

12-2010

# Religion in Flux Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings: Dada's Prophets of the Word

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RELIGION IN FLUX

HUGO BALL AND EMMY HENNINGS: DADA'S PROPHETS OF THE WORD

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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December 2010

Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
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Title: Religion in Flux Hugo Ball: Dada's Prophet of the Word

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This study argues that Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings's artistic output at and founding of the Cabaret Voltaire and subsequently Dadaism, despite their ephemeral and sometimes tenuous official involvement with the movement caused by exhaustion, poverty, and petty-infighting, was spurred by their intertwined spiritual quests. In order to do so, the ways in which Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings's spiritual exploration and fervent belief in the centripetal role of spiritual experience in all forms of artistic creation are highlighted and analyzed. This focus on spirituality is necessary, as it served as impetus and drive for their continued philosophical and creative efforts, even in the depths of poverty, drug abuse, and isolation.

This study hopes to show that, contrary to much prevailing Dada scholarship which analyzes Zurich Dada as a nihilistic and inherently anti-spiritual movement, Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings's roles as founders, key "philosophers," and artist wranglers of Dada, proves that the very foundation and life-force of Dada was a strange, anti-rational conglomeration of diverse and sometimes opposing mystical beliefs. Particularly, this essay will attempt to answer the question of whether the deliberate blind-spot that one finds in much avant-garde scholarship to the religious and spiritual tendencies that Ball and Hennings brought to the stage at the Cabaret Voltaire caused us to lose something essential in our understanding of Zürich Dada.

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## INTRODUCTION

The man on stage was part priest, part shaman, part child playing in a costume of cutup cardboard—with wings: “jolifanto bambla ô falli bambla.” His voice “as if it had not choice, was taking on the cadence of a priestly lamentation” (*Flight Out of Time* 71). His clothing “was harboring the partly frightened, partly eager face of a ten-year-old who listens breathless to the priest’s words in the requiems and high masses of his village church” (*Flight* 71). Beginning to tremble, overcome by the power of what his syllables *didn’t* mean, when he departed the stage, it was with a “body bathed in sweat and like a magic bishop” (*Flight* 71).

Perhaps the most famous image of Dada: Hugo Ball standing in his shiny cylindrical cubist costume with stoic face, lobster-claw-like paper hands, and the score to what would be his most famous sound poem positioned next to him. It has also been one of the most problematic. Something happened here that scholars and fans of Dada alike still cannot quite grasp, something that no one really understood, even at the time. Famously known as “The Magic Bishop Episode,” it is perhaps what Hugo Ball is best known for. Certainly, it is one of the most popular and recognizable images of Zürich Dada. Yet, if you read the plethora of scholarship and criticism on Ball and his sound poetry and attempt to construct a cause for this moment’s vitality, you would find yourself at a loss. Even those who have taken pains to do thorough critical examinations of these works find it difficult to move past the claim that they were productions of nonsense syllables—the repetition of sounds and meaningless words, as done in children’s games. Admirers of Ball, even those who occasionally reenact his works, will do so with the assumption that the intended effect is one of laughter or striking discomfort. If they are right and this is indeed the case, then is it not odd that it produced such an intensely important moment in history? How could onomonapoeia and noise games have such a lasting effect?

This study will argue that the answer to these questions are intrinsically tied with Hugo Ball's spiritual philosophies. After all, if one takes Ball at his word, these “sound games” were attempts to create true mystical experiences not only for the performer (what most scholars have underlined), but for the audience as well. While many scholars and biographers of Ball's works have analyzed his work with a spiritual lens, the majority of them follow Emmy Hennings's biographies in attempting to paint his spiritual life as a steady movement toward the church, where indeed Ball did end his days. However, this particular study will analyze he and Hennings's spirituality in the context of their creative productions, particularly their poetry. It will also show how their creative work forms a steady progression towards Dada, which, when viewed in the context of Ball and Hennings as founders, can be interpreted as an inherently and intentionally spiritual movement.

This study also hopes to clarify some of the difficulties which Dada scholars and historians have in placing Ball and Hennings and Dada properly in respect to one another. It does so by reanalyzing the place that the couple held and holds in the Dada movement, how they formed and shaped it, and also how Dada and the goals of Dada permeated their lives, even while Ball rejected it as a movement. It does so by paying close attention to Ball's own philosophical writing and to that which remained consistent in his work as opposed to that which was inconsistent, as too often is the case with scholars who attempt to write off Dada as a key point in his creative evolution, and also by giving Hennings's more credit as an individual poet and a key component in the spiritual direction which the couple's life took just prior to and during their involvement with Dada. This thesis in particular looks at the primary links between Hugo Ball's spiritual stages, which, in my opinion, creates a stream of consistency between Hugo Ball's works. Since Ball can be counted as a primary founder of Dada, answering these

questions about Ball and the creation of this trajectory allows it to expose on a larger scale how Dada happened, why Dada happened, and exactly what it was a reaction to.

This will be accomplished, in part, by expanding upon current scholarship, such as Erdmute Wenzel White's biography *The Magic Bishop, Hugo Ball: Dada Prophet*, which attempts to link Hugo Ball's mystical and religious inclinations and his founding of and deep involvement with Zürich Dada. In doing so, it will show that Ball's Dadaist inclinations were apparent even from the time of his earliest creative works and that he maintained that trajectory until his desertion of the movement.

Scholars of the avant-garde seem to have difficulty assimilating ideas of religion and spirituality into their work. As Mike Sell notes in his study of religion and the avant-garde, they tend to strongly resist the acceptance of religious sensibilities in many avant-garde movements (2). He observes that Peter Bürger's pivotal text *Theory of the Avant-Garde* perhaps deliberately ignores Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennig's roles as essential founding members of Zürich Dada, due to this bias against religiosity as an avant-garde sensibility (6). Perhaps, the intellectual conflicts between the religious and the spiritual and the political and the revolutionary are too wide for scholars to cross, due to the "general distaste of intellectuals for religious belief" (8). Sell recognizes that these conflicts and this distaste may serve as a road block to a fuller understanding of avant-garde history and subsequently attempts to "open up the conventional history to new connections, new implications" (10).

Could this blind-spot to the religious and spiritual tendencies that Ball and Hennings brought to the stage at the Cabaret Voltaire have caused us to lose an understanding of the complexity and heterogeneous nature of the true goals of Zürich Dada? In regard to Zürich Dada, this conflict and antipathy extends to matters of the spiritual, particularly, as the outward

appearance of many of its most popular and anthologized works creates the illusion of a movement so consumed by destructive, primitive, contrary, and nearly nihilistic passions that a spiritual under-layer would be incomprehensible to most. Yet, as Sell remarks in his study, when one considers the strength of the influence that figures such as Wagner and Kandinsky had on Ball's artistic philosophies, "[i]t's not so far-fetched" (6).

An important question to ask when studying such an abstract concept as "spirituality," is exactly what is going to be discussed. How does one differentiate the "spiritual" philosophy, motive, or sensibility from, say, a mystical or a religious one? Therefore, some terms shall be defined here at the beginning of this study, for the sake of comprehension and readability; however, it is done so in full recognition of the fact that, by the nature and implication of these terms, they are both unstable and overlapping. The *spiritual* or *spirituality* refers to a sensibility, belief, practice, or motive that invokes and inspires a *general* sense of something greater or more eternal than the sensual world that exists beyond the realm of the material and logical. *Mysticism* is meant to refer to spiritual beliefs and practices that are non-canonical, often occult, and frequently have the ultimate goal of complete unification of reality, particularly that of the individual spirit with the eternal. *Religion* refers to any standardized system of spiritual belief practices.

It certainly must strike one as odd, at first, that the founder of the Cabaret Voltaire, one of the fathers of Zürich Dada, a nihilistic enterprise seeking to damn all institutions, smash the past, reject all predecessors, and revel in all that is offensive would eventually decide to devote his life to the Catholic faith, and to a God he once sought to damn— when he pronounced that every man should be his own savior and declaring that religion had been destroyed long ago by rationality (Steinke 50). Understanding this riddle, the seeming paradox that is Hugo Ball, is key

to comprehending the role that spirituality played in Zürich Dada. When one traces the history of Ball and Hennings's philosophical, artistic, political, and ontological interests, it serves as a kind of roadmap to both his and the greater spiritual quest of Zürich Dada. This history is displayed most prominently in their creative work produced during their period of involvement with Zürich Dada, at both the Cabaret Voltaire and the Galerie Dada; however, understanding how they came to that point and the work that he produced prior to that period is essential. When analyzed properly, this work displays, step by step, what they hoped to achieve in his Dada performances and poetry.

This study is broken into three historical and conceptual parts. The first chapter focuses on the evolution of Ball's experimentation with language as a means of communion with the divine and spiritual practice, which focuses on the build-up to his creation of sound poetry. Sound poetry is then hypothesized to be his "purest" artistic expression of spirituality, which is also perhaps his most important contribution to Dada, as it would become one of its major cornerstones. The second chapter looks at the political and social context of Ball's spiritual evolution and how it served a centripetal role in his more radical and mystically centered creative practices and philosophies which served as major drives towards his progression towards Dada. The analysis therein focuses on the complexities of spirituality's role in society, as either a drive toward revolution or as a structuring mechanism for the governing of groups and as a compass for the behavior of individuals within those groups. This chapter necessarily focuses on World War I and Ball's treatment of and engagement with the political and social forces surrounding that catastrophic event, as it took center stage in his life and the lives of most other European artists. The last chapter looks at the creative partnership between Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings with a focus on both the way in which their lives coalesced into one and the manner in which she

affected him both spiritually and creatively. This chapter focuses heavily on how Hennings's mysticism drove Ball toward a greater interest in mysticism and a more mystical understanding of art, politics, and the universe in general. Though it may seem to be a stretch for a study to focus so heavily on another individual while attempting to explore an already complex figure, many of those closest to Ball have noted that Hennings served an undeniably essential and pivotal role in the formation of both his spiritual and creative path, as well as in how he is remembered by scholars and historians today. This neglect of Hennings is part and parcel of the blind-spot towards spirituality in the avant-garde, which this study is attempting to correct.

#### Chapter One:

“In the Beginning was the Word” is structured chronologically, and is separated into two major sections of Hugo Ball's pre-Dada creative and spiritual evolution: His early works, which were of a soft, nearly traditional Romantic nature and were spiritually-focused in myth and fairy-tale manner utilizing Pfälzerwald, the Black Forest, used as their setting; and his darker, more risky, and intentionally blasphemous Expressionist poetry, written after he first encountered the European avant-garde and the philosophies of Nietzsche. These sections show how certain elements of these works display elements of and hope to achieve similar effect to his sounds poetry, which is often argued to be his ultimate form of poetic experimentation and expression of spirituality produced at the Cabaret Voltaire and Galerie DADA.

Analysis of these works focuses on Ball's evolving concepts of and experimentation with the word as a means of communication with the divine and how it mutually drove his spiritual and his creative progression. The chapter not only attempts to create a time line structurally for his experimentation with language, but also serves the pivotal purpose in this of giving a

significant amount of attention and focus to his writing specifically, by analyzing in depth what he felt was the most important in his creation of art, bringing the word to life.

## Chapter Two:

The primary goal of “Hugo Ball, WWI, and the birth of Dada” is to provide political and social context and commentary for this study. WWI was perhaps the most catastrophic event of the modern age and it shattered the worlds of many of the artist and writers involved with the avant-garde in Europe. Dada's very materialization was a direct response to WWI and societal responses to it. This chapter reveals and analyzes Ball's reactions to and views of WWI as his views progressed from supporter, to detractor, to anti-war activist. These transitions were complex, and often driven by inconsistent reasoning. In fact, to this day his political reactions and positions are a bit murky and contradictory: a fact which he addresses in his journals and which is studied in depth below.

Like many artists and intellectuals of his day, Ball supported the war at first as a cleansing act, which he found to be necessary for humanity to achieve the next level of spiritual evolution. However, once he fully experienced the tragedy of the war through personal loss and suffering and realized that those to blame for much of its devastation were profiting from the blood, thus further solidifying the existing corrupt social order, he pulled his fervent support of it. Yet, he did not become a pacifist, as one would expect, and in fact continued to mock many of the anti-war activist and pacifists in his writings (no Dada could be a true pacifist), until after his period of involvement with Zürich Dada. He continued to believe in the act of conflagration, in violence, in action, and in revolution. This chapter will show how the reasons behind his conflicting outlooks are purely spiritual in nature. This chapter also shows and analyzes how his

involvement with the war and his views of its role in society caused to him to embrace the concept of the need for spirituality to serve as a morally and politically structuring and governing force for humanity. Ultimately, this chapter proves how these spiritually-based and conflicting reactions to the war led directly to the formation of Dada as a movement: Without having experienced the war from both sides, supporter and objector, Ball could not have produced such effective critique and would not have participated in the artistic experimentation of the Cabaret Voltaire. His initial support of the war and his initial affinity for violence and violent rebellions was transformed into the attack on the bourgeoisie that occurred there. Essentially, Ball's spirituality and his response to war are intertwined causes for Ball's initial engagement with Dada, therefore, we cannot understand either Ball or Dada properly without acknowledging this.

