaren individuellen Abstracta, die Sie im Text hinwerfen, im Gespräch aufleben und sich bereichern zu lassen.

Ich freue mich ungewöhnlich, Sie und das Buch zu kennen.

Ihr aufrichtig ergebener  
Hofmannsthal<sup>1</sup>

The book in question was Kassner's first major publication, a volume of essays on nineteenth-century English poets and painters which had appeared in 1900 under the portentous, if rather unwieldy, title of *Die Mystik, die Künstler und das Leben: Über englische Dichter und Maler im 19. Jahrhundert. Accorde*.<sup>2</sup> Given that this was the critical début of an unknown young writer, and that Hofmannsthal had already established a considerable — if still relatively limited — reputation as a poet, prose writer, critic, and dramatist, his enthusiasm for the volume and his respect for its author are quite remarkable. From his next letter to Kassner, written a few days later, it is evident that the more Hofmannsthal read, the greater his enthusiasm became:

Lieber Kassner,  
ich habe eben das Buch in einem Zug durchgelesen. Ich konnte es lesen, wie einen Brief, ja manchmal wie einen an mich gerichteten Brief, mit einer unbeschreiblich wachsenden Erregung und Freude. Nehmen Sie das, wie Sie wollen: nie waren fortlaufende Gedanken von Schopenhauer, von Nietzsche oder anderen dgl. imstande, mir annähernd solches

<sup>1</sup> 'Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Briefe an Freunde', *Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, 9 (1955), II. Halbjahr, 964–70 (p. 965).

<sup>2</sup> Referred to throughout this study as *Die Mystik*.

inneres Glück zu geben, eine solche Erleuchtung meiner Selbst bis in den tiefsten Kern hinein, ein solches Begreifen, warum man dichtet, was das ist, wenn man dichtet, was es mit dem Dasein zu tun hat. Während ich las und las, war mir, als wären Lasten von meiner Brust abgewälzt, ich erlebte fortwährend, die Glücksgefühle des Lesens und Verstehens, des gleitenden Vorwärtskommens setzten sich in ungeheure Metaphern um, die zu beachten ich keine Zeit hatte und die um so schöner waren, weil sie im Entstehen zergingen — es war ein Hingleiten in tief eingeschnittenen wundervollen Wasserwegen, schwarze Massen, die entgegenzustehen schienen, teilten sich lautlos, es war ein plötzliches Hinabstürzen, aber voll Seligkeit 'und sank mein Kahn, er sank zu neuen Meeren', das wiederholte sich immerfort. — So werde ich das Buch nicht leicht, nicht bald wieder lesen können, es wird verlöschen wie ein Blitz, der einen zuerst in noch größerer Dunkelheit stehen läßt, aber ich werde diesen Blitz verschluckt haben und es geht nichts verloren.

Wir werden über das Buch kaum sprechen, aber ich verlange mir sehr, daß Sie bald wiederkommen.

Ihr H. H.<sup>3</sup>

The tone of this letter differs considerably from that of the first, with the formal salutation giving way to the more intimate 'Lieber Kassner', and Hofmannsthal's initially reserved and self-effacing tone being replaced by one of friendship and gratitude. Gone too is the uncertainty regarding Kassner's interest in Hofmannsthal's work, its place taken by an intense feeling of personal affinity.

Clearly, the experience of reading *Die Mystik*, exhausting as it was, made a powerful, if sublimely evanescent, impression on Hofmannsthal. It is perhaps surprising, then, that the question of just why this might have been the case has been largely ignored by critics of both Kassner's and Hofmannsthal's work. One clue to the source of Hofmannsthal's initial interest in Kassner's book is to be found in the first of the letters cited above. It would appear that Hofmannsthal began reading *Die Mystik* so to speak *in medias res*, starting with the essay on Swinburne, the seventh of the ten chapters in the volume. This seemingly eccentric approach becomes comprehensible when one realizes that during the 1890s Hofmannsthal had himself published a number of articles on various aspects of English art and literature. Among these was the essay 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' (1892) in which he had presented the English poet and his like-minded artistic contemporaries to a German-speaking audience. It is, then, quite understandable that Hofmannsthal should have been eager to discover what his new acquaintance had to say on the same subject; and, in the light of the second of his letters, it is no surprise to learn that he felt compelled to defer to Kassner's judgement of the English poet. As Klaus Günther Just has pointed out, Kassner's critical reflections effectively eclipsed those of Hofmannsthal who when asked in 1910 for his opinions on Swinburne referred a correspondent not to his own early essay but to that in *Die Mystik*.<sup>4</sup>

However, the second of the above letters shows that the affinity which Hofmannsthal came to feel for Kassner's work extended far beyond its ostensible subject matter. From this letter it is clear that Kassner's critical achievement lay not merely in his having written impressively and at length about an English poet whose work had fascinated the young Hofmannsthal; he had also, it seems, illuminated, however briefly, a number of more profound questions concerning the nature of poetry and the relationship of the poet *qua* poet to life, questions which had weighed heavily on Hofmannsthal throughout his 'lyrical decade', and which would continue intensely to occupy him up to the publication of *Ein Brief* in 1902. Hofmannsthal's enthusiasm

<sup>3</sup> 'Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Briefe an Freunde', pp. 965–66. The letter, headed 'Sonntagabend', is undated.

<sup>4</sup> See Klaus Günther Just, 'Die Rezeption Swinburnes in der deutschen Literatur der Jahrhundertwende', in *Festschrift für Jost Trier zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. by William Foerste and Karl Heinz Borck (Cologne/Graz, 1964), pp. 466–89 (p. 471, footnote 13).

for *Die Mystik* was not merely a matter of a shared taste for modern English literature. In Kassner, Hofmannsthal saw a consummate critic capable of shedding light on the most obscure and refractory of his own aesthetic problems. What this suggests is that, far from being marginal or eccentric, Kassner's little-known critical debut is centrally concerned with a range of questions, both aesthetic and more broadly philosophical, which alternately fascinated and plagued his more famous contemporary. This, in turn, implies that Hofmannsthal's admiration of Kassner as a critic is by no means idiosyncratic or fortuitous, and that the affinity between the two writers is based on a range of shared problems and preoccupations central to the literary avant-garde of the 1890s.

As already mentioned, this affinity has received surprisingly little critical attention. The only publication to examine at any length the relationship between the two writers remains Gerhart Baumann's extended essay *Rudolf Kassner – Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Kreuzwege des Geistes* (1964) which was originally delivered as a speech in October 1963, some months after the main festivities to mark the foundation of the *Rudolf Kassner Gesellschaft* in Vienna.<sup>5</sup> In keeping with the nature of the occasion, Baumann's reflections are presented in a style more literary than scholarly. It is a style, however, which is based on his close acquaintance with the work of Hofmannsthal and Kassner. This is evident not only in Baumann's extensive use of key terms and quotations from the work of both authors but also in the fundamentally antithetical structure of his essay which is strongly reminiscent of Kassner's earliest publications.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the distinctive style of *Kreuzwege* can be said to derive largely from Baumann's conscious emulation of Hofmannsthal and Kassner, and the essay is, therefore, best read less as a work of scholarly criticism than as informed literary appreciation. Whatever the virtues of such appreciative criticism, the essay has one obvious drawback. In order to appreciate *Kreuzwege* fully, the reader must already have a sound grasp of both Hofmannsthal's and Kassner's work. This knowledge might reasonably have been expected of Baumann's original Viennese audience, but it presents considerable problems for the general reader who is unlikely to be acquainted with Kassner's neglected publications. As a result the essay, for all its sensitivity and perspicacity, does not provide the best introduction to its subject matter. More importantly from the point of view of the present study, Baumann's essay, which covers the entire output of both authors in some forty pages, necessarily excludes detailed analysis of the early relationship between Hofmannsthal and Kassner with which I am here concerned. In the course of this study I will seek to supplement Baumann's understandably cursory outline of this relationship. Following lines of inquiry suggested by his essay, I will trace in greater detail the sources of that intense affinity which Hofmannsthal felt on first reading *Die Mystik*.

It should be emphasized that my approach differs in one important respect from that of *Kreuzwege*. Whereas Baumann expressly rejects the notion of influence, I have worked on the hypothesis that Hofmannsthal's early critical essays may have influenced Kassner's conception of criticism. Baumann's position on this point is stated most clearly at the beginning of the

<sup>5</sup> The International Kassner Symposium was held in Vienna from 12 to 17 May 1963. Among those who paid tribute to Kassner were W. H. Auden, Eudo C. Mason, and Ernst Zinn. See Klaus E. Bohnenkamp, 'Das Werk Rudolf Kassners. Ein Editionsbericht zum Abschluß der zehnbändigen Gesamtausgabe', *JDSG*, 38 (1994), 465–78 (p. 467, footnote 15). Auden's brief tribute to Kassner, 'Zahl und Gesicht', can be found in *Gedenkbuch* (p. 58).

<sup>6</sup> The title of Baumann's study derives from Hofmannsthal's early short story 'Age of Innocence' (1891). In the first paragraph of the section of the story headed 'Kreuzwege', he writes: 'Was man also den Lebensweg nennt, ist kein wirklicher Weg mit Anfang und Ziel, sondern er hat viele Kreuzwege, ja er besteht wohl eigentlich nur aus Kreuzwegen und jeder Punkt ist der mögliche Ausgangspunkt zu unendlichen Möglichkeiten; und das Schicksal nannten darum die Griechen sehr geistreich "Tyche", das zufällig-zugefallene.' (HSW XXIX, p. 20) See also *Kreuzwege*, p. 11.

second section of his essay where he dismisses the matter of Hofmannsthal's and Kassner's common literary influences as unimportant, electing rather to concentrate on what he calls the 'correspondences' between the two, 'Korrespondenzen, die wesentlicher sind als vordergründige Fragen nach Stoff und Einfluß' (*Kreuzwege*, p. 11). Although Baumann's reluctance to pursue the question of influence at length may have been motivated by considerations of space, it seems more likely that his rejection of 'Stoff und Einfluß' is intended to show solidarity with Kassner's own dismissal of what he regarded as the near obsessive concern with influence characteristic of his late nineteenth-century academic literary education.<sup>7</sup>

Later in the same section of *Kreuzwege* there is an indication that the intellectual intersections of the essay's title are based on something more than chance:

Alle diese Begegnungen sind nicht zufällig, sondern notwendig; das Buch über 'Englische Dichter' und die Geisteswelt von Loris-Hofmannsthal speisen sich vielfach aus einem gemeinsamen Quellgebiet, zahlreich sind die unsichtbaren wie sichtbaren Verbindungen. (*Kreuzwege*, pp. 18–19)

Baumann then goes on to note that Hofmannsthal's critical essays on Swinburne and the Pre-Raphaelites could have been just such 'sources' for Kassner.<sup>8</sup> Although characteristically couched in terms which studiously avoid any reference to 'Stoff' or 'Einfluß', this strongly suggests the possibility of one-sided influence during the years leading up to the writers' first meeting. It must be remembered that before 1900 there was an obvious asymmetry in their relationship. Before the publication of *Die Mystik*, Kassner could have and, as I shall show, did read Hofmannsthal; Hofmannsthal, however, could not have read Kassner. Thus, the name Hofmannsthal must be added to the list of Kassner's early reading, and the possibility that a writer of such central importance in the Viennese literary avant-garde exercised some form of influence on Kassner's thought cannot simply be dismissed out of hand.

However, this assumption is problematic in two respects. First, it constitutes a kind of critical heresy by going against the grain of 'sympathetic' Kassner criticism which, on the whole, has tended to follow Kassner's own depreciation of the notion of influence. Both Baumann and his student Bong Hi-Cha would appear to regard the very thought that Kassner was influenced by anyone as a potential threat to his originality and as such to be avoided at all costs.<sup>9</sup> Although apparently motivated by a laudable desire to do justice to Kassner's 'uniqueness', this critical position seems to me untenable. For one thing, it considerably oversimplifies Kassner's own view on the question of influence which was certainly not one of flat rejection. As the epigraph to this chapter shows, Kassner, if not always specific on the matter, made no secret of his debt to other writers.<sup>10</sup> Imitation ('Nachahmung') is, he thought, the route by which a developing thinker comes to achieve his own particular identity. Nor was he alone in this belief. It is well known that Hofmannsthal's early work absorbs and integrates a daunting range of the most

<sup>7</sup> Baumann's formulation echoes Kassner's dismissive remarks on the central role of 'Stoff und Einfluß' in German university courses of the 1890s. See KSW VII, p. 121, quoted on p. 60 below. It should be noted that the specific target of his witty remarks is not the notion of influence as such, but rather the materialist bias of late nineteenth-century German literary criticism. This point is examined in greater detail in Chapter Two of the present study.

<sup>8</sup> Baumann draws attention to further correspondences in Hofmannsthal's and Kassner's reading 'Darüber hinaus finden sich Kreuzungspunkte in Baudelaire und Poe, in Maeterlinck und Amiel, Pater und Keats; die Briefe Flauberts und das Journal der Marie Bashkirtseff, Lektüren des jungen Hofmannsthal, sie erscheinen auch bei Kassner.' (*Kreuzwege*, p. 19) See also Gotthart Wunberg's comment that this common reading represented 'eine selbstverständliche, gemeinsame Voraussetzung' for late nineteenth-century Austrian writers. Wunberg, *Der frühe Hofmannsthal: Schizophrenie als dichterische Struktur* (Stuttgart, Cologne, Mainz, 1965), p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> See the introduction to Bong-Hi Cha's 'Das Erstlingswerk Rudolf Kassners: Ansätze zu seinem physiognomischen Weltbild' (doctoral dissertation, University of Tübingen, 1976), pp. 1–8.

<sup>10</sup> Baumann quotes part of the epigraph on p. 22 of his essay.

diverse literary influences and models to create an *œuvre* which is by no means merely derivative. Indeed, the creative tension between the desire for originality and the perceived burden of precocious erudition and traditional heritage ('Erbe') is one of the most important and problematic features of late nineteenth-century Viennese modernism.

Furthermore, the adoption of an oversimplified and generalized version of Kassner's late remarks on influence renders the kind of sympathetic criticism practised by Baumann and Bong-Hi Cha effectively self-defeating. The point of such criticism is surely to elucidate Kassner's neglected work and to demonstrate its value to a general audience. By adopting wholesale the supposed point of view of its subject, however, this approach inevitably results in a form of eulogy which can be neither critical nor ultimately very enlightening. Both Baumann and Bong Hi-Cha seem to confuse the two quite distinct activities of writing about Kassner and writing with him. It is my contention that one can retain some conception of influence and still remain sympathetic to Kassner's thought. Indeed, the rejection of the notion of influence, however well-intentioned, can only mystify the relationship of Kassner to his contemporaries, making his neglected and supposedly 'unique' work seem all the more strange to the uninitiated reader. I have, therefore, tried to avoid the critical identification with Kassner which is evident to a greater or lesser degree in the work of both Baumann and Bong-Hi Cha. Kassner's contemporaries may have compared *Die Mystik* to an intellectual 'Rauschtrank', but ninety-five years after its first publication a more sober consideration seems in order.<sup>11</sup> It should be made clear that I am not suggesting Kassner's work can be reduced to a sum of influences; and, given Kassner's extensive reading, it would be patently absurd to claim that Hofmannsthal was the sole influence on his earliest work. However, as Kassner himself would have acknowledged, no text is created *ex nihilo*, and more detailed consideration of the textual and contextual antecedents of *Die Mystik* is necessary if its immense appeal is to be properly appreciated.

The second problem associated with the question of influence appears more serious. Any attempt to determine the precise influence of Hofmannsthal's work on Kassner during the 1890s must contend with the relative dearth of reliable documentation on Kassner's reading and thought before 1896. This plainly makes it impossible to determine influence with complete certainty. However, in the following few pages I will be less concerned with detecting influence in this strong, positivist sense than with demonstrating the young Kassner's knowledge of Hofmannsthal's early critical essays. My purpose is not to draw rigid lines of causal influence between Hofmannsthal and Kassner, but rather to examine the congruity of the former's essays with the thought of *Die Mystik*. Terminological differences aside, I am in substantial agreement with Baumann to the extent that he regards merely fortuitous intellectual affinity as highly improbable.

What, then, did Kassner know of Hofmannsthal's work from the 1890s? In the first of the letters reproduced at the beginning of this chapter, Hofmannsthal is clearly in some doubt as to whether Kassner would be interested in his work — or if he even knew it at all. The modern reader may find it strange that a writer of Hofmannsthal's stature should describe the works he had arranged to be sent to Kassner as 'eine Anzahl unbekannter Sachen'. It should be remembered, however, that Hofmannsthal's status in the twentieth-century literary canon stands in marked contrast to his comparatively limited reputation at the turn of the century

<sup>11</sup> This formulation, attributed to E. R. Curtius, is cited by Hans Paeschke in his essay 'Rudolf Kassner', in *Gedenkbuch*, pp. 89–128 (p. 90).

when his fame was still confined to a relatively narrow readership.<sup>12</sup> By the time he came to write his second letter it would have been clear to Hofmannsthal that Kassner not only knew his work, but that he had referred to it at least three times in the course of *Die Mystik*.<sup>13</sup> The recent completion of the ten-volume critical edition of Kassner's works has made more widely available a number of previously inaccessible documents which shed light on the relationship of *Die Mystik* to Hofmannsthal's early work. The earliest of these is a brief excerpt from an unpublished letter of Tuesday 17 December 1901 in which Kassner responds to Hofmannsthal's first enthusiastic letter.<sup>14</sup> Kassner's comment on the writing of *Die Mystik*, 'wie oft ich an Ihre Kunst gedacht habe auch wenn ich Sie nicht nannte' (KSW IV, p. 753), appears expressly calculated to dispel Hofmannsthal's initial doubts concerning his correspondent's knowledge of his work. This remark also indicates Kassner's perception of a close relationship between Hofmannsthal's art and that of the English artists discussed in *Die Mystik*, and this would tend to support Hofmannsthal's reading of the volume as a letter addressed to him. There can be no doubt, then, that Kassner had some knowledge of Hofmannsthal's work, but what exactly did he know of the poet's early publications?

Between 1929, the year of Hofmannsthal's death, and 1954 Kassner published a number of retrospective essays on his better-known contemporary.<sup>15</sup> The first public indication of the extent of his familiarity with Hofmannsthal's early work is to be found in the essay 'Erinnerung an Hugo von Hofmannsthal' which appeared in *Das physiognomische Weltbild* (1930). In the opening paragraph Kassner describes his impressions of Hofmannsthal on their first meeting, impressions which did not at all correspond to expectations:

Dem ich da begegnet bin, das war nicht mehr der 'Prinz', der 'verschwendende Erbe', worauf ich durch zahlreiche Artikel in Revuen und Zeitungen, wohl auch durch ähnliche aus der Lektüre seiner Gedichte und Aufsätze genährte Vorstellungen vorbereitet worden war [. . .] (KSW IV, p. 525)

The explicit reference to Hofmannsthal's publications, and Kassner's characterization of his expectations in terms of images drawn from Hofmannsthal's work of the 1890s suggests that he had more than a passing acquaintance with the poet before their first meeting.<sup>16</sup> In the essay 'Loris' (1930), a review of a posthumous collection of Hofmannsthal's early prose, Kassner's comments on the frequency of the word 'Leben' in Loris-Hofmannsthal's critical essays show him to have been familiar with these texts on their first appearance:

Mir war schon damals, als die Aufsätze in Zeitschriften und Zeitungen, teils mit größter Ungeduld erwartet, erschienen, darin eben der Begriff oder das Wort: Leben aufgefallen. Ich hatte das Gefühl, daß er es im Vers und in Prosa häufiger verwendet als andere. (KSW VI, p. 275)

<sup>12</sup> On Hofmannsthal's early reputation, see Kassner's reminiscence 'Hofmannsthal und Rilke: Erinnerung' (1946), KSW X, pp. 307–21. Here the poet's limited readership is attributed to the machinations of the exclusive 'George Kreis' with which Hofmannsthal was uneasily involved throughout the 1890s (p. 309).

<sup>13</sup> *Die Mystik* contains two unacknowledged quotations – from the poem 'Gesellschaft' (1896) and the lyrical drama *Die Frau im Fenster* (1897) – and an explicit reference to the latter as a masterpiece. See KSW I, p. 17, p. 114, and p. 239 respectively.

<sup>14</sup> The editors of KSW interpret this as a reply to the first of Hofmannsthal's letters cited above, that of Wednesday 11 December 1901 (KSW IV, p. 753). This would imply that his second letter was written on the evening of Sunday 22 December.

<sup>15</sup> For a list of Kassner's essays on Hofmannsthal contained in KSW, see Bibliography. These essays were originally published in a number of forms, full details of which can be found in the relevant volumes of KSW, and in Klaus E. Bohnenkamp's article, 'Ein wenig bekannter Aufsatz von Rudolf Kassner über die Prosa des jungen Hofmannsthal', in *Für Rudolf Hirsch zum siebzigsten Geburtstag am 22. September 1975* (Frankfurt a.M., 1975), pp. 295–309 (pp. 306–09).

<sup>16</sup> For a less flattering account of Kassner's earliest impressions of Hofmannsthal, see his letter to Gottlieb Fritz of 7 January 1902: 'Hofmannsthal [. . .] ist ein merkwürdiger unruhiger unklarer, wohl etwas durch seine Umgebung und seine frühen Erfolge verdorbener Mensch. Wenig Persönlichkeit, aber Lyriker von doch sehr hohem Rang. Literat und doch nicht ohne vornehme Gesinnung. Ich bin mir über ihn noch nicht ganz klar.' (BaT, p. 112)

Whatever Hofmannsthal's initial reservations regarding his correspondent's knowledge of his work, there can be no doubt that in the 1890s Kassner was already well acquainted not only with Hofmannsthal's poetry and lyrical dramas, but also with his critical essays.

Of course, Kassner's knowledge of these texts would not, in itself, imply that he was influenced by them. His debt to Hofmannsthal's early critical essays is stated unambiguously in the opening pages of the essay 'Hofmannsthal und Rilke: Erinnerung' (1946):

Ich bin Hofmannsthal das erstemal Anfang 1902 [sic] begegnet. In seinem Rodauner Haus, wohin mich Hermann von Keyserling brachte. Jahre also, nachdem ich schon der Bezauberung durch seine Gedichte und einige Aufsätze unterlegen war. Ich sage Gedichte, denn auch seine kleinen Dramen nahm ich für solche. *Seinen Aufsätzen habe ich unter anderem den ersten Hinweis auf englische Dichter wie A. C. Swinburne und den Ästhetiker und Essayisten Walter Pater verdankt, auch auf andere, von denen später mein erstes Buch gehandelt hat, das im übrigen auch die Brücke war, die mich, da mir jede andere Verbindung mit ihm gefehlt hat, zu Hofmannsthal hinüberführen sollte.* (KSW X, p. 307: my emphasis)

Clearly when he wrote *Die Mystik* Kassner's attitude to Hofmannsthal's work exceeded mere interest. As the above passage shows, the young Kassner was not only enchanted by Hofmannsthal's poetic works, he was openly indebted to the critical essays on English art which attracted his attention to some of the poets and painters who would form the subject matter of his first book.

What all this suggests is that Hofmannsthal's intense feelings of affinity with Kassner are the result of something more substantial than the rather nebulous sympathy implied by Baumann's 'Kreuzwege des Geistes'. In the light of the foregoing, Hofmannsthal's enthusiastic reading of *Die Mystik* as a personal letter would appear to be, in part at least, a reflection of his own influence on Kassner; and this suggests that the affinity between the two writers is best sought in those areas where — to use Baumann's title in a less esoteric sense — their work can be shown to intersect. As the title of this study indicates, the particular 'intersection' in which I am interested is the theoretical and thematic overlap between *Die Mystik* and Hofmannsthal's early essays on English art and artists; that is, Hofmannsthal's and Kassner's conception and practice of criticism as art, and their reception of Pre-Raphaelitism. Both these key terms require some elucidation. By 'criticism as art' I mean the distinctive late nineteenth-century notion that the traditionally secondary activity of art criticism can, in certain circumstances, claim parity with the primary activity of artistic creation. This view of criticism and prose non-fiction generally, which challenges the post-Romantic hierarchy of poetry and prose, was developed in the course of the nineteenth century and is exemplified by the critical practice of, among others, John Ruskin, Walter Pater, Charles Baudelaire, and Anatole France. Towards the end of the century the notion of criticism as art received its most strident and paradoxical formulation in the critical writings of Oscar Wilde, specifically in the dialogue 'The Critic as Artist', published in his collection of essays and dialogues *Intentions* (1891).<sup>17</sup> It should be stressed that the particular manifestations of nineteenth-century criticism as art vary considerably, depending on the relative emphasis given to artistic expression or factual accuracy. In Walter Pater's 'aesthetic criticism', for example, these elements tend to appear in (an occasionally tenuous) equilibrium, which has led to Pater being called a 'scholar-artist';<sup>18</sup> in

<sup>17</sup> See *The Works of Oscar Wilde* (no place: Galley Press, 1987), pp. 909–1017.

<sup>18</sup> See Lord David Cecil, *Walter Pater. The Scholar-Artist* (Cambridge, 1955), and G. S. Frazer, 'Walter Pater: His Theory of Style, His Style in Practice, His Influence', in George Levine and William Madden (eds), *The Art of Victorian Prose* (London/Toronto, 1968), pp. 201–23 (p. 202).

Wilde's *Intentions*, by contrast, scholarship and factual accuracy are flatly dismissed in favour of ingenious and aesthetically pleasing critical fabulation, or as Wilde more flippantly puts it — lying.<sup>19</sup> (It is a characteristic Wildean paradox that this point is made with the maximum display of scholarly erudition.) As I will show, both Hofmannsthal and Kassner held their art criticism to be itself intrinsically artistic, and one of the central aims of this study is to discover the similarities and differences between their respective conceptions and practice of criticism as art.

The term 'Pre-Raphaelitism' is commonly associated with a certain tendency in nineteenth-century painting. Throughout this study, however, unless otherwise indicated, it is used in its broadest sense, as referring both to literature and the pictorial arts. In neither painting nor poetry is there any single identifiable Pre-Raphaelite style, and the English artists commonly grouped under this heading are united more by their personal association and collaboration than by a shared aesthetic. Thus, the term 'Pre-Raphaelitism' should be understood as a soft-edged concept, denoting a 'family resemblance' rather than a rigidly bounded aesthetic theory or style. Historically, Pre-Raphaelitism can be divided into two distinct phases. The first of these, sometimes referred to as high Pre-Raphaelitism, began in 1848 with the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, or PRB, a group of young graphic artists and sculptors, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais, and William Holman Hunt. The loosely-formulated aesthetic programme of these first Pre-Raphaelites was based on a shared enthusiasm for late medieval and early Renaissance art and a corresponding rejection of contemporary academic conventions. Stylistically, their disparate work is united by its 'hard edge', detailed depiction of natural objects, deliberate archaism, and extensive use of narrative subjects drawn from literary sources including the Bible, Dante, and Keats.

The second phase of Pre-Raphaelitism, dating roughly from the mid-1850s, is marked by a gradual move away from religious and narrative subject matter towards static images in which abstract composition and the notion of beauty take precedence over easily discernible themes. This shift towards the purely aesthetic is taken by some to have been inaugurated by Millais's 'Autumn Leaves' (1855–56), and is evident in much of Rossetti's late work, particularly in his striking portraits of beautiful and mysterious women.<sup>20</sup> By 1860 the original Brotherhood had dissolved, and another, younger group of artists congregated around Rossetti. These included the painter Edward Burne-Jones, and the poet, interior designer, painter, printer, and political activist William Morris, both of whose earliest artistic efforts Rossetti encouraged, and with whom he worked closely in the late 1850s. It was during their collaboration on a commission to decorate the Oxford Union in 1857 that the three became acquainted with the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne, then still a student. Swinburne, who shared their enthusiasm for things medieval, became an acolyte of Rossetti, himself an accomplished poet and translator, and for a time lodged in the latter's house.

Like any application of art-historical terms to literature, the characterization of Rossetti, Morris, and Swinburne as 'Pre-Raphaelite poets', while to some extent justified by their close association, is not entirely satisfactory.<sup>21</sup> Here, however, the term is intended not to denote a particular shared style, but rather to demarcate their work both from that of the earlier English

<sup>19</sup> See 'The Decay of Lying. An Observation', in Wilde, pp. 909–31.

<sup>20</sup> See Malcolm Warner, 'John Everett Millais's "Autumn Leaves": "a picture full of beauty and without subject"', in *Pre-Raphaelite Papers*, ed. by Leslie Parris (London, 1984), pp. 126–42.

<sup>21</sup> A precedent for this usage is provided by Lionel Stevenson's *The Pre-Raphaelite Poets* (University of North Carolina Press, 1972).



Romantics and from their near contemporaries Tennyson and Browning. It also has the virtue of distinguishing them from later figures such as Wilde and the artists of the so-called Aesthetic Movement, whose work is at best peripherally related to that of Rossetti and his close associates. This distinction is important as the English Romantics, although treated at some length by Kassner, are mentioned only in passing in Hofmannsthal's early critical essays. Likewise, Browning, to whom Kassner devoted a chapter of *Die Mystik*, while an important influence on Hofmannsthal's verse dramas of the late 1890s, does not figure in his criticism of English art; and although Hofmannsthal and Kassner both wrote essays on Wilde, these post-date the period with which I am here concerned.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the focus of this study on Pre-Raphaelitism in the above sense most adequately reflects the greatest area of thematic overlap between *Die Mystik* and Hofmannsthal's early essays.

The remainder of this chapter examines those of Hofmannsthal's critical essays which laid the foundation for Kassner's interest in English art. Had Hofmannsthal's influence been confined to the choice of subject matter for *Die Mystik*, these could be passed over in a few pages. However, in order to elucidate Hofmannsthal's notion of criticism as art, it is necessary to analyse the essays in some detail and to situate them in the broader context in which they first appeared. It should be stressed that by 'context' I mean the literary context of the 1890s. This is not to deny the importance of extra-literary factors, a number of which will be examined in Chapter Two.

## II 'DIE ANDERE KUNST': HOFMANNSTHAL'S EARLY ESSAYS ON ENGLISH ART IN CONTEXT

'von landläufigen [sic] kritischen essays kann keine rede sein.' (GrBr, p. 23)

Hofmannsthal's at times slightly bizarre enthusiasm for all things English is well documented, and, if the draft of a late letter is to be believed, his intense interest in English literature, art, and culture, began at an extraordinarily early age:<sup>23</sup>

Up from an early age, almost from my fifth or sixth year, I have been very fond of English poetry, reading Keats and Wordsworth, Edward Young and Robert Burns, Spencer and Sidney, Dryden and Thomas Gay (or Gray? what's his name, who wrote the Elegy on a country churchyard?) Shelley and Swinburne and all of them with almost equal pleasure — (this sounds queer, but its true.) — but nothing with so deep joy as Miltons minor poems. (HSW II, p. 467)<sup>24</sup>

During his 'lyrical decade' Hofmannsthal published no less than five essays on English themes. The first and last of these, 'Englisches Leben' (1891) and 'Englischer Stil' (1896), can be passed over here, as they are not directly related to the more radical currents in modern English art treated by Kassner in *Die Mystik*. The remaining three essays, 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' (1892), 'Walter Pater' (1894), and 'Über moderne englische Malerei' (1894) deal not only with particular English artists but with more general aspects of modern art which are central to Kassner's reflections in *Die Mystik*. These are, respectively, the modern poet, his counterpart the

<sup>22</sup> See Kassner's obituary essay, 'Zum Tode Oskar Wildes: Einiges über das Paradoxe' (1901), KSW II, pp. 380–87, and Hofmannsthal's 'Sebastian Melmoth' (1905), RA I, pp. 341–44.

<sup>23</sup> On Hofmannsthal's various anglophile enthusiasms, which included lawn tennis, gentlemanliness, and English recipes, see Mary E. Gilbert, 'Hofmannsthal and England', *GLL*, 1 (1937), 182–93.

<sup>24</sup> Draft of a letter to John Drinkwater, 10 September 1924.

critic, and Pre-Raphaelitism in painting. It is important to realize that these three essays are not concerned exclusively with English art and artists; they also have an important bearing on the values of the avant-garde tendency in German literature with which the young Hofmannsthal was closely, if uneasily, associated throughout the 1890s. Before turning to the essays themselves, then, I want to consider briefly the specific context in which they were written. It should be emphasized that what follows is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of English literary reception in turn-of-the-century Germany but is directed, rather, towards demonstrating that, initially at least, one important function of Hofmannsthal's essays on English art was their promotion of an alternative, non-Naturalist aesthetic to a German-speaking readership.<sup>25</sup>

The most decisive single influence on Hofmannsthal's critical engagement with the more radical tendencies in modern English art and literature was undoubtedly his productive but troubled association with the poet Stefan George which began in December 1891. Prior to their first meeting, George, who was some five and a half years older than Hofmannsthal, had spent time in both London and Paris, where he had become acquainted at first hand with the latest developments in European art. In particular, his privileged admission to the exclusive circle of French Symbolist writers who congregated around the poet Stéphane Mallarmé brought George an intimate acquaintance with Symbolism unique among his German contemporaries. It should be remembered that in 1891 the phenomenon of literary Symbolism was, if recognized at all, still largely misunderstood in German-speaking Europe, and George's first-hand experience of London and Paris, together with his own manifest poetic abilities, gave him an authority on matters of modern European literature which far surpassed that of other avowed admirers of Symbolism such as the protean Austrian author and critic Hermann Bahr.<sup>26</sup>

On his return to Germany, George began what was in effect an uncompromising, and initially single-handed, reform of German poetry in the spirit of the exemplary non-Naturalist practice of modern English and French writers.<sup>27</sup> George's reformative energy was primarily directed against what he regarded as two pernicious tendencies in late nineteenth-century German poetry: shallow, cliché-ridden epigonism and materialistic Naturalism. Rather than indulge in theoretical feuds with the representatives of these positions, George sought to realize his literary aims in his own exemplary poetic practice and through the translation of appropriate foreign literary models.

George's unsystematic aesthetic, later expounded in the anonymous introductory 'Merksprüche' of his exclusive periodical *Blätter für die Kunst* (1892–1919), is in several key respects similar to the poetics of the foreign non-Naturalist writers he admired.<sup>28</sup> Central to George's understanding of literature is the notion of aesthetic autonomy. In his theoretical reflections, poetry is presented as a strictly demarcated realm, quite distinct from the practical

<sup>25</sup> Throughout this study the term 'non-Naturalist' refers only to the avant-garde literary tendency with which Hofmannsthal and George, among others, were aligned. This formulation has the disadvantage of encompassing all non-Naturalist tendencies of the period, but remains preferable to 'anti-' or 'post-Naturalist', implying neither militant opposition nor chronological posteriority. It is also preferable to such potentially misleading slogans as 'Decadence', 'Aestheticism', or 'Symbolism', from which both George and Hofmannsthal expressly distanced themselves in the 1890s. See, for example, George's comment in the 'Merksprüche' of the *Blätter* (I, i, 1, footnote), and Hofmannsthal's disparaging remarks on such popular contemporary slogans in his speech 'Poesie und Leben' (1896), RA I, pp. 13–19 (p. 13).

<sup>26</sup> On the contemporary German reception of French Symbolism, see Manfred Gsteiger, *Französische Symbolisten in der deutschen Literatur der Jahrhundertwende (1869–1914)*, (Bern, 1971), *passim*.

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed assessment of George's debt to French Symbolism, see Manfred Durzak, *Der junge Stefan George: Kunsttheorie und Dichtung* (Munich, 1968), Chapter 2, 'I. Einfluß des französischen Symbolismus', pp. 58–87.

<sup>28</sup> Durzak identifies George as the probable author of the anonymous 'Merksprüche'. Op. cit., p. 95, footnote 25.

spheres of morality and social utility.<sup>29</sup> The value of poetry, then, is not to be sought in its didactic or socially reformative content; indeed, in terms of George's aesthetic, any poetry which is concerned with social or moral issues has outstepped the bounds of the aesthetic and can thus make no claim to the high title of art. Closely associated with the notion of aesthetic autonomy is George's rejection of mimesis, the principle that art basically consists in the imitation of nature. In George's aesthetic reflections, the mimetic emphasis on copying nature is replaced by an insistence on the primacy of beauty and form in literature.<sup>30</sup> As a corollary of this position George accords the highest literary value to poetry, relegating the novel to the status of second-rate history.<sup>31</sup>

The immediate implications of these views for the status of Naturalist writing are obvious: any literary movement which, like Naturalism, is centrally concerned with examining social or moral issues, and which strives to document or replicate nature must lie outside the autonomous realm of art.<sup>32</sup> But if George's theoretical position has the virtue of excluding such an approach to literature as essentially unaesthetic, it inevitably raises uncomfortable questions regarding the relationship between life and art. For if autonomous art is not essentially a matter of morality, social issues, or the depiction of nature, how does art relate to life? This highly problematic question, of which George was by no means unaware, is of central importance not only to Hofmannsthal's critical essays on English literature, but to his work of the 1890s generally.<sup>33</sup>

It is against the background of George's isolated reformative aspirations that his initial approaches towards Loris-Hofmannsthal must be seen. Their first meeting was instigated by George who, having read some of Hofmannsthal's earliest essays and poems, recognized in the young Austrian a kindred spirit whose collaboration could help him to realize his own high aims for German poetry. However, from the very outset, the relationship between the two was fraught with tensions and misunderstanding. The uncompromising directness of George's approaches and the insistence of his demands for a personal as well as a poetic alliance served only to confuse and unsettle the more reserved Hofmannsthal, and by January 1892 matters had reached such a dangerous intensity that Hofmannsthal's father had to step in to mediate between the two.<sup>34</sup> Yet, despite such tensions and manifest differences in temperament, Hofmannsthal would go on to collaborate with George throughout the 1890s and remained in regular contact with the older poet until 1906 when, after years of latent conflict and growing estrangement, they finally broke off all relations.

Hofmannsthal's brief diary entry for 21 December 1891, one of his earliest meetings with George, shows the central importance of foreign literary models for the older poet's programme of aesthetic reform: 'Stefan George. (Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé, Poe, Swinburne.) —

<sup>29</sup> This aspect of George's position is evident in the introductory remarks to the first number of the *Blätter für die Kunst* which appeared in October 1892: 'Der name dieser veröffentlichung sagt schon zum teil was sie soll: der kunst besonders der dichtung und dem schrifttum dienen, alles staatliche und gesellschaftliche ausscheidend.' And later: 'sie [diese veröffentlichung] kann sich auch nicht beschäftigen mit weltverbesserungen und allbeglückungsträumen in denen man gegenwärtig bei uns den keim zu allem neuen sieht, die ja sehr schön sein mögen aber in ein anderes gebiet gehören als das der dichtung' (BfdK I, i, 1).

<sup>30</sup> On the relationship of George's autonomous poetics to the mimetic theories of literary Naturalism, see Durzak, *op. cit.*, Chapter 2, 'II. Auseinandersetzung mit dem Naturalismus', pp. 88–113.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, the introductory comments in the *Blätter* of March 1894: 'Erzählung. Man verwechselt heute kunst (literatur) mit berichterstattung (reportage) zu welch letzteren gattung die meisten unsrer erzählungen (sog. romane) gehören. ein gewisser zeitgeschichtlicher wert bleibt ihnen immerhin obgleich er nicht dem der tagesblätter richtverhandlungen behördlichen zählungen u. ä. gleichkommt.' (BfdK II, ii, 34)

<sup>32</sup> The first theoretical pronouncements in the *Blätter* presented George's position as directly opposed to that of the Naturalists (BfdK I, i, 1). Later, however, he came to acknowledge a certain beneficial influence of Naturalism. See, for example, BfdK, III, ii, 34.

<sup>33</sup> See Manfred Durzak's analysis of George's poem 'Die Spange' as a critique of this aesthetic in Durzak, *Zwischen Symbolismus und Expressionismus: Stefan George* (Stuttgart, 1974), pp. 10–12.

<sup>34</sup> George, feeling himself accused of some unspecified impropriety, even threatened to challenge Hofmannsthal to a duel (GrBr, p. 16).

“Unsere Klassiker waren nur Plastiker des Stils, noch nicht Maler und Musiker.” (RA III, p. 340) The list of French authors here is almost a genealogy of Symbolism. Baudelaire, though himself not strictly a Symbolist, had inaugurated a radical new aesthetic with his *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857). His deliberately provocative combination of ugly and morally questionable subjects with meticulous attention to poetic form, and his aggressively anti-bourgeois doctrine of autonomous ‘l’art pour l’art’ exercised a decisive influence on the aesthetics of the following generation of poets and novelists. Paul Verlaine, the Symbolist lyric poet who eventually achieved widest recognition in Germany, continued and modified Baudelaire’s legacy, and in his highly estoric, language-centred conception of poetry Mallarmé took aesthetic autonomy to hitherto unknown extremes.

The name Poe may seem out of place in the above list; however, it should be remembered that both Baudelaire and Mallarmé were avid admirers of the American author and devoted what to some has appeared an inordinate amount of time and energy to translating his work into French.<sup>35</sup> Although now best known for his horror and detective stories, it was Poe’s theoretical essays, in particular ‘The Philosophy of Composition’ (1846) and ‘The Poetic Principle’ (1850), which fascinated the French Symbolists.<sup>36</sup> From Poe, the French poets acquired a theory of poetic composition which was directed not to the mimetic depiction of external objects, but rather to the linguistic evocation of elusive psychological and emotional effects. The enduring appeal of Poe’s understanding of poetic composition lay chiefly in its combination of emotion and reason. For Poe, a poem is neither the product of emotional inspiration nor of rational planning alone; it is, rather, a painstakingly crafted artefact, created by a process of reasoned selection with the end of suggesting a particular emotion.<sup>37</sup>

Although not Symbolist, in its formal virtuosity and the deliberate moral provocation of its content, the earliest work of the English Pre-Raphaelite poet Algernon Charles Swinburne is closely related to that of his near contemporary and early idol Baudelaire. The richly sensuous images and often excessive musicality of Swinburne’s verse go some way towards explaining the comment (presumably made by George) quoted above: “Unsere Klassiker waren nur Plastiker des Stils, noch nicht Maler und Musiker.” The pictorial and musical qualities of Swinburne’s poetry have marked affinities with the notion of synaesthesia, implicit in Poe’s ‘Philosophy of Composition’ and further developed by the French Symbolists, and thus would have appealed to George as examples of what modern German verse could and should aspire to.

To return to Hofmannsthal’s first meetings with George: towards the end of December 1891, in a diary note under the heading “Der Prophet” (Eine Episode), Hofmannsthal characterizes the topic of a Saturday evening conversation as ‘die andere Kunst’ (RA III, p. 340). Given George’s low estimation of late nineteenth-century German poetry, it is understandable that French and English models should have played such an important role in his understanding of this ‘alternative’ art. What, though, was Hofmannsthal’s attitude to this aesthetic project, and to what extent can he be said to have promoted ‘die andere Kunst’? In a

<sup>35</sup> See for example Aldous Huxley’s disparaging comments on Poe and his translators in ‘Vulgarity in Literature’, reprinted (extract) in *Edgar Allan Poe, Complete Poems and Selected Essays*, ed. by Richard Gray (London, Vermont, 1993), pp. 298–302.

<sup>36</sup> On the possible influence of Poe on George and his associates see Durzak, *Zwischen Symbolismus und Expressionismus*, Chapter 3, pp. 30–43.

<sup>37</sup> On George’s similar emphasis on the combination of intellect, emotion, and technique in modern poetry, see the introductory remarks to the first number of the *Blätter*: ‘Sie [diese Veröffentlichung] will die GEISTIGE KUNST auf grund der neuen fühlweise und mache.’ (BfdK, I, i, 1)

late letter to the Germanist Walter Brecht, Hofmannsthal looked back on his first meetings with George, recalling the subjects of their literary discussions:

Wir kamen dann einige Male zusammen: die Namen Verlaine, Baudelaire, Swinburne, Rossetti, Shelley wurden dabei in einer gewissen Weise genannt — man fühlte sich als Verbundene; auch der Name d'Annunzio kam schon vor und natürlich Mallarmé. (GrBr, p. 235)<sup>38</sup>

This passage shows that Hofmannsthal was well acquainted with the European representatives of George's 'andere Kunst' before their first meeting. Indeed, later in the same letter he states that even before George approached him he had aspired to create German verse comparable with the work of the greatest nineteenth-century English and French poets:

Im Ganzen kann man sagen, daß die Begegnung von entscheidender Bedeutung war — die Bestätigung dessen, was in mir lag, die Bekräftigung, daß ich kein ganz vereinzelter Sonderling war, wenn ich es für möglich hielt, in der deutschen Sprache etwas zu geben, was mit den großen Engländern von Keats an sich auf einer poetischen Ebene bewegte und andererseits mit den festen romanischen Formen zusammenhing — so wie ja die Italiener auch für diese Engländer so viel bedeutet hatten. (GrBr, p. 235–36)

It would appear, then, that in his presumed literary isolation Hofmannsthal had been contemplating a kind of poetry wholly compatible with George's alternative programme of aesthetic reform. Thus, whatever the complexities of the relationship between the two poets, their initial feeling of artistic affinity would seem to have been mutual and related to their shared belief in the regenerative potential of French and English literary models.

Although George did not introduce Hofmannsthal to alternative trends in modern European literature, he almost certainly influenced the younger man's critical engagement with English artists by directing his talents as an essayist towards the promotion of 'die andere Kunst'. According to Robert Boehringer, at the time of the poets' second meeting in May 1892 George was occupied with plans to establish a literary periodical aimed at a small, select readership and dedicated to the promotion of their common aesthetic values.<sup>39</sup> The result was the *Blätter für die Kunst* to which Hofmannsthal agreed to contribute.<sup>40</sup> However, it very soon became clear that George and his editor Carl August Klein required more than occasional collaboration, and that they would be satisfied with nothing less than absolute and unconditional loyalty to their publication and its cause.<sup>41</sup> For his part, Hofmannsthal was either unwilling or unable to work solely for the *Blätter*. His bemused response to Klein's suggestion that he should advertise the supposedly exclusive periodical is typical of the misunderstandings which blighted his association with George and his publication:

Um ein Publikum von Theilnahmslosen zu gewinnen, dazu ist aber doch dieses Heft augenscheinlich auch nicht zusammengestellt; überhaupt befremdet mich Ihr Vorschlag, in einem andern öffentlichen Blatt unser Unternehmen zu besprechen, aufs höchste. Wozu? (GrBr, p. 52)<sup>42</sup>

Later in the same letter, Hofmannsthal casually mentions his intention to publish a series of critical essays on foreign literary figures:

<sup>38</sup> Hofmannsthal to Walter Brecht, February 20 1929 (GrBr, pp. 234–36).

<sup>39</sup> GrBr, p. 246.

<sup>40</sup> For full details of Hofmannsthal's numerous contributions to the periodical, see GrBr, pp. 232–33.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, George's angry response to Hofmannsthal's literary association with Hermann Bahr. GrBr, p. 29.

<sup>42</sup> Hofmannsthal to Klein, 19 December 1892 (GrBr, pp. 51–53). The exclusiveness of the *Blätter* was clearly indicated on the title page of the periodical: 'Diese Zeitschrift im Verlag des Herausgebers hat einen geschlossenen von den Mitgliedern geladenen Leserkreis.'

Ich werde übrigens nächstens versuchen, in Tagesblättern die uns verwandten Erscheinungen fremder Litteraturen (Verlaine, Swinburne, Oscar Wilde, die Praeraphaeliten etc.) zu besprechen, dabei kommt ja ganz naturgemäß eine persönliche Stellungnahme und Andeutung eines auch in Deutschland vorhandenen Programmes heraus. (GrBr, p. 53)

Hofmannsthal's use of 'übrigens' here seems somewhat disingenuous for, given the unresolved confusion over the matter of advertising, these comments on his proposed journalistic essays look very much like a placatory gesture. Hofmannsthal is careful to emphasize that, while drawing wider attention to 'die andere Kunst' abroad, his essays will suggest the existence of a related, non-Naturalistic movement in Germany. The use of 'uns' in the above passage suggests that Klein was to understand these critical discussions as an indirect form of advertising for the literary programme of the *Blätter*. As they are presented here, then, Hofmannsthal's planned essays can be seen as a kind of compromise. In them he could promote the common cause of 'die andere Kunst' in a way which might satisfy Klein's requests for advertisements, yet which did not involve unconditional commitment to the periodical.

The first of Hofmannsthal's proposed essays was written in late 1892 and appeared in the Viennese *Deutsche Zeitung* of 5 January 1893 under the title 'Algernon Charles Swinburne'.<sup>43</sup> Only two months later the *Blätter* published its first translation from Swinburne's poetry, 'Eine Ballade vom Traumland' from the second series of *Poems and Ballads* (1878). Given the brief interval between the publication of the two pieces, one can hardly avoid seeing some degree of co-ordination between Hofmannsthal's essay and the Swinburne translation, an impression strengthened by the use of a quotation from the former in the laudatory introduction to 'Eine Ballade vom Traumland'.<sup>44</sup> In this context it should be mentioned that there has been some critical disagreement as to what exactly prompted Hofmannsthal to write his Swinburne essay. Writing in 1937, Mary E. Gilbert considered the decisive impulse to have been provided by George's Swinburne translation for the *Blätter*.<sup>45</sup> Klaus Günter Just, on the other hand, rejects Gilbert's explanation, proposing that the essay was occasioned by the British establishment's recent refusal to honour Swinburne with the title of Poet Laureate.<sup>46</sup> Of these interpretations, Just's is, at least superficially, the more persuasive, as Hofmannsthal's essay was published before the Swinburne translation in the *Blätter*, and the matter of the poet laureateship is referred to repeatedly in the course of the essay. But there is another, more compelling reason to reject Gilbert's interpretation; for, it is highly unlikely that the Swinburne translation published in March 1893 was George's work. Both Gilbert and Just attribute 'Eine Ballade vom Traumland' to George, identifying the 1893 version with that published in his later collection of translations, *Zeitgenössische Dichter* (1905). This overlooks two conspicuous facts. First, the poem published in the *Blätter* is initialled 'G. E.', and not 'S. G.' or the asterisk which were George's usual marks. Secondly, George's 1905 translation of 'Eine Ballade vom Traumland' bears little resemblance to the poem published in 1893, the style of which is markedly different from and

<sup>43</sup> Ironically it was Hermann Bahr, a writer of whom George greatly disapproved, who made it possible for Hofmannsthal and the other *Jung-Wiener* to publish in the *Deutsche Zeitung*. See Jens Rieckmann, *Aufbruch in die Moderne: Die Anfänge des Jungen Wien: Österreichische Literatur und Kritik im Fin de Siècle*, second edition (Frankfurt a.M., 1986), p. 85.

<sup>44</sup> 'Wir hoffen bald eine grössere sammlung von übertragungen dieses englischen Dichtersfürsten zur verfügung zu bekommen 'dem sie vor ein paar tagen den goldenen lorbeerkrantz nicht gegeben weil er nichts heiligeres zu thun weiss als auf dem reichen blauen meere mit wachen augen die unsterbliche furche zu suchen aus der die Göttin stieg' wie unlängst unser mitarbeiter H.v.H. sich so schön ausgesprochen.' (BfdK, I, iii, 86)

<sup>45</sup> Gilbert, p. 184.

<sup>46</sup> Just, op. cit., pp. 469-70.

quite inferior to that of George's own meticulously crafted early poetry. In fact the first translation of Swinburne's poem was the work of one Georg Edward, a relatively obscure early contributor to the periodical, who had published two of his own poems in the preceding volume of the *Blätter*.<sup>47</sup>

Whatever particular circumstances may have prompted Hofmannsthal to write his essay on Swinburne, and here Just's explanation in terms of the poet laureateship seems the more plausible, there was a more important general background to his engagement with English art and artists. As Hofmannsthal's journal entries and his letter to Klein show, his intention to write on Swinburne must be seen in the context of the alternative aesthetic he shared with George and his literary confrères. Closer examination of Hofmannsthal's essays, however, reveals another, equally important, dimension to his engagement with 'die andere Kunst'. The essays on English art cannot be read simply as propaganda for the cause of the *Blätter*. Hofmannsthal's evasive and non-committal responses to Klein show that he wanted to preserve some measure of independence in his dealings with the periodical. It is not, therefore, surprising to find that his essays are also critical reflections on latent aspects of the alternative aesthetic programme with which Hofmannsthal became increasingly uneasy during the 1890s.

Whereas George's terse, categorical 'Merkprüche' proclaim the central tenets of his poetics with characteristic single-mindedness, Hofmannsthal's critical essays explore the wider ramifications of aesthetic autonomy in a spirit which is more ambivalent than straightforwardly partisan. At the heart of these essays is a theme which, for the moment, I will naively call the relationship between art and life. In the course of the following sections I will show that this theme is considerably more problematic than the simple polar opposition for which it has frequently been taken by critics of Hofmannsthal's early work.

i) *'Algernon Charles Swinburne' (1892)*

Given its title, one might expect this essay to be concerned exclusively with Swinburne's life and work, but almost half the text is given over to the depiction of the group of modern English artists to which Swinburne is said to belong. Most of the first half of the essay presents the aesthetic sensibility of this unnamed group as radically estranged from the dominant values of what Hofmannsthal styles 'das moralische England' (RA I, p. 143). The first indication of the gulf between these English artists and their sensible, morally-minded countrymen is their belief that the essence of poetry is a certain conception of beauty, 'eine persönliche, tiefe und erregende Konzeption der Schönheit [. . .], der Schönheit an sich, der moralfremden, zweckfremden, lebensfremden [sic]' (RA I, p. 143). Although there is no explicit reference here or elsewhere in the essay to a related aesthetic programme in Germany, the notion of an ideal beauty distinct from and independent of morality, utility, and life has obvious affinities with George's anti-mimetic conception of autonomous art. These unnamed English artists can, then, be seen as representatives of that 'andere Kunst' which the *Blätter* sought to promote in Germany. The above characterization of the English artists' conception of beauty as 'lebensfremd' introduces the problematic question of the relationship between these modern artists and life. It is tempting to see this in terms of a simple art/life dichotomy, but Hofmannsthal's use of the word 'lebensfremd' highlights the fundamental ambiguity of his

<sup>47</sup> See, Georg Edward, 'Gedichte': 'Mittagstille' and 'Des Friedens Land' (BfdK I, ii, 51–52). Edward's translation of 'Eine Ballade vom Traumland' was later republished in *Deutsche Dichtung*, 32 (1902), p. 81.

position. As an attribute of 'die Schönheit an sich', the adjective has the force of emphasizing that this is an ideal beauty, distinct not only from the spheres of morality and utility but also from its particular manifestations in individual objects. However, the negative sense of 'lebensfremd' in everyday usage cannot be overlooked and inevitably suggests a depreciation of the artists' attitude. Throughout the first half of the essay, the English artists and their values are presented in polar opposition to those of life, but Hofmannsthal's use of the word 'Leben' considerably complicates the question of the art/life relationship. Far from having a single, determinate meaning, the scope of this central term varies according to the context in which it is used.<sup>48</sup> First there is the relatively straightforward sense of English public life which is implicit both in Hofmannsthal's opening comments on 'das moralische England' and in his first remarks on the matter of the poet laureateship. Hofmannsthal writes that even if there should be a great poet among this group of English artists, and here he is clearly alluding to Swinburne, it is not customary for him to be honoured with the laurels. The establishment's denial of this honour, however, is no loss to such a poet whose own inner treasure house of images more than compensates for the lack of official recognition. Indeed, the unimportance of worldly rewards for these idealistic artists is given particular emphasis by the description of the laurels as 'das schöne, goldene, altertümliche Spielzeug' (RA I, p. 143). This depreciation of the poet laureateship underlines the estrangement of Swinburne and his contemporaries from the values of English public life.

A second sense of 'Leben' is evident in the following passage which introduces another distinctive feature of the English artists' attitudes: 'Ihnen wird das Leben erst lebendig, wenn es durch irgendeine Kunst hindurchgegangen ist, Stil und Stimmung empfangen hat.' (RA I, p. 143) Here the scope of the word is more extensive, encompassing the whole range of natural phenomena. Hofmannsthal's equivocal formulation of this aspect of the elusive art/life relationship (*life* only comes *alive* through the medium of art) has marked affinities with Oscar Wilde's paradoxical contention that life imitates art.<sup>49</sup> Wilde's deliberately provocative assertion of the primacy of art over immediate experience, a central tenet of his aestheticism, is a radical inversion of the traditional mimetic relationship between art and nature. Hofmannsthal's use of this inversion to characterize the sensibility of his unnamed English artists suggests that, although not explicitly referred to as such, they too are to be seen as aesthetes for whom art is not a secondary adjunct of nature but the primary medium of all experience.

In his study of Hofmannsthal's debt to Symbolism, Thomas A. Kovach suggests that the relatively early Swinburne essay is implicitly critical of aestheticism.<sup>50</sup> This interpretation seems to me untenable. As I have pointed out, the opening paragraph of the essay contains an explicit devaluation of the institution of the poet laureateship which is entirely consistent with the spirit of the English aesthetes. More importantly, the text reveals Hofmannsthal to be at some pains to

<sup>48</sup> I am indebted to Thomas A. Kovach's study *Hofmannsthal and Symbolism: Art and Life in the Work of a Modern Poet* (New York, 1985) for drawing my attention to this point. See Kovach, pp. 119–22 (esp. footnote 29). Here Kovach identifies three distinct senses of 'Leben' in the essay. These are nature as opposed to art, chaotic everyday life as opposed to aesthetic form, and finally what he calls the vitalistic 'Dionysian' notion of life deriving from Nietzsche's 'Lebensphilosophie'. My discussion follows Kovach's rejection of conveniently narrow definitions of 'Leben', but differs significantly in the interpretation of the scope of the word.

<sup>49</sup> The formulation here echoes Oscar Wilde's critical dialogue 'The Decay of Lying', in which life is said paradoxically to imitate art. Hofmannsthal seems to have been introduced to Wilde's volume of essays and dialogues *Intentions* (1891) towards the end of 1892. In an undated letter, probably written in December of that year, he thanks Hermann Bahr for lending him *Intentions* and exclaims that it is the book for which he has been unconsciously yearning for fifteen and a half years (*Briefe I*, p. 69) – which is rather improbable, given that he was only eighteen at the time. See Eugene Weber, 'Hofmannsthal und Oscar Wilde', *Hofmannsthal Forschungen*, 1 (Basel, 1971), 99–106. Although there are a number of articles on Wilde and Hofmannsthal, the influence of the Irish aesthete on Hofmannsthal has never been adequately examined.

<sup>50</sup> Kovach, pp. 120–21.



show that the aesthetes' mediated perception of life is a perfectly natural phenomenon. Their notion of the primacy of art over life is not, he stresses, a wilful affectation but the natural product of a modern urban upbringing:

Das alles ganz natürlich, ohne Zwang und präziöse Affektation, als Menschen, die in einer riesigen Stadt aufgewachsen sind, mit riesigen Schatzhäusern der Kunst und künstlich geschmückten Wohnungen, wo kleine sensitive Kinder die Offenbarung des Lebens durch die Hand der Kunst empfangen, die Offenbarung der Frühlingsnacht aus Bildern mit mageren Bäumen und rotem Mond, die Offenbarung menschlicher Schmerzen aus der wächsernen Agonie eines Kreuzifixes, die Offenbarung der koketten und verwirrenden Schönheit aus Frauenköpfchen des Greuze auf kleinen Dosen und Bonbonnieren. (RA I, pp. 143–44)

Hofmannsthal's defence of the English aesthete against charges of affectation, preciousness, or unnaturalness may have been prompted the sustained critical mauling to which a host of non-Realist European artists, including the French Symbolists and the English Pre-Raphaelites, had recently been subjected in Max Nordau's notorious *Entartung* (1892/1893).<sup>51</sup> Conducted, as its title suggests, in terms of pathology, Nordau's uncompromisingly materialist onslaught on modern art had delivered a diagnosis of the Pre-Raphaelites as feeble-minded and affected mystics.<sup>52</sup> Seen against this background, Hofmannsthal's seemingly eccentric emphasis on the natural relationship between aestheticism and a modern urban upbringing would appear calculated to forestall such hostile critical interpretations. It seems, therefore, highly implausible that his depiction of the English artists is to be understood as a criticism of aestheticism.

In its third usage, the word 'Leben' refers generally to modern urban society in all its harshness and ugliness. Characterizing a further aspect of the English aesthetes' relationship to life, Hofmannsthal describes the metaphorical air which they breathe as resembling that of an opulent, artificially darkened room:

Die Fenster sind mit Gobelins verhängt, und hinter denen kann man einen Garten des Watteau vermuten, mit Nymphen, Springbrunnen und vergoldeten Schaukeln, oder einen dämmernden Park mit schwarzen Pappelgruppen. In Wirklichkeit aber rollt draußen das rasselnde, gellende, brutale und formlose Leben. An den Scheiben trommelt ein harter Wind, der mit Staub, Rauch und unharmonischem Lärm erfüllt ist, dem aufregenden Geschrei vieler Menschen, die am Leben leiden.  
Es herrscht ein gegenseitiges Mißtrauen und ein gewisser Mangel an Verständnis zwischen den Menschen in dem Zimmer und den Menschen auf der Straße.  
Diese Künstler kommen, wie gesagt, nicht vom Leben her: was sie schaffen, dringt nicht ins Leben. (RA I, pp. 144–45)

Kovach, perhaps not unreasonably, takes this highly stylized presentation of fugitive inwardness to imply censure, and interprets the mutual incomprehension of these closeted artists and the man on the street as a tacit criticism of aestheticism.<sup>53</sup> However, it should be noted that Hofmannsthal's description of the aesthetes' isolation is prefaced by the following qualification:

<sup>51</sup> That Hofmannsthal knew of Nordau's book at the time he was working on the Swinburne essay is clear from his letter to Klein of 19 December 1892 (GrBr, p. 52). What is also clear from this letter is that Nordau's aggressively dismissive attitude to unrealistic modern art was shared by many of Hofmannsthal's acquaintances in Vienna.

<sup>52</sup> There is, unfortunately, no modern edition of *Entartung*. An abridged version of Nordau's chapter on the Pre-Raphaelites can be found in Gisela Hönnighausen's collection *Die Präraffaeliten: Dichtung, Malerei, Ästhetik, Rezeption* (Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 356–62.

<sup>53</sup> In this context Kovach rightly points out the absence of Wildean jibes at the vulgarity of the masses (p. 120), and indicates the ambivalence of Hofmannsthal's attitude to the art/life antagonism (p. 121). What Kovach does not see is that this ambivalence is a result of Hofmannsthal's refusal explicitly to take sides with either the aesthete or the masses.

Es ist nicht unnatürlich, daß dieser Gruppe von Menschen, die zwischen phantasievollen Künstlern und sensitiven Dilettanten stehen, etwas eigentümlich Zerbrechliches, der Isolierung Bedürftiges anhaftet. (RA I, p. 144)

By providing this explanatory counterbalance to the potentially negative overtones of closeted aesthetic existence Hofmannsthal again precludes any interpretation of his attitude to aestheticism as one of unambiguous censure. Here, as throughout the first half of the essay, the depiction of the idealistic English artists and their more down-to-earth countrymen is that of two irreconcilably antagonistic value systems, neither of which is ultimately allowed to predominate.

Given these various uses of the word 'Leben' in the first part of the essay, what is one to make of Hofmannsthal's attitude to the aesthetes and their relationship to 'life'? Judged purely in terms of the essay's content, his position is perhaps best described as non-committal. For, although the English aesthetes are clearly defended from stock attacks of decadence or degeneracy, as Jens Rieckmann has pointed out, the pronoun 'wir' is conspicuously and uncharacteristically absent from the discussion.<sup>54</sup> This would suggest that, whilst generally sympathetic towards the English artists, Hofmannsthal did not wish to associate himself too closely with their views and lifestyle. There is no explicit indication of Hofmannsthal's allegiance to either of the antagonistic groups. Superficially at least, his stance is that of a neutral observer, and his presentation of the opposition of aestheticism and life in its various manifestations is balanced and non-judgemental.

Where, then, are the 'persönliche Stellungnahme und Andeutung eines auch in Deutschland vorhandenen Programms' which were mentioned in his letter to Klein? In order to answer this question one must look beyond the ostensible content of the Swinburne essay to its distinctive critical method. This is a point which has been generally overlooked by critics of Hofmannsthal's early essays who have tended to assume that the part of the essay discussed so far is about an actual group of English artists. But who, one might ask, are these unnamed artists? Kovach states that this group 'is of course the English Aesthetic Movement'.<sup>55</sup> However, closer examination of the essay shows that this cannot be assumed with such certainty. Gisa Briese-Neumann comes closer to the truth when she says that the first half of Hofmannsthal's essay presents 'seine eigene Auffassung zum (englischen) Ästhetizismus [. . .], ohne dabei die nationale Prägung dieses Phänomens hervorzuheben'.<sup>56</sup> This interpretation has the virtue of emphasizing Hofmannsthal's concern with the general phenomenon of aestheticism rather than with the details of its specifically English manifestations;<sup>57</sup> but it does not address the more important question of the manner in which this concern is articulated. It is here that the key to a proper understanding of Hofmannsthal's essays on English art lies.

In fact the English artists depicted by Hofmannsthal do not correspond to any particular historical group or movement. They do, it is true, bear a resemblance to a number of groups, but those passages of the essay which would appear to indicate the identity of this group turn out on reflection to be far from consistent. For example, Hofmannsthal's depiction of the primacy of art in the English artists' sensibility suggests these artists are to be identified with the self-conscious

<sup>54</sup> Rieckmann, p. 106. However, Rieckmann does not mention that the pronoun 'uns' appears in the section of the essay dealing directly with Swinburne. See pp. 21–22 below.

<sup>55</sup> Kovach, p. 119.

<sup>56</sup> *Ästhet – Dilettant – Narziss: Untersuchungen zur Reflexion der fin de siècle Phänomene im Frühwerk Hofmannsthal's* (Frankfurt a.M., 1985), p. 85.

<sup>57</sup> See also Briese-Neumann, pp. 85–86: 'Der erste Teil des Essays befaßt sich allgemein mit dem Wesen des Ästhetizismus.'

aesthetes of the 1880s, such as Wilde and Whistler. However, the later reference to John Ruskin as the critic around whom these artists first congregated suggest that Hofmannsthal is referring to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, an earlier generation of English artists with quite different aesthetic aims and values. But this is not all: even Ruskin, an apparently fixed point of reference in the midst of this indeterminacy, appears strangely transformed in the Swinburne essay. He is, Hofmannsthal writes,

ein genialer Mensch, der Malen gelernt hatte, um zu verstehen, wie man Leben in farbige Flecke und verschwimmende Tinten übersetzt, um dann mit berauscher Beredsamkeit aus Bildern die lebendigen Seelen der Künstler und der Dinge herauszudeuten: John Ruskin, dessen Kritik ein Nachleben, ein dithyrambisches und hellsichtiges Auflösen und Wiederschaffen ist. (RA I, p. 144)

Whatever his superficial resemblance to the historical John Ruskin, this vitalistic dilettante surely cannot be identified with the author of *Modern Painters* (1843–60), who was, it is true, a powerful rhetorician — but also an excellent draughtsman, a thoroughly moral critic, and one whose praises were addressed not to the ancient god of wine, but to the more sober deity of evangelical Christianity. The stylized Ruskin presented in the Swinburne essay is so unlike his historical counterpart that one wonders if Hofmannsthal had actually read his criticism.<sup>58</sup>

What, then, is one to make of all this? Given the indeterminacy and inaccuracy of Hofmannsthal's depiction, it is tempting to conclude that the eighteen-year-old author had simply neglected to do his homework and was writing from an incomplete knowledge of English art. If this were the case, one could say that he had simply botched his literary history, unwittingly confusing the first Pre-Raphaelites with their later compatriots and confounding Ruskin with Walter Pater. There may well be a measure of truth in this, but if so, it is of no great importance. As Briese-Neumann rightly indicates, in the first half of the essay Hofmannsthal is not primarily interested in the particular historical details of English aestheticism. I would go further still and claim that his English artists are not intended to correspond to real individuals at all. They are, rather, a conscious construction, a stylized vision of English aestheticism, composed not of factual historical information but of images drawn from late nineteenth-century avant-garde literature. The fundamental structural principle of the essay is aesthetic and not historical in any straightforward sense of the word. Whether he had read Ruskin or not, Hofmannsthal characterizes the English critic's biblical prose as dithyrambic because this accords with the Nietzschean notion of Dionysian intoxication which is used extensively later in the essay. Similarly, Hofmannsthal's stylized image of a darkened room, which represents the English artists' fugitive aestheticism, is derived not from the actual life of any English artist, but from the exquisite salons which provide the setting for Wilde's critical dialogues. These opulent aesthetic retreats owe less to William Morris's crafty interior décor than to the 'refined Thebaid' of Joris Karl Huysmans' *Des Esseintes*, the literary archetype of the decadent aesthete.<sup>59</sup> Ironically, even Hofmannsthal's stolidly practical English man in the street turns out on closer inspection to be an aesthetic construct, less a naturalistic portrait than a mosaic of stereotypic attributes received at second-hand.

<sup>58</sup> In a journal entry of 1 October 1906 Hofmannsthal remarks: 'Ruskin lesen, es muß dort viel über den Übergang vom Ästhetischen zum Sittlichen zu finden sein.' (RA III, p. 476) This strongly suggests that almost fourteen years after writing his Swinburne essay, Hofmannsthal had still not read Ruskin's work in any depth.

<sup>59</sup> The somewhat tepid English counterpart of *Des Esseintes'* febrile aestheticism is to be found in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). The novel occasionally strives to emulate the extreme cult of sensation and inwardness portrayed in Huysmans' *A Rebours* (1884) but is in comparison a pale and surprisingly moralistic imitation.

However, none of the above should be taken to imply criticism of Hofmannsthal's essay. Seen in this light, Hofmannsthal's discussion of his indeterminate group of English artists reveals itself to be a form of critical fabulation, and the self-reflexive dimension of the text becomes apparent. Like the aesthetic sensibility it depicts, Hofmannsthal's essay does not proceed from the historical facts of real life to artistic representation; rather, the critical method of the text exemplifies the aesthetic sensibility it expounds by employing a repository of artist images and topoi to construct a stylized literary history. The critical uncertainty regarding Hofmannsthal's attitude to aestheticism in the Swinburne essay is a result of an over-emphasis on the literal content of the text. If the essay is read solely as a commentary on aestheticism, one can easily overlook the fact that it is equally a product of aestheticism. Thus, it is in the method and not in the apparent matter of the essay that Hofmannsthal's 'Stellungnahme und Andeutung eines auch in Deutschland vorhandenen Programms' are to be found. By constructing a stylized history of English literature in the manner outlined, Hofmannsthal tacitly allies himself to the modern aesthetic sensibility he expounds, and it is the aestheticism of the essay itself which constitutes Hofmannsthal's indication of a comparable programme in Germany.

Hofmannsthal's introduction of the initially unnamed Swinburne towards the end of the first half of the essay moves his critical reflections onto a new level. Here the previously dual perspective on the phenomena of English life and aestheticism is replaced by a form of presentation in which the qualities and values of Swinburne's poetry predominate. Although Swinburne is presented as belonging to the group of artists discussed in the opening pages of the essay, his art is distinguished from that of his like-minded contemporaries by its distinctive content and supreme mastery of form. Whereas the works of the aesthetes are described as fragile little vessels for their refined sensibility, Swinburne's poetry, for all its superficial formal similarities, is presented as having a considerably more potent content:

Da ist unter ihnen einer, der füllt diese zierlichen und zerbrechlichen Gefäße mit so dunkelglühendem, so starkem Wein des Lebens, gepreßt aus den Trauben, aus denen rätselhaft gemischt dionysische Lust und Qual und Tanz und Wahnsinn quillt, füllt sie mit so aufwühlenden Lauten der Seele und solcher Beredsamkeit der Sinne, daß man ihn nicht länger übersehen kann. (RA I, p. 145)

The influence of Nietzsche's notion of the Dionysian, expounded at length in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (1871), is evident here in the image of wine fermented from Dionysian juices. More significant in this highly metaphorical passage, however, are the implications regarding the relationship between art and life: for the depiction of poetic content as 'Wein des Lebens' tacitly excludes the mimetic notion of art as representation. Far from providing the artist with a range of determinate empirical objects and actions for mechanical photographic reproduction, life supplies Swinburne with essentially ambivalent raw material from which the content of his poetry is organically derived. This fundamental ambivalence, also emphasized by Hofmannsthal's use of the oxymoron 'dunkelglühend' to characterize the intoxicating content of the poetry, indicates that the sense of 'Leben' in this context is considerably more wide-ranging and elusive than in the earlier part of the essay. This is a point to which I shall return in greater detail towards the end of this section.

It is also notable that although (the still unnamed) Swinburne's art is presented as surpassing that of his English peers, the relationship of its well-wrought form ('Gefäß') to its

heady content ('Wein des Lebens') remains substantially the same. The works of the group of English artists to which Swinburne is said to belong are also characterized as dainty vessels filled with a rather less intoxicating 'Empfindsamkeit'. In this image form and content are two quite distinct entities — form being the artistic heritage of the ages, and content a distinctively modern psychology. The superlative achievement of Swinburne's poetry is said to consist in its depiction of certain unspecified experiences of the modern psyche and has marked affinities with George's alternative aesthetic programme:

Er [the unnamed Swinburne] hat für die Darstellung gewisser innerer Erlebnisse eine solche pénétrance des Tones gefunden, gewissen Stimmungen eine so wunderbare Körperlichkeit, solche Sprache an alle Sinne gegeben, daß er gewissen Menschen einen feineren und reicheren Rausch geschenkt hat als irgendein anderer Dichter. (RA I, p. 145)

The emphasis on the embodiment of moods in the poetry, and the indication of synaesthesia in Swinburne's language, tacitly ally him to the aesthetic values of Poe, the French Symbolists, and George's *Blätter*.<sup>60</sup> The repeated use of 'gewiß' in the above passage simultaneously emphasizes the particularity and conceptual indeterminacy of these experiences and moods. In the final clause the adjective indicates that the intoxicating effect of Swinburne's poetry is accessible only to a small, select group of readers.

The implied exclusiveness of Swinburne's poetry becomes explicit in Hofmannsthal's explanation of the formal aspects of the English poet's work. After giving a brief but highly figurative summary of two of Swinburne's most important works, the verse drama *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865) and the first series of *Poems and Ballads* (1866), Hofmannsthal goes on to explain their artistic significance. In Swinburne's poetry the perception of life through the stylized medium of art, which was earlier presented as a natural consequence of a modern metropolitan upbringing, becomes the core of a new artistic technique. According to Hofmannsthal, although Swinburne's use of antiquated verse forms to accommodate his distinctly modern sensibility may appear to be a mere game, it must be seen as expressing a 'souveränes Stilgefühl' (RA I, p. 146). The virtuosity of his formal eclecticism is in effect a higher manifestation of the specifically modern aesthetic sensibility presented earlier in the essay. The English aesthetes can experience life intensely only through the inherited medium of art; Swinburne achieves his distinctive poetic effects by revitalizing this vast aesthetic heritage in his work. His use of recondite verse forms and allusions is said to establish the underlying mood of the poetry, in the same way that natural phenomena set the tone of popular ballads. Hofmannsthal concedes that, as an extensive knowledge of art is required to appreciate the effects of Swinburne's poetry, his work is necessarily more exclusive than the universally accessible old ballads. However, there is no hint of censure in this concession. Indeed, Hofmannsthal goes on to praise the effect of Swinburne's technique for his exclusive readership:

Es ist der raffinierte, unvergleichliche Reiz dieser Technik, daß sie uns unaufhörlich die Erinnerung an Kunstwerke weckt und daß ihr rohes Material schon stilisierte, kunstverklärte Schönheit ist [. . .] (RA I, p. 147)

The use of 'uns', which is uncharacteristic of the Swinburne essay as a whole, shows that Hofmannsthal wishes to present himself as belonging to the select few capable of appreciating

<sup>60</sup> The central role of 'Stimmung' in modern poetry was later reiterated in George's 'Merkprüche' to the *Blätter*: 'Wir wollen keine erfindung von geschichten sondern wiedergabe von stimmungen [. . .] Gedicht ist nicht wiedergabe eines gedankens sondern einer stimmung. zum ersteren genügt das gewöhnliche wort zum zweiten bedürfen wir noch auswahl klang maass und reim.' (BfDK, II, ii, 33 and 34)

these allusions. As a supreme product of a particular modern sensibility Swinburne's poetry can be appreciated properly only by those who share that sensibility.

In the final section of the essay, Hofmannsthal returns to the distinctive content of Swinburne's formally accomplished poetry which is characterized as 'eine heiße und tiefe Erotik' (RA I, p. 147). In his discussion of the Swinburne essay, Kovach fundamentally misinterprets this crucial point, remarking that 'one suspects that what these artists [the Pre-Raphaelites] worshipped was an ideal of pure beauty, rather than a flesh and blood woman'.<sup>61</sup> There are a number of objections to this reading. First, one need hardly suspect the English aesthetes of worshipping an ideal of beauty, as this is explicitly stated in the opening pages of the essay. Secondly, the notion of eroticism introduced above applies solely to the content of Swinburne's poetry; by taking this to apply equally to Swinburne's less accomplished contemporaries, Kovach confuses the work of a superlative poet with the broader modern context in which it is situated. Most importantly, however, Hofmannsthal's point here is precisely that the eroticism of Swinburne's poetry does not proceed from the love of some particular 'flesh and blood woman'; the love to which Swinburne's poetry bears witness is divine in nature — 'eine vielnamige Gottheit' (RA I, p. 147). By interpreting Hofmannsthal's comments on eroticism specifically as a depiction of a 'neo-medieval "Liebesdienst"', Kovach completely misses the thrust of the closing pages of the essay.<sup>62</sup> It should be remembered that on its first appearance Swinburne's work was roundly condemned for what was widely perceived as its morally reprehensible eroticism, and this was a contributory factor in the later refusal of the English establishment to make him Poet Laureate.<sup>63</sup> What Hofmannsthal suggests here is that the undeniable eroticism of Swinburne's poetry is immune to such ethical criticism, as it is not concerned with fleshly love as an end in itself. The point is that the erotic content of Swinburne's work is not to be understood literally; it is, rather, a mystery symbolizing the still greater mystery of life. Hofmannsthal's extended depiction of the 'vielnamige Gottheit' served by Swinburne's work shows the essentially mystical character of his eroticism:

Es ist die allbelebende Venus, die 'allnährende, allbeseelende Mutter' des Lucrez, die vergötterte Leidenschaft, die Daseinserhöherin, die durch das Blut die Seele weckt; dem Gott des Rausches verwandt, verwandt der Musik und der mystischen Begeisterung, die Apollo schenkt; sie ist das Leben und spielt auf einer wunderbaren Laute und durchdringt tote Dinge mit Saft und Sinn und Anmut; sie ist Notre dame des sept douleurs, die Lust der Qual und der Rausch der Schmerzen; sie ist in jeder Farbe und jedem Beben und jeder Glut und jedem Duft des Daseins. (RA I, p. 148)

Love here is not merely physical sexuality, it is the fundamental divine principle which unites and animates the apparent contradictions of earthly existence. The comment 'sie ist das Leben' provides the final perspective on the relationship between art and life by elevating the latter to the status of a mythical deity.

What is less immediately apparent, however, is that the names by which Hofmannsthal invokes this all-informing goddess are derived from the titles of poems by Swinburne, thus constituting a subtle form of embedded citation. Venus, of course, recurs with notorious frequency throughout Swinburne's poetry, most notably in his treatment of the Tannhäuser

<sup>61</sup> Kovach, p. 124.

<sup>62</sup> Kovach, p. 123. The introduction of neo-medievalism into Kovach's reading misrepresents Hofmannsthal's understanding of Swinburne and his peers. At no point does Hofmannsthal draw attention to the neo-medievalism which is a key feature of Pre-Raphaelite art; rather, his interpretation is framed in terms of the (critically reinterpreted) Renaissance, thus revealing the influence of Burckhardt and Nietzsche on his thought at this time.

<sup>63</sup> On the hostile critical reception of the first series of *Poems and Ballads* see Stevenson, *The Pre-Raphaelite Poets*, p. 217.

legend, 'Laus Veneris' from the first series of *Poems and Ballads*. Apart from this reference, the above passage contains less immediately obvious allusions to Swinburne: for example, to the poems 'A Ballad of Life' ('sie ist das Leben und spielt auf einer wunderbaren Laute und durchdringt tote Dinge mit Saft und Sinn und Anmut') and 'Dolores' ('sie ist Notre dame des sept douleurs, die Lust der Qual und der Rausch der Schmerzen'). Here, as in the first half of the essay, Hofmannsthal is subtly indulging in the method of composition said to be distinctive of Swinburne and his peers.<sup>64</sup>

It should also be noted that the final paragraph of 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' brings Hofmannsthal's reflections to an emphatic, if not exactly logical, conclusion:

Aber niemals sind auf dem Altar der vielnamigen Göttin kostbarere Gewürze in schöneren Schalen verbrannt worden, als von dem Mann, dem sie vor ein paar Wochen den goldenen Lorbeerkrantz nicht gegeben haben, weil er nichts Heiligeres zu tun weiß, als auf dem reichen blauen Meer mit wachen Augen die unsterbliche Furche zu suchen, aus der die Göttin stieg. (RA I, p. 148)

Whatever the earlier ambiguity and equivocation concerning Hofmannsthal's view of the art/life relationship, this brings the essay to a formally satisfying close. The above paragraph, while clearly ironic, rounds off Hofmannsthal's reflections by restating the mutual incomprehension between the English establishment and the country's greatest modern poet in Swinburnian terms. This formal closure is a recurrent feature of all of Hofmannsthal's early essays on English art. Whatever their elusiveness of conceptual meaning — and 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' is perhaps the most elusive of the three with which I am here concerned — all these essays are formally rounded off. Their message may be open to interpretation, but formally they give the reader the sense of an ending, a conclusion.

Some days after the publication of 'Algernon Charles Swinburne', Hofmannsthal sent a copy of the essay to George with the following explanation:

Heute schicke ich Ihnen einen Versuch historischer Prosa, deren gedrängte Dunkelheit Ihnen, der den Stoff beherrscht, weder störend noch unverzeihlich erscheinen wird. Hätte ich bei gleicher Plasticität etwas größere Deutlichkeit erzielen können, so wäre das für den Zweck geeigneter gewesen. (GrBr, p. 55)

It is notable that while satisfied with the (aesthetic) plasticity of his essay, Hofmannsthal regretted its lack of (discursive) clarity. These misgivings arise from the failure of the essay satisfactorily to fulfil its purpose, which was to make German readers aware of the 'andere Kunst'. It is also interesting that Hofmannsthal would not have sacrificed the plasticity of the essay for greater clarity. The ideal to which he aspired was clearly a combination of plasticity and comprehensibility. However, it is questionable if such a combination could have been achieved at all. As Hofmannsthal would appear to have been aware, the obscurity of his essay is directly related to the average German reader's knowledge, or rather lack of knowledge, of its recondite subject matter. For Hofmannsthal's essay to have served its purpose it would have had to evoke in its readers memories of works of art, and in the case of the little-known Swinburne this was impossible. The exclusiveness of Hofmannsthal's allusive critical method is

<sup>64</sup> As Klaus Günther Just points out, Hofmannsthal, the prose writer, uses the same stylistic means as Swinburne the poet. Op. cit., p. 475, footnote 33: 'Der Schluß beispielsweise setzt Elemente von Swinburnes "Hymn to Proserpine" in hymnische Prosa um.'

simultaneously the aesthetic triumph of the essay and its downfall as effective propaganda for the cause of the *Blätter*.

As Hofmannsthal indicates, if the general reader could scarcely be expected to penetrate the darkness of his allusions, George with his expert knowledge of the subject matter was an ideal reader. His disapproval of 'popular' journalism notwithstanding, George was far from disturbed by the obscurity of the essay and clearly regarded it as a contribution to his cause. His response to Hofmannsthal's letter singles out the rhapsodic tone of the essay for particular praise:

gestatten Sie flüchtigen dank für Ihren herrlichen aufsatz über Swinburne: Sie haben eine art erhabenen schwärmens über einen dichter gefunden auf das Sie und er stolz sein dürfen. (GrBr, p. 57)<sup>65</sup>

In a journal entry written in May 1891, some months before his first meeting with George, Hofmannsthal notes his misgivings regarding his critical abilities: 'Der beste Kritiker ist der, welcher nichts in ein Buch hinein und doch alles herausliest. Darum kann ich kein guter Kritiker sein.' (RA III, p. 329) In his Swinburne essay, he had found a way of reading out of and into the texts and individuals under discussion — although the balance tends more towards input.

