

KASCHNITZ INTO ENGLISH: SIX SHORT STORIES AND ESSAYS

KASCHNITZ INTO ENGLISH:  
SIX SHORT STORIES AND ESSAYS

by

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## Abstract

Marie Luise Kaschnitz continues to be almost unknown in North America despite her status in Germany as an important poet and writer. Writing through and after the worst years of modern German history, the political depravity of the thirties and forties and the physical devastation of the war years and their aftermath, Kaschnitz told stories involving characters in various states of denial, isolation and alienation. Her characters are awakened by some cathartic event and then react to that awakening in different ways. In "The Sleepwalker" a woman made aware of the ugliness around herself throws herself before a truck. In "Life After Death" a near-death experience transforms two girls in opposite ways. A listening audience, in "The Violinist," is unable, or refuses to hear the healing message in a musician's performance. The husband and wife, in "Polar Bears," attempt to communicate across a gulf symbolized by his death. The essays "On the Nature of the 'I'" and "On Journeying Through the Depths" examine the effect of the Nazi regime on the German psyche and the best route to healing. Through these stories and essays we can see Kaschnitz's fascination with "das Unheimliche," myth, and

her tendency to draw her stories from her own life experiences.

Translating Kaschnitz presents many challenges arising from her lyrical style of writing. Kaschnitz's writing does not only speak to the conscious mind but also seeks to reach the reader at an emotional and intuitive level. I have attempted to make consistent choices and have explained those choices in the two introductory essays referring. I have also illustrated the effects of such choices by discussing two translators of Kaschnitz who have differing approaches, Donald MacRae and Lisel Mueller. To add a critical perspective to the translations, I have prefaced each story or essay with a discussion of the themes present and the context in which it was written. The selection of stories and essays have been arranged in chronological order to show the development of her writing style and thematic concerns.

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## List of Abbreviations

- KG "Die Möglichkeiten der Kurtzgeschichte"  
WG "Werkstattgespräch mit Horst Bienek"

Full bibliographical details are in the bibliography at the end of this thesis.

References in the footnotes are also brief and can likewise be followed up in full in the bibliography.



## CHAPTER ONE

### Introducing Kaschnitz

#### A) Life and Times

Marie Luise von Holzinger-Berstett was born on January 31, 1901, in Karlsruhe into a family that had its roots in the aristocracy from Baden and Alsace. She was the youngest of three daughters and had a younger brother.<sup>1</sup> Her mother was a talented and passionate musician who was admired at a distance by her children. Marie's father was Max Freiherr von Holzinger-Berstett, a Prussian major-general who became so mentally disturbed after World War I that he lived much of the time in a tent pitched in the back yard. In 1925 Marie married an archeologist, Guido von Kaschnitz-Weinberg, and gave birth to her only daughter, Iris Constanza, in 1928. Her marriage to Guido was important to her and she strove to put her role as wife and mother before her literary work. Over the years, Guido's profession took the family to Italy, Greece, Turkey and North Africa, and these travels had a tremendous impact on her work. When Guido died in 1958 from a lingering disease, Marie was devastated and her writing became filled with images of death as she worked through her

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<sup>1</sup> According to family history, her mother, Elsa von Seldeneck, was deeply disappointed that Marie was not a boy and this affected her daughter deeply.

grief. In fact, so much of Marie's life experience has found its way into her writing that the lines are often blurred between autobiography and fiction. She died in Rome while visiting her daughter in 1974 at the age of 72.

When she was eighteen years old, Marie Luise Kaschnitz published her first story (or sketch), "Der Geiger: Eine Skizze" under the initials of her maiden name, M.H.B., in the Badische Presse in 1919. This was the beginning of a long and prolific writing career. Kaschnitz's work spans more than fifty-five years and she wrote almost one hundred short stories, ten volumes of poetry, hundreds of essays, and a number of radio plays and novels.

Germany's history was chaotic and unstable during her lifetime. When young Marie published her first prose, Germany was attempting to recover from the destruction of World War I. Kaschnitz continued to write through the Great Depression and World War II, although she did not publish during the war years. Many of the collections published in the years after the war she pulled from a drawer filled with the writing she produced during the Nazi years.

Although Kaschnitz did not like to be considered a "grande dame" of literature, she did write her entire life long and received much recognition and many literary awards, including the prestigious Georg Büchner Award. She was also active in the literary community and was often a catalyst,

inspiration and friend to such writers such as Ingeborg Bachmann, Paul Celan and the Group of 47 who she felt were guiding the course German literature was taking after the second world war. Yet she did not belong to the Group of 47 because she was twenty years older than the members. She also felt that she did not fit in with the literary peers of her generation, such as Hermann Kesten, Hans Erich Nossack, Ruth Schaumann and Marie-Luise Fleißer. Because she did not affiliate herself with any group or any tradition of writing, Marie Luise Kaschnitz can be difficult to categorize.

Kaschnitz did not write from a deliberately feminist perspective. Although her writing deals with her experiences as a woman, her themes are not overtly gender political in nature. Kaschnitz does not have an agenda. Unlike many of the women writers of her generation, she did not rebel against the patriarchal structure of the society she lived in, and she embraced the traditional female roles of wife and mother. She was never an active feminist; if anything she demonstrated a great deal of ambivalence towards feminist ideas. She felt equal to men, yet worried that her education was inadequate and generally sold her accomplishments short:

Anlässlich einer Ausstellung zum Thema Emanzipation notiert Kaschnitz selbstkritisch, daß sie "nie

eine Vorkämpferin der Emanzipation" gewesen sei .  
 . . und sich nicht nur ihrem eigenen Mann,  
 sondern "eigentlich jedem Mann untergeordnet"  
 habe. (Stephan 153)<sup>2</sup>

This attitude is frequently found among women writers of her generation.

#### B) The Autobiographical and Mythical Nature of Kaschnitz's Writing

Marie Luise Kaschnitz wrote about the human condition as she experienced it and saw it. She was fascinated by the internal worlds of people: what motivates them, what their dreams are, their fears. Her writing was permeated with imaginative speculation into her own psyche as well as that of those around her. Unschooled in any dogmatic psychological viewpoint, Kaschnitz blended personal insights, spiritualism, the supernatural, and the dark, pessimism of her troubled homeland into compelling images of the human psyche; alienated, disassociated, and dissatisfied, her characters move through her worlds in a self-imposed state of denial until they are presented with

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<sup>2</sup> For a more complete feminist interpretation of Kaschnitz, as well as an excellent exploration of her autobiographical method, see Inge Stephan, "Männliche Ordnung und weibliche Erfahrung: Überlegungen zum autobiographischen Schreiben bei Marie Luise Kaschnitz."

an undeniable cathartic revelation that either destroys or enriches them.

Much of her fiction contains autobiographical elements or has been inspired by the lives and experiences of those around her. Kaschnitz said, "Als eine ewige Autobiographin, eine im eigenen Umkreis befangene Schreiberin, werde ich, wenn überhaupt, in die Literaturgeschichte eingehen, und mit Recht" (Stephan 133). For example, in her stories "Am Cicero" and "Eines Tages, Mitte Juni," she deals with grieving for her husband while she is in the town of Cicero, and her subsequent homecoming. Many other personal details of her life find their way into these stories and the lines between reality and fiction are further blurred by the fact that she calls this female character "Frau Kaschnitz."

This is not to say that her fiction is autobiography in the traditional sense; she has filtered her life through her imagination and placed it in the realm of art. When asked about the autobiographical nature of her writing Kaschnitz responded: "Wenn sie wissen wollen, wer hier spricht, welches Ich, so ist es das meine und auch wieder nicht, aus wem spräche immer nur das eigene Ich" (Stephan 136). On another occasion she remarked, "Mit dem erzählenden Ich bin ich allerdings nicht identisch" (WG 743). The "I" in her stories is at once her own voice and a fictive illusion. Many scholars have theorized about why Kaschnitz often used

her life as a centre point for her writing but have been unable to reach a firm conclusion. Stephan's suggestion that Kaschnitz may have used her writing as a method to discover and create her own identity is a plausible explanation.

Kaschnitz wrote stories capturing the frailties and strengths of humanity in the lives of ordinary and mundane characters, placing them within a more universal framework. In a short untitled essay, she states:

Die großen Lebensvorgänge sind mir wichtiger als die Eigenschaften des Individuums--wie in "Ja, mein Engel" treten auch in anderen meiner neuen Geschichten die persönlichen Eigenschaften der Menschen und ihre persönliche Tragik hinter die allgemeine Tragik des menschlichen Daseins zurück.

(KG 774-5)

In her fiction, Kaschnitz was interested in plumbing the dark depths of the mind--not only the mind of the individual, but the collective mind of society. Describing the common link between her characters, she says that "sie stehen alle unter der Einwirkung rationalistisch nicht zu erklärender Mächte, gegen die sie ankämpfen oder denen die sich beugen oder an denen sie zugrunde gehen" (WG 751). Her

characters invariably stand under a shadow whose source is vague and frightening.<sup>3</sup>

Kaschnitz's interest in ancient mythology was kindled as a young bride when she travelled with her husband to Rome and Greece and other parts of the world.<sup>4</sup> In 1943 she

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<sup>3</sup> Kaschnitz's style can be described as mythic. Joseph Campbell claims that the metaphysics of the unconscious becomes the content of folklore or myth (87-8). What is myth? E. W. Herd uses Jung's definition in his essay, "Myth and Modern German Literature":

The primitive mentality does not invent *myths*, it experiences them. Myths are the original revelations of the preconscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings and anything but allegories of physical processes. (56)

As Kaschnitz mentions in her introduction to Griechische Mythen, myths are stories that reflect the drama of humanity on a divine scale. Jung calls these mythic figures 'archetypes':

The primordial image, or archetype, is a figure--be it a daemon, a human being, or a process--that constantly recurs in the course of history and appears wherever creative fantasy is freely expressed. Essentially, therefore, it is a mythological figure. (Jung 319)

Myth is the property of humanity which each artist filters through his or her own psyche and imagination.

<sup>4</sup> It is beyond the scope of this introductory essay to discuss Kaschnitz's place within the larger context of literary explorations of myth in German literature by her contemporaries. Certainly since the Romantic period, writers have seen the fate of the Germans within a grand framework and their destiny as a great one. Given the immense scope of the experiences of the German people resulting from the horrors of the Nazi regime and the additional horror of having to face the fully disclosed facts of the holocaust after the war, it is not surprising to see writers such as Hermann Broch, Thomas Mann and Marie Luise Kaschnitz turn to myth not only to escape but as a

published Griechische Mythen in which she retells her favourite myths.<sup>5</sup> In her "Nachwort" to a new edition of this book she explained that her interest grew from the many Greek vases and other ancient art work she saw in the museums and art galleries in the countries visited; she says that every time she looked at the ancient artwork, she would wonder "was geht da vor, was wird da erzählt. . . . Den zierlichen, manchmal recht lustigen Gestalten der Vasenbilder bin ich dann nachgegangen, in der Literatur, vor allem in der Tragödie" (689).

In her fiction, she also habitually looked for the deeper messages behind the narrative asking the question, "was geht davor" and often placed the plights of her characters within a mythic framework.<sup>6</sup> She describes the process in the following passage:

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search for knowledge. E. W. Herd's "Myth and Modern German Literature" offers an interesting discussion of this tradition.

<sup>5</sup> See Norbert Altenhofer's "Sibyllinische Rede: Poetologische Mythen im Werk von Marie Luise Kaschnitz," for a thorough treatment of Kaschnitz's Griechische Mythen, as well as more general observations on the mythic nature of her writing.

<sup>6</sup> Kaschnitz frequently was intrigued by an event which she had witnessed. This carried over into her writing, where she would tell the imagined story that could have led up to that occurrence. For example, the suicide she witnessed as a young girl where she watched a piano teacher throw herself out of a window became the basis for "Sleepwalker."



Mit den weit geöffneten Augen der Sibylle blickt  
 der Mythos über den Abgrund her. Sprich, schöner  
 entrückter Genius; ich höre dir zu. Wer sind wir,  
 wohin gehen wir? Ist diese Erde unwiderruflich?  
 Warum hallt sie nicht mehr wider von unserem Glück  
 und unserem Zorn? ("Mythos" 415)

Her characters never seem to be able to remain within the realm of the mundane, because for Kaschnitz, life was mysterious, dramatic, and permeated with unnameable fears and joys.

Kaschnitz created many worlds out of the wood of the primeval forests and the veil of mystery. Since childhood, she lived in a world of fantasy and imagination, not a world populated with beautiful fairies, princesses and prince charmings, but rather with witches and goblins lurking deep in the forest. She shared a terrifying mythic vision with the likes of E.T.A. Hoffmann and Franz Kafka. In her interview with Bienek she tells him that "ich in meiner Kindheit so viel Angst gehabt habe" (743), and von Gersdorff relates that she was "nicht beglückt, sondern 'gepeinigt von Phantasie'" (24-5). That fear and torment became a prominent characteristic in her writing.

Northrop Frye, in Anatomy of Criticism, divides his theory of myths into three categories: apocalyptic imagery, demonic imagery, and analogical imagery. His description of

the demonic imagery is quite germane this discussion of Kaschnitz's mythical vision:

The demonic divine world largely personifies the vast, menacing, stupid powers of nature as they appear to a technologically undeveloped society. Symbols of heaven in such a world tend to become associated with the inaccessible sky, and the central idea that crystallizes from it is the idea of inscrutable fate or external necessity. The machinery of fate is administered by a set of remote invisible gods, whose freedom and pleasure are ironic because they safeguard their own prerogatives. They demand sacrifices, punish presumption, and enforce obedience to natural and moral law as an end in itself. Here we are not trying to describe, for instance, the gods in Greek tragedy: we are trying to isolate the sense of human remoteness and futility in relation to the divine order. (147)

This description suits, as we shall see, the plight of the sleepwalker in "Die Schlafwandlerin," the dark descriptions in "On Journeying Through the Depths," as well as the general "unheimliche" nature of much of Kaschnitz's work. The worlds into which Kaschnitz allows us entry are often dark and shadowy and full of fear. She once said, "Die Welt

soll in Ordnung sein, ist aber nicht in Ordnung . . . Darum das Schwarzsehen, die poésie noire . . . Wer ausspricht, bannt, und der Wunsch, das Schreckliche zu bannen, mag die Ursache meiner traurigen Gedichte und pessimistischen Geschichten gewesen sein" (von Gerstorff 25). In Kaschnitz's view, giving horror some kind of voice and form renders them less harmful.<sup>7</sup>

Where does this dark mythical and mystical world exist? It lives in the mind, deep below the surface in what Freud terms the unconscious. It is these depths that Kaschnitz seeks to plumb. As I stated earlier, Kaschnitz sought to reach a greater understanding about herself and her environment through her writing. The mythical scope of her vision was the form which shaped her views of the human condition. The world, other people, everything, even her own identity seen through her eyes had an aura of mystery about it; the world was something almost incomprehensible which she tried to shape and articulate in her work.

### C) General Themes

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<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to see how this need to confront the terrifying manifested itself in her life. For instance, Kaschnitz and Nelly Sachs were the only two literary representatives to attend the Auschwitz trials (von Gersdorff 297). For Kaschnitz the confrontation of evil acted as an exorcism (von Gersdorff 25).

