

*Australisch-
Neuseeländische Studien
zur deutschen Sprache
und Literatur*

*Australian and
New Zealand Studies
in German Language
and Literature*

*Études parues en
Australie et Nouvelle-
Zélande en relation avec
la philologie allemande*

Richard Millington

Snow from Broken Eyes

Cocaine in the Lives
and Works of Three
Expressionist Poets



Peter Lang

The highpoint of German Expressionism in the second decade of the 20th century coincided with a rapid increase in the availability of cocaine as the drug was stockpiled for medical purposes by armies fighting the First World War. *Snow from Broken Eyes* investigates the implications of this historical intersection for the lives and works of three poets associated with Expressionism: Gottfried Benn, Walter Rheiner and Georg Trakl. All three are known to have used the drug during the War, although under very different circumstances, and the cocaine references contained in their works are equally diverse. These range from demonstrative declarations of drug use (Benn), via agonized textual re-enactments of the addict's humiliation and suffering (Rheiner), to the integration of drug symbolism into an original, deeply resonant poetic code (Trakl). In this study, the findings arising from close readings of key works by Benn, Rheiner and Trakl are contextualized in relation both to the longstanding historical association between psychoactive substances and imaginative literature, and to the radical innovations in literary style that characterized the early 20th century.

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*Australisch-
Neuseeländische Studien
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und Literatur*

Vol. 20

*Australian and
New Zealand Studies
in German Language
and Literature*

*Etudes parues en
Australie et Nouvelle-
Zélande en relation avec
la philologie allemande*

*founded by
Gerhard Schulz
and John Asher †*

*edited by
Gerhard Schulz (Melbourne)*

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Bern · Berlin · Bruxelles · Frankfurt am Main · New York · Oxford · Wien

Bibliographic information published by die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data: A catalogue record for this book is available from The British Library, Great Britain

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Millington, Richard H.

Snow from broken eyes : cocaine in the lives and works of three expressionist poets / Richard Millington.

p. cm. – (Australisch-Neuseeländische Studien zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur ISSN 0171-6867 ; v. 20)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-3-0343-1069-7

1. German poetry–20th century–History and criticism. 2. Cocaine abuse in literature. 3. Expressionism–Germany. 4. Benn, Gottfried, 1886-1956–Drug use. 5. Rheiner, Walter, 1895-1925–Drug use. 6. Trakl, Georg, 1887-1914–Drug use. 7. Poets, German–20th century. I. Title.

PT553.M55 2012

831'.912093556–dc23

2011042103

ISBN 978-3-0343-1069-7 E-ISBN 978-3-0351-0312-0
ISSN 0171-6867

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Hochfeldstrasse 32, CH-3012 Bern, Switzerland
info@peterlang.com, www.peterlang.com

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Printed in Switzerland

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*For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.
— Wallace Stevens, 'The Snow Man'*

1 Introduction

1.1 ‘Snow from Broken Eyes’

The image ‘snow from broken eyes’ – ‘Schnee aus brochenen [sic] Augen’ in the original German (Trakl *SW* 2:283–286) – has been chosen as the title for the present study because it captures, with supreme concision, several essential facets of its principal object: the relationship between a set of literary texts composed by three Expressionist poets on the one hand, and the psychoactive drug cocaine on the other. The image is taken from the poem ‘Rosiger Spiegel: ein häßliches Bild,’ written by the Austrian poet Georg Trakl between December 1912 and February 1913 (the full text is quoted and discussed in 10.2). Although the austerity and subtlety of Trakl’s poetic style sets it apart from the stridency typical of Expressionism, and although the poet himself had no serious association with the movement’s various programmatic forms, his image of ‘snow from broken eyes’ is quintessentially Expressionist in its combination of the destructive and surreal, and displays his affinity with the artistic and literary movement that dominated the German cultural scene throughout the second decade of the 20th century.

