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Confessional Narrative/Fragmented Identity: Emmy Hennings's *Das Brandmal. Ein Tagebuch*

The writer Emmy Hennings (1885-1948), whom Hermann Hesse considered to be one of the 'neglected figures' (Hesse 1930: 4) of German literature, is difficult to categorise: not only because the documentary record of her life remains largely fragmentary, but also because her work exhibits an individual quality that defies attempts at classification. Her style exhibits a closeness and an intimacy that appear almost naïve. Her prose works, such as her first two novels *Gefängnis* (1919) and *Das Brandmal. Ein Tagebuch* (1920), can perfectly well be read socio-critically, since they sensitively address, respectively, the situation of female inmates in a penal institution and the misery of prostitution. Although public(at)ions, they nevertheless remain introspective, and her belief in the mimetic potential of language remains intact in spite of the modern age raging around her.

Between 1930 and 1953 Emmy Hennings published a series of explicitly autobiographical writings: *Blume und Flamme. Geschichte einer Jugend* (1938), *Das flüchtige Spiel. Wege und Umwege einer Frau* (1940), as well as *Hugo Ball. Sein Leben in Briefen und Gedichten* (1929), *Hugo Balls Weg zu Gott. Ein Buch der Erinnerung* (1931), and *Ruf und Echo. Mein Leben mit Hugo Ball* (1953). If we examine these works for clues that might fill in the gaps in Emmy Hennings's biography, we soon realise that in their contradictions, they often seem to blur the picture of their author rather than offering a clear and stable image of Emmy Hennings. In this article my attention is focused principally on the above-mentioned prose text *Das Brandmal. Ein Tagebuch*. Although *Das Brandmal* has recently been classified as one of Hennings's autobiographical works (Werner-Birkenbach 1996: 121; Gass 1998: 47), it cannot simply be read as an autobiography. In this novel we find what we may regard as a particularly ambivalent fusion of autobiography and fiction, for the author employs one of the most traditional aspects of the autobiographical genre,

namely the confession. In the following pages I aim to shed light on the extent to which *Das Brandmal* can be read as a 'confessional narrative', and what information this can add to what we already know about the author Emmy Hennings, in spite of – or indeed because of – the fact that the novel remains firmly ambivalent in nature.

In Emmy Hennings's poem 'Traum' we read of her near-incredulous realisation of her 'Anderssein' (Hennings 1990: 49), which had 'colourfully unfolded' and was to determine her literary identity from the very start. Marginalised in many and various ways – as a woman, divorcee and single mother, as a drug addict, possibly as a prostitute and convicted felon, as an artist, singer and actress – she is repeatedly deprived of the language she desperately seeks. In 'Traum' she calls this condition 'Verschwiegenes Sein' (48).

Despite the fragmentary (and in part contradictory) nature of research into Hennings's life history,¹ the following can be said with some certainty: Emmy Hennings was born Emma Maria Cordsen on 17 January 1885 in Flensburg, the daughter of a housewife and a sailor. She grew up with her stepsister and more or less as a matter of course left school at fourteen to work as a maid in various households. Her dream of becoming an actress earned her nothing but scorn within her own class, and derision on the part of her bourgeois employers. When, at nineteen, she married the typesetter Joseph Paul Hennings, a social democrat, and gave birth to a son, the young family moved to Elmshorn, where Emmy Hennings started work as a washerwoman. But her dream of being an actress kept resurfacing, and in 1905 she and her husband became members of a touring theatre company. When Hennings's young son died the same year, her marriage fell apart and her husband disappeared. She continued to work as a singer and actress and made sporadic appearances in small theatres and cabarets throughout northern Germany. In 1906 she gave birth to her daughter Annemarie, who was brought up until 1916 by her maternal grandmother in Flensburg. Emmy Hennings took flight. 'Von einer Spielgier besessen, von einer Wander- und Melodiensucht, war selbst mein Kind nicht fähig, mich zurückzuhalten' (Hennings 1940: 198) she writes in *Das flüchtige Spiel*.