Kaschnitz's characters often misunderstand each other and are often alienated from each other, society, or the realm of the normal (I am referring here to the many stories she has written dealing with mysterious and uncanny events which place the individual outside society). For example, in "Eisbären," a wife feels alienated from her husband when he comes home one night and acts strangely and asks peculiar questions. This feeling of separation she feels during their conversation becomes a concrete reality at the end of the story, when she is informed that he has been in a car accident and may not live. The violinist, in "Der Geiger," is also alienated from his audience because they are deaf to the language of his music; the audience misunderstands the violinist's intentions. The separation and alienation of the characters are not simply a plot device, but a central theme in Kaschnitz's work.

A related topic around which Kaschnitz constructs her stories is conflict. The natural reaction of someone who does not wish to go where another is leading is to fight. Many of Kaschnitz's stories deal with these kinds of conflicts which are not necessarily between two or more people, but sometimes within the psyche itself. For instance, in "Die Schlafwandlerin," a woman is plagued by a disembodied voice commanding her to wake up out of her slumbering stupor; throughout the entire story the

sleepwalker and the voice fight each other until the woman throws herself in front of a truck and dies. In this case the protagonist cannot bear to be forced to deal with the specific harsh realities of post-World-War-II Germany. Kaschnitz vividly depicts the realities of life that not only makes the characters uncomfortable, but can make the reader nervous as well.

After the war, Kaschnitz's vision became bleaker. Much of her writing deals with the theme of guilt. Kaschnitz never ceased to feel guilty for her fearful silence during the Nazi regime and used her writing as a forum for ruminating about it. The clearest example of this occurs in the book of essays she wrote in 1945, Menschen und Dinge. The first essay to appear in the important post-war journal, Die Wandlung, was "Von der Schuld." The more information that became available about the war atrocities and the holocaust, the more she felt guilty as an individual, and like many Germans, she felt the greater guilt of her nation rest heavily upon her. Kaschnitz searches for a constructive outlet for these feelings in these essays.

Another theme which began to dominate her writing at this time is that of death and destruction. Kaschnitz, like the majority of Europeans during this time, had seen a great deal of death, so much so, that they had become hardened to it. In a prose poem, "1001 Nacht," in Steht noch dahin, she

describes how the audience emerging from the opera barely notices the body of a person hanging from a beautiful lamp-post in front of the building they must walk by; their only reaction is to duck their heads a little in order to avoid having their heads hit the feet hanging from above. This exploration of the theme of death became intensified after her husband died after a debilitating illness. Many of the stories written at this time incorporated much of the grief she felt at this loss. The story "Am Cicero" is an excellent example of how she uses fiction to work through her grief.

#### D) The Question of Genre

Marie Luise Kaschnitz was primarily known as a poet. Over the course of her lifetime she published several volumes of poetry as well as prose poetry. When asked by Horst Bienek which literary form was her favourite and which one lent itself best to expressing herself, she responded:

Ich glaube im Gedicht. Ich will aber mehr und noch anders sagen, als sich im Gedicht ausdrücken läßt. Die Kritik hat mich die längste Zeit nur als Lyrikerin angesehen. Tatsächlich setze ich mich mit Vorliebe zwischen alle Stühle insofern, als man meine Gedichte episch, meine Prosa lyrisch

und meine dramatischen Versuche sowohl episch wie lyrisch nennt. (WG 745)

This statement concisely summarizes the type of writing Kaschnitz practiced; it never falls into neat categories, which creates interesting challenges for the literary critic and the translator. Because her poetry has received more attention than the rest of her work, and some of it has already been skilfully translated by Lisel Mueller and others, in making my translation selection, I have chosen to focus on the other writing Kaschnitz did which fills the other volumes of the Gesammelte Werke, that is, her short stories and essays.

Kaschnitz wrote over one hundred short stories (this includes those published posthumously). When explaining why she was drawn to the short story form she stated:

Die Möglichkeiten der Kurzgeschichte sind fast unbegrenzt. Von der besonderen Begebenheiten der alten Novelle bis zum pointelosen Ausschnitt aus einem alltäglichen Menschenleben ist nahezu alles denkbar, auch jede Form, die einfache Erzählung, die direkte oder indirekte Rede, das Zwiegespräch und der innere Monolog. (KG 774)

This genre provided a flexible vessel for her to delve into human experience. In the last few years, two volumes of her stories have been translated into English: a volume of early

prose entitled Long Shadows, originally entitled Lange Schatten, and Circe's Mountain, which contains a small selection of prose as well.

Within the limited scope of this thesis I have attempted to make a selection of Kaschnitz's short stories which are representative in terms of theme and time frame. "Der Geiger--Eine Skizze" was first published in 1919. This sketch reveals the beginnings of Kaschnitz's writing style and thematic concerns. "Das Leben nach dem Tode" is from the collection of stories found in her "Nachlaß" written between 1927-31. "Die Schlafwandlerin" was published in the collection Das dicke Kind und andere Erzählungen in 1952. "Eisbären" was published in the collection Ferngespräche: Erzählungen in 1966. There was much material to choose from, and I feel that the translation of these stories will add to a more complete picture of Kaschnitz's contribution to this genre.

I have also chosen to translate two essays by Kaschnitz, which display a different style of her prose writing. Her description of her essay writing as being lyrical sums up the writing style perfectly. She wrote many formal essays dealing with a number of topics which interested her: mythology, poetry, and literature in general, as well as more esoteric topics. The form varies from being tight and controlled to an almost rambling style



in which she writes the thoughts down as they occur to her, much like her diary writing. She once commented:

Deshalb schreibe ich auch so viel Essayistisches, das heißt, ich beschränke mich oft daran, zu deuten, was ich sehe oder höre und von dem ich leidenschaftlich wünsche, daß auch andere es hören und sehen. (WG 744)

She was attempting to explain that she often found it difficult to become other people in order to speak and act through them in her fiction; she enjoyed using her own voice to describe what she was thinking and feeling, which is why she wrote "essayistische Prosa." It is while reading these essays that you can get a different and more concrete sense of who Marie Luise Kaschnitz was; however, we must remember that even while apparently using her own voice, the "I" is a literary construct. The essays shed an interpretive light onto the other pieces Kaschnitz wrote, allowing perhaps, a greater understanding of what she was attempting to accomplish.

I have chosen two essays published in the collection, Menschen und Dinge 1945: Zwölf Essays. This collection deals with twelve specific issues which she felt needed to be addressed after the war. Her silence during the Hitler era weighed heavily on Kaschnitz, so she attempted to articulate her many thoughts and feelings about this

horrible experience. For instance, Kaschnitz felt that the horrifying experiences of the war years had destroyed German self-worth and hope. The two essays I have chosen, "Vom Ich" and "Vom Wandern in der Tiefe," explore a path to renewal for herself and her fellow Germans. Two main topics--identity and exploring the depths--appear again and again in her other works.

Marie Luise Kaschnitz was a fascinating woman who still has a great deal to offer the literary community. Although the second-world-war occurred many decades ago, the Western world still bears the scars of the many tragedies experienced. Many walls of misunderstanding and hatred were erected during those dark years and some of them still stand even today. It is through writers like Marie Luise Kaschnitz, who wrote painful, guilt-ridden and yet optimistic literature, that we can perhaps understand Germans. Her work reveals that we are all kin, we have similar concerns, needs and experiences which link us together. As a result, the broad themes she wove into her work will never become dated. Kaschnitz sought enlightenment for herself and for others, and in a world of ignorance and darkness we cannot afford to lose her light.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Translating Kaschnitz

Good translation involves more than the communication of ideas and images . . . It is an act of poetry, and I do not now think that it can ever be anything else without risking failure.

Dudley Fitts, "The Poetic Nuance" (39)

#### A) A Discussion of Relevant Issues in Translation Theory

What is a translator? Much has been written on the subject of what a translator's role is and on what a literary translation should be. Translation theory can be broken down into two basic groups: the semiotic or "crib" approach and the poetic approach.<sup>8</sup>

The "crib" approach refers to the approach where the translator produces a strictly literal translation of a given text. For example, translation was used as a tool to learn and demonstrate an aptitude for learning Latin. "Cribs" are word-for-word translations, like a dictionary: this word equals that one. For the scholar, this method provides the purest translation in the sense that it has not been interpreted by the translator. Barnstone suggests in The Poetics of Translation that, while this approach is

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<sup>8</sup> For an excellent overview of the various approaches to translation and the issues involved see: Friedmar Apel's Literarische Übersetzung.

useful as a method to return to the original, (much like using a dictionary to clarify literal meaning of words), it lacks artistic merit (29-39). Similarly, the semiotic approach maintains that the use of linguistics is the key to transmitting a text from one language into another, substituting phrase for phrase instead of word for word, and each grammatical structure for its requisite equivalent. Each translator attempts to find the best textual correlative for the source text in the receptor language, but of course there are only varying degrees of equivalence. Translation is about compromise; some elements must be sacrificed while others are saved. The key questions any translator must ask are: Is textual equivalence possible, and how far must we go to achieve it?

The poetic approach to translating literature attempts to recreate not only the literal meaning of the source text into the receptor language, but the artistry and poetry as well: "The one underlying plank of any working theory of literary translation is: *art must be translated as art*" (Barnstone 47). Willa Muir articulates the dilemma facing the translator as follows:

One is not dealing with blocks of words that have to be trimmed into other shapes, one is struggling with something at once more recalcitrant and more fluid, the spirit of a language, which makes

thoughts flow into molds that are quite different from those of one's native speech. The very shape of thought has to be changed in translation, and that seems to me more difficult than rendering words and idioms into their equivalents. (94)

This leads the translator into very murky waters indeed. Dealing with language theory and word-and-phrase equivalents is at least tangible, but what is art? How do you recreate it? Can a simple word-for-word translation fail to communicate rhyme and metre, culturally specific images, and other intangible aspects of literature? Translators advocating the poetic method have a valid criticism of semiotic translations in advocating this change of focus. Many translations in libraries and on students' bookshelves are spiritually dead--the literal meaning is there but not the soul. A work of literature is more than the sum of its parts.

#### B) Translating Kaschnitz

The first question that the translator must ask before beginning to translate Kaschnitz is: how does she communicate? Kaschnitz writes in a symbolic language that appeals to the intuition of the reader, and so the translator must be careful not to over- or under-interpret

when translating.<sup>9</sup> Because she rarely writes clear, concise prose, her writing can come across as vague because her purpose is not to state facts baldly, but to evoke understanding and feeling through inferences, images and allusions. In short, Kaschnitz's texts are full of ambiguities. For example, in "Wandern in der Tiefe," she begins with a classical allusion to the labyrinths of the Lake Avernus region that is the home of the Sibyl. She describes a figurative journey through the dark regions far below the earth, and explores its implications on the German psyche. Nowhere does she state that she is attempting to understand the nature of the human unconscious, yet this can be interpreted as one of several meanings of the text. Another example is "Vom Ich," where she discusses the nature of the "I." The "I" represents several things: ego, identity, consciousness, etc; Kaschnitz never clearly defines the term, and the meaning is fluid and awaits the reader's interpretation.

Kaschnitz has a distinctive prose style that must be handled properly. As I have already mentioned in my introduction, Kaschnitz often writes long, fluid, poetic

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<sup>9</sup> I have also found that reading a great deal of Kaschnitz helps in interpreting and translating her work correctly. She often comments on her own work in her essays and also frequently circles back repeatedly to the same theme.

sentences; they have a rhythm and cadence unique to her writing which enhances her frequently introspective subject matter. In general, I have attempted to recreate this cadence with the English language. When I felt a sentence was too long, I inserted a semi-colon instead of breaking it into two separate sentences in order to avoid distracting comma splices.

As Willa Muir points out, English syntax does not have the same control over its content that German has: "It runs discursively, perhaps qualifying or changing its meaning, and uses verbs as they come in what seem to the English their natural order. To construct an English sentence is not unlike stringing beads one after the other" (95). This creates problems in translating Kaschnitz's style of writing. Her long fluid prose is held together by the verb positioned at the end of the sentence; English prose does not conform easily to this type of writing without shuffling the elements around, and running the risk of changing the tone of emphasis of the passage being translated.

In addition, German builds many compound nouns, sometimes incorporating up to three or four words into one and it also has the tendency to make nouns out of verbs with some frequency. Kaschnitz creates many word collages which creates a dense, compact style of prose. Translating them often requires rewording, or else the sentence can become

bogged down and wordy. What appears as compact and elegant in German can become cumbersome in English. Exacerbating the problem, the fact that the German language assigns gender to its nouns clarifies very long sentences because the gendered pronouns keep multiple antecedents from being confused. In contrast, the English "it" is not as useful. This problem can be particularly acute when translating Kaschnitz because her personal style tends towards very long sentences.

In many of her stories Kaschnitz does not use quotation marks to denote speech. I chose to maintain this stylistic feature in the English even though readers of English are more accustomed to having clearly delineated speech in our fiction. Many writers of English prose, particularly when writing in a stream-of-consciousness mode similar to Kaschnitz's style, have made the same choice; Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner are two examples who come immediately to mind. Kaschnitz did on occasion use quotation marks in her work, which indicates that her omission of them was a conscious choice in other stories. Donald MacRae, whose translation of Kaschnitz I will be discussing further on, argues in his translator's note that the lack of quotation marks makes the line between speech and narrative unclear to a readership unaccustomed to this common German device (7). I would argue that such confusion is exactly the purpose for



which Kaschnitz left the quotation marks out. Her stories invoke the fabric of life created by the warp of third person, objective reality, and the weft of first-person perceptions; her characters themselves are often confused as to the divisions between the two.

Another issue that must be dealt with is the use of contractions in English where no linguistic equivalent exists in the German language. Contractions can communicate a lack of formality in English, and their use can alter the tone of language considerably. Because Kaschnitz's style is often intimate, I have used contractions in the stories where I felt the informality of the contractions correctly conveyed the tone of the original.

C) A Review of Lisel Mueller's and Donald MacRae's translation of "Das dicke Kind"

In order to demonstrate in a practical fashion the questions and problems which arise when translating Kaschnitz, I have chosen to evaluate the two translated versions of Kaschnitz's "Das dicke Kind," the first one by Lisel Mueller and the second by Donald MacRae. Their translations illustrate very different approaches to translation and produce very dissimilar results. Mueller did not allow herself to intrude heavily upon the text, and her end result "sounds" like Kaschnitz. MacRae, on the

other hand, felt the need to rearrange much of her prose because, as he states in his short introduction, he thought her prose needed clarification.

Lisel Mueller's version of "The Fat Girl" shows a great deal of skill and knowledge, not only in dealing with a German text but in dealing with Kaschnitz's writing. Mueller makes translating Kaschnitz's long fluid melodic prose seem effortless. Her work is an example of what can be accomplished with a minimum of intrusion by the translator. She remains faithful to the sound and rhythm of Kaschnitz's prose by keeping the original syntax as intact as possible. Her prose is elegant and she accurately interprets and translates images and metaphors. Hal Rennert praises her translations highly, stating that "they are faithful, but not slavishly so; they are economical, but not wordier than the original" (57). Occasionally the reader does stumble slightly over her intermittent failure to use a more colloquial or idiomatic phrase. For example, she translates "dicke" into "fatty" where MacRae's use of "fatso" reads more naturally to a North American readership. These occurrences are rare and do not detract from the overall value of her translation.

Donald MacRae was not as successful in his translation of the same story because he failed to convey Kaschnitz's

unique style into English. In his translator's note he states,

Kaschnitz's sentences are often extremely long and her punctuation almost non-existent. Although the meaning of such sentences is usually quite clear in the original German, I have broken most of them into smaller sections which will be more palatable to an English-speaking audience. (8)

Not only did he break the majority of Kaschnitz's sentences into smaller pieces, but he felt it necessary to break paragraphs into pieces as well. As a result, MacRae's prose reads choppily and is often inelegant. While the merits of such a prose style may be debatable, as a translation of Kaschnitz it is unacceptable because Kaschnitz's writing style is so rarely choppy. Ironically, this is a fact which MacRae himself has implied in his explanation for having repunctuated her text.

