

LITERATURE AS INCARNATION: FORM AND CONTENT IN ELISABETH
LANGGÄSSER'S NOVELS

By

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For Karl

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*Das Problem ...ist vollkommen das meine – nämlich die Inkarnation und das
Dichten über sich selbst hinaus.*

-Elisabeth Langgässer to Felix Stössinger¹

¹ Langgässer, Elisabeth. "An Felix Stössinger." 11 January 1949. Letter 458 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 2
Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 863-864.

**Elisabeth Langgässer's Incarnational Literature:
Theology and Literature Unify to Embody Community**

“Der Roman ist fertig. Aber, ach, ich auch,”² Elisabeth Langgässer wrote to her confessor, Alfons Kusche, in her last letter a month before her death. With this simple statement, she perfectly articulates the connection between literature and life, where completion of one project coincides with the end of her life. This statement reflects Langgässer’s deep and abiding dedication to both the physical and the spiritual, to form and content, which she strives to unify in her life and her work. “Leben und Denken, Leben und Kunst Elisabeth Langgässers waren eins,”³ Eberhard Horst, an early Langgässer scholar, writes. In 1956, scholars like Horst only had access to Langgässer’s published fiction and a few short articles and speeches. As a result of this limited access, the scholarship of Horst and his contemporaries considers Catholic theology and its critical engagement with the world. Horst’s scholarship therefore perceives unity between Langgässer’s Catholic fiction and Catholic life only.

While Horst and his contemporaries did not realize that the classification of *Mischling ersten Grades* by the Nazis played a distinct role not only in Langgässer’s identity as well as her relationship to her daughter, his assessment remains true. The additional layers of imposed Jewish identity, as well as the private Catholic aspects of Langgässer’s identity, are now accessible through Langgässer’s published letters and archive. These layers of knowledge about Langgässer add further complexity to the

² Langgässer, Elisabeth. “To Alfons Kusche.” 25 June 1950. Letter 599 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 2 edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 1059-1060.

³ Horst, Eberhard. “Christliche Dichtung und moderne Welterfahrung: Zum epischen Werke Elisabeth Langgässers.” Phil. Diss. Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, 1956. 1.

theoretical, theologically-based work she undertakes in her fiction. Her goal, to demonstrate the persistence of baptism in the face of evil and to re-knit the unraveling fabric of German society, includes Christians and Jewish Germans (but only those who have converted to Christianity, which is problematic because it implicitly supports the narrative of Germany as an explicitly Christian country). The single Christian community posits the Incarnation, where the Incarnation bridges the distance between the divine and the human.⁴ Because of Langgässer's exclusion from community during the Nazi regime, she focuses on building a community to which she belonged through the Incarnation. She applies this incarnational thinking to her theory of literature, creating a whole theology of literature where form cannot be distinguished from content, just as human cannot be separated from divine in the Incarnation.

Langgässer's final works, *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* (1946) and *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* (1950), reflect her developing theology of literature, where the Incarnation defines her understanding of the relationship between the divine and the world and is mirrored by the relationship between Catholic literature and the world. The theology is also influenced by her own physical experiences (such as suffering from multiple sclerosis) and spiritual experiences (evidenced by an ongoing fascination with mysticism). While this dissertation will focus primarily on the intersection of Langgässer's theology in her literary work and theory of literature, her biography

⁴ Jürgen Moltmann addresses the Incarnation's role in the Trinity and defines the special relationship between the Son and the Father through the Incarnation: "God intended the incarnation of the Son of God from eternity. His intention was formed together with the idea of the world, though taking precedence over it; so that creation represents the external framework and preparation for the Son's incarnation," so that "the Son ... becomes the foundation of the new creation" (114). See: Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981.

illuminates why the body and soul—their consideration together, a sort of incarnation—matter so much in her thinking.

Until now, scholarship has focused either on Langgässer's theology, with minimal focus on her theoretical writings, or on her biography, with limited work on her religious motivation with a few notable exceptions. Langgässer scholarship can be roughly classified in three stages or waves: 1) the initial wave, where the focus was primarily theological (1950s and 60s); 2) the second wave, where Langgässer's Jewish identity and her rocky relationship with her daughter were the primary interest (1980s and 1990s); and 3) a third wave, which began in the 1990s and runs through present. The third wave considers both the theological foundation of Langgässer's work and considers her work alongside other German writers. The most recent scholarship, including lectures, accounts for the second wave of Langgässer scholarship but primarily considers Langgässer's work within the modernist German tradition, in many ways bringing Langgässer scholarship full circle.⁵

Scholarship of the 1950s and into the 60s, which makes up the first of three major waves of Langgässer scholarship, focuses on Elisabeth Langgässer's fiction and the theology that informs her projects. Scholars address her Catholic rather than her imposed Jewish identity. Depending on the scholar, Langgässer's work is radical or conservative. The experiments with form were in tune with the public's perception of upheaval after

⁵ Langgässer continues to be of interest to scholars working on 20th century German poets as well as modernists. For example, two papers at a 2012 conference in Münster, Germany addressed her work: Scherer, Stefan. "Textur der Synthetischen Moderne (Döblin, Lampe, Lange, Fallada, Kreuder, Langgässer, Koeppen)." Paper presented at *Deutsche Literatur 1920-1960. Zur (Dis-) Kontinuität literarischer Verfahren*. Münster, Germany. 9 February 2012. And: Leine, Torsten. "'Wer sich gefunden hat, ist freigesprochen' Identität und Mythos in Elisabeth Langgässers 'Gang durch das Ried' und Ilse Aichingers 'Die größere Hoffnung.'" Paper presented at *Deutsche Literatur 1920-1960. Zur (Dis-) Kontinuität literarischer Verfahren*. Münster, Germany. 11 February 2012.

the war, but the religious element returned, so many readers thought, to the old structures of religion they rejected. With the rejection of organized religion came a rejection of Langgässer's Catholic work. Langgässer, however, does not recommend a simple return to the Church, but a mystic and transcendental relationship between the believer, divine, and world—a relationship which has always pushed the boundaries of orthodoxy.

As a writer, Langgässer found herself in a complex situation: she wanted to both respond to the contemporary situation and play with form like the greats James Joyce and William Faulkner,⁶ while remaining true to the core of the Christian narrative, the *Heilsgeschichte* established through centuries of theology. This creates a tension in her work; some critics perceive Langgässer's attempts to reconcile the contemporary play with form with the Christian narrative as ultimately failed, while others appreciate the difficulties associated with maintaining a Christian perspective of the world while depicting it in its complexity and precariousness. Ultimately, Langgässer resolves this tension—at least theoretically, if not practically—by making a distinction between the fallen world (*Kosmos*)⁷ she depicts in her late fiction and the *Heilsgeschichte* the stories move toward, even though the two are completely interrelated and, in terms of faith, inseparable.

⁶ Langgässer was familiar with Joyce and Faulkner's work; she names them in her analysis of modern literature in "Möglichkeiten christlicher Dichtung – heute." In *Das Christliche der christlichen Dichtung. Vorträge und Briefe*. Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1961. 17, and she also owned works by the two authors, notably German translations of Faulkner's *Light in August*, *Absalom! Absalom!*, and Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*, *Ulysses*, and *Dubliners*. First wave scholarship compares Langgässer to James Joyce's work, notably Eva Augsburg (Augsberger, Eva. *Elisabeth Langgässer: Assoziative Reihung, Leitmotiv und Symbol in ihren Prosawerken*. Nürnberg: Hans Carl, 1962. 9. And also: Horst, Eberhard. "Christliche Dichtung und moderne Welterfahrung: Zum epischen Werke Elisabeth Langgässers." Phil. Diss. Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, 1956. 160-179.).

⁷ Compare with: Hardenbruch, Ilse. *Der Roman 'Das unauslöschliche Siegel' im dichterischen Werk Elisabeth Langgässers. Ein Beitrag zur Form des modernen religiösen Romans*. Düsseldorf: Zentralverlag für Dissertationen Triltsch, 1962. 1-5.

Langgässer's detractors of this first wave focus on the disjointed qualities of her texts, on the conflation of too many images in one scene, on the flat characters, and on Langgässer's apparent fascination with the perverse.⁸ Peter Demetz, writing at the end of the first wave of Langgässer scholarship, takes a far more sympathetic stance and appreciates her work as a rarity only a few can appreciate:

Ich halte es für symptomatisch, daß die schwierigen Arbeiten Elisabeth Langgässers, die von den Nationalsozialisten verfolgt wurde, nicht lange Beachtung fanden. Sie stieß ihre Mitkatholiken durch schwüle Bilder des Geschlechtlichten und die Leser der Linken, die eher erdgebundene Relevanz fordern, durch die weiß-glühende Leidenschaft ihrer mystischen Passionen ab. Heute wird sie nur noch von wenigen Glücklichen gelesen.⁹

Precisely those attributes critics deride are positives here, challenges for the reader to rise to, rather than deficiencies in the text.

Ilse Hardenbruch reads Langgässer's pure artistic work as also displaying a tension, "zwischen Beschwörung und Belehrung, zwischen Symbol und Allegorie," where the *Beschwörung des göttlichen Mysteriums* (Hardenbruch, 2) connects *Dichtung* with mystery as revelatory. The artistic work brings earthly and heavenly realms together: "Vielmehr sind Kunst und Mysterium derart miteinander verbunden, daß – je stärker sich Dichtung 'rein' erhält, d.h. sich auf ihre ureigensten Mittel der Gestaltung

⁸ Rose Matz, one of the critics who did not appreciate Langgässer's work, writes: "Das Entmutigende ist, daß die Gestalten, deren Schicksal bis zum Ende verfolgt wird, nicht sündig, sondern pervers sind. Ihre Laster gehören nicht vor die Ohren eines Beichtvaters, sondern in das Sprechzimmer eines Psychiaters" (186). Matz, Rose. "Christliche Motive bei Elisabeth Langgässer, Graham Greene, Gertrud von Le Fort und George Bernanos." *Theologische Rundschau*. 19 (1951): 186-192.

⁹ Maassen, J. P. J. *Die Schrecken der Tiefe: Untersuchungen zu Elisabeth Langgässers Erzählungen*. Leiden: Universitaire Pers, 1973. 110. She quoted: Demetz, Peter. *Die süße Anarchie. Deutsche Literatur seit 1945. Eine kritische Einführung*. Translated by Beate Paulus. Berlin: Propyläen, 1970. 59.

besinnt, - desto entscheidender auch das Göttliche als das Jenseitige sich in ihr offenbart” (Hardenbruch, 3). Art, even pure art, does not strive to be beautiful, but to connect this world and the next, to demonstrate the divine in the world and make the transcendent immanent. Langgässer sought to portray fictional literary worlds, based on her own worldview, that evidence God’s grace. The way individual characters learn about grace models a transcendent relationship; this mystic¹⁰ experience connects the individual to the numinous.¹¹ While Ilse Hardenbruch does not directly identify this experience as mystical, her descriptions of Langgässer’s experience and also her assessment of Langgässer’s language as passive and open, such as Langgässer’s willingness to be used as a vessel, share a common language with the mystics: “... weil ich zu deutlich fühle, daß ich nur Werkzeug gewesen bin, Gefäß, das noch zittert und nun leer steht” (Hardenbruch, 340). Language becomes the vehicle for mystic experience, filling Langgässer who is a means for conveying the work, rather than the creative force behind the work. Such a stance underscores the poet’s existential tightrope walk, somewhere between human and divine, prophetically passing the message from divine to humans. I would further argue that, as a sort of mouthpiece, Langgässer portrays human events on

¹⁰ Mysticism consists of a tie to the numinous, where the individual needs are forgotten, and every marker of individual identity falls away. The mystic does not think about a connection with God, but simply learns to be. Evelyn Underhill defines mysticism as “a movement of the heart, seeking to transcend the limitations of the individual standpoint and to surrender itself to ultimate Reality; for no personal gain, to satisfy no transcendental curiosity, to obtain no other-worldly joys, but purely from an instinct of love. [...] [I]n its pure form, [mysticism] is the science of ultimates, the science of union with the Absolute, and nothing else, and that the mystic is the person who attains to this union, not the person who talks about it. Not to know about, but to *Be*, is the mark of the real initiate.” Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. Digireads: Stilwell, KS, 2005. 53-54. Emphasis in the original.

Margaret Smith defines mysticism as “an attitude of mind; an innate tendency of the human soul, which seeks to transcend reason and to attain to a direct experience of God, and which believes that it is possible for the human soul to be united with Ultimate reality, when ‘God ceases to be an object and becomes an experience’” (20). Smith, Margret. “The Nature and Meaning of Mysticism.” *Understanding Mysticism*. Edited by Richard Woods. Image: Garden City, NY, 1980. 19-25.

¹¹ I use the word “numinous” to emphasize the transcendent experience of the divine as established by Rudolf Otto; used here in respect to Langgässer’s work, the “numinous” refers to the Christian divine only.

one level, with the aid of plot development (but not character development in the usual sense), and provides occasional glimpses of the divine through conversations, conversions, and confessions.

Eva Augsberger's dissertation on motifs and symbols in Langgässer's works focuses on the relationships between the worldly and the divine as well; for her, the antinomy inherent in every symbol helps explore Langgässer's *Weltbild* and how Langgässer's work fits in with other existential and nihilistic writers of the day.¹² Antimony as a guiding interpretation for Langgässer's work reflects the dialectical choice for any individual to choose God or Satan, the ultimate decision that informs Langgässer's portrayal of the world as a stage where every character can choose between good and evil (51). Augsberger's reading of antimony as dialectic also applies to the Incarnation, where Christ is both fully God and fully man. Langgässer calls this *Logos*—the word made flesh (John 1:14), a specific moment in time when the divine takes on human form, and also concurrently the spoken word at the beginning of creation, where *Logos* is also the spoken word that makes order out of chaos (John 1:3-4). Completely in both supranatural and mortal, the Incarnation spans the tension between human and divine.

With the publication of *Gebranntes Kind sucht das Feuer* (German, 1985; Swedish, 1984), a memoir written by Langgässer's daughter, Cordelia Edvardson, a second wave of Langgässer scholarship was launched that focused primarily on Langgässer's assigned Jewish identity. Edvardson, Langgässer's oldest daughter, was born in 1929; her father was Hermann Heller, a married man who was an expert in

¹² Augsberger, Eva. *Elisabeth Langgässer: Assoziative Reihung, Leitmotiv und Symbol in ihren Prosawerken*. Nürnberg: Hans Carl, 1962.

constitutional law. Because he was a Jew and, remarkably for the time, recognized Cordelia as his child, she then qualified as fully Jewish under Nazi law, as Langgässer was classified “half-Jewish” because her father was a baptized Jew¹³. Classified fully Jewish according to the Nuremberg Race Laws, Cordelia was deported to Theresienstadt, then on to Auschwitz. Remarkably, Edvardson survived and was brought to Sweden, where she recovered from tuberculosis contracted in the camp. Despite her mother’s attempt to find her, Edvardson remained silent until after Langgässer published an open letter looking for news. The relationship between the two women was fraught; the letters Langgässer wrote to her daughter and Edvardson’s account of their relationship reveal deep conflict between mother and daughter.

Scholars were interested in the relationship between the mother and daughter and—accepting Edvardson’s retelling of how she came to be separated from her family and then deported—condemned her as an unfit mother. The relationship, however, is far more complex. Elisabeth Hoffmann’s scholarly work on the relationship between the two women explores Langgässer’s multiple identities and offers a more equitable reading of the relationship between Langgässer and Edvardson than most. Remarkably, Elisabeth Hoffmann is Edvardson’s daughter, and she has done much of the groundbreaking work on Langgässer’s Catholic and imposed Jewish identities, as well as the complex familial ties. After Cordelia Edvardson’s divorce, Elisabeth Hoffmann was adopted by Wilhelm Hoffmann, Langgässer’s husband, to whom Elisabeth Hoffmann is not biologically

¹³ Langgässer contested her half-Jewish classification, even writing to Joseph Goebbels, Reich Minister of Propaganda, to assert her Arian background and Catholic faith. See: Langgässer, Elisabeth. Letter 223 “An Wilhelm Lehmann.” 3 April 1938 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 1. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 239-294. See also: Hilzinger, Sonja. *Elisabeth Langgässer: Eine Biografie*. Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2009. 208-213.

related.¹⁴ Three generations have written about and tried to work through the ramifications of the Holocaust. Hoffmann's article, "Jüdin – Deutsche – Katholikin," is one of the first to consider how the two women formed their identities and how these identities affected how they responded to their victimhood differently.¹⁵ Cathy Gelbin's *An Indelible Seal: Race, Hybridity and Identity in Elisabeth Langgässer's Writings*¹⁶ benefits from Hoffmann's work; Gelbin builds on this work, making particular use of the two-volume set of letters Hoffmann published in 1990.¹⁷ Thanks to her perusal of these letters, Gelbin offers a nuanced reading of Langgässer and Edvardson's relationship that did not happen during the second wave of Langgässer scholarship post-1984 which focuses on Langgässer's perceived betrayal of her daughter, casting Langgässer in the role of "bad mother," rather than considering Langgässer's position within a complex system where she was both a victim of the Nazi regime and enabled the victimization of her own daughter because of her desire to keep the rest of her family safe from persecution.

A handful of scholars, however, renewed an interest in Langgässer in terms of her religious perspective as it is reflected in the fictional world during the third wave of Langgässer scholarship. Konstanze Fliedl¹⁸ and Carolin Mülverstedt¹⁹ return to the first

¹⁴ See: Sayner, Joanne. *Women Without a Past?: German Autobiographical Writings and Fascism*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 153.

¹⁵ Hoffmann, Elisabeth. "Jüdin – Deutsche – Katholikin. Fragen nach der Identität am Beispiel von Elisabeth Langgässer und Cordelia Edvardson." In *Von einer Welt in die Andere: Jüdinnen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. Edited by Jutta Dick, Barbara Hahn. Wien: C. Brandstätter, 1993. 286-296.

¹⁶ Gelbin, Cathy. *An Indelible Seal: Race, Hybridity and Identity in Elisabeth Langgässer's Writings*. Essen: Verlag Die Blaue Eule, 2001.

¹⁷ Langgässer, Elisabeth, *Briefe 1924-1950*. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990.

¹⁸ Although Fliedl's work was published in 1986, which would place her at the forefront of the second wave of Langgässer fellowship, Fliedl's work focuses almost entirely on the religious aspects of

wave of Langgässer scholarship, focusing on the theological aspects of Langgässer's oeuvre. Fliedl reads narrative cues to support her argument that Langgässer's works exist on a number of temporal levels. She ties the levels of "Gegenwart" as well as "Überzeitlich" (21) with mythic time as part of a single eschatology (75-88). Her focus on time, specifically the *Heilsgeschichte*, ties the sacred and the profane events of the novels to one common goal—salvation.

Carolin Mülverstedt builds on Fliedl's work on the Augustine concept of time, *Heilsgeschichte*, and Langgässer; where Fliedl focuses on time and the *Heilsgeschichte* established by Augustine, Mülverstedt reads Langgässer's fiction with a focus on the individual and the role the individual plays as a type within *Weltgeschichte* and *Heilsgeschichte*. According to the argument in Mülverstedt's "*Denn das Thema der Dichtung ist immer der Mensch*": *Entindividualisierung und Typologisierung im Romanwerk Elisabeth Langgässers* (2000), Langgässer creates archetypes within her novels and the reader is to identify with one particular character and learn from the character's experience (162). Connections between the use of archetypes, Augustine's influence on Langgässer's thinking, and Langgässer's use of a structure similar to that of confessional literature, offer essential background for this dissertation. Using Mülverstedt's work on the connections between Augustine and Langgässer, I take a closer look at Langgässer's theoretical works, focusing on explicit and implicit

Langgässer's work. For this reason, she is being included as the vanguard of the third wave of Langgässer scholarship.

¹⁹ See: Fliedl, Konstanze. *Zeitroman und Heilsgeschichte: Elisabeth Langgässers "Märkische Argonautenfahrt."* Wien: W. Braumüller, 1986. And: Mülverstedt, Carolin. "*Denn das Thema der Dichtung ist immer der Mensch*": *Entindividualisierung und Typologisierung im Romanwerk Elisabeth Langgässers*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000. And also: Kubik, Silke. *Die europäische Ordnung stirbt--: Religion und Geschichtskonstruktion im Angesicht der Katastrophe: Eine vergleichende Untersuchung der Romane 'Die Schlafwandler' von Hermann Broch und 'Das unauslöschliche Siegel' von Elisabeth Langgässer*. Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2008.

discussions of the Incarnation, tying together the human and the divine through mysticism. For this reason, mystic figures, especially those who wrote confessional literature, play a key role in establishing the new communal body.

Combining the first and most current waves of Langgässer criticism in order to offer a new reading of her works, I posit that her theology of the Incarnation, where divine and human come together in one form, appears in multiple iterations throughout her theoretical and fictional works so that the created fictional world (created by the author) echoes the world created by God through words and the *Logos*. Through these words, the divine creates a world within which the numinous becomes immanent. The first chapter, “Literature as Form and Content Across Time and Space,” establishes the centrality and persistence of the Incarnation to Langgässer’s thinking. The Incarnation will be explored in its relationship to time and space, and the framework it provides for thinking about a new type of Catholic literature, which is deemed Catholic in both form and content. Langgässer saw her own role in the world created by God as parallel to the relationship her characters have to her as the writer. In order to clarify the relationship between creator and created and how one abides in the other, she adapts the verse from Galatians 2:20, “Ich lebe aber; doch nun nicht ich, sondern Christus lebt in mir,”²⁰ where the individual dies to the law in order to be resurrected, mirroring the resurrection of Christ. Langgässer repeats the lines in a discussion of the Christian novel and how the author interacts with the text: “nicht ich lebe, sondern Christus lebt in mir”.²¹ The

²⁰ “Galater 2.20.” *Die Bibel: Nach der Übersetzung Martin Luthers*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1985.

²¹ Langgässer, Elisabeth. *Der christliche Roman in der Gegenwart: Vortrag für Rundfunk*. Ms. 70.3050. Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach.

author's role, played down, disappears in the background of a Christ incarnated in the individual life. This holds true not only for the author and her interaction with the text as she writes, but also for the characters and their role in the fictional story. The characters themselves are insignificant, important only because they signify the role of the divine in the world. I will first explore the argument with three of the four speeches posthumously published in *Das Christliche der christlichen Dichtung*²², as well as archival work that demonstrates Langgässer's incarnational thinking, and then show how her belief in a transcendental existence translates into her fiction by providing readings of *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* and *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*.

The following two chapters use the theoretical work done in the first chapter to interpret how the Incarnation functions within and as part of Langgässer's final two novels. In the second chapter, "Becoming the Incarnation: Saints' Lives as Models for the Baptized," I study *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, building on Mülverstedt's observation that Langgässer was influenced by the genre of confessional literature launched by Augustine's *Confessions*. I will argue that the novel not only provides the reader with a template of a saint's life, but that this template models the way each individual joins an incarnational community. Incarnational community is established through a common identity in the *Logos*, where participants in baptism enter the Christian community and become one single entity, referred to as "one body," that represents Christ on earth.

Das unauslöschliche Siegel was published just after the end of the Third Reich, but was written during the Nazi regime when Langgässer was forbidden to publish under the Nürnberger Rassengesetze (1935). Raised Catholic, Langgässer fully embraced the

²² Langgässer, Elisabeth. *Das Christliche der christlichen Dichtung: Vorträge und Briefe*. Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1961.

religion she was born into; the redefinition of her identity by the Nazis as half Jewish because her father had been born Jewish radically challenged Langgässer's Catholic identity.²³ These new legal definitions excluded her from the "German" *Volk*. In response to this exclusion and keen sense of belonging to an explicitly Christian community, the novel creates a community that transcends a simple definition of race and requires only participation in the baptismal covenant. Her decision to write in spite of the laws forbidding publication demonstrates her enduring faith in the single body of her Christian community. This community, made up of others who share in the baptismal covenant, transcend the apocalyptic state of Germany after 1943, as established by the epilog of *Das unauslöschliche Siegel, Epilog 1943*, but with the signs of the fiery apocalypse clearly visible in the events of Belfontaine's life as told through the novel.

The third chapter, "'Mythos der Gegenwart': Elisabeth Langgässer's Zeitroman and Apocalyptic Book in Germany," looks at *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* as a novel not only focused on time, but on the space that Germany occupied and continues to occupy. The space and time community defined in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* continues building the ties between community and Incarnation Langgässer has already established. Conceived during the war and composed in the years after the fall of the Nazi regime when Germany was in ruins, *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* was also written as Langgässer suffered several attacks of multiple sclerosis. As her own health deteriorated, Langgässer created a community of pilgrims in the novel to represent the baptized German people (including baptized Jews, soldiers, and communists). Their journey into the German

²³ See: Hoffmann, Elisabeth. "Jüdin – Deutsche – Katholikin. Fragen nach der Identität am Beispiel von Elisabeth Langgässer und Cordelia Edvardson." In *Von Einer Welt in Die Andere: Jüdinnen Im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert*. Edited by Jutta Dick and Barbara Hahn. Wien: C. Brandstätter, 1993. 286-296.

countryside helps them form a single community that can address Germany's sins. As Langgässer's body failed, she created a new, resurrected body for all baptized Germans. Fiction was to show the way for Germans to establish a new community during the *Stunde Null* in order to (re)establish one single, dominant Christian narrative and religious identity. As part of my exploration of Langgässer's incarnational thinking amidst the post-war ruins, I consider how a new community becomes established by movement and atones for its sins by interacting with the environment by imitating the Incarnation.

CHAPTER I

Incarnational Literature: Form and Content Across Time and Space

Ich denke mir—das wäre natürlich ganz mystisch-visionär—den Sündenfallbaum weit, wie eine Höhle, geöffnet, darin die Wiege mit dem Kind u. Maria, an den Wurzeln die besiegte Schlange; Adam u. Eva anbetend. Aus dem Wurzelwerk Dämonenvolk hervorlugend.

Also eine Art “kosmischer Krippe”. Dass es in unserer Zeit ein ganz starkes Echo fände, weiss ich gewiss.

Elisabeth Langgässer thanks Martha Friedlaender²⁴ for a crèche in a letter from October 26, 1929.²⁵ The scene she suggests—which we will read about more fully in a moment—demonstrates Langgässer’s new way of thinking about the Incarnation and its manifestation across space and time. To understand this, we must first picture an ordinary crèche: animals tucked away in their stalls; the wise men either outside the stable, processing toward the couple and their child; or inside, circled around the manger with the shepherds. Inside of that larger circle, Joseph stands watching, and Mary kneels before the manger where the baby Jesus sleeps. Somewhere over the whole scene, the

²⁴ Martha Friedlaender was the mother of Marianne, a classmate and close friend of Elisabeth Langgässer’s. Martha, an artist, introduced Langgässer to literature and art, as well as a cultural and intellectual sphere (Hilzinger, 45). Langgässer lived with Martha Friedlaender in Munich from 1928 until Cordelia’s birth to avoid losing her job. See: Hilzinger, Sonja. *Elisabeth Langgässer: Eine Biografie*. Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2009. 105. And: Langgässer, Elisabeth. *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 2. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 1250.

²⁵ Cordelia would have been 10 months old at the time Langgässer wrote the letter. This means that, as Langgässer contemplates the nativity, she has just experienced what it means to be pregnant and give birth. See the discussion on form and content, “Speaking a Community into Being: Language in Worship and Writing.”

guiding star represents God's orchestrating hand. Divine and human narratives join in this moment.

The crèche Langgässer proposes portrays much more than the instant of the Incarnation. Her mystic crèche collapses time and space altogether, so that the moments of sin, grace, and redemption occur in the same space, at the same time. In this mystic-visionary crèche, Jesus and Mary sit deep within the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, as though they are the treasure buried deep in its core. They burst open the tree while remaining at its center. Moving outward from the open tree, sin—including daemons—peek out from the tree. The conquered serpent, the embodiment of temptation and sin, lies at the roots of the tree. Adam and Eve worship at Christ's feet like the shepherds and angels or even as the wise men did. Their contemporaneous existence explodes the linear story. Elements of the Fall (the daemons, Adam and Eve—sin), the Incarnation (Christ and Mary—grace), and Redemption (the conquered serpent) are all present at once in a tableau like a Matthias Grünewald altar,²⁶ yet, narratively, even more flattened. Rather than depicting each of the three elements separately as traditionally seen in altars—with sin on one panel, grace on another, and redemption on a third—the elements now inhabit one single space and, on the cosmic scale, one moment. The crèche defies chronology and makes a clear statement about how the Incarnation is both a moment in history and the coordinating point for the world within created time, which can be repeated again and again, so that the current time finds resonance with the story

²⁶ Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece radically departs from the portrayal of perspective in earlier altarpieces. His use of super-saturated color and chiaroscuro plays with perspective in new and exciting ways. While the relationship between Grünewald's new form and technique and Langgässer's own attempt to create a new literary form would be worth further exploration, particularly in the context of work on literature and visual arts, I will only mention it here in the interest of brevity. See: Seidel, Max, Matthias Grünewald, and Christian Baur. *Grünewald: Der Isenheimer Altar*. Stuttgart: Belser, 1983.

(“Dass es in unserer Zeit ein ganz starkes Echo fände”). The simplification of the *Heilsgeschichte* into one instant, represented by the crèche, creates a synecdoche where the incarnational moment of Christ’s birth transcends the historical Jesus to reach to the very beginning and very end of time. Within the context of the greater passage, the revolutionary nature of the suggestion becomes clear, as does the centrality of the Incarnation:

Ich bin ja so gespannt, wie Ihr Weg nun weitergehen wird! Könnten Sie nicht mal versuchen, imaginäre Tiere u. Chimären in die Krippenkunst einzuführen? Dinge, wie sie altes Chorgestühl hat? Z. T. ornamental verwandt, aber auch als mystisch-spekulativen Gedanken wie bei Grünewald?! Eine phantastische, erlösungsbedürftige Welt, ein Wald von Dämonen, der um die Krippe lodert! Auf jeden Fall sollten Sie den Sündenfall mit hineinnehmen u. einmal überlegen, ob man die beiden Vorgänge – Sündenfall u. Geburt Christi – nicht ganz eng zusammenschliessen könnte. Ich denke mir – das wäre natürlich ganz mystisch-visionär – den Sündenfallbaum weit, wie eine Höhle, geöffnet, darin die Wiege mit dem Kind u. Maria, an den Wurzeln die besiegte Schlange; Adam u. Eva anbetend. Aus dem Wurzelwerk Dämonenvolk hervorlugend.

Also eine Art “kosmischer Krippe”. Dass es in unserer Zeit ein ganz starkes Echo fände, weiss ich *gewiss*.

Oder, wie ich schon sagte, die Sternzeichen als ornamentalen Kranz, darüber das Auge Gottes! In diesem Stil.

Langgässer reconsiders how the crèche depicts human history within the redemption narrative. Her recasting of the same old story borrows elements from sacred Christian art to create her mystic visionary work. The imaginary-mythic Grunewaldian creatures, fantastic animals and chimera, not created by God but born from human imagination, can be found in choir stalls. Paired with the unredeemed, this reenvisioning of the Incarnation also alters the traditional understanding of how the Incarnation exists within time. She places together two parts of the salvation narrative in a contemporaneous relationship along with the means for ultimate redemption. The scenes weave in and out of one another, demonstrating their interdependence as illustrated by their creation of a complete human story overseen by God's divine eye.

The image of Christ's birth—the moment of the Incarnation—at the center of creation, triumphant, depicts the world Langgässer strives to create in her fiction. Here the visual of the crèche, the product of an artist's interaction with raw material, demonstrates the artist's understanding of the world. The relationship between the crèche (a Christian form, to borrow a concept from literature's category of genre) and what it depicts (the salvation narrative, the content) serve as a metaphor for what Langgässer achieves, depicting sin and redemption in the same work, but not in a linear way that would suggest a simple progression. Instead, Langgässer makes visible to the reader the complexities of a world where sin and redemption exist side by side and within one another.

The cosmic crèche Langgässer outlines conflates the artist's position with the viewer's. As we will see in the following sections, she achieves this formally in her

fiction, especially in *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*.²⁷ The audience takes the position of an informed viewer capable of grasping the panorama of “Sünde, Gnade und Erlösung.” The three events—moments of sin, grace, and redemption—can all be depicted in one space. The author dictates which part of the story comes to the forefront for consideration at a specific moment, slowly revealing how all the little moments interact with one another and build one large, complex picture. What appear as line-by-line sequences on the linear page—chains of sin, then grace, and finally redemption—actually stand as parts of one picture made up of three intertwined points. Langgässer frames the story’s overarching perspective in terms of the cosmos, the universal, the consistent; only small narrative aspects change. Her navigation of time and narrative in times of crisis are part of a life-long engagement with theology and aesthetic theory which deepens and broadens during Langgässer’s life.

The mystic-cosmic crèche Langgässer knows will find resonance with her time—in 1929—and does not change much post-1945, even though worlds stand between the two years. The constancy of her perspective speaks volumes to her faith in this story, where every element coexists and is therefore inseparable from the larger narrative. A series of speeches Langgässer gave in 1948 and 1949²⁸ help position her Christian understanding of the salvation narrative in the world after the fall of the Third Reich. These speeches—“Möglichkeiten christlicher Dichtung – heute,” “Der geistige Raum des christlichen

²⁷ See: Langgässer, Elisabeth. “Möglichkeiten christlicher Dichtung – heute.” In *Das Christliche der Christlichen Dichtung. Vorträge und Briefe*. Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1961. 13-27. The talk was presented at the German-French Conference in October 1948, in Royaumont, France. Langgässer fleshes out the theology behind the merged perspectives of reader and writer.

²⁸ Two collections of Langgässer’s speeches were published posthumously by Elisabeth Langgässer’s husband, Wilhelm Hoffmann: Langgässer, Elisabeth. *Geist in den Sinnen behaust*. Edited by Wilhelm Hoffmann. Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1951, and Langgässer, Elisabeth. *Das Christliche der christlichen Dichtung. Vorträge und Briefe*. Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1961.

Schriftstellers in Deutschland,” and “Grenzen und Möglichkeiten christlicher Dichtung,” all published in *Das Christliche der christlichen Dichtung* (1961)—address various aspects of the central question: How does an explicitly Christian literary depiction function within a moment or span of time, specifically, at the intersection of historical moment and particular place within which Langgässer wrote? To answer this central question, the ancillary questions must be addressed: What is the function of the Incarnation and the role of fiction for the reader? What is the relationship between the author, reader(s), and work? How does the Christian narrative remain the central focus of a work even when other conflicting or contradictory narratives compete?

Langgässer’s Early Incarnational Thinking in Die Welt vor den Toren der Kirche

The Incarnation, central to Langgässer’s understanding of how fiction functions in the world, consistently appears in even her earliest reflections on literature and faith in the world. In an unpublished essay, complex questions of literature and censorship, liturgy and life appear. *Die Welt vor den Toren der Kirche* (1922)²⁹ remains hidden in Langgässer’s archive, omitted from critical discussions of theology in her work.³⁰ The essay outlines the salvational role of the Church in the world, a metonymy for all Christians.³¹ The backdrop for her writing, in the middle of the Weimar Republic, is

²⁹ The date is noted at the top of the manuscript in what appears to be Wilhelm Hoffmann’s handwriting. Langgässer, Elisabeth. *Die Welt vor den Toren der Kirche*. Ts. 70.3109. Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach.

³⁰ Only Anthony Riley’s annotated bibliography makes mention of the work; this is noteworthy, since several recent works deal with theological concepts in Langgässer’s works, specifically Augustinian theologies of *Heilsgeschichte*, time, and memory. Riley, Anthony W. *Elisabeth Langgässer Bibliographie mit Nachlassbericht*. Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1970.

³¹ Here I specifically chose the more general term “Christian” over “Catholic.” While Langgässer was outspoken in her critique of the Reformation, she also saw baptism as a bond between all Christians, and

especially significant. The world as she knows it is in one of the “grossen Niedergangszeiten der Kulturen.” Langgässer perceives the era as especially sinful because an increasing number of people have left the Church to lead secular lives. The solution to this “decline into madness” and the separation of a single communal body is the very Church that has been deserted. That “sinners” have left the Church or been banished from its walls runs contrary to Langgässer’s perception of the Church’s inclusionary mission; the “Aufgabe der Kirche dagegen ist es von jeher und an allen Orten gewesen, das geschöpfliche Leben mit dem göttlichen zu verbinden und in ihren Dogmen, ihren Sakramenten und liturgischen Handlungen die ewige Fleischwerdung des Logos nicht nur symbolisch darzustellen, sondern höchst wesentlich und persönlich zu verwirklichen.” The role of the Church is not to exclude, but to include, by establishing a connection between individuals. Carrying out the sacraments (the realization [verwirklichen] of the sacraments [through liturgy])³² in the world binds the divine and the worldly. Sacramental and liturgical acts are not simply related to the Incarnation, as relation would suggest only an association that draws distinctions between those acts and the Incarnation. Instead, the acts of sacrament and liturgy fully reinstate the Incarnation. Their enactment and reenactment of the Incarnation are real, brought into daily life by choices every member of the body makes every day. The role of the individual’s life in

this bond forms the Church. She writes Elisabeth Andre (a Protestant and Cordelia’s Godmother) when she will not come visit to remind her of the binds of baptism: “Denn Lieslein, so gerne Du Dich vielleicht Deiner Patenschaft entbinden möchtest (ach, Liebste, tu es in allen *äusseren* Dingen!!) – die innere Verwandtschaft, die unsrer Auffassung die Taufpatenschaft zwischen zwei Christen (Christen, Lieslein!!) begründet, kann *niemals*, so wenig wie eine Blutsverwandtschaft, aufhören oder zerrissen werden, und es ist ein theologischer Irrtum, Liebstes, wenn Du meinst, dass hier ein Unterschied zwischen Katholiken und Protestanten bestünde – es gibt ihn sowenig wie einen Unterschied zwischen Taufe und Taufe, denn Taufe ist die Wiedergeburt aus dem *einen* Christus.” See: Langgässer, Elisabeth. Letter 138 “An Elisabeth Andre.” 25 March 1936 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 1. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 263-266.

³² While the sacraments use a specific liturgy as they are carried out, this does not mean that all liturgy is necessarily sacramental.

living out the sacraments radically informs Langgässer's mystical, metaphysical understanding of how the Church interacts with the world.

Division, distinctions, polarity—these separate religion from the culture. It is this detachment that Langgässer takes on with her brand of mysticism, understood through the essence of the Incarnation. Through the Incarnation, she argues, the common practice religions use to define themselves as separate are the same practices the Church must challenge: the “Sinn der Kirche kann es also nicht sein, jene Spannungen und mit ihnen das Leben selber aufzuheben, sondern ihre ungeheure Wirklichkeit anzuerkennen, sie zu binden.” The reconciliatory nature and mission of the Church is therefore at odds with censorial practices like the Index, where the Church attempts to separate itself from the world. Morality becomes yet another means of splitting the Church from lives lived. Sentences pertaining to the Index, placed within an assessment of the contemporary Church and the youth movement, were struck from the manuscript: “~~aber die Kirche hat ihre Tore zugeworfen, das Tor der Lehre durch den Index, das Tor der Liebe durch Konkordate und Sittlichkeitserlasse, und alles, was schön, stark, wandlungs- und todesmutig ist, scheint aus ihren Bezirken verbannt zu sein.~~” It appears Langgässer struck this line from her critique of the Church's desire to separate itself from sin rather than acknowledge sin's place in a fallen world. Perhaps because she considered her own stand was too strong, made too early, in the opening paragraphs of her essay, Langgässer redacts her initial critique and waits to make her case for why the Church must engage not just with culture (though this would have been a term thinkers later in the 20th century could easily have agreed with), but *life* as it is lived by all. Langgässer wants works that

portray and take on the sinfulness of the times. She asks what has changed that “we” (the Church) no longer sit to eat with prostitutes and tax collectors,³³ as Jesus did.

The “we” Langgässer uses in *Die Welt vor den Toren der Kirche* implies community between herself and her readers.³⁴ Planted squarely in the middle of an essay about how the Church engages the fallen world stands a single pronoun constituting one group. Langgässer bridges the world between the Church and the World at its gates with a single “we”: “Vor den Toren der Kirche steht die geschöpfliche Welt der Sünder, der Revolutionäre, der aufrührerischen Intellektuelle – aber auch die Welt der Liebenden und der Künstler.” Radicals, sinners, and seditious intellectuals all stand apart from those Christians affiliated with the Church. Langgässer wants to throw open the metaphorical gates and invite exchange between intellectuals and artists and the Church, for she believes that only through open exchange can the transformative work of the Incarnation begin.

The proposed solutions will remain consistent for the next thirty years of Langgässer’s writing career. In fact, the conclusion of *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* will return to the image and issues Langgässer outlines here: a mystical union, preserved in Eastern and Russian Orthodoxy, and the Bolshevik threat to the mystical lessons the Eastern Church can offer to the West. Already in 1922, the Eastern Church:

³³ As we will see later in the chapter, Langgässer defended herself against readers who understood her works to be too salacious; her justification for her portrayal of affairs and sexually deviant acts forbidden by the Church was that she had to portray the world as it was and not purge her fictional world of the real-world sins. Here she connects her stance with a biblical allusion—Christ ate with prostitutes and tax collectors. See: “Mathew 9:11 and Mark 2:16.” *Holy Bible: The New King James Version, Containing the Old and New Testaments*. Nashville: T. Nelson, 1982.

³⁴ For example, when Langgässer chastises the Church for excluding sinners, she includes herself in the admonishment: “Ach nein, wir sitzen nicht mehr zu Tisch mit öffentlichen Sündern, und Magdalena würde es nicht wagen, in unsere gehüteten Häuser einzutreten, denn die christliche Vorsicht ist grösser geworden als die christliche Liebe.” (*Toren*)

schliesse vor allem ihr grosses, glühendes Herz dem Strom der Mystik wieder auf, die von Osten, von Russland kommt, jenem Land, das als einziges die mystische Tradition der griechischen Kirchenväter in der tiefen, goldenen Erstarrung seiner Kathedralen bewahrte und nun durch die Bedrohung des Bolschewismus gezwungen wird, sein geheimnisvolles Angesicht nach Westeuropa zu wenden- und als wahrhaft "katholische" Kirche, nicht nur in den Dimensionen des Raumens und der Zeit, sondern auch in denen des Geistes, deute sie uns wieder den Wald der Symbole, um die Dante noch gewusst hat und die dunkle, süsse Verflochtenheit der Sakramente mit den Elementen der Schöpfung. In delphischen Schlaf ist Europa, das herrliche, weissagende gesunken, und ihre Hände, die das Schicksal der Völker hielten, ruhen ihr geöffnet im Schosse. Wir aber, wenn wir die stürzenden Linien betrachten, die gleich geendigten Pfaden in hymnischer Nacht und Trunkenheit verlaufen, sehen schweigend und erstaunt einen neuen Himmel und fremde Sternbilder über ihrem Haupte heraufziehen, wir blicken den Morgenstern, aber sieh, es ist derselbe, der den Abend verkündete, es ist das ewig Gestirn der Liebe, das die irdischen Zeiten messen wird, bis alle Verheissungen erfüllt worden sind. (*Toren*)

Mysticism transcends the borders of the individual and the world, and it can just as easily erase the boundaries between the Church and the world. It is this mystical connection within the Church that will help the Catholic Church overcome its issues not only with censorship, but with the world in general. At the conclusion of her essay, love, represented by Venus (the morning and the evening star), also represents God, who in

turn represents/embodies love.³⁵ With her chain of mystical references, Langgässer's solution returns to the beginning of the essay. Within the text, she reminds the reader of the repetitive cycle established between the Incarnation and the Eucharist, where every instance of the Eucharist is a reenactment of the Incarnation. The result of the movement from Incarnation to the sacraments and back again draws the two closer and makes it possible to bridge the distance between sanctified Church and fallen World.

The themes of sacrament and Incarnation that determine the mystical bent of *Die Welt vor den Toren der Kirche* underpin all of Langgässer's works. Indeed, her budding identity as a Catholic writer and thinker will only grow—as I will show through readings of her post-war speeches (all of which share the questions of Christian literature's role in the world) and interpretations of her novels—in an effort to account for the various groups (Christian, secular, etc.) that make up her audience at a particular moment in time, and how she hopes to guide them through incarnational literature.

Speaking a Community into Being: Language in Worship and Writing

While Langgässer was in conversation with multiple contemporary theologians, she had a special affinity for Romano Guardini.³⁶ His thinking resonated so greatly with her fictional works that, once the Nazi regime fell and Langgässer could travel again, she

³⁵ God as the embodiment of love is most evident in *unio mystica*, a mystical union between an individual and God. *Unio mystica* is similar to a marriage union, based in love, but not romantic love. See Underhill, Evelyn. "The Unitive Life." *Mysticism*. Stilwell, KS: Digireads, 279-304.

³⁶ In her discussion of a collection of poems with poet Wilhelm Lehmann, for example, Langgässer mentions sending the collection to others, "Ich will sehen, was Leute wie der Schriftsteller Usinger und der Theologe Guardini dazu sagen." In his introduction to the volume of speeches *Das Christliche der christlichen Dichtung* (1961), Wilhelm Hoffmann underscores Guardini's significance as a Catholic thinker generally, and for Langgässer in particular. See: Langgässer, Elisabeth. Letter 223 "An Wilhelm Lehmann." 2 June 1943 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 1. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 425-426.

actively sought a meeting with him.³⁷ The fact that Guardini worked extensively on literature and theology,³⁸ as well as that he had his finger on the pulse of contemporary German culture, made him an ideal conversation partner for Langgässer, who sought to incorporate the same areas in her fiction that Guardini focused on in critical form. Despite the fact that the two apparently never met, the affinities in the areas of myth and liturgy demonstrate a pronounced influence Guardini's work had on Langgässer's works.³⁹

Langgässer's understanding of liturgy and how she stages it within her historical moment borrows heavily from Guardini's concepts of the symbol as it exists in liturgy and with liturgy's rhythm.⁴⁰ She integrates Guardini's theory of liturgy at the end of *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, for example, where the understanding of word and time, of *Form* and *Inhalt*, meet with the events of the fictional world through the platform of liturgy.

Here, we will focus on Guardini's *Liturgie und liturgische Bildung*, which includes many

³⁷ Langgässer, in a postcard to Wilhelm Hoffman dated October 6, 1948, bemoans the fact that Guardini, along with Kramer and Grosche, were not in attendance in Royaumont, France, for the German-French conference where she was to present. The talk was "Möglichkeiten christlicher Dichtung – heute." The talk later appeared in the magazine *Hochland*: Langgässer, Elisabeth. "Möglichkeiten christlicher Dichtung – heute." *Hochland* 41 (1948/49): 242-252. See also: Langgässer, Elisabeth. *Briefe 1924-1950*. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Volume 2. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 826 and 1177.

³⁸ Guardini wrote not only on the Church's place in the culture, but the intersection of literature and religion: *Die Engel in Dantes Göttlicher Komödie* (1937), *Hölderlin. Weltbild und Frömmigkeit* (1939), *Zu Rainer Maria Rilkes Deutung des Daseins* (1941).

³⁹ During the 1920s, Guardini was not the only religious thinker publishing on the constitutive work language does for community, and the importance of the text within time. Franz Rosenzweig, too, proposes a relationship between words and language, where words help define the group, and the group participates through words. Through language, the community also exists in, and moves through, time. We see this specifically in Rosenzweig's understanding of the Bible (specifically how reading aloud in the Jewish tradition helps form an audience and, by extension, a community) and in Guardini, who understands liturgy as a constitutive force for community. Daniel Hoffmann notes the similarities between Langgässer's own concepts of rhythm and the reflections on language by Buber and Rosenzweig in: Hoffmann, Daniel. *Die Wiederkunft des Heiligen Literatur und Religion zwischen den Weltkriegen*. Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998.

⁴⁰ Rhythm here in the sense of the pattern in the text, not the resonances with non-Christian liturgy.

of Guardini's earlier thoughts on liturgy Langgässer would have been familiar with. The themes and imagined audience are similar to Langgässer's unpublished 1922 essay, *Die Welt vor den Toren der Kirche*, for example.

Romano Guardini considered the role of liturgy and how it functions in the body of the Church, and constitutes community, for the length of his career. His very first work, *Vom Geist der Liturgie* (1918), began his reflections on liturgy's essential role in the Church. Together with Odo Casel (*Das Gedächtnis des Herrn in der altchristlichen Liturgie: Die Grundgedanken des Messkanons*, also 1918), Guardini's work helped fuel the revolution in Catholic liturgy that culminated in the Second Sacred Ecumenical Council of the Vatican (Vatican II, 1962-1965). One of the monumental decisions made during Vatican II allowed Mass to be celebrated in the vernacular and encouraged the participation of the congregation in a more active manner.⁴¹

In his 1923 work, *Liturgische Bildung*,⁴² Guardini challenges the traditional acceptance of liturgy as a symbol. If liturgy is simply a symbol, part of an act "getan" by the celebrant and passively "gelesen" by the congregation (13), then it is a waste of time, Guardini argues. Mere symbols only stand in for what is absent and remains a symbol regardless of whether or not someone interacts with it. The passive reading of liturgy avoids full participation and, therefore, maintains symbol status. This is different,

⁴¹ "Particular law remaining in force, the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites. But since the use of the mother tongue, whether in the Mass, the administration of the sacraments, or other parts of the liturgy, frequently may be of great advantage to the people, the limits of its employment may be extended. This will apply in the first place to the readings and directives, and to some of the prayers and chants, according to the regulations on this matter to be laid down separately in subsequent chapters." See: "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Sacrosanctum Concilium." December 4, 1963. Article 36.1-2.

⁴² Guardini, Romano. *Liturgische Bildung: Versuche*. Burg Rothenfels am Main: Dt. Quickbornhaus, 1923.

however, from the act of active reading that Langgässer promotes through her novels, where the words transform the reader and goad the reader to act.

In the old understanding of liturgy as a symbol, the congregation need not be present in order for the liturgical act to have meaning. Rather than splitting the body and spirit from one another, Guardini argues for their interconnectedness, where participation in spoken words manifests community and establishes a connection between community and the divine. This is the “Leib-Geistiges,” physically-spiritual. In the reconception of how liturgy (and liturgical acts) exist in the world, the congregation plays a key role in constructing the body (ecclesia), the physicality of what would otherwise only be an external expression of the physical.⁴³ The cotemporality has real implications for the congregation. Conceiving of the congregation as body underscores the single body-spirit entity expressed by the liturgy and the sacraments.

Liturgy is for the whole person, soul and body, worshipping in community.⁴⁴ For both Guardini and Langgässer, the liturgical (literary) experience cannot be separated from “real” life, but must be incorporated into a greater experience.⁴⁵ Words create and define community. Guardini skillfully interweaves this second creation of a liturgical body with the first creation of humans, where body and soul were first unified. Without directly invoking the Incarnation, when the *Logos* becomes flesh, he draws a parallel from Christ’s divinity and humanity to the *Mensch*’s experience of community and

⁴³ All subsequent citations of Romano Guardini’s work on liturgy come from the final volume he wrote on liturgy: Guardini, Romano. *Liturgie und liturgische Bildung*. Würzburg: Werkbund-Verlag, 1966.

⁴⁴ Langgässer also connects the physical body of the individual with the communal. Her dedication of *Das unauflöschliche Siegel*, “commystus committo,” connects the writer and her audience through the shared text.

⁴⁵ Literally, incorporated. The English term includes “corpus” (body), allowing the individual to include him or herself in constituted community through reading.

liturgy (*liturgische Bildung*, 35). Community becomes possible through (self-) identification (in others), just as Christ is an example for all believers: “Im Leib übersetzt sich die Seele ins Körperliche als in ihr lebendiges Symbol. Darum erkennt der wache Blick aus dem Körper die Seele des Anderen” (*liturgische Bildung*, 38). The embodied soul, where the soul’s movements and gestures are revealed through the body, allows for the individual to express him- or herself in a way that can be read and interpreted by others. Together, these reading acts constitute a community where external connections have interior significance. Through the movement between internal and external, the *Ichbewusstsein* becomes the *Gemeinschafts-Ich* as the individual learns, through participation, to be part of one body, where “das große ‘Wir’ als Subjekt des Betens und Opfern im Sinne steht” (*liturgische Bildung*, 86). This is part of liturgical *Bildung*, where the upbringing of the individual (*Erziehung*) helps develop the single body of the community.

Christians in times past were able to participate in community so that the internal and external did not seem so far from one another. A unity existed between the individual and communal interactions, and at all levels of interpersonal interaction. Contemporary existence, on the other hand, is without deeper meaning and in isolation. As a life is lived in community and through liturgy, it becomes interwoven with the greater fabric of community. The call to re-learn liturgy is therefore also a call to a unification of individual and internal experience with a larger community.

How, then, do individuals learn to be a part of the community? Liturgical *Bildung* instructs the individual on how to be a part of the body. The development of a person is necessary for enabling the whole community’s ability to function as a single unit. This

harkens back to the original meaning of *Bildung*, related to the image, and the *Bildungsroman*, a genre that focuses on the development of a protagonist from youth to adulthood. While the change of character in the *Bildungsroman* is usually psychological and ethical, for Guardini, *Bildung* is spiritual. The person who learns how to profess faith and unifies body and soul becomes an image of wholeness. He or she professes faith through image, through symbol, through active participation in creating a single communal narrative. Here Guardini includes himself in the charge concerning image: “Wir müssen lernen, unser Inneres im Äußeren auszudrücken und aus Äußerem das Innere abzulesen. Mit andern Worten: wir müssen wieder symbolfähig werden” (*liturgische Bildung*, 48). The image is not a surface phenomenon at all, but connected intimately with the internal.

All—from the individual capable of looking inward and participating in the external community, to the constituted community capable of expressing the internal externally—exist within space and time. Objects (the material world generally and the sacraments specifically) also play a role in constituting community.⁴⁶ Guardini’s exploration of space, time, and object begins with the individual and how the world becomes ordered according to the individual’s interactions with the three: “Die Gestalt steht in einer bestimmten Umgebung, in einem bewußt geformten, mit Gestühl, Nutzwerk und Schmuckgerät ausgestatteten Raum. Die ausdrückenden Handlungen sind nach Anfang, Ende und innerem Ablauf an bestimmte Zeiten gebunden” (*liturgische Bildung*, 53). Externally focused, the description’s focus is almost scientific in regards to the

⁴⁶ The altered relationship to objects, though Guardini does not state this directly, is a repercussion of modernity and mass production. The indirect critique of the altered relationship is indicated through a reference to the Middle Ages.

relationship between the *Gestalt* and space that defines it. The definition takes place within a discrete time span. *Gestalt*, figure, describes the individual and dwells on the objective or superficial. This carries into the internal response to the external factors of space, time, and object, where space and time determine a specific, remarkable relationship to the object. In modernity, the relationship has changed: “Die objective Welt mit ihrem unbegrenzten Raum, ihrer endlos strömenden Zeit und unabsehbaren Fülle der Dinge bleibt für den Menschen undurchlebbare Weite, alles verschlingender Strom, seelisch nicht mehr formbare Wirrnis von Gestalten und Vorgängen” (*liturgische Bildung*, 53). At a certain point, the world becomes too large for the individual to order or to interact with. Confusion ensues when the individual cannot relate to time. The body experiences time differently from how memory moves recursively through time. The result is a complete disconnect between interior and exterior.

