The Role of Fischerle in Elias Canetti's Novel Die Blendung

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the role of Fischerle in Elias Canetti's novel Die Blendung. Fischerle is examined from two main points of view: first he is seen as a dramatically vitalizing figure associated with a significant body of imagery and motifs in the novel; then he is viewed as a foil to Kien.

Die Blendung is populated by a wide variety of grotesques. It is argued that Fischerle, who is more elaborately burdened with grotesque features than any other figure in the novel, is also the character who is most self-aware and awake to the world. Fischerle is a rogue, but he generates pathos.

Chapter III studies the figure of Fischerle as a composite of his defining features, his qualities and his abilities. Particular attention is paid to the function of the imagery and motifs associated with Fischerle.

Chapter IV explores the Kien-Fischerle dynamic in terms of the imagery that relates the two characters to one another. A selection of images and metaphors showing a pattern of blending and separation is analyzed. Conclusions are drawn concerning this pattern of imagery as a further source of pathos for readers of this peculiarly "heartless" novel.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce mémoire a pour but d'examiner le rôle de Fischerle dans le roman Die Blendung d'Elias Canetti. Fischerle est analysé sous deux angles principaux: premièrement, il est perçu comme un personnage extrêmement animé et associé à un vaste corpus symbolique; deuxièmement, il est perçu comme antagoniste de Kien.

Ce roman est habité par une grande variété de grotesque. Il est argumenté que Fischerle, lui-même accablé de caractéristiques grotesques plus que nul autre personnage, est également le personnage le plus ouvert à lui-même et au monde extérieur. Fischerle est un fripon mais il engendre le pathétique.

Le troisième chapitre étudie le personnage de Fischerle: ses traits caractéristiques, ses qualités et ses capacités. Une attention particulière sera portée sur le rôle de la symbolique associée à Fischerle.

Le quatrième chapitre explore la dynamique Kien-Fischerle en ce qui concerne la symbolique reliant les deux personnages. Une sélection d'images et de métaphores présentant un motif de fusion et de séparation sera analysée. Des conclusions seront tirées de ce motif symbolique comme source additionnelle de pathétique pour les lecteurs de ce roman "sans-coeur."

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I. Introduction

Elias Canetti's novel Die Blendung[1] is in several respects a literary curiosity. It is Canetti's first major work and only published novel, standing at the very beginning of his long and extremely varied writing career. Composed over the years 1930-31, it appeared in 1935 to appreciative but mixed reviews which expressed astonishment at its singularity.[2] Not until the late 1960s did it begin to receive intensive and sustained critical attention, and then attempts were made to understand it predominantly in terms of the ideas and theories of crowds and power set forth in Canetti's great tome Masse und Macht,[3] which appeared in 1960.

Die Blendung is an oddly inscrutable book. Its tone is permeated with irony and its humour is laced with madness; at once comic and harrowing, it portrays a degenerate world in which a course of calamitous events unfolds. Many readers of Die Blendung have resisted its representation of a world populated by a wide variety of grotesques who seem incapable of human fellowship, compassion and love. Accordingly, one of the main difficulties encountered by readers of the novel concerns a basic emotional and psychological response: what to make of this novel so strangely lacking a "normal" sympathetic core?

This thesis examines the role of Fischerle, a character of pivotal significance in the middle section of the novel. Fischerle is more misshapen with grotesque features than any other figure in Die Blendung; he is also the only character who is painfully aware of his own freakishness, and for all the apparent absurdity of his being, Fischerle is vibrantly sentient and "alive." Fischerle is the most intriguing and complex character we meet in this book. Still, many important elements of Fischerle's

role in Die Blendung have gone largely unexplored and even unrecognized in previous criticism of the novel In particular, much remains to be said about the imagery and motifs associated with Fischerle, both as they bear on the figure of Fischerle himself, and as they inform his relationship to Kien. Especially this latter point, i.e., the play of imagery and metaphor in the Kien-Fischerle dynamic, has received scant critical attention, and is a subject this thesis will discuss at some length.

There are, then, several aspects of Fischerle to be considered here: the significance of his physical attributes as a grotesque, his personal and psychological qualities the dominant imagery and motifs associated with Fischerle — including the motif of his obsession with chess, which is his driving force — and finally, his relationship to Kien. How do the motifs and imagery surrounding the figure of Fischerle fit into the scheme of the novel as a whole? What is Fischerle's place in the overall constellation of characters, especially in relation to Kien? What does Fischerle teach us about Canetti's vision of mankind? It is hoped that this study will reveal Fischerle as a figure who in many ways animates the peculiar "heart" in this book of seeming heartlessness.

The central character of the novel is the unworldly sinologist Peter Kien. Kien loves books and, above all, his library, but disdains other human beings. Next to Kien there are four other principal characters: Therese of the starched blue skirt, Kien's wife and former housekeeper; Benedikt Pfaff, the brutal house porter and retired policeman, with his huge fists and red hair; wily, chess-crazed Fischerle, the Jewish humpbacked dwarf; and Peter Kien's brother Georg Kien, a Parisian psychiatrist. The novel describes Kien's undoing in three successive phases as a function of his relationships, first with Therese (Part One, "Ein Kopf ohne Welt"), then with Fischerle

(Part Two, "Kopflose Welt"), and finally with Pfaff and with Georg (Part Three, "Welt im Kopf").

In this novel of fractured, freakish humanity, Fischerle captures our interest as a character of peculiar vitality and dramatic force. Fischerle is more arresting as a grotesque than the other figures, and, unlike them, he is also involved in a struggle to transform himself, to escape from the constraints of his impoverished life and his physical crippledom, to win human dignity and recognition for his "genius." He is the only acutely self-conscious, self-critical character in the novel. Fischerle is far from noble, in fact he is a scoundrel, but he is essentially human and pathetic.

Furthermore, Fischerle must be seen in counterpoint to Kien. Though they are obviously strongly contrasted with each other, there are a great many parallels between them. Moreover, there are several moments in the novel where the relationship between Kien and Fischerle is rendered metaphorically, through imagery, and therefore takes on a kind of poetic poignancy. The Kien-Fischerle dynamic can be fruitfully studied by way of their related imagery.

In sum, it will be put forward here that Fischerle enjoys special status in the novel as an animating force, and, more specifically, as a foil and pendant to Kien; this can be seen not only on the level of the surface action, but also in terms of the imagery and symbolism associated with the two figures.

Major studies of Die Blendung such as those by W. E. Stewart, Dieter Dissinger, David Roberts, Barbara Meih and, more recently, Jutta Paal, and David Darby, which have variously sought to come to terms with the themes, ideas, infrastructure, form and mode of the novel as a whole, have necessarily included commentary on Fischerle for his part as one of the key players in the work.

Stewart[4] assumes in his readers a knowledge of Masse und Macht and makes frequent reference to this work as he explicates the crowd-symbolism in Die Blendung Stewart concentrates mainly on the character and story of Kien, but he does consider Fischerle separately in a short section of his study.

Dissinger[5] illustrates the "Vereinzelung" of the characters by examining the themes of "Blendung" and "Sprachverwirrung." In his third chapter he systematically evaluates the ideas of Masse und Macht as represented in the novel.

Roberts[6] also considers Canetti's philosophy of Masse und Macht while he analyzes the "Kopf"-"Welt" dichotomy within and among the characters, in all its permutations of mind vs. body, reason vs. unreason, individual vs. crowd, and cripple vs. beast.

Darby[7] elucidates the narrative strategies in Die Blendung which determine it as an "open" text. He claims that in the chapter "Das Kleine," Fischerle makes an (unsuccessful) attempt at narrative closure by creating a "Schachnovelle."

Paal[8] sorts out the constellation of characters in the novel, with Kien at the centre, by analyzing the appearances and relationships of the various figures in terms of the structure and formal principles of the work. Paal sets out to prove Kien's exclusive centrality, and she outlines the positions of the "Nebenfiguren" (Therese, Pfaff, Fischerle and Georg) as well as of the "Randfiguren" (satellites of the "Nebenfiguren") around Kien as "Hauptfigur."

Barbara Meili,[9] looking at three characters in the novel in relation to Canetti's own life, offers a more isolated assessment of Fischerle as a *Gestalt*, or as she says, "Konstrukt." Meili better than anyone else has evaluated Fischerle as a composite of

his grotesque features, his significant human qualities, and his concentrated interest in the game of chess.

Several articles, for example those by Idris Parry,[10] Manfred Moser,[11] and Annemarie Auer,[12] make important observations on the novel and its characters, noting Fischerle for his role as a cunning opportunist, whose gifts of keen intelligence and linguistic adaptability — even genius — make him a *Verwandlungskünstler*.

Mechthild Curtius[13] discusses the use of the grotesque in Die Blendung, including what she calls "Sprachgroteske," as a technique of social criticism.

Manfred Schneider's article on the Canetti "myth"[14] is a gripping account of a specific dynamic, or pattern of characterization, which he claims is fundamental in Canetti's work, and which he finds particularly vividly expressed in Fischerle.

Critical treatment of Fischerle has therefore been wide-ranging and varied, depending on the critical perspective or agenda of each approach. A more thorough review of the pertinent commentary on Fischerle and Die Blendung (as outlined above) is supplied in Chapter II, "Survey of Critical Readings."

Curiously, while Fischerle's dastardly side is universally acknowledged, less mention is made of his entertaining qualities, such as the comic energy of his speech and inventiveness, or the hilarious audacity of his fantasies and behaviour. This raises the thorny issue of pathos — or, as some critics insist, the lack of it — in the novel. I suggest that Fischerle does constitute a source of pathos in the harsh, virtually loveless world of Die Blendung.

Only a few of the critics just mentioned (Roberts, Meili and Darby) touch upon the chess motif, though even they do not fully delve into it as a potent complex of imagery and metaphor in the novel. There is in general an abundance of dramatically

striking imagery in Die Blendung which has not been appreciated for its full poetic value.[15] Often commentators have treated the imagery in the novel as incidental to their discussions of larger concerns (e.g., "Masse"), and so have registered only particular aspects of it. Much of this imagery deserves to be appreciated for its immediate impact, or for its full range of references. One of the tasks of this study is to seek out and comment on such imagery pertaining to Fischerle and his relationship to Kien.

Fischerle is a humpbacked dwarf with an enormous nose, large, dark, sad eyes and very long monkey-like arms; he is a Jew, a low-life procurer and petty thief, a con artist of extraordinary mental and verbal agility, obsessed with the game of chess and with the dream of becoming world chess champion. Clearly, Fischerle is portrayed as a grotesque. Similarly, Kien, Therese and Pfaff are also obsessed, psychologically extreme types with exaggerated physical properties. These figures are further distinguished and isolated from one another by the confines of their language and speech. Canetti conceives of the unique shape and quality of each individual's speech as an "akustische Maske," an idea we shall return to.

The depiction of the characters as grotesques presents certain problems of interpretation. Rudolf Hartung has suggested the analogy of light refracted through a prism into the various colours of the spectrum to describe the fragmented picture of humanity we get here:

> Wo ist eigentlich die Normalität geblieben im Rahmen dieses Romans? Wenn ich für einen Augenblick die Normalität, das Normale vergleichen durfte [*sic*] mit dem Licht, so kommt es mir so vor, als würde es in diesem Roman wie durch ein Prisma hindurchgeschickt, das das Licht in seine verschiedenen Farben zerlegt — der Leser hat ein Spektrum vor sich, aber das "normale" Licht ist sozusagen nicht mehr vorhanden.[16]

The characters fall into categories of "beasts and cripples," as David Roberts elucidates.[17] In various pairings and configurations, they become involved in warped and exploitative relationships with one another. Irony pervades both the tone of narration and the mode of representation in Die Blendung, the quality of irony ranging from piquant to gruesome: as we read we find ourselves "laughing with horror."[18] The world of the novel approaches the outer boundaries of realistic representation; it skirts the edges of the fantastic, has preposterous, lunatic and even unbelievable moments, but it cannot be characterized as fantastic outright. The characters of Die Blendung, while they are caricatures who at times seem merely unbalanced and at other times appear as near-fantastic monstrosities, are nevertheless made of flesh and blood, as certain scenes graphically demonstrate.

Yet it must be recognized that as grotesques, these figures can only be fully understood in terms of the symbolism of their peculiar external features and the motifs of their individual obsessions, interpreted in conjunction with their personalities, dispositions and abilities. That is, the characters interact not just as personalities, but as bodies of imagery, as shapes, colours, humours and elements, as symbols and forces of nature. When considering Fischerle, we will see that each of his pronounced features contributes in a significant way to the themes and imagery of the novel.

The problem of reader sympathy when faced with Die Blendung has been addressed by Peter Russell, who argues that:

> It provides a picture of mankind indefensible, indeed almost unintelligible, to anyone who has had much experience of human relationships, to anyone in fact who expects from a novel a presentation of human behaviour and not merely a savage exercise in the grotesque.[19]

This is a world almost completely devoid of normal forms of love, sympathy, understanding and mercy. And yet, though repulsive, the characters compel our interest with the fierce energy of their obsessions: we brace ourselves against their hardness and lack of love to discover their still recognizably human needs, passions and motivations. We observe their interactions as we might observe dangerous chemical experiments, with a mixture of dread and fascination. Fischerle in particular captivates us with his comic, intense imaginative inventiveness.

In the hard, unforgiving but grotesquely comic world of this novel, in which the reader is confronted with endless varieties of heartlessness and few signs of sound heart, Fischerle is, for all his wickedness, an antidote to the two-dimensional humanity of the other figures. Fischerle fascinates because he is fully alive, even though he is more flamboyantly burdened as a grotesque than any of the other characters. Fischerle, unlike Kien, Therese and Pfaff, feels his grotesque afflictions — his hump, his dwarfism, his crippledom — as a burden and strives to be free of them: he is self-conscious in a way that the others are not. He is aware of his misshapenness and he accuses himself of it. His self-consciousness finds expression in his obsession with the game of chess, which he habitually plays with himself as an imagined opponent; his struggle for deliverance to a state of human worthiness and respectability finds expression in his dreams of becoming world chess champion (and consequently, a millionaire). Both the intensity and the nature of his fantasies, his wish for transformation and recognition, and then the steps he takes to realize his dreams, attest to his optimistic, irrepressible and essentially human spirit. Despite his devious duplicity, his harshness, his shameless opportunism and unbridled

audacity, we are engaged by Fischerle's will to become "king" in the face of seemingly insurmountable circumstances. Fischerle generates pathos.

Fischerle is also remarkable among these blinkered and blinded characters for his ability to read others effortlessly. This is part of his alertness to the world, and it is a tool he uses to gain advantage over others. But Fischerle tends to read for speed and not for depth or accuracy of detail: though his immediate, intuitive reading of Kien gives him access to Kien's deluded state, Fischerle never appreciates Kien's actual, full situation, and Fischerle's skimming of the "blind" *Knopfhans* in the end proves a deadly error.

Due to Fischerle's lively consciousness and sharpened wits, he is (unlike Therese and Pfaff) able to make deliberately ironic observations, barbed and comic. By engaging himself, talking to himself, challenging himself, asserting himself, he provides a rich fund of the novel's humour. This quality of Fischerle as an ironist and jester also draws the reader to him, since he offers a perspective of busy interpretation and assessment of the action, which, however twisted, reflects our own efforts to make sense of what is happening.

While the central character of the novel as a whole is plainly the book-mad sinologist Peter Kien, it is chess-mad Fischerle[20] who commands the reader's closest attention in "Kopflose Welt." David Roberts recognizes Fischerle's critical role and significance at the core of the novel:

> Fischerle spiegelt eigentlich Aspekte von Kien und Therese, er vereint sozusagen die beiden in seiner Person, und doch ist er wiederum eine Gestalt für sich — zweifelsohne die faszinierendste Gestalt des Romans, eine Gestalt, deren Konflikt von Geist und Körper, von "Kopf" und "Welt" unser Verständnis von Canettis Auffassung der menschlichen Existenz vertieft.[21]

To some extent, Fischerle upstages Kien. While Kien becomes increasingly lost in his eccentricity, valiantly deluded, Fischerle provokes and surprises, demanding our wariness. He is a spicier character: more awake, more psychologically interesting, more colourful than Kien and the other characters. But Fischerle is, after all, Kien's sidekick. Fischerle's story is confined to the last week of Kien's "wandering in the wilderness," where he is granted the miracle of beginning to realize his dreams, and then he is cut down; he does not quite reach his promised land, as Kien eventually does reach his (however ironically and tragically). Fischerle appears only in Part Two, though his impact is felt into Part Three; aside from reverberating in Kien's consciousness, he affects the action in Part Three chiefly as a result of his telegram which summons Georg into the fray.

Jutta Paal has discerned that Kien's position as the exclusive central character has not been conclusively acknowledged among critics and scholars of the novel.[22] The difficulty in this matter may be largely one of terminology, with many critics applying the term "Hauptfigur" to those major figures Paal terms "Nebenfiguren," as well as of course to Kien. In any case, critical attention to the novel has tended to focus on Kien (as "Kopf") and his experience of the world ("Welt"), encompassing his encounters with Therese, Pfaff, Fischerle and Georg.

Certainly, it seems clear to this reader that Die Blendung is predominantly "about" Kien, and the present study will treat Kien as the main character based on the fact that it is Kien, with the imagery of his library and his book-obsession, who gives shape to the novel as a whole. It is understood here as a basis of argument that the main underlying complex of imagery in Die Blendung is that of Kien's library (meaning his four rooms of 25,000 volumes and the philological study they generate)

and of books as such: symbolically as well as literally, this is the essence of Kien and his passion, the vehicle of his suffering and ruin. Imagery of the library and of books in their various paradisal and demonic manifestations form the underpinnings of Kien's story. As the predominant physical and psychological setting in Part One, a palpable absence compensated for in other forms of ersatz-library in Part Two, and apocalyptic landscape of alienation and ironic reunion in Part Three, the library is the main point of reference for Kien. The library is a symbolic extension of Kien.

In Part One Kien is locked in mortal combat with his wife and former housekeeper Therese, who succeeds in infiltrating his library and thereby unhinging his mind. We see that Kien's sanity and identity are bound to the sanctity and integrity of his library; both Kien and the library are deeply violated by Therese. Kien is eventually ripped from his home and natural element in a kind of grotesquely savage birth, and he enters the world severely dislocated and traumatized.

Fischerle's ostensible role is as "helper" and companion to Kien. The underworld of the city, into which Kien strays after being expelled from his library, is Fischerle's domain, and it is Fischerle who guides the action of the novel here through his manipulative relationship with Kien. Fischerle's surfacing in Part Two from out of the blue marks a dramatic shift in the tone and psychological atmosphere of the novel. After Kien's excruciating struggle with Therese, we at first feel relieved that Kien is seemingly free of her, and we are invigorated by Fischerle's comic, highly animated, crafty presence. Fischerle takes up the bedevilment of Kien where Therese left off, but in such a way that Kien is not aware of it.

Kien finds in Fischerle a distorted but sympathetic version of himself when he steps "through the looking glass" (Kien is moved by a desolate reflection of his own

face in a barber shop mirror to seek human company) into the dive "Zum idealen Himmel." Fischerle soon finds his way into Kien's heart and mind (and pocketbook), suggesting for the first time that Kien actually does have a sort of heart for another human, provided he is of "like mind." A link of apparent friendship and partnership, somewhat in the manner of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza,[23] is established between them. The friendship is in fact one-sided: ironically enough, heart-felt by Kien, and pretended to by Fischerle. Fischerle profoundly influences Kien in his mental degeneration, first by indulging and encouraging Kien's book-madness, then by delivering the *coup de grâce* — the false news of Therese's death.[24] Fischerle uses Kien to his own best advantage, cleverly plundering and, as he proudly thinks, outwitting him. In so doing, Fischerle establishes his own story (his business operations, followed by his preparations for departure to America), and temporarily shifts the narrative track in a direction away from Kien.

However, the connection between Kien and Fischerle is played out and considerably enriched on a symbolic level, where the imagery and motifs of their obsessions meet. In fact, much of the dominant imagery surrounding the figures of Kien and Fischerle is metaphorically identified and contrasted, translated from one figure to the other: for example, Kien has a vision which merges books with chess, and this expresses his sympathetic identification with Fischerle. A page of typed text and the chessboard share the motif of a black-and-white patterning, which operates as a conceit for the idea of confrontation *per se*. This imagery will be interpreted as reflecting the basic characters of both Kien and Fischerle, who both engage *themselves*, self-reflexively, in dialogue and intellectual challenge — Kien with books, Fischerle with chess — as well as representing their interlocking contrast with one

another. Further: Kien's books and Fischerle's chess dreams invoke the opposing pull towards east (the Orient) and west (America), towards past and future; the "temples" of Kien's library and Fischerle's fantasized chess palace are different versions of "heaven"; both Kien and Fischerle have a genius for memory and revision; both are masters of word-manipulation; both are trapped in absurd, despised and perfectly opposite types of bodies; both live in exile; their separate worlds (the "Kopf" of the library and the "Welt" outside it) parody each other. They have in common a hatred of women, extremely disturbed, bizarre marriage relationships with treacherous wives, apparent asexuality, and a general scorn for mankind. Money is the mediating image between them, steadily making its way from Kien's pocket to Fischerle's armpits, from the beleaguered "king" of sinology ("der wohl größte Sinologe seiner Zeit") to the aspiring "king" of chess ("Schachweltmeister Siegfried Fischer"), as Fischerle imagines himself to be. Self-deluded, isolated and effectively impotent "kings," both Kien and Fischerle go to their doom, Fischerle's horrific death by murder ending Part Two, and Kien's death in the fiery chaos of his library ending Part Three and the novel.

What is the meaning of their encounter? How does the Kien-Fischerle dynamic inform such major themes of the novel as blindness, isolation, the confusion of imagination and reality, the travesty of attempted communication, the desire for human fulfilment? Some tentative answers to these questions will be suggested as we probe the connection between the two figures.

The objective of this study is to evaluate Fischerle's role in the novel first as a dramatically vitalizing figure associated with a substantial body of imagery and motifs, and then as a foil to Kien. We will have to take into account: 1) the significance of his most striking features, i.e., his Jewishness, his grotesque physical

attributes such as his tremendous *Buckel*, his powerful nose, his dwarfism and state of "crippledom"; 2) his mental agility, his facility with language, his theatricality and talent for metamorphosis, his remarkable fantasies; 3) his obsession with chess and his dream of becoming world chess champion; 4) his character or personality, 5) his life situation and story; 6) his relationship to Kien.

Such is the richness and complexity of this novel that it will be possible to achieve only a partial commentary on Fischerle here. The many details relating Fischerle to Therese (as insidious plunderers of Kien) on the one hand, and to Georg (as different varieties of "Verwandlungskünstler") on the other, for example, will not be meticulously inspected and weighed in this analysis. The focus of this study will be on the figure of Fischerle himself, on the components that comprise his character, on his attendant imagery, and on his relationship to Kien through imagery.

This project will be circumscribed as follows: Chapter II presents a brief review of noteworthy critical treatments of Fischerle and Die Blendung in several seminal studies of the novel, and in a selection of essays and articles. Chapter III examines Barbara Meili's model of Fischerle as a "Konstrukt" or composite of his defining features, his qualities and his abilities; I use this model as a guide for further investigation of Fischerle's place and significance in the novel, with a particular view to the function of the imagery and motifs associated with Fischerle. Chapter IV explores the relationship between Fischerle and Kien through the imagery that both contrasts and metaphorically links them to one another. Attention will be drawn to the way in which this imagery contributes to the "poetry" of the novel and involves the reader in an experience of pathos.

Notes to Chapter I

1. Elias Canetti, Die Blendung (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1988). All subsequent references to Die Blendung are to this edition and will be cited in the text parenthetically.

2. For a good summary of the publication and reception history of Die Blendung, see Herbert G. Göpfert, "Vorbemerkung zur Publikationsgeschichte des Romans," Hüter der Verwandlung: Beiträge zum Werk von Elias Canetti (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988) 277-284, and Dieter Dissinger, "Erster Versuch einer Rezeptionsgeschichte Canettis am Beispiel seiner Werke Die Blendung und Masse und Macht," Canetti Lesen: Erfahrungen mit seinen Büchern, ed. Herbert G. Göpfert (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1975) 90-105.

3. Elias Canetti, Masse und Macht (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992).

4. W. E. Stewart, "The Role of the Crowd in Elias Canetti's Novel Die Blendung," diss., University of Manchester, 1968.

5. Dieter Dissinger, Vereinzelung und Massenwahn: Elias Canettis Roman *Die Blendung* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1971). This work will subsequently be cited with the name "Dissinger" alone followed by page references.

6. David Roberts, Kopf und Welt: Elias Canettis Roman *Die Blendung* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1975).

7. David Darby, Structures of Disintegration: Narrative Strategies in Elias Canetti's *Die Blendung* (Riverside, California: Ariadne Press, 1992).

8. Jutta Paal, Die Figurenkonstellation in Elias Canettis Roman *Die Blendung* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1991).

9. Barbara Meili, Erinnerung und Vision: Der lebensgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Elias Canettis Roman *Die Blendung* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1985).

10. Idris Parry, "Elias Canetti's Novel Die Blendung," Essays in German Literature I, ed. F. Norman (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, 1965) 145-166.

11. Manfred Moser, "Zu Canettis Blendung," Literatur und Kritik 5.50 (1970): 591-609. This is a partial distillation of Moser's 1968 dissertation.

12. Annemarie Auer, "Ein Genie und sein Sonderling -- Elias Canetti und die Blendung," Zu Elias Canetti, ed. Manfred Durzak (Stuttgart: Klett, 1983) 31-53.

13. Mechthild Curtius, "Das Groteske als Kritik," Literatur und Kritik 7.65 (1972): 294-311. This forms a chapter in Curtius' 1973 study of Die Blendung.

14. Manfred Schneider, "Die Krüppel und ihr symbolischer Leib," Huter der Verwandlung: Beitrage zum Werk von Elias Canetti (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988) 22-41.

15. A good example of this is the image of Kien's library after his "Mobilmachung," when he turns all the books on his shelves around so that their spines are to the wall, and their white pages face forward. Usually this is cited as an image of a crowd made equal and anonymous, representing the abolition of social hierarchy and individuality (see Moser 607). It is the result of Kien's campaign to seize power in order to fight his enemy Therese. But, seen strictly on its own terms, this is an image of enormous force, an image of patent madness: it is a massive blanching, a skinning-alive, a blood-curdling inversion of sense and order. Kien has absurdly done this to his own library, he has turned it inside out, he has grossly violated it. At the same time he moves towards insanity and, exposed by his fall from the ladder, becomes increasingly vulnerable to Therese. Confronted with the strangely white walls when she arrives home, Therese is instantly alarmed, but her response is typically prosaic and practical: "Bücher gehoren so, daß man den Rücken fassen kann. Zum Abstauben muß das sein" (107).

16. "Elias Canetti / Rudolf Hartung," Selbstanzeige: Schriftsteller im Gesprach, ed. Werner Koch (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1971) 34.

17. See for example Roberts 160-161, 175.

18. Salman Rushdie, "The Worm of Learning Turns, Swallows its Tail, and Bites Itself in Half," Essays in Honour of Elias Canetti (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1987) 87. Rushdie writes here:

> You may be wondering why I called this book a comedy. The answer lies in that black, ironic, and perhaps peculiarly German tone of voice I mentioned earlier, which has the effect of making us laugh with horror, and laugh louder and more shrilly as the horror mounts, but to continue to laugh, until the very last sentence, when the book itself joins in.

19. Peter Russell, "The Vision of Man in Elias Canetti's Die Blendung," German Life and Letters 28 (1974-75): 29.

20. Parry (149) comments: "Kien the simpleton would surely have been annihilated in this place, snapped up, eaten alive, but for one person — Fischerle the hunchback dwarf. . . . Fischerle, chess-mad, just as Kien is book-mad."

21. Roberts 53.

22. Paal (39-40) reviews the various positions taken on this question.

23. Comparisons of Kien and Fischerle with Don Quixote and Sancho Panza have frequently surfaced in critiques of Die Blendung. Fischerle is no carbon copy of Sancho Panza, however. He does not share Sancho's simplicity, or Sancho's true affection for his master, although he does, like Sancho, represent an earth-bound sidekick to his highly eccentric partner.

24. The news is actually delivered by the *Knopfhans* at Fischerle's instigation.

II. Survey of Critical Readings

Many interpretations of Die Blendung include a consideration of, or are based on, the concepts and theory of crowds and power as expounded by Canetti in his magnum opus Masse und Macht which appeared in 1960, 25 years after the first publication of the novel This approach is justified, as Canetti's interest in and early research into crowd phenomena in fact predate his writing of the novel by several years. Canetti has documented the formative crowd experiences of his late teens and early twenties, most notably the riot ending in the burning of the Palace of Justice in Vienna on July 15, 1927,[1] which provided inspiration for both Die Blendung and Masse und Macht. Furthermore, theories of "Masse" are articulated by the character of Georg in the last section of the novel, in obvious contrast to the common use of this word (in reference to the rabble of society at large) seen elsewhere in the book.[2] The word "Gesindel" also runs as a refrain for this common idea of crowd throughout the novel.

Crowd symbols of all kinds,[3] but especially fire, and crowd scenes are clearly central to Die Blendung These also involve Fischerle; Fischerle, for example, becomes the object of mob frenzy just at the point of his final separation from Kien, while Kien simultaneously suffers a brutal attack of "Welt" at the hands of Therese, Pfaff and the crowd inside the Theresianum. David Roberts has seen this attack of the crowd on Fischerle — more specifically, on his *Buckel* — as the unloading of the redirected self-hatred of the "beast" (*Masse*) onto the "cripple"[4] as scapegoat.

Moreover, most interpretations of Die Blendung through Masse und Macht recognize that the "madness" of the characters can be understood in terms of their

repression of the crowd impulse, their resistance to the primordial force of "Masse," and the resultant dangerous outgrowths and perversions of "Macht." Walter Sokel observes the ambiguity of the term "Masse" and goes on to demonstrate the ambiguity of madness in the novel: "Thus madness occurs on both ends of the spectrum,"[5] both as a manifestation of extreme individualism and as a complete surrender to "Masse."

W E. Stewart in his 1968 study of the role of the crowd in Die Blendung investigates two basically opposed categories of crowd-symbols: on the one hand, contributing to the isolation and hysteria of the major characters, there are the "unnatural" and "repressive" crowd-symbols, such as books and money, which exhibit the qualities of the "closed crowd" as defined in Masse und Macht;[6] on the other hand, there are the "natural" and "elemental" crowd-symbols, such as air, water, earth, and fire, and (related to fire) the ferocious tiger, all of which share the qualitites of the "open crowd."

