

Fritz Senn's Poems *Drei Bauern* and *Russisches Liebespaar*

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I

In two of his poems, Fritz Senn explicitly acknowledges their relation to individual works of art by Ernst Barlach (1870-1938); *Drei Bauern* and *Russisches Liebespaar* are subtitled "Nach einem Bild von E. Barlach"¹ and "Zu einem Bilde von Ernst Barlach,"² respectively. In addition to analyzing how these poems are related to specific Barlachian prototypes, this paper will present a full interpretation of each poem. To this end, it is necessary to begin by establishing their textual history.

II

Victor Doerksen states that both poems are mentioned in a letter from about 1965.³ Senn's correspondence with Arnold Dyck allows us to date their origin more precisely. On January 27, 1960, Senn informed Dyck:

"Ich bin gerade im Begriff mit 2 hiesigen Zeitschriften anzubandeln ("Die Zeit" u. "Westermanns Monatshefte"). Ich habe da ein paar Sachen zu Ernst Barlachs Malereien geschrieben. Barlach hat seinerzeit Rußland besucht u. etliche vortreffliche Sachen festgehalten, besser oder gerade so gut als [sic] jemand, der dort wohnte. Die Sachen werden Sie auch interessieren ("Drei russische Bauern in der Landschaft" u. "Russisches Liebespaar"). Ich müßte Reproduktionen für die Zeitungen haben. Da ich dieselben hier (in Wilhelmshaven) nicht auftreiben kann, will ich die Bilder photographieren lassen, oder ich muß die Bücher mitschicken, was ich aber gerne vermeiden möchte."⁴

Senn clearly considered it essential to have a publication of these texts accompanied by facsimiles of the two corresponding Barlachiana here identified but mistakenly referred to as paintings.⁵ "Drei russische Bauern in der Landschaft" is a drawing, and "Russisches Liebespaar" a porcelain sculpture measuring 19 cm. in height, 35 cm. in width, and 27 cm. in depth.

Encouraged by Dyck's reply dated Winnipeg, March 29, 1960, Senn sent him the two poems together with the appropriate illustrations and a letter

of April 4, 1960, asking Dyck to pass them on, with a recommendation, to the editor of *Der Bote* in Rosthern, Saskatchewan. On May 6, 1960, Dyck reported that he had forwarded the poems and pictures as requested, but — because of his disagreement with the *Bote's* current editorial policy — without a personal endorsement. He also implied that the *Bote's* narrowly religious orientation would probably preclude their publication. Indeed, both poems were not published until fifteen years later, when a collection of Senn's poems appeared under the title *Das Dorf im Abendgrauen* (Winnipeg, 1974).⁶ Unfortunately, its editor Elisabeth Peters omitted the Barlach pictures to save time and money.⁷ Even more regrettable is the fact that, for reasons unknown to me, the poem *Russisches Liebespaar* was included only in a truncated version. This fragment of six lines, in turn, provided the textual basis for Doerksen's otherwise meritorious edition (Winnipeg, 1987).

Let us now examine the individual poems and their pictorial prototypes.



Drei russische Bauern in der Landschaft
by Ernst Barlach (1870-1938)

Picture credit: Ernst und Hans
Barlach GBR Lizenzverwaltung
Ratzeburg

Drei Bauern

(Nach einem Bild von E. Barlach)

1. Bauer:

Geschwür, das sich nicht schließt,
 Du Rotlauf, der nicht heilt,
 Traumspuk, der nicht zerfließt,
 Der alle Welt verdrießt
 Und alle Welt zerteilt. 5

Ägyptens Plagen sind
 Gering zu deinem Gift,
 Du roter Wüstenwind
 Bringst Hunger, Pest and Grind
 Mit Stalins Unterschrift. 10

Vielleicht, daß einer spät,
 Wenn all der Spuk vorbei,
 Der Bauer wieder sät,
 Das Schreckliche versteht:
 Die Folter und den Schrei! — 15

2. Bauer:

Glaubt nur nicht, daß der Aussatz schon geheilt.
 Schwer ist dies Erdreich, das der Pflug zerteilt;
 Schwer sind die Steine, schwer und unbewegt,
 Die eine Hand vor unsre Pflugschar legt.
 Zur Nacht, indeß der Sturm die Katen rückt, 20
 Blickst du ins Dunkel, das dies Land bedrückt,
 Und fühlst den Pflug, den keine Macht verwehrt,
 Daß er dir pflügend deine Stirn durchquert. —

3. Bauer:

Wo treiben wir hin? Wann glänzt uns das Licht
 Der Freiheit, ewig gesucht? 25
 Wir fragen nicht mehr, wir wissen es nicht,
 Wir gehen irr und verflucht. —

Alle drei:

Wohin wir gehn, woher wir kamen,
 Der Schollen Heimatduft schlägt über uns zusammen.
 Zum fernen Heimatdorf führt unser Lauf.
 Hauchfeiner Herdrauch steigt wie Andacht ferne himmelauf!⁸ 30