In 1907, a theatrical engagement in Münster came to an end when the ensemble split up. Emmy Hennings travelled to Cologne and experienced dire financial difficulties which forced her to take whatever work

she could get. It was apparently not until 1909 that she began singing and acting again, first in Frankfurt, later in Hanover and then Berlin, where John Höxter introduced her to Berlin's avant-garde. From 1911 she lived mainly in Munich where she held down a theatrical engagement in the 'Simplizissimus'. She met among others Georg Heym, Jakob van Hoddis and Frank Wedekind, and became the companion of such figures as the Expressionist writers Johannes R. Becher and Ferdinand Hardekopf, and the anarchist author Erich Mühsam. The latter provides evidence in his diary of the days and nights he spent in Munich in the immediate pre-war years. He describes Emmy Hennings as living and working creatively, provocatively and (especially in view of the prevailing mores) uninhibitedly, and yet at the same time as apparently devoting herself ever more fanatically to Catholicism (1995: 34-41).

In autumn 1913, Emmy Hennings met the writer Hugo Ball in the 'Simplizissimus' after one of her performances. One year later, Emmy Hennings was arrested several times, presumably after having been convicted of theft and later for attempting to aid Franz Jung's desertion and emigration.² After her release from prison Emmy Hennings emigrated to Switzerland with Hugo Ball in May 1915. There, in Zurich, in February 1916, along with Hans Arp, Marcel Janco, Tristan Tzara and Richard Huelsenbeck, they opened the 'Cabaret Voltaire', which was to become the birthplace of Dadaism. Hugo Ball remained Emmy Hennings's *raison d'être* until her death in 1948. Although he was to die of stomach cancer in 1927, seven years after their marriage, she spent the rest of her life devoted to his remembrance and dedicated to his work. Emmy Hennings's symbiotic relationship with Ball, their joint artistic work, and her devotion to Catholicism ensured that even after his death Hugo Ball remained the focal point of her life in the following two decades, most of which she spent in abject poverty.

Yet in her many prose works and poems Emmy Hennings does not concentrate on Hugo Ball alone; she also provides numerous descriptions of herself. Again, if these are read autobiographically, we cannot fail to notice certain contradictions. The main attempts to provide a survey of Emmy Hennings the writer have hitherto been made by the author Anna Rheinsberg and the literary scholar Sabine Werner-Birkenbach, and more recently by René Gass, who published an Emmy Hennings biography, and by Bernhard Echte, the main organiser of Emmy Hennings exhibi-

tions in Zürich and Flensburg and editor of the excellent exhibition catalogue.

Anna Rheinsberg's quest for Emmy Hennings is a poetic and subjective one, and yet at the same time she succeeds in drawing a believable, sympathetic picture of the writer, whom she describes as a 'Vogelfreie' (Rheinsberg 1987: 37). Conforming to the demands of academic rigour, Sabine Werner-Birkenbach (1996) highlights the problems of subordinating the literary work to the biographical interest in relation to the novel *Gefängnis* (124-125).³ She sees the main difficulty in writing a definitive biography of Emmy Hennings – and thus in producing a credible identification of the author with her autobiographical subject – in Hennings's love of role-play. In her view, it is Emmy Hennings who appears as the main female characters in her novels: as Dagny in *Das Brandmal*, as Helga in *Blume und Flamme* and *Das flüchtige Spiel*, and as Finny in *Das flüchtige Spiel*. In the unpublished text *Das Haus im Schatten* the protagonist refers to herself as 'Maria Lund, genannt Liane Zumsteg oder Nachtvogel, in Gelsenkirchen auch als weiblicher Humorist unter dem Namen Charmette genannt und bekannt' (cited in Werner-Birkenbach 1996: 126). Werner-Birkenbach, rightly, sees this role-play as an 'Inszenierung des täglichen Lebens' and identifies in the text not only 'eine Brechung des realen Lebens', but also 'ein Übergreifen des Künstlerischen in die Alltagsgestaltung' (1996: 127). But this is an observation that could be made about any autobiographical text, irrespective of the presence or absence of a deliberately dramatised role-play. Every experience is 'refracted' through literature as soon as it is placed in a text. The unbridgeable distance between the past and present forms of the self, between the narrated and narrating 'I', the distance which is created by the 'performance', i.e. by the very act of writing itself, has been for decades the subject of numerous discussions about autobiography.⁴ The problem of the first person narrative voice was also tackled by Ingeborg Bachmann in her *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* who insists that the narrating and narrated self can no longer lay claim to any degree of reliability – 'Ich ohne Gewähr!' (Bachmann 1982: 42).