### Chapter Three:

“Shared Dreams and Silent Language” reveals the place of Hennings in the life and career of Hugo Ball and the formation of Dada by focusing on the place where she is most pivotal in the movement, as a mystic poet and performer. As she was both a poet and a staunch Catholic from the time that Ball knew her, Hennings's importance in the evolution of Ball's spiritual and artistic paths, particularly during their time in Zürich, cannot possibly be over-estimated. Even Hennings's harshest critic, Richard Huelsenbeck, who credits her with Ball's abandonment of Dada, confesses that she influenced him spiritually and creatively in many different ways. However, this chapter will look specifically at how her mysticism, non-traditional Catholic beliefs, and her poetry influenced his manner of artistic expression, most specifically his experimentation with language as a mystical means of communication with the divine. It also influenced his understanding of the world as a whole. Without Hennings, Ball may never have

understood that “silent language” and “shared dreams” were a real world possibility and perhaps would not have taken such an interest in the writing of the Catholic mystics, such as Jakob Böhme who wrote extensively on chants and incantations from which Ball heavily drew in his production of the “Gadji Beri Bimba” cycle. In addition, without Hennings's example of a living, mystical work of art, he may not have discovered that diverse political, artistic, and spiritual theories could potentially merge and form one theory of both life and art, which would become the initial driving force behind Dada.

CHAPTER ONE:  
IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD

The goal of this chapter is to build solid connections between the different transmutations of Hugo Ball's creative spirituality: his obsession with the concept of the word, its mystical properties, its role as creator and agent of change, and in some cases, even the savior of mankind. John Elderfield rightly stresses these connections in his introduction to Hugo Ball's diaries, *Flight out of Time*, when he writes that "The word' was of such central importance to Ball's ideas that one might well say that his last Cabaret Voltaire performance was the summit of his active Dadaism" (xxvi). This study hopes to extend that performance and his Dada experimentation with the word, in general, to being the summit of all of the language experimentation, where all of his influenced and artistic goals melded most perfectly and produced the effects that he had been building toward his entire literary and artistic career.

This chapter traces the parallels between stages of Ball's experimentation with and use of language and symbolic sound devices and his greater creative spiritual transformations—from his days in the Black Forest as a young poet utilizing his musical training and deep connection with the harmonies of the natural world to reveal and create fantastical and mystical experiences; to his expressionist period (after his break with the Catholic Church) and his use of creative language and theatrical experimentation to "seize the moment for direct political intervention" and the unexpected word to disorder reality and dissolve logical relationships; then to his Dadaist period, where through the power of performance and complete theatre, the truly mystical powers of language and the "alchemy of the word" reached its peak of his experimentation, and then to his final conversion to Catholicism, where he would devoutly wait for the word to become flesh in the form of his lord and savior. In tracing this parallel between his different pre-Dada artistic

phases, I hope to offer a corrective showing that, while it is easy to see Ball's early poetry as Romantic melodrama, his Expressionist work as blasphemous provocation, and his Dada work as mere jest, Ball was in fact working toward a coherent project of using the word to both communicate the divine to mankind and to communicate with the divine directly. He wanted to envision and perform a true spiritual transformation through word magic. As Arp once noted, for Ball language was always “a magic treasure and connects him with the language of light and dark” (224-25).

Hugo Ball's earliest published poetry (1905-1908), not rediscovered or discussed critically until 1983 when it was reprinted in the *Hugo Ball Almanach* (Riha 64), gives readers and scholars solid groundwork for a fuller understanding and appreciation of Ball's lifelong fascination with the power of the word and his attempts to hone language into a tool for understanding of and communication with the divine. Written between the years of 1905 and 1908, it shows a young man with a keen interest in supernatural and invisible powers. Gerhardt Stienke, his earliest English speaking biographer, tells us that that these interests were cultivated separately and simultaneously by particular relatives, for each of whom he had an equal admiration: his sternly religious mother regularly imparted parables and old testament tales; his father, who had a particular fondness for tall-tales of all sorts, often coming back from long sales trips with fantastic stories of his adventures, also told folk stories and fairy tales to Hugo and his siblings as a means of family entertainment <sup>1</sup> In addition, his aunt, with whom he was particularly close, taught him Greek and Roman mythology (15).

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1 These stories had a lasting impression it would seem, as Ball would later write to his sister from Zürich that one day she would find him as a character in a fairy tale. Strangely enough, Herman Hesse, many years later, did include Hugo Ball as a main character in a fairy tale that he authored.

These stories of the unexplainable took root in Ball's highly sensitive nature, and he was fortunate to have the perfect grounds for their mingling and proliferation at his disposal: the woods of Pfälzerwald, the Palatinate Forest which to this day is one of the largest wooded areas in Europe. In his college days, he would reflect that if not for the woods his hometown would have been insufferable. However, they did not serve as mere medicine for Ball during his youth; they were his sanctuary, his muse, and the source for many of the philosophies that were later to come. It was here that Ball's unique sense of the spiritual would emerge--it would include reverence towards art and language. It was also an all-encompassing sense of what connotes the divine. This spirituality emerges in his early poetry as a central theme, expressed through a collage of mythic and folkloric creatures, Greek goddesses, and Catholic themes and figures. These poems are the beginnings of what would become a spirituality in continual flux.

Centripetal elements of the poetry of his youth, such as the fairy tale images and the innocent atmosphere come back to inform, though sometimes in a mutilated and disturbing fashion, the poetry that would prove to be the most long-lasting images of his career as a wordsmith. Karl Riha, in his essay, "I Was Born a Great Enthusiast: Hugo Ball" tells us that "Hugo Ball sought to recall his childhood and document it in a variety of contexts and in the most diverse situations of his active life" (60). He goes on to point out that Ball's diaries -- which are cited extensively throughout the many histories of Dada, as well as in this study -- frequently relate events to his childhood. He then refers to Hesse's observation that Ball's intellectual life, as well as his spiritual self, actually hinged on his ability to tap into his childhood and child-nature. Hesse stated, "He could rediscover consolation and innocence in flowers, the songs of birds, in scribbling little scurrilous drawings, the writing and reciting of phantastic verse" (qtd. in Riha 61). His original fantastic verses, therefore proves to be an essential source for the

discovery of the foundations of Ball's relationship to "things invisible" and his spiritual transformations that would unfold throughout his career. In particular, this study shall focus on his use of words as the medium for the expression of his spiritual, fantastical, and mythical sensibility.

This early poetry was published in the local paper of his hometown. A cycle of seven poems was published, two of which particularly display the thesis that Ball, even from these earliest ventures into the poetic world and before his experiences with the European avant-garde and Nietzschean philosophy, was heavily interested in the idea of the "word" and symbolic associations to the "thing-itself" and intertwined that interest with his preoccupation with "things invisible" and spiritual forces. These poems are surprisingly traditional in style, seeming mostly Romantic in nature.<sup>2</sup> They are filled with reflections on the natural world, spontaneous outbursts of emotions, odes to muses and goddesses lurking in forests, and are composed in primarily standard language and stanza structures. However, they do contain occasional elements that foreshadow Ball's future experimental preoccupations, such as ellipsis and neologisms, which will be discussed below. In addition, in poems such as "Night's Dream" and "Bagatelle, (which this study will focus on) Ball's interest in language and his belief in the power of "the word" to act as a mediating device between the divine and the terrestrial is clear and lay a foundation for concepts that come into fruition during Dada such as the "revolution of the word" or the "alchemy of the word."

In the poem "Night's Dream," Ball paints a classic scene of the artist's refuge in the

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2 Unsurprising, considering the fact that Ball would continue to praise the Romantic poets throughout his poetic career, even occasionally wondering if they (the poets and artists with whom he collaborated) would ever reach beyond the Romantics creative and revolutionary feats (*Flight* 66).

natural world and in the heavens. This is a poem that one might find in any young poet's repertoire: the poet staring out his window into the night sky and waxing philosophical on the relationship between the heavens and the earth below. However, what is interesting to note is the fact that Ball's thoughts on this relationship and the manner in which he expresses it at this point in his career is almost radically similar to and certainly foundational to his more complex and revolutionary writings later on in life.

Ball portrays the goddess Selene as a fellow artist, whose artwork, namely the night sky, soothes the speaker's soul, which is troubled by the banal human world out from which he looks. He not only draws the connection between god and artist in this moment, but he also chooses to make Selene's craft both visual and aural: "When Selene's rapidly embroidering/Silver needles sound faintly,/Upon broad blue curtain," thus making it a similar experience to that of the production of language. Even while this young, Ball connected the art of poetry to music, often reciting it aloud to revel in its inner harmonies. Later in life, particularly while in Zürich, he would create a quasi religious practice out of his belief in the power of the word when spoken.

The speaker tells us that "[v]iewing this lovely work/I always feel as if before magic,/And my soul's burdened wings/Calmly come to rest." The fact that the speaker of the poem is finding spiritual rest in consolation outside of the church and through the craft of a pagan goddess is quite unusual if Ball's early biographers, such as Steinke, are correct in their observations that he, at this time, was a strict and unwavering Catholic. Indeed, this kind of rest should only be found in the works of the lord and in a church. However, what we see instead from Ball is a certainty in his own kind of artistic amalgamation of spirituality, which is based in nature, the creations of human minds, and the mediation of nature, man, and "the invisible powers" through words and "silent speech." Though this spiritualization of nature is a familiar

aspect of the Romantic poetry which Ball emulates in some ways, the ease with which Ball combines each conflicting spiritual element is unique. I would argue that this is made possible by the placement of the “word” and other tools of the artist as the ultimate power of mediation between man and the divine or unseen forces.

Perhaps the most pivotal aspect of this poem for this particular study deals with the concept of “silent speech”; and interestingly enough, the poem also contains the only truly experimental moment of any poem in the Pfälzerwald cycle, an ellipsis: the absence of text calling attention to itself: “If it’s true that the poet/Is blessed, in hours such as these,/To hear even silent speech/And to feel it inwardly...” The ellipsis serves to clue the reader to that which is in essence the unutterable and the “secret language”, which he would build his career and his reputation attempting to convey to others. The speaker not only is blessed among men “to hear even silent speech,” but he also “feels it inwardly.” Here, the connection between the divine and the poet is built up even more strongly. The power to relate to “silent speech,” through manipulation of the Word, is very clearly here in this moment of Ball’s thinking directly related to his spirituality.

Karl Riha, in his essay “I was Born a Great Enthusiast!: Hugo Ball,” also notes this reference to “silent speech” in this poem the translator renders the German line in English “to hear silent language/and to empathize with it inwardly” (64). The short discussion is then referenced again later in the essay when the author describes Ball and Hennings’s secret names for one another; he was her Saint Anthony of Padua and she his Seahorse. He uses the reference to highlight Ball’s continual interest in the “secret language of nature” and “the secret language of animals” which appear in his works throughout his career. Riha shows how the language of the natural world guided him and showed him how to shape reality with true names and words.

However, his argument could be extended to show how this love for secret, numinous languages guide his expression of the avant-garde and his attempts to shape a new movement with this language which is truly “holy” and truly regenerative.

The idea of naming and the concept of the “word” as a symbol or referent versus the “word” as a thing in and of itself, a shape and a sound, are most clearly referred to in the poem “Bagatelle” (which means “trick”). This poem, like most of the others, shows a magical and spiritually relevant act happening outside of the domain of man and in the realms of nature, where Ball has declared dominion for the unexplainable and invisible. In this poem, we see creatures of Christian myth performing miracles and enacting mischief, which is slightly unusual in these poems. And this time the mischief is done directly with the tools of the poet himself: letters, language, words, his own name.

The next poem to be analyzed, “Night’s Dream,” foreshadows slightly different issues which will reoccur throughout Ball’s career: that of the open, fluid, and sometimes tumultuous state of his religious beliefs. “Night's Dream” opens with the speaker looking outside his window longingly to find creatures of myth there to entertain and engage his lonely mind. There he finds three angels waiting to bait him. “They breathe on the panes/and chuckle amongst themselves,/And write down/Your name.” This direct manner of interaction between the “invisible powers” is particularly interesting as they are representatives of Ball’s major spiritual influence at the time, Catholicism, acting in an entirely different role, that of fairies, pixies, and other mischievous folkloric creatures that appear throughout the Pfälzerwald cycle. Again, this hints at the fact that Ball’s feelings toward Catholicism at even this early period were not strictly orthodox, and that he was ready to begin to molding new beliefs, stories, and myths into his concepts of the divine and divine communication. Though different varieties of Catholicism had

opened themselves to folkloric and even pagan elements through to this time, Ball is still incorporating these elements in a self-directed and striking manner which merits noting and analysis.

