

PETER ALTENBERG: A NEGLECTED WRITER OF THE VIENNESE  
JAHRHUNDERTWENDE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that "Peter Altenberg: a neglected writer of the Viennese Jahrhundertwende" is my own work and has been composed entirely by me.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a reevaluation of the works of Peter Altenberg, a neglected writer of the Viennese Jahrhundertwende. Although largely ignored by literary criticism, Altenberg's writing influenced German Expressionist authors as well as such major figures as Musil, Rilke and Kafka.

The text is divided into six sections. (The confusion and profusion of topics and ideas in Altenberg's work mean that my divisions may appear arbitrary at times. However, they broadly represent the most important aspects of Altenberg's thought, literary theory and practice.) In order to reveal the development of Altenberg's thought, individual topics are usually discussed from a chronological perspective.

In section 1 I present Altenberg in the context of Vienna 1900 and establish his relationship with Naturalist writers. Section 2 thematizes Altenberg's image of mankind and, more specifically, his presentation and assessment of the existential dilemma of the modern urban dweller. Section 3 comprises a critical analysis of Altenberg's conception of womankind and his "Frauenkult". Section 4 is devoted to a detailed examination of Altenberg's socio-cultural critique which, I propose, is inspired by that of Friedrich Nietzsche and Richard Wagner. Section 5 sets out Altenberg's blueprint for a new society, or alternative social order, based on his ideals of freedom, nobility and naturalness. In section 6 I deal with aspects of Altenberg's literary theory and practice; I discuss the formal elements in his work as well as the principle of aesthetic reductionism which he pioneered.

## A NOTE ON ABBREVIATIONS AND EDITIONS

<u>Wie ich es sehe</u>	WS (unless stated otherwise page numbers are taken from the 4th edition)
<u>Ashantee</u>	A
<u>Was der Tag mir zuträgt</u>	WT (unless stated otherwise page numbers are taken from the 2nd edition)
<u>Pródrómós</u>	P
<u>Märchen des Lebens</u>	ML
<u>Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens</u>	BL
<u>Neues Altes</u>	NA
<u>Semmering 1912</u>	S
<u>Fechsung</u>	F
<u>Nachfechsung</u>	NF
<u>Vita Ipsa</u>	VI
<u>Mein Lebensabend</u>	LA
<u>Der Nachlaß</u>	NL

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FOR MARGARET,  
MY MOTHER

Richard Engländer and "Peter Altenberg".

Peter Altenberg, whose real - or original - name was Richard Engländer, was born in Vienna in 1859. As a young man he spent part of the summer of 1878 with the Lecher family (whose son was a classmate of his) at their rural home in Altenberg an der Donau. There he fell in love with the thirteen year old daughter Bertha Lecher whose nickname was "Peter". His changing of name was not simply a case of adopting a nom de plume; it was the deliberate rejection of a role and identity imposed upon him by the society of which he disapproved. "Peter Altenberg" was the self-styled revolutionary, the man free of social constraints and obligations, the independent being at liberty to define and become himself - in short "der Mann ohne Concessionen" (WT 7) - that Engländer strove to become. By the time Wie ich es sehe was published in 1896 it would appear that Engländer had been largely successful in achieving his new identity as Altenberg. Indeed, it was this genuine attempt to live up to a moral and artistic ideal which first won him the admiration of Karl Kraus.

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## 1. ALTENBERG'S VIENNA

The world which lives and breathes in Altenberg's writing is the world of the Austro-Hungarian Empire of Vienna, caught between an old age and a new, between age-old tradition and modern innovation, between deep-rooted conservatism and radical modernity, narrow-minded provincialism and liberal cosmopolitanism. Egon Friedell writes of Altenberg in Ecce Poeta, the forerunner to his magnum opus, Die Kulturgeschichte der Neuzeit:

Er hat in seinen kleinen hingetupften Bildchen ein Inventarium, eine Topographie der heutigen Gesellschaft gegeben, an der man sich später einmal übersichtlicher und genauer orientieren wird als an den dickleibigen Zeitromanen. (1)

Altenberg's work is firmly anchored in actual experience, in the everyday, and in the concrete reality of Austria, but specifically Vienna, at the turn of the century. The physical background in his work is real rather than imaginary. It provides the reader with a real point of reference and, where it is described, in brief, often at the beginning of a piece, creates a tangible framework. Altenberg refers to actual streets, the Grillparzerstraße in "At home", or the Praterstraße, for example; to districts, such as Hietzing, Unter-St. Veit, Ober-St. Veit etc; to Vienna's cafés, to the Café de l'Opéra in the Prater, the Grabenkiosk and Café Chantant, to Venedig in Wien (2), and Ronacher's. References to Vöslau and the Salzkammergut are scattered throughout his work, and the setting for the "See-Ufer" series of Wie ich es sehe was probably Gmunden am Traunsee where Altenberg spent his own summers. The sugar factory of Wie ich es sehe had a real life model, whilst many pieces are set in Vienna's parks such as the Volksgarten, Stadtpark and Rathauspark. The Semmering provided Altenberg with a favourite theme and a title for a collection of his pieces, Semmering 1912. The narrow-

gauge Schafbergbahn, opened in 1893, provided Altenberg's theme in "Sanct Wolfgang" (WS 27-9), in which nature and technology are set in opposition.

This adherence to the details of Austria's physical reality enriches Altenberg's work, giving an almost three-dimensional effect. Altenberg's society, his fellow Viennese, are fixed firmly in time and space. Indeed, his particular concern is his contemporary society. He observes, chronicles and criticises its structure, customs and ethical code. Such strict attention to details of locality was, moreover, conditioned by Altenberg's conception of the essentially mimetic function of art. "Die Kunst ist ein Spiegel des Lebens" he writes in Fechtung (p.188). It is a conception of art which is not far removed from the theories of Naturalism, which stress the importance of rendering the evidence of one's senses exactly and truthfully.

Events in everyday life often acted as the catalyst of Altenberg's thought - for example, the disappearance of a young girl on the way to her music lesson (see "Locale Chronik" WT 159-165). Vienna's "Blumen-Corso", an annual event inaugurated by Pauline Metternich, "to climax the May Day Parade" (3), prompted an analysis of the natural and artificial and presented Altenberg with a rich backcloth of colourful horse-drawn equipages, of splendour and Viennese joie de vivre against which to depict, in stark contrast, the plight of the homeless and the colourless existence of the poor and working classes (see WS 213-5). The reconstruction of an Ashanti village as an attraction in Vienna's "Tiergarten" in 1896/7 enabled Altenberg to compare "civilised" and "primitive" society, and to measure the shortcomings of Viennese society against the standard of simple and natural humanity embodied in this people from the Gold Coast (see Ashantee, 1897).

Both Hermann Bahr and Hugo von Hofmannsthal were struck by the specifically Viennese flavour of Wie ich es sehe (4), Hofmannsthal entitling his review "Ein neues

Wiener Buch", thereby emphasising the innovatory nature of the book as well as its marked Viennese character.

Vienna, the centre of Altenberg's world, held a strong fascination for his contemporary men of letters. Their love-hate relationship with Vienna has been described by Hermann Bahr, who maintained that the Viennese considered life in the city a curse, but added:

Aber er bleibt. Es scheint, daß er von der so geschmähten, so gehähten Stadt dennoch nicht lassen kann. (5)

In spite of his preference for life in the country, for Gmunden and Vöslau, Altenberg continued to live in Vienna, stubbornly insisting that travel abroad was unnecessary - one could experience life to the full in Vienna.

Vienna's rapid growth in the second half of the nineteenth century went hand in hand with the process of industrial revolution and expansion which Austro-Hungary experienced somewhat later than her European sisters, France, Germany and Britain. The growth of the cities had provided European literature with new themes, with Charles Baudelaire proclaiming that modern poetry was nothing other than urban poetry which would result from the "fréquentation des villes énormes" (6); in Spleen de Paris he consciously sets out to realise the poetry of the capital. In La Peinture de la Vie moderne he declares his ambition of becoming the "parfait flâneur" who would, as Saint-Beuve did before him, use the thoughts occasioned by his walks as material for his poetry (7). Altenberg, who was greatly influenced by Baudelaire, apparently shared his ambition, as Hans Dieter Schäfer has observed in his essay on Peter Altenberg and the Viennese "Belle Époque":

Nicht die soziale Frage zog Altenberg an, sondern der Müßiggang, jene passive, ganz auf die Beobachtung gerichtete Haltung des flanierenden Großstädtlers ..(8)

However, Schäfer mistakenly emphasises Altenberg's fascination for the aimless and passive response to life of

the "flâneur", and overlooks the evidence of Altenberg's commitment to social questions. A piece entitled "Siebzehn bis dreissig" (WS 10-12) illustrates Altenberg in the assumed role of "flâneur" as well as showing his critical awareness of the burning social questions of his day.

The piece begins with a line which describes the background to Altenberg's fortuitous encounter with an attractive young cashier, and which reveals him in the role of a casual observer or "flâneur":

Ich kam einmal zu dem ersten Friseur der Residenz.

The encounter stimulates Altenberg's imagination and provokes thoughts on the fate of those working class women - of whom the cashier is typical - who, if they are to improve the quality of their lives, must be prepared for self-sacrifice and must subject themselves to the whims of men who control women's destinies in a patriarchal society like Vienna. In the slightly later piece, "Newsky Roussotine-Truppe" (WT 257-262), which is used to project a vision of a future humanity, Altenberg once again adopts the role of the "flâneur" who samples and records the atmosphere of the Praterstraße in early evening (see also below, section 5.4)

In "Siebzehn bis dreissig", which also recalls Schnitzler's concern with the plight of Vienna's "süße Mädel", Altenberg betrays his debt to Naturalism which similarly sought to expose the oppression of women. Although the similarities between Baudelaire, reputedly the first urban poet, and Altenberg, the "Dichter der Straße" (Friedell) are greater than Schäfer suggests, it is necessary to redress the rather one-sided view of Altenberg as the "arch-Bohemian" (9) or "Impressionist par excellence" (10) which has held sway in literary criticism for so long - for he was more than this. Recent revaluations (11) of his work have drawn attention to his poetic achievements, emphasising the strong formal element in his early works, and rightly designating them prose poems, as Herman Bahr

had done as early as 1896 (12). However, Altenberg's debt to Naturalism has never been properly evaluated. Even trenchant analyses of fin de siècle literature such as Gotthart Wunberg's comprehensive introduction to Das Junge Wien still tend to overlook the critical thrust in Altenberg's work (13).

Altenberg's work from Wie ich es sehe to Mein Lebensabend is populated, then, by recognisable characters and types who represent the broad spectrum of Viennese society, from princess to prostitute, from the wealthy middle classes to a humble street sweeper, who appears briefly in "Blumen-Corso". Petty officials (such as the "ärarische Zuckerbeamten" of "Die Zuckerfabrik"), gypsies, artists, café proprietors and their clientèle, the working class (notably the domestic servants of Vienna's bourgeoisie), waiters, chambermaids, pimps, süße Mädels and wealthy bourgeois sons and fathers - all emerge from Altenberg's work. In his early work he prefers to depict women, of all ages and from all walks of life, although middle class wives and daughters are his most favoured subjects. With the exception of the lieutenant in the series "Frau Fabrikdirektor Von H" (WS) and "Revolutionär" (WS), the military is conspicuously absent from his work, but in Fechtung, written during the First World War, he pays tribute to the gallantry and heroic deaths of men in the Austro-Hungarian fighting force.

A comparison of Altenberg's work with Leopold Andrian's Der Garten der Erkenntnis (1895), or Richard Beer-Hofmann's Der Tod Georgs (1900) will soon reveal the extent of his social awareness. While the work of these contemporaries is deeply subjective and egocentric, Altenberg's vision embraces his whole society. He suggests, in Pròdrómós (p 155), that in Wie ich es sehe he had recorded what he saw and was far less concerned with revealing the results of self-analysis:

Als mein Buch herauskam entspann sich ... oft eine heftige Auseinandersetzung darüber, ob man zu

betonen habe "Wie ich es sehe" oder "Wie ich es sehe"? Die letztere Betonung ist nun die einzig richtige.

It is tempting to compare Altenberg's desire to reflect the whole of his society in his writing, albeit in a haphazard fashion, with that of Dickens, whom he admired. In Bleak House (1852-53), for example, Dickens constructs a model of his contemporary English society and depicts people from all levels of it, from the landed gentry, represented by Sir Lester Dedlock, to Jo, the crossing sweeper, who bears a marked resemblance to Altenberg's StraBenkehrer in "Blumen-Corso". Altenberg admired the tradition of social criticism in European literature embodied in the novels of Tolstoy, Dickens and Thackeray, and recognised the deeper, truly humanitarian concern from which it stemmed. In his discussion of Tolstoy's Chadschi Murat (S 63-4) he identifies himself with this great literary tradition and, in addition, urges his readers to adopt a similar critical attitude towards their fellow men in the cause of true humanity. In an interesting piece entitled "Die 'Götter' meiner holden Jugendzeit" (LA 89-90), Altenberg lists his literary idols:

Meine Dichter-Götter Victor Hugo, Emile Zola,  
Boz-Dickens, Franz Grillparzer, Richard Wagner.

Such explicit reference to Zola and Dickens in particular - so obviously at odds with Gotthart Wunberg's literary categorisation of Altenberg which places him in company with Andrian, Beer-Hofmann and Hofmannsthal and, more importantly, in opposition to both Ibsen and Zola - is crucial to any balanced evaluation of Altenberg's work. His social awareness, his depiction of society and diagnosis of social malaise, emphasises rather his affinity with Arthur Schnitzler, with whom he was nominated jointly for the Nobel prize for literature in 1914. (However, the outbreak of war meant that no prize was awarded that year). The common cause of humanity unites both artists, and

although their literary techniques and styles differ greatly, their methods are often similar. Nameless types figure in the work of both men, in Schnitzler's Reigen, for example, and in Altenberg's "See-Ufer" studies where the individual is of interest insofar as she is typical of others in her age-group, e.g. in "Neunzehn", "Siebzehn bis dreiBig", "Fünfundzwanzig" and "FünfunddreiBig".

The initial piece in "See-Ufer" entitled "Neun und elf" refers by name to characters for whom there were real life models (see LA9). Nevertheless the girls, Rositta and Margueritta, are types. Rositta, nine years old, pale and delicate, embodies Altenberg's own ideal of feminine beauty. Moreover, in her he recognises the artistic temperament in embryo. Her love of solitude and nature, her dreamy, romantic temperament make her the opposite of her extrovert sister for whom life itself is far less complicated. The theme of this piece, a study of the artistic temperament which is then compared to a "healthy" norm, instantly recalls the dualism of art and life in Thomas Mann's early work.

Published in the last decade of the nineteenth century, Wie ich es sehe assembles representatives of Vienna's ancien régime, "diese altösterreichischen Menschen", as Hermann Bahr calls them (in "Ein neuer Dichter"), as if to bid them farewell. "Noch einmal trägt er alle Schätze zusammen, die wir von uns wergerwerfen müssen", Bahr writes in his 1896 review of the book. Wie ich es sehe provides an analysis of the state of society in 1896, and may well have been intended as a cenotaph for a dying century and an old way of life.

In the "See-Ufer" series with which Wie ich es sehe begins, Altenberg concentrates almost exclusively on the Austrian bourgeoisie, that social class from which he came and which figures so prominently in his work. As Egon Friedell notes in Ecce Poeta, he depicts, "Zunächst und vor allem, (...), die Welt der Bourgeoisie, der er entstammt" (14). In "See-Ufer" he pictures Vienna's well-to-do in a lakeside resort during the summer season.

Cocooned by their wealth, they are able to live their lives at leisure, relaxing, dancing, boating or making excursions into the surrounding countryside. In a later sequence entitled "Frau Fabrikdirektor von H", Altenberg focuses on the city life and pastimes of this class, the musical soirées, dinner parties, evenings spent at the theatre, in Ronacher's or in a Café Chantant. Attention to minute detail distinguishes Altenberg's descriptions of the life of the bourgeoisie, and he takes particular delight in describing female attire. "Fünfunddreißig" begins with a detailed description of the clothes of the principal character, a nameless thirty-five year old woman - her unusual straw hat, her dress of raw silk with light brown velvet belt, her parasol and red boots are described in turn. Her expensive and tasteful costume indicates not only her social position, but also her inner culture and refined tastes, as Peter Wagner demonstrates in his study of Altenberg's early writing (15). In "Fünfundzwanzig" Altenberg refers to the fashionable colours of the season:

An den meisten Tischen auf dem in den See rund vorspringenden Plateau schimmerte es weiss und lila oder weiss und grün. (WS 22)

while in "Es geht zu Ende", a young girl wonders whether the fashion would be for round necks:

Es träumt: "Wird man heuer die Ballkleider rund ausgeschnitten tragen?!" (WS 42)

Altenberg's interest in the latest fashions combines with an awareness of technical innovations and their effect on the quality of man's life. Whereas in "Neunzehn" Altenberg's interest in the quality of electric light is objective - he simply refers to it - his treatment of the Schafbergbahn in "Sanct Wolfgang" is coloured by personal opinion, for the railway not only mars the natural landscape but also prevents man from establishing a natural relationship with the countryside. In this

piece, Altenberg critically examines the adverse psychological effects of technological and industrial progress.

Wie ich es sehe is distinguished further by the co-existence of the old and new, the latest fashions and technological advances, electricity and the railway exist alongside horsedrawn carriages and the representatives of a conservative and almost feudal society. In the "Revolutionär" cycle (WS) traditional furniture - "die sechs geerbten Stühle" - in the revolutionary's family home contrast sharply with the newly fashionable Japanese style of interior décor and dress in the following piece, "Der Besuch", in which the youthful revolutionary figure Albert visits two young lady friends. The juxtaposing of youth and age in Wie ich es sehe is closely related to this theme; the co-existence of the old and the new, where youthful optimism and vitality are contrasted with the disillusionment and lethargy of age (see "Zwölf" and "Die Natur" in the "See-Ufer" series).

The autumnal mood of Altenberg's early work, his frequently ambivalent depiction of the golden days of the Habsburg Empire, reflect this awareness of a passing way of life and of the fact that the seeds of decay had already been sown amidst this rich, final flowering. The following excerpt from "At Home" (WS 44-46) with which the "See-Ufer" series ends, illustrates beautifully Altenberg's association of riches with decay, and mirrors in microcosm the wealthy and moribund upper middle classes who helped to seal the fate of the Austro-Hungarian Empire:

Fräulein Margarethe sitzt in ihrem Zimmerchen  
mit der kühlen Oktoberluft, den dunkelbraunen  
Tapeten mit den tausend gepressten goldenen  
Chrysanthenen und dem staubigen hellbraunen  
Thonofen mit den Goldlinien.

In 1896 Altenberg realised that the fabric of society was crumbling, and foresaw the imminent demise of the Empire: "Und wenn einst Alles in Trümmer sinkt und Asche" he writes in "At Home" (WS44). In the prophetically entitled piece

"Es geht zu Ende" (WS 41-3) he envisages the threatened position of the Austrian aristocracy and the bourgeoisie:

Hochadel und Villenbesitzer! Ihr sitzt noch in den Gärten in der Herbstsonne und fahrt auf den Landstrassen in den Equipagen ---! Ihr dürft noch die goldenen Lichter der letzten Herbsttage trinken, Ihr, die Georginen und die Krähen --- kraa!

The causes of his society's decline and ultimate collapse are comprehensively analysed by Altenberg in Wie ich es sehe and his subsequent collections. It will be seen that Altenberg attributes social decay to the unhealthy psychological and physical state of individual members of his society. His social critique begins, therefore, with a detailed examination of the individual; and it is to this, Altenberg's vision of mankind, that we now turn our attention.

## 2. ALIENATION AND ISOLATION: THE CRISIS OF MODERN MAN

### 2.1 "Nuda Veritas"

That Altenberg's writing should foretell, with such assurance, social change and upheaval as early as the 1890's may well have alarmed the majority of his contemporaries. They felt secure in the belief that life would go on as before under the watchful eye of their apparently timeless monarch, Franz Joseph, who was seen as the ultimate guarantor of peace and security. The Imperial Jubilee celebrations of 1898 which marked the fiftieth anniversary of his accession to the throne served only to reinforce this belief. And yet despite all the evidence of continuity embodied in the institutions and traditions of Empire, life in Vienna, the very nerve-centre of the sprawling Habsburg domains, was being dramatically transformed.

In Austria-Hungary the industrial revolution, which had arrived somewhat tardily, was accomplished within a remarkably short space of time. Indeed, Vienna had undergone so complete a transformation during the reign of Franz Joseph that by 1914 she emerged as "the highly developed centre of a largely prosperous, technologically orientated society" (1). In 1857 the Emperor had authorised the dismantling of the fortifications which had been in existence from the Middle Ages, and in January of 1858 a competition was announced for plans for the "regulation and adornment of the Imperial Capital and Residence ... of Vienna" (2). The resultant Ringstraße, a pot-pourri of vastly different styles ranging from the Neo-Gothic Rathaus to the Neo-Baroque Burgtheater and the classicism of the parliament building, was a triumph in architectural historicism and the pride of the "Gründerzeitgeneration" upon whose commercial success the modern metropolis was founded. However, while the Ring enhanced the civic pride of one generation by giving visual expression to its illustrious origins, history and heritage,

to the children of the "founding fathers" it represented little more than a series of unrelated façades totally removed from the form and demands of modern metropolitan life. In 1895 Otto Wagner repudiated the prevalent spirit of historicism in architecture in the preface to his Moderne Architektur by insisting that the "only possible point of departure for our artistic creation is modern life" (3). His views were echoed by his younger and more radical contemporary, Adolf Loos, who in a provocatively entitled essay, "Die Potemkinsche Stadt", which was published in the July 1898 edition of Ver Sacrum, denounced the historicism of the Ringstraße as a piece of deception. Even at the turn of the century this monumental thoroughfare functioned as a symbol of the fundamental dichotomy of life in the Dual Monarchy. While on one level the Ringstraße seemed to emphasise the importance the Viennese attached to appearance - something for which Altenberg would repeatedly take them to task - it also highlighted that love of nostalgia which, as Loos and Wagner each perceived, is characteristic of a society lacking orientation, self-confidence and a sense of identity. Both men considered it the duty of the architect to alleviate this condition by responding to the new practical and psychological needs of the modern urban dweller. Otto Wagner, for his part, believed that it was the task of art to adapt the face of the city to contemporary humanity (4). The designs he submitted in 1893 for a competition for a new development plan for Vienna clearly uphold this principle in their emphasis on the need for "efficiency, economy and the facilitation of the pursuit of business"(5).

Similarly, in the visual arts, a group of artists who (in emulation of their German counterparts in Munich) called themselves the "Secession", abandoned the traditional subjects and canons of art in a parallel attempt to express the truth of modern man's existence. Their common aim is perhaps best illustrated in Klimt's "Nuda Veritas" of 1898, a drawing executed for the first edition of Ver Sacrum

which depicts a naked young woman holding out a blank mirror to the spectator. "Who are you, man? What remains once you are stripped of the trappings of convention and tradition?", the artist seems to be asking. The question is taken up by Altenberg who attempts in his writing to penetrate appearances, to peel away man's social persona and illuminate his innermost being.

It seems probable that the impetus for Altenberg's voyage of psychological discovery was provided by recent developments in French literature (which Altenberg, like his father, admired) as well as by Hermann Bahr, a key figure on the Viennese literary scene who was largely responsible for the dissemination of French culture in Vienna in the 1890's. In an essay entitled "Die Moderne" (1890) Bahr urges his contemporaries to free themselves from their bondage to the past and adapt to the changing face of metropolitan life. For, he maintains:

Das Leben hat sich gewandelt, bis in den letzten Grund, und wandelt sich immer noch aufs neue, alle Tage, rastlos und unstät. Aber der Geist bleibt alt und starr und regte sich nicht und bewegte sich nicht und nun leidet er hilflos, weil er einsam ist und verlassen vom Leben. (6)

Bahr is convinced that many traditionally-held values were rapidly becoming anachronistic and that man must acknowledge and accommodate himself to his new surroundings. In "Die Moderne" he underlines the need for the inner reality to correspond to the external reality:

Wir wollen wahr werden. Wir wollen gehorchen dem äußeren Gebote und der inneren Sehnsucht. Wir wollen werden was unsere Umwelt geworden. Wir wollen die faule Vergangenheit von uns abschütteln, die lange verblüht, unsere Seele in faulem Laube erstickt, Gegenwart wollen wir sein. (7)

For Bahr, as for Klimt and the Vienna Secession as a whole, the key word is truth; their common goal to uncover and render the truth of modern man's existence or "die neue Psychologie", as Bahr calls it.

In an essay of the same name ("Die neue Psychologie" 1890) Bahr examines in greater detail both the contents and the form of this new psychology which in his opinion offered the most fitting subject matter for modern art:

Die Sensations nouvelles, die uns alle Tage auf der Straße begegnen; unsere Façon zu lieben, unser Mode der Moral, unseren Schnitt der Ideale: was die neue Zeit in uns von neuem aufgespeichert hat und was uns zu diesen besonderen, merkwürdigen und zukräftigen Ungetümen macht ... (8)

New sensations acquired in the course of everyday life in Vienna, love, morality: these too are the themes which Peter Altenberg elaborates in his writing. Indeed, we need look no further than his early writing to find the most consummate expression of Bahr's dictum: "der Einzug des auswärtigen Lebens in den inneren Geist, das ist die neue Kunst" (9).

## 2.2 Affluence and Alienation

The experience of man's existential loneliness, his isolation and alienation, is common to modern European writers. In his study Empiriokritizismus und Impressionismus Manfred Diersch diagnoses "Vereinsamung" and "Selbstentfremdung" as the common experience of Viennese writers at the turn of the century. He contends that this was engendered by their position in society:

Ihre eigene soziale Stellung ist die Voraussetzung ihrer Lebensproblematik. (10)

Their sense of alienation was rooted in the socio-economic reality of Vienna, and was a by-product of what he terms the "imperialistische Wirklichkeit" (11). The family background of these writers - described by Hofmannsthal as the "gehobene Bourgeoisie" - determined the nature of their existence, for they enjoyed material security without having to earn their bread and butter. Their families' wealth insulated them against the harsh everyday world. In the words of Franz Mehring:

Wer sich mit der handfesten Wirklichkeit des  
rauen Lebens herumschlagen muß, erwirbt sich  
nicht die Feinheit der Sinne. (12)

However, in itself material security does not vouch-  
safe a harmonious life style or personal happiness, and  
Vienna's youthful men of letters often felt estranged  
from reality and life itself, which they experienced as  
an oppressive burden. And while Hofmannsthal complained,

Mein Leben ist manchmal schwer, dies Abhängigsein  
von allem, auch dem Materiellen vom gänzlich  
Unberechenbaren ... (13)

Altenberg felt equally oppressed by life, which in Vita  
Ipsa he describes as "belastend und erdrückend" (VI 146).  
Like Hofmannsthal, he too was tormented by the shapeless-  
ness of his cheerless and uneventful existence. He con-  
ceived of his life as a prolonged battle against social  
hypocrisy as well as personal inadequacies, insecurity  
and "Angst", and he admired the so-called "Lebenskünstler",  
the man who, in his eyes, possessed the steely nerves  
indispensable to modern existence. In "Zwei angeblich  
'uninteressante' Tiere" (BL 71-72) he celebrates the  
"gesunde Nerven" of the humble wild rabbit which seems to  
him to epitomise the heroism of modern life.

.....Das sind 'gesunde' Nerven, gewappnet  
für den Kampf ums Dasein, wie ein Ritter in  
seinem Stahlpanzer! Sie können das Leben genieBen,  
wie es gerade sich darbietet, während es im Busche  
bereits verdächtig raschelt! Können wir das?!  
Lebenskünstler sind es, Nervenkünstler!

The contrast between the heroism and love of life displayed  
by this wild creature, which had adapted itself successfully  
to life in the face of death, and the angst-ridden existence  
of the unspecified creature in Kafka's short story of  
1923/4, "Der Bau", is particularly striking. Like many of  
their fellow artists in the Dual Monarchy, both Kafka and  
Altenberg were acutely aware of the problematical nature of  
modern life, of its inherent paradoxes and uncertainties.

For each, writing offered a means of coming to terms with and exorcising his existential dilemma.

Thus it is possible to interpret Altenberg's early preference for female subjects and especially for middle class women of all ages, who appear like Hofmannsthal or Altenberg himself to languish under the weight of an oppressive existence, in the light of his particular experience of life. He was attracted to them as subjects for his art because he recognised in them fellow sufferers, like him the helpless prisoners of life who lacked the power to shape their destiny and achieve self-fulfilment. Indeed, it is tempting to regard the society portraits in Altenberg's early writing, whose subjects bear so striking a resemblance to Klimt's sitters, as an attempt to articulate his personal problems and those of his social class.

The subjects of the "See-Ufer" series, for example, suggest by their dress, their manners and their pastimes that they are the representatives of a highly evolved and cultured society. Altenberg portrays them, like their real life models, free of all economic constraints and at liberty to indulge their refined aesthetic tastes. In "At Home", Fräulein Margarethe's prolonged sensual enjoyment of an exquisite pear suggests both the rather vacuous nature of her existence and the emptiness associated with her social class, whose wealth permits this form of self-indulgence. The "edle stille Orgie der Geschmacksnerven" celebrated by Margarethe recalls the somewhat overdeveloped sensual pleasures of Des Esseintes in Huysmans' novel À Rebours. He, like Margarethe, is the wealthy child of an advanced civilisation who has sought refuge from the sordid aspects of life in the world of art and sensual enjoyment. For many of the sons of Austria's "Gründerzeitgeneration" the pursuit of new sensations, of that which was different or "apart", foreign or exotic, constituted a whole raison d'être (14). And yet the aestheticism of this class had another face - a face which

was no less familiar to Altenberg and which manifests itself similarly in "At Home". For in this piece Margarethe, the youthful representative of Vienna's haute bourgeoisie, is depicted in isolation, sequestered in opulent surroundings which shield her from a battalion of domestic servants whose coarse manners Altenberg skilfully contrasts with her refinement. Her retreat into aesthetic isolation suggests the response of her class when similarly confronted with the threat "from below" and the fact of their political impotence (15).

Many years before Manfred Diersch was to interpret the existential dilemma of fin de siècle Vienna's literati and artists in terms of their social and economic status, Altenberg fully realised the negative implications of wealth. Far from enhancing the quality of man's life, great riches, he believed, were primarily responsible for his spiritual and moral bankruptcy. He too suggests in his writing that the rapidly amassed fortunes of the city's founding fathers lay behind the "Selbstentfremdung" of the younger generation, i.e. their crisis of identity and inability to see their place in life's intricately complex web. In the "See-Ufer" series he presents a number of potentially tragic figures whose aimless and futile existence is evoked with a deft touch and the utmost economy of means: their essential loneliness, their lack of self-awareness, is implied rather than stated,

One thinks for example of his evocation of the life of a beautiful and representative twenty-five year old in "Fünfundzwanzig" (WS 22-24), who everyday would appear on the esplanade with clockwork regularity:

Die junge Frau, die täglich um fünf Uhr auf der Esplanade erschien, war wunderbar schön und trug wunderbare Kleider. Zum Beispiel eines aus braunrosa Seide mit weisser und hellgrüner Stickerei.

Aber ihr schönster Schmuck war das Kind, das mit der Bonne an ihrer Seite ging.

Her life, which lacks substance and meaning, adheres to a pattern dictated by social conventions regulating every facet of her existence, from the cut of her clothes to the hour when she dines or retires for the night. Her day, like that of her slightly younger social counterpart in "Neunzehn" or of Christine in "Une femme est un état de notre âme" (WS 273-283), seems to lack all sense of inner necessity: "Ihr Leben zog an ihr vorüber", Altenberg says of Teresa K (WS 18), but the description might equally apply to this twenty-five year old's uneventful existence. Her actions, like her life, bear no stamp of individuality: they emphasise that she is a stereotype. The extent of her isolation is, however, revealed above all in her relationship with her child, whom she treasures as one might a favourite piece of jewellery, but to whose human needs she is blind. She is aware neither of the child's love for her nor of the child's need to be loved. Indeed, Katja seems to owe her existence to no real desire of her mother for a child, but once again to convention. To marry and have children, this was what society expected of its women.

In an informative piece published in his Nachlaß, Altenberg reaffirms that the task of the poet is to aid his fellow beings in the process of self-discovery and fulfilment. His writing, he suggests, has a therapeutic and cathartic function, not only for himself, but more importantly for his readers. He believes above all in its relevance for that social group to which - by birth - he belonged, and with whose existential problems he sympathises most. The following passage is worth quoting at length because it corroborates the artistic evocation of the lives of the middle class children contained in his early work, expressing in a more direct manner the common existential problems of a generation:

Ich vernehme es also durch persönliche Briefe,  
daß ich Söhnen, Töchtern, im zartesten Alter,  
helfe, ja eine geistig-seelische Stütze bin im  
allzu bequemen und deshalb langweiligen Labyrinth  
ihres allerdings eintönigen Daseins! Beethoven-  
Symphonien sind in ihnen (Frühlings melancholisches

Drängen) und sind zugleich für immerdar trotz allem in ihnen lebendig-begraben. Sie lesen viele gute angeblich wertvolle wichtige notwendige (?!?) Bücher, aber alles gleitet ab an ihnen wie Öl an Wasser, mit ihrem Leben hat es nämlich nichts zu schaffen! Da schreibe ich meine "eine-Seite Impressionen", und die zarten unverstandenen Söhne und Töchter aus reichen Häusern finden dadurch den Weg aus ihren Lebenslabirinthent! Nicht zu mir, zu sich. Infolgedessen trage ich meine Lebensbürde leichter, da ich helfe. (NL 108-9)

### 2.3 Alienation as a universal experience

Although Altenberg's attention is focused primarily on the existential plight of the bourgeoisie, "Roman am Lande" (WS) demonstrates his awareness that isolation is a universal condition which favours no one class. In this piece, in which man's existential isolation is related (as in "At Home", "Neunzehn" and "Fünfundzwanzig") to social status, Altenberg draws together the themes of alienation and exploitation. The handsome gardener, Georg, must be regarded as the victim of a class society, for while he must endure unrequited love for a lady of a higher social rank, Frau R, he is also the victim of his master's wife, who, it is implied, attempts to seduce him. Altenberg tells how Georg has been vulnerable to exploitation for four years because of his need to be in the proximity of Frau R. He is sustained by dreams and romantic aspirations, which provide a psychological gloss for the pathetic reality of his impoverished existence. (In his attempt to find compensation in fantasy for his lack of fulfilment in his everyday existence, Georg was typical of many of his compatriots.) But for Georg there would be neither escape or fulfilment. Altenberg suggests that he would remain the prisoner not only of his own emotions but also of the prevailing social conditions.

Both in "Roman am Lande" and the "See-Ufer" series as a whole the rigid class divisions of Austrian society are implicit rather than overt. In "At Home" and "Es geht zu Ende", for instance, Altenberg suggests, by their physical

isolation and an absence of communication, those invisible but real barriers which exist between men and women of differing social rank. In the latter piece he emphasises the intransigence of the burly coachman who is insensitive to nature's autumnal splendours and the ephemerality of life. He, like the servants of the Grillparzerstraße household ("At Home"), seems to view the fate of Austro-Hungary's ruling classes with indifference.

Altenberg's uncomplimentary portrayal of the working classes in the above-named pieces is reinforced by his description of the "ärarischen Zuckerbeamten" and their squalid environment which reeks of oil, rotting turnips and damp washing, and stands in marked contrast to his sympathetic response to the haute bourgeoisie (although his attitude to this class was ambivalent, as we shall see). The egalitarian and democratic spirit which informs his later writing, his evolutionism as well as his artistic theory, is not as marked in the early works which suggest rather a latent mistrust of the masses not uncommon in Austria's middle class Jews.

By rejecting the aspirations and values of his class, however, by choosing to live the life of a bohemian and mix with the lower echelons of Viennese society, Altenberg was proclaiming loudly his dissatisfaction with the status quo. Clearly he felt that only by renouncing his class would he be able to transcend his own isolation and overcome social divisions. And it is interesting that even in his early works he draws attention to the common experience of, and bonds which exist between, men and women from all social strata.

#### 2.4 "Der Welt entfremdet ... fremd dem tiefsten Ich (Stadler)

In "Nach Paris, Nach Paris" (WT 242-246) Altenberg evaluates the effect of metropolitan life on the individual. While appreciating the variety, stimuli and challenge which city life offers, Altenberg takes this opportunity to express the dangers such a life holds for the individual.

The enthusiasm of the principal character, the student Kodjo, at the prospect of a stay in Paris is tempered by his fear that he would be insignificant there and that Paris would engulf him. (Altenberg refers elsewhere to "der Wirbel des Grossstadtmeeres" (WT 165)):

Mein Ich wird versinken, nicht mehr zum Vorschein kommen in Paris. Für Jesus Christus wäre es eine Stadt, für Mark Aurel. Wenn man mit sich fertig geworden ist! Aber wir wollen uns erhalten, wir Nietzscheaner, nicht durch Geben reich und mächtig werden, innere Könige! Wir würden versinken im Welten-Lärme. Zu klein sind wir, um das Maass verlieren zu dürfen.

Only the most highly evolved man who had attained self-knowledge and had realised his ideal potential could assert himself in Paris, according to Kodjo. Other men would remain insignificant. Nonetheless Kodjo realises that for the developing man, the "Nietzscheaner", Paris has much to offer and is conducive to human growth:

Paris, ich schlürfe dich in mich ein wie eine Auster. Ich pölze mein mauerrissiges Selbstbewusstsein mit deinen grandiosen Stützbalken, Paris! Ich. Ich. Ich. Ich. Ich siege über dich wie der Floh über den Menschen. Irgendwo setze ich mich an und sauge. Die Stelle ist gleichgiltig.

However, the bubble of Kodjo's confidence and over-inflated ego is finally burst by his latent existential fears:

Ich versinke. Ich bin ein Unglücklicher. Paris wird mich verschlingen, verdauen, die Reste von sich geben in die Cloaken --- Lutetia Parisorium, Lutetia!

In Altenberg's opinion, the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation of Austria-Hungary had resulted not only in man's alienation from his natural environment, but also in his self-estrangement. This is implied in "Sanct Wolfgang" (WS 27-9) in which, by contrasting the attitudes

to nature of two women from different social backgrounds, Altenberg suggests the adverse effects of metropolitan living on the individual psyche.

"Sanct Wolfgang" is divided into two equal parts, the first of which describes in an abbreviated and unembellished style the excursion of a townswoman into the countryside. Significantly, she travels along the recently opened Schafbergbahn, itself a triumph of the new technology which Altenberg considered a very mixed blessing. For although he recognised that the railway could transport man quickly from the hustle and bustle of the city into more tranquil, natural surroundings, he was equally aware of the way in which it could disturb the intimate relationship with nature enjoyed by man prior to the industrial revolution. And in "Sanct Wolfgang" he is concerned with this latter effect. On another level, however, the piece implies how, in this age which admired reason and scientific enquiry (16), man was gradually losing his capacity to respond warmly to the beauty of the natural world and experience life on a purely emotional level:

Dann stand sie oben an dem Eisengeländer und  
sah auf die siebzehn Seen ---.

Die Sonne ging unter und als Jemand sagte:  
"Der helle Streifen ist der Chiemsee --", sagte  
sie: "ah ---!"

Zwischen ihr, der lebendig gewordenen Natur  
und dieser todten im Abendglanze war keine  
Liebe --!

By contrast, the second part of "Sanct Wolfgang" at once suggests, by virtue of its more lyrical style, an intimate relationship between its subject, a young girl, and her natural surroundings. Unlike her counterpart from the city she is fully integrated with and loves nature. This is conveyed symbolically in a series of images which depict her stooping to pick poppies, binding her posy to her belt and finally carefully arranging and tenderly regarding her flowers.

In this piece dress has a symbolic significance, acting both as a guide to the wearer's social status and as a mirror of her psychological state. The shimmering dress of "la femme incomprise", for example, not only suggests her bourgeois origins (since only the wealthy could afford to follow fashion), but also affords the reader insight into her precariously balanced emotional life. The simple, white dress of the country girl on the other hand suggests her purity and uncomplicated nature. In this way Altenberg is able to suggest, simply and economically, complex details of his characters' environmental background. His understanding of the interaction of social milieu and the individual psyche clearly owed much to his reading of Naturalist works, the techniques of which he eagerly adopted and refined. He was, however, equally indebted to Hermann Bahr, who, in his essay "Die neue Psychologie", appeals to modern writers to portray their characters "deterministically", i.e. against their social origins and background (17).

Within "Sanct Wolfgang" dress also serves to reinforce the fundamental antithesis on which the piece hinges and which holds that, whereas a rural environment is conducive to human happiness, city life is frequently the cause of psychological disturbances. Like Freud, who would later develop the relationship between neuroses and the demands of civilised life, Altenberg too implies that the nervous disorders of many of his compatriots can be ascribed partly to the fact that they are anxiously preoccupied with financial speculations and partly to the artificiality and rigidity of social forms. His writing also reveals his interest in the nervous disorders to which women were especially prone in his day, in their tendency to melancholy and hysteria, all of which he attributes to the demands of social conventions. And it is interesting to note that the remedy which he prescribes in his writing is identical to a cure favoured in the eighteenth century which attempted to alleviate nervous disorders and any

unhealthy tendency to subjectivity by exposing the sufferer to a natural landscape (18).

In an interesting piece entitled "In einem Gedenkbuche" (WT 37-42), which is dedicated to the Privy Councillor "S", Altenberg examines modern man from the perspective of "S", a man of the old school who still kept faith with the traditional middle class values of "Pflicht", "Treue" and "Gehorsam". In contrast with the younger generation (which in his eyes is maladroit and hampered by its overdeveloped sensibility), "S" is a clear-sighted man of reason, a true son of the Enlightenment who insists that nature be the measure of all things, but who, in this period of transition when life no longer had "secure co-ordinates" (19), has lost his bearings:

Aus einer vollblütigen, sicher und aus aufgestapelten Kräften von Jahrhunderten heraus funktionierenden Zeit ragt er einfach herüber in die complicirten und beschwerlichen Entwicklungs-Perioden eines neuen und noch ziemlich unbestimmbaren Daseins. Das macht ihn ein bischen unruhig, schüchtert ihn gleichsam ein, erzeugt Conflict.

The quick, breathless tempo of modern life and man's uncertainty in an urban environment which is at once colourfully complex and darkly intimidating, these are the factors which Altenberg holds responsible for the "Desorganisation der neuen Seelen" (WT 38). In this piece, he compares the neurosis of modern man with the balanced and rounded character of the Privy Councillor who is described admiringly as a "Bismarck seiner eigenen Lebensthätigkeiten" (41). Unlike his younger contemporaries, whose chameleon-like nature so fascinates Altenberg, "S" represents a breed of men descended via Bismarck from Goethe and the ancient Greeks, but which in the modern world is threatened with extinction. These were men of outstanding personal integrity who had the measure of themselves and who were in control of their environment and destiny. They, unlike their modern descendants, were conscious of and respected their

limitations. They conserved their energy wisely that they might live their life to the full and, Altenberg suggests, maximise their innate potential:

Siehe! Damals lebte man und kämpfte! Ein Einziger war man wirklich seiner eigenen Reiche, kein Zersplitterer! Jeder führte sich selbst zur Kaiser-Krönung, hatte Achtung vor seiner eigenen Dynastie in ihm!

It was no doubt with some regret that Altenberg, like the Privy Councillor, reflected upon those times when life appeared less complicated, when man wisely conserved his "vital energy" and lived in harmony with nature. First-hand experience of the Ashanti, whose spontaneity, vitality and candour earned his respect, convinced him finally of the superiority of the "naive" response to life which he upheld throughout his life as an antidote to the widespread psychological and cultural malaise (see also below section 5.3).

## 2.5 Types and Social Roles

More than half a century before Peter Altenberg first began to dissect the nature of the modern city dweller, Friedrich Engels, in his analysis of "Die Lage der arbeitenden Klassen in England"(1845), reflected upon the "Atomisierung und Isolierung der Menschen" in London:

Schon das Straßengewühl hat etwas Widerliches, etwas wogegen sich die menschliche Natur empört. Diese Hunderttausende aus allen Klassen und aus allen Ständen die sich da aneinander vorbeidrängen, sind sie nicht alle Menschen mit denselben Eigenschaften und Fähigkeiten, und mit demselben Interesse glücklich zu werden? ... (20)

A new image of man as a faceless member of society entered western literature in the wake of industrial expansion and the explosion of urban populations. In the work of both Dickens and Baudelaire the face of the seemingly insignificant individual is brought into sharp focus for one brief moment before being engulfed once more

by the human tide, while in the writing of Schnitzler and Altenberg the depiction of a depersonalised type accentuates man's loss of individuality, identity and fundamental humanity. Throughout his literary career Altenberg tended to suppress the individuality of his characters, whom he prefers to portray as representative types. Almost invariably he elects to use the personal pronoun in place of a proper name, for he was concerned to demonstrate the general validity of his observations on human nature. At all times he appears conscious of the universal relevance of personal experience: he writes in the conviction that his own existence epitomises the existential plight of modern man and shares Grillparzer's view that the little world with which he was most intimately familiar is but a scaled-down version of the world at large.

In two of Altenberg's earliest pieces, "Spätsommer-Nachmittag" (WS 31-33) and "Landpartie" (WS 33-37) - which each treat of the relationship between the sexes, exploring the forces of attraction and repulsion which Altenberg believes distinguish all such relationships - the characters are typically nameless. We are invited to regard them as instances of the masculine and feminine principle, i.e. as "Ur-Mann" and "Ur-Weib". Today's readers are perhaps more familiar with this "reductionist" technique in the works of the Expressionists, who, by omitting all individual and distinguishing features, sought to uncover the "essential" man or woman and to make of their characters universal symbols. Their technique is, however, clearly anticipated in the work of Peter Altenberg who was in many ways their forerunner, but notably in his use of types and in his desire to reveal the fundamental truths concerning mankind.

In the "See-Ufer" series the titles of a number of pieces refer simply to the age of their respective subjects, e.g. "Neun und elf", "Zwölf", "Neunzehn", "Siebzehn bis dreissig", etc. In this way too Altenberg suggests their general and representative nature, for each title refers

to a particular stage in woman's physical and emotional development, from childhood to maturity. Furthermore, by linking motifs - he refers both in "Zwölf" and "Siebzehn bis dreissig" to the slim, gazelle-like build of the girl and the young woman - Altenberg not only lends to the series a measure of artistic unity, but also underlines the universality of his observations. In his opinion all women, regardless of either age or class, long for a full and happy life and all are equally susceptible to disappointment and frustration.

In view of the fact that it is the Expressionist writers who are usually accredited with popularising the use of types as a means of expressing the importance attached to social roles (which, they believed, posed a threat to individual fulfilment), it is interesting to find Altenberg already well established in this practice in 1896. In the initial study of the "Revolutionär" cycle (WS 98f), "Gesellschaft", which presents a typical gathering of polite society, we find the characters designated in the following manner: "Haustöchterchen", "Haussohn". Their guests are clearly representative of the types generally found at fashionable Viennese soirées, the obligatory member of the military, "der junge Leutnant", for example - what gathering in Altenberg's Vienna would have been complete without him? - or the disagreeable young man with whom one was nevertheless obliged to agree since he came from a wealthy family. In "Sonntag", the second study in this cycle, we encounter the "Hausherr" or "Vater", the "Hausfrau" or "Mutter", the conciliatory but martyred sister referred to habitually as "die sanfte Schwester" and of course "der Sohn", the revolutionary himself. Although the interfamily tensions and generational conflict portrayed in "Sonntag" were modelled on the fraught atmosphere of the Engländer household, Altenberg considers them representative of the clash between the established social order (i.e. bourgeois values) and the emergent order or the "neue Hauch" proclaimed by the revolutionary.

While in the work of modern authors such as Altenberg, Schnitzler and the Expressionists the use of types reflects a new awareness of man's social persona, the practice itself dates from ancient times, when it was determined not only by the desire to attain universal significance but also to heighten the comic and satirical effect of particular works. In more recent times, Dickens and Thackeray were amongst those writing in the tradition of social criticism who employed social stereotypes to a similar end. And in the work of Peter Altenberg, who particularly admired and aligned himself with this tradition, the use of types is often governed by a comparable comic and critical intention.

In the "Revolutionär" cycle, for example, Albert's fervour and the solemnity of his radical idealism is tempered by Altenberg's pervasive humour which pokes fun at this would-be revolutionary who, like many of his peers, longed to purge the bourgeois mentality. His diction, which in "Gesellschaft" has a particularly Nietzschean ring, suggesting Dionysian abandon and a Promethean rebellion against the established order, encapsulates the mood of fin de siècle Vienna's youthful malcontents, who, finding themselves in conflict with their society and its values, had turned to the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche for inspiration and guidance. And although Altenberg obviously respected and shared their serious intentions and revolutionary zeal, he was struck nonetheless by the comedy inherent in the pose of the somewhat over-inflated figure of the self-styled revolutionary.

His characterisation of Albert Königsberg, who is more complex in his conception than any other figure in his work, betrays the ambivalent nature of Altenberg's attitude towards the young radicals with whom he identified. For while Königsberg is imbued with many of his creator's own characteristics and acts as the spokesman for Altenberg's views on art, religion, diet and hygiene, he is treated with detachment and even ridiculed. The gravity of his

philosophical ideals is frequently undermined by humour. There is, for example, comic incongruity in Königsberg's identification with Danton, Marat and Robespierre which is all the more striking when one takes into account his immediate revolutionary goal, the departure from traditional Sunday fare, 'Juliensuppe' - such is the vision of the domestic revolutionary! In "Der Besuch" the serious reformatory zest of the revolutionary is set against his extraordinary capacity for "marrons glacés". In this way, Altenberg suggests the naivety of this young idealist.

By contrast with the revolutionary, the character of the housewife or mother is more in the nature of a cardboard cut-out whose superficiality and facile views Altenberg is intent on exposing. An examination of her speeches reveals the extent to which she identifies with her social role as a mother and the lady of the house. She affects disdain for the more intellectual interests of her husband, restricting herself to comments concerning more mundane matters such as heating and diet. Even in this area, however, her comments appear to be thoughtless, mechanical responses which reveal her reluctance to question, let alone depart from, the habits of a lifetime. So complacent is she that she would rather repeat the opinions of others than attempt to form one independently (see WS 104). Like many of her social counterparts portrayed by Altenberg in "See-Ufer", she appears to have lost her self-identity, so completely is her personality submerged in her social role. However, whereas Altenberg is sympathetic towards the plight of his middle class subjects in "See-Ufer", his attitude towards this housewife is critical. He is especially critical of the narrow-mindedness which she epitomises and which he considers a major obstacle to change. In his writing she represents the element of stagnation in bourgeois society which, he emphasises, must be overcome in the cause of cultural renewal.

Throughout his literary career Altenberg continues to favour the type over the individual, perhaps because he knows that only by elevating the particular instance to a general principle can he ensure universal validity for his personal and highly subjective world view. For despite his strong leanings towards subjectivity, Altenberg is concerned to describe reality in an objective manner. His early experimentation with an impersonal standpoint in "Blumen-Corso" and his use of the shifting or multiple perspective in "Zwei Dichterinnen" (WS 246-7) "Die Grade der Hysterie" (BL 10-11) and "Zwei Welten" (VI 185), reflect his desire for an objective and comprehensive image of reality. Similarly, in his characterisation Altenberg usually emphasises the generality of individual experience. Often titles of individual pieces are used to suggest the wider application of Altenberg's observations as, for example, in the "See-Ufer" series. Alternatively, Altenberg consciously suppresses any reference to distinguishing, individual detail. In "Fünfunddreissig", for example, he concentrates exclusively on the details of his heroine's dress and omits any reference to her facial appearance. Thus is he able to suggest both her universality and anonymity, and to imply her loss of self-identity. And yet, despite this tendency to overlook individual characteristics, Altenberg's early studies of women have plasticity and vitality, as a result of which the reader experiences the immediacy of their social plight and existential dilemma. Indeed, the vision of humanity which emerges from Altenberg's early work lacks neither psychological depth nor social breadth.

By contrast with these representatives of Austrian society at the turn of the century, the nameless types which people the pages of his later works often appear flat and lifeless. While much of the strength and appeal of his early work derives from his skilful use of types in such a way that his vision of humanity is considerably enhanced and broadened, in his later collections his

tendency to generalise detracts greatly from the quality of his writing. On the whole, his later works lack the fine psychological detail which distinguishes his early studies. His characters are more roughly sketched, while his view of mankind becomes increasingly polarised and subject to crass generalisation. In Vita Ipsa (277-8), for example, he insists that mankind can be divided into two broad groups: those who believe in change for positive and practical reasons; and those who promote change in order to appear fashionable. And in "Die Unterschiede" (LA 193) he argues that all men fit one of two categories. The first consists of those men for whom the sight of a woman is spiritually elevating; the second comprises those for whom it provides an opportunity to feed their vanity.

Almost invariably, the individuals whom he encountered in the course of his later life re-emerge in his writings as ciphers, as the embodiment of a particular principle or attitude which Altenberg wishes either to promote or condemn. The diligent and uncomplaining chamber-maid comes to epitomise the stoic acceptance of one's fate, applauded by Altenberg during the years of war and his physical decline. Female friends like Lioschka, Paula or the eighteen year old E.K., who gave up her work in order to nurse Altenberg through the last months of his illness, all assume exemplary significance in his later works. Lioschka, whom Altenberg hails as a poetess and romantic, shuns material riches and represents a spiritually refined and highly evolved humanity. Paula, on the other hand, exemplifies the understanding and gentle woman, the kindred spirit who stimulates spiritual growth, while E.K. epitomises self-sacrifice or selflessness. In her own way each contributes to Altenberg's ideal of womanhood and denotes an attitude which Altenberg believed would furnish the basis of a truly humanitarian society.

There is ample evidence in the later works to suggest that he was interested in the behaviour of the individual only inasmuch as this revealed the truth of man's essential nature or insofar as it could be considered as a

guide to the behavioural norms and values of his society. In "Vergnügungslokal" (F 34), for example, Altenberg's indirect criticism of Paula, a young society woman whose vanity and greed is juxtaposed with the more modest wishes of a beautiful kitchen-maid, suggests his contempt for the extravagance of the social class represented by Paula. The importance she attaches to appearances - she asks that the flowers she has just received be prominently displayed, "vorn, daB die Leut' es sehn!" as they are taken to her car - is represented by Altenberg as a typical bourgeois trait and one which he particularly deplors.

Because of his gift for perceiving, in the behaviour of the individual, general truths concerning the nature of mankind, Altenberg was able to imbue the apparently insignificant events in his private life with a wider, ethical significance. A piece like "Der Tag des Reichtums" (NA 81) may serve to represent a technique which Altenberg favours in his later works and which depends for its success upon the reader's ability to elicit a moral point from what would appear, at first sight, to be a purely anecdotal piece. "Der Tag des Reichtums" describes an exceptional day in Altenberg's life when he is indulged in all those things which he considered luxuries - the company of a charming lady, a visit to his barber's, a trip to Baden, a favourite meal, a drive through the country and the taking of tea, a ritualistic pleasure which Altenberg informs us in Pròdròmós (153-4) consummates each day in his life. Having enjoyed this day to the full, Altenberg tells how he wished similarly to enrich the existence of a young lady whom he admires. Indeed it is for this reason that he sends her three dark roses and an egg-nog, her favourite drink. But his attempt to make her happy backfires when the young woman shows herself incapable either of happiness or gratitude. (She thinks she is obliging him by accepting his kindness.) Altenberg's day of riches is marred by this revelation of the insensitivity and paltriness of a fellow being. Thus does Altenberg milk

the trivial incidents of daily life in order to expose human failings like vanity, insensitivity and ingratitude which, although common to all men, he found to be particularly rife in his own society.

## 2.6. Conformity and Uniformity

As the momentum of the industrial revolution increased and cities expanded with a new labour force recruited from the provinces, the individual experienced a new and potent threat to his integrity. Within the vast social complex of the modern metropolis it was not long before man began to doubt his significance and unique worth. Altenberg, in company with several like-minded artists and writers such as Robert Walser, Hofmannsthal and George, was especially critical of the way in which the individual was required to conform to social norms and set patterns of behaviour which, he believed, tended to hinder original thought and independent action.

In a recent examination of the image of the city in the works of selected authors of the Austrian and German "Jahrhundertwende", Michael Pleister makes detailed reference to the uniformity and "levelling tendency" of city life in the writing of Robert Walser:

Obwohl Walser auch diejenigen in der Metropole wirkenden Kräfte im Blickfeld hat, die die Einzelpersönlichkeit aus der Masse herausheben, prävaliert jedoch in seiner Großstadtdichtung der Gesichtspunkt der Vermassung, das heißt der Einebnung von Unterschieden und Divergenzen innerhalb der Gesellschaft. Vereinheitlichungs- und Nivellierungstendenzen stellen ein konstitutives Merkmal der Großstadtrealität dar. (21)

Walser's critical response to the uniformity and emphasis on conformity is typical of many writers who, like him, viewed the city with a mixture of fascination and revulsion. Although they recognised the greater opportunities offered to the individual by the city which, with its greater social flexibility, promoted a special form of egali-

tarianism, they were still more preoccupied with the unhealthy aspect and inhumanity of this "levelling tendency". While the most violent opposition to the uniformity and conformity of metropolitan life was to come from the Expressionists (from artists like Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, the extreme stylisation of whose Berlin street scenes expose this tendency as well as illustrating man's loss of individual identity, and from the dramatist Reinhard Sorge, who employs "Gruppenpersonen" in his play Der Bettler to similar effect), Altenberg resists with equal determination any assault on man's individuality.

In "Café-Chantant" (WT 221-4), for example, his extreme stylisation of the human figure in a manner reminiscent of Kirchner or Sorge, and the absence of individual characteristics, are particularly striking:

Fünf junge Damen sind es, Schwestern. Vier sind hellblond, mit tiefen Scheiteln in ihren seidenen leichten Haaren. Eine ist hellbraun, mit tiefem Scheitel in ihren seidenen leichten Haaren.

All wear identical black silk dresses and light grey hats, each with three black ostrich feathers. There is uniformity even in their language and gestures: they speak and act in unison. Moreover, the fact that one may easily be substituted for another emphasises the relative unimportance of the individual:

... Eine sechste ist in Reserve da. Plötzlich ist sie verschwunden. Wohin?! Niemand könnte es ergründen. Entführt, versunken?!? Siehst Du, wie gut es ist, dass eine in der Reserve ist?! Gleich bestellt man einen neuen Reservisten und ein schwarzes Seidenkleid und einen Hut Empire.

In addition to their stylisation, which has the effect of robbing them of their individuality, we see from this excerpt that the sisters have undergone a process of reification which, by stressing the material aspect of their appearance, focuses our attention upon the dehumanisation of the individual. Indeed, such was the influence

of the so-called "Marktgesetz" (first identified in capitalist societies by Marx) on all aspects of Viennese life that even the individual appears to have been treated as a commodity which could be ordered and purchased at will. In "Café-Chantant" Altenberg refers obliquely to this fact of modern life in his choice of the apparently innocuous verb "bestellen". Moreover, Altenberg suggests that the gentlemen dining with the café's star attraction value the sisters not so much for themselves but for the beneficial effect they produce. Their charming lack of pretension delights their companions and raises their spirits, as the count's inscription in Maggie's album confirms. He warmly recommends Maggie as a remedy for depression, likening her effect to that of Beechams Pills:

(...) Wenn Sie haben eine üble Laune, mein Herr, so nehmen Sie nicht Beechams Pillen, sondern soupiieren sie mit Mage, und Ihre Krankheit wird fort sein, ganz fort.

Although the comparison is intended as a witty compliment to Mage, it nonetheless reveals a stereotyped attitude to women and underlines the degradation of the individual to object-status in a predominantly materialistic society.

## 2.7 "Rolle" versus "Nicht-Rolle"

The Baroque tradition of "theatrum mundi" continued to flourish in Viennese literature of the "Jahrhundertwende", furnishing both Altenberg and Arthur Schnitzler with a vehicle for expressing one aspect of modern man's existential dilemma, the conflict of his social persona with his deeper emotional needs, his fundamental being. In "Die dumme Lise" (WT 113-122) for example, in which Altenberg confronts the threat which social roles pose for individual integrity, he has recourse to a theatrical metaphor to suggest how the demands of a social role result in alienating the individual from his inner self. (Here, as elsewhere in Altenberg's oeuvre, the term "Comödie" denotes vacuous role-playing and has bitter undertones.):

Und wie Du bist, einzige Lügelse, sind doch Alle in den versteckten Schlupfwinkeln, in den Tavernen ihres Seins: vom Momente des Erwachens am Morgen bis in den verlogenen, mit lächerlichen und unwichtigen Dingen vollgestopften Tag hinein, mit Kinder-Idyllen, Gatten-Liebe, Klavier-Spiel à quatre mains, Promenade, Kommissionen, Lächeln, Fragen und Erwiderungen --- Alle, Alle leben, als ob sie in einem endelosen Stücke von 1000 Akten immer, immer tragiren müssten: die "liebvolle" Tochter, die "zärtliche" Schwester, das "dankbare" Geschöpf, die "nervöse, in's Blaue hinein träumende" Jungfrau, die "montirte" Braut mit dem neuen funkelnden Ringe, die "besorgte" Gattin, welche ihren Mann "betreut und innerlich geleitet", die "heilige" Schwangere, zu der Alle gedämpft sagen: "Wie gehts?!", die "preoccupirten" Eltern, welche Carrièren ihrer Kinder träumen and ihre Schäden vor der Mitwelt verbergen und Alle, Alle! Ununterbrochen spielen sie Comödie ihrer Lebens-Rolle, bis sie crepiren, hin werden, erschöpft umsinken, wie Einer, der 70 Jahre "Hamlet" spielte oder "Tasso", ewig in lila Trikots und bedrängten Gesichtszügen, jeder Schritt eine psychologische Offenbarung, fi donc!

Frequently, Altenberg's characters appear conscious of the role they are playing. In "Man braucht Mehrere" (WT 193-201) Kamilla admits that she too is acting:

"Was geht er mich an!" erwiderte das Mädchen.  
 "Theater, Theater ---" trillerte sie.  
 "Theater heisst Komödie und ich spiele mich mit dir und das macht mir einmal Pläsier."

But the candour of this girl with working class roots is not shared by the members of Vienna's fashionable set and the bourgeoisie in general, for in polite society the emphasis was placed firmly on appearance rather than reality, the "dehors" rather than the "dedans" to use Altenberg's own terms. In a slightly later piece entitled "Maske der Vierzehnjährigen" (BL 66-7) Altenberg suggests that the ability to enact a part at variance with one's true nature is cultivated from puberty. The piece, which is written in the form of an inner monologue, affords the reader insight into the turbulent emotional life of a young girl, newly conscious of her sexuality. It consists

of a series of confessions such as the following which reveals indirectly that, in society, the individual's bearing is often consciously deceptive and that society is indeed maintained by necessary lies:

WeiB ich es, fühl' ich es nicht, daB der Hofmeister meines Bruders mich liebhat?! Ich muB mich stellen, als wär's nur ein Lehrer; aber vielleicht lernt man so am schnellsten diese notwendige "Lüge des Lebens!"

Altenberg clearly loathes such hypocrisy, and demands in his writing that the individual obey his inner voice. He is highly critical of those who suppress their thoughts and feelings in accordance with the dictates of polite society, and longs for a world in which everyone is sincere, telling the truth for the sake of their own feelings and integrity. Nonetheless, he is not unaware of the social anarchy which might ensue if every individual were to act in compliance with a personal - rather than the common - code of conduct. For he knew of the personal injury which might result from the straightforward expression of feeling and opinion. Although he believes sincerity a necessary component of social intercourse, he does not underestimate the importance of tact and diplomacy. The individual must learn to express himself, but he must also know when to remain silent in order to avoid wounding his fellow men.

In an interesting piece contained in Was der Tag mir zuträgt, "Eine Schweigende Runde" (WT 46-53), role-playing is scrutinised from an unusual perspective, through the eyes of the actor Friedrich Mitterwurzer, to whose memory the piece is dedicated. Mitterwurzer upholds the superiority of the artist vis-à-vis the average man who has but one role in life:

Ihr seid Ihr! Jawohl! Ewige träge unzulängliche Darsteller Eurer einzigen armseligen Lebens-Rolle! An Euch selbst geschmiedet lebt Ihr hin! Euch kann man fassen! Ihr bleibt Euch treu und habt Character. Armseligkeiten habt Ihr!!

The actor by comparison may enjoy and immerse himself in an infinite variety of roles. Where other men remain static, anchored to their being, the actor or artist constantly undergoes change, shedding one role for another, symbolising, perhaps, the great principle of movement, the cycle of life in nature:

Wir aber sind die Welt und ihre Wandlung, von Urzeit, die da war, in Zeit, die kommen wird. Wehe uns, wenn wir zu fassen und zu halten wären! Geliebt?? Gehasst?? Wir sind die Wandlungen der Welt!

This positive evaluation of roles and the personal stature of the actor is, however, balanced by Mitterwurzer's realisation that he is nothing other than the sum of his roles, that behind the masks he so successfully assumes there is nothing:

Hören Sie --- ich bin die Gestalten, die ich schaffe!! Sonst nichts, nichts, nichts.

Despite his lifelong championing of individuality as opposed to the unquestioning adherence to social roles, Altenberg realised towards the end of his life that he too had succumbed to role-playing. Like Schnitzler's character, Professor Bernhardt, Altenberg came to acknowledge that by refusing to compromise his individuality, and by adhering to an antisocial stance, he was in fact conforming to another acknowledged role, the role of the "outsider". This realisation resulted in Altenberg's striving, in the last months of his life, to liberate himself from this role which he now believed constituted a threat to his personal integrity. "Diese schreckliche falsche Komödie P.A. muß aufhören." he writes in "Geselligkeit" (NL 75-6), a piece first published after his death in which Altenberg expresses his intention of abandoning finally the society which had enslaved him against his will.

In recent times Altenberg has been described as a beatnik and a "drop-out" (22); these terms are misleading, however, since far from rejecting or abandoning society, he was very much preoccupied with it and he possessed a highly-developed sense of duty towards his fellow men. Although he was neither willing nor able to serve his society in a traditional middle class role such as that of doctor or lawyer, he came to regard himself as a kind of poet-priest whose mission was to fill the spiritual and moral vacuum of the times. (Because he deliberately involved himself with the physical and moral welfare of humanity, it could be argued though that he was after all fulfilling the traditional roles of doctor and lawyer in an individual and unconventional way.)

Despite this conscious embracing of the "poet-priest" identity, Altenberg frequently appears in his writing to doubt the value of social roles. He argues that in society the individual's integrity is invariably undermined. Every relationship and social function constitutes an erosion of the "absolute self",\* since in Altenberg's view it necessarily entails compromise and concessions. For Altenberg, two things are essential to the attainment and preservation of this all-important individuality: solitude and nature. While he considers the individual's withdrawal from society a necessary prerequisite of self-knowledge and fulfilment, he also believes that natural surroundings are more beneficial to this process of self-realisation than an urban environment. This extreme view which neglects the value of man's social roles is clearly a reaction against the nature of the society in which he lived. For fin de siècle Vienna was a world dominated by forms and an artificial code of conduct.

\* I have borrowed this term from D.H. Lawrence to describe what Altenberg saw as the individual's uniqueness or essential being. Its opposite, the "relative self", is the term used by Lawrence to suggest how the individual in his relationships reveals and realises only certain aspects of his inner being or absolute self.

Altenberg was particularly struck by the way in which individual behaviour was regulated by the conventions of polite society. In a posthumously-published piece entitled "Kultur" (LA 330-1) he laments society's lack of culture, which he attributes chiefly to the hypocrisy and artificiality of social intercourse:

Aber jetzt hieß es noch leider schlecht oder falsch Komödie spielen mit seinen Nebenmenschen, um ihnen dadurch die Verlegenheit ihrer Minderwärtigkeiten zu ersparen!

The individual, he observes, is constantly obliged to enact a part, to compromise personal feelings and beliefs out of deference to an interlocutor whose human failings are all too often blatantly obvious. Somewhat pessimistically, he concludes that in polite society "Man verlangte eine ununterbrochene Komödie des Nicht-man-selbst-sein-dürfens!" In this world in which external forms tend to conceal rather than reveal inner reality, the individual is prevented from being himself. In Altenberg's eyes he is an unwilling and, still more frequently, an unwitting participant in a comedy, a "Komödiant", staged upon "das Theater des Lebens" (NL 19).

Throughout his life Altenberg remained convinced that every relationship entered into by the individual, be it marriage or friendship, tends to compromise rather than enhance his individuality and to detract from his absolute self. In "Bleibe" (NL 81) he cautions his fellow man as to the dangers of role-playing:

Im Taumel eines fremden Seins verzehrt sich  
allmählich dein Bestes in dir, und du bist  
die Hingeopferte.

In Altenberg's opinion, all relationships entail self-sacrifice, which frequently results in the individual's betrayal of his absolute self, and implicate him in what is in Altenberg's eyes a "konzessionsvergiftetes Scheinleben" (NL 126). And although he is preoccupied mainly with the consequences of such self-betrayal on a

personal level - he believes that self-neglect of this kind is the origin of most physical and mental disorders - Altenberg is conscious too of its wider implications for society. He is at all times intent on exposing the discrepancy between appearance and reality and, particularly in his later writing, on unmasking the participants in the social masquerade.

Like Franz Kafka, Altenberg believes that the individual is truly conscious of himself and can fulfil himself only in solitude. He admires those who possess the inner strength necessary to transcend social conventions. Occasionally, he sees evidence of such strength in the daughters of middle class families, who renounce their security in favour of independence as, for example, does the young woman portrayed in "Vorstadtzimmer" (ML 185). More frequently, it is epitomised in his writing by the prostitute - or "Primitive" as Altenberg preferred to call her - as well as by great historical figures like Bismarck or Napoleon. He particularly admires the man who could boast of having made no concessions, the man whom Altenberg believed he himself exemplified. In "Die Nacht ohne Schlafmittel" (LA 242-3) he writes:

Niemand hat bisher je so Konzessionslos bis zu seinem 60. Lebensjahr gelebt wie ich.

By this he means that he, more than others, had acted in accordance with his inner being, that he had endeavoured to obey his inner voice rather than allow himself to be influenced by others. In his personal relationships he had remained true to his absolute self and he constantly advises his fellow men to do likewise. In a piece entitled "Endgültiges in sämtlichen Beziehungen" (LA 100-1) he offers this advice: "Tue stets nur, was Du aus Innerstem nicht lassen kannst!" The cardinal message of his works is, however, Be who you are!, Sei der du bist! It recurs with the frequency of a leitmotif and lends to Altenberg's heterogeneous literary output a considerable

degree of thematic unity. The individual should, he believes, endeavour to be himself in all things. His language, his gestures, his dress and home should all mirror his individuality. He is especially critical of the following of fashion, which in his opinion endorses conventionality:

Sich nach der Mode richten, ist bereits tiefste Unkultur. Es beweist die Sklavennatur. (ML 170)

He insists that dress should reflect one's individuality:

Nie wird eine Persönlichkeit fragen: "Was trägt man?!?" Sondern sie wird autoritär sagen: "Ich trage mich so!" (ML 170)

The follower of fashion, Altenberg maintains, lacks the courage to be him- or herself. It is equally important to him that interior design should be a reflection of the occupant's character rather than the realisation of an architect's dream. In "Zimmereinrichtung" (VI 60-1) Altenberg writes:

Ein Nest sich bauen, wirklich sein höchsteigenes, apartes. (...) Und jedes Nest ist anders, grundverschieden, hat gleichsam irgendwie den Charakter des Besitzers, des Bewohners.

To rediscover and express oneself in one's dress and home is more important than feathering the nests of architects or providing a fat income for dressmakers, shoemakers etc. Through his writing, Altenberg attempts to win support for his views on dress, which stress the importance of hygiene, taste and simplicity:

Man hat ewig und immer zu tragen eine den Gesetzen der Hygiene entsprechende Sache, eine künstlerische, einfache. (ML 69)

In Märchen des Lebens his diatribe on fashion is characteristically concluded with the following words:

Sei der du bist! ---  
 Nicht mehr, nicht weniger. ---  
 Aber der sei!  
 Und in allem und jedem! (ML 72)

In later life, and especially in the years of war, Altenberg's optimistic faith in man's better nature was diminished daily by the evidence of his senses which suggested that, far from realising his ideal of true humanity, Austrian society had reverted to barbarism. In wartime Vienna, appearance held sway over reality: hypocrisy and deception were more rife than ever before. Against this background, Altenberg's appeal to his fellow men to realise the "Wahrhaftigkeit seines wirklichen in ihm tief versteckten Lebens" (LA 241) or his "eigene Wahrheit" (LA 126) acquire a new note of urgency. Many pieces in his later collections hinge on the discrepancy between appearance and reality, and deal in particular with the conflict between truth - or more specifically truthfulness to self - on the one hand and, on the other, the "Lebenslüge" or social hypocrisy. In Mein Lebensabend, for example, this conflict is thematicised in "Lug", "Der Verrat" and "Warten". In the first of these pieces, "Lug" (LA 241-2), Altenberg reveals the extent of social corruption by emphasising that every man and woman without exception is guilty of ignoring his/her inner voice, of covering up faults and practising what Altenberg terms "Vogel-Straub-Politik":

Niemand wagt es, auch nur für einen einzigsten heiligen Tag der "Wahrhaftigkeit seines wirklichen, in ihm tief versteckten Lebens", das dennoch nie, nie, nie sich besiegen läßt ... finster-entschlossen ins Antlitz zu schauen! Jeder, Jede, suchen sich vor sich selbst und ihren Unzulänglichkeiten (Entfernung vom möglichen Eigen-Ideale) ... zu verbergen, und ziehen die Vogel-Straub-Politik vor, der, wenn er den Kopf in den Sand vergräbt und nichts sieht, glaubt, hofft, erwartet, infolgedessen vom Jäger auch nicht gesehen zu werden!

In "Der Verrat" (LA 125-7) Altenberg is concerned more with the implications for the individual of this "Vogel-Straub-Politik". He reveals how self-deception results ultimately in man's spiritual impoverishment and suggests that if the individual's personal integrity, happiness and health is to be restored, he must first become conscious of, and admit to, his tendency to self-deception. Finally, in "Warten" (LA 199-200), Altenberg's interest centres on the relationship between man's social role and what he terms his "Nicht-Rolle". As the title suggests, Altenberg's ostensible intention in this piece is to describe his feelings as he awaits the arrival of Alma Pt., his beloved. For once, Altenberg implies that the hours spent in solitude, in waiting, are unfulfilled. He longs for the arrival of his beloved, for only she may give meaning to his existence. At last she arrives and Altenberg contemplates how happy he might make her, were he to describe to her how he spent the day anxiously thinking of her. But in his society such candour is impossible, and on her arrival Altenberg lapses into a predetermined social role and engages in polite but meaningless conversation which seems to parody his actual feelings:

Man sitzt da und beginnt zu "plappern", wie ein schlechter, oder hie und da sogar guter Komödiant Seiner selbst!

The following lines reveal Altenberg in characteristic attitude, firmly insisting that truthfulness to self or integrity is possible only in solitude. "Allein war man bisher ein Echter", he writes. However, "Warten" does have an interesting twist in its tail, for Altenberg suggests that even the so-called "Nicht-Rolle" involves role-playing:

Aber nun, da sie kommt, da sie da ist, vorhanden ist, fällt man sogleich aus der "Rolle", seiner "Nicht-Rolle"! Arme Alma Pt.!

Here Altenberg's delight in word play and love of paradox highlight what appears to be a profoundly pessimistic view of human nature. For although preferable to the social role, Altenberg suggests that the "Nicht-Rolle", that is to say the attitude and bearing of the individual in solitude, cannot be equated with his inner being or true self. He knew well that even in solitude the individual is capable of avoiding or disguising his true nature, and of "burying his head in the sand".

## 2.8 Egocentricity

The extreme atomisation of Austrian society at the turn of the century nurtured in the individual an acute sense of isolation and encouraged a tendency to introspection or inwardness; this not only characterised much artistic creativity but also prompted it and, in addition, furnished the basis of modern psychoanalysis. But this increased tendency to subjectivity, which may be interpreted as modern man's reaction to his complex and apparently hostile environment, had another, less attractive, facet. In the eyes of Peter Altenberg and his fellow countryman, Arthur Schnitzler, what posed a still greater threat both to individual integrity and to human community was the egocentricity of the individual.

Towards the end of his life, his mettle broken at last by ill-health and the effects of war, Altenberg commented sadly upon the self-imprisonment or encapsulation of the individual who, he stresses, is "nur nur in der eigenen Seele eingekapselt" (NL 23). In his view, it is this which is responsible for the breakdown in communication between man and woman, within families and between nations. It creates an aura of suspicion around human actions and arouses man's more primitive urges, his self-preservation instinct, for example, which Altenberg believed seriously endangered human brotherhood. In Fechsung, a collection of pieces first published in 1915 in which he launches a vigorous new counter-offensive

against the barbarism which threatens to engulf modern civilisation, Altenberg bitterly remarks:

Die Roheit der Menschen zeigt sich nicht erst im Krieg, sondern bereits im privaten friedlichen Verkehre!

It is, he believes, man's insensitivity (i.e. his failure to understand or treat others with consideration), his blind self-interest, ambition and greed, all of which are the by-products of his egocentricity, which undermine still further the fabric of Austrian society and which (he suggests in Fechsung) have culminated in world war. Like Schnitzler, Altenberg thought that social ills originate in the self-centredness of the individual. Consequently, in his writing, he combats social malaise at its source, by exposing the base and selfish motivation of mankind's dealings, by dissecting its causes and by suggesting the means of overcoming it.

