

2006

Filling the Silence --An Iserian Reading of Ilse Aichinger's Work

Julia Sonja Brassat
West Virginia University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/etd>



Part of the [European Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Language Interpretation and Translation Commons](#), and the [Modern Languages Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brassat, Julia Sonja, "Filling the Silence --An Iserian Reading of Ilse Aichinger's Work" (2006). *Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Problem Reports*. 10153.
<https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/etd/10153>

This Thesis is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by the The Research Repository @ WVU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Thesis in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you must obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in WVU Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Problem Reports collection by an authorized administrator of The Research Repository @ WVU. For more information, please contact researchrepository@mail.wvu.edu.

Filling the Silence—An Iserian Reading of Ilse Aichinger's Work

Julia Sonja Brassat

Thesis
submitted to the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
at
West Virginia University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Foreign Languages

Cynthia Chalupa, Ph.D., Chair
Deborah Janson, Ph.D.
Johan Seynnaeve, Ph.D.

Department of Foreign Languages

Morgantown, West Virginia
2006

Keywords: Aichinger, Iser, Reception theory, Austrian literature, Language critique

UMI Number: 1436607



UMI Microform 1436607

Copyright 2006 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

ABSTRACT

Filling the Silence—An Iserian Reading of Ilse Aichinger's Work

Julia Sonja Brassat

The works of the Austrian writer Ilse Aichinger are often considered impenetrable and incomprehensible. Aichinger's doubt about conventional language serves as the basis for her use of highly pictorial and complex linguistic constructions. Although many literary scholars have alluded to the impenetrability of Aichinger's works, few attempts have been made to investigate the meaning of her texts.

In his theory of aesthetic response, Wolfgang Iser explains that literary works contain vacancies in the system of the text that need to be filled by the reader's imagination. They serve as an impetus for the reader, during the process of reading, to draw together apparently unrelated or conflicting textual aspects. Thus, the reader creates the meaning through interaction with the text.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the applicability of Iser's theory to Aichinger's works to determine whether they leave space for the reader to create meaning. I will analyze selected texts in an attempt to dissolve their impenetrability and show how the meaning comes to life through an Iserian reading.

Um zu lieben, ist es nötig,
nicht zuerst einen großen Schritt vor,
sondern einen kleinen zurück zu tun,
weil es dann leichter ist, zu springen.

Ilse Aichinger Kleist, Moos, Fasane

Wir tragen heiße Schüsseln in den erhobenen Händen.
Wenn wir in der Mitte des Saales sind, brennt es durch die Tücher.
Sollen wir sie fallen lassen oder weitertragen,
bis unsere Handflächen Brandblasen sind?
Ausgelacht wird man für beides.
 Es brennt durch die Tücher!
 Hätte ich das gewußt, ich hätte keine Tücher genommen.

Ilse Aichinger Kleist, Moos, Fasane

To Andreas
and in memory of Mutsch

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The years I have spent at West Virginia University as a graduate student and as a teacher of German have redirected my entire life. I clearly recall Dr. Anne-Marie Scholz, the professor responsible for the exchange between my home university, the University of Bremen, and WVU, explaining that the stay here is meant to be a new episode in my academic career. At that time, which now seems to be light-years behind me, I was not able to apprehend how right she had been and to what extent this change would eventually affect every area of my professional and private life. I thank Anne-Marie for all her encouragement and commitment and all my teachers at the University of Bremen, who, with their high academic expectations, their never abating demands, and likewise their continual assistance and support, have laid the foundation for my success at West Virginia University.

I began my studies here with my distinct interest in language and linguistics as the basis for human communication and cultural identity. My closer occupation with German literature, however, has drawn my attention to the fact that literature and its relation to philosophy are additional variations of interpersonal and intercultural understanding. This intellectual growth during my studies and, as a result, the completion of this thesis, would not have been possible without the help, support, and guidance of several people.

First of all, I would like to thank deeply Dr. Cynthia Chalupa. Without her help and influence, this thesis would never have been written. In the years that we have worked together, she has shaped my perception of literature and literary studies and thus made the greatest difference in my academic development. In addition, as coordinator of the German language program, she has guided my progress as a teacher and provided the opportunity to explore and

develop further my teaching skills. Most importantly, however, she has been a friend whose constructive criticism, encouraging advice, and practical help have contributed significantly to my success. Her example will continue to influence and inspire my future development.

I would also like to thank Dr. Deborah Janson not only for choosing to be a member of my committee, but foremost for the constant support and advice she has provided throughout the years. Her enthusiasm for and expertise in her field as well as her often humorous approach have made my studies here an interesting, enlightening, and enlivening experience.

Furthermore, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Johan Seynnaeve. His assistance and patience were invaluable for this project and his influence and advice have ensured that it has become my own work.

My very special thanks go to Sue and Steve Woodruff, who have become my “American family” and without whom my life here would not have been the same. Their immediate willingness to help me through various difficult situations has been incredible and of unimaginable value—they have been true friends when I needed it most. I will always remember Sue and Steve as the best part of my American experience.

Finally, my husband and friend Andreas M. Brassat deserves the greatest debt of thanks. He has always supported my stay and work here regardless of the effects it had on his own life; without his help, I would not have been able to accomplish my goals. His love has carried me through the most difficult times and his trust and belief in me and my skills kept me going when I thought I couldn't.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Filling the Silence—An Iserian Reading of Ilse Aichinger’s Work	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	vi
I. Introduction	1
II. Constructing the Meaning of Literary Texts as a Joint Task of Text and Reader: Wolfgang Iser’s Theory of Aesthetic Response	8
II. 1. Implied Agents of Interpretation: Author and Reader in Literary Theories	8
II. 2. Literature as World Model: Iser’s View of Literary Theory	11
II. 3. Implied Meaning, Implied Reader: Theory of Aesthetic Response	15
II. 4. Criticizing the Critic: Theory of Aesthetic Response in Light of Criticism	26
III. Formulierung ist Einverständnis—Ilse Aichinger’s Prose	34
III. 1. Schlechte Wörter—the Author’s Use of Language	35
III. 2. Silent Writing: Unsettling Meaning through Images and Liberation of Conventions	38
III. 3. Decoding the Silence: the Reader’s Role	43
III. 4. Prose for the Psychiatrist or Expressive Poetics?: Ilse Aichinger’s Narratives	45
IV. Reading Between the Lines: Understanding Ilse Aichinger through Wolfgang Iser’s Theory of Aesthetic Response	57
IV. 1. Doomed to Fail: Communication in “Die geöffnete Order”	60
IV. 2. Broken Connections in “Wisconsin und Apfelreis”	66
IV. 3. Silent Memories in Kleist, Moos, Fasane	71
V. Making Space for the Reader: How Iser’s Theory Applies to Aichinger’s Texts	79
VI. Works Cited	85

*Ich wollte von dem langen Wohnen
berichten,
von den Kegelspielen mit den roten
Hölzern
auf der Terrasse, von den Blicken hinaus.
Ich wollte die Rufe der Männer auf dem
Eis
genau wiederholen, wie die Hölzer auch
schlugen,
die Fensterblumen wollt ich beschreiben,
wie sie zur Sonne wuchsen.
Was tat ich?
(Aichinger, "Mir" Rat 44)*

I. INTRODUCTION

“Wir bereuen morgen alles. Wir mit den Bohnenmasten und den aufrechten Krebsen, dem harten Laut auf der Spur, der die Kronen trägt, der Filzlaus, auch noch im Salz und in der Eberesche, der Rundung, der Gewalttat, dem vertrockneten Schrei, wir stehen morgen mit geknickten Beinen an unserem schwimmenden Zaun und starren hinunter, die Hände an den Rippen, und hinter uns nichts als ein schüchternes Kind, das mit Hühnern spielt” (Aichinger, “Westen” 201). Ilse Aichinger’s literature is rarely easy to read, with smooth linear narratives and easily understood symbols. Instead it has been considered baffling, impenetrable, and seemingly incoherent. In his book Ilse Aichinger, J. C. Alldridge refers to scholars from the 1950s who described her work as “enigmatical, surrealist, dissonant” (45). To underline this point he mentions Russian critics who wondered if many of her readers would be able to grasp the meaning hidden between the lines of her works.

It is precisely this “impenetrability” and the unelucidated nature of literary texts that Wolfgang Iser considers the point of literature and literary interpretation. In this light, constructing the meaning of the text becomes the joint task of author and reader, or, for the purposes of this work, of Aichinger and her readers. In his book The Act of Reading.

A Theory of Aesthetic Response,¹ Iser explains an approach to the reception and interpretation of literary texts that is different from traditional theories such as New Criticism, which suggest that there is only one given meaning inherent in the literary work. He instead focuses on the structure of the text and its effects on the reader, thus moving interpretation away from the text and its contemporary, historical, or social context toward the reader, through whom the text is to come to life. Accordingly, Iser develops the concept of the implied reader, whose presence is anticipated by the author and whose act of reading lends meaning to the text. The implied reader is a network of dialogic textual structures that requires the reader to respond to the text, and thereby creates his² role. At each point in the reading process, the reader creates new hypotheses and expectations based on his previous experience with the text. As the reader moves on, the textual structure will approve, modify, or disapprove these expectations, forcing the reader to reconcile his views with the text. J. E. Müller elucidates this process very clearly: “Der Leser reagiert im Rezeptionsvorgang fortwährend auf das, was er selbst hervorgebracht hat, denn er nimmt bestimmte Ausgleichsoperationen vor, welche die Tendenzen, die der gebildeten Konsistenz abträglich sind, zu integrieren versuchen“ (185). In this way, literary texts allow for the reader’s role to be fulfilled in different ways, depending on each reader’s own structure. Therefore, the actualization of the text is selective and does not possess one valid meaning, but instead multiple meanings based on varied responses of individual readers that can be

¹ I am using the English version instead of the original German version Der Akt des Lesens simply because I have found that the English translation provides a clearer and more precise description of Iser’s theory than the German original, which is written in a style often employed in German specialist books in the 1970s. Theoretical German texts from this period often consist of highly complex sentence structures that include lengthy embedded sentences, overly complex noun phrases and a high number of unnecessary foreign words, thus making it difficult for the reader to follow.

² In this thesis, I am using the male form of the personal pronoun when referring to the reader. One reason for this is that Iser develops the concept of an “implied reader” in a literary text, referring to an abstract entity rather than a real person. Secondly, Iser as well as all other authors I am quoting use the male form. Consequently, I have decided to adopt this use. I am doing so only to avoid inconsistent and thus confusing appearance of personal pronouns in the text and for better readability; it does by no means imply any disregard or discrimination of the female gender.

communicated in and with the text. For Iser, this communication between text and reader is essential for the process of creating meaning.

Iser determines two “essential conditions for communication” in a text: blanks and negations, which in his view “set in motion the interaction that takes place between text and reader” (Act 182). He explains that the blanks in a literary work designate vacancies in the system of the text that need to be filled by the reader. Through his imagination, the reader can bring together textual aspects that may appear totally unrelated or even conflicting in order to construct a coherent meaning. The reader’s task is to combine segments that the text does not explicitly connect. According to Iser, the blanks in the text trigger this “combination process” in the reader that leads to the formation of context and coherence and thus meaning in the text (183). Negations occur when different perspectives of the text conflict with one another. Certain norms that are set by the author underlie these perspectives; conflicting perspectives result in an abrogation of one norm in support of another. This process requires the reader to interact with the text by reviewing and re-interpreting the perspectives and thus the norms provided by the author.

Iser distinguishes use of everyday speech from that of language in literary texts, explaining that in pragmatic speech there is no need to fill the blanks in communication through the imagination since “open connections can be closed by questioning the partner” (185). Literary texts, on the other hand, require the reader to find what J. M. Lotman calls the “Archisem” or basic meaning underlying the disconnected segments and to link them to a new unit of meaning (qtd. In Iser, Act 185).

Blanks in the text occur for various reasons. The language used by the author or unexpected changes in the flow of the story create blanks in the narrative structure. According to

Iser, literary language represents normal speech, since it uses the same “symbolic mode.” However, it does not refer to the same empirical reality_{empie}. Thus “what is represented must be language itself” (Act 64). Using Charles Morris’s definition of iconic signs to describe his understanding of signs in literature, Iser states that since literature does not represent a given reality, the language of literature does not denote given objects, but instead constitutes “an organization of signifiers which [. . .] designate *instructions* for the *production* of the signified” (65). In other words, the reader is instructed by the text to construct not the thing explicitly signified by language, but what lies behind it—the signified becomes a signifier itself. Therefore, what has to be imagined is something that is not denoted by the signs (or language), although it is “preconditioned by that which is denoted” (Act 65). As a result, the reader has to convert denotation into connotation.

Given that Aichinger questions language’s ability to speak conclusively about reality and experience, her works offer an aesthetic application of Iser's theory. Initiated by the misuse of language through the Nazi regime in the Second World War, Aichinger has developed suspicion toward language as a sign system based on conventions. For her, the present-day use of language is indicated by unawareness and indifference and thus the words are emptied of meaning and not able to convey any truth. Conventional language provides the possibility to cover up lies, indolence, and assimilation and therefore has to be used with caution and distrust. For Aichinger, trustworthy language is characterized as much by its silence as by its words. In an article about Aichinger’s search for language Cecilia Bortolan Pirona explains, “Die konventionelle Sprache [. . .], ist laut der Schriftstellerin unzureichend, [. . .] daraus ergibt sich auch Aichingers Ablehnung der Benennung“ (97). In many of her works, Aichinger strives for a language that does not adulterate communication by using words that distort meaning and reality. Accordingly,

she has developed a very individual use of words and language that leads to the interpretive difficulties the reader encounters in several of her short stories and narratives. In the course of her career as a writer, her language became increasingly sparse and as a result, her texts have become seemingly unintelligible. The only way for Aichinger to manifest the reality behind the words is through poetic and subjective images; in this regard her texts are, to use Iser's terms, connotative rather than denotative.

In the following pages, I will argue that Ilse Aichinger's works hold a high number of Iserian blanks and extremely symbolic language that force the reader to find the meaning that lies somewhere behind them. In his introduction to Ilse Aichinger. Leben und Werk, Samuel Moser says about Aichinger's texts: "Was sie sagen, läßt sich anders nicht sagen. Ihrem Gebot des Weglassens oder Nichthinzufügens hat sich auch der Leser zu unterziehen" (12). The reader, however, feels the need to understand. Given Aichinger's language, this is not an easy task. Her texts do not allow for lighthearted consumption; instead they try to communicate by means of silence and abstraction. This demands that the reader be actively involved in the process of reading; he must place together the text's images in a logical manner to fill in the blanks of the message Aichinger is trying to create between the lines. The readerTh is required to insert information into the blanks to establish the textual meaning intended by Aichinger, if there is an intended meaning at all.

According to Iser's theory, however, the reader is always involved in constructing the meaning of a text, and thus each text holds multiple meanings based on the interpretations of a variety of readers. The question that remains is whether Aichinger agrees that the aesthetic object of a text is created in large part by the reader and her texts actually give the reader the space in which to create meaning, or, whether the text comes with its own message that the reader must

decipher. In this thesis, I shall investigate the Iserian blanks in a selection of Aichinger's short stories and texts to find an answer to this question and to see how Iser's theory can be brought to bear on the understanding and analysis of her literary works.

Chapter Two will give an overview of different approaches to the interpretation of literary texts. It will briefly compare the seemingly incompatible arguments of receptionists, who focus on the reader as the entity creating meaning, and the intentionalists, who claim that texts include an intended meaning created by the author. This will provide the context for Iser's theory of aesthetic response and will facilitate the understanding of its background and development. I will further explain and discuss Iser's theory in more detail; the basic concepts, schemata, and arguments underlying the theory will be worked out and represented in a way that will allow a methodical application to Aichinger's texts in Chapter Four. I will also examine strengths and weaknesses of this approach as well as the criticism and approval it has evoked.

Chapter Three will focus on selected texts by Ilse Aichinger and her use of language. To show the development of her writing, the chosen texts will cover a time period from the beginning of her career as an author in the late 1940s to more recent works from the late 1980s. Because Aichinger's language has become more and more symbolic, looking at texts from different periods will provide interesting points of departure for the application of Iser's theory. The texts I will analyze are the short stories "Die geöffnete Order" (1949), which reveals a traditional linear plot and focuses on the failure of communication, and "Wisconsin und Apfelreis" (1971), which appears as a mere accumulation of disparate trains of thought. In addition, I will analyze autobiographic narratives and aphorisms from Kleist, Moos, Fasane (1991)³, a collection of prose, aphorisms, and short essays. The narratives in particular reveal a

³ Kleist, Moos, Fasane was first published by Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, in 1987. The new edition cited in this paper contains an additional essay on Thomas Bernhard.

use of language that implicitly emphasizes silence, whereas the aphorisms to a great extent explicitly deal with silence, muteness, and problems in communication. In showing a very different writing style and use of language, this selection is exemplary for Aichinger's professional development and shows how Iser's theory can serve as an aid for understanding her prose. Although Aichinger has written a great number of poems, they will not be included here as expressive examples of her work, because the Iserian nature of Aichinger's texts is more easily recognizable in prose works in which a typical linear narrative structure is generally expected.

In Chapter Four I will apply Iser's theory to Aichinger's works and provide an interpretation of the narratives and the aphorisms based on the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Two. The chapter will reveal how Aichinger's use of language and selection of certain textual elements summon the reader's interaction with the text to create meaning and direct his attention to certain norms that are provided by Aichinger. I will utilize several aspects of Iser's theory in the analysis of selected texts and determine and discuss its general applicability in view of Aichinger's works. In addition, I will show how certain aspects of Iser's theory facilitate the interpretation, but also indicate the theory's limits that are caused by its high degree of abstractness and its partial impreciseness. In the concluding chapter, I will account for the main difficulty readers and literary critics encounter in Aichinger's texts, namely, their impenetrability. I will summarize the findings presented in the previous chapters and comment on the different degrees of Iserian blanks that can be determined in Aichinger's texts and their impact on the interpretation of her works. Finally, I will argue why Iser's theory can be seen as a valuable tool for interpreting Aichinger's literary texts despite its weaknesses.