In the first part of *Das Brandmal* the narrator turns to prostitution for the first time, out of financial necessity, and thus experiences the fusion of her self with the bright new ten mark coin in her hand. It is only in the street that she notices 'daß ich ein Geldstück in der Hand hielt [...] Fest

umklammert, und das Geld war heiß und feucht' (42). At once she senses that the two are interchangeable. She has sold herself and is holding the evidence of her commodification in her clenched fist. The money suddenly becomes a 'Zeichen meiner Verwahrlosung', an 'aufdringliches Zeichen der Schande' (46), and as she subsequently places her order in a café she feels that the money is only one part of the economic chain – the other links are herself and the food that she craves:

Ich habe ein Butterbrot bekommen und eine Tasse Kaffee, und dafür lege ich mein irrsinniges Zehnmarkstück auf den Marmortisch. Für dieses Zehnmarkstück wurde ich selbst auf den Tisch gelegt, es wurde mit mir bezahlt. Darum lege ich heute ein schillerndes Goldstück auf den Tisch. Und das soll ich sein? [...] Der Kellner ahnt nichts. Weiß nicht woher das Geld stammt, ahnt nicht, daß ich selbst das Zehnmarkstück bedeuten soll [...] Wie sehr ich mit dem Zehnmarkstück verbunden bin, wie meine ganze Person dahintersteckt! Ich schweige und kläre den Kellner nicht auf. Geld, Zeit und Mensch, alles rollt, ist Kugel, und ich Sorge für den Umlauf, für die Kreisung, und gebe vierzig Pfennige Trinkgeld. (46-47)

The main female character in *Das Brandmal* subsequently tries her hand as, amongst other things, a peddler (for example, selling 'Luftreinigungstafeln') and as a hostess in a wine bar, but in the end she chooses the profession which seems more honest to her: prostitution. The brothel becomes her home, the prostitutes – or 'Mädchen', as she calls them – are her family. In many of her early poems, too, Emmy Hennings exhibits this attachment to this milieu, which appears as a refuge. For example, in the poem 'Im Krankenhause' (1913: 12), as in *Das Brandmal*, she speaks of her 'Schwestern von den Gassen' with whom she longs to be. Her texts address the issue of prostitution, the misery, the shock of utter commodification, the consequences (including the health factors), the emptiness, the everyday life of the brothel. Emmy Hennings adopts a particular voice: as the author of the 'Tagebuch' she is making a bold statement about the individual's experience of alienation from society and herself, and she clearly condemns the hypocritical behaviour of the bourgeois clientele, but as first-person narrator she overcomes this alienation as a literary, textual self. She accepts this facet of the narrator's identity as a necessity, for prostitution makes survival possible: 'Und diese Kunst, die geht nach Brot' (1990: 32) as Emmy Hennings put it in her poem entitled 'Mädchen am Kai'.

Sin, also frequently mentioned by the first-person narrator of *Das Brandmal*, is not related to the assessment and evaluation of her actions by society, but is seen in relation only to her faith and her feelings of guilt before God. The 'cabaret artist' (Hennings 1920: 277) believes she is accountable to Him rather than to the citizens who sully her with their looks of disapproval. Although she deliberately chooses prostitution because she cannot bear to peddle products which are useless or even detrimental to one's health, she feels herself overwhelmed by the will of the people for whom she has become 'Allgemeingut und Freiwild' (88). The sale of her body results in the loss of her being, her identity; the first-person narrator loses 'die Kraft des Denkens' and 'weiß weder, was ich bin noch was ich werden kann' (308-309). She longs to be protected, as she confesses at the end of the poem 'Mädchen am Kai'. In the 'diary' *Das Brandmal* this wish becomes a literary reality. Once the narrator can no longer bear the burden of prostitution, the death of a fellow streetwalker seems to offer a possible way out. She, too, seeks in death the security refused to her by society. She intends to sell her corpse to medical science, the money to be used to buy her mother one last birthday present. The 'cabaret artist' has reached the end of the road:

Ich will mich in Sicherheit bringen. Selbst wenn man mir nur fünf Mark geben wird.
Um jeden Preis. Um jeden Preis. Ich bin zu tief beeinflusst. Bin preisgegeben und
ausgesetzt. Wahrhaftig, ich bin so weit, ich könnte mich versteigern. (273)

However, a serious illness prevents her from auctioning herself in this way or committing suicide, and in the end she returns to her parents' house, where she finally finds the security for which she has been longing.