The return to liturgy, with its yearly cycle, reestablishes the changing of content according to specific holy days and commemorates fast and feast days. These days observe a specific relationship to one another, and build upon and respond to one another. Sacraments are performed within liturgy, joining objects as they stand in space and time with an overarching, supertemporal (*überzeitlich*) truth. The liturgy surrounding the sacraments (as the soul works through them) frees an element’s essences to achieve a “höherer Bildkraft” (*liturgische Bildung*, 66). Guardini uses water as his example, with its duplicitous identity: “wir spüren sie, im ruhelosen Strömen, im Strudeln und Rauschen: erquickend und gefährlich, mild und furchtbar, klar und rätselhaft ‘...’ das Magische, Verlockende, ja Böse darin” (*liturgische Bildung*, 66). Water is not simply neutral, but ambiguous in its meaning because it exists in a world being fought over by

God and Satan. As water becomes fully redeemed, Guardini argues, the same happens for other matter as well: “Feuer, Öl, Salz, Asche, Wachs”⁴⁷ (*liturgische Bildung*, 67). Here is the crux of Guardini’s argument: The individual must learn to properly engage these materials through liturgy, which engages their essential being and places them within the cosmos, overseen by God. In order to adapt to modernity, the next generation must reconnect with the elements through liturgy. Matter and the people can then reestablish the process of becoming obedient to God (*liturgische Bildung*, 112). Liturgical performance and participation returns the *Wesentlich* to the *Wirklich*, where the cosmos—the Kingdom of God—is reality, far beyond the limitations of modern man’s understanding of the world (*liturgische Bildung*, 68). For simple substance, the means of engagement with the world also offers a means for encountering the divine. The physically present points to divine reality. The sacrament of baptism makes use of the simple element water and allows the individual to participate in the reality of a spiritual death and resurrection.

Catholic Content, Catholic Form: Meeting Winkler’s Call for a New Catholic Novel

When Langgässer writes her publishers, Henry Goverts and Eugen Claassen, about her nearly completed novel, *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, she accounts for her novel through a number of influences. Form alone cannot explain the fable at the center of her work:

⁴⁷ Langgässer uses a slightly different ordering of sacramental materials in *Die Welt vor den Toren der Kirche*: “Feuer, Weihrauch, Öl und Salbung, die heilkraftigen Kräuter der Erde und das Wachs”. Langgässer, Elisabeth. *Die Welt vor den Toren der Kirche*. Ts. 70.3109. Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach. In both Guardini’s and Langgässer’s works, material and their sacramental uses through liturgy are key to constituting community.

Seine Fabel zu erzählen, wäre bei dem Umfang des Buches schon rein äusserlich sinnlos und unmöglich; im Übrigen wissen Sie ja aus Ihrem letzten Besuch, lieber Herr Claassen, dass eine neue Form existentieller Darstellung, objektiver Welterfassung und antipsychologisierender Religiosität darin angestrebt wird. Calderons “Welttheater”, Claudels “Soulie de satin”, Gottlob Eugen Winklers Forderung an den neuen katholischen Roman und seine nur ihm eigentümliche Form (in einer gewissen Parallelität zu Bernanos, Mauriac, Claudel) dürften zu dem Verständnis dieser Dichtung hinführen, von der ich glaube, dass ihr – in Absicht und Darstellung – zur Zeit nichts Ähnliches an der Seite steht.⁴⁸

Fable and form fall in the same sentence, demonstrating the tension and occlusion between the content (here, the genre of the story) and its portrayal. The fable, in fact, is both a genre (form) and also the story (content). The more the elements of the story are broken down into the two categories, the more evident it becomes that one element cannot be separated from the other. The three works Langgässer names as influences for her work do not make a distinction between form and content. The first two works—Calderon’s allegory *Life is a Dream* (1635) and Claudel’s *The Satin Slipper* (1931)—are both plays; the third work, “Dichtung aus dem Glauben,” is an essay.⁴⁹ Winkler’s essay stands apart not only as a different genre, but also because it is the only German work.

⁴⁸ Langgässer, Elisabeth. “An Henry Goverts & Eugen Claassen.” 3 August 1945. Letter 259 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 1. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 501-502.

⁴⁹ Weinert’s essay was published in 1934 as “Dichtung aus dem Glauben” in: Weinert, Hermann. *Dichtung Aus Dem Glauben: Ein Beitrag Zur Problematik Des Literarischen Renouveau Catholique in Frankreich*. Hamburg: Seminar für romanische Sprachen und Kultur, 1934. Winkler’s response, also an essay, “Dichtung aus dem Glauben,” was first published as: Winkler, Eugen G. “Dichtung aus dem Glauben.” In *Das Deutsche Wort. Die literarische Welt* 11, no. 28 (1935). It was also reprinted in Winkler, Eugen G. *Dichtungen, Gestalten Und Probleme: Nachlass*. Pfullingen: G. Neske, 1956.

Winkler's essay critiques Hermann Weinert's historical overview of the Renouveau catholique movement⁵⁰ and couples his critique with an appeal to the German reader (or, rather, writer) to apply Renouveau catholique's revolutionary work of form and content to the novel.⁵¹ In his analysis of the French literary scene, Winkler interprets the 1905 Law of Laïcité that officially cut the ties between the Roman Catholic Church and the Third Republic of France⁵² as a threat to the Church, but also acknowledges that the prevalent attitudes toward religion encouraged the next generation to return to the Church. They could then express their disapproval of religion's removal from daily political life from the realm of faith through art. Winkler objects to Weinert's position that art responds to the changes in philosophical and religious spheres where influence is practiced in only one direction and art only responds to existent dialogues. Instead of a unilateral relationship, Winkler proposes a dialectic relationship where art can influence the political and theological realms. Works of art are relevant to the larger sphere of

⁵⁰ Eva Augsberger gives more attention to Weinert's introduction than Winkler's response (which Langgässer read) in the introduction to her dissertation, *Elisabeth Langgässer: Assoziative Reihung, Leitmotiv und Symbol in ihren Prosawerken*. Nürnberg: Verlag Hans Carl, 1962. 5-9.

⁵¹ As his essay is in German, it implies a German (Catholic) reading public. That his essay was originally published in 1935, when Germany's political narrative was dominated by the Nationalist Socialist regime, should be considered along with other Catholic academic work of the era, including the literary and cultural journal, the *Hochland*. Langgässer would have read Winkler's essay in 1937; she references the 1937 volume of essays *Gestalten und Probleme* in: Langgässer, Elisabeth. "An Heinrich Wild." 18 December 1937. Letter 149 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 1. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 283-285. Langgässer continued to be interested in Winkler's work throughout the Nazi regime. See also: Langgässer, Elisabeth. "An Henry Goverts und Eugen Claassen." 3 August 1945. Letter 259 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 1. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 501-502. Winkler is not the only Catholic thinker of the time who responds to renouveau catholique and its potential for transcending national and linguistic barriers. F.J. Schöningh posits that what is possible in French literature, must be possible in English as well. Schöningh, Franz Josef. "Heimweh des Unglaubens: Zum Werk Eugen Gottlob Winklers." *Hochland* 35, no. 1 (1937-1938): 227-231.

⁵² Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, Georgetown University. "France." Resources on Faith, Ethics, and Public Life. Accessed 15 April 2012. <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/resources/countries/france>

thinking and public life beyond the Church; they can influence what people discuss and even how they think.

Winkler offers an alternative understanding of how Catholic art comes into existence and what Catholic art is: “Vor dem Anfang dieser Kunst steht ein absoluter Kunstbegriff. Es geht nicht darum, katholische Dichtung unter anderem zu schaffen, sondern es gilt als festgelegt, daß keine echte Kunst möglich ist, wenn sie nicht auf dem katholisch-theologischen Weltbild gegründet ist” (Winkler, *Dichtungen*, 350). Winkler accepts only works anchored in a theologically Catholic view of the world as true or real art. Such an absolute, radical statement both excludes much literary work produced up until this point in 1935 and makes high demands of all future literary works. Winkler’s absolute requirement questions the possibility of true art beyond a small contingent of Catholic writers. What does this mean for the non-confessional writer’s work? Winkler makes the claim that if the author does not prescribe to a Catholic *Weltbild*, that the writing act would bring the “Welt der Erscheinungen zum sinnlosen Chaos” (Winkler, *Dichtungen*, 351). Confessional writing, in its essence, orders the world, and a non-Catholic work would only further disarray the world.

Winkler’s choice of *Weltbild* over *Weltanschauung*⁵³ emphasizes the picture, rather than the subjective reception of that picture.⁵⁴ If we accept there to be only one *Weltbild*, the object or situation depicted in art would be the only true likeness. All other reproductions would be just that—simulacra, imperfect reports of events and their causes. A theologically Catholic perspective, on the other hand, provides what Winkler considers

⁵³ The term *Weltbild* (literally: world picture) incorporates the whole of the Catholic attempt to theoretically take on the dominant narrative in Germany at the time. See: Stegmaier, Werner. “Weltbild, Weltorientierung.” In *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon*. 3rd edition. 1986.

the single correct lens for seeing the world. Langgässer takes up Winkler's challenge to German writers. Her works are not simple responses or a product of her time, but a *Catholic* response beyond her specific political situation, made possible by her distinctly Catholic worldview. Her novels situate contemporary events in the greater context of a story of redemption.

The relationship of the author to her text mirrors the relationship between a Christian and her life, where life and text are informed by belief:

Der Glaube ist ihm [dem Dichter] Ausgang und zugleich, indem der Dichter sein Werk als Bekenntnis zum Glauben bildet, höchstes und letztes Ziel. Aus dem Glauben allein gewinnt er wieder Adams fraglose Sicherheit, mit der er vor die Erscheinung hintritt, ihre wahren gottgewollten Bezüge erkennt, um sie im dichterischen Werk zu benennen und zu gestalten. (Winkler, *Dichtungen*, 351)

The writing act for the Catholic begins from a point⁵⁵ of faith. As a Christian, the author can look at an event and understand its God-given properties with "certainty." Through the certainty of God-given attributes, the writer understands the world both before the Fall, as God created it, and also how those characteristics evident in the fallen world relate to a perfect creation. For Winkler, such writing is a redemptive rather than a naïve act.⁵⁶ The author identifies the telos of creation and writes toward that goal, which

⁵⁵ "Point" here is purposely ambiguous; it can mean a point in time or it can also work spatially and suggest perspective. Throughout this chapter, "point" will be used when talking about a discrete moment in time, and it is often connected to place as well. The Incarnation (and life) of Christ can be seen as a discrete span of time (and occurring at a specific point), just as the moment of the writer's introspection can be understood as a point.

⁵⁶ The distinction is that, as a redemptive act, writing works through (or despite) the sinful world to achieve paradise again. As a naïve act, writing would simply avoid depictions of sin (such as prostitution or gambling) to provide a sanitized version of what the world would look like. A naïve view of the world is

happens to be the same as the confession of faith: the redemption of the world, through which order is reestablished.

The writing act—*dichten*—poetically creates a world in which the author sees order. Writing, for Winkler, must be an ordering act, a means of creating and discerning meaning.⁵⁷ The writer recreates this world for the reader. The author-centered connection between humanity, art, and religion both depicts and becomes a means of salvation (Winkler, *Dichtungen*, 353). Langgässer expands on the concept *dichten* in her consideration of what *Dichtung* is. In the speech “Möglichkeiten christlicher Dichtung – heute” (1948), *Dichtung* is not simply the product of a writer putting words onto the page; rather, *Dichtung* elevates the world into a higher reality, has a spiritual aspect/relation.⁵⁸ The act of *dichten* is transcendent and that writing and texts, at any given time, have specific relevance to the audience and the world in which they exist.

precisely what Langgässer avoids in her works. When confronted by a reader concerning her depiction of sin, Langgässer answered in a letter dated 31 October 1948: “Denn die Welt ‘liegt im Argen’, wie der Apostel sagt; und es hilft nichts, wenn wir vor diesen Tatsachen die Augen verschliessen und zwischen den weit ausgespannten Polen der Sünde und Erlösung eine ‘humane’, eine künstlich desinfizierte oder optimistisch verlogene Welt aufzubauen versuchen [...] –jene Welt, die doch am Ende eine Schöpfung des Satans war und in den Folterkammern und Gasöfen endigte.” Langgässer, Elisabeth. “An Hedwig Schulte.” 31 October 1948. Letter 442 in *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 2. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 835-838. Langgässer continues to articulate the importance of depicting sin in her texts, as Bernano’s work did, rather than glossing over sin and pretending it does not exist.

⁵⁷ As we will see, Langgässer takes up this charge in her own theoretical writing, thematizing the writing act as a creative re-ordering modeled on the creation story in Genesis 1.

⁵⁸ “Dichtung.” *Grimm Deutsches Wörterbuch*. Accessed 15 June 2010.
<http://woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/?sigle=DWB&mode=Vernetzung&hitlist=&patternlist=&lemid=GD01921>

Constituting Community through Incarnational Narrative

Romano Guardini's 1946 theological-political contemplation of the Nazi appropriation of Christ as Saviour, *Der Heilbringer. In Mythos, Offenbarung und Politik. Eine theologische-politsiche Besinnung*, revisits the topic he first addressed in a 1935 work, *Der Heiland*. Back in 1935, when the Nazis were building their community, the work was prophetic. By 1946, the Nazi regime had come and gone; the purpose of Guardini's revision was no longer a warning, but an attempt to reconstitute the Christian community through the mainline Christian narrative where Christ is savior, not a political figure.

Der Heilbringer became an attempt to intervene in a general skepticism toward Christianity, facilitated by the Nazi appropriation of Christian imagery and tradition. As part of his work to distinguish between the true Christian narrative and reiterations or appropriations thereof, Guardini looks at the Christian narrative in relationship to the non-Christian narratives. By arguing the Christian narrative as unique, Guardini demonstrates how these myths were abused and misused in the Nazi regime in order to achieve specific political ends by creating a new, false narrative that helped establish a fascist community. Where the earlier myths of the savior included some evil from which a group had to be saved, the Nazis recast the myth so that the Jew represents the evil from which the German people must be saved. The new, post-regime distrust of Hitler would translate easily to a distrust of the concept of a messiah and damage the Church's narrative and ability to constitute community. Guardini addresses the Nazi (mis)appropriation of the messiah myth to explain Hitler's relationship with the German

people and to address the ramifications of this appropriation/abuse for the German people—indeed, for all of Europe.

Especially where aspects of the Christian ritual are reacquisitioned (i.e., prayer and greeting someone in God's name misappropriated as addresses to an absent Führer or greeting someone in Hitler's name) (*Heilbringer*, 41), the Nazi repurposing of these daily acts returns the meaning of these acts to a primordial understanding of myth before Christianity began in historical time through the Incarnation. The Nazi appropriation takes aspects of Christian dogma, but reverts to a murky *Urzeit*. By drawing a distinction between other myths and Christian belief and by claiming a qualitative difference between the primitive Nazi myth and revealed *Heilsgeschichte*, Guardini can dismiss the fallacy of Nazi mythologizing.

Looking back on the twelve years Germany spent under Hitler's rule, Guardini realizes that Germany has lost sight of the Christian narrative. His *Vorbemerkung* locates the departure from tradition: "In den jüngst vergangenen Jahren ist etwas vor sich gegangen, das einer genaueren Betrachtung wert ist, da es ein scharfes Licht auf die geistig-religiöse Situation der Nach-Neuzeit, darüber hinaus aber auch auf die des Menschen überhaupt wirft" (*Heilbringer*, 5). What is this *Nach-Neuzeit*? Guardini argues in favor of a new, fourth era marked by the Nazi regime (beyond the standard three ages—Classical, Medieval, Modern). What is to come in the new age remains undefined within the parameters of Guardini's essay; he hints at the possibility of an end to the era of stark individualism and manipulation of the masses.⁵⁹ With its fall in 1945, the Nazi

⁵⁹ It is within other works, like *Liturgische Bildung*, that Guardini offers a solution. Intended for the younger generations, *Liturgie und liturgische Bildung* hopes to reinstate a Christian narrative through participation in another communal text: liturgy. Liturgy constitutes Christian community positively, offering continuity despite the change.

regime ends the modern age and a new age begins—one full of uncertainties, due in part to the large-scale rejection of Christianity. Guardini implies this is due in part to the Nazi appropriation of Christian imagery and its recasting as myth.

In contrast to the other types of *Heilbringer*, Christ steps into time through the Incarnation; his is not a recurring story that ties into natural seasonal phenomena (i.e., Dionysus, or even Persepina, where the coming of winter marks her annual descent into Hades).⁶⁰ Rather, Christ and his crucifixion is a one-time event repetitively celebrated through the sacraments. As a unique phenomenon, Christ's crucifixion and resurrection results in a religion and a dogma (*Heilbringer*, 18).

Christ stepping into time establishes a unique relationship with space and time.⁶¹ This is perhaps the single most important point Guardini makes concerning the role of Christ in myth; all other “saviors” (Osiris, Apollo, Dionysus, and Baldur; *Heilbringer*, 15-16) “stehen in der Urzeit.” The time in which they have come, lived, and died is a “damals,” a “once upon a time” which is not historical, “sondern ähnelt dem Schnittpunkt des ‘Himmels’ und der ‘Erde’, dem Hoizont, der sich nie ‘hier’, sondern immer weit ‘drüben’ befindet. [...] Was der Mythos erzählt, ist ‘einst’ geschehen; aber in dem hinter jedem angebbaren Zeitpunkt liegenden Einst – jenem Einst, von welchem das ‘es war einmal’ des Märchens die freundlichere Abstufung bildet” (*Heilbringer*, 20). This means that the narratives within which every other saviour stands are fundamentally different in their relationship to space and time. Greek and other salvation mythologies constitute

⁶⁰ In contrast, Langgässer freely appropriates Persepina as a Christ-type. See: Langgässer, Elisabeth. *Prosperina: Welt Eines Kindes*. Leipzig: Hesse & Becker Verlag, 1933. Cordelia, Langgässer's daughter, also felt a connection with the myth; she saw herself as the sacrificial daughter who saved her family. See: Edvardson, Cordelia. *Gebranntes Kind sucht das Feuer*. München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1987.

⁶¹ This is why Langgässer treats this as the ultimate myth; no other myths come after this. But this qualification is not enough for Guardini, who insists on a break, not a continuation, between Greek and Christian myth.

community through narratives placed outside of, or beyond, time like fairy tales and fables. Christ, as a historical insertion, exists within time at all times, a fundamental difference from all the other saviour myths.

Christ's entry is a one-time event, but Guardini argues for Christ's continued presence in time through liturgy and its cyclical nature. Every instant is expressed through rhythm, where repeated singular elements (like the Incarnation, reenacted through the sacraments and liturgy) allow for the participation of individuals and establish connections between these individuals and the world they interact with. Rhythm connects symbolically with the natural world; it is an appearance and an expression of pattern, from the rising and setting of the sun to the change of the seasons (*Heilbringer*; 27, 30). For example, the arc, a sort of circle or cycle, resonates with the cyclical nature of the natural world. The coming of spring each year represents a rebirth, for example; the pattern of sin-grace-redemption and the liturgical year emulates and reproduces this cycle, but is not derived from it.⁶²

Liturgy is not the only way that Christ enters into a rhythmic manifestation in time. Literature, too, can reembody Christ through repetitions of a story, such as the fable, and do so through time. And literature can still be confessional in nature, helping to build one single community through participation in the reading event, even though it is read largely in private. The singular story all Christian readers participate in, despite the various iterations, is the *Heilsgeschichte*, the salvation narrative where the Incarnation plays the central role.

⁶² The attention paid to the cycle as a pattern for human life and part of a greater pattern comes to the fore in Langgässer's poetry, where the pagan and Christian join in liturgical cycles of the year. Her first collection, *Der Wendekreis des Lammes* (1924), and *Der Laubmann und die Rose* (1947) both evidence a liturgical structure which repeats itself.

Langgässer's Fable: Telling the Old Story

Langgässer explores the novel and its theological challenges for the writer, such the tension between portraying modern existence and depicting modern existence within Christian *Heilsgeschichte*.⁶³ On the one hand, there is the unchanging *Heilsgeschichte*, central to Langgässer's work. On the other hand, life in modernity is transient. The tension between these two contemporaneous, intertwined stories can best be explored through the concept of *fable*—a concept which appears in Langgässer's and her critics' writings alike, and which indicates a difference between the levels of storytelling even as the levels occur within the same frame.

A fable is a short work of fiction intended to teach the reader a lesson. The fable consists of one single narrative with a clear, predictable conclusion.⁶⁴ Langgässer calls this *monotonie*; like the *Heilsgeschichte*, the fable's core elements never change. The Christian novel, to which the *Heilsgeschichte* is central, "ist von bestürzender Monotonie, von erschütternder Einfachheit. Immer wieder heissen ihre Elemente: Sünde, Gnade und Erlösung." These elements appear slightly different in each soul, but the foundational form of the character remains as simple and undifferentiated as the mystery itself.

⁶³ According to Luise Rinser, the only true fable for Langgässer is the "Heilsgeschichte"; her own fiction is not a fable, since it also explores the problems of space, time, and causality. Rinser quotes Langgässer: "Wie diese Fabel sich in verschiedenen Zeiträumen wiederholt und an weit voneinander entfernten Orten aufleuchtet, das wiederum macht die Aufhebung dessen aus, was wir gewöhnlich mit diesem Namen bezeichnet." Rinser, Luise. *Magische Agronautenfahrt: Eine Einführung in die gesammelten Werke von Elisabeth Langgässer*. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1959.

⁶⁴ For example, Eberhard Horst explains the continuity that appears in the fable and that, according to modern definitions, Langgässer doesn't fall into these. See: Horst, Eberhard. "Christliche Dichtung und moderne Welterfahrung: Zum epischen Werke Elisabeth Langgässers." Phil. Diss. Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, 1956. 80. See also: Dithmar, Reinhard. "Fabel." In *Enzyklopädie des Märchens. Handwörterbuch zur historischen und vergleichenden Erzählforschung*. Edited by Kurt Ranke. Göttingen: Walter de Gruyter, 1984. 729-743.

The monotony of the *Heilsgeschichte*, central to every Christian novel, is not simply part of reality. It *is* reality. This absolutism mirrors what we saw in Winkler's work, where Catholic and secular works were assessed by the same criteria—a work must present a “katholisch-theologisches Weltbild.” For Langgässer, reality cannot be considered apart from God, and any experience of the world therefore makes it possible to experience the numinous.⁶⁵

The Christian novel depicts all of reality; God's role (and consequently the *Heilsgeschichte*) and also the contemporary human condition make up the shared experience common to all readers across all times. The depiction of reality relies on rhythm (which Langgässer says taps into a *Zeitgefühl*): a combination of the literature's form and content within time. The choice of “rhythm” to explain how form and content appear (and reappear) as specific iterations over time centers on the retelling of the same old story. This echoes Guardini's conception of liturgy as rhythm with a connection to the natural world, where cyclical repetitions show the same story retold over time.

⁶⁵ In an exchange of letters between Langgässer and a former soldier, Walter Kolbenhoff, author of *Heimkehr in die Fremde*, she questions the absence of a divine role in the author's memoirs, where Langgässer would like to see an inexorable connection between the divine and the daily. She remarks, “Ich habe mich nämlich beim Lesen Ihres Buches darüber gewundert, daß in all diesen ungeheure einprägsamen und von einem tiefen Wahrheitswillen erfüllten Szenen der Name ‘Gott’ überhaupt nicht aufgetaucht.” She continues: “sind Sie ihm tatsächlich auf Ihrer Odyssee durch unsere Nachkriegszeit noch niemals begegnet? Und glauben Sie nicht, daß Sie, ohne ihn zu kennen, nur die Hälfte der Realität haben?” Half is the visible world, *nur die Hälfte der Realität*, and the other half, the divine role unwritten, belongs to the “tiefsten und verborgensten Dingen,” where God *is* the reality. For her, his failure to see God as a part of his journey is a reluctance to look for God's presence in all of creation, perhaps buried, or hidden from view, but worth seeking. By writing on two distinct contemporaneous and overlapping levels, Langgässer articulates two different stories that are, in fact, the same. Whether the “top half” or the “bottom half” of reality, the story is incomplete. Here we see the argument not only *for* Catholic literature, but *against* secular literature in a (post-Shoah) era when the Christian worldview continues to be questioned. The letter exchange between Christian Langgässer and agnostic Kolbenhoff later had a wider audience. Kolbenhoff's letter was published as “Raustreten zum Feldgottesdienst.” Part of Langgässer's original letter was published nearly thirty years after Kolbenhoff's response was published by Heinrich Schirmbeck: Schirmbeck, Heinrich. “Das Dilemma Elisabeth Langgässers.” In *Frankfurter Hefte: Zeitschrift für Kultur und Politik* 32, no. 8 (1977): 50-58. See also: Kolbenhoff, Walter. “Selbstzeugnis über sein Beziehung zur Religion.” In *Ost und West: Beiträge zu kulturellen und politischen Fragen der Zeit*. 3, no. 10 (1949): 77-80.

In a radio presentation Langgässer made toward the end of her life, she explains how rhythm, form, and content work together to show the true content of things—reality, the fable that is the kernel of truth—“Wir sehen hier also Rhythmus, Inhalt und Form gleichzeitig am Werk, und während der Rhythmus dasjenige Element ist, das den beiden andern vorgegeben wurde, sie umspült und trägt, be=inhaltet die Form und formt der Inhalt das, was wir die ‘Fabel’ nennen können: Den Kern, die Sache, die Realität.”⁶⁶ The *Kern*, the quintessence of the story, is the *Heilsgeschichte*, while the plot becomes the mere recounting of incidentals. The goal of telling the story (at a specific time, through a specific form) of the novel is to reveal the fable at its core. Fable does not define a form, as it is not an old-wives’ tale or simply a fiction, but it works closely with content (*Inhalt*) to portray the supernatural and extraordinary.⁶⁷ The fable, a return to the supernatural or the extraordinary, allows for providence (the *providentiell*) to become evident to the reader, rather than trying to scientifically demonstrate the origins for each cause.

At first glance, Langgässer seems to contradict herself when she writes to Erich Fried in 1948: “Nicht meine Lyrik ist die Ausfahrt in schizophrene Bezirke – aber immer mehr meine Prosa. Ich gebe es auf, ‘Fabeln’ zu erdichten, ‘Handlungen’ zu spinnen, sondern treibe mit ungeheurer Vehemenz auf dem Meer der reinen Worte. Es ist

⁶⁶ Langgässer, Elisabeth. *Der christliche Roman in der Gegenwart-Vortrag für Rundfunk*. Ms. 70.3050. Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach.

⁶⁷ The Oxford English Dictionary includes both definitions of “fable”; definition 1b offers the positive understanding of fable Langgässer would agree with: “A fictitious story relating to supernatural or extraordinary persons or incidents, and more or less current in popular belief; a myth or legend. (Now rare.) Also, legendary or mythical stories in general; mythological fiction.” The other definitions related to myth (not in the sense used later in this chapter) and lie. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. See also: Dithmar, Reinhard. “Fabel.” In *Enzyklopädie des Märchens. Handwörterbuch zur historischen und vergleichenden Erzählforschung*. Edited by Kurt Ranke, 729-743. Göttingen: Walter de Gruyter, 1984: “Die didaktische Absicht der Fabel prägt die Textstruktur, bewirkt eine Reduktion der Sprache und setzt der Erzählfreude Grenzen” (735).

furchtbar.”⁶⁸ This, however, is not a contradiction, but a development of Langgässer’s engagement with form and content in respect to the Catholic novel. The fable is still in her work, but she does not create it; it is already there, because the *Heilsgeschichte* is at the core of every story. With her decision to create works of fiction beyond the fable, she also creates worlds and works difficult for the reader to understand, even if the reader knows the story centers around the sequence Sünde—Gnade—Erlösung. Her artistic efforts, her play with words and form (as well as her play with time) beyond the core of the *Heilsgeschichte*, keep her stories from being “mere” fables.⁶⁹ The artistic treatments help make evident the fable’s relevance to the work; it also helps lodge her work in literary discussions. Her combination of fable with literary form was not always accessible to her readers, however. Experiment with form and content, opaque to the reader, leads Langgässer to introduce *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* with a stage, setting the theoretical limits of time and place for the novel’s events, thereby helping the reader navigate this difficult relationship.

⁶⁸ Langgässer, Elisabeth. “‘Ich habe Furcht’: Ein unveröff. Brief E.Langgässers an Erich Fried.” *Die Neunzehn: Texte und Informationen*. (1964): 23. See also: Langgässer, Elisabeth. “An Erich Fried.” 4 February 1948. Letter 379 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 2. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 738-739. Langgässer struggles with the label “fable” in her letter to Claassen, where she names Winkler’s essay as one of the works that influence her own thinking. Depending upon the context in which “fable” is used, it can mean either a fictional work without relation to the real world, like a fairy tale, or a work which mirrors the real world and gives the reader insight into how that world works.

⁶⁹ Despite Langgässer’s insistence that her novels are not fables, critics like Karl August Horst continue to use the term fable to describe the plot. Not coincidentally, Horst also considers Langgässer’s literary works largely unsuccessful and limits his discussion of her language and allusions to comparisons between her work and imagery already existent in literature. See: Horst, Karl August. “Elisabeth Langgässer und der magische Nihilismus.” In *Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*. 4 (1950): 562-571. And also: Horst, Karl August. “Vereinfachte Rechnung. [Zu Elisabeth Langgässer, Märkische Argonautenfahrt. 1950.]” In *Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*. 5 (1951): 299-300.

*The Stage as Metaphor for the World, the Individual's Experience,
and the Epic Battle between God and Satan*

Langgässer does her best to answer Winkler's call to create a new form to fit explicitly Christian content and, in fact, she believes that she has invented a new form for a new content in *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*. In the novel's opening pages, she recreates a stage⁷⁰—the same vehicle Claudel used to create a *Welttheater*—to help the reader understand that the apparently unassociated events belong to one larger story.⁷¹ The stage shrinks the world, recreating the world within a small space, so that the audience can see and understand the relationship between events on a smaller scale. During a staged play, the events may run in a continuous way that suggests a cohesive story. The relationship between the events on stage, which may take place on any corner of the earth and at any point in time, opens a new perspective for the audience, which can see the unfolding relationships between characters and events on the stage. Langgässer relates this universal stage to how she understands God's and Satan's interactions with the world. In this metaphor, both theater/play and the novel form become a means for understanding what occurs in the real world but at a cosmic level:

Denn, was der moderne Roman ausbreitet [und ich rede hier immer und in erster Linie von dem christlichen Roman], ist weniger eine kontinuierliche und spannende Handlung als das Bezugssystem aufeinander wirkender Kräfte; die Bühne aber, auf der sich diese Kräfte an den verschiedensten

⁷⁰ The stage metaphor best expresses the interaction of reader (audience) with the text (work/concept of art). See Chapter 2 for how the stage metaphor is used in *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*.

⁷¹ Claudel's works draw on medieval mystery plays and Spanish Baroque plays, both of which incorporate a variety of forms, including poetry. The synthesis of forms and Catholic-dogmatic content (*Inhalt*), as Winkler asserted, results in a pure (*rein*) work of art. In *Soulier de satin*, the world becomes a stage and the stage is the world; the events of the play stretch to the ends of the earth and across time.

Punkten der Welt entladen und wirksam werden, ist die eines großen Amphitheaters, in welchem Gott und Satan einander entgegentreten. Wie sich das Individuum in dem Kampf zwischen Gott und Satan verhält, wie es in ihr Bezugssystem seinsmäßig und durchaus nicht kausal, sondern providentiell hineingerät, das bildet die sogenannte Fabel[.] (“Möglichkeiten,” 20)

In her consideration of how the modern novel should achieve its goals, Langgässer moves fluidly between a staged play, the metaphor of the stage as a world, and the relationship between the world stage and the cosmic battle between God and Satan.

Two Sundays before Easter in 1949, Langgässer responds to Peter Berglar-Schröer with a commentary on their shared goals for writing: “Ich glaube, dass es heute für den Schriftsteller, sofern er es ernst und nicht nur ‘literarisch’ meint, überhaupt kein anderes Ziel gibt, als eine neue und (allerdings profane) ‘Wortverkündigung’, die vor nichts zurückschreckt und sich nicht davor scheut, den ewig uralten und ewig neuen Wein in neue Schläuche zu giessen.”⁷² Langgässer applies the parable from Matthew 9:17⁷³ to the form and content of literature, where the parable originally refers to faith and the law.⁷⁴ The reappropriation of the wineskin parable melds the old and new; the “ewig uralten” and “ewig neuen” maintain enough of an identity to be mentioned

⁷² Langgässer, Elisabeth. “An Peter Berglar[-Schröer].” 3 April 1949. Letter 486 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 2. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 904-905.

⁷³ Langgässer cites the parable of using new wineskins for new wine, meaning that if the content is new, then it requires a new form (“Möglichkeiten,” 19-20): “Man faßt auch nicht Most in alte Schläuche; sonst zerreißen die Schläuche und der Most wird verschüttet, und die Schläuche kommen um. Sondern man faßt Most in neue Schläuche, so werden sie beide miteinander erhalten.” *Die Bibel: Nach der Übersetzung Martin Luthers*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1985.

⁷⁴ See, for example: Hagner, Donald A. “Balancing The Old and the New: The Law of Moses in Matthew and Paul.” *Interpretation* 51, no. 1 (1997): 20-30. doi:10.1177/002096439605100103

separately from one another, even as they are, at the same time, both ‘eternal.’ The paradoxical nature within the sets themselves, the coupling of “eternally” and “ancient” or “eternally” and “new” are open contradictions, but they tie nonetheless into Langgässer’s concept of time, where the two coexist. The modifiers “ancient” and “new” place a marker in respect to time and perspective of the speaker; for something to be judged old, there is a present reference point from which that evaluation is made. She also borrows a theological word and concept, combining “Verkündigung” (annunciation) with the word. While she is speaking of literary forms here, there are clearly religious resonances. “Verkündigung” is also used to describe the annunciation of Christ to Mary. The multiple reference of “Verkündigung” links form with the Incarnation through the Johannine concept of *Logos*, where divinity and humanity become indistinguishable from one another.

“Von dieser Überzeugung bin ich so tief durchdrungen, dass ich meine, man sollte überhaupt heute nicht mehr von “Dichtung” sprechen und ihren landesüblichen Unterscheidungen in ‘Roman’, ‘Gedicht’, ‘Drama’, sondern von ‘Tafeln’, ‘Lehrstücken’, ‘Spectacula’ u.s.w. Umso grossartiger dürfte dann der Glanz und die numinose Gewalt des transzendierenden Wortes hervorbrechen.”⁷⁵ The literary categories Langgässer suggests have their roots in Christian sacred art for the most part, and have a new way of defining not simply the work of art, but the response called upon from the audience or viewer. *Spectaculum*, for example, references to the viewer’s position in the theater, not the events on the stage. “Tafeln” could be a reference to “Tafelbilder,” popular in the Christian art, such as iconography. As with icons, an object is portrayed concretely or

⁷⁵ Langgässer, Elisabeth. “An Peter Berglar[-Schröer].” 3 April 1949. Letter 486 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 2. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 904-905.

through an analogy. The icon is supposed to focus the attention of the viewer, offering a representation of a divine or saintly figure to whom the viewer directs prayers or the viewer attempts to emulate. “Lehrstücke” refers to the religious tradition of didactic plays. Within Langgässer’s arguments for a new system for labeling art is a dismantling of attention on the work itself and an emphasis on how the work interacts with the world.

If the world is a stage, then Christ is the spotlight that illuminates one point on the stage, focusing the gaze on one particular point so that the viewer might consider it more carefully. Christ’s birth, following Christian theology, represents the entrance of the divine in human form: Incarnation. Fully human and fully divine, Christ gives meaning to human lives by making particular human experience visible one at a time, like a spotlight.⁷⁶ Within Langgässer’s understanding of God and Satan in battle over the world, Christ becomes the one figure that makes this battle visible to the audience. The cone of light illuminates the *Weltbühne*, highlighting both holy and sacrilegious acts on earth, both the “religiösen Sphäre” and the “Zeugnis des Satans” (“Möglichkeiten,” 17). The new illumination afforded by the cone of light also (to use the dialectic of Good-Evil) makes it possible to see how Satan works on the world stage and guides the audience’s eye to focus on specific interactions.

Christ’s “spotlight” enables other writers to see darkness: “Er – dieser Lichtkegel – ist der Grund dafür, daß es in der gesamten Gegenwartsdichtung eine sozusagen ‘negative Vereinbarung’ und Übereinstimmung gibt, ob diese Dichtung von Faulkner oder von Thornton Wilder, von Sartre oder Mauriac, von Bernanos oder Graham Greene

⁷⁶ Along those lines, Langgässer argues that the Orpheus myth, as a prefiguration of Christ, functions like a lightning bolt. The instant of light serves as a moment in which truth can be recognized. The far longer duration of a spotlight on the stage, however, allows for an enduring truth to be identified and absorbed by the audience.

geschaffen worden ist” (“Möglichkeiten,” 17). The authors (who, not coincidentally, are American, French, and English—not a single German writer among them)⁷⁷ are a short survey of Langgässer’s perceived contemporaries in modernist literature. Each author depicts some form of evil, malaise, or hate in the world, but little of the good because the small part of the world that crosses their stages does not include a spotlight to illuminate the good. Each of these works displays “andere Verhaltensweisen und Interessensphären, Erkenntnisse und Bewußtseinsinhalte aus dem Weltganzen aus, während anderes in Geschichtslosigkeit zurücksinkt” (“Möglichkeiten,” 17). Here the word “Welt” repeats the extended metaphor of “Weltbühne.” The setting has not changed; only the (superficial) boundaries of the spotlight alter which aspects of this *Weltbühne* are perceived. From the contemporary (secular) literary scene, to Christian literature,⁷⁸ Christ functions as a spotlight because his very existence enables a relation to and a depiction of the human condition. The audience, able to interpret the actions on stage thanks to the illumination provided by Christ, acts in the same way that a reader would who interprets the actions of the novel through a Christologically-driven reading. A story about the human condition cannot follow a linear track, but must build upon itself, slowly leading to full revelation where the reading act resonates with the reader’s life, building momentum as the circles move outward until the whole life becomes illuminated by that one point of light.

⁷⁷ The incorporation of authors from other traditions avoids reading each of the works as a simple theodicy of the Holocaust (which would be a difficult task in and of itself), but instead shows that Langgässer’s contemporaries battle with the same existential and spiritual issues she does. The very title of her speech, “Möglichkeiten christlicher Dichtung – heute,” does not mention a national tradition (unlike her other speeches, including *Der geistige Raum des christlichen Schriftstellers in Deutschland*), but an era.

⁷⁸ The speech accounts for both Christian writing and the fact that it remains a possibility, especially during a particularly secular era.

Logos: The Incarnation as an Archetype for Form and Content

Time and again, Langgässer returns to the Incarnation as she weighs the possibilities of Christian writing at this particular point in time. She makes these considerations through language (*Sprache*) (“Möglichkeiten,” 23), which is not only the tool of the writer (the means for mediating meaning), but the Word, *Logos*.⁷⁹ Langgässer associates *Logos* with *Pneuma*, the means of creating order and giving life. *Pneuma*, Greek for breath and also spirit/soul, resonates with the creation myth, where God breathes life into man, imbuing earth with a soul. *Pneuma*, the soul, cannot be separated from the body. Christ’s divinity and humanity, body and soul, form and content: Langgässer sets up a series of apparent dichotomies that are, in fact, ways of seeing different sides of the same thing.

Language, central to this new age in which Langgässer writes, becomes the carrier for structure and substance. This jump from language as a carrier to actual spirit (life-giving power) occurs in a constellation of coordinating clauses, marking the associations and interconnectedness on linguistic and spiritual levels:

Diese Sprache zu kennzeichnen in ihrem Bau, ihrer Eigenart, ihrem Duft, ihrer Farbe und ihrem Pneuma ist allerdings unmöglich, denn Sprache wird nur sprechend nachvollzogen; wohl aber können wir, denke ich, mit einigem Recht behaupten, daß diese Sprache sich weitgehend jeder Sentimentalität entäußert hat; daß sie als Träger der Substanz diese

⁷⁹ Hans Blumenberg explains how myth, like *Logos*, orders the world: “The boundary line between myth and logos is imaginary and does not obviate the need to inquire about the logos of myth in the process of working free of the absolutism of reality. Myth itself is a piece of high carat ‘work of logos.’” Blumenberg, Hans. *Work on Myth*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985. 12.

Substanz in ihrer Nacktheit und Unbedingtheit ausspricht ohne
psychologische Deutungsversuche; daß in ihr der Geist vollkommen real
und die Realität vollkommen Geist wird: Creator und Logos zugleich.
(“Möglichkeiten,” 23)

Language has a real role in the world: it both forms the world and *is* the world. In that
language can only be understood once it is spoken, Langgässer nods toward Franz
Rosenzweig and his work on spoken language and its creative role.⁸⁰

So far, time has stood in the background of this discussion of language, yet time
and history play an integral role in Langgässer’s consideration of Catholic literature.

Arguing against the common perception that there has been a break in tradition,

Langgässer aims to demonstrate that there are no breaks.⁸¹ Langgässer calls Christian
literature to be a resurrection, a return, *and* a move forward, or at least a move on from

⁸⁰ Daniel Hoffmann suggests that more research ought to be completed on the ties between Langgässer and Rosenzweig and Buber’s theoretical work. While I believe he is correct in his assessment that there is a connection between Rosenzweig and Buber’s thinking and Langgässer’s mysticism generally and understanding of liturgy specifically, I also think Hoffmann is tapping into a core idea first explored by Buber and Rosenzweig that found great resonance during the era. The community first established in Jewish tradition through reading the Bible aloud was adopted as part of Liturgy in the Christian tradition. I could not find a direct tie between Langgässer and Buber or Rosenzweig other than one letter from Buber declining to come from Jerusalem and speak in Germany. Neither of the men’s works are listed in her library catalogue; that does not necessarily mean she didn’t read them. Hoffmann, Daniel. „Die Welt war heil...“ Profanität und Sakralisierung der Welt in Elisabeth Langgässers *Das unauslöschliche Siegel. Mythen der Kreativität. Das Schöpferische zwischen Innovation und Hybris*. Edited by Annette Deschner, Oliver Krüger, and Refika Sariönder. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2003. 77-91.

⁸¹ See: Bergengruen, Werner. *Im Anfang war das Wort*. Freiburg: Verlag Karl Alber, 1948. The flyleaf reads: “Nach einem Vortrag, gehalten am 1. Juni 1947 bei der Festversammlung des Börsenvereins der Buchhändler in der franz. Bes. Zone Deutschlands.” Langgässer owned a copy, according to the catalog of her library found in the archives in Marbach. Bergengruen, who himself had been forbidden to publish during the Nazi regime, wrote of the connection between the primacy of the word and its relationship to deeds in the world (16-17). The ultimate goal of his work was to bring together the German people and help them rewin their souls, in order to bridge the distance between their experiences and faith, “diesem mißbrauchten und geschändeten Volk zum Wiedergewinn seiner Seele zu helfen. Ihm zu helfen, daß es wieder ein rechtes Verhältnis erwerbe zu sich selber und damit auch zu den Völkern der übrigen Welt, daß es endlich den Ausgleich finde zwischen Innen und Außen, zwischen bewahrendem und neuerschaffendem Weltgefühl, zwischen den Ansprüchen der Individualität und denen der Gemeinsamkeit, zwischen Härte und Weiche, Martha und Maria, Vita activa und Vita contemplative, Geist und Materie, Wort und Tat” (23).

the *Stunde Null*. She achieves this by establishing Christian literature's origins in Christ's mother Mary and centering its endurance in the Incarnation. The Incarnation marks the beginning of Christian poetry, according to Langgässer. The moment of the Incarnation, the divine (and therefore eternal) appears within time and takes a specific form. A convergence between measured time (human time) and time immeasurable (divine timelessness) marks all Christian writing. The Magnificat, Mary's response to the Annunciation, defines the beginning of *christliche Dichtung*.⁸² A woman speaks poetically, giving ideas (*Inhalt*) a form (*Form* and *Gestalt*). The pregnancy, a biological event where the divine becomes flesh, repeats the moment when ideas take on a form through words.⁸³ The (re)iterations of form paired with content mirror one another: Mary's reaction to the pregnancy (to her own body and the new life it holds) articulated in words, along with the incarnation of Christ, play with the relationship between form and content, the soul and the body.

Literature, like the Incarnation where *Logos* becomes flesh, can also experience a resurrection like Lazarus, whom Christ calls back from the grave. From the rubble of European modernity, Langgässer announces, with its roots in the Enlightenment, comes a (disembodied) voice, commanding a bodily resurrection to accompany the intellectual

⁸² To help get a grasp on the terms *Dichtung*, *dichten*, and *Dichter*, which Langgässer and Hoffmann use to describe the poet and Langgässer's work, the following: With Mary's Magnificat, the subject, God's role in Mary's life and in the lives of her people, takes on the form of a prayer of praise. The prayer-song is the *Dichtung*, the *Dichter* (poet) is Mary, and the act of praising God is active and transcendent, *dichten*. See: Hoffmann, Wilhelm. "Der Briefwechsel zwischen E. L. und Hermann Broch." *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch* 5 (1964): 297-326.

⁸³ The other early Christian poem Langgässer includes is "Veni creator spiritus," a call for the Holy Spirit creator to come; that is, a request for the spirit to become manifest. Langgässer omits the *Nunc dimittis* here, which both has a male speaker, and also explicitly ties the coming of Christ with the Jewish tradition (Simeon was in the temple, waiting for the promised messiah, when he encountered Jesus). She opts instead to place Christ in the Greek tradition, offering a hymn to the Holy Spirit, similar to *Pneuma* in the link established between the body and the soul.

advancements: “Lazarus, komm heraus!”⁸⁴ The call for European literature to rise up from the ruins of reason reiterates Langgässer’s belief that the emphasis on intellect, rather than faith, has disembodied reason from the spirit and resulted in a sort of gnosis—the separation of mind and body, resulting in death. This gnosis has its roots in the Reformation and the Enlightenment.⁸⁵ The most recent consequence of this long-standing gnosis is the Nazi regime and its fall.

The biblical imperative also references Langgässer’s own work, *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*. At the end of the novel, which tracks Lazarus Belfontaine’s quest to understand his own baptism, a voice calls him to be resurrected and realize the full implications of his baptismal vows: “LAZARUS! KOMM HERAUS!” (*Siegel*, 491). His entire life, both up to this point and his life beyond, culminate in this command. Belfontaine’s baptism remains with him in that moment; the moment also encompasses his entire existence. Now, Langgässer commands her readers and the thinkers in the audience to rise up from the dead. Biblical Lazarus, Christian literature, and post-war Europe need to be resurrected to new life.

The narratives of resurrection and embodiment have roots beyond Christianity. For Langgässer, the Incarnation shares a common narrative with Greek mythology. Christ is also the “neue Orpheus” (“Möglichkeiten,” 13). By considering Christ through the lens of Greek mythology, she opens a parallel narrative: Orpheus descends into Hades to save Eurydice, just as Christ descends to Earth and harrows Hell after his bodily death.

⁸⁴ “Möglichkeiten,” 27; see also: “Johannes 11.42-43.” *Die Bibel: Nach der Übersetzung Martin Luthers*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1985. “Doch ich weiß, daß du mich allezeit hörst; aber um des Volkes willen, das umhersteht, sage ich's, daß sie glauben, du habest mich gesandt. Da er das gesagt hatte, rief er mit lauter Stimme: Lazarus, komm heraus!”

⁸⁵ Langgässer writes about the “Ärgernis des Verstandes” and “die Torheit der Vernunft” in “Möglichkeiten christlicher Dichtung – heute” (25-26), reflected in contemporary German writing.

By emphasizing this parallel, Langgässer claims Greek myth as *part* of the Christian story, but *not the same* as the Christian story. Orpheus does not replace the Christian salvation narrative, but illuminates it. With Orpheus as part of the Christian salvation narrative, the Christian incarnation transcends the historical moment. Tied together, the two mythic narratives join Hellenic and Christian, pushing Judaism out of the narrative.

Orpheus becomes more like Christ through a creation of Langgässer's own. She retells the story of Orpheus' conception; Orpheus is the grandson of the union between Zeus (the divine) and Mnemosyne (personified Memoria, loosely identified with memory). They, in turn, produce the muses, including Orpheus' mother, Calliope, the muse of epic poetry. Orpheus' heritage plays with literary form, related specifically to memory's function: "das heißt des ewig seienden Geistes und der Verleiblichung, [ich] will sagen: Formwerdung jenes himmlischen Feuers, des Blitzes, [...] eine Verleiblichung, blitzhaft, wie jede Empfängnis, und dem Schoß der Memoria entstiegen" ("Möglichkeiten," 13-14). Here myth produces the text, where form is implicit, and which incorporates Greek figures in new ways to produce a Christian tradition of text, a "Vollzug des Mysteriums und gleichzeitig Ausdruck des neuen Existenzbewußtseins" ("Möglichkeiten," 14). The gods Zeus and Orpheus, and the titan Memoria, help tell the same story, just on a mythical level.

But it is not only the concept of incarnation, of spirit taking on flesh, which constructs a clear progression from Greek antiquity to the full realization of incarnation in Christianity. Typologies blend into one another. An example of this is the composite image of conception ("Empfängnis") as lightning: Zeus's weapon also resonates with

Christ's "claim that he is the light of the world."⁸⁶ Lightning represents not only divine power in an earthly form, but also relates to the body and the discrete time within which it exists as a metaphor for embodiment.

Memory, Time, Heilsgeschichte: Narratives Forming Community

Memory, connected with epic poetry and the Incarnation, helps establish continuity in how time is recalled. Langgässer establishes this connection in terms of recurring themes (Orpheus, Christ) and also through religious philosophy concerning the experience of time and the creation of memory. She points to the continuity of memory as a marker of time across nearly two millennia, from St. Augustine, who closely associates the human perception of time with memory, to Uexküll, who establishes that time cannot exist without a living subject ("Möglichkeiten," 17). With the jump from Greek mythology and memory to Christian theology and time and memory, and the continuation onto contemporary thinking concerning memory and time, Langgässer underscores the continuity in memory's function. Continuity of memory and tradition (through the incorporation of Greek myth) both assert continuity of the human condition before and after the Incarnation and help argue for continuity between the past and the future.

The continuity that exists between past and future, spanned by all literary works, also exists for a single work and the connection to its contemporaries. A shared rhythm ("gemeinsamer Rhythmus") taps into a "mitexistieren 'Zeitgefühl.'"⁸⁷ The connection

⁸⁶ It is no coincidence that this statement is made in John 8:12, the mystic gospel, where Christ makes a number of "I am" statements, creating parallels between his own claims and God's name Jahweh ("I am who am"): "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." *Holy Bible: The New King James Version, Containing the Old and New Testaments*. Nashville: T. Nelson, 1982.

⁸⁷ Langgässer, Elisabeth. "Der christliche Roman in der Gegenwart." Ms. 70.3050. Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach.

through rhythm, where rhythm offers a contemporary sense of the times, is by no means limited to the present; it is only experienced in the present and includes the past and the future. A work that reflects this common rhythm, then, is also aware of its place in the present. Inherent in this contemplation of time is also memory and how memory functions in the present.⁸⁸ The present, always in flux, bears a particular relationship to memory and also to the language fundamental to memory's formation and retention. St. Augustine contemplates these relationships in ways that later influenced 20th century thinkers:

If the future and the past do exist, I want to know where they are. I may not yet be capable of such knowledge, but at least I know that wherever they are, they are not there as future or past, but as present. For if, wherever they are, they are future, they do not yet exist; if past, they no longer exist. So wherever they are and whatever they are, it is only by being present that they *are*.

Whether some similar process enables the future to be seen, some process by which events which have not yet occurred become present to us by means of already existing images of them, I confess, my God, that I do not know. But at least I know that we generally think about what we are going to do before we do it, and this preliminary thought is in the present whereas the action which we premeditate does not yet exist because it is

⁸⁸ Caroline Mülverstedt explores the role Augustine's *memoria* plays in *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*. She reads the novel as modeled on confessional literature, and her focus lies primarily on how individual memory functions in order to tell the *Heilsgeschichte*. Mülverstedt, Carolin. "Denn das Thema der Dichtung ist immer der Mensch": Entindividualisierung und Typologisierung im Romanwerk Elisabeth Langgässers. Marburg: Tectum, 1999. 168-190.

future. Once we have set to work and started to put our plans into action, that action exists, because it is now not future but present.⁸⁹

Thought brings the past into the present, just as forethought brings the future into the present. As we've seen in "Möglichkeiten christlicher Dichtung – heute," Langgässer relates memory and time to the modern condition through a return to Augustine's work on how past, present, and future relate to one another.

Langgässer argues for this continuity in the face of what she calls the "Zeitproblem" ("Möglichkeiten," 18), evidenced through the modern author's relationship to time, and the relationship can be corrected through a return to Augustine's work on time and memory. The *Zeitproblem*, roughly, is a revitalization of continual time order, the "Relativierung der kontinuierlichen Zeitfolge" ("Möglichkeiten," 18). *Zeitfolge*, a discrete set of events, places specific events in relationship to one another. That these events are uninterrupted and continuous does not mean that they are linear, however. Practically, in terms of writing, the perceived connection between events does not require a linear mapping of events, or for cause and effect to be clearly mapped out in order for the reader to gain full understanding of how the events are interrelated. This marks a break from the *Entwicklungsroman* of the 19th century and a return to the genre *Confessiones*.⁹⁰ Within mere moments of mentioning Augustine and his concept of time in "Möglichkeiten christlicher Dichtung – heute," Langgässer again addresses his concept

⁸⁹ Augustine of Hippo. *Confessions*. Translated by Garry Wills. New York: Penguin, 2008. Book XI, §18, 267-268.

⁹⁰ See: Schiller, Dieter. "Drama zwischen Gott und Satan. Auseinandersetzung mit dem Faschismus. Elisabeth Langgässer: 'Das unauslöschliche Siegel.'" In *Erfahrung Nazideutschland. Romane in Deutschland. 1933-1945*. Edited by Sigrid Bock and Manfred Hahn. Berlin: Aufbau, 1987. 412-465. Here: 413. Carolin Mülverstedt argues *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* is based upon Augustine's *Confessions*, with the main figure Belfontaine modeled on Augustine. See: Mülverstedt, Carolin. "*Denn das Thema der Dichtung ist immer der Mensch*": *Entindividualisierung und Typologisierung im Romanwerk Elisabeth Langgässers*. Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 1999. 186-190.

of time and individual psychological experience of it, which is a move back from “Enwicklungsgeschichte” to “Heilsgeschichte.”⁹¹ With this, Langgässer argues, the movement has come full circle and returned to the birth of the Christian mystery, or perhaps better expressed, brought back to where the Christian mystery of the Incarnation enters human time. The implications are that the individual experience of time must take place in (Langgässer’s understanding of) Christian time and, concurrently, within salvation history. One individual’s story offers a myopic view of the grand salvation narrative, and one individual story is, in the grand scheme of things, not any different from any other narrative.