On some occasions, he translates incorrectly; for example, he translates "wasserhellen Augen" as "eyes that sparkled like water." MacRae has obviously not only mistranslated the light, watery colour of the girl's eyes but also misunderstood the purpose of the image. The girl is described throughout the story as dull, listless and incredibly unattractive; sparkling eyes suggests a vitality and life which are not evident in the story. By contrast,

Lisel Mueller translates the phrase as "eyes light as water." Some might argue that MacRae's translation offers a clearer and more immediately visible image. I would argue that MacRae's determination to translate the metaphor into a concrete, specific image has altered the mood and meaning, illustrating his dissatisfaction with her poetic language.

Three longer examples of the issues I have just raised concerning these translations will illustrate the problems, and each author's solution, more clearly. I have arranged the passages so that the original Kaschnitz passage appears first, then Mueller's translation, and then MacRae's translation.

i) Example 1

Ich weiß nicht, sagte das Kind, und wie es dasaß  
in seinem haarigen Lodenmantel, glich es einer  
fetten Raupe, und wie eine Raupe hatte es auch  
gegessen und wie eine Raupe witterte es jetzt  
wieder herum. (ll 29-32, 60)

"I don't know," the girl said, and the way she  
sat there in her hairy loden coat she resembled a  
fat caterpillar; and she was like a caterpillar in  
the way she had eaten and the way she was now  
checking out her surroundings again.

(ll 19-22, 103)

"I don't know," said the child.

As she sat there in her hairy cloth coat she looked like a fat caterpillar. She ate like a caterpillar and began to sniff around again like a caterpillar. (ll 27-29, 130)

We see in the original that the narrator is expressing her distaste for the fat girl in one long fluid sentence punctuated with many commas. This type of sentence is characteristic of Kaschnitz's prose. The use of repetition emphasizes the image of this girl as a caterpillar: "und wie. . .und wie. . ." The Mueller version captures this rhythm and imagery neatly. She inserts a semi-colon for clarity and uses italics for "was" to create emphasis, as an alternative to repeating "caterpillar" twice. Mueller chooses to interpret "wittern," which literally means "to sniff out," as "checking out her surroundings"; by doing so, she loses some of visual quality of the insect imagery which MacRae manages to capture in his version. Also notice that MacRae not only breaks Kaschnitz's single sentence into three sentences, but also splits it into two paragraphs. Granted, this is normal English style, but Mueller's version demonstrates that it is not necessary. Note also that Mueller successfully translates Kaschnitz's paragraph into

one long sentence without sacrificing clarity or readability, proving that MacRae's fundamental alteration of Kaschnitz's style, with the insertion of additional punctuation, is unnecessary. His rendering of the imagery is accurate here, but Kaschnitz's characteristic rhythm is almost completely lost.

ii) Example 2

Ich setzte mich wieder an meine Arbeit, aber dann hörte ich das Kind hinter mir schmatzen, und dieses Geräusch glich dem trägen Schmatzen eines schwarzen Weihers irgendwo im Walde, es brachte mir alles wässrig Dumpfe, alles Schwere und Trübe der Menschennatur zum Bewußtsein und verstimmte mich sehr. (ll 7-13, 61)

I went back to my desk to work, but then I heard the girl smack her lips behind me, and this sound was like the slow plop of a black pond in the woods somewhere, and it reminded me of everything murky, everything heavy and brackish in human nature, and it irked me a great deal. (ll 32-37, 103)

I sat down at my work again but I heard the child behind me, smacking her lips. The sound of

it reminded me of the lapping of the black waters of a pond somewhere in the woods. It brought to mind everything about people that was watery and dull, everything heavy and murky. And that made me angry. (ll 3-8, 131)

Again we have an example of Kaschnitz's long fluid sentence structure. Her poetic style is quite evident in the heavy, dank, watery imagery that reveals the narrator's intense and deep dislike for the girl. Things are rising in her consciousness that she would like to keep buried--the fact, as we later find out, that the fat girl is the narrator herself as a child. Mueller skilfully captures the lyrical flow of the prose in her translation. The slow rhythm of the words and imagery are conveyed with beauty comparable to that found in the original; one could almost imagine that Kaschnitz had written this English sentence herself. MacRae, on the other hand, proves here that he is deaf to the sound of Kaschnitz's poetry. As he has done throughout the story, he fragments this lyrical sentence and begins a new paragraph. He completely destroys the poetic effect of the original and replaces it with four factual statements without imagination and magic. He claims that he does this for clarity, but Mueller's version demonstrates that it need not be done. Her version is not unclear or awkward. MacRae obviously underestimates his English-speaking audience.

MacRae does express himself well in idiomatic English. For example, he translates, "verstimmte mich sehr," as, "that made me angry" which is much clearer and less wordy than Mueller's version, "it irked me a great deal." Another troublesome phrase in this passage is "trägen Schmatzen," which MacRae translates as "lapping" and Mueller as "slow plop." MacRae's word choice is superior here; however neither translator successfully shows the correlation between the girl's smacking lips and the sound of the black pond. Kaschnitz used "schmatzen" in both instances, thus making the correlation obvious.

iii) Example 3

Und das war ein langer Kampf, ein schreckliches Ringen um Befreiung und Verwandlung, wie das Aufbrechen einer Schale oder eines Gespinstes, dem ich da zusah, und jetzt hätte ich dem Kinde wohl helfen mögen, aber ich wußte, ich brauchte ihm nicht mehr zu helfen--ich hatte es erkannt. . .  
(ll 25-30, 65)

I was watching a long struggle, a terrible wrestling for liberation and transformation, like the breaking apart of a shell or cocoon, and now I wanted to help the girl, but I knew that my help



had become unnecessary, because now I knew who she was. (ll 14-18, 107)

It was a long struggle, a terrible struggle, to free herself and to evolve. It was like watching the bursting of a shell or the tearing of a piece of fabric. I would have helped the child but I knew that I no longer had to help her. I had recognized her. . . (ll 4-8, 135)

In this example I will focus on the image of the fat girl's metamorphoses. The narrator shows us the moment of change for this young girl from a lethargic lump to a being fighting for her existence. The picture of the breaking shell or cocoon is of course the conclusion to an image Kaschnitz has been creating throughout the story. The fat girl has been a caterpillar and is now a pupa breaking out of her cocoon--becoming a butterfly perhaps. Notice that Mueller has correctly interpreted this image and translates "Gespinstes" as "cocoon" which, given the context, is the most appropriate translation. This final fate of the caterpillar-girl remains hidden and unclear in MacRae's translation. He translates "Verwandlung" as "to evolve," thus misreading the meaning of the original word *and*

misinterpreting the entire image.<sup>10</sup> In addition, he continues to mistranslate this little drama by misunderstanding "Gespinstes" and translating it as fabric so that almost the entire image of the caterpillar breaking out of her cocoon becomes lost.<sup>11</sup> Instead of fostering clarity, MacRae obscures the meaning found in the original text. These mistakes, particularly in the translation of "Gespinstes," are a clear example of the problems which can arise when translating with a "crib" approach.

The art of translating is like walking a tight-rope; it requires balance, discipline and knowledge. No one single aspect of a given literary work should be emphasised above the others. Marie Luise Kaschnitz's writing, be it poems, fiction or essays, is her attempt to communicate from one soul to another as well as one mind to another. Translators of her work must always bear that in mind. Bettelheim, in his comments about translation, asserts:

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<sup>10</sup> "Verwandlung" literally means transformation, metamorphosis, change, etc. The word "evolution" means to develop and corresponds to the German word "Entwicklung." Caterpillars *metamorphose* and species *evolve*.

<sup>11</sup> The Collins German Dictionary translates this word as "weave," "thread," "spun yarn," "gossamer," "cocoon," "web," etc. I assume that MacRae extrapolated from "yarn" to get "fabric".

Their task very definitely includes an obligation to try to transmit not just the words forming the sentence but also the meanings to which these words allude. The translators must be responsive to the author's efforts to speak also to the reader's subconscious, to arouse an emotional response as well as an intellectual one. In short, they must also translate the author's attempts to convey covert meanings. (31)

Mueller successfully captures the mood and rhythm of Kaschnitz's writing by keeping the syntax intact and correctly interpreting the imagery. MacRae, on the other hand, often successfully makes good word choices in colloquial English; unfortunately, by breaking up the syntax, he does not succeed in conveying Kaschnitz's style. I have attempted to make judgements and choices which allow, as much as possible, the full message in Kaschnitz's text to emerge, including the unspecific, poetic language. I hope I have accomplished this task without adding any ambiguities of my own. The way Kaschnitz expresses herself is as much a part of her stories as the images she presents and the narratives she relates.

### CHAPTER THREE: Six Translations

#### Introduction to "The Violinist--A Sketch" (1919)

"The Violinist" is a sketch which explores the links between people and music, as well as the relationship between the artist/musician and the audience, specifically, the plight of the artist in a wounded and devastated society. The violinist's music causes his audience to think and feel in spite of themselves; their thoughts are black and all they can feel is misery and pain for their losses. He is aware of his inability to soothe the pain present in his audience, and attempts to reach them through his music using his playing to lift them out of themselves and beyond their pain, but they are unwilling to be carried away. Kaschnitz describes this tie between musician and audience as a "Kampf" or struggle, thus emphasizing not only the distance between them, but also the stubborn resistance of the people to heal.

As Kaschnitz indicates in her title, "The Violinist" cannot be strictly defined as a short story. This piece conforms more closely to the impressionistic sketch than the genre of the story, as it is characterized by its lack of plot action and its "Eindruckschilderung." In this regard,

"The Violinist" is representative of a large portion of her prose work.

This piece is the earliest published example of her narrative style. Still, it reveals her typical intimate style and characteristic method of shifting narrative perspective, as well as her almost photographic use of image. Kaschnitz focuses the reader's attention on a series of images, shifting from the violinist alone on stage, to his movements, and to the audience. She then shifts from showing us these images to divining what the violinist is trying to communicate to the audience through his music. Finally she leaves us with the images of the inaccessible audience and the violinist immersed in the world of his music.

Initially, Kaschnitz narrates in the third person, staying close to one character's perspective so that the reader knows little more than the characters she is depicting. The narrative flows past in a meandering stream of images and associations. She does not maintain this narrative perspective for the entire sketch; suddenly the narrator is conveying an interpretation of the violinist's thoughts. Interestingly, the style of the prose does not change significantly; the narrative voice stays the same, because she is voicing her interpretation of the violinist's music and movements. The reader is receiving the viewpoint

of an audience member, complete with the observer's projection of the violinist's motivations and thoughts, rather than an account from an omnipotent perspective.

The balance between narrative perspectives must be maintained in the English. In addition, the translator cannot give in to the urge to explain or interpret the text too much for the readership. When translating Kaschnitz, this is always a temptation, given her tendency towards vagueness. She expects readers to do their own interpreting of the images. As a result, because of its primary importance to the text, the photographic nature of the images in this sketch was often a challenge to reconstruct in the English text. I often had to rephrase sentences in order to maintain the visual quality of the original which, when simply literally translated, remained dull and lifeless.

## The Violinist--A Sketch

A young violinist was giving one of his first concerts in a small, full hall. He was standing exactly at centre stage between the two garish pillars. A powerful, glaring spotlight<sup>12</sup> shone on him and cast his pointed but blurred shadow on the white wall. He appeared to be calm, but the shadow was shaking back and forth almost ceaselessly, as if it could not be fooled by his outward calm. The violinist was hunched over and his body was contorted;<sup>13</sup> his face, an unhappy, agonized face, was turned sharply to one side. You had to keep looking at him, as at an ultra-modern painting that is exaggerated and distorted, and yet shocking in its simplicity.

Passion and boldness were in the beautiful sweep of his playing. His stroke was tender and comforting, whenever those sweet, wistful musical passages emerged--so typical of the violin and which have such a profound effect on us all.

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<sup>12</sup> "Starkes, grelles Licht" : Kaschnitz does not specify how many lights are shining. I have translated it as a spotlight because it corresponds to the clearly delineated shadow behind him.

<sup>13</sup> I have reworded this phrase somewhat to maintain the visual quality of the original.

Still, he did not smile; he did not play dreamily, obeying an inner voice, but deliberately and seriously.

The people were sitting in the cold hall all wrapped up in their coats. Their faces revealed no delight.<sup>14</sup> They kept their heads lowered and seemed to be depressed and guilty, sad and despairing all at once. They were reflecting. The music was compelling them to do this, and they were unhappy about it.

Suddenly I noticed that the violinist's battle was just beginning, the battle with the audience, which is always out there and was especially relentless on that day. He was not fighting for the audience's favour--his playing was supposed to lift them up beyond themselves.

I sensed what he wanted to say with the impetuous movements of his unattractive head, with the agonized opening and closing of his mouth:

All of you for whom I'm playing cannot forget.<sup>15</sup> I know that the grief of many, the tragedy of an entire nation, *your nation*, weighs on the heart of each and every one of you. I could comfort you when *one single* departed soul filled you with pain. But because you are now grieving

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<sup>14</sup> Literally translated, this should read, "there were no expressions of delight." I have condensed this phrase to eliminate wordiness.

<sup>15</sup> I have rephrased this sentence in order to make it sound natural in the English.



over thousands, I cannot comfort you any longer. But you should not struggle to see all this in a different, more conciliatory light. You should leave it all behind.<sup>16</sup> Because my violin melodies have nothing whatsoever to do with all that. People still project their pain and their joy into music, and want to hear human feelings there as well. And yet, only if we consider music a gift from a far distant kingdom, which has nothing in common with us and our petty little goals, will celestial beauty completely fill us. Because peace and fulfilment are found within that distance. . .

But the people did not understand what he wanted to tell them. I did not see fulfilment in their faces. It only came over the young violinist. As he followed his tightly clasped inspiration he forgot that no one can bring peace to people torn by suffering and pain, because they are searching for it here on earth.

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<sup>16</sup> Literally translated, this should read, "forget yourselves." This is a figurative phrase in German, so I have used a comparable phrase in English.

Introduction to "Life After Death" (1937-41)

This story is an analysis of the transforming effects of a near-death experience. Near-death experiences have fascinated people for generations. They have been seen as either confirming our beliefs in an afterlife or shaking our faith. This story is actually based on an occurrence in Kaschnitz's life. When she was seventeen years old, she lost consciousness and almost died because of a defect in a gas stove which had leaked gas into the room. As happens in the story, a cleaning lady found her unconscious on the floor and saved her life (von Gersdorff 61-2). In the story, Kaschnitz uses two victims, in order to explore two radically different responses to the same experience. For most people it is the experience itself which holds their interest, but Kaschnitz uses the experience (which she does not describe in the story except to say that it happened) as a catalyst to illustrate the change in the girls before and after the event. This study of transformation is a recurring theme in Kaschnitz's work.

Using a third-person narration, Kaschnitz describes the mind sets of the two girls during the time they spend together. Notice how she begins the story: "Es wurde einmal davon gesprochen . . ." We are receiving the story of the

two girls in an indirect manner. The narrator is remembering that this story was told once as an example of how the same experience can change people in different ways. Both girls were similar in most ways, in background, education, etc., and yet when they meet we are shown how their paths diverge in a relatively short period of time. Leni is well travelled, going to art school, and about to be married; Ursula, on the other hand, is stuck in a mundane job, has no marriage prospects, and very little hope for love and beauty in her life. The two girls appear to almost exchange places. Leni leaves earthly pleasure in order to live in a dream world inspired by her brush with death; Ursula finds love with a married man and feels as if her senses have just woken up from a deep sleep.

