

THE DEVELOPMENT OF GOTTFRIED BENN'S VIEWS ON LYRIC POETRY,
SEEN IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

by

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This thesis attempts to take a fresh look at Gottfried Benn's poetological views and to show how they form a consistent and significant pattern of thought.

Close contextual interpretations of critical and literary works from Benn's first published attempt of 1910 to his public presentation of 1951 and his late poetry bring out the consistency with which these views developed, and correct some widely held misconceptions about Benn's irrationalism, rigid formalism and all-pervading self-contradiction. The creative process is shown to be thought of as involving, at all stages, a close co-operation of intellectual and imaginative energies. It is suggested that the 'absolute poem', as Benn envisages it, is a vehicle of depth and significance whose 'monologic' character activates and affects the reader; that poetic 'montage' aims at the production of an organic whole whose 'fascination' addresses itself to the reader's emotional and cognitive faculties; that the 'transcendence of the creative pleasure' is an aid in life. It is argued that 'ambivalence', to be clearly distinguished from 'contradiction', informs and unifies Benn's various superficially contradictory pronouncements.

Attention is drawn to Benn's deeply rooted belief in the continuity of tradition which causes him to link every major aspect of modern poetry to the main stream of the German poetic tradition.

It is suggested that literary scholarship today owes Gottfried Benn a reevaluation of his aesthetic.

ABSTRACT

English-speaking Germanists have shown considerably less interest in Gottfried Benn than their German colleagues. The latter have produced, in recent years, a multitude of critical works, approaching Benn from various angles and arriving at very different conclusions. Outside Germany, the picture is less variegated. The few voices to be heard seem to agree that there is, or may be, some value in Benn's poetic works, but little or none in his theoretical pronouncements. By offering a dissenting view, this thesis hopes to animate the discussion outside Germany and, with due respect, to expose and correct a number of misconceptions that have, in my view, tarnished Benn's image and brought upon him undeserved opprobrium.

I shall endeavour to show that Benn's views on lyric poetry form a consistent and significant pattern of thought which defies the many suggestions we have heard of his fickleness, irrationalism, rigid formalism and all-pervading self-contradiction.

A diachronic approach seemed best suited to counter the assumption of an essential stasis of Benn's views - an assumption that underlies tacitly most critical discussions of the various aspects of his alleged irrationalism. At the same time, this approach brings out the consistency with which Benn's views developed and crystallized. Three chapters of my thesis are devoted to tracing this development (chapters two, three and four): close interpretations of some critical and literary works, selected to represent the successive stages of Benn's evolving thought, are designed to illuminate and place into context Benn's understanding of the various issues he himself raised and elaborated over the years.

From these analyses emerges a poetic theory identical with that presented at Marburg under the title 'Probleme der Lyrik' and discussed, for strategic purposes, in my first chapter. This rather extended discussion has three principal goals:

First, to show that Benn, in order to be understood, must be approached as a poet and provocateur who aims at neither accuracy of quotation nor conceptual precision and consistency, but at effective formulation.

Second, to present in a new light the salient aspects of Benn's poetological conception. The creative

process is shown to be thought of as involving, at all stages, a close co-operation of intellectual and imaginative energies. It is suggested that the 'absolute poem', as Benn envisages it, is a vehicle of depth and significance whose 'monologic' character activates and affects the reader; that poetic 'montage' aims at the production of an organic whole whose 'fascination' addresses itself to the reader's emotional and cognitive faculties; that the 'transcendence of the creative pleasure' is an aid in life.

Third, to call attention to Benn's 'historical' stance which causes him to relate every important aspect of 'modern' poetry to the poetic tradition and invalidates the charge, levelled against Benn from various quarters, that he adopted a progressive pose to present an antiquated second-hand theory.

Chapter five deals with the question of Benn's alleged self-contradiction. It argues that 'ambivalence' and 'tension', to be clearly distinguished from 'contradiction', are the principles informing the whole of his poetological thought, endowing it with perspective, depth, and ultimate credibility.

In conclusion it is suggested that the generally accepted placement of Benn's poetology at the extreme 'absolute', 'anti-human' end of the modernist spectrum

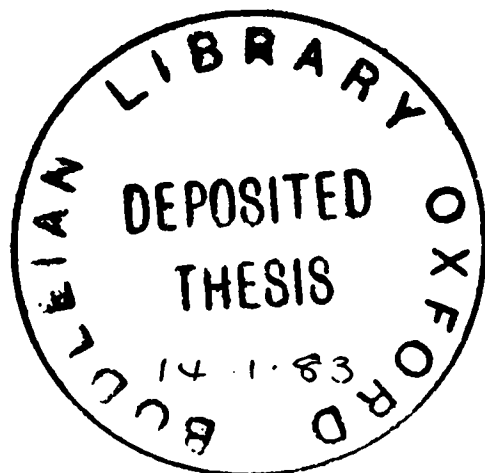
and, consequently, our evaluation of its historical significance, need to be reconsidered.

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ABBREVIATIONS

From Benn's Works

- AB Ausgewählte Briefe (ed. Rychner)
APK 'Altern als Problem für Künstler' (4, 1116-1146)
AR 'Akademie-Rede' (4, 995-1003)
BOe Briefe an F.W. Oelze (ed. Steinhagen and Schröder)
DL Doppelleben (8, 1935-2038)
GI Das gezeichnete Ich
KDR 'Kunst und Drittes Reich' (3, 861-884)
LI 'Lyrisches Ich' (8, 1877-1880)
LWI 'Lebensweg eines Intellektualisten' (8, 1885-1934)
PdL Probleme der Lyrik
PL 'Provoziertes Leben' (3, 894-905)
RG 'Rede auf Stefan George' (4, 1028-1041)
SchK 'Schöpferische Konfession' (7, 1644-1645)
SDL 'Soll die Dichtung das Leben bessern?' (4, 1147-1157)
StV 'Die Stimme hinter dem Vorhang' (6, 1589-1621)

Collections of Critical Essays

- DiW Denken in Widersprüchen (ed. Peitz)
GB Gottfried Benn (ed. Hillebrand)
WwW Wirkung wider Willen (ed. Hohendahl)

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER ONE: PROBLEME DER LYRIK: BENN'S ARS POETICA 8

I. Some Misunderstandings 8

II. An Artist Presents 15

1. Overall Structure: Symmetry 15

2. Spiral Amplification: Dynamism 16

i. Preliminaries ('Grundsätzliches') 16

ii. Principal Part ('Handgreifliches') 18

3. Allusion and Metaphor: Suggestion 27

4. Polemic Parody: Hyperbole 32

III. Poetological Content 37

1. 'Grundsätzliches' 37

i. 'Problems of Lyric Poetry' 37

ii. 'Artistik' 40

2. 'Handgreifliches' 47

i. The Lyric Poet 47

ii. The Word and the Creative Process 52

iii. The Poem 61

a) Four Diagnostic Symptoms 61

b) Rhyme and Reading 65

c) Fascinating Montage 68

d) The Monologic Poem 76

CHAPTER TWO: EARLY BEGINNINGS 81

- I. 'Gespräch': Departure from Impressionism 81
- II. 'Der junge Hebbel': The Poet's Cross 95
- III. 'Die Insel': Energy and Reason 103
- IV. 'Schöpferische Konfession': 'Begriff and
'südliches Wort' 129

CHAPTER THREE: CRYSTALLIZATION 135

- I. 'Lyrisches Ich': The Word and the Creative
Process 135
- II. 'Akademie-Rede': Nihilism and Creativity 138
- III. 'Rede auf Stefan George': Form and Absolute
Language 144
- IV. Lyric Poetry: 'Form' and 'Rausch' 153
 - 1. 'Form' - An Exacting Goal 154
 - i. 'Der Sänger' 154
 - ii. 'Wer allein ist-' 161
 - 2. 'Rausch' - The Great Tempter 167
 - i. 'Leben - niederer Wahn' 168
 - ii. 'Einsamer nie-' 170
 - 3. Creative Synthesis: 'Am Brückenwehr' 174

CHAPTER FOUR: CONSOLIDATION 192

- I. 'Provoziertes Leben': 'Grundsätzliches' 194
- II. 'Kunst und Drittes Reich': 'Artistik' 199
- III. 'Marginalien': Montage 208
- IV. Lyrical Ars Poetica 214
 - 1. 'Ein Wort' 215
 - 2. 'Statische Gedichte' 223

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| CHAPTER FIVE: CONSISTENCY | 232 |
| I. Private Expressions of Doubt | 232 |
| II. Ambivalence of Attitude | 236 |
| III. Complexity of Poetic Statement | 243 |
| 1. 'Epilog 1949' | 243 |
| 2. 'Satzbau' | 252 |
| 3. 'Worte' | 261 |
| CONCLUSION | 269 |
| NOTES | 272 |
| SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY | 298 |

INTRODUCTION

A charlatan to some, a great poet and thinker to others, Gottfried Benn has to this day remained a controversial figure. While his exegetes have reached some measure of agreement on his poetic work, they continue to disagree on the subject of his theoretical pronouncements, offering views that range from enthusiastic acclaim to uncompromising censure.

When I embarked upon this study I was intent on adding one more voice to the critical side of the debate. However, in the course of familiarizing myself more thoroughly with the extant literature on Benn I was faced, time and again, with the startling discovery that the object of criticism and attack were not Benn's ideas as much as their erroneous interpretations. As a result, many of Benn's notorious contradictions and absurdities presented themselves to me as projections of critical errors.

Here lies my reason for entering once more into an area of investigation that seems thoroughly

exhausted. I submit that Benn's ars poetica has been largely misunderstood - not by every critic writing on the subject, and not in every one of its details - but misunderstandings go far and deep, prompting widely accepted interpretations of Benn's utterances that need to be modified or corrected.

The source of the array of errors is undoubtedly Benn's 'expressive' style. It has been commented on often enough, yet the methods adopted to analyze this language and the ideas it 'expresses', in spite of the occasional call for an avoidance of 'das Anlegen ungerechtfertigter Maßstäbe',¹ have on the whole remained distressingly uncongenial.

Common to many diverse approaches is a tendency towards what might be called a 'systematic' or 'comparative' analysis. Rather than attending to the specific contexts in which particular 'expressive' words or phrases are embedded, critics have all too often undertaken to establish the meaning Benn attaches to such words or phrases by comparing their repeated uses in his various works, ignoring not only context but also chronology. False systematization will generate false contradictions. The word 'Nichts' is a case in point; the controversy around Benn's

so-called 'nihilism' would benefit from an adjustment of approach. Benn was not concerned with a consistency of terms, nor did his views remain static throughout his life. Even the most memorable and most often repeated of his formulations must in every instance be related to the particular context of which it forms part. Superficial contradictions will then be seen for what they are and will no longer bar from view the underlying consistency of Benn's ideas, both in their development and relation to each other.

Hand in hand with this preoccupation with words, instead of contexts, goes a tendency to resort to mere quotation. 'Seine Formulierungen werden terminologisch verwendet.'² Central formulations, such as 'das absolute Gedicht', 'das monologische Gedicht', 'faszinierend montieren', spring to mind. The particular danger inherent in this practice of unquestioning quotation lies in the fact that it may easily be abused.

At the other end of the quotation syndrome stands a tendency to overlook the metaphorical and provocative quality of many of Benn's expressions. His biological vocabulary ('Hyperämie', 'Kongestion' or even 'Spaltung') has time and again been taken liter-

ally, and words like 'Rasse' and 'Formalist' have given rise to indignation and opprobrium. Literalism, I suggest, is the surest road to a misunderstanding of Benn's thought.

Finally, misconstruction due to superficial reading occurs too often for comfort. The most blatant case is probably that of Benn's formulation: 'Artistik ist der Versuch der Kunst, (...) sich selber als Inhalt zu erleben'. How many commentators have told us that in Benn's view 'art' is the only 'theme' congenial to the modern poem!

What we need, then, are close contextual analyses guided by an awareness that a poet and provocateur is speaking, not a systematic thinker. As to the former point, there have been few successful attempts to fill the void between and around Edgar Lohner's exemplary work of 1961 and Annemarie Christiansen's sensitive interpretations of 1976; Hanspeter Brode's articles (1972/73) deserve to be singled out for praise.³ As to the latter point, it is not, of course, meant to belittle the seriousness and significance, positive or negative, of Benn's ideas. The poet's and provocateur's voice must not be mistaken for an alibi, or be seized upon as an excuse for inadequate critical

examination of Benn's utterances. But a recognition of the poet's and provocateur's voice should determine the method of approach.

My following analyses intend to demonstrate that if an effort is made to elicit the meaning of Benn's pronouncements in a way that takes account of the idiosyncrasies of his habits of expression, his ars poetica will emerge as a serious, consistent and significant pattern of thought that does not justify the familiar charges of irrationalism, meaningless formalism and all-pervading contradiction. Benn's is not a systematic theory - but a complex of ideas which, whether or not we agree with these ideas, makes sense.

Chapter one will offer an interpretation of Benn's Marburg-lecture Probleme der Lyrik, aiming to do two things. By focusing on the artistic character of both the structure and the language of what is undoubtedly the main work of Benn's poetology, it will draw attention to the artistic manner of presentation and expression Benn relies on even as a theorist. My first chapter will then go on to elucidate the poetological programme put forward in Probleme der Lyrik.

Chapters two, three and four will trace its development from Benn's first programmatic statement

up to the time of his return to the public arena; his poetological thought will be shown to have evolved with a remarkable consistency: not, as is often suggested, in a dialectical progression from one position to another, but in a process of growth best described by the idea of entelechy. The underlying chronological division is based on that in which Benn himself decided to present his lyrical work; it is meant to have no more than heuristic significance.

My last chapter will address itself to the question of the later Benn's doubt and resignation, contending that these do not indicate a break between his private insights and public utterances,⁴ but constitute an essential feature of Benn's poetological thought whose informing principle is 'Spannung' rather than 'Widerspruch'.

Benn's 'fascism' is not part of my immediate concern. However, later commentators may find some of my observations, especially those of chapter three, relevant to their enquiries.

I have confined myself to the study of Benn's published work and have not sought out unpublished material because I wish to show that on the evidence of easily accessible and quite familiar sources it is possible to arrive at an understanding of Benn's

poetological utterances that differs substantially from that shared by most commentators. It is my intention to demonstrate that the material on hand justifies, indeed calls for, a reevaluation of Benn's aesthetic.

CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEME DER LYRIK: BENN'S ARS POETICA

I. Some Misunderstandings

Apologists, critics and detractors agree on one point: Probleme der Lyrik is the sum total of Benn's poetic. They refer to it, they quote from it - but only Reinhold Grimm has so far undertaken to look at it in more detail.¹ At the end of his instructive critique of some of Benn's 'problems', he makes this noteworthy observation:

Auf ihre Weise besitzen aber auch die "Probleme der Lyrik", obgleich nur ein Vortrag, Kunst-Charakter; auch sie, die in so vielem eklektisch und kompilatorisch sind, bilden ein Ganzes. (2)

He quotes E.R. Curtius, 'daß auch eine Sammlung von Lesefrüchten durch die Form der Anordnung und Darbietung zu etwas Neuem und Eigenem werde' and concludes by counselling that such a work be approached with humility.³

What in my opinion this work deserves and demands at least as much is the kind of scrutiny and attention to detail which able critics have accorded to a good number of Benn's poems, thereby deepening our understanding of his poetic practice. Such treatment would expose many ideas about Benn's poetic as half-truths or misrepresentations; it would dispose of alleged inconsistencies and bridge the gulf widespread consensus perceives between his theory and and practice.

One example shall suffice to illustrate the way in which some of Benn's pronouncements have been misconstrued. Peter Schünemann, in his monograph Gottfried Benn of 1977, precludes his discussion of Probleme der Lyrik, which he presents under the title 'Probleme der Lyrik oder die Sprache als zeitloses Phänomen',⁴ with two quotations from Benn - the first containing Benn's well-known words on 'Artistik', on the 'allgemeinen Verfall [s] der Inhalte' and 'eine neue Transzendenz (...) der schöpferischen Lust'(4,1064⁵), the second his equally famous words on the 'Chiffre (...) diese schwarze Letter'(4,1075).⁶ Twenty-two lines of citation are followed by seventeen lines of apparently well-constructed and conclusive comment: the former passage, Schünemann argues, points to the dissociation

of 'Lebenspraxis' and creative activity; the latter to the possibility for the creative intellect to form, on the basis of 'stylized nature', a 'Kunstprodukt'; ergo: the poem is a 'synthetic' artefact, its words are '"Geheimzeichen", (...) dem lebendigen, dem kommunikativen und sozialen Umfeld entzogen.'⁷

Schünemann's exposition of Benn's supposed conception of 'Sprache als zeitloses Phänomen' - language unrelated to historical reality - rests on a simplification of Benn's ideas. Where in the lines quoted (4,1064) does Benn talk about 'Lebenspraxis'? The lost 'Inhalte' he is referring to, as the parallel construction of his explanation of 'Artistik' suggests, are 'Werte' - values of metaphysical significance:

'Artistik ist der Versuch der Kunst,
'es ist der Versuch,

innerhalb des allgemeinen Verfalls
gegen den allgemeinen Nihilismus

der Inhalte sich selber als Inhalt zu
der Werte eine neue Transzendenz zu

erleben...'
setzen ...' (1064; my emphases)

By mistaking Benn's 'Inhalte' for practical issues, Schünemann clothes in simplicity something not quite so simple.

He then transfers the idea of art removed from 'Lebenspraxis' to the narrower realm of language and

arrives at the notion of the non-communicative poetic word of which there is no trace in the related quotation (4,1075). Benn here elaborates the contrast between poetry receiving its stimulus directly from nature, and poetry receiving it from the written word. This latter is the 'Kunstprodukt' Benn is referring to, not the poem as Schünemann has it. On the very page from which he quotes we find a comment on the nature of words which confirms that the 'black letter' as Schünemann sees it, is indeed 'ein Unding'.⁸ Again, Schünemann is guilty of over-simplification. In Probleme der Lyrik Benn does in fact maintain that language has lost its communicative function (4,1092). However, the loss he deplures is not that of communication on the level of social and historical reality, but of communication 'in einem metaphysischen Sinne' (4,1092). We may find it difficult to see what exactly he means by this 'metaphysical sense';⁹ but in what follows I shall try to come as near as possible to Benn's meaning.

His deceptive ways and the particular disposition of his audience combined to impair communication. The dominance in literary criticism of the method of 'werk-immanente Interpretation' is among the most powerful

factors responsible for what appears to have been enthusiastic acclaim fuelled by selective perception. The idol erected then soon fell victim to the change of direction in literary criticism; but the object of both praise and condemnation was not so much Benn's theory as a selection of its most obvious features, partially apprehended and viewed in isolation. Schöne-
mann argues that Benn's theory could remain uncontradicted, at least for a while, because of a historical coincidence of ideas.¹⁰ It seems to me that such coincidence is an assumption we ought not to accept uncritically. If it was a coincidence, it was one circumscribed by the limits of the expectations with which Benn was approached, applauded or criticized. To my knowledge, only Annemarie Christiansen and Dieter Liewerscheidt have looked in this direction. Liewerscheidt explains how easy it was for Benn's audience to see him in agreement with Heidegger; Christiansen points to 'die Enge des interpretatorischen Ansatzes' as the root-cause of frequent misunderstandings of Benn's theoretical statements.¹¹

Even Reinhold Grimm's very illuminating criticism of some problematical aspects of Benn's Probleme der Lyrik is, in some respects, a misaimed attack because of the erroneous assumptions on which it is

based. Grimm is right in pointing out that many of the ideas presented by Benn, far from being new, were drawn from various sources. But when Grimm goes on to censure Benn for his failure to come up with new ideas and to provide accurate reference to his sources, he is moved to do so by his own expectations (reflecting a more general view) rather than by any claim on Benn's part to be original or scholarly. For one thing, novelty of ideas would be quite incompatible with Benn's conviction of the relativity and recurrence of all cultural phenomena.¹² For another, he addressed his audience as a poet who cannot as a matter of course be expected to bow to scholarly discipline.

Benn's Nietzsche-inspired perspectivism is coupled with a deeply-rooted awareness of tradition that pervades all of his writings. Tradition, of course, is nowhere approached as an authority, but is used as a reservoir of creative material. Sovereign use of whatever it may offer forms the basis of Benn's much discussed technique of poetic montage. The depth and complexity of the poetic structures he has thereby created have taken painstaking scholarship to recognize and reveal. Grimm's labours, in spite of the argument they are to support, suggest that montage is at work in Benn's *ars poetica* too. When in conclusion

to his criticisms Grimm points out, if somewhat apologetically, the 'Kunst-Charakter' of Benn's lecture,¹³ he gives away his awareness of this fact. But the goal he set himself - to punch holes into Benn's originality of thought and integrity of practice - prevents him from seeing Benn's eclectic compilation more positively for what it is and impels him to criticize it for what it is not.

The fact that a poet is speaking here, and one with no doubt about his own stature, is brought home, not without a touch of irony, at the end of the lecture. Benn registers his disapproval of the practice, by literary critics, of according equal attention to the works of both great poets and mediocre ones (4,1094) - not realizing, or not choosing to notice, that a critic may derive as much insight from a second-rate work as he may from a good one. The 'inner standards' whose lack Benn deplores are clearly those of the poet. Benn here passes an unjust sentence on literary critics for the same reason that they pass an unjust sentence on him: either party projects its own standards into the other and is therefore incapable of objective judgement.

If we are prepared to read Probleme der Lyrik as a poet's statement, the charge of unscholarly citation and appropriation of ideas becomes meaningless.

We are indebted to Reinhold Grimm for having drawn our attention to the immensely significant montage aspect of Benn's poetological credo. Its recognition helps us to free ourselves from the critical cliché of Benn's inaptitude as a theorist, and to approach his Marburg-lecture in a more congenial way.

II. AN ARTIST PRESENTS

1. Overall Structure: Symmetry

Benn begins and ends his presentation on a personal note. At one end, he uses common experience to draw his audience into the orbit of his concerns (4,1058); at the other end, he uses his own experience to give encouragement to those who may wish to foster the seeds he has sown (1095-96). Within this communicative framework he presents his ideas. He starts off with some preliminary remarks introducing the major themes to be discussed (1059-66), outlining the historical perspective (1061-63) and philosophical background (1064-66); these thoughts on 'Grundsätzliches' (1066) are to lend some perspective to his ensuing poetological deliberations (1067-94) which form the main

body of his address ('Handgreifliches', 1066). Benn's presentation unfolds in a circular or spiral movement: by way of amplified repetition it widens and intensifies progressively the discussion of the themes introduced at the outset. A brief attack on literary critics (1094) leads to Benn's concluding words to the young hopefuls in his audience (1095-96).

The following simplified diagram will bring out the lucid overall structure of Probleme der Lyrik.

It is symmetrical, but not rigidly so:

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Introd- uction 1058 | Preliminaries 1059-66 | Principal Part 1067-94 | Marginal Note 1094 | Con- clusion 1095-96 |
| | ARS POETICA | | | |

2. Spiral Amplification: Dynamism

i. Preliminaries ('Grundsätzliches')

In an attempt to offer a first modest insight into what 'modern lyric poetry' involves, Benn isolates two of its outstanding characteristics: first,

the combination by the modern poet of creative and critical activity, the latter being aimed at the poem he is shaping, at himself, and the creative process he engages in (1059-60); second, the modern poet's reliance on the word as his exclusive working material (1060-61). With this introduction of his two central themes - 'Systematik des Schöpferischen' (1060) and 'Das Wort' (1061) - Benn has introduced implicitly the four major interrelated topics that evolve from these two themes: the poem, the creative process, the lyric poet and the word.¹⁴

The ensuing brief historical review (1061-63) serves to place the 'new poetry' in a wider perspective: to point to its historical roots and supra-national range. Benn then proceeds to throw light, again very briefly, on the fundamental implications of the poetry he envisages; on his concept of 'Artistik' (1064-66). Referring to 'books' where these things may be studied (1066), he deals with just enough 'Grundsätzliches' to avoid an unbecoming reduction of his subject-matter. And without saying one word too many on the complex issues involved he goes on to pursue his declared intention: to discuss 'Handgreifliches' - 'auch auf die Gefahr hin, das Banale zu streifen' (1066).¹⁵

ii. Principal Part
('Handgreifliches')

'The banal' does indeed appear to serve as Benn's point of departure - his four 'diagnostic symptoms' that are to assist in determining whether or not a contemporary poem is in tune with its time: 1) the division of the poetic subject and object; 2) the reliance on simile; 3) the use of verbal clichés; 4) the exalted tone (1067-69). An addendum on the 'exorbitant' nature of lyric poetry and the 'tragic' struggle it inflicts on the poet is inserted (1069-70) to lend some impact to this first very modest exploration of the first theme. It serves also as a transition to the discussion of the second theme, the genesis of the poem, whose beginning Benn announces faithfully (1070).

In accordance with the dual description of the creative-cum-critical activity given in the introduction (1059-60), he pays attention to both the characteristic qualities of the poet and the process of formation. The poet possesses a certain 'schöpferischen Keim' or 'psychische Materie' (1070), and a special fund of, and sensitivity to, certain words ('Zuordnung der Worte zu einem Autor', 1070); he has

at his disposal a subjective and an objective factor that stand in a relation of 'bipolare Spannung'(1070). This 'tension' is the motive power of the creative activity; the degree to which it is resolved determines the degree of perfection of the resulting poetic form. Thus the interplay of a subjective and an objective factor has been established, the co-operation of a 'naive' and an 'intellectual' principle (1071). Its result is 'Form'(1071).

Benn's presentation has here reached a second caesura, which gives him occasion to return to his first theme (the poem) and enlarge on it in the light of the preceding elaborations. He emphasizes the identity of the poem and its form and dwells on the transformation effected by this form into all-important 'fascination'(1071-73). He then goes on to state explicitly what we have so far only been able to infer from his description of the creative process, and thus elucidates the union of subject and object whose lack he diagnosed as a symptom of a poem being out of step with modernity: the object to be 'made' into a poem, that is, into fascinating form, proceeds from the poet's 'psychic substance'(1073). In Benn's provocative formulation, 'es gibt keinen anderen Gegenstand für die Lyrik als den Lyriker selbst'(1074).

These words conclude his subtly rendered indication of his position vis-à-vis the kind of poetry generally referred to as 'absolute'. A string of quotations illuminating this conception of poetry is followed by his own view (1073). He draws particular attention to Eliot's 'bemerkenswerten Standpunkt' (1073) that the object of even poésie pure must, to a certain extent, be valued for its own sake; he affirms Eliot's view in the sense that this object is ultimately identical with the poet. While not rejecting the various descriptions of 'pure poetry', he adds his own version in a way that suggests difference more than agreement. We are sufficiently alerted that his idea of 'absolute poetry' may not be the same. - A third caesura has been reached; the third theme, the word, duly announced, makes its entrance (1074).

From the preceding description of the creative mechanism we are informed about the vital role the word plays in it. The new and significant insight into Benn's conception of the word we gain here is that he regards it as a hybrid thing belonging to the realm of intellect as well as that of nature (1075). Recognition of this dual character is essential for an understanding of Benn's 'hyperämische Theorie' presented here

(1075-77)
in full. It offers a detailed account of the various functions performed by the word in the 'bipolar tension' that we know to be productive of poetic form: the discussion of the word has widened and transformed into a highly poetic description of the creative process (1077). These lines form the climax of Benn's presentation so far. They culminate in a tribute to the magic and the mystery inherent in the word (1078).

To mark off this climax Benn pauses to offer the retrospective synopsis we looked at earlier (p.17, note 14). From among the many more 'Spezialthemen' that might be discussed he singles out the question of rhyme for brief consideration (1078-79).¹⁶ This formal consideration, more suggestion than exposition, is similar in character to that at the beginning ('diagnostic symptoms', 1067-69), both sides dealing with matters pertaining to the first theme, the poem. They form a frame of simplicity around the first part of Benn's not at all simple elaborations, keeping in check their ever-increasing intensity.

Benn now proceeds to develop his second major (and fourth consecutive) theme: the lyric poet. A number of oppositions give a very basic idea of what his poet is or is not: not a dreamer, but a utilizer of dreams; not an aesthete, but a 'Kleinbürger';

neither a socialite nor a 'Himmelstürmer', but an eccentric occupying 'a room of his own'(1079-80). This last opposition leads to some thoughts on the fundamental difference between the poet and the thinker (1081). While the latter's work forms part of a co-operative effort transcending time and place, the poet is alone, working with the material given to him by his time and place: his historically determined 'Stimmung'(1082) and his geographically determined language (1082), the latter placing at his disposal the practically unlimited variety of expressive means it has developed over the years.

We recognize in these words a somewhat deepened version of the earlier description of the 'bipolar tension' between the poet's 'psychic substance' and his words (1073), spiced by a sense of awe that was also expressed at the close of the first part (1078).

This present climax in the second part is in the now familiar manner followed by a clearly marked new beginning. It ushers in a sparkling dramatic dialogue (1082-87), a mixture of defence and aggression by the 'lyric I' vis-à-vis 'die Mitte', 'the mean', mediocrity personified. Again, the poet's distinctive qualities are brought out by way of contrast: his sensitive inwardness stands in opposition to the health and

vitality the defenders of 'die Mitte' strive for; his element is the artificial, theirs nature; his object is the expression of the self, theirs the realization of humanitarian ideals. The 'lyric I' concludes the altercation with a plea to allow art to keep abreast of time (1086-87). This demand leads directly to the claim that the poet must have 'Nüstem auf allen Start- und Sattelplätzen'(1088). The idea of the poet's free use of language (1082) here receives a significant amplification: whatever material the world may yield will enter his fund of expressive means, 'Aus all diesem kommt das Gedicht'(1088).

We have reached the second climax of the second part and the high-point of the whole presentation so far. Predictably, it returns to the first theme, the poem, bringing together its three significant characteristics. The poem today is 'absolute', it is 'fascinating' and 'monologic'. The summary here given has been carefully prepared and produces an effect not unlike that of a musical finale: Benn's 'absolute poem' we know to be different from what is generally meant by this term (1073-74); with the poet 'living in the absolute'(1084) and forging his 'psychic substance' into poetic form (1073), the poem is 'absolute' in the sense that it casts into form what the poet experiences

as absolute. This form, if it deserves the name, is 'fascinating'(1072), its fascination stemming from the dual nature (1075) and magic power (1078) of the word as much as from the contemporary aspect of montage that brings together the widest variety of disparate themes and levels of style and vocabulary (1082). The 'absolute' and 'fascinating' poem is, finally, 'monologic' in that its object is the poet himself (1074) who 'occupies a room of his own'(1080) and refrains from writing poetry 'für die Menschheit'(1083).

These climactic words on the poem lead to the fundamental issue of 'Artistik' that was dealt with briefly at the very beginning (1064-66) and is here resumed, with comparable brevity, to add weight to the idea of the 'absolute poem'. 'Artistik' makes its reappearance as 'Ananke des Ausdrucksschaffens' (1088): the poet today, unable to fall back on the comforts offered by religion and community, is compelled to obey 'das Formgesetz'(1088) and may thereby gain transcendence. An unidentified quotation from 'a French thinker'¹⁷ - we recall that Nietzsche had taken over the concept of 'Artistik' from France - underscores the idea of a new a-religious transcendence. This quotation brings these significant paragraphs to a worthy conclusion.

After a strategic pause Benn ventures further into the realm of systematic thought. He does so to produce confirmation of his claim that intellect, form and consciousness are what the historical hour demands (1089-91), and so to strengthen the foundation on which his theory of the 'absolute poem' is built. Having thereby asserted the need for modern poetry to be 'absolute', and reaffirmed its existential significance (1091), he arrives at his ultimate conclusion: 'alles möchte dichten'(1092) - lyric poetry is the congenial vehicle for modern life, feeling and - as the immediate context suggests - thought. The repetition of these words reflects the intensity Benn's presentation has reached.

As at previous high-points, the theme of the poem is resumed, this time to give particular weight to its 'monologic' nature. Relying, as before, on what he has said so far, Benn declares it to be 'beyond doubt'(1092): monologic art is the only witness to the fact that 'in der Tiefe ist ruhelos das Andere, das uns machte, das wir aber nicht sehen'(1093); it is the only means we have to give voice to the absolute.

Again, the climax is thrown into relief by a contrast. It is followed by Benn's ironical self-deprecation vis-à-vis his learned audience (1093) and his final poetological remark that the modern poem should

be read silently rather than declaimed (1093-94). These words are in nature and function comparable to those on the significance of rhyme inserted at the end of the first of the two central parts (1078-79, see p.21). Recalling also the very modest beginning of Benn's presentation of 'Handgreifliches' with his four 'diagnostic symptoms', we see a frame of simplicity surrounding both major parts as well as the whole, at once heightening the intensity of the enclosed utterances, safeguarding the balance of tone, and rounding off the complex but lucidly structured main body of the presentation.

Its pattern of amplified repetition may be compared to a musical crescendo developing up to the point where Benn pulls all available registers to enlarge on the 'absolute poem'(1088-89). The intensity here reached is sustained throughout the ensuing observations on the contemporary intellectual situation (1089-92) and culminates in Benn declaring lyric poetry what Wolfgang Iser, fifteen years later, was to call 'Paradigma der Moderne'¹⁸ (1092). The sober return to the reality of the lecture hall and the practical issue of the reading of modern poetry adds a final touch to the pattern of contrasts whose functions I have just described. The criticism of literary critics

that follows (1094) leads over to the outer frame which serves Benn as a means to reach out to his audience and ensure maximum effectiveness.

While being a well constructed whole doesn't yet turn a lecture into a work of art, the emotive dynamism Benn has wrought into this 'lecture' makes it speak to its audience in a way only a work of art can. It seems fair to suggest that Benn is an artist forever faithful to his *métier* - even when writing a lecture to expound his poetological views.

3. Allusion and Metaphor: Suggestion

In the same manner as the artist draws on the communicative power of an emotive appeal, he draws on the power of suggestion to involve his listeners intellectually and imaginatively and establishes thereby an all the more effective rapport.

Intellectual involvement is effected by literary allusion in the form of submerged quotation - a device characteristic of Benn and, predictably, employed in Probleme der Lyrik. One example shall suffice for illustration. I refer to Benn's repudiation of any idea that 'Stimmung' makes a poem:

...da ist eine Heidelandschaft oder
ein Sonnenuntergang, und da steht ein
junger Mann oder ein Fräulein, hat
eine melancholische Stimmung, und nun
entsteht ein Gedicht. Nein, so entsteht
kein Gedicht. (1059)

This scene reconstructs that presented in one of
Heine's Neue Gedichte:

Das Fräulein stand am Meere
Und seufzte lang und bang,
es rührte sie so sehre
Der Sonnenuntergang.

Mein Fräulein! sein Sie munter,
das ist ein altes Stück;
Hier vorne geht sie unter
Und kehrt von hinten zurück.¹⁹

Benn avails himself, so to speak, of Heine's sardonic
tongue to show up the worthlessness of common emotion
for poetry.

This literary allusion in the outer frame is
joined by a specific reference to the Heine-edition
by Benn's former university teacher Ernst Elster
in its closing part (1095). Poetic satire and liter-
ary scholarship are thus called in obliquely to throw
light, from different angles, on the 'making' of a
poem. Roughly half-way between these two, Benn inserts
this image:

Da steht also ein solches Ich, sagt sich:
ich bin heute so. Diese Stimmung liegt
in mir vor. (1082)

Identical words ('da steht', 'Stimmung') are used
to accentuate a profound difference. Needless to draw

particular attention to the fact that the two Heine-allusions together with this inner link accord with the structural setting described above.

Imaginative involvement is effected by the use of metaphor - again, one of Benn's characteristic practices determining also the peculiar linguistic make-up of Probleme der Lyrik.

Metaphorical expressions pervade the entire work from Nietzsche's 'Artistik' at the beginning (1059) to Flaubert's 'Speer' at the end (1096). Quite logically, metaphor becomes the dominant vehicle of expression where Benn talks about 'Erlebnisse besonderer Art' (1074), namely the poet's special relationship with words and his creative experience. We shall take a brief look at the most prominent of these metaphors. Their recognition is vital to an understanding of Benn's poetological utterances and will preclude such false conclusions as the suggestion made by one critic that Benn here offers nothing but 'Verlegenheitsformulierungen'.²⁰

The two main sources of his metaphors are classical mythology and the fields of physiology and medicine.²¹ In the attempt to put into words the experience of creativity, metaphors drawn from the latter predominate. There is, first, the poet's 'schöpferi-

scher Keim'(1070 and 1073), some inner 'seed' that will be made to germinate and produce poetic form. There is the description of the word as 'der Phallus des Geistes'(1074), a metaphor particularly apt to convey the dual nature of the word and, by extension, the idea that a 'naive', elemental force goes hand in hand with an 'intellectual', sceptically distanced activity (1071). Associations of a physiological nature are also evoked by this explanation of the same process: 'irgend etwas in Ihnen schleudert ein paar Verse heraus oder tastet sich mit ein paar Versen hervor'(1071) - the coactive intellectual factor being here rendered by this vivid scientific/medical metaphor: 'irgend etwas anderes in Ihnen (...) prüft sie, färbt sie, sucht nach pathologischen Stellen'(1071). Another metaphor describes the language the poet has at his command as fraught with 'sinn- und stimmungsgeschwängerten (...) Worten'(1082). Benn's famous 'Flimmerhaar'-image (1075-76) must be mentioned here: as certain primitive organisms possess one general sense organ spread all over their bodies in the form of cilia, so the poet is covered all over with 'cilia' sensitive only to words. Poetic form is described as 'die Ordnung jener "fahlen Hyperämie"' (1076): 'pale hyperemia' is Benn's own metaphor con-

veying the intensity, physical and mental, of the creative endeavour (see pp.56-58). Finally, there is the unforgettable 'Gehirn mit Eckzähnen' with which the 'lyric I' crushes all outer and inner obstacles (1079).

Classical mythology provides the cricket, the earth-born Athenian insect to illustrate the poet's closeness to all things 'real' and down to earth (1069). Ariadne's thread and the ship of the Phaeacians point the certainty with which the poet works towards his creative goal (1071).

This list of metaphors is, of course, incomplete. It may be useful to mention, briefly, metaphors of light, fire and water relating to the sphere of creativity ('Selbstentzündung', 'das tödliche Fanal', 1076; poets are 'Leuchttürme' lighting up 'das große schöpferische Meer', 1081); metaphors taken from geometry (the stanza is an ellipsis or a 'Umspannung zweier Pole', 1082 and 1080), and from Christian myth (poets are 'Erscheinungen' who are nailing themselves to the cross, 1080).

These metaphors play a significant part in the pattern of intensification and contrasting soberness I have described above. As I maintained earlier, Benn's persistent use of metaphorical expression,

while not relieving him of the obligation to present discussable ideas, imposes on us the extra effort of first isolating the ideas presented in the guise of metaphor in order then to subject these ideas to fair criticism.

4. Polemic Parody: Hyperbole

Finally, a brief look at the dramatic dialogue that occupies pride of place in Benn's discussion of the lyric poet (1082-87). However questionable its burden may be to informed and serious-minded people,²² it displays the provocateur's consummate craftsmanship and should be taken for what it is: a deliberate exaggeration designed to convey and hammer home, in as unforgettable a manner as possible, ideas close to the speaker's heart.²³

He draws on Hans Sedlmayr's critical analysis of modern art²⁴ and forces it, against its own impetus, to support his argument. Sedlmayr's book sets out to 'diagnose' the malady of our time; it is 'der Versuch einer Diagnose der Zeit, ihres Elends und ihrer Größe, von der Kunst her', for which purpose it offers an extensive compilation of the 'symptoms' of the disease.²⁵

The dialogue Benn stages is a dramatization of the 'war' waged, according to Sedlmayr, by the dehumanized autonomous art of the 'fourth phase' of Western art against the art of the preceding phases that was built on the affirmation of man's central place within the organic and the spiritual world. It is, in short, a dramatization of the war between modernism and humanism. Benn puts these two positions on the stage, as it were, the dramatis personae being his own 'lyric I' and Sedlmayr's 'centre'. The drama falls into two parts separated by a direct intervention by the stage-manager.

In the first part (1082-85), argument is met by counter-argument, both parties getting a fairly equal share of the stage. 'Die Mitte' echoes Sedlmayr's most memorable formulations (underlined in the following sample) which are picked and parodied with Bennessque flair:

Aber was Ihre Clique betreibt, (...) das ist Deshumanisation, das ist nicht das Ewige im Menschen, das sind Störungen im vitalen Mark. Zurück zur Forstwirtschaft, Kultur der Erde!

(...)

Das ist Transzendenz des Menschen nach unten, Sie verhöhnen das menschliche Gesamtbild. Was ist das immer für ein Gerede mit dem Wort, das ist Primat des Materials, Erniedrigung des Geistes ins Anorganische, das ist Viertes Zeitalter, selbstmörderische Phase - (1083)

The way in which Sedlmayr's words are cited exposes his very serious concerns to the glare of ridicule.

At the point where the eloquence of the wrangling has done enough to discredit 'the centre', the 'lyric I' changes its tactics and assumes the offensive (1084-85). The speaker intervenes to focus more sharply on this now patently curious thing 'die Mitte' (1085-86). He goes on to bring in Heidegger, and with him, presumably, 'de [n] ganze [n] Rummel des Existentialismus' (AB, p.173), to let him collect his share of the beating:

...wir müssen mit Verlaub diese Mitte ins Auge fassen, (...) Gottes schönste Mitte, (...) diese Mitte ist das Abendland, das will sich nicht mehr verteidigen, aber Angst will es haben, geworfen will es sein. (...) Im Theater wollen sie zu ihrer Betäubung Stücke sehen, in denen in der ersten Szene ein Gast eintritt und bei dem Anblick eines jungen Mädchens stutzt, in der zweiten muß einem Tischgenossen der Braten auf den Kopf fallen, weil der Diener stolpert - das ist erlösender Humor, erdverbunden. Zu Hause erinnern sie sich dann wieder ihrer Geworfenheit und nehmen zur Beruhigung Phanodorm. (1085)

We note that 'die Mitte' here attacked is not the centre in Sedlmayr's understanding of the word. Benn has underhandedly reinterpreted it to denote 'the mean', the average, the mediocre. From this flows his protestation:

--nein, von dieser Mitte nehme ich
keine Belehrung an, meine Mitte ist
intakt. (1086)

Another 'Mitte' has been introduced: the personal 'centre', the self, the focal point and source of meaning that remains unaffected by temporal developments:

Entweder nämlich hat der Mensch heute
genauso eine Mitte wie er nur je eine
hatte, entweder ist der Mensch auch
heute tief, oder er war es nie. (1086)

This 'Mitte' is the trump-card Benn plays to demolish Sedlmayr's idea of the lost centre.

Through his intervention he has helped the 'lyric I' to spirit away its opponent - the 'lyric I' had accused 'the centre' of striving to do precisely this to it! (1084-85) - and to have the stage all to itself (1086-87). One last address to 'the centre' serves as a reminder of the original dialogic setting ('Haben Sie schon einmal...' 108687). After this, the 'lyric I' launches its grand finale. Pointing out the service the machine - according to Sedlmayr, man's and art's worst enemy - may in the end render to the human spirit, the 'lyric I' enters into an increasingly hyperbolic description of the achievements of modern science - to turn abruptly to the pious restraint demanded of art. This contrast hammers home the

absurdity of the demand.