If, as I have suggested, Hofmannsthal's essay on Swinburne was to some extent calculated to placate Carl August Klein's importunate demands for contributions to the *Blätter*, it did not fulfil its purpose. Indeed, the essay would appear to have had quite the opposite effect, as only two months after the appearance of 'Algernon Charles Swinburne', Klein was once more asking for critical articles:

wiederhole meine vor einigen monaten an Sie gerichtete anfrage und ersuche Sie Ihren nächsten artikel (und gerade einen artikel über Englisches woran wir mangel haben und den Sie bereits avisierten) ja den Blättern zukommen zu lassen [. . .] (GrBr, p. 59)<sup>66</sup>

When one considers Klein's earliest comments on the subject of critical essays for the *Blätter*, it is not surprising that, far from appeasing him, the Swinburne essay should have whetted his appetite for more articles on English art. In an undated letter to Hofmannsthal written sometime in mid-1892, Klein had specified 'von landläufigten [*sic*] kritischen essays kann keine rede sein.' (GrBr, p. 23)<sup>67</sup> In this respect 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' more than satisfied Klein's requirements, being anything but a critical essay in the commonly accepted sense of the word. What Hofmannsthal had written was a critical corollary of George's autonomous 'andere Kunst': 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' was criticism as art and as such ideal for the *Blätter*.

Klein's requests, however, went unheeded. Although Hofmannsthal continued to publish critical essays throughout the 1890s, only two short theoretical sketches, 'Bildlicher Ausdruck' (1897) and 'Dichter und Leben' (1897), would appear in the *Blätter*.<sup>68</sup> Thus, the remaining two essays on English art which I shall examine here are not as closely associated with the aims of George's publication. Nonetheless, they continue to address problems arising from the autonomous aesthetic which George and Hofmannsthal shared, most notably that of the relationship between art and life.

In the eighteen months between the publication of 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' and the composition of his essay on Pater, Hofmannsthal became increasingly concerned with the

<sup>65</sup> George to Hofmannsthal, 16 or 23 January 1893 (GrBr, pp. 56–57).

<sup>66</sup> Klein to Hofmannsthal, 9 March 1893 (GrBr, pp. 59–60).

<sup>67</sup> Klein to Hofmannsthal, between 27 June and 7 July 1892 (GrBr, 23–24).

<sup>68</sup> BfdK IV, i–ii, 13 and 14.



relationship between aesthetics and ethics. In particular, the lyrical drama *Der Tor und der Tod*, completed in April 1893, reflects a significant shift of emphasis in his treatment of the relationship between aestheticism and life, according morality a role unthinkable in the rhapsodic Swinburne essay. It is worth pausing here briefly to consider Hofmannsthal's reassessment of the mediated aesthetic sensibility in *Der Tor und der Tod*, as this has a direct bearing on the remaining essays on English art. For present purposes the following discussion can be confined to the play's revaluation of aestheticism.

*Excursus: Aestheticism Revalued: 'Der Tor und der Tod' (1893)*

*Der Tor und der Tod* takes as one of its central themes the formative education of the English aesthete in 'Algernon Charles Swinburne', which Hofmannsthal, in a journal entry of February 1893, characterized as 'sensitive Erziehung' (RA I, p. 356). The play in effect constitutes an ethical critique of the mediated sensibility arising from this education. One should not conclude, however, that Hofmannsthal wished unambiguously to dissociate himself from this sensibility. What is under scrutiny in the play is not aestheticism as such; it is, rather, its deadening effect on an individual devoid of artistic talent. The protagonist of *Der Tor und der Tod*, the fool of the title, is Claudio, a nobleman who leads an opulent and insular existence surrounded by works of art, and the scant action of the lyrical drama is set in his study which is described extensively in the prefatory stage directions.<sup>69</sup> This attention to detail is not intended to establish a naturalistic milieu, but to suggest Claudio's way of life and his attitudes. Before the first line is uttered the reader or theatre audience has an insight into the protagonist's attitude to art and, one could argue, to life. The room, decorated in neo-classical Empire Style ('Empiregeschmack', HSW III, p. 63), contains glass cases of antiquities, a dark carved gothic chest, antiquated musical instruments, and an Italian Old Master, blackened by the years. These objects all have two things in common — their great age, and the fact that they are of greater aesthetic than functional value. Before Claudio's writing desk is an easy chair ('Lehnstuhl', HSW III, p. 63), suggesting the study to be a place of leisure rather than of scholarly work. Before the protagonist takes the stage, then, the décor and contents of his room suggest him to be an art lover, antiquarian, and, it would appear, a man of leisure rather than a scholar.

With its artistic and antiquarian treasures Claudio's study bears a striking resemblance to that artificially darkened room inhabited by the English artists of 'Algernon Charles Swinburne'; it is also a miniature version of the gigantic metropolitan 'Schatzhäuser der Kunst' in which they, as sensitive children, first experienced life through the medium of art. However, whereas the English aesthete deliberately withdrew from the harsh reality of modern life, seeking refuge in beautiful interiors, in the course of *Der Tor und der Tod* Claudio's study comes to seem more prison than sanctuary. Claudio's problematic relationship to life is evident from the first lines of his elegiac opening soliloquy. Watching the setting sun from his window, he expresses intense longing for the human life he imagines outside, a life initially evoked in images of honest toil in harmony with the rhythms of nature. As the soliloquy progresses Claudio's reflections turn to the bonds of affection essential to human society. Finally, he contrasts the vital emotions, be they pleasurable or painful, of those outside his study with his own affective indifference, concluding that he has never really participated in human life. These

<sup>69</sup> All references are to *Der Tor und der Tod*, in HSW III, *Dramen I*, ed. by Götz Eberhard Hübner, Klaus-Gerhard Pott and Christoph Michel (Frankfurt a.M., 1982), pp. 61–80.

reflections reveal two important aspects of Claudio's problem. First, he is only too painfully aware of his distance from life in the natural, social, and vitalistic senses of the word; and secondly his melancholy reflections on this isolation are united by an overwhelming desire to participate in life in all three senses. Claudio may be a fool, but he is, in the words of Richard Alewyn, 'zu klug und zu aufrichtig, um sich eine Täuschung zu gestatten'.<sup>70</sup> He is a clever fool, only too well-aware of the nature of his folly.

Claudio's melancholy brooding on the intensely imagined richness of life outside his study is interrupted by the fall of darkness, and when his servant brings the lamp Claudio's thoughts turn to the study and its contents. Significantly, this change in the focus of his reflections corresponds to a change in the source of illumination. While the setting sun, the natural light source, illuminates the landscape below his window Claudio's thoughts are occupied with life in the outside world; the lamp, an artificial light, illuminates Claudio's artificial surroundings focusing his thoughts on his withdrawn aesthetic existence. Perhaps surprisingly, his attitude to the comfortable study and its choice antiquarian contents is one of disillusionment bordering on disgust:

Jetzt läßt der Lampe Glanz mich wieder sehen  
Die Rumpelkammer voller totem Tand,  
Wodurch ich doch mich einzuschleichen wähnte,  
Wenn ich den graden Weg auch nimmer fand  
In jenes Leben, das ich so ersehnte. (HSW III, p. 65)

The study, for all its opulence, seems a junk room, its contents so much dead dross, and the disgust which these lines express reveals Claudio's present predicament to be based on an earlier delusion. For it is important to recognize that the study was never intended as a place of aesthetic retreat. Claudio surrounded himself with antiquities and works of art not to escape from the world, but to mediate between himself and the life for which he longs but to which he could find no direct access.<sup>71</sup> He conceived of art not as an alternative to, but rather as a route into life, a means of mediating between his isolated existence and that distant world evoked in the melancholy opening images of his soliloquy. Of course, there is nothing in 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' to suggest that the English aesthetes seek through their art to participate in life; however, Claudio's understanding of art is substantially the same as their (Willean) sensibility, which was said to proceed not from life to art but from art to life. It is this attitude which Claudio now realizes to have been deluded.

As he reflects successively on each of the objects in his room, his feelings approach despair. Far from providing an alternative route to life, his art treasures have further estranged him from the world. He realizes not only that it is impossible for him to enter life through the medium of art, but that this deluded view of aesthetic contemplation has actually increased his distance from life: 'Ich hab mich so an Künstliches verloren, / Daß ich die Sonne sah aus toten Augen / Und nicht mehr hörte, als durch tote Ohren.' (HSW III, p. 66) Here, for the first time, the relationship between Claudio's aestheticism and his death is evident. These lines reveal him to be deadened by his aestheticism even before the figure of Death takes the stage. This interpretation is given further weight if one recalls Claudio's melancholy evocation of life at the start of the play. For all its richly sensuous language, his elegiac depiction of the sunset and

<sup>70</sup> Richard Alewyn, 'Der Tod des Ästheteten' (1944 and 1949), in Alewyn, *Über Hugo von Hofmannsthal* (Göttingen, 1958), pp. 64–77 (p. 68).

<sup>71</sup> Kovach's references to Claudio's study as a 'refuge' (pp. 113–14) overlook this crucial point.

twilit landscape is to a great extent composed of metaphors drawn from inorganic nature. In the opening lines Claudio describes a cloud formation, one of the most evanescent of natural phenomena, as being of alabaster: 'Es schwebt ein Alabasterwolkenkranz / Zuhöchst, mit grauen Schatten, goldumrandet' (HSW III, p. 63); and a few lines later the sea into which he watches the sun set is described as being of greenish crystal: 'Jetzt rückt der goldne Ball, und er versinkt / In fernster Meere grünlichem Kristall' (HSW III, p. 64). Both these images project static inorganic metaphors onto natural objects which, if not strictly animate, are essentially mutable. Another feature of this aesthetic deadening of the world is to be found in Claudio's description of the cloud formation mentioned above, in which he goes on to compare the clouds to those in the religious paintings of Old Masters: 'So malen Meister von den frühen Tagen / Die Wolken, welche die Madonna tragen' (HSW III, p. 63). Similarly, the harbour on which he looks down longingly seems to cradle its ships and their crews in 'Najadenarmen' (HSW III, p. 64). These two metaphors, drawn from high art and classical mythology respectively, exemplify Claudio's inability to experience nature and life immediately. Art, the past, and the dead world of inorganic nature are the media through which his perceptions of life must pass, and the world as depicted in his imagination becomes a beautiful but dead aestheticized image. Thus, the estranging effect of Claudio's aestheticism is not only explicitly stated in his melancholy reflections; it is exemplified in his involuntarily aestheticized perceptions of the world. Like the aesthete of 'Algernon Charles Swinburne', he can apprehend life only through the medium of art. However, unlike Swinburne and his peers, Claudio is not an artist, not even one who, like the English aesthete, occupies a position between imaginative artistry and sensitive dilettantism.<sup>72</sup> He is at best a hypersensitive dilettante, and as such temperamentally incapable of infusing his ancient art treasures with life.

When Death takes the stage, then, Claudio is already more dead than alive. As stated, he is sufficiently intelligent to realize the role of aestheticism in his agonizing estrangement. He sees that he can have no immediate access to life because art stands in his way.<sup>73</sup> He also realizes that his capacity to feel intense human emotions is destroyed both by his memory, which curses him to kill every fresh experience by comparing it to something else, and by his over-active intellect which deadens every vital emotion by giving it a name.<sup>74</sup> However, there is one aspect of his estrangement from life which remains inaccessible to his intelligence. It is symptomatic of Claudio's folly that he can understand only those facets of his problem which concern his individual relationship to life. What he cannot explain is his inability to form binding social relationships. To understand this interpersonal problem, he would have to be able to appreciate the feelings of others, but this is something of which a self-absorbed, isolated aesthete is quite incapable. Having recognized his personal folly, Claudio must wait for Death to reveal the social and ethical dimensions of his wasted existence. Only after he has been confronted with the shades of his doting mother, an abandoned lover, and a betrayed friend does Claudio recognize the full extent of his folly. It is with this increased self-knowledge that the moribund aesthete finally embraces death as the paradoxical sense of his wasted life.

<sup>72</sup> See RA I, p. 144, cited on p. 18 above.

<sup>73</sup> See Claudio's later depiction of his art treasures as voracious harpies: 'Ihr hieltet mich, ein Flatterschwarm, umstellt / Abweidend, unerbittliche Harpyen, / An frischen Quellen jedes frische Blühen . .' (HSW III, p. 66).

<sup>74</sup> 'Wenn ich von guten Gaben der Natur / Je eine Regung, einen Hauch erfuhr, / So nannte ihn mein überwacher Sinn / Unfähig des Vergessens, grell beim Namen. / Und wie dann tausende Vergleiche kamen, / War das Vertrauen, war das Glück dahin.' (HSW III, p. 65)

What is notable about *Der Tor und der Tod*, and was largely misunderstood on its first appearance, is its moral dimension.<sup>75</sup> Not surprisingly, the rich and highly allusive language of the play misled many into reading it purely as a document of its author's own aestheticism. As one critic has remarked, even Death, the supposed moral arbiter of the piece, is an aesthetic construct, whose famous self-characterization is drawn from the same mythological heritage through which Claudio is cursed to see the world:<sup>76</sup> 'Ich bin nicht schauerlich, bin kein Gerippe! / Aus des Dionysos, der Venus Sippe, / Ein großer Gott der Seele steht vor dir' (HSW III, p. 70). Does this seeming paradox imply that Hofmannsthal was himself suffering from Claudio's malaise? No; or, rather, only if the intention of *Der Tor und der Tod* is understood to be the outright condemnation of aestheticism. However, the play is not quite that simple. For what is under scrutiny in the character of Claudio is not aestheticism as such; it is, rather, aestheticism as a philosophy of life. Claudio and his creator have realized that there is no route through art into life, and only if Hofmannsthal were attempting to pursue such a route in his play would he be guilty of his protagonist's folly. But the aestheticized language of *Der Tor und der Tod* attempts neither to break through to nor to reflect life — this is no stylized documentary drama. It is, rather, an artefact, a highly crafted work of art, and, as Hofmannsthal had made clear in 'Algernon Charles Swinburne', in the aesthetic realm Claudio's sensibility can produce poetic works of greatness and vitality. However, not everyone is gifted with Swinburne's superlative poetic talent — nor, for that matter, with Hofmannsthal's — and the play shows that what may be legitimate for a consummate artist is death for one who, like Claudio, lacks artistic ability. The aesthetic triumph of Swinburne's and Hofmannsthal's poetry is, as a philosophy of life, mere folly.

As I have shown, the extreme art/life polarization which structures the first half of 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' effectively excludes any moral dimension from the discussion of aestheticism. Hofmannsthal's dissatisfaction with this impasse is evident both in *Der Tor und Tod* and in his journal entries for 1893–94 in which he returns repeatedly to the questions of aestheticism and morality. The change in his position is most clearly expressed in a gnomic comment dating from mid-1893: 'Ästhetismus. Die Grundlage des Ästhetischen ist Sittlichkeit' (RA III, p. 362). Throughout this chapter I have, for the sake of clarity, referred to Claudio and Hofmannsthal's modern English artists as 'aesthetes'. Here, for the first time, their shared sensibility is given a name — 'Ästhetismus', Hofmannsthal's direct translation of the French term 'esthétisme'.<sup>77</sup> Almost a year after this journal entry, in June 1894, the month in which he was working on the Pater essay and in which 'Über moderne englische Malerei' was published, Hofmannsthal noted the following thoughts on the phenomenon of English aestheticism:

<sup>75</sup> One of the few to recognize the moral concerns of Hofmannsthal's early work was Hermann Bahr. In 'Das junge Österreich', *Studien zur Kritik der Moderne* (1894), he remarks: 'Bei uns ist Loris der Einzige, der immer von moralischen Fragen handelt.' See Bahr, *Zur Überwindung des Naturalismus: Theoretische Schriften 1887–1904*, selected, introduced and annotated by Gotthart Wunberg (Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne, Mainz, 1968), p. 151.

<sup>76</sup> Hinrich C. Seeba, *Kritik des ästhetischen Menschen. Hermeneutik und Moral in Hofmannsthals 'Der Tor und der Tod'* (Bad Homburg, Berlin, 1970), p. 164: 'Hofmannsthal's Death of the Ancients who sets himself up as a moral arbiter over Claudio's past life of aestheticism and empty belletristic pursuits is himself [...] a literary death.' Quoted (in English) in Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler's 'Decadence and Antiquity: the Educational Preconditions of Jung-Wien', in Erika Nielsen (ed.), *Focus on Vienna 1900: Change and Continuity in Literature, Music, Art and Intellectual History* (Munich, 1982), p. 39.

<sup>77</sup> Briese-Neumann offers an ingenious but unconvincing explanation of Hofmannsthal's idiosyncratic use of the term 'Ästhetismus', contending that it refers specifically to the turn-of-the-century mode of aestheticism (op. cit., p. 68, footnote 31). Given that aestheticism was essentially a late nineteenth-century phenomenon, this differentiation seems rather implausible. Furthermore, although occasionally used by Hermann Bahr, in 1893 the now common word 'Ästhetizismus' had not yet become established in German usage, appearing neither in dictionaries nor *Konversationslexika* of the period. Thus, Hofmannsthal could not, as Briese-Neumann implies, have departed from common usage in order to draw semantic distinctions. A more plausible explanation is that, in lieu of an accepted German expression, Hofmannsthal simply coined his own term on the model of 'esthétisme' which had become established around 1881.

Englischer Ästhetismus als Element unserer Kultur. I. Erstes Entgegenreten: als Sonderbarkeit, wohl etwa Affektation, Kostümtragen etc. II. Oscar Wilde, 'Intentions': starker narkotischer Zauber, sophistisch verführerisch, unelegant paradoxal, Reaktion gegen englischen Utilitarismus. III. Ruskin, Pater, Madox Brown, Rossetti, Burne-Jones — die tiefen Zusammenhänge mit Seelenleben; das ganze als Versuch einer inneren Kultur. (RA III, p. 386)<sup>78</sup>

The highly ambivalent characterization of Wilde's *Intentions* shows that, whatever its initial appeal, Hofmannsthal had come to regard the volume as dangerously misleading. This change in attitude indicates Hofmannsthal's growing misgivings concerning the cultural effects of aestheticism — misgivings primarily motivated by moral considerations. Again, however, this should not be taken as undifferentiated rejection. If Hofmannsthal was obviously becoming suspicious of what he regarded as Wilde's seductive sophistry, it is equally clear from the above remarks that he regarded Wilde as quite distinct from other currents in English aestheticism. His third set of comments shows that Hofmannsthal was still prepared to recognize the contributions of English artists like Pater and Burne-Jones as serious attempts to develop an inner (psychological) form of culture.

Hofmannsthal's work of this period shows that he was attempting, not always successfully, to reconcile aestheticism with the claims of culture and morality, and the essays 'Walter Pater' and 'Über moderne englische Malerei' can be properly understood only if this significant shift in emphasis is appreciated, as both are centrally concerned with redefining and demarcating aestheticism.

ii) 'Walter Pater' (1894)

This essay and 'Über moderne englische Malerei' are roughly contemporaneous, and both bear witness to Hofmannsthal's qualified admiration for Pater's aesthetic criticism. As Robert Vilain has pointed out, Hofmannsthal already knew of Walter Pater as early as December 1892, but his engagement with the English critic's work only began in January 1894 when he borrowed *The Renaissance* and *Imaginary Portraits* from Elsa Bruckmann-Cantacuzène.<sup>79</sup> 'Walter Pater' was published in *Die Zeit* (Vienna) on 17 November 1894 under the unlikely pseudonym of Archibald O' Hagan B. A. — Old Rookery, Herfordshire [*sic*]. The discussion covers three of Pater's major publications: the idiosyncratic and controversial volume of critical essays *The Renaissance* (1873), the generically anomalous *Imaginary Portraits* (1887), and the philosophical/historical novel *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). Each of these texts provides Hofmannsthal with a point of departure for a series of interrelated reflections on the nature of criticism and aestheticism. The stylistic differences between the Pater essay and that on Swinburne are immediately apparent. Whereas the Swinburne essay simultaneously expounds and embodies the achievements of a specifically modern aesthetic sensibility, 'Walter Pater' presents what is for the most part a considerably more sober, and not altogether uncritical,

<sup>78</sup> I cannot agree with Michael Hamburger's laudatory interpretation of Hofmannsthal's comments on the relationship between Wilde's *Intentions* and utilitarianism in this passage. Hamburger interprets this as an indication that 'even at the age of twenty he [Hofmannsthal] had a sharp eye for political and cultural realities.' See Hamburger, 'Hofmannsthal and England', in *Hofmannsthal: Studies in Commemoration*, ed. by F. Norman (London, 1963), pp. 11–28 (p. 13). Apart from the fact that the utilitarian Englishman was a common nineteenth-century stereotype, this supposedly acute cultural insight could have been drawn directly from Wilde's critical dialogues which continually rail against the practical spirit of the age.

<sup>79</sup> See Robert Vilain, "'Wer lügt macht schlechte Metaphern': Hofmannsthal's 'Manche freilich . . .' and Walter Pater", *DVLG*, 65 (1991), Heft 4, 717–54; esp. pp. 730–31, and footnote 21 which gives bibliographical details of Hofmannsthal's copies of Pater's work. Having read Wilde's *Intentions* in late 1892, Hofmannsthal would have been aware of Pater who is referred to repeatedly in both 'The Decay of Lying' and 'The Critic as Artist'.

account of the nature and scope of that sensibility. In comparison with the concentrated Dionysian exuberance of the earlier essay, Hofmannsthal's discussion of Pater appears restrained and at times almost discursive in style.

However, if 'Walter Pater' reflects important changes in Hofmannsthal's evaluation of aestheticism, his account of the phenomenon in the essay is in many key respects similar to that developed in his depiction of Swinburne and the English aesthetes. Here, as in the earlier essay, Hofmannsthal's attention is directed more to the methods of his chosen author than to biography or the actual content of his works, and the discussion of Pater further develops a notion hinted at in his earlier remarks on the critic Ruskin's role as the initial rallying point for the English aesthetes: namely, the intimate relationship between criticism and aestheticism.

As the author of *The Renaissance*, Pater is presented as a critic of superlative abilities whose distinctive achievements are his revitalization of historical figures and epochs, and his unparalleled comprehension of the relationship between artists and life.<sup>80</sup> Hofmannsthal's formulation of this last point — 'Die Art, wie Künstler im Leben stehen, ist nie so begriffen und dargestellt worden, auch nicht von Goethe' (RA I, p. 194) — contrasts sharply with his earlier stylized depiction of the English aesthetes' radical estrangement from life. Artists, too, participate in life, but in a manner quite different from that of their non-artistic fellows, the "Menschen im Leben" (RA I, p. 194). Hofmannsthal's use of inverted commas here makes it clear that while retaining the commonly accepted art/life distinction he does not wish it to be understood in a rigidly exclusive sense.

According to Hofmannsthal, the essays of *The Renaissance* reveal Pater to be 'der sehr seltene geborene Versteher des Künstlers, ein Kritiker notwendigerweise und aus dem Willen der Natur. Er ist in den Künstler verliebt, wie dieser ins Leben' (RA I, p. 194). Although the wording is Hofmannsthal's own, this presentation of criticism as an innate ability accords with Pater's insistence that the aesthetic critic is distinguished by personal 'temperament' rather than by the possession of an abstract conceptual definition of beauty.<sup>81</sup> It is also notable that in 'Walter Pater', as in 'Algernon Charles Swinburne', nature is invoked to legitimize the artist under discussion. Here Hofmannsthal's understanding of the essentially erotic relationship which was said to obtain between the artist and the mystery life in the closing section of the Swinburne essay remains unchanged. What is notable in the above quotation is that the same erotic relationship applies between the critic and the artist. It is the critic's task to understand the mysterious quasi-erotic processes whereby the artist achieves symbolic expression in his work:

Die geheimnisvollen, nur dem Leben der Liebe vergleichbaren Vorgänge, wie die Seele des Künstlers sich in symbolischen, dem begrifflichen Ausdruck entzogenen Ideen zu äußern strebt und diese Ideen wieder in dunklem Drange ihren symbolischen Ausdruck dem äußeren Leben entnehmen, diese Vorgänge erfassen, heißt der Idee des Künstlers am nächsten kommen. (RA I, p. 194)

Hofmannsthal's 'Idee des Künstlers' can be seen as corresponding to Pater's notion of the particular 'virtues' of artists and their work, by which he means not their moral qualities, but

<sup>80</sup> If Hofmannsthal was beginning to distance himself from Wilde's narcotic aestheticism, he had not fallen into what the latter flippantly called 'careless habits of accuracy' ('The Decay of Lying', p. 912). Hofmannsthal refers to Pater's volume as 'Die Renaissance, zehn Studien' (RA I, p. 194); its original title was in fact *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. As this was felt to be an inaccurate reflection of the content of his impressionistic essays Pater changed the title of the second edition (1877) to *The Renaissance; Studies in Art and Poetry*. See Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. with an introduction by Adam Phillips (Oxford, 1986), pp. x–xi.

<sup>81</sup> See *The Renaissance*, 'Preface', p. xxx.

rather their distinctive active principles, 'the property each has of affecting one with a special, or unique impression of pleasure'.<sup>82</sup> By discriminating the distinctive pleasurable virtues of a particular artist's work (characteristic themes, images, etc) and strictly distinguishing these from what Pater calls 'débris', the critic arrives at an unsullied understanding of that artist's particular essence. Hofmannsthal noticeably ignores the Epicurean emphasis on pleasure which is fundamental to Pater's subject-centred impressionistic criticism, concentrating rather on the critic's ability to evoke a revitalized ideal image of the artist from the isolated distinctive features of his art. According to Hofmannsthal, the critic's intuitive grasp of a particular artist's essential nature enables him to envisage the whole character of that artist from even the most minute biographical or artistic detail. This, then, is the essence of criticism as practised by Pater in *The Renaissance*: the critic proceeds from his strong impression of some isolated distinctive feature of a work of art to an imaginative vision of the harmonious totality of which it is a part:

Es handelt sich darum, aus dem verirrtten Bruchstück durch eine große Anspannung der Phantasie für einen Augenblick eine Vision dieser fremden Welt hervorzurufen, im Leser hervorzurufen: wer das kann und dieser großen Anspannung und Verdichtung der reproduzierenden Phantasie fähig ist, wird ein großer Kritiker sein. Er wird gleichzeitig sehr gerecht und sehr nachgiebig sein, denn er wird jedes Kunstwerk an einem Ideal messen, aber an dem subjektiven, aus der Persönlichkeit des Künstlers geschöpften Ideal, und er wird die Schönheit von allem spüren, was in Wahrhaftigkeit empfangen und geboren ist. (RA I, p. 195)

What is notable here is that the critical faculty is not reason or historical sense but imagination, and this, together with Hofmannsthal's earlier remarks on the erotic relationship between critic and artist, brings criticism into the sphere of art. In the above passage the formulation is Hofmannsthal's, but the central thought corresponds broadly to Pater's atomistic understanding of perception as a fragmented series of fleeting moments, and to his comments on the ideality of art in the essay 'The School of Giorgione':

Now it is part of the ideality of the highest sort of dramatic poetry, that it presents us with a kind of profoundly significant and animated instants, a mere gesture, a look, a smile, perhaps — some brief and wholly concrete moment — into which, however, all the motives, all the interests and effects of a long history, have condensed themselves, and which seem to absorb past and future in an intense consciousness of the present.<sup>83</sup>

This is only one of numerous self-referential passages in *The Renaissance* in which Pater, while superficially appearing to give a general account of art, offers an oblique commentary on his own critical procedure.<sup>84</sup> Hofmannsthal would appear to have appreciated the applicability of the notion of 'significant instants' (i.e. 'Bruchstücke') to Pater's critical method and to have extended the notion further to characterize the critic as such.

Quite independently of its appropriateness as an explanation of Pater's actual method, Hofmannsthal's presentation of great criticism as essentially visionary and imaginative can be seen as an explicit statement and retrospective justification of his own critical approach in the Swinburne essay. As I have shown, 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' is not a critical essay in the commonly accepted sense of the word, but rather an imaginative evocation of Swinburne and his like-minded compatriots, a work of criticism as art. In terms of the notion of criticism set out above, Hofmannsthal's selective use of distinctive images from Swinburne's poetry to construct

<sup>82</sup> *The Renaissance*, loc. cit.

<sup>83</sup> *The Renaissance*, p. 95. Vilain characterizes these significant fragments as "epiphanic" moments' (p. 733).

<sup>84</sup> On this self-referential aspect of *The Renaissance* see the editor's introduction, p. vii.

a vision of the poet can be seen as calculated both to suggest the ideal totality of the poet's aesthetic world and to establish the individual ideal by which his work is to be judged. The subject of 'Algernon Charles Swinburne', then, is not the historical person of that name, but rather the 'essential' Swinburne, an ideal poet defined solely by his aesthetic 'virtues' and stripped of all accidental 'débris'. To this extent, Hofmannsthal's unreserved praise of *The Renaissance* is also an implicit vindication of his own critical methods.

For Hofmannsthal, the excellence of *The Renaissance* consists in its attempt to illuminate the lives of real, historical artists; the short stories in Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* are interpreted as an application of the same visionary critical temperament to the presentation of fictional characters. Each of the stories presents the life (and death) of a fictitious artist, thinker, or lover of art. Typically, Hofmannsthal is more interested in expounding the method of the four essayistic tales in the volume than in analysing their content. The method of *Imaginary Portraits* is presented as being essentially the same as that of *The Renaissance*. In their use of the critical temperament to create rounded fictitious representatives of historical periods, Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* are said to represent the consummation of a more general modern tendency:

In diesen imaginären Porträts ist etwas zur Vollendung getrieben, womit wir alle uns in einer fast ungesunden Weise häufig im kleinen abgeben: aus den hinterlassenen Kunstwerken einer Epoche ihr Seelenleben bis zum Spüren deutlich zu erraten. Wir sind fast alle in der einen oder anderen Weise in eine durch das Medium der Künste angeschaute, stilisierte Vergangenheit verliebt. Es ist dies sozusagen unsere Art, in ideales, wenigstens in idealisiertes Leben verliebt zu sein. Das ist Ästhetismus, in England ein großes, berühmtes Wort, im allgemeinen ein übernährtes und überwachsenes Element unserer Kultur und gefährlich wie Opium. (RA I, pp. 195–96)

This is yet another expression of the mediated aesthetic sensibility which was expounded in the first half of the Swinburne essay and subjected to further scrutiny in *Der Tor und der Tod*. Here, however, Hofmannsthal's growing reservations concerning the potentially damaging influence of aestheticism on modern culture are evident, both in the ambivalent characterization of this tendency as almost unhealthy, and in the comparison of the dangers of aestheticism with those of opium which recalls the reference in his journal to Wilde's 'narkotischem Zauber'.

It should be noted that the above passage effectively identifies criticism as outlined in the presentation of *The Renaissance* with aestheticism, thereby subtly shifting the focus of the essay. However, this is not intended to imply that criticism is necessarily blighted. Hofmannsthal makes it clear that, whatever the wider cultural dangers of the aesthete's love of a past glimpsed through the stylized medium of art, it is the basic function of the critic to revitalize the past:

Immerhin ist dergleichen die Grundfunktion des Kritikers, und an der Vergangenheit darf sich ihm entzünden, um in die Gegenwart hineinzuleuchten: nur eben ist im Gesamten das Kritische selber eine untergeordnete Funktion. (RA I, p. 196)

This passage is the key to understanding Hofmannsthal's differentiated position *vis-à-vis* aestheticism in the Pater essay. In modern culture generally aestheticism is a potentially addictive and debilitating phenomenon; nonetheless, it remains the legitimate basis of great art criticism. The important point here is that criticism, if a natural complement to art, has a subordinate function in life as whole. This is further emphasized by Hofmannsthal's contention that the *Imaginary Portraits* show the scope of Pater's consummate critical talents to be strictly and necessarily limited to the rounded depiction of 'ästhetischen Menschen' (RA I, p. 196); that is, to the depiction of individuals whose lives are lived according to aesthetic standards of



imagination and beauty. Indeed, Hofmannsthal goes still further, stating that the critic is constitutionally incapable of comprehending anything but such aesthetic individuals: 'Künstler oder dem Künstler sehr nahestehende Dilettanten kann der Kritiker als ein Ganzes erfassen und suggestiv herausbringen. Alles andere entgeht ihm' (RA I, p. 196). Aestheticism, then, is questionable to the extent that it exerts a disproportionate influence on modern culture generally. In the limited sphere of aesthetic criticism and fictitious aesthetic biography, such as Pater's *Imaginary Portraits*, it is not only permissible but essential.

If Hofmannsthal's interpretations of *The Renaissance* and *Imaginary Portraits* present the strengths of aestheticism as a critical procedure, the concluding discussion of *Marius the Epicurean* elaborates on his reservations concerning the pernicious effects of aestheticism applied beyond its limited sphere. Pater's philosophical novel is said to demonstrate 'die Unzulänglichkeit, sobald man auf der ästhetischen Weltanschauung die ganze Lebensführung aufbauen wollte' (RA I, p. 196). In addition to this supposed inadequacy, Hofmannsthal cites the novel's lack of humanity, its conscious one-sidedness, and excessively systematic exposition as factors which create an overall impression of barrenness.

It is worth pausing at this point to consider just what Hofmannsthal is criticizing in Pater's novel. Robert Vilain contends that the object of Hofmannsthal's censure is the novel's 'lack of human depth and its programmatic approach to depicting the inadequacies of aestheticism'.<sup>85</sup> Vilain, whose knowledge of Pater's work is extensive and detailed, clearly believes that Hofmannsthal is presenting *Marius* as a deliberate, but stylistically flawed, critique of aestheticism — an interpretation which would accord with the highly ambivalent presentation of Epicureanism in the novel. However, it seems to me that Vilain has been led astray here, both by his own impeccable close reading of Pater and by his estimation of Hofmannsthal's critical acumen.<sup>86</sup> For if one examines the text of 'Walter Pater', it becomes clear that *Marius* is presented not as a flawed depiction of the inadequacies of aestheticism, but rather as itself an unintentional example of the inadequacy of the aesthetic (i.e. critical) mode of perception as a basis for life.

Hofmannsthal's stark summary of the intellectually complex novel as 'die Geschichte eines jungen Römers der hadrianischen Zeit, der sein Leben auf einen sehr feinen und komplizierten Epikureismus gestellt hat' (RA I, p. 196), is directly followed by the sentence: 'Aber das Leben ist doch viel gewaltiger, größer und unsäglicher, und das Buch macht einen dürftigen Eindruck, so sehr aus zweiter Hand wie Marginalglossen zu einem toten Text.' (RA I, pp. 196–97: my emphasis) The 'und' here is crucial, as it indicates that the feeble impression made by Pater's novel arises directly from its presentation of aestheticism (i.e. Epicureanism) as a philosophical basis for life. It is not, then, Pater's 'approach to depicting the inadequacies of aestheticism' to which Hofmannsthal takes exception, but rather what he sees as the critic's misguided attempt systematically to present the essentially limited critical mode of perception as a philosophy of life. Does this questionable interpretation of *Marius* mean that Hofmannsthal the critic had simply got things wrong? Only, I would contend, if one insists on reading his essay as being primarily about Walter Pater. As my discussion of 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' should have suggested, to judge Hofmannsthal's critical practice by standards of factual accuracy is

<sup>85</sup> Vilain, p. 740. My emphasis.

<sup>86</sup> In his discussion of Hofmannsthal's reception of Pater's notorious depiction of the *Mona Lisa*, Vilain revealingly comments: 'There is no reason to assume in Hofmannsthal a lesser capacity for interpretative discrimination than in Hough or Yeats' (p. 738). No reason, that is, if one assumes all three to have been engaged in the same kind of criticism.

fundamentally misguided. In 'Walter Pater' the cursory plot summary of a subtle and highly complex novel of ideas would suggest that Hofmannsthal is once more indulging in that kind of critical fabulation which I outlined earlier in this chapter. His scant summary of *Marius*, while wholly inadequate from the point of view of academic criticism, functions perfectly as the starting point for Hofmannsthal's further reflections on the nature of aestheticism. One could say that he is here employing the critical procedure presented in his discussion of *The Renaissance* and *Imaginary Portraits*. The final page of the essay shows the brief summary of *Marius* to function as the significant fragment ('Bruchstück') from which Hofmannsthal imaginatively conjures up a greater whole, in this case the charm and inadequacies of modern aestheticism.

If Pater's novel unwittingly reveals the inadequacy of aestheticism as a philosophy of life, it also shows the great appeal of aestheticism in its own, peripheral sphere: 'So erweist sich in der Hauptsache die Unzulänglichkeit des Ästhetismus (hier = Epikureismus), in Nebensachen sein großer Zauber.' (RA I, p. 197) Pater's Epicurean aestheticism may be inadequate in the face of the vastness and ineffability of life as a whole, but nonetheless the setting of his novel holds a powerful attraction for a generation imaginatively enthralled by the declining Roman Empire. It is noticeable that in his characterization of this wider appeal of Imperial Rome Hofmannsthal simultaneously identifies himself with and distances himself from the enthusiasm of his contemporaries: 'In einem gewissen halbreifen Alter voll Sehnsucht und Raffiniertheit hat unser aller Phantasie sich einmal an dem Rom der Verfallzeit wollüstig festgesogen' (RA I, p. 197). This shows that whilst acknowledging the general fascination of the Roman Empire, Hofmannsthal wishes it to be understood as an immature phase — and one which, by implication, he has outgrown.

The highly stylized depiction of the inhabitants of Rome in decline with which the essay culminates is particularly remarkable:

So ähnlich mit uns selber kamen sie uns vor, wie sie da vor sich hinlebten, nicht ganz wahr und doch sehr geistreich und sehr schön, von einer morbiden Narcissus-Schönheit, allem Gleichnishaften zugetan und in einer etwas manierten Skepsis; frauenhaft und knabenhaft und greisenhaft und vibrierend vor tiefen Spuren der Schönheit, jeder Schönheit, der Schönheit sanftschwellender Vasen und der Schönheit klippiger Felsen, der Schönheit des Antinous, der Schönheit des Sterbens, des Totseins, der Blumen, der Göttin Isis, der Schönheit der großen Kurtisanen, der Schönheit der untergehenden Sonne, der christlichen Märtyrer, der Schönheit der Psyche, der weinenden wandelnden, naiv-perversen kleinen Psyche aus dem 'Goldenen Esel', jeder Schönheit, nur nicht der einen großen, unsäglichen des Daseins; denn die ist schwachen Geschlechtern verborgen. (RA I, p. 197)

In its style and enumeration of beautiful objects, some of which are drawn from *Marius*, this passage differs considerably from the rest of the essay and recalls the earlier rhapsodic depiction of Swinburne.<sup>87</sup> However, whereas the heady products of Swinburne's passionate eroticism are celebrated as a singular triumph of the modern aesthetic sensibility, the alluring Roman cult of beauty which provides the historical backdrop for Pater's novel is revealed to be a symptom of cultural malaise. Far from indicating a wealth of diverse aesthetic sensations, the hypnotic repetition of the word 'Schönheit' in the above passage serves to emphasize the fragmentary nature of the Roman perception of beauty and its modern correlative. Thus, whatever the

<sup>87</sup> Hofmannsthal's reference to Psyche probably derives from Chapter V of *Marius*, 'The Golden Book', in which the protagonist is introduced to Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*. See also Chapter VI, 'Euphuism' for Marius' meditations on the story of Cupid and Psyche.

apparent stylistic similarities between the concluding sections of the two essays, in 'Walter Pater' Hofmannsthal employs seductive critical fabulation to the end of unmasking the disintegrative tendency of aestheticism as a perspective on life as a whole.

It should also be mentioned that these reflections on *Marius* contain an unmistakable suggestion of cultural decadence. One must be cautious when applying this term to the work and thought of Hofmannsthal and George, as both were reluctant to use the word 'dekadent' to describe their own writings.<sup>88</sup> This reluctance is understandable when one considers that in mainstream German literary criticism of the 1890s the term was commonly used as a pejorative label for French Symbolism.<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, Hofmannsthal's reference to the period of Rome's decline as the 'Verfallzeit' inevitably introduces the notion of decay, and the identification of late nineteenth-century aesthetes with the generic weakness of that period would imply that they, too, are decadent.

To sum up: this essay, while ostensibly concerned with the work of Walter Pater, is primarily a reflection on the nature and scope of criticism and aestheticism. Having extrapolated an ideal of criticism from *The Renaissance*, Hofmannsthal goes on to show that criticism in this sense is identical with aestheticism. The discussion of *Imaginary Portraits* makes it clear that the scope of criticism/aestheticism is strictly limited to the realm of art and suggests the possible cultural dangers of applying this essentially aesthetic point of view beyond its proper sphere. In keeping with his account of Pater's exemplary criticism, Hofmannsthal's critique of *Marius* uses a radically simplified summary of the novel as the point of departure for an extended and highly stylized demonstration of the inadequacies of aestheticism as a philosophy of life. The irony of this closing section is that, like *Der Tor und der Tod*, it effectively employs aestheticism to undermine itself. While still recognizing the strength of aestheticism as a critical temperament, 'Walter Pater' is centrally concerned with restricting its scope. As a whole, the essay can be seen as a differentiated reflection on the related themes of 'Englischer Ästhetismus als Element unserer Kultur' and the dangerous narcotic charm of aestheticism for Hofmannsthal and his contemporaries.

iii) 'Über moderne englische Malerei: Rückblick auf die internationale Ausstellung in Wien 1894'

As mentioned above, although this essay was published some five months before 'Walter Pater', both were written at roughly the same time during the summer of 1894.<sup>90</sup> The subject of 'Über moderne englische Malerei' is Pre-Raphaelitism in the graphic arts, and it is perhaps surprising to find that the essay seeks to demonstrate and praise the fundamentally ethical nature of the Pre-Raphaelites' work. As Pre-Raphaelitism is commonly identified with English aestheticism, Hofmannsthal's critical project in this essay would appear to stand in marked contrast to his often ambivalent, yet ultimately critical, analysis of Pater's aestheticism and its wider cultural implications.<sup>91</sup> However, if seen in the light of his journal entry on English aestheticism of June 1894, quoted earlier in this chapter, Hofmannsthal's seeming volte-face turns out to be less

<sup>88</sup> See p. 10, footnote 25 above.

<sup>89</sup> On the confusion surrounding the term 'dekadent' in German literary criticism of the period, see Gsteiger, pp. 36, 66, 79, 128–29. Gsteiger's discussion shows that the pejorative identification of Symbolism with decadence which persisted throughout the 1890s arose partly from German critics' lack of knowledge of French literature and partly from ideological (i.e. anti-French) bias. This being said a few minor Viennese poets, such as Felix Dörmann, deliberately styled themselves decadents.

<sup>90</sup> 'Über moderne englische Malerei' was first published in the *Neue Revue (Wiener Literatur-Zeitung)* of 13 June 1894.

<sup>91</sup> Penrith Goff, for example, characterizes 'Über moderne englische Malerei' as 'an attempt to demonstrate morality in the painting of the Pre-Raphaelites' and regards Hofmannsthal's defence of their artificiality as 'dubious'. 'Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Walter Pater', *CLS*, 7 (1971), 1–11 (p. 2). See p. 41 below.

radical than it might at first appear. It will be remembered that in the third of his reflections under the heading of 'Englischer Ästhetismus als Element unserer Kultur', Hofmannsthal writes: 'Ruskin, Pater, Madox Brown, Rossetti, Burne-Jones — die tiefen Zusammenhänge mit Seelenleben; das ganze als Versuch einer inneren Kultur.' (RA III, p. 386) From this brief entry it is evident that, while calling into question the cultural implications of Wilde's narcotic aesthetic criticism, Hofmannsthal was nonetheless prepared to acknowledge the more serious attempts of other English artists and critics to create a specific form of culture attuned to the inner life. The mixture of glowing praise and forthright censure in 'Walter Pater' shows that this acknowledgement was by no means uncritical: Hofmannsthal can extol Pater's superlative achievements as an aesthetic critic while condemning his supposed advocacy of aestheticism as a philosophy of life in *Marius*. As the work of the Pre-Raphaelites confines aestheticism to its proper sphere, it is immune to the censure directed at Pater's novel. Hofmannsthal's apparently incongruous praise of the ethical dimension in Pre-Raphaelite painting is thus quite consistent with his differentiated attitude to the phenomenon of aestheticism. Furthermore, the emphasis on the ethical in 'Über moderne englische Malerei' can be seen as a development of his earlier, more general, journal entry: 'Ästhetismus. Die Grundlage des Ästhetischen ist Sittlichkeit.' (RA III, p. 362) An adequate interpretation of 'Über moderne englische Malerei' must address the question of what Hofmannsthal means by morality, and I will examine this problematic point in the further course of this analysis.

As its subtitle indicates, 'Über moderne englische Malerei' is a retrospective review of the 1894 International Art Exhibition in Vienna. Hofmannsthal had discussed this exhibition some two months earlier in a series of three reviews now collected under the title of 'Internationale Kunst-Ausstellung 1894' (RA I, pp. 534–45).<sup>92</sup> In the first of these articles Hofmannsthal, while praising the work of those English artists on display at the exhibition, had expressed his disappointment at the absence of what he considered the most remarkable Pre-Raphaelite work: that of Edward Burne-Jones, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and G. F. Watts.<sup>93</sup> It would appear that this was an oversight on Hofmannsthal's part, as his wide-ranging reflections in 'Über moderne englische Malerei' take as their point of departure thirty photogravure reproductions of paintings by Burne-Jones which he had apparently overlooked on his earlier visits to the exhibition.<sup>94</sup> Hofmannsthal is quick to point out that the particularly intense effect of these pictures on the imagination and understanding of the general viewer was not significantly diminished by their being reproduced in monochrome, explaining that their effect was evoked by features from which the absence of colour could not detract: namely line, facial expression, and symbolism.

Hofmannsthal then goes on briefly to describe the world, figures, and beings of Burne-Jones's remarkable work. Here the use of the impersonal formulation 'man sah/man erblickte' (RA I, p. 546) emphasizes the general accessibility of these aspects of the paintings. On this public level the reproductions presented the viewer with a complex and contradictory world which was both archaic and yet refined in its suggestiveness; a world of mythic antiquity which at the same time appeared to be Christian and English. The sad-eyed figures of Burne-Jones's

<sup>92</sup> Like 'Über moderne englische Malerei' these three articles were published in the *Neue Revue (Wiener Literatur-Zeitung)*, 14 and 21 March, and 4 April 1894.

<sup>93</sup> 'Aber es fehlen die mystischen Augen der Frauen von Burne-Jones, es fehlt die faszinierende perverse Schein-Naivität der Dante Gabriel Rossettis und die heidnisch-christliche Märchenphantasie der Watts. Es fehlt wieder eben das Merkwürdigste.' (RA I, p. 536)

<sup>94</sup> Just why this was the case is unclear, although in his retrospective Hofmannsthal mentions that the reproductions were displayed in a side room.

paintings appeared likewise paradoxically compounded of simplicity and refinement, being at once doll-like in their naive gestures and yet involved in allegorical actions and emotions of infinite implications. Finally, Hofmannsthal states that neither the slender, at times hermaphroditic, grace of the beings who inhabit the paintings nor their dainty actions seemed at first sight to contain anything unearthly — a formulation which implies that closer examination will reveal them to be not of this world.

Indeed, Hofmannsthal goes on to indicate a deeper, less obvious level of significance in Burne-Jones's work, a level accessible only to the more attentive viewer:

Dem aufmerksameren Blick aber erschloß sich tatsächlich mehr. Diese schönen Wesen hatten ein intensives, wenn auch eng begrenztes Innenleben. Sie waren traurig und verwundert. Sie waren dabei sehr einfach, einfacher als Menschen sind, so einfach wie tief sinnige Mythen, so einfach wie die mythische Gestalt, deren Traumleben und Irrfahrten und Metamorphosen jeder in sich unaufhörlich ausspinnt: Psyche, unsere Seele. (RA I, pp. 546–47)

The emphasis here on the intense inner life beneath the beautiful surface of Burne-Jones's creatures, and the equation of their extreme simplicity with that of the human soul recall Hofmannsthal's journal entry on English aestheticism which notes 'die tiefen Zusammenhänge mit Seelenleben' in the work of modern English painters and critics, specifically that of the Pre-Raphaelites (RA III, p. 386). Contrary to first impressions, the beautiful creatures in Burne-Jones's paintings are not depictions of earthly persons ('Menschen'); they are rather mythic personifications, whose deeper significance lies in their embodiment of the soul ('Psyche') and its solitary journey through existence.

At this point Hofmannsthal departs from his interpretation of Burne-Jones's paintings to give a more general account of the human soul as a fugitive and aimless wanderer passively suffering the vicissitudes of a cruel existence:

Selbstvorstellung, ahnend träumen, wie die eigene Seele unbegreiflich einsam die unsäglich schauerlichen Gefilde des Daseins durchwandelt, unwissend, von wo sie komme und wohin sie gehe, im Tiefsten schauernd vor unendlichem Staunen, vor Sehnsucht und Traurigkeit, das ist die tiefste Funktion aller Phantasie. (RA I, p. 547)

This passage is of central importance for an understanding of Hofmannsthal's aesthetic in 'Über moderne englische Malerei'. The categorical assertion that the most profound function of imagination — and by extension its products, art and aesthetic criticism — is to represent the condition of the human soul implies a position which effectively excludes the materialist aesthetic of literary Naturalism. For if directed primarily towards the soul, imagination cannot be chiefly concerned with recording the events of the material world, nor with recombining empirical objects and events to produce works of art. This implicit rejection of Naturalism in favour of an art concerned with the 'deeper' inner life does not, however, imply a form of unbridled subjectivism. If Hofmannsthal's presentation of the imagination rules out mimetic Naturalism, his formulation also makes clear that the function of imagination is not to document mere personal feelings. What imagination seeks to depict is the soul's archetypal voyage through a hostile and incomprehensible world, as embodied in the ancient myth of Psyche. In this context the myth, as an element of the Western cultural heritage, is to be understood as the objective, if unscientific, depiction of the enduring nature of soul and its

estrangement from the world. This trans-historical dimension indicates that the inner life with which art is concerned is not that of the particular historical individual but of man as such.<sup>95</sup>

The depiction of Burne-Jones's work as essentially mythic in character derives to some extent from John Ruskin's series of lectures *The Art of England* (1883) from which Hofmannsthal quotes in his essay.<sup>96</sup> In the second of these lectures, 'Mythic Schools of Painting', Ruskin contrasts Burne-Jones's distinctive talent for the mythic personification of general spiritual truths with Rossetti's realistic method of representing 'spiritual creatures' (i.e. biblical figures) in dramatic situations.<sup>97</sup> It is possible that Hofmannsthal has this distinction in mind when he writes of Burne-Jones's figures:

Diese Wesen haben sich untereinander nichts zu sagen; sie fügen einander kein Gutes und kein Schlimmes zu; daß sie sind, ist alles, was sie voneinander wissen. Die Region des Dramatischen liegt anderswo, der Oberfläche näher, hier in den dämmernden Tiefen des einsamen Seins treten andere Gegenspieler auf, die kosmischen Gewalten, die Herren des Traumes und des Todes, Pan, der unreif geborene Gott, aus dem Unterleib der Erde geschnitten, nicht Mensch, nicht Tier, nicht Mann, nicht Weib, mit wildem wehendem Haar und plumpen gutmütigen Händen und traurigen Augen, und andere göttliche, wundervolle Personifikationen des sehnächtigen, des drohenden, des berauschten, des tödlichen Daseins. (RA I, p. 547)

While retaining the vocabulary of Ruskin's lecture, this interpretation differs significantly from the English critic's relatively simple contrast between the realistic/dramatic style of Rossetti and the mythic depiction of general spiritual truths in the work of Burne-Jones. Here Hofmannsthal's exclusion of drama from the paintings is based on an Idealist distinction between the temporal world of events, which is the proper province of drama, and the essential solitude of the soul. In the depths of this latter realm, the realm of pure being, the events of the temporal world have no place; and thus in the region of the soul only mythic embodiments of cosmic forces can appear as antagonists. The latent Platonism of Hofmannsthal's Idealist interpretation is underlined by his comparison of Burne-Jones's style of depiction with the 'Niederschlag einer platonischen Idee' (RA I, p. 548).

The notion of the soul's essential dissociation from the outside world is one which recurs in Hofmannsthal's early lyric poetry and is found in similar terms in his 'Ballade des Äußeren Lebens' (1894?) which may have been written around the same time as 'Über moderne englische Malerei'.<sup>98</sup> The poem presents the seemingly unbridgeable gulf which separates the terrifying diversity and transience of earthly existence (the 'äußere Leben' of the title) from the solitude of the aimless, peripatetic soul. It is this same opposition between the soul, as pure self-sufficient being, and the external world of restless flux, which structures Hofmannsthal's interpretation of Burne-Jones. The creatures of Burne-Jones's paintings are not personal inhabitants of the transient, external world; they are rather mythic embodiments of an insulated inner life which regards the outside world with astonishment. The final lines of 'Ballade des Äußeren Lebens' suggest that the bridge between these two seemingly irreconcilable realms is language: 'Und

<sup>95</sup> In this respect Hofmannsthal's conception of non-Naturalist art differs from that of Hermann Bahr, who in his 'Überwindung des Naturalismus' (1891) had argued for a dialectical synthesis of Naturalism and Romanticism. Modern art, according to Bahr, should transcend Naturalism by redirecting its observational techniques to the internal contents of consciousness. Hofmannsthal's critical reflections show him to be more concerned with the ineffable nature of consciousness itself than with the quasi-scientific documentation of its specific content.

<sup>96</sup> See Winfried F. Weiss, 'Ruskin, Pater and Hofmannsthal', *ColGer*, 6 (1973), 162-70.

<sup>97</sup> See, 'Mythic Schools of Painting', in *The Works of John Ruskin*, Library Edition, ed. by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols (London, 1908), XXXIII, 287-305 (p. 287 and p. 292).

<sup>98</sup> The precise date of composition is uncertain. The poem was sent to George in late 1895 (GrBr, pp. 79-80) and published by the *Blätter* in January 1896 (BfdK III, i, 12). The editors of the *Kritische Ausgabe* take it to have been written in early 1894 (HSW I, p. 220).

dennoch sagt der viel der "Abend" sagt, / Ein Wort daraus Tiefsinn und Trauer rinnt, / Wie schwerer Honig aus den hohlen Waben.' (HSW I, p. 44) The soul's astonishment at the seemingly senseless events of the outer world notwithstanding, the utterance of 'Abend' is not simply another external fact. Hofmannsthal's image presents the apparently hollow word — and by extension language — as the receptacle of profound emotions and, thus, as a locus in which the seemingly disparate outer and inner realms are united. This attempt to generate a link between the material and the spiritual world is also evident in 'Über moderne englische Malerei' and, as I shall attempt to show, is essential to a proper understanding of Hofmannsthal's conception of the ethical in Pre-Raphaelite painting.

The opening section of 'Über moderne englische Malerei', then, presents the reader with two levels of significance in Burne-Jones's paintings: the first is located in their broadly-accessible, if puzzlingly complex, superficial features and is exemplified by the graceful gestures of the figures they depict; the second, less obvious level lies in the deeper mythic function of these apparently naive figures as embodiments of the human soul. This is an important distinction, as the remainder of Hofmannsthal's essay is concerned with showing how the two apparently opposed levels of body (gesture) and soul (psyche) are reconciled to moral effect in the work of the Pre-Raphaelites generally.

Having quoted Ruskin to support his characterization of Burne-Jones as a consummate exponent of allegory, Hofmannsthal moves the focus of his essay to the Pre-Raphaelites in general. Commenting on the undeniable artificiality of Burne-Jones's style of painting, Hofmannsthal remarks on the general tendency of Pre-Raphaelitism in its widest sense:

In der Tat ist die Malerschule, die England seit vierzig Jahren beherrscht und deren Ausläufer Burne-Jones wir betrachten, eine von großen und fruchtbaren Kritikern durch die verführerischste und geistreichste Interpretation vergangener italienischer Kunst zu einer künstlichen Wiederholung der Renaissance heraufgezogene. (RA I, p. 548)

This is substantially the same view of modern English art as that expounded in the first part of 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' where the critic Ruskin was presented as the rallying point for Hofmannsthal's precious group of English artists.<sup>99</sup> The depiction of the relationship between criticism and Pre-Raphaelitism given in 'Über moderne englische Malerei' is in effect an extension of this earlier general characterization of the roots of English aestheticism.

The first phase of Pre-Raphaelitism, Hofmannsthal contends, derived from the English critical reception of Dante, which paradoxically emphasized the painterly qualities of his work at the expense of its literary characteristics. While conceding the apparent strangeness of viewing Dante as a painter, Hofmannsthal confirms the abundance of painterly elements in his work: 'An tausend Stellen der "Divina Commedia" mehr noch der "Vita Nuova" hat man den Eindruck, Schilderungen aus zweiter Hand zu lesen, geschilderte Bilder.' (RA I, p. 548) This is not merely confined to Dante's depiction of allegorical figures, which draws on the conventions of contemporary painting; this 'painterly' element is also to be found in Dante's technique of presenting gesture in characters who, superficially at least, are not allegorical:

die Gestalt der Beatrice, jedes Schreiten, Neigen, Grüßen und Winken an ihr ist in seiner subtilen Expressivität dem Stil der primitiven Madonnen entnommen, nur noch raffinierter. Raffiniert ist das einzige Wort für diese in kaum glaublicher Weise gesteigerte Fähigkeit, innere Vorgänge, namentlich bei Frauen und Jünglingen, durch naive, fast

<sup>99</sup> See the paragraph beginning: 'Es ist charakteristisch, daß der Erste, um den sich diese Gruppe von Künstlern sammelte, ein Kritiker war [. . .]' (RA I, p. 144).

linkische Bewegungen des Körpers zu verraten, wie sie sich bei den Malern des Quattrocento und bei Dante findet. (RA I, pp. 548–49)

Dante's artistic innovation, then, consists in applying a style hitherto associated with the graphic depiction of allegorical figures to the literary portrayal of individuals. The essence of Dante's style lies in its refinement of the established aesthetic conventions for revealing inner processes through gestures and expressions, and this, Hofmannsthal continues, is the 'secret' of Dante's art which forms the nucleus of the English Pre-Raphaelite tradition.

The second phase in the development of the Pre-Raphaelite movement is marked by a move away from the relatively simple art of the Italian trecento and a preoccupation with the more complex work of Botticelli and Leonardo. Again, the development of modern English art is depicted as proceeding from the modern critical reception of Italian Renaissance artists:

Die verwirrende Frauenschönheit des Botticelli und die komplizierte Psychologie, die man hinter den seltsam, spöttisch und resigniert lächelnden Köpfen Lionardos [*sic*] in bebender Faszination vermutete, wurde wiederum gleichzeitig von geistreichen und schöpferischen Kritikern und ebenso geistreichen Künstlern ergriffen und so variiert, daß eine bei aller Künstlichkeit doch bestrickende Reihe von Bildern entstand. (RA I, p. 549)

Thus, according to Hofmannsthal, the relatively simple revelation of emotion through gesture learned from Dante undergoes a further refinement to accommodate the greater aesthetic and psychological complexity of the quattrocento — or rather, of the quattrocento as interpreted in the work of creative critics. As soon becomes clear, the creative critic of whom Hofmannsthal is thinking is Walter Pater, in particular Pater's highly idiosyncratic views of Botticelli and Leonardo presented in the 'schöpferischen Kritik' of his *Renaissance*.

Hofmannsthal concedes that, deriving as it does from critical interpretations of art, the work of the Pre-Raphaelites may be more interpretative than creative, but states that it is nonetheless essentially poetic in its 'Beherrschung und Beseelung der körperlichen Dinge' (RA I, p. 549). This depiction of the Pre-Raphaelite painters as poets, and his explanation of their 'poetry' as consisting in the investing of physical objects with soul simultaneously encapsulates that preoccupation with the convergence of the arts which was a prominent feature of the late nineteenth-century avant-garde, while referring back to his opening comments on the two levels of significance in the Burne-Jones reproductions exhibited in Vienna.<sup>100</sup> Although Hofmannsthal does not draw an explicit conclusion from his account of the development of Pre-Raphaelitism, the move from Dante's comparatively simple gestural style to one which includes a complex psychological dimension provides an explanation of Burne-Jones's work. The combination of naive gestures and psychological profundity in Burne-Jones's painting, which at first sight appeared characteristic, is not in fact a distinctive feature of his work alone; as the last representative ('Ausläufer') of Pre-Raphaelitism, Burne-Jones incorporates the two stages of the movement's aesthetic development in his work.

At this point Hofmannsthal breaks off his reflections on the history of the Pre-Raphaelites to address the problem of their artificiality. That this is a problem is evident from the concessive formulation, 'bei aller Künstlichkeit' and the following 'doch' (RA I, p. 549), in his characterization of the appeal of later Pre-Raphaelite paintings. The highly figurative passage in which Hofmannsthal seeks to resolve the question of artificiality marks a significant departure

<sup>100</sup> In the first of his earlier articles on the international exhibition, Hofmannsthal refers to the Pre-Raphaelites as 'eine merkwürdige Art zeichnender Dichter' (RA I, p. 536).



from the general style of the essay, which, if typically stylized, has to this point been largely expository:

Kunst ist schließlich Natur auf Umwegen; Quellwasser um dem Umweg durch Wurzel und Rebe heißt Wein und ist nicht schlimm. Wir fahren nachts übers Meer. Fern ist das Land und wir sehnen uns nach dem Gemurmel süßen Wassers, nach Gärten und Wegen der Erde. Da wirft der Wind einen feinen, süßen, scharfen Duft im Wehen über uns. 'Rosen!' ruft der eine halb im Schlaf und lächelt. Aber es gibt keine Rosen weit und breit. Der Duft flog herüber von einem Schiff, das im Dunkel vorüberglitt, einem Schiff persischer Männer, geladen mit köstlichem betäubendem Öl, dem ausgekochten süßen Blut glühender Rosen, das durch Ritzen sickert und in der Nachtluft lebt. Solche süße, zur Hälfte natürliche Trunkenheit haben diese englischen Künstler aus den Blüten der Renaissance ausgekocht. Wie Kinder aus Kleeblüten den Honig saugen, so saugen sie die feine Essenz der seelischen Schönheit aus den Gebärden der Beatrice, aus dem rätselhaften Lächeln der Gioconda. (RA I, pp. 549–50)

This remarkable passage functions not only as an attempt to vindicate the Pre-Raphaelites' artificiality, but also as the preface to Hofmannsthal's translation of Pater's notorious impressionistic depiction of the *Mona Lisa* from the *Renaissance* which immediately follows. Penrith Goff, in his discussion of the relationship between the work of Hofmannsthal and Pater, claims that the highly metaphorical defence of artificiality quoted above is dubious to the extent that it departs from the poet's 'usual criterion that art must give form to first-hand experience'.<sup>101</sup> I would agree that this depiction is dubious, but would call into question Goff's assumption of a 'usual criterion' from which the essay deviates. The analyses of Hofmannsthal's critical essays in this chapter should have suggested that the young poet himself employed precisely the techniques of aesthetic creation from 'second-hand' sources which he explicates in his depiction of Swinburne and his contemporaries. Goff's assumption of a 'usual criterion' has the convenience of providing a 'real' or 'essential' Hofmannsthal in terms of which firm critical judgements can be framed, but it also has the manifest disadvantage of glossing over the tensions and ambivalence of the poet's attitude to aestheticism during the 1890s.

What is dubious in the above depiction of 'natural' artifice is not its departure from some supposed canon of otherwise fixed attitudes; it is not a regrettable aberration from the otherwise steady course of Hofmannsthal's progress from aestheticism to 'life'. It is, rather, its abrupt departure from the general style of the essay, and its unmistakable tone of uncertainty. As I have already remarked, the concessive formulation 'bei aller Künstlichkeit' in the passage preceding this quasi-parabolic defence of artificiality suggests a certain uneasiness on Hofmannsthal's part. Far from resolving this sense of uncertainty, the passage quoted above serves only to compound it. For example, the concluding words of the description of the natural relationship between spring water and wine, 'und ist nicht schlimm' are almost bathetic; and, as Goff suggests, the image of the Pre-Raphaelites as being like children sucking honey from clover is forced to an extent which would suggest Hofmannsthal's uneasiness with his case.<sup>102</sup>

This uneasiness, I would contend, is occasioned not by a deviation from a set of core convictions regarding art, but rather by Hofmannsthal's inability to formulate satisfactorily an intuition regarding the relationship between art and nature. The lengthy quotation from Pater's depiction of the *Mona Lisa* which immediately follows the above passage provides further evidence of this point. In neither the essay on Swinburne nor that on Pater does Hofmannsthal employ extended direct quotation in support of his critical reflections. Here the uncharacteristic

<sup>101</sup> Goff, p. 2.

<sup>102</sup> Goff, loc. cit.

citation of Pater — albeit in the subtly modified form of his own German translation — could be seen as reflecting Hofmannsthal's admiration of the English critic. However, the use of extended quotation suggests his difficulty in putting forward his case without extrinsic legitimation, a difficulty also suggested by his earlier quotation from Ruskin's lectures in support of his interpretation of Burne-Jones's work. The most obvious function of the Pater quotation is to lend further weight to Hofmannsthal's earlier contentions regarding the relationship between body and soul in the work of the Pre-Raphaelites. Hofmannsthal translates Pater's characterization of the beauty of the *Mona Lisa*, 'a beauty wrought out from within', as 'von innen heraus dem Körper angeschaffene Schönheit' (RA I, pp. 550–51), a formulation which relates back to his earlier discussions of the relationship of gesture and psyche in the works of the Pre-Raphaelites generally and of Burne-Jones in particular.

However, the passage from *The Renaissance* also serves to legitimize Hofmannsthal's interpretation of the Pre-Raphaelites with reference to the aesthetic tradition of German classicism. As Robert Vilain has pointed out, the formulation 'eine von innen dem Körper angeschaffene Schönheit' has strong Goethean overtones, and it is therefore no mere coincidence that Hofmannsthal should go on to compare this distinctive kind of beauty to that which overwhelmed Goethe on seeing Schiller's skull.<sup>103</sup> Pater's impression of 'beauty wrought from within' is,

dieselbe, die Goethes Sinn beim Anblick der kühnen und edlen Linien von Schillers Totenschädel tief ergreift, diese von innen heraus notwendige Schönheit, gleichsam eine so vollendete Durchseelung des Leiblichen, daß sie wie Verleiblichung des Seelischen berührt, diese höchste, veredelte, individuelle Schönheit suchen die englischen Präraphaeliten [. . .] (RA I, p. 551)

Here Hofmannsthal's introduction of Goethe, the keystone of the nineteenth-century German cultural canon, can be seen as serving further to legitimize his contentions on the Pre-Raphaelites' particular conception of beauty. Vilain not unreasonably interprets Hofmannsthal's equation of Goethean classicism with Pater's radically modern depiction of the *Mona Lisa* as an attempt to avert its disintegrative implications for the notion of personal identity and integrity. Vilain concludes that 'Hofmannsthal may have been distracted by Goethe, but only so as to stifle his anxiety and reinforce his resistance to the implications of Pater's evocation'.<sup>104</sup> In terms of Hofmannsthal's understanding of — or resistance to — the implications of Pater's aesthetic his reference to Goethe can indeed be seen as a distraction. However, in the context of 'Über moderne englische Malerei' this recourse to the authority of German classicism, and in particular the seemingly marginal reference to Schiller, have a significance which, if not immediately obvious, is of central importance for the closing section of the essay.

Having concluded his history of Pre-Raphaelitism on the theme of body and soul established in the opening discussion of Burne-Jones, Hofmannsthal turns finally to the question of the ethical nature of modern English art. The two concluding paragraphs of the essay are separated from what has gone before by a double space which would suggest a significant change in theme. The closing section of 'Über moderne englische Malerei' begins by remarking on the surprise with which the so-called second, moral and religious, phase of

<sup>103</sup> See Vilain, p. 737, footnote 33, where Goethe's *Italienische Reise* is cited as the probable source of the formulation of 'von innen heraus'.

<sup>104</sup> Vilain, p. 738.

Ruskin's intellectual life is mentioned in Viennese circles. This supposed transition from the aesthetic to the ethical is not as remarkable as it seems, writes Hofmannsthal, and in the case of English art it is all the less surprising, for 'diese englische Kunst der psychisch-leiblichen Schönheit ist durch und durch ethisch' (RA I, p. 551). This categorical assertion of the thoroughly ethical character of Pre-Raphaelite art is initially somewhat disconcerting as it stands in no immediately discernible relation to what has gone before. However, Hofmannsthal's opening reference to the questionable Viennese cliché of Ruskin's progress from art to ethics is an indication of how his own apparent change of theme should be read. The closing section of 'Über moderne englische Malerei' does not radically depart from what has gone before; rather, it is an attempt to bring out the latent moral dimension of Hofmannsthal's earlier reflections on the union of body and soul in English painting.

What links the two apparently disparate parts of the essay is Hofmannsthal's distinctive critical use of evocation and allusion. He describes the ethical dimension of the Pre-Raphaelites' work as follows:

Diese Kunstwerke reden eine veredelnde Sprache direkt, viel direkter als edle Musik oder tiefsinnig gemalte Landschaft. Diese gemalten Menschen erziehen die Seele durch das Beispiel ihres edlen Betragens. (RA I, p. 551)

The repetition of the words 'edel' and 'veredelnd' in this passage refer back to Hofmannsthal's earlier characterization of Schiller's skull, the lines of which were described as 'kühn' and 'edel'. This, in conjunction with the reference to the educative moral example of the people in Pre-Raphaelite painting, indicates a subtle connection between the two parts of the essay. Hofmannsthal's extensive reflections on the Pre-Raphaelites' conception of 'a beauty wrought from within' are linked to the contention that their art is thoroughly ethical by a subtext which derives not from Goethe but from Schiller.<sup>105</sup>

What Hofmannsthal is seeking to evoke in his use of these typically eighteenth-century moral epithets is the notion of aesthetic education expounded in Schiller's epistolary fragment *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (1793). Thus, the earlier introduction of Schiller's skull, its distraction from the more unsettling implications of Pater's aesthetics notwithstanding, can be seen as serving subtly to introduce this particular element of the classical German aesthetic tradition. Based solely on the evidence of the passage cited above this contention may seem rather tenuous, but it is lent further support by Hofmannsthal's later presentation of the beings in Dante's *Divine Comedy* and *Vita Nuova* whose characteristic gestures and expression are described as 'anmutig' und 'erhaben' (RA I, p. 552). In the context of the essay as a whole these terms evoke Schiller's aesthetic essays, in particular *Über Anmut und Würde* (1793) and *Vom Erhabenen* (1793), and serve here to suggest the classicism of his neo-Kantian aesthetic theories without rehearsing their complex arguments at length. In the light of these considerations, the Schillerian-sounding title 'Über moderne englische Malerei' could be seen as allying the essay to the tradition of German classical aesthetics.

Does this subtle recourse to an older tradition, a tradition which effectively inaugurated the notion of autonomous art, solve Hofmannsthal's problems in presenting his case? I would contend that it does not. The suggestion of close affinities between modern English art and the notion of aesthetic education as expounded by Schiller serves rather to underline

<sup>105</sup> On the influence of Schiller's theory of aesthetic education on the *Blätter* see Guido Glur, *Kunstlehre und Kunstschauung des Georgenkreises und die Aesthetik Oscar Wildes* (Bern, 1957), pp. 19–20.

Hofmannsthal's considerable difficulties in stating his central proposition. For what differentiates 'Über moderne englische Malerei' from the other essays discussed in this chapter is its uncharacteristic attempt to demonstrate a particular proposition: namely, 'diese englische Kunst der psychisch-leiblichen Schönheit ist durch und durch ethisch.' (RA I, p. 551)

Hofmannsthal's uneasiness with this project is evident in his reference to this explicit formulation as 'diesen etwas hölzernen Satz' (RA I, p. 551), and in his ensuing attempt to illustrate his point by returning to the example of Dante's gestural style which he has shown to be related to that of the Pre-Raphaelites. Hofmannsthal begins by drawing attention to Dante's innumerable conversations with the inhabitants of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise in the *Divine Comedy*. A striking feature of these conversations are the frequent references to the facial expressions of Dante's interlocutors, expressions which betray apparently unmotivated emotions. Initially the reader of the *Divine Comedy* is unable to account for the source of these emotions; on further reflection, however, their cause becomes clear. Hofmannsthal explains that the expression of emotion by the dead in the *Divine Comedy* is motivated by their recognizing, in some chance utterance, an allusion to or analogy with one particularly fatal event from their past, moral life. Hofmannsthal stresses here the exceptional nature of these characters, who perceive such subtle connections 'mit der Luzidität hochbegabter überlegener Menschen' (RA I, p. 552); and this is further emphasized by the comment that their ability to feel such an analogy requires an extraordinary degree of tact in its highest sense.

Having thus explained the source of Dante's characters' emotions, Hofmannsthal sums up their moral effect as follows:

Darin beruht die tiefe sittliche Wirkung der Mimik Dantescher Gestalten; sie verrät ein Seelenleben, darin die geistreichste energievollste Begabung im Dienste der intensivsten moralischen Wachheit und des unnachgiebigsten Strebens nach Wahrheit steht. (RA I, p. 552)

The repeated emphasis here on the exceptional vigilance of these characters and their extraordinary awareness of the most subtle allusions recalls Hofmannsthal's earlier presentation of the qualities required in order to appreciate Swinburne's poetic technique. Swinburne, it will be remembered, was shown to be necessarily exclusive as, in order to perceive the subtle meanings generated by his distinctive, allusive use of antiquated forms, his readers must be exceptionally aware of the history of art. In the above interpretation of Dante's characters, similarly exceptional divinatory talents are directed not towards deriving exquisite and ambivalent sensations from works of art, but rather towards perceiving the moral significance of words and events. The initially puzzling emotions of these figures in their conversations with Dante are expressive of this sensitivity to the most subtle of moral allusions. Hofmannsthal concludes his interpretation by emphasizing the authenticity of Dante's characters and the necessary relationship between their emotions and their inner life:

Diese Wesen sind durch und durch echt; sie paktieren nicht mit dem Dasein, sie betäuben sich nicht, sie kümmern sich nicht um fremde Dinge, sie vergessen nichts, sie leben nicht provisorisch, nicht bildlich und nicht in Unwahrheit; sie haben *eine* Angst, *eine* Sehnsucht, *ein* Erzürnen: die Angst, die Sehnsucht, das Erzürnen, das ihrem Wesen wesentlich ist. Was sie reden, winken und blicken, ist anmutig und erhaben, weil es notwendig ist. (RA I, p. 552)

The grace and sublimity of each figure's gestures is the result of the necessary relationship between their essential nature and its one, distinctive emotion. This necessary correspondence between emotion and essential nature is what makes their every gesture graceful and sublime. What Hofmannsthal appears to be suggesting here is that the grace and sublimity of these figures is traceable to their ideal simplicity and integrity of character.

Whatever the validity of this interpretation of Dante's work, Hofmannsthal again appears uneasy in his attempt to apply it to the works of the Pre-Raphaelites. This is particularly evident in his attempt to link Dante's moral qualities with those of the English painters. Here the onus of finding a similar ethical impetus in the works of the Pre-Raphaelites is placed squarely on the reader:

Wer bei den Zeilen der 'Göttlichen Komödie' und des 'Neuen Lebens' den Sinn dieser Betrachtungen besser und deutlicher, als sie hier stehen, gefühlt hat, wird vor den Bildern, der Rossetti und Holman Hunt, der Watts und Burne-Jones nicht leugnen, daß etwas Ähnliches angestrebt wird. (RA I, p. 552)

The formulation of the final clause reveals Hofmannsthal's uncertainty with his case as it implies that the work of the English artists strives for but has perhaps not achieved the Dantesque union of body and soul, and it is difficult not to read this appeal to the reader as an admission of defeat, as Hofmannsthal is in effect confessing that he is unequal to the task of expressing his central proposition more lucidly.

The final paragraph concludes the essay by subtly reintroducing the Ruskinian subtext of the opening pages. Referring to the reader who can recognize the similarity of ethical purpose in Dante and the Pre-Raphaelites, Hofmannsthal writes:

Ihm wird für eine Zeitlang vielleicht alle andere Kunst neben dieser reizlos und unvornehm, ja etwa leer und gemein vorkommen. Und auch wenn er dann wieder in die elementaren Offenbarungen des Genius, als sind Landschaften von Whistler, Menschenköpfe von Rembrandt, Musik von Mozart, mit atmenden Freuden hinabgetaucht ist, wird er bekennen, es gibt ursprünglichere Weise, dem Herrn zu dienen, aber nicht edlere, noch reinere. (RA I, p. 552)

As in 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' and 'Walter Pater', Hofmannsthal ends on a seemingly emphatic note, summing up his reflections on the ethical nature of modern English painting in the Ruskinian notion of artistic service to the Lord. Here it is not Eros, that heady neo-pagan devotion to Venus said to be the essential content of Swinburne's poetry, which is distinctive of the modern English painters, but rather the purity and nobility of their Christian service to God — a notion most likely derived from Ruskin's quasi-religious ethics of art as praise and art as service.<sup>106</sup> Here, however, as throughout this essay, Hofmannsthal is uncharacteristically tentative in his pronouncements on English art. Not only does he put the onus of finding the ethical content of Pre-Raphaelite painting on his readers, he limits the duration of this insight ('eine Zeitlang') and gives no guarantee that this effect will be felt at all ('vielleicht').

Lest my criticisms of 'Über moderne englische Malerei' seem too harsh, it should be said that Hofmannsthal himself was not entirely satisfied with the essay. In a letter to Elsa Bruckmann-Cantacuzène, written in the summer of 1894, he describes the piece as 'meinen

<sup>106</sup> Compare the closing paragraph of Ruskin's 'Mythic Schools of Painting' in which he writes of Rossetti, Hunt, Burne-Jones, and Watts: 'whatever may be their faults or shortcomings, their aim has always been the brightest and the noblest possible. The more you can admire them and the longer you read, the more your minds and hearts will be filled with the best knowledge accessible in history, and the loftiest associations conveyable by the passionate and reverent skill, of which I have told you in *The Laws of Fésolo*, that "All great Art is Praise".' Op. cit., pp. 304-05.

gutgemeinten und schlechtgeschriebenen Aufsatz über die englischen Präraphaeliten', and surmises that on reading it she will sense, 'wie ich von dem etwas leeren Ästhetismus ins Menschlich-Sittliche hinüberzulenken suche. Denn es scheint mir sehr darauf anzukommen, daß die Kunst vom Standpunkt des Lebens betrachtet werde.' (*Briefe I*, p. 103)<sup>107</sup> This, it seems to me, identifies the chief failing of the essay — its rather uncertain attempt to steer a course from what Hofmannsthal was coming to see as the utter vacuity of aestheticism towards a vaguely-defined moral sphere. His moralistic intentions are clear; their expression, however, leaves something to be desired.

I have analysed 'Über moderne englische Malerei' in great detail as it is considerably more complex than the other essays discussed in this chapter. Whereas the critical reflections of 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' and 'Walter Pater' are presented in relatively simple bi- and tri-partite structures, 'Über moderne Malerei' follows a considerably more tortuous route to its uncertain conclusion. The essay establishes its central theme, that of the union between physical beauty and the soul, on the basis of Hofmannsthal's impressions of Burne-Jones's work and seeks to situate this distinctive aspect of modern English painting in the high tradition of European culture — something nigh impossible in a journalistic text that purports to be a retrospective on an art exhibition. The juxtaposition of Burne-Jones, Ruskin, Dante, Pater, Goethe, and Schiller, by means of which Hofmannsthal seeks to clarify his central contention makes it almost impossible to determine just what is to be understood by the term 'ethical' in his conclusion. What is clear, however, is that the morally educative value of Pre-Raphaelite painting does not consist in the transmission of a code of practice. The ethical effect of the paintings proceeds, rather, from the distinctive union of body and soul in the characters depicted. But what is this effect? I mentioned earlier that the interpretation of Burne-Jones's work presented in this essay has significant similarities with the lyrical depiction of the relationship between the soul and the world in 'Ballade des Äußeren Lebens'. A more charitable interpretation of 'Über moderne englische Malerei' could see the union of body and soul in the gestures of Pre-Raphaelite painting as a correlative of the union of world and soul in language which is presented in the closing lines of Hofmannsthal's poem: 'Und dennoch sagt der viel der "Abend" sagt, / Ein Wort daraus Tiefsinn und Trauer rinnt, / Wie schwerer Honig aus den hohlen Waben.' (*HSW I*, p. 44) This union of the inner and outer suggests that the soul's apparently eternal estrangement from the temporal world is not absolute, and that in language the soul participates in the otherwise senseless outer world. One could perhaps see what Hofmannsthal calls the ethical dimension of Pre-Raphaelite painting as consisting in its attempt to unite the inner and outer worlds in the language of gesture. In this case, 'ethical' would not mean expressive of a normative morality, but rather expressive of the ideal harmony of world and soul.

If the ethical in art is understood as consisting in the presentation of an ideal relationship between body and soul, Hofmannsthal's ethics in 'Über moderne englische Malerei' would seem to be based on the notion of individual integrity. Thus the ethical in art is not a code of action but rather a mode of being in which the inner and outer realms of existence correspond perfectly. What is noticeably absent from this notion of ethics, however, is the social dimension. Indeed, the terms of Hofmannsthal's discussion necessarily exclude such a practical dimension.

<sup>107</sup> The letter would appear to be out of sequence as in it Hofmannsthal writes that he has enclosed Bruckmann-Cantacuzène's copy of Pater's *Renaissance*. In the following letter to her, however, (26 June 1894) he still has both Pater volumes she had lent him (*Briefe I*, p. 104).

The Idealist eclecticism of the essay makes it impossible to show how the supposedly ethical qualities of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, or for that matter of Dante's poetry, could issue forth in action.

### III CONCLUSION

'O goldne Lügen, werdend ohne Grund,  
Ein Trieb der Kunst, im unbewußten Mund!  
O weise Lügen, mühevoll gewebt,  
Wo eins das andre färbt und hält und hebt!  
Wie süß, die Lüge wissend zu genießen,  
Bis Lüg und Wahrheit sanft zusammenfließen,  
Und dann zu wissen, wie uns jeder Zug  
Im Wirbel näher treibt dem Selbstbetrug!  
Das alles üben alle wir alltäglich  
Und vieles mehr, unschätzbar und unsäglich!  
(HSW III, p. 19–20)

'After all, what is a fine lie.? Simply that which is its own evidence.' (Oscar Wilde)<sup>108</sup>

The critique of the art/life relationship evident in all three essays treated in this chapter, and increasingly urgent in those written after *Der Tor und der Tod*, continued to dominate Hofmannsthal's work throughout the late 1890s, and 'das rasselnde, gellende, brutale und formlose Leben' (RA I, p. 144) which in 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' rages outside the opulent rooms of the English artists comes to assume the mythical dimensions of a jealous and vengeful god. This potent image of the unappeasable force of Life (the initial capital is essential) recurs in Hofmannsthal's criticism and art from 1894 to the end of the century. In one of Hofmannsthal's finest short stories of the period, *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht* (1895), a young, self-absorbed aesthete — a close relative of Claudio — steps out of his cloistered artificial existence into the nightmarish labyrinth of Life which leads him inexorably to a hideous and squalid death. This disturbing story perhaps best illustrates Hofmannsthal's notion of Life as implacably demanding participation, and mercilessly striking down anyone who refuses this.<sup>109</sup>

The gradual predominance of this notion of Life in Hofmannsthal's thought is reflected in his changing attitude to the phenomenon of aestheticism which is central to all of the texts discussed above. As I have shown, while initially retaining the notion of 'Ästhetismus' as a legitimate artistic-critical sensibility, by 1894 Hofmannsthal had come to reject aestheticism as a philosophy of life. In the further course of the decade, however, he eventually dissociated himself entirely from 'Ästhetismus', and by 1896 dismissed this characteristically modern sensibility as a dead end. In a letter to Hermann Bahr written sometime between July and November 1896 he comments:

Ich selber könnte jetzt eine Menge Kritisches schreiben: 'über das Beiwort in Goethes verschiedenen Epochen', über 'die Sackgasse des Ästhetismus' (anlässlich sonderbarer tiefligender Zusammenhänge zwischen der 'Aphrodite' von Louÿs und 'Dorian Gray' von Oscar Wilde) und noch über anderes. (*Briefe I*, p. 206)<sup>110</sup>

<sup>108</sup> 'The Decay of Lying', p. 910.

<sup>109</sup> For an interpretation of the role of 'Leben' in the short story see Andrew W. Barker, 'The Triumph of Life in Hofmannsthal's "Das Märchen der 672. Nacht"', *MLR*, 74 (1979), 341–48, particularly the final page where the notion of life in the story is related to the cudgel-wielding life force of Hofmannsthal's second essay under the title of 'Gabriele d' Annunzio' (1894). See RA I, pp. 198–202 (p. 200).

<sup>110</sup> See also Hofmannsthal's roughly contemporaneous comment to Leopold von Andrian: 'Ich glaube: das schöne Leben verarmt einen. Wenn man immer so leben könnte, wie man will, würde man alle Kraft verlieren.' Hofmannsthal to Andrian, 4 and 5 May 1896, in *Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Leopold von Andrian. Briefwechsel*, ed. by Walter H. Perl (Frankfurt a.M., 1968), pp. 63–65 (p. 64).