The poem opens with a bitter indictment of Russian communism. In a series of negative apostrophes, the First Peasant calls the regime a festering wound, an incurable disease, an unending nightmare, an oppressive, divisive,

and poisonous power that under Stalin has caused nothing but suffering and privation. In the third stanza, the speaker speculates that at some unspecified time in the future a state of normalcy might come about, perhaps enabling someone to rationalize the previous era of terror and calamity. Immediately rejecting this as an unwarranted ray of hope, the Second Peasant defines their earthly existence as an incessant struggle against elementary hardships. The only consolation comes from the divine spirit whose omnipotence prevails over the secular forces of darkness and oppression. More despondent than his companions, the Third Peasant categorically declares worldly human endeavours to be bereft of any genuine purpose, before joining in the fervent conclusion voiced by all three: Life's destiny lies in death that reunites the believer with his divine maker.

At first glance, three nameless Russian peasants are all Senn's poem and Barlach's drawing seem to have in common. And since the latter (although undated) was undoubtedly a result of Barlach's 1906 sojourn in Czarist Russia, Senn is technically guilty of an anachronism by transposing these peasants into the Stalinist era (1928-1953) of the Soviet Union. This is due to the fact that Senn was not acquainted with the particulars of Barlach's Russian experience when he wrote *Drei Bauern* and *Russisches Liebespaar* some time before late January 1960. Senn's personal copy of the book *Spiegel des Unendlichen*,⁹ published in October 1960, documents that he finished reading Barlach's *Russisches Tagebuch* on October 29,¹⁰ and *Ein selbsterzähltes Leben* on November 2 of that year.¹¹ In other words, precisely because he was as yet unacquainted with much of the Barlach literature burgeoning since 1958, Senn had to rely all the more on what *he* perceived in Barlach's art and in his own imagination.

On closer inspection, Barlach's three peasants,¹² despite their apparent uniformity, reveal a physiognomic differentiation whose nuances, as will be shown, Senn has successfully translated into poetry, without lapsing into crass realism. By depicting the three walking peasants from behind, Barlach's drawing shows very little of two faces and nothing of the third, thus depriving the observer of what would normally convey their most obvious personal expressions. By choosing this unusual perspective, Barlach is, of course, going against the canon of traditional western art, and Senn's poem matches this unconventionality by following a right-to-left sequence in imagining their individual articulations.

Barlach's right-hand peasant is the only one carrying a stick. Senn has interpreted this as characteristic of a temperament in which defensiveness is never far removed from aggressiveness, as manifested in his diction that ranges from the drastic (*Rotlauf*¹³) to the hyperbolic (the comparison between the Ten Plagues of Egypt and communism). Of the three peasants, he is the most outspoken and verbose. His fifteen short lines (iambic trimeter) convey shortness of breath, impatience, and volatility. Notwithstanding his hyperbolism,

he is also more down-to-earth than the others, in naming specific evils of communist rule, as well as in longing for a better life in Russia.

Barlach's middle peasant appears in the attitude of the peripatetic thinker. His arms and shoulders constitute an almost perfect circle, symbolizing logical conclusiveness and harmony. Accordingly, Senn presents him as the most pensive and balanced one. Central to the meaning of his measured couplets (eight iambic pentameter lines) is the symbolism of the plough as found in Senn's earliest and latest poems,¹⁴ including these hitherto unpublished lines:

Der Unsichtbare pflügt. Wer mag ihm wehren,
Daß er die Furchen tiefer zieht?
Wir können nichts als ihm gewähren
Und beten, daß ein Heil geschieht.¹⁵

It is therefore possible to identify this Second Peasant as Senn's *alter ego*.

Even more stooped than his companions and with his long dangling arms, the left-hand figure in Barlach's drawing embodies the classical posture of resignation. Senn's poem characterizes him as the most naive of the three, and unconscious of a contradiction in what little he has to say. After asking two difficult questions, he claims that he and the others are no longer asking them. Significantly, his four dejected lines are cast in the mold of the German folksong stanza (iambic tetrameter alternating with iambic trimeter lines in the pattern abab) to connote the rather pedestrian nature of his words.

The winding but eventually rising road and the distant horizon in Barlach's picture are the visual basis for Senn's last stanza. That it is spoken in unison by all three peasants may be straining the previously established individual differentiations, although we might regard it as a common prayer or a suddenly inspired vision. However we view this finale, its couplet form¹⁶ indicates a close connection to the Second Peasant's statement. The line "Der Schollen Heimatduft schlägt über uns zusammen" alludes to the plough, intrinsic to his (and Senn's) existential explanation, as well as implying graves and thus death, with *zusammenschlagen* devoid of its usual connotation of violence and destruction. Here it is employed as in the statement "Das Wasser schlägt (Die Wellen schlagen) über uns zusammen," to signify the return to a normal elementary state. "Wohin wir gehn, woher wir kamen" is an obvious link to the Third Peasant's words, and the concluding line "Hauchfeiner Herdrauch steigt wie Andacht ferne himmelauf" comes as a triumph over the "roter Wüstenwind" (1.8) denounced by the First Peasant. The sense of a pre-established harmony imbuing these last four lines may be reinforced by a simple numerical device. Despite the three different mentalities and temperaments, each peasant has previously spoken in three sentences. I consider it very likely that Senn intended line 30 to end with a period. This would

not only be a syntactic improvement but also result in *three* synthesizing sentences for the final stanza, to reflect the extraordinary nature of a unanimous triple conclusion that reaffirms the Christian belief in a heavenly *Heil*, expressed in the peasant's terminology. If we bear in mind the multiple meanings of this German word (related to English *whole*, *hail*, *hale*, and *heal*), this provides a further link with the verb *heilen* used in lines 2 and 16.