For this study it is significant that Trakl’s image – and the poem ‘Rosiger Spiegel’ as a whole – conveys a perspective of the world and the self distinct from the perspective of normal, sober consciousness, and consistent rather in several fundamental respects with the condition of intoxication, in particular as associated with the use and abuse of psychoactive substances. The most obvious parallel is the painful bodily destruction leading to death evoked in the collocation ‘broken eyes,’ in so far as physiological damage is one inevitable consequence of excessive or prolonged drug taking; the allusion to death is conveyed by means of play on the German phrase ‘seine Augen brechen,’ used to refer to the glazing over of eyes at the moment of death. Further, we might also note that these ‘eyes’ are unmodified by any possessive adjective or other determiner that would indicate their owner, and so appear strangely detached and auto-

mous, as body parts frequently do in the intoxicated consciousness of the drug user. Further, and perhaps most importantly, Trakl's image is imbued with the ontological amorphousness characteristic of the drugged perspective. The perception of snow emanating – or 'crying', which is the verb used in 'Rosiger Spiegel' – from eyes, whether broken or whole, alive or dead, fits most uneasily with the range of perceptions that can normally be made in the world outside this text. Is the reader, therefore, to understand this perception as imaginary, or perhaps hallucinatory? If so, we must then ask which elements – the snow, the eyes, their brokenness (or glazing), the 'crying' of the snow 'from' the eyes – are imaginary or hallucinatory, and which are real. But the poem offers no indications as to where this line should be drawn. The reader might be tempted to avoid this interpretative dilemma by adopting a different strategy and assuming that Trakl's image, in whole or in part, is not in fact an account of perceptual or imaginary experience, but a metaphorical expression of something else. Here, however, new difficulties arise, for the boundary between literal and metaphorical meaning is no more evident than that between perception and hallucination. A figurative interpretation of 'brochenen' as 'dead', for example, in no way precludes the literal interpretation 'broken'; it merely complicates the matter further by adding another layer of possible meaning,¹ while it is hardly clear what meaning could be attributed to any other metaphor that might be present. As a result, Trakl's image remains suspended between imaginary and real, literal and figurative dimensions, and appears loaded with possible meanings in all of them. It takes on the same quality of amplified semantic potential that objects, people, thoughts, and dreams typically assume in the intoxicated mind of the drug user. As Henri

1 Trakl's play on the literal and figurative dimensions of the phrase 'seine Augen brechen' has a precedent in the work of another renowned Expressionist, Georg Heym. The penultimate stanza of Heym's poem 'Umbra Vitae' (1911) reads:

Wer stirbt, der setzt sich auf, sich zu erheben,
Und eben hat er noch ein Wort gesprochen,
Auf einmal ist er fort. Wo ist sein Leben?
Und seine Augen sind wie Glas zerbrochen. (Pinthus 40)

Trakl's usage, in which neither meaning is fully activated or deactivated, is stylistically more radical than Heym's, in which the figurative meaning is activated unambiguously by the description of death that precedes it.

Michaux observed of one of his mescaline trips, ‘everything tingles with possibilities’ (Plant 146).

The various intoxicated features concentrated in this image may induce the suspicion that Trakl’s ‘snow’ represents an allusion to cocaine, that is, an agent of intoxication. Clearly such a reference would have to be posited on a secondary and figurative level of meaning, for it is no more credible that cocaine should literally ‘cry from broken eyes’ than snow in its primary sense of ‘flakes of ice crystals.’ Yet even an indirect or enciphered reference of this sort would cohere with and reinforce the subtextual intoxication motif already identified. At this stage the reader might question the historical legitimacy of such a reading, for although the German *Schnee*, like its equivalents in English and many other languages, is today among the most widely used and recognizable of the numerous epithets for the white, crystalline powder of cocaine, this metaphorical association was surely less familiar, perhaps even unborn, when this poem was written. Indeed, Douglas Harper’s *Online Etymology Dictionary* informs us that the first attested use of ‘snow’ for ‘cocaine’ dates from 1914, at least one year after the composition of ‘Rosiger Spiegel.’ This information, however, far from settling the question, makes it all the more intriguing, for when we consider the etymologists’ warning that such dates must be taken as purely indicative (due to the impossibility of accounting for the vast quantity of unrecorded language use or the time that may have passed before a new word or meaning appears in written form), this dating demonstrates that ‘snow’ acquired its codified metaphorical association with cocaine in the same period in which Trakl was poetically active.² Of broader relevance here, this was also the high point of the Expressionist period, which coincided not only with the beginning of the First World War, the social and political upheavals resulting from which were partly foreshadowed in the works of Expressionism’s