Of the four artistic components in the structure and language of Probleme der Lyrik I I have discussed, this parody is the most eloquent witness to the fact that an artist, in his very own manner, is presenting his views on 'problems of lyric poetry'. It may well be that the strongly emotive appeal Probleme der Lyrik derives from its non-scholarly means of presentation is yet another factor responsible for the impact it made on Benn's immediate audience, and the disappointment it held in store for scholars subsequently analyzing it. Here, for example, is Karl Krolow's assessment:

eine interessante Rede, aber eine Rede, die allzu hermetischen Charakters ist, um eine für den Gegenstand notwendige Eigenschaft mit- und aufzubringen: Gelassenheit. Gelassenheit gegenüber einer heiklen und verdächtigen Sache, der man mit Exorbitanz schwerlich beikommen kann. (26)

It seems to me that we stand a better chance of doing justice to Benn and his thought if we accept this 'exorbitancy', with due 'Gelassenheit', as the characteristic tone of his voice and analyze his utterances with the tools appropriate to 'exorbitant' - as Benn reminds us: poetic (1069) - language.

III. Poetological Content

1. 'Grundsätzliches'

i. 'Problems of Lyric Poetry'

Let us first consider the title. It announces Benn's intention to discuss 'problems' concerning lyric poetry. This seems highly relevant. His awareness that problems of central significance are involved comes across forcefully from his correspondence of the time:

Ich vertrete nicht den Standpunkt des Autors, sondern den Standpunkt von Problemen, die auf des Messers Schneide stehn, von Existenzentscheidungen mit tödlichen Gefahren. Breitere Leserkreise bewahrt man besser vor dem Einblick in diese Katastrophen.

(Letter to Adolf Frisé, 24 November 1949, GI, p.113)

One who stands for problems cannot wish to offer easy explanations and directives. These should therefore not be sought in a work that puts up a clear signal to this effect at its very beginning. Benn who insists, more than once, that art today can give 'keine Antwort mehr, keine allgemeinen Lehren' (AB, p.136), that all it can do is 'Eindrücke hinter-

lassen, Keime ausstreun' (AB, pp. 151-52), deserves to be credited with sufficient consistency of thought to claim no more for his own poetological utterances.

The concluding statement of the passage quoted above indicates Benn's disinclination to admit the wider reading public into the orbit of the problems that burden him. His feeling of superiority may have mingled with one of inferiority in front of the academic audience for whom the lecture was designed.²⁷ It may have caused him to make full use of the poet's privilege to hide behind a façade of simplicity. We should therefore be prepared to consider his utterances with great care before deciding whether or not we agree with Grimm's verdict 'reichlich läppisch'.²⁸

The second part of the title, 'lyric poetry', receives some explanation in the introductory paragraphs. Benn distinguishes between 'Dichterische[s]' or 'Poetische[s]' on the one hand, and 'Lyrik' on the other.⁽¹⁰⁵⁹⁾ He is evidently utilizing, but avoiding exact quotation of, Emil Staiger's distinction between 'das Lyrische' and 'die Lyrik'²⁹ to clarify and underscore the point he is making: the 'new poem' (1059) is not an effusion of a 'lyric mood' but an artefact, a product of 'Kunst'. One must agree with Reinhold

Grimm that this is not at all a new idea and that Benn does no more than represent 'das Fortdauern des alten Wahren auch unterm Schutt der Vergessenheit'.³⁰ But then, he is doing his part to remove this 'Schutt der Vergessenheit'.

His somewhat provocative identification of 'neues Gedicht' and 'Lyrik'(1059) has its function here. Rather than focusing on the aspect of newness and innovation, it restores the modern poem to its proper tradition. Hence the lack of a qualifier in the title. The more comprehensive term 'Lyrik' - not 'moderne Lyrik' - serves as a frame of reference for Benn's ensuing discussion of some specifically modern features of 'lyric poetry'. These are thus presented as characteristics of what at this particular historical hour merits the name 'Lyrik'. Whether they are themselves new or old is none of Benn's immediate concerns. Ironically, Grimm makes it quite clear that the claim of novelty was made by critics, not by Benn.³¹

The title 'Probleme der Lyrik', then, implies two things worthy of our attention: Benn's object of discussion are neither cut-and-dried ideas nor necessarily new ones.

ii. 'Artistik'

The brief historical review Benn gives at the beginning of his presentation (1061-63) is of interest to us for two reasons. First, however much it may rely on T.S. Eliot's address 'From Poe to Valery' and John Ciardi's anthology Mid-Century American Poets,³² the fact that it predates by five years Hugo Friedrich's much acclaimed work on modern lyric poetry speaks for the relevance of Benn's words in their time and place.³³ Second, Benn's historical observations draw our attention to his refusal to force a modern or 'new' phenomenon into a false isolation, and makes us aware of the importance he attaches to a continuity of tradition.

Most revealing in this context is his comment on 'das Gründungsereignis der modernen Kunst in Europa', Marinetti's Manifesto of 1909, and 'den Beginn der expressionistischen Lyrik in Deutschland'(1062).

'Avantgardisten' and 'Vollender' in one, the young poets of those eventful years both started and completed the revolution that was to give birth to modern poetry. Here lies Benn's justification for his leap over four decades to his own day. Here he also gives a clear enough indication that rather than

wishing to offer something new, he intends to mediate 'das Neue das (...) ein Altes ist'. The charge of 'progressive Attitüde'³⁴ is quite unjustified. To suggest, as is done not infrequently, that Benn presented an out-of-date theory dressed up in the guise of novelty is to betray an inability, or unwillingness, to judge history, or this particular case, objectively. Post-war Germany was in need of orientation, and Benn drew attention to one thread of the modernist tradition that had been arbitrarily cut off in Germany. Whether or not we attach to this thread the same significance as Benn did,³⁵ and whether or not further developments were to prove him right, has no bearing on the fact that his was a genuine response to the call of the historical hour. Not an inability to come up with new ideas moved him to look back, but a profound conviction that the continuity of the poetic tradition must be restored and preserved.

After his historical sketch Benn proceeds to illumine briefly the fundamental assumptions on which his idea of the 'new lyric poetry' is based. The key-word of this 'ganze Problematik der Ausdruckswelt'(1064) is, of course, 'Artistik'.

'Artistik' is first described as 'gefährliche[r]

Ausdruck'(1059) and then as 'umstrittener Begriff' (1064). By emphatically characterizing it as problematic, Benn exploits the diversity of implications thus intimated for a concise account of a complex issue. His acknowledgement of Nietzsche as his source has a similar function. Although he piles up, with his own zest, pet formulations such as 'Transzendenz der schöpferischen Lust'(1064), 'die Kunst als die eigentliche Aufgabe des Lebens, die Kunst als dessen metaphysische Tätigkeit'(1064), 'Olymp des Scheins'(1065), something less frivolous than indulgence in the pleasure of citation moves him to do so. He adduces the philosopher's words to bring to bear on his own argument the profundity and reach they derive from the pattern of thought to which they belong. The idea thus focused on and conveyed to the knowledgeable listener or reader with maximum economy is that of the complexity and metaphysical significance of 'Artistik': 'Das alles nannte er [Nietzsche] Artistik'(1064).³⁶

With Nietzsche behind him, he entrusts these relatively brief words to explain:

Artistik ist der Versuch der Kunst,
innerhalb des allgemeinen Verfalls
der Inhalte sich selber als Inhalt zu
erleben und aus diesem Erlebnis einen
neuen Stil zu bilden, es ist der Versuch,

gegen den allgemeinen Nihilismus
der Werte eine neue Transzendenz
zu setzen: die Transzendenz der
schöpferischen Lust. (1064)

In the absence of all the values that served in the past to guarantee meaning and transcendence, art comes to the fore and offers a new value: the experience of art, the consciously experienced act of creation - we remember: the modern poet creates and observes at one and the same time (1059-60, see p.17) - restoring to the self-conscious creator some meaning and some transcendence. It is through the pleasure the artist derives from his creative experience that he may transcend the meaninglessness that engulfs the modern world. In a letter to F.W.Oelze Benn puts into simple words what is involved:

...ich kann immer wieder nur sagen,
daß Produktivität das Einzige ist,
das einen sichert und führt.
(18 April 1952, BOe,II,2,p.135)

'Transzendenz der schöpferischen Lust' is, of course, a much more affirmative formulation, but in essence it carries the same message. And if the word 'Lust' seems to give away the old vitalist, we might do well to remember that 'Lust', beside 'Wohlgefallen', was introduced into aesthetics by Kant - father also of the idea of art's autonomy whose advocacy by Benn has raised many a scholarly eyebrow.

The 'new style' engendered by this experience, while independent of any traditional value system and the 'Inhalte' it may offer for poetic rendition, must not, however, be mistaken for 'pure' form as aspired to by the 19th-century movement of poésie pure. It does have a 'content' - and one that endows it with existential significance unknown to mere aestheticism. This 'content', as we know, is what the poet knows to be the essence of his being ('sein inneres Wesen', 1065), which it is his ineluctable calling ('Verhängnis', 1065) to externalize and cast into the form 'unvergänglicher Schönheit' (1065). As Bruno Hillebrand puts it, 'Form ist Ausdruck menschlichen Seins'.³⁷ Benn's commitment to substance is unbroken. 'Der finale Aspekt einer letzten religiösen Substanzerfahrung (...) gehört zum festen Bestandteil der Bennschen Ästhetik.'³⁸

To Hillebrand we also owe the clarification of the motive behind Benn's emphasis on artistic superficiality at the expense of the crucial experience of substance. He points out that it is a provocative measure designed to ward off 'falsche Lebensansprüche'.³⁹ Provocative overstatement serves Benn to dissociate himself from literary movements advocating what to him are fatuous variants of pseudo-substance.⁴⁰

The quotation from Goethe's Wilhelm Meister is instructive:

Und wer immer noch zweifelt, daß hier eine Entwicklung zum Abschluß kam, denke des Wortes aus Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahren: "Auf ihrem höchsten Gipfel scheint die Poesie ganz äußerlich, je mehr sie sich ins Innere zurückzieht, ist sie auf dem Wege zu sinken." Das alles lag vor, aber der Zwang zur Integration vollzog sich erst hier. (1065)

Benn establishes a historical link between modernism and the aesthetics of Weimar classicism. Reinhold Grimm takes exception to this precisely because of his apparent misunderstanding of Benn's 'Artistik' as 'leere Transzendenz'. He argues that Goethe's aim being 'Mimesis', Benn's 'Metaphysik', Benn is wrong in claiming Goethe's words 'als Vorwegnahme (...) der modernen Ästhetik und Artistik'.⁴¹ Grimm appears to overlook the fact that Goethe's 'Äußere' and Benn's 'Ausdruck' have in common the important function of 'embodying'(Goethe') or 'expressing'(Benn) 'das Innere'. I suggest that the Goethe-quotation serves Benn to focus on the significant role 'ein Äußeres' plays in the poet's attempt to express 'das Innere'. Rather than concerning himself with 'nur das Innere' and neglecting the manner of its presentation, he fashions a poetic symbol, or in Benn's context, poetic form, to 'embody' or 'express' it. In the perfect symbol or

form the inner substance will have reached its maximum degree of externalization: 'Auf ihrem Gipfel scheint die Poesie ganz äußerlich'.

The key notion of Benn's deliberations here is that of 'Schein' as developed by Schiller (whom he mentions explicitly: 1065) and received and handed on by Nietzsche whose 'rätselhafte Worte' on the 'Olymp des Scheins' (1065) feature prominently among Benn's favourite formulations. I do not think that it is fair comment to say that Benn claims Goethe's words as a basis for his own poetry or for modernism as a whole.⁴² He postulates no such single or direct link. His aim is to indicate, through reference to some well-known pronouncements, from Flaubert back to Goethe, that modern poetry as 'Ausdruck' or 'Schein' is rooted in the depth of the poetic tradition - the difference between modernism and tradition being that the former, on account of the changed epistemological presuppositions, brings to dominance a feature contained in the latter without comparable 'Zwang zur Integration'(1065). Benn is not striving to ascertain any single prototype, but - as always - historical perspective.⁴³

2. 'Handgreifliches'

1. The Lyric Poet

He is born with a special sensitivity to words (cilia-image) and a special ability to use them effectively, both of which cannot be acquired:

...das Verhältnis zum Wort ist primär,
diese Beziehung kann man nicht lernen.
(...) das Wort faszinierend ansetzen,
das können Sie, oder das können Sie
nicht. (1074)

Being gifted in this way does not, however, exempt him from hard work involving extensive study and observation on the one hand, and a scrupulous formative effort on the other. Benn goes to considerable lengths to emphasize the importance of study and observation:

Der Lyriker kann gar nicht genug
wissen, er kann gar nicht genug
arbeiten, er muß an allem nahe dran
sein,... (1087)

The poet gathers information from 'the world' in its entirety - its past and present spiritual, intellectual and material endeavours; he is a 'Verwerker' not only of his own inner world (1079) but also of the many facets of the outer world: 'aus allem

kommt das Gedicht'(1088). Benn's own transformation of material drawn from diverse fields into vehicles of poetic expression best demonstrates what is meant. Benn is indeed embracing the idea of the poeta doctus, as Professor Grimm points out; but when he goes on to castigate Benn for not realizing how old this ideal is,⁴⁴ he foists on him a crime he does not commit. Benn does not imply that learning is a new or specifically modern requirement. He does emphasize that the poet must know 'wo die Welt sich heute hält' (1087, my emphasis), but in doing so he merely indicates what being a poeta doctus involves today; he does not present the concept itself as a new one.

The knowledgeable poet is at the same time a precision worker who does not rest until he knows the form he is shaping to be perfect:

Sie wissen ganz genau wenn es fertig ist, das kann natürlich lange dauern, wochenlang, jahrelang, aber bevor es nicht fertig ist, geben Sie es nicht aus der Hand. Immer wieder fühlen Sie an ihm herum, am einzelnen Wort, am einzelnen Vers, Sie nehmen die zweite Strophe gesondert heraus, betrachten sie, bei der dritten Strophe fragen Sie sich, ob sie das missing link zwischen der zweiten und der vierten Strophe ist,... (1070)

The success of this process depends very much on the poet knowing his words and being able to put them to maximum effect:

Er [Stefan George] kennt seine Worte,
er weiß mit ihnen etwas anzufangen, er
kennt die ihm gemäße Zuordnung der Worte,
formt mit ihnen, sucht Reime, ruhige,
stille Strophen, ausdrucksvolle Strophen,
(...) - drei Strophen zu vier Reihen,
diese faszinieren kraft ihrer Form das
Jahrhundert. (1072)

Study and observation, examination and use of his own - given as well as acquired - 'Bestände'(1084) place the poet outside the arena of social intercourse. His solitude, however, is no self-imposed exile to secure the external conditions best suited to his creative work; it is essentially bound up with his particular disposition whose mainspring is a 'besondere[r], halb aus Vulkanismus, halb aus Apathie geborene[r] Drang'(1079). Apathy is his response to what to him is 'Sesselgemurmel'(1093). What moves him is seated within and requires solitude to be perceived:

...aber wer begegnet sich selbst?
Nur wenige und dann allein. (1093)⁴⁵

In these 'Selbstbegegnungen'(1093) the poet reaches 'das Andere'(1093) which urges him to reveal it. 'Produktives Ablenken inneren Mystizismus zu klaren, irdisch gebundenen Formen'(1090) is another description of the poet's disposition.

Benn's conception of the poet appears to bear resemblance to Heidegger's:

Das Wort ist aber zugleich jenes Gut,
das dem Dichter als Dichter auf eine
ungewöhnliche Weise zugetraut und an-
vertraut wird. Der Dichter erfährt den
Dichterberuf im Sinne einer Berufung
zum Wort als dem Born des Seins. (46)

Edith Kern, in her introduction to a collection of critical essays on Sartre, offers this helpful explanation of the existentialist understanding of the poet as pioneered by Heidegger: 'The poet is (...) the per-sona of Being (...) that through which Being speaks.'⁴⁷

Judging by the frequency with which the words 'Existenz' and 'existentiell' enter into Benn's argument, he seems to encourage an existentialist interpretation of his utterances. He insists on 'existentielle Bedeutung'(1091), he asserts that 'das Wort nimmt (...) beim primären Lyriker die unmittelbare Bewegung seiner Existenz auf'(1061), he indulges in punning on the poet giving up his 'Existenz, um zu existieren'(1080). This apparently Bennesque pun, however, is taken from Goethe,⁴⁸ suggesting that the existential dimension Benn has in mind is not identical with twentieth-century existentialism. It seems fair to suggest that Benn, who is concerned with

lyric poetry in its appropriate modern form, attaches existential significance to the poet's activity, not just that of the modern poet. His Heidegger-criticism seems to bear me out: '...bei H. handelt es sich um (...) uralte Bestände der Philosophie, die er nur neu "deutet"'. (Letter to Oelze, 28 October 1949; BOe,II, 1,p.260.)

Furthermore, we have witnessed, in the context of Benn's Heine-allusion and particularly his Sedlmayr-attack, the way he uses identical words to convey a different meaning ('Stimmung', 'Mitte'). The possibility of a similar provocative use of words suggests itself, of words that were, after all, on everybody's lips. Benn's attack on Heidegger, which forms part of his parody on Sedlmayr's 'Mitte', lends support to this conjecture. The mordancy of the outburst may not be unconnected with the fact that Benn's views did in certain respects agree with Heidegger's.⁴⁹ However, 'Angst' and 'Geworfenheit' have no place in the existence of his poet. He is secure in his belief in 'das Absolute'(1084) and absorbed in the task enjoined on him to express it at all costs ('ihm ist etwas auferlegt, was er auf jeden Fall und unter jeder Gefahr zum Ausdruck bringen muß', 1086) - and thereby restore meaning to human life:

...und diese augenblicklichen Moira-Substanzen führen ihn, da es für ihn kein Mekka mehr gibt und kein Gethsemane, (...) weiter den Weg auf den Olymp des Scheins - überall wo Menschen sind, werden auch Götter wohnen. (1091)

After the demise of religion, the poet's 'pilgrimage' leads to the 'Olymp des Scheins' - to 'Artistik' authenticated by its link to the implied double classicism of Greek antiquity ('Olymp') and Weimar aestheticism ('Schein').

ii. The Word and the Creative Process

The poet's intimate familiarity with words does not, however, enable him to write poetry at any moment of his choice. Rather, he waits for 'his hour' in which the impulse received from a word or words sets in motion the creative process:

Immer wartet das lyrische Ich auf seine Stunde, in der es sich für Augenblicke erwärmt, wartet auf seine südlichen Komplexe mit ihrem "Wallungswert", nämlich Rauschwert, in dem die Zusammenhangsdurchstoßung, das heißt die Wirklichkeitszertrümmerung, vollzogen werden kann, die Freiheit schafft für das Gedicht - durch Worte. (1076)

What Benn presents here is his 'hyperämische Theorie des Dichterischen' (3,644) that had been fully developed by 1927 in the essay 'Lyrisches Ich'. Critics have dismissed it for being irrational, some of them

arguing that it was overcome at a certain point and left behind by the maturing poet and thinker in favour of 'Form' and 'Artistik'.⁵⁰ In my opinion, this overestimates the irrational element in Benn's early exposition. In fairness one must say that much of the blame lies with Benn himself, with his sovereign exploitation of metaphor and its associative potential - if one feels called upon to blame him for exercising, in his attempt to verbalize the creative experience, the very talent it is hard not to admire even in his less attractive lyric compositions. His 'wrong-doing' is to have formulated, with his own force of expression, what others may prefer to leave unsaid or couch in softer tones.

The fact that Benn in 1951 reverts to his exposition of 1927 and quotes it without any alteration throws light on the often underrated balance of his earlier views and, by the same token, on the fundamental constancy and consistency of his poetological thought. As Hans Otto Horch suggested recently, the decisive turn in Benn's creative and theoretical endeavour occurred in the years 1921/22 (when he wrote and published his 'Epilog'); his theoretical position took shape during the 1920s and was maintained, with some shifts of emphasis, to the end.⁵¹ Significantly,

as early as 1961, Edgar Lohner had said much the same, stating with characteristic circumspection that the notion of 'Form' may have crystallized more clearly after 1932 but was far from absent before.⁵²

With his cilia-image Benn undertakes to explain the poet's unique susceptibility to words (1075). It is a metaphorical description of the way in which the poet's disposition induces him to build up the reservoir of 'his words' (1070). Of particular interest is the concluding statement that the lyric sensorium responds only to the printed word:

Sie [the 'Reizbemerkung' of the cilia]
gilt der Chiffre, ihrem gedruckten
Bild, der schwarzen Letter, ihr allein.
(1075; 8,1878)

This qualification serves as a reminder of the poet's intellectual pursuit which, as we have seen, is a prerequisite for his creative activity. Benn goes on to emphasize this point through reference to his notes, books, and exploratory word-compositions:

Phäaken, Megalithen, lernäische Ge-
biete - allerdings Namen, allerdings
zum Teil von mir sogar gebildet,
(...) Astarte, Geta, Heraklit - aller-
dings Notizen aus meinen Büchern...
(1076-77; 1879)

Now it may happen that in response to some intellectual stimulus - a word, an idea, a fact; or words, ideas, facts - his 'psychic substance' is

stirred into what Lohner describes as 'innerliche Bewegung des Gemüts':⁵³

Bei der Lektüre eines, nein zahlloser
Bücher durcheinander, Verwirrung von
Ären, Mischung [1927: Pêlemêle] von
Stoffen und Aspekten, Eröffnung weiter
typologischer Schichten: entrückter
strömender Beginn. Nun eine Müdigkeit
aus schweren Nächten, Nachgiebigkeit
des Strukturellen oft von Nutzen, für
die große Stunde unbedingt. (1076; 1878-79)

Under the impact of this inner movement - in which, as Lohner points out, both 'Bewußtsein' and 'Einbildungskraft' seem to have a part⁵⁴ - the rule of reason collapses, its categories are broken up, Benn's 'Zusammenhangsdurchstoßung' has been effected. Now the 'bipolar tension' between the poet's 'psychic substance' and 'his words'(1070) causes the 'cilia' to draw from his store those words that will serve to 'express' the inner movement:

Nun nähern sich vielleicht schon
Worte, Worte durcheinander, dem
Klaren noch nicht bemerkbar, aber
die Flimmerhaare tasten es heran.
(1076; 1879)

Owing to the poet's wide-ranging studies, these words have become so fraught with associations as to be perceived as 'realms' that are felt to be thronging towards his 'inflamed', that is actively creative 'self' to form part of the 'order' it is about to produce:

Nicht umsonst sage ich Blau. Es ist das Südwort schlechthin, der Exponent des "ligurischen Komplexes", von enormem "Wallungswert", das Hauptmittel zur "Zusammenhangsdurchstoßung", nach der die Selbstentzündung beginnt, das "tödliche Fanal", auf das sie zuströmen, die ferneren Reiche, um sich einzufügen in die Ordnung jener "fahlen Hyperämie".
(1076; 1879)⁵⁵

'Fahle Hyperämie' is one of a number of phrases Benn coined and reiterated to describe the poet's creative frame of mind. Other such phrases, relying equally on the reader's knowledge of medical terms, are found at the beginning of the original essay: 'heuristiche Kongestionen', 'monistische Hypertonien' (8,1877). I submit that 'hyperemia' - like 'congestion' and 'hypertonia' - is used as a metaphor to convey Benn's conviction that poetic creation is not a normal activity (hyperemia is a disease); that it involves an over-functioning, an unusual abundance of ideas, images and associations surging into the creative mind (hyperemia is a profusion of blood in one part of the body). The qualifier 'fahl', by way of contrastive association, adds to the suggestion of intensified productivity that of pallid saplessness often associated with scholarship and book-worming, pointing to the intellectual work that not only precedes but also goes into the creation of the new 'order'.

Benn-criticism has tended not to take sufficient account of the metaphorical function of this often-quoted formulation and has come up, as a result, with astonishing suggestions, such as:

The "swellings" of the body and especially the flow of blood are central factors in the urge towards expression.⁵⁶

One reason for this literalism, beside the layman's unfamiliarity with medical terms, may be the fact that Benn first used this phrase at a time when a wave of vitalism swept over Germany which most certainly did not leave the young Benn unaffected. But three decades later? It doesn't seem to make sense to assume that a poet who exploited every field of knowledge as a treasure-house of metaphor should have singled out for literal treatment the one he was most familiar with. Of course, the gross devaluation the 'blood'-complex has suffered at the hands of National Socialism, coupled with our knowledge that Benn's fatal mistake was prompted in large measure by indisputable correspondences between his poetological conception and the Fascist creed, plays into our perception of Benn's blood-metaphors. But the fact that his thoughts and formulations took shape well before these disturbing events, and particularly the fact that he reiterated them well thereafter, would seem to indicate that his

'blood-thinking' is of another, surely more refined nature. Michael Hamburger's contention that Benn 'consistently refused' to 'stand back (...) from his obsessions and irrationalities' and was dominated by a 'determination (...) never to correct his specific errors publicly'⁵⁷ is in my opinion an unjust assault on Benn's intellectual integrity.

What comes to the poet in 'his hour' are hosts of associatively charged words. And this is how these words are transmuted into poetic words:

Da wäre vielleicht ein Befreundung für
Blau, welch Glück, welch reines Erlebnis!
Man denke alle die leeren entkräfteten
Bespielungen, die suggestionslosen
Präambeln für dies einzige Kolorit, nun
kann man ja den Himmel von Sansibar über
den Blüten der Bougainville und das Meer
der Syrten in sein Herz beschwören, man
denke dies ewige und schöne Wort! (1076; 1879)

The poet is advised to 'think': to gather all 'thinkable' variations and associations of a particular word. He is then to conjure these colourless 'preambles' 'down', as it were, into his 'heart' which transmutes them into agents of poetic magic. This is to say that his 'heart', too, relies for its generating fuel on his intellectual inquiries. Finally, the poet is again advised to 'think'. The repeated and this time more strikingly transitive use of the verb endows it with creative connotations: by estab-

lishing and fusing diverse associations, such 'thinking' transforms a word into a poetic word.

It has become clear that this process of transformation involves a close co-operation of the poet's rational and imaginative faculties. The magic 'mehr' of the poetic word (1077) stems, in the first place, from the poet's extensive knowledge and derives its particular strength from his capacity for imaginative reanimation and 'Zusammenschau':

Worte, Worte - Substantive! Sie brauchen nur die Schwingen zu öffnen und Jahrtausende entfallen ihrem Flug. Nehmen Sie Anemonenwald, (...) - oder nehmen Sie Olive oder Theogonien - Jahrtausende entfallen ihrem Flug. Botanisches, Geographisches, Völker und Länder, alle die historisch und systematisch so verlorenen Welten hier ihre Blüte, hier ihr Traum - aller Leichtsinn, alle Wehmut, alle Hoffnungslosigkeit des Geistes werden fühlbar aus den Schichten eines Querschnitts von Begriff. (1077; 1879-80)

The layers of meaning a word or 'Begriff' comprises, its range of denotations and connotations, are discovered through intellectual work and transmuted by the creative mind into imaginatively 'fühlbar [e]' entities capable of poetic 'Blüte' and 'Traum'.

The ability to go beyond the 'Begriff' and grasp the 'Wort' is what constitutes the poet's distinctive gift: his special susceptibility to the word, particularly the noun.⁵⁸ It makes available to him '[die]

Macht des Wortes, das löst und fügt'(1077; 1880).

With this succinct summary of his poetic of the word Benn draws our attention to the double function performed by the word in the creative process. Encountered in print as a 'Chiffre',⁵⁹ it 'dissolves' ('lösen'='auflösen') the notional divisions and releases ('lösen'='auslösen') the processes of associative collection and enrichment. This last process forms the link between the 'destructive' and the 'constructive' functions of the word, the latter function being that of fitting together ('fügen') the material gathered by dint of association.

To the poet, then, as a result of his wide-ranging knowledge ('Lektüre', 'Notizen'), words are fraught with meaning and associations ('Wallungswert' or 'Rauschwert') so as to transcend, in certain inspired moments ('die große Stunde'), the defined contexts of which they originally formed part ('Zusammenhangsdurchstoßung') and point to, and make themselves available for the construction of, a new context ('die Ordnung jener "fahlen Hyperämie"').

Thus the aspects both of 'Rausch' and 'Form', the latter in the sense of active formation, are presented in close proximity, leading to Benn's assertion 'der formfordernden Gewalt des Nichts'(1077;

1880). His 'Nichts' appears to refer to the stage reached during the creative 'hour' where the dissolution of notional divisions is complete and gives way to the process of associative enrichment and ensuing formation. It is the fountain-head of 'Gebilde' - a word borrowed from the 'Olympische[r] Urgroßvater' (BOe, II, 2, p. 185), referring us to his poem 'Dauer im Wechsel' and thus pointing to the metaphysical implications of the processes described:

Danke, daß die Gunst der Musen
Unvergängliches verheißt,
den Gehalt in deinem Busen
und die Form in deinem Geist.⁶⁰
(st. 5, ll. 37-40)

iii. The Poem

a) Four Diagnostic Symptoms

The negative criteria Benn offers as a quick guide for sifting poems that have not kept up with their time from those that have may at first glance seem simplistic and therefore meaningless.⁶¹ However, if we are prepared to meet Benn as a poet a less offensive picture may emerge. Firstly, the apparent simplicity of these 'rules' will be understood as

forming part of the skilfully composed overall structure I endeavoured to describe earlier. Secondly, remembering that the poet does not define but, by various means, suggest, we may assume that these simple illustrations point to more fundamental issues than meet the eye.

If Benn chose a somewhat primitive example to illustrate his first symptom, that of 'Andichten'(1069), he did so to furnish a negative foil against which the positive method, which he leaves for us to establish, will stand out clearly. To argue that the poor quality of the example destroys its own effectiveness⁶² is to misunderstand the way in which it is used.

This 'Andichten' should be clearly distinguished from the 'WIE-Dichte[n]'(1068) which constitutes Benn's second symptom. Whereas the former has to do with the relation between the composing I ('dichtende[s] Ich', 1067) and his poetic object ('angedichtete[r] Gegenstand',1067), the latter has to do with that between the object and its expression in language. In other words, the first point deals with the nature of the poetic object, the second with that of the poetic language.⁶³ From the vantage-point of our preceding discussions we recognize in the rejected method of 'Andichten' the very opposite to 'Ausdruck' and thus

a veiled harbinger of a concept fundamental to all ensuing elaborations.

Benn's 'WIE'-criticism follows logically from this rejection of the subject-object dichotomy and constitutes a call for 'primäre Setzung'(1068) - for a poetic language that 'carries directly the movement of his [the poet's] inner being' ('Das Wort nimmt (...) beim primären Lyriker die unmittelbare Bewegung seiner Existenz auf.'1061) Such 'primäre Setzung' entails no 'Bruch in der Vision'(1068), no 'Nachlassen der sprachlichen Spannung'(1068); it implies a complete congruence of the poetic word and what it expresses. The formulation 'primäre Setzung' tell us vividly that poetic expression should be original, direct and whole. It does not, however, tell us which of the available forms of the poetic repertoire are or are not capable of producing it - the one exception being, of course, explicit comparison which by virtue of its characteristic duality is the direct opposite of 'primäre Setzung'. I suggest that Benn's refusal to specify further springs from the practitioner's implicit awareness that any specific canon would limit the range of expressive means and thereby thwart the poet's attempt to lend 'direct expression' to every one of the diverse inner movements that impel him

to produce as many poetic utterances.⁶⁴

Benn's third symptom, the 'Farbenskala'(1069) looks simple indeed. However, if we consider that the tell-tale colours are descriptive adjectives whose ruthless elimination Benn advised,⁶⁵ may we not assume that behind 'colour' stands the whole army of colourful adjectives useless to the poet who aims at 'primäre Setzung'? By owning up to his own passion for the colour blue (1068) Benn adds an important qualification: depending on a poet's particular disposition, certain colours - or adjectives? - may not be clichés at all but may occupy a secure place in the range of 'his words' as made available to him by his geographically and historically determined 'Stimmung' - and may well be capable of 'primäre Setzung'.⁶⁶

Benn's warning against 'the seraphic tone', his fourth symptom (1069), attests implicitly to his recognition of the importance of 'tones'. However, 'seraphic' poetry - Klopstock is known as 'the seraphic poet' - is a thing of the past. The characteristic tone of today's poetry is 'realistic', the poet being a 'great realist', being 'close to all realities' and distributing esoteric and seraphic elements over his 'realistic' material with extreme

caution (1069).⁶⁷ As with adjectives, Benn does not issue a total ban but relies implicitly on the true poet's discerning judgement.

The apparent vagueness of these utterances has not failed to draw the charge of superficiality.⁶⁸ In my opinion, the fact that in discussing concrete aspects of poetic form Benn has recourse to indirect-
ion should be viewed positively as a measure of caution: Benn wishes to avoid arbitrary reduction.

b) Rhyme and Reading

I suggested earlier that a frame of apparent simplicity, aided by a connecting middle link, surrounds Benn's poetological presentation (see p.26). The four 'diagnostic symptoms' just discussed form the opening part of this frame, the suggestion that the modern poem should be 'seen' and read silently its closing part (1093-94), while the middle link is provided by Benn's brief comment on the question of rhyme (1078-79). Just as the four 'läppisch[e]' symptoms serve to bring out indirectly some essential qualities of the 'primäre Setzung' Benn demands of the poet, so his brief words on the function of rhyme and the reading reception of a modern poem point to deeper issues than meet the eye.

In view of the fact that rhyme plays a not inconsiderable part in Benn's own poetry, his explanation, however brief, is important. He is aware of its present exhaustion: 'man kennt ihn zu sehr aus all den tausend Gedichten'(1078). He knows that it is an objective element liable to run counter to the poet's desire to express his own 'inneres Wesen':

Der lyrische Autor selbst wird wohl
immer den Reim als ein Prinzip emp-
finden, das nicht er selbst ist,
sondern das ihm von der Sprache nahe-
gelegt wird,... (1079)

Yet he embraces rhyme as a 'principle of order':

Der Reim ist auf jeden Fall ein Ord-
nungsprinzip und eine Kontrolle
innerhalb des Gedichts. (...) Der
lyrische Autor (...) wird ihn immer
besonders prüfend betrachten...(1078-79)

Far from seizing upon rhyme as an easy crutch, he welcomes it as an agent of 'das geistige Prinzip'(1071) whose influence, 'raffiniert und skeptisch'(1071), will help the poet cast his 'naive' and 'subjective' (1071) substance into objective form capable of speaking to, of 'fascinating', the outside world (1072).

While some of his younger colleagues dismiss rhyme as a rigid formal device that limits the range of words ^{the poet} could use to express his ideas,⁶⁹ Benn's willingness to take up the challenge, to crush 'Widerstände'(1079), may well be a measure of his competence

as a poet.

Let us turn to Benn's declared opinion that the modern poem is 'nicht...vortragsfähig..., weder im Interesse des Gedichts, noch im Interesse des Hörers'(1093). This, of course, agrees with his warning against 'the seraphic tone' which attests to his awareness that the modern ethos is one of sobriety. But there is more to these words: declaiming a poem would be 'neither in the interest of the poem nor in the interest of the listener'. The concepts of lecture and écriture seem to stand behind these words. Jonathan Culler, quoting from Derrida, explains:

"To write is to produce a mark which constitutes in its turn a kind of productive mechanism, which my absence will not, as a matter of principle, prevent from functioning and provoking reading, from yielding itself up to reading and rewriting..."
The meaning of a sentence (...) is not a form or an essence (...) lying behind it as a truth to be recovered, but the series of developments to which it gives rise,... (70)

The 'series of developments' a poem can give rise to in its reader, thereby realizing its 'meaning', cannot, to the same extent, be effected by an aural reception. In Benn's more graphic words, 'es wird innerlicher, wenn sich einer schweigend darüberbeugt'(1094). The

passage cited from Culler adds up to a description of Benn's 'abgeschlossene [s] Gebilde' which, as my comments on 'fascinating montage' and the 'monologic poem' will show (see below, pp.68-79), is at once 'fascinating' and 'monologic' in the sense that it imparts no 'meaning' but acts upon the reader and induces him to recreate the poem and thereby effectuate its meaning.

Needless to say that Benn could not have known of Derrida's writings.⁷¹ As a practising poet he operates on intuitively apprehended assumptions which it is the scholar's business to analyze and condense in a concept. It is a sign of good judgement, rather than superficiality, that in speaking about an issue which concerns the theorist more than the practitioner, Benn, the poet, does no more than suggest.

c) Fascinating Montage

The striking absence in Probleme der Lyrik, as in all of Benn's writings,⁷² of a clear exposition of his understanding of montage is a similar case in point. In view of the significance his practice of montage demonstrably held for the younger generation of poets in West Germany,⁷³ a more detailed comment than the meagre description of the modern poem as

'das Gedicht aus Worten, die Sie faszinierend montieren'(1088) would have been helpful. But has Benn really said no more about montage? After reading Wolfgang Iser's illuminating comments on 'Zitatmontage' in Eliot's Waste Land, it occurred to me that Benn has in fact said a number of relevant things about montage but has done so in a manner and in contexts that have prevented us from making the necessary connection. Iser writes:

...die lyrischen Montagen [entstehen] durch einen Bildschnitt und die dadurch ermöglichte neue Zusammensetzung der Bildteile. Die vorhandene "Realität" - der literarische Text und die banale Situation - wird zerlegt und geschnitten, um dann nach bestimmten Kompositionsabsichten wieder verklammert zu werden.(74)

The two steps involved in lyric montage are the dissection of a given 'reality' and the subsequent new assemblage of these parts. Making allowance for the different tone of Benn's voice, we recognize an essential agreement between the mechanism explained by Professor Iser and that implied by some of Benn's formulations that we have just considered (see pp. 55-61): 'Zusammenhangsdurchstoßung' followed by a certain 'Ordnung'; the word 'das löst und fügt'; the stanza which is 'voll von Untergang und Wiederkehr'; the 'formfordernde Gewalt des Nichts'; 'die Wirklichkeitszertrümmerung, (...) die Freiheit schafft für das

Gedicht'.

The differences that do exist are differences of focus and detachment arising from the different angles of approach. The scholar, in his rather more sober style, analyzes a given montage structure and deduces from it what the poet has done to create it. The poet views the same process from the creator's vantage-point; he includes and - what has proved so misleading - attaches considerable importance to the inspirational element that precedes the processes of destruction and construction. I quote again:

Nicht umsonst sage ich Blau. Es ist das Südwort schlechthin, der Exponent des "ligurischen Komplexes", von enormem "Wallungswert", das Hauptmittel zur "Zusammenhangsdurchstoßung", nach der die Selbstentzündung beginnt, das "tödliche Fanal", auf das sie zuströmen, die fernen Reiche, um sich einzufügen in die Ordnung jener "fahlen Hyperämie". (1076)

With his native exuberance of metaphor, Benn casts into words a momentary experience - that granted by 'die große Stunde'(1076) - which sets in motion those rational processes that are accessible to scholarly analysis. While the literary critic can only state, and comment on, the fact that the poet has dissected given material, the poet tells us how he comes to do so. But he does not stop there, he goes on to give a clear indication of the constructive work that follows:

Irgend etwas in Ihnen schleudert ein paar Verse heraus oder tastet sich mit ein paar Versen hervor, irgend etwas anderes in Ihnen nimmt diese Verse sofort in die Hand, legt sie in eine Art Beobachtungsapparat, ein Mikroskop, prüft sie, färbt sie, sucht nach pathologischen Stellen. Ist das erste vielleicht naiv, ist das zweite ganz etwas anderes: raffiniert und skeptisch. Ist das erste vielleicht subjektiv, bringt das zweite die objektive Welt heran, es ist das formale, das geistige Prinzip. (1071)

These explanations do not include the word 'Montage', but they present an anatomy of montage, laying bare its destructive and constructive mechanisms. The 'given reality' to be dissected and assembled anew, in the case of Eliot's lyric montage a literary text and some banal situation, is the world in the form of the words, ideas and contexts the poet has absorbed in the course of his study and observation; he has gathered them for what they mean and suggest to use them, when the hour is ripe, in accordance with his own 'bestimmten Kompositionsabsichten'.

Turning to Sergei Eisenstein, who has given us a profound exposition of the concept of montage relevant not only to cinematography,⁷⁵ we find further correspondences. Eisenstein defines montage as 'the idea of a principally new qualitative fusion, flowing out of the process of juxtaposition'.⁷⁶ The units

juxtaposed are not simply the individual shots as the 'process of juxtaposition' begins from within the shot:

The shot is a montage cell. Just as cells in their division form a phenomenon of another order, the organism or embryo, (...) so (...) from the shot there is montage. Montage is the expansion of intra-shot conflict. (...) Conflict within the shot is potential montage, in the development of its intensity (...) exploding its conflict into montage impulses between the montage pieces. (...) Thus is broken up a montage unit (...) into a multiple chain, which is anew gathered into a new unity - in the montage phrase... (77)

This 'new unity' constitutes

neither a successive mechanical alternation of cross-cuts, nor an interweaving of antagonistic themes, but above all a unity, which in the play of inner contradictions, through a shift of the play in the direction of tracing its organic pulse (78) - that is what lies at the base of rhythm. This is not an outer unity of story, (...) but that inner unity, which can be realized in montage. (79)

Significantly, Eisenstein draws an analogy to language, comparing the 'montage unit' (=shot) with the word, and the 'montage phrase' with the sentence:

It is interesting to watch such a process moving also through the history of language in relation to the word (the "shot") and the sentence (the "montage phrase"), and to see (...) a primitive stage of "word-sentences" later "foliating" into the sentence made up of separately independent words. (80)

If in cinematography montage is 'an expansion of intra-shot conflict', then in language montage might be described as 'an expansion of intra-word conflict'. The elements conflicting within a word can only be its various possible meanings and associations. Therefore, when the poet is moved by the word 'Blau' to associate the African sky of Zanzibar with the blossoms of Bougainville in the South Pacific and the sea of the Mediterranean Syrtes (1076), he has brought about the initial 'collision'⁸¹ with its potential for montage: for the gathering of these images and associations into 'a unity of a higher order',⁸² into 'das Gedicht aus Worten, die Sie faszinierend montieren'(1088).

Eisenstein also calls attention to the fact that the structure of montage is identical with that of emotional speech:

Thus the secret of the structure of montage was gradually revealed as a secret of the structure of emotional speech. For the very principle of montage, as is the entire individuality of its formation, is the substance of an exact copy of the language of excited emotional speech. (83)

Affirming the paramount importance to montage of an affective logic that he considers to be at the source of 'those general laws of form',⁸⁴ he throws light on the meaning of the word 'Faszination' which Benn, in

spite of abundant use and emphasis on its importance (1072-73), refrains from explaining. 'Die inneren Wandlungen' that in Benn's view poetry is capable of effecting (1073) may have to do with its affective inner structure, of which sound and rhythm, considered by some critics as the main or even exclusive source of Benn's 'fascination',⁸⁵ are only part. Benn's 'erregend'(1072) seems designed to point this aspect of poetic montage.