Essentially, "Life After Death" is not about concrete issues or occurrences; it is about feelings, thoughts and dreams. Kaschnitz, very much at home in this realm, has an allusive, poetic yet exact writing style for evoking these experiences for the reader. I had to be careful in my recreation of this style in my translation. As I have commented previously, capturing the rhythm of Kaschnitz's prose is essential to experiencing her vision. The short factual sentences keep the reader distanced from the characters; we, the readers, are observers of this drama. We are not invited to participate in any other way.

Therefore, I had to be careful to keep the tone of the prose the same; the words and syntax I chose could not be too factual and clinical, but at the same time they could not be too intimate and familiar.

As indicated in the footnotes, I had to circumvent the use of "Du" and "Sie." Because we do not have such formal rules about addressing strangers and acquaintances, these types of passages become a thorn in the translator's side. The inappropriate use of "Du" is important to the overall situation Kaschnitz describes where the narrator comments that the girls fell back into the use of "Du" even though they were no longer school girls where the formal use of "Sie" is not required. This idea needed to be expressed in the English and yet a direct translation would have been nonsense to the target reader (without background in German or French). Therefore, I rephrased this passage in a descriptive manner in an attempt to convey the same idea.

## Life After Death

Someone once said that two people could have the very same experience and yet be moved by it in completely different ways. As evidence for this, he told the story about two young girls who, the storyteller stressed, were very much alike. They resembled each other in all those characteristics that human experience imprints on people: because they were both definitely not unusual people this meant that they resembled each other in many ways.<sup>17</sup>

These two young girls met quite accidentally on one of the main streets in the city. It was on one of the days between Christmas and New Year's which still have something special and festive about them even though they aren't holidays. Besides, the sun was shining. The air was full of the freshness of night time frost, but also the warmth of spring, which no one had dared to think about before Christmas and was now suddenly announcing itself, incredibly bright and forceful.

The young girls recognized each other almost simultaneously and greeted each other warmly. They had gone

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<sup>17</sup> The German text reads: "da sie beide durchaus nicht ungewöhnliche Menschen waren, also in vielem." I have added to the English text here for clarity.

to school together several years ago and hadn't seen each other since. Because they had been neither friends nor enemies during those years at school, they had hardly thought about each other since.

Perhaps Ursula seemed a little happier about their meeting than Leni. Ursula was on a visit to the city. Her vacation was almost over and in a way it probably had been a disappointment. To make up for a whole year of work, the ten days should have been overflowing with those new important things that only freedom and idleness can provide. Ursula couldn't admit to herself that she had expected something other than the relaxing emptiness of the holidays in the circle of her relatives. She was beginning to think about the office again where she would be sitting day after day. But when she recognized Leni, she immediately saw the possibility of new experiences, which represented to her something like provisions taken on a long journey.

Leni lived in that city. She was on her way to lunch after visiting some friends she had thanked for their Christmas present. She had to meet someone that afternoon and planned to go out with her fiance that evening. She didn't have as much free time as Ursula, and the years had distanced her more quickly from their years at school together. That may even have been why she was so glad to see Ursula. Because she was very much inclined to become

more relaxed and cheerful when remembering bygone times, all the memories were like a wide-open landscape, but the future was like a forest at night where only the nearest thing can be seen.

Ursula joined Leni. They walked together through a park. They talked about their lives<sup>18</sup> since school, all the while becoming more enthusiastic and hearty. Soon they were walking arm in arm the way they had during recess in the school yard. The informal use of first names instead of the more appropriate use of "Miss" or "Mrs." between adults<sup>19</sup> as well as the thought that they would soon separate and might never see each other again were the reasons that they confided things to each other that they withheld from those closest to them. Since they were very young their own frankness made them happy.

After a while they decided to have lunch at an inn. This was something out of the ordinary for Leni and she felt festive. She ordered a bottle of wine and Ursula, who almost single-handedly emptied it, was more and more

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<sup>18</sup> This phrase should literally read, "how they had lived during the years since school" but I found this too wordy and cumbersome and paraphrased.

<sup>19</sup>I had to rephrase this sentence to make the inappropriate use of "Du" between adult acquaintances clear in English.

inclined to regard this luncheon, this unexpected intimacy, as the adventure that her holidays still owed her.

She eagerly took in her friend's stories as if she were acquiring a piece of life that was to become her own.<sup>20</sup> She herself had a dull job, and the people that she knew in her small town were also dull and uninteresting. Perhaps it was her own fault that she didn't see things differently. But she would get so exhausted that she just didn't have the strength to see things as more lovely and people as more attractive than they were. Nevertheless, she wasn't unsatisfied. She was valiantly resolved to remain a minor employee for the rest of her life and not to get married since she didn't have any money and wasn't particularly pretty.

Leni's life was quite different.<sup>21</sup> She had gone to art school and had gone on a number of trips. She had a boyfriend she was going to marry as soon as he got a secure job. Her time belonged to herself or to those things and people to whom she freely gave it.

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<sup>20</sup> "Als gewänne sie damit ein Stück eigenes Leben." The phrase, "eigenes Leben" I had to expand upon for clarity.

<sup>21</sup> "Bei Leni war alles anders": I have rephrased the English by using a more familiar phrase.



Even though the two girls lived such different lives, they got along surprisingly well, in fact, they now felt an immediate and strange affection for each other, as if they had found in each other the hidden "I" and all unknown sisters. It was as if fate, which was preparing a dangerous experience for the two of them, wanted to remove every hint of coincidence from that meeting.

After the meal the two girls left together. They were a little tired from the wine and their heads were spinning. Leni invited her friend into her studio to look at her drawings. Ursula took her arm once again. They looked at the display windows on the way, which were still decorated for Christmas.

Leni's studio was in an art school--a tall, light-coloured building on the outskirts of town. They went up the stairs, and the entire building was silent and icy cold because it was still the holidays. When they entered, Leni immediately pulled matches out of her purse and lit a fire in a small iron stove, which quickly got very hot. Ursula wanted to look around, but Leni said that there was still plenty of time for that. They had started talking about school, now trying to outdo each other in recalling their memories. They imitated all their old teachers, while bursting into silly laughter. They talked for an hour about nothing else and laughed constantly. Then the unthinkable

happened, abruptly ending their cheerfulness. All of a sudden, Ursula, who had sat down on a stool, began to beat her fists wildly on her knees. Astounded, Leni leaned over and saw that her face was contorted and that there were huge tears in her eyes. Before she could ask her what was wrong, she herself became very weak. She didn't even have enough strength to put her arm around her friend. She still was able to see Ursula topple over, heavy as a sack, and then nothing else.

A cleaning lady, who had forgotten her apron in the studio building, came up the stairs late that afternoon and heard a moaning sound. She rattled various doors, which were all locked. Finally, one gave way and she saw the two girls lying on the floor in the room. The woman had enough common sense to fling open the windows. Then she went to get the caretaker. She sent him to the first-aid station and phoned Leni's parents.

While all this was going on, the two young girls were slowly coming back to life. Their bodies recovered in spasms, and they were hardly able to inhale the fresh air, the new breath being blown into them. In fact, they had been close to death and were now being recreated. But they didn't know anything about this. Later, they only faintly remembered the seconds before they fell unconscious. So you

could say, that they didn't consciously experience their accidentally averted deaths. It is all the more remarkable that they were nevertheless marked by death's hand and couldn't continue living they way they had been before. They also returned from this vast remarkable distance not together but alone.

Ursula saw a man's large, blurry face over her own. Astonishment and sympathy were visible on that face. Feeling tremendously weak, she surrendered herself to the arms that lifted her. The first-aid attendant sat her down on a chair. Ursula thought she had lost her mind. She recognized the room; it was full of people who were speaking excitedly. Suddenly her uncle stood in front of her and seized her by the shoulder. The good-natured man yelled rudely in her face: Stand up! Ursula obeyed him, and walked a few steps. The people were crowding around the little iron stove. The first-aid attendant skilfully picked Ursula up and carried her down the stairs. Her uncle went with them. Stop carrying her, sir,<sup>22</sup> he said, she can walk. An ambulance was waiting in front of the door, and the driver pushed the bystanders back. Nonsense, the uncle said, we'll walk. Ursula walked resolutely on swaying ground, through surging fog, hoping finally to reach the firm ground of the

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<sup>22</sup> I have added "sir" to convey the politeness of Sie.

everyday somewhere. Gradually, she recognized the streets and squares. Her uncle stopped and wiped his forehead with a large handkerchief. Ursula finally dared to ask what had actually happened. She heard that they had been poisoned by coal gas. After that she was quiet and didn't even ask about her friend. They crossed over a large bridge; ice floes were floating beneath it, and the wind was blowing heavily through the large gap that the river made between the houses; night fell. Suddenly Ursula stopped and grabbed the iron railing. It seemed as if she had been walking through total silence till now--all of a sudden all the dynamic noises of life hit her ears: the crashing floes, the rolling wheels, the roaring water and wind. The breeze tugged at her hair. The edge of the iron railing cut into the flesh of her hand. Her heart was beating madly and passionately, and for the first time she felt how her blood was racing through her body with fierce energy.

Her uncle impatiently urged her to hurry. His wife was sitting there, at home, afraid. When he came in with Ursula, she wasn't alone. Guests had been invited for that evening, relatives and friends, who had been welcomed with the bad news. When her uncle pushed Ursula, alive and well, through the door, the gloomy atmosphere dissolved into raucous joy. Ursula was surrounded and congratulated, given cognac to drink and was questioned. She sat silently for a

while, drinking in little sips and looking around with curious shining eyes. Suddenly she began to talk about the event with great animation. Again and again she told the whole story leading up to the event. Then, getting bolder, she described the feelings she had before losing consciousness. Her description got increasingly more colourful when she noticed how attentively they were listening to her. Dinner was served, and someone settled her into the most comfortable chair. She didn't eat but described dreams she hadn't even had.

One of the guests was from the small town she lived in. He was a married man she'd often seen at work. He had taken as little notice of her there as she had of him, but now he was the one who listened most attentively, and was most solicitous towards her. He looked at her constantly, and sometimes, in the middle of her talk, Ursula would stop and stare before her as if she were seeing ghosts. Then he would urge her to eat and drink. When the record player was turned on after dinner, he told her she was not to dance. He spoke quietly to her, as if he had a special right to be worried about her. Ursula shook her head; her cheeks were flushed, she said: it's not worth talking about. She danced and he held her, while watching her anxiously. It was Ursula's big day. She shuddered when she thought about

how she had almost left this indescribably marvellous world, and all the people she loved so much.

She yanked the balcony door open and stepped outside. It was a beautiful, cold night. Her aunt called her back inside; the guests were crowding around the door. Ursula bent her head all the way back,<sup>23</sup> and they all suddenly fell silent, thinking that the sight of the starry sky was making her happy. But Ursula wasn't thinking about the stars; instead, she had an attack of despair about her daily job at the office. At the same moment, someone wrapped a coat around her. It was a very big, wide coat that almost hid her completely, and no one could see that the man from her town, who had brought it to her, was now grasping her hands. No one heard what he said to her, only Ursula, the intoxicated one, for whom the world had been transformed; love was only one of the miracles she had been waiting for for a long time, and now she was surrendering herself to it as she trembled.

Leni had been taken home in an ambulance. Her parents didn't let her walk; she was obviously not fit for that. She could neither stand nor sit; it was as if her limbs were terribly heavy. She didn't speak, and didn't wish to know

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<sup>23</sup> Literally: she put her head on the nape of her neck. Doesn't work in English at all.

about anything. She lay on the stretcher in the ambulance, and her parents sat on the little seat that was so small that they had to hold on to each other to stay on it. They were most distraught. Leni stared at them with big eyes.

The doctor arrived and said as he came in: Well, what have we been up to now? Leni didn't smile at any of his little jokes and he became embarrassed. He couldn't find any after effects from the poisonous gas and shook his head, while murmuring something about a shock to her nerves. They walked on tip-toes around Leni's room. Once, her father went in, and timidly asked: Don't you want to get up, sweetheart? Leni signalled no with a gesture of her hand. The father said: I have arranged for a thorough investigation. Something like that shouldn't be allowed to happen again. You really didn't shut the stove up tight, right? Leni said in a feeble voice: I don't know anymore.

Actually, she did remember clearly on the day of the accident that she hadn't closed the stove door tightly. But now the opposite seemed just as possible.

Although the doctor had found her lungs and heart to be completely normal, Leni really was incapable of getting up. She lay in bed, didn't speak, and didn't read. She thought incessantly about the moment of her death. As with Ursula, the empty space of unconsciousness gradually became filled with strange images and she was soon thinking of them as

real experiences. Whereas Ursula had been given life at that moment--a restless, dangerous life--one very different from her previous existence, Leni came to know a different and even more powerful attraction--the lure of death.

Leni lay immobile, in the same way that someone does who is trying to find his way back into a terrifying dream that was also more radiant and full of rich pleasure than reality; in this way, Leni was always ready for those visions, because reality seemed banal and empty to her in comparison to the world of dreams.<sup>24</sup> She awoke one night and found herself in an unearthly landscape surrounded by spectral<sup>25</sup> beings who terrified her. In order to push through the circle surrounding her, she approached them and recognized them as people closest to her with horrible grotesque faces, and they were the ones who were now pressing around her with malicious intent. She broke through the threatening dancing ring; the landscape absorbed her, and she roamed through it, floating, drifting over the earth with never-ending pleasure.

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<sup>24</sup> I had to extensively reconstruct this sentence, because of its inverted structure.

<sup>25</sup> "Gestalten, die lebenden Wesen nicht glichen" literally translated becomes: "figures who did not resemble living creatures." Again this is too wordy and clutters the image in English, and I therefore condensed the image into an appropriate adjective.



Leni's fiance came every day and tried to take her mind off things by talking about what happened that day, and his affairs. Leni showed little interest, and she would even sometimes cry out in fear the moment anyone entered the room. Her parents felt helpless and unhappy. A relative came to visit one day who thought she knew a lot about the human psyche. She had everything that happened described to her. Then she asked to speak with Leni alone.

Leni greeted her in a friendly manner and with surprise. Her relative came towards her with hands outstretched and a worried look and asked with ardent sympathy: Why did you do it? Leni finally understood her, and smiling, shook her head. The relative talked and kept prying, saying that Leni was supposed to pour out her heart to her because she said she understood everything so well. When she didn't get anywhere, she said angrily: So you didn't deliberately close the stove tightly. Leni said: No-but she was thinking, maybe yes.

From that day on, she got worse. Her visitors were appalled because she no longer seemed to recognize anybody. She did recognize all of them, but it was only through this deception that she was able to protect the world in which she was now living.

A new doctor came, and they tried to almost force Leni to get up. She finally did, but only to have some peace.

But a little while later, when she was unexpectedly surprised in the bathroom just as she was turning on the gas, they didn't dare keep the sick girl at home any longer.

Leni was admitted to a sanatorium. She was very content there, and expressed no further wishes. For a little while, she urgently asked for a friend called Ursula, who they tried to reach at her relatives' home. But she had long since left the city under the most adventurous circumstances.