2 One of the few German dictionaries to comment on the etymology of *Schnee* as an epithet for cocaine is Heinz Küpper’s *Wörterbuch der deutschen Umgangssprache* (1970). Küpper dates the emergence of this usage to post-World War One, when it became widespread. But this etymology is approximate, and Küpper’s main concern is to underline that its origin is not more recent: ‘Den heutigen Halbwüchsigen eine sehr geläufige Vokabel; aber nicht von ihnen aufgebracht und wahrscheinlich kurz nach 1918 in Berlin aufgekommen’ (6:283). Note also that nasal inhalation is documented as having become a popular mode of administration of the drug in the years 1912–14 (Maier 64); the emergence of the epithet ‘snow’ would logically have coincided with the increased distribution of the drug in powder form resulting from this development.

early exponents, but also with the beginning of cocaine's first wave of large-scale popularity, which would peak a decade later in the hedonistic excesses of the 'Golden Twenties.' Furthermore, even if it were demonstrable that at the time of writing 'Rosiger Spiegel' Trakl himself could not have been aware of a possible cocaine connotation in this snow image, to exclude a reference to the drug on this basis alone would amount to an arbitrary and – for Trakl – un-poetic conflation of meaning with authorial intention. As we shall see in part 3, not only 'Rosiger Spiegel' but Trakl's poetry as a whole is particularly resistant to reductive interpretations of this or any other kind.

For now, suffice it to note that one of the chief reasons the image of 'snow from broken eyes' can be considered representative of the text–drug relationship under examination here is, curiously, that its reference to cocaine is essentially indeterminate and elusive. Elusiveness is a theme that will be met with repeatedly in this study, and as we shall have several occasions to observe, the uncertainty it produces often has the paradoxical effect of reinforcing the text–drug relationship by investing it with the force and fascination of mystery. Even in works that contain an unambiguous reference to the drug in the form of the word *Kokain* – these represent approximately half of those discussed – the same elusiveness invariably manifests itself in other aspects of the relationship, such as the drug's role in the syntactic, sonic and thematic structures of the text, or the link between the drug in the text and the drug experience of its writer, especially with regard to the confessional impulse that seems masked in certain works, such as Walter Rheiner's 1918 novella *Kokain*, while assuming a suspiciously exaggerated prominence in others, for example in Gottfried Benn's 1916 poem 'O Nacht.' Significantly, ambivalence, intangibility and elusiveness are features that permeate not only these texts, but also many if not most aspects of drug taking as a whole. This can in part be attributed to the illegality and stigma connected with the production, distribution, and consumption of so many psychoactive drugs, cocaine included. But this connection is preceded, both historically and causally, by a more fundamental link between drug use and transcendental experience that can never be fully assimilated to the conventional categories and codes of sober consciousness or rational thought. In written accounts of drug use, this transcendental aspect often finds expression in the disruption or subversion of these categories and codes, in what amounts to a form of *textual intoxication* that manifests itself, for example, in lexical idiosyncrasies, syntactic or

semantic ambiguities, paradoxes, ellipses, or conceptual discontinuity. In certain texts, especially of the literary variety and including several of those that will be discussed in this study, such textual intoxication may represent the most solid link between the work and the writer's drug experience, particularly in the absence of direct references to drugs themselves; in this respect too, Trakl's 'snow from broken eyes' is illustrative. Crucially, however, for the reader it is impossible to determine whether such features result from the influence of an external agent, such as a psychoactive drug, or are cultivated by the writer as stylistic devices – or some combination of the two. For this reason we must be careful not to use the text as a basis for rash assumptions about the writer's methods or the influence of his drug use on his creativity. Here also, elusiveness remains the keynote.