This change in Hofmannsthal's assessment of 'Ästhetismus' is also evident in 'Englischer Stil' (1896), the final essay on English art of his 'lyrical decade', in which he examines the expression of Englishness in a number of diverse cultural phenomena, including Chippendale furniture and an American (*sic*) dance troupe.<sup>111</sup> Detailed consideration of this essay lies beyond the scope of the present study, but it is worth noting that by 1896 Hofmannsthal's view of the Pre-Raphaelites, who are mentioned only in passing, had undergone a further revision in line with his changing understanding of the art/life relationship, and the beautiful, artificially refined images of female beauty in the work of modern English poets and painters are judged to be inferior to the reality on which they were originally based:

Zwar die Dichter schrieben die englischen Mädchennamen über ihre Gedichte, und die Maler schrieben diese Namen dann unter ihre Bilder, wirklich oder wenigstens in Gedanken: Lilian und Vivian, Mabel und Maud. Aber die Gedichte und die Bilder waren unendlich viel weniger schön als diese Namen, die etwas Wirkliches, Gewordenes sind und in denen der ganze feuchte Glanz der englischen Landschaft und die ganze naive Lieblichkeit der altenglischen Poesie lebt. (RA I, p. 567)

The unintentional irony of this passage is that when it was written Hofmannsthal had not yet experienced the reality of the stereotypical damp English landscape at first hand, and thus was hardly in a position to pronounce with any assurance on the correspondence between these names and their country of origin. This notwithstanding, Hofmannsthal is clearly at pains to stress the superiority of what he takes to be the vital reality of England to its ultra-refined expression in the work of the Pre-Raphaelites, and this effectively constitutes a withdrawal of the uncertain apology for Pre-Raphaelitism advanced in 'Über moderne englische Malerei'.

What is particularly notable in the essays analysed in this chapter is that, with the possible exception of 'Algernon Charles Swinburne', they fail to bring the art/life antinomy to a reconciliatory synthesis. Such a synthesis is clearly the aim of 'Über moderne englische Malerei', but, as I have argued, it is not realized. Even the poetological speech 'Poesie und Leben' (1896), which may have influenced the well-known dialogue on art and life in Thomas Mann's *Tonio Kröger*, fails to reach any convincing conclusions on how the gulf between life and art could be bridged.<sup>112</sup> This inability to integrate the realms of art and life proceeds directly from their polar opposition in Hofmannsthal's thought, and it is notable that his essays on English art, two of which are headed with the names of artists, include no reference to the life of the artist concerned. This absence of biography could be explained as reflecting a philosophical understanding of the author as identical with the work. Or one could surmise that, relying mainly on books for his information, Hofmannsthal simply did not have access to the relevant details of his subject matter.<sup>113</sup> However, I would contend that the lack of biography in his essays is intimately related to the distinctive nature of Hofmannsthal's practice of criticism as art, in which fabulation outweighs factual accuracy.

Hofmannsthal himself openly admitted that his essays were not primarily concerned with empirical reality. In a letter of 14 December 1892 to the critic Marie Herzfeld he writes:

<sup>111</sup> See RA I, pp. 565–72.

<sup>112</sup> For example, Hofmannsthal's comment, 'Ich liebe das Leben, vielmehr ich liebe nichts als das Leben' (RA I, p. 18) is echoed in Tonio Kröger's confession of his love for life. See Thomas Mann *Tonio Kröger*, ed. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson, second edition (Oxford, 1973), p. 35, and p. viii of the editor's introduction.

<sup>113</sup> For example, the closing paragraphs of 'Englisches Leben' (1891) reveal Hofmannsthal's debt to Nietzsche and Taine for his image of the wealth and restriction of English life (RA I, p. 138). See also his letter to Elsa Bruckmann-Cantacuzène of 26 June 1894 in which he asks: 'Lebt der Pater noch?' (*Briefe I*, p. 104)



Ihre Kritik meiner Kritik ist, glaube ich, streng richtig; daß Sie mich 'ernst nehmen', freut mich aufrichtig. Aber warum Sie gerade einen wirklichen Kritiker aus mir machen und so den allenfalls möglichen wirklichen Künstler ganz ersticken wollen, sehe ich nicht recht ein. Warum soll ich nicht bei der 'geistreich' -nebensächlichen Causerie bleiben dürfen; ich will aus dem Plaudern über Métiersachen keinen Beruf machen. Kennen Sie Anatole France? Wie sagen die Rohans? "Taine ne puis, Brunetière ne daigne" etc. Ich spiele nicht mit meinem Talent, aber mein Talent will manchmal spielen. Es gibt ein hübsches Motto von Montaigne: "Ce n'est pas ici ma doctrine, c'est mon étude." Auf *Ihr* Buch würde ich mich das nicht zu schreiben getrauen. [. . .]  
Was ich ins Kuvert lege, brauchen Sie natürlich nicht zu lesen; ich meine nur, daß diese Art Mache, zwischen kulturgeschichtlicher Reflexion und Prosagedicht, doch etwas gibt, ohne innerlich so sehr zu verbrennen, wie die wahre, die scheidende, die kritische Kritik; nicht? (*Briefe I*, p. 70)

Written only five days before the placatory letter to Carl August Klein cited earlier in this chapter, these comments ally Hofmannsthal's critical practice to his art, emphasizing the ludic and provisional nature of his criticism and relating this style of essayism to both modern (Anatole France) and traditional (Montaigne) models of undogmatic, artistic prose non-fiction.

There can be little doubt, then, that from an early age Hofmannsthal regarded his criticism as a form of art, as a supplement to his fictional writings and lyrical output. The artistic dimension of this criticism is not confined to the sensuous opulence of Hofmannsthal's prose, most striking in 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' which abounds in alliterations, assonances, repetitions, and rhythmic cadences; it is also seen in Hofmannsthal's distinctive critical method. In the introduction to this chapter I stated that the practice of criticism as art varies according to the relative emphasis placed on artistic expression and factual scholarship. In the case of the three essays analysed above it is fair to say that, to a greater or lesser extent, aesthetic considerations outweigh attention to factual accuracy. In the first half of 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' Hofmannsthal presents a group of English artists who, while bearing a certain resemblance to historical figures, are largely constructed from literary sources. In particular, Hofmannsthal's idiosyncratic image of Ruskin as the progenitor of English aestheticism is based less on a solid grasp of historical fact than on the aesthetic dictates of the recurrent Dionysian imagery in the essay. Similarly, in 'Walter Pater' the chronology of Pater's publications is silently altered in order to bring Hofmannsthal's critical reflections on aestheticism to a thematic climax.

This critical fabulation would be unproblematic in itself. But what is one to make of Hofmannsthal's characterization of 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' as 'einen Versuch historischer Prosa' (GrBr, p. 55)? What kind of history is this in which factuality is subordinated to considerations of style? If Hofmannsthal's seemingly idiosyncratic conception of history is to be understood, it must be related to an element of the broader cultural context on which I have touched only briefly in my analyses of his essays: namely, the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and, more specifically, his early cultural criticism. This is an area which has been remarked on in Hofmannsthal criticism but, as far as I am aware, there is still no extensive study of the poet's early debt to Nietzsche.<sup>114</sup> An exhaustive discussion of this complex topic is obviously beyond the scope of the present study, and the following comments are intended merely to indicate an aspect of Hofmannsthal's early career which deserves closer scrutiny.

As indicated in my discussion of 'Algernon Charles Swinburne', the depiction of Swinburne's Dionysian vitalism is obviously indebted to Nietzsche's *Geburt der Tragödie*.

<sup>114</sup> See, for example, Hilde D. Cohn's article 'Loris – Die frühen Essays des jungen Hofmannsthal', *PMLA*, 63 (1948), 1294–1313, in which the pervasive influence of Nietzsche on Hofmannsthal's critical essays is mooted.

However, it is the second of the philosopher's *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, 'Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben' (1874), which exerts a more pervasive influence on Hofmannsthal's early criticism and provides the philosophical legitimation for his implicit notion of history.<sup>115</sup> The untimeliness of this particular Nietzschean meditation lies in its sustained attack on the dominant nineteenth-century view of history as 'Wissenschaft'; i.e. as science in both its primary etymological sense of 'knowledge' and in its more specialized nineteenth-century meaning of 'objective knowledge derived from rational analysis'. The scientific practice of history, as depicted by Nietzsche, is shown to consist in the indiscriminate encyclopaedic compilation of objective factual knowledge. In the eyes of the scientific historian all facts are equal by virtue of their objective factuality, and thus the questions of value and evaluation disappear from history. According to Nietzsche, the danger of history in this sense is that it inevitably overwhelms the individual with an excess of objective information which it is impossible to assimilate. This excess of undigested and therefore meaningless knowledge creates a state of passive 'Innerlichkeit' which stifles the individual's ability to act. The excessive concern with the past and the resulting burden of historical knowledge leads to a sense of epigonism and 'Spätzeitlichkeit', and this is life-denying in that it smothers man's natural instincts and capacity for action under a mass of rationally appropriated objective facts.

Nietzsche does not, however, deny the usefulness, nor indeed the necessity, of history and historical truth for life, but he contends that the quest for such truth cannot consist in the essentially debilitating pursuit of the most exhaustive objective knowledge. The supposed objectivity of nineteenth-century historicism, which is said to conceive of itself as pure thought contemplating life, is based on the delusion that empirical reality can be photographically reproduced in language without first passing through the medium of a perceiving, judging, living subject. Against the impotence of such passive, spectatorial objectivism, in which life is subordinated to history, Nietzsche presents an ideal of history in the service of life. The model for Nietzsche's ideal historian is not the experimental scientist striving to establish final general laws from the totality of facts, but rather the creative artist whose work transforms and gives meaning to the world:

Wenn der Wert eines Dramas nur in dem Schluß- und Hauptgedanken liegen sollte, so würde das Drama selbst ein möglichst weiter, ungerader und mühsamer Weg zum Ziele sein; und so hoffe ich, daß die Geschichte ihre Bedeutung nicht in den allgemeinen Gedanken, als einer Art von Blüte und Frucht, erkennen dürfe: sondern daß ihr Wert gerade der ist, ein bekanntes, vielleicht gewöhnliches Thema, eine Alltags-Melodie geistreich zu umschreiben, zu erheben, zum umfassenden Symbol zu steigern und so in dem Original-Thema eine ganze Welt von Tiefsinn, Macht und Schönheit ahnen zu lassen. Dazu gehört aber vor allem eine große künstlerische Potenz, ein schaffendes Darüberschweben, ein liebendes Versenktsein in die empirischen Data, ein Weiterdichten an gegebenen Typen — dazu gehört allerdings Objektivität, aber als positive Eigenschaft.<sup>116</sup>

Nietzsche not only rejects the teleological scientism of nineteenth-century historicism, he also characteristically attacks its democratic, egalitarian tendency. In order to judge rightly the value of past events what is needed is not the passivity of spectators but the extraordinary capacity to attempt to participate in the greatness of history:

<sup>115</sup> In Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in Drei Bänden*, ed. by Karl Schlechta, ninth edition (Munich, 1982), I, pp. 135–434 (pp. 210–85). Hofmannsthal first read the first two *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* in 1892, i.e. before writing 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' (HSW III, p. 397).

<sup>116</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 249.

*Nur aus der höchsten Kraft der Gegenwart dürft ihr das Vergangene deuten: nur in der stärksten Anspannung eurer edelsten Eigenschaften werdet ihr erraten, was in dem Vergangnen wissens- und bewahrenswürdig und groß ist. Gleiches durch Gleiches!*<sup>117</sup>

Thus, the life-affirming engagement with history cannot be a universal pursuit; it is the exclusive province of a small artistic élite capable of recognizing greatness.

Nietzsche acknowledges that by virtue of the fact that man is endowed with memory, he cannot, like the animals, forget his past utterly and live in the pure present. However, history cannot consist in remembering everything, as to live in the past in this sense is to forfeit the ability to act in the present and for the future. For Nietzsche, history necessarily involves a kind of selective amnesia: in order for history to serve the ongoing process of life — that is, to issue forth in meaningful action and not simply to stagnate in cluttered 'Innerlichkeit' — it must concentrate solely on those elements of the past which are of value and reject all others.

There are a number of noticeable similarities between Nietzsche's observations on history and Hofmannsthal's texts discussed in this chapter. Nietzsche's reflections on the inability to forget and the burden of the past have parallels with Hofmannsthal's depiction of the modern English aesthetic sensibility in 'Algernon Charles Swinburne', and with the plight of Claudio in *Der Tor und der Tod*. The English aesthetes' estrangement from life, it will be remembered, was said to be a natural result of a modern urban upbringing in which art, and specifically museums and art galleries, provide the first experience of the world. In the case of Claudio this mediated perception of the world through the inherited repository of aesthetic memories was shown to hinder participation in life, though the example of Swinburne demonstrates that it is possible to infuse the vast artistic inheritance of the past with a higher order of vitality. Similarly, in 'Walter Pater' Hofmannsthal's depiction of his generation as weak and enthralled by the narcotic beauties of an imagined past has close affinities with Nietzsche's criticism of the scientific preoccupation with history as spectatorial and impotent. The ideal critic of 'Walter Pater' also has marked similarities to Nietzsche's ideal historian. Both must be artists, and both must love; and their task consists not in the futile attempt to reproduce reality with photographic accuracy but in 'Weiterdichten'. Nietzsche's assertion that the historian can only judge what is worth knowing by exerting his most noble qualities is similar to Hofmannsthal's statement that the ideal critic must revivify the art of the past by an exertion of the reproductive imagination.

One could extend this comparison, but the above discussion is sufficient to explain Hofmannsthal's seemingly idiosyncratic description of his Swinburne essay as historical prose. This appears strange only if history is taken to mean the essentially factual depiction of the past. Hofmannsthal, however, did not conceive of history in the objectivist factual sense which Nietzsche attacks; when the young Hofmannsthal writes of history he means this in something akin to the Nietzschean sense of the artistic interpretation of significant facts and events in the service of life. Thus the metaphorical style of Hofmannsthal's essays and their creativity which involves the highly selective use of factual material can be seen as related to Nietzsche's notion of life-affirming history. Hofmannsthal's criticism as art does not aim to produce a documentary history of literature, but rather to create a literary history in the service of life. Whether Nietzsche would have approved of the result is another matter.

<sup>117</sup> Op. cit., p. 250.



As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, it was Hofmannsthal's essays which introduced Rudolf Kassner to Swinburne, Pater, and the Pre-Raphaelites. What, then, could Kassner have learned from these critical reflections on English art? In terms of solid factual information, he could have learned very little indeed. The Swinburne essay informs the reader only of the existence of *Atalanta in Calydon* and the first series of *Poems and Ballads*. 'Walter Pater' gives only the briefest glosses of three of the English critic's publications, and from 'Über moderne englische Malerei' one learns little about the career of Burne-Jones and the other Pre-Raphaelites. The purely factual content of these essays, then, would have introduced Kassner to little more than the names of these artists and the titles of a limited number of their works. However, Kassner could have learned much more from the themes of Hofmannsthal's essays: the attempted resolution of the art/life dichotomy; the ethical dimension of modern art; and, most importantly for Kassner, the creative nature of aesthetic criticism. As I have shown, the last of these themes is not only discussed by Hofmannsthal, it is exemplified by his mode of critical engagement which has more in common with art than with the scientific approaches advocated by late nineteenth-century German academic critics. What Hofmannsthal's essays expound and exemplify is criticism as art, and this, more than anything else, is what Kassner could have learned from them. While not the originator of the notion of criticism as art, Hofmannsthal was one of its most accomplished German exponents, and in Vienna the leading critic in this mode. His essays would have introduced Kassner not only to the work of the English artists who formed the subject matter of *Die Mystik*, but also to an artistic mode of critical engagement with art. Just why this would have appealed to the young Kassner will be examined in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PRECONDITIONS: KASSNER'S EARLY LIFE AND WORK

#### I INTRODUCTION

'Was so direct niederzuschreiben ist über das Leben, Geburt etc langweilt mich immer entsetzlich. Das Leben u. s. w. ist nur da um der Verwandlung willen; unser Leben wenigstens, heute im besonderen Sinn u. Ausmaß. Mit dem bloßen Verlauf können wir nichts anfangen; das läuft aus, und das ist alles. Und diesen bloßen Auslauf zu hindern, oder hintanzusetzen, dazu ist die Kunst da.'  
(KSW VII, p. 763)

In the previous chapter I showed what the young Rudolf Kassner could have learned from Loris-Hofmannsthal's essays on English art and artists. Being primarily concerned with the method of these essays, my discussion gave relatively little attention to Hofmannsthal's early life. There is, to date, no critical biography of Hofmannsthal. Indeed, it is hard to see how such a biography could be written given the vast number of primary sources ranging from notebooks, through letters, to the complex interpretations of the relationship between life and work in *Ad me ipsum* (1916–29) — not to mention the seemingly countless secondary texts on his life and work.<sup>1</sup> The absence or impossibility of a comprehensive biography notwithstanding, the general reader can easily find basic biographical information in any of the numerous monographs on Hofmannsthal.<sup>2</sup> In a study such as the present, therefore, extensive detail of Hofmannsthal's early life is largely unnecessary.

By contrast, in the case of a critically neglected and scarcely-known figure like Kassner some biographical information is necessary for the general reader who can be expected to know little of his life and work. However, any account of Kassner's early life must contend with the relative dearth of reliable documentation from the period under consideration. There are a number of reasons for this lack of primary material, three of which I will mention. First, Kassner's literary début was, at least by the standards of his contemporaries, comparatively late. During the 1890s, Kassner, unlike Hofmannsthal, was still unpublished and unknown, and therefore had no reason to believe he was writing for posterity. There are, then, no carefully preserved notebooks or journals which would reveal the development of Kassner's interests and ideas in the way the copious 'Aufzeichnungen aus dem Nachlaß' illuminate even the earliest years of Hofmannsthal's career.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, as Kassner's association with the literary figures of his time began only after *Die Mystik* had been published, there is little correspondence to shed light on the period with which this study is concerned. Even if Kassner's earliest letters had expressed literary or

<sup>1</sup> On the difficulty of such a biography, see Hans-Albrecht Koch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal* (Darmstadt, 1989), pp. 28–33.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Werner Volke's monograph, *Hofmannsthal* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1967) and the less immediately accessible but more detailed critical apparatus of HSW.

<sup>3</sup> A letter of May 1897 shows Kassner to have kept a notebook or rough workbook: 'Augenblicklich produziere ich ohne Ziel, das heißt in mein Taschenbuch über Kunst und Philosophie ohne Ziel!' (BaT, p. 25) The book has not survived.

philosophical views, his correspondents would understandably have seen no reason to preserve the reflections of an unknown young man. Finally, unlike most writers of his generation, Kassner survived both World Wars, during which much material from his early career was destroyed or went astray.<sup>4</sup> After the Second World War Kassner, then over seventy, was rescued from near destitution in Vienna and resettled in Switzerland where, with the support of friends and admirers, he lived out his final years in hotel accommodation. If any early correspondence survived by 1945, Kassner's displacement and the relatively confined nature of his new home would have made it difficult to preserve such material.

Until recently, the scarcity and inaccessibility of reliable information on Kassner's early years made it impossible to give anything but the most sketchy account of his life and thought before the publication of *Die Mystik*. However, the completion in 1991 of the ten-volume critical edition of his works has made a considerable quantity of previously inaccessible material widely available. In particular, the publication of volumes VII (1984) and IX (1990) has provided not only extensively annotated modern editions of Kassner's three volumes of memoirs, but also a number of previously unpublished primary texts which shed new light on his early life and education. In addition to these late primary sources and the invaluable critical apparatus of the edition, the publication of Kassner's earliest surviving correspondence as *Briefe an Tetzl* (1979) has given a unique insight into his life and thought in the years immediately preceding the publication of *Die Mystik* in 1900. The picture of Kassner's early life which can be reconstructed from these diverse texts is far from complete, and it is now unlikely that new sources from the period will come to light; however, these publications — in particular the early letters — should put an end to unfounded speculation regarding Kassner's thought in the 1890s.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into four sections. The first and fourth are predominantly biographical; the second and third are largely text-analytical. The purpose of the biographical sections is twofold. First, they aim to give the general reader an insight into Kassner's early life and the broader context in which his literary education and tastes must be seen. Secondly, the information presented here is intended to highlight parallels and divergences in the lives of Hofmannsthal and Kassner, and more specifically the areas of similarity and difference in their respective notions of criticism. The first section of this chapter focuses on Kassner's upbringing and education. My account of his university years in Austria and Germany draws particular attention to the critical orthodoxy of the late nineteenth-century German academy and considers Kassner's response to the methods of his teachers. The following section presents a detailed textual analysis of Kassner's earliest publication, the critically neglected short story 'Sonnengnade' (1896). My reading aims to show the richness of this superficially simple text and the inadequacy of such stock notions as aestheticism and the art/life distinction to its analysis. From the point of view of this study the importance of 'Sonnengnade' lies in its far from obvious autobiographical dimension and its treatment of the question of the ideal relationship between critic and artist, a problem which dominates Kassner's early thought and finds mature expression in *Die Mystik*.

The third main section analyses the earliest example of Kassner's literary criticism, his doctoral dissertation 'Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung' (1896). This important document, which has survived only in an abridged and highly selective transcription, became available when work

<sup>4</sup> In 'Erinnerungen an England: 1897–1912' (*Umgang der Jahre*, 1949), Kassner remarks that the bombing of the Inselverlag in December 1943 had destroyed any remaining copies of *Englische Dichter*, the revised second edition of *Die Mystik*. See KSW IX, p. 353 (cited on p. 97 below) and the editors' note on p. 910.

on this study was already well advanced. Accordingly, my analysis is less extensive than I would have wished. Nonetheless, even a cursory reading of the dissertation yields invaluable insights into the young Kassner's unorthodox approach to literature and reveals significant areas of continuity between the themes of 'Sonnengnade' and the ideal of criticism presented in *Die Mystik, die Künstler und das Leben*. The final section of this chapter returns to Kassner's early life, presenting his reading and thought in the period 1896 to 1899 with special reference to the alternative literary canon of *Jung-Wien*, and tracing the genesis of *Die Mystik* from the author's first, tentative plans through to composition. Here too I have drawn attention to significant differences between Kassner's and Hofmannsthal's respective views of English art and life — differences which, though revealed by seemingly trivial biographical details, are symptomatic of a fundamental divergence in their attitudes to experience and factuality. The conclusion of this chapter draws together the key findings of the preceding sections, summarizing the convergences and divergences in Hofmannsthal's and Kassner's understanding of criticism, art, and criticism as art.

## II RURAL UPBRINGING AND METROPOLITAN EDUCATION

“Was hilft mir die Wissenschaft, so ich darinnen nicht lebe?” Jakob Böhme' (KSW VII, p. 81)

Rudolf Kassner was born, the seventh of ten children, on 11 September 1873 at Groß-Pawlowitz in the Austro-Hungarian province of Southern Moravia.<sup>5</sup> His Silesian parents had settled there some nine years earlier, and his father had leased the imperial estate of Groß-Pawlowitz, establishing what became a profitable sugar plantation and factory. Here, in the security of a large, relatively affluent provincial household, far from the bustle of modern urban society, Rudolf Kassner spent most of his first fifteen years. However, his childhood was no unsullied rural idyll: at the age of only nine months the child was found motionless in his cot with no control over his limbs. He had suffered an attack of poliomyelitis which left him permanently crippled in both legs. As a result, for most of his life Kassner could walk only with the aid of sticks, and in early years suffered constant physical pain, both as consequence of his disability and of protracted, but largely unsuccessful, courses of orthopaedic treatment.

Ironically, it was his immobilizing handicap which occasioned Kassner's earliest journeys to Vienna and various Hungarian spas where his parents sought specialist advice and therapy. If walking was a slow and strenuous process, this did not restrict Kassner's mobility. Despite his pain and the awareness of difference from his peers, he was not an introverted boy and enjoyed an active rural childhood, joining in the games of his siblings and friends as best he could. One remarkable and admirable feature of Kassner's earliest correspondence and his late memoirs is the almost total absence of self-pity regarding his disability. While conscious, sometimes painfully so, of his difference and the disadvantages it often entailed, he refused to capitulate mentally or physically to his handicap, and the most impressive testaments to Kassner's extraordinary will-power and resilience are the extensive travels he undertook in early manhood. In an era when there was even less provision for the disabled than there is today, he travelled widely in Europe, Africa, and India, and until late in his long life remained an avid walker.

<sup>5</sup> Kassner's early life is sketched in Theodor Wieser's *Die Einbildungskraft bei Rudolf Kassner: Studie mit Abriss von Leben und Werk* (Zurich, 1949), pp. 13–16. Written during Kassner's lifetime, Wieser's study draws heavily and, in my opinion, rather too literally on the subtly artful late memoirs.

Like many of his contemporaries, Kassner received his elementary schooling at home, where he was taught by a governess and private tutor.<sup>6</sup> The first four years of secondary education were undertaken by the family's house tutor, and Kassner travelled twice each year to the 'Gymnasium' in nearby Nikolsburg to sit the obligatory 'Privatistenprüfungen'.<sup>7</sup> His final four years of schooling were spent in Nikolsburg, and he received his 'Matura' (the Austrian school leaving certificate) in July 1892. Although his school results were above average, Kassner was not considered an exceptionally gifted pupil, and when he matriculated at the University of Vienna in the autumn of the same year he was, as he later confessed, 'sehr unbelesen und auch sonst erstaunlich ungebildet' (KSW VII, p. 619).

It is tempting to regard this early lack of erudition and culture as a result of Kassner's provincial childhood and education. One can scarcely imagine a greater contrast than that between the upbringing of Kassner and Hofmannsthal, and there is an understandable temptation to focus, at least initially, on the very obvious differences between the two. Unlike Hofmannsthal, an only child who grew up in a household steeped in culture and spent most of his formative years in a bustling metropolis, Kassner was brought up in a large provincial family which was indifferent to culture, and for his first nineteen years was almost completely insulated from the influences of the city. In late 1892, when Loris-Hofmannsthal's precocious talent had already brought him recognition in the exclusive literary circles of *Jung-Wien* and George's *Blätter für die Kunst*, Rudolf Kassner was an unknown, unpublished, and, by his own admission, uncultured school-leaver about to start studies in Vienna. When Kassner was experiencing modern city life for the first time, Hofmannsthal, his junior by some six months, was already reflecting on the role of urban childhood in forming the mediated sensibility characteristic of his English aesthetes in 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' — reflections which drew on and transformed his own metropolitan childhood.

This being said, the discrepancies between the early achievements of Kassner and Hofmannsthal cannot convincingly be attributed to Kassner's provincial education. As mentioned above, it was not unusual for children of affluent Austrian families to receive their initial schooling at home, and Hofmannsthal, too, was privately tutored before going on to the 'Wiener Akademische Gymnasium'. It should also be emphasized that the curriculum in Nikolsburg would not have differed significantly from that of Hofmannsthal's distinguished school in Vienna. As his later memoirs attest, at Nikolsburg Kassner received the standard late nineteenth-century Austrian humanist education with its strong emphasis on classical languages and literature.<sup>8</sup> His undistinguished school performance notwithstanding, in this respect at least he was at no great disadvantage to his Viennese contemporaries, and on his arrival in the capital was already equipped with the thorough grounding in the classics which has been described as the 'educational precondition' of *Jung-Wien*.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the significant differences between Kassner and Hofmannsthal at this time are to be understood primarily in terms of the radically disparate cultural horizons of rural Moravia and urban Vienna, rather than with reference to supposed discrepancies in the quality of provincial and metropolitan education. For the first nineteen years of his life Kassner had little or no access to modern literature, no opportunity to visit the

<sup>6</sup> On Kassner's governess and house tutor see 'Meine Lehrer', KSW VII, pp. 7–42 (pp. 7–22), and p. 637, *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> During his first four years of secondary education Kassner was classified as a 'Privatist', i.e. a pupil educated at home. See KSW VII, p. 637, note to p. 19, lines 9f.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Kassner's reminiscences of his Latin teachers, KSW VII, pp. 29–34.

<sup>9</sup> See Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler, 'Decadence and Antiquity: The Educational Preconditions of *Jung-Wien*', in Erika Nielsen (ed.), *Focus on Vienna 1900: Change and Continuity in Literature, Music, Art and Intellectual History* (Munich, 1982), pp. 32–45.



theatre, and no knowledge of the thriving urban literary circles of the time.<sup>10</sup> All this changed in October 1892 when he arrived in Vienna to begin university studies.

Information regarding Kassner's earliest university years is scant, but from the outset he would appear to have been disenchanted with the academy. In his first semesters Kassner studied History and Geography, the subjects in which he had excelled in Nikolsburg. However, as he later put it, he soon came to regard his History teachers as incapable of inspiring what he felt to be the necessary enthusiasm for their subject.<sup>11</sup> If uninspiring, Kassner's studies were nothing if not varied: during his three years in Vienna, he attended classes on a variety of subjects ranging from Philosophy to Swedish language, taking in courses in English literary history and philology on the way. It is notable that in his third semester (winter 1893–94), both he and Hofmannsthal, although they did not then know each other, attended the same course of lectures in Aesthetics given by Alfred von Berger, 'Dramaturgie der antiken Tragiker'.<sup>12</sup> During his first four semesters, however, the emphasis of Kassner's studies gradually moved towards 'Germanistik', the subject in which he would submit his doctoral thesis in 1896.

As far as Kassner's search for enthusiasm was concerned, the Germanists of Vienna fared little better than the Historians. Many of Kassner's classes during his six semesters in the city were with the professor who subsequently became his 'Doktorvater', Jakob Minor.<sup>13</sup> Whatever his academic eminence and daunting scholarly output, Minor was not the man to fire his student's literary enthusiasm. According even to a largely sympathetic obituary published in 1913, Minor, a leading authority on Schiller and a particularly stringent practitioner of positivist scholarship, was a classic 'Stubengelehrter', a diligent but closeted academic.<sup>14</sup> Kassner's references to Minor in letters from the late 1890s reveal a good-humoured antipathy but are on the whole characterized by indifference. Written some forty years later, however, the reminiscences of his 'Doktorvater' in *Umgang der Jahre* paint a picture which is anything but indifferent.<sup>15</sup> Here Minor is portrayed as an unhappy and physically unlovely man whose home resembled a library of terrifying proportions. Heavy-hipped from a sedantry life of study, and doleful in appearance, he had an unpleasantly high-pitched voice in which he is said to have delivered lectures distinguished by little more than a virtuosity in relating plot summaries. Even allowing for exaggeration in the late memoirs, Minor was hardly the man to inspire his young student's literary enthusiasm. How, then, did Kassner's passion for literature develop?

The lecture theatres of the 'Universität Wien' may have held little attraction, but the dramatic performances of the 'Burgtheater' more than compensated for Kassner's disaffection towards the academy. Until he moved to Vienna Kassner had had access neither to modern literature nor the theatre; once in the capital, he became an avid theatre-goer, and it was this extra-curricular enthusiasm, rather than the uninspiring performances of his university teachers, which kindled his passion for literature:

<sup>10</sup> On the unimportance of reading for Kassner and his siblings, see KSW VII, p. 405, where he writes: 'Es wurde wenig gelesen unter uns.' On Kassner's early ignorance of contemporary literature see also, KSW VII, pp. 451–52.

<sup>11</sup> KSW VII, p. 614 and p. 620.

<sup>12</sup> On the various courses by Berger which Kassner attended see KSW VII, p. 658, note to p. 117, lines 10ff.

<sup>13</sup> The courses by Minor for which Kassner was registered are listed in the extract from his 'Meldebuch' cited in KSW VII, pp. 659–60, note to p. 119, lines 11–14. He also enrolled for numerous Old and Middle High German classes given by Professor Richard Heinzel.

<sup>14</sup> See Robert F. Arnold, 'Jakob Minor', *Euphorion*, 20 (1913), 789–801: 'Ein Stubengelehrter war er allerdings, im guten und schlechten Sinne des Wortes.' (p. 795) However, Minor was not indifferent to modern literary developments; on 11 April 1891 he held the 'Festrede' for Henrik Ibsen during the latter's visit to Vienna. See Jens Rieckmann, *Aufbruch in die Moderne: Die Anfänge des Jungen Wien. Österreichische Literatur und Kritik im Fin de siècle*, second revised edition, (Frankfurt a.M., 1986), p. 52.

<sup>15</sup> See KSW IX, pp. 261–62.

Noch mehr aber als die Universität mit ihren großen Professoren zog mich damals die Literatur an; Literatur aber war zunächst das Theater. Ich bin in allen diesen Jahren ein richtiger Theatermann gewesen und habe mich erst ganz wohl und im Gleichgewicht mit mir selber gefühlt, wenn ich abends aus dem Dunkel der vierten Galerie des Burgtheaters auf die Bühne unten im Licht starren durfte. (KSW IX, p. 227)<sup>16</sup>

The university here is not 'die k.k. Universität Wien' but 'die königliche Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Berlin', where Kassner matriculated as a visiting doctoral student in October 1895. In the above passage, however, one can read 'die Universität' as meaning the university as such. Kassner's early devotion to the theatre marks the beginning of a literary education which took place largely outside the confines of the academy. As he later put it:

Es muß aber gesagt werden, daß ich auch hier [in Wien] ganz wenig den Vorlesungen, sehr viel aber dem Burgtheater, damals der ersten Bühne der Welt, und der einsamen Lectüre in meinem Studentenzimmer der Josefstadt verdanke. (KSW VII, p. 620)

Indeed, so great was his disillusionment with the academy that in a late, posthumously published remark Kassner looked back on his university years and concluded that he had no teachers, having in effect educated himself.<sup>17</sup>

Now, as I will suggest later in this chapter and again in the next, the formative influence of Kassner's university years cannot be dismissed quite as swiftly as this remark would have one believe. But, concentrating for the moment on the notion of self-education, what exactly would have been the content of Kassner's extra-curricular 'studies'? Whatever else he might have seen there, in the early 1890s the 'Burgtheater' would not have introduced Kassner to the drama of the Viennese avant-garde to which Hofmannsthal belonged. As Karl Kraus's acidic theatre reviews from this period attest, during Kassner's early years in Vienna the programme of the 'Burgtheater' was still dominated by the classics and what Kraus regarded as minor dramas of the recent past.<sup>18</sup> Of course, Kraus was no friend of the *Jung-Wiener*, whose critical mentor Hermann Bahr he pilloried relentlessly, and consequently did not lament the absence of their productions from the Viennese stage. What Kraus detested, however, was the absence of Naturalist drama; for, like the modern Viennese poets and playwrights he reviled, the German Naturalists he revered were largely ignored by the theatrical establishment of the city. Kassner's early visits to the 'Burgtheater' would, therefore, have introduced him to little that was radically modern in drama. If he did have access to the work of the *Jung-Wiener* — and his late remarks on his knowledge of Hofmannsthal's essays show that he did — it would have been through the numerous literary periodicals of the decade. Little more can be said with certainty of Kassner's three years in Vienna than that they appear to have been solitary and largely directed towards a passionate, unstructured, and non-academic education in literature.

When he went to Berlin in the late summer of 1895, Kassner had completed six uninspiring semesters in Vienna. He spent the final year of his undergraduate studies in the German capital before returning to Vienna to submit his doctoral thesis 'Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung' in autumn 1896. In Berlin, as in Vienna, it was literature and the theatre rather than his university courses which held the greatest attraction for Kassner, and in the mid-1890s the literary scene of the German capital was thriving. In Berlin Kassner encountered a conception of literary modernism quite distinct from that of the Austrian metropolis. Although the 1890s are often

<sup>16</sup> Also quoted by Wieser, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> KSW VII, p. 614. and p. 622.

<sup>18</sup> For the programme of the Burgtheater between 1892 and 1895 see *Burgtheater 1776–1976: Aufführungen und Besetzungen von zweihundert Jahren*, 2 vols (Vienna, n.d.), I, 369–82.

depicted as a confused decade of 'isms' ('Impressionism', 'Symbolism', etc.), during Kassner's time in Berlin the dominant modern trend in literature and drama remained Naturalism.<sup>19</sup> This must be stressed as it is a common misconception that, as a literary force, Naturalism had run its course by the early nineties. This notion can be traced in part to a confusion of the currents in German and Austrian literature of the period. Although Hermann Bahr, a leading critical light in the *Jung-Wien* circle, had proclaimed as early as 1891 that literary Naturalism had seen its day, the progressive theatres of Berlin were still firmly under the sway of the Naturalists until well into the 1890s.<sup>20</sup> This highlights an important difference in the phenomenon of literary modernism ('die Moderne') in the two cities, a difference best understood by comparing briefly the two capitals. In the late nineteenth century Berlin was a new and rapidly expanding industrial metropolis with all the social and political problems of nascent industrial society. Vienna, on the other hand, was an ancient imperial capital in which modernization had to contend with the largely ossified social and political traditions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. From this thumbnail sketch of the two cities, it is easy to see why the 'Berliner Moderne' should have grown up around the social and political materialism of literary Naturalism. By contrast, in Vienna Naturalism was never really a force to be reckoned with, and the writers of the 'Wiener Moderne' sought other modes of literary expression to accommodate their perceptions of the specifically Austrian problems of modernity. To this extent Bahr's essays sounded the death knell on a movement which in Vienna had never really existed.<sup>21</sup> This is not to deny his importance. There can be no doubt that Bahr's polemical and trend-setting criticism was decisive in shaping the literary tastes of the young Viennese modernists. Indeed, such was his influence that his programmatic utterances, when compared with subsequent developments, can seem almost prophetic. However, one should beware of seeing Bahr as a prophet of Austrian modernism. On closer inspection his 'prophecies' were largely self-fulfilling. It must be remembered that it was chiefly through the protean Bahr that the young writers of the 'Wiener Moderne' became acquainted with the latest European literary trends.<sup>22</sup>

As indicated in the previous chapter, for the *Jung-Wiener* the most notable of these trends was French Symbolism which decisively influenced Austrian literature throughout and beyond the 1890s. During Kassner's year in Berlin it was the Naturalist plays of Hauptmann and Ibsen, and not the Symbolism of Maurice Maeterlinck, which was regarded as the last word in modernity. However, although his regular visits to Otto Brahm's 'Deutsches Theater' exposed him to the latest in Naturalist drama, this strand of modernism held little appeal for Kassner, whose literary interests were more closely allied to those of his Viennese contemporaries. Through his extra-curricular engagement with drama and literature he was becoming increasingly concerned with questions of style and form, which, although at the heart of contemporary Viennese literary debate, were at best peripheral to materialistic Naturalism and the positivism of his university teachers. It is not surprising, then, that even before he came to

<sup>19</sup> See Kassner's remark that his time in Berlin was 'die Blütezeit des Naturalismus auf der Bühne' (KSW VII, p. 615). The difficulties of dating the end of Naturalism are addressed by Günther Mahal in his *Naturalismus*, second edition (Munich, 1975). Mahal suggests a fluid cut-off point ('fließende Grenze') between 1893 and 1895 (p. 26).

<sup>20</sup> Bahr's essay 'Die Überwindung des Naturalismus' was published in his volume of the same name (Dresden/Leipzig, 1891). In the essay he depicts Naturalism as a necessary stage in literary history which by 1891 had been surpassed by subsequent developments. See *Zur Überwindung des Naturalismus. Theoretische Schriften 1887-1904*, ed. by Gotthart Wunberg (Stuttgart, 1968), pp. 85-89; the volume is henceforth cited as *Zur Überwindung*.

<sup>21</sup> See Manfred Gsteiger, *Französische Symbolisten in der deutschen Literatur der Jahrhundertwende: (1869-1914)*, (Bern, 1971), p. 75: 'Hier [in Wien] brauchte der Naturalismus im Grunde nie überwunden zu werden, weil er gar nie geherrscht hatte.' This point is supported by Jacques Le Rider, *Das Ende der Illusion: Die Wiener Moderne und die Krisen der Identität* (Vienna, 1990), p. 16; and Rieckmann, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> On Bahr's influence on *Jung-Wien* see Rieckmann, especially chapter one, 'Hermann Bahr: "Bote und Werber einer neuen Kunst"', pp. 13-41.

write his doctoral thesis, Kassner was beginning to look for new critical perspectives on literature and art, and it was during his time in Berlin that he made the first tentative step towards what would become his career.

As Kassner later remarked, by Austrian standards of the time, to study in Berlin was the ideal culmination of a university course, irrespective of one's subject.<sup>23</sup> In the German capital he continued to study 'Germanistik' under Erich Schmidt, the successor and former student of the foremost nineteenth-century positivist critic Wilhelm Scherer — and, according to Kassner, the rival of Jakob Minor.<sup>24</sup> During his year in the city, Kassner also attended lectures by a number of other renowned academics, including the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, father of modern 'Geisteswissenschaft', the literary scholar Hermann Grimm, and the Prussian historian Heinrich von Treitschke. Kassner's uninspiring years in Vienna and his later antipathy towards Jakob Minor should not be taken to imply an outright rejection of the academy and academics. In Berlin he studied with greater enthusiasm and diligence, attending classes regularly and even coming to regard some of his teachers with awe.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, both in his later memoirs and his correspondence from the 1890s Kassner's attitudes to his professors cover the spectrum from scarcely veiled antipathy towards Minor, to near reverence for Treitschke and Grimm. His estimation of Minor's supposed rival, Erich Schmidt, is less clearly defined, lying somewhere between these extremes. In the memoirs he describes Schmidt in terms of the fashionable 'Lebensphilosophie' of the 1890s as 'ein Sonnenkind', a fortunate man, and more a man of the world than his Viennese counterpart, the morose, if thoroughgoing, scholar Minor. But, affable and well-liked as Schmidt would appear to have been, his work failed to impress Kassner.<sup>26</sup>

On the whole, then, in Berlin as in Vienna the academy and its professors exerted relatively little influence on Kassner's approach to literature. As his unflattering retrospective portrait of Minor shows, Kassner's assessment of his teachers in later work tends to focus on personality and physiognomy more than on the tenability of their critical or philosophical positions. This being said, the question remains as to what it was in the orthodox university approach to criticism that Kassner found incompatible with his own developing interests in art and literature. Over forty years after completing his doctorate, Kassner took stock of his studies in Vienna and Berlin. The following passage characterizes, with a humour typical of the late memoirs, his view of the academic approach to literature in the 1890s:

Die Methode jener Wissenschaft, darin ich meine Doktorsprüfung gemacht und das Doktorat der Philosophie freilich bloß mit Mehrstimmigkeit erlangt habe, war wie alle anderen, die streng wissenschaftlich gehandhabt werden sollten, die kausalgenetische, welche im speziellen Falle etwa in solchen Fragen zusammengefaßt werden konnte: Woher hat der Autor, Goethe oder sonst wer, den Stoff? Wie wurde derselbe Stoff von anderen Autoren welcher Größenordnung immer, auch von ganz minimen, behandelt? Woher kam der Stoff überhaupt? Welcher Einfluß liegt bei diesem oder jenem Werk vor, wenn wir endlich vom Stoff absehen? Gibt es noch etwas anderes auf der Welt als Stoff und Einfluß? Welche Frau hat Goethe am meisten, und von welcher wurde er am meisten geliebt? Hat er es selber noch gewußt, als er sich darüber nach Verlauf einer geraumen Zeit zu anderen mündlich oder schriftlich äußerte? Oder können wir erst so etwas ganz richtig wissen, uns dabei beruhigen und zugleich glücklich fühlen? (KSW VII, p. 121)

<sup>23</sup> On the appeal of Berlin for Austrians see KSW VII, p. 92. On the particular attraction of the university for Austrian students see KSW IX, p. 224. For another account of the Viennese awe of Berlin at the time, see Le Rider, p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> KSW IX, p. 261.

<sup>25</sup> KSW VII, p. 615.

<sup>26</sup> See BaT, p. 13 and p. 22 where the evasiveness of Schmidt's critical work on Platen is criticized. Like Minor, Schmidt actively promoted modern literature, most notably the work of Gerhart Hauptmann.

This is almost certainly a source of Baumann's devaluation of subject matter and influence discussed in the opening section of the previous chapter. What emerges from the above quotation, however, is that Kassner's aversion to the notions of 'Stoff' and 'Einfluß' arose less from a preconceived theoretical standpoint than from his affective response to literary scholarship in the universities of Vienna and Berlin during the 1890s. Kassner was quite simply bored by what he considered the ludicrous amount of indiscriminate reading demanded of him. On one level, then, his devaluation of the notion of influence in academic literary study is an expression of personal feelings rather than of a reasoned intellectual position, and as such can hardly be adopted convincingly by scholars of his work. As I remarked in chapter one, the danger of uncritically adopting Kassner's views, or what are taken to be his views, concerning influence is that this obscures the question of why he felt the causal-genetic approach satirized above to be inappropriate to his own interests in literature.

So far I have considered Kassner's education primarily from the point of view of his affective response to his teachers and their methods. This is justified to the extent that during his university years he sought to cultivate a passion for literature which the uninspiring plot summaries of academic literary studies failed to provide. But seen in its broader context Kassner's rejection of institutionalized 'Germanistik' is more than the expression of personal disaffection. Indeed, his attitude to the academy is representative of a widespread disenchantment with late nineteenth-century scholarly methods. In order to appreciate the more general dimension of Kassner's attitude towards his university teachers some account of the underlying assumptions of academic literary studies at the turn of the century is necessary. Although Kassner does not use the term in his memoirs of Vienna and Berlin, what he describes in the above caricature of literary scholarship is the positivist approach to the humanities which dominated Western European universities for much of the last century. Kassner himself attributed the causal-genetic emphasis of this academic method specifically to the influence of Darwinism.<sup>27</sup> Although there is some truth in this, to the extent that Darwinism represented a radical application of scientific enquiry to what had formerly been the exclusive province of religion and metaphysics, it is more accurate to describe nineteenth-century positivist method as a product of the general hegemony of the natural sciences. Deriving from the philosophy of Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill, positivist literary scholarship sought to apply the supposedly objective empirical methods of natural science to literature. Theoretically at least, this meant the literary text should be observed with the impartial eye of the natural scientist. Thus, the ideal positivist critic became a kind of literary scientist whose discipline consisted in the dispassionate observation of objectively verifiable facts, and the identification of their causal relationships. Accordingly, positivist criticism rejected as unscientific not only the subjective feelings and opinions of the critic but any form of metaphysical or religious speculation. The results of applying positivist method to literary scholarship were the compendious nineteenth-century literary histories, the enduring value of which resides in their painstaking compilation of factual information rather than in their critical interpretations.

What I have sketched above is a picture of the ideal positivist critic. Not surprisingly, in practice even Wilhelm Scherer, the foremost exponent of nineteenth-century German

<sup>27</sup> KSW VII, p. 122.

positivism, frequently deviated from the ideal of strict scientific objectivity.<sup>28</sup> However, if it proved impossible to banish the subjective and the metaphysical from literary scholarship, the positivist concern with observable facts and identifiable causal relationships almost invariably gave rise to the lengthy plot summaries and the fixation with literary motifs ('Stoff') which dominated Kassner's university studies. As he suggests, this tedious procedure was related to a further problem of positivist criticism, namely its inability to give a satisfactory account of literary value. One of the most irksome features of Kassner's studies was that he had to read so many authors whose work he found bad or indifferent, or as he puts it, 'Autoren welcher Größenordnung immer, auch [ . . . ] ganz minimen' (KSW VII, p. 121). This is directly attributable to the scientific ideal discussed above. For, given that the basic unit of positivism is the objective fact, it is difficult to see how one could assert the value of any particular literary text relative to another without importing inadmissible subjective judgements or metaphysical considerations. Theoretically at least, all literary texts are equal in the eye of positivist literary science by virtue of their factuality. The practical consequence was that one had to read as much as possible of a period in order to acquire the greatest number of facts and thus approximate to the greatest quantity of objective knowledge. The positivist criterion of erudition was quantitative rather than qualitative, objective rather than subjective, and it is therefore hardly surprising that a student seeking inspiration from literature should have felt this all-consuming concern with motifs and influence calculated to stifle any form of affective engagement.

As mentioned above, Kassner's attitude to academic method, though largely founded on personal disaffection, is not merely the expression of a subjective feeling; it exemplifies a more widespread disillusionment with scientific positivism. Writing in 1902, the ageing Berlin professor Friedrich Paulsen assessed with concern the nature and consequences of this disillusionment:

Ein neues Geschlecht [wendete sich], misstrauisch gegen die Vernunft wie das frühere [i.e. Hegels generation] gegen den Glauben, zur Wissenschaft: die exakte Forschung wird uns den Boden unter den Füßen sichern und uns ein treues Weltbild geben. Aber die Wissenschaft leistet das nicht; immer deutlicher wird es, sie führt nicht zu einer das Ganze umspannenden, die Phantasie und das Gemüt befriedigenden Weltansicht; sie bringt nur tausend fragmentarische Kenntnisse zu Wege, zum Teil leidlich gesichert, vor allem in den Naturwissenschaften, die wenigstens der Technik eine Grundlage geben, zum Teil ewig fragwürdige, ewig der Umwertung ausgesetzt, wie in den historischen Wissenschaften. Die Folge ist ein Gefühl der Enttäuschung: die Wissenschaft sättigt nicht den Hunger nach Erkenntnis; sie erfüllt auch nicht das Verlangen nach persönlicher Bildung; sie fordert Einsetzung der letzten Kraft und lohnt mit spärlichen Früchten. Das Gefühl solcher Enttäuschung ist weit verbreitet; die Gefolgschaft, die hinter Nietzsche herzieht, ist in der Hauptsache doch wohl durch den Unglauben an die Wissenschaft verbunden; die Zeiten des Unglaubens sind immer für Wunderdoktoren am zugänglichsten.<sup>29</sup>

This newest, anti-scientific generation, Kassner's generation, turned away from the belief in the exclusive hegemony of rationalist natural science in which the subjective dimensions of imagination and personality had no place and could find no fulfilment. Although Paulsen presents the rejection of objective science as proceeding from an understandable disillusionment with its failure to meet the needs of the subject, he regards the anti-scientific tendency of this

<sup>28</sup> See Manon Maren-Grisebach *Methoden der Literaturwissenschaft*, ninth edition (Tübingen, 1985). Chapter one, 'Positivistische Methode', pp. 10–22. Here Scherer, the 'Zentralgestalt des Positivismus' (p. 12), is said to have projected his own ideas onto literature in ways incompatible with the strict causal determinism of positivist theory (p. 14). Scherer's positivism is treated in greater detail by René Wellek in his *A History of Modern Criticism 1750–1950*, 5 vols (London, 1966), IV, *The Later Nineteenth Century*, 297–303.

<sup>29</sup> *Die deutschen Universitäten und das Universitätsstudium* (Berlin, 1902), pp. 81–82.

young generation as finding expression in irrationalist aberrations, such as the fashionable enthusiasm for Nietzsche — an enthusiasm which, with certain reservations, Kassner would later share.

As I have shown, during his first years in Vienna Kassner's engagement with literature and the theatre seems to have been solitary. However, in view of the widespread German disaffection with positivism outlined by Paulsen, it was almost inevitable that in Berlin Kassner would meet like-minded peers. During his time in the city he came into contact with a small group of students who shared his extra-curricular enthusiasm for literature. The origins of this association are undocumented, but Kassner's letters to his closest student friend Gottlieb Fritz ('Tetzel') testify to an enduring friendship, revealing both the fondness with which Kassner recalled their time together and the exuberance of their regular informal meetings. Though informal, this association was as productive as it was enjoyable. Not only did Kassner and his fellow students indulge in heady intellectual debate, they sought to give their common interests lasting expression by editing and publishing a volume of student poetry and prose. Over thirty years later, a contributor to their collection, Heinrich Spiero, recalled how Kassner and his friends had publicized their literary venture:

Im Jahre 1896 ließen die drei Studenten Emil Schering, Gottlieb Fritz und Rudolf Kaßner im Vorgarten der Universität Druckzettel mit der Aufforderung zur Teilnahme an einem *Musen Almanach* Berliner Studenten verteilen. Es kam, bei dem jungen Richard Schuster verlegt, Fontane und Hauptmann gewidmet, ein recht anständiger Band zusammen [. . .] (BaT, p. 155)<sup>30</sup>

The product of their editorial efforts, the *Musen Almanach Berliner Studenten*, was compiled during Kassner's final months in Berlin and published in November 1896. As Spiero indicates, the volume bears the dedication 'Unserem alten und jungen Meister Theodor Fontane und Gerhart Hauptmann' and includes mottos from both authors. Significantly, the Hauptmann motto is from the dream play *Hanneles Himmelfahrt* (1896), and not one of his more Naturalistic dramas, a choice which reveals the interests of Kassner and his friends to have been focused on the subjective and symbolic, rather than the social and materialist dimension of the playwright's work.

Although the *Musen Almanach* provided a number of students with the opportunity to publish their literary efforts, its importance should not be exaggerated. Kassner was satisfied with the volume but harboured no illusions regarding its literary merits. Soon after its publication he confided in Fritz that their collection was no 'Ewigkeitsbuch' (BaT, p. 16). The annotations to *Briefe an Tetzel* show the contributors to the *Musen Almanach* to have included a number of students who later achieved recognition as writers and academics.<sup>31</sup> Of Kassner's co-editors, however, only Schering went on to pursue a literary career, becoming Strindberg's authorized German translator and editor.<sup>32</sup> Fritz, although he did not publish any more original poetry, made his name as a distinguished senior librarian, and was instrumental in the reform of the German public library system during the early decades of this century.<sup>33</sup> By contrast, Kassner's contribution to the volume, the short story 'Sonnengnade', marks the beginning of a long and prolific literary career. To his astonishment, when he first read the story to Fritz and

<sup>30</sup> Quoted from H. Spiero, *Schicksal und Anteil. Ein Lebensweg in deutscher Wendezeit* (Berlin 1929), p. 72.

<sup>31</sup> See BaT, pp. 153–55.

<sup>32</sup> For details of Schering's life and career see BaT, pp. 145–47, note to page 10, line 16.

<sup>33</sup> Fritz's life and work are extensively documented in the appendices to BaT, pp. 273–87.

Schering in June 1896, they praised it as the best contribution to the collection.<sup>34</sup> Some years later, their enthusiasm would be echoed by another, considerably more distinguished literary associate, Rainer Maria Rilke. Yet, despite Rilke's comments, the story has been all but ignored in scholarly discussions of Kassner's early work. This neglect is particularly unfortunate, for, as I will argue in the following section, 'Sonnengnade' is not only of intrinsic interest, it also establishes a number of important and interrelated themes which recur in Kassner's early thought, and which find mature expression in *Die Mystik*.

### III CRITICAL BLINDNESS AND ARTISTIC VISION: 'SONNENGNADEN' (1896)

'Der Rationalismus [. . .] hatte jetzt um die Jahrhundertwende einen schweren Stand. Die Vernunft schien wie aufgebraucht, man war nicht mehr Rationalist [. . .], sondern was war man? Nihilist, und zwar nicht im Sinne der Russen, sondern gründlich im Sinne Sigmund Freuds. Das war man. Oder man war Mystiker. Mystiker, um nicht Nihilist zu sein.' (KSW IX, p. 356)

Ironically, the story which Kassner's friends greeted so enthusiastically merits only passing comment in the few studies of his work. In the introduction to her doctoral thesis, Bong-Hi Cha passes over 'Sonnengnade' with the brief and uncontentious gloss that it indicates Kassner's early inclination towards literary production.<sup>35</sup> Gerhart Baumann's remarks are slightly more extensive and considerably more contentious. He states that Kassner's short story and Hofmannsthal's verse drama *Der Tor und der Tod* (1893) share the same theme:

Die erste Veröffentlichung Kassners, die schmale Erzählung 'Sonnengnade' (1895; gedr. 1896), sie greift ein wenig tastend das Thema auf, welches Loris-Hofmannsthal zwei Jahre zuvor in 'Tor und Tod' gleichnishaft gestaltet hatte: hier wie dort Wahn und Tod des Ästheten [. . .] (*Kreuzwege*, p. 7)<sup>36</sup>

Given his later dismissal of common themes as uninteresting, it is somewhat strange to find Baumann making this thematic comparison. This notwithstanding, the thematic identification of the two texts functions as Baumann's point of departure for a wide-ranging divagation which, in a move characteristic of his essay, concludes with the assertion that, although many of their works embody the same themes, the attitudes of Hofmannsthal and Kassner to their subject matter are diametrically opposed. The treatment of the specific theme of 'Wahn und Tod des Ästheten' in Hofmannsthal is glossed as the poet's attempt to commit himself to something other than aestheticism; Kassner's approach to the theme is interpreted as expressing his antithetical desire for freedom. It would be inappropriate to take issue with these conclusions here. As I indicated in the previous chapter, *Kreuzwege* originated as a speech and cannot, therefore, be expected to address individual texts in detail. However, Baumann's reflections after the above comparison of 'Sonnengnade' and *Der Tor und der Tod* indicate a manifest weakness of *Kreuzwege* as criticism, namely its method. While attempting to participate in the intellectual

<sup>34</sup> Letter from Kassner to Princess Herbert Bismarck, 29 April 1941. The letter is in a private collection and may not be quoted here. My thanks to Klaus E. Bohnenkamp for making this information available.

<sup>35</sup> Bong-Hi Cha, 'Das Erstlingswerk Rudolf Kassners: Ansätze zu seinem physiognomischen Weltbild' (doctoral dissertation, University of Tübingen, 1976), p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Baumann's dating of the composition of 'Sonnengnade' as 1895 presumably derives from Kassner's misdating of the story in the *Gedenkbuch*. See Alfons Clemens Kensik, 'Aus den Gesprächen mit Rudolf Kassner', *Gedenkbuch*, pp. 181-234. 'Sonnengnade' is mentioned and misdated on p. 203. Kassner's only other published references to the story are in 'Narziss': *Im Gespräch mit Rudolf Kassner* von A. Cl. Kensik (Sierre, 1947-1958) (Zurich, 1985), p. 16, p. 18, and pp. 22-23.



world of Hofmannsthal and Kassner, Baumann has to operate on a very high level of generality. In the passage quoted he presents 'Sonnengnade' and *Der Tor und der Tod*, two generically different texts, as embodying the same general theme. By the end of the ensuing divagation, which conflates the themes of several works by both authors, this general unity is shown to coexist with an equally general antithesis of temperament between the two writers. Such generalized juggling may have a certain entertainment value, but it fails to provide useful insights into Kassner's story or Hofmannsthal's lyrical drama; the reader may marvel at Baumann's deft production of diversity from unity but beyond this recurrent generalization will learn little about the work of either author.

Rather than subsuming Kassner's novella and Hofmannsthal's play under a predetermined general theme, I will concentrate here solely on 'Sonnengnade', examining the text in detail and allowing its themes to emerge in the course of my reading. This is not to deny that useful comparisons could be drawn between the two works; but these can only be pursued once Kassner's neglected story has been analysed, and in any case they would have no place in the present study. As 'Sonnengnade' is as good as unknown, to orientate the reader I will begin with a brief plot outline and then go on to examine its construction and themes.

The central characters of 'Sonnengnade' are an enigmatic professor of Aesthetics and a beautiful young woman acquaintance who one evening visits him in his book-lined study. She is a painter who has spent some years in Italy completing her education, and the purpose of her visit is to ask for help to exhibit her only painting, a remarkably accurate self-portrait. When the professor comments on how little she has produced, she replies by relating her fruitless attempts to depict the landscape, people, and art of the country. The unexpected culmination of these efforts came while she was trying to sketch a sunset. As she watched the sun go down she had a fleeting vision of her own image in its converging rays. Taking this as a sign, she destroyed the sketch she had been working on and returned home to paint her self-portrait. The professor, strangely moved by her exalted depiction of this liberating experience, asks what would happen if he were to destroy the painting before her eyes. She replies, "Dann bin ich mir selbst Kunstwerk" (KSW II, p. 378), and then rips the portrait in two. After she has gone, the distracted professor chances to catch sight of his reflection in a mirror and is crushed by the recognition of his own ugliness. From this point he becomes increasingly withdrawn and is eventually found insane before the shattered mirror. He is committed to an asylum and dies a few months later.

In contrast to Baumann's one-sided characterization of the theme of 'Sonnengnade' as 'Wahn und Tod des Ästheten', this schematic plot summary shows Kassner's narrative to be essentially dualistic and structured throughout in terms of antitheses. The professor of Aesthetics is male; the painter is female. He is by profession a critic of art; she creates works of art. He works at home in his study; she has worked abroad and mainly outdoors. He is destroyed by the reflection of his ugliness; she is liberated by the epiphanic vision of her beauty. A similar schematism is evident in Kassner's presentation of his protagonists who are initially characterized only by gender and profession: 'Er war Professor der Ästhetik' (KSW II, p. 375); 'Sie war Malerin' (KSW II, p. 376). Neither has a proper name, and what personal background is provided is minimal. This ahistorical, depersonalized depiction indicates that the protagonists of 'Sonnengnade' are not intended as rounded characters in any realistic sense; they are, rather, typical figures. Together with the dualistic plot structure of 'Sonnengnade' Kassner's stark

method of characterization distances his story from rigorously mimetic literary Naturalism and allies it with representative, symbolic narrative. Just what the two protagonists might represent remains to be seen, but for the moment it should be noted that the professor and painter are characterized primarily in terms of their diametrically opposed relationship to art. He is a critic whose work consists in the reception of art, while she creates works of art.

From these preliminary considerations it is evident that, although permeated by polar oppositions, Kassner's story cannot easily be interpreted in terms of the stock art/life dichotomy often applied to non-Naturalist texts of the period. For if art and life are regarded as mutually exclusive opposites, it is not at all clear to which of these categories the protagonists are to be assigned. The professor of Aesthetics, closeted in his book-lined study, may appear to represent the extreme inwardness of the aesthete, while the beautiful young painter embodies a life-affirming relationship to nature. However, even if the aesthetician's (professional) bookishness could be construed as an indication of aestheticism, his counterpart cannot be unproblematically categorized under the heading of 'life'. Her visionary experience notwithstanding, she is after all an artist. As a closer examination of the text reveals, Kassner's story is more than simply a failed attempt to depict the conflict of art and life.

The characterization with which 'Sonnengnade' opens underlines the difficulties of applying the stock art/life dichotomy to the story:

Er war Professor der Ästhetik. Seine Kollegen schätzten ihn, zu einigen mochte er wenigstens zeitweise in ein näheres Verhältnis treten. In politischer und ästhetischer Hinsicht galt er für frei, und das haben ja die Menschen am frühesten heraus, weil sie es selbst am wenigsten sind. Denen die ihm fern standen, erschien er zurückhaltend. Einige nannten ihn stolz, andere glaubten ihn mit dem Worte 'schüchtern' abzuthun. Schüchtern war er — aber nicht aus Bescheidenheit, sondern weil ihn das steife, förmliche, oft rohe, immer unkünstlerische zurückstieß. Sie wirkten mit ihrer frohen Determinirtheit wie der Herbstfrost auf eine einsame Blume. Für die Intimsten war er der geistreiche Sarkast der bei größter Liebenswürdigkeit nichts schonte, bei kühnstem Bilderschwung doch plötzlich mit dem sichersten Wort wie aus Wolken einen Blitz in die Gegenwart niederprasseln konnte. Wie oft kam es vor, daß er, mit seinen Freunden beim Thee sitzend, mit dem Rauch aus seiner Zigarette spielend, ausgelassen über alles sprach, mit gewagten Hypothesen herumwarf, plötzlich aber still hielt und wie verloren vor sich hin starrte. (KSW II, p. 375)

This terse exposition shows that, although a depersonalized type, Kassner's professor is far from simple. On the contrary, it seems impossible to give an unambiguous account of his character. The professor's elusiveness and complexity are, however, quite deliberate and traceable to two sources: the capriciousness of his behaviour, and Kassner's skilful juxtaposition of perspectives in the depiction of his protagonist. Concentrating for the moment on this latter point, there are three main perspectives in the above paragraph. First, there is that of the omniscient impersonal narrator which reveals aspects of the professor's psychology inaccessible to others in the story. Secondly, there are the opinions and judgements of distanced onlookers who do not belong to the professor's select circle of friends. Finally, there are the views of his few intimate acquaintances. Of these three perspectives only the first can give reliable information on the professor, while the others offer relative and restricted interpretations of his behaviour.

Closer analysis of the above passage in terms of these shifting points of view shows how Kassner creates the elusiveness of his protagonist. The two opening sentences present an unambiguous and objective account of the professor's occupation, the estimation in which he is held by his professional colleagues, and his considerable reserve in forming close relationships. The next three sentences, framed primarily in terms of the opinions of others, introduce a less

reliable view of the professor's qualities. His supposed freedom in matters of aesthetics and politics, while not explicitly challenged, is relativized by the construction 'gelten für' and by the wry comment that most who pass such judgements themselves lack freedom. Those not close to the professor either interpret his reliably established reserve as pride or simply dismiss it as shyness. The two following sentences return to the impersonal narrative perspective, and correct these unreliable opinions. Those who judge the professor's reserve to be shyness are correct; however, what they cannot know is that, far from being a sign of modesty, his shyness is prompted by an aversion to stiffness and formality. It should be noted that this aversion is related to the invariably inartistic nature of such conventionality. This explanation of the professor's reserve, juxtaposed with the simile comparing the effect of happy determinedness (i.e. stiffness and formality) with that of autumn frost on a solitary flower, indicates a vulnerable aesthetic sensitivity which could be construed as form of effete aestheticism. However, this point is not developed, and the next sentence shifts the perspective to that of the professor's closest friends. They see him as simultaneously witty and sarcastic, a capricious individual whose kindness alternates with merciless sarcasm, and whose boldly figurative language is interspersed with expressions of devastating precision. These abrupt changes in behaviour acquire a slightly ominous undertone in the final sentence of the paragraph which returns to the impersonal perspective and introduces the sudden, seemingly unmotivated silences which frequently interrupt the professor's brilliant and otherwise unrestrained talk.

Having thus established his protagonist's essential indeterminacy and instability, an indeterminacy which excludes easy identifications with stock characters such as the aesthete, Kassner goes on to reveal the inability of even the professor's closest friends to understand his plunges from ludic heights into forlorn silence. Here it becomes evident that this indeterminacy is not merely a product of shifting narrative perspective but has a deeper dimension. Though the professor's intimates interpret his abrupt silences as simply another characteristic caprice, believing him to be happy, the truth is less simple:

Ja glücklich — dafür hielten ihn die Menschen. Ob er es wirklich war — er wußte es nicht. Für Augenblicke mochte er sich etwas wie Glück und Zufriedenheit vorspiegeln lassen, dann aber kamen die leeren Momente wo er den Blick frei hatte und nichts sah. (KSW II, p. 376)

This shows the professor's capricious behaviour and abrupt mood swings to be symptoms of a more deeply rooted indeterminacy. Even he has no definite notion of his character. His recurrent nihilistic epiphanies, which presumably coincide with his seemingly unmotivated silences, make the moments of happiness with which they alternate seem no more than vague pretence. His intense and unconditional desire for company, which is introduced after the above passage, suggests a need to hold these visions of nullity at bay, and this is confirmed in the description of his work habits:

Und wenn er dann nach Hause kam, so stürzte er sich mit einem wahren Fluchtgefühl in seine Bücher und arbeitete so lange, bis er zusammenbrach. Es war ihm immer als müßte er sich mit allen Dingen verbauen, hoch und immer höher auftürmend, um ja nur jenen furchtbaren freien Blick ins Nichts nicht zu haben. Wenn er schlaflos im Bette lag, preßte er seinen Kopf tief in die Kissen, als wollte er seine Augen eindrücken. (KSW II, p. 376)

These paragraphs reveal the horrifying nature of the professor's recurrent nihilistic visions. His meaningless socializing and excessive work are both motivated by intense *horror vacui*, and the final sentence shows his desire to blind himself to these visions of nothingness to be compulsive.

So far I have concentrated largely on Kassner's perspectivist depiction of his elusive male protagonist. But how is the unstable professor to be interpreted? What is the significance of his manic-depressive swings from ludic caprice into horrifying nihilistic epiphanies? To understand the professor's complex character one must consider more closely the interrelated notions of freedom, determinedness, happiness, and vision which are subtly introduced in the paragraphs discussed above. As indicated, the depersonalized nature of the protagonists in 'Sonnengnade' excludes realistic depiction, but while the terse, schematic style of the opening pages makes no attempt to establish a determinate and determining milieu in a Naturalist sense, it does imply a social background of sorts. The elusiveness of the professor's character is not merely the product of unreliable subjective opinions; it is a reflection of his deliberate departure from accepted social norms. For example, his reputed freedom in matters of politics and aesthetics differentiates him from most of his peers. The attitude of those around him is encapsulated in the gnomic comment 'und das haben ja die Menschen am frühesten heraus, weil sie es selbst am wenigsten sind' (KSW II, p. 375), a remark which implies the professor's freedom to be exceptional. This implication is supported by the narratorial explanation of his reserve in forming friendships. The professor's shyness is motivated by an aversion to inartistic stiffness and formality, and the qualification of such rigid adherence to convention as 'frohe Determinirtheit' implies that it is abdication of freedom from which he recoils. The small number of his intimate friends would, then, suggest the majority of his peers to be constrained by stiff, formal conventions of behaviour and thought. However, it should be noted that, though the professor deliberately avoids the inartistic, his reputed freedom arises not from strength of character, but rather from vulnerability in the face of convention. The professor's behaviour in the company of friends also indicates his freedom from social constraints. The meetings with his intimates are informal affairs which take place over tea and cigarettes. It is indicated that the subject matter of his conversation is unbounded — he speaks about anything and everything. His animation during these social occasions is characterized by the word 'ausgelassen' which, with its etymological overtones of release, subtly underlines his freedom. In conversation the professor's treatment of his unrestricted subject matter is similarly free from conventional restraint. The ideas he puts forward in company are not categorical theses but daring hypotheses thrown around ('herumwarf') with regard neither to formal standards of discourse nor social decorum.

The professor can, then, be said to be free to the extent that he refuses to be bound or determined by widely accepted standards of social and intellectual behaviour. But, although his shyness of inflexible conventions allows him to indulge freely in capricious intellectual sallies, this freedom is by no means unambiguously positive. For, by avoiding the inartistic determinedness of those around him, the professor also forfeits the happiness of a life determined by conventions ('frohe Determinirtheit'). Although not immediately apparent, the fearful visions which alternate with his displays of unbridled wit and sarcasm are also an aspect of his freedom. The repeated use of the word 'frei' in conjunction with the epiphanies which undermine his apparent happiness associates these nihilistic visions with his freedom. The professor's sudden lapses into silence during which he stares ahead forlornly correspond to the

recurrent moments of emptiness when his vision is unrestricted yet he can see nothing. The academic work in which he indulges to the point of collapse is expressly an attempt to obstruct this unbearable freedom of vision — 'jenen furchtbaren freien Blick.' Thus, by avoiding the comfortable conventionality of his peers the professor attains a rare freedom, but one which is double-edged. While he can at times enjoy his intellectual and social liberty, he is compelled to use people and work to restrict his vision. His compulsive cultivation of blindness is, then, a paradoxical result of his quest for freedom.

Before turning to the professor's female counterpart, the beautiful painter, and her fatal visit, a few words must be said on their meeting place, the study where the professor seeks refuge from his visions of nullity:

Er saß in seinem Arbeitszimmer, um ihn herum lagen Bücher. An den Wänden in schönen Regalen standen dicke Bände, und wo ein Fleckchen frei war, hing ein Kupferstich. In einer Nische auf schwarzem Sockel stand die weiße Apollobüste. (KSW II, p. 376)

The extraordinary number of books, which all but cover the walls, recall Kassner's appalled description of Jakob Minor's book-filled flat.<sup>37</sup> The engravings which fill the remaining spaces indicate the professor's absorption with art. The bust of Apollo, ancient god of the fine arts, is not, as might be imagined, an allusion to Nietzsche whom Kassner read only after he had written 'Sonnengnade'. Given the title of the story, the Greek god is more likely a reference to the association of Phoebus Apollo with the sun. The professor's study, while perhaps suggesting closeted aestheticism, indicates a professional and private life dedicated exclusively to art.

The female protagonist of 'Sonnengnade', the beautiful painter, is introduced in two short, open-ended, and apparently unmotivated paragraphs preceding the description of the study:

Vor Jahren hatte er die Bekanntschaft eines schönen Mädchens gemacht. Vielleicht hat er sie geliebt . . .  
Wie dem auch sei, sie war nach Italien gegangen. Sie war Malerin und wollte sich dort endgiltig ausbilden lassen . . . (KSW II, p. 376)

The evasiveness of these incomplete paragraphs and the uncertainty of the professor's feelings for the unambiguously beautiful young woman reflect his constitutional indeterminacy. When she enters his refuge, however, this perspective gives way to an impersonal and objective point of view:

Sie trat herein. Auf den ersten flüchtigen Blick hin mußte man sie einfach eine hübsche Erscheinung nennen. Das dicke blonde Haar, hinten zu einem einfachen Knoten zusammengebunden, ließ die schöne, stolze Stirn frei. In ihren blauen, nicht zu großen Augen lag Liebenswürdigkeit und Sicherheit, eine oft überraschende bannende Sicherheit. Die Nase war schmal, ganz leicht gebogen. Die feinen Lippen gingen in bald schelmisch sich verbergenden, bald offen und energisch hervortretenden Mundwinkel über. Die Kleidung verbarg ihre schönen, mit etwas bewußter Sanftheit in einander gehenden Formen keineswegs. (KSW II, pp. 376-77)

The impersonal 'man' in conjunction with 'müssen' in the opening sentence gives this description a binding quality, and the recurrence of the word 'einfach' sets her visible simplicity in stark contrast to the hidden depths of the professor's complex and elusive character. Her most striking features are physical beauty and self-assurance, both of which are diametrically opposed to the psychological uncertainty of the faceless professor. The emphasis given to the captivating

<sup>37</sup> See p. 57 above.

certainty of her eyes further underlines the radical antithesis between her and her host, whose eyes call his cherished freedom into question.

As their conversation unfolds the antithetical nature of the protagonists takes on the character of one-sided antagonism. After asking the professor if he can help her to exhibit her work, the painter expresses indifference at the outcome:

“Wenn es nicht ginge,” fügte sie leicht hinzu, “schadet es auch nichts, dann hänge ich es in meinem Zimmer auf oder schenke es Ihnen oder einem anderen.” (KSW II, p. 377)

In contrast to this easy openness, the professor's snide response wilfully misconstrues her attitude: “Ja,” fragte er, “haben Sie zu Ihrer Kunst so wenig Vertrauen?” Im Innern dachte er gerade das Gegenteil. (KSW II, p. 377) The perverse antagonism of this remark underlies all his subsequent comments. Seeing the perfect likeness of her self-portrait, her only painting, the professor can only murmur peevishly to himself: “Dazu so viele Jahre, noch dazu in Italien” (KSW II, p. 377). The painter's response, “Ja, nicht mehr — und nicht weniger” (KSW II, p. 377), suggests that the professor has failed to appreciate the significance of her solitary painting, which she proceeds to explain.

When she arrived, alone, in Italy she was deeply affected by everything: ‘Alles wirkte auf mich ein, die Landschaft, die Menschen, die Kunstwerke. Es that mir das alles schon körperlich wehe.’ (KSW II, p. 377) This openness to the painful influence of reality contrasts sharply with the vulnerable professor's deliberate avoidance of the chilling inartistic determinedness of those around him. This contrast is subtly emphasized by the use of the verb ‘einwirken’. In the opening paragraph of the story the professor's aversion to the inartistic is expressed using the verb ‘wirken’. It is also notable that in her enumeration the landscape and people of Italy precede the art of the country, showing that the painter does not share the professor's aversion to the inartistic in life. Where he seeks to insulate himself from this aspect of the people around him, she attempted to give artistic form to the landscape and people of Italy: ‘Ich versuchte mich mit dem Pinsel an allem, zerriß aber wieder alles. Und je mehr ich zerriß, desto freier fühlte ich mich’ (KSW II, p. 377). At this point it is not entirely clear how this feeling of increasing freedom through destruction is to be understood, although it has certain parallels with the professor's liberated but intrinsically destructive sarcasm.

The decisive experience of the painter's time abroad came one evening as she watched the sunset from a Sicilian hill:

Es war an einem Sommerabend in Sizilien, ich sah von einem Hügel die Sonne untergehen. Wie sie sich langsam und majestätisch, vielleicht mit etwas Spott, von den Dingen zurückzog, wie sich die Dinge mit gewohntem und doch immer neuem Schmerz mit ihrem Schatten wie mit großen, grauschwarzen Trauerschleiern verhüllten, das wollte ich malen. Doch immer wieder irrte mein Blick von der Leinwand ab zur Sonne, als wollte er sie festhalten. Mein Pinsel entfiel sachte meiner Hand, ich sah sehnsuchtsvoll mit begehrenden Thränen ihr nach. Doch sie sank und sank, ich wurde immer unruhiger. Mir war, jetzt müßte sie stehen bleiben, mir, nur mir zu Liebe. Alles andere müßte sich in die Schatten hüllen, nur ich allein im goldenen Abglanz erstrahlen. Ich wollte keine Trauerschatten die mich behutsam verhüllten. Ich wollte den Mut haben ihn zu zerreißen, wie ihn die Sonne zerreißt. Doch sie sank weiter. (KSW II, pp. 377–78)

This passage introduces a number of important points: first, the majesty with which the sun withdraws its light from the landscape; secondly, the notion of sorrow (‘Trauer’) which recurs in conjunction with the shadows with which the setting sun veils the land; and thirdly, the

painter's desire for courage to rend, like the sun, these oppressive veils of darkness. Whereas the horrified professor seeks desperately to blind himself to his visions of nullity, the painter desired the sun-like courage to tear through darkness. Significantly, although she originally wanted to paint the mournful veil of shadows over the landscape, she found her gaze irresistibly drawn to the sun.

As she watched the sun inexorably setting, she saw a few last rays which converged and diverged as if with a purpose:

[“] Plötzlich sah ich dort wo die Strahlen sich finden wollten, etwas wie ein Bild. Bald zerfloß es in der Luft. Bald tauchte es wieder empor. Ich erkannte erst zweifelnd, dann immer sicherer in ihm meine Züge, es war mein Bild. Das wurde mir ein Zeichen, ich zerriß meine Skizze, und mit einem dankbaren Blick nach der Stelle hin wo die Sonne untergegangen war, ging ich nach Hause. Ich nahm mir vor mich selbst zu malen, ich that es und seitdem bin ich frei.” Dabei athmete sie voll auf, ihre Wangen waren purpurn gefärbt und sie sah ins Weite, so froh, so sicher . . . (KSW II, p. 378)

The painter's tearing up of her sketch recalls both the apparently liberating destruction of her earlier attempts to depict the people and scenes of Italy, and her desire to be able, like the sun, to tear through the mourning veil of shadows. Her radiance and bearing after this speech stand in marked contrast to the professor's unsettling periodic silences. Whereas he was earlier described as staring blankly ahead ('vor sich hin'), she looks into the distance; his forlorn gaze is the polar opposite of the painter's happiness and certainty. The use of 'froh' in the above characterization recalls the phrase 'frohe Determinirtheit', suggesting that the freedom granted by her mystical vision has brought a happiness which is neither determined nor inartistic. The freedom she attains by completing her self-portrait contrasts sharply with the supposed freedom of the professor. Whereas his apparently liberating avoidance of inartistic formality and stiffness finds expression in a witty but essentially destructive sarcasm, her freedom is gained through the grace of mystical vision and the resultant artistic creation.

The professor's response to the painter's exultant speech marks the culmination of his antagonism, and reveals the emptiness of his supposed freedom. In a hoarse, trembling voice he asks what would happen if he were to destroy the picture before the painter's eyes. Here again the contrast between his eyes and hers is stressed in the phrase, 'mit irrenden Augen' (KSW II, p. 378). Her response shows the professor to have fundamentally misunderstood the nature of her freedom:

“Dann bin ich mir selbst Kunstwerk. Geben Sie mir nur das Bild, ich zerfetze es vor Ihren Augen.” Nervös griff sie danach. Ein Riß, und die zwei Teile fielen auf den Boden. Er sah den beiden Stücken nach, wie sie langsam danieder zitterten. Ihm war als verschwände alles um ihn und er sähe in die blaue Luft und sähe, wie zwei weiße Engelsflügel zur Erde schwebten und wie weit über ihnen ein Engel ohne Flügel in den Himmel flöge. (KSW II, pp. 378–79)

Despite her apparent resoluteness, the nervousness with which the painter reaches for her self-portrait indicates her action to require considerable courage. Significantly, she inverts the professor's suggestion, offering to destroy the painting before his eyes. The professor, who uses company and work as a barrier against his horrifying nihilism, apparently expects the destruction of the painting to deprive the painter of her means of liberation. However, his vision of the ascending wingless angel, reveals the spiritually redemptive nature of the painter's freedom. The image of the angel recalls the quasi-religious title of the story, while the

metaphorical discarded wings (the torn halves of the painting) show her liberated spirit to have no further need of material means of redemption.

The painter's action and parting words echo the invocation of the sun before her mystical vision:

Sie sagte ruhig: "Jeder wahre Künstler hat damit angefangen sich selbst darzustellen. Und alle haben ihr Selbstporträt wieder zerstört, als sie den Mut hatten sich selbst für schöner zu halten." (KSW II, p. 379)

Far from destroying a means of liberation, as the professor would appear to have expected, the rending of her painting adds a further dimension to her freedom. Her use of the word 'Mut', the quality for which she had wished before her mystical vision, subtly establishes her affinity with the sun. Her action implies that it is not the material result of artistic creation, the work of art, which redeems, but rather the graced consciousness on which such creation is based. The destruction of her self-portrait does not negate the painter's attainment; it serves, rather, to transcend the mystical self-recognition out of which the painting was created. The professor's vision of the painter as she leaves his study elevates her affinity with the sun to the point of identification:

Er sah ihr nach, sie kam ihm so groß, so rein, so schön vor. Als trete alles zurück vor ihr und würde klein, als bewegten sich sogar die Luftteilchen und machten ihr Platz — der Königin. (KSW II, p. 379)

The painter's regal bearing, which in the professor's eyes assumes cosmic dimensions, recalls her earlier description of the almost disdainful majesty with which the setting sun slowly withdrew its light from the landscape, and thus adumbrates the professor's impending madness and death.

Alone in his study, the professor distractedly wanders the room until catching sight of himself in the mirror:

Da traf sein Blick einen Spiegel, er sah sich selbst. Wie ein Gespenst packte es ihn und wollte ihn niederdrücken. Er kam sich so alt, kalt und schwach vor. Schaudernd vor der großen Wahrheit sprach er aus tiefster Seele das Wort 'häßlich' in sich hinein . . . (KSW II, p. 379)

This moment of self-recognition is the polar opposite of his vision of the painter after the destruction of her portrait. Whereas she appeared an angel ascending into heaven, his reflection resembles a ghost and seems to want to crush him down. The antithesis of his vision and that of the painter implicit in this image is emphasized by a parallel use of adjectives. On her exit the painter appeared 'so groß, so rein, so schön'; he sees himself as 'so alt, kalt und schwach'. Whereas she seemed to embody radiant beauty, he recognizes himself as essentially ugly. The closing paragraphs of 'Sonnengnade' radically condense the professor's withdrawal from society and descent through madness to death:

Als eines Morgens der Diener in sein Zimmer trat, sah er seine Bücher zerrissen auf der Erde wüst herumliegen. Er selbst saß wahnsinnig vor dem zertrümmerten Spiegel. Aus den Wunden die er sich dabei gerissen, floß helles Blut. Er wurde in ein Irrenhaus gebracht und starb nach einigen Monaten. (KSW II, p. 379)

This somewhat melodramatic scene recalls the liberating destruction of the self-portrait. Here, however, the significance of that earlier destructive act is inverted. While the recurrence of the prefix 'zer-' links this scene of destruction with the confrontation between professor and painter,



his tearing up of the books with which he blinded himself to nihilism brings no redemption. The destruction of the mirror, the medium of his chilling self-recognition, does not free him, but disfigures him further and accelerates his demise. The concluding paragraph of 'Sonnengnade' shows the professor to die as he has lived:

Sein Begräbnis war feierlich, doch niemand wußte vor seinem Grabe etwas zu sagen. Unter denen die seinem Sarge folgten, war ein Mädchen das niemand vorher gesehen hatte, noch später sehen sollte. (KSW II, p. 379)

While the mourners' loss for words reflects the elusiveness of the professor's character, their silence also underlines the fundamental emptiness of his life.

What the above textual analysis shows is that, while Baumann's characterization of the theme of 'Sonnengnade' as 'Wahn und Tod des Ästheten' may have a certain superficial appeal, close reading of the story reveals it to be considerably richer than such generalizations can hope to convey. I would also take issue with Baumann's remark that Kassner's story is a somewhat tentative attempt to render this theme. Although it contains occasional stylistic lapses and mannerisms, for the literary début of a 22-year-old 'Sonnengnade' is a remarkably tightly structured text. If its themes fail to fit neatly into stock categories, this is less a sign of incompetence on Kassner's part than of the inflexibility and inadequacy of such categories — after all, these are primarily aids to classification, and as such have no normative force. Indeed, I would contend that it is a mark of aesthetic quality that, despite the antithetical schematism of its structure, 'Sonnengnade' cannot be 'decoded' to yield some simple abstract meaning or message. Seen in the context of Kassner's work from the period with which this study is concerned, 'Sonnengnade' establishes a complex of themes — or rather problems — which would occupy him up to the publication of *Die Mystik* and beyond. These are: the nature of authentic (non-nihilistic) freedom; the notion that such freedom is to be achieved not by rejecting external constraints but by privileged mystical vision; and, most importantly, the relationship between the critic and the artist.