From the start of his literary career Altenberg was preoccupied with the problem and implications of egocentricity. Wie ich es sehe provides his first detailed analysis of this psychoneurosis to which his contemporaries seemed particularly prone. In his opinion the modern tendency to subjectivity, and above all the perverse pleasure derived by some of his fellow artists from publicly displaying their psychotic sores, is thoroughly unwholesome:

Das ist Nervenkrankheit, oder vielmehr, das macht nervenkrank; Hypertrophie des Ich. (WS 226)

He does grant, however, that nature provides rich compensation for those who suffer from this affliction by cultivating in them superior powers of observation and by equipping them with a lively intellect:

Aber wie die gerechte Natur den Blinden entschädigt durch ein überzartes Gehör und feinen Tastsinn, so giebt sie uns für diese Krankheit des Ich einen wunderbar feinen

Geist, Beobachtungsgabe, kurz erhöhte Intelligenz. Das Ich wird ein kostbares Objekt, an welchem man immer und unersättlich Studien machen kann, sich belehren kann, forschen, wie ein Botaniker, ein Arzt, ein Chemiker. Man repräsentirt quasi die Welt mit allen ihren Freuden und Leiden ihren Sehnsuchten, ihrem stupiden Leben, ihrem schweren Absterben, ihrem heiligen Wiederwerden. Und indem man in dieses zarte complicirte Getriebe seines Ich seine nervösen geistvollen Blicke dringen lässt, erfährt man etwas von dem, was der geschäftige rastlose Nächstenliebende nie erfährt und wird wirklich ein "Sehender". "So gleicht sich Alles aus ..." dachte sie. (WS 226-7)

As one accustomed to probing his own psyche, Altenberg was familiar with the benefits as well as the dangers of introspection. He suggests that self-knowledge, while valuable in itself, results in greater intuitive understanding of the world and of life. Perhaps it was his lifelong respect for Goethe which enabled him still to regard man as the microcosm, the ebb and flow of whose life corresponds to the pulse of all creation. Moreover, in addition to emphasising the unhealthy aspect of introspection through the character of Werther, Goethe's writing suggested to Altenberg a means of escaping self-imprisonment. For Goethe exhorts mankind to look afresh at nature and to marvel at its beauty and infinite variety. And as nature furnishes the basis of Goethe's "healthy", classical ideal which superseded the heady subjectivity of his youth, so too does it provide Altenberg with an antidote to the decadent symptoms of his society, and with a means of transcending egocentricity:

In sich selbst versunken bleiben --- einziges Verbrechen des Mannes! Aus sich heraus gehen --- einzige Pflicht! In die Welt! Goethisch werden! Rundum schauen und planen. Wie der Kondor über den höchsten Bergespitzen. (P 99-100)

In Märchen des Lebens (p 173) we find Altenberg denouncing vanity as "ungoethean":

Es gibt nur ein einziges Laster, die Eitelkeit. Sie ist ungoethisch. Sie führt uns statt in die Welt, zu uns selbst zurück! An den Anfang statt an das Ende.

### 2.8.1 Egocentricity as Psychoneurosis

While, in his later collections, Altenberg is pre-occupied with the social implications of egocentricity, his early works treat egocentricity more as an individual and psychological problem. In Wie ich es sehe he is particularly concerned with the manifestation of egocentricity in middle class women who, because they had few diversions outside the home, were prone to introversion and melancholy. He elaborates their specific dilemma in three pieces, "Handarbeit", "Das Leiden" and "Beja Flor".

In "Das Leiden" (WS 226-9) Altenberg provides the following vivid description of the turbulent emotional life of his youthful subject, whom he likens to a steam engine:

Aber das Leben um diese Dampfmaschine herum war stumpf und so drehte sich das Ganze um sich selbst wie ein toll gewordener Kreisel, statt auf einem ungeheuren Schienenwege dahinzubrausen bis an eine Endstation Endstation "Friede". [sic]

Altenberg's machine metaphors, unlike those of the Expressionists, do not usually have negative connotations (23). He apparently shares his contemporaries' initial optimism in the latest technology as long as it continued to enhance man's life, and perceives fundamental similarities between the human organism and the machine. He recognises that in order for each to function properly all component parts must be kept in good repair. And just as an outlet for excess energy is required to prevent machinery from malfunctioning, so too does man's soul require a safe channel for excess emotion or, to use Altenberg's term, "Ventilklappen der Seele" to ensure its well being.

Altenberg is especially sensitive to the difficulties encountered by women in their search for a suitable outlet for their emotions which, he believes, holds the key to their physical and psychological health. "Dieses heilige Auslöschen des Ich ist die Gesundheit des Weibes!" he maintains in "Das Leiden", in which he also provides some suggestions as to how women might surmount their tendency to introversion. The love of a man, an absorbing task, a sound beating, these tried means which offered release for some women were, however, powerless to liberate the nameless heroine of "Das Leiden" from the tyrannical influence of her ego which is personified as Nero, Caligula and an unvanquished Titan. As a last resort, Altenberg suggests that narcotics such as alcohol and tobacco offer fleeting but false contentment.

In "Handarbeit" (WS 177-81) Altenberg adds his support to the argument that artistic creativity performs a valuable cathartic and therapeutic function, providing release for those who might otherwise suffer on account of their refined sensibilities and overactive imagination. The subject, a striking young lady with an exotic, oriental appearance, is accustomed to giving free rein to her fantasy in her needlework; she recognises that this provides her with the means to exorcise longings that, were they to remain unfulfilled, might induce a state of melancholy:

Einmal sagte sie: "Nadel-Malerei ist, die schöne künstlerische Welt, nach welcher wir uns sehnen, in Seide verwandeln, die Sehnsucht unseres Herzens gleichsam auflösen in schattirten Seidengeflechten, sie los werden, sich befreien mit jedem seidenen Stiche, sie aus uns herausstellen als seidene Organisation für sich, ein kleines seidenes Kind gebären ---".

Unlike many of her social peers who "discover" themselves only when their being is wholly submerged in a loving relationship, this young woman has no need of marriage. For her art not only guarantees her emotional equilibrium, but

also provides her with the means both to express herself and, since it reflects her subconscious states, to understand her inner life.

For the tormented heroine of "Das Leiden", however, "deliverance" from self-imprisonment comes from a very different quarter. The second part of this study suggests how she is inspired by the example of the Dutch beauty Lidvine, whose story, as it is told by J.K. Huysmans in his novel En route, is incorporated by Altenberg into "Das Leiden". For thirty-five years Lidvine willingly endures the agony of what is described by Huysmans as "la terrible maladie du Moyen Age" so that she might expiate through her suffering the sins of others. Her extreme act of self-abnegation, recounted here at some length, epitomises that unselfish love of humanity or "selflessness" which Altenberg upholds as an example not just to the anonymous heroine of "Das Leiden" but to all mankind. Throughout his literary career Altenberg stresses again and again the importance of selflessness, describing it in Nachfechtung (p 15) as "die Religion aller Religionen", while in Fechtung (p 148-9) he refers to "die Gnade der Selbstlosigkeit, die aller Religionen einzig wertvoller Kern ist". He firmly believes that the key to social cohesion, and indeed the future of humanity, resides with the individual and his capacity for selfless altruistic behaviour.

In "Beja Flor" (WS 191-5), however, Altenberg views self-sacrifice from a complementary angle and suggests how one woman's immersion in the lives of others has resulted in her unhappiness and loss of self-identity:

Aber die reine, die wahre Christin war sie, denn sie hatte die Leidensstationen durchgemacht und hatte ihr Ich verloren und lebte in denen, die nicht mehr waren und lebte für die, die waren und für die unschuldigen, intelligenten Thiere ---.

Like her social counterpart in "Zwölf", she can no longer bathe those around her in love, for her warm human emotions have been exhausted, her vital juices drained,

Clearly, Altenberg recognises that the core of the religion he preached - selflessness and self-abnegation - cannot bring happiness to all its adherents, and that the self-neglect which it occasionally entails can have as serious implications for the individual as egocentricity. For this reason he takes pains, particularly in his later works, to remind his readers - as Grillparzer does - of the value of "Sammlung", of concentration and self-possession, which he hopes might offset any tendency to self-neglect. In Fechsung (p 25), for example, he warns young girls of the dangers of "amusements", which, by constantly distracting their attention and allowing them little time for reflection and self-analysis, undermine their intellectual and spiritual growth. There is, however, one other form of egocentricity or preoccupation with the self of which Altenberg approves: this is the cult of physical fitness which (Robert Musil suggests in Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften) was as popular at the turn of the century as it is in our own day. In "Handarbeit", for instance, Altenberg describes the subject's habit of taking a hot bath each day as "eine ziemlich gesunde und unschädliche Concentration auf das eigene Ich". Indeed, the value of bathing is but one aspect of the programme for "Lebensreform" formulated by Altenberg to combat the symptoms of decadence in his contemporary society; and although the programme was not fully detailed until 1906, which witnessed the publication of Pròdrómós, its salient features are contained in the first edition of Wie ich es sehe. Because Altenberg considers physical fitness the necessary prerequisite of the regeneration of the individual and indeed of society as a whole, he does not outlaw that form of vanity which finds expression in a striving for physical perfection.

Published in 1904, the fourth edition of Wie ich es sehe contains a piece which, because it anticipates Altenberg's treatment of egocentricity in his later works, merits close attention. While his later pieces - for the



most part unbridled diatribes which lack the formal and artistic qualities of the early work - tend to numb the reader by their very repetitiveness, "Verkehr zwischen Menschen" (p 254-6) is a more compelling, naturalistic study of those human deficiencies which Altenberg sought to eradicate from his society. Set in the familiar haunt of Vienna's demi-monde, the Nachtcafé, the piece has a strong local flavour to which the use of Viennese dialect also contributes. It opens with a description of two well-heeled artists engaged in a lively discussion of that cardinal vice, egocentricity; in addition to introducing the theme, this establishes the value system according to which their subsequent conduct may be judged:

Die beiden wohlgestallten Künstler sassen im kleinen Nachtcafé und besprachen es emsig, wie brutal der Ichismus der Nebenmenschen wäre! Das Wort "Ichismus" sprachen sie so aus, wie wenn sie sagten: "Die übrige Menschheit sagt nämlich, Egoismus"!

Already in this brief paragraph Altenberg implies his criticism of the affectations of the artist figure which made him an easy target for satire. He deplores the self-conceit which enables such men to sit in judgement of others while they themselves are guilty of inhumanity, insensitivity and selfishness. In "Verkehr zwischen Menschen" he exposes their harsh and unsympathetic treatment of a young woman threatened with eviction whom they are clearly in a position to help morally and financially. Instead, they demonstrate by their suggestions as to how she might best repay her debt to her landlady - in itself a pointless exercise since she has no steady income - their reluctance to commit themselves. Moreover, by skilfully juxtaposing the substance of their conversation (their condemnation of the blind egotism of a certain Herr B.) with their actual failure to respond to the plight of an unfortunate in their midst, Altenberg highlights their own brutal egocentricity and hypocrisy.

Although more scathing in his attacks upon the pretentious moral stance of the artist figure, Altenberg is equally aware that the callous self-interest displayed by this class can in fact be traced in all strata of his society. In "Verkehr zwischen Menschen" he describes how, after the exit of the artists, a "poor" waiter (from whom we might expect more sympathy for Mitzi because of their shared social background) steps forward with an offer of assistance. However, his apparent concern is ultimately revealed as a sham, for having wormed his way into her affections and having gratified his own physical desire, he too abandons her to her fate. With this the full irony of the title "Verkehr zwischen Menschen" becomes apparent. For in this world of the night café, which in Neues Altes (149-50) Altenberg describes as the "Abbild der großen, noch viel miserableren (Welt)", genuine human concern has been superseded by crass self-interest, and interpersonal relationships inevitably flounder upon the rock of mankind's insensitivity and inhumanity.

#### 2.8.2 "Selbstlosigkeit: Ein hygienisches Märchen"

In Pròdrómós Altenberg devotes little space to the personal and social problems raised by the egocentricity of the individual. He does, however, encourage the individual to become more circumspect, to transcend his limited family and business concerns (which Altenberg condemns as proof of his prejudice, superficiality and inhumanity), and to cultivate instead greater social awareness and deeper humanity (see p 99-100). In addition, he emphasises the value of selfless love between man and woman, and argues - somewhat bizarrely - that while egocentricity is itself the result of poor digestion, it may also cause this physical disorder.

Although the works which predate Pròdrómós already reflect his awareness of the interdependency of body and soul, Altenberg only fully realised the relationship between the physical, moral and psychological aspects of being around 1906. In "Die Selbstlosigkeit (Ein hygienisches

Märchen)" (ML 150-1) he adapts the conventions of the fairy tale to his own moral and didactic purpose, in order to illustrate how physical complaints - and, more specifically, disorders of the digestive system - originate in immoral behaviour. Indeed, this idea continued to fascinate Altenberg throughout his life. He believed that all manner of vices, chief amongst them that blind self-interest which eschews the common good, are avenged on bodily functions.

Unsere Darmnerven üben in uns eine Art  
physiologischer Moral aus, sie belohnen und  
 sie strafen jegliches Vergehen gegen die  
 "göttliche Natur im Menschen"!

he writes in "Die Selbstlosigkeit", while in Fechsung he voices his peculiar belief that Iago, Franz Moor, Macbeth, Mephisto, Hamlet and Wallenstein all suffered from constipation for their sins! However, in this hygienic fairy tale Altenberg is more concerned with prescribing "die Medizin Selbstlosigkeit" as a remedy for this ailment. He is careful to distinguish between true selflessness, which is motivated by our genuine feelings for others, and a more spurious variety which stems from a desire for self-gratification and a desire to promote self-interest.

Keine Selbstlosigkeit belohnt sich jedoch  
 die nicht freudigen Herzens geschieht.

he cautions his fellow men, and in a clutch of short pieces entitled "Lies es aufmerksam. Ein Rückfall in Pròdrómós" (ML 144-7) Altenberg describes the benefits of genuine self-sacrifice (interestingly referred to here as "eine Form des Edelegoismus") as "erhöhten Lebensenergien" or the increase of those vital energies which, Altenberg suggests, may enhance the quality of man's physical and spiritual life.

Given that man is imprisoned by his own, at times tyrannical, ego and that his perception of others is subjective and as such frequently unjust, how then is

meaningful intercourse, friendship and human community possible? This is the question which preoccupies Altenberg in his middle age and which overshadows his later writing. In answer to those of his critics who were perhaps weary of his sermonising, Altenberg emphasises that it is the duty of the modern writer not to uncover the hidden meaning of life, but to "expatiate" upon the egotism of his fellow men (NF 229). In his later works he is increasingly concerned to replace the dubious, double-edged morality of his countrymen with a truly humane, moral code of conduct intended to promote social welfare and cohesion. Indeed, the morality preached by Altenberg, which emphasises the value of selflessness and of giving rather than receiving, has much in common with the traditional Christian ethic which Altenberg embraced publicly in 1900. But how are we to reconcile Altenberg's lifelong advocacy of an uncompromising individuality, his ideal of "der Mann ohne Concessionen" with his oft-repeated appeals for self-sacrifice? How should we regard his attempts to dilute Nietzschean individualism with Christian ethics? In his study From Naturalism to Expressionism, Roy Pascal refers to the ethical dilemma of the Berlin Naturalists, for whom "the main ethical problem is to reconcile socialism with Nietzschean individualism, Tolstoy with Nietzsche" (24). Altenberg's personal solution to this problem consists of simultaneously advocating individualism and self-sacrifice, of encouraging a "selfless individualism", that is to say, an individualism tempered by a concern for the common good.

### 2.8.3. Egocentricity as a social ill

Before examining in greater detail the vision of humanity which emerges from Altenberg's later writing, and in particular his statements concerning egocentricity and its implications for society, I believe it is necessary to remind ourselves of some biographical facts which help to explain the extremity of Altenberg's views. Undoubtedly,

the unfavourable image of man which dominates his later works was greatly determined by his mental illness.

Pròdrómós itself may be understood as an attempt to overcome those debilitating forces which sapped the life blood of his society and, on a more intimate level, as his confrontation with personal illness. And although subsequent collections manifest his will to health, through the veil of Altenberg's "philosophy of life" we may chart quite easily the progress of his physical and psychological decline. The impressions and observations contained in Neues Altes and Semmering 1912 derive almost entirely from Altenberg's prolonged stays in the sanatoria "Fango", "Inzersdorf" and "Am Steinhof".

In his weakened state Altenberg followed the instinct of the stalked and wounded animal which sees its best form of defence in attack. His illness afforded him insight into the abyss of human nature, revealing the parasitical and predatory nature of mankind. In a piece entitled "Ungeziefer" (NA 75) he condemns his fellow men as "lice" while in "Notiz" (NA 182) he has this to say of them:

Tiere wie Menschen fressen sich ja eh zu Tode,  
wenn man sie nur läßt!

He himself was deeply mistrustful of the motives of almost all those who visited him during his illness, for he believed that they hoped to profit from an action which he maintained should be selfless (see "Besuch" LA 255-6). He resented their intrusion upon his privacy (NA 41-2), their indiscretion and tactlessness which provided further proof - if proof was needed - of their lack of culture and refinement.

In one of several pieces entitled "Der Nebenmensch" (NA 68-9) which examine interpersonal relationships in Austrian society, Altenberg outlines his case against what he sees as the "ill-breeding" and "tactlessness" of his fellow men:

Neunzig Prozent unsrer Lebensenergien raubt uns die Ungezogenheit, die Taktlosigkeit unseres Nebenmenschen. Jedes falsch angebrachte Wort zerstört unser zart empfindliches Nervensystem. Nicht Distanz halten von der Welt des andern, die man ja doch nicht begreifen kann, mordert die Nerven. Die unverständliche Welt des andern nicht achtungsvoll und scheu behandeln, ist eine bodenlose Feigheit.

Altenberg was, as we shall see in a subsequent section, especially sensitive to the destructive potential of language, to man's ability to inflict fatal wounds verbally or to devastate, with a few barbed words, the frail structure of another's existence. He frequently laments the absence - in his society - of tact (see, for example, NA 68), which he defines as "ununterbrochene Anständigkeit des Herzens" (NL 63), for he sees this as evidence of true culture and as the basis of true community. However, he recognises that his fellow men still lack the necessary spiritual refinement required to translate his ideal of human brotherhood into reality. In "Der Nebenmensch" he argues, in a manner which totally compounds literature and life, that "unsre Nebenmenschen sind noch Satan, Jago, Mephistopheles, Franz Moor", by which he means that they consciously and maliciously subvert the spiritual evolutionary process. "Der Nebenmensch ist ein Gegenmensch", he concludes, "Er will nicht helfen, sondern schädigen".

In this antagonistic society in which one man pits himself remorselessly against all others, Altenberg holds out little hope of ever experiencing true friendship. In the ironically-entitled "Freunde unter sich" (NL 43-4) he remarks:

Es gibt nur falsche nichtssagende lächerliche Gespräche und schädliche Handlungen unter dem Deckmantel von Interesse und Freundschaft.

He deplores the daily abuse of the words "Freund" and "Freundschaft" by his contemporaries. For what they were happy to call friendship is, in his opinion, little more than mutual exploitation or "hidden transactions" (WT 70)

in which each party is governed exclusively by self-interest. He notes too that the designation "Freundschaft" is often misapplied to what he considers superficial acquaintance, "eine aufgezwungene Komödie" sustained not by genuine feeling but by the conventions of "polite" society.

By contrast, Altenberg maintains that true friendship can flourish only when each party is willing to work at a relationship and give of himself. But the most essential ingredient of any meaningful relationship, according to Altenberg, is knowledge of one's fellow beings, i.e. "geistiges tiefes Erfassen der fremden Natur" (NL 43). And yet to penetrate the surface of another's life, to attain knowledge of the inner being so carefully concealed from public view is, as Altenberg recognises, a formidable task. Indeed, we have seen already in "Der Nebenmensch" that Altenberg categorically denies the possibility of such understanding. The mental life and inner experience of one's fellow beings will, he suggests, forever remain incomprehensible and alien in view of the subjective nature and severe limitations of the individual's perception. In Altenberg's opinion, most men are incapable of the circum-spection and universal vision epitomised by his idols Goethe, Bismarck and Beethoven (NF 52). Moreover, he regards his contemporaries' lack of empathy as a source of much injustice and misunderstanding. He urges them to be more lenient and tolerant, to overcome their tendency to condemn, and to be guided by the maxim "tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner".

As he grew older and weaker so too did his attacks on the selfishness and "blinkered vision" of his contemporaries increase in number and intensity. A particular source of irritation in his later years was his "maltreatment" by doctors whom he believed incapable of understanding his singular needs. However, their lack of understanding and objectivity exemplifies a widespread problem which Altenberg met with daily in social intercourse. In Vita Ipsa (p158) he complains:

Die Menschen zwingen mich liebevoll in das Prokrustesbett ihres eigenen Denkens, und wenn ich dann "Au!" seufze, sagen sie: Undankbarer!

From the outset of his literary career Altenberg appears deeply interested in the nature and limitations of human perception, in the relationship between the subjective perspective and a multifaceted reality, which he endeavours to reflect in his writing through the use of a multiple perspective. In his later works, however, he is increasingly concerned with the ethical implications of our limited perception. Because he recognises that man can claim only partial veracity for his vision, he cautions him to withhold judgement. Moreover, it becomes a habit with him to view events such as the disappearance of a young girl or criminal offences like the case of "Der vierzigfache Frauenmörder" (LA 28-9) from an unorthodox angle (see also "Der Angriff" LA 227). In this way, he hopes to contest fallacious and unjust preconceptions, and to win understanding for the victims of bourgeois prejudice and condemnation. In addition, Altenberg is especially concerned to reveal the arbitrary and inaccurate nature of the mental image we form of others and, even more important, its implications for individual integrity and human community. The following "diary entry" (LA 354) written only weeks before his death reflects this concern:

..... Ihr zwingt ihn in jenes durchaus falsche willkürliche Bildnis, das Ihr noch von ihm begreift und das Ihr direkt von ihm haben wollt! Er darf nicht Der sein der er ist, sondern Der, wie Ihr ihn noch am besten brauchen oder genießen könnt! Verzweifelt möchte sich der Andere gegen dieses ihm aufgezwungene Schicksal der Beurteilung erwehren, aber der "Andere" arbeitet mit den geschicktesten, ja perfidesten Mitteln, seine Auffassung immer unentrinnbarer bei sich selbst durchzusetzen gegen den wehrlos gemachten Gegner. So leben die Meisten mit einander, nein gegen einander!

Altenberg's ideal of human brotherhood and social cohesion is implicit in each of his works from Wie ich es

sehe to the posthumously published collections. It underlines the ideal relationship between man and woman projected in his early works and is enshrined in the "Ashantee" series (later subsumed in Wie ich es sehe) which presents Altenberg's alternative to jaded civilisation. And in his later writing it is this vision of humanity which both prompts and determines the nature of Altenberg's attack on egocentricity and the deeply divided and fraught society which, in his opinion, it produces. Thus we find in his later writing that Altenberg frequently relies upon a technique which involves generating tension between an ideal, often made explicit in the titles of individual pieces, and the reality, a society in which cohesion is undermined by rampant egotism. In "Geselligkeit des Abends im Kaffeehaus" (LA 235-6), for example, we become aware almost at once that the contents of the piece belie the ostensible subject indicated by the title. Indeed, our expectations of a glowing vignette depicting the conviviality of café society are upset by the opening sentence which vigorously asserts the impossibility of such sociability as long as man remains anxious about his physical and spiritual well-being, his financial affairs and not least his social status. At best, the society provided by Vienna's coffee houses enables the individual to forget for a while those pressures which make his life almost intolerable.

On examination of Altenberg's collections we find that this technique is employed on several occasions, in those pieces entitled "Der Nebenmensch", in "Die heiligen Versteher", "Verkehr zwischen Menschen" or "Altruismus". In each case the title performs the same function: it establishes an "ideal" standard against which the shortcomings of contemporary society, and indeed mankind in general, may be measured. The technique is itself explicable in terms of Altenberg's "functional" conception of art. For, as Geoffrey Broad demonstrates (25), Altenberg's writing is governed from first to last by a powerful didactic purpose which has, as its ultimate goal, the

establishment of a more humane and cohesive society. His method involves the juxtaposing of this ideal with the social reality, and is intended to stimulate both a greater awareness of the real-ideal discrepancy and a desire for improvement.

In a longish piece entitled "Die heiligen Versteher" (LA 335-8) which is representative of the style and preoccupations of his later works, Altenberg develops a further variation on the by now familiar theme of human understanding and friendship. Once again he uses this opportunity to demonstrate how the egocentricity of the individual, and in particular his inability to identify with his confrères, proves a major obstacle to human community. While the primary object of "Die heiligen Versteher" is to illustrate the nature of true friendship and to uncover the hypocrisy of "polite" society, the piece also touches upon the self-preservation instinct, man's "infernal Selbsterhaltungstrieb" (LA 85) as Altenberg calls it. This drive, which Altenberg considers the most primitive and destructive of all man's urges, is examined in greater detail in "De natura hominum" (LA 85-6), the solemn title of which betokens a comprehensive treatise on human nature only partially fulfilled by its contents. For this piece, which extends for little more than one page (235 words), deals exclusively with the self-preservation instinct and its implications for society.

Altenberg begins by defining the self-preservation instinct, suggesting that it is common to all men as an ever-present and powerful impulse; by ensuring that the individual is constantly concerned with his own lot and its improvement, it perpetuates self-interest. Although he recognises that this instinct is a vital part of man's existential armour, a "Kampfwaffe im täglichen Dasein", necessary for survival in the modern world, he is doubtful as to whether it serves the interests of human community:

Der Selbsterhaltungstrieb des Einzelnen befördere eben die Menschheit im Ganzen, sagt man leichthin. Ja, wenn er in "gesunden", ich möchte fast sagen, in religiösen Grenzen ausgeübt wird. Aber so wie er heutzutage noch ausgeübt wird, von der "Herde", ist er für die Gesamtheit und ihr Wohl ziemlich verhängnisvoll!

The self-preservation instinct, Altenberg argues, is justifiable only when it promotes the physical and moral welfare of the individual and the collective life of society, that is to say when it is practised within carefully defined limits described by Altenberg as "healthy" and "religious". However, because he considers few men capable of reconciling their fundamental urge to self-preservation with the common good, Altenberg cannot condone this basic instinct. On the contrary, he argues that the truly humane do not possess it, and he defends the spiritual supremacy and virtue of a few exceptional groups - poets, philosophers and dreamers - despised by the common crowd and dismissed generally as "allgemein Lebensunfähige", eccentrics and madmen.

Altenberg concludes his inquiry into human nature with a brief paragraph devoted to altruism, the "principle of acting and living in the interest of others" (26), which he attempts to substitute for the self-preservation instinct. It is interesting that, superficially at least, Altenberg attempts to promote this ideal of human behaviour by detailing the ways in which the individual rather than society stands to benefit:

Man kann damit sogar Stoffwechselerkrankungen heilen, da die Freude einem Anderen zu helfen, zu dienen den physiologischen Stoffwechsel befördert, während Selbstsucht die schauerlich-unmenschliche Darmträgheit erzeugt und unterstützt!

Altenberg considers altruism, like selflessness, its own reward because it is conducive both to the physical and psychological well-being of the individual. Moreover, by slanting his argument so as to reveal the individual benefits of altruism, Altenberg hopes to strengthen the

appeal of selfless behaviour to a society governed by self-interest. Altenberg had previously employed this technique of advertising in Pròdrómós where, in order to encourage his fellow men to conserve their vital energies, he has recourse to the language of economics and business, as in this example (p 29):

Unser Organismus ist ein Kapital, mit dem man  
in Weisheit ein Rockefeller-Vermögen machen oder  
in Dummheit Bankrott machen kann!

This is a language which he knew would be understood by a society easily impressed by property and wealth.

There is, however, another reason for couching his recommendation of altruistic behaviour in these terms. Throughout his literary career Altenberg is obsessed with the idea that the most effective way of combating social decay is to encourage individual health. The physical perfection of the individual is, in his opinion, the sine qua non of the regeneration of society. It would appear, then, that Altenberg values altruism as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself, and that he puts altruistic behaviour on a par with the principles of diet and hygiene propounded in Pròdrómós. In each case the result appears to be the same, the health of the individual. Nonetheless, Altenberg knew well that altruism was no mere tonic, no simple stimulus to health. In his writing he pays tribute to its potential to "revolutionise" relationships and to establish the precondition for social cohesion.

While altruism is the mode of behaviour recommended by Altenberg to facilitate progress towards an ideal society, it also provides an absolute ethical standard against which the moral deficiencies of his fellow men may be judged. In a slightly earlier piece entitled "Altruismus" (VI 112-3) which, like "Geselligkeit des Abends im Kaffeehaus", depends upon the discrepancy between the ideal indicated by the title and the reality described

in the text, Altenberg invites his readers to join him in condemning the inhumanity of his fellow men whom he clearly considers incapable of altruism:

Niemand kann den Anderen verstehen, ihm sozusagen ganz herzlich gutmütig gerecht werden in seinen Lebens-Labyrinthen, da er doch sich selbst durchkämpfen will vor allem durch eigene Verstrickungen hindurch!? Niemand hat herzlich Zeit für den Anderen!

As the contents of this piece denote, Altenberg's definition of altruism involves understanding and self-sacrifice. It demands that the individual transcend his own problems, devote time to others, and attempt to alleviate their suffering. But bitter experience, the indifference of so-called friends and the atrocities of war damaged Altenberg's faith in his fellow men and he learned to view with suspicion any profession of altruistic motives.

Written during the latter stages of the Great War and representative of Altenberg's darkest pronouncements on human nature, "Ego-Altruismus" (VI 286-7) forms an interesting postscript to the subject of altruism and egocentricity in his work. From this piece there emerges a bleak image of a society incapable of truly altruistic behaviour and justice since, in Altenberg's opinion, mankind is governed solely by self-interest. Indeed, in this climate the only possible form of altruism is, as Altenberg despairingly remarks, "Ego-Altruismus" which, contrary to the true spirit of altruism, acknowledges the paramouncy of individual interests:

Die Meisten denken falsch über sich selbst und die Anderen, weil sie ihren "in ihnen ewig tyrannisch herrschenden Egoismus" irgendwie, der Allgemeinheit zuliebe, der allgemeinen Gerechtigkeit zuliebe, der Menschenliebe, ihrer eigenen Selbstachtung zuliebe (sehr wichtig!) besiegen, unterdrücken wollen! Das aber geht eben nicht. Man lasse vielmehr seinen organischen unentrinnbaren Egoismus in seiner Lebens-Maschinerie frei schalten und walten, und rette dennoch irgend Etwas für die Allgemeinheit (man ist ja doch ein Teilchen derselben) trotz alledem noch heraus! Das ist viel anständiger als der "Hokus-Pokus" der allgemeinen Menschenliebe! Wieviel Du

außer deinem verdammten infernalischen infamen  
schamlosen Egoismus noch für die Anderen  
erübrigen kannst, das allein bestimmt deinen,  
"göttlichen Wert" hienieden!

Truly selfless behaviour, Altenberg concludes, is an impossible dream, "die man ebenso wenig von irgend Jemandem erwarten darf wie von irgend einem angeblich modernen Musiker Richard Wagners 'Leitmotive'!" Against this darkening image of mankind, social cohesion and human brotherhood appear in Altenberg's later works as a remote, unattainable ideal.

### 3. ALTENBERG'S CONCEPTION OF WOMAN

#### 3.1 "Frauenlob oder FrauenhaB?"

From 1896 to 1901, those years which saw him at the height of his creative and literary powers, Altenberg's writing reveals a distinct preference for female subjects, so much so that Egon Friedell was to observe in 1912:

Die Frau steht im Zentrum aller Dichtungen, die Peter Altenberg jemals geschrieben hat und die er jemals schreiben wird. Er hat eigentlich niemals etwas anderes beschrieben als die Frauen, die Männer sind blaB gezeichnet. Sie sind nur da, damit sich die Frauenseele in ihnen reflektiere; also gerade umgekehrt wie bei allen anderen Dichtern. (1)

These were the years during which Altenberg elucidated and expounded his "Frauenkult" and which established his reputation as a modern troubadour or "Troubadour der Frauenseele" (2). His emphatic defence of woman's superior intuitive and instinctual powers which, in his opinion, bring her closer to nature and the very essence of life, and his belief in her capacity to "ennoble", or spiritually elevate, man through the example both of her own physical perfection and spiritual refinement (which forms the core of his "Frauenkult") provide the justification for Friedell's summary description of Altenberg's standpoint as "der Positivdruck der Frauenphilosophie Weiningers" (3) (Weininger is perhaps Vienna's most renowned misogynist). The tendency thus established by Friedell to regard Altenberg's "Frauenkult" as the antipode of the misogynistic philosophy of Weininger's Geschlecht und Charakter has survived to the present day, being most recently upheld by Nike Wagner, for whom their respective attitudes are illustrative, more generally, of an ambiguous response to woman current in fin de siècle Vienna:

In Wien ist es der junge Philosoph Otto Weininger, der der Frauenfeindlichkeit extremen Ausdruck gibt, in Wien dichtet aber auch der Troubadour der

Frauenseele, Peter Altenberg, sein überschwengliches  
Frauenlob. (4)

And yet Altenberg's "Frauenlob" was not, even during the period from 1896 to 1901 which witnessed its most perfect expression, without reservation; his inclusion of images of woman as a predator, a man-eater, or as "sexuality incarnate" serves as a forceful reminder of the darker, more fearful side of her nature and denotes a view of her closer to that of Weininger. In the "See-Ufer" series, for example, Georg (in "Roman am Lande") appears at the mercy of his employer's wife, while Assarow is the helpless victim of Madame Oyasouki, Altenberg's variation of the "femme fatale", whose voluptuous delight in her subjugation of man is reminiscent of the savage sensuality of Gustav Klimt's Judith. In Was der Tag mir zuträgt, which has survived as a monument to Altenberg's "Frauenkult", "Tulpen" (p 64-7) acts as a timely reminder of woman's capacity to destroy man psychologically, i.e. to subject him to extreme forms of mental and emotional anguish. In this piece, Altenberg contends that woman alone may undermine man's self-assurance: "Nur Weibesliebe ist unseres Wahnsinns Herrin". Elsewhere in Was der Tag mir zuträgt his positive attitude towards woman is offset by an image of her as "armselige Erpresserin" who must secure a man's love in order to exist (see "So lieben Sclavinen" in "Ganz Kleine Sachen" (WT 270). Moreover, a motto provided by Altenberg for "Theobröma" (WT 130-6) reveals an attitude to woman more usually associated with Weininger, for while man is depicted as the master of his destiny, woman is considered powerless to influence hers:

Vergebliches Ringen geziemt dem Weibe, der  
Sklavin des Lebens --  
Noch, im Abgrund schwebend krümmt sie  
die Finger zum Griff!!

In a collection of aperçus (WT 68-71) which anticipate both the caustic and humorous aphoristic approach of his later work, he exposes the mutual exploitation which he

believes characterises all human relationships, with the exception of that between a grandfather and granddaughter. In "De Libertate" (WT 69) he suggests, in a manner equally characteristic of his later work, that the single man is more fortunate than the man involved in a relationship with a member of the opposite sex.

Thus we find that evidence of Altenberg's ambivalence towards woman, which becomes the pronounced misogyny of his later work, is contained in his earliest collections. To label Altenberg conveniently as a "latter-day troubadour" - a view which he both initiated and sought to popularise himself through pieces such as the "Gedichte an Ljuba" (WT 203-12) (in which he adopts the attitude, imagery and poetic formulae of the Minnesänger) and "Neu-Romantik" (WT 97-98) (where he laments the degradation of the ethos of courtly love in contemporary society) - is to oversimplify a crucial aspect of Altenberg's life and work. His attitude towards, and depiction of, women offers a central insight into the nature of the relationship between the sexes and the position of women in Austrian - and indeed Western - society around the turn of the century.

Altenberg's ambivalence towards women may be explained in a number of ways. It might be regarded biographically, for example, as the result of personal experience, and in this respect the portrayal of his mother in his writing is particularly interesting. In "Revolutionär" (WS) she is depicted as an insensitive and rather ignorant woman, aggressive in her dealings with husband, son and servants alike. In "Mama" (S 41-2) she is remembered with greater affection, for her capacity for self-sacrifice and devotion when nursing him during his childhood. (In "Vöslau" (NA 101) the longing of a man unable to cope with the pressures of modern life to return to the safety of his childhood and the womb, is implicit.) The emotional attachments formed in Altenberg's later years are recalled with like measures of affection and venom. For, although capable of arousing his emotions

to an ecstatic pitch, woman remained a source of extreme disappointment to him. For Altenberg, as for Weininger, she appeared to be motivated not by noble virtue, but by base instinct.

Ever conscious of the gulf which separates the real from the ideal, Altenberg claims that his writing, like Schiller's, revolves around these polar opposites:

Auch Schiller dichtete eigentlich nur diesen Gegensatz: Ideal und Leben! Aber er nahm tiefe mythologische Worte zu Hilfe, während ich mehr die usuellen Worte bevorzuge. (NF 158)

To perceive the ideal within the real, to give substance to the "Märchen des Lebens", or yet realise the "Romantik des Alltags", this is Altenberg's goal in his life and his work, and in his writing he attempts to resolve the tension between these opposites, "Ideal und Leben". His women, too, vacillate between these poles. He observes them on the periphery of life in "See-Ufer", for example; the setting for this is a lakeside resort where middle class women and their children spent the summer months, frequently without their husbands who were detained in the city by business. In the words of Gisela Wysocki, women were "von der männlichen Geschichte des Fortschritts ausgeschlossen" (5), excluded from the process of decision-making which dictated the course and quality of their lives. Altenberg recognises, in the faces of women of all ages and from different social backgrounds, a burning thirst for experience. It animates the features of a beautiful young cashier working in an exclusive hair-dressing salon, for example. But in the ashen faces of older women that fiery longing for life has burnt itself out. Their impassive beauty is untouched by experience and at the mercy of time alone, as Altenberg suggests in his description of one such woman in "Familienleben" (WS ed. 1. p 108-15):

Sie war eine Dame mit unzerstörbaren feinen Zügen. Die Schönheit hatte sich gleichsam zu dem 'aristokratischen Zug' versteinert. Sie sah aus wie ein Mensch, wenn er zu der Zeit sagt: "Du allein machst mich alt, Du allein, sonst Nichts! Ich habe Nichts genossen, nichts erlebt ---" Sie konnte nicht einmal pathetisch sagen: "Ich habe gekämpft und gelitten --!" Womit hätte sie denn kämpfen sollen?!

Despite their strong desire to participate fully in life, Altenberg's women often demonstrate a tendency to transcend it. For their creator was capable both of empathising with the mundane reality of their lives, responding sympathetically to their unfulfilled dreams, and of depicting them as romanticised ideals, as he does most consistently in Was der Tag mir zuträgt.

The inherently ambiguous portrayal of woman in Altenberg's works might equally result from his sense of her ideal capacity allied to an awareness of her earthly reality and inadequacies, as he himself hints in his "French aphorism" (S 247):

Il y a un mystère, qui nous fait vivre ---  
la femme!  
Il y a une réalité, qui nous fait mourir ---  
la femme!

In addition to explaining Altenberg's ambivalence vis-à-vis woman in terms of his actual experience and his polarised Weltanschauung (whereby he sought to resolve the tension between the antipathetic poles "Ideal" and "Leben"), it is essential that it be evaluated against the wider social and cultural context.

In a historical analysis of woman's social status, Nike Wagner underlines the subordinate position of women in nineteenth century bourgeois society:

Zentrum dieser bürgerlichen Ideologie ist die Überzeugung von der Dominanz des Mannes in der Gesellschaft. Er bestimmt den ideellen Rang und die soziale Funktion des anderen Teils der Menschheit, der Frau. Damit bestimmt er auch über das Verhältnis der Geschlechter und über

die Moral, die das geschlechtliche Verhältnis regieren soll. Wesentlicher Bestandteil dieser bürgerlich-männlich<sup>en</sup> Geschlechtsmoral ist die Übereinkunft darüber zu schweigen. (6)

Her sexuality thus denied, woman's only "legitimate" social roles were those of wife or mother, while,

Außerhalb dieser familiären Struktur gibt es keine Normalität für die Frau, sondern nur die anomale, d.h. amoralische Situation der unverheirateten Frau, auf die das Schicksal der alten Jungfer wartet, oder der unverheirateten Frau, die den verschiedenen Formen der Prostitution ausgeliefert ist. (7)

The scope and expectations of women were, then, severely restricted. In a male-dominated society such as Austria's at the turn of the century, they were doomed to a surrogate existence and even relegated to object-status.

Following in the footsteps of the Naturalists, who, according to Nike Wagner, were among the first to challenge the social and sexual repression of women and to attempt to "demystify" their nature (8), Altenberg too mounts an attack upon the regnant bourgeois "Männermoral". His championing of the prostitute, for example, (he, like Kraus, considers her the innocent victim of social hypocrisy) and his appeal for an open and candid approach to sexual matters (see Pròdrómós p 34) - each embodies a critique of the masculine morality of his society. His "Frauenkult", which springs from a positive evaluation of womankind, was clearly conceived of originally as an alternative to this morality, and as a basis for revised relationships between the sexes. Moreover, like Schnitzler, Altenberg reacts strongly in his writing against the "functional" view of women prevalent amongst his fellow men. In "Zwei Fremde" (WS ed. 1 p 151-8) Anita acts as woman's advocate:

"Was sind Wir?! Brennholz  
Man entzündet Uns, Wir brennen, wärmen -  
Aber eigentlich sind Wir Etwas, was Niemand

weiss ---- Bäume! (...)  
 Etwas in die Welt hinein Wachsendes sind Wir,  
 in einem Walde, wo kein Mann geht und Alles  
 still ist. Nicht zerhacktes Brennholz! (...)"

Altenberg opposes the view of woman as a means to an end, as a means of guaranteeing the continuation of the family line, or as "schöne Zwecke" (WS ed.1 158) who serve man's sexual needs; he suggests how much greater is their value when left in peace to grow and perfect themselves and thus furnish mankind spiritually with a model for emulation. Their spiritual mission, Altenberg argues in "Zwei Fremde", is loftier and more noble than the biological service they render to mankind. And in a slightly later piece entitled "Ereignis des hundertsten Tages" contained in his novella, "Paulina" (WT 166f), Altenberg is similarly critical of man's low estimation of woman:

Wie der Bauer sein Kartoffelfeld betrachtet Ihr  
 die Frau Etwas, was Ihr sätet um zu ernten ...  
 (WT 188)

### 3.2 The "femme fragile" and the sublimation of sexual neuroses.

The historical subordination of woman in society, her treatment as man's social, biological and intellectual inferior, and her subsequent neglect spawned numerous theoretical writings and philosophical tracts during the latter half of the nineteenth century, through which man attempted to remedy his ignorance of woman (9). The flat, stereotyped images of women which abound in the literature of the Viennese "Jahrhundertwende" may be considered a parallel attempt on the part of men to come to terms with the enigma of the opposite sex, for as Nike Wagner contends, with the exception of Arthur Schnitzler:

Die klassische Typologie des literarischen Fin de siècle Weibes kennt jedoch wenig Rücksicht auf das subtile Zusammenspiel psychischer und sozialer Faktoren die eine Figure über den Typus hinaus lebendig machen kann. Das Rätsel Weib wird gelöst, nicht in dem die Frau differenziert, sondern indem sie simplifiziert wird. (10)

The opposing stereotypes - the "femme fragile" on the one hand, and on the other the "femme fatale" - which characterise the literature of this period are each representative of the oversimplified solutions proposed by artists and writers when confronted with what seemed to them at first glance woman's illusory and elusive nature. As Egon Friedell correctly observes, to depict woman either as an asexual being, a delicate and sensitive virgin, or as a she-devil, constitutes little more than an attempt at a "mythologische Erklärung", because neither view has a basis in gynaecological facts, but is rather "das instinktive Werk der Frauen und das bewußte Werk der Dichter" (11). What is more, Ariane Thomalla and Nike Wagner each support the view that both the "femme fragile" and the "femme fatale" are in fact "die Transfigurationen erotischer Wünsche" - the embodiment of opposing erotic desires:

Der Sexualangst und Sexualablehnung auf der einen Seite entsprechen die Sexualekstase und Sexualüberschätzung auf der anderen. In beiden Fällen ist ein entrealisiertes, enthumanisiertes Kunst-Geschöpf das Resultat. (12)

Each "femme", the asexual "femme fragile" as well as the oversexed "femme fatale", is an aspect of what Wagner terms "künstlerische Selbsttherapie", that is to say, each represents a sublimation of the artist's sexual anxiety and neurosis:

Vor der spiritualisierten, infantilisierten Frau kann keine Angst aufkommen, und einer übersexualisierten Frau zu unterliegen ist schließlich keine Schande. (13)

In her study of the "femme fragile", that pale, delicate and idealised image of woman which entered literature with the Romantics and held a strong fascination for the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as well as Edgar Allan Poe, Maurice Maeterlinck and Peter Altenberg, Ariane Thomalla portrays her as "eine typische Gestalt der Dekadenz und des "Ästhetizismus" (14), as the sublim-

ation of sickness and death, and the embodiment of the particularly sterile beauty characteristic of "Dekadenzliteratur". Thomalla briefly outlines the sociological origin of this literary type, seeing her partly as a reaction against women's attempt to assert and emancipate themselves, and partly as a symptomatic endeavour by man to re-establish hegemony in a world which he was increasingly powerless to change because of his political impotence (15). But the main thrust of her argument is to demonstrate firstly that both the "femme fatale" and the "femme fragile" are the products of sexual repression in the late nineteenth century, and secondly that the "femme fragile" has its psychological origins in what she regards as the "sexual infantilism" of the artist. Moreover, in order to substantiate this argument she draws upon Altenberg's biography and literary output.

According to Thomalla, the treatment of sexual problems in literature guaranteed a wide audience around the turn of the century, especially in Austrian society where amongst the predominantly middle class reading public sexual neuroses were commonplace:

Außerdem galt in den literarischen Zirkeln die erotische Lust am Erotisch-Komplizierten als Zeichen eleganten Raffinements, womit nicht nur die Spielarten der psychopathia sexualis von der Homophilie bis zum Sadismus gemeint waren: man kokettierte auch mit der eigenen Impotenz. (16)

The depiction of asexual women who shrink from sexual encounters was, she suggests, psychologically conditioned by the impotence of their creators, of whom Peter Altenberg appears to her both typical and representative. However, in Altenberg's case the problematical nature of sex is at once more obvious and urgent. Whereas in his early work his revulsion from the sex act is implicit in his ideal conception of the role of the husband (who should act as his partner's friend and custodian, and love her as a father or mother loves their child), his

later writing contains a violent and unequivocal condemnation of the sex act which is summarised in the following letter Altenberg addressed to Frau Lina Loos:

Lina, für mich sind Sie das Opfer der schamlosen Sexualität des Mannes, dem nichts heilig und künstlerisch ist, sondern eine Freß-Gelegenheit! Niemals hat man Achtung vor diesen aschblonden Haaren, diesen lieblichen Achselhöhlen mit dem unbeschreiblichen zarten und beglückenden Dufte, vor dem Schimmer dieser oft verzweifelten und jammernden Augen, vor diesem elfenbeinfarbenen Rücken der in einer edelsten elfenbeinfarbenen Rundung endete oder seine Krönung fand, vor diesen glattpolierten Beinen. Niemals wußten sie es dem Schicksale in exaltierter Weise zu danken, diesen ambrabfarbenen Leib langsam in seine eigene Extase bringen zu dürfen und das heilige Maß tiefster Erregung in sich eintrinken zu dürfen! Niemals hatten sie Ehrfurcht vor den Extasen der Natur! Die männliche Eitelkeit, der männliche Wollust-Egoismus siegten über diesen mysteriösen und märchenhaften Welten und schafften diese Dichtung Weib zu einer Kloake um für ihre überschüssigen Säfte ...

Fluch Ihnen !!!

Ihr PA (17)

In addition to documenting his profound aversion to the sex act, Altenberg's letter bears witness to his own erotic temperament - Ernst Randak suggests that Altenberg was an erotomaniac (18) - and depicts him in what may have been for him the more comfortable and safer role of the voyeur. For Randak, Altenberg's attitude to woman seems encapsulated in the following lines:

Das Obers abschöpfen können ist alles! Die Tiefe, d.h. die stinkende Flachheit dem Philister. (19)

Feminine beauty and the sensations aroused in its contemplation were in themselves sufficient for Altenberg, for whom "longing" promised bliss while "fulfilment" of erotic desire spelled disillusionment and despair.

In a letter to Kraus written after the death from tuberculosis of their friend, the talented young actress

Anni Kalmar, Altenberg attacks the basic premise of contemporary society's "masculine morality", whereby woman is relegated to the position of sex object. This was, incidentally, the "morality" in which Weininger's Geschlecht und Charakter is firmly anchored, according to which "Das Weib sucht seine Vollendung als Objekt." (20). This aspect of masculine morality furnishes Altenberg with a prime target in his letter to Kraus in which he exposes, as an example for all men, its inevitable and tragic consequences:

..... Weil Ihr nicht die Kraft habt idealer Ziele, erniedrigt Ihr diese herrlichsten gutmütigsten erziehungsfähigsten dankbarsten Geschöpfe zu Sexuellen Freaks, die dann an innerer Leere, an inneren Enttäuschungen elendlich zugrunde gehen müssen!

As Schnitzler does in Reigen, so too does Altenberg attempt to "demystify" sex, to reveal the emptiness and meaninglessness of an experience which, in his opinion, is initiated by men's baser instincts. Addressing himself to all men, Altenberg laments:

ich halte Euch Alle (...) für armseligste, tief, tief bedauernswerte Organisationen, die unter dem Drang eines bedürfnisreichen Schwanzes das Weib ersehnen wie ein ScheiBen-Müssender den Abort ersehnt! (21)

However, Altenberg does admit to having no objections to sexual fulfilment where it is the "physiological consequence" of what he terms "seelische Unentrinnbarkeit", or spiritual necessity (P 36).

Thomalla suggests that Altenberg suffered from a "Männlichkeitskomplex", a charge which he seems to anticipate when offering this defence of his attitude to sexual matters:

Ich weise es mit tiefster Entrüstung, mit hohnlachender Verachtung zurück, daß mir das mangle, was eine wahre Beziehung mit der Frau herstelle und wende diese Anklage vielmehr gegen Euch! (22)

Nonetheless, his initial preference for the delicate, asexual "femme fragile" is, as Thomalla asserts, a measure of his sexual neurosis, while his advocacy of Platonic love, his assumption of the role of the Minnesänger, and finally his bachelordom, constitute in part a personal attempt to come to terms with and sublimate this neurosis.

### 3.2.1 The Platonic Relationship

Altenberg's ideal of a platonic relationship between the sexes is exemplified in his letters to Lina Loos (see Friedell's Altenbergbuch p 171f). Here, he argues that mutual understanding and cooperation alone may form the basis of his ideal of an "organische Freundschaft", which he envisages as a delicate harmony where woman keeps pace with man, helping him as he helps her to personal fulfilment and peace of mind. This ideal is upheld by Altenberg throughout his oeuvre and denotes a further point of intersection between his own and Weininger's philosophy of the sexes, for the latter also advocates a Platonic relationship between man and woman (See Geschlecht und Charakter chapters XI and XIV).

### 3.2.2 "Frauendienst"

"Sie haben noch Etwas von den Troubadouren", Paulina's husband remarks to Herr Peter in "Compliment de coeur" (WT 172-5). Altenberg commends the attitude of the Minnesänger through this character, who is conceived of as an ideal figure and whose service lies in fostering the spiritual growth of the sensitive "Frauenseele". Altenberg sees in the ancient ritual of courtly love or "Ritterdienst" both a model and a parallel for his latter-day "Frauenkult".

The medieval "Frauendienst" epitomised in the writings of Friedrich von Hausen and Heinrich von Morungen involves the worship of a noble lady, for the sake of whom the poet is willing to sacrifice himself. The love he bears her is both selfless and unrequited, sustained solely by the

promise of "Gnade" and his spiritual ennoblement, while the ethos of courtly love is itself intricately related to the Christian faith and Christian virtues. And it is interesting to note in this respect how Altenberg, disillusioned with the money-making mentality of his society, upholds traditional Christian virtues in his writing. Here he emphasises the value of selflessness, especially in love, and insists that it is more blessed to give than to receive. To reinforce this point he frequently has recourse to the "reich-arm" paradox of Minnesang and Christian writings generally, which stress that the materially impoverished man possesses great spiritual wealth.

Like the poets of courtly love before him, Altenberg insists upon the importance of loving from afar. His is a modern variation on a theme, the paradoxical nature of which holds a particular appeal for the poet-knight, von Hausen. And like the early troubadours Altenberg, too, often depicts love as a malady, an all-consuming and potentially self-destructive passion. In his "Gedichte an Ljuba" (WT 205-212), for example, he adopts a metaphor which may be traced via von Morungen to antiquity, and which likens the nature and effects of love to the fatal attraction of a moth to a flame:

Ich aber, gleich der Motte im Lichte,  
mache meinen Selbsterhaltungs-Trieb zu nicht!

While the cycle "Gedichte an Ljuba" provides a typical illustration of Altenberg's ability to cast himself in the role of the latter-day troubadour, he is equally capable of empathising with the conflicting emotions of the woman in love in the manner of the age-old "frowenklage", the lyrical precursor of Minnesang, for which his piece beginning "Wie der Morgentau für zarte Wiesenblumen" (P 67) provides an interesting modern parallel.

The underlying religiosity of medieval courtly love poems has already been noted, where the object of the

poet's aspiration and longing is frequently depicted in an abstract fashion. Aspects of her physical appearance are described in accordance with conventional formulae, as a result of which she lacks substance and seems little more than a vehicle for the poet's "Gottesdienst". Symbolically, she represents the Christian faith and church, offering salvation to those who serve her loyally. In a manner reminiscent of the medieval "Frauendienst" Altenberg too emphasises the spiritual rewards which may be derived from serving a lady, and he too couches his "Frauenkult" in religious terms. But unlike the essentially religious "Frauendienst" of the Minnesänger, Altenberg's "Frauenkult" is not a means of expressing or reaffirming religious belief. Indeed, he adapts and exploits Christian tenets, notably that of "Erlösung" or salvation, to fit the specific requirements of his "evolutionary theory", of which his "Frauenkult" constitutes one major aspect.

### 3.2.3 "Die Neutralität der Dichterexistenz"

While Platonic friendship and a "Frauenkult" closely modelled on the medieval "Frauendienst" each present Altenberg with a means of sublimating his sexual neurosis, his sense of mission as a poet offers him the chance to retreat into what Thomalla describes as "die Neutralität der Dichterexistenz" (23). For, like Rilke and Hofmannsthal, Altenberg considers himself the custodian of woman's soul:

Ich besitze in mir alle Seelen, die im Sein des schweren Alltags so oder so verloren gehen, sich nicht ausleben, vor der Zeit ersterben. Siehe! Denn ich bin nichts anderes als Gottes Aufbewahrungsort für alle verkümmerten und zerstörten Frauenseelen. In mir leben sie alle weiter, das träumende Bürgermädchen, die traurige Gefallene, die Verstossene, die Verkaufte, die Alternde, die Bucklige, die Verrathene, die Hysterische, die Allzuschöne und die Allzuhässliche!  
(WT x)

He envisages the poet as an advocate for that silently suffering majority of women: "Denn siehe, ich bin nur Euer

tönend gewordenes stummes Herz selber" (WT 1). The poet is set apart from the average man because of his greater and intuitive understanding of women, by virtue of which he may further women's self-knowledge and aid them in the process of self-fulfilment. This, in Altenberg's opinion constitutes mankind's highest task - in each of his published works his appeal, "Werde, der du bist", is restated afresh. In Wie ich es sehe it is Albert Königsberg who exemplifies man's "ideal" mission vis-à-vis woman, that mission which Altenberg usually ascribes to the writer or poet. The short "Don Juan" cycle thematicises Königsberg's relationship with women, tracing his responses to the gently fluctuating emotions of a twelve year old girl, his relationship with a young married woman (to whom he represents an escape-route from the mundane world and offers a meaningful, spiritual relationship) and his sympathy for "eine gebrochene Frauenseele". In "Revolutionär", Altenberg returns to this favourite theme now in order to illustrate Königsberg's rapport with the spiritual side of woman's nature and his understanding of those existential forces which mould her destiny as, for example, in "Sommer-Nachmittag" and "Zwei Fremde". The latter piece also reveals the exhaustive process whereby Königsberg absorbs a "Frauenseele" in the manner prescribed by Altenberg in the programmatic piece "Warum Sie dieses Dichters Werke so sehr liebt" (WT). In "Paulina" (WT) the role of the poet within a marriage (which is outlined first in "Fünfunddreissig" (WS)) is examined in greater detail. Altenberg had suggested in "Fünfunddreissig" that even the happily married woman is unfulfilled, in which case the task of the poet is to transport her spiritually from the narrow confines of family life and initiate her in life's great mysteries. In "Paulina", Altenberg suggests that woman has need both of a husband and a poet, the one to act as her physical protector and secure her material existence, the other to anticipate and fulfil her spiritual needs. This ideal relationship is encapsulated in "Liebesnacht", in which Paulina's husband and Herr Peter are each portrayed as Paulina's custodians.

Because he considered that he had a duty towards all women, Altenberg felt he could forgo the dubious honour of marriage. His objections to marriage on the grounds that it fosters man's tribal instincts and is not conducive to self-fulfilment are comparable to the reservations expressed by Nietzsche on the subject of marriage. Moreover, like Grillparzer, Nietzsche and Franz Kafka, Altenberg was ultimately unable to reconcile his life as a poet with marriage.

Unlike Stanislaw Przybyszewski, his friend and champion Karl Kraus or D.H. Lawrence, Altenberg does not consider sexual activity and artistic creativity compatible. Instead he believes that indulgence in sexual activity of any kind amounts to the reckless squandering of one's "vital" resources ("Lebensenergien") which could be better employed by the artist or poet in the cause of his art. To this extent Altenberg's position appears closer to that represented by Oskar Panizza, whose article entitled "Die sexuelle Belastung der Psyche als Quelle künstlerischer Inspiration" appeared in the Wiener Rundschau on 15 February 1897 (24). Panizza's contention that sexual neuroses which remain unexorcised in real life have a beneficial effect on artistic creativity is reminiscent of Freud's "Sublimationstheorie" and finds an echo in Altenberg's own ruminations on the subject of sex and artistic creation (See WS 1st edition p155 and P 47 and 63, for example).

### 3.3 Realistic portraits of women in the Early Work

Altenberg's attitude to woman is not consistent, as we have seen. His fear of her, which surfaces occasionally in his early writing, grows with the years, developing into the full-blown misogyny of his later works. His later collections reflect his mounting disillusionment with mankind and show an extreme polarisation of his views, a process which the Great War accelerated. During this period his depiction of woman is uncharitable, uncompromising and

flat, especially where Altenberg descends to clichés. By comparison, the portraits of the early years, notably those of Wie ich es sehe, are vibrant, sympathetic and fresh. In the words of Egon Friedell:

er sieht die Frau mit stereoskopischem Blick, als ein rundes plastisches Gebilde, von allen Seiten.  
(25)

"See-Ufer" in particular bears witness to his capacity for understanding women, and for seeing things from their point of view. His sympathy embraces bourgeois wives and daughters, girls from a working class background, actresses and prostitutes. He responds to the dreams of youth as well as the disillusionment of older women whom life has passed by, and shares Schnitzler's understanding of the subtle and potentially destructive conflict between woman's innermost being and the social role she is obliged to assume.

In the first half of "See-Ufer", Altenberg adopts a loosely chronological approach in exploring the nature of women at various developmental stages, as he indicates through his choice of titles: "Neun und elf", "Zwölf", "Neunzehn", "Siebzehn bis dreissig", "Fünfundzwanzig" and "Fünfunddreissig". Thus, by emphasising the general rather than the particular, as well as the anonymity of his subjects, Altenberg underlines their representative nature.

### 3.3.1 Young Girls

In "Neun und elf" Altenberg examines the different temperaments of two young girls who, he reveals in Mein Lebensabend (p 9), are the fictitious counterparts of actual friends made during a summer season spent in Gmunden. While Margueritta is an extrovert, Rosie is characterised by a deeper spirituality (through her association with water) and a romantic temperament which, Altenberg suggests, diminish her ability to cope with life. Unlike her rosy-cheeked sister she is pale and delicate, touched by the symptoms of decadence, which manifest them-

selves in her need for sleep and that hypersensitivity which Altenberg values highly as evidence of spiritual refinement.

In "Zwölf" the reader is confronted with a heroine of a very different nature. Characterised briefly as "das Kind mit den braunblonden Haaren und den Gazellenbeinen", she is closely related to the central theme of this piece which juxtaposes jaded civilisation with more "primitive" and vital nature. While her physical appearance is a variation of the slim and graceful ideal of womanhood idolised by Altenberg, he suggests by her animal attributes that this twelve year old lives on an instinctual level. He contrasts her strength, resolution and activity sharply with the lethargy of an elderly and devitalised woman who personifies the sterility and decay of Austria's "ancien régime". Within the context of Altenberg's early work "Zwölf" is exceptional in its criticism of overrefined feeling and hypersensitivity, of which he consistently approves elsewhere in his writing. In this case, however, it results in a cultured middle class lady's pathetic identification with a fish. An interesting parallel is provided by "Beja Flor" (WS 191-5). Here, a woman who is approaching middle age and has little left to live for - "Sie hatte eine Welt verloren" - betrays a comparable sympathy for animals, who in turn provide her with a *raison d'être*. Altenberg reveals the existence of a sympathetic bond between her and an ailing pet which she is trying to restore to health, and suggests similarities in their existence. For does not the vacuous and narrowly circumscribed life of her goldfish reflect the nature of Stefanie's own empty existence? And although Altenberg treats her kindly, the piece serves to remind us that those delicate emotions manifest in each woman's response to the plight of a fish are born of disillusionment and shattered hopes (as Altenberg clearly states in "Zwölf"):

Aber diese zarten Regungen der Seele erblühen erst auf dem Grabe aller zerstörten Träume, aller getödteten Hoffnungen ---. (WS 7)

Altenberg's youthful heroines in "See-Ufer" give an early indication of his preference for young girls. The preference is shared by Albert Königsberg, a semi-autobiographical figure whose sentiments appear identical to Altenberg's own:

"Man wird über den Kleinen sprechen - ",  
dachte der Sohn, "Gott wie fad, ich liebe nur  
kleine Mädchen, die haben Gracie, riechen gut  
und man kann sie auf die Haare küssen ---"  
(WS 103)

It was precisely this kind of attraction to prepubescent girls which provided the foundation for charges of sexual abnormality and infantilism brought against Altenberg by Thomalla. The pale and delicate girls like Rositta and Rosamunde who populate the pages of his work are, in her opinion, representative of the "unschuldige femme enfant" favoured by many late nineteenth century writers, amongst them Ruskin, Ernest Dowson and Edgar Allan Poe. Chaste and asexual, they are but a variation of the "femme fragile", for like her they pose no threat to those men who lacked confidence in their relationships with the opposite sex:

Die Frau in ein kindliches oder ästhetisches Reich zu entrücken, war die sicherste Methode sie aus der Reichweite der Macht zu verbannen und ungefährlich zu machen. (26)

And perhaps Altenberg's engagement to the thirteen year old Bertha Lecher should also be considered in this light, i.e. as an attempt by him to circumvent the problem posed by his sexuality. For, as Thomalla points out, a love which cannot be consummated is safe.

For Altenberg, the dawning of sexual awareness entails the loss of innocence, naturalness and honesty, virtues which are displayed principally by his prepubes-

cent heroines. In "Maske der Vierzehnjährigen" (BL) Altenberg argues that the ability to enact a part at odds with one's nature is cultivated from puberty, when hypocrisy becomes an essential component of social intercourse. By identifying the corruption of human nature with puberty, essentially part of the process of human growth, Altenberg underlines its tragic inevitability. In "Nach dem Balle", which immediately precedes "Maske der Vierzehnjährigen" in Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens, and which should be considered as its companion piece, Altenberg treats the problems associated with puberty and adulthood with greater sympathy. In "Nach dem Balle" a mother is pictured at the bedside of her daughter, who had attended her first ball that evening. She recalls the evening of her own first ball which signified the end of her childhood and brought insight into the hypocrisy of the adult world. It is a bitter and poignant lament for the lost innocence of youth:

Diese eine Nacht hat mich ruiniert und aufgeklärt.  
 Ich hielt mich für wertvoll! Ich geriet in den  
 Schwindel und in die Verlogenheit der Welt! Ich  
 verlor meine edle Kindheit auf Nimmerwiedersehen,  
 in dieser ersten Ballnacht! (BL 65)

Altenberg, the self-appointed custodian of the misunderstood and "manhandled" soul of womankind, was quick to perceive his duty towards young girls "die schon ein leichter Hauch unverstandener Weiblichkeit und Fragilität umgibt" (27). He sees himself in the role of their protector, ever ready to defend them against their oppressor, "l'homme médiocre", whom he describes variously as a "Vampyr der Seele" (WT 47), a minotaur, a shark or as a dark menace - "Störer in der Ferne am Horizont" (WS 39) - in young girls' lives.

Altenberg's predilection for young girls should, however, be seen too in the context of the more general interest in children as the subjects of art during the latter half of the nineteenth century:

Im Kindermotto spiegelt sich die alte Sehnsucht nach dem verlorenen Goldenen Zeitalter von Reinheit Unschuld und Unmittelbarkeit wider - einem ersehnten Zustand, den man in dem unschuldigen Alter der Kindheit allein noch repräsentiert sah. (28)

The Pre-Raphaelites' especial fondness for children, by which their dissatisfaction with Victorian morality may be measured, is possibly best known. However, the paedophilia of the Viennese is also particularly striking, its unhealthy aspect being epitomised in the work of Egon Schiele.

### 3.3.2 Young Women

In "Neunzehn" Altenberg turns his attention to a social group for whom he experienced a special sympathy. Their social and psychological plight greatly preoccupies him in his early work, furnishing the themes of "Fünfundzwanzig", "At Home", "Une Femme est un état de notre âme" as well as of "Neunzehn". And, as Otto Stoessel so readily perceives:

In diesen Skizzen von den verheirateten Frauen, oder von den jungen Mädchen, die schon Bräute sein können, sind Fragmente zu Tragödien. (29)

While Altenberg sympathised with the disillusionment of middle-aged bourgeois women whose melancholic expression bespoke their existential impoverishment, his passions were equally aroused by the hopes and dreams of all young women whom he knew to be doomed by their social status to a vacuous existence. In each of the above-named pieces he timetables the life of young women from a wealthy social background, in each case to expose - beneath the rich veneer - the tragically hollow nature of their existence. In "Neunzehn", for example, Altenberg begins by fixing, with his accustomed economy, the social status of his heroine through an early reference to her environment: "Sie wohnte in dem wunderschönen Hotel am See-Ufer." (WS 8). By his choice of the epithet "wunderschön" he

suggests the luxurious nature of surroundings which wealth alone provides. Like Fräulein Margarethe in "At Home" and Christine in "Une femme est un état de notre âme" (WS 273-283), this young girl is the recognisable daughter of the "Gründerzeitgeneration", whose economic power dictates the form of an existence free of material concerns - a freedom which (Altenberg implies) results in spiritual impoverishment.

Interestingly, Altenberg elects, in these pieces, to adhere to the "external facts" of his heroines' existence, to describe the outward appearance of their life rather than probe its inner or emotional vacuity. While in "Friede" (WS 275-9) he encapsulates the nature of Christine's life within his description of her unvarying daily routine or "Tagesmechanismus", in "Neunzehn" he provides the following account of one nineteen year old's life during the summer season:

Der Tag war lang -- bis zum Abend.  
 Sie stand spät auf --. Dann sass sie auf  
 der schattigen Promenade auf einer Bank -.  
 Nach dem Speisen ging sie in ihr kühles Zimmer.  
 Um fünf, um sechs, machte sie einen  
 Spaziergang mit den Eltern, den Geschwistern.  
 Abends speiste die Familie unter grünen  
 Laubengängen, die in elektrischem Lichte  
 schimmerten.  
 Der Tag war lang bis zum Abend ---. (WS 8)

Here the emphasis on superficial details successfully conveys the complete lack of content and meaning in her existence. Arguably, this method proves more effective than an in-depth analysis of her existential ennui might have done, for his preoccupation with "external" details underlines more forcefully a loss of intrinsic values and, in this case, of individuality and a *raison d'être*. Moreover, his method might be compared with the techniques employed in Klimt's portraiture of this period. For, like Klimt, Altenberg prefers to work in two dimensions, thereby emphasising the superficial nature of the lives of middle class Viennese women, highlighting

appearances rather than the underlying reality, and the formal beauty of his subjects rather than their neuroses which bubble just beneath the surface. And like Klimt, Altenberg often depicts the female subjects of his early work in a stylised manner, concentrating, as a painter might do, almost exclusively on the details of their dress. "Fünfunddreissig" contains perhaps the most memorable example of this technique:

Ein gelbbrauner Strohhut mit Veilchensträusschen und Veilchenblättern an langen dünnen grünen Stielen. Das Kleid aus Rohseide, mit einem breiten hellbraunen Sammtgürtel. Der Griff des Schirmes ein Bergkristall, Oktaeder, an einem braunen Zuckerrohr. Flachsblonde Haare. Schnürstiefel aus rothem Juften. Das fünfzehnjährige Töchterchen hat braunrothe Haare, braune Augen und wunderbare Hände. (WS 25)

In its degree of stylisation, which involves the ironing out of all individual characteristics, and in its insistence on the paramouncy of the optical impression, Altenberg's description approximates to the early works of the French Impressionists who likewise sought their subjects amongst the fashionable middle classes. We might point specifically to Manet's "Game of Croquet" (1873), or Claude Monet's "On the Beach, Trouville" of 1870, or his "Women in the Garden" executed during 1866-1867. Writing almost twenty years after the works of these men first came to prominence, Altenberg was able to adapt their painterly techniques to his own requirements. Nevertheless, his predilection for middle class subjects transcends all interest in the purely optical effect. It stems rather from a profound humanitarian concern. But by focusing on the material aspect of their appearance, Altenberg is able to suggest the limitations and conventions which bind their lives, and the importance of maintaining appearances in this society. In "Neunzehn", he examines how social conventions, in addition to wealth, determine the quality of one young woman's life, and suggests how they increase her psychological discomfiture by impeding her personal development. The fairy tale riches

which insulate her against the harsh workaday world, and her ritualistic courting - almost inevitably the prelude to a marriage which will envelop and stifle her in a similar way - exclude all possibility of self-fulfilment and happiness:

Hie und da kam ein Jüngling zu Besuch, der sie liebte ---.

Müde und ruhig widmete sie ihm die Stunden, die er ihretwegen dort verbrachte. Er ruderte sie auf den See hinaus -- er fühlte sich sehr glücklich.

Sie sass am Steuersitze. (WS 8)

Her rigidity and lifelessness may be blamed on those social conventions which dictate the pattern of her existence, and which we observe in Klimt's female portraiture too. Each artist's subjects appear ensnared by, or suspended in, their opulent surroundings without knowledge of how to extricate themselves or hope of doing so. And in "Neunzehn" Altenberg plots symbolically the course of one such woman's life, foretelling her inevitable disillusionment and despair:

Als sie im Coupé sass und in den Herbst, in den Winter hineinfuhr, in fröstelnder Langweile (...)  
(WS 9)

"Neunzehn" gives way to a short piece of a very different nature which is immediately arresting because of its sudden shift in perspective; for while the preceding pieces in this series are written in the third person, "Siebzehn bis dreissig" is told in the first person and is differentiated further by its increased tempo. The scenario of the lakeside resort has been exchanged for a more urban setting, a more fitting complement for the subject matter. For the principal character in this piece is a beautiful young woman from a working class background. She is, however, related to some of her female counterparts in Altenberg's work through her physical attributes. While he refers in "Zwölf" to the "Gazellenbeinen" of the young

girl, he says of the subject in this piece "Sie war gebaut wie eine Gazelle". And thus, by linking the motifs of the individual pieces, he implies the fundamental affinity of all women, regardless of their age and class, who were confronted by a common existential dilemma and shared a common fate in a patriarchal society such as Austria's. In "Siebzehn bis dreissig" Altenberg departs slightly from his favoured technique (which enables him to crystallise woman's existence within a few selected and characteristic moments) in order to span those crucial years which witness most changes in her life. That passion for life, relinquished early by bourgeois daughters and extinguished in the faces of matrons and widows, is thematicised by Altenberg in "Siebzehn bis dreissig". Here he deals with its implications for a working class girl whose illusions are gradually dispelled. Her urgent desire to live, one facet of which is her social ambition, drives her into marriage with the proprietor of a café. However, the marriage ends abruptly with his death, and she is left with a child to care for. The narrator next encounters her tending a friend of his, a rich bachelor with typhoid, for whom she sacrifices herself in the belief that her love and her suffering give meaning to her life. But her devotion is abused and her life obviously subject to the whims of rich young men upon whom her economic security and her life now depends. She is passed from one to another, no longer in control of her own destiny. The narrator's sympathy does not extend to his friend, the rich bachelor, whose behaviour is noted in a series of clichés reminiscent of those employed by Arthur Schnitzler in his characterisation of Anatol:

Als er genesen war, überliess er die Dame  
 einem anderen reichen jungen Manne ---.  
 Er trat sie einfach ab, ganz einfach ---.  
 Das war im Sommer.  
 Später überfiel ihn die Sehnsucht -- im Herbst.  
 (WS 11)

These lines suggest that the young man's moods are conditioned automatically by the changing seasons. He is utterly bereft of either personal integrity or resolution, just like Anatol. Altenberg's examination of the plight of this representative girl is, moreover, reminiscent of Schnitzler's treatment of a similar theme in Liebelei which was given its premiere in 1896 (the year in which Wie ich es sehe was published). In this play Schnitzler explores the socially conditioned fate and the personal aspirations of the "süBe Mädels". The problem for Christine Weiring results from her understandable inability to reconcile her own emotions with the role assigned to her by society. Schnitzler, sympathetic towards his heroine, unfolds the tragic conflict between the social and the sensitive individual, exposing in the process the inhumanity and hypocrisy of his contemporary social code. Altenberg shares his concern for the "süBe Mädels" and, more generally, his interest in types. And, like Schnitzler, he is acutely aware of the subtle interplay between the social and the psychological being, showing himself to be especially sensitive towards its implications for women whose tightly defined social roles (which, as Nike Wagner points out (see 3.1), were determined by men) offered little hope of personal fulfilment.

### 3.3.3 Women and Work

Altenberg returns to the problem of reconciling individual needs with social role in "Wie es geht" (WS 39-40), in which the character constellation of an actress and an author brings to mind a scene from Schnitzler's Reigen which explores the relationship between these social types. However, where Schnitzler ruthlessly exposes the selfish motivation of each character, Altenberg adopts a gentler, more understanding approach. For Altenberg - and in this he resembles Karl Kraus - understands the actress's need to "prostitute" herself in order to achieve economic security, or often

simply so that she could eat! In "Wie es geht" he suggests that poverty and hunger leave this actress, who is employed on a seasonal basis in a provincial theatre, no other option but to form a liaison with an author, for as Altenberg states:

Sie war eine ganz kleine Schauspielerin des Sommertheaters, hatte Himmels Augen und hungerte.

In his play Freiwild (1896) Schnitzler unmasks "die perfide Verknüpfung von beruflichem Aufstieg und privater Dienstleistung, die an den meisten Bühnen üblich war" (30), while Altenberg is content to insinuate this. The following account of the actress's social status and working conditions provided by Nike Wagner sheds further light on an underprivileged and exploited section of Viennese society, whose predicament aroused the passions of writers with a social conscience like Kraus, Schnitzler and Altenberg:

Bühnen, insbesondere Sommertheater, sahen damals Vergnügungsetablissemments ähnlicher als seriösen Kunstinstituten. Die jungen Schauspielerinnen, die Rollen ergattern und berühmt werden wollten, galten als Freiwild. Zeigten sie sich den Wünschen einflüßreicher Herren nicht geneigt, wurden sie nicht mehr engagiert. Das Fallen gehört zum Beruf, die Karriere hängt davon ab. Nur wer fällt, steigt. Überdies erhöhte die schlechte Bezahlung die Abhängigkeit und die schlechten Arbeitsbedingungen steigerten die Anfälligkeit für Lungenkrankheiten. (31)

Through his choice of the title "Wie es geht", Altenberg suggests the generality of this actress's plight as well as the inevitability of her fate, for she too must "fall" in order to survive.

In both "Wie es geht" and "Blumen-Corso" (WS 213-5) Altenberg provides examples of the kind of employment open to girls from a working class or "kleinbürgerlich" background: cashier, actress or shop assistant, particularly in a florist's or confectioner's ("Melusine" WT 229-34). In each case they were poorly paid, however. An exhibition

mounted recently by the Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien has drawn attention to the particular plight of Vienna's "Blumenmacherinnen" who produced, in dreadful working conditions, those artificial flowers which became a Viennese speciality. The museum presented some documentary evidence in the form of a text for an illustration of a "Blumenfabrik" featured in an exhibition in Vienna in 1895, which took as its theme "Wienerstadt - Lebensbilder aus der Gegenwart":

Wer wagt es, z.B unsere hübschen Blumenmacherinnen zu verdächtigen, daß sie während ihrer flinken Hantirung mit Battist und Pergamentpapier, mit Gaze, Taffet und Sammt keinen anderen Gedanken haben als an Onkel Ferdinand Lasalle? Die feinsten Blattnarben, Spitzen und Ränder botanisch treu nachzuahmen - das ist ihr Ehrgeiz. "Zart, meine Damen, zart aber korrekt!" ruft die Leiterin der Werkstätte den jüngeren Mädchen manchmal zu und die Mahnung wird beherzigt. (32)

While it may be surmised that the 1895 exhibition provided Altenberg with a stock of images from the everyday reality of his contemporary Vienna, this illustration may well have been the inspiration for "Blumen-Corso" in which Altenberg turns to social inequality, depicting the plight of Vienna's poor working classes and homeless against the splendour of this annual parade. He emphasises that this event would line the pockets of many Viennese, but he also notes that false flowers were substituted for real ones, thereby implying the unhealthy face of life in the modern metropolis, in which the natural is corrupted and perverted. Throughout his life Altenberg remained sympathetic to the working class girl. His later writings, notably Mein Lebensabend, sing the praises of the diligent and uncomplaining chamber-maid, whose stoicism in the face of an uncompromisingly harsh fate and whose ability for self-sacrifice and renunciation he prized above all.

Around the turn of the century young middle class women came to regard work as a possible solution to their existential dilemma and ennui, and this is mirrored in the

literature of the period. In Chekov's Three Sisters, for example, Irene clearly sees work as the sole salvation for herself and her sisters, as a means of providing them with a vitally needed *raison d'être*. And in his brief survey of the social status of Viennese women around 1900, Günther Martin notes the wider social implications of woman's "redefinition" of her role and of her desire to liberate herself from her economic dependence on men, i.e. on her father or husband:

Dennoch, solcher Wille, sich auf eigene Füße zu stellen, obwohl doch sicherlich eine gute Partie ins Haus stünde, demonstrativ auszubrechen, und sei es in eines der sich mehrenden Büros als Tippmamsell, um nur innerlich frei zu werden, bildet ein Ferment der Gesellschaft. (33)

One such young woman is the subject of a piece by Altenberg entitled "Die Post-Novize" (WT 43-5). While the majority of her contemporaries see the necessity of having to work as an infringement of personal freedom, for her work holds the promise of liberation and fulfilment far in excess of that offered by a life which alternates between boredom and love affairs:

"Hier sind alle so fein mit mir, wie wenn man sagte: 'Auch du musst in das Joch?!' Wie wenn ich sie alle betröge, komme ich mir vor. Dieses andere Leben aus Langweile und Liebeleien!? Nein, ich weiss nun, wofür ich wenigstens vorhanden bin. Eine geordnete geregelte Lebensweise! Keine ungesundenen Träume mehr. Romantisch, war es bei der Frau Tante vielleicht romantisch?! Freilich der Herr Onkel. Nein, da ziehe ich den Ernst des Lebens vor. Ich danke."