Introduction to the Essays: "On the Nature of the 'I'"  
and "On Journeying through the Depths" (1945)

The essay "Vom Ich" opens the book of essays Kaschnitz wrote entitled Menschen und Dinge 1945: Zwölf Essays. These essays constitute an articulate expression of the scarred post-war German psyche. In these essays Kaschnitz searches for the answer to the question, "Where do we go from here?" Some of the essays appeared in Die Wandlung, an influential journal founded by Kaschnitz's friend, Dolf Sternberger. The essays published in the journal caused much controversy and this reaction shocked Kaschnitz: "Wie arm ist dieses Land noch, wenn Dinge wie die Essays soviel Resonanz wecken" (von Gersdorff 174). The essays have not lost their insightful edge and are still relevant to society.

In "Vom Ich" Kaschnitz ruminates on the nature of human identity. She sees human individuality and self-consciousness as being born out of a constant process of rebirth and metamorphosis, as changes in the external world drive changes in self-definition and perspective. She sees the "I" and the world as being connected through experience; the "I" absorbs the world into itself, becoming a part of it, and the "I" expresses its independent will, giving its thoughts shape through speech. Into all the images of

destruction and death, Kaschnitz adds the light of hope. The "I" has been reborn from the ash heap. It is all that is left when everything else has been stripped and burned away. The indestructibility of the "I" gives Kaschnitz hope in the midst of chaos.

The seventh essay from this collection, "Vom Wandern in der Tiefe," deals with the consequences of living in darkness. For Kaschnitz this does not only refer to physically living in bomb shelters and basements, but also in a metaphorical/psychological sense. She believed that people were seduced in to giving into their darker impulses, allowing themselves to be ruled by them during the time of the Third Reich.

The essay, like many of the others, demonstrates Kaschnitz's love and knowledge of ancient mythology. Her diaries reveal that she saw the past as a foil to the present. There she states: "Auch bei uns leben noch Mythen und Märchen. Ewige Themen immer wiederkehrend . . . Der unbekannte Soldat. Stalingrad . . ." (von Gersdorff 124). She opens "Vom Wandern in der Tiefe" with an image derived from ancient Roman mythology and presents it as a parallel for the experience of the German people. She feels that the nation has been on the labyrinthine journey through the caves by the shore of Lake Avernus which she describes at the beginning of the essay. The New Larousse Encyclopedia

of Mythology summarizes the mystery and mythology surrounding this area:

Like the Greeks, the Latins placed the Infernal Regions in the centre of the earth. It could be reached by various openings--caves, lakes, marshes. One of the most celebrated of these was Lake Avernus in Campania, a grim and deserted spot in the neighbourhood of Pozzuoli. The hills which surrounded it were formerly covered with woods sacred to Hecate (*luci averni*) and pitted with cavities through which, according to Cicero, one called forth the souls of the dead. Near Avernus the cave called the Cave of the Cumaean Sibyl can still be seen. (213)

Although Kaschnitz does not specifically mention the Sibyl of Cumae in this essay, her presence is inextricably tied to Lake Avernus; it was her home. In Griechische Mythen the first story she tells is "Die Sibylle," a story of the Sibyl. There she describes the landscape in more detail and the Sibyl's place in it:

Aber über der Szene des Totenopfers an den Ufern des unheimlichen Averner Sees liegt etwas von dem Schauer der Nachtwelt, und schaurig klingen die Worte der Sibylle, die das Echo der Höhle hundertfältig zurückwirft. Sie führt den Helden

in die Unterwelt, und diese Unterwelt ist ihr vertraut wie eine Heimat. Und nicht nur Apollon, sondern auch die Erdmutter haben ihr den Ort gewiesen, an dem sie wirkt, die campanische Grotte, welche halb der unteren Welt und halb dem lichten Tag gehört. (575)

This mythical metaphor of the journey through the bowels of the earth is extended through the entire essay and places the plight of the German people on a loftier plateau: the realm of myth. She is not idealizing this experience or refusing to deal with the mundane details of horror and shock. Realistic details are mingled with the mythic to create a real yet super-real effect in her prose. The reader can be carried along by the rhythm of her words and the beauty of the images without being distracted from the horror of the experience being described. Von Gersdorff describes Kaschnitz's writing best in writing that she drew upon "uralten Wahrheiten, die auf der Erkenntnis vom Wesen des Menschen und seinen Konflikten beruhen. Und sie will, was sie zu sagen hat, so eindringlich erzählen, daß ein 'friedliches Darüberhinweghören nicht möglich ist'" (263).

These two essays challenged me as a translator because the formal prose presented new problems in addition to those associated with Kaschnitz's short stories. In many ways Kaschnitz's story-telling style was easier to render into

English because it was often more straightforward. In her essays, she is not a precise, clinical writer who lists off points in an orderly fashion. Rather, she drifts through the argument using poetical allusions and vivid, surreal, imagery. In any translation, the translator must be careful to render double meanings, metaphors, allusions and culturally specific imagery in a way which is comprehensible to the reader. Kaschnitz's writing is so filled with these devices that her essays can be very difficult to translate. The essays are not so much presentations of fact or argument, but are thoughts, with all their winding pathways, communicated in rich language and provocative imagery.

In both essays Kaschnitz describes a journey into the self. She often uses allusions to classical literature and myth, as well as philosophy and the German classics in order to reach the reader on a subconscious level. The essays contain a multiple overlay of language: the romantic poetic vocabulary of Novalis and Hölderlin, who worshipped the night in all its mystery and glory, philosophical existentialism, and the psychological language of the soul. All these disciplines and ideas are mingled with Kaschnitz's own voice.

Kaschnitz communicates in images and poetry, not in straightforward or pedantic speech; the reader must often intuit the meaning. This means that the translator must

continually maintain a balance between literal, logical meaning and the accurate rendering of the illusive and mysterious nature of her writing.

My footnotes show specific areas where I felt it necessary to rephrase Kaschnitz's sentences at times in order to make the meaning clear. Kaschnitz uses compact language which is often difficult to translate into English in a literal manner. I frequently had to expand the dense nominal constructions into the verbal constructions common in English in order to clarify meaning or sharpen an image. Occasionally I had to replace a metaphor or a tricky word with one more easily understood and visualized in English.



### On the Nature of the "I"

Let us go back again to the threshold of conscious life. Let us begin again with the word "I." In the past it sounded like a clear trumpet blast; a trumpet blast introduced each sentence; the "I" opened up the world. Decades have gone by since then. Has this caused courage to falter and hope to diminish? No. Courage and hope are not dependent on personal and supra-personal fateful events. They are a gift and they are part<sup>26</sup> of the great blessing of rebirth that fulfils itself in everyone's life over and over again. Perhaps only a night, perhaps only a moment in time separates the reborn person from the deep abyss of his despair, but the world before his eyes is no longer the same: the blush<sup>27</sup> of breaking dawn passes over it, the light of the new sun pours out over it and it is as young as it was on the first day.

Nevertheless, the person who has been reborn does not simply return to his point of origin. He has been

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<sup>26</sup> Literally this phrase should read: "they belong to the great blessing of rebirth" but this does not make sense stated this way.

<sup>27</sup> I have interpreted "Ton" as "blush" instead of "hue" or "colour" because "blush" helps create the image of youthful, healthy enthusiasm.

transformed, and the sequence of his metamorphoses shows the path his inner development has taken. His sense of being in this world changes over time. The clear trumpet blasts have died away, and anyone who does not know how to say "I" at forty years old differently from at twenty is either brutish or ridiculous, a braggart or a spoiled, aging child.

But it is quite unnecessary to look to self-criticism or the fear of embarrassment for help to avoid this danger. Who would want to--who ever could--protect youth's naturalness for all time? The external world has flooded into the empty soul, filling it with teachings about history and with the sad fates of those foreign to us, with the knowledge of human inadequacy and with the experience of death.

Anyone waking up who flings open the shutters and sees the garden lying at his feet, the fields and meadows and the mountain range--how could he remember the night! But the experience of night is reborn with him. The light of morning can no longer be taken for granted. For the mature person, it is a delightful marvel; for the old man offering up his trembling hands to the sun, it is grace itself. Natural spontaneity is gone. Its place has been taken by confusion, imprisonment and involvement in the insoluble conflicts and puzzles of this world. But we are mistaken if we believe that the "I" has now diffidently moved off to one

side. It still stands at the centre of the universe, and planets, mankind and all of nature's creatures still revolve around this central point. Strangely enough, when it was still new, the "I" believed that it was glowing and shining, a candle attracting the moth, a torch illuminating the darkness. But now that it is filled with experiences it has become something totally non-independent, like a magnifying glass whose curves refract rays a thousand times, or like a seashell whose cavity amplifies every sound a thousandfold.

The "I" has absorbed so much of the outside world into itself that it has become a part of the world. When it begins to speak, it no longer tells us what it is made of; instead, the multitude of the world's phenomena and the infinite number of its voices find expression in its voice. The only pieces of wisdom it can utter are those that create life itself! But life makes use of its voice, it makes use of its boldness and its unbroken courage.

For there are times when speech itself becomes an act of boldness, an act of will, and the quintessentially intense and passionate expression of life. The voices of spiritually burdened people sound forced and as the tension mounts they become weak and monotone until the sound can barely struggle through painfully contorted lips, and then

finally they fall completely silent,<sup>28</sup> We are under enormous pressure. Let us free ourselves through speech, and let us thereby try to acquit all of creation of the enormous charge of meaninglessness and cruelty that seem to rule on earth. Let us begin with the word "I" once more.

No other beginning exists and no other ending exists either. A person becoming self-aware faces life alone, and alone, without help or support, he will some day face his own death. No amount of devotion to the community of love and sacrifice can hide the fact from him that he is a being unto himself who bears responsibility for himself. Anyone who wants to devote himself to something, must *be* someone; anyone wishing to make a sacrifice, must *have*<sup>29</sup> something to sacrifice. And just as everlasting self-abandonment does not exist in love, so too the "I" cannot lose itself forever in the community of a group or a religious idea. Not until it reflects upon itself will it again become that proud and free being whose attitude of devotion and sacrifice disturbs and delights us.

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<sup>28</sup> The central image here is essentially that the tighter you pull a piano string for example, the less sound it will make until it is pulled so tight it snaps. I have made slight changes to the syntax to make the image sharper.

<sup>29</sup> I have added the italics here to reflect the emphasis expressed in the original.

But this return home to oneself is not always a source of strength and happiness. It does not occur only in a tangible sense when, hoping for the ineffable upon returning to oneself, we find the place of our origin destroyed, burned down and covered with dust and rubble. It could be that upon our return to what is most personally ours<sup>30</sup> we find ourselves standing before a wasteland of an infinite sorrow. What has survived of the belief in the goodness of man, of our pure delight in the beauty of the earth, of the certainty in divine justice and reason? It is futile, for those who have almost nothing left, to continue to rummage around in the rubble. Go away! Get out! Go to where people still know what to do with a sad and empty heart, where despair is still a source of energy and hopelessness is a driving force! Just don't think, just don't<sup>31</sup> come to your senses--we hear those words every day. Nonetheless, thinking, the coming-to-one's-senses is the only thing that can protect us from the horrible nihilism of a merciless age. A sad and empty heart cannot devote itself, its

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<sup>30</sup> The phrase "zurückkehrend ins Eigene" is difficult to translate into English, given its compact yet vague language and that she appears to be using the terminology of existentialism. In the English, I had to expand on the phrase to make it clear.

<sup>31</sup> I have used contractions here to reflect that Kaschnitz is quoting speech. The use of contractions suggests natural speech in English.

labours of love are unenthusiastic, its sacrifice a mockery. If the first journey home leads to despair, then we must try a second, and a third. If the house is destroyed, then we must hold onto the things that are always there: the trees over the narrow passageway of childhood, the constellation that still remains at the same place over the street at night. To rummage around in rubble is a disgusting and meaningless activity. But was this house that was lost made of mortar, clay and stone? Was it not instead made of reality<sup>32</sup> and dream?

We need not concern ourselves with dreams, those eternally new-born, shimmering hopes of mankind. They materialize like redeeming tears of pain, like sighs of relief at moments of suffering. Although we have no control over our dreams, the most beautiful are always created by poverty and hunger. The boldest and tenderest belong to youth, an impoverished and very insecure time. Their number is legion, and the garments they wear bear all the colours of the rainbow; they fly in effortless circles around the happiness of mankind today, and around a place of longing or a beloved heart tomorrow. They never leave us, even in the arid wasteland, even under the autumnal stars.

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<sup>32</sup> The German word is "Gewißheit" which means "certainty." On most occasions I have translated it as reality, which is a word we more commonly use when speaking about certainties.

Reality is something quite different.<sup>33</sup> Real to us were the rooms of childhood, the peal of tower clocks and the bridges over the river, the smell of festivals and the twinkling city lights. Particular, hard to grasp things were real, things which had grown out of earlier centuries and which continue to live on, carried and sustained by reverence, yearning and need: religion and poetry, knowledge and art. All these things were like stone palaces built by lost generations to last for eternity. They had no need of us, but one day, when we needed them, they revealed all their grandeur and their silent power. We were just as certain of their immortality as we were of the firmly fixed time-span of our own lives, the security of our own time on earth. Life was spread out before us; some did not want to reflect upon it, and perhaps we even despised old age and wished for an early, dazzling end. But basically, we did not doubt the reliability and faithfulness of the fate which leads the youth into the years of manhood, the man into the decades of maturity, and the old man into a fulfilled, blessed death.

The third of our realities was our confidence in ourselves. Were we not bold and independent? Did we not

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<sup>33</sup> I have rephrased "ist es anders bestellt" into clear English syntax.

hold our fate in our own hands?<sup>34</sup> The world was full of wonderful possibilities, full too of lies and greed and hate. Anyone who could renounce power and a life of luxury was still free; anyone who could abandon himself to a work that excited and fulfilled him could still be happy. There were always two paths; it always seemed possible to reject the pact offered by the Prince of this world, and to lose yourself in the loneliness cherished by drunken boozers and obsessed thinkers, great lovers and wise men.

Because we ourselves felt courage, the spirit of sacrifice, and freedom to do good, we recognized courage, the spirit of sacrifice, and freedom in the eyes of other people, slumbering, perhaps and in the shadows, but they were within reach and could be awakened by trust and the blessed word. Because we loved ourselves, we loved people, and our belief in God was rooted in our belief in humanity.

And now everything has been greatly changed. Not only were real houses, real churches and palaces demolished and consumed by flames. Ghostly pale oceans of debris of the values no one values any longer and the beliefs no one believes in any more hang in the evening sky above the ruins of the cities. A human life is worth little, and the blood

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<sup>34</sup> Literally: "did we not carry our star in our own bosom." This metaphor does not make sense in English so I have replaced it with a similar one.



the soul continually sheds is worth nothing. There is no more right to a lifetime and to old age, no more right to fulfilling possibilities, no more right to the freedom of poverty, solitude and dreams.

What does it matter if someone or other with apparently clearer vision and keener perceptions,<sup>35</sup> caused by misfortune, had already lost his confidence early on? What does it matter if the edifice of the mind, spirit<sup>36</sup> and human endeavour seemed so hollow and empty to that person that he even helped to destroy it--the extent of the destruction really goes off every imaginable scale he could conceive of, and the high water marks of the centuries have been flooded.

The first, the only thing we can grasp and hold onto is our own "I." How much it has changed! Now it is filled only with reality. It is filled with the despair of mankind, its hunger and self-destruction, its restlessness and ruin. It is dissatisfied with itself because it can only suffer, and it does even that imperfectly.

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<sup>35</sup> This should literally read: "keener sight and keener hearing" but because these do not work as metaphors as well as they do in German I have used English equivalents.

<sup>36</sup> The word "Geist" actually incorporates the ideas of "mind" and "spirit" in English. In this context I feel that it is important to articulate this in English.