A purely text-based interpretation of 'Sonnengnade', while illuminating these themes, cannot do full justice to the significance of the story, which can only be appreciated if the latent autobiographical dimension of the text is taken into account. Although schematized and depersonalized, Kassner's professor of Aesthetics shares many features with his creator. His wit and devastating sarcasm are qualities evident in Kassner's early letters. Indeed, at one point in his correspondence the young man speculates that his half-serious chaffing may have alienated one of his Berlin friends.<sup>38</sup> The professor's rejection of stiffness and formality has a parallel in Kassner's (considerably more light-hearted) campaign against commonplaces, mentioned in a letter to Gottlieb Fritz.<sup>39</sup> Likewise, the bold figurative sallies of the professor's thought have their parallels in the exuberantly figurative style of Kassner's letters and in his rejection of deterministic positivism. Even the cigarette with which the professor toys during his talks is no mere literary prop: Kassner was for many years a heavy smoker who worked best with tobacco, a comfortable armchair, and a good book.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> See BaT, p. 18: 'Ich schrieb ihm [Hermann Stockhausen] so wie ich etwa zu ihm in Berlin gesprochen hätte und habe. Er muß sich gehäutet haben, denn damals fühlte er sich ganz wohl und sicher bei meinen halbernten Neckereien.'

<sup>39</sup> See BaT, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> See BaT, p. 17; and p. 89 where Kassner writes: 'Bibliotheken werden mir immer unmöglicher. Ich muß ein Fauteuil haben und die Cigarette oder Pfeife, sonst komme ich mit mir in Conflict.'

Illuminating as these correspondences are, there is a more profound autobiographical dimension to 'Sonnengnade', namely Kassner's undeclared and unrequited love for his cousin Marie Latzel, who was a painter.<sup>41</sup> In a letter of 6 February 1898, written during a particularly bleak period of his stay in England, Kassner confided to Fritz:

Ich kenne ein junges Mädchen, sie ist mir verwandt, sehr hübsch, außerordentlich begabt, feine Hände, ein weiblicher Gottlieb Fritz auch klein, vor nicht ganz zwei Jahren habe ich sie geliebt, ich glaube sogar leidenschaftlich, ohne daß sie es wußte. Ich darf so etwas nicht gut sagen, wenn ich auf meinen zwei Stöcken stehe. Sie ist nebenbei gesagt die Malerin in meiner 'Sonnengnade' seligen Angedenkens. Sie hat mich sehr gerne, meine Liebe wurde wohl deshalb, weil ich von ihr immer entfernt war, in eine wirklich ehrliche Freundschaft, which I cherished, verwandelt. Wir schrieben uns die schönsten Briefe, ich war schon stolz genug, daß sie mir gegenüber zu sich selbst aufrichtig war<,> wie man es von einem jungen Mädchen von Vermögen, auf dem Lande unter wenig anregenden Verwandten lebend, nicht immer erwartet. Genug sie war ein Mädchen, das mir unter anderen Umständen (Verwandschaft nicht zuletzt) hätte viel werden können. (BaT, pp. 40–41: the English is in the original)

In the light of this confession 'Sonnengnade' takes on another, disturbing dimension. While their close family relationship was one of the chief reasons for Kassner's concealing his affection from his cousin, it is evident that he was also painfully conscious of his physical disability as an obstacle to the expression of his feelings. If the painter in 'Sonnengnade' is Kassner's cousin, and if, as I have argued the professor bears a striking resemblance to his creator, then the oppressive recognition of ugliness which precipitates the professor's demise is no mere literary device. It is, rather, Kassner's consciousness of his disability writ large. Portrait photographs of the period show Kassner to have been a handsome young man.<sup>42</sup> By making his fictitious counterpart intrinsically ugly, Kassner had projected the deformity of his crippled legs onto an entire individual. The professor's ugliness is, in effect, an embodiment of the author's disability.

Some fifteen years after 'Sonnengnade' was published, this distressing autobiographical dimension of the story was perceived by two of Kassner's admirers, Rainer Maria Rilke and Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis. Rilke had first met Kassner in 1907, and the two spent several months together in 1910. Eager to read more of Kassner's work, Rilke wrote to Anton Kippenberg in early December 1911 asking for the publisher's help to find a copy of the *Musenalmanach*, which was no longer available from Schuster und Loeffler in Berlin.<sup>43</sup> By the end of the month he had clearly read the book and discussed 'Sonnengnade' with the Princess. On 30 December he wrote to her:

Sie haben Recht, es ist mir erst über Ihren Worten deutlich geworden, wie erschütternd [. . .] die gewisse kleine Novelle ist. Und sie ist technisch selbst so tief ernsthaft, wenn man in dem kleinen Buch [i.e. the *Musenalmanach*] blättert, überall spielt es und versucht sich und ahmt eitel dahin und dorthin nach: aber hier ringt es, ob jemand zusieht oder nicht. — Auch ich hatte das Gefühl, daß ich Kassner nicht davon sprechen möchte, außer er spricht selbst wieder einmal davon. Aber, nichtwahr, wie ist das Entsetzliche an seinem Platz in der Welt und wie weit bringt es einen, sich damit einzurichten.<sup>44</sup>

More important than his estimation of the technical seriousness of 'Sonnengnade' is Rilke's interpretation of the story as an unsettling document of Kassner's struggle to come to terms with his physical disability. Rilke's point is that by confronting his handicap in 'Sonnengnade'

<sup>41</sup> See BaT, p. 183, note to p. 40, lines 21f.

<sup>42</sup> See the first three plates in BaT (between p. 80 and p. 81).

<sup>43</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe an seinen Verleger. 1906–1926*, ed. by Ruth Sieber-Rilke and Carl Sieber, new enlarged edition, 2 vols (Wiesbaden, 1949), I, 153.

<sup>44</sup> *Rainer Maria Rilke und Marie von Thurn und Taxis: Briefwechsel*, 2 vols (Zurich, 1958), I, 85–86.

Kassner had achieved an enviable clarity of vision — a clarity which Rilke felt lacking in himself. The indissociability of the story and Kassner's disability for his two admirers is evident at another point in their correspondence. Almost five years later, the Princess wrote to Rilke contrasting what she regarded as the mature Kassner's almost cosmic impersonality with his early vulnerability:

Ich scheue mich schon gar nicht mehr von seinem Gebrechen zu sprechen (wenn es zufälliger Weise nöthig ist) das geht ihn ja gar nichts mehr an. Er hat einen weiten Weg gemacht seit dieser ersten sonderbaren kurzen Novelle in irgend einer Jugendzeitschrift — wo die heimliche Wunde noch so brannte — erinnern Sie sich?<sup>45</sup>

If somewhat unfortunately expressed, this interpretation has some substance. As Kassner put it in an unpublished letter of April 1941, his story was written against a largely unconscious background of great pain.<sup>46</sup>

In view of its autobiographical origins, how is 'Sonnengnade' to be read? Is the story merely an exercise in self-loathing? I would argue that it is not, and that Rilke's interpretation of the 'Novelle' as an act of liberation is substantially correct. As I have shown, 'Sonnengnade', if not strictly a literary self-portrait, contains a self-portrait in the figure of the male protagonist, and if the author is too closely identified with the professor, the story necessarily appears negative. However, Kassner's self-image and his unrequited love, painful as they undoubtedly were, did not end in madness and death; they found expression in a work of art, and this is the key to understanding the story. Seen in terms of the view of self-portraiture expressed in the text, the author's annihilation of his fictional self, far from being a cry of despair, is an unambiguously positive act, corresponding to the painter's destruction of her self-portrait. To paraphrase her parting words: like all great artists, Kassner began his career by depicting himself and destroyed the self-portrait when he had found the courage to see himself as better than it. The author's agonizing sense of his ugliness is embodied by the professor, but the character's decline and death, far from symbolizing self-loathing, reveal Kassner to have transcended this negative self-image. Thus, Kassner should not be identified solely with his ill-fated professor; the destruction of his literary self-portrait equally, if less obviously, identifies him with the graced artist. Superficially, the story may appear to be concerned with the tragic antagonism between critic and artist. However, Kassner's authorial identification with both protagonists reveals that on an extra-textual level he had overcome this conflict. It still remained, however, for him to give expression to the proper relationship between the two poles of artistic creation and reception, and this he would do three years later in *Die Mystik*.

As I shall show in the following sections, the concern with literary self-portraiture evident in 'Sonnengnade' is not an isolated phenomenon in Kassner's work. It adumbrates a central theme of both his doctoral thesis and his early conception of criticism; namely, the intimate relationship between the artist and his work.

<sup>45</sup> Op. cit., II, 496–97.

<sup>46</sup> Letter from Kassner to Princess Herbert Bismarck 29 April 1941. See p. 64, footnote 34 above.

IV KASSNER'S DOCTORAL DISSERTATION 'DER EWIGE JUDE IN DER DICHTUNG'  
(1896)

'Wissenschaftliche Zucht hat sich der Candidat weder in Wien noch in Berlin angedeihen lassen.' (BaT, p. 150)

After the heady and productive months with his friends in Berlin, Kassner's return to Vienna was a sobering experience. On his arrival in the Austrian capital in late summer 1896, he was confronted by two pressing matters: first, the completion and submission of his doctoral thesis, and secondly, preparation for the wide-ranging final, oral examinations ('Rigorosa'). I will mention Kassner's examination revision in the following section; here, however, I will be concerned solely with his doctoral dissertation, 'Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung. Studien zur allgemeinen Literaturgeschichte'. Until recently, the only sources of information on the dissertation were the examiners' report by professors Jakob Minor and Richard Heinzl, and a late conversation between Kassner and Alfons Clemens Kensik. The dissertation was never published, and the original text was deposited or, as Kassner ironically put it, mercifully laid to rest in the library of Vienna University shortly after it had been examined and passed.<sup>47</sup> Although it remained there until the 1940s, 'Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung' has been registered missing for many years and must now be presumed irretrievably lost. It has, therefore, hitherto been impossible to corroborate Kassner's late remarks and the assessment of his examiners with reference to the original text.

In late 1994, however, Klaus E. Bohnenkamp, edited and published a partial transcription of the dissertation made in 1941. This transcription, representing approximately one third of the original 102-page handwritten text, was undertaken by Frau Isa von Wulffen at the request of Kassner's friend, admirer, and 'Eckermann', Alfons Clemens Kensik (1907–78). Given the circumstances under which it was made, the transcription is highly selective. In its fragmentary form it is a tantalizing, and often frustrating, document of the young Kassner's thought. As an avid admirer of Kassner's work, Kensik would have been more interested in those features of the text which reflected the preoccupations of the author's later writings than in any concessions the young man may have felt obliged to make to the requirements of academic scholarship. To this extent, it would be unwise to regard the transcription as representing the general tenor of the dissertation. Nonetheless, the surviving text is the earliest example of Kassner's critical engagement with literature and, as such, is of particular importance for this study. As Bohnenkamp indicates in his informative introduction, while necessarily distorting the overall nature of the dissertation, the *disjecta membra* of the transcription reveal the foundations of the distinctive style of criticism practised in *Die Mystik* to have been laid as early as 1896.<sup>48</sup>

It is unlikely that Kassner chose his dissertation topic out of any particular interest in the motif of Ahasver, the Wandering Jew. As Bohnenkamp points out, this was probably suggested by Minor, whose study *Goethes Fragmente vom ewigen Juden und vom wiederkehrenden Heiland. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der religiösen Fragen in der Zeit Goethes* appeared in 1904.<sup>49</sup> Not surprisingly, Kassner approached neither the subject matter nor the composition of his thesis with anything approaching the rigour his professors expected. If Minor's method involved lengthy plot summaries and causal-genetic accounts of 'Stoff und Einfluß', Kassner's literary interests

<sup>47</sup> See BaT, p. 37 and p. 121.

<sup>48</sup> EJ, p. 23.

<sup>49</sup> EJ, p. 21.

focused on quite different matters. Late in his life he gave Kensing the following account of the dissertation:

Denn als ich nach meiner in sechs Wochen hingetzten, heruntergeschriebenen Dissertation über den 'Ewigen Juden in der Litteratur' (einer Arbeit voll orthographischer und Interpunktionsfehler, voll schadhafter Zitate, in schöner Schrift, aber doch wohl schon mit einigen gewagten Charakteristiken von Mensch und Dichter, Leben und Dichtung, Vokabular und Sprache) [. . .] denn da ich nach sechs Jahren Lesens zu schreiben begann, mußte ich als ein an der Dichtung und am Dichter leidenschaftlich Interessierter nach all dem fragen, wonach die Professoren und Studenten in ihren Diskussionen damals eben nicht fragten: nach dem Drama zwischen Inhalt und Form, Gehalt und Gestalt, das heißt nach dem Stil [. . .] (BaT, p. 151)<sup>50</sup>

Kassner's remark that he had been reading passionately for six years before writing the dissertation contradicts the accounts of his uncultured childhood and early youth, implying that his engagement with literature began in 1890 when he was still in Moravia. This lapse and his misquotation of the title of his dissertation notwithstanding, the above passage would seem to give an accurate depiction of the text. As von Wulffen's transcription and later reminiscences testify, the dissertation was full of orthographic errors — a fact which did not escape the examiners' notice. Kassner's claim to have dashed off the piece in six weeks would also seem accurate, and would go some way to explaining his chaotic spelling. More importantly from the point of view of the present study, the surviving fragments confirm the above account of his daring characterizations and his interest in style, understood as the dramatic relationship between the apparent opposites of form and content.

Although it is impossible to date the composition of the dissertation with absolute certainty, extrinsic and intrinsic evidence suggests it to have been written during the two months following Kassner's return to Vienna in August 1896. In his earliest surviving letter to Gottlieb Fritz, dated 15 August 1896, he complains about the chore of revising for his oral examinations. He does not, however, mention the dissertation, which suggests he had not yet begun writing. After this letter there is a hiatus of approximately three months, and the correspondence resumes in mid-November, after Kassner had successfully taken his 'Rigorosen'. This three-month silence, and the fact that the curriculum vitae accompanying his 'Anmeldung zur Promotion' is dated 30 September 1896,<sup>51</sup> suggest that Kassner probably wrote his thesis in the six weeks from mid-August to the end of September. This hypothesis is given further weight by the references to Nietzsche in the surviving fragments of the text, which show it to have been written in autumn 1896 when his intensive reading of the 'Dichter-Denker' began.<sup>52</sup> I will return to the matter of Kassner's Nietzsche reception in the following section.

On 28 October 1896 'Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung' was accepted as satisfying statutory requirements. From the examiners' report, however, it is evident that Kassner's work did not remotely satisfy the requirements of professors Minor and Heinzl, and that they passed the dissertation less on academic merit than as evidence of their student's intensive engagement with literature and his manifest, if undisciplined, intellectual talents. Their assessment is worth quoting in full:

Der Candidat besitzt eine sehr ausgedehnte Belesenheit, nicht blos in der umfangreichen internationalen Ahasver-Litteratur, sondern in der modernen und modernsten Dichtung

<sup>50</sup> Quoted (abridged) from Alfons Clemens Kensing, 'Zwischen Frage und Antwort. Aus Gesprächen mit Rudolf Kassner', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 7 September 1953, p. 5, col. 3.

<sup>51</sup> BaT, p. 268.

<sup>52</sup> EJ, pp. 49–50, footnote 120.

überhaupt. Leider aber hat er den dankbaren Stoff in eine Reihe von losen und wenig zusammenhängenden Capiteln zersplittert, die einen durchaus feuilletonistischen Charakter haben und neben manchen geistreichen Beobachtungen doch recht viele anfechtbare Aperçus enthalten. Zu wertvollen Analysen und zu ergiebigen Untersuchungen im wissenschaftlichen Sinn finden sich kaum hie und da die Ansätze. Alles Sprachliche, Metrische, Stilistische hätte der Verfasser, wie das Thema erlaubt, getrost links liegen lassen dürfen, seine vereinzelt Beobachtungen sind zu dürftig und wirken oft unfreiwillig komisch. Dem Inhalt entspricht die äußere Form der Arbeit, die von stilistischen Flüchtigkeiten und von Schreibfehlern wimmelt und wenigstens einer oberflächlichen Durchsicht hätte unterzogen werden sollen, ehe sie vorgelegt wurde. Wissenschaftliche Zucht hat sich der Candidat weder in Wien noch in Berlin angeeignet lassen. Aber seine reiche Belesenheit, seine litterarische Bildung und seine ungewöhnliche Begabung treten in der Arbeit so deutlich zu Tage, daß die Dissertation als den gesetzlichen Anforderungen entsprechend wohl bezeichnet werden darf. (BaT, pp. 150–51)

The dissertation plainly fell far short of the standards of objectivity demanded by positivist literary scholarship. However, the examiners' acceptance of the doctorate, despite its formal sloppiness and aberrance from accepted method, is testimony to Kassner's early erudition and intellectual ability. Heinzel and Minor, the latter himself a voracious reader, obviously appreciated the extent of their student's reading. Particularly noteworthy is their recognition of Kassner's detailed acquaintance with contemporary letters which, if not strictly apposite to his topic, revealed a studious, though unscholarly, engagement with literature. At this stage, it would be exaggerated to insist on a comparison with Hofmannsthal, but the examiners' characterization of Kassner's critical efforts as 'feuilletonistisch' associates them with the form of art journalism of which in the 1890s Hofmannsthal was a leading Viennese practitioner.

From the point of view of this study, one of the most interesting features of the dissertation is its inclusion of references to Shelley, William Godwin, 'Monk' Lewis, and Emerson, which show Kassner's critical reading of English literature to have begun earlier than hitherto assumed. Unfortunately, the sections on Shelley, Godwin, and Lewis are not among those transcribed, and one can only speculate what Kassner may have had to say about these authors.<sup>53</sup> However, his reference to Emerson, a writer to whom he frequently returned in early publications, sheds light on his view of criticism and will be discussed later in this section.<sup>54</sup>

A glance at the table of contents of 'Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung' (EJ, p. 28) shows the examiners' criticisms of Kassner's chaotic organization to have been well-founded. The original text consisted of three main sections. The first was a general introduction under the title of 'Legende, Volksbuch, Volkslied' presenting the nature and sources of the Ahasver legend; the second consisted of no fewer than thirteen chapters on various literary treatments of the Ahasver motif, of which only eight were partially transcribed; the closing section, gnominically headed 'Der Stil', sought to determine the stylistic treatment best suited to the legendary figure. As indicated, the extent to which Kassner compromised his interests with those of the academy must remain unclear, but in the published fragment such concessions are few and far between.<sup>55</sup> On the whole Kassner goes his own way, concentrating on those elements which the examiners regarded as superfluous — style, metre, language, and their relationship to the character of his chosen authors.

<sup>53</sup> Bohnenkamp surmises that Shelley and the others were probably discussed in chapter three (EJ, p. 29, footnote 22).

<sup>54</sup> For a detailed treatment of Kassner's reception of Emerson see Geoffrey C. Howes, 'Emerson's Image in Turn-of-the-Century Austria: The Cases of Kassner, Friedell, and Musil', *MAL*, 22, 3/4 (1989), 227–40 (pp. 229–31).

<sup>55</sup> For example, in his discussion of Goethe's treatment of the Wandering Jew Kassner openly uses Jakob Minor's classes as the basis for his, surprisingly brief, textual analyses (EJ, p. 36, footnote by Kassner). On page 57, there is a rather perfunctory reference to 'Stoff', and in a footnote (p. 62) a possible instance of 'Einfluß' is glossed in one sentence.

To claim that Kassner applies his own critical method to the texts examined would be misleading, suggesting theoretical coherence where in fact there is none. For there is no system, however loosely-formulated, in his criticism; rather, Kassner's critical approach is characterized by a range of recurrent concerns, one of which, as his late conversation with Kensik indicates, being the character of the author. A remark in Kassner's first letter to Fritz, written shortly before he began writing the dissertation, sheds further light on this key aspect of his early criticism:

‘Die Dichtung geht auf kein Erlebnis zurück’ — ein jüngst vielfach citiertes Wort! Das heißt für mich, der Plebejer wird weder Gelegenheit noch Kraft, noch Muth haben, nach diesen Erlebnissen zu spüren. (BaT, p. 9)

Kassner's point is that, contrary to popular contemporary opinion, literary works originate in the experience of the writer.<sup>56</sup> However, these experiences can be detected only by a select few, hence the general scepticism regarding the experiential basis of literature. The use of ‘spüren’ here is significant as it indicates Kassner's critical élite to have intuitive rather than rational access to the underlying experiences of a text. These remarks imply not only that criticism is exclusive and intuitive, but also that literature, being based on the writer's experience, is a form of autobiography. It is important to note that the experiences with which the sensitive critic is concerned do not manifest themselves in any obvious way in the text. Kassner does not mean that literature is autobiographical in any straightforwardly documentary sense. Rather, as in ‘Sonnengnade’, the author's experiences and their significance for critical interpretation can be divined only by subjecting both text and biography to close scrutiny. Thus, Kassner's early interest in characterizing the poet can be seen as a corollary of his notion that literature is based on experience.

This concern with the life of his chosen authors radically differentiates Kassner's critical perspective from that of Hofmannsthal. In the essays analysed in the previous chapter biography is noticeably absent. As I will show, one of Kassner's central, if unstated, aims in the dissertation is to reveal the intimate relationship between the individual authors and their treatments of the Ahasver legend. In most of Kassner's critical readings, the personality of the author is constantly in the foreground. His notion of personality, however, places little emphasis on the canonical positivist categories of heredity and education, nor is it primarily concerned with the empirical events of the author's life. Rather than painstakingly amassing factual biographical information and constructing deterministic accounts of personal development, Kassner seeks to divine the personality of his chosen authors in more general, holistic terms.

In his introduction, of which only one page survives, Kassner presents the legendary figure of the Wandering Jew within a general account of the folk origins of legend. Legend, he asserts, is a product of folk will and imagination and as such serves to supplement history. It is because of its origins in folk psychology that the legend of Ahasver, the Wandering Jew, has become so widely disseminated:

Vielleicht hätte die Legende keine solche Verbreitung gefunden, hätte nicht das Volksbewußtsein einen so starken Rückhalt an einem tief im Menschen liegenden Gefühl:

<sup>56</sup> As the editors of BaT point out, Kassner's formulation ‘Die Dichtung geht auf kein Erlebnis zurück’ can be read as summarizing the views of opponents of Wilhelm Dilthey's ‘Geisteswissenschaft’, to which the notion of experience is central. (BaT, p. 144, note to p. 9, lines 2f.) This is not to say, however, that Kassner was necessarily allying himself to Dilthey's particular philosophical cause. Although not mentioned in the letters of BaT, in one of Kassner's most scathing (and unjust) reminiscences Dilthey's gaze is bizarrely depicted as a cross between a ferret and a tool. See KSW VII, pp. 124–25.

Die Fragen: wie wäre es, wenn ich ewig lebte; wäre ich da glücklich oder nicht; die Todesfurcht! Wenn nicht Ahasver die Personification dieser Urempfindung geworden wäre, so wäre es ein anderer geworden. An ähnlichen Beispielen fehlt es ja nicht. Eine solche Legende muß entstehen, wenn das Volk denkt und fühlt. (EJ, p. 30)

This interpretation of Ahasver as the embodiment of man's perennial fear of death and the associated notion of eternal life recurs throughout Kassner's examination of the literary treatments of the figure. It is, as it were, the original folk theme varied by his chosen authors. Having dutifully established the nature and origin of the Ahasver legend, Kassner goes on to examine its treatment in literature, giving scant attention to the determination of sources and causal chains of influence.

The first chapter in the central section of the dissertation, 'Goethe-Schubart', has survived complete and reveals Kassner's concern with experience and autobiography discussed above. He opens his examination by emphasizing the absence of reliable factual information on the origins of Goethe's fragment 'Der ewige Jude'. In the case of this poem, he remarks, the copious historical data on Goethe's inner and outer life shed no light on the genesis of the text, and the critic must make do with what Kassner calls the author's 'confessions' ('Bekenntnisse'): 'Wir haben keine Daten, wir haben den ganzen, großen Goethe selbst. Kann uns das auch für Einzelheiten genug sein?' (EJ, p. 31) Kassner's answer is, in a word, no. He points out that the relevant 'confessional' information in the *Italienische Reise* and *Dichtung und Wahrheit* is not strictly factual, and goes so far as to assert that the account of the fragment in the latter is itself 'Dichtung' (EJ, p. 32). The critic, therefore, should not seek to discover the particular empirical facts concerning the poem, but what Kassner, citing Goethe, calls 'das Grundwahr':<sup>57</sup>

Goethe gibt uns in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* nicht so sehr das Wirkliche, Thatsächliche, als das 'Grundwahr'. Das können wir aus seinem Fragmente herauschälen. An Einzelheiten dürfen wir nur behutsam rühren. (EJ, p. 32)

These comments are remarkable in their invocation of Goethe to legitimize a radical departure from fact-based positivist method. Kassner implies that, in this particular case, the critic must devote attention not to the empirical events of the poet's life but rather to its essential underlying truth. Truth of this order cannot be scientifically calculated from an atomistic inventory of individual facts ('Einzelheiten'); rather, the critic must proceed holistically and intuitively, divining an author's essential character from an extensive acquaintance with both life and work.

Before examining the text of Goethe's fragment, Kassner presents in some detail the author's probable motivation for adopting what he calls the 'mask' of the Wandering Jew (EJ, pp. 35–36). The explanations advanced by Kassner need not concern us here; what is distinctive of his general approach, however, is that it ignores the positivist questions of 'Stoff und Einfluß', concentrating instead on the relationship between the experiences and character of the author and those of Ahasver. According to Kassner, it was Goethe's perception of personal affinities with the renegade Wandering Jew which aroused his affection for the figure and made his treatment so sympathetic.<sup>58</sup> Being, to a great extent, a product of the interaction between author and legendary figure, Goethe's Ahasver owes relatively little to traditional printed sources:

Ganz aus Goethes Geist heraus ist Ahasver selbst. Er ist eine feste, in sich geschlossene Natur. Er ist geistig und gemüthlich beschränkt, sein Wissenstrieb ist Neugier. Er nimmt

<sup>57</sup> For the origins of this term see EJ, p. 32, footnote 27.

<sup>58</sup> EJ, p. 36.



begierig auf, was ihm in den Kram passt, ihn reizt zum Widerspruch, was er nicht versteht, eben weil er es nicht fassen kann. Er besitzt weder ein politisches noch ein religiöses Glaubensbekenntnis, Pharisäer und Sadducäer sind ihm gleich. In ihrem Wesen versteht er keine Partei. Er greift nach Einzelheiten, die andere, weil geringfügig, nicht beachten. (EJ, p. 35)

Here the convergence of author and legendary figure approaches identification, a point underlined by Kassner's laudatory comment on the opening lines of the fragment: 'Konnte sich Goethe-Ahasver klarer, aufrichtiger und schneidender schildern?' (EJ, p. 37)

After a rather perfunctory commentary on the philosophical content of Goethe's poem Kassner turns to the final 201 lines of the fragment, 'Die Wiederkunft Christi'. Here, too, he radically departs from positivist method. Particularly noteworthy is his attempt to convey the great beauty of the poem:

Es ist das eine jener Dichterstellen, denen man nicht einmal mit den Gefühlen beizukommen wagt, geschweige denn mit Worten. Wer vermag es den Blütenstaub einer Blume in die Hand zu nehmen, ohne auch nur ein Stäubchen zu verwischen! Man könnte an die wundervollsten Holzschnitte Dürers mit ihrem intimen Christusleben erinnern, man müsste jenes tief-liebenden Eloa's von Alfred de Vigny gedenken und käme sich doch nur wie jener arme Narr vor, der die Sonne verbauen will. Vielleicht kommt man dem Verständnis dieser Schönheit am nächsten, wenn man an den letzten Gesang von Dantes Paradiso erinnert. (EJ, p. 39)

This figurative and exorbitantly allusive passage, reminiscent of Hofmannsthal's critical discourse, indicates the impossibility of translating art into conceptual terms. Kassner's ironic attempt to suggest the beauty of Goethe's poetic fragment with reference to other works of art has obvious affinities with the aesthetic sensibility depicted in Hofmannsthal's 'Algernon Charles Swinburne', where the English poet's supposed contemporaries experience the world through the medium of art, or more specifically, memories of works of art. The style of the above passage also comes dangerously close to Hermann Bahr's critical name-dropping. Kassner's comments suggest that a proper appreciation of the beauty of Goethe's poem can be achieved, if at all, only through the medium of other works of art; and this, in turn, implies the inadequacy of scientific positivist criticism to convey aesthetic beauty. The implication is that such beauty is commensurate only with that of other works of art and must, therefore, elude the grasp of a purely fact-oriented critical metalanguage.

Kassner's transition from Goethe's Ahasver fragment to that of Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart is characteristically framed in terms of their respective personalities:

Es gibt zu Goethe kaum ein größerer [*sic*] Gegensatz als Schubart. Goethe mit seiner festen Richtung ohne Unter- oder Oberströmung ist als Mensch Dichter und als Dichter Mensch, jedesmals über dem Augenblicke stehend. Schubart ist, wie er selbst gesteht, meist Alltagsmensch. Seine Gedichte sind Ausflüsse einer ebenso starken als momentanen Stimmung. (EJ, p. 41)

In the ensuing discussion of Schubart the relationship between the author's personality, his experience, and poetic style forms the focus of attention. Schubart is not only presented as being by temperament an 'Alltagsmensch', whose work proceeded from momentary impulses; he was also, Kassner indicates, in his early years a journalist, and an explosive individual whose volatility was at its greatest during his long imprisonment. It was this experience of protracted incarceration that made Schubart see his life as a curse, and death as a blessing. This intense longing for death, Kassner writes, gave rise to his poetic treatment of the Ahasver legend: 'Aus

dieser Stimmung heraus ist "Der ewige Jude. Eine lyrische Rhapsodie", gedichtet.' (EJ, p. 42) The lyrical fragment is the final, and only surviving section of a greater epic, in which Schubart had intended to chart Ahasver's experience through two thousand years of history. Kassner's characterization of the Ahasver of this unwritten epic as a 'Riesenreporter' (EJ, p. 43) associates the projected poem with Schubart's journalistic beginnings. Kassner goes on to interpret as symbolic the fact that only the concluding, lyrical section of the ambitious plan was executed:

Und wie sinnbildlich! Aus dem ganzen weltüberblickenden Plane des Journalisten Schubart reife der so durchaus subjective Schluß. Wie im Symbol erscheint uns hier sein Leben ein halbes. Die Jugend, das Ausleben hackte man ihm ab u. ließ den Stumpf im eigenen Blute sich wüthend gebärden. Das Leben Schubart <s> erscheint als Fragment wie sein Gedicht, der wahnsinnige todsehrende Schluß eines verpfuschten Anfang's. (EJ, p. 43)

This is presumably one of those unintentionally comical passages commented on in the examiners' report, and it cannot be denied that in attempting to express the relationship between Schubart's life and his fragmentary poem Kassner strays into tastelessness. If unfortunately expressed, his point is that the necessary relationship between the poet's life and work is to be understood as symbolic and artistic, and not in causal, scientific terms.

After summarizing the plot of Schubart's poem, Kassner turns to its style, declaring the fragment a stylistic masterpiece.<sup>59</sup> He supports this judgement by demonstrating the perfect correspondence of sound and sense in the verse, drawing attention, for example, to Schubart's use of full iambs to depict Ahasver's reluctant crawling; to the alliteration of 'k' sounds, suggesting the barrenness of the desert; and to the use of repetitions to create a sense of resignation. Kassner not only comments on the style, he illustrates its effects by imitation: 'Alles steinig, kahl und kalksteingrau.' (EJ, p. 44) The fulsome praise of Schubart's stylistic achievement culminates in the sentence: 'Jeder dichterischen Vorstellung entspricht der Stil' (EJ, p. 45), which shows the value of the poem for Kassner to lie in the indissoluble bond between its (psychological) content and (linguistic) form.<sup>60</sup> The conclusion of the chapter returns to and expands on the antithesis of Goethe and Schubart presented earlier, showing their very different treatments of the Ahasver legend to correspond to their respective personalities and experiences: in Goethe's poem the Wandering Jew is a Goethean 'Weltkind'; in Schubart's, Ahasver is, like the harried author, a restless 'Ruhesucher' (EJ pp. 45-46).

This emphasis on the intimate relationship between author and work recurs throughout most of the surviving fragments of the dissertation, and two further examples will serve to underline the importance of this theme in Kassner's early criticism. In his second chapter, 'Ein romantisches Drama', Kassner demonstrates how Achim von Arnim introduced the figure of the Wandering Jew into his *Halle und Jerusalem* (a reworking of Gryphius' drama *Cardenio und Celinde*) in order to explain the unconsummated love of the two protagonists. This addition to the original material is said to be typical of Arnim's Romantic appropriation of traditional German sources. In *Halle und Jerusalem* the author is identified not with Ahasver, but with his male protagonist: 'In Cardenio portraitierte sich Arnim selbst.' (EJ, p. 49) Kassner then goes on

<sup>59</sup> EJ, p. 44.

<sup>60</sup> This conception of the complete correspondence of the inner ('Vorstellung') and the sensuous form ('Stil') is remarkably consonant with Hofmannsthal's laudatory account of George's poetry in the essay 'Gedichte von Stefan George' of March 1896 (RA I, pp. 214-21). At the heart of this essay is the question of style, and early in his reflections Hofmannsthal cites Pater on the subject. The sentences closest to Kassner's understanding of style are: 'Diese Übereinstimmung zwischen Gesinnung und Manier hätten wir nicht entbehren dürfen, ohne irrezuwerden. Denn die künstlerische Kraft und das Weltgefühl eines Künstlers sind eins.' (RA I, p. 219) However, Hofmannsthal characteristically does not attempt to corroborate this insight with reference to George's biography.

to show the relationship between Arnim and the Faustian Cardenio, who initially conceives of himself as 'Übermensch', but whom life and love prove to be all too human.<sup>61</sup>

Similarly, in the surviving fragment of the third chapter, which originally bore the telling heading 'Selbstbekenntnisse',<sup>62</sup> Kassner writes of Nikolaus Lenau's 'Ahasver, der ewige Jude':

Ja, man kann dreist sagen, wäre diese Figur [Ahasver] überhaupt nicht schon da, Lenau könnte sie erfunden haben. So sehr ist Ahasver seiner Natur verwandt. Der ganze Lenau ist doch der Jüngling und Ahasver. Seine Jugendsehnsucht 'lügt ihm die Erde noch zum Paradiese', seine Todesgedanken haben ihm 'den schönen Traum von trunk'ner Stirne schon gestreift.' (EJ, p. 53)

Here the author's self-portrait is embodied not in one but two figures — the young shepherd, whose death in youth preserves his illusion of the world as paradise, and the immortal Ahasver, whose longevity and associated preoccupation with death have deprived him of such illusions. These two characters, Kassner contends, give poetic form to Lenau's whole life — the optimism of his early years and the *taedium vitae* which later overcame him in America.<sup>63</sup> The similarity between this symbolic interpretation and the earlier discussion of Schubart is underlined by Kassner's laconic micro-paragraph, 'Lenau kennt Schubart' (EJ, p. 53), which, while vaguely suggesting influence, was hardly likely to endear him to his teachers.

The frustratingly short introductory fragment of chapter four, 'Die Ahasvertragödie', provides a quasi-theoretical reflection on the limits of the textual-biographical approach of the preceding chapters. Kassner opens with a consideration of the nature of genius and its relationship to the age, which is openly indebted to Emerson's notion of 'Representative Men'. Following this brief account of the two main forms of genius — genius which confirms the age, and genius which looks beyond the age — Kassner turns to a third class of (unrepresentative) individuals, whom, again citing Emerson, he dubs 'reiche Möglichkeiten' ('rich possibilities').<sup>64</sup>

Daneben gibt es Menschen, die, ob wirklich bedeutend oder nicht, jeder Strömung geflissentlich aus dem Wege gehen. Zwischen diese und sein Ich keilt er eine meist dunkle Philosophie ein. Emerson nennt solche Geister 'reiche Möglichkeiten'. Ich möchte mir diesen Ausdruck auf folgende Weise zurechtlegen: Es ist möglich, daß dieser oder jener Schriftsteller eine große Individualität ist. Er braucht es nicht zu sein. Wir können seine Person ignorieren und nur sein 'reiches' Werk ins Auge ziehen. Die Kritik kann hier nur subjectiv verfahren, weil sie durch nichts corrigiert werden kann. (EJ, p. 57)

Here the transcription breaks off, making it impossible to judge just where these remarks are leading, although it seems likely that the following analysis of Max Haushofer's tragedy *Der ewige Jude* (1884) departed from the pattern of the preceding chapters and was text-immanent in character. What the above passage proposes is the apparent paradox that exclusively text-oriented criticism, of the kind applicable to 'unrepresentative' artists, is inescapably subjective. Kassner's point is that, far from introducing excessive subjectivism into criticism, consideration of the artist's personality provides a corrective to purely textual analyses. The implication is that, to be complete, criticism must take into account both the personality of the artist and the style of his work. This, in effect, is a statement and vindication of Kassner's tacit critical approach in his earlier chapters, where his bold assessments of aesthetic quality are based on the degree of perceived correspondence between the author's personality and artistic style.

<sup>61</sup> On Kassner's use of the Nietzschean term, see EJ, pp. 49–50, footnote 120.

<sup>62</sup> See Kassner's Table of Contents (EJ, p. 28), and EJ, p. 29, footnote 22.

<sup>63</sup> EJ, p. 53.

<sup>64</sup> For the source of these Emersonian terms see EJ, pp. 56–57, footnotes 160 and 161.

After a gap of some ten pages, the transcription resumes in the middle of the seventh chapter, 'Ahasvers Erdenwallen'. Here Kassner considers Seligmann Heller's 'Die Wanderungen des Ahasver' (1865), a poem in three parts dealing successively with Ahasver's wanderings through antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the modern era. Kassner's reflections open with a sentence which seems to announce the kind of positivist examination his teachers would have appreciated: 'Zunächst die Frage, wie bewältigt Heller den Stoff?' (EJ, p. 57). However, any expectations of a causal-genetic account of 'Die Wanderungen des Ahasver' are dashed in the next sentence: 'Gerade in diesem Fall ist es lehrreich und nothwendig, allgemein zu werden.' (EJ, p. 57) What follows is an extended reflection on Heller's treatment of the Ahasver theme which, in its generality, radically departs from the positivist ideal of particular factual analysis. This remarkable passage deserves extended quotation:

Die Zeit von Christi Geburt bis zum Tode des abtrünnigen Julianus ist die Zeit langsamen Auflösens des Heidenthums und stetiger Kraftzunahme des Christenthums. Die beiden großen Strömungen fließen ineinander anziehend und abstoßend. Wie ein glänzendes Gestirn beim Anprall mit einem stärkeren Körper in tausend leuchtende Theile zerplatzt, die durch die Welt schwirren! Wir sehen ihnen mit Sehnsucht nach, bis sie kalt und grau irgendwo niederfallen und man sie über dem Neuen und Werden vergisst. Die Menschen individualisieren sich, verlieren aber ihre Taten. Sie werden schöner, aber schwächer. Sie sind lyrischer d. h. ihre nackte Menschheit tritt hinter das Ideal, zu dem sie beten, zurück. Ich verstehe unter lyrisch Alles, was den Thatenmenschen auf irgend eine Weise verbirgt. Zarte Geister ziehen sich von der Strömung zurück. Sie denken und dichten sich ein Ideal, das schöner ist als sie — Marcus Aurelius. Starke Geister erheben sich über die Strömung. Mit wahnsinniger Lust greifen sie über ihr eigenes Maß. Was sie thun, ist größer als sie selbst. Wie von einem Feuerbrande umgeben, erscheinen sie in magische Atmosphäre gebannt. Der Brand verzehrt sie, ein letztes schönes Aufflackern, sie verschwinden und die Nachwelt stürmt über das Häufchen Asche, das übrig blieb, unwissend hinweg. Es sind das die Lyriker der That — also Nero's und Agrippina's. Was sind uns gegen diese Menschen mit dem schwachen Körper, dem kranken Blut und der großen Seele jene positiven Geister, deren gewaltiges Handeln eine kurze Inschrift auf Stein verkündet! Ich meine, was sind sie einer reflectierenden Phantasie! Solon, Themistokles, Alexander der Große! Diese Menschen gehören zu ihrer Inschrift, sind von ihr vollständig umschrieben. In einfacher, aber erschöpfender Größe trägt sie die Inschrift von Jahrhundert zu Jahrhundert. Nur die Volksphantasie mit ihrer naiven Freude an der That flicht um sie Märchenkränze. Es gibt Märchen von Solon und Themistokles. Kann sich jemand ein solches von Nero, der ein goldenes Rom wieder aufbaute, denken? Solche Zeiten des Niederganges haben für jeden reflectierenden Geist eine seltsame Anziehungskraft. Sie äussern sich in Bildern. Die Wahrheit verschwindet im Bilde, und dieses ändert die Farben, sooft es ein anders gearteter Geist ansieht. Heller gehört zu jenen Menschen, die über Bildern zu Dichtern werden. Nicht ohne Grund habe ich so oft Renan zum Vergleiche herangezogen, der feiner, skeptischer, darum auch weniger hingebend die Farben sieht. Was aber dann, wenn ein solcher Geist einer positiven Zeit, wie sie das Mittelalter trotz aller Ablenkungen war und die Neuzeit ist, entgegen tritt! Seine rein dichterische Subjectivität löst sich vor diesen großen Pluszeichen der Weltgeschichte auf. Die Freude an der Thatsache, die mit stärkster Liebe und stärkstem Haß die Phantasie eines Conrad Ferdinand Mayer [*sic*] und Heinrich v. Treitschke erregte, fehlt ihm gänzlich. Es bleibt ihm die Gesinnung. Und diese ist liberal. Es ist aber nicht der philosophische, immerhin sehr skeptische Liberalismus des Franzosen Renan[d], nicht der selbstbewusste, aristokratische des Engländers Makaulay, es ist österreichischer Liberalismus. Ein Liberalismus, der lange Zeit hindurch unterdrückt mit Sehnsucht und ein bischen Neid auf die Aufklärung des XVIII. Jh. blickt, ist es — Parteiliberalismus. Er äussert sich hier ebenso wie bei anderen österreichischen Dichtern in einer starken für den Künstler unbrauchbaren, für die Zeit aber sehr charakterischen Freude an der Gesinnung. Darum empfinde ich nach dem ersten Theile eine so starke Abnahme des künstlerischen Wertes. (EJ, pp. 58–59)

Frustratingly, these reflections are interrupted by a seven-page lacuna in the text. The central ideas of this passage, however, are important and require some explication. Here Kassner, while ostensibly examining the question of how Heller treats the 'Stoff' of the Ahasver legend,

addresses the more general question of how a modern poet encounters the three periods presented in Heller's poem — antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the modern era. The extensive and highly figurative characterization of the transitional period between paganism and Christianity introduces the question of 'our', that is reflective modern man's, relationship to the past. For the primitive folk imagination with its naive pleasure in deeds ('Freude an der That'), the heroes of classical antiquity in their simple greatness are objects for legendary embellishment. The more complex period of transition or decline, represented here by Nero, holds no appeal for the naive folk mind, and thus does not generate the kind of legends inspired by heroic ages. For the reflective intellect, however, such periods of decline have a strange attraction, and this is because they express themselves not in simple, monolithic deeds but in intrinsically unstable images ('Bilder'). Kassner's characterization of Heller: 'Heller gehört zu jenen Menschen, die über Bildern zu Dichtern werden' (EJ, p. 59) introduces a subtype into his account of the modern reflective mind. Unlike the naive folk and the heroes of antiquity, modern man is essentially reflective; Heller, however, in addition to displaying this general characteristic of his time, belongs to a subclass of individuals who become poets through the medium of images. Thus, the declining Roman Empire, which, according to Kassner, expresses itself in unstable images, is an age eminently suited to Heller's poetic temperament.

When, however, a poet of Heller's type approaches what Kassner calls a 'positive' age, such as the Medieval Period and the modern era, his poetic subjectivity dissolves completely. The difficulty presented for such poets by a 'positive' historical period is said to lie in their inability to take pleasure in facts ('Freude an der Thatsache'). Unlike Kassner's revered Berlin teacher Treitschke, Heller is receptive only to the shifting, relative images generated by unstable historical periods; the positive facts of history have no appeal for his imagination. The formulation 'Die Freude an der Thatsache' is particularly striking as it not only serves subtly to establish a parallel to the folk's pleasure in deeds ('Freude an der That'); it also shows that, although Kassner rejected the rigidly fact-based, analytical approach of positivist literary study, he did not reject factuality outright. The notion of deriving pleasure from facts, of engaging imaginatively with the positive, indicates that Kassner saw factuality as having a legitimate place in intellectual life — provided, that is, that engagement with facts involves the subject's imagination and emotions ('Freude'). This interpretation of Heller's specific poetic temperament forms the basis for Kassner's concluding assessment of 'Die Wanderungen des Ahasver'. As Heller is said to be capable of appreciating only unstable, aesthetically mediated periods of transition, Kassner judges the first part of his poem, that set in Nero's Rome, to be the most artistically successful. Here, as in earlier chapters of the dissertation, literary value is seen in terms of the consonance of the author's psychology with his work. It is also notable that the extensive depiction of Heller's sensibility quoted above functions as a justification for Kassner's feelings concerning the final two parts of the poem ('Darum empfinde ich . . .').

Kassner's position here is remarkably close to that of Hofmannsthal in his discussion of Pater. Heller's sensibility, as presented by Kassner, has marked similarities to that ambivalent element of modern European culture which Hofmannsthal terms 'Ästhetismus'. The general fascination with a past experienced subjectively through the medium of art, the modern aesthete's intense feelings of affinity with the period of Rome in decline, and finally the inadequacy of this aesthetic sensibility to comprehend the totality of existence: all these key elements of Hofmannsthal's account of 'Ästhetismus' have clear correlatives in Kassner's

interpretation and criticism of Heller's reflective sensibility. It is impossible to determine if these similarities are attributable to direct influence; what is significant is that in 'Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung' Kassner's understanding of the modern aesthetic sensibility and its relationship to history closely resembles Hofmannsthal's critique of 'Ästhetismus'.

One final reading which deserves mention here is that put forward in Kassner's ninth chapter, 'Ahasver-Schopenhauer', in which the Wandering Jew of Robert Hamerling's 'Ahasver in Rom' is interpreted as an embodiment of Schopenhauer's pessimism. More important from the point of view of the present study, however, is Kassner's characterization of Hamerling as the writer born to depict Ahasver: 'Hamerling war der berufene Schilderer der Ahasverfigur.' (EJ, p. 63) After rejecting various accounts of Hamerling's character put forward by his admirers and detractors, Kassner gives his own preliminary characterization of the man:

Ich muss sagen, den melancholischen und doch sarkastischen, den sehnsuchtsvollen und doch philosophisch bestimmten, den schönheitsdurstigen und doch eng in sich verschlossenen, den sich ganz hingebenden und oft so harten Hamerling haben sie [Hamerling's critics and friends] nie recht verstanden. (EJ, p. 64)

This catalogue of seemingly contradictory qualities is reminiscent of Kassner's depiction of the elusive professor in 'Sonnengnade', another complex and ambiguous character, misunderstood by those around him. Hamerling is, Kassner continues, 'ein philosophischer Romantiker' (EJ, p. 64); that is, one whose philosophy prevents him from thinking naively, and whose romanticism takes the conceptual rigidity from his philosophy. Thus, Hamerling's calling to depict the Wandering Jew is explained in terms of the correspondence between the character of the author and that of Ahasver, who is said to be the kind of philosophical-romantic figure which commits one to nothing.<sup>65</sup>

Only two pages of the final section of the dissertation, 'Der Stil' have survived, and it is, therefore, impossible to draw any solid conclusions from this potentially interesting chapter. However, one passage deserves mention, as it sheds further light on Kassner's understanding of literary value. After some general remarks on the style appropriate to the Ahasver figure, Kassner states his criterion of literary worth:

Ahasver ist nichts anderes als die Symbolisierung eines menschlichen Urgefühls, das negativ auftritt. Es ist ein lauter Lebensschrei, eine Empfindung, die immer den Todesgedanken vorangeht. Io vuol' esser' immortale — wer anders ruft so aus als den schon oft Todesfurcht bleich gefärbt hat! Jedes menschliche Urgefühl hat Recht auf poetische Wiedergeburt. Und jene Dichtung wird mir die entscheidende sein, in der die Natur im starken Bewußtsein ihres ewigen Seins den düsteren Todrufer zu Tode jauchzen, ihn erlösen wird. (EJ, p. 67: the faulty Italian is in the original)

This is somewhat obscurely expressed, but what Kassner appears to be saying is the following: like all legends, that of Ahasver has its origins in primitive folk psychology, being the obverse of man's deep-seated fear of death. The Wandering Jew is, then, the legitimate poetic expression of the desire to live forever. Accordingly, the ultimate value of any treatment of the legend is not to be judged solely or even predominantly in aesthetic terms; this will depend, rather, on the efficacy of the particular literary work in dispelling the fear from which the legendary figure arose. To be of value an Ahasver poem must enable man to embrace death with joy. The notion of redemption through art, explicit in the closing sentence, links Kassner's understanding of the function of the Ahasver legend to the themes of 'Sonnengnade'. There the painter is shown to be

<sup>65</sup> EJ, p. 65.

redeemed by her mystical/artistic vision; here Kassner's employment of this quasi-religious notion as his index of literary value precludes the use of the legendary figure as a vehicle for a poet's subjective thoughts or feelings. The quality of any treatment of the Ahasver legend must be measured with reference not only to the consonance of its style with the author's psychology, equally important is that the text should redeem author, reader, and legendary figure from the perennial fear to which the legend gives expression.

What conclusions can be drawn from the fragmentary dissertation? The above reading, though necessarily provisional, confirms both Kassner's late account of his bold departure from positivist academic method and the damning judgements of professors Minor and Heinzl. In the transcribed passages, orthodox 'causal-genetic' examinations of the Ahasver motif scarcely appear, and Kassner's treatment of his subject matter suggests him to have been more interested in finding his own alternative form of critical engagement with art than in appeasing his teachers. At the heart of his nascent critical approach is a concern with the relationship between the personality and literary style of individual authors, a corollary of Kassner's conviction that literature is inseparable from the experiences of the writer. Personality here is to be understood not as the sum total of particular biographical facts, but as the essential truth (the Goethean 'Grundwahr') of an indivisible totality. This holistic notion of biography at times suspends the distinction between life and art, putting the intuitively divined truth of a life on a par with literature — as is most strikingly seen in the interpretation of the symbolic correspondences between Schubart's life and his 'Der ewige Jude. Eine lyrische Rhapsodie'. In the dissertation Kassner's treatment of great art as a form of self-portraiture reveals his notion of criticism to be consonant with the latent autobiographical concerns of 'Sonnengnade'. This not only indicates an important line of continuity in his earliest work; it also differentiates Kassner's critical approach from that of Hofmannsthal, in whose essays biography is noticeably lacking.

Can 'Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung', then, be called criticism as art? Kassner's intuitive approach to literature, his extensive use of figurative language, and his attempt to convey the superlative beauty of Goethe's 'Wiederkunft Christi' with reference to other works of art all have affinities with Hofmannsthal's critical essays of the 1890s. Similarly, Kassner's extended and highly imaginative presentation of Seligmann Heller's characteristically modern responses to history bears a marked resemblance to Hofmannsthal's account of aestheticism. To this extent Kassner's dissertation — while hardly as well-formed and linguistically accomplished as Hofmannsthal's early essays — can be regarded as a form of criticism as art. However, what radically differentiates Kassner from Hofmannsthal is their respective attitudes to facts. Whereas in Hofmannsthal's essays attention to factual accuracy was seen to be subordinate to considerations of aesthetic effect, Kassner's first work of criticism seeks to combine factuality with aesthetic subjectivity. Kassner's immense erudition not only redeemed his dissertation in the eyes of the examiners; it provided the indispensable objective basis for his intuitive interpretations. If his citations are at times inaccurate, this is less a reflection of a philosophical devaluation of fact than of the haste with which the lengthy dissertation was written.<sup>66</sup> The distinctive style of 'Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung' lies in its author's imaginative response to a vast corpus of textual and biographical sources, a critical attitude summarized in Kassner's striking phrase 'die Freude an der Thatsache'. His subjective pleasure in objective facts and his

<sup>66</sup> For examples of Kassner's factual errors, see EJ, p. 31, footnote 26 (misdating) and p. 35, footnote 46 (misquotation).

related concern with the symbolic relationship between art and life show that by 1896 Kassner was already well on the way to the kind of literary criticism which in December 1901 would show Hofmannsthal, 'warum man dichtet, was das ist, wenn man dichtet, was es mit dem Dasein zu tun hat'.<sup>67</sup>

## V A BELATED 'AUFBRUCH IN DIE MODERNE': THE GENESIS OF *DIE MYSTIK*

'Merkwürdig<, > was ich von mir direct sage, ist doch immer uneigentlich und ich möchte es meist in der nächsten 1/4 Stunde widerrufen. Das ist allerdings nicht sehr charaktervoll und nur wenn ich optimistisch bin, wie z. B. immer wenn ich mich an andere wende, sage ich, das sei musicalisch.' (BaT, p. 99)

The period with which this section is concerned begins with Kassner's return to Vienna in summer 1896 and closes with the completion of *Die Mystik, die Künstler und das Leben* in autumn 1899. The main source for the following synoptic discussion is the (one-sided) early correspondence published as *Briefe an Tetzl*. Informal in tone, often highly figurative, and at times exuberantly playful, these letters provide a unique insight into the young Kassner's developing character. Their impulsiveness, evident in the frequent grammatical and orthographic lapses, stands in marked contrast to the self-conscious concern with posterity which characterizes much of Hofmannsthal's early correspondence.<sup>68</sup> While fascinating documents in their own right, Kassner's letters cover the most wide-ranging topics, and my citation is, therefore, highly selective. In what follows I will be chiefly concerned with four interrelated topics: first, Kassner's reading during the late 1890s and its relationship to the alternative literary canon of *Jung-Wien*; secondly, the origins and development of his plans for *Die Mystik*; thirdly, his fifteen-month stay in England and its significance for his understanding of art and life; and, finally, the conception of criticism which emerges from his engagement with modern English art.

As previously mentioned, after his fruitful semesters in Berlin, on his return to Vienna Kassner not only had to complete a doctoral dissertation in a matter of months, he also had to revise for his comprehensive oral examinations. This unenviable workload notwithstanding, he maintained his extra-curricular engagement with literature. His first letter to Fritz contains the reflections on the experiential basis of literature cited in the previous section, and an enthusiastic characterization of Pierre Louÿs's novel *Aphrodite* (1896), which is hailed as evidence of the progress of the modern psyche ('Seelenleben').<sup>69</sup> While Kassner was still passionately interested in modern literature, much of his time was necessarily taken up with the chore of preparing for his oral examinations in German and Latin ('Haupt rigorosum'), and Philosophy ('Neben rigorosum'). The same letter shows that, in addition to Louÿs, Kassner was (with varying degrees of reluctance) reading Old and Middle High German, Virgil, and Spinoza. Not surprisingly, he could muster little enthusiasm for the extensive rote learning of conjugations and declensions which this revision involved, and his distaste is memorably expressed in his characterization of philology as 'das derbe Ochsenfleisch' (BaT, p. 7).

<sup>67</sup> Hofmannsthal to Kassner, 22 (?) December 1901, cited on p. 2 above.

<sup>68</sup> To convey the impulsiveness of Kassner's letters I have retained the copious editorial corrections of BaT. Here '< >' indicates an editorial insertion, while '[ ]' marks extraneous matter in the original text. See the editors' 'Erläuterungen', BaT, pp. 141-42.

<sup>69</sup> BaT, p. 8.



Kassner's disenchantment with university study is undiminished in his next letter. Dated 18 November 1896 and headed 'Meine lieben Freunde!', it is addressed jointly to Gottlieb Fritz, Emil Schering, and a third Berlin friend, Hermann Stockhausen.<sup>70</sup> Here, having successfully completed his oral examinations, Kassner reviews his studies with only two desires: to be able, finally, to forget all he had been required to learn, and to revive the intellectual and social atmosphere of his year in Berlin:

Jetzt möchte ich gerne wenigstens 2 Tage unter Euch weilen — da möchte ich all den Krempel vergessen, der mir wie einem Staatsesel auf den Rücken geladen wurde, um den holprigen Weg, mit Minorcoax gepflastert, nach dem Doctorhut zurückzulegen. Wenn mir all das fremde Zeug zwar schon abgenommen wurde, so spüre ich noch ab und zu die Druckfläche! Ich wollte unlängst in der mathematischen Ruhe Spinozas einschlafen, als ich mich dabei ertappte, wie ich biudan baup budum conjugierte. Wie gesagt, das Prüfungswissen stößt einem auf wie ungegohr'nes Hausbrod und mir fehlt der Ra-usch! Den dürfte ich so ziemlich bei Euch finden, so etwa wie Ihr auf Bierbrief und Bierkarte Euch geistig ausgespien habt. (BaT, p. 11)

Although intentionally humorous, Kassner's image of himself as an ass straining under the burden of prescribed learning, and his comment on the intellectual indigestion caused by unleavened philology both have a more serious point, as they indicate the main source of his distaste for the academy. These images and his characterization of the content of university studies as 'all das fremde Zeug' show Kassner's main objection to academic study to have been its failure to provide an authentic, personal relationship between student and knowledge. The nature of such a relationship is, then, not only a central theme of 'Sonnengnade' and a pervasive concern in 'Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung'; it is a question which concerned Kassner's own relationship to his studies. The quotation from Jakob Böhme which provides the epigraph to section II of this chapter sums up Kassner's attitude to the academy and its methods: 'Was hilft mir die Wissenschaft, so ich darinnen nicht lebe?'

What is also evident from this letter is that after the exhilarating experiences with his student friends — ranging from intellectual intoxication of a quasi-Nietzschean kind to the less cerebral 'Rausch' induced by their Thursday evening meetings in a Berlin bar<sup>71</sup> — Kassner found himself completely isolated in Vienna. The stark contrast between the lively social life of Berlin and utter solitude of Vienna is particularly marked in Kassner's poignant explanation of his friendship for Fritz, Schering, and Stockhausen:

Die ganze Zeit über, seitdem ich mich von Euch getrennt habe, hatte ich nie recht Zeit über das Berliner Jahr und unser schönes Zusammensein nachzudenken. Es lag hinter mir wie etwas Schönes, Erhebendes, immer Weckendes in einen Goldnebel gehüllt und ich wollte daran mit meinen Werktagshänden, die gothische Vocabel<n> unterstrichen, nicht rühren. Erst jetzt finde ich langsam die freie Reinheit wieder den Nebel wegzuhauchen und eines nach dem anderen von [den] all den schönen Dingen herauszuholen, mich immer zu Neugier reizend und so unsere Erlebnisse zu blanken Kunstwerken froher Erinnerung zu verknüpfen. Ihr werdet sagen, ich schwefle wiedereinmal um meiner selbst willen und ich höre Stockerl sein 'Phantast' in unverfälschtem hessisch hervorbrüllen. Doch diesmal irrt er sich! Ich bin durch mein Leiden oft und viel zur Einsamkeit verurtheilt und gerade da wo mein Wille am stärksten Ja sagt, kreischt es mir irgendwoher 'Nein' entgegen. Und weil ich gerade kein dummer Kerl bin, so hat sich in mir ein schlauer Fatalismus herausgebildet, den ich hüte wie ein schlechter Priester seine Pfründen. Nur ab und zu schenkt man mir Etwas, an was ich nicht gedacht und dann bin ich naiv und Kind und Phantast und weiß der Teufel was. So geht es mir mit Euch! Wenn ich hier einsam wandere und höchstens ein<en> Trottel oder Bewunderer finde, so erfüllte es mich manchmal mit einem

<sup>70</sup> BaT, p. 11.

<sup>71</sup> See BaT, p. 33. Comparing these meetings with Erich Schmidt's Monday evening 'Germanistenstammtisch', Kassner writes: 'Was war dagegen nicht unser Donnerstag für ein Tag!'

strahlenden Bewußtsein, wo ander[e]s drei seelensgute Kerl zu finden, die sozusagen nicht bezahlt an mich denken. Und da habe ich denn viel reinere Empfindungen als sonst und diese danke ich Euch! Jetzt wißt Ihr wenigstens, warum ich Euch meine Freunde nenne. Ich gebrauche das Wort nicht leichtsinnig. — (BaT, pp. 11–12)

This open confession of affection is uncharacteristic of Kassner's published work, and, as if embarrassed by his candour, he breaks off here to give a humorous account of his uneven performance in the 'Rigorosa'. Kassner's explanation of his solitude in terms of his physical disability ('mein Leiden'), while perfectly credible, is only part of the truth; there is also a clear indication that his high expectations of others contributed to his failure to find the kind of stimulating company he had so briefly enjoyed in the German capital.

As in his first university years, then, Kassner's life during the months following his examinations was largely solitary and taken up with reading and visits to the theatre. However, although the Austrian capital was a hotbed of artistic activity, Kassner was not impressed by the latest developments in the cultural life of the city, to which, it must be remembered, he still had access only through the theatre and the press. Towards the end of his letter to Fritz, Schering, and Stockhausen, he remarks:

Das Wiener lit<erarische> Leben scheint mir sehr flau zu werden. Hier herrscht zuviel Stimmung und die ist eben zu unzuverlässig, H<ermann> Bahr wächst allmählich in den warmen Pelz eines bourgeois hinein. Sonst kümmerge ich mich wenig darum. Vorläufig freue ich mich Wien auf ca 10 Tage zu verlassen. (BaT, p. 14)

It would be pointless to speculate what particular aspect of Viennese literary life might have prompted Kassner's dismissal of excessive 'Stimmung'. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the underdetermined notion of 'Stimmung' was widespread in non-Naturalist aesthetics of the 1890s, being prominent both in the 'Merksprüche' of George's *Blätter für die Kunst* and Hofmannsthal's Swinburne essay. In his tendentious literary criticism of the early 1890s Hermann Bahr, too, repeatedly emphasized the modernity of subjective moods and sensations — although, to judge by the above characterization, Kassner had come to regard the mentor of *Jung-Wien* and advocate of ultra-modern 'Nervositäten' as having developed an excessively cosy relationship with bourgeois Vienna. The witty formulation of this criticism, the only reference to Bahr in Kassner's early work, suggests that by 1896 he was already familiar with the earlier, more strident work of the controversial Austrian critic, novelist, and playwright.<sup>72</sup>

To return to the question of 'Stimmung': two things are notable about Kassner's gnomic comments. First, they represent the rejection of an aesthetic dominated by subjective mood; and secondly, this rejection is based on a perception of the intrinsic unreliability of such moods. As emphasized throughout this chapter, Kassner's disaffection with academic literary studies and his extensive extra-curricular reading were motivated by a passion for literature and an associated rejection of dispassionate positivist objectivism. It may, therefore, seem warranted to polarize his position and that of his university teachers, applying the adjective 'subjective' to Kassner's approach to art. However, as the above remark shows, by 1896 he had no interest in

<sup>72</sup> In later years, Kassner's estimation of Bahr was even more critical. His devastating characterization of the critic in *Buch der Erinnerung* (1938/1954) is worth quoting here for its brilliant parody of Bahr's mannered syntax and penchant for name-dropping: 'Es war so um die Mitte der neunziger Jahre, daß Hermann Bahr, den Hofmannsthal zu Richard Strauß in einem Briefe später eine taumelige, unleidliche Renegatenatur nennt, der aber bei mancherlei Begabung vielleicht nur ein eingefleischter Clown war, daß also Wiens Verfechter alles Modernen von Paris, wohin er sich zuweilen zu begeben hatte zur Orientierung in geistigen Dingen gleich der Inhaberin eines Modesalons, Kunde holend, was im Frühjahr getragen werde, von Maurice Maeterlinck, der im Figaro von dem eben genannten Octave Mirbeau schon mit Shakespeare verglichen worden war, in die Zeitung brachte, er sei alles in allem ein Mystiker, der Bier trinke. Abends im Restaurant. Das war viel. Man hatte abermals die beiden Enden des Lebens oder, wie Heraklit sich ausdrückt, der Leier zusammen in den Händen.' (KSW VII, pp. 99–100)

literature dominated by vague subjective moods, and demanded something more reliable than the evanescent 'Stimmungen' of the Viennese literary scene. This rejection of excessive subjectivity in art is closely related to Kassner's critical position in 'Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung'. There the notions of 'das Grundwahre' and 'Freude an der Thatsache' provide objective, if hardly positivist, points of reference for criticism; and Kassner's reinterpretation of the Emersonian notion of 'rich possibilities' is memorably employed to marginalize writers whose work does not stand in any discernible relationship to their life or times. The notion of 'Stimmung' is one to which Kassner would return in greater detail in *Die Mystik*, and will be discussed in the following chapter.

Even with his dissertation and examinations behind him, Kassner had good reason to find the closing months of 1896 particularly bleak. In addition to his solitude he faced the imminent prospect of a protracted course of orthopaedic treatment on his crippled legs. Separated from his friends, often alone, and uninspired by the literary climate of the Austrian capital, Kassner devoted much of his time and energy to extending his already considerable knowledge of modern literature. One of his most important reading experiences in the mid-1890s was undoubtedly the work of Nietzsche. As already indicated, Kassner probably first encountered Nietzsche's thought during his stay in Berlin.<sup>73</sup> However, although he and his friends may have known through hearsay of key Nietzschean notions such as the 'Übermensch' and the Dionysian in art and life, it is unlikely that they had actually read Nietzsche in any depth before late 1896.<sup>74</sup> While Kassner's dissertation reveals him to have been acquainted with both notions by early autumn of that year, his first documented encounter with the work of the 'Dichter-Denker' dates from mid-November 1896. Towards the end of the letter to his three friends, he remarks: 'Sonst lese ich Nietzsche' (BaT, p. 14), promising to tell Fritz more later. His next letter, written about a month later, contains a detailed account of his reading which shows that, though he was averse to the rigours of academic study, Kassner's engagement with literature was by no means that of a dilettante. In response to Fritz's enquiries concerning his views on Nietzsche he writes:

Ich habe nur das erste Band gründlich studiert, also den N<ietzsche>, den N<ietzsche> später zum Theile wenigstens selbst noch corrigieren mußte! Man würde ihm Unrecht thun, wollte man ihn schon jetzt bewundern. (BaT, p. 15)<sup>75</sup>

This comment reveals not only the extent of Kassner's reading — at this point confined to what he regarded as the unrepresentative early works, *Die Geburt der Tragödie* and *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* — it also indicates his view of this reading as study, and an associated reluctance to make definitive judgements without first having studied Nietzsche's later publications in depth.

A striking feature of Kassner's early Nietzsche reception is its considered balance of praise and criticism. In this respect he differs from many of his contemporaries, most significantly from the young Hofmannsthal, whose correspondence and 'Aufzeichnungen' from the early 1890s reveal him to have responded to Nietzsche, initially at least, with uncritical enthusiasm.<sup>76</sup> Kassner does praise a number of features of Nietzsche's early works, such as their critical

<sup>73</sup> See p. 69, p. 77, and p. 83, footnote 61 above.

<sup>74</sup> The editors of BaT interpret the slogan-like recurrence of the word 'Rausch' in Kassner's earliest letters as probably indicating Nietzsche's influence on the circle of Berlin friends. See BaT, p. 144, note to p. 9, line 2 from bottom of page.

<sup>75</sup> The edition in question is *Nietzsche's Werke. Erste Abtheilung, Band I* (Leipzig, 1895). See BaT, p. 161, editors' note to p. 15, lines 20ff.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Hofmannsthal's notes on Nietzsche (RA III, pp. 329–30, and p. 335); also *Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Arthur Schnitzler. Briefwechsel*, ed. by Therese Nickl and Heinrich Schnitzler (Frankfurt a.M., 1964), p. 7 and p. 9.

analyses of modern phenomena, interpretations of literary and mythological figures, tracing of parallels between antiquity and modernity, and the polar principles of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. However, while acknowledging the value of this last distinction, Kassner finds Nietzsche's attempt to unite the two poles forced and unconvincing. Kassner's reluctance to judge Nietzsche solely on the basis of his earliest publications is reiterated in a comment on the generally negative reception of *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*:

Wie viel aber unsere sich immer entrüstende geistige Welt von Nietzsches 'Unzeitgemäßen B<etrachtungen>' hat, ist unverkennbar. Nach einer Seite hin hat man ihn vielleicht zuviel verstanden d. i. ich glaube, daß es ihm geschadet hat, daß man ihn so schnell ad mundi gloriam zerfetzen durfte! (BaT, p. 16)

Although Kassner here distances himself from the widespread intellectual hostility to Nietzsche, which he sees as based solely on the content of the early works, this does not imply that he embraces the opposite extreme of uncritical adulation. The importance of Nietzsche's thought for Kassner at this time should not be underestimated, but his early responses, while at times enthusiastic, are devoid of that unreflecting and distorting cultic reverence which, during the 1890s, was already developing around the philosopher's life and work.

It is characteristic that while studying Nietzsche Kassner did not neglect the latest literary developments, and the same letter contains a revealing comment on Gerhart Hauptmann's 'Märchendrama', *Die versunkene Glocke* (1897). Although in Kassner's judgement the play, which he had read, but not seen staged, failed to surpass the dramatic achievement of *Die Weber* (1892) and *Florian Geyer* (1896), he nonetheless praises it as 'ein Selbstbekenntnis<,> ein reinigendes und darum verheißendes' (BaT, p. 16). Here, again, is the concern with the relationship between life and artistic work central to 'Sonnengnade', the dissertation, and Kassner's tacit understanding of the ideal relationship between student and studies. The above remark not only highlights this important line of continuity in his early thought; it also reveals that the personal, confessional significance of a literary work can, to a certain extent, compensate for its aesthetic shortcomings. If failing to advance Hauptmann's dramatic art, as a confessional act of purification, *Die versunkene Glocke* holds promise for the future.

In January 1897 Kassner began a course of orthopaedic therapy at a clinic in Göggingen near Augsburg. The duration of his treatment was not determined in advance, but turned out to be considerably longer than expected. Agonizing and ineffective as the therapy was, Kassner used his six-month stay in Göggingen to extend and intensify his literary interests. In his first letter from the clinic, he writes that he is reading almost nothing but Nietzsche. Although his attitude remains critical, at times even antagonistic, he is both fascinated and challenged by the reading experience:

Mit Nietzsche kämpfe ich — an ihm will ich lesen lernen, das hat mir<,> glaube ich gefehlt. Ich habe zu viel genippt und geschlürft vom Quell des Großen, mich so recht hineingestürzt in die schneidenden Fluten aber nie. (BaT, p. 19)

To this dramatic account of his struggle with Nietzsche Kassner appends the following comment:

Ich will über N<ietzsche> vorläufig nichts anders schreiben, als daß er mir bisher zu viel Selbstentdeckung und darum auch ein bisschen Selbstbespiegelung ist. Aber lieber sich am Spiegelglas wund schneiden, als immer hineinsehen. (BaT, p. 19)

The echoes of 'Sonnengnade' in the image of the broken mirror are unmistakable, and show Kassner to have understood his struggle with Nietzsche in terms of the central motifs of his short story. The implications of the mirror image, which recurs throughout Kassner's early work, are here — as elsewhere — dizzyingly complex. What is clear in the above passage is that Kassner's ambivalence towards Nietzsche applies equally to himself. Although he discovered in Nietzsche certain (probably negative) aspects of his own personality, rather than gaze passively into this metaphorical mirror Kassner preferred to destroy it, even if that entailed injuring himself. His occasionally scathing criticism of Nietzsche, then, contains a good deal of self-criticism.<sup>77</sup> However, this figurative mirror smashing is not merely wanton destruction; as in 'Sonnengnade' the destruction of a negative self-image, painful as it may be, represents an act of liberation, being the precondition for transcendence of that image. Far from reading his perceived affinities with Nietzsche as confirming or legitimizing his own views — a passive, self-regarding attitude likely to lead only to complacency and stagnation — Kassner chooses the course of action which will enable him to develop as an individual.

Closely related to the above considerations is the fact that Nietzsche's positive value for Kassner at this time resides less in the 'message' of his philosophy than in his distinctive style. The implications of notions such as 'Herren-' and 'Sklavenmoral', which appear to have outraged the moralistic Gottlieb Fritz, held little interest for Kassner, who repeatedly describes himself as an amoralist.<sup>78</sup> What engaged and excited him was the relationship of man and work summed up in the following exclamatory passage:

Ich kann mich einmal nicht für das erwärmen, was deutsche Professoren schreiben. [. . .] Es sind Menschen ohne Stil und schreiben daher auch keinen Stil. O Nietzsche ein bisschen nur von Dir! Ich werde überhaupt nichts mehr von Deutschen über andere lesen, wenn es nicht ganz große, ausgesprochen leidenschaftliche Menschen sind — Treitschke, etwas bedingt Scherer. (BaT, p. 22)

The conception of style implicit here is substantially that of 'Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung'. Style, for Kassner, is not the rhetorical or ornamental use of language, but the linguistic embodiment of an author's personality. Hence, moral questions aside, it is not the critic's method or even matter which Kassner regards as decisive, but rather the passion with which he (symbolically) incorporates himself in his work. The crucial point is the intimate relationship between personality and work which, as in the dissertation, all but dissolves the distinction between life and art — if an author has no style in life, he can have none in his writing. Thus, Kassner can see beyond his aversion to positivist method and give qualified praise to Scherer, its chief German exponent. The fascination of Nietzsche, then, is less the content of his philosophy than the embodiment of individual greatness and passion which it represents.

Not surprisingly, Nietzsche was not Kassner's only reading during his six months in Göggingen. During his stay in the clinic he prescribed himself a varied literary diet consisting of Baudelaire, Plato, Montaigne, Marcus Aurelius, Stendhal, Maurice Barrès, and Walter Pater. This list is noteworthy in two respects: first, it shows the direction that Kassner's engagement with literature was taking; and secondly, it reveals significant areas of contact with Hofmannsthal's alternative literary canon and that of *Jung-Wien* generally. Kassner explains his choice of reading in terms of a suitably clinical metaphor: 'Ich bin überhaupt augenblicklich in einer der reinen Kunst zu fremden Stimmung. Ich will mich seelisch auch etwas orthopädieren

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, his scathing criticisms of Nietzsche as 'Tänzer' (or rather 'Tanzmeister!'), BaT, p. 21.

<sup>78</sup> See BaT, p. 20 and p. 25.

lassen.' (BaT, p. 19) Indeed, the majority of Kassner's chosen authors are not poets or novelists in any straightforward sense, but essayists, critics, philosophers, and less easily categorized writers whose work was regarded as philosophical or psychological in character. Given the vast quantity of intellectually indigestible prescribed texts he had recently been forced to consume, it seems likely that Kassner intended this literary diet to rectify what he saw as the psychic deformities inflicted on him by the academy — hence his move from 'pure' art to texts concerned with criticism, philosophy, and psychology. As his knowledge of European literature was already extensive, Kassner's reading in Göggingen would appear to have been directed towards finding an alternative critical approach to art.

But why should Kassner have chosen these particular texts? It is tempting to say that the modern writers on his reading list were simply 'in the air' at the time. Certainly, anyone with Kassner's interest in the non-Naturalist currents of late nineteenth-century European literature could hardly have failed to be aware of Baudelaire. However, to gloss Kassner's reading of Barrès and Pater merely as symptoms of some vague 'Zeitgeist' would be obfuscatory; these names were not only in the air, they were in the considerably less rarefied medium of print. The influence of Hofmannsthal's essay on Pater needs no further comment here, as Kassner openly admitted that it first drew his attention to the English critic. However, it should be noted that Hermann Bahr had introduced Barrès's work to German-speaking readers with his essay 'Die neue Psychologie' (1890), and in October of the following year Hofmannsthal had published a long article under the title of 'Maurice Barrès' in the *Moderne Rundschau*.<sup>79</sup> As Jens Malte Fischer has pointed out the Viennese reception of Barrès was not entirely consistent.<sup>80</sup> For Bahr, as the title of his essay indicates, the French author's importance lay in the ultra-modern psychology embodied in his novels. Hofmannsthal, while not calling this interpretation into question, presents Barrès at considerably greater length as the systematic philosopher of a quintessentially modern 'culture du moi'. Whatever the differences of emphasis, for the writers of *Jung-Wien* Barrès's significance lay in the philosophical and psychological individualism of his early work. Stendhal, too, was accorded high rank in the loosely-defined canon of the Viennese avant-garde, being particularly prominent in Bahr's early critical essays.<sup>81</sup> Characteristically, Bahr presents Stendhal as the pioneer of that new psychology said to find its most modern literary expression in Barrès. Thus, despite Kassner's isolation and his disaffection towards the Viennese literary scene, his reading of modern literature in Göggingen was closely related to the interests of the *Jung-Wiener*. Given his admission of the importance that Hofmannsthal's early essays held for him, and the likelihood that he knew Bahr's work in his first years in Vienna, it is highly probable that he became aware of these foreign authors through the literary criticism of *Jung-Wien*. What is notable, however, is that the more modern texts he read at Göggingen in the early months of 1897 had been the focus of interest in Vienna some five to six years earlier, and Kassner's therapeutic reading was, therefore, remedial in character.

While it is not surprising that he should have read Stendhal, Baudelaire, Barrès and Pater, the juxtaposition of ancient and modern authors in Kassner's reading at Göggingen is less

<sup>79</sup> Bahr's essay was also published in *Die Überwindung des Naturalismus* (1891). See *Zur Überwindung*, pp. 53–64. Bahr's later essays 'Maurice Barrès' is reprinted (abridged) in Gotthart Wunberg's *Die Wiener Moderne*, pp. 326–28. Hofmannsthal's essay is in RA I, pp. 118–26.

<sup>80</sup> See *Fin de siècle. Kommentar zu einer Epoche* (Munich, 1978), pp. 31–32.

<sup>81</sup> See, for example, 'Die neue Psychologie', pp. 54–55 and p. 61. In his satire on *Jung-Wien*, 'Die demolirte Literatur' (1897/1899), Karl Kraus poured scorn on the trend-setting Stendhal enthusiasm of the 'Herrn aus Linz', Hermann Bahr. See Karl Kraus *Frühe Schriften 1892–1900*, edited by Johannes J. Braakenburg, 2 vols (Munich, 1979), II, pp. 277–97, especially p. 280 where Kraus parodies the notion of Stendhal's 'psychologie blasée'.

immediately comprehensible. At first sight, this might appear no more than typical *fin de siècle* eclecticism, or merely another example of the indiscipline lamented by his professors. Closer consideration reveals that this heterogeneous literary diet was not simply the product of personal whim. For one thing, Nietzsche's reinterpretation of classical antiquity in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, and his comparisons of ancient and modern culture in *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, cannot have failed to focus Kassner's attention on Socrates and Plato, who are repeatedly chastised in both works. Furthermore, as Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler has pointed out, at the turn of the century the figure of Socrates was a focal point of contemporary Austrian cultural thinking, being regarded by some as an embodiment and justification of the typically ironic and peripatetic lifestyle of Viennese youth.<sup>82</sup> Thus, Kassner's apparently idiosyncratic reading of the authors of classical antiquity in Göggingen can also be seen as belonging to his belated self-education in the concerns of *Jung-Wien*.

Kassner's engagement with Greek literature was initially somewhat hesitant, and he sought the advice of Fritz, whose knowledge of Greek was superior, concerning reading, editions, and commentaries.<sup>83</sup> However, the grounding in classics he had received in Nikolsburg stood him in good stead, and he had soon refreshed his school grammar to the extent that he could read Plato, Plotinus, Euripides, and Sophocles in the original — although he was doubtful if his shaky grammar would enable him to tackle Aeschylus.<sup>84</sup> He was particularly impressed by Plato's dialogues, marvelling at the bold transition from the treatment of love to that of philosophy in *Phaedrus*.<sup>85</sup> In this dialogue in particular he found a form of philosophy which he felt impossible in the modern age: 'Für diese Übergänge von Liebe zu Philosophie oder gar zu Rhetorik fehlen uns die Erziehung, die lachenden Lehrer.' (BaT, p. 24) The importance of the classical element of his reading is summed up in his final letter from the clinic:

Wenn meine Kurfortschritte doch nicht so [so] bedeutend sind, wie ich mir in der ersten Zeit einreden ließ, so kann ich schließlich ganz zufrieden sein.  
Dafür bedeutet Göggingen für mich Bekanntwerden mit der griechischen Philosophie und Poesie. (BaT, p. 23)

This assessment of the significance of his 'orthopaedic' reading turned out to be prescient. Not only would Plato's philosophy help form the basis for his notion of criticism in *Die Mystik*; in the early 1900s Kassner would translate six of the Platonic dialogues for his first publisher Eugen Diederichs.<sup>86</sup> As Klaus E. Bohnenkamp, himself a classicist, has recently pointed out, for many years these translations decisively shaped the understanding of Plato in German-speaking Europe:

Das Verständnis, welches unsere Väter und Großväter von der Philosophie Platons hatten, [war] ganz von jenem Geist geprägt [. . .], den die Übertragungen Kassners vermitteln; denn sie waren es, die zu Beginn des Jahrhunderts die Verdeutschung Schleiermachers und seiner Bearbeiter im Bildungsbürgertum fast völlig verdrängten. Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, Stefan George, Sigmund Freud — sie lasen und begriffen den griechischen Denker durch das Medium von Kassners Sprache.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>82</sup> See Schmidt-Dengler's discussion of the Viennese Neo-Socratic society. Op. cit, pp. 35–38.

<sup>83</sup> See, for example, BaT, p. 22, where Kassner asks for information on the neoplatonists.

<sup>84</sup> BaT, p. 22.

<sup>85</sup> BaT, p. 24.

<sup>86</sup> For details of Kassner's Plato translations see the Bibliography.

<sup>87</sup> Klaus E. Bohnenkamp, 'Das Werk Rudolf Kassners. Ein Editionsbericht zum Abschluß der zehnbändigen Gesamtausgabe', *JDSG*, 38 (1994), 465–78 (pp. 475–76). On the pervasive influence of Kassner's translations of the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* on Thomas Mann, see the editor's notes to *Der Tod in Venedig*, ed. by T. J. Reed (Oxford, 1971), p. 169.

The above consideration of Kassner's reading during his months in Göggingen goes some way towards demystifying his image as a unique writer, immune to the influences of his age. While his literary development during the 1890s was for the most part solitary and individualistic, his wide-ranging literary studies at the clinic not only consolidated an established interest in philosophy, psychology, and criticism, they also drew on — and in later years feed would back into — the aesthetic and cultural concerns of his more famous contemporaries, the writers of *Jung-Wien*.

So far I have concentrated on Kassner's extensive and varied reading during the mid- to late-1890s, indicating the convergence of his literary interests with those of Hofmannsthal and the *Jung-Wiener*. There is one factor, however, which radically differentiates Kassner's approach to English literature and culture from that of his more famous contemporary: namely, the fifteen months he spent in England before writing *Die Mystik*. It is worth pausing here to consider the significance of this visit and the important differences it reveals between Kassner's and Hofmannsthal's views of the country. As mentioned previously, there is no shortage of information regarding the importance of English life and literature for Hofmannsthal. However, critics have tended to ignore the fact that, despite his anglophile enthusiasms, for the young Hofmannsthal England was essentially a country of the mind. This, of course, is understandable in so far as his initial engagement with the country was unavoidably mediated. In Austria, Hofmannsthal's earliest sources of information on England and its people were books, magazines, the English Embassy in Vienna — and, somewhat bizarrely, a chance meeting with an elderly English lady in Bad Fusch.<sup>88</sup> It is hardly surprising, then, that even after he had met George, Hofmannsthal's view of England was based entirely on his reading, the image of the country propagated by the Embassy, and chance anecdotes.

In fairness, it must be said that as early as 1891 Hofmannsthal had considered travelling to London with Hermann Bahr. However, this journey never materialized — perhaps partly because Bahr's knowledge of English was still limited.<sup>89</sup> Hofmannsthal finally travelled to England in 1900, but, surprisingly for so copious a writer, documented the journey neither in letters nor in his notebooks. This silence is all the more puzzling, as only a year earlier, in a letter to Felix Baron Oppenheimer, Hofmannsthal had unambiguously declared his estimation of the enormous importance of England:

London nimmt in meinem *Vorstellungsleben* einen ungeheuren Raum ein: mehr Fäden, als mir aufzuzählen möglich wäre, laufen von dort aus, und die wichtigsten Einflüsse für mein *inneres* Leben lassen sich mehr oder weniger auf englische Kunst, englische Weltanschauung und das intensive und weltumspannende Gegenwartsleben, das sich dort konzentriert, zurückführen. (*Briefe I*, p. 285: my emphasis)

Significantly, the influence exerted by England is on Hofmannsthal's inner life, and London, a city he had not yet visited, is situated in his imagination. In the light of this passage Hofmannsthal's initially puzzling silence regarding his first stay in England suggests that reality

<sup>88</sup> On this meeting see Hofmannsthal's letter to Arthur Schnitzler of 13 July 1891, in *Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Arthur Schnitzler. Briefwechsel* (Frankfurt a.M., 1964), pp. 7–8 (p. 8).