This story, repeated in every life, constant in its variations, is the *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation history). Langgässer challenges the shape traditionally associated with teleology, a line with an arrow pointing to some end. The line of the *Heilsgeschichte* seems to connect two points, but Langgässer undermines this by associating memory with a gesture: the arc. The arc closing back on itself explains how humankind experiences time—which must include memory and its recursive structure. Autobiography, for example, tends to associate different points in time with one another in different ways, showing the causal and temporal relationship between multiple events.

The arc, closing on itself, creates a circle. The structure of memory, transposed on the concept of *Heilsgeschichte*, avoids making the absolute distinction of a clear progression from sin, grace, and redemption (“Sünde, Gnade und Erlösung”) (“Möglichkeiten,” 21) to create a rhythm, like Guardini’s, which repeats ad infinitum. These interrelated stages all happen at once cosmically. The mystic-visionary image of the crèche with Christ, conquered serpent, and daemons lowering throughout,

demonstrates this non-linearity and co-temporality visually. Conceived of either through an arc or as contemporaneous, the *Heilsgeschichte* transcends a linear conception of time.

How to present this concept of time in literature becomes Langgässer's main concern. While a psychological novel would be able to depict the internal workings of an individual, Langgässer argues (perhaps counterintuitively) that—like the Kantian construction of the world, where time is mechanical, transparent, and governed by laws—it cannot adequately address the three parts of time.⁹² Her decision against writing a psychological novel effectively refuses a linear structure, placing the elements of the *Heilsgeschichte* in a modern context and giving them a different, newer, more organic sense of how humans experience the narrative.

This explanation, this worldview, becomes an apologetics for Langgässer's own fiction, which has remained in the background of her exploration of Christian writing. Her favoring of an external narrative, even as she follows the experiences of an individual in *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, do not follow a linear course either. The three books in the novel stand in relationship to one another, but use of anachronistic material (notably produced by Catholic thinkers—Donoso Cortes and Thérèse of Lisieux) produces a narrative which makes use of common thematic elements which appear, disappear, and reappear in the course of the novel's non-chronology.

Langgässer's experiments with time are a response to the transtemporal mysteries associated with the Incarnation. As sacraments, the mysteries tie the individual into a *Jenseits* beyond time. Like the Augustinian concept of time, lived time is not linear.

⁹² “Der Kant-Laplacesche Dämon eines kausal geschlossenen, gläsern durchsichtigen Weltbildes rein mechanistischer Prägung ist in seiner usurpierenden Tendenz über sämtliche Geistesgebiete gebrochen und in seine Grenzen zurückverwiesen worden. Potitiv ausgedrückt: es begegnet uns wieder die Realität des menschlichen Geistes in seiner Eigengesetzlichkeit” (“Möglichkeiten,” 19).

Implicit in Langgässer's argument is that lived time and Christian time tell us something—she makes these arguments through how the sacrament of baptism and atonement are experienced, mapping the one-time event of baptism on a repetitive calendar.

The causal relationship between space and time disappears in the sacraments. The Eucharist,⁹³ Baptism,⁹⁴ and Penance,⁹⁵—all repeated practices within the liturgical cycle—center Langgässer's novelistic works and provide the focal point for each of the plot elements. Baptism, fully explored in *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* in terms of its relationship to space and time, shows how an individual enters into and realizes God's grace with the community present. The community repeats its baptismal vows, making the sacrament repetitive. Penance, the sacrament that drives the plot of *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, frames the context of the liturgical prayers of the nuns. They pray day in, day out, including when they make the Eucharistic bread and leave batter for the flies buzzing about the kitchen, demonstrating the nuns' readiness to incorporate all aspects of the Eucharist and share it with the rest of creation. The Eucharist reenacts the Incarnation, where bread and wine change into body and blood, becoming Christ embodied, another

⁹³ Langgässer places the Eucharist in a repeating cycle in her depiction of Anastasiendorf. The Incarnation within the repetitive act of the Eucharist, and also in the repetitive and consistent daily acts of the cloister. Langgässer's excerpt printed in the *Frankfurter Hefte*: Langgässer, Elisabeth. "Anastasiendorf" *Frankfurter Hefte: Zeitschrift für Kultur und Politik*. 3 (1948): 1112-1116.

⁹⁴ See, for example: Hardenbruch, Ilse. *Der Roman 'Das unauslöschliche Siegel' im dichterischen Werk Elisabeth Langgässers. Ein Beitrag zur Form des modernen religiösen Romans*. Düsseldorf: Zentralverlag für Dissertationen Triltsch, 1962. Especially chapter 2, "Heilige und profane Zeit", and the section "Die Bedeutsamkeit des kreisförmigen Zeitrhythmus": Taufkreise und naturkosmisch-mythischer Jahreskreis and "Heilige und profane Zeit im Rhythmus der Tage" (113-141).

⁹⁵ Johanna Behrendt calls this a "circulus vitiosus," referencing the never-ending loop of the resurrection story (and repentance mapped upon it): "wenn du glaubst, [Anastasiendorf] erreicht zu haben, wirst du wissen, dass du im Kreis gelaufen und wieder am Anfang bist" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 142, quoted from Behrendt 49). In: Behrendt, Johanna E. *Die Einheit Von Elisabeth Langgässers Weltbild in Der Märkischen Argonautenfahrt*. Ann Arbor, Mich: University Microfilms, 1974.

incarnation. The ability of the host and wine transmute and to appear as one thing while its essence is another points to a reality beyond the physical world, a movement beyond the boundaries of simple perception.⁹⁶

Repetitive sacramental acts depicted within the text are also echoed in the relationship between reader and text. The perceived mystic relationship between language and reality, where each is a distinct entity and yet one cannot be fully distinguished from another, acknowledges language to be *Inhaltliches und Formales* (“Möglichkeiten,” 24). Mirroring the way Langgässer as a Christian writer uses language, she forms community (*commystis committo*) and the text becomes fully realized, living through the community’s shared reading. As the word’s importance comes to the forefront of the exploration of Christian writing, the use of the mystic, transcendental word not only requires an attention to “künstlerische Moral” (the aesthetic), but also to a human ethic.

The shared communal reading bears special relationship to the individual participating in the text. The redemption of an individual takes place in a specific moment for Langgässer, a point when the individual realizes that s/he has been redeemed from sin. Even though this realization is at a specific moment, that moment reaches far into the past and future, meaning that the individual experiences redemption at a particular moment, but the redemption includes the whole life, not just the person at that

⁹⁶ Langgässer keys into the Eucharist’s multiple levels of existence in order to call Christian writers to share with their audience (to offer *Nachricht*) how God became flesh. The Eucharist illuminates the relationship between word and flesh (*Logos*) in an age where the Christian thinks and operates in a jail of self and dictatorship. The resonances between Paul’s work in the prison in Philippi and his continued witness despite imprisonment echoes with Langgässer’s perception of her own work written during the Nazi regime. See: Langgässer, Elisabeth. “Die christliche Wirklichkeit und ihre dichterische Darstellung” *Das Christliche der christlichen Dichtung. Vorträge und Briefe*. Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1961. 64.

moment. Read in a larger context, as a type, the individual's experience also becomes representative of communal experience.

Rhythm: Words as Instance, Erscheinung, Incarnation

The creative process for a writer mirrors the creative act in Genesis 1, where God speaks creation into being. On each day, God orders chaos to form the world by making distinctions between dark and light, earth and sky, water and ground. Words, then, have the power to create order, constitutively connecting language, creation, and order. Words (and therefore literature, which relies on words, patterns, and distinctions) also exist within time and speak to a particular moment in time as they deal with existence.

Langgässer calls this "Sosein" in a speech given in Hamburg in 1949, "Grenzen und Möglichkeiten christlicher Dichtung."⁹⁷ The very title of the speech touches on borders, distinctions; these distinctions are not limitations as to what Christian literature can do, but descriptions of *what* it does. Christian *Dichtung*, Langgässer argues, creates boundaries just as God does during creation, and also creates the distinctions made between Christian and secular works. Her primary concern here is to define where secular literature (including the modernist works contemporary with her own novels) ends and her own (an attempt at a new form to match the Christian content) begins. In order to work through her compact and complex theoretical stances, I will first briefly account for the creative act in light of the Incarnation, and then explore what this means for the Christian literary work within time and for a specific era.

⁹⁷ Langgässer, Elisabeth. "Grenzen und Möglichkeiten christlicher Dichtung." *Das Christliche der Christlichen Dichtung. Vorträge und Briefe*. Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1961. 28-45.

Langgässer's theory of the Incarnation in literature reveals itself in words like *Form* and *Gestalt*.⁹⁸ At first glance, these words define only how a phenomenon appears in the world. But, as Langgässer will argue, these are completely connected with content. Her earlier edits of "Genzen und Möglichkeiten christlicher Dichtung" reveal the inherent connection between Incarnation and literary theory. In a typed reproduction of the edited manuscript, we can see her decision to cut explicit references to *Logos* below, and to replace *Logos* with either "Gestalt" or "Form":

Das Gesetz der schöpferischen Vision ist der Rhythmus, jenes geheimnisvolle Element, das, Hans von Marées zufolge, am Anfang jeglichen Kunstwerks steht, und – als Ergebnis die "Erscheinung" – wie Marées die Endstufe des schöpferischen Prozesses nennt – zeitigt und hervorbring. Dieser gegliederte Rhythmus steht immer am Anfang, wie ~~der Logos~~ die Gestalt am Ende steht; doch setzt auch [die schon] hinwider ~~der Logos~~ den Ursprung und die Fülle der Schöpfung zugleich. "~~Nichts wurde ohne den Logos, durch den Logos ist alles geworden, und nichts was geworden ist, ward jemals ohne ihn.~~" Bei der Hervorbringung und Betrachtung eines Kunstwerks, ob christlich oder nicht christlich spielt hier noch keine Rolle, befinden wir uns also immer in dem Spannungsfeld zwischen Rhythmus und ~~Logos~~ [Gestalt], zwischen Empfängnis und Form, und wie zwei Zeugungskerne einander durchdringen und miteinander verschmelzen müssen, um das neue Lebewesen

⁹⁸ *Gestalt* has no English equivalent, but it roughly means shape, likeness, or form. *Gestalt*, as defined by the Reallexikon der deutschen Literatur, does not deal purely with semantic means, but through a configuration of formal elements. This aesthetic expression organizes a constellation of content, but it is not purely form. *Form* is the external expression of the work's emergence ("Erscheinung," which also means epiphany, or phenomenon), and *Gestalt* the work's inner expression.

hervorzubringen, ist schon in dem Rhythmus ~~der Logos~~ [die Form] enthalten, das Ende vorweggenommen und der Horizont vorgezeichnet, dessen Bogen die künftige Schöpfung zugleich überwölbt und begrenzt.⁹⁹

The resulting edits not only layer literary terms over Christian theology, but also offer a more concise expression of the Incarnation's function in the world. The substitution also allows those listeners to pay more attention to the theory of how Christian literature fits in with all literature written during the time period without becoming distracted by theological terms. Before we look at the relationship between Christian and secular literature, let us look a bit more closely at how Christian belief understands creation to occur through *Logos*, and then see how that applies to Christian writing.

In Christian belief, the order of creation comes through Christ, who is *the Logos*, the Word. The Gospel of John, often considered the mystic gospel, begins: “Im Anfang war das Wort, und das Wort war bei Gott, und Gott war das Wort” (Johannes 1.1). *Wort* does not capture the full meaning of *Logos*; *Logos* signifies reason and indicates the order that underlies any whole act, bespeaking intentionality and purpose. The next few lines of John 1 continue: “Dasselbe war im Anfang bei Gott. Alle Dinge sind durch dasselbe gemacht, und ohne dasselbe ist nichts gemacht, was gemacht ist. In ihm war das Leben, und das Leben war das Licht der Menschen” (*Die Bibel* Johannes 1.2-4). Christ before the Incarnation (which takes place in created time) is also *the Logos*—the order underlying creation. There is a paradox here, expressed through Christ's two persons: Christ, as the Incarnation, steps into history as a human at a specific moment in time;

⁹⁹ Langgässer, Elisabeth. “Genzen und Möglichkeiten christlicher Dichtung.” Ms. 70.3064. Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach. The quote above includes the text Langgässer struck through, and her additions are written in square brackets.

Christ as the divine, however, has always been. Christ exists alongside God in eternity. The temporal paradox here is one Langgässer exploits in her fiction, as she understands her work to exist in time and to function above time.

The Gospel of John deepens the connection between the Creation myth in Genesis 1 and how words create order through Christ's Incarnation. The connection between words and Incarnation are therefore key to understanding Christian literature at this moment in time, where an existential crisis must be addressed by literature as it becomes produced in time. The Incarnation (embodiment) aids Langgässer's understanding of how words interact with the world in which they are created (by the author) and read (by the audience). The way the divine becomes human for a discrete part of history parallels the way *Dichtung* functions in the world; it is both in the world and it signifies transcendent reality.

Literature's reception in the world is characterized by *Erscheinung*—an appearance, an occurrence, event, or emergence¹⁰⁰—made up by a series of laws expressed through rhythms (“Grenzen und Möglichkeiten,” 28). Because of literature's spatial qualities, it marks a specific point or expanse of time, whether through theme, form, or content. Through multiple appearances over time, where different works share common topics or forms, a pattern is created; expressed across time, this pattern becomes a rhythm, a marker of shared experience.

When addressing how literature (whether Christian or secular) functions, Langgässer considers the relationships between defining terms which are nearly identical, rather than polar opposites. That is to say, she uses a near paradox as she considers the

¹⁰⁰ Grimm's Wörterbuch underscores the entrance and presence as a visual of the soul or a spiritual, divine, “sichtbarwerdung, mit der idee des lichtetes, glanzes im hintergrund, göttliche, geisterhafte.” “Erscheinung.” *Grimm Deutsches Wörterbuch*. Accessed 12 October 2010.

tension between “Rhythmus” and “Gestalt,” between “Empfängnis” and “Form.” The dynamic relationship between the near synonyms opens a far more complex understanding of what the creative act can do, within time, and how the work has also been predetermined by its time:

Das Gesetz der schöpferischen Vision ist der Rhythmus, jenes geheimnisvolle Element, das, Hans von Marées zufolge, am Anfang jeglichen Kunstwerks steht, und als Ergebnis die “Erscheinung” – wie Marées die Endstufe des schöpferischen Prozesses nennt – zeitigt und hervorbringt. Dieser gegliederte Rhythmus steht immer am Anfang, wie die Gestalt am Ende steht; doch setzt auch sie schon hinwieder den Ursprung und die Fülle der Schöpfung zugleich. Bei der Hervorbringung und Betrachtung eines Kunstwerkes – ob christlich oder nicht christlich spielt hier noch keine Rolle – befinden wir uns also immer in dem Spannungsfeld zwischen Rhythmus und Gestalt, zwischen Empfängnis und Form, und wie zwei Zeugungskerne einander durchdringen und miteinander verschmelzen müssen, um das neuere Lebewesen hervorzubringen, ist schon in dem Rhythmus die Form enthalten, das Ende vorweggenommen und der Horizont vorgezeichnet, dessen Bogen die künftige Schöpfung zugleich überwölbt und begrenzt. Der Zugang zu einem Kunstwerk und seine Möglichkeit, von einer großen Anzahl von Menschen aufgenommen zu werden, wird daher in erster Linie durch den gemeinsamen Rhythmus, das heißt die gleiche Schwingungszahl zwischen dem produktiven und dem empfangenden Menschen, bestimmt, und keine

Macht der Welt vermöchte in Einklang zu bringen, was dieser magische Rhythmus nicht zuvor schon geeignet hat. Es gibt daher, wie ich behaupte, eine Art Prädestination auch des Kunstwerks: die Notwendigkeit seines Ursprungs und die Möglichkeit seiner Wirkung, das heißt seine weiterzeugende Kraft in dieser und späteren Generationen, sind im Augenblick seiner Zeugung auf das engste Relation gesetzt und auf den Glockenschlag “seiner Stunde” genau vorherbestimmt. Dieser gemeinsame Rhythmus nun wäre, so scheint es nach dem vorher Gesagten, nichts weiter als rein formal? Formal-ästhetisch, wenn Sie so wollen, formal-dynamisch, formal-vital, aber nicht material? Ist er, wie Gottfried Benn es im Hinblick auf das Gesetz der Form einmal ausgedrückt hat: “Nahezu ein Nichts um ein Geheimnis geschmiedet, das nie ausgesprochen wird, und das sich nie enthüllt?”¹⁰¹ Oder ist vielleicht auch der magische Rhythmus an einen Inhalt gebunden und der Glockenguß einer neuen Form an den Glockenschlag einer Epoche, die uns allen gemeinsam ist? (“Grenzen und Möglichkeiten,” 28-30)

Langgässer’s concluding question is rhetorical—she intends to create a new form of literature for the era, for all readers, not just for a Christian audience. She believes the form interacts with the era and remains pertinent for the following generations, expressed as rhythm. Rhythm occurs throughout the reading and writing process; it is present in the

¹⁰¹ For Benn, form ought not be thought of as an unacceptable mystery and one which cannot be understood. Rather, form holds no secrets. Benn argues that the Germans are incapable of true content, that their passion for form and “innere Verzehrung” is not content. Benn, Gottfried. “Die neue literarische Saison” (radio presentation given on August 28, 1931). Edited by Dieter Wellershoff. In *Gesammelte Werke: In 4 Bd.* Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1986. 426.

conception of the work, its execution, and in its reading. Rhythm,¹⁰² like “Gestalt” and “Form,” are both *zugleich überwölbt und begrenzt* by the literary creation. This places the work in continuity and manifests itself in specific moments in time. The resulting tension between the stages of existence for a text and the manifestation of an inner meaning through an outer form becomes a metaphor for predestination. In predestination, intention and execution occur discretely within time and space, but are organized by a divine force beyond time’s limits.

The “Glockenschlag,”¹⁰³ a precise instance in time, makes for a helpful metaphor. The bell must be produced well before time, and the production of the bell enables (or, to use Langgässer’s vocabulary, predestines) its future ringing. Each striking of the bell produces one sound in one moment, an instance within time. These moments are discrete, yet the sound of the bell ringing and its echo continues the metaphor for understanding how one small event resonates over time and fills space. The ringing of the bell can therefore be traced back to a specific moment when the rope is pulled (which causes the clapper to strike and makes the sound), and also as a sequence of strikes and subsequent resonating rings. This metaphor also holds true in the realm of physics. The ringing of the

¹⁰² We also must remember that Langgässer was a poet, and that Rhythm also places an emphasis on the appearance and sound of a word. Rhythm may not have direct correlation to the word’s meaning, but will affect how it gets used.

¹⁰³ Schiller’s *Das Lied von der Glocke* asks these questions of form and predestination; for example: “In die Erd’ ist’s aufgenommen,/ Glücklich ist die Form gefüllt,/ Wird’s auch schön zu Tage kommen,/ Daß es Fleiß und Kunst vergilt?/ Wenn der Guß mißlang?/ Wenn die Form zersprang?/ Ach! vielleicht indem wir hoffen/ Hat uns Unheil schon getroffen” (227-234). The concluding stanza answers these questions concerning the bell’s future function: “Daß sie in das Reich des Klanges/ Steige, in die Himmelsluft. / Zieheth, ziehet, hebt!/ Sie bewegt sich, schwebt./ Freude dieser Stadt bedeute,/ Friede sey ihr erst Geläute” (425-430). Schiller, Friedrich. “Das Lied von der Glocke.” *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1. Edited by Albert Meier. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2004. 429-442.

bell, when graphed, is sinusoidal.¹⁰⁴ The physical representation of the sound is a curve—like Langgässer’s arc of time.

Here, we are specifically interested in time’s curved structure and how memory, itself a recursive structure, relates to time. Memory is fully contained within time; it is part of time. Memory as a special concept can be broken up, from “erinnern” come the elements “er-innern,” demonstrating the interior movement of introspection and how recollection penetrates deep into the depths of the soul. This act of remembering, or contemplation, she believes, is “um welches unausgesprochen jede Erörterung um das Thema der christlichen Dichtung kreist” (“Grenzen und Möglichkeiten,” 44). “Kreisen” extends the spatial metaphor of how memory works and resonates with the time concept.¹⁰⁵ Objects, on the other hand, do not experience time.¹⁰⁶ In the conversation between Möisinger and Belfontaine in *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, for example, a marionette becomes the object lesson for Möisinger’s explication that the absence of memory is hell, being condemned to remaining merely an object: “Was sagte ich Ihnen?” he says to Belfontaine, pointing to the marionette. “Es fehlt dieser Art – die Erinnerung. Und warum? Weil zu der Erinnerung Zeit gehört” (“Grenzen und Möglichkeiten,” 44).

¹⁰⁴ Compare this structure to Schiller’s discussion of the “Schönheit der Schlangenlinie” in the Kallias Briefe, where Schiller discusses the appearance (*Erscheinung*) of the line (423). His discussion, like Langgässer’s, also considers how form and content work together; for him, however, the primary concern is the aesthetic and the moral, rather than the Christian, as it is by Langgässer. Schiller, Friedrich. “[Kallias oder über die Schönheit]. Briefe an Gottfried Körner.” *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 5. Edited by Wolfgang Riedel. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2004. 394-432.

¹⁰⁵ Here Langgässer repeats and extends the re-mythologization from the speech “Möglichkeiten christlicher Dichtung – heute”; here the muse, as part of the “ewig seienden Geistes und der Erinnerung” exemplifies this through her connection to the divine and also to memory.

¹⁰⁶ For Langgässer, this is an important distinction; in “Möglichkeiten christlicher Dichtung – heute,” she relates Uexküll’s understanding of subject and time back to Augustine’s work on memory. She cites Uexküll: “Während wir bisher sagten: ohne Zeit kann es kein lebendes Subjekt geben, werden wir jetzt sagen müssen, ohne ein lebendes Subjekt kann es keine Zeit geben” (“Grenzen und Möglichkeiten,” 17).

The marionette they discuss exists as a simple inanimate object, upon which time acts only externally, but does not alter the doll's being. Mössinger's answer to Belfontaine's questioning look is: Do not be like the doll, defined by detachment, with separate reason and body, lacking memory; memory, a recollection of the past in the present, opens new possibilities for the future. To attain these possibilities, Belfontaine would have to become an individual which, for Langgässer, means developing an aligning with either Satan or God. Through the supernatural connection, he would then be able to access memory and use it as an impetus for agency. Langgässer's argument about writing, a creative act that relies on divine influence and memory, also holds true for agency in the world and for the authorship of an individual's story within the world narrative.

The Role of "Today's" Author During Crisis: Writing for the Next Generation

In February of 1950, Langgässer traveled to Paris to give a speech before the Comité Français d'échanges avec l'Allemagne. The speech, "Der geistige Raum des christlichen Schriftstellers in Deutschland,"¹⁰⁷ is her most tangible speech because of its clear application. It is also the final lecture she gave before her death that same year. In it, she considers her specific place at that particular point in time.¹⁰⁸ Time and perspective are the main themes.

In the very first line of the lecture, she offers two temporal qualifiers that emphasize two different aspects of her perspective: "Wenn ich mir das Thema 'Der

¹⁰⁷ Langgässer, Elisabeth. "Der geistige Raum des christlichen Schriftstellers in Deutschland." *Das Christliche der christlichen Dichtung. Vorträge und Briefe*. Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1961. 65-81.

¹⁰⁸ Here, as elsewhere, the choice of "point" is a conscious one, as it underscores both the time and the place from which Langgässer writes.

geistige Raum des christlichen Schriftstellers¹⁰⁹ in Deutschland *von heute*’ *vergegenwärtige*” (“geistige Raum,” 65; emphasis added). The first temporal phrase, *von heute*, references the general or public sphere and response to time (that is, a specific point); the second, *vergegenwärtige*, locates her personal reflection concerning her own writing and suggests a work of memory, even as she addresses the state of contemporary authorship.

The tension in her dual modes of thinking about the writer, both at a particular moment and within a recursive continuum, helps her position her argument within tradition and also mirrors her understanding of how memory works. Key for her argument is that the literary tradition, even in Germany, has not experienced a break. She chooses instead the metaphor of a cultural vacuum to explain the empty space left by the now-defunct Nazi narratives and language. The present-day catastrophe is a result of a “Versäumnis, die augustinische Theologie legitim fortzuführen” (“geistige Raum,” 69), where God’s grace stands outside of time.

The vacuum, the current crisis, is a “Weltlosigkeit” (“geistige Raum,” 69): an emptiness culminating in Nietzsche’s words “Gott ist tot” and Heidegger’s interpretation. The empty space creates a vacuum, a *Hohlkugel* (67). Vacuum, a scientific term, resonates with religious concepts already at hand. Langgässer uses this modern concept

¹⁰⁹ The choice of *Schriftsteller* here in the title over *Dichter*, used later in the speech, is most likely conscientious. Jürgen Engler notes the difference between “Dichter” and “Schriftsteller,” and when Langgässer switches between the two designations within the speech *Der geistige Raum des christlichen Schriftstellers in Deutschland*. In his accounting for the different applications of “Autor,” “Schriftsteller,” “Dichter,” where the *Dichter* can speak of vocation and traditionally garners more respect, notes that Langgässer, in “Schriftsteller unter der Hitlerdiktatur” switches from Schriftsteller to Dichter, “als es nun um die Erörterung der für sie zentralen literarischen Fragen geht, die sich auf das Verhältnis des Dichters zur Sprache beziehen” (54). Engler, Jürgen. “‘Geistige Führer’ und ‘arme Poeten.’” In *Unterm Notdach. Nachkriegsliteratur in Berlin 1945-1949*. Edited by Ursula Heukenkamp. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1996. 47-88.

to stand in for the chaos out of which God created the world, suggesting that where writers stand now is a new opportunity for ordering the world through writing. This sphere may represent the past and therefore tradition; but, like an egg, it also hints at a hope of a rebirth. (The “Kugel” motif in Langgässer’s work is always ambivalent.)¹¹⁰ A new generation of writers strives to break through, to shake off the shell of humanist and rationalist intellectual and literary tradition and its limitations. Within the context of the conversation, even if the situation young post-war writers find themselves in is a catastrophe, there is hope that the writer can order and fill the empty world of the “Stunde Null.”

Langgässer attributes the cultural vacuum to Enlightenment thought, most recently manifested in Nietzsche and Heidegger.¹¹¹ In her selection of Nietzsche and Heidegger as examples, Langgässer has grouped these philosophers both with the past—which includes the recent past. By implying a connection with the Nazis without explicitly naming them, Langgässer’s speech reproduces the contemporary ethical vacuum, though unintentionally. Just as the moral vacuum is an empty space created by lack, Langgässer perpetuates that vacuum by leaving the space undefined by perpetrators. The Nazi narratives that helped create the current cultural vacuum are now present only through their absence in Langgässer’s own speech. The absence marks Langgässer’s own

¹¹⁰ See Augsburg, Eva. “Das Sinnbild der Kugel.” *Elisabeth Langgässer: assoziative Reihung, Leitmotiv und Symbol in ihren Prosawerken*. Nürnberg: Hans Carl, 1962. 67-72; and: Hardenbruch, Ilse. *Der Roman ‘Das unauslöschliche Siegel’ im dichterischen Werk Elisabeth Langgässers: Ein Beitrag zur Form des modernen religiösen Romans*. Düsseldorf: Tritsch, 1962. 226.

¹¹¹ Broken statues represent Nietzsche and Heidegger, their apparent ‘beauty’ has not held up to the test of time. Like a Greek statue weathered over the years, the integrity of these philosophers has been compromised. Now only truncated limbs pointing to their former completion. This is a recurring image for Langgässer—broken statues, such as the torso in the eponymous collection of short stories, *Der Torso* (1947), figure in Langgässer’s work post-45.

omissions; she references and points to the past, but not to the direct past. Rather than name the publications or the appropriation of myth, as critics in the *Hochland*¹¹² or theologians like Romano Guardini have, Langgässer appears to, at least partially, suppress the memory of a traumatic event. Yet the connection to the Third Reich remains. In a clever conflation of the two Goethe years (1932 and 1949) with the Nazi regime (1933-1945), Langgässer associates the literary event and its representation of idealism in the German tradition¹¹³ with a fascist and repressive government, but she does so without explicitly stating a causal relationship between humanism and fascism. In her extended metaphor of the Nazi regime as a nightmare, a student dreams about answering the question “Was bedeutet mir Goethe?” or “Goethe als Vorbild” in a school essay (“geistige Raum,” 67). The dreamer, a “Durchschnittsmensch,” includes readers, audience, and the youth—but not professors (perhaps an allusion to Heidegger?) (“geistige Raum,” 68). After all, the professor participates in the nightmare itself. The awakening relates not only to the stagnant literary tradition the student was required to

¹¹² See, for example: Kroll, Frank-Lothar. *Intellektueller Widerstand im Dritten Reich: Heinrich Lützeler und der Nationalsozialismus*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2008. And: Ackermann, Konrad. *Der Widerstand Der Monatsschrift Hochland Gegen Den Nationalsozialismus*. München: Kösel-Verlag, 1965.

¹¹³ In 1949, Langgässer signed the declaration for the “Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung” in commemoration of the 200th birth year of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, held in the Paulskirche zur Frankfurt am Main. The proclamation openly alludes to Goethe and calls members to let language speak and breathe for itself, to keep it independent of the state and politics, and to foster the “Volk” from Frankfurt to Weimar, because “Ein Volk lebt und stirbt mit seiner Sprache, blüht und verdorrt mit ihr.” Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung. “An Elisabeth Langgässer.” 28. August 1949 at the “Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung” for Goethe in the Paulskirche zur Frankfurt a. Main. Ms. 70.4179/2, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach. Heinrich Schirmbeck clarifies Langgässer’s eschewal of German Classicism, including Goethe, in his essay “Das Dilemma Elisabeth Langgässers”: “Die deutsche Klassik ist ihr philosophisch und ästhetisch zu eng mit dem philosophischen und gesellschaftlichen Idealismus liiert, als daß sie im Zeitalter des Terrors, der Gaskammern, des Völkermords, der Atombombe und des ideologischen Massenwahns noch irgendeinen modellhaften Wert für menschliches Verhalten und Weltbegreifen haben könnte” (52). Schirmbeck, Heinrich. “Das Dilemma Elisabeth Langgässers.” *Frankfurter Hefte: Zeitschrift für Kultur und Politik* 32, no. 8 (1977): 50-58.

write about (i.e., participate in), but to the departure from and cleansing of the fascist regime:

Wenn der Träumer dann schweißgebadet erwacht, ist er vielleicht so ehrlich, sich einzugestehen, daß Goethe, dessen Geburtstag auf seine Brust wie eine Pistole zielte, ihm überhaupt nichts bedeutet, oder höchstens einen Aktiv-Posten darstellt in dem Reparationskonto seiner Nation; eine Gestalt, von welcher er hofft, daß man sie als Entlastungszeugen vor einem geheimnisvollen Entnazifizierungsgericht kafka'scher Prägung zulassen wird, wenn es gilt, jenes Trauma loszuwerden, das 'Kollektivschuld' heißt. ("geistige Raum," 68; emphasis in the original)

But Goethe's works do not help the reader work through the trauma; for Langgässer, Goethe's works are part of the German heritage used by the Nazi regime and cannot help relieve Germany of its collective guilt.

Langgässer speaks to the youth, in the hopes that they will depart from idealism, leave behind fascism, and write and live from a new Christian perspective. While the older generation has been educated in the humanist tradition of storytelling, the youth still stand a chance of breaking away and starting anew. With the help of a new literature, the youth can depart from the nightmare and awaken to a new space they can fill with their own reading and writing. This new space is not a vacuum of the Nazi regime's dream; it is the new space of Germany after the regime's fall. The slip from dreamer to one who survives trauma (Träumer/Trauma) completes the slip, underscoring not only the temporal change, but also the space politics and literature occupies.

Langgässer expands her evaluation to provide an overview of contemporary German literature and to help her audience distinguish between types of literature as she argues for one particular type. She does not offer a survey of authors, but rather a catalogue of types of literature sorted by aesthetic and moral values. Key to her evaluations are her developing standards for defining Christian literature and organizing her thoughts according to her own understanding of form and content as indistinguishable from one another in Christian literature.

Langgässer proposes four different groups of literature, categorized by how the authors react to their era and the aesthetic approaches they use for portraying their subject matter. The first group of writers, the aesthetic moralists, value form above any sort of moral depiction. For them, form itself is the moral good the artists seek. Among the writers, with their small and elite intellectual audience (dismissive terms in and of themselves), are the moralists of form whose focus on aesthetic form neglects content. The group as a whole consists of “Artisten, Ironiker, Akrobaten, Florettfechter, Seiltänzer oder, wie immer wir sie bezeichnen wollen, sind mehr oder weniger einem Kreis von Feinschmeckern¹¹⁴ vorbehalten” (“geistige Raum,” 71).

The second group, the “weltanschaulichen Moralisten” (“geistige Raum,” 71), creates an escapist dream world. As plaster only emulates the look, but not the formal qualities, of marble, the mere simulacrum of these “moralists” celebrates “das alte Bedürfnis des Deutschen, sich aus der Wirklichkeit in den Schein, aus dem Tag in den Traum zu flüchten, seine fürchterlichen Triumphe” (“geistige Raum,” 72). Langgässer

¹¹⁴ In *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, Belfontaine belongs to a circle of *Feinschmeckern*, a group which represents gluttony through their indulgence of well-trained palates. See, for example: Gelbin, Cathy. *Indelible Seal: Race, Hybridity and Identity in Elisabeth Langgässer's Writings*. Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 2001. 93.

condemns such literature for the general reading public, where the author “verwechself Schönheit mit Schönfärberei [...] verwechself Keuschheit mit Prüderei, und Güte mit Sentimentalität” (“geistige Raum,” 72). In an attempt to portray virtue, the authors water down reality. Langgässer’s condemnation here resonates with prior responses to readers who questioned her inclusion of sexual deviance (lesbianism, extramarital sex) in her novels. To these critics, Langgässer responded that virtue cannot be portrayed without also showing sin, just as chastity only makes sense in response to temptation. Isolation from temptation would be prudery, not virtue.

The third category is the least common, and it is the type of writing Langgässer wants to promote. She calls the writers of it the “wirklichen Moralisten” (“geistige Raum,” 73), and she finds their roots in France. These are the writers of *renouveau catholique*, the same group Winkler uses as examples of successful Christian writers in his exhortation to German writers.¹¹⁵ Langgässer sees herself as a part of this group.

The fourth and last group, which claims to be “zeitnah” (“geistige Raum,” 73), only represents the echo of an era long gone. The tardiness of the literature, indicated by its irrelevance, results in a lack of moral measures, traditions, knowledge, and education. These maudlin works might include sentimental literature, like *Heimatliteratur* or historical novels; I can only posit these examples because Langgässer does not provide any. With her quick dismissal of this group, Langgässer returns to address the problem at hand: Germany’s present moral vacuum.

On a literary level, Christianity must make its way to its own essential form of a valid expression of the world (“geistige Raum,” 74) in the work of the true moralists. Here Christian form and content marry; one cannot be distinguished from the other or

¹¹⁵ See the section above.

considered more important than the other: “der Inhalt bei Dichtungen solcher Gattung [hat] keine Wahl [...], sich bald in diese, bald in jene Form zu verlegen. Inhalt und Form bedingen einander, und alles Äußere ist nur, um ein Wort von Novalis zu brauchen, ein in Geheimniszustand erhobenes Innere” (“geistige Raum,” 75). Langgässer no longer speaks of moral content versus moral form, as she has with the other categories of literature in contemporary Germany. Here form and content bear equal burdens, or perhaps better expressed, form and content exist in a symbiotic relationship, where one aspect of the work cannot be valued apart from the other and the existence of one cannot be distinguished from the other.

To create a new form of literature inseparable from content, Langgässer borrows extensively from a long tradition of drama to write a novel that uses the fable (or allegory) of the *Heilsgeschichte* to tell its story. These forms, in contemporary literature, bring together a solution to the recent turn (not break) in literature. By writing through the crisis, Langgässer, too, places hope in the coming generation. She hopes the next generation continues in the cultural and religious traditions. To maintain their inherited traditions, they must reestablish a rhythm, a pattern, and tap into an already established form by participating in liturgy and transforming its form and content into a renewed writing.

Conclusion

In Langgässer’s conception of the mystical crèche, where some of the events do have a specific moment in time (Christ’s crucifixion), the actual time and date are not significant; it would have been just as significant had it happened a week, a month, or a

year later. What is vital is *how* that event fits into the greater Christian narrative; the redemptive act of the crucifixion must be seen in relation to sin and through grace, which are both a one-time historical moment and also a revelation over time in the individual's life. The Langgässarian crèche works in the same way that the myth works: sequence is important. In addition to this sequence, however, is the belief that God's overarching presence means that each of the story elements is present at once, even as one has a sequential relationship to the elements.

Langgässer's response to the salvation narrative is not (initially) through theory, but through a Christian narrative novel (i.e., *Das unauslöschliche Siegel, Märkische Argonautenfahrt*). The novel combines the specific moments of an individual's life to show the sequence of the *Heilsgeschichte*. The novel uses the same elements (Sünde, Gnade und Erlösung) in different ways and paradoxically shows characters as types; no single character is "plastisch und körperhaft [...] individuell und unverwechselbar" ("Möglichkeiten," 21). If the story is ultimately the same for each person, and the Christian novel demonstrates a telos in its recapitulation of the three elements, then there is something transcendental about each character and his or her experience. That the similarities between the typologization in Langgässer's fiction and Existentialist works are clear in the use of types is remarkable. The difference between a Christian work during this new era and Existentialism, however, is the religious conviction that there is a reason to the transcendental experience in each life. As such, every individual life has significance as part of a whole in Christian literature, but only in so far as the individual can be seen as part of a communal whole or as a type.

Yet, because secular and Catholic works are all responding to the same world (even if their responses are different), the Christian novel can be read alongside its secular contemporaries. This fits into Langgässer's mapping of existential history and (perhaps as wishful thinking) would make it easier for a secular audience to accept an explicitly Christian novel.

These discussions about form, content, genre, and tradition demonstrate how intimately connected writing is with time generally and the moment specifically. If we follow Langgässer's arguments, that these aspects of literature are in fact intimately connected and have significance for the greater world, we can see why she focuses on writing and reading as fundamental for constructively writing after crisis. Part of her re-conception of what the novel is is accounted for clearly in her fiction, even if not explicitly in her theoretical writing. *The Incarnation*, a unique marriage of form and content, serves as Langgässer's model and inspiration as she strives to create the new Catholic novel during an unbelieving age. Both *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* and *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, therefore, model the path back to incarnational faith and way of life.

CHAPTER II

Becoming the Incarnation: Saints' Lives as Models for the Baptized

Das unauslöschliche Siegel

“Sein [the book’s] Thema ist ein unausgesprochen theologisches und umkreist, auf einen sehr allgemeinen Nenner gebracht, die Frage: ‘Was ist der Mensch?’ Deutlicher: ‘Was ist der getaufte Mensch?’” Langgässer wrote to publisher Julius Kittl on February 26, 1937. The existential and metaphysical novel in question is *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*. As a devout Catholic, Langgässer attempts to find meaning in all events on earth, understood through the sacraments. Even the most horrific events—those that affect her and her daughter, thought dead at the time she wrote *Das unauslöschliches Siegel*—leave Langgässer searching for deeper meaning. Like her analysis of her marriage with Hoffmann as her salvation,¹¹⁶ Langgässer reinterprets the past and present in order to see God’s grace not only after the Third Reich but in the Third Reich. Unfortunately, the result is a sanctification of the Holocaust and the German people who enabled it.

The novel addresses a community of believers, present as an audience throughout the novel, even from the novel’s dedication: “commystis committo”—to my fellow mystics. Sandwiched between the *Proszenium* and the three books of the novel, the dedication reads as an address to the reader, introducing the concept of a community consisting of fellow mystics. *Committo*, from the Latin *committere*: either to connect,

¹¹⁶ See: Hilzinger, Sonja. *Elisabeth Langgässer: Eine Biografie*. Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2009. 212-213. Hilzinger reads the marriage as both deliverance from the struggle to believe and also, because of its coincidence with the Third Reich, protection from prosecution as a half-Jew.

untie or combine, or to entrust or commit. *Commystis* proves a bit more difficult; what appears to be a neologism brings together “mysticus,” which can mean either “secret” or “mystic,” and “com” from words like “communitus,” indicating “common” or “community.” Read together, the motto, then, would mean something like “I dedicate this work to my fellow-mystics.”

The storyline of *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, with its focus on the individual growing in faith throughout life, provides an example for others to emulate. The specific focus on growing faith in the face of challenges, and the paradox of focusing on a single individual while negating that individual’s importance, is what I would like to argue is a mystic novel. The mystic novel borrows many characteristics from the mystic autobiography, which follows the spiritual journey of one soul. The mystic autobiography—of which Teresa of Avila’s *Autobiography*, Thomas Merton’s *Seven Story Mountain*, and Thérèse of Lisieux’s *Story of a Soul* are prime examples—features the individual’s experiences as he or she seeks to be closer to God, without focusing on the individual. Taken one step further, by denying the main figure of the novel the status of a protagonist, Langgässer favors following the sacrament of baptism and its ramifications for an individual life, rather than the individual life itself.

Baptism provides the metaphysical connection between Christians who are all joined through the sacrament, and it also marks the beginning of spiritual life from which faith will grow. Because of the emphasis on the baptism, and not the person, the individual becomes inconsequential.¹¹⁷ The novel’s title sets up the expectation that

¹¹⁷ Within the first ten pages of the novel, the reader is cautioned not to look for a protagonist because “es gibt keine Hauptperson” (*Siegel*, 10). Compare this to “Grenzen und Möglichkeiten,” 43. Paradoxically, Langgässer believes that a person is more individual (“individueller”) when he or she is most like God or Satan. The total opposite of this phenomenon is when a person is somewhere in the middle of the two, a

baptism, as the indelible seal, persists no matter how far the baptized strays from the baptismal covenant. The main figure of the novel, non-protagonist Lazarus Belfontaine,¹¹⁸ is a baptized Jew¹¹⁹ who features heavily in the first book, disappears nearly entirely in the second book, and reappears in the third book. At the conclusion of the third book, he disappears once again, a modern legend without any markers of individualism, into the death camps in the East. There Belfontaine, as ‘Vater Lazarus’ is

“Phantom,” that is, a person who may appear to be real, but has no substance, or a person who stands in for any other. This “Phantom” plays a particular role on the *Christian* world stage. Langgässer calls this phantom a “Mangelwesen” (“Grenzen und Möglichkeiten,” 44). Wilhelm Hoffmann prefers the terms “heilige Maske” and “Phantom”/“Mangelwesen.” Like the marionette, the characteristics of the “heilige Maske” or the “Phantom”/“Mangelwesen” are determined by the relationship to either God or Satan. The person who wears the “heilige Maske” associates with Christ and is open to Christ working through him or her; the “Phantom,” on the other hand, does not choose Christ and is therefore open to Satan’s interference. See: Hoffmann, Wilhelm and Elisabeth Langgässer: *Existentielles und dichterisches Welterlebnis*. In *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch im Auftrag der Görres-Gesellschaft* 2 (1961): 156. The main characteristic of a “Mangelwesen” is its inability to remember; in this respect, it is different from the positive image of a marionette, a similar image Langgässer uses to speak about characters who lack agency. The marionette has memory and therefore can also free itself to be acted through in the future. What is important to remember with the positive marionette image, as is the case for characters like Helga in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* and the nuns, is that they are not objects per se, but their ‘marionette’ qualities have everything to do with their ability to give up control of themselves and allow God to work through them. See: Behrendt, Johanna E. *Die Einheit von Elisabeth Langgässers Weltbild in der Märkischen Argonautenfahrt*. Ann Arbor, Mich: University Microfilms, 1974. Friedrich am Ende, too, has a moment when he realizes that he is part of the pilgrimage; the realization is connected to memory. Behrendt writes: “Diese Antwort [that he’s the seventh bead in the rosary, and therefore belongs to the group and cannot leave], das empfindet Friedrich, lautet: ob du willst oder nicht, du bist eine Marionette Gottes in einer Reihe von Marionetten. Die siebente Perle im Rosenkranz der Nonne macht ihm klar, dass er die siebente Marionette in der Gruppe der Wanderer ist. Die Perlen des Rosenkranzes sind wieder eine auslösende Sinnesappellation, die Friedrich zu Erinnerungen führt, indem sie ihn auf Assoziationen zu seiner Kristallkugel, die das Nichts für ihn bedeutet, aufmerksam machen” (115; paraphrase of *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, 292-293).

¹¹⁸ Langgässer has asserted that Belfontaine is not a protagonist: “So kommt es, dass wir es in dem ‘Unauslöschlichen Siegel’ nicht mit einer ‘Hauptperson’ zu tun haben; ja, dass sogar die einzige Person, der man diesen Titel füglich zuerkennen könnte im Verlauf der Erzählung verschwindet und in völlig verwandeltem Aspekt wieder auftaucht: Lazarus Belfontaine, welcher der irdische Brennpunkt eines Bündels von Schicksalen ist, deren Strahlen in dem immer wechselnden Spektrum und den Hitzegraden jenseitiger Feuergarben entbrennen, aufglühen und verlöschen.” Langgässer, Elisabeth. “Über den Roman ‘Das unauslöschliche Siegel.’” Ms. 70.3100, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach.

¹¹⁹ The figure of the Baptized Jew reappears in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*; Sichel (whom we meet through the recollections of her cousin Hauteville) is friends with the baptized Jew Florentine; Sichel and Florentine, as two baptized Jews, enjoyed worldly advancement in their school days with the aid of their fathers’ bribes for better treatment. That Langgässer would mention this in the middle (and possibly only) description of the Jewish people and their position in Germany shows Langgässer’s own keen awareness of the suspicions surrounding Jews before the war, and also her own focus in including such figures in her work (See: *Argonautenfahrt*, 82).

the only person to survive and return to Germany, to the heart of the Reformation, which represents splintering the communal aspects of Catholicism in favor of Protestant individualism.

As the theological core of the novel, the leitmotif baptism connects apparently unassociated characters and events. Langgässer underscores the constitutive power of baptism by fragmenting time and place, making the protagonist's individual experiences fall into the background, while elevating community at the novel's conclusion. The core of the novel is disjointed, replete with Modernist literary techniques to describe the world, such as non-linear timeline and lack of protagonist, without the common modernist literary tools like stream of consciousness which emphasizes subjective individual experience against objective world. Langgässer avoids some of the hallmarks of the Modernist movement, such as stream of consciousness, because of its emphasis on the internal and the individual, while she embraces Modernist play with space and time.

Because Langgässer is most interested in the battle between God and Satan, with all other events seen as insignificant, the focus of the novel remains on external symbols, like baptism. With baptism and the external world at the forefront of *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, the motifs and vignettes (i.e., baptism, the reflection of spiritual conflict in the natural world, providence, and the allegory of Blind Faith) which fill the three books of the novel (plus *Proszenium* and epilogue) will be the focus of my analysis. The interwoven themes tie up neatly in the novel's concluding lines and become illuminated in the epilogue, where the storylines wrap up in one liturgically-constituted community. Because the events of the novel seem unrelated, I will briefly outline the three books of the novel here.

Overview of the Novel

The novel—split into three books, framed by an introductory *Proszonium* and an epilogue—offers a look at Lazarus Belfontaine, a baptized Jew, as he moves through his adult life. The first book presents Belfontaine’s life in the town A. in the Rhineland. Set just before World War I begins, Belfontaine marries Elisabeth and has one daughter, Elfriede. The family seems to have typically bourgeois problems, but the quotidian reveals a world riddled with sin, and satanic influence insinuates itself into even the most mundane conversations. The second book jumps inexplicably to Senlis, France, with a seemingly unrelated cast of characters, where Belfontaine is mentioned just once. The only connection between the change in scene and time in these two books is the final word of the first book, “LISIEUX” (*Siegel*, 261). Introduced as the word which has climbed up from the lap of hope—“Dieses Wort, dem Schoß der Hoffnung entstiegen, und mächtig wie sie, hieß”—Thérèse’s name at the end of the first book becomes a character inserted into the second book. Thérèse of Lisieux does verbal battle with Satan, where Langgässer adapts passages from Thérèse of Lisieux’s autobiography, *Story of a Soul* (1898), and inserts Satan’s words as a dialogue in order to connect the novel with the mystic autobiography and show how individual lives on the small stage reflect the greater cosmos, where God and Satan engage in an epic battle.

The conversation between Thérèse of Lisieux and Satan is one of two major conversations in the second book that frame the greater theological network of ideas grounding the novel. Both conversations are drawn from actual text sources that suggest the fictional text has roots in autobiographical texts. These two intertextual insertions in the middle of the book help establish significant patterns across lives.

The second conversation is between two German soldiers in a tower in Île-de-France, called the “Turm-Kapitel,” because two German soldiers standing in a tower read and discuss a letter exchange between Catholic political theologian Juan Donoso Cortés and annotated by his friend, Count Racziński.¹²⁰ The exchange between Cortés and Racziński is based on actual letters by Cortés.¹²¹

In addition to connecting the novel to mystic autobiography, the second book offers a closer look at sexual sins, indicative of a greater malaise of the time. The French cast of characters have no relation to Belfontaine yet, but in the third book, Belfontaine will marry Suzette Bonmarché, committing bigamy.

The third and final book remains in the setting of the second book, Senlis, and reintroduces Belfontaine. Daily life in Senlis is punctuated by philosophical conversations between Belfontaine, the sexton, and de Chamant, which provide opportunities for engagement with concepts normally dealt with in theoretical texts. While somewhat awkward, these are the conversations that unlock the significance of the first two books. In the third book, Belfontaine has successfully integrated himself into the community, and his choice to live only in the present has become challenged through a slow realization of the significance of his baptism.

¹²⁰ Anthony Riley contributed greatly to Langgässer scholarship; he explains Langgässer’s invention of a fictional epistolary exchange between Donoso Cortés, 19th century diplomat and political theologian, and his friend, Count Racziński. He calls the chapter the “Turm-Kapitel,” and points out that the theological and political arguments outlined in the chapter are also nearly in the center of the novel (358). Riley, Anthony W. “Elisabeth Langgässer and Juan Donoso Cortés: A Source of the ‘Turm-Kapitel’ in ‘Das unauslöschliche Siegel.’” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 83, no. 2 (1968): 357-367.

¹²¹ While work has been done on the “Turm-Kapitel,” the autobiographically inspired exchange between Thérèse and Satan remains unaddressed in secondary literature, perhaps dismissed because its relationship to the rest of the text remains difficult to decipher.

How Belfontaine gets to Senlis is revealed only in the final pages of the third book, where the reader learns Belfontaine was captured in World War I and remained there after the war ended, committing bigamy by marrying Suzette while he was still married to Elisabeth back in Germany. The late reveal of the connection between the three books at the conclusion of the third book underscores the individual story's insignificance within the larger story.

Still, the larger story is interwoven with recurring characters, with the names of the characters appearing before the characters themselves. The characters represent the life of a saint on earth and link the conclusion of one book with the events of the next. Just as the first book ends with the name "LISIEUX" (*Siegel*, 261); the second book ends with another name: "JOSEF BENEDIKT LABRE" (*Siegel*, 406). The third book does not end with a saint's name, but a short description of Belfontaine, who has battled Satan like Lisieux and who disappears into the crematoria of the East, a mendicant like Labre. The name "Josef Benedikt Labre" reappears in the liturgical *Epilog 1943* as well, where the connection between Labre and Belfontaine becomes even more established (*Siegel*, 520-522). There, the melding of the two characters, Belfontaine and Labre, becomes explicit, and the reader understands that Belfontaine has joined the communion of saints who guided him through the novel. The novel concludes with an epilogue that features Belfontaine, somewhere in Eastern Europe, now something of a legend. In the final pages, Belfontaine morphs into a combination of the recurring figure of Blind Faith and the mendicant Joseph Labre.¹²²

¹²² Labre was a French mendicant priest who made pilgrimages across Europe and died as a result of his austere living. Delany, Joseph. "St. Benedict Joseph Labre." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Accessed 13 April 2012. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02442a.htm>

The sudden moves between different places and times highlights a tension which underlies the novel, from superficial aspects of the content, to the very form of the novel. Transitions between the various characters and conversations offer a perspective of one character at a time, and connections between the individual scenes and the narrative arc are not visible until the book is reconsidered as a whole. The book can be read linearly as the page is understood, from page one through the final page, or thematically. Repeated images and phrases encourage the reader to look forward and backward through the text in order to trace their progress. Many of these phrases and images are articulated through dialogue, so that in referencing the various passages, the reader is led through a series of discussions which build on one another and provide a larger scope for understanding specific ideas in relation to one another. This brings dialogues into dialogue with one another, across space (represented in a physical sense for the reader by the book) and time (emphasized by the amount of time required for the reader to find and consult the novel). Connections exist between sections of the novel, across the various books, which only become apparent through multiple readings, and not readings done from start to end. An example of this includes the theme of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment as the historical moment when faith was exchanged for reason. This appears during the “Turm-Gespräch” (*Siegel*, 263), during Casculade and Marinier’s conversation on the park bench, and also in Belfontaine’s own life, when he uses reason to dismiss the importance of baptism and faith. In a conversation with a secondary character Belfontaine is diagnosed as poisoned by reason (*Siegel*, 425) and that he belongs to the “Kultus der Vernunft” (*Siegel*, 426). This determination is made just before Belfontaine has his epiphany, when he realizes grace pervades his life.

The interconnectedness of these conversations are represented on a formal-symbolic level as well. Details like the chain of stone salamanders (*Siegel*, 270), mythical figures which represent the resurrection through fire, appear in the second book in a church in the Île-de-France and again in a cathedral where Belfontaine explores mystic experience and the mysteries of the church:

Dem menschlichen Auge, der zeichnenden Hand unfassbar und daher nicht zu beschreiben, weil sie in unaufhörlichem Wandel, in fließender Hin- und Herbewegung, in Auflösung und Verdichtung war, empfand sie das Geistesauge als ein festumrissenes Zeichen; als das immer wiederkehrende Bild des Salamanders, wie ihn die Fenster der großen Kathedrale im Laufband aufbewahrten, wo das reine, feurige Licht des Glases ihn in den heiteren Aufstieg seiner Kaskade hinaufnahm [...] Nun war dieses Zeichen aus Belfontaine wieder herausgetreten: ein aufrecht gehender Salamander von geschmeidiger Schwärze und finsternem Glanz, den er nur von hinten erblickte wie etwas, das schon vorüber war ...['Jetzt' – durchfuhr ihn eine Erinnerung . . . da durfte Moses ihn schauen: doch nur seinen Rücken, das, was vergangen und nicht, was zukünftig war.] (*Siegel*, 440-441)

The connection between the two scenes, the salamanders in the church and Moses looking at God's back, are both concerned with specific instances in time as they constitute part of a broader narrative. They do not have meaning specifically and only for Belfontaine, but for multiple characters like the soldier in France during the Great War and, specifically and especially, for the reader who can move between sections of the

book. The movement through the books helps the reader perceive patterns, and understand the significance of the fragmented narrative arc.