But this mysterious "I," abandoned to so many dangers, reflects not only chaos, but also infinite light. Not only does despairing devotion to destruction live in the "I," but hope, reverence and a holy spirit<sup>37</sup> as well. On the threshold of each rebirth we tremble at the memory of the infinite experience of night. But the world before our eyes is as young as it was on the first day.

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<sup>37</sup> I have translated "ein heiliger Geist" as "a holy spirit." Kaschnitz is using religious terminology, and therefore the phrase should be translated to something with a similar religious double meaning.

### On Journeying through the Depths

It was on a day long ago that we set out from the dismal shore of lake Avernus, and after a long journey on the subterranean path through the cave we reached the blooming and fragrant land of Cumae; also long past are the panic-stricken<sup>38</sup> hours when we re-emerged from the labyrinths of graves of Roman Campania into the glowing afternoon light.<sup>39</sup> But the impressions from those days are indelible, the experiences from that time embody the quintessential experience of the underworld accessible to each living creature. Until that day we had never experienced more clearly light and darkness, burning sun and icy drafts, wide-open space and cramped surroundings, precise understanding and anxious foreboding, mortal dread and all the exhilaration of rebirth into the day. No real mortal threat and rescue from it, no convalescence after a serious illness could have brought more horror and delight

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<sup>38</sup> The word "panisch" refers to the ancient god of the wild, Pan and according to Grimm's Deutsches Wörterbuch, it entered the German language to denote great fear; it typically appeared as, "panischer Schrecken."

<sup>39</sup> Campania is situated in the Roman countryside near Pozzuoli.

than the experience of those hours of wantonly giving oneself over to the night.

The uniqueness of those impressions are surely caused by the great and powerful contrast between light and dark, life and death. The nature of life could not have been more clearly revealed than at the monks' midday meal, that offered white bread from their fields, plump cheese from their goats, oily wine from their vines, and golden liquid honey from their bees. Oh, how the sun blazed, how the young, still green stalks of wheat bowed in the wind and then straightened up, how, against the backdrop of<sup>40</sup> the deep blue sky, the mighty pine-tops began to rustle in the wind above the ochre-coloured wall of the house! How the landscape embraced it all: mountains, plain and ocean, sun and rain, country and city--all the eternal continuum of nature and the ever-changing centuries of fateful destiny! And then how everything was so different down there, so constricted and dark; the ancient symbols of love and death marked on the wall looked so ghostly in the flickering gleam of light, and every footstep led into the seclusion of the vast state of non-being. The draft wafting through the dark passages seemed to be working its way up from the icy depths of the caverns, from a realm where the burial chambers

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<sup>40</sup> I have added this descriptive phrase to clarify the visual image Kaschnitz is evoking here.

represent but the stage of transition; you could not see an end to the winding labyrinthine paths, and extinguishing a candle revealed to us all the horror of hopelessness.

Voices sounded flat in the cramped space. The scattered white roots, running through the earth like pale veins, did not seem any more alive than the bones and skulls that shape various figurines and ornaments, producing a strange kind of adornment, and this was no more modern than the beautiful marble shells of the sarcophagi which have been resting in those depths for thousands of years. The blue sky, the bamboo walls, and the flapping wings of the doves were terrifyingly distant, and death drove its shattering "Never-Again" into the frightened heart with a dreadful urgency.

But was it really only fear and horror that moved me there? Upon reflection, does not a gentle sense of allurement also awaken--something of that wondrous, delicate and powerful seduction that draws us, beyond every personal experience, out of the light into the dark?

Out of the light into the dark--that is the way into the quiet, peaceful night. It is the longing of light-blinded eyes, noise-torn ears, overworked limbs and the exhausted soul, the desire for transformation; it is the flight into a realm which despite all its horrifying darkness and emptiness harbours mysterious splendours. For the realm of possibility begins where reality ends, and if

the latter, for all its wide range, is limited, then the former is infinite, and time is powerless under its spell. Whereas only a single moment can exist outside in the light,<sup>41</sup> as spring or summer, morning or evening, in joy or pain; down there it is the fullness of infinity, the freedom of a dream unfettered by logical coherence that reigns.

Freedom from time and form--was this not the attraction which has always come from the silent underworld? The marvellous caves of the romantic poets were unfathomable in their shadowy depths; the subterranean path's every turn reveals new wonders of crystal flowers or of magical songs and words. The hidden fairy-tale treasures, which not only grant us earthly wealth but also tremendous knowledge and mysterious power were located in the bowels of the earth. It is also the place for encountering the dead, whose deep and sad wisdom and vision resolutely move the wanderer's heart.

Here underground springs murmur, already harbouring the primal river's essential nature within themselves and here the seeds of flowers yet to bloom push up towards the light. Here is where the ancient generative force reigns as the sole power; for its sake, Persephone left gardens in bloom and surrendered herself to it in love.

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<sup>41</sup> Literally: "only a single moment can become effective outside..."; rephrased for clarity.

To blossom into this dark and titanic world of infinite night is a dangerous joy. It is the fulfilment of a masculine longing for a mother's womb, where everything is still love and potentiality, which can never be fulfilled as it was so magnificently then. In non-being, we are free from the burden of responsibility, free from the anguish of making a decision, from the agitation of having to achieve, to which every living person succumbs. With the words, "Just for a short time/I'll be free,/to engage ecstatically/in love's drunken lap,"<sup>42</sup> Novalis conjures up the act of sinking into divine night. And it is no coincidence that it was precisely the creative, dreamy Romantics who were unhappy with life, who were more attracted by that state than by all the pleasures to be found on earth.

Yes, we have need of the night. And nations need their nights of destiny to which they often seem to strive with all their might as if they were heading towards a terrifying abyss. But it is particularly during the times when we were intoxicated with death that the full extent of the awful danger found in the nightly depths becomes apparent.

Because the realm of dark, all-encompassing love, the place of origin of sweet springs and fruit-bringing seeds,

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<sup>42</sup> Novalis, Hymns to the Night, trans. Jeremy Reed (Hampshire: Enitharmon, 1989) 23.

is also the dwelling-place of demons, and their effect does not always remain confined to the puzzling realms of the unconscious. It so happens that all the dark shadows of that lower world do grow upwards and spread out in the bright world above the earth; thousands of chaotic powers do destroy the peace and harmony<sup>43</sup> of the light where the dignity of man is most beautifully revealed.

Not only in a literal sense do we live below the earth today, in bomb shelters and unlit basements which are supposed to offer us protection from mortal danger. We are on a path leading into the depths, and there is no telling how long it will be until the path leads us to the surface again.<sup>44</sup>

Even when we see spring blossoming in all its magic, far beyond our destroyed homes, we can still hear the distant sounds of destruction and annihilation in our minds. Even when we close our eyes, we see horrible images of mangled bodies and tormented people fleeing. In the depths

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<sup>43</sup> I have translated "Ordnung" as "harmony" instead of "order" because "harmony" conveys a similar meaning and the phrase "peace and harmony" is more natural in English. The tension between "chaotisch" and "Ordnung" has been maintained.

<sup>44</sup> I have recast the difficult phrase, "dessen Wiederaufsteigung nicht abzusehen ist." The language is compact and required that I expand the meaning behind the German. The word "abzusehen" is a difficult one to render into English.



where we are hiding there is nothing of the quiet peace found in ancient burial places, and those who have escaped danger find there, with every passing day, a world that is even more horribly destroyed. Do not the places of our daily lives in fact resemble that realm of myth below, where a terrible storm wind continuously blew from all sides and where the horrible house of death stood in the deepest cave? Our paths also intertwine like a maze, and the embers of our paltry faith have long since died. Hope seems to have died a long time ago, hope that a sudden, powerful light would break through.

The danger lies in the ecstasy of destruction that is threatening to overcome us. The ancient lure of the depths has a new voice and a new sinister face. The power of darkness appears to be the only real power, and to surrender yourself freely to it appears to be the only freedom that we are still allowed to have. Was there not also a dark grandeur in the fall of the Titans--is not an insignificant, arduous life more pitiful than the most wretched death?

But I think that such thoughts do not conceal a free devotion to divine night, but rather a terrible denial of day and night, of the life and death of all creation. Those blessed with dreams, those blinded and wounded by the harsh light of day and lost in the depths of night, search there for gold and for the pure crystals of ideas; the mystic

merges with the totality of God's world that is revealed to him down in the deep well of non-being. Anyone at the horrible places of destruction who is still able to recognize the roots of the earth and the sea, is not lost. It is only when the hope for rebirth no longer exists that the gates to hell are really opened. Hell on earth--nothing seems to be keeping it from actually being fully realized: not the apocalyptic horsemen, not the bodies piled mountain-high, not the triumph of cruelty, nor the omnipotence of poverty. But it is, nevertheless, always possible to reflect upon the other face of night. It is possible to sense the stillness that is already in preparation and out of which a new life will one day emerge.

The ancient symbols on the burial chamber walls are engraved so deeply that even a blind finger is able to trace them. The dead are always ready for our pleas for the blessing of liberation, and pathways of memory, which are often the pathways of hope as well, are constantly opening up.

Whoever abandons himself to the ecstasy of destruction denies the possibility of a new birth. This can mean: transformation through physical death. But it can also mean: survival, and after being intoxicated for so long with

fighting and death the regaining of that sobriety which the Poet has called holy.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Kaschnitz is alluding to Hölderlin's poem, "Hälfte des Lebens."

## Introduction to "The Sleepwalker" (1952)

This story by Kaschnitz explores a few themes common to her writing: awakening awareness and "das Unheimliche." In it, a woman walking down the street, enjoying the first signs of spring, is suddenly accosted by a voice. The reflection she sees in the shop window next to her own looks like her. Who is she? Where does the voice come from? What made it accost the sleepwalker, herself, at this time? These questions are not answered for us. Kaschnitz simply explores the experience without an explanation. The reader witnesses an inner dialogue that takes place in the realm between reality and dream and passivity and action. These two realms must be reconciled within the sleepwalker for her to continue to live. As Elsbeth Pulver so aptly summarizes, it is the conflict between "Ahnung und Beobachtung," "Traum und Rationalität" and "Romantik und Realismus" (52). The sleepwalker resists the reconciliation, resists being awakened.

Kaschnitz explored this conflict in her poetry as well. In her poem entitled "Ich und Ich," "das eine Ich ist aktiv, es ergreift die Initiative, stellt die Fragen und drängt voran. Das andere Ich hat sich zurückgezogen, auf dem

Mörtel der leeren Wand liest es die 'Flugschrift der  
Träume' " (Stephan 137).

Mein Ich und Ich  
Eines steht aufrecht  
Faßt noch ins Auge  
Greift noch die Handvoll  
Spürt noch den Hundsschweiß  
Den Winterbiß.

Eines schon lange  
Zur Wand gekehrt  
Liest auf dem Mörtel  
Die Flugschrift der Träume  
Sieht ein durchscheinendes  
Wandernd ein Licht . . .

This struggle between the two "I"s is demonstrated for us in greater detail in "The Sleepwalker." In her sonnet "Die Wirklichkeit," Kaschnitz shows this same struggle only here between two lovers (Pulver 23):

Kannst du schlafen, Lächelnde, noch immer?  
Willst an meiner Brust der Zeit entfliehen?  
Siehst du nicht des Nachts im kalten Schimmer  
Meereswellen voll von Toten ziehen?

Siehst du Feuer nicht vom Himmel regnen,

Leugnest du den Schrei gequälter Brust?  
Muß dir tausendfach der Tod begegnen,  
Ehe du der Wirklichkeit bewußt?

Laß mich ruhen, Liebster, laß mich bleiben.  
Selber muß ich mit den Wellen treiben,  
Selber muß ich brennen, kommt die Zeit.

Heute nur mit jedem meiner Sinne  
Werd ich tiefer deines Wesens inne.  
Diese ist die Wirklichkeit.

In "Vom Ich" Kaschnitz explores the theme of awakening to the world once again. (For a closer discussion on that theme, see the introduction that accompanies the essay.)

The sleepwalker, like the woman in the poem, refuses to confront death and reality. She wishes to continue living in her dream world. The sleepwalker is not allowed to focus on any beauty around her, but is forced, by the disembodied voice, to focus on the ugly reality of poverty, dissolution and death. Pulver notes that "was damals [in the poem "Die Wirklichkeit] als männliches Prinzip galt, spricht jetzt aus dem Innern der Frau" (52) in "Die Schlafwandlerin."

Not only is this a story about the conflict between the two realms of existence, but it is also another account of transformation from dream/ignorance to reality/full

consciousness. Once the transformation is complete, as in Leni's case in "Life After Death," the only way back into the realm of dream and forgetfulness is through death.

Kaschnitz writes this story in a third person stream-of-consciousness style, so that the reader remains almost completely immersed in the woman's thoughts. Just enough distance is maintained to form an incomplete understanding of the unfolding events; the reader is given enough distance through the narration for her to be able to view some of the character's actions as well as her thoughts.

Kaschnitz's descriptive writing style is realistic and vivid; in many passages she carries the metaphor of the sleepwalker taking pictures through the text and makes it part of her narrative style. The pictures are not described to the reader in their entirety, but in broken-down images. A good example of this technique is her description of the fishmonger's window display. For example, she does not say that the fish mouths have been stuffed with parsley, but rather that parsley is emerging from their open mouths. On the other hand, the content of the story takes place in the realm of the unreal or surreal. Like Kafka's writing, realistic narration and the surreal content conflict with each other.

Kaschnitz's long, descriptive, photographic passages were particularly difficult to translate. The sentences had

concrete meaning yet were hinged together in such a peculiar fashion that the literally translated text read like nonsense in English. As you will see in my footnotes, I often expanded on certain images for clarity of meaning. Also, I often tightened up some phrases to keep them from sounding too wordy and vague.

Another common problem encountered in translating from German into English, which was particularly relevant to this story, concerned the word "Sie." I chose in this story to translate it as "you." For the disembodied voice speaking to the sleepwalker, I have often not used contractions, in order to convey the stiff formality of her character.



## The Sleepwalker

When someone had called out to the sleepwalker, she was already half-way to her destination. She had crossed a street and stopped in front of a shop window that reflected a few things in the dull and dirty window pane: a little bit of March sky, a slate roof and an advertisement for a brassiere--it was all so nice and colourful and pleasantly distorted by the ripples in the pane. The sleepwalker was stood there, letting her red string shopping bag swing back and forth, and sensed a vague something made up of blue air, sticky brown buds, bird calls and sniffing dogs, something called "spring." She wasn't thinking about anything in particular, and the shop window she was looking at was totally empty. Don't you<sup>46</sup> see me? someone asked. The sleepwalker gave a little start. Then she became aware of her reflection<sup>47</sup> in the glass and a woman's face beside it, a lively yet severe face. Right away, she was convinced that she knew this woman, or at least that she should know her. So she said: Of course, and, how are you? and turned

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<sup>46</sup> Throughout the entire story, the characters address each other using the formal "Sie."

<sup>47</sup>This sentence is not translated literally, as it would be incomprehensible and awkward in English.

around in a friendly way, only to prove to herself, mind you, that there really wasn't anyone behind her.

How like me! the sleepwalker thought, and smiled to herself. But then she gave another start because she still heard the voice as close as it was before. I am<sup>48</sup> thinking, the other woman said, without taking the slightest notice of the sleepwalker's politeness. I am wondering if you are short-sighted.

Yes, I am! the sleepwalker said.

Don't you have glasses? the woman asked.

Of course! the sleepwalker said.

Why don't you put them on? the woman demanded.

I'm too vain, the sleepwalker said, embarrassed.

I don't believe that, the strange voice said. You don't want to see!