This story, the author assures us in the first pages of the 'diary', is based on personal experiences, or rather on her memory of them. The author is fully conscious of the insurmountable distance between past and present, between narrated and narrating self, and yet she seems to write about these experiences as if this distance did not exist. The reason for this is alluded to in the very title of the work: her experiences have imprinted themselves on her memory as if branded there, and have left traces which still haunt her years later; indeed the stigma has marked her for the rest of her life. She writes: 'Um die Gegenwart zu erhellen, gedenke ich der Vergangenheit. Die Erinnerung lebt in mir, nach Tagen, Monaten, Jahren, immer' (6). The author assures us that experiences of an extremely

profound nature have been put down on paper here. And yet while the text has been read by contemporary critics as a piece of fiction which may possibly allude to the author's own experiences, they have shied away from a reading of the text as a confession, almost as if they wished to spare the author such close identification with her protagonist. Only Franz Herwig, one of her keenest critics, stated in the twenties: 'Die Fähigkeit und die Kraft, sich in andere Menschen zu verwandeln, hat sie nicht; sie könnte nur immer wieder das persönlich Erlebte auftischen, und wehe, wenn die Routine über solche letzten Endes heiligen Dinge kommt!' (Herwig 1923: 217) However, in his sarcasm Herwig overlooks the fact that Emmy Hennings does make a choice and constructs the text accordingly; in the first pages of *Das Brandmal* she assures her readers of the veracity of her account. This is because her Catholicism, and the perceived need to confess and atone for her sins, form the basis of her narrative. This may come across as naïve, and indeed this is probably true of Hennings's Catholicism as well. In faith she discovers her roots, her childhood, and thus her autobiographical texts such as *Blume und Flamme*, *Das flüchtige Spiel* and *Ruf und Echo* have this innocence and childlike quality as teleological leitmotifs. And yet, by committing this 'diary' to paper, the move from fact to fiction has already been made: the author puts together a confessional narrative which succeeds in creating a 'Third Space' (Bhaba 1994) suspended somewhere between poetry and truth.

Das Brandmal is one of three published prose texts which describe Emmy Hennings's life before she met Hugo Ball. In 1916, when Emmy Hennings started turning the events of her life into a novel, Hugo Ball wrote to his cousin August Hoffmann: 'Emmy schreibt auch ein Buch, das ebenfalls einen Verlag finden soll. Sie versucht, ihr fantastisches Leben auf einen Roman zu reduzieren' (Ball and Hennings 1978: 106). Since her childhood, Emmy Hennings had been fascinated with Catholicism and at an early stage was toying with the idea of converting. On 14 July 1911, notes Erich Mühsam, she was baptised in the Ludwigskirche in Munich (1995: 43). Her piety, which seemingly stands in sharp contrast to her way of life, since it does not correspond with the bourgeois conception of morality, often occasioned Mühsam to make slightly ironic comments in his diary.⁵

Das Brandmal begins with the words:

Im Namen des Namenlosen will ich beginnen, obgleich ich mich so weit von ihm entfernt fühle. Gerade aus diesem Grunde: in seinem Namen. Das Namenlose ist die erste und letzte Ursache meines Daseins. Ich ahne es als die Ursache des Daseins aller Menschen. Das ist nur meine gläubige Vermutung, sonst nichts. Ich aber will über meine eigene Ursache sinnen, über mich, denn ich bin noch nicht über mich hinausgekommen. (Hennings 1920: 5)

Emmy Hennings's work on *Das Brandmal* appears to be an attempt to confess, reappraise and purify, to come closer to herself and to God. The novel is designed as a confession: 'Wie lange hat es doch gedauert, bis ich dahin gekommen bin, mir eines Tages einzugestehen: ich bin ein ungeordneter Mensch' (5). Even on the first page of this 'diary' the author refers explicitly to her account as a 'Bekenntnis' (5), and unambiguously establishes that her faith in God is the impetus for writing down her experiences, her ambiguous 'Fall', as she calls it: 'Hat mich ein Fall, ein Zufall verführt zum Bekenntnis? Mein Gott ist kein Zufall' (5).