The events between are “mosaic-haft”; on their own they appear as pieces and bits of conversation, but when viewed together (with the aid of imagination), they form a pattern which allows the two main characters, hidden behind the stage of the book, to emerge: God and Satan. On this same stage the various characters will enter, like puppets, moved by some unseen force. The events within the novel exist on two levels—the mortal and the numinous—though the overarching level is not visible as a direct representation, but through conversations about grace and providence.

Proszenium: Setting the Stage for Reader and Critic

Das unauslöschliche Siegel, written for fellow mystics, invites the reader to reflect on the novel’s events and piece together a theology of space and time that supports an incarnational interpretation. Read within the context of an uncertain time, when Langgässer was cut off from her audience and wrote in hopes of one day reengaging in public dialogue, the *Proszenium* helps set the stage not only for the novel’s events, but for the interaction between reader and text. Even in the *Proszenium*, the opening sequence for the novel, the reader is initiated into a way of reading themes and time that establish a community, a body—in short, the *Proszenium* helps establish a Christian audience, which is to serve as the Incarnation, interacting with the world and responding to the divine. The reflexive qualities of such a reading promote a way of understanding form as well as content, two aspects of Langgässer’s incarnational approach to literature.

The *Proszenium* sets the stage for the novel and borrows heavily from theater, particularly Pedro Calderón de la Barca's baroque play, *La vida es sueño* (*Life is a dream*, 1635) and Paul Claudel's renouveau Catholique play, *Le Soulier de Satin* (*The Satin Slipper*, 1931). The borrowed theatrical elements—from the architecture of the stage, the relationship between critic, theater-goer, and actor, as well as the epilogue (the bookend companion to the *Proszenium*)—all literally set the stage for the events about to unfold before the reader. Werner Milch interprets this stage as a means to make the “Wirken göttlicher und widergöttlicher Kräfte beispielhaft sichtbar.”¹²³ He notes the similarities between theater up through the 17th century and the novel, both of which produce a microcosm within the work that explains and illuminates the real world and the cosmos in which it exists. The self-reflexive elements already present in the *Proszenium* attempt to undermine the reader's assumptively passive role. The *Proszenium* highlights the novel's structure as non-traditional, creating a space for reflection about the recent past (the *Proszenium* is set in the present, while the three books of the novel take place over the course of approximately twenty years) within a space that fills with changing scenery but is ultimately empty, full of ruins.

The opening lines are printed in italics, stage directions for the reader, in order to point out the artifice of the work even as it engages the reader in the work. Although the script format used in the *Proszenium* disappears until its reemergence in the Epilogue, italics reappear interspersed throughout the text, when the author—and here we can tentatively identify the narrator's voice with Elisabeth Langgässer's because of the voice over uses the communal “we” to address the situation of the reader, potential critics, and

¹²³ Milch, Werner. “Der Deutsche Roman Auf neuen Wegen.” In *Neue Schweizer Rundschau* 12, no. 2 (1947): 55-60.

the author: “*Wir befinden uns vor dem Eingang eines großen Auktionsgebäudes*” (Siegel, 5). The stage is set for the exchange about to take place.

Onto this stage come the *idealer Leser* and the *vollkommener Kritiker*. The former is of an “unbestimmbarem Alter” and his dress is timeless; the latter does not appear “wie man etwa erwarten möchte [... M]it einem Fernroh bewaffnet”—he can both look far into the future and bring the microcosm that is the novel to his feet. The dual-purpose telescope establishes the relationship with the Critic¹²⁴ to the work; unlike the Reader, who walks through the text, the Critic enjoys a distance. This, then, would be a critical distance. Asked to check the telescope in order to enter the theater, the Critic responds: “Das Fernrohr auf gar keinen Fall! Schließlich ist es ein Stück meiner selbst” (Siegel, 9). The Critic, refusing to give up his tools for achieving critical distance, will be unable to fully engage in the novel’s content or participate in the way it forms community. Were the Critic to leave his telescope behind, he could fully participate in the novel, allowing it to transform him.¹²⁵ Here we have the first of many instances where rational thought endangers a deeper engagement based in faith.

Time, *Chronos*, appears in this prelude as a character. Without stage directions or introduction, Herr Chronos affirms his presence when he addresses Reader and Critic alike, just after the Reader asks where Herr Belfontaine, the main figure who has not yet been introduced to the audience, has gone. The Critic responds that he stands before a mirror, where he “betrachtet sich wohlgefällig” (Siegel, 9). The mirror itself is an art

¹²⁴ In my translation of the *Leser* and *Kritiker*, I capitalize the first letters to show that they represent types, or allegorical characters.

¹²⁵ In effect, by checking his telescope, the Critic would become a “Mitmysten” and fully participate in Belfontaine’s spiritual transformation.

object—beautifully framed Venetian glass. The pattern of mirrors, of a character looking at or “reflecting” upon himself, is another leitmotif for the narrative, one that will appear in the final battle between Belfontaine and Satan. Herr Chronos reveals this, as he explains that the mirror is an invention, an object which opens the reflected world to further revelation (*Siegel*, 10). At the top of the mirror is the inscription “Die göttliche Weisheit des Ursprungs,” yet another reference to the Creation (which the reader will soon reencounter in Belfontaine’s garden). Here the mirror (art, fiction) opens the created world more, giving both the characters of the novel (Belfontaine) and the Reader (Der Leser) a deeper understanding of themselves and the world as it appears in the mirror.¹²⁶ Again, the purpose of literature is referenced here, and the number of reflections possible within the work and with the work must remain a constant consideration for the reader. This is not a work to be considered for entertainment, to distract for an hour or two, but should provide genuine reason for reflection, both upon the contents of the book and the reader’s own life.

The Reader, unsure of his recent purchase—a heavy, complicated book—receives words of comfort from the Critic that reading aids are available. The Critic also ensures the Reader that he can, in fact, demand the cost of admission back (in other words, he can return the book), at which point the Reader identifies himself as a former author, as though he has lost agency. Every German was an author, who has written and printed works has not profited from the work, but paid for it: “Von dem Autor kann man gar nichts verlangen. Ich bin selber ein Autor. Ich meine: ich war es. Jeder Deutsche, der lesen kann, hat schon geschrieben. Irgend etwas. Er hat es drucken lassen. Natürlich auf

¹²⁶ Reader and Critic both enter the novel through this mirror, further blurring the line between characters in fiction and in “reality.”

eigene Kosten” (*Siegel*, 5). The implication is that the Germans who wrote their own stories continue to pay. This opens a complex relationship between author, reading audience, critic, and the characters depicted in the book. The Reader specifically identifies Germans as authors—this identifies the audience as German-language, German-national. And this audience, represented by this single male Reader, must be cautious in his interaction with the text, lest he be confused with the characters of the novel (*Siegel*, 6). The identification between Reader and Character becomes fluid, and the Character’s acts of reading and interpreting are reiterated within the novel itself. The role of the reader doubles; we have both the reader of the text, reading about a representative Reader and a Critic, and the Reader in the text, who is aware of both his relationship to the other characters in the book (they exist on two distinct planes) and his relationship to the actual reader (where the two different planes can easily be confused with one another). Consequently, the reader, whether it is you or me, could possibly identify him or herself with characters in the book, so that the line between fiction and reality becomes completely irrelevant, and the reading act constitutes a shared experience, even a shared body.

As the Reader and Critic further discuss the work to come, the Critic looks through his telescope, only to notice that his mechanical way of viewing the world is not completely correct—he sees all of the characters and they are naked. This image, like the other images, has several functions. It references the work as post-Edenic, where man has fallen, is naked, and exists in this world, and in which, at the same time, above which the reader is positioned, oversee all the events in the book. The Eden-imagery continues throughout the course of the book, from the opening pages where Belfontaine sits in his

garden with his daughter, to the end, where Belfontaine has his final, transformative mystic experience. The Reader claims, “ich habe nichts zu verbergen, ich kann mich sehen lassen.” He is not afraid of identifying himself with the characters or being identified as a character. The Critic replies that, by the end of the book, they will have both learned to be naked, “bis auf das Feigenblatt” (*Siegel*, 7), so that both Reader and Critic will have learned that they, as human beings, have something of which to be ashamed. The fig leaf again references the Fall, but through an artistic rendering of the pre-Fall world, where man and woman are naked and without shame. Yet the world in which the artwork exists is a product of the Fall, and so the fig leaf must be painted in not for the sake of those depicted in the painting, but for the sake of the viewer or, in this case, the reader who interacts with the work, post-Fall and pre-redemption. The conversation about reading and an interaction with the text all take place in front of an auction house—a not-so-subtle comment about the function of literature and also censorship, which reveals aspects about the reader to him or herself, and which must also exist on a market, sold as books, either well, badly, or not at all (especially if one is kept from publishing at all, as was the case for Elisabeth Langgässer). The book in the Reader’s and the readers’ hands is Langgässer’s response to the government’s control over her publishing—but also underscores her ability to continue writing despite that control.

In these continued reflections about the work, its content, and its function, the Critic is unable to see the various spaces and times depicted in the course of the work

(*Siegel*, 11). He cannot see the *rote Faden*.¹²⁷ Here, Herr Chronos identifies that string as “Die göttliche Gnade” (*Siegel*, 12), which provides the means by which the reader must continue through the labyrinth of the three-part narrative and which also gives the reader guidance in his or her own life. Grace renders time ultimately unimportant. Both the book and life, one could say, begins and ends in the same place. Herr Chronos answers the Reader’s question about exactly how the narrative works—in this case referring to the story we, the reader, are about to begin: “Die Seitenzählung beginnt und endigt auch wieder mit 1.” Indeed, in order to understand the characters who appear in the *Proszenium*, we, the readers, must re-read the prelude after completing the work.

Baptism Through Water and Baptism Through Fire: Sacrifice and Salvation as Bookends

The first page is both where the reader should begin, and where the reader will end. The self-reflexive, cyclical quality of the novel mirrors the bookend instances of baptism: a baptism by water before the novel begins, and baptism by fire in the concluding pages. The *Proszenium* sets the stage for observing the enduring qualities of baptism both in time and beyond time within the work’s pages. Baptism appears in these early pages through the grotto imagery (which will reappear in a later scene, where the miracles in a grotto at Lourdes are explicitly connected with baptism) and also through a baptism by fire, evidenced by the rubble of buildings destroyed by (possible fire-) bombings.

The two types of baptism are brought together in the third of the three grottos in the concluding pages of the *Proszenium*, and again in the epilogue. The first and second

¹²⁷ *Faden*, here referenced as Ariadne’s thread, who provided the string for Theseus to find his way out of the labyrinth after slaying the Menator. As the *rote Faden*, it is woven throughout the work, providing a consistent point of reference and a motif which guides the reader through the work.

grottos in the *Proszenium*, which represent the past and the present, are really one and the same: “die dritte Grotte war immer da und hat die erste und zweite von Anfang an überwolbt.” This apocalyptic insight about the future’s all-encompassing role is not provided by Chronos, but by the “Mönch von Heisterbach,”¹²⁸ into whom Herr Chronos had metamorphosed. Ultimately, what the Reader observes here can only be described as disturbing:

Dann wäre also die dritte Grotte der “Mundus” an und für sich? [...] Die Beleuchtung ist wirklich sehr ungenügend. In diesem flackernden, kleinen Lichtschein gleicht nun der ganze große Auktionsraum einer einzigen Rumpelkammer. Dieser schäbige Schreibtisch—zerbrochene Stühle—die Lederbände am Boden zertreten, zerrissen und angekohlt. Hier muß ein Feuer gewütet haben, es kann nicht anders sein[.] Wer wird wohl noch etwas ersteigern wollen, außer Hermes, dem Totenführer? Und wer hat den Obolus, um zu bezahlen, wenn der beinerne Hammer fällt? (*Siegel*, 15)

The scene starts with three grottos and finishes in death and the underworld. Here the rhetorical comment notes that it seems that no one will emerge from Hades. This is a hint toward the death symbolism of baptism,¹²⁹ but without the marks of resurrection. Indeed, the monk’s one response to the writer’s room, a space that reappears in shambles at the

¹²⁸ This character is most likely Caesarius von Heisterbach, a monk who chronicled cultural history, miracles of his time, and the lives of Archbishop Engelbert I of Cologne and St. Elisabeth of Hungary.

¹²⁹ Baptism in the Christian tradition represents the death and resurrection of Christ. The lowering of the body into water during baptism by immersion draws a connection between the crossing of the Red Sea, the Flood, and the death of the individual being baptized to him or herself. See: Ferguson, Sinclair B, David F. Wright, and J I. Packer. “Baptism.” *New Dictionary of Theology*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1988. 69-73.

end of the book (and the end of the Third Reich), is to remain silent and pull his hood over his head. The room's significance, full of ruined books and desk, but without a single person present, is ambiguous, suggesting that no one is left. Yet the novel, as a produced text, witnesses to the writer's persistence. And of all the Jews who punctuate the text (not the least of them would be Belfontaine himself), it is three Jews from the Old Testament who show up in the epilogue to help Langgässer construct her interpretation of the destruction of Berlin, a city from which the Jews have been "exiled" that is, a city declared free of Jews in 1943.

The war ruins appear in the *Proszenium* in the form of a burnt-out room and signs of previous life, and it reappears at the novel's end in *Epilog 1943*. Here, the story of Daniel from the Hebrew Bible is retold as a modern story of survival. In *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, Daniel's friends are recast as the "drei Feuerwehrmänner – Sidriach, Misach und Abdenago," who take the stage during a bombing raid on Berlin. They report that they have just returned from Nebuchadnezzar's furnace (*Siegel*, 514). Three Jews in Berlin, three Jews in Babylon, a retelling of apocalyptic literature.¹³⁰ The Old Testament Empire Babylon, where the Jews experienced a period of exile, also references the Book of Revelation from the Christian Bible, where Babylon stands in opposition to the New Jerusalem for Christians.¹³¹ In this retelling, the old story transfers easily to the new, collapsing historical and real time. Modern-day Berlin, a new empire

¹³⁰ *Siegel*, 513. The epilog depicts bombings of Berlin. Langgässer and her family surviving the bombings, as well as her manuscript even though her house was destroyed. See also Sonja Hilzinger's Langgässer biography: Hilzinger, Sonja. *Elisabeth Langgässer: Eine Biografie*. Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2009. 289-294.

¹³¹ See: "Babylon" In Ryken, Leland, Jim Wilhoit, Tremper Longman, Colin Duriez, Douglas Penney, and Daniel G. Reid. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1998. 68-69. And also: Revelation 17-18 in *Holy Bible: The New King James Version, Containing the Old and New Testaments*. Nashville: T. Nelson, 1982.

for Jewish exile, represents another period of prosecution, here only for baptized Jews. Jewish figures also dot the books of the novel. An intermediary scene includes Jewish figures in a dream-scape, who take up the covenant of baptism. And Belfontaine's clear Jewish-Catholic identity, with his baptism dominating his Jewish character traits, offers another instance of Jewishness (or Jewish practice). Because of his baptism, Belfontaine's Catholic identity supersedes the Jewish, and it is precisely this Catholic-Jewish identity that enables him to sacrifice himself in the crematoria of the East and survive the flames.

Belfontaine appears at the novel's conclusion as a beggar doing penance. Sometimes his characteristics are Jewish; other times he appears to be a person: "hier wurde er als typischer Jude, dort wieder als ein Mensch geschildert, dem selbst der kleinste Zug dieser Rasse nicht nachzuweisen war" (*Siegel*, 520). Langgässer uses the word "Rasse," the same word the Nazis used to make distinctions between Jews and Germans, acknowledging and concurrently erasing Belfontaine's Jewish identity. Physical features, hair and skin color, all can be read racially. These contrast with the indelible seal permeates to the soul. Indelible seal relates to the human, while the Jewish racial (not religion) becomes subsumed. Langgässer repeats the Nazi term and appears to corroborate the Nazi concept of race by explaining race away and avoiding any conversation about the Jewish faith. Langgässer's racial reading of Belfontaine creates a tension with the other characteristics Belfontaine has that make him an Everyman: he has no specific age, similar to the Reader in the opening lines of the *Proszenium*. In short, Belfontaine's individual characteristics are always in flux and never defined. Belfontaine takes on the identities of the mendicant saint, Joseph Benedikt Labre, and also Blind

Faith, punished “Für die Gesamtschuld des europäischen Menschen. Für die Schuld der Könige und der Kärner; der Herrscher, der Unterdrückten; der Philosophen, der Dichter, der Künstler und Mathematiker büßte der Arme im Geist” (*Siegel*, 522). Any part of Belfontaine’s identity that could be tied to his Jewish race, including his suffering, is ignored in favor of his suffering as a German. The scapegoat Belfontaine only matters because he can seek forgiveness for Germany’s sins, not because of his own identity.

Catholic community and theology overwrite the significance of a Jewish exile. In fact, Catholic community, constituted by liturgy, dominates the epilogue. Der Kleine, one of the participants in the epilogue’s liturgy (which also takes on the form of a script, mirroring the script of the *Proszenium*) connects the experience he and the other allegorical characters (Der Dicke, Der Dünne, and Der Große) share while in a bomb shelter with the experience of Belfontaine who disappears in the fires in the East.¹³² Here Belfontaine-Labre comes to represent the Jews again—but not surviving as Jews, but *baptized* Jews—living as if surrounded by a halo and sanctified by fire (*Siegel* 498). What brings the Jewish survivors through the Holocaust, then, has nothing to do with their Jewishness and everything to do with their baptism. Christ’s crucifixion, accessed through liturgy, brings them through the flames: “Gepriesen sei das unbrennbare Holz, das dauerhafte und harte Holz, das Holz des Kreuzes inmitten der brausenden Feuerflamme!” (*Siegel*, 526). Those saved through the cross—a representation for

¹³² The opening story of the epilogue recounts the story of a woman who reemerges from her cellar after a bombing, the top half of her house in flames: “während es oben schon brannte, und [sie] einen Teller in ihrer Hand trug, auf welchem ein marinierter Hering, von einigen Zwiebelringen umgeben, wie ein freundliches Stilleben lag. Dieser Hering, dieser silberne Fisch, zuckt, während ihr Vergleich um Vergleich für euren Heiligen findet....er sei noch da.” The herring and onions, earlier connected with Belfontaine, whose love for the food exposes him as a Jew, here stand for a typical Berlin meal (*Siegel*, 525).

suffering, death, and resurrection—include all characters, from the Jews exiled in Egypt to those absent from the writer’s room.

The cry “Gelobt und gepriesen in Ewigkeit!” draws together as though the revelation and interpretation of history were part of Sunday Mass’ liturgy. And it is here that we realize the whole novel is not framed by a play, but by a Mass. The structure of the epilogue is in fact the structure of a baptismal service, connecting the persecution and murder of the Jews with baptism, which represents both death and resurrection. The pastor figure, who considers the fire a sanctification, even goes on to say: “Gelobt sei der Wind, der die Flamme emporträgt und sich mit seinem dämonischen Sausen ihrem furchtbaren Atem vermischt” (*Siegel*, 527), thanking the wind for making the fire even larger and, therefore, capable of consuming even more.

With the hope that the flames will sanctify, the author’s own experiences inform the events in the epilogue. This includes several references to women and children from a house in North Berlin being sent off to Auschwitz and Birkenau—Elisabeth Langgässer’s daughter, Cordelia, worked in a hospital in the north of Berlin until she was sent off to Theresienstadt and, from there, on to Auschwitz. As one character of Langgässer’s epilogue recites the litany of abuses Jews (and Cordelia) experienced, the other characters respond, “Verflucht und vergessen in Ewigkeit” (*Siegel*, 509). The response to tragedy through liturgy shows a personal association with the events Langgässer portrays. Ultimately, Langgässer frames her own experience as a Catholic and a *Mischling* in terms of Catholic liturgy and theology. Baptism and Incarnation, two of the primary theological concepts that center the events of the novel, are approached through a mystical lens. Langgässer takes a mystic approach to her characters and to baptism. Specifically, she

uses common mystic tropes to explain Belfontaine's progress in acknowledging and coming into his baptismal vows. In order to appreciate these tropes, we will take a closer look first at what defines most mystic experiences, and then see how these steps along the Mystic Way are modeled by Belfontaine.

Storms: A Natural Phenomenon as a Mirror for Mystic Experience;

An Object Lesson for Baptism

Belfontaine's life is interspersed with mystic experiences that lead him to embrace grace and fully realize the implications of his baptism. For Belfontaine, his baptism was originally nothing more than a step he had to undertake in order to marry his gentile wife. The growing awareness that the self is imperfect and finite, as well as a growing consciousness of transcendent order, occur side by side; they form moments of illumination for Belfontaine where an inner-tension effected by the divine presence must be expressed. The natural world, specifically storms, help reflect this inner tension as they reference baptismal water, since Langgässer refused to write a psychological novel, but she still describes a "Mystic Way" Belfontaine experiences as he heads toward Union with God. Evelyn Underhill's work on the "Mystic Way" provides an interpretive frame for understanding Belfontaine's spiritual progress post-baptism.

No single mystic experience defines all mystic experiences, but tendencies and patterns in mystic lives emerge when they are read together. In Underhill's seminal work "Mysticism," she outlines the five steps she reads as a composite portrait of the Mystic Way (116). Because the five steps do not define all mystic experiences, but tend to be common experiences, the list cannot be taken as the single measure for assessing mystic

experience. The “Mystic Way” consists of: 1) “The awakening of the Self to consciousness of Divine Reality,” where the individual becomes aware of the numinous. 2) The Self, aware of the divine, also realizes its own imperfection and finiteness, 3) “Consciousness of the Transcendent Order [...] in an enhanced form” for the Self. This step is similar to the fifth (union with God), but to a lesser degree. 4) “Final and complete purification of the Self,” when “[t]he human instinct for personal happiness [and the individual will] must be killed.” At this stage, the mystic feels abandoned, and so the Self surrenders to the Divine completely. 5. Union with the Divine, commonly known as ecstasy. “Union [is] the true goal of mystical growth,” where life is intensified and changes in form. Here, the “utter surrender of the self” marks the mystical union, where the surrender and the Union is not passive, but an active life (*Mysticism*, 117-119).

Spiritual turmoil mirrored by natural phenomena provides the opportunity for a writing (and a reading) of nature and the surrounding world as both destructive and a means for salvation. Each of Belfontaine’s experiences of spiritual conflict, brought on through his daily interactions, is represented by a storm so that several storms punctuate the novel. Each storm seems poised to destroy the utopian settings of the gardens (a reference to Eden and a right relationship between God and humans) where these conflicts take place. As a force of nature, storms can bring flood and disruption, but they can also bring nourishing rain and foster new growth. Lightning both destroys and brightens the surrounding landscape like flashes of memory that illuminate the consciousness to bring about a new awareness of the situation. Thunder offers an auditory reminder of some booming mythic and epic time. All together, the elements of the storm represent disruption and new beginnings; they provide imagery that conveys the internal

disturbance of mystic experience at the core of a person, even while altering the world outside of an individual and threatening to bring the shared world into disorder.

Mystic experiences, represented by storms, punctuate the course of events which make up Belfontaine's growing understanding and ultimate acceptance of his baptism as totally transformative. This transformation is difficult to depict, in part because Langgässer does not use stream of consciousness or extended monologues which would share an individual character's innermost thoughts with the reader. So, while she uses the mystic autobiography, where typically only one voice narrates the life, Langgässer relies on dialogues to express the internal process rather than stream of consciousness or an omniscient narrator to reveal internal motivations. With the focus on dialogue, the emphasis lies on the communal aspects of discussion. Dialogues are just one way of showing transformation. Metaphysical and transformational relationships between nature, humans, and the divine become evident through clear, concrete metaphors like the recurring storms as well.

The first storm breaks just after a lengthier dialogue about evil and providence between Elfriede, Belfontaine's daughter, and the Reverend Mother. Lightning transforms the gazing ball¹³³ in the center of Belfontaine's garden into a glowing ball of fire. The coinciding storm and discussion demonstrate continuity among the daily exchanges between characters which move the plot of the novel along, so that theological topics and natural phenomena enhance and clarify one another. "Der Donner überstürzte,

¹³³ The gazing ball becomes a *Dingsymbol* that represents the world, as it appears empty (and therefore devoid of its own meaning until invested with meaning when a lottery ticket is hidden within it) and a mirror. The reflective and fillable qualities of the globe allow the ongoing battle between God and Satan to make the globe either good or evil. During the storms, the gazing ball glows, taking on the qualities of the lightning and turmoil around it. As we will later see in the section on providence, the globe, holding a hidden lottery ticket, represents the decision some make to invest the world with meaning through chance only, rather than providence.

vermischte, verstärkte sich in dem nächsten, und der dröhnende, feuerflüssige Hohlraum einer unaufhörlich sich bildenden Kugel umschloß mit den Innenwänden aus Glanz und löwenhaftem Gebrüll diesen Garten, der seine Wirklichkeit gegen den Trug einer Lichtmagie eingetauscht hatte, die ihn schöner und lebloser machte” (*Siegel*, 119).

Throughout the scene, the thunder plays between sky and earth, and lightning plays with the surfaces of the gazing ball; the two mirror one another, presenting interacting layers of symbolic meaning. Light and reality interplay, creating a microcosm which represents existence on earth, where God and Satan do battle. Until the Last Judgment, Satan will have power on earth and be free to exercise influence in human affairs.

During these mystic storms, it becomes evident that Satan’s power extends beyond the human realm to the natural world, which is only a world of *Schein*. In one of the intermediary storms that punctuate the novel, the supernatural force of the storm exerts power over this world, down to even the elemental “Blätter, Blumen und Gras” and bends “dem Wesensgrund der Natur hinweg und verstärkte den Schein durch den Schein” (*Siegel*, 119-120). The storm’s ability to bend nature back onto itself results in a doubling of appearance, suggesting a superficiality not connected to their essence: “doch schienen diese Blätter und Blumen alle, die über das trostlos gefesselte Reich der Elemente nicht vordringen konnten, den außerweltlichen Blick eines Dämons mit Ungeduld zu erwarten, der sie Blitz um Blitz, aufspringen ließ wie dürre Strochschnabelfrüchte: unvermittelt und koboldhaft...” (*Siegel*, 120; ellipses in the original). The vibrant metallic colors represent the elemental struggles creation is going through as it groans against its fallen state.

As the rains flood the garden, new streams of water bubble up and race across the grass, bringing destruction to the order of the blossoms. The flooding of the earth, reminiscent of the flood in Genesis, points again to the fallen state of creation. Belfontaine compares the storm to Hell twice, even as he observes the garden-scape, detached, as if he did not participate in the world: “Aber das ist ja die Hölle! Sagte Belfontaine halblaut und starrte aufmerksam, ohne Furcht und fast ohne Anteilnahme, in den wilden Wechsel von Hell und Dunkel, den der brüllende Donner zermalmte. [...] “Die Hölle...”, sagte er wieder mit einer gewissen Andacht” (*Siegel*, 120). The close association of chained kingdom, supernatural imagery and daemons, and the near-absence of agency for Belfontaine allows the storm to be read concurrently as a mystic experience in which he has no agency and as an allegory for the epic battle between God and Satan over the earth, without actually representing the protagonist or antagonist in this story. Belfontaine’s passivity in this first storm, which slowly plays out and does not bring about noticeable change, slowly melts away during subsequent storms, until the final storm where Belfontaine becomes fully involved and therefore can finally realize the grace inherently present in his baptism.

In the next storm, water’s role develops even more. Another mystic experience takes place in the swan pavilion, at the edge of a lake, at the culmination of a conversation between Belfontaine and the pastor. In a dream-like state, Belfontaine stumbles like a drunkard toward the pavilion, where swans swim about like “Traumkreaturen” (*Siegel*, 214-215), surrounded by depictions of Leda and the Swan, as well as other mythical figures. The supernatural, otherworldly swans overlay the mythic story of Leda and her rape by Zeus. In these surroundings, Belfontaine loses control over

his senses, his “Sinne” and “Erkenntnisorgane” (*Siegel*, 215) are taken over by a higher power and are projected deep into himself, while also throwing pictures of the world onto the interior surface of a hollow metal ball, “welche sich einwärts bogen und die Bilder der Welt auf die Innenfläche einer hohlen Metallkugel warfen” (*Siegel*, 215). This image repeats the empty mirror ball in the garden, ready to take on the properties of the supernatural storm. Here, the empty ball, filled, acquires the properties of the outside world, establishing fluid and transient connections between the interior and exterior worlds. The tension between interiority and exteriority transfer to Belfontaine’s person. He appears drunk because his five senses (interior to him) no longer correctly engage with the outside world. The disconnect between Belfontaine’s body and the world he interacts with is reflected by the mirror ball, which “sich wie eine schillernde Blase allmählich von ihm entfernte und gleichsam seine ganze Person aus allen Häuten schälte” (*Siegel*, 215-216). This removal demonstrates on a basic physical and visual level how perceptions of reality can be separated from the physical world when connected to consciousness or, in this case, a sort of dream state. The paradox or, perhaps, the reality of how the mind functions, is that the dream state brings Belfontaine to a new level of consciousness of his baptism, “dieses mystische, lächerliche Bewußtsein” (*Siegel*, 216).

This new self-awareness that comes from some external, higher power enables Belfontaine to contemplate his position in terms of the other characters, as well as the way sin pervades all human relationships. As with other psychologically-driven developments, a dialog becomes the vehicle for continuing Belfontaine’s development. Here, Belfontaine’s pastor is the interlocutor. The conversation meanders through a discussion of coincidence, what it means to be a priest, and even what loneliness means.

All of these topics deal with the human condition, and Belfontaine begins realizing that his baptism is significant. He begins working through his sins since his baptism and compares them to the Church's teachings surrounding baptism: "seit seinem Tauftag nicht mehr gesündigt, nicht Ehebruch, Unzucht, nicht Wucher, Erpressung oder sonst ein Laster getrieben zu haben, das den Bindestoff abgibt für Mann und Weib..." (Siegel, 216). Aware of the divine and the role the sacraments play in his life, Belfontaine realizes his own imperfections in comparison (Underhill's Step 2 on the "Mystic Way"). The realization is not simply driven by reason, though Belfontaine confirms with the priest that he has also regained his reason as the storm subsides—this is now a much different reason than that of the Enlightenment which rejects the presence of God. Here, Belfontaine's regained reason stands in contrast to his loss of control represented by the storm with strong winds and heavy rains. Belfontaine's new awareness is worth further consideration, since it occurs early in his story, and he still has much progress to make on his spiritual journey. Despite his awakening consciousness and the sense he has control over his body, the sense that he has been reborn will not last because his rebirth is not yet complete:

[und] Belfontaine [...] preßte, während sein Hirn sich entleerte, um einer schwindelerregenden Klarheit und Ruhe Platz zu machen, eine Hand auf das getroffene Herz, dessen Wunde nicht ausströmen sollte. Sofort, als zöge ein furchtbares Gift die zerrissenen Adern zusammen, kehrte gleichsam das Blut auf dem Wege um und ergoß die stürzende Lebenswelle in Becken und Geschlecht. Er fühlte die Erde. Sie war ihm nah und trug ihn, wie eine Geliebte das Gewicht des Mannes erträgt. Er

stand. Oh, wie fest und gut er nun stand, wie einfach und sicher gegründet war dieses neue Gefühl. Nichts würde ihn jetzt mehr erschüttern und aus der Bahn werfen können, dachte Herr Belfontaine dankbar, oder das Gleichgewicht stören, welches ihn, wie einen Schwimmer der Auftrieb, aus den finsternen Wirbeln hinausgetragen und ihn in den vollen Besitz all seiner Kräfte gesetzt, ja, ihm andere Kräfte hinzugewonnen und die alten gereinigt hatte. Jeder Muskel gehorchte ihm, jeder Gedanke war ohne Bodensatz, leicht und frei; gefügig und zugleich fest genug, um jede beliebige Bindung nach den Gesetzen, besser: den Launen eines noch nicht begonnenen Spiels ohne Schwierigkeit einzugehen. . . Herr Belfontaine verschränkte die Arme und lehnte sich an die Wand; sein Rücken fühlte durch Tuch und Leinen ihre weiche, unregelmäßige Bildung, den roh beworfenen Muschelkalk, jeden Kratzer und jede winzige Schale, und gab diese Eindrücke dem Gehirn wie die Anfänge einer Welterfahrung mit kindischer Freude weiter.

Ich bin neu geboren. Wiedergeboren, fühlte Belfontaine ohne Erstaunen und tat seit langem zum ersten Mal einen tieferen Atemzug.

(*Siegel*, 220)

The experience here, more than the first storm scene where Belfontaine is completely passive, emphasizes the connection with the spirit as well as the body.¹³⁴ Experience

¹³⁴ An example of the connection between body and spirit can be found in John 3:5-8: "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." *Holy Bible: The New King James Version, Containing the Old and New Testaments*. Nashville: T. Nelson, 1982.

takes precedence over thought; it is the heart which undergoes this transformative event, not the mind which remains clear and uninvolved. The change of heart allows for a spiritual, rather than a rational, response to this reality (*Wirklichkeit*). The depth and weight of the process of recognition for Belfontaine is conveyed through phrases like “vollem Gewicht die Frucht der Erkenntnis” and “Erkenntnis der Wirklichkeit: wollte er sie? Und jetzt? Und aus diesen Händen?” (*Siegel*, 222). Because Belfontaine’s experience is directly tied to his baptism, the stirrings of redemption are visible; this contrasts with the natural world, where even the leaves and blades of grass are stuck in a world of illusion.

The conversation escalates, from the realization that Belfontaine has been reborn, to the understanding that the recognition of reality transcends what the mind knows and requires the discernment of the heart, to a mystic experience related to Christ’s divinity, but falling short of complete identification (Underhill’s third step on the “Mystic Way”). Following so closely on the heels of a core recognition, we might expect Belfontaine to be able to recognize Christ as part of the Godhead. But Belfontaine has not yet reached the illumination stage (outlined in Evelyn Underhill’s *Mysticism*), and so does not make this key recognition.

The scenes which deal with baptism can also be read in terms of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Considered together, these scenes can help decipher what Langgässer herself believed about Judaism. Belfontaine claims in this dialogue that his affiliation with Christianity for the past seven years was only an attempt, not his true identity. He claims that he must be a Jew because his Jewishness is stronger than he is: “C’était plus fort que moi” (*Siegel*, 225). This, I believe, is a simple statement of self-

realization and also a moment of doubt. Belfontaine was born Jewish, and he sees this as his identity. Yet the situation is more complex and gives rise to a number of questions: Why the French formulation? When he then asks the priest to take faith from him, rather than push him under like a drowning animal, which faith is he referring to? What has happened to the faith into which he was baptized? Why the belief (faith) that, for seven years, he thought that his baptism meant nothing? The discussion demonstrates the tension between reason and faith (elsewhere Langgässer connects the French Revolution with the Enlightenment, so that all things French represent an emphasis on reason over faith, and also ties into the National Socialist narrative connecting France and Judaism, justifying anti-Semitism). The conversation also demonstrates the progressive realization of salvation throughout a life through faith, even if baptism occurs at one moment in time. The priest summarizes this succinctly:

Und doch, Herr Belfontaine [...] wurden Sie einmal aus freiem Willen auf den Tod dieses Menschen getauft. Sie tragen sein unauslöschliches Siegel, das Feuer und Wasser nicht tilgen; das den Himmel himmlischer und die Hölle [...] höllischer macht. Sie sind kein 'natürlicher Mensch' mehr, lieber Herr Belfontaine. Sie sind wiedergeboren [...] Ihr Schicksal vollzieht sich mit Gottes Schicksal; an dem Leib seines Sohnes oder am Leib des ewigen Widersachers, in dessen Fleisch er mit tausend Gliedern, die das unauslöschliche Siegel tragen, hinabgewuchert ist. Auch das Geheimnis der Hölle ist Gottes Geheimnis [...]. Auch sie [...] ist ein Mysterium der Liebe und darum ewig wie jene - - ewig[.] (*Siegel*, 227)

Baptism explicitly relates to the experience on earth where it cannot be erased, nor can it be denied through reason—the tool of the “natürlicher Mensch.” This indelible seal—the seal which gives the novel its name—ties the human life (and death) with God. The sacrament of baptism connects the divine with human above all other elements in the created world. Simply stated, Belfontaine is a marked man, and not just for his life on earth, but for all of eternity.

Water imagery, reminiscent of water’s role in baptism, surrounds the priest’s question: “G l a u b e n S i e a n d i e G o t t h e i t C h r i s t i ?” (*Siegel*, 223; emphasis in the original). Before his query, the priest lifts a stone and throws it into the water. The stone disrupts the surface of the water and, in contrast, the question creates a “mystische Stille,” with only the sound of a waterfall in the distance to punctuate the conversation. Its interaction with the calm surface (“Wasserspiegel”), the subsequent concentric ripples that emanate out from that one point of contact becomes the metaphor for how the question disrupts the surface of consciousness for Belfontaine as well as how a question which carries such significance for the very understanding of the world can be asked in a way which welcomes providence, without the person asking being fully aware of the weight of the question.

Sound, like the stone and the question, creates a disturbance evidenced only by the after-effects, once the cause has sunk from sight. The question (and perhaps the motivation that comes with it) cannot simply be answered; the truth, like an animal, stands ready to pounce, “wie ein reißendes Tier, Körper an Körper mit ihm” (*Siegel*, 223). Truth’s hot breath intimidates Belfontaine so that he responds with a rejection of what he just experienced—“Natürlich – nicht” (*Siegel*, 223). His objection is that a

reasonable person (“vernünftiger Mensch”) (*Siegel*, 223) cannot believe that God became flesh like Jupiter or Apollo. For now, reason still trumps spiritual experience. His objection is to the Incarnation, the problem of how spiritual and physical worlds interact. He focuses on the similarities between the stories and rejects them as that—simply stories, without relation to his own experience, based in reality. The objection shifts to the resurrection, as a mythology. The priest counters that the conflict between Belfontaine’s own rebirth/resurrection experience and reason divides his ability to comprehend or believe what can only be understood through faith. With that, the underlying theme—grace—finally emerges as the cause for the resonances Belfontaine finds moving through his life and fully apparent in the concluding scene. As he debates this, he quotes Christ’s command to Lazarus to rise from the dead. Lazarus is a Christ-type; his bodily resurrection from the dead demonstrates Christ’s power over death and foreshadows what Christ himself will do in the resurrection. This quote of Christ’s words in the Gospel of John 11:43: “Da er [Christus] das gesagt hatte, rief er mit lauter Stimme: Lazarus, komm heraus!” These words will repeat in Belfontaine’s final mystic experience in which he fully realizes the significance of his baptism and comes into faith. This is one instance of the story beginning and ending on page one; the reader does not see these stages in Belfontaine’s life as leading to an ultimate acceptance of grace until the final pages. Rereading the novel, and retracing Belfontaine’s life *after* his full conversion becomes known, makes these intermediate stages legible within the greater life-narrative. Even as Belfontaine rejects the possibility of the resurrection here, in the middle of his life, he unknowingly connects this experience and discussion with his full conversation and subsumption into his baptism.

The final mystic experience in the novel ties together motifs which have been interwoven through the novel, from being in God's presence to the existential questions plaguing Belfontaine's life. Specifically, the theme of boundaries and crossed borders appears in three manifestations: as philosophical, theological, and physical experiences. Belfontaine asks himself how much longer he will be able to bear the repetition that marks his life, the cycle which returns to the garden, where he seems only to be in the present. His very body, the "Blut und Same in seinen Hoden" (*Siegel*, 483), are a biological reminder that he is very much in the moment, but also that there are ties to reproduction, a pattern for life has established itself over thousands of years. This pattern remains the same truth, the "ewige Wiederkehr und der Kreislauf, das Außer-sich-sein, der unendliche Bogen" (*Siegel*, 483). This repetition exists on a smaller scale in Belfontaine's life. The constant pattern of temptation, lost course, and renewed search for the meaning of his baptism is modeled by the relationship he has had with various women. Those women seduced him and kept him from following the proper course for his life, as Suzette ("Sie war alles in einem") comes to represent: "sie war die Verwirrung der Wege gewesen und in der Verwirrung ebenso sehr die Ausweglosigkeit; das Labyrinth und die grelle Enthüllung der kalten und satanischen Pläne, nach welchen es angelegt war; die Logik der Sünde, der Biß der Schlange, die nach sich selber greift" (*Siegel*, 484). This is the life without hope, so the narrator informs the reader, and Belfontaine realizes this from a different perspective; as he contemplates how the world passes away, he wonders why the cycle abides. Rejection of these relationships translates into stepping beyond the circle, into emptiness and nothingness; he realizes that, "über den schwindelnden Rand des Daseins, wo es in seinen Gegenpol umschlägt, das Leben in

Tod und der Tod in --" (*Siegel*, 485). The break in Belfontaine's reflection marks the spatial break between life and death, as well as the break in his thought; the next word, "GNADE!" unleashes a storm with winds intended to reignite a cold fire. Where Belfontaine has contemplated the borders and transgression his life previously followed, grace becomes the one principle governing all of his experience. In this moment of clarity, life no longer seems to be a temporary phenomenon simply ended by death, but both transcendent and enduring, a cycle that competes with the cycle of sin and transgression.

The third and final storm becomes an object lesson for how grace works in the world. Though the storm rages for a moment and the individual must seek shelter, the storm will pass and can then be seen, retrospectively, in its entirety. The gardener cautions Belfontaine to take cover and it will pass: "Ja, freilich wird er vorübergehen, und dann erst wird man dem Ganzen auf den Rücken sehen, Herr Belfontaine" (*Siegel*, 486). "Vorüber," repeated throughout the scene, conveys the sense of life's transience and hope of transcendence—not in the sense of crossing the barrier between life and death in a nihilistic way, but in the sense of turmoil coming to a conclusion akin to seeing Yahweh's back and knowing the divine presence persists in the individual life and beyond: "Vorüber – die Hand auf der Schulter Mosis - - und schon vorüber. Die Hand auf der Hüfte - - - vorüber, vorüber ... nun durfte er ihn schauen: den Rücken Jawehs; das, was vergangen und nicht, was zukünftig war" (*Siegel*, 486). Borderlessness and depth mark this experience as mystic; Belfontaine becomes aware of the "Transcendent Order," as in Underhill's third step on the Mystic Way. The next steps along the Way will come quickly after one another in the storm scene.

The rain and the storm provide a moment of clarity, which is also a blindness, where sensory perception of the outside world is cut off, during which Belfontaine experiences a new level of introspection. He takes refuge in a greenhouse in the middle of the garden, a microcosm of the world. From this vantage point, his world becomes a mirror and this allows him, as a person, to see his position in the world, in both the here and now, and in the eternal:

“Jetzt – jetzt – –!” Herr Belfontaine eilte weiter, blindlings, die Arme weit vorgestreckt wie ein Mensch, der sich mitten in finsterner Nacht durch das Gelände tastet. Er war erblindet. Vielmehr: sein Auge – zwar fähig, die ihn umgebende Welt mühelos aufzunehmen – starrte nach innen; es war ein Spiegel, über dem, wie über die Linse des photographischen Apparates, das Tuch geworfen wurde, das alles abdeckt, außer dem einen und einzigen Gegenstand, der ihm genügt, [...] für das Ganze der Welt zu treten...einer Welt, die sich umgekehrt auf ihr spiegelt, um erst in der Tiefe des Menschen wieder aufgerichtet zu werden. [...] Sein Standort – [...] war zwischen der gläsernen Kugel und dem Bild auf der Gartentreppe; zwischen der Illusion und der Wahrheit, der mühsam und schwer zu bestehenden Wahrheit, auf die hin sein Engel ihn peitschte und stieß; die auf ihn wartete – [ach, schon wie lange!] zäh und geduldig, an gleicher Stelle, unverrückbar und zeitlos, ewiges Heute, heutiges Jetzt und Hier. (Siegel, 487)

Somewhere between illusion and reality, the *Schein* of the world grows transparent so that Belfontaine can see the present. The rain turns into one single entity and then

combines with lightning, emulating baptism by water and baptism by fire. Together, they become a “seraphische[s] Wesen, das Licht und Wasser in einem war, vergeistigtes Wasser, verleiblichtes Licht, das Unausprechliche an und für sich, bevor es in Raum und Zeit tritt, um fest und faßbar zu werden--” (*Siegel*, 488). The reader’s gaze shifts from the external world to the internal world for Belfontaine, whose eyes are wide open but still blind—he is now transformed into Blind Faith. From his new vantage point in the greenhouse, both transparent and impermeable, Belfontaine can both see the storm surrounding him and still remain safe and dry.

Belfontaine’s ability to weather the storm, representative of his baptism and future sacrifice, also sets the stage for his relationship to divine grace. His modeling of the “Mystic Way” opens the possibility for others to follow in his footsteps or to come to the same realization in their own lives. The active identification with the type Belfontaine represents helps build the mystic community Langgässer addresses through the whole work. While this identification with saints and martyrs helps readers find their faith, the identification is problematic. Self-identification with baptized Jews murdered in the East only accounts for the baptized and leaves a gaping theological hole concerning all those murdered who were not baptized.

Providence

While there are no laws in the Old Testament about the portrayal of Satan, from the perspective of the early church, there are rules concerning the depiction of God. Inclusion of a fictional God-character would go against Exodus 33:20: “Thou canst not

see my face: for there shall no man see me and live.”¹³⁵ References to God in the Old Testament, like the burning thorn bush or seeing God’s back as he passes by, become helpful models for those hoping to avoid the injunction against depicting God. Another means for depicting the divine role in daily life is to have characters (or natural phenomena) who act in a god-like way or whose actions show how God enacts change in an individual, such as mystic experiences. Yet another way is to show God’s hand working externally on an individual, through providence.

Providence, as described by the child Elfriede, could easily be confused with chance—*Los*. Her observation of her father’s hidden lottery ticket in the gazing ball on the seventh anniversary of his baptism provides the background for the theological discussion she has with the Reverend Mother. Elfriede has found her father’s lottery ticket hidden in the gazing ball in the middle of the garden (which we learn through Belfontaine’s mystic experience in the garden, during the storm, is both an empty ball and a representation of the earth). First, the conversation between Gully, the lottery collector, and Belfontaine reveals one way of understanding how the world works. Gully believes that the lottery, pure chance, promises an improvement to social standing and an increase of wealth. Elisabeth, Belfontaine’s pious wife, is suspicious of Gully, but Belfontaine defers to Gully as a knowledgeable man who has answers concerning how the world works.

Gully proposes that the world is nothing but a *system*, where each individual does not understand his or her place in the world. The self-perpetuating governing systems are determined by “[m]echanische[m] Fortschritt” (*Siegel*, 39). Gully mixes social theory,

¹³⁵ Cornwell, Hilarie, James Cornwell, and W E. Post. *Saints, Signs, and Symbols*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub, 2009. 2.

financial systems, and mechanical understanding to explain the systems which have control over the lives of individuals. The system strives towards “blinde Gerechtigkeit,” justice for all. This system is without a divine power; it relies on chance to move the masses to achieve “Fortschritt [...], Gerechtigkeit [...], Wohlfahrt” (*Siegel*, 39). Gully connects chance with socialist government, with a movement of the masses which, even as it purports to expand the wealth of the individual, only serves to perpetuate the system. While forms of government become a recurring topic, the point of these conversations is not to promote one system of government over another. The discussions are all intended to contrast worldviews that reject a divine agent and are therefore suspect, with a faithful affirmation of a divine role.

Elfriede offers the counter view to the adults’ ready acceptance of chance as the world’s ordering principle. She has just watched Belfontaine hide his lottery piece in the gazing ball in the garden and wonders what it is. Unaware of the significance of the ongoing debate about fortune and providence, she asks the Reverend Mother (who was just picking lice out of her hair) what providence is. The Reverend Mother explains providence in terms of inheritance, planning, and provision: “wenn dein Vater ein Testament macht, worin geschrieben steht: so und so viel soll dem und jenem gehören. Ein Blättchen Papier und den Namen darunter – dann kann nach dem Tod deines Vaters nicht das Geringste passieren” (*Siegel*, 118). Elfriede connects the last will and testament with the hidden lottery ticket, a piece of paper with nothing on it but a name and numbers. Here, the two interpretations of the lottery come head to head. Does the paper simply represent chance as the driving force of life or does providence guide the individual through life? Rather than offering a simple answer, Belfontaine’s life

exemplifies providence's ongoing role. Patterns not caused by chance emerge through reading and re-reading Belfontaine's life as preordained through baptism's indelible seal.

Before Belfontaine disappears in France during the Great War, Elfriede demonstrates an understanding of the coming dangers, while her nanny, Bertha, assumes that Elfriede's naïve perspective precludes her from true understanding. As Elfriede and Bertha watch the fireworks from Elfriede's bedroom window, Elfriede, afraid of the explosions, wonders about her father's safety. It is not without irony that Bertha explains that he is safe because he understands the order necessary for launching fireworks. Bertha explains to Elfriede, "dein Vater versteht es noch besser und muß deshalb Vorsehung spielen" (*Siegel*, 248) to explain Belfontaine's ability to account for the possible missteps and remain safe despite potential danger. This is a repetition from Elfriede's earlier conversation with the Reverend Mother, where the Reverend Mother clarifies her hope of coming into a bit of money in order to build a chapel where she wants to house a crèche, which of course includes Christ Incarnate. During the later conversation between Bertha and Elfriede, fireworks explode in the background, similar to the storm against which Elfriede and the Reverend Mother discussed providence. Now, Elfriede interprets the physical representation of providence, comparing the gazing ball to the fireworks. She explains that, "Die Kugeln sind leer. [...] Ein bißchen Rauch und ein Knall; ein Feuerchen, na, und schon ist es vorbei" (*Siegel*, 249). The world is ephemeral, a mere mirror of the eternal. She also understands both objects on a figurative level—both the gazing ball and the fireworks are transient illusions. Bertha only understands Elfriede's conflation of the two objects on the literal level. Ultimately, Bertha believes they are only talking about the material world. At the discussion's conclusion, Elfriede is left

wondering where understanding (*Verstand*) has gone, so that she is the one character who asks reasonable questions about the world and its relation to the numinous, including who made the sun: “Und wer macht sie?” (*Siegel*, 250). Her desire to comprehend where understanding is (“Und wo bleibt der Verstand?”) (*Siegel*, 249) works on multiple levels: on a human level, on the level which understanding relies on the human ability for understanding, and the one through which God in heaven has orchestrated all of creation from the beginning of time to the end of the world.

Elfriede’s insight concerning providence demonstrates that experience does not necessarily translate into an understanding of how the world is defined by the battle between God and Satan. For Belfontaine, for example, the battle is not readily evident. Over time, God’s and Satan’s roles will become evident to Belfontaine, and only then will he be able to renounce Satan and fully realize his baptismal vows.

Satan: An Epic Figure in Quotidian Encounters

Satan is one of the two major players on the world stage; he battles against God in order to gain control of the world in the novel. Paradoxically people, not these supernatural figures God and Satan, populate the story. These individual mortal characters matter only in so far as they interact with the world; it is this intersection of character and world that creates a series of possibilities, or a stage where God and Satan fight their battles.¹³⁶ Langgässer calls this expression of the world “Inter-esse,” with an emphasis on the “inter,” the relationship between the individual and the world. The relationship reveals all conflicts to be inherent to the essence of the world and directly

¹³⁶ Langgässer, Elisabeth. “Grenzen und Möglichkeiten christlicher Dichtung.” In *Das Christliche der Christlichen Dichtung. Vorträge und Briefe*. Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1961. 37.

relates to a specific theodicy played out within the novel's pages.

Satan represents the evil in the world; he occurs in different forms and as different characters in *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*. His omnipresence spreads into even the small, day-to-day plagues, like lice, demonstrating the insidious conflict between individual and Satan. As the Reverend Mother picks through Elfriede's hair, searching for lice, she explains that the pestilence exists because of the Fall: "Das alles kommt von der Erbsünde her [...]. Darum ist es so dauerhaft" (*Siegel*, 116). The simplicity of her comment belies the foundational nature of her theodicy. The juxtaposition shows how the epic battle between God and Satan is evident in the quotidian.

The contrast between the narrator's voice and exchanges between characters supplies a structural and topical form for demonstrating the discrepancy between how the characters see the world, and the continuing battle between good and evil. As the Reverend Mother speeds her work, picking through the girl's hair, the narrator compares her small-scale work to a larger problem:

dabei verstärkten sich ihre Gespräche und galten jetzt nicht nur den Läusen allein, sondern dem Herrn aller Plagen selber: Beelzebub, Fliegengott, Dämon der Herden, welche blökend über das Land hinirren, während die Stare ihnen den Pelz mit geduldigen Schnäbeln belesen; dem Herrn der Insekten, der Bremsen und Brummer, der Blutsauger und der Heuschreckenschwärme, die über die Felder fallen (*Siegel*, 116).

The nun promises Elfriede an icon if she can sit through the temporary discomfort of having her hair picked through. Her bribe is intended to reward her enduring transient pain through a connection to the divine, achieved through the saint in the icon. This also

connects the iconic saint's suffering with Elfriede's. By persisting, sanctification is within reach.

The common plagues like lice demonstrate Satan's parasitic relationship to creation; individual figures mirror this relationship on an interpersonal basis. Figures like Tricheur, the wine merchant in Senlis, and Bonmarché, Suzette's father (and Belfontaine's second father-in-law, whom Belfontaine meets in an internment camp), all bear satanic features and tempt Belfontaine through conversations or by haunting Belfontaine through memories of forbidden sexual encounters.

None of these characters can be distinguished from their surroundings because their evil qualities do not render them distinct. Elisabeth, Belfontaine's first wife back in Germany, tries to describe Tricheur, the wine merchant, when he arrives in town. As she struggles to come up with one significant characteristic for him, she draws upon similarities he shares with other characters, including members of Belfontaine's sybarite eating group "Tafel Runde" and even Belfontaine himself.

Tricheur is in fact Grandpierre, Belfontaine's old teacher who enabled a sexual encounter for Belfontaine as he was undergoing puberty. Belfontaine, taking the physical characteristics Tricheur has into account, notes that he has "bogenförmigen Brauen," his eyes which give his face "etwas Gelangweiltes [...] lange Oberlippe" and wrinkles about his mouth which "alle Laster der Hölle versammelt zu haben schienen," all framed by his hair, dark and of a fatty "Substanz [...] welche sich über die ganze Erscheinung wie ein flaumiges Fell hinzog," that gives his character something "zeitlos[es]" even as it functions as a "Merkmal des ganzen Menschen" (*Siegel*, 253). Here, Belfontaine finally realizes that Tricheur and Grandpierre are the same person. Belfontaine's initial

confusion results in not knowing what to call Tricheur/Grandpierre.¹³⁷ Satan is difficult to distinguish from any other character; he has no characteristics of his own. Notably, his characteristics are not only Satanic, but feminine and stereotypically Jewish.¹³⁸ Only his mouth reveals something of the satanic, as it collects “alle Laster der Hölle” (*Siegel*, 253) in the wrinkles about the lips. Small signs, interpreted by just a few characters like the Reverend Mother and the narrator, suggest that Satan is interwoven in the very world fiction depicts. How, then, is Satan’s presence to be recognized if he shares so many characteristics with other figures and, like a shape shifter, evades recognition?