> As the novel progresses and the primitive power of the crowd gradually bubbles to the surface, finally to erupt in flames, there is a mounting insistence on the primitive, elemental crowd-symbols, particularly that of fire.[7]

Stewart traces the process of "eruption" in the crowd-symbolism, delineating the "violent transition from the closed to the open crowd,"[8] from the repressive crowd-symbols (such as books, or the money dreams of Therese and Fischerle), to the natural or elemental crowd-symbols (such as fire or the raging tiger). Stewart focuses primarily on the character and story of Kien. The predominant repressive crowd-symbol associated with Kien is his library and its select lot of individual books, in which Kien invests all his passions, to the exclusion of the rest of humanity. Just as Kien is undermined and attacked by the "fierce tiger in the undergrowth"[9] of the

library, the book, according to Stewart, seeking to deny its essential nature as "crowd," gives way to the eruption of fire:

> Civilisation is a flimsy shelter from the power of the crowd .... Kien's repressive symbol, the book, is precisely what he pretends it is not: a symbol of the crowd; and it becomes what he expects least, yet fears most: fire.[10]

For Stewart, the repressive crowd-symbol most obviously associated with both Therese and Fischerle is money. Stewart sees examples of rampant "inflation"[11] in both Therese's "O"-mania (whereby she believes she can increase her inheritance by simply adding a few noughts — as many as will fit according to her rule of uniformity of script — to the figure in Kien's *Testament*), as well as in Fischerle's fantasy of auctioning off his life-story to bidding reporters, starting with the sum of a thousand dollars and inflating it to ten million dollars. For both Therese and Fischerle, the inflationary process abruptly ends in a disappointing shock of reality, which, however, only intensifies their greed and ambition.

Though Stewart does not discuss Fischerle in any great detail, his general impression of Fischerle is illuminating:

> The elusive ideal of becoming a millionaire exerts a potent, mesmeric effect on his imagination which is as vivid and fertile as his real surroundings are barren and drab. The contrast between this dream and this reality is a rich source of the novel's grim and grotesque humour, and at the same time accounts for much of the perverse attractiveness of Fischerle's character. Fischerle is evil and ugly: like Shakespeare's Caliban he is "of the earth, earthy"; but he also has Caliban's paradoxical charm and his irrepressible zest for life. So that when at last he is overtaken by the fiendishly calculated retribution of the crowd, justice itself seems unjust.[12]

Whether or not we concur that Fischerle is "evil," or are persuaded that his murder by the *Knopfhans* is the "retribution of the crowd," we can agree on the

"paradoxical charm" of his character. Stewart leaves Fischerle's chess imagery entirely out of the picture, though it might be argued that chess matches, both those he plays himself and those he follows in magazines (collecting them only to defile and destroy them), chess figures, chess squares and chess dreams consitute Fischerle's essential and characteristic "crowd."

Many other critics, among them Dieter Dissinger and David Roberts, also base much of their interpretations of Die Blendung on readings of Masse und Macht. Dissinger, in addition to his considerations of "Masse" in his general arguments about Die Blendung, devotes the third chapter of his study, Vereinzelung und Massenwahn: Elias Canettis Roman *Die Blendung*, to an analysis of the ideas of Masse und Macht, and illustrates a correspondence between many of these ideas and the dynamics of the novel.

In the second, analytical part of his study, Kopf und Welt: Elias Canettis Roman *Die Blendung*, David Roberts sees the crowd complex expressed in the characters and their relationships as a principle of oppositions. He establishes his thesis of what he calls "die negative Dialektik der Zivilisation" at work in the novel, and shows that the "Kopf"-"Welt" split, in all its permutations of "Geist"-"Körper," "Individuum"-"Masse," "Rationales"-"Irrationales," "Leben"-"Tod" is untenable as a state of being; it is the tension of these polarities within and among the characters that propels the novel's action.

These interpretations, as well as others using the philosophy of Masse und Macht to explain Die Blendung, of course include considerable commentary on Fischerle for his part in the general scenario. Such commentary has raised very intriguing points about Fischerle and the crowd, but this is not an avenue of

investigation we shall pursue further. The emphasis here, while certainly not excluding crowd symbols and crowd phenomena, will be on an appreciation of imagery, in all its referential potency, as it reveals the character of Fischerle and relates him to Kien.

Moreover, as David Darby argues, even though a knowledge of Masse und Macht may well be very helpful for an understanding of Die Blendung, the novel certainly need not continually be approached through the anthropological study, and in fact deserves not to be. Referring to Canetti's own speculations about the different reception the novel had in the English-speaking and German-speaking realms, Darby sums up:

> The suggestion is clearly that the autonomy and integrity of *Die Blendung* as a work of imaginative fiction has been compromised by the interpretative straitjacket which has tended to label the work as a kind of *roman à thèse* manifesting the same thematic concerns as are found in a work published later but received earlier: *Masse und Macht*.[13]

Returning again to Dissinger and Roberts with a view to their more general treatment of the novel, we see that both critics devote the first parts of their studies to a close examination of the inner workings of the text of Die Blendung, though with very different methods and results. Dissinger has been credited for his enormous undertaking in exposing and charting the complex orchestration of detail in Die Blendung. He begins by considering the novel's form, structure, narrative perspective and narrative strategy, and he shows the isolation ("Vereinzelung") of the characters in their concepts of time and space. He then turns to the themes of "Blendung" and "Sprachverwirrung" and again shows the (self-)limitation, delusion and isolation of

each of the characters as a function of their restricted or faulty vision and their extremely individualized grasp and use of language.

Dissinger illustrates his ideas by repeatedly treating each of the major characters in turn, focusing mostly on Kien. In order to make his points about their blindness or idiosyncrasies of language, he pulls examples of their speech and behaviour from all parts of the text, sometimes with slightly jarring effects. He is more interested in demonstrating thematic formulations and connections than in concentrated character study, and he does not pay particularly deep or careful attention to Fischerle. He tends to draw quick comparisons between Fischerle's greed or duplicity with Therese's,[14] or his partial vision and delusion with Kien's,[15] without exploring their separate contexts, and he puts down Fischerle's speedy learning of English to mere linguistic opportunism,[16] when this should also be seen as an important triumph for Fischerle as "Verwandlungskünstler," both utilitarian and self-fulfilling.

David Roberts proceeds entirely differently by following the developments among the characters through the three sections of the novel, part by part, giving his chapters the same titles as those of Canetti's book ("Ein Kopf ohne Welt," "Kopflose Welt" and "Welt im Kopf"), and using the method of what he calls "constructive paraphrase" to come to his understanding of the text. He is interested in the "Kopf"-"Welt" dichotomy as played out by the characters and their attendant imagery. Fischerle is treated extensively in his second chapter, "Kopflose Welt," especially with a view to his impact on Kien.

Roberts points out dramatic or ritual repetitions amongst the characters, e.g., the falls from the ladder by Therese and Kien,[17] which deliver them into the hands

of others, and the self-viewings in mirrors by Kien, Therese and Fischerle.[18] Roberts sees and evaluates many of the parallels between Kien and Fischerle, finding in their counterpoint further variations of the "Kopf"-"Welt," "Geist"-"Körper," "Krüppel"-"Bestie" dialectic, and Roberts in fact locates these conflicts and thematic tensions centralized within Fischerle himself:

> Die Spaltung zwischen dem Geist und dem Körper oder, mit anderen Worten, die unglückliche Ehe der beiden in Kien und Therese, findet in Fischerle selbst statt und das Ergebnis ist dasselbe — "Prügel."[19]

Manfred Moser examines the use of language by each of the characters and the narrator: "Jede Figur ist durch ihre eigene laute Sprache von allen anderen Figuren deutlich abgesondert und unverwechselbar gestaltet."[20] One of the narrator's techniques is a "Stil der Anpassung,"[21] which echoes the voice and perspective of any given character. Moser differentiates and analyzes the quality of the characters' voices according to vocabulary, texture, tone, volume, cadence and force, and he hears them as musical instruments with distinct variations in vocalic and consonantal effects: "Präzisiert werden diese 'akustischen Masken' durch jeweils eigene Virtuosität."[22] Thus the novel acquires "seinen symphonischen Charakter."[23] Fischerle is noted for his "Rabenstimme,"[24] and for his "intrigantes Frage-und-Antwort-Spiel,"[25] the linguistic eqivalent of his self-addressed behaviour, i.e., his habit of playing chess with himself.

Moser also discusses the systems of imagery which involve "elemental" contrasts,

> . . . in denen der Widerstreit der entgegengesetzten Prinzipien zum Austrag kommt. Solche Elemente sind Stein, Holz, Wasser oder Feuer; ihnen ordnen sich Zahlen und geometrische Figuren zu, so etwa die gerade oder gekrümmte Linie, der Winkel, der Kreis, ferner

> bestimmte Körperformen, das Kleine oder Riesige, und eine ganze Reihe von Tierzeichen wie Hund, Tiger, Affe, Schwein, Spinne und andere.[26]

Kien and Fischerle are "dogs," Therese and Pfaff are "cats" — more specifically, tigers. But Fischerle is also an "ape" and a "parrot," "bunt wie ein Papagei"[27]:

> Fischerles Farbenfreude entspricht seiner Fähigkeit, Aufgeschnapptes zu wiederholen, seine krächzende Stimme repräsentiert in gleicher Weise wie der gesamte Habitus die Stileinheit der personalen Sphäre und ihre Isolation.[28]

Annemarie Auer and Mechthild Curtius both approach Die Blendung from a Marxist perspective. Auer sees Canetti exercising sharp social criticism against Austrian "Spießbürgertum," but emphasizes his failure to recognize Marxism as a remedy to the ruinous problems of encapsulated bourgeois self-interest. She regrets Canetti's lack of political consciousness as a thinker, but reads Die Blendung as a recommendation for a socialist vision. For Auer, the characters are all inhuman monsters:

> Die Personen, denen wir begegnen, sind ausnahmslos abscheulich, und jede Situation, welche auch immer, gerät nur zu bald ins Monströse oder Groteske, oftmals in beides zugleich. Auf diese Weise wird unsere Neigung zum Mitlieben und Mitleiden einer Verwandlung unterzogen; sie wird in einem bruchlosen, energischen Schöpfungsakt in Erkenntnisleistung umgemünzt, so daß wir wissen: Dieser phantastische Vorgang einer "Blendung" ist nicht ausgedacht und nicht Blendwerk. Er ist wahr.[29]

Auer does applaud Canetti as a humanist, citing his expressions of optimistic hope as in this 1942 jotting:

> Kein Dummkopf und kein Fanatiker wird mir je die Liebe nehmen für alle, denen die Träume beschattet und beschnitten wurden. Der Mensch wird noch alles und ganz werden. Die Sklaven werden die Herren erlösen.[30]

She suggests that Canetti's portrayal of Fischerle shows some sympathy for his social straits[31] as opposed to the unflinching contempt with which the more privileged characters ("Bürger" and "Kleinbürger") are treated. Auer goes so far as to say we are unmoved by Kien's fate at the hands of his worldlier persecutors, "Kontrahenten von der Kehrseite dieser Gesellschaft"[32]: "Mögen auch sie abscheulich sein, Kiens Untergang durch sie tut uns nicht leid. Er ist gerecht."[33]

Despite this kind of slanted, politically judgmental response (which does not do justice to Kien's trials), Auer shows an appreciation for Canetti's wide-ranging and intimate knowledge of humanity and for his method of characterization, particularly his virtuoso representation of speech across the human spectrum, with his accuracy down to minutest details:

> Das hochabstrahierende Typisierungsverfahren geht niemals von Thesen, sondern immer vom Empirischen aus. Es erzeugt daher weder Spruchbandfiguren noch Homunculi; den scharf auf Form, sogar auf Formel gebrachten Gestalten ist anzumerken, daß sie aus reichhaltigem konkreten Lebensmaterial komprimiert worden sind.[34]

Mechthild Curtius describes the use of the grotesque as a reflection of social ills, expressing "Entfremdung," and as a tool for social criticism. Discussing "die groteske Figur," Curtius identifies fairy-tale archetypes for the figures of Fischerle, Therese and Kien:

> Die äußere Gestalt dieser drei ist seit Urzeiten bekannt in Märchen und Literatur. Sie entspricht den Märchenfiguren des buckligen Zwerges, der kopfwackelnden Hexe und des hageren Zauberers.[35]

She argues that these archetypal associations resonate in Canetti's characters, and cites instances in the novel where their mere physical (grotesque) appearance provokes overwhelming disgust, contempt, fear or hostility in others.

Referring to Moser's work, Curtius examines Canetti's use of rhetorical devices, particularly as they serve "Entfremdungs- und Verdinglichungserscheinungen,"[36] preponderantly those, "die Doppelsinniges, Widersprechendes, Parodierendes zum Ausdruck bringen können."[37] Notable amongst these are metaphor, zeugma and oxymoron, which achieve surprising, comic effects, often by confounding figurative and concrete meanings. Much as Canetti reshapes traditional character types, he revitalizes stock idioms and formulas of language by fleshing them out with ironic meaning.

While Auer and Curtius comment on Canetti's methods of characterization, they do not dwell on individual characters, and so contribute only marginally to a close look at Fischerle.

More pertinent to the present study is Manfred Schneider's article "Die Krüppel und ihr symbolischer Leib." Schneider perceives in the characters of the novel an expression of Canetti's basic "myth" or story pattern, as he sees it, which he finds based in Canetti's own experiences as revealed in the author's memoirs. This myth might be summed up as follows: given the core variables of crippledom (the crippled or disfigured body), money (parasitically attained in the form of inheritance, alms or a "Stipendium"), and either the utterance or the denial of the word and name of God, the cripple concentrates his energies — all the more so with the help of money — in an obsession, or obsessive work, and thereby creates a second "symbolic body" for himself. This symbolic body, the object of the cripple's obsession, compensates for his own deformed body and replaces the concept of God.

> Im Inferno der "Blendung" sind sie alle einem Gesetz unterworfen: Entstellt zu sein, um sich besessen einen anderen Leib zu erzeugen, einen symbolischen Körper, worin sich Seele und Gott zugleich verflüchtigen und

> konkretisieren. Mit Ausnahme von Georges Kien sehen sich alle Figuren der "Blendung" an dieses Gesetz gekettet, und sie figurieren so als geschundene Delinquenten, an denen sich die Wirkung einer mythischen Wahrheit erfüllt.[38]

Or again:

> Dieser Mythos — so ließe sich auch formulieren — ist eine Dynamik, deren Energien unbekannt sind, deren Struktur aber konstant bleibt, es ist eine Art Verausgabung der Leibeskräfte im Dienst eines zweiten symbolischen und vollständigen Körpers, eines Körpers, der Gottes Wort verdrängt und der das Stipendium des Zufalls genießt.[39]

Schneider considers Fischerle the prime exemplar of this mythic formulation:

> Fischerle besteht nur aus "einem Buckel, einer mächtigen Nase und zwei schwarzen, ruhigen, traurigen Augen." Fischerles symbolischer Leib hingegen ist das Schachspiel; dieses ist ein Leib ohne Monströsität und eine Machtgarantie. . . .
>
> . . . "Weltmeister" ist in der Tat ein säkularisierter Gottesname; doch nicht das Bild seines stigmatisierten Leibes, sondern die Schachpartie soll von Fischerle und seiner Macht Zeugnis ablegen. Wie einem Bettler das Almosen, wie Thomas Marek die Dotation der Fee, fällt dem Fischerle das "Stipendium" in den Schoß, das ihm von Kien gestiftet wird. So finden wir an ihm alle Elemente, die Canettis Mythos auszeichnen: die Krüppelhaftigkeit, die Leugnung des Gottesnamens, das besessene Werk als symbolischen Leib und jenes Geld, das von einer milden Hand gespendet wird. Zwischen Schach und Geld spielt die Bewegungsenergie, eine völlig rudimentäre Psychologie dieses Krüppels. Fischerle ist nicht böse und nicht gut, nicht mitfühlend oder grausam, er ist der Erzeuger eines anderen Leibes, des Weltmeisterleibes.[40]

The "symbolic bodies," Schneider points out, are also forms of crowds: "Kiens Bibliothek ist eine Masse von Büchern; Fischerles Schachkörper konkretisiert sich in einer Masse von Plakaten."[41] In Canetti's universe, becoming part of a crowd means a release from the constraints of individuality.[42] These symbolic bodies in the form

of "crowds" are, therefore, particularly appropriate as the goals of redemption-fantasies.

Schneider argues that the characters in Die Blendung have no souls, just intensities and obsessions.[43] Their madness in effect lies in their obsessions, in their displacement or sublimation of their souls. He claims that because they lack psychological coherence, not to mention spiritual depth, they cannot be psychologically interpreted or understood. The only fruitful approach to the text then lies, he says, in an interpretation of its internal "Funktionsgesetze . . ., die Antriebselemente seiner eigenen obsessiven Bewegung."[44]

The most comprehensive and insightful analysis of Fischerle as a *Gestalt* has been undertaken by Barbara Meili in her book Erinnerung und Vision: Der lebensgeschichtliche Hintergrund von Elias Canetti's Roman *Die Blendung*. Meili's intention is to relate the characters of Kien, Fischerle and Georg to aspects of Canetti's own character and life as exposed in his autobiographies (Meili considers only the first two volumes of memoirs, as the third had not yet appeared at the time of her writing). This seems at first glance to be an unlikely way to appreciate Fischerle, yet it yields very interesting results.

Meili devotes the middle section of her book to Fischerle, discussing him first as a "Konstrukt": "Der Jude," "Der Krüppel," "Der Besitzlose," "Der Wünschende." She then incorporates the results of this analysis into her thesis that the figure of Fischerle (like that of Kien and Georg) bears relevance to Canetti's own life, discussing Fischerle's attitudes and abilities (which are directly related to the conditions of his life as outlined above) as "Programm" and "Warnung" for Canetti's

own future course as a writer: "Verwandlungsfähigkeit," "Konzentration," "Kynismus," "Hoffnung."

Meili's findings will be more thoroughly examined in Chapter III of this study. Her work will greatly assist our understanding of Fischerle, but it remains for us to explore in greater depth the system of imagery and the motifs associated with the figure of Fischerle.

Two major studies of Die Blendung have appeared very recently. David Darby's book Structures of Disintegration: Narrative Strategies in Elias Canetti's *Die Blendung* (1992) investigates the narrative strategies in the novel which determine it as an "open" text. Darby's work goes a long way towards exposing the "play of points of view in the narration"[45] and revealing the narrative ploys and mechanisms of the novel, and it brings an interesting perspective to the criticism of Die Blendung. In his chapter "Structures of Closure," Darby argues that Fischerle's chapter "Das Kleine" is one of three contiguous episodes in the novel which employ "narrative strategies suggesting possible closure,"[46] that is, these episodes attempt to counter or resolve the "informational chaos" on the levels of both story and narration that increasingly threatens — and eventually overwhelms — the rest of the text These attempts at closure are unsuccessful. The attempt at closure in "Das Kleine" fails as follows: on the level of story, Fischerle's plan to flee the city obviously does not succeed, and on the level of narration — despite the fact that this episode is marked by a chronologically consistent, sequential account of one character's (Fischerle's) goal-oriented actions, and despite the fact that "the focalization of the narrative becomes considerably more unified than in previous chapters"[47] — there is also no escape from the "openness" of the text.

Darby's section on Fischerle is entitled "Fiction of Escape: Fischerle's *Schachnovelle*." Darby sees Fischerle's activity throughout "Das Kleine" predicated on chess strategy

> The choice of chess as a model for Fischerle's belief-world stresses the importance of the element of ratiocination in the construction of that world.[48]

Darby also sees in "Das Kleine" strong manifestations of the "Novelle" form — hence the reference to Stefan Zweig's Schachnovelle in his section title. He observes that the Novelle as a form, however, itself resists or subverts closure by means of the characteristic ambiguity of its simultaneously logical and unexpected turning point. Darby finds this feature adequately illustrated in Fischerle's final encounter with Johann Schwer, which "is quite logical on the principal story level of *Die Blendung*, but impossible in Fischerle's view since he is busy creating a story on a different, subordinate level."[49] Darby perceives Fischerle undertaking a "vain and necessarily doomed act of narratological defiance,"[50] presumably by attempting to commandeer his story and to assert his "belief-world," which clashes with and succumbs to the "existing fact-world"[51] of the novel.

But one obvious problem with likening "Das Kleine" to a "Novelle" is that as a story (i.e., "of Fischerle's plan to lose his hump and to put an end to his 'Krüppelei in Europa' [400]"[52]) it is not self-contained. Much (too much) pertinent information is contained in previous chapters, including the set-up of Fischerle's relationship to Schwer, not to mention the establishment of Fischerle's character and situation — hump, crippledom, Kien and all — upon which the ending of his story in "Das Kleine" turns.

Jutta Paal in her study Die Figurenkonstellation in Elias Canettis Roman *Die Blendung* (1991) assesses the constellation of characters in the novel, placing Kien firmly in the central position. Paal treats Fischerle as one of the four *Nebenfiguren* (the others are Therese, Pfaff and Georg) who surround Kien as *Hauptfigur*. Surrounding each of the *Nebenfiguren* in turn are the *Randfiguren*, each confined to his or her orbit around one particular *Nebenfigur*.[53] When Paal says that "Im Bereich der Randfiguren finden sich keinerlei Überschneidungen der Personenkreise,"[54] she glosses over several exceptions to the rule, notably that many of Fischerle's satellites do come into direct contact with Kien (the *Pensionistin* and each of the four "employees," the *Hausierer*, the *Knopfhans*, the *Kanalraumer* and the *Fischerin*). However, she rightly observes that:

> Der mangelnde Kontakt zwischen dem Protagonisten und den Randfiguren führt dazu, daß Kien nur die ihm zugewandte Seite der Nebenfiguren kennenlernt. Das, was außerhalb dieses Erfahrungsbereiches für das Verhalten der Nebenfiguren konstitutiv ist, das heißt deren Kontakt zu den Randfiguren, bleibt ihm verborgen. . . . Fischerles betrügerische Machenschaften funktionieren nur, wenn Kien seine Angestellten nicht als solche erkennt . . . .[55]

Paal points out some of the repeated patterns or configurations of characters, such as the "Dreierkonstellation, in den Liebesbeziehungen der Romanfiguren nach dem Muster der Beziehung zwischen Kien, Therese und Pfaff."[56] All of these triangular relationships include assorted threats of murder. Kien wishes Therese dead, and in the end Therese and Pfaff are well on the way to abusing Kien to death. Fischerle's "triangle" is disbanded when the *Pensionistin* and the *Knopfhans* actually do kill him.

Another pattern is that of a set of characters consisting of one female and three (or four) males,[57] which we see among the primary characters (Therese, Kien, Pfaff, Fischerle, Georg) and again in Fischerle's "Randfigurenbereich" (the *Fischerin*, Fischerle and the three male employees). Paal does not pursue the possibility of individual correspondences between these two particular sets of relationships.

As part of her discussion of those five chapters in the novel in which Kien is mostly absent and which focus on the *Nebenfiguren*,[58] where she points out that these chapters showcase the *Nebenfiguren* as potential threats to Kien, Paal does also acknowledge that the chapter "Das Kleine" — the longest chapter in the novel at the end of Part II, describing Fischerle's last two days — is an anomaly, since it does not bear on Kien's future development, aside from Fischerle's sending of his telegram to Georg. Although she sees a parallel between Fischerle's fate and Kien's — a final, ironic wish-fulfillment at the moment of death, as Fischerle's hump is "surgically" removed and Kien is finally united with his books — and although she grants the formal singularity of the chapter as a break in the structure of the novel,[59] she does not weigh Fischerle more heavily than the other *Nebenfiguren* in the final analysis. Instead, Paal wants to show that Therese and Fischerle both have the function of preparing Kien (by opening him up to human contact) for the final onslaught by Pfaff and Georg:

> Therese findet ihr "steigerndes Pendant" in Pfaff, Fischerle in Georg. In Bezug auf die Entwicklung des Protagonisten ist dieses Prinzip insofern von Bedeutung, als es zur Erklärung des gesamten Romanaufbaus dienen kann. Der verhältnismäßig breite Raum, der im Roman der Schilderung der Beziehung des Protagonisten zu Therese und Fischerle eingeräumt wird, findet seine Berechtigung durch diese Vorbereitungsfunktion. Die Eskalation im dritten Romanteil, die durch die Konfrontation Kiens mit dem Hausbesorger Pfaff und

> seinem Bruder Georg herbeigeführt wird, baut somit auf die vorangegangenen Beziehungen zu Therese und Fischerle auf, indem durch sie Kiens Wahnsinn bis auf die Spitze getrieben wird.[60]

In the course of her discussion, Paal comments on many aspects of the characters and their relationships, for example their use of language, their use of "Gewalt" (Therese and Pfaff) as opposed to their use of "Macht"[61] (Fischerle and Georg), and their mechanisms of compensation and projection. Ultimately Paal argues that Kien's demise through the influence of the *Nebenfiguren* represents the fall of the tradition-bound world to the new world:

> Die traditionsgebundene Welt Kiens wird mit der "neuen Welt" der Nebenfiguren konfrontiert, deren verbaler und gewalttätiger Einflußnahme Kien sich nicht zu entziehen vermag, so daß schließlich sogar der Grundpfeiler seiner Welt, die Bücher, durch die veränderte Objektbeziehung zerstört wird.[62]

Again:

> Als einsamer Vertreter einer nicht mehr gültigen Welt der Vergangenheit vollzieht sich in seiner Selbstauslöschung zugleich der endgültige Sieg der Welt der Nebenfiguren, die als Vertreter einer neuen Wirklichkeit ohne Tradition in ihren personalen Welten verhaftet bleiben.[63]

But this reading, however valid in the abstract, is removed from the immediate fray, the cut and thrust of the action. Our impression while reading is not just that Kien is lost in the past (even though he is preoccupied with ancient oriental texts, and eventually declares himself an enemy of the present); he is lost, period. And while Therese, Pfaff and Fischerle deny some aspects of the past, they represent quintessential human forces that have been with us always and are not strictly speaking "new": desire, greed, bestiality, cruelty and — in Fischerle's case — ambition. What is lacking in this particular world more than a sense of a shared

place in time is a sense of shared humanity: compassion and love. Do the characters feel this lack? If so, where? Where are the moments of pathos in this novel?

Many of the critics reviewed above are concerned with a comprehensive overview of the novel, with its relation to Canetti's ideas in Masse und Macht, or with its social message. Fischerle is treated in accordance with each critic's efforts to illustrate his or her general thesis. The approach taken here will differ in angle and emphasis, in that we will first look at the figure of Fischerle as a composite of many elements, and then inspect his link to Kien in terms of imagery. This will bring us into the realm of the "poetry" of the novel. It is hoped that an investigation of such imagery will enhance our understanding of the dynamic between these two characters, at the same time allowing us to discover a kind of pathos in these instances of poetry.

Notes to Chapter II

1. See for example Elias Canetti, "Das erste Buch: Die Blendung," Das Gewissen der Worte (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Tachenbuch Verlag, 1989) 241-245, and Elias Canetti, "Der 15. Juli," Die Fackel im Ohr (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991) 230-237. Canetti describes his earlier crowd experiences at demonstrations in Frankfurt in Die Fackel im Ohr 52, and in his interview with Joachim Schickel in Elias Canetti, Die gespaltene Zukunft (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1972) 112.

2. Dissinger points out:

> Das Wort "Masse" wird hier auf zwei recht verschiedene Weisen angewandt. Das ist im Zusammenhang der Sprachverwirrung durchaus folgerichtig. Die Brüder Kien verwenden beide das Wort "Masse," meinen aber nicht das gleiche. Peter Kien versteht unter der "Masse" die lügnerischen Mitmenschen, d.h. praktisch alle seine Mitmenschen. (139)

3. See Canetti, "Massensymbole," Masse und Macht 81-100.

4. Roberts 77.

5. Walter Sokel, "The Ambiguity of Madness: Elias Canetti's Novel Die Blendung," Views and Reviews of Modern German Literature: Festschrift for Adolf D. Klarmann, ed. Karl S. Weimar (München: Delp Verlag, 1974) 183.

6. Since the closed crowd is confined and limited by barriers which stifle its intrinsic urge to grow, it compensates for lack of growth by emphasizing the qualities of density and uniformity — hence Kien's rigid hyper-orderliness (especially concerning his books and his work) and his insistence on routine and ritual repetition.

7. Stewart 3.

8. Stewart 73.

9. Stewart 34.

10. Stewart 77.

11. See Canetti, "Inflation und Masse," Masse und Macht 202-207.

12. Stewart 67.

13. Darby 8.

14. Dissinger 91.

15. Dissinger 92.

16. Dissinger 110.

17. Roberts 52.

18. Roberts 62-63.

19. Roberts 60.

20. Moser 594.

21. Moser 598.

22. Moser 597.

23. Moser 597.

24. Moser 597.

25. Moser 597.

26. Moser 603.

27. Moser 602.

28. Moser 602.

29. Auer 31.

30. Elias Canetti, Die Provinz des Menschen: Aufzeichnungen 1942-1972 (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1973) 19.

31. Auer 41.

32. Auer 48.

33. Auer 48.

34. Auer 49.

35. Curtius 297.

36. Curtius 303.

37. Curtius 304.

38. Schneider 31.

39. Schneider 39.

40. Schneider 31-32. For the story of Thomas Marek, see Canetti, "Der Ernährer," Die Fackel im Ohr 309-322.

41. Schneider 39.

42. See Canetti, Masse und Macht 9-10.

43. Schneider 23, 38.

44. Schneider 24.

45. Darby 16.

46. Darby 81.

47. Darby 105.

48. Darby 110.

49. Darby 119.

50. Darby 118.

51. Darby 123.

52. Darby 122.

53. Paal (49) graphically illustrates this constellation of characters with a diagram.

54. Paal 41.

55. Paal 50.

56. Paal 51.

57. See Paal 52. Further examples of this pattern are Jean Préval's niece and three nephews, whom he strangles, and Pfaff's canaries, one female and three males, similarly throttled by Kien. I submit that one might also see this pattern in the original state of Kien's library: Kien's four rooms of books, across the hall from Therese's kitchen and single small room. Therese (the female, in this case) invades and chokes off the rooms of Kien's library one by one.

58. See Paal 43. These chapters are: "Liebste Gnädigste" (Therese); "Vier und ihre Zukunft" (Fischerle); "Der gute Vater" (Pfaff); "Ein Irrenhaus" (Georg); and "Das Kleine" (again Fischerle).

59. Paal 47.

60. Paal 106.

61. See Canetti, "Gewalt und Macht," Masse und Macht 313.

62. Paal 55.

63. Paal 107. Paal continues in the following paragraph:

> Der enge Bezug zum zeitgenössischen Problem des Kulturpessimismus schließt die Auseinandersetzung mit der Frage der Aufklärung ein, die im ursprünglichen Namen des Protagonisten noch explizit zum Ausdruck gebracht wurde. Kien, alias Kant, ist von der neuen Wirklichkeit bereits überholt worden. Sein Tod am Ende besiegelt den endgültigen Untergang der Aufklärungsideale, jedoch mit dem negativen Beigeschmack, daß die Welt der Nebenfiguren keine Alternative zu Kiens Leben zu bieten vermag.