Indeterminacies of this sort add complexity to our investigation and also broaden its relevance, for they extend its ramifications beyond the purely historical problem of establishing which Expressionist writers used cocaine and what literature they produced while using it, knowledge in itself of marginal value for enhancing our appreciation of the writers' works. We will be faced, rather, with a series of more fundamental questions concerning the 'multiform interpenetration' of text and world (Jakobson 320), the purpose and possibilities of poetic expression, and the place of Expressionism both as heir to the Romantic tradition and the first full-blown manifestation of literary Modernism. In particular, we will examine what the treatment of the drug and cocaine motifs in each work reveals about the text's aesthetic and communicative strategies, and how this treatment coheres with other aspects of the work – its themes, form, and style. A more specific consideration will be how each text manipulates, via enhancement or containment, the elusive qualities central to the experience of transcendence-through-intoxication. Where this is enhanced via a poetic defamiliarization of the linguistic code, as it is in most of these works, we shall assess to what extent the text itself suggests a correspondence between poetic language and drugged consciousness as parallel manifestations of the transcendental. This study will also investigate how a text–drug relationship can be manifested in a given work even in the absence of explicit references to psychoactive substances, and further, the possibility of relating our knowledge of a writer's drug use to a reading of his works without reducing the literary text to a form of encrypted autobiography. Finally, we are interested in placing our findings in a broader context, identifying patterns and developments in the *œuvre* of each writer, highlighting significant similarities and

differences between the three poets under discussion, as well as between their works and the drug-associated literature of other periods, in particular distinguishing elements that perpetuate the literary concerns of the Expressionists' 19th-century predecessors from those that represent innovations in the literary elaboration of the drug theme.

Considering the centrality to our topic of such features as opacity, indeterminacy and mystification, it will remain imperative throughout to ascertain what can be said with certainty about the role of cocaine in the lives and works of our three poets, and what on the other hand results from implication, deduction, or speculation. This is not to say that only certainties are valuable to our analysis; on the contrary, particular attention will be dedicated to the exploration of aspects – of both text and biography – that appear ambiguous or puzzling, as it is usually here that the key to an enriched response to the work lies. This circumstance makes it doubly important not to confuse assumption with fact. As a general methodological guideline, therefore, we shall adopt the French sociologist Edgar Morin's dictum that 'one must learn to sail through an ocean of uncertainties from one archipelago of certainty to the next.'³ A similar consideration underlies the overall organization of this study, which is divided into three parts, each dealing with the life and works of one poet: Benn, Rheiner and Trakl. This order is unchronological and only coincidentally alphabetical. Its procedural basis is a decreasing level of explicitness, and inversely an increasing level of uncertainty, in the references to cocaine in each writer's works: the word *Kokain* appears in all four works by Benn analyzed in part 1, in three of the six that make up Rheiner's 'master narrative of addiction' traced in part 2, and in none of the seven by Trakl quoted in full (or the numerous others quoted in part) in part 3. To extend Morin's metaphor, this approach will allow us to take our bearings in an archipelago of relative certainty before confronting the rigours of the open sea. The first chapter in each part will investigate the nature and extent of the writer's own drug use and evaluate possible relationships between these biographical factors and the writer's literary activity (the greater space given to Rheiner reflecting an assumption of lesser familiarity with both his biography and his work), while the subsequent chapters will be concerned with close textual analysis, addressing questions such as those outlined in

3 'Il faut apprendre à naviguer dans un océan d'incertitudes à travers des archipels de certitude.'

the previous paragraph. With Rheiner and Trakl, the biographical perspective provided in the opening chapter will similarly serve as a relatively secure departure point for the textual exploration that follows; with Benn it will confirm that the certainty his explicit cocaine references seem to offer is only relative, or to stretch Morin's metaphor even further, that the islands in Benn's archipelago are separated by treacherous waters.

The following three sections of this introductory chapter represent the preliminary stages for the exploration contained in the three main parts of this study. Our first concerns will be to sketch a brief history of the association between psychoactive drugs and creative writing, and to draw from this an overview of cocaine's literary role in the periods before, during and after the Expressionist era. This will be followed by a summary and assessment of the critical material relevant to the topic, including studies concerned directly with the three writers in question and those that approach the drug-literature relationship more generically. In the last section of this chapter, on the basis of the observations made in the preceding ones, we will expand on the methodological considerations already delineated and propose an analytical system adapted to the conditions and parameters of this study, one that accounts for the complex interweaving of certainties and uncertainties, affirmations, ambiguities and evasions with which a critical investigation into the text-drug relationship must come to terms.