A quick note on who Satan is not, a topic which must be addressed if we consider that Satan appears in a novel written during a time when one particular figure could be easily demonized. LeRoy, who is also Belfontaine’s confessor, discusses Belfontaine with an old man in 1936 (following the patchy chronology of the novel). Le Roy believes “daß der Satan als brüllender Löwe umhergeht und also mindestens unüberhörbar für jedes Menschenohr ist” (*Siegel*, 197). This, then, suggests a specific figure to the German audience reading the novel post-1933, as well as to the men here in the novel’s pages who discuss Satan’s identity once Hitler seizes power. The old man corrects Le Roy: “Nur, daß die meisten ihn dann für einen Volksredner halten werden, einen Politiker höchstwahrscheinlich—Sie inbegriffen, mein lieber Le Roy” (*Siegel*, 197). Here, the old man realizes that the temptation to decry Hitler as Satan is due to his leonine hectoring.

¹³⁷ When Tricheur and Belfontaine meet for the first time, Tricheur asks Belfontaine whether he recognizes his old teacher. This causes Belfontaine to have a reaction which hits to his core—an internal storm which melts the metal inside him. This reaction, later more deeply and richly felt, becomes connected with the mystic experience, which is a response against evil and an alteration of Belfontaine’s spiritual state as he moves closer to God (*Siegel*, 253).

¹³⁸ Cathy Gelbin reads these figures as Judaized, finding sources of latent anti-Semitism interwoven in *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*. See: Gelbin, Cathy. *An Idelibel Seal: Race, Hybridity and Identity in Elisabeth Langgässer’s writings*. Essen: Verlag Die Blaue Eule, 2001. 111.

Even his final ascent to power in August of 1934 when von Hindenburg dies takes place in the star sign of Leo, yet Langgässer makes it clear that Hitler's remarkable "Vestigia leonis" (Siegel, 197), as deceptive and seductive as it may have been, does not bear the same insidious marks and metamorphic qualities that are a part of Satan's daily presence. While it may be tempting to find one single figure to represent the Antichrist, the anachronistic dialogue between Belfontaine's confessor and an old father reveal that Satan is far more insidious. The conversation takes place well after the events of the first books in 1914, and is set in Paris rather than Germany. The two conclude that Satan is omnipresent or at least more deceptively present in the way he sneaks into the corners of daily life. He therefore cannot be looked for in one person or in one instance, but through a set of patterns. Elsewhere, Le Roy considers Satan to be an extra piece in a board game ("Brettspiel") that the player sets aside because it seems extraneous. This metaphor differs from the recurring theater metaphor where Satan is like a mask. Here, the player has an overview of the board and tries to orchestrate and make sense of the pieces' movements within a specific field. The player must make sense of how the pieces interact with one another in order to successfully win the game, thanks to a vantage point outside of the constraints of the game. In some ways, this lends itself easily to the stage metaphor, where the two main players are not visible on the stage. These players affect every bit of action upon it; yet in the case of the game, Satan is a piece *and* a player. What remains nebulous, and therefore incomplete in LeRoy's metaphor, is who the players actually are. For this reason, studying saints' lives will help expose narrative similarities, so that the patterns of temptation and overcoming temptation can be revealed to the reader.

Mystic autobiography provides the reader with not only a pattern for seeing Satan in the saints' lives, but then also a way of seeing or reading his presence in their own lives.¹³⁹ This interpretive act takes place within the text of *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, by fictional characters who also demonstrate the same pattern from *Die Teufelerscheinung im Leben der Heiligen*, a fictional work Langgässer creates and works into *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*.¹⁴⁰ A double reading/interpreting act therefore takes place, once in the interaction of fictional characters in *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* with the fictional book *Die Teufelerscheinung im Leben der Heiligen*, another with the actual reader and the actual book *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*. The goal is for the layers of interpretation to provide a frame, so that the pattern can be applied to the reader's own life when trying to understand what appears to be a normal life where no single Satan-figure can be distinguished. This way of reading patterns provides concrete examples for finding not just evil in the world, but discerning Satan's hand, a necessary step for observing God's providence and grace.

The fictional work, *Die Teufelerscheinung im Leben der Heiligen*, offers a textual pattern for seeing how Satan works in others' lives. In each life "jeder dieser

¹³⁹ In the short essay "Über Biographien," Langgässer writes: "Nichts kennzeichnet besser die Situation unserer gut- und großbürgerlichen Gegenwartsliteratur als die in ihr ausgebrochene Biographieenseuche und das erhöhte Interesse für Briefwechsel, Memorien und Romane, die geistige Kochbücher sind, Trostbüchlein, Seelenwärmer, Sorgenbrecher, Leitfäden, mit einem Wort: Inventurausverkäufe wegen Aufgabe des Geschäfts. Denn was bedeutet das ungeheuere Anwachsen der biographischen Literatur anderes, als die ramschweise Befriedigung einer Nachfrage des Bürgertums, das seinen Laden schon aufgegeben hat und den Restbestand dessen, was es selber einst produzierte, nun hastig aufkaufen möchte; ja, mit der linken Hand weiter herstellt, um mit der rechten noch einzuheimsen: drei Lebensweisheiten, im Dutzend billiger, zwei Pulswärmer, einen Fuhsack, vielleicht baucht ihn Opapa. Wahrhaftig das Bedürfnis ist groß und nicht nur vom Konsumenten her, sondern ebenso sehr drängt es den Schriftsteller heute, sich selber darzustellen: vorne ein Foto und hinten eins, in der Mitte drei oder vier; das dreißigste Lebensjahr ist die Grenze: hast du bis dahin noch keine Biographie, so kriegst du keine mehr. Welche Torschluss- Panik, die plötzlich die verkalkte Jugend ergreift!" Langgässer, Elisabeth. "Über Biographien." Ms.T. 70.3099, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach, 1934.

¹⁴⁰ *Siegel*, 196. To the best of my knowledge, the title and the work were Langgässer's invention.

Kämpfe [sei] nichts anderes als die erneute Begegnung des mystischen Leibes Christi mit dem großen Verführer” (Siegel, 197). In the mystic body of Christ (that is, in the Church), each saint represents a part of the body. Together, all the parts make up the whole body and tell the story of how the Church constantly battles Satan. For the pattern to emerge, an outside reader puts the lives into one cohesive narrative. Here the interaction of the reader with the text takes a central position; the reader connects the stories already presented as a whole by the text. The effect is like a series of frames that make up a movie. One frame differs only slightly from another. The rapid change from one frame to the next, the quick repetition of frames over time, creates the movement the viewer then views as a single entity, or a single continuous story.¹⁴¹ Together, the lives read as one story with variations on a theme. The reader can then recognize the singular recurring role of the Antichrist in each saint’s life. Satan becomes visible at a specific place and a particular time. This intersection, played out in repetitive rhythms, resonates and models Langgässer’s theory of how literature functions within an age, where particular themes or styles repeat across works and over time, so that literature produced during any span of time creates one single movement.

Ever-present Satan takes on specific forms within each life, so that each appearance becomes a particular set of coordinates at any given intersection of space and time: “es könne vielmehr kein Heiligenleben ohne Satan vorgestellt werden, und zwar einen Satan, der nicht moralisch verstanden und nur als Metapher gedacht werden dürfte, sondern mehr und mehr als *bestimmte Person*, als dieser eine, in dieser Zeit und im

¹⁴¹ The analogy of reading the lives together like film frames is imperfect since it suggests a linear narrative, but it does connect to the linear way a reader moves through the novel, from the first to the last page. The intention is only to show how one single image remains difficult to understand on its own, but the compound image of the frames allows the larger story to become evident.

Schnittpunkt koordinierter Wege, bis er endlich in nackten Erscheinung des Antichrist seine Erfüllung fände” (*Siegel*, 197; italics mine).

Thérèse of Lisieux: An Example of the Individual Taking on Satan

Beyond establishing a pattern of satanic figures across all saints’ lives, one specific life becomes an example of diabolical temptation. These temptations are recounted in Thérèse of Lisieux’s autobiography, *Story of a Soul*.¹⁴² Langgässer adapts the autobiography by piecing quotations from Thérèse with created quotations for Satan. “Der Satan,” also called “der Widersacher” (*Siegel*, 334), represents Nihilism through his continued attempts to negate her faith and the meaning it brings to her life. By inserting this dialogue into the larger narrative of the novel, and on the heels of the “Turm-Kapitel,” Langgässer provides the reader with further examples of Satan’s existence in real lives. He tries to get Thérèse to doubt her vocation as a nun and dissuade her from her attempts to draw near to God.

Established and transcended boundaries define Thérèse’s experience, much like the movement along the “Mystic Way.” She writes in the middle of the night, “Vorbei die Gesänge der Matutin” (*Siegel*, 331). The darkness of night separates her from space and time, “ein Raum umgibt uns, und eine Zeit läuft in dem Stundenglas ab” (*Siegel*, 331), so that her conversation seems limitless and transcendent, yet the darkness that isolates her also creates the sensation of being deceived by the flickering lamplight. The result is an existential and a mystic experience: “Ich bin Theresia - aber in einem anderen Dasein: n i

¹⁴² Langgässer felt a special affinity for Thérèse of Lisieux. In a letter dated November 8, 1944, Langgässer writes to Hoffmann about coordinating a meeting and prays to “Heilige Teresa.” Thérèse of Lisieux is the patron saint of missionaries and Russia; Hoffmann was fighting in the East. Langgässer, Elisabeth. “An Wilhelm Hoffmann.” 11 November 1944. Letter 248 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 1. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 476-479.

cht jetzt, nicht drüben, nicht hier” (*Siegel*, 331; emphasis in the original). Her experience is peaceful, both out of body and completely present, physically and mentally, setting up a paradoxical situation of boundaries in which she is “außer mir” but senses she still has control over her mind and body. The physical body is not a barrier for her experience any more than the cloister where she writes, her senses are “[g]renzenlos” and “fließend an ihren Rändern” (*Siegel*, 332), yet they touch and reaffirm the barrier of her skin “wie Flügel gespenstiger Schmetterlinge.” Her senses both move beyond her skin and remind her of the barrier; her body is part of the mystic experience she has in the dark, when senses are heightened and easily melt into the night. Even the boundaries of her body are easily transcended; she describes it as if she were outside of it, from her eyes to her sandals to her habit, then she jumps to an interior description of the cough that wracks her body. The illness defines her body and worldly experience so that she aspires to reach God through death (“Wunschtraum;” *Siegel*, 333), a mystical union that does not stop at a metaphorical denial of individuality, but spreads to include a rejection of life. Physical suffering highlights her awareness of heaven which, along with the series of paradoxical experiences, contributes to the mystic experience. The exploration of these paradoxes makes it possible for Thérèse to declare the body as both the largest stumbling block to faith, as it can easily be confused and led astray, and also as the means to sanctification, a “Brandopfer” (*Siegel*, 334) to honor God.

Satan, as he argues with Thérèse, claims to only be a part of her own doubt (just as he tries to convince her that God does not exist) and that this doubt is credible.

Appropriating paradoxes similar to those Thérèse uses to explain her mystic experience, Satan tries to make her question her own physical and spiritual experiences. God and

Satan are “Gut und Böse” (*Siegel*, 334); they are like “Feuer und Kälte, [...] Tag und Nacht, Sommer und Winter, Leben und Tod” (*Siegel*, 335). The polar opposites are simply two sides of the same illusionary coin. Satan can argue that if he does not exist, then neither does God.

Thérèse rejects Satan’s temptations to deny the existence of the supernatural, and his temptation therefore becomes one moment during the course of her life, instead of determining the entire way. The path she takes as a mystic provides a metaphor for understanding the progress of the faithful through life on earth. “Oh Wege! Wege! Pfade des Herzens” (*Siegel*, 337), Thérèse expands on a metaphor for the figurative journeys and maps them on real places, from the rice fields of the Far East to including the migrations animals make every year.¹⁴³ These destinations represent the progress of the human soul, moving about the world because of “ihrer Pilgernatur, ihrer Sehnsucht und ihrer Friedlosigkeit, ihres Ursprungs und ihres Zieles; der paradisischen Herkunft des Raumes noch eingedenkt, doch an das Chaos verloren” (*Siegel*, 337). This places the world, over which Satan lays claim, back in the context of God’s creation. The trajectory that follows the world from its origins in chaos is ordered by God, moves through the Fall and on to redemption through “Liebe.” The telos of Thérèse’s world is modeled through the individual physical and emotional paths of the pilgrim. Her decision to take all paths, to be open to manifestations of the divine and not just follow the one path of a wanderer,

¹⁴³ We will see a similar relationship to space and time in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*; the special relationship a pilgrim has to both space and time will be further explored in the next chapter.

fits with her *Story of a Soul*, in which she outlines her “way,”¹⁴⁴ a spiritual journey marked by little, not grand, deeds.

The inner-workings of a person, the heart, is even bigger than the geographical places and journeys Thérèse describes. And even larger than this is God, who is limitless. By establishing this gradation from movement in the world to movement of the heart to God’s presence in her *Little Way*, when she calls prayer “a movement of the heart.” Thérèse also establishes a chain linking the individual’s life and a greater spiritual quest which exists in “die Einheit des Menschengeschlechtes in der Tiefe von Raum und Zeit: die Erlösungsbedürftigkeit aller Seelen, die mich heftiger Schwindeln macht, als die Weite der Milchstraße und die Größe der unerforschten, brennenden Flecke im Herzen Zentralafrikas – versunkene Seelen, vergessene Helden” (*Siegel*, 344-345). The space between a single pilgrimage, all pilgrimages, and God, is spanned by prayer. This offers an image for how prayer transcends space and time. Prayer lifts “das starre Naturgesetz von Wirkung und Ursache” and tears “den Faden der düsteren Parze [...], die eins an das andere knüpft; es schwächt und zerstört die Folgen der Sünde, die vor Jahrtausenden ausging und in das Zukünftige wirkt” (*Siegel*, 345). As a great chain across time, sins bind an individual. But these shackles can be transcended by prayer, because prayer connects the individual with the divine.

In her assurance that she will die only physically and only for a moment, the mystic Thérèse brings together belief that the heart moves through earth towards heaven and that prayer transcends space and time. The ongoing theme of barriers crossed and

¹⁴⁴ Thérèse of Lisieux. *The Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus*. Translated by John Clarke. Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1996. 207.

broken down becomes the journey from Hell/Earth¹⁴⁵ to Heaven: “So will ich mich denn entschlossen über die Grenze begeben, die mich hindert, schon jetzt und hier nichts außer Liebe zu sein” (*Siegel* 347). This individual transcendent life wants nothing more than *Love*—a call to identify with God, where God and love are considered one and the same, because “love” is the predicate of God: “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 1 John 4:16).

Thérèsia of Lisieux’s invented interaction with Satan, inserted into the middle of the novel, provides a specific example of how an individual might reject Satan. Moved away from the abstraction and toward the concrete, Thérèsia’s story helps the reader gain a better understanding of the development Belfontaine must (and will) undergo in order to realize the salvation offered by his baptism in the following pages. To help knit the apparent digression with the ongoing narrative, similar images—like that of the stone dropped in the well, consuming fire, and temptations by Satan—all connect the prefiguring Thérèse with Belfontaine’s progress for the reader. The next extension, from Thérèsia to Belfontaine, establishes a connection between Thérèsia’s and Belfontaine’s lives and the reader’s.

Blind Faith: A Saintly Example and Belfontaine’s Future

The inclusion of Blind Faith’s story, as well as Thérèse’s, creates a spiritual lineage the reader strings together and can participate in. The whole of the novel, then, functions like the story of a saint’s life, which also follows the trajectory of Christ’s life, from spiritual birth to sacrifice and resurrection. Together, these steps help form Christ’s body, which is the very definition of Incarnation, and also the Church as a body. In addition to these templates, the figure of *Blind Faith* provides an even more impressive

¹⁴⁵ Chapter 3 addresses the vertical movement between earth and heaven in terms of the pilgrimage.

paradigm, in part because Belfontaine will not simply emulate but also *become* Blind Faith and relate to the world in the same way Blind Faith does.¹⁴⁶ As we will see, Blind Faith interacts with (and becomes a means for) writing Jewish bodies, as well as faithful bodies. When these representations are taken together, they help write a whole community of faith, progressing along the “Mystic Way” to a union with God and one another, ultimately achieving Langgässer’s goal for her work.

The figure *Blind Faith* (Blinde Glauben) first appears to Belfontaine on the day of Belfontaine’s baptism as the character Jean, seven years¹⁴⁷ before the novel begins. The reader first learns of him as “Der Blinde” (*Siegel*, 26), who stands begging on the portal of the church while Belfontaine is baptized inside. When the novel opens in medias res seven years later, Belfontaine is waiting for Jean to come for his annual visit that marks the anniversary of his baptism and the day they first met. The first encounter with Blind Faith marks the act of baptism. The appearance and reappearance of Blind Faith as a character throughout the novel, in seemingly unconnected scenes, is therefore significant when making a case for Belfontaine’s own transformation into a mendicant at the novel’s conclusion. Personified, Blind Faith offers a number of traceable relationships with other characters as they journey through their lives.

As he waits, Belfontaine contemplates the changes water affects on the landscape; once upon a time, the very place he now stands was the bottom of the sea. The only signs that point to the land’s past are the seashells scattered in the sand. Belfontaine physically

¹⁴⁶ With a character so central to the novel’s tale, a large response in the secondary literature would be expected. Yet he is, as a figure, largely ignored. This is especially surprising because the figure Blind Faith is reminiscent of blind Synagogue.

¹⁴⁷ The seven years that have elapsed are significant: seven is the biblical number of completion; in fact, here it appears (at least) twice: seven years have passed since his baptism, and Belfontaine was baptized in 1907.

reacts to the hidden history of the very ground he stands on, so that his body re-experiences the land's watery past. His body shakes like "die Brandung den Wasserspiegel" (*Siegel*, 28); thought and physical reality coexist. The connection between physical experience and thought are strengthened by Belfontaine's song he sings to himself, "All deine Wellenberge, deine Fluten, sie gingen über mich hinweg..." (*Siegel* 28). His voice, "fremd," disconnects his contemplation and his actual body. Disassociation between the land's watery past and its current dry state replicates the tensions inherent in Belfontaine's "watery" past (his baptism) and his current "dry" state: "Dies war es, und es war ausgesprochen; das Geheimnis des Lazarus Belfontaine, der heute vor sieben Jahren die Taufe empfangen hatte" (*Siegel*, 28; emphasis in the original). Connected by Belfontaine's body, the two water stories are now grounded in the present. Historical convergence provides layers and perspective for reading and interpreting Belfontaine's flashback to the day of his baptism.

In the flashback, the reader is introduced to the beggar, whom Belfontaine encounters, "schwankend" (*Siegel*, 29), as though the whole church were underwater. The water was not simply still, but like a flood coursing through his body, making him into a sacrifice "wie dem Lamm der Apokalypse" (*Siegel*, 29). The movement toward becoming Christ-like is already visible, where Christ is the sacrificial lamb.¹⁴⁸ Belfontaine reacts physically to this baptism—one which fills his mouth, nose, eyes and ears, and permeates his very being. In the connection established between the "lamb of the apocalypse" and Belfontaine as a sacrifice, Belfontaine's baptism is connected with Christ's sacrifice as interpreted in Revelation 5: "For thou [the lamb] wast slain, and hast

¹⁴⁸ See Revelation 5, where Christ is a sacrificial lamb. In John 1:29, John the Baptist greets Christ by hailing him as the "Lamb of God."

redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.”¹⁴⁹ This connection between baptism and sacrifice prefigures Belfontaine’s transformation into Blind Faith and journey toward the East to save the baptized Jews.

As though just recovered from nearly drowning, Belfontaine gasps for breath as he gives the figure Blind Faith alms. “Der blinde Jean” (*Siegel*, 29)—the French name for John. He is John the Baptist. By aligning Blind Faith with the figure of John the Baptist, a number of possible parallels between the Biblical figure and the fictional figure can be explored. Like John the Baptist, Blind Faith exists in a sort of wilderness. Both characters “prepare the way” for a greater figure; they provide witness (Blind Faith is called “der Zeuge” [*Siegel*, 30]), the life of someone yet to come, who will sacrifice his life to save others. For the Christian reader of the Bible, John the Baptist’s words clearly refer to the Christ; in *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, Blind Faith’s witness to Belfontaine’s sacrifice of his own life in the East will only be revealed in the final pages.¹⁵⁰ In John the Baptist’s case, he aligned himself with the prophesy in Isaiah 40:3: “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”¹⁵¹ Jean, as Blind Faith, does prepare the way for Lazarus Belfontaine, as the reader follows his journey from his baptism through his martyrdom.

¹⁴⁹ See Revelation 5:9b.

¹⁵⁰ There is another Jewish connection here, in addition to Belfontaine’s Jewish identification. Both the story of John the Baptist and Christ’s lineage are from the Gospel of Matthew, which was written by a Jewish author who wrote for a Jewish audience to demonstrate how Christ’s coming, death, and resurrection fulfilled Old Testament prophesy. The role of the covenant, later explored in a vision of Blind Faith, underscores this reading.

¹⁵¹ *Holy Bible: The New King James Version, Containing the Old and New Testaments*. Nashville: T. Nelson, 1982.

Belfontaine and Jean's geographies and genealogies tell the stories of where they come from and where they are headed. As the two become acquainted, Belfontaine, the "Getaufte," tries to understand Jean's (Blind Faith) origins. Belfontaine asks whether Jean is from the town "am Ende" (*Siegel*, 29), perhaps in order to understand how Jean came to be where he is now, perhaps because he understands faith to be a product of reaching his limits. Here, Jean's soft spoken response reiterates the idiomatic "am Ende,"¹⁵² but gives it new significance; ultimately, Jean's origin as such does not matter—Blind Faith's story is all about his destination and how he gets there. Yet this does not stop Belfontaine from trying to look back in order to understand Jean's origins, nor will it stop the reader from later discovering how Jean came to his present position.

Recovered from his swaying episode, Belfontaine shares the story of his life with Blind Faith. He traces back his heritage three generations,¹⁵³ with stories about his family which comes from A. Interestingly, he traces the female side of his family which also happens to be Jewish.¹⁵⁴ Lineage, part of the past, a determining factor in the present and projected into the future, is important for Belfontaine's story. Through Blind Faith's and Thérèse's¹⁵⁵ additional narrative lines, Belfontaine's development as a more detailed version of these stories becomes more evident.

¹⁵² The same figuration of "am Ende" reappears in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, where one of the protagonists Friedrich am Ende must reach the end of his spiritual rope in order to return to the Christian God.

¹⁵³ Under the Nuremberg Race Laws, an individual had to trace his or her ancestry back at least three generations to prove that he or she was Aryan through church records.

¹⁵⁴ This could indicate Langgässer's attempt to show that Jews are also German according to Jewish law, since Jewish descent is passed matrilineally, and not by both parents, as determined by Nazi law. The paternal half of Belfontaine's family comes from France, hence the French surname.

¹⁵⁵ Teresa of Avila, after whom Thérèse of Lisieux is named, also fits into the lineage. Teresea of Avila, the granddaughter of a Marrano, also had to account for a Jewish lineage. Both nuns were Carmelites, famous for their mysticism.

Without a *Heimat* and referenced as “der Unbekannte” (*Siegel*, 34), Blind Faith speaks more on the problems of “heute” and “hier.” The here and now have no meaning in terms of faith’s origins. Both Belfontaine and Blind Faith share a common heritage as “Vettern von Abraham, [...] der ‘Vater des Glaubens’” (*Siegel*, 35), but Belfontaine must go back even further than that: “Aber du mußt noch zurück hinter ihn...dorthin, wo wieder die Blutkette abreißt und keiner sich auf sie berufen kann – hinter Noë, Henoch und Seth” (*Siegel*, 35). The connection to bloodlines runs below the surface discussion of lineage, so that more contemporary definitions of “blood” are rejected.¹⁵⁶ The “Blutkette” in *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* designates Adam as the father of all humanity and makes faith as old as humanity itself and tied to the Fall, when Adam and Eve could no longer walk with God, but were cast out of the garden. The community therefore extends far beyond any single racial definition to include all people. Theological ties between sin and being cast out of the garden severs those ties between individuals, and between people and God. A return to the broader definition of family widens community; this community widens even more and reestablishes ties to God through baptism. Belfontaine realizes this physiologically, though not consciously, and his body, more precisely his blood, collects deep in his bowels as water collects in grottos and serves as a deeper consciousness for him—the metaphor of a “Blutsee des auserwählten Volkes” (*Siegel*, 35) combining the blood and water images, waters the roots of origin “mit Segen, Verheißung und Fluch” (*Siegel*, 35). This appropriates the story of the Jewish people—defined by blessings, promises, and curses—and ties it to the Christian sacrament of baptism, so that the title

¹⁵⁶ See: May, Werner. *Deutscher National-Katechismus: Dem jungen Deutschen in Schule und Beruf*. Breslau: Handel, 1934. 22-26. Quoted in: Bytwerk, Randall. *German Propaganda Archive*. Grand Rapids: Calvin College, Michigan, 2003. The *Katechismus* defines racial defilement as “forgetting our spirit and blood,” which would include Germans marrying Jews and therefore excluding “themselves from the community of the German people.”

“the chosen people” transfers from the Jews to Christians. The stories of the Pentateuch come to life at the table in the vineyard as Blind Faith and Belfontaine talk openly about his baptism. Made in broad strokes, the politically loaded definition of “blood” is rejected in favor of a faith lineage Belfontaine belongs to and all people share.

Belfontaine’s retelling of how he came to be baptized reveals his ambivalence toward baptism, and establishes the starting point for his physical and spiritual journey. As Belfontaine recounts his lineage, he also includes how he met his wife and how, as their relationship progressed, she wanted him to become baptized. Deep in thought, he lies his body down on his arms, on the table, a position of capitulation, and he comes to realize that he thirsted for much more than the outward symbolism of water: “Ich habe nicht gewußt... nicht gewußt... daß ich nicht nur das Wasser wollte,” (*Siegel*, 34) he tells Blind Faith. But Belfontaine is not yet at the point where he can articulate what he did want. He therefore cannot answer Jean’s questions about whether he [Belfontaine] was baptized because he wanted tangible rewards like a wife and an inheritance. Jean brings the conversation to a close by raising his glass with the words “Prost, Lazarus!” to which Belfontaine only manages to utter “Den Glauben [...] Den blinden Glauben.”¹⁵⁷ Belfontaine does not yet have “den blinden Glauben,” nor will he acquire blind faith through a single conversation. Over the course of the novel, Belfontaine will not only acquire blind Faith, but he will personify it, but only by encountering the divine in a mystical union. Blind Faith’s back-story will become part of Belfontaine’s story through

¹⁵⁷ (*Siegel*, 34) Belfontaine’s response could reference the utterance of “Prosit” when a priest enters the sacristy where the altar servers are waiting. Vestments and sacred vessels used during Eucharist (one could argue the sacramental reenactment of the Incarnation) are stored in the sacristy.

gradual revelation, just as Belfontaine's progress along the "Mystic Way" will progress slowly, through moments of crisis and clarity.

Blind Faith at Lourdes

Blind Faith's story provides a frame for Belfontaine's story, and it also foreshadows Belfontaine's future traveling across central Europe, saving baptized Jews. Belfontaine, unaware of his baptism as an indelible seal, is the inverse of Jean's (Blind Faith) choice to, literally, not see in order to see the divine. Gradually, Belfontaine grows into his baptism and, in this growth, transforms into Blind Faith. How Jean becomes Blind Faith is embedded within a second story (with two more stories imbedded within that story). The frame here is created by the dialogue between two new figures, Casculade and Marinier. Sitting on a Parisian park bench, Casculade and Marinier discuss rational thought based in the Enlightenment and faith. Their conversation develops through an apparent rabbit trail, but in fact their theoretical conversation develops into a practical exploration of faith through Blind Faith's story.

Only a break in the book designated with a roman numeral indicates the change in place. The action moves from Belfontaine's shop in A., Germany, to Paris, France. Temporally, the discussion takes place on the same day, "An dem Abend des gleichen Tages" (*Siegel*, 126) as the events in the previous section. Here we have a story within a story: the major narrative follows Belfontaine, within which Casculade sits on a park bench in Paris, remembering the miracle he saw at Lourdes. This miracle was a public act, and it reads as though Casculade was an eyewitness to all of it, yet the context of the conversations Casculade recounts (behind closed doors, in private) suggests that he could

not have been present for all of it. This mimics aspects of the Gospels, which are written by those who were not present for all of the events, but report them nonetheless.

Casculade and Marinier's discussion is sparked by a prostitute named Therese (Siegel, 127), who reminds Casculade of Bernadette and the miracles at Lourdes and sparks his memory.¹⁵⁸ These miracles take place in a dark grotto, a "Gnadenort," a place where "diese Pilger im tiefsten hoffen" to receive "die Vergebung der Schuld" (Siegel, 142). The grotto is a place for physical and spiritual healing. Here, it becomes the focus of a discussion about what faith is and how faith is fostered.

Casculade finds himself defending his faith to his companion Marinier, where the miracle at Lourdes helps Casculade speak about his faith. As Casculade explains to his friend Marinier, who refuses to believe in miracles because he wants to preserve his individuality, Marinier declares that he does not want to be "vernichtet und wiedergeboren" (Siegel, 131), referring to both the depersonalization that is part of faith and also the symbolic aspects of baptism, where the individual being lowered into the water represents a death to the self and rising up from the water a rebirth.

Both men define faith as something circular; for Marinier faith simply supports itself. Miracles, for example, cannot be proven and cannot be given meaning. Since reason cannot support belief in these things, Marinier rejects them. Casculade accepts the circular structure as the form faith takes on: "Ein Kreis wie der Glaube" (Siegel, 135). Faith supports itself, which he explains not only with blindness and vision ("seeing") imagery, but with an anecdote which illustrates the "innere Hellsicht" (Siegel, 136)

¹⁵⁸ See the *Proszonium* for discussion of the three grottos in the opening pages of *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*. The name "Therese" also connects the discussion on the park bench with *Thérèse of Lisieux*. I have been unable to find why Langgässer chose to reuse the name for this fictional character, connecting her with the real figure.

Casculade lives by. The paradigm of seeing (“Hellsichtigkeit”) and remaining “blind” as ways of interacting with the world are turned on their head, so that blindness results in spiritual sight. Effectively, the conversation between the two serves as the theoretical frame for understanding Jean’s miracle—Jean chooses to extinguish his own sight in order to be reborn as a man of faith who can see the divine.

Casculade’s story follows the philosophical discussion, illustrating his argument in favor of faith. Jean, a young blind man who lived approximately two hours away from Lourdes, struggled to make his living in the world by weaving baskets. He relies on the charity of others and, when word of the miracles possible in Lourdes arrives, he chooses to go. But his motivation is not to be healed, rather to witness the healing of others. He modestly realizes that his healing is insignificant: “[d]ie Muttergottes von Lourdes braucht mich nicht, [...] überdies gibt es noch andere Leute, die schlechter gestellt sind als ich” (*Siegel*, 139). His humility and his willingness to submit his life to God’s work make him vulnerable to the criticism of others. His pastor, who ought to sympathize with Jean’s poverty and vulnerability, only offers condescending pity limited to Jean’s physical state, rather than applauding his desire to go: “Du tust mir leid, stockfinster, wie du es hast” (*Siegel*, 140). Jean echoes the framing conversation between Casculade and Marinier and counters the pastor’s shortsightedness by stating that his faith is a light, “[e]r ist mein Tag und macht mir so hell, wie die besten Augen nicht machen können” (*Siegel*, 140). Jean proves himself more faithful than the pastor in his motives for getting to Lourdes, setting the stage for a comparison between the truly faithful (Jean) and those merely trained to think and say the right things without understanding them through faith (the rational pastor).

The eyewitness quality of Casculade's story places him "nur fünf Schritte von dieser Szene entfernt" (*Siegel*, 143), and he claims not to have missed the smallest of the details. Marinier is totally taken in by the story, encouraging his friend to continue with the details. Casculade narrates Jean's healing, so that the reader participates in the event like one of the onlookers, scrambling to understand the healing and not simply accepting the miracle as such. The retelling shows the reader how the story of healing draws in the audience and mirrors the reaction of those present at Lourdes. Jean, removing the linen binding from his eyes, suddenly can see again. He encounters not those around him, but Mary herself at the water. Healed at the water's edge: "dann kehrte jener seltsame Mensch, welcher wie keiner vor ihm, noch nachher, auf seine Heilung geantwortet hat" (*Siegel*, 143). Returned from the healing, the others present are eager to test his vision like a "Wirbelsturm" (*Siegel*, 143); a storm of interest is sparked among those who both doubted the miracles at Lourdes or wanted to see God prove himself. The crowd has no interest in the miracle in and of itself.

The miracle of faith—the true miracle, the circular and self-supporting phenomenon—does not happen in the commotion of regained sight, but as the group breaks up and goes its separate ways. With the simple request for his stick, Jean is met with impatience by those who tell him he no longer needs this aid—he can see. But Jean will not give in to the crowds. Here is the true miracle, which Casculade narrates with the first-person certainly of *ich*: "Mit einer Schnelligkeit, wie sie die Einsicht des Intellekts nicht vermitteln kann, hatte ich alles begriffen" (*Siegel*, 145). As a tool, intellect is unable to perceive the breadth of the miracle. This returns as the central question of whether

intellect or heart guides true understanding.¹⁵⁹ Casculade shows that he understands what has happened with his heart, that those present for the miracle, like Marinier, still have not relinquished their individual intellects and they therefore have not been transformed by the experience.

Casculade's retelling of Jean's story begins with Jean's declaration of faith, expressed simply: "Muttergottes, du hast mein Gebet erhört. Jetzt bin ich wieder blind" (*Siegel*, 145). His praise offers context for understanding his unusual action, a request to revert to blindness after his miraculous healing, and gives him the name "Blind Faith." Casculade's voice moves between the observer's point of view during the miracle and the mediator's role, years later, on the Parisian park bench: "Er war ein Mystiker," the marker of the simple past positions Jean's existence in the past, and suggests his life has significant meaning in the present, as the story is important enough to be worthy of retelling. Casculade continues to interpret Jean's miracle of faith, contextualizing it within the stories of the church fathers from the Old Testament and mystics alike:

Seine Blindheit war für ihn, was für den Wüstenvater und frühesten Eremiten die unermessliche Einsamkeit und die Nacht der Zelle gewesen sein mußte, in die er sich einmauern ließ. Es war eine furchtbare Prüfung für ihn, ja, etwas wie ein geistiger Tod, als er die Dunkelheit seiner Zelle, die einem unmittelbaren Schauen der Gottheit nahe kam, gegen etwas, was keinen Wirklichkeitswert für ihn hatte, um der Schwäche der Menschen willen, ihrer Hartherzigkeit, ihres Kleinmuts, ihres Unglaubens wegen eintauschen mußte. [...] Das Wunder war seine Bitte

¹⁵⁹ This discussion is in Paris, the city of light—there is a connection to and a critique of the Enlightenment in the subtext of this argument.

um Blindheit, um jene Blindheit des Glaubens, mein Freund, aus welchem jedes andere Wunder immer nur abkünftig ist. Der Glaube war das Wunder schlechthin wie die Taufe die Quelle der Wasserquellen und das Becken, das jenes Wasser umschloß, die erste Grotte ist, welcher der heile, der geistesmächtige Mensch entspringt, in welchem die Schöpfung wunderbar wird – und das Wunder zur zweiten Natur. (*Siegel*, 145-146)

Casculade himself interprets the true miracle at Lourdes. Jean, in a metaphorical jail of blindness, chose to return to the isolation blindness provides, so that he has spiritual sight rather than physical sight. Physical vision becomes synonymous with humankind's foibles—hard heartedness, faintness of heart, unbelief. Because of these sins present in the spectators at Lourdes, Jean must demonstrate true faith. His prayers to become blind once again qualify as the true miracle because he chooses faith. Faith is the true miracle. In order to explain the causal centrality of faith, Casculade employs a metaphor that ties together the two core theological arguments that ground the whole book—he compares the fundamental role faith plays in the metaphysical, to baptism's role as the source (Quelle) of wells (Wasserquellen—a play on words, tying the words “source” and the origin of baptismal water together). Here, the play on words connects the miraculous grotto in Lourdes with the first three grottos in the *Proszenium*.

Casculade's recollection of the miracle at Lourdes, of the true miracle of Jean—now Blind Faith—as “second Nature” (*Siegel*, 146), where creation becomes renewed. This second nature rejects sin and leads toward sainthood. The recollection of the miracle at Lourdes coincides with the coincidence of spotting Theresa. Her name foreshadows the saintly Thérèse of Lisieux and her battle with Satan, which will follow in subsequent

pages.¹⁶⁰ From the encounter with Theresa, he recounts the dream he had the night before, a “Traumbild.”¹⁶¹ The physical and static nature of the vision—Bild—also ties into an artistic depiction of the vision. The *Traumbild*, combined with the miracle at Lourdes and the sighting of the prostitute, form a web of associations that connect all of the meta-narratives to form an overarching narrative meaning.

The distinctiveness and memorability of Casculade’s vision means that this is not a simple “Traum,” as Casculade later calls it, but it is in fact part of his memory. The way Blind Faith disappears for spans of time in the novel’s narrative, and then reappears, mimics the way memory functions: “und jedesmal war sein Bild nur frischer; gereinigt von jeder Zufälligkeit und gleichzeitig wie ein Teil von mir selbst, den ich langsam begreifen lernte.—Dieser unsichtbare Freund und Begleiter, der mein Dasein an jedem Wendepunkt tiefer in seine Bestimmung führte...” (*Siegel*, 147). The lines between memory, dream, and individual melt into one another. Casculade does not distinguish whether “sein [Jean’s] Bild” is a memory, an image, or figure which appears to him in a dream, or whether Blind Faith is a physical entity with real experiences of his own.

All three possibilities make use of the flexible meanings of *Bild*. Blind Faith can therefore also be an actual figure or simply a personification. Framed as a dream-vision, Blind Faith’s story transcends barriers of space and time, leading to the telos of Belfontaine’s story where, like Blind Faith, he will become a mendicant, unbound to specific geographical spaces.

¹⁶⁰ In the novel, the exchange between Thérèse and the Devil takes place after this scene.

¹⁶¹ See: *Siegel*, 147. The connection to dream-images taps into the ideal and also replicates how memory functions—one seemingly unrelated event sparks a moment of recognition, causing a connection, and enabling a larger pattern to emerge.

Dreamscape: Blind Faith and Judaism; Blind Faith and Signs for the Apocalypse

Jean's sight regained and lost again is not the only vision in Casculade's associations with Blind Faith. Casculade has his own (dream-)vision where Blind Faith plays the central role. The vision itself unfolds like a play before Casculade's (and the reader's) eyes. The dream-scene is a "verwunschene Bühne, deren Kulissen man wegzutragen und abzubauen vergessen hatte, vielleicht auch gar nicht wegräumen wollte, weil das Spiel der Geister das Spiel der Geschichte nach dem letzten Akt weiterträumte" (Siegel, 147). The dream offers another level of storytelling or narrative which helps convey truth, just as the fictional theological conversations also give insight into the reader's reality.

The stage-like qualities that provide the setting for the dream tie into Langgässer's theory of a *Welttheater*. The normal expectation of the stage as setting for a linear story, already subverted by the prologue, completely disappears in the dream, where both time and space evade the rules that govern waking hours. This eradication of space and time allows the play to speak into the reader's expectations about what their own faith means, and also creates a disturbing connection between Christianity and Judaism. Here, on the streets of Paris, Langgässer creates another stage in order to grant the reader a new perspective.¹⁶²

In the framed narrative, Casculade recounts the dream vision from his park bench in Paris. The setting for the retelling mirrors the dream. In the dream, he sits on a bench in the Place de Vosges, the oldest planned square in Paris. Surrounded by small children

¹⁶² See the section *The Stage as Metaphor for the World, the Individual's Experience, and the Epic Battle between God and Satan* for the theoretical background for how the stage becomes a metaphor for the world.

who hold hands, sing, and play in the sunlight streaming through the trees' leaves, Casculade notes the idyllic state seems more "kleinstädtisch" than something in the middle of the city. The setting seems assembled, constructed, and therefore surreal. Adding to the play-like atmosphere, beyond Casculade's audience-like presence and still in his line of vision, are the puppet-like balconies on the surrounding houses, suggesting the square has something *Verschollenes* about it, as Casculade describes it. Here, then, is a contrast between the very lively image of children playing in the sunlight and the eerie sense that the space has disappeared or has been forgotten or lost, like a dream.

A figure enters the stage, his shadow made even darker by the brightening sun behind him, adding to the theatrical quality of the square. Here the sun functions like the bright stage lights that make shadows seem darker. Casculade recognizes the figure as Jean, and calls out to him, but Jean quickens his steps as though he could not hear Casculade "wie es in Träumen so geht," (*Siegel*, 148), Casculade clarifies for his awake and attentive audience, Marinier. In his evaluation, the theatrical aspects of the dream are reproduced for the reader on the printed page. The setting is "etwas von einer verwunschenen Bühne, deren Kulissen man wegzutragen und abzubauen vergessen hatte, vielleicht auch gar nicht wegräumen wollte, weil das Spiel der Geister das Spiel der Geschichte nach dem letzten Akt weiterträumte" (*Siegel*, 147). On this stage, Blind Faith occupies a fluid place between dream and reality because he is both a bystander in the dream, and he plays the role of the story-teller, recounting his story to his friend.

In the dream, Blind Faith rushes by the Carnevalet, which houses the history of Paris, and into the Jewish Quarter. The move from one historical space into another emphasizes the liminal quality of the dreamscape. Where Paris has its museums to attest

to its history, the Jews have this quarter of living memory; each of the ‘museums’ provides a narrative or definition of identity for the separate groups. In the Jewish space, indistinguishable figures in kaftans are physically demarcated from the gentiles both communally through the quarter’s border and individually through their traditional clothing. The old men wear caps drawn over their faces, their bodies hunched over. The figures bear no individual marks of identity, but can be interchanged with one another, so that one Jew represents every other Jew, and these Jews are all marked as outsiders from the greater community.

Song fills the Jewish quarter, just as the children’s singing had filled the Place des Vosges earlier in the dream. But now, the singers are the Jewish men singing a song of mourning. Their song fills the narrow street full of sorrow, “die sowohl Wasser wie Töne und tiefe Dunkelheit war” (*Siegel*, 148). Sorrow’s ability to hold water-like tones and deep darkness suggests an unfathomable quality, an unknown which, like the depths of water, holds great mysteries. The theme of water here is not explicitly identified as baptism, but the unconscious or the limitlessness of the Jewish people and sorrow.

Like a time traveler, Blind Faith ducks into a tent, a wares store, in which the reader will later recognize similarities to Belfontaine’s own general store in Senlis, France. This store in the Jewish quarter represents one of the traditional occupations for Jews, and it is no coincidence that this is where Blind Faith decides to sell his cane. This terrifies Casculade, who realizes what is about to happen.

The storeowner has the words “HIER BIN ICH” (*Siegel*, 148) written across his forehead in glowing letters. Writing on the forehead is an image from the Book of

Revelation.¹⁶³ Here the mark of the covenant becomes a mark that Christians and Jews can both bear, rather than circumcision which marks Jews only and which could not be denied during the Nazi regime. The words have significance too; they resonate with the words of the patriarchs. Abraham answers “hier bin ich” at least three times.¹⁶⁴ The third time, Abraham is responding to the Angel of the Lord who calls out to Abraham and stops him from sacrificing his son.

But why does an echoing of the words “hier bin ich” appear in a scene where Blind Faith sells his cane to the Jews? The cane, like Aaron’s rod included in the Ark of the Covenant, represents the Covenant. The writing on the forehead brings the image from Revelation—a book at the end of the Christian Bible—full circle and returns to the Covenant made in the first book of the Pentateuch, to the mark of Cain. With this arc, the stories nest into one another and complement one another, a full Christian appropriation of, and an overwriting of, the Jewish faith and stories in an attempt to redeem even the mark of Cain. Casculade indicates this understanding of the cane’s symbolism as well, in a moment when Blind Faith hands over his cane to the shopkeeper and regains sight (echoing the miracle at Lourdes) and when Casculade “sees” in a moment of realization

¹⁶³ I believe that it would be incorrect to connect the inscription on the forehead here with the number 666 written on the forehead of the beast in Revelation only, and not also with God’s way of marking his covenant. Still, the idea of marking the forehead to show possession has both negative and positive resonances and is deeply disturbing when considered in conjunction with the Jews, especially because the mark of the beast is associated with buying and selling. See, for example, Revelation 13:16-18: “And he [the beast] causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.” Compare the association of the mark on the forehead with evil to the mark that indicated God’s chosen in Revelation 14:1: “And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads.” *Holy Bible: The New King James Version, Containing the Old and New Testaments*. Nashville: T. Nelson, 1982.

¹⁶⁴ “1. Mose 22:1, 22:7, 22:11.” *Die Bibel: Nach der Übersetzung Martin Luthers*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1985.

as he sees during a liminal moment as he awakens from the vision:

[E]r war in Schauen übergegangen, und mir wurde, indem ich weinend erwachte, ganz klar, daß der Bettler gestorben sein mußte, und jenes finstere Ghetto, an welches sein Stab nun zurückfiel, der Alte Bund war, die Herkunft des Glaubens unter den Kindern Gottes, der bräutliche Schoß in dem Fleisch der Menschheit, den Gott sich auserwählt hatte: rein, unbefleckt, ohne Makel und Fehl – ach Marinier, jener zweite Versuch einer unersättlichen, göttlichen Liebe, nachdem die unbefleckte Empfängnis der Schöpfung getrübt worden war. (*Siegel*, 148)

In the vision, the staff's movement from Christian Blind Faith to Jewish shop owner appears to completely leave the hands of Christians all together. But in fact, this exchange, with the help of Casculade's interpretation, places Mary's Immaculate Conception in the context of Jewish experience, tying together the Covenant and Christian salvation through recursive time structures.¹⁶⁵ These are the same structures we have seen in Langgässer's speeches, where the Incarnation reframes the normal temporal association between events, creating a center around which all other traditions and beliefs become satellites.

The restructuring and appropriation of Jewish tradition and covenant easily fits in with Langgässer's concept of history, where events of the past prefigure those of the future. Stories can double-back on themselves and Casculade repeats the phrase "unbefleckte Empfängnis," a repetition of Bernadette's response to a vision of the Virgin

¹⁶⁵ Langgässer made the connection between Jewish Covenant and Christian baptism as 'indelible seals' in her other writings as well. In a handwritten description of the poem "Frühling 1946," written in response to news that Cordelia survived her time in Auschwitz, Langgässer reports that Cordelia has converted to Judaism. Cordelia "ist 'Glied im Bund' dieses anderen 'unauslöschlichen Siegels' geworden." Langgässer, Elisabeth. "zu 'Elisabeth Langgässer: Frühling 1946.'" Ts. 39, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach.

Mary in Lourdes, where she reports the vision to have called herself “die unbefleckte Empfängnis” and not “Empfangene” (*Siegel*, 131). Casculade explains the detail in terms of God being “Love”: Mary is not simply the recipient of the Immaculate, but the Immaculate Conception itself. Casculade places Mary’s immaculate conception in the very beginning of creation, which means that, before even the Covenant with the Jews, Mary, and not just the conception of Christ, were present. His repetition of “Empfängnis” here ties together the miracle at Lourdes with the dream-vision and also supports the Langgässarian theory of time as an arc.

Where Bernadette’s articulation about Mary places the “unbefleckte Empfängnis der Schöpfung” at the beginning of time, this subsequently places the Jewish Covenant *after* Christ (as the Logos of creation [*Siegel*, 132]). If baptism is the indelible seal that centers all the events of the novel, then the Old Covenant, represented by the stamp on the store clerk’s forehead, is not enduring on its own. The implications of this belief are then clear: on the one hand, Langgässer’s decision to include it acknowledges the role that Judaism plays in a greater Christian narrative. In making Judaism a part of the Christian narrative, rather than seeing Christianity as a narrative which usurps Jewish narrative, Langgässer both accepts the Jewish relationship to faith, but also tries to “redeem” it through Christ as Incarnation. As a result, while the inclusion of Judaism in a book written during the Holocaust is remarkable (especially when Langgässer asserted her Catholic identity during the Third Reich),¹⁶⁶ Langgässer’s assimilation of Jewish faith into Christian theology also eliminates space for the Jewish faith to stand on its own. As a result, Langgässer deconstructs Judaism through a systematic removal of its independent

¹⁶⁶ See: Langgässer, Elisabeth. Letter 154 “An Joseph Goebbels.” 3 April 1938 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 1. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 239-294.

theology. She usurps Judaism by subsuming its theology and identity into Christianity. In the concentric circles within which Langgässer perceives Judaism and Christianity existing, Jewish persecution accounts only for the baptized. With the Jewish and Christian narratives combined, the stage is now set for an apocalyptic battle with Satan.

The Final Battle

Satan, the shape-shifter, appears in the final scene where Belfontaine faces him down, demonstrating that Belfontaine has fully realized the role of his baptism across time and experience. This sets the stage for the final, transformative mystic experience for Belfontaine, who will renounce Satan and continue on to sainthood.

Belfontaine seems totally embedded in his new life in France, when a sailor arrives in Senlis. The sailor meets a young gypsy girl who recounts Belfontaine's story—how he came to France; met his wife Suzette; and how all of the characters, seemingly unrelated to one another through the course of the book, in fact have ties to one another, including Thérèse of Lisieux's own ties to Senlis. Enraptured with the tale's force, "jetzt [redet sie] wie ein Buch" (*Siegel*, 472). The narrator's self-reflective observation reminds the reader that Belfontaine's story takes only pages within a book that does not follow the traditional lines of plot or character development, but also undermines the project of the novel.

The final storm gathers, drawing together the storm and rain imagery employed throughout the book to indicate a transcendent, mystical experience that connects human crises and the presence grace. Belfontaine, struck with the realization of Satan's role in his life, experiences a "Blitz der Erkenntnis" (*Siegel*, 484). His reflections on baptism run

parallel to a conversation he had with de Chamant about suicide and the desire to escape the world: “Komm, laß uns Nichts sein!,” the words of de Chamant tempt Belfontaine (*Siegel*, 485). While the voices of others tempt him “über den Rand zu treten [...] Er sehnte sich, ihn endlich zu verlassen und in das Leere zu treten, über den schwindelnden Rand des Daseins, wo es in seinen Gegenpol umschlägt, das Leben in Tod und der Tod in —” (*Siegel*, 485). The break is followed by the insertion of a voice divine and a presence that moves the conversation from suicide to baptism: “‘GNADE!’ sagte mit furchtbarer Stimme das unsichtbare Wesen, das seinen Nacken berührte, jedes Haar seines Hauptes emporhob, es sträubte und es verwandelte, als ob Sturm durch eine verlassene und schon fast erkaltete Feuerstelle und ihre Umwallung raste, um die Funken hinaufzuschlagen” (*Siegel*, 485). With this realization, the storm breaks violently, representing the overwhelming experience of the divine and the raging battle between Satan and God over Belfontaine.

A greenhouse provides shelter from the storm while also providing a window into the storm, an act of grace. The storm’s passing is likened to God’s hand passing over him (*Siegel*, 486), releasing the “Sintflut des Regens” (*Siegel*, 487). Hail beats against the fragile windows that represent God’s protection, and the whole experience wraps up all of Belfontaine’s life. Here where water and storm imagery abound, Belfontaine realizes he must step out from sin, like Thérèse of Lisieux, like Lucien Benoît, and all of the saints who have confronted the “Teufelerscheinungen.”

Now Belfontaine can observe grace, at work like the glass windows of the greenhouse: present, and transparent, enabling all of the other forces to be visible. The result of this realization is a rebirth, fully captured in the disembodied command—

“Lazarus—komm heraus!”¹⁶⁷ With the rebirth, Belfontaine is now prepared to take on Satan face to face. He emerges from deep within the greenhouse, to strains of two different musical pieces, providing competing themes for the last battle. Like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, one instrument is “[d]ie Flöte des Grandpierre. Die Flöte des Täuschers.” It beckons to Belfontaine, competing with the death song from the Song of Roland.¹⁶⁸ The two songs compete with one another, providing a score for the final battle which will show that Belfontaine has fully grown into his baptismal vows.

The music draws Belfontaine into the bedroom he shares with Suzette, where the most remarkable furnishings are the mirrors which reproduce multiples of images, multiply the mirrors, and provide perspectives otherwise impossible. All the previous mirrorings and themes from within the story culminate in this one moment, when the room explodes with light brighter than the day, “was noch heller als das Tageslicht war” (*Siegel*, 494). These mirrors enable a new kind of seeing, distinctly different from the seeing of Blind Faith, but a way of seeing evil.

As Belfontaine enters the bedroom, the music breaks off suddenly. The silence that oppressively weighs on the room accompanies a melting and melding of visual realities, where Satan appears in the room as the sailor; the entire house sits completely silent, absent even of the sound of breathing,

¹⁶⁷ See Chapter 1, where Langgässer references the line in *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, also in relation to resurrection—of German people generally, and German fiction specifically, post-Shoah.

¹⁶⁸ While the song is only identified by name, not lyrics, the words of the Song of Roland for this choice are evident. The song praises God for raising Lazarus from the dead and prays God will save the singer from sins committed during his lifetime: «Veire Patene, ki unkes ne mentis, / Seint Lazaron de mort resurrexis, / E Daniel des leons guaresis, / Guaris de mei l'anme de tuz perilz / Pur les pecchez que en ma vie fis!» “Very Father, in Whom no falsehood is, / Saint Lazaron from death Thou didst remit, / And Daniel save from the lions’ pit; / My soul in me preserve from all perils / And from the sins I did in life commit!” CLXXVI (Song of Roland).

dieses plötzliche Fehlen von jeglichem Laut, und sei es nur einem geflüsterten Hauch, einem Knacken, Rieseln und Rauschen, dem Furchtgefühl einer sich steigernden Angst und endlich dem Schrecken gleichkam, der dicht vor der Katastrophe die Kreaturen befällt. Ein Medusengesicht mit geöffnetem Mund – zu einem lautlosen Schrei geöffnet, dem sich auszulösen verboten war – verging in dieser gräßlichen Stille wie eine langsam brennende Mischung aus schmelzenden Substanzen, die an die Stelle der Atmosphäre, der Atemluft und des Raumes traten, den sie vernichtete. Medusa starrte und schmolz zugleich dahin. [...] Dann verging ihre Form, und ein wilder Duft von blühendem Lavendel drang durch die Schlafzimmertür. (Siegel, 495)

The mirror's ability to reflect an image/re-image translates into the myth of Medusa, where Perseus uses his shield as a mirror to cut off Medusa's head. In this myth, the mirror helps him avoid danger. In the context of the novel, mirrors define layers of reality, but they also indicate a replication of truth, just as in the book *Teufelserscheinung*, where Satan's interference in the saints' lives can only be seen by reading all of the lives together, in a larger narrative. The melding of the mythological snake-headed Gorgon and Satan comes in a silent moment which transcends not only the divisions between characters, but also between myth-time and the present-time of the novel:

In dem Spiegel begegneten seine Augen Lazarus Belfontaine. *Er war es.*

Es war Grandpierre, war Tricheur, der ihn wie immer betrogen und in dem

Wechsel seiner Erscheinung geblendet und eingekreist hatte. Der Veränderliche, der Lügner an sich, glich zwar in nichts diesem blonden Matrosen, mit dem sich jetzt Belfontaine, ohne zu sprechen, in dem Spiegelglas unterredete, noch deckte er sich mit dem Bild von Grandpierre, dem haarigen Flötenspieler. Aber er war es. Von seiner Erscheinung ging das gleiche Gefühl der Befriedigung aus, das Belfontaine auf dem Gartenfest in A. überdrungen hatte, als der Täuscher ihn fragte: “Erkennst du mich?” (*Siegel*, 496-497)

The moment of recognition occurs through a mirror. In it, Belfontaine spies the sailor crouched over the lifeless body of Suzette.¹⁶⁹ As the sailor lifts himself from Suzette’s still body, he looks into a mirror and meets Belfontaine’s eyes. In the replicated image, an instant recognition, Satan can no longer hide behind another character, nor can he convince Belfontaine that his faith is pointless and there is no sin.