Ingrid Aichinger, in her writings on autobiography, has repeatedly stressed that the confession is deeply rooted in the history and tradition of the genre, and cannot be clearly distinguished from it, for autobiography is rooted both in the religious and in the worldly. We cannot even seem to succeed in drawing a clear distinction between literature of confession and literature of personal experience; the uncertainties in definition persist, particularly because literary texts – whether Emmy Hennings's or, say, those of Honoré de Balzac, Jean Paul or Friedrich Hebbel – are declared to be confessions, and yet often appear to show a greater affinity with 'Erlebnisdichtung', and vice versa. In this connection the question of truth continually comes to the fore in literary analysis: it is a question to which the answer can never be clear-cut in the case of Emmy Hennings, owing principally to the paucity of reliable sources. Even if we assume the author's 'Willen zur Aufrichtigkeit' (Aichinger 1977: 806) in writing her 'diary', there still remains at least the unity of and at the same time the unbridgeable distance between the narrated and the narrating self. The writing self can no longer release itself from 'what it has become' (806). For Emmy Hennings, however, what she has become is quite clearly the precondition for her writing and the driving force behind it. She deals with events which have moulded and influenced her, which have left her with wounds and the stigmatising imprints of the branding iron: 'Wie werde ich mich je wieder von diesem Grauen befreien können?' (Hennings 1920: 41)

Rita Felski (1989) stresses that the main aim of confessional literature is to fashion an authentic self: 'The confessional text makes public that which has been private, typically claiming to avoid filtering mechanisms of objectivity and detachment in its pursuit of the truth of subjective experience' (87-88). The confession takes on the explicitly representational, even mimetic, function of self-description, and does so even more obviously than in conventional autobiographical discourse. Since the 'desire for truth' can, however, only be effectively put into practice if the autobiographical subject is aware of what the dominant culture considers to be valid as 'truth', the production of 'truth' can never be independent or absolute (Gilmore 1994: 226). The desire for truth implies a choice which has always already been made within a cultural, sociological and political framework. And in Emmy Hennings's case, Catholicism is held responsible for demanding truth of the author: she wishes to confess, but not 'warum und woher', as she says, but rather, 'ich gestehe nur das "Wie"' (1920: 6). The Catholic faith to which she feels herself drawn demands confession, and Emmy Hennings chooses the most public form of this; for it is not in the confessional, in apparent anonymity (or at any rate in private) that her guilt is confessed and penitence done, but rather in every household in which her 'diary' was read, in every newspaper which published a review of her 'Bekenntnisbuch', as it was usually referred to in the press. With this text Emmy Hennings transcends several boundaries simultaneously: not only that of the genre, but also personal, social and moral boundaries. The fact that she presents herself both as victim and as guilty party appears somewhat masochistic. Almost all criticisms of the 'diary' *Das Brandmal* which appeared in the twenties and early thirties implicitly identify the author with the main protagonist and write sympathetically about Emmy Hennings (Rockenbach 1928: 4, Dietrich 1932: 39, Dr. A.S. 1934: 278): after all, she has repented of her sins and – as Martin Rockenbach declared in 1928 – 'Keine Schlammlut kann ja den Schmetterling zur Schmeißfliege verwandeln' (Rockenbach 1928: 4). Nevertheless, many critics are clearly still undecided when, for instance, they refer to the text on the one hand as a 'novel', but still suggest that the author has 'called herself to account' for her life. By avoiding an unambiguous classification of the text, *Das Brandmal* is left in a state of limbo, which seems rather appropriate for this type of narrative; even though the critics in question shy away from identifying the text as autobiographical due to

the dominant culture of their time. It is only today, when it seems less scandalous that an author should have worked as a streetwalker that the concept 'Gelegenheitsprostituierte' has become current and can be used as a non-judgemental term (Echte 1999: 287). Not to judge or classify, but to make her voice heard clearly and unambiguously. In recent publications, the question of whether Emmy Hennings is Dagny, the prostitute of *Das Brandmal*, is answered. René Gass, in his biography of Emmy Hennings, bases his chapter on her experience of prostitution on the literary text *Das Brandmal* (Gass 1998: 47-62). The exhibition catalogue by Bernhard Echte specifies two periods in Emmy Hennings's life when occasional prostitution became a necessary means of survival: 1907/08 and May 1915 (1999: 287-288), but again these claims are based mainly on literary texts and (in regard to the latter period) on a rather dubious letter of denunciation sent to the Zurich police, accusing Hugo Ball not only of revolutionary activities but of forcing his lover into prostitution and beating her up whenever she fails to bring home enough cash (cf. Echte 1999: 109-110). The text itself has not changed. *Das Brandmal* and a number of poems by Emmy Hennings convincingly reflect the world of a sex worker. However, we interpret them as clearly autobiographical due to the change in *our* culture, not due to additional factual information.