However, during the period between 1896 and 1901 Altenberg continues to emphasise the social and psychological plight of the majority of middle class women, who, unlike his "Post-Novize", were unable to break out of their conventional and historically determined mould. In a piece entitled "Flirt" (WS 37), the shortest in the "See-Ufer" series, he explores the tragic consequences for one young woman of Viennese society's superficial attitude towards

relationships. For this society, love was an innocuous pastime, a "geistreich - galantes Spiel" (34) which answered the immediate needs of young men. Because society expected its young men to be established socially and financially before entering marriage (by which time they were often thirty-five or thirty-six years old) they were compelled to find alternative emotional and sexual outlets. The "süße Mädels" answered this need. For a brief period these young women enjoyed the attention, flattery and affectionate displays of young men who would eventually abandon them, in accordance with the dictates of society, to form more permanent attachments with women of their own class. These, then, are the hard social facts which inform a piece like "Flirt" in which Altenberg reveals, with particular sensitivity, the poignant fate of one such woman; he invites the reader to compare the loneliness of her later life with those brief moments of joy she experienced in her youth, and to censure those conventions which, by permitting - and even necessitating - relationships of such a temporary nature, discount the human life at stake in the love-game and silently authorise such suffering:

Später sass sie immer allein. Ihr mattgrünes  
Kleid schimmerte wie Phosphor. Sie zupfte langsam  
Rosenblätter ab, gab sie Niemandem zu essen.  
Eine Thräne fiel auf ihr Kleid.  
Aber Niemand sagte: Nektar!

#### 3.3.4 "Die dumme Lise"

In "Die dumme Lise" (WT 113-22) Altenberg examines another way in which the women of his society were obliged to comply with conventional roles and masculine preconceptions outlined by Stefan Zweig in Die Welt von Gestern:

Aber so wollte die Gesellschaft von damals das junge Mädchen, töricht und unbelehrt, wohlerzogen und ahnungslos, neugierig und schamhaft, unsicher und unpraktisch, und durch diese lebensfremde Erziehung von vornherein bestimmt, in der Ehe dann willenslos vom Manne geformt und geführt werden. (35)

To Altenberg too it seems that women were required above all not to think. He recognises that in his society the cultivation of personal opinions was frowned upon and might result in a woman being labelled "a silly goose" or even as "eine Hysterische". Lise, for example, is dismissed as stupid by other members of her class because of her refusal, and apparent inability, to conform to the norms of social behaviour. She does, however, find a champion in Giwril, a radical outsider in this society, "ein Aufwirbler" (a role which Altenberg ascribes to the poet elsewhere), for whom Lise is the "einzige Lügelse" or "Unverlogene". She alone in this social gathering is truly herself. Still a novice in the ways of the world, she has not yet learned (unlike her social counterparts) to enact a part at odds with her own nature (WT 114). Altenberg contrasts Lise's unashamed naivety, which allows her to discuss whatever she chooses regardless of the subject's appropriateness, with the artificial manners of her fellows.

Truthfulness to oneself, honesty and naivety are the virtues Altenberg extols above all others. He sees their living embodiment in a people from the Gold Coast and in the prostitute whose cause he, like Kraus, champions. In his early work she is presented "als Gegentyp der bürgerlichen Frau" (36) who, because she transcends social conventions, possesses greater individual freedom than bourgeois women. In "Revolutionär" he celebrates her candour - which he contrasts with the hypocrisy of polite society - and her refreshingly naive response to life. Her naked physical perfection suggests to Altenberg the innocence of mankind before the Fall and the lost Paradise which he attempts to regain through his writing, notably in Ashantee. He portrays the prostitute or "primitive" as an exemplary form of humanity who feels no shame since she has attained her ideal potential as a human being. Altenberg often takes pains to emphasise her emotional integrity and spiritual purity when depicting her erotic

freedom. Indeed, his frank treatment of and unprejudiced approach to a subject only privately acknowledged by society may well have outraged Vienna's reading public in 1896. In "Putain" (WS 188-90) for example, he describes, with remarkable candour and sympathy, the relationship of one "süsse Gefallene" with a middle class Viennese whose friendship she values. The description of her room, with which he prefaces an account of their relationship, implies by its naturalness both the disposition of the occupant and Altenberg's approval of her:

Das kleine Zimmer duftet wie Berg-Wiese. Im hellbraunen Lavoir liegen dicke Büschel von Daphne Cneorum, rosige Sternblüthen.

For, as indicated, Altenberg regarded nature in its widest sense and the naivety of the child, the negress and the prostitute in particular as antidotes to lethargy and ennui, those symptoms of decadence which he thought blighted his society. (See also Section 5.3).

### 3.3.5 Middle-aged women

The success of Altenberg's early "realistic" portraits of women is largely due to his ability to empathise and identify with them. And in Ecce Poeta Egon Friedell pays tribute to this "bisher unerreichte Fähigkeit, sich in das Seelenleben der Frau zu versetzen" (37). In Friedell's opinion, it is this which distinguishes Altenberg's writing from those authors who "sahen die Frau vom Manne aus" (38). In "Die Natur", for example, Altenberg demonstrates his ability to see life through the eyes of the elderly Frau E., contrasting her weariness and disillusionment with the optimism and romance of the younger generation. Altenberg would return frequently to this theme, the juxtaposition of old and new, youth and age, which is given prominence in "See-Ufer", where transience and the passage of time are thematicised. In addition, he manifests a special awareness for the way in which women

are affected by the ageing process. Their capacity for spreading "Freude, Licht und Wärme" - i.e. for enhancing the quality of the lives of those around them to which he often refers (in "Zwölf", "Beja Flor" and "Absinth 'Schönheit'" (WS 241-5), for example) - diminishes as they grow older, as one by one their hopes and dreams fade, unanswered. For such women, Altenberg suggests in "Die Natur", resignation offers the only possibility of coming to terms with life, and nature alone provides compensation for the unfulfilled promises of youth:

Frau von E. sass, ein bischen gebückt, in ihrem kleinen Boote und genoss den Abendfrieden ---. (WS 14)

### 3.4 The "ideal" Woman: Frau Fabrikdirektor von H.

Within Wie ich es sehe, the realistic portraits of women in the "See-Ufer" series are balanced, in a series originally entitled "Frau Bankdirektor von H", by an idealised image of womanhood, although the abbreviation of her name does suggest that she had a real life model. In the fourth and subsequent editions of Wie ich es sehe Altenberg changed Frau Bankdirektor to Frau Fabrikdirektor von H., but carelessly, or perhaps intentionally, retained the Bankdirektor in the series. One reason for this change may have been objections raised by the - all too readily identifiable - model for the series. Nonetheless Frau von H., is, as Peter Wagner has confirmed, Altenberg's "Leitbild seelenvoller Weiblichkeit", his ideal of "Innerlichkeit" (39). She is imbued with "überschüssige Seele" which, Altenberg suggests in "Am Lande", enables her to transcend material cares and enter communion with nature. In this piece, she too is associated with water and is depicted in the characteristic attitude used by Altenberg to denote a dreamy, romantic temperament, deep spirituality and otherworldliness. We might compare her dreamy contemplation of the lake with that of Rositta in "Neun und elf". Both Rositta and Frau von H., or Anita, love nature - Anita is pictured passively drinking in

nature - and possess an artistic temperament, a necessary precondition of which is their delicate physical constitution.

While the series ends with a piece which explores Anita's relationship with nature and the receptive aspect of her artistic temperament, it opens with a piece entitled "Ein poetischer Abend" (WS 69-71) which introduces Anita in festive mood and emphasises her artistic creativity. In particular, Altenberg notes Anita's ability to create harmony in her surroundings and in the relationships of those around her which, he suggests, is an offshoot of her artistic temperament. For at her behest voices are raised in unison, while her "Symphonie in Roth" is responsible for the creation of atmospheric unity. Indeed, she is responsible for realising, in life, a subtle harmony more usually associated with art. As such she represents Altenberg's ideal, the "Lebenskünstler", an individual who exercises his/her artistic talent in life so as to enhance its quality.

"Die Dienstboten" (WS 71-6) takes as its theme Anita's relationship with her servants. Her understanding of them, which compares favourably with the rough handling of Hedwig by her mistress in "Tristan und Isolde" (WT), is upheld by Altenberg as an example for the middle class readers to whom he addresses much of his writing. He emphasises Anita's sympathetic response to the secret hopes and ambitions of the young women in her employ and, by commending her conduct, implies criticism of those relationships between employer and employee which are characterised by ignorance and misunderstanding.

In each of the following pieces, "Der Trommler Belin" (WS 76-9), "Venedig in Wien" (WS 79-83), "Café Chantant" (WS 83-6) "Quartett-Soirée" (WS 86-91), "'Der Cid' - Herr Winkelmann" (WS 91-4) and "Ecce Domina!" (WS 95), Altenberg examines the relationship between Anita and her husband Albert and assesses the level of his understanding for his delicate and spiritually refined wife. In addition,

each piece reveals a new facet of Anita's character by presenting her in situations removed from the everyday reality - a visit to a variety show or "Venedig in Wien" recently opened in the Prater, to a musical soir ee or dining after a visit to the theatre. In the first of these, "Der Trommler Belin", Altenberg differentiates between Anita's intuitive appreciation of the drummer's performance, which conveys to her the horrible truth of war, with the unfavourable response of the audience in general, there to be entertained but offended instead by this "schrecklicher Trommler" (WS 78).

"Venedig in Wien" describes an ideal relationship between man and woman, paying particular attention to the role of the husband who, it is implied, should be attentive to the physical needs of his wife and who should, where possible, provide for her spiritual fulfilment. "Quartett-Soir ee", on the other hand, is principally concerned with the effects of music on the psyche, and Anita is only one member of this social gathering. With "Ecce Domina!" however, she is once again the focus of attention in this short piece which suggests that, for men, she is an object of reverence. As such, this piece is indirectly related to Altenberg's "Frauenkult".

In "Caf e Chantant" Altenberg uses the performance of Mademoiselle Paquerette to introduce a favourite theme in his writing and one which owes much to his understanding of Friedrich Nietzsche. For, like Nietzsche, Altenberg recognises in his society the symptoms of cultural decay. He too believes it necessary to revitalise society, to stimulate movement in order to overcome physical and mental lethargy (see Section 4.2). And it is for this reason that he extols the agility both of Mr. Bigloff in "No Age" and of professional dancers. However, for those who, like Anita, lack physical elasticity, enthusiasm ("Schw armerei") - which in Caf e Chantant is described as "Bewegung der Seele" - offers another means of overcoming rigidity and torpor, for in Altenberg's opinion it too is a stimulus to life.

Finally, in "'Der Cid' - Herr Winkelmann", in which the characters remain anonymous, Altenberg examines the fundamental nature of man and woman. Indeed, it is a mark of Altenberg's sophistication and psychological insight that he does so by exploring woman's preconception of man and vice versa, and by looking at the way in which women are conditioned to regard themselves in relation to men.

"Siegfried und Hamlet", dachte sie. Aber sie war zu bescheiden, um das auszusprechen. Er war ja der Mann, der grosse Musiker, der Philosoph, der Denker-..

Anita recognises that in her society woman is not required to think. Indeed she is considered incapable of rational thought by men. While men are at liberty to think what they want, Anita, like other women, must content herself with feelings. Moreover, she acknowledges the supremacy of man ("der Grosse, der Zwingende") and woman's passive subordination to him.

It is clear from Altenberg's early writing that he too subscribes to the historically determined view of man as a rational, woman as an irrational, being. However, he breaks with tradition and the entrenched masculine morality of contemporary society in his positive evaluation of feminine emotion and irrationality. Like his philosophical mentor, Nietzsche, he presents irrationality as an antidote to the scientific rationalism and materialism of his age.

### 3.5 Women and the "Frauenkult" in Was der Tag mir zuträgt

Altenberg prefaced the third collection of his studies, Was der Tag mir zuträgt (1901), with a programmatic piece entitled "Warum Sie Dieses Dichters Werke so sehr liebt". Ostensibly written and dedicated by a young girl to Peter Altenberg, the piece outlines the poet's responsibility towards the "Frauenseele" and stresses his duty to those women who, because of the pressures of their daily lives, are unable to attend to

their own spiritual requirements. Two further pieces, "Selbstbiographie" and "Selbstanzeige"\* have a comparable programmatic significance. They too provide an exposition of Altenberg's "Frauenkult" and highlight important areas of his thought.

In the former, "Selbstbiographie", Altenberg reaffirms his enthusiasm for "Gottes Kunstwerk 'Frauenleib'", perhaps because woman's naked physical perfection enables him to envisage mankind in its ideal, prelapsarian, state. He maintains in "Selbstbiographie" that the main purpose of his writing is to "enlighten" his fellow men who are prevented by the demands of their work from exploring the nature of the opposite sex:

Meinen kleinen Sachen, die ich schreibe, lege ich nur den Wert bei, den Mann, welchen seine Tausend Pflichten erschöpfen und aushöhlen, ein bißchen aufzuklären über dieses liebliche zarte und mysteriöse Geschöpf an seiner Seite. (WT 11)

This intention is confirmed in the later "Selbstanzeige", in which Altenberg expresses his concern to portray woman from a female, rather than a male, point of view (WT 3). However, "Selbstanzeige" was designed primarily to illustrate what spiritual benefits - in the form of self-knowledge and fulfilment - women and girls might derive from Altenberg's writing.

Altenberg, in common with such prominent Viennese thinkers as Kraus and Weininger, challenges historical assumptions about the nature and relationship of the sexes, and attempts to redefine the basis of their relationship. In "Selbstanzeige", for example, he characterises man and woman in the following manner, and suggests how each might best serve the other:

\*"Selbstanzeige" is included in the second and subsequent editions of Was der Tag mir zuträgt, where it is placed immediately after the list of contents.

Die Frau, siehe, ist die unerbittliche Idealistin, gleichsam vom Schicksal in die Welt gesetzt, um den Mann, diesen perfiden Pactirer mit dem Leben, zu zwingen, seine eigenen Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten zu erreichen! (WT 2)

In his opinion, it is the duty of woman (who is frequently described in his early work as an idealist) to force man to realise his ideal potential, while in his "Selbstbiographie" he emphasises that man's only possibility of attaining his evolutionary goal depends upon woman. He believes that her physical beauty can inspire spiritual perfection in the opposite sex, and considers her active support crucial to the spiritual evolution of man:

..... Wisse es, Verführter des Lebens, dass Du ein Tagelöhner, ein Kärerner, ein Gefangener, ein Rekrut bist, ein Selbst-Betrüger und Betrogener des Lebens und dass nur durch die 'heilige schöne Frau' Du ein Adelliger und ein Kaiserlicher werden könntest! (WT 11)

This, then, is the basis of Altenberg's "Frauenkult", his earliest attempt at an evolutionary theory which has as its goal the spiritual refinement and improvement of man.

Women themselves do not seem to have been considered as candidates for the evolutionary process. Geoffrey Broad argues that the "Frauenkult" which established Altenberg's reputation as a modern troubadour and champion of women was in fact firmly anchored in the contemporary masculine morality:

Behind the opaque screen of the evolutionary theory in Altenberg's work the female is reduced to a mere pawn in a Weltanschauung which makes an implicit claim to the superiority of the male sex. (40)

From this it would appear that although he renounced the traditional view of woman's social and biological functions, Altenberg continued to value her as a means to an end, albeit a spiritual end. However, in my opinion, this argument holds true only for Altenberg's later writing which

witnesses his thorough disillusionment with womankind and his retreat into the entrenched masculine morality of his day. For, at the time of his writing Wie ich es sehe and Was der Tag mir zuträgt, Altenberg clearly values woman more highly than man, insisting that she already possesses a greater degree of spiritual refinement. As such she clearly had no need of the evolutionary process. Moreover, in his "Selbstanzeige" Altenberg states firmly that by realising his evolutionary potential, man is acting in the interests of woman: "Deine Vollkommenheit ist ihre Erlösung!" (WT 2). In his early writing Altenberg presents his "Frauenkult" as a reciprocal process, as a programme of mutual cooperation which should result in the spiritual evolution of man and liberation of woman. In addition, the "Frauenkult" was intended to establish the relationship of the sexes on an equitable and spiritually solid foundation.

In the retrospectively written "Selbstanzeige" Altenberg suggests that it had been his intention in Was der Tag mir zuträgt to render an idealistic portrait of woman, an intention wholly realised in the initial study, "Aus dem Tagebuch der edlen Miss Madrilene" (WT 13-22). The piece, which purports to be a diary entry, illustrates an attitude to life which Altenberg wishes to recommend to his fellow Viennese. Indeed, the exemplary significance of the piece is indicated in the title, by Altenberg's use of the attribute "edel" to describe Madrilene. This adjective is frequently used by him to denote spiritual refinement and true culture, qualities which he believed would distinguish the "new man" from the so-called "homme médiocre". Moreover, Altenberg's choice of the title "Miss" for Madrilene is also significant. Like Mr. Bigloff in "No Age" she is not an Austrian, and it is implied that, like him, she too has attained a degree of physical and spiritual perfection as yet unrealised by Altenberg's fellow countrymen. Both characters display qualities of which Altenberg approves. Their dress, for example, is a

variation of the "Reformdress", loose, comfortable clothing which Altenberg - and Klimt - wished to substitute for the restrictive dress fashionable in Vienna at the turn of the century. For in his opinion man cannot evolve spiritually while physically restricted. Loose clothing, on the other hand, affords the individual greater mobility and, as in the case of Madrilene and Mr. Bigloff, suggests personal freedom. Portrayed as free of material cares, Madrilene, unlike her social counterparts in the "See-Ufer" series, possesses a degree of self-awareness and self-confidence. She acknowledges the imperfections of her sex and betrays an awareness of woman's mission vis-à-vis man, as outlined by Altenberg in his "Selbstanzeige".

However, the idyllic world of Madrilene - in which friendship is based on deep spiritual rapport, and where woman is at liberty to cultivate the spiritual side of her being - is but one aspect of the utopian vision contained in Was der Tag mir zuträgt. For, in addition, this work projects an idealised view of the relationship between the sexes which is exemplified in such pieces as "Der Freund" (72-75), "Diese ist sein" (92-96) and "Melusine" (229-234). And yet, despite a pronounced idealistic tendency, Altenberg neither overlooks nor attempts to gloss over the actual shortcomings of many relationships. Already in the "See-Ufer" series he had revealed the precarious nature of the relationship between man and woman, and in "Landparthie" (WS 33-7) had suggested the difficulties they experience in communicating. Now, in Was der Tag mir zuträgt, he consciously juxtaposes his ideal vision of a perfect partnership with an image of a tense relationship in which each partner remains unfulfilled, in (for example) "Der 'Fliegende Holländer'" (137-9) and "Walküre" (235-41). This has the effect of strengthening the appeal of the former, and is obviously intended as an encouragement to his readers to strive for such perfection in their own relationships. Moreover, the inclusion of "Tulpen" (64-7), "Der Abendspaziergang"

(251-2) and "So lieben Slavinen" (270) serves to remind us of the enmity which can exist between man and woman. Like the earlier piece, "Assarow und Madame Oyasouki" (WS), both "Tulpen" and "Der Abendspaziergang" reveal woman's cruel sport with man's emotions and her subjugation of him. The former demonstrates woman's capacity to destroy man's happiness, while the latter shows how, by bringing psychological pressure to bear, woman is able to subjugate man to her will. Finally, in "So lieben Slavinen", Altenberg argues that many women are incapable of true love, of loving man for his own sake. Instead, their "love" is a means of satisfying their own emotional needs, and of bolstering their own self-esteem. Indeed, this is the kind of love which Altenberg consistently denounces in terms such as the following:

Chinen für Rückenmark-Fieber, Morphium für  
Seelen-Leere-Leiden, Pölzungen für schwankendes  
Selbstbewusstsein, geschickte Bilanz-Fälschungen  
 von Seelen-Bankrottirern, fixe Idee der Seele und  
 Irrsinn des Rückenmarkes! (WT 70)

In an attempt to overcome such moral and emotional inadequacy Altenberg exhorts his fellow men to face the truth of their existence, to overcome the existential void by developing greater self-awareness and self-reliance. And in place of this suspect, selfish love he advocates the noble, selfless love which he sees exemplified above all by the Wagnerian heroine, Brünnhilde. In "Gotterdämmerung-Anfang" (P. 159-60), for example, he not only commends Brünnhilde's understanding of her beloved Siegfried, but also her willingness to renounce her meagre claims upon him in order that he might "fulfil" himself. For Altenberg, as for C. Day Lewis in his poem "Walking Away", love is proved in the "letting-go".

In addition to furnishing him with a model of exemplary behaviour, Wagner's music dramas had a decisive effect on Altenberg's aesthetic and supplied the titles for a number of pieces. "Der Ring des Niebelungen"

provided the inspiration for "Rheingold" (ML 87-9) and "Aufführung der Walküre (ML 141-3), which are contained in Märchen des Lebens, while in Was der Tag mir zuträgt the names of three of Wagner's operas are taken over by Altenberg as titles for pieces which deal with the relationship between the sexes: "Der 'Fliegende Holländer'", "Tristan und Isolde" and "Walküre". In a recent study of Wagner and modern European literature, Raymond Furness notes the Bayreuth Master's influence on Altenberg and argues that, in common with such varied and disparate authors as Nestroy, Carl Sternheim, Grillparzer, Fontane and Heinrich Mann, Altenberg set out to parody Wagner's style and world view:

A frequent source of amusement was the dichotomy between the overwrought sublimity of Wagner's heroes and heroines, and humbler, often more domestic realities; another Viennese, Peter Altenberg, in his collection of impressionistic sketches entitled What the Day brings (1901) gives a witty description of a wife who casts herself in the role of Senta, longing to "redeem" her husband who stands before her in his underwear gargling: of a young man who returns in ecstasy from a performance of Tristan and finds his Isolde in the maid: and of a young lady whose raptures at a performance of "Die Walkuere" are interrupted by her husband who solicitously offers her coffee-cream chocolates with nut centres. (41)

But despite his readiness to exploit the humour of the situation, Altenberg's juxtaposing of Wagner's romantic vision of the relationship between the sexes with the mundane reality was governed by a serious, didactic intention. His primary concern was not to deflate Wagner's elevated vision, but rather, by emphasising the deeply spiritual and transcendental nature of the relationships between Wagner's characters, to suggest its exemplary significance. In the same way as he advocates the unselfish love of Brünnhilde, or indeed the unflinching loyalty of Kurwenal and Brangäne, so too does he regard the relationship between Senta and the Flying Dutchman, Sieglinde and Siegmund, Siegfried and Brünnhilde,

as paradigmatic. In short, Wagnerian opera provided in considerable measure the inspiration for Altenberg's idealistic conception of the relationship between the sexes, as well as an absolute standard against which the shortcomings of actual relationships could be measured.

Moreover, in view of his lifelong veneration of Wagner (whom he often refers to as "Gott Wagner"\*) it is extremely unlikely that Altenberg wished to detract from or parody Wagner's achievement. On the contrary, while he believed in the relation of all art to life, in both "Walküre" (ML) and "Aufführung der Walküre" (ML) he underlines the representative validity of the fate of Sieglinde and the Valkyrie:

Junge, arme, wunderbare Mädchen, weshalb rückt ihr die Kunst so endlos weit von eurem Leben ab, daß sie euch nicht störe und treffe in eurem Herzen?!? Alles, was dort ist, ist in eurem eigenen Leben, und alles Schicksal der Walküre und Sieglindens ist unentrinnbar in euch selber! (ML 135)

Similarly, in "Der 'Fliegende Holländer'", Altenberg propounds the likeness between Senta and all women: "Wie Senta im 'Fliegenden Holländer' sind alle Frauenseelen" (WT 137). In his opinion all women experience a deep spiritual need to "redeem" man, i.e. to provide for his spiritual fulfilment. But their need invariably remains unanswered since the kind of man they long for has an ideal rather than a real existence, and the material demands of their real-life husbands leave them spiritually frustrated.

In his writing Altenberg not only employs Wagner's heroines as paradigms of ideal womanhood; he also uses Wagnerian opera as a vehicle for his "Frauenkult". "Walküre" (WT 235-241) is a striking example of the way in which he adapts the Wagnerian model to his specific requirements. Apart from the hint of bathos detected by Furness

\* See Prodrómōs (159-60) and Mein Lebensabend (89-90)

in "Walküre" during the first act when the husband offers his wife coffee-creams, the tone of the piece is both serious and elevated. Moreover, I consider it unlikely that Altenberg wished either to deflate the significance of the opera or his interpretation of it by this brief inclusion of realistic detail. The division of the opera into three acts provides him with a ready-made framework and allows him to reveal the gradual enlightenment of his subject, as to her own nature and her relationship with her husband, in stages.

Altenberg describes how during the first act his subject, a young woman, grasps the true significance of Sieglinde's flight from Hunding:

Aber plötzlich sagte Frau Paulina Dönges-Sieglinde:  
"Dieser Heerd und ich sind Herren Hunding zu eigen!"  
Wie die Kreideperiode der Seele ist es: "Ich bin zu eigen!!"  
"Ich bin zu eigen ---" fühlte die Dame.  
Stille. Schweigen. Sammlung ---  
Aber plötzlich ertönen die Silber-Posaunen der Seele, welche die Mauern Jerichos in Trümmer legen und Sieglinde feierte innere Siege und wusste, dass sie nun niemandem mehr zu eigen sei als ihrer eigenen Seele!!

She sees in Sieglinde's marriage to Hunding a parallel with her own situation, and realises that she - like Sieglinde before the advent of Siegmund - is utterly dependent on her husband, that she is, in a sense, his possession. However, Sieglinde's flight with Siegmund suggests to her how it is possible for woman to liberate herself from masculine domination and enter a relationship in which she is an equal partner. Indeed, Altenberg challenges the bourgeois mentality which treats the union of Siegmund and Sieglinde as incest in "Walküre" by emphasising the spiritual dimension of their relationship:

Die Dame betete innerlich: "Richard Wagner!  
Mein Gott! Ich höre Dich! Wie einfach ist es!  
Wie evangelisch! Jawohl, der brüderlichste

Bruder seiner Frau sein! Das ist es.  
Die schwesterlichste Schwester seines  
Geliebten! Was braucht man da zu grübeln?!  
 So ist es. Amen ---."

As we have seen, Altenberg strongly opposes the typecasting of woman in a subordinate sexual and matrimonial role. He believes the historical emphasis on the sexual consummation of marriage to be mistaken, and through his writing encourages his fellow men to treat their wives more as a father or mother might treat their child, or a brother his sister. He invariably emphasises the spiritual and psychological dimension of the relationship between the sexes and criticises its sexual aspect on the grounds that sex pollutes love and distracts man from his spiritual goal. In "Walküre" he contends that woman should no longer be regarded as a sex object, as the means of satisfying man's "nocturnal passions". Rather, man should acknowledge, in her unashamed spirituality and frank admission of her emotions, the projection of that facet of his own being which he had been compelled to neglect down the ages in order to concentrate on his social role as businessman and breadwinner (WT 237).

Like the initial study, "Aus dem Tagebuch der edlen Miss Madriline", both "Der Freund" (72-5) and "Diese ist sein" (92-6) are exemplary pieces which portray a model relationship between the sexes. The title of the former denotes what Altenberg considers the ideal role of the husband, that of a friend. It should perhaps be emphasised that Altenberg's portrait of Der Freund is highly idealised. His awareness of Jolanthe's physical and spiritual needs, the latter being exemplified by his provision of The Studio, is exceptional, as is perhaps his respect for the "sanctity" of her feelings on the fifteenth of each month, the celebrated day of The Studio's arrival. His thoughtful regulation of Jolanthe's life and his solicitous attention to her requirements guarantee her state of physical and emotional well-being. Thus, Jolanthe, unlike so many of her peers (whose disillusionment and lack of fulfilment Altenberg

records), never falls victim to the kind of neurosis common amongst middle class Viennese women around the turn of the century. In "Diese ist sein" Altenberg once again prescribes, in detail, how a husband should treat his wife. He should, for example, pay particular attention to his wife's diet, which in Altenberg's view is the key to both physical and emotional health. But he should also provide for her spiritual growth and indeed anticipate her spiritual needs. As in "Walküre", Altenberg emphasises the important part played by music, especially Wagner's, in woman's growth (see WT 95 and 239).

### 3.6 Women and the "Frauenkult" in Pròdròmòs

Compared with the realistic and idealised portraits of women in his early work, Altenberg's portrayal of women in Pròdròmòs is generalised and less interesting. He no longer differentiates between women of different ages and from different social backgrounds, but attempts to fit them instead into one of two rough categories: the "edle Frau" or "das gewöhnliche Weib" (who is also referred to as "die unideale" or "unerzogene Frau"). Altenberg's attitude to women is positive if and when they fulfil their "mission" vis-à-vis men, and negative when they prove incapable of this.

Ihr habt eure Macht mitbekommen, um uns hinauf-  
nicht herunter zu bringen. (P 66)

Altenberg cautions women in Pròdròmòs and exhorts them to exercise their undoubted power over men judiciously, so that the latter might prosper and develop spiritually.

Despite the new emphasis on a physiological approach to the evolutionary question in Pròdròmòs, Altenberg continues to accord a central position to his "Frauenkult" - a fact which secondary literature often overlooks (42). Indeed, there is strong evidence in this work to suggest that he considered that a dedicated woman could further the cause of a man's spiritual evolution more effectively than

he himself could independently by following Altenberg's advice on diet and hygiene. "Seelische Liebe" remains for him "der genialste Akkumulator und Regenerator" (P 40). He emphasises that it is woman's duty to augment man's vital resources, to act as a "Lebensenergien Vermehrer" (P 107) or "ein Tonikum für seine Gottes-Ähnlichkeiten" (P 90). His inclusion of a number of exemplary pieces in the form of the "Frauenmonolog", in which he attempts to commend his views to women, provides further proof of his continued faith in the "Frauenkult".

Like the diary entries attributed to various young women in Viennese society, these monologues provide Altenberg with a means of advertising his views. By using fictitious characters as his mouthpiece, Altenberg suggests the favourable reception of his ideas in some quarters, hoping that this, in turn, would strengthen their appeal. The following piece is representative of the exemplary "Frauenmonolog" which Altenberg addresses primarily to his female audience:

Ich möchte die Summe der Lebens-Energien meines Geliebten, in körperlicher seelischer geistiger und ökonomischer Beziehung, betreuen und beschützen, erhalten und vermehren zu jeder Stunde. Ich möchte für diese Edel-Maschine "Mann" das sein was reine Bergesluft und leichte feine Nahrung sind! Ein Tonikum für seine Gottes-Ähnlichkeiten!

Und erlischt eines Tages meine magische Anziehungskraft, so will ich sanftmütig aus seinem Leben verschwinden, gedenkend der heiligen Tage und Nächte, da er gedieh gleichsam unter meinen Atemzügen! (P 90-91)

Here, too, Altenberg stresses that woman's role is to preserve and increase man's vital resources, and to exert a beneficial influence on his spiritual development. The second paragraph implies his own passionate hope that woman will have the strength and the goodness to leave man once she realises that she is no longer of use to him. This hope runs through each of Altenberg's subsequent works, often taking the form of an impassioned plea to woman to respect man's need for solitude and independence. It also prompted

the inclusion in Pròdrómós of "Ein Liebes-Brief" (151-2), ostensibly written by Elizabeth Barret-Browning to her husband Robert, in which she acknowledges his need for freedom in order that he might develop spiritually, and renounces her claims upon him. Finally, in "Religion" (P 140), another "Frauenmonolog", Altenberg implies woman's crucial yet subordinate role in man's evolution. For in this piece woman is seen to regard herself purely as an aesthetic object whose beauty enriches man spiritually and has a catalytic effect on his evolution:

Mit meinem Leib, diesem bezweckten Geschenke Gottes, will ich ihn reicher machen und reicher, da ich denselben nur mit bekam, um aus diesem Menschen "Mann" den Menschen "gottähnliches Wesen" zu machen! Der Schöpfer dachte sich in genialer Weise mich als Mittel aus, den Mann durch mich zu seinem Ebenbilde zu erhöhen!

We might compare Altenberg's revaluation of woman's role here with the basic tenets of the contemporary masculine morality which relegated woman to object-status.

In "Religion" Altenberg differentiates between the attitude of his anonymous subject and that of "die anderen Damen" who, she realises, are intent on debasing man, and who selfishly incite his jealousy, that "Krebs der Seele" which (in Altenberg's opinion) dissipates man's vital resources and thwarts his evolution. He is highly critical of those women who lack "religious" zeal and who long instead for sexual gratification. In Pròdrómós he warns his fellow men of the dangers which attend involvement with such women. Their physical demands of man would exhaust his vital resources and thus deprive him of the means of attaining his potential, his evolutionary ideal:

Sie adaptiert uns für das Seiende, bewahrt uns vor ungewissen und dennoch möglichen "werdenden Welten", die aus unseren überschüssigen Kräften erblühen wollen.

Deine Träumereien, deine Utopien, deine Wahrheits-Ahnungen, deine Fanatismen nimmt sie liebevoll gleichsam in ihrem Becken auf! (P 17-18)

Altenberg's criticism of the sexual side of relationships, which finds expression both in this piece and indeed in Pròdrómós in general, should be regarded in the light of his conviction that man can best attain his evolutionary goal by conserving and accumulating his vital resources:

Jeder wird zum Dichter wenn er seine  
überschüssigen Kräfte in sich anhäuft  
die zu "Symphonien des eigenen Lebens" werden!

Nur der, der immer gerade so viel immer wieder  
ausgibt als er besitzt, bleibt eingesperrt im kleinen  
Kreislaufe, ein ödes Geschlechts-Tier! (P 63)

He repeatedly stresses the value of spiritual love which, he believes, activates the soul and thus acts as a catalyst in man's evolutionary process. And he urges that relationships be seen primarily as "eine seelische Angelegenheit", for he maintains in Pròdrómós (12), "Aus seelischem allein erblüht Kraft und Frieden". Sex, on the other hand, can be justified only as an outlet for superfluous spiritual reserves, i.e. as "die letzte unentrinnbare Auslösung ungeheurer aufgesammelter seelischer Lebens Spannkkräfte".

### 3.7 Altenberg the misogynist

Between the years 1908 to 1913 Altenberg attempts to effect a more balanced portrayal of womankind by juxtaposing negative images of woman as she-devil or the betrayer and murderer of man, with pieces which reaffirm his enthusiasm for her, such as his distinctive love poems (e.g. ML 41). His increased awareness of the inadequacies of the fair sex, of woman's vanity and greed, her egotism and lack of idealism, is offset by a display of sympathy for those women whose harsh lot in life attracted his support. His enthusiasm for prepubescent girls meanwhile remains constant, even during the long years of his acute psychological depression which sapped his strength and his optimism. Then, the natural beauty and grace of young girls were capable of restoring his spirits (see ML 232-3).

However, beneath this semblance of objectivity the underlying tendency of Altenberg's writing of this period is misogynistic and reminiscent of Weininger and his philosophical forebear, Arthur Schopenhauer. For, like Schopenhauer, Altenberg became convinced of woman's mendacity ("Verlogenheit"), her apparently natural propensity for lies and deceit. Moreover, he too emphasises what he sees as woman's injustice and her lack of a sense of fair play. In "Erste Liebe" (LA 6-7), for example, he presents one early childhood experience as representative of the unjust treatment he subsequently received at the hands of all women. Like Schopenhauer, Altenberg frequently denounces women's behaviour as "coquetry", for in his opinion the desire to ensnare and subjugate man is the mainspring of all their actions. During the years 1908-1913 he often portrays woman in a dominant and destructive mood, describing her as the "Beherrscherin und Zerstörerin dieser unglückseligen zarten Welt 'männliche Zuneigung'" (NA 147). And on one occasion he even applauds the "verbrecherische Genialität" of a young man who, in order to prevent the suffering which he foresees as the inevitable consequence of his love for a nineteen year old girl, murders her (NA 147).

Whereas in his early works Altenberg portrays himself as the custodian of the delicate and defenceless soul of woman, now in the works of this later period he realises his duty towards the victimised man. His feminism is eclipsed by violent misogynistic outbursts for which Otto Weininger's Geschlecht und Charakter may have provided the inspiration and justification.

First published in 1903, Weininger's magnum opus was widely acclaimed; the suicide of its young author later that year was a cold guarantee for the work's commercial success and by 1925 Geschlecht und Charakter had reached its twenty-sixth edition. In his introduction, Weininger sets out the aims of his study:

Dieses Buch unternimmt es, das Verhältnis der Geschlechter in ein neues, entscheidendes Licht zu rücken.

He proceeds from the hypothesis that "the concepts masculine and feminine represent primarily psychological ideal types of variations on Platonic ideas and are embodied only secondarily in actual human beings" (43) and argues that these ideal types explain the basis of all human behaviour. He evaluates the masculine principle positively, equating it with rationality and creativity and attributing to it all progress in history. He depicts the feminine principle as its antithesis, as a destructive, nihilistic and irrational force.

Although his reticence about influences makes it difficult to estimate accurately Altenberg's response to leading philosophical ideas and debates of his day, he does appear to have familiarised himself early with Weininger's arguments, which he then gradually assimilated to his own "Weltanschauung".\* In his later works he appears especially sensitive to Weininger's personal fate at the hands of women, depicting him, as he does Strindberg, as an artist whose happiness and achievements are bedevilled by women. But he is also critical of their apparent weakness which manifested itself in their impotency and capitulation before the opposite sex. (NL 123-4)

Whereas in his early works Altenberg (in contradiction to Weininger) accredits woman with a soul, in his later writing he appears more interested in the sexual side of her nature. Like Weininger, he argues that woman lives in a perpetual state of "physiologische Erregbarkeit" (see S 212), and in a number of pieces \*\* to which Altenberg gives the title "Das Flugerl" (a term which he claims to have coined, and which in Märchen des Lebens he defines as "Diejenigen, auf die sie mit den Nerven fliegen,

\* Vita Ipsa contains several citations from Weininger's work - see "Wirkung von 'Lektüre'" (206-8)

\*\* e.g. ML 46-7; ML 182-3 and NF 190

nicht mit der Seele.") he examines the implications of woman's "physiologische Irritabilität" or "Erregbarkeit". In one of these (ML 46-7), he begins by uncovering what he believes to be man's supreme fallacy, his faith in woman, by pointing out that all women are at all times capable of being physically aroused by a type of man whom Altenberg calls a "Flugerl".

In Altenberg's opinion, woman's response to "das Flugerl" is of a purely physical nature and can be attributed to a powerful subconscious drive over which she has little control. As an inhabitant of the city of Freud, Altenberg was particularly aware of the way in which human behaviour appears governed by the sex drive. In "Das Institut" (NF 195-6) he refers to mankind's "vor allem durch Sexualität irritierten Nerven".

Against this background human relationships appeared precarious, while love itself seemed fleeting and elusive. In the short, dramatic series "In einem Kurpark" (ML 34-6) Altenberg is content to suggest the transitory nature of love in a brief but evocative piece. In "Idylle" (BL 60-2) however, a "Fünfminutenspiel" which recaptures the haunting atmospheric qualities of Maeterlinckian drama in its use of a "Schleiertuch" and shadowy, allegorical figures, Altenberg identifies more closely those deep psychological forces which combine to destroy happiness and love: fulfilment, boredom, hysteria, jealousy and "der Nadelstich", by which Altenberg means those minor irritations which strike a note of discord in any relationship. It is interesting to compare "Idylle" with Klimt's choice of subject matter in his painting "Die Liebe" of 1895 which may even have been the inspiration for Altenberg's dramatic piece.

### 3.8 The critique of the "Frauenkult"

Although Altenberg never entirely rules out the possibility of man's attaining salvation through woman, an element of criticism of the "Frauenkult" emerges in Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens. This criticism first

becomes explicit in a piece entitled "Frauengunst" (BL 39-40), in which Altenberg laments that even the most intelligent men persist in their foolish endeavour to curry favour with women, "Wie feile Senatoren vor einem wahnwitzigen Cäsar!". He enlarges upon this theme in "Die 'gewöhnliche' Frau" (BL 68-9) where, by overturning the basic premise of courtly love in which the poet seeks his lady's favour, Altenberg demonstrates the pitfalls of "Frauengunst":

Wehe dir, der du nicht geschützt bist vor Frauengunst,  
und verbrennst in Liebesbrunst!  
Ein ewig Wachsender bisher, wirst du nun ein  
Stillgestandener!

These opening lines establish the theme and tone of a poem which, unlike Altenberg's other experiments with poetic forms, is in rhyme. In it Altenberg speaks out against marriage, which he believes restricts man's evolutionary potential, and cautions man that the adulation of woman precludes the possibility of his realising his "divine" potential: "Der Gott in dir duldet keine Göttinnen." (p69) Even the most perfect woman, Altenberg concludes, is incapable of true self-sacrifice in the cause of man's spiritual evolution, and with this the grounds for his disillusionment with women and the "Frauenkult" become fully apparent.

Altenberg's attitude to woman in Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens is more consistently critical and sceptical than in his preceding works. He frequently depicts her as a vain creature, capable of manipulating men and incapable of gratitude, and describes how her idealism is all too often undermined by powerful "innere Mächte". In "Die Jungfrau von Orleans" (BL 151-5), for example, he suggests that woman's capacity for self-sacrifice and idealism vanishes with the onset of puberty. Henceforth, she is content with a life which Altenberg considers too narrowly circumscribed. He criticises her for forsaking her duty to all humanity and concentrating instead on one "meistens minderwertigen Einzelmenschen" (BL 151) and her

"perhaps worthless" children. Elsewhere he acknowledges that marriage and domesticity provide woman with a "comfortable" life style, easier by far than the path mapped out for her should she wish to partner the poet or 'new man', but is angered and disappointed that so few women possess sufficient strength and idealism to accompany him "in höhere Regionen". (See Altenberg's letters to Lina Loos in Friedell's Altenbergbuch.)

Neues Altes (1911) reflects Altenberg's mounting frustration with the opposite sex, whose lack of personality or "leere Persönlichkeiten" (NA 43) he now, like Weininger, condemns. His irritation with women increases when he observes that, in spite of their own inadequacy, they appear to tolerate no rivals and continue to make demands on man's attention. In "Heilmittel" (NA 67) Altenberg presents a wholly negative image of woman, pinpointing her malicious thoughts and instincts and above all her "innere Leere", while in "Plauderei" (NA 49-50) he exposes, once again, woman's superiority over man in the war of words. "Angstschrei" (NA 163-4), on the other hand, takes the form of an urgent plea to his fellow men to recognise the way in which their vital resources are being sapped by women and to guard against "dieser tiefsten Gefahr: unerzogenes, eitles, freches und sich überhebendes Weib!" who, he concludes, is a "Teufline statt Schutzengel". Finally, in "Zynismus" (NA 147-8), Altenberg appears to have abandoned all hope of achieving salvation through woman. He is reduced here to pleading with woman not to aggravate the wounds he has already sustained.

In Semmering 1912 Altenberg's attitude to women is no less scathing than in Neues Altes. Although the collection is dedicated to nine girls and young women whose companionship Altenberg had enjoyed during the long months of his illness, his attitude to the sex remains fundamentally unaltered. It is, however, a feature of the works of this period (1908-13) and of Semmering 1912 in particular that

Altenberg's condemnatory pieces on women tend to be tempered by the inclusion of a number of more sympathetic portraits. And in addition to numerous pieces in praise of dancers, whose natural grace and devotion to their art Altenberg especially admires, Semmering 1912 includes a short and moving piece entitled "Kusine" (S 109) which is related both thematically and stylistically to the portraits of women in "See-Ufer". In little over half a page Altenberg encapsulates the life of his beautiful cousin, according special significance to her initial "triumph" at the first ball she attended and her "final fall" when, at the age of fifty-two, she fell from the Seekofel while picking flowers. In "Das Hotel-Stubenmädchen" (S 67) Altenberg reveals his sympathy for a young woman (in whom he recognises a former beauty) who is obliged to work in order to support herself and her three year old daughter, because her husband has abandoned them. However, his understanding of her does not preclude his criticism of her initial decision to marry, which he sees as the cause of her present misfortune.

In a piece entitled "Richtige, aber eben deshalb wertlose Betrachtungen" (S 101) Altenberg returns to a familiar cause of complaint, woman's infidelity, while in "Bilanz" (S 113-4) he charges women with their false values and materialism:

Frauen haben eine perfide Geschicklichkeit  
"unreelle Werte", wie Schmuck, Pelz, Kleider, in  
ihr "Plus-Konto" des Lebens frech einzutragen.

Increasingly in his later writing Altenberg appears reluctant to forgive woman those inadequacies which he had been willing to overlook initially, when the strength of his idealism had enabled him to appreciate woman's potential for perfection and to play down her faults. In Semmering 1912 he even catalogues the shortcomings of women dear to him (S 143), and in "Erkenntnis" (S 183) he strikes a still deeper note of pessimism when he observes:

Alle Frauen rächen sich am Manne für irgendeine Unzulänglichkeit, die sie besitzen! (...). Sie verlassen sich auf die Güte des Mannes, der sich "sekkieren, quälen, ungerecht behandeln" läßt! Sie aber haben recht, denn seine Liebe ist von Gott eingegeben und ihr Schicksal ist irdisch und ein bißchen vom Teufel! Er hat die göttliche Kraft zu leiden mitbekommen, sie die irdische Schwäche glücklich sein zu wollen!

In Semmering 1912, two further pieces which reveal the extent of his disillusionment, both with woman and with his "Frauenkult", merit our attention. The first of these, "Bobby" (S 69), expresses Altenberg's preference for a fox terrier over all women:

Ich ziehe also Bobby allen Frauen vor, freilich sage ich das erst öffentlich am Ende meiner sogenannten "Liebeslaufbahn", mit einem Wort: nach meiner Schlacht von Sedan.

The second, "Gespräch", explains in the dry, humorous manner characteristic of much of his later work how he was able (in spite of his experience of woman's multitudinous vices) to persevere in the role of the latter-day troubadour. He recalls how he had once been asked how he had managed to survive for so long in the Semmering without female companionship, and records the astonishment of his interlocutor on being told that he was able to survive precisely because there were no women there:

"No, Sie sind doch der grÖBte Troubadour für die Weiber, was wir haben heutzutage!?"

Altenberg, however, replies in his own defence:

"No, könnt' ich denn ihr grÖBter Troubadour sein, wenn ich alleweil mit ihnen beisammen wär!?"

In his later writing Altenberg's goodwill towards woman, as well as the survival of his "Frauenkult", depends entirely upon his capacity for sustained idealism, an idealism which the events of the years which followed the publication of Semmering 1912 would put sorely to the test.

During the years of the Great War Altenberg's attitude to women remained hostile, although as in the writing of the period 1908-1913, his misogyny is still tempered by a tendency, now less marked, to sympathise with those women whom he considered helpless victims of life (NF 105). On the whole, however, he is convinced of woman's inferiority to man (F11), although he acknowledges her superiority in the battle between the sexes. He attributes this to her greater resilience (VI 134-5), her ability to come to terms with misfortune and psychological malaise, and - last but not least - her stronger self-preservation instinct (NL 93). In numerous pieces scattered throughout the collections published during the war years, Altenberg attempts to expose once and for all the myth of the fair and gentle sex. He depicts women as money-grabbing creatures (F 59), as social climbers, as dull, humourless and heartless creatures (F48) who exploit men and take a sadistic pleasure in the pain they inflict upon them (NF 333-4). And, in a series of aphorisms grouped under the general heading "Die Stupiditäten der Vogel-Straub-Politik" (F 90-1), he uncovers man's fundamental misconceptions concerning women. The following aphorism illustrates the general approach and basic principle of the series:

Sie sagt immer "Maxl" zu mir, und zwar so  
herzig" ---."

Ich höre immer nur heraus "Herr Idiot", "Herr  
Nebbich" und von herzig keine Spur. (F 90)

In addition, Fechsung contains Altenberg's most memorable image of woman as man-eater:

"Das Leben ist eben nicht anders!" sagt das  
Kaninchen, als er von der Riesenschlange lebendig  
langsam verschluckt wurde. Dann steckt er resigniert  
noch den Kopf heraus und seufzte: "Frau Schlange,  
wenn ich ihnen nur schmeck!" (F 80)

Both Fechsung and Nachfechung, which are set against the background of wartime Vienna, comprise a great number of such "Splinter" or fragmentary pieces which are employed

primarily as a vehicle for Altenberg's misogynistic outbursts. Largely uninspired, cliché-ridden and repetitive, they present their author in a poor light. In them, Altenberg is provocative and offensive by turns, perhaps in the hope that he might at least be able to shame woman into self-improvement. Given the historical background - Altenberg's daily exposure to the atrocities of war and, nearer home, to the insensitivity, egotism and avarice of his fellow men - it is little wonder that Altenberg's attitude and tone should harden, or that his attacks on all those guilty of inhumanity should be so unrelenting. However, if we wish to account fully for Altenberg's misogyny during this period we must look beyond the social reality to the man himself.

We might attribute his misogyny to his lack of "success" with women, as recounted in "Erste Liebe" (LA).\* Altenberg clearly suffered acutely from a sense of his own inadequacies and unattractiveness, as a piece like "Nach Abwärts" (S 105) - in which he describes himself as "diese menschliche Ruine" - reveals. He stood by helplessly as the affections of women whom he had befriended and loved were subsequently claimed by other men. (Olga Waissnix entered a relationship with Arthur Schnitzler, Annie Kalmar became involved with Kraus and Altenberg's adored Lina became the wife of Adolf Loos.)

As with his earlier work, Nachfechtung too reflects Altenberg's disenchantment with his "Frauenkult". Here too he emphasises that woman diverts man from his true path in life, and that by allowing himself to feel for her, man is in effect committing spiritual suicide (NF 78). Moreover, he argues that love is a prop for those men who are incapable of achieving their ideal potential, a "Krücke für die Lahmen, die allein nicht schreiten, tanzen, fliegen, können" (NF 98), and makes the following appeal to his

\* In his autobiography Ich war begeistert Stefan Grobman too recalls: "Die Geschichte von Peter Altenbergs Amouren ist eine Geschichte von bitteren Abweisungen."

fellow men: "Habe deine Resonanzen in Dir selbst, Mann!" (NF 98).

In Vita Ipsa Altenberg's "Frauenkult" experiences a temporary revival which is only partially sustained in the posthumously published Mein Lebensabend (1919). In the former collection Altenberg reminds woman of her "higher mission", which he specifies once again for her benefit in pieces like "Der Besuch" (VI 19-20), "Die Frau" (VI 25) and "De Femina" (VI 26-7):

Die Frau soll das einzige natürlich Bestreben haben (...) dem Manne in seiner schwierigen ernststen komplizierten Lebenslage ideal zu helfen, zu dienen! (VI 25)

In "Psychologie" (VI 25), on the other hand, he emphasises man's duty to educate women and make of them "menschlichen Geschöpfen". However, the "Frauenkult" of Altenberg's later period is no longer motivated by the inner conviction and idealism which finds its most perfect expression in his early works. Rather, it appears as a last plea to woman at least to help man if she cannot "ennoble" him.

In the profoundly pessimistic Mein Lebensabend Altenberg is finally compelled to reject the "Frauenkult" because he believes that women are incapable of learning and changing. And in a piece entitled "Das Lied an den Abendstern" (LA 41-2) he suggests that the whole ethos of the "Frauenkult", the roots of which reached back to the Middle Ages, is an anachronism in the current "verderbten naturalistischen Zeiten". Perhaps, he concludes, the whole thing had been nothing other than "ein raffiniertes Geschäft (...) unter dem falschen Titel: Selbstlosigkeit?!"

#### 4. ALTENBERG'S SOCIO-CULTURAL CRITIQUE

##### 4.1 Altenberg's Socio-Cultural Critique: its origins and background.

In the past, secondary literature has been inclined to regard Altenberg as an "arch-Bohemian" or "d ecadent par excellence" (1), emphasising his tendency to detached aestheticism and inwardness. Even as perceptive a scholar as Gotthart Wunberg, by linking Altenberg with the more introspective writers Leopold von Andrian and Richard Beer-Hofmann, overlooks the strength of Altenberg's commitment to social questions. For although there is some evidence in his writing to suggest that he too felt the need to insulate himself against harsh, mundane reality (as a piece such as "Ich trinke Tee" (P153-4) demonstrates), Altenberg was no seasoned aesthete. As we have seen, his interest in psychology was of a general rather than a particular nature: his concern was less with the individual than the social type, less with man than with mankind. His work, from the very beginning, is strongly ethical in tone, suggesting an author with a finely developed social conscience. Moreover, it must be stressed that Altenberg, in contrast with the aesthetes, was against the cultivation of art for art's sake. His literary career is characterised by opposition to the doctrine of pure aestheticism as expressed by Oscar Wilde in the phrase, "Art never expresses anything but itself". On the one hand, he emphasises the extra-aesthetic function and goal of art - to enhance life, reform and "ennoble" the individual and to regenerate society. On the other hand, Altenberg insists that it is the duty of the artist to mirror external reality. For example, in the motto for Was der Tag mir zutragt he declares his modest ambition as a poet "Ein Spiegel sein der Dinge um sich her".

This mimetic theory of art (which of course dates from classical times, having been expounded by Aristotle in his Poetics) was enjoying renewed popularity in late 19th century Europe in the form of Naturalism. Even in Austria where,

until recently literary historians could detect no evidence of its ever having taken root, Naturalism influenced both the contents and the form of "modern" literature decisively. In his recent attempt to correct the long standing and erroneous "opinio communis" of secondary literature, "daß der Naturalismus für Österreich keine Rolle gespielt hat" (2), Wunberg describes how the enterprising literature of the "Jung Wiener" was constantly compared by contemporary critics to the achievements of Naturalist writers, especially Ibsen and Zola. More importantly, however, Wunberg asserts that Naturalism, and an awareness of its thematic and technical limitations, formed the basis or point of departure for the Viennese "Moderne" (3).

As early as 1887 Hermann Bahr, the lynchpin of the "Jung Wien" movement, expressed dissatisfaction with Naturalist writing in his essay on Henrik Ibsen. Principally, Bahr objected to the materialistic bias of Naturalism which, he believed, had robbed the artist of his initiative and freedom. In "Die Überwindung des Naturalismus" he writes, "Es war ein Wehklagen des Künstlers im Naturalismus, weil er dienen mußte" (4). By contrast, the new Austrian literature, envisaged by him in a series of essays which show his debt to the latest literary developments in France, should witness the restoration of the artist's liberty. Bahr, whose perspicacity and talent for literary analysis has often been underrated, was conscious that the theoretical Naturalism preached in Germany, which sought to blot out the subjective moment, was founded on a misunderstanding. For instance, he recognised that Zola's famous dictum, "une oeuvre d'art est un coin de la nature vu à travers un tempérament" in fact acknowledges the importance of the subjective element in what purported to be Naturalist works. Moreover, Bahr discovered in the works of Baudelaire, Huysmans and Barrès (which he studied during his stay in Paris in 1888/89) a significant shift in emphasis which henceforth he upheld as the distinguishing feature of

"modern" literature. This was the renewed interest in the inner life: in "des états des âmes" as opposed to "des états des choses" (5).

Despite his misgivings about the materialistic bias of Naturalism and its subjugation of the artist, Bahr never went so far as to wholly reject or discredit the movement. On the contrary, in his essay "Die Überwindung des Naturalismus" he argues that Naturalism constitutes a first and necessary step in the development of the new literature with its focus on the inner life (or "Nerven") of modern man. For, he maintains:

bloß in dieser dreißigjährigen Reibung der Seele am Wirklichen konnte der Virtuose im Nervösen werden. (6)

Still more striking, however, is Bahr's recommendation that the modern writer should not only attempt to preserve the external framework (i.e. "die tägliche, äußere Wirklichkeit von der Straße, die Wirklichkeit des Naturalismus" (7)) and impersonality of the Naturalist work (8), but also present his subject matter in the almost scientific manner which characterises Naturalism. In his essay "Die neue Psychologie" Bahr describes this method as follows:

Eine Methode, mit einem Wort, aus der modernen Denkweise, welche deterministisch, dialektisch und dekompositiv ist (9).

In other words, Bahr was anxious that the new literature should describe character with reference to heredity and social milieu; do justice to the complexity of the inner life, and attempt to reveal this without recourse to rational analysis and abstractions. Feelings, he believed, should be presented in their raw state, "bevor sie noch an dem klaren Tag herausschlagen" (10). Altenberg, as Janik and Toulmin observe, strove to comply with Bahr's naturalistic requirements for the new literature (11). In his early works he achieves, through his

skilful balancing of psychological and social observations, the "Synthese von Romantik und Naturalismus" (12) which Bahr regards as the hallmark of truly modern literature.

In addition to affirming his debt to Bahr, Altenberg's writing reveals him as a direct descendant of Zola and Ibsen\*, i.e. as a critical observer of society. Throughout his literary career Altenberg endeavoured to correct any natural inclination to subjectivity both by attending closely to his social milieu and by concentrating on the task of improving society. Both in Pròdrómós and Semmering 1912 he stresses that his intention is to record the evidence of his senses objectively and not to present an idiosyncratic picture of his contemporary Vienna. His later works are peppered with assertions of the general validity of what often appears as an unashamedly personal view of life. More important, however, is Altenberg's preoccupation with the so-called "Lebenslüge", and the determination to unmask the hypocrisy of social intercourse and conventional morality which Altenberg shared with dedicated Naturalists.

Despite his obvious preference for untamed nature and the countryside, Altenberg's art is, in the best Naturalist traditions, urban. As has been noted, he too is greatly interested in the pressures and privations of life in the modern metropolis. In addition, much of his early writing is taken up with the problematical status of women in society, the cause célèbre of the Naturalists. Indeed, his particular concern with the right of middle class women to "self-determination" indicates his affinity with Ibsen. Moreover, like Ibsen's, Altenberg's specific brand of Naturalism takes the form of a critique of the bourgeoisie. For, despite his familiarity with and undoubted sympathy

\* Altenberg admired both authors, although in later life his respect for Ibsen was eclipsed by his passion for Strindberg (see LA 73-74).

for the socially underprivileged, their well being is not his primary concern. He concentrates instead on the bourgeoisie, whose values and institutions become the prime target in his campaign for social reform.

Undoubtedly, it was Naturalism, with its overtly anti-Establishment tendency and reforming zeal, which cradled the "revolutionary" aspect of Altenberg's aesthetic. This important facet of Altenberg's writing - frequently overlooked by secondary literature in the past - has, however, been re-emphasised by Klawiter, for whom Altenberg is a cultural revolutionary who probed the wounds of the social structure, but to no apparent effect (13). Long before he had earned a name as a writer, Altenberg was already a well-known, if controversial, figure in Vienna. For Herbert Eulenberg he was "so etwas wie eine Seltsamkeit Wiens" (14), whose peculiar attire - he preferred a floppy hat and billowing cape, riding boots and, in later years, wooden sandals - made him conspicuous amongst Vienna's "respectable" and conventionally clad burghers. In society his behaviour lacked that sense of dignified restraint usually demanded of its men. Instead he was given to noisy, emotional outbursts: in the eyes of his friend Alfred Polgar his words and gestures appeared "hemmungslos hinausgeschleudert aus bewegtem Innern". In his sketch "Wirkung der Persönlichkeit" Polgar also recalls his strangely disruptive effect: "Wo er hinkam, entstand Unruhe, Verlegenheit, Stockungen im glatten Ablauf sicherster Kausalitäten" (15). He was, in short, an "agitator" who used the café initially as a platform from which to denounce bourgeois society and as a tribune for his own reformatory views. (See Friedell's introduction to Das Altenbergbuch.) Gradually, however, each of these functions was taken over by his writing, which friends and critics alike regarded as the organic extension of the man himself.

In Wie ich es sehe, Altenberg consciously distances himself from the doctrine of pure aestheticism, as pro-

pounded by Wilde and his followers, and proclaims the extra-aesthetic goal of art. In "Sonntag" (WS 102-7), for example, he intimates the purgative effects and reformatory ends of art:

Nun, die Kunst, die Natur, das Leben des Diogenes, des Chr. ---! Bewegungen der Seele, des Geistes, die die Kräfte in neue Verbindungen brachten, die trägen Stoffe wegschwemmen, einen kleinen Wirbel, Strudel erzeugten. (WS 106)

Altenberg held with this view of art until the end of his life. Thus in Vita Ipsa (p 262) he insists that the committed poet must be each of these things: "Aufwirbler, Bewegung-Bringer, Zertörer und Aufbauer". In Altenberg's opinion, he must arouse and incite his contemporaries. More importantly, however, he must be both a destroyer and creator of values. As we shall see, this conception of the function of art and the artist is one which Altenberg derived from Friedrich Nietzsche, who harnesses a vibrant image of his social ideality to a trenchant critique of contemporary values and mores.

Throughout his literary career Altenberg endeavours to realise this conception of art, using his writing both as a vehicle for social criticism and to project his own vision of an ideal society. This is perhaps most apparent in the "Revolutionär" series (WS) which proceeds from a critique of the existing social order, in the pieces "Gesellschaft", "Sonntag" and "Familienleben", and culminates in the proclamation of an alternative set of values and the positing of a model society in the pieces "Der Besuch", "Im Garten", "Der Grieche" and "Die Primitive". This same pattern, combining social criticism and constructive guidelines for a new society, also appears to determine the overall structure of the 1896 edition of Wie ich es sehe. The first series, "See-Ufer", concentrates on the ailments of Austrian society, particularly those of the bourgeoisie who, according to Egon Friedell, Altenberg regards as "das Element der Stagnation" (16) in contemporary society. The

following piece, entitled "Die Zuckerfabrik", is in a sense a pendant to this series, for in it Altenberg returns us briefly to the source of middle class wealth. In the next short sequence of pieces, "Don Juan", Altenberg abandons the naturalistic milieu of the sugar factory in order to explore more fully the relationship between the sexes. This brief cycle is succeeded by "Frau Fabrikdirektor von H.", and this in turn by "Revolutionär", which emphasises the need for radical reform and projects a vision of a new social order. In Ashantee, his second work, Altenberg employs a slightly different technique, this time choosing to criticise middle class society from the perspective of a primitive people, whose values and life style are presented by him as a refreshingly wholesome alternative to jaded civilisation. Similarly, in Was der Tag mir zuträgt, Altenberg's criticism of existing social conditions is implicit in his vision of ideal interpersonal relationships. In his subsequent works Altenberg tends to interweave social criticism with his blueprint for a new society. However, for reasons of clarity these will be treated independently in the chapters which follow. For the present it will suffice to demonstrate that these characteristics of Altenberg's writing can be traced back to the cultural critique and idealistic vision of Friedrich Nietzsche and Altenberg's idol, Richard Wagner.

In the intellectual climate of Vienna in the 1890s the ideas of Nietzsche and Wagner were greeted enthusiastically. Wagner's ideal of an integrated community and human brotherhood found resonance in a society particularly fraught with national rivalries. (Moreover, it was the cohesive quality of the Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk which appealed to Nietzsche.) Altenberg idolised Wagner (see above, Section 3.5), and in Wie ich es sehe (p 15) he suggests the influence of the "Musikgedanken des Parsifals". From Wagner Altenberg learned the value of the leitmotif as a means of characterisation and as a formal device capable of rendering artistic unity to an

individual piece or group of pieces.

Superficially, the work of Peter Altenberg - the cameos and miniatures, fragments and extracts - seems to have little in common with the mammoth Wagnerian "Gesamtkunstwerk". Indeed, Altenberg's economical treatment of his subject matter, his tendency to condense, seems to epitomise the antithesis of Wagner's expansive style. Nevertheless, the work of both men embodies a distinctive and revolutionary aesthetic. Both the Wagnerian "Gesamtkunstwerk" and Altenberg's "Extrakttheorie" grew out of a sense of dissatisfaction with contemporary society and with those traditional art forms sanctioned by it. In his study of Wagner, Ronald Taylor proposes that the Bayreuth Master's search for a new art form was triggered by his aversion to the ethos of genteel bourgeois society, and that the aesthetic revolution represented by the Wagnerian music-drama was the product of the "strong revolutionary tendency" of a man who saw himself as a "have-not". According to Taylor, Wagner's social revolutionary aspirations and anti-capitalist mood find expression in the "Ring des Nibelungen" (17), a work which also presents Wagner's ideal of a new man, Siegfried, and his model for an integrated community.

Altenberg, another anti-capitalist and social revolutionary, had, as a counterpart to Wagner's "Gesamtkunstwerk", his "Extrakttheorie": it was born of his reaction against the prevalent materialism or "Marktgesetz" which controlled all aspects of Viennese life, and represents the extension into art of his "essentialist" creed. This creed, stressing as it does the importance of the spiritual life, can perhaps best be expressed in the words of Franz Marc: "To separate the essential from the inessential is what I call being spiritual."

Although usually quick to express his admiration of particular authors, artists and musicians, Altenberg was surprisingly reticent on the subject of Friedrich Nietzsche. His comments are restricted to a humorous and deflationary

portrait of the young Nietzschean, Kodjo, in "Nach Paris, nach Paris" (WT), and to his flat denial in 1911 that he had ever read Nietzsche (see Das Altenbergbuch p 399). His denial was taken literally by Werner Riemerschmid who maintains, quite erroneously, that Altenberg was familiar neither with the works of Baudelaire nor Nietzsche (18). On the other hand, in his joint production with Egon Friedell, "Das schwarze Buch", Altenberg indicates a certain sympathy for Nietzsche. Here he issues a half-playful warning that all those guilty of the following, or comparable, pronouncements should be ostracised:

Ja, - Nietzsche. Sehr interessant. Aber finden Sie nicht auch: wie er seine letzten Sachen geschrieben hat, war er doch schon nicht mehr ganz bei sich. (19)

Although he attempted to make light of Nietzsche's importance - perhaps in an effort to preserve his reputation as "ein Original" - Altenberg was clearly greatly influenced by him. In his article "Die moderne Seele" Max Messer cites Nietzsche as one of Altenberg's spiritual mentors (20). And in his literary tribute to the Viennese poet, Thomas Mann details Nietzsche's influence on the composition, rhythm and spirit of Altenberg's writing:

Man wird bei genauerm Hinhören die Note "Andersen" darin nicht verkennen, sowenig wie Geist, Rhythmus und Komposition seiner Prosa den Einfluß Nietzsches verkennen lassen ... (21)

Moreover, Mann lists Altenberg along with himself and his brother, Dehmel, George and Kerr as "die wahren Kritiker und fragmentarischen Verdeutlicher Nietzsches" (22).

The cultural critique undertaken from a philhellenic perspective, the counter-ideal of a new humanity or "Superman" with its emphasis on self-overcoming and physical fitness: each of these facets of the Nietzschean credo was assimilated by Altenberg and is filtered through his writing. He too undertakes a criticism of contemporary

culture from a philhellenic perspective, holding out the Greek ideal of physical and moral wholeness, of an integrated humanity, to his own atomised society. His professed goal was to revive the spirit of ancient Greece (see WT 12 and VI 252), and he chose the Greek word "pròdrómōs" (meaning "forerunner") as the title for the book in which he expounds the ancient maxim "mens sana in corpore sano". Above all, however, Nietzsche equipped Altenberg and his fellow "culture makers" with a complete symptomatology of social ills and suggested a means of combating the decline in civilised values.

Nietzsche indicated that what was called for in the first instance was the systematic negation of the institutions and values of a morally corrupt and ailing society. For only then could a new value system be established, only then could the new humanity prosper and the foundations for a new society be laid. For Nietzsche, the notion of creation is thus inextricably bound up with that of destruction. In Also sprach Zarathustra he emphasises that whoever wants to be a creator must first be an annihilator and break values (23). Indeed, this double principle involving the destruction of conventional values on the one hand and, on the other, the creation of new values, characterises much of Nietzsche's writing from Die Geburt der Tragödie onwards. It is, perhaps, best illustrated by his Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen which Nietzsche describes in Ecce Homo as "four attempts at assassination" (24) i.e. the assassination of German culture which Nietzsche looked down upon with ruthless contempt. The first of these "untimely observations" entitled "David Strauss. Der Bekenner und Schriftsteller" represents a direct attack on his contemporary culture. In the second, "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie", Nietzsche analyses the symptoms of cultural decay - society's traffic with science, which, in his opinion, ultimately condemns life; the process of dehumanisation which Nietzsche sees as a dangerous by-product of the industrial revolution; and

the universal preoccupation with the past, the nation's "historical sense" which he considers hostile to life and responsible for decay. In the third and fourth essays "Schopenhauer als Erzieher" and "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth" Nietzsche presents Schopenhauer and Wagner as "pointers to a higher concept of culture" (25).

As we have seen, a similar method combining social criticism with the work of constructing a new society can be identified in the work of Peter Altenberg. In the sections which follow each of these facets of his writing will be examined in greater detail.

#### 4.2 Altenberg's analysis of cultural decay

Nietzsche's diagnosis of cultural malaise had a profound impact on Viennese writers at the turn of the century; they quickly perceived the similarities between the cultural climate of Nietzsche's Germany and that of the ailing Dual Monarchy. It furnishes writers like Peter Altenberg, Hermann Bahr and Altenberg's friend and biographer, Egon Friedell, with a point of departure for their cultural critique, and with a stock of images to describe the desolation of modern existence. Bahr's use of desert regions, icy mountains and barren, snow-covered fields in his essay "Die Moderne" of 1890 clearly owes much to the example of Friedrich Nietzsche, who, in Die Geburt der Tragödie, leaves this bleak account of cultural decay:

Vergebens spähen wir nach einer kräftig geästeten Wurzel, nach einem Fleck fruchtbaren und gesunden Erdbodens: überall Staub, Sand, Erstarrung, Verschmachten. (26)

Bleak landscapes, deserts, snowscapes: these were the images chosen by Nietzsche not only to describe the state of contemporary culture, but also to reflect the psychological condition of modern man, the vacuous nature of his existence and the collapse of his value system. The wintry landscape in Altenberg's "Aus dem Tagebuch der edlen Miss Madrilene" (WT) has a similar symbolic function.

Altenberg too was acutely aware of the moribundity of his contemporary society which, like Nietzsche, he conveys through the image of the swamp. In the overtly Nietzschean piece, "Zwölf", the following atmospheric description may well have been intended as a metaphor for the socio-cultural reality:

Es roch nach Weiden und dampfenden verwesenden  
Sumpfräusern. (WS 6)

Significantly, civilisation is personified in this piece by a pale, middle-aged woman, a member of Austria's haute bourgeoisie whose inactivity and sentimentality contrasts sharply with the animal vitality and naivety of the twelve year old girl who heralds a new humanity.

As a metaphor for all that restricts and is hostile to growth and, on another level, for social and cultural decay, the image of the swamp is singularly appropriate and is used more extensively by Altenberg in the series "Revolutionär" (WS). As in the case of "Zwölf", this series, which plots the Promethean rebellion of its title figure Albert Königsberg against the established order, is unmistakably Nietzschean. In the initial study, "Gesellschaft", Altenberg begins with a critical examination of a typical Viennese soirée, unmasking the boredom and hypocrisy which, it is implied, characterises all such gatherings of the middle class. His evocation of boredom, bloated and slothlike, a veritable creature of the swamps which infects everyone present, is particularly striking, suggesting as it does the satiation and lethargy to which this privileged section of society fell prey. (Towards the end of his life Altenberg continued to regard boredom as the chief weakness of his society, to which he refers as "vollkommen vertrottelt von innerster Langweile zerfressene Gesellschaft" (NL 75/6).) Königsberg alone does not succumb to the general ennui. Indeed, in his desire to celebrate life and movement which he, like his creator,

upholds as an antidote to psychological torpor and social decay, Königsberg reveals himself as a true disciple of Nietzsche's Zarathustra.

In "Sonntag", the second study in the series, the image of the swamp is once again invoked, (this time by Königsberg) to designate his complacent and reactionary contemporaries, whom he condemns as "Verharrenden", "Stagnierenden" and "Sumpfschildkröten" (WS 105). While in "Gesellschaft" Altenberg portrays a representative gathering of middle class society, in "Sonntag" his theme is the life of typical middle class family for which the model was the Engländer household. Altenberg's characterisation of the irritable mother and the hen-pecked father, and his description of the tensions within the family were based on the members and circumstances of his own family. However, in addition to being the stylised counterpart of the Engländer household, the family of the revolutionary mirrors, in microcosm, the political reality of the Habsburg Empire. Altenberg's description of family life seems equally appropriate as a designation for Franz Joseph's benevolent patriarchy and the easy going attitude which, according to Viktor Adler (27) diluted the absolute power of the monarch:

Jedesfalls war das Ganze gutmüthig patriarchalisch so wie wenn man sagt: "Das sind unsere Sorgen, nicht wahr, nichts Bedeutendes, Gott sei Dank ---?!"(WS 103)

Moreover, the internal family discord in "Sonntag" is representative of the confrontation between tradition and innovation at the turn of the century. In Vienna this was a time for nostalgia, but also a time for optimism and planning a bright, new future. As in "Gesellschaft" it is Königsberg who challenges traditional convention and the complacency of the contented, which he (like his creator) perceives as a "Gift-Sumpf Ruhe" (WS 106), i.e. as an obstacle to progress. Like Nietzsche's prototype for a new humanity, Zarathustra, Königsberg is driven by the

desire to root out all that is touched by corruption and decay, and to demonstrate how mankind might realise a higher concept of humanity.

In the initial "See-Ufer" series (WS) Altenberg is at pains to demonstrate how the future of the Empire would ultimately be determined by the impotent and ill-starred middle class and aristocracy. The autumnal atmosphere of the series and the ominous signs of storm clouds gathering on the horizon foretell not only the end of the season, but of a whole way of life. In "Es geht zu Ende" the threat to "Hochadel" and "Villenbesitzer" alike is made explicit. Altenberg was well aware that the privileged position of the Austrian aristocracy, like that of the haute bourgeoisie, was becoming increasingly untenable. In "Fromont" he merely hints at a decline in the social standing of this class. In "Es geht zu Ende" he goes further: he suggests the sterility of the nobility, associates them with death and decay and prophesies their imminent demise. In "At Home" he suggests the similar fate of the bourgeoisie who look on with helpless resignation as the more dynamic working classes lay claim to their power. In "Die Zuckerfabrik", however, Altenberg suggests that even this large section of society which, according to Max Nordau, was "not fin de siècle, but possessed of their own vitality" (28), is similarly touched with decay. In his description of the great courtyard of the factory he refers specifically to the stench of decomposing vegetables:

Es roch nach Oel-Schmiere und verwesendem  
Rüben-Brei. (WS49)

Interesting too is Altenberg's reference to the inactivity of the bureaucrats, the "ärarische Zuckerbeamten" who sit smoking at the factory gates. Indeed, it was this kind of bureaucratic inertia which compounded the rigidity and torpor of the Habsburg administration. Like their Imperial master, whom George Clare describes in Last Waltz in Vienna

as "the bureaucratic Emperor of the world's most bureaucratic Empire" (29), they presented a formidable obstacle to genuine reform.

Just as in his early works Altenberg assiduously avoids providing any rational explanation for his characters and their motivation, so too is he reluctant to provide any systematic analysis of social decay. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify three things which he considers primary factors in his society's decline: physical inertia, mental complacency and materialism. Throughout his life, Altenberg remained convinced that if the individual and society as a whole were to thrive, it was essential that these weaknesses be recognised and eradicated.

Altenberg considers physical inertia both a symptom and a cause of social decay. In his early work he suggests the moribundity of advanced civilisation through the passivity of its members: young and old appear equally devoid of strength and lacking in resolution. In his 1896 review of Wie ich es sehe, Hermann Bahr comments on the inactivity and apparent paralysis of Altenberg's Chekopian characters, whom he aptly describes as "Bräute des Lebens" (30). In "No Age", as in "Zwölf" however, Altenberg presents a vibrant alternative to effete civilisation, this time in the person of Mr. Bigloff. Significantly, Bigloff belongs to a younger civilisation (America) and as such possesses a freshness and spontaneity now alien to his Austrian counterparts. Still more impressive is his limitless energy, for which he finds an outlet in dancing, rowing and playing with his children, and which in the eyes of one young onlooker distinguishes him as "einen wirklichen Menschen" (WS21). This response is of particular interest because it suggests how Altenberg wishes his readers to view Bigloff, i.e. as an ideal figure intent on living life to the full.\* As we shall see,

\* However, as in the case of Albert Königsberg, Altenberg highlights the comical side of Mr. Bigloff's behaviour. Arguably, this insistence upon the ambivalent nature of these characters, each of whom is made to appear faintly ridiculous, undermines the cogency of Altenberg's ideal of humanity.

Altenberg tends to equate humanity with movement, which he sees as the condition of physical and mental growth (see below, Section 5.2). In short, he values movement as a means of revitalising the individual and society.

Altenberg's attempts to counter the physical inertia of his contemporaries issue from his genuine concern for society's well being; equally, his assault on complacency and all other forms of mental lethargy is born of his desire for social reform or progress. The improvement or growth of the individual and better interpersonal relationships all depend, in Altenberg's opinion, on the overcoming of ingrained habits and historical prejudices. In "Plauderei" (LA 178-181) Altenberg examines the threat which historical preconceptions pose to the regeneration of the individual and society as a whole. He argues that his contemporaries' blind adherence to traditional precepts and values is the major cause both of individual illness and the widespread cultural malaise. Furthermore, he emphasises that only those capable of overcoming their historical preconceptions may consider themselves worthy human beings. He writes:

Der wirkliche frische Organismus läßt jeden Morgen alle seine bisherigen Irrsinne, Irrtümer, Vorurteile, historische Bedenken, rücksichtslos hinter sich, und beginnt sein neues Leben mit ganz neuen bisher ungeahnten Kräften! (LA 179)

Perhaps Altenberg's consciousness of the dangers of historical preconceptions and the resultant mental complacency (of which physical inertia is the external manifestation) was heightened by his experience of the fate of the middle class society into which he was born. He recognises how their paralysis of will has resulted in their political emasculation. They did little either to halt the decline of the Liberal party, their political wing, or to safeguard the process of parliamentary government. As the balance of power tilted in favour of the new mass

parties "captained by the defectors from Liberalism" (31), and as the clamour of the anti-Semites, who flocked to the banner of Karl Lueger, increased, the middle classes retreated further into the cocoon provided by their wealth, and the surrogate world of the arts.