III. The Figure of Fischerle

1. Preamble: Canetti's Approach to Characterization

Canetti has often accounted for the genesis of Die Blendung and for his method of characterization. In Die Fackel im Ohr, Canetti relates that his visits to Berlin in the summers of 1928 and 1929, at the ages of twenty-three and twenty-four, radically altered his view of humanity. The wild, almost phantasmagorically licentious world he found in Berlin violently shook up his still-uninitiated, rather puritanical sensibilities, so much so that he later found himself inventing a series of extreme fictional characters as a way of "refracting" his impressions and coping with the overwhelming chaos of these experiences.

Canetti was inducted into a circle of avant-garde artists and intellectuals in Berlin, which included Bertolt Brecht and George Grosz. Canetti was greatly impressed by the art of Grosz, whose grotesque, satirical drawings he had already admired for several years:

> Mir gefiel, daß es stark und rücksichtslos war, was man auf diesen Zeichnungen sah, schonungslos und furchtbar. Da es extrem war, hielt ich es für die Wahrheit. Eine vermittelnde, eine abschwächende, eine erklärende und entschuldigende Wahrheit war für mich keine.[1]

Long before the Berlin experiences, Canetti's thinking and imagination had been enormously influenced by Karl Kraus. Canetti attended Kraus' lectures in Vienna from 1924 to 1929,[2] and he became enthralled by Kraus' powerful, scourging and prophet-like orations. Canetti addresses his great debt to Kraus in his essay "Karl Kraus, Schule des Widerstands."[3] Kraus "hat mir . . . das Ohr aufgetan und

niemand hätte das wie er vermocht."[4] Kraus was attentive to all the voices of Vienna, and he became their mouthpiece:

> Es war Karl Kraus gegeben, Menschen sozusagen aus ihrem eigenen Mund heraus zu verurteilen. Der Ursprung dieser Meisterschaft aber . . . lag in dem, was ich das "akustische Zitat" nennen mochte.[5]
>
> . . . Da er aber unterschiedslos alles zitierte, keine Stimme überhörte, keine unterdrückte, da sie alle in einer Art von kurioser Gleichberechtigung, abgesehen von Rang, Gewicht und Wert, nebeneinander bestanden, war Karl Kraus das unvergleichlich Lebendigste, was Wien damals zu bieten hatte.[6]

Kraus was able to capture people by the quality and essence of their speech, and to let their speech "accuse" and condemn them, that is, he could lay their speech bare and let this be the ultimate testimony for or against them. In Die Fackel im Ohr, Canetti reiterates:

> Daß man mit den Worten anderer alles machen kann, erfuhr ich von Karl Kraus. Er operierte mit dem, was er las, auf atemberaubende Weise. Er war ein Meister darin, Menschen in ihren eigenen Worten zu verklagen.[7]

Canetti learned from Kraus how to "hear," how to recognize the unique, individual shape and nature of each person's speech:

> Wichtig daran war die unverfälschte, reine Gestalt, daß sich keine dieser akustischen Masken (wie ich sie später nannte) mit der anderen vermischte.[8]

Canetti also came to understand how such "masks" of speech divide and isolate rather than join people:

> Ich begriff, daß Menschen zwar zueinander sprechen, aber sich nicht verstehen; daß ihre Worte Stöße sind, die an den Worten der anderen abprallen; daß es keine größere Illusion gibt als die Meinung, Sprache sei ein Mittel der Kommunikation zwischen Menschen.[9]

The *akustische Maske*[10] became a vital feature of Canetti's characterizations, both in his novel and later in his plays. In Die Blendung, each character is clearly demarcated by his or her distinctive voice, vocabulary, mentality and speech pattern, such that one character's verbal expressions are only partially intelligible to another character, and dialogues very often do not serve mutual understanding, but rather can involve a clash of words which cracks and splinters one body of speech away from the other. Communication between the characters, especially between Therese and Kien, is skewed and crippled to the point of burlesque. Fischerle distinguishes himself by his ability to interpret Kien well and even to outdo him in word-games, as we shall see.

Canetti further explains his strategy of characterization in his essay "Das erste Buch: Die Blendung":

> Eines Tages kam mir der Gedanke, daß die Welt nicht mehr so darzustellen war wie in früheren Romanen, sozusagen vom Standpunkt *eines* Schriftstellers aus, die Welt war *zerfallen*, und nur wenn man den Mut hatte, sie in ihrer Zerfallenheit zu zeigen, war es noch möglich, eine wahrhafte Vorstellung von ihr zu geben. Das bedeutete aber nicht, daß man sich an ein chaotisches Buch zu machen hätte, in dem nichts mehr zu verstehen war, im Gegenteil, man mußte mit strengster Konsequenz extreme Individuen erfinden, so wie die, aus denen die Welt ja bestand, und diese auf die Spitze getriebenen Individuen in ihrer Geschiedenheit nebeneinanderstellen.[11]

One of the eight "extreme" characters Canetti invented for his projected 8-novel cycle "einer Comédie Humaine an Irren"[12] — each one uniquely "am Rande des Irrsinns"[13] — was the "Büchermensch" who became Kien. Canetti acknowledges some models for Kien in the form of people he encountered locally in Vienna: e.g., the man who outrageously lamented the burning files (and not the massacred people)

during the riot at the Palace of Justice on the 15th of July, 1927, and for physical appearance, a cactus shop proprietor, "ein langer, dürrer Mensch, . . . hinter all diesen Stacheln ein spitzer Anblick. . . . Er war so abwesend, wie er dürr war, . . . er bestand aus Stacheln."[14] Precisely who or what inspired the figure of Fischerle is not specified by Canetti, but it is clear that, whatever source he may spring from, he is cast in Die Blendung as a foil to Kien; the two are "auf die Spitze getrieben in ihrer Geschiedenheit," yet strangely linked beneath the surface.

2. The Issue of Fischerle as Jew

Die Blendung is Canetti's earliest major literary work and only published novel. It was written over the years 1930-31, and first appeared in Vienna in 1935, in a political atmosphere that was hostile both to the author as a Jew and to satirical works of social criticism — provocative literary grotesques, or one might even say "Fratzen" — like Die Blendung. The visionary nature of the novel has frequently been acknowledged. Meili, for example, observes that Canetti did not need to write a post-war "Bewältigungsbuch":

> Er hatte mit keiner Vergangenheit abzurechnen, weil er sie zu packen begonnen hatte, als sie noch Gegenwart oder Zukunft war. Was Faschismus ist, findet sich in seinem Roman von 1930 dichter und schärfer dargestellt als in jeder modernen Untersuchung.[15]

Seen in this context, Fischerle's Jewishness is a conspicuous and potentially unsettling aspect of the novel. Canetti himself has confessed that he at times felt uneasy about Fischerle. In Das Augenspiel, Canetti recalls the response of Dr. Sonne, his esteemed mentor, to the newly published novel, and to the "problem" of Fischerle.

Sonne spoke with Canetti about the novel at the Café Museum in Vienna in the fall of 1935, and warned that the book would have a hard life:

> Nur langsam merkte ich daß seine Rede auch von einer Absicht getragen war: er war sich klar daruber, daß das Buch ein schweres Schicksal haben wurde und wollte mich gegen die Angriffe wappnen, die zu erwarten waren.
>
> . . . Man werde sich gegen Fischerle sträuben, weil er Jude sei und dem Autor vorwerfen, daß diese Figur sich zugunsten der gehässigen Gesinnungen der Zeit mißbrauchen lasse. Die Figur sei aber wahr, so wahr wie die der beschränkten ländlichen Haushälterin oder wie die des schlagenden Hausbesorgers. Wenn die Katastrophe vorüber sei, würden alle Etiketten dieser Art von den Figuren abfallen und sie würden dastehen als das, was zur Katastrophe geführt habe. Ich erwähne von allen nur diese Einzelheit, weil ich später, mit dem Fortgang der Ereignisse über Fischerle oft Unbehagen empfand and dann immer bei dieser frühen Rechtfertigung Zuflucht suchte.[16]

David Roberts remarks that the portrait of Fischerle is "eine Karikatur, die dem *Sturmer* zur Ehre gereicht hätte."[17] Fischerle's Jewishness is certainly one of his outstanding features, but what is its significance, what role does it play in the novel? This will be the first category of investigation in the ensuing examination of the figure of Fischerle.

3. Introduction to Barbara Meili's Assessment of Fischerle

Barbara Meili sees Fischerle's Jewishness as one of the four basic conditions ("Startbedingungen"[18]) that determine his character: the others are his crippledom, his poverty, and his wish for betterment and self-fulfilment.

Meili evaluates Fischerle as a "construct" of these features and the qualities they generate in him, namely, his protean adaptability, his concentrated focus on

chess, his audacity and his optimism. Since Meili treats Fischerle as the sum of these parts, taking into account many of the most salient aspects of his character, it will be useful for us to turn to her analysis of Fischerle and to consider her arguments as a preliminary framework for further discussion of his role in the novel.

> — Weil er Jude ist, sehnt er sich danach, Anerkennung zu finden, und arbeitet ihr entgegen mit immer neuen Verwandlungskunststücken.
>
> — Weil er behindert ist, sehnt er sich danach, als vollwertiger Mensch betrachtet zu werden, und konzentriert alle Kräfte auf das Schachspiel und damit auf Intellekt und Intuition.
>
> — Weil er besitz- und herkunftslos ist, hat er nichts zu verlieren und schreckt deshalb vor keinem Risiko und keiner Frechheit zurück.
>
> — Weil er, all diesen Voraussetzungen zum Trotz, auf gesellschaftlichen Erfolg aus ist, kultiviert er die einzige Kraft, die auf seiner Seite steht: die Hoffnung.
>
> So betrachtet, macht Fischerle jede einzelne Not zur Tugend. Aus den Geburtsfehlern Judentum, Behinderung, Hablosigkeit und einem lacherlichen gesellschaftlichen Ehrgeiz entwickeln sich Verwandlungsfähigkeit, Konzentration, Kynismus und Hoffnung.[19]

Meili's thesis is that Canetti conceived the figure of Fischerle in response to his first reading of Kafka, which occurred after he had written eight chapters of Die Blendung,[20] and that Fischerle represents a kind of poetic prescription for Canetti himself as a writer: the basic conditions of Fischerle's life are remote from his own,[21] but the qualities Fischerle develops in order to achieve his goals are those Canetti himself will need for the gargantuan task of completing his study Masse und Macht.[22]

Canetti began his research into crowds by vehemently rejecting Freud's theories of crowd psychology (Canetti is in general an adversary of Freud[23]), and he undertook to challenge all previous thinking about crowds and power.

> Hier offenbart sich die Verwandtschaft zwischen Elias Canetti und Siegfried Fischerle in ihrem innersten Kern: in der Vornahme des Unmöglichen. . Der Lebensplan, den Canetti an der Schwelle zum Erwachsenenalter für sich entwarf, mutet historisch betrachtet kaum weniger utopistisch an als Fischerles Tagtraume. Wo Fischerle sich aufmacht, den großten Schachmeister aller Zeiten zu schlagen, hat der junge Canetti nichts Geringeres vor, als den Begründer der modernen Psychologie zu widerlegen Was für Fischerle Capablanca ist, ist für Canetti Sigmund Freud.[24]

Meili further contends that Canetti lets Fischerle fail due to certain shortcomings or abuses of his qualities and abilities (his use of his *Verwandlungskunst* for purely selfish purposes; his inadequate, unrealistic development of his chess skills, his misdirected "cynicism"; and his misuse of the hopes of others), and that Fischerle's failure sketches out a warning to Canetti himself as an author not to fail for similar deficiencies of character. She investigates Canetti's writings (especially his essays and "Aufzeichnungen") for evidence of Canetti's "program" for himself as a writer, and confirms Canetti's demands of himself for the ideal versions of those qualities with which he endows Fischerle.

Interesting as this angle of investigation is, we are more concerned here with how Fischerle is constituted than with how he describes Canetti's constitution; that is, we want to pay more attention to Fischerle as a "construct" within the work than as a "program" or "warning" for Canetti, although of course where Fischerle reflects important aspects of Canetti's thinking, this will have some bearing on our examination of Fischerle's role in Die Blendung. We will therefore roughly follow only

certain portions of Meili's argument, i.e., the scheme which presents Fischerle as a "construct" or composite of his conditioning features and traits, along with his qualities and abilities; but we will frequently depart from her discussion in order to elaborate on those facets of Fischerle's make-up which contribute to our understanding of him on the one hand as a dramatically co-ordinated body of imagery and motifs within the work, and on the other as a figure who fuels the novel with a sense of sentience and life. Furthermore, we will be alert to his role as foil to Kien, though a more comprehensive discussion of the Kien-Fischerle relationship will be reserved for Chapter IV.

4. Fischerle as Jew and *Verwandlungskünstler*

Meili observes that Fischerle springs into the action well-defined at the outset:

> Während Kien behutsam eingeführt wird und als Figur nur langsam Konturen annimmt, ist Fischerles Bild schon nach wenigen Zeilen scharf umrissen. Innert Kürze weiß der Leser, wer dieser Fischerle ist und was er beabsichtigt: Er ist Jude, er ist Krüppel, er ist besitzlos — und er will nach oben. Das sind die grundlegenden Zwänge, denen Fischerle folgt.[25]

Meili finds that Fischerle's Jewishness is more a stigma in his own self-perception than in the attitudes of others towards him. Still, he is the only Jew in the novel, and he is clearly known to others as a Jew; for example, Kien recognizes him as a Jew immediately — perhaps just at the sight of his nose: "Er musterte die ausschließliche Nase des Kleinen, sie flößte ihm Verdacht ein" (190). But certainly a short while later, after Fischerle has held his introductory speech on chess, Kien is assured: "Seitdem der Kleine vom Schach sprach, war er der harmloseste Jud von der

Welt" (192). The *Pensionistin*'s customers, whom Fischerle challenges to games of chess, "hofften, vom schäbigen Juden das Geld zurückzugewinnen, das sie der Frau unter höherem Zwang geschenkt hatten" (193).

For Meili, such instances as these, "wo die jüdische Herkunft außerhalb von Fischerles Bewußtsein erwähnt wird,"[26] are merely of peripheral importance. However, Meili overlooks a rather significant example of Fischerle's Jewishness contributing to his very real victimization, i.e., the mob attack on him outside the Theresianum, where, amongst the scattered charges against him, a clamour to the following effect reaches his ears: "Was fange er mit den Perlen an, so ein Krüppel, und die Judennase gehöre abgehackt" (360). It is Fischerle's hump that will be hacked off, but the association between his "Judennase" and his crippledom is quite apparent in the mob's hostile outcry.

In Die Blendung, Naziism (with its particular agenda of Jewish persecution) is not depicted as such, i.e., as a distinct political presence.[27] But the mob in this scene indulges in the sort of the pat demonization of Jews which has agelessly stoked anti-semitism. And Fischerle makes a perfect scapegoat. The mob's contemptuous association of Fischerle's Jewishness (his nose) with his crippledom highlights the ironic fact that his grotesque appearance so closely matches the distorted (Nazi) stereotype of the monstrous Jew, which would make Fischerle seem "typical" to them, when in fact he is markedly extraordinary.

Nevertheless, Meili argues "daß die Problematik viel deutlicher in Fischerles Selbstreflexionen dargestellt wird als im Bewußtsein seiner Umgebung."[28]

> Sein Denken und Handeln ist geprägt vom Wissen, Jude zu sein und von aller Welt als solcher erkannt zu werden. Jude zu sein ist in seinen Augen nicht Identität, sondern

> Stigma, nicht Aufgehobensein in einer Tradition, sondern Strafe.[29]

Fischerle has no religious faith, he is not an observant Jew, but he is marked by Jewishness as a stroke of fate Meili makes the case that for Fischerle, as for many non-observant Jews of the western world, "Auserwähltsein" has become a curse instead of a privilege. Being in a church makes Fischerle nervous, since the *Pensionistin* has told him stories about churches collapsing on Jews:

> Er glaubte an gar nichts, nur daran, daß "Jud" zu den Verbrechen gehört, die sich von selbst bestrafen. (268)

This idea of a self-punishing crime that is no crime may remind us of Kien's thoughts in his own self-defense at the end of Part One, when Therese throws him out of his flat amidst accusations of his being a beggar and thief: Kien has his bank book with him, and reasons, "Bitte, wo gibt es einen Dieb, der sein Verbrechen immer bei sich hat?" (178). This is almost an ironic foreshadowing of Fischerle, whom Kien is just about to meet. Kien is the "thief" of his own money only according to Therese's absurd logic, and Fischerle's sense of affliction for the "crime" of being Jewish is based on the absurd reality of social prejudice. Fischerle, however, *is* a petty thief by trade, which he does not seem to feel guilty about, though he would like to leave this behind him as a risky way of life: he greatly fears the pain and humiliation of police arrest.

Fischerle raises the topic of a "Stipendium" to Kien:

> "Wissen Sie, was ein Stipendium ist? . . . Passen Sie gut auf: Stipendium ist ein feines Wort. Dieses Wort stammt aus dem Französischen und heißt dasselbe wie das jüdische Kapital!"
>
> Kien schluckte. An ihrer Etymologie sollt ihr sie erkennen. (196)

Meili observes that Kien is taken aback by Fischerle's "etymology," but (like other commentators who cite this passage) she does not acknowledge the biblical allusion:

> 15 Seht euch vor vor den falschen Propheten, die in Schafskleidern zu euch kommen, inwendig aber sind sie reißende Wölfe. 16 An ihren Fruchten sollt ihr sie erkennen. Kann man denn Trauben lesen von den Dornen oder Feigen von den Disteln? 17 So bringt jeder gute Baum gute Früchte; aber ein fauler Baum bringt schlechte Früchte. 18 Ein guter Baum kann nicht schlechte Früchte bringen, und ein fauler Baum kann nicht gute Früchte bringen. 19 Jeder Baum, der nicht gute Früchte bringt, wird abgehauen und ins Feuer geworfen. 20 Darum: an ihren Fruchten sollt ihr sie erkennen. Matt. 7:15-20

The biblical image of trees bearing fruit may in Kien's mind metaphorically suggest "etymologies," the field of his expertise, and Fischerle's word associations have evidently borne a strange, hybrid, unorthodox fruit — which "etymology," however, convincingly identifies Fischerle as Jewish, since his main point of reference seems to be "das jüdische Kapital." The biblical echo is a message of warning welling up from within Kien himself — one which Kien does not heed, for all his learning. And indeed, Fischerle does become a "false prophet" for Kien, most obviously as the oracle of Therese's death, but also through a stream of other falsehoods. Noteworthy too is the idea in verse 19 that unsound trees should be "abgehauen und ins Feuer geworfen" — these are the fates awaiting Fischerle and Kien.

Fischerle meanwhile closely watches Kien:

> Fischerle machte eine ganz kleine Pause, um die Wirkung des Wortes "jüdisch" auf sein Visavis zu beobachten. Kann man wissen? Die Welt wimmelt von Antisemiten. Ein Jude ist immer auf der Hut vor Todfeinden. . . . Das Schlucken des anderen entging ihm nicht. Er deutete es als Verlegenheit und hielt von diesem Augenblick an Kien, der nichts weniger war, für einen Juden. (196)

Both Kien and Fischerle gauge each other on the basis of this "etymology" as friend or foe, like or unlike themselves, and both come to faulty conclusions. Meili notes:

> Wie so oft bei Canetti tun sich auch hier gerade im Moment höchster Komik die Abgründe auf. Fischerles Analogiesetzung von "Stipendium" und "jüdischem Kapital" ist nämlich von einer Hintergründigkeit, die Kiens nüchterner Philologensinn nicht zu fassen vermag. Sehr zu recht geht es dem Professor hier durch den Kopf: "An ihrer Etymologie sollt ihr sie erkennen." Im Bewußtsein des Juden gibt es tatsächlich eine fatale Verwandtschaft zwischen den beiden Begriffen: hier, für ihn, das "jüdische" Kapital, dort, für die anderen, das "feine" Stipendium.[30]

In order to establish her general ideas about Jewish consciousness, Meili refers to certain personal writings of Kafka's (his letters to Milena) which convey his own sense of Jewishness — but she does not clearly show how this ideology applies to or motivates Fischerle. Accordingly, Meili claims that it is part of Fischerle's Jewish consciousness "daß ihm nichts geschenkt wird."[31]

> Fischerles "Stipendium" ist im weitesten Sinn die christliche Gnade. Das "Kapital" dagegen fällt nicht vom Himmel. Kapital wird nicht verschenkt, es muß erworben werden.[32]

Fischerle's decision to "earn" Kien's money means, then, that he has realized there can be no "Stipendium" for him, but rather he must work for "das jüdische Kapital."

However, we cannot forget that Fischerle is a practiced thief, and his hesitation in simply making off with all of Kien's money actually seems less due to his Jewish conscience than to his fear of being arrested with his new fortune:

> Es gehört doch sowieso alles ihm. Die Polizei ist überflüssig. Er verzichtet auf ihre Einmischung. Er wird sich das Ganze redlich verdienen. Drüben liegt ein Idiot, hier liegt ein Mensch mit Intelligenz. Wem wird das Geld zum Schluß gehören? (213)

> Wie entwischt er aus dem Hotel? . . . Morgen hat ihn die Polizei, noch bevor er in der Bahn sitzt. Warum hat sie ihn? Weil er den Buckel hat! Er tastet ihn gehässig mit seinen langen Fingern ab. Er mag nicht mehr ins Loch. (220)

He briefly considers killing Kien, but "Das tut ein Jud nicht. Womit soll er ihn umbringen?" (220). Meili remarks:

> Auch in dieser Überlegung spielt das jüdische Bewußtsein eine ambivalente, wenn nicht paradoxe Rolle. . . . "Das tut ein Jud nicht" bedeutet im gleichen Zug "Töten verstößt gegen das erste Gebot; wir Juden töten nicht" und "Töten braucht Mut; ihr Juden seid zu feig dazu." . . . Die heikle Frage, ob der Professor dank Fischerles Selbstbeherrschung oder dank Fischerles Feigheit am Leben bleibt, fällt damit ins Leere.[33]

As Meili reminds us, we have seen that Fischerle is affected by "das Fremdstereotyp vom feigen Juden."[34] At the beginning of his *Weltmeister* fantasy Fischerle tells himself:

> Wäre er zu Hause geblieben, so hätte er es zu nichts gebracht. Durchbrennen muß ein Mann, das ist die ganze Kunst. Ist einer feig, so wird er kein Weltmeister. Da soll einer sagen, die Juden sind feig. Die Reporter fragen ihn, wer er ist. Kein Mensch kennt ihn. Wie ein Amerikaner schaut er nicht aus. Juden gibt's überall. Aber von wo ist dieser Jud, der den Capablanca im Siegeszug hingemacht hat? (215)

Fischerle's self-consciousness as a Jew stays with him even in his wildest dreams of glory. Meili argues that it is Fischerle's feeling of stigmatization as a Jew that drives his desire for recognition as *Weltmeister*, and thus develops in him his skill as *Verwandlungskünstler*:

> Ohne Fischerles Strategie jetzt Schritt für Schritt zu verfolgen, kann man seine Taktik ungefähr so zusammenfassen: Dem Fernziel der Assimilation nähert er sich durch eine Unzahl kleiner Verwandlungen.[35]

But is Fischerle's goal really "assimilation," as Meili says, or does he simply want to rise and prevail as *Schachweltmeister*, to prove his talents and worth to the world despite *all* his handicaps and hindrances — his Jewishness as well as his crippledom, lack of education, poverty and low social status? What exactly does Meili

mean by the term "assimilation"? Certainly Fischerle would like to overcome his Jewishness, but does he believe he can repudiate it? Does he want to negate his Jewishness, or make it respectable? (The Salvation Army in America, Fischerle believes, "fuhrt ihre Hotels mit weißen Betten; jeder bekommt zwei Leintücher zu persönlichem Gebrauch, er darf auch ein Jud sein" [381].) Can his *Verwandlungskunst* be definitively linked to his Jewishness, or is it just part of his general strategy for survival as a multiply-disadvantaged character?

There is no doubt that Fischerle continually calls upon his skill for adaptation and metamorphosis — for example, he plays along with Kien's book lunacy from his first evening in Kien's service, unloading the phantom "Kopfbibliothek" so laboriously that we at first can't be sure whether we haven't followed him into the dimension of the fantastic. Fischerle readily becomes the authoritative "Chef" of his business racket, easily convincing his cronies of his new identity. Finally, Fischerle's transformation into Dr. Fischer, complete with passport, tailor-made suit which miraculously hides his *Buckel*, and a quickly acquired working knowledge of English, is his crowning achievement. He does not make it to New York, where his bubble would surely burst were he to face Capablanca as a chess opponent — should he be so lucky as to find Capablanca at all, let alone reach the level of tournament play!

Fischerle also projects this talent of pretense onto Kien, alternating in his opinion that Kien is either truly demented or the "Weltmeister der Hochstapelei" (267). When Fischerle later curses Kien for his (supposed) sly posturing (271) and for his "ingratitude," he viciously accuses him of his "Jewishness": "'Also undankbar sind Sie auch! Sie Saujud!' schrie Fischerle. 'Von einem Saujuden hat man nichts anderes zu erwarten! . . .'" (273). Fischerle at this moment despises himself —

> sich, seine Kleinheit, seine Kleinlichkeit, seine kleinliche Zukunft, die Niederlage knapp vor dem Sieg, den schäbigen Verdienst (gegen das königliche Ganze gehalten, das er in wenigen Tagen spielend verdient hätte) . . . (274)

— and he is redirecting his own self-hatred towards Kien as a fellow "Jew" and swindler. This moment is very precarious for Fischerle, as he has just provoked Kien into dismissing him and now stands in danger of losing all, but he manages through a fortunate display of dignified behaviour to (ironically) shame Kien and to regain Kien's favour.

Fischerle seems to feel his Jewishness as a stigma in conjunction with his crippledom and his social straits. During a euphoric moment of metamorphosis as he is learning English, he transforms a band of rowdy boys into a supporting chorus for his achievement: ". . . er war kein Jud und kein Krüppel, er war ein feiner Kerl und verstand sich auf Wigwams" (393). Yet Fischerle's alleged wish for assimilation — that is, for the shucking off of his Jewish identity — is not as strongly articulated as Meili implies. It is not entirely clear whether Fischerle thinks he can renounce his Jewishness, or whether he thinks fame will resolve it (somehow neutralize it) for him. The question of whether Fischerle hopes through his accomplishments to expunge his Jewishness, or whether he realizes that he cannot discard it and must always reckon with it, is not conclusively answered in the text. (His American millionairess wife, we remember, has a particular fondness for his large [still Jewish?] nose [400].) It therefore seems slightly off the mark, considering Fischerle's various overlapping motives, to isolate the rejection of his Jewishness as his main spur to action, or the annulment of his Jewishness as his primary ambition, as Meili does:

> Seine Abstammung ist ihm nur noch Stigma. Dieses loszuwerden, indem er die Anerkennung der Welt

> gewinnt, ist sein höchstes Ziel. . . . Fischerles Weg zur Assimilation fordert die Fähigkeit zu immer neuen Verwandlungen.[36]

In fact, Fischerle seems more concerned to be free of his crippledom, particularly his *Buckel*, and to be wealthy, adored and in command of his chess palace than to be "assimilated." However, Meili draws an amusing comparison between Fischerle with his metamorphoses and Woody Allen's film character "Zelig," a Jew who also undergoes countless transformations into people of all kinds in order to fit in.[37] She notes that the film "Zelig," coinicidentally, is set in the year 1928 — very close to the time setting of Die Blendung.[38]

I propose that we might more readily understand Fischerle's Jewishness and its link to his *Verwandlungsfähigkeit* if we see it from a mythological point of view: as a condition of exile and a longing for exodus. In this view we follow Canetti's own thinking about the Jewish state of being:

> Kein Volk ist schwieriger zu begreifen als die Juden. Sie sind über die ganze bewohnte Erde verbreitet, ihr Stammland war ihnen verloren. Ihre Fähigkeit zur Anpassung ist berühmt und berüchtigt, doch der Grad der Anpassung ist ungeheuer variabel. . . .
>
> Eine territoriale oder sprachliche Einheit gab es unter ihnen bis vor wenigen Jahren nicht. Die meisten verstanden Hebräisch nicht mehr, sie sprachen in hundert Zungen. Ihre alte Religion war für Millionen von ihnen ein leerer Sack; . . . Oberflächlich betrachtet, vom ordinären Standpunkt der Selbsterhaltung aus, sollten sie alles daransetzen, vergessen zu machen, daß sie Juden sind, und es selber vergessen. Aber es ist so, daß sie es nicht vergessen können, meist wollen sie es auch nicht. Man muß sich fragen, worin denn diese Menschen Juden bleiben, was sie zu Juden macht, was das letzte, allerletzte ist, das sie mit anderen verbindet, wenn sie sich sagen: Ich bin Jude.

> Dieses letzte steht am Anfang ihrer Geschichte und hat sich mit unheimlicher Gleichmäßigkeit im Laufe dieser Geschichte wiederholt: es ist der *Auszug aus Ägypten*. Man vergegenwärtige sich den Inhalt dieser Überlieferung: ein ganzes Volk . . . zieht vierzig Jahre lang durch den Sand. . . . Das Meer läßt sie passieren, über den Feinden schlägt es zusammen. Ihr Ziel ist ein gelobtes Land, das sie sich mit dem Schwert erkämpfen werden.[39]

For Fischerle, a social outcast, America is the "promised land" of his deliverance, a land of wealth and bounty, his new homeland, which he is to conquer in battle by slaughtering many armies of chess figures and their masters. Fischerle even fantasizes a millionairess wife and a palace for his kingly life in a blessed state of redemption. His days of toil and labour under Kien — the onerous loading and unloading of the *Kopfbibliothek* — parody the heaping up of the pyramids by Jewish slave labour in Egypt, and Fischerle is eager to cross the ocean (399), leaving the city where he has passed the forty years of his life[40] behind him.

The Old Testament (Judaic) myth of the yearning for exodus is invoked for Fischerle in counterpoint to the Christian myth of the "Divine Comedy," which Kien's odyssey plots out in reverse and parodies.[41] Kien, expelled from the paradise of his library in the sky, sets out on a voyage of (involuntary) self-discovery. Paradoxically, this journey is simultaneously a process of self-estrangement as well as of self-realization. Parodying Christ, Kien passes through the purgatory of Fischerle's cityscape as a grievously deluded book-saviour, and after his arrest, where he wears Therese's arm as a "Dornenkrone" (312), and a mock trial at the police station, he lands in the inferno of Pfaff's murderous den. Here he learns to doubt his sanity before ascending again to his now "fallen" world of books,[42] where he brings on his apocalyptic end. Fischerle, on the other hand, always knows who he is and who he

wants to be: these two identities, actual and imagined, are, for him, an ocean apart, a distance he hopes to bridge through a bold leap of faith — not in God, but in himself.