<sup>89</sup> Hofmannsthal's earliest reference to his planned visit to London suggests that Bahr's knowledge of English was then scant: 'Lernen Sie also schnell Englisch, nämlich in Wien geht das sehr gut, ich bringe Sie dann viel in englische Gesellschaft, und wir bereiten uns beide auf unsere Londoner Reise vor.' (*Briefe I*, p. 32)



paled beside his high imaginative expectations.<sup>90</sup> This again poses the question of how far Hofmannsthal can be said to have overcome the aestheticism of his early years. The absence of information concerning Hofmannsthal's visits to England would suggest that the imaginary, mediated image of the country he had cultivated during the 1890s eclipsed his first-hand experiences; and this, in turn, casts doubt on the contention that by the turn of the century Hofmannsthal had renounced the mediated sensibility of aestheticism in favour of 'life'.

These considerations are neither minor details nor mere biographical aperçus. They point to a fundamental difference between Hofmannsthal's and Kassner's perspectives on England and the experiential bases of their criticism of English life and art. As I have shown, for all their talk of 'Leben', Hofmannsthal's early essays on English topics are based on images drawn from (intensely imagined) second-hand sources. Kassner, by contrast, considered it necessary to experience English life at first-hand before writing *Die Mystik*. What this shows is that for Kassner experience was a matter neither of erudition and intellectual empathy, nor of empirical perception alone. As his combination of voracious reading and extensive travel in the early years of this century attests, Kassner's understanding of 'Erlebnis' as the source of art included both intellectual and empirical components. His first visit to England, then, demonstrates a characteristic desire for first-hand experience of countries and cultures, and it is, therefore, not surprising that his letters to Fritz reveal him as an acute observer of everyday English life.

The first indication of Kassner's plans to travel to England comes in his letter of 18 November 1896 where he tells Fritz, Schering and Stockhausen: 'Nach England gehe ich Anfang Februar [1897].' (BaT, p. 14) There is no mention of any plan to use the journey to gather material for publication, but the brevity of Kassner's remark suggests his friends already knew of his intended trip. As it transpired, the unexpectedly protracted stay in Göggingen delayed Kassner's intended departure by five months. Although at this stage there is no indication of a literary interest in England, Kassner's plan to write some form of critical study of English poetry was already taking shape before he left for London in July 1897. This must be stressed, as in later years Kassner seems to imply that *Die Mystik* arose almost fortuitously out of his visit to England. In his 'Erinnerungen an England. 1897–1912' he states that before travelling to the country he had had no definite plans to write a book:

Zu Anfang war es bloß Ahnung, Vorstellung, kaum Vorsatz gewesen. Erst als ich London im Herbst 1898 verließ, stand der Plan in mir fest und war ich bereit, jenes Buch zu schreiben, das heute, sehr gekürzt, entfettet mit dem Titel Englische Dichter versehen, nachdem es einmal den hochtrabenden *Die Mystik, die Künstler und das Leben* getragen hat, das heute, sage ich, nach der Ausbombung des Inselverlages nur noch mehr in Antiquariaten zu finden wäre. (KSW IX, p. 353)

Whether one sees this passage as representing a lapse of memory or an attempt to create an aura of spontaneity, it has led one of Kassner's critics seriously astray. Bong-Hi Cha, writing some years before the publication of *Briefe an Tetzl*, claims that the inspiration for *Die Mystik* was provided by Kassner's visit to England. More specifically:

<sup>90</sup> Michael Hamburger's 'Hofmannsthal and England', in F. Norman (ed.), *Hofmannsthal: Studies in Commemoration* (London, 1963), pp. 11–28, quotes from the letter to Oppenheimer (p. 12) and indicates the absence of information on Hofmannsthal's visit to England: 'Little has become known as yet about Hofmannsthal's visits to England [Hamburger notes that Hofmannsthal visited Brighton and London in 1900, and London again in 1925. Both visits were brief.] or his relations with British friends and acquaintances [. . .] Scattered references in his works and published letters suggest that personal contacts with English men and women were as important to him as his wide acquaintance with English literature and English institutions.' (p. 17) Here, as in his comments on Hofmannsthal's knowledge of English culture and life (cited p. 29, footnote 78 above), Hamburger emphasizes the writer's supposedly extensive knowledge of England, ignoring the fact that secondary sources were more important to him than first-hand experience of the country.

Der direkte Anlaß für seine Auseinandersetzung mit den englischen Künstlern liegt ohne Zweifel in der unmittelbaren Begegnung mit den Bildern der Präraffaeliten, während seines England-Aufenthaltes.<sup>91</sup>

Given that Bong-Hi Cha had no access to Kassner's letters, this conclusion may seem excusable. However, the confident assertion that *Die Mystik* was directly inspired by his first-hand experience of Pre-Raphaelite painting is pure speculation. If the 'Erinnerungen an England' create the impression that *Die Mystik* was conceived only after Kassner's visit to England, there is nothing in his later work to suggest that he had discovered the Pre-Raphaelites there, or that such a discovery provided the direct impetus for the book. In view of this lack of documentary evidence, it is difficult to see Bong-Hi Cha's claims as anything but a contribution to the myth of Kassner as a thoroughly spontaneous writer. However, his early correspondence again casts doubt on this myth. For example, in the first of his letters, 15 August 1896, he thanks 'Tetzel' for his present of a portrait photograph, adding waspishly: 'Man sieht, daß sie nicht von vergangenem Jahr ist. Es fehlen die praeraphaeliten Lippen.' (BaT, p. 10) This joke at his correspondent's expense, which relies on their shared knowledge of modern art, reveals that Kassner must have seen Pre-Raphaelite paintings some time before setting out for England. Just how he had become acquainted with Pre-Raphaelitism is not entirely clear. He could, of course, have read Hofmannsthal's retrospective on the International Art Exhibition of 1894, and might even have visited the Viennese exhibition himself. The only reliable indication of the source of his earliest knowledge of modern English painting is a passing remark in *Die Mystik* which shows Kassner to have read Richard Muther's illustrated *Geschichte der Malerei im 19. Jahrhundert* (1893–94) while still in mainland Europe.<sup>92</sup>

But what of Kassner's literary plans or lack thereof? Again, the early letters reveal that before travelling to England he had planned, albeit vaguely, to use his stay in the country to gather material for a critical study of English literature. The first indication that his journey was connected with such a project comes in the letter of 15 May 1897, written towards the end of his time in Göggingen:

Ich möchte mich<, > sowie ich nach England komme<, > an die moderne englische Lyrik von Shelley bis Swinburne <machen>, alle Firesidepoeten auch den großen Wordsworth ausgenommen. Eine Psychologie und Aesthetik des Bildes! Vorher will ich noch Shakespeare und Spenser ev<entuell> Chaucer studieren. (BaT, p. 25)

Here three key features of Kassner's provisional plan are already evident. First, there is the historical scope of the project, extending from Shelley to Swinburne. The fact that the period with which Kassner was concerned begins with Shelley may reflect his relatively limited acquaintance with modern English letters. As the bibliography of 'Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung' shows, Shelley was one of the few English writers discussed in Kassner's review of the Ahasver motif.<sup>93</sup> That Swinburne, whose best work dates from the late 1860s, should have the

<sup>91</sup> Bong-Hi Cha, p. 75.

<sup>92</sup> See KSW I, pp. 157–58. Referring to Muther's depiction of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his wife Elizabeth Siddal Kassner writes: 'Auch ich hatte mythische Vorstellungen von ihr und Rossetti's Leben bevor ich nach England ging. Ich hatte wohl die Sonette gelesen, Reproduktionen seiner Frauenköpfe gesehen und kannte Muther's Geschichte der Malerei.' The passage to which Kassner refers is in volume three of Muther's art history (1894). See the relevant editorial annotation in KSW II, p. 465.

<sup>93</sup> See p. 78 above.

last word in the proposed survey of modern English poetry may also indicate Kassner's unfamiliarity with the latest in English literature, while suggesting the influence of Hofmannsthal's laudatory essay on the poet.

The second aspect of Kassner's proposed study which emerges from the above passage is the specific current in nineteenth-century English poetry in which he was interested. Bong-Hi Cha classifies the English poets presented in *Die Mystik* under the general heading of Romantics; but it is evident that from the outset Kassner excluded Wordsworth, a canonical Romantic, from his plans. Given her terms of reference, it is not surprising that Bong-Hi Cha is unable convincingly to account for such an omission.<sup>94</sup> The above description of Wordsworth as a 'Firesidepoet' shows Kassner to have felt the poet's work too cosy and domestic to fall within the scope of his critical attention. Even at this early stage, then, Kassner's interests were focused on what he considered the more radical tendencies in nineteenth-century English poetry. The third feature of the project already discernible is its method. Kassner's critical interest in modern English poetry has a dual focus, being directed towards the sensuous (aesthetic) and psychological aspects of the poetic image ('Bild'). This dual perspective is substantially that of 'Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung' where Kassner's interpretations of the Ahasver theme were seen to be framed in terms of the stylistic (aesthetic) features of particular works and their consonance with the individual psychology of the author. At this stage Kassner's provisional plan implies an engagement not only with the poetry of a specific current in nineteenth-century English literature but also with the lives of his chosen poets. Even before leaving for England, then, Kassner had a fairly differentiated, if provisional, conception of the nature and scope of the study which would become *Die Mystik*.

On his arrival in London in July 1897 Kassner lodged for almost a year with a family in the lower-middle-class district of Dalston.<sup>95</sup> In the early months of his stay Kassner discovered that his inability to speak conversational English presented a considerable obstacle to his attempts to assimilate British life and culture. This is alluded to in his first letter from London ('ich muß erst das Englisch fließender sprechen', BaT, p. 28), and is presented with characteristic humour in his late memoirs where he confesses that his knowledge of English, derived mainly from Shakespeare, proved less than useful in late nineteenth-century England.<sup>96</sup> These linguistic problems notwithstanding, in his first letters from London, Kassner relates his impressions of the metropolis in considerable detail. Whatever its status as an imperial capital, in the 1890s London was not the most aesthetically appealing metropolis. Yet Kassner, while noting the ugliness of the city, did not regard this as an obstacle to his literary plans, remarking philosophically in his first letter from England: 'Ich kann nicht von einer Stadt mehr Schönheit verlangen als die Bürger das Bedürfnis empfinden sich mit welcher zu umgeben.' (BaT, p. 26) The ceaseless activity of the city, its crowds and bustle also prevented the young man from taking in what sights there were. More disappointing for an avid theatre-goer, however, was the English stage which he considered thoroughly miserable. His letters reveal an abhorrence of the frivolous and openly mercantile English theatre. Even Henry Irving, the country's leading

<sup>94</sup> Bong-Hi Cha, p. 68.

<sup>95</sup> For details of Kassner's time in Dalston see BaT, pp. 174-75, note to p. 26, line 7; and KSW IX, pp. 286-87. Kassner lodged in London from early July 1897 until late May 1898. He then spent June to mid-July 1898 in Oxford, from whence he travelled on to Brighton, staying there for several weeks. He returned to the capital in August 1898 where he remained until his departure for Vienna in October of that year (KSW IX, pp. 875-77).

<sup>96</sup> See KSW IX, p. 285, and BaT, pp. 174-75, note to p. 26, line 7.

tragedian, failed to impress a devotee of the 'Burgtheater' — after seeing Irving play Shylock, Kassner dismissed the actor as 'nur Komödiant' (BaT, p. 28).

What Kassner regarded as his real discoveries were derived less from the high culture of England than from the everyday scenes encountered on his walks through the back streets and alleyways of London. His first letters from England show that Kassner was fascinated by the common people of the country ('das Volk'), a social class which, as he points out to Fritz, in Victorian England is synonymous with poverty.<sup>97</sup> Unimpressed by Irving's Lyceum, Kassner visited the workers' theatres, and observed with interest the spectacle of popular political gatherings in the parks of the capital, contrasting staid, joyless German socialism with the more ludic working class politics of London. This playfulness, he thought, indicated a political freedom quite lacking in Germany.<sup>98</sup> Kassner's tendency to compare and contrast England with mainland Europe is further evident in his depictions of the religion and middle class of the country. While granting the restrictiveness of English religion, he adds that it is not nearly as puritanical as commonly imagined in Europe. The middle class ('das Bürgerthum', BaT, p. 30), he explains to Fritz, is the one stratum of English society most similar to its European equivalent. However, lacking the learning of their continental counterparts, the English middle classes display none of that superficial and self-satisfied 'Bildungsphilistertum' which had been the target of Nietzsche's 'untimely' jeremiads on Imperial German pseudo-culture.

Kassner's interest in what would have been regarded as the 'low life' of the English capital — its back streets, workers' theatres, and popular assemblies — was neither unique, nor extraordinary. Many guide books of the time encouraged 'slumming', directing the curious traveller to less salubrious districts of big cities.<sup>99</sup> There is, however, no hint of prurience in Kassner's reports of lower class London. His unprejudiced openness to all levels of English society, and his first-hand experience of the diversity of life and institutions in the country gave him a more differentiated understanding of English culture than most of his literary contemporaries. It is notable that his familiarity with the realities of English society on a variety of levels made it impossible for Kassner to accept the kind of simplistic European stereotypes of the country which Hofmannsthal had employed in 'Algernon Charles Swinburne'. A particularly striking example of the difference between the two writers is Kassner's hatred of the notion of 'gentleman'. While Hofmannsthal and his Viennese friends blithely affected a mannered and ill-understood ideal of English gentlemanliness, Kassner's experiences in Oxford convinced him that the word 'gentleman' was often no more than a veil for cant, hypocrisy, and common pushiness.<sup>100</sup>

How, then, did Kassner's plans for *Die Mystik* develop during his fourteen months in England, and what light does the correspondence from his time in the country shed on his conception of criticism? For the sake of clarity I will depart here from strict chronology and present these two points separately. Kassner's second statement of his intentions appears in a letter written some three months into his stay in London:<sup>101</sup>

Meinen Plan kennst Du ja! Ich möchte bis nächste Weihnachten 1898 (längstens!)  
hierbleiben und die Frucht sollen Studien über ein paar Lyriker im weiteren Wortsinn

<sup>97</sup> BaT, p. 29.

<sup>98</sup> BaT, p. 30.

<sup>99</sup> See, for example, the extract from the anonymous tourist guide 'Berlin für Kenner' in Jürgen Schütte and Peter Sprengel (eds), *Die Berliner Moderne: 1885–1914* (Stuttgart, 1987), pp. 95–99; also the section of the editors' introduction headed 'Auch das ist Berlin', pp. 31–35.

<sup>100</sup> See BaT, p. 43.

<sup>101</sup> 13 September 1897.

Englands sein: Shelley, Keats, Rossetti (diesen gewaltigen Maler)<,> Tennyson, Praeraphaeliten im Allgeme<inen,> (vielleicht Browning) und Swinburne. Es sind das alles Artistenseelen und gerade das reizt mich. (BaT, p. 31)

The first sentence may refer to Kassner's earlier account of his intention to write 'eine Psychologie und Ästhetik des Bildes'. It is also possible that before his departure he had discussed his intentions with Fritz, either in person or in a letter which has been lost. As the two had not met since Kassner left Berlin over a year earlier, and as their correspondence appears complete, this plan may even have been formed during his time in the German capital. The above outline of his proposed studies is essentially a more detailed version of that cited earlier. The limits of the project remain Shelley and Swinburne, but the addition of other poets and painters reflects the increase in Kassner's knowledge of English art during his first months in the country. In the same letter Kassner provides Fritz with a comprehensive overview of nineteenth-century English poetry and prose which includes references to Carlyle, Coleridge, Macaulay, Ruskin, Pater, and Dowden.<sup>102</sup>

In his penultimate letter from England Kassner gives a still fuller account of the scope of his critical project:<sup>103</sup>

Ich weiß nicht ob du einen von den Dichtern außer Shelley kennst. Blake, Mystiker, Maler und Dichter, einer der eigenartigsten Geister der Menschheit. Browning, den solltest Du lesen, die wichtigste Entdeckung für mich seit Jahren, vielleicht der mächtigste Geist Englands nach Shakespeare, in Deutschland wenig gekannt, weil sein Englisch oft fürchterlich ist; Keats; Rossetti, den berühmtesten Praeraphaeliten, der schrieb und malte wenig, aber jedes Gedicht ist ein Kunstwerk, er schrieb vielleicht die schönsten Sonette in diesem Jahrhundert, Swinburne, der sinnlichste und zugleich verwöhnteste Geist Englands, sein 'english' ist die farbenvollste Sprache, die man sich einbilden kann, William Morris, Tennyson, den Nationaldichter des goody-goody Engländer, von zwei Frauen dann über Eliz<abeth> Barret<t>-Browning und Christina Rossetti. (BaT, pp. 45–46)

With the exception of Tennyson, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti, all these writers would be treated at length in *Die Mystik*. Kassner's initial plan may have been rather vague, but his extensive reading in England effectively fleshed out the original, skeletal outline of his studies, filling in the detail of nineteenth-century English literature from Shelley to Swinburne, and adding Rossetti's Pre-Raphaelite painting to the subjects for critical scrutiny.

If the content of Kassner's planned studies was more or less clear from the outset, the same cannot be said of his critical method. Although he had characterized his proposed engagement with English literature as 'eine Psychologie und Ästhetik des Bildes', thereby allying it to the concerns of his doctoral dissertation, there is no indication of a systematic theory of criticism in his letters. Kassner's reflections on his engagement with art are expressed in terms of his personality rather than a consistent methodology, and the problem of criticism is embodied in a number of striking figurative self-characterizations. While still in Göggingen, Kassner had remarked on the aimlessness of his jottings on art and philosophy, and on the importance of this aimlessness for his active engagement with literature: 'Der Zweck verdirbt mir immer die Hälfte.' (BaT, p. 25) If lacking a final goal, however, Kassner's literary production was not unmotivated. In a letter from London he explains the nature of his need to write:<sup>104</sup>

Ich glaube nicht, daß Du das Schaffen so als Entledigung, wohl [*sic*] bischen Erledigung brauchst als z. B. ich, den das ewige Kosten oft schon nervös z<um> mindesten höchst

<sup>102</sup> BaT, pp. 30–31.

<sup>103</sup> Oxford, 12 July 1898.

<sup>104</sup> 13 October 1897.

ungeduldig macht. Ich stapple zu viel in mir auf und das gibt mir oft das Gefühl einer gewissen Unreinlichkeit. Ich glaube, das ist der Grund, warum ich schreiben will. Mich waschen! Andererseits treibt mich eine fürchterliche Neugier von Buch zu Buch und ich ersehne den Augenblick, wo ich sagen werde <:> Halt, nicht weiter! Hast Du was, so gib es her, hast Du nichts, so hang thee! (BaT, p. 32–33: the English is in the original)

Here Kassner presents writing as a necessity, born of his temperament and voracious appetite for literature. However, if he regarded creativity as an necessary act of intellectual hygiene, Kassner's insatiable curiosity made it nigh impossible to curb his excessive reading. In a letter of the following month he returns to this complex of problems, expressing his desire for a book which could bring his perpetual browsing to an end. Here his restless flitting from text to text is initially compared with that of a butterfly from flower to flower, a comparison immediately rejected in favour of the image of a courtesan flitting from love affair to love affair:

Wenn ich nur ein Buch hätte, in dem ich alle Tage lesen könnte? Es ist das ein kindischer Wunsch, aber furchtbar wahr. Ich brauche leider ein Buch, in das ich hineinwachsen kann oder umgekehrt. Oder ein Weib . . . aber Menschen meines Zustandes sind meistens feige oder vornehm, wie man's nimmt. So fliege ich wie ein Schmetterling von Blume zu Blume oder besser gesagt wie eine Curtisane von Liebchen zu Liebchen. 'Memoiren einer geistigen Curtisane' können nur meine Schriften werden. So eine Art Fried<rich> Schlegel, dem ich mich <in> vielen Dingen sehr verwandt fühle. (BaT, pp. 34–35)

This remarkable passage is significant in two respects: first, it contains the earliest indications of an erotic paradigm of reading, both in the interchangeability of books and women, and in Kassner's self-characterization as intellectual courtesan. Secondly, his feeling of kinship with the Romantic philosopher and critic Friedrich Schlegel serves to illuminate the comment that Kassner's writing can only be the memoirs of intellectual inconstancy. This is not to be understood solely in terms of Kassner's curiosity. The implication is that his childish desire for the book with which he can identify completely is, like the Romantic yearning for the unattainable and ineffable absolute, by its very nature insatiable. As I will show in the following chapter, the notions of eroticism and Romanticism here used to characterize Kassner's reading both play key roles in the conception and practice of criticism as art developed in *Die Mystik*.

If these metaphors of Kassner's flighty critical intellect are relatively light-hearted, his next self-characterization is decidedly less so. In the course of the melancholy confession of his hopeless love for his cousin Marie, Kassner reflects on the resultant collapse of his carefully nurtured (and decidedly Barrès-esque) "Ich"-thum'. In his humiliation he turns to his writing, which offers little solace for his unhappiness:<sup>105</sup>

Ich schreibe jetzt ziemlich viel, jedes Wort das nicht im Momente wie inspiriert mir zukommt, ekelt mich an wenn ich es überhaupt niederschreibe. Vielleicht nur deshalb, weil ich noch keinen Stil habe! Stil im höchsten Sinne ist für mich Barbaren Nothwendigkeit und Sehnsucht. Gedichten gegenüber fühle ich mich manchmal wie ein Weib das mit nervöser weißer Hand in Edelsteinen und Perlen wühlt — sie glaubt durch sie schöner zu werden und ist es auch. Und wer fragt bei ihr, woher sie es hat, wenn sie den Schmuck zu tragen weiß. Ja er gehört ihr, wenn sie schön ist. Sie wird sie nie als etwas betrachten, das zu ihr gehört wie ihre Brüste wenn wie sich ins Bett legt. Ich beziehe den Vergleich mit allen Konsequenzen auf mich. Ich fühle mich gar nicht beraubt, wenn ich etwas weglege, ich vergesse übrigens sehr schnell. Ich fühle mich von dem meisten ganz unabhängig, vieles scheint mir nur ein<e> Bestätigung meiner selbst. Aber hast Du schon einmal gehört, daß Weiber Goldschmiede waren? (BaT, pp. 41–42)

<sup>105</sup> 6 February 1898. See also p. 74 above.

The awkwardness of this comparison, with its stock-in-trade images of 'decadence', reflects the depth of Kassner's despair. Its point, however, is serious enough and related to an earlier attack of self-doubt. This stereotypically passive neurotic woman is a close relative of the professor in 'Sonnengnade', surrounded by objects of beauty yet incapable of creating them. As critic, Kassner may be able to preserve a measure of independence while figuratively beautifying himself with works of art. However, this is little compensation for the inability to create such works or incorporate them into his life in any meaningful way.

The general problem of the relationship between critic and artist, and the particular problem of his own approach to works of art, continued to trouble Kassner throughout the remainder of his time in England. Towards the end of his stay in the country, he wrote from Oxford in response to Fritz's enquiries regarding his work in progress:<sup>106</sup>

Mein Buch? Nächsten Herbst soll es erscheinen, ich habe weniger äußerlich als innerlich daran gearbeitet. Was ist mir ein fremder Dichter, was ist mir ein 'Anderer' überhaupt? Er kann mir doch keine Gedanken geben, die finde ich viel besser beim Spaziergehen, keine Gefühle, die sind gefährlich — aber ich suche in anderen ihre Erlösungen, wie der wechselnde, schillernde, trügende Gedanke sein Glück in dieser oder jener Form fand. Ich suche nach den tausend Formen des Glücks. (BaT, p. 45)

This is noticeably more confident than Kassner's earlier interpretations of himself as critic. Here his critical engagement with art is no longer characterized by inability and inconstancy, and the critic's independence from the artist, which had negative overtones in his self-characterization as intellectual courtesan, now provides the foundation of a positive conception of criticism. As critic, Kassner is quite independent of others, receiving neither thoughts nor emotions from the artist; that is to say, he has no critical interest in the content of art. Rather, he must bring his own thoughts to the work of art in order to detect the artist's 'Erlösungen'. This quasi-religious notion of redemption through art, central both to 'Sonnengnade' and the concluding section of 'Der ewige Jude', here acquires a new dimension in its association with 'Form' and 'Glück'. The closing sentences of the above quotation imply a contrast between unstable thought and stable form, suggesting redemption to consist in the embodiment of thought (psychology) in (aesthetic) form. In *Die Mystik* Kassner would offer a sustained apology for and demonstration of this understanding of criticism as an essentially form-oriented activity, distinct from positivist scholarship and textual exegesis.

It should be noted that, while the scope of his still unwritten book remained rather vague, in the same letter Kassner felt confident that it would appeal to certain readers: 'Wenn das Buch so ausfällt, wie ich mir's heute denke, wird es manchem gefallen.' (BaT, p. 46) Just whom he may have had in mind is unclear, but it is possible he was thinking of the *Jung-Wiener* whose literary tastes he had belatedly assimilated in the months preceding his departure for England. What this remark shows is that Kassner was not writing purely for himself; he had a readership in mind, and, in view of his reading during the mid-1890s, one can speculate that this would have included Hofmannsthal and the other writers of *Jung-Wien*.

Kassner's time in England, though invaluable for his intellectual development, had been largely solitary, and his return to Vienna in October 1898 did nothing to alleviate his intense feeling of loneliness. In the Austrian capital he again felt alienated and alone, but whereas he had earlier escaped isolation by immersing himself in reading and the theatre, Kassner now devoted most of his energy to writing his book. Apart from one page of the essay on Shelley, no

<sup>106</sup> 12 July 1898.

manuscript of *Die Mystik* has survived, and the letters from October 1898 to December 1899 provide little more than tantalizing glimpses into the work in progress.<sup>107</sup> One such passage which deserves mention concerns an unrealized plan for the conclusion of the volume:<sup>108</sup> 'Als Schluß schwebt mir jetzt ein<e> Paraphrase auf die Rede des Socrates im Symposion vor, auf den Künstler gedeutet und seine Liebe zum Leben quand même.' (BaT, p. 51) Again, one can only speculate what Kassner may have had in mind, but this brief comment indicates an understanding of the artist's relationship to life framed in terms of the paradigm of platonic love. This has affinities not only with his earlier self-characterization as intellectual courtesan, but also with Hofmannsthal's recurrent notion of the artist's love for life, variously expressed in both 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' and 'Walter Pater'. As I shall show in the following chapter, Kassner's reinterpretations of Platonism and platonic love are fundamental to his notion of criticism in *Die Mystik*.

As the months passed, Kassner began to anticipate the completion of his book with growing impatience. Although hampered by attacks of illness and writer's block, he had no doubts concerning the significance of his work. In a letter of March 1899, after relating the difficulties of writing his essay on Swinburne, he tells Fritz: 'Ich werde eigentlich recht froh sein, wenn ich mit meiner Arbeit werde fertig sein. Obwohl ich durch sie alles sagen kann, wozu ich mich eben emporgelebt habe.' (BaT, p. 58) The expressive neologism 'emporgelebt' underlines the indissoluble relationship between experience and literature which is central to Kassner's thought in the 1890s. This shows him to have understood *Die Mystik* not as a dispassionate scholarly survey of English art, but rather as the expression of all his recent formative experiences, and as much a product of its author's life as of his extensive studies; that is to say, Kassner regarded his book, ostensibly a work of criticism, as adhering to the same principles he considered to govern works of imaginative literature.

His heavy workload notwithstanding, during the summer of 1899 Kassner found time to travel. In mid-May he went to Berlin where he worked alone till the beginning of June. From here he travelled on to Hamburg to visit Gottlieb Fritz and continue writing his essay on Blake. Towards the end of that month Kassner travelled with Fritz to the latter's family home in Westerlinde where they spent a week. This visit is noteworthy as it was here that Kassner was introduced to the work of Kierkegaard which, if of marginal importance to *Die Mystik*, would play a decisive role in his later thought.<sup>109</sup> At the suggestion of Fritz's mother, Kassner then spent the month from mid-August to 15 September 1899 in the seclusion of Bockswiese, a small village in the Harz mountains. By then his work was well advanced, and he could write from his retreat: 'Blake und Einleitung sind schon beim Drucken, augenblicklich schreibe ich einen kleinen Essay "ästhetische Cultur"' (BaT, p. 63). The title of this essay reflects Kassner's intensive engagement with the omnipresent question of culture. It has not survived as an independent section of *Die Mystik*, but was most likely incorporated in the chapter on Robert Browning where the notion of culture is extensively discussed.<sup>110</sup> The final reference to the work in progress comes in the letter of 11 September 1899:

<sup>107</sup> The handwritten page from the Shelley essay is reproduced in *Gedenkbuch*, facing p. 32.

<sup>108</sup> 9 December 1898.

<sup>109</sup> Kassner acknowledged Kierkegaard as one of his three 'hohen Ahnen', the others being Pascal and Laurence Sterne, whose *Tristram Shandy* he translated into German. See letter to Princess Herbert Bismarck, 6 December 1926, quoted in KSW VI, p. 651. On the visit to Westerlinde see the extract from 'Der Goldene Drachen', cited in BaT, pp. 268-71; now in KSW X pp. 187-91.

<sup>110</sup> See editors' comments, BaT, p. 197, note to p. 63 lines 26f.



Ich bin in voller Arbeit. Habe sehr vieles umgearbeitet, Schluß Dialog muß ich mir für Wien aufheben. Drucken geht langsam, habe daher Zeit genug. Kopfleisten werden auch gezeichnet — von Müller-Schoenefeld Berlin. (BaT, p. 65)

The intensity of the final stage of work on *Die Mystik* is reflected by Kassner's uncharacteristic telegram style and the ensuing three-month hiatus in the correspondence.

By 14 December, when the correspondence resumes, the book which two years later would form the bridge between Kassner and Hofmannsthal was complete, and its author's attention had turned to other matters.<sup>111</sup> He now found himself waiting, 'Nicht auf mein Buch, es ist mir niemals entfernter als jetzt, da es in einem Monat erscheinen soll, gewesen' (BaT, p. 66), but on his departure for Paris, the second in what would become an extended series of increasingly exotic foreign journeys. Kassner's indifference to the fate of *Die Mystik* is evident in his last reference to the book before its publication, the laconic remark: 'Mein Buch erscheint also erst im Januar so in der 2ten Hälfte.' (BaT, p. 67) He may have conceived of the book as a reflection of his experiences, but characteristically Kassner was not going to hinder his development by contentedly gazing into this mirror.

## VI CONCLUSION

This chapter will have provided the reader with an insight into Rudolf Kassner's early life and thought, indicating the formation of his distinctive critical approach. Kassner's rejection of positivist method is not in itself remarkable, being a reflection of a more widespread disenchantment with the scientific orthodoxy of late nineteenth-century scholarship. What is significant for the present study is the particular form taken by his alternative critical approach. While Kassner had no coherently formulated aesthetic theory, 'Sonnengnade', 'Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung', and his correspondence from the late 1890s all reflect his early concern with the relationship between individual experience and art. As my textual analysis of 'Sonnengnade' and consideration of its less obvious autobiographical dimensions show, although he considered himself primarily a critic, Kassner's literary debut represents a self-portrait as both critic and artist. The notion of art as a form of self-portraiture, autobiography, or confession, latent in the short story, is made explicit in Kassner's unsystematic doctoral dissertation, which is centrally concerned with divining the authorial experiences from which his chosen texts arose. The letters from the period 1896–99 show that his notion of the symbolic relationship between art and life is not merely a critical tenet, but applies equally to Kassner's understanding of himself as both scholar and critic. For Kassner, an individual's life and work should ideally form an integrated whole, hence his rejection of the academic orthodoxy which required him to learn so much which was alien to him ('all das fremde Zeug'). It is against this background that *Die Mystik* must be understood. For, although in part the product of extensive textual study, Kassner's first book was not conceived as a dispassionate, scholarly survey of nineteenth-century English art. Rather, it was, as he put it, a product of his life, something to which he had metaphorically lived up ('emporgelebt') through a combination of study and first-hand experience.

In view of Kassner's rejection of positivist method and his enthusiastic engagement with literature, it is hardly surprising that Hofmannsthal's early essays should have appealed to him, as they represented an alternative, intuitive approach to art criticism. Despite radical differences

<sup>111</sup> For Kassner's characterization of *Die Mystik* as bridge, see KSW IX, p. 307, cited on p. 7 above.

in their upbringing, Kassner's intellectual development during the 1890s displays significant parallels with that of Hofmannsthal. Although, by his own admission, initially uncultured and lacking erudition, Kassner shared with Hofmannsthal the standard classically-oriented Austrian education of the period, an education which was the prerequisite for his later pursuit of some of his more precocious contemporary's central interests, most notably Platonism. Kassner's solitary and initially unprogrammatically self-education, which started soon after his arrival in Vienna, continued undiminished to the end of the decade. Although he had almost certainly become acquainted with the work of both Hofmannsthal and Hermann Bahr before his visit to Berlin, Kassner's documented reading from 1896 to 1899 represents an intensive and belated assimilation of the loosely-defined alternative literary canon of *Jung-Wien*. As seen in the previous chapter, Hofmannsthal's essays played a part in directing Kassner to the foreign artists who preoccupied the *Jung-Wiener* in the early to mid-1890s, but did they provide a critical model for imitation?

Their parallel interests notwithstanding, there are a number of important differences between Kassner's and Hofmannsthal's respective approaches to criticism, art, and life. First, unlike Hofmannsthal's early essays on English art, Kassner's work and thought during the 1890s is characterized by an intense concern with biography. Secondly, Kassner's doctoral thesis and correspondence show that, if averse to positivism, he was a voracious and diligent reader who thought of his engagement with literature as study. Thirdly, and most strikingly, Kassner, unlike Hofmannsthal, felt it necessary to visit England and experience the country at first-hand before writing on English art. These three points underline the most significant differences between Kassner's and Hofmannsthal's critical engagement with art and life. As shown in the previous chapter, Hofmannsthal's essays on English art frequently resort to ingenious and compelling fabulation, both to compensate for deficits in factual knowledge and to illuminate the author's aesthetic preoccupations. While centrally concerned with the relationship between art and life, Hofmannsthal's essays make no use of biographical information; rather, his criticism, like that of his Walter Pater, proceeds from significant fragments of an artist's life or work to the imaginative reconstruction of the artist's essential identity. Kassner's earliest criticism, too, is concerned with the essential character of great artists. However, his approach is intuitively to distil this essence ('das Grundwahre') from the totality of an artist's work and experiences. Whereas Hofmannsthal's ideal criticism is atomistic and predominantly subjective, Kassner's is holistic and seeks to strike a balance between objective facts and subjective interpretation. Whereas Hofmannsthal's criticism is one-sidedly textual, imaginatively reconstructing the artist from isolated fragments of his work, Kassner seeks to divine the symbolic relationships between life and work. For, although disenchanted by positivism, Kassner did not reject factuality outright, and it is particularly notable that in 'Der ewige Jude' he assigns biography, in his special sense of the word, a corrective function in the criticism of great art, dubbing purely work-immanent approaches 'subjective'. To this extent intuition and extensive study combine in Kassner's early criticism to create what could be called an imaginative sense of fact, his 'Freude an der Thatsache'.

In the following chapter I will examine how this notion of criticism is expressed in *Die Mystik*, how it was misunderstood by reviewers, and why it held such great appeal for Hofmannsthal.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RUDOLF KASSNER: THE CRITIC AS ARTIST

#### I INTRODUCTION

In the main sections of this chapter I will examine those essays of *Die Mystik* concerned with the notion of criticism as art and Pre-Raphaelitism in its broadest sense, drawing particular attention to the similarities and differences between Kassner's presentation of these subjects and their treatment in Hofmannsthal's early critical essays. My textual analyses are, therefore, confined to six of the ten chapters in Kassner's volume: the introductory essay on the nature of the critic, and the essays on Keats, Pre-Raphaelitism as an aesthetic movement, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Swinburne, and Burne-Jones.<sup>1</sup> My readings of Kassner's essays, although extensive, are necessarily less detailed than those presented in chapter one of this study. There are a number of reasons for this. First, whereas Hofmannsthal devoted only three essays to modern English art, Kassner's critical interpretation of Pre-Raphaelitism extends over five chapters of his book. Similarly, whereas Hofmannsthal's notion of criticism as art is, for the most part, implicit in his critical practice, Kassner's volume opens with a sustained apology for the critic as artist. Secondly, unlike Hofmannsthal's feuilletonistic essays which were published separately over a number of years, and thus reflect gradual changes in the author's attitudes to his subject matter, the ten chapters of *Die Mystik* were written over a period of some fourteen months and, as elements of a greater whole, can only adequately be understood in the context of the volume. Accordingly, I have tried to bring out the place of the individual Pre-Raphaelites in Kassner's 'history' of nineteenth-century English art while stressing their unique features. Finally, as the essays of *Die Mystik* are considerably longer than Hofmannsthal's brief journalistic pieces, full analysis of their complex structure and their exposition of interpretations would exceed the scope of this study.

As a preliminary to the analyses of Kassner's essays the opening section of this chapter presents a brief overview of the publication and initial critical responses to *Die Mystik*. This survey serves two main functions: first, it situates the text in its wider context of turn-of-the-century German letters; secondly, it provides a counterbalance to Hofmannsthal's enthusiastic responses with which this study opened. So far, in considering the reception of Kassner's work I have concentrated chiefly on the judgments of sympathetic critics such as Baumann, Bong-Hi Cha, and, of course, Hofmannsthal. However, critical accounts of the undivided acclaim with which Kassner's contemporaries greeted his work can only be sustained if confined to certain of his fellow writers. While it is undeniable that an impressive number of authors as diverse as

<sup>1</sup> The remaining chapters on Blake, Shelley, Browning, and English style are only peripherally related to the genealogy of Pre-Raphaelitism presented in the central essays of *Die Mystik*. The reasons for the apparently eccentric inclusion of Keats, a canonical Romantic, in Kassner's treatment of Pre-Raphaelitism will become clear in the course of this chapter.

André Gide and Friedrich Dürrenmatt have held Kassner in high esteem, to concentrate solely on the positive responses to his work is to overlook the problems it posed — and continues to pose — for the reader, thus mystifying its enduring marginal status.<sup>2</sup> It is, therefore, instructive briefly to shift the focus of enquiry from the reactions of fellow writers to those of uninitiated readers. An appreciation of the difficulties encountered by such readers (in this case periodical reviewers) and the misunderstandings generated by *Die Mystik* not only renders Kassner's marginality more comprehensible, it also serves to highlight the ways in which his book should not be approached. It must be stressed that, in contrast to Hofmannsthal's feuilletons, *Die Mystik* was, and remains, a text with strictly limited appeal. For all their implied and explicit aesthetic élitism, Hofmannsthal's journalistic essays were written for a relatively large audience. Kassner's book, on the other hand, was by its very nature directed at a smaller, more exclusive readership, and thus made fewer concessions to the reader. Not surprisingly, the difficulties of comprehension experienced by Hofmannsthal, an Austrian reader with an exceptional knowledge of the subject matter and critical stance of *Die Mystik*, are as nothing compared to the puzzlement of Kassner's periodical reviewers.

## II THE PUBLICATION AND RECEPTION OF *DIE MYSTIK*

‘Man mag über das Buch sagen, was man will, es ist erlebt.’  
(BaT, p. 70)

Kassner completed *Die Mystik* in autumn 1899, and it was published, at the author's expense, by Eugen Diederichs Verlag Leipzig in January 1900. Although he had felt confident that the volume would find enthusiastic readers, it was 1907 before Kassner saw a meagre return for his outlay — or, as he put it in a letter to Eugen Diederichs, weak milk from his oldest cow.<sup>3</sup> This characterization typifies Kassner's harsh reassessment of his earliest work following his father's death in 1906, and must have appeared far from fair to Diederichs, whose book design drew fulsome praise when the volume appeared. The layout and typeface of *Sämtliche Werke*, while in themselves perfectly adequate, give today's reader no sense of the attention to material form which Diederichs lavished on the design and production of Kassner's 'älteste Kuh'.<sup>4</sup> In keeping with its portentous title and recondite aesthetic subject matter, *Die Mystik, die Künstler und das Leben* was a book of great physical beauty. The octavo volume was available in paper or hard (half vellum) covers, and for the particularly discerning bibliophile there was a limited edition of fifteen copies printed on handmade paper with deckle edge. All editions were set in an *Antiqua* typeface (as opposed to the more common German *Fraktur*) and included as frontispiece a plate from William Blake's Prophetic Book *America*. These features, together with the decorative floral vignettes and tailpieces commissioned for the volume, make the first edition of *Die Mystik* a striking example of the turn-of-the-century vogue for beautiful, well-made books.

Appropriately enough, this fashion had originated in England where, in reaction against industrialized mass manufacture, William Morris's Kelmscott Press had undertaken a revival of book production as art and craft. On its appearance in 1896 the lavish Kelmscott *Chaucer* set

<sup>2</sup> On the many artists who responded positively to Kassner's work see Klaus E. Bohnenkamp, 'Das Werk Rudolf Kassners. Ein Editionsbericht zum Abschluß der zehnbändigen Gesamtausgabe', *JDSG*, 38 (1994), 465–78 (pp. 465–66).

<sup>3</sup> BaT, p. 194. Kassner's return on *Die Mystik* was the stately sum of 108 Marks.

<sup>4</sup> See Bohnenkamp's comments on the impossibility of reproducing the first editions of the early work in *Sämtliche Werke*, and his remark that Kassner would not have wished them reprinted in their original form. Op. cit, p. 470.

new standards in book production and design, and it is still regarded as one of the most beautiful books ever published. Morris's publications had an immense and enduring influence on modern European book design, and in the early 1890s the most notable German imitator of the Kelmscott ideal was Stefan George, whose exclusive volumes of poetry were set in sans-serif typefaces (some styled on his own handwriting) and adorned with elaborate line illustrations and decorative borders by his artistic confrère Melchior Lechter.<sup>5</sup> However, George's painstaking attention to book design cannot be understood as merely precious decorative ornamentation. The editions of his early poetry were conceived holistically, being intended to realize what has been called the 'Durchgestaltung des Buchs zu einem einheitlichen Kunstwerk'.<sup>6</sup> If by the mid-1890s George was the most notable German pioneer of modern bibliophile editions, during the decade a more widespread interest in book design became evident. This was reflected by a number of highly ornate non-Naturalist German literary and aesthetic periodicals, such as *Pan*, *Die Insel*, and *Jugend*. By the turn of the century, Eugen Diederichs, who had founded his publishing house in 1896, enjoyed an established reputation as the foremost German publisher of exquisitely crafted books. Although less exclusive in outlook, Diederichs shared George's holistic conception of book design and sought to harmonize the material form and artistic content of his publications. This quasi-mystical view of the unity of form and content is expressed in the following account of Diederich's early attitudes to book design:

Da er sich als goethische Natur verstand und das fast naiv aussprach, erkannte er einen Unterschied zwischen innen und außen nicht an oder: er nahm das Außen so wichtig wie das Innen — auch beim Buch. Er hat es als einen bedeutenden Teil seiner Lebensleistung empfunden, daß er einer dem geistigen Anspruch angemessenen äußeren Gestaltung des Buches in Deutschland den Weg bahnte. Er sah hier einen Vorsprung der Engländer — bewirkt durch den der Renaissance verhafteten Universalkünstler William Morris. Und es ist einer der stolzesten Augenblicke seines Verlegerlebens gewesen, als ein englischer Verleger kam, um seinen Rat in Fragen der Buchgestaltung zu erbitten.<sup>7</sup>

This concern with Goethean wholeness is also evident in Diederich's *Verlagsprogramm: Zur Jahrhundertwende*, which appeared in the same year as *Die Mystik*. On the threshold of the century, Diederichs set out the aims and values of his publishing house, announcing himself as the leading publisher of the 'Neuromantik' — a 'movement' which at the time was largely his own invention. Diederichs distanced his endeavours both from the self-absorbed fugitive dreams of the 'Dekadenzrichtung' (then a pejorative catch-all term for Symbolism, Impressionism, and other self-consciously modern non-Naturalist literary tendencies of the period) and from the materialism, Naturalism, and what he saw as the frigid 'Bildungsphilistertum' of an overspecialized 'Verstandeskultur'. In addition to its Goethean dimension, Diederichs' manifesto has pedagogic, vitalistic (Nietzschean), and nationalistic overtones, its central aim being to educate the German people ('Volk') by promoting intuitive knowledge and revitalizing Renaissance humanist culture. The aim of this educative programme was to realize an authentic and practical twentieth-century artistic culture in which art and life

<sup>5</sup> George's correspondence with Hofmannsthal reflects their shared concern with the question of book design. See, for example: Wolfskehl's plan for Kelmscott style editions (GrBr, p. 109); the use of artists to design books for Georg Bondi (p. 134); the typeface for Hofmannsthal's collected poems (p. 193); Beardsley illustrations for Hofmannsthal's poems and proposed typeface and paper for the edition (p. 196); typeface based on George's handwriting (p. 220).

<sup>6</sup> Jürg Mathes, *Prosa des Jugendstils*, (Stuttgart, 1982). 'Nachwort', p. 327.

<sup>7</sup> "Eugen Diederichs". Rede von Rüdiger Robert Beer zum 100. Geburtstag', in Ulf Diederichs (ed.), *Eugen Diederichs, Selbstzeugnisse und Briefe von Zeitgenossen* (Düsseldorf, 1967), pp. 7–20 (p. 16).

would be reconciled. Significantly, Diederichs concludes by citing Ruskin as the exemplar of this cultural ideal:

Kein totes Wissen mehr, sondern es soll die Kunst werden, des Menschen Seele und Empfinden umzuformen und ihn zur praktischen Betätigung zu führen. Nur dadurch hat Ruskin der englischen Kultur ihre jetzige einflußreiche Stellung gegeben.<sup>8</sup>

Whether or not one agrees with Diederichs' ideology, his pronouncements demonstrate that the outward appearance of his bibliophile publications was not intended as mere surface decoration, a separable aesthetic supplement to the content of a book.<sup>9</sup> It represented, rather, the embodiment of a holistic belief in the mystical unity of inner and outer, of the form and content of a literary work. For Diederichs, as for George, the supposedly superficial material features of a book were indistinguishable from and as important as its intellectual content.

From this it should be clear that the physical appearance of *Die Mystik* was not intended as incidental decoration. In keeping with Diederichs' holistic philosophy, the design of the volume was conceived as integral to the whole. It also indicated the young Kassner's allegiance to life-affirming holism, and advertised his commitment to the particular non-Naturalist tendency which Diederichs characterized as 'Neuromantik'. Given his publisher's established reputation for quality, it is not surprising that one of the few things on which Kassner's first readers could agree was the excellent design of his book. However, if the appearance of the volume was generally considered irreproachable, most reviewers had difficulty in responding to its content. Unfortunately for Kassner, few of these first readers shared his publisher's holistic view of form and content, and many judged the content of *Die Mystik* to stand in marked contrast to its pleasing outward form. From the outset this was a problematic book.

To be fair, it is not hard to imagine the difficulties which confronted the first readers of the handsome volume. For after they had admired the binding, layout, and typeface of *Die Mystik*, questions would inevitably have arisen concerning its content. What kind of book was this? A glance at the title page would probably have baffled the average reader. The portentous title, *Die Mystik, die Künstler und das Leben*, evokes all manner of esoteric associations, from Christian mysticism to Nietzschean 'Lebensphilosophie', and hardly seems calculated to generate any clear idea of the contents of the volume. The subtitle, *Über englische Dichter und Maler im 19. Jahrhundert*, appears more promising; but, though it indicates the critical nature, and the national and historical scope of Kassner's study, it is followed by the single, cryptic word *Accorde* which clouds this apparent clarity by introducing a musical term where there was only poetry and painting. Turning to the contents page the confused reader would have found *Die Mystik* to contain ten chapters or essays. Of these, seven directly address nineteenth-century English poets and painters (William Blake, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Algernon Charles Swinburne, William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, and finally Robert Browning); one ('Der Traum vom Mittelalter') presents Pre-Raphaelitism as a movement; and the remaining chapters, the cryptically-titled introduction, 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker', and the closing dialogue, 'Stil', are of a less specific nature.

On its appearance *Die Mystik* attracted considerable critical attention, and, given the above problems of classification and orientation, it is not surprising that much of this was less than

<sup>8</sup> *Das Verlagsprogramm: Zur Jahrhundertwende* (1900), in Eugen Diederichs, *Leben und Werk. Ausgewählte Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, ed. by Lulu von Strauß und Torney-Diederichs (Jena, 1936), pp. 52–53.

<sup>9</sup> For an extensive discussion of Diederichs' early ideological positions see Gary D. Stark, *Entrepreneurs of Ideology. Neoconservative Publishers In Germany, 1890–1933* (Chapel Hill, 1981), especially chapter three, pp. 58–110.

positive.<sup>10</sup> Although greatly admired by fellow writers as diverse as Hofmannsthal and Georg Lukács, Kassner's book was not universally praised by reviewers. I emphasize this point as the only extensive treatment of the reception of *Die Mystik* is that given by Bong-Hi Cha which, while a useful source of factual information, is vitiated by the hagiographic tendency of her study and distorts the general tenor of critical responses to Kassner's book.<sup>11</sup> Having set out to demonstrate the almost universal critical acclaim which greeted *Die Mystik* — an enthusiasm established by selective and, at times, misleading quotation — she is eventually forced to concede,

daß Kassners Buch zwar innerhalb des zeitgenössischen literarischen Denkens, d. h. innerhalb bestimmter, mehr oder weniger esoterischer Zirkel einen mächtigen Einfluß ausübte, nach außen hin jedoch, d. h. für die Literatur- und Kunstgeschichte in Deutschland, keine nennenswerte Wirkung gehabt hat.<sup>12</sup>

This conclusion, if disappointing for Kassner's admirers, is perfectly correct and in itself unobjectionable. However, in Bong-Hi Cha's study it appears rather odd, coming after an extended account of the undivided praise heaped on Kassner's book. Exhaustive consideration of the numerous reviews of *Die Mystik* is beyond the scope of the present study, and it would be pointless to attempt a systematic revision of Bong-Hi Cha's readings here. However, having earlier presented Hofmannsthal's great enthusiasm for *Die Mystik*, a brief overview of critical responses will help illuminate the problems which the volume presented, and continues to present, for the reader. Unless these are appreciated, the limited appeal of Kassner's work and its critical neglect appear either incomprehensible or manifestly unjust.

A cursory glance at the earliest reviews shows that most readers had mixed feelings about *Die Mystik*. Like Kassner's first critic, Jakob Minor, who only reluctantly passed 'Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung', many reviewers of *Die Mystik*, while compelled to acknowledge its author's impressive knowledge and intellectual ingenuity, took exception to the methods and underlying assumptions of his criticism. This ambivalence of response is reflected in the various epithets applied to the book which range from the blandly descriptive 'ziemlich umfangreich',<sup>13</sup> through various degrees of praise, such as: 'ein interessantes Buch';<sup>14</sup> 'das prächtige Buch';<sup>15</sup> 'ein geistvolles Buch';<sup>16</sup> 'dieses bedeutsame Buch';<sup>17</sup> 'dieses überaus feine Werk'.<sup>18</sup> However, a note of misgiving can be detected in the concessive formulation: 'Ein Buch für Wenige über Wenige — aber ein talentvolles, kunstsinniges feines Buch'.<sup>19</sup> Finally, there are the altogether less positive assessments expressed by characterizations such as: 'das eigenartige Buch';<sup>20</sup> and 'ein wundersames, ein absonderliches Buch'.<sup>21</sup> A number of reviewers sought to resolve their

<sup>10</sup> In a late review of *Die Mystik* Paul Stefan draws attention to the extent of its initial critical reception: 'Dieses vor fast zwei Jahren erschienene Buch hat mit Recht derartiges Aufsehen erregt, daß ich den Dank aller zu verdienen glaube, die ich hiermit abermals darauf aufmerksam mache.' Paul Stefan, 'Rudolf Kassner: Die Mystik, die Künstler und das Leben (etc)', *Tagesbote aus Mähren und Schlesien*, 26 April 1902, no page reference.

<sup>11</sup> Bong-Hi Cha, 'Das Erstlingswerk Rudolf Kassners: Ansätze zu seinem physiognomischen Weltbild' (doctoral dissertation, university of Tübingen, 1976). 'Fünftes Kapitel. Rezeptionsgeschichte des Erstlingswerkes', pp. 178–207.

<sup>12</sup> Bong-Hi Cha, pp. 205–06.

<sup>13</sup> Brunnemann, p. 48. For publishing details of the reviews cited, see Bibliography. To avoid confusion, where there are two reviews by one reviewer full bibliographical details are given in the notes.

<sup>14</sup> K–n, no page reference.

<sup>15</sup> Meyer, p. 138.

<sup>16</sup> Schlaf, p. 206. See also BaT p. 213.

<sup>17</sup> Stefan, no page reference.

<sup>18</sup> O. St. (i.e. Otto Stoeßl), p. 94.

<sup>19</sup> Scapinnelli, no page reference.

<sup>20</sup> Lienhard, p. 571. See also BaT, pp. 219–20.

<sup>21</sup> Meyerfeld, Max, 'Ein Stilsucher: Die Mystik, die Künstler und das Leben (etc)', *Das literarische Echo*, 3, 1900/1901, cols 178–79, col. 178.

problems with Kassner's text by resorting to national stereotypes. The dedication of *Die Mystik* ('Dem Andenken meiner Mutter und meines Bruders Felix gewidmet') is dated 'Wien, im Herbste 1899' (KSW I, p. 7), and some were quick to explain what they regarded as the stylistic excesses of Kassner's book with reference to its autumnal Viennese origins. Indeed, a number of his critics mistakenly took the dedication to imply that the Moravian author was himself Viennese: 'ein Wiener sagt die Widmung, sagt uns jede Seite';<sup>22</sup> 'aber dies Buch muß ein Wiener geschrieben haben';<sup>23</sup> 'Das Wienerthum steht ihm an der Stirn geschrieben: doch nicht Hermann Bahrs behende Jonglierkunst, sondern eher eine rhapsodische Schwermuth'.<sup>24</sup> Given his opinion of Bahr, Kassner would no doubt have been quite happy to be dissociated from the older critic's nimble 'juggling'. He might have been less pleased, however, to find himself in the stereotypic cultural hothouse of Camill Hoffmann's largely unsympathetic review:

Kassners Buch ist viel zu vergeistigt [. . .], und so besitzt es auch keine richtige Heimaterde, sondern entstammt einem Treibhaus, das sich die Wiener zu besitzen rühmen mögen.<sup>25</sup>

Hoffmann's dismissive comments represent one popular view of the Viennese literary and intellectual scene at the turn of the century. For many nationalistically-minded Germans of the period — although he was Jewish, Hoffmann's reference to 'Heimaterde' is revealing — Austria generally and Vienna in particular were synonymous with dreaminess, vagueness, melancholy, a questionable cosmopolitanism, historicist eclecticism, aesthetic preciousness, and cultural decline (if not outright decadence). Like most stereotypes, this has an element of truth; however, when used to foreclose debate it becomes a pernicious expedient. As shown in the previous chapter, the young Kassner was indeed steeped in the literary and cultural concerns of *Jung-Wien*. Unfortunately, most critics who recognized this found it easier to dismiss the Viennese dimension of *Die Mystik* out of hand rather than pursue it in depth.<sup>26</sup>

Where reviewers referred to Kassner's supposed Viennese origins, it was generally to explain the one feature of *Die Mystik* to which many took greatest exception, namely its style. More specifically, they objected to the unevenness and unclarity of Kassner's prose, and the looseness of his composition. A few representative examples will illustrate the general response to the style of *Die Mystik*. Alois Brandl, while acknowledging Kassner's profound knowledge of his subject matter, had harsh words for the young author's style:

Der Verf., der seine Widmung aus Wien datirt, verbindet eine sehr schöne Kenntniss der neuern englischen Litteratur mit einem seltsamen, aphoristischen Stil, der prophetisch sein will, thatsächlich aber chaotisch wirkt.<sup>27</sup>

Although he praised the sonority of Kassner's sentences, Josef Hofmiller was similarly critical:

Sein Buch ist mit rühmens- und nachahmenswerther Sorgfalt geschrieben; noch meistert er die Sprache nicht überall; manchmal werden die Worte Herr über ihn, und dann schwelgt er in gekünstelten Antithesen, flachen Paradoxen, tief klingenden Wortspielen; er läuft Gefahr, sich ins Weite und Grenzenlose zu verlieren und findet kaum mehr zu seinem Gegenstände zurück.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Meyerfeld, loc. cit.

<sup>23</sup> Schur, p. 197.

<sup>24</sup> Meyerfeld, Max, 'Rudolf Kassner: Die Mystik, die Künstler und das Leben (etc)', *Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt (Neue Frankfurter Zeitung)*, Nr. 6, Viertes Morgenblatt, Sunday 6 January 1901, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Hoffmann, p. 53.

<sup>26</sup> His criticism of the Viennese 'Treibhaus' notwithstanding, Hoffmann perceptively identifies the congruity between Hofmannsthal as lyric poet and Kassner as essayist: 'Hofmannsthal gilt als ihr Typus [i.e. of the pallid precious Viennese dreamer]. In Rudolf Kassner glaube ich ihren Essayisten zu erkennen.' Hoffmann, loc. cit.

<sup>27</sup> Brandl, col. 1133. See also BaT, p. 222.

<sup>28</sup> Hofmiller, p. 5, col. 1.



In a particularly hostile review, Fritz Lienhard, a leading apologist of German 'Heimatkunst' and opponent of foreign literary fads, after a feeble attempt at caricaturing the style of *Die Mystik*, roundly censured its author for 'stilistisches Outrieren'.<sup>29</sup> While not everyone was as outspoken as Lienhard — nor as the anonymous 'Burenfreund' of *Der Bund* who dismissed Kassner's extensive reading as 'unendliche Bildungskomposthaufen' — many associated the perceived stylistic defects of *Die Mystik* with its author's excessive erudition.<sup>30</sup> In a review tellingly headed 'Ein Stilsucher', Max Meyerfeld diagnosed the style of *Die Mystik* as a product of Kassner's exorbitant knowledge and youthful lack of restraint:

Ihm fehlt die Beschränkung. Ihm fehlt die Plastik. Das ist doppelt gefährlich, wenn es sich um so verschwimmende Dichter wie Shelley und die Präraphaeliten handelt. Verschwimmende Dichter; aber ein verschwommener Darsteller. Mit dieser Neigung zu Abschweifungen hängt aufs engste die Bibelotsucht und -zucht zusammen. Jeder dritte Satz ist eine Sentenz. Er kann herausgelöst werden und besteht für sich. Darin übertrifft Kassner die modernisten 'Horribiliscrififaxe'. Und mit derselben bequemen Unerschrockenheit, mit der er seine Sprüche in Prosa prägt, läßt er auch gelegentlich ein wenig 'balderash' [*sic*] ab. Er definiert, wenn er schwärmt; er schwärmt, wenn er definiert.<sup>31</sup>

Even Otto Stoeßl, who praised *Die Mystik* enthusiastically (and whose review in *Die Nation* was one of the few acknowledged by Kassner) could not refrain from criticizing Kassner's style:

Indem er alles sagen will, sagt er zu viel, indem er zu oft Worte sucht und findet, die treffen, verwischt er, anstatt scharf zu zeichnen. Sein Verständniß ist reif, aber noch nicht seine Darstellung. Noch kann er sich nicht aus dem Spiele lassen und in seinem Werke den Stoff frei und aus der vollen Strenge des Künstlers ordnen und bezwingen; noch wird er von seinem Plan beherrscht, anstatt ihn zu beherrschen.<sup>32</sup>

These criticisms are representative and, to some extent, justified. As the reviews cited suggest, *Die Mystik* is an extraordinarily difficult book, laden — at times overloaded — with recondite knowledge, and written in an often impenetrably dense style. Nor was it only baffled reviewers who were critical of the book; from his correspondence it emerges that Kassner himself was far from satisfied with his work. In a letter of March 1900, he estimated that under a fifth of *Die Mystik* was of enduring value:

Man mag über das Buch sagen, was man will, es ist erlebt. 40–50 Seiten in ihm werden bleiben, das weiß ich, wenn auch alles andere nur Literatur ist und seinen Weg in das Nichts finden wird. (BaT, p. 70)

Here Kassner effectively corroborates his reviewers' charges of overwriting. However, as the first sentence indicates, he still considered the value of the book to lie in its embodiment of his intense experience of English culture and art. Similarly, he saw his work as an important step in his own intellectual development:

Mir selbst ist das Buch doch etwas, das sehe ich jeden Tag mehr. Es ist ein Schritt vorwärts zur Freiheit, wie ich sie verstehe, es enthält eine Menge Gelöbnisse, Versprechen, die ich einzulösen habe, so ich nicht feige werde. (BaT, p. 70)

<sup>29</sup> Lienhard, pp. 571–72. See also BaT, pp. 219–20.

<sup>30</sup> No bibliographical details are available for the review which appeared in the *Der Bund* of 22 April 1900.

<sup>31</sup> Meyerfeld, Max, 'Ein Stilsucher: Die Mystik, die Künstler und das Leben (etc)', cols 179–80.

<sup>32</sup> Stoeßl, p. 482. See also BaT, p. 220–21. It should be noted that it was this (anonymous) review in *Die Nation*, and not that which appeared in *Die Wage* with the initials 'O. St.' which Kassner thought particularly praiseworthy. See BaT, p. 86.

These remarks adumbrate a criticism of *Die Mystik* made by the reviewer Ernst Schur: 'Der Verfasser hat es zum größten Teil für sich geschrieben.'<sup>33</sup> Unlike Schur, though, Kassner considered the importance of his work to reside more in its existential significance than in its potential appeal for a mass readership. However, as seen in the previous chapter, Kassner was not entirely indifferent to public opinion. His letters of 1900 show him to have followed the reception of *Die Mystik* with emotions ranging from amusement to intense irritation. From the press cuttings Eugen Diederichs sent him, Kassner concluded that the majority of his reviewers had either misunderstood or misrepresented his work. While generally sanguine, Kassner was roused to an uncharacteristic outburst of anger by Lienhard's sarcastic critical broadside:

Ja Meyer könnte einen bei aller Gemüthlichkeit zum Antisemiten machen, wenn so ein Viehhufer und Langohr mit patriotischer Herzerweiterung in der 'Deutschen Zeitung', der mich einen geistreichen Plauderer, Raffinierten, Entarteten, im Grunde Humbugmenschen, beinahe Juden, zumindesten Wiener oder Pariser nennt, nicht wäre. (BaT, p. 86)<sup>34</sup>

Lienhard's jibes notwithstanding, Kassner's response to his reviews was on the whole light-hearted, and in the same letter, after giving an overview of the critical errors and confusions surrounding his work, he tells Fritz that he intends to ask Diederichs to forward more press cuttings: 'Sie machen mich nämlich thatsächlich heiter und muthig' (BaT, p. 86).<sup>35</sup>

Now given Kassner's acknowledgement that the greater part of his book was of little enduring value, it may seem rather strange that he should have rejected so many reviews of *Die Mystik* as mistaken. However, it appears that what Kassner objected to was not so much specific charges, such as that of overwriting, but rather the more fundamental misunderstanding of his style. This requires emphasis, as unsuspecting present-day readers are likely to share these misunderstandings; for the problem of style in *Die Mystik* is largely one of unfulfilled and unjustified reader expectations. Many of Kassner's first critics appear to have expected *Die Mystik* to provide a sound critical introduction to nineteenth-century English art, shedding scholarly light on the history of Romanticism and Pre-Raphaelitism. It is not surprising, then, that they were disappointed by the shadow of impenetrable darkness the book at times appeared to cast over its subject matter. As orthodox scholarly criticism, *Die Mystik* was plainly a failure.

From the point of view of anyone seeking information on the English artists discussed by Kassner his opaque style is undeniably a fault. But does this necessarily vitiate his criticism? I would contend that it does not. For only if one deliberately overlooks Kassner's daunting title, *Die Mystik, die Künstler und das Leben*, and reads the book solely in terms of its more comforting subtitle, *Über englische Dichter und Maler im 19. Jahrhundert*, does its author appear incompetent. Much of the criticism directed at Kassner's style can be justified only if the book is approached as a scholarly historical guide to nineteenth-century English literature and painting. How, then, had the reviewers misunderstood *Die Mystik*? Kassner himself does not state the precise nature of their supposed misunderstandings, and, given his rage at Lienhard's scathing review, it may seem odd that he did not enter into the public debate surrounding *Die Mystik*. However, he had

<sup>33</sup> Schur, p. 197.

<sup>34</sup> The Meyer referred to in the first sentence is the Jewish Germanist Richard Moses Meyer, whose *Die deutsche Litteratur des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (1900) is savaged earlier in the same letter. Meyer, whom Kassner met during his year in Berlin, also published a positive but somewhat condescending review of *Die Mystik*, 'Kaßner Rudolf, "Die Mystik, die Künstler und das Leben [...]"', *Euphorion*, 8 (1901), 138–39. Kassner acknowledged the review as flattering, but this did not soften his attitude towards Meyer: 'Aber was für Mißverständnisse! Wie ist der Mann ganz und gar Journalist!' (BaT, p. 110).

<sup>35</sup> Of the many published reviews of *Die Mystik* he considered only two — those of Servaes and Stoeßl [i.e. his anonymous article for *Die Nation*] — to be of value. He also appreciated the positive comments of Houston Stewart Chamberlain and Maurice Maeterlinck, to whom he had sent copies. See BaT, p. 86.

good reason for not openly replying to his critics; for he had already answered, or rather forestalled, many of the objections to what was regarded as the uneven style and loose composition of his 'critical survey'. The introductory essay of *Die Mystik* may not provide a positive account of Kassner's style, but it does warn the unwary reader what not to expect of the volume. If the notions of criticism and style expounded in 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' are taken seriously, the reader can have no excuse for expecting scholarly clarity from Kassner.

### III 'SELBSTCHARAKTERISTIK UND EIN PROGRAMM': 'DER DICHTER UND DER PLATONIKER'

'Be another; not thyself, but a Platonist . . .' (Emerson)<sup>36</sup>

Although he would excise it from the second, drastically abridged edition of 1920 (*Englische Dichter*), when *Die Mystik* was first published Kassner considered his introductory essay, 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker', one of the most successful in the book.<sup>37</sup> From the point of view of the present study, this essay is of particular importance as it expounds Kassner's critical position in *Die Mystik*. If most reviewers failed to appreciate the significance of the introduction, regarding it as little more than a diversion from the 'real' business of scholarly criticism, over twenty years after its publication Hofmannsthal remained an enthusiastic admirer of this essay. In a survey of Viennese culture written in 1921, he praised 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' as an adumbration of Kassner's whole, neglected *œuvre*:

In einer Vorrede, die heute ebenso glänzend ist als sie damals erschien, umschreibt er seine Funktion — die des 'Kritikers' — und seine geistige Situation mit einer unvergleichlichen Schärfe. [Long quotation from 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' follows.] Dies war zugleich Selbstcharakteristik und ein Programm, die Ankündigung einer Person und die Vorwegnahme des Werkes.<sup>38</sup>

This is high praise for an essay which its author had recently rejected as immature and aberrant.<sup>39</sup> Kassner's judgement notwithstanding, Hofmannsthal's description of 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' as a programmatic self-characterization is apt. Although by 1920 Kassner felt he had outgrown the essay, in 1899 it represented the resolution of two problems which had occupied him at least since the writing of 'Sonnengnade', namely the nature of criticism and the relationship between critic and artist. Whereas the unorthodox critical attitudes of the capricious, yet fundamentally nihilistic male protagonist of 'Sonnengnade' led only to madness and death, Kassner's 'self-portrait as critic' in the introductory chapter of *Die Mystik* proposes a viable alternative to the scientific positivism of the nineteenth-century academy — an alternative based in part on a reinterpretation of the relationship between the (receptive) critic and the (creative) artist. Little short of interlinear commentary could do justice to the density, allusiveness, and elusiveness of Kassner's prose, and such an analysis is obviously beyond the scope of this study. Although my close reading is necessarily selective, it should bring out the

<sup>36</sup> *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Centenary Edition, 10 Vols, IV: *Representative Men*. Seven Lectures By Ralph Waldo Emerson (Boston and New York, 1903). 'I. Uses of Great Men', pp. 1–35 (p. 29).

<sup>37</sup> 'Das Essay über Browning und die Einleitung ist das beste, dann Keats und Burne Jones; Swinburne gefällt mir am wenigsten[s], Shelley ist etwas unreif, Blake zu ehrgeizig und dann in eigenen Worten, in sehr eigenen Worten, die aber doch nicht mir gehören.' (BaT, p. 81)

<sup>38</sup> Hugo von Hofmannsthal, 'Zweiter Brief aus Wien', A, pp. 281–93 (pp. 286–87).

<sup>39</sup> In the foreword to *Englische Dichter* (1920), Kassner outlined his stringent editorial principles as follows: 'Alles Überflüssige, Grimassige, Falsche, Unreife ist aus dem Buche gestrichen worden, soweit dies anging und der Bestand und Sinn des Ganzen dadurch nicht in Frage gestellt wurde.' (KSW III, p. 466)

salient features of Kassner's critical position and their implications for the much-censured style of his essays on English art.

The first aspect of 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' requiring comment is its subtitle. So far I have referred to the piece either as a chapter or an essay, but it is subtitled 'Aus einer Rede über den "Kritiker"' (KSW I, p. 9). This characterization has several important implications. First, the presentation of the text as a speech is an early example of the generic diversity characteristic of Kassner's work as a whole.<sup>40</sup> It is possible that the choice of genre was inspired by one of Hofmannsthal's publications of the 1890s, the essay 'Poesie und Leben' (1896), which was originally delivered as a lecture. By characterizing his introductory reflections as oratory, Kassner may have been aligning himself with the critical practice of a respected contemporary and, although he probably never actually delivered his speech to an audience, with the social dimension of Hofmannsthal's literary activities. The second notable point in the subtitle is its indication that this speech is incomplete. 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' is not 'eine Rede'; it is 'Aus einer Rede', a formulation which echoes the subtitle of Hofmannsthal's 'Poesie und Leben', 'Aus einem Vortrag'. In addition to signalling that Kassner's introduction makes no claim to exhaustiveness, the fragmentary nature of his reflections can be seen as allied to the predilection of the German 'Frühromantiker', in particular Friedrich Schlegel, for the fragment as a form of critical discourse.<sup>41</sup> The avowed incompleteness of 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' may, then, represent more than the diffidence of a literary newcomer; the fragmentary nature of Kassner's text suggests affinities both with Hofmannsthal's modern critical practice and with the older Romantic conception of criticism in which the expression of ultimate truth is held to be impossible. The final point arising from the subtitle concerns the quotation marks on the word "Kritiker". In view of the incompleteness of the speech, these could be seen as further emphasizing that Kassner's account of the critic makes no claim to absolute truth. While serving thus to relativize the word 'Kritiker', the quotation marks also indicate Kassner's use of the term to be distinct from common usage. However, this does not necessarily imply a devaluation of Kassner's notion of the critic. As I shall show, it is not his 'Kritiker' but rather the widespread late nineteenth-century understanding of critics and criticism which is relativized and devalued in 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker'.

How, then, does Kassner present the critic and his relationship to the artist? The heavily ironic opening sentence of the chapter plunges the reader into uncertainty, thereby setting the tone for much of what follows:

Der Kritiker, von dem ich zu Ihnen spreche, scheint auf den ersten Blick hin etwas so ganz Neues, so wenig Exponiertes, etwas mit Allem so Verkettetes, dass es schwer ist, sein Wesen irgendwie positiv zu bestimmen. (KSW I, p. 9)

The irony here lies in the implication that, although at first sight this critic is likely to seem novel, closer examination may show him to be more familiar. Before revealing the nature of this familiarity, however, Kassner generates a thoroughly alienating first impression. As if to demonstrate the difficulty of positive definition, his exordium presents a list of paradoxical characterizations:

<sup>40</sup> On the diversity of literary genres in Kassner's work see Bohnenkamp, *op. cit.*, p. 474.

<sup>41</sup> It will be remembered that in the 1890s Kassner was already familiar with Schlegel's work, and that he had compared his own voracious and unsystematic reading with that of the Romantic critic. See BaT, p. 35 and p. 102 above.

Er ist der Philosoph ohne System, der Dichter ohne Reim, der einsamste Gesellschaftsmensch, der Aristokrat ohne Wappen, der bohème ohne Abenteuer. (KSW I, p. 9)

These introductory remarks appear calculated to baffle the reader, and one can imagine the confusion of reviewers confronted with these paradoxically indefinite definitions. What is one to make of this? Closer examination of this passage shows Kassner's critic to be less elusive than he at first sight appears. It should be noted that each of the initial characterizations identifies the critic with a well-known general type (the philosopher, the poet, etc) only to remove one of the external attributes commonly associated with that type. The suggestion is that if the critic is to be understood as conforming to a common type, it is only in a qualified sense. He is a thinker, a poet, a man of society, an aristocrat, and a bohemian, but he lacks an essential attribute of each. That is to say, he can be identified with these types in a purely intellectual sense — in thought, but not in action.

The introductory paragraph continues by elaborating on the critic's essentially receptive and contemplative temperament, the disproportion of his knowledge and ability, and his difference from those around him:

Er hat das feinste Gehör und vermag keine Saite zu rühren. Er weiss Alles und kann gewöhnlich nichts. Er ist 'talentlos' und bleibt eigentlich immer unerwidert. Er ist ein ganz und gar illegitimes Geschöpf, negatives Geschöpf. Ihn definiert das, was er nicht besitzt und seine Grenzen findet er immer in anderen. Er ist immer übrig und die Anderen empfinden ihn als Eindringling. (KSW I, p. 9)

Here the reader acquainted with Kassner's earliest work should recognize the resemblance between this complex and contradictory figure and another 'critic', namely the elusive professor of 'Sonnengnade'. Both are receptive in temperament — i.e. although they can respond to art, they are themselves incapable of creating original works — and like his fictional predecessor, whose character was, even to himself, elusive and unnameable, the critic of 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' lacks positive defining qualities. His character is essentially indeterminate and can be defined only in contradistinction to those around him, or in terms of apparent paradoxes. This continuity in Kassner's thought would, of course, have been lost on his reviewers who could hardly be expected to have read a story in an obscure student anthology. To today's reader, however, the congruity between the critic of 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' and the doomed protagonist of 'Sonnengnade' shows that in *Die Mystik* Kassner is concerned with the problem which lies at the heart of his short story: the relationship between the creative and receptive temperament, between the artist and the critic.

This relationship, also central to Loris-Hofmannsthal's essays on English art, is first expressed by Kassner in terms reminiscent of a Wildean aphorism: 'Er [der Kritiker] liebt das Leben um der Kunst anderer willen und die Kunst um seines eigenen Lebens willen.' (KSW I, p. 10) Although more elusive, this gnomic sentence appears to have affinities with Hofmannsthal's presentation of Walter Pater, whose innate critical temperament he depicts as consisting in love for the artist: 'Er ist in den Künstler verliebt, wie dieser ins Leben.' (RA I, p. 194) This resemblance, however, is largely superficial, as the critic's attitude to art in 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' is considerably more complex than in Hofmannsthal's essay. Kassner's critic does not simply love art; he loves art for the sake of his very life. His paradoxically expressed love of life — for the sake of others' art — strongly suggests Wildean aestheticism, and appears to draw Kassner's critic into the orbit of the fugitive English aesthete

presented in Hofmannsthal's 'Algernon Charles Swinburne'. However, Kassner's central point here is that his critic's attitude to art is more than simply one of innate temperamental orientation; it is, rather, a matter of existential necessity. In himself Kassner's critic is nothing; it is only in terms of his relationship to others, and specifically to their art, that he can acquire a more or less determinate identity.

For the contemplative critic, who is incomplete and lacks definite limits, the forms of art provide a supplement to his thoughts:

Es ist, als trüge er in sich die Möglichkeit aller Schicksale und liebe gerade darum nur die Formen und Oberflächen der Anderen. Ihre Gedanken und Themen sind ihm ganz gleichgültig, er sieht nur auf ihre Spiele und Bewegungen. Die ganze Welt ist ihm eine grosse Form, für die er in seinen Gedanken den Inhalt bei sich führt. (KSW I, p. 10)

This concern solely with the forms and surfaces of art distances Kassner's critic from the content-centred 'Stoff und Einfluß' approach of positivism. At the same time, the insistence that the critic's thoughts provide the intellectual content for the forms of art echoes the final personal reflection on criticism in Kassner's correspondence discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>42</sup> This, in turn, lends further weight to Hofmannsthal's perspicacious interpretation of 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' as a self-characterization and critical programme.

Kassner's description of his critic as 'ein negatives Geschöpf' (KSW I, p. 9) shows the negative overtones of his opening paragraph to be entirely intentional. Having presented an elaborate and thoroughly negative image of his reflective critic as creature (as opposed to creator), Kassner poses a rhetorical question which has probably already occurred to his readers: 'Hat er denn keine Vorfahren, besitzt er kein Erbe und keine Tugend?' (KSW I, p. 10) Typically, the answer is deferred until Kassner has given a condensed historical overview of the perennial phenomenon of aesthetics. Far from giving positive content to the notion of criticism, this serves further to dissociate his critic from conventional systematic aesthetics and, significantly, from both German philosophy and turn-of-the-century aestheticism:

Aesthetik hat man ja zu allen Zeiten getrieben, gewiss schon vor Aristoteles. Augustinus hat, als er noch unheilig war, ein Buch über das Schöne geschrieben, deutsche Philosophen abstrahierten so lange vom Leben, bis sie eine Wissenschaft vom Schönen zu haben glaubten, in England gab es ein 'aesthetic movement', in Deutschland wird sich die beschauliche Dummheit wohl noch lange hinter den Namen 'Schöngeist' verstecken und die vielen Aestheten, die heute herumlaufen, sehen so abgegriffen aus, sind so alt geworden an ihrer Liebe zur Schönheit und haben in geistigen Dingen schmutzige Hände. Das sind wahrlich nicht die Brüder oder Vettern des Kritikers, wie ich ihn meine. (KSW I, pp. 10–11)

Whatever the earlier hints of aestheticism, this passage makes clear that the critic of *Die Mystik* can be associated neither with the aesthete nor with his German counterpart, the 'Schöngeist'. Having thus dissociated his critic from these programmatic, pseudo-scientific, and fugitive conceptions of aesthetics, Kassner gives a brief, and largely uncontentious, synopsis of the critic's time-honoured role as mediator between the few (poets) and the masses. This historical survey culminates in an indictment of the cultural climate of turn-of-the-century Europe and its damaging effect on the essential nature of the critic:

Eine Zeit wie unsere, die Classen, Grade und Thätigkeiten vermengt, weil sie den naiven Muth zur Ausschliesslichkeit noch nicht gefunden hat, die Goethe's Weltbürgerthum noch immer mit Liberalismus übersetzt, die Prosa und Poesie in einander fließen lässt, weil sie

<sup>42</sup> See BaT, p. 45, cited on p. 103 above.

keinen Stil besitzt, die im Trüben Tiefes wittert und aus verdächtiger Angst vor den Gemeinplätzen und der Selbstverständlichkeit das Klare meidet, eine solche Zeit musste den Kritiker, wie Sie ihn heute noch zu oft sehen, züchten und sein Wesen, wie Sie es unter anderen Namen in allen Zeiten finden, verbilden. (KSW I, pp. 11–12)

This vigorous attack on the defects of contemporary culture has clear affinities with Nietzsche and with Diederich's programme of cultural criticism and reform, and serves both to dissociate Kassner's critic from common late nineteenth-century critical practice and to ally him to a longer-standing, but as yet unexplained, tradition.

It is only now, on the fourth page of the text, that Kassner reveals the historical lineage of his apparently novel critic — and the significance of the cryptic 'Platoniker' of the title:

Unter anderen Namen . . . damit ich es gleich sage, der Kritiker von heute ist nichts anderes, als der Platoniker des Alterthums, der Mystiker des Mittelalters, der Skeptiker der ausgehenden Renaissance, der Moralist des XVIII. Jahrhunderts in Frankreich, der Synphilosoph Friedrich Schlegel's. Ich will Ihnen nun vom Ideale eines Kritikers sprechen, ohne mich darauf einzulassen, wie dieses in einigen grossen Geistern dieses Jahrhunderts wie Friedrich Schlegel, St. Beuve, Taine, H. Grimm, Ruskin, Pater und anderen sich darstellt. (KSW I, p. 12)

This genealogy highlights an important difference between Hofmannsthal's and Kassner's respective conceptions of criticism. Whereas in 'Walter Pater' Hofmannsthal simply asserts the critic to be one who naturally loves the artist, Kassner here seeks to sanction his apparently idiosyncratic image of the critic with reference to history and tradition. As indicated, the ironic opening sentence of 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' implies that Kassner's critic may be less novel than first impressions suggest; the above passage shows this indeed to be the case. The preceding references to history and tradition can now be seen as calculated to suggest that it is not Kassner's critic but the late nineteenth-century understanding of criticism which is aberrant. Paradoxical as it seems, Kassner's highly individual presentation of his critic is fundamentally conservative. As his attack on contemporary culture demonstrates, in 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' Kassner is concerned with developing a notion of criticism which, if seemingly novel, reaffirms traditional critical values.

It should be noted that in Kassner's usage the word 'Platoniker' refers to the critical temperament generally and does not imply adherence to Plato's philosophy. The Platonist of antiquity is, on Kassner's account, merely the first recorded example of the perennial character type with which he is concerned. After his explicit statement of the 'Platonic' critical tradition from Plato to Schlegel the generic term 'Platoniker' replaces 'Kritiker' in Kassner's discussion. The presentation of the ideal (Platonic) critical temperament which follows can be seen as a more positive restatement of, and enlargement on, the negative and paradoxical exordium of the essay:

Der Kritiker ein Platoniker . . . Man wird immer Geister finden, die sich nicht leicht hingeben. Etwas in ihrer Seele zieht sie zurück von dem, dem sich andere sofort und leicht erklären. In ihnen ist etwas lebendig, wofür sie nirgends einen Reim finden, ein Schmerz, eine Härte, irgend etwas Undefinierbares, dem sie selbst keinen Namen geben wollen, der Reflex irgend eines grossen Lichtes, das sie verloren haben. Sie sind verschlossen, vorsichtig, misstrauisch und verstehen auszuweichen. Sie sehen sich immer im Gegensatz zu etwas, sind sehr relativ, immer relativ, das Absolute negiert sie. Der Ausdruck fällt ihnen schwer und doch trifft sie jeder Eindruck. (KSW I, p. 12)

Again, there are obvious similarities between these reserved and cautious Platonists and the shy protagonist of 'Sonnengnade'. Furthermore, Kassner's highly ambiguous depiction of the

Platonists' characteristic, yet indefinable, sense of pain and loss as the reflection of some great luminary ('irgend eines grossen Lichtes') recalls the image of the sun central to the short story.<sup>43</sup> Like his fictional predecessor, Kassner's ideal critic lacks graced illumination; however, unlike the nihilistic professor, the Platonist is not utterly estranged from the light he lacks. He is aware, albeit painfully, of its reflection.

The relativism and sensitivity to impressions which are distinctive of the Platonist have corollaries in a constitutional aversion to 'grand words' and a painstaking attention to detail:

Sie sind sehr verschämt, immer verliebt, ohne sich erklären zu können, ehrgeizig mit der entschiedensten Abneigung vor grossen Worten — sie fürchten immer zu laut oder zu leise zu sein, sie rechnen mit dem Flüchtigsten und Ideellsten wie mit Münzen, das Grosse und Greifbare ist für sie immer schon gesagt und selbstverständlich. Sie sind bis in's Schweigen hinein gewissenhaft und wollen nichts übersehen, weil kein Ding für sie einen bestimmten Werth hat. (KSW I, p. 12)

This lack of determinate standards of value allies Kassner's ideal critic to the literary and philosophical Impressionism of Vienna in the 1890s, and to the associated 'Wertrelativismus' of the period. Yet, although temperamentally an amoral relativist, the Platonist aspires to the absolute freedom from which he is by nature estranged:

Alles Freie, Schamlose, Umarmende, Naive, alles Unnahbare und Unsagbare, alle Musik ist ihr Ideal, und ihr Leben ist eine Erziehung zu dieser Zuchtlosigkeit. Sie lieben es nur um ihrer selbst willen. Sie erkennen es aus sich — die grosse Freiheit aus eigener Gebundenheit, die grosse Schamlosigkeit aus den vielen uneingestandenen Schamhaftigkeiten, die vielen Umarmungen, die wie eine Musik das Leben durchtönen, aus den Versagungen eigensüchtiger Augenblicke, den Humor aus eigenen Launen und die Musik aus den Dissonanzen. Ihr Leben ist ein unruhiges Werden, ein Umwerden. (KSW I, p. 13)

The Platonist is drawn to his various ideals by the sense of his own deficiencies. His relentless hubristic quest for freedom is an attempt to overcome the restriction and dissonance of his own character type.