Like Nietzsche, Altenberg is highly critical of his contemporaries' overweening preoccupation with the past, regarding it as hostile to life and as a barrier to progress. In a piece entitled "Die Historie" (LA 32-4) he condemns the study of history as "eine der fürchterlichsten Landplagen der Menschheit", since it prevents mankind from rapidly attaining its evolutionary goal. Unlike Nietzsche, however, Altenberg fails to recognise the benefits of history for life, or to see that the historical and unhistorical have an equal part to play in the health of an individual, a people and a culture. Indeed, such is his dislike of the historical in general that he stubbornly refuses to acknowledge either the beauty or the worth of the Old Masters, churches and palazzi of Venice. In "Venezianerinnen" (F 50-51) he writes:

Alle Leute, die hier in Venedig ihr Geld unnütz ausgeben, schwärmen (als Gegengeschäft irgendwie muß doch ein Profit sein für die Reisespesen) für die alten Meister (Carpaccio und Bellini haben wenigstens einen Hauch unserer feinen, modernen Seele), für die alten Kirchen, die alten Palazzi. Aber zwei Dinge sind hier wichtiger: die blutroten, lilagrauen Sonnenuntergänge vom Lido aus, vis-à-vis Venedig, und die Volkstracht der Mädchen. (F 50)

Typically, Altenberg stresses nature's supremacy over art in this piece. (His preference for the simple national costume of Venetian women, on the other hand, arose from his desire to promote social equality, as he explains at greater length in a letter to Viktor Adler. See 4.6). His interest, as he confirms in a further piece which originated in his Venetian experience, is with the living, the youthful and the modern. ("Venedig" F 53-4).

Towards the end of his life Altenberg's vital interest in the here and now was, however, eclipsed by a tendency to look beyond the bleak actuality of a country gripped by war, and to dwell on an optimistic vision of the future of humanity. In view of Altenberg's serious misgivings concerning human nature, this renewed optimism apparent at times in Mein Lebensabend seems less the product of any new-found faith in mankind than of wishful thinking. His "belief" in human improvement which finds expression in such pieces as "Die Historie" (LA 32-34)\* and "Ärzte" (LA 214-219) stemmed not from inner conviction, but rather from hope. In a sense, it constitutes an attempt on Altenberg's part to recapture his former idealism, that special brand of positive thinking which was anchored in the conviction that it is possible to realise any "conceivable" ideal. Altenberg's fervent desire to further the spiritual evolution of mankind prompted his opposition to what (in "Ärzte") he terms "das konservative Element". He urges his contemporaries to look ahead, to wipe out the "Schmutz alles Gewesenen" (VI 32) in order that the future humanity might be unspoiled and whole.

On a more mundane level, Altenberg's offensive against conservatism involves repeated attacks upon the "poison"/habit, which saps the life-blood of the individual and society (BL 61). In "Revolutionär" Altenberg uses Königsberg to expose the unwholesome habits of his contemporaries. In "Sonntag", for example, he upbraids the women of his society for their unhealthy practice of wearing corsets - this was something which Altenberg was determined to end. He also condemns all those engaged in

\* In "Die Historie" Altenberg's need to reaffirm his faith in human improvement causes him to go back on his initial condemnation of the study of history and to stress that the seriously-minded modern man possesses sufficient inner strength to realise his spiritual potential in spite of the burden of historical prejudices.

the selfish pursuit of happiness and a quiet life; for he believes that this encourages complacency and stifles any will to self-improvement. "Sonntag" ends with a plea from Königsberg that the statutory Sunday fare, Julienne soup, be replaced. Although trivial and humorous in itself, this plea does indicate Altenberg's more serious conviction that the reform of the seemingly insignificant is the prerequisite of greater social changes (see also LA91).

In his subsequent writing Altenberg consistently denounces habit, referring to it as "the eternal enemy of mankind" (LA 244), "poison" (LA 340) and as a "cowardly crime" (NF 82). Indeed, his social criticism is largely directed against the particular habits of his contemporaries, their dress, eating habits, manners and morals. For Altenberg reasoned that he could win support for his own reformatory ideas only by convincing his fellows first of the error of their present ways. In "Krieg" (F 134-6), a powerful piece written during the initial stages of the war, Altenberg begins by exposing the barbarous indifference of man towards his fellow man and concludes with an appeal to us all to engage the "enemy within". He believes it crucial that we overcome stupidity, luxury, prejudice, cowardice, mendacity, but most of all habit which, he emphasises, prevents us from doing what is right and stands in the way of human brotherhood.

Altenberg considers the limited vision of his contemporaries and their tendency to accept conventional views without demur as further evidence of that inflexibility which places the future of mankind in jeopardy. In "Skeptizismus" (LA 340-1) he argues that true culture and humanity is possible only if mankind learns to overcome prejudice, and in a further piece contained in his Nachlaß he maintains:

Frei von allen Vorurteilen ist überhaupt erst  
die Grundlage des Menschentums. (NL 30)

He is especially critical of the prejudicial views displayed by the bourgeoisie (whom he denounces en masse in a letter to Emil Franzos as "blöd-vorurteilsvolle"(32)), and sets out to expose these in the "Revolutionär" series and the related piece, "Tristan und Isolde" (WT 140-149). As has already been noted, he denounces the mundane and material concerns of the bourgeoisie exemplified by the mother-figure. In "Tristan und Isolde" he uses her incessant chatter to suggest her superficiality and insensitivity towards the opera which she has just attended in the company of her husband and children. By contrast, the silence of the latter, i.e. of Glarys and her father, on their return is indicative of a genuine and deep response to Wagner's art. They are clearly more cultured and spiritually refined than the down-to-earth mother. While she appears as a member of that class of social parvenues, the so-called "Geldadel", who, having bought their position in society, then sought to distinguish themselves further through their patronage of the arts; the father-figure represents those traditional middle class virtues which in real life had been impressed upon Altenberg by his father. Not only did he inherit his father's love of nature and his interest in the arts; he was also influenced by Moriz Engländer's cosmopolitan, liberal-humanitarian outlook. Indeed, this outlook informs Altenberg's conception of true culture and his vision of an ideal humanity.

In both "Familienleben" (WS ed.1) and "Tristan und Isolde" Altenberg challenges bourgeois narrow-mindedness. In the latter piece, the revolutionary opposes his mother's conventional interpretation of Wagner's opera by insisting that Kürwenal and Brangäne are in fact its most important characters. In "Familienleben", on the other hand, the revolutionary consciously sets out to arouse members of his family from their complacency; to unmask the "schöne Lüge" of their lives, and to challenge their pale, stereotyped convictions. Altenberg suggests, for example, how the paradoxical nature of Königsberg's thought shatters the safe views held by his family:

Solche Paradoxen wirkten auf seine Familie wie eine explodierende Granate. Alles wirft sich platt auf den Bauch, um sich geistig zu schützen. Man spürt den Krach, aber Niemand ist getroffen. Nur der Geist hat sich zersplittert! (WS ed. 1 p114)

In order to appreciate the full significance of the revolutionary's attempt to smash traditional precepts we should perhaps recall Nietzsche's appeal in Also sprach Zarathustra: "Oh meine Brüder, zerbrecht, zerbrecht mir die alten Tafeln" (33). That it is necessary first to destroy the old ways before the work of constructing a new society can begin, this is the lesson which Altenberg learned from Nietzsche.

Altenberg's contemporary Otto Stoessl was among the first to perceive Königsberg's similarity to Altenberg and to appreciate the anarchic mood of Altenberg's writing. In his review of Wie ich es sehe entitled "Ein Wiener Brief" (34) he hails Altenberg as a revolutionary intent on drastically revising the bourgeois value system. Altenberg's writing as a whole is suffused with this same revolutionary spirit: it too contains numerous "bombs" whose intended target is "l'homme médiocre". In the proto-expressionistic work Pròdrómós Altenberg offers this striking elucidation of his "explosive" technique and underlines his faith in the value of repetition:

Mit einem Wort: mens sana in corpore sano.  
Nein, eben nicht mit einem Wort.  
Sondern mit Millionen Wörtern, mit Wort-  
Schrapnells, mit einem Regen von Wort-  
Ekrasitbomben in diesen Feind Stupidität  
hineinkartätscht! (P 34)

With the apparent failure of his earlier didactic method, which had involved the couching of his "philosophy" in poetic form, and had left the reader to deduce his/her own meaning, Altenberg sharpened the edge of his critique. As we shall see, in Pròdrómós and his subsequent works, he repeatedly pierces the thin veneer of bourgeois respectability. And like Karl Kraus, whose effective use of similar "explosive" tactics ("Wort-Ekrasitbomben") drew his admiration (35), Altenberg dedicates himself to the

task of exposing the corruption and duplicity rife in his society. Moreover (as Stoessl perceives), his intention is clearly to effect a revaluation of values. In Wie ich es sehe he attempts this by showing things in a new light, as Stoessl observes:

Dieses Buch zeigt die Dinge von unseren sehr egoistischen Werturteilen befreit und das geringste ist dem höchsten gleich. Das ist die eigenartige Objectivität dieses sich gar so subjektiv gebärdenden Künstlers, dass er eigentlich nur aus einer unendlichen, mitleidvollen Liebe zu den wertvollen Dingen, die in Knechtschaft schmachten, sie durch seine herrische Anschauung befreit und erhöhte Macht gewinnen lässt. (36)

Throughout his career as poet and "Outsider der Gesellschaft" Altenberg was intent on revealing the fundamental fallacy of bourgeois attitudes. His championing of women, particularly the prostitute, is perhaps the most obvious example of what Stoessl identifies correctly as Altenberg's "Drang nach Gerechtigkeit" (37).

In addition to illustrating how physical and mental inertia endanger the future of humanity, Altenberg also devotes much space to a critique of the predominantly materialistic values of his society. In his opinion, this overt emphasis on material possessions and success not only results in the existential impoverishment of the individual and the dehumanisation of his relationships; it also blocks the spiritual development of mankind. For, Altenberg contends, if mankind is to realise its innate spiritual potential and become "godlike", it must first renounce all but essential material possessions. The idea that material impoverishment is more conducive to spiritual development is, of course, not new. It is, rather, a re-statement of a fundamental religious doctrine of which, Altenberg opines, his contemporaries have lost sight. (The same idea also informs the new asceticism advocated by Nietzsche in Also Sprach Zarathustra.)

In old Vienna, human existence was determined largely by economics: according to Max Stirner "a man expressed himself in terms of what he owned" (38). Altenberg too was well aware of the emphasis on "Besitz" in this society which admired material success, and where even emotions could be quantified. Indeed, Dickens' sad comment in Great Expectations on the "stupendous power of money" in Victorian England might easily be applied to fin de siècle Vienna. In Altenberg's opinion, wealth is responsible for deep social divisions and the depersonalisation of the individual. In "Café Chantant" (WT), for example, he suggests how the individual tends to be treated as a commodity: Mage is likened by her gentleman companion to Beechams pills.

Such was the influence of the so-called "Marktgesetz" on all aspects of life that, Altenberg believed, all human relationships in his society (with the exception of that of a grandfather and granddaughter) were placed on a financial footing - in Was der Tag mir zuträgt (p 70) he refers to them as "versteckten Geschäfte". In Fechsung Altenberg continues to lament the business nature of most relationships and to deny the existence of true friendship:

Wenn nur alle wüßten, daß es in keiner Sphäre  
des menschlichen Wirkens keine Freundschaft nicht  
gibt, sondern nur Geschäftchen! (F179)

Moreover, in the following fragment, which is also contained in Fechsung, Altenberg reveals how his contemporaries no longer attempt to preserve even the semblance of propriety, but openly admit the crude, materialistic nature of their relationships:

Eine Dame sagte: "Ich bin nur neugierig, ob  
Sie mir zuliebe Ihre schöne Autofahrt heute aufgeben  
werden!?" Später sagte sie: "Tut es Ihnen nicht  
doch ein bißchen leid um Ihre schöne Autofahrt?!"  
O ja, sogar sehr, aber zwei Geschäfte kann man  
eben leider nicht auf einmal machen! (F121/2)

In Viennese society a price was put on all things, even love, as Altenberg in company with his fellow writer Arthur Schnitzler observes. While the latter exposes the reified nature of love in Austrian society in Anatol and Reigen, Altenberg proves especially adept at uncovering the mercenary attitude of women "in love" as, for example, in "Tabarin" (F 83-4) and "Die Brosche" (NL 88-9). In the latter piece he suggests that women's need for expensive, material proof of love is indicative of their emotional impoverishment. On another level, the piece is a severe indictment of the materialistic code of Altenberg's society.

Generally speaking, Altenberg opposes the materialistic value system of his contemporaries on the grounds that it is detrimental to their spiritual development. However, he does acknowledge that the system can, in some instances, provide for the spiritual enrichment of the individual. In "Verdienen" (LA 130), he tacitly admits that material wealth holds the key to greater spiritual riches insofar as it enables the individual to purchase a seat at a Wagnerian opera, or books. In Altenberg's opinion, the earning ethos of his society is valuable as a means to an end and not as an end in itself. It is interesting too, that despite his misgivings concerning materialism, Altenberg looks favourably upon the cult of objects practised by the aesthetes. In "Liebe zu Gegenständen" (F 230), he recommends that children be taught to appreciate certain objects; for he regards the cultivation of an aesthetic sense as a means of refining and "ennobling" the individual.

Whilst he is prepared to concede the value of this cult of objects (which he himself practised on a modest scale) and to grant the individual some material possessions, Altenberg remains the firm enemy of luxury, the over-elaborate and the superfluous. It is most probable that he inherited this mistrust of "Überfluß" from Nietzsche and, more specifically, from his understanding of Also sprach Zarathustra. In this work Nietzsche

voices his distaste for profusion, or superfluous riches, because he considers this responsible for social corruption and stagnation:

Voll ist die Erde von Überflüssigen, verdorben ist das Leben durch die Viel-zu-Vielen. (39)

In Nietzsche's view, superfluity together with what he terms "der Geist der Schwere" prevents mankind from evolving spiritually. He emphasises that if the individual is to become a "Superman" he must free himself from the pull of the material and live the ascetic life exemplified by Zarathustra.

In the intellectual climate of Europe around the turn of the century the moral of Also sprach Zarathustra did not go unheeded: its doctrine of a new asceticism is echoed in the spiritual slogan of the German Expressionists, "Mensch, sei wesentlich!". It also appears to have exercised a significant influence on Altenberg's evolutionary philosophy and his conception of the poet's role. Like Nietzsche, he too appears convinced that spiritual evolution can be accomplished only if the individual succeeds in liberating himself from the physical and economic forces which govern human life. Moreover, he declares it the duty of the poet (who, he believes, is less bound by material considerations and constraints) to assist his fellows in their bid for spiritual freedom. In Märchen des Lebens (p 202) he says of the poet:

Er allein weiß mit seiner erhöhten Freiheit etwas anzufangen eure Gebundenheiten zu verringern.

Altenberg himself rarely misses an opportunity to attack what he describes as "das schrecklich ÜberflüBige", for he too considers it unhealthy and hostile to growth. Only the luxury of the body and soul, i.e. health, purity and goodness, are worthwhile. All other "external" forms of luxury, on the other hand, are suspect to Altenberg and dismissed by him as "utter nonsense" and "criminal".

Pròdrómós contains Altenberg's first detailed critique of "external luxuries", notably his contemporaries' overindulgence in rich foods and their tendency to overdress. In this work Altenberg attempts to wean them off their love of pastries and furs and to win them over to the asceticism embodied in his "essentialist" creed. Indeed, such is his distaste for the crass materialism displayed by his fellow citizens that Altenberg reverts to the opposite extreme. In Pròdrómós he makes the exaggerated claim:

Nur das Skelett am Menschen ist schön. Das Fleisch ist das, was man sich schleunigst abgewöhnen muss!

Heilige Magerkeit, getreueste Beschützerin unserer Beweglichkeiten! Werde das Ziel kommender Generationen!. (P 116)

His preference for the "femme fragile" and the slim, ethereal nudes portrayed by Gustav Klimt is also explicable in terms of his reaction against materialism. Unencumbered by either superfluous flesh or clothing, these figures appear to have transcended material cares and seem to live on a more spiritual plane. As such, they too might be said to be the forerunners of the more spiritually evolved humanity envisaged by Altenberg.

The works which follow Pròdrómós each contain a similar message, renewing the appeal to mankind to renounce his material values in the cause of spiritual evolution. The outbreak of war in 1914 caused Altenberg to embark upon a new campaign against luxury and excess in which he was sustained by the hope that the war would teach mankind truer values. In the short piece "Der Luxus von heute und seine Übertreibungen" (F 42-43), Altenberg defines luxury as all those things which are not directly related to physical health, and denounces it as an "idée fixe", "eine Hysterie" of the "half-educated" and social arrivés, which foments moral corruption and social decay. In the thematically related "Werdet Einfach" (F 218-9)

Altenberg's critique of luxury assumes the form of an appeal to mankind to "become simple" and, more specifically, to follow the basic rules on diet and hygiene which, he believes, would furnish the basis of a simple and noble way of life. In conclusion he writes:

Es gibt einen Genuß der Einfachheit! Es gibt einen Stolz, es gibt eine Ehre des einfachen Lebens. Jeder helfe jetzt mit, die Welt zu reinigen von düsteren, grausamen, heimtückischen, teuflischen Vorurteilen. Tod dem Überflüssigen, es belastet, raubt Kräfte, schwächt, verhindert und zerstört!

Werdet einfach!

It is, he maintains, the duty of all men to participate in the cleansing, or regeneration, of the world by overcoming their love of luxury and learning the benefits of austerity.

To regenerate the world and to assist in the spiritual evolution of mankind: this, Altenberg stresses, is his supreme task as a poet. Moreover, it is to further this lofty, spiritual goal that he continually seeks to discredit and undermine the materialist code of society. The posthumously published piece "Prothesen" (LA 173-6), which sets out the grounds for his dislike of artificial limbs, epitomises the manner and substance of Altenberg's later arguments against materialism. The views expressed therein are typically uncompromising and extreme. The wearing of artificial limbs - except at work - is condemned by him on the following grounds. Firstly, Altenberg maintains, it is an expression of the vanity of the wearer. Secondly, he sees artificial limbs as an attempt of manufacturers and traders to capitalise on human misfortune. Finally, he argues that they constitute a further material impediment to the spiritual development of man; for, he writes:

Durch den Verlust eines Beines wird das Gewicht des Organismus um so und so viel Kilo verringert, also der "Kampf gegen die Materie" erleichtert! Ich selbst verpflichte, mich in sechs Wochen bis zwei Monaten, mit Hilfe hohler Bambuskrücken mich ohne linkes Bein viel elastischer und viel anstrengungsloser, also entmaterialisierter, also menschlicher, fortzubewegen als bisher! (LA 174)

Altenberg's critique of materialism should be seen, then, within the context of his evolutionism. His ideal of a spiritually refined humanity depends, in the first instance, on his success in convincing others of the fallacy and immorality of a code which (in his view) is hostile to life itself. It also depends, to a lesser extent, on mankind's ability to perceive the living spirit in matter, as Altenberg indicates in Fechsung - "Leblose Dinge sollen dir auch lebendig werden" is the advice offered by him in "Das Glasgeschenk" (F 71-2). Towards the end of his life, however, Altenberg despaired of his success, and succumbed to doubts about his fellow men's desire - and capacity - to realise their spiritual potential. His admonitions appeared to go unheeded: his contemporaries continued to fall into the materialist trap. Moreover, the power of the spirit seemed (to him) useless against indomitable matter. On 3rd August 1918 Altenberg recorded:

Die Materie ist zu dumpf, träge, in sich beharrend, stumpf, entwicklungsunfähig, unelastisch, um sich vom "Geiste" und den lichten Neuerungen regenerieren zu lassen! (NL 132-3)

#### 4.3 Marriage and the family

Throughout his literary career Altenberg condemns marriage as a meaningless bourgeois institution which not only stands in the way of self-fulfilment but also, by encouraging the individual to concentrate on the well being of one other person, causes him to neglect his duty to humanity. In Vita Ipsa (115-6) he stresses that marriage is essentially a bourgeois discovery, an attempt to regulate and channel human emotions, and to give order and stability to society. It is, in his opinion, one of the most striking examples of bourgeois complacency and hypocrisy and as such poses a serious threat both to the spiritual growth of mankind and to human community, for this, Altenberg believes, should be founded on sincerity.

The "See-Ufer" series provides the first indication of Altenberg's scepticism about marriage: even the happily married woman, he suggests in "Fünfunddreissig", is unfulfilled. In Was der Tag mir zuträgt the nature of this solidly bourgeois institution is examined in greater depth in "Die Tante" (p105-7). In the opening paragraph Altenberg ridicules the bourgeois view of marriage as one of life's crowning achievements and as a reward for industry and learning - perhaps he considered this kind of thinking typical of the "naive idealism" which to his mind surrounded and sustained the institution (NF 277). In the following paragraphs of "Die Tante" he goes on to expose the marriage-myth by illustrating that, far from setting the seal on human happiness, marriage results in frustration, disillusionment and unhappiness. In a later piece entitled "Dienstboten" (BL 12-13) Altenberg suggests how an unhappy marriage may adversely affect the individual's relationships with others. In this instance he attributes his mother's and aunt's maltreatment of their servants to the fact that neither woman had known love. Marriage for them offered an escape-route from intolerable conditions within the parental home where their interests took second place to those of their brothers. However, it too failed to provide for their emotional fulfilment.

In Altenberg's opinion, marriage in Viennese society was doomed to failure since it was based not on love but on financial considerations, and because it did not take into account the inconstancy of human emotion. In Semmering 1912 Altenberg categorically states (in a piece written to supplement his earlier "Psychologie der bürgerlichen Liebe"):

Man kann niemanden auf die Dauer gleichmässig  
gern haben! (S 135)

Love, he believes, is never constant and is continually undermined by hatred, contempt and indifference; this view is echoed in "Der Schleier" (VI 115-6). So cynical had Altenberg become where "bourgeois love" was concerned, that

he was convinced that the Viennese actually enjoyed a turbulent relationship involving conflicting emotions far more than an even-tempered relationship where love remains constant. He therefore condemns as hypocritical the bourgeois insistence on emotional and physical constancy in marriage:

Die bürgerliche Gesellschaft will etwas äußerlich, à tout prix (das ist französisch!) erzwingen, was es in der Welt aber tatsächlich nicht gibt! Nämlich eine anständige Stetigkeit und Verlässlichkeit der Gefühls-Welt; ja sogar der Sinnenwelt, was eine noch entsetzlichere Stupidität ist! (S. 135)

In conclusion, he suggests that marriage has far more in common with a business transaction than with love. For those involved are intent on furthering their own interests and securing personal gain which, he suggests, might take the form of greater financial security or, alternatively, of an improved self-image.

Ultimately, however, Altenberg attributes the breakdown of marriage in his society to individual inadequacy and, more specifically, to the parents' failure to educate their children properly, that is, to provide for their physical, intellectual and spiritual fulfilment. In "Woran krankt die moderne Ehe!?" (BL 86-7) Altenberg places much of the blame for marital failure on the mother who lacks "practical idealism":

An dem Mangel an werktätigstem Idealismus einer Mama, aus ihrem unter Schmerzen in die Welt hineingesetzten geliebten Kindchen ein äußergewöhnliches lebendiges Kunstwerk zu machen.

He believes that it is necessary to impress on mothers - so prone to underrating their natural and social role - the magnitude of their responsibility. It is up to the mother to use her undoubted influence over her child wisely, to make him as physically and morally perfect as she knows how, in order that he might lead a fulfilled life as a valuable member of society. In addition to this piece,

Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens also contains a memorable description of a typical modern marriage threatened with extinction. "Wer bleibt Sieger?!" (BL 53-4) is basically concerned with the duplicitous code of Viennese society, which insisted that marriage forms the only legitimate basis for a relationship between the sexes, but which tolerated, and even condoned, extramarital relationships. Paradoxically, in this society where extramarital relationships were commonplace, adultery, or the suspicion of adultery, could even prop up a shaky marriage. Jealousy, as Altenberg often demonstrates, was a means of keeping passions alive and cementing crumbling relationships.

While he believes that marriage should, ideally, acknowledge the importance of individuality and self-fulfilment, Altenberg is convinced that in reality it restricts the development of the individual. In Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens he gently rebukes those women who have forsaken their duty to themselves and settled instead for the comfortable and ordered existence which marriage can provide, "die Bequemlichkeit und Ordnung im Leben" (BL 28). Their selfless devotion to their children causes Altenberg to be unusually lenient in his treatment of them. Elsewhere, however, he is damning in his criticism of those who have opted for a "comfortable existence". He is quick to differentiate between the bourgeois view of marriage (a comfortable and ordered existence) and what, in his opinion, marriage ought to be, namely a union based on compatibility in which individual needs are respected. (NL 56). In a piece entitled "Ehe" (LA 195-6) he challenges the bourgeois view of marriage, by suggesting that the single person's life is in fact more "comfortable".

DaB man alle diese Opfer bringen kann,  
 nur um bequem zu leben,  
 da wäre es fast bequemer, unbequem  
 zu leben!

Marriage, Altenberg argues, is not in the best interests of the individual; because it involves compromise, it prevents the individual from realising his full potential. In "Ehe", in an attempt to put this point across to his contemporaries, Altenberg has recourse to a language which he is confident they understand, the language of commerce:

Schlechte falsch berechnete Geschäfte machen mit dem Leben ist voreiliger Bankrott.

In his opinion, to make concessions is to ignore one's inner voice and thus to betray oneself and one's humanity:

Mit jeglicher Konzession hört sofort der Adels-Mensch im Menschen zu funktionieren auf, man wird Konzessionär! Aber "Mensch" ist man nicht mehr!

Elsewhere Altenberg states that illness ("the bankruptcy of one's physical reserves") is the penalty for self-betrayal.

While Altenberg's own bachelorhood may be regarded as one manifestation of his scepticism concerning marriage, it might equally be considered as the inevitable consequence of his own inability to sustain relationships. In a telling piece entitled "Treuebruch" (BL 114) he suggests that he was unable to meet the demands ordinarily made of a man by a woman:

Aber leider konnte er nicht allen Ansprüchen genügen, die das Leben von einem sogenannten "ganzen Mann" erfordert.

Perhaps this is a veiled allusion to his aversion to the sex-act. At any rate his femininity or effeminacy was a favourite (and obvious?) target for contemporary caricaturists. (See Bertold Löffler's "Design for a brochure", produced by the Kabarett Fledermaus, in honour of Altenberg's 50th birthday (40).) As Thomalla suggests, it seems very likely that Altenberg suffered from a form of sexual neurosis which expressed itself in a fear of physical intimacy. As we have seen, his idealisation of

the fair sex and his advocacy of the Platonic relationship each offered him the means to sublimate this fear. In addition we have seen how his sense of mission as a poet which, he stresses, involves a duty to all mankind, furnished him with a legitimate excuse for remaining unattached, and thus for avoiding the sex-issue. On a number of occasions he chastises those men who attempt to combine their career as artists with their role as husband and father, and casts doubt both on their commitment to humanity and the quality of their art. In Nachfechtung (p 115), for example, he writes:

Die meisten Schriftsteller geben ihr Bestes.  
Aber ist es wirklich ihr Bestes?! Ich vermute,  
daß ~~die~~ gerade das ihrer Frau, ihrem Kinde, ihrer  
Geliebten und sich selbst geben. Die Welt bekommt  
so einen kargen, netten Brosamen. Beweist mir doch  
zuerst, daß ihr euch nicht "anderwärts" verausgabt!

In the posthumously published "Wege" (LA 321-323) he goes still further and warns the artist-figure of the dangers of devoting himself to anything other than his vocation:

Sei's eine Frau, ein Kind, ein Hund,  
ja nur eine kleine Villa mit Gärtchen,  
ja nur eine kleine Sammler-Leidenschaft für  
Marken, Münzen oder sonst etwas,  
ja Alles raubt Dir Dein wunderbares freies  
Mit-leiden mit Allen, Du wirst beschränkt,  
es raubt Dir die Sehnsucht und die Kraft,  
der Welt-Regenerierung tätig beizuwohnen;  
Deshalb kannst Du auch nie den "Göttlichen  
Frieden" finden, (...).

In Altenberg's opinion, it is the duty of the artist to keep an open mind, to take an interest in all mankind and not just in those close to him, and to assist in the regeneration of the world. For the dedicated artist, marriage is, therefore, out of the question.

Altenberg's scepticism about marriage, should, however, also be seen in its social context. In fin de siècle Vienna where the sanctity of marriage had been seriously undermined, his criticism was pertinent and timely. Nor was Altenberg alone in condemning the hypocrisy of the

bourgeois marriage. At the turn of the century there were many who spoke out in support of free love, "condemning the normal type of arranged marriage as "Ehe-Prostitution" (41). Altenberg, for his part, was repelled by the idea that in marriage the woman was obliged to prostitute herself spiritually as well as physically. In his early writing, as we have seen, he urges that marriage be considered as a spiritual union rather than the only socially approved "framework for sexual intercourse" (42). Indeed, he goes so far as to suggest that sex be excluded from marriage: in his opinion, the husband's role should, ideally, be that of a friend, a brother, even a mother. Moreover, he believed that the primary function of marriage is neither to contain or regulate the sex-drive, nor to provide a legitimate framework for procreation, but rather to further the spiritual evolution of mankind. (This view of marriage may well have been inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche. See Also Sprach Zarathustra "Von Kind und Ehe".)

It is, however, one of the fundamental ironies in Altenberg's world-view that while he emphasises the importance of spiritual evolution and looks forward to the emergence of a more highly refined human being, he attempts to discourage sex and reproduction. (He frequently emphasises that woman's purpose is spiritual rather than biological.) Although his standpoint is explicable in terms of his personal antipathy to the sex-act and as a reaction against the covert emphasis on sex in his society, it does impair the cogency of Altenberg's vision of a new social order. But did Altenberg really envisage a society of spiritually mature adults with no place for children? We know that he did not: we know that he loved and placed his hope in children - or rather in girls. Perhaps the inconsistency in his thought results instead from his assimilation of conflicting philosophies current in fin de siècle Vienna. For Altenberg was an eclectic who derived his views from many widely different sources. He was, for

example, strongly influenced by "Dekadenzliteratur" which both fostered an appreciation of sensual and spiritual refinement and fed his doubts about sex and procreation. But he was impressed too by Nietzsche's vital philosophy, which emphasises the value of the instinctual and physical well being. He was fascinated by death, but was drawn irresistably towards life. Indeed, as Peter Wagner observes, the philosophies of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer (the latter's thought was deeply embedded in the Wagnerian music-dramas he adored) each contributed to Altenberg's thought:

Sehr vereinfachend könnte man formulieren, daß Altenberg paradoxerweise versucht hat, die schopenhauerische Forderung nach Überwindung des materiellen Lebens und seine Mitleidsethik mit Nietzches Willen zur Lebenssteigerung zu vereinen. (43)

Finally, as to Altenberg's evolutionary theory, this - as we shall see - consists of an uneasy synthesis of Darwin's evolutionism and Nietzsche's doctrine of the "Superman".

### The Family

As the self-appointed advocate of that silently suffering majority, womankind, Altenberg inevitably clashed with the masculine morality of his society and with what was perhaps its most tangible expression, patriarchal authority. Whilst he acknowledges that the middle class paterfamilias could provide every material advantage for his wife and daughters, he also recognises that this may not guarantee their happiness. As a piece such as "Emotion" (WT 202-204) clearly demonstrates, Altenberg recognises that the cossetting of middle class women only tended to exacerbate their inner tensions, adding to their sense of unfulfilment and their feelings of guilt. However, unlike his younger contemporaries, the Expressionists, Altenberg neither sought direct confrontation with authority, nor did he attempt to depose the father-figure from his position of power. His criticism of patriarchal authority

tends to be indirect and lacks the cutting edge of the Expressionists' critique. Within the "Revolutionär" series, for example, the father-figure is subjected only to mild ridicule. One reason for this may have been Altenberg's respect for his own father: in the eyes of his son, Moriz Engländer was a kindly, cultured man of enlightened views. It is the mother-figure who, as has already been noted, embodies those bourgeois attitudes which Altenberg found distasteful.

Whilst his lenient treatment of the father-figure stands in contrast to the patricide advocated by his Expressionist counterparts, Altenberg does share their objections to the insularity and hypocrisy of family life. His conviction that marriage and family commitments each stand in the way of individual fulfilment is paralleled in a number of Expressionist works, notably in Reinhold Sorge's Der Bettler (1911-2) and Georg Kaiser's Von morgens bis mitternachts (1912). In each case the break with family ties is seen as the prerequisite for self-discovery and fulfilment. In addition, both of these works suggest the claustrophobic nature and meaninglessness of family life. Indeed, it is interesting that Kaiser, himself an ardent admirer of Altenberg's work, draws attention to the stagnation (see stage directions Part ii, scene i) and boredom of family life much as Altenberg had done before him in such pieces as "Sonntag" and "Familienleben". This latter piece which was published initially in 1896 as part of the "Revolutionär" series, but dropped from the second and subsequent editions of Wie ich es sehe (perhaps because of objections from the Engländer family, its real-life models), provides the most memorable account of family life within Altenberg's oeuvre.

Against the backcloth of a faintly exotic hotel garden, Altenberg describes the eve of the departure of Albert Königsberg's (i.e. the revolutionary's) mother and younger sister for Ischl where they would spend the summer months, as was the fashion amongst Vienna's well-to-do. By

choosing the occasion of a family reunion, Altenberg is able to demonstrate more effectively the dissension and tensions within the family and expose its unity and harmony as a lie or, to use Altenberg's words, "Talmi-Idylle". For Albert, as for his creator, family life exemplifies the superficiality and smug self-satisfaction of middle class society, which attempts to evade the political and social reality and the evidence of social injustice and malaise by retreating further into cosy domesticity. In contrast to the other members of his family, Königsberg is unwilling to keep up the pretence of solidarity or to suppress those thoughts which endanger the family's sense of well being. Thus he finds himself in conflict with the mother whose attitudes typify bourgeois prejudice. Altenberg uses the ensuing "argument" between Königsberg and his mother as a means of exploring the former's outlook, especially his views on evolution (to which we shall return in a future section). In "Familienleben" differences are finally submerged: Albert's toast to happy summer days and some motherly advice serve to paper over the cracks. The domestic idyll is restored - on the surface at least.

In a piece written more than a decade later entitled "Luftveränderung" (S 133-34), Altenberg returns to his earlier theme, the hypocrisy of family life. On this occasion he observes how a change of air and environment produces an "improvement" in family relationships. The father, for example, becomes more solicitous towards his wife and family and shows unusual interest in the opinions of their maid. On holiday, one makes an effort to be affable: the consideration of others takes precedence over self-interest. But, Altenberg suggests, this too is a sham, another false idyll which will last, at best, for the duration of the holidays.

Finally, reference should be made to a piece contained in Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens to which Altenberg gave the title "Familienidyll" (BL 52). In the

image of domestic contentment recalled here by Altenberg adults are conspicuously absent. His attention is wholly absorbed by the children of the family who sit at supper, and in particular by the twelve year old daughter, JM, whose purity and beauty "intoxicates" Altenberg. To this extent "Familienidyll" appears to be more in the nature of a personal idyll. The absence of adults (with the exception of the narrator) is significant and may be explained quite easily. For, in Altenberg's opinion, the essential ingredients of human community, purity and truthfulness, are generally lacking in adult society and can be found only in children and primitive peoples like the Ashanti.

#### 4.4 Education

In his examination of the "Educational preconditions of Jung-Wien" (44), Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler highlights the controversy surrounding education at the turn of the century. He notes that while there were many who continued to appreciate the "formal educational value" of the classical languages, which were the principal subjects on offer in the humanistic Gymnasium, a growing contingent criticised the "impracticality" of an education which, they argued, did not prepare young people properly for life. As Janik and Toulmin observe, Vienna's artistic set was particularly vociferous in its condemnation of the educational system from which they had profited, but which had filled them nonetheless with "weariness and boredom" (45). Altenberg too was an active participant in the educational debate.

Having experienced the benefits of an informal or private education at home as well as the traditional, classical education provided by the "Akademisches Gymnasium", Altenberg was well placed to judge the relative merits of each. However, personal experience biased him towards the former. A solitary and nervous child, Altenberg encountered many difficulties at school which

in turn nurtured his dislike for formal institutionalised learning, causing him to extol instead the superiority of private tuition. "Ein schweres Herz" (WS 196-201) embodies one of Altenberg's earliest attacks on institutionalised learning. As is usual in the early work, Altenberg's criticism in this piece is muted and indirect; it is implicit in his sympathetic response to one young girl who longs to leave boarding-school and return to her family. Indeed, Altenberg considers that it is extremely harmful to the child to wrench it from its home and family in order to provide it with a fuller education. By contrast, he emphasises the importance of the parents' role in the education of their children.

As we have seen in "Woran krankt die moderne Ehe!?!" (BL 86-7) Altenberg considers it necessary to define and accentuate a mother's responsibility to her child: she has a duty to educate the whole child, to cultivate its innate qualities and to promote its happiness and fulfilment. In a later piece entitled "Erziehung" (S 29-30) Altenberg argues that the mother, rather than the father, is better suited to the education of their children, since she tends to know them more intimately, and is less determined to dictate their future existence. Moreover, Altenberg maintains that while her husband invariably wishes his own lot upon his children, she usually hopes for a better life for them than she herself has known. In a later, complementary piece entitled "Kindererziehung" (LA 246), however, Altenberg reveals one typical mother's inadequacies as a teacher. He is especially critical of the way in which she appeals to her little girl's emotions when teaching her, rather than rationally explaining why, for example, it is dangerous to play with matches.

In education, Altenberg objects to favouritism which, he notes in "Schule des Lebens" (F 144-5), is not in the best interests of the child. He is equally critical of the strict discipline imposed on children in

schools. This is brought out in "The School" ("Ashantee") which describes his anguish when his friend, the young Ashanti girl Bibi Akolé, is tested and punished for not knowing her German numbers. In addition to offering this criticism of a well-tried teaching method, which is based on the assumption that fear of punishment encourages rapid and thorough learning, "Ashantee" enshrines Altenberg's educational ideals.

These ideals are implied in the opening piece, "Der Hofmeister" (WS 298-304), which suggests that a loving relationship between teacher and pupil provides a more solid foundation for learning. Clearly, Altenberg's own experience of private tuition as a child influenced this view. In later life he liked to recall his happy relationship with his "beloved" teacher in a number of pieces entitled simply "Der Hofmeister", while in "Naturliebe" (F 131-132), as in "Ashantee", he presents the intimate relationship between tutor and pupils in an ideal light. In the first place, he suggests that the tutor's familiarity with his pupils enables him to instruct them more fruitfully. Still more important in Altenberg's eyes is the tutor's ability to teach by example. Elsewhere he states that the poet too should instruct mankind by setting a "noble example" (VI 168). In "Der Hofmeister" ("Ashantee") Altenberg illustrates how, by demonstrating his affection and respect for the Ashanti, the tutor is able to inspire these feelings for a foreign people in his charges. However, in this piece, Altenberg is not simply concerned to suggest the practical application of a pet educational theory, but also to show his readers how they too might profit from this teacher's example, and overcome their prejudice against "primitive", or foreign, peoples by learning to appreciate their differences and to love them.

In Mein Lebensabend Altenberg sums up his experience of, and attitude towards, institutionalised learning in the following manner:

Ich hielt vor allem alles für überflüssig und verzwicket. (LA 3)

His attitude was typical of Vienna's artistic elite: he too publicly denounces the educational system and its diet of learning which, he stresses, has little relevance for life. In "Das Institut" (VI 195-6) he complains:

Erziehung zu "einfacher Gerechtigkeit" wäre Erziehung! Aber man erzieht zu "Sprachenkenntnissen, Klavier, Violine, Geschichte, Geographie". Niemand wurde dadurch auch nur für eine Stunde lang, "ein besserer Mensch", aber die "Institute" verdienen dadurch die Monats-Gage der um ihr Geld infam Betrogenen!

He is particularly angered by what he sees as the failure of the educationalists to provide proper moral instruction, and to inculcate humane values, taking it upon himself to compensate for their failure in his writing. In the thematically-related piece "Gymnasium" (F 244-5) he questions the value of the education provided by the "Gymnasium", and describes the years spent there as a waste of time and energy. The principal function of this piece is, however, to illustrate the adverse effects of the teaching methods employed in the humanistic Gymnasium. The beauty and value of the classics would, Altenberg argues, forever be spoiled for those children who are compelled to learn by rote verbs and rules of syntax. In "Weshalb ich nicht 'Mediziner' wurde" (VI 58-9) Altenberg is similarly critical of what he sees as the tendency of education to be divorced, or at one remove, from life. For instead of being made interesting and lively, he complains that subjects are treated in a dull and lifeless manner in educational institutes. In "Matura" (LA 2), on the other hand, Altenberg is critical of the demands made of young people under the educational system of his day:

Es ist merkwürdig, weshalb man an 18 - bis 19 jährige Gehirne Anforderungen stellt, noch dazu bei Prüfungsaufregung, die die 40 jährigen unaufgeregten Gehirne auch nicht so ganz leisten könnten ?? Was Wunder, daß man unter diesen Umständen aus Verzweiflung zum Dichter wird?! Da braucht man Gott sei Dank nichts "Positives" zu wissen.

It would, however, be misleading to overemphasise the negative aspect of Altenberg's criticism: as we have seen in "Der Hofmeister" (Ashantee) Altenberg is not at a loss to suggest an alternative to institutionalised learning. He condemns public education on the grounds that it is unrelated to life, but advocates instead, in such pieces as "Naturliebe" and "Weshalb ich nicht 'Mediziner' wurde", that the child be taught directly from nature and life. And in Nachfechtung he urges his readers to view life itself as a school. He dislikes the formal education provided in schools, but favours a more relaxed one-to-one relationship such as he had enjoyed as a child with his private tutor. And, on a number of occasions he argues in favour of an autodidactic approach to education, as for example in "Das Institut" (VI), where he states:

Ein wahrhaftiger reiner einfacher Mensch sein, das kann man, muß man, soll man ganz von selbst werden, nicht durch "Geschichte und Geographie"!

Although he is generally suspicious of book-learning, Altenberg does believe that the individual can profit more from reading certain authors - Goethe, Schiller, Dickens, Tolstoy, to name but some - than from a formal education. For he maintains that their works (which he often describes as "Lebens-Bibeln") offer valuable insight into life and provide practical and spiritual guidance for living. It is interesting too that Altenberg favours the cinema as a means of providing popular education. (See NA 181.)

Although critical of his classical schooling, Altenberg nonetheless drew heavily upon it in formulating his educational alternative. For as William Johnston observes in his study The Austrian Mind:

Precisely because it transmitted traditional skills, Austrian education equipped its alumni to supplant what they had inherited. (46).

Hailed by his contemporaries Otto Stoessel and Hugo von Hofmannsthal as a "modern Socrates", Altenberg not only favoured the peripatetic life style and the flowing raiment of the ancient Greeks; he was impressed too by their attitude to education. In his own writing, which he also designates "Lebens-Bibeln" and which, as Geoffrey Broad demonstrates, is governed by a strong didactic purpose, Altenberg often has recourse to the Socratic method of teaching. For instance, in the overtly didactic "Platonisches Gespräch" (F 161-2) Altenberg's "disciple" learns, by posing a series of questions, what kind of woman is most worthy of man's admiration. Clearly, Altenberg intends the piece as a lesson to his fellow men to be more discriminating in their love of women. In addition to adopting didactic methods favoured by the ancients, Altenberg was influenced by their broader concept of education as a means of acquiring self-knowledge and attaining self-fulfilment. In Was der Tag mir zuträgt, for example, he provides the following characteristic definition of education:

Einen Menschen erziehen, heisst, ihm zu sich selbst verhelfen. (WT 274)

Moreover, he sees his writing which, he stresses, bears the fruits of his own experience and knowledge of life, as an aid to others in their quest for self-identity and fulfilment.

#### 4.5 Social Justice and the Law

In "Der Beginn" (BL 179) Altenberg describes how he first tasted life's injustices. He recalls how, as an exceptionally timid child with a great fear of darkness, he dreaded going every evening from his bedroom through several large, unlit rooms to the toilet. On one particular occasion, he was sent a second time by his mother, and, having returned very quickly was forced to go yet again because she refused to believe that he had obeyed her in the first place. Looking back, this incident seems to Altenberg to have foreshadowed all those future iniquities which he both witnessed and experienced personally, and to have aroused in him a burning desire to see justice done. While his mother's behaviour seems (to him) to typify the unjust treatment he subsequently endured in life, his father, on the other hand, possesses what Altenberg regards as an unprecedented and exemplary sense of justice. In the posthumously published biographical sketch "Mein Vater" (LA 4-6) he describes his father in the following manner:

Mein Vater war der überhaupt allergütigste Mensch, den es geben kann. Er war sogar den Meisten ganz unverständlich, man kann sagen, mit den übrigen Sterblichen verglichen, hatte er eine Art von pathologischer und direkt aufreizender Gerechtigkeitsliebe.

He goes on to cite how his father offered protection to those too weak to defend their own interests, such as his staff, servants and even complete strangers. Undoubtedly, the father's respect for the feelings and rights of others, as well as his sense of fair play, made a deep and lasting impression on Altenberg, who in turn appeals to his fellow men to be more lenient judges, and to understand rather than condemn.

As "Die Fliege" (F 162-3) demonstrates, Altenberg identified with the weaker members of what was in his eyes an unjust and predatory society, and considered it his

duty to protect them. In this piece, which may have been inspired by Musil's "Das Fliegenpapier"\* , Altenberg likens his experience to that of the fly which is cruelly tormented and tortured to death by mankind. The piece questions the basic humanity of mankind. Women in general, the prostitute in particular, the exploited members of Austria's working class, children - all found in Altenberg a staunch and sympathetic advocate who responded to their modest ambitions and was anxious to generate understanding for (and so alleviate) their social plight. As he grew older, so too did he become more unrelenting in his attacks upon Austria's haute bourgeoisie (that "limited ruling caste who lived, directly or indirectly, on the labours of exploited millions" (47)), describing their lives as tragic, worthless and futile by turns. As his contempt for this caste grew, so did his support for the socially underprivileged. He recognised that poverty is the source of much misery and cruelty. In "Lebensbild" (NA 52-53), for example, he demonstrates convincingly how poverty undermines the individual psychologically, and reveals it as the cause of child abuse. Similarly, in "Mord" (LA 176-8) he argues that social inequalities nurture the baser emotions, such as envy, and can even result in murder.

Altenberg was obviously deeply troubled by the problem of child abuse in his society and returns to it frequently in his writing. The strength of this concern is evidenced by his regular donations to the "Kinder-Schutz-und Rettungsgesellschaft", to which he also bequeathed his entire estate of 100,000 Kronen (48). Two pieces entitled "Kindermisshandlung", one contained in Märchen des Lebens (p 178-9), the other in Mein Lebensabend (p 206), each reveal Altenberg's understanding of the predicament of the poverty-stricken mother who takes her frustration and despair out on her children. In the former, he describes in detail the family background of a mother found guilty of infanticide, and attributes her crime both

\*Prose miniature of 1913

to poverty and to the fact that as a child and young woman she herself had been beaten almost as a matter of course. In her defence, her lawyer describes the wretched conditions of the poor which, it is suggested, should be regarded as a major factor in her crime or at least as "extenuating circumstances":

Der Verteidiger schilderte "Armut und Elend" und sagte, hier regierten andere Gesetze; die Nerven seien eben zerrüttet und daher unverantwortlich. Hysterie der Armut!

While the views articulated here are clearly those of Altenberg himself, the final paragraph is an expression of his sympathy for this apparently ill-fated woman who had neither self-knowledge nor knowledge of life. Finally, he suggests that as long as people are caught in the poverty-trap, there is little hope of alleviating human suffering. In the second piece, although Altenberg acknowledges social deprivation as the indirect cause of child abuse, he is less sympathetic towards the offending mother. As in "Lebensbild" (NA 52-3) and "Gerichtsverhandlung" (ML 187) he is more concerned to draw attention to the inadequacies of the existing laws which, he stresses, fail to provide adequate protection for children. Thus, in "Kindermiss-handlung" (LA 206) he appeals for a new law to safeguard step-children.

In "Lebensbild" (NA), he argues that a new law should be introduced to prevent children brought up by foster parents from being returned to their natural parents if the latter are unable to support them financially. For he believes that such children would almost certainly suffer physical and psychological harm as a result of their real parents' financial hardship. In the slightly earlier piece, "Gerichtsverhandlung" (ML 187), which begins with a stark and horrifying account of how a mother inflicts terrible and fatal injuries on her child, Altenberg is chiefly concerned with the inhumanity and iniquity of the law. Because it is deemed by the court that a child did

not die directly as a result of the wounds inflicted by its mother, her sentence is drastically reduced to three months imprisonment. Altenberg compares this to the fate of those who are sentenced to death for having "directly" caused the death of their child, a lesser crime in his eyes, since death by this means is sudden, "less painful" and "more humane".

In a further piece entitled "Gerichtsverhandlung in Wien" (NA 189) Altenberg is concerned, once again, to expose the harsh iniquity of the law. On this occasion, he relates the case of a poor piano teacher who sends money to her brother in the hope of saving him from the life of crime upon which, she knows, he has embarked. In view of the nobility of her motives, Altenberg suggests that her sentence for "aiding" and "abetting" a criminal is both unwarranted and cruel. In the posthumously published "Natural-Wirtschaft" (LA 272-3) Altenberg not only uncovers the duplicitous nature of the law, but also the dubious morality upon which it is based. For, while a soldier escapes punishment for theft, the prostitutes to whom he has given the stolen goods in payment for their services, and who candidly admit having received them, are imprisoned. Finally, in "Notiz" (NA 181-2) Altenberg raises doubts about the moral integrity of the police who, by suppressing a series of films which highlight cruelty to animals, appear to be acting neither in the public's interest nor in the cause of humanity. Instead, their action safeguards what Altenberg considers barbarous practices - the force-feeding of geese and the depluming of ostriches - which line the pockets of unscrupulous businessmen.

Altenberg's criticism of certain aspects of Imperial legislation, of judgements reached and sentences passed in Vienna's courts of law, and of the police, should, however, be regarded as part of his wider concern for social and individual justice. In his opinion, the law is, after all, an extension and expression of social morality; its

iniquities are a reflection of a morally bankrupt society. Therefore, in order to redress social and legal injustice, he believes that it is necessary first to rekindle the individual's social conscience. In Fechsung (p 125) his attitude towards justice is summarised in the following "fragment":

Gerechtigkeit ist ein Talent wie ein anderes!  
 Man hat es oder man hat es nicht. Es ist ein  
religiöses Talent, gerecht sein zu wollen. Zu  
erlernen gibt es da nichts. Das kommt von oben,  
 das heißt, von drinnen!

Although in this piece he treats justice as an innate quality or capacity, he strongly implies elsewhere that justice depends on the individual's propensity for objectivity, tolerance and leniency. Moreover, he insists that improved, that is, more just interpersonal relationships would form the basis of a more humane and equitable society (see also above subsection 2.8.3).

#### 4.6 Politics and War

In view of the failure of Austrian Liberalism and the final breakdown of parliamentary rule - in 1897 the so-called "Badeni Krawallen" effectively spelled an end to constitutional government - it is little wonder that Altenberg, as a member of Austria's beleaguered middle class, should have become disillusioned with politics and politicians. Like the majority of his fellow artists who shared his middle class background, Altenberg has more in common with the "homo philosophicus" than with the "homo politicus": in his writing he is concerned chiefly with those issues which affect all mankind regardless of nationality, class or creed and, above all, with the spiritual welfare of mankind. He was a cultural revolutionary and as such found himself in conflict with politicians who, he opines, are fired by purely personal ambition and not by genuine social concern. In "Die Strasse" (VI 59-60) he argues that, whereas politicians

ought to be humane, well-rounded individuals with a capacity for self-sacrifice and impartial judgement, they are in fact extremely selfish and partisan. Only the Social Democrats, whose political aims seem to him to be most in accord with the interests of humanity, are exempt from criticism. And although he objects on principle to the poet's becoming politically involved, insisting rather that he remain "above politics", Altenberg himself identifies increasingly with the Social Democrats in his writing, so much so that in "Poeta" (F233-4) he writes:

Ein Dichter, der kein Sozialdemokrat ist,  
und sogar mit Rücksicht auf HaB und Verachtung  
der durch Gewohnheit eingenisteten Vorurteile  
der Menschen kein Anarchist ist, ist kein  
Dichter!

Altenberg's daily contact with members of the working class and Vienna's demi-monde enabled him to overcome any suspicion he might have harboured about this hitherto relatively unknown quantity which once had seemed to him to threaten middle class society. He notes with approval their lack of pretensions, their natural dignity and the modesty of their ambitions. More importantly, the favourable impression he received of this class strengthened his commitment to egalitarianism. In the early piece "Fromont" (WS 40-41) Altenberg had already begun to question the birthright of the Austrian nobility, suggesting that true nobility is determined neither by birth nor wealth but by the degree of spiritual refinement possessed by the individual. In his subsequent writings he consistently argues that all men and women, irrespective of social status, have the potential to become more spiritually refined, humane beings: his evolutionism is firmly rooted in a belief in human equality and aims at the creation of a new spiritual nobility embracing all levels of society. (In addition to informing his evolutionary theory, it will be seen that Altenberg's belief in human equality manifests itself in his opposition to elitism in the arts.)

Although Altenberg's egalitarianism does indicate a certain solidarity of feeling and purpose with the Social Democrats, we should not forget that the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity espoused by this party are also central to the classical liberal doctrine which may well have been impressed upon Altenberg both by his father and by the teachers of the "Akademisches Gymnasium". For the education which Altenberg (in company with Arthur Schnitzler, Richard Beer-Hofmann and Hugo von Hofmannsthal) received here was markedly Josephin in flavour, and as such perpetuated a concern for the common good of society (49). However, in the late 1890's, with the demise of parliamentary liberalism, Altenberg gravitated towards the more radical and active successors to the classical liberal tradition, the Social Democrats. It is perhaps not insignificant that Altenberg's first literary reference to the Social Democratic Party is made in Was der Tag mir zuträgt in connection with the rise of Karl Lueger, whose popular success seemed to Altenberg to confirm his darkest fears, namely that his fellow Viennese had renounced humanitarianism. In Altenberg's eyes, the Social Democrats appeared to embody those humanitarian principles which his fellow citizens neglected.

However, Altenberg's socialism is, as Hedwig Prohaska suggests, more intuitive than doctrinaire:

Peter Altenbergs Sozialismus besteht auf keinerlei wissenschaftlicher Fundierung, sondern war eine gefühlsmäßig bedingte Erkenntnis. (50)

This in turn helps to explain certain inconsistencies in Altenberg's political thought, and suggests why he could agitate for a redistribution of wealth as a panacea for social ills one day, and oppose it the next. On occasion, he even seems prepared to abandon socialist principles altogether when these come into conflict with his own idiosyncratic world-view, as for example in "Bettlerfrechheit" (NA 171). In this piece, although Altenberg begins by acknowledging the "ungerecht

verteilten Lebensgüter im Dasein", he goes on to condemn those who borrow or beg from others as irresolute and uneconomical, in accordance with his belief that everyone should live within his or her means. (In view of the frequency of his own appeals to friends for loans and donations, this objection smacks of hypocrisy.) That Altenberg's socialism is pragmatic, subject to his moods and even more to his personal opinions or creed, is also borne out in "Religion" (LA 79-80). In this piece he proclaims in a manner which appears to conflate Marxist doctrine and the teaching of Christ: "der Tag, das Tagen wird anbrechen, wo wir "Enterbten" die einzige Führung übernehmen!!!" (p 80). However, within the context of Altenberg's writing this proclamation seems less prophetic of the triumph of the proletariat in the class struggle, than expressive of Altenberg's optimistic belief in his own evolutionism (i.e. his vision of a new social order in which inhumanity and materialism would be eradicated by the spiritually enriched). Finally, Altenberg's letter to Viktor Adler, in which he argues that social inequalities could be ironed out if Viennese women adopted the Venetian folk costume, offers further proof of his political naivety and of his tendency to respond emotionally to socio-political questions. If this simplistic solution goes little way to healing deep social divisions, in Altenberg's defence it should be noted that even today similar solutions, or attempts to mask differences in social background, are favoured, for example, by the supporters of school uniform in Great Britain.

Within Altenberg's oeuvre both the Social Democrats in general and Viktor Adler in particular are described in glowing terms. In Was der Tag mir zuträgt the Social Democrat is extolled by Altenberg as "das Individuum gewordene Menschheit", a description which is subsequently applied to Adler himself in a piece written to celebrate the fiftieth birthday of the "people's politician"

(BL 155-6). In Altenberg's eyes, Adler exemplifies the ideal politician, for he is uncorrupted by personal ambition, free of the self-preservation instinct and completely attuned to the thoughts, feelings and needs of the oppressed majority. Most of all, Altenberg is impressed by Adler's selfless devotion to the cause of humanity, and it is this which inspires his heart-felt tribute to one whom he embraces as a kindred spirit:

So sorgt sich väterlich Victor Adler, der nun 50 jährige, am Krankenlager dieses geliebten kranken Kindes "Menschheit", unermüdlich seine Liebe spendend, seine werktätigen Zärtlichkeiten, hoffend, zagend, erflehend, ängstlich spähend nach einem Symptome der Genesung!

The above-quoted excerpt from "Poeta (F)", which defines the task of the poet vis-à-vis mankind, also clarifies what Altenberg means by his appeal to the poet to be an anarchist. He is not, as one might suppose, advocating that the poet take up arms against government and the status quo, but rather that he should attack complacency and moral duplicity in the name of a juster society and human improvement. The poet, he maintains in Vita Ipsa (p 13), should be an anarchist "in bezug auf Lebens- Verlogenheiten jeglicher Art". In Altenberg's opinion, political considerations are largely irrelevant to the spiritual evolution of mankind. Moreover, because he believes that social change could best be accomplished "from within" (that is, through gentle evolution rather than political upheaval or revolution) he attempts to "redefine" politics so as to increase their relevance for what he sees as the more vital interests of mankind. In Fechsung, for example, he provides the following exposition of what, in his view, constitutes good politics:

Gesunde Politik: Die englische Paradiessauce mit Curry "Catsup" sollte den französischen Senf als Fleischwürze vertreiben! (F 122)

Whereas in this "fragment" Altenberg suggests that politics should promote health, in a later piece entitled "Die Politik" (VI 217-8) he defines politics as self-knowledge, foresight and the ability to anticipate the demands of others:

Nicht, was ich brauche, ist für mich wichtig, sondern auch und vor allem das zu berücksichtigen, was die Anderen von mir brauchen. Denn nur so kann ich mit dem Anderen "in Frieden" leben, (...)

Written with the benefit of hindsight during the latter stages of the war, this piece is offered by Altenberg as advice on how to avoid future confrontation and global conflict. As usual, Altenberg suggests that improved interpersonal relationships hold the key to better international relations. In addition, it is interesting that in its political application the piece implies Altenberg's acceptance of a policy which he had earlier rejected (in Fechsung), that of appeasement. This shift in position may well have its origins in the deepening mood of resignation to which Altenberg succumbed towards the end of his life. By then Altenberg, exhausted by the war-years and still more by his personal campaign against social corruption, seemed more willing to make concessions for the sake of peace, or a quiet life.

Given that Altenberg's writing spans one of the most fascinating periods in the history of the Habsburg Monarchy, his apparent indifference to overtly political affairs is rather disappointing. Altenberg clearly anticipated criticism of his lack of political awareness, and in Fechsung attempts to excuse his apathy by pointing to the fundamental and universal nature of his concerns (see F256). He genuinely believes that the moral improvement of mankind depends on the acceptance of stricter standards governing diet and hygiene, and that "future catastrophes" might be avoided if mankind "relearns" the value of simplicity and selflessness, sincerity, tolerance and understanding (see, for example, F 197-199). Thus, even at the height of the

war, Altenberg attempts to justify concentrating on basic human shortcomings at the expense of the political aspect, on the grounds that war itself is the result of human, as opposed to political, failure. Interestingly enough, Altenberg's assessment of the causes of the Great War is echoed by the historian Edward Crankshaw who argues in his study of The Fall of the House of Habsburg:

The 1914 war, seen as an episode in the development of peoples, was not inevitable, it was a disaster, and it was due not to human progress but to human failure. (51)

Somewhat surprisingly, Altenberg makes no mention in his writing of the conflicting sectional interests of the Empire's nationalities. In a piece entitled "Die Slovakei" (BL 8-9), which has its origins in one of Altenberg's rarer excursions into the outlying provinces, he is content to record his impressions of spring in the country, and to describe his meeting with the "village beauties" of Pudmericz and Stefansdorf. Moreover, in contrast with his compatriot Arthur Schnitzler, whose writing formulates the dilemma of Austria's middle class Jews, Altenberg appears to have been less sensitive to their plight and on occasion even indulges in a mild form of anti-Semitism in his writing\*. In Fechsung, for example, he jibes at the Jews' so-called love of money:

Die reichen Juden haben die Nüchternheit  
erfunden! "As ma Geld, was braucht ma Schnaps?!"  
(F 180)

While the figure of Franz Joseph has only a shadowy presence in Altenberg's writing - one senses his presence in "Sonntag", for instance, where the conditions within the Königsberg household mirror in microcosm those of the

\* According to Stefan Großmann (in Ich war begeistert), in his conversation Altenberg was, by contrast, virulently anti-Semitic.

Empire - his wife, the Empress Elizabeth is the subject of several short pieces in Neues Altes (65-66). In Altenberg's eyes she is a tragic figure, an idealist doomed to restless wandering in search of her ideal, seeming to epitomise the plight of women who longed for spiritual fulfilment, but often remain trapped within a mundane and unrewarding relationship. As has already been noted, in Was der Tag mir zuträgt Altenberg devotes some space to another prominent public figure, Karl Lueger, who finally succeeded to the post of Mayor of Vienna in 1897 and proceeded to "build up the Vienna municipality into an example for all Europe" (52). In Altenberg's piece "Ein 'Wiener'" (WT 290-296), "der schöne Karl" (as he was affectionately called by the Viennese populace) is presented as the quintessential Viennese, the personification or "extract" of Vienna:

Auch Wien hat nun ein Gehirn erhalten, Wien hat eine Seele erhalten, Wien hat einen Willen erhalten. Dieses Gehirn, diese Seele, dieser Wille Wiens heisst: Lueger!

This idea, that the essence of a nation may be distilled in one outstanding individual, was not peculiar to Altenberg: his close friend Egon Friedell was evidently intrigued by the similar notion of the "Repräsentativmensch", which he, in turn, may have derived from Carlyle. Although his portrait of "der schöne Karl" may seem flattering, Altenberg was in fact just as sceptical of Lueger as he was of the Viennese in general. Moreover, his attempt to account for the enmity which existed between Lueger and the Social Democrats amounts to a severe indictment of Viennese society:

Der Socialdemokrat ist gleichsam die 'Individuum gewordene' Menschheit! Lueger ist das 'Individuum gewordene' Wien. Wien hat andere Bedürfnisse als die Menschheit. Die Menschheit hat andere Bedürfnisse als Wien. Daher verstehen sich die 'Extracte' nicht!!

For the most part, Altenberg spent the years of mounting national and international tension (which surfaced in the Agadir crisis of 1911 and the Balkan wars of 1912-1913) in the sanatorium "Am Steinhof". Indeed, it is tempting to regard the illness which confined him there, and which caused him to despair of himself and all mankind, as an individual manifestation of the "unhealthy state of mind" which, according to Sir Harold Nicolson, affected not just Austro-Hungary but all of Europe, and was the primary cause of war in 1914 (53). Clearly, Nicolson's diagnosis was one with which Altenberg would have agreed: in his writing he repeatedly stresses that mankind is sick and in need of both physical and moral regeneration. Moreover, he regarded war initially as a means of purifying and revitalising his ailing society.

In "Melusine" (WT 229-234) war is described in the following manner:

(...). "Nun, ein Krieg ist nichts Wünschenwertes. Dennoch reisst er vieles mit, erzeugt strudelnde Wirbel im Menschenmeere, schwemmt todte schwere Sachen weg, die die Wege verlegen. Marienbader Cur der Menschheitsträgheit. Man zählt die Leichen und weint. Wie angenehm ist es jedoch eigentlich, über Leichen zu weinen. Kriege sind gut. Feige Seelen, was schliesset Ihr Friedensverträge vor der Zeit?! Lasset hinwegschwemmen und sterben - - -! Was blickst Du traurig der Scholle nach, die von dem Sturzbach geschwemmt wird?! Aus der bewegten Kraft spriesst an anderem Ort eine Fichte hervor!"

Significantly, Altenberg distances himself from this contentious evaluation of the benefits of war (doubtless inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche) by attributing it to a philosopher. Nevertheless, it is possible that Altenberg, like Nietzsche, intended his words to be taken metaphorically rather than literally, as an exhortation to his fellow beings to engage the enemy within rather than an incitement to war. The views expressed by the philosopher in this piece are, however, echoed elsewhere

in Altenberg's oeuvre. In the striking expressionistic "Weltenbummler 1914" (F 157-8), for example, war is welcomed by the impoverished as a means of redressing social injustice and of "purging" society. The piece describes how two allegorical figures - the God of War and the God of Death - travel disguised as elegant gentlemen, through an unspecified country (which has the characteristics of Austro-Hungary) stopping at various inns so that they might assess the moral standing of society. On one level, the piece seems a clever adaptation of a convention favoured in ancient mythology whereby the gods return to earth incognito to resolve human problems. On another, it is intended as an admonitory lesson to mankind to reorder its priorities and improve. (In addition, the piece may also have been a source of inspiration for the Expressionist writer Ernst Toller, who makes comparable use of the figures, "der Kriegstod", "der Friedenstod" and a skeleton in the prologue of his drama, Die Wandlung which was written during the years 1917-18).

The outbreak of war in 1914 aroused Altenberg from his political indifference, prompting an initial outburst of patriotic sentiment \* which according to his commentator, D. S. Low, rapidly descended into "jingoistic pronouncements" (54) as, for example, in "Romantik der Namen! U9" (F 201) (which celebrates the destruction of three British armoured cruisers by the submarine U9), and the following fragment which comments upon England's position vis-à-vis Belgium's neutrality:

\* In his contribution to Friedell's Altenbergbuch, Thomas Mann writes approvingly of what he sees as Altenberg's patriotic fervour, contrasting this with the treacherous attitude displayed by his fellow German intellectuals (who, he implies, had successfully sabotaged the Reich's war effort). Such observations are misleading, however, for they fail to acknowledge Altenberg's opposition to the war and his criticism of Austro-Hungary's part in it. Indeed, it was this which ensured Kraus's continued respect for Altenberg.

England hat sich für Belgiens Neutralität  
eingesetzt, die Deutschland miBachtet hat?!  
Hätte sich England auch für Belgiens Neutralität  
eingesetzt, wenn Frankreich sie miBachtet hätte?!  
Nun also! (F179)

However, this observation is perhaps less indicative of Altenberg's jingoism than of his political naivety and of his delight, in later life, in rendering the complex simple.

Altenberg's patriotism, which manifests itself in his fervent belief in Austrian victory did not blind him to the faults of his own side, nor for that matter to the merits of the opposition. In Fechsung he ventures to criticise German colonial ambitions (i.e. the Kaiser's ambition to have "a place in the sun"), suggests that all peoples have a right to self-determination and urges that, on a political as well as a private level, it is important to respect and accommodate the rights and wishes of others. As to the "enemy", he emphasises in Fechsung that his disappointment in the Japanese as "human beings" does not extend either to their art or their diet. In "Japan" (F 255-6) he writes:

Ich bin natürlich gegen die Japaner, sie haben  
mich als Menschen enttäuscht, aber nicht als  
Klein-Künstler!

And in a further fragment, in which he attempts to promote his dietary views, Altenberg attributes the Japanese victory at Port Arthur to their diet of rice, a food which he rates highly because it can be easily digested and converted into energy. In addition, it ought to be noted in Altenberg's defence against D.S. Low's criticism of jingoism, that he finds the attempts of his fellow writers to capitalise on patriotic sentiment and war-fever extremely distasteful. Fechsung contains a fierce attack on those poets and philosophers who seem intent on whipping up war-fever and who attempt to glamorise war and death for the fatherland. Their talents, he maintains, would be

better employed in times of peace when, he argues, there is a more obvious need to arouse mankind's passions and enthusiasm, and to encourage human greatness. In Nachfechtung Altenberg expresses similar sentiments in the humorous fable entitled "Weltkrieg der Dichter" (NF 238), while in a further piece with the heading "1915" (NF 160) he criticises those authors who, anxious to preserve their popularity, pen nationalist essays and patriotic songs:

Ich sehe die Dichter, die Schriftsteller  
 ergreift ein panischer Schreck; sie fürchten  
 jetzt vergessen zu werden: rasch eine Kriegshymne  
 oder ein politischer Essay: "Wesen der Deutschen"!  
 Ich aber gebe "Fechtung" heraus, wie eh und je  
 Schuster bleib bei deinem Leisten, über das Wesen  
 der Frauenseele, die meistens gar nicht vorhanden  
 ist, und über Abfuhrmittel! Beides wird den  
 Krieg überdauern! (sic)

Contrary to popular expectation, the war was not a short, sharp affair which cleared the political air. Christmas came, the soldiers prepared for a war of attrition, disillusionment set in. Already at the time of writing Fechtung, Altenberg describes the war as a "terrible" and "unjust" aberration, but continues to hope that something good would come of it, even if this were simply a change in diet. Moreover, he still nurses the hope that the war would destroy false values and so prepare the way for a more humane social order. As Camillo Schaefer observes (55), Altenberg suspected that the war was being fuelled by unscrupulous industrialists and capitalists. In Fechtung he uncovers the greed of a typical businessman who sells fur jackets to soldiers at a handsome profit, and in Mein Lebensabend he denounces the profiteering of manufacturers and traders. However, he reserves his harshest words of criticism for politicians, whose desire for power and ability to persuade millions of the legitimacy of their claims resulted in tragic, human conflict. (See "Der Krieg" LA 331-3). In "Der Krieg" Altenberg emphasises that the course of history cannot be

dictated by force of arms and describes war as an aberration of human nature brought about by the politically ambitious and self-seeking. The piece, which was written towards the end of Altenberg's life, assumes the form of an impassioned plea to those in authority to allow mankind to live in peace and settle disputes by reason ("geistige Kraft") rather than war. In the thematically related piece "Aus der 'Kriegsmappe' des 'SDS' 1916" (LA 46) Altenberg rejects the view (which he himself once held) that war would result in a radical change for the better, and offers mankind the following advice:

Arbeitet lieber kleinlich-emsig-resigniert  
à la Ameise und Biene an der Hygiene  
des Leibes, der Seele, des Geistes!

In Altenberg's case, the awareness of the utter futility of war had the effect of strengthening his commitment to evolutionism and to the principles governing diet and hygiene which, he believed, would promote spiritual refinement. However, his attempts to impress others with the relevance and importance of his themes have not convinced the critics: D.S. Low dismisses his treatment of the 1914 war as trivial while Paulmichl Leonhard attacks Altenberg's superficiality (56). In view of the fact that barely ten percent of the total number of pieces contained in Fechsung are directly concerned with the war, while in later collections the percentage is still smaller, their criticisms do not seem unreasonable. Nonetheless, such statistics do not take into account the long shadow which the war casts over his writing up to his death in 1919. During this period the ever-present and awful reality of war informs the background of much of his writing, deepening his disillusionment with mankind and sharpening the edge of his social criticism. Fechsung, Nachfechung, Vita Ipsa and the posthumously published collections each contribute to a highly personal account of the war and describe the torment of one who lacked the power to stem

the tide of disaster. His experience was shared by millions throughout Europe.

Altenberg, like the majority of his compatriots, was deprived by the war of a number of commodities which hitherto he had taken for granted. As Leonhard points out (57), the war brought about a change in his personal habits: he gave up smoking and, during the last months of his life, he - like many of his compatriots - subsisted almost solely on a diet of potatoes. And, like so many others, he too knew what it was to be parted from loved ones (see VI 38), and to search the lists of those missing or killed in action, posted outside the Ministry of War, to discover the fate of friends. He mourned the loss of young and promising men like Otto Müller (LA 296-7); the talented actor Viktor Arnold who, Altenberg reports, "brach unter den Eindrücken des Krieges zusammen" (F 145); prominent public figures such as the former politician Dr. Frank (F 130), Herbert Fries, Dr. of Law (F 172) and

a German prince who asked to be buried in a simple soldier's grave (F 147). His Nachlaß contains a moving account of the death of Egon Schiele and his wife, victims of the Spanish 'flu epidemic which swept Vienna in 1918.

During the war Altenberg relied almost exclusively on newspaper reports for his information. In addition they provided both the inspiration and material for a number of pieces. The Austrian offensive against Italy in May 1916 provides the referential framework for "Maitag" (LA 58-9) which records the stifling conditions in Vienna, and, more importantly, exposes the pettiness of human nature. In the final paragraph Altenberg draws together the two main themes of the piece, the Austrian bombardment of Val Sugans and a lover's jealousy, in such a way as to highlight the selfish indifference of mankind. An earlier piece "Wissenschaft und Krieg 1914" (F 158-9) is concerned with the report that Professor Röntgen had given the valuable gold medal presented to him by the Royal Society to the Red Cross. Typically, Altenberg leaves it to the

reader to determine the professor's motivation which, however, appears to have involved that rare blend of patriotism and humanity admired by Altenberg.

"Briefwechsel zweier Freundinnen" (F 147-8), on the other hand, conveys Altenberg's disgust and horror on hearing that wounded soldiers had been attacked by girls who had poured burning oil on them. Occasionally, in Fechsung, Altenberg's comments on the war take the form of bald, factual newspaper reports as, for example, his account of the "hero's death" of the socialist politician Dr. Frank, and his notice of the death of Dr. Herbert Fries. As one who deplored gushing sentimentality and preferred to let the facts speak for themselves, Altenberg appears to have had little time for the sensationalist style of reporting which Kraus too condemns in Die letzten Tage der Menschheit. And, like Kraus, Altenberg objects strongly to the media's glorification of the "hero's death" which he considers indicative of gross human failing, particularly the need for "krasse historische Beispiele" (F 254).

#### 4.7 The Total Critique of Civilisation

At the turn of the century, Vienna was not only the cultural capital of the German speaking world, but also of all central and south-eastern Europe (58). Under the generous patronage of the aristocracy and upper middle classes, the arts were flourishing: the opera, theatres and concert halls were splendid (59). There were, however, many who questioned the real nature and value of this cultural efflorescence. On the one hand, they criticised its remoteness from ordinary people, the quality of whose lives remained unaffected by the arts. On the other hand, they were disturbed by its apparent superficiality. In the eyes of such men as Karl Kraus, Adolf Loos and Peter Altenberg, Vienna's rich cultural life was wholly deceptive. It was, in their opinion, a crude attempt to mask an intrinsic worthlessness,

barbarism even. Altenberg attempts to combat both the remoteness and superficiality of contemporary culture in a number of ways. In the first instance he advocates the thorough democratisation of the arts (see also section 6), and welcomes such technical innovations as the gramophone, which he considers capable of disseminating culture to a wider audience. In addition, he envisages a counter culture based on his ideals of freedom, nobility and naturalness; honesty, delicacy and respect for one's fellow beings. Indeed, it was to further this vision of true culture that Altenberg joined forces with Kraus and Loos in a crusade against duplicity and corruption in society.

In the words of Egon Friedell, Altenberg was "eine reformatorische Persönlichkeit von fast religiösem Charakter" (60). Indeed, it was this overwhelming desire for individual and social reform, allied to a quasi-religious moral fervour, which attracted Kraus and Loos, both cultural revolutionaries like himself, to Altenberg. He enjoyed a long-standing friendship with both men, who each appreciated his qualities, forgave him his faults and offered him financial assistance and moral support. During the period 1903 - 1904 Altenberg and Loos collaborated closely to produce Kunst: eine Halbmonatschrift für Kunst und alles Andere. This periodical was intended to disseminate true cultural values: to educate public taste, promote understanding of the arts and illustrate the relevancy of art for life. Significantly, the motto chosen for the magazine underlines nature's supremacy over life ("Natura artis magistra"); for both Altenberg and Loos disliked the merest suggestion of artifice, which they saw as a further manifestation of hypocrisy. Writing of his project with Loos some years later, Altenberg describes the famous architect and himself as "zwei, die sich hinwegsetzen über das, das bisher unwichtig war" (Nachlese 67).

While Altenberg's relationship with Loos was warm and trusting, his friendship with Kraus apparently stemmed

from their mutual admiration. In "Wie ich mir Karl Kraus 'gewann'" (VI 165-7) Altenberg suggests that Kraus was attracted by his sincerity: "Er war für mich, weil ich echt 'bin'", he claims. Indeed, it is noteworthy that Altenberg is one of a select few to escape condemnation in Kraus' devastating assault on Vienna's literati, Die demolierte Literatur. Whilst Kraus pilloried the precocious and rarefied talents of "Jung Wien" and criticised Schnitzler's literary excesses (61), he was fulsome in his praise of Altenberg, whom he actively defends in Die Fackel where he also writes enthusiastically of Altenberg's linguistic usage. In his review of Semmering 1912, for example, he extols the moral authenticity of Altenberg's language:

Diese von Gott autorisierte Übersetzung des Menschen in die Sprache wird - eine Empfänglichkeit späteren Welten vorausgesetzt - noch zu Menschen sprechen, wenn fast alles, was heute gedrückt wird, nicht mehr mit freiem Auge wahrnehmbar sein wird. (62)

Altenberg, for his part, was equally admiring of Kraus, addressing him on one occasion as "eine Seelen-Exception in dieser schlimmen Welt" (63). Moreover, as the piece entitled simply "Karl Kraus" denotes, (VI 233-4) he was just as eager to go to the defence of his champion. In later life Altenberg felt increasingly indebted to Kraus, who remained loyal to him at the time of his most severe mental crisis and supervised the work, Semmering 1912, which had its origins in this period. Perhaps it was Altenberg's sense of gratitude which caused him to portray Kraus as his discoverer and to suggest that Kraus had both compiled and arranged for the publication of Wie ich es sehe. (See "Wie ich mir Karl Kraus gewann" VI). This claim appears somewhat exaggerated, for although Kraus helped to promote Altenberg's literary career and mediated between him and his publisher, Samuel Fischer (64), he was neither solely responsible for launching Altenberg nor, contrary to what Altenberg would have us

believe, wholly responsible for the form of Wie ich es sehe. According to Stefan GroBmann, Fritz Eckstein was Altenberg's real discoverer (65), but it is also said that Hedwig Fischer, the publisher's wife, was behind the publication of Altenberg's first work (66). Furthermore, letters written by Altenberg to Kraus during the period 1895 - 1896 show that he was, after all, the chief architect of his own work. Nonetheless, the two men did work closely together: they were, in a sense, comrades-in-arms united against the moral duplicity and dehumanising forces in their contemporary society. On different occasions, Altenberg himself readily acknowledges the similarity of their aims and methods. In an article published in the Neues Wiener Journal (7.4.1912) he indicates that Kraus shared his ambition to purge society. And in his letter to Kraus of 22.9.1913 he comments upon his friend's use of "explosive" tactics similar to his own.

