

Nancy Erickson
Bemidji State University
NErickson@bemidjistate.edu

Dismantling Collective Memory: Paul Celan in Elfriede Jelinek's "In den Alpen"

Since her early writings, Elfriede Jelinek has pointed up contemporary use of visual and written texts to construct the modern-day cultural memory of Austria. In her prose and in her dramas, Jelinek has juxtaposed that memory with culturally-embedded myths created from previously occurring texts, ranging from philosophical treatises to hallowed visual images to biblical references that link Austria's historical and cultural past with its present. In her recent dramatic work, *In den Alpen*, Jelinek continues this practice by connecting modern-day catastrophes to Austria's role in the Shoah through the use of a specific text by Paul Celan, "Gespräch im Gebirg."

Jelinek's inclusion of Celan's fictional account of the meeting of two Jewish men high up in the Alps entwines the themes of nature, "Heimat," and Austria's brown past with the tragic fire in which 155 skiers died in a mountain train near Kaprun November 1, 2000. Jelinek adds to those storylines the events that brought about one of the technological "miracles" in Austria, the development of the storage power plant located near Kaprun that was constructed by slave laborers and others during and immediately following the second World War.

In this paper, I will examine the role of Celan's short prose piece within *In den Alpen*, using the critical framework of dialogics, resulting in a kind of literary "archaeological dig." By examining the points of correspondence as well as those of difference, I will provide a critical interpretation that examines the spaces created by the "dialogue" between the texts, which in turn contributes to an overall reading of the Jelinek's three-part drama. My purpose is to locate in the spaces points where new voices emerge and new understandings allow for remembering as individuals and as silenced groups encapsulated in Walter Benjamin's notion of "Eingedenken." I will discuss Jelinek's careful mimicking of rhythm and sound in Celan's original piece and discuss the effect of the shift from two fictional adult speakers in Celan's version to that of an adult speaker and a child in *In den Alpen*. I will point to the tension created within the dialogue between the texts that allows for further connections to Celan's poetry and to other of Jelinek's dramatic writings that connect the specific historical events that comprise the specific storylines in the text to Austria's past as Jelinek continues to write against her country's construct of the "monumental memory" (as defined in the writings of Benjamin and Friedrich Nietzsche).