II. CONSTRUCTING THE MEANING OF LITERARY TEXTS AS A JOINT TASK OF TEXT AND READER: WOLFGANG ISER'S THEORY OF AESTHETIC RESPONSE

*Die Tendenz der Methoden, sich in Maximen zu verwandeln, verlangt die Erfindung immer neuer Methoden. So werden die Maximen in den Hintergrund geschoben, endlich unsichtbar und wieder fähig, als Methoden neu erkannt zu werden. Die richtige Reihenfolge der Erfindung, Erfindung als Ökonomie, weil es vielleicht nur eine bestimmte Anzahl von Methoden gibt.
(Aichinger, Kleist 73)*

II. 1. Implied Agents of Interpretation: Author and Reader in Literary Theories

“Warum aber muß Literatur übersetzt werden, wie sich das in der langen Tradition ihrer Kommentierung, ihrer Interpretation und in den dafür entwickelten Auslegungsverfahren bezeugt?” Referring to the search for meaning in a literary text, Wolfgang Iser raises this question in his book Theorie der Literatur (10), at the same time pointing out the problem that has continually occupied literary critics, and drawing attention to the fact that there have been almost innumerable methods and approaches to solve this problem. Different, though often interwoven trends have developed in literary theory in the last decades, many of them rather opposed to one another. Three basic views on the interpretation of literary works underlying various theoretical trends are especially prominent: Historicism, formalism, and receptionalism. Whereas the historicists claim that literary texts have to be seen in their historical context to find the meaning lying in them, the formalists state that literary texts have an intended meaning created by the author. The third view, advocated by receptionalists like Iser, calls for theories that focus mainly on the reader and his interaction with the text.⁴

⁴ There are, of course, many different literary theories following other views than these. The purpose here is to show the fundamental opposition between text-focused and reader-focused literary theory in order to place Iser's theory of aesthetic response in the overall context of theoretical discourse. Other trends are therefore disregarded.

In his article “Formalist Criticism: Its Principles and Limits” (1973), the New Critic Kenneth Burke describes his tactics of analyzing a poetic work as prohibiting all biographical reference including history. He points out, however, that although the history of a literary work is not generally useful for a proper interpretation, its historical meaning should not be totally disregarded because the meaning of a term used by the author could have undergone a change over time. Burke warns “For the later meaning of a term may cover up its meaning at the time when the poem was written; and a critic’s failure to make the appropriate discount [. . .] is in effect the imposing of a new text upon an old one” (31). He further explains that this truth of terms and statements in a text is necessary for “our sense of a work’s verisimilitude,” which is necessary to engage a reader who has to be able to believe in the text’s statements to find its meaning (31).

Other hermeneutic critics focus more exclusively on the author’s intention as the source for meaning in a text. In his essay “Three dimensions of Hermeneutics” (1971), E.D. Hirsch, Jr. calls the intention of an author the original meaning of the text, and argues that it is a matter of ethics not to disregard this intention “unless there is a powerful overriding value” to doing so (55). The same concern for ethics should be the reason not to misuse an author’s words and language for individual interpretive purposes. Every author chooses his or her words and language to convey a certain meaning and “All [languages] are ethically governed by the intentions of the author. To treat an author’s words merely as grist for one’s own mills is ethically analogous to using another man merely for one’s own purposes” (56). Such a practice is in general not justifiable, according to Hirsch. He leaves a little room, however, for the subjectivity of the reader by distinguishing between the meaning and the significance of a literary text. Whereas the meaning is based on the intention of the author and cannot generally

change, the significance of a text is dependent on the reader's interests and may change accordingly.

Finally, advocates of New Criticism, such as Cleanth Brooks and John M. Ellis, argue for an interpretation of literary works that disregards the author's intention or the text's historical context. Ellis expresses in his essay "The Relevant Context of a Literary Text" (1974) that literary works to a certain degree exist outside of their contexts or their author's intentions. He argues that consideration of this context could even change the meaning of a text. In doing so, the interpreter might reinsert things from the original situation in which the text was written that the author left out on purpose. According to Ellis, the meaning of a text lies in the text itself. Going even further, Brooks criticizes in the article "The Formalist Critic" (1951) the formalists' assumption that what is in the work is the relevant intention of the author and that there is an ideal reader. He points out that literary works are "recreated in the minds of actual readers, who vary enormously in their capabilities, their interests, their prejudices, their ideas" (27). This standpoint comes close to that of receptionalists like Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser.

Even in this rather selective and brief portrayal of literary criticism and theory it becomes clear that the interpretation of literary works is a field of severe debate and discord. For the reader, orienting himself within this overwhelming range of differing statements and thoughts is even more strenuous since, despite the differences, all of them bear a certain power of persuasion. In developing a logical chain of argumentation, all theories appear to pinpoint an aspect of interpretation that cannot be overridden or ignored without doing injustice to the author or the literary work itself. It is exactly this phenomenon, however, that provides the strongest argument for assuming that all interpretation of texts has to be subjective rather than objective. Given that every approach has to be considered rightful based on its argumentation, subjectivity

is the only explanation that holds for all theories. In his electronic article “Abductive reasoning as a way of worldmaking”, Hans Rudi Fischer explains the constructivist definition of knowledge:

Focusing on the operational aspects of knowing as inferring does away with the hiatus between logic and life, theory and praxis, cognition and the world (reality) – or whatever other dualism one wants to invoke -: knowing means inferring, inferring means rule-governed interpreting, interpreting is a constructive, synthetic act, and a construction that proves adequate (viable) in the “world of experience” [. . .], in life, in the praxis of living, is, to the constructivist mind, knowledge. [. . .] The question of truth is replaced by the question of viability, and viability depends on the (right) kind of experiential fit.

This definition also underlines the subjective character of interpretation, which, as a construction the only requirement of which is that it fits into the world of experience, cannot be objective. Similarly, Wolfgang Iser refers to the reader’s world of experience as the basis for interpretation of literary works in his theory of aesthetic response.

II. 2. Literature as World Model: Iser’s View of Literary Theory

Wolfgang Iser describes theory in general as the mastery of problems, calling literary theory soft theory as opposed to the hard theories of natural sciences. The goal of literary theory is not prediction or explanation of phenomena, but a cognitive discourse supposed to help solve problems and organize thoughts to make understanding and interpretation possible. In his view, literature is not a reflection of reality, but rather a reaction to it, and therefore always an interpretation itself. In his book Theorie der Literatur Iser explains: “Interpretieren ist eine

internalisierte Form unseres Weltverhaltens, das insofern in der Literatur vorgebildet ist, als diese durch ihre Reaktion auf Welt den Wechselfällen der Lebensrealitäten folgt” (26). Thus, literary theory becomes a theory of interpretation and a methodology for interpretation procedures, and as such a general condition for the study of literature. Different interpretations proceed from different general assumptions, which is the reason for the pluralism of conflicting interpretations and theories.

Answering his own question about the necessity for the translation of literature listed above, Iser states that literature brings something into being that does not exist in real life and therefore has to be translated to make it understandable. He describes literature as “inszenierter Diskurs” that puts something that does not exist into language in a way as if it existed (11). In this way, literature produces a world of imagination. Theory refers to a given stock of texts, not to something that could be, and serves as a tool for the process of translation. Iser divides literary theory into three categories: literature as an object of cognition, an anthropological function, and an object that produces a diversity of interpretations.

When it is seen as an object of cognition, the focus is on language: “Wenn Literatur Gegenstand der Erkenntnis ist, dann wird sie primär als Sprache verstanden, und dabei zeigt es sich, daß Sprache nur den Horizont bildet, um die Vielfalt ihrer operativen Möglichkeiten erkennbar zu machen” (Theorie 18). Iser again divides this focus on language into three models: a semiotic model, a dialogical model, and an intertextual model. The semiotic model concentrates on the translation of signs, or signifiers, into the signified. The relation between the two, however, is solely based on conventions and therefore relative and the conventions themselves can also be changed. The signifier becomes ambiguous: “Denn wenn der Signifikant das Bezeichnete nicht mehr meint, dann wird das Nicht-mehr-Meinen doch wieder zu einem

Bezeichnen, um in die Existenz zu ziehen, was es so nicht gibt” (15). In this way, the translation of the sign into the signified is not governed by traditional conventions anymore; the signifier can separate from its conventional signified and thus set free a variety of implications that the signifier, as a word, always carries with it. Denotation becomes figuration and thus “eine Quelle sprachlicher Mehrsinnigkeit” (16). This process of transformation is theoretically infinitely recursive in so far as the signifier can undergo again and again the figuration it has created itself, leading to an ambiguity of a literary text that makes a definition of its meaning impossible.

According to Iser, this is what determines the literary quality of signs: only when they do not remain within a conventional framework of allocation to a certain signified, but instead serve to create new codes of denotation, they do achieve literary quality. For him, use of language becomes literary when the sign is detached from its conventional reference to a certain signified and thus puts into language what could not be expressed before.

The dialogic model is related to the semiotic model: it is concerned with the connotations that words have accumulated by traversing many different contexts over the course of time. Thus every word is “mehrstimmig” and provides even more possible translations than those created by the “Wechselspiel von Bezeichnen und Figurieren” (17). A literary use of language employs the variety of meanings of words in a dialogue of voices that is careful to always include the many different voices. None of these voices contains the meaning in itself; possible meanings disperse, which leads to interaction and mutual connection of the possible connotations every word contains. Every voice conditions the others and in turn is conditioned by them; this prevents a “babylonisches Gemurmel” and instead makes visible “das Gewärtigen von Sinnbildungsverfahren, die – weil nicht normativ faßbar – erst durch die dialogische Stimmenvielfalt zureichend verdeutlicht werden” (17). According to Iser, this is the purpose of

using such language in literature. By referring to a use of language as described by Iser as literary, he implies an evaluation of language as “non-literary” when it makes use of the conventions underlying the relation between signifiers and signified to create and convey meaning or when it disregards the various possible connotations of words. Since countless literary works employ what I call “conventional language” in lack of a more precise term, Iser’s implication is at least questionable.

The intertextual model within the focus on language deals with a network of texts within the text. Iser refers to these incorporated texts as “Zitat, Anspielung, Wiederholung, Montage, Parodie, Verstellung” (Theorie 18) and explains that they constitute the distinctiveness of the text’s linguistic organization. By including the various other texts, they become cut up and deformed and finally “re-composed”. These proceedings manifest the act of creative production: “Denn es gibt keine Dekomposition ohne Rekomposition, und eine solche Dualität ist in der Mannigfaltigkeit freigesetzter Beziehung eine kognitive Übersetzung schöpferischen Hervorbringens” (18). Again, Iser evaluates the literary quality of a text according to his parameters: he states that an increased connecting of texts signifies literary quality.

When literature is seen as a function, it primarily suggests that everything is to be understood at face value, thus demonstrating that it makes something different possible: namely, what it does not describe. As a less abstract example, we can imagine the depiction of darkness, which implicitly hints toward something different, alternative, or oppositional being at least possible: something not dark, or, more concrete, something bright or colorful. As a function, literature is an alternative world to the real world; it shows what is possible and in doing so reveals at the same time what is not possible, not existent, or not seen in the empirical world to which it refers. Iser calls this “Literatur als Diagnose der in ihr dargestellten Welt” (Theorie 22).

It depicts the world by means of what is not depicted. In his theory of aesthetic response, Iser's own orientation focuses on these two orientations of literary theory—literature as object of cognition and a function.

II. 3. Implied Meaning, Implied Reader: Theory of Aesthetic Response

In order to understand Iser's theory, it is important to realize that he does not approach a text in a traditional way, but that he sees it as a function. A literary text is not to be put on a level with reality; instead Iser describes it in The Act of Reading as “a means of telling us something about reality” (53). For him, the major concern is not the meaning of a text itself, but rather how it affects the reader. Here, he uses Hirsch's distinction between the meaning of a text, which lies in the text itself, and its significance, which changes according to the individual reader. In this functional approach, Iser falls back on pragmatics, the study of language from the point of view of its users, to analyze the intersections between text and reader and text and reality, which determine the effectiveness of a text as a means of communication. Referring to J.L. Austin's How to Do Things with Words, Iser compares speech acts in spoken language with a literary text, since the message of the text comes into being through the communication with the reader, just as a message between two speakers is created in the moment of the utterance. The speech act theory states that words, sentences, or other utterances become communication when they are produced in a speech act. Major conditions for speech acts are that they organize the signs used and assume a reception of the utterance. That means they occur in certain contexts and obtain their meaning through usage. For the correct interpretation of the utterance, both speaker and receiver must have a similar background in conventions, and the communicatory act succeeds

only when the recipient signals through his responses that the message has been transferred correctly.

While speech acts in normal language need a real world context to be successful, the literary text reveals a different application of language. The signs used in literature do not refer to an empirical reality; instead they “provide instructions for the building of a situation and so for the production of an imaginary object” (Iser, Act 64). Therefore, the denotations of the signs or words in a text are not of primary importance, but rather the connotations they carry with them. As an example Iser uses a character in a novel that is denoted as a perfect person, but as the plot unfolds fails to discover the hypocrisy of another character. “Clearly, then, the signifiers are not meant solely to designate perfection. On the contrary, they denote instructions to the reader to build up the signified, which represents not a quality of perfection, but in fact a vital defect, namely, Allworthy’s lack of judgment” (65). Thus, the reader has to perform the transformation of denotations into connotations, and contribute his own ideas and conventional background to the dynamic process of communication. Iser calls the conventions of the reader and those the text alludes to the “repertoire” of the text. The repertoire wants to convey the author’s conventions, but they are taken out of their social contexts, and the reader’s task is to find out why these conventions have been selected. In this process of exploring the reason for the selection, the reader is guided by different narrative techniques that Iser calls the “strategies” of a text, a central constituent of his theory of aesthetic response that will be explained in detail on page 19.

For Iser, the meaning of a literary work cannot be found in it, as one finds a treasure, instead it is created through the interaction between the text and the reader. If interpretation meant withdrawing the meaning from a text, it would be left as an empty shell after its meaning had been revealed and thus interpretation would become an act of consumption, the reader

devouring the text's meaning. The meaning is not to be found in the printed text, but its structure offers instructions for the reader's imagination to realize the meaning as an image. Iser explains: "The image provides the filling for what the textual pattern structures but leaves out" (9). These blanks in a literary text and the structure that guides the reader are fundamental conditions for the communication between text and reader. The blanks are open connections between elements of the text that the reader must fill; he contributes his own experiences and conventions to this interaction while the textual structure guides the process in a direction pre-defined by the author. The following pages will explain this in more detail.

The structure Iser is talking about is itself two-sided. It includes a verbal aspect, the "structure of effects", with the language of a text prestructuring the reception by the reader, and thus keeping his reaction from being arbitrary (Act 21). The author selects the words and linguistic components that he wants to use and decides how to combine and structure them in the text. The text's structure also includes an affective aspect, "the structure of response", which encompasses the reader's response to the verbal aspect. In other words: the verbal aspect, that is, the author's choice of language, limits the reader's possibilities of interpretation, whereas the affective aspect determines the reader's response: when the text describes rain and thunder, for example, the reader will react by creating an image of bad weather rather than a scenario of brightness and sunshine. For the text to be able to exercise its effect, it relies on a concept that Iser calls the "implied reader". Given that the textual structure of a work exists to guide the reader's imagination and the process of creating meaning, the presence of a reader has to be presupposed. If the reader's imagination is to be guided, certain preconditions must be implied in the structure of the text with respect to the reader's perception and the role that is offered to him by the text. We will see that the reader's role is mainly to create the meaning by joining together

different perspectives emerging from the textual structure and the author's choice of language. Therefore, possible dispositions of possible readers and the resulting realizations of the various elements need to be considered and worked into the text and its structure. The implied reader therefore is a network of textual structures that invite the "real" reader to respond and to play the role offered.

The literary text offers two different, though related aspects of the reader's role, which is both a textual structure and a structured act. Due to the "implied reader," an assumed reader "written into" the text and therefore part of the textual structure, the "real" reader is compelled to adopt certain perspectives that derive from the author's view of the world. A literary text in general contains various perspectives, realized in "the narrator, the characters, the plot, and the fictitious reader" (Act 35). These perspectives are individual and show different standpoints and points of departure, but interact with each other to form the meaning of the text⁵. The reader has to adopt these different textual perspectives and gradually coalesce them into a pattern. When he adopts these different points of view, they evoke structured acts in the reader. The structured acts can be seen as the reader's response to the text that is structured by the author's selection of perspectives and textual elements. The structured acts happen because, although the perspectives are given in the text, their convergence is not literally expressed, but force the reader to create mental images of what Iser calls the "final meeting place" of the perspectives (36). This final meeting place is the meaning of the text, created by the reader and prestructured by the author's selection of elements; it can only appear when there is an underlying standpoint (perspective) from which it is visualized. As an effect on the reader, shifting standpoints create shifting mental

⁵ Perspectives are a main point in Iser's theory and relevant for its application to Aichinger's texts in Chapter IV. I will come back to the different types of perspectives and explain them in more detail on page 22 because it is necessary to first discuss other points to understand fully the concept of perspectives and their effects.

images, and it is in this way that the two roles of the reader are interrelated and involve the reader in the creation of the world of the literary text.

Important components of the text that determine its aesthetic potential are: structures and the strategies used to decipher them. Textual strategies “organize both the material of the text and the conditions under which that material is to be communicated” (86). Strategies are governed by the author’s processes of selection and combination; they organize the relations of individual elements of the text selected by the author and supply the reader with an outline for his imagination. The selection of elements opens up the world of the literary work, whereas combination is a synthesis of the selected elements. The relation between the foreground, or ‘theme’, and the background, or “horizon”, is a characteristic feature of literary texts and forms the basis for all textual strategies. The structure of theme and horizon directs the attention of the reader; the theme is the segment of the text in which the reader is momentarily involved. The segment that is the theme prestructures the next segment. When the reader moves to the next segment, this new segment becomes the new theme, whereas the previous theme now becomes the horizon.

The horizon consists of all those elements and perspectives that the reader has already passed in the text. Every segment of the text carries certain norms and conventions that influence the reader’s interpretation; in becoming the horizon, they provide the interpretive background against which the reader experiences the new theme and thus influence the interpretation of the new theme. In addition, the perspectives of the theme influence the interpretation of the horizon in a kind of backward operation: the perspectives of the segment that is to become the horizon create certain expectations in the reader about what is to come next; the perspectives of the new theme then either fulfill or deceive the expectations, thus the perspectives confirm or change the

interpretation of the horizon. Iser calls these expectations “blanks” or “blank expectations” that the reader has to fill to create meaning in interaction with the text. Since the reader contributes his own conventions and experiences to the process, the interpretation becomes multifaceted.