Fischerle's *Verwandlungsfähigkeit* is a quality of special significance in the context of Canetti's general thinking and view of humanity. For Canetti, *Verwandlungsfähigkeit* is the quality which most fundamentally defines humanity. Canetti has written about the nature and importance of metamorphosis in his essays, in his "Aufzeichnungen" and in Masse und Macht. Consider also the following exerpts from his 1965 interview with Horst Bienek:

> Canetti: Ja, das allmähliche Verschwinden der Tiere halte ich für die vielleicht gefährlichste Verarmung des Menschen. Durch seine Begabung zur Verwandlung ist er ja erst zum Menschen geworden, und der Inhalt dieser Verwandlungen waren alle die Tiere, mit denen er je zu tun hatte. Der Mensch ist auch die Summe aller Tiere, in die er sich im Laufe seiner Geschichte verwandelt hat.
>
> . . . Das Problem der Verwandlung beschäftigt mich übrigens sehr intensiv. Sie ist natürlich auch der Kernvorgang des Dramas.
>
> . . . ich glaube, es ist im Kern alles, was ich mache, dramatischer Natur.[43]

And from a 1972 interview with Joachim Schickel:

> . . . Ich glaube, daß der Mensch ein Verwandlungswesen par excellence ist und durch seine Verwandlungen in Tiere, die seine Umgebung ausgemacht haben, zum Menschen geworden ist.[44]

In his essay "Der Beruf des Dichters," Canetti writes:

> Was aber neben allen spezifischen Einzelgehalten das Eigentliche der Mythen ausmacht, ist die in ihnen geübte Verwandlung. Sie ist es, durch die sich der Mensch erschaffen hat. Durch sie hat er sich die Welt zu eigen gemacht, durch sie hat er Anteil an ihr, daß er der Verwandlung seine Macht verdankt, vermögen wir wohl

> einzusehen, er verdankt ihr aber Besseres, er verdankt ihr sein Erbarmen.[45]

It would lead us too far afield to pursue the importance for Canetti of *Verwandlungsfahigkeit* in the creative process, which the author discusses in this essay (the poet is doubly "der Huter der Verwandlungen"[46] as the guardian of mythological metamorphoses inherited by him in literature, and as the practitioner of metamorphosis in his experience and understanding of the world).

In Die Blendung, Fischerle's metamorphoses reflect his struggle for self-fulfilment. He uses his gift for transformation to dupe others and to re-create himself according to his visions of *Weltmeisterschaft*. He does not use this gift to put himself in another's place and so to feel for him, but rather to assess and to exploit him. This finally leads to his downfall, as the *Knopfhans* executes the fatal transformation of Fischerle into a *Buckel*-less corpse in exchange for the dire button Fischerle has foisted upon him, robbing the *Knopfhans* of due payment for his day's work as well as of his dreams for a button-less future, and enjoying the cruel but irresistably opportune button-joke at the "blind man's" expense. Fischerle should have known better; he himself had just given the *Knopfhans* some "sympathetic" parting advice: "'Die Knöpfe sind dein Unglück, paß auf, du bringst noch einen um!'" (365). But Fischerle is carried away by a spirit of levity and exhilaration, gathering momentum for his imminent transformation into a world traveller and for his departure to America. He turns and adds in unwelcome consolation: "'Auf Wiedersehen, in einem besseren Jenseits, lieber Freund, nimm dir's nicht zu Herzen!'" (367).

5. Fischerle as Cripple

> Ein grausames Schicksal hat Fischerle nicht nur mit dem Mackel des Judentums geschlagen, sondern auch mit einem Leiden, das ganz unmetaphorisch als Geburtsfehler bezeichnet werden kann: Er ist von zwergenhaftem Wuchs und hat einen riesigen Buckel. Im Gegensatz zum Judentum, das sich weit mehr als Belastung seines Selbstgefühls erwiesen hat denn als Zielpunkt äußerer Anfeindungen, ist seine Mißgestalt so augenfällig, daß er im Bewußtsein der Umgebung zuerst einmal als "der Krüppel" erscheint und erst dann auch als Zuhälter, Schachgenie oder Jude.[47]

Fischerle is very self-consciously burdened, inwardly and outwardly, by his crippledom. Fischerle is not a cripple in the sense that he is lame (his "krumme Beine" are quite functional) or maimed or missing limbs, but he is malformed, and he belongs to the class "Krüppel" which in Die Blendung encompasses all outcasts and misfits. He is also frustrated by circumstance and is a cripple in this sense too, complaining to Kien: "Ein Mensch ohne ein Stipendium ist ein Krüppel" (196).

Fischerle's most pronounced features are his physical deformities: his hump, his dwarfish size, his crooked legs, his great nose, long arms and capacious armpits — just the right size and shape for storing banknotes. The first picture we get of Fischerle presents a figure defined by his lack of normal features and encumbered with greatly exaggerated ones; we also quickly see that he is suffused with comic energy:

> Die Spitze der stark gebogenen Nase lag in der Tiefe des Kinns. Der Mund war so klein wie der Mann, nur — er war nicht zu finden. Keine Stirn, keine Ohren, kein Hals, kein Rumpf — dieser Mensch bestand aus einem Buckel, einer mächtigen Nase und zwei schwarzen, ruhigen, traurigen Augen. . . .

> "Fischerle is mein Name!" Die Nase pickte auf die Tischplatte. . . . Er holte zwei Arme hervor — lang wie die eines Gibbons — und griff nach Kiens Aktentasche. Ihr Inhalt brachte ihn zum Lachen. Durch die Mundwinkel, die rechts und links von der Nase zuckten, bewies er endlich die Existenz seines Mundes (189-190)

Fischerle is often referred to as "der Kruppel" and he also identifies himself as such. Much of Fischerle's sense of crippledom resides in his dwarfism: his desire to grow rich (to literally grow with wealth) and to rise in the world can be directly linked to his smallness, as is evident in his fantasy of sitting atop a great heap of money (212), as well as in his extended fantasy of success as *Schachweltmeister* in America, where he eventually finds himself dwarfing the throng of financially reduced — and physically belittled — reporters who are bidding for his life-story (216-217). Fischerle's cronies at the dive *Zum Idealen Himmel* make a joke of the incongruity of Fischerle's size and his grand ambitions:

> Wenn ihn die Polizei gerade schikanierte, pflegte Fischerle auf einige Tage zu verschwinden. Man sagte: "Er ist nach Amerika," lachte jedesmal über den Witz — wie kam ein solcher Knirps in das Riesenland der Wolkenkratzer — und vergaß ihn, bis er wieder auftauchte. (242)

But the epicentre of Fischerle's crippledom is his *Buckel*, the beast of his back which relentlessly clings to him, weighing him down, betraying and humiliating him. Fischerle is described as "ein eigenartig kurzes Höckerreptil" (208). Since it hides immovably behind him, it is impossible for Fischerle to confront his *Buckel* squarely, and yet he tries to do so.

There is evidence of some ambivalence in Fischerle's attitude towards his *Buckel*. He acknowledges it as flesh of his flesh, but considers it a problematic contradiction with his finer persona as *Weltmeister*:

> Die Photographen lassen einen Augenblick bitten. "Aber meine Herren, mit dem Buckel!" sagt er. "Weltmeister ist Weltmeister, hochverehrter Herr Fischerle. Damit hat der Buckel nichts zu tun." Die Leute nehmen ihn auf, von rechts, von links, von hinten, von vorn. "Tun S'ihn doch wegretuschieren", schlagt er vor, "da haben Sie was Schönes für Ihr Blatt." "Wie Sie wunschen, sehr verehrtester Herr Schachweltmeister." Wirklich, wo hat er die Augen gehabt, sein Bild ist überall ohne Buckel. Weg ist er. Er hat ihn nicht. Wegen der Kleinigkeit macht er sich noch Sorgen. (215-216)

At times Fischerle seems able to tolerate the *Buckel* with some humour, regarding it as a ridiculous blemish, and he can make comically self-deprecating reference to it, such as when he snipes at the *Hausierer*:

> "Uff!" seufzte er, "bis man Sie so weit hat, daß Sie was kapieren, wächst einem ein zweiter Buckel." (250)

There are times too when Fischerle takes advantage of the *Buckel* — as extra storage space for Kien's *Kopfbibliothek* (278) (this rather loaded image will be discussed in the following chapter, "Imagery Relating Fischerle and Kien") — and as a protective shell to withdraw into when fists and blows come pounding down around him in a scuffle:

> Zu Kiens Knieen geht Fischerle nach und nach ein, er besteht nur noch aus Buckel. Manchmal wird der Buckel zum Schild, hinter dem er verschwindet, zum Schneckenhaus, in das er sich zurückzieht, zur Muschelschale, die sich um ihn schließt. (317)

By and large, however, Fischerle's *Buckel* is his persistent challenge, abhorred and resented by him, yet unshakeable and inseparable from him until death. Though he suffers it along with his other afflictions, Fischerle mainly longs to be rid of his *Buckel*. He dreams of becoming a millionaire and paying a surgeon to remove his hump.[48] Sitting on a mountain of banknotes, delirious Fischerle fantasizes:

> Es hat schon seine Vorteile, wenn man so groß ist. Da paßt man auf beides zugleich auf; von weitem sieht man jeden, der stehlen kommt, und von nahem halt man das Brett. So erledigen große Herren ihre Geschäfte. Mit der Rechten rückt man die Figuren, mit der Linken putzt man die dreckigen Finger an Banknoten ab. Es sind eben zuviel da. Sagen wir: Millionen. Was fangt man mit den vielen Millionen an? Was herschenken wär' nicht schlecht, aber wer traut sich das? Die müssen nur sehen, daß ein kleiner Mensch was hat, das Gesindel, und gleich nehmen sie ihm alles weg. Ein Kleiner darf sich nicht groß machen. Er hat das Kapital dazu, aber er darf nicht. Was muß er drauf sitzen? sagen sie, ja, wo soll der kleine Mensch die Millionen hingeben, wenn er nichts zum Aufheben hat? Eine Operation wäre das Gescheiteste. Man hält dem berühmten Chirurgen eine Million vor die Nase. Herr, sagt man, schneiden Sie mir den Buckel herunter und Sie kriegen die Million dazu. Für eine Million wird ein Mensch zum Künstler. Ist der Buckel weg, da sagt man: lieber Herr, die Million war falsch, an ein paar Tausendern soll's nicht fehlen. Er ist imstand' und bedankt sich noch. Der Buckel wird verbrannt. Jetzt könnt' man sein Lebtag grad sein. Aber der gescheite Mensch ist nicht so dumm. Er nimmt seine Million, rollt die Banknoten ganz klein zusammen und macht einen neuen Buckel draus. Den zieht er an. Kein Mensch merkt was. *Er* weiß, er ist grad, die Leute glauben, er hat einen Buckel. *Er* weiß, er ist ein Millionär, die Leute glauben, ein armer Teufel. Beim Schlafen schiebt er sich den Buckel auf den Bauch. Großer Gott, er möcht' auch einmal auf dem Rücken schlafen.
>
> Da kommt Fischerle auf seinen Buckel zu liegen, und ist dem Schmerz, der ihn aus dem Halbschlaf reißt, geradezu dankbar. (212-213)

This passage well illustrates many components in the basic complex of Fischerle's nature: he would like to be a grand gentleman, but this aggrandizement could be dangerous for "ein Kleiner," and it is convenient to allow his smallness to restrict his show of generosity; his *Buckel* is his enemy, but it would make a good disguise for him as a "straightened" wealthy man, and though it causes him pain, it

is just this pain that binds him to reality — wakes him up — and keeps him scheming.

W. E. Stewart has identified a connection between the diminutive suffix of Fischerle's name, "-le," and his hump. When Fischerle is acclaimed *Schachweltmeister* in America, he insists that his name is not Fischerle, but Fischer:

> Am nächsten Tag stehen schon tausend Reporter da. "Meine Herren," sagte er, "ich bin überrascht, daß man mich überall Fischerle nennt. Ich heiße Fischer. Sie werden das berichtigen, hoff' ich!" Sie geben ihm die Hand drauf. Dann knien sie vor ihm nieder, klein sind die Menschen, und flehen ihn an, er soll schon was sagen. (216)

Stewart argues that fame for Fischerle is "a particular form of power which involves a particular relationship to the crowd; here the name is all-important."[49] As *Schachweltmeister*, Fischerle wishes to be known as "Herr Fischer" to the admiring masses, just as he has suggested that his *Buckel* be erased from his photographs. "So Fischerle insists that the humiliating diminutive suffix be removed from his name."[50] In reality, it is Fischerle's hump that defines him as Fischerle:

> Suddenly Fischerle wakes up and his grandiose vision of an ideal future dissolves in the harsh reality of the present. Once again the double process of inflation results in double humiliation: the crowd disintegrates, and at the same time Fischerle finds himself reduced to his former stunted stature. His hump, reality incarnate, sits squarely on his shoulders, an ineluctable diminutive suffix.[51]

The hump, while in itself enormous, contributes to Fischerle's smallness (of physical stature and social status) — and in turn to his grand ambitions; linked as it is to the "-le" of Fischerle, it is central to the paradoxical motif of "das Kleine."[52]

Fischerle also focuses his self-contempt on his *Buckel* as an enemy "other," a stubborn demon he cannot dislodge:

> Er schlägt auf seinen Buckel los. Das Geld steckt er zwischen die Beine. Der Buckel ist an allem schuld. Er soll nur wehtun. Er hat es verdient. Schlägt er nicht, so muß er heulen. Heult er, so ist Amerika begraben.
>
> Genau in der Mitte zwischen Bett und Tür steht Fischerle fest gewurzelt auf einem Fleck und geißelt den Buckel. Wie Peitschenstiele hebt er die Arme abwechselnd in die Höhe und schleudert fünf zweifach geknotete Riemen, seine Finger, über die Schultern hinweg auf den Buckel. Dieser hält still Ein unerbittlicher Berg, erhebt er sich über dem niederen Vorgebirge der Schultern und strotzt von Härte. Er könnte schreien: ich hab' genug!, er schweigt. Fischerle kommt in Übung. Er sieht, was der Buckel aushält. Er richtet sich auf eine längere Folter ein. . . . Er prügelt die Bestie krumm und blau. Soll sie ihn klagen! Vor jedem Streich denkt er: "Herunter, du Aas!" Das Aas bleibt unbewegt. Fischerle ist in Schweiß gebadet. Die Arme schmerzen ihn, die Finger sind schlaff und matt. Er harrt aus, er hat Geduld, er schwört, der Buckel liegt in den letzten Zügen. Aus Falschheit gehabt er sich gesund. Ficherle kennt ihn. Er will ihn sehen. Er renkt sich den Kopf aus, um die Fratze des Gegners zu verhöhnen. Was, der versteckt sich — du Feigling! — du Krüppel! — ein Messer, ein Messer!, er sticht ihn tot, wo ist ein Messer! Fischerle tritt der Schaum vor den Mund, schwere Tränen stürzen ihm aus den Augen, er weint, weil er kein Messer hat, er weint, weil der Krüppel schweigt. (221)

The stony hardness of the *Buckel*, hyperbolically pictured here as an unyielding mountain, picks up the motif of inhuman hardness that we have seen earlier in Therese's hard hands and stiff skirt,[53] and in Kien's desperate petrifaction (into an Egyptian monument, as he thinks [172-174]) as a defense against Therese. Kien quickly dissolves into vulnerable flesh when Therese actually attacks and beats him ("Er spürt alles. Es tut weh. Er ist kein Stein." [178]); Fischerle thrashes himself to exhaustion, proving his fleshliness to himself with bruises. His sweat and tears here are the product of genuine toil and distress, they are pathetic and comically piteous, unlike the sweat and tears of Therese, which are always signs of a kind of sinister

melting: she constantly breaks out in sweat and her eyes water in anticipation of finding evidence of Kien's "secret murder," at the prospect of getting money, or in anticipation of sexual gratification.[54] Kien, on the other hand, often wants to cry but cannot: "Weinen will er, wo bleiben die Tränen, die Augen sind grausam fest verschlossen . . ." (38), and the victim in his first dream (a version of himself) cries tears of glass: "Glaskugeln flossen aus den Augen des Gefangenen und sprangen am Boden in tausend Splitter" (37). Kien's tears are blocked, or they are shameful: he does run sobbing from the scene of his failed marriage consummation to the refuge of the toilet. Therese's tears are menacing, or obscene, or a grotesque reaction to rejection (300). Manfred Moser interprets the interaction between Therese and Kien as a mingling of "elements":

> Kien beispielsweise ist das Holz, das dem Wasser unterliegt. Wasser ist das Element der schwitzenden, tränigen, sich gleitend fortbewegenden Therese. Kien versucht sich zu retten, indem er zur steinernen Statue erstarrt, aber seine Kunst "zerbricht", er bleibt ein Stück Holz, ausgesetzt der zerlaugenden Kraft des Wassers. Das Holz, dessen Härte an das feindliche Element übergeht, wird brüchig und spröde, bis es zuletzt lichterloh brennt.[55]

Fischerle is both "earthy" and "watery." He is dusty and unwashed — the *Pensionistin* laments: "Manchmal meint man direkt, er ist aus einer Mistkisten gestiegen" (198) — and because he is small he is usually very close to the ground. But he feels pulled towards the ocean, and he is well irrigated with sweat and tears. His tears in this instance are anguished and cathartic. Yet as a supreme trickster Fischerle is also quite capable of crocodile tears, for example, when he "broken-heartedly" dismisses his employees after his business collapses: "Sein Kopf fiel auf die Brust und die weitaufgerissenen Augen füllten sich mit Tränen" (364). Similarly,

when he wants to gain sympathy in order to milk favours from the *Paßkoch* at the dive "Zum Pavian": "Fischerles Augen füllten sich mit Tränen. Er legte die Kaffeeschale weg und begann zu schluchzen" (373). Yet even here Fischerle's play-acting engages us as a measure of his audacity rather than of calculating "evil"; these pretended tears are part of his arsenal of tricks for shameless self-promotion, and they actually do have the effect of temporarily softening others.

Fischerle repeatedly calls for a knife with which to slay his hump (the "Feigling" and "Krüppel" in himself, dragging him down). A blunt breadknife will eventually do the job, but we are aware that Kien, too, is often metaphorically described as a "Messer":

> Ruhig drehte er dem gestikulierenden Analphabeten den Rücken. Mit diesem schmalen Messer schnitt er sein Geschwätz entzwei. (15)
>
> Ein entsetzlicher Dunst benahm ihm den Atem. Wie zur Abwehr ging er mechanisch zwei Schritte weiter. Seine scharfe Gestalt durchschnitt, ein Messer, die dicke Luft. (188)
>
> Auf Fischerle hatte die Nähe der Polizei eine beängstigende Wirkung, er sprang an Kien in die Höhe, packte seinen Mund, schloß ihn fest und zog ihn zu sich herunter. So schleppte er ihn, ein halb geschlossenes Federmesser, bis zur Kirchentür . . . . (266)

Fischerle's demand for a knife with which to destroy his hump, his abject self, is ironically answered in the person of Kien, who makes possible with his "Kapital" Fischerle's severance from his former self, and inadvertantly steers him to his death. By the time the *Knopfhans* is about to kill him, saying "Krüppel und Dreck ist dasselbe!" (400), Fischerle ironically relishes the idea that he is no longer a cripple, and so misses the deadly reference to himself: "Fischerle lacht, weil er keiner mehr ist" (400).

Before his actual murder, Fischerle narrowly escapes being killed by the angry mob, which focuses its hatred on his *Buckel* and shouts "Der Krüppel!" (359):

> Für Zwerge gebe es 20 Jahre. Die Todesstrafe müßte wieder her. Kruppel gehören ausgerottet. Alle Verbrecher seien Krüppel. Nein, alle Krüppel Verbrecher. (360)

Fischerle is rescued by the sacrifice of his *Doppelgängerin*, the *Fischerin*:

> Plötzlich schreit jemand dicht neben ihr: "Der Krüppel!" und haut sie auf den Buckel. Andere schreien auch, andere schlagen zu. Die Menge fällt über sie her, hier war man weit vom Schlag, um so kräftiger holt man ihn nach. Die Fischerin stürzt zu Boden. Sie liegt auf dem Bauch und hält sich still. Sie wird furchtbar zugerichtet. Man meint den Buckel und trifft sie überall. Von drüben zieht sich die Menge hierher zusammen. An der Echtheit des Buckels ist nicht zu zweifeln. Über ihn entlädt sich die Masse. Solange sie kann, zittert die Fischerin für Fischerles Los und stöhnt: "Er ist das Einzige, was ich auf der Welt hab'." Dann verliert sie das Bewußtsein. (363)

The role of the *Fischerin* in Die Blendung has received very little commentary. Manfred Schneider suggests:

> Die Strenge und Unerbittlichkeit der "Fackel"-Stimme ging als künstlerische Disziplin und Härte in "Die Blendung" ein. Die Negation der Wiener Feuilleton-Literatur hieß bei Canetti die Parodie einer Seelenhaftigkeit, deren triviale Lyrismen in den weiblichen Figuren der "Blendung" als satirische Zitate fortleben.[56]

Schneider does not name the *Fischerin*, but we are reminded of her soulful lament in her unrequited love for Fischerle:

> Hänselte man sie wegen dieser ihrer unbegreiflichen Dummheit, so zuckte sie mit den Schultern, wackelte mit dem Buckel — er nahm es mit dem Fischerles an Größe und Ausdrucksfähigkeit auf — und sagte: "Er ist das *Einzige*, was ich auf der *Welt* hab'!" Vielleicht liebte sie Fischerle diesem klagenden Satz zuliebe. Sie rief ihn mit scheppernder Stimme aus, es klang so, als ob sie zwei

> Zeitungen, "Das Einzige" und "Der Welthab" anzupreisen habe. (243)

The *Fischerin* is a dwarf like Fischerle — "sie war gleich klein wie er" (243) — and she is named after Fischerle because of their striking physical similarity (the text gives no indication that she might also be Jewish), and because of her hopeless attachment to him (242). The *Fischerin*'s timid, gentle gestures of kindness and love for Fischerle are thanklessly received or rudely rebuffed by him:

> "Ich bin das Einzige, was du auf der Welt hast", er erinnerte sie an ihren Liebes- und Lieblingssatz. "Siehst, das kann eine jede sagen. Ich bin für die Beweise. Wenn du einen Groschen unterschlägst, ist es aus zwischen uns und ich rühr' keine Zeitung mehr an, das schwör' ich, und du kannst warten, bis du einen zweiten find'st, der genauso ausschaut wie du!" (246)

Rather than feeling fondness, kinship or solidarity with her as a partner in misfortune — his mate in crippledom — Fischerle impatiently rejects her: "Sie war ihm zuwider, weil sie ihn die ganze Zeit liebte" (247). The *Fischerin* is actually opposite to Fischerle in nature: she is sentimental, giving, thoughtful of others, self-sacrificing. First she is emotionally squashed by Fischerle — he mercilessly upbraids and threatens her when she tells him that Kien took her for "Frau Fischerle" (255), though this honour was a high point in her life ("In ihrem ganzen Leben hatte sie sich noch nie so glücklich gefühlt" [256]) — and then she is physically crushed by the crowd on Fischerle's behalf. She has been a good soldier for Fischerle, and a misfit in this story for her feeling heart. Her main concern in her final search for Fischerle is for his vulnerable "smallness," a weakness which she of course shares. As a small pawn she is easily dispensed with by Fischerle, but her sacrifice has the major consequence of launching Fischerle anew. He issues forth from the fracas of the crowd

newly born, full of high hopes for his brilliant reincarnation, unknowingly leaving his greatest admirer in the dust in place of himself.

6. Fischerle and Chess

Meili (like Schneider) sees Fischerle's obsession with chess as a response to his crippledom. She argues that because Fischerle's crippledom limits his possibilities of self-expression, it forces him to concentrate his mental talents:

> Fischerle lebt im Bewußtsein, mit einem Geburtsfehler geschlagen zu sein, der dem vollen Lebensglück im Weg steht. Ihn vor den Augen der Welt zu widerlegen, ist die treibende Kraft seines Tuns. Seine Hoffnung, einmal nicht mehr nur "der Krüppel" zu sein, nährt sich aus der Meisterschaft im Schachspiel. Daß er es darin zu hoher Virtuosität gebracht hat, verdankt er gerade seiner Behinderung, unter deren Zwang er alle seine Fähigkeiten auf einen fest abgegrenzten Bereich konzentrieren lernte.[57]

Furthermore, building on her thesis that Fischerle's field of concentration represents Canetti's own powers of concentration, Meili sees the game of chess as a metaphor for Canetti's approach to characterization:

> Des weiteren ist Schach ein Spiel mit Figuren ganz besonderer Art. Im Gegensatz zu Spielen wie Mühle oder auch Kegeln sind die Figuren des Schachspiels schon in ihrer Form streng funktionalisiert. Jede einzelne hat genau vorbestimmte Möglichkeiten, die einmal festgelegt und nie mehr verändert wurden. Der Spieler verfügt über sie, aber sie bestimmen seine Strategie durch ihre Begrenztheit. Dies korrespondiert nun genau mit dem, was Canetti bei den Vorarbeiten zur "Blendung" zu üben begonnen und seither in seinen Fiktionen nie mehr verlassen hat, dem Spiel mit Figuren.[58]

But there is much more to be said about the chess motif within the novel itself. Chess as the consummate intellectual activity affirms for Fischerle his worth as a

human being. When he first encounters the giant Kien, he seems particularly sensitive about his own small size, and he pounces on Kien's negative response to his standard question, "Spielen Se Schach?":

> "Ein Mensch, was ka Schach spielt, is ka Mensch. Im Schach sitzt die Intelligenz, sag' ich. Da kann einer vier Meter lang sein, Schach muß er spielen, sonst is er ein Tepp. Ich kann Schach. Ich bin auch kein Tepp. . . . Wozu hat ein Mensch den Kopf? . . . Zum Schach hat er den Kopf. . . ." (191)

Fischerle is "kein Mensch" because he is a dwarf and a cripple, but his ability to play chess compensates for and remedies his crippledom with "intelligence" and makes him "ein Mensch." Even the fully grown Kien is therefore "kein Mensch" for his chess-illiteracy, but Fischerle will come to respect Kien's character for other reasons, namely, for his supposedly refined "Hochstapelei." The motif "Mensch" / "kein Mensch" as it applies to both Fischerle and Kien will be examined more fully later in this study.

Chess allows Fischerle freedom of movement and freedom of expression, and gives him a feeling of power:

> Das Wort "Schach" klang in seinem Mund wie ein Befehl, so, als ob es nur von seiner Gnade abhinge, das tödliche "Matt" hinzuzusetzen. (192)

> Er hätte am liebsten ununterbrochen gespielt. Er träumte von einem Leben, wo man Essen und Schlafen während der Züge des Gegners erledigt. (192)

The *Pensionistin* disapproves of Fischerle's chess-mania and likes to put a stop to his play when he is on a winning streak, "er wurde ihr sonst zu frech" (192). This infuriates Fischerle, and he arouses the pity of the *Himmel* audience, "doch hätte es niemand gewagt, ihrem Verbot entgegen eine neue Partie zu beginnen" (192-193). As

soon as the *Pensionistin* has gone away with a customer, Fischerle returns to the freedom of the chess-board:

> Sobald sie sich mit einem entfernt hatte, trieb er sich nach Herzenslust auf dem Brett herum. (193)

When Fischerle dazzles the *Himmel*-audience with his impressive performance of blindfolded (and innovatively cheating) chess play, the immediate rewards fall to his most grotesque features in a show of physical affection:

> Alles war atemlos gefolgt. Alles staunte. Die Mädchen tätschelten seinen Buckel und küßten ihn auf die Nase. (195)

Even the *Pensionistin*, an enemy of chess, enjoys the spectacle of Fischerle's *Rösselsprünge*:

> Die Türme und die Rössel gefielen ihr, weil sie so aussahen wie richtige, und wenn Fischerles Rösser im konzentrierten Galopp über das Brett fegten, pflegte sie mit ihrer ruhigen, trägen Stimme hell aufzulachen. (199)

Not only is his prowess in the game of chess a compensation for his crippledom, but Fischerle translates his chess skills into life, waging battle against himself and others as metaphorically transfigured chess battles. In the lengthy passage we examined earlier, Fischerle brings his showdown with his *Buckel* to an end by declaring "Schach-matt!" (221). Fischerle has been stalking an imaginary intruder in the hotel room, the "Weltmeister" against whom he has been playing imaginary chess:

> Da fällt ihm ein, wie scharf es die Weltmeister aufs Geld haben, . . . sicher ist der Kerl auch hier hinter dem Geld her und treibt sich in der Nähe der Brieftasche herum. (214)

When Fischerle feels his hand clutching Kien's money, the "Stipendium" of his dreams, he naturally grasps this as the ultimate prize of a captured enemy queen: "Die Hand bleibt fest. Sie klammert sich an das Paket wie an eine eben erbeutete

Königin" (219). Now he sizes up his crippled self in the guise of the enemy *Weltmeister*:

> ". . . Er schlägt, ich schlag auch. Er bettelt um Gnade, ich hab' keine. Er will nach Amerika, ich laß ihn nicht. Glauben Sie, der hat ein Buch angerührt? Nicht ein Stück. Eine Intelligenz hat er gehabt. Aber dumm war er doch. Sein Lebtag wär' er nicht bis Amerika gekommen. Wissen Sie, wohin er gekommen wär'? Unter uns gesagt, ins Kriminal. Jetzt ist er fort." . . .
>
> ". . . Ein Krüppel war er wie ich. Ich könnt' schwören, er spielt gut Schach. Ein armer Teufel." (222)

The power dynamics and the imagery of the game of chess are apparent in Fischerle's own escapades in Die Blendung. The word "Schach" itself, and the call "Schach-matt" are significant; Duden's Herkunftswörterbuch lists the following entry for the word "Schach":

> **Schach:** Das königliche Spiel, dessen Ursprünge wohl in Indien zu suchen sind, gelangte im 11. Jh. durch die Araber, die es ihrerseits von den Persen übernommen hatten, nach Europa. Der Name des Spiels . . . beruht auf *pers.* šāh "König" (vgl. *Schah*). Er hat sich aus dem im Schachspiel üblichen Ausruf *pers.-arab.* šāh māta "der König ist gestorben" verselbständigt (vgl. hierzu auch den Artikel *matt*).