Loos, Kraus and Altenberg were each appalled by the inhumanity of so-called civilised society. The indifference displayed by man towards his fellow man in the selfish pursuit of fortune was, as we have seen, a matter of grave concern to Altenberg, who considered social etiquette and pleasantries a poor attempt on the part of his compatriots to disguise their base and selfish motivation (their "natürliche Grausamkeiten" NA 175). Indeed, throughout his literary career, Altenberg, in marked contrast to the committed and consequent Impressionist, is rarely content with the surface reality of life. Instead, he looks beyond and behind the golden mask which was Vienna's public face in order to reveal the deceptive and cruel nature of life in the Dual Monarchy. This is one of the two main functions of the early piece "Die Primitive" (WS) which proceeds from a critique of the unhealthy and inhuman attitudes prevalent in Viennese society to the postulation of new social order founded on physical and moral integrity.

"Die Primitive" opens with a naturalistic description of a night café which Altenberg habitually describes as the microcosm of the world at large. In this he resembles the post-Impressionist painter Van Gogh, for whom the night café and its sickly clientèle also came to represent the corruption and malaise of the civilised world. In "Die Primitive" Altenberg too provides a stark account of the café's nightly customers, for the most part men without direction and dignity whose pathetic air of self-importance barely conceals their self-destructive tendencies. They squander their money and their vital resources until, without hope and down-trodden, they resemble the gutter-drunk. This night café is the meeting place of cabbies too, brutal, silent men who store up their inner resentment which they then unleash on their horses. Altenberg often cites mankind's cruelty to animals, especially horses, as evidence of its inhumanity. (The maltreatment of a horse furnishes the theme of the later piece "Nächtliche Szene" which was included in the fourth edition of Wie ich es sehe, perhaps because of its thematic associations with "Die Primitive".) Nor is it perhaps insignificant in this respect, that Nietzsche's mental collapse closely followed his witnessing of the flogging of a horse in the Piazza Carlo Alberto in Turin. To Altenberg this incident may have suggested the base instinctual motivation of much human behaviour, and may have challenged existing preconceptions concerning the efficacy of cultural values.

A keen observer of his fellow men, Altenberg constantly found himself questioning their entitlement to the description "human": personal experience revealed their baseness to him at almost every turn. An incident recalled in Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens is used by him to reveal the Viennese' unworthiness of their reputation for kindness. The piece, which tells how Altenberg accepts an offer of a lift to the city centre late one night from two "filles de joie", and is subsequently obliged to pay for the favour,

exposes the greed and insensitivity of his fellow citizens. However, Altenberg reveals in a letter to Adolf Loos (of 1905) that he considers his compatriots' shortcomings representative of universal human failings. In an attempt to account for his difficulties in life, Altenberg refers to his problem both in accepting and gaining acceptance from "diese Welt von schamlosem Barbarentum und hinterlistigem Egoismus" (Friedell's Altenbergbuch 354). Time and again, he draws attention in his writing to the iniquitous and predatory nature of a society in which the poor are exploited by the rich, the weak by the strong. In Vita Ipsa Altenberg argues that child abuse is but one powerful example of the depravity and sheer inhumanity of a society which laid claim to culture and refinement. One of his most moving indictments of the barbarity of the civilised world is contained in the earlier collection Märchen des Lebens. "Gamelang-Musik" (ML 107-8) describes Altenberg's personal reaction to the fate of a beautiful slave of the sultan of Karangasam. According to a report issued by the Niederländische Wochen Zeitung, she had fled from the sultan's harem and sought the protection of the Dutch ambassador in Bali. Rather than jeopardise his country's relations with the Balinese, the ambassador turned her over to the sultan's executioners who devised a terrible punishment and death for the slave. The news of this atrocity had a devastating effect upon Altenberg, causing him to doubt the value of life itself and to question the humanity of the civilised world. He is both horrified and dismayed to think that a European, "der Vertreter eines kultivierten Staates" from whom the slave girl had expected compassion, had not attempted to prevent her death.

The effects of his mental illness and the trauma of war left Altenberg with little hope of ever experiencing human goodness in his contemporaries. His disillusionment, despair and cynicism are registered in countless pieces ranging from "Ästheteten" (NA), "Besuch im einsamen Park"

(NA 205-8), "In Kurort Vöslau" (NF 248-9) and "Das Duell" (S 70) to the ironically entitled pieces "Humanitas" in Fechsung and Mein Lebensabend. In the first of these pieces, "Ästheteten", Altenberg criticises the barbarism of his contemporaries, but he also suggests how, by emulating the example of the aesthetes, they might acquire true culture. By contrast, "Besuch im einsamen Park" is devoid of all such advice and takes the form of a plea to his friend, "Helene N." (Helene Nostiz, later Frau Berg), to flee with him "weg von den Ungetümen 'Menschen'". The later piece, "In Kurort Vöslau", finishes on an equally strident note of criticism. In response to some comments concerning the nature of the society gathered in this favourite holiday resort, Altenberg retorts:

Welche Gesellschaft?! Ach so die Menschen?!  
Ich hab' keine gesehen!!! (NF 249)

It is interesting too that, like Arthur Schnitzler, Altenberg considers his fellow countrymen's tacit admission of duelling further evidence of their cold-bloodedness. "Das Duell"\* directly challenges the morality of "polite" society and berates its members for their self-righteous air and, even more, for their disregard for human life.

The two further pieces which each appear under the title "Humanitas" are similarly intended to demonstrate the inhumanity of the civilised world. In each case the title is ironic; for it implies an ideal as yet unattained by mankind. In the first piece, contained in Fechsung (p227-8), Altenberg strikes a familiar note in condemning the individual's preoccupation with those closest to him or her. In his opinion this is irreconcilable with true humanitarianism (which requires the individual to subordinate personal passions to the common good). He is especially critical of his fellows' tendency to lavish affection on

\* reprinted in the Nachlaß as "Über das Duell" (p16)

dogs, because he sees this as a manifestation of their personal inadequacies. Elsewhere, however, Altenberg argues in favour of pets in the hope that, by learning to care for animals, the individual would become gentler and more considerate in his interpersonal relationships. (In an apparent attempt to resolve the inconsistencies he displays in his attitude to animals, Altenberg argues in Nachfechtung that while the love of one animal is foolish, the love of all animals offers proof of one's humanity.) In the second piece entitled "Humanitas" (LA 153-4) Altenberg highlights the ill-will, envy and maliciousness of his contemporaries. Altenberg's stance in each of these pieces is wholly representative of his later uncompromising and condemnatory attitude towards his contemporaries. Towards the end of his life he felt he could trust to no-one's humanity: in the brutally pessimistic piece "Ich" (VI 22-4), for example, he pours scorn on the human aspirations of his fellow beings whom he denounces as "Gott-unähnlichste(n) Organisationen im Grössenwahn dückelhaft benamster "Menschen", ha ha hi hi hia!"

One of Altenberg's favourite ways of demonstrating the inhumanity of man was to compare his contemporaries to animals, which he very often endows with those human virtues which he prized most. Perhaps it was this feature of his writing which prompted Karl Kraus' observation in Die Fackel that Altenberg's "first class" evolutionary theory is designed to show "daB der Affe vom Menschen abstammt" (67). Indeed, the animals described in Altenberg's work often do demonstrate qualities which Altenberg found wanting in the human world. He is especially attracted by the loyalty displayed by dogs, which he thematicises in several pieces. "Theater-Abend" (WT 34-6) contains an unashamedly romantic description of a dog left in Altenberg's care while its mistress attends the theatre. Above all, Altenberg sympathises with the dog's longing ("Sehnsucht") for its mistress. This was an emotion

with which he was very familiar, and which he regards as a positive, strength-giving force in human life: in his opinion it is conducive to spiritual growth. In two intriguing and complementary pieces "Katherine und der Hund" (WT 219-220) and "Gentleman" (BL 160-3) Altenberg is concerned chiefly with the attitudes of men to dogs owned by a lover or wife. In the former he applauds the unselfish behaviour of Katherine, who willingly parts with her dog to spare her lover's feelings. In the latter piece, a "five-minute drama" contained in Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens, he describes how a jealous husband poisons his wife's dog because he wants her undivided love. The husband declares that henceforth he will be even truer to her than her dog had been; for he will be more discriminating, and love her only when she proves worthy. Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens also contains a flattering description of sealions (p 109) which, Altenberg suggests, exemplify qualities lacking in human beings, i.e. philanthropy, amiability and willingness to exert oneself on behalf of others.

Despite his occasional protestations to the contrary, Altenberg's animal pieces do have much in common with the fable; for they too are relevant for human behaviour and are governed by a didactic and moral purpose. The short posthumously published piece, "Ein Bild" (LA 76), clearly fulfils each of these functions and is, in fact, a stinging indictment of the jaundiced attitudes and inhumanity displayed by mankind. The piece describes a picture which Altenberg has entitled "Der letzte Trauergast" because it portrays a Newfoundland dog sitting alone by the cradle of a dead child. In conclusion, Altenberg contrasts the unselfish and unbiased love which he sees epitomised in this animal with the prejudice and rapaciousness which, he insists, characterise mankind:

Ich will nicht sagen, mit den exaltierten Hundefreunden, der Hund allein habe eine getreue Seele! Aber dass er nach dem Tode getreuer gedenkt als die perfiden Erbschleicher, und nicht nur wegen der Wurst und der Kalbsleber, das ist für mich diesmal sicher!

However, Altenberg did not always regard animals in an ideal light, or as the embodiment of essentially human virtues. And in his later works he frequently employs animal imagery to highlight the stupidity and predatory nature of his contemporaries. Altenberg makes use of negatively charged animal metaphors particularly when describing the battle of the sexes. In his early works, which were written at a time when Altenberg sympathised with their social plight, women are depicted as helpless creatures (rabbit, lamb) wholly at the mercy of men (who are presented on occasion as minotaurs and wolves). In his later works, his disillusionment with women and strong sense of solidarity with the men who suffer at their hands is reflected in the animal metaphors he chooses to characterise both sexes. Now it is woman who is the predator (the snake) and man her helpless victim (rabbit). Finally, a piece entitled "De Femina", which Altenberg addresses to Egon Friedell (see Das Altenbergbuch 329), offers a compelling and horrific vision of the relationship between the sexes. Altenberg's image of man and woman as scorpions engaged in combat is strongly reminiscent of Kubin's graphic rendering of the mutually hostile and destructive nature of the sexes. Moreover, as in the natural world, Altenberg argues that in the battle between the sexes, it is the male who succumbs first to exhaustion and is "devoured" by the female.

In his later works Altenberg often indicates his contemporaries' inhumanity by cataloguing their faults; the following excerpt from a "fragmentary" piece in Fechsung may serve as a typical example of this practice:

Wollen Sie alle Fäden in der Hand haben, um Menschen wie Marionetten zu dirigieren?!? Nehmen Sie doch nur die drei Fäden: Eitelkeit, Geldgier, Sexualität! Schon danach tanzen sie ganz korrekt. Nehmen Sie aber noch dazu die drei anderen Fäden: Neid, Eifersucht und Stupidität, so haben Sie ein ganz nett ausgeführtes Marionettenspiel! (F 174-5)

Two further pieces in Fechsung entitled "Christentum I" (p 160-1) and "Christentum 2" (p 161) are each intended to show the degeneration of the Christian ethos in his contemporary society. While the first highlights the ingratitude and revengeful nature of his compatriots, the second cites a father's terrible threats to his child as evidence of man's inhumanity to man. In Altenberg's opinion, barbarous behaviour both exemplifies and can be explained in terms of the "value vacuum" of the modern age. In Neues Altes he acknowledges modern man's difficulties in distinguishing right from wrong "in diesen verworrenen Zeitläuften" (p 172-3). Moreover, he is strongly motivated by the desire to uncover "true values" (NA 141); to draw a dividing line between what he describes in Semmering 1912 as "reele" and "unreelle Werte" (S 113).

Above all, Altenberg sets out to expose the deceptive nature of life in the Dual Monarchy, the so-called "Lebenslüge". He is sharply critical of his contemporaries' insistence upon keeping up appearances and their related notion of propriety which, in Altenberg's opinion, tended to disguise rather than promote truthfulness. He is discouraged too by artificial social forms; the artificial demarcation of class and the artifice of polite society and social institutions, all of which is exposed in his penetrating study "Blumen-Corso" (WS 213-5). For the flowers which are used to create this beautiful spectacle to the glory of Vienna and the Imperial Monarchy are false. In addition, Altenberg uses the piece to suggest the discrepancy between appearance and reality in this, the City of Dreams. He not only reveals the superficiality of the

splendour by hinting that this neither conceals nor mitigates the distress of the poor and homeless, but also indicates its spurious nature, since it is based on evanescent economic riches and not inner strength. The Blumen-Corso was a grandiloquent, if empty, gesture of a kind which, Altenberg knew, was bound to appeal to his equally shallow society. In his writing he repeatedly attacks the superficiality and frivolous attitude given expression in displays like the Blumen-Corso (S 100); in Nachfechtung he dismisses the Viennese' renowned joie de vivre as "rohe Flachheit" (NF 195); and in Semmering 1912 he cautions his fellow men to be on their guard against the seemingly beautiful ("Beauté" p 99). Throughout his life he maintains that it is more important to cultivate one's inner resources, and to acquire inner riches, than to amass material wealth (see, for example, NL p28 "Diatetik I").

Like Adolf Loos, Altenberg too denounces the extravagant architectural and interior designs favoured by his compatriots as fraudulent. A number of pieces including "Trattnerhof" (NA 155-6), "Moderne Architekten"(F 223-4) and "Architektenmumpitz" (VI 245-6) are indicative of Altenberg's affinity with Loos, whose criticism of ornament was based similarly on ethical considerations. In the first of these, Altenberg laments the (imminent) demolition of the Trattnerhof which he describes admiringly as "dieser aristokratisch-einfache, zweckmässig gegliederte alte Bau" (NA 155) and criticises the current preference for elaborate ornamentation:

Die Menschen suchen Ornamente, Verschnörkelungen,  
Zieraten (ein ekelerregendes Wort), weil sie zu  
 ihren eigenen, in sie von Gott gelegten  
Paradieseinfachheiten noch nicht vorgedrungen  
 sind!

In "Moderne Architekten" Altenberg once again finds fault with the prodigality of contemporaries, this time on health grounds. He strongly urges them to abandon their

aesthetic approach to design in favour of functionalism. As in "Trattnerhof", he advocates simplicity and modesty since material austerity is, in his opinion, more conducive to spiritual growth. Indeed, such was Altenberg's demand for stringency that he even disapproves of mahogany and marble (see also "Architektenmumpitz" VI 245-6), both of which materials feature prominently in Loos' designs. Vita Ipsa contains several pieces, e.g. "Tapete" (VI 189-190) and a series of "fragments" (VI 95-6), in which Altenberg exposes what he regards as his contemporaries' aberrations in taste - particularly their tendency to value only that which is expensive and beautiful - and issues alternative standards of hygiene and "functionality". As the following fragment illustrates, beauty is determined for Altenberg, as it is for Loos, by usefulness:

"Die Schönheit eines Sessels kann nur darin bestehen, daß Du bequem auf demselben sitztest!"  
 "Wenn er mir aber abgesehen davon dennoch gefällt?!"

"Dann bist Du ein ausgewachsener Schmock!" (VI 96)

Finally, in "Quartett" (LA 294-5) Altenberg consciously allies himself with Loos in criticising the designs of the Wiener Werkstätte, an example of which is worn by a member of their company. Like Loos, he insists upon integrity in design, equating this with simplicity, and regards their companion's choice of rich material and the intricate patterning of the Werkstätte as evidence of her lack of inner culture:

In unserer Gesellschaft hätten Sie es eben längst lernen sollen schon durch meine gestrickten seidenen einfarbigen Krawatten, daß bei uns bereits ein höherer, einfacher, also menschlich-freier Geschmack herrsche!

Throughout his life Altenberg denounced his contemporaries' suppression of truth in favour of superficial beauty and their resultant preference for illusory art

forms. He confronts this openly in the companion pieces "Legende" (VI 36) and "Merkwürdig" (VI 37-8), both of which are concerned with the role of the poet in society. While the former reveals how the poet who dares speak the truth is ostracised by his society, the latter refers fleetingly to the problems posed by censorship (which, Altenberg suggests, prevents the poet from fulfilling his primary mission of enlightenment), and offers criticism of the public's need for illusion:

Dichte, Dichter, stréife an der Wahrheit letzten  
Hüllen dichterisch vorbei - - -  
aber enthülle uns ja nicht die letzte Wahrheit!

However, Altenberg reserves his harshest words of criticism for those of his fellow writers who accede to the public's demand for illusion in the hope of enhancing their own reputation and wealth. He repeatedly denounces modern literature in general as an ill-disguised attempt to dupe the public. In Vita Ipsa, for example, he condemns the majority of his fellow writers as "Worte-Lügner" (P 16-17). A piece written some years earlier in praise of the cinema contains a characteristic dismissal of modern literature as an "impudent attempt to swindle" the public, as "seelischen Poker-Bluff" (S 51). This sceptical view of the artist as trickster was one which Altenberg shared with his younger contemporary Thomas Mann (see Mario und der Zauberer) and with their common philosophical mentor, Nietzsche. Like Nietzsche, Altenberg values art as a means of regenerating society and it is, perhaps, for this reason that he objects to the artistic pretensions of a number of his social peers who appear to view art solely as a vehicle for self-aggrandisement. In an early piece entitled "Unsere jungen Leute" (WS 220-5) Altenberg satirises and exposes the affectations of Vienna's aspiring literati. The characters of three of the piece's principal figures, referred to here as 'L', 'O' and 'B', may well have had real-life models. 'B''s preparedness to foster new talents

is especially reminiscent of Bahr's role within "Jung Wien". Moreover, by ridiculing the elitist attitude of 'O' (of whom Altenberg writes: "Er repräsentierte die ideale Nerven-Aristokratie" (WS 222)), Altenberg implies criticism of the esoteric and rarefied art of the (so-called) decadents. It is interesting that in this piece Altenberg also deprecates his own literary attitudes and practice exemplified here by the poet-author of "Die Katze". (In later life he tended to take his writing much more seriously, although he retained his capacity for self-irony). The sworn enemy of pretension, Altenberg was eager to guard himself against accusations of affectation. It was his proud boast that as a writer he had shunned embellishments and inventiveness:

Ich erfinde nichts, daher bin ich kein Schriftsteller und kein Dichter. Das Leben trägt mir alles zu, ich habe nichts dabei zu verrichten, als das Zugetragene nicht zu verfälschen oder den anderen absichtlich plausibler machen zu wollen, denn man hilft ihnen ja doch nicht dadurch. (NA 203)

The pretentiousness of his fellow artists furnished Altenberg with a prime target throughout his literary career. One of his most effective pieces of criticism is, however, the early piece "Lucifer, Licht-bringer" (WT 319-322). In this serio-comic study Altenberg sets about deflating that conspicuous group of young men who were anxious to make a mark on the literary scene. He begins by exposing their pathetic attempts to curry favour with Baron B, the editor of an Arts magazine of a kind much in vogue around the turn of the century, directed at, and composed of articles by, young members of middle class society. He ridicules their lack of originality - all model themselves on fashionable modern authors, for example, Maupassant and Verlaine - and unmasks their lack of integrity. However, they are not only trying to "cash in" on the market for literary wares; they are themselves being exploited by it. A final judgement is passed upon them by one of their number, a young woman

described by Altenberg as a cross between Mme. de Staël and Lassalle, who dismisses them as frauds and fools.

In Altenberg's opinion, the corrupt and deceitful nature of his confrères manifests itself not only in their institutions, homes and artistic preferences, but also in their standards of dress, behaviour and linguistic usage. In his opinion the elegant clothes worn by his contemporaries gives them only the semblance of respectability (NL 65): their immaculate appearance is a calculated attempt to conceal their worthlessness (LA 40). Furthermore, he insists that the same is also true of the charming manners and amiability displayed by them in a social context. In a piece characteristic of the style and preoccupations of his later years entitled "Lug" (LA 241-2) Altenberg begins by emphasising the lies and deceit which undermine life in his society:

Alles Lug, Alles Trug, Alles Trug, Alles  
Lug. (LA 241)

Good-naturedness, he maintains, is feigned to conceal selfish indifference, while social etiquette is a cowardly pact entered into by his compatriots in the interests of self-presentation and advancement. (See LA 139-140 "Gutmütigkeit"). In one of his most powerful indictments of his society, "Die Lüge" (NA 48), Altenberg uncovers the hypocrisy of social intercourse and paints a stark picture of his social counterparts as "wolves in sheeps' clothing":

Eine falsche, feige Gutmütigkeit beherrscht alles,  
vom lebenswürdigen, scheinbar erfreuten Lächeln  
der Begrüßung an, bis in die ernsteren  
Komplikationen hinein, wo die Maske fällt!

Altenberg considers that by participating in social intercourse, the individual becomes an accomplice in the "Lebenslüge". In "Die Lüge" and related pieces such as "Verkehr" (LA 191) he warns the individual not to be taken in by the sense of security and community he experiences in society, for this is illusory. Moreover, he stresses

that his participation is detrimental to his health and spiritual growth, and ultimately stands in the way of human progress (NL 63).

Altenberg consistently emphasises that honesty is indeed the best policy. In "Die Lüge", for example, he concludes with an appeal to his fellow men to express their inner thoughts and feelings. Towards the end of his life, however, Altenberg's personal belief in the ultimate victory of truth over lies (see F 210) was put severely to the test. In a piece entitled "Furcht" (LA 198-9) Altenberg discloses that he too is constantly restrained from speaking the truth by the power of his instinct for self-preservation. He returns to this theme in "Unerbittliche Betrachtungen" (LA 267-8) where he laments:

Wenn Du Dich also mit geistig-seelischem Flügelschlage von der Herde zu erheben beabsichtigst, um die "Lüge des Lebens" kennen zu lernen, zu korrigieren, so gib es zugleich auf, daß es Dir je gelingen könne! "Der Nächste" ist sogleich Dein "Entferntester", hege ja keine trügerischen Hoffnungen! Begnüge Dich mit Deinem eigenen guten Willen! Er allein erhält Dir Deine geistig-seelische selbstlose Spannkraft, sonst nichts!

It is in the social context that Altenberg becomes most conscious of the discrepancy between appearance and reality in his Vienna - particularly the disparity between what is said and what is actually meant. In this atmosphere of half-truths, words, like clothes, are used to mask inner thoughts and feelings. And it is to Altenberg's critique of language that we now turn our attention.

#### 4.8 Altenberg's Critique of Language

From 1901 until approximately 5 months before his death on 30 May 1931, Arthur Schnitzler worked sporadically on his drama Das Wort, which is centrally concerned with our responsibilities as language users. This is reflected in Schnitzler's choice of motto, taken from Proverbs

chapter 18 verse 21: "The tongue has power of life and death". Initially, Schnitzler conceived of his play as a "Literatenstück" (68) directed against that "spurious" breed of literary virtuosi whose readiness to sacrifice truth to artistic effect appalled him. Its central figure, Anastasius Treuenhof, was modelled on Peter Altenberg, whom Schnitzler had known in the days before either had acquired prominence as a writer. And, a real life event of 1904 was seized upon by Schnitzler as a "kostbare Szene für das Literatenstück" (69) which revealed the failings and pretensions of this self-glorified élite. This was a meeting of Altenberg's friends to organise a collection on his behalf at which Altenberg gave a frosty reception to Lina Loos' suggestion that it is better to die a poor but dignified poet than become financially dependent upon others. However, it was the death of a young man, an ardent admirer of Loos' wife, Lina, who had allegedly taken his life in response to Altenberg's ill-considered and heartless "advice" ("Stirb, sie ist eine Göttin" (70)) which provided the main focus of the play: the power of language and the individual's moral responsibility as language user.

Schnitzler never completed the drama to his own satisfaction; partly because of the difficulty of successfully integrating its comic with its tragic elements; and partly because of his ambivalence towards Altenberg. He sympathised with Altenberg's quest for psychic identity and had been one of the first to appreciate his poetic talents. (In a letter of 1897, Altenberg gratefully acknowledges Schnitzler as "der Erste, der über meine Manuskripte erlösende Worte sagte" (72)). At the same time, however, he deplored Altenberg's laxity, his tendency to luxuriate in his nervous debility; his posturing as "P.A." and, not least, his irresponsible use of language. Nonetheless, it would appear from Schnitzler's diary entry for 21.11.1907 that his respect

for Altenberg finally outweighed his personal objections to him and, indeed, prevented his successful completion of Das Wort. Clearly, Schnitzler found it difficult to reconcile Altenberg's outspokenness, his frenzied and recriminatory outbursts against his friends, with his frequent written appeals to his compatriots to choose their words with care. Indeed, pieces such as "Tulpen" (WT 64-7) and "Fjaestad oder: Weg des Weibes" (WT 213-5) demonstrate rather his affinity with Schnitzler; for each piece evidences a highly developed language consciousness and a special awareness of the destructive potential of language and language user. Like Schnitzler, Altenberg too realised that "Auch Worte können mordern" (NA 49).

As a fin de siècle writer, resident in the capital of a multinational empire, Altenberg was inevitably confronted with "the problem of the nature and limits of language, expression and communication" (73). Like Kraus, Altenberg waged war on society on the back of a trenchant critique of language. His attempts to purify language by unmasking hypocrisy, artifice and verbal excesses, and to restore the unity of thought, feeling and expression were an important part of his cleaning-up operation, his programme for cultural regeneration. In addition, Altenberg's critique of language was informed by the language scepticism which affected many of his contemporary men of letters - Hofmannsthal, Schnitzler, Kraus, Fritz Mauthner, Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Kafka, Rilke, Holz and Hauptmann - and which was rooted in the linguistic observations of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Nietzsche. For Altenberg and his peers, the moral authenticity of language had long since been seriously undermined: the word was no longer considered sacrosanct. Moreover, in the modern world where each day brought news of some new technical invention and witnessed the destruction of some traditionally-held belief, the referential function of language was also open to doubts. It seemed to Franz Joseph's more linguistically aware subjects that

language had become estranged from reality. Traditional concepts had become meaningless. Indeed, there were some who opined that their linguistic inheritance distorted and even obscured their perception of the external world. In the experience of Hugo von Hofmannsthal: "Die Worte haben sich vor die Dinge gestellt" (74). Moreover, censorship and the unwritten laws governing verbal communication in society had the effect of undermining the cogency of language still further. A form of double-talk had been evolved as a means of keeping up appearances. However, it also made communication more difficult and complicated social, moral and political issues. As Walter Eschenbacher demonstrates in relation to Fritz Mauthner, there were two possibilities of overcoming the deterioration and estrangement of language from reality. The first was an aggressive critique of language and linguistic usage. The second was a retreat into silence. Altenberg too exploited each of these possibilities.

Throughout his literary career, Altenberg is, like Kraus, a staunch advocate of a kind of linguistic Puritanism. He too believes that it is possible to restore the expressive power and authenticity of language by stripping away all unnecessary embellishments. He dislikes verbal excess and is wary of any display of linguistic virtuosity. In "Lucifer, Licht-Bringer" (WT 319-322), for example, he ridicules the verbosity of one aspiring writer who is so intent on parading his linguistic dexterity that he fails to contribute anything meaningful to the literary discussion. Altenberg evidently shares Kraus' objections to popular feuilletonistic practices, especially when these result in the distortion of the truth, and repeatedly expresses his preference for the simple, direct statement. Thus, in the early piece "Marionetten-Theater" (WT 123-9) Altenberg upholds the uncluttered and honest idiom of the child as an example to his loquacious compatriots. He emphasises

that Rositta's matter-of-fact response to her mother's request for an account of her outing to the puppet theatre is quite self-sufficient:

"Ich war in einem Theater!" Alles liegt darin.  
Braucht man mehr zu sagen?! Wie ein Genie  
drückt sie sich aus, Süsse! Feine! Zarte!  
Mehr braucht man nicht zu sagen: "Ich war in  
einem Theater!"

In addition, this excerpt illustrates a further means by which Altenberg attempts to restore the expressive power of language, i.e. through the dynamic use of punctuation. His profligate use of the exclamation mark, frequently in multiples of three, is particularly reminiscent of the practice of the younger generation of Expressionist writers who are motivated similarly by the desire to re-establish the unity of language and feeling.

Altenberg's (and Kraus') appeal for a sparser, more economical use of language may be equated with Adolf Loos' advocacy of reductionist principles in architectural design. For each is governed by the same ethical consideration, namely a desire for the naked truth. In Altenberg's case the demand for economy may also be understood as a repudiation of the predominantly materialistic values of his contemporaries. His preference for concise literary forms not only implies a rejection of the tastes and whole ethos of society; it is also the corollary of what Karl Kraus once described as his "ökonomischer Irrsinn" (75). Altenberg holds that only those who live modestly, learn to husband their vital resources and use words sparingly, might accrue spiritual riches. His insistence on an economical use of language is, thus, an integral part of the "essentialist" doctrine which he formulated in opposition to the crass materialism of his day and which is intended to promote the spiritual growth of mankind.

In two "fragmentary" pieces in Nachfechtung Altenberg draws the logical conclusion to his strict adherence to the principle of literary economy, his

"Extrakttheorie". In the first he writes:

Ich werde immer kürzer in meinen Gedanken-  
gängen, und das heißt also immer besser, immer  
weniger Zeit raubend! Zum Schluß werde ich  
gar nichts mehr sagen. Das wird das beste  
sein. Da wird mich einer nur anschauen  
brauchen, und sagen: "Ich weiß schon!" Eine  
kann es schon, sie heißt "Paula"! (NF 104)

The second piece consists of the following sequence of questions and answers:

Was sind denn meine Skizzen?! Extrakte von  
Novellen. Was sind denn meine Aphorismen?!  
Extrakte meiner Skizzen. Was ist denn wenn ich  
gar nichts mehr schreibe?! Extrakte meines  
Heiligen Schweigens! (NF 113)

For Altenberg, silence has both a negative and a positive aspect. It reflects the general language scepticism of his age: a universal loss of faith in its communicative powers, the severity of which may be assessed from Arthur Rimbaud's pained ejaculation, "Je ne sais plus parler", or from Stéphane Mallarmé's increasing tendency to take refuge in the blank spaces. Indeed, there is an interesting parallel between Mallarmé's practice of "multiplier les blancs" and Altenberg's extensive use of the dash, particularly in his early work. Each serves to highlight the ineffectuality of language for conveying thought and feeling. However, the blanks and dashes (the silence) fulfil a positive function too. In the first place, they are used to throw the words on the page into relief, in much the same way as Aubrey Beardsley uses the white spaces to emphasise the contours of his line-drawings. More importantly, they afford the reader greater time to visualise meaning, and for contemplation. In other words, they encourage the reader to depart from the written word and exercise his imagination. As such they were perhaps intended to pave the way for the almost mystical form of "extra-verbal" communication as envisaged by Altenberg in the first of the above quoted fragments.

Altenberg's dream of an age when human beings could converse without recourse to language, or commune on a purely spiritual plane, was doubtless influenced by Maeterlinck's vision of a new spiritual age, and his appeal for a new language of the soul in his widely read work Le Trésor des Humbles. Its first chapter, entitled "Le Silence", contains a positive evaluation of silence (partially inspired by Thomas Carlyle and his rehabilitation of the Swiss idiom: "Sprechen ist silbern, schweigen ist golden") which clearly made a lasting impression on Altenberg. Like Maeterlinck, he too came to consider words superfluous to true understanding and to equate silence with truthfulness and deep spirituality. By contrast, he is suspicious of those who display a talent for fluent conversation, believing them to be superficial. In Märchen des Lebens he writes:

Die Menschen vertragen das flache Geschwätz.  
Aber nicht das tiefe Schweigen. (ML 172)

(Such views are, perhaps, more familiar to us from the writing of Theodor Fontane, whose keen sense of the ambiguity and dangers of verbal communication made him similarly appreciative of silence.)

As well as influencing Altenberg directly, Maeterlinck's positive evaluation of silence was also taken over by Fritz Mauthner, the basic elements of whose critique of language closely resemble those of Altenberg's. In his Beiträge I Mauthner advocates silence as a positive alternative to the defunct languages of the civilised world:

Die Kultursprachen haben die Fähigkeit verloren,  
den Menschen über das Größte hinaus zu  
Verständigung zu dienen. Es wäre Zeit, wieder  
schweigen zu lernen. (76)

Silence, Mauthner argues, is a more honest basis for interpersonal relationships. It is the mark of inner culture. Finally, and even more importantly for Mauthner and those of his contemporaries who felt estranged from the world in

which they lived, silence offers a means of restoring the lost unity of man and nature, of overcoming the duality of subject and object (77).

Altenberg's critique of language was already well developed at the time of his writing Wie ich es sehe. In the "See-Ufer" series he draws attention to the ineffectiveness and mendacity of language, and extols the virtues of silence in its place. In "P.A. und T.K." (WS 14-20), for example, Teresa K expresses Altenberg's view that silence is a more reliable guide to inner thoughts and feelings than words, which all too often are calculated for effect. In Altenberg's, as in Teresa's opinion, silence is a more sincere form of flattery than conventional compliments. In "Spätsommer-Nachmittag" (WS 31-3), in which Altenberg explores the theme of adolescent love, he once again underlines the deficiencies of language as an expression of feeling. Words, he suggests, are like the glowing cigarette ends which make tiny points of light in the darkness of the piano-room where the young couple find themselves in late afternoon. At best, they illuminate the tip of our emotions. This view of language is reinforced in the final paragraph where Altenberg compares language to music; the latter, he suggests, is more expressive of human emotion.

In addition, Altenberg reveals his language scepticism in his preference for what might be described as the mute language of the soul: the language of gesture or "body-language", as it is more fashionably called. In his opinion this is far more indicative of individual nature than spoken or written words. In a piece entitled "Kleinigkeiten" (BL 182-3) Altenberg exhorts his readers to base their assessments of their fellows not on their publicised achievements, but rather on the minute details of their behaviour and dress. For these, he maintains, give a more accurate picture of their general psychological state. Moreover, it is of interest that, in the same way as Hofmannsthal is impressed by the greater potential of

mime to express human thoughts and feelings, so too does Altenberg value the emotional sincerity and superior communicative powers of the dancer. In his writing too, Altenberg frequently uses physical attitudes to express his characters' inner states. Thus, in both "Neun und elf" (WS) and "Am Lande" (WS) a dreamy, contemplative nature is suggested by the characters' intent gazing into water. In "Landparthie" (WS), on the other hand, Altenberg provides an oblique reference to his practice of externalising inner states, describing it as "diese Art, die Seele plastisch hinzustellen" (WS 35). Although this technique is not new - actors have employed it for centuries - it does enable Altenberg to comply with Bahr's demand that the modern writer should present his characters' emotions in a "decompositional" manner, i.e. as raw and unprocessed by the intellect.

In "Revolutionär" (WS) Altenberg limits his concern with the nature and limitations of language to a critical examination of the idiom of polite society. In "Gesellschaft" he exposes the insincerity of his social counterparts, who willingly sacrifice truth to self-interest, and their false sense of propriety which, Altenberg demonstrates, is largely based on material considerations. Altenberg returns to this theme in "Die Primitive", where he criticises polite society's tendency to indulge in insincere flattery and adapt its language to the wishes, needs and preconceptions of its audience. He emphasises that his "cultured" compatriots would do better to adopt the sincere idiom of the prostitute:

Er hatte eine tiefe Sympathie für Die, die das wahre aufrichtige Wort des Innern verkünden, und sei es brutal, wie die Natur selbst.

(...)

Er liebte Dies, für die die Sprache Identität mit dem Gesamtorganismus war, ja, der tönend gewordene Gesamtorganismus selbst, nicht ein Instrument wie die Flöte, die Klarinette, auf dem man beliebig spielen könnte, so oder so. Und dann legt man es weg. Man ist kein Flötist

mehr. Niemand sieht es Dir an, was Du bist.  
 Du wischt die Lippen ab und fertig. Ein Musiker  
 bist Du - - kein Mensch! Der kann seine Musik  
 nicht los werden, sich die Lippen abwischen ---.  
 Immer müssen sie sein Menschentum singen, wenn  
 auch ganz leise, dass kaum Einer es hört. Ist  
 es brutal - - singe brutal!  
 Aber diese Cultivirten spielen, was Du willst.  
 (WS 121-2)

In Altenberg's opinion, the prostitute, children and his Ashanti friends all use language in an exemplary manner, to communicate their innermost thoughts and feelings. They are honest, direct and see no need for artifice. Not so the members of Viennese high society, whose remote and artificial life style is reflected in their use of a foreign idiom, as Altenberg suggests in "Blumen-Corso" (WS). In this piece too, Altenberg implies his preference for the natural and straightforward idiom of the working class and, in particular, of the street-sweeper's daughter. She unwittingly reveals the putrid core of the Imperial Monarchy in her comment on the rose which her father has salvaged from the Blumen-Corso: "Pfui, sie stinkt - - " (WS 214).

Although in general Altenberg favours natural and unpretentious language, he does share Kraus' objections to the harsh sounding Viennese dialect. In "Nächtliche Szene" (WS 259-261), for example, he uses the coarse, slovenly vernacular of the older cabbie to suggest his moral laxity and insensitivity - in his time he has witnessed and participated in the flogging of many a horse and sees nothing wrong, or disturbing, in the practice. Altenberg's later works contain numerous jibes at his native patois, which he usually cites as evidence of the speaker's lack of inner culture. In the scathing piece "Kriegshymnen" (F 207-8) his imitation of the Viennese vernacular in the opening line:

Kriegshymnen san net schlecht. Gar net schlecht!

is intended to expose the false patriotic sentiment and sabre-rattling of his compatriots, as well as their flagrant disregard for human life.

Was der Tag mir zuträgt contains a number of pieces which demonstrate Altenberg's concern with the nature, limitations and possibilities of language. It is perhaps not insignificant that in this, his most stylistically expansive work, Altenberg should undertake a positive appraisal of language with a special accent on its therapeutic properties. He begins in "Selbstanzeige" by defining the poet's role as advocate or "voice" of the silently suffering majority, womankind:

"Denn siehe, ich bin nur Euer tönend  
gewordenes stummes Herz selber!" (WT 1)

In the following paragraph he goes on to elaborate his meaning, and describes how melancholy and depression may be exorcised verbally. The problem was that in a patriarchal society such as Austro-Hungary women were actively discouraged from thinking, let alone voicing their problems. In Altenberg's opinion, theirs was an obvious and pressing need: they required a special kind of advocate who should be responsive to their innermost needs, but also capable of releasing them from their suffering, simply by articulating their hopes and fears. There is an intriguing parallel between Altenberg's undertaking, in Was der Tag mir zuträgt, to liberate women from their psychoneuroses by expressing these in words, and the pioneering work of Freud and Breuer to uncover and treat the causes of hysteria. (Their Studien über Hysterie was published in 1895). Moreover, the efforts of each man were directed towards a common goal: the restoration of women to psychic health and happiness. It is interesting too to speculate to what extent Altenberg's new found faith in the therapeutic or cathartic properties of language - in the initial study he describes words as "Ventile (...) für ungeheuerere Kraft-Maschinen von Seelen"

(WT 22) - was determined by Freud's early experimentation with psychoanalytical techniques. Although Altenberg's writing contains no references to Freud and his work, he must have been familiar with his "radical" views. He evidently shared Freud's interest in hysteria although unlike Freud, he tended to view it in a more positive light and valued the heightened sensitivity of the hysteric as a truly human quality. And, like Freud, he recognised the sex-drive as the mainspring of much human behaviour.

In Was der Tag mir zuträgt Altenberg takes pains to differentiate between the valuable cathartic function of language and meaningless "self-articulation", a fault which he considers more prevalent amongst townspeople. Thus, in "Angenehme Reise-Eindrücke" (WT 253-6), he is sharply critical of the town dweller's compulsion to talk, dismissing it as "lauter Herausbringenwollen" (p 255). He evidently regards talkativeness as a form of self-dissipation and looks much more favourably upon the less garrulous and, in his opinion, more self-contained or integral country folk.

In addition to the above, Was der Tag mir zuträgt contains several other pieces in which language is thematicised. Altenberg's linguistic considerations play an important part in "Tulpen", which is concerned principally with the problematical relationship between the sexes. The piece not only demonstrates the language user's capacity to inflict wounds verbally, but also the cathartic value of words:

(...) Aber Worte giebt es wie Steinwürfe und geschleuderte Biergläser, die entlasten, blos wenn man sie denkt und so gewaltsam ausspricht: "Dich massakriren, massakriren, masss-sssa-krrri-rrren!!" (WT 66)

In a further piece entitled "Theobröma" (WT 130-3) Altenberg once again touches upon the palliative effect of certain words. "Wie warme Bäder sind manche Worte",

he writes: they may soothe a guilty conscience or an emotional wound. By contrast, in "Fjaestad oder: Weg des Weibes" Altenberg demonstrates how conventional terms of praise may be used to mask indifference or dislike.

Finally, the two complementary pieces "Was giebt es für komische Ballgespräche!" (WT "Hausball" 150-8) and "Wie einst im Mai" (WT 89-90) also merit closer attention. In the former Altenberg likens the conversation of polite society to a complex and finely orchestrated musical performance. (The underlying theme of the piece is, however, the "coming-out" of a young girl (Mitzi) and, more specifically, her concern to become, and be regarded as, a lady.) In the latter piece, "Wie einst im Mai", Altenberg once again reveals his abiding concern with the hypocrisy of polite conversation: the discrepancy between what is said and what is actually felt. (Towards the end of his life he referred to this as the disparity between the conventional idiom and the "Sprache des Herzens" (NL 63).) In addition, he underlines the stilted and vacuous nature of conventional phrases, which he likens to "gehacktes Holz". Language, he suggests, is powerless to convey the deep emotions which bind a young couple.

In the ten year period between the publication of Was der Tag mir zuträgt and Semmering 1912 Altenberg continues to promote linguistic Puritanism as a means of overcoming the debasement of language by his contemporaries. He attacks the use of clichés as a form of "ready-made" language which falsifies true sentiments and perpetuates prejudicial opinions (ML 144). He is especially critical of his compatriots' over-use, and abuse, of the words "love" and "I love you". In Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens he argues that they no longer know the meaning of true love and advises them to use the words more sparingly (BL 150). During this period Altenberg also seeks to eradicate linguistic pomposity and obscurity, and works towards the creation of an economical and authentic language, as exemplified

in the "Abschiedsbrief eines Ashanti-mädchens von Wien" (ML 110-1). He suggests that her simple statement of fact, "Ich gehe weg und Du bleibst hier" is sufficient to convey her grief at parting from a loved one: further elaboration is unnecessary. Like Kraus, Altenberg dislikes expressions of gushing sentiment; for in his opinion these smack of insincerity and tend to devalue the emotional experience.

In the works which follow Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens Altenberg is mainly concerned to demonstrate the linguistic irresponsibility of his compatriots, for he considers this evidence of their moral degeneration. In Semmering 1912 he criticises the cunning use of tone to alter meaning (see p 202). And although it belongs to his chief stock-in-trade and is an important weapon in his own psychic armoury, Altenberg disapproves of the use of irony by others. In Vita Ipsa (p 131-2) he argues that irony denotes cowardice, and in the posthumously published piece "Mein Bruder Georg" (NL 93-4) insists that irony serves no purpose and betrays a lack of inner culture. Altenberg sees it as the favoured means of his contemporaries of concealing their personal inadequacies and asserting their social superiority. Altenberg is critical too of the false note of humour and intimacy which, he argues, so often informs the conversation of his fellow citizens. Vita Ipsa includes a piece entitled "Geselliger Humor" (VI 244-5) in which Altenberg criticises the use of humour to impress others. In a further piece in this collection entitled "Worte" (VI 214-5), Altenberg takes issue with the over-familiarity of his peers. He considers that their use of the familiar Du-form establishes a spurious "Talmi-Intimität", and sees it as a licence for misconduct.

Above all, however, Altenberg objects to tactlessness and indiscretion, each of which he regards as the by-product of his society's superficiality and general lack of culture. The following fragment in Fechsung is representative of this view:

Aus Mangel an Gesprächsstoff begeht man die gemeinsten Taktlosigkeiten und Indiskretionen.  
(F 200)

In "De Amicitia" (F 206-7), on the other hand, Altenberg draws a parallel between the war raging in Western Europe and the equally devastating war of words on the home front, emphasising, in particular, the psychological destruction caused by tactlessness. In Altenberg's oft-stated opinion, tactlessness is a sin, a crime against humanity. In "Takt" (VI 79-81) he writes:

Taktlosigkeit in einer auch noch so geringfügigen Bemerkung, sei es ökonomisch, seelisch, sexuell, ist eine wenn auch scheinbar geringe Art von "Schwer-Verbrechen". (VI 81)

Despite his grave reservations about mankind's capacity for goodness, Altenberg uses this piece to emphasise that tact can be learned.

Towards the end of his life Altenberg was greatly preoccupied with the vacuity and hypocrisy of what passed in his society for conversation. In his posthumously published works he argues that all conversation is hypocritical since the individual is only really interested in him- or herself. He no longer believed in the cathartic or therapeutic properties of language and became more and more frustrated with the self-absorption of his contemporaries, and the deterioration of their conversation into meaningless self-articulation (which he considered boring and of benefit to no-one). Moreover, his scepticism towards the idiom of his society gradually re-enveloped his vision of language. This culminates in his denunciation, in Mein Lebensabend, of all words, with the single exception of "Enttäuschung", as "more or less mendacious" (LA 117).

Despite the increased language scepticism of his later years, Altenberg never did fulfil his prediction and take refuge in silence. On the contrary, he maintained a steady

literary output up to his death in January 1919; indeed, much of his later writing could even have the charge of prolixity levelled against it. For although acutely conscious of its inadequacies, Altenberg nevertheless came to realise that language was the only medium of communication available to him. He both perceived and took hope from what Theodor Fontane terms "die Chance der Sprache" (78). For he too evidently believed that language can succeed and that it is possible to create an authentic language capable of uniting mankind. Altenberg had intimated this ideal function of language in the early piece "Der Neger" (Ashantee), in which he reveals how cultural differences and prejudices may be overcome through the creation of "eine gemeinsame Sprache" (WS 314). Altenberg continued to cling to this vision throughout his life. His language scepticism never became as profound as that of Anastasius Treuenhof, for whom words are entirely without meaning ("Worte sind nichts"). Altenberg's real position was in fact much closer to that of Schnitzler's character (and alter ego?), the privy councillor Rudolf Winkler in Das Wort, who maintains: "Worte sind alles. Wir haben ja nichts anderes." (79)

## 5. THE REGENERATION OF SOCIETY

5.1 "die Welt muB regeneriert werden"  
(Peter Altenberg)

As William J. McGrath reveals in his stimulating account Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria, Nietzsche's writing not only furnished a number of intellectual malcontents (of whom the Pernerstorfer Circle may be considered representative) with a framework for a critique of contemporary culture; it also pointed the way towards a higher culture. Furthermore, it demonstrated how this might best be accomplished.

In Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik (1872), a work which Nietzsche insists in his "Preface to Richard Wagner" was central to the hopes for the new German state, the philosopher began his counter-offensive against the "desolation and exhaustion of contemporary culture" by calling upon his contemporaries to assist in the "regeneration of Germany's spirit". This, he argues, could be achieved through the agency of art, especially the music-drama of Richard Wagner which, by revitalising myth and re-activating the Dionysian spirit in the modern world, could counteract the Alexandrine-Socratic, or rationalistic, spirit which Nietzsche holds responsible for the fragmentation of civilised society. In one sense, Die Geburt der Tragödie constitutes Nietzsche's first attempt at formulating a programme for cultural regeneration, a process which involves the revitalisation and reconstruction of society, and which has as its ultimate goals the establishment of true culture and the enhancement of the individual.

Because he believed that his fellow men no longer possessed firm beliefs and lacked spiritual reference points, Nietzsche felt it necessary to provide them with human paradigms, inspiring "images of man" (1) which would encourage them to overcome their base motivations, and promote an ideal of true culture. In later life Nietzsche described such an image, which suggests an

alternative to contemporary culture, as a "counter-ideal". Initially, in Die Geburt der Tragödie he presents the ancient Greeks as an example to his ailing, self-riven society; according to Silk and Stern (2) they appeared to embody Nietzsche's ideals of physical, psychical and cultural wholeness. (The tendency to see the Greeks as the highest type of the species "man" is not peculiar to Nietzsche, but is an important strand in eighteenth century thought: it finds expression in the writing of Winckelmann, Goethe and Holderlin.) In his Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen Nietzsche underlines the exemplary nature of Schopenhauer's life and, as in Die Geburt der Tragödie, refers his contemporaries to the works of Richard Wagner which, he observes, illuminate the doctrine of personal and social integration so crucial to the healthy survival of the new Germany. However, by the time he came to write his most revealingly self-analytical work, Ecce Homo, Nietzsche had broken with Schopenhauer and Wagner. And, in an attempt to establish the independence of his own spirit, and the unique significance of his prototype for a new humanity, Zarathustra, he boldly asserts:

Vor allem fehlte ein Gegen-Ideal - bis auf Zarathustra. (3)

Also sprach Zarathustra (1883-1885) was intended by Nietzsche to give substance to his conception of the "Superman". It is a didactic work: Zarathustra serves both as an inspiring image of man, and as an educator whose function is to indicate a higher humanity. "Ich lehre euch den Übermenschen"; thus does Zarathustra identify his purpose. (See "Zarathustra's Vorrede") In the prologue to the first part of the work, he refers to the death of God and argues that now the "meaning" of life in the sense of metaphysical purpose is gone, it is the duty of man to give his life meaning by raising himself above the animals and realising the "god within him". The chapters which follow elucidate and expand upon this central doctrine of "self-overcoming" by illustrating how man might realise his "divine potential".

Nietzsche's writings were enthusiastically received in intellectual circles throughout the Dual Monarchy - the response of Engelbert Pernerstorfer and his followers was typical in this, as in other, respects. Artists, notably the members of the Vienna Secession, and men-of-letters like Herman Bahr, Egon Friedell and Karl Kraus, quickly absorbed the spirit of Nietzsche's writings and became obsessed with the notion of cultural regeneration which, the philosopher had convinced them, could be achieved through the agency of art. Thus Bahr, in his essay "Die Moderne", calls for artistic innovation, and urges his fellow writers to work towards a cultural renaissance. The founder members of the Vienna Secession were motivated by a similar desire to inject new life into art, for they perceived that under Franz Joseph this had become rigid and remote from individual experience. Their concern was shared by Altenberg, who was equally impressed by Nietzsche's programme for cultural renewal. He, too, sought to reverse the process of cultural decay by encouraging movement, and through the agency of his art, which he considered a powerful stimulus to life. Moreover, like Nietzsche, he believed it important to inspire modern man with images of true humanity: as we shall see, he shared the philosopher's admiration for the Ancient Greeks, upholding their example as an alternative to jaded civilisation. Finally, it should be emphasised that, in contrast with the Pernerstorfer circle - which, McGrath informs us, was inspired chiefly by Nietzsche's early works - Altenberg was greatly influenced by the spirit and the letter of his later writing. In his tribute to Peter Altenberg, Thomas Mann proposes that Nietzsche's Ecce Homo "emboldened" Altenberg to give literary expression to his own dietary views (4). Still greater was the impression made on Altenberg by Also sprach Zarathustra: it not only encouraged him to present his philosophy in poetic form, but also determined his vision of a physically robust and spiritually refined humanity. It was from Also sprach

Zarathustra that Altenberg learned the value of the images of flight and dance as a means of suggesting spiritual refinement (see also 5.2). In addition, Also sprach Zarathustra had a decisive influence on Altenberg's conception of marriage: he believed, as Nietzsche did, that the institution should further the spiritual evolution of mankind.

Sich fortpflanzen?!? Zeuge doch lieber den, der  
Du nicht hast werden können! (WT 264)

Altenberg exhorts his contemporaries, thus recalling a similar appeal made by Nietzsche in a chapter of Also sprach Zarathustra entitled "Von Kind und Ehe":

Nicht nur fort sollst du dich pflanzen, sondern  
hinauf! Dazu helfe dir der Garten der Ehe! (5)

## 5.2 Altenberg's counter-ideal: "das Freie, Edle und Natürliche".

Altenberg's dissatisfaction with the form and mores of his contemporary society was the motive force behind his attempts at constructing an alternative social model. Like Nietzsche, he was driven by the necessity of inspiring his deracinated contemporaries with a vision of a vital and cohesive community, and of filling the "value vacuum" of the modern age. Moreover, he addresses himself to this task even in his earliest writing. Thus, in addition to embodying an indirect critique of the materialism and atomisation of his contemporary society, the "See-Ufer" series projects images of Altenberg's social ideality.

In his 1897 review of Wie ich es sehe, Hugo von Hofmannsthal applauds Altenberg's capacity to empathise with his characters, and comments on the spirit of love which suffuses the work. However, he fails to perceive the wider social implications of Altenberg's auctorial stance. For Altenberg (who believed it the poet's duty to set a "noble example" (VI 168)) wishes to demonstrate how social divisions might be healed through sympathy and

bother-love. Although in later life Altenberg ceased to believe in love as a cohesive and unifying force in society, emphasising instead the superiority of objective knowledge and understanding, in his early work love and sympathy are presented as the panacea for many a social and psychological ill. Thus in "Neun und elf", which presents a number of ideal relationships\*, he shows how love may overcome individuation and restore the unity of man and the natural world. In addition, the gentle relationships described in this piece offer insight into the nature of Altenberg's social ideality. This might best be described as a kind of spiritual community which, Altenberg indicates, admits only of the purer, more noble human emotions, and for which all men and women possess the necessary credentials: a soul. This social ideal - which Altenberg shared with such diverse figures as Maurice Maeterlinck and J.K. Huysmans on the one hand, and Friedrich Nietzsche on the other - may be understood both as a challenge to his society's materialistic code and to the existing social order. For the spiritual community envisaged by Altenberg would be classless.

Within the "See-Ufer" series Altenberg balances his portrait of the sensitive, emotionally refined Rositta with a contrasting image of a vibrant twelve year old. Unlike Rositta, who evinces a Romantic yearning to be at one with creation in her ambition to tend mountain flocks, this twelve year old appears confident of her place in nature and in control of her environment. Closely akin to Rousseau's "noble savage", she reveals another facet of Altenberg's social ideal, the organic society, for which he subsequently found a model amongst the Ashanti. Whereas Altenberg's emphasis on Rositta's spirituality may be interpreted as a reaction against the rampant materialism of his age, his celebration of the almost animal

\* i.e. the relationship between Königsberg and each of the two sisters, Rositta and Margueritta.

vitality, and naivety, of his twelve year old protagonist, may be considered indicative of his distaste for the values of so-called civilised society. Indeed, it will be seen that Altenberg's advocacy of the naive, and natural standards, was typical of the response of many social malcontents throughout Europe who were similarly repelled by the form and strictures of life in the modern, industrial metropolis.

Altenberg uses "Neun und elf" and "Zwölf" to present two different social alternatives: the former points the way to a spiritually refined humanity, while the latter is anchored in a more primitive model. (However, it is interesting that in the latter piece he suggests that an integrated, natural life style may result in the spiritual advancement of the individual.) "Neunzehn", the third piece in "See-Ufer", outlines yet another social alternative which, this time, is inspired by the philhellenic tradition in German writing. As we have seen, Altenberg's underlying intention in this piece is to demonstrate how wealth and social conventions restrict and oppress one representative daughter of Vienna's haute bourgeoisie, barring her personal fulfilment (see below 3.3.2). As in the preceding pieces in the series, Altenberg is not content simply to imply criticism of societal values. Rather, he considers it his duty to present an alternative. In this instance he suggests how, by shedding one's social role and materialist values (symbolised here by clothes), the individual is at greater liberty to realise himself. This was the lesson which Altenberg learned from Diogenes and Socrates, whom he hails on a later occasion as "vornehme Lehrer der Menschheit" (LA 283). Inspired by their example, he too came to regard austerity and truthfulness as the preconditions of self-knowledge and fulfilment.

In fin de siècle Vienna, the philosophy of the Ancients was the subject of much attention and some speculation. Their quest for psychic truth and their mythology stimulated

Freud, providing him with a framework for his own psychological investigations. And, in the field of art, Gustav Klimt discovered in the ancient world a fund of images which he re-interpreted in such a way as to express the psychological dilemma of modern man. For Altenberg, who as a "Gymnasiast" had received a thorough grounding in the classics, and whose response to the Ancients had been conditioned further by his understanding of Goethe and Nietzsche, the philhellenic tradition offered a social as well as a personal ideal. In his eyes the Greeks stood out as highly evolved representatives of the human species who, in contrast with his fellow citizens, were purged of base emotions and unaffected by material considerations. Whilst he admired their pursuit of the highest human ideals, beauty and truth, he was equally impressed by what he regarded as their earthy realism, their naivety. To him they appeared as men of action who derived their confidence from their integrated lives. Thus, in "Neunzehn", Altenberg presents his Greek ideal as an antidote to cultural and social decline. In describing how the example of the Greeks arouses his young heroine from her lethargy and ennui, he suggests how the exhaustion of his contemporary civilisation might be overcome by the revival of the Hellenic spirit. Moreover, it is this spirit which informs Altenberg's early work, equipping him with standards of perfection against which he could measure his society's shortcomings. Above all, however, the Greeks exemplified what Altenberg considered the most outstanding human qualities: freedom, nobility and naturalness. These are the ideals which underpin the multifaceted counter-ideal to existing circumstances which he develops and reveals in his writing.

Within Altenberg's oeuvre "Revolutionär" occupies a position of central importance, for not only does it contain his major themes and preoccupations in nuce; it also offers a comprehensive picture of his social ideality. And it is to these constructive guidelines for a new society that we now turn our attention.

In "Der Besuch" (WS 107-113), the third piece in the series, Altenberg departs from social criticism and provides his first expanded statement on diet and hygiene, as well as on art and the principle of economy which, he maintains, should determine its form. Significantly, Altenberg abandons the conventional bourgeois milieu of "Gesellschaft" and "Sonntag" in favour of a setting which, by reflecting the modern Japanese taste of its occupants, suggests their receptiveness to new ideas. As such they provide the ideal audience for Altenberg's spokesman, Königsberg, who uses the occasion of his visit to expound his "philosophy". As in the earlier pieces in the series, Altenberg is at pains to suggest how his fellow men might overcome physical and mental inertia. He begins by describing the benefits of tea laced with rum, an invigorating beverage of which he claims: "Es erhöht die Energie des Lebens ganz einfach" (WS 109). Whilst he approves of gingerbread on similar grounds, he singles out the special nutritional value and benefits of marrons glacés, of which he writes: "Im Verlaufe ihrer weiteren Umwandlung erzeugt sie direkt Geist" (WS 109). As we shall see, Altenberg took a keen interest in nutritional matters and closely observed the effects of diet on physical and mental health. He believed that diet influences the life of the soul and considered light, nutritious meals more conducive to spiritual development.

Finally, in "Der Besuch" Altenberg argues that art too may function as a powerful stimulus to life: "Kunst ist Etwas, was das Leben lebendiger macht!" (WS 113). This is the revelation experienced by the younger of Königsberg's companions as she listens to him expound his views on art. She is noticeably impressed by his account of the vital interrelationship of art and life, a view which Altenberg had formulated first in opposition to the decadents' insistence upon the duality of art and life, and which he continued to defend staunchly through-

out his literary career. In his opinion, art is firmly rooted in actual experience. Moreover, because it tends to distil, or concentrate, the very essence of life, it is more vital than life itself (see "Der Besuch" p 113). This basic conviction led him, in turn, to an appreciation of art's life-enhancing potential in "Der Besuch".

Already in the preceding piece, "Sonntag", Altenberg had placed art at the top of a list of things which, he believed, could inject new life into his ailing civilisation, and induce social change. While this latter, "revolutionary" aspect of his aesthetic may (as I have proposed) owe much to his understanding of both Wagner's and Nietzsche's conception of the socio-cultural mission of art, Altenberg's belief in art's vital, existential function appears to have been shaped specifically by Nietzsche's interpretation of the metaphysical purpose of Greek art in his epoch-making work, Die Geburt der Tragödie. We shall return shortly to the significance of this work for Altenberg's aesthetic theory in our discussion of "Der Grieche" below.

"Der Besuch" is succeeded by the controversial piece "Familienleben", in which Altenberg challenges bourgeois suppositions and exposes their most sacred institution, the family. In addition, the piece sets out Altenberg's evolutionary theory, revealing at its core an uneasy synthesis of nineteenth century evolutionism and Nietzsche's doctrine of the Superman (see below 5.5). Altenberg's evolutionary philosophy also forms the backbone of the subsequent piece, "Im Garten" (WS 113-117) which is provided with the telling subtitle, "Der Revolutionär docirt Religionsphilosophie". Thus Altenberg declares the didactic purpose of this piece, which is rhetorical in style, serious in tone. Clearly, his intention is to establish his evolutionism as an alternative religion capable of filling the contemporary value vacuum. In this respect, it is interesting that Altenberg's evolutionism involves the rejection of meta-

physical belief in favour of a materialistic conception of the universe, which sees God as the sum of all physical forces and Christ as the "end result" of matter. From this it would appear that Altenberg was desirous of accommodating Christian belief within the opposing positivistic creed of bourgeois society. Indeed, Altenberg's personal religion, which might best be described as syncretic, merged elements of each "faith"; for like his spokesman he was "Theist und Atheist zugleich". As a theist, he is vaguely aware of the spirit in matter. As an atheist, he proposes that God is no transcendently ideal being, but rather that He is a purely psychological phenomenon, or image of mankind's ideal potential. The revolutionary, who says of man:

Er bedarf nicht mehr des aus dem Inneren  
der Menschheit in die Sterne versetzten  
Ideales! (WS 117)

implies that God is nothing more than the external projection of man's idealism. What is more, his atheism is, like his creator's, closely akin to that of Nietzsche who suggests (in Also sprach Zarathustra) that his fellow man's godlessness issues from an awareness of his "divine" potential:

Irgendein Gott in dir bekehrte dich zu deiner  
Gottlosigkeit! (6)

Just as Nietzsche's realisation of "the collapse of cosmological values" precipitated his quest for the meaning of earthly existence, leading him ultimately to stress the importance of "self-overcoming" as a *raison d'être*; so too is atheism the point of departure for Altenberg's evolutionism, in which he too calls upon man to devote himself, not to some remote deity, but to perfecting himself within his life time.

In "Im Garten" Altenberg attempts to account for his evolutionism in abstract, quasi-philosophical terms. His intention in the following piece is to give more tangible

expression to, or "flesh out", both his evolutionary concept and his counter-ideal. Thus in "Der Grieche" (WS 117-120) Altenberg's ideal of a free, noble and natural humanity is exemplified by a young girl at play. The title itself underlines Altenberg's affiliation to the philhellenic tradition in German literature which sought the reinstatement of a healthy, classical ideal. Like Nietzsche and Goethe before him, Altenberg commends the "noble simplicity" of the ancient Greeks: in their simple dignity, the youthful heroines of "Zwölf", "Sanct Wolfgang", the "Don Juan" cycle and "Der Grieche" each give substance to this ideal, while the girls of the Ashanti perhaps came closest to actually realising it in Altenberg's eyes.

Es gibt nur eine Unanständigkeit des  
Nackten - - das Nackte unanständig zu  
finden (WS 163)

In this punchy aphorism Altenberg gives concise formulation to his distaste for the hypocrisy of a society which unashamedly sought to mask its imperfections and neuroses with superficial splendour and gaiety. It also expresses his marked preference for the simplicity and candour of peoples like the Ashanti and the Americans, and of young girls like the thirteen year old featured in "Der Grieche". As in the case of the country girl who appears in "Sanct Wolfgang" (WS), her simple dress of white linen signifies that she too is untouched as yet by corruptive social influences. Moreover, Altenberg implies that her naked physical perfection - which Königsberg delights in imagining - is the external manifestation of her inner purity. Here (as elsewhere in Altenberg's works) the celebration of nudity is expressive of the writer's longing for a truthful, perfect society (see also F 119). And in this too we are reminded of Nietzsche, particularly of his assertion in Also sprach Zarathustra:

Ja, wenn ihr Götter wäret, da dürftet euch  
eurer Kleider schämen (7)

For Nietzsche and Altenberg the elaborate dress of their contemporaries was a further manifestation of hidden inadequacies.

In Altenberg's eyes physical perfection is but one manifestation of the "Weltenschönheit" (the beauty which he perceived all around him) whose powers he celebrates in "Der Grieche". He begins, in the opening paragraph, by transporting the reader to Greece, and invites him to consider first the very sensuous nature of the Greek aesthetic ideal. He then fastens upon what appears to him a paradox namely that although beauty exists in matter, it also transcends the material: we are conscious, for example, of the beauty of movement and physical grace. This brief meditation on beauty is offered by Altenberg as an introduction to "Der Grieche", and is clearly intended to encourage the reader to regard the thirteen year old, whose fluid movements and natural grace so enchant the revolutionary, as the embodiment of an aesthetic ideal. It also encourages us to see the revolutionary's attraction to her in a philosophical as well as a psychological light: as the elucidation of an aesthetic theory as well as an intriguing relationship. Confirmation of the appropriateness of this more abstract reading is offered at the end of the piece, when the full significance of Königsberg's encounter with this latter-day Diana is disclosed. As he watches her walking away, Königsberg gives free rein to his imagination:

Dich, Dich, nackt, ganz nackt, auf einer  
duftenden Wiese im Abendschatten Reifen schlagen  
sehen und fliegen - - fliegen, und, wenn Du müde  
bist, neben Dir zu sitzen, am Waldessaum, im  
Abendschatten und den Duft der feuchten Walderde  
und der Wiese und deines Leibes einzuathmen und  
die Schönheit der Welt in sich einzusaugen und  
in diesen Schönheitskräften, die durch tausend  
Strahlen in's Auge, durch tausend Atome in's Gehirn  
dringen, zu wachsen, und voll, übervoll zu werden  
und diese concentrirten latenten Spannkkräfte in

Reichtum zu empfinden und diesen Reichtum in Liebe, in Gedanken umzuwandeln und diese in Bewegung umgesetzten Kräfte neue Kraft zeugen zu lassen - - unerschöpfliche, das ist "ein Lebendiger" sein! Das!! (WS 120)

For Altenberg, as for Königsberg, beauty - albeit the beauty of a woman's hand or a child's movements - appeared to have a special, vital significance. He considered that the Greeks' ability to appreciate beauty had played an important part in their psychological development. Moreover, he hoped that, by spreading what he describes in his "Selbstbiographie" as "ein Hauch von griechischem Schönheits-Kultus" (WT 12) amongst his contemporaries, he could instil in them a comparable longing for self-perfection. His specific purpose in "Der Grieche" is to demonstrate how beauty stimulates human growth.

There is good reason to suppose that Altenberg's view of the Greek cult of the beautiful and his own aesthetic theory were shaped by Nietzsche's interpretation of Hellenistic art in Die Geburt der Tragödie. Here, Nietzsche argued, against the tide of academic opinion, that the "serenity" of Greek art is not expressive of an optimistic response to life, but is rather an attempt to conceal its terrible depths. He proposes further that because art draws a veil over the horrors of the abyss and superimposes harmony and order, it acts as a stimulus to life. The similarities between this interpretation of the Greek aesthetic and Altenberg's own artistic programme are very striking. For Altenberg too was convinced of the crucial importance of art for the life of the individual and society. He valued it both as an agent for social reform and as a means of providing comfort and encouragement for those individuals who shrink from life. Again and again he stresses that his duty as an artist is to assist others through life and lighten the burden of their earthly existence. This involved his using his art to awaken them to the beauty inherent in

their everyday experiences and natural surroundings. In his "Nachträgliche Vorrede" to Märchen des Lebens he suggests that his purpose in writing, and particularly in revealing the fairy tale elements in life, is essentially metaphysical: to alleviate the existential sufferings of his fellow beings. And he calls upon us to follow his example and seek out "die märchenhaften Dinge, die Romantik des Tages und der Stunde" in order that we might begin to enjoy life and live more fully.

Partly as a result of his initial preference for compressing his philosophy within a tight poetic structure, Altenberg's characters often function on a number of levels. While the reader is tempted to identify with them as individuals, he is also encouraged to see them as types (as the representatives of an oppressed social class, for instance) and not infrequently as the embodiment of an idea, or - more specifically - an aspect of Altenberg's world-view. Thus we find in "Der Grieche" that the figure of the young girl performs several functions simultaneously: she appears as the personification of an aesthetic ideal and as the catalyst in the revolutionary's spiritual development. In addition, she exemplifies the great principle of becoming ("werden") which Altenberg perceives at the heart of all life and which, he insists, determines our humanity. As he watches her at play, the revolutionary becomes conscious of the difference between the young girl and the other people in the park. Whereas the latter seem sluggish and awkward, she is fleet-of-foot, graceful, almost ethereal. Moreover, Altenberg indicates that these qualities distinguish her as a true human being:

"Du bist ein Mensch", fühlt er, "Du bewegst Dich". (WS 118)

In Altenberg's eyes physical grace, the love of movement and, to a lesser extent, youthfulness all reveal the individual's propensity for growth or "becoming". And it is this capacity and will to grow, to move on spiritually as well as physically, which Altenberg regards as the essence

of true humanity:

Zum Teufel, Mensch sein heisst sich bewegen,  
sich von sich wegbewegen, irgendwohin, nach  
vorwärts, nach aufwärts! (WS 106)

This is the "definition" of humanity which Altenberg advances in "Sonntag". In "Im Garten" he goes still further and decries as heathens all those who consider themselves fully developed, for they are guilty of self-betrayal. By contrast he proclaims:

Wer sich als Vorläufigen, Unbeständigen,  
sich Wegbewegenden, sich von sich selbst  
Wegbewegenden, fühlt, weiss, erkennt, ist  
Christ!! (WS 116)

In Altenberg's view, only those who acknowledge the importance of growth are worthy human beings.

By 1908 Altenberg, now even more conscious of the need to express his thoughts clearly and concisely and so fix them in the reader's mind, summed up his credo in this neat adaptation of Descartes' cogito: cresco ergo sum (see ML 127). Altenberg holds that the mere fact of existence does not constitute true "being": true "being" is for him "becoming".

As has already been intimated, Altenberg tends to equate movement with becoming. When he describes the young girl in "Der Grieche" as flying, he does so not only to convey the fluidity of her movements, but also to indicate her humanity and spiritual refinement. While her fellow beings appear ponderous, she seems to defy the law of gravity and to transcend the material reality. Altenberg's use of flight as an image of spiritual refinement is, as has been pointed out, especially reminiscent of Nietzsche's practice in Also sprach Zarathustra, where metaphors of flight are used to suggest self-transcendence.

Jetzt bin ich leicht, jetzt fliege ich: jetzt  
sehe ich mich unter mir (8)

Zarathustra joyfully exclaims, following his realisation that he has the power to overcome the material restrictions of his earthly existence, and thus to develop spiritually.

That Altenberg was deeply impressed by the spirit as well as the letter of Also sprach Zarathustra is revealed above all in his own attempts to fly. Rumours of his efforts to become airborne over the Graben following a night's drinking, which were first put about by the Griensteidl waiter, Heinrich, are substantiated by Altenberg's friend and confidante, Frau Lina Loos, who writes:

Sein Körper, sein ganzes Wesen machte den Eindruck von etwas Schwebendem. Es ist kein Zufall, daß gerade er den Mut fand zu Flugversuchen eigenster Art. Nachts, auf den Straßen und Plätzen, breitete er seine Arme aus, dehnte seinen mächtigen Brustkorb, sog sich voll mit Luft und schlug mit seinen Armen immer rascher, immer schnellere Kreise bis sein schmaler Körper, seine überzarten Beine jeden Widerstand aufgaben, ihre Schwere verloren und, sonderbar gewichtlos, von Geist und Sehnsucht getragen erschienen. Alle, die es sahen hatten den Eindruck eines freischwebenden Menschen. (9)

While Altenberg's critics dismissed his tragi-comic attempts at flying as a crude publicity stunt and further proof of his eccentricity, his admirers considered them indicative of his very real desire to liberate himself from his material existence: from the social and financial pressures which he considered hostile to self-fulfilment. In their eyes, his longing to fly was expressive of an inner striving to realise his spiritual potential.

Finally, it is noteworthy that Altenberg's use of dance as a symbol of self-transcendence and spiritual refinement also appears to have been influenced by Also sprach Zarathustra. In Wie ich es sehe he uses the dance motif in connection with such characters as the young girl in "Der Grieche", Mr. Bigloff in "No Age" and Mlle. Paquarette in "Café Chantant", in each case to demonstrate their vitality, and to establish their exemplary

significance. All possess the superabundance of vital energy which Altenberg believed indispensable to spiritual evolution. In his subsequent works dancers, such as the Newsky Roussotine-Truppe and the popular Wiesenthal sisters, all of whom Altenberg encountered in his capacity as dance and cabaret critic for the Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung, are invested with the same exemplary significance: they appear either as the precursors, or representatives, of a more highly evolved humanity. Thus, in a short piece written in praise of a series of Erwin Lang's woodcuts, which depict Grete Wiesenthal, the painter's wife, Altenberg celebrates the dancer as "Eine Höherentwicklung, von Erdschwere aus zum Engelflug". (See Der Ruf 1912 Internationale Schwarz Weiß Ausstellung).

"Die Primitive" (WS 120-8), which follows immediately upon "Der Grieche", reveals another facet of Altenberg's counter-ideal. The title itself has special, exemplary significance: "primitive" is the name which Altenberg gave to the prostitute, whom Peter Wagner correctly identifies as "the antithesis of the bourgeois woman" in Altenberg's oeuvre (10). In contrast with the wives and daughters of the bourgeoisie, she is not bound by social conventions. Her relative economic independence is the key to her greater personal freedom. Moreover, unlike her middle class counterparts, she takes no part in the comedy of manners enacted daily by "polite" society. In "Die Primitive" Altenberg suggests her opposition to "advanced" civilisation by linking her with the cretaceous period of the earth's prehistory.

However, in addition to distinguishing her from polite society, Altenberg is at pains to differentiate between this "primitive" and her fellow members of the demi-monde assembled in the night café. While the latter are self-destructive and aimless, this young woman has a healthy self-respect. As her social peers indulge their baser passions and dissipate their vital reserves, she attends closely to her own physical needs. Altenberg

clearly approves of, and wishes to popularise, the young woman's programme for physical fitness. Significantly, the dietary and hygienic principles to which she subscribes - she prefers easily digestible foods and believes in the value of sleep and invigorating baths - were also favoured by Altenberg as a means of attaining greater spiritual fulfilment. (See also 5.6).

"Die Primitive" is a skilfully constructed piece in which Altenberg makes clever use of milieu to point the difference between his social ideality on the one hand, and the social reality on the other. The piece opens with a naturalistic description of a night café and its clientele, poor scraps of humanity who act as a foil for the revolutionary and the primitive (each of whom has exemplary significance). Then follows an evocation of urban life which even in the daylight hours seems stale and cheerless. This is juxtaposed with a description of the revolutionary's living quarters where he now takes the "primitive". After the wretchedness of the night café and the street life these appear as a haven in which the individual might recuperate from the unhealthy, urban environment. His room is clean and filled with the aroma of apples which suggest his love of the natural and wholesome. It is a more fitting environment for the "primitive" who at once feels at home there. More importantly, it is conducive both to her personal development - it affords her the freedom to be herself - and to her relationship with the revolutionary which, Altenberg emphasises, admits of no falseness:

Es war nicht eine Komödie, die einer vor dem  
andern spielte. Es war Freiheit, Verständigung.  
(WS 127)

Thus do the different milieux serve to underline the anti-thetical structure of "Die Primitive", in which Altenberg sets his social ideality (enacted by the primitive and the revolutionary) against the impoverished and base social reality.

In addition, Altenberg uses the piece to recapitulate the earlier themes of the series: to reinforce the principles governing diet and hygiene which are outlined in "Der Besuch", and to continue the meditation on religion and the significance of Christ begun in "Im Garten". Thus he presents Christ as the highest instance of humanity and Judas as the personification of evil. (The revolutionary's attempt to blot out the figure of Judas - in Gebhardt's engraving of the Last Supper - with a gold coin depicting Spinoza may be interpreted as a symbolic gesture signifying Altenberg's desire to rescue mankind from evil and barbarism.) The spirit of ancient Greece which permeates "Der Grieche" is revoked here too in Altenberg's celebration of the natural, human dignity of the primitive. Altenberg also pays a further tribute to the power of beauty to purge the individual of his baser instincts and thereby elevate him spiritually. Finally, the abbreviated tract "De Pudore" enclosed within the piece echoes another note struck in "Der Grieche". For here too Altenberg exults in the naked physical perfection of mankind, which he perceives as the visible evidence of its incorruptibility and divine stature. In "Die Primitive" Altenberg suggests that shame is the product of the individual's awareness that he falls short of his ideal. More than this:

Es ist die Sehnsucht, dass wir noch nicht die  
 "Letzten", die "Gott-Gleichen" sind - - -.  
 (WS 124)

For Altenberg, then, shame has a positive value: the individual's sense of shame not only denotes his awareness of his ideal potential; it also acts as an inducement to him to realise this.

### 5.3 "Ashantee" and the return to nature

Freedom, nobility and naturalness, these were the qualities which, Altenberg believed, were epitomised by the Ashanti who were brought to Vienna in 1896 as an

attraction for the zoological gardens. There Altenberg visited them and was impressed by their integrity and candour as well as their lack of pretensions. His letter to Annie Holitscher of 11.8.1896 reveals more fully the reasons for, and the extent of, his admiration for this African people, and one young girl in particular. He writes approvingly of her ability to assimilate the habits of civilised society without relinquishing her natural grace and self-assurance. Above all, however, Altenberg was struck by the Ashanti's effusive love of life and of their fellow men whom, he notes, they treat with consideration and tenderness. "So war es im Paradiese", he writes rapturously:

Nackte, wunderbar gewachsene, freie Menschen  
mit Frieden. Ich lerne viel dort. Bei den  
Ärmsten ist das Himmelreich. (11)

Clearly, contact with the Ashanti convinced Altenberg of the cogency of the counter-ideal which he projects in Wie ich es sehe: a society of free, highly developed individuals bonded by love.

In his letter to Annie Holitscher Altenberg compares his fellow citizens with the Ashanti, and whilst he extols the latter's virtues, he is no less quick to point out the shortcomings of the former. He condemns their rough treatment of the Ashanti and enumerates those vices which make a mockery of their claim to culture - stupidity, vanity, deceit and cowardice. Moreover, it is this contrast between the manners and mores of so-called civilised society and those of the more primitive Ashanti which forms the core of "Ashantee", which first appeared in 1897 bearing the dedication to "den unvergesslichen Paradieses-Menschen". As Altenberg's contemporary Max Messer observed:

Es wird hier zum erstenmal in künstlerischer Form, aus persönlichen Erlebnissen heraus das Problematische der Cultur gezeigt und vor Allem die Lüge zerstört, daß Cultur und Menschlichkeit identische Begriffe seien. Peter Altenberg lehrt

uns, in die Cultur unter der Optik der "Uncultur" zu sehen. Indem wir uns mit dem Augen dieser schwarzen, einfachen, kindlichen Menschen schauen, werden wir uns klarer über uns selbst, erblicken früher verborgene Mangel unseres Lebens, können unsere großen Ziele deutlicher erfassen, den mühevollen Weg zu ihnen abkürzen, erleichtern (12).