In addition to Barlach's drawing, there is another, though less conspicuous source for Senn's poem. Only a reader well versed in German literature will recognize that stanzas 1 and 3 contain substantial appropriations from these introductory lines of the six-poem cycle *Mit fünfzig Jahren* by Josef Weinheber (1892-1945):

Geschwür, das sich nicht schließt
Verwundung, die nicht heilt.
Traumsschatten, der zerfließt,
Tag, der vorüber eilt —

Vielleicht, daß einer spät,
wenn all dies lang' vorbei,
das Schreckliche versteht,
die Folter und den Schrei —¹⁷

If we dismiss the myopic assumption that Senn simply plagiarized Weinheber (few poets are exempt from such "borrowing", and Weinheber ironically referred to himself as "Meistberaubter der Piraten"¹⁸), then we must be able to demonstrate that Senn has incorporated Weinheber's words to give his poem an extra dimension and resonance. This should become apparent once we understand the circumstances and meaning of Weinheber's cycle. For practical reasons, I cannot digress into a full interpretation of this complex and sometimes opaque opus totalling 105 lines, nor can I draw on any analysis that is complete and convincing.¹⁹ Suffice it to say that when he composed this cycle in 1942, Weinheber intended it as "Ein Zyklus gegen mich und die Zeit."²⁰ Having initially benefited from his less than enthusiastic accommodation with the Nazi authorities after the Austrian *Anschluß* of 1938, Weinheber was soon haunted by feelings of guilt and personal failure for allowing himself to be exploited by the propaganda machine of a regime fundamentally hostile to genuine artistic creativity and all traditional humanistic values. The resulting depression eventually led to his suicide on April 8, 1945.

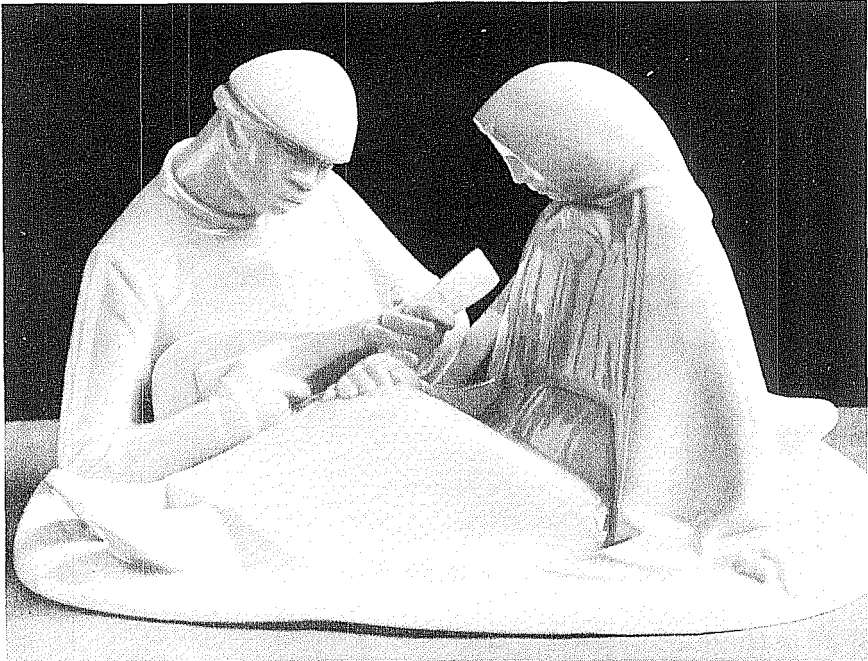
Weinheber's *Mit fünfzig Jahren* constitutes a very personal condemnation of Hitler's dictatorship by a sensitive and alienated poet. By using parts of it in a montage, Senn's antitotalitarian poem *Drei Bauern* gains in authenticity, with the implication that there is little difference between the ruthless regimes of Stalin and Hitler. But there are two additional aspects. By assigning

Weinheber's very personal words to the First Peasant, Senn is indirectly rejecting Weinheber's intellectual repudiation of his own rustic environment in the village of Kirchstetten, Lower Austria:

Lebe so . . . Der Bauer nimmt
mein gerechtes Geld.
Aber seine Welt, sie stimmt
nicht mir meiner Welt. (ll. 45-48)²¹

Furthermore, and more important, Weinheber has descended into abject existential despair:

Blut, Mord, Frevel, Bezicht:
Das ist der Mensch — Und ich
trage sein Angesicht.
Wo ist annoch Gewähr?
Stürzt *er*, stürzt das Meinige auch.
Schläft Gott? Ist er nicht mehr?
Trümmer und Rauch . . . (ll. 87-93)²²



Russisches Liebespaar. 1908
by Ernst Barlach (1870-1938)

Picture credit: Kunstarchiv
Arntz, Stuttgart

Concluding on a note of collective Christian confidence, Senn's poem clearly overcomes such individual and intellectual agonizing, and it is probably no coincidence that Senn's final image contrasts sharply with Weinheber's smoke of conflagration and destruction. The ascending smoke in Senn's last line connotes religious worship as a positive link between man and God.

Before proceeding to Senn's second Barlach poem, we can now attempt a total assessment of the relation between *Drei Bauern* and its artistic prototype. From the above analysis it follows that Barlach's drawing, by its very nature, provided Senn with relatively few details. Its nevertheless strong impact on Senn becomes manifest once we compare this poem with Senn's others. Although he did write a few other *Rollengedichte*,²³ he clearly preferred a purely lyric to a "dramatic" mode. In fact there exists but one other Senn poem with some sort of structured dialogue.²⁴ Even more extraordinary in *Drei Bauern* are the lack of landscape (which in most of his poems is never mere background but the very source of mood and meaning) and the high degree of prosodic variety. In sum, Barlach is responsible for eliciting an almost meta-physical poem from an author whose strength lies in the locodescriptive lyric.

IV

Russisches Liebespaar

(Zu E. Barlachs Porzellanfigur)

Sie sitzen wie in einer Gondel in Venedig,
Umzirpt von Grillen in der Sommernacht.
Er summt ein Lied und zupft die Saiten sacht,
Der Tagesfron und aller Sorgen ledig.

Die Steppe schweigt. Wie scheint der Vollmond gnädig.
Weither in Feld und Wiese aufgewacht
Ist Thymianduft, der alles trunken macht.
Sie gleiten still, da ist kein Segel nötig.

Die Wolga atmet. Manchmal stehen
Die Winde aus den Wäldern auf
Und führen sehnsuchtsschwüles Wehen
Der Leidenschaft vom Dorf herauf.

Die Barke hat statt Segel einen Traum:
Romeo und Julia im Steppenraum.²⁵

The tangible basis for this poem is Barlach's 1907 sculpture "Russisches Liebespaar" (also known as "Ruhendes Hirtenpaar" and "Schäfergruppe"), of which bronze and porcelain versions exist.²⁶ The authoritative catalogue of Barlach's sculptures offers this succinct description:

Gruppe aus zwei verschränkt einander zugekehrten Figuren; im Vordergrund rechts ein sitzendes junges Weib mit Kopf- und Schultertuch, die Knie angezogen, mit der Linken sich aufstützend; links, teils überschritten, in halb liegender Stellung der Mann, das linke Bein angewinkelt, das rechts vom Künstler unterschlagen, in der auf den Ellenbogen gestützten Rechten eine Balalaika [sic], die er am Griffbrette mit der Linken bedient.²⁷

Senn never saw the actual work and relied on a photographic reproduction²⁸ in Paul Fechter's 1958 monograph *Ernst Barlach*, which includes also a wordy but less than appreciative and not entirely accurate critical analysis of the porcelain figurine.²⁹ Afflicted with the notorious shortcomings of the *Geistesgeschichte* approach fashionable among German critics mainly between the two world wars, Fechter's book provides only the scantiest biographical information. About Barlach's crucial Russian epiphany, Fechter states merely that the artist in 1906 obtained a passport to accompany his brother on a trip to the steppe region of Southern Russia.³⁰ As mentioned above, when he was writing the two poems under discussion, Senn thus knew neither the exact time nor the specific destination of Barlach's Russian sojourn. From several details in this second poem (the steppe, the Volga river, a nearby village, forests at an indeterminate distance, and the topographical elevation) we can infer that its setting is somewhere on the bluffs on the western bank of the Volga between Saratov and what is now known as Volgograd (formerly Tsaritsyn, 1926-61 Stalingrad). Senn must have assumed that Barlach and his brother would seek out this region because of its substantial German population, the so-called Wolgadeutschen, who had settled here since 1763, and before World War I numbered about 400,000. Actually, Barlach and his brother Nikolaus (1872-1925) travelled via Kiev to Kharkov, where their brother Hans (1871-1953) had established himself as a successful engineer. During this two-month visit, Ernst Barlach made a number of excursions into the neighbouring countryside. When Senn, after completing his two Barlach poems, read the artist's *Russisches Tagebuch*, he marked this entry of July 1, 1906:

Sonntag in Pokatilowka. Hinaus mitten im Gedränge auf der Plattform zwischen zwei Wagen dritter Klasse. Junge Arbeiter und Arbeiterinnen; unter den letzten suchte ich vergeblich das Russentum, das in den männlichen Gesichtern, man möchte sagen, mit einem abgenutzten Stempel geprägt dastand, so überein in den Haupttiefen und Höhen, aber auch so unverfeinert und unscharf in den Übergängen. Einen besonders werde ich nie vergessen, und zwar bei diesem einen nie den Ausdruck, mit dem er im Gedränge der Köpfe auftauchte und verschwand. Einer hatte ein Lied zu summen begonnen, ein Mädchen mit einem Tuch, dessen Muster schwarz gegen das helle Gesicht standen, stimmte mit einem starken Ton ein und drang, bald von andern Stimmen gehoben, auf die leidenschaftlichen Höhen einer schwermütigen Melodie hinauf. Sie weilten mit grenzenloser Hingabe bei den Auf- und Abschwüngen, beim Herabgleiten von rasch emporgestürzten Höhen. Absolute Seligkeit gemeinsamer Empfindungen. Und der Bursche von vorhin brummte nur mit, als ginge er auswärts seines Körpers mit seiner Seele wie betäubt von dumpfer Empfindung. Die Augbrauenlinie war ihm scharf unter der massiven Stirn quer über den Nasenrücken weggeführt, die dicke,

*kurze Nase war ein wenig aufgestülpt, und die Oberlippe stand wulstig über der Unterlippe, ein geteilter Bartwuchs keimte rechts und links am Kinn. Die Augen lagen tief verborgen im Schatten der Felsenstirn und wirkten von vorn nicht anders als Schatten.*³¹

As far as I can determine, nobody else has hitherto identified this textual origin of the musician in Barlach's own figurine and thus, ultimately, also in Senn's poem.

Unlike *Drei Bauern*, *Russisches Liebespaar* presents a specific landscape. In fact, most of the poem is devoted to a spacial "background" absent from Barlach's figurine, and only five lines (1, 3-4, 8, and 13) give a scanty sketch of the two lovers, without characterizing their faces and other individualizing features. Although expressly located along the Volga, the poem's natural setting is very similar to that of Senn's own native Mennonite milieu in the Southern Ukraine. And here the poet is in his element, reworking some of his favourite literary motifs — a summer night in the steppe, complete with moonlight, music, and crickets — in what might be regarded as a typical Sennian *Stimmungsgedicht* conjuring up an idyllic world that vanished with the Russian Revolution. Further examination of the poem's form and content will, however, bring out some subtle complexities.

Barlach's figurine conveys a mood of pristine serenity, harmony, and complete absorption. The rounded contours of the lovers' outer arms, shoulders, and heads suggest an imaginary circle encompassing both, with their eyes directed at its centre where the mandolin player's left hand seems to meet the woman's right. This circular configuration and the total lack of background lets the two exist in a private sphere unto themselves, seemingly remote from the rigours of the world, while spellbound by the combined powers of love and music. This removal from ordinary reality is reinforced by Barlach's choice of smooth white porcelain as a medium (in marked contrast to his later preference of wood for a rather rugged and primitivistic immediacy).

Formally, Senn has rendered the polish and harmony of Barlach's figurine in a carefully crafted Shakespearean sonnet (three quatrains followed by a couplet) that draws on a rich register of alliteration, assonance and consonance as detailed in the Appendix. To be sure, the rhyme scheme in the first two quatrains deviates slightly from that of the pure Shakespearean sonnet (cdcd as employed in the third quatrain), but such variance is not uncommon among modern practitioners of this form. By using in lines 1 to 8 what is known in German as *umarmender Reim* (abba), Senn may even be accentuating the central theme of love. Through Weinheber he was familiar with Karl Kraus' persuasive writings on the essentially erotic nature of the most fortuitous poetic rhymes. And while the impure rhyme of *gnädig* (1.5) with *nötig* (1.8) may seem like a typical consequence of Senn's Low German and Russian-Mennonite roots, it would be altogether fitting according to Kraus' and Weinheber's poetics.³² The first four lines of Weinheber's only

Shakespearean sonnet *Der unreine Reim* decree and simultaneously exemplify the principle:

Sich einer bessern Menschheit aufzutun
mit einer Sehnsucht, die zum Kusse drängt,
gab er der Welt, im Spiegelbild zu ruhn,
ein zwanglos Fest: Wie Liebe Lieb beschenkt.³³

Given the relative rarity of Shakespearean sonnets in German literature,³⁴ Senn's choice of this form³⁵ is remarkable in itself. It is, however, also an evident link with the poem's heavily accented last line, "Romeo und Julia im Steppenraum."³⁶ (In this context it may be well to recall that *Romeo and Juliet* is Shakespeare's only tragedy that also contains two of his sonnets, ominously recited by the Chorus at the openings of Act I and II, respectively.) In the fragmented printed version of *Russisches Liebespaar*, this line actually reads "Shakespeares Romeo und Julia im Steppenraum."³⁷ By identifying the Russian lovers with Shakespeare's, the poem implicitly ordains them to a similar tragic fate. How has Senn arrived at this conclusion?