Maybe I really don't want to see, the sleepwalker said, beginning to feel uneasy and defiant. She turned away from the window and tried to go on her way, but the invisible stranger didn't seem to have any intention of leaving her. She walked by her side, and the sleepwalker thought she could hear the hard sound of her short steps on the pavement.

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<sup>48</sup> I have chosen to limit the voice's use of contractions in the dialogue to convey her strict and formal tone of voice.

You can't manage anymore, can you? the voice<sup>49</sup> asked after a while.

What can't I manage? the sleepwalker asked.

Work, the voice said.

That word was like a shout from someone on a street at night who sees a white figure up at the edge of a roof. A shout that reaches the calm walker's ears, and suddenly makes her conscious of everything: the height of the four storeys, the narrowness of the eaves, the utter strangeness of her existence. When the sleepwalker heard that word, she actually woke up.

What do you mean?<sup>50</sup> she asked and looked around uneasily.

Things can't work out for you anymore, the stranger said.

The sleepwalker stopped because the ground under her feet had begun to sway. She was immediately convinced that the stranger was right. She even imagined that she had felt nothing else and had thought about nothing else this entire morning except that nothing would work out for her any longer and that she couldn't continue in her work. And if the stranger's presence had been burdensome a few minutes

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<sup>49</sup> I substituted "the voice" for pronoun "she" in order to avoid confusion about which person had begun speaking.

<sup>50</sup> I have restated this sentence for clarity.

ago, she now felt a painful fear of being alone with those memories.

Why won't things work out anymore? she quickly asked.

Because there is a time for everything, the stranger said. Something is gone.

What's gone? the sleepwalker asked eagerly.

Obscurity is gone, the stranger said.

And what comes next? the sleepwalker asked in a shaky voice.

Now you must see! her companion said.

Now I must see, the sleepwalker thought and opened her eyes wide.

Right in front of her were the ruins of a large commercial complex. A one-legged man stood in the entrance-way hawking shoelaces in a monotone voice. The cars were speeding by in both directions on the narrow street and spraying dirty snow in small clumps to the side. Although this was all familiar to the sleepwalker, the sight of the city at this moment filled her with deadly terror. She was certain that not only was she going to be forced to focus on reality but that she was supposed to discover something absolutely appalling behind it.

Start recording now! the voice demanded.

In writing? the sleepwalker asked, distraught.

No, the stranger said. In your head; that will do.

I have to buy some fish, the sleepwalker said, in a final attempt to escape.

That is exactly where we are going, the voice said.

The fish store was right next door. There were reddish and gold scaled bodies in the display window, stacked in big bowls, and lush green parsley grew out of round mouths.

It was a splendid sight to which the sleepwalker immediately surrendered herself in exhilaration. But it turned out that it wasn't the time for such mindless pleasures because she had hardly entered the shop<sup>51</sup> when the invisible woman made herself heard again.

What do you see? she asked.

Fish, the sleepwalker said a bit stupidly.

What kind of fish?

The sleepwalker raised her eyebrows and made a great effort.

Tench, she said, redfish, Pike.

What about their eyes? the voice asked.

The sleepwalker looked at the fishes' eyes and thought they resembled crater lakes in the golden hills of the moor or shiny black seeds on mother-of-pearl plates. And then she saw in all those eyes something of the relentlessness of death through violence, and something of the alarmed

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<sup>51</sup>"Denn kaum, daß sie nun im Laden stand": this would be quite wordy and passive, literally translated.

stupidity of creatures who are unable to see into the future and unable to be afraid.

Although the sleepwalker was too shy to express these thoughts, her companion did appear to be satisfied with the result.

Now look at the shopkeeper, she said a little less sharply than before.

Just a minute, the old man said, lifting his arms out of a tub of water, and shaking them off a few times. Then he dried off his hands on a grey cloth and slowly went over to the sales counter. After the sleepwalker gave her order, he cut off a piece of fish sausage and laid it on the scale, and then cut off another thin slice to add on to it. At the same time, he had to cough, doing it in a furtive, rasping way, like someone who has something to hide. His eyes filled with tears, and a red net of blood vessels bulged out of his watery blue eyeballs.

Well? the voice asked impatiently.

He's sick, the sleepwalker said.

What is this disease called? the stranger asked.

It doesn't matter, the sleepwalker said reluctantly.

But it does matter, the stranger said. For example, if you have lung cancer, you wake up in a certain way in the morning.

In what way? the sleepwalker asked, appalled.

Ask him! the voice ordered.

But the sleepwalker did not do it. She shook her head indignantly and turned to go. At the same time she couldn't avoid looking into those bloodshot eyes again, discovering there something which was disquietingly human and very different from the surprised look in the fish's eyes.<sup>52</sup>

That's enough, she thought, swiftly pulling the door shut behind her. But of course it didn't do any good. As soon as she was outside she heard the footsteps beside her again, hard as glass and solid and with a spring.

What do you see now? her companion asked.

A boy, whose bare head was covered with a red rash was standing right in front of the sleepwalker.

I see a child with scabby skin, she said.

What do you see now? her companion asked.

Maybe it's cradle cap, the sleepwalker said, close to tears.

She looked at the child's head, where wet red spots had formed on the rash. When the child noticed that he was being scrutinized, he put his hand on his head and picked at the scabs with his dirty fingernails. A truck rattled up, stopped and stood still for a while; the motor was left

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<sup>52</sup> For clarity, I have rounded out the imagery regarding the fishes' eyes in contrast to those of the shopkeeper.

running, sending its rough heartbeats through the giant metal body. The driver stuck his<sup>53</sup> fat red face out of the window, and the boy suddenly bent over and threw a lump of dirty snow right into his mouth.

Well? the voice asked curiously.

Well what? the sleepwalker asked, feeling depressed.

What is all that about? the voice asked.

And now the sleepwalker began to think hard, about what kind of hate could have motivated that child, and what kind of feeling caused the driver to wipe the dirt off his face and stare straight ahead, just straight ahead without saying a word. She was supposed to discover something, but she couldn't discover what it was, no matter how much she struggled and strained. She tried to get something, the merest trifle, out of the heart of the mystery, but that heart pulled her into itself.

Why are you closing your eyes? the voice demanded.

Am I? the sleepwalker asked guiltily, immediately looking. She noticed that they had gone a few steps farther and were now standing in front of a camera store. A bright sand-dune landscape with marram grass and a half-naked girl hung in the window, and underneath it in capital letters it

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<sup>53</sup> "ein dickes rotes Gesicht": Kaschnitz does not say "sein Gesicht" in the German but to say "he hung a fat red face out the window" is too confusing in English.



read: "PHOTOGRAPHERS GET MORE OUT OF LIFE!" The sleepwalker read these words and applied them at once to her own situation. She suddenly realized that she would carry the image of those fish-eyes, the image of those sick human eyes, that of the child and the driver home with her and develop them as if they were on a photographic plate. And now she suddenly felt as if she had begun something like a new life, a life full of immense possibilities. In this new life there would be no more empty hours, no more drowsy daydreaming, no more desperate waiting. It was like a single, dazzling, bright day. I'm alive, she thought. Delighted, she discarded her previous form of life with cruel determination, a form of life<sup>54</sup> that was essentially nothing but a sleep, yet a terrible one -- a temple-sleep, so to speak, into which the wafting breeze and vague noises had brought her many things. The phrase "It is gone" still rang in her ears, but it was changing from minute to minute until it finally sounded like a cry of liberation which she was beginning to listen to with delight. And so it continued as they went<sup>55</sup> up and down the streets. The sleepwalker had long since forgotten that she had been on

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<sup>54</sup> I have added the phrase "a form of life that" for clarity, otherwise it is unclear what "that" is referring to in English.

<sup>55</sup> I have added this phrase for clarity.

her way home, or even that she owned a home. She was taking pictures and letting them sink to the depths within her, as it were--all those exciting images of the world. At one point, people were crowding around a man standing under a red umbrella and hawking a type of salve in a hoarse voice; it was a runny grey ointment that, when ironed onto a rip in a pair of pants, turned hard and held the worn-out cloth together. If you're still not convinced, you're beyond all hope,<sup>56</sup> the man shouted, and the people laughed and didn't buy anything.

What do you see? the voice asked.

I see a red umbrella, the sleepwalker said eagerly, and a lot of curious faces.

Move up closer, the voice commanded.

Now the sleepwalker had to push her way through the crowd, which made her feel very uncomfortable. She had to keep using her elbows until she was standing in the front row. She had to reach out her hand and feel the cloth and the sticky grey blob and inhale the man's breath that smelled like rotting teeth and cheap liquor. And then she was compelled to think about what the room he goes back to at night probably looked like, and what he would say then to

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<sup>56</sup> This is not a literal translation of the phrase. I have translated the meaning into natural sounding English because it should sound like a sales pitch.

his wife, who would be standing next to him, tiny and pale, and who he would hit off and on--little nasty punches.

Come closer, Miss, the man said and touched her breast with his hand.

The bystanders laughed and the sleepwalker backed away.

I'm going to be sick, she whispered.

Don't feel so sorry for yourself! the voice said, scornfully.

And the sleepwalker submitted to the voice. She submitted to it because she had been awakened and because now she had to learn how to walk on roof tops with open eyes, because she had to learn to look into the terrifying abysses beneath her feet without falling.

Where to next? she asked, without tiring. And on they went, looking into windows, into rooms with expensive furnishings and rooms with cheap furnishings and into countless faces, cheerful or ravaged ones; sometimes the sleepwalker became aware of a horrifying restlessness, a constant, trembling movement on the cheerful faces, and flitting over the ravaged ones there was something like hope, like a glowing wind playing with ashes and making sparks fly.

What do you see? the voice asked relentlessly.

I see death, the sleepwalker said.

Did you not see it before? the voice asked in amazement.

No, the sleepwalker said.

Then it was long overdue, the stranger said.

The sleepwalker realized then that there was no turning back. She realized that she could never stop recording life from now on, and she could only hope that something behind her faithfully drawn lines would illuminate something that would have a mysterious connection to those lines and would lend meaning to them.

But this thought emerged in her like a horrible physical pain. She raised her hand to her head and stumbled and ran into someone.

Pull yourself together, her companion said.

The sleepwalker pulled herself together. I want to do it, she thought, I want to.

Now they stood in the middle of the old part of town which was just a scene of devastation, but life was beginning to stir there in a strange, frivolous, playful way with rides and Ferris wheels and little carousels. Balloons on a stick were for sale, and they were so gigantic, so hard and luxurious, something you never saw before the war. In spite of their high price they were selling at a great rate, and the first ones were already detaching themselves from the children's inexperienced hands and were quickly being

carried away by the strong warm wind. The sleepwalker followed them with her eyes and while she watched those rosy-red and violet-coloured balls she was filled with something of the old, innocent exhilaration of life, to which she had so often abandoned herself in the past. But she could tell right away that her companion didn't agree with this.

This is nothing, she said tersely.

This is something, too, the sleepwalker thought. But she was no longer able to contradict the voice. She felt a dreadful tiredness, which was not so much caused by her experiences as it was in anticipation of what was still waiting to be experienced, a fear of what had opened up and before which there was no escape. She had obediently lowered her glance and was looking at the cobblestones at her feet.

What kind of stones are they? the voice asked.

Granite, the sleepwalker said obediently. Ancient rocks from the Alps.

That is sufficient, the voice said.

But the sleepwalker wouldn't let herself be held up. She was dead tired and had to keep herself awake while she spoke. And although she walked very modestly and only her lips moved, she really wanted to gesticulate and scream.

The heart of the Alps, she screamed, is made of ancient rock. The sides out of sedimentary rock. The rivers . . .

Enough, her companion said, annoyed, enough! And the sleepwalker really did fall silent, but she didn't do this out of fear of this invisible demon who was constantly beside her. She had heard the murmuring of the river. The two of them were in the old part of town and close to the river.<sup>57</sup> One just had to go down a tiny little street and cross a wide main road, and one would already be able to see the gulls swooping upwards in steep arcs and could hear their high-pitched calls.

Not there, the voice said.

But the sleepwalker deliberately went along that street. She was heading that way because she was tired and wanted to dream, because she yearned to return to her old blissful sleep. And so she approached the main road and saw the white fluttering bird-bodies and her ears were filled with the sluggish murmuring river which seemed to her like a mighty song of life.

There is no turning back, the voice barked.

But there's always a way back.

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<sup>57</sup> I condensed the clauses describing their location here for clarity and style. Literally translated, the sentence was wordy and cumbersome.

Hey look out, you idiot!<sup>58</sup> the truck driver yelled. And then he stopped the truck and leaned out, his face white as snow. The sleepwalker was lying in the middle of the street and her body was so mangled that it looked as if she had fallen from a great height. But her face was not injured and was smiling as if in sleep.

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<sup>58</sup> The German is "dumme Gans" and I substituted an appropriate English phrase.

## Introduction to "Polar Bears" (1966)

Themes of alienation and exploration into the realm of "das Unheimliche" or the supernatural are threads that wind through many of Kaschnitz's stories and novels. In this story we are given a brief glimpse into the relationship of a young married couple. The narrative takes place in a few minutes of time but encompasses their entire relationship. How well do you know the one you love? This is the disconcerting question Kaschnitz poses in this story.<sup>59</sup> The characters remain nameless throughout, and are only referred to as the woman and the man. Their anonymity seems to confer upon them the larger roles of Everyman and Everywoman struggling to find the truth about each other. The woman cannot tell her husband, whom she cannot see, the truth when he asks: "Did you marry me because you were jilted by another man and didn't want to be alone? Do you really love me?" She lies to him and tells him what he wants to hear, not the beautiful story she aches to tell him. Tragically,

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<sup>59</sup> This was a theme that Kaschnitz often explored in her writing (for example in Liebe beginnt). The autobiographical nature of her writing as well as her journals suggests that Kaschnitz often suffered from insecurity in her relationship with Guido.



this moment is all the time they have left together. The moment passes and he is gone forever.

As she did in "Die Schlafwandlerin" Kaschnitz seamlessly blends realism with the supernatural without disorienting the reader. Still, the reader is left with an uncomfortable sense of disquiet. This story is told in third-person narration, strictly from the woman's perspective; we see what she sees or does not see, we hear her thoughts, we hear the dialogue. Occasionally Kaschnitz broadens the frame to show us the woman's actions. The core of this narrative is the dialogue between the married couple. The husband's questions and the wife's answers drive the plot to the inevitable result. As she must have numerous times before, driven by fear and insecurity, the woman lies to the man, but this time, as must eventually happen, she will receive no second chance.

In contrast to her spoken words, her actual thoughts reveal the truth and therein lies the tragic action. Both people are alone, alienated in their fears which are represented by the darkness and distance between them during the entire exchange. The woman often expresses the wish to approach him or for him to approach her, but he refuses. Of course we find out at the end that this distance is unbridgeable. The figure of the man remains shrouded in darkness; only his voice exists.

How people say something is as important as what they say. Because the narrative is bare and spare, the dialogue is central to the development of the characters and the tragic climax; it was therefore essential that I convey the proper tone. As I have indicated in the footnotes, I have occasionally rephrased thoughts and dialogue to sound more natural. These characters represent a typical couple, and I wanted them to sound as natural in the English as they do in the German. Kaschnitz had a perceptive ear for the cadences of speech which she often drew upon in her stories.