The following figure illustrates the concept of theme and horizon:

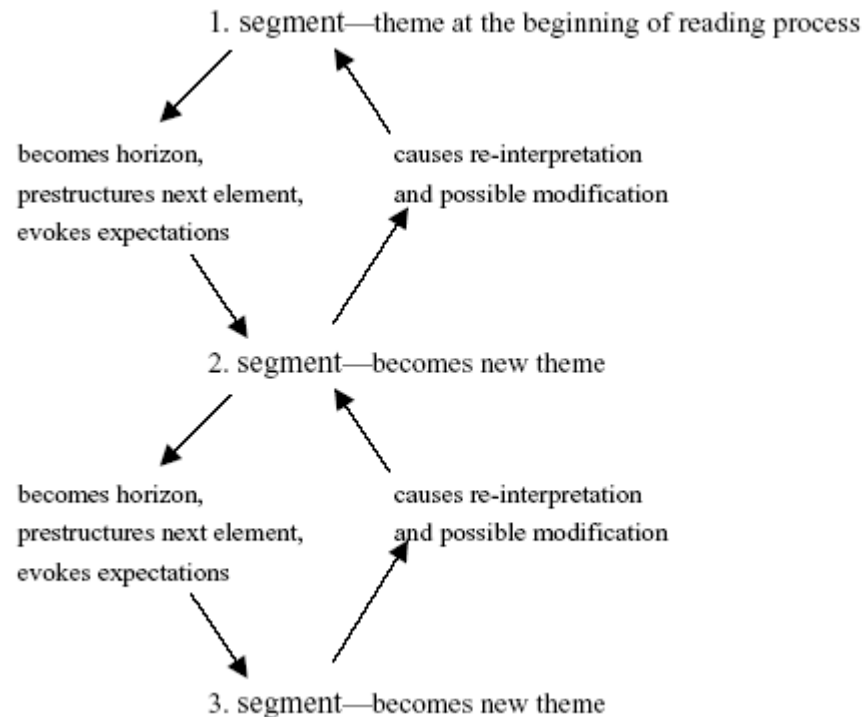


Figure 1: The concept of theme and horizon

As a pragmatic example for the mode of action of theme and horizon we may want to consider the well-known fairy tale “Little Red Riding Hood”: In the beginning of the story, which can be seen as the first segment and thus the theme, the mother sends the girl to the grandmother to bring her food and wine. The mother warns the girl not to leave the path because of the danger that lurks in the woods. The girl promises to stay on the path and to go directly to the grandmother’s house. The reader’s interpretation is that of an obedient little girl and he is likely to expect her to do as she was told. As the reader moves on to the next segment, this first part

turns from theme to horizon. In the next segment, which now is the new theme, however, the girl is on her way and against her orders and her own promise leaves the path to pick some flowers. At this point, the reader's expectations are not fulfilled and he has to modify his interpretation of the former segment, which is now the horizon, accordingly⁶.

The text can therefore be seen as a system of different perspectives that are combined in the process of reading. By interacting with the text, the reader produces the effect, or object, of the literary work, but the structure of theme and horizon ensures that he does so only as defined by the author. The interaction is therefore not arbitrary, but guided and prestructured by strategies the author inserts in the text. In her electronic paper "Kommunikations- und rezeptionstheoretische Konzepte anhand der Analysen von Wolfgang Iser und Espen J. Aarseth", Kathrin Keller explains:

Über das Netz dieser Beziehungen wird der ästhetische Gegenstand kreierte, der somit keinesfalls eine feste Größe ist, sondern etwas, was sich aus den sich verschiebenden wechselseitigen Positionen bilden lässt. Er ist somit ebenso veränderlich wie die Textelemente, die sich im Zuge ihrer wechselseitigen Beobachtbarkeit verändern. Der ästhetische Gegenstand ist damit als "transzendentaler Blickpunkt" charakterisierbar, [. . .].

The change experienced by the reader through the different perspectives is transferred to the next segment that becomes the theme. In this way, the manifoldness of interpretation rises even more and the accumulated change is also transferred into the aesthetic object. The aesthetic object therefore cannot be found in individual elements of the text or in single perspectives; nor is it a

⁶ As with the use of highly connotative language, Iser evaluates the literary quality of a text based on the number of unfulfilled expectations it causes. In "Iser's Theory of Aesthetic Response: A Brief Critique" Peter Swirski explains that Iser considers a fulfillment of expectations and thus a confirmative effect of the text as depreciation and quotes Iser's description of such confirmative effect as "a defect in a work of art" (Iser qtd. in Swirski 7). This evaluation, too, is questionable in face of the many literary works that are easily comprehensible due to their "confirmative effect"—and yet are good literature.

summary of the elements and perspectives—it is more than this, since it is continually accumulated. Although the reader creates the aesthetic object and his transformation is an accumulation of the different perspectives, the perspectives themselves are to a high degree given by the author and the structure he used.

According to Iser, four types of perspectives are established in a literary text: “Counterbalance,” “oppositional arrangement,” “echelon arrangement,” and “serial arrangement.” The central perspective that sets the norms of the repertoire against which all other values must be judged is “counterbalance” . In general, the hero of a novel embodies this perspective. The oppositional arrangement of perspectives simply places different norms in opposition that the reader has to relate to each other. In general, one segment of the text displays one of the opposing perspectives, and the other perspective is revealed in the next, or another following, segment. The segment displaying one perspective is the theme at some point in the process of reading and then becomes the horizon for the next segment, which then shows a different, opposing perspective. In this way, theme and horizon are in an ongoing conflict with each other and the reader produces a “reciprocal negation” (Act 101). In other words: every time a certain norm becomes thematic, it excludes or negates those contained in the horizon, causing a steady process of negation of norms. Iser explains the result of this switch of perspectives: “The context is a product of switching perspectives, and the producer is the reader himself, who removes the norms from their pragmatic setting and begins to see them for what they are, thus becoming aware of the functions they perform in the system from which they have been removed” (101). These negations are an essential condition for the communication between reader and text.

The echelon and serial arrangements of perspectives are closely related and suspend the referential element of the counterbalance or oppositional perspective. In the echelon arrangement there is no predominance of selected perspectives or norms; instead all characters serve the same purpose, causing disorientation in the reader. The author or narrator does not provide guidance anymore, and the reader can only solve this problem by adopting own attitudes toward the text, which, of course, are no longer dominated by the structure of the text, but by the reader's own personality. An escalation of the echelon arrangement is the serial arrangement of perspectives, which provides changing perspectives in quick succession, making it almost impossible for the reader to find a reference in the structure of theme and horizon. "The reader is forced to try and identify the perspective and the referential context of each individual sentence or section, which means that he must constantly abandon the connections he had established or had hoped to establish" (102). As a result, the reader cannot refer to the norms and conventions of the repertoire and the transformation of the perspectives into the aesthetic object fails in a way that it only leads back to itself. This phenomenon will be further discussed in a later section of this chapter.

When the author selects the perspectives and implicitly the aesthetic object of a literary text, he takes them out of their real-life context, and the aesthetic object therefore uncovers something that could not be seen if reference to the empirical object was given. Furthermore, as opposed to a given empirical object, a literary text cannot be perceived in its whole at any given time, but the reader moves through the text toward its aesthetic object. This traveling inside the text Iser calls the "wandering viewpoint" of the reader. The world of the text is constituted by sentences or interrelated sentence correlates that have the task to convey the meaning of the text.

They are dependent on what was expressed before and allude to what will follow and thus evoke a mode of expectation in the reader through their interaction.

The reader's expectations, however, will not always be fulfilled by the text. Instead, through its dynamic structure of theme and horizon the text continually modifies the reader's expectations. The wandering viewpoint becomes a coalescence of expectations about what is to come and knowledge of what has already happened. The wandering viewpoint passes both the future horizon and the past one at the same time. Since the horizon only prestructures what is to come, it is only relatively concrete and contains blank expectations in anticipation of their fulfillment. The text will either fulfill the reader's expectations or lead to disorientation, because the sentence correlates modify or deceive the expectations evoked by previous sentences. If the theme does not fulfill the expectations evoked by the horizon, these expectations are modified and the elements of the text previously read now appear in a different light; the interpretation of the horizon changes in retrospective. Protension and retention are conditions for the subjective realization of the text through the reader and influenced by the reader's own features like interest, competence, and powers of recollection the actualizations can differ widely.

There are two basic conditions for the interaction and communication between the text and the reader: blanks and negations. Negations, as outlined earlier in this chapter, occur when in an oppositional arrangement the perspective switches from theme to horizon, negating the norms and perspectives provided by the former. Iser also calls blanks indeterminacies. They arise from the fact that a literary text does not denote or refer to empirical reality. In his article "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response", Iser points out that "This possibility of verification that all expository texts offer is, precisely, denied by the literary text" (196). Not only would many critics and readers disagree with Iser in this point; he also seem to contradict his own

statements. For Iser, the text comes to life in the interaction with the reader and does not exist for itself. The reader, however, contributes his own experiences and norms and thus his own cultural background to the creation of meaning. Furthermore, the author selects certain norms and conventions which are included in the text's repertoire. Consequently, the text cannot be free of any reference to cultural contexts, but they are an immanent part of the literary work. According to Iser, however, the denial of verification is the source of indeterminacy. The blank expectations described earlier represent such blanks in the interaction between text and reader. The text can, however, show indeterminacies in itself. Iser lists "schematized views" as a basic characteristic of literary texts and describes them according to Roman Ingarden⁷ as unfolding views in the text that in stages constitute its object, giving a concrete form for the reader to contemplate. Every view presents the object "not in an incidental or even accidental way, but in a representative manner" (197). What is represented by one of the views is, however, only one single "representative aspect" (197), which determines the literary object and at the same time leaves the need for a new determination. Indeterminacies occur between the single views as a result of their determinacy. The blanks have to be filled by the reader while reading the text and serve as an incentive for the reader's imagination at the same time. In the act of bridging the different views and connecting views and perspectives, the reader has to obtain an attitude of determinacy himself in order to realize the meaning in cooperation with the text.

Iser's theory of serial arrangements is particularly useful for analyzing some of Ilse Aichinger's works, especially the later texts. Rapidly changing perspectives cause disorientation in the reader due to the impossibility of reference in the structure of theme and horizon. Iser calls the disorientation of the reader and the author's denial of guidance a "minus function" of the literary text (Act 207). In traditional novels, one function of the perspectives and norms provided

⁷ Iser refers to Roman Ingarden's work Das literarische Kunstwerk, Tübingen, 1960.

by the author or implied narrator is to grant at least some form of orientation. In a serial arrangement of perspectives, this expected function is not fulfilled but instead the text “uses its techniques to transform expected functions into minus functions” (207). Thus, the reader is also required to create the referential frameworks for his evaluation of norms because the text does not provide such a tool anymore.

Expectations of any kind become blanks, and if more segments or perspectives have to be connected, then there will be a greater number of blanks in the reader’s world of reference. By linking the perspectives together to create meaning, the reader closes the blanks between the segments. In the case of minus function, he has to carry out the same transformation with regard not only to the segments, but also to the linkage of the segments. This leads to a new, different type of communication between the text and the reader that could be seen as criticism of everyday real life. Given the absence of reference to a specific empirical object the world can only be experienced as a place of constantly changing points of view. Iser describes the minus function as important means of interaction: “In this mode of communication the blank, as a background of nonfulfilled functions, assumes its full significance. In negating techniques expected for the structuring of the text, it acts as a matrix for the productivity sparked in the reader” (211). As such, the continually changing viewpoint helps the reader realize the openness of the world and the fact that any given views are merely possibilities of experiencing it.

II. 4. Criticizing the Critic: Theory of Aesthetic Response in Light of Criticism

Many scholars criticize Iser’s theory of aesthetic response for being too abstract and not applicable. Dagmar Barnouw commiserates with the text and the reader in her review of Iser’s Act of Reading and The Implied Reader, because both disappear in Iser’s theory. Barnouw

argues that in Iser's framework the text seems to exist only as a means of communication, and thus loses its value as a work of art. In addition, the theory only holds true for a small selection of particular kinds of texts. Barnouw does not, however, prove this point by explaining which texts can or cannot be analyzed successfully. Furthermore, she states that Iser's reader is as determined and normative as the readers of Ingarden, and the reader's background and mind must not interfere with the structures and blanks that guide him. This background seems to be of minor importance to Iser, according to Barnouw, since the reader's participation in the act of reading is regulated by textual structures that degrade him to a mere receiver of instructions. In The Act of Reading, Iser develops the referential system of the repertoire and explains how the reassessment of norms constitute the repertoire and the effect of this process on the reader: "In other words, the literary text enables its readers to transcend the limitations of their own real-life situation; [. . .]" (79). For the reader's own reality to be transcended, we may assume that there first must be an individual background that can be subject to transcendence.

Another major point in Barnouw's critique concerns Iser's theory of blanks and indeterminacies. She claims that Iser fails to explain why and how blanks can serve as instructions for the reader and that consequently the reader can do whatever he wants with these blanks. Furthermore, the blanks' only importance for Iser seems to be their ability to serve as stimuli, whereas Barnouw states that blanks themselves are "highly complex social-historical phenomena" whose interpretation depends on the social-psychological experience of the reader (1213). She also criticizes the fact that Iser promises a concise analysis of the interaction between text and reader but fails to provide it, partly because it is impossible to analyze the operations of the mind as if they happened in a vacuum. A reader whose mind is not easily manipulated becomes frustrated when trying to apply Iser's theory. She ends her review stating

that Iser reduces the text to a system of stimuli and the reader to a mere target of this system. Barnouw cites Iser's statement about the process of reading being a dialogic interaction between text and reader and concludes with the questions: "A dialogue between whom? A text reduced to a self-regulatory system of stimuli, a reader who is subjected to such stimuli as if he has been lobotomized?" (1213). Barnouw's viewpoint is problematic because Iser indicates the individual experience of the reader as an important aspect in the process of the realization of the aesthetic object throughout his book, thus the reproach of ignoring the social-psychological background cannot be proved. On the other hand, Iser's statement that a literary text does not denote or refer to a given reality seems to affirm Barnouw's criticism. Keller, however, also criticizes Iser's theory for being too abstract:

Iser dagegen unternimmt mit seiner abstrakten Theorie den Versuch, eine allgemein anzuwendende, strukturierte Beschreibung der verschiedenen Positionen des Textes, des Lesers und der daraus folgenden Herstellung des ästhetischen Gegenstandes zu entwickeln, [. . .]. Bei ihm bleibt für eine Darstellung von Individualitäten einzelner Texte oder gar eine Verdeutlichung der begrifflich sehr durchdachten und allgemein gehaltenen Analyse anhand eines Beispiels kein Platz. Unter diesem Blickwinkel scheint die allgemeine Anwendbarkeit von Iser's Theorie unter einem Defizit zu leiden: zu abstrakt, und möglicherweise zu weit von der Empirie entfernt, um noch die Beziehung zu seinem Gegenstand – dem Text, dem Leser und seinen Leistungen oder der Konstituierung des ästhetischen Produkts – herstellen zu können.

Although Iser gives sporadic, rather marginal examples for how to comprehend individual aspects of his theory, he fails to provide instructions or examples for the practical application of

his overall theory. The high degree of abstraction and complexity of Iser's theory may indeed represent a major problem with regard to actual texts.

Stanley Fish, a leading figure in Reception Theory and perhaps Iser's greatest critic, accuses Iser of conforming to all possible theories, approaches, and any party involved in criticism of literary works. In his article "Why no one's afraid of Wolfgang Iser," he sarcastically admires Iser's attempt to stretch his theory to encompass all oppositional aspects or concepts, be it intended or produced meaning, historical or reader-oriented approach, or any other aspect:

Indeed the range of problems that Iser apparently solves is remarkable; but even more remarkable is the fact that he achieves his solutions without sacrificing any of the interests that might be urged by one or another of the traditional theoretical positions. His theory is mounted on behalf of the reader, but it honors the intentions of the authors; the aesthetic object is constructed in time, but the blueprint for its construction is spatially embodied; each realization of the blueprint is historical and unique; but it itself is given once and for all; literature is freed from the tyranny of referential meaning, but nevertheless contains a meaning in the directions that trigger the reader's activities; those activities are determined by a reader's 'stock of experience' (Act 38), but in the course of their unfolding, that stock is transformed. The theory, in short, has something for everyone, and denies legitimacy to no one. (6)

In the pages preceding this statement, Fish proves his findings on every listed aspect with apparently contradictory quotes from Iser's The Act of Reading. Although his argument seems to be persuasive, Iser's reply in the article "Talk like Whales" is convincing, too, and certainly

deserves closer consideration. He states that being obviously contrary does not mean one does not take sides, but rather one sees truth in various points.

By announcing that the distinction between determinate and indeterminate will not hold, Fish attacks one major aspect of Iser's theory. Textual structures, which are part of the real world, are given and therefore determinate, whereas the information that has to be filled in by the reader, such as the connections between the textual segments, is interpretive and therefore indeterminate. Fish draws upon Iser's example of Allworthy and points out that the reader can only come to the conclusion that Allworthy is not as perfect as stated by the text, when the reader has a certain, fixed idea of perfection. Only in this case will the indeterminacy, that is the information that the reader fills in the blank, trigger the correct conclusion and lead to the connection of what is stated literally and what is left out but still connotated. If, however, a reader does not regard Allworthy's inability to recognize the hypocrisy of the other character as imperfection, there will not be a blank in the repertoire of the text, and thus no need for the reader to fill it in. Fish abolishes the distinction between what is given by the text and supplied by the reader: "[. . .] if gaps are not built into the text, but appear (or do not appear) as a consequence of particular interpretive strategies, then there is no distinction between what the text gives and what the reader supplies; he supplies *everything*; [. . .]" (7). He applies the same doubts to Iser's distinction between the real world and literature and the distinction between everyday use of language and the language of literary texts and comes to the conclusion that everything is either supplied by the reader or given by the text, depending on the reader's interpretation and background.

Fish also agrees with Keller's critique of missing examples and Barnouw's critique of the degraded reader, declaring that Iser's reader is merely a creature controlled by strategies and

elements that are “themselves the product of interpretation” (12). Finally, he shrugs off Iser’s theory as “nothing more than a loosely constructed network of pasted-together contradictions” that is itself “full of gaps” (12-13). By being as contradictory as he is, and with his fluctuating perspectives and lack of determination, Iser will, according to Fish, not have any problems disproving any kind of critique. In fact, Iser replies in his article in a manner predicted by Fish, although his comments on Fish’s points are basically comprehensible and do not lack a certain persuasive power. He accuses Fish of confusing the distinctions he draws, and rectifies them according to his theory. In the case of the interpretation of Allworthy’s perfection, Iser explains that Fish made a two-way distinction out of a situation that actually has three perspectives. Correctly, he distinguishes between the given, the determinate, and the indeterminate, with the name Allworthy being a given which is not supplied by the reader, and the qualities the reader attaches to the character and his counterpart being the determinate. The connection or link between the two is the indeterminate, or significance, as Iser calls it in this article, and this blank has to be filled by the reader. This process is ongoing, since the indeterminate changes into a determinate after the connection is established and will be “altered by subsequent significances that have to be produced in order to bridge the gaps between (a) given elements and (b) his previous determinate interpretations” (Iser, “Talk” 84). He further argues that the distinction between determinacy and indeterminacy holds as long as the reader keeps on linking his views of the characters to each other, independent of whether or not there is agreement about the interpretation of the relationship. Iser fails again, however, to provide an explicit answer to or a precise example of what might happen if the reader does not attach certain qualities to the character or does not connect anything with the name Allworthy, which is a given textual

element. Although he responds to almost each of Fish's accusations with varying degrees of acuity, he leaves this aspect open – a possible blank in the reader's comprehension.