His 'interessant'(1072), on the other hand, points in the direction explored by Iser who focuses on the intellectual aspect of montage: on the rational clarity ('Bewußtseinshelle') which the reader develops in response to its disjunctive structure.⁸⁶ 'Interesse' - 'being between' the various sections, grasping them individually as well as in their relation to each other - may be the source of considerable fascination. Benn himself comments on the literal meaning of 'inter-esse', translating it as 'zwischen dem Sein, nämlich seinem Dunkel und seinem Schimmer' ('Stil der Zukunft':8,2030). 'Darkness' and 'shimmer' suggest blindness and perception, pointing to the dialectic of disorientation and discernment. A few lines further he adds these revealing words: 'Nach meiner Theorie müssen Sie Verblüffendes machen, bei

dem Sie am Schluß selber lachen.'(8,2031) Montage establishes relationships that amaze and amuse the comprehending intellect.

It seems fair to conclude that both emotional and intellectual factors are involved in the 'fascinating montage' Benn advocates.⁸⁷ This conclusion finds support in another of Professor Iser's observations. In the introduction to his book Der implizite Leser he comments on the aesthetic value of 'Entdeckung' which, it seems to me, has a lot in common with Benn's 'Faszination':

Darüberhinaus aber beansprucht die Entdeckung unsere Vermögen, ja vielleicht immer mehrere zugleich, in der Regel die emotionalen und die kognitiven. Bestätigung von Vermögen aber ist schon immer als ein ästhetisches Vergnügen verstanden worden, zumal, wenn eine solche Beanspruchung zu Bedingungen erfolgt, die im Handlungszusammenhang der Lebenswelt eher verschwinden als zur Geltung kommen. (88)

'Discovery', so readily interpreted as a purely intellectual activity, is said to involve, as a rule, cognitive and emotional faculties. I suggest that 'fascination', so readily interpreted as of a purely affective nature, involves both emotional and cognitive faculties; and that it is in this dual sense that Benn wanted the poem to be 'faszinierend montiert'.

d) The Monologic Poem

We have entered the territory of reader response and must now try to clarify whether or not the declared 'monologic' character of the poem Benn advocates conflicts with what I have suggested he means by 'fascinating montage'.

There is no doubt in my mind that Benn who, as we have learned, insists on the superficiality of art to ward off 'falsche Lebensansprüche' (see p.44), employs the attribute 'monologic' provocatively, intending, in the same manner, to ward off false communicative expectations and thereby secure for poetry its essential freedom from didacticism and tendentiousness. Just as the 'absolute' poem he envisages is not devoid of substance, so his 'monologic' poem is not devoid of communicative power. By placing so much emphasis on the element of fascination, Benn gives us a clear warning not to mistake his 'monologic' poem for self-expression by a poet oblivious of the social context. Speaking of 'inner changes' which poetry may bring about (1073), and of the need for the poem to be read and carefully absorbed (1093), he indicates that he, no less than anyone else, is aware of the fact that the poem is written for someone other than the poet.

However, no matter how much meaning the 'monologic' poem may in fact communicate (nowhere does Benn deny that it does), this is not and - in view of the loss of binding codes and values - cannot be its essential function. Instead, it intends, by dint of its emotionally and intellectually 'fascinating' form, to incite the reader to enter into, and explore, its diverse facets and implications and thus to engage in a re-creative monologue:

Man will ja mit einem Gedicht nicht
ansprechend sein, gefallen, sondern
es soll die Gehirne spannen u. reizen,
aufbrechen, durchbluten, schöpferisch
machen. (Letter to Celze, 12 October 1946:
BOe, II, 1, p. 55)

The 'monologic' poem, rather than setting out to establish rapport between the poet and the reader, renders independent service to both. To the former it accords an opportunity for self-expression, for giving voice to 'the other' (1093) or 'the absolute' (1084) within; to the latter an opportunity for self-confrontation, for becoming aware of that within. Benn's poem, then, is 'monologic' in a double sense: it is a creative monologue by the poet inviting the reader to engage in a re-creative monologue.

If the re-creative part assigned by Benn to the reader is associated, as it should be, with his

understanding of the 'monologic' poem, the latter is seen to perform a social function after all. Refraining from any now questionable desire to instruct or teach, it offers an opportunity for an experience, the re-creative experience, which enables the reader, if only for a while, to transcend the confines of his ordinary life:

Das moderne Gedicht, das absolute Gedicht ist das Gedicht ohne Glauben, das Gedicht ohne Hoffnung, das Gedicht an niemanden gerichtet, ein Gedicht aus Worten, die Sie faszinierend montieren. Und doch kann es ein überirdisches, ein transzendentes, ein das Leben des einzelnen Menschen übersteigerndes Wesen sein.

(SDL, 1955: 4,1156)

As Wolfgang Iser's comment on 'Entdeckung' also implies, 'discovery', which I have related to 'fascination', is an aesthetic pleasure because, among other things, it may lead to an experience of transcendence:

Immerhin ließe sich sagen, daß Entdeckung eine Kategorie ästhetischen Vergnügens darstellt. Denn sie bietet zwei elementare Chancen: mündet der Akt der Sinnkonstitution in eine Entdeckung, so ist durch diese zugleich ein Freiheitsgrad gewährt, sich - und sei es auch nur vorübergehend - von dem zu lösen, der man ist, bzw. das zu übersteigen, woran man im sozialen Leben gebunden ist. (89)

Decades ago, Wilhelm Dilthey had said much the same:

So versetzt es [the poetic work] den Auffassenden in Freiheit, indem er sich in dieser Welt des Scheins außerhalb der Notwendigkeiten seiner tatsächlichen

Existenz findet. Es erhöht sein Daseinsgefühl. (...) Es öffnet ihm den Blick in eine höhere und stärkere Welt. Und es beschäftigt im Nacherleben sein ganzes Wesen in einem ihm gemäßen Ablauf der seelischen Vorgänge, von der Freude an Klang, Rhythmus, sinnlicher Anschaulichkeit bis zum tiefsten Verständnis des Geschehnisses... (90)

I suggest that Benn's 'monologic' poem, by virtue of its power to grant the experience of such aesthetic pleasure - the transcendence of the re-creative pleasure - is a socially relevant artefact.

In sum: If we approach Probleme der Lyrik as a kind of 'Werkstattgespräch' in which the poet, in his very own manner, offers his thoughts on the creative task, we begin to understand why Benn dwells in expressive detail on questions relating to the poet and the creative process, and deals only briefly with specific questions of poetic form. As his ars poetica, which Probleme der Lyrik still is, it bears witness to Benn's affirmation of the involvement and close co-operation of rational and irrational factors on all levels of the poetic process: from the faculties the poet needs and the multiple potential of the word to the creation of, and response to, poetic form. Owing to this all-pervading duality, the key-notion of 'fascinating montage', put forward without much

explanatory comment, receives sufficient illumination to enable us to appreciate the significant social function performed by the 'absolute' and 'monologic' poem. As Benn rightly claims, his advocacy of 'Artistik' as a road to 'the transcendence of the creative - and re-creative - pleasure' is 'kein Ästhetizismus, wie er das neunzehnte Jahrhundert durchzuckte', but a deeply committed attempt to come to terms with 'die Probleme der Zeit, der Kunst, der inneren Grundlagen unserer Existenz'(1065).

CHAPTER TWO

EARLY BEGINNINGS

I. 'Gespräch': Departure from Impressionism

Thanks to Horst Fritz, whose essay 'Gottfried Benn's Anfänge' rescued Benn's 'Gespräch' of 1910 from critical neglect,¹ there can be no more doubt about the significance of this short prose dialogue as Benn's earliest, eminently illuminating poetological statement. The interesting point Fritz makes is that this first attempt by the young poet to clarify the basis of his creative work, for all its indebtedness to the aesthetic climate of the fin de siècle, contains the seeds of much of what Benn's later works were to develop more explicitly as his very own. For example, Fritz suggests that Benn's concept of montage has its source in his early naturalistic bias,² the idea of regression and 'Rausch' in his vitalistic

adaptation of Darwinism.³ Fritz's elaborations lend considerable support to my thesis that Benn's poetological thought evolved with a high degree of consistency which deserves more attention than it generally receives owing to the misleading presence of the more readily perceived shifts of focus and emphasis.

The very form of this first prose work betrays Benn's hand, that is, his characteristic method of using a given model as a vehicle for both agreement and divergence. The title 'Gespräch' is to all appearances modelled on Hofmannsthal's 'Gespräch über Gedichte' of 1903. Like Hofmannsthal, Benn gives his two conversing partners an unequal share in the dialogue, using one as his mouth-piece and causing the other to keep the 'dialogue' going through questions and comments. Thus title and structure act as an overt indication of Benn's literary provenance: German Impressionism.

The dialogue itself shows the young Benn to be in agreement with his impressionist mentor on a number of points. Hofmannsthal's Gabriel rejects in no uncertain terms any suggestion of poetry representing one thing through another by way of image, symbol or simile:

Niemals setzt die Poesie eine Sache
für eine andere, denn es ist gerade
die Poesie, welche fieberhaft be-
strebt ist, die Sache selbst zu setzen...⁴

Benn's Thom, in response to the image of birds carrying on their wings, and shedding in their flight, the shadows of the woods - an image suggested by his friend as a poetic description of nightfall in spring - states that his version would have to be a simple description of what is actually happening:

Ich würde wohl einfach sagen müssen,
was geschieht: die Wälder wurden uns
ferner; ... (7,1636)

Gabriel explains that poetry, seeing whatever it sees for the first time, presents nothing but this object, surrounding it 'mit allen Wundern seines Daseins'.⁵ Thom's answer to the question 'was heißt denn eigentlich: Dichten?' is this:

Feiner, flüchtiger, noch nie gesagter
Dinge will man doch habhaft werden
und sie so aufbewahren, daß sie den
Schmelz nicht verlieren, den sie trugen,
als sie zu uns kamen. (1638)

Gabriel finds many beautiful words to bring home to his partner the oneness of man and nature (clouds, wind, trees; animals⁶) which he considers to be the fountain-head of the magic power the poetic word possesses to move and change 'unseren Leib'.⁷ Thom, pointing out the interconnectedness of all life forms

(trees, flowers, girl; 1639), expresses admiration for his model artist Jens Peter Jacobsen who, 'living' as a natural scientist within nature, has become intimately acquainted with the words - 'Worte über Gerüche, Farben, Geräusche, über Leibliches und Tierisches'(1638) - which will help him to describe effectively 'Neues, (...) Lebendiges, Bewegliches'(1638).

Besides agreeing with Hofmannsthal's ideas in these fundamental respects, the young Benn's aestheticizing formulations underscore his sympathy with the impressionists and their sensitive refinement.

However, these patent resemblances do not cancel out one fundamental difference. While Hofmannsthal's young poet, in a typically impressionistic manner, speaks in highly suggestive images evoking a certain atmosphere or 'Stimmung', whose expressive value he thereby affirms, Benn's opposite number rejects it, not without a touch of regret, as unacceptable to contemporary taste. This point is made at the beginning of the dialogue where the two speakers engage in a brief discussion of literary genres, associating the novella with 'etwas Freundliches' and the ballad with coolness, tightness and evocative colour (1635). The very concern with generic forms signals their continued acceptance. But as Thom points out,

an unqualified adherence to them would make the modern poet the laughing-stock of his contemporaries:

Sieh mal, wenn man heute von jemandem sagt: der macht Gedichte oder schreibt Novellen, so ist das beinahe so, als ob man sagte, er habe einen unreinen Teint. Das kompromittiert seinen Geschmack und stellt seine Lebensart in Frage. (1636)

Writing in the traditional genres would invite ridicule because they carry with them 'Stimmungswerte' (1637) such as those said to characterize the novella and the ballad, which are apparently viewed with disapproval. To solve his dilemma, Thom has recourse not to an outright rejection of these forms, but to a method of presentation operating on what he calls a 'scientific basis':

Wenn man es aber doch nicht lassen kann, bleibt nur die Zuflucht, die Dinge und Geschehnisse auf ihren rein tatsächlichen Bestand zurückzuführen, sie auf eine wissenschaftliche Basis zu stellen. (1636)

It is undoubtedly this 'scientific' element that introduces Benn's new perspective and takes him away from the orbit of Impressionism.⁸ In order to appreciate its relevance to Benn's emerging poetic we must first delimit clearly the scope of this declared orientation towards the natural sciences.

Thom, insisting on the singular importance Jacobsen's creative work holds for contemporary

writers, speaks of 'eine ganz seltsame und eindringliche Art' in which Jacobsen pursues his studies in the natural sciences (1637). Thom then presents him as literally being at home among the things words describe:

...der wohnt in der Heimat aller dieser
Worte; unter Dingen, von denen andere
nur den Namen wissen, lebt er sein
Leben;... (1638)

The natural scientist's 'strange' and 'intense' manner so much admired by Thom appears to be rather too life-oriented to coincide with what is commonly considered 'scientific' practice. It seems that Benn, without conforming to the conventional understanding of the word, uses the scientific label to dissociate himself energetically from the impressionistic 'Stimmungspsychologie' that occupies a central place in Hofmannsthal's 'Gespräch'.

If this assessment is correct we are here confronted with the first example of Benn's self-willed use of a given term or notion for its provocative value, demanding a more than literal reading. It would seem to be quite wrong to conclude that the young Benn is here holding up the scientific method of presentation as the model to be emulated by the poet. There are two potentially misleading passages:

First, at the beginning of the dialogue Thom, as we know, gives preference to a factual rendition of the spring evening (1636). Objective presentation is indeed what he is aiming at, but as his factual counter-example shows, it is 'scientific' in the limited sense that it casts aside imagery and embellishment productive of 'Stimmung' or 'the seraphic tone' (PdL: 4,1069). Furthermore, a clear distinction is made between the scientific or scholarly endeavour and creative writing, the former being said to provide the material basis for the latter:

Gert: Das hieße also, ehe man einen Roman oder ein Gedicht schreiben wollte, müßte man Chemie, experimentelle Psychologie, Atomistik, Embryologie studieren?

Thom: Du drückst es etwas verwegen aus; aber ich sage: ja. (1636-37)

Second, towards the end of the dialogue Thom makes the following claim:

Ich kann dir zeigen, daß er [Jacobsen] bewußt diese Art zu schauen und zu schildern als Methode aus den Naturwissenschaften in die Kunst hinübergenommen hat. (1642)

His model artist has consciously borrowed 'this way of looking and describing' from the natural sciences and converted it into an artistic method. This method involves two operations, looking and describing,

which we have no difficulty in relating to those just mentioned: preparatory study and poetic rendition. As to the former, we recall the peculiarly vitalistic understanding of the natural scientist's 'study' of the world. The present context extends this vitalistic perspective to the object to be studied and described, claiming Darwinism as a witness to the interconnection between all forms of life and their perpetual change:

Der Darwinismus (...) bedeutet doch nur, daß alles, was ist, dem Gesetz der Entwicklung unterstellt ist; daß unser Leben verknüpft ist mit vielen anderen Leben, daß wir verwandt sind mit allem, das überhaupt Leben heißt. (1639)

Für ihn [Jacobsen] gibt es nichts Zuständliches; er sieht alles kommen von weither und seinen Weg gehen (...) Seine Empfindungen sind ganz durchdrungen von dem Gefühl des ewigen Flutens und Weitermüssens und Aufsteigens in neue Formen... (1641)

Significantly, the method of presentation based on this view of life bears more affinity to the aesthetic concept of open form than to scientific definition and subsumption:

Und wenn er zwei Menschen zusammenführt in seinen Büchern, so gehen sie wohl eine Strecke zusammen und leben ein Stück Leben zusammen, aber bald gehen sie auseinander und nehmen kaum Abschied. (...) Wo bleiben sie eigentlich alle (...)? Man erfährt es nicht. (1641)

Thom's 'absolut naturwissenschaftlicher Stil' (1639) turns out to be neither scientific nor, it should be added, new. The ideal of exact realism coupled with the claim to be scientifically based is the hallmark of Naturalism. 'Open form', though highly relevant to modern literature, is a concept developed in 1915 by Heinrich Wölfflin to characterize the visual arts of the seventeenth century.⁹

This does not mean, however, that Benn's 'Gespräch' constitutes a cul-de-sac forcing him to try again and take off in a different direction.¹⁰ It does contain the seeds of a number of ideas fundamental to Benn's later theory, but these are to be found in the less conspicuous corollaries of Thom's scientific ideas. And it is with this proviso that the young Benn's scientism may indeed be considered to have provided the spring-board from which he launched forth into his own poetological territory.

Living among the phenomena of the world, the natural scientist of 1910 prefigures the poeta doctus of 1951 who has 'Nüstern auf allen Start- und Sattelplätzen' (4,1088). As in Probleme der Lyrik, contact with the world is viewed as a means of acquiring an extensive and intimate knowledge for the purpose of poetic construction:

Du mußt also eine ganze Heerschar von Worten und Bildern und Vorstellungen haben, denen du gebieten kannst; und du mußt sie zusammenpassen und du mußt sie ändern, sie müssen ganz geschmeidig vor dir sein, und meinst du, du vermöchtest dies, ohne ganz genau zu wissen, woher sie eigentlich kommen und was denn in ihnen steckt? (...) Sieh dir Jacobsen an: der wohnt in der Heimat aller dieser Worte; (...) und glaubst du nicht, daß dieser Dinge Namen für ihn nun etwas ganz anderes bedeuten, viel mehr Inhalt und Beziehungen haben? (...) die sind nun bei ihm und können ihm helfen, sooft er etwas Lebendiges, Bewegliches, Neues beschreiben will. (1638)

What Benn says, in 1910 as much as four decades later, is this: with the unquenchable curiosity of a natural scientist the poet studies words and their range of denotations and connotations, thus gathering material for the fashioning of his verbal textures.

Thom, who commends Jacobsen's intellectual activity, has no less admiration for a feature in his work which seems strangely contradictory:

Da sitzt er nun, Niels, der ausgezogen war, um ein großer Künstler zu werden, der seine Seele hatte durchrütteln lassen von allen Sensationen moderner Kultur und Wissenschaft, da sitzt er nun (...) und starrt wie mit ausgelöschten Hirnfunktionen auf die rhythmisch wogenden Kornfelder. (1640)

The accumulation of knowledge has led the artist to a point where the extinction of the intellectual faculties seems to offer a desirable alternative mode of being.

What Thom describes in Jacobsen's Niels Lyhne is Benn's 'letztes Ich' of 1921: 'ein Linsen-Ich, das sammelte und brach'(5,1269). It is the modern 'I' that finds release from its tormenting 'Bewußtsein' - from the intellect's awareness of being separated from the whole of life - in a state of 'vegetativer Ergriffenheit'(1640), or 'Rausch', alluded to by the image of the rhythmically surging cornfield, which restores the original union.

Thus for the young Benn the rational and the irrational are two contiguous aspects of the poet's existence, and he approves of both. While in the context just referred to Thom makes no comment on the creative potential or value of the irrational, towards the end of the dialogue he adds the missing link. He expresses scorn for the idea that instinct or ecstasy are the source of poetic creation:

Ich muß dir offen gestehen, daß mir diese Rede vom Instinkt und Rausch, aus dem der Künstler seine Werke gebiert, immer ein wenig lächerlich vorkam. (1642-43)

But does he really reject them:

Meinst du nicht, daß auch sie ganz bitterlich ringen, nicht anders, als wie Jacob rang mit einem fremden starken Mann, bis er ihn segnete? (1643)

In order to create a work of art, to which the poet

is the 'mother', they - 'auch sie': instinct and ecstasy - wrest from some foreign power the blessing that makes possible the birth. In a polemical overstatement, Thom elaborates on this power:

Du kannst den ganzen Kosmos durch dich fluten fühlen und brauchst doch nur ein Schwätzer zu sein. Ich halte mich an Rodins hartes Wort, daß es überhaupt keine Kunst gibt, sondern nur ein Handwerk. (1643)

'Handwerk' is the 'strong man' who eventually concedes his blessing to 'Instinkt' and 'Rausch'; it is the formative principle which makes the 'Schwätzer' into a poet. Thom negates 'das Intuitive, Spontane' (1643) as little as he negates 'Instinkt und Rausch'. But he emphasizes that what they are and give to the poet needs to undergo a shaping process, and a very demanding one, by which it is fashioned into a work of art. The intuitive or irrational principle is as much a part of artistic creation as the formative principle, and vice versa. Both constitute two interdependent components of the creative process.

It is of no little interest to realize the very early emergence of such a synthetizing view of artistic/poetic creation. This view is not, of course, identical with that advanced in later pronouncements. The element of 'Rausch' was to undergo a thorough

re-valuation and reduction from its original understanding of participation mystique by the poet to its limitation to the sphere of the poetic word (see chapter one, pp.54-56). But the fact that the young Benn affirms the co-operation in poetic creativity of the rational and the irrational principle is a significant indication of the consistency that informs, in spite of patent modifications, the evolution of Benn's poetological thought.

As a result of his comprehensive knowledge, the poet recognizes that every form of life is a momentary occurrence within the stream 'des ewigen Flutens und Weitermüssens (...) er weiß, "daß alles gleitet und vorüberrint"'(1641). In the face of this transience he can do no more than comment on minute sections of the passing stream:

...er sieht alles kommen von weither
und seinen Weg gehen und über einen
Moment dieses Weges sagt er schnell
ein Wort. (1641)

Implied in these words is the idea that the fleeting moment, through its arrest in the poetic word, is elevated, as it were, above the stream of evanescence and transmuted into lasting form. The impressionist's desire to capture the fleeting moment is here seen to lie at the source of Benn's notion of the 'form-demand-

ing power of nothingness'(4,1077) and its attendant idea of the 'transcendent reality of the stanza' in which 'die Hinfälligkeit des Individuellen'(1077) is suspended.

The direct quotation from the first of Hofmannsthal's 'Terzinen über Vergänglichkeit', 'daß alles gleitet und vorüberrinnt', accentuates Benn's impressionist point of departure. The way in which it is 'einmontiert' into his own statement demonstrates once again his characteristic method of drawing on a given form to acknowledge his source and at the same time indicate some measure of divergence from it¹¹ - a method exemplified on a larger scale, as I hope to have shown, by the entire dialogue.

Its form and much of its content reflect the young Benn's rootedness in the soil of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Its provocative emphasis on the scientific element, which itself presents nothing new, introduces, with varying degrees of explicitness, a number of ideas pointing in the direction of Benn's future thought: the idea of the knowledgeable poet and his special relationship with words; the idea of the co-operation of rational and irrational factors in the whole of the multipartite process of poetic creation; the idea of the poetic language discarding

conventional means of figurative speech; the idea of poetic form transcending the evanescence of life. Underneath the main line of argument we have been able to detect in Benn's early 'Gespräch' the rudiments of a more complex pattern of thought suggesting much of what Benn was to formulate in more detail and with greater power of expression in later years.

II. 'Der junge Hebbel': The Poet's Cross

The title of this poem, like that of the prose dialogue discussed in the preceding pages, bespeaks the young Benn's retrospective tendency and serves as a warning, one year after the publication of the 'Morgue'-poems, not to underrate his respect for tradition. While both works arise from the young poet's reflection on the creative task, they attend to different aspects of it. In the earlier 'Gespräch'(1910) Benn endeavours to clarify his position vis-à-vis the poetic tradition of his immediate present and past. In 'Der junge Hebbel'(1913) he reaches a whole generation further back into the past and thus gives reason to assume that his interest here lies more with essential constants rather than historical

variants. As to the form in which these matters are presented, Benn's more personal concern is objectified in the scenic dialogue between the two fictitious youths; his concern with more objective matters is subjectified in the lyric monologue by a historical persona. The presentation in both works thus achieves a blend of distance and immediacy.

These two works resemble each other on one more count. Both pursue one central question and in doing so touch upon a number of aspects fundamental to Benn's poetic as we know it from his later writings. The question mooted in 'Gespräch' concerns the historically appropriate mode of poetic presentation; the argument in answer to this question branches out, as we have seen, into a multiplicity of relevant implication. Similarly, in 'Der junge Hebbel' the central question concerning the lyric poet is answered by the depiction of his struggle, anticipating much of Benn's future thought.

The key-notion of the poet's excruciating struggle, known to us from Probleme der Lyrik (4,1096), explains Benn's recourse to the young Hebbel who invested considerable effort and time in recording his woes in his diaries. Friedrich Wilhelm Wodtke's suggestion that 'Der junge Hebbel' develops a number

of motifs taken over by Benn from Hebbel's poem 'An die Jünglinge',¹² may be true as far as it goes, but its brevity entails the risk of reducing Benn's poem to a mere appropriation of pre-thought ideas and obscuring Benn's different and rather more independent approach to any given material. He does not take over and develop it, he uses it in his own way and for his own purpose. The source used here is not any one particular poem - although affinities may exist - but the phenomenon 'Der junge Hebbel', incarnation of the struggle and suffering the poem sets out to present as the poet's inescapable legacy. The title could hardly have been more explicit.

In the first stanza, the contrast set up by the speaking 'I' between himself and a collective 'you',¹³ gives a first indication of the hardship the poet's task involves. It is the contrast between the lucky aesthetes who create for pleasure, and the strenuously engaged poet who creates for a living:

Ihr schnitzt und bildet: den gelenken Meißel
in einer feinen weichen Hand.
Ich schlage mit der Stirn am Marmorblock
die Form heraus,
meine Hände schaffen ums Brot.
(1,21: st.1,11.1-5)

The contrast is expressed by the verbs describing the two different kinds of creative activity: while they

'carve' and 'mould' what seems to be a pliable material, he 'strikes' form out of hard marble. It is further highlighted by the two 'hand'-images played off against one another: the delicacy and softness of their hand together with the use of a 'nimble' carving tool indicate the ease of their activity, whereas the strain of his work is conveyed by the image of his forehead resting in fatigue against the block of marble while his hands continue working.¹⁴

The second stanza goes on to suggest that the initial, biographically based contrast between a fortunate and a less fortunate kind of poet possesses a deeper dimension, pointing to Benn's later juxtaposition of 'Ästhetizismus' and 'Verhängnis' (PdL: 4,1065): over and above working for a living ('ums Brot'), the lyric poet works for his life, he creates out of an existential necessity. This compulsion arises from his awareness of his deep self and its need for expression. The youth of the persona provides the metaphorical frame of reference and combines with the vitalistic 'blood'-imagery so characteristic of Benn's earlier writings to suggest what was later to be presented under the label 'Ausdruckszwang':¹⁵

Ich bin mir noch so fern.
Aber ich will Ich werden!
Ich trage einen tief im Blut,
der schreit nach seinen selbsterschaffenen
Götterhimmeln und Menschenerden.
(st.2, 11.6-10)

Benn's words of 1951, 'in der Tiefe ist ruhelos das Andere'(4,1093), seem curiously anticipated here. Such anticipation goes further still. What the deep 'Ich' is craving for are 'seine[n] selbsterschaffenen / Götterhimmel[n] und Menschenerden'. The enjambement between the attribute and its two nouns places the former in prominent end-position and the latter in emphatic isolation. It thus accentuates the two crucial notions: creative self-reliance and its all-embracing significance. The poet aspires to nothing less than the creation of his own new universe, presumably to fill the void left by the loss of a meaningful reality and a solacing transcendence. The plural of the two polar nouns, heavens populated by gods and earths populated by humans, points to the totality of the loss and the totality of the gain the poet hopes to make through the exercise of his innate creativity. These lines, however hyperbolic, look forward to Benn's later explanation of 'Artistik' and the 'new transcendence' it affords (PdL: 4,1064).

The first half of the third stanza is based more

explicitly than any other part of the poem on biographical detail: the young Hebbel's life together with his poverty-stricken mother *in* the outskirts of his native market town:

Meine Mutter ist eine so arme Frau,
daß ihr lachen würdet, wenn ihr sie sähet,
wir wohnen in einer engen Bucht,
ausgebaut an des Dorfes Ende.
(st.3, 11.11-14)

The second half employs a 'Blut- und Wunden'-image, born out of the young Benn's vitalistic orientation as much as the religious background of his parental home, to give expression to the torment this life visits upon the aspiring youth:

Meine Jugend ist mir wie ein Schorf:
eine Wunde darunter,
da sickert täglich Blut hervor,
davon bin ich so entstellt.
(st.3, 11.15-18)

Poverty, isolation and pain are aspects of the poet's existence emphasized by Benn at all times. We recall the pun he has borrowed from Goethe on the words 'Existenz' and 'existieren' to say that the poet gives up a secure livelihood in favour of a meaningful existence (PdL: 4,1080); the poet's description as a 'Sonderling' and 'Einzimmerbewohner' and as someone who has nailed himself to the cross (*loc.cit.*).

'Blood', 'wound', 'mother' - metaphors to be encountered in many of Benn's earlier works - combine

to suggest another complex of meaning: that of poetic creativity. The young Hebbel's life with his mother at the end of the village may also be seen as an allusion to the poet's life in the sole company of his creative urge and activity, away from social organization. However, the poet is not presented as cut off from society; his residence, built as an extension to it ('ausgebaut'), provides both isolation and contiguity. This point is of no little importance as it precludes any erroneous assumption that Benn's insistence in later years on the poet's presence 'auf allen Start- und Sattelplätzen' (PdL:4,1088) contradicts his original emphasis on the poet's isolation.

The poet's actual confrontation with the world is the theme of the last stanza, presented under the key-word 'Kampf'. It is a struggle in two directions: against the needs of his natural self (11.19-20) and, more incisively, against the onslaughts of the outer world (11.21-25):

Schlaf brauche ich keinen.
Essen nur so viel, daß ich nicht verrecke!
Unerbittlich ist der Kampf,
und die Welt starrt von Schwertspitzen.
Jede hungert nach meinem Herzen.
Jede muß ich, Waffenloser,
in meinem Blut zerschmelzen.

(st.4, 11.19-25)

Behind this portrayal of the young Hebbel's feeling

of exposure to what he experienced as a world hostile to his aspirations, we perceive a more general level of meaning. Conventional though the 'heart'-metaphor may be, it is intimately connected with the 'blood'-images of the two preceding stanzas and points, in this company, to the sphere most vital to the poet: the sphere of creativity. It combines with the equally conventional 'sword'-metaphor, which evokes associations of Christian martyrdom, to indicate the poet's total openness to the surrounding world. He is defenceless and therefore forced to 'dissolve' it in his 'blood', that is, to assimilate it, not without considerable pain, into the innermost part of his being that we know to be the spring of his creativity. The 'cilia'-complex (PdL: 4,1075-76) does not seem to be far away, together with the idea of 'Wirklichkeitszertrümmerung' preceding poetic creation (4,1076). However, what in 1913 is said to be done by the poet's 'blood' is in 1951 seen as a function of his 'brain':

ein hartes, massives Gehirn mit Eckzähnen, das die Widerstände, auch die eigenen, zermalmt. (4,1079)

A shift has evidently taken place from the irrational to the rational principle, but the idea of the poet crushing opposition from within and without has remained the same.

The poem 'Der junge Hebbel', then, by depicting the young poet's struggle for the realization of his creative urge, bears witness to the very early presence in Benn's poetological conception of the idea of the poet's existential motivation; the idea of transcendence gained through poetic creation; and of the dialectic of reality-destruction and creativity. All this is presented in the light of the young Benn's vitalism, which accounts for the dominance in this poem of the irrational principle. For an appreciation of the young Benn's successful endeavour to reconcile it with the rational principle, which after 'Gespräch' had not simply been dropped, we now turn to the novella 'Die Insel', published in 1916.

III. 'Die Insel': Energy and Reason

It has been suggested that all of Benn's 'Rönne'-stories end in the disintegration ('Vergehen', 'Untergang') of the central 'I',¹⁶ reflecting the young Benn's failure 'die Realisation zur Kunst zu vollziehen'.¹⁷ Not surprisingly, Herbert Braun, in his attempt to substantiate this claim through specific reference, does not include in his catalogue of titles¹⁸

'Die Insel', which, as I intend to show, has a rather different ending, urging a different interpretation.

The title seems significant. Hanspeter Brode, discussing the symbolism of 'Rundes und Zentriertes' in Benn's early works, suggests that 'islands' are 'Stätten imaginärer Selbstverwirklichung'.¹⁹ M.Kent Casper, who also offers some helpful thoughts on 'the circle and the centre' as 'symbols of totality', suggests that the poet possesses an 'island psyche' the centre of which constitutes his creative consciousness.²⁰ The title 'Die Insel', then, appears to announce a presentation of the poet's self-realization.

Its specific description as a 'Novelle' points in the same direction. As Annemarie Christiansen explains, despite the lack of 'action', this 'Novelle', by leading its central figure from uncertainty to knowledge, shares with many of its classical predecessors the central theme of 'Selbstfindung'.²¹ Here is a brief outline:

Rönne, a physician in the prison on the island, is the poet engaged in a 'double life' who strives to clear the ground for his creative work. He sets out from a seemingly reassured sense of purpose flowing from his participation in a meaningful social order.

This sense is soon undermined by his experience of imaginative energies that throws into relief the limitations of the rational order of things. Irrationalism therefore presents a very tempting road to liberation. However, realizing in the end that rationality is the force congruent with the historical hour, he accepts it as the framework within and against which imagination has to operate to create a 'new' work of art.

The import of the two works discussed previously in this chapter casts doubt on Braun's contention that 'das artistische Existenzgefühl' was unknown to Benn before 1917;²² the symbolic title of this early prose-work, together with its thematic affinity to the 'Novelle', suggest strongly that Benn found and embraced a positive and constructive solution before this same date.

1.

The 'island' is made up of three separate 'regions': jail, village and beach (5,1209), which Rönne sets out to examine for their relevance to his own life.

'Das Gefängnis' points to the sphere of purposive

organization based on ethical principles and scientific insight, guided by humanistic ideals. This is presented as a provocative mixture of ideas and formulations taken from Goethe, Darwin and Schiller: organized society grants protection 'dem strebenden Bemühen' (1209) by striving to eliminate the parasite (1209), according the latter humane care on account of 'des großen allumschließenden Bandes des Seelischen' (1209-1210). The hypocrisy underlying such action comes across clearly and the society perpetrating it stands condemned.

This judgement is the narrator's, not Rönne's. The latter appears to identify with the party found guilty by the former:

Eins fühlte er sich mit dem Geist, der
ihn hierherberufen und gestellt, ...
(1209)

To appreciate the irony informing these lines we must consider briefly the third-person narrative employed here for an immediate and at once distanced presentation. It allows the direct rendition of Rönne's 'stream of consciousness', while at the same time ensuring a tangible distance between Rönne and the narrator to ironize Rönne's position. We are thus made aware that he may be echoing scientific and lit-

erary currency, and that he may be treading on flimsy ground when participating, both as a physician and a poet, in the activities of this 'Gefängnis'.

His identification with its social, scientific and poetic practices is, in fact, not as unbroken as may appear. As Dr Christiansen has shown, the introductory sentence of the 'Novelle' provides a number of syntactic, semantic and phonetic clues to the intended understanding of Rönne's attitude.²³ It reveals some degree of uncertainty in Rönne himself. The narrative begins with an indirect quotation of the assumption on which Rönne appears to base his acceptance of social organization. This assumption is phrased in the subjunctive mood:

Daß dies das Leben sei, war eine Annahme,
zu der (...) das von leitender Stelle aus
Geregelte seiner Tage Rönne (...) wohl be-
rechtigte. (1209)

As the German term 'Möglichkeitsform' indicates, a possibility is being considered, not a fact. In addition, a number of external factors are listed to justify this assumption:

...das von leitender Stelle aus Geregelte
seiner Tage, das staatlich Genehmigte, ja
Vorgeschriebene seiner Bestimmung... (1209)

There is a definite ring of rationalization here, pointing to some opposition not entirely silenced. The adverb

'wohl' further heightens this impression, reinforced by the verb 'berechtigte' which, apart from indicating past tense, may also be a subjunctive form. After this introduction it is not quite possible to trust Rönne's explicit deliberations. The ring of rationalization remains throughout, and his sympathy with the sphere of life symbolized by 'das Gefängnis' bears resemblance to the drowning man's belief that the straw will save him.

As Rönne directs his attention to the second area of his 'island' represented by 'das Dorf', the narrator's voice is conspicuously absent. The ridicule showered on the simple life springs from Rönne's own ever sharpening tongue. The first target of his mockery is the at one time prevalent sentimentalism about home and family:

Und nun die karge Schindel der ersten
Hütte, war sie nicht Hut gegen Sturm und
Regen, der Unbill Abwehr, Traute und Be-
haglichkeit bedachend? Das Netz, das vom
Fang kommend der Gatte ausbreitete, sorg-
sam über Pfahl und Stein, war es nicht um-
wittert vom Geruch der Diele, wo es sich
vollzog, das Natürliche, das Urgesunde?
(1210)

Next in line is the idealization of rustic sociability:

Vor der Kneipe saßen Männer. Ihr Sinn?
Sie saßen! Sie gingen nicht, sie schonten
ihre Kraft. Sie tranken aus Krügen! (...)
Erholung von Mann zu Mann?! Erfahrung-
austausch?! Bestätigungen!!!? (1210)

The exaggerated question-and-exclamation style of these lines indicates that Rönne is here indulging in a hilarious spoof, leaving us in no doubt about his distance from the sphere of life thus parodied.

His rejection of pragmatic simplicity embodied in these honest carousers is followed by his rejection of esoteric over-sublimation embodied by 'der Düstere abseits', 'der Grübeler, der sich ernster nahm'(1210). This solitary brooder is easily recognized as a descendant of Goethe's 'hypochochrischer Selbstquäler' of the poem 'Harzreise im Winter' who is suffering from Werther's 'Empfindsamkeitskrankheit'. As Dr Christiansen points out, he is also 'ein spöttisch betrachteter Prometheus'²⁴ identified as such by the ironic reference to 'das Lichtbringerische in eventuellen Abgrund' (1210). Any continued cult of genius, sentimental or heroic, is here branded as ludicrous. The transposition of this literary genius into the stolid surroundings of the village further underscores the unacceptability to Rönne of what he represents. Rönne's conclusion is pure irony:

Kurz und gut: lauter Wahrnehmungen, die
wohl befriedigen durften. Nirgends eine
Störung, überall Sonne und heller Ablauf.
(1210)

The 'village' and what he finds in it: uncomplicated

pragmatism and sentimentalism simple or sublime, has no place in his life. It will not occupy his attention again.²⁵

While thinking about his somewhat doubtful participation in the affairs of the institution and his distance from those of the village, Rönne is actually walking away from them towards the beach, the third 'region' on his 'island'. Here he stops and sits down. These are symbolic actions indicating where he does or does not belong. The beach with its proximity to the sea is the sphere of creativity away from rational involvement. It is here that Rönne, the poet, may rest and become active.

As if he had done anything else on the way out, he now decides to 'think': '...jetzt will ich etwas denken'(1210). The verb 'denken' is employed transitively, the ambiguous 'etwas' being identified as its object by the following elliptical sentence. He thinks 'something': 'eine Insel und etwas südliches Meer'(1210). In the normal understanding of the process he does not 'think', he 'imagines'. But the semantic content of 'think' has been introduced to serve as an energetic pointer to the participation of reason in the imaginative process: the poet is neither seized nor carried away by a fit of ecstasy. Rönne settles down to 'think'

at a moment of his own choice ('Ich habe etwas freie Zeit,...', 1210) and begins it with the exaggerated introduction 'Also'. There is a good deal of irony in this dramatic gesture, modifying the statement.

The demonstrative fashion in which Rönne starts his 'thinking' also emphasizes the strict division between the real and the imagined worlds. This is made explicit at the very beginning of his 'thinking':

Es sind nicht da, aber es könnten
da sein: Zimtwälder. (1210)

The objects of the poet's imagination do not 'exist', they are possibilities hatched out in his mind - hence the use of the subjunctive mood to describe 'ein aromatisches Geschehen' on the imagined island:

...es könnten da sein (...) es begönne
(...) bräcke...wohl ab (...) würde sich
verbreiten... (1210-11)

The subjunctive form testifies to the imagining poet's refusal to identify with the imagined world. Far from being transported, he has his 'vision' well under control. To emphasize this point, the ensuing list of details regarding the cinnamon plant and its harvesting is not part of his 'vision' but part of his reasoning about it. The beginning of this reasoning process is signalled by the causative introduction 'Denn alles in allem:...' (1211). The process itself

is presented directly in the present indicative:

Ist (...) tritt...heran (...) erfordert
(...) ist...erwiesen (...) wird...abge-
schält. (1211)

Whether or not we receive the promised explanation, we are made aware of Rönne being engaged in a conscious deliberation of the factual basis of his 'vision'.

Moreover, we are made aware of him as a poet concerned about the efficacy of the words used:

...mit diesen Worten ist manches schon
erwiesen, aber erst in der Hütte wird
das Häutchen abgeschält. (1211)

In demonstration of what is meant by the transitively used verb 'denken', the poet's intellect and imagination appear to be working together, correcting any hazy ideas about the imaginative process as much as any exaggerated notion of realism in literature.

While so far the rational component of the creative process has been emphasized at the expense of the imaginative component, the following paragraph restores the balance by giving more weight to the latter. The strict division between the imagined and the real worlds, which I have interpreted as a pointer to Rönne's rational activity, now becomes blurred and gives way to an inextricable fusion of these two levels, evincing the agency of imagination. Again, the form

of the verbs provides guidelines for an understanding of what is taking place in Rönne's mind.

As if reassured by his cogitative interlude, he returns to his 'thinking' and gives his imaginary island a more specific location ('in einem Meer vor Indien', 1211). This, in conjunction with the now adopted narrative past ('war', 'lag'), produces a sense of realism that was deliberately kept out of the previous image of the island. This introduction of the narrative past tense opens the door for the fusion now taking place of Rönne's 'real' and imagined worlds. The point of contact is given by an identity of thought on the part of 'der Reisende', an imagined figure, and Rönne, the imagining poet:

Der Zimtwald, dachte der Reisende, und
der Zimtwald, dachte Rönne. (1211)

While 'der Reisende' and Rönne are here still neatly kept apart, their separate identities soon become one:

Und durch die Insel schritt er, zwischen
Roggen und Wein, abgeschlossen und still
umgrenzt. (1211)

Their fusion in the ambiguous pronoun 'er' is signalled by the path leading through 'Roggen' and 'Wein', the former suggesting a northern, the latter a southern landscape; the former pointing to Rönne's 'real', the latter to his imagined island. The identities of the

of the two islands, and those of the two persons, have merged.

This is reflected by the present tense now employed:

Sein Urteil ist Begehren, der Satzbau
Stellung nehmend. (1211)

Lacking the specificity of the narrative past (factualness) and the modifying quality of the subjunctive mood (possibility), the present tense lends itself as a vehicle for a state of consciousness - the creative state of consciousness - in which the 'factual' and the 'possible' worlds are one.

Being informed of the poet's more than rational relation to the world, we now receive reassurance that reason does nevertheless play an important part:

Er grübelt, doch über die Polle einer
Pflanze, denn er ist gewillt, sie
einzusäen. (1211)

The poet thinks, and very strenuously so, in order to sift and comprehend the material he intends to use creatively. Just how thoroughly he does this is conveyed by the singular 'die Polle', a form invented by Benn to point the idea that every individual detail, however diminutive, receives the poet's undivided attention.