The point in chess is to trap and pose death to the opposing king. The king himself is very restricted in his movements and so is fairly impotent, yet his survival means all to the game. Fischerle's battle against Kien is like one of his staged chess matches, player against mock player, king against puppet king. Kien, operating for his part in a different context altogether (in his mission as book saviour, he believes Fischerle is his loyal disciple), is unaware of the unilateral attack by Fischerle, who busily schemes:

> Wie kleinlich diese großen Herren alle sind! . . . Eine Intelligenz hat der Mensch. Da sieht man gleich den

> Unterschied zwischen einem armen Taschendieb und einem besseren Hochstapler. In den Hotels glaubt's ihm jeder. Beinahe hatte ihm Fischerle auch geglaubt. . . .
>
> "Kanaille!" dachte sich Fischerle, "du spielst gut, aber ich werd' noch besser spielen!" . . .
>
> Seit diesem Tage fuhrten die beiden einen Kampf auf Leben und Tod gegeneinander, von dem der eine nichts ahnte. Der andere, der sich als Schauspieler schwächer fühlte, nahm die Regie in Hand und hoffte, seinen Nachteil auf diese Weise auszugleichen. (237-238)

Both Kien and Fischerle have enemies, not allies, in their estranged, all-powerful queens (the queen in chess is by far the most mobile and the deadliest figure); Therese and the *Pensionistin*, different versions of "Analphabetengesindel" (the pursuits of philology and chess are incomprehensible to them), have not only undermined their husbands' vocations, but have subjugated them physically and territorially. Therese, in fact, displaces Kien entirely from his field of books, and she initially gains power by taking over his row of rooms, square by square, until she literally corners and immobilizes Kien behind his desk in the far corner of his study.

The chess board is defined by eight rows of eight squares, each square alternately coloured light and dark. The two armies of figures on either side (white and black) each consist of sixteen pieces which occupy two rows of squares: the king, the queen, two bishops, two knights (this piece is typically fashioned after a horse's head), and two rooks (or castles); before these pieces stands a row of eight pawns. In the configuration and the interaction of the players in Die Blendung we see only fragments and hints of this array of pieces and board patterning, not a complete set in action. Kien's library, for example, spans four rooms, but when he thinks he is about to inherit a million schillings, he immediately wants to acquire the neighbouring flat, knock down walls and expand his library to a row of eight rooms:

> Erweiterung der Bibliothek von vier Räumen auf acht.
> Das ließ sich sehen. (146)

Suddenly he feels his own library is oppressively small, he will sally forth from "der drückend kleinen Bibliothek, in der ich bis jetzt gehaust habe" (147), and he dreams about "die achtraumige Halle" (151). His hopes are dashed (there is no inheritance) and Kien eventually realizes that he has been poisoned by greed, but the suggestion remains that he is a cornered king in too confined a space.

Fischerle deploys half a set of pawns (his four employees, foot soldiers of his business enterprise) to assail Kien, and later boasts that he could well have afforded a full fleet of eight:

> Natürlich hat er Angestellte, gleich vier auf einmal, er hätte auch acht aufnehmen konnen — sechzehn nicht — natürlich kann er sie hinschicken und befehlen: "Leuteln, hebts das dreckige Geld auf!" Aber er riskiert so was nicht. . . . Ein Chef heißt Chef, weil er sich auf sich selbst verläßt. Man nennt das auch Risiko." (367)

Thus Fischerle rationalizes his final unsuccessful attempt to collect the last of Kien's money single-handedly.

Ultimately, Kien and Fischerle simply separate; the game is not ended as such, though Fischerle believes he is the victor. But Fischerle will be killed by the *Knopfhans*, one of his own pawns turned against him,[59] and by his renegade queen, immediately after confirming himself in his *Taschenkalender* as the newest *Schachweltmeister*: "Doktor Fischer New York" (400).

Further commentary on Fischerle and chess (the more concrete imagery of chess figures and chess play, and the motif of *Weltmeisterschaft*) will be offered in the next chapter, "Imagery relating Fischerle and Kien."

7. Fischerle as "Armer Teufel" and "Dog"

Returning again to Barbara Meili's assessment of Fischerle, we come to the characteristic "der Besitzlose " Fischerle is, in his own words, "ein armer Teufel," and he repeatedly describes himself as such.

"Fischerle kommt aus dem Nichts."[60] We hear very little about Fischerle's past — just that he has had no formal schooling (229), and that for twenty years he has been living with the *Pensionistin* (196). He is dependent on the *Pensionistin* for his livelihood ("Er hielt sich an sie, weil sie ihm zu essen gab" [192]); for her he is a source of entertainment ("Ihr Haserl wußte immer was zu reden" [198]) and she regards him as her child: "Sie liebte ihn nämlich, er war ihr Kind. Das Geschäft erlaubte ihr kein anderes" (192).

Meili argues that Fischerle has nothing, and therefore he has nothing to lose; because of this, he can afford to risk all, and to allow himself boundless audacity.

> Er hat nichts zu bewahren, für ihn gibt es nur die Flucht nach vorn.[61]

But this is not entirely correct. Fischerle does indeed have very few possessions, but these he guards jealously, namely, the small chess set he always carries with him in his pocket, and his *Taschenkalender*, well hidden in a crack in the floor under the *Pensionistin*'s bed. He fears arrest largely because he knows the police will take away his chess set, and this prevents him from stealing Kien's money at the outset:

> Er mag nicht mehr ins Loch. Die Schweine nehmen ihm sein Schach ab. Er muß die Figuren greifen können, damit ihm das Spiel Freude macht. Sie zwingen ihn, bloß im Kopf zu spielen. Das hält kein Mensch aus. (220)

And he is so connected to his *Taschenkalender* that he unwisely returns home to retrieve it, instead of making his getaway; his need to write himself into it as new world chess champion costs him his life.

However, Meili pursues her argument:

> Er hat nicht nur keinen Glauben, keine Traditionsbindung, keinen ererbten Besitz, er hat auch keine Bildung.[62]

Fischerle is uneducated; this fosters his irreverent attitude towards "große Herren." Fischerle admires Kien as the "Weltmeister der Hochstapelei" ("Man muß sagen, es ist ein Vergnügen, wie er das kann" [237]), but he does not respect Kien for his (alleged) true expertise as the world's leading sinologist.

> Fischerles Respektlosigkeit hat eine wichtigere Funktion im Romanganzen als die bloße Unterhaltung des Lesers. Sein Weg zum Ziel setzt sich zusammen aus einer raschen Folge verblüffender Frechheiten.[63]

We recall, for example, Fischerle's uninhibited, rude behaviour towards Kien at their first encounter: Fischerle helps himself to the contents of Kien's briefcase (which is only packing paper) and bats him about the ears with it, singing:

> "I bin a Fischer — er is a Fisch!" Bei "i" klatschte er sich mit dem Papier auf den eigenen Buckel, bei "er" schlug er es Kien um die Ohren. Der hielt geduldig still. Er konnte noch von Glück sagen, daß der rabiate Zwerg ihn nicht ermordete. (190-191)

Fischerle has reeled Kien in,[64] and forces Kien to introduce himself in *his* (Fischerle's) own terms: "'Kien, Buchbranche'" (191). Fischerle later boldly insinuates intimacy with Kien by proposing the familiar address "Du" (277). On this topic Dissinger comments:

> Kiens Überwältigung durch die Realität wird von einem sprachlichen Mittel begleitet: dem Duzen. Dreimal rennt die Realität sozusagen gegen Kien an: in der

> Gestalt Thereses, in der Gestalt Fischerles und in der Gestalt Pfaffs. Dabei büßt Kien jedesmal etwas von seiner selbstgeschaffenen Distanz zur Realität ein; das distanzierende Sie wird vom intimeren Du abgelöst. . . . Therese wahlt den Weg der Legalität, Fischerle den Weg des Betrugs, Pfaff den Weg der Gewalt. Kien bietet Therese mit der Heirat zwangsläufig das Du an, Fischerle bietet es Kien an, Pfaff duzt Kien ungefragt.[65]

Meili sees in Fischerle an impudent, doglike cousin of the classical cynic Diogenes, along with a mixture of several other mythical and literary prototypes:

> In Siegfried Fischerle trifft der semihistorische Diogenes zusammen mit dem mythischen Odysseus, der deutsche Abenteurer Till Eulenspiegel mit dem spanischen Feigling Sancho Pansa. Und zu ihnen allen gesellt sich die Gestalt, die Sloterdijk als "Prototyp des Frechlings" bezeichnet: der jüdische David. Mit Diogenes teilt er seine unabdingbare Zugehörigkeit zur Stadtkultur, mit Odysseus die Verwandlungskunst, mit Eulenspiegel die animalische Unverfrorenheit und mit Sancho den Verzicht auf alles Heroische wie den Anspruch auf Glück. Als ungebildeter Zwerg stellt sich Fischerle siegesgewiß dem hochgelehrten Riesen Peter Kien entgegen und torpediert dessen erhabenes Buchwissen mit diabolischem Gelächter.[66]

Meili associates the imagery of Fischerle as a "dog" with his purported role as "cynic."

> Canetti, der sich in den Jahren vor der Niederschrift des Romans intensiv mit griechischer Philosophie beschäftigte, muß bei der Gestaltung seiner Figur den antiken Kynismus vor Augen gehabt haben. Fischerles dominante Nase ist nicht nur Markenzeichen seiner jüdischen Herkunft, er braucht sie vielmehr auf eine dem Menschen ganz ungemäße Weise: zum Herumschnüffeln.[67]

A brief digression in etymology will clarify the association between dog imagery and "cynicism." The Oxford English Dictionary traces the etymology for the word "cynic" to the Greek *kunikos* (*kuōn kunos* dog). The Encyclopedia Americana enlarges:

> The term "Cynic" may derive . . . from the Greek word *kynikos* (doglike), a contemptuous allusion to the way of life and the snarling disposition of many of the cynics.

Meili notes that Fischerle is especially keen on sniffing the money rolled up in his armpits. He almost introduces himself as a dog with his early expostulation: "Bin ich a Hund?" (190) when he notices Kien looking down his long legs to find him at his feet. And Fischerle's provisional doglike home is under the *Pensionistin*'s bed:

> Mit Fischerle führt Canetti die Metaphorik des Kynismus gnadenlos auf die Bedeutngsebene des ursprünglichen Bildspenders zurück. Sein Held haust nicht in einer Tonne wie der antike Philosoph, er hat seinen Platz, wie ein echter Hund, unter dem Bett seiner Ernaherin. Auch seine Funktion ist die eines Hundes: Er tritt zwar nach außen als Beschützer seiner Frau auf, doch in Wirklichkeit hält sie ihn zu ihrer Unterhaltung [68]

Dog imagery is scattered throughout the novel: the blind man is led by a dog; Kien fantasizes a horrific *Fleischerhund* who mauls the dead Therese's remains to shreds;[69] Pfaff treats everyone in his way like a dog, with his brute command "Kusch!" Kien, too, is pictured as a dog, but when Kien is a dog, he is "ein verprügelter Hund" (165), completely subjugated by Therese in an utterly wretched state:

> Sie stellte ihm die Schüssel mit Futter auf den Stuhl neben das Bett und drehte sich sofort weg. Er wollte nicht glauben, daß es wieder zu essen gab. Solange er krank lag, war sie so dumm. Er schob sich heran und lappte mit genauer Not einen Teil ihrer milden Gabe auf. Sie hörte das Klatschen seiner gierigen Zunge und fuhlte sich versucht: "Wie hat's geschmeckt?" zu fragen. (165)

Dissinger finds the French word *chien* hidden in Kien's name.[70] Both Kien and Fischerle are "poor devils" and "dogs," but Fischerle is not a beaten, dispirited dog; he is rather an unrestrained, curious, busily sniffing and roving dog — as Meili

points out, a dog somewhat in the spirit of Canetti's idea of the poet as "Hund seiner Zeit."[71]

Fischerle begins at the bottom:

> Situiert in seinem historischen Kontext, dem Wien der Zwischenkriegszeit, figuriert er in jeder einzelnen der herrschenden Wertordnungen auf der untersten Stufe der Skala In der alten feudalen, die noch durch die zwanziger Jahre geistert, ist er ohne Abkunft, in der dominierenden bürgerlichen ohne Beruf und Erwerbskapazität, und den Exponenten der neuesten Strömungen, die ihre Schatten schon tief in Fischerles Lebenszeit werfen, ist er erst recht ein Dorn im Auge: Ein Jude und Krüppel ist im Sog des Arierkults und der Anbetung kraftstrotzender Männlichkeit nichts als ein Untermensch, unwertes Leben.[72]

But Fischerle is not to be held down. He has a vision of himself as a worthy human being; he only needs the opportunity and the financial means to translate it into reality:

> "Was wollt's ihr, ich bin ein armer Teufel. Wenn mir einer heute die Kaution gibt, morgen bin ich Weltmeister!" (195)

8. Fischerle as Fantasist

The most uplifting moments in the novel are those in which Fischerle fantasizes his brilliant success as *Schachweltmeister* in America (215-219), or his jubilant reception by millions of cheering New Yorkers (399). The brazen joy of these visions for Fischerle is matched perhaps only by the thrill of his actual transformation into "Dr. Fischer" in the chapter "Das Kleine": his acquisition of a cooked-up passport, his purchase of the chessboard-patterned, checkered wallet (the largest he can find for his great bundle of notes), his fitting for a similarly checkered tailor-made suit which

ingeniously conceals his hump, his selection of yellow shoes and a black hat (Fischerle as mynah bird!), blue shirt(s) and bright blue coat (the tailor comments: "'Auf so eine Art und Weise entpuppt sich der strahlende Phönix'" [388]), his visit to a bath, his purchase of a train ticket, his purchase of an English primer and his swift learning of basic English over the course of just a few hours, his exultant use of English — "Yes!" (393), "Thank you!" (394), "Good bye!" (394), "Wonderful!" (394), "How do you do?" (398) — these and many other details contribute to the building euphoria of Fischerle's self-transformation.

Ironically, Fischerle's *Buckel* and his misshapenness, together with his comic inventiveness, eventually earn him the title of "Doktor." Fischerle is made a "doctor" by the riff-raff of the dive *Zum Pavian* (the *Paß-Koch* confers the honour by writing it into Fischerle's passport), just as Kien is named "Professor" by Pfaff.[73]

> Fischerle versprach alles; an Dank, Anerkennung, Nachrichten und Erkenntlichkeit werde es nicht fehlen. Angst habe er doch. Er sei eben so gebaut. Wenn er wenigstens Dr. Fischer hieße, statt einfach Fischer, da hätte die Polizei gleich einen Respekt. (376)

At first the *Pavian*-rabble objects that a cripple cannot be a doctor:

> Der Doktor ist unmöglich, brüllten sie durcheinander, weil ein Krüppel nicht Doktor werden darf. Krüppel und Doktor zugleich, das gibt's nicht. Das wär' noch schöner! Ein Doktor braucht einen guten Leumund. Krüppel und schlechter Leumund ist dasselbe. Das wird er zugeben. Ob er vielleicht einen Krüppel kenne, der Doktor sei? (377)

Fischerle persuades them by making up a story that he does know a crippled doctor, one who is even smaller than himself and much more severely handicapped, without arms and legs. This poor fellow, wheeled about on a wagon,[74] need only look at or sniff at his patients and he immediately makes the correct diagnosis.

> "So einen guten Doktor gibt's nicht mehr. Mich liebt er heiß. Er sagt, alle Krüppel müssen zusammenhalten. Ich nehm' bei ihm Stunden. Er macht mich zum Doktor, hat er versprochen. . . . Noch zwei Jahr und ich wär' mit dem Studium fertig." (378)

Fischerle finally wins over his half-convinced listeners by turning his story into a joke: "Fischerle steckte die Nase in seine Westentasche und sagte: 'Ich hab' ihn heut nicht mit. Sonst liegt er immer da drin! Was soll ich mir tun?'" (378). He brings them to laughter, a rare occasion for them, and in appreciation for Fischerle's entertainment they rush to the *Paß-Koch* to plead for Fischerle:

> Da lachten alle, . . . vergaßen ihre Furcht und stampften, acht man hoch, vor die Kabine des Paß-Koch. Zusammen, damit keiner die Schuld allein trüge, rissen sie die Türe auf und brüllten im Chor: "Den Doktor nicht vergessen! Den Doktor nicht vergessen! Er studiert schon zehn Jahr!" Der Paß-Koch nickte. (378)

Fischerle achieves his transformation into Dr. Fischer by cleverly combining several ploys, including a subtle tactical feint: Fischerle claims that he needs the prestige of "Doktor" to compensate for his crippledom; to counter their arguments that this would be an impossible contradiction, he charms them with a fantastic tale which puts the picture of a noble crippled doctor in their minds (making this not only possible but desirable); he casts himself in the story as a friend, chess-partner and student of this doctor, ascribing to himself the necessary learning and credentials for the role; finally he surprises them with a bathotic joke, breaking the spell of the pretense and reappearing before them as the jesting Fischerle they know. Fischerle's strategy has worked, and the men (another set of pawns in a formation of eight) procure his title for him. In the giddy celebration that follows, Fischerle sings the triumphant refrain, "'Schachmatt, Schachmatt!'" (379).

Fischerle's most extended and vivid fantasy is the half-waking, half-dreaming vision he has during his first night in Kien's service in their hotel room, portions of which we have already examined. He conjures up a *Weltmeister*, his rival and alter-ego, to lure him into taking Kien's money, hides under Kien's bed ("Unterm Bett grast er jedes Fleckchen mit der Nase ab. Solange war er schon unter keinem Bett, wie zu Hause kommt er sich da vor." [214]), and travels to America:

> Dort geht er zum Weltmeister Capablanca, sagt: "Sie hab' ich gesucht!", legt den Einsatz hin und spielt so lang, bis der Kerl kaputt ist. Am nächsten Tag steht Fischerles Bild in allen Zeitungen. Ein gutes Geschäft macht er auch dabei. (215)

Fischerle favours himself with rapidly escalating rewards: he auctions off his life story to a thousand competing reporters for ten million dollars — judiciously suggesting each give $10,000.00, so as not to ruin any one of them — and confesses. "Er ist als Weltmeister vom Himmel gefallen" (217). He has metaphorically turned the dingy "Himmel" where he ekes out his existence into a paradisal "Himmel" that has bestowed upon him the gifts of chess genius, and a life of ease and splendour. His *Stipendium* in hand, Fischerle savours the rapture of imagined deliverance, but still he casts a wary eye back to the threat of his former life. All too conscious of his cheating ways, Fischerle now ironically feels the need to protect himself from the likes of himself. In order to prevent impostors from falsifying his games, he will donate a *Stipendium* to the coffee houses of the world so that they will post placards of his games on their walls:

> Sonst kommt auf einmal ein Schwindler, womöglich ein Zwerg oder ein anderer Krüppel daher und behauptet, *er* spielt besser. Den Leuten fällt es nicht ein, die Züge des Krüppels zu kontrollieren. Sie sind imstande und glauben ihm, bloß weil er gut lügen kann. . . . Der Gauner sagt *einen* falschen Zug, alle schau'n aufs Plakat

> und wer schämt sich bis in seinen miesen Buckel hinein?
> Der Hochstapler! (217-218)

But Fischerle's imagination also unleashes his generous impulses: "Er ist nicht kleinlich. Der Frau schickt er auch eine Million, damit sie nicht mehr gehn muß" (218). He will marry a millionairess, build a chess palace, hospitably house and feed the poor challengers who come from far and wide to play against him, and he will give alms — he will be acclaimed for giving alms by a chorus of shouting recipients: "'Schachweltmeister Fischer gibt Almosen'" (218).

Fischerle shifts out of this dream into another dream, one closer to home, that is, the enveloping comfort of his deluxe American car becomes the imagined reality of his place under the *Pensionistin*'s bed, until at last he crawls out and recognizes Kien. Fischerle laughs himself awake, once again "ein armer Teufel" (219), only to face the dilemma of whether or not to steal the money he finds in his hand.

Comically, Fischerle's fanciful vision of himself as a generous benefactor is in stark contrast to his stingy pettiness in actual life. The most extreme example of this is his poor man's act when he pays off his dismissed employees. He "graciously" divides a single last schilling from his pocket five ways (he keeps the *Fischerin*'s portion, "'Vielleicht treff' ich sie'" [366]), rather than dipping into the wads of money securely stashed in his armpits:

> "Ihr habts leicht lachen!" sagte Fischerle, er war der einzige, der lachte, "ich kann mich mit zwanzig Groschen im Sack verstecken, ihr habts eure Arbeit, reiche Leute, was ihr seids! Ich hab' eben einen Ehrgeiz, ich bin so. Ich will, daß ein jeder im Himmel von mir redet: der Fischerle ist verschwunden, aber nobel war er!" (366)

Fischerle fantasizes his betterment and his self-fulfilment, and in the very act of fantasizing confirms his humanity. For Barbara Meili he is "der Wünschende" who affirms "das Prinzip Hoffnung":

> Im Wunsch aber findet Siegfried Fischerle das, was ihm das aktuelle Leben nicht gewähren wollte: seine Identitat als Mensch. Mit dieser Behauptung wird nicht zu hoch gegriffen. Nach dem Altmeister der Wunschforschung, Ernst Bloch, gehort es zum Wesen des Menschen schlechthin, daß er fähig ist, nicht bloß zu begehren, sondern zu wünschen.[75]

While Therese is motivated by naked desire (for sex and for money), and Pfaff operates on an even more primitive level with his lust for brutality and his purely predatory imagination, and while Kien is tormented by monstrous nightmares and "hallucinations," Fischerle is a "daydreamer":

> Fischerle ist ein Tagträumer ganz im Blochschen Sinne. . . . Im Tagtraum sieht Bloch den Ursprung allen menschlichen Fortschritts.[76]

Day-dreams, Meili contends along with Bloch, are goal-oriented, and, as opposed to night dreams, they are directed and controlled by the imaginer. Since they do not contain esoteric symbols as night dreams do, they are straightforward and readily comprehensible:

> Fischerles Phantasien brauchen tatsächlich keinerlei Interpretation. Bei jedem einzelnen Wunsch ist auf den ersten Blick zu erkennen, welcher Mangel in der Realität ihm zugrundeliegt.[77]

As fantasists, hallucinators, and especially as fabulists, Therese and Kien lose sight of their fictions as untruths and believe them — they invent, and become truly deluded by their invented stories. Fischerle seems to keep his perspective on his lies, even though he also indulges his fantasies to the point that he believes they will

eventually come true, and in "Das Kleine," as soon as he is underway with Kien's money, his dreams actually do seem to him to be coming true.

In so far as fantasy offers relief or deliverance from reality, part of the pathos of fantasy can be sought in the way "reality" limits the fantasy, that is, the way in which the imagination curbs its wish-fulfilment by remaining shackled to certain inescapable realities: for instance, we have seen that Fischerle's Jewishness and his *Buckel* more often than not accompany him — even if only to be refuted or "disproved" — in his role as *Schachweltmeister*.

Yet Fischerle's great strength is his unfailing hope and his allegience to his dreams, preposterous though they may be:

> Es schafft den großen Lichtblick in diesem Roman der Phobien und Frustrationen, daß Canetti seinen Helden Siegfried Fischerle auf dem Feldzug gegen sein vorgegebenes Schicksal ein paar Schlachten gewinnen läßt, deren siegreichen Ausgang keiner erwartet hätte.[78]

We can assume that Fischerle has nourished these dreams for the twenty years he has been waiting for his *Stipendium*. His expectations are, of course, unrealistic — his chess wizardry is based largely on pretense (though Meili believes Fischerle may well harbour considerable native chess talent, and simply fails to develop it properly[79]), and if Fischerle did reach America, he would be in for a crushing defeat. Fischerle himself inwardly knows that he has reason to doubt himself:

> Von seiner Bedeutung war er selbst durchaus nicht überzeugt. Die wirklichen Züge, die er unterschlug, gaben seinem gescheiten Kopf bitter zu denken. Drum haßte er die Weltmeister wie die Pest. (195-196)

But Fischerle is brought to an end before his dreams themselves are punctured:

> Und doch sieht es ganz so aus, als hätte Canetti nicht umhin können, für das Prinzip Hoffnung Partei zu ergreifen. Fischerles tragisches Schicksal ist zwar um

> nichts weniger zwingend als das des Peter Kien, aber Canetti gönnt dem Zukunftsgläubigen eine kurze Spanne des Triumphes, der dem Vergangenheitsmenschen versagt bleibt.[80]

Fischerle gives life to the novel by giving life to himself. He dramatizes himself as an "animating force" through his display of imagination and by concocting himself as Dr. Siegfried Fischer. He raises our hopes for his further adventures; the same cannot be said of the other characters. He is, as Meili says, "die schillernde Figur"[81] His grisly death puts his life into a bitterly realistic context — the *Knopfhans* kills him with a furious blow to the head, smashing his skull,[82] then cuts off his hump and wraps it up in Fischerle's new coat. This is the final reduction of Fischerle into his diminutive essence, "das Kleine." The head full of plans and dreams lies shattered under the bed, Kien's money is in the pocket of Fischerle's bloodied coat which holds the lump of *Buckel*, while on the stairs two garish yellow shoes and a new black hat point to America.

Notes to Chapter III

1 Canetti, Die Fackel im Ohr 261.

2. During this period Canetti earned his doctorate in Chemistry at the University of Vienna. Immediately after completing his studies in 1929, Canetti turned away from the field of sciences and assumed his literary career. In his essay "Das erste Buch: Die Blendung," he writes that the discipline of his scientific training stood him in good stead for the writing of the novel:

> Ich glaube, daß auch die Vertrautheit mit der Chemie, mit ihren Prozessen und Formeln in diese Strenge eingeflossen ist. So kann ich die 4½ Jahre, die ich im Laboratorium verbrachte, eine Beschäftigung, die ich damals als ungeistig und beengend empfand, im Rückblick keineswegs bedauern.

See Canetti, Das Gewissen der Worte 250.

3. See Canetti, "Karl Kraus, Schule des Widerstands," Das Gewissen der Worte 42-53 Canetti eventually liberated himself from his virtual intellectual enslavement to Kraus, and rejected the condemnatory aspect of his thinking, but remained indebted to him for the "schooling" the formidable Kraus gave him.

4. Canetti, Das Gewissen der Worte 48.

5. Canetti, Das Gewissen der Worte 45.

6. Canetti, Das Gewissen der Worte 46.

7. Canetti, Die Fackel im Ohr 207.

8. Canetti, Die Fackel im Ohr 208.

9. Canetti, Das Gewissen der Worte 48.

10. In a 1937 interview with the Viennese newspaper Wiener Tag, Canetti elaborates on the discernment of the acoustic mask of any random subject:

> Nein, seine Sprechweise ist einmalig und unverwechselbar. Sie hat ihre eigene Tonhöhe und Geschwindigkeit, sie hat ihren eigenen Rhythmus. Er hebt die Satze wenig voneinander ab. Bestimmte Worte und Wendungen kehren immer wieder. Überhaupt besteht seine Sprache aus nur fünfhundert Worten. Er behilft sich recht gewandt damit. Es sind seine

> fünfhundert Worte. Ein anderer, auch wortarm, spricht in anderen funfhundert. Sie konnen ihn, wenn Sie ihm gut zugehört haben, das nachste Mal an seiner Sprache erkennen, ohne ihn zu sehen. Er ist im Sprechen so sehr Gestalt geworden, nach allen Seiten hin deutlich abgegrenzt, von allen ubrigen Menschen verschieden, wie etwa in seiner Physiognomie, die ja auch einmalig ist. Diese sprachliche Gestalt eines Menschen, das Gleichbleibende seines Sprechens, diese Sprache, die mit ihm entstanden ist, die er für sich allein hat, die nur mit ihm vergehen wird, nenne ich seine akustische Maske.

This interview is quoted at length by Hans Feth, Elias Canettis Dramen (Frankfurt/M.: R.G. Fischer Verlag, 1980) 50-51.

Sigurd Paul Scheichl carefully distinguishes between the acoustic masks of actually living people and Canetti's use of the *akustische Maske* as a literary device in character portrayal:

> Aus dieser Beobachtung real sprechender Menschen entwickelt Canetti die "akustische Maske" als literarische Verfahrensweise, als eine Technik der, freilich immer in irgendeiner Form karikierenden, Darstellung von Figuren, die durch die mimetische Qualitat der ihnen in den Mund gelegten Worte "aus reichhaltigem konkreten Lebensmaterial komprimiert" scheinen und selbst dann an eine nachvollziehbare Realität zuruckgebunden wirken, wenn ihr Verhalten jeder psychologischen Plausibilitat, ja uberhaupt jeder Wahrscheinlichkeit widerspricht; ihr Bezug zur Wirklichkeit ergibt sich eben aus der Wiedererkennbarkeit ihres Sprechens.

See Sigurd Paul Scheichl, "Der Mobelkauf: Zur Funktion eines Handlungsstrangs in der Blendung," Elias Canetti: Blendung als Lebensform, ed. Friedbert Aspetsberger and Gerald Stieg (Frankfurt/M.: Athenaum Verlag, 1985) 131.

11. Elias Canetti, "Das erste Buch: Die Blendung," Das Gewissen der Worte (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992) 249

12. See Canetti, "Das erste Buch. Die Blendung," Das Gewissen der Worte 249 The other seven characters and Canetti's plans for their books fell by the wayside when the "Buchermensch" gained predominance in Canetti's imagination

13. Canetti, "Das erste Buch Die Blendung," Das Gewissen der Worte 249

14. Canetti, Die Fackel im Ohr 343.

15. Meili 151.

16. Elias Canetti, Das Augenspiel: Lebensgeschichte 1931-1937 (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1990) 201.

17. Roberts 53.

18. Meili 100.

19. Meili 127-128.

20. Meili informs:

> Man weiß, daß Canetti nach der Niederschrift von acht Kapiteln der "Blendung" erstmals mit Texten von Kafka in Berührung kam und von ihnen tiefer beeindruckt war als von allem, was er je gelesen hatte. Es handelte sich um Passagen aus der "Landarzt"-Sammlung und — um "Die Verwandlung." (135)
>
> . . . so ist zu vermuten, daß die Entdeckung Kafkas den jungen Romanschreiber nicht bloß in seinen poetologischen Prinzipien bestätigte, sondern auf die Konzeption der "Blendung" unmittelbar Einfluß nahm Die späte Einführung Fischerles als zweite Hauptfigur, die zu abrupt ins Geschehen springt, als daß sie Baustein eines ursprünglich vorgegebenen Plans gewesen sein kann, ist wahrscheinlich die direkte Folge der Kafka-Lektüre. (136)

Canetti mentions his reading of Kafka in his essay "Das erste Buch. Die Blendung," Das Gewissen der Worte 250.

21. Canetti and Fischerle are both Jews, but unlike Fischerle, Canetti has a strong sense of Jewish tradition — he is a Sephardic Jew from Bulgaria, whose family had an intense Jewish pride, and as Meili shows by referring to several passages of the memoirs, Canetti's Jewish consciousness in his early years was relatively untroubled by a sense of persecution. See Meili 125-127.

