

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11252-9 - Hugo von Hofmannsthal: The Theaters of Consciousness

Benjamin Bennett

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN GERMAN

Hugo von Hofmannsthal

This book focuses on Hugo von Hofmannsthal's intense, lifelong concentration upon a single cohesive set of poetic, philosophical and ethical concerns, a quality of his work which has been neglected in the bulk of existing scholarship.

Professor Bennett examines Hofmannsthal's work in the context of literary theory and the history of philosophy, referring especially to Nietzsche, German Idealism and the poetics of German Classicism. He identifies three principal areas of concern to Hofmannsthal: the theory of genre, the question of the role of literature in society, and the search for a fruitful response to the problem of the historical development of culture.

The argument proceeds by way of detailed interpretation of texts, including *Der Tor und der Tod*, the Chandos letter, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Der Schwierige*, *Das Salzburger Grosse Welttheater* and *Der Turm*.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11252-9 - Hugo von Hofmannsthal: The Theaters of Consciousness

Benjamin Bennett

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN GERMAN

General editors: H. B. NISBET and MARTIN SWALES

*Frankenstein's Island: England and the English
in the Writings of Heinrich Heine*

S.S. PRAWER

*Hugo von Hofmannsthal:
The Theaters of Consciousness*

BENJAMIN BENNETT

Forthcoming:
*Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision:
From Marxism to Feminism*

ANNA KUHN

*Robert Musil's 'The Man without Qualities':
A Critical Study*

PHILIP PAYNE

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11252-9 - Hugo von Hofmannsthal: The Theaters of Consciousness

Benjamin Bennett

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



Hugo von Hofmannsthal in 1914

*photograph by permission of the
Mary Evans Picture Library*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11252-9 - Hugo von Hofmannsthal: The Theaters of Consciousness

Benjamin Bennett

Frontmatter

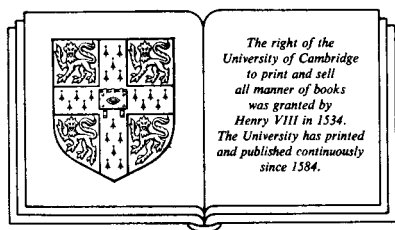
[More information](#)

Hugo von Hofmannsthal

The theaters of consciousness

BENJAMIN BENNETT

University of Virginia



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge

New York New Rochelle Melbourne Sydney

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-11252-9 - Hugo von Hofmannsthal: The Theaters of Consciousness
 Benjamin Bennett
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521112529

© Cambridge University Press 1988

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1988
 This digitally printed version 2009

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Bennett, Benjamin, 1939–
 Hugo von Hofmannsthal: the theaters of consciousness / Benjamin Bennett.
 p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in German)

Bibliography.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-521-34053-5

1. Hofmannsthal, Hugo von, 1874-1929 – Criticism and interpretation.

I. Title. II. Series.

PT2617.047Z7328 1988

831'.912 – dc9 87-20280 CIP

ISBN 978-0-521-34053-3 hardback
 ISBN 978-0-521-11252-9 paperback

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11252-9 - Hugo von Hofmannsthal: The Theaters of Consciousness

Benjamin Bennett

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

For H. B.

Meine Frau ganz einfach. Ist das nicht spaßig?

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11252-9 - Hugo von Hofmannsthal: The Theaters of Consciousness

Benjamin Bennett

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page xi</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xvii

Part I: Principles of lyric and drama

1	Kleist's puppets	3
2	Language as poetry	19
3	The smallest world theater	34
4	Death and the fools	49
5	Idea, reality and play-acting in <i>Der Tor und der Tod</i>	63
6	Theatrical philosophy: from <i>Der Tor und der Tod</i> to <i>Theater in Versen</i>	82

Part II: Language and society

7	Chandos and his neighbors	105
8	Werther and Chandos	129
9	Hofmannsthal's return	142
10	Missed meetings in <i>Der Schwierige</i>	156
11	Hans Karl's return	168
12	Society as drama	191

Part III: Culture and collapse

13	Art by accident	233
14	The allomatic	252
15	The rôle of "Vorwitz" in <i>Das Salzburger Große Welttheater</i>	269
16	Salzburg as a theater	287