The interaction takes place with the speaker inside of a house, a representative of civilization and culture, with the angels outside, in nature, the grounds of the mythological world where the poet “always feels as if before magic” and where transcendence of the ordinary is not only possible but expected. The dichotomy is clearly set up. Glass stands between the two worlds, simultaneously an invisible artistic medium and divider. The speaker watches the angels through the glass. The angels then use their breath, a force created using many of the same instruments from which speech is made, to create a canvass for communication with the speaker. They then proceed to write the speaker’s name, the first “word” that an individual associates himself with. The magic of this occurrence is therefore two-fold. One element is the very recognition of one’s existence by creatures of the divine and the second is the means and lesson of the ensuing communication.

This word, their breath, and the glass are all symbolic of different levels of interaction between the divine and the artist. Through these symbols the angels, who are multi-faceted representatives of the spiritual realm, and the speaker are able to recognize one another and for a moment directly interact. The speaker; however, only gets this connection for a moment. “And chuckle amongst themselves/And wipe it off.” The name is gone. The word is gone. Man is temporary. Yet, the word itself is not simply the word in form of man and the name associated with the “thing” itself is temporary. The angels then “wink diabolically, And teasingly,/And flutter onward,/The three small angels.” The speaker recognizes both his own ephemeral nature and the permanence of the word and the name itself that was just written, that can get written and

wiped away a million times, but yet remain the same in and of themselves. This recognition of the importance of the power of the ephemeral would prove to be a major theme in the works of the Dadaists at the Cabaret Voltaire. In fact, many of the tropes in Ball's early poetry (fairy tales, divine communication, conglomeration of myths and spiritualities, and impermanence) remain relevant throughout his lifetime. Looking onward to Expressionism, many of the same tropes in "Bagatelle" and "Night's Dream" are raised again in the poetry that he will compose under the influence of Nietzsche, Kandinsky, and Expressionism.

The next phase of Ball's evolution in experimentation with "the word" was spent as a member of Munich's Expressionist inner circle (1911-1916) and as a key player in the German avant-garde. This time served to both clarify and engage Ball's sense of poetry and the word as key to communication with the divine (White 66). During this period, he was intensely involved in the theater and it further drove him to the belief that if language and the performance of it could be perfected and purified it could also serve as the agent for radical social and political change. Ball was drawn to this group of artists for their belief in the necessity of intensity of feeling and extremism in art and life. They, like Ball, were influenced by Nietzschean ideals, promoting the Dionysian, or the revolutionary potential of the artist to surpass reason and human rationality to find truth (Miesel 43). While the Expressionist circle was not necessarily concerned with communication with the divine *per se*, Ball seamlessly melded his own philosophies of spirituality and the divine with their revolutionary sentiments seamlessly.

The writings of two particular figures had the largest impact on Ball's writing and thoughts on language and concepts of the "word" after leaving Pfälzerwald and attending the University of Munich in 1906: Nietzsche and Kandinsky. At this time, Ball had merely observed in his own parochial and nearly pastoral existence the effects of his creative output and word-

play on his spiritual life and relationship with the divine. He seems to have come to the conclusion that through his word crafting and creative energies he was most able to commune with invisible and divine forces, as he worked obsessively in theater and on his writing producing works whose intents he described in his philosophical writing as spiritually transformative and purifying. When he entered the wider community of artist and intellectuals, he would find complications of theory and complexities of action in his spiritual, artistic, and social life that it would take nearly a lifetime to resolve.

Ball wrote his unfinished doctoral dissertation on Nietzsche, having become obsessed with his concept of the Dionysian, or the necessary and revolutionary creative and irrational impulse of man, as well as his criticism of the truth value of language or what he called “logo-centrism.” Ball’s fascination with Nietzsche often led to spiritual and religious turmoil, due to the contradiction between his ardent Catholic upbringing and Nietzsche’s anti-religious, demonic stance. Gerhardt Steinke, Ball’s first English language biographer, spends a significant amount of time reflecting on the effects of this turmoil on Ball’s philosophical evolution and artistic production (56). However, Nietzsche’s take on the Kantian concept of “the thing-in-itself” as pure truth influenced his own linguistic experimentation.

A quick analysis of Nietzsche’s philosophies on language is all that is required to understand how and why Ball became so intensely and immediately influence fixated on him. Scholars such as Martin Gaughan and Rudolf Kuenzli have observed that Nietzsche’s linguistic influence on Ball and his experimentation with sound proves that Ball was attempting to accomplish much more with his sound poetry and other experimental works than the mere play which many formerly have believed it to be. Kuenzli observes in his study that Ball took Nietzsche’s concept of “logo-centrism” to a logical conclusion and offered the resolution that

Nietzsche never broaches. Nietzsche first presented the concept of the sign as a lie, but never offered a way in which to supersede this problem and create real truth. Ball, Kuenzli states, formed a new sign system based off of onomatopoeia, which he hoped would reveal real spiritual truth (in "The Semiotic of Dada Poetry" 75). Gaughan agrees with Kuenzli's analysis of the relationship between Nietzsche and Ball, but extends it to state that Ball did not merely work wish to create onomatopoeia, but that he was forming a system which scholars still tend to oversimplify and misunderstand. He offers no further resolution however (in "Dada Poetics, Flight out of Sign" 50-51). Further focus on the inherent spiritual basis and effects of Ball's work is necessary to clarify this issue.

Nietzsche states in "On Truth and Falsehood in an Extramoral Sense," "The thing-in-itself (for that is what pure truth would effectively be) is totally inconceivable to the creator of language... We believe we know something about the things themselves when we speak of trees, colors, snow, and flowers but possess nothing but metaphors, metaphors which are in no way adequate original substitutes" (34). To one so driven to discover a purer means of expression and natural and unhampered communication with the spiritual world, it is easy to see how a philosophy such as this could be quite seductive. During his Expressionist period, Ball would not be able to fully enact a solution to this problem; however, we will see below in his Expressionist poetry that he recognizes the problem and puts a call out for a solution. The solution to the problem of a lack of an untainted, adamic means of artistic expression, of course, would be Dada. During this period, he merely allowed his frustrations with language and its stale associations to boil out over into his themes, imagery, and his own philosophical writing.

As has been stated above, Ball's more revolutionary experimentation with language did not begin to take shape until the birth of Dada. However, he takes an interesting direction during

his Expressionist period in terms of his spirituality and the function that language serves in that spirituality. Though not orthodox, Ball was still striving to meet with the divine and, in fact, desired to bring about a larger spiritual revolution of man. Through Nietzsche, he abandoned the church, finding it to be an ineffective source of spiritual regeneration. He turned instead to art, poetry, theatre, and the creative impulse in general, as a spiritual structure. He did not entirely abandon Catholicism and maintained an interest in its figures and mythology. Gerhardt Steinke, whom Philip Mann notes openly displays a desire to paint Ball's life as a fall away from enlightenment and a subsequent climb back to Catholicism (6), described Ball's interest in Nietzsche as inherently anti-spiritual. He also states that it was the cause for Ball's first "break" with Catholicism (28); however, this study argues that it was simply another interesting evolution of spirituality which, as we saw in the poems of Pfälzerwald, was already open to the incorporation of new and even opposing elements.

Here in this state of religious liminality, Ball begins to form his creed of the necessity for linguistic freedom and renewal, which he felt would lead society to spiritual purification and enlightenment. And this is where one finds the entry of the other major figure in Ball's life who was responsible for his transformation from a kind of fantastic pastoral poet to that of a major linguistic revolutionary, Wassily Kandinsky. Kandinsky's tract "On the Spiritual in Art," plays out heavily in Ball's spirituality and linguistic experiment, as he notes that "The apt use of a word (in its poetical meaning)...will not only tend to intensify the inner harmony but also bring to light unsuspected spiritual properties of the word itself" (23). This tract's main thesis is that, as Ida Katherine Rigby puts it, "The artist was equivalent to a prophet whose destiny was to communicate the divine—the heavenly order—to the public" (39). When Ball began to collaborate with Kandinsky in 1914 on composing new philosophical tracts for the theater, he

became obsessed his concept of “the total work of art,” and it drove him philosophically until the very end of his engagement with Dada. Primarily, one might say that Kandinsky had the most effect on Ball’s ideal of “total theater:” a format for the full integration of all arts, the purpose of which is the transformation of the human psyche through a full immersion in creative spirit. Kandinsky believed that theater has transformative power as it produces creative energies that are then projected through space, potentially altering the soul of the spectator (White 71). For Ball, this concept would not fully emerge until the Galerie Dada and the Cabaret Voltaire, as his efforts in expressionist theater in Germany were never given to the chance to come into fruition, due to war and other factors; however, the artistic tools that he honed there were essential for what would come into effect in Zürich in 1916-1917 and are utilized in the poetry that he was publishing between 1911 and 1915.

Kandinsky felt that relationship between the thing itself, word, and sound required radical transformation, as well, and pushed for an art that released the inner harmony of words, through repetition and focus on its “inner” sound (145). Kandinsky, in this way, helped to further form and add nuance to Ball’s notion of the word as a key to understanding and communicating with the divine. Though he would not put these new theories fully into action until leaving Germany, we can see their beginning emergence in his Expressionist poetry, such as “The Temptation of Saint Anthony.”

“The Temptation of Saint Anthony” is an excellent example of a work by Ball produced in this liminal state in his artistic and spiritual life. As mentioned above, Ball took Anthony for his “secret name,” which he shared with only his wife Emmy, and planned a chapter in his novel *Byzantine Christianity* on the saint. For this reason some scholars, including White, feel that the piece is biographical: a “terrifying expressionist self portrait” (27). Like most of his expressionist

poetry, “The Temptation of Saint Anthony” contains many of the same symbols, themes, characters, and images as does his Pfälzerwald poetry; however, one might say that they have been put through a nightmare blender and instead of serving the function of creating scenes of artistic and spiritual harmony and inspiration that they create scenes of spiritual shock, purification, and harsh extremity. The historical Saint Anthony's temptations, as popularly represented by Bosch, were physical torture, a black mass or pagan rituals, and food and drink. Each of these elements are interwoven into the text of the poem, as well.

Ball himself wrote in the same magazine in which much of his Expressionist poetry was published, *Revolution*, that “the urge to destroy is a creative urge” (27). Ball would count himself as a follower of Bakunin in 1913 and he was intensely interested in his theories of nihilism and destruction as a necessary step of creation (Sheppard 311). This explains the purpose of much of the nihilistic and destructive themes and imagery that can be found in his work of this period. Ball believed that these images would be transformative in the mind and spirit of the reader. White, who recognizes Ball's ultimate and lofty goals for his writing but chooses not to engage them fully in his criticism of Ball's poetry, refers to Ball's “gift to create imagery that transforms human perception” through the perception of his contemporaries (27). The images are as fantastic as those in his earlier poetry--creatures of myth, folklore, and fairytale. In fact, his collaborator and dear friend Hans Leybold, who was later killed in the war, described Ball's expressionist poetry as exalted fantasy, as he creates “flying scarlet cities” and apocalyptic landscapes and then places old myth inside of them (27). Yet the desired effect of this fantasy has evolved significantly. White notes that “[t]he poet brings to expressionist art his mastery of the sudden act of language... hurtling the text into a counterfeit dream” (40). The dream is now a nightmare, from which the reader hopes to wake in a purified world--exactly what the poet

himself hopes to create:

Flying scarlet cities. Green oases. Filaments of light. Black rattling suns.

The ground quakes. A green ceiling caves in.

“There he is!” They gag me, Negro masks, a knee into my gut.

...

Running. Stomping. Festering air. Bursting light. Fixed stars in lost barracks.

And always the rumbling blows from beneath, as if arising from hell's cauldron.

And always the sulfide green, violet yellow, zigzag din of lustful strokes.

In the uproar my hands cling to a temple column.

Someone jeers: obscenity! Others jump out of windows.

A crash rips apart an entire city. The priests of Buddha on lotus chairs,

On high to the left, big-bellied and swollen, grandfathers of stupidity,

Smile and fan and wave their bellies to and fro in shrewd hands

And burst with rip-roaring Schadenfreude. (qtd. in White 213)

Ball's language play and experimentation in "The Temptation of Saint Anthony" is impossible to find in translation, as it relies on the creation of sound itself. However, Erdmute White notes his emphasis on harsh consonants throughout the text and the manner in which they build upon one another and create gagging sounds (37). Other examples of this kind of use of language to add layers of meaning and direct emotional effects upon the reader abound, such as the utilization of sharp and guttural sounds which build upon another for particular effect; however, this study will focus on the elements which are easier to explicate in translation, such as his use of syntactical fragmentation.