Iser's theory of aesthetic response is, in fact, slightly problematic. The high degree of abstractness and the constant interweaving of all aspects of the theory make it difficult to apprehend it in its entirety. Missing examples of application of the individual aspects to different literary texts give the impression that in fact only selected texts "qualify" as being representative candidates for a pragmatic application. In addition, some aspects, such as the explanations of perspectives, appear to be incomplete to a certain degree. Iser lists the four types of perspectives, but fails to illustrate how to determine which type is appropriately applied to what kind of textual segments and what the basis and parameters for such application might be. Some examples of how he determines the applicable perspective would certainly provide helpful clarification when it comes to analyzing perspectives in actual literary texts. Iser's occasional use of different terms for the same concept also increases the difficulties in understanding his theory completely. In his article "Iser's Theory of Aesthetic Response: A Brief Critique", Peter Swirski discovers contradictions in Iser's work. He quotes Iser's claim that the aesthetic value of a work is greater when eventually "all its parts are joined together in a harmonious whole" (Act 15) and explains: "As such, this view is in direct contradiction to his argument from the same page in *The Act of Reading*, where he dismisses the New Critical approach for valuating a text by the harmony of its composite elements" ("Iser's Theory" 8). On pages 24-25 I have alluded to a similar contradiction referring to the author's denial of verification of the literary text by means of reference to an empirical world, which supports Swirski's criticism.

Nevertheless, Iser's theory contains many aspects that can be applied to Aichinger's texts and that can help to dissolve their impenetrability and to determine whether Aichinger leaves the

space for the reader to create their meaning. The fact that in many texts she tries to create a textual world that does not have a referent in the world of reality seems to predestine her works for the application of Iser's theory. The willingness to accept the occurrence of blanks, however, and to interpret them according to Iser's theory is the key for approaching Aichinger's texts through an Iserian reading.

III. FORMULIERUNG IST EINVERSTÄNDNIS—ILSE AICHINGER'S PROSE

*Es ist schwer, die Wahrheit zu schreiben.
Bis man durch das Gestrüpp von Banalität durch ist,
ist man schon erschöpft.
(Aichinger, Kleist 54)*

Ilse Aichinger distrusts words and language – she has alluded to this skepticism in numerous published interviews, speeches, and essays. Born and raised as the child of a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father in Austria during the Second World War, she was confronted daily with the terror of the Nazi-Regime and the disappearance and persecution of relatives and friends. Experiences of anxiety, loss, and suspicion are palpable in her texts and have become a major part of her world of thoughts. Aichinger is afraid of normalcy, since for her it goes along with belittlement and careless thinking and dealing with people and society. In her speech “Rede an die Jugend”, she describes this anxiety she and her friends felt toward the end of World War II:

Und als der Krieg immer offenkundiger seinem Ende zuzuging, bekamen wir Angst vor diesem Ende, Angst vor der Befreiung. Davor, daß wir dann vielleicht nicht mehr im Stande sein würden, jeden Tag als den ersten und letzten zu nehmen, davor, daß wir wieder in den Irrtum verfielen, es wäre möglich, jede verweigerte Begegnung, jeden unterlassenen Freundesbeweis doppelt und dreifach nachzuholen, aber später, morgen, übermorgen. (21)

Here, Aichinger criticizes the propensity of human beings to fall into complacency. Continuing, she cites Inge Scholl's sentence “Von der Verharmlosung darf kein Tag berührt werden” and applies it to language to make even clearer her views about an unconscious, normal use of words (22). In her view the ongoing threat of persecution created a higher awareness of the value of social relationships. Just as the regained normalcy of everyday life in terms of an end to this

threat could cause a careless dealing with friendship, the normal and unconscious use of language makes it easy to hide the lies behind the spoken or written word.

III. 1. Schlechte Wörter—the Author’s Use of Language

Aichinger’s essay “Aufruf zum Mißtrauen” (1946) is an additional reflection of Aichinger’s fear of normalcy and the abuse of language. It is also one of her few works in which she addresses the reader directly and makes her point with a clarity that is rather untypical of her writing. The essay is an urgent appeal to the people of the twentieth century to distrust their language and their thoughts to prevent unawareness that could lead to another historical disaster like the Holocaust. She repeatedly reminds the reader of the danger emanating from unconsciousness: “Unserer eigenen Wahrhaftigkeit müssen wir mißtrauen! Schwingt nicht schon wieder Lüge darin?” (19). In its forcefulness, this appeal clearly reveals Aichinger’s discomfort when it comes to unreflected perceptions in general. Even though she does not explicitly focus on the use of language, the statement “Kaum haben wir stammelnd versucht, wieder “ich” zu sagen, haben wir auch schon wieder versucht, es zu betonen” indicates her special concern about it (19). Cynthia Chalupa argues in her dissertation: “While ‘Aufruf zum Mißtrauen’ is indeed very different from Aichinger’s later texts, it already contains the inherent critique of language that became the foundation and catalyst of virtually every work that followed” (155). In fact, Aichinger’s skepticism recalls criticism practiced by the *Gruppe 47* after the Second World War⁸. The abuse of language for Nazi propaganda led to a new, critical consciousness of many authors when dealing with language. Rüdiger Görner states in his article about Aichinger’s language “Die

⁸ This loose association of authors received its name in a way that was similar to the manner in which the Spanish group 98 got its title. It was founded in September 1947 and its purpose was the promotion of authors of postwar German literature. Furthermore, the members of Gruppe 47 criticized literature and the use of a poetic language that emphasized idealization und poetic euphemism. After the misuse of language by the National Socialists for propaganda purposes, Gruppe 47 supported clear, direct language without flourish and embellishment.

versprochene Sprache”: “Der Sündenfall der Sprache begann, als sie zum Mittel bedingungsloser Manipulation wurde und wahres Reden und Schweigen tödlich sein konnten” (9). He explains her inner conflicts as follows:

[. . .] einerseits schreibt sie im Bewußtsein, daß jede Hoffnung auf der sittlichen Kraft der Sprache im Sinne eines Versprechens aufbaut, andererseits weiß sie, daß die Sprache sich versprochen, leer-gesprochen hat, indem sie der Perversion von Rassengesetzen, Massenvernichtungsordern, die Auschwitz und Katyn, Theresienstadt und Haiphong möglich machten, ihre Wörter lieh. Und dazu gesellte sich das Versprechen, das zufällige, Unterbewußtes freilegende; eine sichere Quelle für Mißverständnisse. (11-12)

Today, Aichinger’s writing seems to focus on other issues, but her attitude toward language has become even more critical and has served as the explicit topic of several of her works⁹.

In view of the many statements and interviews in which Aichinger talks about language, it is clear that she does not have a one-sided view of it. Her suspicion of words is based primarily on her experience that language is predestined to be abused and misused, twisted and perverted. It is used to veil reality and thus Aichinger denounces a modern use of language that facilitates indifference and apathy. In a letter to Salman Rushdie titled “Wissen lernen,” she explains that the word “normal” has come to indicate assimilation and impassiveness, providing the chance to avoid interference, and admonishes the reader to become afraid of himself. For Aichinger, language is always suspect, even dangerous, at least when it is established language that is worn and used up – emptied of meaning and distorting meaning at the same time.

⁹ Though many of Aichinger’s works inherently deal with the problems of language and communication, some of her short stories explicitly thematize the autonomy of language: *Meine Sprache und ich*, *Schlechte Wörter*, *Die Rampenmaler*, *Die Schwestern Jouet*.

In an interview with Heinz F. Schafroth, Aichinger also states that language is suspect “weil sie im Aufbruch ist, weil sie in Frage stellt” (31). In contrast to her view of established language, Aichinger sees language itself, liberated from its conventional use, as a commitment, as a tool and weapon to fight established language. In her essay “Stummheit immer wieder in Schweigen zu übersetzen, das ist die Aufgabe des Schreibens,” Luzia Stettler cites Aichinger with the words: “Meine Sprache ist eine Form von Anarchie” (45). Her language is an expression of her resistance to indifference and unawareness; it resists succumbing to the rules of linguistic conventions. Instead, it often seems that its purpose is to turn these very rules upside down. Chalupa explains: “The ‘anarchy’ to which Aichinger refers does not, however, encompass a direct attack on convention; instead, it refers to the careful and highly complex manner in which she breaks with traditional conceptions of writing [. . .]” (147). Consequently, she uses her texts to write against the consumption and wear and tear of language in an attempt to keep it from being manipulated. It is in this fight that Aichinger grows ever more silent. She does not believe in present-day language; she distrusts the common sentence’s ability to convey any truth. She even distrusts words themselves, and it is partly because she also distrusts people’s ability and willingness to understand that her language has become more and more scarce. For what can be said can also be manipulated and vanish: “Immer wenn etwas sprechbar, sprachbar werde, sei das meistens der Augenblick, in dem es verschwinde” (qtd. in Stettler 45). For this reason she fights with every single word in her texts to attain the silence that will truthfully tell what she does not want to speak outright.

III. 2. Silent Writing: Unsettling Meaning through Images and Liberation of Conventions

For Aichinger, silence is a way to avoid and overcome the traps of conventional language. She does not believe in the arbitrary referential system underlying the use of words and their ability to communicate true meaning. In her essay “Schnee” she states her view of words and their use and explains why she rejects it:

Es gibt nicht viele Wörter. Es gibt nicht viele, die nicht bezeichnen, womit sie eins sind, weil sie es nicht bezeichnen. Die nicht eins sind mit dem, was sie nicht bezeichnen, weil sie damit eins sind. Aber Schnee ist ein Wort. Ob er ausbleibt, zögernd zu fallen beginnt oder in Wirbeln herunterjagt, er kann sich nicht wehren. Er ist ein Wort. (113)

The single word snow does not take into account the various forms in which snow can appear or its consequences and thus leaves room for misinterpretation and misunderstanding. She refers to the impreciseness that results from such a use as “diesen [. . .] Ungenauigkeiten, die einem die Lust nehmen, den Mund aufzumachen” (113). In addition, she investigates the etymological origin of the word snow and argues against the superficial use of phrases such as “etwas mit Recht sagen” that often serve the purpose of veiling the inappropriateness of that which is said:

[. . .] ich verdächtige alles, was man mit Recht sagen kann, schon lange. Entweder kann man etwas sagen oder man kann es nicht sagen. Wenn man etwas nicht sagen kann, setzt man geschwind voraus, daß man es mit Recht sagen kann. Und da man von allem, was gesagt wird, das meiste nicht sagen kann, nimmt diese Redensart zu. (114)

Aichinger explains that most things are said although they actually cannot be said using conventional, established language and consequently opposes it with silence. For her, silence and meaningful language are the same: “Wenn ich etwas lese, denke ich auch oft, hier ist Sprache

oder hier ist keine. Daraufhin befragt, was das heißen solle, wurde mir klar, daß es hieß, das hat Schweigen in sich und das nicht” (“Ins Wort” 112). In Aichinger’s view, silence is not to be equated with speechlessness or muteness. Instead, it is the very purpose of silence to fight muteness caused by established language and to communicate meaning.

Marion Schmaus refers to Aichinger’s silence as “ersprochenes Schweigen” and locates it as “zwischen den Polen der Stille, der Stummheit und des Geredes [. . .]” (“Die Autorin tritt aus dem Spiegel” 82-83). For Aichinger, the repertoire of words of established language is not able to convey meaning in its actual sense. Therefore, using it is nonsensical; it can only lead to muteness that does not say anything at all. Inability to communicate, however, is the only way to create literature. In an essay about Georg Trakl, Aichinger explains: “Sicher konnte er sich nicht mitteilen, nur so wird Dichtung lebensspendend” (Kleist 99). Through the silence created by unspoken words meaning comes to life and can be conveyed; it is where muteness is obliterated. In Aichinger’s poetology it serves as mediation associated with translation: “Einerseits die Überführung des Redens in die Stille, andererseits das zur Sprache bringen der Stummheit” (83). For her, it is the task of writing to translate this muteness into silence and to communicate it.

Aichinger creates silence in her works by employing a characteristically sparse language. Although she describes it in “Meine Sprache und ich” as “meine Sprache ist eine, die zu Fremdwörtern neigt”, it is rather marked by the lack of foreign words and complex constructions. She continues her description stating “Es ist aber eine kleine Sprache. Sie reicht nicht weit. Rund um, rund um mich herum, immer rund um und so fort” (219). In the text, Aichinger introduces her language as personified object and describes it as an entity that is taciturn and apparently unwilling to communicate. This judgment is certainly valid not only for her personified language in the story, but also for her use of words in most of her works. Fairly often, Aichinger gives the impression that the explicit words she uses are the bare minimum necessary; she uses only simple

linguistic constructions and forgoes every kind of ornamentation, and hence indeed employs a ‘small’ language. she is utterly successful, however, in fully expanding this small language to a degree that goes far beyond conventional linguistic use; she uses it to create not linguistic linearity, but a world of metaphoric images. In fact, her language shows a limited number of traditional means of expression that she utilizes to the full capacity to create fictional texts that are constructed simply, but nevertheless rich in highly complex images. Her texts assemble chains of these images that are “joined together by words which create the fiber of the text but do not establish its content” (Chalupa 165). Through this fusion of words and images Aichinger strives for the silence that is able to communicate.

In analogy with her ever-growing rejection of using conventional language and her endeavor to attain perfect silence, Aichinger’s texts have become increasingly pictorial, but also more and more impenetrable. In an attempt to dissolve the incomprehensibility, some literary critics and scholars have interpreted her use of words and the resulting images as highly metaphoric and tried to manifest the author’s intention by translating the metaphors back into words. In his book Die Bergung der Opfer in der Sprache, Richard Reichensperger achieves an interesting circular deduction by referring Aichinger’s images back to two of her favorite words. Interpreting the short story “Mein Vater aus Stroh”, he explains that whereas textual fragments such as the father that is wearing the old uniform are still facts that can be related to reality, suddenly occurring words and sentences like “Mein Vater [. . .] ist ganz aus Stroh” cannot:

In der Mitte der Erzählung fällt das Wort „Strohmann“ – eine Metapher, die für diese Erzählung wörtlich genommen wird: deshalb „mein Vater aus Stroh“, deshalb die zum Bildfeld „Stroh“ gehörenden „Heubündel“, deshalb „Strohfeuer“, aus dem „Feuer“ abgelöst wird, die größte Gefahr für den „Vater aus Stroh“. Aber schon im ersten Satz wird ein zweites Bildfeld evoziert: „Remise“ hat es mit

Eisenbahnen zu tun: deshalb „die Leute von der alten Bahn“, [. . .]. Von „Eisenbahn“ wird die erste Silbe abgetrennt: deshalb „Eis“ aus dem Bildfeld „Schnee“. (17)

Following the linguistic concept of semantic or lexical fields, Reichensperger creates fields of images to analyze the text and establish a cross-reference to the author. He concludes that the reader's initial irritation and following astonishment result from the combination of the “Logik der Alltagswelt und scheinbar “realistischen” Erzählens” and the evenly strong logic of the fields of images. The combination of these two apparently conflicting areas breaks open the logic itself; Reichensperger closes the circle by suggesting: “Damit entsteht eine doppelte Geschichte, eine über den *Vater aus Stroh* und eine “in der Sprache”, über zwei Lieblingswörter Ilse Aichingers, “Heu” und “Schnee”” (18). Although this might be a daring analysis, it exemplarily describes the efforts undertaken to come to terms with the impreciseness and impenetrability of Aichinger's texts.

Astonishingly, Reichensperger justifies Aichinger's pictorial silence by explaining that for her, traditional means of narrating seem too imprecise and not binding, thus implying that her texts actually achieve preciseness through their impreciseness. Certainly, by way of omitting descriptions of time, place, plot, and characters, the texts seem to fully concentrate on the nucleus of the narration. What is left, however, particularly in her late texts, is a string of images that, in their sometimes extreme abstractness and apparent disjointedness, give an impression of arbitrariness and ambiguity. It is an incoherence intended by Aichinger: “Niemand kann von mir verlangen, daß ich Zusammenhänge herstelle, solange sie vermeidbar sind” (“Schlechte Wörter”¹⁰ 12). With her language full of metaphoric images, she successfully creates ambivalence that leads to interpretative openness and avoids predefinition. At the same time, it

¹⁰ In: Schlechte Wörter

causes difficulty to distinguish metaphoric from non-metaphoric use of language – the border between them becomes fluid. It is the very nature of metaphors to cause ambiguity that can normally be dissolved by opposing the text and its context. In her article “Definieren grenzt an Unterhöhlen”, Neva Šlibar expounds the impossibility of this method in Aichinger’s texts because “[. . .] sich nach Weinrichs Definition, die Metapher sei “definierbar als ein Wort in einem konterdeterminierenden Kontext”, die Abhebung des Texts vom Kontext, d.h. der metaphorisierten Elemente von ihrem Hintergrund, als schwierig, wenn nicht gar stellenweise unmöglich erweist” (57). Šlibar defines the disappearing differentiation between text and context and metaphorical and non-metaphorical language as characteristic not only for modern lyrics, but also for the mode of action of Aichinger’s works.

In a presentation given on a conference on Austrian authors, Brigid Haines explains: “Aichinger’s texts, particularly the late ones, seek first and foremost to unsettle. Rather than striving for closure, they deliberately work towards openness, and are defiantly oppositional to all structures of dominance, whether institutional, linguistic, or hermeneutic” (“The sounds of silence” 106). The openness Aichinger, to whom Monique Boussart refers as “Dichterin der Ambivalenz”, strives for is one that leaves room for communication (metaphorisches Sprechen 139). Impreciseness and ambivalence of her language and images are not by-products of her literary production, but desired and artfully established outcome. However, it also aggravates the reader’s difficulty to fully, or sometimes even partly, understand her texts. Even an analysis like Reichensperger’s that seeks to dissolve the ambiguity presupposes that the reader is familiar with Aichinger’s entire work to successfully interpret the text.

III. 3. Decoding the Silence: the Reader's Role

“Nur wenn wir wissen, daß alles offenbleibt, kann ein Dialog zustande kommen”. This statement, included in a collection of aphorisms created in a time in which Aichinger produced only single sentences, concisely summarizes her view of silence as a means of communication (Kleist 59). Her texts summon the reader to disassociate from conventional use and understanding of words and language and to search for meaning within the space created between her words and metaphoric images which Haines calls Aichinger's “private linguistic world” (111). The seeming arbitrariness, however, with which she selects words and strings them together, and the paradoxical expressions in her writing, especially in her later works, confront the reader with a difficult task. The author herself describes the dubious process of reading her texts:

Ich weiß nicht, wie man meine Texte lesen soll, ich kann nur sagen, wie ich Texte lese, die mich zugleich anziehen und mir Schwierigkeiten machen. Ich lese sie so, wie ich etwas suche, das verlorengegangen ist, indem ich zuerst das Suchen suche, die Form zu suchen, und wenn ich es gefunden habe, merke ich, daß ich eigentlich die Form zu finden gefunden habe, im Fall des Textes, die Form zu lesen, und daß Lesen und Schreiben wie Suchen und Finden sich einander bis zur Identität nähern können. Diese Form zu lesen, hat sich bewährt, und ich glaube, sie steht jedem offen. (qtd. in Schafroth, “Gespräche” 34)

The search Aichinger refers to could be understood as the attempt to find the connection between her words and images and the reader's own experience and cognition of real world events in order to bring into being some individual meaning.