1.2 Drugs, Cocaine: A Condensed Literary History

We preface this necessarily abbreviated historical account with two terminological clarifications. First, throughout this study the word 'drug' is used broadly and inclusively – alcohol, tobacco and caffeine are drugs – and is considered interchangeable with the terms 'psychoactive substance' and 'intoxicant'. The intricacies of questions such as 'what is a drug?' or, just as pertinently, 'how does a particular substance come to be considered a drug?' have been dealt with elsewhere and will not be reiterated here in detail. In one such discussion that has gained particular currency among scholars in literary and cultural studies, Jacques Derrida's 'The Rhetoric of Drugs' (1989), the philosopher (via his translator Michael Israel) states that 'one can, of course, refer to alcohol or tobacco as "drugs", but this will

necessarily imply a sort of irony, as if in doing so one only marked a sort of rhetorical displacement' (22). The inclusiveness of the definition offered here, however, neither implies any 'sort of irony,' nor is it intended to 'mark a rhetorical displacement.' This contradiction serves as a useful reminder that the degree of inclusiveness of the term is a significant semantic variable (making this note of clarification necessary), and that cognate terms in other languages may have broader or narrower semantic fields. The equally broad pharmaceutical sense of the term 'drug' as a synonym for 'medicament', as it is used chiefly in American English, also has some bearing, especially in so far as the substances it denotes overlap with those of the first definition. Historically, the widespread pharmaceutical use of cocaine extended to the period with which we are concerned here, and both Benn and Trakl, in their respective capacities as medical doctor and pharmacist, must have been actively involved in its medical application. In this connection, it is worth underlining the fundamental ambivalence of the word 'drug' as denoting substances that can have either harmful or beneficial effects, and often both at once, depending on the frequency and size of the dosage, the psychological and physiological condition of the user, his social and physical environment, etc. This ambivalence is shared by the Latin *venenum* and the Greek *pharmakon*, the latter having become something of an academic buzzword since the implications of its use by Plato as a metaphor for writing were scrutinized by Derrida in 'La Pharmacie de Platon' (1972).

The second clarification concerns terms used to denote literary movements and epochs such as Romanticism, Realism, Modernism and Expressionism, all of which have received book-length analyses. In this study they, too, are used broadly, in accordance with the following considerations made by Martin Seymour-Smith in his *Guide to Modern World Literature*:

Our understanding of literature does not benefit from attempts to narrow down the meaning of terms too precisely: the terms themselves lose their value. They are very useful, but become abstract when allowed to dominate individual achievement. Literature is generated by men and women, not by movements. (xii)

In this respect it is significant that the subtitle of this study identifies 'the lives and works of three Expressionist poets,' rather than Expressionism

itself, as the object of our investigation.⁴ It is certainly legitimate and useful, as well as conventional, to link Benn, Trakl and Rheiner with Expressionism, and via Expressionism with each other, but it must also be emphasized that the works of the first two always transcend the movement's programmatic interests, while Rheiner's assumption of a zealously and polemically Expressionist position, alien to his own temperament, renders much of his verse – for today's reader – trivial and dated. His most interesting works, on the other hand, including those examined in chapter 6, are also his least Expressionist (the story 'Der Tod des Schwärmer's Gautier Fémin' presents itself as a song of 'welcome' to Expressionism, but intriguingly comes to undermine its own precepts; see 6.2). Trakl never actively subscribed to any Expressionist doctrine; Benn declared his allegiance to the movement only *post factum* in his essay 'Bekenntnis zum Expressionismus' (*GW* 3:802–818) of November 1933, written in response to the Nazis' proclamation of Expressionism's – and Benn's own – 'degeneracy'; Rheiner, by contrast, participated in the foundation of the 'Expressionistische Arbeitsgemeinschaft Dresden' in 1917 and a year later became editor of the Dresden-based Expressionist journal *Menschen*. These differences confirm that, as Seymour-Smith remarks, 'the more considerable the gifts of those poets or writers now usually called expressionist, the more isolated or remote from the movement they tended to be' (571). They also explain why the Expressionist ethos, the movement's favourite forms and motifs, its historical development and its reception, its various currents and their most prominent representatives will be afforded much greater consideration in part two than in either parts one or three. That said, let us begin our history.