When Satan invites Belfontaine to be complicit in his murder (“Na, schien der Matrose ihn aufzufordern, wenn Sie näher kommen möchten, mein Herr, so mache ich gerne Platz. [...] Es ist alles nur menschlich” (*Siegel*, 497), Belfontaine rejects Satan’s invitation, which implies a rejection of the Holy Spirit: “Aber hören Sie bitte, mit diesen Faxen, *diesem lächerlichen, entsetzlichen Mumpitz von der Stirn zu der Brust und von links nach rechts* auf, sonst vergesse ich mich am Ende, so höflich ich sonst auch bin” (*Siegel*, 497), referring to the sign of the cross, which represents the trinity, including the Holy Spirit and Christ Incarnate. Belfontaine finally acknowledges Satan’s actual presence in the world by confronting him, and when the murderer tries to escape,

¹⁶⁹ The sailor had just murdered Suzette to take back a pearl necklace, equating her life with payment. The pearl necklace, when she buys it, is connected with her sexuality and also has an unbelievably high price—her purchase of it becomes a debt to the sailor, where the necklace gets compared to a “Kette.”

Belfontaine attacks the sailor/Satan, “mit übermenschlichen Kräften” (Siegel, 498).

Belfontaine’s willingness to physically take on Satan equates with a final renunciation.

Belfontaine has now fully aligned himself with God.

Conclusion

The final paragraph of the third book, written entirely in italics, summarizes Belfontaine’s journey. He leaves the French town Senlis, and his journey continues as a mendicant, as a Joseph Labre-type figure who disappears into the East during the Holocaust and then, as an old man, returns West, driven by the Red Army. Now “Vater Lazarus,” Belfontaine has lost his own identity. The paragraph’s narrative moves to the necklace the sailor killed Suzette for, now in the possession of White Fathers, who use the necklace to purchase freedom for a few stateless Jewish Christians from a concentration camp in Poland. Here there is no mention of crematoria or gas chambers, and no mention of Jews who were not baptized. This includes all who were simply counted as racially Jewish by the Nazis. “Vater Lazarus” becomes an example to others. Now fully aligned with the divine, he loses all markers of individuality: “*Man verwechselte ihn, verlor das Gefühl für seine Identität. Er wurde aus einem armen Häftling zu dem Armen schlechthin, und endlich zu einem betenden Bettler*” (Siegel, 499).

Father Lazarus becomes the saint who serves as an example for all of Langgässer’s contemporary readers who, like her, have just lived through the fall of the Third Reich, know about the Holocaust and, in their moment of post-war trauma, are seeking some form of guidance, some scrap of meaning. A single figure with German Everyman qualities, Belfontaine’s gradual fulfillment of his baptismal vows becomes a

model for the faith journey that any German can take. Here, in a Christian life and in self-sacrifice, Langgässer offers the solution of her faith.

Belfontaine's disappearance into the East among the crematoria chimneys culminates his ongoing battle with Satan, who constantly tempted Belfontaine, trying to keep him from seeking grace. The temptations, followed by complete identification with, and recognition of, divine grace were present in everyday activities and interactions. The everyday qualities of both protagonist and Satan make it possible for the reader to identify him or herself within the novel. The result is that the reader looks to figures like Thérèse of Lisieux, Joseph Labre, and Lazarus Belfontaine for guidance. A community forms between reader and book.

The community expands to include all readers, in the way that liturgy expands the community to include all those who participate in the call and response, as well as in the sacraments liturgy frames and contextualizes. Participation helps form a body, reiterating the Incarnation. Suddenly, the act of reading and the act of worship are parallel—both constitute a body or community. When *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* concludes with the bombing of Berlin and a liturgical mass, a whole community becomes spoken into being, a community within and beyond the pages of the book, capable of taking on the current post-war chaos.

Astoundingly, Langgässer writes these communities *during* the Third Reich, while she does not know what has happened to her oldest daughter and as she suffers several lapses of multiple sclerosis and works as a *Zwangsarbeiter*. This faith in grace, and in a single body of believers that resonates with and reiterates the Incarnation, carries into *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, written in the years immediately after the end of World

War II. Within its pages, the community created through reading *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* is reproduced as a group of pilgrims that journeys through the German countryside. Their physical and spiritual journey, as it moves through the rubble, helps them understand the incarnational qualities of their community and reaffirms their faith.

CHAPTER III

“Mythos der Gegenwart”:

Elisabeth Langgässer’s *Zeitroman* and *Apocalyptic Book* in Germany¹⁷⁰

“Ihr Schmerz, verehrter Herr Doctor,” Hermann Broch wrote to Wilhelm Hoffmann after learning of the death of his wife, Elisabeth Langgässer, in 1950,

wird von Unzähligen geteilt. Doch das ist kaum ein Trost; Ihr Verlust wird hiedurch [sic] noch deutlicher: denn Deutschland hat eine seiner stärksten geistigen Potenzen verloren, und das ist gerade in diesen Zeiten der Krise schier unersetzlich. Wichtiges, das zu erwarten wir berechtigt waren, wird uns nicht mehr geschenkt werden.¹⁷¹

These lines conclude the exchange between Hermann Broch and Elisabeth Langgässer, later annotated and published by Langgässer’s husband, Wilhelm Hoffmann, in the *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch* in 1964. The exchange not only accounts for

¹⁷⁰ The title of this final chapter comes from a letter Langgässer wrote to her publisher, Eugen Claassen: Langgässer, Elisabeth. “An Eugen Claassen.” 13 July 1949. Letter 515 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 2. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 944. A little over a year before her death, Langgässer continued working hard on *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*. The situation in Germany was still rather dire; Langgässer wrote Claassen and others requesting payment for her work in an attempt to squeak by financially. As she reports in that same letter about her progress on her final novel, she places the novel in the context of not only her own life, but the situation generally: “Der neue Roman wächst munter weiter – als der eigentliche Mythos der Gegenwart. Die seltsamste Mischung von Zeitroman u. vollkommener Entrückung. Etwas ähnliches gibt es in Deutschland nicht – aber auch sonstwo ist mir so etwas (Merkwürdiges) noch nicht begegnet.” Here the novel, as elsewhere, is classified by a tension or seeming paradox. It is both the underlying myth of the era, a critique of the time, and also ruptures the barrier between the age and the eternal. As a myth, the novel makes claims about Germany’s current state, but also does not claim a literal understanding of the events surrounding the war and the Holocaust. As such, the novel does not give a good look at *how* Germany entered the *Stunde Null*, but claims to understand the *why* of the situation. This is the function of myth—to explain why things are the way they are without looking at the technical way they came into being. Rather than studying how Hitler came into power and Germans followed him blindly, Langgässer uses the guilt associated with the past to depict the state of Germany experiences in the moment.

¹⁷¹ Hoffmann, Wilhelm. “Der Briefwechsel zwischen Elisabeth Langgässer und Hermann Broch.” In *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch* 5 (1964): 297-326.

remarkable affinities between the two authors' works, but also sheds light on the affinities between both Broch's work, *Tod des Vergil*, and Langgässer's response, *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, a connection not yet explored in secondary literature.

Broch certainly appreciated Langgässer's technical skill, as well as her complex fictional worlds and depictions of modern malaise. His most extensive—and public—evaluation of her work was a review of *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*, published in the *Literarische Revue* in 1949.¹⁷² In the exchange between the two authors, we see their responses to one another's works written in exile (Broch in America, Langgässer in inner-exile in Berlin): *Tod des Vergil* (1945) and *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* (1946/47). But these works, created during the same time frame, respond not to one another, but to their age. Specifically, Broch's novel demonstrates skepticism toward fiction's function in his era, as evidenced by the conflicting attitudes the poet bears toward his work. In *Tod des Vergil*, the main character Vergil, a historical figure working on the founding myth of Rome, provides the critical frame for understanding the contemporary political crisis Broch experiences. Within *Vergil's* pages, the end of one era (the Roman Republic, or Weimar Germany) and the dawn of a new era (the Roman Empire, or the Third Reich) represent the liminal moment of the crisis.

In her final work, *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, Langgässer holds a more optimistic stance toward the function of literature than Broch does. *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* maps a course for post-Third Reich Germany. She hoped to provide a means for acknowledging culpability and working through guilt. *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* responds to Broch's pessimism in *Der Tod des Vergil* on multiple

¹⁷² Broch, Hermann. "Randbemerkungen zu Elisabeth Langgässers Roman 'Das unauslöschliche Siegel.'" In *Literarische Revue* 4 (1949): 56-59.

levels: from the poet's social status, to the significance of the written word, to the function of individual and collective memory, to the exchange of subject matter. *Der Tod des Vergil* focuses on death, concluding with an ambiguous hallucination which might represent the afterlife or may simply be part of the poet's death throws; *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* offers a vision of resurrection and connects repentance of the German people with the faith in life after death.

As intellectual pen pals, Langgässer and Broch discussed the significance of writing in their moment. The writing act was not intended as an end in itself; Broch noted to Langgässer that, "Dichten [soll]...über das Dichten hinausgehen" (Wilhelm Hoffmann, 298). Both writers are concerned with producing a "Weltentwurf," a way of thinking about, creating, and responding to the world. At its core, this sketch of the world also reflects human experience. The poetic world, the manifestation of the poet's work—"Dichten"—is indistinguishable from human experience (as Langgässer would call it—"pure Existence") or human suffering (Broch's term, "Menschenleid"). The contemplative and creative acts are directly related to experience. The inward gaze toward the center of what it means to be human also moves outside of and beyond the self. The gaze, manifest in the poetic act, transcends the boundaries of "poetry" to distill common experience and to create a community. The aesthetic is not of value to itself, nor is it to be self-serving. We must remember the depiction as a transcendent, or metaphysical, experience as the greater goal for both authors. They attempt to portray individual existence or suffering in the context of some greater connection—whether it be through common human experience (Broch) or a connection to the divine (Langgässer) through the complementary act, "Dichten."

Where Broch's *Vergil* ended in death, Langgässer's *Argonautenfahrt* promises an enduring world at the end of the journey, embodied by the convent Anastasiendorf and represented by empty graves. There, the priest, Mamertus, attends to the spiritual needs of the nuns. His journal, the conclusion of the novel (textually and contextually), frames the pilgrimage in terms of atonement and resurrection; as the final word, the journal also makes Mamertus the authority of the narrative. His relationship to the convent, the symbol of redemption and of heaven on earth, and the written word are a response to Broch's *Vergil*.

As we look at *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, we must keep in mind how it responds to Langgässer's era and also how it responds to place. For this reason, we will first look at Langgässer's personal situation, assessing her own experience and also what she witnessed. We will then look at the theological response Langgässer offered, aided by work on spatial theory. Spatial theory, as well as a close reading, will help clarify a proposal for the redemption of Germany. What we will ultimately see is that Langgässer constructed a model for the German people to move past their sins through atoning acts with the hope of constructing a new Germany. She does so by creating a modern myth which ties into historical experience, establishing a context which treats the current state not as the exception, but rather remains obedient to the rule of human experience.

As Elisabeth Langgässer stood simultaneously at the edge of the end of the Third Reich and on the cusp of a new era, her works *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* and *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* granted her a Janus-like perspective. From her years writing alone, isolated from a reading public, her work was an act of faith that she would one day be

able to publish. While *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* is viewed as a post-war novel, it is in fact a product of the war.¹⁷³

The bulk of *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* was indeed written during the war, and the novel was completed after the war, but before Langgässer knew what became of her daughter Cordelia. Cordelia lived in a Jewish hospital in Berlin¹⁷⁴—a geographic coordinate for the apocalyptic firebombing featured in the epilogue. The novel itself was written during the Nazi regime with hopes of publication at a later date, possible only on the other side of political change. The novel therefore defies any sort of simple classification as to its time of composition and the “era” it is written within and for. Most events of the novel take place within the interwar period yet, in October of 1945, Langgässer wrote to her publisher, Claassen, describing the novel’s length and plot as relevant and also referencing the isolation in which she finished her work: “Zwölf Jahre im Dunkel und völliger Einsamkeit gearbeitet zu haben! Nun, ich habe in dieser Zeit einiges erlebt, erlitten, gelernt und gestaltet. So kann ich wohl mit vollem Recht behaupten: auch ich war Zeuge.”¹⁷⁵ Having written the novel during a time when she was

¹⁷³ See: Vogel, Marianne. “Krieg als Kulturkrise und utopischer Neubeginn. Elisabeth Langgässer und das Deutschland nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg.” In *Imaginäre Welten im Widerstreit: Krieg und Geschichte in der deutschsprachigen Literatur seit 1900*. Edited by Lars Koch and Marianne Vogel. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007. 222-233.

¹⁷⁴ Cordelia, forbidden from living with the rest of her family in Eichendorf because Langgässer refused to mark the home with the Star of David, was sent to a hospital in Wedding located in northern Berlin. Langgässer references this hospital in the epilogue. See: Hilzinger, Sonja. *Elisabeth Langgässer: Eine Biografie*. Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2009. 292.

¹⁷⁵ Langgässer does not think only in idealized terms about her experience, but also how her work will be received commercially: “Zwei Dinge werden ihn [der Roman] nach menschlichem Ermessen zu einem Erfolg werden lassen – mein persönliches Schicksal: als einer der ganz wenigen Schriftsteller von einigem Format die Verfolgung erlitten zu haben und ‘nach innen’ emigriert zu sein; dann aber auch das Thema, das, wenn man an die Aufsätze der bedeutendsten Zeitschriften der Gegenwart denkt, das Thema katexochen sein wird. Mein Gott, welches Gefühl, wieder leben zu dürfen – und dabei zu sein!” Langgässer, Elisabeth. “An Eugen Claassen.” 13 October 1945. Letter 260 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 1. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 503.

uncertain that the novel would be published or whether anyone would be able to read it, the novel becomes a record of Langgässer's suffering. As a document written possibly for her eyes only, the novel records what Langgässer perceives as historical and spiritual truths. She captures her understanding of the past and infuses it with her constant faith. This combination means that the novel describes a specific time full of limitations while orienting itself to the post-war reading public.

Märkische Argonautenfahrt is not simply a continuation of Langgässer's forward-looking perspective initiated in *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*; rather, as a work of fiction, its presence (*Gegenwart*) in the *Stunde Null* accounts for the past in order to prepare for the future. Both the events of the novel and the subject matter deal with Germany's current situation, where life was lived from day to day, and where survivors avoided thinking about who was responsible for the Holocaust and left unquestioned the previous allegiance to Hitler and the Nazi party. In a way, *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* is an apocalyptic novel, starting out where *Das unauslöschliche Siegel*'s epilogue leaves off. The seed of *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*'s plot consists of references to the end of an era, including a spiritual death of the individual and the movement toward establishing a new world. Apocalyptic imagery of the bombed-out cities and references to the ruins and hunger, manifestations of death, and the movement onto the convent at the conclusion of the novel represents resurrection and a new life within geographical constraints. Consequently, the novel reads like a ritualistic atonement for sin through death—which, in the end, is a parallel experience to the baptismal covenant, a concept Langgässer's readers readily identify as an indelible seal, a designation that transcends death.

The goal of this chapter is to explore Langgässer's "Mythos der Gegenwart" through a reading of her various characters, whom I believe represent the German people and their collective guilt as well as their collective future. While I believe that Langgässer fails in her attempt to understand the ambiance of the concentration camps—we shall see that she only alludes to them, never entering them—Langgässer successfully writes about what she knows. Each figure stands for one variant of Germany's story, and a number of the stories relate to her own experience during the war. This still leaves the question of Langgässer's purpose for writing, however. One can only guess that Langgässer felt she had to absolve herself of responsibility in her daughter's deportation and for other acts of silent complicity, even as she cast herself as a victim of the regime. I believe that Langgässer outlines a novel not only of judgment and explanation, but also a map of redemption. The pilgrimage frames the individual characters' experiences and functions not only as a reestablishment of a single national (German) identity over all others, for victims and perpetrators alike, but also represents the very real temporal and spatial issues at stake for a single German entity in addition to the redemptive work of the pilgrimage.

The novel's epigraph is a quotation from Ephesians: "...aufgefahren in die Höhe, hat er gefangen geführt die Gefangenschaft und Gaben den Menschen ausgeteilt. Daß er aber aufgefahren, was ist es anders, als daß er auch zuerst hinabgestiegen in die Regionen unter der Erde?" (Epheser 4, 8-9). This epigraph sets up the vertical axis, one of the two axes the pilgrimage traverses. The vertical axis connects God and human beings (both individuals and groups), while the horizontal axis connects individuals with one another.

Christ's incarnation, crucifixion,¹⁷⁶ and resurrection model the movement on the vertical axis, where he first descends to earth in human form. Christ undertakes this act in order to serve as an example, building up the "body"—the Church, which continues to stand in for Christ on earth after his resurrection according to Christian belief. As attributed in the passage, the function of Christ's descent to the lower parts of the earth is two-fold in the novel: one is to show that Christ is present in the hellish situation of the *Stunde Null* as well as the genocide preceding this moment; the other demonstrates how the pilgrims, in their journey to atone for Germany's sins, participate in the body of Christ and move closer to God.

Response to the Holocaust: Depicting the "True Nature" of Things

In a letter to her daughter, the recently married Cordelia Edvardson, dated June 3, 1948,¹⁷⁷ Langgässer requests information concerning Edvardson's internment at Auschwitz. Langgässer asks Cordelia for reports of Auschwitz so that she might include details in her next work of fiction—which was to be *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*. Langgässer offers her reasoning to Cordelia for her request:

Gurian erzählte mir einiges, was er von Dir wusste, und wenn ich Dich
jetzt bitte, mir diese Dinge noch einmal genau zu wiederholen, so ist das

¹⁷⁶ The crucifixion, the end of Christ's Incarnation, centers the story of Christ's "descent" to earth and "ascension" to heaven. The metaphor of life as a journey exemplifies the horizontal axis and also helps us understand the person of Christ, as well as the pilgrimage, in terms of space and time. The spatial relationship Christ as the Incarnation has to the world is not horizontal, but vertical, according to W.D. Davies, because of Christ's descent from above and ascent back into heaven. Davies recognizes the movement between God and humans in the person of Christ, but ignores Christ's full humanity and the horizontal aspect of his relation to others. See Davies, W.D. *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1974. 335.

¹⁷⁷ Langgässer, Elisabeth. "An Cordelia Edvardson." 3 June 1948. Letter 406 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 2. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 783-786.

eine der eindringlichsten Bitten, die ich an Dich habe. Er sagte mir unter anderem, Deine Tbc sei darauf zurückzuführen, dass Dir eine Frau bei dem Transport den Brustkasten eingetreten habe, und dass Du in Auschwitz die “Buchhaltung der Toten” geführt habest. Dela, dies Dinge muss ich ganz genau wissen, um sie der Nachwelt als Feuerwein zu kredenzen – in meinem Werk, in dem nächsten Buch, an dem ich jetzt schreibe.

The progression from inquiry into her daughter’s state of being to research for her next novel appears callous. Langgässer’s objective is to serve the wine of experience to the “Nachwelt”—the world after Auschwitz—as though the reader can ritualistically participate in the events of the Third Reich through the transubstantive act of “kredenzen” and move past them, as a concomitant takes part in the Eucharist after having her sins forgiven.

Langgässer focuses on two of Cordelia’s experiences as a prisoner as potential sources of material for *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*: one, being trampled on during transport to Auschwitz; the other, the selection process in the camps, where Cordelia kept “the Record of the Dead.” Cordelia, then, was responsible for recording the numbers of dead in the concentration camp in the Book of the Dead.¹⁷⁸ But did Langgässer see it as more than that? In parallel accounts, Cordelia and Langgässer both record memories of victims of the Nazi Regime. Their books become a means for representing the dead, the past. But where Cordelia’s “Book of the Dead” from the camps represents the murdered, Langgässer’s brings the dead back to life through her fictionalized work, transmuting

¹⁷⁸ See: Langgässer, Elisabeth. “Schreiben Sie, Fräulein, schreiben Sie!” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 6 July 1948. And also Cordelia Edvardson’s memoir: Edvardson, Cordelia. *Gebranntes Kind Sucht Das Feuer*. München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1987. 87-99.

deaths of baptized Jewish characters into memories the living and survivors can process. Langgässer explains to Cordelia how her daughter's story has inspired events in the novel; here we see an attention to Langgässer's own failure to protect her daughter. Langgässer first emphasizes her *daughter's* story, and Langgässer's own story becomes evident through continued reading:

Nicht *Du* kommst darin vor, sondern ein Mann, der seine junge Cousine hätte retten können, wenn er nicht träge und bequem und feige gewesen wäre. Später trifft er ein junges Mädchen, das er liebt, das er aber nicht begreift, weil sie so merkwürdig ist, scheinbar frivol und doch ungeheuer verschlossen. Schliesslich stellt sich heraus, dass sie im Grunde garnicht 'lebt', sondern immer noch in der Hölle ihrer Erinnerungen festgehalten wird – sie war in einem Konzentrationslager und hat schreckliche Dinge gesehen, die man nur ahnen kann. Als sie sich endlich dem Mann erschliesst und ihm einiges erzählt, bricht er unter seiner Schuld zusammen; denn sie wird nun für sein Gewissen eines mit dem anderen jungen Mädchen, das er zu retten versäumt hat, eines mit allen jungen Mädchen, Kindern, ja, mit allen Opfern, die durch die Herzensträgheit der Deutschen – und gerade der Harmlosen! – umgekommen sind. Natürlich ist diese Begebenheit nur ein winziges Partikelchen aus dem ganzen Roman, aber ein sehr wichtiges; und ich muss genau Bescheid wissen um die ganze Atmosphäre. Ich bitte Dich daher dringend: schildere mir, was und wie Du es erlebt hast, vor allem das Äussere Deines 'Lebens' in A. und Deine Beschäftigung. Denke nicht: wie unnatürlich, dass meine

Mutter das wissen will, um es ‘zu verwerten’, gewissermassen, um einen Roman daraus zu machen – in Wirklichkeit *weiss ich ja alles*, und es setzt sich zur Zeit Nacht um Nacht an mein Bett wie kurz nach dem Umsturz. Was ich aber brauche, sind ganz reale Anschauungen. Dieser Roman ist ein Versuch, die verschiedenen deutschen Häresien, die typisch deutschen Sünden in verschiedenen Schicksalen darzustellen – als Gericht, als Busspredigt und als Läuterung. Darum wirst Du wohl auch meine Bitte verstehen.¹⁷⁹

Langgässer’s request of Cordelia may shock readers today,¹⁸⁰ who read Langgässer’s words as an equation of Cordelia’s suffering with her own experience. I would rather argue that Langgässer is working through her own feelings of failure for not keeping her daughter safe and, in a round-about way, acknowledging her shortcomings to her daughter. A Cordelia-like figure appears in the novel, and a Langgässer-like figure appears as a man who could have saved his cousin. Here the mother-daughter relationship does not appear, which would be perhaps the closest family bond, but the two characters are closely related. In *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, Langgässer replicates her perceived betrayal of her daughter. This replication shows that individual experience is not the central question for Langgässer, but collective guilt.

¹⁷⁹ Langgässer, Elisabeth. “An Cordelia Edvardson.” 3 June 1948. Letter 406 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 2. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 784-785. An excerpt of the letter also appeared in the collection of letters: Langgässer, Elisabeth. “... so viel berauschende Vergänglichkeit.” In *Frankfurter Hefte: Zeitschrift für Kultur und Politik* 9 (1954): 110-120. In the excerpt, the name of the addressee has been redacted.

¹⁸⁰ See, for example: Susaneck, Corrine. “Neue Heimat Schweden: Cordelia Edvardsons und Ebba Sörboms Autobiografik zur Shoah.” *Reihe Jüdische Moderne* 5. Köln: Böhlau, 2007. 118-119. Also El-Akramy, Ursula. *Wotans Rabe: Elisabeth Langgässer, Ihre Tochter Cordelia und die Feuer von Auschwitz*. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1997.

The request contrasts a vague reference with “knowing everything”: there is the need for specific perspectives Langgässer can use in her novel in order to properly portray “the whole ambience,” yet Langgässer is unable to articulate what this “everything” is. This narrow request for knowledge awkwardly points to the fact that Langgässer believes herself to understand the implications of the Third Reich and the spiritual repercussions associated with Germany’s sins. This particular understanding leads to Langgässer believing she can portray events within the context of *German* errors and sins. Langgässer draws a clear line from knowing everything that has happened and her ability to portray German sin through judgment, calls to penitence, and subsequent catharsis. The macro-perspective achieved through specific representations ties the personal/individual together with the whole public sphere.

Märkische Argonautenfahrt is the vehicle for helping her German readers move from divine judgment to redemption. As a work of fiction, the novel as a theological treatise opens a myriad of theological questions about representation and content. We have seen this discussion unfold in the discussion surrounding the form and content of the Christian novel.

A year after her letter to Cordelia, Langgässer demonstrates continued difficulties with understanding Cordelia’s experience. Langgässer wrote to her good friends Rahel and Emanuel bin Gorion, who left Germany for Palestine, to tell them about where the Hoffmanns now lived and how her daughters fared. After describing how “their” (the Hoffmann’s) daughters fared, she addresses Cordelia with her separate account of how Cordelia is doing since her arrival in Sweden. While Cordelia has nearly recovered her health and married life seems to agree with her, Langgässer can only hint at Cordelia’s

emotional trauma. “Dela ist fast ganz ausgeheilt – seelisch aber —nun, das kannst Du Dir ja denken.”¹⁸¹ Cordelia’s experience of the Holocaust, of the camps and what can only be described as a perceived betrayal¹⁸² by her family, has shaken her to her core. The emotional scarring can only be hinted at with a dash, pointing to the shortcomings of language and an inability to articulate Cordelia’s spiritual struggles. Langgässer either cannot or will not articulate her own understanding of how utterly distressed Cordelia feels and her ongoing struggles as a survivor. The dash leads to a questioning of how accurately, how completely, Langgässer could possibly depict Germany after the Nazi Regime and genocide.

Just half a year before Langgässer’s death, her perspective on *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* and its address of the past becomes more complex and far less resolved than her prior assumptions. Langgässer believed that she could both grasp the significance of and also redeem the murdered, while forgiving sinners through writing. Langgässer began comprehending that she did not, in fact, understand the depths of what happened.¹⁸³ To Clara Menck she confided her worry that she will disappear beneath the waves of the ocean she attempted to describe. In her incomplete metaphor, the word is a stormy sea beating against a boat. The waves threaten to cover the boat entirely,

¹⁸¹ Langgässer, Elisabeth. “An Rahel und Emanuel bin Gorion.” 31 January 1950. Letter 567 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 2. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 1011.

¹⁸² I use “perceived betrayal” cautiously, as scholars offer a wide difference of opinions concerning Cordelia and Elisabeth’s relationship, especially concerning the decisions to keep Cordelia in Germany and later the decision to allow the German government to rescind Cordelia’s adoption by Spaniard Marcelino Garcia. This resulted in Cordelia’s deportation and internment first in Theresienstadt, then Auschwitz. For a critical perspective on Langgässer, see: Wassermann, Annette. “Verrat einer Mutter. Eine Studie zu Elisabeth Langgässer.” *Der Tagesspiegel* 7. December 1997. A more sympathetic reading of Langgässer and her actions can be found in: Gelbin, Cathy. *An Indelible Seal: Race, Hybridity and Identity in Elisabeth Langgässer's Writings*. Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 2001.

¹⁸³ See: Rosenwald, George C, and Richard L. Ochberg. *Storied Lives: The Cultural Politics of Self-Understanding*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

swallowing it and leaving no trace behind. The stormy atmosphere melts into another, this time spatial, metaphor: “Immer mehr komme ich zu der Überzeugung, dass ich nur schreibe, um hinter Dinge zu kommen, die ich *noch nicht* weiss.” The world she perceives is but a façade, with a truth or significance she cannot yet access but, through the process of writing, she can reveal the previously unknown boundaries. Writing and thinking support one another, unveiling a greater truth beyond, below the visible world. The shift is from “knowing everything” to “not yet” knowing—effectively, the more I learn, the less I know. Despite this, Langgässer hopes that in time, the relationship between known and unknown will change. She hopes for the better. The water metaphor returns, this time to describe an unfathomable subject. Langgässer feels her writing to be an “ewiges Perlentauchen – wobei es nicht ausgeschlossen ist, dass ich mit einem alten Schuh hochkomme.”¹⁸⁴ The work of a pearl diver is arduous; she swims down to the bottom of the sea in order to return to the surface where the find can finally be seen and appraised. Once Langgässer finishes her task, she should be able to understand just what she has produced—perhaps a treasure, or a single old shoe, completely worthless. Writing becomes an act of faith, where the outcome is totally uncertain. Writing is also a retrospective act; by moving her pen forward across the page, Langgässer can also look back and understand the events of the Third Reich.

Pilgrimage as Spatial Mediation; Pilgrimage as a Journey to Experience the Numinous

At the conclusion of World War II, Germany finds itself adrift as a defeated people. Their soldiers have either been lost in the war or are prisoners across Europe. In

¹⁸⁴ Langgässer, Elisabeth. “An Clara Menck.” 13 January 1949. Letter 459 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 2. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 864-865.

Russia, they have been witness to, and participated in, genocide. After crossing the threshold of the war's end, now in the *Stunde Null*, the German people question what they have just experienced. How are they party to it? Why are they hungry among ruins now, when greatness was promised to them? Elisabeth Langgässer's *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* offers an interpretation of Germany's current state and previous culpability, and offers a moral and spiritual navigation through the pilgrimage. Through the pilgrims' journey across the German countryside, they seek repentance for their "gemeinsame Schuld" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 7).

The novel follows the pilgrimage of seven characters the summer after the fall of the Nazi regime. These people, accompanied by two nuns, Pat and Patachon,¹⁸⁵ journey toward the convent in Anastasiendorf. Together, they represent the German people: a baptized Jewish couple, Arthur and Florence Levi-Jeschower, who found shelter at the convent to escape deportation to the concentration camps and whose children emigrated to avoid deportation; Irene von Dörfer, a political prisoner returned from a concentration camp and now off to visit her aunt, the prioress of the convent; Ewald Hauteville, Irene's love interest and a German who experienced the war on the home front; Lotte Corneli, his sister, who is married to a renowned Jewish composer who was imprisoned in a concentration camp, discovered by Lotte to have survived only after the pilgrimage was completed; Albrecht Beifuß, an actor who falls in love with Lotte and dies defending her from a Russian soldier; and Friedrich am Ende, a soldier returned from a Russian prison

¹⁸⁵ Though nicknamed Pat and Patachon because of their comical appearance, their actual names bear meaning for the journey the pilgrims are undertaking. The taller is Dolores; the shorter, Perpetua. Mamertus as the first-person narrator lets us know the significance of these names: "es wollte mir einleuchten, daß der Schmerz und das Immerfort, das ihre Namen bedeuten, die Begleiter der Argonauten waren, wie sie ja grundsätzlich jedes Leben begleiten und lieb gewinnen" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 407). The Argonaut's journey is, ultimately, a life of perpetual sorrows.

camp who does not want to go on the pilgrimage, but finds himself part of the group anyway.

The pilgrimage provides a frame, like that of the *Decameron* or the *Canterbury Tales*, for the characters to engage one another intellectually and emotionally as they traverse the post-war landscape. The pilgrimage is not the outermost frame of the narrative, however. Instead, a photograph at the beginning of the novel provides the retrospective perspective for the pilgrimage about to be recounted in the following pages. The conclusion of the novel reframes the pilgrimage with another retrospective recounted through Lotte's son, who reenacts the pilgrimage in a puppet show. Yet another frame, as a textual addendum, offers perspective on Germany post-war and post-pilgrimage, along with possibilities for the future, through the diary of the priest at Anastasiendorf, Mamertus.

Spatially and temporally, the German people are trying to understand their place in the world. The search for place becomes a metaphorical and literal journey. The choice of taking a journey along the path demonstrates progress toward a final goal, a convent representing divine order achieved through collective life. As John Inge has demonstrated in his work on sacred space, monasteries (and, by extension, convents) represent a space for individuals' reconciliation with one another and with God. The pilgrimage serves as a spatial representation of an interior, spiritual development; the movement represents an approach toward freedom.¹⁸⁶ Langgässer consciously maps a spiritual and an existential journey onto a physical one, where the final destination represents a complete and reconciled state between individuals and the divine.

¹⁸⁶ Inge cites Sigurd Bergmann's work. See: Bergmann, Sigurd. "Theology in its Spatial Turn: Space, Place and Built Environments Challenging and Changing the Images of God." In *Religion Compass* 1, no. 3 (2007): 343.

Central to the space occupied by characters in both novels and their movements across space and within time are the concept of God's created space and his omnipresence. Langgässer develops a theory of space that both emphasizes the sacredness of place and also underscores the presence of God across time and space that applies to Germany.

The spatial turn in theological studies of pilgrimage connect the interior, or spiritual identity, with the external journey. Especially Victor and Edith Turner's *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (1978) and John Inge's *A Christian Theology of Place* (2003) have renewed an interest in the spatial turn and in Christianity through their emphasis on body, place, and pilgrimage as a liminal experience. Their works illuminate Elisabeth Langgässer's choice of a pilgrimage as one of the framing narratives for *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, where the pilgrims attempt to atone for their sins and reconstruct a community among the rubble. Pilgrimage becomes a vehicle for starting anew. In the course of crossing the land, with the convent at Anastasiendorf as their goal, the pilgrims cross a threshold, moving away from the guilt of the German people and their acceptance of Nazi rule and the criminal acts perpetrated against their fellow citizens. The journey emphasizes the sacredness of place and underscores the presence of God across time and space.¹⁸⁷ The Incarnation embodies this, where a single body spatially defines divinity while transgressing all boundaries.

The three aspects of pilgrimage include the journey to a sacred space, the journey as allegorical representation of life (moving from birth to death, accompanied along the

¹⁸⁷ Bergmann, Sigurd. "Theology in its Spatial Turn: Space, Place and Built Environments Challenging and Changing the Images of God." *Religion Compass* 1, no. 3 (2007): 356-357. See also Moltmann, John. *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*. SCM: London, 1985. 29.

way by faith and doubt), and the eschatological aspects of the journey, where the earthly destination stands in for heaven. These aspects do not compete with one another, but are present in every pilgrimage, including *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*.¹⁸⁸ The convent at Anastasiendorf is the pilgrims' sacred goal. During the pilgrimage, each of the pilgrims works on her/his life story. This includes coming to terms with guilt, remembering their roles, and forgetting as they move forward, spiritually dying to themselves by denying their own desires and acting as holy figures. At the journey's end, the convent and the New Jerusalem of Revelation stand together, offering the promise of reconciliation and ultimate community before God.

Scholars of Elisabeth Langgässer's work pay much attention to racial identity, biography, and religious identity, but when relation to space warrants mention, it remains secondary to considerations of time and eschatology. Konstanze Friedel's outstanding work on *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, for example, considers the temporal elements of salvation. From its very title, *Zeitroman und Heilsgeschichte*, we see that concepts of history and salvation are considered mostly temporal events, while the setting of the novel—post-war Germany—as well as the emphasis on community and physical journey, fall into the background. This gap in Langgässer scholarship is especially noteworthy when we consider her very special relationship to nature (including ecology) along with geographical and political boundaries (all of her novels—*Gang durch das Ried* (1936), *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* (1946), and *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* (1950)—include

¹⁸⁸ “Pilgrimage is journey to places where divine human encounter has taken place [...] it is travel to the dwelling places of the saints. [...] Secondly, pilgrimage is about journey. It reminds those travelling that their lives are a journey to God: the pilgrimage is symbolic of that larger journey. [...] The third ingredient of pilgrimage, an eschatological one, which is about destination and the consummation of all things in Christ.” Inge, John. *A Christian Theology of Place*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003. 92.

some sort of personal development mapped on a geographical journey), and her attention to racial categories, where a number of her works focus on baptized Jewish protagonists. Spatial relationships that make up ecologies, environments, and communities are central to Langgässer's theology and personal theory of fiction's function.

Pilgrimage as a Liminal Phenomenon

Victor and Edith Turner adapted Arnold van Gennep's three stages of the *rites de passage* in their seminal work *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* to describe the process of the pilgrimage. *Separation*, *limen* or *margin*, and *aggregation* clarify the spatiotemporal social development of individuals as they move from childhood to adulthood and toward total membership within a community.¹⁸⁹ Turner adapts the stages of the *rites* to the pilgrimage, where the three stages correspond to departure from one place, the experience of the pilgrimage in between places, and the collection of experiences and the changes to daily life those experiences make after their return. The liminal experience of the pilgrimage, with all its transgressions, enables change by reestablishing communities. Pilgrimage

has some of the attributes of liminality in passage rites: release from mundane structure; homogenization of status; simplicity of dress and behavior; *communitas*; ordeal; reflection on the meaning of basic religious and cultural values; ritualized enactment of correspondences between religious paradigms and shared human experiences; emergence of the

¹⁸⁹ Van Gennep "paved the way for future studies of all processes of spatiotemporal social or individual change." Turner, Victor and Edith Turner. "Chapter One. Introduction: Pilgrimage as a Liminal Phenomenon." *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture. Anthropological Perspectives*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978. 2.

integral person from multiple personae; movement from a mundane center to a sacred periphery which suddenly, transiently, becomes central for the individual, an axis mundi of his faith; movement itself, a symbol of *communitas*, which changes with time, as against stasis, which represents structure; individuality posed against the institutionalized milieu. (Turner, 34)

Pilgrimage transgresses boundaries and transposes individual and community identities through external movement. The individual moves between two places, where the individual leaves the profane and re-centers on the sacred. External movement mirrors internal movement, where the individual re-centers on a new faith. The movement transmutes multiple identities and creates a new community through the shared experience.

Part of the pilgrimage's redemptive work is the reestablishment of community. The journey helps pilgrims work through existential questions¹⁹⁰ of identity, explore how the individual has acted in the past, and establish new patterns and relational connections. The community can be understood as a body, as the Church is described in multiple epistles in the New Testament.¹⁹¹ The Church, however, is not just *a* body, but *the* body—Christ's body. As such, the church community functions as one entity: interactions with the world are described in terms of a body acting and interacting with its surroundings. The body metaphor establishes a connection between the spiritual and

¹⁹⁰ “[P]ilgrimage has remained both a practical expression of religious faith and also an image applied down the ages to the journey of human life and existence. [...] The broader understanding of pilgrimage, however, which used the term as a way of understanding one's life, remained an image rich in its resonances.” Platten, Stephen. *Pilgrims*. London: Harper Collins, 1996. 12-14.

¹⁹¹ See: “Colossians 1:24,” “1 Corinthians 12:27,” and “Ephesians 5:30.” *Holy Bible: The New King James Version, Containing the Old and New Testaments*. Nashville: T. Nelson, 1982.

physical worlds, which are separate entities, but indistinguishable from one another. The material and spiritual worlds are completely married to one another, just as the divine and human are married in Christ through the Incarnation.

The presence of the body of Christ, both through the Church and through the Incarnation, establishes the importance of the created world. Starting with the creation myth featured in Langgässer's work, God relates to space, and Christ has agency in this creative act.¹⁹² The Incarnation, where Christ was born human, lived, and died, means that space has been Christified even into daily interactions, and the crucifixion redeems all of creation. As we learn to talk about the body and its relation to space through the Incarnation,

we must [...] reassert the importance of place [...]. The two are inseparable, since place is always there at the first level of human experience: just as there is no experience of place without body, so there is no experience of body without place. It is fascinating that although the importance of the body is increasingly recognized in theology and other disciplines, the obvious interrelationship between place and body, and therefore the importance of place itself in human experience, is scarcely commented on in theology. (Inge, 53)

Langgässer devotes particular attention to the materiality of the places with which the pilgrims interact, in addition to the relationships these places host and foster. The body

¹⁹² “[I]t is more satisfactory to begin with an appreciation of sacramental encounters in which the material becomes a vehicle for God’s self-communication. [...] The role of place is essential. When places become associated with divine disclosure they become the defining coordinates of a sacred geography the function of which is to remind believers that they are to understand all their experience in the light of the creation of the world by God and its redemption in Jesus Christ. Sacramental encounters also have an eschatological dimension, since they reveal the reality of things as they will be.” Inge, John. *A Christian Theology of Place*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003. 91.

the pilgrims form helps reestablish a connection to place in a redemptive way that reimagines the Incarnation as the connection between individuals as well as between humanity and the divine.

Pilgrimage as Photograph: Capturing the Moment, Framing the Narrative

The story uses a series of frames; a photograph regarded at the opening of the novel is not taken until the end of the novel, near the conclusion of the pilgrimage. The photograph freezes the pilgrims in time and introduces us to the central characters. Photographs enjoy a unique relationship with a referent, as a camera captures a specific moment in time,¹⁹³ and the photograph is an enduring record of that moment across time. A sort of relic, the image travels across space and time, and points back to the precise moment of a singular intersection of place and moment. The time (*Zeitpunkt*) is captured on a summer's day after the conquest (*Eroberung*) of the shattered capital. Other language in the passage refers not only to the time, but the placement: the connection between the pilgrims is at a specific *Schnittpunkt* (*Argonautenfahrt*, 7). These markers are specific, but the photograph transcends the demarcations of the specific instant, even as it refers to that moment.

The photograph serves as an emblem in the opening scene of the book when Ewald sits in Berlin and reflects on the photograph and when it was taken; the tale of its production near the end of the journey is told near the novel's conclusion.¹⁹⁴ In the final

¹⁹³ See Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* for a thorough treatment of the relationship between photograph and referent: Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.

¹⁹⁴ Just after the Argonauts have crossed the lake and before they enter Anastasiendorf, Ewald encourages am Ende to remain with the group until the photograph can be taken: "Bleiben sie wenigstens morgen noch, bis das Reisebildchen von Ihnen allen geknipst worden ist, Herr Am Ende", fügte er noch hinzu.

pages when the photo is taken, the reader is brought full circle, back to the first pages.

The object's presence within time, itself a capture of a specific moment within a tangible medium, offers a counter-linear means of reading the pilgrims' story, underscoring the novel's cyclical, non-linear structure of the novel. The cyclical structure mimics the function of memory, repeated by each character to help define their atoning acts.

The photograph also reminds the pilgrims that, in their quest, the divine constantly safeguards them. After the photograph is taken, Patachon¹⁹⁵ places the camera in her bag, with the warning that Ewald's bag might be robbed. The bag, bearing, 'Ata, Imi, Persil' (*Argonautenfahrt*, 301), is described as "weltlich"—profane and temporal. Patachon claims that if someone were to stop the group, the camera would be stolen from Ewald: "Und wenn Ihnen unterwegs etwas zustößt – ich meine, wenn Ihnen der Rucksack geleert wird – haben Sie die Gewißheit, daß sie sicher ankommen wird" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 301). In her keeping, the camera will make it to Anastasiendorf. Surprised, Ewald asks whether hers would be emptied. "Nein", behauptete Patachon" comes the response (*Argonautenfahrt*, 301). Subsequent events, including Beifuß's murder, demonstrate the nun's wisdom and faith.

Proving the pilgrims' ability to look out for one another within their representative community, even in death, Beifuß willingly sacrifices himself as a second Christ-type. Beifuß is killed saving Lotte from a Russian soldier who wants to rob and rape her. Patachon's offer to carry the camera, including the film and the recently taken

'Auch Sie nehmen sicher gerne ein kleines Andenken mit. Eine – Erinnerung. Sobald ich es später entwickelt habe, schicke ich es Ihnen zu'" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 248).

¹⁹⁵ In addition to the reference to the Finnish comedians Pat and Patachon, the word *Patachon* also means "coachdriver" in French. As a leader, Patachon, along with Pat, helps determine the path of the pilgrims and also keeps them moving along collectively.

photograph, suggests that while Beifuß does not make it to Anastasiendorf, his likeness does. The negative and the photograph, which reveals the good and evil of the world, become a symbol for the group. The layers of representation all point to the transcendental import of the group's undertaking, and the importance not of personal survival, but moving from one world to the next.

The photograph, in addition to its transcendental significance, serves as a physical and visual frame for the story. Before the protagonists appear in the flesh, their likenesses, captured on paper through the reaction of light and chemicals, presents the portrait, here photogenic and soon to be literary. The contrast of the relationship to time—depicted through the picture as a frozen instant and through the text as a progress across the landscape—underscores the varied connections between time, the readers, and fictions present in the novel; it also creates a theory of time for Langgässer and her Christian poetics. Here we find a concrete example of Langgässer's theory of Christian writing in fiction, reproduced by the photograph within the fictional work.

“Das reizvoll zusammengeraffte, aber schlecht belichtete Foto” suggests partial revelation of a fuller image. The description continues and, preceding the naming of the seven pilgrims and information about their specific experience, gives a far-reaching view of what the photograph is and how it relates the story(s): “Es zeigt jeden Teilnehmer wie von dem Auge eines allwissenden Gottes betroffen und wie zufällig von seinem Finger in dem gleichen Atemzug angerührt und geheimnisvoll festgehalten.”¹⁹⁶ The eye of God, capable of seeing all times and all actions, dissects the moment and sees to the heart of

¹⁹⁶ *Argonautenfahrt*, 7. This is not the only instance that the photograph relates to a divine perspective. As the photograph is taken much later in the novel, a shift occurs: “ihn (den Schuh) perspektivisch dadurch vergrößernd und zum Symbol dieser Reise machend, in der sich plötzlich das Auge Gottes vor die Linse der Kamera schob” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 283).

the matter by capturing, like the photograph, a moment (“im gleichen Atemzug”), where the hand of God both freezes and inspires the image and the events which cause it to transpire. The photograph shows how the divine interacts with the profane; the entire story is steered by God’s hand. The physical characteristics of these figures, stopped not in an “Augenblick” but rather in the same “Atemzug,” emphasize the single corporality of the whole group. The physical breath, like God’s breath giving life to humankind at creation, connects the human experience in the novel with human all experience, and it connects all human experience with the divine.

Frau Levi-Jeschower is the focal point of the photograph, and her hands are at the ready to unknot the laces of a shoe:

Auf diese Weise wird jener Schuh zum Symbol der Wanderschaft überhaupt und im besonderen dieser Reise; einer reichlich mißglückten und mühsamen Wahlfahrt mit dem Drum und Dran von Gequengel und Unzufriedenheit, von Zufall und Absicht, Glück und Verhängnis, von dem Hufeisen und der Katze mitten auf dem Weg, kurz und gut: von all diesen Ingredienzien, die jeder, je nach Temperament, auf seine Weise benennt und einzuordnen pflegt. (*Argonautenfahrt*, 9)

The knotted laces serve as a spatial metaphor for the conflicts and difficulties the pilgrimage entails. As an object, it is both linear and enclosed in itself; the temporal element associated in unknotting the lace, here captured in a moment, helps demonstrate the progress made along the length of the lace as the knots are worked out.

The photograph, like the shoelace knotted into itself, continues to be a focal point for the characters and frames the pilgrims’ experience, connecting the various stories.

Ewald reflects on the photographic likeness of the two nuns. Dressed in the same black and white habits so that they resemble “Stubenfliegen,” they are indistinguishable from one another, but that “für sie selber der Unterschied deutlich und im Auge des Schöpfers jede von ihnen vollkommen einmalig ist” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 10). The nuns have a defined relationship to the divine; throughout the journey they demonstrate God’s enduring presence and involvement, despite their unassuming appearances.

The narrator’s voice then explicates another of Ewald’s comments made a year later and while he contemplates another, different photograph. Here, he contemplates a different nun: “Sie gleichen sich alle in dem, was das Licht, wenn es im Bruchteil einer Sekunde die Konturen der Gegenstände umreißt, auf der Platte des Lichtbildners ausgespart hatte: nämlich im Negative. Würde man sie entwickeln, so käme in jeder eine Cabrini, das heißt, etwas völlig Neues und Originales heraus” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 10). Here Ewald is not looking at a picture of the two nuns Pat and Patachon. Instead, this is a photograph of Mother Cabrini. She, like Pat and Patachon, is also a nun; as a saint, Langgässer’s theory that individuality is most evident at the extremes of either good or evil is defined through a photograph. In the negative, the nuns’ black habits would appear white within the frame of the photograph; with its different ways of seeing, both the human and the divine are contrasted through the mechanics of photographic reproduction.

These competing narratives provide the background necessary for contemplating the photograph and its significance for the journeyers, and how the photograph was taken. Ewald Hauteville, described as a “träge[r] Träumer,” lifts the camera. “Ich möchte nicht nur Sie, sondern alle sich selbst entwenden...und Ihnen mit dem Bild, das ich mache, jene Aura aus Schuld und Strafe stehlen, die man das Negativ nennt”

(*Argonautenfahrt*, 300). The photographic act captures the negative, stealing the aura¹⁹⁷ of guilt and punishment that surrounds each and every one of the pilgrims. The *negative* is captured in the (film) negative, the bright light of day is captured as dark, and the shadows become light. The paradox is mystic, certainly, where the darkest points become the lightest, and a reversal of what appears to be the truth actually allows the viewer to capture the reality which hides beyond the surface.

The two nuns are not in the photograph; the nuns are the markers of the divine interaction with the earth. The narrator describes them in terms of their divine connection and the implications this has for their auras: “nur die beiden Nonnen fehlten – wahrscheinlich, weil die Allwissenheit Gottes sie mit oder ohne Aura als die, die sie eigentlich waren, erkannte und ihr künftiges Bild, das, ‘zusammengenommen’, wie Ewald Hauteville später sagte, ‘der heiligen Mutter Cabrini glich’, bereits vorausgesehen, in das reine, untäuschbar Licht entrückt und mit dem Siegel der Auserwählten¹⁹⁸ für immer bezeichnet hatte” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 301). The nuns need not be viewed through a photograph or its negative in order to demonstrate the import of their presence on earth for others. Their light belongs to the saints and reflects the nature of God. Like Enoch, Methuselah, or Elijah who have been taken up into heaven alive, they exhibit a sort of glow that signifies God’s touch on the physical body, a touch that transcends death. As the chosen, they bear the mark of God and his divine perspective of the world in which

¹⁹⁷ Compare, for example, to Benjamin’s concept *Aura* in respect to secularization and photographic reproduction; Langgässer’s inclusion of the numinous uses the photograph as proof. Benjamin, Walter. *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter Seiner Technischen Reproduzierbarkeit: Drei Studien zur Kunstsoziologie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963.

¹⁹⁸ Here, as elsewhere, Langgässer expropriates the term “the chosen people” which traditionally refers to the Jewish people, for baptized Christians.

the women move as part of their future picture—what awaits in the future is also part of God’s eternity.

Mutter Cabrini, Saint: “Bete für uns”

The two nuns, Pat and Patachon, are not the only holy sisters portrayed in the book. Ewald Hauteville, as mentioned above, compares these nuns with a third: Saint Francesca Xavier Cabrini. Hauteville, after having completed the pilgrimage about to be traced in the course of the novel, stands contemplating two photographs—one of them of Mother Cabrini, the other a photograph of the pilgrims (minus the two nuns) at the conclusion of their journey. Mother Cabrini, the first canonized saint from the United States of America,¹⁹⁹ was an Italian immigrant who served with other Italian immigrants in New York City. As a patron saint of immigrants, the homeless, orphaned children, and pilgrims, her presence in the text becomes manifest through her photograph.

The nature of photographs fosters a three-part reflection in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*. One is a retrospective look at the pilgrimage, another is the present moment Hauteville finds himself in, and the third is the forward-looking possibilities of Cabrini’s work. The temporal quality of film and its interaction with light become a statement on space and time that support the three times represented in the photograph. In the moment captured by the photograph, both space and time have no impact on the figures’ similarities. Moment captured by the photograph shows how light in the transient moment, in an instant, is just as enduring as the hand of God to those figures as it interacts with.

¹⁹⁹ “Franziska Xaviera Cabrini.” *Heilige und Patrone im Jahreslauf*. Edited by Vera Schaubert and Hanns Michael Schindler. München: Pattloch, 2001.

The reflection on this photograph of Cabrini moves to a direct address of the reader by the (yet) unidentified narrator. The voice carries complete authority, allowing for an omniscient perspective of Cabrini's character through her picture. Her interaction with the world mediates between opposites; she will be able to intercede for those who pray to her. Her countenance reveals a simple peasant woman with full cheeks; the only shadows on her face are "der Schatten des Mysteriums," further playing with the light and dark motif of the novel and alluding to the contrast of light and dark captured by photographs (*Argonautenfahrt*, 11). Throughout the novel, light does not equate with good nor dark with bad; the "shadow of the mystery" here suggests the presence of something not visible on its own, but reliant on light's illumination in order to be seen. Resonances and reflections point to the divine, where God's presence shines in little flickers, glints of light during dark times. The medial quality of her face also shows the role that she will play in the story as a representative figure for God's hand in the entire story.

Cabrini's own journey as a saint—from her sickly existence on earth, to her persistence in serving others, to her ability to intercede for others—belongs to the material world ("Materie"). The process and change of the material world characterizes Cabrini's relationship to fear and myth: "Vor dieser Auferstehung der Toten erzittert die Materie. Würde sie nur vor dem Tod erzittern, so wäre ihre Furcht noch begreiflich; aber daß sie vor der Verwandlung erzittert, bedeutet, daß in dieser Verwandlung die Materie gerichtet wird. Wovor die Materie also erzittert, ist der Tod, die Verwandlung und das Gericht" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 11). Cabrini stands on the other side of death, having passed through metamorphosis, and judgment—stages the pilgrims must progress through in order to atone for their transgressions. These three stages are variations of the three parts

of time in Langgässer's letter from 1923 about the crèche, here with a focus on the human side of the story. Here death (sin), the metamorphosis (Incarnation), and resurrection (judgment) all unfold to tell a story.