All this is thrown into bold relief by the

saddening example of Rönne's female travelling companions whose 'Verarbeitung' of the row of hills, the valley, the town, the woods and the clover is actuated by stock responses and has nothing to do with what is actually there:

denn wenn die Mutter es nicht gesagt
hätte, mußte Rönne immer wieder denken,
wäre der Aufstieg nicht erfolgt. (1211)

'Hier aber' - on the beach, the realm of creativity, 'sachliche Verarbeitung' of useful objects ('Netz', 'Reuse', 1211) reigns supreme. Yet the poet's 'Verarbeitung' of 'was ins Auge traf' (1211) constitutes 'keine Bereicherung, mehr ein[en] Traum' (1211). It does not 'enrich' him as the pseudo-experience would the philistine enthusiast; it is more like the private and 'unreal' world of a dream. As Benn was to insist thirty-five years later, the poet is 'ein Realist' and 'Verwerter von Träumen' (PdL: 4,1069 and 1079).

However, his rational-cum-intuitive perception and use of reality is not matched by the capacity of the language he has at his disposal. I quote again:

Sein Urteil ist Begehren,
der Satzbau Stellung nehmend. (1211)

'Urteil' and 'Syntax' stand in a relation of contrast: to the poet, 'judgement' - an essentially rational process - is at once an emotive one; but when he

commits it to the system of 'syntax' it will be reduced to a fixed position that fails to do justice to the experience it is meant to convey.

This dissatisfaction with the inherited system of language is the real reason for Rönne's presence on the island:

an Gegenständen, die er möglichst isoliert und unter wenig veränderlichen Bedingungen beobachten konnte, den Begriff nachzuprüfen,... (1212)

He is aware of the more than rational functioning of his mind and therefore all the more alive to the shortcomings of 'die Begriffe' which form part of an abstract system divorced from what is real and alive:

Wie hatte zum Beispiel Meer auf ihm gelegen, ein sprachlicher Bestand, abgeschnürt von allen hellen Wässern, beweglich, aber doch höchstens als Systemwiesel, das Ergebnis eines Denkprozesses, ein allgemeinsten Ausdruck. (1212)

The word 'Meer', seized upon merely as a 'sprachlicher Bestand', may possess flexibility, but it is one circumscribed by the limits of the system to which it belongs.²⁶ It does not possess that all-important emotive quality which makes Rönne's perception of reality the desirable experience rendered in the concluding sentences of the first part of the novella.

2.

The second part follows out the logic of the first by informing us of Rönne's endeavours to create 'the new syntax':

Seine Studien galten der Schaffung der neuen Syntax. (...) Den Du-Charakter des Grammatischen auszuschalten, schien ihm ehrlicherweise notwendig, denn die Anrede war mythisch geworden. (1212)

He is painfully aware of the fact that 'im Norden'(1213) man's 'Trieb [der] Erkenntnis'(1213) has turned into a myth any idea of individual selfhood. He accepts one consequence flowing from this: 'Anrede' or communication has become impossible. He does not, however, seem to accept as willingly the ultimate consequence that along with the 'you' the 'I' has been destroyed - hence his tormented question:

Wo aber blieb die Auseinandersetzung innerhalb seiner selbst, wo fand die statt? Ihr Ausdruck, das Sprachliche, wo vollzog sich das? (1213)

The locus searched for seems to be the 'new syntax' he strives to create. Benn's central idea of the self-expressive function and 'monologic' nature of the poetic language appears to have been born.

However, much as Rönne is convinced of the need to free language of its now redundant 'Du-Charakter', he employs precisely this 'Du-Charakter' when at the

sight of a poppy field he bursts out:

"Mohn, pralle Form des Sommers (...)
Ha, wie du hinklirrst! Ins Feld ge-
stürzt, du Ausgezackter,..." (1213-14)

The poppy, traditionally associated with sleep, with opium and visions, transports him into a state of oneness with the surrounding world similar to that experienced at the sight of the sea (1212). It seems intensified here by the suggestion of potentially active creativeness.

The poppy appears to possess what Rönne feels is threatened by his heritage of intellectualism: an inner substance, suggested by the formulation 'pralle Form des Sommers'. The latter, together with the nouns 'Nabelhafter'(1213) and 'Bauchiges'(1214), evokes associations of motherhood and fertility, of new life being nurtured within the womb, pointing to the origination of the work of art from the heart of the poet's existence. We recall the young Hebbel's cries from within his blood-stream and the mature Benn's 'innere Stimme' (PdL: 4,1081).

There is also an allusion to the formative principle that ought not to be overlooked. Let us consider these strange words: 'Nabelhafter: Gruppierend Bauchiges' (1213-14). The suffix '-haft' indicates similarity, which in connection with the active form of the part-

inciple is one of function: the 'Nabelhafter' does something comparable to what 'Nabel' does: ensure the supply of nourishment and thus give life. The suffix '-ig' indicates kind or quality, so that 'Bauchiges' refers to what 'Bauch' is made of: the new life.

These two expressions are linked by an explicative colon that seems to say: 'nabelhaft', that is, 'gruppierend Bauchiges'; giving life, that is, ordering it; creating, that is, forming. Semantic, grammatical and metaphorical forces join hands to point to the union of the creative and the formative principle.

One further aspect of creativity is sounded by the genitive metaphor 'Dynamit des Dualismus'(1214). Exploding any schematic division into logical opposites, creativity draws on an infinite number of disjointed elements. The ensuing reference to a fall and the sound produced by the shattering of hard matter reinforces this suggestion:

Ha, wie du hinklirrst! Ins Feld gestürzt, du Ausgezackter,... (1214)

Benn's 'Wirklichkeitszertrümmerung' springs to mind and the idea of montage.

Significantly, the metaphors of destruction are intermingled with metaphors suggesting impaired clarity of visual perception and perceptibility -

metaphors pointing to the fusion that we know to be an equally important part of the creative process:

der Farbenblinde, die Röte-Nacht (...)
ins Kraut geschwemmt,- (1214)

Rönne appears to have entered a creative frame of mind. This is underscored by the somewhat startling metaphor 'Reiz-Felsen'(1214) with its legendary associations of mysterious fascination. It prompts the memory of previous experiences of enchantment. As the phrase 'treue Stunden'(1214) suggests, he appears to prize them as treasured occurrences. They seem indeed to have been the first experiences of 'the great hour' (PdL: 4,1076), involving what Benn a few years hence, and several decades later, was to describe as 'Nachgiebigkeit des Strukturellen'(8,1879 and 4,1076). Allusions to Nietzsche's Zarathustra combine with associations traditionally connected with poppy to indicate Rönne's creative 'Nachgiebigkeit':

- und alle süßen Mittage, da mein Auge
auf dir schlief letzte stille Schläfe,
treue Stunden -- An deiner Narbe Blauschatten,
an deine Flatterglut gelehnt,
gewärmt, getröstet, hingesunken an
deine Feuer: angeblüht! (1214)

Being 'angeblüht' by the 'Flatterglut' as one would be 'angeleuchtet' by some fire, Rönne, by recapturing imaginatively one of the 'treue Stunden', is 'angeblüht'in the sense of being 'angezündet' by this fire,

or 'erblüht' himself.

The sight of the fructiferous poppy field, then, has induced Rönne to work himself into a feeling of oneness with his surroundings which, according to all that his imaginative outburst has evinced, is an essential prerequisite for creativity. Even the world of purposive rationality, present in the person of 'dieser Mann' from the institution, is included in his sense of communion:

"...angeblüht!: nun dieser Mann -: auch du! Auch du! - - An meinen Randen spielend, in Sommersweite,... (1214)

The vision here evoked of water playing against the beach accords, of course, with the island-symbolism of the novella. And the sonorous plural 'Randen' (rather than 'Ränder') suggests beautifully the lack of clear-cut demarcation lines essential to the 'Allgefühl' he is experiencing, whose significance is underscored by the echo of Goethe's 'Ganymed': 'Wie im Morgenrot / du rings mich anglühst,/...'.

However intense, Rönne's enchantment comes to an abrupt end, brought about by the expression 'Gegen-glück'(1214) he uses to put his experience into words. It presupposes an act of delimitation and thereby destroys the spell of the limitless. In a similar way, his concluding question 'wo bin ich nicht?'(1214)

masters the forces of negative definition to grasp a state of mind experienced as limitless. Rönne assesses his situation correctly when he implies that he does not belong to the searched-for category of 'Umströmte':

Wann gab es Umströmte? Ich muß alles denken, ich muß alles zusammenfassen, nichts entgeht meiner logischen Verknüpfung. (1215)

But after his brief encounter with creativity he is aware more acutely than he was before that there is more to him than pure rationality:

Anfang und Ende, aber ich geschehe. (1215)

While the verb 'geschehe' points to an intense and dynamic mode of being, the contrastive 'aber' emphasizes the fact that in spite of his constituent confinement behind the bars of logic he is capable of 'happening' on a different level - through his creativity:

Ich lebe auf dieser Insel und denke Zimtwälder. In mir durchwächst sich Wirkliches und Traum. (1215)

When active creatively, he will experience the real and the imagined as interpenetrating.

And this is precisely what separates Rönne from the two social groups present on the island; and he is quite clear about it. His logical self, taking literally the question 'wo bin ich nicht?', directs

him to both 'Anstalt' and 'Dorf' as areas where 'das Ereignis nicht in das Gegebene [tritt]'(1214), areas whose humdrum reality is impervious to this kind of 'event'. We note that village and institution now merge in Rönne's perception as he places the drinking villagers together with 'Direktoren und Beamte'(1214). This means that he now distances himself from the world of reason and purpose too because of its inability to sustain the tension of the disparate which he has learned is an essential quality of a deeper mode of being:

Wachgerufen wird in den Bewußtseinsabläufen das Bestreben, das Ungeklärte zu entwirren, das Zweifelhafte sicherzustellen, der Überbrückung des Zwiespalts gilt das Wort. (...) Schon weicht das Dunkle. Schon glättet sich das Krause, und daß kein Widerspruch mehr besteht, nun blaut es herab. (1214)

The sarcasm inspiring these words, followed by Benn's own buffoonery about 'den Kalbsbraten, den Entfesseler des Psychischen'(1214-15) is obvious without further comment.

Alienated as Rönne is from this world, he is still part of it and bound to participate in it. He therefore returns to the 'Anstalt', albeit with a sense of bitter resignation:

Ich werde den Korridor entlanggehen,
und mein Schritt wird hallen. Denn

muß im Korridor der Schritt nicht
hellen? Jawohl, das ist das Leben,
und im Vorbeigehen ein Scherzwort
and die Beamtin? Jawohl, auch dies!-
(1215)

3.

For a moment Rönne seems hopeful to find a way out: 'Da landete das Schiff, (...) und mit den Gästen stieg eine Frau ans Land'(1216). Although his rational constitution compels him 'sie [zu] beformeln'(1216), his attraction to her is of an irrational nature:

...wenn man sich ihr nähert, tritt man
unter das Dach der Liebe, und plötz-
lich (...) - - welch erschütternde
Verwirrung! (1216)

Sensing the danger to his rational integrity, he engages in a desperate battle, but remains clearly vulnerable:

Witternd Gefahr, hörend aus der Ferne
einen Strom, der herangurgelte,
ihn aufzulösen, schlug er um sich die
soziologischen Bestände.
(...)
Aber schon wieder war die Lockerung da,
die Frau, das Strömende,... (1216-17)

The reason for his vulnerability is not hard to find. A symbol of the irrational, she could offer him the shortest escape route from his bondage to reason. Ironically, reason itself urges him in the direction

of the irrational by prompting him to consider that the latter is also part of the 'system' in which human life is embedded: 'das System ist allgültig, es enthält auch sie...' (1217).

His redoubled intellectual efforts lead him in no other direction. He comes across a recent publication²⁷ in which 'Gefühl' and 'Zweigeschlechtigkeit' are declared to be the creative forces capable of producing what reason has made impossible: 'Neues' (1217-18). The poet Rönne is only too eager to seize upon the possibility inaugurated here: reason being superseded by a 'Neuformung des Entwicklungsgedankens aus dem Mathematischen ins Intuitive' (1218).

But the facts of his actual existence pull him down from the heights climbed on the ladder of theoretical insight:

mußte er sich nicht zusammenraffen zu
(...) zielstrebigen Gesten, dem ganzen
Grauen bejahter Wirklichkeiten, zu einer
Hypothese von Realität, die er erkenntnis-
theoretisch nicht mehr halten konnte, um
des Kindes willen, das schon blau war, (...) und von Amts wegen? (1218)

As if attempting to escape from this 'Grauen bejahter Wirklichkeiten', he steps to the window where he sees a garden in full bloom and saturated with fragrance and light. This is the moment for the irrational to overpower him:

Einen Augenblick streift es ihn am
Haupt: eine Lockerung, ein leises Klirren
der Zerspaltung, und in sein Auge fuhr
ein Bild:... (1219)

Preluded by the bursting of the 'Reifen (...) um seine Stirn'(1219), a vision enters his eye. The verb 'fuhr' suggests that his imagination is now possessed as one would be possessed by a spirit. In contrast to his earlier experiences on the beach and in front of the poppy field, he has no part in the formation of this vision. It has all the familiar ingredients of creativity: 'Bläue' and 'Säule' evoking the 'Südkomplex' (beach); 'Glut' and 'Rosen' suggesting fire and bloom (poppy); 'er und die Frau' adding the vitalistic aspect. The loose syntactic structure of these sentences and the absence of any finite verb underline the non-participation of reason in the making of this vision.

However, this 'Lockerung' is only a fleeting occurrence. Rönne's rational self comes immediately to the fore and analyzes the factual source of his vision. He realizes that the facts do not suffice to account for it and that there is the all-important 'Rest (...), daß er sich genommen war, es rauschte und er blutete' (1219). And again, pulling himself together to escape another such 'Lockerung', he asks: 'aber wo führte das hin?'(1219)

Now that his rational control is restored, something significant happens:

Hart wurde sein Blick. Gestählt drang er
in den Garten, ordnend die Büsche,
messend den Pfad. (1219)

Under the rule of reason his imagination is re-activated and 'hardened', following Zarathustra's advice 'werdet hart'.²⁸ No 'eye' is mentioned, but an active 'gaze' creating order and measurement where to the passive 'eye' there had been fragrant and glowing diffusion.

What seems to be suggested here is that the control of reason enables imagination to function - and logically, to function in a more mathematical than intuitive manner. This is the insight dawning on Rönne:

er stand am Ausgang eines Jahrtausends,
aber die Frau war stets; er schuldete
seine Entwicklung einer Epoche, die das
System erschaffen hatte, und was auch
kommen mochte, dies war er! (1219)

While the irrational is timeless, the rational principle constitutes the order of the day and must be embraced at whatever cost. Because of the limitations it imposes, it presents a challenge to be met by imagination:

Fordernd jagte er seinen Blick in den Abend...
(1219)

With 'Abend' pointing to the 'Epoche, die das System

erschaffen hatte', this line suggests that creativity, as Rönne comes to see it, is essentially a duel between reason and imagination.

'Die Insel' ends in a vision of the kind of art thereby to be gained. Its biblical introduction arouses expectations of truth to be revealed, thus underscoring its significance:

und siehe, es blaute das Hyazinthenwesen
unter Duftkurven reiner Formeln, einheit-
liche Geschlossenheiten, in den Garten-
raum; (1219)

'Hyazinthenwesen' suggests creativity: the associations of bloom, fragrance, blue colour, blood, death counter-acted by life, all point in this direction. And whereas earlier on Rönne's view of the garden suggested creativity dictated either by his irrationally or by his rationally disposed frame of mind, the garden, referred to as 'Gartenraum', now suggests a combination of the two principles, 'Garten' connoting order imposed on nature, and 'Raum' boundlessness. The same is indicated by the phrase 'unter Duftkurven reiner Formeln' which combines the mathematical qualities of abstraction and precision with qualities of a sensual and evocative nature.

The vision in which Rönne 'erblickte...die Kunst' culminates in a juxtaposition of two images pointing up

the particular quality and strength of this art:

und eine versickernde Streichholzvettel
rann teigig über die Stufen eines An-
staltsgebäudes unter Glutwerk berechen-
barer Lichtstrahlen einer untergehenden
Sonne senkrecht in die Erde.- (1219)

The 'Streichholzvettel' 'dissolving and seeping into the ground' is a quite revolting counter-image to the dying little match girl with its redemptive but elusive visions in Hans Andersen's tale, indicating Rönne's, the artist's, abhorrence of sentimentalism. This unforgettable image is a most effective negative foil to the precision and splendour of the art he envisions.

IV. 'Schöpferische Konfession':

'Begriff' and 'südliches Wort'

'Schöpferische Konfession', we remember, is not the title Benn chose for these brief elaborations. It is the title of a column in Kasimir Edschmid's Tribüne der Kunst und der Zeit in which artists were invited to comment on their work. Benn's text has no title of its own. This should be borne in mind, for the title 'creative confession' under which it appears in the standard editions of Benn's work may prompt expectations of a comprehensive poetological statement, which

it is not. Benn has selected for comment only one aspect of his thought: 'das Problem des südlichen Worts' (7, 1644).

The theme of the word was first embraced by Thom who insisted on the poet's intimate knowledge of words to be acquired through 'scientific' endeavour. It was resumed, but not dealt with conclusively, by Rönne whose declared intention it was to examine 'den Begriff'. It is here placed at the centre of Benn's first recorded critical pronouncement.

Why should the young Benn, who only three years later averred 'ich habe einen besonderen Sinn für das Wort',²⁹ perceive the 'südliches Wort' or 'associative motif' (1645) as a problem? I suggest that he did so because the goal of his poetic endeavour then was not the creation of poetic form as much as an escape from his tormenting 'Bewußtheit':

da ich keine Kunst kenne und keinen
Glauben, keine Wissenschaft und keine
Mythe, sondern immer nur die Bewußtheit,
ewig sinnlos, ewig qualbestürmt-, so ist
es im Grunde diese, gegen die ich mich
wehre, mit der südlichen Zermalmung, und
sie, die ich abzuleiten trachte in liguri-
sche Komplexe bis zur Überhöhung oder bis
zum Verlöschen im Außersich des Rausches
oder des Vergehens. (1645)

In these lines Benn describes what in 'Die Insel' he has rendered poetically by the poppy image. The assoc-

iative or creative or 'südliche' word is seized upon by the young Benn as a means to satisfy his urge to transcend his given rational constitution. And as such it presents the vital problem referred to in the introductory paragraph. Benn's explanation of what he means by 'assoziatives Motiv' tacitly provides a clue to an understanding of this problem:

Mich sensationiert eben das Wort ohne jede Rücksicht auf seinen beschreibenden Charakter rein als assoziatives Motiv und dann empfinde ich ganz gegenständlich seine Eigenschaft des logischen Begriffs als den Querschnitt durch kondensierte Katastrophen. (1645)

The 'descriptive character' of the word is its specific lexical definition, making it a 'Begriff' which, as our knowledge of Rönne's dissatisfaction allows us to infer, does not measure up to the young poet's expressive needs. He is 'sensationiert' by the layers of intensely vivid meaning he perceives underneath the descriptive label and strives to reveal through the associative use of words:

"Anemonenwald". Allen Leichtsin, alle Wehmut, alle Hoffnungslosigkeit des Geistes enthülle ich oder trachte ich zu enthüllen als Schichten dieses Querschnitts von Begriff. (1644)

We cannot overlook the curious fact that in this very short essay Benn employs the despised notion of 'Begriff' twice to explain his glorified 'assoziatives

Motiv'. He does so because the latter is in fact a 'Begriff', but one seen as a thing of meaningful depth rather than a horizontally embedded 'Systemwiesel'. Benn states clearly that he uses 'Begriffe'. He may use them under a diverted perspective, transmuting the contextually defined elements into plurivalent compounds in their own right, but he still uses 'Begriffe'. And this is where the 'problem' lies. In his endeavour to break the fetters of 'Bewußtheit' he depends on the tools it provides.

We recognize in this problem a relation of the paradox indicated at the end of 'Die Insel' by the image of Rönne sending a challenging 'gaze' into the 'evening', and at the end of 'Gespräch', by the image of the struggle between 'instinct'/'ecstasy' and 'craft'. All three works speak of a tension between the irrational and the rational principles. However, while the two earlier works are informed by an implicit belief that the 'blessing' will ultimately be obtained, Benn's brief statement of 1919 is marked by a sharpened awareness of the problems involved in the paradoxical task the young poet finds himself compelled to tackle.

The diminished optimism of 'Schöpferische Konfession' seems to be a reflection of Benn's newly

acquired - and henceforth characteristic - 'Problem-bewußtsein' which brings in its wake an undercurrent of irrationalism: a yearning in spite and because of better knowledge, a longing against the advice of conviction. My ensuing discussions will show that Benn was never to free himself from this kind of 'irrationalism', which is in fact the source of the sustained tensions informing his thought and work (see in particular chapter five, pp.236-42). As far as the present problem 'des südlichen Worts' is concerned, by the testimony of the analysis given only a few years later of the process by which a 'Begriff' is transmuted into a poetic word (Lyr.Ich: 1923; see chapter one, pp.58-60), it was soon overcome.

Benn's poetological concern during his first creative decade appears to have embraced three of the four major themes outlined in Probleme der Lyrik: the poet, the creative process and the word. His treatment of all three rests on the basis of a synthesizing conception that does not allow us to tie the young Benn down to any one-sided, predominantly rational or irrational position. Such interpretations have been encouraged by the alliance of Benn's predilection for metaphor and hyperbole with his vitalistic

bent, fed by the current of the time as much as his native inclination. Added to this is the absence in his earlier works of any detailed discussion of poetic form, which was apt to compound the commentators' problem and lend seeming plausibility to the erroneous assumption that Benn, after briefly adopting a scientific stance, followed an essentially irrational course to be abandoned again in favour of his eventual advocacy of 'Form' and creative rationality.

In this chapter I have endeavoured to draw attention to the rather more complex nature of the young Benn's apparently one-sided utterances. In the following I intend to show that, by the same token, Benn's advocacy in the 1930s of 'Form' and all it involves did not put an end to the submerged 'irrationalism' I referred to earlier (p.133), and that Benn, rather than switching allegiance from one creative principle to another, responded to the complex nature of the object of his deliberations by directing his attention successively to its diverse aspects.

CHAPTER THREE

CRYSTALLIZATION

I. 'Lyrisches Ich':

The Word and the Creative Process

At the beginning of the time-span covered by this chapter (1922-1936) stands the essay 'Epilog und Lyrisches Ich'(1928). While its first part, composed in 1922, signals the climax of the feeling of crisis that accompanied Benn's early creative and intellectual endeavours, its second part, written five years later, makes mention of 'new attempts by the lyric I'(8,1877) and indicates thereby that the crisis has brought about a new beginning. The direct juxtaposition of resignation and new beginning seems a deliberate device to highlight the decisive juncture here reached: the young poet has abandoned his fruitless attempts, documented by the Rönne-cycle, to secure a meaningful relationship between the creative self

and the social world, and re-defines this self by its relation to the world of words. The social 'I' is superseded by the 'lyric I':

-ein neues ICH, das die Götter erlebt:
substantivisch suggestiv. (8,1877)

What distinguishes this 'new I' from its predecessor is its orientation to the experience of a transcendent reality transmitted and transmissible through the suggestive power of words. This newly found position offers the quintessence of Benn's poetic never to be changed or modified.

However, much as Benn's demonstrative presentation of 1928 may be designed to indicate a fundamental reorientation, nothing essentially new is introduced at this point. The poet's retreat from the social world into that of language is a central idea of 'Die Insel'. This novella, as well as the poem 'Der junge Hebbel', also gives an indication of the poet's extraordinary capacity for intense experience. The prose-dialogue 'Gespräch' focuses on his special relationship with words, while the transcendent aspect of creativity is alluded to in both 'Gespräch' and 'Der junge Hebbel'. Finally, Benn's so called 'Schöpferische Konfession' dwells on the suggestive or associative power of the word, using examples from the

Rönne-cycle. All this suggests that the conception Benn seems anxious to present as new is new only in that it brings together and affirms emphatically ideas embraced earlier in various contexts.

The original and significant contribution made by the essay 'Lyrisches Ich' lies in its sensitive analysis of the creative process and the multiple function performed in it by the word, culminating in a paean to poetic form. The lasting validity of these passages is apparent from the fact referred to earlier that Benn saw fit to incorporate them in his crucial Probleme der Lyrik. As my analysis of this lecture includes a detailed discussion of the various implications inherent in these earlier pronouncements, it will suffice here to recall the main points arrived at there (chapter one, pp.52-61).

Consistent with previous, if less explicit utterances, an essential co-operation of rational and irrational energies is envisaged at all stages of the creative process. The word is seized for its associative content which enables it to function destructively as well as constructively. In this dual function lies the secret 'der formfordernden Gewalt des Nichts' (1880) mentioned here for the first time. It also provides the basis for the montage aspect of Benn's

understanding of poetic form. 'Form' thus created transcends, and allows the creator to transcend, 'die Hinfälligkeit des Individuellen' obtaining in the natural world.

II. 'Akademie-Rede':

Nihilism and Creativity

The contrast between 'Natur' and 'Geist', or 'chaos' and 'form', lies at the centre of this address of 1932 in which the idea of the 'form-demanding power of nothingness' receives a significant amplification. In 'Lyrisches Ich', 'nothingness' is related to the limited sphere of language, denoting that stage in the creative intellect's activity where concepts, on account of their associative wealth, burst the fetters of semantic definition to form part of the 'Pêlemêle von Stoffen und Aspekten' out of which is created poetic form. In his Academy-address Benn goes beyond the confines of language. 'Das Nichts' is described as 'naturalistic chaos'(4,1002), 'some blind thing, nature'(1001):

Dies Nichts, das wir hinter allen
Gestalten sehen, allen Wendungen der
Geschichte, den Begriffen, hinter
Stein und Bein. (1001)

And 'Formung', we learn, is modern man's means of asserting his stature as

das einzige, unter allen physischen
Gestalten, metaphysische Wesen...:
der sich durch Formung an Bildern
vom Chaos differenzierende Mensch.
(1003)

In the face of 'nothingness' understood as chaos resulting from the breakdown of the old meaningful order of things ('von den alten Wahrheiten, den alten Inhalten ist nichts zu retten', 1001), the human intellect, in order not to be swallowed up by it, is impelled to create its own order, to create form. Whether we agree or disagree, within the edifice of Benn's thought his idea of 'the form-demanding power of nothingness' makes sense. His 'nihilism of values', as Benn rightly points out, is a highly productive force:

ist das Nihilismus? Vom Standpunkt jeder materiellen, selektiven, historischen Idee des Menschen aus wohl, (...) aber vom Standpunkt unserer Untersuchung des Produktiven aus meine ich: nein. (1001)

To call Benn a self-professed nihilist without adding the necessary qualification¹ is to suppress a crucial part of his statement and thereby preclude a fair judgement of his position.

Benn affords us another opportunity to appreciate his all-pervading historical thinking when he

maintains that the mechanism of 'nothingness' calling for 'form', though 'über alles gespannt' and 'unausweichlich' today (1001; 'Ananke des Ausdrucksschaffens', PdL:4,1089), is relevant not only to modern creativity but constitutes some sort of 'law', 'das Gesetz des Produktiven', which governs the intellect's creative functions regardless of its location in history:

...stellt sich von selbst der Gedanke ein, daß dies gar keine besondere Lage ist, daß der Geist (...) sich nie anders erlebte als in der Differenzierung zwischen den Formen und dem Nichts, sehen wir das Produktive gegen dies naturalistische Chaos im Mühen um einen Grund, ein Sein, ein ordnendes Gesicht, stehen wir plötzlich vor einer Art von Gesetz, dem Gesetz von einer formfordernden Gewalt des Nichts, (...): dies scheint das Gesetz des Produktiven zu sein. (1002)

'Nothingness', and with it the formative process it engenders, is a historical variable,

seine Wucht bestimmt durch die Tiefe,
sein Inhalt durch die zeitgeschichtlich
wechselnden Gründe dieses Nichts. (1002)

Benn's 'Nichts' is a relational category deriving its particular character from the historical situation of which it forms part. It might be more correctly, if less effectively, called a 'Nicht' indicating the absence or invalidity of certain ideas or values.

In this context it seems helpful to go forward in time and consider Benn's contention of 1941 that nihilism has constituted, for centuries, the 'inner creative substance' of all great European artists (KDR: 3,874), that it was nihilism which motivated men like Dürer, Tolstoy, Goethe and Balzac to create their works of art:

Alle großen Männer der weißen Rasse hatten seit Jahrhunderten nur die eine innere Aufgabe empfunden, ihren Nihilismus zu verdecken. (...) es war das Grundelement aller ihrer Arbeiten gewesen. (...) Keinen Augenblick sind sie sich im unklaren über das Wesen ihrer inneren schöpferischen Substanz. Das Agründige ist es, das Leere, das Kalte, das Unmenschliche.
(3,873-74)

As Benn explained in 1930, the poet - and by extension the 'great man' - is 'eingeboren durch Geschick in das Zweideutige des Seins' ('Können Dichter die Welt ändern?': 7,1677). He is destined to look deeper than ordinary men and perceive the 'ambivalence of being' that undermines positive ideas and values vital to a meaningful individual and social existence. This is what constitutes his 'nihilism'. It compels him to concern himself with such values as are dominant at his time - hence Kant's epistemological, Dürer's religious, Tolstoy's moral 'nihilism', Goethe's and Balzac's 'nihilism' as to universally human and

social values - and create works of art or thought which, by the testimony of the ambivalence that informs them, call into question no less than they affirm:²

Ungeheuer vorsichtig wird er [ihr Nihilismus] immer wieder verdeckt, mit Fragen zweideutiger Art, mit Wendungen höchst abtastenden und doppelsinnigen Charakters nähern sie sich ihm auf jeder Seite, in jedem Kapitel, in jeder Figur. (3, 873-74)

However much one may be inclined to dismiss this view as a Bennesque distortion of history, an unprejudiced examination of this claim might conceivably produce some interesting results. But this avenue must remain unexplored within the limits of my inquiry. What matters here is a recognition of Benn's historical bent that moves him to trace the historical roots of a phenomenon commonly considered essentially modern, post Nietzschean, and thereby to embed it in the continuity of tradition while at the same time bringing out its uniqueness. In the past as much as in the present, men have been impelled by their insight into the equivocalness of being to look for ways of coming to terms with the destructive ambivalence it gives rise to, and to create, in the process, works of art - to create form as a defence or barrier against nothingness. The particular 'nihilism' from which traditional

artists received their creative impulse was always located in the sphere of valid 'Wahrheiten' and 'Inhalte'. Their artistic rendition, despite and because of its subtle ambiguities, 'concealed' the authors' better - or more disturbing - knowledge. In the face of the invalidity of all values, the modern artist's, or poet's, is a radical kind of 'nihilism' left with 'Ausdruck' as the only criterion guiding the creation of poetry.

These thoughts clearly prefigure those expressed in the 1950s on the historically repeated 'Ausdruckszwänge' (7, 1836) and the already quoted 'Ananke des Ausdrucksschaffens' (4, 1089; see chapter one, p. 24 and chapter two, pp. 98-99).

The significance of Benn's 'Akademie-Rede' lies in the fact that it elaborates in considerable detail an idea present but no more than touched upon in his earlier writings: the idea of 'nihilism' as the motive power of creativity. Benn goes to great lengths not only to affirm but also to qualify it, thereby depriving of their target those criticisms that were nevertheless to be levelled against his irrational and smug nihilistic pose.

III. 'Rede auf Stefan George'

Form and Absolute Language

This 'address' of 1934 offers further illumination of Benn's understanding of 'Form'. For obvious reasons, the commemorative celebration for which it was commissioned and prepared never took place. Aware as we are of the historical hour that saw the composition of this work, we cannot but shudder at the sinister connotations of words such as these:

Es gibt nur das Weiter im Ausprägen
neuer Herrschaftsgrenzen, dort, wohin
andere nicht gelangten, oder wo sie
stürzten, (...) Es gibt nur die (...)
imperative Kunst, die Raum setzt, an-
ordnet, das Maßlose gliedert, ...
(4,1041)

However, many scholarly pages have been filled to show that what in this context will freeze one's blood does in fact form an integral part of Benn's thought and language, predating by a good many years its abasement through National Socialism and, of course, precipitating Benn's fatal error.³ No doubt, by employing such language in April 1934 Benn makes himself highly suspect, especially to us who are blessed with hindsight. But the fact that the para-Nazi components in his language do not disappear even after his ferocious renunciation of National Socialism (see his

essay 'Kunst und Drittes Reich' of 1941: 3,861-84, esp. pp.877-84) seems to call for caution. I suggest that his demonstrative insistence on using his words, no matter who misused them, is his own, if somewhat naive way of asserting his right to be true to himself. I have argued throughout that in order to understand Benn and do justice to his thought we must make an effort not to be put off by his deceptive ways and analyze dispassionately the evocative and provocative elements of his language. His para-Nazi vocabulary should be no exception.

At the centre of the 'Rede auf Stefan George', which acknowledges the debt owed by 'the time' to Stefan George, stands the idea of 'Form':

für George gilt: die Form ist Schöpfung;
Prinzip, Voraussetzung, tiefstes Wesen
der Schöpfung; (4,1037)

And further on:

Es ist das Formgefühl, das die große
Transzendenz der Epoche sein wird.
(1039)

There can be no doubt that Benn's emphatic avowal of the transcendental significance of the new principle of form is backed up by genuine conviction (cf. 'Der junge Hebbel': 1,21; LI: 8,1880; AR: 4,1003). In the particular context of the George-address, the transcendental argument seems also intended to anticipate

and ward off accusations of 'formalism', hence Benn's recourse to the authority of Nietzsche, hence his somewhat arbitrary and extreme 'either-or' argument:

dieser Wille zur Form, dieses neue Formgefühl, das ist nicht Ästhetizismus, nicht Intellektualismus, nicht Formalismus, sondern höchster Glaube: entweder gibt es ein geistiges Weltbild, und dann steht es über der Natur und der Geschichte, oder es gibt keines, dann sind die Opfer, die Kleist, Hölderlin, Nietzsche brachten, umsonst gebracht. (1039)

The ensuing asseveration that 'Form' is essentially bound up with a palpable material seems to carry more conviction:

Es wird also ein Zeitalter des Geistes sein, nicht des unfruchtbaren Geistes, sondern des realen Geistes, der nirgends die Wirklichkeit verläßt, sondern im Gegenteil ihr Stimme gibt, sie fruchtbar, sie erbfähig macht, sie kultiviert, sie mit Blüten überzieht. Ein Geist, der der Natur nirgends ausweicht, sondern ihr überall ins Auge sieht, in ihr Sphinxauge, in ihr gefährliches, schönes, zweideutiges Sphinxauge, vielleicht auch einen Augenblick von ihr träumt, aber doch für den Menschen auf Ordnung sieht. (1039-40)

Form is the final product of the creative intellect's encounter with 'nature' or phenomenal reality. 'Der große Dichter...ist ein großer Realist, sehr nahe allen allen Wirklichkeiten', Benn was to say in 1951 (PdL: 4,1069); and as early as 1916 he had written: 'Hier wurde alles hingenommen, was ins Auge traf' ('Die

Insel': 5,1211). This encounter with the world is a challenge prerequisite to the creation of form. The sphinx-metaphor points to the mysteries and allurements inherent in 'nature' that cast their spell over the creative imagination and induce it to 'dream'. It is in the process of 'Verwertung' (PdL: 4,1079) of this dream that poetic form is generated. We recall the struggle between 'Rausch' and 'Handwerk' ('Gespräch': 7,1642-43) discussed by Thom four decades earlier. In the specific context of George's poetry, Benn explains:

Nicht also weil George einen Park besingt, sondern weil er sein Parkgefühl in logisch stilisierte Formen bannt und wir diese Formen als verbindlich, dauernd und überlieferbar empfinden, darum sprechen wir von ihm. (4,1037)

The poet fulfils his task if he is able to capture the 'feeling' occasioned in him by some natural phenomenon in a 'stylized form'. This form is felt to be objectively valid, lasting and amenable to tradition.

These lines deserve our attention chiefly on two counts. First, the object of poetic stylization is not objective 'reality' but a subjective inner experience caused by it. Second, external reality is nevertheless indispensable for the excitation of the emotive process that will be objectified in poetic

form. 'Overcoming' the world of reality through poetic formation does not entail a turning away from this reality. When Benn maintains that the poet 'im Kunstwerk eine Welt aufrichtet und eine überwindet, formend überwindet'(1038), he places visible emphasis on the constructive aspect of the process, implying that the continued availability of the 'real' world is a material prerequisite for the continued formation of the aesthetic world. The former is used by the poet as a 'means of artistic excitation'('in jedem Ereignis in jedem Zeitalter erblickt er nur ein Mittel künstlerischer Erregung',1039); it does not itself enter the latter in the guise of 'meaning' or 'design':

l'art pour l'art, das heißt eine Kunst,
die keiner Ergänzung von der moralischen
oder soziologischen Seite her bedarf.
(1038)

One cannot fail to notice that for all his rhetoric Benn does not, in this presentation, employ the attribute 'absolute' to qualify 'art' or 'form'. It is ~~to the~~ poet, described metaphorically as 'moulder' ('Gestalter', 1038), ~~that~~ he accords this distinction. The Goethean noun 'Gestalter' implies a concrete material fashioned into organic form. If the poet who creates this kind of form is said to be 'absolute' (1038), his freedom lies in the manner in which he

fashions his material, and in the end to which he chooses to do so. He is neither bound by any creative rules, however time-honoured or reasonable, nor dependent on any code of meaning or value extraneous to his art. But as a 'Gestalter', he uses some palpable raw material which he cannot draw from anywhere save 'reality'. It is a mistake to conclude that the poet envisaged by Benn operates in a realm outside the spectrum of reality, creating poetic form devoid of any content or meaning.⁴ When Benn quotes with emphasis and approval George's dictum: 'In der Dichtung entscheidet nicht der Sinn, sondern die Form' (1039), he does not deny that poetry contains 'meaning'. What he does say is that 'meaning' is second in importance to 'form'; he places the two categories in order of priority without asserting absolute rule of the one and total invalidity of the other.

While he is careful not to attach the 'absolute' label to 'Form', he fastens it, with the full force of his eloquence, to the new poetic language he finds inaugurated in George's poetry. It is 'absolute Sprache', he maintains, because words do not function as vehicles of content and meaning but as 'artistic ingredients':

hier sollten Worte auftreten, nur als Kunstingredienzen, absolute Sprache, vokaler Urlaut, vor der Zivilisierung des Wortes zum Inhalts- und Verständnisträger, sie sollten eine Welt ausschließen und an ihrer Stelle eine neue Ordnung bauen. (1031)

It would seem that Benn, when talking about the concept of form, stresses its objective qualities and metaphysical implications in order to prevent any suggestion of 'formalism' which because of its connection with Soviet Communism had acquired unpalatable connotations. When talking about language, the ogre of 'formalism' is not felt to be lurking behind the very word, hence his freedom to emphasize the innovative aspect by exploiting the associative force of a well-established concept.

A closer look at the passage that precedes the one just quoted will show that Benn's 'absolute Sprache', like many of his catch-phrases, requires a more than literal reading:

die Sprache (...) war plötzlich nicht mehr Abbild und Ausdruck des Lebens, entsprach nicht der Wirklichkeit, sondern sie war eine metaphorische Überspannung des Seins, eine Schöpfung in sich und ohnegleichen, geistige Mächte radikaler und metaphysischer Art standen hinter den Lettern und Lauten, schaffende, rufende, beschwörende Mächte, und nur an diese wandte sich das Gedicht. Worte schon, aber nur als anthropologische Laut- und Lastträger, weitausgeschweifte Primitive, zaubervoll und immer totemistisch. (1030-31)

The untranslatable metaphor describing the poetic language as 'metaphorische Überspannung des Seins' conveys, to me, the idea that this language goes beyond, transcends, the entire reach of phenomenal 'being', of 'life', of 'reality'. Its relation to this reality is not one of subservience, as was the case in the mimetic tradition, but one of sovereignty intent on lending expression to a metaphysical reality that constitutes the essence of human existence. The poetic language has been freed from its service to transient reality in order to serve 'absolute' reality and is in this sense 'absolute'. It is not absolute in the sense that it aims at 'Stoffvernichtung' with Mallarmé's blank page as its ultimate consequence. It is designed to say something: to express what is experienced as absolute in human life. Although presented under the label 'absolute language', the essence of what Benn was to say about the 'absolute poem' in 1951 (see chapter one, pp.23-24; 44-46) appears to have crystallized by 1934.

Ideas and terms borrowed from contemporary anthropological literature⁵ serve as a ready tool to formulate, metaphorically, the relationship between content and the 'absolute' word. The latter is said to be 'magic' and 'totemistic'(1031). As Jonathan

Culler explains,

Western civilizations have developed abstract categories and mathematical symbols to facilitate intellectual operations, other cultures use a logic whose procedures are similar but whose categories are more concrete and hence metaphorical. (6)

A 'totemistic' word, then, is a word that enacts a metaphorical identification making for concrete rather than logical signification. Any suggestion that Benn envisages words depleted of content clearly misses the point. It is a particular kind of content his 'absolute' words have ceased to carry on the one hand, and resumed to carry on the other.

Whereas the idea of the 'totemistic' word points to its 'concrete' nature and function, the attribute 'magic' throws new light, from a rather unexpected angle, on Benn's synthetizing stance. Joseph P. Dolan, in his essay on Elisabeth Langgässer's 'Tierkreisgedichte', tells us that 'knowing the proper name of a person or thing has always been considered the source of power among archaic societies'.⁷ He goes on to point out that 'mythical thinking' and the scientifically objective style advocated by the 'Neue Sachlichkeit' have in common a concern for the specificity of words. 'Magic realism' and 'new objectivity' meet somewhere along the line.⁸ I suggest that Benn's notion

of 'rufende, beschwörende Mächte' operating behind and through the poetic word is quite compatible with his insistence on 'Kälte des Denkens, Nüchternheit, letzte Schärfe des Begriffs'(LWI: 8,1894). It is only one short step from here to Benn's assertion that 'seine [des abendländischen Menschen] Dämonie ist die Form, seine Magie das Technisch-Konstruktive'(4,1037):

It appears that the primitive element in Benn's metaphorical language possesses a profound justification and accords fully with his idea of the co-operation of 'reason and energy' whose early emergence I have traced in the preceding chapter. To the insights gained there, the 'Rede auf Stefan George' adds significant evidence that at the time of its composition, Benn's conception of poetic form was less esoteric and unbalanced, more reality-oriented and integrated, than his many pronouncements with their superficial contradictions have prompted some critics to maintain.

IV. Lyric Poetry: 'Form' and 'Rausch'

Benn's preoccupation during the period from 1922 to 1936 with poetological questions is faithfully reflected by the large number of poems composed in these years whose thematic core is the poet and his creative

work. Such poems are 'Der Sänger'(1925), 'Staatsbibliothek'(1927), 'Für Oskar Loerke'(1934), 'Am Brückeweher'(1934), 'Leben - niederer Wahn'(1936), 'Wer allein ist-'(1936) - to mention only some of the overtly programmatic ones. They all contain, with remarkable consistency, the by now familiar aspects of Benn's poetological conception.