## Polar Bears

Finally! she thought, when she heard the key turning in the lock. She had been asleep and was awakened by the noise; she was surprised that her husband did not turn on the hall light, which she would have seen since the door to the front hall was half open. Walther, she said, afraid for a few minutes that it was not her husband who had unlocked the door but a stranger, a burglar, who was going to sneak around the house and search the closets and drawers. She wondered whether it would be better to pretend to be sleeping, but what if her husband came home while the burglar was still in the house and the burglar shot at him under cover of darkness?<sup>60</sup> That was why she decided, in spite of her terror, to turn on the light and see who was there. But just as she was reaching out to pull the chain on her bedside lamp she heard her husband's voice from the doorway.

Don't turn the light on, the voice said.

She let her hand drop and sat up a little in bed. Her husband didn't say anything else, and didn't move either,

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<sup>60</sup> I have changed the tone slightly here and rephrased her vision in the form of a question which is normally how such hypothetical situations are phrased in English.

and she wondered whether he'd perhaps sat down on the chair beside the door because he was too exhausted to get into bed.

How was it? she asked.

What? her husband asked.

Everything you did today, she said. The negotiations. Dinner. The drive home.

Let's not talk about that now, her husband said.

What'll we talk about? she asked.

About way back then, her husband said.

I don't know what you mean, she said. Her eyes tried to penetrate the darkness without any success, and she was annoyed at her habit of locking the shutters up tight and drawing the heavy blue drapes. She wanted to see if her husband was still standing there, in his hat and overcoat, which could mean either that he intended to go out again, or that he had already been drinking and was no longer capable of rational thought.<sup>61</sup>

I mean the zoo, her husband said. She kept hearing his voice from the doorway, which--because they had an old-fashioned apartment with a big, high-ceilinged bedroom--seemed far away.

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<sup>61</sup> "einen vernünftigen Entschluß zu fassen": literally means "to make a rational decision." I found this too wordy so I condensed the idea.

The zoo, she said in astonishment. But then she smiled and sank back down into the pillows. We met at the Zoo.

And do you remember where? the man asked.

I'm sure I still know, the woman said. But I don't understand why you don't get undressed and come to bed. If you're still hungry I'll bring you something to eat. I can bring it to you in bed, or we can sit in the kitchen and you can eat there.

She pulled the blanket back so that she could get up, but although it must have been just as dark for her husband as for her, he seemed to be able to see what she was trying to do.

Don't get up, he said, and don't turn on the light. I don't want anything to eat and we can talk in the dark.

She was puzzled by the strange tone in his voice and that he had nothing else on his mind but talking about old times, even though he must have been very tired. They had been married for five years now, but every new day seemed more lovely and important than all those gone by. But since it seemed to be so important to him for her to answer his question, she stretched herself out again and put her hands behind her head.

Near the polar bears, she said. They'd just been fed. The polar bears had been sliding down from their rock into

the water and diving for fish. Then they were standing on their rocks again, dirty white, and--

And what? her husband asked sternly. You know what polar bears do, she said. They move their heads from side to side, continuously back and forth.

Like you, said her husband.

Like me? she asked in astonishment and began to imitate the movement she had just described, to herself, in the dark.

You were waiting for someone, her husband said. I was watching you. I'd just come from where the big birds sit very still on their branches and then suddenly drop down and fly around in a circle and brush the bars with the tips of their wings.

There aren't any bars, the woman said, around the polar bears.

You were waiting for someone, said her husband. You were turning your head from side to side. But he didn't come, that person you were waiting for.

The woman was lying very still now under her blanket. She felt she had to stay on her guard, and she was on her guard.

I wasn't waiting for anyone, she said

After I'd been watching you for a while, her husband said, I walked farther along the path and stood next to you.

I cracked a few jokes about the polar bears, and that's how we got talking. We sat on a bench and watched the flamingos move their rosy necks like snakes. It wasn't as hot anymore, and there was even a hint of Indian summer in the air.

That's when I started to live, the woman said.

I don't believe that, her husband said.

Get undressed, the woman said, or turn on the light.

Are you at least sitting on a chair?

I'm sitting and standing, the man said. I'm lying down and flying. I'd like to know the truth.

The woman began, in her warm bed, to shiver from the cold. She was afraid that her husband, normally a happy and friendly person, had lost his mind. But at the same time she remembered that she had indeed been waiting for someone else that afternoon, and it didn't seem impossible to her that her husband had met that other person today and had learned all kinds of things from him.

What kind of truth? she asked, to gain a little time.

Then I brought you home, her husband said. We went for a few walks and went out for a few evenings together too. I asked you every time if you'd been waiting for another man that afternoon at the zoo, and if you were still waiting for him and couldn't forget him. But you shook your head every time and said no.

That was the truth, the woman said.

It could be that morning had begun to dawn outside, or maybe her eyes had finally adjusted to the dark. In any case, the outlines of the room began to emerge very faintly around her. But she couldn't see her husband and this unsettled her greatly.

That wasn't the truth, the man said.

No, the woman thought, he's right. I went for walks with him and went dancing with him in the evening, and every time I was secretly looking around for the man I loved who'd left me. I liked Walther, but I didn't marry him for love but because I didn't want to be alone. She was suddenly very tired and she felt the urge to confess everything she'd been denying for such a long time. Maybe if she admitted it her husband would come out of the dark and sit with her on the side of the bed. She would tell him the way it had been and the way it was now, that she loved him now and that the other man meant nothing to her now.<sup>62</sup> She didn't doubt that if she could just throw her arms around his neck she would convince him--that it could happen, that a love can awaken and grow every day while another dies off and in the end turns out to be nothing more than a corpse that makes you

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<sup>62</sup> Literally translated this would read: "the other man had become completely unimportant to her." I have rephrased this using a common English phrase to convey this sentiment.



shudder. Walther, she said, not sweetheart, not darling, she just said his name, but she stretched out her arms into the darkness towards him.

But her husband didn't come over to sit on the edge of the bed with her. He stayed where he was so that she couldn't even make out the outline of his figure.

I hadn't been in Munich long at the time, he said. It was your idea that I really should get to know the city well. Because we didn't have a car yet, we went in a different direction every Sunday using different kinds of transportation; we got off at the last stop and went for a walk. It always seemed to me as if you were looking for someone on those walks. You always moved your head back and forth like a polar bear looking for its freedom or something else we don't know anything about, and I often called you "my polar bear."

Yes, the woman said in a choked-up voice.

She remembered that her husband gave her this nickname during the first months of their marriage. She thought he had done this in memory of their first meeting at the zoo or because she had such thick white blond hair that used to hang like a mane down onto her shoulders. But, as it now turned out, it wasn't a term of endearment but suspicion.

Later, she said, when we had the car, we went for a drive into the country on Sundays. We ran through the woods

and lay down in a field in the sun and slept, with your head on my breast. When we woke up we were completely dazed by the sun and the high wind. We had trouble finding the right direction, and one time it took us several hours to find the car. Do you still remember that? she asked.

But her husband didn't follow up on this story.

We ran into him once, he said.

Oh, stop it! the woman suddenly said angrily. Go get something to eat or let me turn on the light and I'll get up and bring you something to eat. There's still half a chicken in the fridge and some beer. But as she was saying this she already knew that her husband wouldn't go along with her suggestion. She wondered how she could distract<sup>63</sup> his thoughts, but she couldn't think of anything.

You have a rough day ahead of you, she finally said, you have to have the accounts ready by tomorrow evening, and if you haven't had a good night's sleep, everything'll seem harder.

We ran into him once, her husband repeated.

The woman's hands clutched at the covers and she didn't know what else she could say. If only it were light, she thought. Her husband had built her a dressing table for

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<sup>63</sup> "Abbringen" literally means to dissuade someone from something or to change their mind about something. In this instance I feel that the most elegant way to express this idea is "distract his thoughts."

Christmas with a cretonne curtain and a glass top; she had made a lamp shade for it, all decorated with grasses and mosses she had collected and pressed in the summer. She was convinced that if those objects were only visible, they would help her convince her husband that she loved him and that he too had long since forgotten about his earlier suspicions.

We ran into him once, her husband said for the third time, and he said it in that tone of voice he was using this evening that sounded so monotonous and strange. We walked down Ludwig Street to the Victory Gate; it was a pleasant evening and lots of people were out. You didn't look at anyone in particular, and nobody stopped, and nobody said hello. I'd put my arm around you and suddenly noticed that your whole body was beginning to shiver. Your heart stopped beating and your cheeks turned pale.<sup>64</sup> Remember?

Yes, yes, the woman wanted to shout, I remember it well. It was the first time I saw my former lover again, and it was also the last. My heart really did stop beating, but then it began again as if it were a completely different heart. As my ex-lover's cold, beautiful face disappeared into the crowd, it dissolved into nothingness and I was never able to call his features to mind again.

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<sup>64</sup> This is a rephrasing of: "and the blood drained from your cheeks."

The woman wanted to tell her husband all this, and she also wanted to remind him that she had pressed herself against him then and had tried to kiss him. All of a sudden she had doubts that her husband would believe her. She felt as if there were an uneasiness behind his words that she wouldn't be able to calm, and an anxiety she couldn't talk out of him, not tonight anyway.

I remember our walk, she said, trying to sound nonchalant. I didn't see anybody I knew. I had something like the shivers, a little cold, and that evening I even got a fever.

Is that true? the man asked.

Yes, the woman replied.

She was sad that she couldn't tell him the truth, which was so much more beautiful than anything her husband wanted to hear from her. She was very tired now and would have liked to go to sleep, but it was more important for her to know what had gotten into her husband, and why he wouldn't turn on the light and didn't want to come to bed.

Then that other stuff is true too, the man said with faint hope in his voice.

What? the woman asked.

The stuff about the zoo, the man said. That you weren't waiting for someone else.

I was waiting for you, said the woman. I didn't know you yet, but you can wait for someone you haven't seen yet.

So, the man said, you didn't take me because you'd been stood up by another man. You loved me.

Once again the woman thought how appalling it was for her to be lying here and telling lies to her husband, and she propped herself up one more time and was about to tell the truth. But an odd noise came from the door which sounded like a deep groan of despair. He's sick, she thought, distressed, and sank back into the pillows and said in a loud and clear voice: Yes.

Then it's okay, the man said. He was barely whispering now. Maybe he had pushed the bedroom door shut from the outside and was on the point of leaving the apartment again. The woman jumped out of bed and grabbed at the chain on the bedside lamp; then it sounded as if that had activated a door bell: a loud and violent ringing came simultaneously from the hallway outside. The room was bright and empty, and when the woman ran into the front hall her husband wasn't to be found there either.

Although the building the young couple lived in was an old-fashioned place, all the apartments had recently gotten buzzers that opened the door to the building. Walther, the woman said, sadly. She pushed the button and at the same time opened the apartment door and listened. They lived

five floors up, and she heard heavy footsteps coming up the stairs for five floors that turned out to be the footsteps of police officers. Your husband, the men said, as they stood on the half-landing before her, hit a car on the highway exit and has been badly injured. And they said this while glancing at the woman's astonished face; they went on to say that the victim was on his way to the hospital, but the attendants who had put him into the ambulance thought he wouldn't survive the trip.

That can't be, the woman said calmly, you must have the wrong person. I've just been talking with my husband, he's in the apartment, he's with me. Here? the men asked surprised, where? And they went into the kitchen and the living room, turning on all the lights. When they found no one, they persuaded the woman to get dressed and go with them to the hospital; so the woman got dressed, brushed her long white blond hair and went downstairs with the officers. During the drive the woman sat between the men, who tried to be friendly, and their heavy woollen coats smelled like rain. It amused her that the driver had the sirens blaring and was driving through all the red lights. Faster, she said, faster, and the officers thought she was afraid she wouldn't find her husband still alive. But she didn't even know why she was sitting in the car and where it was going. She said the words "faster, faster" completely

mechanically, and she turned her head from side to side completely mechanically, the way polar bears do.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusion

Kaschnitz was an influential writer of poetry and prose. During her lifetime she used a wide variety of genres to contemplate the nature of human existence. Kaschnitz's essence is hard to define, in part because she herself was using her writing to search for self-definition and knowledge. The world was rapidly changing around her. Much of the world she had known was destroyed during World War II and the illusions she and her contemporaries had about the nobility of humankind and the permanence of their surroundings were washed away. Through her writing, Kaschnitz attempted to understand what was happening to her and those around her; her ultimate goal was to rebuild what had been destroyed, on a personal and spiritual level, with a new awareness. These themes of awareness and rebirth are universal and make her work rewarding to read and study.

Translators usually choose to introduce literature that they feel is important and should be read in their native language. The skill with which they recreate the original text in the receptor language may determine the degree of its acceptance by its new readership. Many great authors and works of literature have found permanent homes within



the English language because a translator thought they were worthy of being translated: Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Allende, Mann, Böll--the list continues to grow, but it is still too short.

For many different reasons Kaschnitz has not been on that list until recently. Continuing antipathy towards Germany among English speakers due to the war experience might have possibly contributed to her lack of an English audience.<sup>65</sup> Kaschnitz remained in Germany throughout the war and perhaps did not have the appeal, to English speakers, of being in exile. As well, Kaschnitz's work may not have been taken as seriously by translators as Thomas Mann's work was, for example, because she was a woman, and women's writing has not gained legitimacy until the last two

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<sup>65</sup> An example of subsequent prejudice towards Germany after the war is Willa Muir's statement describing her distaste for the German language, in her essay, "Translating from the German":

I ought to say that the last war prejudiced me, I think, against the German language. I find myself disliking the purposive control, the will power dominating the German sentence. I dislike its subordination of everything to these hammer-blow verbs; I dislike its weight and its clotted abstractions. I have the feeling that the shape of the German language affects the thought of those who use it and disposes them to overvalue authoritative statement, will power, and purposive drive. . . . A language which emphasizes control and rigid subordination must tend to shape what we call *Macht-Menschen*. (95)

The essay appeared in 1966, over twenty years after the war.

decades. Regardless of the reasons, Kaschnitz's work is not widely available to an English-speaking audience.

It is time that Kaschnitz's stories, essays, novels, plays and poetry reach a wider audience in North America. Even though the war was fought many years ago, prejudices still linger and many people say to themselves, "had I been there, I would have. . ." Kaschnitz was there. She was a thoughtful, observant, warm-hearted woman who was afraid, and largely unable to affect what was occurring around her. Her examinations of the guilt, the damage and the healing which are the result of that experience provide a compelling and meaningful glimpse into the human psyche. Perhaps after reading her work we will have a greater understanding of the German experience of World War II, and of ourselves as human beings.

I have attempted to transfer Kaschnitz's writing style into English by remaining faithful to the language style and tone she chose in the German. At all times I tried to maintain a delicate balance between literal and lyrical meaning. At times, if the literal meaning became unclear in English I had to sacrifice some of the lyricism for clarity of meaning. A translation must, in the end, read like natural English if it is to reach a wide audience beyond the realm of scholars. If a reader must struggle with a

difficult passage (which can occur when reading Kaschnitz in German) the difficulty should not be because the translator was not skilful in handling the two languages.

Kaschnitz's writing can be vague; she expects readers to intuit and create meaning for themselves, and the translator must not eliminate this sense from the translated text. Lisel Mueller, in her translation of "Das dicke Kind" captures much of Kaschnitz's lyrical writing style in her translation and only occasionally does she miss the mark with her "word-pictures." Donald MacRae, on the other hand, chose to ignore Kaschnitz's poetic prose style completely and therefore misses many key images in his translation. After carefully examining the translations produced by Mueller and MacRae, I attempted to maintain a balance between their two methods. Any success I have achieved should be credited to the merit of the original material. A translation is a veil, a window through which a new audience can see the outline of an author's original work. How clearly they see the work can be a measure of the clarity of the glass or the brilliance of the original.

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