22. See Meili 128-129.

23. See Canetti, Die Fackel im Ohr 115-118.

24. Meili 128-129.

25. Meili 100.

26. Meili 101.

27. Instead, we have in Benedikt Pfaff a personification of its hate-filled, savage nature. Pfaff is a bloodthirsty *Raubkatze* who preys upon the lowest and weakest in society, targetting the beggars who wander into his sights. When Kien tells Fischerle about him (287-290), Fischerle quickly decides against going to loot Kien's flat and possibly running into Pfaff:

> Da verzichtet Fischerle sofort. Mit Polizei läßt er sich jetzt nicht ein, vor Amerika bestimmt nicht, mit pensionierter erst recht nicht, die Pensionierten, die sind am ärgsten. Die . . . werden bei jeder Gelegenheit rabiat und schlagen harmlose Krüppel zu Kruppeln. (290)

28. Meili 101.

29. Meili 101.

30. Meili 103.

31. Meili 103.

32. Meili 103.

33. Meili 105-106.

34. Meili 105.

35. Meili 106.

36. Meili 109.

37. Meili does not mention that for Zelig, the chameleon-like changes are instinctive and involuntary, whereas Fischerle's changes are conscious and deliberate.

38. Dissinger (37) locates the time setting of the novel somewhere between 1918 and 1935, suggesting a narrower range between 1928 and 1931. According to the Encyclopedia Americana, the Cuban chess grand master José Raoul Capablanca (1888-1942), who was world chess champion from 1921-1927, attended an international chess tournament in New York in 1927. This particular event in New York City could well be Fischerle's destination.

39. Canetti, Masse und Macht 195-196.

40. Fischerle's exact age is not mentioned in the text. But we know that Kien is 40 years old (we first learn this on p.10), and Kien surmises about Fischerle:

> Vielleicht überschätzte er die Intelligenz dieses Männchens, das fast so alt war wie er und eine Unzahl von Jahren ohne Bücher, im Exil verlebt hatte. (209)

41. Dissinger (126) sketches out the reversal of the "Divine Comedy" in Die Blendung.

42. Unbeknownst to Kien, some of his own precious books were pawned by Therese and Pfaff at the Theresianum in his absence, so that these books were mingled in with the flock of imprisoned pawned books he had made his primary cause in his exile from home. Georg later forces Pfaff to retrieve them and reinstate them in Kien's library: Kien never knows it, but his books too have been cast out into the hands of the world and returned to the library along with himself

43. See "Gespräch mit Horst Bienek," Die gespaltene Zukunft, by Elias Canetti (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1972) 97-101. A certain quality of the "dramatic" or the "theatrical" is everywhere evident in the pronounced element of theatrical gesture and ritual practiced by the characters of the novel. Fischerle is the character who most vividly embodies the principle of "Verwandlung" itself.

44. See "Gespräch mit Joachim Schickel," Die gespaltene Zukunft, by Elias Canetti (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1972) 125.

45. Canetti, "Der Beruf des Dichters," Das Gewissen der Worte 289.

46. Canetti, "Der Beruf des Dichters," Das Gewissen der Worte 283.

47. Meili 109.

48. This idea is later entertained as a possible option for Fischerle by Kien as well (294), though it seems in fact a medical impossibility to operate away such a spinal deformity.

49. Stewart 69.

50. Stewart 69.

51. Stewart 70-71.

52. The motif of the diminutive ("das Kleine") is strongly associated with Fischerle. Small things — trifles — such as a single Groschen he almost cheats the official at the telegram office out of (until he thinks better of it, realizing that he risks the telegram being held up: "'Wegen einem Groschen, Fischerle,' meint er vorwurfsvoll zu sich, 'wo dich das Telegramm 267mal soviel kostet!'" [371]), and of course the fateful button which he palms off on the *Knopfhans*, are invested with huge significance when they are "paid back" to Fischerle in the end.

53. "Halb aufgebracht, halb resigniert ließ sie die harten Hände auf den harten Rock sinken und erstarrte zu einer Holzpuppe" (31).

54. The following passage gives just one example of this:

> Sie kam heute aus dem Schwitzen gar nicht heraus. Verhext folgte sie den Bewegungen seines Mundes, seiner Hand. Ihre Augen, sonst in vielerlei bosen Farben funkelnd, jetzt friedlich, wäßrig und beinahe blau, flossen gehorsam uber die Einlagen. (81)

55. Moser 603.

56. Schneider 30.

57. Meili 115.

58. Meili 144.

59. Dissinger (17n78; 94n166) suggests that the *Knopfhans* is the same dissembling blind man whom Kien meets on his morning walk in Chapter One ("Der Spaziergang"), to whom Kien gives all his loose change in angry response to a young rascal cheating the man with a button (20). This reading neatly and ironically links Kien and Fischerle, but there is no definite proof in the text of the first blind man being the *Knopfhans*.

60. Meili 115.

61. Meili 116.

62. Meili 116.

63. Meili 116.

64. Kien is obliquely referred to as a "Fisch" on at least two other occasions in the book. When Pfaff questions Therese about whether Kien (whom he has not seen for over a week) has died, she retorts: "'Aber ich bitt' Sie, tot, der lebt wie ein Fisch. Tot kennt er nicht'" (305). Georg, pondering his best course of action regarding Kien, decides: "Ich werde . . . den trockenen Fisch in seinem traurigen Element, er findet es heiter, sich selbst überlassen" (494-495). The "fish" imagery may be a grotesque play on the traditional symbolism of Christ as "fish" (representing life), whom Kien parodies as book messiah; in this connection Fischerle as "fisherman" ("Fischer") suggests a parodic disciple of the "saviour" Kien. (Cf. Matt. 4:18-22)

65 Dissinger 131.

66. Meili 119.

67. Meili 119.

68. Meili 119.

69. Cf. the biblical story of Jezebel thrown to the dogs, 1 Kings 21.23, 2 Kings 9:30-37.

70. Dissinger 129. Dissinger also points out that the most obvious "meaning" of the name is a reference to Kien's brittle woodenness and flammability as a "Kienspan." As W E Stewart notes (90), we also hear the German word *China* abbreviated in "Kien." Stewart further argues that the full name Peter Kien, with "Peter" signifying "stone," reflects Kien's ambiguous attitude towards fire: simultaneous fear and fascination. See Stewart 90

71. See Meili 146. See also Canetti's essay "Herman Broch: Rede zum 50. Geburtstag," Das Gewissen der Worte 12-14.

72. Meili 120.

73. When Kien awards Pfaff a monthly "douceur" for keeping beggars from his door, Pfaff bestows on Kien the title "Professor":

> Von diesem Augenblick an wagte es niemand im Haus, von Kien anders als vom Herrn Professor zu sprechen, obwohl er eigentlich keiner war. Neu einziehende Parteien wurden mit dieser obersten Bedingung, die der Hausbesorger für ihr Verbleiben im Haus stellte, prompt vertraut gemacht. (89)

Young Franz Metzger knows that Kien is "Der Herr Professor Kien, aber ohne Schule" (8).

74. We are reminded here, as in the scene at the Theresianum where Fischerle desperately licks up the strewn banknotes from the floor between the feet of Therese, Pfaff and Kien (316), of the "cripple" Thomas Marek, whom Canetti writes about in Die Fackel im Ohr. Marek, twisted and paralyzed by a mysterious disease, was rolled about on a wagon; intellectually gifted and an aspiring philosopher, he astonished Canetti by his method of consuming books, turning the pages with his tongue. See Die Fackel im Ohr 313-314.

75. Meili 121-122.

76. Meili 123.

77. Meili 124.

78. Meili 124.

79. See Meili 129-130.

80. Meili 124.

81. Meili 100.

82. Even Pfaff's supernatural fists and punches have so far not shown us this kind of carnage, though the full extent of Pfaff's deadly violence is reported in the chapter "Der gute Vater."

IV. Imagery Relating Fischerle and Kien

1. Overview

The central drama of the second section of the novel, "Kopflose Welt," revolves around the meeting, "friendship" and eventual parting of Fischerle and Kien; this dramatic process is informed by a pattern of contrast and convergence in the imagery related to these two characters. In a sense, Fischerle and Kien are sifted through one another: in the end, Kien is left with some of the preposterous ideas lodged in his head that were implanted there by Fischerle, such as the death of Therese and the book-eating "cannibalism" of the Theresianum *Schwein*, and Fischerle is left with Kien's *Kopfbibliothek* (which he has pretended to carry in his own head, and later in his hump), as well as a letter of introduction to Kien's brother Georg in Paris, and, of course, most of Kien's money. The process of sifting involves a transfer both of ideas and of concrete objects — though in the world of Kien, the two categories are easily confused.

The dramatic developments of this section of the novel continue beyond the parting of Kien and Fischerle into the last two chapters of Part Two: "Privateigentum," which depicts Kien's "trial" at the police station in the presence of Therese, Pfaff, the *Kommandant* and a dozen police officers, and finally "Das Kleine," where Fischerle uses Kien's money to begin his self-transformation into a respectable "Dr. Fischer" and to set in motion his plan of escape to America. For Fischerle, Kien has been reduced to the bundle of banknotes that now speeds him on his way, but he is so irritated by the fact that a portion of Kien's money eluded his grasp and fell into

the hands of the police, that he is moved to play a prank of revenge on the police, and by sending a telegram to Georg in Paris (presumably with the aim of getting Georg to come and collect Kien's money), he writes himself back into Kien's story. Masquerading as Kien in his authorship of the telegram, he establishes a brief metaphorical identity with Kien; once Georg receives and acts on the news in the telegram, Fischerle's message effectively translates into the appearance of Georg in Vienna, bringing on the meeting of the two brothers that in turn precipitates Kien's demise.

This chapter will examine the Kien-Fischerle dynamic in terms of the contrast and convergence of imagery associated with the two figures. Several different types of imagery will be considered, beginning with the physical appearance of the figures as such; this will lead to a consideration of the imagery of books (printed text) and chess, and of the metaphorical merging of these images and motifs. The question of the confusion for Kien of figurative and literal meanings of language, and Fischerle's exploitation of this vulnerability in Kien, will be raised when we examine the central episode of Kien's "breakdown" at the yellow church, which culminates in another kind of metaphorical merging of the two figures, namely, the interplay of words which themselves undergo metaphorical transformations into strangely competing images. The imagery of words, text, and of textual emendation will be studied in the scene of Fischerle's inventive writing of his telegram: here we see a wonderful display of inspiration on Fischerle's part, which, in its bold simplicity and in its effectiveness, eclipses any actual demonstration of editing genius Kien may have given us, and mocks Georg's rather sorry show of psychiatric acumen and interpretative (dis)ability.

As outlined in the introductory chapter of this study, there is a relationship of overlap and opposition between Kien and Fischerle which produces an ironic tension between the characters. This tension operates on the level of story as well as in the network of imagery in the novel. What follows is an investigation and assessment of some of this imagery.

2. Stick Figure and Dwarf / "Intelligenz" and "Charakter"

Kien and Fischerle are opposites in physical appearance: Kien is "ein langer, hagerer Mensch" (8), skeletally thin, stiff, wooden and desiccated;[1] Fischerle is small, rounded, watery with sweat and tears, though also dusty and — until his last day — unwashed. For Kien, Fischerle is "der Kleine"; Fischerle thinks of Kien as "der Lange."

Kien, with his straight, knife-thin back, reminds us of the rigid, narrow spines of his beloved books, while Fischerle, with his small size and his hump, together with his rhythmically lopsided gait (229) may remind us of the shape and movement of the chess horse, or knight, an image that complements his role as Kien's "squire."[2] Thus, in addition to the deep psychological connection that Kien feels with books and that Fischerle feels with chess, there is also an obvious physical association between these characters and the objects of their obsessions.

Kien walks with "eine[m] steifen, nachdrücklichen Gang" (22), while Fischerle bobs about and is frequently jumpy in motion. Both Kien and Fischerle are high-strung in temperament, but while Kien is dry and superficially restrained, Fischerle is unreserved and effusive. Fischerle's smallness brings him close to the ground,

which emphasizes his "earthiness"; Kien in his library very often lengthens himself, or extends his height by climbing onto his ladder, blending his backbone with the library's and bringing his head even further skyward, which emphasizes his ideal of lofty intellectuality. Kien is like a stick figure. He abhors his physical being and tries to exist purely as intellect, as "spirit" or "air." While Fischerle also insists that he is a man of intelligence, particularly by virtue of his devotion to chess, he is nevertheless intensely caught up in his physical nature as a cripple.

Both Kien and Fischerle pride themselves on their "character" in their scorn for the rest of mankind and in their commitment to the cultivation of their "intelligence." The words "Charakter" and "Intelligenz" are words of special significance for Fischerle and Kien, frequently used by both characters to distinguish themselves from everyone else. Kien celebrates his intelligence in the company of his library, Fischerle shows off his intelligence with his repertoire of memorized chess games of grand masters. Both characters enjoy a reputation for genius (however undeserved and however home-bound the exercise of this genius may be), and both are known for their astonishing memories.

Fischerle as "verkanntes Schachgenie" (195) bolsters his reputation for genius with brilliantly staged chess hoaxes.

> Fischerle haßte *eine* Kategorie von Menschen auf der Welt, und das waren die Schachweltmeister. Mit einer Art von Tollwut verfolgte er alle bedeutenden Partien, die ihm in Zeitungen und Zeitschriften geboten wurden. Was er einmal für sich durchgespielt hatte, behielt er lange Jahre im Kopf. Bei seiner unbestrittenen Lokalmeisterschaft war es ihm ein leichtes, seinen Freunden die Nichtigkeit dieser Größen zu beweisen. (194)

Kien for his part has a phenomenal, perfect memory for books He knows each volume in his library thoroughly and intimately, so that he need not actually physically use his books to write his papers, though he does confirm references, "aber nur aus Gewissenhaftigkeit" (18) His mind is, in essence, a second library, "gleichsam eine zweite Bibliothek im Kopf" (18), the original "Kopfbibliothek" (18) Kien enhances his mythical stature among his learned peers by spurning all invitations to appear in person at conferences. He is supposedly esteemed far and wide as the highest authority in his field (17-18), and he is well known for his supreme mental machinery.

But just as Fischerle is a sham "genius," Kien's genius too is not altogether convincing. David Darby comments:

> Outside the game-world, of course, there is considerable doubt as to whether Fischerle can even play chess. There is a clear parallel here to Kien's belief-world of which the central tenet is Kien's identity as the greatest Sinologist of his time (16, etc.), a claim which like Fischerle's is substantiated only in narrative utterances quoted from or at least focalized by the figure in question.[1]

It is difficult to judge whether the report of Kien's famed genius in the first chapter of the novel (17-18) is reliable, but we should note that Georg too states matter-of-factly about Kien that he is "[d]er größte lebende Sinologe" (457) This would be an exception to the claim Darby makes, but it does not necessarily settle the matter of Kien's stature. Certainly we, the readers, do not witness Kien's philological ingenuity; even if we do see him sitting at his desk, stalking the mysteries of a text from sentence to sentence (69), we only see him going through the motions of the hunt; at no point do we follow him through an actual textual discovery or emendation. Instead, we do repeatedly witness his convoluted and duplicitous logic and his often

silly, wilful thinking. Kien's reputation for genius, aside from his perfect memory, actually stands in contrast to the thinking and behaviour he displays throughout the novel.

On the other hand, both Kien and Fischerle are equipped with another kind of genius which we accept as a feature of their grotesque characterization, namely, a genius for learning languages. Kien "beherrschte über ein Dutzend östliche Sprachen. Einige westliche verstanden sich von selbst" (15). When Kien tells Fischerle about this ability of his (Fischerle is informed "daß es hierzulande Leute gibt, die Chinesisch besser sprechen als die Chinesen und außerdem ein Dutzend Sprachen dazu" [277]), Fischerle is truly impressed, but sceptical:

> Diese Tatsache, wenn sie eine war, imponierte ihm wirklich. Doch glaubte er nicht daran. Immerhin war es schon eine Leistung, daß ein Mensch so viel Intelligenz vorlog. (277)

After Fischerle himself has picked up English (or "Amerikanisch," as he says) with amazing ease, he comically pledges to make a hobby of learning foreign languages:

> Seit seinem Erfolg war er der leichten Erlernbarkeit sämtlicher Sprachen gewiß und nahm sich für die freie Zeit, die ihm sein Beruf als Weltmeister in Amerika übriglasse, pro Woche zwei Sprachen vor. In einem Jahr macht das 66, mehr Sprachen braucht man nicht, wozu, auf die Dialekte pfeift er, die kann man sowieso. (397)

Kien's oriental languages and Fischerle's "Amerikanisch" not only represent the opposition of their different kinds of "Intelligenz" (Kien's is exotic, Fischerle's is practical), but they also well reflect the opposing pull towards east and west that fundamentally tugs at the two characters.

Kien also locates his "character" in his steadfast refusal to change. He is determined to remain always the same, unlike other people, who are all spineless.

According to Kien, the rabble of the public at large is a mass of "schlechten Schauspielern" (13), pathetically changeable natures:

> *Er* legte seinen Ehrgeiz in eine Hartnackigkeit des Wesens. Nicht bloß einen Monat, nicht ein Jahr, sein ganzes Leben blieb er sich gleich. Der Charakter, wenn man einen hatte, bestimmte auch die Gestalt. Seit er denken konnte, war er lang und zu mager. (13-14)

Kien not only denies his mutability and sees his firmness of character expressed in his stick-like stiffness, but as much as possible he also minimizes the importance of his physical being altogether, a conceit which is also expressed in his extremely spare shape.

If Kien barely tolerates his corporeal nature, he further confounds body and spirit by animating lifeless objects, such as certain pieces of "enemy" furniture Therese brings into his library ("Nachtkasten, Waschtisch und Bett" . "die bose Drei, so nannte er das Trio von Möbelstücken" [69,71]), and of course by ascribing spirit and life to books. By the time he wanders into the "Kopflose Welt," he will be capable of treating certain ideas and mental images as concrete beings, as he does, for example, with his *Kopfbibliothek*.

Kien speculates that books may have a life of their own and crave the companionship of other books (68); just so, he himself needs to be among books. For Kien, books are far more precious and worthy of respect than human beings. All that is noble and precious in the human mind or spirit does not belong in humans *per se*, but properly resides, Kien thinks, in books. Books are his reliable comrades and friends. When Kien occasionally feels twinges of loneliness for human company, he suppresses the unseemly urge to be among people and he turns to his library.

Early in the novel, we see Kien animating and conversing with the spirits of his books — that is, with their authors (42-43) — in an elaborate game of make-believe, summoning them from their places on his shelves, politely seating them before him and supplying them with their own words as he "debates" them. Kien tells himself that conventional human entertainments are dull and a waste of time: "Meine eigenen Dialoge dauern kürzer und haben Niveau" (43). If he occasionally overhears an interesting remark from a passer-by in the street, from amongst the crowd of common "Barbaren" (43), he quickly calculates that the few interesting words he has heard are a tiny fraction of the hundreds of thousands of unspoken nonsensical words, the great volume of unspoken trash that must necessarily fill the speaker's head every day. Thus Kien deliberately preserves his attitude of contempt for the common man.

Practising his usual method of conferring with his select "friends" in the library, Kien seeks the advice of Confucius before marrying Therese (45-47). The ghost of Confucius appears before Kien as a familiar, clearly visualized, dramatic presence. But this time Kien, impatient and over-excited at the idea that he has discovered a potential wife (i.e., a guardian for the library) in Therese, takes liberties with Confucius ("Er scheute sich nicht, Konfuzius zu duzen" [45]),[4] and even though he supplies cautionary words to Confucius, he impetuously interprets them to suit his wishes. The result of this affront to his communion with the library is his disastrous marriage to Therese.

Both Kien and Fischerle, in their intense involvement in the worlds of books and chess respectively, self-reflexively animate these worlds. In both cases this is done at the expense of normal human relations. Much as Kien animates his ancient oriental texts and consults Confucius by providing him with his own words, Fischerle

conjures up Capablanca and tinkers with his chess moves or challenges him outright as *Schachweltmeister*. Fischerle even challenges himself as a would-be Capablanca. The most striking instance of this occurs when Fischerle, posing before a mirror in a luxurious bathing establishment as a newly wealthy man, engages his own reflection in a quick chess skirmish:

> Hier bedeutete das Tischchen eine Zugabe zum Bade. Der reiche Mieter schob es vor den Spiegel, holte sein Schachspiel aus der Tasche des verachteten Anzugs heraus, nahm ungeniert Platz und gewann eine Blitzpartie gegen sich selbst. "Wenn Sie der Capablanca wären," schrie er sich an, 'hätt' ich Sie schon sechsmal geschlagen, in derselben Zeit! Bei uns in Europa nennt man das Freßschach! Gehen Sie betteln mit Ihrer Nase! Sie glauben, ich fürcht mich. Eins, zwei und Sie sind kaputt. Sie Amerikaner! Sie Paralytiker! Wissen Sie, wer ich bin? Ein Doktor! Ich hab' studiert! Zum Schachspiel gehört Intelligenz. Und so was war Weltmeister!" (387)

This heated confrontation with his alter-ego shows that Fischerle's impulse to fabricate, and to confound black and white, extends even to his posturing against himself. His insistence on his intelligence (now reinforced by his "doctorhood") is noteworthy: in his mirror image he sees the stubborn vestiges of his former self (nose and crippledom) which are to be demolished by his "intelligence" when he destroys and supplants Capablanca.

Kien repeatedly insists on his strength of character in his rejection of humankind, but at several crucial points his resolve weakens, and loneliness for real human companionship overcomes him. The most serious of these instances is the occasion of his feeling of estrangement when he studies his own reflection in a barber-shop mirror some few weeks after his expulsion from the library. Kien kept no mirror in his flat and he is only roughly acquainted with his face:

> Sein Gesicht kannte er nur flüchtig, aus den Scheiben der Buchhandlungen. Einen Spiegel besaß er nicht zu Hause, vor lauter Büchern mangelte es an Platz. Aber daß es schmal, streng und knochig war, wußte er: das genügte. (14)

Now, after three weeks of wandering the city streets and compiling a replacement *Kopfbibliothek*, Kien wonders if he would be recognized, should he repeat his round of bookstore visits:

> Gehörte sein Gesicht vielleicht zu denen, die jeder sich auf den ersten Blick einprägt? Er trat vor den Spiegel eines Friseurladens und besah sich darin seine Züge. Er hatte wasserblaue Augen und überhaupt keine Wangen. Seine Stirn war eine zerissene Felswand. Die Nase stürzte, ein senkrechter, schwindelnd schmaler Grat, in die Tiefe. . . . Zwei scharfe Falten liefen, wie künstliche Narben, von beiden Schläfen zum Kinn und trafen sich in seiner Spitze. Durch sie und die Nase zerfiel das Gesicht, ohnehin lang und schmal, in fünf beängstigend enge Streifen, eng, aber streng symmetrisch, zum Verweilen war nirgends Platz, und Kien verweilte auch nur kurz. Denn als er sich selber sah, er pflegte sich nie zu sehen, wurde ihm plötzlich sehr einsam zumute. Er beschloß, unter recht viel Menschen zu gehen. (187-188)

Kien's facial image, either reflected in a bookshop window against a background of books or perceived in this barber-shop mirror as five splayed symmetrical strips, conveys the impression of being made up of an arrangement of books, as Mechthild Curtius observes:

> Das Gesicht von Kien, "streng symmetrisch," fleischlos, ein Kopf wie aus Buchbänden zusammengesetzt . . . soll das asketische Leben des ganz der Philologie Geweihten eingeprägt tragen.[5]

Kien's feeling of loneliness at the sight of his austere face, and his uncharacteristic impulse to seek out human company mark a moment of truth for him. By entering the dive "Zum Idealen Himmel," Kien is turning away from his forbidding policy of solitude and submitting to his human impulses. Under more

favourable circumstances, this might be a positive step; but Kien has no practical knowledge of worldly ways, and when he steps "through the looking glass" he enters the topsy-turvy realm of Fischerle, where he will find a distorted reflection of himself, his library, and his situation of exile. As David Roberts suggests:

> Wie schon die Überschrift besagt, ist der zweite Teil des Romans thematisch und strukturell die Umkehrung des ersten. Die Bibliothek, gegen die Welt befestigt und offen nur zum Himmel, wird verhöhnt durch die Unterwelt des Kaffeehauses "Zum Idealen Himmel," dessen niedriges, dunkles, rauchgeschwängertes Innere seinen Namen Lügen straft und eine gefallene Welt ohne Transzendenz darstellt.[6]

3. Books and Chess

Kien initially sympathizes with Fischerle when he learns that Fischerle's wife has deprived him of his promised "Stipendium" and so is suppressing his intellectual aspirations. He conceives an intense dislike for the *Pensionistin* and identifies her with Therese:

> Seit sie ihn um ein Geschenk gebeten hatte, wußte er, wen er vor sich hatte: eine zweite Therese. Von den Sitten der Lokalität verstand er wenig, aber eins schien ihm gewiß: hier strebte ein reiner Geist in elendem Körper seit zwanzig Jahren danach, sich über den Schmutz seiner Umgebung zu erheben. Therese erlaubte es nicht. Grenzenlose Entbehrungen mußte er sich auferlegen, beharrlich das Ziel einer selbstherrlichen Intelligenz vor Augen. Therese zog ihn ebenso beharrlich in den Schmutz zurück. (201)

Kien increases his sympathy for Fischerle by projecting his own intellectual nature and his current state of exile and oppression onto Fischerle:

> Von der Welt des Geistes hat er einen winzigen Zipfel gefaßt und klammert sich daran mit der Kraft eines Ertrinkenden. Das Schachspiel ist seine Bibliothek. (201)

Kien goes on to imagine a scene which expresses his full identification with Fischerle by merging the imagery of their central concerns, books and chess. The imagined scenario begins with "her" (the *Pensionistin* / Therese) destroying a book Fischerle has brought home, where books are forbidden. In compensation for the ban on books, Fischerle is at last allowed a chess set: "Da sitzt er nun die langen Nächte und besinnt sich an Hand der hölzernen Figuren auf seine Menschenwürde" (201). (In this idea Kien is not far off the mark.) Then comes the catastrophe:

> Sie reißt die Türe auf und stößt mit ihren plumpen Füßen das Schachbrett um. Herr Fischerle heult wie ein kleines Kind. Er befand sich gerade an der interessantesten Stelle seines Buches. Er sammelt die herumliegenden Buchstaben und wendet das Gesicht ab, damit sie sich über seine Tränen nicht freut. Er ist ein kleiner Held. Er hat Charakter. (201-202)

The chess figures flying off the board are transformed in Kien's imagination into letters flying off the page. Kien superimposes an image of text onto the image of a chess game, knitting the two together even as they disastrously unravel. This explosive image is at once deeply upsetting (as a picture of fragmentation, of meaning coming undone just at the point of peak interest and greatest urgency of understanding) and, paradoxically, it is also soothing and even redemptive for Kien as an image of synthesis; that is, his metaphorical identification of books with chess has the effect of uniting his world with Fischerle's and, therefore, suggesting their intimate understanding of one another, their common suffering and humanity. This is a novel experience for Kien. It is essentially a "poetic" experience, a vision that momentarily transfigures his consciousness. It opens Kien up, even if he is basically

only carrying out an operation of projection. And certainly he is projecting: he subsequently laments "her" insidious designs on Fischerle's *Testament*, and he reveals the extent of his own injury at Therese's hands by worrying that Fischerle should be spared the terrible truth about his wife:

> Man darf es ihm nicht sagen. Er könnte sich ein Leid antun. Er ist nicht aus Granit. Seine zwerghafte Konstitution . . . (202)

The empathy Kien feels for Fischerle can of course be seen as deceptively limited — he is, in fact, (almost literally) reading himself into Fischerle. Nevertheless, Kien's "insight" into Fischerle does create in him a new feeling of discovery and enlightenment, of human understanding:

> Noch nie hatte sich Kien so tief in einen Menschen eingefühlt. . . . Kien stand tief in der Schuld dieses Menschen. Er mußte etwas für ihn tun. Er achtete ihn. (202)

Kien believes he has found a soul mate in Fischerle, a creature who lives for the intellect alone. Sadly and ironically for Kien, his quixotic "understanding" of Fischerle is in vital respects a gross misreading of him — "Wäre Herr Fischerle nicht so fein geartet, er würde ihm geradezu Geld anbieten" (202) — and Kien's feeling of friendship for Fischerle makes him even more vulnerable to worldly predation from these "friendly" quarters.

However unlikely a pair Kien and Fischerle might make as physical opposites, the stuff of their mental worlds, the imagery of books (text) and chess, blends easily and well: the dark characters of typed text against a white page and any possible arrangement of black and white chess figures on the black and white board obviously share a strong black-and-white patterning. The black-and-white motif in itself reflects the dynamic of contrast and challenge that joins Kien and Fischerle, as well as

representing their individual self-reflexive preoccupations: Kien with his library and head full of immortal "friends," his philological pursuits and textual restorations, Fischerle with his self-addressed banter and his improvised chess battles against himself in the guise of phantom chess masters.

Notably, the motif "black-and-white" applies quite differently to Therese. "Black-and-white" means for Therese the inflexibility and permanence of a legal contract: "'Schwarz auf weiß bleibt!'" (149). Hypocrite that she is, however, and for all her insistence on the fixed categories of black and white, she thinks nothing of violating or doctoring contracts (e.g Kien's *Testament*) or of muddying the truth. For Kien, on the other hand, the motif "black-and-white" represents text both fixed in an ideal form (as in any healthy book) and text in a state of corruption, requiring his erudite and ingenious mending. For Fischerle, black and white are categories to be artfully manipulated and confounded; he is an accomplished practitioner of deception, both as a fabulist and as a chess player.

The motif of spilled, scrambled or jumping letters, words, books — and chess figures — recurs throughout the novel, and is evident even on a formal level in the juggled "Kopf" / "Welt" word-play of the three section titles. Text is meant to remain stationary, though it is set in motion in the reader's imagination: the reader perceives in it a flow of language, an orchestrated movement of interconnected sounds, images and meanings. Each new move in a chess game alters the configuration of figures and shifts the balance of power on the board. These "motions" of text and chess figures, controlled by the reader or chess player, are the necessary mechanisms that constitute the activities of reading or playing chess. For Kien and Fischerle, however, text and chess figures assume a life of their own.

The chess figures in Fischerle's coat pocket, imprisoned in their box, leap up impatiently when Fischerle tries to concentrate on getting his business underway:

> Fischerle hatte mittlerweile genug mit sich selbst zu tun. Es galt, die aufgestiegenen Schachgedanken zurückzutreiben. Keine Störung fürchtete er jetzt mehr als die wachsende Lust nach einer neuen Partie. Das Geschäft konnte darüber zugrunde gehen. Er klopfte auf das kleine Schachbrett in der rechten Rocktasche, das zugleich als Schachtel für die Figuren diente, hörte sie drinnen aufgeregt springen, murmelte "jetzt bist aber ruhig!" und klopfte wieder drauf, bis er den bloßen Lärm satt hatte. (255)

Fischerle does manage to restrain his chess set and to control his impulse to play in this instance — the jumping chess-men merely punctuate his thoughts, and then are still again. As we saw earlier, the catastrophic mutiny of Fischerle's "pawns" takes place in the real world of his human pawns (his employees), when the *Knopfhans* ambushes Fischerle in his home.