The clearest example of experimentation with language in this particular work of Ball's is

the manner in which he piles presented images upon images in a fragmented manner without regard to the rules of syntax. Ball shoots out images to the reader, as if he were striking or firing at them with a gun in expectation of their fall during battle: “I cock my arm to strike. Help! It does not retreat,” the poet cries out. And then the compulsory resultant attack: “Flying scarlet cities. Green oases. Filaments of light. Black, rattling suns.” His weaponry is that of the unexpected and the immediate effect upon the senses, sight and sound, before rationalization and cognition can take place. It is as if he attempting to attack the more “primitive” part of the readers mind before the civilized half can catch up. None of these images relates to the other in any rational manner, they are unfamiliar and require active use of the imagination to picture and to form relations between. Some of the images presented even actively oppose others, such as “green oases,” which is pleasant and welcoming, and “Black, rattling suns,” which are foreboding and alien.

White’s own analysis of the text concurs with this study’s analysis of “Saint Anthony” as a piece representative of Ball’s initial attempts to create language that is “pure” and true,” as opposed to what is “worn out and without sensuous power” (White 36-38) in the way Nietzsche describes as ideal in his essay “On Truth and Falsehood in an Extramoral Sense” (46). As Nietzsche argues, words must create effect on their own and immediately, without “equating what is unequal” with a system of “canonical and obligatory” tropes and metaphors (ibid 47). White notes that words in Ball's poem are appreciated for their sound and their immediate effect on the senses (37), “Running. Stomping. Festering air. Bursting light. Fixed stars lost in barracks.” The piling up of and rapid fire of unusual, disconnected, jarring, and shocking images in the midst of an already uncomfortable narrative serve as an assault on the reader’s immediate senses, as well as their rationality.

The most interesting effect of this text is its role as a spiritual biography, confession, and personal apologia for Ball's state of belief at this time. Saint Anthony and other of Ball's spiritual heroes maintained a pivotal role in Ball's life during this period, contrary to Steinke's analysis of this time as a fall from grace and religion. This poem, and others from this period, include religious figures and themes, not to mock religion or curse it, but to call for a renewal of it, after its current incarnation falls.

Ball writes in the final stanza that, "[i]n the uproar, my hands cling to a temple column./ Someone jeers: obscenity!" As White states, this line clearly refers back to Ball's obscenity trial over his poem "The Executioner" (38). It can be further inferred that this stanza serves an explanation of "The Executioner," which vividly portrays the Virgin Mary both sexually and violently. The speaker is grasping onto a temple column to stabilize himself in the uproar. He is actually attempting to grasp onto organized religion for relief; however, this is denied to him through cries of obscenity. This poem therefore portrays his attempt to maintain a certain level of connection with already established religions throughout this process of destruction and rebirth, which unfortunately fails. Even the "priests of Buddha on lotus chairs" fail to be moved by the poet's distress.

White writes of Ball's Expressionist work that the "lasting impression of these poems, despite their assault on sensibility, is one of purity, a result arrived at by the calculated sweep of extremes of emotion" (40). Yet, Ball would have one step further to go before he could achieve that true purity of expression and communication which he strove for. It would require a war, a flight from the country, and a cabaret to get there. It would also require the ability to write with words entirely of his own creation and words he had never used before that had existed from the beginning of time.

Let us return again to that introductory moment: standing before the crowd, sweat running down his forehead, throat spouting out shadows of the unimaginable, Ball has finally become his own priest, written his own secret language, and released his own inner harmonies of the word: D A D A. Reflecting upon the moment years later in his diaries (and, like several of the original Dadas, claiming he coined the word), Ball would claim that he named Dada when Dionysius the Aereopagite, a Catholic saint who spent years of his life in the desert on top of a pole in search of God, called upon him twice. For Ball, Dada was a blaring and desperate cry out to God, his own version of waiting for seven years in the desert for a moment to share a word with him, and that his poetry and performance were alchemical linguistic experimentation in search of his ear, in hopes of bringing himself and others to that mystical moment as well.

The only appropriate forum for these experiments was an artistic philosophy entirely of his own creation, as well: namely, Dada—a name that is a magical incantation in of itself. A word that one can see being endlessly written in the breath of angels and then wiped off again even to this day. It was a culmination of all the experiences of Ball's past, the innocence of his youth in Pfälzerwald and the language of nature and animals that he experienced therein; the noise, destruction, and terror of his anarchist and expressionist existence in Germany; and the harsh lines, speed, and performative experiments of the Futurists who had fascinated him as well.

In his introduction to *Flight Out of Time*, John Elderfield notes that, for Ball, “the ‘power’ of words necessitates care in their use and that art generally is something irrational, primitive, and complex that speaks a ‘secret language’” (xxvii). Ball, after his performance as the Magic Bishop, came to realize that he might not have given the care necessary to the magical, complex, and irrational “secret language” that he was dealing with. That night, he fell under the weight of the words, suffering from a nervous breakdown and spiritual exhaustion (Steinke 178). He would

flee from Zürich after this, in August 1916, and would return to open the Galerie Dada on March 18, 1917, even more determined in his conviction of artistic creation and “still hoping to work a miracle of transformation on the times” (Steinke 209). He would continue on this quest throughout his lifetime. He left Zürich again after further experimentation with sound and performance for Bern to join the inner circle of peace negotiators during WWI. After seeing that politics would not bring about the spiritual revolution that he sought, he returned finally to Catholic church, still seeking communion with “the word” and utilizing the “secret language” that he and Hennings had invented during their days in Zürich: he, her Saint Anthony, and she his Little Seahorse, for whom he wrote the sound poem “Of Flying Fish and Seahorses.”

## CHAPTER TWO

“THIS IS, WITHOUT A DOUBT, A TIME FOR HEALERS OF SOULS:”

## HUGO BALL, WWI, AND THE BIRTH OF DADA

Reading Hugo Ball's esoteric history, philosophical writings, and creative works confronts one with contradictions, such as proclamations of his distrust of Anarchism in his journals which follow quickly on the heels of letters proclaiming the virtues of the works of Bakunin or almost disturbingly blasphemous poetry written during the same period in which he takes up an intense interest in Catholic mystic writings and ritual. For this reason, his works have often been misinterpreted or skewed by scholars in an attempt to resolve these contradictions by categorizing them as Catholic, atheistic, socialist, liberal, or anarchic (Mann 3-4). Or their scholarship, as Phillip Mann puts it, often “relapses into some over-simplified, stereotyped view which [runs] roughshod over [the] intricacies of Ball's life and work” (11). For example, the greater part of Steinke's biography cuts out or brushes aside his writings during more blasphemous or anarchic periods as his psychotic breaks from Christ (84). Paradoxically, even the resurgence of interest in Dada in the 1960s and 1970s created distortions, as it encouraged scholars to focus on his Dada activities and writings without regard for his less exciting and revolutionary work. Mann also notes in his introduction that many scholars ignored Ball's earliest poetry, his expressionist poetry, and his pre-Dada socio-political writing, to the detriment of a more complete understanding of Ball's character and literary and artistic aims (8). These earlier, complicated works are also essential for a full understanding of how his Dada experimentation began, which was the result of extreme fluctuation in his spirituality, world

views, and creative philosophies.

Ball would write in his journals that he could not hold onto to any particular political or aesthetic philosophy for a significant period of time, because his fantastic, utopian tendencies would make “a fool of him” in the end (*Flight 24*), meaning that he would eventually begin to diverge or become overly idealistic and open himself to criticism. What is particularly interesting for this study is his confounding and conflicting reactions to WWI and how they came to influence the creation and direction of Dada as a movement. This chapter looks at the effects of the First World War on Ball’s creative works and philosophical leanings and how those responses eventually lead to the formation of Dadaism. Particularly, it looks at Ball's journalistic and philosophical writings, in order to give a coherent and hopefully faithful picture of the ways in which spirituality guided his response to WWI and how Ball's spiritual response to the war was vital to the evolution of Zürich Dada’s societal and political intentions. These intentions were colored by the mystical influences which Ball brought to Dada, which sought a fusion of otherworldly desires to transcend the concrete and unimaginative political parties that made up the leftist groups of Europe at the time, whom Ball found it difficult to commit to due to his often fantastic and utopian vision for the world.

Hugo Ball’s claims for the spiritual necessity of WWI were not out of the ordinary, nor did they make him an outcast in the avant-garde literary circles of Europe at the time. Both the Expressionists and the Futurists supported the war, though for reasons which may have been at odds with the general public’s arguments in favor of militaristic actions. The Expressionists believed that physical battle and the ensuing mass deaths, mass mourning, and jubilant

reconfigurations of society at fighting's end to bring about a kind of revolutionary spiritual enlightenment in the public. Ida Katherine Rigby states, "Many Expressionists welcomed the war as the cathartic cataclysm, the cleansing, apocalyptic purge that their paintings and poems had predicted (161). For example, Franz Marc held views similar to Ball on the mystical aspects of war. Writing to his sister in September 1914, he comments that, "so strong do I feel the spirit that hovers behind the battles, behind each bullet, that the realistic, the materialistic, disappears completely. Battles, wounds, movements have such a mystical, unreal effect, as though they meant something quite different from what their names signify" (*Documents* 162). Similarly, the Italian Futurists not only referred to the "belle guerre" (beautiful war) affectionately signaling their belief in its ability to serve as "the world's only hygiene," a long standing trope which the Futurists made their own, but also for its ability to produce new extremes of emotion, experience, and means of interaction with hypernatural methods of destroying and creating (*Marinetti Manifesto*). When Hugo Ball exclaims in his diaries in 1914, "War is the only thing that excites me now" (White 47), it is therefore not the bombshell that one approaching his writings from a contemporary perspective, and with of knowledge on his post-1915 activities, might initially suppose it to be.

It may seem quite incongruous for someone who ended their years well-known for their religious piety, artistic humanism, and left-wing political crusading to admire and continually support, through exhibitions and essays, a movement such as Futurism, which proudly professes a love for war and violence and defines itself by the fact that their "hearts know no weariness because they are fed with fire, hatred, and speed!" (*Marinetti Manifesto*). Hatred, violence, and

war are certainly the last things one would expect a religious and socially conscious individual to publicly condone. However, Hugo Ball did just that. In fact, his initial interest in joining the avant-garde circles of Europe was spurred by a desire further explore such Futurist philosophies and artwork after writing a review of an Futurist art exhibit that he saw in Dresden in October 1913.

It must have seemed an interesting experiment to attempt to meld this love of “fire, hatred, and speed” with his Catholic upbringing and deep-seated interests in mysticism and fantasy. Indeed, Futurism’s influence is certainly apparent in his initially enthusiastic reactions to war, not only in that Futurist thought influenced many of the basic tenants of the Expressionist circles, with whom Ball eventually began to collaborate with, but in a much more individually significant way: that of the formation of his base modernist tendencies—which would lead to both his eventual disillusionment with the lack of force in Expressionism and his drive toward the establishment of a more aggressive and provocative movement, such as Dada.

The “Manifesto of Futurism,” which Ball sought out immediately after his pivotal experience at the Dresden Futurist exhibition of October 1913, exalts all forms of aggression, violence, war-mongering (White 27). Beauties, such as those which we will see in his early-Expressionist poetry, in this manifesto, are to be found only in the most extreme ends of experience and thus, war reigns as the ultimate act of artistry:

1. We intend to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness.
2. Courage, audacity, and revolt will be essential elements of our poetry...
7. Except in struggle, there is no more beauty. No work without an aggressive

character can be a masterpiece. Poetry must be conceived as a violent act on unknown forces...

9. We glorify war—the world's only hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture. (*Marinetti Manifesto*)

When speaking of the coming generation of poets and artists, Marinetti looks forward to a group of young men who are violent, hating, aggressive, and daring—even more so than he. He tells his readers that, when their day comes,

they'll storm around us, panting with scorn and anguish, and all of them, exasperated by our proud daring, will hurtle to kill us, driven by a hatred the more implacable the more their hearts will be drunk with love and admiration for us...Art, in fact, can be nothing but violence, cruelty, and injustice. (*Manifesto*)

During this time of exciting technological advances and industrialization, the speed, noise, and aggression of everyday life seemed to these artists to be the beginning of a new generation of creative expression. Ball was drawn to these violent and extreme components of Futurist philosophy and artwork as it was something new that offered the opportunity for both social revolution and spiritual revelation, awakening, and cleansing. Ball wrote in his review of a Futurist exhibit in 1913 that “power lines howl, burn and whiz across the picture, assaulting one's brain and whipping the blood into falsetto tones...these pictures proclaim the revolution of subversion, of ecstatic disease” (qtd. in White 27). The language is already reminiscent of that found in Dada manifestos.