It is the boundary between fiction and truth which we continually come up against in our work with autobiography. The interesting thing about a text like *Das Brandmal* is that, on the one hand, the fiction of the story is also demanded by the subject matter – for what woman in the early twentieth century, shortly before her wedding, would publicly confess to her past as a prostitute? Yet on the other hand, the seeming authenticity of the text lies precisely in Emmy Hennings's declaration that it is to be read as a confession.

It is not the identity of the author, Hugo Ball's partner, that is to be captured here, but that of the twenty-three year old cabaret artist – if we wish to lend credence to the age given in the text (Hennings 1920: 216). This fixes the events described as happening in 1908, at a time when Emmy Hennings does seem frequently to have been unemployed and thus to have found herself in grave financial difficulties. The principal difficulty in reading a text that lies between autobiography and fiction is, as mentioned above, the author herself, who may 'confess' but constantly avoids any clear-cut identification of herself with her characters:

Was auf meinen Papieren steht, nämlich, daß ich Schauspielerin, Fabrikarbeiterin, Photographin, usw. bin, das besagt nicht viel. Auch ist es nicht wichtig, zu wissen, woher ich gekommen bin. Was hat die geographische Lage meiner Herkunft, mein Geburtsort, mit meiner Heimatlosigkeit zu tun? [...] mein einziger Beruf ist, das zu erlernen, was ich bin. (1920: 185)

By thus representing multi-dimensional, ambiguous identities, the author (re)creates her 'Anderssein'. She will not let herself be pinned down with respect to places, professions, or even names. The text remains up in the air, undecided, and creates uncertainties; but these, too, can be seen as part of its essence. A 'mirror scene' in *Das Brandmal* is informative here: 'Da sitze ich vor meinem Spiegel und kann diese Puppe betrachten. Ich weiß, daß ich mich verdoppeln kann. Unter schwarzen Brauen sind lichte, blonde, und das sind die echten'. (187) Dagny wants to conceal herself. Her make-up becomes a mask, offering detachment and at the same time protecting her genuine self: 'Ich bilde mir ein, ich schicke nur die eine Hälfte auf die Straße'. (188) Here the self is doubled. And yet her make-up, as her 'work uniform', is a danger to her self, and the doubling is an illusion. The only way out seems to be for her to remove the mask and accept her own identity, even as a prostitute. 'Jetzt bin ich genötigt, einen ganzen Menschen in die Schildergasse zu schicken'. (188) Yet a complete, unprotected person will not be able to bear the suffering of the streetwalkers, and will break down in despair at her own situation. The only hope for an unveiled, unambiguous existence which remains for Dagny is God and her faith in the possibility of absolution. She prays:

Sieh unsere Wunden, die die Welt verhüllt sehen will. Vor dir ist alles enthüllt. Du siehst die geschminkte Not. Du kennst das übertünchte Elend. Gib uns von dem Übermaß deiner Liebe, auf daß wir lieben können. So werden wir unsere Sünde überleben. (291-292)

And so the diary, too, ends in prayer, for 'auch die gefallenen Engel hoffen auf dich, Gütiger' (326). This hope for the forgiveness of her sins is also a hope for wholeness, stability and identity.

While for centuries Western philosophy only understood Being in terms of presence, the post-modern era – notably in the work of Jacques Derrida – has turned our attention to absence. This is a way of thinking which helps us understand the way in which Emmy Hennings creates texts which confess to their own fragmented nature. In Emmy Hennings's auto-