With the same six grave beats on which it ends, the poem introduces the two sitting lovers by immediately associating them with a (black) Venetian gondola. Initially a simile, this boat image grows through lines 8 and 13 into the poem's crucial metaphor. By virtue of its Venetian allusion, it connotes love as well as death. Probably the most famous literary treatment of this dualistic concept is Thomas Mann's novella *Der Tod in Venedig*, which derives from a continuous 19th-century German tradition that made Venice the haven of honeymooners and originated with this epigram by August von Platen (1796-1835):

Doppelte Bestimmung

Liebendem Paar wohl dient zum Versteck die venetische Gondel,
Doch beim Leichengepräng dient sie zur Bahre dem Sarg.³⁸

A number of further ambiguities in Senn's poem sustain the fatalistic irony of its fundamental *eros-thanatos* metaphor. According to European folklore, the chirping crickets of line 2 may be omens of erotic promise or death,³⁹ the latter sense gaining extra strength from the German folk etymologies of two synonyms for *Grille*, deriving *Grabheuschrecke* from *Grab*, and *Heimchen* or *Heinchen* from *Freund Hein*, a euphemism for death. A similar dualistic function of crickets is found in Senn's poem *Abend der Grillen*, where the first half creates an atmosphere of awakening and biological generation in the temporal twilight steppe, whereas the latter half, in conjunction with

the boat metaphor, brings a transition into dream and death *sub specie aeternitatis*:

Die Dämmerung kommt im grauen Gewand.
Das Urlied der Schöpfung erwachet im Land,
Der Grillen trauter Steppengesang,
Gern lausch ich ihm stunden-, ja nächtelang.

Die Steppe liegt wie ein flaches Meer,
Belebt von der Grillen unzähligen Heer.
Wie Traumboote gleiten die Dörfer darin
Und tragen zur ewigen Heimat uns hin.⁴⁰

The statement “Wie scheint der Vollmond gnädig” (1.5) has two possible meanings; either the moon is shining graciously, or it is creating an appearance of benevolence that may turn out to be a mere illusion. The third quatrain, despite its marked euphony, metric levity (iambic tetrameter) and smooth syntactic flow (two enjambements), presents an even higher degree of ambivalence. The pivotal infinitive noun *Wehen* (1.11) may refer to the blowing of the winds mentioned in the previous line as well as to the suffering inherent in the basic meaning of *Leidenschaft* (1.12). In the latter case, it can denote either the inflicting of pain (*Weh bereiten*) or lamenting (*Wehklagen*). And it is possible that the wild thyme of line 7 could, apart from its intoxicating fragrance and aphrodisiac function⁴¹ (antiquity considered thyme sacred to Aphrodite,⁴² who is also the goddess of the calm seas⁴³), connote sleep and death, as it does in Weinheber’s poem *Im Grase*,⁴⁴ probably his best-known. Here the hauntingly hypnotic refrains “Thymian und Mohn” and “Mohn und Thymian” combine with the familiar boat topos to evoke a dreamlike passage from life to the port of death.

Most, if not all of these ambivalences must be deliberate in such an intricately designed poem. All of them are a function of the Russian tableau Senn has created around the characters of Barlach’s figurine, while (unlike in *Drei Bauern*) dispensing with individualizing characterization and concentrating instead on the mood and the landscape setting. This apparently idyllic environment is actually a deceptively equivocal and threatening world, in which the lovers are, without any apparent guilt of their own, foredoomed to a tragic fate. The text offers no definite reasons, although it suggests the vicissitudes of time implicit in the boat metaphor and the river as the archetypal symbol of perpetual flux. In thus negating the almost magic sphere of Barlach’s Russian lovers, Senn is undoubtedly projecting an existential view shaped by the Mennonite experience of World War I and the Russian Revolution. And it is highly significant that Senn had planned a substantial literary formulation of this experience under the main title *Panta rhei — Alles fließt*.⁴⁵

By way of concluding I want to call attention to the fact that, despite certain conceptual differences this paper has established between Barlach’s art

and Senn's two poems based on it, there are a surprising number of similarities between their *literary* renditions of the Russian steppe. A detailed study of these parallels should, however, be the subject of a separate investigation.

Appendix

Line numbers in parentheses refer to the text of *Russisches Liebespaar*, supra.