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11252-9 - Hugo von Hofmannsthal: The Theaters of Consciousness

Benjamin Bennett

Frontmatter

[More information](#)**Contents**

17	Goethe, Nietzsche, Thomas Taylor and <i>Der Turm</i>	303
18	A tower in ruins: the tragedy of a tragedy	326

Conclusion

Hofmannsthal's development	345
<i>Notes</i>	351
<i>Index of works</i>	385
<i>General index</i>	388

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11252-9 - Hugo von Hofmannsthal: The Theaters of Consciousness

Benjamin Bennett

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

Richard Exner, in a study that attempts boldly to illuminate Hofmannsthal's whole career by interpreting one short text, feels called upon to say at the outset that he is "not pleading the case for invariability in Hofmannsthal's work. But a development is not the same as a break."¹ This is an important point, simple as it may be. There are frequent developmental crises in Hofmannsthal's career, and times when the poet himself has little idea where he is headed; but his life's work, in the end, is characterized by an extraordinary, if deeply problematic cohesion, which is mainly the result of his own effort to achieve it.

My approach, while not so radical as Exner's, is similar in its proceeding from the interpretation of a relatively small number of texts. I seek thus to present the reader with more or less complete arguments of limited scope, rather than oblige him to keep a large amount of preliminary material in mind while waiting for the conclusion that justifies it. And the reader does not have to agree with all my inferences from the particular to the general in order (I hope) to find something useful in the individual interpretations. In any case, I will not try to treat all of Hofmannsthal. Especially the narrative work will receive less than its share of attention, and I concede that this lack has to do with my conviction that Hofmannsthal's is a fundamentally theatrical imagination. But even if my approach is one-sided, it does not follow that it is invalid. And if I am laughed at, it will at least not be for claiming to have spoken the last word on Hofmannsthal.

I will set out, then, from the interpretation of finished works. Hofmannsthal left behind a great deal of fragmentary material, in notes and drafts and letters, that contains numerous tantalizing hints for the critic; but I will avoid actually basing any interpretive arguments upon such notions as "pre-existence" or "the allomantic."

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11252-9 - Hugo von Hofmannsthal: The Theaters of Consciousness

Benjamin Bennett

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

These notions are useful only so long as the principal line of argument proceeds from the interpretation of a finished work toward the interpretation of the fragment, not vice versa. The scribbles and jottings that start to get published after a writer dies are as a rule so tentative as to be practically an invitation to irresponsible criticism, whereas the finished work generally provides at least a better criterion of validity. Strictly speaking, of course, no work is ever “finished,” least of all for Hofmannsthal, in whose later period we shall observe a constant habit of self-rewriting. But still, the more a complex of thought and figure and image has been refined in the crucible of grammatical and artistic form – that is, the closer the text comes to being recognizable as a “work” – the likelier it is to provide a sound basis for interpretation. I will *use* Hofmannsthal’s jottings repeatedly, for re-enforcement and amplification; but whenever the fragmentary material actually figures in an argument, I will try to ensure that a prior basis, in interpretation, is present.

I do not want to put undue strain on either myself or the reader by calling my approach a “method” and writing an introduction on it. The text and notes of the early chapters contain a relatively high proportion of methodological material, in my attempts to explain what I am doing *while* doing it. But the concepts of “society” and “culture” will perhaps still be a source of confusion. My own main interest, and my reason for being interested in Hofmannsthal, is the theory of poetry and drama; and when I speak of society or culture I always mean, primarily, society or culture as seen from the perspective of poetic theory. Especially in Parts II and III, I have occasion to deal with specific historical facts; but I do not aim for either system or completeness. I treat the facts that I think matter from a poetic–theoretical perspective; I do not claim to treat Hofmannsthal’s work *as* a social or cultural phenomenon.²

The structure of the argument as a whole is as simple as I have been able to make it. Part I treats the question of poetic language as a heightening mirror of language in general, and then, by way of the idea of language as action in *Der Tor und der Tod*, moves to the question of drama. My point is that the irreducible given of the dramatic genres, the situation of audience and actors in a theater, here becomes, mirror-wise, an indispensable symbol in the structure of meaning. Parts II and III are the redemption of a promise I made in my *Modern Drama and German Classicism*, to show Hofmannsthal’s achievement of both a true neo-comic and a true neo-tragic drama at what I called “maximum saturation,” where