From this point the antithesis (inhibition/freedom) implicit in the above passage becomes the dominant structural feature of the remainder of 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker'. Kassner's presentation of the Platonist's constitutional deficiencies leads to a consideration of his polar opposite, the great poet: 'Ihr [i.e. the Platonists'] Gegensatz ist immer der grosse Dichter' (KSW I, p. 13).<sup>44</sup> Whereas the Platonic critic is reserved and distanced, the poet is characterized by proximity to all things. (It should be noted, however, that the image of the poet is presented from the Platonist's point of view, and is, therefore, relative.) The critic's life is one of restless, relative becoming ('Werden'), the poet's one of absolute being ('Sein'). The critic lacks standards; the poet is himself the standard of all things. The critic is estranged from the ideal; in the poet the ideal is ever present. This final point, the radical difference between the relationship of poet and Platonist to the ideal, explains the peculiar nature of their respective modes of expression:

Das Ideal — der grosse Schein, übersetzen wir das abgebrauchte Wort für diesmal so — das Ideal ist im Dichter immer gegenwärtig als Musik, als Farbe oder Metapher, im Platoniker immer ferne. Im Ausdruck des Dichters scheint es aufgesogen und die Verse des Dichters

<sup>43</sup> See also the Greek epigraph to *Die Mystik* (KSW I, p. 8), the famous dictum from Plotinus' *Enneads*, which is translated by the editors as: 'Niemals nämlich würde das Auge die Sonne erblicken, wäre es nicht sonnenhaft.' (KSW II, p. 427)

<sup>44</sup> By 'Dichter' Kassner understands not only the poet but any creative artist. As the term 'Künstler' is introduced later in 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker', I will for the sake of clarity refer to 'der Dichter' as 'poet' throughout.



tanzen und taumeln wie junge Mädchen, die den Ring vom Manne empfangen und von seiner Liebe getrunken haben. Die Worte des Platonikers sind hart und spröde wie edle Jünglinge, auf deren Stirn der Glanz des Glückes, das sie nicht zu fassen wagen, weil sie auch andere danach greifen sehen, fällt. Die Worte regen und strecken sich wie die Arme des 'Adorante'. (KSW I, p. 14)

Here a self-reflexive dimension of Kassner's text becomes evident in his characteristically Platonic aversion to defining absolutely the ideal — one of those 'grossen Worte' from which a reserved and relative Platonist would instinctively recoil. However, Kassner's provisional 'translation' of the word is not merely symptomatic of a constitutional aversion to outworn terms. The formulation 'der grosse Schein' subtly takes up the earlier ambiguous image of an indeterminate 'grosstes Licht' which the Platonist was said to lack. In addition to connoting luminosity, 'Schein' has the philosophical sense of 'appearance' (as opposed to absolute reality). Its introduction in this context, then, not only suggests an equivalence between the Platonist's lack of illumination and his distance from the ideal, it also implies Kassner's ideal to be phenomenal and not transcendent in nature. This indicates that the implicit idealism of 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' does not necessarily entail a metaphysical realm of self-subsisting (Platonic) Ideas beyond space and time, nor the unknowable (Kantian) 'Dinge an sich'. Rather, the ideal said to be ever present in the poet and lacking in the Platonist paradoxically belongs, in an unspecified sense, to the phenomenal world of sensory experience. This is a point to which I shall return later in this section.

The stylized image of joyful young girls and noble youths, used to depict the language of the poet and the Platonist respectively, requires comment as it may now appear somewhat mannered. This image can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, the dancing female figures are typical pictorial motifs of turn-of-the-century *Jugendstil*, and are particularly reminiscent of Fidus's illustrations for the Munich periodical *Jugend*. To the reader acquainted with Kassner's early life, these images inevitably recall the author's unrequited love for his cousin Marie, the initial impetus for 'Sonnengnade'. Here, as in the short story, the fortunate artist is associated with femininity, the reserved critic with masculinity. However, the above passage shows an important change in the relationship between these two diametrically opposed types. Whereas the professor of 'Sonnengnade' was annihilated by the spectacle of the visionary painter's grace, the Platonist of *Die Mystik*, although by temperament unable to participate in that good fortune which is the province of the poet alone, does reflect it in his language. The comparison of the Platonist's words with the supplicatory gesture of the 'Adorante' graphically expresses the relationship of quasi-religious devotion and unrequited love which binds the critic to the poet.<sup>45</sup> Although this essentially static gesture can hardly be said to reconcile the receptive and the creative personalities, it represents a less destructive alternative to the tragic hostility of 'Sonnengnade'. In *Die Mystik* the antagonism of the short story gives way to a relationship of peaceful coexistence, complementarity, and dependence — albeit one sided.

From this striking, if dated, image of the radical difference between the words of the poet and the Platonist, Kassner proceeds to a consideration of their respective media of expression, namely poetry and prose. Here the conservatism of Kassner's position, mentioned earlier, is particularly marked. His avowed intention is to reaffirm the fundamental difference between

<sup>45</sup> By 'Adorante' Kassner means the 'Betenden Knaben', a life-sized Greek bronze in the 'Alten Museum zu Berlin'. The editors of KSW surmise that Kassner's use of the term 'Adorante' derives from Pater's reference to the statue as such in his *Greek Studies*. See KSW II, p. 428, note to KSW I, p. 14, line 11. It is also mentioned in Pater's essay on Winckelmann, see *The Renaissance*, p. 140. In a letter of 7 March 1900 Kassner thanks Fritz for sending him what was presumably a picture of the sculpture. See BaT, p. 69.

poetry and prose: 'Der Sprache des Dichters nennt man die Poesie und die Sprache des Platonikers ist die Prosa.' (KSW I, p. 14) Kassner's seemingly trivial insistence on this difference must be understood in the context of turn-of-the-century literary trends, for in drawing this apparently self-evident distinction between the language of the poet and critic Kassner is actually attacking a comparatively modern literary tendency — the novel. His disparaging reference to 'Gedichte in Prosa' (KSW I, p. 14) as the expedient of those who have difficulty writing verse may suggest he is thinking of prose poetry, a genre which flourished in the late nineteenth century. However, the subsequent formulation, 'die Romanschriftsteller, also die Dichter in Prosa' (KSW I, p. 14) reveals the object of Kassner's censure to be the novel. Although conceding that significant works have been and will continue to be written in this genre, Kassner again invokes history to support his conservative insistence on the essential difference between poetry and prose. His intention here is not, he stresses, prescriptive: 'ich will ja keine Vorschriften geben, sondern ich strebe, hier und dort ein geheimes Gesetz aufzudecken.' (KSW I, p. 14) Nonetheless, citing literary history as his witness, he reminds the reader that all the greatest original literary works ('Gedichte') are in verse, and then dismisses the majority of modern novelists as bad or non-existent stylists. Here Kassner reiterates the genealogy of his ideal critic — from Plato via Montaigne to Nietzsche — in support of his contention that Platonists, and not novelists, have always had a consummate prose style. To emphasize this point he adds an impressive list of nineteenth-century English prose stylists, including Ruskin and Pater.<sup>46</sup> Kassner's pronouncements on the novel are entirely in the spirit of George's 'Merksprüche' for the *Blätter*, where the genre is flatly rejected as confounding reportage with art.<sup>47</sup> However, there is some justice in the criticism levelled by one reviewer that Kassner's devaluation of novels as imperfect poetry is based on his prejudicial definition of them as 'Gedichte in Prosa'.<sup>48</sup> It must be said that in his zeal to provide an apology for prose non-fiction, Kassner throws the novel overboard, and his concessive remarks on the achievements and potential of the genre may indicate a certain uneasiness in his position.<sup>49</sup>

The poetry/prose distinction is also related to the preceding characterizations of the poetic and critical temperaments. Prose, which Kassner defines as having no rules, is the natural mode of expression for the Platonist whose existential quest is for freedom. Poetry on the other hand, being rule-governed, imposes formal constraints on the poet, whose work proceeds from the realm of absolute freedom. This is one source of Kassner's conservative distinction between poetry and prose. The other is more elusive and requires closer scrutiny. Kassner's insistence on the segregation of poetry and prose may not be prescriptive, but it is in a special sense law-like: 'Es gibt also Grenzen zwischen der Poesie und der Prosa, nach mystischen Gesetzen sind sie gezogen. Ich will zeigen, wie ich das meine.' (KSW I, p. 15) Kassner's demonstration of these laws — it should be noted that this is not a discursive explanation — introduces explicitly the notion of mysticism latent in his earlier presentation of the critic and the poet.

To demonstrate the mystical nature of his poetry/prose antithesis Kassner first distinguishes two ways of regarding the world in general and language in particular. The first considers the words of the poet or writer as subsumed under natural laws. Seen thus, words appear historically

<sup>46</sup> KSW I, p. 114.

<sup>47</sup> See p. 11, footnote 31 above.

<sup>48</sup> See C. J., (i.e. Jentsch, Carl), 'Künstlermystik', *Die Grenzboten. Zeitschrift für Politik, Litteratur und Kunst*, 59. Jg., 3. Vierteljahr, Heft 32, vom 10. August, Leipzig 1900, pp. 261–70 (p. 262).

<sup>49</sup> Kassner would appear to have later overcome this fashionable turn-of-the-century aversion to the novel and even translated into German Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, 'the most typical novel in world literature' (Shklovsky).

determined, and this, Kassner remarks, is not unjustifiably the dominant perspective of his age. According to this view, words, irrespective of use or author, are essentially expressive, a means to an end:

Die Verse und Worte sind eben nur Ausdruck, Mittel zu einem Zwecke, Talent eines Genies oder Schwachkopfes. Sie helfen der Emotion, und ob Shelley Epipsyichidion oder ein Temperenzler einen Tractat über die Ehescheidung schreibt, ist für den consequenten Psychologen gleichgiltig. Shelley, heisst es dann nur, ist ein Genie und der andere — ein Temperenzler. Der Ausdruck beider ist verschieden, aber was vorliegt, ist doch immer nur Ausdruck. (KSW I, p. 15)

Kassner's remark that this expressionistic psychologism is the dominant contemporary view of language might suggest him to be thinking of his positivist university teachers' understanding of literature as the expression of certain ideas, motifs, or themes. It should be noted, however, that he does not criticize this instrumentalist perspective on language, and even concedes that it has some justification.

The second perspective depicted by Kassner posits a radically different relationship between poet and world. Whereas adherents of the above view regard words as a naturally determined means of poetic self-expression, on the second view objects (including words) are felt to have a powerful absolute existence independent of the poet's individual psychology, and this entails a fundamentally different understanding of poetry:<sup>50</sup>

Die andere Art, die Dinge zu betrachten, ist diese: Man empfindet sie als etwas Absolutes, unabhängig Bestehendes, als eine Macht. Die Verse des Dichters sind als Genie über das Leben hingestreu und nehmen nur unter dem Einflusse, dem Zauber des Dichters die Form an, an der wir sie erkennen und nach der wir sie benennen. Der Dichter also nur der Diener eines höheren Sinnes, der sich an ihm in einer ungewöhnlichen Combination von Worten, Farben etc. äussert! (KSW I, p. 15)

This view of the absolute, self-subsisting power of objects effectively inverts the earlier relationship between poet and language. Whereas the psychologistic account of poetic expression accords words an auxiliary role, here it is the poet who serves a higher instance. On this account poetry is not self-expression in any naively subjectivist sense; it represents, rather, the magical transformation of the poetry inherent in life into the media of language and colour. It is tempting to regard this quasi-mystical account of poetry as the one to which Kassner would more readily have subscribed, but again it must be stressed that he presents both points of view as valid. This non-evaluative, relativist presentation of two apparently diametrically opposed perspectives on language and the world is typical of Kassner's (Platonist) logic, which is more a matter of conjunctive both/and than of disjunctive either/or. This integrative tendency is underlined by his ensuing criticism of early nineteenth-century German philosophers. According to Kassner, these philosophers (here he appears to be thinking of the Romantics) mistakenly held the latter view of poetry to be normative, and, by uttering their sentiments in the form of a law, marred any genuine understanding of the poet. The characteristically Platonist implication is that any absolute legislation on the nature of poetry is fundamentally mistaken. The early nineteenth-century German philosophers' error was, Kassner contends, to regard as exclusive facts phenomena which can only be matters of tact: 'Sie waren grosse, aber keine feinen, keine gewitzigten Denker. Denken ist Tact, Tact der grossen Musik, in der Alles zusammen stimmt [. . .]' (KSW I, p. 16). It would appear, then, that whatever his regard for

<sup>50</sup> Kassner's use of the word 'Ding' is loose and indeterminate; thus, my translation of the term as 'object' should not be confused with the strict philosophical sense of subject/object.

Friedrich Schlegel, Kassner's attitude to the philosophers of German Romanticism was not one of unconditional reverence.

The notion of music introduced here to illuminate the nature of 'tactful' thought is central to the mysticism of 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' and recurs in the essays on Rossetti, Swinburne, and Burne-Jones. Kassner's characterization of music in the following passage has marked affinities with the influential post-Romantic philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer:

Es ist die Art der Musik, dass sie die Dinge als Töne, als etwas in sich Abgeschlossenes, Absichtsloses, als etwas, das in seinem Sein das Werden, in der Idee den Willen einschliesst, und das Leben selbst als Accorde und Harmonieen nimmt. (KSW I, p. 16)

Music, for Schopenhauer, is the highest form of art. Of all the arts music comes closest to the direct expression of the Will and is, therefore, of a different order than those genres, such as literature and painting, in which the Will manifests itself in a mediated form.<sup>51</sup> Unlike Schopenhauer, however, Kassner presents music not as an individual aesthetic genre but as a metaphor of mystical perception generally.<sup>52</sup> In music, he asserts, the objects of the world are taken as being independent and free from the constraints of space, time, and causality. Thus, music encompasses both absolute being and becoming. The mystic, Kassner continues, is one who regards the objects of the world as being, like music, free and the laws which are revealed to him are the tragic laws of concatenation:

Der Mystiker betrachtet die Dinge frei und die Gesetze, die sich ihm enthüllen, sind die tragischen Gesetze, nach denen sich die freien Dinge mit einander verketten und an denen sie sich verschulden und der Mystiker ist wahrhaft frei, wenn er diese tragischen Gesetze wie die Tacte einer Musik wahrnimmt. (KSW I, p. 16)

Kassner's distinction between poetry and prose, then, proceeds not from scientific observation or deductive reasoning, nor ultimately from the historical tradition repeatedly adduced to illustrate his paradoxically conservative contentions. Rather, the so-called mystical law which distinguishes the two genres arises out of an interaction of subject and object, out of the intuitive perception of the essences of poetry and prose from their concrete manifestations, or, to use Kassner's metaphor, out of the intuition of their distinctive music:

Mystisches Denken ist intuitives Denken, das heisst den Genius der Dinge ausdenken, Musik denken, den Einfällen nachdenken, genial denken, als Künstler denken. Künstler sind die Dialektiker des mystischen Lebens und Mystiker Künstler des Denkens, die wahren Freidenker. Die Künstler schaffen den Tact des Lebens und die Mystiker denken ihn. (KSW I, p. 16)

Unlike the natural scientist and his counterpart the orthodox nineteenth-century positivist scholar, the mystic does not proceed from individual observations to all-encompassing general laws. Rather, by pursuing his intellectual impulses, he ingeniously intuits the musical essence of objects, their 'Genius'. By virtue of this procedure the mystic's thought is artistic rather than philosophical in any commonly accepted sense, and this suggests a reconciliation of the extensively illustrated poet/Platonist antithesis in the shared artistry of these polar types. Although the penultimate sentence of the above passage is rendered almost incomprehensible by the equivocation of the word 'Künstler' and the uncertain reference of 'Mystiker', Kassner

<sup>51</sup> See *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung I*, 'Drittes Buch. Die Welt als Vorstellung Zweite Betrachtung.: Die Vorstellung, unabhängig vom Satze des Grundes: Die Platonische Idee: Das Objekt der Kunst', § 52.

<sup>52</sup> This point is also made by Bong-Hi Cha, pp. 37–38.

appears to be suggesting that the mystic (Platonist?) is, like the poet, an artist — but one whose art is purely intellectual.

To illustrate the mystical spirit of poetry Kassner cites the example of Shelley, whom he describes as a born poet. His contention that Shelley's work has no practical function is clearly allied to the views of Hofmannsthal and George on the autonomy of art: 'Shelley darf nicht angewandt werden, das hiesse ihn zerstören.' (KSW I, p. 17) This autonomous poetry is inaccessible to the practically minded, and can best be understood by a Platonist:

Shelley ist nur Dichter und am besten wird ihn der Platoniker verstehen. Die Worte des Dichters kommen vom Ideal her, sie fallen uns zu, sie strahlen nieder, die Worte des Platonikers nahen sich dem Ideal, sie streben aufwärts und entfernen sich uns langsam. Sie tragen anfangs noch 'die Schwere vieler Erden' an sich und verlieren immer ein wenig davon auf der steigenden Bahn nach dem, das zu nennen sie anfangs so scheu sind. Sie sind wie die Wanderer nach den grossen, scheinenden Städten! Allmählich durch den Staub der Strassen dringen die Strahlen des Zieles und berühren die Lider erst leise. (KSW I, p. 17)

Here the Platonist's relationship to the poet is no longer merely spectatorial. The initial contrast of the poetic and Platonic modes of expression presented the Platonist as a mere onlooker, one whose words reflected the innate good fortune of the poet. While the Platonist may not be able directly to participate in the poet's happiness, the above passage reveals that Platonic writing is a form of ascent towards the ideal from which the critic is temperamentally estranged. Whereas the poet's radiant verse embodies the presence of the ideal, the Platonist's prose must ascend by means of commonplace expressions towards this distant light. This passage also shows that Kassner was not merely flattering Hofmannsthal when he wrote that he had often thought of the poet while writing *Die Mystik*.<sup>53</sup> The formulation 'die Schwere vieler Erden', here used to characterize the Platonist's earthbound vocabulary, is an unacknowledged quotation from the second strophe of Hofmannsthal's 'Gesellschaft' (1896), one of the poems later collected under the heading 'Gestalten'.<sup>54</sup> This depiction of the Platonist's strenuous ascent towards the ideal, characteristically expressed in images of light ('scheinend', 'Strahlen'), leads on to a further consideration of the respective languages of poet and Platonist, and eventually to the reconciliation of their diametrically opposed temperaments.

In the previous section I cited some common criticisms of the style of *Die Mystik*, and stated that they had been forestalled in the text. One of the most important explanations of the nature of Kassner's style and its lucidity (or apparent lack thereof) is provided by the following comments on the Platonist's distinctive use of words:

Der wahre Platoniker wählt die Worte, weil er am besten fühlt, wie viel von ihrem Sinne den Anderen gehört, oder er liebt es, die vielgedeuteten und vieldeutigen Worte, die Worte, die im Staube des täglichen Gebrauches ersticken, zu sich emporzuführen. Niemand fühlt mehr das Allgemeine, Gemeine, die ὄψις in sich als der Platoniker und niemand hat so das Bedürfnis, das Tägliche so ewig zu sagen wie gerade er. Prosa ist Wahl, Veredelung, Bildung, die Poesie schenkt sich, führt zusammen, verwirrt, sie ist demokratisch wie ein Gott, der unter das Volk tritt. Lesen Sie die guten Prosaiker und Sie werden finden, dass diese nie mit grossen Worten beginnen. Sie nehmen die unscheinbaren und ordinären Worte, durchleuchten sie und machen sie ungewöhnlich mit einem Sinne, den die Anderen nicht kennen, bis sie ganz Licht, ganz eigenster Sinn sind. Die letzten Sätze sind da immer wie ein Abklingen von Handschellen bei einem Gefangenen, ein endliches Durchbrechen der Sonne am Nachmittage, die zu Gebete erhobenen Arme des 'Adorante'. (KSW I, pp. 17–18)

<sup>53</sup> Kassner to Hofmannsthal, 17 December 1901, cited on p. 6 above.

<sup>54</sup> HSW I, pp. 56–57 (p. 56).

Whereas poetry is a quasi-divine gift, effortlessly descending from the luminous ideal to the quotidian, the Platonist must painstakingly choose his words from the common currency of language. This point, while referring to Platonism generally, also serves to explain the recurrent, and by no means fortuitous, use of 'Schein' in Kassner's text — for this is one of those 'vielgedeuteten und vieldeutigen Worte', the meaning of which is both open to subjective interpretations and inherently plural. Kassner's choice of the related and equally ambiguous 'unscheinbar' ('inconspicuous' / 'dull' / 'lacklustre') to characterize mundane Platonist vocabulary continues the imagery of luminosity introduced as the indeterminate 'grosses Licht' and developed in the use of 'der grosse Schein' as a translation of 'Ideal', thereby making the inconspicuous paradoxically conspicuous. This imagery is further evident in the notion of the Platonist's characteristic illuminating ('durchleuchten') of everyday words which estranges them from their common meanings. Here the ambiguity is particularly marked, as 'durchleuchten' means both to illuminate and to X-ray.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the unusual meaning which a common word acquires in Platonist usage is simultaneously the Platonist's subjective projection (illumination) and a hidden aspect of the word's objective meaning, visible, as it were, only to X-rays. This ambiguity of subjective and objective is underlined by the formulation 'eigenster Sinn', which means that the Platonist's words take on both his *and* their own distinctive sense. The meaning of his words is simultaneously strange ('eigen') and characteristic ('eigen').<sup>56</sup> What this suggests is that the final liberating radiance of Platonist prose derives both from the writer and from his inherently polysemantic vocabulary. This is another example of the paradoxical conservatism of Kassner's text, for just as his critic turned out in the light of forgotten traditions to be less novel than he at first appeared, so the characteristic strangeness of the Platonist's language is, in part at least, the strangeness of meanings which have been forgotten and are revealed by the Platonist as linguistic radiographer. The final sentence of the above passage draws together the notions of the sun (associated with the ideal), the Platonist's existential quest for freedom, and the image of the 'Adorante' (symbol of Platonic yearning), suggesting a form of redemption through writing.

The conclusion of Kassner's extended antithetical presentation of 'Dichter' and 'Platoniker', is remarkable for its explicit resolution of the opposition elaborated in the course of the preceding pages:

Der Dichter thut eigentlich nichts anderes, als dass er für die grosse Seele Aller, die auch seine Seele ist, eigene Formen findet, der Platoniker sucht in den vielfach verschlungenen Körpern des Lebens seine eigene Seele. Der Dichter — schliessen wir mit den Antithesen ab — verkörpert, schafft, kommt entgegen, der Platoniker vergeistigt, erzieht, zieht herauf und entzieht sich. Wie zwei Brüder sind sie. Der Eine kommt den Berg herab, die Sonne im Rücken, in der Hand die Gaben der Höhen wie Flammen, die ihn nicht sengen, der Andere steigt den Berg herauf, seine Hände sind leer und seine Augen vergessen. Sie begegnen einander und tauschen die Zeichen, mit denen sie dem Leben verschworen sind. (KSW I, p. 18)

The opening sentence shows that Kassner's ideal critic is not only estranged from the realm of ideality, like his precursor the professor of 'Sonnengnade', he is estranged from himself. In contrast to the creative poet, whose work is an individual embodiment of the common soul in all things, the critic seeks his soul in the variously entwined forms of life. Kassner's formulation

<sup>55</sup> The usage 'vermittels der Röntgenstrahlen durchleuchten' was already established by 1899, and would no doubt have been all too familiar to Kassner as a consequence of his orthopaedic therapy. See *Muret-Sanders English-German and German-English Dictionary*, Part Second, German-English (Berlin, 1899), p. 524.

<sup>56</sup> See Kassner's similarly ambiguous use of 'eigen' in his comment that his overambitious essay on Blake is 'in eigenen Worten, in sehr eigenen Worten, die aber doch nicht mir gehören.' (BaT, p. 81) Cited p. 115, footnote 37 above.

'in den vielfach verschlungenen Körpern des Lebens' is particularly noteworthy, being reminiscent both of the serpentine convulvuli which were a favourite pictorial motif of decorative *Jugendstil*, and of a passage from Hofmannsthal's *Märchen der 672. Nacht* (1895).<sup>57</sup> The protagonist of this dark 'fairy tale', the orphaned son of a wealthy merchant, is yet another example of the cloistered aesthete who recurs in Hofmannsthal's work of the 1890s. In the opening pages of the story, the young man's absorbed contemplation of his beautiful possessions is described in considerable detail, and Kassner's description of his critic's relationship to the objects of life bears a striking resemblance to the following sentence: 'Er erkannte in den Ornamenten, die sich verschlingen, ein verzaubertes Bild der verschlungenen Wunder der Welt.' (HSW XXVIII, p. 15) Kassner varies Hofmannsthal's motif by stating that the critic's contemplation of such objects is a quest for the personal identity he lacks.<sup>58</sup> Another notable feature of the above passage from 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' is the parenthetical remark 'schliessen wir mit den Antithesen ab'. Given the extended use of antithesis preceding this part of the discussion, these words can be read as almost an expression of exasperation, and are certainly a reflexive comment on the style of the text. More importantly, however, they signal the resolution of the 'Dichter'/'Platoniker' antithesis which immediately follows. Kassner's likening of poet and critic to two brothers places them in a family relationship which unites their disparate qualities. Their filial encounter on the mountain slope shows that their kinship has none of the destructive tendencies which characterized the artist/critic relationship in 'Sonnengnade'.

Having brought the antithetical discussion of his two ideal types to this reconciliatory climax, Kassner anticipates a possible interjection from his audience. The foregoing is a depiction of the spirit ('Genius') of poet and critic. But, one might object, these unadulterated types are hardly ever found in real life. This Kassner willingly concedes, and goes on to clarify the relationship between his ideal types and the characters of actual poets and critics. In life, he writes, many poets display the qualities of the ideal Platonist and vice versa. Indeed, most nineteenth-century poets are also to a greater or lesser extent Platonists: 'Im 19. Jahrhundert gibt es zwei oder drei Dichter, die nicht auch Platoniker sind.' (KSW I, p. 19) This, he explains, is because life intermixes the ideal character types:

Das Leben bringt die Genien durcheinander, vermischt sie. Seine Formen und Wirklichkeiten sind die Verhältnisse der Genien zu einander. Ein jedes Ding ist relativ. Und wenn grosse Worte unser Leben bestimmen, so wissen wir, dass sie uns gerade soviel werth sind als wir unsere Augenblicke ihnen verantworten können. Das Ideal — ein grosses Wort, das ein Jahrhundert dem anderen zuwirft — ist gerade den Ehrgeiz werth, mit dem wir nach ihm streben, die Umstände werth, die wir machen, um zu ihm zu gelangen, die Formen werth, an denen es sich bricht. (KSW I, p. 19)

Relative here does not merely mean relative to an ideal. Kassner's typically Platonist relativism is all-embracing, applying even to the ideal itself. The value of an ideal is not absolute, but relative to the effort expended on it, and, crucially, to the forms in which it is manifest (or to use Kassner's optical metaphor, prismatically refracted). This has the startling implication that the value of Kassner's ideal types, his 'Dichter' and 'Platoniker', is not determinable with reference

<sup>57</sup> This was one of the texts Hofmannsthal had sent to Kassner after their first meeting. See Hofmannsthal to Kassner, 11 December 1901, cited on p. 1 above.

<sup>58</sup> In her brief discussion of *Die Mystik*, Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf also draws attention to the critic's derivation of self from external objects: 'Ähnlichkeit und Nähe also werden dem Dichter zugesprochen, Unähnlichkeit und Ferne dem Platoniker, der zudem sein Ich von einem Außen ableitet, während der Dichter ein Außen für sein Ich sucht.' *Mystik der Moderne: die visionäre Ästhetik der deutschen Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1989), p. 104.

to some absolute standard, but arises, rather, from his efforts to give them linguistic form. As seen in the previous chapter, Kassner's preoccupation with form radically differentiated his engagement with literature and art from that of his university teachers. Towards the end of his introductory oration, he gives an account of form and its relationship to the ideal:

Das Ideal, das keine Formen gebiert, ist ein unfruchtbares Ideal, überhaupt Nichts, eine fromme Lüge, durch die Sie wie durch Schatten greifen. Und eben diese Formen sind die Zeichen, von denen ich sagte, dass Dichter und Platoniker sie tauschen. Die Lust des Dichters und die Sehnsucht des Platonikers — sie gehen durch diese Formen wie durch Thore hindurch. Die Formen sind das erlebte Leben, eine Unzahl goldener Thore und hölzerner Hinterthüren, durch die Sie — verschwinden, sich verabschieden. Das Ideal ist immer das, wohin Sie verschwinden, entschwinden, wo Sie nicht mehr da sind, der Sitz der Ideen Plato's, der letzte Himmel Dante's, irgend ein grosses Glück, das Sie niemandem mehr verräth. (KSW I, pp. 19–20)

From this it is clear that, as indicated earlier, Kassner's ideal ('der grosse Schein') is immanent and not transcendent. On this account, an ideal which does not bring forth forms is not merely barren, it is non-existent. Furthermore, as was seen to be the case with the painter's redemptive self-portrait in 'Sonnengnade', aesthetic form is not an end in itself; it is, rather, the gateway to self-transcendence, the medium through which the artist's personality disappears. This understanding of the redemptive potential of form relates Kassner's aesthetics to the notion of impersonality, a key tenet of Modernism from Flaubert to the present.<sup>59</sup>

The concrete nature of Kassner's ideal, implicit in the above passage, is stated explicitly in the striking penultimate paragraphs of 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker':

Das Leben selbst ist die mystische Tugend, die Summe der Dichterthaten und Gedanken der Platoniker, der Schönheit, die wie eine Ewigkeit oder ein Gedicht uns zufällt und der Gedanken, die an der Schönheit die Liebe zeugen — τóκος ἐν τῷ καλῷ.  
Das Ideal, das Plato von der Erde abstahiert und in's Ueberirdische versetzt hatte, es ist für uns auf die Erde zurückgefallen und hat wild und sündhaft, wenn Sie wollen, die Formen des Lebens umarmt. (KSW I, p. 21)

The Greek quotation, from Socrates' speech on the nature of love in the *Symposium*, translates as 'Zeugen im Schönen' (KSW II, p. 429) and serves to link Kassner's understanding of his Platonist critic's love of beauty with the canonical notion of platonic love.<sup>60</sup> However, whereas in the *Symposium* Socrates presents the love of mutable earthly beauty as the philosophical path to perception of the immutable Idea of the beautiful, Kassner's imagery of carnal lust emphatically brings the transcendent Platonic Idea down to earth. This variation of Plato's philosophical Eros not only recalls Kassner's erotic self-characterizations as critic discussed in the previous chapter, it shows that, like Pater in the 'Preface' of *The Renaissance*, Kassner is interested not in abstract notions of beauty, but in its concrete embodiment. This underlines the difference between Kassner's Platonism and that of Plato; in *Die Mystik* the ideal is immanent, having no existence apart from its formal manifestations.

Kassner's peroration — if the concluding paragraph of a speech fragment can be described as such — combines the pervasive imagery of light discussed above with a restatement of the kinship of artistry between the active poet and contemplative Platonist:

Das Leben der Menschen ist nichts anderes als ein Warten auf die Flammen, die sich aus diesem bleichen Scheine lösen wie feurige Stimmen aus einem grossen Schweigen. Ob der

<sup>59</sup> For an excellent recent discussion of the notion of artistic impersonality see Michael Wood, *The Magician's Doubts: Nabokov and the Risks of Fiction* (London, 1994), Chapter One 'Deaths of the Author', pp. 9–28.

<sup>60</sup> On Kassner's early plan to reinterpret this part of the *Symposium* for the conclusion of *Die Mystik*, see p. 104 above.



Mensch nun als Dichter in's Leben tritt und die Flammen wie bunte Blüten über die Dinge ausschüttet oder ob er als Platoniker sich selbst zur Flammenweihe erzieht, es ist Alles nur Sache des menschlichen Genius. Er ist niemandem verantwortlich, er ist das Glück. Man fragt die Menschen nur, ob sie Künstler sind und wie ihr Genius am Leben sich bricht. Er bricht sich — gleich dem Lichte am Prisma — an ihren Schöpfungen oder an ihren Gedanken. Im letzten Falle sind sie Künstler des Gedankens. (KSW I, pp. 21–22)

Although the image of fire, earlier associated with the poet's god-given gift of linguistic expression, is an ancient symbol of divine power, there is also a hint of Pater's 'hard gem-like flame' here.<sup>61</sup> What must be noted, however, is the indication that, be he poet or Platonist, an artist's temperamental orientation is beyond his control. There can be no free will in such matters — one cannot choose to be a poet or a Platonist. The consequence of this remark for the style of *Die Mystik* should not be overlooked; for, as Hofmannsthal put it, this is the self-characterization of a Platonist, and thus the reader must realize that the remaining essays of the volume will be Platonist texts — in Kassner's terms he could write no other.

What conclusions, then, can be drawn from this introductory oration? From the above close reading it emerges that Kassner's conception of criticism is paradoxically both highly individual and a typical product of its time. The individuality of Kassner's position is seen in his insistence that his 'Platoniker' is not to be confused with the critic in the debased popular sense. The Platonic critic's function is not confined to mediating between poet and public; his work is, rather, primarily an existential quest for identity and redemption. This emphasis on the relationship between the critic's innate temperament and his distinctive form of literary expression reflects Kassner's concern with the relationship between life and art discussed in the previous chapter, and shows that the original characterization of his planned study of English poetry as 'eine Psychologie und Ästhetik' applies equally to his treatment of the typical psychology and linguistic media of critic and poet. While in these respects a personal document, 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' also reflects broader concerns in turn-of-the-century non-Naturalist aesthetics. Kassner's reading of the mid-1890s — what I have called his remedial self-education in the canon of *Jung-Wien* — finds expression in a number of features of the text, most notably its use of *Jugendstil* imagery, the devaluation of the novel, and the neoconservative emphasis on (reinterpreted) history and tradition. These elements, and in particular the omnipresence of Plato, all bear witness to Kassner's extensive literary studies in Göttingen and England.

To return to the questions raised at the end of the previous section: How had the reviewers of *Die Mystik* misunderstood the volume? How had Kassner forestalled the criticisms levelled at the style and clarity of his work? It is important to realize that, as Hofmannsthal put it, 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' is a self-characterization of its author as critic, as a Platonist — or at least as one in whom the Platonic temperament is dominant. Thus, the personal and stylistic characteristics attributed to the Platonist must be seen as applying to Kassner and his critical essays. This has a number of implications. First, the reader can expect no final conclusions from these essays: the Platonist's work is of its nature inconclusive, absolute clarity being the natural province of the poet. This feature of Kassner's work — what could be called its resistance to closure — is advertised in the subtitle of 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' which classifies the text as fragment. The openness of the text radically differentiates Kassner's criticism from the

<sup>61</sup> See *The Renaissance*, 'Conclusion', p. 152: 'To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.'

formal closure of Hofmannsthal's essays on English art. Secondly, the illumination afforded by Kassner's essays cannot be immediate nor can it be expressed in 'grand words', be these propositions or widely accepted generalizations. By definition the Platonist is always on his way towards an unattainable goal, and thus the meaning of his seemingly commonplace words is not final but emerges from their interplay in the course of his work. Fittingly, Kassner provides an example of this network of meaning in his use of inherently polysemantic words to form metaphors of illumination ('Schein', 'grosses Licht', 'unscheinbar', 'durchleuchten').

Hofmannsthal's comparison of his reading of *Die Mystik* to the brief, intense illumination of flashes of lightning is particularly apt, for 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker', like his 'Algernon Charles Swinburne', simultaneously expounds and enacts its conception of art.

While explicitly and implicitly presenting the ideal critic as an artist 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' reveals a significant difference between Kassner's and Hofmannsthal's practice of criticism as art. Whereas Hofmannsthal's essays, in particular 'Algernon Charles Swinburne', are characterized by their exploitation of the sensuous qualities of language (alliteration, assonance, sentence rhythm, etc), Kassner's theory and practice of criticism is founded on the intelligible content of carefully selected commonplace words, specifically their inherent polysemantic qualities. His distaste for philology and his later claims to have educated himself notwithstanding, Kassner's thorough academic grounding in German language would appear to have been fruitful for his distinctive style.

In 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker', then, Kassner had given a personal, topical, and dauntingly erudite apology for prose non-fiction and criticism as art.<sup>62</sup> Reviewers could hardly claim that Kassner had not warned them what to expect from his essays. The distinctive style of *Die Mystik* is adumbrated in the author's introductory self-characterization; his critical essays on English art were not going to be scholarly in any conventional sense. Of course, reviewers were still free to disagree with Kassner's notion of criticism (which, not surprisingly, few did), or simply to reject it out of hand (the more common response). In the following section I will examine the practical, if unsystematic, application of Kassner's Platonist criticism in his essays on nineteenth-century English artists, and particularly in those on the Pre-Raphaelites.

#### IV AN IMAGINATIVE HISTORY OF PRE-RAPHAELITISM

'Man ist genötigt, sich auf Kassners Darstellung, auf seine divagierende Argumentation einzulassen, die er selbst als die dramatische Einheit von Dichten und Denken charakterisiert hat. Sie folgt einem eigenen Prinzip des Assoziativen und Analogischen, das sich abgrenzt gegenüber der praktischen Logik der Schulphilosophie mit ihrem Satz der Identität.' (Klaus E. Bohnenkamp)<sup>63</sup>

The extensive exposition of 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' in the previous section shows why detailed examination of the remaining essays of *Die Mystik* would not be feasible in this study. As one of Kassner's reviewers put it, this is 'ein wissensvolles [*sic*] und übervolles Buch, in dem mehr Gelehrsamkeit und Belesenheit steckt als in drei Dutzend Dissertationen'; and, as if that were not enough, he goes on to state that *Die Mystik* contains a more comprehensive knowledge

<sup>62</sup> In his earliest literary criticism Georg Lukács adopted many central tenets of Kassner's Platonic criticism, but wisely presented the essay as the distinctive form of critical discourse, thereby leaving scope for the novel and prose fiction as aesthetically respectable genres. See 'Über Wesen und Form des Essays. Ein Brief an Leo Popper', in Lukács, *Die Seele und die Formen. (Essays)* (Neuwied and Berlin, 1971), pp. 7–31.

<sup>63</sup> Bohnenkamp, *op. cit.*, p. 474.

of English literature, world literature, and philosophy than two dozen 'Habilitationsschriften'.<sup>64</sup> This, of course, is comic hyperbole, but it is not wholly unfounded. On average the critical essays of *Die Mystik* are some twenty-five pages long, and each contains a profusion of themes and daunting range of erudite allusions. To analyse the essays on Pre-Raphaelitism in the same detail as 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' — or Hofmannsthal's comparatively short feuilletons — would obviously be impractical. How, then, are Kassner's essays to be approached?

The foregoing reading of 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' highlights two potential dangers for academic critics of Kassner's early work. First, if one examines his complex and unsystematic essays in minute detail one can soon become lost in their characteristic density of erudition, imagery, definition, and divagation. The temptation to concentrate on every word of Kassner's extraordinarily dense prose is understandable, and quite in keeping with the Platonic spirit of his criticism; but to follow his thought so closely is more likely to end in confusion than in comprehension. The second potential danger is that the critic adopts the — still more seductive — expedient of simplifying and systematizing Kassner's complex thought. However, as my analysis of 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' will have shown, any attempt to abstract a simple generalized position from Kassner's prose must wilfully ignore its characteristic paradoxes and ambiguities, its avowed incompleteness, and its eschewal of absolute positions. Indeed, I would contend that to approach Kassner in terms of generalizations constitutes a more serious error than reading his work in excessive detail. This danger is illustrated by Bong-Hi Cha's *post hoc* approach to *Die Mystik*, which she reads in terms of Kassner's *Das Physiognomische Weltbild* (1930). Part of her method consists in amassing disparate material from Kassner's work from 1900 to 1930, and then, by all but ignoring the complications of historical context, using this material to explicate a number of supposedly central Kassnerian terms as elements of a consistent and essentially unchanging theory.<sup>65</sup> This may be reassuring for the uninitiated reader, but the theoretical cohesion implied by such a presentation is quite spurious and achieved only by projecting a system onto what are openly unsystematic texts. The critic of *Die Mystik*, then, is faced with the problem of doing justice to the complexity and distinctiveness of the text without plunging the reader into utter darkness or forcing Kassner's thought into the straitjacket of an inappropriate system. These difficulties are further compounded by the absence of useful critical studies of Kassner's early work. Although the ten volumes of *Sämtliche Werke* contain vast quantities of painstaking and invaluable scholarly research, little attention has yet been given to critical interpretation. The critic of *Die Mystik* is, therefore, compelled to make basic decisions in order to delimit the scope of his or her interpretation.

In what follows I will attempt to steer a middle course between the extremes of minute analysis and systematic generalization. My discussion will focus on a number of interrelated issues. First, I will seek to convey the combination of factual scholarship and imaginative interpretation characteristic of Kassner's criticism. Secondly, I will, where appropriate, relate the apparently individualistic interpretations of English artists advanced in *Die Mystik* to the context of turn-of-the-century German and Austrian literature. Throughout I will draw particular attention to parallels and divergences between Kassner's interpretations of English art and those proposed in Hofmannsthal's essays. As mentioned earlier, there is an obvious difference between these essays and those of *Die Mystik*. Although ostensibly concerned with the

<sup>64</sup> Max Meyerfeld, 'Ein Stilsucher', col. 178.

<sup>65</sup> See Bong-Hi Cha, pp. 21–31.

same subject matter as Hofmannsthal's self-contained critical feuilletons, the chapters of *Die Mystik* are embedded in the total context of the book and must, therefore, be read with some reference to this context.

As its subtitle, *Über englische Dichter und Maler im 19. Jahrhundert*, indicates, *Die Mystik* is a history of nineteenth-century English art, albeit an unorthodox one. In keeping with the historical subtitle, Kassner presents most of the artists discussed in chronological order: Blake, Shelley, Keats, the Pre-Raphaelites, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Swinburne, Morris and Burne-Jones.<sup>66</sup> The only obvious historical anomaly is that Robert Browning, the subject of Kassner's final critical essay, should appear much earlier in the book. This departure from chronology is intentional and is explained by Kassner's justified understanding of Browning as a poet outside the main (Romantic/Pre-Raphaelite) current of his nineteenth-century English literary history.<sup>67</sup> Had the essay on Browning (1812–89) appeared where it properly belongs — between those on Keats (1795–1821) and the Pre-Raphaelites (1848–?) — it would have interrupted the line of development with which Kassner is centrally concerned in *Die Mystik*, namely the emergence of a distinctively modern aesthetic sensibility which in English art has its origins in the life and work of Keats, is developed by the Pre-Raphaelites, and finds its ultimate expression in Burne-Jones. As the central essays of the volume trace this line of development, Kassner's interpretations of individual artists cannot easily be read in isolation from those of their predecessors. Although they do not follow in any logical or causal sense from the preceding chapters, the later essays of the volume can only be properly understood if related to what has gone before. An adequate analysis of Kassner's historical-critical interpretations of those English artists treated by Hofmannsthal must, then, follow this line of artistic development from its origins in the life and work of Keats, a poet not discussed by Hofmannsthal. I will begin my readings, therefore, with Kassner's essay on Keats and go on to examine the development of themes established there in the essays on the artists treated in Hofmannsthal's critical essays: the Pre-Raphaelites generally, Rossetti, Swinburne, and Burne-Jones.

i) 'John Keats'

It will be remembered that in his second letter to Kassner, Hofmannsthal characterized his response to *Die Mystik* as follows: 'Ich konnte es lesen, wie einen Brief, ja manchmal wie einen an mich gerichteten Brief'.<sup>68</sup> In chapter one I showed how this feeling of intense affinity is partly traceable to Hofmannsthal's influence on Kassner's critical engagement with English literature, and in my discussion of 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' I drew attention to Kassner's use of an unacknowledged quotation from Hofmannsthal's poem 'Gesellschaft' to characterize the mundane vocabulary of his ideal critic.<sup>69</sup> Both these facts show Kassner's comment that he had often thought of Hofmannsthal during the writing of *Die Mystik* to be something more than idle flattery,<sup>70</sup> but they would not in themselves be sufficient to explain the poet's reading of the book as a personal letter. Perhaps the most striking evidence of Hofmannsthal's presence in Kassner's interpretations of English art is provided by the essay on

<sup>66</sup> It could be argued that Morris and Burne-Jones should precede Swinburne who was their junior by three and four years respectively. However, as will be seen, in *Die Mystik* they appear after Swinburne as Kassner interprets their roughly contemporaneous work as the culmination of a common aesthetic sensibility.

<sup>67</sup> See KSW I, p. 241.

<sup>68</sup> Hofmannsthal to Kassner, 22 (?) December 1901, cited on p. 2 above.

<sup>69</sup> See p. 125 above.

<sup>70</sup> Kassner to Hofmannsthal, 17 December 1901, cited on p. 6 above.

Keats. In chapter one I noted that Hofmannsthal is referred to, directly or obliquely, on a number of occasions in the course of *Die Mystik*;<sup>71</sup> in the early pages of the Keats essay Hofmannsthal, although unnamed, is almost omnipresent. The following discussion focuses on three interrelated aspects of Kassner's essay: first, its interpretation of Keats's life and the role of Hofmannsthal in this interpretation; secondly, the significance of Keats's life for subsequent artists; and finally, the distinctive nature of Keats's poetic achievement and its relationship to the work of his successors.

The introductory paragraph of Kassner's essay is a typical example of the dissimulation characteristic of his work.<sup>72</sup> He opens by stating that he has no intention of relating the well-known events of Keats's life: 'Ich will nicht von den Ereignissen seines kurzen Lebens erzählen.' (KSW I, p. 110) Ironically, he then goes on to sketch these events before referring anyone interested in such mundane information to the poet's biography. This seemingly perfunctory gesture serves both to distance Kassner's critical approach from factual biography and to demonstrate his close acquaintance with the events of Keats's life. Thus, Kassner shows himself to be interested in the poet's biography, but not in the exhaustive empirical sense of positivist literary scholarship. His aim, rather, is to establish, by means of selection and imaginative interpretation, the essential truth of this life — what he elsewhere calls, 'das Grundwahr'.<sup>73</sup> In these respects 'John Keats' represents a continuation of the kind of criticism Kassner had first practised in his doctoral dissertation, and of the Platonist criticism expounded in the opening chapter of *Die Mystik*. In keeping with his psychological/aesthetic approach, the essay focuses the problematic relationship between life and art — not in any abstract sense, but as manifest in the life and work of an individual artist. Accordingly, the two main textual sources for Kassner's discussion are Keats's letters, which are taken as illustrative of his life, and his poetry.

Drawing on a laudatory remark made by Tennyson, Kassner presents Keats's role in the development of nineteenth-century English poetry as that of teacher: 'Keats ist wirklich der Lehrer der grossen Dichter von Tennyson bis William Morris.' (KSW I, p. 111) With characteristic Platonist reticence, Kassner defers consideration of the nature of Keats's educative example until he has given an account of the poet's temperament. This is said to consist of two main elements: his sensual imagination, and his thought:

sein Denken schlägt Brücken vom Helden zu dem, der ihn liebt. Und Held ist für ihn alles, was seine Phantasie oder Sinnlichkeit erregt. Darf man bei Keats überhaupt zwischen Phantasie und Sinnlichkeit unterscheiden? Held für ihn ist der Ritter, dessen Speer in der Sonne glänzt, und der Baum, in dessen Blättern Licht und Schatten spielen. (KSW I, p. 111)

Kassner's use of 'Sinnlichkeit' here requires some comment. This is yet another of these inherently polysemantic everyday words which the Platonist critic was said to love. In common usage this word can mean both (neutral) 'sensuousness', and (erotic) 'sensuality', although the former meaning is the more common. In view of the decidedly carnal reinterpretation of Platonic Eros in 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker', I have opted for the ambiguous English 'sensuality' and its relatives as the most appropriate translations of this central term. In the above passage,

<sup>71</sup> See p. 6, footnote 13 above.

<sup>72</sup> See Hofmannsthal, 'Rudolf Kassner [Notizen]' (1929), RA III, p. 143: 'Gemeinsam ist dem Kassnerschen Werk mit dem erst vor kurzem in seiner ganzen Tragweite erkannten Werk Kierkegaards vielleicht jene eigentümliche Dissimulation: der Wille, das Tiefe und Umfassende in einer solchen künstlerisch verdeckten Weise vorzubringen, als handle es sich um Einzelnes, Besonderes, ja gar um Unbedeutendes [...].'

<sup>73</sup> See EJ, p. 32 and footnote 27; also KSW I, p. 71. See above, Chapter 2, section IV, *passim*.

then, Kassner's point is that the object of the poet's love is beauty, and that for Keats there is no distinction between the (imagined) beauty of heroic legend and the (sensual) beauty of the natural world. The role of Keats's thought is to bridge the gap between the poet as lover of sensual/imaginary beauty and the objects he loves. Thus, what Keats's 'pupils' learned from him was a peculiar mixture of sensuality and philosophy:

Seine Schüler sind die Aestheten mit ihrer krankhaften Art zu geniessen, und sein Schönheitsgefühl ist wie bei vielen späteren englischen Künstlern eine eigenthümliche Mischung von Sinnlichkeit und Philosophie. (KSW I, p. 111)

While Keats's sense of beauty is said to combine the sensual and the intellectual, in the course of Kassner's discussion it becomes clear that these poles are not united in most of the poet's work. Initially at least, Keats's sensualism and philosophy found separate expression — the former in his poetry, and the latter in his correspondence. This combination of sensuality and philosophy should be noted, as it is one of the central themes of Kassner's essays on the Pre-Raphaelites.<sup>74</sup>

According to Kassner, Keats's educative example is to be found not only in his poetry, but also in his life, and the significance of this life for his successors lies in what Kassner calls its tragedy. By this he does not merely mean the fact that the poet died young. When Kassner describes Keats's life as a tragedy, he means this quite literally; that is, he interprets the poet's life as a work of art. Keats's so-called tragedy is said to have arisen from a number of factors. First, there is the poet's uncompromising desire to be an artist and nothing but an artist, an ambition which necessarily increases his awareness of his humanity: 'Keats will nur Künstler sein und empfindet seine Menschlichkeit eben darum am intensivsten.' (KSW I, p. 111) Kassner's point is that Keats's exclusively artistic aspirations and his conception of poetry as vocation generate a conflict between the high demands of art and common human frailty.

The second factor in Keats's tragedy is more complex and is said to emerge from his early letters, which Kassner characterizes as psychological documents of European significance:

Keats' Briefe sind für die Psychologie des Künstlers im allgemeinen ebenso bedeutend wie etwa die Briefe Flaubert's und das Journal der Bashkirtseff. Sie bedeuten eine Erziehung des Dichters, und ich will zeigen, wie sie die Entwicklung einer merkwürdigen und grossen Tragödie weisen. (KSW I, p. 112)

Keats's letters shed light not only on the poet's own life, but on the psychology of the modern artist generally. The most noteworthy example of this wider significance is provided by Kassner's extensive quotation from the well-known letter to Richard Woodhouse in which Keats expounds his notion of the 'chameleon poet'.<sup>75</sup> Here Keats explains his understanding of himself as representing the type of poet who possesses neither determinate character nor personal identity, consisting purely of sympathetic impressions of others. Kassner interprets this self-characterization as the first statement of a particularly modern poetic psychology:

So hat noch niemand vor Keats gesprochen. Der Dichter, wie er einer ist, sei da, Eindrücke zu empfangen; seine Seele müsse sich den Dingen um ihn herum verschenken, und er verliere sein Wesen. 'Lasst uns öffnen unsere Seelen wie Blumen und seien wir passiv und empfänglich'. (KSW I, p. 113)

<sup>74</sup> It is conceivable that Kassner's characterization of Keats's sensual/intellectual temperament and its relationship to aestheticism was inspired by Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* which is subtitled *His Sensations and Ideas*.

<sup>75</sup> Keats to Woodhouse, 27 October 1818. See Richard Monckton Milnes, (Lord Houghton), *The Life and Letters of John Keats*, introduced by Sylvia Norman (London, New York, 1969), pp. 133–35 (p. 134). Kassner quotes extensively from the letter in his own German translation, which, on the whole, is faithful to the original. See Kassner's translation (KSW I, p. 116), and the editors' citation of the English original. (KSW II, pp. 451–52)

The formulation of this well-founded gloss subtly relates Keats's thoughts on his poetic psychology to the aesthetic and philosophical concerns of Kassner's Viennese contemporaries. The emphasis on receptivity to impressions and the concomitant dissolution of personal identity underlines Keats's affinities not only with Kassner's constitutionally indeterminate 'Platoniker', but also with late nineteenth-century Impressionism, which in turn-of-the-century Vienna was finding belated philosophical legitimation in Ernst Mach's *Beiträge zur Analyse der Empfindungen* (1886).<sup>76</sup> It is notable that after 1900 a number of Austrian writers associated Keats with the Impressionistic sensibility. For example, although vehemently opposed to the disintegrative implications of Mach's sensationalist epistemology, in his *Geschlecht und Charakter* (1903) the Viennese philosopher Otto Weininger quotes from Keats's letter to Woodhouse in the notes to his discussion of genius and personal identity, calling it 'das hochinteressante Bekenntnis des auf dem Kontinent wenig gewürdigten englischen Dichters John Keats.'<sup>77</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that Weininger had read *Die Mystik*, but Kassner would appear to have been among the first to draw attention to the affinities between the English poet's self-characterization and the aesthetic and philosophical concerns of *fin de siècle* Vienna.

More specifically, Kassner's characterization of Keats's impressionistic psychology corresponds to the 'Depersonalisation' — the dissolution of the unified subject — which has been said to recur thematically and formally in Hofmannsthal's work of the 1890s, culminating in the epistemological crisis of the *Chandos-Brief* (1902).<sup>78</sup> Hofmannsthal himself was clearly well aware of the affinities between his early work and Keats's poetic psychology. Some five or six years after first reading *Die Mystik*, he noted the words 'Der Kaufmannssohn' next to the Keats quotation in *Geschlecht und Charakter*, thereby identifying the impressionable 'chameleon poet' with the protagonist of his *Das Märchen der 672. Nacht*.<sup>79</sup> While it remains uncertain if Hofmannsthal first learned of Keats's epistolary self-characterization from Kassner, in a letter of 1907 he expressed his assessment of its significance as follows:

Dieser Brief hat mich sehr entlastet, als er mir vor Jahren das erstmal in die Hand kam. Ein Dichter zu sein, ist eine Sache, gegen die man sich nicht helfen kann. (HSW XXVIII, p. 210)<sup>80</sup>

Although there is no mention here of *Die Mystik*, this passage closely resembles Hofmannsthal's formulation of his feelings of relief and illumination on first reading the volume:

nie waren fortlaufende Gedanken von Schopenhauer, von Nietzsche oder anderen dgl. imstande, mir annähernd solches inneres Glück zu geben, eine solche Erleuchtung meiner Selbst bis in den tiefsten Kern hinein, ein solches Begreifen, warum man dichtet, was das ist, wenn man dichtet, was es mit dem Dasein zu tun hat. Während ich las und las, war mir, als wären Lasten von meiner Brust abgewälzt [. . .]<sup>81</sup>

In view of this similarity, it is conceivable that Kassner's essay on Keats drew Hofmannsthal's attention to the notion of the 'chameleon poet' and suggested its affinities with his own poetic

<sup>76</sup> Hermann Bahr, for example, cites Mach in support of Impressionism in 'Das unrettbare Ich' (1904), reprinted (abridged) in Wunberg, *Die Wiener Moderne*, pp. 147–48. Mach is not mentioned in Kassner's earliest work.

<sup>77</sup> *Geschlecht und Charakter. Eine prinzipielle Untersuchung*, (Vienna, 1903), reprint of the first edition (Munich, 1980), pp. 535–36 (p. 535).

<sup>78</sup> On 'Depersonalisation' in Hofmannsthal's early work and its relationship to Mach's epistemology, see Gotthart Wunberg *Der junge Hofmannsthal: Schizophrenie und dichterische Struktur* (Stuttgart, Cologne, Mainz, 1965), pp. 11–40, and *passim*. For a Marxist–Leninist reading of the relationship between Viennese Impressionism and Mach's philosophy, see Manfred Diersch, *Empirio-kritizismus und Impressionismus: Über Beziehungen zwischen Philosophie, Ästhetik und Literatur um 1900 in Wien* (Berlin, GDR, 1977)

<sup>79</sup> See HSW XXVIII, p. 210.

<sup>80</sup> Hofmannsthal to Stefan Gruss, 23 January 1907, HSW XXVIII, pp. 210–11.

<sup>81</sup> Hofmannsthal to Kassner 22 (?) December 1901, cited on pp. 1–2 above.

temperament. Just why he should have felt the applicability of Kassner's interpretation of Keats to himself will become clear below.

Keats's implied relationship to modern Austrian literature becomes explicit in the further course of Kassner's discussion of the poet's letters. Commenting on a passage in which Keats ironically juxtaposes a stylized image of his 'languor' with a more realistic assessment of his behaviour as mere 'laziness', Kassner writes: 'er fühlt sich selbst wie ein Gedicht, wie die Nympe möchte er sein und die Blume, von der er singt. Er stilisiert sich selbst.' (KSW I, p. 114) However, the complex 'chameleon poet's' wish to experience himself as a work of art is unfulfilled, resulting not in the desired simplicity of beautiful objects, but rather in a doubling of perspective, encapsulated by Kassner in the following lines:

Mir ist, als wär' ich doppelt, könnte selber  
Mir zusehen, wissend, dass ich's selber bin . . . (KSW I, p. 114)

This unattributed quotation is not, as some have supposed, a translation from Keats;<sup>82</sup> it is in fact from Hofmannsthal's verse drama *Die Frau im Fenster* (1897),<sup>83</sup> referred to later in *Die Mystik* as 'das kleine Meisterwerk von Hugo von Hofmannsthal' (KSW I, p. 239). By quoting Hofmannsthal in this context Kassner not only subtly reinforces the line of continuity from Keats to the modern poetic sensibility of *Jung-Wien*; he also adumbrates the impending tragedy of Keats's impressionistic, self-reflexive character. The lines following those quoted are: 'Ich glaube, so sind die Gedanken, die / ein Mensch in seiner Todesstunde denkt.' (HSW III, p. 106) Indeed, Dianora, the self-regarding speaker in the lyrical drama, will soon meet her doom at the hands of her brutal husband, just as in Kassner's essay the self-stylizing Keats will become a tragic figure when confronted with the unpredictable realities of love and death.

The above interpretations of Keats's poetic character and the associated stylization of his life indicate the inevitable dissolution of his kind of artistic sensibility. Lacking determinate identity, the proto-impressionist Keatsian 'chameleon poet' is 'the most unpoetical of all God's creatures'.<sup>84</sup> The desire of such a poet to experience himself as a work of art represents an attempt to achieve the stable identity characteristic of poetic objects. However, this conscious stylization necessarily results in further fragmentation, as the poet becomes a knowing spectator of his poeticized self. Thus, for a poet of Keats's kind, to attempt to aestheticize one's life only widens the rift between the non-self-identical poet and the stable identity of poetic objects.

What Kassner calls the tragedy of Keats's life arises from the conflict between his artistic aspirations as glossed above and the demands of real life. Kassner argues that the apparent sagacity of Keats's early epistolary pronouncements on life, love, and death is in fact specious, depending entirely on the poet's ability to treat life as an aesthetic phenomenon:

Poesie und Phrase ist in den Selbstanalysen Keats', ein ästhetisches Spiel mit den schönen Masken des Lebens und des Todes. Keats ist darin ebenso typisch für viele junge Künstler des 19. Jahrhunderts, wie Troilus und Romeo typisch sind für jene geistreichen, blasierten, noch ungeweckten Jünglinge, die doch Leidenschaft genug besaßen, um eine Tragödie zu erleben (KSW I, p. 115)

The likening of Keats's self-assured precociousness to that of Troilus and Romeo, two literary figures, serves a dual function, emphasizing both the perennial nature of his tragedy and the

<sup>82</sup> Both Hans Paeschke and Baumann attribute these lines to Keats. See *Gedenkbuch*, p. 113, and *Kreuzwege*, p. 36.

<sup>83</sup> *Die Frau im Fenster*, HSW III, pp. 93-114 (p. 105). Kassner must have read the play after his return from England as it was first published in the periodical *Pan*, 4 Jg., Heft 2, 15 November 1898. See KSW II, p. 453.

<sup>84</sup> Keats to Woodhouse, loc. cit.



apparent dissolution of the art/life antithesis in the psychology of the narcissistically-inclined poet.<sup>85</sup> However, the reality of Keats's love for Fanny Brawne could not be incorporated into his autonomous aesthetic play (in both the theatrical and ludic senses of the word), and fearing for his art, Keats tried to flee his emotions. Kassner's formulation of the crisis precipitated by this experience, in particular the contrast of the poet's earlier state and his confusion in love, introduces another subtle allusion to Hofmannsthal:

Er mag fühlen, dass er dieser grössten Offenbarung seines Lebens nicht rein gegenüberreten könne, dass das Leben Abgründe in seiner Seele aufdeckt, über denen er früher wie ein Kind gespielt hat. (KSW I, p. 116)

Keats's earlier child-like ability to play over the hidden abysses of the soul — the profound realities concealed behind the beautiful masks of love and death — echoes the existential mode of another of Hofmannsthal's poetic creations of the 1890s, namely the 'verschwenderischen Erben' of 'Lebenslied' (1896):<sup>86</sup>

Er lächelt der Gefährten, —  
Die schwebend unbeschwerten  
Abgründe und Gärten  
Des Lebens tragen ihn! (HSW I, p. 63)

However, unlike this blithe literary figure, who remains in the glorious yet dangerous state of 'Praeexistenz',<sup>87</sup> Keats's self-regarding proto-aestheticism is engulfed by life in the form of his naive feelings of love:

Er hat sich selbst bisher wie ein Geschlossenes, ein Kunstwerk betrachtet. Er liebt sein Schicksal, aber nur unter der Bedingung, dass es ihn zum Kunstwerke mache, ihn frei lasse. Ich denke mir, er empfand sein Verhältnis zu Fanny Brawne wie einen schlecht gespielten Auftritt in einem Schauspiele, sich selbst wie einen Helden, der aus der Szene heraus sich in eine Dame des Parterre's verliebt. (KSW I, p. 116)

The tragedy of Keats's life culminates in the onset of the tuberculosis which would kill him. Whereas he tried to resist love in order to save his art and self-sufficient aesthetic persona, Keats resigns himself to death, and it is this capitulation which paradoxically makes his life a tragic work of art:

An der Schwindsucht sterben viele; hier erscheint der Tod tragisch, wie der Dichter, der löst und bindet, dem Menschen zum Helden und dem Helden zum Menschen verhilft. Er kommt wie eine Nothwendigkeit, und Keats mochte ihn empfinden wie ein letztes, ganzes Hingeben der Schönheit an die Liebe des Künstlers. Er hat sich aufgebäumt, als das grosse Leben vor ihn trat in der Maske der Liebe, er fällt zusammen vor dem Tode, und das gebundene Leben ist frei — wie ein Kunstwerk. Keats' Leben ist wahrlich ein Gedicht [. . .] (KSW I, p. 117)

But not, one might add, the kind of poem he intended. The irony of Kassner's interpretation is that Keats's life is a work of art not by virtue of conscious self-stylization, but rather as a result of the dramatic conflict between his quasi-narcissistic artistic sensibility and his ineluctable human destiny. The conclusion of Keats's tragedy contains further echoes of Hofmannsthal's early work. Keats's surrender to death as the (poetic) culmination of his life is reminiscent of the

<sup>85</sup> This particular tragic archetype is a recurrent topos of Kassner's early criticism. See, for example, the interpretation of Arnim's *Halle und Jerusalem* in his doctoral dissertation (EJ, p. 49, and pp. 82–83 above), and his account of Rossetti's life later in *Die Mystik* (pp. 155–56 below).

<sup>86</sup> The poem was originally published (untitled) in the *Wiener Rundschau*, I, No. I, Vienna, 15 November 1896.

<sup>87</sup> See Hofmannsthal's ambivalent definition of this state in *Ad me ipsum*: 'Praeexistenz. Glorreicher, aber gefährlicher Zustand.' (RA III, p. 599)

aesthete Claudio's acceptance of death as the sense of his wasted existence in *Der Tor und der Tod*.<sup>88</sup> This similarity is perhaps not surprising, given that Kassner is operating with a tragic archetype in his interpretation of the English poet's life. What is striking, however, is Kassner's comparison of death with the poet 'der löst und bindet'. This echoes Death's characterization of the purpose of human life in Hofmannsthal's lyrical drama — 'Man bindet und man wird gebunden' (HSW III, p. 72) — and Claudio's ensuing plea for clemency: 'Ich werde Menschen auf dem Wege finden, / Nicht länger stumm im Nehmen und im Geben, / Gebunden werden — ja! — und kräftig binden.' (HSW III, p. 73) Once more, then, one of the self-regarding aesthetes who populate Hofmannsthal's early work, appears to have provided a literary subtext for Kassner's interpretation of Keats's life.

But why, one might well ask, does Kassner go to such lengths to interpret the poet's life, and how does its tragedy relate to Keats's educative role in the development of nineteenth-century English art? Surely it would have been sufficient for the purposes of *Die Mystik* as art history simply to have shown the congruity of his style with that of later artists. In order to understand Kassner's critical procedure one must recall that Keats's temperament is initially characterized in terms of an antithesis. On the one hand there is his (sensual/imaginative) love of beauty; on the other are his (intellectual) endeavours to become the things he loves. Both these tendencies were said to find their expression in the work of later artists — specifically that of the aesthete. However, in Keats these poles remain largely unreconciled. His sensuality finds its expression in his poetry, while his philosophy of art is formulated in his correspondence. To this extent, according to Kassner, Keats's life surpassed his poetry, and what lives on in the work of his successors is less his poetic technique than the tragic conflict between his humanity and his desire to live art:

Keats schrieb seine Gedanken für viele voraus, er lebte das Leben den anderen vor, und die Tragödie seines Lebens ist die Dichtung kommender Dichter. Er lebt in Browning's Sordello und träumt sich dort in die Rolle des Apollo, bis die Saiten ihm aus der Lyra fallen und die Pfeile seinen müden Händen entsinken. Sein Bruder ist Julien [Sorel — protagonist of Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*], aber auch Niels Lyhne, dem sich das Leben in letzten Augenblicken immer entwindet, und vor den es dann tritt wie ein Spiel, das er nicht versteht. Als Tristan hasst er das Licht des Tages und singt der Nacht und dem Tode sein Lied. Er ist glücklich und genießt das Leben wie ein Kunstwerk in Morris' 'Earthly Paradise', und seine Abenteuer sind wie die, welche er in alten Erzählungen gelesen. Die Schönheit macht ihn traurig auf den Bildern des Burne-Jones, und wenn er die Bäume und Seen und Augen der Mädchen nach dem fragt, was er noch nie gehört hat, so antworten sie ihm schweigend: Auch wir waren einst im Leben und sind jetzt nur schön. Er studiert in Oxford, liest Goethe und will sich erziehen und bleibt doch ein Ästhet, der das Leben als Heide und den Tod als Christ liebt — im 'Marius the Epicurean' von Pater. Er liebt die französische Prosa und wird paradox in den Dialogen von Oscar Wilde. In letzter Metamorphose endlich singt er in Swinburne's schwermüthigen Gesängen. (KSW I, pp. 118–19)

Keats's life is a work of art, and it is as such that it finds its way into the art of his successors. The tragedy of his intellectual precociousness, glossed earlier, conforms to a perennial model, being structurally the same as that experienced by Romeo and Troilus. However, the specific manifestation of this tragedy in Keats's life, the life of a modern artist, is prototypical, anticipating a modern sensibility shared by the figures in all the texts and paintings listed above. What these figures have in common with Keats is that peculiar mixture of sensuality and reflective intellect, mentioned at the outset of Kassner's discussion. It should be noted that the

<sup>88</sup> See p. 27 above.

particular type of modern individual represented by Keats is not confined to nineteenth-century English art; it also recurs in European art of the period. Thus, Kassner's subtle allusions to characters from Hofmannsthal's work of the 1890s, which provide the subtext to the reading of Keats's life, are not fortuitous. These self-regarding figures also belong to what is styled the aesthetic metamorphoses of Keats's prototypical life.

Kassner's highly literary interpretation of Keats's letters — the documents of the poet's life — and his assertion that the tragedy they reveal lives on in the art of the poet's successors both tend to blur, if not suspend entirely, any rigid distinction between art and life. Nonetheless, Kassner continues to use this stock dichotomy to point his discussion. Keats's life, as manifest in his correspondence, consists essentially of the tragic antagonism between his precocious thoughts on art and the two decisive events of his biography, his encounters with the realities of love and death. The second part of 'John Keats', separated by a double space from the preceding consideration of the poet's life, turns to his poetry. Whereas Keats's early life was shown to be dominated by thought or philosophy, the greater part of his art is presented as the expression of his sensual imagination, and as such it, too, contributes to the 'education' of later artists.

Kassner divides Keats's poetry into two main chronological groups: the work up to 1818, which is characterized as 'Programm und Vorstudie' (KSW I, p. 119), and the late poetry, which is judged to be 'von absolutem Kunstwerthe' (KSW I, p. 124). This distinction and the general thrust of Kassner's discussion of Keats's poetic language are uncontentious enough. The poetry of the first period, up to and including 'Endymion' (1818), is said to reveal the development of Keats's distinctive style. In the broadest terms, the literary-historical significance of Keats's work is shown to lie in its unprogrammatically reform and revitalization of English poetic language. Keats's rejection of what he saw as false, rule-bound eighteenth-century classicism prompted his return to the rude linguistic vitality of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and the Elizabethans. However, Kassner stresses that these influences, though important, should not be seen as determining Keats's style:

Doch alles das war doch nur da, um Keats zu seinem eigenen Stile zu verhelfen. Da sind nun gleich anfangs gewisse Thatsachen festzuhalten. Keats denkt jedes Bild zu Ende und deutet nicht bloss an. Er vermeidet jede Abstraction und ist oft affectiert in der Genauigkeit der Wiedergabe eines sinnlichen Eindruckes. (KSW I, p. 121)

Whereas the ratiocinated poetry of his predecessors was characterized by conventional imagery, generality and abstraction, Keats's style is directed at the faithful reproduction of particular sense impressions. To this extent it is a corollary of both his sensuality and his understanding of his impressionistic poetic psychology. The significance of this style for his successors, or pupils as Kassner calls them, is explicitly stated in a comment on a passage from the otherwise unremarkable early poem 'Calidore' (1817):

Diese Verse sind die Noth eines Suchenden, und doch liegt in ihnen wie im Keime die grosse Tugend des sinnlichen Impressionismus der späteren englischen Maler und Dichter. (KSW I, p. 122)

Here the use of the term 'Impressionismus' serves not only to explain Keats's place in the history of nineteenth-century English art; it also makes explicit the implied affinities between his psychology and later international developments in painting and literature. Further parallels with later artists are suggested by Kassner's brief reference to the rendition of 'Stimmung', a key

notion in non-Naturalist aesthetics, in the descriptive parts of 'Lamia', 'The Eve of St Agnes', and 'The Eve of St Mark' (1819–20).<sup>89</sup>

Kassner opens his discussion of Keats's more accomplished late poetry by noting the excitement it generated among the central members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, drawing particular attention to the stylistic congruity of Keats's narrative poetry with early ('hard edge') Pre-Raphaelite painting:

Keats' Erzählungen, vor allen Isabella, sind nur Stil. Der Dichter stilisiert das Motiv einer Novelle des Decameron, etwa wie die Praeraphaeliten ein Bild eines Quattrocentisten stilisierten. Farbe drängt sich an Farbe, ein Bild löst das andere ab, die Schatten sind vermieden, und die Dinge biegen sich uns gleichsam mit ihrer Lichtseite zu. (KSW I, p. 125)

The imagery of light and shade, a recurrent feature of Kassner's early work from 'Sonnengnade' onwards, is here used to illustrate the painterly qualities of Keats's stylized narratives. Like the paintings of the first Pre-Raphaelites, these poems are characterized by their stark juxtaposition of light and shade. The application of this visual metaphor to the non-visual medium of poetry is initially somewhat disconcerting. Kassner's point, however, is that for Keats joy (light) and pain (shade) were two separate things, and thus appear separately in his verse. This rigid demarcation of the positive and the negative is said to be a characteristic of the predominantly sensual artist, for whom light and shade are distinct entities. In a passage which recalls the imagery and themes of both 'Sonnengnade' and 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' Kassner elevates the perception of light and shade to a position of supreme importance:

Die Frage von Licht und Schatten ist die wichtigste, ja einzige Frage des Lebens im allgemeinen und der Kunst im besonderen. Wie wird der Künstler mit den Schatten fertig, wie bändigt der Mensch das Leben, wenn die Schatten seiner Sonnetthaten wachen! Den einen kosten die Schatten seine Gedanken, den anderen seine Tänze, den dritten seine schöne Sinnlichkeit. (KSW I, p. 126)

The simple naive style of Keats's narrative poems, the style they are said to share with folk poetry and medieval literature, is the direct result of the predominance of the sensual side of his temperament. Thus, Keats's predilection for the Middle Ages as a source of poetic subject matter is implied to be a correlative of his psychology. This is underlined by Kassner's striking comparison of the disjunction of sensuality and thought in the poet's work to a medieval *memento mori*, in which the poles of life and death, like light and shade in the work of a sensual artist, remain unreconciled.

As shown above, Kassner's discussion of Keats's early life and work associates the poet's reflective intellect with his life (i.e. his correspondence), and his sensual love of beauty with his poetry. Hence, Kassner concludes that for Keats art and the senses were the sources of light and joy; life and thought were the sources of darkness and pain. However, this recurrent antithesis of intellect/life and sensuality/art is shown to break down in the poet's late odes:

Leben und Kunst erscheinen äusserlich unvermittelt in den Versen Keats', die Sinne gehören der Kunst, dem Leben die Gedanken . . . Und doch war das Leben stärker, der Gedanke bricht durch die prangenden Blumen seiner Sinne und bleicht sie wie ein zarter Nebel . . . Keats schreibt seine Oden [. . .] (KSW I, p. 127)

<sup>89</sup> KSW I, pp. 122–23. For Kassner's views on 'Stimmung', see pp. 90–91 above, and pp. 178–80 below.

This serves to explain the passage on the general significance of light and shade quoted above. Keats's shadows were his thoughts, and their irruption into the odes, the only poems to give expression to his reflective intellect, occurs at the expense of his 'schöne Sinnlichkeit'. It is for this reason that these odes are said to express pain — what Kassner characterizes as the pain of feeling the magnitude of one's thoughts to exceed the joys of one's senses.<sup>90</sup> To explain the distinctive melancholy of these poems, Kassner contrasts them with Wordsworth's ode 'Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' (1807).<sup>91</sup> Wordsworth, Kassner contends, is essentially an intellectual poet and one descended from English Christians. Accordingly, his ode, built on memories of his childhood, expresses an optimistic faith in the omnipresence of God which becomes a form of pantheism.<sup>92</sup> By contrast, Keats's poetic forebears are said to be the pagans of antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, whose lost and legendary joys the modern poet can experience only imaginatively.<sup>93</sup> What his odes express, then, is the realization that of all the sensual joys of the past only poetry remains. Keats's tragic intellectual insight is that it is impossible for the 'chameleon poet' as historical individual to live the beauty he loves. Thus, he is said, like Flaubert, to have realized through bitter experience that the sensual modern artist can only say, but never have what he desires.<sup>94</sup> For to desire beauty is, by definition, to lack it, and for the modern artist of Keats's type art must be renunciation of beauty in life. After quoting the last six lines of the second strophe of 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' (1820), those depicting the image of the 'bold lover' perpetually frozen in pursuit of ideal beauty, Kassner concludes:

Niemand hat soviel nachgedacht über den Unterschied zwischen dem, der schön ist, und dem anderen, der das Schöne liebt, wie Keats. Es ist etwas perverses darin, denn: AP ΕΣΤΙ ΚΑΙ ΟΥΚ ΕΧΕΙ Ο ΣΡΩΣ ΤΟ ΚΑΛΛΟΣ. (KSW I, p. 131)

The quotation from Plato's *Symposium* (201 B: 'Dem Eros fehlt also die Schönheit, und er besitzt sie nicht') serves to link Keats's tragic insight both to the Western philosophical tradition and to Kassner's antithesis of 'Dichter' and 'Platoniker'. The perversity alluded to here is that Keats had to suffer his personal tragedy in order to arrive at a truth formulated by Plato over two thousand years earlier. What Plato states philosophically, Keats experienced through his tragic failure to live art. In terms of the ideals of 'Dichter' and 'Platoniker' put forward in the introductory essay of *Die Mystik* Keats, whose work is characterized by a hubristic and unrequited love of sensual forms, is a poet in whom the Platonist temperament is ascendent.

To sum up: In this essay two distinct dimensions can be discerned. First, there is the factually well-founded presentation of Keats as both educator of his English successors and as stylistic and existential precursor of late nineteenth-century Impressionism generally. In addition to illuminating his individual character, the use of examples from Keats's letters and poetry serve to illustrate the congruity of the English poet's thought and style with the work of later European artists, in particular with that of Hofmannsthal. From the preceding discussion it should be clear that when Kassner told Hofmannsthal that he had often thought of him during the writing of *Die Mystik* he was not merely reciprocating the poet's admiring comments, and

<sup>90</sup> KSW I, p. 127.

<sup>91</sup> KSW I, pp. 128–29.

<sup>92</sup> KSW I, p. 129.

<sup>93</sup> KSW I, p. 129.

<sup>94</sup> KSW I, p. 130.

Hofmannsthal's reading of parts of the volume as a personal letter now seems less startling. Kassner's essay on Keats shows that *Die Mystik* is not concerned only with English art. Hofmannsthal's poetry of the 1890s, as a key literary subtext in the interpretation of Keats's early life, subtly draws its author into the main current of nineteenth-century artistic developments which Kassner seeks to illuminate. The international resonance of Kassner's interpretation is reflected by the fact that only ten months after the appearance of *Die Mystik* André Gide published his anonymous translation of 'John Keats' into French.<sup>95</sup>

The second important aspect of the essay is its imaginative interpretation of factual information. This is evident both in Kassner's elaborate explanation of Keats's tragedy and in the individualistic use of terminology ('Licht'/'Schatten') to characterize the poet's style. The critical procedure of the essay as a whole accords with that of Platonist criticism set out in 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker'. Like his ideal critic, Kassner does not seek to explicate the thoughts and themes of his subject matter. Rather, he brings his own thoughts to bear on the form of that subject matter, be it poetry or life, thereby generating a factually grounded, yet highly individual interpretation. Hofmannsthal's central role as a subtext of the essay notwithstanding, in 'John Keats' it is already apparent that Kassner's interpretation of the development of Pre-Raphaelitism differs significantly from that proposed in the critical essays of his contemporary. In 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' and 'Über moderne englische Malerei' the Pre-Raphaelites are said to have received their most important impulses from art critics such as Ruskin and Pater. The educative role which Kassner accords to Keats and the attention drawn to the stylistic congruity between his narrative poetry and early Pre-Raphaelite painting call into question Hofmannsthal's interpretation of nineteenth-century English art history. As I shall show, in the following chapter of *Die Mystik* Kassner effectively rejects Hofmannsthal's account of Pre-Raphaelitism as a product of modern art criticism, replacing it with his own, more historically accurate, but no less imaginative, interpretation of the phenomenon.

ii) *Der Traum vom Mittelalter. Eine Ouvertüre*

As its musical subtitle indicates, this essay marks the introduction of a new stage in the historical line of development traced in the central chapters of *Die Mystik*. 'Der Traum vom Mittelalter' is one of only three chapters in the volume which are not directly concerned with a particular artist or artists, the others being 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' and the concluding dialogue 'Stil'. Situated between the chapters on Keats and Rossetti, this essay provides a historical survey and, as one might expect, a more extensive imaginative interpretation of Pre-Raphaelitism and its consequences. It should be pointed out that, although Kassner distinguishes between the earliest work of the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (in particular of Millais, Holman Hunt, and Rossetti) and that of the generation of artists who succeeded them, he also uses the term Pre-Raphaelite in its wider sense as referring to a general strand of artistic development which originates in Rossetti's later work and is taken up by younger artists such as Swinburne, Morris, and Burne-Jones.<sup>96</sup> As its title indicates, the essay is centrally concerned with the medievalism common to the work of these artists. In the context of *Die Mystik* this 'overture' serves both to elaborate on Kassner's interpretation of Keats's poetic

<sup>95</sup> 'John Keats' (transl. anonymous: i.e. André Gide), *L'Ermitage*, 11, vol. 21, No. 11, November 1900, 329-35.

<sup>96</sup> See KSW I, p. 133 on the use of 'Pre-Raphaelite' as a slogan; and p. 138 on the extensive sense of the word.

reception of the Middle Ages and to introduce the themes and motifs developed in the following chapters on the individual Pre-Raphaelites: Rossetti, Swinburne, Morris and Burne-Jones.

That the early Pre-Raphaelites and their immediate successors shared an intense fascination with the Middle Ages is beyond question, but Kassner's initially puzzling characterization of their medievalism as a dream requires elucidation, and can only be understood if his treatment of the context in which Pre-Raphaelitism arose and developed is examined in some detail. Characteristically, Kassner elaborates the significance of this so-called dream of the Middle Ages by means of contrasts — in this case with the medievalism of Ruskin, and, perhaps surprisingly, with the reception of the Middle Ages by certain nineteenth-century German artists and thinkers. As indicated in chapter one, Ruskin's name is rightly given prominence in Hofmannsthal's presentations of the development of nineteenth-century English art.<sup>97</sup> In contrast to Hofmannsthal, however, Kassner points out that Ruskin, although the most prominent defender and promoter of Pre-Raphaelitism, was not a motivating force behind the movement. As Kassner indicates, the aesthetic principles of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were already established and expressed in painting before Ruskin stepped in to defend the young artists from hostile criticism: 'wie dann Ruskin mit einer Brochüre und in drei Artikeln der Times für sie eintrat, ist zuletzt sehr gut von R. de la Sizeranne im 'Artist' geschildert worden.' (KSW I, p. 133) The Brotherhood, he contends, arose not from Ruskin's theories, but rather from the painters' own shared enthusiasm for medieval art and their desire to free nineteenth-century painting from restrictive conventions.<sup>98</sup>

Although Kassner characteristically treats the historical facts of Pre-Raphaelitism as being of secondary importance to his critical concerns, as in the Keats essay he provides uninitiated readers with a schematic overview of key events before referring those interested in such matters to de la Sizeranne's article. Brief though it is, Kassner's historical summary of Pre-Raphaelitism and its consequences is considerably more accurate and differentiated than the schematic accounts given in Hofmannsthal's essays. As shown in chapter one, a key component in Hofmannsthal's understanding of modern English art is his myth of a mediated and essentially receptive artistic sensibility born of ingenious art criticism. Whereas Hofmannsthal attributes to Ruskin a motivating role in the formation of this sensibility, Kassner shows that, though he was the Pre-Raphaelites' critical champion, Ruskin was not the originator of their artistic ideals. Kassner locates Ruskin's positive contribution to Pre-Raphaelitism not in his influence on the practice of the Brotherhood, but in his creation of the critical context which gave their work its art-historical significance:

Nun, alle diese Bilder verdanken ihre kunsthistorische Bedeutung Ruskin. Er gab ihnen eigentlich erst den weiten Horizont, den wir jetzt von ihnen nun einmal nicht wegdenken können. (KSW I, p. 135)

As his essays on English art attest, Hofmannsthal was unable to dissociate Pre-Raphaelitism from the name of Ruskin. However, his error, which most probably proceeded from a scant knowledge of the English critic's work, was to put the critical cart before the artistic horse. If

<sup>97</sup> See my discussions of 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' and 'Über moderne englische Malerei', *passim*.

<sup>98</sup> See KSW I, pp. 132–33.

Kassner's first reviewers berated him for what they saw as fanciful interpretation, they would have been hard pressed to fault his scholarship on this point.<sup>99</sup>

For the sake of German readers unfamiliar with Ruskin's work, Kassner presents a summary of the English critic's views, drawing attention to the medievalism elaborated in his writings. Again, Kassner tacitly dispels the popular myth — employed by Hofmannsthal in 'Über moderne englische Malerei' — that Ruskin began his career as a proto-aesthete and was only later 'converted' to ethics. As Kassner makes clear, from the outset Ruskin's ideal of art had an openly ethical dimension, expressed not in dilettantism and pyrotechnical Nietzschean vitalism, as Hofmannsthal would have the readers of 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' believe, but in a pervasive concern with the ethos of the artist in the broadest sense of the word:<sup>100</sup>

Sein Ideal war der Künstler als Arbeiter, als Diener, der Mensch, der klein ist an Macht und gross wird an seinem Werke. "It is far better to give work, which is above the men, than to educate the men to be above their work." (KSW I, p. 136)

The realization of this ideal of art as work and service was not, however, to be found in the nineteenth century, and Ruskin initially had to look back to earlier times, specifically to a reinterpreted Gothic Middle Age, to find his aesthetic ideals embodied in art. As Ruskin's artistic creed was essentially backward-looking and vigorously hostile to the nineteenth century, what he found laudable in the early work of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was not their latent modernity — a modernity Kassner finds openly expressed in the mature work of Rossetti and his younger followers Swinburne, Morris, and Burne-Jones — but rather what he saw as their partial realization of his own medieval ideal:

Nun in den drei Praeraphaeliten [Hunt, Rossetti, and Millais] fand er ein wenig von dem, was er in der Kunst seiner Zeit vermisste: Naturtreue bis ins Kleinste und keine Pretention im Ideellen, ehrliche Arbeit an den von der Natur gegebenen Körpern. (KSW I, p. 137)

The point of Kassner's discussion here is to emphasize that, despite the undeniable realization of certain of his aesthetic ideals in their painting, Ruskin ultimately failed to understand the Pre-Raphaelites. In so far as he saw in their practice only the confirmation of his own backward-looking aesthetic, he remained blind to their modernity, and thus never ceased to regard their work as belonging to an older notion of art: 'Er entdeckte nicht eine neue, sondern die alte Kunst an ihnen' (KSW I, p. 137) — i.e. the art of his idealized Gothic Middle Ages.