When one accepts the fact the fact that Ball was a supporter of WWI initially and that one

of Ball's artistic philosophies was “The urge to destroy is a creative urge,” his approval of the Futurist mission is unsurprising. Yet, many scholars misinterpret Ball's withdrawal of support for the war after the death of his friend Hans Leybold in September 1914 as a move towards pacifism (White 48). However, Futurism influenced Ball's ideals of aesthetics and artistry, even after he had rejected WWI as inhumane. This seems to show that Ball had a deeper, spiritual philosophy behind his sympathy for Futurist ideals. For example, even after leaving for Zürich, he read and enthusiastically responded to Marinetti's “Destruction of Syntax—Imagination without Strings—Words-in-Freedom.” He wrote in his journals that “you can roll up such a poem in a map...There is no language anymore, the literary astrologers and leaders proclaim; it has been invented all over again. Disintegration right in the innermost process of creation” (*Flight* 25). In this essay, Marinetti extols the modern “[d]read of quiet living, love of danger, and attitude of daily heroism” and exclaims the necessity for new methods of relaying experiences “in a zone of intense life” (*Destruction*). In Zürich, Ball would pledge himself to this task laid out by Marinetti. He clearly still reveled in and believed, at least to a certain extent in the Futurist glorification of violence, even after ceasing to be an enthusiastic supporter of the war. This seems to give further evidence to the theory that Ball would not become a staunch pacifist, until after his affair with the anarchic and aggressive Dadas.

An interesting example of Futurism's influence upon Hugo Ball's thoughts on the war is in a journal entry written soon after the founding of Dada. He writes,

The war is based on a crass error. Men have been mistaken for machines.  
Machines not men, should be decimated. At some future date, when only

machines march, things will be better. Then everyone will have the right to rejoice when they all demolish each other. (*Flight 22*)

This seems to be a direct reference to Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero's essay "The Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe," where they predict a Futurist instrument of war called "The Metallic Animal," which will be a "fusion of art and science." They proclaimed that they would "construct millions of metallic animals for the greatest war (conflagration of all the creative energies of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, which will undoubtedly follow the current marvelous little human conflagration)." This off-handed treatment of war as a "little human conflagration" is reminiscent of Ball's early response to WWI, as well. In a letter to his sister he lamented that "It's a pity that even this, too, will be a half-hearted attempt" (White 47).

Ball initially promoted the war as a solution to the problem of the unconquerable state of the "almighty bourgeoisie," against whom he often declared himself to be a warrior. Interested in the creation of revolutionary moments long before the war, as Mann states in his biography (51), early on Ball desired revolution of a meta-physical kind. That which is often associated with Mallarme, Rimbaud, and the French symbolists who desired to bring about a revolution of the word, which would alter perceptions of reality in such a way that all men would not only fully appreciate poetry, but live it and be poets themselves. This philosophy, forming the crux of the goals of Ball's total theatre, was by extension, of course, socially and politically conscientiousness, but preoccupations with ideas of a more transcendental nature, occluded any direct or serious associations with radical political groups of the time (*Flight 24*). As stated above, Ball desired more than worldly change. This required the extremes of Futurism and by

extension the extremity of war.

Yet, as did many pre-war Expressionists, Ball expounded his ideals of art's importance only upon entering life with fervency and a sense of radical political goals (*Flight 7*). Ludwig Rubiner, a collaborator with Ball, wrote in an article, published in 1914 in *Die Aktion*, that "Painting does not exist so that paintings will be made....a true exhibition is a polemic, and politics means the greatest talent...Painters, know that you are spiritual beings or leave us alone!...Painter, you have a will: you topple the world; you are a politician!" (*Documents 79*). This kind of call to intellectuals and artists was not uncommon during this period. Many artists, including Ball, tried their hand at effecting political and social change and, like Ball, worked it into their own creative practices. Many more, even experiencing firsthand the devastating violence of war, believed that the ends would be worthwhile for humanity in the long run. For example, Franz Marc wrote from the front lines:

For several years we have been saying that many things in art and life were rotten and done for; and we pointed to new and better possibilities. Nobody was interested! But we didn't know that the great war would come with such terrible suddenness and, pushing words aside, sweeping dirt and decay away to give us the future today. Should the war bring us what we desire, and in proportion to our sacrifices—this fantastic equation leaves us quite breathless (160-164).

This is the same general sentiment that was held by the rest of the Blue Rider group, which Ball associated with during this period. However, aside from supporting the war, more specific social and political stances do not seem to have been universally agreed upon in artistic circles.

Ball's Expressionist poetry and artistic and intellectual discourses with the individuals surrounding the magazines *Die Aktion* and *Der Revoluzzer* show that he was interested in, but not entirely convinced of anarchist and socialist philosophies. As Philip Mann points out, this inability to be convinced of anarchism and socialism often seems due to, not only a distrust in the ability of the common man to guide himself spiritually, but also a never fully developed trust in the spirit-awakening abilities of the irrational and chaotic. The spiritual was to be the guide-map for the masses to follow: "With Demonic glee, Ball and Leybold reveal the bankruptcy of modern life and its complete lack of spiritual values" (74). These tendencies towards radicalism, direct action, and his belief in the necessity for some guide-map for the public strongly foreshadow his initial excitement at the thought of a war, which would open up new possibilities for the restructuring and reawakening of society.

Ball's Expressionist poetry bears many resemblances to his earlier Pfälzerwald poems, which lends to them a style that is quite distinct from other Expressionist poets of the era and shows Ball's early inclinations towards the style which would later be dubbed Dada. His Expressionist poetry displays an interest in the fantastical, mythological, religious, and natural world, while simultaneously focusing obsessively on the aspects of life, and the world in general, which are tainted, disturbing, grotesque, and explicitly erotic. This conscious integration of the folkloric and religious in an apocalyptic or somehow degenerate context is quite unique to Ball's work. However, like many Expressionist works of the pre-war era, they are showcases of a society wallowing in a state of putrefaction, awaiting the next step in the alchemical process: ablation. It was resoundingly clear to many Expressionists before the onset of World War I that

this next step was soon to come and would be exalted as an opportunity for the nation to be reborn into a classless society. However, the very different Futurist appeal for war, whose praise of the act of war by no means necessitated spiritual regeneration, and its creed of mechanical action, speed, destruction, and loud excitement is apparent Ball's Expressionist poetry, as well.

An excellent example of this is Hugo Ball's poem "The Executioner," which first appeared in the journal *Der Revoluzzer* in October, 1913. It is a striking example, both in its reception by the public and its style and content, of the Expressionist desire for the cataclysmic moment of world-restructuring catastrophe. It also clearly displays Ball's distinct personal emphasis on the centripetal role that he believed spirituality would play when the moment of catastrophe arrived. Ball's abilities to combine elements of the grotesque with those of child-like playfulness are impressively, and disturbingly, displayed within this poem. The desired effect of the enmeshment of opposites, aside from the allusion to the second stage of the alchemical process, is to display the pervasiveness and extreme perversion in the natural order of society and the necessity of an equally extreme and pervasive act of ablution.

The first lines of "The Executioner" introduce a speaker who could just as easily be addressing a sexual partner as one of his condemned.

I roll you on your red blanket.

I am at work, skillful as a butcher.

Tables and benches stand like blinking knives

The syphilitic dwarf is poking in pots full of jelly and good. (209)

The references intentionally refer to necrophilia. This theme continues until poem's end and then

sinks into even deeper grotesqueness by adding heavy allusions to sadistic rape, torture, and erotic blasphemy—all while maintaining a tone of child-like wondrous beauty through sensuous nature images. The second stanza follows with:

Your bent body dazzles and shines like the yellow moon.  
 Your eyes are wanton little moons  
 Your mouth has burst into lewdness as in the Jewess's need  
 Your hand's a snail that dwelled in the blood-red gardens  
 full of grapes and roses. (209)

The reader is informed by the title and the disturbing references to knives and butchers in the opening stanza that this poem is about an execution, either metaphoric or literal. Yet, the reader could mistake this quatrain for a poem about a love affair only mildly tainted by cynical descriptors and his budding anti-Semitism<sup>3</sup>—wanton eyes, lewd mouth, and snail-like hands. The oddities of this stanza, while thought-provoking and mildly discomforting, do little to prepare the reader for the images and action of the third, penultimate, and final stanzas.

“Help me Holy Mary! From your womb sprang the fruit./Be blessed! But a fiery sap snakes down my legs” (209). What this plea to the Heavenly Virgin could be in reference to is somewhat unclear, perhaps purposefully invoking the charge of incomprehensibility made by the judge of the poem's censorship case in 1913, but more likely enforcing the ambiguity caused by simultaneous references to murder and coitus. If it is found that the plea is asking for deliverance, the confusion upon reading the last line of the third stanza more deeply entrenches

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<sup>3</sup> Which would make itself fully apparent in his 1919 attack on German culture *Critique of the German Intelligentsia*.

the reader in this disconcerting ambiguity with the metaphor likening the speaker's fingers to "ten greedy carpenter's nails" that drives into "Christianity's tattered idols" (209). The speaker is therefore left even a little uncertain as to whether the "sap" referenced to in the second line is blood or semen and whether the fingers are being used to murder or sexually penetrate. The levels of perversity in this poem, already in the opening stanzas, are multifold and pervasive enough to thoroughly sully sexuality, religion, and the natural world.

The penultimate stanza serves to expand upon the fantastical reference in the opening stanza of the "syphilitic dwarf," introducing hosts of angels, showers of gold, and heavenly chants—all, of course, putrefied by being "gurgled through apostle's and shepherd's bones" (209). Thus completing his perfect circle of perversion and purification, Ball universalizes his narrative in the final stanza, bringing together "Heathens, Turks, Kafirs, and Mohammedans" to dance nude "in deranged ecstasy" (209) and introduces the final destructive and purifying act:

And then the angels alighted on our globe  
 And brought with them on fiery plates darkness and suffering.  
 There was no mother bud, no bloodshot eye without hope.  
 Every soul stood open to childhood and miracles. (209)

The only unambiguous moment in the poem comes at its very end. After the final paradoxical image of angels alighting on the world to bring "fiery plates of darkness and suffering" where one would be expecting gracious salvation, the reader finds a disturbing resolution in the image of hopeful tears and souls universally "open to childhood and miracles" (209).

The cause of police confiscation of the first issue of *Revolution*, "The Executioner" is a

poem perhaps less shocking for its images and content than its surprising abstruseness—which, strangely enough, ultimately saved the poem from censorship. White claims that this poem anticipates Dada consciousness--reading it as a provocation, using “quirky” religious metaphors and scornful of public sensibility (31). White also claims that letter written to the censor’s office against “The Executioner” may well have been written by Ball himself, making the poem, its publication, reception, and trial the quintessence of the Dada act, as well as a provocative move which epitomizes the journal *Revolution’s* loose promotion of all things “revolutionary in some way or another,” (33) as it is unconcerned with hard politics. Instead it is metaphysically and spiritually revolutionary, as it calls for the destruction of the established religion and aesthetic ideals in order for a new form of spirituality and artistic appreciation to be birthed in the newly cleansed souls and eyes of the spectators in the world of the poem.

The spiritual and metaphysical revolution is also exemplified in Ball’s 1913 poem “The Sun.” This poem begins by introducing the reader to a verdant world which is presented in an ambiguous fashion. It could be interpreted as either a positive or a negative reality, good or evil. The speaker’s emotional point of view is unclear. He makes observations using terms which convey little in the way of negative or positive feelings towards each image or action. “A stone makes a speech./Trees in Greenbrand./Escaping islands.” The next stanzas convey more of a sense of the intrusion of man in the natural world, “My legs stretch out over the horizon. A carriage bangs/away over them.” The speaker continues on to prophesy the destruction of the material world of man: their church towers and their town, yet their “front gardens full of crocus and hyacinth will blare/like the time of children’s trumpets.” The speaker then makes his

commentaries on the war through lightly coded language: “But in the air there is a counterblowing of crimson and egg-yellow/and bottle-green.” These colors, particularly in the context of being written by an Expressionist poet, are clearly symbolic; therefore, when this poem is read in its historical context as looking forward to a global conflagration, crimson could signify blood, egg-yellow could signify either after-birth or mustard gas (as mustard is often associated with yellow, though mustard gas in its purest form is clear) and green bottles could signify grenades. By using colors to signify these items, as opposed to using their standard signifiers/names, Ball is perhaps seeking to evoke deeper reactions and reflections on the nature of the signified items, thus building upon Expressionist painting philosophies which also attempt to evoke the deeper nature of things, as opposed to painting precisely how they “look” to the viewer. Ball could also already be attempting to escape the tainted relationship between the signifier and signified. He goes on to call this conflagration “A very fragile fencing of children’s banners”—a strange and unsettling way to describe war, particularly one which would go on to become the most destructive in modern history, though both sides predicted it would be over before Christmas. Ball is clearly setting up his ideal of the impending spiritual warfare in this first section of the poem: the natural world looks on, as the mechanical human world awaits destruction.