1. 'Form' - An Exacting Goal

i. 'Der Sänger'

The title of this poem, together with its leading position in the collection Die Spaltung, points to its importance as a programmatic utterance. This obvious significance compels me to include it in my study although I can add little to F.W. Wodtke's lucid interpretation.⁹

'Der Sänger' is the title of a ballad by Goethe featuring a medieval courtly singer. By using this very title Benn establishes a direct link between the modern poet, with whom he is concerned, and his medieval ancestor as presented by a classical poet who commanded Benn's undivided admiration. While the title thus draws attention to the line of tradition

the modern poet may look back to, the poem itself suggests that the relationship between the modern and the traditional singer is one of contrast more than similarity.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Goethe's poem is the festive social scene whose joyful spirit is heightened by the singer's performance. It contrasts sharply with the sickly gloom of Benn's poem whose 'singer' is painfully absorbed in the pursuit of his creative goal and oblivious of any social function. Goethe's singer presents effortlessly what seems to be an ad-hoc composition:

Ich singe, wie der Vogel singt,
(...)
Das Lied, das aus der Kehle dringt.
(11.29 and 31)¹⁰

Benn's counterpart labours strenuously towards his poem; as the genitive metaphor in the first of the following lines suggests, he may never be able to succeed:

drängend zum Traum des Gedichts
seine schweren Substanzen
selten und langsam ins Nichts.
(1,59: 11.22-24)

The difference in ease and success of their endeavour has to do with the different framework within which each poet is operating. The traditional singer is an integral part of a whole and well-ordered

world. Like the king for his well-being, the bird for its song, he is indebted for his gift, his song, to God whom he acknowledges, in his own simple manner, as the supreme and unifying principle of this worldly order (11.40-42). The modern 'singer' has no creator to rely on for his song. To create it, he must first erase from his consciousness the now spurious distinctions that were meaningful only within the lost order. While the first stanza of Benn's poem presents this '...oblivion of the division / between I and you' (11.7-8) as a fait accompli, the second takes us one step back and describes, with Bennesque expressiveness, just what is involved in the attempt to achieve the 'Vergessen' after which poetic creation takes place:

Neurogene Leier,
fahle Hyperämien,
Blutdruckschleier
mittels Koffein,
keiner kann ermessen
dies: dem einen zu,
ewig dem Vergessen
zwischen ich und du. (11.9-16)

The sense of pain and sacrifice informing these lines derives its intensity from the vitalistic metaphors filling the three introductory lines, but first of all from the ambiguous 'Leier' which suggests that the poet's work goes on and on without end. The attributive intimation of nervousness only adds to the strain this endless process visits upon the poet.

'Hyperämie', we remember, is a disease involving a concentration and profusion of blood in one part of the body. The plural form here used indicates repetition and thus underscores the painful fact that there is no end in sight and no reprieve. The qualifier 'fahl' only adds to the sickly exertion conveyed here. The 'I's' caffeine-induced 'Blutdruckschleier' follow to suggest a degree of intensity ('blood-pressure') that brings with it a softening of perceptual outlines ('veils'¹¹), ushering in the 'Vergessen der Spaltung' that we know to be only the first step of poetic creation.

The singer of yesteryear is now drawn into the open to serve explicitly as a negative foil:

Wenn es einst der Sänger
dualistisch trieb,
heute ist er Zersprenger
mittels Gehirnprinzip,...(11.17-20)

He is a 'dualist' in the sense that his frame of reference is one of ordered categories, such as 'I' and 'you', which the modern singer must first strive to 'forget'.

While the second stanza has dwelled, in expressive detail, on the difficulty of this prerequisite process of 'forgetting', the third stanza now tells us that it is first set in motion through a deliberate destruction accomplished by dint of the 'intellectual

principle'(1.20). What is meant here seems to be indicated by the first four lines of the poem:

Keime, Begriffsgenesen,
Broadway, Azimut,
Turf- und Nebelwesen
mischt der Sänger im Blut,...(11.1-4)

Through intellectual inquiry the poet familiarizes himself with the disparate features of the world, he 'takes them in' and makes them his own, disregarding and thereby destroying given contexts and relationships. He absorbs these features so completely as to 'mingle' them 'in his blood'. This mingling suggests complete internalization which in turn renders possible the desired 'Vergessen' after which the process of creative formation may get under way:

immer in Gestaltung,
immer dem Worte zu...(11.5-6)

The Goethean 'Gestaltung' strikes our attention. It tells us, once again, that Benn views poetic creation as a process of organic growth and formation. It is very interesting indeed to find this idea accompanying Benn's first allusion to the concept of montage (see chapter four, pp.211-214).

The concluding lines of the poem sum up its burden:

stündlich webt er im Ganzen
drängend zum Traum des Gedichts
seine schweren Substanzen
selten und langsam ins Nichts. (11.21-24)

The ever-active poet takes his 'weaving' material from the whole of reality and transmutes it into his own 'heavy', that is associatively charged substances. But only on rare occasions, and after a slow process, does he succeed in transposing them into the state of 'nothingness' where all traditional relationships are 'forgotten'. And this - the end-position leaves us in no doubt - is the all-important mile-stone on his weary road to his dream of a poem or the poem of his dream.

The poem 'Der Sanger' is an elaboration of Benn's conviction of the hardship and virtual impossibility of being a poet today. The conditions of modern creativity are such as to make the creative effort demanding to the utmost, continual and slow, and hardly ever capable of success.

Yet the poem itself, if it is a successful poem, is there to show that the modern poet, in spite of the exacting conditions, can still be a 'singer'. 'Der Sanger' is a first notable example of Benn's characteristic ambivalence.

The various points stated explicitly or touched upon by implication in 'Der Sanger' are resumed in a number of poems composed during the following ten years. For example, the thematic core of 'Staats-

bibliothek'(1927) is the moment of 'Zusammenhangsdurchstoßung' which occurs during intellectual activity and ushers in the 'hour of creation' with its 'dream-laden word'(1,89). The poem 'Regressiv'(1927) also conjures up this moment but makes no reference to its role in the creative process. Its significance is here brought out by a thematic contrast that divides the poem into two equally long parts and juxtaposes this rare moment of 'thalassale Regression' to the meaninglessness of all human endeavour (1,131). This contrast highlights the emphatic distinction between the realms of 'life' and art Benn drew in many essays and also in his poetry (e.g. 'Leben - niederer Wahn',1936: 1, 34). Intimately connected with this distinction is the idea of the poet's otherness ('Das Ganze',1936: 1,179; 'Ach, das Erhabene',1936: 1,181) and the poet's solitude ('Wer allein ist -',1936: 1,135); the idea of his relentless pursuit of his 'dream' which renders the question of usefulness to, and appreciation by, others quite irrelevant ('Dein ist-',1936: 1,169); the idea of the poet's renunciation of any life-oriented design ('Für Oskar Loerke zum 50. Geburtstag',1934: 2,436).

Common to most of these poems is a sense of suffering and sacrifice compressed most succinctly

in the phrase 'das Joch der Höhe'(1,181). This sense of suffering is absent from some of Benn's later poems in which the notion of 'Form' plays a prominent role. For example:

ii. 'Wer allein ist-'

As the title indicates, the central theme of this poem is the poet's solitude that we know from Probleme der Lyrik to be considered an essential feature of his life as a poet (4,1093). It is solitude that enables his imaginative faculties to thrive:

Wer allein ist, ist auch im Geheimnis,
immer steht er in der Bilder Flut,
ihrer Zeugung, ihrer Keimnis,
selbst die Schatten tragen ihre Glut.
(1,135: st.1, 11.1-4)

It is solitude that has enabled him to acquire a rich fund of knowledge:

Trächtig ist er jeder Schichtung
denkerisch erfüllt und aufgespart.
(st.2, 11.5-6)

He is outside the arena of human association:

mächtig ist er der Vernichtung
allem Menschlichen, das nährt und paart.
(st.2, 11.7-8)

His distance from 'everything human' is thrown into relief by the juxtaposition of the feeding and mating taking place in the human realm (1.8) with his

intellectual pregnancy (11.5-6) and imaginative involvement in the 'begetting' and 'germination' of his images (1.3). In the central second stanza, this pattern of contrastive parallel extends into syntax and sound:

Trächtig ist er jeder Schichtung
mächtig ist er der Vernichtung
(11. 5 and 7)

These constructions seem to suggest subtly the style of Goethe's late poetry and thus look forward to the 'Stirb und Werde'-allusion at the end of the poem (1.11).

The adjective 'trächtig' seems also chosen for its literal semantic content indicating that the poet 'carries', as part of his creativeness, man's intellectual - not woman's biological - burden. He is in this sense 'pregnant' with 'every stratification', he is intellectually 'fulfilled' and in a state of readiness. Although these lines resist stubbornly a satisfactory translation, they do convey a familiar notion: the poet has penetrated the world and internalized it and is waiting for the 'great hour' that will enable him to express it.

The noun 'Schichtung' deserves our attention. It is taken from geology and suggests immobility and depth, as opposed to the superficial progression or

continuation implied in the feeding-cum-mating aspect of life. The poet, then, who 'carries' every 'Schichtung', is not concerned with the flux of life, but with its depths and essences.

'Schichtung' also recalls Benn's very early formulation to the effect that the poetic word is made up of 'Schichten' - 'layers of intensively vivid meaning', as I ventured to interpret (SchK: 7,1644-45; see chapter two, p.131). The poet's extraordinary sensitivity to words and their 'Schichtung' transforms a mere 'Begriff' into an 'assoziatives Motiv' or poetic word (LI: 8,1878-80) - source of the 'flood of images' surrounding the poet:

immer steht er in der Bilder Flut,
ihrer Zeugung, ihrer Keimnis,...(11.2-3)

Direct experience of life is replaced by direct experience of images flowing from the associations evoked in the poet's mind by the 'Heerschar von Worten' ('Gespräch': 7,1638) he has at his command.

The flow or flood of images, of their 'Zeugung' and 'Keimnis', is a movement and growth clearly juxtaposed to that indicated by the negated 'Stirb und (...) Werde' of the third stanza:

Ohne Rührung sieht er, wie die Erde
eine andere ward, als ihm begann,
nicht mehr Stirb und nicht mehr Werde:
formstill sieht ihn die Vollendung an.
(st.3, 11.9-12)

Line 11 is easily identified as an allusion to Goethe's 'Selige Sehnsucht':

Und solange du das nicht hast,
Dieses: Stirb und werde!
Bist du nur ein trüber Gast
auf der dunklen Erde.
(11.17-20)¹²

It does what the title 'Der Sänger' does in the earlier poem: highlight the difference between the traditional and the modern poet, that is, the difference in their attitude to life. While its ever-changing scene, its continual succession of death and birth, was an object of the traditional poet's contemplation, it leaves the modern poet, who knows all about 'eternal recurrence', unaffected. He is a coolly detached observer of this movement; but he is directly steeped in that which produces his images. And while the former has no goal and hence no meaning, the latter derives meaning from a specific goal: 'perfection still in its form' gazing at the poet (1.12) as he stands in the flood of creativeness (1.2).

What 'Der Sänger' refers to as 'Traum des Gedichts' is here described, more specifically, as 'formstill [e] Vollendung'. It is the perfect, static form to be created through the formative effort. In the words of Probleme der Lyrik, it is the poem that is 'complete before it has begun' (4,1070).

We note that the point where it crystallizes receives no mention. In 'Der Sanger', the noun 'dream' removes it from the ambit of reality. Here, a clear distance between the poet and his creative goal is indicated: 'perfection' looks at him, challenging him, as it were, to reach it from where he stands. But while the earlier poem places this goal virtually beyond the poet's reach, this later poem culminates in its emphatic affirmation.

One might be tempted to conclude that the difference in tone and 'message' of the two poems may be a reflection of a development undergone by Benn during the decade that lies between them, a development from a predominantly negative stance to a more positive *evaluation* of the given possibilities. However, a word of caution seems in order. The two poems do not look at the same thing. 'Der Sanger' of 1925 takes us into the poet's study and gives us some insight into what is involved in the creative effort. The lesson we learn there is that writing poetry is demanding to the utmost, and probably rarely accomplished to the poet's own satisfaction. The central concern of 'Wer allein ist -' of 1936 is not to take us into the poet's 'secret', but to draw a dividing line between him and other humans. He 'is in the secret', he is

conversant with meaning because he has a goal; none of this is true of the others. This positive definition of the poet does not, however, confute what we have learned about the hardships of the creative process. Having a goal is one thing, reaching it, another.

The final stanza of the poem 'Leben - niederer Wahn', first published in the same collection of 1936, tells us much the same:

Form nur ist Glaube und Tat,
die erst von Händen berührten,
doch dann den Händen entführten
Statuen bergen die Saat.
(1,134: st.4, 11.13-16)

These lines emphasize the singular significance of 'Form'. It is understood both as a guiding ideal ('Glaube') and active formation ('Tat'). The statue-metaphor seems particularly apt to convey the idea of static form achieved after a long fashioning process.

The poem 'Das Ganze', on the other hand, also published in 1936, lacks such implicit affirmation. Its concluding surrealist image seems to suggest that it is quite impossible for the poet to reach his goal:

da war es kaum ein Glanz und kaum ein Feuer,
in dem dein Blick, der letzte, sich verfieng:
Ein nacktes Haupt, in Blut, ein Ungeheuer,
an dessen Wimper ein Träne hing.
(1,179: st.5, 11.17-20)

This image, reminiscent, as Wodtke points out, of the Medusa or the Sphinx,¹³ seems to be a projection of

the poet's own sense of sacrifice, if not self-pity, in the face of his distant objective.

In 1951, Benn's view of the matter appears to have remained basically unchanged. I have already indicated that the idea expressed by the image of perfection looking at the poet reappears in the form of the somewhat provocative asseveration that 'the poem ^{is} complete before it has begun (p.164). It is probably a function of the different medium in which these thoughts are presented that at Marburg Benn's exposition possesses a higher degree of specificity, emphasizing the extended duration of the formative effort that may span, if necessary, several decades (4,1070 and 1080), and conceding also the possibility of six to eight 'perfect poems'(1069).

2. 'Rausch'- The Great Tempter

The poems written in the earlier part of the creative decade considered in this chapter reflect Benn's preoccupation with the conditions of creativity ('Der Sänger' and also 'Staatsbibliothek'), his later poems his preoccupation with the work of art ('Wer allein ist -'; 'Leben - niederer Wahn'). I suggested earlier that the attendant shift from

'Rausch' to 'Form' does not indicate a change of theory as much as a change of focus. My discussions so far have shown that the irrational elements featuring in Benn's earlier thoughts on poetry never lacked the counter-weight of thoughts on creative rationality. I now wish to show that, by the same token, the predominance in his later poems of considerations of form was attended by an undercurrent of subtle to overt attraction to the irrational, suggesting that if Benn withdrew the latter from the limelight, he did so with all the melancholy and longing occasioned by a continued but unfulfilled love.

i. 'Leben - niederer Wahn'

The second stanza of this poem seems to revoke specifically what in 'Der Sänger' was declared to be the prerequisite condition for the creative effort:

was erwartest du hier?
immer noch eine Berausung,
eine Stundenvertauschung
von Welt und dir?
(1,134: st.2, 11.5-8)

Much of the pain experienced by 'the singer' accrued from the fact that he strove to bring about 'die große Stunde' and its 'Vergessen von ich und du' - synonymous with 'Stundenvertauschung / von Welt und dir' - which, regardless of its virtual inaccessibility, he

believed to be the necessary first step towards poetic formation and form. Here, the futility of this endeavour is clearly implied in the question 'do you still expect...?' These lines, while not denying the possible creative fruitfulness of 'Berauschung', express acceptance of defeat. The 'Stundenvertauschung', like any other 'belief', has been found to be an elusive guide:

ward dir nicht alles bereitet,
Glauben und wie es entgleitet
und die Zerstörung dann?
(st.3, 11.10-12)

It is against this background of resignation that 'Form' is apprehended, in the last stanza, as a positive counter-value embracing both 'Glaube' and 'Tat', belief and action towards its realization. We are here reminded of Rönne at the end of 'Die Insel' resigning himself to the fact that creativeness has to operate within the framework of rationality. Significantly, this resignation, like Rönne's, is rendered productive through Benn's characteristic ability to wrest from a negative insight a positive working theory.

ii. 'Einsamer nie-'

These three stanzas present the familiar contrast between the realms of nature and spirit/intellect, and describe the poet as a 'representative' and a 'servant' of the latter:

Einsamer nie als im August:
Erfüllungsstunde - im Gelände
die roten und die goldenen Brände
doch wo ist deiner Gärten Lust?

Die Seen hell, der Himmel weich,
die Äcker rein und glänzen leise,
doch wo sind Sieg und Siegsbeweise
aus dem von dir vertretenen Reich?

Wo alles sich durch Glück beweist
und tauscht den Blick und tauscht die Ringe
im Weingeruch, im Rausch der Dinge -
dienst du dem Gegenglück, dem Geist.

(1,140)

The juxtaposition of natural 'happiness' and spiritual/intellectual 'counter-happiness' holds up the latter against the former and brings into focus the superiority of the spiritual realm. But there are undertones we cannot miss. Of the twelve lines that constitute the poem, eight are devoted to depicting, in rich and delectable colours, the happy abandon enjoyed by all of nature's creatures. Compared to this, the four lines referring to the poet's lot sound suspiciously laconic. In addition, the contrastive 'doch', occurring in both the first and the second

stanzas, has a negative ring which suggests that 'the pleasures' of the poet's 'gardens' and 'the victory and tokens of victory' attainable in this 'realm' are nowhere to be found. The questions introduced by this 'doch' remain unanswered. The concluding line of the poem may have the appearance of an answer, as it names the counter-value 'Geist' whose significance is underscored by means of antithetic formulation ('Glück' - 'Gegenglück') and emphatic end-position; but this last line is in fact permeated by a deep sense of sadness indicated chiefly by the verb 'serve' and the contrast it throws into relief: while 'nature' celebrates its 'hour of fulfilment' in happy exuberance, the poet is bound to dutiful service - without the certainty of his hour of fulfilment, as the two preceding stanzas have suggested. The poet's particular distinction, no matter how eagerly he embraces it, is here felt to be a hindrance thwarting his own natural desire to join in where happiness reigns. Hence his pronounced awareness of his solitude in the month of plenty, and the ironical undercurrent beneath his 'counter-happiness'.

This poem recalls Hölderlin's 'Mein Eigentum' whose speaker, comparing his lot to that of happier mortals, turns to poetry for 'friendly asylum':

Und daß doch mir zu retten mein sterblich Herz,
Wie andern, eine bleibende Stätte sei,
(...)

Sei du, Gesang! mein freundlich Asyl!...
(st.10,11.37-38; st.11,1.39)¹⁴

F.W.Wodtke maintains that 'Einsamer nie -' affirms, without any trace of irony or longing for the lost oneness with nature, the poet's absolute solitude.¹⁵ There can be no doubt about Benn's decisive affirmation of the poet's severance from natural simplicity, but to deny the presence in this poem of a subtle undercurrent pulling the speaker in the direction of this realm is to miss the finer threads in the poem's design. Wodtke seems to overlook the emotive quality of the questions concluding two of the three stanzas. It produces anything but the clear-cut statement he reads in these lines. It would seem that he has allowed his judgement of this poem to be swayed by his knowledge of Benn's critical utterances. But these, too, are less unequivocal than Wodtke would have us believe. When Benn maintains 'Du stehst für Reiche, nicht zu deuten und in denen es keine Siege gibt' ('Weinhaus Wolf': 5,1312), he may indeed indicate 'that he does not need any Sieg or Siegsbeweise':¹⁶ but he does not exclude the possibility suggested by the poem 'Einsamer nie -' that the poet is not altogether immune to, that he is indeed

very conscious of, their attraction.

The profound ambivalence the advocate of 'Form' had to grapple with is possibly best demonstrated by a poem like 'Träume, Träume -' (1934) whose monotonous Benn-tune suggests both indulgence and self-parody.

Here are three of its eight stanzas:

Träume, Träume - Flackerndes und Flammen,
Bildung, ewig dem Vergängnis nah,
Räume, Räume - Suchen und Verdammen
Schatten, Schreie der Apostata.

Stunden, Stunden - die Gebilde weichen,
letzte Lösungen der Ursubstanz,
Übergänge, Wendekreise, Gleichen,
stygisches Gemurmel, Aschenglanz.

Räume, Räume, Räume, die verdammen,
Stunden, Stunden, da das Letzte weicht,
Träume, Träume rufen sie zusammen,
bis das Nichts auch diese Bilder bleicht.
(1,172-73: stanzas 1,2,8)

However ambivalent Benn's experience of creativity may have been, his goal, declared and striven for, was a marriage of the two creative principles. Such union is developed, both in theme and form, by the cycle of four poems I shall discuss next.

3. Creative Synthesis:

'Am Brückenwehr'

While the individual poems are monologues, the cycle as a whole is presented in a form resembling that of a dialogue. In the first and the third poems, the poet speaks as the disillusioned 'I' that yet looks backward with longing; in the second and fourth poems, he addresses himself as 'you', affirming his present situation and pointing to what will be his task from now on. 'Am Brückenwehr', it would seem, is an internalized later version (1934) of Benn's early 'Gespräch' (1910), the 'dialogue' between the poet's two 'voices', like that between Thom and Gert, making for both immediacy and objectivity of presentation. The fact that all four poems are enclosed in quotation marks, which in the first edition were even differentiated into single inverted commas for the 'I'-poems, and double inverted commas for the 'you'-poems, indicates deliberate utilization of the expressive qualities inherent in the dialogue form.¹⁷

I

The speaking 'I' is leaning against the parapet of a bridge looking down into the gushing water, and

around into the scenery of late summer (1,159: stanzas 2-4). We recognize the poet observing 'ohne Rührung' the flux of life in its two dimensions: space (the water moving along the surface over the depth of the 'Schichtenbau' of Goethe's 'Urgestein', 11.10 and 12), and time (the 'agony of summer', 1.13, bringing with it both death and fruition: Goethe's 'Stirb und werde'). The 'I' states that he has embraced all this in thought (11.1 and 21), the adverb 'weit' implying the spatial as well as the temporal dimension. The poet, as we know, is an intellectual observer of the world. His previous attempts to explain it have led him to ultimate doubt of its meaning (st.5). He is therefore now ready to give up his interpretive efforts and any previously formulated explanations (st.1). He has apparently found a 'new force' or 'power' in whose favour he is willing to abandon his intellectual heritage (11.3-4). But the poem terminates in a direct question giving voice to some uncertainty as to the nature or significance of this 'Macht'.

II

The 'answering' voice now affirms emphatically the poet's intellectualism: as a poet he is a 'thinker'

who cannot give up his intellectual stance, neither in deference to an outside authority (p.161: 1.1) nor in abandonment to irrationalism (1.2). The active self-reliance demanded of him finds expression in the Rilkean image identifying him with both 'Trank' and 'Trinken'(1.3). The final stanza resumes this affirmation of his intellectualism, adding the idea of the poet's solitude (1.21), of his unrelenting openness to the world (1.22), of his refusal to be eclipsed or silenced by external conditions(11.23-24)¹⁸

The enclosed four stanzas form two pairs in which the poet is defined against other human beings: those who were, in the mythical past, absorbed in an unthinking, hence idyllic existence (11.5-6; 9-10); and those who have, in the course of the Western tradition of thought, followed the illusory light of some explanation of life, be it in terms of meaningful progression (11.13-14) or irrational regression (11.15-16). In both pairs the poet-thinker is said to produce 'Form'.

His first designation, 'Formenpräger'(1.11), is a neologism, as Wodtke explains,¹⁹ but one with a specific literary background. The combination of the noun 'Form' and the verb 'prägen' recalls Goethe's 'Urwort' on 'geprägte Form, die lebend sich entwickelt'.

Goethe's words relate to human form, Benn's to poetic form; but we observe time and again that when Benn alludes to, or quotes from, literary sources he is concerned entirely with his own work and interested in a particular source only in so far as it yields associations with which he may charge his own context.²⁰ The effectiveness of these allusions and quotations does nevertheless depend on the reader's knowledge of the original context from which they are taken or to which they refer. Here are Goethe's words:

Daimon

Wie an dem Tag, der dich der Welt verliehen,
Die Sonne stand zum Gruße der Planeten,
Bist alsobald und fort und fort gediehen
Nach dem Gesetz, wonach du angetreten.
So mußt du sein, dir kannst du nicht entfliehen,
So sagten schon Sibyllen und Propheten;
Und keine Zeit und keine Macht zerstückelt
Geprägte Form, die lebend sich entwickelt. (21)

Calling the poet a 'Formenpräger', Benn wishes to use the idea of the ultimate creative force whose agency is implied in Goethe's participial attribute 'geprägt'. It serves him to point to the poet's creator-role with its claim to metaphysical significance.

The name 'Formenpräger' also utilizes Goethe's explicit assertion that no temporal force is capable of disrupting the process by which 'geprägte Form'

develops into what it was designed to be from the very beginning. The resemblance of Goethe's 'Entelechie' and Benn's constant and single-minded process of 'Gestaltung' in the direction of 'formstill [e] Vollendung' is evident. It rests on the ambiguity of the noun 'Präger' which combines the meaning of 'originator' with that of 'moulder'. The poet conceives an idea of perfected form and fashions his material until he has realized it. We recall Benn's claim that the poem is complete before it has begun (PdL: 4,1070). The derived neologism 'Formenpräger', then, by utilizing various implications inherent in its literary source, conveys to the informed reader fundamental aspects of Benn's understanding of both the poet and the creative process.

The poet-thinker is not, however, simply called a 'Formenpräger'; he is 'der Formenpräger / der weiben Spur'(11.11-12). The genitive complement, together with the negative foil of the primal hunter (11.9-10), introduces into this poem Benn's idea of 'Form' constituting 'die Fuge des zweiten Zeitalters'(RG: 4,1039), the idea of today's 'Formgesetz' and 'Ananke des Ausdrucksschaffens'(PdL: 4,1089) - the allusion to Goethe indicating the tradition that lies behind.

Whereas the name 'Formenpräger' relates the modern poet to tradition, the ensuing 'Formalist'(1.20) relates him to the contemporary scene. It seems that Benn uses this label to emphasize the poet's otherness and the novel nature of the formative task. Syntax, rhyme and metre join to hammer home this point: at this historical juncture, the poet, owing to his knowledge of the transience of any kind of 'Werden'(1.17), is compelled to remain outside its sweep and devote himself to that which lasts: form. The genitive complement 'der Himmel und der Erden'(1.19) reminds us of the young Hebbel's 'selbsterschaffene[n] / Götterhimmel[n] und Menschenerden' and points to the all-embracing significance of the 'formalist's' activity.

It also indicates that what the soliloquizing poet has in mind is something quite different from 'empty' formalism. This point is of some importance as the provocative term 'Formalist' is all too apt to suggest that Benn here advocates the kind of formalism which only a few months earlier he seemed so anxious to rule out (RG: 4,1039). What appears to have taken place between April and October 1934 is not a change, but a strengthening of heart: no more apologetic defence of what has been recognized as the order of the day, but its positive affirmation, the loaded word 'Formalist'

meeting Benn's native inclination for hyperbole and shock-technique.

III

The third poem responds to the preceding avowal of the poet's intellectual 'formalism' with beautiful and moving lines giving voice to his desire to return to the lost realm of irrational creativity - a desire, as we have seen, which Benn to that day had been unable to conquer.

The dialectic structure of the entire cycle begins to reveal itself. The initial outline of the modern poet's point of departure (I) is followed by the thesis that his creative task is to embrace intellect as its driving force and form as its goal (II). This poem now offers the antithesis by invoking the once potent magic of the irrational to oppose what is abhorred as an empty shell.

The ideas presented here are familiar enough and require no further explanation. The 'I' invokes those 'hours' in which all divisions, qualitative, temporal and spatial, vanish (p.162: stanzas 1 and 2) and give way to a 'song' that forms itself, untouched by the divisive forces just mentioned, in the depth of being

(st.3). The elemental, undivided, all-inclusive nature of this 'Gestalten' is indicated by the apposition 'asiatisch tief' - Asia holding for Benn, and many of his contemporaries, the promise of the longed-for 'innere Welt, (...) die einen Zusammenhang noch kennt, einen der sich in steter Erneuerung um einen geistigen Wesenskern bildet' (PL, 1943: 3, 898). The magic power of those hours is such as to turn the bridge, 'the place of existential realization',²² from a place of detached contemplation to one of spontaneous creativity (st.4).²³ In the wake of this imagined creative self-realization - an experience not unlike that undergone by Rönne on viewing the poppy field - the 'I' launches his final plea to be allowed, once again, to indulge his irrational craving (st.5) and be freed from what the historical hour has imposed on him, what to him is accursed superficiality barring him from the depth and riches of creation (st.6).

The concluding contrast between 'Hölle'-'Hülle'-'Form' and 'Tiefe'-'Fülle'-'Schöpfung' involves an extreme articulation by the searching 'I' of the idea of formalism. The answering voice of the fourth and final poem will restore the balance and offer a synthesizing concept of 'Form' that we may safely assume

to be Benn's own.

IV

'Depth', 'fullness' and 'creation' are sharply contrasted by the image of eagles soaring high up above the mountains (p.163: st.1). Benn uses this Nietzschean symbol of the human spirit to convey his idea of 'Geist' - as opposed to the previously decried 'Formungstrieb'(III,1.22; my emphasis) - being the motive power of modern creativity (cf.RG: 4,1039). It is in its opposition to the sphere of productive 'life' that this 'Geist' is real, silent and barren (11.3-4)

The second stanza continues this opposition. The image of the fading fruit points to the transience of life's plenitude. It throws into relief the scarcity of those who are in touch with the immutable realm of the 'creator' or 'das Blaue'(1.9). Any participation in the sphere of 'life', even in the form of opposition -the 'Stimmen' not to be thought of any more (1.10) seem to refer to the 'Stimme' of the third poem calling out 'gegen Geschichtsgewalten' (11.9-10) - indicates an inability to sustain the heights of the creative realm, resulting in the kind

of yearning to which, by the testimony of the preceding poem, the 'I' has fallen victim (II.11-12).

The contrastive self-address 'Du aber...' (I.13) now emphasizes the poet's transcendental orientation. He looks neither down nor back, but up to the realm of the creative intellect, serving its 'Gestalten' (II.13-14). This plural noun is a more concrete description of what we already know as 'formstill[e] Vollendung'. Whereas the backward-looking 'I' of the third poem envisages a 'deep' process of 'Gestalten' in which apparently he has no active part (III, II.11-12), the forward-looking 'I' of the fourth poem embraces an active service to the 'Gestalten' above (st.4). Through his service to these transcendent forms the poet of today will find fulfilment (II.17-18).

Once again, in order to make an important point, Benn has recourse to provocative expression. However rightly one may take exception to his use, in 1934, of the word 'Rasse', it lends relief to two ideas crucial to his proposition. 'Rasse' refers to the 'white' race (cf. 'weiße Spur': II, I.12), upholder of the Western tradition of thought. Added to this is the suggestion of a 'race' of poets, distinguishing itself from all non-poets, with all the implications of excellence and superiority contained in this word.

Thus the diachronic and the synchronic perspectives, which were previously distributed on the nouns 'Formenpräger' and 'Formalist', are here united to add weight to Benn's message: at this point in the development of Western thought the poet, if he is to deserve this name, dedicates himself to the task of fashioning form, of merging 'Hülle' and 'Tiefe', occidental form and oriental depth (st.5). As Professor Wodtke explains, the noun 'Reigen' is a symbol of completion derived from a dictum by a Persian mystic, and also used by Hofmannsthal.²⁴ In Benn's context it indicates that completion or formal perfection emerges from a synthesis of the two contending forces: together they form a 'Reigen', the image of the eagles passing through it pointing to the creative intellect that has come down, as it were, from its barren heights (st.1) to be at the centre of the formative process.

The dynamic quality of the concept of form here presented seems significant. A 'Reigen' is a ring dance, an arrangement of defined movements that may, independently of its creator, be re-enacted any number of times. The word 'Reigen', therefore, seems to point to the re-creative aspect of poetic form which, as I maintained earlier (see chapter one, pp.76-78)

seems so important for an adequate understanding of Benn's aesthetic of reception. His allusion to this aspect is here reinforced by the asseveration 'und keiner kann entfliehn'(1.22). Whereas the poet pursues his task in solitude, confronted by the world (II, ll. 21-22), the perfect form he releases confronts and involves the human world (IV, ll.21-22). The private act of poetic formation culminates in a perfect poem to be re-created by the public.

It need hardly be stressed that 'Form' as the final stanza presents it is the 'new force' referred to in the first stanza of the cycle. The poems 'Am Brückenwehr' indicate that Benn in 1934 embraces 'Form' consciously as a new ideal. He seems to have reached a decisive mile-stone in the development of his poetological thought.²⁵ Let there be no mistake: striving to create 'Form', he does not aim at 'Stoffvernichtung', but at a perfect union of substance and shape, content and form. Benn goes to great lengths to make this understood. The dialectic progression of thought from one poem to another and its circular completion are meticulously elaborated to develop before our eyes the synthesis he has in mind. Furthermore, the metrical form of the whole cycle, as determined by rhythm and rhyme, is in perfect agreement with

its thematic structure.

The progression of thought from one poem to the next is reflected by their changing patterns of rhythm and rhyme. The six quatrains of the poems I and II possess an evenly flowing iambic rhythm, three three-stress lines being followed by a two-stress line that brings to a pointed conclusion every individual stanza. The rhythmic and syntactic completeness of these stanzas, reflecting in every instance a completion of thought, is counterbalanced by a regular pattern of rhyme running through the whole poem and integrating each stanza into its even structure. The two poems differ in the extent to which this equalizing power of rhyme is allowed to take effect. The controlling agent is the type of rhyme chosen, supported in both poems by a corresponding sequence of masculine and feminine cadences. The stanzas of the first poem retain much of their individual strength thanks to their enclosing rhyme (abba) which adds relief to their pointed rhythmic and syntactic structure. The stanzas of the second poem are immersed more deeply in the flow of the whole by virtue of their alternating rhyme (abab) which tends to join and equalize the consecutive rhythmic and syntactic units.

Whereas the formal structure of the first poem

causes it to come across as a pointed succession of thoughts suggesting a good measure of rational distance, that of the second favours the impression of their cohesion and flow, pointing to a deepened involvement on the part of the speaking 'I'. The form of these two poems is thus seen to accord with their 'content', reflecting and underscoring the speaker's departure from an initial stance of detached observation and subsequent entrance into, and involvement in, the argument of the cycle.

It is a measure of the perfection of this agreement of form and content that where the metrical pattern just described is broken it is done in the service of the particular content. This may be observed in the fifth stanzas of both poems. In poem I, the first three lines of this stanza interrupt the regular iambic flow through the stress on their first syllable which introduces the somewhat heavier rhythmic quality of trochees and/or dactyls:

Wéssen ist das und wer?
Déssen, der alles machte,
déssen, der es dann dachte
vóm Énde her?

This sudden change of rhythm serves to convey the intensity of the questions here asked, and to set it off against the relative calm of the preceding observ-

ations. Similarly, the final two-stress line of the fifth stanza in poem II, also lacking the gentle introduction by an unstressed syllable, hammers in the provocative assertion here made:

(...)
dů bléibst gěbánnt ũnd bíst
děr Hímměl únd děr Érděn
Fórmálist.

After such a sensitive synchronization of form and content it is only to be expected that the third poem, formulating the antithesis to the thesis offered by the second poem, should possess a different metrical structure. It combines and varies the ordering principles of poems I and II in a way that heightens the inner movement conveyed by this poem. Its first three stanzas repeat the pointed metrical form of the first poem but are linked together by the flow of syntax that ignores the boundaries of the stanza-form and becomes increasingly loose and open-ended. Metre and syntax appear to be pulling in opposite directions: the former towards the pole of rational control, the latter towards that of emotional fusion. The change of rhythm in the third stanza indicates that the pull of the irrational becomes the dominant force. The two inner lines of this stanza depart from the regular iambic rhythm so far adhered to in the manner observed

before:

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

The following three stanzas are dominated almost entirely by dactyls, interspersed with trochees, whose initial stress, especially when placed at the beginning of a line (in eight out of the twelve lines), is apt to enhance the impression of weight and intensity. In addition, stanzas 4 and 5 give up the pattern of pointed conclusion and realize three stresses in all four lines. The regular alternation of cadence and rhyme joins in, together with the syntactical cohesion of these stanzas, to advance the flux of emotion. At the point where it reaches its peak, the climactic two-stress line is resumed:

"(...)
gib mir die Tiefe, die Fülle,
die Schöpfung - gib!"

But rather than rounding off, as before, a dispassionately presented thought, it sounds like an impassioned cry issuing forth from the depth of the speaker's soul.

The metrical pattern introduced in the latter half of the third poem continues, in a purified form - not a single iambic, let alone two-stress line - well

into the fourth poem (stanzas 1-4) where it lends an air of solemn intensity to the culminating thoughts on the realm of the creative intellect and the poet's service to it. The renewed coincidence of the syntactical and stanzaic units points to an appreciable measure of newly gained rational distance. The didactic tone adopted in the final two stanzas for an effective articulation of the synthetizing conclusion to the argument of the entire cycle is aided by one last change of rhythm. The second and fourth lines of stanza 5 resume the iambic metre whose unstressed beginning throws into sharper relief the crucial idea of 'formen' already emphasized through position, stress and repetition:

fórmén, das ist deine Fülle,
dĕr Rássĕ áufĕrlĕgt,
fórmén, bis die Hülle
díe gánzĕ Tíĕfĕ trágt.

Stanza 6 consists entirely of iambic lines. With all three stresses realized in all four lines, it is metrically the most regular stanza of the entire cycle. Forming the climax of a succession of formal variations that reflects and reinforces the inner movement pervading and uniting these four poems, the final stanza indicates that this movement has here come to a rest. Its metrical ease and evenness accord with what it

holds up as the poet's ultimate goal: the resolution of the tension between rational form and pre-rational substance in their harmonious ensemble.

In conclusion to this brief survey of Benn's poetological utterances during what might be considered his middle period, it seems fair to suggest that by 1936 his ars poetica as we know it from Probleme der Lyrik was fully formed. All four themes - the poem, the creative process, the word, the poet - received detailed exposition during these years, agreeing in principle and much of its detail with that offered by Benn in 1951. It seems significant that his oblique but nonetheless illuminating utterances on montage were made as early as 1925 ('Der Sänger') and 1927 ('Lyrisches Ich'), and that his later pre-occupation with 'Form' ('Rede auf Stefan George'; 'Am Brückenwehr', both of 1934) cancels out the relevance of irrational energies and of reality as little as it disposes of meaning and the intention to reach an audience.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONSOLIDATION

The conclusion of my preceding chapter is borne out by poetological utterances found in Benn's works from 1937 up to his public appearance at Marburg. His essays, his imaginative prose, his lyric poetry - all convey the same message: creativity today involves both 'ecstasy' and 'form', 'hallucination' and construction. These works corroborate, with the intensity accruing from constant repetition, my contention that Benn's advocacy in the 1930s of consciously elaborated form does not entail a negation of the creative relevance of the irrational which had preoccupied him before, and that his deliberations in the 1940s on the element of 'Rausch', far from signalling a return to a temporarily rejected stance, do nothing to affect the by then fully formed cast of his poetological theory.

We shall first look at three short pieces, all composed in the early 'forties and included by Benn in his volume Ausdruckswelt which he published in 1949 with a declared didactic intent:

Gedankengänge aus den Jahren 1940 bis 1945 - (...) Ihr Wert könnte darin bestehen, die durch Nationalsozialismus und Krieg mißbildete Jugend an Probleme heranzuführen, die einmal Europa erfüllten und die meiner Generation geläufig waren, also ihr Wert könnte darin bestehen, dieser Jugend eine Art Anschlußhilfe zu bieten. (7,1857)

Benn publishes these 'thoughts' to help the disoriented younger generation resume the strands of a suppressed tradition. The driving force behind this mediating endeavour is his unbroken belief in the validity of the thoughts here presented.

The works I have selected for closer scrutiny are 'Provoziertes Leben' (1943: 3,894-905), 'Kunst und Drittes Reich' (1941: 3,861-84) and two 'Marginalien' (1940-45?¹: 3,951-63). Together they convey the burden of Benn's 'Ausdruckswelt': 'Provoziertes Leben' deals with the 'metaphysical background' (3,900) of human life and 'das uralte Menschheitsverlangen nach Überwindung unerträglich gewordener Spannungen' (901-02) to which it gives rise; 'Kunst und Drittes Reich' expands on Benn's notion of 'Artistik' as the kind of cathartic activity available to the modern poet;

'Marginalien' contain most helpful observations on the practical side of 'Artistik'.

I. 'Provoziertes Leben':
'Grundsätzliches'

The fact that Benn included these provocative pronouncements in his Ausdruckswelt only two years before the composition of Probleme der Lyrik is a measure of their significance. Professor Wodtke's rather vague comment that 'Provoziertes Leben' constitutes 'eine Wiederaufnahme der früher so wichtigen "hyperämischen Metaphysik" des Dichterischen'² tends to encourage the widely held misconception of the fickleness of Benn's habit of mind. My preceding discussions have shown that from the very beginning, the idea of creative irrationality, of 'Hyperämie' and 'Rausch', has been linked antithetically to that of constructive rationality variously labelled as 'Handwerk' ('Gespräch') or 'sachliche Verarbeitung' ('Die Insel'), and that by the same token, none of Benn's expositions of the latter ignores the part played by the former: his Academy-address offers the concise formula 'eines...halluzinatorisch-konstruktivi-

ven Stils'(4,1002); his George-address this vivid description of the creative intellect: 'ein Geist, der der Natur (...) überall ins Auge sieht, (...) vielleicht auch einen Augenblick von ihr träumt, aber doch für den Menschen auf Ordnung sieht'(4,1039-40); and to these we must add the 'Brückenwehr'-cycle whose dialectical structure constitutes the most incisive elaboration of this point. The last-mentioned three works indicate also that the idea of 'Metaphysik' was never absent from Benn's various presentations.

What exactly does this essay deal with? Benn himself provides the answer: the 'metaphysical background' of 'reality'(3,900; parts I and II: 894-900) and 'Steigerungsphänomene[n] und Ausdruckswerte[n]' (900) that may yield access to it and promote its realization (part III: 900-905). In contrast to Probleme der Lyrik, this essay addresses itself to 'Grundsätzliches' rather than 'Handgreifliches'. In Benn's native provocativeness, which is no doubt fuelled by the events of the immediate past, it dwells on what he considers to be a desideratum for the common run of civilized mankind, but the poet's unquestioned possession. This contrast is not explicitly stated, but I would suggest that it underlies the

argument of this essay, throwing light, if obliquely, on the poet's otherness.