It should also be noted that Kassner quite rightly characterizes both Ruskin's general view of art, with its emphasis on the faithful reproduction of natural objects, and his high estimation of medieval Gothic in particular, as species of 'Naturalismus' (KSW I, p. 136). Whether or not Hofmannsthal was aware of the naturalistic tenor of Ruskin's aesthetic theories in 1892, this is obviously not a term he could have used in 'Algernon Charles Swinburne'. Given that the essay was, at least in part, motivated by a desire to promote the non-Naturalist poetic of George and his artistic confrères, and in view of the fact that in constructing his lineage of modern English

<sup>99</sup> See, for example, the editors' introduction to vol XXII of Ruskin's works, p. lxiii: 'In considering Ruskin's relations with the Pre-Raphaelites we must remember that though he had not directly inspired them, yet their practice and their theories were in accord with his teaching, and were in some sort the outcome of a general tendency to which he had contributed.' A more recent critic writes: 'Ruskin's part in that critical war [i.e. surrounding Pre-Raphaelitism] is in some ways obscure. The Pre-Raphaelites themselves do not seem to have been influenced by or indeed to have read the first volume of *Modern Painters*; it was the second volume which interested Holman Hunt. Presumably they became more aware of Ruskin as a critic after his celebrated intervention in 1851.' Quentin Bell, 'The Pre-Raphaelites and their Critics', in Leslie Parris (ed.), *Pre-Raphaelite Papers* (London, 1984), pp. 11–22 (p. 20).

<sup>100</sup> This point is made by Graham Hough in his chapter on Ruskin. See Hough, *The Last Romantics*, second impression (London, 1983), pp. 19–20.



art Hofmannsthal drew heavily on the stridently anti-Naturalist paradoxes of Wilde's critical dialogues, it would have been impossible to do justice to the mimetic aspect of Ruskin's theories without undermining the striking Wildean inversion of the art/life relationship which is used to characterize modern English artists.

After commenting briefly on the enduring appeal which Holman Hunt and John Millais, two of the original Pre-Raphaelite Brothers, held for Ruskin, Kassner raises the question of why Ruskin and Rossetti should have gradually drifted apart in the course of the 1860s and finally broken off all contact in 1868. He surmises, not improbably, that the rift may have been attributable to Rossetti's morbid temperament, but that an equally significant factor in the estrangement was Ruskin's fundamental inability to comprehend the painter's mature work.<sup>101</sup> As Kassner points out, in *The Art of England*, on which Hofmannsthal's 'Über moderne englische Malerei' relies heavily, Ruskin discusses only Rossetti's earliest work and not his more characteristic late paintings, the haunting portraits of mysterious and mythological women. In view of this imbalance of emphasis, Kassner concludes with characteristic Platonist ambiguity: 'Ich glaube, Ruskin verstand das Letzte an Rossetti gar nicht.' (KSW I, p. 138) While conceding the lasting influence of Ruskin's ideals of 'art as praise' and 'art as decoration' on William Morris, and their place in the early work of Burne-Jones, Kassner contends that it is from Rossetti that the aesthetic development in which he is interested proceeds:

Und gerade an die Gedichte und Bilder Rossetti's knüpfen nun jene anderen grossen Maler und Dichter wie Burne-Jones, Swinburne, William Morris u. a., die man gewöhnlich unter den erweiterten Begriff der Praeraphaeliten stellt, an. (KSW I, p. 138)

What Ruskin failed to comprehend in Rossetti's influential later art was, Kassner states, the feature it shares with certain works of Burne-Jones, Swinburne, and William Morris — namely, a distinctive conception of the Middle Ages. Unlike Ruskin's naturalistic Gothic, which Kassner rightly presents as a practical and social, if essentially backward-looking, idealism, the medievalism of these younger artists is something quite new, 'etwas ganz Modernes; den Traum vom Mittelalter nenne ich es' (KSW I, p. 139).

Kassner's explanation of this dream is initially framed in terms of a contrast with Ruskin's medievalism:

Er [der Traum] ist nicht so umfassend und allgemein wie der Ruskin's von den gothischen Kathedralen, aber intim und oft von tiefer Schönheit. Er ist ihnen allen gemeinsam; er beschreibt gewiss nicht das ganze Wesen Swinburne's, er berührt nur an wenigen Stellen den Schmerz Rossetti's und die sanfte Trauer Burne-Jones', aber unter seinem milden Scheine sehen sie sich, wenn auch nur für einen Augenblick, ähnlich, und man denkt dann zurück an Keats und weiter an sich und alle Menschen. Und wenn man eins der Bilder von Burne-Jones z. B. sieht, so mag man zurückdenken an die scharfen Linien und trockenglühenden Farben, an die Genauigkeit in allen Details der Form der ersten Praeraphaeliten, man findet sie wieder, aber sie haben einen anderen Sinn, und es wird einem jenes Bild Rossetti's 'Ecce Ancilla Domini' einfallen, und man wird verstehen, warum man sich sagte, als man die Bilder der 'Brüder' nebeneinander sah: dieses ist das am meisten humane. (KSW I, p. 139)

This indication of the variable occurrence of the dream element in Pre-Raphaelite art well illustrates the subtlety and differentiation of Kassner's criticism. As he makes clear, this is neither the sole nor the most prominent feature of these artists' work; it is, rather, a unifying

<sup>101</sup> The rift in fact arose from Rossetti's staunch resistance to Ruskin's dictatorial imposition of his aesthetic values on younger artists. See John Christian, "'A Serious Talk': Ruskin's Place in Burne-Jones's Artistic Development", in *Pre-Raphaelite Papers*, pp. 184–205 (pp. 187–88).

feature, a kind of significant family resemblance. In contrast to Ruskin's more comprehensive practical medievalism, which is also essentially a dream, that of the younger artists is intimate and characterized by profound beauty. This comparison establishes the distinctive features of these respective positions by means of typically Kassnerian antitheses between the social and the individual, and the practical and the beautiful. Kassner's emphasis on the applicability of the Pre-Raphaelite dream to Keats and the readers of *Die Mystik* is also noteworthy. Unlike Hofmannsthal, Kassner seldom uses the first person plural to include his readership in his critical reflections, but here he openly addresses his comments to a broad community of like-minded modern individuals. This serves not only to remind the reader of Keats's role in Kassner's history of Pre-Raphaelitism, but also indicates the European dimensions of the Pre-Raphaelites' modern aesthetic sensibility — a central theme of the Keats essay. It should also be noted that the style which unites all the Pre-Raphaelites, from the Brotherhood to Burne-Jones, is said to be essentially the same, but in the work of the later artists it acquires a significance quite different from the humanity characteristic of Rossetti's early devotional paintings. The implication is that Burne-Jones's work, far from being an expression of pious, quasi-Ruskinian morality, as it is said to be in Hofmannsthal's 'Über moderne englische Malerei', will turn out to be something less easily compatible with human values.

What, then, is this so-called dream of the Middle Ages? In order to show his readers just what is meant by the Pre-Raphaelites' 'Traum vom Mittelalter' Kassner contrasts their oneiric perception of the Middle Ages with the conception of the period held by their near-contemporaries the 'Jung Deutschen'. Kassner contends that the latter group of writers and thinkers, drawing on the intellectual legacy of German Romanticism, understood the medieval period and the Christian era generally as being essentially spiritualized, contrasting this spiritualism with the sensuality of pagan Greece. In other words, the early nineteenth-century Germans tendenciously conceptualized the difference between classical antiquity and the Middle Ages. This explanation is clearly directed at Kassner's German readers who would, of course, have been more familiar with 'Junges Deutschland' than with Pre-Raphaelitism. Having earlier indicated the differences between Ruskin's medievalism and that of the Pre-Raphaelites, he now ensures there can be no confusion of the English artists' view of the Middle Ages with that of their mainland European counterparts.

Kassner locates the main difference between the German perception of the Middle Ages and that of Rossetti and his followers in the atheoretical, artistic approach of the English:

Diese Engländer waren aber nur Künstler, sie theoretisierten nicht, traten von keiner Idee voreingenommen vor das Mittelalter; sie sahen und empfanden, und die Formen wurden ihnen laut von einer menschlichen Seele, wo sie anderen nur von philosophischen Begriffen sprachen. (KSW I, p. 140)

Here again Kassner's characteristically Platonist aversion to dogmatically prescriptive philosophies of art, seen in his comments on German Romantic poetics in 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker', is evident.<sup>102</sup> More important, however, is his contrast of ratiocinated German conceptualism with the English artists' direct perception of form and soul; for it is in terms of these two notions, which are developed extensively in the course of the following pages, that Kassner elucidates the distinctive Pre-Raphaelite 'Traum vom Mittelalter'. Here some comment is required concerning the scope of the word 'Seele' in Kassner's usage. It must be realized that

<sup>102</sup> See KSW I, pp. 15–16, discussed on pp. 123–24 above.

in turn-of-the-century Austrian literature this term does not have a precisely demarcated meaning. As Gotthart Wunberg has shown, for writers of Kassner's and Hofmannsthal's generation the terms 'Seele' and 'Geist' were not clearly differentiated and are, therefore, often used interchangeably.<sup>103</sup> Thus, the apparent indeterminacy of the word in 'Der Traum vom Mittelalter' and the following essays of *Die Mystik* is probably more a reflection of local, late nineteenth-century Austrian usage than of Kassner's predilection for inherently ambiguous vocabulary. Throughout this and the following subsections I will translate 'Seele' as 'soul', with the caveat that this must be understood as applying both to cognitive and affective psychology.

Kassner goes on to point out that if spiritualism is conceived of as 'ein Überwiegen des Geistigen' (KSW I, p. 140), then it is easy enough to find examples which appear to corroborate the Young Germans one-sided interpretation of the medieval period. Among others, Kassner cites the ascetic monks and mystics of the Middle Ages who turned their gaze from worldly things to seek the unseen, otherworldly beauty of the divine spirit.<sup>104</sup> In view of the undeniable existence of this spiritual love of unseen phenomena, it is easy to draw the conclusion that medieval man renounced his senses and became blind to the material world:

Nun ist es sehr leicht zu schliessen, dass, wenn diese Menschen ihre Liebe über der Erde suchten und ihre Augen durch die Farben irdischer Körper hindurch am Scheine der Seele sich entzückten, dass dann den Dingen die Farbe abfloss, dass die Blumen welkten und die Sterne erblichen, die Erde die Lust der Formen verbarg und der Körper seine Sinne entsagte. (KSW I, p. 141)

This was not, however, the Pre-Raphaelites' view of the Middle Ages. In contrast to their cerebral German counterparts and all other 'Verfechter von der Alleinherrschaft des Gedankens, alle wesentlich unhistorischen und unkünstlerischen Menschen, alle diejenigen, welche vom Eigensten wegsahen und einem Allgemeinen sich zukehrten' (KSW I, p. 141) Rossetti and his followers were artists, and thus less absolute in their conceptions. They were rather,

nur sicher, absolut im Werten ihrer Träume. Hier sind sie Meister, weil sie hier allein sind, und jede Herrlichkeit ihrer Seele haben sie den Formen abgerungen, deren Diener sie ein für allemal sind (KSW I, p. 141).

Again Kassner emphasizes the essentially solitary, individualistic nature of the Pre-Raphaelite dream, tacitly opposing it both to Ruskin's broad social ideal of the Middle Ages and to any absolutist conceptualization of the period. Here another difference between Kassner's interpretation of the Pre-Raphaelites and that put forward in 'Über moderne englische Malerei' becomes evident. It will be remembered that in the concluding section of his essay Hofmannsthal presented a Ruskinian image of the English painters as servants of the Lord.<sup>105</sup> In Kassner's version, however, these artists while servants, do not serve the Christian deity; rather, their masters are forms. The significance of this rather obscure comment will become clearer below.

What Rossetti and his followers discovered in the Middle Ages, then, was neither a Ruskinian social ethos nor an expression of the absolute concept of spirituality, but what

<sup>103</sup> See the discussion of the tradition of psychological terminology deriving from Fechner's *Elemente der Psychophysik* (1860) in *Der frühe Hofmannsthal*, pp. 37–38: 'Auch für die Generation der um 1875 Geborenen stellen Seele und Geist eine vertraute Analogie dar. (So ist es z. B. keineswegs ganz eindeutig, was eigentlich mit dem Wort "Seele" gemeint ist, wenn der Tod sich in Hofmannsthals Drama *Der Tor und der Tod* als großer Gott der Seele vorstellt.)'

<sup>104</sup> KSW I, p. 140.

<sup>105</sup> RA I, p. 552, cited on p. 45 above.

Kassner variously calls 'Macht der Dinge' or 'Macht der Formen' (KSW I, p. 141), a power only recognizable to artists.<sup>106</sup>

Und es gibt ein Gesetz von der Macht der Formen, und nur die Künstler sind dazu da, es zu deuten. Es geht nichts verloren auf dieser Erde, und an die Flügel der höchsten Träume hängt sich die Last der engsten Stunden, und sie kommen wieder die verachteten Dinge der Erde. Und wenn der Geist sich an den Lippen dessen Traumbildes satt getrunken hat und erschöpft sich seinen Armen entwindet, so sind sie da die Farben der Erde und das Begehren ihrer Formen, und ihre vielen Augen starren auf und ihre Zungen werden überlaut. (KSWI, pp. 141–42)

Stated in more commonplace terms, this perception amounts to the 'law' that no matter how rarefied the spirituality of an age or individual, the things of the earth, physical objects, cannot simply disappear, and must eventually reassert themselves. What the above passage depicts is a redirection towards physical forms of that spiritual love which is reserved for God. Kassner's point is that, contrary to one-sided absolutist interpretations of the period as one of pure spiritualism, and despite the devaluation of worldly *vanitas* in medieval Christianity, the Middle Ages, like any historical era, had its physical side; it is merely that the high culture of the time and later interpreters refused to acknowledge this.

It is not, then, in the works of the great representative figures of medieval culture — the popes, emperors, and cathedral builders — that the forms which fascinated the Pre-Raphaelites are to be sought, but rather in the lone individuals of the period:

An die Sünder, die nach Erlösung dürsteten, an Heilige, die fielen, denke man, an die Mystiker und an Tannhäuser, an die Verliebten der Legende und Geschichte, an die, welche in der Mitte standen zwischen Gott und Teufel, an die einfachen Menschen. (KSW I, p. 142)

Here Kassner again takes up the theme established in his introductory comments on the 'Traum vom Mittelalter', namely that of its intimacy as opposed to Ruskin's socially comprehensive medievalism. It is not in the achievements of high medieval culture, achievements expressing the common will of the age, that the significance of form for the Pre-Raphaelites is to be found, but in the isolated and marginalized world of the medieval individual. Accordingly, Kassner locates the appeal of the Middle Ages for the Pre-Raphaelites in the perceived relationship of the solitary medieval individual to the physical world. Seen from this perspective the Middle Ages, far from having no sense of the physical, had — for later generations, at least — an extraordinarily acute sense of form. It should be noted that Kassner draws the reader's attention to the status of his exposition: 'ich erzähle nur das Empfinden moderner Künstler' (KSW I, p. 143). What this indicates is that, unlike the dogmatic German conception of the Middle Ages, Kassner's interpretations make no claim to universal validity. They are, rather, derived from his intuition of the psychology embodied in Pre-Raphaelite art. From the point of view of nineteenth-century English artists, the physical objects of this supposedly spiritual period appear informed with a life of their own, a life derived from the unsanctified emotions of the individual. Rossetti and his followers were enthralled not by the high, communal culture of the Christian Middle Ages, but rather by those marginal products which went against the grain of the period.

In terms of medieval religious thought, forms could only have the status of unredeemed bodies, and as such were to be shunned. However, for a later generation of artists, these despised

<sup>106</sup> Throughout his discussion, Kassner uses 'Form' and 'Ding' interchangeably.

forms seemed to contain all the unholy desires and pain, the entire unsanctioned inner life of the lone medieval individual, and it is from this that their immense appeal is said to derive:

Das Mittelalter hatte kein Gefühl für die Form, weil es zu spiritualistisch war? Das ist nicht deutlich. Hatte es nicht vielmehr ein zu starkes Gefühl vom Körper, um zu Formen zu kommen? Fielen die Formen nicht von ihm ab wie wehe, unerlöste Körper? Blieben sie nicht zurück wie ein Schicksal noch schwer vom Blute, das es aus den Seelen gesogen hat, und lebendig von seinem Wirken, wenn die Seele sich ihm entrissen hat, sich von ihm abgerissen hat, und sprechen sie nicht von einem Schmerze, den nur die heile Seele versteht und umgekehrt? Das Mittelalter hatte mehr Farbe als alle anderen Jahrhunderte zusammen, und nie sind die Seelen so heiss und bleich gewesen. DIE FORMEN HABEN HIER ETWAS FATALES. Das haben die englischen Künstler wiedergegeben. Ob sie damit das Mittelalter selbst deuten wollten, ist ganz gleichgiltig — für sie wenigstens. Vielleicht haben sie sich selbst nur verstehen wollen. Es war eben nur ein Traum vom Mittelalter, und seine Wahrheit ist nur die eines Traumes. (KSW I, pp. 143–44)

The point of this highly figurative passage, which was deleted entirely from the second edition of *Die Mystik*, is to show that the Middle Ages supposed lack of forms, its devaluation of the physical, does not, as the 'Jung Deutschen' thought, imply the medieval mind to have had no sense of the body. Rather, the rejection of the physical in medieval culture proceeds from an overly acute sense of the body, in particular of its potential for sin. For the modern artists, then, the forms of the Middle Ages, its works of art, appear a repository of desire, the physical embodiment of unsanctified psychical states and urges. They are ensouled bodies, and as such represent the nexus of the two sides of Keats's temperament which were shown to be unreconciled in his tragic life and work.

Although not always clearly differentiated in the text, two distinct perspectives can be discerned in Kassner's interpretation of the peculiar shared sense of form which unites the work of Rossetti and his followers. First there is the perspective of the Middle Ages as a historical period with its particular religious values and associated cultural products. This can be called the objective historical perspective. Secondly, there is that of the modern, predominantly artistic interpretation of the Middle Ages by certain nineteenth-century English poets and painters. In contrast to the views of their cerebral German counterparts, these artists' interpretation is neither theoretical nor philosophical; it is, rather, an involuntary perception of a past age embodied in their modern works. In these works the forms of the Middle Ages, its cultural products, are presented not merely as objects of beauty. As perceived by the modern artist they have another, deeper dimension: the dimension of soul. Kassner's characterization of the Pre-Raphaelites' medievalism as a dream is directed towards dissolving this subjective/objective antithesis. As he puts it in the final sentences of the above passage, whether the 'fatal forms' reproduced in their work are intended as an interpretation of the Middle Ages or are merely an attempt to arrive at self-understanding is a matter of indifference. This assertion reveals the latent ambiguity of the title of the essay, in which 'vom' can be read both in the possessive sense ('the Middle Ages' dream') and in the sense of 'directed towards' ('a dream about the Middle Ages'). Whichever interpretation one chooses — and Kassner typically gives the reader no criterion for choice — the phenomenon remains no more than a dream, a state in which subject and object, the dreamer and the dreamt are indistinguishable, and in which commonsense standards of truth and falsehood do not apply.

It must be said that the notion of form expounded above, idiosyncratic as it may seem, does not originate in *Die Mystik*. The most obvious precedent for Kassner's images of the vampiric

forms of the Middle Ages as fatal, in both senses of the word, is Walter Pater's notorious depiction of the *Mona Lisa*, which is quoted in abridged translation in Hofmannsthal's 'Über moderne englische Malerei':<sup>107</sup>

The presence that rose thus so strangely beside the waters is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire. Hers is the head upon which 'all the ends of the world are come,' and the eyelids are a little weary. It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. Set it for a moment beside one of those white Greek goddesses or beautiful women of antiquity, and how would they be troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed!<sup>108</sup>

In the further course of Pater's evocation, the psychically-charged *Mona Lisa* is described as being 'like the vampire', having been dead many times.<sup>109</sup> In a late remark, unpublished in his lifetime, Kassner admitted the style of *Die Mystik* to have been influenced by Pater, and the striking similarities between the English critic's depiction of the *Mona Lisa* as vampire and Kassner's presentation of fatal, blood-gorged medieval forms may suggest him to have had *The Renaissance* in mind when he wrote 'Der Traum vom Mittelalter'.<sup>110</sup> There is almost certainly a Paterian subtext at work here; however, I would contend that it derives less from the above passage than from the English critic's little-known essay on William Morris, 'Æsthetic Poetry' (1868). This piece was published in the first edition of *Appreciations* (1889) but removed from the second (1890).<sup>111</sup> I cannot here offer a detailed comparison of Kassner's and Pater's critical treatments of the nineteenth-century English reception of the Middle Ages, but it is instructive to note the similarities of their notions of medieval form. In the opening pages of his essay Pater seeks to identify those aspects of the Middle Ages which find their way into Morris's early poetry, in particular *The Defence of Guenevere* (1858). Having sketched the historical development of medievalism through the work of Scott and Goethe, he turns to what he calls the 'stricter imaginative medievalism' of Hugo and Heine. Morris's poems are said to represent a refinement on the latter,<sup>112</sup> and to explain this Pater presents an account of a medieval sensuousness born of monastic asceticism:

That religion, monastic religion at any rate, has its sensuous side, a dangerously sensuous side, has been often seen: it is the experience of Rousseau as well as of the Christian mystics.<sup>113</sup>

This bears a marked resemblance to the interpretation of the extraordinary sensuousness of the Middle Ages put forward by Kassner. Here, as in 'Der Traum vom Mittelalter', medieval religion is shown to consist not merely of rarefied spiritualism. After a discussion of the relationship between the Provençal poetry of idealized courtly love and Christian devotion, Pater returns to the ascetic monastic life of the Middle Ages, drawing attention to its dream-like, or rather nightmarish elements:

That monastic religion of the Middle Age was, in fact, in many of its bearings, like a beautiful disease or disorder of the senses: and a religion which is a disorder of the senses

<sup>107</sup> RA I, p. 550. See pp. 41–42 above.

<sup>108</sup> *The Renaissance*, pp. 79–80.

<sup>109</sup> *The Renaissance*, loc. cit.

<sup>110</sup> See Kassner's characterization of *Die Mystik* as, 'mein erstes [...] Buch, dessen Stil wohl von Walter Pater, den ich in England viel gelesen und bewundert habe, beeinflusst ist.' (KSW VII, p. 620)

<sup>111</sup> The essay is now hard to find, all references here are to the version in *Sketches and Reviews by Walter Pater* (New York, 1919), pp. 1–19.

<sup>112</sup> 'Æsthetic Poetry', pp. 2–3.

<sup>113</sup> Op. cit., p. 4.

must always be subject to illusions. Reverie, illusion, delirium: they are the three stages of a fatal descent both in the religion and the loves of the Middle Age. [...] The strangest creations of sleep seem here, by some appalling licence, to cross the limit of the dawn.<sup>114</sup>

Accordingly, what Morris is said to have learned from the monasticism of the Middle Ages is its heightened, delirious sense of the physical:

A passion of which the outlets are sealed begets a tension of nerve, in which the sensible world comes to one with a reinforced brilliancy and relief — all redness is turned into blood, all water into tears. Hence a wild, convulsed sensuousness in the poetry of the Middle Age, in which the things of nature begin to play a strange delirious part. Of the things of nature the mediæval mind had a deep sense; but its sense of them was not objective, no real escape to the world without us. The aspects and motions of nature only reinforced its prevailing mood, and were in conspiracy with one's own brain against one. A single sentiment invaded the world: everything was infused with a motive drawn from the soul.<sup>115</sup>

Here Pater's notion of the infusion of form with psychical significance (soul) is substantially that put forward in Kassner's essay. It is also striking that Pater should emphasize the intense medieval sense of natural (physical) objects. Although further analysis would be required to determine the nature and degree of Pater's influence on Kassner, the above comparison will serve to show the marked similarities between 'Der Traum vom Mittelalter' and the English critic's interpretation of the Middle Ages. I will return to the significance of these similarities in the closing comments of this subsection.

Had Kassner given his readers only this highly figurative interpretation of Pre-Raphaelite medievalism, one would understand the charges of obscurantism which reviewers levelled at *Die Mystik*. However, as if in response to the possibility of such criticism, Kassner supports his contentions with a number of examples from the work of the Pre-Raphaelites. This is not to say, however, that he steps out of his role of critic as artist. Although illustrated by quotations, this elaboration on his general thesis is no less figurative than the preceding discussion of form. The first practical demonstration of his interpretative point is given by a comparison of the treatment of medieval subject matter in two poems: Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott' and Rossetti's 'The Staff and Scrip'. The purpose of this comparison is not only to show how the distinctive English dream of the Middle Ages is expressed in Rossetti's poem, but also to exclude Tennyson from the line of development with which the central essays of *Die Mystik* are concerned.

Tennyson, Kassner contends, although the first to inherit Keats's perception of the sensuous appeal of the Middle Ages, does not share the Pre-Raphaelites' sense of medieval form outlined above. Contrary to popular critical opinion, Kassner argues, Tennyson belongs to an earlier stage of nineteenth-century English medievalism and does not participate in the developments which can be traced through the work of Rossetti, Swinburne, Morris, and Burne-Jones. Kassner's comparison of the two poems focuses on what he calls their music. He distinguishes between two musical components in the verse, the accompaniment and the singing voice:

Ich will nur auf die Musik der Verse achten, auf die eigenthümliche Mischung von Ton und Farbe. Ich fühle das so: Ein Instrument begleitet die Singstimme. Das Instrument malt das Spiel der Formen, und die Singstimme bringt die Gefühle des in oder unter diesen Formen

<sup>114</sup> Op. cit., pp. 6-7.

<sup>115</sup> Op. cit., p. 8.

sich bewegenden Menschen zum Ausdrucke. So hat Keats schon komponiert, besonders aber Tennyson, und von beiden übernahmen es die Praeraphaeliten. (KSW I, pp. 144–45)

This explanation of poetic music, based characteristically on Kassner's feeling, may appear somewhat confusing, but by 'accompaniment' he simply means the rendition of inanimate objects in a poem, and by 'singing voice' the depiction of the human protagonists' feelings and thoughts. The content of both poems is passed over in two brief paragraphs, and Kassner turns his attention to the more important matter of style. Although both poems are said to consist of style and nothing but style, in Tennyson the so-called accompaniment, the objects surrounding the Lady of Shallot, is rendered lightly, scarcely impinging on the 'Singstimme' in which her feelings are related. In Rossetti, however, the 'accompaniment' predominates to the almost total exclusion of the human voice:

In 'The Staff and Scrip' ist die Begleitung dunkel und schmerzhaft zitternd wie die Augenlider vor verhaltenen Thränen. Sie malt die Starre schwarzer Nadelwälder, die Sehnsucht verlassener Flächen und lang sich hindehnender Wege, die Melancholie bröckelnder Mauern, die alten Farben schwerer Teppiche und illuminiertes Texte, die Sinnlichkeit betäubend süßer Düfte. (KSW I, pp. 145–46)

To read this oppressive 'accompaniment' merely as balladic mood-setting, as the creation of a melancholy backdrop for the action proper, would be to misunderstand Kassner. His point is, rather, that the objects surrounding Rossetti's queen in 'The Staff and Scrip' are not mere stage properties: they are endowed with greater vitality than the feelings of the protagonist herself. Thus, the emotion of the poem is shown to reside not in the soul of the queen but in the psychical significance acquired by the objects around her. This is further illustrated by Kassner's second quotation from the poem and ensuing interpretation:

Her eyes were like the wave within,  
Like water-reeds the poise  
Of her soft body, dainty thin;  
And like the water's noise  
Her plaintive voice.

Es ist, als wären die blühende Pracht ihres Körpers in seiner ungestillten Sehnsucht, der Puls ihres Blutes in seinem langen Harren und das Frohlocken ihres Kinderglaubens von den Dingen, die sie umgeben, aufgesogen worden, von der Luft, den Mauern, den Teppichen und den Vorhängen. Und der Duft 'of musk and myrrh' macht krank, aus den Mauern stöhnt es wie leise Klagen, die Gobelins wehen im dunklen Roth kranker Lippen und fahlen Grün ungeküsster Wangen. (KSW I, p. 146)

Rossetti's recognition of this independent life of inanimate forms is, Kassner asserts, his original perception and contribution to English art. This notion of the poetic coincidence of opposites, specifically the conjunction of body and soul, animate and inanimate is the distinctive feature of his art and that of his successors.

To this presentation of Rossetti as the originator of the distinctive Pre-Raphaelite sense of form Kassner appends several further examples from the work of his younger associates. Particularly striking is his interpretation of the Saint's armour in Burne-Jones's painting *Saint George*. This armour, according to Kassner, is no mere garment separate from the saint; it is an organic growth enclosing, and indistinguishable from, the saint's body:

Das ist keine Rüstung aus gewöhnlichem Stahl, wie sie sonst Ritter tragen. Sie ist wie ein Gewächs, wie die zähen Rinden einer Palmenstaude schlägt sie sich um seinen Körper; er kann nicht mehr aus ihr heraus, sie ist ihm an den Leib gewachsen, hat die ganze Kraft des Leibes in sich aufgenommen, sie ist sein Leib geworden. Was in ihr steckt, ist nur mehr die



Seele. Um dieser Rüstung willen ist er heilig und traurig. Wo immer er in ihr erscheint, jubelt das Volk dem Auserlesenen zu; der hl. Georg aber weiss den Preis. (KSW I, p. 147)

In Swinburne's first series of *Poems and Ballads* these forms, Kassner writes, seem themselves to sing of the joy and pain which they have taken over from man. Like the preceding essay, in which Keats's life is interpreted as tragedy, Kassner's account of Pre-Raphaelite medievalism blurs the ontological distinction between the characters in works of art and those in life, the human beings of empirical reality. As I shall show in my exposition of Kassner's essay on Swinburne, this blurring of distinctions is not fortuitous. In the course of *Die Mystik* it becomes evident that Kassner not only saw human life as a source of art; he also regarded art as a potential source of life.<sup>116</sup>

Kassner concludes his discussion with a reflection on the status of his interpretations of Pre-Raphaelitism:

Ist das Gesagte nur ein Traum dieser wenigen Künstler oder gar nur von mir? Ich glaube, es ist eine tiefe Wahrheit, die zu den Künstlern als Traum kam, und dessen sie sich bewusst wurden. Alle Wahrheiten kommen doch zum Künstler, und um sein Werk spielen sie wie die Träume um den Schlaf. (KSW I, p. 147)

Kassner's reading is true, then, not in any objectively verifiable sense, but rather as itself a dream; that is, his interpretation of the English artists' medievalism has an unverifiable aesthetic truth appreciable only through non-rational, artistic modes of perception. In effect Kassner is here reiterating the artistic nature of his own ideal Platonist criticism.

This essay is important for two reasons. First, the notion of form it elaborates is of central significance for the following chapters of *Die Mystik*. Secondly, Kassner's presentation of the Pre-Raphaelites, while sharing certain features with Hofmannsthal's 'Über moderne englische Malerei', reveals a number of marked divergences in their approach to and understanding of the English artists. The most immediately striking difference between the two critics lies in their treatment of the history of the movement. Whereas Hofmannsthal repeatedly insists on the motivating role of English art criticism in the creation of a distinctive aesthetic sensibility and associated style of poetry and painting, Kassner emphasizes the origins of Pre-Raphaelitism in the perceptions and enthusiasm of the artists involved, according only an ancillary role to Ruskin's criticism. It must be said that on this point Kassner's position, which is based on superior scholarship, is the more cogent. A further difference can be seen in the treatment of medievalism in Hofmannsthal's and Kassner's essays. Unlike 'Der Traum vom Mittelalter' Hofmannsthal's essays, while stressing the role of the (critically re-interpreted) past in the art of the Pre-Raphaelites, give little attention to the specific role of the Middle Ages in the work of the movement. Here again, Kassner's position is, from the point of view of scholarship, the more persuasive. It is also notable that, whereas in 'Über moderne englische Malerei' Hofmannsthal seeks to relate the practice of English artists to a high German tradition represented by the aesthetic theories of Weimar classicism, Kassner, while acknowledging the international aspects

<sup>116</sup> After his conversion to Marxism, the Hungarian critic Georg Lukács, one of Kassner's most ardent early admirers, gave only scant attention to the work of his erstwhile mentor. In one of his few late references to Kassner, Lukács criticizes the blurring of the art/life distinction. Referring to the criticism of the aestheticizing of life in his own early essays on Novalis and Kierkegaard in *Die Seele und die Formen*, a collection in which Kassner's influence is omnipresent, Lukács writes: 'So naiv und unbeholfen diese Kritik von heutigen Gesichtspunkten aus auch erscheint, hat sie den Zeitgenossen gegenüber den Vorzug, daß sie in beiden Fällen [i.e., those of Novalis and Kierkegaard] das notwendige Scheitern dieser Tendenz im Mittelpunkt stand, während der damals von mir sehr verehrte Rudolf Kassner in seinem Essay über Kierkegaard, an den der meine anknüpft, noch schreiben konnte: Kierkegaard habe sein Leben gedichtet. Kassner: Motive, Berlin o. J., S. 16 f.' Georg Lukács, *Aesthetik. Teil I, Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen*, 2. Halbband (no place, Luchterhand, n.d.). The essay on Kierkegaard to which Lukács refers can be found in KSW II, pp. 39-97.

of its modernity, expressly distances the aesthetic sensibility of the Pre-Raphaelites from the predominantly conceptual interpretations of the Middle Ages in the work of their German contemporaries. That is to say, Kassner insists on basic temperamental differences between the two nations. However, perhaps the most striking difference between the two critics is in Kassner's elucidation of the Pre-Raphaelites' distinctive oneiric perception of form, which has decidedly sinister overtones wholly absent from Hofmannsthal's interpretation of their work. Hofmannsthal's account of the fundamentally ethical nature of modern English painting is directed towards establishing a firm bond between life and the work of artists widely regarded as closeted, life-denying aesthetes, and this critical goal inevitably generates a predominantly positive image of their work.<sup>117</sup> Kassner, on the other hand, while avoiding explicit value judgements, places emphasis on the darker aspects of form in the work of Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Morris, and Swinburne. The human figures pictorially or poetically represented in their art, do not, as Hofmannsthal contends, express intense moral vigilance; rather, they are imbued with a profound melancholy. Far from being repositories of an extraordinarily acute moral sense, in Kassner's essay the distinctive medieval forms of Pre-Raphaelite art are presented metaphorically as vampiric predators charged with the life-blood of the human soul.

The difference between the views of the two critics on his point is well illustrated by comparing the notion of form expounded in 'Der Traum vom Mittelalter' with a quotation from Hofmannsthal's 'Aufzeichnungen'. In a note dating from around June 1894, the period when he was working on 'Walter Pater' and 'Über moderne englische Malerei', Hofmannsthal writes:

Sein und Bedeuten. Die Seele der Dinge, etwas das aus den Dingen uns mit Liebesblick anschaut, mit einem Ausdruck über allen Worten. (RA III, p. 387)

This affirmative image of the benign soul in things could not be further removed from Kassner's depiction of the troubled, dark, unsanctified emotions with which medieval objects are infused in the Pre-Raphaelite dream of the Middle Ages. How is this to be accounted for? If my hypothesis concerning the probable source of Kassner's 'fatal form' is correct, this striking difference would be explicable with reference to the radically different subtexts of Hofmannsthal's and Kassner's readings of Pre-Raphaelitism. Whereas Hofmannsthal sought to interpret the English painters in terms of Ruskinian devotion — even to the extent of trying to integrate Pater's unsettling depiction of the *Mona Lisa* into his moralistic discourse — Kassner's appropriation of and elaboration on the Paterian notion of medieval form is carried out in full awareness of the more sinister aspects of nineteenth-century English medievalism it entails. As I will show in the remaining subsections of this chapter, these aspects are developed extensively in the following essays of *Die Mystik*.

### iii) 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Sonette und Frauenköpfe'

Kassner's critical treatment of Rossetti, a leading Pre-Raphaelite mentioned only in passing by Hofmannsthal, elaborates on the notion of form developed in 'Der Traum vom Mittelalter'. Whereas in the preceding overview of Pre-Raphaelitism this distinctive conception — the family resemblance uniting the disparate work of Rossetti, Swinburne, Morris, and Burne-Jones — is expounded in relatively general terms, in this essay it is interpreted as proceeding from the

<sup>117</sup> That this was Hofmannsthal's intention is confirmed by his letter to Elsa Bruckmann-Cantacuzène. *Briefe I*, p. 103, cited on pp. 45–46 above.

psychology of an individual artist. As in 'Der Traum vom Mittelalter', Rossetti is presented as an artistic innovator, the originator of a repository of forms passed on to his successors. However, although providing the decisive impulse for late Pre-Raphaelitism, Rossetti's art and the life which produced it are here shown to be tragic. For, as in his essay on Keats, Kassner proceeds in accordance with his earliest characterization of *Die Mystik* as 'eine Psychologie und Ästhetik des Bildes',<sup>118</sup> developing an interpretation of the tragic interconnection of Rossetti's individual psychology and his style. Throughout the essay Kassner presents Rossetti's influential art as the product of a network of temperamental dissonances, antagonisms, and antitheses. For the purposes of the present discussion, and for the sake of brevity, I will confine my reading of 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti' to the aesthetic sources and nature of Rossetti's distinctive artistic achievement, concentrating on his legacy to his successors, and giving relatively little attention to Kassner's elaborate interpretation of the significant events in the artist's life.

Kassner begins by stating that, as artist, Rossetti took up and completed the reform of poetic language started, but left unfinished, by Keats.<sup>119</sup> Unlike the majority of Romantics, in his poetry Rossetti did not abandon himself to his feelings at the expense of technique, and as a consequence his work constitutes a reminder of the basic fact, largely forgotten by his predecessors, that poetry is 'ein Können am Stoffe' (KSW I, p. 151).<sup>120</sup> To this extent, Kassner argues, Rossetti represents, albeit unintentionally, the answer to Ruskin's call for the artist as simple craftsman.<sup>121</sup> The distinctive achievement of Rossetti's early work is said to lie in its revitalization of poetic images which had become commonplace abstractions, reminding his contemporaries, 'dass jedes poetische Bild ein Erlebnis unserer Sinne sein muss' (KSW I, p. 153). Every sensuous detail of his early poems expresses the whole soul of the artist, and in this respect they accord both with Ruskin's stringent aesthetic demands and with the practice of the early Pre-Raphaelite painters:

Das war es ja, was Ruskin vom Maler und Bildhauer verlangte: In die Krümmung einer jeden Linie, die Ausmeisselung der kleinsten Rosette über dem Portal eines grossen Domes soll die ganze Seele des Künstlers überströmen. Das sei die einzige Gewährleistung für die Wahrheit des Ganzen. Was andere mit den Linien und Farben thaten, versuchte Rossetti zuerst unter seinen Zeitgenossen für die Worte. In diesem Sinne darf man auch von Praeraphaeliten in der Dichtung sprechen. (KSW I, p. 154)

Rossetti's earliest work, Kassner adds, while expressive of the whole artist, is dictated solely by aesthetic considerations and characterized by a pure joy in artistic creation.<sup>122</sup>

Although a consummate artist in the above sense, Rossetti was, Kassner asserts, an individual in whom the artistic and the human sides of the personality were in an unhealthy conflict.<sup>123</sup> This is one of the tragic dissonances which shape his art and in terms of which Kassner's interpretation is framed. In his early work it is the uncompromisingly dictatorial artist who dominates to the complete exclusion of Rossetti's human feelings towards his subject matter. However, as in Kassner's reading of Keats, when love and death irrupt into the artist's life (here in the shape of the doomed Elizabeth Siddal, Rossetti's wife and muse) the needs of the

<sup>118</sup> See BaT, p. 25, cited on p. 98 above.

<sup>119</sup> KSW I, pp. 149–51 (p. 149).

<sup>120</sup> This insistence on the technique of poetry relates Kassner's interpretation of Rossetti to George's notion of poetry as 'Mache' discussed in chapter one of the present study. See p. 12, footnote 37 above.

<sup>121</sup> KSW I, p. 151.

<sup>122</sup> KSW I, p. 157.

<sup>123</sup> KSW I, p. 161.

man begin tragically to conflict with the demands of the artist.<sup>124</sup> Put briefly, after Rossetti's experience of the love and premature death of his wife, the antiquated religious motifs characteristic of his early work (particularly the recurrent topos of the longing for and of dead lovers) cease to be motivated by merely aesthetic considerations, and take on an existential urgency as his art becomes a quest for redemption from the agonizing loss of his beloved.<sup>125</sup>

The second significant dissonance in Rossetti's life and art is indicated by the subtitle of the essay, 'Sonette und Frauenköpfe'. Much of Kassner's interpretation focuses on Rossetti's dual talent as poet and painter, showing how in his life and work these two quite different tendencies (artistic temperaments) do not merely coexist in isolation — as they are said to do in William Blake — but are necessarily connected, flowing together to form a distinctive style, described as the synthesis of (modern) poetry and (medieval) painting.<sup>126</sup> Kassner presents painting, specifically the painting of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance which fascinated Rossetti, as intrinsically formal, being concerned with the depiction of the body; modern poetry, on the other hand, is ideal, and seeks to give formal expression to the soul.<sup>127</sup> Thus, according to Kassner, the distinctive and necessary medium of expression for Rossetti's dual talent is a synthesis of these two apparently irreconcilable poles. In his attempt to combine (painterly) body and (poetic) soul in his art Rossetti necessarily sought expression in symbols:

Die Renaissance schuf Körper, der moderne Dichter Seelen, und ein Künstler wie Rossetti musste seinen endlichen Ausdruck im Symbole suchen.  
Ein Symbol ist ein allgemein Sinnliches, ein gedeuteter Körper, ein verdichteter, ein vergeistigter Körper. Die Religion gebraucht Symbole: ein grosses, ein allgemeines Empfindungsleben staut sich hier an einer Form, durchseelt sie und lässt sich so von ihr weiter weisen. Die Kunst primitiver Völker ist symbolisch: die Gedanken der Menschen können durch die Formen — ihre Sinnlichkeit, Naivität — nicht hindurch, sondern werden von diesen gleichsam aufgefangen. Ein Symbol ist eine Zwitterbildung von Körper und Seele, eine Stimmung, an der man ein Leben, ein Dauerndes, an dem man einen Augenblick wiedererkennt, eine gestimmte Saite, die doch nichts anderes als ein Compromiss zwischen dem Darne irgend eines geschlachteten Schafes und der grossen Musik der Welt ist. Ein Symbol ist ein Compromiss, eine Verdichtung, ein gedeutetes Leben. Es steht zwischen der Form, die uns bannt, und der Musik, die uns von ihr erlöst, ja es ist eine Verschmelzung beider. In diesem Sinne ist nun Rossetti's Kunst symbolisch. (KSW I, pp. 165–66)

To adopt, for a moment, the perspective of some of Kassner's less sympathetic reviewers: one might well ask here why he does not simply come to the point and state: 'Rossetti ist Symbolist.' However, to demand this of Kassner is fundamentally to misunderstand his critical approach. Not only is 'Symbolism' one of those 'grossen Worte' from which the reticent Platonist critic as artist would instinctively recoil, had Kassner used this term from the outset of his discussion, he would have been unable to develop his complex image of Rossetti as man and artist. The common associations of the term for turn-of-the-century readers would almost inevitably have obscured the individuality of the English artist under critical scrutiny, associating him with a quite distinct French aesthetic movement. In the above passage the symbol, as nexus of body and soul, represents not only the necessary form of artistic expression for Rossetti's particular

<sup>124</sup> KSW I, pp. 157–61.

<sup>125</sup> It must be said that the enduring significance attributed to Elizabeth Siddal in Kassner's discussion, although expressly aimed at dispelling Richard Muther's myth of her as vampire/muse, is at best questionable. Kassner appears not to have known that Siddal's death by an overdose of laudanum was probably suicide, and that Rossetti's guilt-ridden involvement with Jane Morris, the model for his most striking late paintings, was characterized by an ardent, if unconsummated, eroticism. Given that in 1897–99 these delicate matters were still quite recent, this lapse in the factual accuracy of Kassner's interpretation is most likely the result of a lack of reliable information, rather than a deliberate attempt to generate a counter-myth.

<sup>126</sup> KSW I, p. 163: 'Er ist der grosse Poetpainter der Weltliteratur.'

<sup>127</sup> KSW I, pp. 163–65.

(dual) artistic temperament; it also brings together the poles of sense and intellect which in Keats remained tragically unreconciled. Kassner's avoidance of calling Rossetti a Symbolist, then, is not merely the expression of a Platonic critical programme; it is a prerequisite for the subtle thematic interconnection of the central essays of *Die Mystik*. Rossetti may be regarded as a Symbolist, but only on the condition that the common meaning of the word is, as it were, bracketed off.

The notion of the symbolic fusion of opposites outlined above is further developed in Kassner's remarkable extended presentation of Rossetti's art as the synthesis of Dante's (physical/painterly) *Vita Nuova* and Edgar Allan Poe's (ideal/atmospheric) modern poetry, in which music dominates to the total exclusion of visual impressions.<sup>128</sup> This comparison with Dante notwithstanding, it should be noted that Kassner, in contrast to Hofmannsthal, plays down the question of the Italian poet's influence: 'Viel hat man vom Einflusse Dante's und der frühitalienischen Dichter auf Rossetti gesprochen. Es ist hier übertrieben worden.' (KSW I, p. 157) It is not the influence of a critically-reinterpreted Dante, but the interaction of the (Renaissance) painter and (modern) poet in Rossetti's temperament which shapes his work, and by implication that of his successors.

However, although innovative in its integrative symbolism, Rossetti's art fails to achieve what Kassner calls salvation. That is to say, it does not attain the condition of music (in the sense of the perfect identity of body and soul) to which Pater famously said all art constantly aspires, and which throughout *Die Mystik* represents a species of redemptive *unio mystica*.<sup>129</sup> This, then, is the tragedy of Rossetti's highly crafted, symbolic art: while it contains the possibility of redemptive music, Rossetti himself was incapable of playing it. In this respect his work is metaphorically no more than a tuned string, a well-wrought instrument which it was left to later artists to play:

Der in der Saite ruhende Ton ist das unbedingte Symbol. Die Frauenkörper Rossetti's sind die Saiten, an denen die Liebe sein Leben spielte. Seine Kunst drückt das vollkommen aus und übermittelt ihr Wesen, das, wozu sie das Leben werden liess, Dichtern wie Swinburne und Morris und Malern wie Burne-Jones als Gesetz. (KSW I, p. 167)

The tragedy of Rossetti's life is that, for all his consummate artistry, the symbols of his art could not of themselves redeem the man who longed for his irretrievable beloved.

What Kassner interprets as the personal and aesthetic tragedy of Rossetti's art does not detract from its positive significance for his successors. Rossetti passed down to the younger Pre-Raphaelites a range of highly crafted (symbolic) forms which contained the potential for music. Expressed in more mundane terms, his art taught them both technique ('Können am Stoffe') and a range of potent motifs in which opposites are fused — in particular the ambiguous motif of the beautiful woman as (Christian) virgin and (Pagan) whore.<sup>130</sup> It should be noted, however, that this art, as presented by Kassner, is the product of life, more specifically of the complex interplay of Rossetti's unique combination of talents as poet and painter, and of the antagonism between his humanity and artistry. His successors inherited this repository of forms ready-made and therefore no longer had to derive them from their own lives. This is one reason

<sup>128</sup> KSW I, pp. 168–72.

<sup>129</sup> Pater's dictum (from 'The School of Giorgione' in *The Renaissance*) is cited in English in Kassner's discussion (KSW I, p. 167). On the mystical significance of music for Kassner, see my discussion of 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker', p. 124 above.

<sup>130</sup> See KSW I, pp. 155–56.

why Kassner's following essays on Swinburne and Burne-Jones depart from the psychological/aesthetic approach characteristic of the preceding chapters of *Die Mystik*.

Formally and psychologically, Rossetti's art is characterized by the intertwining of the seemingly irreconcilable — painting and poetry; the medieval and the modern; and the body and the soul. Rossetti mediates between these extremes, holding them in an uneasy compromise. But the inherently integrative symbols of his work are not in themselves redemptive. His successors would inherit his symbolic creations and generate from them the perfection which Kassner calls music. In the following essays Kassner pursues the highly ambiguous consequences of this artistic inheritance in the work of Swinburne, Morris, and Burne-Jones.

v) 'Algernon Charles Swinburne. Von der letzten Schönheit der Dinge'

'Es ist etwas eigenes um das Schreiben. Ich arbeite eben an einem Essay über Swinburne. Ich will oder wollte mein Bestes darin sagen, aus dem einfachen Grunde, weil er für mich offen dasteht wie mein Haß<, > meine Liebe, alles Überlebte und Unerlebte, alles was mir schmeichelt und von dem ich weiß, daß ich darüber hinweg kommen werde. Er war mir klar nach dem ersten Lesen voriges Jahr in London und es ist mir als hätte ich schon alles gesagt.' (BaT, p. 57)

As was seen in the opening pages of this study, the essay on Swinburne was Hofmannsthal's introduction to *Die Mystik*. To say that he was impressed by Kassner's critical reflections on the English poet would be something of an understatement; yet, despite the enthusiasm of his peer, this was the chapter which least satisfied Kassner. The epigraph to this subsection reveals the extraordinary difficulties and frustrations he experienced while writing the essay, and following the publication of *Die Mystik*, Kassner confessed to Gottlieb Fritz: 'Swinburne gefällt mir am wenigsten[s].' (BaT, p. 81) As mentioned in chapter one, these problems and reservations notwithstanding, Kassner's interpretation of Swinburne overshadowed Hofmannsthal's critical essay to the extent that in 1910, when asked for his views on the English poet, Hofmannsthal referred a correspondent not to his 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' but to the relevant chapter of *Die Mystik*.<sup>131</sup> Leaving aside Kassner's dissatisfaction with his essay for the moment, it is worth considering the possible reasons for Hofmannsthal's enthusiastic response to it, and for the associated devaluation of his own essay. These can both be traced to the development of his attitudes to English art and aestheticism during the 1890s. As I have argued, in the course of his 'lyrical decade' Hofmannsthal's view of aestheticism underwent a gradual and by no means straightforward change. In 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' he had created a critical essay which simultaneously expounded and enacted the (Willean) paradox of the primacy of art over life. As the decade progressed, however, he came to have grave reservations concerning both Wilde's dangerously seductive aestheticism and the adequacy of the mediated modern aesthetic sensibility as a philosophy of life. Hofmannsthal's first extended treatment of the dangers of this sensibility in *Der Tor und der Tod* constitutes a critique of aestheticism from within, and, although it could be argued that he was not entirely successful in finding a way out of the 'Sackgasse des Ästhetismus',<sup>132</sup> both 'Walter Pater' and 'Über moderne englische Malerei' continue the reassessment, qualification and containment of the modern sensibility he had rhapsodized so extravagantly in 'Algernon Charles Swinburne'. Thus, even if Kassner had never

<sup>131</sup> See p. 2, footnote 4 above.

<sup>132</sup> *Briefe I*, p. 206, cited on p. 47 above.

written, it is highly unlikely that in 1910 Hofmannsthal would have stood by the image of Swinburne he had conjured up almost two decades earlier.

This being said, the question remains as to what exactly it was in Kassner's essay which so impressed Hofmannsthal. A possible answer is suggested by Klaus Günther Just in his survey of the reception of Swinburne in turn-of-the-century German literature.<sup>133</sup> Put briefly, Just's contention is that Kassner's essay represents an objective and more extensive critical legitimation of Hofmannsthal's brief and essentially intuitive assessment of Swinburne, the implication being that Kassner's essay appealed to Hofmannsthal as a reinforcement of and expansion on his own views on the English poet.<sup>134</sup> This tacit conclusion rests in part on Just's claim that Hofmannsthal's and Kassner's essays share the same view of the relationship between life and art in Swinburne's poetry — i.e. that both essays assert the primacy of art over life.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, according to Just, Kassner's and Hofmannsthal's critical readings of Swinburne also have the common aim of making the English poet's work fruitful for German literature. This is certainly true of Hofmannsthal, whose 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' was, in part at least, an advertisement for the aesthetic of George's *Blätter*. However, it is far from clear that *Die Mystik* was written with the aim, which Just summarizes as follows: 'die lyrischen Errungenschaften der englischen Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts sollen für die deutsche Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts fruchtbar gemacht werden.'<sup>136</sup>

I cannot here go into the finer detail of Just's analyses of the two Swinburne essays, but his conclusions seem to me to be founded on a number of misunderstandings. First, as recapitulated above, between 1893 and the turn-of-the-century Hofmannsthal's attitude to aestheticism underwent significant changes. It is, therefore, highly improbable that he would have reacted so enthusiastically to *Die Mystik* had Kassner shared the views on art and life put forward in his own Swinburne essay.<sup>137</sup> Secondly, Just's claim that Kassner's critical treatment of Swinburne serves, like Hofmannsthal's, to legitimize modern German literary developments is at best problematic and, I would contend, ultimately untenable. In the subsection before last I showed how Kassner rigorously distinguishes the medievalism of the Pre-Raphaelites from that of their German contemporaries. This procedure is typical of his approach throughout *Die Mystik*. In the chapter on Shelley, for example, he goes to considerable lengths to differentiate the English poet's early Romanticism from 'Romantik' as Germans would understand the term,<sup>138</sup> and the closing dialogue of the volume, 'Stil', is an extensive explication of the fundamental, and apparently irreconcilable, differences between the English and the German national character as expressed both in the high culture and day-to-day life of the countries.<sup>139</sup> Given this insistence on the differences between the two nations, Just's contention that Kassner's critical reception of Swinburne, an English poet, serves to legitimize German literary practice seems highly

<sup>133</sup> 'Die Rezeption Swinburnes in der deutschen Literatur der Jahrhundertwende', in *Festschrift für Jost Trier zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. by William Foerste und Karl Heinz Borck (Cologne/Graz, 1964), pp. 466–89. In section II (pp. 469–81) Just discusses the critical reception of Swinburne by Hofmannsthal, Kassner, and Rudolf Borchardt.

<sup>134</sup> Just, p. 477.

<sup>135</sup> Just presents both essays as sharing the same basic tension between art and life (p. 476).

<sup>136</sup> Just, p. 471.

<sup>137</sup> Just's contention that the appeal of Kassner's essay lay in its explanation of Swinburne as a necessary consequence of nineteenth-century historicism is particularly suspect. Not only is it inconceivable that Kassner would have attempted such a demonstration; it is hard to imagine that Hofmannsthal would have seen such an explanation as illuminating 'was das ist, wenn man dichtet, was das dem Dasein zu tun hat.'

<sup>138</sup> See KSW I, pp. 83–86, esp. p. 85: 'Romantik, wie wir Deutsche sie verstehen, ist etwas dem englischen Geiste wesentlich widerstrebendes, und bei der Anwendung dieses Begriffes auf die grossen Dichter des beginnenden 19. Jahrhunderts muss man sehr vorsichtig sein.'

<sup>139</sup> For a recent discussion of Hofmannsthal's and Kassner's views of England, see Martina Lauster, 'Englishness in Essays of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Rudolf Borchardt and Rudolf Kassner', in *Anglo-German Studies*, ed. by R. F. M. Byrn and K. G. Knight (Leeds, 1992), pp. 116–47.

unconvincing. It is true that in the course of *Die Mystik* Kassner draws subtle comparisons and connections between aspects of English and German literature: for example, between Keats's understanding of his poetic psychology and the work of Hofmannsthal. I have also drawn attention to Kassner's notion of a common condition of modernity in his interpretation of the Pre-Raphaelites' dream of the Middle Ages. However, in the total context of *Die Mystik*, the poetry of Swinburne, if in some respects quintessentially modern, is characteristically presented as the intersection of a particular historical line of artistic development and a particular individual, and these are, and can only be, uniquely English. Should there be any doubt on this point, one only has to turn to Kassner's discussion of Swinburne's reading. Commenting on the poet's immense 'Bildung' and extraordinarily retentive memory, Kassner emphasizes a fundamental difference between the English and German temperament: 'Er hat es [sein Gedächtnis] aber nicht schmerzlich empfunden, — er ist Engländer und nicht Deutscher.' (KSW I, p. 180)<sup>140</sup>

One of the basic problems with Just's interpretation can be traced to his antithetical presentation of Hofmannsthal and Kassner. Like Baumann, Just situates the differences between the two writers in their respective temperaments — those of the (enthusiastic) lyric poet and the (distanced) critic. This polarity of temperament is said to coexist with their basic agreement on the nature of Swinburne's art and achievement. Thus, their essays are presented as representing different treatments of the same aesthetic position. Now this schematic interpretation may accord well with the antithetical typology of 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker', but it distracts Just from fundamental divergences in the interpretations of Swinburne put forward by Hofmannsthal and Kassner, and it is these divergences which I will seek to bring out in the following discussion.

It must be said that Kassner's dissatisfaction with his essay was well-founded. Even in the context of *Die Mystik*, this chapter appears extraordinarily digressive, over-laden, and opaque. There are also abrupt transitions, such as those from the consideration of Swinburne's metaphors to a comparison with Baudelaire, and from the interpretation of the English poet's dramas to the concluding presentation of the so-called 'Makranthropos'. It is little wonder, then, that even Hofmannsthal, whose acquaintance with Swinburne and the non-Naturalist aesthetic debates of the era was extensive, should have been so exhausted by the piece.<sup>141</sup> Rather than attempt an exhaustive and exhausting analysis of Kassner's essay, in the remainder of this subsection I will concentrate primarily on two salient elements of his interpretation: his treatment of Swinburne's style, and the more general question of form as manifest in Swinburne's poetry. My main aim will be to indicate the considerable divergences between Kassner's and Hofmannsthal's accounts of these phenomena. Following a brief discussion of Swinburne's drama, I will turn to the conclusion of Kassner's essay, drawing attention to its more pessimistic implications overlooked in Just's analysis.

That both Austrian critics held Swinburne in high regard can be taken for granted. Hofmannsthal's laudatory assessment of the English poet requires no further comment here, and Kassner, who avowedly eschewed evaluative criticism, unambiguously states Swinburne to be

<sup>140</sup> Interestingly this passage is also quoted by Baumann. However, in his desire to emphasize parallels between Swinburne and Hofmannsthal, he omits the reference to Swinburne's Englishness. (*Kreuzwege*, p. 15)

<sup>141</sup> Hofmannsthal to Kassner, 11 December 1901, cited on p. 1 above.



'der grösste moderne Dichter Englands' (KSW I, p. 180).<sup>142</sup> Characteristically, Kassner's acquaintance with Swinburne's work appears to have been considerably more extensive than that of his contemporary, and bears witness to his intensive studies in England. Unlike Hofmannsthal's 'Algernon Charles Swinburne', *Die Mystik* gives the German reader an indication of the scope of the poet's vast and uneven *œuvre*.<sup>143</sup> However, having presented a brief overview of Swinburne's publications, Kassner accords only *Atalanta in Calydon* and the first series of *Poems and Ballads* European significance, thereby effectively concurring with Hofmannsthal's evaluation of the English poet's work.<sup>144</sup> In the previous subsections of this chapter I drew attention to Kassner's superior knowledge of the facts of his subject matter, whether this be Keats's life or the history of Pre-Raphaelitism. It is, then, perhaps surprising to find that the chapter on Swinburne contains almost no biographical information. This apparent inconsistency in Kassner's approach is partly explained by the fact that in 1899 Swinburne was the only English artist treated at length in *Die Mystik* who was still alive.<sup>145</sup> Given that any consideration of the poet's life would inevitably have had to address his bizarre physical appearance, neuroses, algolagnia, and the near fatal alcoholic excesses of his middle years, Kassner's reticence to touch on biography may have been partially motivated by a sense of discretion.

However, a more compelling reason for the absence of biography in this essay is Kassner's contention that, unlike the art of his precursors Keats and Rossetti, Swinburne's poetry does not stand in any easily discernible relationship to the events or experiences of his life; indeed, by its very nature, it cannot. In 'Algernon Charles Swinburne', in accordance with the general literary history outlined in *Die Mystik*, Swinburne, Morris, and Burne-Jones are presented as the successors and pupils of Rossetti. However, whereas Kassner interpreted Rossetti's work as the tragic product of his life, for these younger artists his art, in particular its formal perfection and mysterious content, itself takes on the aspect of a life. Rossetti's art, his quest for redemption, is said to represent a barrier between the artist and life, and this explains its distinctive character:

Daher jene beinahe classische Vollkommenheit, die den Gegenstand ganz zwingt, vereinigt mit einer Räthselhaftigkeit des Inhaltes, die die jungen Maler und Dichter begeisterte wie ein Leben, das noch der Deutung wartet. (KSW I, p. 178)

The implication is that art, Rossetti's art, takes the place of life in the consciousness of his successors. This would appear to support Just's contention that in their respective essays Kassner and Hofmannsthal share the same conception of the primacy of art over life. However, there is a subtle difference between the positions represented in the two essays. In the introductory section of his 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' Hofmannsthal puts forward the paradoxical Wildean notions that for the English aesthetes life imitates art, and that they can experience life only through the medium of art. Kassner's point, however, is that the artistic practice of Rossetti's successors is based on art and not on life; that is to say, Kassner's interpretation is applicable only to the aesthetic sphere, and does not entail the more extreme

<sup>142</sup> See the foreword to the drastically abridged second edition of *Die Mystik, Englische Dichter* (1920) in which Kassner writes: 'Es ist durchweg mehr das Werk eines Sehenden als das eines Urteilenden.' (KSW III, p. 466) This explicit distancing of his earliest work from evaluative criticism is probably more a reflection of the changes in Kassner's judgement of the English artists treated in the book than of an absence of judgment in the original edition. For the elderly Kassner's view of the subject matter of *Die Mystik*, see KSW IX, p. 353.

<sup>143</sup> See Kassner's comment: 'Swinburne's Werk umfasst heute 29 Bände. Es zerfällt in Dichtung und Kritik.' (KSW I, p. 179)

<sup>144</sup> 'Von eigentlich europäischer Bedeutung sind doch nur *Atalanta in Calydon* und die "Poems and Ballads".' (KSW I, pp. 179-80) Hofmannsthal's similar assessment is reflected by the fact that he mentions only these works in his essay.

<sup>145</sup> Swinburne, who lived out his uneventful later years under the watchful eye of Theodore Watts-Dunton, died in 1909.

general perception of nature in terms of art. This, I am aware, is a relatively subtle difference between the two critics, and I mention it here only as a revision of Just's interpretation. In the course of Kassner's essay, however, considerably more radical differences become apparent, in particular with respect to the central and related questions of the distinctive style and the form of Swinburne's poetry.

What, then, does Kassner have to say on Swinburne's style, and how does this differ from Hofmannsthal's interpretation? It will be remembered that in the latter half of his 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' Hofmannsthal addresses the stylistic eclecticism characteristic of the English poet's work, asserting that, contrary to appearances, the diversity of archaic forms employed in *Atalanta in Calydon* and the first series of *Poems and Ballads* is no mere 'Spielerei' (RA I, p. 146). Swinburne's vast array of antiquated poetic forms is indicative, rather, of the poet's 'souveränes Stilgefühl' (RA I, p. 146). While stressing the utter seriousness of Swinburne's style, Hofmannsthal's explanation of this point implies an instrumental relationship between the English poet and the archaic forms of his poetry. For, according to Hofmannsthal, Swinburne masterfully employs the stylistic heritage as a means of generating distinctive and ambiguous psychological states ('Stimmungen'). On this account, then, the poet and his style are two quite separate entities, and this instrumentalism is summed up in Hofmannsthal's characterization of the vast range of artistic forms employed in Swinburne's work, which are said to be 'dieser ganze große und künstliche Apparat' (RA I, p. 146).

By contrast, Kassner's account of Swinburne's style constitutes an unambiguous rejection of this instrumental interpretation. In Kassner's discussion, Swinburne's work is not characterized by a consummate sense of style, in which poet and style are seen as separate. Rather, Swinburne's style is uniquely his own and to be understood with reference to his place in the history of poetry:

Und Swinburne? Bedeuten seine Verse nur eine Anhäufung seltener Metaphern? Er wäre dann doch nur ein literary poet, ein Alexandriner, ein blasierter Literat, dem das Beste und Reifste gerade gut genug sei. So einfach ist das nicht. Swinburne stilisiert nicht nur, sondern er hat auch Stil. Er ist der Letzte eines reichen Stammes; seine Ahnen dichteten in Griechenland Tragödien, im Mittelalter Aventiuren, in der Renaissance Canzonen und nach der französischen Revolution Oden. (KSW I, p. 188)

As the last in this distinguished poetic line of descent, Swinburne possesses his own distinctive style, and this is not an instrumental adjunct but an innate characteristic inherited from his poetic forebears. Swinburne's style, then, is neither 'Spielerei' nor 'souveränes Stilgefühl'; it is an essential feature of his individual character as a poet.

The second point on which Kassner and Hofmannsthal radically differ concerns their respective conceptions of form. For all its Dionysian vitalism, Hofmannsthal's discussion of Swinburne's style implies a fundamental disjunction between the form and the content of modern poetry. In the course of his essay the archaic forms which Swinburne employs with such consummate skill are repeatedly characterized as vessels or receptacles ('Gefäße'), and their distinctively modern content as heady Dionysian wine. This disjunction between (dead) form and (vitalistic) content in Swinburne's work is introduced as follows:

Da ist unter ihnen [i.e. the modern English artists] einer, der füllt diese zierlichen und zerbrechlichen Gefäße mit so dunkelglühendem, so starkem Wein des Lebens, gepreßt aus den Trauben, aus denen rätselhaft gemischt dionysische Lust und Qual und Tanz und

Wahnsinn quillt, füllt sie mit so aufwühlenden Lauten der Seele und solcher Beredsamkeit der Sinne, daß man ihn nicht länger übersehen kann. (RA I, p. 145)

The vessel/wine image is later taken up in Hofmannsthal's remark on the relationship between form and content in Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads*: 'Wieder für den neuen Wein höchst seltsame und altertümliche Gefäße' (RA I, p. 146). As shown in chapter one, Hofmannsthal's 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' presents the work of the English poet as a distinctive combination of archaic form and modern (psychological) content. Yet, while form and content interact to produce a distinctive reading experience — Swinburne's masterful use of form generates the intoxicating psychological effect of his poetry — in Hofmannsthal's discussion they remain essentially separate entities.<sup>146</sup>

By contrast, in his essay, Kassner advances a conception of form and content as an indissoluble organic whole. This organic holism refers back to and develops on the distinctively modern artistic perception of form expounded in his discussions of Pre-Raphaelitism generally and Rossetti in particular. According to Kassner, the medieval forms which fascinated the Pre-Raphaelites are not merely dead receptacles for a heady modern psychology; they stand in an organic relationship to their content (the soul), having absorbed it, or drunk it like blood. Thus assimilated, form is indistinguishable and inseparable from content. The central role of this organic metaphor in Kassner's discussion of Swinburne underlines once more the interrelatedness of the central essays of *Die Mystik*.

Having outlined the salient differences between Hofmannsthal's and Kassner's accounts of form and style in their respective Swinburne essays, I will now examine Kassner's interpretation more closely. As indicated above, it would be impractical to follow the exposition of Kassner's essay in detail. Not only is the movement of ideas in the text extraordinarily complex, the essay is in places — particularly at its thematic transitions — uncharacteristically awkward. Here I will gloss only the most important points of his interpretation, drawing attention to the similarities and differences between the image of Swinburne developed in his essay and that created by Hofmannsthal. This is not an entirely satisfactory approach, but I will try to avoid, as far as possible, oversimplifying or misrepresenting Kassner's position. The image of Swinburne created in his essay is not only intrinsically interesting, it has important implications for his account of Burne-Jones and English aestheticism which will be examined in the following subsection.

In order better to understand Kassner's conclusions on form and style, it is necessary to trace the course by which he arrives at them. The opening pages of his essay recapitulate the relationship of tutelage between Rossetti and Swinburne set out in 'Der Traum vom Mittelalter'. Swinburne, and his peers Burne-Jones and Morris, began as Rossetti's 'pupils'. However, the key difference between Rossetti and Swinburne is located in their respective temperaments. Whereas Rossetti is an artist ('Künstler'), and one whose work is shaped by his dual talent as poet and painter, Swinburne is purely a lyrist ('Sänger').<sup>147</sup> The combination of Swinburne's native lyrical temperament and the educative influence of Rossetti makes his work appear, at first sight at least, a synthesis of Rossetti and Shelley, the latter being a poet also classified by Kassner as 'Sänger'. After remarking on Swinburne's consummate mastery of the poetic heritage of the ages, Kassner turns to the question of the English poet's style. His discussion begins

<sup>146</sup> See pp. 20–21 above.

<sup>147</sup> I have used 'lyrist' rather than 'lyricist' as the translation of Kassner's 'Sänger' as it better conveys the musicality of Swinburne's temperament which is a central notion in the essay.

conventionally enough with what he somewhat disparagingly describes as a merely literary analysis of the distinctive stylistic features of Swinburne's verse.<sup>148</sup> Here Kassner quotes extensively from the poet's greatest works, *Atalanta in Calydon* and the first series of *Poems and Ballads* in order to illuminate their characteristic style, which is to be understood in terms of the interpretations of Keats and the Pre-Raphaelites developed earlier in *Die Mystik*. These artists represent, Kassner reiterates, 'eine Schule für die Sinne der Künstler' (KSW I, p. 180). On the basis of examples from *Atalanta*, Kassner asserts the key feature of Swinburne's style to reside in its presentation of objects in spatial juxtaposition ('neben einander') as opposed to temporal succession ('nach einander').<sup>149</sup> This juxtaposition of objects, Kassner argues, reproduces the character of visual perception: 'Das Mass der Dinge ist die Stärke des Reizes, und der Reiz kennt kein "nach einander".' (KSW I, p. 181) In its characteristic reproduction of intense sensory stimuli, Swinburne's verse is said effortlessly to achieve what his predecessors could only sustain for short periods, and even then with difficulty — the faithful reproduction of sensuous impressions. Thus, Swinburne's style represents the consummation of the tendency in nineteenth-century art traced in the preceding chapters of *Die Mystik*. It is, Kassner states, 'die höchste Entwicklung des sinnlichen Stils,' adding significantly, 'aber auch seine Grenze' (KSW I, p. 181).

To reinforce his interpretation of the spatial juxtaposition characteristic of Swinburne's style Kassner analyses examples from his verse, pointing out that the poet's distinctive use of simple sentences, unconnected by subordinating particles, also serves to preserve the effect of juxtaposed sensuous impressions. However, this essentially spatial presentation of objects does not imply stasis as Kassner demonstrates in his explanation of Swinburne's use of the 'Participium Praesentis' (it is actually the gerund): 'Er nimmt hiermit das Thun eines Dinges als dessen Eigenschaft und fixiert gleichsam ein Ding in dessen Bewegung.' (KSW I, p. 182)<sup>150</sup> This paradoxical union of motion and stasis in Swinburne's verse is of particular importance for the following interpretation of the poet's style. In all of his later reflections — on style, imagery, form, and drama — Kassner stresses the synthesis of opposites as characteristic of Swinburne's work. The final part of Kassner's 'literary' analysis concerns the pervasive influence of the Bible on Swinburne's style. Kassner defines Biblical style as the perfect union of 'Pathos und Sinnlichkeit' (KSW I, p. 182) in which abstract objects, such as human emotions, are rendered by verbs of sense perception. To achieve this paradoxical union of abstraction and sensuousness is, Kassner contends, the chief end of Swinburne's poetry.

The next stage of Kassner's discussion examines Swinburne's imagery — 'die poetischen Bilder' (KSW I p. 183) — and arrives at a characterization of his images by way of a series of contrasts with those of his fellow lyricist, Shelley. The conclusion of this exercise is the fairly uncontentious assertion that Swinburne's imagery is of far greater intensity than Shelley's. This contrast, however, presents problems of interpretation: Why should this be the case? What difference between Swinburne and Shelley as poets would account for the striking difference in their poetic imagery? With characteristic Platonist relativism, Kassner presents a number of possible answers:

<sup>148</sup> KSW I, p. 180.

<sup>149</sup> KSW I, p. 181.

<sup>150</sup> Immediately following this passage, in a sentence wisely excised from the 1920 edition, Kassner remarks with youthful self-satisfaction: 'Auf so etwas muss man Acht haben, wenn man dem Bestreben der Dichter, die Sprache lebendig zu erhalten, folgen will.' (KSW I, p. 182)

Ein Arzt würde sagen, Swinburne ist kränker, nervöser; ein skeptischer Kritiker, er ist verwöhnt, für ihn ist das meiste schon abgebraucht, und er muss allem eine starke Würze begeben. Nietzsche würde auch hier fragen: "Ist hier Hass gegen das Leben oder Überfluss an Leben schöpferisch geworden?" Statt 'Hass gegen das Leben', könnte man wohl auch nicht ganz gegen den Sinn Nietzsche's 'Armuth am Leben' sagen, und die Antwort müsste lauten: Armuth! Sie ist immer die Mutter blühender Bilder, weil die Bilder des Menschen Sehnsucht bedeuten. (KSW I, p. 185)

Nietzsche's status as 'dieser grösste aller Ästhetiker' (KSW I, p. 185) notwithstanding, having set out these various interpretative perspectives, Kassner rejects the Nietzschean opposition wealth/poverty of life as too stark. There is, Kassner contends, no radical breach between these two poles; rather the scale on which a poet's relationship to life is measured is a continuum, and the poet's relationship to life is, thus, a question of degree rather than of absolute orientation. Kassner also rejects the possibility of a poet ever being able to write from absolute wealth of life. With respect to life the poet must always be impoverished:

Für immer trennt den Dichter vom Leben sein Bild vom Leben, und erst die Summe von Dichter und Metapher geben den Helden. [. . .] Zwischen dem Dichter und dem Leben geht das Bild einher. Der Dichter krönt das Leben mit dem Traume, und die Träume sind die Kronen der Bettler. (KSW I, p. 186)

How, then, is Swinburne's uncommonly intense imagery to be explained? Here Kassner again defers an answer by reformulating the question: Is the image something projected by the poet onto life (his dream); and to what extent can life be said to be responsible for the image? That is to say, is imagery predominantly subjective or objective in origin? Rather than situate the source of intense poetic imagery on one side of the subject/object (poet/life) divide, Kassner proposes the following general answer to his initial question:

Je reicher an umgewerthetem Leben die Seele des Dichters, desto sparsamer ist das Bild und umgekehrt. Vielleicht gilt das nur für die modernen Dichter, vielleicht war in früheren Zeiten ihrer Sehnsucht eine Umwerthung nicht nöthig, und die Schönheit und das Bild des Dichters etwas allen Gemeinsames. (KSW I, p. 186)

The difference between Shelley's and Swinburne's imagery, which was the point of departure for this divagatory exposition, is to be understood, then, in terms of the poets' respective relationships to life. The notion of 'Umwerthung' in this passage is a further indication of Kassner's debt to Nietzsche, its implication is that Shelley's imagery is less opulent either because he had more 're-evaluated' experience of life, or because his experience, being based on a notion of beauty shared with his contemporaries, had no need of 're-evaluation'. By contrast, the intense imagery of a poet like Swinburne is the sign of a relative dearth of 're-evaluated' life, and Kassner suggests that this lack of meaningful, (re)interpreted experience is perhaps a distinctively modern phenomenon, proceeding from an absence of shared values.

This conclusion leads on to the question of the nature of the image or metaphor generally (both terms being used interchangeably), or as Kassner puts it, 'das Bild als das vom Wirklichen Unterschiedene' (KSW I, p. 186). Again, he frames the possible interpretations antithetically, asking if the image/metaphor is to be understood as a supplement to the real object (i.e. something subjectively projected by the poet), or as something which grows out of the object (i.e. an aspect of the object perceived by the poet alone). Here Kassner introduces the Wagnerian conception of music as 'die Gerechtigkeit den Erscheinungen gegenüber' (KSW I, p. 187).<sup>151</sup>

<sup>151</sup> Kassner's source is Wagner's *Oper und Drama*, Zweiter Theil: Das Schauspiel und das Wesen der dramatischen Dichtkunst, Abschnitt IV (1851). For full bibliographical details, see KSW II, p. 471.

The so-called justice of Wagner's music is said to be the judgement passed by the eternal soul on the objects of temporal life, and this is illustrated by a scene from *Tannhäuser* in which the unsteady steps of the moribund Elisabeth are accompanied by triumphal music of almost celestial lightness. In this scene, Kassner explains, the music is Elisabeth's otherwise imperceptible soul, the psychical complement to her physical appearance: 'Das ist Wagner's "Gerechtigkeit", wenn ich ihn recht verstehe.' (KSW I, p. 187) This equation of metaphor with music does not, nor is it intended to, answer Kassner's original question concerning the image, it simply introduces yet another term into the enquiry. The reformulated question is now: Is this music something superadded to life, or is it inherent in life?

Die Musik eine Metapher des Lebens! Das Bild die Seele des Dichters, die sich dem Dinge schenkt wie zur Versöhnung, oder das Bild die Seele des Dinges selbst, die nur der Dichter sieht! (KSW I, p. 187)

Kassner's answer is that it is neither one nor the other — it is both: 'Mystiker sprechen von der Einen Seele, die in Allem lebt, und Kunst bedeutete dann ein wechselseitiges Erkennen und Begaben.' (KSW I, p. 187) The answer to Kassner's original question, then, is that the image is neither subjective nor objective in origin. Seen in terms of the notion of mystical pansychism, images arise in a reciprocal process of (subjective) bestowal and (objective) recognition. Here, as in the earlier discussion of Swinburne's style, the opposition of apparent antitheses (movement/stasis — subject/object) breaks down and is replaced by paradoxical reconciliation.

Kassner continues to focus on the question of the nature of the image, but disconcertingly, shifts the terms of his discussion once more, introducing the organicism which I discussed earlier in this subsection:

Das Bild ist etwas, zu dem ein Ding strebt wie zu seiner Nothwendigkeit, sei diese Nothwendigkeit nun sein Opfer oder sein Jubel. Es wächst in das Bild hinein, der Mensch in sein Schicksal, der Held in den Sieg wie Blatt und Stengel in die Blüthe. Vom Standpunkte des Künstlers aus kann man sagen: das Schicksal gibt dem Menschen, der Sieg oder Tod dem Helden, wie die Blüthe der Pflanze — Stil. In diesem Sinne nun bedeuten die Bilder ein Mitleben mit dem Dinge von der Wurzel bis zur Blüthe. (KSW I, p. 188)

From the artistic point of view, style consists in the organic relationship between the whole and the part (blossom and plant). On this account the history of a poetic image is an organic process. Individual images develop out of a necessary and natural process of growth; they are the blossom of the life of an object from its roots upward. Kassner's assertion that Swinburne is no mere literary poet — the claim that he *has* style — is closely related to this organic metaphor of the development of imagery: 'Swinburne stilisiert nicht nur, sondern er hat auch Stil. Er ist der Letzte eines reichen Stammes [. . .]' (KSW I, p. 188). Here, by subtly revitalizing the dead metaphor of 'Stamm', Kassner implies a metaphorical equivalence between Swinburne and the 'Blüthe' of his preceding discussion. Swinburne's place in the 'family tree' of world poetry is analogous to that of the blossom on the plant, and of the poetic image in its relationship to the things of the world. Read in the context of his extensive discussion of imagery, Kassner's characterization of the poet as the last efflorescence of this 'family tree' takes on a new meaning by virtue of that Platonist use of language to which the reader's attention is drawn in 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker'. In the Swinburne essay, as elsewhere in *Die Mystik*, seemingly commonplace words are used in ways which reveal their latent dimensions of meaning.

The organic metaphor of plant/blossom draws together the preceding discussions of Swinburne's imagery, the nature of imagery generally, the style of Swinburne's poetry, and style as such. It is only here that one becomes aware of the significance of Kassner's earlier use of the adjective 'blühend' to characterize Swinburne's images. At this point of his discussion Kassner reintroduces the notion of 'fatal form' central to his overview of Pre-Raphaelitism in 'Der Traum vom Mittelalter'. This is initially presented in a pejorative sense, that of Swinburne's critics:

Er lebt nicht mehr mit den Dingen mit, sondern empfängt sie in ihrer letzten Schönheit. Alles ist Metapher, einfach Form hört man sagen. Aber die Form ist hier etwas organisches, etwas, das mit den Jahren wuchs, überwucherte und die Seele austrank, so dass diese in der Form fortlebt. Swinburne war bei der Geburt der Dinge nicht dabei, er kennt ihre Wurzeln und ihr Werden nicht. Er nimmt die Blüten, und die Früchte fallen reif vor seinen Augen nieder. Der Mensch ist mit seinem Schicksale identisch, es hat ihn aufgesogen wie die Blüthe die Kraft der Wurzel und die Frucht die Blüthe. Der Sieg hat den Helden umfängen wie jene Rüstung den hl. Georg von Burne-Jones, von der ich an anderer Stelle sprach. (KSW I, pp. 188–89)<sup>152</sup>

The thrust of this passage is clear enough: the forms of Swinburne's poetry, his lush metaphors, are, like the image generally, organic. They have grown over the years, and he receives them from his forebears in the stage of their final beauty. However, the vitality of forms in Swinburne's poetry is attributed to the poet's having suffered them. By this, Kassner means that whereas most people suffer the vicissitudes of temporal life, Swinburne, as poet, experiences these perfected poetic forms as his life. This comment refers the reader back both to the opening pages of the essay and to the preceding discussion of Rossetti in which it was said that the poet-painter's work took on the aspect of a life for his young followers:

Swinburne liebt die Formen, weil er an ihnen gelitten hat. Darum sind sie ein Lebendiges, sie haben das Geschlecht und die Sünden der Seele, die sie einst bekleidet hatten. (KSW I, p. 189)

On Kassner's account the forms in Swinburne's poetry are not merely receptacles of complex psychology, as they are said to be in Hofmannsthal's essay on the poet. They have assimilated the sex and sins of the souls they once clothed. 'Once clothed' here is essential — Kassner's point is that these supposed 'garments', like the 'fatal forms' in his discussion of Pre-Raphaelite medievalism, no longer merely clothe the soul: they have absorbed it entirely and now have a life of their own.

Having given this complex account of Swinburne's style Kassner's next step is to examine the protagonists of his poetry, i.e. the people who utter that style: 'Wie wird nun dieser Stil Swinburne's fruchtbar? Seine Helden sprechen ihn; und wie sind nun seine Helden!' (KSW I, p. 189) What this exclamation implies is that the nature of these heroes will be a correlative of Swinburne's uniquely 'ripe' style. Although not strictly apposite to the present study, Kassner's extraordinarily convoluted interpretation of Swinburne's drama is a prerequisite for the reflections of the concluding section of his essay. In what follows, then, I will radically condense his discussion, glossing only those points necessary for an understanding of Kassner's conclusions on Swinburne.

After noting the fact that Swinburne began his publishing career as a dramatist, Kassner opens his consideration with a general account of the nature of drama.<sup>153</sup> In drama, he writes,

<sup>152</sup> See KSW I, p. 147, cited on pp. 152–53 above.

<sup>153</sup> KSW I, pp. 190–91.

the hero and his destiny are two quite distinct entities. What distinguishes them is the hero's lack of knowledge, and thus the dramatic poet's task is to lead his protagonist out of this state of ignorance to the realization of his destiny. The climax of the drama, then, is reached when the hero and destiny merge — in death. This progress from ignorance to knowledge explains Kassner's notion of the drama as inherently educative, and his contention that it, and tragedy in particular, is the product of a young, ascending culture.<sup>154</sup> Kassner stresses that drama can only perform its educative function if the power of destiny exceeds that of the hero: that is, if the hero is initially ignorant of it. The question of man's relationship to destiny was one which preoccupied many avant-garde writers at the turn-of-the-century, and in *La Sagesse et la Destinée* (1898), Maurice Maeterlinck had argued that through the cultivation of wisdom (*sagesse*) man could attain power over this blind force. After glossing Maeterlinck's position, Kassner contends that this account of wisdom as an essentially intellectual phenomenon, while in itself unobjectionable, is too narrow, and proposes that there are other, non-intellectual forms of knowledge, derived not from the reflective mind but from the senses:

Ist nicht eine bis ins Krankhafte gesteigerte Sinnlichkeit, ein Gezeichnetsein an den Sinnen eine starke Macht gegen das Schicksal? Das Schicksal ist doch nichts anderes als ein Ausdruck für das, womit wir uns im Leben bereichern können. Der Mensch geht seiner 'Erfüllung' entgegen, indem er sich seinem Schicksale nähert, und die Tragödie ist zu Ende, wenn das Schicksal wie ein Blut die Adern seiner Seele füllt. (KSW I, p. 192)

The simile of blood-filled veins used here to render the plenitude of destiny, and the (Platonist) equivocation of 'Erfüllung' in the senses of 'fullness' and 'completeness', link this passage both to the notion of vampiric form elaborated in 'Der Traum vom Mittelalter' and to the perfected forms inherited by Swinburne from his poetic forebears. This in turn suggests an equivalence between the protagonists of Swinburne's drama, Swinburne himself, and the forms which are his inheritance.