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11252-9 - Hugo von Hofmannsthal: The Theaters of Consciousness

Benjamin Bennett

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

“saturation” refers to the extent to which a play’s meaning is completed in the performance itself, without presupposing any special conditions outside the theater.³ Part II ends with a discussion of *Der Schwierige*, especially of the idea that the theater’s symbolic function within society is a mirror of society’s own symbolic function with respect to human existence metaphysically considered. And in Part III, which closes with *Der Turm*, the supplanting of a relatively abstract idea of society by a thoroughly immediate idea of culture is discussed, and with it the complex of problems that produces both an enormous achievement and an enormous collapse in Hofmannsthal’s late work. My main point concerns what Hofmannsthal understood as the two principal dangers, in the abstract, to a worthy communal existence: the danger of social petrification and that of cultural fragmentation. Considered structurally (not sociologically or historically), comedy turns out to be the appropriate theatrical response to the first danger, tragedy to the second.

This point, as I say, is a simple one, but in order to be developed it requires a number of theoretical and interpretive detours, some of which I hope will be interesting in their own right. At least the matter they deal with is interesting: Hofmannsthal’s theory of poetic language, his manner of reading creatively his own earlier works, his assimilation of Goethe, his struggle with Kleist, his incorporation of idealism and something like Hermetism into an ever unsettled philosophical dynamics, his confrontation with the historical power of Western music and with a special kind of cultural reality at Salzburg. I have tried to distribute this matter so as to provide not only a basis for my own argument, but also as complete and balanced a picture of Hofmannsthal’s career as the limits of my interest and competence permit. At age twenty-five Hofmannsthal was already established as “the idolized hope of his generation”;⁴ but the misunderstanding that came with this early prominence, the confusion of public images, persisted beyond his death, persists to an extent even now, and makes it less easy than it should be to recognize the intensity of his lifelong concentration upon the single cohesive set of poetic, philosophical and ethical concerns that I will try to justify summarizing in the phrase “the theaters of consciousness.”

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11252-9 - Hugo von Hofmannsthal: The Theaters of Consciousness

Benjamin Bennett

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project is well over a decade old, and if I attempted to name all the people who have helped me with it by discussion and criticism, the result would be a small autobiography. For the opportunity actually to sit down and write and rewrite the book, however, I am especially grateful to the Center for Advanced Studies at the University of Virginia. I am indebted to Gail Moore and her crew for help with the otherwise not always helpful electronic helps in manuscript preparation, to the editors and consultants at Cambridge University Press for a last good measure of criticism, and to my wife for reading several stages of manuscript.

A number of chapters contain revised versions of published articles:

“The Smallest World Theater,” *MOSAIC, A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 7/2 (Winter, 1975), 53–66.

“Chandos and his Neighbors,” *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 49 (1975), 315–31.

“The Role of Vorwitz in Hofmannsthal’s *Das Salzburger Große Welttheater*,” *Symposium*, 29 (1975), 13–29. Reprinted with permission of the Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation. Published by Heldref Publications, 4000 Albemarle St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016. Copyright © 1975.

“Idea, Reality and Play-Acting in *Der Tor und der Tod*,” *Orbis Litterarum*, 30 (1975), 262–76.

“Hans Karl’s Unmysterious Return,” *Essays in Literature*, 2 (1975), 230–44.

“Kleist’s Puppets in Early Hofmannsthal,” *Modern Language Quarterly*, 37 (1976), 151–67.

“Werther and Chandos,” *Modern Language Notes*, 91 (1976), 552–8.

“Hofmannsthal’s Return,” *Germanic Review*, 51 (1976), 28–40. Reprinted with permission of the Helen Dwight Reid Educational

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11252-9 - Hugo von Hofmannsthal: The Theaters of Consciousness

Benjamin Bennett

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

Foundation. Published by Heldref Publications, 4000 Albemarle St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016. Copyright © 1976.