A grand mutiny is staged against Kien, on the other hand, through the agency of his own books in conjunction with the final rebellion of his mind: ironically, Kien himself has prepared the books for their uprising, little suspecting they would use their training against *him*. In his "Mobilmachung," Kien instructs his books, complete with every separate line, word and letter, to prepare to fight off the "enemy":

> Überschätze nicht die Stärke des Feindes, mein Volk! Zwischen deinen Lettern wirst du ihn totpressen, deine Zeilen seien die Keulen, die auf sein Haupt niederprasseln, deine Buchstaben die Bleigewichte, die sich an seine Füße hängen, deine Deckel die Panzer, die dich vor ihm schützen! (97)

When Kien returns to his library in the last chapter of the novel, his "Kopf" (both his head and his library) having been invaded by "Welt," he finds that he himself has

become the enemy. A book he tries to read will not allow itself to be read, his mind has betrayed him, and the book itself attacks him with all its might and resources:

> . . . Es klopft.
>
> Kien öffnet nicht. Er hält sich die Ohren zu. Er versteckt sich hinter ein Buch. Auf dem Schreibtisch liegt es. Er will darin lesen. Die Buchstaben tanzen auf und ab. Kein Wort ist zu entziffern. Ich bitte um Ruhe! . . . Er steht. Wie kann man da lesen? Das Buch liegt ja viel zu tief. Setz dich! Er sitzt. Sitzt. Nein, zu Hause, der Schreibtisch, die Bibliothek. Hier hält alles zu ihm. Nichts ist bereits verbrannt. Lesen darf er, wann er will. Aber das Buch ist ja gar nicht offen. Er hat vergessen, es aufzuschlagen. Dummheit verdient Schläge. Er schlägt es auf. Er schlägt die Hand drauf. Es schlägt elf. Jetzt hab' ich dich. Lies. Laß! Nein, Pack! Au! Aus der ersten Zeile löst sich ein Stab und schlägt ihm eine um die Ohren. Blei. Das tut weh. Schlag! Schlag! Noch einer. Noch einer. Eine Fußnote tritt ihn mit Füßen. Immer mehr. Er taumelt. Zeilen und ganze Seiten, alles fällt über ihn her. Die schütteln und schlagen ihn, die beuteln ihn, die schleudern ihn einander zu. Blut. Laßt mich los! Verdammtes Gesindel! Zu Hilfe! . . . (513)

As the revolt of the book is enacted by leaping letters and words, the revolt of Kien's mind is marked both by his distorted visual perception and by frenzied associative mental leaps.[7] Especially noteworthy in this passage is the play on meanings of the words "Schlag" and "schlagen": a slew of alternatively figurative and concrete meanings trigger each other in rapid succession. The explosion of the root word "schlag-" in this spray of associations accompanies the explosion of the text of Kien's book into violent action against him, and reflects the shattering of his mind. The passage continues:

> . . . Mit gewaltiger Kraft packt er das Buch und klappt es zu. Da hat er die Buchstaben gefangen, alle, und läßt sie gewiß nicht mehr frei. Nie! . . . (513-514)
>
> . . . Buchstaben klappern im Buch. Sind gefangen und können nicht heraus. Blutig haben sie ihn geschlagen.

> Er droht ihnen mit dem Feuertod. So rächt er sich an allen Feinden! . . . (514)

In this scene of mental chaos, the motif of unruly letters, words and language reaches its climax. Following the example of the flailing, fragmenting text, Kien's books hurl themselves from their shelves and form the pyre that Kien eagerly sets ablaze in order to quell them and, paradoxically, just when he is faced with their utmost estrangement from him, to join with them inextricably in a fire ceremony of marriage and death.[8]

Both Kien and Fischerle "come undone" (Kien mentally, Fischerle physically), but achieve ironic self-fulfilment even as they perish. Fischerle has the satisfaction of inscribing his name into his *Taschenkalender* as the newest world chess champion, thereby joining the ranks of the masters he has longed to be among, and making his catalogue whole and complete. Moments later he is hewn to pieces, finally — as a corpse — losing the hump that in life determined his existence as a mere cripple. Similarly, Kien is united with his library just when both his mind and the library itself are cracking up. These moments of paradoxical "coherence" and "incoherence," of simultaneous "coming together" or arrival at a desired goal and disastrous sundering, are also prefigured in Kien's vision of the merging of text with chess in the very process of their calamitous scattering.

The motif of spilled, scrambled and tumbling letters, words and books is strongly prevalent in the novel. Kien twice dreams of catastrophically falling books: in the first dream (37-40), books gush from the cloven chest of a sacrificial victim (the books in this dream are associated first with blood, then with fire); in the second dream (222), Kien stands helplessly in a deluge of books, unable to catch any of them

with his needle-thin body. Finally, as we have seen, the books in his library pour down into his arms from their shelves.

"Word imagery" in Die Blendung is a subject for further consideration. Words and letters dance, rearrange themselves, play tricks, rebel, and resist interpretation by scrambling themselves.[9] Not only words as printed or written text, however, but also words as spoken sounds, as strategically released blasts of meaning, and as metaphorically transformed visual images play a significant role in the word imagery of the novel. Just such aspects of word imagery will be illustrated in the pages to follow.

4. Cannibals and Roses

The themes of "unmanliness" and "unhumanness," particularly as they apply to Kien and Fischerle, are recurrently invoked in the expressions "kein Mann" and "kein Mensch." Both Kien and Fischerle seem to be asexual, and they are husbands only by the accident of marriage.[10] Kien's virility in particular is called into question and reviled by Therese, who regularly scoffs: "Ist das ein Mann? Das ist ja kein Mann!" (e.g., 162). Therese also uses this expression against Kien to imply not just unmanliness, but unhumanness (e.g., 327).

Kien's "Menschheit" is also compromised because of his grotesque thinness; he is pitied and despised as a near-unhuman "Gestell" (e.g., 112) and "Gerippe" (e.g., 112). The crowd at the Theresianum finds little satisfaction in tormenting him: "Er benimmt sich weder als Mensch noch als Leiche. Das Auswinden entlockt ihm keinen Laut" (323). At the police station, Kien is seen as "das hilflose Skelett" (327),

provoking the hostility of the others. For the *Kommandant*, Kien is "dieses Hundertstel Geschöpf" (331). Fischerle is also regarded as a fraction of a person; because of his small size, he is jokingly called "ein halber Mensch" by the *Pavian-Gesindel*, who tease: "Fischerle brauche nur halbe Preise zahlen, weil er ein halber Mensch sei" (374), and again, "Ein halber Biß und er ist tot, weil er ein halber Mensch ist" (380).

The categories "Mensch" / "kein Mensch" also feature prominently in both Kien's and Fischerle's world-views. For Fischerle, as we saw earlier, anyone who cannot play chess is "ka Mensch" (191); likewise for Kien, "Analphabetengesindel" occupy the lowest rung of so-called humanity. However, for both Kien and Fischerle, "Mensch" and "kein Mensch" are not absolute terms, but rather, they vary according to circumstances. Thus Fischerle can regard himself as "kein Mensch" because he is a cripple, putting the rest of humanity (who as chess-illiterates belong in the camp of "kein Mensch") into the category of "Mensch." Kien uses the term "Menschlichkeit" (45) in its usual sense of humane-ness, even though the essence of "Mensch" for him usually means the opposite, i.e., "Unmenschlichkeit."

In spite of his vocation as a philologist, Kien's relationship to language becomes increasingly tenuous. Just as Kien confuses imagination and reality, believing that his mental constructs (such as the *Kopfbibliothek*) have "real" (spatial, concrete) substance, and later denying that certain physical beings have any real substance, insisting instead that they are figments of his imagination (e.g., the "hallucination" of Therese), Kien also loses his grip on the distinction between literal and figurative aspects of meaning in language.

Just such linguistic confusion comes into play during a key encounter between Kien and Fischerle in a scene at the centre of the novel, in the chapter "Enthullungen." The theme of "Deutung" is introduced at the beginning of this chapter, when Kien feels a renewed enthusiasm for philology in his role as book saviour: he determines to undertake a new interpretation of John's "Logos" in order to enlighten Christianity about the true chosen subjects for salvation — books. Kien's use of the word "Deutung" (261) (meaning "interpretation") is immediately contrasted with Fischerle's physical "Deutung" (261) in the next sentence, his signal of warning to Kien, which Kien ironically fails to interpret. The stage is set for word-play.

Fischerle manages to move Kien to the yellow church, claiming that the police at the Theresianum were about to arrest him promptly at 11:00 (the church clock strikes 11:00 just as they arrive there). On the street, they happened to pass one of the Theresianum officials, the man who appraises books in the book department, known to Kien and Fischerle as "das Schwein." Fischerle now points out the *Schwein*'s identity to Kien, and when Kien answers that he took the man "für einen einfachen Teufel" (264), Fischerle initiates the impending crisis for Kien (which develops over the course of the episode into a crisis of language, logic, and world-view) with his response: "Ist er auch. Warum soll ein Teufel kein Schwein sein? Haben Sie seinen Bauch geseh'n? Es geht ein Gerücht im Theresianum . . . es ist besser, ich schweig drüber" (264). At Kien's insistence, Fischerle proceeds to tell Kien the "rumour" that the *Schwein* has a square stomach because he eats books, and at this news, Kien collapses in horror. The absurdity of the idea does not dawn on Kien (even a very rudimentary understanding of normal digestive processes would prohibit such a notion; the idea of eating books is one thing, still marginally credible, but the

conceit of a book-shaped stomach as a result of book-eating is quite another thing again). Kien does not think to question Fischerle, who is toying with Kien's madness, instead, Kien is appalled at this ultimate outrage of mankind against books. For Kien this amounts to "cannibalism," and as Fischerle elaborates the crimes of the *Schwein*, for whom books are nothing more than "Dreck" (264) to be expediently disposed of by means of a hundred and three different culinary preparations, Kien becomes increasingly distraught. Writhing on the pavement and pummelling the ground, shouting "Kan-ni-ba-len!", Kien attracts the attention of people nearby He is approached by a flower-girl, who gives Fischerle a bunch of fresh roses for Kien out of pity (Fischerle lies that Kien is in mourning over the death of a loved one).

The police are also drawn to the scene. This alarms Fischerle to the point that he pulls Kien into the church to calm him, and to escape public scrutiny. While Fischerle desperately appeases Kien, he ponders Kien's "game": is Kien truly insane, or is he posing, in which case he would be "der kühnste Schwindler der Welt" (266).

> Ein Hochstapler, . . . dem ein Krüppel die größten Lügen erzählen darf, ohne daß er ihn verhaut! Ein Weltmeister der Hochstapelei! Einen solchen Meister seines Fachs übers Ohr zu hauen, ist ein Vergnügen, Gegner, deren man sich schämen muß, kann Fischerle nicht leiden. (266-267)

Indulging Kien for the moment, he climbs on a pew in order to put his ear close to Kien's weakly murmuring lips; the gesture does not go unnoticed by Kien:

> . . . Kien nimmt nichts mehr einfach hin. Jede freundliche Regung eines Menschen erscheint ihm als Wunder.
>
> "Sie sind kein Mensch," haucht er liebevoll.
>
> "Ein Krüppel ist kein Mensch, kann ich was dafür?"
>
> "Der einzige Krüppel ist der Mensch," Kiens Stimme versucht sich stärker. Sie sehen sich Aug in

> Aug, drum übersieht er, was man vor dem Zwerg verschweigen müßte.
>
> "Nein," sagt Fischerle, "der Mensch ist kein Krüppel, sonst wär' ich ein Mensch!"
>
> "Das erlaub' ich nicht. Der Mensch ist die einzige Bestie!" Kien wird laut, verbietet und befiehlt.
>
> Fischerle macht das Geplänkel, dafür hält er es, großen Spaß. "Und warum heißt unser Schwein nicht Mensch?" Jetzt hat er ihn geschlagen.
>
> Kien springt auf. Er ist unbesiegbar. "Weil die Schweine sich nicht wehren können! Ich protestiere gegen diese Vergewaltigung! Menschen sind Menschen und Schweine sind Schweine! Alle Menschen sind bloß Menschen! Ihr Schwein heißt Mensch! Wehe dem Menschen, der sich ein Schwein anmaßt! Ich zerschlage ihn! Kan-ni-ba-len! Kan-ni-ba-len!" (267-268)

This exchange sounds like a pair of Shakespearean clowns playing word-games, but the matter becomes quite serious for Kien. Kien pays Fischerle the compliment of being "kein Mensch," that is to say, not being barbaric like the rest of mankind. Kien uses the word "Mensch" to mean "Unmensch." Fischerle interprets "kein Mensch" in its more usual sense, taking it to mean "inhuman," or in other words, a "cripple" such as he is; whether he is deliberately misunderstanding Kien we cannot yet say at this point. Kien then insists on his ironic meaning of "der Mensch" (now explicitly meaning "mankind") as a figurative "Krüppel" (meaning spiritually perverted, and not physically deformed); he is again becoming upset, this time at the challenge to his understanding and use of language. Fischerle now confuses Kien utterly with his rebuttal, "Nein, . . . der Mensch ist kein Krüppel, sonst wär' ich ein Mensch!" Fischerle deliberately confounds the literal (his) and figurative (Kien's) meanings of "Krüppel" in order to render Kien's statements a complete contradiction. He succeeds in driving Kien to distraction, whose logic will not tolerate these verbal tricks and manipulations. Kien does not "allow" it, and again he insists that "Der

Mensch ist die einzige Bestie," a statement which may in figurative terms be all too true, but which flies in the face of the most basic definition of mankind.

For David Roberts, who does not concern himself with the details of the linguistic confusion, but focuses on the "negative dialectic" in the exchange, this is a scene of utmost importance at the very heart of the novel:

> Dies ist die Schlüsselstelle des Buches (unterstrichen durch den Schauplatz in der Kirche), von bitterer Ironie . . . .[11]
>
> Dieser komisch-rührende Wortwechsel steht im Mittelpunkt des zweiten Teils, doch es ist das hohle Herz des Romans in seiner Betonung der Negativität, das die negative Dialektik des menschlichen Daseins bestimmt. Der Mensch ist entweder Krüppel oder Bestie, das heißt, kein Mensch (und dies hallt im sprachlichen Leitmotiv dieser Negativität wieder: "kein Mann, keine Ruhe, keine Zeit, keine Liebe, keine Sinne" usw.).[12]

Fischerle clearly has the upper hand in this linguistic and logical skirmish, and since he is enjoying it, he presses on with his clincher ("Und warum heißt unser Schwein nicht Mensch?"), confronting Kien again with the irreconcilable paradox of figurative (metaphorical) and literal meanings. (The metaphorical use of the word "Schwein" for a despicable person cannot be reconciled with the fact that in Kien's language, "Mensch" would be the only correct term.) This proves to be too much for Kien, who protests the outrage against language and sense, and again breaks out in screams of "Kan-ni-ba-len!"

What happens next is extremely curious, and generates one of the most remarkable images in the novel. Kien's echoing cries of "Kan-ni-ba-len!" fill the church, and Fischerle, made uneasy by Kien's fit and the commotion in the church (where he as a Jew feels unsafe), responds impulsively:

> In seiner Ratlosigkeit blickte er auf seine Hände, die er immer in der Höhe eines vermeintlichen Schachbretts hielt, und bemerkte die Rosen, wie er sie unter seinem rechten Arm zerdrückt hatte. Er holte sie hervor und schrie: "Rosen, schöne Rosen, schöne Rosen!" Die Kirche war von krächzenden Rosen erfüllt, von der Höhe des Mittelschiffs, von den Seitenschiffen, vom Chor, vom Tor, von überall flogen die roten Vögel auf Kien zu. (268)

This is a scene of poetic transfiguration; the tangled logic of the preceding knot of dialogue is relieved by the metamorphosis of a word ("Rosen") into an almost physical force of redemption. Fischerle's shouts of "Rosen" take flight and are metaphorically transformed into swooping red birds which croak out their names in Fischerle's voice. Through the agency of Fischerle's voice, the roses he holds in his arms (which in themselves symbolize sympathy and appeasement) are translated into images that fill the space of the church with the colour and essence of roses-as-birds, countering the force of Kien's shouts of "Kannibalen."

This is surely one of the most intriguing instances of word imagery in the novel. The ambiguity of the narrative perspective in the statement, "Die Kirche war von krächzenden Rosen erfüllt, . . . von überall flogen die roten Vögel auf Kien zu," does not allow us to conclude definitively whether the transformation of Fischerle's shouts into birds is something in fact apprehended by Fischerle and/or Kien, or whether the narrator alone offers the image outside the perception of the characters. Moreover, while Fischerle's "Rosen" decidedly predominate in the swirling flock of words, making it seem a mass of red, Kien's "Kannibalen" are less clearly defined as images. How do we picture them? Although they are not specifically transformed, as the roses are, into birds, they seem also to become birds by virtue of their association with the "Rosen," both words echoing in the church. But strangely, the "Kannibalen" seem to retain the characteristics of the word as we see it printed on the page;

somehow, as a visual image, they seem ragged, and — especially compared to the "Rosen" — black and white.

In any case, Fischerle's shouts have a dramatic impact on Kien. The "red birds," echoing "roses," do battle with Kien's shrieking "cannibals" and subdue them:

> Kiens Kannibalen wurden von den Rosen erstickt. Seine Stimme war noch von früher her geschwächt und kam gegen den Zwerg nicht auf. Sobald er das Wort "Rosen" bewußt aufgenommen hatte, brach er mit seinem Geschrei ab und drehte sich, halb erstaunt, halb beschämt nach Fischerle um. Wie kamen die Blumen da her, er war doch wo anders, Blumen sind harmlos, leben von Wasser und Licht, von Erde und Luft, sind keine Menschen, tun keinem Buch was zuleid', werden gefressen, gehn an Menschen zugrunde, Blumen sind schutzbedürftig, man muß sie schützen, vor Menschen und Tieren, worin liegt der Unterschied, Bestien, Bestien, ob hier, ob dort, die einen fressen Pflanzen, die andern Bücher, einziger natürlicher Verbündeter des Buchs ist die Blume. Er nahm die Rosen aus Fischerles Hand, entsann sich ihres Wohlgeruches, den er aus persischen Liebesgedichten kannte, und näherte sie seinen Augen, richtig, sie rochen. Das besänftigte ihn vollends. (268-269)

The roses strike Kien "poetically," first suggesting to him a natural alliance between flowers and books, and then putting him in mind of the very idea of poetry.[13] Whether Kien perceives the image of the red birds or not, the "poetry" of the incident — the power of the roses, given wing by Fischerle's voice — overcomes him. But Kien's epiphany of the natural alliance between books and flowers leads him, ironically, to subordinate the direct experience of the roses he has just had, which was healing, viscerally "poetic" and redemptive, to his memory of roses as words, roses documented in the texts of written poetry.

What is remarkable about this scene is the interplay between an object (a bunch of roses), the word that represents it ("Rosen"), the metaphorical transformation

of the sound of the word into a visual image, the physical and spiritual effect of the word on Kien, and the poetic experience that the sound of the word, coupled with the sensory experience of the object itself, produces in him, ending, ironically enough, in Kien's apprehension of the essence of "roses" in a written form (i.e., his memories of Persian love poetry). Kien finally tries to "read" the smell of the actual roses he holds in his hands.

Fischerle, meanwhile, has achieved his goal of taming Kien. Again there has been a metaphorical merging of the two figures through imagery — in this case, a church full of their blended words. Kien's insane "Kannibalen" are engulfed by Fischerle's "schöne Rosen." Here too, as in the text/chess imagery, the process of merging has involved a spray or burst of images; reconciliation has been achieved through an image of diffusion. The roses have brought relief to Fischerle: they have put him out of danger of the police, and they have temporarily cured Kien of the cannibal scare. Fischerle and Kien are brought physically very close together as the scene unfolds, and Kien is made increasingly dependent on Fischerle. Kien emerges from the ordeal feeling that he has at last been understood, an impression Fischerle is henceforward anxious to foster.

5. Head and Hump

Immediately following this scene, Fischerle removes Kien to a hotel, where the pair undergo a further crisis in their relationship. Fischerle is severely provoked by Kien's loose spending of money (Kien pays for two rooms instead of one, and

generously tips the porter), and he thinks Kien is deliberately testing his (Fischerle's) "game":

> Er [Fischerle] wird sich hüten. Er wird . . das Theater spielen. Die schlechteste Schachpartie ist ihm lieber. Der Lange glaubt es doch selber nicht, daß er, Fischerle, ihm die unmöglichen Bücher glaubt. Er will ihm nur Respekt beibringen, aber Fischerle hat Respekt, solange er Respekt braucht, keine Sekunde länger. (271)

Fischerle has from the beginning of their alliance instinctively indulged Kien's whimsy of the *Kopfbibliothek* in order to ingratiate himself with Kien. Now, sensing Kien's "pretended" madness slipping, he wants to jolt Kien back into his previous, familiar and more easily manageable frame of mind by outdoing him with solicitude for the *Kopfbibliothek*. The result is an absurd pantomime:

> Immer wieder erkundigte er sich nach den Büchern. Ob sie dem Herrn Bibliothekar nicht doch schon schwerfielen? Die momentane Lage seien weder der Kopf noch die Bücher gewohnt. Er wolle ja nichts dreinreden, aber für die Unordnung im Kopf stehe er nicht gut. Ob man nicht wenigstens mehr Kissen verlangen solle, damit der Kopf in eine senkrechte Lage komme? Riß Kien den Kopf gar herum, so rief der Kleine mit allen Zeichen der Angst: "Um Gottes willen, passen Sie auf!" Einmal sprang er sogar auf ihn zu und hielt die Hände unter sein rechtes Ohr, um Bücher aufzufangen. "Sie fallen ja heraus!" sagte er vorwurfsvoll. (272)

Kien becomes increasingly annoyed by Fischerle's fussing over him, and he is particularly vexed by Fischerle's attention to detail, which theatrically tests the fantasy of the *Kopfbibliothek*:

> Wenn der Kleine nur schwieg. Bei seinen Reden und Blicken wurde ihm unheimlich zumute, so, als ob die Bibliothek in höchster Gefahr schwebte, was doch wirklich nicht der Fall war. Übermäßige Sorge bereitet Pein. . . . Fischerle schien ihm zu genau. Er war — sicher wegen des Buckels — viel mit seinem Körper beschäftigt und übertrug das auf den seines Herrn. Er nannte Dinge beim Namen, die man besser verschwieg,

> und klammerte sich an Haare, Augen und Ohren. Wozu? Daß in einen Kopf allerlei hineinging, stand fest, nur kleinliche Naturen beschäftigten sich mit Äußerlichkeiten. Lästig war er bis jetzt nicht gewesen. (272)

Kien does not want to be reminded of the identification he himself has made between his body and his mind; Kien has in fact made his mind "body" by crystallizing the contents of his head into a material library, making his skull into a physical holding vessel. Fischerle seizes the opportunity of seeing a large drop at the tip of Kien's running nose to escalate his antics:

> Er [Kien] zog ein Taschentuch hervor und wollte sich auch gleich schneuzen. Da stöhnte Fischerle laut auf. "Halt, halt, warten Sie, bis ich komm'!" Er riß ihm das Taschentuch aus der Hand, selber hatte er kein's, näherte sich vorsichtig der Nase und fing den Tropfen wie eine kostbare Perle auf. "Wissen Sie was," sagte er, "ich bleib' nicht bei Ihnen! Jetzt hätten Sie sich geschneuzt und die Bücher wären zur Nase herausgekommen! Wie die ausgeschaut hätten, brauch ich Ihnen nicht zu sagen. . . . (272)

The image of the mucus-soiled books that would issue forth from Kien's nose does, of course, tax the fantasy of the *Kopfbibliothek*. It greatly distresses Kien, and he regretfully agrees with Fischerle — but it does not occur to him that, by the same logic, the books in his head would already be badly spoiled by brain matter. In any event, Fischerle does succeed in shaming Kien back to a conscientious awareness of his *Kopfbibliothek*, essentially by reminding Kien of his former self: "Es schien ihm, als hätte er selber aus Fischerle gesprochen" (273).

However, the tension between the two characters continues to mount until they are brought to an exchange of gross insults. Kien actually dismisses Fischerle: "'Sie sind ein unverschämter Krüppel! Verlassen Sie sofort mein Zimmer! Sie sind entlassen'" (273). Fischerle demands financial compensation for his outlay (by which

he really means the money Kien has spent, which he, Fischerle, considers rightfully his own), and Kien, having such a poor grasp of money matters, opts to oblige Fischerle in this. Fischerle then falls into an agony of self-recrimination for jeopardizing his future, and he summons from his depths a response of true desperation:

> Fischerle, der plötzlich wieder gespürt hatte, wie schwer ihm der Buckel am Rücken hing, zog tief Atem ein und da es ihm so schlecht ging, da vielleicht aus Amerika nichts wurde, da seine eigene Dummheit an dieser Wendung schuld war, da er sich haßte, sich, seine Kleinheit, seine Kleinlichkeit, seine kleinliche Zukunft, die Niederlage kurz vor dem Sieg, . . . da er diesen Anfangsverdienst, eine Bagatelle, auf die er spuckte, Kien am liebsten an den Kopf geschleudert hätte, wenn es nicht so schad' drum gewesen wäre, samt der sogenannten Bibliothek, auf die er schiß: verzichtete er auch auf den Betrag, den Kien für die Zimmer und den Portier ausgelegt hatte. Er sagte: "Ich verzichte drauf!" So schwer fiel ihm dieser Satz, daß die Art, ihn zu sprechen, ihm mehr Würde verlieh, als Kien alle Länge und Strenge. Beleidigtes Menschentum klang aus dem Verzicht und das Bewußtsein, wie gut man es gemeint habe, und wie schlecht man verstanden werde. (274)

Fortunately for Fischerle, his response earns Kien's sympathy and (misguided) understanding.[14] Kien apologizes by addressing the crippledom he so ruthlessly abused moments earlier:

> Er legte die Hand auf Fischerles Buckel, drückte ihn freundlich, als wollte er sagen: mach' dir nichts draus, andere haben ihren Buckel im Kopf . . . (274)

If Kien is implying that he, too, may briefly have had a "Buckel im Kopf," a temporary deformity of thought, the image is neatly reversed a short time later, when Kien's *Kopfbibliothek* finds its way into Fischerle's *Buckel.* After the two characters have had a "Versöhnungsfeier," traded stories and confessions about their wives (Fischerle merely adopts the stories Kien tells him about Therese and repeats them

back to Kien as his own, which leads Kien to think Therese may be conducting a double life as a prostitute and Fischerle's wife, or at the least she must be the *Pensionistin*'s twin sister), and after they have decided to use the familiar form "Du" with one another (277), and have consolidated their friendship by formulating an "Erlösungsplan" (for the Theresianum books — which of course for Fischerle means the stoking of his business operations), Kien relieves himself of the weight of the *Kopfbibliothek* by entrusting it entirely to Fischerle — both to his head and to his *Buckel*:

> Am nächsten Morgen, um Punkt halb zehn Uhr, stand er [Kien] frisch, erleichtert und zu jedem Mut bereit, auf seinem Posten. Frisch fühlte er sich, weil er weniger Gelehrsamkeit mit sich schleppte, Fischerle hatte auch den Rest der Bibliothek übernommen. "In meinen Kopf geht was herein," scherzte er, "und langt der Platz nicht, so stopf ich was in den Buckel!" Erleichtert war Kien, weil ihn das häßliche Geheimnis von seiner Frau nicht mehr drückte, und zu jedem Mut bereit, weil er fremden Befehlen gehorchte. (278)

Kien has given himself over to Fischerle in two vital ways: he now relies on Fischerle completely as the guardian of the *Kopfbibliothek*, and he is ready to take orders from Fischerle concerning his actions as book redeemer.

The image of Fischerle's *Buckel* as library is a wildly grotesque parody of Kien's original library, and of the *Kopfbibliothek*: as a symbol of Kien's mind, the *Kopfbibliothek* is here swallowed up by the symbol of utmost physical wretchedness, the "beast" of the *Buckel*. We might compare Fischerle's *Buckel-Bibliothek* with another demonic parody of the library from Part One, that of Therese's *Bücherinventar* (121-122), which she keeps in a special pocket sewn into her monstrous skirt: this too amounts to a grotesque "Einverleibung" and desecration of the library. (In the case of Therese's *Bücherinventar*, the library is broken down into a collection of strips of

newsprint, each strip documenting the title of a book. The object of the exercise for Therese is to catalogue her holdings, to protect herself against the theft of the most valuable books by the claims of "der neue Bruder.")

Kien never finds out about the *Bücherinventar*; by contrast, the idea of the *Buckel-Bibliothek* is presented directly to him as a friendly gesture on Fischerle's part. This is a concentrated image of loading: the *Kopfbibliothek*, a precious but unwieldy weight for Kien (which he believes may be interfering with his memory functions) is to be incorporated into Fischerle's great burden, the *Buckel*. It is a sign of Kien's trust and affection for Fischerle that he indulges this peculiar intimacy, a definite merging of their beings. Kien later regrets this trust, thinking that Fischerle has made off with his library, and he laments to Georg: "Meine kleine Handbibliothek ist mir gestohlen worden" (469). Kien ultimately considers Fischerle a thief, still having no idea, however, that Fischerle has siphoned off most of his remaining fortune. For Fischerle, of course, it is the transfer of money, not of books, that determines the essence of their encounter.

David Darby comments on the Kien-Fischerle dynamic as follows:

> Kien confuses two quite different belief-worlds. While his own "Wissenschaft" is pursued for purely ascetic reasons (he refuses physical, i.e., pecuniary reward), Fischerle's chess is a means to a very different end, his America-idyll. Kien interprets Fischerle's belief-world according to the categories of his own, and fails to distinguish between his own level of motivation and intellectual activity, and that of Fischerle, "der den Wert der Intelligenz, wie er für Bildung zu sagen pflegte, hochschätzte" (229). The irony is that Fischerle's "Intelligenz" is all the time preying on the values which Kien has derived from his own "Bildung."[15]

Fischerle applies his acute "Intelligenz" to outwitting Kien and playing along with Kien's "game." Fischerle believes that he understands Kien so well, in fact, that

his understanding of Kien eventually gets on his own nerves. Only a short time later Fischerle finds himself cursing his own intelligence for comprehending Kien's "nonsense." Kien, now believing that Therese is dead (thanks to the false report sent by Fischerle), and convinced that he will have to defend himself in a trial for his guilt in her murder, rehearses his "Verteidigungsrede" before Fischerle. Fischerle listens with irritation, occasionally amusing or consoling himself by sniffing at the money in his armpits:

> Fischerle ärgerte sich, weil er ihn verstand, jeden Blödsinn mußte er verstehen, er verwünschte die eigene Intelligenz und ging nur aus Gewohnheit auf die Reden des armen Teufels neben ihm ein. "Lieber Freund," sagte er, "du bist ein Narr. . . ." (292)

The roles of king and fool, sage and jester, master and servant are increasingly spoofed and subverted as the "friendship" between Kien and Fischerle grows. The metaphorical bond between Kien and Fischerle, strengthened by the implied convergence, or sharing, of head and hump, reflects the ironic fact that as Kien's affection for Fischerle deepens, his thinking goes increasingly awry, and he almost literally loses his mind to Fischerle. Conversely, Fischerle means to disburden himself of his crippledom by taking on and manipulating Kien's mind; he trains his wits on bending Kien's mind ever further into folly and madness, making an ever sorrier cripple of Kien's head, in order to separate Kien from that part of himself he would consider most expendable anyway — his money.