Given her suspicion toward language, Aichinger resists explicit articulation, and urges the reader “to resist natural discourses” (Haines 111). By objecting to traditional means of linear and explicit narration, Aichinger's prose does not offer a convenient given meaning, but instead it has

to be produced through a jointed effort between text and reader. Although the textual space of her works is filled with gaps created by images and the structure of her writing, earlier texts like “Die Spiegelgeschichte” are constructed in a way that they guide the reader in his search for meaning. The reader needs to fill these gaps by referring to his own world of thoughts, thus creating the meaning in interaction with the text and clues given by the author. In her later texts, however, Aichinger denies coherent narratives or direct connections to reality, leaving the reader perplexed. Increasing impenetrability results from her “Poetik unaufhörlicher Verweigerung und Verunsicherung”, and the reader’s real world experience seems no longer useful in the process of understanding, and instead acts as an obstacle to it (Šlibar 58). Seemingly motley accumulations of images and words do not match a corresponding counterpart in the reader’s cognition and experience; as a result, the reader suffers from the loss of orientation and starts to doubt his own ability to understand or the ability of language to communicate at all. Here, in a self-reflexive moment, the text communicates in form the very language skepticism the author harbors.

Indeed, not only the reader, but also professional literary critics experience a sense of helplessness with regard to Aichinger’s sometimes fragmented sentences and scattered strings of images. In Ilse Aichinger, Gisela Lindemann alludes to the “wachsende[n] Ratlosigkeit einer nicht geringen Zahl gutwilliger Kritiker” that have difficulty deciphering the ever-growing scarcity of Aichinger’s literature. In addition, she cites Schafroth’s introductory essay to Schlechte Wörter as a helpful tool to understanding and overcoming the interpretative dilemma¹¹:

Es bedingt, daß ein Leser seiner Ratlosigkeit vorerst mißtraut und sie als eine Form der Voreingenommenheit verdächtigt. Voreingenommenheit, die beispielsweise die Einsicht verhindert, daß jedem von Ilse Aichingers überraschenden Sätzen im Grund eine unanfechtbare Verständlichkeit eignet, vom ersten des Buchs: „Ich

¹¹ Ilse Aichinger. Schlechte Wörter. Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1976.

gebrauche jetzt die besseren Wörter nicht mehr“, bis zum letzten: „Ich glaube wir kommen voran“. Solche Sätze – und es gibt keine anderen – sind ohne Umwege über Symbolik, Mystizismus, Hermeneutik geschrieben, so sollen sie auch gelesen werden, sie können *beim Wort genommen* werden. Wer den Sätzen zutraut, daß sie ganz unverstellt existentielle Situationen und Erfahrungen [. . .] in Sprache umsetzen, *zur Sprache bringen*, der wird, auch wenn er die Texte Ilse Aichingers noch nicht verstanden hat, ein entschiedenes Vertrauen in ihre Verstehbarkeit gewonnen haben. (82-83)

By suggesting that the reader read the prose like poems, with the focus not on coherence, but on associations that build on each other, however, Schafroth apparently contradicts himself as well as Aichinger. He continues by saying that trusting in his associative abilities, the reader will find his way to approaching and understanding Aichinger's texts. Given that Aichinger distrusts conventional language, and therefore congruously denies the use of conventional images, it is impossible for the reader, who himself is habitually integrated in the traditional semantic system, to merely rely on association. It is also not always possible to “take the sentences at their word”; if this were the case, Aichinger's use of words would often become non-sensical. Instead, it becomes indispensable for the reader to look beyond the surface of perfunctory and accustomed associations to be able to create meaning through interacting with the text.

III. 4. Prose for the Psychiatrist or Expressive Poetics?: Ilse Aichinger's Narratives

While most of Aichinger's early narratives can be referred to reality without larger difficulty, the later texts increasingly break away from traditional conceptions of reality. They appear as strings of fantastic images or, frequently focusing on language and the world of pictorial expressions, as linguistic experiments. Her later texts have often been referred to as

surrealistic visions; dreamlike sequences and fragmentation of structures occur in lieu of linear narration. Even Aichinger's images have changed their function: whereas in the earlier works they serve to support the structure, in the later texts they become "vereinzelte Bilder" (Boussart 150).

For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on the short stories "Die geöffnete Order", "Wisconsin und Apfelreis", and the partially autobiographic texts and aphorisms of Kleist, Moos, Fasane. This selection shall exemplarily show Ilse Aichinger's literary development and her increasing withdrawal from traditional narration and conventional use of language. Furthermore, in their narrative and stylistic heterogeneity the stories and texts provide a good starting point for the application of Iser's theory in the next chapter.

Written in 1949, "Die geöffnete Order" is one of Aichinger's first narratives. It appeared at approximately the same time as her most famous story "Die Spiegelgeschichte". Like most of the texts from that period, "Die geöffnete Order" shows a linear and chronologically coherent plot¹². The story takes place during a period of war the participants, reason, or date of which are not closer defined, the soldiers experience a longer period of inactivity due to a lack of directives. Some of the younger men toy with the idea of disobedience by attacking the enemy even without orders. When one of them is chosen to transport a message to headquarters, he feels a sense of insecurity that grows to fear and suspicion when he is sent back with an answer, accompanied, based on the order, by another soldier. During their journey back, the soldier learns that the message calls for his execution upon delivery: "Er stand über den Wagen gebeugt und las. Die Order lautete auf seine Erschießung", and he struggles with the idea of desertion to save his life

¹² Although some stories are written in timely reversed manner, "vom Ende her auf das Ende zu", like "Die Spiegelgeschichte", they nevertheless follow a certain logical timely sequence of events. In "Spiegelgeschichte", Aichinger tells the story of a young woman who dies after complications from an abortion. The story begins with the death of the woman and continues backward through time, illuminating the most dramatic stations of her life, until finally the moment of birth coincides with the moment of death. Here, Aichinger elucidates her view of the equality of birth and death.

(“Order” 22). In the course of the story, he decides to kill his companion, but instead gets shot himself during an attack by snipers, rendering every hope of escape useless. In a last attempt to escape certain death, he hands over the message to the other man, hoping that, since no name is given on the paper, his companion will be executed in his place. The companion takes the badly wounded soldier to the camp, where he is left by himself for a while. Before he loses consciousness, he hears the sound of gunfire and associates it with the other man’s execution; he considers the pointlessness of handing the message to his companion, since he is about to bleed to death anyway. Upon awakening, he faces the companion and remorsefully thinks they are in heaven, but instead he is told by his superior that the wording of the message was a code for the beginning of a military action against the enemy.

In this story, Aichinger implicitly and artfully expresses her view of language and the danger following from misinterpretation – what is stated in the message has never been meant to happen. Görner explains: “Aber die Gefährlichkeit des Textes verbietet es, anzunehmen, daß Sprache unschädlich sein kann” (“Sprache” 13). Due to the purposely chiffré-like nature of the message, the wounded soldier’s companion is nearly killed. The soldier’s adventure merely serves as the foil through which the author develops the whole spectrum of miscommunication and its consequences. By choosing to use conventional language as a code for the message, Aichinger points to the unreliability of a common sign system and indicates the weaknesses in a supposedly concrete system of communication. It is only when both the sender and the receiver of a linguistic message have the full knowledge of context and intention that proper communication is possible. In addition, agreement about the sign system used is necessary to grant full understanding. In the story, the author clearly reveals the eagerness with which language is often purposefully or carelessly misused; typically enough, military authorities

manipulate language here, what can be understood as an allusion to the misuse of language by the Nazi-regime.

In “Die geöffnete Order”, as in almost all of her early stories, Aichinger’s protagonists remain nameless and faceless. She describes and distinguishes the characters by referring to their professional functions only or by simply using general terms like “der Junge” or “das Mädchen”, thus creating distance between the reader and the characters of the narration. In contrast, descriptions of nature and natural phenomena reveal almost human features. Whereas Aichinger narrates human actions and activities in rather simple and factual constructions, the sentences describing nature sometimes appear highly poetic: “Der Wald schien auf Holzsammler zu warten und auch der Fluß, der da und dort über ausgerodete Stellen hinweg in der Tiefe sichtbar wurde, stellte sich unwissend. Auf den Kämmen glänzte geschlagenes Holz in der Mittagssonne” (“Order” 21). Likewise, the verb constructions that designate natural phenomena appear to violate conventional understandings of conformity: “[. . .] aber während sie da, wo der Weg wie in einer plötzlichen Sinnesverwirrung selbstmörderisch hinabstürzte [. . .]; Der Weg verbreiterte sich an seinem tiefsten Punkt, als reute ihn sein plötzlicher Absturz, und führte sachte hinauf” (21-22). Aichinger anthropomorphizes abstractions and nature, thus giving the impression that they are at least as human-like as people themselves. Even in her early stories, Aichinger’s stronger and more trustful relationship to nature and places than to people is discernible.

Görner alludes to Aichinger’s description of nature in “Die geöffnete Order” as “Die Naturschilderungen, die das Geschehen durchsetzen, gehören zu den vielsagensten, die Ilse Aichinger bislang geschaffen hat” (“Sprache” 14). By describing natural phenomena in this lively manner, Aichinger simultaneously creates complex images of nature that bears every feature of humanity. While the characters of her story remain faceless, the physical depictions of nature are meaningful and multifaceted: “Die eingetrockneten Furchen glichen im Mondlicht dem Innern

einer Totenmaske. Auch dem, der die Rodung gegen den Fluß zu hinuntersah, wurde deutlich, daß die Erde den Abdruck eines fremden Gesichts trug” (“Order” 23). In general, the frequent pictorial expressions referring to natural phenomena and places are positive; in combination with the rather bald linguistic constructions used to express human activity they create an impression of silence in the flow of the narration. Unlike her later texts, however, the silence in “Die geöffnete Order” is implicit; rather than serving as the theme of the story, it underlines the events and emphasizes the effects of failed communication.

To a certain degree, Aichinger’s early works show a narrative structure that the reader can follow without great difficulty. The narrative structure and the use of language enable readers to refer back to real life situations and their own experiences and to align them with the information of the plot, thus creating meaning in interaction with the text as the story develops. Although the author has always used metaphoric images, the metaphors in “Die geöffnete Order” can easily be understood and “translated” back to their non-metaphoric linguistic counterpart: “Die letzte halbe Stunde verging in Schweigen, Zeit und Weg waren zu Wölfen geworden, die einander rissen. Auf den himmlischen Weiden sind die Schafe geschützt, aber die himmlischen Weiden enthüllten sich als Richtplatz” (23-24). In this example, distance and time are competing entities; the two soldiers are approaching the camp where certain death is waiting for one of them. He is in dire need of more time, but the distance left is too short. Another possible interpretation suggests that the distance is too great for the seriously wounded messenger and he might not live until their arrival in camp, which is both the heavenly meadows that provide shelter, and the place of execution. The silence created through avoidance of explicit articulation leaves a space that needs to be filled by the reader’s own interpretation; Aichinger’s early metaphoric writing is composed in a way that actually allows for and guides this process.

While “Die geöffnete Order” and other short stories from the outset of Aichinger’s career are quite understandable despite their sparse language, her refusal to provide detailed narrations has increased over time. Most of the texts from the 1960s do not tell a story; instead they are highly subjective descriptions of events or places, often represented as the exposition of the narrator’s trains of thought combined with personal emotions. This development toward abstractness and subjectivity proceeds consistently and reaches its highpoint in the collection of prose published under the title Schlechte Wörter, which contains texts written between the years 1970 and 1976¹³. They appear as an accumulation of obscure outpourings of authorial impressions; Reichensperger explains: “Es gibt also keinen nacherzählbaren „Inhalt“ mehr in diesen Texten [. . .]” (20). The pieces of prose are far from showing a traditional plot or structure; for the reader, it seems almost impossible to discover any reasonable content. In the text “Wisconsin und Apfelreis” (1971), several recurring motifs can be found, including an elderly female narrator, apple rice, a monastery in Wisconsin, and gates. The connection between them, however, remains unclear. An excerpt from the text reads:

Alles falsch. Aber doch nur an der Darstellung. Die Sache selbst stimmt. Die gemeine Sache. Wie das klickt, wenn die Gatter sich verschieben. Und sie verschieben sich immer, wenn sie springen. Jetzt ist die Lady draußen, Wisconsin auch, bleibt der Apfelreis. Der ist unermüdlich. Der hängt so drinnen, daß er alle Sprünge übersteht. Der ist ganz dabei und der Hader stört ihn nicht.

Wahrscheinlich liebevoll und ohne einen halben Gedanken zugerichtet. Gut, gut, wir müssen nehmen, was sich bietet. Aber mir wäre dann doch der halbe Mond lieber gewesen. Oder ein griechischer Buchstabe zum Abschied. Einer von den

¹³ Schlechte Wörter was first published in 1976 by Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main. A new edition, published as part of the complete edition Ilse Aichinger. Werke, includes the text “Friedhof in B”, which was written while the first edition of Schlechte Wörter was in print. In the complete edition, another text of the original edition, “Gare maritime”, has been left out and included in the collection of radio plays Auckland. Hörspiele.

mittleren. Denn nach Abschied riecht es. Nach Blei, Bleistiften. Den Umständen entsprechend. Es schmeckt auch so. (76)

The external structure of the text matches with its impenetrability; the complete lack of paragraphs that normally mark the beginning and end of contiguous thoughts amplifies the impression of density.

In accordance with Aichinger's withdrawal from texts that can be related to actual events, the characters in her texts gradually lose their identities. In the earlier narratives name- and faceless, but still actual people, they later become "ich" or "wir" and eventually disappear altogether. Instead, places and things gain increasing significance. In Aichinger's language, inanimate objects take the place of living beings; her tendency to describe natural phenomena and things using constructions conventionally reserved for human beings or animals has reversed typical representations of the natural world. In "Wisconsin und Apfelreis", the author talks about gates that jump and quarrel with each other, tiring apple rice that does not mind the quarrels, or Wisconsin and the apple rice that survive the jumps of the gates. While people and their characteristics are described with decreasing preciseness and increasing vagueness, in earlier stories and throughout Schlechte Wörter Aichinger depicts places as fixed points that grant stability and retreat: "Und Wisconsin scheint mir auf seine Weise ebenso stabil zu sein. Das Klösterchen. Da habe ich keine Sorgen. Aber einem, der mich fragte, ob wir da noch einmal durchkommen, quer durch die Gatter, durch die kleinen Blechrahmen, durch die leeren natürlich oder außen herum, dem würde ich sagen: Nein." (77-78). Aichinger's writing increasingly unveils her distrust in human beings and their abilities and her ever stronger bond to places and things because they do not use language to communicate.

The collection Schlechte Wörter is, on the whole, an escalation of Aichinger's unconventional approaches to writing. Her language in the texts is ever more scarce, the

sentences have become extremely short and concise and partially vanish into mere fragments. In her essay “Sammele den Untergang,” Britta Steinwendtner describes the language in Aichinger’s late texts as “aggressiv, aufrufend, auffordernd”; it demands that the reader be aware of deceptions and summons him to suspicion (139). Aichinger warns of the dangers of certainty: “Sicher sollte man auch weglassen. Alle Fragen und alle Sicherheiten” (“Wisconsin” 75) and advocates reflectiveness and openness: “Vielleicht darf es heißen. Das muß es heißen dürfen. Sonst bleibt ja nichts. Vielleicht sollte öffentlich geschützt werden” (76-77). The uncertainty makes itself felt in her late texts, which consist of almost as many questions as statements. In these texts, communication is part of the text, a dialogue that creates the action of the text, whereas in earlier works, communication is the text’s explicit message.

Aichinger’s short, staccato sentences lend a feeling of breathlessness and incompleteness to her texts, which do not provide answers to the posed questions. Indeed, answering questions is not the author’s concern. Like her linguistic constructions, the strings of images she conjures up in fast sequels are precise and almost tangible. In contrast to the images in earlier stories, however, they do not serve to structure and round out the narration, but instead seem to take on a life on their own. Boussart sees them as “fragmenthafte und disparate Eindrücke ohne deutliche gemeinsame Bezugsebene” (150). Disconnected from each other like the sentences, the images contribute to the disorientation of the reader and become a “Wirbel von grotesken und absurden Bildern”, that Boussart considers close to “Nonsensdichtung” (150). She interprets Aichinger’s images as signs for the author’s “wachsende existenzielle Verunsicherung” (152). The reader is in any case insecure; the texts do not provide any helpful clues for the interpretation of pictorial expressions such as “Soll ich sagen: Der Apfelreis paßt mir nicht, weil er lächerlich ist? Ich kann schon sagen. Es könnte einem ja auch ein Batzen Reis ins Auge kommen, wenn das Zeug stimmt. Obwohl es nicht so aussieht. Der hängt fest drin, die Äpfel auch. Braun an den Rändern, aber

immerhin” (“Wisconsin” 77). The images do not seem to be joined together by words anymore; instead they seek to disassemble reality and put it back together in a new constellation. In their introduction to Was wir einsetzen können, ist Nüchternheit, Britta Herrmann and Barbara Thums talk about the “Auflösung referentieller Bezüge” in Aichinger’s works (16) and doubt their comprehensibility. The blanks created by this dissolution rather assemble an abyss of perplexity than mere gaps; the reader does not seem to be involved in the process of creating meaning anymore. Instead, it would seem that Aichinger does not consider the reader at all. Ingeborg Drewitz explains in her critique “Was schwer zu greifen ist”, that Aichinger makes it difficult for the reader to find a meaning in the “Nicht-Geschichten”; she “verführt ihn [. . .] zu Wahrnehmungen, die ihm gewöhnlich entgehen, obwohl es Wahrnehmungen von Gewöhnlichem sind” (215). Even so, the reader is left alone not knowing what to do with these incoherent perceptions. The author does not seem to write with the reader in mind; she also does not appear to write for herself. Both reader and author seem to be absent from the later texts to a certain extent. In this case, the silence that appears between the articulated words and images is insurmountable and does not lead to communication, but to a communicative breakdown.