Alliteration and Consonance

Sie sitzen (1)
 wie . . . Venedig (1)
 Gondel (1) . . . Grillen (2)
 sitzen . . . in . . . einer Gondel in Venedig (1)
 sitzen (1) . . . Umzirpt (2) . . . summt . . . zupft . . . Saiten (3) . . . Tagesfron . . . (4)
 Umzirpt (2) . . . zupft (3)
 von Grillen in . . . Sommernacht (2) . . . ein . . . Saiten (3) . . . Tagesfron . . . Sorgen (4)
 Grillen (2) . . . Lied (3) . . . alter . . . ledig (4) . . . Vollmond (5)
 Umzirpt . . . Sommernacht (2) . . . summt (3)
 Sommernacht (2) . . . summt . . . Saiten sacht (3)
 zupft (3) . . . Tagesfron (4) . . . Vollmond (5) . . . Feld . . . aufgewacht (6) . . . Thymianduft (7)
 Steppe *schweigt* . . . *scheint* (5)
schweigt . . . *Wie* (5) . . . *Weither* . . . *Wiese* aufgewacht (6)
 in (6) . . . Ist (7)
 Thymianduft . . . *trunken* (7) . . . *gleiten* . . . *nörrig* (8) . . . *armet* . . . *stehen* (9)
 Thymianduft . . . *macht* (7) . . . *atmet*. *Manchmal* (9)
 Sie . . . Segel (8)
gleiten *stills* . . . Segel (8) . . . Wolga (9) . . . Manchmal . . . Wäldern (10) . . . sehnsuchtsschwüles
 (11) . . . Leidenschaft (12)
stills (8) . . . *stehen* (9)
 Wolga (9) . . . Winde . . . Wäldern (10) . . . sehnsuchtsschwüles Wehen (11)
 Manchmal *stehen* (9) . . . Winde . . . Wäldern (10) . . . führen sehnsuchtsschwüles Wehen (11)
 . . . Leidenschaft (12)
 aus . . . auf (10)
 auf (10) . . . führen (11) . . . Leidenschaft vom Dorf herauf (12)
 sehnsuchtsschwüles (11)
 sehnsuchtsschwüles (11)
 statt (13) . . . Steppenraum (14)
 hat statt . . . Traum (13)

Assonance

Sie . . . wie (1)
 sitzen . . . in . . . in . . . Venedig (1) . . . Umzirpt . . . Grillen in (2)
 Gondel (1) . . . von . . . Sommernacht (2)
 Umzirpt (2) . . . summt . . . zupft (3)
 Lied . . . die (3)
 Tagesfron (4) . . . Vollmond (5)
 Sorgen (4) . . . Vollmond (5)
schweigt . . . *scheint* (5) . . . *weither* (6)
 Wie (5) . . . Wiese (6) . . . Thymianduft (7) . . . Sie (8)
 Thymianduft . . . *trunken* (7)
 alles . . . *macht* (7)
gleiten . . . *kein* (8)

st ll . . . ist (8)
 Wolga . . . Manchmal (9)
 atmet . . . Manchmal (9)
 aus . . . auf (10)
 f hren . . . sehnstuchsschw les (11)
 vom . . . Dorf (12)
 Barke . . . hat statt (13)

Notes

¹Fritz Senn, *Gesammelte Gedichte und Prosa*, ed. Victor G. Doerksen (Winnipeg, 1987), p. 111. Hereafter referred to as ed. Doerksen.

²ed. Doerksen, p. 110.

³ed. Doerksen, p. 294. In a letter of July 26, 1974, Senn states, "Von Barlach habe ich manche Anregung, Inspiration erhalten."

⁴I am grateful to Harry Loewen for providing me with copies of this letter and the one of April 4, 1960. The originals of Dyck's replies are in my possession.

⁵There is, however, a famous precedent for such usage in that the title of Lessing's *Lao-koon: oder  ber die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (1776) refers to painting as well as to sculpture. ⁶Subsequently cited as ed. Peters. Although dated 1974, this book did not appear until May 1975.

⁷As reported to Senn by Hedwig Dyck Knoop in her letter dated Sicamous (B.C.), July 13, 1975. Original in my possession.

⁸ed. Doerksen, pp. 111-112. In line 15, I have corrected Doerksen's *Folger* into *Folter*, according to the typescript in my possession and also ed. Peters, p. 54.

⁹Ernst Barlach, *Spiegel des Unendlichen. Auswahl aus dem dichterischen Gesamtwerk* (M nchen, 1960). On the title-page verso: "Ver ffentlicht im Oktober 1960 als Band 71 der Reihe *Die B cher der Neunzehn*."

¹⁰Handwritten entry by Senn, p. 104.

¹¹Handwritten entry by Senn, p. 53.

¹²Senn's probable source for the Barlach drawing was the booklet Ernst Barlach, *Zwischen Erde und Himmel. 45 Handzeichnungen*, ed. Carl Georg Heise (M nchen, 1953), which was reprinted several times and of which 64,000 copies were sold before 1964. The drawing is not included in Ernst Barlach, *Zeichnungen*, ed. Wolf Stubbe (M nchen, 1961), the most complete catalogue of Barlach's drawings.

¹³Denoting dysentery in human beings, as well as intestinal fever or cholera in hogs, horses, and sheep. The diseases named in lines 9 and 16 could be understood as allusions to Leviticus, ch. 13.

¹⁴For a detailed analysis of Senn's *Hinterm Pflug* (1935-36), see Victor G. Doerksen, "The Divine Plowman and the Mennonite Clod" in Michael S. Batts et. al (eds.), *Annals 4. German-Canadian Studies in the 1980s* (Vancouver, 1983), pp. 208-229.