When Benn suggests that it might be possible

durch den Ausbau visionärer Zustände,
etwa durch Meskalin oder Haschisch, der
Rasse einen Zustrom von Erkenntnissen
und von Geist zu vermitteln, der eine
neue schöpferische Periode aus sich ent-
binden könnte (901),

he does not say that measures such as these are a requirement for the poet or occupy a place in his poetic.³ His own abstention from drugs is significant. These easily misunderstood observations are not made in a narrowly poetological context but in one concerned more widely with the basis and essence of human life:

Es handelt sich um das mythische
Kollektiv als Lebensgrund, als un-
reflektiertes Existenzgefühl, seine
in uns noch verbliebenen Reste und
die sie realisierenden Prozesse. (900)

Non-Western peoples, particularly in Asia, enjoyed the secure possession of an 'inner world':

eine noch jedem zugängliche innere Welt,
heiter, sanft und reigenverschlungen,
die einen inneren Zusammenhang noch
kennt,... (898; my emphasis)

It was a deeper dimension that could be realized through ritual and dance, or indeed the use of drugs (894). Western society has lost this possession as a result of 'die schizoide Katastrophe' that has

brought about 'die Trennung von Ich und Welt'(899).

What, in my view, Benn suggests is that drugs and hypnosis, alongside their application by conventional medicine, could be tried out for the purpose of 'die Freisetzung unbewußter, das heißt eindrucklos gewordener Organfunktionen'(901) to produce 'überraschende Erlebnisresultate' and the possibility of a 'new creative period'(901). Rather than maintaining that drugs will help the poet gain access to the 'Lebensgrund' which his poetry is to give voice to, Benn, I suggest, points to a way in which might be increased the number of those capable of this experience. Consider the title: from first to last Benn insists that the poet keeps his distance from 'Leben'; whose 'life', then, is to be 'provoked'?

The experience such 'provocation' is to make accessible forms part of the poet's natural equipment:

...gewisse Gehirne realisieren in gewissen Zeitabständen ihre Träume, die Bilder des großen Urtraums sind, in rückerinnerndem Wissen. Diese Realisation vollzieht sich in "Stein, Vers, Flötenlied", dann entsteht Kunst; (905)

These 'certain brains', whose 'archaic mechanisms'(901) have remained intact and therefore capable of realizing, at certain intervals, the 'great primal dream', bear a striking resemblance to those few among us

who 'live in the absolute' (PdL: 4,1084) and are able, at 'their hour' (4,1076), to cast it into the 'transcendent reality of the stanza' (4,1077). There is nothing to suggest that these 'brains' need, or would benefit from, the mediation of drugs. We note the absence in this context of the words 'hyperemia' and 'hyperemic' which in Benn's use point consistently to the irrational energies involved in the creative process. Their participation receives no more than passing reference in the elliptical tail-sentence 'manchmal nur in Gedanken und Ekstasen' (905). We note also that in addition to the close link being indicated by this brief remark between 'thoughts and ecstasies', 'Zucht, enormes Tatsachenwissen' are also included in the very summary treatment this essay accords to Benn's idea of 'Kunst' (903). While this essay does not fail to point to the co-operation of reason and unreason, it is primarily concerned with the basic assumption underlying Benn's artistic creed - an assumption that unites the creative mind of today with his fellow men as much as it sets him apart.

II. 'Kunst und Drittes Reich':
'Artistik'

This essay is divided into three parts of which the second, 'Die Kunst in Europa'(3,867-77) is of particular relevance to this inquiry. Preceded by a sketch of the cultural scene of the late 19th century and some of its historical roots, it describes the processes of intellectual and artistic fermentation that got under way around the turn of the century and produced the 'new style'(3,872) that was to be stifled by the cultural agents of the Third Reich. Their barbarism is subjected, in the third part of the essay, to the most scathing of criticism.

Whether or not we agree with Benn's contention that the nihilism out of which this style was born has constituted, for centuries, the 'inner creative substance' of all great European artists (873; see chapter three, pp.141-143), it calls to our attention Benn's historical thinking and his concern for the continuity of tradition. It is because of the arbitrary disruption of such continuity that Benn in 1941 considers it worth his while to compose this analysis of the emergence and nature of 'Artistik', and publish it eight years later.

At this point it must be stated clearly that Benn had developed the concept of 'Artistik' fully and explicitly as early as 1931 in his 'Rede auf Heinrich Mann' (4,974-82). This fact has so far remained unmentioned because the works included in my discussion - I refer in particular to 'Akademie-Rede' and 'Rede auf Stefan George' - do not specifically mention 'Artistik', although, and here lies the reason for my choice, they expound in detail its main facets: the idea of nihilism, of absolute language and form, the idea of a new transcendence. However, all these essentials had been pondered and formulated by March 1931.

About the nexus between nihilism and creativity we read:

Die Allgemeinheit hatte den Zusammenhang noch nicht erföhlt zwischen dem europäischen Nihilismus und der dionysischen Gestaltung, der skeptischen Relativierung und dem artistischen Mysterium, zwischen dem Verklärten, Verschwärzten, Schwammigen des deutschen Geistes und dieser Oberflächlichkeit aus Tiefe, diesem Olymp des Scheins; (4,977)

Absolute language and form are celebrated in these words:

Liegt nicht in der Genauigkeit der Wortgefüge, der Seltenheit der Bestandteile, der Glätte der Oberfläche, der Übereinstimmung des Ganzen, liegt darin nicht eine innere Tugend, eine Art göttlicher

Kraft, etwas Ewiges wie ein Prinzip? (976)

...die artistische, die dionysische Kunst, die vielleicht auch sinnlos ist wie der Raum und die Zeit, und das Gedachte und das Ungedachte und doch allein von jenem Reflex der Immortalität, der (...) von einer Vase oder einem geretteten Vers aus der Form sich hebt, unantastbar und vollendet - (979)

The idea of transcendence attainable through 'Artistik' is taken over verbatim, as readily as two decades later (PdL:4,1064), from Benn's much admired mentor Nietzsche:

...das Artistenevangelium: "die Kunst als die eigentliche Aufgabe des Lebens, die Kunst als dessen metaphysische Tätigkeit", das finden wir in seiner Theorie - (976)

...die Kunst, (...)die letzte Transzendenz innerhalb des großen europäischen Nichts... (979)

And finally, this important affirmation of the reliance of 'Artistik' on the agency of both irrational and rational energies, the Dionysian and the Apolline:

Die neue Kunst, die Artistik, (...) erkämpft aus der Antithese aus Rausch und Zucht. (979-80)

Benn's presentation of 1941 seems particularly helpful because of the relatively high degree of explicitness that flows from its didactic impetus. The somewhat baffling contention regarding the 'creative substance' of all great Europeans, put forward to

back up the claim that nihilism is a creative force (3,873-74), has already been discussed (see pp.141-143). The causative link Benn sees between nihilism and form is here elucidated in its various facets and ramifications:

...hier wurde im Artistischen die Überführung der Dingen [sic] in eine neue Wirklichkeit versucht, in einen neuen echten Zusammenhang, in eine biologische Realität, erwiesen durch die Gesetze der Proportion, erlebbar als Ausdruck ansetzender geistiger Daseinsbewältigung, erregend in seiner schöpferischen Spannung zu einem aus innerem Schicksal sich ergebenden Stil. Kunst als Wirklichkeitserzeugung: Herstellungsprinzip. (874)

The 'inner fate' of nihilism leads to the production of 'style', or in the words of the Academy-address, nothingness demands form. In the place of the lost order of things the artist creates a new one, a 'new context' of formal relationships. Thus 'Artistik' is 'reality production', creation in the full sense of the word. As Benn will never tire of hammering in, it is not merely an aesthetic activity, but one with an existential dimension. It allows the human spirit and intellect to come to terms with human existence.

The newly engendered reality is 'genuine' because it possesses its own criteria of verification. It is not measured by its appropriateness to a particular

content to be conveyed, but by the appropriateness of its own inner proportions:

die Sucht zur Form, (...) bis die Gestalt zu den Proportionen durchgearbeitet ist, die ihr zukommen. (872)

In a letter to his daughter Nele (11 April 1946) Benn quotes himself to explain why he considers the new form-oriented order superior to any truth-oriented order:

"Stil ist der Wahrheit überlegen; er trägt in sich den Beweis seiner Existenz."
(G.B.) (4)

'Style' is superior to 'truth' because, unlike the latter, it does not depend for its verification on any external referent and thus remains unaffected by any relativizing perspectivism.

It follows from this view that the only authority accepted by the style-creating modern poet is his 'will to express', 'his craving for form' and 'bis zur Brutalität durchgeführte Wahrheitssicherung' (869) which stops at nothing, neither the prospect of hardship and suffering of whatever magnitude nor the destruction of 'Geliebtes, Bewährtes, Heiligtümer' (873).

Nothing less than self-denying disciplined hard work ('Arbeit, Objektivität, Zucht', 882) is involved in the production of 'Form' as Benn envisages it:

...völlig Durchgearbeitetes, Klargestelltes,

Hartgemachtes, hartgemacht durch Arbeit, äußerste Präzision in der Materialverwertung, Anordnung, strengste geistige Durchdringung. Es ist eine Wendung gegen Innenleben, guten Willen, pädagogische oder rassische Nebentendenzen zugunsten des Gestaltannehmenden und dadurch anderen Gestalt Aufzwingenden: zum Ausdruck. (872)

The 'turn against inner life' does not, however, indicate an abnegation of inwardness. What Benn opposes is the exaltation of 'Nebentendenzen', the dominance in art of 'das nur Gefühlte, das Dumpfe, das Romantische, das Amorphe'(872; my emphasis). In the abovementioned letter to Nele he explains:

Der i n n e r e Mensch - das ist die Voraussetzung für alles; aber der A u s d r u c k ist das Entscheidende. (...) in der Kunst gilt das Äußere! "Olymp des Scheins"(Nietzsche)! Artistik! Stil! Meine neue Formulierung: K u n s t ist der g e l u n g e n e A u s - g l e i c h z w i s c h e n Z e n - t r u m u. P e r i p h e r i e." Die Peripherie ist das objektiv Gewordene, das einzige, das geschichtlich wird und bleibt. Das Innere, die Substanz ist selbstverständlich u. immer da u. immer das gleiche. (5)

The 'substance' of man is a given fact, an immutable quantity. It is the 'centre' which, as Benn was to avow at Marburg, man has never lost (4,1086); it is 'in der Tiefe ruhelos das Andere'(4,1093), 'das mythische Kollektiv'(PL: 3,900) which urged on the young Hebbel as much as the 'I' of the 'Brückenwehr'-poems.

The 'harmonization' Benn mentions to his daughter is that between the immutable essence within and its historical manifestation without, between 'Ich und Wirklichkeit'(3,902), between 'Ich' and 'ich'(1,21), 'Tiefe' and 'Hülle'(1,163). This 'Ausgleich' was to be described in 1951 as the poet's work 'an der Umspannung zweier Pole, dem Ich und seinem Sprachbestand', resulting in 'einer Art Wunder, einer kleinen Strophe'(4,1082).

We have entered the territory of Benn's 'absolute language'. In the place of its anthropologically tinted explanation in the George-address (chapter three, pp.151-153) the essay discussed here offers this instructive musical metaphor, beginning with a quotation from Nietzsche:

"Du hättest singen sollen, oh, meine Seele"- nicht: glauben, züchten, geschichtlich-pädagogisch denken, nicht so positiv sein- (...) Singen - das heißt Sätze bilden, Ausdruck finden, Artist sein, (...) vor allen Abgründen nur die Wände auf ihr Echo prüfen, ihren Klang, ihren Laut, ihre koloraturistischen Effekte. (874)

The 'singing' referred to is evidently not that performed by the traditional 'Sänger' who received his farewell in the early poem bearing this title. The 'singer' is no longer a herald, but a pure musician who, far from striving to combine 'singen' with

'sagen', is concerned solely with the quality and effectiveness of his sound structure.

The musical analogy is highly relevant. Like music, poetry is composed, constructed rationally to produce effects directed at the rational and intuitive faculties of the listener. Like music, it is essentially abstract and indifferent to the transmission of a strictly defined meaning:

Die entscheidenden Dinge in die Sprache
des Unverständlichen erheben; sich hin-
geben an die Dinge, die es verdienen,
daß man niemanden von ihnen überzeugt.
(875-76)

There can be little doubt that these 'decisive things' are matters connected with the jealously defended 'substance' or 'centre' within; that the poet's 'devotion' to them is his 'life in the absolute' (PdL: 4,1084); that their 'elevation' into language constitutes the creative act.

Since they form part of a realm quite different from that organized by the tools of reason, the familiar rules of signification may not be capable of accommodating them in the established house of language. The language to do so, the 'absolute language', may therefore be structured quite differently, following its own set of rules made to suit its object. The latter being beyond justification, any attempt

to 'convince' and in that sense communicate would be meaningless. The only thing to do is to create 'style' with its musical, rational-cum-intuitive quality. We seem to have come close to the concept of montage: to its fusion of intellectual and emotive components as well as its 'monologic' intent which does not exclude meaningful communication.

It is important to understand that this 'style', or 'absolute language', need not be unintelligible. Benn's formulation reads 'Sprache des Unverständlichen', not 'unverständliche Sprache'. Nowhere does he say that it may not carry meaning; but whether or not, or to what extent, or with what explicitness, it does so is not his chief concern. The object is to use words, whose conceptual content is there to be reckoned with, and indeed to be exploited (cf. LI and PdL: chapter one, pp.58-60), to build an aesthetic structure expressive and evocative of something beyond semantics. Benn's 'Welle der Nacht' offers itself as a perfect example of artistic expressiveness which, while escaping clear-cut understanding, cannot be said to be incomprehensible or devoid of meaning.

III. 'Marginalien':

Montage

In some of these short pieces Benn describes, with his usual exuberance of metaphor, the practical method employed by the poet to fashion the kind of language we have just considered. Under the title 'Lyrik' we are admitted into the poet's 'Laboratorium für Worte':

Hier modelliert, fabriziert er Worte,
öffnet sie, sprengt, zertrümmert sie,
um sie mit Spannung zu laden,... (3,951)

...für den Lyriker wird alles, was geschieht, (...) Wort; Wortwurzel, Wortfolge, Verbindung von Worten; Silben werden psychoanalysiert, Diphthonge umgeschult, Konsonanten transplantiert. Für ihn ist das Wort real und magisch, ein moderner Totem. (952)

While these explanations do not include the word 'Montage', they present an anatomy of montage, laying bare its destructive and constructive mechanisms, and pointing to the intellectual as well as emotional 'Ausdrucks-' and 'Appellstruktur' of the words and combinations of words thus 'fabricated'. Recalling Thom's postulate that the poet be able to command 'eine ganze Heerschar von Worten' (7,1638), the young Benn's confession that he is engrossed by 'das Problem des südlichen Worts' (7,1644), his vibrant

effusion on the unique relationship enjoyed by the 'lyric I' with words (8,1878-79), and his sense of wonder at the 'schwer erklärbare Macht des Wortes, das löst und fügt'(8,1880 and 4,1077), recalling also the third theme of Probleme der Lyrik (4,1078) and Benn's condemnation of what he branded as 'rezidivierenden Dadaismus'(4,1063), we appreciate the extent of his faithfulness to his poetic of the word.

The word constitutes the principal unit of poetic form and derives its expressiveness from the inner tensions with which it is charged through the processes just described (cf. Eisenstein's 'intra-shot conflict': chapter one, pp.72-73) as well as from those tensions that obtain in the disparate configuration of which it forms part (Iser's 'neue Zusammensetzung der Bildteile': chapter one, p.69). In explanation of his idea of 'Montagekunst', Benn was to write in 1949:

Die Darstellung wird in Schwung gehalten durch formale Tricks, Wiederholungen von Worten und Motiven - (...) Jetzt werden Gedankengänge gruppiert, Geographie herangeholt, Träumereien eingesponnen und wieder fallengelassen. Nichts wird stofflich psychologisch mehr verflochten, alles angeschlagen, nichts durchgeführt. Alles bleibt offen. Antisynthetik. Verharren vor dem Unvereinbaren.

(...)

Nach meiner Theorie müssen Sie Verblüffendes machen, bei dem Sie am Schluß selber lachen. (...) Sie müssen alles selber wieder aufheben: dann schwebt es. (DL: 8,2029-30)

Looking at the two statements from 'Marginalien' and Doppelleben, we may sum up Benn's 'Montagekunst' as the art of manipulating words, phrases, ideas, images and associations culled from various sources to form an expressive structure designed, by virtue of its inner tensions, not to convey but to provoke thoughts and emotions - to 'fascinate' and thereby incite the reader to engage in a re-creative act.

In this attempt to give Benn a fair hearing we must not ignore the qualification he includes in his comment on 'Montagekunst':

Bedarf größten Geistes und größten Griffs, sonst Spielerei und kindisch. Bedarf größten tragischen Sinns, sonst nicht überzeugend. Aber wenn der Mann danach ist, kann der erste Vers aus dem Kursbuch sein und der zweite eine Gesangbuchstrophe und der dritte ein Mikoschwitz und das Ganze ist doch ein Gedicht. (DL: 8,2030)

Only he who combines a powerful intellect with a golden touch and a sense of the tragic can hope to make a success of montage.

While the tone of these words and the extremism of illustration may not go down well with every critic, Benn's comment on Julius Schmidhauser's inability to coin his own diction seems less open to censure:

Was bedeuten vom Produktiven aus

diese Verbindungen? Sie bedeuten eine konventionelle Sprache, eine Verwendung von grammatikalischen Fertigfabrikaten, auswärts erstandener Vorstellungspaarung, Aufbau mittels bewährten, gang und gäben, aus dem öffentlichen Verkehr übernommenen Materials.

(...)

...das ist nur lächerlich und planlos, Wortverknüpfung ohne Einsatz, Sprachfügung ohne existentielle Härte, Begriffsetzung ohne kategorialen Grund, außerhalb der Struktur von Anankasmen.
(7,1724-25)

Poetic montage, to be more than a mere combination of second-hand material, presupposes a profound originality that flows from an existential source. To make sure that this be the case the poet is advised to do this:

Rechne mit deinen Defekten, gehe von deinen Beständen aus, nicht von deinen Parolen. ('Der Ptolemäer': 5,1404)

The 'glass-blower''s know-thyself maxim seeks to exclude 'guten Willen' as the poet's motive (KDR: 3,872) and induce him to take - and, of course, employ - the full measure of his creative ability:

Arbeite, (...) suche deine Worte, zeichne deine Morphologie, drücke dich aus, über-
nimm ruhig die Aufgabe einer Teilfunktion,
aber die versorge ernstlich. (SDL: 4,1155)

The emphasis placed by Benn, and all students of montage, on the artificiality of the montage technique, on the wilful breaking and making of things, tends to overshadow the thought-provoking fact that Benn views

the process of artistic construction as essentially congruous with that of organic growth. We remember that in the poem 'Der Sänger', where the idea of montage is first touched upon, the Goethean 'Gestaltung' suggests much the same. The 'Marginalie' 'Kunst und Natur' explains:

Für das organische Wachstum gibt es einen Formbildungsbefehl: erst einen technischen Mittelpunkt bilden, dann Zuordnung der einzelnen Zellen zu ihm, davon hängt ihr weiteres Schicksal ab, Größe, Inhalt, Ziel. Ihre ursprüngliche Lage und Herkunft wird durch dieses Prinzip nahezu aufgehoben, nun bestimmt die Anordnung, die Platzzuweisung zum Mittelpunkt ihre endgültige Bedeutung.

(...)

Von diesem Prinzip erhält die Kunst ihr Leben mit. Der Plan des Ganzen bildet Einzelheiten um, Einzelheiten werden Träger einer anderen Art. Oberstes Gesetz wird die Anordnung, das Inhaltliche der Fakten bleibt am Rande. (...) Das Verfahren: Teilzentren bilden, gruppieren und wiederauflösen, wenn das Innere sich erweitern will, vorübergehende Anlagen machen als Umweg zur Gestalt. (3,956)

How does this interesting analogy tally with Benn's declared anti-nature stance? To answer this question we must first remember that what Benn rejects is not nature itself as much as the enslavement of art to it; that he advocates a reversal of their traditional relationship: what with the now patent nothingness behind nature's every phenomenon (AR:4,1001), art is no longer to 'imitate' nature, but nature -

like history, the other principal constituent of the 'reality' to be 'overcome' by art (RG: 4,1038) - is to serve art as a reservoir of material and a means of 'artistic excitation'(RG: 4,1039). Such an approach to nature need take no exception to an identity of the creative method employed by nature and autonomous art.⁶

This analogy offers yet another occasion to appreciate Benn's fundamental and all-pervading holism, his refusal to view any particular phenomenon in isolation. His historicism and concern for tradition have their roots here, his suggestion that the 'form-demanding power of nothingness' may constitute 'das Gesetz des Produktiven'(AR: 4,1002) as much as his treatment of problems concerning modern poetry under the title 'Probleme der Lyrik'(my emphases). The present context adds what Benn might have labelled 'die Methode des Schöpferischen' - the method of reality production holding good for the modern montage artist no less than for venerable Mother Nature. 'Montagekunst' is the modern poet's 'Moirai' which represents anything but a mere fad as its method accords with the universal principles of creation.

This organic interpretation appears to conflict with the technical/mechanical associations of the

word 'montage'. I shall come back to this apparent conflict later (chapter five, p.239); in the present context I wish to indicate only that Benn's use of the words 'Montage'/'montieren' seems to be one more example of the self-confessed provocateur's practice of picking loaded or fashionable words - we remember 'Existenz', 'Formalist', 'Rasse' - for purposes of his own.

IV. Lyrical Ars Poetica

Let us now look at two of Benn's best known poems which together form what the title of this section has announced. The idea, expounded in 'Lyrisches Ich' and Probleme der Lyrik, that the associative word yields, in a flash of inspiration, insights to be cast into the poetic word or form - the idea of the 'Macht des Wortes, das löst und fügt', with all the significant implications it holds for Benn - is presented, in enchanting simplicity and with formal perfection, by the short poem:

1. 'Ein Wort'

Ein Wort, ein Satz-: aus Chiffren steigen
erkanntes Leben, jäher Sinn,
die Sonne steht, die Sphären schweigen
und alles ballt sich zu ihm hin.

Ein Wort - ein Glanz, ein Flug, ein Feuer,
ein Flammenwurf, ein Sternenstrich -
und wieder Dunkel, ungeheuer,
im leeren Raum um Welt und Ich.
(1941: 1,208)

The repetition of the title at the beginning of both stanzas is a device by which formal reduction is made to signal thematic complexity. 'Ein Wort' in the first line, denoting 'word' as well as a whole utterance, is followed by a noun whose ambiguity leads away from the linguistic context and initiates the inner movement rendered by the poem as a whole. 'Ein Satz', apart from denoting 'sentence' or 'phrase', may also be a 'leap', suggesting an instantaneous mental leap performed by the implied agent on contact with 'a word' in this or that understanding.

A dash and a colon follow both to add relief to the suddenness of the inspirational flash and to point to the momentous process that has been set in motion: the emergence from under 'ciphers' of insight into life and of 'sudden significance'(11.1-2). To refresh our memory on Benn's understanding of the

crucial word 'Chiffren':

Ich unterbreche jetzt für einen Augenblick die alten Sätze und hebe hervor: Flimmerhaare, die tasten etwas heran, nämlich Worte, und diese herangetasteten Worte rinnen sofort zusammen zu einer Chiffre, einer stilistischen Figur.
(PdL: 4,1075)

On contact with the lyric sensorium, words merge and form a 'stylistic figure', a formal configuration serving as a vehicle of meaning.

The meaning suddenly apprehended encompasses vast dimensions. This is indicated by the two cosmic images that follow (1.3). They bring together four different worlds: those of Ancient Greece and medieval pre-Copernican Europe, the biblical world of the Old Testament and the post-Nietzschean modern era. The allusion to Ptolemy's geocentric cosmological system points to Benn's ego-centric view of the 'lyric I' to whom, in his 'great hour', the whole world 'stands still': 'everything' interrupts its own course - the sun his revolution around the earth, the spheres their music - to unite and assist the 'lyric I' in his creative task: 'und alles ballt sich zu ihm hin'(1.4). The allusions to Joshua (10.12-13) and Zarathustra seem to suggest that any 'modern' task is, in essence, 'Neues, das ja doch immer wieder ein Altes ist'(AB,p.232), that the 'lyric I' is doing in

his time what others before him did in theirs.

Owing to their multiplicity of allusions and implications, the two images appear to render poetically what Benn in his theoretical works has described as 'Verwirrung von Ären, Mischung von Stoffen und Aspekten, Eröffnung weiter typologischer Schichten, entrückter, strömender Beginn' (PdL: 4,1076). The 'beginning' here mentioned finds poetic expression in the fourth line of our poem: 'und alles ballt sich zu ihm hin'. The allusion to Goethe's 'Lied und Gebilde' is significant:

Löscht' ich so der Seele Brand,
Lied, es wird erschallen;
Schöpft des Dichters reine Hand,
Wasser wird sich ballen. (11.9-12)⁷

Reaching into the heart of the poetic tradition, it corroborates what the first line implies: the genesis we are about to witness is that of a work of lyric poetry. The fact that Goethe's poet is at home in Asia as well as in Europe, that he creates form ('Gebilde') out of an amorphous natural element, that this form is a 'song' whose creation quenches some inner flame, is of no little significance to Benn's poem. 'Everything' joins in to efform 'it': the poet's word, 'ein Wort' of the second stanza, his poem.

This process is rendered in an asyndetic sequence of highly suggestive metaphors. While these five nouns refuse to be pinned down to any exact or single meaning, their sequence conveys an impression of progressive illumination and efformation, of upward expansion and final descent. It begins with an indefinite notion of brightness: 'ein Glanz', alluding to the biblical notion of light being created to illumine the dark, shapeless and void earth. The following 'Flug' brings out further the poet-creator's sovereignty. To the suggestion of illumination and insight it adds that of freedom of movement, of creative freedom. 'Feuer' conveys an idea of the intensity and absorption involved in the creation of a poem. The following 'Flammenwurf' implies more clearly than any of the preceding metaphors the presence of a personal agent: the poet who 'casts' out his inspiration. Casting suggests vigour and spontaneity and points to the non-rational part of creativity. 'Sternenstrich' continues to convey the notion of inspired creativity through its implication of brightness and increased loftiness ('Stern'), and of lightness and speed ('Strich'). This metaphor seems a particularly happy poetic rendition of Benn's postulate 'des größten Griffes' (DL: 8,2030).

The upward movement so far implied has here reached its zenith. 'Sternenstrich' suggests an arched line, a comet sweeping across the sky, illuminating the world briefly and going out again. The 'I', pointedly mentioned at the very end of the poem, finds himself engulfed once more by the darkness of his non-creative life. In the light of the tremendous anti-climax here presented, the elevation experienced during the occasional creative hour appears all the more elevating, the oppressive isolation of the remaining hours of darkness all the more oppressive. 'Größter Griff' and 'tragischer Sinn', declared in Doppelleben to be prerequisites for a mature and convincing execution of the creative task (8,2030), are here presented in their reciprocal relationship.

The identical beginning of the two stanzas, then, conceals a difference of meaning fundamental to the thematic structure of the poem. 'Ein Wort' in the first line introduces the poetic rendition of 'die lösende Macht des Wortes', 'ein Wort' in the fifth line that of its 'fügende Macht'. Both meanings, complex in themselves, make up the titular 'ein Wort' whose plurivalence adds a new, and I think significant, dimension to the entire poem. The 'word' that causes the experiences it presents may well be a

poet's word, a poem, in which case the 'I' undergoing these experiences is the reader who may be moved by a poem in the same manner as the poet may be moved by a word or phrase.

I can see nothing in this poem to refute my suggestion that it renders at once the creative and the re-creative experience, pointing to the secure place the reader occupies in Benn's theory of the 'monologic' poem. When four years later he writes,

Riefst den Verlorenen,...
den Ungeborenen
ein Wort des Glaubens zu.
('Die Form' : 1,235, 11.9-12)

he tells us as explicitly as he will allow himself to do what is subtly woven into the associative structure of the poem 'Ein Wort'.

The thematic differentiation of the two stanzas is matched by one of form whose recognition will further our understanding of Benn's idea and practice of montage. With the exception of its introductory half-line, the first stanza possesses a well-elaborated syntax, whereas the second stanza houses not a single verb to produce syntactic completion. The nominal staccato at the beginning of the poem is consonant with the immediacy of the inspirational moment rendered there. All that follows lacks this immediacy. It is essentially a description of what

happens as a consequence of this moment. The element of detachment such description presupposes is reflected in the perfect sentence-structure of these lines. The only thing missing is the punctuation mark one would have expected at the end of the third line. Its lack is again functional in that it underscores the urgency with which 'everything' strives towards the creative release.

In the second stanza, creativeness unfolds according to its own design: syntactic construction has given way to an associative sequence of mainly nouns and adjectives. In view of Benn's categorical advice to eliminate adjectives (see chapter one, note 65, p.283), their intrusion into the last two lines of this poem is significant. Benn, who demands 'existentielle Härte der Sprachfügung' (7,1725), uses their 'Stimmungswert', reinforced in the case of 'ungeheuer' by onomatopoeia and syntactic isolation, to bring home the full force of the non-creative 'I''s existential wretchedness.

Springing from a successful fusion of content and form, the structural differentiation of the two stanzas demonstrates, in relative purity, the two fundamental aspects of montage as Benn understands it, its intellectual and emotional side. The intellectual

factor predominates in the first half of the poem. Its imagery, by evoking and assembling diverse cultural orbits, makes a complex statement, to the knowledgeable reader, on the nature of modern creativity and its relation to tradition. The emotional factor predominates in the second half. Its emotive quality rests on the inner movement and tension that arise from the evocative wealth of its nouns and adjectives, and their direct juxtaposition and combination.

In the poem as a whole, 'Evokation und Montage' are shown to work hand in hand, their co-operation making for a potent blend of thematic complexity, structural concision and poetic beauty in which, by the testimony of this great little poem, lies the strength of Benn's 'Montagekunst'.

The fact that Benn, in 'Ein Wort', focuses on the element of intuitive spontaneity does not signal a departure from his 'formalistic' stance. This is attested to by another of his well known poems which accords at least as much attention to the complementary other side: the element of deliberate and controlled construction. I am referring to the poem:

2. 'Statische Gedichte'

Its significance can be gauged by the fact that it supplied the title for the collection of poems which Benn, disregarding the ban on publication that was still in force, issued privately on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday.

The first two stanzas dwell on the idea of the poet's detachment from the arena of historical development, from 'life' and any aspiration it may involve. We know that he has chosen such 'immobility' and attendant solitude because he is aware of a deeper level of being and therefore alive to the transience of the outer scene:

Entwicklungsfremdheit
ist die Tiefe des Weisen,
Kinder und Kindeskind
beunruhigen ihn nicht,
dringen nicht in ihn ein.

(...)

Vor meinem Fenster
- sagt der Weise -
liegt ein Tal,
darin sammeln sich die Schatten,
zwei Pappeln säumen einen Weg,
du weißt - wohin.

(1,236: stanzas 1-2, 11.1-5, 11-16)

We also know that his 'Tiefe' may be elevated into poetic language. Thus his 'Statik' vis-à-vis life is, in fact, a 'Rückzug auf Maß und Form',⁸

a withdrawal into the dynamic activity of poetic creation - or according to the first half of the third stanza, 'perspectivism':

Perspektivismus
ist ein anderes Wort für seine Statik:
Linien anlegen,
sie weiterführen...

(st.3, 11.17-20)

Nietzsche's idea of perspectivism is easily recognized behind these lines, an idea involving not only a destruction, but also 'ein aktives Bestimmen'⁹ of 'truth'. To Benn, this can only mean the creation of 'style' (cf. his letter to Nele, p.203).

Creative perspectivism, then, while manifesting itself as inaction or 'Statik' in relation to 'life', is a highly dynamic process. Stanza three and the following isolated line muster five verbs to hammer home this point: 'anlegen' and 'weiterführen', 'sprühen', 'auswerfen' and 'sinken lassen' are the diverse activities involved:

Linien anlegen,
sie weiterführen
nach Rankengesetz -
Ranken sprühen -,
auch Schwärme, Krähen,
auswerfen in Winterrot von Frühhimmeln,

dann sinken lassen -

(st.3, 11.19-25)

The repeated metaphor 'Ranken' seems to hold the key to a reconciliation of the rational factor

indicated by the first two verbs and the irrational factor indicated by the two that follow. In conjunction with the preceding verb 'anlegen', 'Rankengesetz' conveys the idea of a garden being laid out according to an ornamental design. However, what 'law' can it be that determines the intertwining of tendrils - or, as the metaphor is intended to suggest, the formal relationships of poetry? Peter Reichel maintains that it is '[das] Rankengesetz des "freien Spiels"'.¹⁰ I cannot agree. 'Free play' doesn't seem to stand out among Benn's preoccupations. A man who tells us that 'das Gedicht ist schon fertig ehe es begonnen hat' (PdL: 4,1070), who insists on the need for painstaking labour 'bis die Gestalt zu den Proportionen durchgearbeitet ist, die ihr zukommen' (KDR: 3,872) - such a man can hardly embrace 'free play' as an artistic method. It is not for nothing that Benn says 'Rankengesetz', not 'Rankenspiel' (my emphasis). Reichel's conjecture leads to, or stems from, the popular misconception of Benn's 'absolute poem' according to which 'es...kennt...nur den musikalischen, rhythmischen, assoziativen Zusammenhang, zielt auf Faszination durch artistischen Ausdruck bei völliger Zweckfreiheit'.¹¹ Benn's 'expression' is deprived of the depth it is to manifest, his 'absolute poem' reduced

to a tinkling cymbal. We seem better advised to take our clues from Benn's own expositions. In 'Provoziertes Leben' we read this:

Die indisch-javanische Kunst (der Sockel von Borobodur) zeigte noch um 800 nach Christus das andere Stadium. Aus seinen fast unflätigen Überladungen, Wucherungen von Gliedern und Formen (...) spricht das tat twam asi, "auch das bist du", der indischen Lehre, (...) aber auch eine noch jedem zugängliche innere Welt, heiter, sanft und reigenverschlungen, die einen inneren Zusammenhang noch kennt, einen der sich in steter Erneuerung um einen geistigen Wesenskern bildet. (3,898)

'Rankengesetz' appears to be the principle of wholeness governing the undivided inner world which poetry seeks to express. An external linear design, then, is developed according to an internal law prescribing totality of inclusion and all-embracing unison. At the point where this design meets the prescription of completion and harmony, 'Linien' turn into 'Ranken', externalizing directly the otherwise buried inner totality. We are back to the notion of entelchy: 'nach Rankengesetz' - 'nach dem Gesetz, wonach du angetreten' - you lay out your garden, taking note of the law which governs the growth and extension of tendrils so that their full growth will complete your design.

Contrary to what F.W.Wodtke says about these

lines, I am moved to submit that the 'linear art' here advocated does indeed aim at 'the artistic combination and interweaving of themes and motifs into an organic whole, as in traditional poetry'.¹² Benn's insistence on the strikingly traditional formulation 'abgeschlossene Gebilde' - cf. Goethe's 'gegliederte[s] Gebilde' - is surely not accidental. This 'linear art' does not 'juxtapose[s] different aspects and perspectives' quite as much as it expands and relates them to each other. The poem 'Ein Wort' has demonstrated what is meant here, and the verb 'weiterführen' seems highly significant. I refer also to my comment on the introductory lines of the early poem 'Der Sänger'(chapter three, p.158). As I have argued all along, Benn's understanding of montage is more inclusive than is generally recognized.

By the same token, rational construction is only one part of the entire process. The italicized line 'Ranken sprühen' places visible emphasis on its complementary opposite: vigorous spontaneity. The following two lines, joined by the significant little 'auch', introduce an element of ambivalence into the irrational aspect of creativity. The metaphor 'Schwärme' seems to point to what is held dear by the unreflecting heart. In terms of visual suggestion, it

agrees with the following 'Krähen' which seems added as an explanatory apposition. In his comment on the latter, Wodtke refers to Nietzsche's poem 'Vereinsamt'.¹³ The speaker of this poem observes the crows flying to the city in search of shelter. He contrasts their flight to his own prospect of solitude and restlessness he has brought upon himself by leaving the warmth of his 'home'. The relevance of these verses to Benn's context is obvious. We recognize his 'wise man' who has opted for solitude and distance from human warmth. The lyrical cipher 'Krähen' thus introduces into the crucial third stanza of Benn's poem the idea of the poet's self-inflicted solitude which, on the one hand, he needs to give expression to his inner self and which, on the other, visits upon him suffering and pain. We remember the poet pondering his 'Gegenglück' ('Einsamer nie-': 1,140).

The dynamic verb 'auswerfen', together with the plural noun 'Himmel', indicates the vigour and reach of the poet's activity (cf. ll.5-6 of 'Ein Wort'). The fact that these 'skies' are 'early skies', harbingers of a new beginning, suggests hope and promise; but the red of dawn is a 'winter red', spelling imminent darkness and gloom.

This, of course, is the idea conveyed at the end

of 'Ein Wort'. While the earlier poem, with its interest in the 'Macht des Wortes', only implies the agency of the creative mind, 'Statische Gedichte' places it at the centre of its concern. It presents the poet as letting off the fireworks and standing back to allow it all to burn itself out: 'du weißt - für wen'(1.26).

To counterbalance this provocative refusal to name explicitly the beneficiary of the creative activity just described, the construction of the concluding asseveration is parallel to that of line 16, thus referring us to the 'wise' poet whose knowledge of the transience that governs the outer scene has caused him to withdraw into his 'Statik' or 'Perspektivismus': a highly dynamic activity, as we have seen, spanning the height and the depth of personal experience. 'Casting out' into the 'skies' and 'allowing to sink' are acts of supreme significance, affording temporary relief from his paralyzing insight into the evanescence of the historical world.

During the early 1940s Benn appears to celebrate the poetic word with remarkable consistency. Running like a red thread through a number of poems is his belief that the poetic word - and the poetic word alone - can lend expression and manifest permanence

to the inner world. The poem 'Verse' (1941) maintains:

das große Selbst, der Alltraum, einem jeden
ins Herz gegeben, der sich schweigend weiht,
hält sich in Psalmen und in Veden
und spottet alles Tuns und trotz der Zeit.
(1,194: 11.21-24)

In 'Gedichte' (1941) we find these famous lines:

es gibt nur ein Begegnen: im Gedichte
die Dinge mystisch bannen durch das Wort.
(1,196: 11.7-8)

'Unanwendbar' (1941) describes poems as:

Gebilde, die die Welt versöhnen,
die ewig sind und nie zu spät-.
(1,224: 11.18-19)

Only in one poem a discordant note is heard. It is the 'Biographical Poem' 'Abschied', also of 1941, whose third stanza I quote in full:

Manchmal noch denkst du dich-: die eigne Sage-:
das warst du doch-? ach, wie du dich vergaßt!
war das dein Bild? war das nicht deine Frage,
dein Wort, dein Himmelslicht, das du besaßt?
Mein Wort, mein Himmelslicht, dereinst besessen,
mein Wort, mein Himmelslicht, zerstört, vertan -
wem das geschah, der muß sich wohl vergessen
und rührt nicht mehr die alten Stunden an.
(1,233: 11.17-24)

The question that arises is this: are we to see the devastating realization expressed by lines 21-22 - with a touch of self-parody again? - as a reflection of a passing mood occasioned by biographical circumstance and advancing age, or is it a first sign of a modification or even recantation of his poetological convictions¹⁴ which, as some commentators maintain, Benn

the poet and man, not the theorist, allowed himself to admit?¹⁵ The answer to this question is eminently relevant to my inquiry; it will shed light on both the central issue of Benn's consistency, or ultimate lack of it, and the fundamental question of his integrity which, judging by the most recent critical publications, has remained, to this day, subject to widely divergent interpretation.

My last chapter will therefore address itself to these two interrelated questions: does the later Benn call into question, modify or indeed renounce the beliefs of his earlier life? If so, in what manner and to what extent?

CHAPTER FIVE

CONSISTENCY

I. Private Expressions of Doubt

In his post-war correspondence with F.W.Celze, Benn does indeed admit, with striking frequency, his painful awareness of 'die Fragwürdigkeit' (BOe, II, 2, p.105) and 'die ganze Isoliertheit und Gefahr meiner inneren Position' (BCe, II, 1, p.261). Do admissions such as these allow us to speak, with Peter Reichel, of Benn's 'zunehmender Zweifel an der Richtigkeit der eigenen poetischen Konzeption'?¹ Here are some more examples:

Zum Speien alles: das Stillstehen u. das Weitermüssen, der Stumpfsinn u. die Produktion, alles von Fratzen umstellt, von Zweifeln zerrüttet, von Schlagern an die Wand gedrückt u. aufgehoben.

(BOe, II, 1, p.39)

Three years later:

Mir wird überhaupt alles immer schwieriger und dunkler, jeder Satz, den ich schreibe, trägt schon sein Gegenargument und seine Aufhebung in sich, kommt mir müssig vor, trostlos, unerheblich.
(BOe,II,1,p.269)

Only half a year before the Marburg-lecture:

Wo, wann, was die Produktion in Bewegung bringt, ist wohl doch schleierhaft. Dies ganze Gebiet wird mir überhaupt immer rätselhafter, ich könnte auch sagen fragwürdiger... (BOe,II,2,p.85)

Eight months later these revealing words:

Ich finde nicht mehr durch, ich kann immer wieder nur sagen, die Produktivität ist das Einzige, das einen sichert u führt. (BOe,II,2,p.135)

Nietzsche's heritage, the idea of perspectivism and consequent nihilism of all values, appears to have caught up with Benn's own position - endowing it, by thwarting any possible, if implicit aspiration to absolute validity, with a kind of credibility it did not possess before. To speak of Benn's doubts about the 'rightness' of his poetological conception without stating also that for him there could be no 'right' position (and no 'wrong' one for that matter) is to belittle the dilemma into which his intellectual rigour had plunged him. Silence was the only alternative, contemplated by Benn more than once.²

What caused 'productivity' to come out victorious

may be inferred from the last of the four quotations above: 'productivity' or artistic creation is experienced as the only stabilizing factor, granting support and orientation of sorts in a chaotic and unintelligible world. The idea of 'the transcendence of creative pleasure', stripped of its sovereignty by the search-light of reason, is reinstated by the authority of experience. The experience of creativity emerges as the only force by dint of which may be transcended an utterly disabling condition. The fallacious phrase 'schöpferische Lust', apart from its Kantian origin, seems modelled on Nietzsche's 'artistische Leidenschaften' and 'artistisches Entzücken';³ it seems chosen to convey the intensity and redemptive power of this experience against the background 'des allgemeinen Verfalls der Inhalte' and of all-engulfing 'Fragwürdigkeit'.

Benn's admissions of doubt only indicate that he did not fall into the trap of worshipping a new god. He harboured no illusion and was very much alive to the fact that the creative experience, for all the momentary uplift it may be capable of giving, is as 'fragwürdig' as any other human endeavour. On May 16 1950, he wrote:

Im Grunde wollen sie alle zum lieben Gott zurück, der uns Denken und Selbstverantwortung abnimmt und alles zum guten Ende führt. Während meine Position ja die ist, dass bei der augenblicklichen Lage das Individuum nur andere Zuflüchte acceptieren kann, darunter die Selbstgestaltung und Innenprägung seiner selbst. (Boe,II,2,p.32)

The creative experience, too, is a 'Zuflucht' which, while relieving a hopeless situation, offers no ultimate answer.