First published more than a decade after Schlechte Wörter, Aichinger’s partly autobiographical volume Kleist, Moos, Fasane reveals a different style and approach. Whereas the former texts and stories deal with silence more or less implicitly and by means of metaphors, images, and linguistic constructions, in the later book it is the explicit and predominant main theme of the volume. Part I includes autobiographical narratives mainly consisting of childhood memories, part II is a collection of powerful aphorisms from the years 1950 – 1985, simply titled “Aufzeichnungen”, and part III mainly contains essays about other writers.

In seven short episodes, Aichinger recalls her grandmother’s kitchen, school afternoons, Christmas, the beginning of World War II, deportation and other incidences. While the stories

contain both banal and serious occurrences, almost all are concerned with experiences of persecution, parting, and loss of family members or friends during the Nazi regime. In these texts, Aichinger returns to a more poetic way of expression; her sentences and constructions regain their illustrative complexity. Klaus Hoffer refers in his critique “Nur zuhören – ohne einen Laut” to the collection of texts as “Atemzüge, kleine, erstickte Ausrufe, Sprache gewordene Lebenszeichen” (221). Using a poetic, very personal language, Aichinger creates an atmosphere of tense calm despite the often depressing content of the narratives.

Nevertheless, the anthropomorphization of inanimate objects typical of the author continues to be a significant feature throughout the volume. Already in the first sentences of the collection, the reader encounters verb and adjective constructions that are typically related to human beings:

Ich erinnere mich der Küche meiner Großmutter. Sie war schmal und hell und lief quer auf die Bahnlinie zu. An ihren guten Tagen setzte sie sich auch darüber hinaus fort, in den stillen, östlichen Himmel hinein. An ihren schlechten Tagen zog sie sich in sich selbst zurück. Sie war überhaupt eine unverheiratete Küche, etwas wie eine wunderbare Jungfer, der die Seligpreisungen der Bibel galten.

Abgeblättert und still, aber nicht zu schlagen. (11)

With this technique of combination of seemingly unrelated linguistic components, Aichinger continues her rejection of conventional, traditional use of language and exposes it as a sign system that, in her view, is unreliable. Šlibar detects in Aichinger’s poetics paradoxes that serve as an “Erweichung verknöchertes Denk-, Reaktions-, Gefühls- und nicht zuletzt Sprachmuster” (55). Whereas in earlier texts Aichinger employs diametrically opposed concepts, in Kleist, Moos, Fasane she makes use instead of subtle contrariness and unspectacular incongruousness in utterances like: “[. . .] oder gegen die Kleistgasse zu, die vielleicht deshalb so hieß, weil nichts

darin an Kleist erinnerte oder weil niemand, der dort wohnte, etwas von ihm wußte” (12). Very likely, the author’s intent is not to indicate that all streets accommodating people who are familiar with Kleist would have to be named after him, but to stimulate different ways of perception.

As in almost all of her works, the figures in Kleist, Moos, Fasane remain faceless and nameless. In contrast to Schlechte Wörter, however, Aichinger falls back to call them by their function or relation to the author. In addition, Aichinger returns to a certain narrative structure in the memoirs of part I. Likewise, her texts bear the typical highly metaphoric and complex images that in part I are used to depict the author’s memories. The images help to structure the fragmented autobiographical excursions and transmute the everyday events into almost mystical poetic occurrences.

The aphorisms in part II reveal the full spectrum of Aichinger’s concerns and attitudes to certain aspects of life, language and writing that recur constantly in her works. Composed in a time where her language grew ever more sparse, they explicitly thematize familiar topics: life, death, agony, anxiety, loss, departure, comfort, and love. The main themes, however, are places, searching, openness, and silence. Aichinger gives her view on silence and muteness as acts of communication: “Man muß ja nicht alles gleich sagen, was man sagt” (84), at the same time playing with the ambiguity of such silent indeterminacy. Often laconically, she brings to bear the full power of her “small language” in this accumulation of sentences and thoughts. Although it is a “small language”, it is still able to communicate a full range of emotions with great impact. Since she does not go into minute detail, the texts never threaten to become melodramatic.

Even though Aichinger’s laconism becomes most obvious in phrases in part I such as “Mein Großonkel – er hieß Julius und entging zwei Jahre später der Deportation, weil er starb [. . .]” (26) or descriptions like “An den hellgrauen, damals schon etwas schäbigen Mauern des Sascha-Palasts waren jedenfalls die Schilder mit dem Wort *Judenverbot*, soweit ich mich

erinnere, unauffälliger angebracht, es ist später auch eingegangen” (23), Walter Vogl suggests in his essay “Notate als Spiegel der Entwicklung”: “In ihrem mit den Jahren zunehmenden Lakonismus, der an die Grenze des Verstummens führt, sind die Notate Spiegel der Entwicklung Ilse Aichingers vom lyrischen Pathos des Romans *Die größere Hoffnung* hin zur „kleinen Sprache“ des 1976 erschienenen Erzählungsbandes *„Schlechte Wörter“*” (224). The aphoristic texts certainly summarize Aichinger’s rejection of convention and her objections to conventional language. At the same time, they emphasize the author’s concern for searching; recollection designates a certain form of search. Most of all, however, they outline the power of silence. Görner comments on Kleist, Moos, Fasane: “Die Stärke und Not des Schweigens, beides ist allgegenwärtig in Ilse Aichingers Sätzen” (“Stimme des Schweigens” 226). It is the very silence in her works that provides the gaps demanding the reader’s interaction with the text to create meaning.

IV. READING BETWEEN THE LINES: UNDERSTANDING ILSE AICHINGER THROUGH WOLFGANG ISER'S THEORY OF AESTHETIC RESPONSE

*[. . .] die präzisen Fragen finden,
aus den Fragen die Summe ziehen,
aus der Summe wieder die neuen Fragen holen
(Aichinger, Kleist 33)*

“Finden kann man nichts, weder Lösungen, noch Dinge. Auch gefunden bleiben sie immer zu suchen und ebenso wie ungefunden” (Kleist 83). For Ilse Aichinger, searching takes on a great significance in every area of life, particularly in relation to writing and reading. In her view, the process of reading is identical with the process of searching, which she even expands to searching for the form of searching. Once found, she has actually found the form of finding.¹⁴ Consequently, there cannot be something in the text that can easily be found or extracted by the reader. It is essential for the reader to remain open, in a mode of searching, in order to perceive even the smallest adumbration that may provide a hint of the text’s message. Given Aichinger’s often very individual use of language, words, and images, the reader of her works must extend the search to possible “translations” aiding the interpretation.

Similarly, for Iser, literary interpretation itself represents a form of translation because a literary text depicts something that actually does not exist, but instead it must be created through the interaction between text and reader. He describes the act of reading as a process of searching for and creating the meaning of a text. According to his theory of aesthetic response, the text’s structure and the author’s use of language provide the blanks in a text that constitute the main parameter for the process of interpretation. The reader must fill these blanks with changing images that result from his interaction with the text through shifting perspectives and the application of his own experience and world of reference. In the following pages, I will apply

¹⁴ See Chapter III, page 43

Iser's theory to an analysis of Aichinger's texts to achieve a reading that might allow deeper insight into her works and aid in moving past their seeming impenetrability. To understand the importance of Iser's theory for Aichinger's work, it is necessary to first provide a brief summary of his main arguments that are relevant for the analysis.

As opposed to speech acts in normal language that need a real life context, Iser argues that language in literary texts does not refer to an empirical reality, but provides instructions for the reader to build a situation and produce an imaginary object. Therefore, the connotations of words in literary language become more important than the denotations; as a result, the reader must transform denotations into connotations. In this way, he adds his own ideas and conventions to the process of communication with the text. The two sides of the structure of the text, the "verbal" and the "affective" aspect, also serve to guide the reader's imagination so that he recognizes the meaning of a text in terms of images, which in turn fills the blanks inherent in the structure. The verbal aspect is the author's language that prestructures the reader's reception and keeps him from creating arbitrary images, whereas the affective aspect determines the reader's response to the verbal aspect. The reader's role in the process is also two-sided: "written into" the text, a "virtual" reader is implied in the textual structure, whereas the "real" reader adopts certain different perspectives and conventions provided by the text and joins them together. The shifting perspectives create shifting mental images in the reader.

The combined conventions of text and reader build the "repertoire" of the text. In general, a literary text seeks to convey conventions selected and taken out of context by the author; the reader's task is to find the reasons for the author's selection. Narrative techniques, which Iser calls the "strategies" of the text, guide the reader in his search. They organize the authorial selection and combination of the text's elements as well as the relations between the individual

elements. The concepts of “theme” and “horizon” constitute the basis for the textual strategies and direct the interpretation of the perspectives: the changes experienced by the reader through the different perspectives are transferred to the next textual segment. In the process of reading, the theme becomes the horizon that in turn influences the interpretation of the next theme. Since the individual reader contributes his own conventions and experiences to the process, the interpretation becomes multifaceted.

Iser distinguishes four types of perspectives: “Counterbalance,” “oppositional,” “echelon,” and “serial arrangements”. Counterbalance sets the norms of the repertoire and is in general embodied by the hero of the narration. The oppositional arrangement of perspectives places different norms in opposition; these can be, for example, the perspective of the hero in opposition to the perspective of one or more minor characters. The reader must relate the opposing perspectives to one another. In this process, “new”, opposing norms become the theme; they replace the “old” ones enclosed in the horizon, thus negating them. Iser calls this process “reciprocal negation”. The negations are an essential condition for the communication between text and reader: through the switch of perspectives the reader recognizes the real nature of the norms as functions. The echelon arrangement provides no predominant perspective in the text and thus creates disorientation in the reader, who is compelled to adopt his own attitudes toward the norms. The missing guidance creates a multiplicity of referential systems and reveals the problematic nature of norms. Finally, the serial arrangement is an escalation of the echelon arrangement; rapidly changing perspectives cause an acceleration of the alternation of theme and horizon and make reference to an empirical world almost impossible.

Iser calls the reader’s travel through the text the “wandering viewpoint”. Unlike an empirical object, the reader cannot perceive a literary text in its whole, but only one sequence at

a time. The sentence correlates that constitute the text depend on what was expressed before and allude to what will follow, thus evoking expectations in the reader. Through the structure of theme and horizon a constant alternation occurs between expectations and the knowledge of the previously read segments. The expectations will either be fulfilled or left open by the next segment; Iser calls the open expectations “blanks” that the reader has to fill, influenced by his own interests and conventions. Another type of blank is an “indeterminacy” inherent in the text; indeterminacies occur because, according to Iser, literary texts do not denote or refer to an empirical reality and thus deny verification by the reader. “Schematized views” on the segments of the text constitute the text’s object in stages. Since one view only contemplates one part of the text, the next part needs a new view. The open connections, or indeterminacies, between these views are blanks that serve as incentive for the reader to connect the perspectives.

IV. 1. Doomed to Fail: Communication in “Die geöffnete Order”

In “Die geöffnete Order”, Aichinger’s masterly employment of metaphoric language immediately takes effect in terms of Iser’s verbal and affective aspects. In the first paragraph, she establishes the setting and the atmosphere of the story using highly imaginary expressions that prestructure the reader’s imagination. She describes an army unit waiting for orders; pictorial depictions of a pre-winter setting and constructions, such as “Die ausgesetzten Posten klebten verloren in den Baumwipfeln und beobachteten das Fallen der Schatten” (20), create an image of inactivity; the reader has to translate the sentries’ denoted state of being glued to the trees into a connoted state of remaining inactively at the same spot for a lengthy period of time. At the same time, the sentence fragment “Es gab unter den jüngeren Freiwilligen der Verteidigungsarmee einige, die Sonne und Mond satt hatten ” adds a noticeable tension (20) and indicates the soldiers’

growing impatience. In addition, it intensifies the impression of extended time by outlining that the soldiers have done their duties for numerous days. As the plot unfolds, Aichinger's language easily guides and structures the reader's imagination and corresponding conclusions with respect to the main character's emotional states and characteristics. She explicitly describes his evolving insecurity, distrust, and increasing despair, even using literal questions to emphasize his train of thought. With regard to the description of nature and natural phenomena, however, Aichinger falls back to a highly metaphoric use of language. The sentence constructions denote nature as entities performing human actions and revealing characteristics usually reserved for animated beings, thus forcing the reader to refer to his own experiences and conventions to uncover the connotations. The signifiers in sentences like "Der Weg lief quer über die Lichtung und verlor sich spielerisch zwischen den Haselsträuchern"; "Wolkenschatten zogen äsenden Tieren gleich über den Rasen und verschwanden gelassen im Dickicht"; "Nichts in der Natur nahm die Grenzhafte zur Kenntnis" do not designate the actions performed by nature, but rather the conditions that cause the reader to perceive its total unaffectedness. This, on the one hand, emphasizes the accelerated uneasiness of the protagonist; on the other hand, it designates the enigmatic silence in the text that stands in sharp contrast to the shallow loudness denoted by the language of the text's segments that deal with human activity.

The first paragraph ends with the determination of the young soldiers to attack the enemy before the first snowfall, if necessary even without orders. The theme—the established setting, the prevailing atmosphere, and the soldiers' dissatisfaction—then becomes the horizon of the narration, providing the necessary background for the reader to place the following events in the appropriate context. In addition, Aichinger creates expectations in the reader; very likely the expectations involve an unauthorized attack on the enemy. The next segment of the text does not

fulfill these expectations, but instead offers an alternative: the soldier receives the message, which he is ordered to deliver. Furthermore, the perspective switches from the narrator's perspective to that of the protagonist. The text does not explain either one of these alternations explicitly, but instead leaves blanks for the reader to fill with his own ideas to establish the meaning. Both incidences lead the reader to revise both his expectations and his point of view. The language and the textual elements chosen by Aichinger, however, ensure that the interpretation generally follows the author's intentions: "Er wußte, daß sie keinen Scherz verstanden, wenn es um Meuterei ging, so nachlässig sie sonst auch schienen" (20). She directs the reader's attention to the seriousness of military hierarchy and the consequences following a refusal to obey orders. The reader's choice of interpretive images is prestructured by Aichinger's linguistic expression and guided by her textual selection and the information she chooses to share.

It is indisputable that the author's selection directs the reader's interpretation of individual segments. We will see later in this chapter that it is also quite understandable how the blanks created by a switch of perspectives can be filled. In the case of unfulfilled expectations, however, Iser's theory fails to illustrate what exactly it is that needs to be filled in. Certainly, the unfulfilled expectations produce blanks in the flow of the story and cause the reader to revise his expectations, but as Barnouw has already pointed out in her critique, it remains unclear how exactly this revision is able to fill the blanks and close the open connections. A reasonable explanation could be that the revision creates a new image and that newly created image¹⁵ fills the blank.

¹⁵ The term "image" is another case where Iser's theory lacks preciseness. He does not explicitly explain how he uses the term and what exactly should be understood by "images". I assume that "images" refer to what the reader can imagine as possible complement to the text.

Moving through the text, the reader constantly has to change his expectations and preconceptions and to adjust the interpretation of the horizon to the new image created by the textual segment that is the current theme. In the string of textual segments the appearances change incessantly: in the beginning, the soldiers – and thus the reader – assume that nothing is going to happen; then the messenger starts to suppose that the command has found out about the imminent mutiny and feels distrusted. As the plot unfolds, he suspects the companion to be a guard, concludes from the content of the message that he will be executed, and in the end thinks that his companion has been executed instead, that he himself has been forgotten by the paramedics, and that he is dead. The text guides the reader's wandering viewpoint through this development of steadily modified expectations, thereby causing blanks in the textual structure and prestructuring the realization of mental images that serve to fill the blanks.

Theme and horizon, as the structure underlying the combination of perspectives, alternate with the many segments of the text. Following, the perspectives—revealing the norms and conventions of the repertoire—appear to constantly switch within an oppositional arrangement determined by Aichinger. Mainly narrated from the standpoint of the narrator or the soldier, the text sets the norms represented by the protagonist against those represented by the minor character, his companion. The soldier's perspective is revealed through the moment's of inner monologue and illuminates the aspects of the main character: His basic disobedience to the authorities, his selfishness and anxiety that lead to the consideration of murder and desertion, and finally his unwillingness to bear the consequences of his own actions and the plan to betray both his companion and his superiors to avoid execution and instead sacrifice the companion.

In the change of theme and horizon, these aspects of the protagonist oppose the aspects of the minor character, thus creating a continual conflict between theme and horizon. When the

soldier's perspective is theme, the reader relates to the represented norms with his own experience and the conventions provided by the author; in the next segment the soldier's perspective becomes horizon, while the companion's perspective arises as new theme. In one segment of the text the soldier is shot by snipers when he is preparing to kill the unsuspecting companion, who manages to bring them safely out of the danger zone. The protagonist still holds the gun in his hands as his companion shows pleasure and relief about the escape: "Das Gespenst vor ihm wandte dem Mann sein fröhliches Gesicht zu und sagte: 'Hier wären wir glücklich darüber, der Schlag war eingesehen'" (23). As a new theme, the totally opposing aspects of the companion—eagerness, trustfulness, openness, obedience, and sense of duty—negate the norms of the soldier's perspective and force the reader to re-evaluate them.

According to Iser, the reciprocal negation that occurs through the constant switch between the two perspectives initiates the production of a context of negated norms and thus changes the reader's perception of real life:

The context is a product of switching perspectives, and the producer is the reader himself, who removes the norms from their paradigmatic setting and begins to see them for what they are, thus becoming aware of the functions they perform in the system from which they have been removed. This is tantamount to saying that he begins to understand the influence the norms have on him in real life. (Act 101).

The most predominant perspective in "Die geöffnete Order", that of the soldier, highlights the norms embodied by him. In the process of creating meaning by filling the blanks provided by the text, the reader realizes that there can be a reference to the empirical world and starts to re-evaluate his own norms and conventions. According to Iser, the reciprocal negation of norms and conventions initiated by the opposing perspectives cause the reader to remove the norms from

their pragmatic setting; he will start to see them as functions in a system of conventions. The soldier's eagerness to take the message word-for-word without explicit knowledge of its context and the resulting negative aspects of his character in terms of dubious thoughts about his next action lead the reader to call into question the reliability of language as a commonly accepted sign system. Görner concludes: "Sprache und Sprachlosigkeit bedrohen den Menschen, aber mehr noch seine ständigen Fehldeutungen "eigentlicher" oder "wahrer" Lebenszusammenhänge" ("Sprache" 15). Using the term "Menschen", he refers to both the reader and the protagonist of the story.

Since the reader's own experiences and background play a major role in the creation of meaning, however, the resulting realization of the text can, and probably will, bring forth multiple individual responses. Iser's concepts of both theme and horizon and shifting perspectives certainly account for such a multiplicity. Though Aichinger describes the failure of communication and its consequences most forcefully, a reader with a different background can as well relate the events in the text, not to a failure in communication, but instead to the soldier's disobedience.¹⁶ The interpretation given here is mainly based on the switch of perspectives, which seems to be the most reliable aspect of Iser's theory for the story. Because of the abstractness and partial incompleteness of Iser's explanation of the types of perspectives, however, it is not possible to unequivocally identify the perspectives employed by Aichinger in "Die geöffnete Order".