“Missed Meetings in Hofmannsthal’s *Der Schwierige*,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 12 (1976), 59–64.

“Death and the Fools,” *German Life & Letters*, 30 (1976–7), 65–72.

I am grateful to the editors and consultants at these periodicals for their criticisms, and to the publishers for permission to use the material.

Translations are my own. I have tried to translate or paraphrase enough of the textual material to make the argument intelligible in English alone, while at the same time keeping enough of the original to avoid disorienting the reader who knows the texts in German.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11252-9 - Hugo von Hofmannsthal: The Theaters of Consciousness

Benjamin Bennett

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ABBREVIATIONS

Editions

W Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Sämtliche Werke*, veranstaltet vom Freien Deutschen Hochstift, 37 vols., 13 published as of May 1, 1987 (Frankfurt/Main, 1975–)

Hofmannsthal, *Gesammelte Werke in Einzelausgaben*, ed. Herbert Steiner (Frankfurt/Main, 1947ff.) is cited according to the following abbreviations:

A *Aufzeichnungen*
 D1–4 *Dramen* I–IV
 E *Die Erzählungen*
 G *Gedichte und lyrische Dramen*
 L1–4 *Lustspiele* I–IV
 P1–4 *Prosa* I–IV

Collections of letters

B1 Hofmannsthal, *Briefe 1890–1901* (Berlin, 1935)
 B2 Hofmannsthal, *Briefe 1900–1909* (Wien, 1937)
 H/LvA H./Leopold von Andrian, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Walter H. Perl (Frankfurt/Main, 1968)
 H/EKvB H./Edgar Karg von Bebenburg, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Mary E. Gilbert (Frankfurt/Main, 1966)
 H/RB-H H./Richard Beer-Hofmann, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Eugene Weber (Frankfurt/Main, 1972)
 H/EvB H./Eberhard von Bodenhausen, *Briefe der Freundschaft* (Düsseldorf, 1953)
 H/RB H./Rudolf Borchardt, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Marie Luise Borchardt, Herbert Steiner (Frankfurt/Main, 1954)
 H/CJB H./Carl J. Burckhardt, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Carl J. Burckhardt (Frankfurt/Main, 1966)

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11252-9 - Hugo von Hofmannsthal: The Theaters of Consciousness

Benjamin Bennett

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Abbreviations

- H/SG *Briefwechsel zwischen George und Hofmannsthal*, 2nd edn (München, Düsseldorf, 1953)
- H/HK H./Harry Graf Kessler, *Briefwechsel 1898–1929*, ed. Hilde Burger (Frankfurt/Main, 1968)
- H/HvN H./Helene von Nostitz, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Oswalt von Nostitz (Frankfurt/Main, 1965)
- H/AS H./Arthur Schnitzler, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Therese Nickl, Heinrich Schnitzler (Frankfurt/Main, 1964)
- H/RS Richard Strauss/H. *Briefwechsel*, ed. Willi Schuh, 3rd edn (Zürich, 1964)
- H/AW H./Anton Wildgans, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Norbert Altenhofer (Heidelberg, 1971)
- H/PZ H./Paul Zifferer, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Hilde Burger (Wien, 1983)

Other abbreviations

- AfdA *Anzeiger für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*
- CL *Comparative Literature*
- DVLG *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*
- GL&L *German Life and Letters*
- GQ *German Quarterly*
- GR *Germanic Review*
- GRM *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*
- JDSG *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Schillergesellschaft*
- JFDH *Jahrbuch des Freien Deutschen Hochstifts*
- K Heinrich von Kleist, *Werke und Briefe*, ed. Helmut Sembdner, 2 vols., 5th edn (München, 1970)
- LJ *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch: im Auftrage der Görres-Gesellschaft*
- LuK *Literatur und Kritik*
- MAL *Modern Austrian Literature*
- MD *Modern Drama*
- MLR *Modern Language Review*
- NR *Neue Rundschau*
- PEGS *Publications of the English Goethe Society*
- PMLA *Publications of the Modern Language Association*
- RG *Recherches Germaniques*
- WA *Goethes Werke*, “Weimarer Ausgabe,” 143 vols. (Weimar, 1887–1918)
- WW *Wirkendes Wort*