We have here reached the core of Benn's 'tragic' stance: 'Im Dunkel leben, im Dunkel tun, was wir können'(StV: 6,1616) - all we can do is do what we can while groping in the dark. The poem 'Ein Wort' is a most compelling rendition of this situation, bringing out its fundamental hopelessness no less than the significance of the creative experience. From this insight flows the profound sense of suffering that pervades Benn's writings from first to last. On 2 November 1949 he wrote to Oelze:

Ahnte doch jemand, welche Last man auf sich nimmt, wenn man seinen inneren Auftrag ausführt, gegen den man alle Einwände genau kennt und den man doch vertreten muss, wenn man einmal angefangen hat. (Boe,II,1,p.262)

The 'inner mission' he is compelled to go on fulfilling, in spite of his knowledge of the arguments against it, is to testify to a course of action which, by allowing an intermittent intake of air, saves

modern man from drowning.

The above quotation may easily be taken to betray the kind of dishonesty imputed to Benn by Michael Hamburger.⁴ However, apart from overlooking the fact that Benn was too independent and radical a spirit to be perverted by any fear of loss of face into resorting to a stubborn insistence in public on a privately unmasked conception, such an interpretation could only spring from a partial view of Benn's position that fails, or refuses, to acknowledge its dimensions and complexities.

II. Ambivalence of Attitude

There is one passage, though, which seems to contradict flatly Benn's 'extravaganten Eindruck' that lyric poetry, as Wolfgang Iser put it, is 'the paradigm of modernity': '-alles möchte dichten' (PdL:4,1092). In a letter to Oelze of 29 November 1949 we find this footnote:

Es giebt nur 1) die mathematischen Lehrsätze u 2) Prosa als Kunst. Der Rest nicht mehr zu ertragen. Furchtbar, furchtbar - vor solchen Erkenntnissen, Erfühlungen zu stehn. Man möchte harmonisch sein u denken-, die andern beruhigen u. ihnen schön tun, aber es geht nicht. Durch alles fasst

man durch, bis die Hand wieder in der eisigen Polarkälte blau wird u. erstarrt, Frostbeulen an Hand u Herz - ein Herz, das eigentlich lyrisch u weich ist. (BOe,II,1,p.270)

Associating lyrical art with harmony, reassurance and softness, Benn declares it, by implication, to be out of tune with modern times, while at the same time admitting to his own profoundly lyrical disposition, to his frustrated longings and attendant distress.

Do not these words betray his otherwise carefully guarded secret of a conflict between his private insights ~~and~~ public expositions? Did Benn conceal, after all, the 'changes of heart and mind' and therefore undermine the credibility of his never modified poetological theory? I do not think so. I shall endeavour to show that the sentiments he expressed in 1949 have a lot in common with those that informed his very first poetological attempt of 1910; that in the way he dealt with them he remained remarkably true to himself, developing, both times, a pattern of thought which receives its uniqueness and complexity from the underlying tension between his personal taste and that of the time. It will be seen that the conflict indicated by the quotation above, rather than having caused a rift between Benn's private and public views, is the fountain-head of his theory which, because of

this conflict, he had no reason to retract.

We recall Thom regretting the fact that writing poems or novellas, on account of the 'Stimmungswert' that adheres to them, is an undertaking liable to be ridiculed by modern taste (chapter two, p.85). To those who cannot help doing it he suggested, as a 'refuge', a method of presentation operating on what he called 'a scientific basis'(p.85). We have seen that this method was 'scientific' in a very limited sense, falling back on ideas well established in literature and art (p.89), and involving irrational no less than rational energies (pp.90-92). Thom's 'refuge' or 'expedient' turned out to have been the use of an eye-catching label ('naturwissenschaftliche Basis') for presenting 'old' ideas in the light of modern existence.

This process appears to prefigure the process by which Benn, over a span of several decades, with greater subtlety and more significant consequences, worked out his concept of 'fascinating montage'. Those critics who regard Benn's work as informed, from first to last, by 'unreconciled contradictions'⁵ will find their view confirmed by Benn's seemingly confused estimation of 'Montage'. His 'flachsichtig[er] Montagetyp' of 1932 (3,717) is clearly

derogatory, and as late as 1948 he scoffs at 'Monteure', 'Streckenarbeiter [mit]Saisonaufträge[n]' who, unlike creative men such as Goethe or Tintoretto, are unable to produce 'Bleibendes'(6,1584). We seem hard pressed to reconcile such disapproval of the idea of 'Montage' with the advocacy of a poem 'aus Worten, die Sie faszinierend montieren'.

Yet I wish to suggest that Benn, with his profound aversion to technical superficiality, fastened on the concept of montage, which was familiar enough from the early days of Expressionism, to fit the poetry he envisaged into the coordinates erected by modern sensibilities. In the same manner as the young Benn, whose anti-scientism was soon to erupt, held up the idea of a 'scientifically based' method of presentation but developed, in the course of his explanations, a concept neither scientific nor entirely new, the mature Benn resorts to the idea of 'montage', in spite of his impatience with its suggestions of technical patchwork, and develops a complex notion that takes account of 'natural', 'organic' and 'emotional' factors as much as of 'technical' and 'intellectual' ones.

Why should Benn have resorted to a practice that might with some justification earn him the opprobrium

of disingenuous opportunism in the choice of his terms?⁶ Let us ponder in this context Nietzsche's question: 'Tiefste Unterscheidung: ob der Hunger oder der Überfluß schöpferisch wird?'⁷ Benn's 'hunger' speaks loud and clear in the above quotation from his letter of 29 November 1949 (pp.236-37). Has not this hunger, in the time 'der modernen Verdüsterung',⁸ turned creative and produced a concept of poetry that accords with the modern ethos of sobriety while at the same time keeping alive the bond that leads back over Expressionism and Symbolism⁹ to the heart of the German poetic tradition? A concept of poetry capable of meeting the demands of the intellect as well as satisfying the longings of the heart and soul?

I can see no break between Benn's public and private utterances. If the latter testify more forcefully to his ceaseless intellectual torments, they only radicalize the tensions inherent in, or indeed fundamental to, his poetological conception. Let us be fair: could Benn have been expected to confront his eager audiences with the message 'echt ist nur, wer völlig sich versagt und schweigt'? There is plenty of evidence in his correspondence that he did, time and again, 'refuse himself'. And when he came out, he came to present a theory he had wrested, in

a hard and painful struggle, from the strong man Ignorabimus. The poem 'Künstlermoral' of 1950 explains in clear and simple words the ethos that orients Benn the speaker no less than Benn the poet. Here are the first two of its three stanzas:

Nur in Worten darfst du dich zeigen,
die klar in Formen stehn,
sein Menschliches muß verschweigen,
wer so mit Qualen versehn.

Du mußt dich selber verzehren -
gib acht, daß es niemand sieht,
und laß es keinen beschweren,
was dir so dunkel geschieht. (2,466)

Dishonesty? Contradiction? It seems more to the point to speak of 'tensions' informing the whole of Benn's thought and work. His tendency to see every 'Satz' accompanied by its 'Gegenargument' and his maxim 'Verharren vor dem Unvereinbaren' are grossly devalued if taken to signify his inability or lack of effort to solve plain contradictions. Perspectivism thwarted any simple 'solution', hence his creed of 'Ambivalenz' with its declared aim of fusing opposites:

...der heutige Phänotyp integriert
die Ambivalenz, die Verschmelzung
eines jeglichen mit den Gegenbegriffen.
('Roman des Phänotyp': 5,1328)

Benn-criticism has displayed a remarkable inability to distinguish 'ambivalence' from 'contradiction', thereby reducing the sustained tensions of Benn's

thought to a hodge-podge of 'unresolved contradictions'.¹⁰ I cannot refrain from pointing to the irony of the fact that Joachim Vahland, whose thesis centres on 'der unversöhnte Widerspruch', quotes these instructive words by A. Mohler to indicate Benn's closeness to the movement of the 'Conservative Revolution':

Das Bild der Welt, das die Grundrichtung der "Konservativen Revolution" mitbestimmt, wird durch die Worte "Einheit", "Ganzheit" angedeutet. Diese Worte wenden sich gegen eine Aufspaltung der Welt in zwei Teile, wobei der eine gegenüber dem anderen geringer gewertet wird. (...) Die "Einheit", die "Ganzheit" schließen jedoch die Gegensätze nicht aus: sie umfassen sie in sich und lassen keine Spaltung zu. Sie sind nicht spannungslos, sondern spaltungslos. Die oft verwischte Unterscheidung von "Spannung" (Polarität) und "Spaltung" (Dualismus) ist einer der Schlüssel zum Verständnis der "Konservativen Revolution". (11)

If we learn to make the distinction between 'dualism' and 'polarity', between contradiction and ambivalence, we may indeed find a key to an understanding of the spirit that informs and unifies Benn's various pronouncements.

III. Complexity of Poetic Statement

The spirit of ambivalence is particularly active in Benn's late poetry, lending subtle complexity to its often simple and apparently straightforward thematic design. For example, 'Epilog 1949' seems to speak of the poet's melancholic resignation in the face of the transience of all things, including his work; 'Satzbau' to present Benn's 'formalistic' programme in the light of this transience; 'Worte' to sound Benn's despairing farewell to the belief of his life-time. But on closer inspection, every one of these poems reveals a rather more complex thematic structure, testifying to Benn's never simple thought processes.

1. 'Epilog 1949'

Every stanza of the first poem in this cycle begins with a line referring explicitly to the poem 'Trunkene Flut' of 1927:

Die trunkenen Fluten fallen - (1.1)

Die trunkenen Fluten enden (1.5)

Die Fluten, die Flammen, die Fragen - (1.9)
(1949: 1,343)

By way of direct quotation the later poem evokes what the earlier poem has presented in detail: the creative hour which crowns the poet's incessant and feverish efforts to give voice to the knowledge of the soul; which brings ecstatic fulfilment and anti-climactic emptiness; which is born out of hardship and studious observation of the world; which lends meaning to life (1,60-61).

Owing to the simple device of self-quotation, all this is integrated into the associative structure of 'Epilog 1949'. The plural 'die trunkenen Fluten' in the place of the original singular 'trunkene Flut' serves to transform the close-up into a long shot whose changed perspective shows this experience to be of a recurrent, hence familiar nature. The emphasis placed, through the end-position of the verbs, on the fact that these floods 'fall' and 'end' (ll.1 and 5) combines with the intimations of dying and fading in the first stanza (ll.2-3), and the negative turn of phrase in the second (ll.6-8), to infuse an essentially gratifying event, the completion of a poem, with a deep sense of melancholy:

Die trunkenen Fluten fallen -
die Stunde des sterbenden Blau
und der erblaßten Korallen
um die Insel von Palau.

Die trunkenen Fluten enden
als Fremdes, nicht dein, nicht mein,
sie lassen dir nichts in Händen
als der Bilder schweigendes Sein.
(1,343: stanzas 1-2, 11.1-8)

We recall the heavy-hearted ending of the poem 'Der Sänger'(1925) and the tearful image concluding the poem 'Das Ganze'(1936).

The third stanza looks back, as it were, at these past experiences of 'ending floods', picking out their three constitutive features: the surge of images (cf. 'Wer allein ist-'), the inspired creativity they burst into ('Ein Wort'), and the questions raised and left unanswered by all this ('Statische Gedichte'):

Die Fluten, die Flammen, die Fragen -
und dann auf Asche sehn:
(st.3, 11.9-10)

Benn's well-known phrase 'gelegentlich auf Wasser sehn' - his prescription for recovering a sense of stability in a profoundly unstable world - is the implied counter-point to the reminder given by line 10 of the vanitas mundi, which in this specific context is a vanitas artis poeticae.

As the colon at the end of this line announces, the aphorism in which this poem culminates¹² offers the quintessential conclusion drawn from the preceding telescopic view of the creative experience.

Here is a superb example of the ambivalence characteristic of Benn's poetry:

"Leben ist Brückenschlagen
über Ströme, die vergehn." (11.11-12)

Living, in the referential context of this poem associated closely with creating,¹³ is throwing bridges across rivers which, by a significant deformation of the well-known poetic symbol of permanence within change, are declared to be themselves impermanent. There are two ways of reading this couplet. One is positive: the creative experience, every time it occurs, affords an opportunity to rise above the flux of things; the other negative: the creative experience, the one means we have to gain such transcendence, is of dubious value as its usefulness is subject to the transience it is supposed to bridge. Both meanings are intended - not because Benn can't make up his mind, but because he knows that he is wielding a double-edged sword, that he is embracing a helpful 'Zuflucht'.¹⁴

Ending in the negative part of the ambivalent configuration, the first poem of the cycle tends to favour the aspect of transience and ultimate meaninglessness. The second poem goes on to restore the balance through its inverse movement from the gloomy

to the redemptive side.

In the first stanza, the reflecting poet, identified by Benn's monologic 'du'(1.4), looks back on the solitary watchfulness that has been his lot:

Ein breiter Graben aus Schweigen,
eine hohe Mauer aus Nacht
zieht um die Stuben, die Steigen,
wo du gewohnt, gewacht. (11.1-4)

In the following two quatrains, which form a thematic and syntactical unit, he tells us that this kind of existence has instilled in him a sense of benighted incomprehension and helplessness vis-à-vis the ephemeral nature of his own creativeness:

In Vor- und Nachgefühlen
hält noch die Strophe sich:
"Auf welchen schwarzen Stühlen
woben die Parzen dich,

aus wo gefüllten Krügen
erströmst du und verrinnst
auf den verzehrten Zügen
ein altes Traumgespinst." (11.5-12)

The 'schwarze[n] Stühle[n]' ('looms') on which he suspects the fates have woven him are a distorted quotation from Goethe's 'Parzenlied' whose '...Stühle.../ Um goldene Tische' provide the contrastive foil to bring out our poet's sense of foredoomed evanescence.¹⁵ It makes itself felt at once as an after-taste (for lack of an adequate equivalent to 'Nachgefühle') left by previous experiences, and a fore-taste ('Vorgefühle')

thwarting the happy anticipation of any creative hour that may come his way - at which occasion, however, all this may be suspended as the creative 'I' bridges the 'breiter Graben aus Schweigen'(1.1) and breaks through the 'hohe Mauer aus Nacht'(1.2) to enter into a communion with the world:

Bis sich die Reime schließen,
die sich der Vers erfand,
und Stein und Graben fließen
in das weite, graue Land.
(p.344, 11.13-16)

The close correlation of the first two poems is underscored by their metrical pattern. Its short three-stress lines distinguish these poems clearly from the three that follow (pp.344-45) with their five stresses in almost every line. The theme of the formally identified first part of the cycle is distinctly poetological, poem I focusing on the individual creative act (albeit as one of a recurrent nature), poem II on the subject engaged in it.

Poem III now opens up a wider historical perspective. Just as the individual creative hour comes and goes within the poet's life-span, so the poet's time comes and goes, subject to the ever-changing fortunes of history: '"Die Himmel wechseln ihre Sterne - geh!'" (11.4 and 12)

One might conceivably use this line, whose

repetition at the end of the poem serves to hammer home the point, as evidence of the later Benn's much touted resignation. But we must be quite clear that the resignation here expressed is not of the defeatist kind, inviting the poet to abandon his 'image' altogether; it is of a more constructive nature, telling him to accept a fact and draw the necessary consequence: to go when his time is over. The second stanza, centrally placed in the symmetrical structure of the poem, and employing metrical variation for its crucial statement, contains the reassuring message that the significance of his poetry is not affected by the mutability of things, but is securely entrenched in its very ceaselessness:

Das du dir trugst, dies Bild, halb Wahn, halb
Wende,
das trägt sich selbst, du mußt nicht bange sein
und Schmetterlinge, März bis Sommerende,
das wird noch lange sein. (ll.5-8)

The belief inspiring these words comes across more forcefully from the concluding lines of the oratorio 'Das Unaufhörliche' of 1931:

Die Welten sinken und die Welten steigen
aus einer Schöpfung stumm und namenlos,
die Götter fügen sich, die Chöre schweigen-:
ewig im Wandel und im Wandel groß. (l,147)

The 'Epilog'-poems do not rise to quite the same heights of optimism, and much of their poetic attract-

ion springs from the melancholic undercurrents one cannot possibly miss. But this only highlights the point I have been trying to make: the meaning of Benn's utterances, especially of his later poetry, is hardly ever straightforward and plain. Opposing elements are fused in such a way as to make it quite impossible for any one of them to go beyond setting the dominant tone of a piece.

Poems IV and V do not deal specifically with poetological issues: the former is overtly biographical, the latter of a wider philosophical nature. However, both poems give expression to Benn's fundamental conviction that answers - including, we may add, those to questions surrounding the phenomenon poetry - cannot be found this side of eternity. Here is poem V:

Die vielen Dinge, die du tief versiegelt
durch deine Tage trägst in dir allein,
die du auch im Gespräche nie entriegelt,
in keinen Brief und Blick sie ließest ein,

die schweigenden, die guten und die bösen,
die so erlittenen, darin du gehst,
die kannst du erst in jener Sphäre lösen,
in der du stirbst und endend auferstehst.

(1,345)

Is it purely accidental, though, that 'the poem' is not included in the list of the means of communication the speaker has refrained from using to give

evidence of those 'many things' locked and sealed deep down within?

Again, there is subtle ambiguity. The negative statement that you cannot ever in your life-time unlock the 'many things' affecting you from within is counter-balanced by the concluding suggestion that an ultimate resurrection will bring with it the solutions denied us here. The adverb 'erst' of the penultimate line, while signifying an inevitable deferment, does not weaken the affirmative force of the verbal statement. Similarly, the fourth poem ends with a repeated 'you know', not 'I won't know until I am in my grave': '..."tu sais" - du weißt'(1.12).

The cycle as a whole, in spite of its persistent melancholic undercurrents, may be said to move from a negative to a positive stance, from initial gloom to eventual affirmation.

The reverse tendency, a movement from affirmation to negation, is found to inform the poem:

2. 'Satzbau'

With this profoundly ironical piece of 1951 Benn has managed to mislead more than one of his knowledgeable commentators. For example, Professor Wodtke tells us that Benn is here concerned 'with an absolute art that was completely emptied of all the meaning and content of traditional art, that was completely autonomous and concerned only with the problem of form'.¹⁶ This, of course, is common currency in Benn-criticism, and Wodtke can salvage it only by declaring the quotation from Goethe's Faust at the end of the poem to be 'purposely meaningless'.¹⁷ Hans-Jürgen Schmitt provides many perceptive and helpful observations but fails to draw the right conclusions from them because his conviction that this poem intends to further the cause of 'formalism' prevents him from seeing the form it actually has.¹⁸

The poem falls into two thoroughly dissimilar parts: one of twenty-three lines, the other of three. The former consists of three stanzaic units whose faithfully elaborated syntax and well-aimed line of argument do indeed warrant the conclusion that Benn treats us here to 'eine[r] rhetorisch gegliederte [n] Redeweise'.¹⁹ One can hardly hope to better Schmitt's

suggestion that this sounds like a lecture by a
'Privatdozent':²⁰

Alle haben den Himmel, die Liebe und das Grab,
damit wollen wir uns nicht befassen,
das ist für den Kulturkreis besprochen und
durchgearbeitet.

Was aber neu ist, ist die Frage nach dem Satzbau
und die ist dringend:
warum drücken wir etwas aus?

Warum reimen wir oder zeichnen ein Mädchen
direkt oder als Spiegelbild
oder stricheln auf eine Handbreit Büttenpapier
unzählige Pflanzen, Baumkronen, Mauern,
letztere als dicke Raupen mit Schildkrötenkopf
sich unheimlich niedrig hinziehend
in bestimmter Anordnung?

Überwältigend unbeantwortbar!
Honoraraussicht ist es nicht,
viele verhungern darüber. Nein,
es ist ein Antrieb in der Hand,
ferngesteuert, eine Gehirnlage,
vielleicht ein verspäteter Heilbringer oder
Totentier,
auf Kosten des Inhalts ein formaler Priapismus,
er wird vorübergehn,
aber heute ist der Satzbau
das Primäre. (1,249: 11.1-23)

The contrast between this learned volubility and the
informal laconism of the two lines that follow the
Goethe-quotation is staggering:

"Die wenigen, die was davon erkannt" -(Goethe)-
wovon eigentlich?
Ich nehme an: vom Satzbau. (p.250, 11.24-26)

Whereas Dr Schmitt suggests that the last part is
'kühl vorgetragen, ein Understatement, welches aber
gerade die absolute Gewißheit des Gesagten pointiert',²¹
I seem to perceive a *tongue* in the cheek of the con-

cluding couplet which, rather than pointing 'the absolute certainty of what has been said', ironizes it and points to a dimension of 'Satzbau' of which the lecturer's rhetorical 'sentence-structure' can impart little or nothing. I am inclined to read this poem as a self-parody by Benn, playing off the public lecturer against the private poet. The former is given the platform to serve up his theory of 'Form' with all the rhetorical trappings and pitfalls - to be put into his place by the latter who knows that a real understanding of 'Form' remains the privilege of a few.

Our lecturer, in an introductory limitation of his topic, points out that matters of content, such as religious, ethical and metaphysical concerns, do not qualify for consideration because their significance extends to a wider sphere of human endeavour than the selected area ('Alle haben...', 1.1), and has been adequately dealt with (1.3). It is important to note that he does not rule out these issues because they have become irrelevant; he does so because their consideration would offer no new insights. As a result of this exhaustion of content, 'the question concerning "Satzbau"' presents itself as a 'new' or as yet unmapped territory for exploration. It is the search for an understanding of neither the 'what' nor the 'how'

of poetic expression, but of the 'why' behind it: what can it be that moves us today to express 'something'(1.6) in 'a certain order'(1.13) when we know that this is, and produces, nothing new?

The 'Satz-bau' here to be considered is evidently not identical with 'sentence-structure' or mere poetic form, but concerns the entire complex of poetic creation. As Wodtke rightly points out, the question of 'Ausdruckszwang' is mooted here;²² but his suggestion that this 'urge for expression' ignores content in favour of form²³ bespeaks a superficial reading of the first stanza and passes over the better part of the second. The fact that the various objects the latter enumerates are said to be presented 'in bestimmter Anordnung' - be it in one of rhyme (1.7), one of direct or inverted reproduction (1.8), or one of surrealist contortion (11.9-12) - does not altogether spirit them away. The two lines concluding the first part of the poem make it quite clear: 'aber heute ist der Satzbau / das Primäre'. 'Satzbau' is today's primary concern, claiming priority, not exclusiveness. The particular emphasis Benn himself, in his reading of the poem, places on 'Primäre' accords with the formal arrangement of this concluding statement and corroborates my point.

Only line 20 would seem to point in the direction of Wodtke's interpretation: 'auf Kosten des Inhalts ein formaler Priapismus'. I do not think, however, that 'at the expense of content' is meant to signal anything as drastic as ignoring or even eliminating content in favour of form. What this phrase does seem to indicate is a shift of emphasis towards the formative principle occasioned by the historical facts outlined in the introductory stanza. Significantly, this imbalance is described in terms of a physical disorder which, while also carrying rather more pleasurable connotations,²⁴ is painful and of limited duration (1.21).

Our modern preoccupation with questions of form, then, is presented as the not altogether ideal order of the historical hour, as a latter-day 'Zuflucht', 'a belated saviour or totem animal'(1.19) which, like its forerunners, is bound to lose its effectiveness with the passing of its hour on the stage of history.

The lecturer's presentation, of course, builds up towards a more affirmative climax. Its positive turn of phrase, little as it intends to cancel out the less encouraging insights of the preceding three lines, seems largely responsible for the various misreadings of this poem. But this positive note is not sounded

at the end of the poem as a whole.²⁵

It seems impossible to determine clearly whether the Goethe-quotation that follows is given by the speaker of the first part, whose inclusive 'we'(11.2, 6,7) suggests consensus, real or assumed, or by the individual 'I' of the second part (1.26) who seems motivated by the spirit of provocation more than that of assent. The fact that this quotation is faithfully identified points to the lecturer, its unmediated 'Setzung' to the poet. Thematically, too, there is an element of ambivalence. On a somewhat superficial level, this line might be seen to echo and thereby corroborate the lecturer's emotive asseveration 'Überwältigend unbeantwortbar!'(1.14). But apart from its contrasting sobriety of tone, it states clearly that, small though their number may be, there are a few who have known 'something about it'. While not contradicting flatly the lecturer's insight, the poet here bears witness to the existence of a cast of men - poets, if, as we can be quite sure it does, the name 'Goethe' is meant to be more than a mere guide for reference - who may not have offered answers, but who knew.

What finally links this quotation to the following two lines, rendering all three distinctly different

from the bulk of the poem, is their laconic provocativeness.²⁶ Provocation springs from the unspecified demonstrative 'davon' of Goethe's words (1.24); from the searching, possibly impatient momentum of the ensuing question (1.25); from the feigned nonchalance of the concluding answer (1.26). It invites us to consult an authority outside the lecture-hall and to consider what we have heard in the light of what we may learn there. Here are the words with which Faust, who is surely not referring to 'sentence-structure', sends away his eager famulus:

Die Wenigen, die was davon erkannten,
Die töricht gnug ihr volles Herz nicht wahrten,
Dem Pöbel ihr Gefühl, ihr Schauen offenbarten,
Hat man von je gekreuzigt und verbrannt.
(Faust I, 11.590-93)

Devastating words, exposing as foolish, even fatal, the lecturer's implicit belief that 'Satzbau' or 'Ausdruckszwang' can be profitably expounded or discussed.

This crushing turn of argument now brings to view the ironical function performed by the 'rhetorisch gegliederte Redeweise' of the first part. Rather than realizing in practice Benn's idea of 'Satzbau' or 'Form',²⁷ it demonstrates the kind of 'syntax' or 'sentence-structure' that has nothing to do with it. I can detect no trace of anything 'art-

istic' or 'expressive' in these lines - with the notable exception of line 14 whose exaggerated expressiveness, contrasting sharply with the studied construction of the preceding stanza, seems clearly ironical.²⁸

Irony turns into self-parody thanks to the inclusion of such familiar presences as 'Kulturkreis' (1.3), 'Gehirnlage'(1.18), 'Totemtier'(1.19), not to omit the suggestive medical/mythological metaphor of the following line. Taken from Benn's theoretical writings and worked into the ironical structure of this poem, they leave little doubt as to who is its immediate target. 'Man muss immer wieder den Ast absägen, auf dem man sitzt, nur dann kommt man weiter', Benn wrote to Oelze, advising him to bear in mind this maxim of his when reading the poems in the collection Fragmente of which 'Satzbau' is one (BOe,II, 2,p.89).

Let us be quite clear that what this poem parodies are the attempts to theorize on 'Satzbau', no matter how well-intentioned and eloquent they may be; the idea of 'Satzbau' itself remains untouched by such criticism. On the contrary, the suggestion borrowed from Faust that the initiate will keep silent where laymen revel in the illusion of knowledge²⁹

serves to lend it an aura of sacrosanct dignity bespeaking anything but a critical attitude. The contrast the poem presents between futile eloquence and effective economy of words only accentuates this point.

The high esteem in which 'Satzbau' appears to be held directs our attention to another fundamental aspect of Benn's poetic, intimated also by the purposely meaningful quotation from Goethe: 'Satzbau' is not an exclusively modern phenomenon; it relates to the essence of poetry and is practised by poets, modern and traditional. As our poem tells us, not 'Satzbau' has become a pressing issue but 'die Frage nach dem Satzbau'(1.4); and the thing that will pass is, again, not 'Satzbau', but the historically conditioned preoccupation with it ('...ein formaler Priapismus,/ er wird vorübergehn', ll.20-21; my emphases).

To read this poem as a programmatic piece advocating the dogma of 'formalism' and forecasting its eventual doom is to take two branches for a tree. A programmatic poem it is, but one with a richer programme than its unpoetic title, form and tone have allowed critics to discover.

Simplification at the hands of literary criticism has also been the lot of the later poem:

3. 'Worte'

F.W.Wodtke, who has once again given us helpful comments and explanations, maintains that 'here Benn's chief concern is with the poet's lifelong struggle to discover and explore the nature of words, which is a never-ending process, since the very essence of words is unfathomable depth', which moves the poet 'only to end finally in silence'.³⁰ Yes indeed, the poem features a silent poet at the end - but does his silence indicate, as unequivocally as Wodtke's comment implies, a resignation in the face of his unfathomable word material? The contrastive structure of the poem seems designed to tell a somewhat more complicated story.

The four stanzas are arranged in a circular pattern: the two outer quatrains dwell on the poet's solitary, unsung, strained, and ultimately unsuccessful intercourse with words; the two inner quatrains present explicitly the contrast implied in the outer frame of the poet's futile intensity and the other people's easy use of words:

Allein: du mit den Worten
und das ist wirklich allein,
Clairons und Ehrenpforten
sind nicht in diesem Sein.

Du siehst ihnen in die Seele
nach Vor- und Urgesicht,
Jahre um Jahre - quäle
dich ab, du findest nicht.

Und drüben brennen die Leuchten
in sanftem Menschenhort,
von Lippen, rosigen, feuchten
perlt unbedenklich das Wort.

Nur deine Jahre vergilben
in einem anderen Sinn,
bis in die Träume: Silben -
doch schweigend gehst du hin.
(1,299)

As Wodtke rightly explains, the two attitudes towards language here juxtaposed are the poet's reflecting attitude and the naive 'unbedenklich' attitude of the others. I am at a loss, however, to find a basis for his claim that the poet, as a consequence of his 'bedenklich' attitude, 'speaks hesitatingly'.³¹ As far as this poem is concerned, the poet's reflecting attitude does not manifest itself in any kind of speech, but in his endless search for what is described as 'Vor- und Urgesicht'(1.7). This latter, now, is something rather less tangible than 'the experiences of mankind which have been stored up in it [the word] since the primeval beginnings of time'.³² The poet, looking into 'the soul' of words, strives to find not just the knowledge of the many experiences of which words can give evidence, but the vision of an undivided reality to be attained

through this knowledge. Wodtke himself quotes this instructive passage from 'Lyrisches Ich':

Ach, immer wieder diese Glut, in die
Grade der plazentaren Räume, in die
Vorstufe der Meere des Urgesichts:
Regressionstendenzen mit Hilfe des Worts,
heuristische Schwächezustände durch
Substantive - das ist der Grundvorgang,
der alles interpretiert...

(8,1880; my emphasis)

While Benn, with advancing years, managed to put a brake on his 'Regressionstendenzen' (see chapter three, pp.167-68), his longing for an undivided reality remained in essence unchanged - his earlier preoccupation with unattainable 'Zerlösung' into oneness with the world crystallizing into a more mature preoccupation with unattainable 'Erlösung' into knowledge of it. Benn's words of 1927, notwithstanding their irrationalism, tell us clearly that words are embraced as a means. Likewise, the poet's lifelong struggle to discover the nature of words is not an end in itself but a path pursued in the hope of finding the longed-for 'Urgesicht'. His failure to find what he is looking for need not necessarily spring from the unfathomableness of words, as Wodtke suggests, but may, for all we know, have to do with the nature of the object of his search. We cannot, for this reason, conclude with any certainty that the lack of success stated in line 8 indicates a breakdown in the

poet's relationship with words. This in turn suggests that his silence at the end of the poem may be meant to signal something less clear-cut than his ultimate surrender.

The assumption on which Wodtke's interpretation rests of a causal link between the depth of words and the poet's eventual silence can only be maintained at the price of playing down the structural and thematic significance of one of the two parts juxtaposed in various ways to produce the poem's characteristic network of tensions. Linking Benn to the line of poets who have made a clear distinction between poetic language and everyday speech,³³ Wodtke seems to overlook the ambivalence of the contrasts Benn presents, keeping his distance from anything as simple as a picture in black and white.

There can be no doubt that Benn's juxtaposition, like that undertaken by George, Rilke, and the young Hofmannsthal, is fundamentally a juxtaposition of the ordinary man's slight word to the poet's significant word, designed to focus attention on the latter. Here lies the function of the contrast between the unreflecting use of words in one realm (stanza 3) and the intellectual search in the other (stanza 2). But the former is presented in a context of freshness,

life and beauty, the latter in one of tortured exertion. Thus is brought out the profound ambivalence of the poet's 'Gegenglück' which was first pondered in the poem 'Einsamer nie-' of 1936 (1,140).

The poem's central opposition of the naive and the conscious attitude to words extends into the last stanza which closes the thematic frame by returning to the poet's situation. The inimitable metaphor 'deine Jahre vergilben'(1.13), suggesting life fading away in scholarly endeavour, contrasts sharply with the preceding images of living beauty. Moreover, the 'word' flowing unthinkingly, round and whole, from happier lips is juxtaposed *with* the 'syllables' pursuing their victim into his very dreams. Seen in this context, the word 'Silben' performs a function more significant than that of mere pars pro toto.³⁴ It brings out the analytical relentlessness of the poet's active relationship with words, as opposed to the unquestioning acceptance and use of given words in the other realm.

This contrast leads to the final and all-important turn of the poem. It is announced by Benn's beloved dash and contrastive 'doch'(11.15-16) and presents itself in the form of a contrast relating to the poet's use of words alone: active when 'allein...mit

den Worten', awake or asleep, he turns inactive or 'silent' when joining his fellow-men. Actively engaged with words when in his own sphere, the poet can find, or use, no words in theirs; his attitude to language is different and he must therefore keep silence. We are here reminded of the sage's 'Statik' ('Statische Gedichte', see chapter four, pp.223-224) which, like the the poet's silence, is inaction in one sphere and action in another. As this analogy suggests, the poet's silence does not rule out a feeling of superiority on his part and an unwillingness to betray his secret, painful though it may be, to them.

Significantly, it remains undecided whether the poet 'geht hin' for good, giving in to the attraction of an uncomplicated life and ending up in silence in a manner similar to that suggested by Wodtke, or whether he turns silent only whenever he 'geht hin'. The fact that silence is mentioned in the last line of a thoroughly melancholic poem seems to favour the former possibility; the climactic contrast within the last stanza, the latter. I think we should leave it at that and refrain from attempting to isolate any single meaning. This would destroy the poem: its import as well as its beauty.

We remember that the poem 'Einsamer nie-', which gave voice, two decades earlier, to the poet's mixed feelings in the face of the contrast between his life and that of the others, was juxtaposed *with and counter-*balanced by other poems, notably 'Leben - niederer Wahn', pointing up the supreme significance of artistic form (see chapter three, p.169). In much the same way, the poem 'Worte' is juxtaposed *with and counter* balanced by another poem:

'Gedicht'

Und was bedeuten diese Zwänge,
halb Bild, halb Wort und halb Kalkül,
was ist in dir, woher die Dränge
aus stillem trauernden Gefühl?

Es strömt dir aus dem Nichts zusammen,
aus einzelner, aus Potpourri,
dort nimmst du die Asche, dort die Flammen,
du streust und löschst und hüttest sie.

Du weißt, du kannst nicht alles fassen,
umgrenze es, den grünen Zaun
um dies und das, du bleibst gelassen,
doch auch gebannt in Mißvertraun.

So Tag und Nacht bist du am Zuge,
auch sonntags meißelst du dich ein
und klopfst das Silber in die Fuge,
dann läßt du es - es ist: das Sein.
(1955: 1,298)

Unrelenting search forever uncrowned by success,
suffering and silence there - successful, if extended,
poetic production here. As before, contradiction is

ruled out by the simple fact that these two poems deal with two different things: 'Worte' with the poet's incessant study of words, 'Gedicht' with his actual use of them. It is surely no accident that both these poems have found their way into Benn's Aprèslude. Together they re-affirm what Benn has said so many times before: persevering work, involving suffering and sacrifice, is the price the poet has to pay for a successful poem. The titles, featuring a plural in one case ('Worte') and a singular in the other ('Gedicht') speak volumes. As Benn insisted in many more words at Marburg, a sacrifice extending over a life-time is necessary to produce six to eight perfect poems (4,1069).

On a more philosophical level, these two poems combine to present the sum-total of Benn's life-long poetological endeavour: we will never know, but creativity can give us purpose and direction, producing evidence of 'being' which, regardless of our own benighted condition, does exist and call out to those who are equipped - chosen and condemned, in a word: 'gezeichnet' - to hear and testify. Reality or 'being', remaining hidden to the searching eye, may be brought into this world by the constructive hand.

CONCLUSION

The expression of anti-bourgeois resentments (...) became more sinister when it was extended, by students of Nietzsche and admirers of the Italian Futurist poet Marinetti, to a general denigration of all civilized and humane values. At this end of the expressionist spectrum (...) we come to Gottfried Benn.

(...)

He expounded his version of the 'art for art's sake' doctrine with increasing insistence. (...) Art has the task of waging war on the meaningless dynamic of life in order to achieve Stil...

(...)

But there is an inherent contradiction in Benn's work. According to his theory he should have written only self-enclosed literature addressed to no one, monologische Kunst. In practice he was much concerned to communicate his theory, (...) Even many of his poems preach the doctrine of extreme aestheticism, and by doing so refute the doctrine. (1)

My thesis has endeavoured to show that this widely held view of Benn's aesthetic stands in need of correction. What this view describes and condemns as 'a general denigration of all civilized and humane values' has been shown to be a profound sorrow at the loss of binding transcendental norms which in fact affirms

rather than denigrates the said values. Benn did not envisage and pursue 'art for art's sake' but art 'for life's sake': art does not have 'the task of waging war on the meaningless dynamic of life', but the task of aiding, of giving direction, of affording some intermittent elevation above the levelling flux of things. The object of art is not to achieve Stil as much as it is to achieve it. Advocating 'monologic art', Benn did not call for a 'self-contained' poetry that wishes to reach no one, but for a kind of poetry which, rather than aiming to establish an inter-personal rapport, involves and activates its readers individually, privately, and therefore all the more profoundly. Benn's work has shown itself to be free of 'inherent contradiction'.

All this leads me to submit that Gottfried Benn has been quite wrongly placed at the extreme 'absolute', 'anti-human' end of the modernist spectrum. As I indicated earlier, historical circumstance, Bennesque deceptiveness and critical imperfection combined to produce an apparently plausible picture with plenty of room to accommodate any inconsistencies at Benn's door. Added to this is the convenience of easy categorization: Benn on the one end, Brecht on the other. I hope that

my preceding chapters have made it sufficiently clear that the 'Artistik' Benn envisaged is too complex and significant a phenomenon to be adequately described by any simple label. His central ideal of 'fascinating montage' was in fact inspired by the very ambitious desire to bring to fruition, for the benefit of the modern poet and his reader, the entire body of the Western spiritual, intellectual and artistic tradition from Classical Antiquity to his own day. Painfully aware of the lost wholeness of life, which he saw realized for the very last time in his deeply admired 'Olympischer Urgroßvater' Goethe, he strove to achieve the kind of synthesis he thought possible in modern times. Whether or not his vision was to materialize in the course of subsequent developments, for his unflinching effort to answer the call of his historical hour, he deserves our respect.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. William H. Rey, 'Gottfried Benns Abschiedsgedicht: Hintergrund und Struktur', in Wirkendes Wort, 20 (1970), 161-183 (p.161).
2. Karl August Horst, 'Gottfried Benn: poeta absconditus', in Merkur, 17 (1963), 193-197 (p.193).
3. Edgar Lohner, Passion und Intellekt: Die Lyrik Gottfried Benns (Neuwied, 1961); Annemarie Christiansen, Benn: Einführung in das Werk (Stuttgart, 1976); Hanspeter Brode, 'Studien zu Gottfried Benn I: Mythologie, Naturwissenschaft und Geschichtsphilosophie', in Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift, 46 (1972), 714-763; 'Studien zu Gottfried Benn II: Anspielung und Zitat als sinngebende Elemente moderner Lyrik: Benns Gedicht "Widmung"', in DVjs, 47 (1973), 286-309.
4. Michael Hamburger, 'Contradictions of Phenotype', in TLS, 3 October 1980, 1095-1096 (p.1096).

CHAPTER ONE

1. Reinhold Grimm, 'Die problematischen "Probleme der Lyrik"', in Festschrift Gottfried Weber, edited by Heinz Otto Burger and Klaus von See (Bad Homburg v.d.H.-Berlin-Zürich, 1967), pp.299-328. (Also in GB, pp.206-239.)

2. 'Die problematischen Probleme', GB, p.228.
3. Op.cit., p.229.
4. Peter Schünemann, Gottfried Benn (München, 1977), p.138.
5. All citations from Benn's work, except his correspondence, will refer to Gottfried Benn: Gesammelte Werke, edited by Dieter Wellershoff, 8 vols (München, 1975).
6. Schünemann, op.cit., p.138.
7. Op.cit., pp.138-139.
8. Op.cit., p.140.
9. Its importance may be gauged by the fact that Benn, in a letter to Dieter Wellershoff, used italics to emphasize the crucial adjectives in the identical formulation: 'Hat die Sprache überhaupt noch einen dialogischen Charakter im metaphysischen Sinne?' (22 November 1950, AB, p.204.)
10. Schünemann, op.cit., p.139.
11. Dieter Liewerscheidt, Gottfried Benns Lyrik: Eine kritische Einführung (München, 1980), p.50; Christiansen, Benn, pp.10-11.
12. In a letter to Hans Paeschke of 29 April 1952, Benn gives voice to his reservations vis-à-vis 'Avantgardismus (...) aus Prinzip', and to his misgivings concerning his own efforts to create 'Neues das ja doch immer wieder ein Altes ist' (AB, p.232).
13. Grimm, op.cit., p.228.
14. Benn postpones an explicit formulation of these themes until half-way through his discussion (1078), thereby offering, if a posteriori, points of orientation to help his audience remember and follow the course of his argument. He arranges his themes in the following manner:
 - I. Lyric Poetry
 1. the modern poem
 2. the creative process
 3. the word
 4. rhyme
 - II. The Lyric Poet

15. My concern in this part of the chapter lying with the formal side of Probleme der Lyrik, considerations of content will enter these discussions only inasmuch as they are needed to lend substance to the formal structure described. An analysis of Benn's poetological argument will be offered in the third section of this chapter under the heading 'Poetological Content' (pp.37-80).
16. By adding this comment on the ordering function of rhyme in a way that gives it the appearance of an afterthought, Benn slips in and at the same time renders prominent his cautiously phrased justification of a formal device that might be regarded as thoroughly out of date by many. (See my further comments, pp.65-67).
17. I have been unable to establish the source of this quotation.
18. Immanente Ästhetik. Ästhetische Reflexion. Lyrik als Paradigma der Moderne, edited by Wolfgang Iser (München, 1966).
19. Quoted from Heinrich Heine: Sämtliche Werke, edited by Jost Perfahl, 4 vols (München, 1969-72), I: Gedichte, p.247.
20. Peter Michelsen, 'Doppelleben: Gottfried Benn's ästhetische Anschauungen', in GB, pp.115-132 (p.126).
21. The fact that classical antiquity serves Benn as a source for his poetic images has been demonstrated by F.W. Wodtke, Die Antike im Werk Gottfried Benns (Wiesbaden, 1963). Wodtke's insight into the functional importance of antiquity in Benn's work stands in a somewhat oblique relation to his claim, expressed implicitly and explicitly in various contexts, that Benn adhered to the 'Wahrheitsgehalt des Mythos' (p.153), which is a reduction of Benn's approach to classical myth. As Gregor Maurach emphasizes, Benn's attitude was anything but a 'bewunderndes Sich-Identifizieren: (...) die Antike lieferte Symbole und brauchbare historische Details für seine Analysen des Welt- und Zeitgeschehens, Erlebnisziel war sie wohl kaum jemals. (...) ihr Wert war ein relativer: ihre Fähigkeit, Parallelen zur Moderne zu liefern, das war ihre Bedeutung für Benn.' (G.M., 'Gottfried Benn und die Antike (Epi-

- krise zu einem Buch)', in Acta Germanica, 5 (1970), 203-213 (p.210). - As to physiology and medicine, Benn-criticism has on the whole failed to take sufficient account of the metaphorical quality of the many expressions Benn borrowed from these disciplines. As a result of such literal reading, absurdities have been pinned on Benn's name which it is time to remove.
22. Karl Krolow, for example, who writes: 'Benn's "Mitte" - scheint mir - ist alles das, was in seiner Vorstellung vom einsamen Leben und Schreiben des lyrischen Ichs nicht aufgeht.' (K.K., 'Das absolute Gedicht und das "lyrische Ich"', in WwW, pp.262-265 (p.264). - More dissatisfied and less specific Walter Muschg, 'Der Ptolemäer', WwW, p.321.
23. 'Ich beschäftige mich mit allerhand Büchern u diesbezüglichen Arbeiten im Hinblick auf die Marburger Vorlesung. Da ist besonders interessant das vielgenannte Buch von Sedlmayr: "Der Verlust der Mitte". Bestimmt sehr aufschlußreich und voll diagnostischen Scharfblicks, ein sehr bemerkenswertes Werk. Aber im Kern des Grundgedankens mich zu starker Opposition anregend.' (Letter to Oelze, 19 May 1951, BOe, II, 2, pp.100-101.) - Benn's 'strong opposition' is inevitable as Sedlmayr's 'Grundgedanke' is diametrically opposed to his: the cultural historian, by deploring 'the loss of the centre', is in Benn's view not facing up to the historical reality of the day; by clinging to a thing that has irreversibly vanished into the past he blinds himself to the existence of the real 'centre' ('in der Tiefe...das Andere': 4,1093) that remains unaffected by the passage of time (and may be attested and expressed by the poetic word).
24. Hans Sedlmayr, Verlust der Mitte (Salzburg, 1948).
25. Sedlmayr, op.cit., eighth edition (1965), p.11. - It appears that Benn's modest four 'diagnostic symptoms' of the ailing contemporary poem are integrated more tightly into the structure of the whole than my earlier comments could indicate.
26. 'Das absolute Gedicht', WwW, p.262.