All primitive peoples, Friedrich Nietzsche tells us in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (1872), speak of narcotic potions in their hymns (3:24). This observation has set the tone for more recent statements on the nebulous origins of the association between intoxicants and literature, with the cultural historians of drugs fond of reminding us that this association is as old as literature itself (Kupfer *GG* 21, *kP* 12–15; Plant 96–98). Thanks not least to Nietzsche, the most celebrated of the numerous forms that the association took in antiquity was the cult of Dionysos, which combined the

4 'Poets' has been favoured over 'writers' because although all three also wrote in forms other than poetry, they all dedicated most energy – and attached most importance – to the lyric genre.

ecstatic worship of the Greek god of wine and madness with dramatic performance, culminating in the theatrical competitions that framed the Golden Age of Greek drama in the 5th century B.C. Nietzsche himself traces the Dionysian tradition to Asia Minor, 'bis hin zu Babylon und den orgiastischen Sakäen' (3:24), and more recent studies have confirmed his assertion that the entheogenic use of psychoactive substances, often involving forms of creative expression, was common to the earliest cultures of every continent (Kupfer *GG* 38–39). Of particular note is the shamanic practice, widespread in the traditional cultures of both northern Asia and the Americas, of narrating visions brought about by the ingestion of such naturally occurring hallucinogens as the fly agaric mushroom or peyote, the cactus from which mescaline is derived. Despite the differences in cultural context and mode of expression – shamanic narratives are predominantly oral rather than written – the basic communicative principle of articulating and interpreting drug-induced transcendental experience inherent in this practice is also the dominant impulse behind many of the works that can be posited in the modern canon of drug literature. This parallel is underlined by the substantial interest shown in shamanism by several of the 20th-century writers whose drug-related works are considered seminal. Although not popularized until the late 1960s in Carlos Castaneda's best-selling mock anthropology,⁵ the roots of this interest stretch further back, via *The Yage Letters* (1963) of William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, to Antonin Artaud's 'Le Rite du Peyotl chez les Tarahumaras' (1943–44), purportedly based on the French playwright's Mexican journey of 1936, and to Benn's own essay 'Provoziertes Leben' (1943), the pseudo-science of which anticipated Castaneda's by 25 years.

The role of psychoactive drugs in European – later also North American – literature of the Christian era remained peripheral (but constant; Boon 6–7) until the turn of the 19th century, when the Romantic preoccupation with the mysteries of the unconscious mind and the power of the irrational placed alternative states of consciousness – madness, dreams, somnambulism, hypnotism, intoxication – at the centre of popular attention. From the historical point of view, the surge of literary interest in drug use that occurred during the Romantic period, embodied most completely in Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*

5 The first and most widely read of Castaneda's many books is *The Teachings of Don Juan. A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (1968).

(1821), must be seen as the result of a confluence of developments in a variety of spheres, many of them non-literary. As Marcus Boon observes,

the notion of a specifically Romantic or aesthetic attitude toward drugs masks a profound interdependence with the scientific practices and the marketplace of the day, as well as the fate of religion in the West. (6)

This is not the place to examine such relations in depth. Nonetheless, one particular historical change should be singled out as particularly relevant, namely that this period saw the definitive affirmation of the modern conception of art, imaginative literature included, as an autonomous field of cultural activity no longer subordinate to political, philosophical, or – crucially – religious systems, which it had always acknowledged as greater than itself. This development gave painters, musicians and writers unprecedented freedom to explore unconventional means of experiencing and expressing the transcendental, which was then, much more readily than today, equated with the divine, or conversely the demonic. Derrida, using a florid ‘rhetoric’ of his own, describes the consequences of this shift for the association between drugs and literature:

When the sky of transcendence comes to be emptied, and not just of Gods, but of any Other, a fatal rhetoric fills the void, and this is the fetishism of drug addiction. Not religion as the opiate of the people, but drugs as the religion of the atheist poets – and of some others, more or less atheists, more or less poets. (RD 29)