Despite its slight proportions (the occasion, perhaps, for its relative neglect by Altenberg's commentators), "Ashantee" offers a comprehensive critique of civilised society. Within it, social institutions such as education, marriage and divorce are examined afresh by Altenberg, who implicitly compares the straightforward and, it is implied, more honest attitude of the Ashanti towards personal relationships with the conduct of "civilised" society. In "Ehebruch" (WS 324) and "L'homme médiocre" (WS 320-2), for example, Altenberg applauds the candour of the Ashanti in acknowledging the impermanency of human feelings, and notes with approval that for this people divorce carries neither social nor moral stigma. Still on the subject of marriage, "Mitgift" (WS 325) highlights the better social standing of the Ashanti women who, Altenberg suggests, are held in higher esteem and possess greater freedom to pick and choose in love than their Austrian counterparts.

Altenberg also admired the modesty and simple taste of this people from the Gold Coast, especially that of the girls who, he illustrates in "Paradies" (WS 309), aspired to nothing more than glass beads. This capacity to be content with little is doubtless intended as a salutary lesson to Altenberg's more materialistically minded and discontented compatriots. In Altenberg's eyes, the Ashanti bore out the truth of a central religious doctrine, namely that modesty and not riches is more conducive to human happiness. In addition, Altenberg was conscious that the freshness and vitality of the Ashanti might invigorate his own, ailing society. In "Complications" (WS 315-6) he describes the possible benefits which one rich young man

might derive from his relationship with the Ashanti girl, Akolé:

Ein ideales Moment dürfte sie sein in seinem Leben, eine Medizin der schlaffen erschöpften Seele, ein Tonicum. Jedesfalls Etwas Aussergewöhnliches, wie eine Reise in das Ausland oder das Militärjahr. Etwas Umwandelndes, Bewegung Bringendes, Etwas wie eine Episode aus dem Leben eines Künstlers, Dichters. (WS 316)

There is, however, a clear indication that Altenberg disapproved of any scheme to live through another. Moreover, he forewarns of the difficulties which might arise from this attempted merging of two different cultures. In his opinion, it was more important that his contemporaries recapture the vigour and freshness which they had possessed as children, and in this way seek to overcome the frigidity and prejudice which, Altenberg maintains, debased their adult lives. In each of the pieces "Der Kuss" (WS 306-7), "Cultur" (WS 308-9) and "Klein-Ella" (WS 317-9) he is openly critical of Viennese sang froid and narrow-mindedness, and commends instead the naivety and spontaneity of the Ashanti. In the first piece Altenberg reprimands one beautiful Viennese for her failure to understand and accept Akolé. In the second he illustrates the naturalness of the Ashanti which he finds spiritually refreshing, and finally, in "Klein-Ella", highlights their sincerity. While Altenberg invariably found himself obliged to act a part in Viennese society, with the Ashanti he found that he could be himself. "Man braucht da Nichts zu lügen" he writes of their community. It was perhaps the greatest praise he could bestow upon this gentle, uninhibited people, as well as a damning pronouncement upon the corrupt and mendacious nature of his own society.

Finally, in "Ein Brief aus Accra" (WS 310-3), Altenberg reveals the highly developed communal spirit of the Ashanti and their sense of affinity with all men. The news of the death of Monambô's brother, in the form of a letter from Accra, sends the Ashanti resident in Vienna into collective mourning; for the boy, for themselves

and for their homeland. It is probable that Altenberg intended the piece to serve as a reminder to a society racked by national rivalries and class conflict of the value of brother love and social cohesion.

In his tendency to glorify the "organic" society and to present its rustic values as a panacea for the social ailments of a modern, mechanised state Altenberg was not, of course, unique. In late eighteenth century Britain the Romantics had expressed their distaste for the values of the emergent industrial society similarly, by praising the virtues of the noble savage. And in our own century it is not uncommon to find artists intent on recasting society in a pre-industrial mould, as if they hoped in this way to compensate for the loss of traditional values and national integrity. One thinks, for example, of D.H. Lawrence's recreation of rural self-sufficiency and contentment in The Rainbow, which was first published during the first world war. In the history of the Habsburg empire the turn of the century represented an equally turbulent period. Technically, at least, the foundations for a modern state had been laid. However, the industrial revolution had deepened social divisions, and resulted in unhealthy living conditions. Consequently, Austria's proletariat and middle class intellectuals found themselves in opposition to the machine age - though for different reasons. While the former denounced their impersonal and inhuman working conditions, the latter considered that industrial expansion was detrimental to psychological and social health. Their belief that this could be regained only by abandoning city life in favour of rural simplicity was consistent with the views of a powerful youth movement, which by 1900 was well established on the European mainland, and had as its goal a full scale return to nature. According to Viktor Žmegač, the movement favoured pre-industrial values and desired:

eine Lebensweise, die im Gegensatz zum Luxus und zur technisch vermittelten Künstlichkeit der

modernen Zivilisation auf einer emphatischen Wertschätzung des Gesunden und Natürlichen beruhen sollte. (13)

Their social reformatory goals were remarkable not for their radicalism, but on account of their conservative nature, as Hugo von Hofmannsthal has observed (14). Indeed, it is anomalous that under the reactionary rule of Franz Joseph, the collective dream of the Empire's malcontents should assume the form of a nostalgic longing for the past, as opposed to a vision of future happiness. However, in a world which lacked fixed co-ordinates, where the present was menacing and the future uncertain, the past alone offered security.

Although he saw himself as a social revolutionary dedicated to the destruction of the established order, Altenberg's counter-ideal was, like that of many of his fellow artists, distinctly conservative in character. For, despite his fascination for the diversity of the metropolis, he was perplexed by its fragmented and shapeless aspect. He longed instead for the simplicity of the old days when man lived in harmony with nature, with himself and with others. Throughout his literary career he expresses his preference for the country in such pieces as "Sanct Wolfgang" (WS), "Rückkehr vom Lande" (NA 39-40)\*, "Grinzinger StraBe" (NF 161), "Land" (VI 199), "Vom Land zurück" (VI 200) and "Der Sommer" (VI 265-6). In general, these pieces hinge on a comparison between the stifling and restrictive conditions of city life, and the freedom and refreshment offered by the countryside. The following piece, which records an impression of the Grinzinger StraBe, may serve as an illustration:

Grinzinger StraBe. Ich sah ganz gewöhnliche ungepflegte weite Wiesen, umrahmt von gepflegten Villengärten mit Erholungsbedürftigen. Über

\* "Rückkehr vom Lande" is duplicated in Neues Altes 183-4 .

die Wiesen schossen scharf niedrig Schwalben.  
 Eine Dame brachte Erdbeeren aus der Stadt. Man  
 ging ihr freudig entgegen. Sie sagte: "Gut, daß  
 ich wieder da bin, es war zum Ersticken!"

Vita Ipsa contains an interesting variation of this structural technique. In this work Altenberg elected to juxtapose rural contentment with the hustle and bustle of city life in the two companion pieces: "Land" and "Vom Land zurück". While the former expresses the deep happiness which Altenberg experiences in natural surroundings, the latter charts his feelings during a journey from Ennsberg to his home in Vienna. He begins by describing his resigned and melancholic leave-taking from the pleasant countryside, and goes on to show how he gradually re-accustoms himself to society and the exigencies of city life. Finally, he suggests that, while this often seems harsh and unfulfilling, it does have some compensations. For Altenberg, as for many of his compatriots entangled in a love-hate relationship with their city, Vienna was, despite its shortcomings, home.

Altenberg's acceptance of the city in "Vom Land zurück" is, however, exceptional in his writing: as a rule his attitude towards it, and the people shaped by it, is uncompromising and hostile. In "Der Sommer" (VI) he condemns the city as a breeding ground for vice: hypocrisy, vanity and self-deception. Such deception, he argues, is impossible in the country, where a different scale of values obtains, and human achievements are dwarfed by the grandeur of nature. Moreover, Altenberg stresses that amidst nature, loquacity and wit, each of them indispensable social accoutrements of the urban dweller, are out of place. However, on one occasion he does admit that people are given to dissembling even in natural surroundings, although here the "human comedy" is made more palatable by the beauty of its setting. In "Rückkehr vom Lande" he writes:

Komödie hier, Komödie dort vielleicht - - -  
 Doch unter freiem Himmel ist das Theater  
 schöner! (NA 40)

"Rückkehr vom Lande" also emphasises two of Altenberg's strongest convictions concerning nature: firstly that nature effects an improvement in the individual's physical and psychological state; and secondly that this new sense of well-being holds the key to improved interpersonal relationships. In the countryside, Altenberg writes, "Man war ein anderer, besser, menschlicher". He was convinced of nature's restorative powers and believed that nature can heal the wounds sustained by the individual in an urban environment:

Natur, Sonne, Licht, Wasser bemühen sich direkt  
 fanatisch alle Schäden auszubessern, zu heilen,  
 wo es nur immer möglich ist. (ML 110)

In "Sankt Martins Insel" (NA 23-4) he pays tribute to the "Heilkraft der Natur" which restores one tubercular young woman to health. The piece relates how, on being told that she has tuberculosis, an eighteen year old Viennese went to Grarosa where she spent each day alone sunbathing on Sankt Martins Insel. In addition, her natural cure involved massaging with menthol spirit and a peculiar diet of cocoa and broth fortified with raw egg yolks as well as large quantities of salt water fish. On one level, the piece is used by Altenberg to advertise the benefits and efficacy of his own dietary and hygienic principles, for the cure is successful. On another, it suggests that Altenberg sympathised with the life philosophy of the youth movement which publicised its views in such periodicals as Ver Sacrum, Pan and Jugend. For he too revered the sun as the source of energy and all life, although he stopped short of sun-worship, and considered mankind's bond with nature the fount of its health and strength. This view, which represents an important corner-stone in Altenberg's personal philosophy, finds its most succinct expression in

"Der Sommer" (VI), where Altenberg likens all mankind to the Greek demi-god, Antaeus, who derived his strength from contact with the earth:

Wie hieß doch jener Held, der immer neue Kräfte wiedergewann, dadurch, daß er die Erde berührte?! Gleichviel, solche Helden sind auch wir! Er hieß "Antaeus". (VI 266)

Throughout his life Altenberg emphasised the part which nature can play in restoring physical health and psychological wholeness (see also section 2.4). Moreover, he believed that through contemplating and learning to love the natural world, the individual becomes a better human being. In one of the famous "Texte auf Ansichtskarten" (NA) which inspired Alban Berg's "Fünf Orchesterlieder" (Op 4) Altenberg writes:

Natur und Frau sollten in gleicher Weise wirken, uns zu adeligen, all-verstehenden, sanftmütigen Weltgeschöpfen zu transformieren! (NA 64)

Nature, Altenberg maintains, should have the effect of refining man's emotions, broadening his outlook and making him more aware of his fellow creatures. In Altenberg's experience, human existence assumes a rosier hue in natural surroundings. Because the individual feels invigorated and at ease, he is better disposed towards his fellow men. In "Rückkehr vom Lande" Altenberg confirms a servant's impression that "Die gnädige Frau war am Land viel netter zu uns - - -." (NA 39). Indeed, there is a strong suggestion in Altenberg's writing that he saw the "return to nature" as a possible way of overcoming those social divisions which he believed are accentuated in an urban environment. In "Der Sommer" (VI) he insists that in the country the demarcation of social class is a vain and ludicrous undertaking. All men are equal, but, Altenberg suggests, their natural equality is respected only in the country, where relationships are at once more basic and more honest, and where social status is irrelevant.

In an appreciation of Altenberg, written to mark his fiftieth birthday, Egon Friedell endeavours to correct his contemporaries' distorted image of the poet as a "genieBerischer Ästhet". Altenberg, he insists, was in fact "ein Natürlichkeits- und Naturfanatiker (...) wie wenige seiner Zeit" (15). As a child, Altenberg was encouraged in his love of nature by his father, who frequently took his children on excursions to the Kaiserbrunnen, Höllental (ML 73-4) and occasionally to Knofeleben, where they would spend the night and rise early to watch the sun rise (ML 114-5). Experiences such as these were important to Altenberg, and formed the basis both of his mature conception of nature and of mankind's place in it. Gradually he became conscious of the parallels between the natural cycle and the pattern of human existence. He noted the effect of the changing seasons upon the psyche: in a piece entitled "Pfungsten" (BL 193), for example, he suggests that winter is a dormant period for man as well as nature, and describes how the natural recrudescence in spring fills mankind with renewed vigour. No doubt, the awareness of such correspondences between man and nature was a source of comfort to Altenberg, who felt estranged from his society; for it restored his belief in the fundamental unity of all life.

In his writing Altenberg not only notes the parallels between the natural cycle and the shape of individual existence; he indicates that social history too conforms to natural laws and rhythms. The cyclical form of the early piece, "Siebzehn bis dreissig" (WS), the final lines of which are almost an exact repetition of the initial stanza, might be cited as evidence that Altenberg subscribed to the Nietzschean conception of eternal recurrence. He evidently shared Nietzsche's belief that, in the same way as the natural cycle perpetuates itself, so too does history repeat itself. And, like Nietzsche, he scorned the popular notion that the history of mankind is a testimony to human progress. Instead, he saw successive

generations struggling against misery and hardship. In "Siebzehn bis dreissig" he implies that even those who overcome material want must pay with their happiness.

Childhood memories played an important part in Altenberg's adult life. In retrospect his youth seemed to him paradisiac; an age of innocence and security. More importantly, it was at this time when, Altenberg believed, his bond with nature was still vital and intact. He celebrates the child's naive response to the natural world in such pieces as "Knofeleben" (ML) and "Vöslau" (NA 101), and in "Die Kinderzeit" (ML 55-9) he suggests that this youthful rapport with nature reflects the primordial harmony between man and nature:

Abends, wenn es stark geregnet hatte, tappten Salamander über den Waldboden. Man hatte die Empfindung von vorsintflutlichen Welten: der feuchtwarme stille Wald und die schwarzgelben Molche - - -.

He notes the primitive roots of the children's games, but is quick to exploit the comedy inherent in these self-styled hunters' pursuit of the innocent *Nutcracker*:

Sehr beliebt war die Jagd auf die "NuBhäher, die zum "Raubzeug" zählen, zum Raubgetier. Es war schwer, sich das von dem schönen Vogel mit den kleinen blauschwarzen Federchen vorzustellen. Aber wenn er am Boden lag, sagten die Jäger oft: "Du arger Sünder!"

In later life Altenberg strove to recreate the child's vital relationship with the natural world which, he believed, had been disrupted by the twin process of industrial expansion and urbanisation. In his writing, he tells of how he would return to scenes of childhood happiness, partly in order to derive new strength from contact with what he regarded as his natural roots; and partly in the hope that, by recapturing his original feelings towards his surroundings, he could, once more, commune with nature. A letter to his cousin Olga Schweinburg of 17.10.1909 conveys his delight at finding

nothing changed in his favourite childhood haunts, Payerbach and Reichenau, least of all his feelings towards them (16). A piece entitled "Erinnerung" (ML 61-3), which was inspired by a visit to Vöslau in 1906, is informed by the same sentiments. Here, Altenberg records how he first came to know Vöslau and its surrounding woodland as a child, and how, on returning some 40 years later, he experiences a sense of spiritual rejuvenation. He rejoices in the realisation that neither the vicissitudes suffered by himself or his family, nor changes in the social pattern had tarnished the impressions he had first received in childhood. Moreover, it seemed that the part of his being which he cherished most as a source of strength and vitality, his naivety, had survived the years intact:

mit 49 Jahren besuchte ich eine teure Freundin,  
 die dort zur Erholung weilte, im Sommer 1906.  
 Und alle meine Kindheitsgefühle kamen  
 wiederauferstehend zum Vorschein, wie  
Eingesargtes, das lebendig wird. Nichts, nichts,  
 nichts hatte sich verändert, nichts war verblaßt,  
 alles wirkte wie einst! 39 Jahre waren spurlos  
 an meiner Seele vorübergegangen und sämtliche  
 Impressionen des Knaben erstanden in ungeschwächter  
 Kraft. (...) Kindheit, in mir bist du also nicht  
 gestorben und verdorben! (ML 63)

For Altenberg, this realisation of the permanency in nature and of his feelings brought reassurance of his own psychic wholeness, or integrity.

During the prolonged periods of his mental illness when Altenberg was unable to make excursions into the countryside, he habitually sought refuge in Vienna's numerous parks where he found spiritual refreshment. He often protested that he had no need to travel widely in order to experience the beauty and infinite variety of nature, for the parks enabled him to experience this "im Extrakt". However, when at last he did undertake a journey to Italy in the company of Adolf Loos, he was thrilled by the sombre grandeur of the mountainous regions.

Although Altenberg's mental illness darkened his image of his fellow men, it did not diminish his love of nature. His powers of observation remained acute; his sensitivity to nature's moods heightened. During the period 1909-1913, which Altenberg spent for the most part in various sanatoriums and the mental asylum "Am Steinhof", his natural surroundings provided the inspiration for countless literary gems. Published in 1909, Märchen des Lebens not only bears witness to the onset of his illness and his attempts to come to terms with it; it also contains a number of outstanding pieces in which he celebrates his closeness to nature as a child, e.g. "Die Kindheit", "Erinnerung" and "Knofeleben". Against the background of his illness such pieces assume a special psychological significance; for in one sense his memories of childhood were a palliative for his sense of impotency in adult life. They compensated greatly for his difficulties in coming to terms with the protean nature of the modern metropolis and its inhabitants.

While Märchen des Lebens is filled with nostalgic longing for the past, Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens is more optimistic in mood and contains several vibrant evocations of spring. In both the initial and the penultimate piece Altenberg seeks to capture the eve of spring in nature. In "Die Slovakei" (BL 8-9) he records the first signs of new growth in the provinces, while the poem entitled "Vorfrühling" (BL 203) heralds the approach of spring. Warmer weather, which causes snow to fall as rain and entices children into the open air, encourages a farmer to hope for a good harvest, and a young woman for future happiness. Indeed, it is noteworthy that both in his choice and treatment of theme, Altenberg appears to have been influenced by Goethe's poem "Ein zärtlich-jugendlicher Kummer": both proceed from a mood of quiet anticipation to pronounced confidence in a future harvesting of crops, and hopes. By contrast, "Baden bei Wien im Frühling" (BL 173) is concerned with present happiness; the peacefulness which

the inhabitants of Baden are at liberty to enjoy while the chestnut blossom hangs heavy on the trees and before the first influx of tourists and day-trippers from Vienna. Finally, reference should be made to "Pfungsten" (BL 193) and "Frühlingsanfang" (BL 153), which are inspired similarly by the beginning of a new natural cycle. While the former expresses Altenberg's conviction that spring is also a time for mankind to make a fresh start, the latter, which begins with a description of Schönbrunn park, affords Altenberg the opportunity to expound the value of fresh air and to attack the medical profession, his *bête noir*, because of its reluctance to prescribe simple natural remedies for physical disorders.

The subsequent collections of Altenberg's work, Neues Altes and Semmering 1912, also contain many outstanding pieces inspired by his feeling for nature. One thinks, for example, of "Sommerabend in Gmunden" (NA 95-6) in which Altenberg describes how an evening spent quietly contemplating the lake may provide spiritual refreshment for the individual, and compensate both for his personal disappointments and the inadequacies of his fellow men. One thinks too of Altenberg's "Texte auf Ansichtskarten" (NA 60-6), short pieces which communicate their author's almost mystic sense of the oneness of man and nature. "Über die Grenzen des All", for example, is expressive of the Romantic yearning to transcend the finite world and the limitations of man's earthly existence, while "Weg im Winter" describes the deep sympathy which unites mankind with nature. This is also the theme of the following piece, which suggests how human tears are reciprocated in nature by the melting of the snow:

Hier ist Friede - - -. Hier weine ich mich  
 aus über alles. Hier löst sich mein unermeßliches  
 unfabbares Leid, das meine Seele verbrennt. Siehe,  
 hier sind keine Menschen, keine Ansiedlungen.  
 Hier tropft Schnee leise in Wasserlachen - - -  
 (NA 63)

Nature's autumnal and winter symphonies provide Altenberg's major theme in Semmering 1912. Many of the pieces contained in this collection are based on his observations of nature in the winter months of 1911 and 1912, which he spent in the Semmering. In the piece entitled "Semmering" (S 44), which dates from November 1912, Altenberg voices his regret at the passing of summer happiness, and apologises for his inability to describe his surroundings:

Überflüssig, die Berglandschaft zu schildern.  
Das können Russen, Schweden, Dänen viel,  
viel besser.

However, in "Winter auf dem Semmering" (S 45), which is placed adjacent to "Semmering", Altenberg attempts, after all, to rival the Russians' evocations of winter in his description of his newest, unhappy love, the snow. Whereas "Semmering" indicates his preference for the colours and aromas of summer, here he extols the greater charms of the wintry landscape, where each tree and fence appears more crisply defined by its covering of snow. From the first fall of snow ("Erster Schnee" p140) to the thaw which is vividly recreated in "Vor-Vorfrühling" (S 93-4), Altenberg's writing records the slightest gradations in nature in months which to the less perceptive appear uniform and dull.

Between the years 1913 and 1919 nature continued to have a vital significance for Altenberg. It was, in a sense, his life-line, his chief means of riding out psychological and social storms, and of salvaging something of his personal integrity while all around him the frail structure of the Habsburg Empire came crashing to the ground. In his writing too nature continued to play an important part, inspiring some of his most significant artistic achievements of these years. Amidst the lengthy diatribes against what he considered human failings and monotonous restatements of his "idées fixes" (i.e. his

principles concerning diet and hygiene), pieces such as his "Semmering-Photograyüren" (F 105-113), "Schönbrunn" (NF 154-5), "Herbst" (VI 258), "Ort Altenberg" (LA 150-1) and "Erster Schneefall" (LA 191-3) are a welcome sign that Altenberg was still capable of producing pieces of enduring literary merit in the years of his decline.

The prose miniature entitled "Das Baumgärtnerhaus auf dem Schneeberg gegen die Raxalpe" (F 108), in which Altenberg describes how as a child he would be torn from his sleep to watch the sun rise over the Kaiserstein, is outstanding in Fechsung:

Baumgärtnerhaus, Märchengasthof meiner  
Kinderjahre! In finsterner feuchter Nacht wurde  
man aus dem Schlaf gerissen, der blutroten  
Sonnenkugel, auf dem Kaiserstein, entgegen!  
Sturm brauste, Kühe schliefen auf schwarzen  
Almen, und in uns ächzte der unausgeschlafene  
Schlaf! (F 108)

The intensity of the childhood experience, now recalled in adult life, is underlined by Altenberg's post-Impressionistic use of planes of primary colours (the blood-red mass of the sun and black expanse of the fields) in a manner reminiscent of Van Gogh or Gauguin; and by his dynamic syntax.

By contrast, the mood of "Schönbrunn" is more contemplative and mellow. The piece, which records details of a walk Altenberg once enjoyed in the park at Schönbrunn in the company of Paula Schweitzer, reveals his sympathy for those animals held captive by man. More importantly for Altenberg, however, the walk represents the consummation of a friendship with one who shared his love of nature.

Frequently, Altenberg's observations of nature stimulated, and provided a referential framework for, his thoughts concerning the human condition as, for example, in "Herbst" and "Erster Schneefall". In the former, decay in nature becomes a symbol for the decline of humanity and civilised values. In the latter piece Altenberg begins by describing the first light snow fall and the emotions generated by it, and then offers his thoughts on the nature

of happiness and fulfilment. Finally, in the posthumously published piece "Ort Altenberg" Altenberg laments the passage of time, human transience and notes, for once, the changes which occur even in nature. Nothing remains the same - the willows and birches which he remembers as little more than bushes have thickened into forests; childhood friends have grown up and gone; and dreams have vanished on the wind:

Ich mache eine Landpartie hinaus, in dieses Land  
meiner heiligen Jugendträume, und bemerke, daß  
die Weiden, die Birken dicke Waldungen geworden  
sind mit der Zeit! (LA 51)

In the same way as Goethe's great concept, "Natur", constitutes a central point of reference within his "Weltanschauung", providing him with a criterion for evaluating human behaviour and aesthetic worth; so too did Altenberg tend to judge the conduct and artistic productions of his contemporaries according to natural standards. We find, for instance, that whilst he is constant in his praise of those who display what he considered natural qualities (e.g. grace and candour), he is contemptuous of those who resort to artifice, albeit in their dress, their homes, or in social intercourse. In part, Altenberg's desire to reinstate natural standards may be understood as a reaction against the "decadents'" preference for the artificial and unnatural, as exemplified in the writing of Felix Dörmann (see "Was ich liebe" in his collection of poems entitled "Sensationen"). In his novel A rebours J.K. Huysmans had already presented a comprehensive and, at times, humorous critique of the decadents' way of life which, he concludes, can result only in ill-health and unhappiness. This work made a deep impression on Altenberg and conditioned his attitude towards decadence. In addition, however, Altenberg's insistence upon naturalness arose from his aversion to industrial society. Like Nietzsche before him he firmly believed that individual and social health could be restored only if mankind returned to nature and natural standards.

With each successive work Altenberg renews his appeal to his fellow citizens to abandon the unwholesome ways of the city. His posthumously published work contains a final warning to Austria's young men to renounce their material and intellectual ambitions and seek fulfilment in nature:

Kehret zurück zu den romantischen Halmen der Bergwiese und lasset ab von der Philosophie des Nichterlebens und Falschexistierens! (NL 119)

Above all, however, Altenberg urges his contemporaries to adopt a healthier and more natural life style. He advises them to obey their inner voice and to respect their physical limitations. In a piece entitled "Vita" (VI 140-1) he cautions of the dangers of overtaxing one's body and overlooking its requirements, and in the thematically related "Die Maschinerie" (VI 208-210), he emphasises the importance of keeping one's body, as one would a machine, in a state of good repair and offers this advice:

Jeder belausche sich selbst, um es zu erfahren, was er eigentlich hienieden braucht, um ein reiner menschlicher Mensch zu werden! (VI 209)

In Altenberg's opinion, physical health (which, he stresses, is the basis of moral behaviour) can be ensured by a natural life style. This, in turn, requires the individual to have adequate sleep (he should be allowed to awaken naturally); to eat only nourishing foods; to wear natural fabrics such as cotton and wool; and to exercise out-of-doors. Together these guidelines for a more natural life form the core of the "Lebensprogramm" which Altenberg developed as a means of combating the disease and insanitary conditions of the metropolis (see section 5.6).

In addition to calling upon the individual to evolve a more natural life style, Altenberg exhorts him to behave more naturally. In "Das Benehmen" (VI 46-7) he writes:

Das Benehmen sei ein natürlicher Außen-Spiegel aller Deiner verborgenen innern Werte selbst!

He disapproves strongly of the assumption of false airs and the artificial conventions of his fellow citizens. In "Ewige Pubertät (VI 274-5) he challenges their notions of propriety, dignity and self-discipline.

"In all, let Nature never be forgot" (17). These words of Alexander Pope aptly sum up the central message of Peter Altenberg, himself a true son of the Enlightenment (18). Indeed, it is interesting that like his English predecessor, Altenberg too encourages his peers to remain faithful to nature when constructing their parks and gardens. In "Gärten" (LA 244) Altenberg condemns certain popular horticultural preferences and advises strict adherence to nature:

Wieso gibt es noch Menschen, die Garten-Kunst bewundern, da die Natur doch von selbst die idealste Garten-Künstlerin ist?!? Blumen-Beete sind ein geschmackloses Verbrechen an tōrichten Menschen: Die Natur, vita ipsa, leitet uns ganz von selbst!

Similarly in "Mein Ehrgeiz" (VI 53-5), which tells of Altenberg's ambition to establish a nature reserve-cum-open air resort in the vicinity of Klosterneuburg, he suggests that architects, too, would do better to be guided by nature.

Finally, because Altenberg considered it necessary to sustain a vital relationship with nature, he encourages his fellow men to surround themselves, in their homes, with natural specimens. In his "Zyklus Venedig" (S 215-225), for example, he recommends the collecting of mussels, which he prizes as "das unmodernste und das modernste Kunstgewebe der Natur" (S 224); for unlike manmade artefacts these can never become outmoded. And in a piece entitled "Nippes" (P 149), published originally in the periodical Kunst (which purported to educate public taste) Altenberg commends the unusual taste of one young woman who selects a Tiffany vase because of its naturalness. Its colours match exactly those of the giant Brazilian beetle which she

also purchases and places next to the vase in a glass case. To this she attaches the following inscription, which in fact encapsulates Altenberg's central artistic principle: "Natura Artis Magistra".

Throughout his literary career, Altenberg based his aesthetic judgements on natural criteria. He tends to discriminate against writers and artists who forsake nature in an attempt to demonstrate their ingenuity, and in "Kunstgewebliches" (VI 47-9) he issues them with the following guidelines:

Nur nichts ausdenken, ausknobeln, meine  
Herrschaften, sondern der Natur auf ihren  
geheimnisvoll einfachen Spuren folgen!  
Zweckmäßigkeit=Natürlichkeit.

As we have seen, Altenberg shared Adolf Loos' aesthetic and moral objections to ornament. He disliked extravagance and waste and was equally critical of any attempt on the part of his contemporaries to transfigure nature and embellish the truth. In his writing he refers them instead to the example of the Japanese whose art demonstrates what he sees as the two most important artistic elements: economy and naturalness. "Hier sind Kunst und Natur eins geworden" he writes of Japanese art in "Ein Wiener" (WT). This theme is elaborated in "In München" (WT 305-9) which, as an elucidation of Altenberg's artistic programme, warrants closer scrutiny.

In this piece Altenberg begins by warning his compatriots of the dangers of living in the past and of their preoccupation with lifeless objects: he suggests that their absorption in books and artefacts has resulted in their estrangement from reality. And, he emphasises that modern psychoneuroses are the result of mankind's inability to appreciate and relate to nature. (In "In München" he describes how, as the individual becomes older, he is subject to certain existential pressures which alienate him from nature.) Moreover, because he considered the majority of his contemporaries incapable of self-help,

Altenberg charges the artist to mediate between mankind and nature, in order to restore the vital bond between them:

Sehet, der neue, der moderne Künstler will  
 Euch aber mit der Natur vereinigen und ihren  
 tiefen Prachten! Er will Eure Augen liebevoll  
 machen für den Glanz des Lebens selbst, nicht  
 für die Truggestalten der Phantasie, die  
 nicht mehr wirken! (WT 306)

Altenberg lives in the hope that there would come a time when everyone would be a "Künstlermensch" and as such capable of appreciating nature directly, at which time, he argues, art would be rendered superfluous. In the meantime, he takes some comfort from the natural forms of Japanese art and the latest developments in European art. He is encouraged by the examples of the "new art", the vases which recreate the delicate nuances of nature which he came across in the Bavarian capital. Indeed, such is the beauty of these natural artefacts that, Altenberg asserts, in contemplating them even the most uninspired individual will be spiritually enriched and elevated.

#### 5.4 The Nobility of the Soul

In his retrospective account of the European cultural climate at the turn of the century, Egon Friedell refers in particular to the new surge of interest in spiritual matters:

Wollte man das Ereignis, das sich soeben in  
 Europa vollzieht, mit einem Schlagwort bezeichnen,  
 so könnte man es die Entdeckung der Seele nennen. (19)

In Friedell's opinion, the discovery of the soul was not only a reaction against the rationalistic positivism of the age; it also represented an important milestone in the development of individual consciousness, whose origins he traces to mankind's prehistory. According to Friedell, the individual first became aware of his estrangement from the natural world in ancient times. This realisation was

compounded in a later age by man's discovery of his individuality, i.e. his sense of unique worth and independence from his fellow men. But, the joy which attended this discovery was short-lived, for, according to Friedell, as men perceived the irrational basis of much human behaviour and the complexity of the inner life, self-confidence gave way to self-doubt.

For Maurice Maeterlinck, however, the discovery of what Friedell terms "the irrationality of the soul" was a cause for rejoicing rather than consternation. For, he intimates, it is by immersing ourselves in our inner lives that we are able to overcome our sense of individuation and rediscover our oneness with all creation. Moreover, he regards his contemporaries' new sensitivity to the requirements of the soul as a welcome portent, which signals the dawning of a new spiritual age, and a new era in human relationships. In Le Trésor des Humbles he writes:

Un temps viendra peut-être, et bien des choses annoncent qu'il approche, un temps viendra peut-être où nos âmes s'apercevront sans l'intermédiaire de nos sens. Il est certain que le domaine de l'âme s'étend chaque jour d'avantage. (20)

While Maeterlinck's dramatisation of "la vie profonde" aroused much interest in fin de siècle Vienna, it is with his vision of a spiritual community that Peter Altenberg identifies most closely. In Pròdròmòs he proclaims their shared ambition:

Maeterlinck und Altenberg erwünschen es sich, dass die Seele des Menschen an Terrain gewinne. Sie sehen darin die Quelle der Weiter-Entwicklung. (P. 27)

As we have seen, Altenberg first outlined his social alternative, a community of the spiritually refined, in Wie ich es sehe. In addition, the work provides (in "Fromont") an interesting account of the new nobility of the soul which Altenberg hoped would one day come to replace the established

social order. In this piece, the appearance of the Austrian countess von Ebner-Eschenbach (at a performance of Alphonse Daudet's Fromont jeune et Risler âiné) prompts a brief interchange between an anonymous lady and a young man on the nature of nobility. While the lady's questioning of the countess's entitlement to noble rank implies the precarious position of this once venerated class (see above 4.2); the response of her companion, who maintains that nobility is determined by spiritual refinement, is notable for two reasons. In the first instance, it is an extension of Altenberg's egalitarianism and his belief that every man and woman may attain spiritual ennoblement. Secondly, it provides an interesting parallel to the "new nobility" envisaged by Nietzsche to supplant the mob and the despots (21). Indeed, it is the philosopher's revised meanings of the words "noble" and "nobility" which form the basis of Altenberg's redefinition of nobility in "Fromont". In Also sprach Zarathustra Nietzsche emphasises that nobility depends not on wealth but on the will to self-perfection, or transcendence:

Oh meine Brüder, ich weihe und weise euch zu einem neuen Adel: Ihr sollt mir Zeuger und Züchter werden und Säemänner der Zukunft, (...)  
 (...) wahrlich, nicht zu einem Adel, den ihr kaufen könntet gleich den Krämern und mit Krämer-Golde: denn wenig Werth hat Alles, was seinen Preis hat.

Nicht woher ihr kommt, macht euch fürderhin eure Ehre, sondern wohin ihr geht! Euer Wille und euer Fuss, der über euch selber hinaus will, - das macht eure neue Ehre. (22)

Altenberg's model society was clearly influenced both by Maeterlinck's vision of a spiritual community and Nietzsche's conception of a new nobility. Was der Tag mir zuträgt, a work which is less concerned with social problems than the presentation of Altenberg's social ideal, reveals the influence of both men, whom Max Messer lists along with Emerson and Wagner as Altenberg's spiritual forbears (23). In the programmatic pieces

"Warum Sie dieses Dichters Werke so sehr liebt" and "Selbstanzeige", Altenberg discloses his primary intention in this collection: to cultivate man's understanding of woman and especially of her emotional and spiritual needs. At the same time he reminds women of their duty to further the spiritual development of their menfolk. Put simply, Altenberg's object in writing Was der Tag mir zuträgt is to establish the relationship between the sexes on a new, spiritual, basis. He evidently believes that many social tensions, which he views as the product of individual frustration, might be relieved in this way. More than this, he regards the spiritual fulfilment of the individual and the "spiritualisation" of his relationships as an important step towards the realisation of his ideal spiritual community.

Significantly, Altenberg uses the initial study in Was der Tag mir zuträgt to present his prototype for his new nobility and to intimate the social ideal which re-emerges in a number of subsequent pieces. (As with Wie ich es sehe and "Ashantee", the underlying theme of this collection is the discrepancy between Altenberg's ideal world of the free, the noble and the natural, and the real world in which the individual is denaturalised, constrained and unfulfilled.) It should be emphasised that Altenberg uses the attribute "edel" in the title of the initial study in its Nietzschean sense, to denote Madrilene's spiritual refinement and exemplary significance. The study itself is devoted to an illustration of Madrilene's inner culture. This is revealed in her love of Beethoven and the arts, and in her relationships with Maria and the poet, both of which are based on spiritual kinship. As in his earlier works, Altenberg intends these idealised relationships to serve as a model for the spiritual community which he conceived in opposition to Habsburg society.

In "Aus dem Tagebuch der edlen Miss Madrilene" Altenberg is at pains to suggest the different levels of spiritual refinement attained by each character: each represents a different stage in the spiritual evolutionary process. Of the three, although Maria seems the least spiritually evolved, she nonetheless reveals her potential for greater growth or self-transcendence, to use a Nietzschean term. At the end of the piece she appears to have won fresh insight into her spiritual potential with the help of the poet and Madrilene. Though more spiritually evolved than her companion, Madrilene feels herself spiritually inferior to the poet. Altenberg uses images borrowed from Nietzsche to suggest her earthliness and the poet's otherworldliness.

Ich schreite - - - fliege Du!

Madrilene exclaims, and although she doubts her ability to live on the same spiritually elevated plane as the poet, she reveals her willingness to submit to his guidance and to participate in his vision of the millennium:

Ich will Dir nachschau'n, bis Du mir entschwunden -  
 - - - - und weiterschreiten! Und lauschen will  
 ich Dir, mein Freund, denn Du erzählst vielleicht  
 von Dingen, die sind und doch nicht sind und kommen  
 möchten in tausend Jahren! (WT 22)

In addition to this study, Was der Tag mir zuträgt contains several other exemplary pieces such as "Der Freund", "Diese ist sein", "Melusine" and "Walküre", all of which feature idealised relationships intended to point the way forwards, to the spiritual community of the future. This is also the principal function of the outstanding study entitled "Newsky Roussotine-Truppe" (WT 257-262).

The piece is skilfully constructed and describes, on its superficial level, a summer evening spent in Vienna; a walk through the Praterstraße as the shops close down for the night, and a performance of the Muscovite dancers, the Newsky Roussotine-Truppe, in the cabaret "Venedig in Wien". On its deeper level, the piece is concerned with

the discrepancy between the sordid reality of the city and the ideal world which is heralded by the dancers. In the first half of the piece, Altenberg juxtaposes the oppressive atmosphere of the city in summer with escapist dreams of natural landscapes teeming with rich insect life and perfumed by the blossom of lilac and linden trees; of sun and swans and regattas; of afternoons spent eating apricots, cherries and gooseberries; and cool summer evenings. But, real life conditions gradually reassert themselves and banish dreams of a life which combines natural pleasures with some of the benefits of civilisation. In the second half of the piece, however, Altenberg suggests how he is able to enjoy such a life vicariously, at the late night performance given by the Newsky Roussotine-Truppe:

"Venedig in Wien",  $\frac{1}{2}$  12 Uhr Nachts: Auftreten der Newsky Roussotine-Truppe. Einen Schritt nächst der Praterstrasse und dem an's Licht gebrachten Sommerelend. Wie wenn Du am Semmering erwachtest, während Du in rother Ziegelstaubluf schlafen gegangen bist! Newsky Roussotine-Truppe. Wie edle Fürstinnen tanzen sie!

The paragraphs which follow are given over to a celebration of the dancers' accomplishments: their movements and gestures, which capture the spirit of Russia and her people: and their songs, which Altenberg rates above those of his compatriots. Indeed, he laments that by comparison the latter lack both sophistication and depth. All in all the Russians seem to Altenberg the forerunners of a more evolved humanity. Moreover, they are portrayed in this piece as a liberating force which offers to release the urban dweller from his lack-lustre existence, and to assist in the founding of a new social order:

Newsky Roussotine-Truppe, wohin hingegen geleitest Du uns?! Vom elenden Stadtsommer der Praterstrasse in die Gefilde des Tyrannenreiches, in die Regionen kommender Kraft und Freiheit!

Von den "Schrammeln" zu "Newsky Roussotine" ist ein langer Weg. Wie von Marlitt zu Tolstoi. Wie eine Schlacht ist die Entwicklung der neuen Seele des Menschen. Alles wehrt sich. Viele fallen vor Ungewohntheiten, Erschöpfungen, im vorhinein. Viele fallen im feindlichen Kugelregen. Wenige erstürmen das neue Land, pflanzen die Fahne auf des neuen Denkens - - -.

Altenberg included in the second and subsequent editions of Was der Tag mir zuträgt a further, detailed portrait of his new nobility of the soul in "Paulina" (166-192)\*. Physically frail and spiritually refined, Paulina is recognisable as the soul-mate of Des Esseintes, the overrefined subject of Huysmans' novel À rebours (i.e. she corresponds to the decadent type popular in late nineteenth century literature). The main interest in this, Altenberg's only novella, is her inner development, and more specifically, the conflict between her inner needs and the demands of her marriage. This conflict between woman's spiritual requirements on the one hand, and, on the other, the mundane and physical demands made of her within marriage, is a dominant theme in Was der Tag mir zuträgt and is fundamental to such pieces as "Walküre" and "Der 'Fliegende Holländer'". The motto which Altenberg provides for "Paulina" not only adumbrates the novella's central theme, but also suggests that the future humanity, which is prefigured by Paulina, is threatened by the dominant masculine morality of the times:

- - - Doch eure Liebe liegt noch schwer wie  
Blei am Wege zum Reiche, das da kommen wird.  
(WT 166)

In Altenberg's opinion, the traditional masculine view of woman as a physical and biological being blocked the spiritual evolution of mankind. The quotation from

\* "Paulina" was first published in Ashantee (1897)

Horace, "odi profanum vulgus et arceo", which Altenberg took as the title for the final "chapter" of his novella, is intended as a further criticism of Paulina's dominant bourgeois partner; for his jealous cossetting of his wife prevents her attaining spiritual fulfilment and results in her death. He decides to send away the poet, Peter A., whose friendship with Paulina had encouraged those artistic inclinations which were given no scope within her marriage. Thus deprived of the soul-mate who holds the key to her self-fulfilment, Paulina goes into rapid physical decline. Her husband's realisation of her inner needs and the value of her friendship with Peter A. comes too late to save her.

In order to appreciate more fully Altenberg's somewhat surprising choice of the fragile Paulina as the precursor of his new humanity, it is important, first, to understand his attitude towards, and concept of, decadence. Montesquieu had been one of the first to employ the term "decadence" to describe moral and political decay in the late Antique world. Nietzsche borrowed it from him, but added to it the sense of biological decay. It is to Nietzsche, too, that we are indebted for what is perhaps the most perceptive and apposite description of decadent art. In his essay "Der Fall Wagner" he proposes that decadent literature is characterised by a loss of coherence or wholeness. It is, in a sense, an "anarchy of atoms" and an extension, in art, of the democratisation process which Nietzsche mistrusted. Although he employs the term "decadent" pejoratively in this polemic against his former idol, Nietzsche's fundamental attitude to decadence was in fact ambivalent. In the self-analytical work Ecce Homo he describes himself in the following manner:

Abgerechnet nämlich, daß ich ein Dekadent bin, bin ich auch dessen Gegenteil (24)

Whilst he combined the frail physical constitution and nervous sensibility of the archetypal literary decadent,

he longed for health and psychological wholeness. In his writing he himself employs the "style of decadence"; one of his most insightful commentators, Walter Kaufmann, suggests that the "maze" of aphorisms which comprises the philosopher's later works epitomises the atomised literature of the decadents (25). However, we must weigh against this the fact that Nietzsche opposed fragmentation (e.g. professional specialisation) and favoured a whole response to life (26). Moreover, in spite of their splintered appearance, Nietzsche's scattered insights do "add up to a philosophy" (27).

As Peter Wagner suggests, Altenberg construes the Nietzschean concept of decadence in much the same way as his younger contemporary, Thomas Mann (28). He too considers hypersensitivity and biological weakness the mark of the decadent, and regards the artist as a decadent type. Unlike Mann, however, Altenberg does not distance himself ironically from decadence, but tends rather to dwell on its positive dimension. He particularly values the psychological refinement of the decadents, whom he came to regard as instances of a more highly evolved humanity. In a short piece entitled "A rebours" (WS 173) he suggests that decadence is an important phase in the spiritual evolution of mankind:

Decadence?! Geburts-Wehen künftiger  
Entwicklungen.

In his later works Altenberg continues to evaluate decadence positively. In Neues Altes decadence is described as an "organic" stage in the development of mankind: "der organische Übergang zur Aszendenz" (NA 50). It is of interest that in this piece Altenberg remarks upon the necessity of reinforcing the decadent's weak physical constitution: the new humanity envisaged by him should be robust in body as well as spiritually refined. In Pròdrómós Altenberg argues that "Dekadenz der Nerven" will play a part in establishing a more humane society. And in

a serio-comic parable in this work he implies his approval of the unselfish attitude and vision of a decadent ape which sacrifices its own strength in the cause of the future evolution of the species (p 120-1).

It is interesting too that Altenberg's ambivalent attitude towards illness is explicable in terms of his conception of decadence. As we have seen, he often tends to see physical illness as a punishment for self-betrayal and/or the maltreatment of others. At other times, however, he looks upon illness favourably, as proof, almost, of the individual's capacity for spiritual growth (e.g. LA 344). In Märchen des Lebens he outlines the part which physical illness plays in the spiritual evolution of mankind. He suggests how in a physically weakened state human perception alters, and indicates that during illness the individual even becomes kinder and more just. In "Krankheit" (ML 176-7) he proposes that man comes closer to realising his ideal human potential when ill:

Sind wir bereits dem Himmel näher?!?  
 Fast scheint es so - - -.  
 Der Gesunde ist jedenfalls brutaler, unbedenklicher, ungerechter als der, der es fühlt, daß das Leben ein Tag, eine Stunde, eine Minute, eine Sekunde ist - - -!  
 Vor dem Sterben stehen, scheint ein radikales Erziehungsmittel zu sein!

Furthermore, like Nietzsche, Altenberg also valued illness as a stimulus to growth. In "Zyklus Krankheit" (ML 200f) he maintains that physical illness is a divine warning to mankind to reform its life style. And in "Winter" (LA 29-30) he comforts the spiritually sick with the thought that through their suffering they will prosper and grow as human beings.

### 5.5 Altenberg's evolutionary philosophy

In his examination of the didactic element in the works of Peter Altenberg, Geoffrey Broad sums up his evolutionism as a "philosophy which running parallel to

the emerging materialism and evolutionary theories of the late nineteenth century holds that man is in a continuous state of development, evolving towards a higher state of human perfection (29). Moreover, like Nietzsche's doctrine of the "Superman" it may be understood as a response to the deep cultural and spiritual crisis of his age. For it represents an attempt to arrest, and indeed reverse, the process of cultural decline and aims at the creation of a more humane social order. In addition, Altenberg conceived of his evolutionism as a positive alternative to modern day nihilism, i.e. as a means of giving spiritual meaning to mankind's earthly existence. In one piece written towards the end of his life, he describes how his evolutionism had gradually acquired the force of an "indestructable religion" in his life. And in several other pieces he attempts to convert his contemporaries to his "faith". In "Ärzte" (LA 214-9) he dogmatically asserts:

Der Glaube an die "Weiter-Entwicklung"  
jeglichen Seins in uns ist eigentlich  
die einzige wirkliche Religiosität.

Elsewhere in Mein Lebensabend he insists that only those who apply themselves rigourously to the task of self-improvement can be considered truly religious. (LA 207-8).

Altenberg's evolutionary theory was already well developed at the time of his writing Wie ich es sehe. Indeed, Altenberg claims in "Erinnerungen" (LA 1-9) that he had believed in mankind's capacity to evolve spiritually since adolescence. In his writing he introduces his evolutionary theory in "Sonntag" (WS), in which bourgeois stagnation is juxtaposed with his vision of a vibrant humanity ever conscious of the need to evolve and attain spiritual perfection. The theory is set out in greater detail in "Im Garten" (WS), where it now appears as a re-adaptation of Christian beliefs. In this piece Altenberg argues that Christianity is less expressive of transcendent belief than of mankind's innate capacity for self-betterment:

"Religion" ist nicht Etwas, was in die Menschen von aussen, von oben hereindringt. Das ist Heidenthum. Es ist Etwas, was aus dem Organismus "Menschheit", von innen, aus der Tiefe, herausdringt. Das ist Christenthum. Es ist die organische Blüthe des Menschheits-Gemüthes, des Menschheits-Geistes selbst. (WS 115).

It should perhaps be stressed that, within the context of Altenberg's evolutionism Christ does not personify divine perfection, but rather the spiritual potential of the human race. On the evolutionary scale intimated by Altenberg in "Im Garten" he occupies the highest rung which, it is emphasised, lesser beings must strive constantly to attain:

In Geburts-Wehen ringt die Menschheit nach Auferstehung vom Thier-Menschen zum Christus-Menschen. Das ist ihre heilige Bewegung!  
(WS 117)

It is interesting that, both in this piece and on a number of subsequent occasions, Altenberg is at pains to publicise the relation between Christian beliefs and his own evolutionism which, according to his contemporary critic Hans Georg Richter, was derived from Christ's teaching that the Kingdom of God lies in the hearts of men (30). Indeed, Altenberg's decision to include Richter's observations on his credo in Nachfechtung suggests not only that he was flattered by the critic's reference to him as "der ideale Christ", but that he wishes his readers to view his evolutionism similarly as a restatement of a creed which is often ignored in the modern age.

It is paradoxical that, although he delights in presenting himself as an anarchic, Promethean figure, Altenberg appears at times as suspicious of the reforms sought by social revolutionaries as he was of those instigated by the Imperial and Royal bureaucracy. Increasingly, in his later works, he argues that such "external" reforms are meaningless - unless they are the product of more evolved attitudes within society. In a piece entitled "Im August" (VI 14-16) he argues his

case for evolution as opposed to revolution and, having dismissed Danton, Marat and Robespierre (with whose aims he had once sympathised) as "dilettantische Idioten der Regeneration der Menschheit", he calls upon his fellow men to select leaders with inner culture:

Die "innerlichen Wohlerzogenen" wollen zur Herrschaft kommen über Euch.

To further "die Evolution der Menschheit in geistig-seelischer Beziehung" (P 18), this, Altenberg stresses, is his personal mission and the task of all committed artists. Moreover, he addresses himself to this task in each of his collections from Wie ich es sehe to the post-humously published works.

Altenberg's evolutionary idealism forms the substratum both of Wie ich es sehe and Was der Tag mir zuträgt where it is exemplified by such figures as Anita, the Frau Fabrikdirektor, Paulina, her spiritual cousin, and by the poet-figure. In each work a new order of the spiritually refined is posited as an alternative to existing society. In Pròdròmós too, a work which is full of practical advice on health, Altenberg frequently retraces his social ideality: a community of "innerliche Adels-Menschen", "End-Kultivierter" or "Lebens-Künstler". Furthermore, he emphasises that the evolution of the individual is the best means of accomplishing the regeneration of society. (In his later works Altenberg often interchanges and conflates the terms "evolution" and "regeneration". See, for example, Pròdròmós p 26.) As in his earlier collections, Altenberg continues to couch his evolutionism in religious terms in Pròdròmós. Here too he interprets mankind's image of God as a reflection of its innate, spiritual potential. When he asserts

In jedem Menschen ruht schlummernd die "Göttliche Seele". (P 88)

he is referring to the divine potential which he believes each man and woman possesses and has a duty to realise.

Although Pròdròmós is largely concerned with illustrating how mankind may further its evolution by attending to physical health, it does not neglect the important part played by idealism, faith and optimism in the framing and realisation of a utopian vision. In Altenberg's opinion, ideals and dreams all betoken mankind's desire and capacity for improvement. Whereas for Freud dreams hold the key to our innermost desires, Altenberg holds with the classical belief that they presage future developments. In Pròdròmós he writes: "Alle Träume sind antizipierte Entwicklungen" (P 84) and defines utopia as "noch nicht realisierte Dinge" (P 48). Faith and optimism, on the other hand, enable mankind to sustain and realise its ideals, so Altenberg thought. And although he himself succumbed increasingly in later life to moods of black despair, he tried hard to guard against scepticism because he considered that this only undermines the cogency and potency of human ideals, and retards progress.

In addition to attempting to justify his evolutionary philosophy in terms of Christian theology, Altenberg also enlists the support of Darwin's theory of organic evolution for his views. In Pròdròmós he employs the arguments of natural science to dispel the doubts of those who lack faith in mankind's capacity for spiritual evolution:

Es hätte für den Ichtiosaurus eine ungeheure Seelenkraft dazu gehört, in der Kreide- und Schachtelhalm-Periode unserer Erd-Entwicklung die heutige Entwicklung zu erträumen! (P 188-9)

In a further piece in Pròdròmós Altenberg suggests that, in the same way as the organic evolution of the species had required centuries, so too does its future spiritual evolution (P 112). Altenberg had first used naturalist arguments to elucidate his own evolutionary theory in the serio-comic "Familienleben" which appeared in the first edition of Wie ich es sehe.

This intriguing piece not only reflects the pervasive influence of nineteenth century evolutionism; it also reveals certain inconsistencies in Altenberg's own theory. The evolutionary theme is introduced almost casually during a gathering of the Königsberg family. Frau Königsberg (the mother figure) criticises her son-in-law, Ernst, in his absence and remarks thankfully that his son has none of his distasteful characteristics, but takes after her own daughter, Maria. Her comments elicit the following response from Königsberg (Altenberg's spokesman), who appears to adapt Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest to illustrate the principle of spiritual evolution:

Albert sagte: "Die edlere Rasse schlägt  
immer durch. Sonst gäbe es keinen Fortschritt!"  
(WS ed. 1 , p 111)

Ignoring the consternation which his words occasion, Königsberg goes on to expound what are essentially Altenberg's evolutionary views. He begins by paying lip-service to the theory of organic evolution and briefly outlines mankind's evolution from cave-dweller into a more sophisticated being. However, it quickly becomes apparent from Königsberg's comparison of Ernst with a caveman, that Altenberg is moulding nineteenth century evolutionism to the requirements of his theory of spiritual evolution, wherein the caveman stands for a raw, spiritually unevolved humanity. It is interesting too that, in marked contrast to his later assertions that the spiritual evolution of mankind spans generations, in this piece Altenberg points to the co-existence of men and women at varying levels of spiritual development.\* He suggests that in his contemporary society "Schachtelhalme", such as the spiritually immature Ernst, exist alongside "Licht-Alben". Altenberg uses this term

\* This is also intimated in the more idealistic pieces "Aus dem Tagebuch der edlen Miss Madrilene" and "Paulina".

in "Familienleben" to denote a more highly evolved humanity which is distinguished by a love of nature, truth and knowledge, of freedom and the naive, and of light, air and movement. In "Am Lande" (WS) too Altenberg points to the co-existence of higher and lower forms of humanity. Here the lowest form of humanity is represented by miners:

Das ist die erste Stufe, der Keller der  
Menschheit, Arbeit unter der Erde und  
wenig Seele - - -. (WS 96)

Practical businessmen represent an intermediate form, while the highest form is exemplified by those people who, because they are relieved of material cares, are at greater liberty to attend to their spiritual being. In "Am Lande" this group, from which, Altenberg believed, the new humanity would emerge, is epitomised by Anita:

Anita ist die dritte Stufe, keine Arbeit,  
über der Erde und überschussige Seele - - - (WS 96)

Clearly, Altenberg was deeply impressed by Darwin's arguments concerning the origin of the species, the survival of the fittest and the self-preservation instinct. Nonetheless, his attempt to substantiate his own evolutionary idealism in terms of Darwin's theories is faintly ironic. It is almost as if Altenberg was afraid to stray too far from the scientific ideology of bourgeois society. Moreover, any attempt to justify the metaphysical in terms of the physical, the supernatural in terms of the natural, is methodologically unsound and unconvincing. Finally, it is noteworthy that, in pointing out the parallels between his own and nineteenth century evolutionism, Altenberg was conscious that he ran the risk of inducing complacency among his contemporaries. He foresaw that by encouraging their belief in future evolution, he was furnishing them with an excuse to neglect their own spiritual development. And it was perhaps for this reason that he holds out the hope of "beschleunigte Entwicklungen zum Bessern" (VI 94) in his writing, and charges the individual to strive for

perfection within his own life time. In Pròdròmós, for example, he chastises those who try to realise their personal ideals through their children:

"Mein Söhnchen wird das erreichen, was mir versagt blieb" dachte der Feigling-Vater.  
 Sein eigener Sohn werden können, sich in sich selbst höher-organisieren zu seiner End-Entwicklung! Aber es von seinen Kindern erwarten, erhoffen?! Feigheit! (P80)

While his emphasis on self-transcendence has an unmistakably Nietzschean ring, Altenberg signifies in Pròdròmós that in exhorting the individual to strive for self-perfection he is in fact underwriting a fundamental Christian doctrine. Thus, on one occasion he asserts:

Niemand kann über sich selbst hinaus - - - schändlichstes feigstes un-christlichstes Wort, das je geprägt wurde. Ein wahres Judas-Wort der Menschheit! (P 101-2)

Although Altenberg tended increasingly to put his faith in the evolutionary potential of future generations, in his writing he continues to stress the importance of self-transcendence and to illustrate how this might be achieved. He believed that beauty (the physical perfection of a young girl or woman, the natural environment and natural artefacts, for example) can promote spiritual growth. His "Frauenkult" too was specifically designed to reveal how each sex might further the spiritual development of the other. In addition he considered that foresight, self-reliance, mental lucidity and "elasticity" are all indispensable to spiritual growth, while self-knowledge is, in his opinion, itself "eine Art von Höher-Entwicklung" (VI 272). He was adamant that if the individual is to evolve spiritually, he must first overcome his prejudices and learn to admire, rather than envy or despise, the qualities of others. In Märchen des Lebens he writes:

Heraustreten dürfen durch etwas Exzeptionelles, das sich berechtigt macht durch eine besondere Vollkommenheit, ist der Weg zu einer Weiterentwicklung der Menschheit überhaupt!  
(ML 85)

Altenberg believed firmly in the value of teaching by example and it was for this reason that he filled his writing with numerous exemplary figures and evolutionary paradigms, all of which are intended to demonstrate mankind's capacity for goodness and perfection, and to encourage his fellow beings to overcome their weaknesses. Although he wished to spare others such pain as he himself had endured, Altenberg realised that suffering and anguish may lead to self-betterment. In a piece entitled "Religion" (F 216-7) he offers this advice to his fellow sufferers:

Entziehet euch nicht, falsch und feig beraten, eurem Schmerze, der euch verklärt und erst zu "Menschen", zu "Dichtern" macht, zu "Gott-ähnlichen" Wesen!

Above all, however, Altenberg emphasised the primacy and value of a physiological approach to evolution; for, like Nietzsche and the ancient Greeks, he regarded physical health as the foundation of psychological health and integrity. In Vita Ipsa he writes, in a piece entitled "Stimmung":

... alles Geistige, Seelische ist nur eine notwendige Konsequenz der Gesamt-Maschinerie. (...) Wenn die Maschinerie prompt funktioniert, funktionieren auch Geist und Seele promptest! Oft nur allzupromptest. (VI 105)

And in the two related pieces "Der Atem" (VI 260) and "Gedicht" (BL 45), which are separated by approximately ten years, Altenberg dogmatically asserts that physical perfection is the basis of moral goodness. While in "Der Atem" he maintains that

Körperliche Vollkommenheit ist die Grundlage für alle anderen Vollkommenheiten. (VI 260)

in the earlier "Gedicht" he attempts to justify his preference for the physically beautiful woman in the following manner:

(...) die beste Seele kann eben nur im besten  
Leib gedeih'n!

In the following lines he develops this theme (which has disturbing proto-fascist undertones) and concludes that only the physically perfect are capable of spiritual growth:

Gott ähnlich werden ist jedem benommen,  
Der nicht die Glieder dazu mitbekommen!  
Nur vom vollendet schönen Menschen fordre  
ich Hirn und Herz - - -

Throughout his life Altenberg insisted that everyone should assume responsibility for his own physical health: in his opinion this would not only prove an effective measure against individual psychoneuroses; it would also benefit society as a whole. In "Mein Ehrgeiz" he states:

Jeder Bürger repräsentiert eine "Lebensmaschinerie".  
Je größer deren Spannkräfte (Lebensenergien) sind,  
durch Licht, Luft, Wasser, Schlaf in kühl-feuchter  
Luft bei geöffneten Fenstern, desto mehr leistet  
die Lebensmaschine im Menschen, was wieder der  
Stadt, dem Staate zugute kommt. (VI 54)

Similarly, in "Weshalb?!" (LA 15-17), Altenberg indicates how, by attending to his own health, the individual is in fact performing a valuable service to society. Of particular interest in this piece is Altenberg's use of metaphors drawn from the insect world. These offer fresh insight into the nature of his social ideality which appears to be a form of communism in which each contributes according to his ability:

Jeder trage, wie Ameisen und Bienen naturgemäß,  
Schicksals-gemäß, also genial-bescheiden, zum  
Gesamt-Baue bei! (LA 16)

Finally, reference should be made to an earlier piece entitled "Die Zukunft unserer Kultur" (BL 18-20) in which

Altenberg declares the physiological regeneration of society the precondition of its cultural renaissance:

Die Kulturmission kann nur mehr vom Diätetiker und Hygieniker ausgehen, jeder andere Weg wäre ein Weg in pfadloses Gestrüpp und in Abgründe, auf brechende Schneewächten und trügerische Schneehalden, die keinerlei Halt verleihen! (BL 19)

Peculiar and trivial though they may appear, the principles which Altenberg formulated concerning diet and hygiene should not be dismissed altogether as a mark of his eccentricity, or as utter nonsense. For Altenberg intended them seriously, as the basis of his programme for cultural regeneration. Perhaps, as Thomas Mann suggests:

Man hat in solchen Anfechtbarkeiten (. . .) am Ende nicht mehr als eine primitiv intellektuelle Zeichensprache für Wahres und Geistigeres zu sehen: die Semiotik seiner menschlichen Zukünftigkeit und Führerschaft. (31)

While Altenberg's early works (up to and including Pròdrómōs) express his faith in mankind's capacity to evolve spiritually, in the later works his evolutionism appears more and more as vain utopian dreaming. Already at the time of writing "Gedicht" (BL) his disillusionment with his fellow beings, especially women, caused him to doubt their capacity for growth. And in conclusion to this poem he wryly suggests that they regard themselves as "miBlungene Exemplare der Ideale erträumende Natur". This scepticism also informs those of his works which have their origin in the war years. A "fragmentary" piece in Fechsung reveals that Altenberg's faith in the spiritual evolution of mankind is conditional rather than absolute; for it depends on the individual's realising his commitment to himself and, by extension, to society. In the later, self-ironical piece "Ich" (VI 22-4) Altenberg refers to the attempt to "purify" humanity as a ridiculous Augean undertaking. By this time Altenberg

had uncovered a serious "flaw" in his thought. Formerly, he had believed that everyone has a soul and as such is capable of self-improvement. Gradually, however, in the face of atrocities committed daily in the name of war, and the monstrous behaviour of those whom he met socially, Altenberg was forced to concede the soullessness of western civilisation. In the profoundly pessimistic Vita Ipsa he writes, in a piece ostensibly concerned with woman's lack of idealism:

Seelen kann man erwecken, aus ihrem eigenen  
dummen Schlafe,  
aber wo nichts ist hat der Kaiser sogar sein  
Recht verloren! (VI 27)

In his opinion men as well as women lack the prerequisites for self-improvement, i.e. a soul and idealism. Moreover, he uses these deficiencies to explain the apparent ineffectiveness of his own writing, as, for example, in Nachfechtung where he asserts: "Von mir kann man alles profitieren, wenn man profitieren - - - kann!" (p 142)

Originally, Altenberg had believed in evolutionism as a viable means of realising a new social order. Towards the end of his life, however, his evolutionary beliefs were more in the nature of a psychological lifeline - albeit a tenuous one. Altenberg clung to his ideals as a drowning man clutches at straws; they were, despite his protestations, no longer a matter of faith or religion.

#### 5.6 Pròdròmós and the physiological approach to evolution.

Ich finde in seinem Buch verstreut eine ganze Abhandlung über die Kunst des Badens. Und eine gleiche über die Kunst des Schlafens, des Schlafens, um heiter und frei aufzuwachen. Und kleine Abhandlungen über Erhitzen und Erkalten, über schönen Teint, über gute und schlechte Ermüdung, über Essen, und zwar das Essen von Suppe, von Fischen und von Früchten, über Spiele: Tennis, Reifschlagen, Federball, über Frisuren, Kleider und Handarbeiten. Aber es sind keine trockenen Abhandlungen, sondern kleine Gedichte, wie jene antiken Bruchstücke der ersten Ärzte und Lehrer der Naturgeschichte, die trunken waren vor Naivetät und Freude über ihren Gegenstand. (32)

Hugo von Hofmannsthal's 1896 review of Wie ich es sehe reveals that most of the principles concerning diet and hygiene incorporated into Pròdrómós, the work Altenberg describes as "ein erster Versuch einer physiologischen Romantik" (P 110), were already present in his first work. In the initial "See-Ufer" series Altenberg presents movement as a means of reversing the process of cultural decay ("No Age"), and suggests the advantages of dress reform for women ("Sanct Wolfgang"). And in the key "Revolutionär" series he advertises the benefits of easily digestible meals, of bathing and sleep as well as properly airing and heating one's living quarters (see, for example, "Die Primitive").

According to his sister Marie, Altenberg first realised the importance of physical fitness and health care during his student days, at which time he also adhered strictly to a special diet of milk and raw eggs, for he considered this more nutritious than traditional Austrian fare (33). It is most likely, as Hofmannsthal intimates, that Altenberg's personal practices, and his later conviction that the physiological regeneration of society is the precondition of its cultural wholeness, were grounded on the beliefs of the Ancients. These were doubtless impressed upon him in the course of the classical training which he received at the "Akademisches Gymnasium" and during his brief study of medicine. It is most probable that, as a student of medicine, he was greatly influenced by the Greeks' revelation of the interdependency of diet, health and morality; and by their use of an aphoristic mode to communicate their observations and doctrines. Altenberg quickly adapted this medium, which he favoured because of its immediacy and concision, to disseminate his own views on diet and hygiene. In addition, Thoman Mann, an ardent admirer of his older Viennese contemporary, indicates a further source of Altenberg's dietetics - Nietzsche's Ecce Homo (34). Indeed, Nietzsche's assertion

to the effect that : "All prejudices come from the intestines"(35) and his belief that the degradation of his compatriots' spirit was a direct consequence of their unwholesome diet (36) may well have provided the justification for Altenberg's equation of immorality and vice with a bad digestion. Moreover, Altenberg evidently shared Nietzsche's conviction that the "salvation of humanity" is more a question of nutrition than theology (37).

It is important, too, that Altenberg's principles on health care be seen in their broader, European context. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, enlightened spirits and social reformers were becoming increasingly conscious of the need to take preventative measures against dirt and disease in overcrowded urban centres, and to instigate healthier personal and social practices. (In the Austrian capital where housing was at a premium and generally insanitary, and where even in 1890 water still had to be hauled to the suburbs in barrels (38), the need for more hygienic practices was, as Altenberg recognises, particularly acute.) In Britain, their efforts culminated in the mounting of an International Health Exhibition in London in 1884, and although this was not the first exhibition of its kind, it was by far the most comprehensive. Organised under the presidency of the Prince of Wales, it not only mirrored the new importance attached to health questions in government circles; it also represented an attempt to educate the populace on all matters relating to health and hygiene. For several decades members of the medical profession had been urging men and women to adopt healthier practices. In his highly influential Principles of Physiology applied to the preservation of health and to the development of physical education, Dr. Andrew Combe attached particular importance to maintaining the body at the correct temperature, the condition of the skin and to the heating and ventilation of rooms. His advice on these matters and on the benefits

of the daily bath and loose fitting clothing was echoed in countless widely read books concerned with health published in the second half of the nineteenth century (39).

In mid-nineteenth century Europe the question of dress reform aroused much interest, especially in middle class and artistic circles. In 1868 the Council of German Women spoke out against the tyranny and vagaries of fashion and recommended that dress design take beauty, health and convenience into account (40). In art, the voluminous dresses worn by the Pre-Raphaelites' models (see Rossetti's drawing of Elizabeth Siddal of 1854, or his photograph of Jane Morris of 1865) were expressive of a widespread desire for freedom and natural simplicity as well as the Brotherhood's rejection of strict, academic classicism. Dress reform was also an important consideration for Austrian artists, and most notably for members of the Viennese *Werkstätte* who readily acknowledged their debt to the English Arts and Crafts movement. In addition to designing interiors and a wide range of articles for household use, Kolo Moser created a silk "reform dress". Although in later life Altenberg sided with Adolf Loos against the *Werkstätte*, his early work reveals his admiration for their English counterparts. He was particularly attracted to the work of Burne-Jones: he extols the beauty of the painter's models, who corresponded closely to his own aesthetic ideal; and he considered their diaphanous shifts an exemplary form of dress. In his opinion, they not only granted the wearer freedom of movement, they also fulfilled his criterion that clothes should reveal rather than conceal the individual's true nature. In a short piece entitled "Mode-Journal" included in the fourth edition of Wie ich es sehe Altenberg sums up his ideal in dress design in the following manner:

Dein Gewand sei die Erweiterung und Fortsetzung  
deines Wesens über die Epidermis hinaus. Die letzte  
Hülle deiner Seele, die Dich enthüllt! Faltenreiches

weites Gewand ist das Symbol deiner Vergeistigung, deiner Immaterialisierung! Der Körper verschwindet und es bleibt weite reiche fliessende Bewegung. Weiche seidene Stoffe in tausend Plissés sind daher die wahre, "englische Mode". Je mehr Bewegung ein Gewand Dir gestattet, desto göttlicher ist es. Das schönste Gewand wären Flügel! (WS 169-70)

It is noteworthy that Altenberg's predilection for this form of clothing was based on spiritual as well as hygienic considerations; he believed that by stripping him- or herself of material encumbrances and wearing only that which was essential, the individual would experience a form of spiritual liberation. However, it also typifies the marked preference for Greek styles in late nineteenth century Europe. From the beginning of the 1870's until the end of the century writers drew heavily on the art and writing of the ancient Greeks in support of their aesthetic and sanitary theories. In her study of dress reform, Stella Mary Newton describes the fashion in the late 19th century for draped costumes resembling those worn by the Ancients, and for Grecian hair styles (41).

In Was der Tag mir zuträgt Altenberg devotes the whole study, "Gift" (p23-6) to the related questions of dress reform and health care. The piece tells how a young girl called Dodo removes the stand-up collar from her blouse after reading of the physical harm caused by wearing tight clothing in an English journal. The article also encourages her to buy dumb-bells with a view to developing her strength. Despite winning her mother over to her more radical views, Dodo is obliged finally to conform to socially acceptable standards of dress and behaviour. For Altenberg, as for many of his liberally minded contemporaries, the question of dress reform mirrored the conflict between women's desire for emancipation and society's expectations of them. Although Dodo is forced to comply with unhealthy conventional practices, "Gift" ends on an optimistic note; for Altenberg implies strongly that her realisation of the

importance of healthy practices will facilitate future reforms.

It is interesting to note, in concluding this brief discussion of hygiene and dress reform, that in advocating the wearing of animal and vegetable fibres next to the skin, Altenberg was in fact concurring with expert opinion. His recommendation of woollen wrist-warmers in Pròdrómòs would surely have found favour with the eminent German physician Dr. Jaeger, whose essays on health culture were well received both at home and abroad (42). It seems probable that Altenberg was himself familiar with Jaeger's theories that the wearing of wool, exhalations of the skin and "healing gymnastics" all enable the human body to dispose more readily of toxic matter.

In discussing the themes of German writing of the "Jahrhundertwende", Viktor Žmegač attempts to overturn secondary literature's negative ruling of Pròdrómòs in his insistence that this work is "fraglos der persönlichste wie auch rhetorisch eindringlichste österreichische Beitrag zu den Lebensreformen der Jahrhundertwende" (43). He comments briefly on the unusual format of the work (a curious mixture of personal confession, hymns in praise of life, recipés and advertisements) and dwells at greater length on those features which it shares with the reform literature of the period. Thus, he considers Altenberg's rapturous acclaim of fresh air and sunlight a further manifestation of the popular nature worship. Altenberg himself makes it clear that he intends Pròdrómòs as a comprehensive guide to healthier living, and as a means of establishing a new social order based on his ideals of freedom, nobility and naturalness. Writing of his choice of title (P 7), Altenberg emphasises that Pròdrómòs is a "sign-post", for it is chiefly concerned with describing how his contemporaries might attain spiritual perfection by conserving and developing their physical resources. This, in turn, could be achieved through the application of his dietary and hygienic principles:

Von der Betätigung der Gesetze der Diätetik und der Hygiene hängt ausschließlich die Evolution der Menschheit in geistig-seelischer Beziehung ab! (P 18)

In Altenberg's opinion the revival of civilisation depended on his contemporaries' ability to evolve a more economic life style. In Pròdrómós, as in his earlier works, he emphasises that this involves the eating of nutritious and easily digestible foods; exercising in the open air; adequate rest and sleep and toning the skin by means of massage and bathing. Although his approach in Pròdrómós is more detailed - Altenberg's subjects range from dental care to general hints on posture, from the benefits of massage and laxatives to the best brand of matches - the work is flawed by excessive repetition. Although stylistically it represents a new, and interesting, departure in Altenberg's work, it does not contribute greatly to his "philosophy". Even at the time of compiling this literary pot-pourri, Altenberg anticipated possible objections to his style and subject matter, each of which he attempts to defend. He justifies his use of repetition in Pròdrómós on the grounds that this is a most effective weapon against the hard-headedness of his contemporaries whom, he believed, had profited little from the more subtle approach to health care in his earlier works. He also anticipates the criticism that Pròdrómós falls outside the proper domain of poetry by insisting that the poet's foremost duty is to promote healthy attitudes.

Pròdrómós was intended not to placate, but to provoke: the very extremity of the views expressed therein was calculated as a challenge to bourgeois norms. Thus, his exaggerated demand for dress reform - "Man kann nicht wenig genug anhaben" (P 71) - was designed to stimulate discussion and encourage reform. Altenberg's disdain for all forms of head gear and undergarments may well have been considered an affront to bourgeois propriety. However, it also issued from his more serious conviction that the future humanity must be physically hardened: in

Nachfechtung he goes so far as to claim "Der nicht abgehärtete Mensch ist noch kein Mensch" (NF 303), a view probably inspired by Nietzsche's emphasis on physical strength in Also sprach Zarathustra.

Pròdrómós experienced a very mixed reaction from Altenberg's friends, fellow writers and the public. (According to Friedell, the work was a disappointment even to Altenberg's admirers (44).) In his autobiography Ich war begeistert, Stefan Großmann expresses his indebtedness to Altenberg, to whom, he believed, he owed his life. From Altenberg he learned the importance of sleep and thus was able to repair the damage done to his health by years deprived of proper sleep. Thomas Mann, on the other hand, was less than enthusiastic as far as Altenberg's programme for health was concerned. In his contribution to Friedell's Altenbergbuch he warns the poet's admirers against following the concentrated diet (consisting largely of soups and vegetable purées) prescribed by Altenberg:

In Befolgung seines Satzes: "Du bist gesund mit Geselchtem mit Kraut, - wie gesund wärest du erst bei lauter Puree, Haschee und Bouillon mit eingesprudeltem Eidotter!" - würde der menschliche Ernährungsapparat unfehlbar von den Zähnen bis zum Mastdarm an Inaktivitätsatrophie zugrunde gehen.(45)

Mann goes on to advise even greater caution when administering the laxatives recommended by the poet, for the doses he prescribes could have drastic consequences.

Peculiar though Altenberg's dietetics may appear, they are in fact an extension of the growing 19th century trend for macrobiotics. One of its most influential proponents was Richard Wagner who, in his essay "Religion und Kunst", advocated vegetarianism as a means of returning to human purity and dignity (46). Although Wagner was not inclined to take his vegetarianism too seriously, many of his acolytes did, including Gustav Mahler and Peter Altenberg. While Mahler is reputed to have ruined his digestion by strict adherence to vegetarianism as preached by Wagner,

Altenberg was deeply impressed by the Bayreuth Master's proposition concerning the relation of diet and the inner life. In Pròdrómós he suggests that diet determines human nature and moods; he believed that red meat inflames the passions and that spinach and gervais cheese foster a more even temperament. However, despite his obvious preference for a vegetarian diet supplemented by rice and dairy products, Altenberg does not proscribe the eating of meat, although he does emphasise that only the physically robust possess the necessary energy to digest this food stuff.

Above all, Altenberg urges his contemporaries to apply the principles of economics to their eating habits. He was of the opinion that they ate far more than their bodies actually required and that they expended their vital resources needlessly in the digestion of superfluous foods. In Pròdrómós he issues the reminder: "Es gibt auch eine Algebra der Verdauungstätigkeiten" (P 13), and strongly advises his contemporaries to eat only when they are truly hungry; to leave the table before they are replete and to apply the principle "le minimum d'effort et le maximum d'effet" (P 13-4) to their eating habits. He considered this an effective way of ensuring the vital energy essential for spiritual growth. An interesting piece included in Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens, which may have been the inspiration for Kafka's short story, "Ein Hungerkünstler" (1924), reveals Altenberg's special admiration for the Berlin hunger artist Fräulein Mrotek (who at the time of Altenberg's writing had gone without food for 16 days). Altenberg hails her as his "geistige Schwester" and as the embodiment of his dietary principles:

denn sie führt das aus, in geistigen Erkenntnissen, was ich seit dreiBig Jahren als die Errettung des Menschengeschlechtes erträumt habe - - die Befreiung von dem schrecklichen Wahne des Wertes von Nahrungsaufnahme !!! (BL 167)

In this piece Altenberg insists that eating should be considered not as pleasure, but as a "religious act", and concludes that all eating and drinking should be determined by necessity:

Nahrungsaufnahme ohne unentrinnbares Bedürfnis danach, ohne daß sozusagen jede Zelle im Körper um Nahrungszufuhr gleichsam weint, ist ein gemeines Verbrechen physiologischer Natur! Wie göttlich ist der Wassertrunk, wenn man ihn dringend benötigt; aber wie direkt widerstehend, wenn man ihn nicht nötig hat!

So sei es in allem, in allem! (BL 167)

Altenberg's insistence on eating and wearing only that which is absolutely necessary are each important facets of his "essentialist" creed. It was his belief that mankind could achieve spiritual fulfilment by casting off material encumbrances. Superfluous clothing, material possessions, excess weight; all of these constitute unnecessary ballast which prevent mankind from scaling greater spiritual heights. In Ecce Poeta Egon Friedell carefully differentiates between Altenberg's "essentialist" creed and more familiar forms of asceticism. The former, he maintains, reveals no trace of the worldly disdain affected by the latter. He suggests rather that Altenberg's "essentialism" is "eine Form der Lebensbejahung und ein Faktor der Lebenskunst" and treats it as a further example of the reductionist tendency (or "puritanical streak" as he prefers to call it) which characterises much modern art (47).