6. The Telegram

Once Kien and Fischerle have parted (or to be more precise, have been parted by the crowd incident which results in Kien's arrest), they continue to be affected by the consequences of their relationship. The final parting of Fischerle and Kien is ironically achieved through a climactic scene of merging, not only a merging of the four major characters we have so far met in the novel, but also of a sizeable crowd of the city inhabitants drawn by the mêlée at the Theresianum. This scene brings Kien, Therese, Pfaff and Fischerle together for the first and only time. Fischerle is the outsider in this grouping of the four principal characters; he arrives only once the other three are tied up in a violent brawl, and he makes his escape through their flailing limbs:

> Gespannt beobachtet er Kiens Peiniger. Wenn sie die Tasche treffen, in die er das Celd hineingesteckt hat, gibt es ihm einen Stich ins Herz. Diese Quälerei richtet ihn noch zugrunde. Blind vor Schmerz rettet er sich unter die nächsten Beine. Die körperliche Aufregung des engeren Kreises kommt ihm zugute. . . So kläglich er kann, schreit er: "Au, ich hab' keine Luft, laßt's mich auße!" . . . Von den sechs Polizisten hat ihn kein einziger geseh'n; er lag zu tief, sein Buckel kam nicht zur Geltung. . . . Heute hat er Glück. Er entkommt in die ungeheure Menge vor dem Theresianum. (322)

Fischerle, here the most incongruous element in the lot, is rapidly expelled from the chemical reaction of this meeting: he is spewed into the larger crowd outside while the others undergo a turbulent reconfiguration. There is no indication that Kien even notices he is there.

Fischerle also goes undetected by the police, for whom he becomes the mysterious "fourth": four suspects were reported by the Theresianum porter to the

police, and when three are finally arrested (Kien, Therese and Pfaff), one police officer realizes that the set is incomplete:

> Ein anderer Wachmann, fur sein gutes Gedächtnis bekannt, zählt die Verhafteten an den Fingern ab, eins, zwei, drei. Wo ist der Vierte? (324)

Later, at the end of the lengthy interrogation episode of the chapter "Privateigentum," this same sleuth ventures a solution to the mystery of the disturbance: "'Der Verbrecher war der Vierte!'" (357).

Certainly, it is Fischerle who is left with most of Kien's money. In effect, Kien has been distilled into a fat bundle of banknotes for Fischerle, which launches him on his flight towards America. But he is nevertheless greatly vexed that Kien's last remaining sum of approximately 2,000 schillings slipped through his fingers into the hands of his old enemies, the police. Fischerle conceives a plan to deprive them of the prize, which in its immediate implementation will also fulfil a lifelong ambition of his, namely, the writing and sending of a telegram (369-370). The telegram is to go to Kien's brother Georg[16] in Paris and alarm him sufficiently that he will come to Vienna and check into his brother's affairs — and presumably recover the money "stolen" by the police.[17] Fischerle writes three drafts of the telegram message, knowing that: "Es handelt sich nur noch um die richtigen Worte" (370). He begins:

> "Bruder meschugge. Ein Freund des Hauses." . . . Er läßt den Freund des Hauses weg, das klingt zu treu, da erwartet man zuviel und verstärkt "meschugge" durch "total." Auf dem zweiten Formular steht: "Bruder total meschugge." Und wer unterschreibt? Auf ein Telegramm ohne Unterschrift reagiert kein situierter Mensch. . . . Fischerle hat noch ein Formular; er ärgert sich über die zwei verpatzten und kritzelt in Gedanken "Bin total meschugge" auf das dritte. Er liest es und ist begeistert. Wenn ein Mensch das von sich selbst schreibt, muß man es ihm glauben, denn wer schreibt das

> von sich selbst? Er unterzeichnet "Dein Bruder" und läuft mit dem gelungenen Wisch zum Schalter. (370)

Fischerle's great inspiration occurs in his second revision, between the second and final versions. Giving voice to his own distress, his momentary psychological identification with Kien is reflected in the fiction of the telegram: he switches from third person to first person narration. Thus Fischerle writes himself back into Kien's story; in the act of writing and sending the telegram, he metaphorically identifies himself with Kien as the (fictitious) lunatic author. The episode is interesting both for Fischerle's display of creative insight and inspiration, which quickly achieves his desired aim of bringing Georg to Vienna, and for the detailed demonstration of the editing process it shows us. While Kien is reputed to be the world master of textual restoration, we never actually get a pen's-eye view of him patching up a text. (Granted, the technical difficulty here would be immense, due to the fact that Kien works with ancient oriental manuscripts.) Still, when we see Kien at work, it is at best from a significant distance.

When Georg receives the telegram, it is the word "meschugge" that convinces him of its authenticity, "meschugge" being a word that Kien would never use under normal circumstances: "Gebrauchte er das Wort doch, so war etwas nicht in Ordnung" (457). Ironically, it is just this word that most genuinely represents Fischerle, for it belongs to underworld jargon and stems from Yiddish usage, and is obviously part of Fischerle's spontaneous vocabulary.[18] The word alerts Georg to Kien's trouble, he explains to his wife that he must leave immediately: "' Er ist in falschen Handen. Wie käme er sonst in die Lage, ein solches Telegramm abzuschicken?'" (458). Fischerle's piece of *Hochstapelei*, his written disguise as Kien, has both fooled Georg and communicated the truth. Here the merging of Fischerle and Kien, this last time

in the fiction of a brief written message, undergoes a dramatic sundering on a concrete plane, as a piece of text: Georg's wife takes the telegram and rips it to shreds, angry that it (representing Georg's brother, about whom she is hearing for the first time) has caused her husband to depart. Like Fischerle himself, this representation of Fischerle-as-Kien gets torn to pieces.

Another instance in which mutilation seems to be a connecting link between Kien and Fischerle is the incident of Kien's cutting off of part of his little finger (434). We come upon this shocking episode two chapters after the death of Fischerle, but in terms of the actual flow of time in the novel, Kien's severance of his finger and Fischerle's murder occur on the same evening, separated by no more than a few hours. (Kien removes the finger soon after Therese brings him dinner at around 7:00 p.m.; Fischerle is killed shortly after 11:00 p.m.; Kien also dies just after 11:00 p.m. several nights later.)

Having opened his eyes to the mess of upset plates and spilled dinner Therese has left behind, Kien gathers some pieces of broken glass from the floor and finds himself bleeding:

> Die Glassplitter liest er zusammen. Seine Sorgen schneiden ihn. Blut fließt. Soll man am eigenen Blut zweifeln? Die Geschichte berichtet von sonderbarsten Verirrungen. Zum Eßbesteck gehört ein Messer. Um es zu erproben, schneidet er sich, es ist scharf und schmerzt sehr, den kleinen Finger der Linken ab. Viel mehr Blut fließt. (434)

Again Kien has difficulty distinguishing between the figurative and the concrete, between idiomatic and literal meanings, between ideas and things. The sight of blood would argue for a literal interpretation of "schneiden," but Kien has perceived the pieces of glass as "Sorgen," which do not ordinarily cut in a real way.

To test the reality of his flowing blood, and of the cutting instrument "Messer," he cuts his little finger off and is apparently satisfied with his proof. Moments later Kien has strangled the four "treacherous" canaries who had failed to warn him of the intruder and, in order to mock him, suddenly turned from yellow to blue. He tosses them out the window and: "Seinen kleinen Finger, eine fünfte Leiche, schleudert er ihnen nach" (435). The "fifth corpse" of the small fifth finger vaguely suggests Fischerle, the smallest of the five principal characters ("der Kleine"). Fischerle is also associated with both the colours yellow and blue (we have noted the yellow shoes and blue coat of his final get-up).[19] Furthermore, Kien must view his disappearance as a bodily separation from himself, since Fischerle was carrying his precious *Kopfbibliothek* (in his head and hump). Kien's sacrifice of his little finger immediately precedes his realization that he is losing his mind, whereupon he creeps under the bed (435): both this action of Kien's (seeking refuge under a bed) and the bloody corpse of his finger unceremoniously discarded combine to recall Fischerle.

Fischerle has more or less sent Georg to Kien by means of his telegram, though it is not Fischerle's idea that anyone should actually help Kien out of his madness. While Georg does initially help Kien, tending to his wounded hand, then banishing Therese and Pfaff (who are sent away to enjoy a so-called happy ending, under Georg's supervision, in the outskirts of the city), and restoring the flat and library to its former state, Georg also steers Kien to his doom by failing to understand him properly. His analogy of the *Termitenstock*, which has been much discussed in the criticism of the novel,[20] but which does not concern us here, is considered a decisive contributing factor in Kien's final action of setting his library ablaze.

7. Kien's Return to the Library

In the last few days of Kien's life, after Fischerle has disappeared, thoughts and images of Fischerle occasionally surface in Kien's mind. For example, at one point while he is trapped in the dungeon of Pfaff's *Kabinett*, Kien drifts into sleep and wonders about the state of his library (421-422); the smell of the corpse (the supposed corpse of Therese) leads him to think of noses, gasmasks, and Fischerle:

> Das gefährlichste Organ ist die Nase. Gasmasken erleichtern die Atmung. Ein Dutzend hoch über dem Schreibtisch. Höher, sonst stiehlt sie ein Zwerg. Greift an die lächerliche Nase. Stülp dir eine Gasmaske über. Zwei riesentraurige Augen. (422)

Fischerle's great nose is contrasted with the *Kommandant*'s pathologically tiny "lächerliche Nase." Gasmasks must be put out of reach of the thieving dwarf, but the large black eyes of the gasmasks themselves look like Fischerle's "zwei riesentraurige Augen." These fleeting images reflect a sense of disappointment rather than a deep sense of loss on Kien's part, though certainly Kien seemed aware that Fischerle, as no other character from the outside world, was able to penetrate his mind and his being.

Kien's memories of Fischerle assert themselves much more strongly and insistently in the moments preceding his death:

> Es war gerade elf. Doch keine Kirchenglocke schlug. Damals war es hellichter Tag. Gegenüber die gelbe Kirche. Auf dem kleinen Platz die Menschen schlichen aufgeregt hin und her. Der bucklige Zwerg hieß Fischerle. Er heulte zum Steinerweichen. Pflastersteine hüpften auf und nieder. Das Theresianum war von Polizei umstellt. . . . Unter den Beinen schlüpft man in die Rosen, er und sein getreuer Zwerg. (510-511)

Kien's acute paranoia at this stage is fed by two ideas for which Fischerle is basically responsible: firstly, he believes the police are out in full military force to arrest him for his work as book-saviour at the Theresianum:

> Und warum war Kien ein Verbrecher? Weil er den Ärmsten der Armen half. Denn schon bevor sie von der Leiche hörte, erließ die Polizei einen Haftbefehl. Gegen ihn das ungeheure Aufgebot. Mannschaft zu Fuß und zu Pferd. Funkelnagelneue Revolver, Karabiner, Maschinengewehre, Stacheldraht und Panzerwagen . . . (510-511)

> Verlaß das Haus! Vorsicht! Panzerautos durchfahren die Straßen. Mit Mann und Roß und Wagen. Die glauben, sie haben ihn schon. (512)

The other idea concerns the "Leiche," that is, the death of Therese, another fiction imparted to Kien by Fischerle (via the *Knopfhans*). Fischerle is clearly to blame for the lie concerning her death, but he could not foresee the horrendous effect this news would have on Kien, or Kien's reaction of assuming the guilt for her "murder," for which he now fears (re-)arrest. Moreover, it is the idea of Therese's death, so desperately desired by Kien, that causes him to resort to the mad strategy of convincing himself that she is a hallucination when he is again faced with her in all her living blueness:

> Therese cannot be real, his mind tells him so — therefore he is seeing an hallucination. This is the ultimate consequence of his logic: he pronounces himself insane in order to stay sane.[21]

Finally, once Kien has already started the fire in his carpet, he believes that the crashing he hears at his door is the Theresianum *Schwein*, and again his thoughts turn to Fischerle:

> Krach! Krach! Schweine stehen vor der Tür und berennen sie mit eckigen Bäuchen. Sicher splittert das Holz. . . . Ho — ruck — krach! Ho — ruck — krach!

> Geklingel. Um elf läuten die Glocken. Theresianum. Buckel. Ziehen ab mit langen Nasen. Hab' ich nicht recht — ho ruck! Hab' ich nicht recht — ho ruck! (514-515)

Fischerle's *Buckel* and nose, and a characteristic tag of Fischerle's "akustische Maske" ("'Hab' ich nicht recht?'") — a rhetorical question which Kien would have done well to consider seriously — present themselves to Kien in association with the imminent invasion of the *Schwein*, precisely at the dreaded eleventh hour (the preferred time for police arrests, according to Fischerle). Immediately thereafter, the books leap from their shelves into Kien's arms.[22]

Kien tells himself that the conflagration will be a form of revenge against *all* his foes — "So rächt er sich an allen Feinden!" (514) — and his suicide is triggered by the impact on his life of the full company of *Nebenfiguren*, of whom Fischerle is only one. It is difficult to judge from the echoes of Fischerle that resonate within Kien in the last section of the novel just what Kien's attitude towards Fischerle finally is: Kien feels abandoned and betrayed by Fischerle for the theft of the *Kopfbibliothek*, but he has no idea of the true nature of Fischerle's predations upon him. There is a hint of bittersweet pathos in Kien's memory of deliverance with Fischerle "into the roses," which recalls the balm of Kien's vision of the "poetry" of roses (however absurdly abstracted from the real roses this experience was). Ultimately, though, it is Fischerle's idea of the square-bellied *Schwein* that forcefully assaults Kien, threatening to smash down his door, and banging loudly against his skull. This is the "Welt" thunderously cracking up the "Kopf," simultaneously bashing against the library as a symbol of "Kopf" — the library is the outer shell of Kien's head — and pummelling Kien's own head from within.

8. Summary

The relationship between Fischerle and Kien produces moments of human fellowship and communion for Kien such as he has never previously experienced (aside perhaps from his earlier relationship with Georg), and his closeness to Fischerle is furthered and reinforced by a series of metaphorical unions. Some of these episodes (as we saw in the chapter "Enthüllungen") have given Kien glimmers of enlightenment about the nature and importance of human friendship, even if his ideas about Fischerle as a loyal friend are always based on his illusions and faulty premises.

The story is quite different from Fischerle's point of view. Fischerle is not really moved by Kien, or by anyone else; he is moved only by his own struggles and trials. But he appreciates Kien as a worthy opponent whom (he believes) he has succeeded in psychologically infiltrating, outmanoeuvring, and vanquishing:

> Er braucht einen Charakter, einen zweiten Charakter wie er, einen Menschen, der bis zu Ende geht, für so einen Menschen würde er gern was zahlen . . . . (259)

Just when he is leaving Kien for the last time, Fischerle reflects:

> Der Lange ist ein Idiot. . . . Armer Mensch! Man darf ihn nicht im Stich lassen. Sie könnten ihm das Geld wegnehmen. Er gibt alles gleich her. Er ist zu seelensgut. Fischerle ist treu. Zu einem Geschäftsfreund hält er. Wenn er in Amerika ist, muß der Lange für sich selber sorgen. Da hilft ihm niemand mehr. (317)

Fischerle wants to "help" Kien by relieving him of his money. For Fischerle, Kien is a puzzle and a challenge, an interesting case of con-artistry, or lunacy, and a rich source of plunder. Fischerle's standard claim that he has a "heart" for various people (e.g., "'Für die Buchbranche hab' ich ein Herz'" [191]; "Für ehrliche Kanalräumer habe er, Fischerle, ein Herz" [246]) really means that he takes an interest in them for

selfish purposes. The "heart" that Fischerle brings to the novel is neither a force of compassion nor of evil, but a strong pulse of lively curiosity, wily opportunism, quick "Intelligenz" and self-centred optimism. Fischerle energizes the novel with his manic play at games of his own devising, including that of creating a new life for himself. The episode of the roses, from Fischerle's perspective, is quite divorced from any "poetic" meaning; in desperation, he merely takes advantage of the opportunity the roses present to shout out their names and silence Kien. Admittedly, this is a stroke of inspiration on Fischerle's part, and his bursting out in roses does bring relief, but the relief is not mystical, transcendent or poetic for Fischerle: it is immediate and life-saving.

For the reader, the entire picture is different again. The reader sees in the Kien-Fischerle dynamic a stress at the centre of the novel, a peculiar parodic overlap, a process of merging and separation, which neither character can perceive or comprehend fully from their separate positions and limited perspectives. Kien believes he has a soul mate and a disciple in Fischerle, who may even eventually become educated in sinology (!); Fischerle believes he can extract from Kien, whose life work is actually centred in the far east, the means to realize his American dream. The pathos of all this for the reader lies in the tease of their mutual interest, the potential for understanding and compassion, which is steadily undermined and foiled by their blindness and stubbornly self-referential thinking.

But it must be emphasized that even where the "pity" of the relationship between Kien and Fischerle is evoked for the reader in imagery and metaphor, such as in the episode of the roses, Canetti does not allow any part of the novel to yield completely to a redemptive aspect of the imagery. As Michel-François Demet remarks

in his essay on the theme of blood and blood imagery in Die Blendung, the "red" in the novel resists redemption, and is usually related to the catastrophic force of fire:

> On the other hand, that which seems certain is the absolute originality of the theme of blood in Canetti. His use of the theme is the only example among the works known to me that is completely bereft of a vermilion aspect, harbinger of life, of love, and of redemption.[23]

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate some ways in which the relationship between Kien and Fischerle is reflected in imagery. The meeting of the characters, the collision of their obsessions (books and chess), the clash of their idiosyncratic, self-encapsulated world views — in short, the basic dynamic between the figures — is expressed in metaphor and imagery that itself dramatizes a process of challenge, collision, merging and separation. Certain images in particular — Kien's vision of an upset chess-board which spills over with written characters, or the spray of Fischerle's echoing "roses" filling the yellow church with a flock of red birds to overcome Kien's shrieking "cannibals" — mark critical moments in the development of the relationship of these characters. These images and metaphors may be only partially apprehended by the characters themselves: in the first instance, the vision of text blended with chess belongs to Kien alone, and is not shared by Fischerle; in the episode of the roses, it is possible that neither character perceives the metamorphosis of the roses into birds, though each has an intense (if different) experience of the roses. But even if only partially apprehended by either character, such imagery represents sudden insight, discovery or revelation for them; and so it may also represent the resolution of a crisis through a "poetic" experience, or a stroke of inspiration, such as guides Fischerle in the composition of his telegram.

For the reader, these instances of metaphor and imagery are seen in the context of the pervasive irony of the novel. They spring forth from the text as moments of poetic concentration of the Kien-Fischerle dynamic, paradoxically providing both imaginative reprieve and a deepened sense of complication. The more intimate the metaphorical bond between Fischerle and Kien, the more remote from one another they actually become. The more potent the imagery of "sympathetic" overlap and reconciliation of the two characters, and the stronger their metaphorical identity, the greater the tension of their mutual misunderstanding. Thus, this "poetic" aspect of the novel, while suggesting the possibility of human contact and commiseration between these two characters, also represents the hollowness of that possibility. For the reader, this also constitutes a source of pathos in the novel: the teasing vision of shared humanity grotesquely undermined; metaphor as *Hochstapelei*.

Notes to Chapter IV

1. Onlookers in the Theresianum crowd scene find it remarkable that Kien is capable of bleeding when he cuts himself: "Dieses Blut fanden sie unglaublich. Es war das erste Lebenszeichen, das Kien von sich gab" (324).

2. As mentioned earlier, Fischerle plays a kind of demonic Sancho Panza to Kien's Don Quixote. For an extensive comparison between Kien and Cervantes' knight, see Tania Hinderberger-Burton, "The Quixotic in Canetti's Die Blendung," Modern Austrian Literature 16.3-4 (1983): 165-176.

3. Darby 108.

4. Dissinger (131) remarks: "Der Verrat an Konfuzius rächt sich."

5. Curtius 297.

6. Roberts 50.

7. Comparing Die Blendung to other modernist urban novels, and particularly to Dos Passos' Manhattan Transfer, David Darby (169) remarks on "the movement away from rational toward associative patterns of thought" in the final episode of the novel.

8. The library, Kien's "Geliebte" (93), is his true "wife." Roberts makes the case that Therese's notion of the corpse of a first wife hidden in the library is not entirely false:

> Hinter den Büchern ist eine Leiche, das Weib, das den Büchern geopfert wurde, die Bücher die den Platz eines Weibes für Kien eingenommen haben und denen seine ganze Liebe gilt.

See Roberts 33-34. The library as wife is also subject to frequent dismemberment, for example in Kien's ritual of carrying "einen winzigen Bruchteil" of it with him on his daily walks (again, see Roberts 34). More disturbingly for Kien (92), once Therese invades it, the library is partitioned into separate rooms by means of closed doors.

9. For example, the sign on the furniture shop "Groß & Mutter" rearranges itself in Therese's perception several times before settling into a final version:

> Erst las sie Groß & Mutter, dann las sie Grob & Frau. Das hatte sie gern. . . . Da tanzten die Buchstaben vor Freude, und als der Tanz zu Ende war, las sie auf einmal Groß & Frau. Das paßte ihr gar nicht. Sie rief "So eine Frechheit!" und trat ins Geschäft ein. (299)

As readers, we cannot be sure of what the sign actually says in the end. Has it really been changed to "Groß & Frau," or has Therese again misread it? Another example of this type of word trickery concerns Fischerle. When Fischerle spends the night under a bridge after procuring his passport, and he dreams of an encounter with Capablanca, he is eventually "tricked" by indecipherable script. Capablanca hands him a personal visiting card:

> Auf der Karte stand die genaue Adresse in fremden Buchstaben, wer konnte das lesen? Fischerle plagte sich, jeder Strich war anders, kein Wort kam heraus. "Lernen Sie lesen!" rief Capablanca, er war schon verschwunden, man hörte ihn nur schreien, wie laut er schrie, der wacklige Gauner, "lernen Sie lesen!" (383)

The visiting card turns out to be Fischerle's own passport, but Fischerle still considers the impossible script to be a nasty ruse of Capablanca's to cheat him out of the desired address.

10. Therese and the *Pensionistin* could not be more opposite in terms of sexual experience and need. The *Pensionistin* is a jaded whore who is glad for Fischerle's lack of sexual interest (198); Therese is inexperienced until Pfaff pounces.

11. Roberts 68.

12. Roberts 69.

13. Roberts comments on this passage of the novel:

> Der dämonische Fischerle treibt Kien durch seine Ängste und Agonie zum Augenblick religiöser Wahrheit. Kien, der Christus der Bücher und Blumen, transzendiert in seinem "großen Erbarmen" die Negativität seiner Weltverneinung. (69)

14. I disagree with Barbara Meili's reading of this passage. Meili (107) argues that Fischerle's great "Verzicht" is a con act, a "Geniestreich der Hochstapelei," and that Fischerle "schwingt sich . . . zum Höhepunkt seiner Verwandlungskunst auf" to call forth this grandiose renunciation. My point is just the opposite: in this extreme circumstance, Fischerle lets his pretences fall and renounces all — not least his own detested self — and wrenches this response of despair from himself. Ironically, it is just the right response to restore him to Kien's good graces and save him.

15. Darby 61.

16. Fischerle is reminded of Georg when he sees two adjacent signs on a house, advertising two doctors: "*Dr. Ernst Flink*, Frauenarzt" and "*Dr. Maximilian Bucher*, Spezialarzt für Nervenkrankheiten" (368-369). It is the combination of gynecologist and psychiatrist that reminds him of Georg, as he recalls Kien's story of Georg's change of career, but the names "Flink" and "Bücher" strongly suggest to the reader the characters of Fischerle and Kien themselves.

17. Fischerle obviously has no way of knowing that the police *Kommandant* eventually returns Kien's money to him (355).

18. Duden's Herkunftswörterbuch lists the following entry for the word "meschugge":

> **meschugge** "verrückt": Das im 19. Jh. aus der Gaunersprache in die Umgangssprache eingedrungene Adjektiv stammt aus gleichbed. *jidd.* meschuggo. Dies geht auf *hebr.* měšuga' zurück, das Partizip von *hebr.* šągag "hin und her schwanken, irren."

19. The colour-symbolism of the characters in Die Blendung has very often received commentary in the critical literature. Blue is the colour of Therese because of her demonic blue skirt (eventually blue signifies for Kien the greatest evil on earth, the wickedness of womankind). Red is the colour of Pfaff, who is covered with fiery red hair and describes himself as "der rote Kater"; both Pfaff and Therese are depicted as dangerous tigers. This much is universally acknowledged. I submit that yellow is associated with Fischerle by virtue of the yellow church that he makes the headquarters of his business operations; yellow also suggests itself for Fischerle as the last primary colour, balancing the blue and red of Therese and Pfaff. Fischerle's loud yellow shoes symbolize his confident self-directedness and his hope for escape.

20. See for example Dissinger 98-99, 154.

21. Edward A. Thomson, "Elias Canetti's Die Blendung and the Changing Image of Madness," German Life and Letters 26 (1972-73): 44.

22. One further curious detail that crops up in the death scenes of both Kien and Fischerle is the lingering smell of petroleum in their noses as they approach their disastrous ends. For Fischerle, the petroleum smell comes from his *Taschenkalender*: "der Kalender ist da, er riecht nach dem Petroleum, in dem er vor Monaten einmal schwamm" (400); "In seiner Nase riecht es nach Petroleum" (400). For Kien the petroleum smell first comes from the newspaper he is trying to read in the fading light: "Er näherte sie den Augen, seine Nase berührte das Papier und saugte den Geruch nach Petroleum gierig und angstvoll ein" (509); "Petroleumgeruch war in seiner Nase. Feuerschein, Schreie, Gestank: das Theresianum *brannte*!" (511). A clear link between Fischerle's *Taschenkalender* and Kien's newspapers is the dangerous lure of ink, which, in the form of these documents, draws the characters towards death.

23. Michel-François Demet, "The Theme of Blood in Elias Canetti's Die Blendung," Modern Austrian Literature 16.3-4 (1983): 152.

I question Demet's assertion that Kien is the only character in the novel associated with the flow of blood (Demet 147). Demet claims that Fischerle's mutilation and murder is free of blood: "Fischerle, assassinated under atrocious conditions . . . but no blood flows" (Demet 148). While it is true that there is no explicit mention of blood in the scene of Fischerle's butchering, there is also no direct statement about the absence of blood, and the reader's imagination naturally supplies great quantities of it. The narration in the account of the killing is extremely spare and colourless; there is no light in the *Pensionistin*'s room; and it is very difficult to imagine how Fischerle's hump could be removed at all; but despite these obstacles to visualizing the event, blood would seem to be an essential, if deliberately omitted detail.

V. Conclusion

This thesis has examined several important aspects of Fischerle's role in Die Blendung. Based on Barbara Meili's model of Fischerle as a "Konstrukt," Chapter III analyzed the figure of Fischerle as a composite of his grotesque features, the conditioning facts of his life (his Jewishness, his poverty etc.), his mental adaptability and agility, his remarkable fantasies, his obsession with chess and his ambition of travelling to America to become *Schachweltmeister*. Throughout the chapter, attention was drawn to the function of the salient imagery and motifs associated with Fischerle. Fischerle's special quality as a self-conscious, self-critical figure, who more than any other character communicates a sense of life in the novel and excites the reader's hopes for his further adventures, was underscored in this section of the study.

Chapter IV of this study attempted to show how the Kien-Fischerle dynamic is reflected and reinforced in a pattern of imagery and metaphor that relates the two figures to one another. It was suggested that this pattern of imagery, in its play on the "sympathetic" overlap of the characters, which, however, is always grotesquely undermined, evokes a teasing pathos for the reader.

In these discussions of the imagery associated with Fischerle, considerations of Canetti's theory of crowds and power were for the most part set aside. There is certainly a "crowd" aspect to Fischerle's chess (and money) fantasies; one might also argue that there is clearly a dimension of crowd-symbolism in the imagery relating Fischerle and Kien (the "crowds" of text, chess figures, roses, words etc., blending and fragmenting). But it has not been my purpose to elucidate the mechanisms of crowd-symbolism in the novel. Critics such as W. E. Stewart, Dieter Dissinger, and David

Roberts (to name only a few) have dealt extensively with the question of Canetti's ideas of the crowd as a shaping influence on Die Blendung; but as David Darby suggests, the time is long overdue for the novel to be more closely investigated in and of itself, as an autonomous organic whole.

Die Blendung is a difficult novel to know well. In fact, even after repeated readings, to claim a comfortable familiarity with this novel would be to deny its very nature. Highly charged with irony, Die Blendung holds seemingly endless surprises, twists and secrets. Canetti himself comments on this when he writes in Das Augenspiel about Dr. Sonne's clairvoyant response to his book:

> Er sprach, wie wenn er auf einer Entdeckungsreise wäre und nahm mich mit. Ich lernte von ihm, als wäre ich ein anderer, nicht der Schreiber; was er vor mich hinstellte, war so überraschend, daß ich es als Eigenes kaum erkannt hätte.
>
> . . . . Ich erwähne davon nichts. In den fünfzig Jahren, die seither vergangen sind, ist manches davon zur Sprache gekommen. In Aufsätzen und Büchern sind Dinge gesagt worden, die Sonne damals erklärt hatte. Es ist, als bestünde ein Reservoir der Geheimnisse, die sich in einem Buch verbergen und als würde allmählich aus diesem Reservoir geschöpft, bis schließlich alle Geheimnisse deklariert und verbraucht sind. Diesen Zeitpunkt fürchte ich, er ist aber noch nicht erreicht.[1]

Dr. Sonne's vision of the novel will remain a mystery to us; Canetti confesses that he has guarded Sonne's insights as a private treasure. But aside from the challenges Die Blendung poses to studied critical interpretation, there is little doubt that a first encounter with the work can leave the reader stunned or even mystified. Die Blendung is full of tricks of perspective. As we have seen, the novel's most vibrant character is also an extremely resourceful trickster, and so Fischerle shall

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[1]Canetti, Das Augenspiel 201-202.

have the last word here: for in all likelihood, Fischerle's parting taunt to his stupefied employees will continue to ring provocatively in the ears of readers as well, who stand looking back at the novel and wondering just what has hit them: "'Lebts wohl, alle miteinand!' krähte er, 'und gescheit sein, Leutln, gescheit sein!'" (366).

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