Ball’s next lines seem out of place, but are pivotal: “Tomorrow the sun will be loaded on a big-wheeled wagon/and taken to Caspari’s art gallery. A beast-headed negro . . . will hold fifty white/bucking asses like those yoked to wagons at the building of the pyramids”. These lines can be read as Ball’s criticism of bourgeois greed, corruption, and their mutilation of the natural

world, which they then call “art.” It simultaneously serves as an image of further destruction of the world. Here we see the call for aesthetic revolution, as well. The last stanza comes as a shock, after the strange images introduced next: “A crowd of bloodbright people will clot the street: midwives and/wet nurses,/ invalids in wheelchairs, a stiling crane, two female St Vitus dancers . . .” Yet again, the reader is left with conflicting options for interpretation of these images. “Bloodbright people” could be anything from those flushed with happiness, to those covered in blood from war, to those given grace through Jesus’s blood sacrifice, or even an anti-Semitic assertion. The latter would seem to follow if simply paired with the image of invalids, who could represent the scores of mutilated young men returning permanently crippled from war, yet what about the wet nurses, midwives and the “two female St. Vitus dancers” (ecstatic dancers inspired by supernatural powers)? What we see in this stanza is the clash of opposites, forming a new whole—the new sun, which Ball calls for in the final stanza. The people are awaiting their final state of transformation.

The crowd in the final stanza, the mix of the near-dead and mutilated and the life-givers and everyday burghers, come together in a confused mass of what seems to the speaker of the poem to be joyous celebration. The speaker calls, “I can’t stop myself: I’m full of joy . . . I want /to make a new sun. I want to strike two together”. This coming together of opposites into the formation of a new world is both transformational, as well as mystical, as the concept of the unification of opposites in order to bring about the transmutation of matter is rooted in the magical and alchemical tradition, as well as the revolutionary action called for by nearly every other avant-garde artist in Europe. Yet, when the action came and the war unfolded, only those

with the most ardent affection for meaningless destruction could maintain a pro-war stance.

However, as stated above, at the war's beginning, many looked forward to participating in the great Kehraus, which can be defined as “the sweeping clean of the materialism and complacency that had stifled the spirit of man” (Patterson 22). Ball's support of the war was inspired by nationalism, nor was it based in an ardent belief in any political system. As shown above, Ball supported the war because he believed that it could be spiritually transformative. Yet Ball came to see that the war was but another sham perpetrated by the bourgeoisie. Ida Katherine Rigby wrote that many artists came to realize that “[m]oney was the lubricant of the whole murdering war machine” and those getting rich from it easily stayed out of its grasp “celebrating ‘dark, devilish triumphs’” (161).

When Ball traveled to the front in 1915, what he witnessed there completely altered his attitude and, upon his return, his philosophical interests and creative output would reflect a much more determinedly political mindset:

I have been at the border for two weeks. In Dieuze I saw the first soldier's graves. For Manonvillers had just been shelled, and in the rubble I found a tattered Rabelais. Then I came here to Berlin. You know I would really like to understand, to comprehend. It is the total mass of machinery and the devil himself that has broken loose now...Everything has been shaken to its very foundations. (*Flight* 10)

At the time of writing this, he was still not entirely convinced that the war was unwelcome. In fact, he published a series of war photos upon his return that attempted to present the war in a

more friendly light to the public (*Sixteen Items*, Sheppard, 363). These photos seem to show that Ball believed in the war for reasons that were perhaps even more deeply entrenched in his consciousness than is apparent from his journals. The certainty that the war would not bring about enlightenment or revolution and that it was yet another product of social disintegration and economic stratification did not arrive until the war-related suicide of his best friend, and probable lover, Hans Leybold. Yet, even then, he would not fall in line with his pacifistic compatriots. In his journal he would mock the staunchly pacifist circle associated with *Die Aktion* (*Flight 11*). Ball did not believe in pacificism as a general practice but embraced passionate and inspired action to create effects. Ball also became less metaphysical and more straightforwardly aggressive toward the establishment at this time. He became more determined to bring about the spiritual and aesthetic revolution that he saw as necessary and was still willing to use violent means to bring it about.

As would the descendents of the Cabaret Voltaire in Berlin, Ball became disenchanted with Expressionism, seeing too little in the way of direct political action. He would write later,

I am not taken with the idea of revolution as art for art's sake. I want to know where a cause is heading...something is rotten and senile in the world. The economic utopias are the same way. There is a need for a widespread conspiracy of youth to defend something noble. (*Flight 22*)

Ball frequently claims in his journals (which, it is good to remember, were significantly edited) to distrust anarchism, yet this is just one of many occasions where Ball struggles with his ability to commit to any single spiritual, artistic, and political revolutionary cause, as he perpetually has

trouble intermingling his spiritual and political creative drives and philosophical beliefs. Yet, he advocated anarchism and anarchist thinkers such as Bakunin even after his disenchantment with Dada. However, he never questioned the idea that art and writing would play a role in bringing it about.

After his experiences on the front, Ball returned to Berlin enthusiastically believing in the power of art, theatre, and poetry to definitively change the power structure of society through spiritual enlightenment. Yet, after the death of Leyboyld, he no longer saw WWI as a last ditch effort on the part of the universe to cleanse the stagnated class structure of Europe and put an end to the Wilhemian era in Germany—but instead as a desperate expression of the need for a new method of creating and communicating and the destruction of the old. This creation and destruction wouldn't involve nations, emissaries, or battlefields, but would bleed through nation lines through an emigrant clique, ready to perform nightly battles in a smoky cabaret. Thus spake Dada. As war failed to provide Ball with the transformation that he desired, he could only turn to art.

Ball would reflect later in his diaries, “To make literature with a gun in hand had, for a time, been my dream” (*Flight* 161). He believed that the artists and creators were to blame for allowing the war to happen: “If language really makes us kings of our nation, then without doubt it is we, the poets and thinkers, who are to blame for this blood bath and who have to atone for it” (*Flight* 29). He also believed that those poets and thinker who glorified the war were more than capable of atoning for it. For example, as mentioned above he still regarded Marinetti as a genius of literary experimentation. He also still believed in the powers of the irrational, the

demonic, the destructive, the shocking, and the chaotic—all of those elements that one associates with war. However, he also began to embrace Oscar Wilde's belief in the necessity of structure, ritual, and spiritual leadership. It would be this clash that would make the Cabaret Voltaire's brief life as dynamic and controversial and the continued analysis of Ball's performances and creative output from around this time as diverse and contradictory as it remains to this day.

The conflict and vacillation described above in Ball's political, artistic, and spiritual beliefs begins to form a philosophy in his collaborative literary manifesto with Richard Hülsenbeck. It was performed and featured in the program for a memorial service for soldiers killed in combat on February 12, 1915. This immortalizes the moment that Ball sheds his former intellectual belief in transcendental revolution and war for an action stance, wherein he and other artists that he reveres lead the revolution and battle of the spirit towards the ideals which they share. In the very center of the manifesto lies Ball's keystone: "We will take over spiritual leadership" (White 222) and, through that spiritual leadership, they will be able to win the war.

Though they would eventually come to embrace pacifism, Ball and Hülsenbeck make a quite pointed jab at everything that claims to be such in this manifesto: "We will make war against eggheads...[also: people associated with *Die Aktion*]" (222). Instead, they use war energy and war language for the cause of their own battles. They declare their cause in the opening of the manifesto and in the same move begin to form alliances with groups that would eventually coalesce within the walls of the Cabaret Voltaire: "We want to demonstrate to the press and to the public at large that even during the war there are individuals who are carrying on the cause of the 'youngest' literature" (222). Their definition of the youngest literature was even younger and

more true than Expressionism, Futurism, and Cubism. They spar against just about everything: “Naysayers we shall be” (222). They join the revolutionaries, but only the revolutionaries that refuse to associate themselves with political parties and organized sects: “We join the party of iconoclasts and radicals of every stripe” (222). Clearly, this is a call to arms that Dada and the Cabaret Voltaire were able to answer for Ball: an outlet for unorganized, primitive drives, impulses, explosions of extremes in emotion, passion, and creativity. Here is where one can see Ball separate from, though not reject, Futurism, Expressionism, and politics, in order to establish for himself a new method, or perhaps more appropriately an anti-methodology, to bring about the spiritual revolution, the ultimate creative act for a new world to be born.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### SHARED DREAMS AND SILENT LANGUAGE

The lives of Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings were deeply entwined, from the time of their initial flight from Germany to Zürich in 1915 onward, through his death. They were constant companions and, equally important, trusted collaborators. Richard Huelsenbeck even once wrote,

It is impossible to measure the influence this frail girl had on Hugo Ball. She helped him toward qualities that fascinated him. Emmy was one of the few women who do not take the world literally. Under her influence, everything is transmuted into relationship, expectation, spirituality. She was a true angel, although she didn't have the least hint of wings...One thing is certain: Hugo was so strongly influenced by Emmy that one cannot love his writings unless one fully and deeply understand this influence. (16)

For this reason, it is essential that this study of the spirituality expressed within Hugo Ball's artistic work also analyze the spiritual aspects of the work of Emmy Hennings and the ways in which her spirituality and mysticism shaped his.

Many of those who find themselves studying and appreciating the work of the artist, poet, cabaret performer, chanteuse, dancer, and painter Emmy Hennings were introduced to her through the work of Ball. This is perhaps what she herself hoped for, as she spent the latter years of her life promoting him tirelessly and altering and hiding from her autobiographies any aspect

of her life which would not coalesce with the Catholic mythology which she painstakingly constructed out of their lives together, a fact which she reluctantly admitted in a letter to Herman Hesse, her closest friend after the death of Ball (qtd. in Weinstein 37). For example, Hennings preferred to keep from history most of the creative work produced during her long career as a member of Munich and Zürich's avant-garde inner circles, as it would unfortunately also reveal a long career as a morphine addict, prostitute, and hustler, who frequently promoted free-love, anarchy, and social revolution, and spent several stints in prison, at least once for forging passports for draft dodgers. For this reason, it seems that Emmy Hennings avoided individual artistic fame in favor of becoming a footnote to Hugo Ball's career.

I open on this note, not only to provide background to Hennings's career, but also because her rewriting of her life to appear more conventionally religious and promote the Catholic legacy of Hugo Ball serves as an appropriate touchstone for the topic of this chapter, which is Emmy Hennings's unique performance of her spirituality in her life and in her artwork and how it influenced the mystical and spiritual qualities of Hugo Ball's own creative works. In this task, I will focus on her period of involvement with Zürich Dada, a period which is unfortunately ill-documented.

Despite the resurgence of interest in the female Dadas with the publication of books such as *Women in Dada*, *Dada's Women*, and *Women in Dada and Surrealism*, and new sources of information on Hennings's early life with the publication of formerly unavailable journals of her peers, such as her close friend and lover, famed German anarchist Eric Müsham, few English language scholars have taken up the task of analyzing Hennings's contribution to the mystical

nature Zürich Dada. Even Richard Sheppard, a revered scholar of Dada who has written extensively on the topic of mysticism and Dada fails to note Hennings's contributions.

Despite the fact that her peers, such as Richard Huelsenbeck and Hans Arp, regarded her as the most mystically-inclined member of Zürich Dada and despite the fact that it was Hennings who was held at fault for Ball's movement toward a more “mystical” understanding of the world and his ultimate defection to Catholicism, Sheppard inexplicably gives Hennings neither agency nor voice in this matter. When discussing the Catholic mystic writer, Jacob Böhme and his influence on Ball, he ignores the fact that Hennings almost certainly introduced Ball to his and other works of Catholic mysticism, and in fact makes a claim that that her readings from Catholic mystic texts at the fourth Dada Soiree were “almost certainly prompted by Ball,” despite that fact her interest in Catholic mysticism far predated his own (273), which is probably due to the basic sexist disinclination to credit Hennings as being more than muse.