27. Benn's request to Curtius points in this direction: 'Bitte sagen Sie mir in einem Satz Ihre Meinung zu der Arbeit, nämlich ob ich mit einigem Abstand in dem Milieu bestehen kann.' (1 August 1951, AB, p.218.) So does his ironic self-deprecation towards the end of the lecture (1093).
28. It seems to me quite unjustified. I am also unable to agree with Peter Michelsen who expresses surprise at the discrepancy between Benn's efforts to make precise statements and their actual results: 'Verlegenheitsformulierungen' excelling by virtue of their 'Unklarheit' and 'Unverbindlichkeit'. ('Doppelleben', GB, p.126.) Michelsen makes no effort to substantiate his claim that Benn actually strove to make 'exakte Angaben' (loc.cit.). The apparent approval of Benn's elaborations by E.R. Curtius, which so baffled Reinhold Grimm (op.cit., p.206), may be an indication that the 'Nestor' of literary criticism did what other critics failed to do: give the poet his due.
29. Staiger's Grundbegriffe der Poetik first appeared in 1946.
30. GB, p.228.
31. Op.cit., p.228.
32. Grimm, op.cit., pp.211-213.
33. In this context, Dieter Liewerscheidt's blinkered vision becomes apparent with particular clarity. He expresses surprise at the resonance Benn's lecture found and goes on to remind us of 'die Unbekanntheit der westlichen lyrischen Avantgarde im Nachkriegsdeutschland' which, says he, 'erst durch Hugo Friedrichs "Struktur der modernen Lyrik" (1956) erfolgreich verringert werden konnte'. (Benns Lyrik, pp.49-50.)
34. Liewerscheidt, op.cit., p.48.
35. Singling out the Futurist Manifesto with its roaring glorification of 'violence, cruelty and injustice', of anti-'moralism' and 'war', six years after Germany's total collapse, seems to be an act of either extreme provocation or unbelievable naivety. Walter Muschg's outrage seems fully justified.

However, let us not overlook that this remark forms part of a historical review. It does not present those 'Avantgardisten' and 'Vollender' as models to be emulated today, but as men who, four decades ago, undertook the necessary 'rücksichtslosen Griff in Geliebtes, Bewährtes, Heiligtümer' (KDR: 3,873), thereby paving the road now to be resumed and pursued. Benn's own 'anti-humanism' is something that has been alleged more than proven, his opposition to society a far cry from the Futurists' unbridled anarchism.

36. For a concise and rewarding discussion of this complex issue see Bruno Hillebrand, 'Gottfried Benn und Friedrich Nietzsche', in GB, pp.409-434. See also: Theo Meyer, Kunstproblematik und Wortkombinatorik bei Gottfried Benn (Köln, 1971), pp.44-137.
37. 'Benn und Nietzsche', GB, p.419.
38. Loc.cit. - Hillebrand's article confirms Hans-Dieter Balser's detailed refutation of the assumption of Benn's unqualified nihilism which debilitates much of the literature on Benn. (H.-D.Balser, Das Problem des Nihilismus im Werke Gottfried Benns (Bonn, 1965).) Balser's argument is anything but invalidated by Marion Adams' more recent attempt to present Benn as a 'disappointed materialist' turned nihilist. (M.A., Gottfried Benn's Critique of Substance (Assen, 1969).) Adams maintains that Benn, caught between the anti-materialist tendencies of the early twentieth century (such as vitalism, primitivism, formalism) and his own materialist assumptions, took refuge in nihilism. The serious shortcomings of this book spring from its author's sometimes stunning literalism and failure to observe and make necessary distinctions. As a consequence, Benn's adherence to substance is reduced to a simple form of physiological materialism. The many absurdities Dr Adams ascribes to Benn are not Benn's.
39. 'Benn and Nietzsche', GB, p.417.
40. According to Dieter Wellershoff, the exponents of the kinds of literature Benn is opposing are these: '...die Restauratoren der verlorenen Mitte oder die Verklärer des einfachen Lebens, von den Blut- und

Boden-Poeten ganz zu schweigen.' (D.W., Gottfried Benn: Phänotyp dieser Stunde (München, 1976), dtv: WR 4185, p.91.) We might add the advocates of Socialist Realism branded by Benn as 'literarische Tschekatyp[en]' (4,986).

41. 'Die problematischen Probleme', GB, p.220.
42. Grimm, op.cit., loc.cit.
43. See Edgar Lohner, 'Schillers Begriff des Scheins und die moderne Lyrik', in Deutsche Beiträge zur geistigen Überlieferung, edited by Matthijs Jolles, vol.4 (1961), pp.131-181. On the classical conception of 'Schein', see Friedrich Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of Man, edited and translated by E.M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford, 1967), pp.327-329.
It is interesting to note that Benn's thoughts on art as 'Schein' agree substantially with those expressed by Martin Heidegger in his debate with Emil Staiger on the meaning of the verb 'scheint' in Mörike's poem 'Auf eine Lampe'. Heidegger, drawing attention to the importance of Hegel's aesthetic to Mörike and his contemporaries, maintains: 'In Hegel's Begriff des Schönen und des Scheinens des schönen Gegenstandes versammelt sich eine streng gebaute Vielfalt von Schein, Erscheinung und bloßem Schein. Aber der Schein, daß z.B. ein als Kunstgebilde nur gemalter Baum kein wirklicher Baum ist und gleichwohl als dieser scheinbare Baum gerade die Wirklichkeit des Baumes selbst zeigt, gehört notwendig zum Wesen jedes Kunstwerks, und zwar zu dessen eigentlichem Scheinens als dem Sich-an-ihm-selbst-zeigen. (...) Die Bedeutung des Scheinens im 'scheint' weist nicht in die Richtung von Phantom, sondern in diejenige von Epiphanie. Das Kunstgebilde echter Art ist selbst die Epiphanie der von ihm gelichteten und in ihm gewährten Welt.' ('Ein Briefwechsel mit Martin Heidegger', in Emil Staiger, Die Kunst der Interpretation (München, 1971), pp.28-42 (pp.36 and 40).) Hegel, in Heidegger's interpretation, recognizes the inherent multivalence of 'Scheinens' (see Wilkinson and Willoughby, p.328); but following Schiller's distinction between 'Schein' ('illusion', 'decept-

- ion') and 'Erscheinung' ('appearance', 'phenomenon'), Hegel focuses on the latter meaning, which was to determine the modern view of art as 'Schein' as held by Heidegger - and also Benn.
44. Op.cit., pp.210-211.
45. Inevitably, this 'solipsism' has met with hostile reaction. Here is Bruno Hillebrand's pertinent comment on this controversial issue: Benn was 'der letzte Dichter der personalen Evokation' motivated by a 'personale[s] "Engagement"'; 'die Verpflichtung des Dichters gegenüber dem eigenen fundamentalen Wesensgrund ist [in the post-Bennian era] belanglos geworden, die "Selbstbegegnung", für Benn unabdingbare Voraussetzung des "metaphysischen Sinns" der Sprache - einem Sinn, der nicht thematisch-inhaltlich, sondern nur existentiell noch legitimierbar ist - diese Verpflichtung hatte einen anachronistischen und suspekten Anstrich bekommen. (...) Die Identifikation des Dichters mit dem eigenen Ich muß zunächst einmal sprachlich zum Ausdruck gebracht sein, soll das Gespräch zum Leser hin eröffnet...werden. (...) Benn hat sich oft darüber gewundert, daß die Aufzeichnungen seiner eigenen, einsamen Befindlichkeit der allgemeinen Situation Ausdruck geben konnten. Er erinnert damit an die alte, heute vielfach vergessene Tatsache, daß die "Objektivität" der Dichtung nicht aus extravertierter Planung erwächst, sondern daß die stille, nach innen gerichtete Subjektivität den Pfeil lenkt, der ins Schwarze trifft.' (B.H., 'Gottfried Benn zehn Jahre nach seinem Tode', in Neue Deutsche Hefte, 13 (1966), 96-107 (pp.99-101).)
46. Martin Heidegger, Unterwegs zur Sprache (Pfullingen, 1959), p.169.
47. Edith Kern, Introduction to Sarte: A Collection of Critical Essays, edited by Edith Kern (Englewood Cliffs, N.Y., 1962), pp.1-14 (pp.6 and 5).

48. 'Maximen und Reflexionen', in Goethes Werke,
Hamburger Ausgabe, Vol. XII, p. 381.
49. It is interesting to observe Benn's progressive,
but not unqualified disenchantment with Heidegger:
June/July 1949: 'Dass V. für Heidegger ist, freut
mich, ich las ein neueres kleines Buch von
ihm - kein Zweifel, dass er alles überragt, was
beruflich denkt u. lehrt u. doziert...'; gefiel
mir sehr. Auch einer, der "den Mittelpunkt" emp-
findet u. ihm Rechnung trägt.' (BOe, II, 1, pp. 215
and 223.)
October 1949: 'Ich muss Ihnen gestehn, dass ich
manchmal denke, bei H. handelt es sich um
längst bekannte Dinge, uralte Bestände der Philo-
sophie, die er nur neu "deutet", etwas Angeberei
ist wohl manchmal dabei. Und nun reist er auch
noch herum! Nicht schön!' (BOe, II, 1, p. 260.)
April 1951:
'Heidegger typischer Wissenschaftler: sowie
sie mal einen Schritt ins Artistische, Feuilleton-
istische wagen, gleich hinterher haben sie Angst
um Ruf und Renommé. Kann mir nicht imponieren.'
(BOe, II, 2, p. 97.)
July 1952: 'Heute im neuen "Merkur" gelesen. Hei-
degger zeigt den ganzen Nonsens und die
ganze Genialität seiner Art auf diesen par Seiten.
Eigentlich ist es inhaltlich viel Lärm um Nichts
u. allein dies Betonen u. Hinweisen auf dieses
Nichts ist interessant.' (BOe, II, 2, p. 142.)
The coincidence of Heidegger's and Benn's views
appears to have inspired Eckart Oehlenschläger
to undertake his interesting study of Benn's
prose style. (E.Oe., Provokation und Vergegen-
wärtigung: Eine Studie zum Prosastil Gottfried
Benns (Frankfurt a.M., 1971).)
50. Else Buddeberg maintains that Benn's 'Akademie-
Rede' of 1932 constitutes the crucial turning
point. (E.B., Probleme um Gottfried Benn: Die
Benn-Forschung 1950-1960 (Stuttgart, 1962), p. 35.)
F.W. Wodtke draws attention to Benn's renunciation
of his earlier views in his comments on the poem
'Am Brückenwehr' of 1934. (F.W.W., Gottfried Benn,
second edition (Stuttgart, 1970), p. 56.)

51. Hans Otto Horch, Gottfried Benn - Worte Texte Sinn (Darmstadt, 1975), p.25.
52. Lohner, Passion und Intellekt, p.184.
53. Edgar Lohner, 'Gottfried Benn und T.S. Eliot', in Neue Deutsche Hefte, 3 (1956), 100-107 (p.105).
54. Loc.cit.
55. Here, for comparison, are some of the things John Dewey wrote about 'the act of expression':
'...when excitement about subject matter goes deep, it stirs up a store of attitudes and meanings derived from prior experience. As they are aroused into activity they become conscious thoughts and emotions... (...) ...an emotion is to or from or about something objective, whether in fact or in idea. (...) art is selective (...) because of the role of emotion in the act of expression. Any predominant mood automatically excludes all that is uncongenial with it. An emotion (...) reaches out tentacles for that which is cognate, for things which feed it and carry it to completion. (...) Inflamed inner material must find objective fuel upon which to feed. Through the interaction of the fuel with the material already afire the refined and formed product comes into existence.'
(J.D., Art as Experience (London, 1934), pp.65, 67-68.)
56. M.Kent Casper, 'The Circle and the Centre: Symbols of Totality in Gottfried Benn', in German Life and Letters, 26 (1972-73), 288-297 (p.294).
57. TLS, 3 October 1980, p.1096.
58. It is important to note that the 'Substantive' Benn gives preference to, and the 'verbale Figur' he comes close to dismissing (1075), are those encountered in print, which act as stimuli to the creative imagination. From this one may reasonably expect that the noun will feature more promin-

ently in poetic form as Benn sees it than the verb, but Benn does not proscribe the latter. Here lies another source of the suggestion made so often that Benn's theory and practice went separate ways.

59. Benn's 'Chiffre' bears some resemblance to the 'Chiffrensprache' of Novalis. The Romantic poet, who strives to understand the order pattern of Nature, senses evidence of it 'on wings, eggshells, in clouds, in the snow...' (See Bruce Haywood, Novalis: The Veil of Imagery ('S-Gravenhage, 1959), pp.31-32.) The modern poet, who strives to understand the order of 'Being', gets glimpses of it through the mediation of words (cf. lines 1-2 of Benn's poem 'Ein Wort', chapter four, pp.215-216).
60. Quoted from Goethe: Gedichte, edited by Erich Trunz, tenth edition (München, 1974), p.248.
61. Reinhold Grimm, 'Die problematischen Probleme', GB, pp.214-215.
62. Grimm, op.cit., p.214.
63. Grimm maintains that on closer inspection these two symptoms will coincide (op.cit., p.215). Liewerscheidt goes further still by arguing that all four symptoms are reducible to the division of subject and object (Benns Lyrik, p.49). I do not think that the interrelation of these four symptoms, which Liewerscheidt is right to point out, allows us to ignore the finer distinctions that bring out different facets of one coherent whole.
64. This may explain the conspicuous absence from Benn's theoretical work of considerations of metaphor. His entire work contains only two references to metaphor. In 'Der Geburtstag'(1916) we read: 'Da wollte er sich etwas Bildhaftes zuzurufen, aber es mißlang: vielleicht sei schon die Metapher ein Fluchtversuch, eine Art Vision und ein Mangel an Treue.' (5,1221)

- In Probleme der Lyrik, 'Metaphorik' is listed as one of the 'themes' relevant to modern poetry (4,1066). - Similarly, 'Chiffre' occurs four times - always denoting the printed word that acts as a stimulus to the creative imagination: 'Ein Wort' (1,208); PdL (4,1075); LI (8,1878); LWI (8,1913).
65. 'Sofern mich mal ein (...) Schriftsteller besucht, (...) gebe ich die Sternheimsche Maxime weiter: streichen Sie die Adjektiva! Ein großes Wort von ihm! (...) Ein Wort, das die wirkliche ästhetische Lage von heute blendend erhellt.' (Letter to Thea Sternheim, 12 August 1949, AB, p.173.)
66. Benn's passion for the colour blue is yet another index of his 'Romanticism'. In tracing those 'Wege zum modernen Gedicht' that start 'bei Kant, Schiller und der deutschen Romantik', Edgar Lohner has presented it in a very positive light. (E.L., 'Wege zum modernen Gedicht: Strukturelle Analysen', in Etudes Germaniques, 15 (1960), 321-337. Also in Zur Lyrik-Diskussion, edited by Reinhold Grimm, WdF 111 (Darmstadt, 1974), pp.368-389.)
67. The 'realism' here avowed is a realism in the narrow sense that it relies on material culled from the 'real' world and presents it in a sober, 'realistic' tone - without, however, aiming at a realistic reproduction of the world or any part or aspect of it. We have already touched upon Benn's 'realism' in the context of the poeta-doctus discussion (pp. 47-49); my comments on Benn's understanding of poetic montage will further illumine this point. (See pp.68-75)
68. Liewerscheidt, Benns Lyrik, p.49.
69. 'Je mehr Reime (...) ich verwende, um so mehr enge ich meine Möglichkeiten ein, denn nicht mehr jedes Wort, das ich brauchen könnte, paßt (...) in mein Reim- und Strophenschema. Wähle ich danach aus, verringert sich mein Wortreservoir.' (Günter Herburger, 'Dogmatisches über Gedichte', in Kursbuch, 10 (1967), 150-161 (pp.151-152).)
70. Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature (London, 1975), p.132.

71. Marges de la philosophie, from which Culler quotes, was published in 1972.
72. 1.1932 in 'Nach dem Nihilismus': 'Montagetyp' employed as a negative description of modern man (3,716).
2.1948 in 'Drei Alte Männer': 'Monteure', 'Streckenarbeiter [mit] Saisonaufträge[n]' derided as incapable of producing 'Bleibendes'(6,1584).
3.1949 in Doppelleben: Benn's most detailed comment on 'Montagekunst'(8,2028-31).
4.1951 in 'W.H.Auden, "Das Zeitalter der Angst": 'einmontiert'(7,1822) - montage as source of certain stylistic effects.
5.1952 in 'Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi': 'montagehaft'(7,1754) - indication of the 'new style'.
6.1955 in 'Soll die Dichtung das Leben bessern?': as in PdL (4,1156).
73. See Reinhold Grimm, 'Montierte Lyrik', in Evokation und Montage, co-authored by Heinz Otto Burger and Reinhold Grimm (Göttingen, 1961), pp.44-68. - Also: Patrick Bridgwater, 'The Making of a Poet: Hans Magnus Enzensberger', in German Life and Letters, 21 (1967-68), 27-44.)
74. Wolfgang Iser, 'Image und Montage: Zur Bildkonzeption der imagistischen Lyrik' und in T.S.Eliots "Waste Land", in Immanente Ästhetik, edited by Wolfgang Iser, pp.361-393 (p.380).
75. Sergei Eisenstein, 'Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today'(1944), in S.E., Film Form: Essays in Film Theory, edited and translated by Jay Leyda (London, 1951), pp.195-255. Also: S.E., 'The Cinematographic Principle'(1929), in Film Form, pp.28-44. - Since Leyda's is the only translation available for reference I have decided to quote from it although I do not find it altogether satisfactory.
76. 'Dickens, Griffith', op.cit., p.238. - The italics in this quotation and all that follow are Eisenstein's.
77. Op.cit., p.236.
78. I would suggest a more literal translation:
'...but above all a unity which in the play of inner contradictions, through the changing of the play of

tensions, produces its organic pulse.' (S.E., Izbrannye proizvedeniya v shesti tomakh (Moscow, 1964-71), vol.5 (1968), p.163.)

79. 'Dickens, Griffith', op.cit., p.235.
80. Op.cit., pp.236-237.
81. 'The Cinematographic Principle', op.cit., p.37.
82. 'Dickens, Griffith', p.254.
83. Op.cit., p.249.
84. Op.cit., p.251.
85. Peter Reichel, 'Artistenevangelium: Zu den theoretischen Grundlagen von Werk und Wirken des späten Gottfried Benn', in GB, pp.313-349 (p.336). - Also: Ursula Wirtz, Die Sprachstruktur Gottfried Benns: Ein Vergleich mit Nietzsche (Göppingen, 1971), pp. 156-182.
86. 'Image und Montage', Immanente Ästhetik, pp.379-380.
87. Michael Townson, in discussing Benn's practice of montage, seems to discard its affective side altogether: 'An image which is to be understood by the intellect rather than the imagination qualifies for the title of montage.' (M.T., 'The Montage-Technique in Gottfried Benn's Lyric', in DiW, pp. 142-170 (p.144). - Hans-Jürgen Schmitt appears to have recognized, in Benn's practice, the basic duality which I suggest inheres in his idea of fascinating montage. Schmitt distinguishes between 'harmonious' and 'disparate' montage, defining the former as 'Gliederung und Durchkonstruktion des Materials zu einer "vieldimensionalen Einheit"', and the latter, somewhat less succinctly, thus: 'Nur die einzelnen Teile für sich genommen, sind disparat, aber sie sind in ihrer Anordnung zu einem Bedeutungszusammenhang gegliedert.' (H.-J.Sch., Über das dichterische Verfahren in der Lyrik Gottfried Benns (Würzburg, 1970), pp.79 and 102.) - Harmonious fusion and combination of disparate parts are the two aspects of montage elaborated by Eisenstein and Iser respectively. They do not, in my opinion, constitute two different kinds of montage as Schmitt

maintains (pp.101-102). Their relationship is, at the outside, one of contiguity rather than opposition, the 'difference' between them being determined by the degree to which the affective or cognitive factor predominates. Schmitt's failure to satisfactorily delimit one from the other corroborates my point. - Franz Forster, without going into much detail, also suggests that two 'variants' of the term 'montage' should be used: one to denote 'die dem Technischen vergleichbare Präzision des Zusammenfügens der Bestandteile', following Townsen's definition; and one to denote 'die Beziehungen zwischen den Bildern des Endprodukts', modifying Theo Meyer's 'Wortkombinatorik' into 'Bildkombinatorik'. (F.F., 'Gottfried Benns Gedicht "Welle der Nacht"', in Sprachkunst, 7 (1976), 72-89 (p.72). This distinction merely separates the process of assemblage from the structure it produces, contributing nothing to our understanding of the particular quality of the montage structure.

88. Wolfgang Iser, Der implizite Leser: Kommunikationsformen des Romans von Bunyan bis Beckett (München, 1972), p.9.
89. Der implizite Leser, p.9.
90. Wilhelm Dilthey, Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung, twelfth edition (Göttingen, 1921), p.125.

CHAPTER TWO

1. Horst Fritz, 'Gottfried Benns Anfänge', in GB, 261-283.
2. Op.cit., p.267.
3. Op.cit., pp.271-272.
4. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, 'Das Gespräch über Gedichte', in Gesammelte Werke in Einzelausgaben, edited by Herbert Steiner, Prosa II (Stockholm-Frankfurt a.M., 1951), pp.94-112 (p.99).
5. Hofmannsthal, op.cit., p.101.

6. Hofmannsthal, op.cit.,
7. Op.cit.
8. See Theo Meyer, 'Gottfried Benn und der Expressionismus', in GB, pp.379-408 (p.384).
9. Heinrich Wölfflin, Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe (München, 1915).
10. A conclusion to this effect has been reached by Eckart Oehlenschläger who appears to take literally and therefore to put a too narrow meaning on Thom's idea of Jacobsen's 'naturwissenschaftliche Beschäftigung mit den Dingen'. (E.Oe., Provokation und Vergegenwärtigung, p.97.)
11. See also Horst Fritz's comment on the positive implication which Hofmannsthal's line acquires in Benn's context. ('Benn's Anfänge', GB, pp.268-269.)
12. Friedrich Wilhelm Wodtke, Gottfried Benn, second edition (Stuttgart, 1970), p.17.
13. Jürgen Schröder interprets this 'ich'-'ihr' constellation as a direct reflection of Benn's own socio-psychological point of departure. (J.Sch., Gottfried Benn: Poesie und Sozialisation (Stuttgart, 1978), p.48.) Although I have serious reservations about Professor Schröder's psychologizing stance, his argument that this constellation was to remain at the base of all of Benn's endeavour lends support to my contention that Benn is better understood if the thread of consistency running through all of his utterances is duly appreciated.
14. The lines depicting the poet working at the block of marble possess a certain ambiguity, which has led Schröder to suggest that the poet is using his forehead, instead of his hands, to hammer out form. (Poesie und Sozialisation, p.49.) This interpretation finds support not only in the young Benn's desire to annihilate 'die Stirn' and what it stands for (cf. the 'Ikarus'- poems of 1915), but also in the fact that it brings to light Benn's lasting conviction of the poet's ineluctable self-sacrifice. However, the preposition 'am' - not 'aus' - seems to indicate that no such grotesque image is intended.

15. This formulation is found in Benn's introduction of 1955 to the anthology Lyrik des expressionistischen Jahrzehnts. Significantly, it appears as a plural: 'Ich würde eher sagen, daß sich im Verlauf einer Kulturperiode innere Lagen wiederholen, gleiche Ausdruckszwänge wieder hervortreten, die eine Weile erloschen waren - so wiederholte sich im Expressionismus zwar der Sturm und Drang,...'(7,1836). The implication I wish to draw attention to is that the urge for expression is seen as something compelling the poet as a poet, no matter in what time he lives. 'Die Ananke des Ausdrucksschaffens' (PdL: 4,1089) is only a radicalization of this fact due to the radically changed epistemological situation.
16. Herbert Braun, Wandlungen des künstlerischen Ich bei Gottfried Benn (München, 1960), pp.66 and 78.
17. Op.cit., p.80.
18. Op.cit., p.78.
19. Hanspeter Brode, 'Studien zu Gottfried Benn I', DVjs, 46 (1972), p.724.
20. M.Kent Casper, 'The Circle and the Centre', GLL, 26 (1972-73), p.296.
21. Christiansen, Benn, p.38.
22. Braun, Wandlungen, pp.76-82.
23. Benn, pp.39-40.
24. Op.cit., p.43.
25. Except on one occasion where it serves, together with the institution, as a negative foil (1214).
26. 'Systemwiesel' alludes to Morgenstern's 'ästhetisches Wiesel' which sat on a 'Kiesel / inmitten Bachgeriesel' to suit the rhyme pattern.
27. Semi Meyer, Probleme der Entwicklung des Geistes. Erster Band: Die Geistesformen. For a brief comment see Dieter Wellershoff, Phänotyp dieser Stunde, pp.66-67.

28. Friedrich Nietzsche: Werke, edited by Karl Schlechta, 5 vols (Frankfurt a.M.-Berlin-Wien, 1972-77), II, p.734.
29. Letter to Gertrud Zenzes, 15 April 1922, AB, p.18.

CHAPTER THREE

1. Adams, Critique of Substance, pp.67 and 77.
2. It is interesting to note that Wolfgang Iser sees a very similar kind of 'nihilism' - a 'Negation imperativischen Charakter[s]' - at work in the English novel from Bunyan to Beckett (Der implizite Leser, p.8.)
3. The most instructive work to date remains Dieter Wellershoff's Gottfried Benn: Phänotyp dieser Stunde (1958). - On the connexions between Benn's poetic and his readiness to fall in with Fascism, see Reinhard Alter, Gottfried Benn: The Artist and Politics (1910-1934) (Bern-Frankfurt a.M., 1976). Alter explains that Benn's adherence to both the irrational and the constructive principle lies at the root of his attraction to Nazism (Op.cit., pp.84-85). Alter points to an area that was no doubt responsible for Benn's 'intellectual short circuit'. However, it should be spelled out more clearly than Alter does that Benn's ideas of 'Rausch' and 'Form' were not identical with those held by the National Socialists, and that his political error sprang from the fact that initially he saw in National Socialism a substantiation of his ideas.- H.M.Ridley, following Karl Kraus's criticism of Benn's relationship to language, adds what he calls Benn's 'deficient attitude to language' that rendered him insensitive to the impoverishment of language and politically blind. (H.M.R., 'National Socialism and Literature', unpublished doctoral dissertation, Cambridge, 1967, pp.316-332.) Ridley's criticism would carry more conviction if it was based on specific and sufficiently comprehensive example and analysis.
4. Wirtz; Die Sprachstruktur, pp.20 and 180-182; Adams, Critique, p.125; Reichel, Künstlermoral, p.67.

5. In his essay 'Zur Problematik des Dichterischen' (1930) Benn quotes extensively from Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (3,638-639) and leaves little doubt about the strong impression this ethnologist's writings have made on him.
6. Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p.40.
7. Joseph P. Dolan, 'The "Tierkreisgedichte" of Elisabeth Langgässer in Historical Context', in Seminar, 14 (1978), no.3, 215-229 (p.222).
8. Op.cit., p.223.
9. Friedrich Wilhelm Wodtke, Gottfried Benn: Selected Poems (Oxford, 1970), pp.132-134.
10. Quoted from Goethe: Gedichte, edited by Erich Trunz, tenth edition (München, 1974), p.156.
11. The 'Schleier'-image provides another link to both classical aesthetics and Romanticism. Goethe, we recall, speaks of 'Der Dichtung Schleier aus der Hand der Wahrheit' ('Zueignung', Gedichte, ed.Trunz, pp.149-152, p.152, l.96.); the 'veil', as Bruce Haywood explains, is a central symbol in Novalis (B.H., The Veil of Imagery, esp. pp.11-13 and 32). This double allusion points to some ideas my study will show to be fundamental to Benn's aesthetic: man is cut off from the intercourse with nature he once enjoyed; poetry both reveals and conceals 'truth'; it communicates and refuses communication; it affords relief and pleasure to the poet as well as the yet 'Ungeborenen'.
12. 'Selige Sehnsucht', ll.17-20. Quoted from Goethes Werke, Hamburger Ausgabe, Vol.II (1949), p.19.
13. Selected Poems, p.187.
14. Quoted from Hölderlin: Sämtliche Werke, Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe, edited by Friedrich Beißner (1946-1968), Vol.I (1946), pp.306-307.
15. Selected Poems, p.181.
16. Wodtke, loc.cit.

17. The following does not claim to be an exhaustive interpretation. For an explanation of many of its literary allusions see Wodtke's comments: Selected Poems, pp.170-180.
18. These lines, of course, have significant autobiographical implications. Wodtke explains: 'Den entscheidenden Punkt der Abwendung vom totalen Staat des Dritten Reiches und des entschlossenen Rückzugs in das eigene Reich der Kunst bezeichnet der (...) Gedichtzyklus 'Am Brückenwehr', vier Monolog-Gedichte, die als innere Auseinandersetzung zwischen Ich und Du des Dichters die schärfste Selbstkritik am eigenen, unverzeihlichen Irrtum vollziehen und das Programm der zukünftigen Arbeit enthalten:...' (Gottfried Benn, p.56.)
19. Selected Poems, p.174.
20. As Beda Allemann points out, Benn is rarely concerned with a correct presentation of the authors' views from whom he quotes: '...insofern Benn zwar gerne zitiert, aber selten oder nie die Position der zitierten Autoren zu seiner eigenen macht, ihre Äußerungen vielmehr in die eigene Konzeption einschmilzt.' (B.A., Gottfried Benn: Das Problem der Geschichte (Pfullingen, 1963), p.28.)
21. Quoted from Goethes Gedichte, ed. Trunz, p.359.
22. Wodtke, Selected Poems, p.174.
23. There is in these lines an echo of Nietzsche's 'Venedig'-poem:
An der Brücke stand
jüngst ich in brauner Nacht.
Fernher kam Gesang:
goldener Tropfen quoll's
über die zitternde Fläche weg.
Gondeln, Lichter, Musik -
trunken schwamm's in die Dämmerung hinaus...

Meine Seele, ein Saitenspiel,
sang ich, unsichtbar berührt,
heimlich ein Gondellied dazu,
zitternd vor bunter Seligkeit.
- Hörte Jemand ihr zu?
(Musarionausgabe, XX, p.152)
24. Wodtke, Selected Poems, pp.179-180.
25. See Harald Steinhagen, Die Statischen Gedichte von Gottfried Benn (Stuttgart, 1969), p.37.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Date uncertain; according to Dieter Wellershoff's researches, they cannot have been written before 1940 or after 1945 (see 8,2176).
2. Wodtke, Gottfried Benn, p.75.
3. Renata Purekevich, without offering proof from Benn's writings, suggests that 'Benn besonders für den Künstler die Droge als Mittel der Wirklichkeitsdurchstoßung befürwortete'. (R.P., Dr. med. Gottfried Benn: Aus anderer Sicht (Bern-Frankfurt a.M., 1976), p.132.) She neither mentions, let alone tries to explain the fact that Benn did not use drugs himself. Günter Witschel, whose treatment of the matter is more discerning, yet debilitated by literalism, takes account of this fact but maintains nevertheless that Benn 'fordert (...) die Droge für den schöpferischen Menschen zur Erzeugung einer Wirklichkeit aus Gehirnrinde'. (G.W., Rausch und Rauschgift bei Baudelaire, Huxley, Benn und Burroughs (Bonn, 1968), p.73.) The 'strange contradiction' Witschel arrives at by the logic of his own argument is a familiar yet unsatisfactory answer to the question raised.
4. Nele Poul Soerensen, Mein Vater Gottfried Benn (Wiesbaden, 1960), p.65.
5. Loc.cit.
6. William Rey calls attention to Benn's 'Einsicht in den tiefen Sinn des organischen Wachstums' as attested to by the poem 'Ebereschen'. But consistent with his idea of Benn's 'rigorose[s] Artistendogma von der Form als dem einzigen Inhalt der Kunst', he suggests that this shows up the mature Benn's disobedience to his own theory; Rey comes to this interesting conclusion: 'Seine Größe besteht eben darin, daß er seiner eigenen Kunsttheorie nicht zum Opfer fiel.' (W.R., 'Gottfried Benn's Abschiedsgedicht', Wirkendes Wort, 20 (1970), p.168.)
7. Quoted from Goethes Werke, Hamburger Ausgabe, Vol.II, p.16.

8. Letter to Peter Schifferli, 23 November 1947, quoted from Wodtke, Selected Poems, p.211.
9. Quoted from W.D.Williams, 'Friedrich Nietzsche', in German Men of Letters, edited by Alex Natan, Vol.II (London, 1963), p.26.
10. Reichel, Künstlermoral, p.67.
11. Loc.cit.
12. Wodtke, Selected Poems, p.213.
13. Selected Poems, p.214.
14. 'Mit einiger Berechtigung wird man in diesen Versen auch einen gewissen Widerruf von Benns eigenen Dichtungstheorien sehen können...' (Anton Reininger, 'Gottfried Benn: "Biographische Gedichte"', in Studi Germanici, 8 (1970), 224-250 (p.244).)
15. Peter Reichel, Künstlermoral, pp.75-76; Michael Hamburger, TLS, 3 October 1980, p.1096.

CHAPTER FIVE

1. Peter Reichel, Künstlermoral, p.74.
2. 'Selbst geistige Produktion ist menschlich-rückblicklich u. fast plump u familiär, es ist immer noch Glauben, aber echt ist nur, wer völlig sich versagt u. schweigt,...' (27 May 1946, BOe,II,1, p.33.)
'Man hat uns zu weite Räume eröffnet, zuviel Kreise, zu schwere Gefühle - ist vielleicht Kunstmachen überhaupt eine untiefe Reaktion, ist nicht vielleicht schweigend an der menschlichen Substanz leiden - tiefer?' (APK, 1954: 4,1141)
3. See Hillebrand, 'Benn und Nietzsche', GB,p.411.
4. 'Nietzsche could stand back from himself, from his obsessions and irrationalities - the one thing Benn consistently refused to do, at least in public.'
'In his determination (...) never to correct his

specific errors publicly but to admit them so generally that the admission became an excuse - fired off in terms of new questionable generalizations about "the white race", the state of the arts, in which "style" had replaced "truth", or of the sciences and the divided, isolated consciousness they had induced - he concealed the changes of mind and heart, the mellowing we can discern in the letters to Oelze.' (TLS, 3 October 1980, p.1096.) Mr Hamburger's argument would carry more conviction had he himself taken the trouble to offer more than generalizations.

5. Joachim Vahland, Gottfried Benn: Der unversöhnte Widerspruch (Heidelberg, 1979). Dr Vahland fails to substantiate conclusively his central thesis because he seems to expend most of his intellectual verve on the compilation rather than analysis of evidence.
6. Benn's sovereign approach to words is also responsible for what Vahland, in discussing Benn's metaphors, has described as 'einen für Benn typischen Kunstgriff: Die Kontinuität des Basis-Vokabulars bleibt auch dann bewahrt, wenn bestimmte Vorstellungen sich ändern; positive wie negative Charakterisierungen werden mit denselben sprachlichen Mitteln dargestellt.' (Der unversöhnte Widerspruch, p.83.) - Again and again we observe Benn playing on his readers' or listeners' familiarity with certain words, provoking reflection and reappraisal. The checkered history of Benn-criticism indicates how much havoc this kind of provocation was liable to cause. The need to study every one of Benn's words in its particular context can hardly be overestimated.
7. Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Aus dem Nachlaß der Achtzigerjahre', in Werke, edited by Karl Schlechta, Vol.IV, p.86.
8. Nietzsche, loc.cit.
9. Liewerscheidt, Benns Lyrik, p.49.
10. One critic who does seem to do justice to Benn's 'integrated ambivalence' is Walter Hof: 'Solche Widersprüche haben manche seiner Interpreten

irritiert und einen - Walter Muschg - gar zu Zornesausbrüchen veranlaßt, (...) Aber Benns Grundprinzip ist nun einmal das der Ambivalenz, und die ist widersprüchlicher Natur. In der eigentümlichen Schwebestimmung (...) besitzt er das Grundelement, in dem sich die Widersprüche aufheben.' (W.H., Der Weg zum heroischen Realismus (Bebenhausen, 1974), p.266.)

11. Vahland, Der unversöhnte Widerspruch, p.30.
12. Anton Reininger calls attention to Benn's use of inverted commas: 'Man darf sie wohl als Zeichen nehmen, die auf den besonderen Sinn dieser Verse aufmerksam machen sollen.' (A.R., 'Biographische Gedichte', Studi Germanici, 8 (1972), p.239.) Reininger's comment relates to the poem 'Unanwendbar' but seems to hold good for many other cases, although lines 11-12 of 'Epilog 1949' are in fact a quotation from the poem 'Schleierkraut' of 1925 (1,114).
13. Cf. 'Trunkene Flut', ll.30-32: 'aus Not und Gebrest/
eine Schöpfergestalt,/ die uns leben läßt'(1,61).
14. Joachim Vahland, by tearing these lines from their context and claiming them for his theory of Benn's 'static poem', puts a rather more clear-cut, and in my opinion wrong, meaning on them: 'Der vitalistischen Dynamik des Lebens soll die Statik der Kunstwerke Einhalt gebieten;' (Der unversöhnte Widerspruch, p.107.) The function of a bridge is not to arrest the current but to keep us out of it; for Benn, the function of art is not to oppose, but to aid.
15. It is interesting to note that Benn cites Goethe's 'Parzenlied' as the first of the three 'Geliebte Gedichte' that have commanded his unreserved admiration: 'die ich während meines Lebens immer wieder gelesen und immer wieder bewundert habe, zu denen meine Gedanken und Studien in den verschiedensten Situationen zurückkehrten.'
16. Wodtke, Selected Poems, p.221.
17. Loc.cit.

18. Das dichterische Verfahren, pp.96-98.
19. Schmitt, op.cit., p.98.
20. Op.cit., p.97.
21. Op.cit., p.98.
22. Selected Poems, p.221.
23. Loc.cit.
24. See Siegbert Praver, Seventeen Modern German Poets (Oxford, 1971), p.149, note on line 20.
25. J.M.Ritchie's translation does not include ll.24-26. (J.M.R., Gottfried Benn: The Unreconstructed Expressionist (London, 1972), p.118.
26. Schmitt suggests the exact reverse: the first part is presented in a 'provocative', the second in a 'cool' tone. (Das dichterische Verfahren, pp.97-98.) This reading appears to be based on an identification of 'rhetorical' and 'provocative' speech. I cannot share Schmitt's view.
27. Schmitt writes: 'Benn kann zwar theoretisch den "Satzbau" nicht erläutern, doch kann er ihn praktisch in der Form des Gedichts verwirklichen - damit kommt man auf das formale Problem.' (p.97) And further on: 'Man darf also von einer rhetorisch gegliederten Redeweise sprechen, (...) deren Ausdruckskraft durch ihre Anordnung wirkt.' (p.98) Schmitt's comment, 'Über solches Sprechen hat sich Benn zwar dichtungstheoretisch nie geäußert' (p.98) hits the nail on the head. But when, in an effort to reconcile this fact with his interpretation of the form in hand, he goes on to claim that he knows Benn better than Benn knew himself (p.98), he is venturing into dangerous territory.
28. Professor Praver, commenting on this line, calls attention to the role the Berlin dialect plays in Benn's language. (Seventeen Poets, p.149.) This is what Benn himself had to say on the matter: 'Einen Schock hat mir Ihre neue Bemerkung über das "fatal Berlinische" versetzt, ich fürchte, daß ich reichlich viel davon assimiliert habe u. mir ist das Schnoddrige u. Kaltschnäuzige nicht so

desagréable wie Ihnen. Es ist eine Nuance der großen Desillusionierung, die ich selber ja so gerne betreibe u. die, wie ich glaube, mich stilistisch erzogen hat.' (24 September 1947, BOe,II,1,p.91; my emphasis) - Line 14 of the poem 'Satzbau' illustrates the point.

29. 'Ja, was man so erkennen heißt! / Wer darf das Kind beim rechten Namen nennen?' (ll.588-89)
30. Wodtke, Selected Poems, p.225.
31. Loc.cit.
32. Loc.cit.
33. Loc.cit.
34. Wodtke, loc.cit.

CONCLUSION

1. Malcolm Pasley, 'Modern German Literature', in Germany: A Companion to German Studies, edited by Malcolm Pasley (London, 1977), pp.555-609 (pp.586-588).

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⁺A comprehensive bibliography of works on Benn written from 1957 to 1977 has been compiled by Bruno Hillebrand in Gottfried Benn, ed. Bruno Hillebrand, WdF 316 (Darmstadt, 1979), pp.435-469. - This collection of essays will be referred to as GB.

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