A related and equally significant result of this cultural reconfiguration was the emergence of a new perception of the artist’s status. Whereas previously poets, playwrights and novelists – like painters, sculptors and composers – had been seen in the first place as craftsmen, in the Romantic mindset they were ascribed mystical power and elevated to the status of prophets and visionaries. The poet in particular, like the shaman in primitive societies, became ‘one who by use of his intuition may unravel the mysteries of the universe’ (Seymour-Smith 424), although the utilitarian imperative of a rapidly developing capitalist economy meant that the poet, unlike the shaman, usually occupied a marginal social position. The notion of the artist as a ‘genius’, an exceptionally sensitive individual with privileged or even divine insight who is destined to be misunderstood by his contemporaries, was already inherent in the works of the *Sturm und Drang*, and so underlay Romantic thought and literature from the outset. Perhaps its most

succinct and accomplished expression, wisely spiced with a dash of self-irony, can be found in three poems by Alexander Pushkin: ‘Prorok’ (‘The Prophet’; 1826), ‘Poet’ and ‘Arion’ (both 1827). Not until decades later, however, did it find its most radical and subsequently most acclaimed formulation, which occurs in the *voyant* letters (1871) of Arthur Rimbaud, where the poet is characterized as ‘le grand malade, le grand criminel, le grand maudit, – et le suprême Savant!’ (*Oc* 270). The dating of Rimbaud’s *voyant* letters is significant because it attests to the enduring nature of the shift that the Romantic perception of the creative artist came to represent.⁶ Indeed, notwithstanding critical attempts to deconstruct the myth of the artist in the second half of the 20th century, the same view has persisted to the present day. Paradoxically, this has resulted in the idolization of the most prominent of those who would do away with it, notably Roland Barthes, who despite himself reserved a place in the pantheon of authors (or its academic adjunct, the pantheon of theorists) with his 1968 pronouncement of the ‘death of the author.’ Its currency during the period with which we are concerned here might be exemplified by Rheiner’s Expressionist radicalization (‘Ein Untermensch. Ein Übergott’) of the Romantic archetype in ‘Der Dichter in der Welt’ (1919):

– Der Dichter; was ist das? Ein steter Schmerz.
Ach weniger als ihr alle ahnt. Und mehr!
Ein Untermensch. Ein Übergott. Ein Zwischentier.
Oh, Fackel unbekanntes Brands! Ein Wolken-Winkel. (*M* 45)

Such ‘inter-animal poets’ figure repeatedly in Rheiner’s works, with the protagonists of both the novella *Kokain* and the short story ‘Die Erniedrigung’ (see 6.3), for example, conforming to this type. The opening paragraph of the latter contains a further elaboration of this author’s view of the poetic vocation as both gift and curse:

Wer ist mehr berufen, die Mächte über sich zu fühlen, als der Dichter? Wer mehr berufen, alle Schauerlichkeit ihrer hallenden Grotten auszutrinken, als er, der Berufene kat’ exochän, der Bejager, der ewig Kämpfende am Ölberge, der da spricht: Ist es nicht möglich, daß dieser Kelch von mir gehe, ich trinke ihn denn; so geschehe dein Wille! ... Er lebt auf allen Inseln; er stürzt in jede Stadt; erfrorner Sperling,

6 As a further sign of its persistence in the late 19th century despite shifting literary fashions, one might refer to its successful parody by the Naturalist Arno Holz in his poem ‘Ihr Dach stieß fast bis an die Sterne’ of 1885.

schwebt er auf jeden Park hernieder; und jede Nacht ist ihm feindlich! – Nur wer dienet, mag befehlen! ... So dienet er, der Prinz, und über Nacht und Finsternis wird er König, triumphaler Rufer und Herrscher des Lichts! (*M* 100)

In both these texts the poet's role is conceptualised as a divine calling (aptronymically underlined in 'Die Erniedrigung' by the protagonist's improbable surname 'Sternraffer'), or better an imposition from God, a burden to be borne, lending him special insight into the mechanics of the human soul but at the same time creating an unbridgeable gap between him and his fellow men and condemning him to a short, miserable life on the fringes of society.