Earlier histories of Dada, such as that of Kenneth Coutts-Smith, published in 1970, often mentioned Hennings as a side-note (9), despite the fact that she was called the “Star of the Cabaret Voltaire” by the Zürich Chronicle, had paintings hanging in the Galerie Dada alongside Kandinsky and Arp, and was largely responsible for founding the Cabaret Voltaire. In fact, you can rarely find her name in their indexes. However, ignoring her contributions at this point is unforgivable; particularly in a matter, which I will argue, she had such significant influence over: that of the avant-garde Spirituality which imbued those legendary early Dada performances.

## II: Hennings as Mystic and Catholic

According to her contemporaries, Hennings's spirituality was most apparent in her general manner of interacting with the world and the "being" she presented in her art. Most often referred to as a mystic by such peers, she seems to have believed that her life on earth was not just reflection of or a step toward her infinite spiritual life, but that they were in fact one and the same. God and spiritual connections to god were to be found in the everyday world, so long as one is capable of seeing them. Hennings was first introduced to mysticism, according to her biographies in 1906, when she was staying in a farmhouse in Silesia before the birth of her daughter and there discovered the writings of the seventeenth century mystic Jakob Böhme (Steinke 101). Jakob Böhme, like many mystics, believed that in order to know God one must learn to see unity where there are apparently contradictions. Böhme did so even to the point of risking appearing heretical by promoting the concept that God and Satan are one in the same. Hennings seems to have adopted this same philosophy in both her religious practices and in her world view in general.

Hennings was a woman of contradictions who often seemed to exist in two worlds at once. Sabine Werner- Birkenback remarks in an essay on her writings from prison that this makes her a difficult individual to study in anything resembling a linear manner (172). Despite the fact that she wrote on and took an interest in politics and social criticism, when reading accounts by her male contemporaries she represented, for many, the furthest thing from worldly concerns: mysticism and holy fairy tales. She was described as an embodiment of childlike naiveté and purity, yet Ball relied on her to managed day to day finances of the Cabaret and the Galerie Dada and occasionally make ends meet by working as a prostitute. She was a poet and a

writer, but she and Ball claimed that their primary means of communication was not words, but instead a “secret” and “silent” language and shared dreams. This affinity for contradictions resonates with and perhaps emanates from Eastern mystical traditions, which see the balance and unification of opposites as necessary, both universally and individually, for harmony and enlightenment to exist, or as Annie Besant explains in her book *Mysticism* to obtain “the direct knowledge of God,” which is one of the most universal aims of the mystic tradition (11).

“Direct knowledge of God,” also requires the crossing of boundaries and the experience of extremes of existence. These are two other elements and major themes in the life and art of Emmy Hennings which are inherently mystical and contributed heavily to the spiritual atmosphere of early Dada happenings. Both of these elements; however, are directly tied with Hennings's affinity for embodying and enacting contradictions: the most obvious of which being her practice of Catholicism while living what could be termed an artistic and somewhat debauched bohemian lifestyle.

Heubert Van de Berg's translations of Müsham's journals it show that even in her conversion, Hemmings displays the conflict that she dealt with in leading a life of two opposing mystic spiritualities, one Catholic and the other intuitive and Dionysian in nature. She managed, though not without significant pains to lead a bohemian lifestyle, obviously believing in and practicing many of the central tenants of the most radical ilk of anarchists and expressionist artists and thinkers in Munich, while also having a deep and abiding faith in the Catholic tradition. The pain of carrying on these conflicting lifestyles was, in fact, occasionally too much for her, occasionally causing her to break down. About a week after her initial conversion,

Müsham writes,

Bolz just left. He tells horror stories of Emmy's condition which has apparently deteriorated into complete religious madness. She condemns me and almost all of her other friends as heretics and hallucinates about the devil trying to drag her off...(qtd. in Van de Berg 79)

The way that she melded these opposing traditions was by consistently maintaining a mystic sensibility in all of her practices and interactions with the world, which necessitate being liminal in all things and crossing, breaking down, and blurring binary relationships. This manner of interacting with the world, as well as the psychic and spiritual dissonance which she occasionally felt is all apparent in her creative works, as well.

What this study refers to as Hennings's "avant-garde spirituality" is as easily found in her poetry as it is in accounts of her performance of day to day life. However, her poetry is, unfortunately, all but ignored by scholars of the avant-garde, even those particularly interested in the mystic aspects of early Dada. Her artistic take on the popular mystic traditions of the period is apparent in her themes of transcendence; death and other forms of worldly escape towards salvation or enlightenment, such as drugs and dreams; the combining of opposites to find unity; and the blurring of and crossing of boundaries. Those scholars who do study her work, such as Rugh, Weinstein, and Van de Berg, unfortunately do not associate these themes with her spirituality or mystic tendencies. Weinstein notes, for example, that many of her poems explore the theme of separation of mental life and physical body (57); however, when seen through a spiritual lens, it becomes clear that these examinations are actually of spiritual release from the

physical body, rather than release from mental activity.

An example of an expression of her “avant-garde spirituality” and her drive to examine ideas of transcendence and spiritual release is her poem “Dancer,” which reveals her complex relationship with death. The speaker says that her constant closeness to death both “keeps me from my many sins” and gives her reason to live life to its fullest, to seek kisses and to dance until she is out of breath. In addition to displaying many of the mystic tropes mentioned above, this interest in and feeling of closeness with death, to the point where it is a comfort and a guiding principle of her life, has a basis in the mystic tradition, which often glorifies the communion of the life and death and views death at the moment of transcendence, when one is finally totally given to the higher power.

Her poem “Morfin,” which was published in the only issue of the journal *Cabaret Voltaire*, is often interpreted as merely a poem about drug use written in the Expressionist vein, which is how Rugh and Weinstein both interpret it; however, a close analysis from a spiritual perspective shows that opens it to quite a different reading.

We wait for the last adventure

What do we care about the sunshine?

High towered days tumble down

Intro restless night—Prayer in Purgatory

We no longer read the daily mail

Only occasionally we smile quietly into the pillows.

Because we know everything, and slyly  
We fly back and forth in a fit of shivering.

Men may hurry and strive  
Today the rain falls more darkly  
We drive ceaselessly through life  
And in sleep, bewildered, pass away...(qtd. in Rugh 19)

“Morfin” opens with the statement, “We wait for the last adventure” and immediately, the speaker wonders whether or not they are included in the “we;” who exactly the “we” is that is being referred to. Though left ambiguous, clarification is given little by little throughout the poem. “The last adventure” most likely refers to the experience of bodily death. The reader understands that “we” don't all necessarily wait for death with anticipation, as the speaker of the poem seems to, and as the title of the poem “Morfin” (not actually a word in any language) connotes morphine usage and also possibly a state of change or transmutation, the reader may believe that the speaker’s “we” refers to users of morphine or drug users in general, who have tired of life. Yet, whoever “we” is at this point (though it is an issue which is further analyzed below), by the next line the reader recognizes that “we” choose darkness over light, and therefore, the theme of the distinguishing and the disappearance of binaries is set simultaneously with the recognition that the poem will be addressing issues related to the darker side of Morphine addiction and whatever that state might be symbolic of. When speaking of “sunshine,” it is also likely that the speaker is referring to the light of god and choosing, or being forced to

choose between the comforts of otherworldly darkness over the difficulty of facing God's direct gaze.

The next line sets up the contrast between this state and that of preoccupation with earthly existence, as she pronounces that “High Towered days tumble down/ Into restless night—Prayer into Purgatory.” Here the reader confirms the metaphorical dichotomy between light and dark and holiness and worldliness. The phrase “high towered days” is possibly a reference to the Tower of Babel, where all languages were understood (this would be extremely relevant at any given time one might hear at the Cabaret Voltaire a minimum of five languages being spoken); however, it is more directly a reference to disintegration of an overly ambitious society into a state of anxiety far from the light of God. Not only this, but prayer has likewise degenerated into purgatory. In other words, the means of communication with the divine has fallen into a state of numbness, stagnation, and uncertainty, much like the general state of blissful, timeless numbness that an addict feels—or a nation of people who have traded in a hopeful state of industrial revolution and nationalistic pride for a state of horrific war losses and technological terror. I find that two readings exist simultaneously in these lines, a universal reading where society is falling out of God's graces and an individual reading, where the speaker is seeking a colder, darker, more comfortable relationship with the Godhead than one where she is ambitiously striving for his direct approval.

The second stanza begins by stating, “We no longer read the daily mail,” signifying the intentional disconnect or lack of concern with day to day life that both a drug addict and a mystic would typically show, in favor of concern with issues of the “other world”, be it the dark comfort

of closeness to death and “purgatory” or the silently longed for life in “sunshine” of the holy. But instead “We”, “Only occasionally smile quietly into the pillows.” Accepting the darkness and their state of perpetual sleep and dream, “because we know everything, and slyly,” an odd exclamation to find in the midst of a poem, which an unfamiliar reader or listener, might until this point have found to be purely lament-filled and bleak. Such a reader might also call into question the seriousness of the tone, suspecting irony, yet this does not need to be the case. The speaker, the “we” accepts her state of darkness and therein finds the same infinite that one does in the light, she embraces her disconnect from the world and knows that she can still obtain wisdom and enlightenment at these depths, at least more so than those who foolishly continue to build towers destined to tumble.

Hennings was the not the first and certainly not the last to make such an indirect claim that drug use can lead to knowledge of the infinite. The next line pushes this metaphor even deeper, as she exclaims, “We fly back and forth in a fit of shivering,” associating the “we” with witches of old, whose flights were understood to be psychic, spiritual, and often assisted by consciousness expanding drugs. This association with witchcraft, popularly understood to be the realm of the feminine, when coupled with the next line, “Men may hurry and strive,” is the first hint that the reader is given to the “We” of the poem being a distinctly feminine voice. Perhaps revealing some other layer to the kind of relationship that Hennings imagined being possible between women and the godhead, particularly, that perhaps women, maybe even particularly creative and powerful women, are destined to have colder, darker relationships with the divine.

The connection between the line, “Men may hurry and strive,” and the one which follows

“Today the rain falls more darkly” is ambiguous, but the only reasonable conjunction to be implied is “yet,” the conjunction which displays the hopelessness and powerlessness and that permeates the mood of this stanza, yet does not override the message of “Morfin.” Hennings wishes to show here that while men strive and rush to build towers and spend their days in the sun of an approving God, the war still rages and evil dictates the actions of masses, “Yet, the rain falls more darkly.” Hennings herself chooses to embrace this darkness and situate herself in it, to transmute it through sleep and dreams, to smile in her pillow as she makes love to it. And fly through it to see its beauty and move towards its escape. It is a dangerous road, the modus operandi of junkies, artists, and madmen, but Hennings argues that you can find God here, as well, at least one half, her half—the darkness which is mutually dependent upon the light.

She then asserts, “We drive ceaselessly through life,” and it seems a line too similar to the first in the stanza. How are “We” differing here from “Men” who strive and hurry to no avail? A direct question is now being raised about this dichotomy about the borders between men/women, addicts/non-addicts, artists/non artists, success/failure, light/dark, life/death. Yet the only real border that exists here is a simple one, Hennings and not Hennings; the only real border that has ever existed from the beginning of time, you and not you. “We”/you “drive ceaselessly through life.” Hennings is telling us that this is the only end. “Men” strive and hurry to no avail. “We” merely need to live until it comes to an end: “And in sleep, bewildered, pass away...” Finding the dark comfort of pillows and the enlightenment to avoid worldly concerns such as the daily mail and building towers.

Huelsenbeck later remarked, “She [Hennings] helped him [Ball] toward qualities that

fascinate him...Under her influence, everything is transmuted into relationship, expectation, spirituality” (49). Indeed, for Ball, Hennings did exist in another world. She existed always in the realm nearest to death and transcendence. She was his creature of the sea, who spoke a secret language that only he and fish could understand. It was the mystical understanding of the world and the way in which she utilized that understanding in her creative work that Ball fell most heavily under the influence of.

Ball's otherworldly views of her are made clear in a couple of passages in his (heavily expurgated) journals. For example, his adoration of her resemblance to and proximity to death is romanticized in an early entry:

The skull: that is what a girl is called in the Apache language. The outline of her skeleton shines through her worn features. I once used to carry a skull around with me from city to city; I found it in an old chapel... They painted the cheekbones with roses and forget-me-nots...I was really madly in love with the hundred and thirty-three year old girl and could hardly part from her...the living head here reminds me of that dead one. When I look at the girl [Hennings], I want to take some paint and paint flowers on her hollow cheeks.” (32)

To Ball, Hennings was mystical in her fluid movement between worlds and in her wise silence, which caused him to liken her to a sea creature. As mentioned above, Ball's secret name for Hennings was “little sea horse” and he remarked frequently in letters and in his journal on her likeness to and affinity for fish. In May, 1921, Ball described Hennings cradling fish in her arms: “Then on the way home we bought a fish at Bernadones, and when we got home we put it in

water. Emmy really is the lady of the sea. Fish are the only animals she can touch and take in her arms” (*Flight* 208-9). Ball held the fish in high regards as creatures that had discovered purity of expression. When Ball speaks of his experimentation with language, he often refers to the purity of and need to emulate “the silent language of fish.” Even later in life after his Dada sound poetry had come to an end, in his book on Byzantine Christianity, he reveres “the lost, moaning speechlessness of fish” (115). One can then infer then from his “secret name” for Hennings and these references to her affinity to and likeness to fish, that Ball felt that Hennings too had discovered this purity of expression.