Kassner goes on to relate Swinburne's art to elements of nineteenth-century European culture more familiar to his readers, declaring the English poet to be a supplement to the Germans Kleist, Schopenhauer, Wagner, and Nietzsche, all of whom are characterized as 'Tragiker'. These German writers and artists are said to be tragedians in so far as all the characters of their work are, as Kassner figuratively puts it, in the final act.<sup>155</sup> That is to say, these characters, like the hero at the end of a drama, are filled with the knowledge of their tragic destiny. Likewise, he continues, all of Swinburne's protagonists are from the outset identical with their destiny.

Why should this be the case? Although Kassner does not state this explicitly, the heroes of Swinburne's dramas and poetic monologues (e.g., Atalanta, Pheadra, Sappho) have all been embodied in art, and thus for the late nineteenth-century poet and reader their destiny is a known quantity. However, this notion of 'Spätzeitlichkeit' in art is taken a step further: for, like their author, these characters are said to be fully aware of their destiny and, therefore, incapable of that gradual enlightenment or education which was said to be one of the principal functions of drama in earlier times. All the characters of Swinburne's poetry are, then, endowed with an awareness of their destiny formerly granted to the tragic hero only in the final act. It is by virtue of this knowledge, acquired through the senses, that their every utterance and action is an expression of their destiny. Thus, these characters are perfectly self-identical, there being no

<sup>154</sup> KSW I, loc. cit.

<sup>155</sup> KSW I, pp. 192-93 (p. 193).



difference between their actions (the effects of destiny) and their soul (the knowledge of destiny):

Sie haben von vornherein die Lust ihres Schicksals. Das Schicksal erfüllt ihnen Nerven und Blut, ist ein Stachel im Leibe, der sie treibt, es macht sie zu nackten Thieren, es ist ihr Thun und Leiden, ihre Tugend und ihre Sünde. Um ihres Schicksals willen lieben und tödten sie, sie wissen es und sind stolz darauf. SIE SINGEN IHR SCHICKSAL, SIE SINGEN SICH SELBST. (KSW I, p. 193)

The rather curious notion that in uttering their destiny Swinburne's self-identical heroes sing *themselves* serves to identify them with music, understood here — as earlier in the essay and throughout *Die Mystik* — as the mystical coincidence of opposites. It should also be remembered that Swinburne is characterized as 'Sänger', a term which underlines the inherent musicality of his creations. By virtue of the perfect congruity of their destiny and actions his characters *are* music; they are the concrete expression of that mystical unity which is a recurrent topos of Kassner's essays, and which is announced in the subtitle of *Die Mystik, Accorde*.

In order to explain what is meant by this embodied harmony of the final act, Kassner cites Schopenhauer's account of the nature of music from the third book of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung I*, supplementing it with his own interpretation. Schopenhauer's philosophy of art, by describing music as the direct objectification of the Will (as opposed to Representations), effectively identifies music with the (Platonic) Idea, the object of all other art forms.<sup>156</sup> While tacitly granting the validity of this interpretation, Kassner proposes that the idea which music objectifies is not necessarily to be understood as a state of perfect original beauty from which the object, as it were, fell into the world of contingency. Rather, music can also be regarded as the final beauty towards which contingent objects struggle — like the tragic hero towards his destiny. This reinterpretation inverts Schopenhauer's relationship between the Idea and its manifestations, and is closely related to the notions of Platonic aspiration and concrete, immanent ideality put forward in 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker'. It should be noted, however, that as in his introductory essay, Kassner does not reject the diametrically opposed view; he supplements it with his antithetical interpretation. Once again, then, Kassner insists on the paradoxical coexistence of seeming opposites — there may be such things as (Schopenhauerian) Ideas which are anterior to phenomenal reality, but there can also be ideas which are posterior to phenomena:

Was bedeutet die Idee eines Dinges? Seine einstige Schönheit, aus der es heraustretet in die Welt der Zufälle? Kann es auch nicht die letzte Schönheit bedeuten, zu der sich ein Ding wie zu seinem Schicksale durchringt? (KSW I, p. 195)

The heroes of Swinburne's poetry, then, are to be understood as musical in this reinterpreted sense, and as such what Kassner calls their immunity to destiny is of a quite different order to that of the people in Dante's and Shelley's poetry. Whereas the latter have this immunity by virtue of their being beyond the phenomenal world, Swinburne's heroes have acquired it via the senses. Thus, Kassner concludes that Schopenhauer's account of the ideal state as music, while applicable to the ethereal characters in Shelley and Dante, did not give the word its most extensive meaning 'in concretis' — ignoring that state of *being* music which is exemplified by Swinburne's protagonists.

<sup>156</sup> KSW I, p. 195. See also p. 124 above.

This remarkable interpretation has a number of important ramifications. First, the shadows (pain) of which Kassner wrote in his interpretation of Keats, and which in the work of the earlier poet remained quite separate from the light (joy), have disappeared completely from Swinburne's musical creations. For by virtue of their musicality, the people and things in these poems can cast no shadow; they have become, as Kassner puts it, 'Ton'.<sup>157</sup> More important than this development of a central Kassnerian metaphor, however, is the related assertion that in Swinburne's work dialogue is an impossibility. Dialogue, Kassner writes, is an expression of the knowledge of the shadow as something exterior, but Swinburne's characters, being (musically) self-identical, can have no such sense of otherness. Thus, his poems are said to be the modern, lyrical equivalent of medieval mysteries, in which the allegorical figures can speak only of themselves.<sup>158</sup> What differentiates Swinburne's people from those of the medieval plays is that the former do not represent typical qualities such as virtues and vices — they *are* their own unique individuality. A further corollary of the musicality of Swinburne's poetry is that in it the question of where experience ends and dream begins has become meaningless, this hierarchy dissolving completely in the undifferentiated state of musical ideality.

There are, though, a number of decidedly less positive consequences of the distinctive mode of existence shared by all of Swinburne's protagonists. In their full consciousness of their unique destiny, all these people are essentially 'für sich' — alone, isolated, perfect in themselves. Life, however, requires the immature ('Unreife') and the unconscious ('Unbewußte') in order to continue, being, as Kassner puts it, a perpetual process of maturing, a gradual dawning of consciousness, which, like the tragedies of nascent cultures, requires a degree of imperfection in order for progress to be possible.<sup>159</sup> In Swinburne's poetry all things are ripe and conscious, and have thus withdrawn themselves from the imperfect, and therefore perfectible, realm of actual human experience. Not only are these people and objects incapable of participating in life; they are also incapable of further development in art, and are, therefore, quite literally the limit of the sensuous style traced through the preceding chapters of *Die Mystik*. In Kassner's discussion of drama the final consequence of this distinctive egoism is Swinburne's inability to construct dramatic plots — for if a character is in full possession of his or her destiny from the first act of the play, nothing but chance can conceivably cause their downfall, and chance has no place in art.<sup>160</sup> As I shall show, in the concluding section of Kassner's essay this account of Swinburne's consummate 'Spätzeitlichkeit', arrived at by means of a baffling array of interpretative paradigms, has radical implications for both art and life.

I began this subsection by glossing Just's account of Kassner's and Hofmannsthal's critical reception of Swinburne. The foregoing analysis of Kassner's essay uncovers a serious deficit in Just's discussion. What fails to emerge from his reading of Kassner's 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' is the essay's wider and more radical implications for poetry. Kassner's extraordinarily elaborate interpretations of Swinburne's art and the nature of its specific 'Spätzeitlichkeit' are directed towards showing the organic relationship between the poet's individuality, the formal eclecticism of his work, and the intensity of its imagery. To this extent the essay might reasonably be read as a critical vindication of Swinburne. However, while the interpretations of the English poet's style and his relationship to the history of poetry are clearly

<sup>157</sup> KSW I, p. 197.

<sup>158</sup> KSW I, loc. cit.

<sup>159</sup> KSW I, p. 198.

<sup>160</sup> KSW I, pp. 203–04.

calculated to defend him against the charge of being a mere 'literary poet', they are by no means unequivocally positive in their implications. For, by virtue of his being the last in a line of poetic descent, and in view of the monadic, musical nature of his self-absorbed creations, Swinburne, great poet as he is, also represents the demise of his poetic lineage.

It should be remembered that Kassner characterizes Swinburne's style as the ultimate development of that sensuous style which originated in Keats, and that he clearly states this culmination to represent not only a pinnacle of achievement, but also a final limit.<sup>161</sup> In his discussion of Swinburne's inability to compose dramatic plots, Kassner's point is not only that the poet's characters are incapable of development. Being complete in itself, Swinburne's verse is also incapable of growth. The 'musicality' of his style and protagonists marks the end of poetry, or rather of that school of poetry presented in the central chapters of *Die Mystik*. This ultimate stage of organic development may be supremely beautiful, but this beauty is terminal — it is the final beauty of death:

Ich nenne die Studie über Swinburne 'Von der letzten Schönheit der Dinge', und die letzte Schönheit, bis zu der ein Ding kommen kann, ist immer sein Tod. (KSW I, p. 199)

Given the profusion of themes in the essay and their highly convoluted explication, it is all too easy to overlook this central point. Far from seeking to provide German poets with a critical justification to emulate Swinburnian verse, Kassner's essay is centrally concerned with revealing the finality of the English poet's achievement. The monadic, self-identical sensibility embodied by Swinburne's characters is by definition incapable of further literary development.

What, then, are the consequences of this interpretation? In the dialogue with which his essay concludes Kassner paradoxically suggests that the only possibility of development for the egoism of Swinburne's protagonists lies in life. The radical implication of this imaginary conversation between an ancient Greek and a modern (i.e. late nineteenth-century) writer is that art may feed back into life, and the cycle, of which Swinburne's moribund beauty is the conclusion, will begin anew as lived reality. The process by which earthly things organically became pure form in Swinburne's verse will be reversed and artistic form will become thing — real people in the temporal world. It is not, as Just claims, that poetry becomes a substitute for being;<sup>162</sup> rather, poetry represents a potential point of departure for a new cycle of development.

In view of the above close analysis, I would reiterate my contention that Hofmannsthal's enthusiasm for Kassner's essay was prompted not by its conformity to his own earlier views but rather by its divergence from them, and its suggestion of a way out of the 'Sackgasse des Ästhetismus'.<sup>163</sup> It will be remembered that for the eighteen-year-old Hofmannsthal the value of Swinburne's poetry lay in its intoxicating effects on an élite of certain young Europeans. In his essay the appeal of Swinburne's poetry was shown to be necessarily exclusive, residing in the masterful employment of recondite forms and images drawn from the vast repository of artistic heritage, the effect of this technique being to evoke 'Stimmungen' (ambiguous moods and psychological states) in extraordinarily sensitive individuals. Swinburne's poetry, in keeping with that of the English aesthetes with whom he is associated, was said to be founded on an inversion of the realistic/naturalistic hierarchy, in that it proceeds not from life to art, but from art to life. On Hofmannsthal's account, Swinburne's intensely vitalistic art exists alongside life

<sup>161</sup> KSW I, p. 181, cited on p. 164 above.

<sup>162</sup> Just, p. 476.

<sup>163</sup> *Briefe I*, p. 206, cited on p. 47 above.

(in its mundane sense), but neither draws from nor feeds into life, and in this respect it represents 'die andere Kunst' promoted by the *Blätter*.

Kassner, on the other hand, has no such programmatic or propagandistic intentions. He is chiefly interested in the character of Swinburne's style, explaining this in terms of the history of English poetry and painting expounded in the preceding essays of *Die Mystik*. Swinburne's poetry is shown to draw on the whole range of poetic tradition. Specifically, however, it is the culmination of the sensual tradition which begins with Keats, and as such it represents the final limit of this tradition. Thus, Swinburne is the 'last man'; the perfect beauty of his poetry is the beauty of death. Kassner does agree with Hofmannsthal to the extent that he portrays Swinburne's poetry as having its source in art — i.e. in the tradition of inherited and perfected forms — rather than in the inchoate material of life. However, Kassner does not locate the importance of Swinburne's poetry in its ability to evoke intoxicating and ambiguous psychological states in the reader. Nor does he regard its significance as residing merely in its creation of art from art, although this is an important aspect of its distinctive character. Rather, Kassner presents Swinburne as typifying a distinctively modern sensibility, that of the 'Kunst-Idealisten' for whom the necessary 'soul-facts' of art (poetry) are more real than the mere possibilities of life.<sup>164</sup>

As Swinburne's poetry is incapable of further development it cannot feed into literature, be that literature English or German. In that it has attained ideality its possibilities are exhausted, and change must thus be sought elsewhere. The closing dialogue of Kassner's essay suggests that the work of Swinburne and the modern 'Kunst-Idealisten' to whom he is said to belong will quite literally proceed from art to life. That is to say, Swinburne's perfect work will not merely coexist with mundane life, as it was said to do in Hofmannsthal's essay; it will itself become life. The people of Swinburne's poetry, the so-called 'Makranthropos', will become reality. By introducing this term, which Schopenhauer used to characterize his distinctive philosophical approach, Kassner would appear to be suggesting something akin to the 'Neue Psychologie' of the *Jung-Wiener* in the 1890s, the distinctive post-Romantic psychology expounded in Bahr's early essays. Rather than seeing man as a reduction of the world, in Schopenhauer's philosophy the world is seen as an enlargement of man, specifically of his Will and Imagination.<sup>165</sup> Quite how this artistically-embodied psychology is to become a reality is unclear — but it would appear that Kassner envisaged a state in which the perfection of Swinburne's poetry would be lived. On this account aestheticism is no longer a blind alley, it is the route to a new form of human life and experience. For Kassner, Swinburne's work does not merely represent a choice source of intoxication for a select few (if it did, it would be 'Ästhetismus' in Hofmannsthal's sense of the word); rather it holds the potential radically to transform life. The protagonists of Swinburne's poetry are 'neue Menschen' — or, with respect to life, possibilities of the New Man.<sup>166</sup>

Thus, Hofmannsthal's enthusiasm for this essay can be assumed to precede from Kassner's highly individual, if rather uneven, interpretation of Swinburne's achievement, an interpretation differing significantly from his own. According to Kassner, although at times

<sup>164</sup> KSW I, pp. 206–08 (p. 208).

<sup>165</sup> The term derives from Schopenhauer's *Epiphilosophie*: 'man [hatte] seit den ältesten Zeiten den Menschen als Mikrokosmos angesprochen. Ich habe den Satz umgekehrt und die Welt als Makranthropos nachgewiesen; sofern Wille und Vorstellung ihr wie sein Wesen erschöpft.' Arthur Schopenhauer, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Wolfgang Frhr. von Löhneysen, 5 vols (Frankfurt a.M., 1986), II, 842. See KSW II, p. 474.

<sup>166</sup> KSW I, pp. 205–06. Kassner's formulation of this point adumbrates the Expressionist preoccupation with the New Man. This probably indicates a common source in Nietzsche's notion of 'Übermensch', rather than direct influence.

verging on mannerism, Swinburne's style is not merely technique ('ein souveränes Stilgefühl'); nor is his poetry merely the serving up of new wine in old vessels. It is, rather, the ultimate perfection of a certain form of artistic expression. All the objects and people of Swinburne's poetry have already been expressed in art, and to this extent his work is composed solely of other works of art. However, this is no merely 'literary' juxtaposition of styles; it is their necessary tragic consummation, the beautiful, moribund efflorescence of his ancient family tree.

The epigraph to this subsection shows Kassner to have intended this essay as a reckoning with all he had outlived or failed to live out. As indicated, the final result fell well short of fulfilling his expectations. One can easily see why: in the space of some thirty-five pages he had tried to compress a highly figurative reading of Swinburne in terms of nineteenth-century English art, world poetry, drama (and its cultural significance), the image (in general and particular), and, of course, music. As if this were not enough, 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' is permeated by German *fin de siècle* preoccupations: Schopenhauer, Wagner, Nietzsche, the question of destiny (as treated by Maeterlinck), and modern, post-Romantic psychology. It is small wonder, then, that Kassner was dissatisfied with the result of his labours — and that Hofmannsthal was so exhausted by reading it.

As I shall show in the following subsection, though the condition of Swinburne's art is said to be terminal, it is not quite the end of the line of nineteenth-century English art which begins with Keats.

v) *William Morris und Edward Burne Jones. Die Bürde der Spiegel*

The final essay with which this chapter is concerned can be seen as a continuation of the complex reading of Swinburne discussed above. Unlike the essay on Swinburne, however, Kassner felt this to be one of the most successful in his book.<sup>167</sup> My reading will centre on the extraordinary impressionistic interpretation of Burne-Jones's paintings it contains — one of the most striking and most densely figurative passages of *Die Mystik* — and will examine the implications of this interpretation for Kassner's final assessment of Pre-Raphaelitism. His extensive account of Morris's poetry, fascinating as it is, lies beyond the scope of the present study. However, in order to understand the complex evocation of Burne-Jones presented in the latter half of the essay some elucidation of the image of aestheticism developed in the discussion of Morris is necessary. It is notable that in his essay on Swinburne Kassner avoids classifying the poet under any commonly-used and potentially pejorative critical category. Although praised as a master in the depiction of 'dekadente Halbgöttinnen', Swinburne is not himself classified as decadent.<sup>168</sup> Morris and Burne-Jones, however, are from the outset of this essay characterized as aesthetes, and their work as representative of aestheticism.

In order to appreciate some of the similarities and differences between Kassner's and Hofmannsthal's understanding of aestheticism it is worth pausing here to recapitulate the latter's position. As shown in chapter one, Hofmannsthal's interpretation of 'Ästhetismus' is framed in terms of a combination of art, history, life, and beauty. In 'Algernon Charles Swinburne', the modern aesthete — although not expressly described as such — is characterized

<sup>167</sup> See BaT, p. 81, cited on p. 115, footnote 37 above.

<sup>168</sup> On Swinburne's decadent demi-goddesses, see KSW I, p. 202. Kassner's distrust of this particular slogan is evident elsewhere in *Die Mystik*. See KSW I, p. 307 where Walter, the more garrulous interlocutor of the Wildean dialogue 'Stil', swiftly dismisses his friend Ralph's stereotypical characterization of Swinburne as a decadent. In a letter of 12 August 1901 Kassner disparaged the charge of decadence levelled at Wagner's music by Nietzsche: 'Decadenz ist ein Geschwätz, krank werden kann man an allem und dumm muß man eben bleiben.' (BaT, p. 107)

by his retreat from society and his perception of life through the inherited medium of art. In *Der Tor und der Tod* and 'Walter Pater', however, this Wildean image of aestheticism is supplemented by an account of the aesthete's intense psychological identification with the beauty of the past, a notion which was shown to have affinities with the critique of nineteenth-century German historicism in Nietzsche's *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*. Although in 'Walter Pater' aestheticism is roundly condemned for its deleterious effects on modern culture, Hofmannsthal's praise of the English critic indicates the value of this attitude to past beauty within its proper sphere, i.e. that of aesthetic criticism. A born critic such as Pater, with a love for art analogous to that of the artist for life, can and must revivify historical periods, artists, and works of art for his readers. However, when this critical mode of perception is applied to life it inevitably leads to fragmentation and decline. Hofmannsthal's concern with delimiting the scope of 'Ästhetismus' in 'Walter Pater' was seen to proceed from the growing uneasiness in his preoccupation with the relationship between life and art in his work from *Der Tor und der Tod* onwards.

To return to Kassner's essay: initially there are a number of noticeable similarities between Kassner's account of aestheticism and those advanced by Hofmannsthal in both 'Algernon Charles Swinburne' and 'Walter Pater'. This is perhaps not very surprising, as any interpretation of the phenomenon would necessarily have to make reference to the central notions of these essays: art, history, life, and beauty. Like Hofmannsthal, Kassner emphasizes the closeted nature of the aesthetes' (here specifically Morris's and Burne-Jones's) work. Their art is presented as having its origin, not in the beauty of the contemporary world, but rather in their closeted dreams of the sensuous beauty of past ages, dreams derived from books and other works of art.<sup>169</sup> While relating this backward-looking, sensuous pursuit of beauty to the work of their immediate forebears — in particular to that of Keats and Rossetti — Kassner indicates that the aesthetes' attitude is more refined than that of their masters, thereby echoing Hofmannsthal's account of the progressive refinement of modern English painting.<sup>170</sup> An important difference, however, is that Kassner ascribes this greater refinement not to any technical or theoretical development in the aesthetes' art, but rather in their total surrender to the past, a surrender proceeding, as he puts it, from their having nothing of their own to say.<sup>171</sup> Like Hofmannsthal, Kassner presents the sensibility of the English aesthete as representatively modern, relating their feelings to those of his readership by use of the pronoun 'uns'.<sup>172</sup> Another striking similarity is Kassner's emphasis on the amalgamation of (pagan) body and (Christian) soul in the works of Morris and Burne-Jones which, while referring back to the preceding essays of *Die Mystik*, echoes Hofmannsthal's notion of the 'psychisch-leibliche Schönheit' said to be distinctive of Pre-Raphaelite painting.<sup>173</sup>

However, a number of fundamental differences between the two critics' understanding of aestheticism are also apparent early in the essay. Unlike Hofmannsthal, Kassner is not primarily concerned with showing the essentially moral nature of English aestheticism generally and of Burne-Jones's painting in particular. Nor is he concerned with examining the influence of criticism on the artistic practice of the late Pre-Raphaelites. Rather, his aim is to divine the distinctive character of Morris's and Burne-Jones's work and to situate it in the context of that

<sup>169</sup> KSW I, p. 213.

<sup>170</sup> KSW I, p. 213. See Hofmannsthal's 'Über moderne englische Malerei' on the progressive refinement of the painterly style of depiction which the early Pre-Raphaelites are said to have appropriated from Dante. RA I, pp. 548–49, discussed on pp. 39–40 above.

<sup>171</sup> KSW I, p. 213.

<sup>172</sup> KSW I, p. 214.

<sup>173</sup> RA I, p. 551, cited on p. 43 above.

line of nineteenth-century artistic development traced through the central chapters of *Die Mystik*. Not surprisingly, then, as the last artists in his history of Pre-Raphaelitism Burne-Jones and Morris represent the poetic and pictorial consummation of that aesthetic tendency which was shown to begin with Keats. This may appear to contradict the preceding interpretation of Swinburne as the last of a distinguished artistic line. However, it soon becomes clear that in Morris and Burne-Jones this consummation takes on a form and significance quite different from that ascribed to Swinburne's art.

Far from seeking to bind the work of the English aesthetes to life, Kassner's discussion could be said to show how the bond between life and art is utterly severed in aestheticism. It is also notable that early in the chapter the work of Morris and Burne-Jones is characterized by its stasis and lack of development.<sup>174</sup> Kassner's reading of Morris reveals further differences between his account of aestheticism and that in Hofmannsthal's essays. For example, where Hofmannsthal employed his recurrent myth of critic-inspired painting to interpret Burne-Jones and the other Pre-Raphaelites, Kassner, drawing on his superior knowledge of English literature and on his first-hand experience of England, explains Morris's and Burne-Jones's character with reference to their time as students at Oxford. Although he naturally avoids any suggestion of positivist determination by milieu, Kassner cites Morris's and Burne-Jones's love for all matters of form, cult, and what he calls the habitual lyricism of college culture as being characteristically Oxonian.<sup>175</sup> In support of this he indicates the correspondence of their formal/cultic temperament to both the garden-like, artificial landscape surrounding the town and the gentle, domestic English style of Gothic architecture.<sup>176</sup> More persuasively perhaps, Kassner also relates their temperament to the nineteenth-century Oxonian fascination with Roman Catholicism which he describes as the most sensuous form of Christianity. He then cites Cardinal Newman and, significantly, Walter Pater as examples of this particular aesthetic/religious tendency, and quotes a passage from Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* on the 'aesthetic charm of the catholic church'.<sup>177</sup> Kassner's emphasis on the now well-documented religious predilections of Oxford-educated English artists such as Pater and Wilde, is a dimension completely lacking in Hofmannsthal's essays on Pre-Raphaelitism.<sup>178</sup>

The association of Morris's and Burne-Jones's attitudes with those of Pater and his fictional *alter ego* Marius serves subtly to introduce the notion of pleasure-oriented Epicureanism into the discussion of English aestheticism, and this is stated explicitly in Kassner's account of the people in Morris's verse. Commenting on the remarkable discrepancy between the very specific feelings evoked by Morris's narrative verse and the impossibility of talking about these 'stories' in anything but the most general terms, Kassner concludes:

Man kann sie eigentlich nur geniessen, sinnlich geniessen wie das Blühen der Rosen im Garten und den Geruch reifer Früchte in Baumschulen. Man wird doch immer nur deutlich über die eigenen Sinne sprechen können, wenn man von den Blumen und Sträuchern erzählen will. (KSW I, pp. 215–16)

This dimension of sensuous pleasure plays only a very minor role in Hofmannsthal's pious, Ruskinian interpretation of Pre-Raphaelite painting in 'Über moderne englische Malerei'. By

<sup>174</sup> KSW I, p. 215.

<sup>175</sup> KSW I, p. 214.

<sup>176</sup> For Kassner's first impressions of English Gothic in Oxford, see BaT, p. 43.

<sup>177</sup> KSW I, pp. 214–15.

<sup>178</sup> Before being converted to aestheticism Morris and Burne-Jones had studied for the Anglican clergy. On the decisive role of Ruskin's aesthetic theories in their conversion, see John Christian, "A Serious Talk": Ruskin's Place in Burne-Jones's Artistic Development', in *Pre-Raphaelite Papers*, pp. 184–205 (p. 185).

Kassner's reading of aestheticism, by contrast, the cultic art of the later Pre-Raphaelites, while closely associated with Oxonian neo- and crypto-Catholicism, is no act of pious Christian devotion; it is, rather, a form of ultra-modern aesthetic Epicureanism combining elements of pagan sensuality and Christian spirituality.

The above comparison of Morris's tales with roses and ripe fruit (it should be noticed that this is not wild fruit, but that of artificially cultivated orchards) reintroduces the organic metaphor central to the essay on Swinburne. As shown, in *Die Mystik* Swinburne's life and work represent the blossom, the final stage, of an organic process of development. However, it should be noted that, while Swinburne represents the ultimate stage of fruition, in the figurative interpretation of his work blossom and plant still form an organic whole. In his presentation of the English aesthete Kassner takes this metaphor a step further. The aesthete's art also represents the culmination of a metaphorical process of fruition, but with one crucial difference: the fruit (their work) is no longer attached to the plant. The words in Morris's poetry seem, Kassner writes, 'unabhängig vom Ganzen, vom Satze, vom Verse, so für sich' (KSW I, p. 216).<sup>179</sup> Metaphorically they are, he continues, ripe fruits which have been harvested, pitted, and served up purely for the pleasure they offer the consumer. Here the tragedy characteristic of Swinburne's verse gives way to a kind of rarefied Epicureanism: 'Sie [Morris's words] sind nicht gewachsen aus einem starken Gefühle und stecken nicht mit ihren Wurzeln in dem Boden des Verses, sie sind wie Früchte aus einem Korbe gefallen' (KSW I, p. 216); and: 'Sie sind wie Früchte, denen man die Kerne herausgeschält hat, da zum Geniessen, hingegeben' (KSW I, p. 217). That is to say, the words of Morris's verse are no longer suffused with a tragedy which is uniquely their own; they exist solely to evoke pleasurable sensations in the reader. Although placing strong emphasis on pleasure, Kassner's metaphorical depiction of Morris's words is highly ambivalent, containing elements of violence, sterility, and lifelessness which are central to the later account of Burne-Jones's paintings:

Sie [the words of Morris's verse] leben nicht ihr eigenes Leben, sondern das Leben, das wir ihnen geben, sie leben von unserem Geniessen. Ihr Wesen ist nur Schein. Sie sind im Leben schon einmal überwunden worden. Etwas an ihnen ist abgestorben. Das Bittere, das, womit sie sich selbst angehören, der Egoismus der Wurzeln, an dem sie, wie ich bei Swinburne sagte, fortleben, zeugend und fruchtbringend, ist ihnen ausgebrochen und abgerissen worden. (KSW I, p. 217)

The suggestion here is that, though these words may give the reader pleasure, this is achieved only by violently depriving them of their vitality and fecundity. Unlike Swinburne's self-sufficient musical characters and images, these words no longer have a life of their own.

Another key aspect of the preceding essays developed in Kassner's discussion of aestheticism is the notion of the artistic integration of opposites. This reconciliation of the apparently irreconcilable is shown to take a number of forms in Morris's work. In its integration of the sensuous and the spiritual/intellectual Morris's language is characterized as the final

<sup>179</sup> Although towards the conclusion of his discussion of Morris and Burne-Jones Kassner flatly rejects the term 'decadent' as an unhelpful slogan, this account of Morris's words closely resembles Nietzsche's characterization of decadence in *Der Fall Wagner*: 'Womit kennzeichnet sich jede literarische *décadence*? Damit, daß das Leben nicht mehr im Ganzen wohnt. Das Wort wird souverän und springt aus dem Satz hinaus, der Satz greift über und verdunkelt den Sinn der Seite, die Seite gewinnt Leben auf Unkosten des Ganzen — das Ganze ist kein Ganzes mehr. Aber das ist das Gleichnis für jeden Stil der *décadence*: jedesmal Anarchie der Atome, Disgregation des Willens, "Freiheit des Individuums", moralisch geredet — zu einer politischen Theorie erweitert "gleiche Rechte für alle". Das Leben, die *gleiche* Lebendigkeit, die Vibration und Exuberanz des Lebens in die kleinsten Gebilde zurückgedrängt, der Rest *arm* an Leben. Überall Lähmung, Mühsal, Erstarrung *oder* Feindschaft und Chaos: beides immer mehr in die Augen springend, in je höhere Formen der Organisation man aufsteigt. Das Ganze lebt überhaupt nicht mehr: es ist zusammengesetzt, gerechnet, künstlich, ein Artefakt.' Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner*, in Schlechta, II, pp. 901–38 (p. 917).



consequence of Keats's poetic style. Its distinctive feature is a suspension of the normal disjunction between the spiritual and the sensuous, making the spiritual sensuous and vice versa. Kassner goes further, however, characterizing this feature of aesthetic poetry as the very essence of language:

Im letzten Grunde ist es überhaupt das Wesen der Sprache und jedes anderen menschlichen Mittels, so zu verfahren und so den gegebenen Zwiespalt zwischen dem Sinnlichen und Geistigen zu heben. Jedes menschliche Mittel strebt nach der Einheit, und der Künstler ist nichts anderes als ein Mittel der Natur, sich zur Einheit zu bringen. Die Sprache des Dichters unterstreicht da die Sprache der Natur, und so oft wir den Mund aufthun, kommen wir dem Dichter schon entgegen — in dem Masse, als wir uns von der Wirklichkeit, die immer nur die eine Hälfte der Natur ist, entfernen. Nun und alle bewussten Künstler wie Keats und Morris, Menschen, die alles Sinnliche thatsächlich geistig und alles Geistige thatsächlich sinnlich an sich erfahren, die im Bilde denken und den Gedanken am Körper geniessen, empfinden alle Umwege, alle Mittel der Natur als ihre Natur und den Schein als das Wesen. Was aber bei Keats noch Neuerung ist und als Literatur aufgenommen wurde, und was Swinburne in einigen Gedichten wie *Laus Veneris* und *At Eleusis* auffallend übertreibt, ist bei Morris so, als könnte es gar nicht anders sein. (KSW I, p. 218)

It was presumably this passage, with its explicit statement of the artist's natural integrative function, which Franz Servaes, one of the most sympathetic and insightful reviewers of *Die Mystik*, had in mind when he glossed the general tendency of Kassner's conception of art. After noting Kassner's thoroughly intellectual pleasure in art and life, Servaes writes: 'Diese geistige Auffassung wird ihm geradezu zu einer neuen Art Sinnlichkeit, welche die "Bedeutung" wie die Duft einer Blume genießt.'<sup>180</sup> The similarity of this formulation to T. S. Eliot's articulation of his notion of 'dissociation of sensibility' is striking, and reflects a widespread concern with the dissociation of sense and intellect in Symbolist literary circles of the 1890s.<sup>181</sup> The perfect unity of which Kassner writes in the above passage is also evident in Morris's style which is said to dissolve the distinction between life and art: in his verse works of art are described as if they were alive and life described as if it were a work of art.<sup>182</sup> As repeatedly pointed out in this chapter, something similar can be observed in Kassner's treatment of literary characters as if they were alive, and real human beings as if they were works of art.

As the cryptic subtitle to the essay, 'Die Bürde der Spiegel' indicates, the central metaphor in Kassner's interpretation of aestheticism is the mirror, a key image in his work from 'Sonnengnade' onwards. In the course of this essay, however, this image acquires a far greater range of meaning than in the early short story. It is introduced into the discussion of Morris's poetry in a passage which is obviously an oblique criticism of Naturalism or, for that matter, any other naively mimetic conception of art:

Die Natur selbst entzieht sich uns ja immer, wir müssen sie übertragen, auf Spiegel übertragen, auf die Spiegel unseres Geistes, unseres Gefühls oder unseres Auges. Das ist beinahe ein Gemeinplatz, aber es ist gut, sich dessen gerade hier zu erinnern. (KSW I, p. 220)

<sup>180</sup> Franz Servaes, 'Kunstliteratur', *Neue freie Presse*, Nr 12760, Vienna, Saturday 3 March 1900, pp. 16–18: quoted (abridged) in BaT, pp. 211–12 (p. 212).

<sup>181</sup> Eliot first uses the phrase 'dissociation of sensibility' in 'The Metaphysical Poets' (1921) where he gives the following account of the dissociated and non-dissociated poetic mind: 'Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.' In T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London/Boston, 1980), pp. 281–91 (p. 287). Frank Kermode discusses the widespread currency of the notion of a dissociation of sensibility during the 1890s in the penultimate chapter of his *Romantic Image* (Glasgow, 1976), pp. 153–77. Of course, unlike Eliot and the other writers discussed by Kermode, Kassner does not attempt to identify a historical point at which a dissociation of the originally unified poetic sensibility set in.

<sup>182</sup> KSW I, p. 218.

The point of Kassner's stating this apparent platitude is to remind the reader that there can be no such thing as an unmediated reproduction of nature. In order for nature to be perceived, let alone depicted in art, it must first be reflected in some medium, be this the intellect, the emotions, or the eyes. Thus, nature is never objectively apprehended, but is always coloured by the subjective medium of perception. Developing on this notion of reflexivity, Kassner proposes that in Morris's poetry nature is represented as reflected by the eye. That is to say, visual perception is the medium of reflection characteristic of Morris's work. By contrast, in Burne-Jones's paintings nature is less sensuous, being reflected in the medium of the artist's dreams. In his work natural objects are transformed, assuming a mystical, abstract quality:

Man sehe sich dann eine von Burne-Jones' Landschaften an, etwa die auf dem 'Spiegel der Venus'. Das sind keine Berge und Bäume, wie sie aus der Erde einmal brachen und gewachsen sind, es sind Linien und Farben, die zu Bergrücken, Abhängen, einer etwas gewellten Ebene — als hätte ein Wind Sand hingeweht —, dünnen Baumstämmen und Ästen komponiert sind. Sie leben von demselben Kunstgesetze wie Rossetti's Proserpina. Die Natur ist dem Künstler in den Spiegel eines Traumes gefallen, und er malt sie vom Traume gleichsam ab. Es sind Metaphern der Berge und Bäume, und sie sind ebenso wirklich wie die Berge in den Augen der mystischen states, der Stimmungen William Blake's. Burne-Jones malte mystische Landschaften, im 17. Jahrhundert würde er vielleicht heroische gemalt haben. (KSW I, p. 220)

It is essential to recognize that this characterization of nature in Burne-Jones's paintings as 'Metapher' subtly refers the reader back to the extensive discussion of imagery in the preceding essay, where metaphor was equated with music in Kassner's distinctive sense of the word. The implicit notion of metaphor as the ideal musical/mystical harmony of subject and object leads over into the following account of 'Stimmung'.

In chapter two I cited a passage from Kassner's correspondence where, shortly after returning to Vienna from Berlin, he complains to Gottlieb Fritz about the excess of unreliable 'Stimmung' in the literary scene of the Austrian capital.<sup>183</sup> As pointed out, in the 1890s this was a central, if indeterminate, term in the aesthetic theories and debates of the non-Naturalist avant-garde, and it is, therefore, difficult to say precisely what it was Kassner objected to in contemporary Viennese literature. In his discussion of Morris's poetry, however, Kassner gives an original account of 'Stimmung', bringing the word into the complex of musical imagery which recurs throughout *Die Mystik*. In the manner of his ideal Platonist critic Kassner's illumination of this vague, almost clichéd term circumvents contemporary aesthetic debate, drawing rather on a latent semantic dimension of the word itself. For this reason I have thus far refrained from translating 'Stimmung', as the common English equivalents ('mood' or 'atmosphere') would only obscure the less obvious German meaning essential to Kassner's interpretation.

'Stimmung', Kassner writes, is one of two elements distinctive of the people in Morris's poetry, the other being what is called their 'desire'. The former is said to be their essential nature, the latter consists in a departure from this. What, then, is 'Stimmung'? Kassner's explanation deserves to be quoted in full:

Was bedeutet denn eigentlich Stimmung! Man gebraucht das Wort heute so oft. Ich bin in Stimmung, mag man sagen, wenn ich seelisch an den Dingen um mich herum theilnehme. Doch das ist zu allgemein. Ich habe in mir etwas aufgegeben, einen Gedanken oder sonst eine Voreingenommenheit, die mich von der Sympathie mit den Dingen ausschloss; ich bin vom Augenblicke eingenommen, habe Störendes ausgehängt, einen Hang nach einem

<sup>183</sup> BaT, p. 14, cited on p. 90, and discussed on pp. 90–91 above.

verlorenen Gestern oder einem unsicheren Morgen und bin jetzt im Gleichgewichte, in der Harmonie, nur ein Ton im Accorde. Stimmung ist Austausch, gegenseitiges Begaben. Die Natur gibt meinen Augen die Farben, und ich vertraue ihrem Schweigen einen eigenen Sinn an. Der Platoniker des Alterthums und des Mittelalters, die intellectuellen Menschen überhaupt, Amiel und Browning, nennen die Stimmung Enthusiasmus oder Ekstase: sie sind auf ein so Hohes, Überirdisches gestimmt, dass sie in ihm aufgehen wie in einem grossen Brande. Die Ästheten, kurz alle diejenigen, denen die Kunst der letzte und höchste Ausdruck des Lebens ist, sind auf die jedem Dinge eigene Schönheit, die aus dem grossen Scheine gefallenen Farben, die aus dem grossen Brande gelösten Flammen gestimmt. Im gewöhnlichen Leben sind wir schliesslich alle, wie Goethe irgendwo sagt, "auf den Effect reducirt", wir gucken mit den Ecken und Kanten unseres Willens zu sehr aus dem Ganzen heraus, und die Dinge leben im Schatten unserer Wünsche. In der Stimmung nun sind sie hell im Lichte unseres eigenen Empfindens, — dieses ist schliesslich auch ihr Leben —, sie sind selbstständig — als Träger des Gefühles im 18. Jahrhundert in den Zeiten der 'schönen Seele' oder als Träger einer Kunst mit Farben und Linien für die Augen des Ästheten. Sie haben dann Stil, und das Auge des Künstlers ist ihr Spiegel. Stimmung ist schweigende, unausgesprochene Musik in uns selbst oder gelöste und gedeutete Musik auf einem Bilde Whistler's oder die Musik Wagner's. (KSW I, pp. 225–26)

This definition of 'Stimmung' as quasi-mystical empathy with objects is closely related to Kassner's account of metaphor in his Swinburne essay. As in the preceding essay, the above state of exchange and reciprocal bestowal suspends the traditional either/or disjunction of subject and object, replacing it with an integrative logic of both/and. Man's relationship to the objects of the world becomes one of authentic reciprocity only in those rare moments when disintegrative everyday habits of thought and perception are temporarily suspended. This recalls the painter's redemptive vision in 'Sonnengnade' in which she perceived her identity with the sun, and is substantially the same as that panpsychical 'wechselseitiges Erkennen und Begaben' which in the Swinburne essay was said to be the essence of the aesthetic image or metaphor.<sup>184</sup>

The characterization of this state as one of harmony explicitly reintroduces the notion of music implied by the earlier depiction of Burne-Jones's lines as 'Metapher', and this indicates how the closing sentences of the above quotation are to be read. If 'Stimmung' is translated as 'mood' or 'atmosphere', the point of Kassner's discussion is utterly lost. For, by bringing 'Stimmung' into the complex of musical imagery used in the discussion of Swinburne's metaphors and throughout *Die Mystik*, Kassner is drawing on the original usage of the term to refer to the tuning of musical instruments.<sup>185</sup> Thus, although it cannot hope to capture the nuances of Kassner's German, the most adequate English translation for the epiphanic state which he here describes would be 'attunement'.<sup>186</sup> In the normal course of life such experiences of harmony are rare and brief; in the art of the English aesthetes they dominate to the extent of replacing of nature. This passage is an excellent example of the near impossibility of reading extracts from Kassner's critical essays without some reference to the context of the whole volume. It also shows how the most seemingly diverse terms in Kassner's essays — metaphor, music, attunement — have a tendency to converge in the course of his discussions. As Servaes'

<sup>184</sup> KSW I, p. 187, cited on p. 166 above.

<sup>185</sup> From the sixteenth century, the word 'Stimmung' was used to refer to musical instruments and acquired its meaning of 'Gemütszustand' only in the eighteenth century. See *Der Duden in 10 Bänden* Herausgegeben vom Wissenschaftlichen Rat der Dudenredaktion: Prof. Dr. Günther Drosdowski, and others. Band 7, *Etymologie. Herkunftswörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*. 2., revised and expanded edition by Günther Drosdowski (Mannheim, Vienna, Zurich, 1989), p. 712, col. 2.

<sup>186</sup> Kassner's account of 'Stimmung' attracted the attention of Rilke during the writing of *Das Stundenbuch* (1905). Ruth Mövius, in her *Rainer Maria Rilkes Studien-Buch. Entstehung und Gehalt* (Leipzig, 1937), notes that in September 1901 Rilke, who had no great interest in English art, transcribed part of the passage quoted above from 'Was bedeutet denn eigentlich Stimmung?' to 'irgendeine Voreingenommenheit, die mich von von der Sympathie mit den Dingen ausschloss', pp. 230–32. The general appeal of Kassner's 'musical' definition of 'Stimmung' probably lay in its elaboration of similar ideas on the musical dimension of objects put forward in Rilke's 'Notizen zur Melodie der Dinge' (1898). As this fragmentary essay was unpublished during Rilke's lifetime influence is highly unlikely. See Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sämtliche Werke*, herausgegeben vom Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn, 6 vols. (Frankfurt a.M., 1965), V, pp. 412–25.

review suggests, Kassner's associative use of these terms is itself integrative, and to this extent his criticism can be said to enact this central theme of *Die Mystik*.

The second element of the characters in Morris's verse, what Kassner calls their 'desire', is glossed as a yearning, sometimes miraculously fulfilled, to step out of this state of perfect harmony and experience life.<sup>187</sup> It is here that the difference between the people in Morris's poetry and those in Burne-Jones's paintings lies. Unlike literary characters, the latter cannot act, they cannot step out of their 'Stimmung'. Captured in their graceful poses they are, as it were, frozen in a rare moment of epiphanous attunement.<sup>188</sup> In contrast to Morris's verse, then, Burne-Jones's paintings are pure 'Stimmung', and the inability of the people in these pictures to leave this state of harmony plays an important role in the impressionistic interpretation which forms the centre-piece of the essay.

Kassner's extended account of Burne-Jones's painting, particularly his early work, is based on the peculiar sensation it evokes in him. This is a feeling, Kassner writes, quite unlike any inspired by the work of Rossetti, Swinburne, or Morris, 'wiewohl Burne-Jones nur die Vollendung des Kunstempfindens dieser Menschen bedeutet' (KSW I, p. 233). Significantly, the unique sensation which Kassner's interpretation articulates is one of disquiet:

Ich habe die Empfindung, als sei mit diesen Menschen etwas Grausames geschehen. Es geht mir so mit den 'Les avertis' in den Spielen Maeterlinck's. Ich werde sie nicht los — allem Scheine der Farben und Klänge der Worte entgegen. Diese Menschen sehen alle so sanft und gut aus, aber um etwas scheinen sie wie betrogen. Etwas hat man ihnen genommen, und an der Sehnsucht nach diesem ist es, als wollten sie dem Bilde entfliehen, aus dem Rahmen fallen. (KSW I, p. 233)

Where Hofmannsthal chose to concentrate on the exquisite ethical grace of the figures in Pre-Raphaelite painting, Kassner cannot suppress the feeling that, their undeniable beauty notwithstanding, they have suffered some terrible deprivation.<sup>189</sup> Their seeming desire to flee the painting is analogous to the 'desire' of the people in Morris's verse to step out of their natural state of attunement and experience life. However, as pointed out above, being incapable of action, the people in Burne-Jones's paintings are effectively trapped in their 'Stimmung'. In the following sentences the parallels with Kassner's earlier discussion of Morris are stated explicitly:

Es ist mit ihnen wie mit den Worten in Morris' Versen. Die Fruchtbarkeit ist ihnen auf irgend einem subtilen Wege abgebunden und das Leben in ihnen niedergetreten worden, gerädert worden [ . . . ] (KSW I, p. 233)

This sterility and violently enforced estrangement from life, which in Morris's language was associated with his Epicureanism, is here related to the central image of the mirror:

Als hätten sie sich einmal in schönster und verruchtester Stunde vor den Spiegel gestellt, und der Spiegel hätte sie aufgefangen und gäbe sie nicht mehr zurück, der Spiegel der Schönheit des Körpers, der ihnen die Reize, wie sie dem Begehren leben, wies, und der Spiegel der Schönheit der Seele, der dieser das Wissen des Schicksals gab und eine Thür in den 'Palast des Todes' aufschlug. (KSW I, p. 233)

<sup>187</sup> KSW I, p. 232.

<sup>188</sup> KSW I, p. 232.

<sup>189</sup> In Maeterlinck's influential mystico-philosophical volume *Le Trésor des Humbles* (1896) 'les avertis' are those destined to die young. See *The Treasure of the Humble*, translated by Arthur Sutro, with introduction by A. B. Walkley. Pocket Edition (Edinburgh, 1909), 'The Pre-Destined', pp. 43–58.

In this passage the significance of the mirror has subtly changed. It no longer represents merely the necessary medium in which nature must be reflected in order to be perceived or become art. The mirror now takes on the sinister form of a trap from which the people in Burne-Jones's paintings are unable to escape. It is notable that their entrapment is associated with their reflexive knowledge of the beauty of both body and soul, a point which takes up the earlier discussion of 'Stimmung' and art as the integration of seemingly irreconcilable opposites. Here, however, such knowledge, like that of fallen man, carries the taint of death.

So far Kassner's reading of Burne-Jones, if highly figurative, is clear enough. However, from this point the interpretation begins to take on an almost intractable complexity. Not only are the people in the paintings trapped by the mirror, they are themselves like mirrors:

Und sie können aus ihrer Schönheit nicht mehr heraus und sind starr geworden wie Glas an der Bürde der Spiegel, sie sind überhaupt nur noch Spiegel. Die Wünsche seltener Stunden, wie sie Keats und Flaubert überkamen und jeden von uns aufsuchen, und an deren Nichterfüllung wir schaffen, diese geheimsten Wünsche, der eigene Spiegel zu sein, wie der Andere zu sein, die Wünsche, so zu sein wie die Phantasie, uns selbst das Schicksal zu geben, uns an den Gedanken eines vollkommenen Augenblickes als an unsere Ewigkeit zu bannen, die perverse Begierde des Narcissus ist ihnen erfüllt worden. Narcissus ertrank in seinem Spiegel, und die Jünglinge und Mädchen Burne-Jones' sind an ihm Kunstwerke geworden. (KSW, p. 233-34)

For the moment it will suffice to note that this passage introduces a number of related notions. Here, as in his essay on Keats, Kassner emphasizes the peculiarly modern desire to be the spectator of one's own life. The equation of the fulfilment of this wish in Burne-Jones's paintings with the fate of Narcissus serves to underline the life-destroying quality of this state of perfect self-reflexivity, while introducing the notion of narcissistic self-love into the interpretation.

All of these elements are now brought together in a passage of astonishing density which forms the climax of Kassner's response to the paintings:

Und ihre Augen leben . . . Ihre Augen sehen aus dem Bilde heraus, sehnen sich heraus . . . Menschen, die Burne-Jones persönlich kannten, erzählen von seinen wunderschönen Augen . . . Als hätte er seine eigenen Augen den Mädchen und Jünglingen seiner Bilder in's Gesicht gemalt . . . Als blickten ihn seine eigenen Augen an aus allem, was er ansieht, aus seiner Phantasie! Als fänden sie überall einen Spiegel und blickten deshalb so ängstlich! Und diese Augen auf den Bildern können nicht etwas erblicken, sie sehen sich nicht an etwas fest, an etwas, das sie noch nicht gesehen haben, sie können nicht auf- und nicht niederblicken, kein Aufwachen vermag sie zu entzücken und kein Schlaf ihre Lider zu senken, sie sind wach wie das Schicksal, als wäre dieses ihr Gewissen und das Gewissen ihr Wissen, sie spiegeln wider. Sie können gar nicht anders als widerspiegeln, dem Leben den Traum, dem Wunsche das Versagen widergeben, und das wirkliche Leben ist nur ein trauriger Zug von Möglichkeiten, welche Träume an ihnen vorbeiführen. Sie sprechen von Tugenden, an denen sie schwach, und von Sünden, an denen sie müde wurden. Es sind Augen, wie Heilige und Sünder sie haben, Jünglinge und Mädchen, die blind in den Geboten der Seele und blind in den Lüsten des Leibes wurden, und ihre Tugend kann nur noch mehr Askese und ihre Sünde Selbstbefleckung sein. Ja, diese Augen sind Spiegel, und jeder Möglichkeit des Lebens sind hier Reflexe wach wie Träume von einer Wirklichkeit, die sie nicht mehr besitzen können, weil sie in ihr als in ihrer Schönheit leben. (KSW I, p. 234)

This is Kassner's Platonist criticism as art at full stretch. The obvious precedent for this kind of imaginative interpretation of painting is Pater's *Renaissance*, in particular his reading of the *Mona Lisa*. However, such is the complexity and suggestiveness of Kassner's evocation that one is tempted to see it as a deliberate attempt to out-Pater Pater. Even to try to 'decode' this

breathless and breathtaking passage, to translate it into a coherent proposition would be madness — or would probably result in the same. Such is the compression of its interwoven imagery and thought that it would be impossible to reduce Kassner's vision of Burne-Jones to a determinate propositional meaning. The following gloss is intended not to 'decode' the text but rather to bring out its suggestive qualities and its implications for the concluding interpretation of aestheticism which it prefaces. In this passage Kassner again employs the polyvalent image of the mirror; now, however, it has acquired further dimensions of significance through its association with the notions of 'Stimmung', modern artistic psychology, and the myth of Narcissus. Thus, the mirroring in this passage assumes quasi-mythic proportions, having distinct overtones of death. As I shall show, this mythic dimension is entirely intentional, and — if initially baffling — is more solidly grounded than Hofmannsthal's (Ruskinian) depiction of Burne-Jones as the painter of ethical personifications of myth. It should be noted that on Kassner's account the figures in these paintings are morally ambiguous, a reading which stands in stark contrast to the comforting ethical-aesthetic discourse of Weimar classicism central to Hofmannsthal's interpretation of Pre-Raphaelitism. It should also be noted that the eyes of Burne-Jones's entrapped creations — which are also his eyes — are identified with mirrors. The significance of this final point will become clear in the following pages.

This remarkable high-point in Kassner's impressions of aestheticism is immediately followed by a characteristic 'Stimmungsbruch':

Das sind so meine Eindrücke. In Wirklichkeit braucht man nichts anderes zu sehen als wundersam belebte Gestalten in Stellungen, wie sie das Leben nicht einnimmt, von einer Schönheit, die sich uns in dem Grade entzieht, in welchem wir ihr nahe zu kommen trachten, 'a beauty far removed and dainty'. Ebenso wie die ganze Kunst von William Morris nichts anderes ist als ein episches Sagen lyrischer Stimmungen. Oder um mich zweier alter Schulbegriffe zu bedienen, dieselbe Kunst, die bei Keats, Tennyson, Rossetti und Swinburne immer noch subjectiv war, d. h. mit einem wenn auch kaum sichtbaren Faden an dem Leben der Künstler hing, ist hier ganz objectiv. (KSW I, pp. 234–35)

This explicit statement of the complete severance of the bond between art and the life of the artist in the work of the aesthete is the preface to Kassner's final diagnosis of the phenomenon and its significance for nineteenth-century art. His concluding remarks draw together the imagery used in the discussion of Morris's poetry, the impressionistic interpretation of Burne-Jones's paintings, and, crucially, the philosophy of love expounded in Plato's *Phaedrus*.

Kassner's final verdict on aestheticism subtly amalgamates the central metaphors of his preceding discussion in a combination of commonplace turn-of-the-century notions (delivered in the form of apophthegms) and ingenious interpretation. It is only here that the shifting image of the mirror, employed throughout the essay, acquires something approaching stable meaning through its association with the notion of platonic love. To deal first with Kassner's more commonplace assertions: the aesthete, he writes, love only art and deliberately shut themselves off from life.<sup>190</sup> Their aims are encapsulated in a phrase recalling Hofmannsthal's equivocal characterization of the English aesthetes' relationship to life in his 'Algernon Charles Swinburne':<sup>191</sup> 'Sie wollen mit den Mittel ihrer Kunst nicht so sehr ein Leben schaffen als die Kunst selbst am Leben lebendig erhalten.' (KSW I, p. 235) Thus, unremarkably enough, for the aesthete art has primacy over life. The decisive twist in Kassner's discussion comes in his characterization of the aesthete as 'Platoniker der Kunst', whose aestheticism

<sup>190</sup> KSW I, p. 235.

<sup>191</sup> See RA I, p. 143 and pp. 144–45, cited on p. 16 and p. 17 above.

(‘Kunstplatonismus’) can be called ‘die Kunst an der Kunst’ (KSW I, p. 235). At first sight this formulation of aestheticism appears little more than a rather convoluted restatement of the commonplace notion of ‘l’art pour l’art’, or as George put it in the first issue of the *Blätter*, ‘eine kunst für die kunst’.<sup>192</sup> However, Kassner’s introduction of Platonism here serves both to give his notion of autonomous art a highly individual meaning and to illuminate the vision of Burne-Jones’s painting cited above. In its sensuous beauty the aesthete’s ‘Kunst an der Kunst’ is the perfection which things acquire in rare epiphanic moments of thought and feeling: ‘sie ist eben die Kunst, bis zu der herauf die Dinge an der Liebe vergangener Geschlechter sich emporgelebt haben.’ (KSW I, p. 235) This characterization has affinities with the modified version of Schopenhauer’s account of music proposed in the preceding essay, where the idea was reinterpreted as something to which objects aspire and not merely an anterior state of perfection from which they have, as it were, fallen.<sup>193</sup> This idealism is spelled out in authentically Platonic terms:

Es ist die schon einmal gedeutete Seele der Dinge, die diese Künstler ihren Sinnen deuten. Diese Seele, dieses vollendete Leben als Kunst, entschleiert sich ihnen an schönen Linien und Farben, und sie lieben diese, wie bei Plato wenigstens der ἐραστῆς den παιδικὸς liebt, als die Offenbarung des Ideals, εἶδωλου ἔρωτος ἀυτέρωτα ἔχων. (KSW I, p. 235)

Lest the reader who, like myself, has no ancient Greek be disheartened by Kassner’s display of classical erudition, I should point out that I have included his quotations from Plato purely for the sake of completeness, and will clarify their significance below. Platonic citations aside, the sense of this passage is clear enough: the aesthetes take the soul of objects, which has already been interpreted by art, and give it sensuous expression. The revelation of the soul of things — that is, of life perfected as art — comes to them in the beautiful lines and colours which they love platonically.

It will be remembered that Hofmannsthal makes repeated, but far from specific, use of the notion of the artist’s love in his essays on English art, and that Kassner, at the end of his ‘John Keats’, cites Plato’s characterization of Eros from the *Symposium* to illuminate the English poet’s tragic but necessary renunciation of the beauty he desired.<sup>194</sup> In the above passage, however, Kassner draws on another Platonic dialogue to illustrate the peculiar nature of the aesthetes’ love for beautiful lines and colours. Their love is analogous to that of the platonic lover for the beloved in the *Phaedrus*: that is to say, the lines and colours of their art, like Plato’s beloved, are loved not for their own sake, but as manifestations of the ideal. Thus, Kassner continues:

Ja, auch ihre sinnliche Schönheit ist ideell, es sind abstracte Farben und Linien auf den Bildern Rossetti’s, G. F. Watts’, W. Crane’s und Burne-Jones’, Farben und Linien der reinen Schönheit. Die Jünglinge und Mädchen sind nicht schön wie die Giorgione’s und Mantegna’s, schön wie das Leben hier und dort, wie das Leben immer, sie sind schön an der Schönheit. Die Schönheit lebt nicht aus ihnen oder von ihnen, sondern sie selbst leben an der Schönheit wie ein anderer an einem Schmerze oder an einer Sünde, sie tragen an ihr, wie die παιδικοὶ Plato’s nicht einfach καλοὶ genannt werden, sondern wie es im Phädrus heisst, οἱ τὸ κάλλος ἔχοντες, die, welche die Schönheit besitzen, die welche am Ideale tragen. (KSW I, pp. 235–36)

The beauty of the people in the English aesthetes’ paintings is not, like that of people in life, something which proceeds from them, which they are; it is external, and as such a burden they

<sup>192</sup> BfdK I, i, 1.

<sup>193</sup> KSW I, p. 195, cited on p. 169 above.

<sup>194</sup> KSW I, p. 131, cited on p. 141 above.

must bear. They are not beautiful in the normal contingent sense, but like the beloved in the *Phaedrus* they are bearers of an ideal beauty:

Und die Menschen Burne-Jones' tragen an den schönen Farben und Linien, an den seligen Augenblicken, in denen sich das Leben thatsächlich einer schönen Linie — zu Liebe — hingibt, und die nur der Künstler erblickt, sie tragen an den erlesenen Augenblicken eines anderen wie an ihrer Ewigkeit, SIE TRAGEN DEN BLICK DES KÜNSTLERS IN IHREN AUGEN, und ihre Augen sind ängstlich, wenn sie nicht träumen. (KSW I, p. 236)

The final lines of this interpretation return to the notion of epiphany, linking the moment ('Augenblick') of artistic vision with the artist's gaze ('Blick des Künstlers'), and are another example of Kassner's distinctive use of the latent meanings of words. The final clause, a near verbatim repetition of the prefatory comments to his impressions of Burne-Jones's paintings, serves to link Kassner's view of aestheticism generally with the specific readings of Morris and Burne-Jones presented earlier in the essay.<sup>195</sup>

The full significance of this interpretation of aestheticism and its relationship to the impressionistic interpretation of Burne-Jones can only be appreciated with reference to the passage from the *Phaedrus* from which Kassner repeatedly quotes. These quotations are not merely a display of recondite knowledge. They are an invitation to the reader to make intellectual connections. Although the word 'Spiegel' does not appear in the interpretation of aestheticism quoted above, the mirror is subtly implied by the references to the artist's eyes (earlier associated with mirrors) and to the burden of beauty borne by the people in the aesthetes' paintings, which recalls the subtitle of the essay, 'die Bürde der Spiegel'. More subtly still, the mirror is implicit in Kassner's repeated references to Plato. The passage from which he quotes in Greek is that in which Socrates describes the growth of love between the philosophical lover and the young, male object of his affections. In Kassner's own translation it reads as follows:

Und wenn diese Empfindung [of amazement at the lover's affections] sich in ihm [the beloved] behauptet, und der Geliebte dem Liebenden stets näher, ja bei den Spielen und, wo sonst noch Jünglinge zusammen sind, mit ihm sogar in körperliche Berührung kommt, dann wird die Quelle des Stromes, den Zeus in seiner Liebe zu Ganymedes Sehnsucht nannte, reich und voll in den Liebenden fließen, und ein Teil wird in ihn sinken und ein anderer, da der Liebende erfüllt ist, überströmen. Und gleichwie ein Luftstrom oder das Echo von Felsen und Hängen dorthin zurückfallen, woher sie ausgegangen waren, so wird auch der Strom der Schönheit wieder in den Jüngling wie durch die Augen fließen und in die Seele, wo seine Quelle war, münden und dort die Wurzeln der Flügel baden und die Flügel treiben und auch die Seele des Geliebten ganz mit Liebe füllen. Ja, auch er liebt jetzt, der Geliebte liebt wieder, noch weiß er nicht was, er ist sich selbst fremd und findet die Worte nicht; ja es ist, als hätten seine Augen sich am anderen entzündet, er kennt nicht die Ursache seines Leidens und sieht selbstvergessen sein eigenes Bild in den Augen des Liebenden wie in einem Spiegel. Wenn der Liebende bei ihm weilt, dann ist der Schmerz weg, sonst aber verlangt der Geliebte nach dem Freunde, wie dieser nach ihm, denn auch der Geliebte spiegelt das Bild der Liebe im eigenen Herzen.<sup>196</sup>

If Kassner's account of aestheticism is related to this Platonic subtext, his baffling interpretations become, if not clear, then certainly somewhat clearer, and the latent significance of the mirror metaphor becomes apparent. In Kassner's account the aesthete-artist is equivalent to the platonic lover; the people in his paintings are equivalent to the beloved. The artist's love of his creations, like that of the platonic lover, proceeds from the so-called stream of desire

<sup>195</sup> See KSW I, p. 232.

<sup>196</sup> *Platons Phaidros*, ins Deutsche übertragen von Rudolf Kassner (Leipzig, 1904), 12–15 thousand (Jena, 1922), pp. 51–52.



emanating from the latter. When the lover is filled with desire, the excess returns to its source, the work of art/beloved, where it in turn gives rise to an echo of love. The work of art now loves its creator; but this love is a reflection of the stream of desire emanating from the beloved. The beloved's love for the lover is, in fact, self-love. For unbeknownst to himself the beloved is in love with the image of his own beauty reflected in the eyes of the lover. Thus, the narcissism in terms of which Kassner elaborates his earlier impressions of the people in Burne-Jones's paintings becomes more comprehensible. Like Narcissus, these people are in love with their own image, and the eye of the artist (their lover) is the mirror in which this image is reflected. This is their burden: they must bear the 'Augenblicke' of the artist/lover, in dual senses of his momentary epiphanies of ideal beauty, and of his gaze. They are entrapped in a platonic love which is an infinite state of mirroring.

Like Swinburne's art that of the aesthetes has reached a perfection which makes further development impossible. They are, as Kassner puts it, the end of that line in modern English art which began with Keats. However, as in the preceding essay, the possibility that aestheticism might form the beginning of a new conception of art is held open:

Die Ästheten bedeuten ein Ende — ich sage absichtlich nicht Decadence, ich weiss mit diesem Schlagworte wenig anzufangen. Sie führen ein grosses Kunstempfinden, wie es in anderen Zeiten lebte, zu Ende. Sie sagen das letzte Wort, einem anderen Geschlechte mag es das erste sein. (KSW I, p. 236)

As in the concluding dialogue of the Swinburne essay, it is difficult here to see just how this consummate art might provide a new generation with its starting point. In the poetry and painting of the aesthetes all things are perfected by virtue of their having already been formed by art, and their work, therefore, bears no traces of the artist's struggle to give aesthetic form to the things of the world. There are no points at which art can be seen to have been connected with life. It is the lack of such imperfections — the blemishes which reveal how the artist has overcome his recalcitrant material — which shows further development to be impossible:

Nun, dem Werke der Ästheten fehlt diese prachtvolle Unvollkommenheit, sie fehlt dort überall, wo die Schönheit, das Gedicht überhaupt, nur Selbstzweck sein kann, schon Selbstzweck sein muss und nur mehr noch Selbstzweck sein darf, überall dort, wo das Leben nichts mehr bietet, was von der Kunst nicht schon erkannt wurde. (KSW I, p. 237)

How this impasse could be overcome — notice it is life, not art which is exhausted — is unclear, and Kassner leaves open the question of how art might hope to progress:

vielleicht haben auch wir einen Ersatz an Unfertigem in etwas, was andere noch nicht gehoben haben. Zeichen sind schon da. Mich dünkt, die Augen auf den Bildern Burne-Jones', die manchmal aus dem Bilde so ängstlich heraussehen, fragen auch da nach etwas, worauf andere ihnen werden Antwort geben können und müssen . . . (KSW I, p. 240)

Trailing off in a row of points, Kassner's terminal diagnosis of aestheticism is characteristically open-ended, and thus not necessarily as pessimistic as its pervasive 'Spät-' or rather 'Endzeitstimmung' would suggest.

The analysis undertaken in this subsection has shown the salient features of Kassner's highly individual and impressionistic interpretation of the English aesthetes, and the relationship of this interpretation to the preceding essays of *Die Mystik*. It should also have made clear some of the numerous differences between Kassner's understanding of aestheticism and that embodied in Hofmannsthal's early essays on English art. Perhaps the most striking

difference between the two critics is to be seen in Kassner's extraordinary impressionistic evocation of Burne-Jones's painting and in the ramifications of this for Pre-Raphaelitism as a historical movement in art. The Platonic Idealism of Burne-Jones's work cursorily referred to by Hofmannsthal (quoting Ruskin) in 'Über moderne englische Malerei' is no longer the nexus of the beautiful and the good. Kassner's use of Plato's philosophy of love from the *Phaedrus* together with the myth of Narcissus, and the earlier, Epicurean, interpretation of English aestheticism, radically subverts any attempt to identify a straightforwardly moral dimension in Burne-Jones's painting. Rather, the beauty characteristic of his works is shown to be bought at a terrible price. The artist's love for the objects he depicts, a recurrent feature of Hofmannsthal's criticism, here takes on a deadly aspect. To vary the lines of another influential turn-of-the-century aesthete: it is as if in order to create works of ideal beauty the artist of Burne-Jones's kind must deprive the things he loves of their life.<sup>197</sup> This essay makes particularly clear the one pervasive difference between Hofmannsthal's and Kassner's practice of criticism as art. Kassner's account of the last Pre-Raphaelites is an imaginative interpretation of a vast body of factual information acquired through his painstaking study of Morris's and Burne-Jones's art and first-hand experience of English life, architecture, and even the countryside around Oxford. The imaginative interpretation of these facts is no mere flight of subjective fancy; it draws together the full range of Kassner's experiences and extensive reading, creating an image of aestheticism which is at once richly suggestive and of formidable intellectual density. Hofmannsthal's criticism of English art appears, by contrast, a compelling imaginative fabulation based on a relatively scant knowledge of facts.

## V CONCLUSION: 'UND SANK MEIN KAHN ...'

'We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
Through the unknown, remembered gate  
When the last of earth left to discover  
Is that which was the beginning;  
At the source of the longest river  
The voice of the hidden waterfall  
And the children in the apple-tree  
Not known, because not looked for  
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness  
Between two waves of the sea.'  
(T. S. Eliot)<sup>198</sup>

Rather than recapitulate the various findings of the preceding sections of this chapter, I want here to return to my original point of departure, Hofmannsthal's two letters to Kassner. Having examined at length the two critics' notions of criticism as art and their reception of Pre-Raphaelitism, it is now possible better to appreciate the significance of these letters. I began this study by considering Hofmannsthal's enthusiastic response to *Die Mystik*, drawing particular attention to his intense feelings of affinity with Kassner. In this chapter I have suggested some of the probable sources of these feelings. My reading of 'John Keats' shows how Kassner subtly uses Hofmannsthal's lyrical work of the 1890s as the subtext for his interpretation of the proto-aestheticism of Keats's early life, thereby integrating the Austrian poet into what is ostensibly a history of nineteenth-century English art. In view of his covert

<sup>197</sup> See Oscar Wilde, 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol', in *Works*, pp. 822–39 (p. 839).

<sup>198</sup> 'Little Gidding', in T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (Bungay, Suffolk, 1980), p. 222.

role in the essay, it is hardly surprising that Hofmannsthal should occasionally have felt *Die Mystik* to be a letter addressed to him.<sup>199</sup> Although the greater part of 'Der ewige Jude in der Dichtung', Kassner's earliest work of criticism, appears to have focused on the relationship between artist and work, of the essays discussed in this chapter only 'John Keats' and 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti' share this concern with relating the artist's psychology to his aesthetic. Nonetheless, the imaginative interpretation of biography in these essays goes some way to explaining Hofmannsthal's assessment of Kassner's extraordinary comprehension of 'warum man dichtet, was das ist, wenn man dichtet, was es mit dem Dasein zu tun hat'.<sup>200</sup> In the preceding section I explained why, after reading *Die Mystik*, Hofmannsthal came to reject his own early essay on Swinburne, his preference for Kassner's critical treatment of the English poet being as much a corollary of the changes in his own view of aestheticism during the 1890s, as a reflection of the intrinsic merits of Kassner's essay.

There is, however, one point arising from Hofmannsthal's second letter which still remains to be considered: namely, that aspect of his complex response to *Die Mystik* encapsulated in the striking words, 'und sank mein Kahn, er sank zu neuen Meeren'.<sup>201</sup> This line is worth considering more closely, as it sheds light on the peculiar mixture of devastation and enthusiasm characteristic of Hofmannsthal's reaction to Kassner's criticism. As it stands, it expresses clearly enough the ambivalence of Hofmannsthal's feelings, but its full significance only becomes clear if it is traced to its source. The first things to note are that in Hofmannsthal's letter this phrase is marked as a quotation, and that it is a regular line of iambic pentameter. Its author, however, was not Hofmannsthal, nor even a German-speaking writer. It is actually a translation of the final line of 'The Poet's Hope' (1843), the work of a relatively obscure nineteenth-century American poet, William Ellery Channing the Younger, and the original English reads: 'If my bark sink, 't is to another sea'.<sup>202</sup> Now, given Channing's obscurity, even Kassner, whose knowledge of nineteenth-century English literature was encyclopaedic, could hardly have been expected to recognize this quotation. Why, then, should Hofmannsthal have chosen this particular line to epitomize his ambivalent response to *Die Mystik*? Is this perhaps an attempt at one-up-manship, a desperate effort to salvage some modicum of self-respect from the wreckage of his own critical endeavours? I would contend that it is not, and that it is in fact quite the opposite — an expression of reverence which Kassner would immediately have recognized and appreciated as such. For this line is not merely a quotation; it is a quotation of a quotation. Even with his extensive knowledge of English poetry, it is highly unlikely that Hofmannsthal would have known of Channing's poem were it not for the fact that its final line is cited as the conclusion of Emerson's 'Montaigne; Or, the Skeptic', the fourth lecture in *Representative Men*.<sup>203</sup> In this context it serves to express the American critic's gratitude to the sceptical philosopher for revealing cherished beliefs to be mistaken. For to be disabused of such beliefs is simultaneously to lose the comfort of one's supposed certainty and to acquire a new freedom,

<sup>199</sup> Kassner's expectations of the poet before their first meeting suggest him to have identified Hofmannsthal with his lyrical creations, in particular with the 'Erben' of 'Lebenslied'. See KSW IV, p. 525, cited on p. 6 above.

<sup>200</sup> Hofmannsthal to Kassner, 22 (?) December 1901, cited on p. 2 above.

<sup>201</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>202</sup> See *Poems, 1843*, in *The Collected Poems of William Ellery Channing the Younger, 1817–1901*, Facsimile Reproductions ed., with an Introduction, by Walter Harding (Gainesville, Florida, 1967), pp. 96–100 (p. 100). My thanks to Paul Titchmarsh for dredging this otherwise inaccessible edition from the depths of the British Library.

<sup>203</sup> *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, IV, pp. 147–86 (p. 186). I have been unable to determine if the German translation of Channing is Hofmannsthal's, or if it derives from one of the numerous editions of Emerson published in Germany between 1894 and the turn-of-the-century. On Emerson's reception in Germany and Austria at the time, see Geoffrey C. Howes, 'Emerson's Image in Turn-of-the-Century Austria: The Cases of Kassner, Friedell, and Musil', *MAL*, 22, 3/4 (1989), 227–40 (pp. 227–29).

albeit provisional, from error. It will be remembered that in 'Der Dichter und der Platoniker' Montaigne is included in the genealogy of Platonist critics, and that as early as 1896 Emerson's work served to delimit the scope of Kassner's critical approach.<sup>204</sup> Although he could not have been aware of the latter point, in the introductory essay of *Die Mystik* Hofmannsthal would have found Emerson described as 'dieser froheste Schüler Plato's' (KSW I, p. 13) and must, therefore, have been fairly certain that his otherwise impenetrable allusion would be recognized and understood by Kassner. By citing Channing's verse, Hofmannsthal was not only expressing his own ambivalence, he was also subtly equating his response to *Die Mystik* with that of one of Kassner's critical forebears to another. He was, in effect, reciprocating Kassner's use of unacknowledged quotation in 'John Keats'. In his essay Kassner characterizes Keats's early life by means of subtle references to the protagonists of Hofmannsthal's lyrical production; in his letter Hofmannsthal, by means of equally subtle allusion, praises Kassner by equating the effect of *Die Mystik* with that of Montaigne's essays. To this extent, the second of his letters was 'ein an Kassner — und nur an Kassner — gerichteter Brief'.

What the preceding chapters will have shown is why Hofmannsthal's 'bark' had to sink, and why he felt such gratitude for Kassner's critical *coup de foudre*. For Hofmannsthal's essays on English art, these dainty vessels wrought more to hold his own artistic sensibility than that of their ostensible subjects, were never meant to carry the burden of factual knowledge contained (and imaginatively transformed) in *Die Mystik*. Where Hofmannsthal's essays of the mid-1890s reveal his largely unsuccessful struggle to see English art from the point of view of life — a struggle born of a disjunctive understanding of the art/life relationship — Kassner had seemingly effortlessly integrated these two poles. As seen, this integration takes a number of forms in Kassner's essays. His interpretations of Keats and Rossetti in particular use selected biographical information to illuminate the complex interplay of the artists' life and work, at times virtually dissolving the art/life distinction. This aspect of Kassner's criticism, its integration of art and life, exemplifies the highly imaginative reading of historical material distinctive of his essays, and radically differentiates his criticism as art from that of Hofmannsthal.

Over two years after reading *Die Mystik* Hofmannsthal praised Kassner to a correspondent as 'die Möglichkeit des bedeutendsten litterary man, [. . .] den wir in Deutschland je hatten'.<sup>205</sup> Although time has not confirmed this judgement, no doubt Hofmannsthal saw in Kassner a German critic who, like his Walter Pater, was 'der sehr seltene geborene Versteher des Künstlers', but one whose comprehension was founded on something more substantial than creative imagination. Unlike Hofmannsthal's art criticism, and that ascribed to Pater in his essay, Kassner's critical procedure is not from the epiphanous vision of significant fragments to the imaginative revivification of artists or *œuvres*. Indeed, in *Die Mystik* quite the reverse is the case: Kassner's essays on the Pre-Raphaelites represent the application of imagination and intellect to a near-encyclopaedic knowledge of his subject matter. Whereas Hofmannsthal's essays are atomistic, Kassner's are holistic in their approach. Where Hofmannsthal seeks linguistically to evoke the nature of the artist under discussion from a knowledge that is often fragmentary, Kassner selects from his vast knowledge only those factors which, imaginatively

<sup>204</sup> See Kassner's reference to late Renaissance scepticism (KSW I, p. 12, cited on p. 119 above); and the explicit reference to Montaigne (KSW I, p. 14, cited on p. 122 above). On Emerson, see EJ, pp. 56–57, cited on p. 83 above.

<sup>205</sup> Hofmannsthal to Oscar Bie, 1904 (undated), in *Gedenkbuch*, pp. 17–18 (p.18). Bohnenkamp presumes the letter to date from early February of that year. Bohnenkamp, op. cit., p. 466, footnote 3.

interpreted, will yield the essential character of an artist. To this extent one could say that in Hofmannsthal's early criticism the words have a tendency to obscure the objects to which they purport to refer; *Die Mystik*, by contrast, represents a sustained attempt to satisfy the claims of objective reality (fact) and those of the thinking, perceiving subject (imagination).

It seems Kassner was aware of this difference between himself and Hofmannsthal, and the final words of this study belong to him:

Was Sie über Hofmannsthal sagen, ist sehr wahr, ich fühle es auch immer mehr und manchmal ist mir als ginge es mit uns gar noch [sic] weiter und reden wir aneinander vorbei. Irgendwo tief unten ist er ganz unklar und gibt nach. Da er so außerordentlich gescheit und fein empfindend, resp. sensibel und stimmungsfähig ist, so *erschrickt* man dann immer so vor dem andern. Liebe Frau Bruckmann, lassen Sie sich das sagen: irgendwo sind alle unsere Wiener nicht *wahr*. Ohne es wahrzuhaben. Sie gehen um sich herum und immer wieder ist ein Wort da statt eines Dinges. Ich bin langsam dahinter gekommen und mir war die Erkenntnis an Menschen, die gerne zu haben und zu schätzen ich viele Ursache habe, nicht gerade angenehm.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Rudolf Kassner to Elsa Bruckmann-Cantacuzène, 17 September 1910, in *Jugend in Wien. Literatur um 1900*. Katalog der Jahresausstellung 1974. Reprint (Marbach am Neckar, 1987), p. 364.

## POSTSKRIPTUM: UNWISSENSCHAFTLICH

Die vorgelegte Studie will keinen Endpunkt darstellen, sondern eher einen Schritt in die Forschung — den ersten Schritt in die englischsprachige Kassnerforschung. Es geht mir vorrangig um das sehr zu unrecht vernachlässigte Kassnersche Werk. Zwar gibt es in englischer Sprache mehrere wertvolle kurze Abhandlungen zu Teilaspekten von Kassners Werken — vor allem sei der 1953 veröffentlichte Gedenkaufsatz des Kassnerkenner und -vertrauten Eudo C. Mason erwähnt — doch fehlte bisher eine ausgedehnte kritische Auseinandersetzung mit Kassner auf Englisch. Die Gründe für diese auffällige Forschungslücke mögen nun auf der Hand liegen: für deutschsprachige Leser, von Nichtmuttersprachlern ganz zu schweigen, ist *Die Mystik* ein außerordentlich schwieriges Buch: höchst paradox und überladen mit einem von überwältigender Geistigkeit durchdrungenem Faktenwissen. Bei dem vorliegenden Versuch, den Kassnerschen Stil ins Englische zu übertragen, wurde ich mir sehr bald der Schwierigkeit einer außerdeutschen Rezeption bewußt. Auf die Gefahr hin, die Wittgensteinsche Leiter sozusagen wegzuwerfen, nachdem ich auf ihr hinaufgestiegen bin, muß hier gestanden werden, daß die Kassnerforschung sich in englischer Sprache keine allzugroßen Fortschritte versprechen darf. Eine tiefgreifende kritische Auseinandersetzung mit der *Mystik* auf Englisch müßte entweder ein enormes Ausmaß annehmen oder völlig unzulänglich bleiben — daher das Ausmaß des dritten Kapitels dieser Studie. Aber wie sollte die Forschung auf diesem potentiell doch sehr ergiebigen Gebiet dann vorgehen?

Dieses Postskriptum ist auf Deutsch geschrieben, da nur in der Sprache Kassners der Stil seiner Texte augenscheinlich wird. An mehreren Stellen der *Mystik*, vor allem in dem hier nicht abgehandelten Schlußdialog 'Stil' ist von den schier unüberbrückbaren Differenzen zwischen deutschem und englischem Geist, deutscher und englischer Sprache die Rede. Wegen dieser unleugbaren Differenzen ist meines Erachtens eine einigermaßen zufriedenstellende Kritik nur auf Deutsch möglich. Anders als bei Hofmannsthal's kritischen Aufsätzen, geht es bei Kassner nicht nur oder, besser gesagt, nicht in erster Linie um eine komparatistische Deutung, deren Ziel es wäre, das Kreative an seiner Rezeption der englischen Kunst aufzuweisen. Vielmehr bedarf es einer ausführlicheren Erklärung des spezifischen Stils dieser Rezeption — des Stils, den man wohl, um mit Kassner zu sprechen, als 'Freude an der Thatsache' bezeichnen kann. Wie wäre dies aber anzugehen?

Hier zwei Vorschläge: Erstens, wie in der vorliegenden Studie schon angedeutet, bleibt noch zu untersuchen, wieviel und genau was die Kritiker Hofmannsthal und Kassner dem von beiden so verehrten 'scholar-artist' Walter Pater und seinem 'aesthetic criticism' verdanken. Dies wäre anhand einer näheren komparatistischen Untersuchung der frühen Hofmannsthal'schen Aufsätze (inklusive 'Englischer Stil'), der *Mystik* und Paters *Renaissance* (vor allem der quasi-theoretischen Kapitel 'Preface' und 'Conclusion'), *Appreciations* und 'Æsthetic Poetry' zu bestimmen. Aufgrund ähnlich tiefgehender Analysen ihrer jeweiligen Aufsätze zum Thema Stil, wäre das hier skizzierte England-Bild der beiden Österreicher zu ergänzen und zu präzisieren.

Zweitens, die prinzipiellen Unterschiede zwischen den scheinbar ähnlichen kunstkritischen Ansätzen Hofmannsthals und Kassners, die ich hauptsächlich anhand der Stellungnahme zum Objekt (bzw. Leben / Tatsachen) aufgezeigt habe, wären durch eine längere, konsequent literaturtheoretische Untersuchung zu erweitern und zu klären. Aufschlußreiche Einsichten wären z.B. durch die Analyse der Werke beider Kritiker im Rahmen der von Roland Barthes entworfenen Typologie des lesbaren (*lisible*) und schreibbaren (*scriptible*) Textes zu erreichen. Man darf vermuten, daß *Die Mystik* zum Typus des exklusiveren Schreibbaren tendieren würde. Hofmannsthals Aufsätze dagegen, aller Virtuosität und Sinnlichkeit der Sprache zum Trotz, zum anderen Pol des allgemein zugänglicheren Lesbaren. Dies nun würde eine handfestere Erklärung für die Vernachlässigung des Kassnerschen Werkes liefern, als der in dieser Studie wiederholt angegriffene Persönlichkeitsmythos. Auch wäre der kanonische Status Hofmannsthals durch seine im Bartheschen Sinne leserfreundlichere Schreibweise erklärt.

Obwohl es, wie aufgezeigt, noch vieles zu leisten gibt, hoffe ich doch, dem Leser / der Leserin einen ersten, allgemeinverständlichen Einblick in das vernachlässigte Frühwerk Rudolf Kassners gegeben zu haben. Denn es sei zu dieser späten Stunde gestanden: nicht minder als die lautstärkeren Kassnerverehrer Baumann und Bong-Hi Cha bewundere ich dieses Werk. Mir geht es aber darum, einen adäquaten kritischen Diskurs zu finden, der Kassners Leistung, das Eigene seines Schreibens, weder auf Schulbegriffe noch auf Mystifikationen reduziert. Diesen Diskurs hat die vorliegende Arbeit gewiß nicht gefunden. Sie trägt noch die Schwere zu vieler akademischer Studienjahre. Vielleicht hat der von mir mit manchmal recht aggressivem (und leider allzu schottischem) Eifer angeprangerte Gerhart Baumann doch nicht so sehr unrecht gehabt, als er den Mut hatte, den Versuch des 'Mit-Kassner-Schreibens' zu wagen. Vielleicht wäre in diesem Fall der angemessene kritische Ansatz kein sich 'objektivistisch' wahnender Metadiskurs — keine 'kritische Kritik', kein anmaßend-wissenschaftliches 'Über-Kassner-Schreiben-Wollen' —, sondern ein wahrhaftes Mitschreiben, faktisch wohlfundierter 'criticism as art'. Auf die naheliegenden Fragen, wer eine solche Kritik zu schreiben vermag, und wie sie mit den wissenschaftlichen Anforderungen der heutigen Akademie in Einklang zu bringen wäre, kann ich nur mit den Schlußworten der *Mystik* antworten:

Das weiss ich  
vorläufig noch  
nicht.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Die Mystik, die Künstler und das Leben* (Leipzig, 1900), S. 289; KSW I, S. 313 (ohne Mittlchase).

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