¹⁵Handwritten original from Senn's *Nachla *, in my possession. The use of *gew hren* with the dative (1.3) is acceptable according to *Grimms W rterbuch*, vol. 6, col. 4845.

¹⁶Metrically, the conclusion is rather diverse, featuring iambic tetrameter, pentameter, and hexameter.

¹⁷Josef Weinheber, *Hier ist das W rt. Gedichte*. 2. Aufl. (Salzburg, 1949), p. 85. Italics are mine. In his personal copy, Senn marked this passage.

¹⁸In the autobiographical poem *Mann von dre   ig Jahren*, in Josef Weinheber, *Gedichte*, ed. Friedrich Sacher (Hamburg, 1966), p. 208. Copy owned by Senn now in my possession.

¹⁹Including Friedrich Jenacek's editorial commentary in Josef Weinheber, *S mtliche Werke*, vol. 2 (Salzburg, 1972), pp. 790-791.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 789.

²¹*Hier ist das Wort*, p. 86.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 88.

²³ed. Doerksen, pp. 90, 102, 109, 152.

²⁴Part XIII of *Hinterm Pflug*, where a chorus merely repeats part of a preceding individual statement; ed. Doerksen, pp. 50-51. In Senn's Low German narrative poems, there are some spoken passages, but no dialogue in the structural ("dramatic") sense.

²⁵Transcribed from a MS in Senn's *Nachlaß*.

²⁶Ernst Barlach, *Das plastische Werk*, ed. Friedrich Schult (Hamburg, 1960), pp. 72-73.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 73.

²⁸According to Willi Flemming, *Ernst Barlach, Wesen und Werk* (Bern, 1958), p. 108, a photographic rendition of this figurine is more impressive than the original.

²⁹Paul Fechter, *Ernst Barlach* (Gütersloh, 1957), pp. 140-141. Although not mentioned in the text, this book is based on a publication prevented by the Gestapo in 1935.

³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 182, 186.

³¹*Spiegel des Unendlichen*, pp. 73-64. Also marked by Senn in his copy of Ernst Barlach, *Das dichterische Werk*, vol. 2, ed. Friedrich Droß (München, 1973), p. 248. Italics mine.

³²For Kraus' decisive influence on Weinheber, cf. *Josef Weinheber, Gedichte*, ed. Friedrich Sacher, p. 428 (marked by Senn).

³³*Hier ist das Wort*, p. 59.

³⁴W.E. Yates, *Tradition in the German Sonnet* (Bern, 1981), p. 69. Neither Yates nor Jörg-Ulrich Fechner (ed.), *Das deutsche Sonett* (München, 1969) come to terms with the true extent of the Shakespearean sonnet's usage in German literature.

³⁵For two other Shakespearean sonnets by Senn, see ed. Doerksen, pp. 72, 94.

³⁶The scansions "Rómeó" and "Júliá" occur repeatedly in August Wilhelm Schlegel's translation of Shakespeare's play, which Senn compared with the English original. Cf. ed. Doerksen, p. 148.

³⁷ed. Doerksen, p. 110.

³⁸*Platens sämtliche Werke*, ed. Karl Goedeke (Stuttgart, 1893), vol. 2, p. 222.

³⁹Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli (ed.), *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, (Berlin und Leipzig, 1927-42), vol. 3, cols. 1161-1167; Richard Beitzl, *Wörterbuch der deutschen Volkskunde* (Stuttgart, 1955), p. 276; *Grimms Wörterbuch*, vol. 10, cols. 868-869. Cf. also Thomas Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig* (Berlin, 1913), p. 89. In addition, the cricket in German literature has epitomized the ephemeral nature of terrestrial life ever since Aesop's fable of the cicada and the ant became popular in Ludwig Gleim's adaptation under the title *Die Ameise und die Grille* (1756).

⁴⁰ed. Doerksen, p. 127. On the basis of Senn's original MS in my possession, I have incorporated two small changes in lines 4 and 7.

⁴¹Dr. Aigremont [ps. of Siegmar von Schultze-Gallera], *Volkserotik und Pflanzenwelt* (Leipzig, 1910), vol. 1, p. 110 *et passim*; Beitzl, p. 621.

⁴²Bächtold-Stäubli, vol. 7, col. 419; *Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend* (New York, 1950), vol. 2, p. 1112.

⁴³Oskar Seyffert, *Dictionary of Classical Antiquities* (Cleveland and New York, 1968), p. 39.

⁴⁴First published in Josef Weinheber, *Späte Krone. Gedichte* (München, 1936), pp. 90-91. Copy owned by Senn now in my possession. Senn's knowledge of herbal folklore is documented by his annotated copy of Heinrich Marzell, "Die deutschen Pflanzennamen und ihre Sammlung," in *Mitteilungen der Akademie zur wissenschaftlichen Erforschung und zur Pflege des Deutschtums*, 1. Heft (1934), 53-62.

⁴⁵Senn to Dietrich Epp (then Editor of *Der Bote*), Nov. 2, 1934. For a copy of this letter, I am indebted to Harry Loewen. See also ed. Doerksen, p. 290.