Introducing the visionary theme in the first of his *voyant* letters, Rimbaud wrote:

Now I am going in for debauchery. Why? I want to be a poet, and I am working to make myself a visionary: you won't possibly understand, and I hardly know how to explain it to you. To arrive at the unknown through the disordering of all the senses, that's the point.⁷ (*Oc* 270)

In his introduction to the 1907 edition of Rimbaud's work in Karl Klammer's German translation (identified as one of Trakl's major sources, *SW* 1:16), Stefan Zweig specifies 'Wein, Gifte, Abenteuer' as three elements of the French poet's visionary 'debauchery' (Springer *N* 29). We need hardly reiterate the potential attraction of psychoactive substances as an aid to the 'disordering of all the senses,' as a means of 'arriving at the unknown,' or from a more detached perspective, as a 'prop' to literature's 'new-found independence' (Boon 6), and the Romantics had in fact assigned them this role long before Rimbaud famously asserted the poet's visionary calling in 1871. In 1844, for example, the poet's penchant for agents of intoxication as keys to the 'life of the Universe' had been highlighted by Ralph Waldo Emerson, himself a firm advocate of unmediated experience of the divine, in terms that prefigure Nietzsche's characterization of 'Dionysian' ecstasy in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*:

It is a secret which every intellectual man quickly learns, that, beyond the energy of his possessed and conscious intellect, he is capable of a new energy (as of an intellect

7 'Maintenant, je m'encrapule le plus possible. Pourquoi? Je veux être poète, et je travaille à me rendre voyant: vous ne comprendrez pas du tout, et je ne saurais presque vous expliquer. Il s'agit d'arriver à l'inconnu par le dérèglement de tous les sens.'

doubled on itself), by abandonment to the nature of things; that, beside his privacy of power as an individual man, there is a great public power, on which he can draw, by unlocking, at all risks, his human doors, and suffering the ethereal tides to roll and circulate through him [Nietzsche would write of 'the shattering of the *principium individuationis*' (3:24)]: then he is caught up into the life of the Universe, his speech is thunder, his thought is law, and his words are universally intelligible as the plants and animals. The poet knows that he speaks adequately, then, only when he speaks somewhat wildly, or, 'with the flower of the mind'; not with the intellect, used as an organ, but with the intellect released from all service, and suffered to take its direction from its celestial life; or, as the ancients were wont to express themselves, not with intellect alone, but with the intellect inebriated by nectar. [...] This is the reason why bards love wine, mead, narcotics, coffee, tea, opium, the fumes of sandal-wood and tobacco, or whatever other species of animal exhilaration. (274–275)

The opening paragraph of 'Die Erniedrigung,' written over 80 years later, follows an equivalent trajectory, positing an almost natural connection between the poet's painful predicament and his recourse to drug use: 'So dient er, der Prinz, und über Nacht und Finsternis wird er König, triumphaler Rufer und Herrscher des Lichts! – So fiel er in (trostlose) Wüste orientalischen Giftes' (*M* 100).

Two 'species of animal exhilaration' are most strongly linked with the literature of the Romantic period. The first is opium, which in the form of laudanum, a tincture of 90% alcohol, was in widespread use during the same period, and remained so until the beginning of the 20th century, as a universal analgesic with a status equivalent to that of aspirin today (Kupfer *GG* 434). The second is hashish, which achieved particular prominence in France through the activities of the *Club des Hashichins*, a group of avant-garde artists and intellectuals of the early 1840s whose meetings consisted in communal drug experiments and were attended by writers such as Honoré de Balzac, Charles Baudelaire and Gustave Flaubert, even if not all participated actively in its goings-on. In the Romantic imagination, the appeal of both these intoxicants was immeasurably enhanced by their association with the distant and exotic lands where they were produced, and with hashish in particular by the greatly exaggerated perception of the drug's importance to Islamic culture, a view based on its role in the tales of the *Thousand and One Nights* and the legend of the Old Man of the Mountain, founder of the hashish-imbibing Assassins, first recounted to a European readership by Marco Polo. The list of writers who can be linked to either or both of these substances – by medicinal use, inquisitive dabbling, full-blown addiction, as well as literary treatment – features many of the

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