That Cabrini's life has moved through these stages, and that these stages are about to be presented within the pages of the book, make her the perfect mediator for helping the pilgrims move along their journey. As an immigrant herself, she moves "zwischen den Kontinenten des sterbenden Europa und der menschenwimmelnden USA; zwischen dem Bild der zerschmetterten Schönheit und dem Bild der morgenrötlichen Kraft; zwischen Anfang und Niedergang, Armut und Fülle" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 11). The narrator (speaking with the same voice which clarifies the mystical nature of the shadow of the mystery on her face) invokes Cabrini to intercede for them and for the narrator as well: "Heilige Mutter Cabrini! Wir bitten dich: bitte für uns!" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 12).

Who is this "us"? The "ganz Besiegten," the "Schuldbeladenen, deren Gesicht, aus dem starren Nacken heruntergezogen, bei den Füßen im Staube liegt" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 12). The narrator includes her voice (and the passive reader's voice) with those represented in the book—the characters who will represent the German people. The collective prayer—offered by the narrator and read by the reader in German—includes all the conquered who have kept their heads down, pretending not to notice the suffering of their neighbors. Their conquered state seems to parallel their need for being uplifted from the dirt where their gaze rests.

Mother Cabrini redirects the reader's gaze not only up, but West. Her picture becomes conflated with the image of the Statue of Liberty, and a paraphrase of the inscription on the statue, from the poem "The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus: "Give

me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. / Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, / I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”²⁰⁰ The sonnet was composed in response to the flight of Eastern European Jews from the pogroms. Langgässer references this poem in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*: “Mutter, nach deren schlichtem Bildnis sich die Blicke der Armen, der Hoffnungslosen gleich den Blicken der Auswanderer nach der Statue der Freiheit im Hafen kehren – aufgerichtete Säule der Kirche, an der die Mayflower festmacht und anlegt: jenes Schiff, das immer wieder den Duft und die Süße des traurigen Abendlandes zu geschichtlosen Küsten trägt” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 12). The combination of Cabrini and Lady Liberty associated with the Mayflower also conflates three groups of travelers: the story of the Argonaut’s ship looms in the background, while the immigrants’ ship pulls into Hudson River, past the Statue of Liberty, and the puritans who sought religious freedom in the New World on the Mayflower.

We see these combined images in Frau Levi-Jeschower’s children (*Argonautenfahrt*, 160). They represent the hope of rescue represented by the West. A daughter and two sons, all fleeing the Nazi regime, find safe havens in Australia, the United States, and England—all English-speaking Western countries. In Langgässer’s vision, the West promises safe harbors. The intercessory prayer to Cabrini for safe passage looks East and West—on the one side, safety in the West; on the other, the redemption of the German people who must atone for those left undefended and sent off to the camps in the East to be killed.

²⁰⁰ “The New Colossus.” American Studies at the University of Virginia. Accessed 14 May 2012. <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~cap/liberty/lazarus.html>

The East is associated with the concentration camps, and it also houses the predominantly Catholic populations in Upper Silesia and Poland. Further East lies Russia. Continued references to demonic Russian soldiers define the constant threat of rape from Russian soldiers.²⁰¹ The East represents a threat to women's bodies and a threat to Western freedom. Langgässer lived in West Berlin and then moved on to Rheinzaubern in the French zone in West Germany, where she passed away. Her books are read by censors in the West, and the political ideology must match up with those approving her books for printing when paper is scarce. Of course, this runs consistent with Langgässer's other assertions—she also expresses her suspicion of Communism and views it as directly oppositional to Christianity. Communism has banished Christianity from its borders, so it seems. Yet one story of Christianity's persistence, despite the political systems, disrupts these East-West dichotomies. Significantly, the final story of the entire novel—part of a fictional journal from Mamertus, the priest at Anastasiendorf, which lies south of Berlin—breaks the East-West axis.

Like the narrator from the opening pages who calls upon Cabrini to pray for everyone, Mamertus possesses an authoritative perspective. His relation to the pilgrims at the core of the text provides a frame of reference when the journey is just completed.

²⁰¹ Langgässer research would benefit from additional focus on the female figures, especially in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*. Rape as a consequence of war threatens female characters, no matter what their allegiance or level of religious dedication. As representatives of Germany, we see women's independence and physical, emotional integrity directly threatened by rape. In the case of a convent, where the nuns are in fact raped, a nun references the 19th chapter of Augustine's *City of God*, in which a discussion of the rape of nuns and their compromised honor forms the discussion. Romans point to Lucretia, who committed suicide after her husband's (and country's) enemy raped her as an honorable woman, while Augustine argues for her continued chastity and her intact honor since she was a victim and she therefore did not need to commit suicide to reinstate her honor. The nun in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, in alluding to Augustine, reminds the post-war reader of the need to carry on and affirms an identity greater than what the enemy might try to take or redefine. Female pilgrims' autonomy is threatened as well; in Lotte's case, the threat of a Russian soldier represents the experience of German women as the war on the Eastern front was lost. Ultimately, the socio-political representations of rape, particularly in post-war Germany, could be explored as Langgässer represents it, or as other authors choose to work through the specific war and post-war experiences, specifically in terms of the female within a national framework.

Like an arc turning back onto itself, he offers a perspective of how the Argonaut's journey has come full circle, and the cycle becomes visible and comprehensible to readers (*Argonautenfahrt*, 410). That Mamertus cut open the bounds of his journal to add his final lines of commentary also shows that the book remains unfinished and open to addenda, open to a continued story that continues experiencing revelation.

Barbara Rux and Vera (Sichlin): The German Non-response to Jewish Victims

In addition to the figure of Mutter Cabrini, the figure of Sichlin orients the pilgrimage so that both figures present only through the memories or references made by the characters on the pilgrimage. Ewald Hauteville, the character who held the photograph of Cabrini and the pilgrims at the start of the novel, also connects Sichlin to the pilgrimage, guides the pilgrims through the German countryside. Hauteville is a "sprechender Name"; the "high city" serves as an example to all who can see it. In *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, Hauteville exemplifies the German non-response to Jewish friends, neighbors, and family during the Nazi regime. Unlike Cabrini who helped the downtrodden, Hauteville did not help his cousin flee from the Nazis. Memory of his inaction becomes manifest in his conscience. His troubled mental state is reflected by his inability to remember a dream (*Argonautenfahrt*, 15). Upon great effort, he realizes that he dreamt of Barbara Rux, his mother's half-sister, a "zwerghaft verwachsenen Flatterwesen mit schwarzen Funkelaugen" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 16); her nicknames were "die Butt" or "die Ui-Ui" because of her ugliness. She and her daughter Vera (Sichlin/Sichelchen) haunt Hauteville's dreams; his difficulty in remembering his dream is followed by a sudden realization, "als ob sein Innerste ihm in dem Aufschlag Antwort

gegeben hätte.” The recognition is like the jump of a wild cat or a marten shying from the rungs of the ladder to the chicken coop (*Argonautenfahrt*, 15). Both of these are instinctual reactions, reflecting the dreamer’s instinctual repulsion from his malformed “mishap” of a relative and her fate.

Hauteville’s dream provides a surreal perspective of his failure to help his family. In the dream, Hauteville walks with his cousin, Vera; she walks faster and faster across the countryside, and he walks with his arm over her shoulder, until his movements “wesensverwandt mit ihr wären,” as if the two of them made up one body. As they race across the landscape together, Hauteville bids his cousin, “Sprich doch! Erzähle mir, wie es dort war” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 17). At first Vera asks where ‘dort’ is, and Hauteville can only say that she knows where, which she denies. She says that she “war ja überhaupt noch nicht da,” but that she will arrive there, most certainly, and then he will know “Ganz genau und im einzelnen [...] wie es dort drüben war.” The ensuing conversation centers around both the spatial and temporal elements of where Vera was during the Nazi regime. Hauteville’s request for a specific point of reference (“dort drüben”) is an attempt to map the intersection of space and time within dream space, where there is no continuity between space or time, and where these same elements exist without relationship to reality. “Sie gab keine Antwort mehr, und Hauteville hatte plötzlich, wie in steinalten Märchen, die magische Empfindung, ein verbotene Frage gestellt – oder verfehlt zu haben” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 17). The reference to the fairy tale and the supernatural importance of words come to the forefront. These are questions about knowledge and responsibility. What is fascinating about this exchange is that words are key to knowing, key to discovering the truth and yet, as represented by “dort drüben,” they are only able

to serve as a sign that points to the reality of the concentration camps. Incapable of talking about the camps and his cousin's certain death there, Hauteville can only allude to what he already knows. And his only way of understanding the situation is to refer to it, in a dream state, in terms of "here." Where is here in a dream? In his conversation with his cousin, Vera asks as much: "Dann, eine Ewigkeit war verstrichen, sagte das junge Mädchen: 'Was heißt: jetzt? Was heißt: hier? Dieses Jetzt war gestern und kommt wieder morgen als Gestern und Heute auf uns zu.' 'Und – hier? [...] Sage mir noch, was 'hier' heißt, Vera. Sage es mir genau!' 'Ach, hier ist nirgends und überall'" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 17). The combination of yesterday and tomorrow, along with today—this is a folding of time that creates on single moment that resonates with eternity. The moment is both elusive and eternally present, as are the specific actions and events which took place at any point in time. It is in the dream, where time does not have a linear chronology, that the relationship of Vera's murder in the concentration camps can be discussed in relation to the German people—so that, as the story progresses, repentance for past acts and omissions matters for the "today" of the story and beyond into the future of Germany.

The ensuing conversation, still in the dream, reveals Hauteville's uncomfortable relationship to his cousin: he asks her if he is culpable for her murder. She does not answer, even after he articulates that he could have saved her, had he only kept her hidden for a year (*Argonautenfahrt*, 18). Hauteville recognizes that he was too much a coward to offer his cousin safety. With this recognition, the two continue their dream-race across the countryside; the landscape morphs into a landscape more surreal, with cliffs and waterfalls and houses that appear to be bombed-out shells. The journey remains undefined by a clear geography as the two race across the globe. They pass by cloisters

and pagodas, the Niagara Falls, and finally come to the upper Indus River, and over Borneo, where graves are marked with bamboo: “So erbaute sich in vielerlei Formen ein mächtiger Totenbezirk” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 18). The whole of the world becomes a domain of death. Without explanation, they are suddenly back in Berlin, in a field of ruins. The last of the bombing sirens cover the landscape, compared to Gog and Magog, delineating the outermost periphery “für immer” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 19). The reference to Gog and Magog, from Revelation 20:8, places all the nations of the earth under Satan’s rule. Here, Hauteville’s dream is prophetic, connecting all the nations of the earth with Germany’s ruins. While Germany serves as the setting for this one story, its position in the world is not unique. Any part of the world could have been the setting for the story; the war is not singled out but kept in a context where the world is connected with another realm, and forces of good and evil battle for control.

As Hauteville awakens, unable to speak, he contemplates the night sky. The natural world reflects the transience of the dream he just experienced: the waves in the water, the moon and the clouds, all embody “Verwandlung” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 20), the constant change prevalent in the dream. This reminds him that these objects are interchangeable; like life, they are “verwechselbar wie Gestern und Heute geworden; alles war gleichzeitig, gleichwichtig” and remain different manifestations of the same phenomenon, both physically and temporally (*Argonautenfahrt*, 20).

The Individuals Who Make Up Community in Märkische Argonautenfahrt

Each of the individuals who go on pilgrimage to Anastasiendorf could easily be exchanged for another, but each individual represents a particular sin or shortcoming of

the German people.²⁰² As such, the characters are types—models—for the reader. The reader therefore ought to identify with the foibles of at least one character. By following along the characters' journey, the reader will learn from the characters' experiences. At the novel's conclusion, characters and readers will not only have learned how to deal with Germany's past, but also formed a new community that re-inhabits the empty space left by the fallen Nazi regime.

Levi-Jeschower: The Baptized Jew and the Holocaust; Rachel and Her Children

Flora and Arthur Levi-Jeschower are two of the three main Jewish figures in the novel (the third being Flora's classmate, Vera, who is also Hauteville's half-Jewish cousin). As an older couple with grown children, they survived the Holocaust by taking refuge at Anastasiendorf. Both are baptized Jews (a recognizable figure; in fact, all of Langgässer's Jews have been baptized).²⁰³ During the course of the pilgrimage, Arthur Levi-Jeschower reveals that the Jewish sin was pride, and this pride connects them to the greater German sin of idolatry (*Argonautenfahrt*, 220). Of course, Levi-Jeschower's assessment of German sin is only one of many German sins represented by the pilgrims. To do penance for these sins, a Jewish couple must join in the pilgrimage with other Germans.

Flora and Arthur Levi-Jeschower represent the Jewish experience in Germany, even though (or especially because) they are baptized. Flora is Rachel, weeping for her

²⁰² Johanna Behrendt analyzes the characters as individuals and as pairs, where each pair shows two sides of the same "German" sin: Behrendt, Johanna E. *Die Einheit von Elisabeth Langgässers Weltbild in der Märkischen Argonautenfahrt*. Ann Arbor, Mich: University Microfilms, 1974. 11-14.

²⁰³ See Chapter 2 on Baptism, which also addresses Langgässer's Jewish father and his baptized Catholic identity.

children, and Arthur is an “eternal Job;” each is a typology drawn from the Bible. Flora, as Rachel, represents one of the women who is the foundation of Israel: Rachel is Jacob’s wife.²⁰⁴ Rachel, driven into exile, cries over her children; her escape from her father is one early example of the Jewish people fleeing persecution and seeking one place to settle. The Jeremiah citation reappears in Matthew 2:18, as part of the retelling of Christ’s nativity. In Matthew, the story is part of the story of another flight, where Mary and Joseph flee with Jesus to Egypt in order to escape Herod, who is systematically killing all male children aged two or three and younger²⁰⁵ through a focused genocide. Here the Rachel figure stands in for all Jewish women who have survived their murdered children and Herod, a tyrant in government,²⁰⁶ murdering children in order to ensure his own rule, stands in for Hitler.

Job is Arthur’s biblical predecessor. Like Rachel, Job loses his children to forces beyond his control. Friedrich am Ende compares Arthur to Job, the long-suffering figure of the Old Testament. Am Ende evaluates Levi-Jeschower’s sin as not taking action in his own life, other than to scrape his wounds, “Doch Hiob ergibt sich. Er kratzt und handelt, indem er sich ergibt. Dieses bißchen Kratzen: handeln, verkaufen und auf die Perle

²⁰⁴ According to Jeremiah 31:15: “Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.” *Holy Bible: The New King James Version, Containing the Old and New Testaments*. Nashville: T. Nelson, 1982.

²⁰⁵ Matthew 2: 16-18: “Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, “In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.”” *Holy Bible: The New King James Version, Containing the Old and New Testaments*. Nashville: T. Nelson, 1982.

²⁰⁶ One of many motives Konrad Ackermann finds in *Hochland* articles published during the Third Reich includes Herod standing in for Hitler. See: Ackermann, Konrad. *Der Widerstand der Monatsschrift Hochland gegen den Nationalsozialismus*. München: Kösel-Verlag, 1965.

hoffen mitten im Schmutz und Dung—es ist die Bewegung, welche nicht zuläßt, daß das Hin und Her zwischen Gott und dem Satan, daß die Hoffnung auf eine Erlösung gerinnt, auf den Messias, den Gott im Fleisch, den fleischgewordenen Gott” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 246). Levi-Jeschower’s self-interest keeps from realizing the full implication of his baptism: the hope of the Messiah coming again. As he learns to see the Incarnation in others and fulfill his baptismal covenant, the hope of being blessed with the restoration of even more children, of life beyond suffering, comes to Arthur. He finds this in the community of the pilgrimage.

Irene von Dörfer: Cultivating Responsibility

Irene von Dörfer freely chooses to go to Anastasiendorf, where her Aunt Demetria is the prioress. Irene’s mother is Demetria’s sister. Irene understands her journey to see her aunt as an opportunity to seek forgiveness and begin reconciliation. In the convent, Demetria has been living a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience.²⁰⁷ During the war, Irene had been in a concentration camp for women because she was a Communist and part of the resistance.

While Irene was against the Nazis, her relationship to Jewish victims of the Holocaust is not a simple one. Confronted by the Levi-Jeschowers, Irene wants to turn around and return home because she has had enough of the “jüdischen Elend [...] Auch, wenn es dem Krematorium entgangen und für das nächste Massaker aufbewahrt worden ist” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 134). She will later demonstrate personal growth; by later even

²⁰⁷ See: Underhill, Evelyn. “Detachment.” *Mysticism*. Stilwell, KS: Digireads, 2005. 141-149. Underhill explains how the values of chastity, poverty, and obedience practiced within monastic life also lend themselves well to the mystic life, where detachment from the world leads to mystic union. See also: Underhill, Evelyn. *The Life of the Spirit and the Life of To-day*. New York: E .P. Dutton, 1922. 94.

asking the question if the reality of genocide matters, she demonstrates her own growth in remembering, commemorating the victims by continuing on the journey.

Frau von Dörfer, Irene's mother, objects to her daughter's decision to travel to Anastasiendorf. Frau von Dörfer cannot see past her own suffering, like most of the German people who could see only their own suffering. She sees her own current life and situation as penance for making the wrong decision in her past life (*Argonautenfahrt*, 39); she idealizes the life of her sister, the nun, as full of joy and ease. Life was difficult for Frau von Dörfer. Her husband, who hid weapons for the Nazis, was killed by Russian troops because Irene, who speaks Russian, was not there to translate and make excuses for him. Irene von Dörfer, in her missed role, could have been a Persephone (*Argonautenfahrt*, 45), descending into Hades to save her family.

At the war's end, Irene fights with her mother about her previous associations with the Russians and Irene's failure to help her own family. The Russian connection here demonizes the Russians. Her family despises them because they killed her father. Yet Irene stands by her love of the people, showing that she also refuses to demonize them, but rather continues loving them "leidenschaftlich" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 57). As they fight, the mother and daughter wear figurative masks as though they were playing roles in a tragedy. In the Greek tradition, masks show the interchangeable quality of the various actors within their specific roles. This reference to masks underscores the interchangeable quality of each of Langgässer's characters, and reminds the reader that the individual does not matter, but that the individuals function as types the reader can recognize and identify with.

Bodily Suffering, Soul Suffering: Lotte Corneli's Story

When we first meet Lotte at the conclusion of Ewald Hauteville's whirlwind dream accompanied by cousin Vera, we see a different reaction to the German non-response than the one her brother Ewald had. Hers is the experience of a gentile wife (Lotte) married to a Jewish man (Corneli) deported to the East. When Ewald awakens from his nightmare, he hears Lotte whimpering in the next room and tries to comfort her. She asks him whether he has had a difficult time sleeping because of the moonlight as well, or if he is in pain. Her inquiry, an intentional focus on another individual, becomes a way of alleviating her own internal pain: "Indem sie sich an den Andern verlor, schwächte der Schmerz in ihrem Innern fast unmerklich ab" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 23). The narrator then comments that asking about emotional pain is a necessary for revealing ("Entblösung") emotional suffering. This conversation, on the heels of Hauteville's own dream, reveals anguish over Hauteville's omission to care for his cousin, and explores the difficulty of openly discussing emotional malaise. The physical becomes a means for understanding the deeper, verbally inaccessible emotional and spiritual scarring left at the end of the war. The revelatory nature of this wound is like leprosy deadening the nerves and muting the ability to feel.²⁰⁸ Unstopped by pain, the leper can scratch all the way down to the bone without feeling a thing. The language of disease, of rotting flesh and skin eroded to expose the structure underneath, provides a tangible metaphor for understanding the spiritual post-war disease the body of the German people experiences.

An interesting conflation of two images—Hauteville comforting his sister by stroking her cheek mirrors Hauteville stroking Vera's cheek in the dream. While the two

²⁰⁸ Physical pain as an embodiment for spiritual suffering recurs in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*. Compare Hauteville's experience with am Ende's description of Levi-Jeschower in *Levi-Jeschower: The Baptized Jew and the Holocaust; Rachel and Her Children*, above.

women had different experiences, Lotte's husband, Corneli, a Jew, was taken to a camp in the East, while Vera herself perished in a camp. Together, both of their bodies, their cheeks, their crying and whimpering, represent a single, shared suffering. Their need for comfort, and Hauteville's inability to ease their suffering, remains incomprehensible to Hauteville (*Argonautenfahrt*, 24). The implication of this physical description is that this aching pain the women experience, and that Hauteville cannot mitigate, is also an emotional pain that must be addressed and healed. As Lotte isolates herself by leaving the bed, Ewald calls her back by telling her that he *is* indeed in pain and that he needs her to rub his back. By recognizing her physical pain and claiming his own need for comfort, he can set the stage for addressing her emotional pain.

The two begin to plan for the future, and a transformation takes place in Ewald. As he plans future repairs to the neglected house (another physical manifestation of a deeper rooted problem), he loses himself in an enchanted state. This state offers a new structure, "eines Gebildes, das nicht nur die Not, sondern, im Übersprung dieser Not, ein neues Gemeinschaftsgefühl geboren, eine Art von traumhafter Kristallisierung des gegenwärtigen Zustands hatte entstehen lassen" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 26). His dream and Lotte's suffering come together in the present time. A sense of community (bound by space) results from this synthesis. This community creates a space for working through affliction; the relationship between brother and sister models the communal approach toward the malaise that individuals experience and isolates them. As though the past were simply a neglect of community, they are like the neglected house ready to be repaired.

As the two siblings set the stage for the pilgrimage, they explore the state of Germany through their own dreamlike pain and need for healing. They discuss how a bat

fluttering about the house is like an Endymion, and this reminds Ewald of his dream of Barbara Rux and Vera. The bat, they decide, is the force, a *Motiv*, that instructs Ewald to go on a pilgrimage to repent for his sin of omission, and for Lotte to seek her lost husband (*Argonautenfahrt*, 29).²⁰⁹ The motif alludes to a sonata, “Oberon,” invoking enchantment. The enchantment references the German people who willingly participated in a fascist regime. Lotte feels that she is “nicht unschuldig” for taking part in “ein Zauber.” The persistent motif of the bat and the rattle constantly reminds her of her role (*Argonautenfahrt*, 28).

With Lotte partially acknowledging her culpability and Ewald acknowledging his responsibility through his dream, Ewald summarizes the connections of the last few pages, and offers the reason for the unfolding journey: “Wenn Vera tot ist, bin ich der Mörder, denn ich hätte sie retten können. [...] Ich will büßen. Ich will den Muschelhut nehmen, den Wanderstab und den Muschelhut und nach Anastasiendorf gehen” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 29). The scarab and the staff are pilgrim’s totems. In taking them up, Hauteville is willing to take part in an aesthetic practice to make amends for his role in Vera’s murder. While Hauteville becomes active to address his culpability, Lotte’s language remains passive, lacking accountability and removing herself from the situation of the past eleven years as much as possible.

Ewald’s desire to journey to a cloister untouched by war, where he can go to confession and take part in the daily hours, threatens Lotte who is unsure of what course

²⁰⁹ Behrendt focuses her analysis of the bat as a motif on the word “Karfreitagsratsche,” where the rattle replaces the ringing of the church bells during Good Friday and Holy Saturday. The rattle is therefore associated with the suffering and death of Christ before the resurrection. The physical and human suffering of Lotte becomes her impetus for going on the pilgrimage, while Ewald’s motivation is his dream. See: Behrendt, Johanna E. *Die Einheit von Elisabeth Langgässers Weltbild in der Märkischen Argonautenfahrt*. Ann Arbor, Mich: University Microfilms, 1974. 19-20.

she should take. She concludes that “Erinnyen,” the furies, whip him on and make him suffer (*Argonautenfahrt*, 29). Lotte, while acknowledging that she was not guiltless, does not willingly take on Ewald’s need for confession or for absolution. He continues the language of magic, of enchantment, acknowledging Lotte’s passive response and attempt to dismiss her own complicity, just as one who is bewitched is acted upon. Ewald’s acknowledgement does not only overcome the past, but is also meant to be a preventative measure for the future: “Wir sollten exorzisiert werden, Lotte, und Wachen aufstellen, daß er [the demon] nicht mit sieben anderen wiederkehrt und es ärger treibt als zuvor” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 31). The exorcism is necessary for healing, for moving forward and not building on the ruins of the past. Lotte, exhausted, lies down in the moonlight, leaving her face in the shadows. After Ewald lays his hand on her forehead—another example of physical touch effecting emotional connection or change—Lotte has a vision of the journey ahead. Through the vision, she knows that the way will not be easy. They will make their way on foot past tanks and ruins. She sees the members of the group already introduced to the reader through the photograph. There will be old and young, a married couple, and a soldier. She also sees an angel with them, who we will discover is the nuns, Pat and Patachon (*Argonautenfahrt*, 31).

The journey will be difficult, traversing physical and emotional obstacles. Every character will have to find his or her way as an individual and as part of a collective. In this journey, the material world plays a key role, and this is best exemplified through Friedrich am Ende, a soldier returned from the East, who attempts to deny any possible connection between the physical and the spiritual.

Friedrich am Ende, the Nihilist Soldier and the Rejection of the Material World

Friedrich am Ende's journey exemplifies the choices each person makes in the course of their lives, and demonstrates the spiritual and physical elements of pilgrimage particularly well. Am Ende contemplates breaking away from the group and going his own way. He minimizes the significance of this moral and spiritual journey through his lack of interest in the physical one, ignoring the importance of the metaphors of physical journeys in favor of an interior one only. "Das Ziel liegt in uns" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 299), he asserts and, further, that the interior journey alone is enough to find the center (*Nabel*) of the world. Irene elaborates am Ende's mystic-oriental concept: "Er [who stands at the center of the world] hat sein Bewußtsein ausgelöscht und mit dem Bewußtsein die Welt. Innen und Außen fallen zusammen, das Alles und das Nichts" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 300). The mystic concept is not wrong, but the relativization that places the individual at the center is. Rather than am Ende's mysticism resulting in union with God, it results only in nihilism. Am Ende misses the divine role central to his quest. For the reader, who can see what am Ende cannot comprehend, the divisions between the individual's consciousness and the world fall away.

Friedrich am Ende, with his Calvinist tendencies, has a deep-rooted distrust of the material world, including all aspects of the pilgrimage and especially the landscape the pilgrims interact with and pass through. He attempts to separate the spiritual and material worlds, as a Manichean or a Gnostic would. As a result, the narrator clarifies, he has a deep mistrust of the perceived distance between body and soul and so remains speechless, horrified before a depiction of Christ's Incarnation, where body and spirit are married. The encounter is described as a mystic experience, where body and spirit become

indistinguishable from one another. Friedrich am Ende practices a mysticism with its root in nihilism (not Christianity), where there is a complete rejection of the body. Unlike the true mystic experience of Christ's Incarnation, Friedrich am Ende's pseudo-spiritual practice is compared to, and rejected as, Eastern mysticism.

The solid Friedrich am Ende represents the nihilistic ends of Europe. In the beginning of the story, he is recently returned from prison in the East, and he survives in the basement ruins of a building. Here is where his story in the novel begins; his role in the war is never mentioned beyond the fact that he fought. Alone in the empty ruins, am Ende experiences loneliness and feels emptied. These buildings represent his existential state, whereas the mere hull of a human being, he stands between "Sein und Nichtsein, Gestern und Morgen, Zerfall und Erinnerung" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 33). His movement into the building disturbs this delicate balance, so that even as he tries not to reflect on his situation, he finds that he must return to feeling that he is not simply empty, but has been emptied, so that he is not the active party, but has been acted upon.

Am Ende's one talisman, a bead he found on the floor of a chapel, is made of mountain crystal and unthinkingly plucked from the ruins. He wears it tied around his neck. The crystal rolled between his hands provides him with a mystical experience; it helps him enter an ecstatic state, where he steps outside of the circle of life and death in "pure ecstasy" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 34). But the same bead that provides him with an escape also connects him to the other pilgrims, because the ball is in fact the bead from a Russian monk's rosary.

The ball represents memory (*Memoria*) and his attempts to forget his experiences, to separate himself from earthly existence. Even the talisman he has chosen to help

himself escape becomes a means of grace. When the group encounters a destroyed village in the course of their pilgrimage, Irene and Ewald Hauteville both recall the world before the destruction of war through objects damaged by the war. The objects' current forms reference the world before the destruction. Friedrich am Ende experiences a similar metaphysical, memory-driven moment where he remembers how he first found the bead: "Eine Kugel aus Bergkristall rollte [ihm...] vor die Füße; sie war durchlöchert, ihre Geschwister, die dem gleichen Rosenkranz angehört hatten, waren in alle Welt zerstreut und wußten nichts mehr von der frommen Übung, der sie früher verpflichtet waren" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 304). Am Ende, about to pick up the crystal, pauses because of some greater, numinous power. Here, the connection between the object—a single bead on a rosary—is made with the other beads on the rosary. Although the war has pulled the rosary apart, it can still be brought back together. We see this through the prayer of the two nuns who accompany the pilgrims and the rosaries they carry by their sides as part of their daily wear.

The rosary as an object figures as a recurring motif that plays a central role in keeping the pilgrims together. The connection becomes evident when Friedrich am Ende declares his desire to leave the group before reaching their destination. Patachon asserts that am Ende will not be asked whether he wanted to continue with the group to its destination and, with her verbal declaration, "fuhr bei der siebenten Perle fort, ihr Rosenkranzgesetzchen zu beten, als sei das unterbrochene Ave ein Teil ihrer Antwort gewesen" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 292-293). The seventh bead—which represents am Ende, the seventh pilgrim—is connected to the other beads through the rosary. The prayer the nun was speaking, momentarily interrupted by am Ende's request, is completed. The act

of prayer—both the words and the physical act of moving through the rosary—show the process of the journey. The rosary—both the individual bead am Ende holds in his hand and the complete string of beads in Patachon’s rosary—pull together the very physical and spiritual sides of am Ende; he feels how his own “Umriß” of flesh pushes against the conception of himself as a nihilist (*Argonautenfahrt*, 293). Borders come into contact with one another rather than simply dissolving into nothing. The act of prayer drives through these separations of soul and material, “in das Nichtsein und zu dem Mittelpunkt der Leere hinunterführte, gaben die Perlen des Rosenkranzes, indem sie zurückflossen bis zu dem Kreuz, das ihr Ausgang gewesen war” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 293). The transcendence of borders existentially connects the cross at the beginning and end of the rosary with the very core of am Ende’s being. Here, his “Ende” connects with his beginning; the figure of the rosary, always returning to its beginning, always returning to the cross, represents a unity of the physical and the spiritual rather than their divorce. This reaffirms the importance of both body and soul together and underscores why the physical pilgrimage connects with with spiritual progress. The rosary, strung together, stresses the connection between place, movement, and spiritual development.

As attached to the found object as he is, by the end of the journey am Ende rejects the bead, which he has finally recognized as part of a rosary after watching the nuns pray. Am Ende declares that he wants this bead, taken from him, as “Sie ist mir kein Mittel, mich mit ihr von mir selbst zu befreien, sondern ein Ärgernis. Würde ich dieser Kugel folgen, so käme ich zu dem Kreuz” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 407). Incidentally, am Ende has also tried to separate from the other pilgrims, claiming to have never wanted to be part of the group. Like the bead, still recognizable as part of the rosary and therefore sacred, am

Ende belongs with the pilgrims, even if he wishes he could disassociate himself from the group and go his own way. Even as Friedrich am Ende tries to separate himself, the rosary maintains its sacred character. He tried to use the sacred object “um den Ort zu verlassen, an welchem das Wort einst Fleisch geworden war.” He finds that the object returns to the Incarnation’s hand, demonstrating that the created world, all of material, cannot be removed from divine control, even as his practice tries to pull apart the binds that connect the very fabric of the universe (*Argonautenfahrt*, 35).

The priest instructs the nun Perpetua—constant without interruption—to take the bead from am Ende because “Das Kind auf dem Arm unserer Muttergottes hält schon lange das Händchen auf” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 407). The gesture of the Christ child, here representing the Incarnation (rather than the sacrifice of the crucifixion) on the lap of his mother, holds his hand out for the bead, ready to hold the representation of—and, because of a metaphysical connection—the actual world. This shows how the material world points to the spiritual world, as well as to a fore-ordained connection between Christ who holds this sphere in his hand, am Ende’s journey to Anastasiendorf, and finally, the completion of the pilgrimage and the dissolution of the “geheimnisvolle” band. Linked together, the pilgrims cannot separate to go their own ways. While this may read as a negative image of pre-destination, it does somewhat accurately reflect the communal, rather than the individual, state of the German people in their connection to one another.

The journey ends with images of redemption even as “perpetual sorrow,” represented by the nuns Perpetua and Dolores, has accompanied them. The bead, taken from ruins, returns to form a complete image of the Incarnation, where divine in human

form redeems the world through form. With this image, and the final Easter story that closes the frame narrative and concludes the novel, the Incarnation combines with the Cross and Resurrection. Together, the three shed a light on the theological connections within the group and with God forged during the pilgrimage, and they conclude with hope for the future.

Descending to the Depths to Rise to the Heights: Resurrectional Thinking

The pilgrimage accesses the lowest points on earth in order to make future reconciliation possible. The geographical relationship between Heaven and Hell, set up in the epigraph (the quote from Ephesians), echoes in the Greek concept of Hades and the Roman Underworld. The dead enter Hades by first crossing the rivers Acheron (the river of sorrow) and Styx with the help of Charon the ferryman. The river provides the means for forgetting the past; spatially, it mediates the pilgrims' relationship to their past and provides means for the spiritual journey towards reconciliation, where memories of transgressions must be forgotten. The river defines the border between the two worlds, and traversing it represents not only the journey the pilgrims are taking, but also a sort of baptism where the individual dies and reemerges, echoing Christ's death and resurrection.

Both the Greek myth and Christian tradition relate to the world through physical bodies and a navigation of space. Langgässer overlaps these shared traditions through the description of the Argonauts crossing a lake as they travel to their end goal. A ferry, with its motor long ago dismantled and two oars in its place, becomes the means for crossing the lake. In the boat is a whisky bottle, still smelling of fire and giving off the strong,

bright sounds of a trumpet as it is thrown in into the water; “es war, als habe ein trunkener Nöck den letzten Schluck entgegengenommen als eine Unterweltgabe” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 236). The crossing’s ritualistic properties pull the pilgrims into the present and help them leave the past behind. Irene von Dörfer dips her hand into the water, “das kühl und verführerisch war,” thinking, “Wie süß die Lethe ist [...] wie süß, wie süß, wie süß” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 237). The Lethe is the river of oblivion and forgetting. In Virgil’s *Aeneid*,²¹⁰ the dead must have their memories erased by the Lethe in order to be reincarnated. Crossing the Lethe-lake enables the pilgrims to begin their new lives and continue moving forward.

The group discusses possible means for crossing the lake and concludes that Friedrich am Ende will row the group across, then remove his clothes, return the boat, and swim back. Rowing across, Charon-like Friedrich am Ende exhibits a “fast anonyme Gewalt,” so that “es schien, als flöge das große Boot fast mühelos dahin” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 237). His quiet strength creates an unbreakable connection that transforms him: “Der Takt dieser ruhigen Ruderbewegung schien Friedrich in sich zurrückzunehmen und sein Wesen, das sich in Frage und Antwort wie die Kristallkugel ausgesprüht hatte, von neuem in einer Begrenzung zu sammeln, die unzerbrechlich war” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 237). A force external to Friedrich am Ende reestablishes his connection to the material world and also physical defines of his body, inexorably connected to his soul. This puts him on the path toward recognizing that body and soul cannot be separated, and that his previously nihilistic beliefs were false. By crossing the lake, am Ende forgets his previous nihilism and becomes prepared to recognize the role

²¹⁰ See: Virgil. *The Aeneid*. Translated by Lewis C. Day. Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1953. 705.

of the numinous in daily objects and interactions, and this will help him learn to rely on others and become a member of the community.²¹¹

Time—or more specifically, history—plays a role here, too. The single instance of pilgrimage connects with geographically diverse places, both across time through individual memory and through myth, the public practice of memory. The group, paused between the two shores, looks back on where it came from, connected with “ihre Erinnerung – unwillkürlich der Zerstörung, dem Feuer, den schwarzen Ruinen und den zerbrochenen Stufen verhaftet” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 240). The ruins remind them of smoldering Gomorrah after God’s wrath rained down upon it. This vision of burnt out ruins widens to include all of Europe, from “Lissabon bis nach Kiew und von Helsingors nach Gibraltar” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 240). Friedrich am Ende’s work becomes something far more significant, where the journey becomes connected with mythic journeys: “oder hatten nicht diese Menschen im Grunde die ewige Argo betreten; die Arche des Bundes, aus Hoffnung gezimmert und verpicht mit der zähen Sehnsucht nach Freude, die die Planken zusammenhält?” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 241) The mythic here refers to a primal trip, like that of Noah’s ark (connected with the ark of the covenant)—enduring and unrestricted. The temporal elements established by the mythic are then completely changed through a flip of perspective, moving from the macro to the individual in abutting sentences: “Welch ein Augenblick zwischen Himmel und Erde! Welch ein Atemholen und welche Ruhe—hier zwischen Wiege und Grab! Welche Stille” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 241). Part of a mythic trip, the “Argonauts” are also at a specific moment in time and a precise point in space, mapped onto the path of their lives. Time is

²¹¹ See: Behrendt, Johanna E. *Die Einheit von Elisabeth Langgässers Weltbild in der Märkischen Argonautenfahrt*. Ann Arbor, Mich: University Microfilms, 1974. 112.

concurrently stopped and continues on as part of an eternal story, with a quest in process: “Sie (the ark) schwebte über den Wassern mit Kranich und Reiherflügen; mit diesem Hieroglyphen der Frühzeit, die den Weg in das zaubrische Kolchis wiesen und nach dem Goldenen Vliess. Nichts als das leise Glucksen der Tiefe, das Knacken des Holzes, *in welchem der Span der dodonischen Eiche zu sprechen anfing, und die Zukunft verkündigte*” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 241; emphasis in the original). From this point in the middle of the lake, during a break in rowing, the pilgrims are in a boat connected with the past, with ancient stories; and the wood, the vehicle, is like the prophetic oaks of Dodona, capable of telling the future and helping the pilgrims continue on their way to a new era.

Anastasiendorf – Concentration Camp: Place and Anti-Place

As the seven pilgrims move through the German countryside, they encounter war-torn, otherworldly land and cityscapes, “Saturngemarkung” and “Mondpaß”; the whole planet appears devoid of inhabitants (*Argonautenfahrt*, 126). Without people, the scarred landscape loses its designation of specific place²¹² so that it becomes mere space, where only bodies, not ensouled bodies, exist. Edward Casey argues in *The Fate of Place* that the sense of place we have as individuals or communities, made up of the world we immediately interact with, is an invention of the 20th century:

Other reasons for the shunning of place as a crucial concept are less pointedly logical or linguistic, yet even more momentous. These include

²¹² John Inge argues place is relational, even emotional or spiritual. As the individual body interacts with the space around it, place is created. The designation “place” can refer to where we were brought up, what we are in direct contact with, and implicit in place is community. Through modernization, however, we increasingly think in terms of space and time. Place becomes space, simply a set of geographical coordinates and a quantified way of encountering the world devoid of relational elements. Inge, John. *A Christian Theology of Place*. Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2003. 1-2.

the cataclysmic events of world wars, which have acted to undermine any secure sense of abiding place (in fact, to destroy it altogether in the case of a radical anti-place such as Auschwitz); the forced migrations of entire peoples, along with continual drifting on the part of many individuals, suggesting that the world is nothing but a scene of endless displacement; [...]. Each of these phenomena is truly “cosmic,” that is, literally worldwide.²¹³

Loss of place within modern space stems from war’s destruction, and the demolished landscape externally represents the dissolution of communities. Applied to *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, where the pilgrims pass through a destroyed city, the single city becomes an illustration for the wide-scale rootlessness and loss of community across Germany.

Casey expands his argument from the loss of place generally in the 20th century to the ultimate lost place, Auschwitz, which he calls a “radical anti-place,” suggesting that anti-places have lost all relational possibilities. Langgässer also uses a spatial conception of war’s destruction and refers to the death camp as a “Todesstadt.” “Anti-place” connects ideas of killing and death, and it cuts out the human relation to space through loss of body: the very means by which we define place. The term “radical” in reference to Auschwitz suggests a permanent state of non-placeness. Place is connected with experience, and human life constructs place. But if the most radical anti-place conceivable were inescapable like Hades (as the post-war landscape is described), then the pilgrimage, with its attempt to reacquire Germany, would be pointless. Edward Casey

²¹³ Casey, Edward. *The Fate of Place*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. xiii.

and Konstanze Fliedl both set up the camps in oppositional pairs to the relatable place (Casey) or the heavenly city (Fliedl). Langgässer sees distance between the oppositional pairs bridgeable: the death camps and the ruins are redeemable through a reestablishment of relations between individuals. Conversations between characters establish a dialectic that works through each of their assumptions and interpretations of the past, helping characters come to a new understanding of their experience. These conversations map onto the journey through the ruins, so that conversations help redeem place.

Coeval Anastasiendorf and *Todesstadt* show that place persists, even through the war. This assertion suggests genocide can be redeemed and “re”-placed through the movement and persistence of community. This optimistic stance avoids speaking about how the cities of death gained their status. The insertion of silence surrounding the loci of death contributes to the city’s anti-place quality, and the notion that that quality can be countered through speech appears too simple. The narrator acknowledges the presence of gas chambers and death camps, but does not speak about the horrors that occurred in these specific locations. Efforts to address the horrors of war and the specifics of the camps remain unknown, even to writers like Langgässer, who was eager to receive any news possible about what the camps were like.²¹⁴ As a result of this ignorance, the anti-place can be referenced, but not actually articulated. Presence in and interaction with the memories of these places is the only possible source of redemption in the narrative.

The pilgrims experience and recreate an inhabited place among the ruins of the former Nazi state. As they travel along, they make the space describable and begin the

²¹⁴ Langgässer never did receive the response from her daughter concerning her experience in the camps; Cordelia was shocked that her mother made such a request. See: Hilzinger, Sonja. *Elisabeth Langgässer: Eine Biografie*. Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2009. 386.

process of reclaiming place. The moment in which Germany finds itself, with the signs of civilization flattened by war, matters—but it is not unique. As Konstanze Fliedl has shown, the “death city,” including the various concentration camps, includes cities from Troy to Hiroshima. Real cities and mystical cities stand side by side: “Mythologische und apokalyptische Bilder bestimmen den Hades als archaischen Topos des Ortes von Schrecken und Entsetzen.”²¹⁵ Together, they form a composite picture of Hades. Langgässer consistently refers to the landscape along the pilgrims’ course as chthonic. Fliedl’s analysis of mythical, contemporary, and apocalyptic cities demonstrates continuity in event, if not in space and in time. Place loses its defining characteristic and the places are thought of only in terms of desecration, end, loss of human habitation, and therefore loss of civilization. As we will see, however, this hell the pilgrims encounter may be full of horror, but it too can be redeemed through repentance and atonement. Irene von Dörfer, for example, continued challenging the regime even from within the camp (*Argonautenfahrt*, 242). She is also an example of one returned from the *Todesstadt*. Corneli, Lotte’s husband, is yet another who survives. Their persistence in body and soul demonstrates that death is not the end, that the space between the *Stadt* and life is not linear, but elliptical.²¹⁶ The geography of the *Todesstadt* folds into and becomes part of the redemption narrative.

When Friedrich am Ende encounters the destroyed city, his response is to deny any connection between spiritual existence and the material world. He does not try to redeem

²¹⁵ Fliedl, Konstanze. *Zeitroman und Heilsgeschichte. Elisabeth Langgässers “Märkische Argonautenfahrt.”* Wien: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1986. 41.

²¹⁶ Victor and Edith Turner use the term “elliptical” to refer to the course of the pilgrimage; a pilgrimage is not linear because pilgrims return home to complete their journeys. See: Turner, Victor and Edith Turner. “Chapter One. Introduction: Pilgrimage as a Liminoid Phenomenon.” *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture. Anthropological Perspectives.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1978. 1-39.

the space by interacting with it, but he tries to “atomize” it and push it into the furthest realms of not-being. His dismissal of the possibility of place becomes a radical assertion of empty space. The only thing to remain of these cities then is a “quälender Traum, den man heute zu Ende träumte” or a memory, “welche lautlos in scheußlichen Laboratorien zerfiel: in Gaskammern, Hinrichtungszellen und Atomzertrümmerschüssen, die nur noch Vorgang waren” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 136). The relegation to process makes the place less real, like a dream, disconnected from the present. The renunciation of the material world turns these places into anti-places. Still, he continues traveling with the pilgrims despite his efforts to set out as an individual; he cannot escape the community that, by the end of the pilgrimage, will redeem Germany as a place.

Am Ende cannot see the connection between the material and the numinous worlds in the hellish and extraterrestrial landscape. But the landscape still points to its creator. Even the air defies him and pushes its createdness onto him, as the narrator objectively comments on the air’s appearance:

Sie [die Luft] schien in seinem Umkreis verflüchtigt und gleichzeitig schärfer zu werden; ihre Zusammensetzung, untauglich von Menschen geatmet zu werden, zerstörte die Lungen, in welche sie eindrang, und bewirkte, daß sich um ihren Träger eine Gefahrenzone aus Eis und ätherischen Giften bildete und ein Niederschlag blendender, scharfer Kristalle, die ihm zugleich etwas weit Entferntes und Statuarisches gaben.

(*Argonautenfahrt*, 135)

The very air is both volatilized and sharper; its interaction with his lungs and with the surrounding environment is made possible by its own materiality. As the air acts upon

him and interacts with him, there is a dissonance between the narrator's report and Friedrich am Ende's gnostic atheism. The narrator continues on as am Ende remains silent:

Vor Friedrich am Ende und hinter ihm schien die Welt sich erst abzugrenzen und in Erscheinung zu treten [...] Erst im Auge Gottes würde dann später eine neue, genauere Unterscheidung ihrer Ordnungen vor sich gehen und eine Scheidung in Gut und Böse erst bei dem jüngsten Gericht. Denn auch Friedrichs magischer Atheismus würde gerichtet werden, dieser subtile Gegengott Jahwes. (*Argonautenfahrt*, 135)

Like the air he breathes in, this place is made up of material; and, because it also has a spiritual dimension, this place can be redeemed. His silent denial of substance contrasts with the narrator's objective stance on the very same situation, where the narrator's view becomes one with God's omniscience.

In the same city where am Ende denies the material world through his silence, a second conversation is indicated by a set of brackets. The conversation takes place in another place entirely: Anastasiendorf, the pilgrims' destination. The prioress and the priest have a conversation about the pain of redeeming the material world: ["Was—schmerzt?" würde Mater Demetria fragen. "Materie," sollte Mamertus erwidern, "die eingeatmet wird. Nur der Engel im Fleisch zieht Materie mit jedem Atemzug ein"] (*Argonautenfahrt*, 135). With earthly angels—that is, angels with bodies—breathing in the same material air that am Ende denies, we are given yet another example of the connection between soul and body, or of incarnation.

Breath, substance, and sound all belong to the creation myth, where the world is spoken into being; distinctions between forms are made through commands; and Adam is filled with God's breath. The world, Langgässer reminds the reader, was spoken into being, and denial of this fact equals silence: "Welche Stille in den satanischen Räumen der großen Vernichtungslager!" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 136). Rejection of creation as space is not simply the "anti-place" of the death camp, but "anti-creation" and a rejection of God. Silence becomes a crime against God's creation; silence represents the lack of witness, and therefore an absence of memory. This silence spreads across the world:

Wie aus den Krematorien des Ostens nur der Rauch aus dem Schornstein und aus den Zellen der Gemarterten an die Ohren der Menschheit kaum mehr als ein Flüstern gedrungen war – so lag auch um die Versuchsbaraken der Atomzertrümmerungsfelder ein Wall von undurchdringlichem Schweigen; um die Gefangenenlager Sibiriens und um die Schreibstuben, wo das Elend eines ganzen Volkes in Abstraktionen: Verwaltungsmaßnahmen, Kalorien und Fiktionen aufgeteilt wurde. Das Ende der Welt war, wer wollte es leugnen, ein geisterhaftes Verschweigen, Verstummen und fürchterlich Lautloswerden, wie ihr Anfang das unermüdliche Sprechen Gottes gewesen war. Gott sprach...'
(*Argonautenfahrt*, 136)

God's command in the heavens moves to create: das Wort "bewegte sich unaufhörlich [...] wie eine Webspule hin und her" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 136).²¹⁷ The Word—both the command and, as mentioned in conjunction with the trinity, also Christ as the Logos—

²¹⁷ See: "Genesis 1-2." *Holy Bible: The New King James Version, Containing the Old and New Testaments*. Nashville: T. Nelson, 1982.

moves in the heavens to create the very substance that the world is made from. Christ is also the means for redeeming this creation through his crucifixion. Here, the voice creates and redeems.²¹⁸ The image of weaving points back to the opening of the passage, where a figure that represents Justice and Klio stands weaving on the edge of the destroyed city both underworldly and otherworldly.²¹⁹ As Klio, the figure is in the process of weaving and maintains an objective distance from those “Styxbewohner,” the pilgrims, who are in the process of forgetting. Klio does not weave history so that all the events have already happened, but she records the story as it unfolds. History is a process and the travelers, Friedrich am Ende included, add to the story’s tapestry. The journey’s end is Anastasiendorf, a recast New Jerusalem. As the end goal, Anastasiendorf represents what these characters—and Germany—could have been during the war. By seeking Anastasiendorf *after* the war, the pilgrims realign their lives with the numinous and right action.

Just as the New Jerusalem represents the end goal of the Christian life, Anastasiendorf stands at the end of the pilgrimage, a physical goal that represents atonement and wholeness of body and soul.²²⁰ Profane place and the numinous are joined

²¹⁸ The crucifixion, including the events leading up to it, is mirrored in the pilgrimage: “Inside the Christian religious frame, pilgrimage may be said to represent the quintessence of voluntary liminality. In this, again, they follow the paradigm of the *via crucis*, in which Jesus Christ voluntarily submitted his will to the will of God and chose martyrdom rather than mastery over man, death for the other, not death of the other.” Elizondo, Virgil and Sean Freyne, ed. *Pilgrimage*. London: SCM Press, Concilium, 1996. viii. Quoted in Turner, Victor and Edith Turner. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture. Anthropological Perspectives*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978. 9-10.

²¹⁹ The city, Tartarus, is an abyss in Greek myth; here it is opened to the sky and visible (*Argonautenfahrt*, 126-127).

²²⁰ The model for Anastasiendorf was *Alexanderdorf*. In the manuscript for *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, the name “Alexanderdorf” is struck through with pencil and above it appears “Anastasiendorf.” Langgässer’s choice of name places emphasis on the resurrection; *Anastasia* is the Greek word for “Resurrection” (See: Eva Augsburg, 117). Langgässer, Elisabeth. “Märkische Argonautenfahrt.” Ms. 70.3045. Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach. The model for Demetria was the prioress there; Langgässer traveled to the

together. Anastasiendorf survived the war and continues to be a safe haven for those seeking succor. Jews, including the Levi-Jeschowers, were kept safe there. While the *Todesstädte* grew throughout the war, Anastasiendorf persisted.

Anastasiendorf, like the New Jerusalem, is a place on earth where God dwells among his people.²²¹ By pilgrimaging to the convent, the seven representative characters realign themselves with the nuns' mission to help all people and live as a community. In the convent, the nuns work assiduously to contribute to communal life. The idyllic setting supports even the insects, where the nuns baking hosts put out a plate with overflow from the irons for the flies. The whole convent is an image of perfect harmony with creation. Even the nuns' embroidery—with themes of vine and wheat (harvest), lily and rose (the Virgin Mary)—show the path of the *Heilsgeschichte* and also the story of the soul at the same time.

convent in order to do research. She writes her good friend, now a professor at Notre Dame, Waldemar Gurian, about the nuns who sing as they work, and other details she incorporates into the novel: "Ich hatte lange Gespräche mit der Priorin – einer sehr klugen, humorvollen, von tiefer starker Frömmigkeit erfüllten Frau, der das kleine Wärzchen auf der Unterlippe etwas ausgesprochen Schalkhaftes gab. Solche Erscheinungen sind für mich schlechthin verehrungswürdig, ich komme mir absolut unwürdig vor, mit ihnen denselben geistigen Raum zu bewohnen und vor allem wie ein Betrüger, weil sie ja keine Ahnung habe, wer ich bin, und daß sie – wenn ich es auch auf den Knieen entgegennehme! – gleichzeitig 'Material' (Gottseidank: Die 'Mater' steckt in diesem Wort!!) für mich und meine Arbeit sind." Langgässer, Elisabeth. "... so viel berauschende Vergänglichkeit." In *Frankfurter Hefte: Zeitschrift für Kultur und Politik* 9 (1954): 110-120. See also Langgässer, Elisabeth. "An Waldemar Gurian." 7 September 1947. Letter 346 of *Briefe 1924-1950*, vol. 2. Edited by Elisabeth Hoffmann. Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1990. 687-689.

²²¹ See Revelation 21, especially verses 3-4 and 7-8: "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. [...] He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." *Holy Bible: The New King James Version, Containing the Old and New Testaments*. Nashville: T. Nelson, 1982.

The convent experienced war as well, and yet, it persisted. The red sky over the city could be seen at night, illuminated by the bombing, so that war was always present. Bombs fell overhead and alarms sent the nuns and refugees into the bunker yet, even there, the rhythm of daily prayers continued. The seasons continue, as does the work, and even the prisoners of war sent to work are incorporated into long-established patterns. When the Yugoslavians take over the convent for the Russians, they protect the convent. The nuns, through their faith, were kept safe, just as the pilgrims, with their eyes set on the convent, will learn to pattern their lives in the same way.

Depicting New Spatial Relationships in Place and Anti-Place: Theoretical Discussions

An exchange between actor Beifuß and his artist friend Festus explores the broad perspective artists have on the universe and the events on earth in terms of mythology.²²² Festus has attempted to depict this global phenomenon in his art; Beifuß attempts to describe this through metamorphosis and also with a description of the fall of the angels:

In immer wechselnden Formen, mein Freund, hast du den Aufbau der neuen Materie darzustellen versucht—und verzweifelt über die alte Erkenntnis, daß wir die Maße der Schöpfung verloren haben, Festus, den Gleichklang mit dem Wandel der Sterne und die Verhältniszahlen, hast du den Pinsel fluchend und betend in eine Ecke geworfen und angefangen, zu diskutieren, Sanskrit zu erlernen, Plotin zu lesen und in das Geheimnis der sphärischen Ecke einzudringen, der Quantentheorie und der Frage um die Gleichheit von Raum und Zeit. (*Argonautenfahrt*, 61)

²²² The conversation was published as an excerpt: Langgässer, Elisabeth. "Die alten Götter: Aus dem unvollendeten Roman 'Märkische Argonautenfahrt.'" In *Welt und Wort: Literarische Monatsschrift*. 4 (1949): 323-324.