The mystical manner of Hennings’s behavior and her relationship with both him and the world in general inspired Ball's experimentation with language and search for purer means of creative expression. Her pure and ardent belief in mystical possibilities and irrational and naïve view of the world drove him to an ever more mystical extreme and seemingly irrational project himself. Hennings's influence was one of the most vital for his persual of sound poetry, which, as argued above, this study finds to be his attempt to find purer means of communicating with and creating the divine. Before Hennings, Ball sought his answers, unsuccessfully, in established movements and philosophical theories. After meeting Hennings in the cabarets of Munich, he began projects like the manifesto described in Chapter Two, which sought out less concrete and more irrational alternatives. It is clear that Hennings’s influence made Ball comfortable accepting that which he formerly believed “would make a fool” of him.

Hennings and Ball were able to communicate one another without the use of words and occasionally without even conscious interaction. For example, Rugh notes,

The most meaningful part of her [Hennings's] relationship with Ball, as she records it, came from their mystical communication through dreams—a sort of ESP she claims fueled their creative impulses. After describing Ball's dreams of the utter destruction of the material world, which she calls his visions, Hennings explains how those visions passed from him to her through a kind of mystical mind reading. (16)

Rugh then goes on to quote Hennings saying,

It may seem strange that I can report the visions of another person, but it is possible that I can do so better than the beholder himself, because there were faces which passed from Hugo to me, projected themselves in a clarity and sharpness that was astonishing...I cannot remain fully silent about them because this strange connection between us remained a mystery even to us: It was exceedingly important and valuable for our living and creating. (16)

In addition to her mysticism, Hennings's interest in Catholicism also influenced Ball, beginning almost immediately after their flight together to Zürich. One can see in Ball's journals an increasing interest in the writings of Medieval Catholic mystics and Böhme himself after the beginning of his relationship with Hennings. This interest in the medieval Catholic mystics and renewed relationship to Catholicism in general was highly influential on his sound poetry and experimentation with language. This effect is perhaps most apparent in his most well-known performance, wherein he recited the "Gadji Beri Bimba" while dressed in an outfit which resembled that of a Cubist pope. His reflections on the incident verify the theory that this

particular sound poem was to be a revolutionary take on a Catholic liturgy. Huelsenbeck even once wrote that he and Ball prayed the Gadjji Beri Bimba each night (75).

However, it is not only in this incident where his interest in medieval mysticism and Catholicism are to be found. In fact, many of his sound poems were intended to be purified prayers of one form or another. Ball mentions the medieval “bruitists” frequently in his journals. In addition, within the words of the sound poems themselves, elements of this interest may be found. “Wolken,” translated as “Clouds”, creates an atmosphere of raising oneself upward, being amongst the spiritually purified, and attempting to achieve weightlessness. “Wolken” also contains references to Christ’s despairing call to God the Father on the cross, and utilizes many words which can be easily interpreted as Christian imagery of purification.

In addition, Hennings’s seemingly effortless ability to blend her mysticism, her faith in Catholicism, her art, and her political and social beliefs inspired Ball to make a similar effort. His early journal entries (see quotes above) show his struggle to unify his interests and passions. As mentioned above, mysticism, as a rule, blurs the lines between the afterlife and earth, as opposed to the clear delineations which are found in traditional spirituality. Hennings seems to have successfully integrated this theory into her everyday view of the world. For example, in Ball's journals, he recalls one particular conversation:

“The people involved in the battle of the Somme,” says Emmy, “cannot have any inner conflicts. It is planned that way.” She regards the battle of the Somme as the real hell that was prophesied. She saw a picture of people with animal like gas masks...” Since then I have been quite convinced that it is the real hell that is

being written about. Why should that not be possible?" (*Flight out of Time* 81)

Other times, Emmy reveals her extreme compassion, while traveling as a cabaret performer. After the closing of the Cabaret Voltaire, she encountered the tattered bodies and faces of the soldiers of WWI and writes back to Ball of the horrors: "I was talking to one of the soldiers who held red roses in his arms. He had no more eyes but the most touching bliss on his face... Yes, he spoke about his eyes. 'They will grow back again. I can almost feel it.'... What can you sing for these people? The gentlest song" (qtd. in Weinstein 97). Here she gives Ball a ideal example of the manner in which she seamlessly and effortlessly mixes her social and political beliefs, artistic theories, and her mystic faith.

After moving to Zürich with Hennings, Ball would remain unwavering in his pacifism, as he fully realized the inherent evil in the destructiveness of war; however, his faith in social and political institutions remained uncertain. Ball would often end up at odds with the various political circles which he and Hennings ended up joining with in one aspect of their theories and philosophies or another. The missing link that he most frequently felt the lack of was the necessity for some form of spiritual guidance of the masses. In both socialism and anarchism, which Ball took an interest in during his initial move to Zürich with Hennings, Ball found himself in agreement with the concepts of the revolution of the working classes and the need for self-governing of the masses; however, he did not believe that many people had the necessary moral or intellectual tools to properly govern themselves. Art could free their spirits, but to what? It was here that Ball found it necessary for the people to turn to some form spirituality or religiosity for their salvation. Hennings's ability to effectively mix her mysticism and Catholic

faith proved to Ball that it was possible for a regeneration of society to take place under the guidance of a mystic Catholic's faith.

In Greil Marcus's study of avant-garde culture in the twentieth century, *Lipstick Traces*, he notes, "Along with Hugo Ball's drive to create, there was Emmy Hennings's need to destroy" (45). Add Marcus to the laundry list of men who have attempted unsuccessfully to simplify or make sense of Hennings's role in Dada and relationship with Ball. Hennings did not simply serve as his opposition or contradictory force. She lived out her own contradictions within herself. She was largely considered unintellectual; however, she was a well-published writer and an active member of the bohemian intelligentsia. She was against systems and an anarchist; however, she longed for the comfort of Catholicism and would have been a nun had her nature allowed for it. She was fiercely independent and unrooted; however, she longed for the companionship of men, even when it did more harm emotionally and spiritually than it did good. She had more life experience packed into her short years than most of her companions could boast of, as a prostitute, drug user, shyster, vagabond, mother, and wife; however, she gave the impression of naiveté, simplicity, and of having a child-like nature. It was for these paradoxes that she was almost entirely erased from the history of the movement that she helped to found and largely inspired. It was for these paradoxes that she felt the need to spend the latter part of her life writing and rewriting her history and that of her savior and spiritual other half, Hugo Ball.

This study argues that despite Hennings's own rewritings, she should be cast in her proper role in the history of Zürich Dada. Analysis of Hennings's poetry and acknowledgment of the many other artistic roles that she played at the Cabaret Voltaire and Galerie Dada reveals that

her mystic nature and spirituality were essential to the ritualistic and mystic nature of early Dada, despite her present exclusion from studies on the topic done by scholars such as Sheppard and despite the lack of attention paid to her early spirituality and mysticism by scholars such as Weinstein and Rugh. Understanding Hennings's role as Zürich Dada's mystic mother is a vital component to understanding and appreciating Hugo Ball's role as its high priest.

## CONCLUSION

Marcel Janco tells us in his essay "Creative Dada" that "[n]o Dadaist will ever write his memoirs! Do not trust anything that calls itself 'Dada history'; however much may be true of Dada, the historian qualified to write about it does not yet exist" (35). Perhaps we should believe him. This essay is no attempt to trace an exact history of Dada. It has certainly been tried, compiled as if completed, and speculated upon as if a movement has been put neatly to bed—in no small part because the story always seems to center on a couple of key members battling over its birth, as if its death were always inevitable. This particular essay is more of a look at what might be too often be seen as a non-issue—that passion and fervor, that glimmer of youth and hope for a chance to stir something new that could never die, that distinct element of early Dada which, aside from geographic location, distinguished it from all other modernist movements. Though to many this may seem a monumental task, this study approaches it as something much simpler—a look into one aspect of two people's particular passion and drive, that burnt itself out and fled when they saw "Dada" become just another art movement that could be (and was) easily put to rest. The passion that I speak of is the spiritual drive for a mystic revolution through word play, performance, totality and convergence of art, and a battle against the bourgeois lifestyle. The couple that I speak of is, of course, Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings.

By focusing on their spiritual quest, this study detailed and examined one method of investigation with which one may come to understand the artistic experiments of Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings their effects in both their legacy and in that of their most noted artistic endeavor, Dada. By examining through a spiritual lens Ball's most frequently visited artistic and

philosophical trope: the word; the context within which most of his work took place: the social and political upheaval surrounding WWI; and his strongest artistic and spiritual influence: his partner, Emmy Hennings; this study shows how Hugo Ball, through being a steadfast man of paradox, was able to enact of life of living art without succumbing to the faults of the times by allowing his spiritual quest to lead to the production of sameness and false hope. He did so by emboldening the word through communication without speech; he did so by placing battlements against rancid social structures within poetry and prayer; he did so through ephemeral acts of protest and beauty, inspired by his waning starlet lover. With the Word, a war, and a woman at his side, he took over (for a time) the bohemian nightlife of neutral Zürich, wherein he created an almost immediately mythical autonomous zones of demonic beauty in which to lament and extol the modern age, find and gift nihilistic freedom, create new prayers to new gods, and then walk away—mission complete, when it is no longer needed.

Ball abandoned Dada as it turned into a movement, as Tzara allowed it to become less a reflection of the outrage that they felt against the times and more a means of production of celebrity and perhaps even shock for shock's sake—a glorification of chaos without the intent of revealing truth or beauty. Huelsenbeck followed Ball out of the movement to create the more politically-minded and caustic sect of Berlin Dada<sup>4</sup>. Perhaps only a few of the remaining Dadas kept alive the spirituality and mysticism that Ball brought to the Cabaret Voltaire and Galerie Dada; however, that initial impulse and his extreme hope, his idealism, and his intended effect of rejuvenation of society through poetry turned prayer is at least well-remembered by them. In his

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<sup>4</sup> With the exception of Johannes Baader and Raoul Hausmann who sustained in interest in religion and spirituality.

essay “Dreamers,” Hans Arp wrote,

Dada was more than a kettle-drum, a big noise and a joke. Dada protested against the stupidity and vanity of mankind. Among the Dadaist there were martyrs and believers, who sacrificed their lives in search for life and beauty. Ball was one of these great dreamers. HE dreamed and believed in poetry and the image. In *Flight from the Times*, Hugo ball writes, "The words and the image are one. Painters and poets belong together. Christ is the image and the word. The word and the image have been crucified." The dreamers are still living in the catacombs within the image, the word, and music” (37).

Arp and Huelsenbeck would both write at one time or another that Ball was one of the greatest German writers and remember his importance to the Dada movement. Huelsenbeck wrote that Ball never truly stopped being Dada (48), even if he professed to stop believing in it. This could be true, Ball never stopped being a man of paradox, contradictions, and protests—even in his faith.

Hugo Ball ended his life in much the same way as so many of his idols: an ascetic, a recluse, an outcast from most of humanity, entirely loyal—but to his God only. After a short lived career in politics (he played a pivotal role in the treaties after WWI), he abandoned traditional artistic and religious goals entirely in order to live as a sort of avant-garde Catholic saint. Rejected by artists and Catholics alike, he still cherished hopes of a nobler kind of religious and artistic existence for his fellow man. He continued to live out his own fairy story, abandoning his exhausting quest to purify humanity by worldly means. Perhaps Richard

Huelsenbeck said it best when trying to describe Ball's final incarnation upon moving to the Italian countryside: "Here the holy family lived with a child, a goat, a typewriter, and a strong desire for solitude and poverty. This philosophy was the opposite of everything that makes the world go round: the striving for success, riches, and comfort" (48). In living in this manner, one could say that he remained absolutely loyal to his original Dada ideals—those which formed the crux of his experimentation with the word as a mean of communication with the divine, that served as his pinnacle of his ideal of performed protest against the stagnant state of European culture, those which housed his most passionate displays of communion between high and low art and the written word and guttural shrieks was not turned against theoretically, or even bodily. It was merely transformed and evolved into yet another (perhaps) purer form—maybe even given a new secret name.

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