¹⁶ Swirski gives an interesting comment on the constant modification and final realization of the aesthetic object through the wandering viewpoint; he states that the realization does not end with the end of the text: "[. . .] although the textual input into this process ends with the completion of the reading, there is no corresponding halt to the modification of *Gestalt* [aesthetic object], Since extratextual data can be, and frequently is, acquired only subsequent to the reading, the newly acquired knowledge can precipitate a further modification of the *Gestalt*" (9). In the case of Aichinger's texts, as in the case of every other text, this would imply that we could neither achieve a final, though subjective, interpretation nor be sure of our "correct" understanding of the text.

IV. 2. Broken Connections in “Wisconsin und Apfelreis”

Unlike “Die geöffnete Order”, “Wisconsin und Apfelreis” does not tell a story that follows a traditional linear plot. It is rather an accumulation of the author’s trains of thought depicted as a series of images; the only similarity between the two narratives is Aichinger’s familiar use of metaphoric language. The language of “Wisconsin und Apfelreis”, however, differs from that in “Die geöffnete Order” in terms of the quality and the quantity of highly imaginary constructions. Aichinger’s language creates paradoxes that the reader has to uncover in an attempt to follow the path prescribed by the words. Constructions such as “Du gibst zu, daß es möglich ist, daß grün nie mehr grün wird” challenge the reader’s imagination and call for his protest (“Wisconsin” 75). The text requires the reader to become involved in what Herrmann and Thums call Aichinger’s “Bemühen, das Undenkbare und Nicht-Repräsentierbare zu denken” (14). Through this attempt to give form to the unthinkable, Aichinger also defines the repertoire of the text that consists of the combined conventions of text and reader. The verbal aspect of the text suspends traditional and common conventions and thus conflicts with those of the reader. In the empirical world of the reader, the color green is likely to be exactly what the word denotes: the color green. The green color of an empirical object can certainly fade and become another, lighter shade of green, but the color itself cannot become something different than the color green, thus it is paradoxical that it should return to what it already is. The reader therefore has to translate the denotation into a connotation in order to make sense of Aichinger’s statement.

The reader who is familiar with Aichinger’s works will immediately be reminded of the frequent occurrence of the color green in other texts and might have some background that

facilitates an understanding of the color.¹⁷ In Ilse Aichinger J.C. Alldridge alludes to a study of colors by Jakob Böhme from 1620, who associates the color green with freedom, and indicates that in the alchemy of the Middle Ages green and blue referred to the spirit and the body.¹⁸ In the modern German-speaking society, however, the color green is most often associated with the concept of hope. Even if the reader translates the denotation into a connotation and interprets green as hope, for example, the sentence still states that something will never become what it is believed to be. It appears as though words are missing for the sentence to really make sense. As a result, the reader starts to doubt either his own concept of green or that of the author, and inherently begins to become suspicious of linguistic conventions in general, or at least how Aichinger uses them.

Throughout the text, the reader encounters similar verbal constructions that appear to be metaphorical, but at the same time represent formulations that go against conventional usage: “Die Gatter springen immer mehr ins Bild”; “Wir haben das Verleugnete auf dem Hals”; “Man kann alle Bundesstaaten summen” (“Wisconsin” 75, 78). A discrepancy between the signifier and the signified arises, that causes Sigrid Schmid-Bortenschlager to place Aichinger in the vicinity of deconstruction. She explains “dass sich in ihren Texten Grundkonzepte der dekonstruktiven [. . .] Theorie finden” (“Poetik” 22). Aichinger purposefully breaks up the relation between signifier and signified and thus leaves the reader with a sense of helplessness. According to Iser, literary language provides instructions for the reader to build a situation and to produce an imaginary object; sentences like the above, however, lead the reader to his limits.

¹⁷ The colors green and blue can be found throughout the works of Ilse Aichinger. Some stories in which these colors are predominant are “Die Spiegelgeschichte”, “Das Plakat”, “Mein grüner Esel”, and the dialogue “Zu keiner Stunde” in which the endless occupation with green is the main activity of the dwarf.

¹⁸ Alldridge further explains the significance of green and blue as symbols for *Anima* and *Animus* in the mysticism of the seventeenth century and builds a bridge to C.G. Jung’s *Anima* in psychoanalysis. He adds that “in modern scientific enquiry, green has been statistically correlated with the sensation function” (31).

Textual references to places like Wisconsin or a monastery only amplify the reader's confusion: although locations apparently are something that can be related to real-world experience, this experience is negated by the fact that even the places appear in a linguistic context that does not match reality. The reader cannot find any reference to his own world of conventions or experiences and, accordingly, is unable to gain access to the author's selection of conventions.

Aichinger begins "Wisconsin und Apfelreis" with questions and the impersonal "man". Already in the third question, the narrator changes to the more personal "wir" and "du". The "du" and the numerous questions in the text, probably addressed to another person that is not explicitly mentioned, summon the reader to engage in the events and to think about possible answers to them himself. They do not, however, receive any answer or even affirmation from the virtual partner, but instead are repudiated. The narrator concludes: "Lassen, lassen, die Fragen lassen", "Ich weiß, ich weiß, keine Fragen", and later in the text defends the narrative technique: "Stoß mich nicht, ich habe nicht gefragt" ("Wisconsin" 75-77). Nevertheless, the narrator keeps asking questions, apparently ignoring the perpetual annoyance and the absence of answers. The use of the first person and the questions cause the reader to identify with the narrator and to adopt the narrator's perspective recurrently.

The external appearance of the text already hints at the innertextual structure: the text is written without any structuring division into paragraphs. The selection and combination of textual elements do not allow for the creation of such structure. According to Iser, the textual strategies, that is the process of selection and combination of the textual material, supply the reader with an outline for his imagination. Consequently, the lack of structural organization of the textual segments in "Wisconsin und Apfelreis" causes disorientation and puzzlement in the reader. The segments of the text's content change in rapid succession and lack coherent

connections most of the time. While the reader is still trying to make sense of one segment, the following one abruptly changes not only the perspective, but also the train of thought established by the author. Passages such as “Ich sehe jetzt ein Kloster in Wisconsin. Dort waschen sie Teller. Sicher sehr sinnvoll. Dort ist man auch gut zu manchen. Immer dieses Schwarzweiß. Die Dame aus Kalifornien trägt eine grüne Bluse und ein schwarzes Jäckchen” make it difficult for the reader to follow Aichinger’s thoughts (75).

The same observations hold for the notion of strategies, the concepts of theme and horizon. Based on the highly pictorial language and incoherent signifiers Aichinger employs, the interpretation of an individual segment based on the horizon becomes an almost impossible task for the reader. Few segments reveal clear a cut coherence: “Die Dame erzählt ganz gut. Sieht aber aus, als kujonierte sie ihre kleinen Brüder. Laß sie. Jetzt sind wir doch schon wieder bei den Verdächtigungen. Laß sie. Sie erzählt auch zu laut. Du sollst sie lassen. Also gut, der Wechselrahmen steht ihr” (“Wisconsin” 75). For the reader, it appears in the beginning of the segment that Aichinger refers to a real lady. The mention of “Wechselrahmen”, which conventionally refers to a picture frame, forces the reader to revise his interpretation and instead think of the lady as a photograph. Though it does not match any real-world experience to connect the image of a photograph with a talking lady, the concept of theme and horizon holds. The reader’s expectations after “Du sollst sie lassen”—perhaps the continuation of the argument or of the lady’s narration—are not fulfilled because something totally unexpected happens, thus leaving a blank that needs to be filled.

In many other cases, however, the text strings together totally unrelated segments: “Wie viele sind wir denn? Zwei? Bist du da sicher? Nein, nein, sag nichts, ich weiß schon. Alles falsch. Aber doch nur an der Darstellung. Die Sache selbst stimmt. Die gemeine Sache. Wie das

klickt, wenn die Gatter sich verschieben” (76). Iser’s claim that the sentence correlates that constitute a text depend on what was expressed before and allude to what will follow is here invalidated. The horizon does not prestructure the following segment; neither does the last sentence, as the theme, enable the reader to revise his expectations or his interpretation of the horizon, because Aichinger destroys every emerging coherent relationship between the segments. The structure of theme and horizon does not fulfill its main function, namely to ensure that the reader produces the meaning in interaction with the text and in a way that is pre-defined by Aichinger.

The arrangement of rapidly changing perspectives and segments in the text leaves the reader disoriented and without guidance from Aichinger. He cannot maintain any of the connections he has established in the process of reading and even the concept of theme and horizon does not provide assistance in the attempt of interpretation. In addition, the reader cannot refer to anything in the empirical world because Aichinger abolishes all conventions and norms, mainly by suspending the relation between signifier and signified. Regine Friedrich talks in her essay “Hermetische Texte” about the “Isolation eines Autors, sein Eingeschlossensein in Ängste und Zweifel, deren sprachliche Kürzel den Leser ausschließen” (214). Aichinger seems to abandon the reader who searches for meaning and to refuse cooperation with him. Eventually, the reader starts to question his perception and Aichinger’s intention. Ilma Rakusa comments: “Nicht alles taugt, was von weit her kommt, und Zweifel – an Balkonen etwa – sind angebracht”¹⁹ (“Die Fremdsprache der Ilse Aichinger” 127). Given Aichinger’s selection and combination of elements in the text and the resulting interpretive silence, there may be no

¹⁹ With the mention of balconies, Rakusa alludes to Aichinger’s text “Zweifel an Balkonen”, also published in Schlechte Wörter. In this text, Aichinger contrasts balconies in the home country with those in foreign countries. “Zweifel an Balkonen”, like all texts in the volume, confronts the reader with challenges similar to those in “Wisconsin und Apfelreis”.

meaning for the reader to create, but an intention of the author: to prove that there is good reason to doubt both perception and communication.

IV. 3. Silent Memories in Kleist, Moos, Fasane

In the autobiographical texts of the first part of Kleist, Moos, Fasane, Aichinger employs poetic language; detailed and skillfully literary, she talks about her memories of childhood. After the short, scarce, and rather hard sounding sentences and sentence fragments of Schlechte Wörter, the complex linguistic constructions of the narratives strike the reader as almost ornate. Aichinger's literary language clearly prestructures the reader's reception, thus providing a framework for the production of images to realize the meaning of the text. In the first narration, which also lends its title to the volume, the reader encounters the author's familiar use of poetic images that need to be translated into connotations to disclose their reference. In most cases, the reader can succeed easily; although the metaphors in the narration often reveal a continuation of Aichinger's rejection of conventional, traditional use of language, they do not lead to incoherence. The author successfully communicates her skeptical attitude toward language while at the same time choosing constructions that nevertheless convey her perspectives. As outlined in the previous chapter, in the first two pages of the text Aichinger uses explicit denotations to describe her grandmother's kitchen and the railroad that traditionally do not apply to inanimate entities: "An ihren stillen Tagen zog sie sich in sich selbst zurück. Sie war überhaupt eine unverheiratete Küche, etwas wie eine wunderbare Jungfer, der die Seligpreisungen der Bibel galten" (Kleist 11). Although the reader will very likely be unable to relate the signifier "unmarried" to a kitchen by referring to his own conventions, the positive term "Seligpreisungen" ensures that he fills the blank with a positive connotation that leads to an

interpretation prestructured by the author's use of words. Continuing, Aichinger describes the railroad that is close to her grandmother's kitchen and relates the two: "Auf ähnliche Weise wie die Küche war sie [die Bahn] mächtig und armselig, und wenn man an manchen Tagen die Teller und Gläser in den Schränken schüttern und klirren hörte, so hätte man meinen können, ein altes Liebespaar unterhielte sich gelassen miteinander" (12). In a highly imaginative and poetic way, Aichinger defines the close relationship that she perceived the house and railroad as having.

The organization of the text opens up Aichinger's childhood world; the combination of the elements enables the reader to explore this world without difficulty. Theme and horizon blend together in almost smooth transitions. Aichinger frequently describes nature, natural phenomena, sensations, and quiet places with a language that suggests peace, quietude, and silence:

Um Mittag gingen wir weg, unsere Blechkannen schlugen aneinander oder flogen ein Stück voraus, unsere Stimmen drangen noch eine Weile über die heißen Wiesen gegen die Waldränder vor, ehe sie still wurden. Hinter uns blieben die grünen, kühlen Flure der Bauernhäuser, die nach alten Kalendern rochen, nach Geschichten von Schneegestöbern, von Herbstern und Räubern, nach säuerlichem Brot und den Milchtöpfen in den Kellern, vor uns zogen die runden, bewaldeten Hügel, einer immer kleiner und ferner als der andere, den Tälern zu; wahrscheinlich waren es sieben. (15)

As these descriptions become the narrative horizon, they prestructure both the reader's expectations and his interpretation of the following segment. Due to their frequency, the reader almost constantly fills the blanks created by his expectations with the silence and calm

established by these images. Theme and horizon modify the wandering viewpoint of the reader in such a way that his expectations are generally fulfilled.

The conventions and norms of the repertoire set by the perspectives are clearly those of the author. The few other characters depicted in the autobiographic narratives of part I of Kleist, Moos, Fasane are for the most part of only secondary importance. Thus one can apply Iser's term "counterbalance" to describe the predominant arrangement of perspectives in this text.

Aichinger's perspectives govern the norms of the narrator against which the reader has to evaluate the norms of the minor characters. As pointed out in the analysis of "Die geöffnete Order", however, a concise determination of the perspectives is difficult in view of Iser's partly deficient explanations of perspectives and their usage. Nevertheless, the strategies and perspectives of the first text converge into the image of a peaceful, carefree, and happy childhood.

The remaining narratives in the first part of Kleist, Moos, Fasane basically follow the pattern of the first one with only minor deviations. Only in the second story, in which Aichinger talks about the deferral of Christmas, sentences such as "Es gab Jahre, in denen Weihnachten schon auf den zweiten Dezember fiel, auf einen Augenblick, in dem wir uns auf einer Truhe im Gang die etwas zu engen Schneeschuhe überzuziehen versuchten" (20) confuse the reader and conflict with his own experiences, thus creating blanks in terms of what Iser calls indeterminacies. The text denies any reference to the empirical world and the reader cannot verify what he has read. As the narration unfolds, however, Aichinger gradually reveals the background for such constructions and in the end explains with a relative clearness that is untypical for her texts:

Wenn man den Schmerz ermißt, [. . .], so ermißt man die Schulden, die von jedem von uns abzutragen sind. Wenn es uns gelänge, und sei es auch nur durch die Hinnahme der Ernüchterung, der Angst und Verwirrung dieser Zeit: Vielleicht fiele dann noch einmal der heilige Abend auf den heiligen Abend, die Stimme des Engels auch für uns wieder in die heilige Nacht. (22)

With this statement she dissolves the denial and resulting confusion herself and provides information that the reader can use to fill the blanks. The story works because Aichinger challenges the reader's expectations about Christmas and Aichinger's conventions.

Aichinger's narratives in the first part of the book show a surprising obliging toward the reader. The linear structure, the structure of theme and horizon and the perspectives, as well as the use of language, guide the reader almost effortlessly through the texts. Most often, his expectations are fulfilled and confirmed by the text, and the reader does not face major difficulty when trying to fill the blanks with his own experiences. Though perhaps not educational and enlightening in the same way as the texts in Schlechte Wörter, the episodes in Kleist, Moos, Fasane offer a pleasing reading experience and help the reader to better understand the events of World War II and its effects on the author's perception of the world. In light of Iser's evaluation of literary works based on the fulfillment or deception of expectations, however, one would have to conclude that at least the first part of Kleist, Moos, Fasane lacks artistic finesse.²⁰ Exactly what makes Aichinger's texts in this book enjoyable would then constitute the "defect" in her work, namely the approval of and consent with the reader. Here, Iser's ideas and standards become evaluative and subjective to a degree that cannot meet the appreciation or even acceptance of any and all readers and that do not do justice to Aichinger's texts.

²⁰ See Chapter II, page 21

Some of the aphorisms in the second part of Kleist, Moos, Fasane are short paragraphs, whereas others consist of only single sentences. An analysis based on aspects of Iser's theory thus proves difficult, at least with regard to certain aspects such as the concept of theme and horizon. The question arises whether Iser's object of consideration includes texts like these and whether he considers them literary works. Alas, the question must remain open, because Iser does not explicitly refer to such text forms in his theory. One could argue, however, that his theories apply to this text form as well, as the following analyses reveal.

It is the very nature of both, aphorisms and Aichinger's language, to consist of highly imaginary language in forms of metaphors, antonyms, metonyms, paradoxes, and similar rhetorical stylistic means. Some of Aichinger's written trains of thought are, despite their linguistic complexity, easily understandable, whereas others reveal the same impenetrability and arbitrariness as the texts in Schlechte Wörter. The impenetrability results partly from the selection and combination of textual elements and partly from Aichinger's use of fragmented sentences or sentence correlates.

Aichinger frequently uses contradictions, contrasts, and antonyms:

Ein Band Metall, das, zum Reifen gebogen, so lange Widerstand leistet, bis es gelötet wird. In diesem Moment, in dem des äußersten Widerstandes, erhält es seine gelassenste, seine selbstverständlichste Form, in der äußersten Spannung die äußerste Gelöstheit. Und nur in ihr. (43)

Zudringlich werden durch Abwesenheit. (43)

Wir müssen uns fürchten, von uns ist die Freude verlangt. (46)

Ich kann das eine Wort nur verstehen, indem ich ein anderes dafür suche. (69).

Daß man etwas weiß heißt nicht, daß man es weiß. (82).

Thus, the reader has to dissolve the tension created between the two poles of the constructions. While for the first aphorism the reader's knowledge of real-world events can help him build an imaginary object, this technique does not necessarily hold for the others. Similarly, it is theoretically possible to apply the concept of theme and horizon to the first aphorism, but not to the others. If, by definition, one considers the individual sentences of the first aphorism individual segments of the text, the reader's expectation created by each one would probably be fulfilled by the next, thus filling the blank that occurred. Obviously, this operation does not actually make sense, because first, the whole short paragraph cannot be seen as individual segments, but as one closed unit, and second, the segment is self-explanatory.

Apparently, the only aspects that could be applied sensibly to the aphorisms are, to a certain extent, the arrangements of perspectives and the underlying repertoire as well as the blanks created by indeterminacies. The perspective in all elements is clearly Aichinger's, thus the author's norms and conventions are predominant in the texts. While adding his own norms and conventions to the repertoire, the reader's task is to find out what norms Aichinger has selected and why. Normally, the strategies of the text guide the reader in this process; in the case of the aphorisms, the reader cannot rely on any authorial guidance. As a result, the actual words of the text move into the background and the reader starts to think over the norms he has discovered. In addition, many of the aphorisms occur as indeterminacies, because they do not refer to any empirical reality, and thus deny the reader verification and, as a result, the short texts appear to have blanks that have to be filled.