Festus struggles to depict the world—where harmony between the earth and the heavens has disappeared—by weaving together theology, philosophy, and science, unifying all areas of human knowledge. Festus tries, for example, to understand quantum physics through the mystic thinker Poltinus,²²³ who has greatly influenced Christian thinking about God in terms of omnipresence and human existence as one entire, inseparable being. When combined, these areas of knowledge create harmony and make the world comprehensible and understandable.

In this reflection, we can see that Festus the artist could be a stand-in for Langgässer; his difficulties with depicting the world and inquiries into how the world is put together reflect the challenges Langgässer faced while writing a modern Catholic novel. The quest for correct and complete depiction of the world, as Beifuß outlines in the letter, jumps between modern scientific thought and the myth of Trojan Aeneas and the founding of Rome. From the origin of Western civilization (*Argonautenfahrt*, 61) to Patmos and the singer of Patmos (John, who wrote the final book of the Christian Bible, *Revelation*) and the New Jerusalem (*Argonautenfahrt*, 62), Beifuß outlines not simply the modern condition, but also situates the current state of Germany within a larger historical context. Afloat among the flotsam of post-war Germany, the Germans need to understand the past (history) in order to see where Germany is headed. For discovering the root of civilization, they go to Aeneas.²²⁴

²²³ Erberhard Horst includes work on quantum physics and *Heilsgeschichte* in his dissertation Horst, Eberhard. “Christliche Dichtung und moderne Welterfahrung: Zum epischen Werke Elisabeth Langgässers.” Phil. Diss. Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, 1956. 257-279.

²²⁴ The *Aeneid* is a work of Vergil’s, and perhaps a reference to Hermann Broch’s *Tod des Vergil*.

In order to understand where the pilgrims, including Beifuß, are headed in this moment of crisis, they seek the cities and figures of the past, from the destroyed Troy and Aeneas who left the ruins behind, to the future, featuring the Singer of Patmos and the New Jerusalem of the Book of Revelation.²²⁵ From the present where artists and thinkers seek the past, a double spatiality is created; John, on the island, is present within a specific geographical reality. The image of the New Jerusalem refers to the return to a unity between the divine and the created. The New Jerusalem is not a spiritual entity, an immaterial vision. It inhabits a real physical space. Space and material matter here, just as much as time matters. Writing about these two cities, Troy and the New Jerusalem, continuity has been established between the foundation of Western Culture, its current state of destruction in the *Stunde Null* (*Argonautenfahrt*, 63), and the eventual redemption and reconstruction of place. Even though this space is currently only a vision (for John of Patmos, for Beifuß, for Festus, and of course, for Langgässer), the vision is a reality (*Argonautenfahrt*, 64); the deep vision and internal picture will someday be a reality.

The hope of a New Jerusalem is consistent throughout the novel,²²⁶ the city as a spiritual and spatial destination helps explain the progress of the pilgrims to a specific place. A tension exists between depicting a specific moment for Germany (through political boundaries that define a specific space) after the war and the hope of a New

²²⁵ “Wir suchen Troja, wir suchen Äneas, und mit Äneas den Ursprung unseres Abendlandes; wir suchen Patmos, den Sänger von Patmos und mit dem Sänger von Patmos das Neue Jerusalem” (*Argonautenfahrt* 62).

²²⁶ In a religious discussion between Cuille, a secondary figure in the novel, and a priest, Mary is called “the New Jerusalem,” where she is the Church, she represents the freedom children of God have to belong. Because the New Jerusalem is also a post-apocalyptic image, the decision to be one of God’s children automatically places them in the space of salvation (*Argonautenfahrt*, 210).

Jerusalem. Time is both created and eternal, just as Anastasiendorf, the convent, exists within time and is also timeless and eternal (*Argonautenfahrt*, 89).

The convent occupies a specific space, and space factors into what the pilgrims must traverse. The focus on spatiality contrasts the experiences of characters during the war, including the new Diaspora²²⁷ Florence Levi-Jeschower experiences through her children, and occurs at the same time that the war represents a loss of space and time, like the rockets that shoot across the sky. The space the rocket inhabits is connected to its speed: “ein geheimnisvoll rasender Körper, in dessen Innerm eine fiktive chimärische Zeit gemessen wurde, die nicht mehr Funktion einer wahren Bewegung, sondern reine Willkür war, unkontrolliert von jeder Realität” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 62-63). The pure chance of these rockets, along with their ability to cut through space and time (and cut short a life) radically alter the reality of linear time by speeding travel and minimizing the space’s significance. Rockets are chaotic and destructive, a means for ending delineations and separations. As in Ewald’s dream, where the world is traveled in just a moment, space shrinks. The rocket’s ability to collapse the world is connected to the chimera; it is fantastic in its movements, connected to the rocket’s “Raumlosigkeit,” which in turn creates further destruction and interrupts the normal course of life.

In the context of Beifuß’s letter, written during Berlin’s final days before its fall, the writing process is disturbed by “nur ein flüchtiges Beben [...] nicht mehr als eine Berührung im Traum, deren Wirkung dem Schläfer zum Anlaß einer Verknüpfung innerer Bilder und tiefer Visionen wird” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 64). Here the surreal world of

²²⁷ The dispersion of the Levi-Jeschower family mirrors the Jewish diaspora, ascribed to Jewish sin and guilt. By calling this a ‘new’ Diaspora, I am interpreting Langgässer’s depiction of the Levi-Jeschower family spread across the world as connected with events from Jewish history.

the rocket approaches the prophetic-visionary. Within the atelier, a connection to history is also made. The act of writing, where the artist's position holds a privileged position, connects the modern city in ruins, in which this writer sits with his hands, a signifier for the creative act, with cities also built by hands and made famous by their destructions: Vineta, Troy, Jerusalem. One is a fictional city on the Baltic coast; the other two are also cities razed by war. All of them survive in collective memory, free of destruction, because of the enduring records formed by writers' and artists' hands. Conceived of as one image, a palimpsest-collage of sorts, the cities, built by words, become one city, "nicht berührbar vom Fluch der Zeit und Vergänglichkeit" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 64-65). All of the cities key for the foundation of Europe (Vineta), Western civilization (Troy), and Christianity (Jerusalem) become one city with transcendent significance, connected to creation but also to eternity: "Sie [die Stadt] war geschaffen, doch nicht in der Zeit, obwohl sie auch wiederum nicht von Ewigkeit her war" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 65). Mythical, religious, and apocalyptic cities become heavenly bodies full of promise. Beifuß sees these cities in a vision where the cities form concentric entities encompassing one another and are geographically located within the mystic rose, Mary (*Argonautenfahrt*, 66). The location of these cities in the heavens exists in "kreisender Kreis und Fülle der Blütenzungen" as part of a metamorphosis without origin (*Argonautenfahrt*, 66). Cities, repeated across time, share a common story that continues into the future and the end time.

Space of Cities; Space of Eternity: Decentering and Recentering
the Relationship between Profane and Numinous

The journey, the act of moving, becomes a way of divining God's will and moving toward it. Part of moving into God's will requires moving away from ruin, roughly approximated by apocalyptic Berlin and the surrounding countryside and into the future, guided by providence. The apocalyptic vision of mythical and historical cities points to a spatial eschatology, where the cities and how they experience war connects the current suffering with the city's future as a city of God. Suffering in the cities occurs primarily because of war.

As the cities are bombed, in the safety of the convent, the nuns in Anastasiendorf stop their daily work and pray, singing wildly as intercession for the cities: "o clemens, o pia, o dulcis Virgo Maria!" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 92).²²⁸ Here Langgässer ties together a geographical place and Mary, who dwells in Heaven and intercedes on behalf of those praying. The nuns are singing parts of the "Salve Regina," which is a prayer looking forward to the coming of Christ. The whole prayer:

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
our life, our sweetness and our hope.

To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve;
to thee do we send up our sighs,

mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.

²²⁸ Florence Levi-Jeschower describes what the convent was like when she stayed there. As they sang the Credo, confessing what they understood to be God's role in the creation, in the choir stalls, the space filled with the sound, then with angels. This description fits hand in hand with Arthur's own conception of how time works at the cloister; it is as if time stands still and is also part of eternity. Quoting the Psalms, he states "Tausend Jahre ein Tag—ein einziger Tag so lang wie tausend Jahre" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 86), where existence at the convent is like a mystical grave, that also offers life, mortifying the flesh and uplifting the spiritual (*Argonautenfahrt*, 86-87).

Turn then, most gracious advocate,
thine eyes of mercy toward us;
and after this our exile,
show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

V. Pray for us O holy Mother of God,

R. that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.²²⁹

The nuns' prayer articulates a moment of exile while here on earth; the prayer declares a separation from God (what it means to be banished children from the garden) and the current existence in a valley of tears. Their prayer of intercession to Mary places the nuns with the rest of the people for whom they pray, the refugees from the bombed cities, and points to their hope in the promise of Christ, anticipating salvation and resurrection.

As they utter these prayers, the war is "über sie...hingegangen" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 92). This is a true passing-over, and also, spatially, an "in-the-middle-of" as bombers destroy the grounds around the convent as they fall in the "Umkreis" of the nuns' cloister. The description of the cloister under fire is apocalyptic, with space and time disappearing in a vision of war: "Der Himmel über der schrecklich fernen, aber plötzlich nahegerückten Hauptstadt warf den rötlichen Schein seiner Feuerbrünste über die Matutin; in die Laudes mische sich wie das Klagen angeketteter Tiere das Geheul der Sirenen, das der Entwarnung, und in die freudigen Töne der Prim das erneute Anschwellen ihrer Schwestern, die schon wieder der Warnung dienen"

²²⁹ The German text: Sei begrüßt, o Königin,/ Mutter der Barmherzigkeit;/ unser Leben, unsere Wonne/ und unsere Hoffnung, sei begrüßt!/ Zu dir rufen wir verbannte Kinder Evas;/ zu dir seufzen wir/ trauernd und weinend in diesem Tal der Tränen./ Wohlan denn, unsere Fürsprecherin,/ wende deine barmherzigen Augen uns zu/ und nach diesem Elend zeige uns Jesus,/ die gebenedeite Frucht deines Leibes!/ O gütige, o milde, o süße Jungfrau Maria.

(*Argonautenfahrt*, 92). Space disappears with the airplanes, which bring the cities (and the refugees) up against the walls of the cloister. Modern technology—first the rockets, then the airplanes—collapse distance. Yet the voices of the nuns, singing out, fill the air in reclaiming it from the flames and planes, so that song creates a sphere of protection despite and through the war. The nuns raise their voices, singing with the sirens, to the cloister in safety like the “vollkommen arglose Vogelkehlen, die noch der Nestrand umschließt” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 92). Despite the arrival of the invading Russians, the nuns and refugees gather around the altar, the sanctified space for the body of Christ and the act of transubstantiation during the Eucharist.²³⁰ The offices are still sung as “Die Eroberung kam, der Klosterhof brannte” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 93). Protected, those who took refuge in the convent are totally safe because of providence: “Kein Haar vom Haupt und kein Sperling vom Dach” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 93).²³¹ Here birds play a role: animals that fly through the air and escape danger have a totally different relationship to space and movement than humans do.

Providence keeps the nuns and those in their care safe; the promise of their safety, along with their own actions and petitions, are responsible for seeing all within the convent’s walls through the war unscathed. Within this eternal existence of the cloister, we also see a changing of the seasons, a rhythm (*Argonautenfahrt*, 94). The convent bears a special relationship to time that transcends the chronological order of pre-war,

²³⁰ The importance of space in its relation to the Incarnation has already been established, where the nuns making the host for the Eucharist are described. The host is made by putting dough into a sort of waffle iron; the leftovers that drip over the sides of the iron are fed to the flies. “[A]uf diese Weise wieder zurück in den Bereich des Weltlichen holend, was einzuführen in den sakralen und erhabenen Raum des Offiziums fast schon gelungen war” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 89). Everything about the production in the Cloister brings Christ’s body into the space of the world, so that everything is a redeeming act.

²³¹ “Kein Haar vom Haupt und kein Sperling vom Dach” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 93) was harmed, a paraphrase of Luke 21:18 and a German folksong.

war, and post-war, and still fits into the seasons of nature—and also the liturgical seasons of the calendar—because of the cloister’s connection with the land.

Time matters for the cloister, as it matters for the pilgrims. The pilgrimage takes place in the summer and references the recent Easter season, which would have lined up with the final days of the war.²³² The clues we have for this include the nuns singing the *Salve Regina*, which is traditionally during the feast days of the Assumption and Immaculate Conception, and the novel’s conclusion. During a Russian Easter celebration, two verses are repeated, which are also sung at the conclusion of praying the rosary. The seasons and time are therefore connected not only with movement, and with a completion of the journey layered on liturgical prayer, but also with a specific direction—East—which Langgässer connects with mysticism.

If we take this layering of time, direction, and place—where war is considered in the context of the Lenten season, a time of reflection and repentance—then penance and penitent acts map onto the pilgrimage and to what the pilgrimage represents. With the journey across a space—where the buildings and farms, signifiers of human interaction with the space, have been all but destroyed—the space becomes redeemed through the movement. The pilgrims are called to “repentance,” which in the Greek (*metanoein*) means “to change one’s mind.”²³³ As a return, the figures of the pilgrimage are returning, and with Dolores (sorrow) in tow, they demonstrate the proper movement for dealing with Germany’s sins.

²³² Easter was on April 1, 1945; Germany officially surrendered to Allied forces on May 2, 1945.

²³³ The *New Dictionary of Theology* emphasizes that *metanoein* signifies far more than simply ‘changing one’s mind’ than we might today; the Greek, in fact, means a radical change in disposition and a transformation that extends from belief to action. Ferguson, Sinclair B, David F. Wright, and J I. Packer. *New Dictionary of Theology*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1988. 580-581.

Geographical/spatial movements mirror spiritual movements, where the rootedness of the *polis*, as well as the home and the known world become exchanged for uncertainties, challenging the way the old places defined individual identity in relationship to a larger whole. Pilgrimage helps “the believer to place the religious routine of the closed and concentric worlds of household, parish, or guild in a broader and more complete perception of the sacred, which transcend while affirming local allegiances.”²³⁴ What exists on the margins or beyond the *polis*’ borders challenges the cities, where churches were the traditional centers of religious life and at the geographical center of each city. The decentering act of a pilgrimage makes possible a spiritual re-centering away from the traditional sources of religion and political power. Among the ruins of the Third Reich, this decentering becomes a vital part of moving on and creating a new community: Langgässer’s mission in her fiction.

The subversive movement of religious and political hierarchies in pilgrimage also occurs in mysticism. Orders which traditionally house mystics remove the religious experience from the external rites in the church and place them within the individual.²³⁵ Turner identifies the challenges mystical experience poses to the status quo:

pilgrimage may be thought of as extroverted mysticism, just as mysticism is introverted pilgrimage. The pilgrim physically traverses a mystical way;

²³⁴ See Duffy, Eamon. *The Stripping of the Altars*. London: Yale University Press, 1992. 197. And also: Inge, John. *A Christian Theology of Place*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003. 102.

²³⁵ Teresa of Avila’s writings provide a prime example of this. Her autobiography, *The Life of Teresa of Jesus: The Autobiography of Teresa of Avila*, provides guides to her nuns concerning mystical experience, but takes special cautions to demonstrate her continued acceptance of church authority over her. She walks a tenuous line between re-centering the act of worship on the individual and remaining part of the church, with its traditional male authority and distinct power structures. See: Schlau, Stacy. “Following Saint Teresa: Early Modern Women and Religious Authority.” *MLN* 117, no. 2 (March 2002): 286-309. And also Weber, Allison. “The Book of Her Life and the Rhetoric of Humility.” In *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. 42-76.

the mystic sets forth on an interior spiritual pilgrimage. [...] Both pilgrimage and mysticism escape the nets of social structure [...] Pilgrimage has its inwardness, as anyone who has observed pilgrims before a shrine can attest; while mysticism has its outwardness, as evidenced by the energetic, practical lives of famous mystics. (Turner, 33-34)

The mystic quest for the divine follows the model of Christ's suffering, where experiences of personal suffering help mystics to identify and suffer with Christ on the cross. Mystics speak of the way of the cross (*via crucis*), the distinct path that the soul moves through, as stages indicated by specific markers or experiences. Similarly, Levi-Jeschower realizes the importance of grace and recognizes it in little markers along their path toward Anastasiendorf. The moral choices to be made while going through the world are like choosing a course based off of "diesen hölzernen Schildern, die für uns aufgestellt sind. Natürlich bleibt es uns unbenommen, nach der falschen Richtung zu gehen. Aber das Ziel verändert sich nicht und liegt nach wie vor in der Gegend, die uns gezeigt worden ist" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 299). In his spatial understanding of grace, signs mark the journey through the world, and the battle between God and Satan invests this world with meaning. The destination remains the same; the course to be taken depends on the traveler. Levi-Jeschower's willingness to follow these signs throughout his journey, coupled with his use of the second-person plural pronoun "uns," shows his understanding of the community he belongs to. The destination remains the same, while the course to be taken depends on the traveler.

This gains specific importance as Friedrich am Ende contemplates breaking away from the group and going his own way. As am Ende learns he belongs to the group and their journey, he also learns that the mystic relation between moving across the landscape and moving inward also maps onto the relationship between Christ as the Incarnation and the resurrected Christ.

T. F. Torrance explains the relationship between Christ and space and time, the “relation established between God and man in Jesus Christ constitutes Him as the place in all space and time where God meets with man in the actualities of human existence, and man meets with God and knows Him in His own divine Being” (Torrance, 75). This movement is both horizontal and vertical. One cannot exist without the other for humans to fully understand the relationship of the divine to their lives and for them to connect with the divine and one another: “[U]nless the eternal breaks into the temporal and the boundless being of God breaks into the *spatial* existence of man and takes up dwelling within it, the vertical dimension vanishes out of man’s life and becomes quite strange to him—and man loses his place under the sun” (Torrance, 75-76). The two axes of relationship, vertical and horizontal, are necessary for orientation within human life, which we have already seen is spatially bound. Inge builds on Torrance’s work, stressing the spatial relationship of the Incarnation, where place becomes key: “incarnation implies that *places are the seat of relations or the place of meeting and activity in the interaction between God and the world*, then this balance is maintained by an incarnational perspective” (Inge, 57; emphasis in the original). The Christian journey, especially the pilgrimage, is an exploration of these places, as both internal and external journeys. The

journey's transformative and redemptive qualities are not simply related to human or divine actions, but rely on a synergy of both axes.

Langgässer demonstrates the synergy across interpersonal conflicts and discussions, as well as the intrusion of the divine into the pilgrims' lives in *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*. In order to demonstrate the interrelated divine and human interactions, Langgässer provides the reader with two spatial metaphors for spiritual development. The movement of the pilgrims in the main narrative of the novel makes up the horizontal axis and provides the movement for the pilgrims to repent for their past sins and reestablish a Christian identity in the wake of war's destruction. The vertical axis, present from the epigraph on, references the Incarnation and its establishing power between divine and human, from the descent to Hell to the ascension to Heaven, as well as the human spiritual quest "upward" to reach God. A corresponding, concluding narrative bookends Christ's descent and ascension, in the final pages of the novel where a brother and sister live in a robbers' underground stronghold, an apparent perdition. The discovery of a staircase to a world above provides them with a means for escape. Their story models the relationship of the soul to the divine and represents differently the eschatological aspect the pilgrimage.

Memory of the Fallen

The alternative to journeying through the German countryside is standing still, refusing to face the recent past by acknowledging all that took place. After passing through the other-worldly cityscape, they come across a defiled gravesite. There, the pilgrims enter into a discussion with an old man sitting among soldiers' graves in the

ruins of his town. One of the graves had been marked by a steel helmet which the Russian troops marching west took from the grave and threw down into the water. With the grave unmarked among the ruins, the town and those who lived there would sink into oblivion. The single old man serves as a living gravestone. He discusses the defiled graves and the inability to retrieve the helmet with the pilgrims, centering the discussion around the possibility of a resurrection, as well as who belongs to the group “Germans.”

The old man bemoans the fact that the helmet is irretrievable, for it is a symbol for the fallen, a means for making the soldiers present in the landscape (*Argonautenfahrt*, 160). Levi-Jeschower responds that the entire “Gräberkult” is only valid in terms of the symbol, so that the symbol is worthless in and of itself.²³⁶ The old man responds that even if the helmet didn’t belong to those buried there, that its removal defiled the grave and, in his opinion, the symbol is not empty. What this sets up, then, is a difference of thinking between Levi-Jeschower, who does not afford a special status to or create a cult around the dead, and the old man, who cannot move past his town’s geographical location or the people who lived and died there.

Florence (Flora) Levi-Jeschower understands that the dead should be granted a respect, but not because they are dead. Her argument centers much more on the humanity of the dead, including the soldiers, by giving a chilling account of what victims in the death camp experienced at the end of their lives. Flora makes a connection between categories that might simply be reduced to victim and perpetrator by asserting the experience of victims: “bedenken Sie, liebes Herrchen, daß es Frauen gab, denen man ihre Haare – und Kinder, denen man ihr Püppchen, bevor man sie in die Gaskammer

²³⁶ Levi-Jeschower’s label of ‘symbol’ here resonates with the debate surrounding baptism and the eucharist. As in that theological discussion, a mere ‘symbol’ is not spiritually grounded, but defines the spiritual and physical.

triebe, hinweggenommen hatte. Männer, welchen man kurz nach dem Gastod die verkrampften Kiefer gewaltsam löste, um die Goldkronen auszubrechen” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 160). In this moment, she is “Flora and Rahel zugleich,” an individual and a type, mourning for her children and all victims, establishing a connection between all lives. Her emotional response is different from this man’s, in so far as he can only respond to what he himself has seen and witnessed (*Argonautenfahrt*, 160). The “Bilder von Auschwitz an jedem Brett—jeder vernünftige Mensch kann sich denken, wie sie zustande kamen. Propaganda und weiter nichts” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 160). The old man’s first line of defense against acknowledging the reality of the Holocaust is to discount the records as propaganda. The photographs—objects that we have seen in the opening lines of the book—represent a caught moment in time and suggest objectivity. Asked whether his response would be the same if it *were* in fact real, he asserts his loyalty to those who are dead, rather than the “paar Lumpen” gassed in Auschwitz: “Zigeuner und Juden, Polen – und solches ... solches Zeug” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 161). The old man’s rejection of allied death camp “propaganda” shows him incapable of discerning true propaganda and remains stuck in the past. Rather than acknowledging his culpability in the murder of members of his community, by standing watch over the graves of “Aryan” soldiers, the old man chooses narrowly-defined community of “Volk” grounded in Nazi propaganda. Because he identifies with the Nazi’s narrowly-defined community, he is incapable of leaving the graves behind and living in the present.

The old man’s chosen ignorance offers three possibilities for Ewald, Arthur, and Florence’s individual interpretations of the situation. Taken together, they represent different reactions Germans might have to their recent Nazi past. For Hauteville, this

man's failure to acknowledge responsibility or even the possibility of such a crime stands in the way of allowing the living to rise from the dead (*Argonautenfahrt*, 161). For Hauteville, recognition of these crimes is central for continuing on with life, potentially as a new Europe, and not for living in a cult of death like this man who lives among the graves. Resurrection is not a bodily resurrection of the dead as thought of in Christian theology, but a figurative resurrection. Levi-Jeschower's response is far more pessimistic than Hauteville's; he believes that the old man is only correct in impeding a resurrection, that perhaps History's hand is completing a specific goal through the old man's obstinacy. "[D]urch ihn und die Art eines Totenkultes, der jegliches Sündenbewußtsein des Volkes, alle Schuldgefühle und jede Erkenntnis in Monumente wie dieses hier einschließt; in die gute Sterbestunde der Deutschen, die man mit trauernden Porzellanhündchen und Papierblumen ausgeputzt hat," marking the grave not as a location from which the dead can rise and come alive, but as a site of kitsch and false commemoration, effectively keeping Germans in stasis, unable to move forward (*Argonautenfahrt*, 161). Levi-Jeschower correctly identifies this as a complete suppression, a self-centered means for not dealing with reality.

Hauteville and Levi-Jeschower's diagnosis of the situation applies to all of Germany; Flora's response, where she both mourns the dead but continues on the pilgrimage searching for what has been forgotten, must be reconsidered. She has just asserted to am Ende that she is not a representative Rachel fleeing to Anastasiendorf; "Nein. Weder fliehen wir stellvertretend, noch fliehen wir überhaupt. Wir suchen etwas, Herr Friedrich am Ende, das wir vergessen haben" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 153). Her figure contrasts with the obstinate stance of the old man, unwilling to move from the ruins. As a

pilgrim, she continues to move and to search among the living. The old man serves as a cautionary figure, rejecting the path of guilt, responsibility, and ultimately resurrection that these pilgrims tread.

Brother and Sister: Unpacking the Past, New Foundations for the Next Generation

The pilgrimage that makes up the core of the novel transcends the experience of the seven pilgrims and provides a template for other Germans seeking to repent their sins, reconstitute community, and move on during the *Stunde Null*. To demonstrate the universality of the pilgrims' experience, the novel concludes in true Langgässerian fashion, with multiple endings and shorter stories illuminating and filling in the main storyline. Langgässer retells the story of the pilgrimage with a fresh set of characters, a brother and a sister named Hellmuth and Helga. The siblings do not simply 're'-enact the pilgrimage that dominated the majority of the novel; as "Medea's Children," (*Argonautenfahrt*, 330) they represent not only the next generation processing Germany's past, but also Germany's inheritance. Their pilgrimage also demonstrates a redemption possible only through sacrifice. "Medea's children" are also Jason's children,²³⁷ sacrificed to spite their father. The Medea reference plays off of *Märkische Argonautenfahrt's* recurring theme of subsequent generations suffering for the sins of the parents by choosing to refer to the children as Medea's, not Jason's. Langgässer underscores the tragic as well as the direct relationship between the younger generation's suffering and the older generation's deeds. Unlike Medea's children, however, these

²³⁷ *Argonautenfahrt*, 338. This is also Jason of Jason and the Argonauts. In most common retellings of the Medea myth, she kills their children to revenge Jason's betrayal. Compare to Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 7.391, Seneca's *Medea*, and Euripides' *Medea*.

children live on, providing a more hopeful ending to *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* than the Greek tragedy. The sibling pair, tragic figures because of their association with Medea, is also the brother and sister of Grimm's fairy tales.²³⁸ The multiple literary traditions—Greek mythology and fairy tales—help frame the children's atavistic experience. The traditions remind the reader of the continuity of human experience. Displaced persons from the East, Hellmuth and Helga have traveled with their grandmother to a city in the West. The grandmother dies in an abandoned railway hut and Hellmuth, determined to avoid the orphanage, burns down the hut with his grandmother's corpse inside (*Argonautenfahrt*, 336). Now homeless, the orphans decide to journey to the city to seek their fortunes. Leaving at night, Hellmuth, the older brother, leads the way through the darkness. They journey to the lair of a gang involved in the black market. The sibling pair becomes involved in the underbelly of German post-war society, where everyone looks after her or himself first, but the older boy is eventually saved by a priest. In the scuffle to extricate the children from the robbers' den, the sister is killed. Her sacrifice makes his survival possible and provides another example of the sacrifice necessary on the part of some individuals in order to help others.

The associations with the robbers' lair, dark and below ground, resonate with the book's epigraph from Ephesians and also with the Argonaut's pilgrimage into the depths of German memory. The dark robbers' lair has an unknown entrance, where the robbers—Carlo, Kasimir, and Stevo—live with the prostitute Gisela. The siblings' flight from the burning hut into the city is equally dark; at first Hellmuth and Helga (both who have the word "bright" in their names) cannot see the city but simply flee blindly in its

²³⁸ See: *Argonautenfahrt*, 357. One of the many Grimm Fairy Tales that features a brother and sister pair, where the sister saves her brother from death, is *Brüderchen und Schwesterchen*.

direction, “in der die Stadt liegen mußte – diese große, in Dunkelheit, Not und Verzweiflung ganz eingehüllte Stadt” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 337). The hollowed-out buildings stand “wie Teile eines treibenden Wracks aus der trostlosen Finsternis” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 338). The themes of light and dark continue. As the two enter a district, only a single naked light bulb punctuates the darkness: the bulb illuminates a kitchen table where a shaking hand slices a hard loaf of bread, shedding light on the hardships of the average post-war family. As the pair pushes further into the ruined city,

Die hellen Flecke vermehrten sich, ohne zusammenzufließen; sie blieben voneinander getrennt, große Flächen von Dunkelheit lagen dazwischen, die Dunkelheit übertraf das Licht, das Licht war nicht eigentlich unterschieden von dem Charakter des Finsternis, sondern nahm teil an ihr. Über riesige Strecken von Dunkelheit war Licht von Licht getrennt; es konnte sich nicht verständigen oder sich Trost zusprechen; es endete, wo seine eigene Kraft, und es verging, wo sein eigener Lichtschein zu Ende gegangen war. (*Argonautenfahrt*, 338)

The darkness of the passage, *trostlos*, cannot be distinguished from the light, but both the light and the dark are part of a gaping hopelessness, a play off of the opening verses of John 1 which describe Christ’s Incarnation as the light coming among the dark and the dark, a metaphor for sin, is unable to understand the light.²³⁹ Light and dark speckle the landscape, where they blend into one another as discrete parts of a single apparition. The speckled complexity shows that the two represent the human condition, a melding of

²³⁹ “In ihm war das Leben, und das Leben war das Licht der Menschen Und das Licht scheint in der Finsternis, und die Finsternis hat's nicht begriffen.” “Johannes 1.4-5.” *Die Bibel: Nach der Übersetzung Martin Luthers*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1985.

good and evil, codependent so that: “von dem Schatten das Licht nahm, die Finsternis von dem Licht” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 339). The blending of the landscape is a constant, surreal change: “In diesem Wechsel setzt sich endlos Verhängnis und Zufall fort...” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 339). The author concludes descriptions of bomb craters with ellipses; black dots on a white page typographically demonstrate the indefinite landscape and the disconnect with the fluid, dreamlike landscape.

It is in this morally ambiguous world that the two descend even further into Hell, both geographically (as they enter the basement where the robbers hide) and metaphorically.²⁴⁰ Continuing the overlap of Christian and Greek metaphors of Earth as a sort of Hell or Hades, a guard dog, Senta,²⁴¹ sits at the entrance to the basement, like Cerberus, just below “der Eingang zur Unterwelt” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 340). With the robbers’ hideaway as the depths of the underworld, a connection is made between the death-like state post-war existence, the shady dealings of those working on the black market, and the spiritual death of the German people. The voice of Stevo, the satanic chief robber “klang wie entfernter Donner, seine Augen waren wie Feuerräder, in seinen Händen lag alle Macht, zu geben und zu nehmen” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 344). Of the three

²⁴⁰ This is not the first time Langgässer uses the ‘depths’ to symbolize hell and depravity. In his study of Langgässer’s short stories, J. P. J. Maassen notes that her earliest short stories are almost all centered on human depravity, and that these are specifically associated with depths: “Gewalt und Verführung steigen auf aus den Tiefen des Raumes, der Zeit und des Unbewußten. In Kellern, Höhlen und Spelunken ist das Bedrohliche und Höllische zuhause. Unter der dünnen Erdschicht, über die der Mensch geht, ruhen aufgeschichtet die Reste vergangenen Lebens. Je tiefer der Blick in die Erde vordringt, umso weiter tut sich die Vergangenheit auf. Die Dimensionen von Raum und Zeit verschmelzen. Dem ekstatisch Schauenden zeigen sich die Schrecken der Vorzeit.” Maassen, J. P. J. *Die Schrecken Der Tiefe: Untersuchungen Zu Elisabeth Langgässers Erzählungen*. Leiden: Universitaire Pers, 1973. 25.

²⁴¹ *Senta* has a number of references; it is a German woman’s name, a Serbian city and, most notably, the female protagonist in Richard Wagner’s *Der fliegende Holländer*. The Dutchman is cursed to roam the seas without respite for calling on Satan. It is Senta’s suicide which frees him from his curse, and the opera concludes with both of them ascending to heaven.

robbers, he is the one who offers Hellmuth schnapps to lessen his inhibitions and begins training his protégé upon whom he also seems to have pedophilic designs.²⁴²

Stevo tempts Hellmuth with worldly promises, not unlike the temptations of Christ. Just after the assertion that Stevo has all of the power, there is a remarkable insertion on the part of the writer. In brackets, making the caesura clear and mimicking stage directions, is a prayer: “[‘Befiehl mir, für dich in die Hölle zu reiten und den Teufel heraufzuholen. Verlange eine Probe von mir, schicke mich bis an das Ende der Welt und wieder zu dir zurück!’]” The prayer, while it supports Hellmuth’s experience, belongs to Kurella, the priest who will descend to the underbelly of post-war Germany, rubbing shoulders with black market dealers and prostitutes, in order to save innocents like Hellmuth. The co-temporal ruin and salvation, represented by Hellmuth’s main storyline and Kurella’s prayer, demonstrate the complexity of the story and the number of characters and relationships.

Directly after this interjection, the exchange between Stevo and Hellmuth continues, with Stevo putting his arm around Hellmuth’s shoulders, sliding his hand down to the boy’s hips, and pulling him closer as he asks how old he is and whether he has been with a girl. Surprised by these questions, Hellmuth is both “hingerissen” and “unsicher” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 344). The ambivalent attraction gets compounded by Stevo’s next comment: “Das ist gut. Kein Mädchen und noch kein Stimmbruch?” referring to Hellmuth’s boyish qualities (*Argonautenfahrt*, 344). Like Hellmuth, the reader remains in the dark about Stevo’s propositions: “Seinen [Stevos] Mund an dem Ohr des Knaben, sprach Stevo auf ihn ein. Was er sagte, verstand der Knabe nicht; seine

²⁴² Nowhere is there an overt reference to Stevo’s propositioning the boy, but the two sleeping together, paired with the priest’s own search for Hellmuth, where Giesela accuses him of being “one of those kinds” of men.

Unerfahrenheit, wie ein dünner, geschmeidiger Kettenpanzer, umgab ihn von Kopf bis Füßen und machte ihn unverletzbar für Feuer oder Dolch” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 344-345). Innocence protects the next generation until the Kurellas, the saviors among the older generation, intercede.

As the other robbers surround Hellmuth, he demonstrates faithfulness to Stevo. The men all attempt to begin instructing him in the ways of the world, but Stevo jealously commands the others to leave him alone, and then the boy to come to him, physically bridging the space between himself and Stevo also establishes a familial relationship by calling Hellmuth “Sohn.” “Du bist mein Junge. Hast du verstanden?” Stevo asks. The reply is not a filial one, but one of a servant or a disciple: “Ja, Herr.” The ensuing inquiry, “Und gehörsr niemanden sonst?” and the response, ““Nein, Herr’, sagte der Knabe stolz mit glücklichem Gesicht,” is even more disturbing: Hellmuth has identified with this devil and chooses to join him, learning from his master how to rob, cheat, and steal (*Argonautenfahrt*, 346). If he continues in this vein, his protection will soon melt away and he will be lost to perdition.

One evening, when the racketeers are out and about, Hellmuth and his sister ascend from the underworld, drawn by the light they see at the top of a ladder. Curious about what stands on the other side of the wall, Hellmuth, with his sister in tow, climbs up. Moving up the stories, his eyes must adjust to the light after being in the darkness for so long. Slowly, they begin to make out the features of the house—a world of light, parents, and safety.

The two climb the ladder to emerge in a living room, where a boy, Reginald, was left to his own devices for the evening while his parents are out. Reginald mistakes the

pair, “zwei rußigen Teufeln ähnlich” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 357), for “die Kinder des Nikolaus” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 357). The narrator connects the two stories for the reader: “Es war ersichtlich: in seinem Köpfchen ging alles durcheinander – der Nikolaus, der durch den Schornstein reitet, die Schuhe, die er am Nikolaustag des verflossenen Jahres herausgestellt hatte, und das Märchen, das ihm erzählt worden war, von des Teufels rußigem Bruder” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 357). The current historical moment, where invading Russians were perceived as devilish for their role conquering and, at times, raping German women becomes a *Märchen*, told and retold during the course of the novel.

Reginald, alone in his room, relates his story to Hellmuth and Helga and, in so doing, closes the narrative gap between the pilgrims and these two orphans. This is in fact a double loop of reintroductions; the reader has already met the figure of Reginald in the first few pages of the novel, before the pilgrimage was undertaken. He is the son of Lotte and Corneli, the Jewish conductor. In the very first pages of the novel, he bore a physical resemblance to his father, demonstrating an inheritance in characteristics and a continuity across generations. Here, at the conclusion of the novel, the next generation of Germans comes together and deals with the consequences of the war: Reginald, the offspring of a German woman and a Jewish concentration camp survivor; Hellmuth and Helga, orphans whose father fought on the Eastern front and whose mother was raped and killed by the invading Russian army.

The children wrestle with their inheritance. When Hellmuth, ignorant about Corneli, asks Reginald about his father’s experience, he is met with silence. Here, Reginald’s mute response suggests an experience that perhaps Elisabeth Langgässer would identify with as well—but for her, it was not her father, but her daughter who

returned from the East. Helga's tearful reaction to the silence, too, makes her seem more traumatized than Reginald, who is quick to assuage her. Why ought Reginald comfort her? Does Langgässer suggest that the victims offer relief to others, even if they are easily cast as perpetrators? But this is the next generation; these are not perpetrator and victim, as we saw between Ewald Hauteville and his cousin Vera. Perhaps the shadow cast by the scaffolding noticed by the two children as they depart gives us the solution: While the room stands in darkness, the muntin casts a cross onto the silk curtain. The brother and sister climb out through the window, passing through the cross, and back down into the underworld from which they came.

The brother and sister, attracted to the light like moths, return three different nights to play with Reginald. The three children act out a puppet drama²⁴³ that features the figures of a soldier, a devil, an old king and queen, and a beautiful princess. The allegory of the children's play is evident: the Levi-Jeschowers have been described in terms of their royalty, and the play references adoption of their Jewish names—Sarah, which means “princess,” and Israel. The storyline follows the episode of Lotte's near-rape, a story reflective of the salvation narrative of the pilgrimage. The children outline the story:

²⁴³ The puppet show, like the already themetized role of puppets in the novel, reminds the reader of Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*, where the puppets have no individual agency, but are moved by some superior force which orchestrates the play. This is the second reference to marionettes; the first appears in a conversation about free will and providence. After Levi-Jeschower tells of a man who escaped his “Kettenstreife” by simply stating that he wanted to be released, Hauteville argues that the will to live is ambivalent at best, not unlike a table during a séance, pushed and made to dance by an “ominösen und wenig vertrauenswürdigen Geist” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 232). Irene von Dörfer agrees that this is the case, and that all actions resulting from a trance have no moral worth. This refers to actions during the Holocaust where these actions cannot be morally evaluated. Florentine Jeschower gives the divine perspective; she believes that God will save those he wants to by allowing them to fall “zurück in den Zustand der Marionette” and also those through whom he acts (*Argonautenfahrt*, 232). The conversation continues to include the Virgin Mary, and how she is both used by God and she has agency in deciding to be used. This discussion, along with the children's game, foreshadows the final allegorical story of Hellmuth being rescued by the priest, Kurella.

Sie einigten sich, daß der Teufel den Soldaten verführen sollte, das Königspaar umbringen und die Prinzessin mit einem Gewehr, das ein Stückchen versinnbildlichen mußte, in seine Herrschaft bringen; das Untier sollte ihm dabei helfen, der Prinzessin den Weg abzuschneiden, der Kaspar vergeblich warnen und schreien, und erst in aller-größter Bedrängnis der Königsohn erscheinen. (*Argonautenfahrt*, 362)

Beifuß's representative figure, called the *Königsohn*, evidences sacrificial, Christ-like qualities. He intercedes for others, including Lotte, who he saved by giving up his own life; in that role, he is also a "second Aeneas," where, in saving Lotte, he also creates a legacy—Lotte's sons²⁴⁴ and subsequent generations. The multiple references echo the levels of allegory—from the pilgrimage, to mythology, to fairy tales, to contemporary experience.

The multiple layers become visible when Helga, spotting a picture of Lotte, wonders about her name; it "war ersichtlich, daß sie den Namen einer Märchenprinzessin erwartete –Allerleirauh oder Jorinde" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 359). While Helga moves the modern day back into fairy tales, Reginald gives the fairy tale princess in the play his mother's name:

Als das Spiel auf seinen Höhepunkt kam und der verführte Soldat sein Gewehr auf die Königstochter gerichtet hatte, schleuderte Reginald plötzlich das Krokodil auf die Erde, riß Helga den Königsohn aus der Hand und warf ihn aus allen Kräften auf den fürchterlichen Soldaten.

"Lauf, Lotte, lauf!" schrie er hoch und hell, der überrumpelte Bösewicht

²⁴⁴ Lotte has had a second son, still a baby, whom she's named after Beifuss.

stürzte, alle Puppen kamen ins Handgemenge, der Teufel versuchte einzugreifen, während Kaspar den Knüppel auf seinen Kopf heruntersausen ließ. (*Argonautenfahrt*, 363)

Reginald's conflation of the fictional play with Lotte's own story further underscores the multiple threads that weave the story together. Reginald has clearly identified this play-story as his story; the play concludes with the puppets in a heap, just the way they started, and with Reginald clutching the Princess puppet to his chest and crying uncontrollably. Hellmuth does not understand why Reginald would have this reaction, "Es ist doch gut gegangen" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 363). Stammering through the sobs, Reginald explains "Ich wollte so gern einmal spielen, was ich heimlich mit gehört habe [...] meine Mutter [sollte] von einem Soldaten umgebracht werden [...] Und [...] dann [hat] ein fremder Mann ihn besiegt und totgeschlagen" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 363). The child's desire to act through and process what his mother experienced demonstrates the continuity of the story and also the emotional ramifications of the war story for later generations. As such, his story also models what Langgässer hopes her fiction will do for her readers. By re-enacting the story through reading, the audience will be able to process the experiences outlined in the novel and can then move on.

The puppet theater as world stage draws on an uncomfortable understanding of the role of the divine in human affairs. Lotte's rescue was orchestrated by the divine hand: "Gott hatte mitgespielt. Er hatte die Puppen in Händen gehalten, er hatte sie nach seinem Willen gelenkt, er lenkt sie immer noch" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 364). But belief in God's divine providence must then accept the rape and murder of other women, including nuns, as willed by God. As soon as the perspective takes a step back, the possibility that

God has orchestrated all interactions, all events, becomes disturbing. Does this mean that God orchestrated the Shoah?

The story, with its limited scope, does not expand to include more victims, but rather focuses on those saved and redeemed. Lotte explains her experience, from sinning to realizing God's hand in her affairs, to her son Reginald in a later scene. She uses terms of her own faith, tying together the magic of fairy tales with theology: "Ich glaube, die Meisten wissen es nicht, wenn sie verzaubert sind. Sie wissen erst, daß sie es waren, wenn Gott sie von dem Zauber erlöst hat und ihnen ihren menschlichen Leib wieder zurückgegeben" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 365). Her adult faith perspective illuminates her own experience,²⁴⁵ an extension of what the children reenact with the puppets. Her explanation relates to her redemption through Beifuß's sacrifice, and she uses the language of an awakening, or enlightenment.

In a discussion with Pat during the pilgrimage, Lotte confesses the rationale behind her affair with Albrecht Beifuß. She explains that the affair is an attempt to get her husband, a Jew, back from the East: "Opfer...Opfer, damit Corneli zurückkehrt, und ich bereuen kann. Herr Beifuß hilft mir zur Reue, indem er mit mir sündigt und mich die Sünde nachahmen läßt, die ich selber nicht tun kann. Die Hölle sündigt nicht mehr" (*Argonautenfahrt*, 291). Lotte treats the affair as a means to penance, in the hopes that by sinning, she will have something to regret, and that this regret would cause her husband to return. For the moment, she cannot comprehend of her actions as sin—she believes herself in Hell, and one cannot sin in a world already damned. Until Lotte awakens to her

²⁴⁵ As a German woman, she represents all German women waiting for husbands to return home; for the example to work, it does not matter whether she is awaiting a soldier or a concentration camp survivor. This is yet another example of Langgässer both including baptized Jews in a singular German experience, and also glossing over what Corneli just experienced.

sin, she remains enchanted and maintains an affair with Beifuß. She avoids the reality of her ambiguous state—her husband may or may not have been killed in a concentration camp, she may or may not see him again. Pat condemns Lotte's behavior as satanic. She makes the sign of the cross, resulting, presumably, in an exorcism. As a result, Lotte loses consciousness. Upon reawakening, disabused of her false assumptions, she continues only a platonic friendship with Beifuß. He accepts this role without complaint, but nearly confides to Flora that he would be prepared to die for Lotte's son Reginald (*Argonautenfahrt*, 291). When Lotte's life is in danger, Beifuß does put his life on the line to save her, and he loses it. His sacrifice ensures Reginald's ongoing well-being and secures a future for him.

In Euripides' version of the Medea myth, Jason's abandonment of his wife Medea drives her mad with rage and she murders their two children, breaking the line. In *Märkische Argonautenfahrt*, some children survive, so that there is a continuation of the line. The mistakes of Medea's generation need not mean death for the next. In this way, Reginald, one of Medea's children like Hellmuth and Helga, survives. Ensuing generations live on in Germany, a nation built on the sacrifice of Beifuß, the "second Aeneas." Sacrifice redeems even conscious sins, like Lotte's; Beifuß's self-sacrifice helps found this new Germany, represented by Hellmuth, Helga, and Reginald.

Mamertus as Langgässer's Response to Broch's Vergil

The brother and sister story is not the only frame to the novel; the final pages return to the convent at Anastasiendorf, where Mamertus, the abbot, kept a journal throughout the war. His journal, recorded on the backs of accounts paid after the harvest, re-

references the pilgrimage and the cumulative textual nature of the novel (*Argonautenfahrt*, 397). Because text is the vehicle for meaning, the formal aspects of the text are reconsidered philosophically and theologically.

Mamertus,²⁴⁶ self-conscious about his work as a writer, also records his own enlightenment concerning the fundamentals of writing—grammar. One of the nuns, Felicitas, taught novices Latin grammar, but was told to stop during the war as there were more pressing physical needs. Mamertus supports this and tells her that she can wait, that there will be a new year and another chance to teach. Felicitas does not trust that there will be another year: “Den nächsten Jahrgang, sagen Sie, Pater. Aber bis dahin ist alles zerstört. Von Grund auf zerstört wie bei einem Gebäude, das nicht lotrecht aufgeführt wurde, und dem vor allem, ich schwöre es Ihnen, die Fundamente fehlen” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 119) because all flesh must die. Felicitas stands in an apocalyptic moment; she does not see the cyclical nature of time surrounding the convent. For this reason, when Mamertus responds that grammar is not only the “Askese der Sprache” one needs to continue with language, but that it is also “das Gerippe der Sprache, ihr Skelett, der Knochenmann ihres schönen blühenden Fleisches—ist es nicht so?—mit einem Worte: Ihr Tod” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 119). Mamertus has had enough death, but the aesthetic nun has a simple reply: “Um zu sterben, sind wir ja hier” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 119). It is Felicitas’, who is also the annalist of the convent, simple response which strikes Mamertus’ heart like lightning. Through it, he feels the very language of her

²⁴⁶ Mamertus is most likely named after Saint Mamertus, a 5th century saint known for his introduction of litanies before Ascension Day—when Christ ascends to heaven. These litanies—words, prayers—were intended as intercession against earthquakes and other disasters. He also initiated rogation days, a period of prayer and fasting “to appease God’s anger at man’s transgressions” and “to ask protection in calamities.” See: “Rogation Days.” *Catholic Encyclopedia*. Accessed 12 June 2012. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13110b.htm> . It may also be a reference to Claudianus Mamertus, the saint’s brother, a theological writer with rhetorical education. See: “St. Mamertus.” *Catholic Encyclopedia*. Accessed 12 June 2012. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09580a.htm>

records concerning the convent, “das harsche Salz, mit welchem sie dieselben gewürzt, und die Süßigkeit ihrer sparsamen, zarten und scheuen Adjektive, durch die sie seinem vergilischen Gaumen [...] so überaus schmackhaft waren” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 119). Here Mamertus, an old man himself, has a radically different relationship to the historical records of the nun than Broch’s Vergil had to death and words; the slip of the adjective “vergilisch” into the description of Mamertus can be seen as a response to Broch’s characterization of Vergil in *Tod des Vergil*. Rather than losing his faith in the written work and questioning the ability of the written word to influence the world, as Vergil does as he considers destroying the *Aeneid* on his deathbed, Mamertus adds two additional journal entries to the main body of the novel in order to complete the story.

Mamertus’ realization that the convent’s history cannot be told without words and grammar results in a revision of his earlier rejection of grammar; his words reflect Langgässer’s own thoughts on form and content. He will, in fact, recommend to Demetria that “man unverzüglich mit der Erklärung der lateinischen Tagestexte beginnt und dem Konvent Gelegenheit gibt, den Zusammenhang zwischen Inhalt und Form selbständig nachzuvollziehen. [...] Repetition kann auf keinen Fall schaden – auch mir nicht,” he adds “mit bezaubernder Demut” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 120). The repetition, the unlocking of form and content together, lead the convent to death—but not death of which the other side remains unknown. Here is a radical departure from what Broch has written, where the “Jenseits” stand as a great unknown. Here, through the nun’s insistence on grammar and her aesthetic adherence to its rules, we gain insight into how words are inscribed into the heart and how words (and, more specifically, the grammar of how these words) are assembled (*Argonautenfahrt*, 120).

Mamertus continues in a reflection on language, grammar, and human existence which mirrors that of Vergil on his deathbed, with the important difference of Mamertus' reflections are guided by his faith in an afterlife, and with words not falling short or unclear, but with text/form and content joining to reveal a greater truth and God's providential wisdom. As Mamertus' reflections end, the scope of the novel returns to the pilgrims, who are connected to Mamertus through providence. The connection between the priest at Anastasiendorf and the pilgrims is not an unfamiliar one to the reader; after the first extended reflections on joy and God's wisdom, a short paragraph reorients the reader and brings the seven pilgrims back to the forefront. As Mamertus completes his reflection, the seven are "bereits zusammengeflossen," they are a "Magnetfeld" and the unbroken forces at work on them and within them emerge as pre-scribed—the powers that pull them together are a palimpsest revealed, creating a whole picture through the layers of writing and rewriting. As a layered text, the pilgrimage makes sense. If grammar, as established by Felicitas, is indeed death that should be longed for, then this pilgrimage, as a text, can also be understood as a writing and re-writing of the German people through their very movements—each figure carries a greater significance and meaning through the very "grammar" of their deaths to themselves through their penitent acts.

Mamertus records in his journal a conversation between Pachulka, a soldier who recently returned from Russia (where he fought in the Battle of Stalingrad), and a farmer, creating an addendum and framing the conclusion to the story. The story not only contradicts the portrayal of Russians as bloodthirsty rapists until this point; it also concludes the story with a resurrection story, echoing the themes of Lotte's awakening,

am Ende's enlightenment, and Beifuß' self-sacrifice as a resurrection act. Mamertus records the conversation as an eavesdropper, loaning his report objectivity.

Pachulke reports that the people in Russia are no different from those in Anastasiendorf. The farmer inquires further as to whether they are totally without God, and Pachulke reports that this is not the case. When he was cutting wood in the forest last Easter, he came across farmers—men and women—who were lying on the ground where a cross had been traced into the soil. Pachulke reports this as he digs graves. These graves represent bodily death that, in the Christian tradition, points to the hope of a resurrection. Dirt cross, graves in the soil—both images relate death with the earth. The story about the Russians, set on Easter,²⁴⁷ reenacts the story of Christ's death and resurrection and provides a narrative for hope for the Germans digging graves. The Russians relate the resurrection narrative to an overarching faith in God by singing the "Dreimalheilig," part of the Improperien in the Catholic church and also part of Orthodox liturgy. Pachulke translates their Orthodox prayer: "Heiliger Gott. Unsterblicher Gott. Heiliger, starker Gott. Unsterblicher, heiliger, starker Gott. Starker Unsterblicher."²⁴⁸ The combinations of characteristics of God, repeated in several iterations, all point to his omnipotence and endurance while bridging the distance between Orthodox and Catholic churches by

²⁴⁷ Two Langgässer poems published side by side in 1960 evidence her belief in the communal nature of Easter. From "Karsamstag": "Gemeinschaft weht wie Duft von seinen Porten, /es sammelt sich das Blut, aus dem entbunden der Geist, in dem wir liebend uns gefunden, / und Gott wird immer neu in ihm geboren ...". The motto connects Easter with the Jewish Passover, establishing continuity across space, time, and tradition: "Dies is die Nacht, in welcher du zuerst unsre Väter, die Kinder Israels aus Ägypten führtest. – Präfation der Kerzenweihe." Ostermontag reiterates these themes: "Unerhörter Sammlung wartet, / sich verklärend, alles Fleisch, / und aus Zeit- und Raumesgrenzen / dehnt sich das verheißne Reich." She also interweaves the story of the ark with Christ's purification through resurrection. See: Langgässer, Elisabeth. "Karsamstag: Ostermontag." *Zeitwende: Kultur, Kirche, Zeitgeschehen*. 31 (1960), 254-255. Originally printed in *Das heilige Feuer. Religiös-kulturelle Monatsschrift* 10, no. 7 (1922/23), 193-196.

²⁴⁸ See *Argonautenfahrt*, 412. A variation of these words exists in both Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches as the Improperien, which is part of the liturgy said during the observance of the Passion on Good Friday. The affirmation of God's omnipresence and omnipotence in the face of suffering folds into Langgässer's pilgrimage. While Langgässer revises the liturgy, the words are recognizable.

highlighting their commonalities. Confused by how these people could gather in the woods, the farmer inquires whether such an act were forbidden, alluding to the communist rejection of Christianity. The details relate the growing mass of people: “Nein. Nicht verboten. Immer mehr Leute kamen hierbei — Frauen und Kinder, junge Soldaten. Zuletzt kam ein Hauptmann dazu” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 412). The captain’s presence demonstrates Christianity within even the military. If leaders in the military—those who just led soldiers into the West to conquer Germany—are also Christian, then there is hope for those Christians in the Russian-occupied East specifically, and for ongoing Christian activity generally.

Pachulka claims all the Russians gathered kissed the cross and placed candles on the surrounding trees. The incredulous farmer dismisses the scene as simply dreamed—impossible—and returns to his work. It is the report of the return to work, digging graves, that concludes the addendum: “der Bauer[,] mit offenem Mund, setzte von neuem den Fuß auf die Schaufel und warf die Erde empor ...” (*Argonautenfahrt*, 412). Unaware of his participation in the cycle of death and resurrection, with Easter framing the events in the woods in the story he has just listened to, the farmer’s dismissal of the religious significance proves too simple. Like the ellipses that leave the page open for possibilities to ensue, the story concludes with a tale of faith practiced in the East, and the not-yet-complete grave in Anastasiendorf indicates the spiritual death Germany must still experience. Like the conclusion of the novel and the not-yet-filled grave, the story remains open, ready to be determined by the faithful.

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