In the works which postdate Pròdròmós Altenberg continues to emphasise the value of the physiological approach to spiritual matters and regularly restates the dietary and hygienic principles detailed in Pròdròmós. Märchen des Lebens contains what he describes as a "Rückfall in Pròdròmós" (p 144), in which he renews his appeal to his fellow men to husband their vital resources well. In both Neues Altes and Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens Altenberg recapitulates his argument that health

care is central to cultural renewal. Included in the latter work are two lengthy pieces, "Sanatorium für Nervenranke" (BL 23-7) and "Der Junggeselle" (BL 46-50) in which Altenberg summarises the principle themes of Pròdròmós, and calls upon restaurateurs and café proprietors to offer a more wholesome bill of fare. In Semmering 1912 Altenberg neglects his health principles and concentrates instead on the beauty and therapeutic properties of his natural surroundings.

The outbreak of war in 1914, however, focused Altenberg's attention on the need for individual and social reform. "Non nascimur homines, sed crescimus" was one of the mottoes he chose for Fechsung, in which he emphasises the primacy of the physiological approach to evolution. Indeed, the prominent position accorded to the fragments grouped under the heading "Nachtrag zu Pròdròmós" - they constitute the first item - is a measure of Altenberg's belief that improved health care holds the key to cultural regeneration. A new note of urgency informs the subsequent collections, Nachfechsung, Vita Ipsa and the posthumously published works with their continued emphasis on the value of sleep and exercise, a light diet and laxatives. For Altenberg was painfully aware of the need to introduce a prophylactic regime. "Principiis obsta" is Altenberg's advice in these works: he strongly recommends "die Kur bevor man es braucht" and provides the frequent reminder that "Später ist zu spät". Even his last writings, poignant diary entries which record his overwhelming sense of failure and despair, reveal Altenberg clinging to the remnants of his health culture; reaffirming the ancient maxim "mens sana in corpore sano"; and vainly attempting to summon sufficient energy to extricate himself from the noose which he felt tight around his neck.

## 6. ASPECTS OF ALTENBERG'S LITERARY THEORY AND PRACTICE

### 6.1 Literary Theory and Models

#### 6.1.1. The Extract Theory

In Vienna, the turn of the century was a period of transition and of taking stock. The nature of society was changing dramatically - its historically determined form and values were considered by many to be no longer applicable to modern existence. In the arts, too, it was a period of uncertainty. Indeed, it is tempting to regard the stylistic pluralism of the "Jahrhundertwende" (i.e. the co-existence of such diverse literary movements as Naturalism and Neo-Romanticism) as a further manifestation, in the arts, of modern man's identity crisis. Similarly, the architectural diversity of the Ringstraße has been interpreted as an expression of the Viennese quest for self-identity. In addition, however, this stylistic pluralism is indicative of the Viennese culture-makers' search for an artistic form more appropriate (than traditional genres) to modern man's perception of life and his existential requirements. In his essay "Vom Stil" Hermann Bahr writes of his contemporaries' dissatisfaction with their stylistic inheritance:

Allgemein ist der Trieb auf eine Revolution des Stiles, auf den Bruch mit aller stilistischen Überlieferung und auf die Bildung neuer, unbekannter, dem veränderten Geschmacke gemäßer Momente. (1)

Because they no longer experienced reality as a totality, many writers abandoned traditional genres such as the novel, which relied upon sustained narrative action and a unified vision. Often, they favoured shorter, more malleable forms which enabled them to present their refracted image of reality. Interestingly, the Romantics had earlier resorted to the "fragment" in an attempt to suggest the partial nature of their vision and the disso-

lution of their world. In this century, it seems that many writers continue to be attracted to the fragment in preference to the diffuse and dense texture of the novel.

Peter Altenberg, whose writing spans a most complex period in social and literary history, reveals an exclusive interest in short literary forms. These range from the prose poem and "five minute drama" to informal essayistic pieces and pithy aphorisms. The literary theory which underpins these varied short forms, the "extract theory", was formulated by Altenberg in opposition to the material bias or wordiness of traditional genres. It is, in one sense, the literary counterpart of his "essentialism". In another sense, the theory represents the application of the reductionist principle, the hallmark of Viennese modernism, to literature. Indeed, Altenberg has been hailed as the originator and leading exponent of reductionist techniques. His example undoubtedly inspired Alban Berg, who visited the ailing poet in "Steinhof". Such was Berg's admiration for Altenberg's creative genius, that he not only attempted to emulate his style of writing, but also set his "Texte auf Ansichtskarten" to music.\*

Amongst the younger generation of culture-makers, Robert Musil, Franz Kafka and Rainer Maria Rilke all shared Berg's respect for Altenberg. In a lecture on the subject "Moderne Lyrik" (1898), Rilke refers to Altenberg's "discovery" of the short literary forms favoured by Alfred Guth, Julius Hart and Johannes Schlaf (2). Moreover, the early works of both Rilke and Kafka were seen by their contemporaries as exhibiting the influence of Altenberg. It

\* First performed in 1913, with Schoenberg conducting, Berg's Orchesterlieder Op. 4 provoked a hostile reaction from public and critics alike. A contemporary critic Richard Specht, wrote derisively of Berg's "aphoristische Kompositionsweise" which strove to incorporate "einen Kosmos in eine Nußschale". It seems possible that Berg was attempting to parallel Altenberg's reductionist technique in his musical settings for the "Texte".

was, however, Robert Musil who encapsulated Altenberg's significance for his generation. In a fragment of his unfinished novel, Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften, he asserts that the writing of Baudelaire, Dostoyevsky, Huysmans and Peter Altenberg determined the "Ton der Jugend" at the turn of the century (3). Evidence of Musil's own esteem for Altenberg is found in his diaries and in his adoption, in his prose miniatures, of the succinct literary mode pioneered by Altenberg.

In his "Selbstbiographie" (WT 5-12), Altenberg provides the following description of his extract theory:

Denn sind meine kleinen Sachen Dichtungen?!  
Keineswegs. Es sind Extrakte! Extrakte des  
Lebens. Das Leben der Seele und des zufälligen  
Tages, in 2-3 Seiten eingedampft, vom  
Überflüssigen befreit wie das Rind im Leibig-  
Tiegel! Dem Leser bleibe es überlassen, diese  
Extrakte aus eigenen Kräften wieder aufzulösen,  
in genießbare Bouillon zu verwandeln, aufkochen  
zu lassen im eigenen Geiste, mit einem Worte,  
sie dünnflüssig und verdaulich zu machen.  
(WT 6)

Altenberg's decision to condense his complex and diverse material within two or three pages was determined, to a large extent, by his understanding of the reading requirements of his contemporaries whom, he believed, had little time to spare for reading (see BL 164-5). Such were the demands of modern life that Austria's solidly middle class reading public had indeed been obliged to change their habits during the Gründerzeit. This fact is recorded by Friedrich Schögl whose own vignettes of Viennese life ("Wiener Skizzen") found favour with a broad section of society during the "take-off" period. In one such sketch, entitled "Beim Tabakkrämer", he answers the charge that his contemporaries read too little in the following manner:

Die Klage, dass noch zu keiner Zeit so wenig gelesen wurde als seit den letzten zwanzig und dreissig Jahren, ist eine stereotype und gerechtfertigte, insoferne sie von buchhändlerischer Seite ergeht und sich auf das Lesen von Büchern und überhaupt tiefern Studiums und ernsterer Qualität bezieht. Trotzdem wurde nie so viel gelesen, als eben seit den geschmähten zwanziger und dreissiger Jahren und ist das Lesebedürfniss ein intensives und allgemeines geworden, aber - man liest eben nur mehr Zeitungen und was in die Rubrik dieser typischen Eintagsfliegen rangirt . . . Nur der minimalste Bruchteil beschäftigt sich noch mit der Lektüre von Büchern, ansonst genügt der Menge die "Zeitung". (4)

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Austria's readership had gradually become accustomed to shorter literary forms. The change in their diet of reading has been attributed to the mass circulation of the press which also resulted in the establishment of the feuilleton as a popular literary genre. Thus, in choosing to write in a succinct feuilletonistic manner, Altenberg was clearly responding to consumer demand. Like his contemporary Bahr, Altenberg had a shrewd understanding of the mechanics of the market-economy and, more specifically, of the market value of literature, as he reveals in "Lucifer, Licht-bringer" (WT 319-22).

In addition to meeting the needs of the modern reader, Altenberg's extract theory also embodies a distinctly modern aesthetic which insists upon the collaborative function of the reader. In his "autobiography" Altenberg outlines the active role of the reader, calling upon him to "dilute" his literary extracts according to his own experience and strength. He stresses that, if the reader wishes to benefit from his extracts, he must process them first. Elsewhere Altenberg reinforces this view, emphasising the active participation of the reader both in the creation of art and in the aesthetic experience. In the "novella", "Paulina", one piece entitled "Auslegung" (WT 185-6) is devoted to an illustration of the reader's and/or audience's "co-authorship"

of a work of literature. In the piece, the poet-figure, Peter A. reads Stephan George's poem "Jahrestag" to Paulina who is deeply moved:

Paulina beugte sich ein wenig vor, umschloss  
mit ihren Händen ihre Kniee --.  
Dann sagte sie: Wie Sie es erklären! Man  
spürt das Traurige. Sie sind eigentlich der Dichter!"  
"Jawohl. Ich bin der Dichter ---!"  
"Oh --. Und was ist Stephan George?!"  
"Der Dichter!"  
"Und ich --?!"  
"Der Dichter! Wir alle Drei zusammen sind  
der Dichter!"

Both in his appreciation of - and insistence upon - the collaborative function of the reader, Altenberg was ahead of his time. For it is only comparatively recently that this aesthetic theory has gained wider currency: the so-called Constance school, centred around Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss, has provided a valuable contribution to our understanding of the process of aesthetic reception and, in particular, the active role of the reader. For a reception theorist such as Iser, reading is always a dynamic process; the reader is engaged in a variety of complex functions which have been summarised by Terry Eagleton in his introduction to literary theory:

Striving to construct a coherent sense from the text, the reader will select and organize its elements into consistent wholes, excluding some and foregrounding others, "concretizing" certain items in certain ways; he or she will try to hold different perspectives within the work together, or shift from perspective to perspective in order to build up an integrated "illusion". (5)

For the reception theorists "reading is not a straightforward linear movement, a merely cumulative affair", Eagleton informs us (6). For what we read often causes us to revise our initial speculations concerning the text and its meaning. The reader is engaged constantly in the work

of interpreting and re-interpreting, as well as in constructing a unified vision from the given variables, i.e. in resolving and supplementing the "indeterminacies" of the text.

In general, the reader performs these varied multiple functions instinctively and unquestioningly, as, for example, when reading a simple set of instructions or the "blurb" on a packet of cornflakes. However, in reading literature, especially modernist works, he or she is often made more aware of the complex operations involved in the reading process, and may also experience difficulties in supplying the missing connections in the work, or resolving its "indeterminacies". Indeed, it is very often the aim of the modern writer to cause his readers such difficulties as they might experience in the face of a complex and uncertain reality, a reality in which human motives remain obscured and meaning is at times impossible to fathom. This is also Altenberg's intention in multiplying the textual indeterminacies in his writing or applying to it the principle of "significant omission" outlined in his "autobiography". Here he asserts that:

Was man "weise verschweigt" ist künstlerischer  
als was man "geschwätzig ausspricht". (WT 6)

However, whilst this strategy allows Altenberg to mirror the intricacies and uncertainties of life in his art, it also enables him to "activate" the reader, i.e. to engage his cooperation in the process of artistic creation. In Ecce Poeta, Egon Friedell provides an interesting comment on this aspect of Altenberg's artistic strategy:

es genüge, einen Impuls, eine Anregung zu geben,  
und daB sich jeder schon selber den Rest an  
Exposition, Aufbau, Nachgeschichte aus eigenem  
Phantasiekapital dazudichten könne. (7)

Altenberg himself clearly considered the contribution of the reader just as, if not more valuable than that of the

writer. Moreover, as we shall see, he was convinced of the functional and subordinate status of the literary work or text.

Altenberg disapproved strongly of his contemporaries' tendency to sanctify art and of the elitist attitude displayed by many of his fellow artists. His declared intention was to harness art in the service of life and bring it into livelier contact with the everyday. In the programmatic piece "Kunst" (which sets forth the aims of the cultural magazine which he co-produced with Adolf Loos) he elucidates his artistic intentions:

Wir wollen dich aber nun lebendig machen, dich dem Leben des Alltags näherrücken, du blut-, du fleischloses Gespenst "Kunst"! In die Stunde wollen wir dich rücken, die erlebt wird, daB du befruchtend und bereichernd wirkest auf Alltagsmenschen! (WS ed 4 293)

Furthermore, Altenberg set about liberating art from the monopoly of an artistic elite in an attempt to make it the property of the masses. In his opinion, all men and women possess the germs of an artistic temperament. The artist differs only insofar as he is more conscious of nature and his fellow creatures (see WS 151-2 and P21-2). His role, Altenberg argues, is that of a mediator who should re-establish the bond between mankind and nature and enable others to realise their own artistic potential (i.e. their identity as "Künstler-Mensch"). In a further programmatic piece headed "Nachträgliche Vorrede zu meinem Buche 'Märchen des Lebens'" Altenberg predicts that there will come a day when all mankind will be spiritually refined, at which time the artist will no longer enjoy his privileged position:

Das Privilegium des Dichterherzens höre auf durch den Fortschritt der innern Kultur des allgemeinen Menschenherzens.

In addition, Altenberg argues that art too has a pragmatic, mediative function: it too should serve the interests of a more cultured humanity and re-unite man and nature (see NL 15). And he looks forward to the day when all art will be rendered superfluous (see F 250).

However, it is important to recognise the distinction which Altenberg himself makes between what Jan Mukarovsky conveniently terms the "material artefact" (i.e. the physical book, painting etc.) and the "aesthetic object" which exists only in the human interpretation of the artefact (8). In Altenberg's opinion, the former is expendable and much less significant than its intangible and elusive correlative, its aesthetic object, which exists in human hearts and minds. This is the underlying point of "Die Amsel" (LA 308-9) quoted here in its entirety:

Es gibt Leute, die an der Amsel im Gartengebüsche achtlos vorübergehen. Dann gibt es Leute, die sich an der Amsel und ihrem ewigen Regenwurmmord erfreuen. Dann gibt es Leute, die ganz ohne weitere böse Absicht das Leben und Treiben der Amsel ernst-sachlich genau beobachten, sie lernen zu, vergrößern den Kreis ihrer Erfahrungen. Dann gibt es Leute, die die Amsel beobachten, um darüber zu schreiben, meistens ein kleines Gedicht. Dann gibt es Leute, die sich an dem Gehaben der Amsel erfreuen, sie interessiert beobachten, ja fast gerührt, und dennoch nicht darüber schreiben. Aber diese Leute sind heutzutage selten, gleich ich gehöre, wie Sie sehen, nicht dazu.

Although a discerning critic, Altenberg usually refrains from evaluating literature according to traditional standards. (He considers that lesser known and second rate works might prove just as valuable as recognised classics.) Moreover, he emphasises that an imaginative recipe or original dress design are just as deserving of the designation "art" as a painting or work of literature. This is indicated in "Keim einer Tragödie" (WS 149-52) and "Ereignis des dritten Tages" (WT182-3) in which an orange soufflé and a dress incorporating chrysanthemums of golden silk are each described as "poetry" (see also P 88-9). In each case the material artefact is the vehicle of an

artistic temperament. In addition to highlighting the need for a broader definition of art, these pieces are intended to demonstrate that art is not the prerogative of a select few.

Altenberg's elucidation of his aesthetic theory in his "autobiography" represented an attempt to clear up the confusion surrounding his writing. In Ecce Poeta, Friedell recalls the contemporary reception of Altenberg's first published works which appeared in the short-lived journal Liebelei. In particular he notes the bitterness which these seemingly "confused and hybrid" products occasioned in some quarters:

Am meisten aber erbitterte eine Anzahl von konfusen Skizzen, mit denen ein Autor debütierte, der sich ebenso unverständlich wie albern erwies. (9)

Even as perceptive and urbane a reader as Hugo von Hofmannsthal was at a loss to describe Altenberg's literary style, as is evidenced in his review of Wie ich es sehe:

Das ist ein neues Buch, eine Art von Buch. Ich weiß nicht recht von welcher Art dieses Buch ist. (10)

Thus does Hofmannsthal seek to classify a work which appeared to him to have little in common with traditional literary genres and which he was inclined to dismiss privately (11). (He settles finally on the designation "kleine Geschichten" for its contents.) Hofmannsthal clearly failed to perceive the aesthetic programme embedded in Wie ich es sehe and illuminated briefly in such pieces as "Sonntag" (WS 102-7) and "Der Besuch" (WS 107-13). Although dimly aware of Altenberg's conception of the interrelationship of art and life, Hofmannsthal offers no comment either on the extra-aesthetic function of art or on the principle of formal economy advanced by Altenberg in these pieces. Altenberg's decision to use a passage from J.K. Huysman's novel, A rebours, setting out the salient features of the prose poem, as a preface for

the second edition, suggests both that he was conscious of the need to expand upon the artistic programme offered in the first edition, and that he wished to reinforce the formal qualities of his writing. We shall return shortly to a more detailed examination of the similarities between Altenberg's literary practice and the prose poem. For the present may it suffice to point to two of the main features identified by Huysmans in the prose poem which Altenberg subsequently incorporated into his extract theory: its radical concision on the one hand and, on the other, its rich linguistic ambiguity which should "open up such wide vistas that the reader could muse on its meaning, at once precise and multiple, for weeks on end". It is Altenberg's intention too that his works should provide the reader with abundant food for thought.

If Altenberg's extract theory is indebted to Huysmans' description of the prose poem, so too does it bear a striking and uncanny resemblance to an account given by Friedrich Nietzsche of his own literary and philosophical practice. The following passage was originally intended for inclusion in Ecce Homo (in the section entitled "Warum ich so gute Bücher schreibe"), but was ultimately omitted from the published version. It is doubtful, therefore, whether Altenberg had access to this account of a strategy which his own extract theory appears to paraphrase:

Meine Schriften machen Mühe, - das ist hoffentlich kein Einwand gegen sie? - Man muss, um die abgekürzteste Sprache zu verstehn, die je ein Philosoph gesprochen hat, - noch dazu die formelärmste, die lebendste, die am meisten künstlerische - sich der umgekehrten Procedur bedienen als sonst philosophische Literatur nöthig macht. Diese muss man condensiren, man verdirbt sich sonst den Magen, - mich muss man verdünnen, flüssig machen, anwässern: man verdirbt sich sonst den Magen. - Das Schweigen ist bei mir ebenso Instinkt als bei den Herrn Philosophen das Schwätzen. Ich bin kurz:

meine Leser selber müssen lang werden, umfänglich werden, um Alles herauf und zusammen zu holen, was von mir gedacht, und von mir hinter gedacht worden ist.

(12)

Even if Altenberg was unfamiliar with this particular passage, Nietzsche's language scepticism and positive evaluation of silence was known to him, from Also sprach Zarathustra for example. It is also certain that Altenberg was familiar with Nietzsche's practice of using bodily functions as an analogy for mental and psychological processes. In particular, Nietzsche's metaphorical use of the digestive system - it is central in his philosophy - made a deep impression on Altenberg. He too considers a good digestion fundamental to physical and psychological well being. Moreover, like Nietzsche, he emphasises the importance of "digesting" that which one reads (see "Selbstbiographie" and F 272).

Altenberg's aesthetic theory and practice parallels that of Nietzsche in many important areas. As I have indicated, Altenberg's conception of the extra-aesthetic function of art as an instrument for socio-cultural renewal and a source of metaphysical consolation owes much to Nietzsche. It is also probable that Altenberg's determination to "activate" the reader, thereby inciting him to a critical analysis of self and society, stemmed from his understanding of Nietzschean practice. Increasingly, in his later works, he has recourse to the literary mode favoured by Nietzsche as a means of challenging existing preconceptions and social norms: the aphorism. (This literary form is especially dependent for its success on the active participation of the reader.) He came to share Nietzsche's mistrust of systems and system-building, a practice which both men believed results in a distorted image of reality (see P 127). Moreover, like Nietzsche, he stresses that his writing and insights

are not the product of detached, reasoned deduction, but that they represent the fruits of personal experience. In Nachfechtung he writes:

Richtige Aphorismen<sup>s</sup> kommen nicht aus dem Gehirne,  
sondern aus dem Leben! (NF 72)

Neither Altenberg nor his philosophical mentor, Nietzsche, believed in the autonomous status of art: rather, each was convinced of its vital significance and life-enhancing potential.

#### 6.1.2 Altenberg's literary models: the sketch and prose poem

The confusion occasioned by the publication of Altenberg's first literary works was a confusion as to form. His short, elliptical pieces confounded the literary expectations of his contemporaries and resisted easy classification. However, Altenberg was in fact drawing on a number of pre-existing literary forms, amongst these the sketch and prose poem. Indeed, his initial choice of the term "sketch" for his short pieces does suggest their relation to the "Wiener Skizze", the feuilletonistic form perfected by Ferdinand Kürnberger, Friedrich Schlögl and Daniel Spitzer. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century the weekly offerings of these men had become something of a Viennese institution - that the feuilleton comprised part of traditional Sunday fare is noted by Altenberg in "Sonntag" (WS 105). In the words of Leigh Bailey:

their mixture of unserious form and often serious content appealed to the Viennese taste for indirect and intricate modes of expression, itself to a large extent a result of those decades of censorship which had taught the Viennese to look for serious comments in unlikely places. (13)

The popular success of these writers was due largely to their deft and often humorous treatment of topical themes as well as to the local flavour of their pieces. Using the

medium of the feuilleton they present a highly personal and satirical view of Viennese life. Schlögl takes particular delight in reproducing scenes of everyday life in suburban Vienna and in portraying familiar Viennese types. While Schlögl's eye lingers on the surface of Viennese public life, Kürnberger tends to delve deeper in an attempt to lay bare the very foundations of life in the Imperial capital. Thus, both in their choice and treatment of themes, each of these Viennese feuilletonists paved the way for Peter Altenberg.

It is clear that Altenberg's understanding of the literary sketch was due not only to his familiarity with the indigenous Wiener Skizze, but also to an awareness of the practices of Naturalist writers. The Naturalists were especially attracted to the sketch (which differs both from the novella and the short story in that it lacks, or has only the minimum of, plot), seeing it as a suitable medium for describing scenes from everyday life and recording the disparate and fortuitous nature of modern existence (14). In his 1897 review of a new collection of literary sketches by Alfred Guth, the critic Paul Wertheimer identifies Charles Dickens as the father of this relatively new literary form which, he maintains, had attained a new level of sophistication and refinement with Chekhov, Mendès, Richepin and Altenberg (15). Altenberg himself may well have concurred with this evaluation of Dickens, for whom he openly professed his admiration. (In Mein Lebensabend he reveals a special liking for Boz-Dickens)

When first published in the 1830's, Sketches by Boz startled the English reading public for they reflected a completely new outlook, that of the man-in-the-street. Their style, too, contains much that was innovatory then. The sketches depend in part upon the stock-in-trade of journalism and encompass a wealth of documentary material. They provide a document of social change: the horrors of poverty and disease; an understanding of crime; an exposé of the prosperous vulgarity of the rising middle classes. A further significant innovation which may well have

impressed Altenberg is Dickens' admixture of fact and fantasy. For Boz is no objective reporter, but tends rather to invest facts with his own reaction to them. Finally, reference should be made to the varied tone of the sketches (which range from comic exuberance to the melodramatic and the ironic), to Dickens' interest in social types and to his tendency to group thematically related pieces. For in each of these practices Dickens appears as Altenberg's forebear.

In addition to adapting the literary sketch to his purposes, Altenberg also modelled much of his work on a further relatively new literary genre, the prose poem. The development of this literary hybrid, like that of the sketch, runs parallel to the process of urban expansion in nineteenth century Europe. Suzanne Bernard, author of Le poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours, regards the prose poem as the product of a search for a new literary medium capable of rendering the complex experience of the urban dweller. Furthermore, she argues that it was born of a revolt against the formal tyranny which obliged poets to turn their material into ready-made literary moulds, thus inhibiting self-expression. This anarchic impulse, which Bernard perceives at the origin of all prose poems, is not only responsible for their polymorphic nature, but also explains our difficulties in defining this "bastard" genre. Indeed, Bernard cautions against any a priori definitions. However, she does isolate certain features common to the prose poems of such distinctive writers as Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé and Verlaine.

According to Bernard, the prose poem is concise and self-contained. In order to be a poem it must involve conscious organisation and exist as an "organic unity". For, she insists, no matter how complex or diverse it may be, if it has not the quality of a whole, the prose poem ceases to be a poem. A further condition of the prose poem is its brevity - in Bernard's opinion it should avoid moral digressions. Moreover, she considers that brevity and

economy of means contribute greatly to the unity and density of the prose poem. In this respect it is of interest that in the passage with which Altenberg chose to preface the second edition of Wie ich es sehe, Huysmans too emphasises that a prose poem should be a concise and unified whole and should dispense with "les longueurs analytiques et les superfétations descriptives". Finally, Bernard identifies a "dual principle", which is at once anarchic and creative, at the heart of all prose poems. She cites the prose poem's inherent rejection of traditional rules governing diction and prosody, metre and rhyme as evidence of the "anarchic principle" which gave it birth. However, this anarchic impulse is held in check by a creative and constructive principle which acknowledges the need to establish order and form. For, Bernard maintains, the prose poem discovers, in the act of transgressing traditional literary laws, the need to establish an alternative constructive strategy. If it is to exist as a viable work of art, it is obliged to discover its own laws. In conclusion, it is worth noting Bernard's definition of the dual principle and her deliberate equation of the anarchic principle with the use of prose:

ce double principe du poème en prose: tendance destructrice et anarchique, correspondant à l'emploi de la prose; tendance constructrice et artistique, correspondant à l'organisation en poème. (16)

Bernard sees the prose poet's use of prose as a tacit refusal to be bound by the laws of the literary establishment, and as an act of self-liberation. His decision to organise his prose as poem, on the other hand, evidences an awareness of the dangers of utter lawlessness and acknowledges that in order to create, one must define, shape and form.

Rebellious by nature and dissatisfied with the forms of his society, Altenberg was deeply attracted to the prose poem. This versatile genre not only met his need for an

economical literary mode; it also offered him wide scope for individual expression. It enabled him to repudiate in purely formal terms the tastes - and indeed the whole ethos - of bourgeois society. In addition, his use of impressionistic elements in the early prose poems (e.g. attention to superficial detail, use of delicate nuances, emphasis on the primacy of sense impressions) offered a further challenge to his society and the rationalistic positivism upon which it was based. However, in Altenberg's early writings the anarchic impulse is contained, as it is in French prose poems, by a powerful shaping principle. For, just as Altenberg was desirous of providing a vital and cohesive alternative to his contemporary society, so too was he concerned to give order and unity to his writing. - Indeed, it is tempting to see his conscious striving for artistic form as evidence of his desire to reverse the process of social disintegration. - As we shall see, the impressionistic elements in the early work are subordinated to a tightly structured form based on juxtaposition (antithesis and parallelism) and repetition. Altenberg also uses poetic rhythms and devices such as alliteration, assonance and sibilance as a means of achieving formal unity. The leitmotif, so skilfully employed by Altenberg's "Dichter-Gott", Richard Wagner, is also used in his writing to this end.

It will be seen from the above that Altenberg's early works operate according to the dual principle which, Bernard argues, is fundamental to all prose poetry. As in the case of his French counterparts, Altenberg's use of a shaping principle and poetic devices may be said to correspond to the "creative-constructive" principle in his writing. Its opposite, the anarchic impulse, finds expression in his use of an impressionistic prose which suppresses causal connections. Thus, the medium of the prose poem is ideally suited to Altenberg's social revolutionary purpose, providing a coherent framework both for his social criticism and his blueprint for a new

society. In later life Altenberg was attracted increasingly to the aphorism, a medium which appears equally well adapted to his revolutionary aims; for the aphorism also enables the writer to question existing values and at the same time propose new ones.

### 6.1.3 Altenberg's eclecticism

Although his writing is stylistically innovative, Altenberg partook nonetheless of the characteristic eclecticism of the age. His novel forms are literary compounds which are made up of the elements of existing genres and combine a variety of literary modes, e.g. narrative, dramatic and lyrical. Moreover, Altenberg drew heavily on a wide range of past and present literary movements. At times his writing reflects Baroque themes: an awareness of the omnipresence of death and of the Baroque vision of the world as a stage. In addition, Altenberg's love of striking contrast and his early preference for literary ornament and arabesque are also prefigured in Baroque art. It is possible, too, to detect in Altenberg's writing the still-dominant spirit of the Enlightenment which he had imbibed as a pupil of the "Akademisches Gymnasium". That same spirit also informs the work of Kraus, Weininger, Freud and Schnitzler. Freud's motto, "Where id was, there shall ego go", might also serve to summarise Altenberg's self-appointed task of penetrating the surface of Viennese life and probing the human psyche. Altenberg's emphasis, in his early writing, on formal cohesion and harmony recalls the Enlightenment's love of order and balance. In his later works, his insistence on reason and his avowed preference for the lucid uncluttered statement underlines his commitment to Enlightenment values.

Altenberg's sense of his historical legacy is counter-balanced by a receptiveness to the very latest literary trends. Peter Wagner perceives parallels between Altenberg's literary practice and that of Jugendstil artists (17). In addition, Altenberg's writing evidences

his familiarity with the works of his French, German, Belgian and Scandinavian contemporaries. As Marianne Kesting observes, Altenberg sought to emulate the example of the French Symbolists (18). He too aspired to a total art form, a synthesis of literature, music and the fine arts. In the early pieces "Quartett-Soirée (WS), "Hausball" (WT) and "Die Zuckerfabrik" (WS), for example, musical chords and melodies are evoked to suggest human emotions and responses to life. At other times, Altenberg's writing displays pictorial qualities. His recreation in "Am Lande" (WS) of his impressions of a lake at different times and subject to different atmospheric conditions is particularly reminiscent of Monet. Although Kesting concentrates on a comparison of Altenberg with Verlaine (whose aesthetic programme, she believes, is fulfilled in the writing of the Viennese), she might also have examined the importance of the Belgian Symbolist, Maeterlinck, or that of Zola's erst-while disciple, Huysmans, for Altenberg. Maeterlinck's static dramas of the inner life clearly provided the model for Altenberg's five minute dramas, while his works "Le Trésor des Humbles" and "La Vie des Abeilles" made a lasting impression on Altenberg's thought. Huysmans' writing, on the other hand, not only supplied Altenberg, but also the "Jung Wien" movement centred around Bahr, with a literary manifesto. Huysmans' appeal, in his novel Là-bas (1891), for a new literature which would employ the tools of Naturalism in rendering the complexities of the inner life (i.e. "un naturalisme spiritualiste") was answered by both Bahr and Altenberg.

In the preceding sections I have endeavoured to portray Altenberg as a writer who allied himself with the Naturalist tradition. His review of Hauptmann's Fuhrmann Henschel may serve to reinforce his high regard for the Naturalists' work as well as his solidarity with the Naturalist school. The review makes it plain that Altenberg regarded Hauptmann's play as a triumph of the

Naturalist principles which, he insists elsewhere, form the backbone of his own literary productions:

Die heilige Ur-Natur gewinnt wieder ihre heilige Macht über die eigenwilligen Künstler, welche nun fühlen, daß sie nur Diener Gottes, Diener der All-Natur, tönende Aussprecher derselben zu sein haben, keine eigenmächtigen selbstherrlichen Wesen! Das Leben selbst ist das Geniale in diesem Stücke, das Leben, welches endlich, endlich unbehindert, ungefälscht vom Dichter, welcher will, sich selbst willenlos ausspricht! Diese Dichtung "Leben", dargestellt von diesem einzigen wirklich Lebendigen: Dichter! (19)

Altenberg disapproved of the artificial preferences and solipsistic tendency of much modern art. (The individual viewpoint, he maintains, is viable in art only if it has universal application.) His personal preference for the natural and vital caused him to identify rather with the Naturalists. As we have seen, he was inspired by their revolutionary fervour and subscribed to their view of the mimetic function of art. In addition, Altenberg adopted many of the practices of the Naturalists' literary successors, the Impressionists. In his writing he too suggests the primacy of sense impressions and attempts to convey the ephemeral and haphazard nature of existence. However, Altenberg lacked the Impressionists' impartiality and indifference to social issues.

Finally, reference should be made to Altenberg's connections with the Expressionist movement. In many ways Altenberg might be considered their precursor; for in his writing he anticipates the Expressionists' repudiation of social norms as well as their Messianic zeal and utopian dreams. Moreover, his use of social types and his "telegram style" were taken over by his younger contemporaries. In his contribution to Friedell's Altenbergbuch, an admiring Georg Kaiser writes of Altenberg's importance for himself and his fellow Expressionists. In his distinctive elliptical style, Kaiser praises Altenberg's powers of social and psychological observation and pin-

points his paradigmatic significance for his generation: "Wie ich es sehe" wird gültige Formel für Schöpfertum." (20). Kurt Pinthus evidently shared Kaiser's admiration for Altenberg, whom he cites in the almanac "Vom jüngsten Tag" as a forerunner of the Expressionists (21). Amongst the Expressionists Altenberg apparently enjoyed a certain prestige: they embraced him as a soul-mate and eagerly accepted a variety of his pieces for publication in their own literary organs, notably Der Sturm, Die Aktion, Der Brenner and Der Friede (22).

#### 6.1.4 Form versus Formlessness

In the annals of literary history Altenberg is portrayed, almost invariably, as the quintessential impressionist writer whose works lack cohesion, form and direction. This view was one which Altenberg himself and those closest to him helped to establish. In a letter to Arthur Schnitzler of 1894 Altenberg underlines the spontaneous, improvisatory nature of his writing:

..... Wie schreibe ich denn?!  
 Ganz frei, ganz ohne Bedenken. Nie weiß ich  
 mein Thema vorher, nie denke ich nach. Ich nehme  
 Papier und schreibe. Sogar den Titel schreibe  
 ich so hin und hoffe, es wird sich schon etwas  
 machen, was mit dem Titel in Zusammenhang steht.  
 (23)

In the following paragraphs he asserts that writing is for him an organic process, a means of discharging powerful emotions, and emphasises his indifference to formal considerations. Altenberg's account of his haphazard literary practice is corroborated by Helga Malmberg who maintains in Widerhall des Herzens that he "never reread, improved or corrected" his work (24). Moreover, both Friedell and Kraus highlight Altenberg's utter disregard for tried artistic means. Indeed, Kraus was struck by what he terms "die elementare Absichtslosigkeit" of Altenberg's work (25). Their evaluations have had a considerable influence on subsequent appraisals of Altenberg's work, which tend

to concentrate on its formless aspect and to overlook Altenberg's obvious concern for cohesion and balance.

Despite his protestations, Altenberg clearly considered the form and structure of his writing important, as is evidenced by "Der Besuch" (WS 112) as well as his letters to Kraus and his publisher, Samuel Fischer. A letter to Kraus of 19.1.1896, which was penned during a bout of first-night nerves prior to the publication of Wie ich es sehe, reveals his concern for the final printed format of this work. Through Kraus he appeals to his publisher to pay particular attention to his use of quotation marks and, even more importantly, to the spatial requirements of his pieces (or "Zeilenfreiheit"). For, he maintains:

Meine so winzigen Sachen vertragen keine  
Entstellung und brauchen Raum und Pausen. (26)

Letters to Samuel Fischer written during 1897 relating to the forthcoming edition of Ashantee offer further proof of the importance which Altenberg attached to formal considerations and exactitude. He not only gave careful consideration to the choice of title, the positioning of a dedication and the spacing of individual pieces; he also insisted that his publisher accept his judgement on formal matters as final (27).

As his mental health declined, Altenberg appears to have been less attentive to form and less inclined to revise and correct his work in the manner which, his letters suggest, he had been accustomed to do in the early years of his career. He tended instead to trust to the judgement of his publisher and Karl Kraus, to whom the task fell of editing and correcting Semmering 1912. However, despite his public repudiation of form in later life - he considered it an obstacle to meaning and truth - many of his pieces betray a desire for structural cohesion and integrity, as I hope to demonstrate in the subsequent sections. Moreover, Altenberg's varied and kaleidoscopic

writing might be said to add up to a heterogeneous whole which is unified thematically and in a technical sense.

## 6.2 The Format of the Early Works

### 6.2.1 Wie ich es sehe

Altenberg assembled the contents of Wie ich es sehe during the years 1894-96. The first edition (1896) which comprises 246 sides has no list of contents and is prefaced with a motto from Alfred de Musset:

Mon verre n'est pas grand - -  
- - Mais je bois dans mon verre. (28)

The first item entitled "See-Ufer" is designated as a "Skizzen-Reihe" and comprises twenty-two titles. This is succeeded by the individual piece, "Die Zuckerfabrik". Then follows a short cycle consisting of three thematically related pieces under the general title "Don Juan" which explore the relationship of the artist figure, Albert Königsberg, with womankind. The relationship between the sexes also constitutes one of the main themes of the two subsequent series which are united under the heading "Zwei, die nicht zusammenkamen". The former, "Frau Bankdirektor von H", consists of ten pieces, two of which ("Das Kindermädchen" and "Das Stubenmädchen") are collectively entitled "Die Dienstboten". The latter series, "Revolutionär", comprises sixteen titles, one of which, namely "Der Revolutionär dichtet", is made up of several short pieces and aphorisms. The final piece in the series, "Zwei Fremde", which brings together the revolutionary and Frau Bankdirektor, is subdivided into two sections. (The second is entitled "Besuch".) The "Revolutionär" series is succeeded in the first edition of Wie ich es sehe by sixteen individual pieces, ending with "Das Leiden". It is noteworthy that each piece is supplied with its own title page - perhaps Altenberg wished to emphasise the autonomy of each in this way.

Subsequent editions of Wie ich es sehe contained a number of major and minor alterations. The second edition of 1898 omits the controversial piece "Familienleben", but contains a number of new additions. It includes a list of contents, the Huysmans preface and Altenberg's quizzical self-characterisation, "Un mot de Monsieur P.A. sur Monsieur P.A.". A further six individual pieces were added to this edition which ends with "Reporter und Dichter". The "Revolutionär" series is also considerably expanded: "Wahrheit" and "De amore" are incorporated into "Der Revolutionär dichtet". In addition, the new piece, "Keim einer Tragödie", and a collection of aphorisms entitled "Der Revolutionär hat sich eingesponnen" now supplement the series. (In this second edition Altenberg also begins to employ subtitles to clarify the themes of individual pieces in "Revolutionär".)

The format of the third edition is identical to that of the second, although there are some minor stylistic and orthographical alterations. In Peter Wagner's opinion, these stylistic innovations, which accentuate rhythm, are intended to emphasise the lyrical character of the texts (29).

The fourth edition (1904), which establishes the format for all subsequent editions, contains further alterations and additions. In this edition the designation "Studie" has been substituted for "Skizze". And, in an attempt to make the two series "Frau Fabrikdirektor von H." and "Revolutionär" independent of each other, Altenberg drops the general title "Zwei, die nicht zusammenkamen" as well as the piece entitled "Zwei Fremde" from this edition. (Altenberg was also obliged to remove a passage from "Sommer-Abend" which referred to "Zwei Fremde".) Possible objections from the real-life model for Frau Bankdirektor von H. perhaps resulted in Altenberg's abandoning this title in favour of "Frau Fabrikdirektor" in this edition. (However, he retains the figure of the Bankdirektor.) A further seventeen individual pieces and the short cycle "Une femme est un état de notre âme" are included in this

fourth edition as well as twenty-eight pieces which form the series "Ashantee".

### 6.2.2 Ashantee

Ashantee was published first in 1897 and reprinted in 1901. Thereafter its contents were restructured and subdivided between Wie ich es sehe and Was der Tag mir zuträgt (ed. 2). In its original format, however, Ashantee comprises 204 sides. The first item, the series "Ashantee", consists of thirty-three thematically related pieces. All except ten are included in the revised and more concise series "Ashantee" in the fourth edition of Wie ich es sehe (30). (This series also contains several new pieces: "Ehebruch", "Prügel", "Mitgift", "Erbfolge" and "Mütterlichkeit", all of which highlight the exemplary nature and mores of the Ashanti.) In addition, Ashantee also contains the following ten items: "Paulina: Novelle", "Marionetten-Theater", "Theobrôma. (Götterspeise)", "Une femme est un état de notre âme", "Der 'Fliegende Holländer' (Gewidmet Denen, die es sind!)", "Tristan und Isolde", "Hausball", "Der Remplaçant" and "Lokale Chronik".

### 6.2.3 Was der Tag mir zuträgt

The first edition of Was der Tag mir zuträgt (1901) which is subtitled "Fünfundfünfzig neue Studien" contains a list of contents and three programmatic pieces: a motto in verse; "Warum Sie dieses Dichters Werke so sehr liebt"; and "Selbstbiographie". (In these pieces Altenberg intimates his major themes and his artistic intentions.) The work consists largely of individual pieces or studies, most of which have narrative or essayistic character. There are, in addition, three groups of shorter pieces and aphorisms ("Ganz kleine Sachen", "Ansichtskarten" and "Aphorismen einer Primitiven") as well as the series, "Essay-Versuch" consisting of programmatic pieces and critical reviews.

The second edition of Was der Tag mir zuträgt (1902) subtitled "Fünfundsechzig neue Studien", is the model for all subsequent editions. A further programmatic piece, "Selbstanzeige", has been added between the list of contents and "Selbstbiographie". The collection also contains the following studies: "Marionetten-Theater", "Theobrôma", "Der 'Fliegende Holländer'", "Tristan und Isolde", "Hausball", "Lokale Chronik", "Paulina", "Man braucht mehrere", "Emotion", "Cyclus: Gedichte an Ljuba", "Fjaestad oder: Weg des Weibes", "La Zarina" and "Katharine und der Hund". However, the second edition also omits several pieces, i.e. "Die Braut", "Ein anglo-saxonischer Künstler", "Das Fräulein", "Glasbläserei", "Im englischen Parke in München", the aphorism, "Westminster Abbey" and "Essay-Versuch". Peter Wagner suggests that Altenberg dropped these pieces (which tend to reflect on private experience or take the form of book and art reviews) both for personal reasons and on artistic grounds (31).

### 6.3 Unifying elements in the early work

#### 6.3.1 Wie ich es sehe

In section four I suggest that the 1896 edition of Wie ich es sehe is no haphazard collection of pieces, but rather that it has an obvious shaping principle. In particular, I note the progression from social criticism in "See-Ufer" to the postulation of a new social order in "Revolutionär". - Indeed, it is possible that Altenberg's social revolutionary aspirations determined the very structure of Wie ich es sehe. However, Altenberg also uses Wie ich es sehe to present his vision of an ideal relationship between the sexes and to challenge contemporary attitudes towards interpersonal relationships. Although this interest tends to divert attention from the revolutionary impulse in his writing, Altenberg clearly considered his themes interrelated. In his opinion, improved relationships between the sexes are fundamental to a more humane social order.

Undoubtedly, the inclusion of several autonomous pieces in the 1896 edition of Wie ich es sehe tends to blur the shaping principle, or inner logic, of this work. Nonetheless, the pieces, which deal with a variety of subjects, are thematically related to the preceding series. For they too reveal Altenberg's sympathy with womankind and demonstrate his concern with the nature and purpose of art and the artist. In addition, they are informed by that distinctive blend of social observation and psychological investigation which is a feature of Altenberg's work. In the second and subsequent editions of Wie ich es sehe the shaping principle is obscured still more by the gradual addition of further individual pieces, many of which had been published first either in the journal Liebelei or Ashantee. Moreover, Altenberg's decision to make the two series, "Frau Fabrikdirektor von H." and " "Revolutionär" independent of each other suggests that he wished to make Wie ich es sehe correspond more closely to the consciously unsystematic Impressionist work.

Peter Wagner's doctoral thesis (entitled Peter Altenbergs Prosadichtung) represents a significant departure from the established view of the Viennese poet. For, in contrast with earlier critics, Wagner emphasises the degree of unity and structure in both the series and individual pieces in Altenberg's early works. He not only considers the thematic relationships of the pieces which comprise the various series; he also discusses the unifying function of character, time and place in Altenberg's early writing. Thus, in addition to its sociological function, the lake-side resort which is the background of "See-Ufer" also serves to integrate the series in a formal sense. Introduced in the initial study, "Neun und elf", the "See-Ufer" motif contributes to the integrity of the series. (The word "See-Ufer" itself occurs in almost half of the texts in the series.) Moreover, as Wagner observes, the loose temporal progression of the series - from high summer to early autumn - reinforces its unity. Wagner also

comments on the integrating function of the penultimate piece, "Herbstabend", which draws together many of the characters featured in the earlier studies and signals the end of the season (32). In the final piece, "At Home", Altenberg abandons the lake-side resort in favour of an urban setting. The piece, which marks a return to the mundane actuality of city life, may be said to form a pendant or coda to the series. Moreover, in its concretisation of the threat to the bourgeoisie from "below", the piece prepares us for the radical tone of the later series, "Revolutionär".

In a more recent essay on Wie ich es sehe, Andrew Barker provides a still more comprehensive analysis of the "See-Ufer" series (33). Of particular relevance for this present inquiry is his illustration of the thematic groupings of individual pieces which scrutinise the social and psychological plight of womankind (e.g. the first four studies and the companion pieces, "Fünfundzwanzig" and "Fünfunddreissig"); the problematical nature of the relationship between the sexes (e.g. "Spätsommer-Nachmittag" and "Landparthie") and socially accepted behavioural standards (e.g. "Flirt" and "Fleiss"). In addition, his comments concerning the balance of the "See-Ufer" series, the central importance of "Sanct Wolfgang" and the integrating function of motifs all merit closer attention here. He suggests, for example, that the powerful auctorial statements in "Assarow und Madame Oyasouki" directed against woman, the heartless oppressor of menfolk, serve to redress the apparent onesidedness of Altenberg's sympathies in the first nine studies (which evidence an unusual understanding of, and concern for, the fair sex). He also comments on the position of "Sanct Wolfgang" which, coming exactly halfway through the series, places "See-Ufer" unmistakably in the context of late nineteenth century industrialisation. Finally, Barker's essay demonstrates how Altenberg suggests the relationship of certain pieces by a subtle linking of motifs. Thus, while "P.A. und T.K."

and "No Age" are bridged by the dance motif, in "Fromont" Altenberg elaborates the theatrical theme which is introduced in the preceding piece, "Wie es geht". It is most probable, too, that Altenberg's decision to attribute to the subject of "Siebzehn bis dreissig" the distinguishing gazelle-like characteristics of the protagonist of "Zwölf" was taken on formal grounds. The linked motifs enabled him to suggest continuity within the series.

Altenberg uses this formal device to still greater effect in the second series, "Don Juan". Its three pieces - the ironically entitled "Idylle", "Musik" and "Im Stadtgarten" - are integrated formally by Altenberg's reference in each to the eyes of his subjects. The eye motif is introduced in "Idylle" by the character Albert who speaks of Franzi's eyes as the source of his poetic inspiration. In "Musik" the reference to the young girl's wonderful, gentle eyes" (WS 59) enables the reader to identify her as Franzi. In "Im Stadgarten", the third and longest piece in the series (which presents Albert's relationship with several females), the motif is skilfully developed into a metaphysical conceit; this serves to underline the elevated and spiritual nature of Albert's relationship with one beautiful, young married woman. The order of the pieces (whose unity is reinforced by the presence of Albert and Franzi in each) is clearly important and immutable. For each describes a new phase in Albert's relationship with the child, i.e. his gradual recognition and reciprocation of her love. The reference in "Im Stadtgarten" to the death of Franzi's mother, who had figured in the initial piece, also serves to bind and relate these pieces temporally.

In Peter Wagner's opinion, "Frau Fabrikdirektor von H." is a more tightly integrated series within which the principal figure performs a subsidiary unifying function. Furthermore, he suggests that the initial and final pieces, which reveal complementary aspects of Anita's artistic temperament (see above Section 3.4), enclose and integrate

the series. The intervening pieces depict Anita's relationship with her servants and, more importantly, with her husband. Wagner suggests that the six pieces from and including "Der Trommler Belin" to "Ecce Domina" may be seen as a unity. Each examines the husband-wife relationship in a context other than that of the everyday (e.g. at a concert, in Ronacher's or "Venedig in Wien"). Wagner considers that these similar settings have both a thematic significance and a unifying function (34).

The structure of "Revolutionär" and interrelationships of its pieces have been examined in considerable detail in preceding sections. Although there is no narrative continuity in the series, I have suggested that the pieces do display a linear development, proceeding from social criticism (in "Gesellschaft", "Sonntag" and "Familienleben") to the proclamation of a new value system and social alternative (in "Im Garten", "Der Grieche" and "Die Primitive"). I have also suggested that improved relationships between the sexes are fundamental to Altenberg's social ideality. This theme, which is introduced in "Die Primitive", is developed by Altenberg in the following three pieces, "Dialog", "Eine Scene zwischen einem Vater und einem unvorsichtigen jungen Manne" and "Adagio". Each of these pieces focuses on the spiritual dimension of man's relationship with woman. In Peter Wagner's opinion, the linear development of the series is abruptly broken after "Adagio" (36). However, the following piece, which takes the form of a letter to the revolutionary from a female friend, complements those pieces which explore the relationship between the sexes. For in it Altenberg reveals the difficulties which one woman experiences in reconciling her emotional needs with the requirements of the "Frauenkult". It might also be suggested, again in opposition to Wagner, that the following item "Der Revolutionär dichtet" is not incongruously placed at this juncture of the series. For its contents, a random collection of short pieces and aphorisms on a variety of themes (ranging from the nature

of love to that of the genius) are intended to point the way towards a higher culture. Thus, while the preceding pieces equip the reader with a model for improved interpersonal relationships, "Der Revolutionär dichtet" challenges accepted behavioural and moral standards and intimates an alternative value system. This is also the function of the later addition, "Der Revolutionär hat sich eingesponnen", which expands upon the dietary and hygienic principles outlined in "Der Besuch" and "Die Primitive". It is noteworthy, too, that Altenberg's practice in this item, particularly his choice of an aphoristic mode and his apparent refusal to present his observations in systematic form, anticipates the style of Prödrömös which was published some eight years later.

The remaining pieces in "Revolutionär" not only show Königsberg in relation to other members of his society; they also reveal how he is viewed by them. According to Wagner, the insertion of "Keim einer Tragödie" (which demonstrates one young woman's willingness to sacrifice herself for Königsberg) between the two items, "Der Revolutionär dichtet" and "Bei dem Photographen", suggests that Altenberg did not consider the sequence of the series immutable. Wagner also considers the three pieces entitled "Bei dem Photographen", "Sommer-Nachmittag" and "Sommerabend" as a group, although he concedes that the temporal progression which he perceives within the pieces has no bearing on the events they describe (36). While the first piece demonstrates the tense relationship between Königsberg and the average bourgeois husband, the second unites him with the principal figures of the preceding series, namely Anita, her husband, Albert, the chamber maid and the children's maid. Like the earlier study, "Herbstabend", this piece also has an integrating function. Finally, mention should be made of "Sommerabend" which draws together the main themes of the "Revolutionär" series and Wie ich es sehe as a whole. This piece is primarily intended to elucidate Altenberg's "Frauenkult" and to suggest how woman's beauty

may spark off and sustain man's spiritual evolution. However, it also reflects upon the social actuality: it refers obliquely to civil unrest and to the emergence of the socialists as a potent political force. In this way it echoes the social revolutionary theme of the collection as a whole.

### 6.3.2 Ashantee

In contrast with Wie ich es sehe, the format of Altenberg's second collection, Ashantee does not appear to be determined by any dominant shaping principle. Indeed, the ultimate division of its contents between Wie ich es sehe and Was der Tag mir zuträgt suggests that Altenberg did not conceive of Ashantee as an entity. The initial series, "Ashantee", differs greatly from the subsequent studies in respect both of style and theme. Altenberg's adoption of a simple, aphoristic mode, shorn of all superfluous detail, is not only a fitting complement for the subject matter of the series, the nature and mores of an unsophisticated people: it also anticipates Altenberg's later literary style, his preference for a concise uncluttered medium and his preparedness to sacrifice form for the sake of clarity.

The desire for concision was clearly a factor in the decision to revise and condense the 1897 version of "Ashantee" for inclusion in the fourth edition of Wie ich es sehe. The revised edition sacrifices ten of the original pieces which either highlight the crude and prejudicial attitude of the Viennese towards the Ashanti, or focus on Altenberg's unhappy love of Nahbadûh. In Peter Wagner's opinion, their omission has the effect of strengthening thematic bonds between certain pieces. He now perceives a number of "partial groupings" within the series. For example, he identifies a common theme in the first three pieces, "Der Hofmeister", "The School" and "Der Kuss", which all compare and contrast the psyche of black and white children. (In addition, the first two

pieces have an educational theme: in them Altenberg contrasts his ideal learning situation with the harsh methods favoured in educational institutions.) Wagner also proposes that the three pieces, "Ehebruch", "Prügel" and "Mitgift", constitute a group; for all are concerned with the Ashanti attitude to love and marriage (37). Wagner might also have referred to the juxtaposition of "L'homme médiocre" and "Der Automat" which contrast the reified nature of love in Viennese society with its purer and freer Ashanti equivalent.

Finally, as in the case of "See-Ufer", the series "Ashantee" is determined by the unities of time and place. While Vienna's zoological gardens form the background to the series, the events described are fixed temporally to the period of the Ashanti "exhibition". As Wagner observes, Altenberg uses the end of the exhibition to bring this series, which also thematicises the transience of human life and relationships, to a close:

Wie bei den "Skizzen-Reihen" ist in "Ashantee" der Schluß einem ausgeprägten Kompositionsprinzip unterworfen: dem Vergehen der Zeit. Die Situation der Ausstellung wird genutzt um die Reihe erzählter Begebenheiten zum Abschluß zu bringen. (38)

The final sequence of pieces ("Palawer", "Der Tag des Abschieds", "Ihre Adresse" and "Spätherbstabend") describes the Ashanti people's last days in, and departure from, Vienna. While the penultimate piece announces the arrival of the Ashanti in their homeland, "Spätherbstabend" tells of a solitary gentleman's visit to the empty village in Vienna, which, it is said, must now be pulled down to make way for a new attraction.

The remaining studies in Ashantee have no relation to the title series. However, they are thematically and stylistically related to each other. The majority examine the relationship between the sexes and probe the existential dilemma of middle class wives and daughters. With the exception of "Une femme est un état de notre âme"

all were subsequently incorporated into Was der Tag mir zuträgt. In both "Der Remplaçant" and "Lokale Chronik" Altenberg casts a sideways glance at contemporary journalistic practices and proffers a partial account of his own literary technique. This, as Thomas Mann suggests, might best be described as a form of "lyrical journalism" (39) since it involves highlighting the romantic and poetic content of everyday events. (Altenberg's ultimate aim in writing was extra-aesthetic, however. He hoped that by presenting his material in an unusual light, or "defamiliarising" the mundane actuality, he might enable his readers to get more from life.)

Stylistically, these studies differ greatly from the terse, aphoristic mode of "Ashantee". Their relatively expansive form is more typical of Was der Tag mir zuträgt, a work which, I have suggested, is founded upon a more positive language philosophy. In addition, Ashantee contains examples of Altenberg's early experimentation with cyclical forms, forms which had long been favoured by musicians as a means of integrating their compositions. Indeed, Altenberg's own cyclical forms may well have been inspired by Schubert, for whom he felt a special affinity and admiration (see "Grammophonplatte" ML 21-2 and "Schubert" NF 107-8). In "Une femme est un état de notre âme" the cyclical form (which involves the almost exact repetition of the initial two and final six stanzas of the first piece, "Friede", in the last piece) is used to suggest the monotony and inevitability of one young woman's life. "Hausball" is a variation of the cyclical form. The sequence consists of seven pieces in which Altenberg probes the inner life of several characters, chiefly young women, at a ball. (Girls' names provide the titles for six of the pieces.)

In his subsequent works Altenberg continues to be attracted to cyclical forms. In Märchen des Lebens, the two sequences, "Krankheit" (200f) and "Sanatorium I" (219f) are both described as cycles. The former is composed of

observations made at the time of Altenberg's first major breakdown. They concern the nature of illness and critically examine the attitudes of patients, their doctors and visitors. Throughout the sequence, which begins with a positive evaluation of illness in "A rebours", it is possible to trace Altenberg's gradual disillusionment and despair. The cycle concludes with the realisation that ill-health is a punishment and curse. In the case of "Sanatorium I" Altenberg uses the term "cycle" to denote a collection of pieces which describe his personal experience of "Inzersdorf" and its inmates. The sanatorium, its park and the nearby road to the village form the background to all the pieces. In Semmering 1912 the term is employed once more, this time as a loose designation for a variety of pieces which originate in his Venetian experience. "Zyklus Venedig" (S 215f) is a very mixed literary bag which consists of sketches, aphorisms and unrhymed verse. Moreover, Altenberg does not confine himself here to a description of Venice, but tends rather to use the sequence as a vehicle for his ripening misogyny.

Throughout his literary career, Altenberg frequently employs a cyclical form in his individual pieces too. The early study "Siebzehn bis dreissig" is perhaps the most outstanding example. (Here, the cyclical form not only has an integrating function; it also serves to underline what Altenberg, like Nietzsche, took to be a social as well as a natural law, i.e. the principle of Eternal Recurrence.) In his later works Altenberg frequently had recourse to cyclical forms to integrate, or give shape to, his fleeting impressions and random observations on human life, morality and institutions.

### 6.3.3 Was der Tag mir zuträgt

As with Ashantee, Altenberg's third collection, Was der Tag mir zuträgt, reveals no clear order or shaping principle. Peter Wagner suggests that Altenberg could have structured his contents according to theme or genre

or character (40). In the event he was committed to none of these, opting instead for a looser and more versatile format. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify certain dominant themes and recurrent motifs which contribute to the distinctive character of this work. The main themes are introduced in the prominently placed programmatic pieces ("Warum Sie dieses Dichters Werke so sehr liebt", "Selbstbiographie" and "Selbstanzeige") which reveal woman and the relationship between the sexes as Altenberg's particular concern. In the following studies he attempts no systematic analysis or treatment of his subject matter, presenting instead variations on his themes. Once again, it is tempting to draw parallels between Altenberg's approach to composition and that of the musician. Indeed, Was der Tag mir zuträgt is rich in musical motifs, references and metaphors. The revised edition of 1902 contains at least four references to Wagnerian opera. In addition, Schubert's Trout Quintet provides Altenberg with an arresting metaphor for psychological liberation. It is used first in "Die Zuckerfabrik" (WS) and again in "Diese ist sein" (WT) and "Walküre" (WT) to suggest the exhilaration and freedom experienced by woman in a conducive environment. (Interestingly, Altenberg considered music, and especially Wagnerian opera, as a liberating existential force.) Moreover, the repetition of the motif may be intended to alert the reader to the thematic relation of these pieces.

Although chiefly concerned with the promotion of his "Frauenkult" in this, his third collection, Altenberg does not neglect his other "idéés fixes"; notably his conception of the function of art and the artist, his reformatory views and social criticism (which is presented indirectly). These themes, which are introduced in the motto and programmatic pieces, are loosely interwoven throughout the work. Thus, in its rejection of systematic presentation, Was der Tag mir zuträgt - like Ashantee - anticipates the format of Altenberg's later works. However, it should be stressed that at the time of writing and revising Was der

mir zuträgt, Altenberg was still preoccupied with formal considerations. As in Wie ich es sehe, characters in this work have a subsidiary unifying function. The poet figure (a variation of Altenberg's masculine ideal) appears in numerous pieces, for example. In addition, "Ischler Sommer" ( 99f) has a unifying function within the collection, for it brings together several characters featured in other pieces, namely Piroska (from "Tragödie"), Jolanthe (from "Der Freund") and Giwril (from "Die dumme Lise"). On occasion Altenberg elected to juxtapose pieces with related or complementary themes, as in "Sonntag-Vormittag" and "Der Abendspaziergang" which reveal the often fraught relationship between the sexes. While the two pieces "Die Tante" and "Hochzeit" are linked by a marital theme, "Newsky Roussotine-Truppe" and "Angenehme Reise-Eindrücke" each point the difference between town and country life.

Finally, Altenberg's tendency to group together shorter pieces in Was der Tag mir zuträgt is noteworthy; for it is a practice which is continued throughout his literary career. Although he often tends to lump together short pieces dealing with a variety of topics, as in "Ganz kleine Sachen" (WT 263-282), he also likes to present several related or complementary pieces in a group. In Was der Tag mir zuträgt "Die Liebe" is one such grouping. In his later works, Altenberg often gathers his observations and maxims concerning diet and hygiene, as in "Nachtrag zu Pròdrómōs" (F 9-30). On rarer occasions, he structures his fragmentary pieces (or "Splitter") in the linear manner familiar to us from "Revolutionär", in which social criticism is succeeded by an outline of an alternative value system. For example, in a short sequence of "Splitter" (VI 95-6) dealing with architecture and interior design, Altenberg begins by criticising the aesthetic preferences of his contemporaries and goes on to suggest a simple, hygienic alternative.

#### 6.4 "Roman am Lande": a structural paradigm in the early work

The majority of Altenberg's early pieces have a tightly integrated form which depends upon three basic elements: succinctness, antithesis and repetition. Indeed, it is by virtue of their economy and structural density that they may be designated as prose poems. Altenberg's technique, his verbal stringency and preference for a lucid, balanced form, is exemplified in what must surely be the shortest novel in the German language, "Roman am Lande" (WS 26-7). This short piece (150 words approx.) is a distillation of the events of a lengthy, but unspecified, period: four years are resumed in a single stanza (lines 4 and 5). More specifically, it offers a concentrated account of the handsome gardener Georg's unrequited love for Frau R.. As such, it not only meets the economical demands of Altenberg's extract theory; it also fulfils the requirements of the prose poem as set out in the Huysmans preface. To write "un roman concentré en quelques phrases qui contiendraient le suc de centaines de pages", this, Huysmans informs us, is the ambition of Des Esseintes.

Altenberg uses the title and the first stanza, as one might stage directions, to fix the geographical and sociological context of his drama of the inner life. This is achieved with the utmost economy. The background is the Austrian countryside, long associated in Altenberg's mind and that of his social peers with a more relaxed, carefree existence. Here, we are told, Frau R. lives in Villa R., a detail which enables the reader to identify her social status. - She is a member of the haute bourgeoisie. Opposite is the workplace of Georg, who, for four years, has endured harsh living and working conditions in order to remain in the proximity of Frau R. (Altenberg frequently introduces his pieces with an economical description of locality. This method, a legacy of the Naturalists, is recommended by Hermann Bahr who, in "Die neue Psychologie", urges his fellow writers to present their

characters "an der Kette der Entwicklung und Umgebung, welche ihr Schicksal sind" (41). Altenberg evidently shares the view that heredity and socio-economic status determine the inner life.)

In the third stanza Altenberg develops the linden motif which is introduced in relation to Frau R. in the initial stanza:

Morgens, Abends, kommen die Winde mit  
Lindengeruch - - -. (WS 26)

These lines are used to suggest the uninterrupted presence of Frau R. in Georg's thoughts. Indeed, it is this which sustains him through years of physical hardship. Within "Roman am Lande" the linden motif also has an integrating function. As Peter Wagner observes:

Durch seine leitmotivische Anwendung besitzt es für die ganze Skizze tragende Bedeutung, verbindet Eingang, Zentrum und Schluß. (42)

The motif informs the central "episode" of the piece in which Georg's love of Frau R. is counterbalanced with his harsh treatment at the hands of his employer and his wife. It recurs finally at the end of the piece, the last lines of which (an exact repetition of stanza three) indicate Georg's future, a life made tolerable only by his idealistic commitment to Frau R..

Repetend (which involves the repetition of a word or phrase more or less frequently throughout a stanza) is a device which Altenberg particularly favours as a means of emphasising certain points and of ensuring the formal cohesion of individual pieces. It is an important structural component in both "Roman am Lande" and Altenberg's early work in general. Altenberg often uses repetition to create, and/or accentuate, internal rhymes and rhythm, as in the fourth stanza of "Roman am Lande":

Der Platz ist schlecht, das Essen ist schlecht,  
der Herr ist schlecht - -, (WS 27)

The threefold repetition of "schlecht" not only underlines the wretchedness of Georg's plight, but also suggests his absolute commitment to Frau R., as Peter Wagner notes:

Es wird noch die Situation Georgs als Kontrast zu seinem Ausharren gegeben, (...) (43)

In addition, stanza four illustrates Altenberg's early preference for paratactical, as against hypotactical, syntax. In his early work he assiduously avoids complex sentence structures and subordinating conjunctions. (The resultant staccato phrasing is partially responsible for the fragmentary aspect of his writing.) In Altenberg's opinion, it is the reader's task to supply missing connections.

In concluding this brief examination of "Roman am Lande" reference should be made to Altenberg's skilful use of antithesis. This device, which involves the juxtaposition of opposites or contrasting statements, is one which Altenberg greatly favours. For it enables him to point up the discrepancy between the social actuality and his ideal of a spiritual community. The clash between physical reality and ideal aspirations also underpins "Roman am Lande". While the latter are symbolised by the ethereal Frau R., the former are embodied in the person of "die Herrin" who, it is implied, is sexually attracted to Georg. Altenberg uses antithesis to crystallise his problematical position:

Georg schläft im Glashaus. Alles ist offen  
und es duftet gut bei Nacht --.  
Verdammt! Seine Herrin kann nicht schlafen  
und im Glashaus blüht, athmet die Jugend ---.  
Er hat nur einen Gedanken: "Linden-Prinzessin"  
und "wann" und "wie" ---!?  
Da klirrt die Glashaus-Thüre -----  
verdammt! Die Herrin! (WS 27)

Georg's dilemma is echoed in the antithetical statements at the end of the piece. Here, too, Altenberg uses images of sleep and sleeplessness to suggest the difference between physical and spiritual love and to highlight the opposite

natures of Georg's ideal woman, Frau R., and his employer's wife. While Frau R. is deep in peaceful sleep, oblivious to Georg, the latter's wakefulness seems to be caused by her physical longing for the young gardener.

#### 6.5. The leitmotif and integrating images in the early work.

A passionate lover of Wagner, Altenberg was not only impressed by the subject matter of the Master's music dramas; he also assimilated certain aspects of their form, notably the leitmotif. In the "Don Juan" series, for example, the leitmotif serves to link the three component-pieces formally. The leitmotif performs a similar integrating function in "Die Zuckerfabrik" (WS 47-54). The two parts of this study are related by the central motif of the bird song, which Fräulein Schwarzkirscherl describes as "das Leitmotiv der Ebene". (It is interwoven throughout the first part and re-emerges towards the end of the second.)

A musical performance is central to the subsequent study "Quartett-Soirée" (WS 86-91) in which Altenberg examines the effects of music on the psyche. The piece contains a number of interior monologues which must surely represent some of the earliest examples of the stream-of-consciousness technique in German literature. They anticipate Schnitzler's Leutnant Gustl (1900) by some four years.\* Altenberg also adopts the musician's approach to composition in "Quartett-Soirée": he moves from an ensemble passage to solo voices in much the same way as a piece of music might do. He focuses, in particular, on the inner life of one young woman whose thoughts revolve around summer holidays spent in Helgoland:

\* Ashantee (1897) provides in "Akolé" an even more striking parallel to Schnitzler's stream-of-consciousness technique in Leutnant Gustl, as Barbara Schoenberg notes. In this piece Altenberg reveals his compatriots' coarse and jaundiced attitude towards the Ashanti.

Sie träumte: Helgoland - - oh meine Sommer-  
tage - ins Meer - - ." (p 87)

Elements and variations of these lines, which are interwoven throughout the piece, contribute to its structural unity. They point up the contrast between the woman's "imprisoned" existence in town and her liberating and vital experience while on holiday in Helgoland. In Altenberg's writing the sea and water function as a metaphor for life and symbolise spiritual freedom.

The imagery of lake and water is fundamental to the "See-Ufer" series. Here, in his studies of women, Altenberg suggests that his subjects are on the periphery of life by placing them at the water's edge, as in the studies "Fünfundzwanzig" and "Fünfunddreissig". "Neunzehn" contains a variation of this imagery. In this piece the image of a young man rowing the nineteen year old subject across the lake may be intended to suggest the dependency of Austrian women on their menfolk. - In Altenberg's opinion, Austrian society sentenced women to a vicarious existence: they "lived" only through their menfolk. By contrast, in "No Age" Altenberg hints at the future self-sufficiency of a younger generation of American girls. For the three daughters of the energetic Mr. Bigloff are depicted rowing their own boat, albeit in strict accordance with their father's instructions. The symbol/metaphor of lake and water is not unique to the "See-Ufer" series, however. It recurs in "Frau Fabrikdirektor von H." (in the study "Am Lande") and in the "Revolutionär" series. In "Der Besuch", for example, the epithet "Meerschäumprinzessin" which is applied to one young woman is intended to suggest her independence. (The fact that she smokes is also offered by Altenberg as evidence of her unconventionality and emancipation.) Indeed, water is a dominant image in Altenberg's early work where it functions as a recurrent, integrating motif. In Ashantee and Was der Tag mir zuträgt Altenberg employs the sea as a metaphor for the metropolis (see "Lokale Chronik" and "Nach Paris, nach

Paris") and for life (see "Eine schweigende Runde"). In his later writing, too, sea-imagery is used to suggest the prolematical nature of human existence as in "Meer des Lebens" (LA 47)

In addition to the sea and water imagery, Altenberg's symbolic use of colour and of the elements, heat and light, also indicates the interrelationship of a number of pieces. The colours red and white, for example, have symbolic significance in the early works where they occur almost with the frequency of a leitmotif. They are used first in the initial study of "See-Ufer". While the gregarious Margueritta is compared to a "rosy dawn", her sister, the romantic Rositta, is described as "die bleiche zarte". In Altenberg's writing a pale complexion denotes spiritual depth and riches, an artistic temperament. The colours red and pink, on the other hand, are associated with vitality and buoyancy. In the studies, "P.A. und T.K." and "Ein poetischer Abend" Altenberg suggests the inwardness or spirituality of Teresa and Anita respectively by describing them as pale. In "Der Besuch" Anita reappears as the pale mistress of the house. In this piece, however, Altenberg's colour symbolism highlights the life-enhancing potential of art. As Altenberg's young interlocutor, the "Meerschäum-prinzessin", realises the vital relation between art and life her complexion becomes rosy. Finally, in the symmetrical composition "Wie ein Bild" (WS 175-6), in which Altenberg explores the inner life of two young girls, colour has a thematic as well as a decorative function. In this piece Altenberg presents two almost identical images of two young women, each of whom is pictured in a garden bordered with gooseberries and filled with carnations. There is, however, one significant difference between them: in the former the colour red predominates and, in the latter, white. In the case of the former, red is associated with a confident attitude to life which Altenberg subsequently reveals as ill-founded. By contrast, he indicates that the uncertainty manifested by the white

figure is in fact superficial. Spiritual intensity, symbolised here by the colour white, is, he suggests, synonymous with inner strength. In his elucidating discussion of this piece, Peter Wagner interprets Altenberg's colour symbolism in the following manner:

Für den "eingeweihten" Leser bestimmen die symbolisch gesetzten Farben bereits im Eingang die Verstehensrichtung. Weiß steht für reflektierende Innerlichkeit (Zweifel and der Liebe), die rote Farbe für die Selbstgewißheit des unreflektierten "Lebens", welche durch das "tiefere Leben" des Traumes korrigiert wird. (44)

In Altenberg's early works, images of light and heat have, like his colour symbolism, a subsidiary, integrating function: they contribute to the thematic and formal unity of the early work. In "Fromont" (WS) light imagery is used to suggest the spiritual nobility of the countess von Ebner-Eschenbach, and to indicate her responses to Daudet's drama. In attempting to account for her noble bearing an anonymous observer suggests that her soul "illuminates" her being:

Man bekommt einen durchscheinenden beweglichen Körper, wie die Meeres-Quallen, welche leuchten.  
(WS 40)

Altenberg's combination of light symbolism with the dominant water imagery of the series is particularly striking. - The sea and marine life provided contemporary Jugendstil writers with a rich fund of images. In "Familienleben" Altenberg uses light symbolism similarly in the compound "Licht-Alben" to suggest a spiritual elite. In "Ein letzter Brief" (WS 136-139), however, light imagery is employed by Altenberg to elucidate woman's mission vis-à-vis man (i.e. her duty to brighten his existence and elevate him spiritually). This is a mission which, in Altenberg's opinion, cannot be fulfilled by older women, such as the one featured in "Zwölf". Of her he writes:

Sie wird Niemandem mehr Freude geben, Licht  
und Wärme ---. (WS 7)

Metaphors of heat, which Altenberg uses to denote the physical dimension of love, also have a unifying function in the early works. They are centrally important in "Absinth-Schönheit" (WS ed.2, 1898) where they are used to adumbrate the ambivalent nature of woman's physical beauty. Although Altenberg considers physical beauty a stimulus to human growth, in this piece he demonstrates an awareness of its potential to divert man from his spiritual goal. In a further piece, "Beja Flor", Altenberg inverts the heat metaphor, again in an attempt to suggest the older, disillusioned woman's lack of physical allure. Like her counterpart in "Zwölf", Stefanie, who is shown seated and shivering, no longer radiates warmth. By contrast, in "Sonntag", Altenberg's description of the stifling atmosphere of the Königsberg household is an indirect critique of Habsburg society and, more specifically, of the restrictive nature of bourgeois institutions and mores.

#### 6.6 The uses of repetition

Repetition is an important structural element in Altenberg's oeuvre where it contributes to the formal coherence of many - and varied - pieces. In his study entitled Peter Altenberg oder das Genie ohne Fähigkeiten Ernst Randak asserts:

nicht zuletzt diesem Element haben es viele seiner  
"kurzen Sachen" zu danken, daß sie wirkliche  
Prosagedichte sind. (45)

The structure and meaning of several of the early pieces depend upon the repetition of a limited number of variables. This is especially true of "Fleiss" (WS 38), "Wie ein Bild" (WS 175-6) and "Die Zwillinge" (WS 202). Each has a tightly integrated symmetrical composition, the product of Altenberg's stringent stylistic and linguistic economy. In "Fleiss", for example, Altenberg works with three basic

elements: a nameless female, who appears totally absorbed by her embroidery; a young poet who greets her; and a mountain, the Schönberg. These are symmetrically arranged (references to the woman's activity are regularly punctuated by descriptions of the Schönberg) and re-arranged to form a coherent whole. The possible "meaning" is intimated only at the end of the piece. The final two stanzas, in which the woman's creativity is contrasted with the poet's star-gazing, suggest that Altenberg is concerned here with two different facets of the artistic temperament. The former manifests itself as a form of blinkered creativity; the latter involves circumspection and an awareness of the living beauty of nature.

Repetition is equally important to the structure of "Wie ein Bild" and "Die Zwillinge". In the former Altenberg uses parallelism to suggest both the similarities and dissimilarities between the two subjects of the piece. The framework of "Die Zwillinge", which also consists of the repetition of certain elements with slight though significant variations, subtly reinforces the theme. For Altenberg wishes to demonstrate the almost imperceptible but crucial difference between identical girl twins whom, he reveals, may be distinguished only by their different reactions to the relationship of one with a gentleman whom both admire. While the successful sister's joy is reflected in her rosy complexion, the pallor of her twin tells of her sadness on being rejected.

Altenberg employs a similar structural technique in the study "Zwei junge Paare" (WT 110) in which he presents, with the utmost economy, an account of the forces of human attraction. The first three stanzas are used to set the scene and introduce the characters: couple A, a handsome man and his gentle wife and their mirror-image, couple B, a gentle husband and his beautiful wife. In the next four stanzas Altenberg describes the animated mood of the party and, in the remaining stanzas, he reveals how this gaiety is dispelled. The harmony and balance which had existed

initially between the couples is destroyed by the attraction of the handsome man to his beautiful counterpart. In these final stanzas Altenberg uses parallelism to highlight the difference between the reaction of the "gentle" characters to each other and that of their "handsome" partners:

"Wer zuerst lacht . . . ?!" sagte die Sanfte zu dem Sanften. Und sie starrten sich an.  
 Aber gleich lachten sie Beide, lachten, lachten.  
 "Wer zuerst lacht . . . ?!" sagte die Wunderschöne zu dem Wunderschönen.  
 Aber sie blieben ganz ernst und starrten sich an, an, an . . .  
 Da verloren auch die Sanfte und der Sanfte ihre Fröhlichkeiten und tranken stumm den Graacher Münzlei.

In each of the above-mentioned pieces, repetition is used, in the interest of economy, to create a balanced, symmetrical composition. Moreover, as in "Roman am Lande", Altenberg uses repetition here as a means of providing internal rhythm and equilibrium. Each of these functions is exemplified further in "Landparthie" (WS 33-37) in which Altenberg provides this rather stylised account of a young couple's impressions of a return journey from the country:

Tannen in Trauer, Lärchen mit grünem Flor;  
 Lärchen mit grünem Flor, Tannen in Trauer;  
 Lärchen, Tannen, Tannen, Lärchen - -. (WS 35-6)

Altenberg frequently employs repetition to bind and enclose his lengthier, more loosely structured pieces, many of which deal with complex aspects of his "Weltanschauung". In "P.A. und T.K." (WS 14-20), which constitutes an early attempt at a philosophy of the sexes, the following line occurs as a refrain and is used to integrate the study formally:

Draussen regnete es und der See brauste an  
 die Ufer - - -.

In her examination of Altenberg's oeuvre, Barbara Schoenberg suggests that the prose poetry of Huysmans provided the

model for this use of the refrain or "ritournelle" (46). In the later pieces "Aus dem Tagebuch der edlen Miss Madrilene" (WT 13-22) and "In München" (WT 305-9) repetition is again employed in the interests of formal cohesion. In each case, Altenberg repeats the first stanza at the end of the study with slight variations. In "In München" Altenberg also undertakes some syntactical alterations: the final paragraph conveys the contents of the first half of paragraph one in three longer, as opposed to five short, sentences. The more expansive syntactical constructions effect a more leisurely tempo which in turn indicates the end of the study. The former study is enclosed by two references to the prevailing wintry conditions.

Repetition continues to play a significant part in Altenberg's later writing, where it functions both as an integrating element and a didactic device. Its former function is exemplified by a variety of pieces ranging from "Kusine" (S 109), which is structurally reminiscent of his early studies, to "Moderne Annonce" (S 43). In this piece the words "Semmering, 1000 Meter Höhe" enclose what Altenberg describes as his most important theory, namely the value of convalescence. Further examples of the integrating function of repetition occur frequently in Altenberg's last collections, in "Zweiter Besuchstag" (LA 67) and "Maitag" (LA 58), for instance. In the former, Altenberg uses repetition in the first stanza to suggest the complex and constantly vacillating emotions he experiences as he awaits the arrival of a new lady friend:

Sie kommt -- sie kommt nicht -- sie kommt  
-- sie kommt nicht -- sie kommt.