biographical work we are dealing with an inconstant, fluid conception of identity, which in its rich diversity is difficult to reduce to a common denominator. In a letter to Hermann Hesse, Emmy Hennings herself alludes to this struggle for her own autobiographical self: 'Wie gerne möchte ich mich als Harmonische gebärden, wenigstens auf dem Papier, aber die Geschichte läßt sich nicht auf zehn Nenner bringen' (Hennings 1956: 115). Yet perhaps the authenticity we are seeking lies precisely in multiplicity and contradiction: after all, identity develops out of the historical process – a process which constantly and necessarily implies ambivalence – while readers decode the text in accordance with their own history. Transcending boundaries is the order of the day. It is not one single identification, but rather a multiplicity of different, indeed contradictory identifications that produce a subject which is continually exposed to fresh processes of change, opposition and interpretation. The tension between the need for identification and the awareness of one's 'otherness' becomes, for Emmy Hennings, an internal, multi-faceted conception of identity. In her (autobiographical) texts, meaning is dissolved into a temporally contingent syntax, rather than remaining part of a stable rhetoric. What little remains of the Hegelian spirit has to take refuge in the Catholic Church. As the telos of Emmy Hennings's religiosity, Catholicism is thus little less than a condition of possibility that ultimately allows her experience of difference to be contained within an all-embracing notion of identity.

If we accept the author's Catholicism as the main motivation behind the writing of *Das Brandmal*, then the presupposed 'desire for honesty' (Aichinger's 'Willen zur Aufrichtigkeit') assumes additional credibility. Yet it is not a matter of reducing *Das Brandmal* to the status of a naïve 'Erlebnisbericht', as Franz Herwig did in 1923, but rather of throwing light on the possibility of approaching Emmy Hennings the author through reading her text. In her 'diary' the author creates the 'Third Space' between fact and fiction, in which signs and imprints are alluded to in the full and certain knowledge that they are both unstable and ineradicable. The various textual levels – what is described, who is writing, who is reading – slide into and over each other and remain as ever incomplete.⁶ And yet the confessional narrative *Das Brandmal* allows us to trace with care some of what Peter Sloterdijk calls the 'Seelen- und Nerventätowierungen' which have etched themselves on Emmy Hennings's identity 'als Sinnverknüpfungen und Erlebnisbahnungen', for they are

reflected in her writing and become the central, most authentic, possibly the most genuine element in the text. Or as Sloterdijk put it, 'Die Poesie redet von den Brandzeichen der Seele her' (Sloterdijk 1988: 16).

Notes

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- 1 The most recent publication regarding the life of Emmy Hennings is Bernhard Echte's excellent exhibition catalogue which includes a chronology of her life (1999: 287-291). René Gass's 1998 biography is in many instances based on literary texts which then bridge the gaps left by the facts available. Emmy Hennings's daughter Annemarie Schütt-Hennings and Franz Pelgen give a somewhat flattering account of Emmy Ball-Hennings which is nevertheless very interesting; Anna Rheinsberg's writings on Emmy Hennings are certainly among the most sensitive and creative. Her 1989 text beautifully combines fact and imagination and becomes a literary text in its own right. A chronology of Emmy Hennings life is also included in Sabine Werner-Birkenbach's English version of her article on Hennings's novel *Gefängnis* (1993: 198-100).
- 2 With reference to Emmy Hennings's time in prison and the contradictory statements regarding the nature of her conviction, see in particular the evidence of her daughter Annemarie Schütt-Hennings and Franz Pelgen (1984: 14), Heinz Ohff 'Nachwort', in the reprint of Emmy Hennings's *Gefängnis* (1985: 144), and Bernhard Echte's account (1999: esp. 288). For the most thorough study of Hennings's imprisonment see Sabine Werner-Birkenbach's essays on the topic.
- 3 I refer below principally to Sabine Werner-Birkenbach's essay 'Emmy Hennings. Eine Frau schreibt Gefängnisliteratur', and to the English version of this study.
- 4 Among the most interesting and helpful discussions of the complex act of autobiographical writing and writing about autobiographical writing are the texts by Roy Pascal, Paul de Man, Gillian Beer, Katherine Goodman, Susan Stanford Friedman, Leah D. Hewitt, and Liz Stanley.
- 5 See in particular the entries for 1911 and 1912. On 14 July 1911, Erich Mühsam notes in his diary: 'Emmy wird heute in der Ludwigskirche getauft. Ihr ist das eine prächtige Sensation – und es ist allerliebste zu sehen, wie sich bei ihr der Entschluss, katholisch zu werden, so durchaus deutlich aus Neugier, Sentimentalität und Geilheit zusammensetzt'. (Mühsam 1995: 43)
- 6 Homi Bhaba's concept of the Third Space has in recent years found increasing use in studies on marginal characters, from parasites to tramps. The prostitute, however, is all too often missing from studies of these figures of the third space, as we can see

for example in the recent and otherwise very interesting volume edited by Claudia Breger and Tobias Döring.

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