Especially the concept of indeterminacies, however, appears to be disputable because of a missing definition of Iser's understanding of empirical reality. This is evident with regard to Aichinger's frequent reference to water:

So sehr man nach dem Fluß verlangt hat, er bleibt für sich, sobald man daran steht. So fern wie der Einfall der Vollendung ist der Todeswunsch dem Tod. Der Wunsch schließt den Ring nicht, aber was schließt ihn?

Ich glaube, daß er ergriffen ist, gehalten, aber an einer sehr langen Schnur.

Und dieses Ergriffensein liebe ich und die Länge der Schnur, beides. (45-46)

Throughout her works, the reader encounters images of water in every possible modification; mostly, however, Aichinger talks about rivers. When reading this segment, the reader with a literary background may immediately be reminded of Hermann Hesse's Siddhartha and his desire for wisdom and search for the meaning of life that he eventually finds in the river.

Siddhartha, too, cannot hear the river's whisper in the beginning, thus has the impression that he cannot become close with the river – the river stays by itself. In addition, Siddhartha's thoughts revolve around perfection; he, too feels a death wish. Consequently, the "literary reader" will interpret the aphorism – and other texts dealing with water – different from the "non-literary reader", which is, by itself, exactly what Iser suggests. In case of indeterminacies, however, Iser explains that indeterminacies occur, because the text does not refer to an empirical reality that would allow the reader to verify what he has read. The question arises how empirical reality is to be defined. If, by definition, we acknowledge the knowledge of another literary work as the reader's individual empirical reality, there is indeed a reality he can refer to while interpreting Aichinger. Thus, no indeterminacies would occur and in consequence, no blanks that could be filled.

In the case of the texts analyzed in this chapter, Iser's Theory of Aesthetic Response certainly gives insights into possible interpretation of Aichinger's works. Even though it is not equally applicable to all texts, one can assume that it provides at least valuable assistance in the

understanding of her other works, too, based on the heterogeneity of the selected texts. However vague the application of Iser's theory is due to the blanks it contains, it illuminates an important aspect of Aichinger's works: it is indeed the silence in her texts that requires the interaction between text and reader and invites the reader to engage in communication to create meaning.

V. MAKING SPACE FOR THE READER: HOW ISER'S THEORY APPLIES TO AICHINGER'S TEXTS

*Nur wenn wir wissen, daß alles offenbleibt,
kann ein Dialog zustande kommen
(Aichinger, Kleist 59)*

“Man kann nur erfahren, was man schon weiß” (Kleist 68). This statement Aichinger’s is characteristic not only of Aichinger’s works, but also of the comments she has made about her works in various interviews, essays, and articles. In their ambiguity and apparent contradiction, Aichinger’s words do not provide a guiding principle on how to understand and interpret her stories and narratives. Although many works have been published about Aichinger, her life, and her works, neither she nor her texts have received the same attention from literary scholars or the public as have the works of some of her contemporaries like Ingeborg Bachmann. It stands to reason that exactly the impenetrability that distinguishes her *œuvre* is also the major obstacle for broader appreciation and the reason for the relatively low number of analyses and interpretations available. Hoffer confirms, not without admiration: “Fast jeder Versuch über Ilse Aichingers Literatur mutet wie eine Anmaßung an” and concludes that it is “besser also, man zitiert sie und bleibt selbst aus dem Spiel” (221). It is probably not only admiration in view of her literary art, however, that causes the retentiveness her works experience, but also the difficulty that her texts pose to both the reader and the literary critic alike. Reading through the secondary literature, one can easily find that, although her stories generally draw positive perception, most authors are left with a certain feeling of uncertainty. Herrmann and Thum summarize: “Ihre Texte entziehen sich den sozialgeschichtlichen Deutungsansätzen ebenso wie parabolischen oder allegorischen Funktionalisierungen” (9), thus summarizing the basic dilemma critic and reader have to face.

Aichinger’s often highly abstract and incoherent texts raise doubt about their comprehensibility. Haines notices a “modernist lack of sovereign perspective” in her works,

indicating that the reader is not guided by the text and thus pointing toward a sense of abandonment that overcomes the reader in face of the missing coherence in many of her narratives (109). Other critics highlight the reader's incessant breakdown because of the increasing reserve of Aichinger's texts. Talking about the openness and many perspectives presented in Aichinger's works, Joanna Ratych concludes that "ihre Schriften dem Leser hermetisch verschlossen bleiben" ("Zeitenthobenheit" 435). The contrariness and abstractness encountered by the reader, particularly in Aichinger's late texts, is the striking issue to which most critiques relate; in most cases, however, they address the problematic nature, but do not provide a solution. Christine Koschel's essay "Die Suche nach dem verlorenen Autor" can serve as a good example for the common bewilderment the reader encounters; she bemoans the lost relation between author and reader and eventually raises many questions:

Was geschieht also, wenn dem Lesenden kein Licht mehr aufgeht, weil im Text nichts mehr leuchtet? Weil dieser sich aus der Erstarrung jeglichen Empfindens konstituiert? Dem Autor die Welt zerfallen ist: in zufällige Blickbilder, [. . .], ein kaleidoskopisches Schleudermaterial, das den Reiz des Puzzle für sich nutzt, ohne dass sich je ein *verlässlich* erfahrbares Bild daraus ergibt. Was geschieht dann mit dem Leser? Ist er nicht in die Wüste geschickt? Da, wo sich der Autor vielleicht längst befindet?

Several similar questions can be found throughout the essay; Koschel fails, however, to give any answers.

It is clearly not Aichinger's intention to answer questions and authoritatively provide the reader with a given meaning, but to stimulate his engagement with the work. Based on her view of the process of searching, she invites the reader to search for the message rather than the

meaning in interaction with the text. As Chalupa points out: “Rather than asking the reader to draw similarities between the work of art and its referent in the real world, her work demands that the reader situate the events of the story in his own cognitive schemata, to engender a reality that consists of both the author’s elements and those that the reader brings to the text” (186). According to Iser, this reality is precisely established by the blanks that occur between the elements; his theory of aesthetic response provides useful help to identify these elements as well as the blanks.

The elements Aichinger contributes consist of the perspectives that she selects to include in the text’s repertoire, thus setting the text’s norms. They are mainly conveyed by her choice of language and linguistic constructions; the way she combines the elements then triggers the reader’s response to the text. The reader’s elements consist of his own norms and world of experience; in the constant interrelation between the perspectives and theme and horizon, the textual elements and their combination in interaction with the reader’s elements provoke expectations in the reader that the text either fulfills or deceives, leading to confirmation or revision of the expectations and thus of the reader’s world of reference. Iser refers to the gaps that arise when the reader’s expectations are not fulfilled as blanks; the readers following revision of his interpretation fills these blanks—step by step the text’s message unveils in interaction with the reader. Another, though similar, type of blanks occurs when the text’s elements cannot be related to any empirical world and thus deny the reader the verification of what he has read by means of his own experiences.

Aichinger’s works hold a different degree of Iserian blanks. In her earlier narratives such as “Die geöffnete Order” that in most cases follow a linear structure, the blanks occur mainly through the arrangement of perspectives and the change of theme and horizon. Aichinger

describes the characters and their actions using a relatively clear and factual language, whereas she uses imaginary and symbolic language to refer to nature, places, and natural phenomena. In doing so, she sets the background against which the perspectives of the characters develop and become even more distinct. Aichinger often employs an oppositional arrangement of perspectives, causing the reader in the change of theme and horizon to evaluate and re-evaluate the norms selected by Aichinger and set by the text. Thus, her early works often summon the reader to deal with certain conventions and norms and to reconsider their value in his own world of reference as well as in society in general. The blanks in the text lead the reader to the norms in question and though he has to interpret the events himself, he is nevertheless guided through the text; the selection and combination of the elements as well as the resulting blanks ensure that the interpretation remains within the limits Aichinger has set.

In fact, Aichinger's later works cause much more confusion in reader and critic than the early ones and most critics that describe her texts as incomprehensible refer to the late texts rather than the early narratives. In her later texts, Aichinger's use of language becomes extremely pictorial; given that it is the function of symbols to refer back to empirical objects and this function can only be fulfilled when conventions determine the relation between the symbol and its object, describing her language as symbolic would be inappropriate. Aichinger breaks up the relation between signifier and signified and brings the concept of theme and horizon to collapse through the rapid change of perspectives and segments. The reader cannot refer to anything in the empirical world and eventually must begin re-evaluating the basics of communication: his own perception of it as well as his linguistic conventions and those of the author. The puzzlement and resulting re-evaluation are caused by the high number of Iserian blanks and lead to a highly individual and subjective dealing with the text and its message. Koschel alludes to

“Bedeutungen wie “wahr, vollständig, genau oder treu”, die man von einem dichterischen Text als immanenten Beweis für seine Wahrheit verlangt hat” and complains that the seeming arbitrariness in Aichinger’s texts does not provide such proof anymore (191).

Aichinger, however, must disappoint the reader that expects an author-given truth; instead, her later texts entail as many realizations as there are readers. In their respective interpretations of Schlechte Wörter, both Görner and Schafroth quote Aichinger’s sentence “Definieren grenzt an Unterhöhlen und setzt dem Zugriff der Träume aus” (12) to explain her use of language. Görner states:

Wie im Sinne eines Spielens mit Thema und Variation verbindet Aichinger diesen Satz [a sentence from “Schlechte Wörter”] mit anderen, wägt die Bedeutung der einzelnen Teile, ohne Zusammenhänge herstellen oder einzelne Worte genauer definieren zu wollen, denn ‘Definieren grenzt an Unterhöhlen und setzt dem Zugriff der Träume aus.’ (“Sprache” 9)

Thus he interprets Aichinger’s refusal of definition as an attempt to avoid substantiation.

Schafroth, on the other hand, concludes: “Die herkömmlichen Arten des Erzählens erscheinen als zu ungenau und unverbindlich – das Beschreiben soll ersetzt werden durch das Definieren, denn: ‘Definieren grenzt an Unterhöhlen und setzt dem Zugriff der Träume aus’” (“Bergung” 20).

Obviously, both realizations are contradictory; neither one can be judged true or false. Because of the high number of blanks in Aichinger’s late texts they do not contain a meaning pre-defined by the author, but force the reader to deal with linguistic and communicatory norms and conventions in general and thus allow for various individual interpretations. Finally, the autobiographic texts in Kleist, Moos, Fasane reveal a relatively low number of blanks, and thus

direct the reader to a certain interpretation, whereas the aphorisms contain blanks in terms of indeterminacies and the arrangement of perspectives.

In sum, it can be said that there is a strong relation between the number of blanks in Aichinger's texts and their meaning. Texts such as "Die geöffnete Order" and the autobiographic narratives that do not show a high number of blanks do not contain a fixed meaning totally defined by the author, but hint directly toward a certain interpretation and reveal Aichinger's intention. Her highly pictorial and sparse language in other texts creates many blanks; those texts work toward openness to a degree that can even lead to the breakdown of communication between text and reader, and consequently induce the reader to review his values and conventions and re-evaluate communication in general. Schafroth refers to Aichinger's oeuvre not as writing, but as philosophy: "Weil schreiben bei Ilse Aichinger längst philosophieren geworden ist" ("Meisterin" 157). Her texts certainly reveal a philosophical character; according to her statement in the beginning of this chapter, however, we can only experience what we already know. But what we know gains a new significance in the interactive reading of her works. And though we might not know what Aichinger's texts exactly mean, Iser's theory of aesthetic response makes their meaning clearer and helps apprehend their purpose: to communicate silence in a dialogue with the reader.

In providing a close reading of some of Aichinger's texts based on Iser's literary theory, this thesis has made a first step not only to philosophize about Aichinger's writing and language, but to subject her works to a direct analysis in an attempt to penetrate their impenetrability. Further detailed analyses that illuminate different aspects of her works rather than giving broad perceptions would help eventually to achieve the clearest possible understanding of the works of Ilse Aichinger.

VI. WORKS CITED

- Aichinger, Ilse. "Aufruf zum Mißtrauen." Moser 18-19.
- . Der Gefesselte. Erzählungen. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1991.
- . "Der Weg nach Westen." Meine Sprache 199-201.
- . "Die geöffnete Order." Meine Sprache 20-26.
- . Eliza Eliza. Erzählungen 2. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1991.
- . "Ins Wort." Kleist 112.
- . Kleist, Moos, Fasane. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1991.
- . Meine Sprache und ich. Erzählungen. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1978.
- . "Rede an die Jugend." Moser 20-22.
- . Schlechte Wörter. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1991.
- . "Schnee." Kleist 113-14.
- . Verschenkter Rat. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1991.
- . "Wisconsin und Apfelreis." Schlechte Wörter 75-78.
- . "Wissen lernen." Moser 23-24.
- Alldrige, J.C. Ilse Aichinger. Modern German Authors—Texts and Contexts. Vol. 2. London: Oswald Wolff, 1969.
- Barnouw, Dagmar. Rev. of The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response, The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett by Wolfgang Iser. MLN; 94 (5), Comparative Literature (1979): 1207-214.
- Bartsch, Kurt, and Gerhard Melzer, eds. Ilse Aichinger. Graz: Drosch, 1993.
- Boussart, Monique. "Ilse Aichingers metaphorisches Sprechen. Zur Bildersprache in der Kurzprosa (1948-1965)." Müller 137-53.

- Brooks, Cleanth. "The Formalist Critic." *Newton* 26-30.
- Burke, Kenneth. "Formalist Criticism: Its Principles and Limits." *Newton* 30-34.
- Chalupa, Cynthia S. "Through the Looking Glass. Overcoming Language in the Works of Georg Trakl, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Ilse Aichinger." Diss. Ohio State U, 2001.
- Drewitz, Ingeborg. "Was schwer zu begreifen ist." *Bartsch and Melzer* 214-16.
- Ellis, John M. "The Relevant Context of a Literary Text." *Newton* 34-37.
- Fischer, Hans R. "Abductive Reasoning as a Way of Worldmaking." 13 Feb. 2006
<<http://www.hrudifisch.de/pdf/AbductiveReasoning.pdf> 13.02.06>
- Fish, Stanley. "Why no one's afraid of Wolfgang Iser." *Diacritics* 11 (1981): 2-13.
- Friedrich, Regine. "Hermetische Texte." *Bartsch and Melzer* 212-14.
- Görner, Rüdiger. "Die versprochene Sprache." *Die Neue Rundschau* 97.4 (1986): 8-21.
- . "Stimme des Schweigens." *Bartsch and Melzer* 225-27.
- Haines, Brigid. "The Sounds of Silence: Ilse Aichinger's *Die größere Hoffnung*, *Der Gefesselte*, and *Kleist, Moos, Fasane*." 'Other' Austrians; post-1945 Austrian Women's Writing: Proceedings of the Conference held at the University of Nottingham from 18-20 April 1996. Berne: Lang, 1998: 105-14.
- Herrmann, Britta, and Thums, Barbara, eds. Introduction. „Was wir einsetzen können, ist Nüchternheit“. Zum Werk Ilse Aichingers. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001.
- Hirsch, E.D. Jr. "Three Dimensions of Hermeneutics." *Newton* 51-56.
- Hoffer, Klaus. "Nur zuhören – ohne einen Laut." *Bartsch and Melzer* 220-22.
- Iser, Wolfgang. "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response." *Newton* 195-99.
- . "Talk like Whales. A Reply to Stanley Fish." *Diacritics* 11 (1981): 82-87.
- . The Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response. Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1978.

- . Theorie der Literatur. Eine Zeitperspektive. Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1992.
- . "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach." Modern Criticism and Theory. Ed. David Lodge. London: Longman, 1988.
- Keller, Kathrin. "Kommunikations- und rezeptionstheoretische Konzepte anhand der Analysen von Wolfgang Iser und Espen J. Aarseth." 20 Sept. 2005
<<http://www.netzwissenschaft.de/sem/keller.htm> - keller>
- Koschel, Christine. "Die Suche nach dem verlorenen Autor. Fragen zur Verbindlichkeit des dichterischen Sprechens im Spätwerk von Ilse Aichinger." Müller 187-94.
- Lindemann, Gisela. Ilse Aichinger. München: Beck, 1988.
- Moser, Samuel, ed. Introduction. Ilse Aichinger. Leben und Werk. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1995.
- Müller, Heidi M., ed. Verschwiegenes Wortspiel. Kommentare zu den Werken Ilse Aichingers. Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 1999.
- Müller, J. E. "Literaturwissenschaftliche Rezeptions- und Handlungstheorien." Neue Literaturtheorien. Eine Einführung. Ed. K.-M. Bogdal. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990: 176-200.
- Newton, K. M., ed. Twentieth-Century Literary Theory. A Reader. 2nd Edition. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.
- Pirone, Cecilia Bortolan. "Ilse Aichinger, eine Schriftstellerin auf der Sprachsuche." Prospero: Rivista di culture anglo-germaniche 8 (2001): 95-121.
- Rakusa, Ilma. "Die Fremdsprache der Ilse Aichinger. Collagierte Splitter." Moser 123-27.
- Ratych, Joanna M. "Zeitenthobenheit und Welterfahrung: Gedanken zum Hermetikbegriff in Ilse Aichingers Dialogen." Modern Austrian Literature 12 (1979): 423-36.

- Reichensperger, Richard. Die Bergung der Opfer in der Sprache. Über Ilse Aichinger – Leben und Werk. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1991.
- Schafroth, Heinz F. “Diese Meisterin der Wortwörtlichkeit. Zu einem “neuen” Text von Ilse Aichinger.” Bartsch und Melzer 148-58.
- . “Gespräche mit Ilse Aichinger.” Moser 31-35.
- Schmaus, Marion. “Die Autorin tritt aus dem Spiegel. Infragestellung von Autorschaft in Ilse Aichingers Werk.” Herrmann and Thums 79-92.
- Schmid-Bortenschlager, Sigrid. “Poetik der Negation.” Müller 21-29.
- Šlibar, Neva. “‘Definieren grenzt an Unterhöhlen’. Ambiguisierte Paradoxie in Ilse Aichingers Gedichten.” Bartsch and Melzer 55-87.
- Steinwendtner, Brita. “Sammele den Untergang. Zu Ilse Aichingers Kurzprosaaband Schlechte Wörter.” Bartsch and Melzer 138-47.
- Stettler, Luzia. “Stummheit immer wieder in Schweigen zu übersetzen, das ist die Aufgabe des Schreibens.” Newton 42-46.
- Swirski, Peter. “Iser’s Theory of Aesthetic Response: A Brief Critique.” Reader 32 (1994): 1-16.
- Vogl, Walter. “Notate als Spiegel der Entwicklung.” Bartsch and Melzer 222-24.