While Altenberg's repetition of these elements in the final stanza contributes to the formal unity and symmetry of the piece, the slight variation in their order is intended to suggest the final frustration of his hopes.

Altenberg's rediscovery of anaphora in later life as a means of structuring individual pieces is noteworthy too. In Mein Lebensabend, the two pieces, "Der Ort Weyer A.D. ENNS" (p 46) and "Weyer a.d. Enns" (pp 82-3) exemplify his use of this rhetorical device of beginning successive sentences or lines with the same words or phrase. Both his attraction to this device and his continued use of repetition as an integrating element in his later writing suggest that Altenberg never wholly abandoned formal considerations despite his protestations.

In Pròdròmós and his subsequent collections Altenberg uses repetition primarily as a didactic tool. Following the publication of Was der Tag mir zuträgt, in which Altenberg continues his initial practice of presenting both his social criticism and his alternative value system in a consciously artistic form, Altenberg changed his tactics. The hard-headedness of his contemporaries and their resistance to change resulted in his adoption of an openly didactic method which relies heavily on repetition. In Pròdròmós Altenberg excuses his tendency to repeat himself by emphasising the necessity of this:

Habe ich das schon einmal geäussert?! Mache mir erst einen Vorwurf, bis ich es das zehntausendste Mal gesagt habe. Und dann erst, wenn du wenigstens bereits daran bist, es aufzufassen und zu befolgen. (P45\*)

To the end of his life Altenberg remained convinced of the need to accentuate those values and truths of which his fellows had, he believed, lost sight.

#### 6.7 Antithesis and Antithetical Parallelism

Antithesis, a favourite stylistic device of Altenberg, is also fundamental to the structure of much of his writing. It is used effectively by him to highlight the discrepancy between his ideal society and the social reality, as in "Die Primitive" and "Newsky Roussotine-Truppe" for example. In these pieces (which both fall into two parts), Altenberg juxtaposes images of human degradation and the squalor of

\* See also P 26, P 52 and F 25

city life with his vision of true humanity and freedom. However, in addition to determining the structure of many pieces, and accentuating the real-ideal discrepancy so often central to them, antithesis also serves a didactic purpose in Altenberg's art. As Geoffrey Broad observes, it is used to create an "internal tension whose resolution has a didactic import" (47). The two early studies, "Zwölf" and "Assarow und Madame Oyasouki" provide examples of this function.

In "Zwölf", antithesis is used to point up the contrast between natural vitality, embodied by the twelve year old, and civilised values, represented by the older woman. Interestingly, Altenberg provides a key to the interpretation of this study in the narrative voice - perhaps because he doubts his readers' ability to derive meaning from its antithetical form. Despite a certain sympathy for the sensitivity of the older woman, the narrator comes down firmly on the side of the child. The affirmation of her right to fish, in the face of "civilised" objections, is informed by the Nietzschean belief that a robust amorality is a better basis for humanity than the "Mitleidsethik" exemplified by the older woman. Similarly, in "Assarow und Madame Oyasouki", an antithetical device is used to facilitate and direct the reader's judgement of the woman's treatment of her young admirer. The piece is divided into two parts which are bound by the presence of the narrator and Assarow in each. In the shorter first part the narrator is witness to Assarow's termination of a relationship with a male friend. The latter's manner, his loving appeal to Assarow (whom he addresses as an "enfant") acts as a foil to that of Madame Oyasouki, whose relationship with Assarow is thematicised in the second part. By comparison with Assarow's male friend she lacks compassion and understanding of the young man. Flattered by his attentions, she appears to entice him into an affair which, it is emphasised, is bound to result in Assarow's suffering. As in "Zwölf", Altenberg employs the device of auctorial intrusion as insurance against the misinterpretation of this study. In

the words of Geoffrey Broad, its function is "to remove any ambivalence, to ensure uniformity of interpretation and ultimately to secure the didactic efficiency of . . . the work" (48). It is noteworthy, too, that the generalising and moralising tendency exhibited by Altenberg in this study - in this instance, his condemnation of Oyasouki's behaviour as representative of her sex - is a pronounced feature of his later writing.

In the early works Altenberg uses antithesis to illustrate social inequalities (see "Blumen-Corso" (WS)) and, more frequently, to point the differences between youth and age. This is a subsidiary function of antithesis in "Zwölf" and its primary task in "Die Natur" (WS 12-14). In this piece Altenberg contrasts youthful romance with the disillusionment of the older generation. Like many of Altenberg's early pieces, this study also falls into two parts. The first provides examples of the superficial perception of the young and suggests their delight in the beautiful appearance of life. In the latter part, Altenberg indicates the more penetrating vision and disillusionment of older people who perceive the misery and decay underlying the semblance of well being. Antithesis is also fundamental to the structure and meaning of "Sanct Wolfgang" (WS27-29) in which Altenberg contrasts the ill effects of city life with the advantages of a simple country life (see above 2.4). The piece is divided clearly into two equal, similarly structured sections which serve to characterise the relationship of their respective subjects to nature. The sections are related by "structural constants" (e.g. the description of the station in each) which provide a rigid framework for the piece and highlight the different responses of the two women to nature.

The didactic import of Altenberg's antithetical pieces is particularly evident in a later addition to Wie ich es sehe, entitled "Im Volksgarten" (262-3) and in "Ashantee". In these items antithesis is employed (as in "Sanct Wolfgang") as a means of differentiating "correct"

from "incorrect" attitudes. In "Im Volksgarten" antithesis is used to highlight two fundamentally different attitudes to life and to illustrate the importance of experiencing life's pleasures on the wing. This "philosophy" of life is upheld by Rosamunde, the child of a wealthy family, who, having no experience - or fear - of material impoverishment, does not hesitate to release the balloons which she is given. Her happiness consists of watching them disappear into the blue sky. An opposite "philosophy" is suggested by the behaviour of a poor little girl who, despite Rosamunde's prompting, does not release the balloon offered to her. However, her attempt to prolong her pleasure through possession results in unhappiness. For in three days the balloon shrivels. The child's (twice repeated) acknowledgement that she ought to have released her balloon too is offered as confirmation of the "correctness" of Rosamunde's action and "philosophy". In "Ashantee" antithesis is employed in "Der Hofmeister" and "Der Kuss" to highlight the prejudicial attitudes of the Viennese towards this African people and to suggest a more humane and cultured alternative. In the former piece, Fortunatina's response is favourably compared to that of her brother, who clearly lacks her intuitive understanding of the Ashanti. His response seems to be conditioned instead by popular Viennese prejudices. In "Der Kuss" Altenberg uses antithesis to reinforce his disapproval of his fellow citizens; in this instance by juxtaposing one Viennese woman's rejection of Akolé's embrace with his own open and loving attitude to the girl.

The structural and didactic significance of antithesis in Altenberg's work is exemplified further by a number of his aphorisms. "Der Revolutionär dichtet" (WS 139-148) contains one of his earliest experiments with this genre:

Ihr Comfortable-Rosse der Liebe, mit den Scheuledern vor der Seele, damit sie auf der breiten Landstrasse des Lebens forttröte - - - le!

Comfortable-Rosse der Liebe, wie leicht findet Ihr euren Weg, während der edle Trakehner "Künstler-Seele" in die pfadlose Ebene hinaussprengt! (WS 141)

In this aphorism Altenberg uses the image of the horse to demonstrate the contrast between the artist's conception of love and the blinkered view of bourgeois society. In Altenberg's opinion the artist's love tends to be universal rather than restricted to one person. The formal cohesion and balance of the aphorism results from the skilful use of an antithetical form based on repetition; i.e. the initial model (a) is repeated with decisive alterations. In his study of Altenberg's oeuvre, Geoffrey Broad employs the term "antithetical parallelism" as a description for this aphoristic form, which Altenberg continues to use throughout his literary career as a means of challenging popular bourgeois notions and values. These are placed in apposition to his personal values (see also 6.9.1).

Antithesis is a favourite device of many writers of aphorisms. Nietzsche, arguably with Lichtenberg the most outstanding aphorist in the German language, writes of it in Menschliches, Allzumenschliches:

Die Antithese ist die enge Pforte durch welche  
sich am liebsten der Irrtum zur Wahrheit schleicht.  
(49)

For Altenberg too, whose aphoristic practice was greatly inspired by the Nietzschean example, antithesis offers a means of approaching truth and true values. On occasion he adopts an aphoristic form to suggest the complexity and inherent contradictions in human nature and life, as in "Zwei Welten" (VI 185) and "Zwei Frauen" (VI 255). More frequently, he employs antithetical parallelism and verbal antithesis to reveal the fallacy and mendacity of the bourgeois code and to promote an alternative. In "Der Revolutionär hat sich eingesponnen" (WS 163-74) Altenberg uses verbal antithesis to expose the popular bourgeois conception of fidelity. In Altenberg's opinion, society's insistence upon fidelity to one's partner necessarily entails self-betrayal and impedes human growth:

Treue ist das "Gesetz der Trägheit" der Seele.  
 Ah, treue Seelen, wie treulos seid Ihr - -  
 eurem Werden! (WS 172)

Altenberg's later collections contain many examples of antithetically structured aphorisms in which contemporary social attitudes and conduct are confronted. In one such piece contained in Semmering 1912 (199) Altenberg casts doubt on the bourgeois notion that mutual admiration is a sound basis for relationships. He suggests instead that partnerships should be based on shared likes and dislikes:

Sie bewunderten sich gegenseitig - - - da war es ein Mißton! Sie bewunderten gemeinsam einen Schildkröt-Schirmgriff - - - da war es ein Akkord!

In Fechung (114) the antithetically structured aphorism proves an effective means of highlighting the difference between partial and impartial judgement and the relative validity of each in affairs of the heart:

Es gibt keinen größeren Gegensatz als die Beurteilung einer Liebesangelegenheit von seiten des Beteiligten und von seiten des Unbeteiligten. Der eine hat die Gerechtigkeit des Herzens, der andere die Ungerechtigkeit objektiver Beurteilung.

Finally, in Vita Ipsa (160) Altenberg uses antithesis to expose the malpractice and pecuniary nature of architects:

Moderne Architekten: Er richtete ihr die Wohnung ziemlich teuer ein, damit sie bequem lebe?  
 Er richtete ihr die Wohnung ziemlich teuer ein, damit er bequem lebe!

In the first element Altenberg intimates what he, like Loos, believes should be the architect's prime consideration: the comfort of his client. In the second element, he reveals the architect's real motivation, i.e. a selfish concern for his own material welfare. Here, too, antithesis is used by Altenberg to highlight the real-ideal discrepancy which he perceives not only in the dealings of architects but in all walks of life.

## 6.8 Impressionistic Elements in the Early Work

Impressionism is a complex socio-cultural phenomenon which emerged in Europe during the great period of industrial and urban expansion in the late nineteenth century. It was based on a new mode of perception, a new consciousness of the flux and instability of the material world, and was characterised by a fascination for the momentary and the minute. It entailed a new and ambivalent attitude to life, which might be summed up as a voluptuous and melancholy pleasure in the infinite riches and transience of life.

However, Impressionism was not all passive enjoyment, as Manfred Diersch illustrates in his impressive study, Empiriokritizismus und Impressionismus. Here he argues that the Impressionist outlook, which is formalised in the writing of Ernst Mach, developed in opposition to the rationalistic and positivistic creed of the bourgeoisie (50). The rational, scientific premises of the bourgeois credo were seriously threatened by Impressionism's insistence upon the primacy of sense impressions and the empiriocriticism embodied in Mach's Analyse der Empfindungen:

Nicht die Körper zeugen Empfindungen, sondern  
Empfindungskomplexe (Elementenkomplexe) bilden  
die Körper . . . (51)

First published in 1885, Mach's Analyse der Empfindungen only won general significance around the turn of the century. Its radical proposition that both our concept of self and material bodies are simply helpful constructs without any objective correlation, shook traditional belief in individual integrity. Moreover, Mach's conclusion that reality exists for mankind as a "Strom der Erscheinungen" had a profound impact on the outlook of many intellectuals of the time.

In Vienna, Impressionism penetrated intellectual life more deeply than anywhere else. As William Johnston observes, "the polyglot Habsburg Empire offered an ideal setting for the multi-faceted mentality of Impressionism"

(52). While Hofmannsthal attended lectures given by Mach, Hermann Bahr approached Impressionism, independently at first, through the medium of art. Although Bahr did not read Mach until 1903, he was, in the words of Manfred Diersch, more of a Machian than Mach himself. In his essays he urges his contemporary writers to adopt the themes and painterly techniques, especially the decompositional method, of French Impressionists. In "Wahrheit, Wahrheit" he argues that sense impressions alone have validity, i.e. "Die Sensationen allein sind Wahrheit" (53). And he contends that these should be the subject matter of modern literature:

Sensationen, nichts als Sensationen, unverbundene Augenblicksbilder der eiligen Ereignisse auf den Nerven - das charakterisiert diese letzte Phase, in welche die Wahrheit jetzt die Literatur getrieben hat. (54)

As Diersch observes, Bahr's views had a decisive effect on the foremost writers of the Viennese "Jahrhundertwende", namely, Hofmannsthal, Schnitzler, Beer-Hofmann, Leopold von Andrian, Felix Salten and Peter Altenberg (55).

In his early programmatic piece, "Der Besuch" (WS) Altenberg's spokesman Albert Königsberg appears to echo Bahr in emphasising the importance of sense impressions for modern art. For he maintains:

Und dann, sehen Sie - - - die feinste Empfänglichkeit haben für Formen, Farben, Düfte ist schön. (WS 112)

However, Altenberg's early literary practice not only suggests the pervasive influence of Bahr; it also distinguishes him, in the eyes of literary historians, as a leading exponent of Impressionism. In their study Impressionismus, Hamann and Hermand consistently select examples from Altenberg's writing to illustrate the salient features of literary Impressionism. This is characterised by them as a subtle art of suggestion which records fleeting sense impressions and attends to the minutest

detail. They stress the formlessness and unsystematic aspect of the Impressionist work as well as its rejection of historical syntax in favour of loose associations and parataxis. In this section I hope to show that, although his writing does fulfil the requirements of literary Impressionism as defined by Hamann and Hermand, Altenberg may not be classified as a pure or consequent Impressionist. Indeed, it will be seen that he shared Arthur Schnitzler's ambivalence towards the Impressionist's outlook and that he endeavoured to distance himself from Impressionistic practices in his art.

Altenberg's description of an exclusive hairdressing salon in "Siebzehn bis dreissig" (WS 10-12) serves to typify literary Impressionism's refinement of Naturalist techniques, i.e. the "Sekundenstil". It also reveals Impressionism's shift in emphasis from objective reality to subjective experience:

Ich kam einmal zu dem ersten Friseur der  
Residenz.

Es roch nach Eau de Cologne, nach frisch  
gewaschenen Leinenmanteln und zartem Cigarettenrauch  
- - Sultan flor, Cigarettes des Prinzesses  
égyptiennes. (WS 10)

In addition to realising Bahr's vision of a new literature based on subjectively verifiable experience, this passage also suggests that Altenberg inclined towards Machism. For he too intimates that reality is experienced as an "Empfindungskomplex".

Impressionism's characteristic neglect, or suppression, of objective reality in favour of a description of the sensory perception of it, is nowhere more apparent in Altenberg's oeuvre than in "Quartett-Soirée" (WS 86-91). In the opening, scene-setting stanza Altenberg focuses, almost exclusively, on a subjective perception of the concert hall, which is likened, rather unusually, to a huge cardboard box. The description also reveals that Altenberg shared the Impressionist's fascination for light and the luminous, shimmering aspect which it confers:

Der Saal ist viereckig, schneeweis, überhaupt wie eine riesige Pappdeckelschachtel. Die durchscheinenden Kugeln aus dicken welligem Glase machen aus dem Bogenlicht im Innern goldgrüne und weissgrüne Flecken, die wie glänzendes Wasser schimmern oder Öl, wie Milch im Mondschein. (WS86)

Here, the loss of objective reality is reflected stylistically in the submergence of the nouns (i.e. the hall and lights) in a sea of adjectives. Similarly, in the studies "Im Stadtgarten" (WS) and "Der Grieche" (WS), Altenberg suggests the primacy of the optical impression in his reference to Franzi as "das rosenrothe Hemd" (p64) and to his "modern Diana" as "ein weisses Battistkleid" (p118).

Each of the above-quoted passages also demonstrates the Impressionist's tendency to dissect or atomise a complex sensory experience as well as his love of exactitude. This striving for exactitude, which was doubtless part of the Naturalist legacy, manifests itself particularly in Altenberg's attempt to describe the subtlest gradations of colour. In the opinion of Hamann and Hermand, Altenberg's art epitomises the "Nuancen kult" practised by Impressionists as well as their preference for a "farbige und duftschwangere Darstellungsart" (56). In addition, the passages exemplify the Impressionist's predilection for unusual attributes or images. Indeed, much of the freshness and appeal of the Impressionist's writing results from an ability to highlight the unusual or "defamiliarise" reality. In Altenberg's case, the "Nuancen kult" and defamiliarisation process are intended to fulfil an extra-aesthetic function, as he intimates in "Der Besuch"; he hoped that these devices would increase his peers' enjoyment of life by making them more conscious of their surroundings. In Altenberg's view, the Impressionist outlook offers at best a source of metaphysical consolation. However, as we shall see, he remained convinced of the need to expose the shallowness and illusory nature of this outlook.

Before examining those pieces in which Altenberg adopts a critical stance towards Impresionism, reference

should be made to his use of Impressionist elements in "Fünfundzwanzig" (WS 22-24). His description of the esplanade, with its exclusive interest in the optical impression (which is revealed as a patchwork of colours) is particularly reminiscent of the art of Monet or Pissaro. However, I would submit that Impressionist techniques are employed here in the service of social criticism; for Altenberg's concern, in this piece, is to unmask the superficiality and vacuity of fashionable bourgeois existence.

Altenberg's early study "Die Natur" is selected by Hamann and Hermand to illustrate how literary Impressionism transcribes the "stream of images" which was believed to constitute mankind's experience of reality. In their opinion, the following stanza exemplifies the characteristic "Reihungstendenz" of Impressionist writing which involves presenting a series of subjective impressions ("eine Folge ichbezogener Spiegelbilder" (57)):

Da kam die dunkelgrüne dicke Linie der Kastanienbäume an den grauen cyclopischen Quai-Mauern, dann eine kleine hölzerne Villa, in der ein sterbender Dichter lag, dann eine grosse aus Stein mit schmiedeeisernen Kandelabern, in der eine sterbende Ehe lag und zwei blühende Kinder, dann kam der Garten der Herzogin, die einen Sohn verloren hatte, den sie nie besessen hatte. Da hingen schwarze Haselstauden in's Wasser. Dann kamen Wiesen mit feinen Sumpfgräsern und goldenem Löwenzahn, dann kam Schilf mit hellbraunen Federbüschen, das raschelte. Der Märchendichter würde sagen: "Und es raunte sich Geschichten zu, Geschichten - - -!"

Dann kamen Wiesen, die ganz still dalagen - - -. (WS 13-14)

Rather surprisingly, Hamann and Hermand neglect to mention Altenberg's tendency to go beyond the purely optical impression here in what is clearly an attempt to suggest the misery and decay underlying the superficial impression of quietude and beauty. As I have suggested above, Frau E. possesses the outlook of one "disillusioned" by life. This disillusionment is apparent too in her vaguely uncompre-

hending and dismissive response to the young man's description of his impressions of an evening spent in the company of a young girl:

"Wie war es - - -?!" fragte Frau E. den Herrn.  
 "O schön - - -. Es ist warm und trocken,  
 dann sinkt das Thermometer, die Abendsonne funkelt  
 herüber, der See hat kupferrothe und flaschengrüne  
 Streifen; plötzlich wird er bleigrau, das Thermometer  
 sinkt und die Wiesen beginnen zu duften und feucht  
 zu werden - - -."  
 "Poet - - -" sagte Frau E. (WS 13)

Frau E.'s responses to the young man are perhaps indicative of Altenberg's personal doubts about Impressionism. They certainly demonstrate his ability to distance himself from the Impressionist outlook, which he considered superficial. It is surely the case that Impressionism is further undermined in "Am Lande" (WS 95-97) in which Altenberg deliberately chooses to reproduce, almost word for word, the young man's evocation of sunset over the lake. (As in "Die Natur", reference is made here to the "bars of copper and bottle-green water" and to the lake's sudden assumption of a "grey and leaden" appearance.) Altenberg seems to be making the point that even an impressionistic attempt to describe reality inevitably involves stylisation and formulation. This point is also brought out in the study entitled "Idylle" (WS 57-9) in which Altenberg once again appears to adopt a critical stance vis-à-vis Impressionism. For, as Hamann and Hermand remark (58), the stylisation of the "Reihungstendenz" exemplified in this piece seems to parody Impressionist techniques:

Strasse, Strassenecke, Strasse, Strassenecke,  
 Strasse, Strassenecke, Hausthor. Stiller Hausflur,  
 stille Stiege, brim, brim, brim, brim, stilles  
 Vorzimmer, stilles Wohnzimmer. (WS 58-9)

Although Altenberg favours loose, associative syntax and the paratactical constructions characteristic of literary Impressionism (59), his use of punctuation is atypical of this movement. In his early works he employs the dash not to dislocate, but to bind the elements of

individual studies. Dashes are used, almost as musical notation, to accentuate rhythm. Altenberg's profligate use of the exclamation mark, usually in multiples of two or three, and of the question mark, which is usually flanked, in the early work by two exclamation marks, represents a further deviation from Impressionist practice. Criticised by Thomas Mann as "infantile" (60), Altenberg's highly charged punctuation underlines his affinity with his literary successors, the Expressionists. Indeed, it provided them with a stylistic model.

Looking back, towards the end of his life, over his literary career and productions, Altenberg nevertheless saw himself as a consistent Impressionist. In "Im 60. Lebensjahre" (LA 291) he writes:

Ich bin ein momentaner kürzester Impressionist, das ist mein anständiger wohlverdienter Ehrentitel. Auf den habe ich seit 20. Jahren ein Recht.

Indeed, much of his later writing displays the haste and formlessness which Hamann and Hermand consider a mark of literary Impressionism. Much appears to be in the nature of a reaction to some random occurrence which seemed to Altenberg to epitomise human behaviour. His passions inflamed, Altenberg would give free rein to his thoughts, often with scant regard to form (see also below 6.9). However, it will be seen that this tendency is counter-balanced, even in his later works, by an attentiveness to formal considerations. Moreover, although his writing often appears as a response to the moment, Altenberg gave much thought to posterity and to the effect of his writing on future generations. Disillusioned by his fellows, he wrote in the hope that their children would profit from - and perhaps even realise - the social ideality outlined in his writing. Even as the twentieth century dawned, Altenberg distanced himself from the rather short-sighted vision of the Impressionists which encourages passive, sensual enjoyment of the moment. Instead, he emphasised

the value of reason, energy and enlightenment, of intellectual control, insight and foresight. This change of outlook is reflected in Pròdrómōs, which marks the first step in Altenberg's endeavour to rehabilitate reason and "enlightened" values.

#### 6.9 The Later Works: the search for form

In a significant and relatively early British contribution to the study of Altenberg's writing, D.S. Low emphasises the difficulties which the Viennese poet's heterogeneous output poses for the literary critic:

. . . for the critic, the classification of the work as a whole provides a real problem - it is a whole compounded of such varied parts, a sort of literary mosaic, for which traditional literary categories are quite inadequate and for which, therefore, no traditional critical apparatus is to hand. Even the individual books themselves cannot properly be regarded as separate, independent entities - they merely form convenient divisions of what is, in fact, one continuous work. (61)

Low's observations are intended as a partial explanation of Altenberg's neglect by literary scholarship. As such, they do little more than scratch the surface of Altenberg's dilemma as a writer who opposed the aesthetic preferences of his society and the art forms sanctioned by it. In fact, Altenberg's varied oeuvre, with its indistinct, hybrid forms, is the product of a conscious rejection of traditional literary practices. In his later works in particular, Altenberg is at pains to dissociate himself from the majority of his fellow writers whose works, he contends, manifest the chief vices of his society: artificiality and materialism. Throughout his literary career he attempts to overcome these faults by stressing the importance of writing concisely and precisely. Moreover, he rejects traditional forms on the grounds that these denote sheer showmanship (see "Versemacher" NF 16), and are an obstacle to meaning. In "Antwort an Egon Friedell" (LA 142-4) Altenberg, writing of himself in

the third person, and in a serio-comic vein, sums up his attitude to literary composition as follows:

Und dann, eine einfache Idee des Dichters! Weshalb soll man nicht alles in zwanzig Zeilen lieber, rascher, prompter definitiver, radikaler, rücksichtsloser, dezidierter ausdrücken als auf zwanzig bis fünfzig Seiten?! Oder, eine weitere Exzentrität dieses Menschen: An Gedichten sind Vers und Reim hinderlich. (...) Vor allem: kurz und präzis sein! Nicht herum reden, sondern hinein! (LA 143-4)

Increasingly in his later works, Altenberg insists upon the functional, as opposed to the aesthetic, aspect of writing. Accordingly, he maintains that the writer's first consideration must be to communicate his thoughts clearly. In Fechsung (262) he argues that literary forms are valid only as an aid to meaning - otherwise they should be discarded.

Distasteful of what he regards as the self-conscious artistry of his fellow literati, Altenberg strives in his writing for a natural or organic form. In Nachfechtung (281-2) he suggests that his method of composition is spontaneous and "intuitive": for months he would produce nothing and then write thirty lines in one sitting. Despite his emphasis, in Pròdrómós and his subsequent collections, on the supremacy of reason, Altenberg retained some doubts about this faculty. It would appear that he still held on to his earlier belief that the intuitive and immediate is "more truthful" than the pre-cogitated. And perhaps it was for this reason that he valued a fresh, spontaneous approach to writing. The momentary impression, the chance occurrence, occasional thoughts; Altenberg considered all of these legitimate subject matter for his writing. Moreover, he believed that systems distort truth (see above 6.1.1.)

The apparent shapelessness of Altenberg's later writing is clearly a result of his mistrust of traditional forms and systems. In Pròdrómós and his subsequent works,

Altenberg appears to have dispensed with a shaping principle: social and psychological observations are interspersed with his views on art, diet and hygiene. In Fechsung (263) Altenberg indicates that he himself considers the divisions of his work arbitrary:

Meine Bücher sind ein Sammelsurium von allem  
Möglichen, Wichtigen (...)

In marked contrast to his earlier practice, Altenberg appears to have involved himself much less in the editorial processing of his later works. Some items reveal orthographical inconsistencies and careless syntax and other pieces are even duplicated. "Besuch im einsamen Park" occurs in both Märchen des Lebens and Neues Altes and, in the latter collection, "Rückkehr vom Lande" appears twice.

The same disregard for formal considerations or a shaping principle is evident too in many individual pieces. "Plauderei" is often the title which Altenberg gives to these pieces which record his thoughts, apparently as they occurred to him. In one such piece in Fechsung (152-3) Altenberg gives free rein to his thoughts on the subject of melancholy. Another piece entitled "Plauderei" (S 153) also lays bare Altenberg's associative thought process. Here he begins by suggesting that the time is slowly approaching when he would no longer be able to write. His thoughts then turn to the nature of his "mission" and the problematical aspect of his relationships. He ascribes this, in turn, to the fundamental differences which he perceives between himself and his fellows, i.e. their possessiveness and apparent lack of concern for the common good.

A further piece entitled "Loca Minoris Resistentiae" (S 37-8), which is retrospectively described by Altenberg as "Plauderei", may serve to illustrate the casual conversational tone which is a feature of his later works, as well as a disregard for formal considerations. The piece is divided into two paragraphs. In the first (270

words approx.) Altenberg begins with a general statement to the effect that every living organism has an Achilles heel and then proceeds to describe his own, jealousy:

Ich zum Beispiel habe meine Achillesferse im Gehirn, aber nicht, wie meine boshaften und heimtückischen Freunde (Feinde sind viel milder gestimmt, indem sie einen in Bausch und Bogen ein für allemal verurteilen) glauben werden, in meinen Denkartien, sondern in jener mysteriösen Partie des Gehirns, wo die Eifersucht ihren Höllensitz aufgeschlagen hat, und zwar die Eifersucht in bezug auf Männer, die mehr Haare, mehr Geld und weniger Intelligenz als ich besitzen, also drei den Frauen besonders wertvoll erscheinende Eigenschaften!

This sentence is typical of the more expansive, even expletive, parenthetical style of Altenberg's later works. It is a style which incorporates its own corrections, self-amendments and asides and which lacks the qualities of concision and precision that were so highly prized by Altenberg. In the second, considerably shorter paragraph (100 words approx.) Altenberg refers to the popular usage of the term "Loca minoris resistentiae" by his *bête noire*, the medical profession, to impress their patients and so ensure handsome payment. These acerbic observations give way to remarks concerning woman, another *bête noire*, whose particular weakness, he maintains, is a tendency to envy the material riches of others. However, Altenberg refrains from elaborating this theme which is a commonplace in his writing. Instead, he concludes the piece rather abruptly, in a manner which suggests his impatience with women as well as his subject matter:

Aber hier fange ich bereits an banal zu werden, und deshalb schließe ich hiermit rasch diese immerhin interessante Plauderei. (S 38)

A further piece, "Im August" (VI 14-16), contains observations on health-care and the problems of genius, and an attack on social revolutionaries and the enemies of the Central Powers. It is possible that Altenberg's pre-

science of his impending death made him regard each piece as his last, and resulted in what appears to be a desperate striving to encapsulate his life philosophy and do justice to the contradictory nature of life in a single sketch. As a result of his haste, his later pieces often appear inchoate. (His determined pursuit of a comprehensive vision also gave rise to these idiosyncratic formulations, "leider, Gott sei Dank" and "von Gottes Gnaden und Ungnaden" which reflect an awareness of the ambivalent nature of all things and the relativity of human values.)

Although Altenberg's later writing appears to lack formal organisation, closer scrutiny reveals much which indicates a continued concern for form, discipline and coherence. For, even in the act of renouncing traditional genres and forms, Altenberg realised the need for a constructive alternative, or framework, for his counter-ideal. Occasionally, this concern for form emerges in the juxtaposition of thematically related or complementary pieces, or in the grouping together of aphorisms which treat the same topic (e.g. jealousy, war, health-care or the nature of womankind). It is evident, too, in Altenberg's use of cyclical forms, repetition and antithesis. These devices may be described as "stylistic constants" in Altenberg's oeuvre: they are employed in the early and later works alike, as a shaping principle or means of achieving formal cohesion. Moreover, although literary scholarship makes a general, stylistic distinction between Altenberg's early and later works, the expressive and expressionistic style of Pròdrómós and his subsequent works is clearly anticipated in the early writing. As Peter Wagner remarks, "Der Trommler Belin" (WS) epitomises literary expressionism in its use of repetition and a dislocated syntax which seems to suggest the chaos and violence of war (62). Moreover, the aphoristic and didactic tendency of the later works is anticipated in "Revolutionär" and "Ashantee".

As in the early writing, Altenberg's habitual use of certain metaphors in his later works performs a subsidiary unifying function. In these works, however, the recurrent machine and financial metaphors and the animal imagery are hackneyed and stale. Stripped of their originality and freshness, they have become mere clichés which detract considerably from the aesthetic quality of Altenberg's later writing. (Nonetheless, they do have an important function, for, as Geoffrey Broad writes, "they contribute to the propagation of the philosophy behind the work"<sup>(63)</sup>). Even the idiosyncratic and expressive punctuation, which pulls the reader up short in the early works and encourages reflection, has lost much of its force in Altenberg's later writing. Here, the exclamatory style tends to deaden rather than activate the reader. - However, by employing pathos and sardonic humour by turns, Altenberg may yet engage the reader's sympathy and attention and spur him/her into action.

#### 6.9.1 The adaptation of traditional genres

##### 1) Essayistic forms.

The uneven appearance and experimental nature of Altenberg's later writing with its variety of formal tendencies, is, in my opinion, the product of a restless search for form. This search involved the revision of a variety of existing literary modes - lyrical and dramatic, narrative and essayistic. As Broad observes, Altenberg adapted the "diary-entry", the letter and the essay to his special didactic purposes. In his hands, both of the former assume exemplary significance, in other words, they illustrate what Altenberg regarded as model attitudes or behaviour. (See, for example, the lengthy diary-entry, "Aus dem Tagebuch der edlen Miss Madrilene" (WT) and Altenberg's version of Elisabeth Browning's letter to her husband in Pròdrómōs.)

A number of Altenberg's later works resemble the informal essay. All of the following, "Das 'Flugerl'" (ML 46-7), "Mode" (ML 69-72) and "Ärzte" (LA 214-9), display many of the qualities which Hugh Holman considers characteristic of this genre (64). All are moderately brief prose discussions of a restricted topic and contain a strong personal element. Each is concerned with Altenberg's personal taste and opinions, albeit on the subject of female fidelity, fashion or doctors. Moreover, in addition to possessing the "rambling" structure favoured by the essayist, each piece reveals a novel and unconventional attitude towards its subject matter. In "Mode", for example, conventionality itself comes under attack. For here Altenberg condemns not only the vagaries of fashion, but also those who try to keep abreast of them. In "Ärzte", the longest of the three pieces, Altenberg launches a personal attack on the conservatism of the medical profession; for he sees this as an obstacle to human progress.

However, although each piece appears to fulfil most of the requirements of the informal essay, caution must be exercised in claiming them as examples of this genre. In the first instance they lack the more literary qualities associated with this genre, notably a graceful and moderate style. Instead, they underline the extremity and uncompromising nature of Altenberg's views, the dogmatism of his later years. This is most evident in "Das 'Flugerl'" in which Altenberg begins by categorically denying the existence, or possibility, of female fidelity. The following paragraphs, which reveal women's susceptibility to "the other man", are intended to justify this absolutist claim. Rather than develop or substantiate his views, Altenberg tends usually to repeat them at intervals within individual pieces. In "Mode", for example, Altenberg continually emphasises the folly of following fashion, which is outlawed in the initial paragraph as "das ästhetische Verbrechen and und für sich". "Mode" also reveals

Altenberg's tendency - even in his longer pieces - towards statements, slogans and aphoristic pronouncements. In Broad's opinion, this tendency suggests Altenberg's inability to present his views in an extended framework. However, it also underlines the didactic or functional purpose of his writing. Indeed, Broad suggests that the absence of aesthetic qualities from - and the explicit didactic import of - "Mode" means that it might be more properly regarded as a "Zweckform" (65). Although many of Altenberg's longer pieces do come into this category - most are used to promote his evolutionary philosophy and principles of diet and hygiene - "Das 'Flugerl'", and "Ärzte" do not. The latter, in particular, might best be described as a diatribe, for it reflects an irrational and intemperate attitude towards the medical profession. Altenberg himself advises against reading his longer pieces as essays. He uses the term guardedly as a designation for "Krisen" (LA 229-31). And in "Die Königswiese in der Vorderbrühl" (ML 93-4) which, Broad believes, comes closest to the literary expectations of this genre, he is at pains to distinguish his own practice from that of the essayist. Many of Altenberg's longer pieces contain more narrative and anecdotal features than they do essayistic. As Broad perceives, these pieces too, generally have a didactic function: they expose human shortcomings and promote what Altenberg considered to be "reelle Werte".

## 2) Dramatic modes.

In addition to experimenting with narrative and essayistic forms, Altenberg also explored the possibilities of a dramatic mode. An early experiment, "In einem Kurpark", is contained in Märchen des Lebens (34-6). The first paragraph is used as stage directions to set the scene, the time (late afternoon) and to introduce the chief characters, a couple who sit hand in hand on a park bench. Before them pass a number of different couples (e.g. a little girl with her governess, an elegant couple etc.) whose conversations

form the subject matter of all but one of the eleven sketches which make up this dramatic cycle. The final piece re-focuses attention on the lovers as they depart from the park in blissful ignorance of the unhappy fate which awaits them. A slightly later piece, "Nach dem Balle" (BL 64-5), which is written as a dramatic monologue, highlights a mother's fears for her daughter, whose first ball signals her entry into the problematical world of adult relationships. The monologue, which is introduced and punctuated by stage directions, given in brackets, is one example of Altenberg's innovative form, the so-called "Fünfminutenszene". This highly compressed genre, which enabled Altenberg to condense the events of one year into a playlet lasting five minutes, draws its inspiration from several sources. The dramatic sketches which Altenberg witnessed in his capacity as cabaret-critic may be one source; the allegorical dramas of Maurice Maeterlinck are clearly another. Maeterlinck's influence is perhaps most obvious in "Idylle" (BL 60-2) in which Altenberg employs shadowy, allegorical figures in an attempt to concretise the threat which certain attitudes pose for loving relationships, and to suggest the ephemerality of human happiness.

Another source of inspiration is the lyrical psychodrama of Jugendstil. Perhaps the most striking feature of this genre is its shift in emphasis from the public and social to the private sphere of interpersonal relationships. Indeed, it was the ambition of one practitioner of this genre, Max Dauthendey, to create "eine Intime Bühne". His drama, "Das Glück" (1893), which concentrates exclusively on the relationship of one couple, is characteristic of the intense and introspective Jugendstil work. It also exemplifies the elevated and stylised diction of the Jugendstil drama, as well as its decorative and symbolic use of colour. In the first scene, for example, the colour red predominates: the scarlet glow of evening is reflected indoors in the dark red of the salon. In

addition to providing an attractive background for the drama, these finely orchestrated colours symbolise the spiritual accord of its two characters, Arnold and Eva. In his "five minute scene", "Alles geht seine Wege" (BL 21-2), Altenberg uses colour to similar effect. The piece is divided into two parts. The first, which is set in a courtroom, shows the sentencing of the manufacturer Anton Romangshorn to ten years imprisonment, the punishment for murdering his wife, Sartypa. In the second, dramatic part Altenberg traces the background to this event. The playlet begins with Romangshorn congratulating his wife on her creation of a "symphony in red". In reply, she maintains that she was simply acting in accordance with her husband's wish that she should make a special effort for his new friend, the soldier Zarsky. She also voices her reservations about Zarsky's visit, which she sees as an intrusion and desecration of their home. In the event, however, it is her husband who feels the sanctity of their relationship threatened by Zarsky. The latter's enthusiastic response to Sartypa's red symphony reveals him as a rival for her affections. Sartypa's willingness to please Zarsky, on the other hand, seals her fate.

Altenberg's diction in "Alles geht seine Wege", a mixture of the elevated and the everyday, suggests a certain reluctance on his part to associate too closely with Jugendstil dramatists. It also indicates his strong Naturalist leanings. Although Altenberg has left only a few examples of his novel five minute scenes, many of his later pieces are distinguished by their dramatic qualities, especially those which comprise or contain dialogue. One thinks here of "Erlebnis" (BL 120-2) or "Idylle" (BL 145). Usually, these pieces have an exemplary or didactic purpose. They too are intended to point the way towards a higher culture.

## 3) The prose poem.

In addition to the above-mentioned genres, Altenberg's later works contain many examples of the prose poem. The "Texte auf Ansichtskarten" in Neues Altes exemplify the prose poem in its most refined form. Arguably, they represent Altenberg's most successful application of the reductionist principle to the prose poem. In these delicate miniatures, Altenberg uses a natural environment as a metaphor for human emotion, as, for example, in "Schneesturm" (p61) which consists of a mere four lines and twenty-nine words. Here, a slow, measured rhythm (which is accentuated by the caesura and dashes in the first and second lines) gives Altenberg's words greater resonance, and is suggestive of the tranquillity which follows turbulent episodes in nature and the spiritual life (66).

Altenberg's subsequent collection, Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens, contains, in addition to a rare example of rhymed verse entitled "Gedicht" (48), prose poems of a different kind. In one such, entitled "Du hast es so gewollt" (BL 94), repetition and anaphora are employed not only in the interest of formal cohesion, but also to suggest a rejected lover's resignation to a situation which he is powerless to change. The piece is distinguished further by its striking animal imagery: a yellow-eyed, black panther restlessly pacing his cage is an impressive metaphor for the torment of the man enslaved by his love. The force of this image is heightened still further by its juxtaposition with the casual and callous remarks of the woman who, completely underestimating the depth of his feelings, asks that they should remain good friends. Altenberg often incorporates naturalistic conversation into his prose poems, perhaps in an attempt to underline their authenticity and relevance for life. Also included in Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens is an interesting literary hybrid entitled "Landschaftsbild" (p33-4) which combines some of the characteristics of the literary vignette with those of the prose poem. In this balanced composition, which consists of three paragraphs, or stanzas, of

slightly varied length, human transience is contrasted with the permanency in nature. Its main theme is, however, the developing relationship of a man and a woman. In the final stanza Altenberg underlines their intimacy by juxtaposing this with loneliness and rejection, which is conveyed by the barking of a solitary dog and the distant whistle of a train. Alliteration and sibilance are also used by Altenberg to reinforce the poetic qualities of the experience of human accord recalled in this piece.

Altenberg's "Semmering-Photogravüren" (F 105-113) appear, at first sight, as a variation of the concise "Texte auf Ansichtskarten". However, with the notable exception of "Das Baumgartenerhaus auf dem Schneeberg" (p108) they reveal less feeling for nature and fewer aesthetic qualities than the "Texte". They are characterised rather by a moral fervour and concern for human betterment which is exemplified in the short piece, "Die Preiner Wand mit der Preiner Schütt auf der Raxalpe" (p109):

Hier werden keine kleinen Kinder malträtiert,  
hier wünscht niemand Hofrat zu werden, hier fällt  
Regen, bläst Wind, hier fällt Schnee, braust Sturm!

Here, repetition and alliteration are used to give formal coherence to a piece which is chiefly concerned with exposing the ambition and barbarism of Altenberg's fellow beings.

Altenberg continues to experiment with, and vary, the form of the prose poem even in his final collections. Quite often, he chose to arrange his prose pieces in stanza form, perhaps in an attempt to catch the reader's attention and accentuate his meaning, as in "Vita" (VI 140-1). Altenberg's use of repetition in this piece, which warns of the fatal effects of overtaxing one's physical reserves, is interesting too. Here it has a didactic rather than a formal function. "Krüppel" (LA 193-5), on the other hand, first appears as an intriguing mixture of prosaic and poetic elements. Longish paragraphs of ten

to twelve lines are broken up by short "stanzas" which vary in length from one to three lines. However, neither the paragraphs nor the stanzas contain any recognisably poetic elements, and the form of the piece remains "indeterminate". ("Brief" (VI 164-5) has a similar indeterminate form.)

In the later works, however, the indeterminate literary hybrid forms exemplified by "Vita" and "Krüppel" are counterbalanced by more consciously poetic and structured prose poems. "Kaffeehaus" (VI 186-7) is one of the most outstanding examples of this form. In this piece the word "Kaffeehaus" functions as a refrain for each short stanza. Altenberg also employs anaphora - eight of the ten lines begin with "Du" - to ensure formal cohesion. As in the early work, the dash is an important rhythmical device in this piece, which exemplifies the elliptical style more commonly associated with the Expressionists. Although many pieces in the later works suggest Altenberg's concern with form, one other example must suffice here. In "Winter" (LA 29-31), in which nature acts, once again, as a barometer for human emotion, the stylistic devices, anaphora and repetition, have an additional structural significance. Indeed, these are the devices which Altenberg favours most as a means of establishing a measure of formal coherence in his later writing.

#### 4) The Aphorism

As a literary mode, the aphorism appealed to Altenberg for a number of reasons. In the first place, he valued its concision and self-sufficiency. As he remarks rather humorously in Fechsung, it spared him the trouble of writing an essay (p174), or of developing his thoughts historically. In Vita Ipsa he maintains:

Wenn der blitzartige rasche Gedanke richtig ist, bedarf er keiner "historischen" Entwicklung. Und wenn er unrichtig ist, kann ihn eine langsame naturgemäße historische Entwicklung auch nicht verbessern!  
(VI 299)

Secondly, it allowed him to "activate" the reader by calling upon him/her to bring personal experience to bear in solving the riddle, or in resolving the tension between the two poles of the aphorism. The unique worth of the aphorism as a means of stimulating further thought and promoting human knowledge was first publicised by Francis Bacon, who based his observations on his understanding of the Ancients' treatment of this literary mode. In his Advancement of Learning, Bacon calls upon his fellow scholars to adopt aphoristic thought in order to promote "active, dynamic cogitation". This, he hoped, would counteract the effects of the "monolithic systematizations of Scholasticism". According to Bacon, to think and write in fragments compels the mind "to seek its own connections in established thought, and thus ensures mental activity" (67).

In addition, Altenberg was attracted to the aphorism because of the opportunities it afforded him to oppose the values of his society. In the opinion of Gerhard Neumann, the aphorism not only challenges established values; it also indicates an alternative:

Er fällt stets aus dem gegebenen System heraus, aber freilich zugleich in eine Gegenordnung hinein. (68)

Altenberg, who kept up a running critique of his aphoristic usage, stresses the "medicinal" value of his aphorisms or "Splitter" (NF 23). He regarded them as a means of lightening the existential load of his fellow men, and used them both to highlight "unhealthy" attitudes and to promote a more wholesome alternative. His method, which is intended to effect a revaluation of existing values, is exemplified by the following fragment. In it Altenberg attempts to overturn bourgeois values:

Gefährlich sind nur die Dinge, die du auf die Dauer verträgst! Ein festes Verhältnis, die Ehe und Mehlspeisen! Fett und die Hure sind ungefährlich!

Like Nietzsche's, Altenberg's aphorisms - which are often experimental - are intended to rouse the reader from indifference and prompt action. In Fechsung Altenberg expresses his intention as follows:

Meine Gedanken sind gut! Gebt ihr die guten Taten dazu! Damit das Ganze einen Sinn habe! (F 177)

To overcome indifference and prejudice, this, Altenberg stresses in his later writing, is the primary duty of the artist. Moreover, the aphorism offers a unique opportunity to do both. For, in addition to encouraging further, independent thought, it also permits the expression of conflicting, or complementary, views.

In general, Altenberg groups his aphorisms according to subject matter. As Neumann observes, this is common practice among aphorists (69). In Vita Ipsa (159), Altenberg suggests that his practice forms part of a deliberate strategy to prevent his pieces from being regarded in isolation. Vita Ipsa itself contains several groups of aphorisms, each of which deals with a separate theme. Thus, while one group is concerned with the nature of genius (208f), another focuses on interpersonal relationships (215f). A further group entitled "Splitter (in eigener Sache)" (VI 158f) highlights mankind's moral inadequacies. Occasionally, however, Altenberg would collect a number of thematically unrelated fragments as, for instance, in Semmering 1912 (197f). For the casual reader, who prefers to dip into an author's works, these mixed groups serve as an introduction to Altenberg's world-view.

Altenberg's writing reveals a wide range of aphorisms which vary dramatically in length, style and tone. Some of the most effective are the punchy pieces consisting of one or two lines which toy with the reader's expectations. The following fragment in Fechsung (97) provides an entertaining example of this kind:

Ein glückliches Paar: Er tut, was sie will - - -  
und sie tut, was sie will.

Both Fechsung and Mein Lebensabend also contain much longer fragments. "Gespräch" (LA 318-9) numbers 190 words approximately. However, these fragments usually lack the aphoristic quality of "Einprägsamkeit".

Many of Altenberg's fragments possess those qualities which, the critics maintain, are characteristic of the "literary aphorism".\* Antithesis is, as we have seen, one of Altenberg's favourite structural devices, parallelism is another. The following fragment exemplifies his use of this device:

Vom Weib befreit, wirst du ein Held!  
Vom Weib befreit, wirst du ein Weiser!  
Vom Weib befreit, wirst du ein Herr! (F 212)

On occasion, Altenberg also employs chiasmus, which is a close relation of antithesis, in his aphorisms. With this device a contrast is achieved by reversing the elements of the initial model. The resultant mirror-effect is apparent in this example:

"Ich habe dich lieb - - - also bist du  
schön!" sagte ein Kaufmann.  
"Du bist schön - - - also habe dich  
lieb!" sagte ein Künstler. (P 125)

Unlike many practitioners of the aphorism, Altenberg uses imagery only rarely (e.g. F 82). However, he loves to exploit the semantic richness and ambiguity of language. In Fechsung, for example, he uses a play on the meanings of "eingehen" to warn his fellow men of the dangers of not acceding to woman's wishes:

\* Traditionally, literary scholarship has divided the aphorism into two main categories: the one scientific and formless; the other consciously artistic. (The latter category is usually said to manifest greater linguistic consciousness.) However, in his recent article on the aphorism, R.H. Stephenson suggests that this division is both arbitrary and misleading. (See the *Modern Language Review*. January 1980, Vol. 75, part 1)

Wenn man nicht auf alle Kapricen einer Dame  
eingeht, geht man ein! (F 188)

Elsewhere in Fechsung (78) he comments on the "appropriateness" of the term, "an jm. hängen":

An einer Frau hängen!?! Freilich, man hat dabei  
etwas wenig Luft und ist dem Ersticken nahe!

Many of Altenberg's fragments do not possess the qualities of the literary aphorism. Often they appear formless, dogmatic statements, bald pronouncements on human nature and social failings. Many are the vehicles for Altenberg's virulent misogyny. Others reveal the influence of advertising techniques. Pròdròmós includes a number of fragments in which Altenberg presents his "guidelines" to better living in the form of a slogan of advertisement, as in the following pieces:

Ehrfurcht vor reiner frischer Luft wird die  
Marke künftiger Generationen sein müssen! (P 13)

Vino Condurango, die undurchdringlichen Mysterien  
unseres Nervensystemes besiegst du durch die  
undurchdringlichen Mysterien der Condurango-Rinde  
des Ceylon-Baumes! (P 26)

Many of Altenberg's fragments have programmatic significance and are intended to promote his principles governing diet and hygiene. These pieces, or statements of principle, are reminiscent of the earliest aphorisms, those of the ancient Greeks which were used to disseminate medical knowledge and promote hygienic practices.

#### 6.10 Conclusions.

We have seen, then, that Altenberg's later writing is not without formal elements. However, in terms of his own extract theory (see above 6.1.1), it must be considered unsuccessful. As Hans Wantoch laments in his review of Nachfechsung:

Das Gleichnis vom Fleischextrakt im Liebig-Tiegel, das Altenberg einmal auf seine Schaffensart angewendet hat, stimmt hier nicht ganz. (VI 55)

His criticism that Nachfechtung lacks the clarity, precision and concision of Altenberg's earlier works (see Wantoch's review VI 55-6) is also applicable to the collections Vita Ipsa, Mein Lebensabend and the Nachlaß. In these works the reductionist tendency is blurred by an increasing garrulity which manifests itself, on a stylistic level, in long, serpentine sentences, and in the use of several adjectives where one might have sufficed before. Each of these tendencies is illustrated in the following sentence, the first in a lengthy piece on the subject of paraldehyde:

Heiliges Schlafmittel; wie Alles hienieden, richtig, vorsichtig, intelligent, ideal angewendet, ein Mittel, einem schlaflosen kranken Menschen von acht Uhr abends bis sieben Uhr morgens einen tiefen, eigentlich fast schon naturgemäßen (einfacher Behelf der geschwächten, gekränkten, mißbrauchten, beleidigten Natur selbst, Krücke für den Lahmen), traumlosen restlosen Schlaf zu verschaffen, amen. (LA 231-2)

This sentence also exemplifies Altenberg's later predilection for a parenthetical style. In Vita Ipsa and the posthumously published works, Altenberg uses parenthesis in a number of ways: firstly, to provide additional information; secondly, to offer self-comments and asides; thirdly, and most importantly, to highlight the discrepancy which he perceived between the social reality and his ideality. In the above-quoted sentence the words in parenthesis are explanatory and are offered as a justification for Altenberg's view of paraldehyde as a "natural remedy". In "Ich" (VI 22-4), on the other hand, Altenberg's parenthetical statements provide ironic self-comments and are intended to lay bare the selfish motives and cynicism of bourgeois society. In many cases, Altenberg's parenthetical statements detract from his main argument, obscure meaning and exaggerate the formless aspect of his work.

For, in his parenthetical pieces, Altenberg often betrays, in his sentence construction, a wilful disregard for the rules of German syntax.

There were both personal and social reasons for Altenberg's overall literary decline. Towards the end of his life, Altenberg suffered from ill-health: his physical reserves were greatly depleted, his emotional and mental state precarious. In his weakened state he wrote, not to satisfy some creative urge, but out of a sense of duty. However, while the loss of balance and control in his last collections reflects his personal crisis, it also mirrors the chaos and collapse surrounding him. Although thought by many to be "sub-literary", Altenberg's writing of this period nevertheless provides valuable socio-cultural insights. His artistic crisis - manifested in the variety of formal tendencies in his oeuvre - anticipates that of the generation which survived the war. It is the crisis of trying to determine the nature, function and purpose of art in an apparently valueless and orderless society.

## APPENDIX : NOTES

## SECTION 1

- (1) Egon Friedell Ecce Poeta p170
- (2) "Venedig in Wien": place of entertainment in the Prater which offered trips in gondolas through artificial canals embellished with a scenario of Venetian palaces (completed in 1895).
- (3) William Johnston The Austrian Mind p41
- (4) See Hermann Bahr's review entitled "Ein neuer Dichter" (Die Zeit, Band 7 Nr. 83 2.5.1896 pp75-6) reprinted in Gotthart Wunberg's Das junge Wien pp587-590  
See also Hugo von Hofmannsthal "Ein neues Wiener Buch" (Die Zukunft, Berlin, (Jg.4), Band 16, Nr. 49,5. September 1896. pp 452-7) reprinted in Wunberg's Das junge Wien pp624-9 and Hofmannsthal Prosa I pp313-322
- (5) Manfred Diersch Empiriekritizismus und Impressionismus/ p 135
- (6) Suzanne Bernard Le poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours p105
- (7) S. Bernard ibid. p105
- (8) Hans Dieter Schäfer "Peter Altenberg und die Wiener 'Belle Epoque'" in Altenberg's Sonnenuntergang im Prater p79
- (9) See Randolph Klawiter "Peter Altenberg and 'Das junge Wien'" (Modern Austrian Literature 1968 Vol.1 Nr.4 p20)
- (10) Altenberg is portrayed as an "impressionist par excellence" in Der große Brockhaus, Die neue deutsche Biographie and by Hamann and Hermand in Impressionismus.
- (11) See, for example, Peter Wagner Peter Altenbergs Prosadichtung; Jens Malte Fischer Fin de siècle pp 157-168 and Wolfgang Nehring "Der Beginn der Moderne" (in Das Handbuch der deutschen Erzählung edited by Karl Polheim)
- (12) See Bahr's "Ein neuer Dichter"
- (13) In his introduction to Das junge Wien Wunberg denies Altenberg's affinity with the Naturalist writers, Zola and Ibsen. He writes (p LXXXII): "Zweifellos bringt man Autoren wie Hofmannsthal, Altenberg, Andrian oder Beer-Hofmann - bei Arthur Schnitzler sieht es schon anders aus - nicht mit Ibsen oder Zola zusammen."
- (14) E. Friedell Ecce Poeta p171
- (15) Peter Wagner Peter Altenbergs Prosadichtung pp171-2

## SECTION 2

- (1) Peter Vergo Art in Vienna 1898-1918 p9
- (2) P. Vergo ibid.p88
- (3) This citation of Otto Wagner's Moderne Architektur is found in Carl Schorske Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture p74
- (4) See C. Schorske ibid. p74
- (5) See C. Schorske ibid. p73
- (6) Hermann Bahr "Die Moderne" in Die Überwindung des Naturalismus p2

- (7) H. Bahr "Die Moderne" ibid. p3
- (8) H. Bahr "Die neue Psychologie" ibid. p105
- (9) H. Bahr "Die Moderne" ibid. p5
- (10) M. Diersch Empiriokritizismus und Impressionismus p131
- (11) M. Diersch ibid. p145
- (12) M. Diersch ibid. p129
- (13) Hugo von Hofmannsthal Briefe (Band 2 p243) cited by M. Diersch ibid. p131
- (14) M. Diersch ibid. p135. See also C. Schorske Fin-de-siècle Vienna p313 where reference is made to the "Gefühlkultur" of Austria's upper middle classes.
- (15) See C. Schorske Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture
- (16) See Roy Pascal From Naturalism to Expressionism chapter 3
- (17) H. Bahr "Die neue Psychologie" in Die Überwindung des Naturalismus p105
- (18) See, for example, Tony Tanner's introduction to the Penguin edition of Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility (1969) p14
- (19) C. Schorske Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture p226
- (20) Friedrich Engel's description of the isolation of the modern urban dweller is cited by Vietta and Kemper in Expressionismus p40
- (21) Michael Pleister Das Bild der Großstadt in den Dichtungen Walsers, Rilkes, Georges und Hofmannsthals p71
- (22) See Elisabeth Zeeman's article on Peter Altenberg entitled "Der erste Beatnik" (in Die Kultur München 1X 170, 1960-1961, 7.)
- (23) See P. Wagner Peter Altenbergs Prosadichtung pp97-102 and 204-206
- (24) R. Pascal From Naturalism to Expressionism p57
- (25) See Geoffrey Broad The Didactic Element in the Works of Peter Altenberg
- (26) This is the definition of altruism given in Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary (1983)

SECTION 3

- (1) E. Friedell Ecce Poeta p175
- (2) Otto Basil's description of Altenberg as a "Troubadour der Frauenseele" is cited by Ernst Randak in Peter Altenberg oder das Genie ohne Fähigkeiten p49
- (3) E. Friedell Ecce Poeta p178
- (4) Nike Wagner Geist und Geschlecht: Karl Kraus und die Erotik der Wiener Moderne p9
- (5) Gisela Wysocki Peter Altenberg: Bilder und Geschichten des befreiten Lebens p26
- (6) N. Wagner Geist und Geschlecht pp12-13
- (7) N. Wagner ibid. p13
- (8) N. Wagner ibid. pp22-3
- (9) N. Wagner ibid. p75f

- (10) N. Wagner ibid. p138  
 (11) E. Friedell Ecce Poeta pp177-8  
 (12) N. Wagner Geist und Geschlecht p138  
 (13) N. Wagner ibid. p149  
 (14) Ariane Thomalla Die femme fragile. Ein literarischer Frauentypus der Jahrhundertwende p14  
 (15) A. Thomalla ibid. p74  
 (16) A. Thomalla ibid. p61  
 (17) Altenberg's letter to Lina Loos is reprinted in Egon Friedell's Das Altenbergbuch p181  
 (18) E. Randak Peter Altenberg oder das Genie ohne Fähigkeiten p132  
 (19) E. Randak ibid. p132  
 (20) Weininger is cited by Camillo Schaefer in Peter Altenberg: ein biographischer Essay p73  
 (21) Altenberg's letter to Kraus is reprinted in C. Schaefer ibid. p69  
 (22) See C. Schaefer ibid. p69  
 (23) A. Thomalla Die femme fragile p65  
 (24) N. Wagner Geist und Geschlecht p80  
 (25) E. Friedell Ecce Poeta p191  
 (26) A. Thomalla Die femme fragile p75  
 (27) A. Thomalla ibid. p72  
 (28) A. Thomalla ibid. p71  
 (29) Otto Stoessl "Ein Wiener Brief" in G. Wunberg Das junge Wien p683  
 (30) N. Wagner Geist und Geschlecht p96  
 (31) N. Wagner ibid. p96  
 (32) Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien Anatols Jahre pp191-2  
 (33) Günther Martin "Versuch über Wiener Frauen um 1900" in Anatols Jahre p89  
 (34) N. Wagner Geist und Geschlecht p11  
 (35) Stefan Zweig Die Welt von Gestern p100  
 (36) P. Wagner Peter Altenbergs Prosadichtung p102  
 (37) E. Friedell Ecce Poeta p175  
 (38) E. Friedell ibid. p176  
 (39) P. Wagner Peter Altenbergs Prosadichtung p111  
 (40) G. Broad The Didactic Element in the Works of Peter Altenberg p82  
 (41) Raymond Furness Wagner and Literature p116  
 (42) See, for example, G. Broad The Didactic Element in the Works of Peter Altenberg p87  
 (43) Janik and Toulmin Wittgenstein's Vienna p70

## SECTION 4

- (1) See above note (9) Section 1  
 (2) G. Wunberg's introduction to Das junge Wien p LXXXIIIff  
 (3) Wunberg's views are echoed by Viktor Zmegač who maintains in his introduction to Deutsche Literatur der Jahrhundertwende (pXI): "In der österreichischen Literatur könnte man mit einem gewissen Recht sogar von einem verspäteten Einsetzen naturalistischer Tendenzen sprechen."

- (4) H. Bahr "Die Überwindung des Naturalismus" in Die Überwindung des Naturalismus p158
- (5) H. Bahr "Die Krise des Naturalismus" ibid pp65-72
- (6) H. Bahr "Die Überwindung des Naturalismus" ibid. pp155-6
- (7) H. Bahr "Die Überwindung des Naturalismus" ibid. p157
- (8) H. Bahr "Die neue Psychologie" ibid. p111
- (9) H. Bahr "Die neue Psychologie" ibid. p105
- (10) H. Bahr "Die neue Psychologie" ibid. p106
- (11) Janik and Toulmin Wittgenstein's Vienna p82. See also M. Diersch Empirio-kritizismus und Impressionismus p82
- (12) See H. Bahr's essay "Henrik Ibsen" (published first in Deutsche Worte, 7, Nos. 8/9, Vienna, August/September 1887) reprinted in Das junge Wien (vol I pp1-17) p9
- (13) R. Klawiter "Peter Altenberg and 'Das junge Wien'" (Modern Austrian Literature 1968 Vol.1 Nr.4) p26
- (14) Herbert Eulenberg "Was ich von Peter Altenberg weiß" in Friedell's Das Altenbergbuch pp221-5; p222
- (15) Alfred Polgar "Wirkung der Persönlichkeit" in Friedell's Das Altenbergbuch pp265-275; p265
- (16) E. Friedell Ecce Poeta p171
- (17) Ronald Taylor Richard Wagner; his life, art and thought p88, 91-2
- (18) Werner Riemerschmid "Peter Altenberg" in Literatur und Kritik 1977, p593-4
- (19) Peter Altenberg Leben und Werk in Texten und Bildern (edited by Hans Christian Kosler) p196
- (20) Max Messer "Die moderne Seele" (published first in Die Zeit, Band 15, Nr. 185, 16 April 1898, pp43-4) reprinted in Das junge Wien pp 858-861; 860
- (21) Thomas Mann "Brief über Peter Altenberg" in Friedell's Das Altenbergbuch pp67-77 (reprinted as "Peter Altenberg" in Thomas Mann Werke Vol. X pp422-6; 423
- (22) Thomas Mann "Peter Altenberg" Werke Vol. X p424
- (23) Friedrich Nietzsche Werke Vol. 6.1 Also sprach Zarathustra p71:  
 "Wandel der Werthe, - das ist Wandel der Schaffenden.  
 Immer vernichtet, wer ein Schöpfer sein muss."
- (24) Friedrich Nietzsche Werke Vol. 6.3 p315
- (25) For a fuller interpretation of the significance of Nietzsche's Die Geburt der Tragödie and his Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen for Vienna's culture-makers see William J. McGrath Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria.
- (26) F. Nietzsche Werke Vol 3.1 p127
- (27) Viktor Adler's description of Habsburg government as "ein durch Schlamperei gemildeter Absolutismus" is cited by William Johnston in The Austrian Mind p22
- (28) Max Nordau's characterisation of the working classes in Degeneration is cited by Andrew Barker in "Die weiseste Ökonomie bei tiefster Fülle. Peter Altenberg's Wie ich es sehe" (Studies in 19th century Austrian Literature. Scottish Papers in Germanic Studies Vol.3, p27)
- (29) George Clare Last Waltz in Vienna p33
- (30) See Hermann Bahr's review "Ein neuer Dichter" Das junge Wien p588

- (31) Janik and Toulmin Wittgenstein's Vienna p48
- (32) Altenberg's letter to Emil Franzos is contained in Friedell's Das Altenbergbuch pp191-2
- (33) F. Nietzsche Werke Vol 6.1 p249
- (34) Otto Stoessl "Ein Wiener Brief" Das Junge Wien pp681-2
- (35) Altenberg's letter to Kraus is reprinted in Peter Altenberg. Leben und Werk in Texten und Bildern p186
- (36) Otto Stoessl "Ein Wiener Brief" Das junge Wien p681
- (37) Otto Stoessl "Ein Wiener Brief" ibid. p682
- (38) Janik and Toulmin Wittgenstein's Vienna p42
- (39) F. Nietzsche Werke Vol. 6.1 p51
- (40) Löffler's design is reproduced in P. Vergo Art in Vienna 1898-1918, illustration Nr. 129
- (41) R. Pascal From Naturalism to Expressionism p231
- (42) R. Pascal ibid. p198
- (43) P. Wagner Peter Altenbergs Prosadichtung p19
- (44) Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler "Decadence and Antiquity: The educational preconditions of Jung Wien" in Focus on Vienna edited by Erika Nielsen, pp32-43
- (45) Janik and Toulmin Wittgenstein's Vienna p46
- (46) W. Johnston The Austrian Mind p73
- (47) Edward Crankshaw The Fall of the House of Habsburg p314
- (48) Werner J. Schweiger's "Nachwort" to Das große Altenbergbuch pp419-423; 420
- (49) See W.J. McGrath's introduction to Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria p12
- (50) Hedwig Prohaska Peter Altenberg: Versuch einer Monographie pp173-4
- (51) E. Crankshaw The Fall of the House of Habsburg p312
- (52) E. Crankshaw ibid. p302
- (53) See E. Crankshaw ibid. p304
- (54) D.S. Low "Peter Altenberg: a case of neglect" in Trivium 4, 1969 pp31-42; p39
- (55) C. Schaefer Peter Altenberg: ein biographischer Essay pp171-2
- (56) Paulmichl Leonhard Zeit und Gesellschaftskritik im Werke Peter Altenbergs pp139-144
- (57) P. Leonhard ibid. p143
- (58) E. Crankshaw The Fall of the House of Habsburg p313
- (59) E. Crankshaw ibid. p313
- (60) See E. Friedell's essay "Peter Altenberg" in Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens p 207f
- (61) See Karl Kraus Die Fackel Nr. 374/5 "Warnung vor der Unsterblichkeit"
- (62) K. Kraus Die Fackel Nr. 372/3
- (63) See Altenberg's letter to Kraus of 24.3.1913 reprinted in Peter Altenberg. Leben und Werk in Texten und Bildern (edited by Kosler) p126
- (64) See Altenberg's letter to Kraus of 19.1.1896 reprinted in Peter Altenberg. Leben und Werk in Texten und Bildern pp119-120
- (65) Stefan Großmann Ich war begeistert p106. See also Peter Altenberg. Leben und Werk in Texten und Bildern p116

- (66) See Peter Altenberg. Leben und Werk in Texten und Bildern p244
- (67) Karl Kraus Die Fackel Nr. 274 p3
- (68) See Kurt Bergel's introduction to Arthur Schnitzler's Das Wort p13
- (69) ibid. p13
- (70) ibid. p13
- (71) For a full account of the background and genesis of Schnitzler's Das Wort see Kurt Bergel's introduction and Hans Tramer's article "Arthur Schnitzlers Altenberg-Stück" in Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts. Tel Aviv. BBI, II, 1968, Nr. 42, pp125-152.
- (72) See K. Bergel's introduction to Das Wort p8
- (73) Janik and Toulmin Wittgenstein's Vienna p117
- (74) The Hofmannsthal citation is contained in Walter Eschenbacher Fritz Mauthner und die deutsche Literatur um 1900 p33
- (75) See Peter Altenberg. Leben und Werk in Texten und Bildern p246
- (76) See W. Eschenbacher Fritz Mauthner und die deutsche Literatur um 1900 p 95
- (77) See W. Eschenbacher ibid. p97
- (78) See W. Eschenbacher ibid. p84
- (79) Arthur Schnitzler Das Wort Act V p125

## SECTION 5

- (1) W.J. McGrath Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria p65
- (2) Silk and Stern Nietzsche on Tragedy
- (3) F. Nietzsche Werke Vol. 6.3 (Ecce Homo) p351
- (4) See Thomas Mann's "Peter Altenberg" (Werke Vol X p423f; 425). In his examination of Friedrich Nietzsches Werke des Zusammenbruchs Ernst Podach reveals that although Ecce Homo was not published until 1908, many extracts from the work appeared prior to this date in feuillets, polemical essays and in introductions to pocket editions of the philosopher's oeuvre. Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche's biography of her brother contains 24 excerpts from Ecce Homo (see Podach p192)
- (5) F. Nietzsche Werke Vol. 6.1 p86
- (6) F. Nietzsche Werke Vol. 6.1 p321
- (7) F. Nietzsche Werke Vol. 6.1 p68
- (8) F. Nietzsche Werke Vol. 6.1 p46
- (9) See Peter Altenberg. Leben und Werk in Texten und Bildern p130
- (10) P. Wagner Peter Altenbergs Prosadichtung p102
- (11) Altenberg's letter to Annie Holitscher is reprinted in Peter Altenberg. Leben und Werk in Texten und Bildern pp 164-5
- (12) Max Messer "Peter Altenberg und sein neues Buch 'Ashantee'" (in Wiener Rundschau, Band 2, Nr.14,16.1897, pp 540-543. Reprinted in Das jung Wien pp722-5; 722)

- (13) Viktor Žmegač's introduction to Deutsche Literatur der Jahrhundertwende p XXIV
- (14) While Hugo von Hofmannsthal speaks of the "conservative revolution" of his generation, Žmegač describes the collective dream of the youth movement as a "ruckwärtsgewandte Utopie". (See his introduction to Deutsche Literatur der Jahrhundertwende pXXIX)
- (15) See E. Friedell's "Peter Altenberg" in Bilderbögen des kleinen Lebens
- (16) Altenberg's letter to Olga Schweinburg of 17.10.1909 appears in Peter Altenberg. Leben und Werk in Texten und Bildern p150
- (17) Alexander Pope "Epistle to Burlington"
- (18) In his study of Kraus, Schnitzler and Weininger, Hans Kohn argues that the direction of, and values embodied in, the writing of the Viennese "Jahrhundertwende" were determined more by the spirit of the Enlightenment than that of the Baroque.
- (19) E. Friedell Ecce Poeta p 49
- (20) Maurice Maeterlinck Le Trésor des Humbles p29
- (21) F. Nietzsche Werke Vol. 6.1 p250
- (22) F. Nietzsche ibid. pp250-1
- (23) Max Messer "Die moderne Seele" Das junge Wien pp860-1
- (24) F. Nietzsche Werke Vol. 6.3 p264
- (25) Walter Kaufmann Nietzsche. Philosoph, Psychologist, Antichrist pp 78 and 85
- (26) Silk and Stern Nietzsche on Tragedy p20
- (27) W. Kaufmann Nietzsche, Philosoph, Psychologist, Antichrist p78
- (28) P. Wagner Peter Altenbergs Prosadichtung pp87-9
- (29) G. Broad The Didactic Element in the Works of Peter Altenberg (see The Abstract pii)
- (30) Hans Georg Richter's observations are contained in Nachfechtung pp199-201
- (31) Thomas Mann "Peter Altenberg" Werke X p425
- (32) Hugo von Hofmannsthal "Ein neues Wiener Buch" in Prosa I p316
- (33) Marie Mautner "Dem Andenken meines Bruders" in Peter Altenberg. Leben und Werk in Texten und Bildern p242
- (34) See above note No. (4)
- (35) Translated from F. Nietzsche Werke 6.3 p279
- (36) Translated from F. Nietzsche ibid. p278
- (37) Translated from F. Nietzsche ibid. p277
- (38) W. Johnston The Austrian Mind p65
- (39) Details of Dr. Combe's study and of the International Health Exhibition in London are contained in Stella Mary Newton's Health, Art and Reason. Dress Reformers of the 19th century chapter 6.
- (40) S.M. Newton ibid. pp39-42
- (41) S.M. Newton ibid. chapter 3
- (42) See S.M. Newton ibid. chapter 6
- (43) V. Žmegač's introduction to Deutsche Literatur der Jahrhundertwende p XXXII

- (44) E. Friedell Ecce Poeta p224  
 (45) Thomas Mann "Peter Altenberg" Werke X p425  
 (46) Ronald Taylor Richard Wagner; his life, art and thought p231  
 (47) E. Friedell Ecce Poeta p240

## SECTION 6

- (1) H. Bahr "Vom Stil" Die Überwindung des Naturalismus pp138-9  
 (2) Rainer Maria Rilke Sämtliche Werke Vol.V p360f  
 (3) Robert Musil Gesammelte Werke Vol.5 p1543  
 (4) See Leigh Bailey "Ferdinand Kürnberger, Friedrich Schlögl and the Feuilleton in Gründerzeit Vienna" in Austrian Life and Literature 1780-1938 pp59-71  
 (5) Terry Eagleton Literary Theory p77  
 (6) T. Eagleton ibid. p77  
 (7) E. Friedell Ecce Poeta p142  
 (8) See T. Eagleton Literary Theory p100  
 (9) E. Friedell Ecce Poeta p125  
 (10) Hugo von Hofmannsthal "Ein neues Wiener Buch" Prosa I p313  
 (11) Hofmannsthal's letter to Beer-Hofmann is reprinted in Peter Altenberg. Leben und Werk in Texten und Bildern pp34-5  
 (12) Ernst Podach Friedrich Nietzsches Werke des Zusammenbruchs pp251-2  
 (13) L. Bailey "Ferdinand Kürnberger, Friedrich Schlögl and the Feuilleton in Gründerzeit Vienna" in Austrian Life and Literature 1780-1938 p61  
 (14) R. Pascal From Naturalism to Expressionism p145  
 (15) Paul Wertheimer's review is contained in Das junge Wien p759  
 (16) Suzanne Bernard Le poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours p14  
 (17) P. Wagner Peter Altenbergs Prosadichtung p4  
 (18) Marianne Kesting "Peter Altenberg revidivus. Sonnenuntergang im Prater" in Auf der Suche nach der Realität pp85-6  
 (19) Altenberg's review of Fuhrmann Henschel is contained in Robert Werba's article "Ein Außenseiter der Theaterkritik" in Maske und Kothurn Vol 20 1974 pp171-2  
 (20) Georg Kaiser's piece entitled "Wie ich es sehe" is found in Friedell's Das Altenbergbuch pp227-230  
 (21) See P. Wagner Peter Altenbergs Prosadichtung p2  
 (22) See Paul Raabe's Index Expressionismus p1383  
 (23) Altenberg's letter to Arthur Schnitzler is contained in Friedell's Das Altenbergbuch pp81-3 and Peter Altenberg. Leben und Werk in Texten und Bildern pp142-4  
 (24) See Peter Altenberg. Leben und Werk in Texten und Bildern pp118-9  
 (25) Karl Kraus Die Fackel 1908-9 Nr.274 (27.2.1909) p2  
 (26) See Peter Altenberg. Leben und Werk in Texten und Bildern pp119-120  
 (27) Peter Altenberg ibid. pp124-6

- (28) Altenberg's motto is a slight adaptation from Alfred de Musset:  
 "Je hais comme la mort l'état plagiaire;  
 Mon verre n'est pas grand mais je bois dans mon verre."  
 (Alfred de Musset La coupe et les lèvres, Dédicace a M.A. Tattet, 1832)
- (29) P. Wagner Peter Altenbergs Prosadichtung p8
- (30) The titles of the ten pieces omitted from the revised edition of "Ashantee" are: "Gespräch" (p14f), "The school" (p16f), "Die Hütten (Abends)" (p20f), "Souper" (p22f), "Akolé" (p38), "Ein Brief aus Wien. (An die Negerin Monambô.)" (p 46f) (this version of the letter which is written in English is followed by its translation into German), "Übersetzung von 'Ein Brief aus Wien'" (p48f), "Le coeur" (p60f), "Conclusion" (p63f) and "Le départ pour l'Afrique" (p70).
- (31) P. Wagner Peter Altenbergs Prosadichtung p13
- (32) P. Wagner ibid. pp106-111
- (33) A. Barker "Die weiseste Ökonomie bei tiefster Fülle. Peter Altenbergs Wie ich es sehe" pp77-101
- (34) P. Wagner Peter Altenbergs Prosadichtung p114
- (35) P. Wagner ibid. p117
- (36) P. Wagner ibid. p117
- (37) P. Wagner ibid. p122
- (38) P. Wagner ibid. pp122-3
- (39) Thomas Mann "Peter Altenberg" Werke Vol.X p424
- (40) P. Wagner Peter Altenbergs Prosadichtung p124
- (41) H. Bahr "Die neue Psychologie" in Die Überwindung des Naturalismus p105
- (42) P. Wagner Peter Altenbergs Prosadichtung p150
- (43) P. Wagner ibid. p151
- (44) P. Wagner ibid. p227
- (45) E. Randak Peter Altenberg oder das Genie ohne Fähigkeiten p71
- (46) Barbara Schoenberg The Art of Peter Altenberg: Bedside Chronicles of a Dying World p304
- (47) G. Broad The Didactic Element in the Works of Peter Altenberg p153
- (48) G. Broad ibid. p196
- (49) Cited by G. Neumann in Der Aphorismus p12
- (50) See M. Diersch Empiriekritizismus und Impressionismus
- (51) M. Diersch ibid. p24
- (52) William Johnston "Viennese Impressionism" in Focus on Vienna p3
- (53) H. Bahr "Wahrheit, Wahrheit" in Die Überwindung des Naturalismus p149
- (54) H. Bahr "Wahrheit, Wahrheit" ibid. p150
- (55) M. Diersch Empiriekritizismus und Impressionismus p82
- (56) Hamann and Hermand Impressionismus p196
- (57) Hamann and Hermand ibid. p188
- (58) Hamann and Hermand ibid. p197
- (59) See Ralph M. Werner Impressionismus als literarhistorischer Begriff esp. pp244 and 323. In his sample analysis of Wie ich es sehe Werner notes that while Altenberg employs the coordinating conjunction "und" 129 times, there are only 40 occurrences of subordinating conjunctions.

- (60) Thomas Mann "Peter Altenberg" Werke X p424
- (61) See D.S. Low "Peter Altenberg: a case of neglect" p32
- (62) P. Wagner Peter Altenbergs Prosadichtung pp208-211
- (63) G. Broad The Didactic Element in the Works of Peter Altenberg p240
- (64) Hugh Holman A Handbook to Literature See pp204-210
- (65) G. Broad The Didactic Element in the Works of Peter Altenberg pp242-6
- (66) For a fuller discussion of Altenberg's "Texte auf Ansichtskarten" see Gert Mattenklott's article "Keine Ansiedlungen" in the Hofmannsthal Blätter Heft 27, Frühjahr 1983 p72f.
- (67) See R.H. Stephenson "On the widespread use of an inappropriate and restrictive model of the literary aphorism" in the Modern Language Review Vol. 75 Part 1, p3
- (68) Gerhard Neumann Der Aphorismus p10
- (69) G. Neumann ibid. p6

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